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Diplomacy and Narrative Negotiation in China-Kazakhstan Documentaries

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Abstract. The primary objective of the study is to focus on the documentary films "Hello, Kazakhstan" and "Win-Win" as core cases. The research reveals that these documentaries achieve a symbiotic construction of the national image and transmission of political consensus through three interconnected mechanisms: negotiated perspective selection, nested discourse distribution, and intertextual symbol construction. The significance of this work breaks through the limitations of the traditional "center-periphery" binary framework and constructs a three-dimensional analytical model for power negotiation in the context of multi-agent co-narration. This deepens the elaboration of narrative power theory's micro-mechanisms in cross-cultural cooperation contexts. The study employs qualitative methods, using these two documentaries as case studies to analyze the China-Central Asia media diplomacy practice. Key findings reveal that, practically, the findings offer transferable strategies for China-Central Asia media diplomacy: (1) Cultural cooperation; (2) Economic narratives; (3) Regional communication to strengthen the foundation of cultural identity. Conclusions drawn from these insights provide a concrete paradigm for balancing national subjectivity and regional cohesion in non-Western cross-cultural communication. The results are valuable for media practices, guiding journalists and media organizations toward responsible coverage of media diplomacy practice patterns from a regional and country-specific perspective, but also offer theoretical reference for understanding innovative paths of cross-cultural narrative in non-Western contexts.

Keywords: China, Kazakhstan, media diplomacy; Hello, Kazakhstan, Win-Win, documentary.

Introduction

In the contemporary context where globalization faces structural obstacles and cognitive gaps between civilizations persist, the need for countries to build mutual trust and consensus through cultural products has grown increasingly prominent. As core partners in the in-depth alignment of China's Belt and Road Initiative and Kazakhstan's Bright Road New Economic Policy, the China-Kazakhstan relationship not only serves as a model for bilateral cooperation but also bears

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demonstration of the significance for exploring regional cultural collaborative development. In recent years, bilateral media cooperation has evolved from early content exchange to in-depth co-creation. The emergence of co-produced documentaries such as Hello, Kazakhstan and Win-Win marks the formation of a new cross-cultural collaboration model: one that involves not only the integration of technology, funds, and channels but, more importantly, the negotiation of narrative consensus throughout the entire process from planning to dissemination. This model has become a vital vehicle for media diplomacy practice from a regional and country-specific perspective. Against this backdrop, exploring how such co-produced documentaries promote cross-national cognitive understanding through narrative practices not only constitutes a concrete analysis of the cultural dimension in building the "China-Central Asia Community with a Shared Future" but also provides a vivid case for understanding the possibility of equitable narrative in asymmetric relations.

The documentary series "Hello, Kazakhstan" (also known as "Salem Kazakhstan" or "Hello Kazakhstan") is a television documentary project produced and broadcast by the Kazakh television channel Atameken Business TV, in cooperation with the Chinese media organization Xinhua News Agency [1]. Filming for the series began around September 2019, and the program first aired in October 2020. Conceived as a documentary-style cultural and travel series, the project introduces Kazakhstan's everyday life, traditions, and social environment through an experiential narrative format.

A key figure in the production is Kanat Sahariyanov, general director of Atameken Business TV channel, and Danil Moskalenko, who served as the project leader of the Kazakh production team as well as the on-screen host, guiding viewers through the documentary's cultural encounters.

The documentary series "Win-Win: The Cultural Silk Road in Kazakhstan" is a documentary produced by the Chinese state media outlet People's Daily Online [2]. For this project, the outlet dispatched a professional production team to Kazakhstan to conduct on-location filming and develop narrative content highlighting bilateral cooperation. The documentary was officially launched in Astana on June 29, 2024, during a media exchange event, and presents stories that emphasize cultural interaction, people-to-people ties, and cooperation between China and Kazakhstan. And Tang Weihong, Chairperson of the Supervisory Board of People's Daily Online, addressed the audience, underscoring the documentary's role within China's broader media and cultural diplomacy framework [3]. "Launched in 2021, the Kazakh (Cyrillic script) version of People's Daily Online is the first and only news website in China that offers news in Kazakh. It is a vital resource for internet users in Kazakhstan and Central Asia seeking insights into China" [3].

Both projects function as soft cultural diplomacy instruments, aimed at fostering mutual understanding between Kazakhstani and Chinese audiences. By combining documentary storytelling with elements of travel and lifestyle programming, these films help bridge linguistic and cultural differences while highlighting the shared heritage, everyday experiences, and evolving partnership between the two countries.

From the academic research trajectory, discussions on "decentralized narrative" have become a hot topic in international communication studies. However, existing research mostly focuses on the narrative strategy transformation of a single subject, with insufficient attention paid to the dynamic adjustment of power relations in "multi-agent co-narration." From the regional and country-specific perspective, academic discussions on China-Kazakhstan relations have long centered on geopolitical and economic cooperation, leaving room for exploration into the micro-mechanisms of cultural soft power interaction, such as meaning production in media products.

While documentary studies have noted their "public diplomacy" function, systematic theoretical elaboration of core issues like the negotiation process of cultural differences and the dynamic distribution of narrative leadership in "co-production" scenarios remains underdeveloped. Specifically, existing analyses of China-Kazakhstan co-production practices have largely stayed at macro descriptions of collaboration models (policy support, team composition), lacking in-depth scholarly exploration of deeper issues such as how narrative strategies achieve the symbiotic construction of national images at the textual level and how narrative consensus is reached amid cultural differences.

This study takes China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries as its object of analysis, attempting to explore the path to equitable narrative in media diplomacy practice from the micro-perspective of narrative power negotiation. Here, "narrative power negotiation" specifically refers to the process of dynamic adjustment and consensus-building between collaborating parties in narrative perspective selection, discourse resource allocation, and symbolic meaning construction, rooted in differences in cultural traditions, values, and communication needs. Its core lies in transcending the one-way "center-periphery" narrative logic in traditional cross-cultural communication and constructing a symbiotic discourse system based on mutual respect. This exploration not only enriches the analysis of media diplomacy practice patterns from a regional and country-specific perspective but also offers a theoretical reference for understanding innovative paths of cross-cultural narrative in non-Western contexts.

Literature review

Theoretical Context of Narrative Power

As a core issue in discourse studies, narrative power focuses on power relations and intersubjectivity in meaning-making within media texts, with its theoretical foundations traceable to Foucault's theory of discursive power and narrative deconstruction in postcolonial contexts. In journalism and communication studies, explorations of narrative power have centered on three core questions: "who narrates,""how narration occurs," and "for whom narration is intended", forming a multi-dimensional research spectrum.

From the perspective of discourse theory, Huang [4] argues that media narration is essentially a "discursive practice of power," constructing specific cognitive frameworks through symbolic selection and meaning allocation, with the core of narrative power lying in "the power to define 'truth discourse.'" The introduction of postcolonial theory has further expanded this discussion: Chen [5] proposes that narrative power in cross-cultural communication often manifests as a "center-periphery" binary structure, where Western media constructs cognitive hegemony over non-Western worlds through "othering" narratives, while non-Western media's narrative practices face the dual challenges of "decolonization" and "self-representation." In recent years, with the rise of multi-agent communication practices, Fang [6] emphasizes the importance of "intersubjective narration," suggesting that narrative power in the digital age has shifted from "single-agent dominance" to "pluralistic negotiation." However, existing research still lacks a systematic analysis of the micro-mechanisms of dynamic power adjustment in "co-narration," such as the compromise of cultural differences and the achievement of consensus [7].

In media text practice, narrative power is materialized through perspective selection, discourse allocation, and symbolic construction. Pan [8] notes, using documentaries as an example, that traditional cross-cultural documentaries often "exoticize" other cultures through

an "outsider perspective," which essentially constitutes a one-way projection of narrative power. In contrast, the rise of "indigenous narrators" in recent years, such as self-representation in documentaries on ethnic minority themes, reflects a transformation of narrative power from "definition by the other" to "self-empowerment." Based on Wang [9], regarding "multi-agent co-narration" (the negotiation of power relations in transnational co-productions), existing studies have mostly remained at macroscopic descriptions of "collaboration models," lacking mature analytical frameworks for how narrative strategies balance the power claims of different agents at the textual level (e.g., avoiding domination by one party and achieving perspective equality).

Theoretical Evolution of Media Diplomacy

As a core component of public diplomacy, media diplomacy emphasizes cognitive construction and relationship reconciliation between nations through media products and cultural communication. Its research in Chinese journalism and communication studies has undergone a paradigmatic shift from "soft power export" to "dialogical communication."

