

### Analysis of integrated development of digital economy with the Heilongjiang Province's cross-border E-commerce with Russia

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**Линлин Сонг**

## **Анализ комплексного развития цифровой экономики с помощью трансграничной электронной торговли провинции Хэйлуцзян с Россией**

**С** момента создания экспериментальной зоны свободной торговли Китая (Хэйлуцзян) в провинции наблюдается ускоренное развитие трансграничной электронной торговли с Россией. Обладая сравнительными преимуществами в области информационных технологий, провинция Хэйлуцзян способствовала более быстрому становлению интернет-экономики в России, включая Дальний Восток, развитию новых форматов цифровой торговли, в т. ч. трансграничной, совместному продвижению онлайн-таможенных, логистических и финансовых услуг.

В статье, которая состоит из четырех частей, рассматривается состояние трансграничной электронной торговли провинции Хэйлуцзян, анализируется развитие её российского направления, выделяются проблемы, а также оцениваются перспективы дальнейшего сотрудничества.

В первой части рассматривается состояние торгово-экономического сотрудничества провинции Хэйлуцзян с Россией. Этот регион Китая имеет самую протяженную границу с Россией, и сотрудничество с Россией всегда было одним из главных приоритетов его развития.

Вторая часть посвящена основам развития трансграничной электронной коммерции в провинции Хэйлуцзян. В эпоху науки и технологий популярность Интернета значительно возросла, особенно в части роста осведомленности людей о возможности покупок, используя инструментарий Интернета. Учитывая это, провинция Хэйлуцзян также использовала свою промышленную трансформацию для создания новой эры цифровой торговли и улучшения своей экономики.

В третьей части анализируются вызовы и проблемы комплексного развития цифровой экономики с трансграничной электронной торговлей провинции Хэйлуцзян с Россией. Автор рассматривает необходимость усилить строительство трансграничной инфраструктуры и сократить время и стоимость трансграничных перевозок, улучшить возможности трансграничных логистических услуг и продвинуть систему гарантий логистики для России. Особо выделена проблема повышения надежности системы онлайн-платежей.

В заключении представлены рекомендации по развитию межгосударственного сотрудничества Китая и России, оценены среднесрочные перспективы экономического взаимодействия.

**Ключевые слова:** провинция Хэйлуцзян, Россия, трансграничная электронная коммерция, цифровая экономика.

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## Analysis of integrated development of digital economy with the Heilongjiang Province's cross-border E-commerce with Russia

*Since the establishment of the China (Heilongjiang) pilot free trade zone, the development of cross-border e-commerce with Russia has continued to increase speed and quality. With its geographical advantages and its comparative advantages in the Internet field, Heilongjiang Province promoted the rapid development of the Internet economy in Russia, fostered a new digital trade format represented by cross-border e-commerce, and promoted online and offline collaborative promotion of customs clearance logistics and financial services. The paper expounds foundation and development status of Heilongjiang Province's cross-border e-commerce, analyzes in integrated development of digital economy with the Heilongjiang Province's cross-border e-commerce with Russia, and further puts forward prospects and recommendations.*

**Keywords:** Heilongjiang Province, Russia, cross-border e-commerce, digital economy.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the China (Heilongjiang) pilot free trade zone, the development of cross-border e-commerce with Russia has continued to increase speed and quality. According to data from the Heilongjiang Provincial Department of Commerce, in the first three quarters of this year in 2020, the province's cross-border e-commerce trade volume reached 560 million yuan, a year-on-year increase of 2.6 times<sup>1</sup>. Recently, Heilongjiang Province has constantly been improving and upgrading the e-commerce development model and successfully opened up cross-border e-commerce development, which is a multi-domain and multi-level information economy belt based on the "Internet Plus" formed by China and the countries along the Belt and Road to strengthen network interconnection and information exchange. With the cooperation in the field of the Internet, we will promote the construction of a new pattern of all-round cooperation with Russia [Cai Chen, Yuxiong Zhang, 2016].

