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THE ROLE OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY OF RUSSIA AND CHINA

WANG MengyaoPeople's Friendship University of Russia
Moscow, Russia

The article examines the role of the Belt and Road Initiative in the development of the digital economy of Russia and China. Special attention is paid to the conceptual relationship between the digital economy and the Digital Silk Road as a new direction of international cooperation within the BRI framework. The paper analyzes the main areas of China–Russia interaction, including the development of digital infrastructure, cross-border e-commerce, technological cooperation, and institutional coordination in the field of digital governance. It is shown that the Belt and Road Initiative functions not only as a mechanism of infrastructural connectivity, but also as a strategic platform for digital transformation and regional integration in Eurasia. At the same time, the article examines the key constraints of bilateral digital partnership, including differences in regulatory systems, technological asymmetry, cybersecurity issues, and the growing importance of digital sovereignty. The study concludes that the prospects for further cooperation between Russia and China depend on deeper institutional interaction and better coordination of digital development strategies.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, digital economy, Digital Silk Road, China–Russia cooperation, digital sovereignty.

Introduction. In the context of the accelerating global digital transformation, the digital economy has become one of the key drivers of economic modernization, international competitiveness, and structural change. Under these conditions, the interaction between large-scale international cooperation initiatives and digital development strategies acquires particular theoretical and practical significance. One of the most important platforms in this regard is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has gradually expanded beyond traditional infrastructure and trade cooperation to include digital connectivity, technological collaboration, and new forms of regional integration. In this broader framework, the Digital Silk Road has emerged as an important dimension of the BRI, linking transport corridors, communication networks, digital trade mechanisms, and innovation partnerships into a more complex model of cross-border development. This transformation makes the study of the relationship between the BRI and the digital economy especially relevant in the case of Russia and China.

The relevance of this topic is determined by

several factors. First, both China and Russia attach increasing strategic importance to digital technologies, data governance, platform development, and technological sovereignty. Second, the current international environment, characterized by geopolitical tension, sanctions pressure, and fragmentation of the global economic order, increases the importance of bilateral and regional mechanisms of digital cooperation. Third, the BRI provides not only a framework for economic connectivity, but also an institutional and strategic space in which digital infrastructure, e-commerce, innovation, and regulatory dialogue can develop simultaneously. In this context, the purpose of the present article is to examine the role of the BRI in the development of the digital economy of Russia and China, with particular attention to its contribution to digital connectivity, bilateral cooperation, and the opportunities and constraints of this partnership. The article is based on a qualitative analysis of academic literature and conceptual interpretations and aims to demonstrate that the BRI functions as an important platform for the formation of a new model of China–Russia dig-

ital cooperation in Eurasia.

Theoretical Foundations: The Belt and Road Initiative and the Digital Economy. In the literature, the digital economy is generally understood not simply as the use of digital technologies, but as a new development model built on digital infrastructure, data circulation, platform-based exchange, cross-border e-commerce, and innovation networks. Zhao and Zhai argue that the Digital Silk Road should be viewed as an extension of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from project-based cooperation to rule-based and governance-oriented cooperation [1]. This interpretation is highly relevant to the present paper because it helps explain why the BRI matters for Russia and China not only in transport or energy, but also in digital trade, data security, and regulatory coordination. In other words, digital transformation under the BRI is inseparable from institutions.

A similar idea is developed by Liu and Avdokushin, who define the Digital Silk Road as the innovative core of the BRI and emphasize that digital connectivity has become a strategic complement to traditional infrastructure connectivity [2]. Their view is important for this study because it shows the evolution of the BRI from roads, railways, and pipelines toward telecommunications, cloud systems, smart logistics, and digital platforms. Thus, in the context of contemporary international political economy, connectivity should be interpreted in three interconnected dimensions: physical connectivity, which enables material exchange; institutional connectivity, which provides legal and regulatory coordination; and digital connectivity, which supports data flows, e-commerce, and technological cooperation.

For the Russia–China context, Li, Ashmarina, and Pavlova stress that the Digital Silk Road creates a new level of external economic interaction through the digitalization of logistics, retail, and infrastructure projects, thereby deepening bilateral cooperation [3]. This argument is especially useful for the present article because it links digital economy development with state-led coordination and regional integration. Therefore, the BRI can be conceptualized as a framework that promotes digital transformation through infrastructure building, policy align-

ment, and technological partnership. For Russia and China, this framework is additionally shaped by concerns over technological sovereignty, cybersecurity, and the search for a more autonomous Eurasian digital space.

The Role of the BRI in Promoting China–Russia Digital Cooperation. In the existing literature, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), especially in its Digital Silk Road dimension, is increasingly interpreted as a practical mechanism for deepening China–Russia digital cooperation. Li, Ashmarina, and Pavlova argue that the development vector of the Digital Silk Road in the China–Russia context lies in the combination of e-commerce, internet technologies, artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing, and blockchain, which together create a new technological basis for bilateral cooperation. This view is important for the present paper because it shows that the BRI supports not only traditional connectivity, but also the construction of digital infrastructure. In the China–Russia case, this includes telecommunications networks, cross-border fiber-optic routes, cloud infrastructure, and the digitalization of logistics and transport. Therefore, the BRI can be seen as a platform through which physical corridors are gradually transformed into smart and data-driven corridors.

At the same time, Russian and Chinese scholars note that the Digital Silk Road expands bilateral cooperation through digital trade and innovation. Liu and Avdokushin emphasize that the Digital Silk Road has become the innovative foundation of the BRI and serves as an instrument for promoting digital economy cooperation among participating states [4]. Applied to Russia and China, this means that the BRI facilitates the growth of cross-border e-commerce platforms, digital payment systems, and more efficient customs and trade procedures. Such developments are especially significant because they reduce transaction costs and increase the speed of cross-border exchange, which is crucial for a geographically extensive Eurasian partnership.