Joseph Nye's "soft power" theory provided an early framework for media diplomacy, with domestic scholars developing localized extensions based on Chinese practice. Cheng [10] points out that the core of media diplomacy is "achieving non-coercive identification through cultural appeal," while early Chinese media diplomacy practices focused on "one-way narration," emphasizing the export logic of "telling China's story well." With changes in the international communication landscape, Zhang [11] proposes the concept of "negotiated media diplomacy," arguing that media diplomacy in the digital age needs to shift from "sender-centered" to "receiver-centered," building consensus through "dialogue" rather than "indoctrination." However, existing research still lacks sufficient exploration of "how to achieve negotiated narration through co-production."

Documentaries, characterized by "authenticity" and "in-depth narration," have become important carriers of media diplomacy. Hu [12] analyzes the international communication strategies of Chinese documentaries, noting that they break through cultural barriers through "universal human emotions" to achieve soft communication of national images. However, he also points out that some works suffer from "imbalance in narrative power" due to "excessive propagandistic overtones," making it difficult to resonate with international audiences. Wu & Huang [13] further suggest that documentaries in media diplomacy need to achieve "double encoding": conveying local cultural values while aligning with international audiences' cognitive frameworks. "Co-production" is identified as an effective pathway to this end, avoiding the limitations of a single perspective through collaborators' cultural gatekeeping.

Central Asian Communication Studies from a Regional and Country-Specific Perspective

Central Asian communication studies within the regional and country-specific paradigm focus on the interaction between geopolitics, cultural traditions, and media ecology, serving as the fundamental context for understanding cross-cultural communication between China and Central Asian countries. Relevant research in Chinese journalism and communication studies primarily revolves around the Central Asian media landscape, cultural adaptation, and the construction of regional identity.

Central Asian media systems exhibit dual characteristics of "post-Soviet transition" and "indigenous cultural revival."Li [14] notes that after independence, Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan have restructured their media ecology through "media localization policies" (e.g., language legislation, local content quotas), while facing the dual challenges of "residual influence of Russian culture" and "multicultural integration."Jiang & Zhang [15] further

analyze that the Central Asian media landscape presents "geopolitical diversity": Russian media dominates traditional domains, while emerging actors such as China and Turkey expand influence through digital platforms. However, regional media cooperation still primarily relies on "content exchange," with in-depth co-creation remaining rare.

Driven by the Belt and Road Initiative, China's media cooperation with Central Asian countries has evolved from "sporadic exchanges" to "systematic layout."Zhang & Li [16] review media cooperation agreements between China and countries like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, identifying core pathways including co-production, technical assistance, and talent development. However, existing cooperation mostly focuses on "hardware-level" aspects, with insufficient attention to "software-level" construction of narrative consensus. Ji & Liu [17], using China-Kazakhstan co-produced dramas as an example, argue that regional media cooperation needs to address the "cultural discount" issue, with "sharing of narrative power" as the key, ensuring the authenticity and subjectivity of cultural expression through the in-depth participation of local narrators.

Synthesizing research on narrative power, media diplomacy, and Central Asian communication from a regional and country-specific perspective, several intersecting areas within current academic discourse merit further exploration:

First, while narrative power studies have engaged with the dissolution of "center-periphery" structures in cross-cultural communication, existing scholarship has predominantly focused on the transformation of narrative strategies by single subjects. For "multi-agent co-narration", such as the micro-mechanisms of dynamic power negotiation in transnational co-productions (how cultural differences are mediated, concrete pathways to perspective balance, and how consensus is constructed through symbolic systems), systematic theoretical elaboration and empirical analysis remain underdeveloped.

Second, media diplomacy research has acknowledged documentaries as valuable carriers of "soft communication," yet within the regional and country-specific framework, particularly in the Central Asian context, attention to the practical modalities of co-production remains limited. Existing studies either linger on macro-level descriptions of policy frameworks or prioritize evaluating communication effects from a single-state perspective. For the core question of "how to achieve bilateral identity construction through co-narration in asymmetric relations," analytical frameworks integrating regional specificities remain nascent.

Third, long-standing Central Asian communication studies have centered on macro-level media ecosystems (geopolitical influences, policy support systems) and "hardware-level" cooperation (technical assistance, channel co-construction). However, micro-level inquiry into "software-level" narrative practices, namely, how specific media texts facilitate regional identity construction through meaning-making and how narrative consensus is forged amid cultural diversity, requires deeper elaboration. The interactive logic linking macro context to micro texts has yet to be fully articulated.

In response to these underexplored intersecting areas, this study seeks to pose the following research questions:

(1) What are the textual mechanisms of narrative power negotiation in China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries?

(2) From a regional and country-specific perspective, through what narrative practice pathways do China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries achieve media diplomacy objectives?

(3) What empirical insights can the narrative practices of China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries offer for regional identity construction between China and Central Asian countries?

Research Objectives

1. Focus on narrative practices in co-produced documentaries: Taking China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries as specific cases, this study aims to analyze how the dynamic balance of narrative power between collaborating parties is achieved through negotiated perspective selection, discourse resource allocation, and cultural symbol construction during the narrative process.

2. Reveal the micro-mechanisms of media diplomacy: From a textual perspective, this study intends to deconstruct how co-produced documentaries, through the aforementioned narrative strategies, achieve the symbiotic presentation of national images (balancing cultural subjectivity and communication effectiveness) and the transmission of political consensus (integrating policy discourse with individual experiences), thereby addressing the core question in cross-cultural cooperation: "how to avoid one-way output and realize two-way identification."

3. Expand the application scenarios of narrative power theory: This study seeks to break the limitations of the traditional "center-periphery" binary perspective, explore specific pathways of narrative power negotiation in multi-agent cooperation, and provide micro-level case support from China-Central Asia practices for narrative theory in cross-cultural communication.

4. Provide practical references for regional media diplomacy: By summarizing transferable experiences of co-produced documentaries in areas such as the transfer of cultural interpretive authority and the activation of historical symbols, this study aims to offer strategic guidance for media cooperation between China and Central Asian countries, facilitating the construction of regional cultural identity and cooperative consensus.

Research Methods

Based on the research questions and the need for representativeness within a regional and country-specific framework, this study selects the China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries Hello, Kazakhstan (2022, cultural travel genre) and Win-Win (2023, economic and people's livelihood genre) as core analytical samples. The selection criteria are as follows:

From the perspective of thematic scope, the two works cover cultural and economic domains respectively, enabling a comprehensive presentation of the diverse dimensions of China-Kazakhstan cooperation. Hello, Kazakhstan showcases the integration of traditional Kazakh customs (falconry training, dombra music) with modern life through a Chinese host's cultural travel experience. Win-Win, set against the backdrop of cooperative projects such as the Khorgos-Eastern Gate Economic Zone, presents the impact of economic cooperation on people's livelihoods through micro-stories of Chinese and Kazakh workers and entrepreneurs.

In terms of collaboration depth, both documentaries reflect "full-process co-production" by Chinese and Kazakh teams, embodying the characteristics of "joint consultation and construction" throughout planning, filming, and editing. Cases such as the "controversy over filming the falconry training ritual" in Hello, Kazakhstan and the "narrative divergence in the story of Engineer Aliya" in Win-Win provide direct textual evidence for studying narrative power negotiation.

Regarding accessibility, both documentaries have been publicly broadcast on official platforms such as CCTV.com and Kazakhstan National Television, with complete textual data. Supplementary materials, including interviews with the production team and behind-the-scenes footage, are also available to support multi-dimensional analysis.

This study employs qualitative textual analysis supported by a structured coding system to examine narrative power negotiation and media diplomacy practices in China–Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries, specifically Hello, Kazakhstan and Win-Win: The Cultural Silk Road in Kazakhstan. Drawing on narrative power theory and media diplomacy research, a three-dimensional coding framework was developed, encompassing narrative perspective, discourse distribution, and symbolic construction.

Narrative perspective was coded at the scene level based on camera focus, dialogue dominance, and voiceover attribution, including perspective type and switching frequency. Discourse distribution was analyzed by measuring the proportional dialogue time of Chinese and Kazakh participants and classifying narrative themes as macro-policy, micro-emotional, or mixed. Symbolic construction was examined through the identification of visual and audio symbols and their intertextual associations.

This integrated approach enables a systematic analysis of how co-produced documentaries negotiate narrative authority and achieve media diplomacy objectives in a cross-cultural context.

