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Trading Partners' Logistics Performance and China's Exports

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Abstract. In the background of the advancing development of the global supply chain, the connection between logistics and international trade has become increasingly close. This paper is intended to investigate the relationship between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports from the dual dimensions of theory and empirical, and provide a new perspective for understanding the operation mechanism of international trade. In this study, China's export volume is taken as the dependent variable, and World Bank's Logistics Performance Index is adopted as the core explanatory variable. A two-way fixed-effects model is constructed for empirical analysis, and panel data of 31 major trading partners of China from 2010 to 2022 are employed. Furthermore, robustness check and heterogeneity analysis are conducted. The results show that there is a positive correlation between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports. This conclusion is supported by the robustness check. Heterogeneity analysis reveals that this relationship is significant in developed countries but not in developing countries. On the basis of the above conclusions, it is suggested that enterprises and the government can strengthen the formulation of logistics system, thereby promoting the common prosperity of the international economy in the win-win cooperation.

Keywords: logistics performance, exports, international trade

1. Introduction

The logistics system plays a vital role in the process of economic globalization. Logistics is not only a bridge connecting the production side and the consumption side, but also an essential factor influencing the cost and efficiency of international trade and consumer experience. As an important participant in international trade and a major commodity supplier, China makes great contributions to economic globalization. Its export trade shows unique toughness and vitality in the uncertain and complex international environment. Therefore, the link between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports should not only be explored for its essential theoretical value, but also be examined for its practical significance in optimizing the layout of the global supply chain and enhancing China's export competitiveness.

As for the association between logistics and international trade, academic circles have carried out research from different perspectives, aiming at different product categories and regions, and generally confirmed that logistics performance is positively correlated with international trade flows,

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which provides a theoretical perspective and empirical reference for subsequent research. However, it can be found that the existing studies still have deficiencies in research pertinence and sample coverage.

Accordingly, this paper further investigates the association between trade partners' logistics performance and China's exports, trying to make up for the deficiencies of existing research. This study takes China's export volume as the dependent variable and the Logistics Performance Index issued by the World Bank as the core explanatory variable, uses the panel data of 31 major trading partners of China from 2010 to 2022, and constructs a two-way fixed-effect model for empirical analysis. In addition, GDP, openness index and population size are introduced as control variables to more accurately explore the relationship between logistics performance and trade flows. Moreover, this paper will complete the robustness check by replacing the core explanatory variable, and carry out heterogeneity analysis for different sample groups.

The value of this research lies in two aspects. Firstly, in theoretical terms, this research combines the classic "iceberg transportation cost" theory with logistics performance, and tries to explain the relationship between the logistics system of importing countries and China's export scale, so as to provide some supplement for the research on international trade in the perspective of logistics and supply chain. Secondly, in practical terms, the research conclusion can provide some reference for Chinese export enterprises to evaluate the logistics environment of the target market, and can also provide enlightenment for the government to implement differentiated international logistics policies.

2. Literature review

The relationship between logistics and international trade has been widely explored. Existing literature have provided theoretical references and empirical foundations for this paper.

The existing literature has been studied from different perspectives. Cuiping Li used the SFGM model to measure the trade efficiency and trade potential between China and the Eurasian Economic Union, and believed that the economic scale and logistics performance of the member countries could promote China's exports [1]. Zhenghuang Shi et al. focused on the ternary margin of export, used the data of China and the "Belt and Road" countries from 2010 to 2018 to carry out empirical research, and suggested that China's logistics performance could significantly improve the price margin, quantity margin and export expansion margin of wood forest products [2]. According to Ting Ding's research, logistics performance is positively associated with export competitiveness [3]. Overall, it can be found that although existing studies approach the issue from different starting points, they generally agree that logistics and trade flows are positively correlated. However, the association between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports has not been thoroughly explored.

