

Structural Bottlenecks and Optimization Strategies for Cross-border E-commerce Logistics at the Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone

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Abstract:

Under the new development paradigm of dual circulation, cross-border e-commerce has become a crucial channel for inland regions to integrate into the global value chain. As a national comprehensive airport economic pilot zone, Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone has maintained steady growth in cross-border e-commerce transaction volume; its logistics system still has obvious structural defects in multimodal transport connection, local service capacity, digital intelligent construction, and professional talent reserve. These problems restrict the zone's development and prevent it from transforming from a simple transit node into an international logistics hub with value-added functions. Besides, incomplete air cargo network coverage, backward overseas logistics node layout, and low port customs clearance efficiency cause an imbalance between logistics supply and demand; this increases the operation costs of cross-border enterprises and weakens the stability of supporting logistics services. Based on hub coordination, enterprise incubation, digital empowerment, and talent cultivation, this paper analyzes the operation status and core problems of the zone's logistics system and proposes feasible optimization measures. The research results can provide theoretical references and policy suggestions for inland airport economies to integrate into global value chains under the dual-circulation pattern.

Keywords: Cross-Border E-commerce Logistics; Inland Airport Economy; Multimodal Transport Integration; Air Silk Road; Supply Chain Visibility

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Problem Statement

Positioned at the intersection of the Air Silk Road and central China's logistics corridor, Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone (ZAEZ) has emerged as a pivotal inland node for transnational e-commerce flows. Endowed with dual policy advantages of the Airport Economic Demonstration Zone and the Air Silk Road, Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone relies on international transportation corridors such as air cargo and China-Europe freight trains to embrace a rapid development period of the cross-border e-commerce industry, among which the logistics system serves as the core foundation for its long-term industrial development. Compared with the well-developed cross-border e-commerce pilot zones in China's eastern coastal regions, the Airport Economy Zone still has obvious shortcomings in logistics supporting facilities; these flaws greatly limit the quality improvement and upgrading of local related industries. Most existing academic studies mainly focus on macroscopic research; they generally discuss overall policy systems and industrial development scales, but pay little attention to the microscopic problems of airport logistics chains. On this basis, this study makes up for the above research deficiencies; it combines the actual operational problems of Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone and the mature experience of excellent aviation logistics hubs, and puts forward targeted improvement schemes suitable for local development.

1.2 Literature Review and Theoretical Gap

Existing research on cross-border e-commerce logistics mostly focuses on coastal pilot areas; these regions have complete port infrastructure and abundant international shipping routes, and they can provide good basic conditions for relevant research.

Qi et al. constructed a grey correlation synergy measurement model to evaluate the matching degree between cross-border e-commerce and supporting logistics systems in coastal comprehensive test zones of China. The study found that uncoordinated industrial development, isolated data between e-commerce and logistics enterprises, and imperfect reverse logistics systems are core obstacles restricting collaborative operation. The information barrier will lead to repeated customs inspections, inventory backlogs, and rising overall logistics costs [1]. He & Guo compared Zhengzhou with Hangzhou, Ningbo, and coastal pilot cities from the perspective of intelligent cross-border e-commerce development. The research pointed out that Zhengzhou's local independent cross-border platforms have weak brand competitiveness and insufficient digital

operation capacity, while the airport logistics system suffers from low informatization, repeated customs inspection procedures, and insufficient application of intelligent identification technologies such as RFID. Besides, the local higher education system lacks specialized cross-border e-commerce majors, resulting in a serious talent gap that restricts the digital upgrading of the whole industrial chain [2]. Van et al. summarized the core successful factors of cross-border e-commerce logistics of global airports through multiple international airport cases, including integrated multimodal transport facilities, special bonded warehouses for e-commerce, digital declaration platforms, and stable international air cargo routes. They also pointed out that inland air hubs are more restricted by long-distance ground transportation costs compared with coastal port cities [3]. Lin carried out targeted research on the cross-border e-commerce industry of Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone. The author argued that the zone has obvious deficiencies in multimodal transport supporting facilities, professional warehousing equipment, and compound logistics talent reserves. Most local logistics enterprises are small-sized and lack the capacity of full-chain global supply chain services, which weakens the overall competitiveness of cross-border merchants [4]. Yao focused on logistics bottlenecks of cross-border e-commerce in the Zhengzhou Free Trade Zone. The study illustrated that the local logistics industry has a low informatization level, insufficient independent international logistics channels, and weak control over overseas supply chains. The shortage of overseas warehouse space further increases the cost of import and export return and exchange [5].

