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Zufarova Nozima Gulamiddinovna
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RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE ON THE OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF FOREIGN TRADE ENTERPRISES IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. Since the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed, it has profoundly influenced the global trade landscape. As an important country in Central Asia, Uzbekistan plays a key role within this initiative. From the perspective of enterprise trade management, this paper examines the specific impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Uzbekistan's foreign trade development and the operation and management of foreign trade enterprises. The study analyzes adjustments in Uzbekistan's foreign trade structure, trade facilitation resulting from infrastructure development, and the application of digital technologies in foreign trade management under the Belt and Road framework. In addition, the optimization of policies and the legal environment supporting foreign trade enterprises is discussed, and specific recommendations are proposed regarding future development trends in the management of Uzbekistan's foreign trade enterprises, with the aim of helping enterprises continuously enhance their competitiveness in international markets.

Key words: Belt and Road Initiative; Uzbekistan; foreign trade; digital technology.

1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1 The “the Belt and Road” initiative and Uzbekistan's strategic position in it.

1.1.1 Background and global impact of the “the Belt and Road” initiative.

In 2013, China put forward the Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to strengthen infrastructure connectivity across Asia, Europe, and Africa, and to promote economic integration and globalization. Central Asia has become a key region due to its strategic geographical location and abundant energy resources. Uzbekistan, as a double landlocked country, has long faced constraints related to limited export capacity.

The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has significantly contributed to Uzbekistan's foreign trade development. By 2024, the country's total foreign trade volume reached USD 65.93 billion, representing a year-on-year increase of 3.8%, including exports of USD 26.94 billion (up 8.4%) and imports of USD 38.98 billion (up 0.8%). From January to September 2025, Uzbekistan's total foreign trade volume amounted to USD 59.8 billion, an increase of USD 11.142 billion, or 22.9%, compared to the same period in 2024 (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

As of 2024, the total bilateral trade volume between China and Uzbekistan reached USD 12.487 billion, representing a decrease of 9.7% compared to 2023, and accounting for 18.9% of Uzbekistan's total foreign trade volume for the year (USD 65.93 billion) (see Table 2 and Figure 2). In 2023, China became Uzbekistan's largest trading partner and has continued to maintain this position. Cooperation between the two countries spans trade, infrastructure, and energy sectors, significantly enhancing Uzbekistan's strategic economic position. Uzbekistan is gradually

integrating into the Central Asian regional economic integration process, not only achieving substantial growth in foreign trade but also playing an increasingly important role in the global trade network.

Table 1

Uzbekistan’s Foreign Trade Volume (2021-2025 September)

Indicator	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Jan.–Sep.)
Total Foreign Trade Volume (USD)	42.1 billion	50.01 billion	62.567 billion	65.93 billion	59.8 billion
Year-on-Year Growth (%)	16%	18.6%	23.9%	3.8%	22.9%
Export Volume (USD)	16.61 billion	19.31 billion	24.426 billion	26.94 billion	26.684 billion
Export YoY Growth (%)	10%	15.9%	23.8%	8.4%	33.3%
Import Volume (USD)	25.46 billion	30.7 billion	38.141 billion	38.98 billion	33.111 billion
Import YoY Growth (%)	20.4%	20.4%	24%	0.8%	15.6%
China’s Share (%)	17.7%	17.8%	21.9%	18.9%	19.1%

