

Editorial Introduction

This issue of the Journal of International Relations and Area Development (JIRAD) Vol. 1, Issue. 1 features one research article and one research note.

The research article by Guo Yanan analyzes the evolving trends and driving factors of public opinion toward China in ASEAN countries under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. The study explores how shifts in public sentiment affect China–ASEAN cooperation, China’s international image, and the dynamics of global power relations. It identifies China’s foreign policy, achievements in economic cooperation, deepening people-to-people exchanges, and heightened sensitivity over security issues as the major contributors to these changes. Based on the findings, the author puts forward a series of policy recommendations. The research note by Zhou Yong and colleagues examines the regulatory frameworks and legal instruments adopted by major international organizations to facilitate digital economic integration. The study highlights the importance of interoperable standards and collaborative approaches in bridging regulatory fragmentation and supporting a more coherent framework for global digital trade governance.

Together, these contributions illuminate pressing issues in international relations and regional development, offering fresh perspectives for both scholarly inquiry and policy practice.

Table of Contents

Research Article

Analysis of China-related Public Opinion of ASEAN Countries under the Background of “Belt and Road”

Yanan GUO

1-8

Research Note

Acts of International Organizations on Digital Economic Integration

Yong ZHOU, Zouting OUYANG (Translator)

9-14

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Analysis of China-related Public Opinion of ASEAN Countries under the Background of “Belt and Road”

Name: GUO Yanan,

College of ASEAN Studies, Guangxi Minzu University

Email: 1369985299@qq.com

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
ASEAN countries; China-related public opinion; Belt and Road; foreign policy opinion analysis; public	With the in-depth implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, ASEAN countries, as important partners under this framework, have increasingly become an important part of China-ASEAN relations under this strategic framework. The public opinion of ASEAN countries not only reflects the attitude of the region towards China’s economy, politics and culture, but also profoundly affects China’s diplomatic strategy and international image in Southeast Asia. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the changing trend and motivation of China-related public opinion of ASEAN countries under the background of “Belt and Road”, and to explore the influence of public opinion change on China-ASEAN cooperation, China’s international image and global power relations. The China-related public opinions of ASEAN countries are characterized by diversification, emotionalization and distinct nationalism, and both positive and negative public opinions coexist, showing a complex public opinion ecology. The main reasons for the change of public opinion include China’s foreign policy, the achievements of economic cooperation, the deepening of cultural exchanges, and the intensification of security-sensitive issues. Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China should optimize its foreign policy, enhance mutual trust and cooperation with ASEAN, and provide theoretical support and practical guidance for realizing common regional prosperity.
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Introduction

With the deepening of economic globalization, regional cooperation has become an important driving force to promote the economic development of various countries. Among them, the “Belt and Road Initiative” has aroused widespread concern around the world since it was put forward. The initiative aims to strengthen economic

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cooperation and cultural exchanges between countries along the route through policy communication, facility connectivity, smooth trade, financial intermediation and popular support, and jointly build a community of interests, destiny and responsibility with political mutual trust, economic integration and cultural tolerance. As an important participant in the Belt and Road Initiative, ASEAN's position and role in regional cooperation cannot be ignored. ASEAN countries' cognition, evaluation and attitude towards China are not only influenced by China's economic development and foreign policy, but also deeply influenced by regional security, national culture and historical background (Shen, 2024). Therefore, it is of great significance not only to understand the cooperative relationship between China and ASEAN, but also to promote the development of bilateral cooperation in a deeper and broader field to analyze the changing trend, characteristics and influence of public opinion about China in ASEAN countries.

1. The current situation and characteristics of China-related public opinion in ASEAN countries

ASEAN is one of the most important regional international organizations in the world, and its foreign policy and speech have an important influence on regional and even global politics. Especially in China, as an important partner of the world's second largest economy and ASEAN, the cooperative relationship between China and ASEAN has gradually deepened in recent years, especially under the impetus of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (Ren, 2024), the two sides have frequent interactions in the fields of trade, infrastructure construction and cultural exchanges. However, behind this close cooperation, China-related public opinion has gradually become an important issue in the diplomatic relations between the two sides. How countries handle their relations with China will not only affect bilateral relations, but also have a far-reaching impact on the overall situation in the region. The China-related public opinions of ASEAN countries are diversified, including cooperative and constructive contents, as well as complicated political and security factors (Fan, 2024).

