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DECIPHERING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHINESE MASS ORGANIZATIONS IN ASEAN FOREIGN RELATIONS: A HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT

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Abstract: This study explores the effectiveness of Belt and Road mass organizations in facilitating non-governmental diplomacy with the ASEAN countries and advancing the high-quality joint construction of the "Belt and Road" initiative. While the Belt and Road initiative has gained significant attention in international relations, empirical research on the effectiveness of mass organizations in ASEAN foreign affairs services remains limited. Our research combines various methodologies, including theoretical analysis and empirical investigations, to provide evidence-based insights into the impact of mass organizations on ASEAN foreign affairs services. By bridging the gap in this area, our study aims to offer valuable theoretical guidance and policy recommendations to enhance decision-making practices in ASEAN foreign affairs.

Keywords: Belt and Road, Mass organizations, non-governmental diplomacy, ASEAN foreign affairs
Evidence-based decision-making

Introduction

"Belt and Road" (2013) has become an important platform for China's opening-up and international cooperation. As an important component of China's social governance, mass organizations are of great practical significance to carry out non-governmental diplomacy to the ten ASEAN countries and to promote the high-quality joint construction of "Belt and Road"[1]. In China, the evidence-based decision-making study on the effectiveness of Belt and Road mass organizations in the foreign affairs service of ASEAN is still in its infancy, while other related studies have yielded fruitful results. "Belt and Road" is a hot issue in international relations and regional cooperation, and the evidence-based research on the effectiveness of ASEAN foreign affairs is of great practical significance. The research adopts a variety of research methods, combined with theoretical analysis and empirical research, with both theoretical support and practical targeted research experience and ability in Belt and Road Co-construction, mass organization, ASEAN foreign affairs service efficiency and evidence-based decision-making, so as to ensure the smooth progress of the research. In conclusion, this study is highly feasible and is expected to provide useful theoretical guidance and policy suggestions for the decision-making practice of foreign affairs services in ASEAN [2].

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1. The role of mass organizations in the joint construction and the exploration of the joint construction with ASEAN.

Taking "Belt and Road" as the basic point, we actively develop economic partnership with countries along the Belt and Road, and jointly create a community of interests, economic integration and cultural inclusiveness, destiny and responsibility [3]. "Belt and Road" initiative is not a geopolitical tool, but a platform for practical cooperation; not a foreign aid plan, but a joint development initiative of consultation, joint contribution and sharing. Therefore, as the organizational carrier of civil diplomacy, organizations play an important role in Belt and Road construction: first, it can play its organizational advantages to provide talent, technical and financial support for the construction of One Belt and One Road; second, it can play its role as a bridge, strengthen the exchange and cooperation with ASEAN countries, and promote the in-depth development of Belt and Road construction[4]. Zhao Tao (2015) believes that China's strategic concept of jointly building "Belt and Road" has endowed the ancient Silk Road with new connotation of the Times and provided innovative ideas for deepening regional exchanges and cooperation. Li Weili (2016) believes that it is necessary to continuously expand the external extension of its own organization system through the mass organization network, make full use of the characteristics and advantages of mass organizations, and realize the integration and re-organization of decentralized social organizations. The current international situation is undergoing a multi-polar development, and mass organizations have played a key role in stabilizing and maintaining the order of social development[5]. The research focuses on the impact of the "Belt and Road" initiative on the efficiency of ASEAN foreign affairs services. Scholars generally believe that the Belt and Road initiative provides new development opportunities for the efficiency of ASEAN foreign affairs services and helps to promote the economic cooperation and regional integration process among ASEAN countries. Chen Huan (2022) believes that under the perspective of the further implementation of the "Belt and Road" initiative, it is urgent and important for China to construct its national image for ASEAN. Tu Qiangnan (2022) believes that the marginal effect of "Belt and Road" initiative on production capacity cooperation is gradually increasing; in the countries along the border with China. By expanding the scale of China's outward direct investment in ASEAN, it will have a certain impact on promoting the manufacturing production capacity cooperation between China and ASEAN and promoting the upgrading of China's manufacturing industry, but the effect is relatively limited.