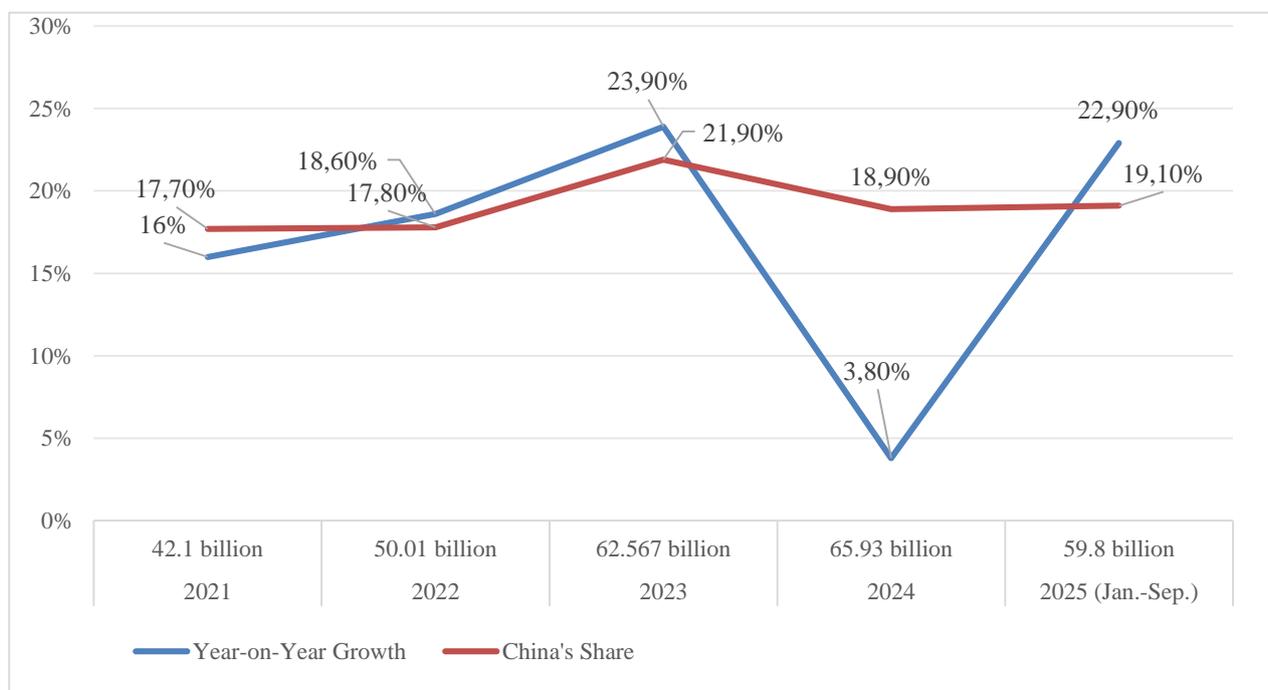


Figure 1. Line Chart of Uzbekistan’s foreign trade situation and China’s proportion (2021-2025 September)

Note: The global pandemic in 2020 is not a reference standard; The data for 2025 (1-9) shows an increase compared to the same period last year; 3. Data sources: National Statistical Commission of Ukraine, Ministry of Commerce of China, China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, and Xinhua News Agency of China.

Table 2

Bilateral trade scale between Uzbekistan and China (2021-2024)

Year	Bilateral Trade Volume (USD)	Share of Total Foreign Trade
2021	16.61 billion	39.5%
2022	7.1 billion	14.2%
2023	13.826 billion	22.1%
2024	12.487 billion	18.9%

