



Discursive Construction of CNPC's Eco-friendly Image in Its Corporate Social Responsibility Report: A Legitimation Strategy Analysis

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Abstract— Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports are important non-financial disclosures that provide insights into an enterprise's commitment to social and environmental responsibilities. With the escalation of global environmental challenges, the focus on the disclosure of environmental responsibility information within CSR reports has intensified. As CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) is an environmentally sensitive corporation, this study investigates the legitimation strategies utilized in the environmental discourse of the CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022, aiming to understand how CNPC constructs its legitimacy in sustainable development for international audience. The findings reveal that: (1) five principal legitimation strategies are employed—authorization, moralization, rationalization, mythopoesis, and altruism—with rationalization as the dominant strategy, representing 65.45% of all cases; (2) these strategies are grounded in diverse sources of legitimacy, such as collective authority and moral values, and are manifested through distinct lexical and syntactic choices; (3) these legitimation strategies constructs an authoritative and credible corporate eco-friendly image for CNPC. These findings contribute to the understanding of legitimation strategies in institutional environmental discourse and offer practical implications for enterprises aiming to enhance their international reputations in sustainable development and facilitate global expansion.



Keywords— CSR report, environmental discourse, legitimation strategy, corporate image, discursive construction.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) report is a disclosure document through which a company communicates to its stakeholders about the fulfillment of its social responsibilities, including resource conservation and environmental protection. As global environmental issues become increasingly pressing, companies, as primary agents of environmental protection, recognize sustainable development as integral to achieving economic growth. Consequently, there is a growing necessity for companies to disclose environment-related responsibilities in their CSR reports. Recently, critical discourse analysis of CSR reports has gained attention for examining how companies employ various strategies to construct a positive public image (Helvac, 2017; Fuoli, 2018; Hao, 2021). However, few studies focus on how environmentally sensitive companies legitimize their decisions, actions, and practices in CSR reports, particularly concerning environmental protection (Xia & Xu, 2020). To fill this gap, this study chooses a Chinese state-owned environmentally sensitive enterprise—China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC, also PetroChina)—as a subject, uses van Leeuwen's (2007, 2008) and Reyes' (2011) frameworks on discourse legitimation strategies to investigate the legitimation strategies within the environmental discourse of *the CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022* and assesses their effectiveness in constructing a corporate image.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Environmental Discourse

Environmental discourse is also called ecological discourse or green discourse (Zheng & Wang, 2018). As an oral or written text that publicly defines the relationship between human beings and the natural environment (Jung, 2001), environmental discourse is an important method to construct, explain, discuss, and analyze environmental issues, which indicates people's attitude and response to

environmental affairs (Dryzek, 2005). The emergence of environmental discourse stems from the confrontation and dialogue between environment and economy (Zheng & Wang, 2018), which suggests that there is a legitimacy struggle in environmental discourse. van Dijk (2001) and Fairclough (2004) explored the power and ideology behind the environmental discourse, which is an important source of legitimacy. Therefore, introducing legitimation strategy theory into environmental discourse can reveal the speaker's attitudes towards and values about environmental issues and environmental protection.

However, many studies tried to conduct environmental discourse analysis from the types of environmental discourse (Brulle & Agency, 2000; Hannigan, 2006), discourse structure (Heinz, Hsin-I & Inuzuka, 2007), typical vocabulary (Hughes, 2006; Mels, 2009), social function (Goldman & Schurman, 2000; Cox, 2006) and other aspects. Only few researches have initially utilized discourse legitimation theory in the study of environmental discourse (Guo, 2020; Sun & Zhang, 2021). Therefore, the legitimacy struggle in environmental discourse needs further exploration.

2.2 Environmental Discourse in the CSR Report

With the introduction and development of environmental discourse, the Corporate Social Responsibility (the CSR Report) has gradually attracted public attention. Elkington (1998) first put forward three responsibility bottom lines for commercial companies, which include environmental responsibility. Corporate information about fulfilling environmental responsibilities is often disclosed in enterprises' CSR reports and a responsible company in environmental protection aims at ecosystem sustainability, which includes indicators such as ecosystem protection, renewable resources, and zero waste generation (Visser, 2014), so environmental discourse is a core component of CSR reports. However, previous legitimation studies mainly focused on environmental discourse in news reports, especially news reports about

climate change themes such as global warming, carbon emission, and the greenhouse effect (Norgaard, 2011; Durr & Pascht, 2017). Studies on environmental discourse in CSR reports are mainly conducted from systemic-functional linguistics (Huang et al., 2017; Xia & Xu, 2020), critical discourse analysis (Hao, 2021) and critical metaphor analysis (Chen & Qiu, 2022), lacking of legitimation analysis. This study will help to fill this gap.