At home and abroad, the role of Belt and Road organizations is mainly concentrated in economic cooperation and cultural exchanges[6]. There are relatively few evidence-based decision-making studies on the effectiveness of Belt and Road organizations in ASEAN foreign affairs, and the research contents and methods need to be further expanded and improved. In the future research, more attention should be paid to the practical role of mass organizations in Belt and Road construction, and how to improve the evidence-based decision-making ability of mass organizations in the efficiency of foreign affairs services in ASEAN, in order to enrich and expand the research content of theory and practice in Belt and Road construction.

2. Academic value and application value

(1) **Enriches the theoretical research system of international relations.** This study combines the "Belt and Road" joint construction group organization with the effectiveness of ASEAN foreign affairs services, from the perspective of evidence-based decision-making, and helps to enrich and expand the theoretical system of international relations. Through an in-depth analysis of the role of mass organizations in the efficiency of ASEAN

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foreign affairs services, it can provide new theoretical perspectives and research methods in the field of international relations, and promote the innovation and development of international relations theory.

(2) **Expand the new areas of cognitive research on the governance function of mass organizations.** This study is helpful to improve the academic circle on the understanding of the role of "Belt and Road" mass organizations in the effectiveness of ASEAN foreign affairs service. At present, the relevant studies on its important role are relatively limited. Through inquiry research, it can reveal its important position and role in international cooperation and provide useful enlightenment for decision-making in related fields.

(3) **Enrich ASEAN research fields.** This study combines the effectiveness of foreign affairs services of mass organizations with the "Belt and Road" co-construction and the high-quality development of mass organizations, from a new perspective of evidence-based decision-making, which is helpful to enrich the THE research field of ASEAN. In foreign affairs, evidence-based decision-making can help policymakers formulate policies and programs more scientifically and improve efficiency and quality. Therefore, the evidence-based decision-making research on the effectiveness of mass organizations in ASEAN foreign affairs services can provide new perspectives and methods for ASEAN research and promote the development of ASEAN research field.

(4) **Provide policy suggestions for Belt and Road Co-construction.**

Through the evidence-based decision-making research on the effectiveness of Chinese mass organizations in ASEAN, we can better play the positive role in promoting "Belt and Road" joint construction and promote high-quality joint construction.

(5) **Promoting the role of mass organizations in international cooperation.**

Through to the organization in the ASEAN foreign affairs service efficiency of evidence-based decision research, for under the effective advice on how to better participate in international cooperation, improve its status and role in international cooperation, can also for the asean countries and "Belt and Road" to build countries in the field of political, economic, cultural cooperation provides useful reference, promote the further development of cooperation. Mass organizations (taking trade unions and women's federations as an example) can give full play to their organizational advantages, participate in the whole society and all fields, pool their wisdom and strength, reflect the diplomatic characteristics of major countries, and can be used as a powerful supplement.

(6) **Promote the wide use of evidence-based policies in project research.**

Evidence-based decision is the identification and definition of data and information and its uncertainty, collection, integration and analysis and scientific processing of evidence, and the decision based on evidence. Evidence-based decisions can support both the operational and the strategic level.

3. New progress and the content of the study

According to the "Project Inquiry" on the website of the National Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences, this topic focuses on the shaping of national capabilities in an evidence-based decision-making way, focusing on the "Belt and Road" in the field of foreign affairs mechanism between China and ASEAN, and focusing on the temporary payment of scientific research projects similar to the research focus[7]. The projects to study the corresponding functions of "evidence-based decision-making", "mass organization" and "Belt and Road" to jointly build the foreign affairs mechanism between China and ASEAN are as follows, Study on the Evidence-based Decision-making Mechanism Based on the Joint Process of Policy and Science (Project No.: 21CSH074), Study on the Competitive and Joint Relationship between Group Organizations and Civil Society Organizations

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from the Perspective of National Capacity (Project No.: 17BSH108), Study on the Role of Group Organizations in Playing a Hub (Project No.: 16CSH060), The project with many similar focuses with this project is "Civil Cooperation of China and ASEAN countries to participate in the joint construction of" Belt and Road "research" (Project No.: 21BGJ031), But although there are many similarities between mass organizations and civil society organizations, However, there are differences in positioning, function, organizational form, financial management and development direction. Therefore, compared with the existing project, this research has a unique perspective, which brings unique academic value and application value.