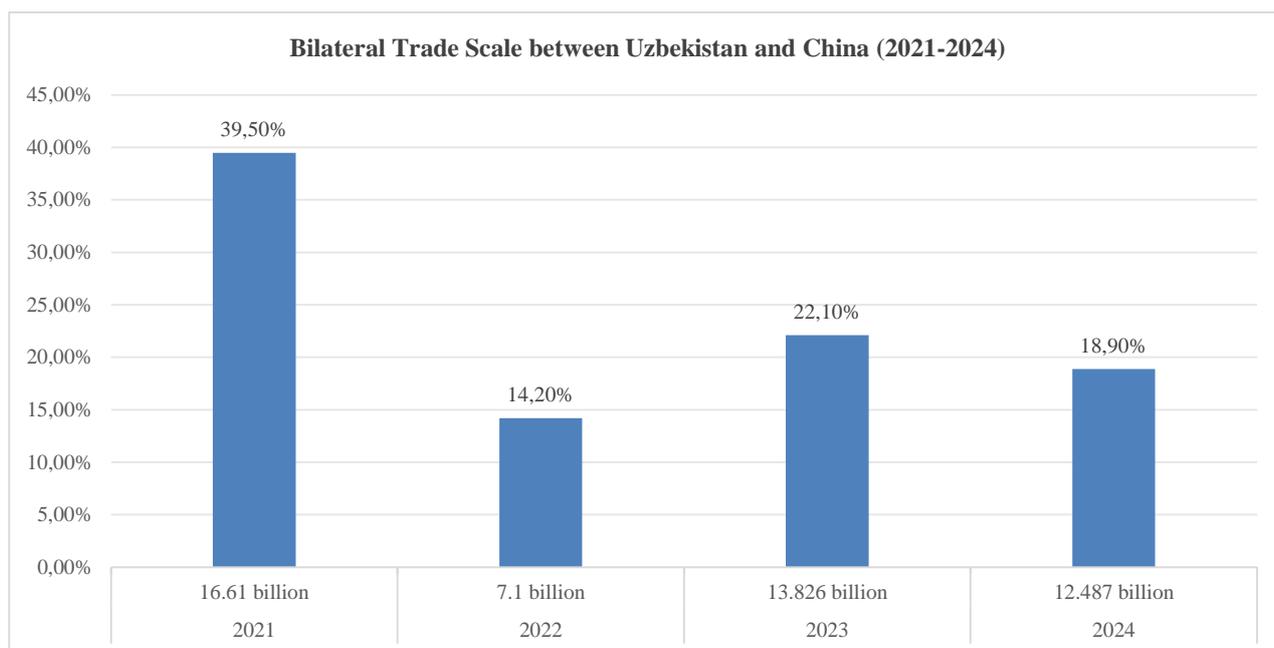


Figure 2. Bar chart of the proportion of total foreign trade volume in the bilateral trade scale between Uzbekistan and China (2021-2024)

Note: The data is sourced from the Uzbekistan National Statistical Committee, the Economic and Commercial Department of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce Embassy in Uzbekistan, the United Nations Trade Database, and China Xinhua News Agency.

1.1.2 Uzbekistan’s strategic positioning in the “the Belt and Road” initiative.

Uzbekistan, with its abundant natural resources and strategic geographical location, holds significant importance within the Belt and Road Initiative. Its proven natural gas reserves amount to approximately 3.4 trillion cubic meters (according to the Uzbekistan National Statistical Committee), accounting for about 0.8% of global natural gas reserves and ranking eleventh worldwide. Proven gold reserves are estimated at approximately 5,990.5 tons (according to the World Gold Council), representing about 2.1% of global gold reserves. Proven copper reserves are approximately 40 million tons (according to the National Geological and Mineral Resources Committee of Uzbekistan), accounting for about 1.8% of global copper reserves. Both gold and copper reserves rank tenth globally (see Table 3).

Through cooperation with China, Uzbekistan is increasingly emerging as a regional logistics hub. The construction of major transportation corridors, such as the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway, has significantly reduced transportation time and enhanced the level of regional trade facilitation. Through extensive economic reforms and cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, Uzbekistan has gradually overcome its geographical constraints, strengthened its foreign trade capacity and international competitiveness, and evolved into a key trade hub connecting China, Europe, and Central Asia, playing an important role in regional economic integration.

Table 3

Scale of proven reserves of important mineral resources in Uzbekistan

Mineral	Reserves	Global Share	Global Ranking
Natural Gas	3.4 trillion cubic meters	0.8%	11
Gold	5,990.5 tons	2.1%	10

Copper	40 million tons	1.8%	10
Uranium	185,800 tons	2.3%	7
Zinc	17 million tons	...	4
Silver: about 500 tons; Lead: 3.2 million tons; Iron Ore: resource volume of about 4 billion tons, ore reserves of 150 million tons; Lithium: 123,600 tons; Tungsten: 21,600 tons; Potash: reserves rank among the top 10 in the world, specific data not disclosed....			

Note: The data is sourced from the Uzbekistan National Statistical Committee, the World Gold Council, and the Uzbekistan National Committee on Geology and Mineral Resources.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE TOPIC.

This study focuses on the macro framework, industrial opportunities, and practical challenges of China–Uzbekistan cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, providing multidimensional support for analyzing the operational and managerial reform of Uzbekistan’s foreign trade enterprises. Macro-level research has identified the development opportunities created by the initiative for Uzbekistan’s foreign trade sector. Zhou Jin (2023)指出 that the Belt and Road Initiative has reshaped regional trade patterns through infrastructure connectivity and policy coordination, with China–Uzbekistan cooperation expanding from single-commodity trade to diversified sectors.

Jiang Yan et al. (2022) reviewed the 30-year history of diplomatic relations between China and Uzbekistan, emphasizing that the deep integration of opening-up policies and bilateral initiatives following Uzbekistan’s “New Policies” in 2017 has provided a solid institutional foundation for the cross-border operations of enterprises. Abobos Bobochonov et al. (2019) previously noted that Uzbekistan needed to rely on international initiatives to address its infrastructure constraints. This demand has been partially met through the implementation of the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway project (2024), which is widely regarded as a key factor in improving logistics efficiency for enterprises.