Collectively, the existing body of research exhibits two dominant orientations. The first stream adopts a comparative lens, benchmarking Zhengzhou against established coastal hubs to extract generalized optimization lessons [6]. The second stream remains largely macroscopic, cataloging industrial challenges without dissecting the endogenous structural deficiencies embedded within airport-exclusive logistics systems [7]. Notably, few studies conceptualize ZAEZ as a distinct analytical unit that synthesizes three defining attributes: an air-freight-centric hub, an inland comprehensive bonded zone, and a strategic node along the Air Silk Road [8]. Consequently, the literature lacks tailored investigations into how aviation-specific operational logics, airport-centered customs regimes, and inland geographical constraints interact to shape logistics performance—a gap this paper explicitly addresses.

1.3 Research Framework and Methodological Structure

This paper first sorts out the industrial scale, traffic distribution, and supporting facility conditions of cross-border

e-commerce logistics in Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone; it also refers to relevant domestic and foreign research on airport economy, so as to build the basic theoretical framework for this research. This paper combines local industrial research results with empirical research findings of foreign airport development; it systematically concludes five structural problems of the regional logistics system from five different perspectives, including multimodal transport, local enterprise competitiveness, digital construction, warehousing support, and talent supply. This research does not simply carry out simple descriptive analysis; it further explores the essential reasons for these existing problems and sorts out the internal logical relationship among institutional rules, market environment, and operational obstacles. This study also analyzes the core causes of each problem one by one; these causes include incomplete supporting systems for multimodal transport, insufficient development of local leading logistics enterprises, non-uniform data standards, slow intelligent upgrading of warehousing equipment, and mismatching problems in the school-enterprise talent training mode. In view of these various development constraints, this paper puts forward hierarchical and practical optimization strategies; combining intelligent logistics theories and advanced global airport construction experience, the countermeasures mainly involve five key aspects, which are transportation coordination, enterprise training, digital platform construction, warehousing facility upgrading, and talent supply guarantee.

2. Development Status of Cross-border E-commerce Logistics in Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone

2.1 Infrastructure and Multimodal Network Configuration

Leveraging its strategic position along the Air Silk Road and central China's logistics corridor, the Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone (ZAEZ) has progressively con-

structed an aviation-centric, multimodally integrated logistics system for cross-border e-commerce operations. After years of construction, Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone has established a basic cross-border e-commerce logistics system centered on air transportation and coordinated with multiple modes of transportation. As the core node of this system, Zhengzhou Xincheng International Airport (CGO) operates a network of over 70 scheduled international all-cargo routes, providing direct air linkages to major consumer markets across Europe, North America, and East Asia. The regular operation of the Air Silk Road and China-Europe freight trains has formed the basic framework of air-rail-road multimodal transportation. This air-rail-road synergy enables ZAEZ to mitigate the inherent disadvantage of inland geography by compressing transit times to coastal ports and extending its logistics reach deep into Eurasian hinterlands. A number of bonded warehousing parks have been deployed in this region, and convenient measures such as 7×24-hour reserved customs clearance have been implemented. Leading platforms, including Tmall Global and JD International, have settled down and operated locally, building an integrated service chain covering warehousing, trunk transportation, customs clearance, and distribution.

2.2 Cross-border E-commerce Cargo Performance (2023–2025)

Quantitative indicators further corroborate this infrastructural expansion. As summarized in Table 1, the declared value of cross-border e-commerce cargo handled within ZAEZ exhibits a robust upward trajectory. According to Table 1, the cross-border e-commerce cargo volume value in the port area increased steadily and substantially from 2023 to 2025, with the annual import and export cargo value surpassing 34.7 billion yuan in 2025. Nevertheless, compared with top-level comprehensive cross-border e-commerce pilot zones in China, there is still a prominent gap in the comprehensive logistics carrying capacity and professional service level of the airport zone.

Table 1. Cross-border E-commerce Cargo Value of Zhengzhou Airport (2023–2025)

Year	Cross-border E-commerce Cargo Value (Billion RMB)	Year-on-Year Growth Rate
2023	16.10	14.43%
2024	25.88	55.80%
2025	34.78	53.28%

3. Structural Deficiencies of the Cross-border E-commerce Logistics System

Despite the continuous progress of Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone in infrastructure construction and route layout scale, the cross-border e-commerce logistics system of the region still has many hidden structural problems in micro-operation links; these intertwined problems form obvious development bottlenecks, and they restrict the overall upgrading of regional cross-border trade capacity.