To sum up, the Belt and Road's evidence-based decision-making research on ASEAN foreign affairs service efficiency has important academic value and application value.

(1) The research content specifically includes the following aspects:

Taking "Belt and Road" joint construction, the foreign affairs mechanism of ASEAN as the research object and evidence-based decision-making.

- 1) Belt and Road Role and function of mass organizations in joint construction: analyze the status and role of mass organizations in Belt and Road joint construction and the relationship with the government, enterprises and other subjects.
- 2) Overview of the Foreign affairs mechanism of the Chinese government to ASEAN: introducing the development process, organizational structure, operation mode of the ASEAN foreign affairs mechanism and the connection with the Belt and Road cooperation.
- 3) Evidence-based decision-making of ASEAN foreign affairs mechanism: explores how mass organizations can use evidence-based decision-making methods to provide decision-making support for the construction of a foreign affairs mechanism with diplomatic characteristics of major countries.

(2) Main objectives

To promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind through the Belt and Road platform are put forward from the perspective of China's reform, opening up and long-term development. It is also in line with the concept of world unity of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people's view of harmony, and occupies the international moral high ground. Therefore, this study can realize: reveal the basic characteristics and rules of mass organizations in the "Belt and Road" construction of ASEAN, analyze the status and role of mass organizations in the "Belt and Road" construction and the relationship with other subjects, discuss the application of evidence-based decision-making methods in the construction of mass organizations in ASEAN. To provide theoretical guidance and decision-making reference for the foreign affairs services of mass organizations.

(3) Key points and difficult points

Key points: how to accurately grasp the role and status of mass organizations in the "Belt and Road" co-construction. Difficulty: How to combine the evidence-based decision-making method with the practice of mass organizations on the effectiveness of ASEAN is weak and cannot be used for reference.

(4) Research methods

Through consulting relevant literature, we can understand the research status and progress of "Belt and Road" joint construction, mass organization, ASEAN foreign affairs and evidence-based decision-making. On the basis of the literature review, the study subject is analyzed to reveal its characteristics and rules. Representative cases of mass organizations and ASEAN foreign affairs service efficiency were selected, and evidence-based decision-

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making method was used to conduct empirical research, and the decision support effect of mass organizations on ASEAN foreign affairs service efficiency was analyzed. According to the results of theoretical analysis and empirical research, the policy suggestions on the decision-making practice of ASEAN[8].

(5) Innovation

1) In academic thought: in Belt and Road to build, under the ASEAN foreign affairs service efficiency of evidence-based decision research, the research in academic ideological innovation is: first, from the perspective of globalization and regional integration to Belt and Road initiative, realize that this initiative is not only the important measure of China's opening to the outside world, is also an important way to promote the global economic governance system change. Secondly, the relationship between Belt and Road initiative and ASEAN countries is analyzed from the perspective of international political economy, and it emphasizes that the interests and development needs of ASEAN countries should be fully considered in the process of joint construction. Finally, we study the role of mass organizations in the joint construction of Belt and Road from the perspective of international relations theory, and emphasize that as non-state actors, their status and role in international affairs is becoming increasingly prominent.

