



**DEVELOPING DIGITAL COOPERATION BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN
AND CHINA IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CHANGE**

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Annotation At a time when global digital transformation processes are intensifying, digital cooperation between Uzbekistan and China is gaining strategic importance for both sides. The article analyzes the regional content of the Digital Silk Road initiative, Uzbekistan's alignment with the Digital Uzbekistan 2030 strategy, areas of cooperation in the fields of telecommunications, data centers, artificial intelligence, e-commerce and cybersecurity. Uzbekistan's experience in infrastructure projects involving Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE, government cloud and digitalization of public services is highlighted. It also compares the views of analysts on information governance, digital sovereignty, and the risks of technological dependence. The study shows that the Uzbekistan-China digital partnership, while serving the rapid development of the country's digital economy, requires long-term strategic management decisions. The article, based on reports by political scientists, experts and international organizations, broadly covers the opportunities and challenges of this cooperation.

Key words Uzbekistan, China, digital cooperation, Digital Silk Road, Digital Uzbekistan – 2030, digital transformation, digital infrastructure, Huawei, ZTE, data center, government cloud, e-government, artificial intelligence, digital sovereignty, cybersecurity, e-commerce, international cooperation

Introduction The Chinese government attaches great importance to the development of the digital economy as a key engine for high-quality economic development. By accelerating the digital transformation of industry, we are committed to cultivating more capital-intensive and technology-intensive enterprises, thus greatly improving resource utilization efficiency and further promote high-quality development of the national economy. At the same time, as the world's second-largest economy, China is well aware of the importance of seizing new opportunities for the development of the digital economy and has made breakthroughs in digital technological innovation, key technology research and development, and digital rule-making. The move is not only intended to enhance the country's scientific and technological innovation capacity and international competitiveness, but also to consolidate and enhance China's influence on the stage of the global digital economy and contribute China's wisdom and solutions to building an open world economy. At present, China's digital economy has ranked second in the world for many consecutive years. Digital infrastructure is



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leadingtheworld,industry digital transformation is steadily advancing, new business forms and newmodelsaredeveloping, digital government construction has achieved remarkable results, andinternationalcooperation in the digital economy has been deepened.

Uzbekistan has adopted the "Digital Uzbekistan-2030" strategy, which outlines projects aimed at expanding e-government systems, modernizing information infrastructure, and developing the digital economy. For example, cooperation with China is expanding in the areas of digital infrastructure, telecommunications, cloud computing, and big data[1]. In this regard, the Digital Silk Road (DSR) — as a structural element of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — aims to promote digital connectivity, develop information infrastructure, and support large IT companies and communication projects.

Main Part For more than 30 years, Uzbekistan and China have been continuously strengthening political mutual trust and developing bilateral relations based on the principles of equality, friendship, good-neighborliness, mutual support, mutual benefit, respect and consideration of each other's interests. With the election of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as President of Uzbekistan, Uzbek-Chinese interaction has entered a trajectory of more dynamic development. This is facilitated by both regular political dialogue at the highest level and the existing friendly and trusting relations between the leaders of the two countries. Thanks to the political will and efforts of the heads of state, in September 2022, bilateral relations were raised to the level of «comprehensive strategic partnership in a new era», which reflects the similarity of their views and geopolitical priorities, the mutual desire to take cooperation to a higher level and fill it with new content. Since 2017, 3 telephone conversations and 8 meetings have taken place. Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Uzbekistan in 2022. In turn, the leader of Uzbekistan visited China 5 times (in 2017, 2019, 2022, 2023).

In the context of global digital transformation, the “Digital Silk Road” initiated by China is becoming one of the most important directions of international politics and economics. Along with economic corridors, this initiative expands China’s global sphere of influence through digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, e-commerce, financial technologies, and cloud services. Researchers note that the Digital Silk Road is no longer a simple infrastructure project, but is becoming “one of China’s most powerful digital diplomacy and soft power tools.” In this process, Central Asia, and Uzbekistan in particular, has become a strategic partner for China, as competition in the region intensifies[2].

