

INTEGRATING THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE INTO PUBLIC-POLITICAL TRANSLATION COURSES IN RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT:

Since its inception, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has attracted significant international attention, profoundly influencing political, economic, and cultural spheres. This expansion provides new content and perspectives for translation education, particularly in public-political translation. This study examines the relevance and challenges of integrating BRI-related materials into the “Public-Political Translation (Chinese)” course curriculum in Russian universities.

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining anonymous surveys of 15 instructors and 60 senior students from five state universities, alongside non-participant classroom observations. The findings reveal that while over 90% of instructors consider studying the BRI highly relevant for translator training, its integration into educational programs remains fragmented and predominantly theoretical. Most educators rely on traditional lectures and text analysis, underutilizing translation software, text corpora, or interpretation simulations.

Based on these results, the study proposes targeted reforms, including the development of modular curricula, the introduction of project-based and simulation methods, and enhanced collaboration with Chinese universities. These measures aim to enhance students’ intercultural competence and practical translation skills. The proposed strategies contribute to the modernization of translator training in socio-political contexts, aligning academic practices with global geopolitical discourse. By bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, this approach ensures that graduates are better equipped to handle the complexities of contemporary international communication within the BRI framework.

Keywords: *Belt and Road Initiative, Public-Political Translation, Chinese Language, Russian Universities, Curriculum Reform.*

INTRODUCTION

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, represents a major strategy for international cooperation, promoting regional integration through infrastructure, trade, and cultural exchange [1]. As a cornerstone of contemporary Chinese foreign policy, the BRI has evolved into a complex geopolitical framework that extends beyond physical connectivity to encompass digital, financial, and ideological dimensions. Its associated public-political discourse—encompassing policy documents, government reports, diplomatic speeches, and media materials—poses significant translation challenges due to profound linguistic and cultural differences [2]. Translating this discourse requires more than linguistic proficiency; it demands a deep understanding of China’s political ideology, historical context, and specific rhetorical strategies, which often lack direct equivalents in Russian or other target languages. Concepts such as “community with a shared future for mankind” or “high-quality development” carry dense ideological baggage that must be carefully navigated to avoid misinterpretation or diplomatic friction.

In Russian universities, courses on "Public-Political Translation (Chinese)" aim to develop students' competencies for international communication, preparing them for roles in diplomacy, international business, and media [3]. Given the strategic partnership between Russia and China, particularly within the framework of Eurasian integration, the demand for specialists capable of accurately interpreting BRI-related narratives has surged. These courses are designed not only to teach translation techniques but also to foster intercultural awareness and critical analysis skills, enabling future professionals to act as effective mediators between Chinese and Russian-speaking contexts.

While BRI-related content is increasingly integrated into curricula to enhance practical training [4], traditional teaching methods often prove inadequate for handling its conceptual complexity and intercultural nuances. Conventional pedagogical approaches, which frequently prioritize rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar over contextual analysis, struggle to address the dynamic and multifaceted nature of modern political discourse. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of BRI terminology and the emergence of new digital communication channels require agile, technology-enhanced teaching strategies that many institutions have yet to fully adopt. There is a noticeable gap between the theoretical knowledge provided in classrooms and the practical skills required in professional settings, where translators must often work under time pressure using advanced computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools and large parallel corpora.

This study examines methodological approaches, identifies key challenges, and proposes reform strategies for teaching BRI-related translation in Russian higher education. By employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative classroom observations, the research provides a comprehensive assessment of the current state of translator training. It highlights specific deficiencies in curriculum design, resource availability, and instructor preparedness, while offering evidence-based recommendations for modernizing pedagogical practices. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the development of a more robust, responsive, and professionally relevant educational framework that equips students with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of Sino-Russian political communication in the era of the Belt and Road Initiative.

THEORY

BRI discourse is characterized by high intercultural specificity and ideological density, offering rich material for translation pedagogy [5]. Its inclusion in Russian curricula supports students' intercultural competence and understanding of international political discourse [6,7]. Translation in this context extends beyond linguistic conversion to ensuring accurate transmission of political meaning and facilitating intercultural communication [8].

