

CHINA-RUSSIA DIGITAL COOPERATION: DEVELOPMENT DIRECTIONS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract: In the context of rapid global digital economic development, China-Russia digital cooperation has become an important component of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries. Based on the framework of policy foundation-cooperation status-challenge response, this paper systematically analyzes the current situation and development prospects of China-Russia digital cooperation. Research indicates that both countries have achieved significant progress in cross-border e-commerce, digital infrastructure, and technological innovation. Bilateral trade in local currency settlement has exceeded 95%, and cross-border e-commerce has achieved explosive growth. However, cooperation still faces challenges including legal system differences, technical standard inconsistencies, data security risks, and Western sanctions. In the future, China-Russia digital cooperation should deepen infrastructure connectivity, promote rule coordination, strengthen talent cultivation, and expand cooperation in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and smart cities. This process will not only reshape the China-Russia economic and trade cooperation pattern but also provide an «Asian model» for global digital governance.

Keywords: China-Russia cooperation; digital economy; digital trade; development directions; prospects

In the context of globalization and rapid digital economic development, digital services trade has become a new growth point for countries' foreign trade, with huge potential[1]. As comprehensive strategic partners in the new era, China and Russia jointly promote the development of digital services trade, and actively expanding cooperation in this field is of great strategic importance. Currently, the fastest-growing areas in China-Russia digital services trade are cross-border e-commerce, cross-border payments and logistics, service trade, and technological cooperation. This paper aims to analyze the current situation and challenges of China-Russia digital cooperation and look forward to future development directions.

China-Russia digital economy cooperation has a solid foundation and huge potential, with both sides demonstrating complementary advantages in technological innovation, infrastructure construction, and e-commerce, achieving significant cooperation results[2]. Both governments have incorporated digital economy development into national strategic plans. The «Joint Communiqué of the 29th Regular Meeting between Chinese and Russian Prime Ministers» issued in August 2024 stated that both sides will deepen cooperation in e-commerce, service trade, and digital technology standards, promote the use of electronic documents to enhance the digital level of cross-border railway transportation, and jointly establish an artificial intelligence working group.

In digital infrastructure construction, important breakthroughs have been achieved. In November 2025, the «China-Russia Digital Economy Intelligent Computing Joint Laboratory» was inaugurated in Xiamen, initiated by the China-Russia Digital Economy Research Center together with Xiamen University and Moscow University. The laboratory focuses on creating a «China-Russia Cross-media Content Analysis and Trusted Data Interaction Platform», and its core application, the «China-Russia Document Assistant», will specifically address challenges in cross-border digital economy fields such as high costs of multilingual public opinion analysis and cross-cultural communication barriers.

In the digital trade field, China-Russia cooperation has achieved remarkable results. In 2023, cross-border e-commerce transaction volume increased by 28% compared with the previous year. Alibaba's «AliExpress» has become the second-largest e-commerce platform in Russia, and JD.com's launched «Super Store» plan shortens cross-border logistics time from Hangzhou to Russia to five days. Russian local platform «Wildberries» has also opened for Chinese sellers, forming a «two-way» cooperation pattern. In payment and settlement, local currency settlement has exceeded 95%, and the proportion of RMB in Russian foreign exchange reserves has risen to 28%. The «Digital Ruble-Digital RMB» direct exchange channel launched by both sides compresses cross-border payment time from three days to one hour through blockchain technology, reducing handling fees by 70%. In technological innovation, two projects recommended by Moscow University were launched in Xiamen: the «Ruifulong» new material project achieved key technological breakthroughs in membrane materials, expected to form an annual market scale of approximately 1 billion US dollars; the «Xintaili» artificial intelligence chemical information system empowers new drug development through AI technology, expected to shorten the research and development cycle by three to four years.

Since the Russia-Ukraine conflict, unprecedented Western

sanctions have plunged Russia's digital economy into development difficulties in technology, talent, and capital, seriously affecting its technology sector development, network sovereignty, and digital industry security[3]. At the technical level, sanctions have led to shortages of key technology equipment and disruption of technology chains. Chip supply cuts directly impact Russia's research in cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and 5G communications[4]. At the talent level, nearly 200,000 Russian IT talents have left since February 2022, and up to 45% of programmers express willingness to develop in European countries. For China-Russia digital economy cooperation, Chinese high-tech enterprises face spillover risks of US secondary sanctions. The US includes products «containing American technology» manufactured overseas within the scope of its long-arm jurisdiction. Under sanction pressure, some Chinese high-tech enterprises have to reconsider their ways of conducting business with Russia.

