

A study on the RCEP intellectual property rules and insights for China

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Abstract. This study analyzes the formative logic and rule characteristics of the RCEP intellectual property (IP) provisions and evaluates their challenges and opportunities for China's IP system. Combining textual analysis of RCEP's IP chapter with comparative legal methodology, the research examines how the agreement balances multilateral governance standards with localized policy flexibility, contrasting its framework with China's domestic laws and global IP regimes. Findings reveal that RCEP innovates by (1) reserving policy space for members to adapt implementation, (2) constructing a "knowledge sovereignty" model led by developing countries to protect traditional resources, and (3) advancing a "balanced protection with flexible implementation" paradigm that recalibrates global IP governance. For China, rule convergence demands legal reforms in broadcasting rights, patent grace periods, and well-known trademark protections. The study concludes that RCEP offers developing nations a hybrid governance template, reconciling strict IP enforcement with developmental equity, thereby challenging hegemonic international norms. Practically, China must prioritize aligning domestic laws with RCEP's standards while strategically leveraging the agreement to expand technology standard exports, strengthen regional IP collaboration, and reshape Asia-Pacific knowledge governance. These insights highlight the role of flexible multilateralism in harmonizing globalization with sovereign development agendas, offering actionable pathways for emerging economies to navigate IP systemic reforms and global rule-shaping.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the world's largest free trade agreement in terms of both economic scale and population coverage, the *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement* (RCEP) features an intellectual property chapter that not only serves as a cornerstone for regional economic and trade cooperation but also represents a landmark achievement in the restructuring of international intellectual property rules. This paper systematically analyzes the textual characteristics and core provisions of RCEP's intellectual property clauses. In light of China's practical needs in global intellectual property governance, it explores the alignment pathways between China's intellectual property system and RCEP rules, while further proposing new development directions for China's participation in global intellectual property governance.

2. THE FORMATIVE LOGIC AND INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF RCEP INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY PROVISIONS

2.1. A Paradigm of Multilateral Negotiation and Interest Balancing

The negotiation of RCEP's intellectual property chapter spanned eight years, and the final text reflects a dynamic balance between developed and developing countries regarding intellectual property protection standards. Unlike the "high-standard, stringent requirement" model of the TPP or CPTPP, RCEP incorporates flexible clauses such as "transition periods" and "technical assistance" to accommodate the institutional adaptability of less-developed countries like Cambodia and Laos (Ma Zhongfa & Wang Yueyue, 2021). For instance, on pharmaceutical patent term compensation, RCEP did not adopt the rigid provisions of the TPP. Instead, it preserved policy space for developing countries through public health exception clauses under the *Doha Declaration* framework. This "baseline thinking" and "flexible design" highlight RCEP's unique value as a "developing country-led agreement."

The negotiation process profoundly reflects the contestation and compromise among different interest groups under multilateral mechanisms. For example, the EU proposed expanding the scope of geographical indication (GI) protection from "names" to "descriptive terms," but this was opposed by ASEAN members. Ultimately, RCEP retained only the "non-misleading to the public" standard consistent with the TRIPS Agreement (Peng Yayuan & Ma Zhongfa, 2021). Additionally, regarding compulsory licensing for digital copyrights, Japan and Australia proposed "expanding fair use in online education scenarios," but this failed to pass due to objections from India and Indonesia, which emphasized "localized control of public educational resources." Consequently, RCEP permits parties to set exceptions based on their domestic laws (Wu Xiaozhi & Zhang Xuancheng, 2022). While this "consensus-based" approach weakens the binding force of certain provisions compared to rigid "one-size-fits-all" rules, it reserves room for dynamic adjustments in future rule evolution.

Notably, RCEP strengthens interest balancing through "soft law mechanisms." For example, Article 19 of Chapter 11 requires developed member states to provide "technical assistance and capacity-building support" to the least-developed countries, including Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) collaboration and intellectual property judicial training programs. According to the ASEAN Secretariat, Japan and Vietnam reduced patent examination periods from 36 months to 12 months through the PPH mechanism in 2022, significantly lowering institutional costs for developing countries in technological cooperation (Tilleke & Gibbins, 2023). Such "North-South cooperation" practices transcend the traditional binary framework of "strong protection versus weak enforcement" in intellectual property agreements, offering a more inclusive model for global governance.

