

RCEP Empowers High-Quality Development of China's Foreign Trade: Mechanisms and Countermeasures

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of profound adjustments in the global economic landscape and a rising tide of anti-globalization, the entry into force of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) presents a historic opportunity for China's high-quality development of foreign trade. This paper systematically explores the mechanisms and policy responses through which RCEP empowers China's high-quality trade growth. The study shows that RCEP functions through five interrelated and progressively reinforcing mechanisms—cost reduction, division enhancement, structure optimization, innovation strengthening, and security safeguarding. Tariff concessions and cumulative rules of origin directly lower trade costs; free flow of factors deepens regional industrial specialization and value chain upgrading; the unified market and high-standard rules guide trade structure toward high-tech and green orientation; intellectual property and e-commerce provisions incentivize innovation and drive institutional opening; diversified market access and supply chain coordination enhance resilience against risks. Based on these findings, the paper proposes a three-tiered policy framework: governments should improve top-level design, strengthen rule dissemination and internationalize the business environment; industry associations ought to build information platforms, promote joint standard setting, and ensure self-discipline and coordination; enterprises must proactively optimize supply chain layouts, increase R&D investment, and diversify markets. Through synergy of mechanisms and collaboration among stakeholders, RCEP is poised to become a key institutional lever for China's transformation from a large trading nation to a trading power, offering a practical pathway for building a new paradigm of open economy.

Keywords

RCEP; High-quality Development of Foreign Trade; Mechanism; Countermeasure.

1. Introduction

At present, the global economic landscape is undergoing profound and complex adjustments. On the one hand, in recent years, anti-globalization sentiment has continued to ferment, while unilateralism and protectionism have accelerated their spread worldwide [1]. Exemplified by the China–U.S. trade friction, frequent global trade disputes have emerged, with practices such as technological blockades and industrial “decoupling and severance of supply chains” becoming increasingly common. These developments have severely disrupted the multilateral rule-based global trading order, weakening the negotiating and dispute settlement functions of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This confluence of a “retreat of rules” and a “deficit of trust” has markedly diminished the momentum for global economic growth, rendering uncertainty and instability the new normal. On the other hand, as a response to and counterbalance against the backlash against globalization, regional economic integration has

advanced with unprecedented depth and breadth. High-standard free trade agreements (FTAs), represented by the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), have entered into force and been implemented successively. Moving beyond traditional tariff concessions, these agreements shift the focus of rule-making to “behind-the-border” issues such as trade in services, investment facilitation, intellectual property rights, the digital economy, state-owned enterprises, environmental protection, and labor standards, thereby striving to construct comprehensive and high-level frameworks for institutional openness. In this round of rule competition, the Asia–Pacific region—as the world’s most dynamic and growth-potential economic bloc—occupies a pivotal position. However, for a long time, the region has lacked a unified FTA capable of integrating the East Asian production network with the resource markets of Australia and New Zealand while encompassing all major economies. The resulting fragmentation of regional economic cooperation has constrained optimal resource allocation and the full realization of latent potential. On January 1, 2022, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) officially came into effect, establishing the world’s largest free trade area in terms of population, the most substantial in economic and trade volume, and distinguished by its most diverse membership structure and the broadest development prospects. Through unified and flexible cumulative rules of origin, the RCEP agreement has substantially reduced the institutional costs associated with intra-regional goods flows, vigorously promoted intermediate and final goods trade within the region, and facilitated the formation of closer and more resilient regional industrial and supply chain networks [2]. The entry into force of RCEP provides China with a historic opportunity and a critical platform to advance the high-quality development of its foreign trade, deepen regional industrial and supply chain cooperation, optimize the allocation of production factors and resources within the region, leverage openness to drive domestic reform and institutional innovation, and ultimately transform foreign trade from “quantitative accumulation” to “qualitative leap.” Nevertheless, the full realization of RCEP dividends is not automatic. The RCEP regulatory system is complex, and its enabling effect on high-quality trade development does not arise from simple linear aggregation; rather, it operates through a series of interrelated and progressively layered mechanisms. Therefore, to effectively translate the institutional advantages of RCEP into a key driver of high-quality development in China’s foreign trade, there is an urgent need to systematically analyze the specific mechanisms through which RCEP empowers such development, and on that basis, to put forward forward-looking, targeted, and actionable policy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on High-Quality Development of China’s Foreign Trade