Functional equivalence theory (Nida & Taber) provides a foundational framework: quality translation must achieve comparable impact and semantic completeness in the target text, not merely lexical correspondence [9,13]. In political translation, this means preserving the pragmatic force of concepts like "community of shared future" or "win-win cooperation" while adapting them to the recipient culture's cognitive frameworks. For BRI texts, functional equivalence requires balancing ideological fidelity with naturalness in the target language—a skill demanding both linguistic precision and political sensitivity.

Dilthey's hermeneutics further emphasizes that language and culture are inseparable; translators must reconstruct the historical and cultural meanings embedded in source expressions [10]. BRI terminology often carries Confucian, socialist, or civilizational connotations unfamiliar to Russian audiences. Students trained in hermeneutic analysis learn to unpack these layers, avoiding superficial literalism that risks misrepresentation.

Bakhtin's polyphony theory adds another dimension: political texts contain multiple, sometimes conflicting, ideological voices [14,15]. The BRI discourse intertwines Chinese developmental narratives, global governance rhetoric, and partner-country perspectives. Translators must recognize and mediate these voices to produce texts that are legitimate and persuasive in the target culture. Venuti's concept of "translator's visibility" [15] reminds us that every translational choice carries ethical and ideological weight.

Integrating these theoretical frameworks with BRI materials enables students to develop both linguistic mastery and cultural-political awareness essential for professional translation practice. Moreover, the growing demand for BRI-related translation in conferences, policy analysis, and media [17,18] underscores the need for pedagogy that bridges theory and real-world application.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a robust mixed-methods research design, strategically integrating quantitative data from structured surveys with qualitative insights derived from direct classroom observations. This triangulation of methods was employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical dynamics within specialized translation courses, allowing for both statistical generalization and in-depth contextual analysis.

Participants and Setting The study was conducted across five prominent state universities in the Russian Federation, selected to ensure geographical and institutional diversity. The participant pool consisted of two distinct groups.

1. A total of 15 faculty members specializing in Chinese language and translation studies. These instructors possessed moderate professional experience, ranging from 7 to 9 years, ensuring a balance between established pedagogical practices and contemporary teaching approaches.

1. Sixty senior-year undergraduate students enrolled in the "Public-Political Translation (Chinese)" course. As final-year students, participants had already acquired foundational linguistic competencies, making their feedback particularly relevant regarding advanced, specialized translation training.

Data Collection Instruments Data collection proceeded in two parallel phases:

2. Anonymous online surveys were distributed via Google Forms to both instructors and students.

The instrument was designed to evaluate four key dimensions:

1. Relevance and up-to-date nature of political and public affairs materials.

2. Effectiveness of instructional strategies, including lecture-based vs. practice-oriented approaches.

3. Access to authentic Chinese media, specialized dictionaries, and digital tools.

3. Specific challenges encountered in translating socio-political terminology and navigating cultural nuances.

To complement self-reported survey data, non-participant observations were conducted during 10 separate classroom sessions. An observation protocol was used to systematically record instructional practices, teacher-student interactions, and levels of student engagement. This observational data provided critical context for interpreting survey responses, highlighting discrepancies between perceived and actual classroom dynamics.

The study strictly adhered to ethical research standards. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all subjects prior to data collection. To protect participant privacy, the survey was fully anonymous, and no personally identifiable information (PII) was collected or stored. Furthermore, during classroom observations, care was taken to ensure that the presence of the researcher did not disrupt the natural flow of the educational process, maintaining the integrity of the observed environment.

RESULTS

1. Although >90% of instructors recognize BRI's relevance, its integration remains fragmented and theory-heavy. Courses often lack systematic analysis of BRI's political concepts, economic mechanisms, and cultural contexts, leading to superficial student understanding. Specifically, curriculum mapping revealed that BRI-related content is typically confined to isolated modules rather than being woven throughout the semester, resulting in inconsistent exposure. Instructors frequently prioritize lexical and grammatical accuracy over critical discourse analysis, leaving students ill-equipped to interpret the ideological underpinnings or strategic narratives embedded in BRI texts. Student surveys indicated that while 78% could identify key BRI terminology, only 34% demonstrated the ability to contextualize these terms within broader geopolitical frameworks or to produce translations that preserve rhetorical nuance. This gap suggests a disconnect between recognition of BRI's importance and the pedagogical strategies needed to foster deep, applied comprehension.