The conceptual framework of the paper is composed of four main parts. The first part combs the development status of Heilongjiang's economic and trade cooperation with Russia. Heilongjiang Province located in the center of Northeast Asia, is the China's longest province bordering Russia. Economic and trade

cooperation with Russia has always been the top priority of Heilongjiang Province's opening up [Linlin Song, 2019, pp. 51–61]. The second part focuses on foundation of the Heilongjiang Province's cross-border e-commerce development construction. Especially in the era of science and technology, the popularity of the Internet has greatly increased, and the awareness of people's online shopping has become stronger. On this basis, Heilongjiang Province has also used its industrial transformation to build a new era of digital trade and help its economy improve. The third part analyses challenges and problems in in integrated development of digital economy with Heilongjiang Province's cross-border e-commerce with Russia. Finally, the paper puts forward prospects and recommendations. Russia, especially the Far East, is an important strategic partner of Heilongjiang Province. With the effective cooperation in the Internet field, Heilongjiang Province and Russia can continue to extend cooperation in various fields.

### 2. DEVELOPMENT STATUS OF HEILONGJIANG'S ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION WITH RUSSIA

In 2019, the import and export of goods in the Heilongjiang Province developed steadily, and both imports and exports achieved double growth. According to statistics from the Harbin Customs, the

<sup>1</sup> Cross-border e-commerce helps China-Russia trade enter the "fast lane", 2020-11-19. URL: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1683768502518393922&wfr=spider&for=pc>

total value of import and export of goods in the Heilongjiang Province in 2019 was 186,59 billion yuan, an increase of 6,7% over 2018, which was 3,3 percentage points higher than the national import and export growth rate during the same period. Among them, exports were 34,94 billion yuan, an increase of 18,8%, 13,8 percentage points higher than the national export growth rate over the same period; imports were 151,65 billion yuan, an increase of 4,2%, which was 2,6 percentage points higher than the national import growth rate over the same period<sup>2</sup>.

In 2019, the total import and export value of Heilongjiang Province to Russia was 127,07 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 4%, accounting for 85,5% of the total import and export value of the countries along the "Belt and Road" in Heilongjiang Province during the same period. Among them, exports to Russia were 10 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 34,1%; imports from Russia were 117,07 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 2,1%<sup>3</sup>.

### **3. FOUNDATION OF THE HEILONGJIANG PROVINCE'S CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE COOPERATION WITH RUSSIA**

#### *3.1. The number of internet users in the Heilongjiang Province and Russia*

Development of the cross-border e-commerce between China and Russia has unique advantages in terms of the online consumer groups. In 2019, the total number of Internet users over the age of 16 in Russia has increased from 91 million in the past to 94.4 million, accounting for 79.8% of Russian adults. In 2019, the elderly are the main source of growth in the number of Internet users in Russia. Compared with 2018, the number of Internet users over 65 has increased from 26% to 36%, and the number of Internet users between the ages of 50 and 64 has increased from 63% to 66%<sup>4</sup>. As of the end of 2019, the number of Internet users in Heilongjiang Province

was approximately 28.163 million, and the Internet penetration rate was 75.1%. By 2020, the access rate of 1G fiber optic access at important ports will reach 100%. It can be seen that the continued growth of Internet users in China and Russia has laid a good foundation for the development of cross-border e-commerce between China and Russia and Heilongjiang Province's cross-border e-commerce development construction. It is specifically proposed to actively build an information and communication hub for Russia, and the capacity of cross-border communication networks has been greatly enhanced.