3.1 Fragmented Multimodal Transport Coordination and Limited Systemic Synergy

Although Zhengzhou possesses an integrated “air–rail–road” physical infrastructure, the absence of soft coordination mechanisms undermines synergies, creating noticeable breaks in the logistics chain.

The cross-border e-commerce cargo transshipment work among air, rail, and road transportation modes still lacks unified operating specifications; different transportation channels cannot recognize each other’s security inspection results, so goods need repeated inspection and declaration procedures during transshipment, and this reduces the operating efficiency of the front-end and terminal links of logistics. In addition, the unified standard construction of cargo loading units moves forward slowly; the conversion work between common containers and aviation pallets mostly depends on manual operation, and this situation will extend the staying time of goods at the port, which will also raise the probability of cargo damage and increase the overall operating costs of logistics services.

Poor connection between different transport ways will affect local goods delivery and distribution work, especially when business volume reaches its peak period; plenty of goods tend to pile up in airport stations, railway stops, and bonded trade areas, and this condition cuts down the whole goods passing speed of local ports. Unstable goods handling time will lower the steady running level of the air trade passage, and it also makes many cross-border trading enterprises lose trust in the local logistics service level.

3.2 Constrained International Competitiveness of Local Logistics Service Providers

Capacity gaps among logistics service providers are key constraints on the zone’s internationalization, with local enterprises playing limited roles in global supply chains. Global large express enterprises, including DHL and FedEx, occupy most of the air cargo space and container resources in international main transportation routes; local logistics enterprises have insufficient funds and lack stable long-term transportation capacity, so they often face the

problem of idle cargo with no available transport space in peak shopping seasons like Black Friday and Christmas. These enterprises have to buy transportation resources at higher prices through the secondary market, and this situation greatly compresses their profit space.

The core competitiveness of cross-border e-commerce logistics is reflected in the full control of the whole supply chain; most small and medium-sized logistics enterprises in the airport zone only complete domestic logistics work, and they need to cooperate with overseas agents to finish foreign customs clearance, warehousing, and terminal distribution services. This incomplete logistics operation mode makes enterprises fail to effectively control the overseas terminal links of the supply chain; it will reduce the overall logistics service quality, and also make it harder for enterprises to adjust operation strategies and avoid risks when destination countries adjust tariff policies and customs clearance rules.

3.3 Persistent Information Asymmetry and Data Silos Across Stakeholders

Inefficient information flows constitute invisible barriers to logistics efficiency, with fragmented data across stakeholders.

Lack of End-to-End Supply Chain Visibility: Cross-border logistics business involves many different service subjects, including e-commerce platforms, customs service agencies, warehousing companies, airline companies, and overseas logistics carriers; there are no unified data exchange standards and data interfaces among these platforms, so information delivery mostly depends on traditional ways such as emails and phone communication. E-commerce enterprises are unable to acquire real-time and accurate cargo position and status information; this slows down the reply speed for customer inquiries, and it brings down the overall shopping experience of consumers. At the same time, logistics service providers cannot accurately predict cargo volume to arrange transportation resources reasonably; this causes excess resource reserve during business peaks and idle resources in off-seasons, forming an unbalanced state between market supply and demand.

Delayed Exception Management Due to Information Frictions: Various abnormal situations may appear in logistics operations, such as flight delays, customs spot checks, and delivery address errors; the lack of effective information sharing channels makes it hard to find out these problems in time and deliver relevant information to responsible personnel. The lagging processing of abnormal events will extend the overall handling cycle of logistics problems; it will increase cargo detention costs and business breach risks, and it will also reduce the flexible adjustment ability of the whole logistics system.

3.4 Lagging Intelligent Upgrading and Structural Imbalances in Warehousing Infrastructure

Functional limitations in warehousing infrastructure fail to meet the evolving needs of cross-border e-commerce.

Low Penetration of Automation in Domestic Bonded Warehouses: Cross-border e-commerce orders now show fragmented and high-frequency characteristics; the traditional warehousing mode of large-scale batch entry and exit can no longer adapt to current market demands. Most warehouse facilities in the airport zone still adopt ordinary flat warehouse modes; the application rate of automated access equipment, intelligent sorting equipment, and warehouse management systems is relatively low. Most warehouse work relies on manual operation; this leads to low goods picking efficiency and frequent operational errors, and these problems will become more serious during large-scale promotional activities.