2.2. Integration of Rule Innovation and Localized Demands

The RCEP builds upon the core principles of TRIPS while introducing new clauses tailored to the digital era. Its innovations are reflected in three key areas: preserving policy flexibility for member states, constructing a developing-country-led “knowledge sovereignty” protection model for traditional resources, and creatively reinterpreting public health exceptions.

First, Article 11(5) of RCEP uses the term “may” to grant member states flexibility in adjusting intellectual property (IP) policies according to their developmental needs. This indicates that RCEP establishes only minimum protection obligations (similar to TRIPS) rather than demanding full legal harmonization among members—a stark contrast to “deep integration” agreements like the CPTPP. Through a dual structure of “empowerment and liability limitation,” RCEP creates a unique tension in its IP framework: on the one hand, it ensures predictability for regional trade via minimum standards; on the other hand, it preserves policy space to stimulate innovative governance (Vitor Henrique Pinto Ido, 2021). In practice, this allows members to either enhance IP protections through domestic legislation or maintain the status quo. For instance, developing countries like India and Vietnam can independently decide whether to adopt stricter copyright term extensions or data localization rules. Such institutional flexibility distinguishes RCEP from other Asia-Pacific trade agreements.

Second, RCEP addresses ASEAN nations’ demands to protect indigenous cultural resources through a dedicated section on “genetic resources, traditional knowledge, and folklore” (Chapter 11, Section 7). This establishes a developing-country-led “knowledge sovereignty” model, breaking away from the “Western-centric” paradigm of traditional IP frameworks (Vitor Henrique Pinto Ido, 2021). By elevating genetic resource disclosure requirements from domestic laws to regional cooperation, RCEP promotes transparency in the utilization of biodiversity resources. Such provisions hold particular significance for developing countries, which have long advocated stronger protections for genetic resources and traditional knowledge within the global IP system. Many have implemented domestic mechanisms, such as *sui generis* rights or mandating disclosure of origin in patent applications involving traditional knowledge. While similar practices exist in other agreements, RCEP’s inclusion of systematic protections in a free trade agreement (FTA) remains groundbreaking.

Finally, Article 11(8) of RCEP solidifies member states’ right to use TRIPS flexibilities by invoking the Doha Declaration, explicitly removes legal barriers to public health measures, and mandates treaty interpretation and enforcement to actively serve public health goals. Compared to CPTPP’s Article 18 (3), which merely states that public health exceptions “shall not be prevented,” RCEP elevates public health support to a guiding principle for treaty interpretation, enhancing enforceability. Relative to TRIPS Article 31 (“public health exceptions”), RCEP explicitly lists “promoting access to medicines” as a concrete implementation objective, strengthening legal accountability. This “empowerment-deregulation-implementation” tripartite design makes RCEP the first regional agreement to systematically prioritize public health in its IP chapter, setting a precedent for future global health governance.

3. ANALYSIS OF CORE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RULES IN RCEP

3.1. Expansion and Limitations of Rights Protection

3.1.1. Upgraded Rules on Copyright and Related Rights

RCEP’s design of copyright and related rights rules not only follows TRIPS’ framework but also addresses the unique demands of the digital era through technical provisions, balancing “innovation protection” and “promotion of dissemination”. For example, RCEP is the first regional agreement to grant performers and producers of sound recordings “the right of communication to the public” and “broadcast remuneration rights”, breaking the limitations of traditional related rights systems. Under Articles 10 and 11 of Chapter 11 of RCEP, performers may transmit their performances to the public via wired or wireless means and receive fair remuneration, while sound recording producers gain the right to claim remuneration for secondary uses (e.g., broadcasting or public performance). Additionally, Articles 14 to 16 of Chapter 11 systematically regulate copyright infringement in the digital age, requiring member states to prohibit circumvention of effective technological measures (e.g., digital watermarks, encryption) and impose criminal penalties on the manufacture or distribution of circumvention tools. The agreement also explicitly bans tampering with or removing rights management information (e.g., author attribution, licensing identifiers) (Peter K. Yu, 2021). While RCEP does not directly adopt a “presumption of confusion” standard for copyright infringement, Article 23 of Chapter 11 introduces a similar mechanism in trademark law: in copyright litigation, courts may presume the person named as the author to be the rights holder unless the defendant provides contrary evidence. This rule reduces the burden of proof for rights holders, particularly benefiting small and medium creators. Notably, RCEP excludes TPP’s clause on “criminal protection of encrypted satellite signals”, reflecting pragmatic considerations for developing countries’ technological capacities. Many Southeast Asian nations lack satellite signal encryption infrastructure, and enforcing TPP standards could misallocate enforcement resources.