2.1.1. Connotation and Characteristics of High-Quality Development of Foreign Trade

High-quality development of foreign trade constitutes a core proposition in the upgrading of China’s open economy, and its connotation and characteristics have been continuously enriched with deepening practice [3]. At the level of connotation, scholars generally define it as a “synergistic leap in scale, structure, efficiency, security, and sustainability” [4–6]: emphasizing steady growth in total trade volume, pursuing quality transformation through innovation-driven development and structural optimization; requiring a balance between development and security, enhancing the resilience of industrial and supply chains, and promoting inclusive growth oriented toward green and low-carbon development. In terms of characteristics, existing studies have distilled five dimensions [5, 7–9]: (i) innovativeness - driven by new business forms such as digital trade and cross-border e-commerce, breaking through the limitations of traditional factor-driven models; (ii) coordination - manifested in the dynamic

equilibrium between trade in goods and services, inbound and outbound investment, and regional distribution; (iii) sustainability - incorporating environmental costs into trade accounting and promoting green standards and circular economy models; (iv) security - reducing risks from external shocks through diversified market deployment and technological self-reliance; and (v) inclusiveness - leveraging trade value-added effects to integrate small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) into global value chains and ensure the equitable sharing of developmental benefits.

2.1.2. Issues, Measurement, and Influencing Factors in High-Quality Development of China's Foreign Trade

Regarding practical issues, extant research has consistently identified prominent structural contradictions [10–12]: exports remain dominated by mid- and low-end processing and manufacturing, with a relatively low share of high-tech and high-value-added products; trade in services lags behind and exhibits weak competitiveness, and China lacks discourse power in digital trade rulemaking; regional development is imbalanced, with significant disparities in foreign trade quality between the eastern coastal areas and the central and western regions; certain industries face risks such as “bottleneck” technologies and dependence on imported key components, highlighting the urgent need to enhance the resilience of industrial and supply chains. In terms of quantitative methods, measurement systems have evolved from reliance on single indicators to comprehensive frameworks: early studies often used single indices such as the trade competitiveness index and revealed comparative advantage index, whereas recent work has gradually constructed integrated evaluation systems covering dimensions of innovation, structure, efficiency, security, and sustainability, applying weighting and assessment techniques such as entropy method, principal component analysis, and TOPSIS model [11, 13–14]. Regarding driving mechanisms, scholars have identified multi-level drivers and constraints, including institutional openness [15], international cooperation in the digital economy [16], digital transformation [17–18], industrial intelligence [19], new quality productive forces [20–21], and enterprise innovation capability [22].

2.2. Main Content of RCEP and Its Impact on China's Foreign Trade

2.2.1. Main Content of RCEP

The RCEP was signed by the ten ASEAN member states together with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. As the world's largest free trade agreement, its content centers on “high-level openness, rule harmonization, and inclusive development,” establishing a multidimensional institutional framework covering trade in goods, trade in services, investment, and rules and enforcement mechanisms [23–24]. With the objectives of being modern, comprehensive, high-quality, and mutually beneficial, the RCEP agreement features openness, inclusiveness, gradualism, and flexibility [2]; it adheres to the fundamental principles of high-level openness while accommodating the diversity and heterogeneity among member countries [25].

