

Research on the Institutional Logic and Practical Path of Standardization in Optimizing the Business Environment

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Abstract

Optimizing the business environment is an important measure to promote high-quality economic development and stimulate the vitality of market entities. In recent years, China has continued to promote the "streamlining administration, delegating powers, and improving regulation and services" reform, emphasizing institutional innovation and the modernization of governance capabilities. Against this background, standardization, as an important tool to improve government governance efficiency, regulate market behavior, and reduce institutional transaction costs, has increasingly become a key support for optimizing the business environment. Starting from the institutional logic, this article systematically analyzes the internal mechanisms of standardization in improving transparency, enhancing predictability, and promoting fair competition. Combining typical domestic practices, it proposes a practical path for leading the reform of the business environment with standards, including improving the standard system, promoting digital empowerment, strengthening implementation supervision, and promoting international integration, providing theoretical support and policy recommendations for building a market-oriented, law-based, and internationalized business environment.

Keywords: standardization, business environment, institutional logic, governance modernization, practical path

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1.Introduction

The business environment is a core indicator for measuring a country or region's economic soft power and institutional competitiveness. The World Bank's "Doing Business" report has long focused on the institutional efficiency of key processes such as business establishment, tax payment, credit acquisition, and contract enforcement. Since launching the "streamlining administration, delegating powers, streamlining administration, and improving services" reform in 2013, my country has continuously deepened the reform of its administrative approval system, promoted the transformation of government functions, and significantly improved the business environment. According to the World Bank's assessment, China's business environment ranking rose from 96th in 2013 to 31st in 2020, demonstrating the remarkable success of institutional reform. However, as reform enters a deeper stage, relying solely on policy promotion is no longer sufficient to continuously improve governance effectiveness. Against this backdrop, standardization, as an institutionalized and systematic governance tool, has increasingly become a fundamental tool in optimizing the business environment. Standardization not only helps standardize service processes and regulate regulatory practices, but also solidifies reform achievements through institutionalization, achieving a transition from "empirical governance" to "rule-based governance." This article aims to explore the institutional logic behind standardization in optimizing the business environment, analyze its mechanisms, and propose practical and actionable approaches, aiming to provide theoretical support and policy reference for deepening business environment reform.

2. The Intrinsic Connection between Standardization and Optimizing the Business Environment

The inherent connection between standardization and optimizing the business environment manifests itself on multiple levels, with the two mutually reinforcing and developing in synergistic fashion. First, standardization provides a crucial technical foundation for optimizing the business environment. By establishing scientific, unified technical standards and management practices, we can effectively reduce institutional transaction costs and eliminate ambiguities in market operations. For example, implementing standardized procedures throughout the entire business process can streamline previously

fragmented steps like business registration, tax filing, and social security account opening into a single, integrated application process, reducing processing time from an average of 15 working days to under three. Second, standardization provides an objective metric for evaluating the business environment. The World Bank's "Processing Construction Permits" indicator includes 18 standardized approval items. By establishing a standardized system for construction approvals aligned with this, my country has reduced approval times in benchmark cities like Beijing and Shanghai from over 300 days to 120 days. Furthermore, standardization promotes fair and transparent supervision. The "double random, one public" supervision standard promoted by the State Administration for Market Regulation has standardized the sampling ratio of inspection objects and law enforcement personnel, the inspection process, and the publicity of results, which has reduced the frequency of supervision by 40% and increased the problem detection rate by 25%. It is worth noting that standardization construction requires dynamic optimization ^[1]. With the deepening of the "separation of licenses and permits" reform, Shenzhen has taken the lead in establishing the "commitment to operate" standard, implementing the "commitment to enter" system for 115 licensing matters, and promoting the transformation of the market access system from standardized management to standard guidance. This practice of solidifying the reform results through standardization is forming a replicable institutional innovation model across the country.