The CSR reports are also a hot subject of studies about discursive construction. There are not a few studies analyzed corporate images constructed in CSR reports (Helvac, 2017; Fuoli, 2018; Hao, 2021; Corciolani et al., 2020; Duan Ping, 2021; Chen & Qiu, 2022). However, there are relatively few studies focusing on how enterprises legitimize their decision-making and behaviors reflected in CSR reports (Faisal & Sherina, 2023), and even fewer studies pay attention to the legitimation discursive construction of corporate images in the environmental discourse in enterprises' CSR reports.

Given this, this study attempts to investigate the legitimation strategies adopted by environmental discourse in *the CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022*, to investigate the effectiveness of enterprises' communication with relevant international stakeholders and to explore the legitimation discursive construction of corporate image in environmental discourse. This study focuses on three specific questions:

Q1: What discourse legitimation strategies are used in the environmental discourse in *the CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022*?

Q2: How are these legitimation strategies realized in this report?

Q3: How's the efficacy of legitimation discursive construction of corporate image in this report?

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The theoretical framework of this study is based on van Leeuwen's and Reyes' legitimation strategies. According to van Leeuwen (2007), legitimation addresses the questions: "Why should we do this?" and "Why should we do this in this way?" Legitimation occurs in public communication and everyday interaction, where discourse not only presents facts but also explains and justifies actions and decisions, with the goal of seeking the audience's support and approval (Reyes, 2011). To achieve this, various legitimation strategies facilitate effective communication with relevant audiences. Van Leeuwen's four legitimation strategies--authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis--have significantly influenced critical discourse analysis (Khosravi Nik, 2015; Martín de la Rosa & Lázaro, 2022; Lin & Miao, 2016; Xin, 2020). Reyes's framework examines how discourse interacts with ideology and power. His strategies are legitimation through emotions, legitimation through a hypothetical future, legitimation rationality, voices of expertise, and altruism. The "voices of expertise" strategy draws upon expert opinions and exact numbers.

While legitimation strategies are primarily used in political discourse (Wodak & van Leeuwen, 1999; Pang, 2013; KhosraviNik, 2015; Lin & Miao, 2016; Oddo, 2011; Gong & Zhang, 2018; Wu et al., 2022), they can also be effectively applied to environmental discourse (Guo, 2020; Sun & Zhang, 2021). This study modifies the two frameworks to better analyze environmental discourse. Given the formal nature of CSR reports, the "legitimation through emotions" strategy is omitted. Additionally, Reyes's "experts opinion" strategy is categorized under authorization, and "exact numbers" under rationalization. Therefore, a framework of five legitimation strategies is established. As shown in Table 3-1:

Table 3- 1 Theoretical Framework of Five Legitimation Strategies

Strategies	Types
Authorization	Personal authority
	Impersonal authority
Moralization	Evaluation
	Abstraction
	Comparison
Rationalization	Instrumental rationality
	Theoretical rationality
	Exact numbers
Mythopoesis	Prediction
	Commitment
Altruism	

This study will use these five strategies to analyze the legitimation strategies adopted by the environmental discourse in *the CNPC's English CSR report of 2022* and to assess the discursive construction efficacy. There are three main considerations in the subject selection. First, the CNPC is a major state-owned enterprise with environmentally sensitive characteristic. So its environmental discourse in CSR report contains great legitimation struggle. Second, as one of the 500 top enterprises in the world, CNPC has many important projects, so its CSR reports have a large group of readers at home and abroad and have an influential impact on other enterprises. Third, *the CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022* reveals the vary recent environmental information of this enterprise, which is of great practical significance and research value.

Corporate information about fulfilling environmental and social responsibilities is often disclosed in the CSR reports. *The CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022* contains five sections, with environmental protection information disclosed in the first three: 1) corporate governance and

management; 2) sustainable energy supply; 3) responsible operations. To fulfill environmental responsibility, PetroChina has made great efforts in three areas, namely energy transition, pollution reduction, and preventing and dealing with major environmental events. Therefore, this study collected data from the first three sections of this report, and separated the data by independent clause.