2.2.2. Research on the Impact of RCEP on China's Foreign Trade

Scholarly research on the impact of RCEP on China's foreign trade can be categorized into three aspects: current situation analysis, mechanism exploration, and policy recommendations. Current situation studies are mainly divided into three types: (i) analysis of trade status, trade structure, and degrees of trade competition and complementarity between China and RCEP members [26]; (ii) examination of the trade and welfare effects of RCEP [27–32]; and (iii) discussion of opportunities and challenges for RCEP in advancing China's foreign trade development [33]. In terms of mechanisms, emphasis has been placed on the impact of RCEP tariff reductions. Among them, Qin Ruobing and Ma Hong (2022) explored the effects of RCEP tariff cuts on the global trade pattern and member countries' welfare levels [28]. Peng Shuijun

and Wu Lamei (2022) proposed that reductions in tariffs and other institutional transaction costs provide strong momentum for intra-regional trade creation and promote optimal allocation of various factors within the region [27]. Ma Tao and Xu Xiujun (2021) argued that RCEP lowers transaction and institutional costs, creates a high-quality business environment, and upgrades regional production networks [33]. Furthermore, RCEP facilitates the formation of a unified regional market, amplifies China's comparative advantages, and elevates the level of its opening up [26]. In terms of policy recommendations, Ma Tao and Xu Xiujun (2021) suggested that China should, under the guidance of a four-in-one reconstruction strategy encompassing "strategy, technology, market, and rules," drive the RCEP regional value chain toward high-standard, high-quality tiers such as industrial innovation chains and data value chains [33]. Peng Shuijun and Wu Lamei (2022) proposed that Chinese manufacturing enterprises should, on the one hand, actively familiarize themselves with RCEP rules to achieve optimal allocation of intra-regional factor resources, and on the other hand, adapt to a more open and competitive international environment following RCEP's entry into force by extending efforts into high-end segments such as R&D, design, and brand cultivation in manufacturing [27]. Qin Ruobing and Ma Hong (2022) put forward four recommendations: (i) make full use of RCEP tariff reductions on goods trade and the regional cumulative rules of origin to optimize supply chain layouts; (ii) strengthen trilateral cooperation among China, Japan, and South Korea in electronic communication technologies; (iii) increase R&D investment in key technology fields; and (iv) participate in negotiations on deep free trade agreements [28].

2.3. Brief Commentary on Existing Studies

Existing research has made important progress in examining the relationship between RCEP and the high-quality development of China's foreign trade, yet notable gaps remain. First, most studies focus on macro-level trade effect analyses and lack systematic deconstruction of the specific mechanisms through which RCEP empowers development, particularly the micro-level transmission pathways linking "institutions-enterprises-industries." Second, existing work tends to emphasize static effect evaluations and pays insufficient attention to the interactive relationship between the dynamic evolution of RCEP rules and the upgrading of regional value chains, failing to fully reveal the intrinsic logic by which RCEP promotes qualitative transformation through "rule competition-innovation incentives-structural optimization." Moreover, the literature often highlights opportunities while downplaying challenges, offering inadequate analysis of practical issues such as rising compliance costs for enterprises and risks of industrial chain restructuring during RCEP implementation, thus limiting the targeting of policy recommendations. These deficiencies hinder existing research from adequately answering the core question of "how RCEP can be transformed into a driving force for high-quality development of foreign trade." There is therefore an urgent need for full-chain deepening from mechanism analysis to policy practice, which also provides a theoretical entry point for this study to systematically construct a mechanism of "cost reduction-promotion of division of labor-structural optimization-strengthening innovation-ensuring security," as well as to develop a hierarchical policy framework based on a progressive "macro-meso-micro" logical system.

3. Mechanisms Through Which RCEP Empowers High-Quality Development of China's Foreign Trade

3.1. Mechanisms for Reducing Trade Costs and Enhancing Trade Facilitation

3.1.1. Progressive Tariff Reductions and Rule Coordination Directly Lower Cross-Border Transaction Cost

RCEP significantly reduces enterprises' cross-border transaction costs through progressive tariff concession commitments and coordinated reductions of non-tariff barriers. On the tariff front, member states phase out tariffs according to product sensitivity, creating a predictable cost-reduction pathway that directly lowers final product prices and intermediate input procurement expenses. On the non-tariff front, the agreement standardizes customs procedures, inspection and quarantine measures, and conformity assessment procedures, thereby reducing redundant procedures and administrative delays caused by regulatory discrepancies. Operating via the dual pathways of "direct price reduction" and "reduction of institutional frictions," this mechanism enables firms to attain a more favorable cost structure and enhanced price competitiveness in the regional market, laying the foundation for high-quality trade development.

