

THE MODEL OF INTER-CITY ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN CITIES OF BELARUS  
AND CHINA UNDER THE BELT ROAD INITIATIVE: A CASE STUDY OF BELARUSIAN-  
STYLE TOWN IN CHONGQING

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*Summary: To explore the pattern of economic cooperation between cities of Belarus and China, this paper analysed a joint economic cooperation project between cities of two countries - Chongqing Belarusian-Style Town and concluded that the economic cooperation between cities of the two countries serves the national development strategy of both sides and develops multi-field cooperation based on the sister-city partnership with economic focus.*

Keywords: economics, economic cooperation, Belt Road Initiative, Belarus, China.

## INTRODUCTION

Since China first proposed the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 to form a transnational economic belt, Belarus, as a key pivot country in the initiative, has contributed significantly to the construction and development of the Silk Road Economic Belt backed by the long-standing friendly bilateral relations between Belarus and China. The economic cooperation between Belarus and China at the national level has yielded remarkable achievements, the most glittering of which is the Belarus-China Industrial Park, which has been praised by the Chinese leader as the pearl of the Silk Road; in addition, the bilateral foreign trade volume between Belarus and China reached a new record of nearly \$5.9 billion by the end of 2021 [1]. Besides the numerous positive achievements in inter-country economic cooperation, inter-city economic cooperation projects between the two countries have also emerged in recent years. As an important identity to promote inter-city cooperation, the friendship city relationship has played an important role in deepening and expanding economic cooperation between the cities of Belarus and China. In 2017, Chongqing Municipality of China and Minsk Oblast of Belarus formally established friendship city-oblast relations [2]; in 2020, the project of Belarusian-style town in Chongqing was officially launched, which added a new milestone to the economic cooperation between the friendship cities of the two countries. Despite a series of positive achievements and widespread attention to the economic cooperation between the two countries, the model of inter-city economic cooperation between the two countries has rarely been studied by academics. Given that inter-city economic cooperation is an important part of the bilateral economic cooperation model between the two countries, what are the characteristics of the current model of inter-city economic cooperation projects between the two countries? has become the focus of this paper. This paper aims to deconstruct the current model of inter-city economic cooperation between Belarus and China by examining the case of the Belarusian-style town in Chongqing, and to explore the positive impact of this model on the respective economic development of the two countries, ultimately providing suggestions and intellectual support to promote sustainable and efficient economic cooperation between the two cities.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The BRI is an initiative initiated by China which aims to connect Asia with Africa and Europe through a network of land and sea routes. The BRI consists of two routes: the Silk Road Economic Belt, a land-based transcontinental corridor linking China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central

Asia, Russia and Europe; and the Maritime Silk Road, which connects China's coastal regions with Southeast Asia, South Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East, East Africa, and Europe [3]. The initiative aims to promote regional integration, facilitate the expansion of trade and stimulate economic growth [4]. Belarus is actively participating in the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and is deepening its economic and trade ties with China through this initiative.

The scale of trade and economic cooperation between Belarus and China continues to expand, backed by the continuing positive diplomatic relations. In 2022, at the twenty-second session of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Heads of Government Meeting in Samarkand of Uzbekistan, Belarus and China unanimously declared to upgrade bilateral relations to a comprehensive all-weather strategic partnership [5]. Since then, the diplomatic relations between Belarus and China have reached a new level. Currently, China is the second largest trading partner of Belarus and its largest trading partner in Asia. Bilateral trade in goods and services between the two countries has grown steadily over the last decade and reached a record high of nearly \$5.9 billion at the end of 2021, with an increase of about 8.7% over the previous year (see Figure 1). In the context of the deepening economic cooperation between the countries of Belarus and China, economic cooperation between the cities of the two countries is also developed through the partnership of “Friendship City”.

