

CONSTRUCTING AN ECO-YUNNAN STORYTELLING SYSTEM FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS

HaiDan Feng

College of Foreign Languages (International School), Southwest Forestry University, Kunming 650224, Yunnan, China.

Abstract: The global community's push for sustainable development is driven by significant changes across the economy, society, and environment. Yunnan, a region that has made impressive strides in ecological development, is a beacon of hope for developing nations seeking guidance on sustainable practices. To effectively convey the essence of Yunnan's ecological culture, a proposal has been made to establish a comprehensive system of ecological Yunnan stories. The system would prioritize three crucial aspects: ecological, spiritual, and institutional culture, as well as material culture. The aim is to educate and engage the international community in sustainable practices by sharing the knowledge and experiences of Yunnan's ecological civilization. This initiative aims to promote a better understanding and appreciation of human and environmental interdependence, ultimately leading to a more sustainable future.

Keywords: Ecological education; Yunnan story; International communication; Overseas students

1 INTRODUCTION

Yunnan province, located in China, is celebrated for its diverse array of flora and fauna, earning it several prominent titles such as 'Kingdom of Plants,' 'Kingdom of Animals,' 'Garden of the World,' 'Gene Bank of Species,' and 'Home of Medicinal Herbs.' Yunnan has made notable strides in developing ecological sustainability and is a noteworthy example of sustainable development. Its ecological and cultural advancements have achieved international acclaim. A remarkable event in 2021 was the migration of wild Asian elephants in the region, which garnered extensive coverage from 1,500 international media outlets, resulting in over 3,000 related news pieces across 180 countries and regions. This coverage received over 11 billion online clicks across various information topics. It has become a model for telling China's ecological civilization stories well in the international communication arena [1].

Scholars are dedicating their efforts to examining the global dialogue and portrayal of ecological civilization through communication theory, communication strategy analysis, communication pathways, and communication practices. According to Jurdi-hage et al. (2019), the acquisition of environmental knowledge, awareness, and critical thinking skills by students can improve their environmental literacy and promote sustainable lifestyles [2]. Most researchers focus on international communication of ecological culture, primarily on media platforms, targeting overseas audiences. However, more research on ecological education needs to be done with international student groups. Currently, only one article exists in the literature on this topic. In a 2019 research paper, Feng Qiguo, Chen Yanting, and Huang Xiang studied Wuyishan's ecological culture and international communication. They recommended that Wuyishan city and universities in northern Fujian actively engage in humanistic exchanges and global ecological governance with countries along the route. The authors emphasized the importance of Wuyishan city and universities confidently participating in global ecological governance and promoting the spread of Wuyishan's ecological culture among overseas students [3-4].

Upon reviewing existing research, it has been noted that international communication plays a crucial role in advancing ecological civilization. Practical communication approaches have been identified through the analysis of representative cases. Additionally, overseas students have been recognized as a significant audience of high importance. However, it should be noted that the current research has limited sample sizes. The proposed research directions primarily focus on national levels and media platforms.

Furthermore, studies concentrating on overseas students often need to pay more attention to the more extensive and diverse group of overseas Chinese language learners. Therefore, this audience requires further research on the international communication of ecological civilization. Inclusive strategies should also be explored.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study focuses on the 'Chinese Bridge' group project initiated by Southwest Forestry University to promote online ecological education. The project significantly impacted environmental education over three years, starting in 2021. Southwest Forestry University, known for its forestry and environmental studies expertise, offered various online programs during this time. These programs aimed to showcase the distinct flora and fauna, cultural resources, and achievements in the ecological civilization construction of Yunnan. They were thoughtfully designed around three themes: 'Colourful Yunnan, Colourful Life,' 'Green Water, Green Mountains, Beautiful Tea and Coffee,' and 'Beautiful Landscape, Wonderful Life.' Each theme aimed to engage learners and raise awareness about the significance of

environmental conservation. Over 800 learners from various countries, including Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Mali, participated in the Eco-Story Cloud Classroom, a significant achievement for the project.

3 RESULTS

Yu Mouchang (2010) proposed that ecological culture in a broad sense refers to “a new way of human existence, that is, a way of life characterized by harmonious development between humans and nature,” while ecological culture in a narrow sense refers to “social ideology, human spirit, and social institutions guided by ecological values [5].” Throughout three years of practicing online eco-education, we have strived to develop an eco-Yunnan storytelling system encompassing three facets: Eco-Material Culture, Eco-Spiritual Culture, and Eco-Institutional Culture. Furthermore, we have created a cloud-based classroom model for eco-education that includes four primary components: Eco-Chinese Cloud Classroom, Eco-Cloud Forum, Eco-Cloud Tour, and Eco-Cloud Exchange (Figure 1).