RCEP’s copyright innovations represent developing countries’ efforts to reshape discourse power in the digital era. By strengthening related rights protections, regulating digital infringement, and balancing public interests, RCEP provides institutional safeguards for the creative industries in the region while offering an “Asian template” for global copyright system reform. As technologies like AI and the metaverse advance, RCEP’s flexible provisions will further empower members to explore “technologically neutral and culturally diverse” IP governance pathways.

3.1.2. Adjustments to Patent and Industrial Design Rules

RCEP’s patent and industrial design rules incentivize technological innovation while bridging developmental gaps among members through flexible clauses, embodying a logic of “inclusive innovation”. First, RCEP redefines the patent utility standard from TRIPS’ “industrial applicability” to “capable of industrial application” (Article 36, Chapter 11), lowering technical entry barriers. This adjustment holds special significance for developing countries, allowing patents for “intermediate innovations” that are not yet fully mature, thereby fostering technological inclusivity and incentivizing R&D (Zhang Naigen, 2021).

Second, RCEP pioneers a “patent grace period” clause (Article 42, Chapter 11), permitting inventors to retain application rights for a defined period after publicly disclosing their inventions. This balances the “first-to-file principle” with risks of premature disclosure and explicitly exempts non-commercial disclosures (e.g., academic journal publications, conference presentations, and government procurement evaluations) from invalidating patent eligibility. RCEP also mandates alignment of industrial design protections with the Locarno Classification system (Article 52, Chapter 11) and enhances protection efficiency through a “formality examination + substantive examination” dual-track mechanism.

Regarding plant variety protection, RCEP does not surpass the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) framework but balances breeders' and farmers' rights via "limitations on rights" clauses. For instance, members may allow farmers to save and exchange seeds for non-commercial purposes under UPOV, and compulsory licensing may be issued without rightsholder consent during "public health crises" or "national emergencies".

RCEP's patent rules reflect developing countries' strategic choices in technological catch-up: lowering innovation thresholds through grace periods and utility standards while guarding against monopolies via classification harmonization and compulsory licensing. This "conservative innovation" approach offers a new global IP governance paradigm that "prioritizes both efficiency and fairness" (Ma Yide & Huang Yunkang, 2022).

3.1.3. Institutional Reconstruction of Genetic Resources and Indigenous Knowledge

RCEP's dedicated section on "genetic resources, traditional knowledge, and folklore" (Section 7, Chapter 11) systematically integrates protections for non-Western knowledge systems into IP rules for the first time, empowering developing countries to engage in global biotechnology value chains. Through a dual-track framework of "source disclosure obligations" and "benefit-sharing mechanisms", RCEP reshapes the distribution of intellectual property benefits.

Article 53 of Chapter 11 mandates that patent applications for innovations derived from genetic resources or traditional knowledge must disclose the source and submit supporting documentation. This directly addresses a "systemic blind spot" in traditional IP regimes: previously, multinational corporations could freely exploit genetic resources (e.g., for cancer drugs or drought-resistant crops) without compensating source countries or communities. Article 53 not only enforces "source disclosure" but also establishes a "fair return" framework through benefit-sharing mechanisms (Vitor Henrique Pinto Ido, 2021). RCEP further extends protection to the digital exploitation of intangible cultural heritage, prohibiting unauthorized "cultural appropriation" (Article 53, Chapter 11).

RCEP's genetic resource and indigenous knowledge clauses represent developing countries' institutional breakthrough in rebalancing global IP benefit distribution. By coupling "source disclosure" with "benefit-sharing", RCEP transforms traditional knowledge from a "public domain" into a "strategic resource", creating institutional pathways for biodiversity conservation and technological innovation. This innovation not only challenges Western-dominated IP hegemony but also provides a replicable governance model for Global South nations to assert developmental rights. Despite its breakthroughs, RCEP's genetic resource provisions face implementation challenges. For example, some members lack digital registries for genetic resources, leading to disputes over "source identification", and quantifying "fair benefits" remains contentious.