Underdeveloped Strategic Deployment of Overseas Warehouses: The construction of overseas warehouses in the region has more obvious shortcomings compared with domestic warehouse construction; overseas warehouse projects require large investment funds and take a long time to recover costs, so most local small and medium-sized enterprises are unwilling to carry out independent construction. Enterprises in the zone have only a small number of overseas warehouse layouts in core markets such as Europe and North America; they mostly choose to rent third-party warehouse resources [9]. The absence of self-controlled overseas warehouses limits the development of various value-added services, including goods return processing and secondary stocking, and it restricts the further value improvement of the whole supply chain.

3.5 Structural Mismatch in Talent Supply and Demand

Talent shortages represent the deepest bottleneck to logistics system upgrading, manifesting as structural supply-demand mismatches.

Misalignment Between Academic Curricula and Industry Requirements: Although local universities offer logistics-related programs, curricula emphasize traditional theories, lacking practical training in cross-border e-commerce platform operations, international customs brokerage, and overseas warehouse management [10]. The absence of practical training platforms hinders graduates' rapid adaptation to frontline work, forcing enterprises to incur substantial retraining costs.

High-end interdisciplinary talents are hard to attract and retain in the local area; Zhengzhou lags far behind first-tier coastal cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, in many aspects, such as salary level, industrial gathering scale, and urban living conditions.

These regional gaps cause the airport zone to face a serious talent shortage in the cross-border e-commerce logistics industry; the region is particularly short of compound talents who have foreign language ability, master international trade rules, and possess basic big data analysis skills. The lack of professional and high-level management talents has directly constrained the innovative development ability and overall operation efficiency of local logistics enterprises.

4. Optimization Pathways for the Cross-border E-commerce Logistics System

In view of the above problems, Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone needs to start from top-level design, and systematically solve the structural dilemmas restricting logistics development through mechanism innovation, main body cultivation, technological empowerment, and ecological construction.

4.1 Enhancing Multimodal Transport Coordination and Network Resilience

Institutionalizing Mutual Recognition of Customs Inspections and Standardized Operational Protocols: Cooperate with civil aviation, railway, and customs authorities to take the lead in implementing the customs clearance mode of "one inspection, universal mutual recognition" within the airport zone, so as to avoid repeated cargo handling and inspection. Accelerate the standardized upgrading of transport units, popularize the application of standard pallets (1200mm×1000mm) and turnover boxes, promote the compatibility of loading equipment for highway, railway, and air transportation, and realize connected transportation without container replacement or cargo unpacking.

Optimizing Hub-and-Spoke Collection and Distribution Networks via Intelligent Scheduling: Improve the construction of special connecting lines connecting airports, railway ports, and bonded logistics centers (Type B), and launch high-frequency air-rail express lines and highway-rail combined transport shuttle buses. Adopt big data algorithms to optimize container truck scheduling routes, reduce vehicle waiting time and empty driving rate in the airport zone, and enhance the throughput efficiency and emergency response capacity of hub nodes.

4.2 Fostering Competitive Local Logistics Enterprises and Global Network Control

Establishing Cross-border Logistics Alliances and Charter Capacity Consortia: Encourage leading local logistics enterprises to expand their scale through mergers, restructuring, and strategic alliances. Support enterprises to sign long-term charter agreements with airlines or jointly build

all-cargo aircraft consortia to lock in basic transport capacity, and strengthen their control and bargaining power over international routes during peak seasons.

Developing Strategically Located Proprietary Overseas Warehouse Networks: Set up special development funds to guide local enterprises to deploy public overseas warehouses in core European and American markets and RCEP member states. Support enterprises to expand overseas warehouse functions from simple warehousing and distribution to value-added services such as exhibition and trading, after-sales maintenance, and financial factoring, and form a two-way radiation pattern of “goods consolidation in Zhengzhou plus distribution via overseas warehouses”.

4.3 Constructing an Integrated Data Ecosystem for Intelligent Logistics

Upgrading the Single Window Platform with Blockchain-enabled Traceability: Rely on Henan Electronic Port to build a cross-border e-commerce big data center in Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone. Formulate unified data interface standards, break data barriers among e-commerce, logistics, payment, and customs clearance links, and realize full-link information tracking with one unified document. Apply blockchain technology to ensure data immutability and traceability, and strengthen mutual trust among all transaction participants.

Deploying AI-driven Predictive Analytics for Capacity Allocation and Risk Early Warning: Enterprises can adopt artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies; these tools can analyze historical logistics data and changing market trends to predict cargo volume and intelligent warehouse arrangement work. The research can support the development of intelligent scheduling systems; the system can match transportation capacity and cargo resources in real time, and it can also optimize goods distribution paths and reduce the empty running rate of transport vehicles. This digital method changes the traditional passive logistics processing mode; it helps the supply chain form an active early warning mechanism to cope with various operational risks.