3.1.2. Cumulative Rules of Origin Reshape Geographical Value Chain Layouts and Reduce Institutional Costs of Intermediate Goods

The regional cumulative rules introduced by RCEP fundamentally alter the logic of origin determination by allowing the accumulation of value added generated in any member country, making it easier to meet preferential tariff thresholds. This mechanism prompts firms to reorganize production networks from a regional perspective: enterprises can flexibly allocate different production stages to member countries offering the lowest costs or optimal technologies without fearing loss of tariff preferences due to sourcing inputs from non-parties. For example, a product assembled in China using core components from Japan and South Korea and primary materials from ASEAN may still qualify as RCEP originating. This not only reduces compliance costs associated with meeting origin rules but also incentivizes firms to build cross-border "multi-node" supply chain systems, achieving efficiency gains through optimal allocation of regional factors.

3.1.3. Trade Facilitation Measures Enhance End-to-End Operational Efficiency Through Procedural Simplification and Digitalization

RCEP establishes efficient and transparent trade processes by unifying and simplifying customs procedures, promoting paperless trade, and implementing mutual recognition of AEO (Authorized Economic Operator) status. Institutionally, it requires member states to commit to shortening clearance times, streamlining import and export formalities, and establishing electronic systems for data sharing. For instance, a unified electronic certificate of origin system enables real-time issuance and verification, substantially compressing documentation preparation time; AEO mutual recognition allows certified high-quality enterprises to benefit from expedited clearance. By reducing physical detention at ports and administrative waiting times, these measures lower firms' time costs and exposure to uncertainty, especially improving responsiveness in time-sensitive supply chains, thereby shifting trade activities from a scale-focused approach to one emphasizing efficiency and reliability.

3.2. Mechanisms for Deepening Regional Industrial Division of Labor and Upgrading Value Chains

3.2.1. Freer Factor Mobility Promotes Reallocation of Resources Based on Comparative Advantage

Through provisions easing investment restrictions, facilitating movement of business personnel, and strengthening intellectual property protection, RCEP fosters freer cross-border flow of capital, technology, talent, and other production factors. This mechanism removes institutional barriers to transnational factor allocation, enabling firms to locate R&D, design, manufacturing, and assembly activities in countries with the greatest cost or technological advantages according to national endowment differences. For example, while retaining domestic R&D and complex manufacturing, Chinese enterprises can relocate labor-intensive processes to ASEAN countries. Such rule-based optimal allocation of factors drives production activities toward higher value-added segments, creating space for Chinese firms to concentrate on technological innovation and brand building.

3.2.2. Industrial Complementarity and Specialized Division of Labor Evolve in Depth Through Rule Incentives

Differentiated tariff concession schedules and origin rules interact with member countries' inherent comparative advantages, reinforcing regional industrial complementarity. This mechanism forms a positive feedback loop: tariff preferences reduce intermediate goods trade costs, making transnational sourcing more attractive, while cumulative origin rules encourage multistage specialized division of labor within the region to ensure final products enjoy preferential treatment. The result is tightly knit vertical specialization networks in specific industries, exemplified by the "Japan–South Korea high-end materials → China complex integrated manufacturing → ASEAN final assembly" model. Within this process, Chinese enterprises gradually evolve from vertically integrated producers to specialized entities controlling key technologies and core segments in global value chains.

3.2.3. Deep Integration into Regional Value Chains Provides a Platform for Functional Upgrading

The unified large market and stable rule environment established by RCEP offer Chinese enterprises a platform to integrate resources, learn iteratively, and expand at scale across the region. Through deep participation in regional division of labor, firms gain access to more advanced technologies and management knowledge, while benefiting from economies of scale that reduce innovation costs. More importantly, involvement in adapting to and shaping RCEP rules presents Chinese enterprises with opportunities to transform their technologies or business models into regional standards, enabling a transition from passive implementers to active participants and even value leaders in global value chains.