In addition, differences in industry and sample selection are also found in the existing research. According to Liuyun He and Jia Li's research, logistics development level, economic scale and population size of China and the EU have a far-reaching influence on China's cross-border e-commerce exports [4]. Yaobo Li et al. took "Belt and Road" countries as samples to conduct empirical analysis. The results showed that cross-border logistics performance could significantly promote the trade flows of agricultural products [5]. Meichao Shi et al. constructed a trade gravity model, and suggested that enhancing the logistics of RCEP countries would positively affect China's exports [6]. In general, most studies place emphasis on the trade of one specific industry, but the research focusing on the correlation between logistics performance and the overall trade is relatively insufficient. In addition, a large proportion of the existing studies tend to choose a specific region or

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organization as the sample, and there is a lack of comparative research between developed and developing countries, which provides a certain exploration space for this paper.

3. Theoretical analysis and research hypothesis

Ronald Harry Coase, a British economist, first carried out the concept of transaction cost and defined it as "the most obvious cost of organizing production through the price mechanism." According to Xianliang Xia, trade costs are defined as the various expenses incurred in the logistics, capital flow and information flow of imported and exported goods, including transaction, management and tax expenses, in addition to the original purchase price of the goods [7]. It can generally be divided into direct costs and indirect costs. Direct costs are the specific costs that must be borne in international trade, such as customs procedures and taxes, transportation fees and currency exchange costs. Indirect costs are additional costs that are difficult to identify, such as the costs of searching for information and missed trade opportunities.

The occurrence and growth of international trade are closely tied to the level of trade costs. The "iceberg transportation cost" theory proposed by Samuelson, an American economist, provides a classic analytical framework for understanding this mechanism. "Iceberg transportation cost" refers to the part of the product that is lost in the form of "melting" in the process of inter-regional transportation, including freight and tariffs. The theory analogizes the transportation cost to the physical characteristics of icebergs, that is, the products will be consumed like icebergs melting during transportation, and the consumption determines the actual number of products arriving at the destination. It is precisely because of the existence of transportation costs that imported goods' price is bound to be higher than that of local goods, which has an inhibitory effect on the trade scale. Consequently, when the transportation cost becomes lower, the competitiveness of products in the destination markets will be stronger and the trade flows will be greater.

Trade costs will be greatly affected by logistics. Logistics is regarded as the process of goods from the supplying place to receiving place, generally covering such essential functions as transportation, storage, packaging, delivery and information management. Logistics performance reflects how efficiently and effectively a country operates its logistics system. Shanglong Song suggested that it is widely regarded as a major factor of the efficiency and competitiveness of trade [8]. When logistics efficiency in the importing countries is low and uncertainty is high, delays, losses and extra costs may be encountered by exporting firms. On the contrary, advances in logistics in importing countries means the simplification of customs clearance procedures and the enhancement of transportation capacity, which helps to reduce unnecessary additional costs in exporting countries and improve the competitiveness of products, so as to promote their exports.

Therefore, a research hypothesis is put forward in this paper: there is a positive correlation between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports. The above hypothesis will be examined through empirical analysis.

4. Research design and data collection

4.1. Econometric model

The gravity model is regarded as one of the classic economic models, which provides an effective framework for explaining international trade. This paper refers to the research of Dušan Steinhauser and Lucia Khúlová, uses the method of traditional gravity model for reference, utilizes the panel data of 31 major trading partners of China from 2010 to 2022, and constructs a two-way fixed-effect

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model to explore the relationship between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports [9]. The two-way fixed-effects model is adopted because the sample countries differ considerably from one another and the time span is long, making the data vulnerable to global shocks; by using this model, country heterogeneity and common time trends can be better controlled. The model is specifically set as:

$$lnEXP_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 lnLPI_{it} + \beta_2 lnGDP_{it} + \beta_3 lnOPEN_{it} + \beta_4 lnPOP_{it} + \mu_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

In this model, subscripts i and t denote the country and year, respectively. EXP represents the export volume of China. LPI represents the composite Logistics Performance Index of the trading partner countries. GDP, $OPEN$ and POP represent the gross domestic product, openness index and population size of the trading partner countries respectively. μ_i and λ_t represent the fixed effect of country and year respectively, and are used to capture the interference of factors that do not change with time at the country level and the common impact at the time level. ε_{it} it is the random disturbance term. The standard errors of regression results are clustered at the country level. In this paper, all variables are logarithmized and expressed in ln. β_1 is a key coefficient, which reflects the degree of correlation between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports.

The dependent variable is China's exports to the sample countries (EXP). This variable reflects China's export performance and is the core indicator to measure the development level of China's export trade.

