

The Output of Diplomatic Concepts in the Process of Railway Cooperation and Construction between China and Southeast Asian Countries under the Background of “the Belt and Road Initiative” — Taking the China-Laos Railway as an Example.

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Abstract. This paper focuses on China's railway construction cooperation in Southeast Asia, taking the China-Laos Railway as a typical case. It expounds on the differences between the China-Laos Railway and Western countries in railway construction in Laos, including investment leadership, construction standards, cooperation concepts, and operation and maintenance models. It detailedly shows the specific manifestations of the new cooperation model of the China-Laos Railway, such as exporting material resources in infrastructure construction and adhering to the diplomatic concept of mutual benefit and win-win results. It analyzes the positive impacts of China's railway diplomacy with Southeast Asia on world diplomacy, including providing cooperation examples for various countries, promoting economic development, enhancing regional cooperation consciousness, and supplementing and developing the world's diplomatic concepts. Finally, it emphasizes that under the background of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, this cooperation model has a profound and positive impact on the world's diplomatic concepts and contributes Chinese wisdom and solutions.

Keywords: The Belt and Road initiative, cooperative construction of the China-Laos Railway, China's diplomatic concept.

1. Introduction

In the context of the continuous acceleration of globalization today, regional cooperation and connectivity have already become key elements in promoting the economic development of various countries and enhancing friendly relations among nations. As a grand vision proposed by China to promote global common development, the “Belt and Road Initiative” has brought unprecedented cooperation opportunities to countries along the line. As an important region in the construction of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, Southeast Asia has increasingly closer cooperation with China in railway construction. Taking the China-Laos Railway as an example, it is an important transportation artery and a remarkable symbol of deepening cooperation between China and Laos and even the entire Southeast Asian region under the framework of the “Belt and Road Initiative”. In the construction process of the China-Laos Railway, China actively exports the diplomatic concept of mutual benefit and win-win results, fully demonstrating the unique charm and responsibility of China's diplomacy in the new era. The concept of mutual benefit and win-win results, as one of the core values of China's diplomacy, emphasizes that all parties in international cooperation benefit and develop together. In the construction of the China-Laos Railway, this concept has been fully practiced and reflected. Through joint planning, joint construction, and joint operation, China and Laos have jointly created a railway corridor that connects the dreams and well-being of the people of the two countries. This report aims to deeply discuss the output of China's diplomatic concept of mutual benefit and win-win results in the cooperation with Southeast Asian countries in railway construction under the background of the “Belt and Road Initiative”. Taking the China-Laos Railway as a specific case, it analyzes its positive impacts on the region and the world, to provide useful references and lessons for further promoting the construction of the “Belt and Road Initiative” and building a closer community with a shared future for mankind.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. New Cooperation Model Of China in Railway Construction In Southeast Asia: Taking the China-Laos Railway As an Example

2.1.1. The Differences In Cooperation Model between The China-Laos Railway and the Railways Built by Other Western Countries in Laos

In terms of investment and leadership, the China-Laos Railway is the first cross-border railway mainly invested and constructed by China, jointly operated and directly connected to the Chinese railway network. China and Laos jointly established the China-Laos Railway Co., Ltd. The Lao government holds 30% of the shares, and the Chinese government holds 70% of the shares [1]. The two sides jointly make decisions and participate in the whole process of project construction and operation. For example, in the railway planning stage, the actual needs and development vision of Laos are fully considered, and the railway line runs through multiple important cities and economic regions. In history, the railways built by France in Laos were mainly for the needs of colonial rule. Laos had almost no say or decision-making power in the construction process. France mainly took its own interests as the starting point and used railways as a tool for plundering resources and strengthening colonial rule. In terms of construction standards and technology application, the China-Laos Railway adopts Chinese technical standards and uses Chinese equipment throughout the line. Advanced tunnel shield technology and geological prediction systems are used in the construction process to ensure construction safety and project progress. For example, in tunnel construction, many tunnel projects are efficiently completed by overcoming complex terrain, landforms and geological conditions. In contrast, the railways built by Japan in Thailand adopt Japanese technical standards and equipment. However, in some railway projects in Thailand, due to the insufficient combination of Japanese technical standards and local actual conditions, problems such as high construction costs and extended construction periods occur. Chinese technical standards are more adaptable to the topography, landforms and climate conditions of Laos, and the construction efficiency is higher. In terms of cooperation concept and goal, the China-Laos Railway adheres to the concept of mutual benefit and win-win results, aiming to help Laos realize the strategic transformation from a “land-locked country” to a “land-linked country” and promote Laos' economic development, social progress and regional connectivity [1]. Pay attention to cultivating railway professional and technical talents for Laos and driving the development of related industries. For example, during the construction of the China-Laos Railway, tens of thousands of jobs were provided for Laos and many technical workers were trained. Some infrastructure projects of the United States in Southeast Asia often have political additional conditions and start more from the perspective of geopolitics, and have limited comprehensive driving effects on local economic and social development. In terms of the later operation and maintenance mode, both China and Laos are jointly responsible for the operation of the China-Laos Railway. Through measures such as compiling and publishing Chinese-Lao bilingual training materials and practical drills with masters leading apprentices, the job quality ability of Lao employees is improved. At present, more than 500 Lao employees have been on duty to participate in operations to ensure the long-term stable operation of the railway [2]. Some railway projects of Western countries in other regions may have problems of insufficient adaptation to local actual conditions in later operation and maintenance. The operation mode is not flexible enough, and the training and participation of local employees are insufficient, resulting in a certain impact on the operation effect and sustainability.