3.3. Mechanisms for Expanding Market Access and Optimizing Trade Structure

3.3.1. Unified Market Access Diversifies Risk and Creates New Demand

By uniting 15 countries at varying stages of economic development into a single market, RCEP greatly expands the boundary of market access for Chinese goods. This mechanism implies not merely geographic expansion but also reduced marginal costs for developing diversified markets, thanks to unified preferential tariffs and regulations. Enterprises can more readily redirect exports from traditional markets to faster-growing emerging regional markets, inherently enhancing overall trade resilience through market structure diversification. Simultaneously, penetration into markets at different development stages encourages firms to offer more graduated product lines, catering to broader consumer demand.

3.3.2. Linkage Between Services Trade and Investment Liberalization Spawns Integrated “Goods + Services” Trade Models

RCEP advances services sector liberalization via negative list approaches and coordinates this with investment liberalization and facilitated movement of natural persons. This mechanism breaks traditional boundaries between trade in goods and trade in services. For instance, Chinese manufacturing investment in the region directly drives related producer service exports; digital service providers can leverage RCEP rules to offer cross-border payment and supply chain management solutions supporting goods trade. This linkage model—where investment drives service exports and services enhance goods value—shifts the trade structure from a goods-only orientation toward integrated, mutually reinforcing development of goods and services.

3.3.3. High-Standard Rules Guide Trade Structure Toward High-Tech and Green Orientation

RCEP incorporates chapters on intellectual property, e-commerce, environment, and other modern trade rules. These provisions set higher market access standards while indicating directions for industrial development. For example, robust IP protection incentive firms to increase R&D investment and engage in high-tech product trade; environmental provisions and green product tariff preferences channel resources toward low-carbon and eco-friendly industries. Through the dual forces of “rules shaping market preferences” and “access incentives for structural adjustment,” this mechanism prompts firms to proactively optimize export product mixes toward greater shares of high-tech, high-value-added, and green low-carbon products, aligning with high-quality development imperatives.

3.4. Mechanisms for Promoting Rule and Standard Alignment and Innovation Incentives

3.4.1. Strengthened Intellectual Property Protection Encourages Innovation Through Stable Expectations

RCEP establishes a comprehensive, high-standard IP protection framework covering enforcement, cooperation, transparency, and more. The core of this mechanism lies in providing institutionalized strong protection to ensure innovators obtain stable and predictable returns during commercialization. Such stability lowers innovation risk for firms, especially technology-intensive ones, thereby encouraging greater allocation of resources to R&D. Harmonized and mutually recognized IP rules across the region also simplify procedures for technology deployment and rights protection in multiple markets, enabling innovation activities to target regional or even global markets more effectively.

3.4.2. New Rules on E-Commerce Provide Institutional Foundation and Testing Space for Trade Model Innovation

For the first time at the Asia–Pacific regional level, RCEP adopts comprehensive e-commerce rules addressing cross-border data flows, electronic signatures, consumer protection, and other key areas. The significance of this mechanism is that it furnishes emerging formats such as digital trade with clear, consistent, and secure regulatory conditions. Enterprises can design and deploy cross-border digital business models under a unified rule framework without confronting highly fragmented regulatory requirements across countries. Regulatory coherence substantially lowers compliance costs and uncertainties in regionalizing business models, paving the way for service and model innovation in trade.

3.4.3. Rule Alignment Pressures Translate Into Intrinsic Drivers for Domestic Business Environment Optimization

To fulfill RCEP’s high-standard commitments, China must align its domestic laws, regulations, and administrative systems with internationally advanced rules, prompting proactive

adjustments and reforms. This “external rule pressure” mechanism triggers adaptive domestic institutional changes, such as streamlining administrative approvals, enhancing regulatory transparency, and strengthening fair competition reviews. Continuous improvement of the domestic business environment reduces institutional transaction costs for all market entities, unleashing market vitality and creativity. Such externally driven internal reforms inject enduring institutional dividends into the long-term high-quality development of China’s foreign trade.