The core explanatory variable is the composite Logistics Performance Index (LPI) of trading partner countries. The Logistics Performance Index issued by the World Bank includes one composite index and six sub-indices, each of which ranges from 1 to 5. A higher value is associated with better logistics performance of the country. The composite index is utilized because it can better reflect the overall logistics performance of a country.

The logistics performance of importing countries is not the only factor that influence China's exports. A variety of other determinants have also been identified as important influences. Referring to the research of Weixin Wang et al., this paper introduces gross domestic product (GDP), openness index ($OPEN$) and population size (POP) as control variables to identify the relationship between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports more cleanly [10]. Among them, the openness index is a comprehensive value weighted by 29 basic indicators, ranging from 0 to 1. The geographical distance between the two countries is absorbed by the country fixed effects, and China's GDP factor has been absorbed by the time fixed effect. Therefore, these factors are no longer introduced.

4.2. Data collection and source

Up to now, the Logistics Performance Index has been published by the World Bank only for the years 2007, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2022, and some data for certain countries are missing. On one hand, in order to extend the observation interval as much as possible and have certain timeliness, the years of 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2022 are selected. On the other hand, for the purpose of improving the reliability of the study and the universality of the conclusion, this paper tries to construct a representative sample. With reference to the materials issued by the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China, and in consideration of the availability of the data, 31 major trading partners of China were used as the research objects, namely

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Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Russia, the United States, Canada, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Brazil, South Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Nigeria, Australia and New Zealand. The sample covers six continents and has a certain universality.

In this study, the data of China's exports are from the World Integrated Trade Solution. The data of Logistics Performance Index, GDP and population size are from the World Bank database. The openness index is from the Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

4.3. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics of the main variables are reported in Table 1, revealing that the data of the 31 sample countries differ in many aspects.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

VarName	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
lnEXP	186	17.227	0.998	14.832	17.287	20.183
lnLPI	186	1.216	0.146	0.859	1.232	1.459
lnGDP	186	27.508	1.129	25.645	27.530	30.889
lnOPEN	186	-0.327	0.104	-0.505	-0.311	-0.043
lnPOP	186	17.890	1.134	15.286	17.913	21.078

5. Analysis of empirical results

5.1. Baseline regression results

In this study, empirical analysis is conducted to explore the association between the main variables. The baseline specification is first estimated, and the corresponding results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Baseline regression results

	(1)	(2)
	Without control variables	With control variables
lnLPI	1.392***	0.852***
	(3.815)	(2.911)
lnGDP		0.569***
		(4.749)
lnOPEN		1.027***
		(2.750)
lnPOP		0.396
		(0.853)

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Table 2. (continued)

_cons	15.134***	-6.496
	(34.393)	(-0.826)
Country-Time FE	Yes	Yes
N	186	186
R^2	0.844	0.893
Adj. R^2	0.839	0.888

Note: The t-value of cluster estimation at the country level is reported in brackets. *, * * and * * * denote significance at the 10%, 5%, 1% levels, respectively. The same applies to the following tables.

The regression result without control variables is reported in column (1). The coefficient of the composite Logistics Performance Index is 1.392, which passes the significance test at the 1% level, that is, the sample countries' logistics performance and China's exports are positively correlated.

The regression result with control variables is reported in column (2). Compared with the regression result (1), the adjusted R^2 is found to increase from 0.839 to 0.888, revealing that the goodness of fit of the model was improved. The coefficient of the composite Logistics Performance Index is 0.852, and it is significant at the 1% level, indicating the existence of a positive correlation between the sample countries' logistics performance and China's exports, which verifies the core hypothesis of this paper

The above results can be interpreted form two aspects. In the first place, a more efficient logistics system in importing country means higher customs clearance efficiency, stronger logistics infrastructure construction, higher logistics service quality, and more reliable transportation. These may helps to reduce the performance risk and operational uncertainty in cross-border trade, decrease unnecessary intermediate links and losses, and lower the overall trade costs, thus the exports volume will increase. In the second place, the improvement of logistics can enhance the consumption experience. When the goods can be delivered faster and more stably, the waiting time of consumers will be shortened, the uncertainty in the purchase process will be reduced, and their purchase intention will also be enhanced. The expansion of consumer demand will further attract export enterprises to enter these markets, reflected in rising trade flows.