In the energy sector, Xu Lijun et al. (2024) focused on renewable energy cooperation, pointing out that China–Uzbekistan power projects not only improve local energy supply but also promote the alignment of Uzbekistani energy enterprises with international standards in technology adoption and project management. In the agricultural sector, Zhang Xiying et al. (2024) analyzed opportunities for agricultural cooperation between China and Uzbekistan, suggesting that Uzbekistani agricultural foreign trade enterprises can optimize their product structure through access to Chinese technologies and market channels. Zhao Tingfeng et al. (2024) further argued that vocational training for farmers has increased the value added of local agricultural products, indirectly enhancing the export competitiveness of enterprises.

In manufacturing and services, enterprise cooperation cases—such as Jinyu Temple of Heaven Furniture (2024)—demonstrate that industrial integration between China and Uzbekistan has facilitated the upgrading of production standards and brand management practices among Uzbekistani enterprises. The Anhui “Two Zones and One Park” project (2025) provides a replicable model for supply chain integration for Uzbekistani foreign trade enterprises through tax incentives and “one-stop” administrative services. Moreover, the accelerated green transformation highlighted by Wang Lin (2025) offers strategic direction for enterprises seeking to expand into emerging foreign trade sectors such as new energy.

Existing studies also highlight the operational challenges faced by Uzbekistani foreign trade enterprises. Yang Nannan (2020) emphasized persistent issues such as weak infrastructure and volatility in policy implementation, while Chen Juxia (2020) noted the relatively slow pace of reform under the “New Policy,” reflecting the need for enterprises to adapt to policy uncertainty in their management practices.

Building on this literature, the present study adopts a quantitative analytical approach to examine management gaps in Uzbekistan's foreign trade sector and conducts a comprehensive evaluation of the operational characteristics of Uzbekistani foreign trade enterprises.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Belt and Road Initiative is an important strategy through which China promotes international economic cooperation. It enhances global connectivity through infrastructure development and policy coordination, and since its inception, it has continuously expanded its influence on international trade and economic cooperation. As a core country in Central Asia, Uzbekistan—covering an area of 448,900 square kilometers and with a population of approximately 37.8–38 million—maintains its position as the most populous country in the region. Owing to its double landlocked geographical status, Uzbekistan occupies an important strategic position within the Belt and Road Initiative. Although its inland location once constrained foreign trade development, the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has significantly improved transportation and logistics infrastructure, thereby enhancing the country's foreign trade capacity.

From the perspective of enterprise trade management, and based on official data platforms such as the Uzbekistan National Statistical Committee, the Economic and Commercial Office of the Embassy of the Ministry of Commerce in Uzbekistan, the United Nations Comtrade Database, China Xinhua News Agency, data from the World Gold Council, and the National Geological and Mineral Resources Committee of Uzbekistan for the period 2021–2025, this paper systematically analyzes the development and transformation of Uzbekistan's foreign trade, its bilateral trade with China, and changes in its international strategic position under the Belt and Road Initiative. Using quantitative analytical methods, the study focuses on adjustments in the foreign trade structure, the expansion of emerging markets, and improvements in logistics efficiency, and further explores the profound impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on the management of Uzbekistan's foreign trade enterprises.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS.

4.1 The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Uzbekistan's Foreign Trade Development.

4.1.1 Changes in Foreign Trade Structure and Market Expansion.

The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has brought significant foreign trade opportunities to Uzbekistan. As of 2024, Uzbekistan's total foreign trade volume reached USD 65.93 billion, representing a year-on-year increase of 3.8%. This growth has largely benefited from market expansion and export structure optimization driven by the Belt and Road Initiative. Uzbekistan's main export products include energy resources, gold, and textiles, with China and Russia remaining its largest trading partners. As of 2024, China has maintained its position as Uzbekistan's largest trading partner, with a bilateral trade volume of USD 12.487 billion, accounting for 18.9% of the country's total foreign trade volume.

Uzbekistan's export structure shows a clear trend toward optimization, characterized by steady growth in agricultural and mineral resource exports. Demand for characteristic agricultural products—such as cherries and honey—has increased significantly in Belt and Road countries. At the same time, the development of manufacturing and textile industries has further enhanced the value added of export products. In recent years, Uzbekistan has actively promoted the localization of textile processing, resulting in a significant increase in the share of finished textile exports.