In order to answer Q1, this study encoded the obtained clauses according to five legitimation strategies by the tool Nvivo (11.3.0), and the frequency and proportion of each strategy among all the obtained clauses are calculated. Next, this study conducted a qualitative analysis to explore how these legitimation strategies are linguistically realized, to address Q2. The legitimation strategies may be realized by specific words or special sentence structures. For example, the mythopoesis strategy often realized through conditional sentences of the type: "(if) + past/ present practice...will + Infinitive without to" (Reyes, 2011). The final step is to discuss the effectiveness of these legitimation strategies in discursive construction of corporate image. Corciolani et al. (2020) have found that companies engaged in irresponsible practices are more likely to use narrative and deceptive language over analytical and transparent language. This suggests that the linguistic features of environmental discourse can reveal a company's stance on environmental responsibility, which further influence the construction of its corporate image.

IV. REALIZATION OF LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES IN THE CSR REPORT

Using the theoretical framework established to analyze the environmental discourse in *the CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022*, this study obtained 356 cases of legitimation strategies. The frequency of each of the five legitimation strategies in the CSR report is shown in Table 4-1:

Table 4- 1 Realization of Five Legitimation Strategies

Legitimation Strategy	Types	Frequency	Percentage
Authorization (n=63, 17.70%)	Impersonal authority	33	9.27%
	Personal authority	30	8.43%
Moralization (n=33, 9.27%)	Evaluation	2	0.56%
	Abstraction	29	8.15%
	Comparison	2	0.56%
Rationalization (n=233, 65.45%)	Instrumental rationality	92	25.84%
	Theoretical rationality	86	24.16%
	Numbers	55	15.45%
Mythopoesis (n=15, 4.21%)	Prediction	6	1.67%
	Commitment	9	2.53%
Altruism (n=12, 3.37%)		12	3.37%
total		356	100%

In legitimizing corporate decisions and behaviors, the rationalization strategy holds a dominant position over the other four legitimation strategies (Vaara & Tienari, 2002), a trend also evident in corporate environmental discourse. As shown in Table 4-1 above, 233 cases (65.45%) belong to the rationalization strategy. Among these, 92 cases used instrumental rationality, which is the most frequently applied subtype, accounting for 25.84% of all the total cases. The theoretical rationality strategy follows closely, with 86 cases (24.16%). Authorization is the second most common strategy, accounting for 63 cases (17.70%). The remaining legitimation strategies, namely moralization (9.27%), mythopoesis (4.21%), and altruism (3.37%), are less frequently used in this report investigated.

4.1 Rationalization

Rationalization is the primary strategy in CNPC's CSR report, accounting for 64.54% of the total cases. It is a

strategy by reference to rationality. Rationality is an indispensable element for scientific decision and practice. Corporate decisions and behaviors can be legitimized by demonstrating that they are scientifically justified and carefully considered. Common rationalization strategies are instrumental rationality and theoretical rationality, which were dominantly used in the CNPC's CSR report. Instrumental rationality (25.84%) legitimizes a practice by focusing on its purpose, outcomes, and methods, often conveyed through infinitive verbs or adverbial clauses of purpose and reason (see Example 4-1).

Example 4-1: We...carried out environmental control and monitoring projects, to protect local marine ecological environment and biodiversity.

Theoretical rationality (24.16%), on the other hand, relies on definitions and explanations about practices or

projects, often grounded in established facts or collective experience. This strategy persuades people that the company's actions is natural, reasonable or sensible, because our experience or the plain facts say "it is right". In Example 4-2, natural gas is commonly recognized as the transitional energy from nonrenewable energy to clean and renewable energies, therefore, PetroChina's natural gas exploration project is theoretically legitimized. Additionally, technological innovation and improvement are powerful elements of theoretical rationality. Advances in science and technology are widely associated with environmental benefits, so it is an effective way to legitimize corporate environmental practices. This is often achieved by using technical terminologies collocated with verbs like "improve" and "promote" (see Example 4-3).

Example 4-2: Taking natural gas as a strategic, growing and value added project, CNPC keeps strengthening natural gas exploration and development...

Example 4-3: We adopted cleaner production technology, performed stratified drilling to reduce the use of oil-based mud, promoted measures for cleaner production...