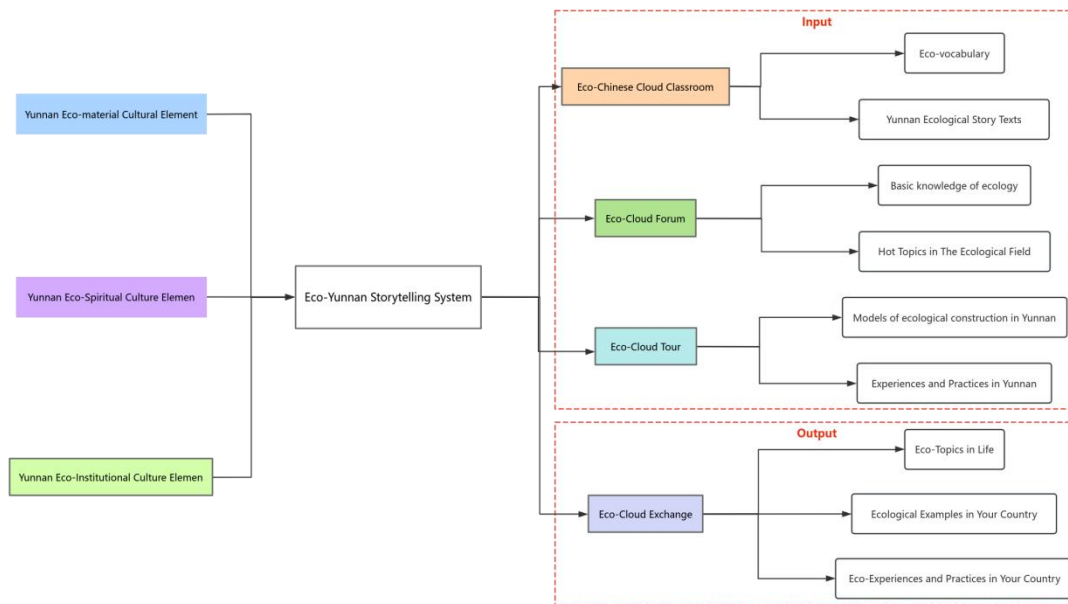


Figure 1 Cloud-based Classroom Model for Eco-education

3.1 Eco-Yunnan Storytelling System Element

The concept of eco-culture is a new cultural paradigm encompassing three key components: eco-spiritual culture, eco-institutional culture, and eco-material culture. Eco-spiritual culture forms the foundation of eco-culture, while institutional and material culture respond to and are influenced by the spiritual aspect.

3.1.1 Yunnan eco-material culture element

"Eco-material culture" can be defined as the material objects that embody eco-cultural values, including but not limited to architectural structures, as well as historical and cultural cities, neighborhoods, villages, and towns that are recognized for their exceptional universal value due to their harmonious integration with the natural environment.

Yunnan's traditional houses of various ethnic groups are typically constructed using local materials such as earth, stone, wood, and bamboo. The Yi Tupa house, Daijia bamboo buildings, Pumi's wooden houses, and Dulong's bamboo houses all use indigenous materials. The traditional 'one seal' house construction promotes land conservation and ensures proper room ventilation and cooling. The pursuit of harmony between humans and nature is a common theme in these houses. The traditional residential architecture of 'one seal' saves land and ensures well-ventilated and cool rooms. Yunnan province is home to many ancient villages that exemplify people's ideas of preserving nature and fostering coexistence between humans and the environment. These villages have become vital tourism resources in Yunnan. Examples of such villages that have undergone development include Ginkgo Village in Gudong Town of Tengchong County, Mangjing Village in Huimin Town of Lancang County, Wengding Village in Mengjiao Township of Cangyuan County in Lincang City, Xiguan Village in Guanglu Township of Yao'an County, and Chenggizi Village in Yongning Township of Luxi County. In addition to its ancient villages, Yunnan has created numerous beautiful cities and villages through projects such as creating ecological civilization construction demonstrations.

Overseas Chinese language learners have the unique opportunity to immerse themselves in a wide range of architectural styles, from the ancient villages of their ancestors to modern urban developments. By exploring these sites, learners can gain a deeper understanding of their ecological wisdom and witness the impressive achievements of ecological civilization. Additionally, they can expand their knowledge of contemporary urban construction and development practices through intellectual explanations and virtual visits.