1.1 Positive public opinion based on economic cooperation

In recent years, the economic cooperation between China and ASEAN has gradually deepened and become an important part of bilateral relations. The economic interaction between ASEAN and China is not only reflected in the fields of trade and investment, but also involves infrastructure construction, energy cooperation and agricultural development. China's Belt and Road Initiative, as an important framework to promote this cooperation, has further promoted the economic interconnection between ASEAN countries and China (Liu et al, 2024). With the development of economic cooperation, the positive public opinion about China has gradually increased in ASEAN countries, especially in the economic field. Public opinion generally believes that such cooperation will help promote regional economic integration and social development.

The economic cooperation between ASEAN and China has a long history, and the cooperation in various fields has gradually deepened in recent years. Since the establishment of dialogue between China and ASEAN in 1991, the economic cooperation between the two sides has developed steadily. In particular, the establishment of a free trade area between ASEAN and China in 2003 injected new impetus into the economic cooperation between the two countries. According to statistics, the trade volume between China and ASEAN has reached US\$ 684.8 billion in 2020, accounting for nearly 30% of the total global trade of ASEAN. Since then, ASEAN has become China's largest trading partner, and China is the third largest source of investment for ASEAN. China's investment in Southeast Asia is also increasing, especially in infrastructure construction and energy field, which has promoted the process of economic modernization in Southeast Asia. The main goal of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is to promote the economic development of countries along the route by strengthening infrastructure construction, promoting international trade circulation and enhancing economic interconnection. In the ASEAN region, China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative has received wide response. ASEAN countries have benefited a lot from this initiative, especially in the field of infrastructure construction. In the public opinion of ASEAN countries, the positive comments on China's investment and economic cooperation are mainly reflected in the field of infrastructure construction. Southeast Asia is a region where developing countries are concentrated in the world, and its infrastructure is relatively backward. Many countries have demand for roads, railways and electricity (He, 2012). With its capital, technology and engineering experience, China has provided a large number of infrastructure projects to ASEAN countries through the Belt and Road Initiative.

Although the economic cooperation between China and ASEAN has brought many positive public opinions, there are also some challenges and negative voices. With the rapid rise of China's economy, some ASEAN countries began to worry about over-reliance on China. Especially in some large-scale infrastructure projects, ASEAN countries rely on China to provide capital, technology and labor resources (Hong, 2019). Some public opinions believe that this dependence may lead to the excessive influence of external factors on their economies in the future, thus affecting the country's autonomy. Although ASEAN and China have deep economic and cooperative relations, there are also concerns in the public opinion of some countries that they are too dependent on China, especially in the context of China's increasing influence. The public opinion and media in some ASEAN countries may worry about China's excessive intervention in the region, or turn economic cooperation into political influence. The public opinion of ASEAN countries may be influenced by the pressure of external powers, expressing certain dissatisfaction or vigilance.

1.2 Regional security and political sensitive issues of negative public opinion

Under the background of globalization, regional security and political issues have become an important focus of international public opinion, especially in Southeast Asia