3.2. Strengthening and Coordination of Rights Enforcement Mechanisms

3.2.1. Institutional Balance Between Damages and Criminal Remedies

The RCEP intellectual property protection mechanism achieves a dynamic equilibrium between private rights protection and public interest through a dual-track design of "compensatory damages" and "limited criminal sanctions," reflecting a systematic consideration of the rights and interests of multiple stakeholders.

Article 60 of RCEP establishes a compensation standard centered on "remedying the actual harm suffered by rights holders," clarifying that judicial authorities may determine compensation amounts based on third-party assessed market value (Article 60(2)). Compared to the traditional "full compensation" principle in civil law systems, this provision enhances the objectivity and operability of compensation standards by introducing market-oriented value assessment mechanisms. Article 60(3) of RCEP limits the application of the "disgorgement of infringer's profits" rule to copyright and trademark infringement, avoiding the over-deterrence risks of punitive damages common in common law systems while balancing incentives for innovation and market competition through differentiated regulation in specific fields. Article 61(1) confines the scope of legal fees borne by the losing party to "evidence materials directly related to infringement," preventing abusive cost-shifting through litigation while strengthening the economic rationality of judicial procedures (Ramalinggam Rajamanickam et al., 2023).

Additionally, Article 74 strictly limits the application of criminal procedures to "willful infringement on a commercial scale" and carves out statutory exceptions for "non-commercial use" (Article 74(2)), delineating boundaries between private rights protection and freedom of expression. This legislative technique aligns with the minimum standards of TRIPS Article 61 while respecting the legal traditions of developing countries. RCEP further mandates judicial review for criminal sanctions (Article 74(3)(c)) and prohibits asset forfeiture without ensuring defendants' rights to compensation, thereby preventing public power abuse through due process mechanisms (Ramalinggam Rajamanickam et al., 2023). For film piracy, RCEP establishes a "tiered thresholds for criminal liability" (Article 74(5)), intensifying protection for key industries while allowing policy flexibility through graded governance.

The RCEP damages and criminal remedy rules embody the outcome of interest balancing between developing and developed countries. For developing nations, restrictions on corporate criminal liability and lowered criminal thresholds prevent transnational corporations from weaponizing IP litigation against local enterprises. For rights holders, unified market-value compensation standards and high statutory damage ceilings significantly enhance enforcement incentives. Thus, RCEP's mechanism achieves a dynamic balance between IP protection and corporate compliance risks through "market orientation, flexible standards, and procedural justice." This framework provides robust remedies for rights holders while preserving developmental space for developing-country enterprises, showcasing the innovative value of emerging regional trade agreements in reshaping global IP governance.

3.2.2. Rule Innovations in Border Measures and Digital Enforcement

RCEP constructs a "substantive and procedural synergy" in border measures and digital enforcement, strengthening rights protection while accommodating regional developmental disparities through flexible designs, exemplifying a balance between "rule uniformity and enforcement adaptability."

RCEP Article 65 (application-based suspension of goods release) and Article 69 (ex officio seizure by authorities) complement each other, ensuring rights holders' remedial efficiency while preempting systemic infringement risks through administrative intervention. Article 67 sets a "reasonable security" standard to prevent procedural abuse against legitimate trade while safeguarding necessary relief, harmonizing procedural fairness with substantive justice. Article 72(2) differentiates treatment between counterfeit trademark goods and ordinary infringing goods, preserving brand integrity while avoiding resource waste,

demonstrating the application of proportionality in IP enforcement (Shimin He, 2023).

Article 75 transcends traditional physical enforcement boundaries by establishing unified online-offline rules, requiring digital remedies to meet standards equivalent to offline measures. This provides frameworks for emerging issues like NFT copyright protection and algorithmic recommendation liability. Article 61(3) authorizes courts to adopt “ex parte” emergency measures, curbing real-time harm from online infringement through procedural acceleration. Article 60(4) expands seizure scope to include infringing tools and data carriers, enabling enforcement against software piracy and illegal digital dissemination while maintaining rule openness through technology neutrality.