#### *3.2. Frequent promulgation of effective documents and the logistics transportation status*

Historically, compared with the coastal provinces, Heilongjiang Province is remote, with the high logistics costs and long transportation time. There are inherent limitations and shortcomings in foreign economic and trade exchanges. Taking trade with Russia as an example, before 2014, China and Russia had insufficient capacity to handle cross-border mail at both ends. In addition, the customs clearance policy was cumbersome and the mode of transportation was backward. The international parcel delivery time was 40-75 days, which was far from meeting the actual demand. In recent years, as the most important online commodity supplier in Russia, China has become a new trade growth point for the two countries. With the rapid growth of the Sino-Russian e-commerce market, Heilongjiang Province has actively used the existing open ports to Russia to vigorously develop the logistics industry and accelerate the transformation and upgrading of the cross-border e-commerce trade model and transportation mode. As a central city and aviation hub city for cooperation with Russia, Harbin has built a comprehensive logistics network covering Russia, including roads, railways, waterways and aviation. In December 2016, Harbin City

<sup>2</sup> Heilongjiang Province's foreign trade import and export achieved double growth in 2019, in: *Heilongjiang Daily*, 2020-01-20. URL: <http://tradeinservices.mofcom.gov.cn/article/yanjiu/hangyezsk/202001/97370.html>

<sup>3</sup> In 2019, the total value of Heilongjiang's import and export to Russia increased by 4%, in: WWW. CHINANEWS.COM, 2020-01-17. URL: <https://www.chinanews.com/cj/2020/01-17/9062954.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> Russia's adult Internet users increase to 94.4 million in 2019, in: WWW. CHINANEWS.COM, 2020-01-14. URL: <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKoStP>

Promoting Modern Logistics Innovation and Development City Pilot Three-Year Action Plan (2016–2018) was promulgated. In January 2017, Implementation plan for promoting rapid development of e-commerce in Harbin was to be carried out. In July 2018, the Harbin International Aviation Hub Strategic Planning was to be implemented. The promulgation of these documents provides an important policy-leading guarantee for Harbin to carry out the cross-border e-commerce to Russia. From the first flight in November 2013 to June 2017, the Harbin-Yekaterinburg e-commerce cargo charter had shipped 355 flights, with a total cargo capacity of nearly 500,000 pieces and a weight of 7,525 tons. Harbin Airport announced that in the first three quarters in the year of 2020, Harbin Airport flew 85 cross-border e-commerce cargo flights to Russia, transporting 142,000 pieces of cargo and mail with 2064 tons, an increase of 14.4% year-on-year, and achieved a reverse during period of the epidemic<sup>5</sup>.

### *3.3. Hardware and software upgrade for the cross-border E-commerce service*

Heilongjiang Province, as the traditional trade province, is vigorously promoting “Internet + trade” and exploring a new model of cross-border e-commerce business between China and Russia, which has achieved fruitful results [Wei Bai, Yu Yang, Chunyu Liu, 2019, pp. 28–29]. Meanwhile, hardware and software support for cross-border e-commerce beneficial. Concerning hardware construction, there are convenient traditional trade channels (railway, highway), Flourishing e-commerce parks, the emerging border warehouses and cold chain logistics networks and professional big data platform construction. Concerning software construction, there are various cross-border e-commerce integrated service platforms, a large number of Chinese and Russian bilingual business professionals, the emerging cross-border e-commerce online payment platform and “Internet+” expansion into many fields such as tourism education, culture and equipment manufacturing, etc. [Yingying Wei, 2017, pp. 8–9; Xiaoyu Jia, Minna Li,

2017, pp. 346–347].

### *3.4. Perfection of the cross-border E-commerce platform and rapid development of industrial parks*

Firstly, at the beginning of 2014, there were 95 self-built e-commerce platforms in Heilongjiang province, including 19 cross-border e-commerce platforms dominated by Russia. The business scope covers commodity sales, logistics, payment, trade matching and integration of cross-border e-commerce industry chains, etc.; enterprises and individuals in the province opened 39,000 stores on third-party platforms. These platforms and merchants sent more than 1.7 million international parcels to Russia in the first quarter. Average of nearly 20,000 items per day was sent to the Russian consumers through the cross-border e-commerce platforms. At that time, the “Double 11” cross-border parcel reached a historical peak of 200,000 pieces per day.[Chunyu Zhou, 2018, pp. 5–8] secondly, in 2016, Heilongjiang province’s e-commerce platform reached 145, and 44 local pavilions were opened in major e-commerce platforms such as Taobao and Jingdong. There were more than 40,000 stores of various types, and the number of online merchants in the province reached 101,800. Thirdly, at the beginning of 2017, among the 32 e-commerce industrial parks in the province, there were 4 national-level e-commerce demonstration bases and 1,368 settled enterprises. Until the end of 2017, 8 companies in Heilongjiang had 19 overseas warehouses in Russia.