3. The Institutional Logic of Standardization in Optimizing the Business environment

3.1 Reducing institutional transaction costs

Institutional transaction costs are a key factor affecting the operational efficiency of enterprises. For small and medium-sized enterprises in particular, high administrative barriers may become a major obstacle to development. Standardization can effectively reduce the uncertainty faced by enterprises in market access, administrative approval, and regulatory compliance by establishing a unified and transparent rule system. For example, in the field of engineering construction, due to the lack of uniformity in approval standards across regions, enterprises often had to repeatedly adapt to different local regulations when investing across regions, resulting in extended project cycles and increased costs ^[2]. In recent years, the

implementation of national unified engineering construction project approval standards has streamlined the number of approval items from an average of more than 100 to less than 50, and through standardized processes such as "multi-regulation integration" and "joint acceptance", the approval time has been reduced by more than 40%. In addition, the standardized electronic certificate mutual recognition system, such as the national network verification of business licenses and qualification certificates, avoids enterprises from repeatedly submitting paper materials in different regions, which can reduce the cost of business for enterprises by more than 10 billion yuan each year. International experience also shows that the EU has shortened the registration time of enterprises between member states from an average of 21 days to 3 days by implementing the "single digital gateway" standard. These cases all prove that standardization can systematically reduce institutional friction and improve market operation efficiency.

3.2 Improving government service efficiency and governance capabilities

Standardization is not only a technical specification, but also an important tool for modern government governance. It promotes the transformation of government from empirical management to scientific governance by solidifying government service processes, data interaction, and regulatory rules into a quantifiable and assessable standard system. For example, in the "One-stop service" reform, Shanghai standardized more than 3,000 government service items into a "scenario-based guidance" model. Enterprises only need to check the applicable situation online, and the system will automatically generate a personalized list of materials, reducing the time for preparing application materials by 60%. In the field of supervision, the "General Enterprise Credit Risk Classification Standard" established by the State Administration for Market Regulation automatically identifies high-risk enterprises through quantitative indicators, improving the accuracy of supervision by 35% and avoiding the interference of "one-size-fits-all" law enforcement on compliant enterprises. In addition, standardization also strengthens the predictability of government services ^[3]. The "Government Service Star Rating Standard" launched by Guangdong Province transforms efficiency and service quality into a 5-level indicator system, forcing government departments to continuously optimize processes. From an international perspective, Singapore's "Smart Nation" strategy relies on the unification of data standards

and interface standards to achieve 98% of government services online. These practices show that standardization can systematically improve the standardization, coordination and intelligence of government services, and ultimately transform them into competitive advantages in the business environment.

3.3 Enhance institutional transparency and predictability

A healthy business environment requires clear rules, fair enforcement, and stable expectations. Standardization significantly enhances the transparency and predictability of the business environment by transforming abstract laws and regulations into concrete, actionable technical specifications. Taking environmental regulation as an example, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment's "Catalogue of Classification Management of Pollutant Emission Permits for Stationary Pollution Sources" and 45 technical specifications for pollutant emission permits have refined the previously vague requirement of "meeting emission standards" into specific, quantifiable indicators such as pollutant emission concentrations and total volume controls, enabling businesses to clearly understand environmental compliance requirements. This standardized regulatory model has reduced environmental law enforcement disputes by over 30%. In the field of government procurement, the "Administrative Measures for Government Procurement Requirement Standards" clearly define the technical parameters and evaluation criteria for the compilation of procurement requirements, effectively curbing unfair practices such as "tailor-made" procurement, resulting in a 40% decrease in the complaint rate. More importantly, standardization has established a stable mechanism for policy expectations. The "General Principles for the Evaluation of Enterprise Standards 'Leaders'" formulated by the State Administration for Market Regulation guide corporate innovation through quantitative indicators, resulting in an average annual increase of 15% in corporate R&D investment. This "standards-first" institutional design enables market players to accurately predict policy trends and greatly enhances investment confidence. From an international perspective, Germany's "Standardization Strategy" uses standards as a "pre-regulatory tool", enabling 80% of technical regulations to be implemented through the reference of standards. This model is worth learning from in my country.

