

# Discourse Analysis of the Belt and Road Initiative From the Perspective of Central Asian Countries: A Case Study of the Republic of Kazakhstan

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This study employs Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) three-dimensional model, using the Republic of Kazakhstan as a case study, to delve into the discourse construction of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central Asian countries. Through detailed analysis of policy documents, media reports, and public discussions in Central Asian countries, this paper reveals how the BRI constructs specific social practices, discourse events, and textual meanings within these nations. The findings indicate that through this global development strategy, China has not only strengthened its economic ties with Central Asian countries but has also exerted profound influences on political, cultural, and social levels.

*Keywords:* Belt and Road Initiative, Central Asian countries, discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model

## Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative, as a major international cooperation and development strategy of China, has attracted widespread attention globally since its proposal in 2013. Central Asia, as an important segment of the ancient Silk Road, holds a central position in the Belt and Road Initiative. However, discussions surrounding this initiative often focus on economic cooperation, with relatively less in-depth analysis on how it impacts the social-cultural structures and discourse power construction of Central Asian countries. This paper aims to fill this research gap by taking the Republic of Kazakhstan as a case study to explore the discourse construction of the Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asian countries and its underlying implications.

## Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

This study adopts Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 1992) to analyze the discourse construction of the Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asian countries. Fairclough's model comprises three interrelated dimensions: discourse practice (the processes of text production,

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distribution, and interpretation), discourse event (the social context of specific communicative events), and social-cultural practice (how discourse impacts broader social and cultural structures), as illustrated in Figure 1.

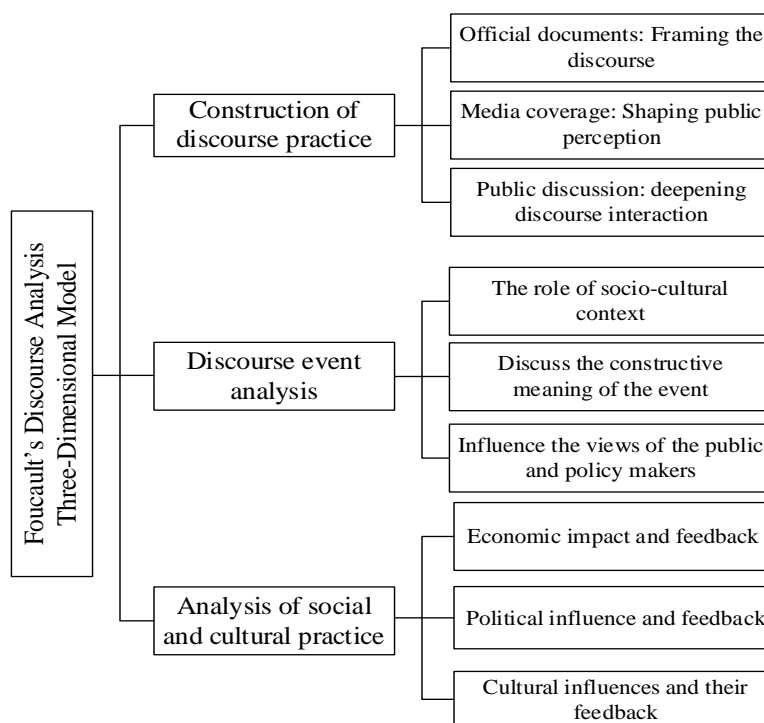


Figure 1. Foucault's discourse analysis three-dimensional model.

## Research Results

### Constructing of Discourse Practice

Discourse practice analysis reveals how the Belt and Road Initiative is constructed and disseminated in Central Asian countries through official documents, media reports, and public discussions, as well as the strategies and purposes involved in this process. The construction and dissemination of the Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asian countries is a multidimensional process involving various channels such as official documents, media reports, and public discussions. This process not only reflects the dissemination and reception of information but also demonstrates the dynamics of discourse power. The following is a specific analysis of this process:

**Official documents: Framing discourse.** Central Asian governments express their positions and objectives regarding participation in the Belt and Road Initiative through the issuance of policy statements, development plans, and cooperation frameworks. These documents form the basis of official discourse, providing a framework for understanding and implementing the initiative. In June 2017, China and Kazakhstan issued a joint statement emphasizing that the Belt and Road Initiative and Kazakhstan's "Bright Path" new economic policy are complementary, promoting comprehensive cooperation and development between the two countries. Both sides will seize this opportunity to further strengthen capacity and investment cooperation. They emphasized the significant importance of aligning the Belt and Road Initiative with the cooperative planning of the "Bright Path" new economic policy (Yidaiyilu (Information Sharing Platform, n.d.).