and its surrounding areas. Due to complex geopolitical and historical issues, regional security and political issues are often in a sensitive and unstable state. Due to geopolitical competition, historical disputes, ethnic issues and big country games, the relationship between China and Southeast Asian countries has been tense and frayed to some extent for a long time. Public opinion plays a particularly important role in these sensitive issues. It not only affects the decision-making of policy makers, but also reflects people's attitudes and feelings towards national security, sovereignty and foreign policy. Sensitive issues of regional security and politics are often highly emotional. When it comes to national sovereignty, territorial disputes and other issues, public opinion tends to form opposition and intensify people's emotional response (Yuen, 2019). The South China Sea dispute is one of the most sensitive political and security issues between China and many countries in Southeast Asia. Since the 1960s, the division of the South China Sea and the competition for resources have become one of the most complicated and sensitive issues in Central and Southeast Asia. China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei all claim sovereignty over parts of the South China Sea, and the resources involved in the dispute include oil, natural gas, fisheries and other important resources. The South China Sea issue is not only the focus of regional security, but also the focus of global public opinion because it involves international shipping and maritime rights and interests. Disputes in the South China Sea have often become sensitive issues in regional public opinion, and to some extent, they have shaped the attitudes of countries towards China. Therefore, the media reports on these issues often have a strong nationalist color. This emotional public opinion reaction not only affects people's daily cognition, but also exerts pressure on the country's foreign policy and international negotiations.

1.3 Two-way public opinion of the soft power spread of cultural exchanges and cultural cooperation

Today, with the acceleration of globalization, the competition between countries is not only reflected in hard power, but also in culture, values and ideas. As an invisible force in international relations, soft power has gradually become one of the important indicators to measure a country's comprehensive national strength. Through people-to-people exchanges and cultural cooperation, a country can effectively shape its international image, spread cultural values and enhance its international influence. China and ASEAN countries have a long history of communication, especially in cultural and non-governmental exchanges. The interaction between the two sides goes back to ancient times. From the ancient Silk Road to the modern maritime communication, the cultural ties between ASEAN countries and China are deeply rooted. In recent years, China has vigorously promoted cultural diplomacy and spread its soft power through various channels. Among them, the most representative is the "Confucius Institute" project in China, which aims to enhance people's awareness and interest in China culture through cultural and language education. In addition, the China government has also strengthened its influence in the global cultural field by holding international film festivals, cultural festivals and other large-scale cultural activities.

Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has also actively promoted cultural cooperation with countries along the route, further promoting cultural exchanges and mutual understanding. The spread of China's traditional culture, especially Confucianism and excellent Chinese culture, has gradually enhanced China's soft power in the world through these cultural exchange projects.

2. The Influence of China-related Public Opinions of ASEAN Countries under the Background of “Belt and Road”

2.1 The impact on ASEAN countries

China-related public opinion of ASEAN countries has had a significant impact on internal political, social and diplomatic relations. The positive factors of China-related public opinion have strengthened the cooperative relationship between China and ASEAN countries, especially in the fields of economy, cultural exchange and infrastructure construction. With the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, cooperation between China and ASEAN countries in transportation, energy, science and technology and other fields has achieved fruitful results. The positive attitude of public opinion towards these cooperation projects has enhanced people's sense of identity with China-ASEAN cooperation, thus promoting the further deepening of bilateral relations. By supporting the Belt and Road Initiative, many ASEAN countries have successfully promoted domestic economic growth and enhanced their international competitiveness. These positive public opinions have effectively consolidated the foundation of trust and cooperation between the two countries. However, in recent years, negative public opinion has gradually increased in some ASEAN countries. Especially on sensitive issues such as the South China Sea and border issues, the nationalist sentiment of some ASEAN countries has been stimulated, and public opinion often shows strong opposition. This kind of emotion may lead to people's misunderstanding and resistance to China, and then affect the cooperation attitude between the government and China (Jetin, 2018).

2.2 The impact on China

China-related public opinion of ASEAN countries has had a far-reaching impact on China's diplomatic image and international status. Positive public opinion, especially in the field of economic cooperation, not only enhances China's influence in ASEAN countries, but also enhances China's soft power on the international stage. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China has gradually changed the traditional impression of China as “tough” and “self-interested” by aiding in infrastructure construction and investment, and formed a certain image of cooperation and mutual benefit. The public opinion response of ASEAN countries has strengthened China's leading position in the region and enhanced the economic mutual trust and cultural identity between China and

its ASEAN partners (Chen, 2018). However, the existence of negative public opinion also challenges China's image. In some ASEAN countries, especially Viet Nam, the Philippines and other countries, due to historical issues and current territorial disputes, the negative sentiment towards China in public opinion is relatively prominent. Some public opinion regards China as an "aggressive" big country and is wary of China's economic expansion. This negative public opinion may make China's public diplomacy in some ASEAN countries face greater challenges and affect its soft power. In the relationship between China and Vietnam, China and the Philippines, the ups and downs of public opinion will often directly affect the communication and cooperation between governments, and even lead to fluctuations in bilateral relations.