International organizations, while recognizing Uzbekistan's digital reforms, also note a number of problems. The UNDP's analytical report on the digital economy notes that the "Digital Uzbekistan - 2030" strategy has attracted significant investments in infrastructure and e-government, but there is low digital literacy in rural areas, an incomplete regulatory framework, and insufficient private sector participation. In this



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context, digital cooperation with China is seen as an important tool not only to attract investment and technology, but also to fill these gaps[3].

China's Digital Silk Road initiative is driving a broad-based transformation in Central Asia. Studies show that China is shaping the region's "digital backbone" by investing in telecommunications infrastructure, data centers, satellite navigation, and smart city technologies. Companies such as Huawei and ZTE are leading the way in expanding 4G and 5G networks, building fiber optic networks, and building data centers. This is both enabling a digital leap for countries in the region and facilitating the penetration of Chinese standards and digital governance practices[4].

The report "Digital Silk Road in Central Asia: Present and Future," prepared by the Davis Center at Harvard University and partner institutions, emphasizes that China's digital presence in Central Asia is twofold: on the one hand, it supports economic growth by increasing the level of digital infrastructure and connectivity; on the other hand, it raises new questions about data governance, cybersecurity, and digital sovereignty. This, of course, also directly applies to Uzbekistan-China digital cooperation[5].

The dynamics of Uzbekistan-China digital cooperation in recent years is clearly visible in statistics and specific projects. According to international news agencies, between 2016 and 2025, Uzbektelecom, in cooperation with Chinese financial institutions, implemented projects worth about \$700 million, installed 27,000 new base stations, and expanded mobile and broadband Internet throughout the country. Mobile operators Beeline, Mobiuz, and Ucell also implemented projects worth more than \$500 million in cooperation with Chinese companies. In 2024, more than \$1 billion worth of agreements were signed between the two state companies to strengthen telecommunications infrastructure[6].

Cooperation in the field of e-commerce and logistics is also intensifying. In the first half of 2025, more than 226 tons of cargo ordered from Chinese platforms such as AliExpress, Temu, and Shein were delivered to Uzbekistan in cooperation with Uzbekistan Post and China Post. This process will not only expand the consumer market, but also accelerate the digitalization of e-commerce infrastructure, online payment systems, and customs and logistics processes.

Another important area in the context of global change is cooperation in artificial intelligence and large-scale computing. Chinese companies are taking initiatives to establish AI laboratories and intelligent computing centers in Central Asia, and Uzbekistan is also becoming an active participant in this process. According to analysts, such infrastructure "will quickly free countries from the problem of a lack of high-performance computing capabilities, but it can also deeply tie them into the Chinese technological ecosystem." At the same time, Uzbekistan plans to attract more than \$ 1 billion in foreign investment in artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure projects



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by 2030 and has created a tax-free zone for AI and data centers in Karakalpakstan; such a zone is very likely to attract Chinese investors[7].

The human capital dimension of digital cooperation should also be noted. Tashkent University of Information Technologies has launched exchange programs with leading Chinese universities, a “Digital Education Laboratory” has been established on the basis of TUIT in collaboration with Huawei and ZTE, and hundreds of Uzbek students are undergoing internships in China as part of the “Seeds for the Future” program. This process is leading to direct acquaintance of Uzbek youth with the Chinese technological ecosystem and the use of digital education and training programs as an element of China's soft power. However, according to the recommendations of the UN and other international organizations, Uzbekistan should pay special attention to ensuring the inclusiveness of digital growth, reducing the digital divide in rural areas, supporting small and medium-sized businesses, women's entrepreneurship, and youth startups. Cooperation with China can yield positive results precisely in these areas - through affordable and fast digital services, access to regional e-commerce platforms, and exchange of experience in financial technologies.

In conclusion In the current era of global change and increased digital competition, digital cooperation between Uzbekistan and China is of strategic importance for both sides. For Uzbekistan, this cooperation opens up opportunities for the rapid development of digital infrastructure, attracting international investment, exporting IT services, and becoming a regional digital center. For China, Uzbekistan is a geostrategic platform for accessing Western and Southern markets within the Digital Silk Road, a means of disseminating its standards and technologies, and strengthening its digital diplomacy. As political scientists note, the main test is whether this cooperation serves to strengthen Uzbekistan's digital sovereignty and multi-vector foreign policy, and does not lead to unilateral technological dependence.



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