Example 4-4: Newly added geothermal heating area of 10.06 million square meters...replacing 575,000 tons of standard coal annually.

Except for these two common rationalization strategies, studies have pointed out that exact numbers (15.45%) can also serve as scientific indicators to legitimize practices and behaviors (van Dijk 1988; Vaara & Tienar, 2002; Reyes, 2011). This study found out that, PetroChina often uses scientific statistics, such as rate of growth, percentage, and amount of growth, to legitimize its practices and projects (see Example 4-4).

4.2 Authorization

Authorization (17.70%) involves legitimation by

reference to authority. It is the strategy most closely associated with power and ideology. The authority can be impersonal, as in laws, regulations, and agreements, or personal. In *the CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022*, authorization is the second most frequently used strategy. Impersonal authority (9.27%), such as environmental-related laws and policies (see Example 4-5) and international standards and agreements (see Example 4-6), often holds broad recognition or even state-enforced compliance. These documents set operational baselines and industrial standards for enterprises. Companies often use verbs like "comply with", "embrace", and "support" to indicate their positive stance and compliance, thereby legitimizing their actions.

Example 4-5: We complied with local environmental protection policies, and animal and plant trading laws and regulations, and protected local rare species.

Example 4-6: We embrace and support the goal of the Paris Agreement and actively respond to climate change.

Personal authority (8.43%) can be divided into individual authority and collective authority. Individual authority often derived from a person's status and roles, knowledge and expertise or popularity and public awareness. Institutions and organizations can serve as legal representatives that have personal authority. In the case of PetroChina, it has mentioned representative authority such as "the United Nations" (see Example 4-7) in its CSR report. Collective authority is reflected in cooperating with other enterprises or institutions, signifying that "we are not alone to do this", but "participate in" or "work with" other members. PetroChina also used collective authority in its report by mentioning worldwide practice, international organizations, and international conferences (see Examples 4-8), etc.

Example 4-7: ...low-carbon and affordable energy is not only a requirement for achieving the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, but also...

Example 4-8: ...and works with other OGCI members to contribute to China's drive to address climate change and build a green, low-carbon oil and gas industry.

Example 4-9: CNPC Dushanzi Petrochemical was honored "Pace Setter" in energy efficiency and water efficiency of ethylene industry in 2021...

It is worth noting that, in addition to seeking support from external authorities, PetroChina also emphasizes self-authority in the oil and gas industry. It frequently mentioned "the industry" in its CSR report and viewed itself as a leader or model in environmental protection of the industry (see Example 4-9).

4.3 Moralization

Moralization (9.27%) is the legitimation by reference to moral values. Corporate practices and behaviors also need moral support. PetroChina explicitly stated in its CSR report that it pursues values of green, low-carbon, and clean sustainable development. Aligning with its values, it launched numerous projects in energy transition, waste and pollution reduction, and dealing with climate change. Moral values often appear implicitly in discourse, conveyed through evaluative adjectives, abstracted practices, and comparisons. In the case of PetroChina, evaluation (0.56%) and comparison (0.56%) are used on occasion. For example, PetroChina used positive words, like "honest" "trustworthy" and "excellent" to evaluate its performance in environmental protection and energy transition (see Example 4-10). Comparison is realized in sentence structures such as "...is equivalent to..." and "reduce...and increase..." By comparison (see Example 4-11), the company's efforts and effects in environmental protection are well presented, indicating that the company has all along bearing its value pursuit in mind.

*Example 4-10: Adhering to legal operation, we are **honest and trustworthy**, conserve resources and protect the environment...*

*Example 4-11: In 2022, we sold 217.81 billion cubic meters of natural gas, which is **equivalent to** reducing about 282 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions compared with coal.*

The abstraction (8.15%) is to abstract the moral values behind the practices. The mainstream values in terms of environmental protection are green, low-carbon, and sustainable development. In this report, it repeated words like "green", "energy conservation", "low-carbon" and "clean" again and again (see Example 4-12).

*Example 4-12: Third, we promote the **green action plan**, and implement **energy conservation, emission reduction and clean energy replacement in production...***

As awareness of environmental issues grows, so does public demand for low-carbon development and clean energy. Thus, pursuing green and sustainable development is not only part of corporate environmental responsibility but also a requirement for long-term economic viability. As an environmentally sensitive enterprise, PetroChina's commitment to green, low-carbon values is crucial in gaining public recognition and support.