2.3 The impact on international relations

China-related public opinion of ASEAN countries has not only influenced the bilateral relations between China and ASEAN, but also played a role in broader international relations. With the promotion of the "Belt and Road Initiative", the relationship between China and ASEAN countries is gradually moving towards multi-level and multi-field comprehensive cooperation. This influence is not limited to bilateral relations, but also affects the interaction between China and other countries, especially big countries. Under the background of globalization and multiploidization, the public opinion of ASEAN countries reflects their complex attitudes towards the rise of China. From the perspective of international relations, the public opinion of ASEAN countries can influence the relations between China and western countries. In terms of economic cooperation, ASEAN countries often support China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative and take this opportunity to win more international resources. This kind of positive public opinion not only makes China gradually occupy an advantage in economy and culture, but also promotes the cooperative relations between China and Europe, Africa and other regions. However, negative public opinion may have a negative impact on China's diplomatic relations with other big countries. Especially under the influence of the United States and other western countries, some negative public opinions of ASEAN countries may aggravate the tension between China and the United States. Western countries may use ASEAN countries' doubts about China to further strengthen the "China threat theory" and exert political pressure on a global scale. This change of external public opinion will directly affect China's international strategic layout (Bi, 2021).

3. Conclusion

The China-related public opinion of ASEAN countries presents diversified characteristics. This diversity is not only reflected in the differences of attitudes and opinions among countries towards China, but also in the content and form of public opinion. ASEAN countries have broad support and recognition in accepting China's economic cooperation and cultural exchanges, but there are also many objections and doubts on sensitive issues such as security issues and historical issues. Therefore, the

China-related public opinion of ASEAN countries presents a positive and negative situation, which reflects the complex political, cultural background and social feelings in this region. Positive public opinion will help promote China-ASEAN economic cooperation and cultural exchanges and promote mutual trust; However, negative public opinion may lead to misunderstanding and tension and affect the cooperation between the two sides in regional affairs. China's international image and soft power have also been reflected and tested in public opinion. Therefore, strengthening public opinion management and cultural diplomacy and enhancing the accuracy and effectiveness of external communication have become one of the important strategies for China to strengthen cooperation with ASEAN.

Generally speaking, the changes of China-related public opinion in ASEAN countries are an important factor in China-ASEAN relations. A deep understanding of these public opinion characteristics and their motivations is of great practical significance for promoting regional stability and development and promoting the in-depth implementation of the "Belt and Road Initiative". In the future, China can further improve its relations with ASEAN countries through accurate public opinion guidance, cultural diplomacy and strategic cooperation, enhance China's influence and soft power in the region, and promote the goal of common prosperity.

Conflict of interests

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.

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Researcher profile: Guo Yanan, Email: 1369985299@qq.com. College of ASEAN Studies, Guangxi Minzu University. The Author's research focuses on International Relations.



Acts of International Organizations on Digital Economic Integration

Name: ZHOU Yong*

OUYANG Zouting (Translator)**

Department of International Law, The Belarusian State University

Email: *frankiezhou953@gmail.com

** elisaouyang97@gmail.com

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
acts; approach digital economic integration; digital trade strategies; international organizations; approach	This paper explores the regulatory frameworks and legal instruments of key international organizations (IOs) in fostering digital economic integration. Through a comparative legal-institutional analysis of acts and policy instruments issued by the United Nations (UN), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Union (EU), African Union (AU), and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the study identifies trends, challenges, and synergies in regional and global digital trade governance. The research highlights varying levels of institutional maturity, digital inclusivity, and regulatory harmonization across IOs. The results underscore the importance of interoperable standards and collaborative approaches to bridge regulatory fragmentation and support cohesive digital trade governance worldwide.
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1. Introduction