3.5. Mechanisms for Enhancing Trade Security and Supply Chain Resilience

3.5.1. Diversified Market Layout Under RCEP Effectively Disperses Trade Risks from External Demand Fluctuations

The unified regional market created by RCEP offers numerous substitutable and fast-growing destinations for Chinese exports. By embodying the logic of “not putting all eggs in one basket,” this mechanism enhances the overall stability of China’s foreign trade system. When traditional markets such as Europe and the United States experience demand contractions due to economic cycles or policy shifts, demand from other regional markets can serve as a hedge and buffer. Such risk dispersion renders China’s trade growth base more robust and less vulnerable to sharp shocks from a single external market.

3.5.2. Close Cooperation in Regional Industrial and Supply Chains Enhances Coordinated Recovery Capacity Against Sudden Shocks

Trade facilitation and investment cooperation under the RCEP framework promote information connectivity and coordinated capacity layout within regional supply chains. This mechanism becomes effective when facing external disruptions: based on close economic ties and coordination mechanisms, member countries can more swiftly share information about supply chain interruptions and activate alternative production or logistics arrangements. Firms can also leverage diversified production bases and supplier networks within the region to rapidly switch and replenish, maintaining basic supply chain operations. Such redundancy designs and rapid-response capabilities rooted in regional cooperation significantly enhance overall supply chain resilience.

3.5.3. Improved Dispute Settlement Mechanism Provides Institutional Safeguards for Stable Trade Development

RCEP establishes a dedicated dispute settlement mechanism, offering clear and actionable resolution pathways for trade frictions among member states. The value of this mechanism lies in its “rule-based” and “de-politicized” nature. When trade disputes arise, parties may resort to established legal procedures rather than political pressure, making the process and outcomes more predictable. A predictable trade environment itself constitutes an important “security asset,” reducing policy uncertainty for firms engaged in long-term trade and investment decisions, thereby providing foundational institutional assurance for the stable development of high-quality trade.

4. Policy Recommendations for RCEP to Empower High-Quality Development of China’s Foreign Trade

4.1. Improving Top-Level Institutional Design and Public Service Systems to Consolidate the Foundations for RCEP Empowerment

4.1.1. Deepen RCEP Rule Research and Outreach Training to Enhance Firms’ Understanding and Utilization Capabilities

A cross-departmental and cross-industry mechanism for RCEP rule research and promotion should be established. Jointly compiled by university think tanks, chambers of commerce,

industry associations, and government agencies, industry- and sector-specific rule interpretation manuals and case collections should be developed, with systematic training provided on key provisions such as tariff concessions, cumulative rules of origin, trade facilitation, and investment negative lists. Through combined online and offline channels, tiered and targeted briefings should be delivered to SMEs, local commerce authorities, and industrial parks to raise awareness and practical application capacity regarding preferential policies. Local governments are encouraged to set up RCEP service centers to offer “one-stop” consultation and guidance, helping firms master critical procedures such as certificate of origin applications and compliant declarations, thereby transforming institutional dividends into tangible cost advantages and market opportunities and motivating firms to actively participate in regional industrial chain restructuring.

4.1.2. Align with International High-Standard Rules to Advance Domestic Institutional Innovation and Continuously Optimize a Market-Oriented, Law-Based, and Internationalized Business Environment

Using RCEP’s high-standard rules as a reference, accelerate institutional openness in trade regulation, market access, intellectual property protection, and e-commerce. Further simplify and digitize customs procedures, improve AEO mutual recognition and pre-arrival ruling systems, and enhance trade facilitation; fully implement negative list management in investment, reducing restrictions on equity ratios and business scope; strengthen end-to-end intellectual property protection and international cooperation, and improve transparency in judicial and administrative enforcement. Simultaneously advance fair competition review, commercial system reform, and government data sharing to reduce firms’ institutional transaction costs. Institutional innovation should create a stable, transparent, and predictable institutional environment, ensuring effective alignment between the domestic business environment and the RCEP rule system, thereby providing solid support for firms to deepen their presence in regional markets.