2) In terms of academic views: In the Belt and Road Co-construction, mass organizations made evidence-based research on the effectiveness of ASEAN foreign affairs services. The academic innovations of the study include: First, it breaks through the traditional concept of national center and emphasizes the role of mass organizations in international affairs. As a non-governmental force, mass organizations can play various functions of people-to-people diplomacy, non-governmental exchanges and people-to-people cooperation in Belt and Road cooperation, providing strong support for the development of China-ASEAN relations. Secondly, it emphasizes the diversified characteristics of Belt and Road joint construction, and realizes that in this process, not only the participation of the national government, but also the participation of various non-governmental organizations, enterprises, social groups and other forces. Finally, it emphasizes that in the joint construction of Belt and Road, mass organizations should give full play to their own advantages, actively participate in the economic and social development of ASEAN countries, and provide strong support for promoting China-ASEAN cooperation.

3) On the research method: in Belt and Road to build, under the ASEAN foreign affairs service efficiency of evidence-based decision research, first, using the method of comparative study, comparative analysis of different countries and regions under the role in the Belt and Road to build and experience, for the group to participate in Belt and Road to build. Secondly, with the method of case study, we are used to deeply analyze specific cooperation projects and activities, and summarize the successful experience and existing problems of mass organizations in Belt and Road construction. Finally, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods is used to make a scientific evaluation of the role of mass organizations in Belt and Road Co-construction to provide strong support for policy making.

4. Expected social benefits

Government departments: The research results will provide a useful reference for government departments to make the evidence-based decisions of ASEAN mass organizations in Belt and Road Co-construction, help government departments to better understand how mass organizations develop with high quality and their role in Belt and Road construction, and provide a scientific basis for policy making[9].

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Mass organizations: The research results will help mass organizations to better realize their own importance in Belt and Road joint construction, improve their evidence-based decision-making ability of ASEAN foreign affairs service efficiency, and promote mass organizations to play a greater role in Belt and Road construction.

Academic e: The research results will provide new research perspectives and methods for the academic community, and promote the development of evidence-based decision-making research on the effectiveness of ASEAN foreign affairs services in the Co-construction of Belt and Road.

5. Research meaning

(1) **Mass organizations play an important role in the Belt and Road Co-construction:** as a representative of the civil forces, it plays an important role in the Belt and Road co-construction. By participating in Belt and Road construction, mass organizations can provide strong support for promoting regional cooperation and promoting friendly people-to-people exchanges.

1) Improve the effectiveness of Belt and Road Co-construction: Through the evidence-based decision-making research on the effectiveness of ASEAN mass organizations in Belt and Road co-construction, it is helpful to improve the effectiveness of mass organizations in Belt and Road construction and provide more scientific and reasonable decision support for Belt and Road construction.

2) Promoting China-ASEAN cooperation: The research results will help deepen the cooperation between China and ASEAN countries in political, economic and social fields, promote the deep integration of Belt and Road construction and ASEAN community building, and achieve common development and prosperity.

(2) **The interaction and cooperation between mass organizations and ASEAN foreign affairs mechanism is an important part of Belt and Road Co-construction:** the interaction and cooperation between mass organizations and ASEAN foreign affairs mechanism is an important part of Belt and Road co-construction. By strengthening the communication and cooperation between the two sides, we can provide more cooperation opportunities for Belt and Road construction and promote the process of regional economic integration. Improving the international status of mass organizations: Through the evidence-based decision-making research on the effectiveness of Belt and Road mass organizations in ASEAN, it will help enhance the status and influence of mass organizations in international affairs and create favorable conditions for China to play a greater role on the international stage.

(3) **Evidence-based decision-making is an effective way for mass organizations to participate in Belt and Road construction:** evidence-based decision-making is an effective way for mass organizations to participate in Belt and Road construction. Through the use of evidence-based decision-making methods, mass organizations can make decisions more scientifically and reasonably, and provide strong support for Belt and Road construction. Enrich evidence-based decision-making theory and practice: the research results will provide new cases and experiences for evidence-based decision-making theory and practice, and help to promote the wide application of evidence-based decision-making in international relations, foreign policy and other fields.

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Data sharing agreement

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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