Moreover, the BRI promotes technological and institutional cooperation. Within this framework, China and Russia are able to expand dialogue in such areas as artificial intelligence,

cybersecurity, satellite navigation, and digital communications. More importantly, digital cooperation under the BRI is not limited to technology itself; it also involves the alignment of development strategies, intergovernmental agreements, and regulatory communication in digital governance. In this sense, Eurasia is not merely a transit space, but an emerging digital corridor linking infrastructure, markets, and institutions. Thus, the BRI plays a systemic role in promoting China–Russia digital cooperation by integrating infrastructure development, digital trade, innovation partnership, and regional governance into a broader process of Eurasian economic transformation.

Opportunities and Challenges in the Digital Economic Partnership between Russia and China. Recent scholarship generally suggests that digital cooperation has become one of the most dynamic dimensions of the contemporary China–Russia partnership. Zubenko argues that, under conditions of growing international uncertainty and Western pressure, cooperation in the digital economy has turned into an important instrument for improving competitiveness, stabilizing growth, and expanding the external economic room for both countries. This argument is directly relevant to the present paper because it highlights the first major opportunity of the partnership: stronger economic resilience through bilateral technological cooperation. In this sense, digital collaboration helps both Russia and China reduce excessive dependence on traditional sectors such as raw materials and conventional trade, while opening new channels for innovation-driven growth in e-commerce, digital services, logistics, and platform-based business models. At the regional level, such cooperation also supports Eurasian connectivity and digital modernization, making the Belt and Road framework more adaptive to the requirements of the digital age.

At the same time, the literature emphasizes that these opportunities are accompanied by serious structural constraints. Ilyin and co-authors note that, although Russia and China have both made notable progress in digitalization, their cooperation develops in the context of global digital transformation, which is characterized by uneven capacities, differences in institutional

settings, and external geopolitical pressures [5]. For the purposes of this article, this means that the bilateral digital partnership cannot be viewed as frictionless. Differences in regulatory systems, governance approaches, and market structures complicate deeper integration in areas such as data circulation, digital platforms, and technological standards. In addition, technological asymmetries may produce an imbalanced relationship in which the benefits of cooperation are distributed unevenly. Cybersecurity risks and data governance concerns further intensify these difficulties, especially when digital infrastructure becomes closely linked with national security and strategic autonomy.

A central contradiction, therefore, lies in the tension between openness and digital sovereignty. On the one hand, the development of digital trade and innovation requires cross-border data exchange, interoperable standards, and institutional openness. On the other hand, both Russia and China increasingly attach strategic importance to controlling digital infrastructure, protecting data, and reducing vulnerability to external restrictions. As a result, the future of China–Russia digital cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative will depend not only on technological complementarity, but also on the ability of both sides to balance integration with sovereignty, and openness with security. This duality explains why the partnership has considerable long-term potential, yet also faces persistent political, legal, and technological limitations.

Conclusion. Thus, the analysis conducted in this article shows that the Belt and Road Initiative plays a significant role in shaping the development of the digital economy of Russia and China. Its importance lies not only in supporting traditional forms of interstate cooperation, but also in creating conditions for the expansion of digital infrastructure, cross-border e-commerce, technological partnership, and institutional dialogue in the sphere of digital governance. In the China–Russia context, the BRI, especially through the concept of the Digital Silk Road, acts as a mechanism that connects infrastructure modernization with broader processes of digital transformation. As a result, cooperation between the two countries acquires a more systemic

character and extends to such areas as telecommunications, logistics digitalization, innovation technologies, cybersecurity, and digital trade.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that the development of this partnership is accompanied by a number of structural limitations. Differences in regulatory approaches, technological asymmetries, data governance issues, cybersecurity concerns, and the broader geopolitical environment create constraints that may complicate deeper digital integration. Therefore, the

future effectiveness of China–Russia cooperation within the BRI framework will depend on the ability of both countries to strengthen institutional coordination, improve the compatibility of digital development strategies, and maintain a balance between openness and technological sovereignty. In this sense, the BRI should be understood not only as an economic initiative, but also as an evolving strategic framework within which a new Eurasian model of digital cooperation may gradually take shape.

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РОЛЬ ИНИЦИАТИВЫ «ОДИН ПОЯС ОДИН ПУТЬ» В РАЗВИТИИ ЦИФРОВОЙ ЭКОНОМИКИ РОССИИ И КИТАЯ

ВАН Мэняо

Российский университет дружбы народов
г. Москва, Россия

В статье исследуется роль инициативы «Один пояс, один путь» в развитии цифровой экономики России и Китая. Особое внимание уделяется концептуальной связи между цифровой экономикой и Цифровым шелковым путем как новым направлением международного сотрудничества в рамках BRI. Рассматриваются основные направления китайско-российского взаимодействия, включая развитие цифровой инфраструктуры, трансграничной электронной торговли, технологического сотрудничества и институциональной координации в сфере цифрового управления. Показано, что инициатива «Один пояс, один путь» выступает не только как механизм инфраструктурной связанности, но и как стратегическая платформа цифровой трансформации и региональной интеграции в Евразии. Одновременно в статье анализируются ключевые ограничения двустороннего цифрового партнерства, связанные с различиями в нормативных системах, технологической асимметрией, проблемами кибербезопасности и растущим значением цифрового суверенитета. Сделан вывод о том, что перспективы дальнейшего сотрудничества России и Китая зависят от углубления институционального взаимодействия и согласования цифровых стратегий.

Ключевые слова: инициатива «Один пояс, один путь», цифровая экономика, Цифровой шелковый путь, российско-китайское сотрудничество, цифровой суверенитет.