

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CROSS-BORDER TOURISM COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA AND RUSSIA: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND COUNTERMEASURES

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Cross-border tourism as a specific form of tourism development that is only typical of regions sharing a border with another country is one of key areas of tourism development in these regions. Geographically, China and Russia are neighbours, which provides a good basis for tourism cooperation between the two countries, especially cross-border tourism cooperation. This article comprehensively explains the progress of China-Russia cross-border tourism cooperation from multiple perspectives such as historical background, current situation, potential opportunities, and various challenges faced. In addition, the article also points out the avenues of stimulating cross-border tourism development in border regions between China and Russia.

Keywords: tourism; cross-border tourism; China; Russia; the Belt and Road Initiative.

РАЗВИТИЕ ТРАНСГРАНИЧНОГО ТУРИСТИЧЕСКОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА МЕЖДУ КИТАЕМ И РОССИЕЙ: ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ, ПРОБЛЕМЫ И КОНТРАМЕРЫ

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Трансграничный туризм как особая форма развития туризма, характерная только для регионов, имеющих границу с другой страной, является одним из ключевых направлений развития туризма в этих регионах. Географически Китай и Россия являются соседями, что создает хорошую основу для туристического сотрудничества между двумя странами, особенно для сотрудничества в области трансграничного туризма. В данной статье всесторонне рассматривается прогресс китайско-российского приграничного туристического сотрудничества с различных точек зрения, таких как исторические предпосылки, текущая ситуация, потенциальные возможности и различные проблемы, с которыми приходится сталкиваться. Кроме того, в статье указываются пути стимулирования развития приграничного туризма в приграничных регионах Китая и России.

Ключевые слова: туризм; трансграничный туризм; Китай; Россия; Инициатива «Пояс и путь».

China and Russia have always maintained a profound friendship. As an important bridge to promote cultural exchanges and economic cooperation between the two countries, cross-border tourism has become increasingly important in Sino-Russian relations. Especially under the promotion and promotion of the “Belt and Road” initiative, cross-border tourism cooperation between China and Russia has entered a new period of development, which has created favorable conditions for strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation and common prosperity between the two countries.

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics of the Russian Federation, as shown in Fig. 1, from 2014 to 2019, the mutual tourist flow between China and Russia maintained growth, with the number of tourists from China arriving in Russia increasing from 874 000 to 1 883 000 and the number of tourists from Russia arriving in China increasing from 1 731 000 to 2 334 000. In 2019, China was Russia’s third largest source of foreign tourists after Ukraine (7 760 000) and Kazakhstan (3 564 000), while it was Russia’s sixth largest tourist destination after Turkey (6 756 000), Abkhazia (4 787 000), Finland (3 653 000), Kazakhstan (3 163 000) and Ukraine (2 527 000). All years since 2020 witnessed a drop in the mutual tourist flow between the two countries due to the pandemic COVID-19. In 2021, only about 18 000 Chinese tourists visited China, and 2 000 Russian toured China. That is the lowest it's ever been.

In 2023, because China exited from zero- covid policy, the mechanism for visa-free group tourist exchange between China and Russia was launched, and electronic visas issued by the Russian government, bilateral tourism was resumed. From January to September 2023, the number of Chinese tourists to Russia and the number of Russian tourists to China increased by about 15 times and 100 times compared to the same period last year, respectively [1].

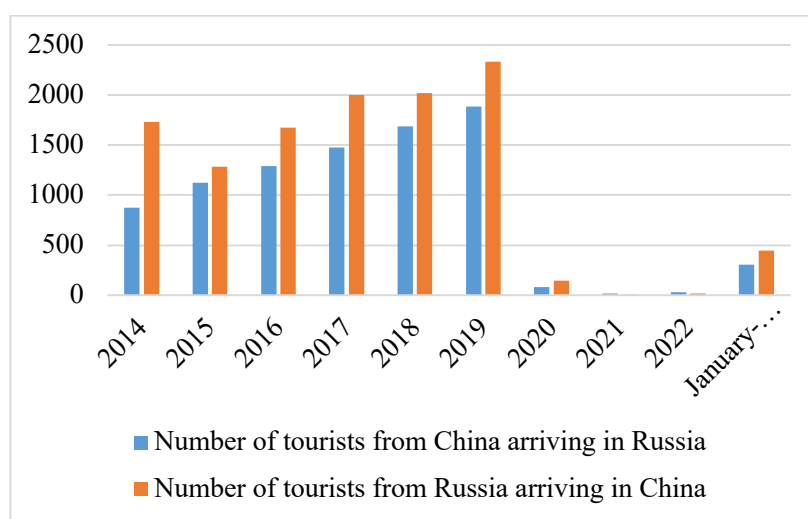


Fig.1. Mutual tourist flow between China and Russia, 2014-2023, in thousand.

Source: [1]

At present, Russian tourists to China mainly focus on shopping tourism, which is mainly due to the fact that China's light industry is more developed compared to Russia. While Chinese tourists' travel to Russia is based on sightseeing and business tourism.