RCEP’s border and digital enforcement rules reflect a “precise governance” logic: leveraging unified standards to reduce cross-border trade costs while reserving policy space for members through tiered obligations. For instance, developing countries may phase in ex officio border measures based on institutional capacity, avoiding enforcement overload (Shimin He, 2023). This “progressive harmonization” approach ensures both rule authority and pragmatic flexibility, offering a novel paradigm for multilateral IP rulemaking in the digital era.

4. INTERACTION AND ADAPTATION BETWEEN RCEP AND CHINA'S INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY SYSTEM

4.1. Rule Convergence and Localization Challenges: Pathways for Improving China's IP Laws

While China's current *Copyright Law*, *Patent Law*, and *Trademark Law* generally fulfill RCEP obligations, further refinements are needed in certain provisions regarding specificity, implementation flexibility, and localized adaptation to address technological challenges and industrial demands in the digital era.

4.1.1. Copyright Law: Legislative Refinements to the Right of Broadcast and Accessible Formats

Article 10 of China's *Copyright Law* defines the “right of broadcast” as covering only “wireless broadcasting” and “wired dissemination,” failing to explicitly include newer transmission methods required by RCEP, such as “encrypted satellite signals” and “online livestreaming” (Wang Zhihui & Li Qingsong, 2022). Additionally, although China has ratified the *Marrakesh Treaty*, existing limitations on accessible formats for visually impaired persons remain narrow in scope and vague in implementation. For example, Braille publishing houses often face obstacles in producing accessible e-books due to inefficient copyright authorization mechanisms. To address this, it is recommended to amend Article 10 of the *Copyright Law* to expand the definition of broadcast rights to explicitly cover “encrypted satellite signal transmission” and mandate that parties adopt technical measures to protect lawful dissemination. Concurrently, provisions on accessible formats should be detailed in the *PRC Copyright Law Implementing Regulations*, requiring publishers to provide free accessible-format copies for visually impaired individuals and establishing a national digital copyright clearinghouse to resolve cross-border disputes over accessible content distribution.

4.1.2. Patent Law: Introduction of Grace Period Provisions and Balancing Innovation Incentives

Article 24 of China's *Patent Law* provides a “novelty grace period” but limits it to narrow scenarios such as “first exhibition at internationally recognized exhibitions hosted by the Chinese government,” excluding non-commercial disclosures required by RCEP, such as “academic journal publications” or “presentations at academic conferences.” This risks depriving researchers of patent rights after disclosing technologies during academic exchanges. To resolve this, Article 24 of RCEP should be revised to expand the grace period's applicability to cover “publication in academic journals” and “first disclosure at academic conferences,” allowing inventors to file patent applications within 12 months post-disclosure. For pharmaceuticals and medical devices, an “administrative review grace period” could be introduced to preserve patent eligibility after clinical trials or regulatory approvals. A “grace period declaration system” should also be established, requiring inventors to disclose prior public uses during patent applications to prevent abuse of the grace period.

4.1.3. Trademark Law: Cross-Class Protection of Well-Known Marks and Curbing Bad-Faith Registration

Although Article 13 of China's *Trademark Law* grants cross-class protection to well-known trademarks, judicial practice suffers from ambiguous standards for determining “likelihood of confusion” and insufficient penalties for bad-faith registrations. It is recommended to strengthen cross-class protection by introducing a burden-shifting rule in judicial interpretations, requiring opposers to prove the absence of confusion. Article 68 should be amended to increase penalties for bad-faith registrations, imposing fines of up to three times illicit gains and establishing a “bad-faith registrant blacklist” to restrict future trademark filings. Furthermore, rights holders should be permitted to assert anti-dilution protections for well-known trademarks through public interest litigation, and a “prohibition on commercial identifier squatting” should be added to the *Anti-Unfair Competition Law*.

These reforms would align China's IP regime with RCEP's standards while addressing domestic practical needs, fostering an innovation-friendly legal environment that balances international obligations with localized governance.

4.2. Strategic Opportunities and Capacity Building: China's New Pathways in Global IP Governance

RCEP not only provides a regulatory benchmark for modernizing China's IP system but also opens new avenues for China's participation in global IP governance through technological collaboration, standard-setting, and innovative regional governance mechanisms.

