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Research on the Linkage Mechanism between the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor and the High-Quality Development of Chongqing's Foreign Trade under the Dual-Circulation Paradigm

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of global value chain restructuring and the new development paradigm of dual circulation, the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor has become an important strategic vehicle for inland regions to advance high-standard opening up. In this context, this paper examines the underlying mechanisms linking the Corridor and the high-quality development of Chongqing's foreign trade from the perspective of dual circulation, an inquiry of considerable practical relevance. By systematically reviewing the existing industrial, logistics, and digital foundations for their interconnected development, this study finds that the Corridor can help improve the quality and promote the upgrading of Chongqing's foreign trade by reducing logistics costs, deepening the industrial division of labor, improving cross-border transaction efficiency, and strengthening supply chain resilience. In turn, the expansion of foreign trade, structural optimization, innovation in business models, and market diversification can create pressure for the iterative improvement of the Corridor in the provision of transport capacity, specialized services, digital governance, and the development of overseas networks, forming a feedback loop in which supply and demand reinforce each other. Accordingly, this paper proposes measures for improvement in logistics coordination, industry–trade integration, alignment of rules, and regional coordination, and argues that evaluations of the outcomes of Corridor development should consider both local industrial value added and firms' actual operating benefits.

Keywords

Dual-Circulation Theory, New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, High-Quality Development of Foreign Trade

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1. Introduction

The profound restructuring of global industrial and supply chains and the accelerated establishment of China's new development paradigm of dual circulation have raised the requirements for high-standard opening up in inland regions (Shao & Su, 2023). The 15th Five-Year Plan explicitly calls for "accelerating the development of the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor" and "deepening practical cooperation in trade, investment, industry, and people-to-people exchanges." The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China made systematic arrangements for high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, innovative trade development, and accelerated progress toward becoming a strong trading nation, further highlighting the Corridor's role as a strategic backbone connecting the western hinterland with international markets. As the only municipality directly under the central government in western China, Chongqing links both the Belt and Road Initiative and the Yangtze River Economic Belt. It is an important strategic pivot for the large-scale development of western China and the starting point and hub of the Corridor. Connecting east and west and linking north and south, it enjoys unique locational advantages for becoming a national strategic hinterland. These advantages underpin the close relationship between Corridor development and the high-quality development of Chongqing's foreign trade. On the one hand, the Corridor is a key foundation for Chongqing to expand into international markets and enhance its level of opening up. On the other hand, Chongqing's steadily expanding industry and trade provide important support for the Corridor's efficient operation. Their coordinated advancement thus constitutes an important practical exploration of pathways toward an open economy in inland regions (Chen et al., 2025; Fan & Ding, 2025).

The Corridor's support for the high-quality development of Chongqing's foreign trade needs to be realized progressively through multiple transmission mechanisms (Fan & Ding, 2025). In terms of its underlying logic, the Corridor can reduce logistics time and transaction costs in cross-border trade, extend the geographical reach of Chongqing's foreign trade markets, accelerate the interregional movement of production factors such as capital, technology, and labor, and deepen the interregional industrial division of labor, thereby providing a foundation for high-quality foreign trade development (Zheng et al., 2026; Fang et al., 2025). However, its impact on economic development is constrained by multiple factors, including the local industrial base, the capacity to organize intermodal transport, and the cross-border institutional environment (Li & Zuo, 2026; Zhang et al., 2026; Luo et al., 2024). Against this background, systematically clarifying the bidirectional linkage mechanism between the Corridor and the high-quality development of Chongqing's foreign trade, and exploring effective pathways for translating the Corridor's benefits into trade gains, have practical significance for Chongqing's efforts to become a leading inland hub for opening up and to improve and upgrade its foreign trade.