**Media reports: Shaping public perception.** Media in Central Asian countries disseminate and interpret information from official documents related to the Belt and Road Initiative through news, success stories, and expert comments. For example, the China-Kazakhstan natural gas pipeline project is one of the important cooperation projects between China and Kazakhstan in the field of energy cooperation, as well as a concrete manifestation of the Belt and Road Initiative. The construction of this pipeline project provides Kazakhstan with an important export channel, while also meeting China's growing energy needs, opening up new space for energy cooperation between the two countries (Бирюков, 2023). The media not only transmit information but also provide a platform for discussion and feedback, making possible the interaction between the government and the public. By reporting public opinions and feedback, the media promote broader social participation and discourse construction.

**Public discourse: Deepening discourse interaction.** Kazakhstan often hosts many forums and seminars related to the Belt and Road Initiative. For example, Kazakhstan frequently participates in and hosts conferences such as the "Central Asia-China" Forum and the "Silk Road" Economic Belt International Cooperation Forum, aiming to promote regional integration, and deepen economic and cultural ties between China and Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan. Additionally, Kazakhstan has also hosted broader international conferences including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank Annual Meeting, further strengthening cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road, promoting fund flows, and infrastructure development projects. Through these forums and seminars, Kazakhstan not only deepens cooperation with China but also enhances its position and influence in the Belt and Road Initiative to some extent, attracting more foreign investment, which contributes to its own economic development and regional economic integration.

### **Discourse Event Analysis**

The analysis focuses on specific discussion events related to the "Belt and Road" Initiative in Central Asian countries, such as conferences, forums, and public speeches. These events construct meaning and influence the perspectives of the public and policymakers within a particular socio-cultural context.

**The role of socio-cultural background.** Central Asian countries, with their rich history and cultural heritage, play a crucial role in the acceptance and interpretation of the "Belt and Road" Initiative within their socio-cultural context. For example, these countries generally value the opinions of communities and families, which influences the way information is disseminated and public discussions are conducted. Additionally, a shared focus on economic development and national security provides points of resonance for discussions on the "Belt and Road" initiative. The historical and cultural heritage of Central Asian countries provides a unique socio-cultural background for the implementation of the "Belt and Road" Initiative. Central Asia has historically been an integral part of the ancient Silk Road, connecting East and West and serving as a significant intermediary for cultural exchange and trade. This tradition provides historical and cultural support and recognition for the current "Belt and Road" Initiative (Aldashev & Guirkingner, 2017).

**Construction of meaning in discussion events.** Kazakhstan has hosted numerous specific discussion events on the "Belt and Road" Initiative, but here are a few notable examples that reflect its impact domestically and trigger public and professional discussions: Event 1. Eurasian International Transport Corridor: Various international forums held in Kazakhstan often highlight the Eurasian International Transport Corridor project as a key topic of discussion. The construction of this corridor aims to improve logistics and trade links between China, Central Asia, and even Europe, providing new momentum for Eurasian trade under the "Belt and Road"

Initiative. These discussions typically focus on the economic prospects of the project and its role in driving regional development (Vinokurov, Ahunbaev, Shashkenov, & Zaboev, 2021; Beifert, Shcherbanin, & Vinokurov, 2018). Event 2. Debt Sustainability Concerns: In Kazakhstan, particularly on social media and online forums, the issue of potential debt burdens caused by the “Belt and Road” projects is a hot topic. The public, economic analysts, and policymakers discuss the sources of funding for these infrastructure projects and how Kazakhstan can avoid overborrowing and falling into a debt trap (Mukhtarkhan, 2021). These discussion events and activities demonstrate the complexity of Kazakhstan’s acceptance and participation in the “Belt and Road” Initiative. From government officials to ordinary citizens, different groups have engaged in extensive discussions and evaluations of this global initiative through various channels.

