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INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT OF UZBEK SPECIALTY PRODUCTS ON CHINESE E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS BACKGROUND, SECTOR OVERVIEW, AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract

Uzbekistan's specialty products, such as Suzani embroidery, ceramics, silk, and dried fruits, possess significant cultural advantages, but their entry into the Chinese e-commerce market is limited by weak branding, insufficient standardization, and a lack of digital capabilities. This study, combining global value chains and e-commerce platform mechanisms, assesses their suitability for the Chinese e-commerce market through literature, case studies, and platform analysis.

The results show that these products have potential in cultural narrative and visual presentation, but improvements are still needed in product packaging, quality standardization, cross-border logistics, and language awareness. While the Belt and Road Initiative has improved transportation and customs clearance conditions, enterprises still need to further upgrade their brand marketing and supply chain management.

The study concludes that strengthening cultural storytelling, standardizing production across the entire supply chain, developing platform differentiation strategies, and improving the operational capabilities of e-commerce teams will

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help Uzbek specialty products achieve better development on Chinese e-commerce platforms.

Keyword: Specialty Products ; SMEs in Export-oriented Industries ; Cross-border E-commerce Platforms ; China–Uzbekistan Industrial Cooperation ; Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Introduction

This chapter provides a systematic theoretical foundation and analytical framework for this study from the perspectives of international trade theory, global value chain perspectives, cross-border e-commerce research, brand strategy, and literature related to Uzbekistan's exports. By elaborating on the research findings of scholars both domestically and internationally, and analyzing the gaps in existing research regarding the development of Uzbekistan's specialty products on Chinese e-commerce platforms, it demonstrates the necessity and scientific validity of this research.

1.The Concept of Specialty Products in Global Trade

1.1 Definitions and Typologies

In international trade theory, "specialty products" generally refer to products with unique regional, cultural, or traditional craft characteristics, possessing "scarcity, high added value, and cultural symbolism." The academic community generally believes that these products differ from standardized industrial goods; their competitive advantage is not based on price, but rather on cultural narratives, regional identity, and craftsmanship value.¹

¹ I.Bramley, C., Biénabe, E., & Kirsten, J. (2009). The Economics of Geographical Indications: Toward a Conceptual Framework for Geographical Indication Research in Developing Countries. *World Development*, 37(9), 1424–1433.

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Specialty products should possess the following characteristics:

- a. Geographical Uniqueness: The product's raw materials, craftsmanship, patterns, or cultural symbols are deeply rooted in a specific region, such as Tashkent embroidery, Samarkand blue ceramics, and Naman dried fruits.
- b. Cultural Embeddedness: The product is a material embodiment of cultural memory and national traditions, representing national image and cultural capital.
- c. Non-standardized and Hard to Replicate

Unlike industrial products, their differentiation relies primarily on handicrafts, traditional techniques, and unique designs.

In international trade between China and Uzbekistan, specialty products can be broadly categorized into three types:

Agricultural products and food (dried fruits, nuts, spices)

Handicrafts and cultural and creative products (ceramics, handicrafts)

Light industrial products and textiles (silk, embroidery, national garments)

Uzbekistan's dried fruit products, hand embroidery, and silk products fall into this category.

1.2 Cultural and Geographic Indicators

The core competitiveness of "specialty products" lies in cultural and geographical indications. This is not only reflected in the material level but also exists in cultural lineage and identity roots.

The main viewpoints of international literature are as follows: Cultural narrative is a crucial variable in conversion rates during the e-commerce era;

In cross-border e-commerce, due to the insufficient information contained in text and image descriptions, shooting videos and live streaming have become the main ways to attract consumers;

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GI certification significantly increases price premiums² and brand reputation; Authenticity determines consumer willingness; For ethnic products, consumers place greater emphasis on credibility markers such as certificates of origin and HALAL certification. Therefore, for Uzbek specialty products, enhancing their "cultural attributes," conveying more content, and using "strong storytelling" to increase the presentation and authenticity verification of specialty products will directly impact their competitiveness on Chinese e-commerce platforms.

2. Industrial Development and Value Chain Theory

2.2 Upgrading in Global Value Chains

The Global Value Chain (GVC) theory emphasizes that the international competitiveness of enterprises in developing countries depends on their position in the global industrial chain. Scholars such as Gereffi propose that enterprises can enhance their competitiveness through four types of "upgrading":

(1) Process/Product Upgrading

The introduction of technology, the exchange of design talent, and digital photography and short video marketing in the new era have provided new ways to add value to traditional crafts.

For example, Suzani embroidery has begun to incorporate modern home design, which is a way to upgrade from souvenirs to high-end soft furnishings.