The import structure has also undergone notable changes. Major imported goods include mechanical equipment, electronic products, and chemical products. In particular, imports of components for electric vehicles and new energy vehicles have increased substantially, reflecting rising domestic demand for new energy products. For example, in 2024, Uzbekistan imported a total of 24,095 electric vehicles, accounting for 32.2% of total light vehicle imports for the year (74,700

vehicles). Among these, 23,982 electric vehicles were imported from China, representing 99.5% of Uzbekistan’s total electric vehicle imports (Uzbekistan National Bureau of Statistics).

The development of emerging markets has also achieved significant results. Uzbekistan has continued to deepen trade cooperation with Türkiye, South Korea, Kazakhstan, and other countries. This diversified market layout has provided Uzbekistan with broader export opportunities and enhanced its competitiveness in international markets (see Table 4 and Figure 3).

Table 4

Uzbekistan’s Five Major Trading Partners (2024)

Country	Bilateral Trade Volume (USD)	Share of Total Foreign Trade	Ranking	Main Trade Goods
China	12.487 billion	18.9%	1	Energy, minerals, agricultural products, mechanical equipment, electronic products, automobiles...
Russia	11.63 billion	17.6%	2	Energy, machinery...
Kazakhstan	4.27 billion	6.5%	3	Energy, agricultural products, metals...
Turkey	2.93 billion	4.5%	4	Textiles, machinery, agricultural products, metals...
South Korea	2 billion	3.0%	5	Electronics, automobiles, textiles, minerals...

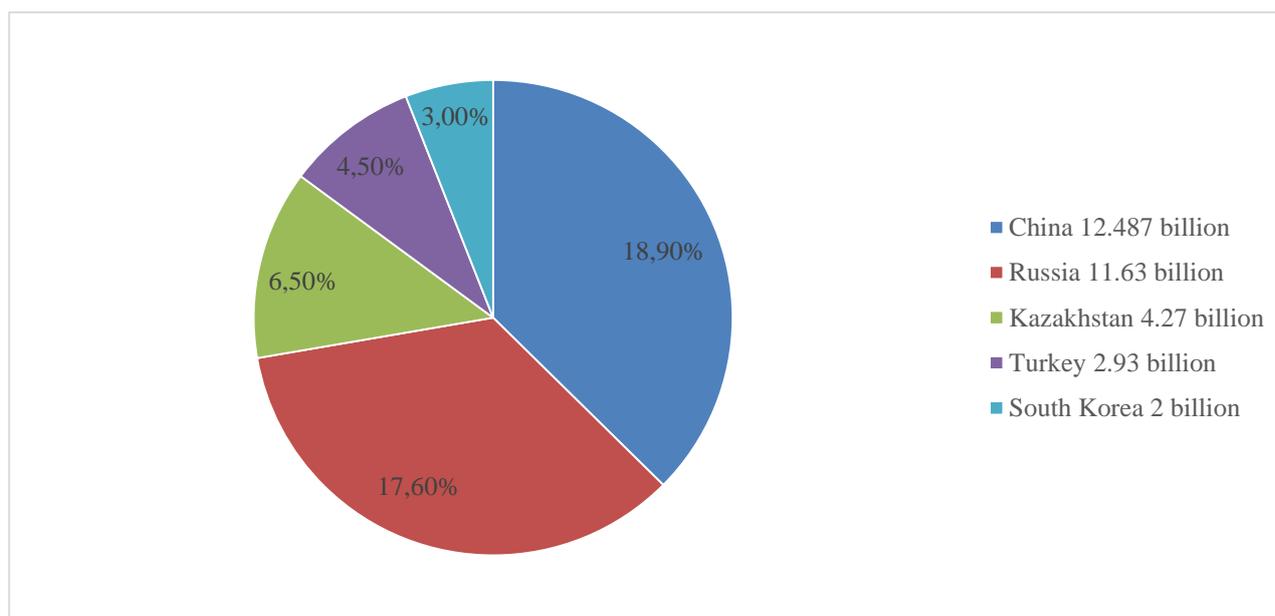


Figure 3. Pie chart of the proportion of total foreign trade of Uzbekistan's five major trading partners (2024)

Note: The data is sourced from the Uzbekistan National Bureau of Statistics and the Economic and Commercial Department of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce Embassy in Uzbekistan.