Under the dual-circulation paradigm, existing studies largely focus on the trade gains and economic resilience arising from the restructuring of the pattern of opening up. From the perspectives of dual circulation and global value chains, scholars primarily discuss the trade gains and economic resilience generated by this restructuring. Zhang et al. (2023) quantitatively identify the composition of trade gains within the dual-circulation system, while Shao and Su (2023) further examine the welfare effects of the division of labor along value chains and its role in offsetting external shocks. As Corridor development has been elevated to a national strategy for opening up, a body of research has turned to assessing the contribution of Corridor development to opening up. Drawing on the Corridor's experience, Chen et al. (2024) demonstrate that infrastructure development can effectively enhance the openness of less-developed regions. Ma et al. (2023) broaden the scope of analysis by examining the underlying logic through which transport infrastructure and the digital economy jointly drive trade growth. Most existing studies treat the Corridor as an exogenous improvement in logistics conditions, emphasizing the unidirectional effects of Corridor development on opening up and focusing more on direct outcomes such as freight volumes and levels of openness. However, these studies provide insufficient explanations of the mechanisms underlying the circular interactions among the Corridor, local industrial systems, and improvements in foreign trade quality and upgrading at the provincial level. Accordingly, situated in the practical context of the dual-circulation paradigm, this paper examines the logical foundations of the Corridor's contribution to the high-quality development of Chongqing's foreign trade and systematically explains the underlying mechanisms of their bidirectional linkage.

2. Logical Foundations of the Linkage between the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor and the High-Quality Development of Chongqing's Foreign Trade under the Dual-Circulation Paradigm

2.1 Characteristics of Industrial Supply and Demand

Chongqing has a relatively strong manufacturing base, providing an important industrial foundation for connecting domestic and international markets through the Corridor and supporting high-quality foreign trade development. Pillar industries, including electronic information, automobiles and motorcycles, and equipment manufacturing, need both to export finished products and to import production equipment and intermediate goods, creating a supply–demand cycle connected to international markets. According to Chongqing Customs statistics, the municipality's total merchandise imports and exports reached RMB 800.68 billion in 2025. Exports of mechanical and electrical products amounted to RMB 496.24 billion, accounting for a dominant share of total exports. Imports of key components such as integrated circuits continued to increase, and dependence on external sources remained relatively high. ASEAN remained Chongqing's largest trading partner, with imports and exports totaling RMB 132.65 billion, a year-on-year increase of 12.6%. In terms of development quality, however, Chongqing's trade structure remains dominated by merchandise trade, with a relatively low share of trade in services. Export activities are concentrated in processing and manufacturing, with insufficient involvement in high-value-added areas such as brand management, control of distribution channels, and after-sales services. Dependence on imported key components is relatively high, while the sophistication of local supporting industries and their capacity to absorb technology require improvement. The contribution of industrial upgrading to high-quality foreign trade development has therefore not yet been fully realized.

2.2 Logistics Networks and Supply Chain Foundations

As the only municipality directly under the central government in western China, Chongqing enjoys important locational advantages. Through the Corridor, it has developed a multimodal transport system encompassing rail–sea intermodal transport, international rail intermodal transport, and cross-border road transport. This system connects efficiently with China–Europe freight trains and the Yangtze River Golden Waterway, forming a cross-border logistics framework linking north and south and connecting east and west. In 2025, Chongqing transported 327,700 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) through the Corridor using these three modes, with a cargo value of RMB 58.312 billion, representing year-on-year increases of 30% and 25%, respectively. At the supply chain level, Chongqing has established distribution centers and logistics bases around its core hubs, initially forming a supply chain network framework combining trunk transport and regional distribution and providing the basic conditions needed to serve local manufacturing supply chains. Nevertheless, significant weaknesses remain in the logistics and supply chain system. First, standards for transshipment between transport modes are inconsistent, and connection efficiency is relatively low. Second, last-mile collection and distribution connections among industrial parks, cargo origins, and hub nodes are inadequate, and

overall supply chain coordination remains weak. Logistics services do not sufficiently meet manufacturing firms' needs for flexible production and delivery precision, constraining the transmission of the Corridor's logistics benefits to industry.

2.3 Support from Digital Infrastructure

Chongqing has used the opportunities offered by Corridor development to continuously improve digital infrastructure in logistics and trade. The development of smart ports of entry has continued to deepen, and the Corridor's cross-regional integrated operations platform has entered service, enabling preliminary online management of information on train scheduling, terminal operations, and customs clearance status. Pilot applications of electronic documents, paperless customs clearance, and digital bills of lading have continued to expand. Digital technologies are widely used in cargo tracking, inspections at ports of entry, and other operational settings, providing technological support for trade facilitation. However, the benefits of digital infrastructure remain subject to multiple constraints. Data barriers among market participants have yet to be removed, and interoperability among the systems of ports, railways, customs authorities, and firms remains limited. Digital services still primarily consist of basic information queries and cargo tracking, with insufficient advanced applications such as intelligent supply chain scheduling and end-to-end operational coordination. The alignment of cross-border digital rules has lagged behind, and the scope of cross-border mutual recognition of electronic documents remains limited. Consequently, the potential of digitalization to improve transaction efficiency has not been fully realized.