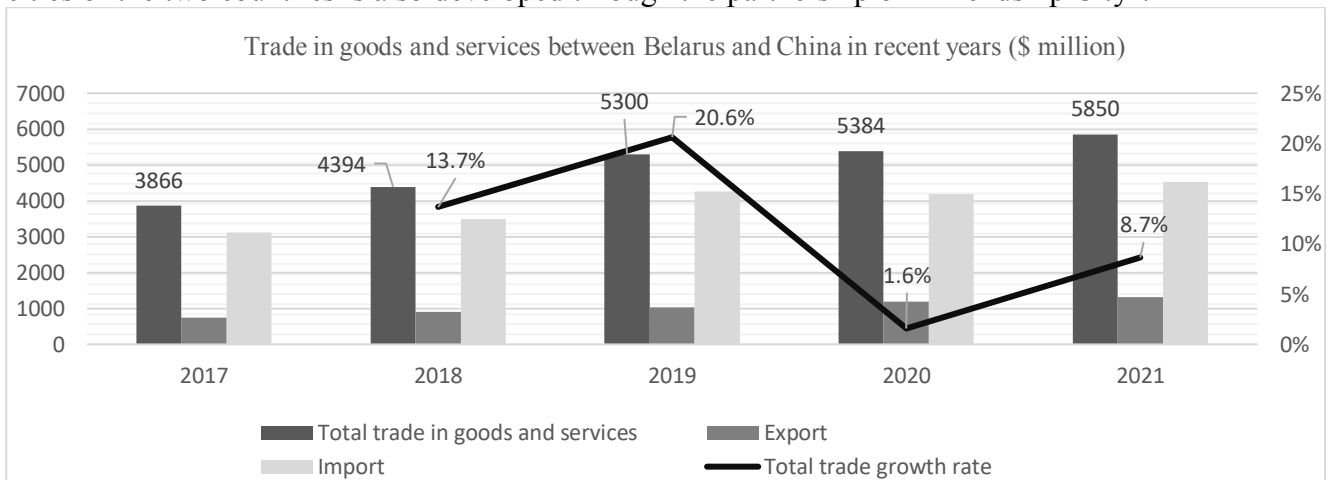


Figure 1. Trade in goods and services between Belarus and China in recent years  
Source: Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the People's Republic of China, 2022.[1]

Friendship city (also known as sister city) refers to a bilateral friendly and cooperative relationship between a home city and a foreign city, which is usually approved by a special administrative authority authorized by the central government or the national parliament of the two countries. Customarily, the term "Friendship City" is widely adopted in China, while European countries, including Belarus, generally call it "Sister City", "Twin City" or "Brother City" [6]. After Chongqing Municipality and Minsk Oblast established friendly city-oblast relationship in 2017, the cooperation between the two cities in trade, culture and tourism has continued to expand. One of the important cooperation projects between the two cities is the Belarusian-style town project with the core of trade and tourism.

The Belarusian style town is located in the core area of the National Agricultural Science and Technology Park in Yubei District, Chongqing, which is one of Yubei District's "main battlefields" for practicing the rural revitalization strategy. The project takes the Belarusian castle as the blueprint, cultural exchange as the background, and commerce and tourism as the core, it aims to build a commercial and cultural complex with a unique Belarusian style integrating commerce, leisure tourism, cultural exchange and ecological liveability. The project covers a land area of about 607 hectares, with a construction area of about 60,000 square meters, and the construction consists of the main building of Belarus-style town, comprehensive environmental improvement facilities and rural facilities for public services. The main construction of the project was completed in 2021 and renewed in the same year, and the overall construction of the project is expected to be completed in December 2023 [7].

The model shown by the project in boosting the economic development of Belarus and China has the following characteristics.

Serving the bilateral national development strategy and the BRI. The agro-tourism nature of the Belarusian-style town project is in line with Chongqing Yubei District's strategy to build a rural revitalization pilot model zone, and serves China's national strategy for rural revitalization proposed in 2017; in addition, the joint participation of the two Belarusian and Chinese cities along the Silk Road Economic Belt is an important achievement of economic cooperation under the influence of the BRI, and the completion of the project will, to a certain extent, enhance the vitality and dynamism of the Initiative. The project is in line with Belarus' emphasis on promoting the export of commercial services in its 2035 National Sustainable Development Strategy [8], as the construction and eventual operation of the project will require continuous support of commercial services from the Belarus's side.

Supported by the friendship city partnership. The friendly city-oblast relationship established between Chongqing Municipality and Minsk Oblast in 2017 contributed to the subsequent investment cooperation agreement signed between Chongqing Yubei District People's Government and the Executive Committee of Minsk Oblast at the 2nd China-Chongqing International Friendship City Mayors' Roundtable in 2019, in which the Belarusian style-town project was initiated with the support of the investment cooperation agreement signed between the two cities.

Multi-field cooperation with economic development as the core. The core of the Belarusian style town project is to create economic income through the development of trade and tourism, in addition, the project covers many areas such as cultural exchange and ecological protection. This is a model of cooperation between the two cities in the fields of culture, tourism, leisure and ecology, with economic development at the core.

## CONCLUSIONS

Under the BRI, the economic cooperation projects between cities in Belarus and China have become increasingly active and the economic cooperation models have become increasingly diversified. This paper has summarized three main characteristics of the current inter-city economic cooperation model of Belarus and China through the perspective of the Belarusian style town project in Chongqing: Serving the bilateral national development strategy and the BRI; supported by the friendship city cooperation relationship; and multi-field cooperation with economic development as the core. The deconstruction of the inter-city economic cooperation model between Belarus and China will provide a possible angle of thinking and intellectual support for solving the dilemmas and problems faced by the inter-city economic cooperation between the two countries and even the inter-country economic cooperation, as well as help to continuously promote more bilateral inter-city economic cooperation projects and enhance the sustainability and efficiency of the economic cooperation between the two countries.

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