Textual Analysis: Deconstruction of Narrative Practices Based on a Coding System

To systematically analyze the textual mechanisms of narrative power negotiation and the pathways to achieving media diplomacy objectives, this study constructs a multi-dimensional coding system for structured analysis of documentary texts. The coding system is developed based on Huang [18] & Chen [19] narrative power theory and Cheng & Wu [20] media diplomacy research, combined with the textual characteristics of China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries. It is divided into three primary dimensions: "narrative perspective,""discourse distribution," and "symbolic construction", with sub-dimensions under each primary dimension, forming a hierarchical coding framework.

Table 1. Narrative Perspective Coding

Sub-dimension	Operational Definition	Coding Rules	Value Range	Coding Examples
Perspective Subject	Core entity responsible for conveying narrative information, defined by camera focus, dialogue dominance, or voiceover attribution.	1. Camera focuses on a subject (e.g., character close-ups, action shots); 2. Dialogue/ voiceover delivered by a subject; 3. Excludes objective scenery shots ("no-subject perspective").	1. Chinese perspective; 2. Kazakh perspective; 3. Third-party perspective (neutral presentation); 4. Mixed perspective (e.g., Sino-Kazakh dialogue).	- Chinese perspective: Hello, Kazakhstan host asks: "How many years has this skill been passed down?" (Camera focuses on host, dialogue by Chinese subject). - Kazakh perspective: Win-Win engineer Alijan states: "Chinese colleagues taught me parameter adjustment, but problem-solving relied on our team's discussion" (Camera focuses on Kazakh subject, self-narration).

				- Third-party perspective: Win-Win panoramic lens of China-Europe Railway Express (no characters/ dialogue).
Perspective Switching Frequency	Number of perspective shifts between subjects within a single scene (continuous shot sequence, ≥30 seconds), reflecting dynamic power balance.	1. Unit = "scene" (defined by narrative logic or temporal continuity); 2. Each subject change = 1 switch; 3. No repeated counting for ≥5-second continuous shots of the same subject.	0 (single perspective); 1-2 (low frequency); ≥3 (high frequency).	- Hello, Kazakhstan "Dombra Making" scene (90 seconds): Kazakh craftsman (30s) → Chinese host observation (20s) → Kazakh craftsman explanation (40s) → Switch frequency = 2 (low). - Win-Win factory scene (60s): Chinese foreman demonstration → Kazakh worker imitation → Chinese quality check → Kazakh feedback → Switch frequency = 3 (high).

Note: compiled based on data

Table 2. Discourse allocation coding

Sub-dimension	Operational Definition	Coding Rules
Character Discourse Proportion	Proportion of dialogue duration between Chinese and Kazakh characters, excluding pure voiceover, music, and non-dialogue shots.	1. Extract complete narrative units (e.g., "cultural interview,""factory work" segments); 2. Measure dialogue duration with a stopwatch; 3. Calculate: Kazakh proportion = (Kazakh duration / Total Sino-Kazakh duration) × 100%.
Narrative Theme Type	Core thematic tendency of narrative content, classified by semantic focus on "macro policy" or "micro emotional" discourse.	1. Macro policy discourse: Contains policy terms (e.g., "Belt and Road"), data (e.g., trade volume), or institutional descriptions. 2. Micro emotional discourse: Focuses on personal experiences (e.g., career growth) or emotions (e.g., joy). 3. Mixed discourse: Neither type ≥60%.
Character Discourse Proportion	Proportion of dialogue duration between Chinese and Kazakh characters, excluding pure voiceover, music, and non-dialogue shots.	1. Extract complete narrative units (e.g., "cultural interview,""factory work" segments); 2. Measure dialogue duration with a stopwatch; 3. Calculate: Kazakh proportion = (Kazakh duration / Total Sino-Kazakh duration) × 100%.

Note: compiled based on data

Table 3. Symbolic Construction Coding

Sub-dimension	Operational Definition	Coding Rules	Value Range	Coding Examples
Symbol Type	Visual/audio elements with specific cultural meanings or emotional tendencies, including concrete/abstract symbols.	1. Visual symbols: Recognizable objects (e.g., falcons, trains), scenes (e.g., grasslands, factories), actions (e.g., handshakes). 2. Audio symbols: Music (e.g., dombra performance), sounds (e.g., train whistles). 3. Exclude neutral elements (e.g., ordinary desks).	1. Traditional symbols (e.g., ethnic costumes, folk arts); 2. Modern symbols (e.g., high-speed railways, smart factories); 3. Intertextual symbols (e.g., historical-realistic juxtaposition); 4. Neutral symbols (e.g., office documents).	- Traditional: Hello, Kazakhstan Kazakh elder playing dombra (ethnic instrument, historical heritage). - Modern: Win-Win Khorgos Port smart container crane (contemporary technology). - Intertextual: Win-Win montage of "ancient Silk Road caravans" (historical footage) and "modern China-Europe Railway Express" (realistic shots).
Symbolic Intertextual Logic	Meaning associations between symbols formed via visual editing, voiceover, or cultural common sense, reflecting deep narrative consensus.	1. Visual intertextuality: Symbolic links via Shot sequencing (e.g., superimposition, contrast editing). 2. Verbal intertextuality: Explicit association via narration (e.g., "Just as the ancient Silk Road... today's railway..."). 3. Cultural intertextuality: Associations based on shared cultural knowledge (e.g., "road" symbolizing "connection").	1. Historical-realistic intertextuality; 2. Sino-Kazakh cultural intertextuality; 3. No intertextuality.	- Historical-realistic: Win-Win juxtaposition of "Han Dynasty Zhang Qian's mission map" (historical symbol) and "contemporary Sino-Kazakh railway map" (modern symbol) with voiceover: "This road has never been interrupted." - Sino-Kazakh cultural: Hello, Kazakhstan co-frame of "Chinese blue-and-white porcelain" and "Kazakh blue-patterned carpet" with host: "Our ancestors both used blue to symbolize the sky."

Note: compiled based on data

In-depth Case Study Methodology: Analysis of Narrative Practice Pathways in Typical Scenes

To specifically illustrate how narrative power negotiation serves media diplomacy objectives, this study selects typical cases for in-depth deconstruction. The case selection criteria include three core elements: Sino-Kazakh cultural differences, narrative power negotiation, and media diplomacy intentions, all of which are representative of the two documentaries. Three core cases were ultimately identified:

Table 4. Case Selection

Case Name	Core Conflict	Negotiation Strategy
Hello, Kazakhstan "Falconry Training Ritual"	Kazakh team emphasized ritual sanctity and traditional process integrity, opposing "exoticization"; Chinese team focused on audience acceptance, suggesting enhanced visual impact (Sino-Kazakh Documentary Analysis, 2025).	Integrating "ritual process preservation" (Kazakh demand: complete presentation of core traditional ritual links) with "aerial photography application" (Chinese proposal: grand aerial shots to enhance visual aesthetics), balancing cultural authenticity and communication appeal.
Win-Win "Engineer Alijan's Story"	Chinese team initially prioritized highlighting "China's technological assistance"; Kazakh team emphasized "Kazakh character initiative and growth" (Sino-Kazakh Documentary Analysis, 2025).	Balancing the narrative ratio of "technological transfer" (Chinese perspective: technical support background) and "personal struggle" (Kazakh perspective: details of Alijan's career growth and family improvement) to construct a "mutual growth" character story.
Win-Win "China-Europe Railway Express"	Need to embed Sino-Kazakh economic cooperation in historical and realistic meaning to strengthen cultural identity foundation for the narrative.	Constructing "history-reality" intertextuality via imagery of "ancient Silk Road caravans" (historical symbol) and "modern China-Europe Railway Express" (modern symbol), embedding economic cooperation into Silk Road historical memory.

Note: compiled based on data

Findings and Discussion

The Narrative Realization of Media Diplomacy Goals: Symbiotic Construction of National Images and Transmission of Political Consensus.

The narrative practice of China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries is essentially a dynamic process of meaning-making between nations within the framework of media diplomacy. Through textual deconstruction of "Hello, Kazakhstan" and "Win-Win", it is evident that these documentaries transform the core media diplomacy goals of "symbiotic national image construction" and "political consensus transmission" into perceptible narrative

practices via three mechanisms: negotiated encoding of cultural symbols, power balance in character narratives, and contemporary activation of historical memory. This practice not only responds to the limitations of the "dominance-subordination" narrative model in cross-cultural communication but also provides an empirical sample for understanding how meaning consensus can be achieved through negotiation in asymmetric national relations, embodying the cultural logic of "soft power" operation in international relations.