2.1.2. The Specific Manifestations of the New Cooperation Model of the China-Laos Railway

In the infrastructure construction stage of the China-Laos Railway, China has exported a large amount of material resources in the field of construction standards and technology application. According to customs data, from January to June 2019, Kunming Customs supervised the export of construction materials for the China-Laos Railway totaling 97,600 tons with a value of 392 million yuan, an increase of 2.4% and 12.1% respectively over the same period of the previous year [3]. These

materials have strongly promoted the smooth completion of the China-Laos Railway. In terms of building materials, a large amount of high-quality steel is transported to Laos and used for infrastructure construction such as railway tracks, bridges, and stations, providing important guarantees for the stability of the railway. For example, on February 22, 2024, the Yunnan steel export special train for the China-Laos Railway departed from Yuxi Yanhe Freight Station, transporting 806 tons of threaded steel. In the future, cross-border steel transportation special trains will also continue to be promoted [4]. According to relevant statistics, it is expected to provide at least 50,000 tons of steel for Laos' engineering construction every year. At the same time, cement is also an indispensable basic material. China exports a large amount of cement that meets standards for the construction of the China-Laos Railway. Vientiane Hongshi, a subsidiary of Hongshi Holding Group, provides a large amount of cement for the construction of the China-Laos Railway. Among the six sections of the entire China-Laos Railway project, it supplies about 600,000 tons of cement for sections 2, 3, 4, and 5. The cement for the 239-kilometer line section from Vientiane to Luang Prabang and for the entire line's sleepers and beam yards is all supplied by Vientiane Hongshi. After calculation, the average consumption of cement per kilometer of this line section is about 2,510 tons [4]. In terms of mechanical equipment, various types of engineering vehicles such as excavators, loaders, and cranes are transported from China to Laos and play an important role in tasks such as tunnel excavation, earthmoving, and bridge erection, improving construction efficiency. On August 20, 2020, the railway electrification construction machinery and equipment carried by China Railway Materials Group set sail from Shanghai Port, including a total of 12 sets of stringing cars, pole erecting cars, and operation vehicles, with a total weight of more than 430 tons. Taking the tunnel project of the China-Laos Railway as an example, after using these engineering vehicles, the construction progress is about 20% ahead of schedule compared to expectations. Track laying equipment such as track laying machines and sleeper installation equipment ensure the accurate laying of railway tracks. CRRC Dalian Locomotive and Rolling Stock Co., Ltd. also designed and manufactured diesel locomotives with many advantages for the China-Laos Railway [4]. The traction force of this diesel locomotive can reach 600 kilonewtons, and the fuel consumption per 100 kilometers is only 300 liters, reducing energy consumption by 15% compared to traditional locomotives. In terms of electrical equipment, China provides power system-related material support such as substation equipment and transmission line equipment for the construction of the China-Laos Railway to ensure the power supply along the railway and enable the normal operation of signals, lighting, and power systems. Far East Cable Co., Ltd., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Far East Smart Energy Co., Ltd., provides a variety of cable products for the China-Laos Railway, such as halogen-free, low-smoke, flame-retardant, and fire-resistant low-voltage power cables with a length of 100,000 meters, irradiated wires with a length of 80,000 meters, and fireproof cables with a length of 50,000 meters. Communication and signal equipment ensures smooth communication between trains and between trains and the dispatching center as well as accurate transmission of railway signals, ensuring railway operation safety and dispatching efficiency. After testing, the accuracy rate of communication signals is as high as 99.9%, and the transmission delay time is only 50 milliseconds [5].