4.4 Advancing Intelligent Warehousing and Inventory Optimization

Accelerating Automation Retrofits and Deployment of AS/RS Technologies: Relevant departments can roll out supportive preferential policies; these policies can encourage local enterprises to upgrade and renovate their traditional warehouse facilities. Enterprises can actively introduce various intelligent logistics devices, including automatic handling vehicles, high-speed sorting equipment, and mechanical operation arms; they can also apply mature warehouse management systems and enterprise resource planning systems in daily operation. These measures can

realize automatic operation of all warehouse links, covering goods warehousing, storage, order picking, packaging, and outbound delivery; they can effectively reduce manual labor investment and lower the error rate of manual operation.

Implementing Dynamic Inventory Zoning and Proximity-based Slotting Optimization: Enterprises can adopt the ABC classification management mode for inventory goods; this mode divides commodities according to product characteristics and market sales volume. Hot-selling goods with fast turnover can be placed in the core warehouse areas of the airport zone; unsalable commodities and goods return processing stations can be arranged in the surrounding regional warehouses. This reasonable spatial layout can shorten the walking distance for goods picking; it can also improve the utilization rate of warehouse space and the working efficiency of staff.

4.5 Institutionalizing Talent Recruitment and Industry-Academia Integration

Establishing Industry-Embedded Curricula and Immersive Apprenticeship Programs: Local universities in Zhengzhou can cooperate with leading logistics enterprises to build specialized colleges for cross-border e-commerce; schools can set up targeted training courses and carry out modern apprenticeship pilot projects. Professional enterprise instructors can take part in daily teaching work; schools can also build practical training venues on campus. Actual business projects from enterprises can be integrated into university courses; this way, the talent training mode can better match the real job demands of logistics enterprises.

Introducing Tiered Incentive Packages and Enhancing Urban Livability Amenities: Local authorities can formulate more competitive talent incentive policies; the government can provide housing subsidies, research start-up funds, and tax benefits for high-end international logistics talents and senior customs practitioners. The local talent green card policy can be fully implemented; it can solve practical problems for talents in children’s education and medical security, and it can build a complete development environment to attract, retain, and make full use of professional logistics talents.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

Based on the current operation of cross-border e-commerce logistics in Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone, this paper identifies five major development difficulties, namely inefficient connection of air-rail-road multimodal transport, weak overseas competitiveness of local logistics

enterprises, fragmented data among industrial participants, slow intelligent construction of bonded and overseas warehouses, and insufficient reserve of interdisciplinary cross-border logistics talents. These intertwined problems lead to repeated cargo inspections, tight international shipping space, inaccessible real-time logistics tracking information, high warehousing labor costs, and talent recruitment difficulties, which hinder the upgrading of regional cross-border trade. In light of the characteristics of the inland aviation hub, this paper abandons the conventional development mode of coastal pilot zones and puts forward five localized optimization measures. Firstly, implement mutual recognition of safety inspection results across different transport modes and improve cargo distribution supporting facilities. Secondly, integrate local logistics enterprises to form industrial alliances and independently arrange overseas warehouse networks. Thirdly, establish a unified data sharing platform for cross-border e-commerce. Fourthly, upgrade automatic warehousing equipment and implement zoned commodity management. Fifthly, deepen targeted talent training through university-enterprise cooperation and introduce high-end logistics talents via supportive policies.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study has practical, industrial, and social values, and fills the research gap that existing studies lack in-depth micro-level research on logistics development of inland airports. The proposed strategies can help local logistics and e-commerce enterprises reduce operating costs, strengthen overseas supply chain control, and improve overall service quality. The ideas on multimodal transport coordination and smart logistics construction can provide references for the airport zone to build an inland cross-border logistics hub relying on the Air Silk Road. The improvement of the logistics system can boost foreign trade growth, gather related industries, promote the integration of inland areas into global industrial chains, and narrow the industrial development gap between coastal and inland regions.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has certain limitations. The research is completed only on the basis of secondary data, including industrial reports and policy documents, without collecting first-hand original data through questionnaires and field interviews. It lacks practical feedback from merchants, logistics practitioners, and customs staff, and the actual application effects of some countermeasures have not been verified through field practice. In future research, scholars can conduct field surveys on enterprises and distribute

questionnaires to collect primary operational data. Comprehensive analysis combined with public data can enrich research arguments and make research conclusions more consistent with the actual industrial situation.

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