(2) Process Upgrading

Chinese enterprises are investing in and establishing new textile and light industrial equipment in Tashkent, Syr Darya, and other regions, enabling traditional industries to join higher-standard global production chains. (3)

² 1. Bramley, C., Biénabe, E., & Kirsten, J. (2009). The Economics of Geographical Indications: Toward a Conceptual Framework for Geographical Indication Research in Developing Countries. *World Development*, 37(9), 1424–1433.

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Functional Upgrading: Uzbek businesses are no longer limited to "production" but are attempting to enter: product design; cross-border live streaming; building strong cultural attributes; and operating stores on e-commerce platforms such as 1688.com, Tmall Global, and Temu.

Example: "Uzbekistan Carpets Silk Traditional Handmade Wool Carpet" was listed on 1688.com in China, participated in live streaming, and saw a significant increase in brand premium.

(4) Chain Upgrading: Leveraging their traditional advantages in agricultural products, they are extending into higher value-added contemporary cultural and creative chains.

Example: Cotton → Specialty Fabrics → Fashion Design Collaboration → International Cultural and Creative Brand Co-branding.

2.3 SME Participation in Export-oriented Sectors

Numerous studies indicate that SMEs are the main players in export-oriented industries in developing countries, but they generally face the following bottlenecks³: limited working capital restricts the expansion of production scale; lack of market information sensitivity prevents them from obtaining order information in a timely manner; lack of standardized, unified, and large-scale production; weak e-commerce infrastructure and a lack of "soft power" in e-commerce teams; and a lack of brand awareness and intellectual property protection capabilities.

Currently, the vast majority of producers of specialty products are family workshops and micro-enterprises. Therefore, enhancing the participation of SMEs in cross-border e-commerce is crucial for the industry's development.

³ 2.Rustamov, A. (2019). SME Development and Export Barriers in Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Economic Review*, 21(4), 55–68.

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3 E-commerce and Cross-border Market Access

3.1 Digital Platforms and Trade Facilitation

Digital platforms and trade facilitation are jointly reshaping the structure of cross-border trade between China and Uzbekistan.

Digital platforms, through standardized product listing, payment systems, logistics tracking, and evaluation systems, significantly lower the barriers for Uzbek SMEs to enter the Chinese market, enabling specialty products such as Tashkent embroidery, Samarkand blue ceramics, and Naman dried fruits to directly reach Chinese consumers.

Simultaneously, trade facilitation measures such as electronic customs declaration, single window, cross-border payment coordination, and the construction of logistics channels under the Belt and Road Initiative will significantly reduce customs clearance time and transaction costs, thereby improving trade efficiency.

Once digital platforms and trade facilitation are widely adopted, Uzbek enterprises will rapidly upgrade their products and transform their businesses. This not only increases the coverage of Uzbek specialty products in the Chinese market but also provides new goals for embedding into regional value chains and promoting industrial upgrading.

3.2 The Role of Chinese E-commerce in Global Exports

China has become the world's largest e-commerce market, and its platform ecosystem has a significant impact on global trade:

Alibaba/1688: Traditional search algorithm, the world's largest B2B export platform;

Taobao: TOC-side tagging algorithm, strong sales capabilities for cultural products and handicrafts;

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Pinduoduo/Tume: An important entry point for high-quality, cost-effective agricultural products and fast-moving consumer goods, focusing on low-profit, high-volume sales, targeting price-sensitive customers;

Douyin: Information flow algorithm plus tag push, a video posting + live streaming sales model, suitable for showcasing culture and handicraft production processes;

Cainiao and cross-border logistics system: Achieving the "last mile," completing the e-commerce closed loop, and ensuring fulfillment efficiency.

Particularly important for Uzbek specialty products: Chinese e-commerce platforms have a clear content preference for "exotic culture," "Silk Road themes," and "handicraft and cultural creations," which provides them with a natural advantage.

4. Branding Strategies for Ethnic and Local Products

Studies by scholars from multiple countries indicate that branding ethnic products⁴ in the international market requires highlighting their cultural symbols and differentiated value, primarily including:

- a. Storytelling : Telling the origin story, connecting it to ethnic history, and emphasizing traditional craftsmanship;
- b. Visual Identity : Using traditional patterns, highlighting Silk Road elements, and ensuring color schemes are integrated with modern aesthetics;
- c. Certifications : Improving trust through GI and HALAL certifications;
- d. Enhanced Promotion and Marketing : Building brand awareness through e-commerce stores, short videos, and cross-border live streaming.

⁴ 6.Keller, K. L. (2013). Strategic Brand Management (4th ed.). Pearson.

