

**Towards Discursive Power:
Discourse Interaction on the Belt and Road
Initiative (BRI) between China and the
Portuguese-Speaking Countries**

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Abstract

This research analyses the mechanism through which discourse exercises influence in foreign policy as a soft power tool, taking the discursive interaction between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries (PSCs) surrounding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a case study.

After nearly three decades of discussion, ‘soft power’, has become an controversial topic in world politics. Nowadays, the widely accepted definition of soft power comprises the ability of one country to shape others’ preferences and policies through its own culture, values, foreign policy (FP), and other resources of attractiveness (Nye, 1990, 2011). Soft power can work not only as a complement, but even as an alternative to ‘hard power’, reducing the need for military interventions and economic conflicts (and the damage and casualties that they may cause) (Nye, 2011; Gallarotti, 2011: 34). In this sense, this research aims to analyse how soft power’s influence contributes to finding a way of maintaining peace and stability. Soft power is constructed through two means: discourse persuasion and behavioural modelling (Nye, 2011: 91). This research focuses on discursive persuasion, which refers to the interpretation of a wielder’s culture and values as attractive, and of FP as legitimate or moral.

Dialectical Discourse Analysis (DDA) which deconstructs the triangular relationship of ‘discourse-knowledge-power’, allows us to understand the mutual interaction between discourse structure and social structure via agents (Jäger, 2001; van Dijk, 2008a; Fairclough, 2015; Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018) and analyse the two-way discursive soft power influences between participants. DDA states that, political agents in the process of making choices of actions consider both reasons in favour and against an action, and their alternatives (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 1-5). Political discourse provides these reasons by: identifying what problems exist in actual social contexts, legitimating policy goals with values, and proposing what

actions should be taken to resolve the identified problems. A receiver manages a producer's discursive influence by accepting/complementing/criticizing/opposing the latter's discursive elements- context, goals, values, and actions (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Fairclough, 2018a). In this sense, DDA allows to compare the contents of discursive elements between participants' narratives and the widely shared perceptions. Most DDA studies focus only on how one side's narratives exert influence (Slembrouck, 2001; Fairclough, 2015). This research contributes to the current literature by adapting the DDA framework to analyse two-way influences, relating changes in receiver's narratives to the producer's texts.

Based on the analysis of the corpus of political texts I collect, it can be said that in China-Portugal, China-Brazil and China-Angola discursive interactions on BRI, each participant's BRI narratives attempt to change the counterpart's narratives and behaviour and change according to the government's perceptions of domestic and international conditions, and of the BRI and its possible alternatives. Participants use coercion, inducement and persuasion as three means to enhance the influences of discursive elements. The elements enhanced by coercion represent soft power weakness while the other means are mainly used to enhance soft power strengthens.

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