Traditional lecture-based formats dominate, with limited use of practical tools: <25% of instructors employ CAT tools or translation corpora. Students report insufficient hands-on experience with translation software, corpora, or simulation tasks. Observational data confirmed that over 70% of class time is devoted to instructor-led explanation of source texts, with minimal opportunities for collaborative translation, peer review, or technology-mediated practice. When digital tools are introduced, they are often demonstrated theoretically rather than integrated into active learning tasks. Student feedback highlighted a strong desire for more project-based assignments, such as translating mock policy briefs or participating in role-play diplomatic scenarios. The scarcity

of practical training correlates with lower self-efficacy scores among students regarding their readiness for professional translation environments, particularly in fast-paced, technology-driven settings.

Many instructors lack specialized practical experience in BRI-related political translation, affecting their ability to teach specialized terminology and discourse strategies effectively. Survey responses indicated that only 4 of 15 instructors had prior professional experience translating official BRI documents, policy white papers, or high-level diplomatic communications. Consequently, instruction often relies on generalized translation principles rather than domain-specific strategies for handling politically sensitive language, euphemisms, or culturally loaded metaphors. This limitation is reflected in student work: analysis of translation assignments showed frequent inconsistencies in rendering key concepts such as "community of shared future" or "connectivity," with students struggling to maintain terminological coherence across texts. Instructors themselves acknowledged the need for targeted professional development, with 87% expressing interest in workshops focused on BRI discourse analysis and applied translation techniques.

Over 80% of instructors rely primarily on static political documents and diplomatic speeches; existing textbooks rarely incorporate dynamic digital tools (e.g., CAT systems, parallel corpora), limiting resource efficiency. The predominant use of fixed, official sources, while valuable for authenticity—restricts exposure to the evolving, multimodal nature of contemporary political communication, such as social media statements, press conference transcripts, or interactive policy platforms. Textbook analysis revealed that fewer than 15% of assigned materials include embedded links to digital corpora, interactive glossaries, or machine translation post-editing exercises. This reliance on static resources not only reduces opportunities for developing digital literacy but also hampers students' ability to engage with real-time translation workflows. Instructors noted logistical barriers to adopting dynamic tools, including limited institutional support, outdated software licenses, and insufficient training. As a result, resource utilization remains suboptimal, and students graduate with limited proficiency in the technological competencies increasingly demanded by employers in the field of political translation.

REFORM STRATEGIES

1. Design sequenced modules covering political documents, diplomatic speeches, and news media. Progress from foundational texts (e.g., policy statements) to complex materials (e.g., multilateral forum interpretations), ensuring gradual skill development. The curriculum should be restructured into a scaffolded learning pathway that begins with the analysis of static, high-register official documents—such as white papers, joint communiqués, and constitutional excerpts—to establish a strong baseline in formal register and standardized terminology. As students demonstrate proficiency, the coursework should transition to dynamic, time-sensitive materials, including live press conference transcripts, op-eds from state-controlled media, and social media discourse from key political figures. This progressive approach allows for the incremental introduction of complex rhetorical devices, ideological nuances, and rapid-decision-making pressures. Each module should include specific learning outcomes focused not only on linguistic accuracy but also on strategic competence, such as identifying implicit political agendas and adapting tone for different target audiences. Regular formative assessments within these modules will ensure that students master each level of complexity before advancing, thereby reducing cognitive overload and fostering confidence in handling diverse political genres.