4.4 Mythopoesis

Mythopoesis (4.21%) is the legitimation by reference to predictions of future (1.67%) or commitment to future actions (2.53%). It usually realized through future tense. In CNPC's CSR report, this strategy appears infrequently but is typically employed when the company outlines its environmental protection goals, sustainable development strategies, or future plans. PetroChina tends to envision a populated future to legitimize its great amount of energy consumption (see Example 4-13). People believe the predicted future is very likely to happen so they will agree

that the current great consumption is necessary and reasonable. Besides, PetroChina uses future tense like "...will do something" (see Example 4-14) to promise the company's future actions.

Example 4-13: In the long run, economic development and population growth will drive sustained growth in global energy demand and consumption.

Example 4-14: Renewable energy will gradually become the main energy source after 2035.

Mythopoesis strategy tries to use future consequences to legitimize present practices. By presenting a bright blueprint, the company encourages stakeholders to overlook any current shortcomings, trusting in the company's commitment to future progress.

4.5 Altruism

Altruism (3.37%) is the legitimation by reference to the benefits of others, particularly the public. While pursuing economic benefits, enterprises are expected to fulfill social responsibilities. Altruism requires enterprises to undertake such responsibilities voluntarily.

Example 4-15: In 2022, CNPC launched a public welfare campaign "Planting Trees for Carbon Neutrality", in which...

Example 4-16: Green development and reliable energy supply to fuel our customers' growth and power people's happy life.

In environmental discourse, those practices that enterprises voluntarily take to protect the environment and boost green and low-carbon development can be seen as altruism, such as tree-planting activity mentioned in Example 4-15. Enterprises may also directly state that their practices or projects are for the benefit of the public or for a better society (see Example 4-16). Although the altruism strategy is not frequently used in CNPC's CSR Report, it remains as effective as other legitimation strategies.

V. DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF CNPC'S INTERNATIONAL CORPORATE IMAGE

CSR reports are one of the important ways for companies to shape and improve their public images. Many previous studies have used corpus technology to analyze corporate images shaped by CSR reports (Helvac, 2017; Fuoli, 2018; Hao, 2021; Chen & Qiu, 2022). The legitimation strategies used in CSR reports are of great importance to corporate image construction. A positive corporate image, in turn, can enhance people's recognition and support for that company. Therefore, it is worthy noticing the relation between corporate image construction and legitimation strategies in CSR reports.

In the context of environmental protection, enterprises try to build an eco-friendly corporate image. Visser (2014) concluded in his study that the strategic goal of a responsible company in environmental protection is ecosystem sustainability, which includes indicators such as ecosystem protection, renewable resources, and zero waste generation. This aligns with PetroChina's efforts in environmental protection, specially in energy transition, pollution reduction, and preventing and dealing with major environmental events. And the legitimation strategies used in the environmental discourse in its CSR report help to maintain and support such an environmentally responsible image.

The authorization strategy enhances PetroChina's authoritative status in environmental protection. In its CSR Report, PetroChina explicitly expressed that its goal is to build "A World-class Integrated Energy Company Built to Last". To this end, PetroChina strategically employed legitimation strategies to shape its self-authority in environmental protection, as discussed in 4.1. Besides, PetroChina actively participates in global energy governance and in establishing and revising environmental-related standards (see Example 5-1). Viewing itself as a model and leader, PetroChina "mobilized" compliance

enterprises to participate in carbon trading for better reducing carbon emission (see Example 5-2). Its CSR report also uses many “the first” (see Example 5-3) to legitimize its leading position and initiative in promoting environmentally friendly technologies and projects. This suggests that PetroChina is always on the foremost of trying to improve energy utilization and transition, promoting environmental, and ecological protection.

Example 5-1: In addition, we...actively participated in global energy governance, and conveyed China's voice in energy governance.

Example 5-2: In 2022, we mobilized all compliance enterprises to actively participate in carbon trading...

Example 5-3: ...a 40 MW/80 MWh electrochemical energy storage system was installed...and put into operation, which is the first of its kind at Yumen Oil Field.