3.1.2 Yunnan eco-spiritual culture element

"Eco-spiritual culture" can be defined as a way of life that emphasises the interconnectedness of all living beings and promotes living in harmony with nature. This is achieved through a combination of ecological awareness and spiritual practices that foster a deep respect for the environment and all its inhabitants.

The province of Yunnan in China is home to 25 ethnic minorities who have developed a unique and rich ethnic culture. This culture reflects the ecological concepts of different ethnic groups, including their respect for nature, reverence for life, and their pursuit of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. This culture is expressed through various aspects such as primitive religious beliefs, customs, taboos, folk oral literature, and production methods. Based on the reverence for nature, an ecological and cultural mindset that values the protection of the environment, as well as flora and fauna, gradually evolved [6]. The eco-spiritual culture of Yunnan is rooted in the spiritual connection between its people and the natural world. Yunnan's rich biodiversity, breathtaking landscapes, and ancient traditions have inspired a profound reverence for nature. The inhabitants of Yunnan have developed a unique set of beliefs, rituals, and practices that reflect their harmonious coexistence with the environment.

The indigenous religions of Yunnan's ethnic minorities comprise totem worship, nature worship, and the belief that everything has a spirit. These beliefs represent ecological, spiritual, and cultural elements that are closely related to the ecological environment and culture of the ethnic minorities. They reflect the idea of the unity of heaven and humanity, the unity of all things, and the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. These beliefs have played a positive and vital role in ecological protection and construction. The ethnic minorities of Yunnan, including the Yi, Bai, Hani, Dai, Miao, Shui, and Yao, hold the preservation of virgin forests and the protection of the ecological environment in high esteem. Their 'sacred forest' culture exemplifies this commitment. Through myths, proverbs, sayings, hymns, and songs, these communities have woven the concept of ecological conservation into their cultural traditions. As a result, ecological civilization has been successfully passed down from one generation to the next.

Incorporating cultural elements such as proverbs, sayings, hymns, and songs into language lessons can be a helpful tool for overseas students. Additionally, providing knowledge of relevant elements of ecological spiritual culture can supplement the introduction of typical ecological material culture. This approach can help overseas students establish a deeper understanding of the intrinsic causes of spiritual culture, making it easier for them to relate the appearance of material culture to these important cultural factors.

3.1.3 Eco-institutional culture

"Eco-Institutional Culture" refers to an organization's shared principles, customs, and actions aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and accountability.

During the 1990s, Yunnan set out to achieve three strategic objectives: to develop a robust green economy. This goal was accomplished by prioritizing green development and employing various measures to safeguard biodiversity, build forests, preserve the nine plateau lakes, conserve energy, reduce emissions, and tackle water, air, and soil pollution. Fortunately, human conflicts did not accompany the 2021 migration of wild Asian elephants from north to south Yunnan, thanks partly to the implementation of a wildlife ecological compensation mechanism. Yunnan's eco-institutional culture is crucial in promoting sustainable practices and policies. The region has established a robust network of eco-friendly institutions, including environmental organizations, research institutes, and governmental bodies. These institutions work collaboratively to develop and implement strategies that protect and preserve Yunnan's natural resources.

Yunnan has also established two regulations to protect forest resources and wild animals in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province. The first regulation was released on July 28th, 1992, and the second on April 2nd, 1996. These regulations have enhanced the measures for wildlife ecological compensation and established a public liability insurance system to cover damages caused by wildlife accidents.

The three dimensions of eco-culture have combined to create a unique and inspiring narrative for Yunnan. The region is committed to ecological civilization and preserving its natural heritage, providing a rich tapestry of stories highlighting the harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. These stories serve as a testament to the importance of sustainable living and offer valuable lessons for other regions seeking to embrace an eco-centric cultural paradigm. Overseas students will not only learn about the successful construction of ecological civilization but also be provided with guidance on analyzing and understanding the institutional culture that helps to preserve the environment and ensure the smooth progress of ecological civilization construction. Moreover, they can examine the institutional culture associated with outstanding ecological civilization accomplishments.

3.2 Online Dissemination Model of Eco-Yunnan Storytelling System

The Eco-Yunnan Storytelling system for overseas Chinese learners is an online dissemination model consisting of four modules: the Eco-Chinese Cloud Classroom, Eco-Cloud Forum, Eco-Cloud Tour, and Eco-Cloud Exchange. Each module caters to the different needs of the learners, providing a comprehensive learning experience.