4.1.3. Focus on High-End, Green, and Intelligent Development to Intensify Policy Support for Key Industries and Weak Links, Steering Trade Structure Upgrade

In line with changing regional demand under RCEP and the orientation of high-standard rules, formulate targeted industrial support policies. For advantageous sectors such as high-tech equipment, new energy, new materials, and energy-saving and environmental protection products, provide R&D subsidies, export tax rebates, and financing support to encourage breakthroughs in core technologies and brand development; apply preferential tariff treatment and certification facilitation to green and low-carbon products, guiding firms to expand the share of low-carbon trade. For relatively weak links such as trade in services and digital trade, support cross-border service outsourcing, industrial internet platforms, and digital supply chain management enterprises, fostering new “goods + services” integrated business forms. Through a combination of policy tools, promote a shift in export product composition from low value-added to high value-added, and from resource-intensive to green and intelligent models, strengthening China’s quality advantage in international division of labor.

4.1.4. Improve Trade Friction Early-Warning and Response Mechanisms to Foster a Fair and Predictable Regional Trade Environment

Establish a trade friction information collection and assessment system covering RCEP members, utilizing overseas commercial offices, industry associations, and big-data monitoring platforms, and regularly release risk reports and response guidelines for key markets. Improve the tripartite emergency response mechanism involving government, industry, and enterprises, guiding firms in preparing for anti-dumping, countervailing, safeguard measures, and technical barriers to trade cases. Actively participate in RCEP dispute settlement practice, familiarize with procedural rules, and provide necessary legal and diplomatic support to firms when

required. Through whole-process management encompassing pre-warning, in-process coordination, and post-incident remedies, mitigate the impact of trade conflicts on business operations, maintain mutual trust in regional cooperation, and provide a stable, fair institutional guarantee for high-quality trade activities.

4.2. Leveraging Industry Associations as Bridges to Pool Synergies for Coordinated Regional Development

4.2.1. Organize Joint Technological Breakthroughs and Standards Development to Enhance Overall Sector Competitiveness and Rule-Making Influence

Industry associations should lead the formation of cross-firm, cross-regional industrial technology innovation alliances focused on RCEP priority areas such as automotive electronics, high-end equipment, and green manufacturing, conducting joint research on key generic technologies to overcome bottlenecks in core components and materials. Promote alignment of domestic industry standards with advanced international norms, and on the basis of consensus, jointly formulate regional applicable group standards or collaborative proposals, seeking their adoption as regional reference standards within the RCEP framework. Through technology sharing and standards coordination, elevate overall sectoral technical levels and product consistency, strengthen bargaining power and rule participation in international markets, and enable Chinese industries to move from followers to peers and even leaders in regional value chains.

4.2.2. Build an Integrated Information Service Platform to Provide Professional Support on Markets, Policies, and Laws, Reducing Firms' Information Costs

Integrate domestic and international market trends, tariff changes, policy updates, laws and regulations, and typical cases to construct a digital information platform for RCEP members, offering multilingual, visual query and push services. Embed functions such as intelligent origin rule determination, target market demand matching, and logistics and payment channel recommendations to assist firms in precise decision-making. Regularly publish sector performance analyses and trend forecasts, organize online and offline policy interpretation sessions and legal practice seminars, and provide timely, reliable information and intellectual support, significantly lowering firms' search and analysis costs in market development and compliance, and enhancing regional trade efficiency.

4.2.3. Strengthen Industry Self-Discipline to Regulate Export Order, Avoid Cutthroat Competition, and Safeguard a Sound Regional Cooperation Ecosystem

Formulate and enforce industry export codes of conduct and price coordination mechanisms to prevent underpricing, counterfeit and substandard products, and IP infringements that erode sector reputation. Establish export credit evaluation systems and black-and-white list regimes, publicize and penalize violators, and guide firms toward quality- and efficiency-driven development paths. Enhance exchanges and dialogue with peer organizations in RCEP member countries, promoting establishment of cross-border self-discipline collaboration mechanisms to jointly maintain a fair and orderly market environment. Combining self-regulation with external oversight will shape the integrity image of Chinese firms in regional markets and foster a favorable ecosystem for long-term stable cooperation.

4.2.4. Represent the Industry in International Economic and Trade Negotiations and Rule Coordination to Secure More Favorable Development Conditions

Industry associations should organize leading enterprises and expert teams to systematically identify sectoral demands and pain points in RCEP implementation and produce representative policy recommendation documents. In bilateral and multilateral consultations, represent industry positions to promote balanced solutions in areas such as e-commerce data flows, IP protection, and environmental clause application that reconcile development and security.