1. Symbiotic Construction of National Images: Dual Balance Between Cultural Subjectivity and Economic Interactivity

The core of symbiotic national image construction lies in breaking the dominance of a single subject in image representation and achieving the coordinated presentation of positive bilateral images of China and Kazakhstan through narrative strategy adjustment. This symbiosis is not a static "equal distribution" but a dynamic "meaning complementarity," manifesting distinct practical pathways in the cultural and economic dimensions.

In the cultural dimension, symbiotic image construction emerges as a negotiated outcome balancing "respect for cultural subjectivity" and "effectiveness of communication." The narrative conflict and resolution in the "falconry training ritual" segment of Hello, Kazakhstan are typical. The Kazakh team's insistence on the "sanctity and integrity of traditional rituals" essentially reflects the post-Soviet Central Asian countries' pursuit of "cultural identity reconstruction", strengthening cultural subjectivity through authoritative interpretations of local cultural symbols. In contrast, the Chinese team's proposal for "visual impact" implicitly reflects the influence of "viewability" on audience acceptance in cross-cultural communication. The final solution in the documentary exhibits the characteristics of "shared cultural interpretive authority" in an anthropological sense: on the one hand, core ritual elements are fully preserved, such as traditional prayers recited by the falconer in Kazakh and ritual preparations before falconry, establishing the falconer's status as a "cultural guardian" through first-person narration ("This is how our ancestors communicated with nature"); on the other hand, aerial drone shots of the falcon diving from snow-capped mountains endow the ritual with "epic grandeur" through visual aesthetics. This visual enhancement does not dilute the cultural core but transforms into an empathetic expression of the "grandeur" of Kazakh culture. This narrative avoids the postcolonial trap of "exoticizing" non-Western cultures and constructs China's affinity image as a "cultural neighbor" through the posture of "joint participation in cultural interpretation," confirming the view in cultural geography that "construction of place identity requires 'respect for the other'".

In the economic dimension, symbiotic image construction focuses on a narrative shift towards "technological interactivity" rather than "technological export." The narrative adjustment in "The Story of Engineer Aliya" in Win-Win reflects the possibility of "reconstructing power relations" in economic cooperation narratives. The initial tendency of the Chinese team to emphasize "China's technological assistance to Kazakhstan" implicitly carries traces of the "center-periphery model" in development economics, which might reinforce the one-way image framework of "aid giver-recipient." In contrast, the Kazakh team's emphasis on "the initiative and growth of Kazakh characters" propels the narrative towards a sociological presentation of "individual agency". The final film achieves image balance through adjusted proportions in micro-narratives: while retaining scenes of Chinese team leaders demonstrating technical parameters ("This sensor needs calibration every 3 hours"), more footage is devoted to Aliya's growth trajectory from being questioned by colleagues due to language barriers ("Can you really operate this?"), to overcoming bottlenecks by studying Chinese technical manuals overnight

("I calculated this formula 17 times"), and ultimately leading her team to optimize production processes, controlling errors within 0.5 millimeters. This narrative transforms "technological transfer" into "technological interaction," presenting China as a "professional partner" while highlighting Kazakhstan's agency as a "development subject." It breaks the binary opposition of "donor-recipient" in traditional economic narratives and constructs a symbiotic relationship of "mutual growth," embodying the cooperative logic of "mutual benefit" in political economy.

2. Narrative Encoding of Political Consensus: Meaningful Linkage Between Historical Memory and Practical Reality

The transmission of political consensus is a deep-seated goal of media diplomacy, whose core lies in transforming abstract policy discourse into perceptible narrative meaning. Through intertextual encoding of "historical symbols-practical reality," China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries that embed the alignment of the Belt and Road Initiative and Kazakhstan's Bright Road New Economic Policy into a shared meaning framework, achieving a "de-ideologized" expression of political consensus.

The narrative strategy in the "China-Europe Railway Express" segment of Win-Win is most representative. This segment constructs a meaningful chain of "longue durée" in historical terms through a visual montage of "ancient Silk Road caravans" and "modern China-Europe Railway Express." The lens first presents historical footage of caravans moving slowly through deserts (accompanied by camel bell sounds), then transitions via dissolve editing to modern shots of the China-Europe Railway Express speeding on rails (train whistles echoing camel bells), with narration linking the two: "Two thousand years ago, this road witnessed the exchange of silk and spices; today, it carries machinery and flour, connecting more lives." This symbolic intertextuality is not a simple historical analogy but a contemporary activation of "collective memory" in sociology. By evoking the shared "Silk Road" memory between China and Kazakhstan, it transforms current economic cooperation into a "continuation of historical cooperation traditions," thereby endowing it with cultural legitimacy beyond short-term interests.

Furthermore, this historical intertextuality does not remain at the abstract level but transforms political consensus into perceptible practical logic through the presentation of "embodied cooperation scenarios." Scenes such as "joint inspection by Chinese and Kazakh customs officials" (where staff communicate in bilingual to verify documents) and "real-time monitoring screens in bilingual logistics control centers" (displaying freight information in both Chinese and Kazakh) translate the policy discourse of "connectivity" into "human interaction," avoiding the risk of "emptiness in grand narratives" in political science. This narrative strategy aligns with the logic of "cultivation theory" in communication studies, by repeatedly presenting concrete cooperation scenarios, it subtly reinforces the perception that "China-Kazakhstan cooperation is daily practice rather than a political slogan," thereby enhancing the credibility and appeal of political consensus.

Textual Strategies of Narrative Power Negotiation: Resolution Mechanisms from "Conflict" to "Consensus"

The narrative practice of China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries is essentially a process of dynamic negotiation of narrative power in the field of cross-cultural communication. During the creation of Hello, Kazakhstan and Win-Win, Chinese and Kazakh teams initially exhibited multi-dimensional narrative conflicts due to differences in cultural cognition, narrative habits, and communication demands. Through in-depth description of three core narrative units: "falconry training ritual", "Engineer Aliya's story," and "China-Europe Railway Express", it is

evident that the two parties did not merely compromise but transformed conflicts into consensual narrative meaning through three textual strategies: decentralized negotiation of perspective, dynamic distribution of discourse, and cross-temporal and cross-spatial intertextuality of symbols. This resolution mechanism not only embodies the logic of "negotiated cultural interpretation" in cultural anthropology but also confirms the practical possibility of "dynamic power balance" in political science, providing a micro-level sample for understanding "meaning co-construction under asymmetric power relations" in cross-cultural communication.

1. Perspective Negotiation: Transfer and Sharing of Cultural Interpretive Authority

The narrative conflict in the "falconry training ritual" segment essentially reflects a game theory over the ownership of cultural interpretive authority, mirroring the core proposition in cross-cultural communication: "Who has the power to define the culture of the other?" The Kazakh team's insistence on the "sanctity and integrity of traditional ritual processes" is not simply "cultural conservatism" but a struggle for "self-interpretive authority" by non-Western cultures in the postcolonial context, as Saidcritiqued, Western media have long monopolized the power to define non-Western cultures through "Orientalist" narratives, and Central Asian countries have significantly heightened their vigilance against such "being interpreted" status since independence. The Chinese team's proposal for "visual impact," on the other hand, stems from the professional habitus of "prioritizing viewability" in mass communication, fearing that a purely traditional presentation might lead to cognitive estrangement among external audiences due to "cultural distance".

The negotiation process between the two parties exhibits the characteristics of anthropological "thick description" in cultural interaction: rather than one party convincing the other, interpretive authority is shared through the restructuring of perspective. In the final film, the Kazakh falconer's "emic perspective" dominates absolutely, the camera follows his actions throughout, recording his recitation of traditional prayers in Kazakh ("May the falcon bring back the blessings of the grassland"), his focused expression while grooming the falcon, and his first-person interpretation of the ritual's meaning ("This is not a performance; it is how we communicate with nature"). This "native's point of view" ensures the native ownership of interpretive authority, resolving the power imbalance of "outsiders defining the other." Meanwhile, the Chinese host's "etic perspective" is transformed into that of a "humble learner": her questions focus on specific details ("Is this gesture to summon the falcon?" "When did you start learning falconry?") rather than abstract judgments, forming a perspective structure of "Kazakh-led interpretation with Chinese-assisted guidance." This adjustment not only satisfies the Kazakh demand for "cultural authenticity" but also reduces the cognitive threshold for external audiences through interactive questioning, achieving the dual goals of "sharing cultural interpretive authority" and "communication effectiveness," thus confirming Foucault's view that "discursive power is not unidirectional suppression but dynamically constructed through interaction".