It should be noted that the cross-border tourism, which is a form of tourism, plays an important role in promoting economic prosperity and social stability in the border areas of China and Russia, the great support of the Chinese and Russian governments for border cooperation undoubtedly creates a rare opportunity for their cross-border tourism. And beyond that, the other opportunities for development of cross-border tourism as follows.

Firstly, the common border between China and Russia spans a vast area, and the length of the state border between the two countries is 4,314 kilometres. It provides a unique condition for the development of border tourism. Among these three provinces that are bordered with Russia – Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, the border between Heilongjiang Province and Russia is about 3,038 kilometres, and since the reform and opening up, with the development of China-Russia trade and economic cooperation, Heilongjiang Province has been approved to open up to the outside world a class of ports up to 27, including 19 Sino-Russian border crossings: 10 waterborne border crossings (Mohe, Heihe, Xunkun, Jiayin, Luobei, Tongjiang, Fuyuan, Raohe, Sunwu, Huma, 6 highway border crossings (Dongning, Suifenhe, Mishan, Hulin, the Heixiazi Island, Heihe), 2 railway border crossing (Suifenhe, Tongjiang, a walking border crossing (Heihe) [2]. This geographical environment has created extremely favorable conditions for cross-border tourism between the two countries and further promoted their tourism cooperation activities in the border areas.

Secondly, both China and Russia regard the development of border tourism as the core task of promoting cultural exchanges, ensuring national security and promoting sustained regional economic growth. At present, many provinces in my country have carried out tourism development and construction in border areas. In China, border tourism has shown strong growth momentum, and various border provinces and cities are working hard to promote progress in this field. At the same time, it has also led to the vigorous development of related industries, such as tourism and transportation. For example, places such as Heilongjiang and Jilin have used their rich tourism resources to attract Russian tourists, thus promoting the development of local tourism economies. Border travel not only promotes local economic growth, but also deepens the bonds of friendship between the people of the two countries.[3]

Thirdly, the governments support to develop cross-border tourism. At the national level, China and Russia have signed multiple bilateral cooperation agreements, especially in the tourism industry. These agreements provide legal

and policy support for transnational tourism activities and create a favorable atmosphere for cooperation among tourism companies. At the same time, cooperation between China and Russia in various fields such as culture and economy have also provided more comprehensive support for the further development of border tourism. At the local level, clear cooperation agreements have also been signed in certain border areas, further strengthening cooperation in border tourism. For example, Heihe and the Russian side jointly formulated the “Sino-Russian Twin Cities Tourism Development Master Plan”.

In general, the opportunities for China and Russia in cross-border tourism cooperation are mainly reflected in their geographical advantages, the key role of border tourism, and the two countries’ all-round support for this field. At the same time, attention should be paid to overcoming some obstacles in the development process. *On the one hand*, at present, China and Russia have not established a clear cooperation framework for border tourism cooperation, and there is still no unified policy structure. At the same time, due to cultural differences and language differences between countries, good interaction between cross-border ethnic cultures and local residents cannot be achieved. This situation has led to uncertainty in the development of tourism in border areas, making various regions encounter difficulties in promoting tourism cooperation. Without an efficient mechanism, disharmony among cooperation projects may arise, thereby limiting the potential growth of border tourism. *On the other hand*, the development status of border areas shows obvious imbalance: some border cities have huge potential for tourism development due to their superior geographical location, rich natural resources and strong policy support, while tourism development in some areas may be limited by factors such as transportation difficulties and inadequate infrastructure.

In addition, China and Russia have long had some sensitive issues in history and geopolitics. Historical background may trigger sensitive emotional responses, while geopolitical instability may also have an impact on the security and stability of border areas. These issues may have a negative impact on border tourism cooperation between the two countries [4].

In conclusion, China and Russia have many favorable conditions for cross-border tourism cooperation. Geographical proximity gives the two countries unique advantages in tourism cooperation, making border tourism activities more convenient and practical. The rich and unique cultural resources in the border areas have also laid a solid foundation for cross-border tourism between the two countries. Especially with the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, strengthening border tourism cooperation between China and Russia has become particularly critical. In order to conduct comprehensive and sustainable development of cross-border tourism cooperation between China and Russia, it is necessary to take the following measures: 1) building a clear

border tourism cooperation framework to more effectively promote the cooperative relationship between the two parties. At the same time, reasonable policies should be formulated to encourage border residents to participate in tourism; 2) promoting balanced growth in border areas, especially in infrastructure and economic development, to ensure the continued healthy growth of border tourism; 3) strengthening ties with neighboring countries and achieve complementary advantages; 4) by innovating tourism products, delving into regional cultural connotations and enhancing their attractiveness, it could better meet the different needs of various tourists; 5) strengthening education and training for border tourists so that they can become truly culturally aware people, thereby effectively reducing misunderstandings caused by cultural differences.

In addition, it is also necessary to solve historical and geopolitical issues through diplomatic channels, thereby creating a more stable and secure environment for tourism on the Sino-Russian border.

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