In addition, when discussing the cooperation goals for the construction of the China-Laos Railway with Laos, implementing management and operation as well as subsequent maintenance and other fields, China presents the diplomatic concept of mutual benefit and win-win results. First, in terms of strengthening political mutual trust, the construction of the China-Laos Railway fully embodies China's peripheral diplomacy concept of "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness." From the planning stage, high-level leaders of the two countries have interacted frequently, jointly established a joint working committee, and conducted in-depth communication and consultation on railway construction matters to ensure the smooth progress of the project. In the railway line planning, Laos' actual needs and development vision are fully considered, running through multiple important cities and economic regions, bringing huge opportunities for Laos' economic development and improvement of people's livelihood. This cooperation model not only allows Laos to truly feel China's sincerity and friendship but also builds a bridge for exchanges between the two peoples, enhancing

mutual understanding and friendship among the people and further consolidating the political relations between the two countries. For example, through the coordination of the joint working committee, the two sides have reached consensus on project schedule arrangements, technical standard docking, and other aspects, jointly promoting project construction [6]. Secondly, in terms of enhancing regional influence, the China-Laos Railway showcases China's advanced railway construction technology and efficient organizational management ability. China adopts advanced shield technology and geological prediction systems to overcome the complex terrain, landforms, and geological conditions along the line, ensuring construction safety and project progress. The Chinese construction team efficiently completes many bridges, tunnel, and subgrade projects, establishes a scientific and reasonable project management system, and coordinates resources from all parties. This provides a successful example for other Southeast Asian countries. They have actively learned from the experience of the China-Laos Railway and actively seek cooperation with China in infrastructure fields such as railway construction to promote regional connectivity and economic development. For example, after seeing the construction results of the China-Laos Railway, countries such as Thailand and Cambodia have expressed their willingness to cooperate with China in railway construction. Finally, in terms of establishing a major country image, the construction of the China-Laos Railway highlights China's diplomatic concept of peace, development, cooperation, and win-win results. China actively fulfills its social responsibilities and takes a series of measures in ecological environmental protection, such as carrying out vegetation restoration and ecological restoration along the railway and protecting wildlife habitats [6]. In terms of residents' employment and training, Chinese enterprises actively recruit local employees in Laos and provide them with skill training and employment opportunities. During the construction of the China-Laos Railway, China has provided tens of thousands of jobs for Laos and trained many technical workers. At the same time, China adheres to promoting the project in a peaceful and cooperative way without attaching any political conditions, fully respecting Laos' sovereignty and development needs. This is in sharp contrast to the hegemonic behavior of some Western countries in attaching political conditions in foreign cooperation, providing new development choices and cooperation models for regional countries. For example, during the construction process, Chinese enterprises invite the Lao environmental protection department to participate in supervision to ensure the effective implementation of ecological environmental protection measures. The construction results of the China-Laos Railway have allowed Southeast Asian countries to see China's sense of responsibility and friendly cooperation attitude as a major country.

2.2. The Railway Diplomacy between China And Southeast Asia has Favorable Influences on World Diplomacy

China's new cooperation model in the construction of the China-Laos Railway has exported the diplomatic concept of mutual benefit and win-win results, bringing many favorable influences to countries in Southeast Asia and countries around the world, and has had a positive development on the world's diplomatic concepts. For countries in Southeast Asia, in terms of railway construction, the China-Laos Railway has set a new paradigm for cooperation between countries. China and Laos jointly invest, jointly construct, and jointly operate. The Lao government undertakes part of the construction costs, and China provides technology, funds, and equipment support. This model fully considers the actual needs and development visions of the two countries. From planning and design to specific construction, they cooperate closely to ensure the smooth progress and sustainable development of the project. For example, in the planning of the railway line, fully combining the key economic development areas of Laos and the transportation needs of southwest China makes the railway construction more targeted and effective. This cooperation model provides an excellent example for railway construction in other Southeast Asian countries, allowing them to see the feasibility and advantages of equal consultation and joint participation. In terms of diplomacy, the China-Laos Railway has greatly promoted regional economic development and strengthened the connections between Southeast Asian countries. The trade between Laos and China and other