The coefficient of GDP is significantly positive at the 1% level, that is, the sample countries' GDP is positively correlated with China's exports. This finding is in accordance with the classical theory of trade gravity model. A larger GDP means a larger economic scale, which also means that the country has stronger domestic market purchasing power and greater aggregate demand, which naturally leads to more imports. It can be seen that economic scale is an important force driving international trade.

The coefficient of the openness index is significantly positive at the 1% level, indicating that there is a positive correlation between the openness of trading partner countries and China's exports. In countries with a higher level of openness, lower tariffs, fewer non-tariff barriers, and more simplified customs clearance procedures are usually implemented, which creates a freer and more convenient trade environment for Chinese goods to enter their markets. Furthermore, highly open countries tend to participate more actively in the international division of labor, and have a stronger demand for intermediate goods, capital goods and consumer goods produced by China, thus attracting China to export goods and services to that country.

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In addition, the coefficient of population size was not statistically significant, revealing that there was no obvious correlation between trading partners' population size and China's exports. This paper speculates that it is possible that the population growth is not accompanied by the synchronous increase of per capita income, the total purchasing power is shared by more people, and the per capita purchasing power is still relatively limited, so the effective demand for imported goods has not increased significantly. In addition, some countries in the sample have a large population, but their economic development level and purchasing power are relatively low, resulting in a low demand for Chinese exports.

5.2. Robustness check

To test the reliability of the conclusions, the author use one of the sub-indices of the Logistics Performance Index, competence and quality of logistics services (LPC) to replace the composite index to complete the robustness check. Theoretically, this indicator directly reflects the performance of logistics services in the terminal link. For example, the professional competence of logistics service providers, the quality of the services they offer, and the consistency and reliability of these services. Therefore, LPC is one of the most direct and sensitive dimensions that affects consumer experience and repurchase decision-making, which is representative in evaluating the trading partner's logistics development level. The regression results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Robustness check

	(1)	(2)
	Without control variables	With control variables
lnLPC	1.075***	0.813***
	(3.351)	(2.994)
lnGDP		0.560***
		(4.978)
lnOPEN		0.926**
		(2.507)
lnPOP		0.576
		(1.276)
_cons	15.526***	-9.430
	(40.756)	(-1.258)
Country-Time FE	Yes	Yes
N	186	186
R^2	0.848	0.898
Adj. R^2	0.843	0.893

Table 3 shows that when control variables are not included, the coefficient of LPC is 1.075, which is significant at the 1% level. When control variables are included, the coefficient of LPC is 0.813, which is significant at the 1% level. This reveals that the performance of logistics services in trading partner countries and China's exports are positively correlated.

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The above results are consistent with the baseline regression conclusion, suggesting that the conclusion drawn in this paper are robust and reliable to a certain degree. This consistency is important because it shows that the main findings do not depend on a particular way of measuring logistics conditions. Even when a more specific measure is adopted, the overall pattern remains unchanged, which provides additional support for the view that logistics conditions in trading partner countries matter for China's exports.

5.3. Heterogeneity analysis

Evidence from the above results supports the conclusion that trading partners' logistics performance is positively correlated to China's exports. In order to further investigate the heterogeneity of this relationship in economies with different development levels, this study divides 31 sample countries into two sub samples, developed countries and developing countries. The reason for this division is that the average effect based on the full sample estimation may cover up important differences between economies. Economies with different levels of development often have differences in logistics conditions, market environment and demand structure. By regressing the two groups of samples, it can be observed that whether the correlation is stronger or weaker under different development conditions.