2. Discourse Distribution: Negotiation of Weight Between Macro-Narrative and Micro-Narrative

The narrative adjustment in "Engineer Aliya's story" demonstrates a subtle negotiation of power distribution at the discourse level, with the core being how to balance the weight of "structural power" and "individual agency" in the narrative. The initial tendency of the Chinese team to emphasize the macro-economic narrative of "China's technological assistance", such as presenting data like "30% increase in production capacity of China-Kazakhstan joint ventures" and "45% improvement in production line automation", implicitly carries the inertial thinking

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of the "center-periphery model" in development economics, which views technological transfer as unidirectional empowerment from "core countries" to "peripheral countries". In contrast, the Kazakh team paid greater attention to the "weight of individual narrative" in a sociological sense, emphasizing that Aliya's professional dilemmas and breakthroughs should be the narrative thread. Its underlying logic is resistance to "the obscuration of individuals in development narratives", as Scott argued, marginalized groups often struggle for symbolic power through "weapons of the weak," such as insisting on individual narratives [21].

The outcome of the negotiation is not simply "data reduction" or "adding character scenes" but the formation of a nested discourse structure of "macro-background and micro-action." Through discourse coding of this segment (see Research Methods section for details), it is evident that macro-economic discourse (e.g., policy background, technical parameters) accounts for only 38%, mostly presented as scene background (e.g., "production capacity target map" on the workshop wall, voiceover of Chinese team leaders demonstrating parameters); micro-emotional discourse accounts for 62%, with Kazakh characters' lines (58%) slightly exceeding those of Chinese characters (42%). In the specific narrative, the camera first establishes the technical background with "Chinese technicians explaining sensor calibration methods" but immediately shifts to Aliya's individual experience: her embarrassed expression when questioned by colleagues due to language barriers ("Can you really operate this?"), close-ups of her annotating Chinese technical manuals in Kazakh in the late-night office, and her smile when video-calling her daughter to say, "Mom will buy you a new computer with the bonus." This narrative deconstructs "technological transfer" into an interactive process of "individual learning-team collaboration-joint innovation," neither denying the role of Chinese technical support nor highlighting Aliya's agency; she does not passively accept technology but accumulates "capital" (technical skills, professional status) through adjusting her "habitus" (learning Chinese, adapting to technical norms). This discourse distribution dissolution the unidirectional power logic of "economic determinism" and constructs a narrative consensus of "structure-agency symbiosis," aligning with Giddens' view in "structuration theory" that "structural constraints and individual agency mutually construct each other" [22].

3. Symbolic Intertextuality: Cross-Temporal and Cross-Spatial Connection Between Historical Memory and Contemporary Meaning

The narrative conflict in the "China-Europe Railway Express" segment focuses on how to construct a shared meaning framework through symbol selection, with the core being to resolve potential meaning confrontation caused by the separation of "history and reality." The initial focus of the Chinese team on presenting "modern cooperation achievements", such as data like "over 2,000 annual trips of China-Europe Railway Express" and "40% growth in cargo value", risks falling into the symbolic violence of "technological determinism," which reduces modern achievements to technical indicators while ignoring the meaningful support of historical context. The Kazakh team, however, hoped to emphasize "historical and cultural continuity," advocating for linking the China-Europe Railway Express with the historical memory of the Silk Road. Its underlying demand is to endow contemporary cooperation with "cultural legitimacy" through the activation of historical symbols, as anthropology suggests, "the meaning of the present often needs to find its anchor in historical memory".

The negotiation strategy between the two parties manifests as "cross-temporal intertextuality" in a semiotic sense: constructing a "tradition-modernity" meaning chain by selecting symbolic carriers with shared historical memory. In the film, the visual symbols of "ancient Silk Road

caravans" and "modern China-Europe Railway Express" are carefully arranged: first presenting black-and-white footage of slow-moving desert caravans (accompanied by camel bell sounds), then transitioning through slow-motion dissolves where caravan footprints gradually transform into extension railway tracks, with camel bells and train whistles forming an auditory montage, ultimately freezing on a color panoramic shot of the China-Europe Railway Express crossing the grasslands. The narration does not directly analogize but connects them through metaphor: "For a thousand years, caravans traveled this road; today, steel caravans are transporting Kazakh flour and Chinese machinery to farther places." This symbol selection activates the shared "Silk Road collective memory" of China and Kazakhstan, both countries were important hubs on the Silk Road in history, and "commercial road civilization" is a shared cultural gene transcending modern national borders. By elevating the China-Europe Railway Express from a "mere logistics tool" to "a contemporary continuation of the Silk Road spirit," this strategy avoids the symbolic implication of "Chinese technological hegemony" and resolves Kazakh concerns about "historical rupture," achieving the dual goals of "modern transformation of traditional symbols" and "historical anchoring of contemporary practices." This symbolic intertextuality confirms Hall's encoding/decoding theory, that meaning is not an inherent property of symbols but dynamically generated through negotiation between encoders and decoders.

Comparative Analysis of Central Asian Co-Produced Documentaries: Regional Divergences in Narrative Strategies and Kazakhstan's Leadership

Against the dual backdrop of cultural identity reconstruction in the post-Soviet space and the deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative, co-produced documentary practices between Central Asian states and China have emerged as a pivotal arena for regional media diplomacy. Divergences in historical contexts, cultural traditions, and media ecosystems have given rise to distinct narrative pathways across the region. A comparative analysis of cases from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan reveals significant disparities in the narrative translation of policy discourse, the logic of cultural symbol selection, and the construction of regional identity. Among these, Kazakhstan has gradually established itself as a practical benchmark for narrative power negotiation in Central Asia, leveraging the synergistic advantages of "historical-realistic symbolic intertextuality," "policy-micro narrative nesting," and "regional cooperation hub." Its experience offers a transferable paradigm for the in-depth construction of regional cultural identity.

Table 5. Case Studies of Co-Produced Films in Central Asian Countries

Country	Case Name (Year)	Core Narrative Strategy	Symbol Selection
Uzbekistan	The Starry Sky of Samarkand (2024)	Dialogue between historical archaeology and contemporary youth, focusing on the reconstruction of imperial memory of "Timurid cultural heritage"	Timur Statue, Registan Square, Miniature Paintings (local imperial symbols)
Kyrgyzstan	"Tian Shan - Issyk-Kul Lake" Joint Report (2025)	Ecological cooperation + oral accounts of herdsmen, constructing the narrative of "a community of man and nature" without macro-policy discourse	Tian Shan Mountains, Issyk-Kul Lake (natural landscape symbols)

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Kazakhstan	Win-Win (2023) "Central Asian Countries Co-production Alliance" (2025)	1. Symbolic innovation: Pioneering the "history-reality intertextuality" model (e.g., the montage of "Silk Road Caravans - China-Europe Railway Express"); 2. Policy translation: Translating the alignment of "Belt and Road" and "Bright Road" into individual stories (e.g., the growth of engineer Aliya); 3. Regional cooperation hub: Leading the establishment of the Central Asian Co-production Alliance and promoting the unification of multilingual subtitle standards.	China-Europe Railway Express, Falcon (steppe civilization symbol), Silk Road Caravans (historical symbol)

Note: compiled based on data

1. Uzbekistan: Policy-Driven Narratives Dominated by Indigenous Imperial Symbols

Taking the China-Uzbekistan co-produced documentary Samarkand Stars (2024) as an observational sample, the film adopts a dual narrative thread of "historical archaeological discovery and contemporary youth dialogue," focusing on the modern interpretation of Timurid cultural heritage. Its symbolic repertoire centers on "indigenous imperial symbols" such as the architectural ensemble of Registan Square and miniature painting art, aiming to reconstruct cultural subjectivity by foregrounding memories of the Timurid Empire. An analysis of policy discourse proportion within the narrative structure reveals that direct citations of macro-policy expression, such as the "Uzbekistan New Development Strategy" and "China-Uzbekistan Cultural Cooperation Agreement," account for 45% of the runtime, significantly exceeding the 38% observed in Kazakh co-productions: characterizing a typical "policy-driven narrative" modality.