4.1.2 Infrastructure construction promotes foreign trade logistics.

The Belt and Road Initiative has played an important role in improving Uzbekistan’s logistics infrastructure. The China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan Railway Project represents one of its landmark achievements. This project connects China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, providing a more efficient

transportation corridor for goods between Central Asia and East Asia. The construction of the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway has shortened transportation time from East Asia to Central Asia and Europe by 7–8 days, significantly reducing transportation costs. It has not only strengthened connectivity with neighboring countries but has also further consolidated Uzbekistan’s hub position in regional trade.

Cross-border logistics facilitation has also improved in parallel. The introduction of the China UnionPay system in Uzbekistan has promoted cross-border payments between the two countries, optimized foreign trade transaction processes, and enhanced bilateral trade efficiency. Overall, improvements in infrastructure have provided strong support for Uzbekistan’s foreign trade logistics, significantly increasing transportation efficiency and international market competitiveness. With the support of Belt and Road–related projects, Uzbekistan is gradually emerging as an important trade hub in Central Asia, injecting sustained momentum into its foreign trade growth.

4.2 The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on the Management of Uzbekistan’s Foreign Trade Enterprises.

4.2.1 Management Philosophy and Strategic Adjustment.

The introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative has brought profound changes to the management philosophy of Uzbekistan’s foreign trade enterprises. In response to shifts in global market demand, enterprises are no longer relying solely on traditional export models but are increasingly emphasizing global supply chain integration and international cooperation. This transformation has prompted foreign trade enterprises in Uzbekistan to reassess their business strategies and more actively integrate into international markets. To adapt to global competition, enterprises are gradually transitioning from single-product export models to diversified operations, expanding export product categories and enhancing brand value in international markets.

At the same time, enterprise management has undergone qualitative changes. Managers are placing greater emphasis on long-term strategic planning rather than focusing solely on short-term gains, with increased attention to sustainable development. By adopting more flexible management models, foreign trade enterprises are better positioned to maintain competitiveness amid market fluctuations. In addition, policy advantages under the Belt and Road Initiative have created more opportunities for Uzbekistani enterprises to participate in international cooperation. Policy incentives have lowered barriers to entry into emerging markets and strengthened enterprises’ international operational capabilities.

To adapt to these changes, Uzbekistan’s foreign trade enterprises have also optimized their internal management processes. By strengthening communication and collaboration with overseas markets, enterprises are able to respond more flexibly to complex international environments. Through in-depth interpretation and utilization of Belt and Road policies, decision-makers can more accurately grasp market trends and adjust business models in a timely manner, thereby enhancing enterprises’ resilience and competitiveness in an increasingly competitive global market.

4.2.2 Application of Digitalization and Informatization in the Management of Foreign Trade Enterprises.

The rapid development of digital technologies has brought about significant changes in the management of Uzbekistan’s foreign trade enterprises. The widespread adoption of digital platforms has substantially improved operational efficiency. By leveraging e-commerce and online trading platforms, enterprises can connect more effectively with international markets and utilize digital tools to automate order processing, logistics management, and customer service.

The application of information technology also provides stronger decision-making support for foreign trade enterprises. Through data analysis, enterprises can gain a more accurate understanding of global market demand, optimize supply chain management, and anticipate market changes. This data-driven management model helps enterprises reduce operational risks while improving decision-making efficiency. Information-based management also enables enterprises to better cope

with complex factors—such as exchange rate fluctuations and regulatory requirements—when conducting cross-border transactions.

In addition, the application of digital technologies offers stronger guarantees for enterprise risk management and control. Through digital platforms, enterprises can monitor logistics flows, inventory levels, and market dynamics in real time, promptly adjust operational strategies based on data feedback, and mitigate potential business risks. Continuous upgrading of information technology enables Uzbekistan's foreign trade enterprises to integrate more effectively into the global trade system and achieve efficient, low-risk international operations.

4.3 Optimization of Policies and Legal Environment to Support the Operation and Management of Foreign Trade Enterprises.

4.3.1 Optimization of Foreign Trade Policies and Coordination of Enterprise Management.

Within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Uzbek government has actively promoted the optimization of foreign trade policies and created a more favorable business environment for enterprises. The government encourages enterprises to expand exports and participate in international market competition through measures such as tariff reductions, simplification of import and export procedures, and the establishment of special economic zones. These policies not only provide additional market opportunities for foreign trade enterprises but also significantly reduce their operating costs. With the support of policy incentives, enterprises are better positioned to formulate long-term development strategies. Government-provided financial support and tax incentives further enable foreign trade enterprises to accelerate product upgrading and technological innovation, thereby enhancing their international competitiveness.