Actively participate in regional economic cooperation forums and standards-setting meetings to raise the visibility and influence of Chinese industry organizations in regional governance. By proactively engaging in rule formation, transform industry development needs into institutional outcomes, securing broader space and lower entry barriers for Chinese firms.

4.3. Encouraging Enterprises to Adapt Proactively to Enhance Core Competitiveness and Supply Chain Resilience

4.3.1. Accurately Master and Flexibly Apply RCEP Rules, Especially Origin Rules, to Optimize Regional Supply Chain Layouts

Firms should systematically study RCEP tariff concession schedules and cumulative origin rules, map their regional value chain based on product characteristics, and identify combinations of intermediate input sources and production stages eligible for preferences. By distributing R&D, procurement, manufacturing, and assembly across different member countries, achieve optimal matching of factor costs, technological advantages, and tariff benefits. For example, combine high-end components from Japan and South Korea, primary materials from ASEAN, and integrated manufacturing in China to satisfy origin requirements while lowering overall costs. Establish origin management and compliance teams to ensure accurate documentation and timely declarations, maximizing utilization of preferential tariffs and enhancing price competitiveness and supply flexibility in regional markets.

4.3.2. Increase Investment in R&D and Brand Building to Raise Product Value Added and Differentiation Advantages

Facing increasingly intense high-quality competition in the RCEP region, firms should devote more resources to core technology R&D and proprietary brand cultivation. Build patent pools and proprietary processes in key technical segments to improve product performance and reliability; craft distinctive brand narratives and service systems tailored to cultural traits and consumption preferences of target markets. Through sustained innovation and differentiated positioning, move away from homogeneous price competition to capture higher profit margins and customer loyalty. Concurrently, utilize RCEP's IP protection regime to register patents and trademarks regionally, forming technological moats and strengthening voice and control in global value chains.

4.3.3. Actively Develop Markets in RCEP Member Countries and Implement Diversified Layouts to Disperse External Demand Risks

While consolidating traditional markets, devise segmented market strategies aligned with the development stage and consumption characteristics of different member countries. Leverage the unified RCEP market and preferential tariffs to prioritize entry into high-growth ASEAN and China–Japan–Korea segments, forming tiered export destination portfolios. Expand market penetration through overseas marketing centers, participation in regional exhibitions, and development of cross-border e-commerce. Diversified layouts provide demand substitution and buffering when major external markets fluctuate, enhancing firms' ability to withstand single-market risks and ensuring revenue stability and sustainable growth.

4.3.4. Prudently Undertake Cross-Border Investment and Capacity Cooperation to Strengthen Industrial and Supply Chain Elasticity and Shock Resistance

Based on RCEP provisions for investment facilitation and factor mobility, assess feasibility and risks of locating production bases, warehousing, and logistics nodes in member countries, establishing multi-point distributed capacity backup systems. Prioritize investment in locations with good transport links, strong industrial support, and stable policies to build rapidly switchable supply networks. In the event of pandemics, natural disasters, or geopolitical conflicts, rely on diversified suppliers and production bases within the region to maintain operational continuity. Establish information-sharing and emergency coordination

mechanisms with partners to improve responsiveness to unexpected events, significantly enhancing supply chain resilience.

4.3.5. Accelerate Cultivation and Recruitment of International Talent Proficient in Global Rules and Cross-Cultural Communication

In the RCEP context, firms require substantial numbers of professionals skilled in origin rule application, international trade compliance, cross-border M&A negotiation, and multilingual communication. Launch specialized training programs through university–enterprise partnerships, introduce international economics, trade, and law curricula, and strengthen practical exercises; implement localized recruitment and training in overseas branches to enhance cross-cultural management capacity. Meanwhile, formulate competitive talent attraction policies to recruit high-end professionals familiar with RCEP member markets and rules. Strengthening the talent pool will enable firms to apply regional rules more efficiently, expand markets, and manage risks, providing intellectual support for high-quality trade.

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