3.4 Promoting the alignment of institutional opening-up with international

rules

Standardization is a key tool for promoting institutional opening. By deeply participating in the formulation of international standards, China can effectively enhance the international competitiveness of its business environment. In the field of digital economy, China has taken the lead in formulating 28 international standards, such as the Internet of Things Reference Architecture, which have removed technical barriers for companies such as Huawei and Alibaba to expand into overseas markets. According to statistics, the export volume of companies that adopt international standards has increased by an average of 12%. In terms of financial opening, the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission has promoted the application of the Global Legal Entity Identifier (LEI), which has increased the efficiency of cross-border financial transactions by 30% and the speed of risk identification by 50%. As a test field for institutional opening, the Shanghai Free Trade Zone was the first to adopt the International Trade "Single Window" Standard, achieving data interconnection with 20 economies and shortening the customs clearance time for goods to within 2 hours ^[4]. It is worth noting that the internationalization of standards requires a balance between independent innovation and international integration. China has innovatively implemented the "Chinese Standard Going Global" strategy in areas such as high-speed rail and ultra-high voltage, driving an average annual growth of 25% in exports across the entire industrial chain.

4. Practical Paths for Standardization to Optimize the Business Environment

4.1 Improve the legal and regulatory system for business environment standardization

At present, China's standardization work is mainly based on the "Standardization Law of the People's Republic of China", but the special supporting regulations in the field of business environment are still imperfect, making it difficult to fully adapt to the "streamlining administration and delegating power" reform and the needs of high-quality development ^[5]. It is recommended to improve the legal guarantee from the following three levels:

(1) At the legislative level, the formulation of the "Regulations on Standardization of the Business Environment" should be accelerated, with a focus on clarifying three aspects: first, establishing the basic principles of business environment standardization, including

market orientation, international integration, and dynamic optimization; second, standardizing the standard-setting procedures and establishing a multi-party consultation mechanism involving government departments, industry associations, and corporate representatives; and third, strengthening the supervision of standard implementation and clarifying the requirements for evaluation feedback and regular revision. (2) At the supporting system level, supporting documents such as the "Administrative Approval Standardization Specification" and the "Market Supervision Standardization Guide" need to be formulated to refine the operational standards for key links such as government services and law enforcement inspections. For example, we can learn from Shenzhen's experience and elevate innovative practices such as the "notification and commitment system" and "acceptance with missing documents" to standard specifications. (3) At the local practice level, provinces and cities are encouraged to formulate implementation details. For example, Zhejiang can issue the "One-Stop Service Standard" around digital reform; the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area can explore the formulation of cross-border investment and trade facilitation standards. By building a three-dimensional system of "national legislation + departmental regulations + local standards", we can provide a solid legal guarantee for optimizing the business environment.

4.2 Establishing a full life cycle business environment standard system

Optimizing the business environment requires establishing a standardized system that covers the entire lifecycle of businesses: "entry, operation, supervision, and exit," forming a systematic and coordinated institutional arrangement. ① In the market access phase, we should prioritize the standardized reform of "joint license and permit application" and "one license for all." We should formulate "Full Electronic Work Specifications for Business Startups," standardize procedures for registration, seal engraving, and tax registration, and reduce the time required to start a business to within one business day. At the same time, we should establish a nationwide standardized database of business scope descriptions to eliminate barriers to entry. ② In the operational service phase, we should establish service standards for high-frequency matters such as water, electricity, gas, and heating connections, financing services, and talent recruitment. For example, we should follow Beijing's "Obtaining Electricity" standards to reduce the number of low-voltage power connection steps

to two, with a processing time of no more than 10 days. We should also draw on Zhejiang Province's "Financial Credit Service Standards" to standardize the financing process for small and medium-sized enterprises. ③ In the supervision and law enforcement link, the focus is on establishing "double random, one public" supervision standards, cross-departmental joint inspection standards and credit grading and classification supervision standards, unifying the inspection procedures and discretionary benchmarks through the "Market Supervision and Law Enforcement Operation Specifications", and improving the "Enterprise Credit Risk Classification Management Standards" to achieve precise supervision ^[6]. ④ In the market exit link, it is necessary to distinguish between simple cancellation and general cancellation and formulate corresponding standards, clarify the applicable conditions, publicity period and list of materials, and promote the experience of Shenzhen's "One-stop Enterprise Cancellation Service" to shorten the general cancellation time from 45 days to 15 days. The construction of this standard system should focus on standard coordination to avoid policy conflicts, maintain dynamic regular evaluation and revision, reserve inclusiveness to support the development of new business formats, and achieve the goal of optimizing the business environment of "convenient entry, smooth exit, scientific management and efficient service" for enterprises through full-chain standardization.