Compared to Kazakhstan's case, Uzbekistan's narrative strategy exhibits two critical limitations. Firstly, its symbolic system remains overly confined to the "national historical framework," lacking the transnational symbolic intertextuality exemplified by "Silk Road caravans-Eurasian Railway Express" in Kazakhstan's Win-Win. For instance, the film fails to connect Samarkand's historical role as a Silk Road hub with contemporary China-Uzbek railway cooperation, restricting the narrative's capacity to transcend national boundaries and generate broader regional cultural resonance. Secondly, the rigidity of policy discourse results in a mere 55% proportion of micro-narrative (below Kazakhstan's 62%), failing to effectively achieve the "everyday translation" of macro-policy. As Adams and Kurbanov [23] note in their comparative study of Kazakh-Uzbek cultural diplomacy, Uzbekistan's over-reliance on "indigenous imperial symbols" risks trapping its narrative in "historical involution," whereas Kazakhstan's activation of "transnational Silk Road symbols" successfully elevates national narratives to the level of shared regional memory, a divergence directly impacting the reach of cultural identity construction.

2. Kyrgyzstan: De-Politicized Narratives Dependent on Natural Symbols

In contrast to Uzbekistan's "policy-driven" approach, the China-Kyrgyzstan collaborative reportage "Tian Shan-Issyk Kul" (2025) presents a diametrically opposed narrative orientation:

centered on "ecological cooperation and herder oral histories," it anchors entirely on micro-experiences of "human-nature community." Symbolic selection focuses on transboundary natural landscapes such as the Tian Shan Mountains and Issyk Kul Lake, with policy discourse accounting for a mere 12% of runtime, effectively dissipating the narrative weight of macro-policy. Through segments like joint Sino-Kyrgyz scientific expedition diaries and herder families' water conservation stories, the film constructs regional identity based on "shared natural heritage," yet its narrative logic stands in stark contrast to Kazakhstan's case.

In terms of narrative focus, the Kyrgyz case exhibits an over-reliance on "micro-individual experience," lacking the "macro-policy-micro experience nesting" technique exemplified by the "falconry training ritual" in Kazakhstan's Hello, Kazakhstan. For instance, while documenting Sino-Kyrgyz scientific collaboration, the film fails to transform the "China-Kyrgyzstan Ecological Cooperation Agreement" into concrete narratives akin to "Engineer Aliya's professional growth," leaving policy consensus without an emotional carrier. In symbolic selection, although "natural landscape symbols" can evoke transboundary emotional resonance, their cultural penetrative power pales in comparison to Kazakhstan's "historical-humanistic symbols." As Laruelle [24] observes in her study of Central Asian media landscapes, a dichotomy exists in post-colonial narrative practices: "natural symbol dependence" (typified by Kyrgyzstan) seeks to construct "de-politicized" regional identity through natural heritage, whereas "humanistic symbol innovation" (exemplified by Kazakhstan) achieves contemporary activation of cultural symbols through historical-realistic intertextuality like "Silk Road caravans-Eurasian Railway Express." Notably, the latter provides stronger political dimension support for regional cultural identity.

3. Kazakhstan's Regional Leadership: Symbolic Innovation, Policy Translation, and Cooperative Hub

In contrast to Uzbekistan's "historical involution" and Kyrgyzstan's "natural symbol dependence," Kazakhstan's co-produced documentary practices demonstrate distinct regional leadership, rooted in three synergistic advantages: innovative activation of historical-realistic symbols, micro-translation of macro-policy, and hub functions in regional cooperation.

Symbolic Innovation: Regional Demonstration of Historical-Realistic Intertextuality

Kazakh co-productions pioneered the "historical-realistic symbolic intertextuality" model, which deeply connects historical memory with contemporary practice through visual montage and narrative metaphor. For example, Win-Win endows Sino-Kazakh economic cooperation with historical legitimacy by superimposing "ancient Silk Road caravans (historical footage)" and "modern Eurasian Railway Express (contemporary shots)." This strategy has generated significant regional demonstration effects: Uzbekistan's 2024 co-produced documentary New Chapters of the Silk Road directly emulates this approach by symbolically linking "Bukhara's ancient trade routes" with "China-Uzbekistan cross-border railways," confirming the transferability of Kazakhstan's symbolic innovation.

Policy Translation: Everyday Translation of Macro-Discourse

In the narrative transformation of policy discourse, Kazakh co-productions have developed a "macro-policy-micro experience" nesting mechanism, achieving "everyday translation" of policy consensus. The "Engineer Aliya's growth story" in Win-Win exemplifies this: rather than directly citing policy texts on "Belt and Road-Bright Road alignment," the film transforms macro-data like "30% production capacity increase" into concrete narratives of family warmth and individual fulfillment such as Aliya overcoming language barriers to debug technical parameters ("studying Chinese manuals overnight") and "buying a computer for her daughter with bonuses." Previous

research at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University shows that such narratives yield a 68% audience policy approval Rate for Sino-Kazakh co-productions, significantly exceeding Sino-Uzbek (52%) and Sino-Kyrgyz (48%) counterparts, rooted in the "de-abstraction" of policy discourse [25].

Cooperative Hub: Technical Infrastructure for Regional Narrative Consensus

As a hub for Central Asian media cooperation, Kazakhstan spearheaded the establishment of the "Central Asian Co-Produced Documentary Alliance" in 2025, advancing regional narrative consensus through two pivotal initiatives: first, promoting standardized multilingual subtitling in Kazakh, Uzbek, and Russian to reduce language barriers in cross-border communication; second, developing a "Central Asian Cultural Symbol Database" that systematically organizes shared regional symbols (e.g., Silk Road caravans, steppe civilization) to provide reusable symbolic resources for co-productions across the region. This institutional innovation responds to Central Asian states' urgent need for "de-colonial narrative tools," establishing Kazakhstan as a practical coordinator of regional cultural identity construction.

Across these three national cases, narrative divergences in Central Asian co-productions reflect alternative pathways of regional identity construction: Uzbekistan prioritizes "national historical anchoring," Kyrgyzstan relies on "natural community sentiment," while Kazakhstan constructs a narrative paradigm balancing national subjectivity and regional inclusivity through "historical-realistic symbolic intertextuality,""policy-micro narrative equilibrium," and "regional cooperation mechanism innovation." This paradigm not only provides an operational framework for "negotiated narrative" in Central Asian media diplomacy but also reveals the composite pathway of "historical memory activation-individual experience anchoring-technical standard coordination" in cultural identity construction, offering a significant regional case study for understanding cross-cultural communication in non-Western contexts.

Regional Demonstration Effect: Implications of the China-Kazakhstan Model for China-Central Asia Media Diplomacy

The narrative practice of China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries has provided transferable "negotiated narrative" experiences for media diplomacy between China and Central Asian countries. Through the deconstruction of three core cases, the "falconry training ritual," "Engineer Aliya's story," and "China-Europe Railway Express", it is evident that their regional value lies not in abstract "paradigm export" but in specific adjustments to textual strategies. By substantively transferring cultural subjectivity, "emotional anchoring of micro-narratives," and activating the meaning of regionally shared symbols on the basis of respecting the particularities of Central Asia's media ecology, these documentaries respond to the practical demands of Central Asian countries for "cultural identity reconstruction,""decolonized narrative," and "regional identity construction". Such adjustments not only embody the logic of "negotiated interpretation" in cultural anthropology but also align with the practical rationality of "differentiated cooperation" in political science, providing a micro-path for deepening China-Central Asia cultural collaborative communication.

1. Transfer of Cultural Subjectivity: "Shared Interpretive Authority" as a Narrative Premise

The negotiation experience of the Chinese and Kazakh teams in the "falconry training ritual" reveals a core premise of Central Asian media diplomacy: the asymmetric transfer of cultural interpretive authority. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian countries have generally faced the dual task of "de-Sovietization of cultural identity" and "rediscovery of local traditions," strengthening cultural subjectivity through policies such as language legislation and local content quotas. They are highly sensitive to externally dominated "cultural definition"—a

sensitivity that essentially reflects the countervailing power of "the interpreted" against "the interpreter" in a postcolonial context. The solution of the China-Kazakhstan team is instructive: rather than engaging in formal "equal participation," it involves the substantive transfer of dominant cultural interpretive authority. The Kazakh falconer defines the ritual's meaning from an "emic perspective" ("This is how we communicate with nature"), while the Chinese team merely assumes the role of an "etic learner" guiding the narrative through questions ("Could you tell me the origin of this gesture?").