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Uzbek souzani, pottery, and silk have a natural advantage in cultural storytelling, but there is still significant room for improvement in their promotional and marketing strategies⁵.

4.1 The Belt and Road Initiative and the Framework for Sino-Uzbek Industrial Cooperation

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provides a systematic and sustainable macro-framework for economic cooperation between Central Asian countries and China⁶. There's a Chinese saying, "To get rich, build roads first." As a crucial hub country in Central Asia, Uzbekistan has established closer industrial, trade, and supply chain cooperation with China against this backdrop, creating unprecedented opportunities for its specialty products to enter the Chinese market.

4.2 Infrastructure Connectivity and Reduced Logistics Costs

One of the core objectives of the BRI is to promote transportation infrastructure development.⁷ To date, Sino-Uzbek cooperation has driven the upgrading of multimodal transport, such as:

The opening of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan international road transport route;

Multimodal transport connecting Central Asia and China's inland logistics hubs;

The development of Sino-Uzbek cross-border e-commerce logistics cooperation and consolidation freight models.

These upgrades have increased transportation efficiency and reduced transportation costs, especially time costs, making it easier for Uzbek specialty

⁵ 7. Choi, T. M. (2021). Consumers' Preferences for Cultural Craft Products in Online

⁶ 8. Vinokurov, E. (2017). The Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union: Opportunities and Challenges. Eurasian Development Bank Report.

⁷ 9. Gallagher, K., & Myers, M. (2020). Building a Belt and Road? Chinese Aid, Trade, and Investment in Global Context. Boston University.

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products to enter China's cross-border e-commerce warehousing systems at ports and inland areas, thus improving the feasibility of cross-border e-commerce.

4.3 Institutional Facilitation and Trade Policy Coordination

Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China and Uzbekistan have strengthened the alignment of their systems regarding customs clearance facilitation, tariffs, and inspection and quarantine:

Uzbekistan is gradually upgrading its electronic customs clearance system; China's General Administration of Customs has expanded the list of eligible agricultural products from Uzbekistan;

The "single window" system improves the efficiency of cross-border trade.

Institutional facilitation means that specialty products can enter cross-border e-commerce bonded zones and overseas warehouses more quickly.

4.4 Deepening of Industrial Chain Cooperation and Upgrading of Value Chain

Under the BRI investment and policy framework, China-Uzbekistan cooperation has expanded from trade to:

Deep processing of agricultural products (such as dried fruit, juice, and spice processing)

Extension of agricultural products and traditional industrial chains

Construction of national industrial parks (dual-country parks)

This provides Uzbekistan's SMEs with the conditions to enter higher value chains, and also corresponds to the global value chain (GVC) upgrading path.

4.5 Literature Review on Uzbek Export Challenges

Domestic and international research generally points out that Uzbekistan faces the following problems in exporting specialty products: Lack of a complete

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industrial chain and insufficient deep processing capabilities⁸; lack of international packaging and standardized quality requirements; language barriers (Russian/Uzbek) and limitations in the "soft power" of large-scale e-commerce restricting e-commerce capabilities; high costs in cold chain and international logistics; weak brand marketing capabilities and a lack of a unified image.

Furthermore, existing research generally remains at the macro level, such as national export strategies and regional cooperation, with insufficient detailed research at the industry and enterprise levels.

In particular, research on "the performance and strategies of Uzbek specialty products on Chinese e-commerce platforms" is almost non-existent.

4.6 Gaps in Current Research and Justification of Study

Gap in Research:

- a. Lack of empirical research and data analysis on "Uzbek specialty products on Chinese e-commerce platforms⁹";
- b. Lack of systematic analysis of e-commerce development paths for specific industries (such as hand embroidery);
- c. Lack of in-depth discussion on cross-border supply chains, certification systems, and logistics models;
- d. Lack of analysis combining Chinese consumer behavior characteristics with Uzbek cultural products;
- e. Few studies propose actionable market entry strategies and branding solutions.

5. Conclusion

This study can fill the theoretical gap in research on cross-border e-commerce industries in Central Asian countries; it helps to construct an industrial upgrading model applicable to Uzbekistan; it provides practical business advice for

⁸ 12.UNDP Uzbekistan. (2022). Value Chain Analysis for Silk, Ceramics, and Textile Sectors.

⁹ 3.UNCTAD. (2022). Digital Economy Report 2022. United Nations.

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governments, industry associations, and enterprises; and it has practical significance for the "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Silk Road e-commerce" practices.

In summary, this chapter lays the theoretical and literature foundation for subsequent research, while emphasizing the necessity and innovativeness of conducting this study.

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