In an era defined by digital transformation, IOs have become central actors in shaping the legal and policy frameworks that underpin digital trade and economic integration. The rise of cross-border e-commerce, digital payments, and data-driven services has highlighted the need for interoperable legal instruments capable of reducing regulatory fragmentation and supporting inclusive growth. While national governments have advanced domestic regulatory regimes, the complexity of the digital economy requires international cooperation to ensure compatibility across borders. IOs such as the UN, APEC, ASEAN, OECD, EU, AU, and EAEU have each developed distinct approaches to digital economic governance. However, these initiatives vary significantly in terms of institutional maturity, regulatory depth, and enforceability. This study addresses the gap by providing a comparative legal-institutional analysis of key acts and policy instruments adopted by major IOs, identifying common trends, divergences, and implications for the future of digital economic integration.

2. Method

This research adopts a comparative legal-institutional methodology, focusing on official policy documents, legal instruments, and strategic action plans published by international organizations. Primary sources include model laws, regulatory frameworks, and action plans accessed from official IO websites. The comparative analysis is structured along three thematic pillars: legal instruments supporting digital trade, digital infrastructure and interoperability mechanisms, and digital inclusion and governance frameworks. Data were triangulated from academic and policy literature to contextualize findings within broader international trade and legal discourse.

Primary documents were collected directly from the official websites of international organizations, including APEC, ASEAN, OECD, EU, AU, EAEU, and UN. These sources comprised legally binding instruments, policy frameworks, strategic plans, and official declarations published. To ensure reliability, only authentic, publicly available documents from official repositories (e.g., UN Treaty Series, APEC Secretariat, ASEAN Secretariat, OECD Library) were used. Academic literature and secondary sources were identified through databases such as JSTOR and Google Scholar to triangulate findings and provide scholarly context. This ensured that both primary legal texts and secondary analyses were integrated into the comparative study.

3. Discussion

In an era defined by digital transformation, the role of IOs in shaping frameworks for digital trade and economic integration has become pivotal. The UN has implemented several acts to foster digital economic integration. The UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law on Electronic Commerce (1996) provides a harmonized legal framework to facilitate the use of electronic communications in commercial transactions, promoting international trade by ensuring legal recognition of electronic documents (UNCITRAL, 1996; UNCITRAL, 2001). Similarly, the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Signatures (2001) ensures that electronic signatures are legally equivalent to handwritten ones, increasing trust in digital transactions (UNCITRAL, 1996; UNCITRAL, 2001). Additionally, the UN/CEFACT Recommendations, such as Recommendation No. 33 and Recommendation No. 37, streamline trade processes through single-window systems, simplifying digital trade documentation procedures (UN/CEFACT, 2005).

The APEC emphasizes digital trade as essential to achieving regional economic growth and integration. APEC's Digital Economy Action Plan (DEAP) (APEC, 2021) lays a foundation for promoting cross-border e-commerce and facilitating data flows among its member economies. Central to APEC's digital trade policy are initiatives supporting data privacy and cybersecurity, aimed at building trust in cross-border transactions. APEC's Cross-Border Privacy Rules (CBPR) system, for example, harmonizes privacy regulations across participating economies, enabling a freer flow

of data while protecting consumer information. Despite its advancements, APEC faces challenges in implementing uniform digital standards due to the economic diversity of its members (APEC, 2019).

The ASEAN has taken significant strides toward digital economic integration. ASEAN's Digital Integration Framework Action Plan outlines further measures to foster e-commerce growth and enhance digital infrastructure across member states. However, ASEAN's policy implementation remains uneven, as economic disparities and varying regulatory environments among members create obstacles to comprehensive digital integration (ASEAN, 2019). Nonetheless, ASEAN's approach highlights a commitment to advancing digital trade within a development-oriented context, recognizing the role of digitalization in bridging economic divides (ASEAN, 2020).