At the same time, the government has actively promoted trade facilitation measures, enabling enterprises to conduct cross-border transactions more efficiently and reducing unnecessary time and financial costs. Policy optimization is closely integrated with enterprise management practices, forming a positive interaction mechanism. Enterprises should not only fully utilize policy incentives but also proactively adjust their management strategies to adapt to market opportunities arising from policy changes. Through close cooperation with government authorities, foreign trade enterprises can secure a more stable position in global markets and contribute to the overall advancement of Uzbekistan's foreign trade sector.

4.3.2 Improvement of Legal Framework and Compliance Management.

The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has also prompted Uzbekistan to strengthen the development of its legal framework for international trade. To ensure enterprise compliance in the context of globalization, the Uzbek government has introduced a series of laws and regulations aimed at regulating cross-border trade activities. The continuous improvement of the legal framework enables enterprises to better comply with international trade rules and reduce legal risks in international operations.

In international trade, foreign trade enterprises face increasingly stringent legal and regulatory requirements from different countries, highlighting the growing importance of compliance management. By strengthening compliance systems, enterprises can avoid economic losses and reputational risks resulting from legal non-compliance. Effective compliance management not only involves adherence to laws and regulations but also requires enterprises to adopt more transparent and standardized operational procedures. To ensure the smooth operation of enterprises within the Belt and Road framework, the Uzbek government has maintained close cooperation with international organizations to align domestic regulations with international trade standards. Within this legal environment, enterprises can engage in international business with greater confidence, minimize legal risks, and ensure sustainable development.

4.4 Future Development Trends and Suggestions.

4.4.1 Future Trends in Uzbekistan's Foreign Trade Management.

With the continued advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, Uzbekistan's foreign trade management is expected to become increasingly digitalized and intelligent. Deeper integration into global supply chains will encourage enterprises to place greater emphasis on data collection and

analytical capabilities in management. By applying big data and artificial intelligence technologies, foreign trade enterprises can more accurately forecast market demand and adjust business strategies in a timely manner.

Moreover, Uzbekistan's foreign trade policies are expected to evolve toward greater internationalization and transparency. Enterprise management will need to pay closer attention to policy changes and adjust operational directions promptly to adapt to fluctuations in the global market. In the face of increasing global economic uncertainty, enterprises should adopt more flexible response strategies to maintain sustained competitiveness in international markets.

4.4.2 Suggestions for Optimizing the Management of Foreign Trade Enterprises.

To enhance the international competitiveness of Uzbekistan's foreign trade enterprises, further optimization of management strategies is required. On the one hand, enterprises should increase investment in digital technologies, improve information management systems, and strengthen adaptability to changing market conditions. On the other hand, enterprises should expand their presence in international markets by strengthening cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road, thereby avoiding excessive dependence on a single market.

In terms of market layout, enterprises should pay greater attention to emerging markets, particularly countries with strong demand for Uzbekistan's products. Through precise market analysis, enterprises can develop more effective export strategies and expand market share. Continuous optimization of technological innovation and management models will further enhance the market competitiveness of foreign trade enterprises.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

The Belt and Road Initiative has had a profound impact on the operation and management of Uzbekistan's foreign trade enterprises. With policy support under the Belt and Road framework, enterprises have actively adjusted their business strategies and improved management models to meet the demands of the global market. Through the continuous optimization of policies and legal frameworks, enterprises are better positioned to seize development opportunities and enhance their competitiveness in international markets.

Looking ahead, Uzbekistan's foreign trade enterprises should focus on three key directions: green energy, the digital economy, and industrial cooperation. By effectively combining policy incentives with market demand, enterprises can achieve sustainable growth. At the same time, strengthening compliance management, responding flexibly to policy changes, and seizing the strategic opportunities arising from China-Uzbekistan cooperation will be critical. Enterprises should also expand the application of new technologies, optimize internal management processes, and ensure sustained development within the global economic system. With the continued advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, Uzbekistan is expected to further consolidate its position as an important trade hub in Central Asia, supported by its unique geographical advantages and favorable policy environment.

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