Southeast Asian countries has increased significantly, injecting new impetus into Laos' economic development and bringing more economic opportunities to surrounding countries. This not only enhances Laos' status in regional diplomacy but also provides new ideas and opportunities for other Southeast Asian countries to carry out foreign cooperation. For example, after seeing the economic dividends brought by the China-Laos Railway, countries such as Thailand and Cambodia actively discuss with Laos the possibility of strengthening railway connections and trade cooperation, further promoting the activity and cooperation of regional diplomacy [7]. In other aspects, the cooperation of the China-Laos Railway has driven the development of related industries such as steel, cement, and construction, creating a broader space for regional economic cooperation. At the same time, multilateral cooperation mechanisms and platforms established by China and Southeast Asian countries, such as the China-ASEAN Expo, provide opportunities for exchanges and cooperation among countries and promote policy communication, unimpeded trade, and people-to-people bonds among countries in the region [7]. For example, during the construction of the China-Laos Railway, enterprises from some Southeast Asian countries participated in part of the project construction and material supply, which not only improved their own technical levels and management experience but also strengthened cooperation and exchanges with enterprises from China and Laos. For countries around the world, the cooperation model of the China-Laos Railway has brought many favorable influences and inspirations. In terms of economic cooperation, the China-Laos Railway has shown the world the importance of infrastructure connectivity in promoting trade, investment, tourism and other fields, prompting other countries to pay more attention to improving their own economic development levels by strengthening infrastructure construction and promoting economic diplomacy to shift from simple trade negotiations to paying more attention to infrastructure construction cooperation. For example, after seeing the successful experience of the China-Laos Railway, some African countries actively seek cooperation with China in infrastructure fields such as railway construction to promote their own economic development. In terms of regional integration and multilateral cooperation, the successful construction of the China-Laos Railway has allowed European countries to see the results of cooperation between China and Southeast Asia and has also more actively promoted railway connectivity and regional integration within Europe. This fully shows that China-Southeast Asia railway cooperation has enhanced regional cooperation consciousness and provided references for the continuous development and improvement of multilateral cooperation mechanisms around the world. For example, when formulating transportation development plans, the European Union refers to the construction experience and cooperation model of the China-Laos Railway and strengthens railway cooperation and connectivity with surrounding countries. At the same time, the cooperation model of the China-Laos Railway also provides an example for cross-border infrastructure construction in other regions of the world, encouraging countries to break geographical restrictions and jointly cooperate to promote regional economic development. In terms of the world's diplomatic concepts, the cooperation model of the China-Laos Railway supplements and develops the world's diplomatic concepts. It has broken the old pattern of unequal cooperation between strong countries and weak countries in traditional diplomacy and established a new paradigm of equal cooperation. At the same time, it emphasizes the concept of mutual benefit and win-win results and common development, providing new ideas and methods for solving global problems. For example, in international multilateral cooperation occasions, the successful case of the China-Laos Railway is widely cited and becomes a powerful argument for promoting countries to carry out equal cooperation in fields such as infrastructure construction and economic cooperation. The spread of this diplomatic concept helps to build a more fair and reasonable international order and promotes mutual understanding and cooperation among countries [8]. In addition, the construction of the China-Laos Railway also reflects the concept of sustainable development. During the construction process, it pays attention to ecological environmental protection and the interests of residents, providing references for countries around the world to achieve coordinated development of economy, society, and environment in infrastructure construction.

3. Summary

Under the background of the Belt and Road Initiative, the win-win diplomatic concept exported by China in railway construction cooperation with Southeast Asian countries has had a profound and positive impact on the world's diplomatic concepts. As can be seen from projects such as the China-Laos Railway jointly constructed by China and Southeast Asian countries, this win-win diplomatic concept has first established a new paradigm of equal cooperation. China and Laos jointly invest, jointly construct and jointly operate in the construction of the China-Laos Railway, breaking the unequal cooperation model between traditional powerful countries and weak countries, setting an example for other regions in the world and promoting diplomatic cooperation to develop in a more equal and just direction. It provides a new direction and impetus for the development of the world's diplomatic concepts, promotes the common development of all countries on the basis of equality, cooperation and sustainability, and contributes Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions to building a better world.

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