Among the sample countries, the developed country group includes Japan, South Korea, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The group of developing countries includes Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Russia, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Brazil, South Africa, Egypt, Algeria and Nigeria. The regression results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Heterogeneity analysis

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Overall sample	Developed countries	Developing countries
lnLPI	0.852***	0.298	0.941**
	(2.911)	(0.644)	(2.528)
lnGDP	0.569***	0.599**	0.472***
	(4.749)	(2.521)	(3.603)
lnOPEN	1.027***	0.979	1.778***
	(2.750)	(1.694)	(2.962)
lnPOP	0.396	0.282	-0.551
	(0.853)	(0.250)	(-0.863)
_cons	-6.496	-4.538	13.412
	(-0.826)	(-0.297)	(1.232)
Country-Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	186	84	102
R^2	0.893	0.914	0.903

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Table 4. (continued)

Adj. R^2	0.888	0.904	0.893

The regression results estimated from the overall sample, developed country group and developing country group are shown in columns (1), (2) and (3), respectively. In the group of developed countries, the coefficient of the composite Logistics Performance Index is 0.298, which failed to pass the significance test, indicating that there is no obvious correlation between the importing countries' logistics performance and China's exports. In the group of developing countries, the coefficient of the composite Logistics Performance Index is 0.941, which is significant at the 5% level, showing that the importing countries' logistics performance and China's exports are positively correlated.

This paper speculates that the core reason for the above differences is that in developed and developing countries, logistics performance exerts different marginal effects on China's exports. On one hand, the logistics level of developed countries is relatively high, and efficient and reliable standardized logistics networks have been built. Its import decision is more affected by non logistics factors such as product quality, brand, technology and service, so there is no obvious correlation between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports. On the other hand, the logistics level of developing countries is relatively low, and there are problems such as low customs clearance efficiency, insufficient port facilities, imperfect distribution network, and lack of tracking system, which are the core pain points hindering the arrival of Chinese goods to end consumers. The enhancement of logistics contributes to reducing the uncertainty, risk and cost of international trade, so as to release consumer demand. Consequently, the marginal effects of logistics performance on China's exports in developing countries are relatively large.

In addition, certain differences between the two groups are also observed in other aspects. Firstly, in both developed and developing country groups, the coefficient of GDP is significantly positive. This indicates that regardless of the country's level of development, the country's economic scale is positively correlated with China's exports. Secondly, the coefficient of the openness index is not significant in developed country group, whereas it is significant in the developing country group. This paper speculates that this is because the local economic strength and production level of developing countries are relatively weak, and these countries are generally in the process of trade liberalization, making their import demand more sensitive to variation in openness. Finally, in the two sample groups, the coefficient of population size was not significant. It can be seen that the link between trading partner countries' population size and China's exports is relatively weak in both developed and developing countries.

6. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, the main conclusions of this paper can be summarized as follows. First, a significant positive correlation is observed between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports. Second, in the robustness check, after replacing the composite index with LPC, the conclusion is still valid. Third, the heterogeneity analysis reveals that the above conclusions vary across different sample countries, that is, the positive correlation between the importing countries' logistics performance and China's exports is obvious in developing countries, but not obvious in developed countries. It is speculated that this is due to the difference in marginal effects of trading partners' logistics performance on China's exports in developed and developing countries.

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Some implications can be drawn from this paper for China to enhance its international competitiveness in international trade. Firstly, for enterprises, the logistics development level of the target market can be taken as a reference for decision-making of the enterprise. For markets with high logistics level, the key to competitiveness lies in product innovation, brand influence and localized services. For markets whose logistics level needs to be improved, the logistics system can be regarded as a strategic growth point. Accordingly, local logistics rules should be actively studied and adapted to, and in-depth cooperation with reliable local logistics service providers should be established.

Secondly, the government and relevant institutions should optimize the logistics policies, and the departments of customs and transportation should strengthen the provision of real-time and authoritative country logistics information for enterprises to support enterprises to cope with the diversified logistics environment. Countries can also implement differentiated international logistics cooperation strategies. In cooperation with developed countries, the policy focus should shift from logistics infrastructure construction to rule docking and data exchange. In cooperation with developing countries, the policy should focus on adapting to local logistics rules, and assistance and investment should be concentrated on improving the port efficiency and port informatization level of the importing countries, so as to further improve their logistics system.

To sum up, investigating the relationship between trading partners' logistics performance and China's exports has certain significance for understanding international trade theory, grasping the global trade operation mechanism and exploring the future development path. With the deepening of economic globalization, there is still plenty of room for exploration in this field. It is expected that the follow-up research will continue to make breakthroughs in data, methods and perspectives, and jointly promote the development and improvement of international trade-related research.

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