This strategy can be directly transferred to cultural cooperation with other Central Asian countries. For instance, when filming the "Bukhara silk-weaving technique" in Uzbekistan, the logic of the "falconry ritual" can be replicated: local weavers lead the interpretation of the craft ("This pomegranate peel dyeing method was improved by my grandmother after learning it from Persian merchants"), while the Chinese team constructs an interactive narrative through "participatory practice" footage (e.g., clumsy attempts to distinguish warp and weft threads). This not only aligns with the emphasis of cultural anthropological "thick description" on "the native's point of view" but also avoids the risk of "cultural appropriation", as Central Asian scholars have critiqued, external media often reduce Central Asian cultural symbols to visual spectacles of "exoticism", and the transfer of interpretive authority is key to addressing this dilemma.

2. Micro-Narrative Anchoring: "Everyday-Life" Translation of Policy Significance

The narrative practice of "Engineer Aliya's story" provides a path to crack the "emptiness of policy discourse" in Central Asian media diplomacy: anchoring macro cooperation significance in individual experiences to translate it into perceptible everyday practices. Central Asian societies exhibit a natural alienation from "top-down" grand narratives, alienation rooted in memories of "ideological indoctrination" during the Soviet era, which makes audiences more inclined to trust "bottom-up" individual experiences. The adjustment by the China-Kazakhstan team is particularly meaningful: the macro data of "30% increase in production capacity of China-Kazakhstan joint ventures" is transformed into Aliya's career trajectory, from being questioned about her competence due to language barriers ("Can you really operate this?"), from overcoming bottlenecks by studying Chinese technical manuals overnight, and finally to the detail of buying her daughter a new computer with her bonus. This narrative essentially embodies "the politics of everyday life" in a sociological sense: individual experiences, though trivial, can bear emotional resonance that transcends policy texts.

This experience is particularly valuable for economic cooperation narratives. For example, when filming the China-Kyrgyzstan "China-Tajikistan-Uzbekistan Highway" project, focus can be placed on the daily life of Kyrgyz truck driver Samir: his exhaustion from a three-day journey to Osh before the highway's completion, the ease of an eight-hour direct trip after completion, and specific scenes of renovating his house and sending his son to a China-Kyrgyzstan joint school with doubled income. These narrative transforms "regional connectivity" from an abstract concept into everyday symbols such as "father-son dialogue" and "family accounts," aligning with the view in communication political economy that "audiences decode media texts through everyday experiences" and avoiding the dilemma of "excessive focus on hardware cooperation at the expense of humanistic resonance".

3. Activation of Regionally Shared Symbols: "Contemporary Meaning-Making" of Historical Memory

The symbolic intertextuality strategy in the "China-Europe Railway Express" segment reveals a core path to regional identity construction: activating historically shared memory symbols

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in Central Asia to endow contemporary cooperation with cultural legitimacy. As historical hubs of the Silk Road, Central Asian countries share collective memories of "commercial road civilization" and "pluralistic integration". However, existing cooperation narratives have insufficiently excavated such memories, leading to a lack of regional roots in meaning-making. The breakthrough of the China-Kazakhstan team lies in embedding economic cooperation into the long historical timeline of the Silk Road through visual intertextuality between "ancient caravans" and "modern railway express", not through simple analogy, but through "creative transformation" of symbols: the narration, "For a thousand years, caravans traveled this road; today, steel caravans are transporting flour and machinery to farther places," elevates the China-Europe Railway Express from a "logistics tool" to a "carrier of civilizational dialogue."

This strategy can be extended to broader regional cooperation. For example, when filming "China-Uzbekistan agricultural cooperation" under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization framework, "Han Dynasty frontier farming" (historical symbol) and "modern China-Uzbekistan joint farms" (contemporary symbol) can be juxtaposed: the camera dissolves from a Han Dynasty iron plow unearthed in Xinjiang (historical artifact) to Uzbek farmers sowing with Chinese agricultural machinery (contemporary footage), with narration: "Two thousand years ago, our ancestors reclaimed wastelands together here; today, we jointly cultivate drought-resistant wheat." Through meaning-making via shared historical symbols, these narrative constructs what Anderson termed an "imagined community" [26], not based on blood or geography, but on meaning connections between "shared historical practices and contemporary cooperative continuity," providing deep symbolic support for regional identity.

Media Construction Paths of Central Asian Regional Cultural Identity: An Integrated Analysis Based on Narrative Practices

Building on the previous microscopic deconstruction of China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries and comparative analysis of differentiated cases from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, this chapter reveals the dual pursuit of "national identity" and "regional connection" in the media narratives of Central Asian countries. Grounded in this foundation, it systematically explores feasible paths for constructing Central Asian regional cultural identity from three dimensions, symbolic translation, discourse adaptation, and mechanism innovation, with the core goal of transforming fragmented national narratives into regionally shared discourses of meaning.

1. Symbolic Translation: Reconstructing Meaning from "Nationally Exclusive" to "Regionally Shared"

Central Asian cultural symbols have long been framed by "national sovereignty narratives": Kazakhstan anchors its national identity through "Steppe Civilization", Uzbekistan reinforces imperial memory via "Timurid heritage", and Kyrgyzstan constructs an ecological community imagination based on "natural landscapes" (see Table 5 in the previous text). While this "symbol nationalization" tendency has satisfied post-Soviet identity reconstruction needs, it has also fragmented regionally shared historical memories.

The generation of regional identity first requires the "de-nationalized translation" of symbols. Kazakhstan's pioneering montage of "ancient Silk Road caravans, modern China-Europe Railway Express" in Win-Win provides a model for this translation: by stripping the Silk Road of its historical exclusivity and extracting universal connotations such as "civilizational exchange" and "cross-border connectivity," it elevates as Laruelle points out [27] the symbol from a "China-Kazakhstan bilateral signifier" to a regionally shared memory. This logic can be extended to regional practices: Uzbekistan's "Samarkand Ancient City" need not be confined to

a "Timurid imperial capital" but reinterpreted as a "living testament to Central Asia's Silk Road hub"; Kyrgyzstan's "Tian Shan Mountains" can transcend "natural borders" by linking to the "Tian Shan cultural sphere" spanning China's Xinjiang and Kazakhstan's Almaty, serving as an emotional bond for cross-border ethnic groups.

The regionalization of modern symbols is equally critical. China-Kazakhstan co-productions have transformed the "China-Europe Railway Express" into a people-centric narrative of "steel caravans", avoiding the "de-culturalization" of technical symbols. This approach can be migrated to Uzbekistan's "China-Uzbekistan photovoltaic power stations" and Kyrgyzstan's "cross-border highways", deeply binding modern cooperation symbols to regional daily life experiences.

2. Discourse Adaptation: Dynamic Balance Between Policy Narratives and Micro-Experiences

Previous quantitative analysis done by Aitbayev [25] reveals significant divergence in narrative discourses across Central Asian countries: Uzbekistan's "policy-driven narratives" contain up to 45% macro-policy narratives, resulting in excessive narrative rigidity; Kyrgyzstan's "de-politicized narratives" include only 12% policy discourse, leaving micro-stories fragmented and lacking institutional support; only Kazakhstan, through a nested structure of "38% policy discourse + 62% micro-narrative", has achieved the "everyday translation" of policy significance, with audience policy rate reaching 68%, significantly higher than the regional average [25].

Regional discourse adaptation requires dynamic adjustments based on national contexts. For policy-dominated countries like Uzbekistan, "micro-narrative anchoring" can soften policy discourse, for instance, transforming the "Cultural Heritage Protection Plan" into the "intergenerational inheritance of miniature painting craftsmanship, "concretization abstract policies into emotional narratives of "craft endangerment, international cooperation, market revival." For de-politicized countries like Kyrgyzstan, a moderate enhancement policy discourse proportion is necessary, such as embedding the causal chain of "China-Kyrgyzstan environmental protection agreement-herder water quality monitoring practices" in "Tian Shan ecological cooperation" reporting, endowing micro-stories with institutional meaning. The core of this differentiated adaptation lies in avoiding "one-size-fits-all" narrative templates and striking a dynamic balance between "policy legitimacy" and "emotional resonance."

3. Mechanism Innovation: Identity Co-Construction from "Textual Negotiation" to "Practice Networks"

The deepening of cultural identity requires institutional mechanisms; mere textual narratives cannot transcend national sovereignty boundaries. The "Central Asian Co-produced Documentary Alliance," led by Kazakhstan in 2025, provides a practical framework for regional identity negotiation: through initiatives such as "joint construction of a symbol database" and "unification of multilingual subtitle standards," the alliance integrates fragmented national narratives into a regional cooperation network.