### *3.5. Construction of new channels on the air transport beneficial to the cross-border E-commerce cooperation*

The Internet era has not only opened a new era of economics, but also the only way for the transformation of traditional enterprises. With the opening of the Russian cargo charter, the average period of cross-border electronic logistics delivery between China and Russia in Heilongjiang Province was shortened from nearly 2 months to 13 days (the fastest 4 days), which made Russian buyers feel the speed of Heilongjiang e-commerce. In December 2013, the Russian Ural Airlines opened a

<sup>5</sup> Cross-border e-commerce traffic from Harbin airport to Russia in the first three quarters increased by 14.41% year-on-year, in: WWW. CHINANEWS.COM, 2020-10-18. URL: <https://tech.sina.com.cn/roll/2020-10-18/doc-iiznezxr6650146.shtml>



cargo charter from Harbin to Yekaterinburg. Subsequently, the Harbin-Novosibirsk route and the Harbin-Krasnoyarsk route were opened. Harbin Taiping International Airport became the gateway airport to the Russian Far East. Customs, border inspection, health inspection and other departments have opened green channels to facilitate airlines and cargo owners. The cargo charter operated more than 100 flights a year, with a total cargo capacity of 2,000 tons, and the value of goods exceeded 200 million US dollars, accounting for 40% of the total amount of e-commerce logistics packages. With the opening of logistics, nearly 5,000 domestic appliance manufacturers and 8 million Internet users in Russia had begun to enjoy high value-added logistics experience, and had great potential for improvement in trading, trade services and financial services. Taking Heilongjiang Russian Express International Logistics Co., Ltd. as an example, the recent logistics orders to Russia increased by 200%, accounting for nearly 40% of the total domestic exports of mail to Russia, and built the first brand image of cross-border logistics. Self-developed big data order operating system and warehouse management system by Russian Express International Logistics Co., Ltd. for the first time enables real-time track query tracking for cross-border logistics packages. From January to October 2018, 164 sorties were carried to Russian charter passengers, with 7 million pieces of parcels and 1,658 tons of parcels, and the income reached more than 200 million yuan. Through the Russian parcels to Russia, the e-commerce charter from Harbin, flying to Yekaterinburg, Russia's logistics hub, for six and a half hours, was sent to the internet users by the Russian Post Office. In 2018, Harbin Taiping International Airport had a total of 91 chartered flights to Russia, with 107,000 parcels and a weight of 1944.68 tons. At present, Harbin Airport has opened domestic and international routes. There are more than 180 cities and more than 110 navigable cities. The air traffic network has been formed with Harbin as the center, radiating important cities across the country, and extending the air traffic network of Russia, Japan, South Korea and

the other neighboring countries and the major European and American countries. Heilongjiang Airport Group will accelerate the development of air passenger and cargo charter flights to Russia, Europe, North-Eastern Asia and North America, and build Harbin into a fully functional, multimodal international logistics hub and channel connecting Europe, Asia and the United States, and further contribute to the North China. The development of cross-border e-commerce in Xinjiang injected strong momentum<sup>6</sup>

### *3.6. New paths of the cross-border E-commerce land transportation*

In November 2014, Russia Post set up the Far-Eastern distribution center in Vladivostok, which was only 220 km away from Suifenhe. After the Russian Far East buyer placed an order online, the logistics company directly transported the goods to the distribution center through Suifenhe. Thus, parcels can be no longer posted bypass the "Harbin (or Beijing) - Moscow headquarters - Far East distribution center" line, which save half of the transportation time. In addition, since the operation of Harbin-Europe train from 2015 to 2017, a total of 665 classes had been shipped, with a value of 1.18 billion U.S. dollars; in 2017, 461 classes were shipped in total, with a value of 800 million U.S. dollars, which showed that the volume of transportation was accelerating.