4.2.1. Technology Export and Standard Leadership: Leveraging RCEP to Enhance Global Technological Influence

China's technological strengths in 5G, renewable energy, and high-speed rail lay the groundwork for international standard-setting. Article 81 of RCEP Chapter 11 (“Technical Assistance”) facilitates cross-member technical cooperation, creating institutional conditions for technology export. For example, Huawei's promotion of 5G technology in ASEAN countries has been streamlined through RCEP-based patent cross-licensing agreements, reducing implementation barriers. Moving forward, China could advocate for a regional technical standards committee under RCEP to integrate Chinese-led standards (e.g., 5G, NB-IoT)

into member states' technical frameworks. Additionally, leveraging RCEP's technical assistance mechanisms (Chapter 11 Annex 2), China could export renewable energy technologies to Cambodia and Laos, coupling technology transfers with patent licensing terms to achieve synergistic "technology-standard bundling."

4.2.2. Expanding Regional Governance Influence: China-ASEAN Collaboration on Emerging Issues

China and ASEAN have a robust foundation for collaboration in genetic resources and digital trade. Section 7 of RCEP Chapter 11 ("Genetic Resources Protection") offers a platform for China to lead regional initiatives. For instance, the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area has established a traditional medicine database to promote coordinated protection of traditional knowledge (Tang Hongzhen et al., 2020). Building on this, China could utilize RCEP's e-commerce rules (Chapter 12) to spearhead the formulation of *Southeast Asian Digital Copyright Protection Standards* and establish a Digital IP Governance Alliance, mandating member states to implement tiered cross-border digital content regulation.

Furthermore, China could propose a Southeast Asia Biodiversity Conservation Fund under RCEP to deepen genetic resource cooperation, requiring foreign enterprises to pay resource usage fees for exploiting regional biological materials and channeling proceeds to local communities. The "cross-border biological corridor" project between China's Yunnan Province and Laos, which combines resource rights clarification and benefit-sharing mechanisms, exemplifies how ecological preservation and community development can coexist. Simultaneously, China should promote RCEP's "developing-country flexibility clauses" within the WTO framework to reform the *Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)*, advocating greater recognition of non-Western knowledge systems (e.g., traditional medicine, folklore).

4.2.3. Capacity Building and Regional Coordination: Constructing an IP Protection Community

While China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) synergizes with RCEP, fragmented regional IP enforcement remains a challenge. For example, inefficient judicial cooperation in cross-border infringement cases across Southeast Asia undermines rights protection. To address this, China could establish regional IP rapid-response centers, such as a China-ASEAN Intellectual Property Arbitration Center in cities like Shenzhen and Nanning, implementing "preliminary injunctions + cross-border evidence collection" mechanisms to resolve e-commerce infringement cases within 30 days (modeled on the Shenzhen Intellectual Property Protection Center's experience) (Huang Dong & Wu Lin, 2020).

To counter the opacity and mobility of cross-border infringements, China could lead the creation of a RCEP IP Data Sharing Platform to enhance regional governance through digitization. Integrating data from customs, market regulators, and public security agencies, the platform would employ blockchain technology to enable real-time tracking and cross-verification of infringing goods across logistics, payment, and social networks. This platform would not only exemplify China's technological empowerment of regional governance but also redefine developing countries' agency in IP protection.

By combining data-driven empowerment and institutional innovation, China is transforming RCEP from a trade pact into a governance community, offering "Eastern wisdom" to global IP protection. This approach positions China as a pivotal player in reshaping international IP governance frameworks while balancing developmental priorities with global responsibilities.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

The RCEP intellectual property rules have redefined the discursive framework for developing countries' participation in global governance, with their institutional design of "balanced protection and adaptive enforcement" providing a new paradigm for regional economic integration. For China, RCEP presents both opportunities and challenges: in the short term, accelerated domestic legal alignment is imperative, while in the medium-to-long term, China should leverage the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to advance a more inclusive global IP governance system. Future research should focus on frontier issues such as the interplay between RCEP and CPTPP rules, as well as IP governance in digital trade, offering theoretical underpinnings for China's deeper engagement in shaping international norms.

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