2. Organize group translation projects (e.g., bilateral government statements) and simulate real-world scenarios (e.g., BRI international forums). Integrate Chinese-Russian parallel corpora to provide authentic translation models and improve terminological consistency. To bridge the gap between classroom theory and professional practice, instructors should implement collaborative, project-based learning activities that mirror actual workplace environments. For instance, students can work in teams to translate comprehensive sets of documents related to specific BRI initiatives, such as infrastructure investment agreements or cultural exchange protocols, requiring them to negotiate meaning, divide tasks, and maintain stylistic coherence across multiple texts. These projects should be complemented by realistic simulations, such as mock diplomatic summits or press briefings, where students must perform consecutive or sight translation under time pressure. Crucially, these activities must be supported by the systematic use of Chinese-Russian parallel corpora and specialized terminology databases. By analyzing authentic previous translations of similar texts, students can identify established equivalents for sensitive political terms, understand contextual variations, and develop the habit of evidence-based decision-making. This integration of technology and collaboration fosters both technical precision and soft skills like teamwork and crisis management.

3. Offer regular workshops with Russian and Chinese experts, support participation in research projects and academic exchanges, and promote mastery of modern CAT tools (SDL Trados, MemoQ) to bridge theory-practice gaps. Addressing the identified deficit in instructors' practical experience requires a robust professional development framework. Universities should establish ongoing partnerships with practicing translators, diplomatic staff, and area studies specialists from both Russia and China to conduct intensive workshops focused on current trends in political discourse and emerging translation challenges. These sessions should provide instructors with up-to-date insights into the geopolitical context of the BRI and practical strategies for teaching specialized vocabulary. Simultaneously, institutions must incentivize and fund faculty participation in joint research projects and academic exchange programs, allowing them to gain firsthand experience in cross-cultural communication and network with peers in the field. Furthermore, mandatory training in advanced Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools, such as SDL Trados and MemoQ, should be integrated into faculty development plans. By becoming proficient in these technologies, instructors can better guide students in leveraging automation for terminology management, quality assurance, and efficiency, thus aligning academic training with industry standards.

4. Collaborate with Chinese universities to create BRI-focused textbooks covering diverse text types. Supplement with online courses, terminology databases, and CAT-integrated exercises to enable structured, accessible practice. The development of specialized pedagogical materials is critical to overcoming the reliance on outdated or generic resources. Joint ventures between Russian and Chinese higher education institutions should be initiated to co-author comprehensive textbooks specifically designed for "Public-Political Translation (Chinese)." These textbooks should feature a wide array of authentic text types, ranging from legal contracts and economic reports to multimedia scripts and digital diplomacy content, accompanied by detailed commentaries on cultural and political contexts. To enhance accessibility and flexibility, these printed resources should be supplemented by a dedicated online learning platform hosting interactive modules, video lectures from native speakers, and searchable terminology databases updated in real-time. Additionally, the platform should include CAT-integrated exercises that allow students to practice translation memory creation, alignment, and post-editing in a controlled environment. This hybrid approach ensures that students have continuous access to high-quality, relevant materials and can engage in self-paced, structured practice that reinforces classroom learning while developing essential digital competencies.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the integration of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) into the teaching of "Public-Political Translation (Chinese)" in Russian universities, identifying both the pedagogical potential of this thematic block and the systemic challenges that currently limit its effective implementation. The research confirms that while the BRI offers an exceptionally rich corpus of authentic, ideologically nuanced, and interculturally complex texts, its didactic application remains underdeveloped in most Russian higher education contexts. The findings underscore an urgent need for curricular modernization, methodological innovation, and enhanced resource support to align translation training with the evolving demands of Russia-China strategic cooperation.

The theoretical analysis demonstrates that successful translation of BRI-related discourse requires more than linguistic competence; it demands a sophisticated integration of multiple interpretive frameworks. Functional equivalence theory reminds us that political concepts such as "community of shared future" or "win-win cooperation" must evoke comparable pragmatic responses in Russian as in Chinese, necessitating strategic adaptation rather than literal transfer. Dilthey's hermeneutic approach further emphasizes the translator's responsibility to reconstruct the historical and cultural sedimentation embedded in BRI terminology, concepts that often draw upon Confucian ethics, socialist developmental logic, and civilizational rhetoric unfamiliar to Russian audiences. Bakhtin's polyphony theory adds a critical layer: BRI texts are not monologic but contain intersecting voices, Chinese state narratives, partner-country expectations, global governance discourses that the translator must mediate to produce a coherent and legitimate target text. Together, these frameworks provide a robust foundation for training translators who can navigate ideological nuance, cultural specificity, and diplomatic sensitivity.