### *3.7. Development Potential in the Field of "Internet +" in the Information Industry*

Cooperation with the e-commerce giants promotes to upgrade Heilongjiang Province's industrial structure. In April, 2013, Alibaba (Sino-Russian Cloud Warehouse) utilized the advantages of the Suifenhe Golden Port to establish a low-cost, convenient, safe and efficient, and internationally-accepted e-commerce trade platform for Russia. In August, 2015, Jingdong Group worked together to develop the cross-border e-commerce business in the Far East. In August, 2015, Tencent Group set up all-dimensional cooperation with Jingdong Group in urban services, cross-border e-commerce, green food, tourism, big data, innovation and entrepreneurship, social and people's livelihood. In April, 2017, ZOL

<sup>6</sup> WWW. CHINANEWS.COM. In 2018, Harbin Airport's chartered cargo volume to Russia reached nearly 2,000 tons, with more than 100,000 parcels, 2019-01-13. URL: <https://www.chinanews.com/cj/2019/01-13/8727787.shtml>

created the regional characteristic industry development, promoting kinetic energy conversion and structural upgrading.

In September 2018, General Secretary Xi Jinping carried out the inspection in the northeast of China and made an important speech at the in-depth promotion of the North-Eastern Revitalization Symposium, who claimed to deeply integrate the Belt and Road and build an open and cooperative highland, which was to lead the direction and inject momentum to better participate in the Belt and Road and to create a new pattern of opening up to the outside world for Heilongjiang Province. Heilongjiang Province should take advantage of the 4th Oriental Economic Forum to give full play to the geographical advantages adjacent to Russia, continue to focus on promoting multi-directional connectivity to Russia, and build a new platform for cross-border cooperation development and opening up. With regard to the level of economic and trade cooperation with Russia, Heilongjiang Province will strive to promote Heilongjiang Province's cooperation with Russia and open up a new pattern for all countries in the North-Eastern Asia such as Japan, South Korea, North Korea and Mongolia [Linlin Song, 2018, pp. 35–42].

#### **4. CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS IN INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL ECONOMY WITH HEILONGJIANG PROVINCE'S CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE WITH RUSSIA**

##### *4.1. High risk of cross-border online payment and low efficiency of the online payment*

According to data from the China Economic Net, since its launch in 2014, the Sino-Russian cross-border e-commerce online payment platform has processed 10.2 million cross-border online payment transactions with a total amount of 2.75 billion yuan by the end of 2016. On April 8, 2015, the Sino-Russian cross-border e-commerce customs clearance service platform was officially opened in Suifenhe City, which was the comprehensive upgrade of the business service platform and the first time in the country to realize the customs clearance, cross-border payment, and foreign exchange settlement tax rebates for cross-border e-commerce exports to Russia. Therefore, the sound cross-border e-commerce payment service system can

promote the development of the Heilongjiang Province's cross-border e-commerce to Russia faster and better. However, in the work of cross-border online payment, the online payment process is more complicated and the online payment risk is relatively high. Quite a few people in the online shopping group still have concerns about online payment, and some groups choose to pay cash on arrival, which affects the effective operation of e-commerce companies. Therefore, the Heilongjiang Province should actively encourage credible financial institutions in the province to expand the scope of cross-border e-commerce online payment services, improve financial services such as cross-border e-commerce online payment and settlement with Russia, and perfect the cross-border e-commerce online payment service system [Linlin Song, 2019, pp. 35–42].