3.2.1 The eco-Chinese cloud classroom

Module 1, the Eco-Chinese Cloud Classroom, is specifically designed to cater to the language learning needs of program participants. Its primary objective is to enhance their Chinese language proficiency and application skills. By actively engaging in the program, participants aim to improve their ability to express themselves orally in Chinese.

Integrate ecological storytelling into language teaching for international students while "identifying and portraying details and small cuts in China's ecological civilization-building that can resonate with a wider audience [7]". The language learning program incorporates ecological themes to enrich the overall educational experience. These themes

encompass various elements such as plants, animals, local cuisine, traditional architecture, climate change, rural tourism, waste reduction, and sustainable development. By immersing themselves in these ecological themes, students can enhance their language skills while gaining valuable insight into environmental concerns and sustainability. The program caters to students of different language proficiency levels, ranging from beginners to advanced learners. This allows international students to join the appropriate class based on their language proficiency and receive customized instruction and support. For example, when teaching about animals, it is crucial to emphasize the significance of animal conservation. One effective approach is to showcase notable examples, such as the migratory routes of Asian elephants or the abandonment of reservoir construction plans to protect the green peacock. Advanced students can delve deeper into animal welfare by exploring its origins, including religious beliefs and cultural influences.

3.2.2 The eco-cloud forum

The Eco-Cloud Forum offered in Module 2 is a cutting-edge platform offering diverse interactive educational opportunities beyond typical video lessons on topics like botany, zoology, ethnology, and horticulture. This innovative program provides learners a comprehensive understanding of ecology while cultivating a deeper appreciation for the natural world. A standout feature of the Eco-Cloud Forum is its focus on expert knowledge, as renowned ecologists, biologists, and environmentalists contribute their expertise to the program, ensuring accurate and current information for learners. Through their captivating storytelling, these experts make the subject matter more relatable and engaging for the audience. The program encourages learners to explore the interconnectedness of ecosystems and comprehend the impact of human actions on the environment, leading to a sense of responsibility towards the planet and the inspiration to make positive changes in their lives. Overall, Module 2's Eco-Cloud Forum is a dynamic and immersive learning experience that deepens learners' knowledge of ecology and nurtures an authentic passion for the environment. By combining expert knowledge, engaging storytelling, and stimulating activities, the program equips learners with the tools to become environmentally conscious individuals who actively contribute to a sustainable future.

3.2.3 The eco-cloud tour

Module 3, the Eco-Cloud Tour, presents an immersive learning experience for online participants. The primary objective of this module is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Yunnan's ecological and cultural accomplishments. To ensure accuracy and authenticity, the project team carefully selected three locations for field visits: Pu'er Wanfeng Mountain Forest, Zuxiang Alpine Tea Plantation, and Aiye Coffee Manor. These visits provided valuable insights into sustainable forest management, including daily forest protection work, under-forest resource development, and transforming the forest plantation's green development.

As part of the assignment, online participants had the privilege of visiting the renowned Zuxiang Organic Tea Plantation. The main focus of the visit was to study their eco-tea plantation construction standards and explore their unique tea production and processing methods. While at the plantation, online participants could interact with local individuals who shared their inspiring stories. One such tale was that of the 'Motorcycle Secretary in Organic Tea Plantation.' This remarkable individual led ethnic minority communities in the cultivation of organic tea, showcasing the positive impact of sustainable farming practices on local communities.

In addition, online participants had the chance to visit a 'rainforest model' dedicated to coffee cultivation. This visit provided valuable insights into the intricacies of coffee production and the cultivation of the Yunnan coffee seed gene bank. Exploring the coffee production line further enhanced the understanding of the coffee production process, from bean to cup.

Overall, the Eco-Cloud Tour in Module 3 provided a rich and diverse learning experience, allowing participants to gain a deeper, more direct, and lively understanding of ecological and cultural achievements in Yunnan.

3.2.4 The eco-cloud exchange

Module 4, the Eco-Cloud Exchange Module, is a comprehensive tool that allows students to create varying-length video assignments, ranging from one to five minutes. It was specifically developed to aid international students with their assignments, and it is essential to note that students should use it under the guidance of an instructor. The module aims to foster reflection on learning experiences from the previous three modules while integrating pertinent characteristics from students' local areas or countries. This enables them to demonstrate their comprehension of the subject matter while highlighting unique aspects of their cultural background.