**Influence on public and policymaker perspectives.** Enhanced sense of identity: Through discussions combined with specific socio-cultural backgrounds, the public’s sense of identification with the “Belt and Road” Initiative is strengthened. When people see that this initiative not only aligns with economic interests but also with cultural and social values, they are more likely to support and actively participate in it. Shaping policy trends: Policymakers, when participating in these discussion events, not only share information but also absorb the opinions of the public and experts. These interactions help shape their views on the initiative, influencing policy formulation and adjustments. Especially when discussions emphasize initiatives that align with national development strategies, policymakers may be more inclined to adopt policy measures that support and promote the implementation of the initiative.

### **Social and Cultural Practice Analysis**

This section explores how the “Belt and Road” Initiative impacts the economic, political, and cultural landscape of Central Asian countries, and how these changes, in turn, affect the understanding and implementation of the initiative. The following is an examination of this reciprocal dynamic:

**Economic impact and feedback.** Infrastructure development and investment growth: Central Asian countries have gained significant infrastructure investments through the “Belt and Road” Initiative, including roads, railways, and energy projects, which not only improve regional connectivity but also foster local economic development. With improved infrastructure, trade and logistics efficiency in Central Asian countries increases, creating conditions to further attract foreign investment. Economic diversification: Through cooperation with China, Central Asian countries have made progress in promoting economic diversification, particularly in energy, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors. This diversification helps reduce dependence on a single economic sector, enhancing economic stability. Feedback mechanisms: Economic growth and diversification enhance Central Asian countries’ support for the “Belt and Road” Initiative, prompting these countries to deepen cooperation with China further. Simultaneously, economic development raises concerns about environmental protection, sustainable development, and social responsibility, influencing the future direction of the initiative’s implementation.

**Political impact and feedback.** Geopolitical status enhancement: The “Belt and Road” Initiative enhances the international standing of Central Asian countries, making them crucial hubs connecting Asia and Europe. This elevation in status helps Central Asian countries play a greater role in international affairs, increasing their bargaining power. Implementation of the initiative strengthens political ties between Central Asian countries and China but also sparks discussions about domestic political influences, including policy formulation, governance models, and political stability. Feedback mechanisms: Political changes promote further adjustments to the “Belt

and Road” Initiative, including demands for multilateral cooperation to ensure sustainability and benefit for participating countries.

**Cultural impact and feedback.** Cultural exchange and integration: The “Belt and Road” Initiative promotes cultural exchange between Central Asian countries and China, including language learning, arts, education, and personnel exchanges. This cultural exchange deepens mutual understanding and respect, fostering multicultural integration. Changes in cultural identity: With deepening exchanges and cooperation, cultural identities in Central Asian countries are also evolving, including levels of acceptance of foreign cultures and the blending of traditional and modern values. Feedback mechanisms: Changes in the cultural sphere, in turn, affect the acceptance and implementation of the “Belt and Road” Initiative. Cultural diversity and inclusivity become key factors for the initiative’s success, prompting implementation strategies to emphasize cultural sensitivity and societal impact.

### Conclusion

Through Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex discursive interactions in this process and their impact on the social-cultural structures of Central Asian countries. This paper demonstrates, through discourse analysis, the profound impact of the “Belt and Road” Initiative in Central Asia, not only in terms of economic cooperation but more importantly, in how it constructs and negotiates power, identity, and ideology through discourse practices, discourse events, and social-cultural practices. This analysis provides new perspectives for understanding the complexity and impact of the “Belt and Road” Initiative globally. Through this paper, we not only gain an in-depth understanding of the multidimensional impact of the “Belt and Road” Initiative in Central Asian countries from a discourse analysis perspective but also insight into how this initiative is understood, practiced in different social-cultural contexts, offering new perspectives and analytical tools for relevant policy-making and future research.

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