The OECD has long been at the forefront of digital trade governance, producing influential guidelines and reports on digital economy policies. The OECD's Model Framework on Digital Trade provides a reference for harmonizing digital trade regulations among member states, addressing issues from data governance to tax policy (OECD, 2020). The OECD's analytical contributions often serve as blueprints for other IOs, given the organization's extensive research capacity and policy expertise. However, the OECD faces challenges in promoting policy adoption across diverse legal systems, particularly in non-member states, limiting its impact in emerging economies.

The EU has established one of the world's most comprehensive regulatory frameworks for digital trade through its Digital Single Market (DSM) strategy. The DSM seeks to remove digital barriers within the EU, creating a unified market for digital services and products. Key initiatives include the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which has set a global benchmark for data privacy, and the Digital Services Act, aimed at regulating online platforms and content (EU, 2018). The EU's robust regulatory approach has promoted consumer trust and market accessibility but has also faced criticism for imposing stringent standards that may hinder innovation and complicate trade relations with non-EU countries (EU, 2021). As the EU extends its influence globally, it is actively engaged in promoting data governance standards that align with its digital trade policies.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is an emerging player in digital trade, seeking to harness digitalization to increase intra-African trade and economic development established by AU. Although AfCFTA's digital trade initiatives are still developing, its Secretariat has expressed commitment to building a framework that supports cross-border e-commerce and digital payments across African nations. The AU's Digital Transformation Strategy provides a guiding vision, emphasizing infrastructure, regulatory alignment, and capacity-building. AfCFTA faces considerable challenges in terms of infrastructure and digital literacy, yet its potential impact on reducing trade barriers and promoting economic inclusion across the continent is

profound (African Union, 2020).

The EAEU has been proactive in pursuing digital integration among its member states, guided by the EAEU Digital Agenda. Key initiatives include the development of a common digital platform to streamline cross-border trade and support digital services. The EAEU's approach focuses on aligning member states' digital regulations, facilitating digital payments, and reducing bureaucratic barriers. However, political and economic differences among EAEU members have limited the pace of integration, as member states prioritize different aspects of digital policy based on national interests (Eurasian Economic Commission, 2018). Nonetheless, the EAEU's focus on digital trade underscores its commitment to enhancing economic cooperation in Eurasia.

Beyond describing institutional acts, these initiatives reflect competing governance models. The EU's binding regulatory framework emphasizes consumer protection, while APEC and ASEAN rely more on consensus-based soft law, prioritizing flexibility over enforceability. Such divergence illustrates the tension between harmonization and regulatory sovereignty. Moreover, policy diffusion is evident: the GDPR has become a global reference point, inspiring ASEAN's privacy standards and influencing APEC's CBPR system. However, uneven digital infrastructure in AU and regulatory asymmetry within the EAEU reveal structural challenges that limit the effectiveness of digital integration. These differences demonstrate that while all IOs pursue digital trade, their pathways diverge significantly depending on institutional maturity, member diversity, and political will.

4. Results

This comparative analysis reveals three principal findings. First, international organizations differ in their regulatory strategies: binding law (EU), soft-law cooperation (APEC, ASEAN), and capacity-building (AU, EAEU), with the UN providing a hybrid model through adaptable legal instruments. Second, despite these differences, there is a convergence around interoperability and standards, as all IOs recognize the necessity of cross-border compatibility for digital trade, though implementation levels vary significantly. Third, digital inclusion has become an explicit policy goal, particularly in ASEAN and AU, though practical barriers remain acute.

Taken together, these results underscore that global digital trade governance remains fragmented, but not directionless. IOs are converging around common priorities—data governance, interoperability, and inclusion—yet pursue them through diverse institutional pathways. This diversity reflects regional economic realities but also creates risks of regulatory fragmentation. To overcome this, IOs could strengthen coordination through joint initiatives, interoperability frameworks, and the gradual articulation of shared legal standards.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no competing financial or non-financial interests that could be perceived as influencing the content or outcomes of this research.

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Bio Statement: Zhou Yong is a PhD student in international law at the Belarusian State University, specializing in the study of institutional cooperation in digital trade within APEC. His email address is frankiezhou953@gmail.com,