The moralization strategy provides moral and value support for PetroChina's eco-friendly image. Xia & Xu (2020) have pointed out that corporate responsible discourse reflects a company's ecological views, while the ecological views are always reflected in corporate images. Therefore, if a company is committed to well-accepted ecological ideas, its corporate image will be more accepted likewise. In its environmental discourse, PetroChina indicates that it bears in mind the value of green, low-carbon and sustainable development (see Example 5-4). It has conducted many projects to this end and has made many achievements on the way of transition to sustainable development. As the values conveyed in the discourse are part of the social culture (Hu & Sheng, 2020), the corporate image supported by these values also takes on some cultural characteristics. Therefore, presenting a eco-friendly corporate image not only promotes the internalization of company itself but also enhances people's understanding of its corporate culture and values.

Example 5-4: Thanks to the development of renewable energy, Yumen Oil Field is now exploring a new path of green and clean development.

The rationalization strategy enhances the trustworthiness and transparency of its environmental-responsible image. Corciolani et al. (2020) found out that, if a company engages in irresponsible business practices, it is more likely to use narrative and deceptive language rather than analytical and truthful language. As rationalization is the dominant legitimation strategy used in the environmental discourse in the CNPC's CSR Report, its language is more analytical than narrative. PetroChina presents tangible results and scientific statistics, rather than deceptive narrations, to prove its trustworthiness in environmental protection (see Example 5-5).

Example 5-5: In 2022, CNPC produced 177.2 billion cubic meters of natural gas, including 145.5 billion cubic meters domestically...

The Mythopoesis strategy demonstrates PetroChina's lasting and staunch commitment to an eco-friendly corporate image. Enterprises will sometimes resort to future predictions and commitments to help shape their corporate images (Bondi, 2016). This assures readers that the company will stay committed to environmental protection without wavering (Example 5-6). Even though the goals set by the company may have not been achieved, it has already helped shaping the company's current image. However, this strategy shouldn't be used too frequently, otherwise, the whole discourse will be deceptive and deceitful.

Example 5-6: The proportion of non fossil fuels is estimated to increase to 25% by 2030, exceed that of coal after 2035, and reach 80% by 2060.

The altruism strategy makes PetroChina's image more approachable to the public (Hu & Sheng, 2020). Altruism

cares about the public and society's benefits and well-being, which is reflected in the company's social responsibility. PetroChina launches public welfare campaigns and tree-planting activities annually (see Example 5-7), by which its corporate image is no longer a cold machine that is only for economic benefits. Particularly in environmental discourse, languages that care about social and public welfare and environmental sustainability are of great importance in shaping a warming and amiable image in front of the public.

Example 5-7: 1.492 million person-times of voluntary tree-planting in 2022.

In summary, these five legitimation strategies support PetroChina's eco-friendly image-shaping from different aspects. While many previous studies focused on the question of "what kind of corporate image is presented in CSR reports", legitimation strategies give us an insight into the image-shaping process and its effectiveness. In this case, PetroChina aims to build itself into a "world-class" energy company in all aspects, so it pays particular attention to establishing its authoritative image in terms of environmental protection and sustainable development, which is realized by authorization strategy and rationalization strategy. At the same time, PetroChina tries to build public trust by maintaining close interaction with the public through moralization, Mythopoesis, and altruism strategies. In addition, PetroChina keeps these strategies in careful proportions, usually with rationalization and authorization strategies as primary strategies. This ensures that its international corporate image is truthful and trustworthy.

VI. CONCLUSION

In order to do legitimation strategy analysis on environmental discourse, this study has taken the environmental discourse in *the CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022* as the research subject by using a theoretical framework based on van Leeuwen's and Reyes'

legitimation strategy theories. Although the study is based on a single CSR report, which may limit the generalizability of the findings, the findings are applaudable. This study finds that legitimation discourse strategies, traditionally used in political discourse analysis, are also applicable to corporate environmental discourse. In examining *the CNPC's English CSR Report of 2022*, rationalization emerged as the dominant strategy, followed by authorization, with moralization, mythopoesis, and altruism representing smaller proportions. These strategies are employed in various ways: authorization relies on institutional authority, moralization promotes green values, rationalization emphasizes practical outcomes, mythopoesis envisions a sustainable future, and altruism highlights societal benefits. Collectively, these strategies reinforce CNPC's self-authority in the pursuit of sustainable development. And the proper adoption of these five legitimation strategies strengthened the credibility of the discursive construction of its corporate image in sustainable development. Future research should expand the dataset, refine theoretical frameworks, and incorporate comparative analyses to strengthen the field's insights.

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