Additionally, China and Russia face practical challenges including inadequate infrastructure support, logistics and operational barriers, significant cultural differences, and a shortage of interdisciplinary talents. Cross-border logistics costs can account for 18%-25% of commodity selling prices, and goods take 14 days from sellers to buyers, with return rates usually exceeding 15%. China and Russia also have differences in data privacy regulations and cybersecurity standards, requiring further improvement of coordination mechanisms to address security threats brought by cross-border data flows. Russia maintains a relatively closed «island» state, implementing differentiated legal supervision for data subjects, while China embodies a balanced view in data governance, pursuing balance between national security and data development.

Looking forward, China-Russia digital services trade will present three major trends: technological innovation shifting from single-point breakthroughs to system integration; policy coordination shifting from partial pilots to comprehensive alignment; cooperation models shifting from trade complementarity to ecological co-construction. At the technical cooperation level, both sides should deepen strategic synergy in quantum communication, artificial intelligence, and blockchain. They have built a 3,800-kilometer quantum encryption channel from Moscow to Urumqi, which will be expanded to civilian fields. In artificial intelligence, breakthroughs in research at the China-Russia Joint Laboratory will promote application in intelligent manufacturing and smart energy. At the rule alignment level, both sides should strengthen policy communication and coordination, establishing a special digital economy cooperation working group. Promote rule alignment in cross-border data flow, privacy protection, and digital trade tax, reducing institutional obstacles. Both sides should actively participate in

international digital trade rule formulation and jointly promote a more just, reasonable, and open international digital economy governance system[5].

At the industrial cooperation level, China and Russia should further broaden digital trade cooperation fields, strengthening digital transformation in manufacturing, agriculture, and healthcare. Relying on platforms such as the «China-Russia Digital Economy Research Center», focus on cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing, establishing normalized joint research and development mechanisms. Strengthen digital talent cultivation and cultural exchange cooperation, establishing joint research institutions and training bases to provide talent support for bilateral cooperation. Both countries should actively explore and construct data sharing and cooperation mechanisms[6] based on data security and user privacy protection principles, promoting data openness and interoperability. China and Russia should deepen cooperation in cybersecurity technology research and development, threat warning system construction, and emergency response mechanism optimization. Both sides should establish a normalized communication mechanism for intergovernmental digital cooperation, holding regular high-level dialogues to coordinate and solve major problems. Digital cooperation requires joint participation of governments, enterprises, universities and research institutions. Encourage enterprises to carry out market-oriented cooperation, support universities and research institutions to strengthen joint research and development, and leverage the leading role of platforms such as the China-Russia Digital Economy Research Center. Aiming at differences in legal systems, both sides should strengthen dialogue in digital governance. Explore mutual recognition mechanisms in data security, privacy protection, and intellectual property rights, creating a predictable institutional environment. Promote the alignment of China-Russia digital cooperation with regional development strategies, such as the connection between the «Digital Silk Road» and the digitalization process of the Eurasian Economic Union. Carry out digital cooperation pilots in border areas, exploring replicable cooperation models.

China-Russia digital economy cooperation is an important component of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries in the new era. Currently, significant achievements have been made in cross-border e-commerce, payments, digital infrastructure, and technological innovation. According to Kostin, Shubaeva, and Karimova's research[7], e-commerce in both countries follows the same development trend, characterized by dynamic growth in user numbers and expansion of e-commerce market volume. However, there are notable structural differences: the Chinese market is more centralized due to

major players (Alibaba, Pinduoduo, and JD.com), while the Russian market is more fragmented (Wildberries, Ozon, and other multimodal platforms). Additionally, logistics development paths differ—Chinese companies develop transport hubs and direct routes to Russia, whereas Russian companies establish warehouse networks and pickup points, adapting domestic logistics systems to accommodate foreign sellers, thereby reducing costs and accelerating order processing.

Despite these achievements, bilateral digital cooperation still faces challenges such as differences in legal systems, inconsistent technical standards, data security risks, and cultural barriers. In the future, China-Russia digital cooperation should deepen digital infrastructure interconnection, promote digital trade rule coordination, strengthen digital economy talent cultivation, and expand cooperation in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and smart cities. This process will reshape the pattern of China-Russia economic and trade cooperation and become a new paradigm of the «Asian model» for global digital cooperation. China-Russia digital cooperation will surely inject new momentum into the modernization of both countries and contribute more to the development of the global digital economy.

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