Its key mechanisms include two aspects: first, decentralized creation authority, which grants countries interpretive sovereignty over local symbols; Uzbek teams retain final decision-making power over "Timurid symbols," and Kyrgyz teams may adjust the presentation of "natural narratives," preventing cultural hegemony by a single country. Second, feedback loops, which collect cross-national audience cognitive disparity parazacco spilurus subsp through "Central Asian Audience Symposia" to dynamically calibrate regional narrative strategies. This model of "decentralized creation + participatory feedback" transforms regional identity from "textual consensus" to "practical consensus," truly realizing "pluralistic integration" in identity co-construction.

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In conclusion, the media construction of Central Asian regional cultural identity requires symbolic translation as the foundation, discourse adaptation as the method, and mechanism innovation as the guarantee, extending the "negotiated narrative" experience of China-Kazakhstan co-productions to the regional level. While this process faces inherent tensions between national sovereignty and regional sharing, activating shared Silk Road memories, balancing policy and micro-narratives, and improving regional cooperation mechanisms can still foster an identity system that balances cultural diversity and regional cohesion. This constitutes the core insight of China-Kazakhstan co-production practices for Central Asian media diplomacy.

Conclusion

This study examines China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries as a lens to systematically explore the narrative practices of media diplomacy from a regional and country-specific perspective. By integrating textual analysis, case studies, and comparative insights from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, this research reveals how narrative power negotiation operates as a dynamic mechanism to achieve symbiotic national image construction and political consensus transmission in cross-cultural collaboration. The core findings identify three interconnected mechanisms through which these documentaries realize media diplomacy objectives: negotiated perspective selection, which balances cultural subjectivity and communication effectiveness by sharing interpretive authority; nested discourse distribution, which integrates macro policy narratives with micro individual experiences to translate abstract policy into relatable stories; and intertextual symbol construction, which links historical memory to contemporary practice via symbolic montage, endowing political consensus with cultural legitimacy. Comparative analysis further highlights Kazakhstan's regional leadership, as its "history-reality intertextuality," "policy-micro narrative equilibrium," and "cooperative hub" model offer a transferable paradigm for balancing national sovereignty and regional shared memory.

Theoretically, this study advances narrative power theory by transcending the "center-periphery" binary framework, constructing a three-dimensional analytical model (perspective-discourse-symbol) to reveal dynamic power negotiation through shared authority, nested structures, and intertextual symbols. It enriches regional media diplomacy research by addressing gaps in non-Western "negotiated narrative" scholarship, demonstrating how cultural soft power interaction (e.g., decolonized symbol translation, decentralized creation) fosters regional identity without homogenizing diversity. Additionally, it bridges macro-micro divides by articulating the interactive logic between geopolitical contexts and micro textual practices, providing a nuanced framework for linking structural dynamics to everyday meaning-making.

Practically, the findings offer actionable strategies for China-Central Asia media diplomacy: cultural cooperation should substantively transfer interpretive authority to local holders, following the Kazakh falconer's model; economic narratives should anchor policy significance in individual livelihood stories, emulating Win-Win's "Engineer Aliya" narrative; regional communication should activate shared historical symbols to construct an "imagined community", as seen in Kazakhstan's "caravans-railway" intertextuality; and institutional innovation should build decentralized mechanisms like the Central Asian Co-produced Documentary Alliance, with standardized multilingual subtitles and shared symbol databases to coordinate fragmented national narratives into regionally resonant discourse.

Limitations of this study include its primary focus on documentary texts; future research could explore audience reception dynamics or digital media's role, while expanding case studies to Tajikistan or Turkmenistan would further enrich regional diversity insights. In conclusion, China-Kazakhstan co-produced documentaries exemplify how "negotiated narrative" transforms asymmetric power relations into symbiotic cultural collaboration, offering a blueprint for China-Central Asia media diplomacy that balances national subjectivity with regional cohesion, and historical memory with contemporary relevance, vital for building mutual trust and civilizational dialogue amid globalization's structural challenges.

The contribution of the authors:

Myssayeva K. – corresponding author, collected comprehensive information during the research, analyzed, reviewed, and interpreted the data; supervised and edited the article, developed recommendations, and ensured its academic quality.

Wang Peng – conducted a sociological study to identify current scientific continuity through a review of international studies and formulated conclusions based on the survey results.

Akynbayeva A. – analyzed the methods and approaches used in the research, research results, and prepared the article in accordance with technical requirements.

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Қытай-Қазақстан бірлескен деректі фильмдеріндегі медиа дипломатия және нарративтік келісімдер

Аңдатпа. Зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – «Hello, Kazakhstan» және «Win-Win» атты деректі фильмдерін негізгі кейс ретінде қарастыра отырып, бұл туындылардың өзара байланысты үш негізгі механизмі арқылы ұлттық бейнені симбиотикалық тұрғыда қалыптастыруға және саяси консенсусқа қалай қол жеткізуге болатынын ашып көрсету. Атап айтқанда, бұл басты үш механизм: ортақ перспективалық таңдау, біріктірілген дискурсты тарату және интертекстуалдық символдар құрастыру. Зерттеудің өзектілігі дәстүрлі «орталық – шеткері аймақ» бинарлық үлгісінің шектеулерінен тыс, көп субъектілі бірлескен баяндаудағы биліктің өзара келісу үдерісін талдаудың үшөлшемді моделін ұсынуымен айқындалады. Бұл өз кезегінде мәдениетаралық ынтымақтастық контексіндегі нарративтік билік теориясының микро-механизмдерін тереңдетіп түсіндіруге мүмкіндік береді. Зерттеуде сапалық әдістерді қолдану арқылы аталған екі деректі фильм Қытай – Орталық Азия медиа дипломатиясы тәжірибесін айқындауда кейстік зерттеу ретінде алынды. Мақаланың негізгі нәтижелері практикалық тұрғыдан Қытай – Орталық Азия медиа дипломатиясы үшін қолдануға арналған стратегияларды ұсынады: (1) мәдени ынтымақтастық; (2) экономикалық нарративтер; (3) мәдени бірегейліктің негізін нығайтуға бағытталған өңірлік коммуникация. Осы тұжырымдар Батыстан тыс мәдениетаралық коммуникация жағдайында ұлттық субъектілік пен өңірлік тұтастықтың тепе-теңдігін сақтауға арналған нақты парадигманы қалыптастырады. Ғылыми зерттеу нәтижелері медиа тәжірибесі үшін құнды еңбек және журналистер мен медиа ұйымдарға өңірлік, елдік ерекшеліктерді ескере отырып, медиа дипломатия практикасын жауапкершілікпен жариялауға бағыт береді. Сонымен қатар, Батыстан тыс контекстегі мәдениетаралық нарративтің инновациялық жолдарын түсінуге теориялық негіз ұсынады.

Түйін сөздер: Қытай, Қазақстан, медиа дипломатия; Hello, Kazakhstan, Win-Win, деректі фильм.

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Медийная дипломатия и нарративные переговоры в китайско-казахстанских документальных фильма

Аннотация. Основной целью исследования является анализ документальных фильмов «Hello, Kazakhstan» и «Win-Win» в качестве ключевых кейсов, позволяющий выявить, каким образом данные произведения достигают симбиотического конструирования национального образа и трансляции политического консенсуса посредством трёх взаимосвязанных механизмов: согласованного выбора перспективы, вложенного распределения дискурса и интертекстуального конструирования символов. Значимость исследования заключается в преодолении ограничений традиционной бинарной модели «центр – периферия» и формировании трёхмерной аналитической модели переговоров о власти в условиях многоагентного совместного нарратива, что углубляет понимание микро-механизмов теории нарративной

власти в контексте межкультурного сотрудничества. В работе применяются качественные методы; указанные два документальных фильма рассматриваются как кейс-стади для анализа практик медиа дипломатии Китая и Центральной Азии. Основные выводы показывают, что результаты исследования имеют практическую значимость и предлагают тиражируемые стратегии для медиа дипломатии Китая и Центральной Азии: (1) культурное сотрудничество; (2) экономические нарративы; (3) региональная коммуникация, направленная на укрепление основы культурной идентичности. Полученные выводы формируют конкретную парадигму балансирования национальной субъектности и региональной сплочённости в незападной межкультурной коммуникации. Результаты исследования представляют ценность для медиапрактики, ориентируя журналистов и медиаорганизации на ответственное освещение моделей медиа дипломатии с учётом региональной и страновой специфики, а также предоставляют теоретическую основу для понимания инновационных путей межкультурного нарратива в незападном контексте.

Ключевые слова: Китай, Казахстан, документальный фильм, медиа дипломатия; Hello, Kazakhstan, Win-Win.

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