Chinese students have played a vital role in supporting this module by assisting overseas learners. This support enables efficient collaboration and cultural exchange and offers language assistance to learners who may face challenges expressing themselves in Chinese. The Eco-Cloud Exchange Module is an exceptional platform for promoting cross-cultural understanding and enhancing language skills among international students. Using this tool, students can collaborate effectively with their peers and engage in meaningful cultural exchanges, fostering a sense of community and providing a platform for students to improve their language skills. It is an excellent resource for international learners seeking to broaden their horizons and develop a deeper understanding of diverse cultures.

Creating a comprehensive ecological and cultural storytelling system in Yunnan depends on four interconnected modules: language input, eco-cultural input, practical experience sharing, and language output. These modules blend smoothly to create a cohesive flow from input to output. The language input forms the foundation of the storytelling system, as it involves acquiring the language skills necessary for effective communication. Cultural input is another essential component that involves exploring and understanding eco-Yunnan's diverse cultural traditions and customs. Practical experience complements language and cultural input by involving immersive encounters with Yunnan's ecological and cultural landscapes. Finally, language output is the culmination of all three segments, involving creative expression and dissemination of ecology through various media. By sharing their stories with local and global audiences,

overseas participants act as a bridge, fostering cultural exchange and understanding while promoting Yunnan's rich ecological heritage.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After three years of dedicated work, we have successfully created a Yunnan eco-storytelling system. However, challenges still need to be addressed when it comes to online ecological education. Firstly, we must consider the language proficiency of overseas Chinese learners. Since their primary focus is language learning, they may need more knowledge of ecology and a lower interest in ecological culture. Therefore, it is crucial to design programs that meet the needs of overseas learners in Chinese language learning while simultaneously achieving the goal of ecological education. This requires creating an online education model that effectively combines language and ecology. Secondly, the complexity of ecological cultural systems makes it essential to pinpoint the specific topics that genuinely interest overseas learners. To address this, we should select typical cases that are not only popular but also highly relevant and engaging. Such cases function as effective educational models, capturing learners' attention and making the educational process both enjoyable and effective. This approach is grounded in the principle of "drawing broader insights from specific cases, reflecting major themes through individual narratives, and conveying profound emotions via ordinary people [8]", ensuring that each small story serves as a compelling window into larger ecological and cultural contexts. Lastly, it is necessary to establish a scientific and systematic approach to evaluating the effectiveness of online eco-education. This evaluation process should consider various factors, such as learning outcomes, engagement levels, and the overall impact on learners. By adopting a comprehensive evaluation framework, we can ensure that the online eco-education programs are continually improved and meet the desired educational objectives.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

FUNDING

Yunnan Provincial Education Science Planning Project of 2023, Project Approval Number: BC23006

REFERENCES

- [1] Li Jinlan. Cross-cultural communication of ecological civilisation stories from the northward migration of Yunnan elephants. *News World*, 2022(05): 92-96.
- [2] Jurdi-Hage R, Hage H, Chow H. Cognitive and behavioural environmental concern among university students in a Canadian city: Implications for institutional interventions. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 2019, 35: 28-61. DOI: 10.1017/aee.2018.48.
- [3] Feng Qiguo, Chen Yanting, et al. Roots of Confidence and Paths of Self-activity in Overseas Communication of Wuyi Mountain Ecological Culture-Centred on Green International Students from Countries Along the "Belt and Road" in Northern Fujian Universities. *Journal of Wuyi College*, 2019, 38(11): 6-10.
- [4] Feng Qiguo, Chen Yanting, Huang Xiang. The Confidence Roots and Paths of Overseas Communication of Ecological Culture in Wuyi Mountain - Focusing on Green International Students from Countries Along the "Belt and Road" in Northern Fujian Colleges and Universities (II). *Journal of Wuyi College*, 2020, 39(01): 7-11.
- [5] Yu Mouchang. *On Ecological Civilization*. Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2010: 10.
- [6] Long Libo, Wu Ruofei. The Ecological Cultural Characteristics and Values of Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan: Based on the Concept of Green Development. *Social Scientist*, 2017(06): 152-156.
- [7] Yang Wanli. Telling the Story of China's Ecological Civilisation in the New Era with Empathy. *External Communication*, 2022(03): 35-38.
- [8] Qiu Hui. How to Increase "Chinese Content" in International Ecological and Environmental Stories?. *China Report*, 2021(11): 56-61.