##### *4.2. Weak Logistics Guarantee System for Russia and Lack of Cross-border Logistics Service Capabilities*

The cross-border e-commerce industry in the Heilongjiang Province started late compared to some southern provinces, but in recent years, with the introduction of national policies and the continuous improvement of cross-border cooperation, the cross-border e-commerce industry has developed rapidly, and it is required to strengthen the cross-border infrastructure construction and shorten the time and cost of cross-border transportation, improve cross-border logistics service capabilities, and advance the logistics guarantee system for Russia. At present, Heilongjiang Province has introduced many measures in response to the weak cross-border logistics system. Among them, E-commerce companies in the province are clearly encouraged to "go global". It is recommended that companies establish overseas warehouses and overseas service outlets in Russia, and then build more sites that can cover major cities in Russia. The cross-border e-commerce logistics hub will improve the integrated service system of cross-border trade, warehousing, distribution and after-sales services, and improve the speed and logistics efficiency of cross-border cargo transportation in Heilongjiang Province to Russia. Take Ruston as an example, in late November 2013, Ruston officially launched the Sino-Russian cross-border e-commerce

aviation operation in Harbin, creating a set of cross-border e-commerce logistics operation mechanism including logistics and warehousing supervision, logistics collection, warehouse management, cross-border logistics, and border warehouse management and customer service management services. From 2015 to 2017, Ruston had ranked first in the cross-border logistics industry with Russia for three consecutive years, with a market share of 12,6%, and it was the largest online cross-border e-commerce logistics service Business for Russia on Alibaba AliExpress. More than 25% of Russian netizens use the service. In 2017, Ruston logistics accounted for 52,1% of the national logistics market to Russia, and 91% of air parcels to Russia were transported by special cargo planes of Ruston [Yannan Wu., 2018, pp. 71–73]. Therefore, other e-commerce companies in the province should take advantage of the favorable policies issued by the government, learn from the advanced experience of peer companies, and better develop cross-border economic and trade cooperation with Russia.

#### **5. PROSPECTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL ECONOMY WITH HEILONGJIANG PROVINCE'S CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE WITH RUSSIA**

There is still room for growth in total e-commerce demand. The volume of e-commerce transactions and online retail transactions at home and abroad still maintains rapid growth. Heilongjiang Province should actively promoted integrated development of digital economy with Heilongjiang Province's cross-border e-commerce with Russia.

Firstly, new technological changes will continue to trigger changes in e-commerce business practices. Heilongjiang Province should study the technological trends of e-commerce platform development, strengthen the training of e-commerce platform operating enterprise systems, and organize research on the new mode of e-commerce platform. Heilongjiang Province should study an effective way to reduce the cost of e-commerce logistics, and improve the logistics distribution system to get through the last mile of distribution.

Secondly, agricultural products speed up the construction of agricultural products outside the province in the main sales area, cross-border goods to increase the construction of overseas warehouses and border warehouses. It is necessary to strengthen the connection with upstream and downstream enterprises and strengthen cooperation in the fields of design, packaging, marketing and talents [Yan Wang, 2017, pp. 54–56; Chunyu Zhou, 2018, pp. 5–8; Leyi Lin, Xianyu Liu, 2018, pp. 84–85].

Thirdly, Heilongjiang Province should join hands with the e-commerce giants to co-build a characteristic digital economy industrial park, relying on the big data and other capabilities and resources and combination with our province's characteristic industries so as to drive a new cross-border e-commerce system. Our province can take advantage of the brand effect of large companies to effectively promote the large-scale development of cross-border e-commerce enterprises through planning and guidance, policy support, technical support, and service support.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

In recent years, Heilongjiang Province has been exploring cross-border cooperation paths suitable for the provincial conditions and the national conditions of neighboring countries, and deepens the all-round exchanges and cooperation with the Belt and Road countries. Heilongjiang Province should accelerate the construction of all-round infrastructure, speed up the construction of international major passages along the border, and promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation. In addition, it is of great significance to accelerate industrial transformation and upgrading and use the digital economy to boost the high-quality development of the real economy. Faced with problems such as difficulty in controlling supply chain risks, risks in cross-border payments, and poor experience in supporting services, Heilongjiang Province needs to continue to promote digital technology innovation and application, improve the quality of supporting services of the e-commerce industry, promote coordinated development in combination with regional



characteristics, so as to explore new paths suitable for the development of provincial conditions and inject new momentum into economic high-quality development [Yueyue Zang, Chongjun Fan, Yue Zhu, Wei Liu, 2020, pp. 7–8].

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