2.4 The System of Platforms for Opening Up

Drawing on multilevel platforms for opening up and efficient regional cooperation mechanisms, Chongqing has established a pattern of openness characterized by "domestic reach and international connectivity" through Corridor development. This has both generated momentum for its own development through opening up and made it a core hub connecting inland western regions to global markets. In terms of platform development, Chongqing has important ports of entry for opening up, including the Lianglu–Cuntan Bonded Port Area and the Xiyong Comprehensive Bonded Zone. As key gateways for opening up, these facilities provide crucial support for firms engaged in processing trade and entrep ôt trade through efficient customs clearance services and targeted preferential tax policies.

3. The Linkage Mechanism between the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor and the High-Quality Development of Chongqing's Foreign Trade

3.1 The Corridor's Positive Contribution to High-Quality Foreign Trade Development

3.1.1 Reducing Logistics Costs and Expanding Factor Flows to Improve the Basic Conditions for Trade

By establishing a multimodal transport system connecting the inland hinterland with coastal and border ports of entry, the Corridor reduces the number of stages in cross-border transport and streamlines transshipment procedures, thereby lowering firms' overall logistics costs for foreign trade. Regular freight train services and predictable transit times can help firms optimize production and procurement

plans, reduce inventory holding costs, and lower the risk of defaulting on orders. For small and medium-sized participants in foreign trade, cargo consolidation and warehousing services developed along the Corridor can reduce per-unit logistics costs for small-batch orders and lower barriers to entry into cross-border trade. The economic gains from transport infrastructure are constrained by network connectivity and operational congestion, and improvements at different stages produce significantly different effects (Wang & Yang, 2023).

Improvements in logistics efficiency can also expand the geographical scope of production factor flows. On the export side, domestic collection and distribution networks can bring raw materials and components from industrial bases in the Chengdu–Chongqing region and across China to Chongqing, integrating regional supporting production capacity and strengthening the export supply base. On the import side, advanced production equipment and key intermediate goods enter western China's industrial system through the Corridor, providing factor inputs for technological upgrading in Chongqing's local industries. However, improvements in factor allocation efficiency are constrained by various institutional barriers. As the geographical scope of market procurement expands, institutional obstacles to factor mobility still need to be removed (Wu, 2023). Domestic and cross-border trade barriers are intrinsically connected: regional market segmentation raises overall transaction costs and inhibits firms' productivity growth (Yu et al., 2022).

3.1.2 Deepening the Industrial Division of Labor and Market Demand Feedback to Move Up the Value Chain

The improved connectivity brought about by the Corridor can reduce transaction costs associated with interregional production arrangements and overseas market expansion, creating external conditions for Chongqing's local firms to deepen the industrial division of labor and extend their involvement in global value chains. Competitive industries such as automobiles, electronic information, and equipment manufacturing can build on their research and development capabilities and supporting component supply capacity to expand sales, operations, and maintenance services in overseas markets, shifting their export model from products alone to the combined provision of products and services. Gains from a deeper industrial division of labor are transmitted to upstream and downstream market participants through procurement, supporting supply, and technical service linkages, enhancing the capacity to create value added across the entire industrial chain. A well-developed domestic supply chain system can help local firms advance their position in the international division of labor within value chains. The benefits of trade are not confined to direct exporters but also spill over through industrial linkages to local upstream and downstream supporting firms (Bao & Liao, 2023).

Two-way import and export activities create a market feedback mechanism that influences industrial upgrading (Yuan et al., 2026). High-quality equipment and technologically advanced intermediate goods introduced through imports can improve the composition of local production inputs and facilitate the upgrading of manufacturing processes. The requirements of overseas markets concerning product performance, certification standards, and delivery times compel local firms to continually optimize

production processes and accelerate the research, development, and iterative improvement of new products. Knowledge spillovers accompanying trade have profound implications for firms' research and development investment decisions and the degree of specialization in the division of labor. For Chongqing, moving into higher-value-added segments of value chains depends on local firms' ability to assimilate and absorb imported technologies, their responsiveness to overseas market demand, and their actual progress in expanding into high-value-added activities such as brand management and control of distribution channels.

