

#5 China's role in Digital Standards for Emerging Technologies

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August 2021

Key Takeaways

- The growing presence of Chinese businesses and governmental actors in international technical standardisation processes is attracting growing attention, and in some cases concern, from Western observers.
- Standards have become an important issue in the emerging global confrontation over digital technology, driven to a significant degree by China's stated aspirations in this field.
- The field of digital technical standards is complex: standards are developed in many organisations, involving multiple corporate participants as well as governmental actors. Evaluating China's actual influence therefore requires a nuanced and more detailed understanding.

Recommendations

1. International SDOs: most of the standards of significant importance to Dutch and European interests are produced by international SDOs. This, in and of itself, tends to provide significant safeguards against unilateral or aggressive action from the Chinese side, as long as these organizations function effectively.
2. Export of domestic standards and technologies: European governments should focus on creating frameworks to prevent harms and other undesirable consequences.
3. Impact of the scope of standards: Not all standards are created equal, and in conceiving policy responses to Chinese involvement, their potential impact must be taken into account.
4. Understanding the nature of technical standards, standardization processes and adoption: a great deal more effort must be done among stakeholders and in policy circles to better understand the territory with which standards engage.
5. Finding a place for Chinese businesses: Whatever risks may arise from China's growing presence in global digital standard setting must be offset against the risks arising from barring its entry.

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Executive Summary

The growing presence of Chinese businesses and governmental actors in international technical standardisation processes is attracting growing attention, and in some cases concern, from Western observers. Standards have become an important issue in the emerging global confrontation over digital technology, driven to a significant degree by China’s stated aspirations in this field. However, the field of digital technical standards is complex: standards are developed in many organisations, involving multiple corporate participants as well as governmental actors. Evaluating China’s actual influence therefore requires a nuanced and more detailed understanding. This report provides an initial survey of the field. First, it reviews the organizational architecture of the international standards-setting landscape, and identifies the ways in which China has sought to build a greater impact. Second, it discusses the processes surrounding the development of the 5G standard, and Chinese companies’ participation, as well as China’s much-discussed “new IP” initiative. Lastly, it identifies potential security considerations arising from greater Chinese participation, and provides recommendations to respond to them.