Empirically, the study reveals four interrelated challenges. First, curriculum design remains fragmented: although over 90% of instructors acknowledge the BRI's relevance, its content is often inserted ad hoc into existing courses without systematic sequencing or depth. Second, pedagogical methods continue to prioritize theoretical exposition over practical application, with limited use of digital tools, translation corpora, or simulation-based learning.

Third, many instructors lack specialized experience in BRI-related political translation, constraining their ability to model advanced strategies for handling terminology, discourse structure, and ideological framing. Fourth, teaching resources are predominantly static—relying on printed documents and traditional textbooks, while dynamic, technology-enhanced materials (parallel corpora, CAT-integrated exercises, interactive modules) remain scarce.

In response, this paper proposes a four-pillar reform strategy. (1) A modular, systematically sequenced curriculum should progress from foundational political documents to complex diplomatic and media texts, ensuring gradual skill development. (2) Project-based learning and corpus-informed practice can bridge the theory-practice gap: group translation projects, simulated international forums, and the use of Chinese-Russian parallel corpora foster collaborative problem-solving and terminological consistency. (3) Targeted professional development, through workshops, academic exchanges, and training in modern CAT tools can empower instructors to teach BRI content with greater confidence and methodological sophistication. (4) Co-development of specialized teaching resources with Chinese partner institutions can address the current deficit of high-quality, contextually appropriate materials, while online platforms and terminology databases can provide scalable, accessible support for both students and teachers.

The implications of these reforms extend beyond the classroom. By cultivating translators who combine linguistic precision with intercultural awareness and political literacy, Russian universities can contribute more effectively to the knowledge infrastructure underpinning Russia-China relations. Graduates equipped with these competencies will be better prepared to serve in diplomatic services, international organizations, media, and business sectors where accurate, culturally attuned communication is essential for mutual understanding and strategic alignment. Moreover, the pedagogical model proposed here, grounded in functional equivalence, hermeneutics, and polyphony, yet oriented toward practical application, offers a transferable framework for teaching political translation in other geopolitical contexts where ideological and intercultural complexity intersect.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The sample, while diverse across five universities, remains modest in size and geographically concentrated within Russia; future research could expand to include comparative perspectives from Chinese, Central Asian, or European institutions participating in BRI-related education. Additionally, while classroom observations provided valuable qualitative insights, longitudinal studies tracking student outcomes after curricular reforms would strengthen evidence of pedagogical efficacy. Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of BRI discourse. Both in content and global reception requires ongoing curriculum updates and continuous professional learning for instructors.

Looking ahead, the teaching of public-political translation must remain dynamically attuned to geopolitical developments. As the BRI enters its second decade, new thematic clusters: digital Silk Road, green development, health cooperation—are emerging, each with distinct terminological and discursive features. Translation pedagogy must anticipate these shifts through flexible curriculum design, interdisciplinary collaboration (with political science, area studies, and digital humanities), and sustained investment in digital infrastructure. Equally important is fostering critical reflexivity among students: translators should not only transmit meaning but also interrogate the ideological assumptions embedded in source texts and consider the ethical implications of their translational choices.

In sum, integrating the Belt and Road Initiative into translation education is not merely a curricular adjustment but a strategic opportunity to redefine the role of the translator in an era of complex interdependence. By grounding pedagogy in robust theory, responsive methodology, and collaborative resource development, Russian universities can produce a new generation of translation professionals capable of facilitating nuanced, accurate, and ethically informed communication between Russia, China, and the wider world. Such an outcome would not only elevate the standards of translation training but also contribute meaningfully to the broader project of mutual understanding and cooperative development that the BRI aspires to advance. The path forward requires commitment, innovation, and partnership but the potential rewards, for both academic excellence and international dialogue, are substantial.

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