3.1.3 Integrating Digital Technologies and Aligning Rules and Standards to Improve Cross-Border Transaction Efficiency

The Corridor's operations involve multiple participants, including manufacturing firms, freight forwarders, railway operators, ports, and customs authorities. Traditional decentralized information transmission can lead to duplicate declarations, transport delays, and mismatches between supply and demand. Digital technologies can reduce transaction costs arising from information searches, cargo tracking, and document verification. Connecting data flows across the entire chain of ordering, warehousing, transport, and customs clearance can enable firms to monitor cargo status dynamically and adjust inventories and production arrangements flexibly. The Corridor's logistics platforms should exchange data with firms' internal supply chain management systems and improve their digital service capabilities, extending beyond basic cargo tracking to coordinated procurement and delivery solutions, thereby improving overall supply chain operating efficiency (Liu et al., 2026).

Fully realizing the benefits of digitalization requires a supporting framework of operational rules. Standards and institutions defining the legal validity of electronic documents, the boundaries of rights and responsibilities in data sharing, and the allocation of responsibility for transferring title to goods directly determine the effectiveness of digital services in practice. Existing research shows that different types of digital trade rules have markedly different trade-promoting effects (Yang, 2023). In light of the development needs of Chongqing's competitive industries, the Corridor's digital logistics services need to be effectively aligned with institutional frameworks for product standards and certification, intellectual property protection, and cross-border data compliance. Clarifying the standards governing the use of documents and the rights and responsibilities of all parties can reduce the institutional costs of repeated verification for market participants and enhance the stability and predictability of cross-border trade.

3.1.4 Multiple Transport Routes and Market Diversification to Strengthen Supply Chain Resilience

The Corridor opens a southbound logistics route from Chongqing to ASEAN. Together with the westbound China–Europe freight train route and the eastbound Yangtze River Golden Waterway, it forms a complementary cross-border logistics network. When an individual transport route is affected by an external shock, firms can flexibly switch transport arrangements according to cargo characteristics, delivery deadlines, and cost constraints, reducing the operational risks caused by supply chain disruptions. Diversifying overseas markets through the Corridor network can cushion shocks

arising from demand fluctuations in a single market and enhance the overall stability of foreign trade development. However, diversification of both transport routes and overseas markets entails operating and maintenance costs. Such diversification can translate into firm-level risk resilience only when routes and markets provide genuinely viable alternatives.

China's well-developed supporting industrial base and vast domestic consumer market provide firms with a buffer against disruptions in the external environment. A wide choice of supporting suppliers and the interconnection of domestic and foreign trade channels can help mitigate the pressures of declining external demand (Dan, 2025). Supply chain adjustments exhibit path dependence, and switching suppliers entails transition costs associated with searching, certification, and operational adaptation. The effects of global industrial chain restructuring differ across firms according to their accumulated technological capabilities and degree of digitalization. Corridor development therefore needs to proceed in coordination with the accumulation of firms' technological capabilities, the development of alternative suppliers, and the expansion of domestic market channels; only then can advantages in logistics routes be translated into tangible supply chain resilience.

3.2 Feedback from Foreign Trade to Corridor Development and Upgrading

3.2.1 Sustained Trade Growth Drives Improvements in Transport Capacity Provision and Cost Optimization

Steady expansion in foreign trade can provide a stable cargo base for the Corridor's operations, driving continued improvements in transport capacity and reductions in unit logistics costs. Growing manufacturing import and export orders can increase the overall utilization of freight train and shipping services, reducing empty-container repositioning and idle facilities. Operators can consequently increase service frequency and reduce per-unit transport costs, attracting more market participants to use the Corridor for cross-border logistics. This creates a virtuous cycle of trade expansion, increased transport capacity, lower costs, and further trade growth. Using nationwide export data, Wang and Yang (2023) confirm a significant linkage between trade scale and the supply of cross-border transport. In terms of the underlying mechanism, the scale effects of cargo volumes generated by foreign trade provide the market foundation for the Corridor's sustainable operation. Insufficient cargo volumes lead to relatively low operating returns from freight train services and make sustained, sound operation difficult. Market signals generated by foreign trade expansion can guide operators to adapt train frequency, capacity allocation, and infrastructure investment, matching the Corridor's supply capacity with actual foreign trade demand.

3.2.2 Continued Trade Structure Upgrading Promotes Improvements in the Corridor's Specialized Service System

The transformation of foreign trade toward higher value added and greater service orientation creates pressure for the Corridor to expand from a single cargo transport function into a comprehensive system of value-added services. High-value-added goods require greater protection during handling and greater delivery precision; trade in fresh products generates demand for cold-chain logistics; and firms'

overseas operations create needs for spare-parts warehousing and distribution, as well as logistics support for after-sales services. These changes in market demand guide Corridor operators to optimize the deployment of physical infrastructure and diversify their logistics services. The feedback effect of trade structure upgrading on Corridor services takes the form of demand-side forces driving supply-side change. As local foreign trade industries move toward higher-value activities, basic trunk transport services no longer meet market needs. The Corridor must therefore address gaps in specialized services such as cold-chain logistics, dedicated transport for finished vehicles, and overseas spare-parts warehousing, establishing a comprehensive logistics service system suited to the local trade structure.

3.2.3 Innovation in Trade Business Models Drives Digital Governance and Rule Coordination along the Corridor

The continued development of new foreign trade business models, including cross-border e-commerce and market procurement trade, places higher demands on the Corridor's digital governance and alignment with cross-border rules. These models involve small batches, frequent shipments, and less-than-container-load consolidation, requiring the Corridor to optimize cargo consolidation operations and innovate customs clearance and supervision procedures. The scope and completeness of digital trade rules directly affect trade facilitation and compliance costs for these business models. The new operational scenarios they create expose shortcomings in the Corridor's existing digital processes and cross-border regulatory rules, prompting regulators and Corridor operators to pursue institutional innovation jointly. This involves, on the one hand, digitalizing activities such as document circulation and customs declarations and, on the other, advancing mutual recognition of customs rules between China and trading partners such as ASEAN, thereby reducing institutional transaction costs for firms operating these new business models across borders.

3.2.4 Progressive Market Diversification Drives the Outward Expansion of the Corridor's Logistics Network

The diversification of Chongqing's overseas trade markets drives the outward expansion of the Corridor's cross-border logistics network and improvements in its overseas node system. As Chongqing's trade ties with ASEAN and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) member countries deepen, firms' practical demand for overseas warehousing nodes and diversified transport routes continues to grow. From the perspective of supply chain network theory, the geographical expansion of trade markets encourages logistics service providers to follow firms overseas, gradually building a cross-border logistics network covering core trade nodes. Market signals from foreign trade firms' overseas expansion guide Corridor operators to establish a network of overseas port and warehouse resources and open new cross-border intermodal routes. In turn, improvements in overseas logistics networks can further reduce the costs of firms' overseas expansion and strengthen the Corridor's support for Chongqing's foreign trade supply chains, completing a feedback loop in which demand drives supply and supply supports trade.

4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

For Chongqing, the Corridor is not only a key link in overcoming the trade bottlenecks associated with its "inland hinterland" location and removing blockages in cross-border logistics, but also a central driver for activating new quality productive forces and shifting foreign trade from "scale expansion" toward "quality and economic benefits." Against this background, this paper examines the linkage mechanism between the Corridor and the high-quality development of Chongqing's foreign trade under the dual-circulation paradigm. The study finds that the Corridor can support foreign trade through lower logistics costs, a deeper industrial division of labor, coordination between digitalization and institutions, and greater supply chain resilience. Feedback effects also exist: trade expansion, structural optimization, innovation in business models, and market diversification can drive the Corridor's iterative improvement in four dimensions—the provision of transport capacity, specialized services, digital governance, and overseas networks. The two thus form an interactive feedback loop. Chongqing still faces constraints such as inadequate multimodal connections, low export value added, insufficient industry–trade integration, and limited coordination of cross-border rules. Growth in freight volumes is not equivalent to an improvement in foreign trade quality.

Accordingly, this paper proposes the following policy recommendations. First, improve the organizational system for multimodal transport, address weaknesses in cargo collection and distribution, focus on firms' actual logistics benefits, and move away from evaluations that pursue freight volume alone. Second, deepen industry–trade integration, extend the value-added chain of foreign trade by drawing on local pillar industries, and strengthen the assimilation and absorption of imported technologies. Third, advance mutual recognition of cross-border digital documents and rules to reduce institutional transaction costs. Fourth, improve cross-regional coordination mechanisms and promote the integration of industrial and logistics resources along the Corridor to fully realize the benefits of bidirectional linkages.

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