4.3 Promote digitalization and platform-based application of standards

Against the backdrop of the rapid development of the digital economy, we should accelerate the construction of a unified national "business environment standards information platform" to achieve the full-process online management of centralized release, convenient query, dynamic update and social feedback of standards, and enhance the transparency, accessibility and authority of standards. We should promote the deep integration of business environment standards with government service platforms at all levels, enterprise credit information disclosure systems, market supervision big data platforms, etc., break through data barriers, realize the interconnection and interoperability of standard information and the automatic connection of business systems, and truly realize the new governance model of "standards as services, standards as supervision" ^[7].

Shanghai's successful "One-stop Service" reform, for example, offers a replicable model for the digitization of standards. Shanghai has fully digitized the standards for high-frequency

matters such as business start-up, construction project approval, and real estate registration, integrating them into its government service system to achieve "one-stop login, all-in-one service." During the company establishment process, the system automatically conducts intelligent pre-review based on a standardized list of materials, providing immediate prompts for correcting missing or formatted documents. During the approval process, the system automatically assigns processing steps according to established standards, sets deadlines, and proactively communicates progress via SMS and platform notifications, ensuring transparency. Furthermore, Shanghai has incorporated AI pre-review and RPA (Robotic Process Automation) technology into the "One-stop Service" system to verify the compliance of application content, reduce manual intervention, and improve approval accuracy and efficiency. Furthermore, leveraging the city's big data resource platform, it dynamically analyzes the implementation of standards for each matter, identifies bottlenecks and regional differences, and provides data support for optimizing standards. These measures have not only significantly reduced processing time but also significantly improved service standardization and business satisfaction, fully demonstrating the powerful enabling role of digital standards in optimizing the business environment.

4.4 Strengthening standard implementation and supervision and evaluation mechanisms

The ultimate success of standardization efforts depends on the effectiveness of their implementation. To ensure that business environment standards truly play their due role, it is necessary to establish a systematic and regularized system for monitoring and evaluating standard implementation, focusing on the following key aspects .

4.4.1 Establish a multi-dimensional guarantee mechanism for standard implementation.

1. Organizational support: Dedicated standardization implementation offices should be established at the provincial, municipal, and county levels of government, staffed with staff with professional backgrounds in standardization. These offices will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of standards across all departments. A cross-departmental joint standardization work meeting system should also be established, with the responsible leader serving as the convener. This system will regularly address key challenges in standard implementation. For key industries and sectors, it is recommended that standardization

technical committees be established, comprised of representatives from government departments, industry associations, and leading enterprises, to provide professional standard interpretation and implementation guidance to businesses. 2. Institutional support: The development of a systematic standard implementation system. The core of this is the issuance of the "Administrative Measures for the Implementation of Business Environment Standards," which will detail all aspects of standard implementation. Key areas include: a unified standard interpretation mechanism to ensure consistent understanding of standards by implementing departments at all levels; standardized requirements for standard operating procedures, clarifying the operational specifications and timelines for each step; standardized templates for standard implementation documents to ensure uniform formatting across regions and departments; a supervisory and inspection system for standard implementation, establishing a regular inspection mechanism; and a standardized system for evaluating the effectiveness of standard implementation to ensure objectivity and fairness. At the same time, an electronic ledger management system for standard implementation will be established to ensure that the entire process of standard implementation is traceable and traceable^[8]. ③ Capacity guarantee: carry out "standard +" special training, and carry out tiered and classified training for different targets: focus on standardization strategic thinking training for leading cadres to enhance their attention to standardization work; carry out in-depth standard interpretation training for business department heads and key personnel to ensure that they accurately understand the standard requirements; carry out standard practical training for front-line window staff to enhance their standard implementation capabilities. At the same time, develop a standard online learning platform, build a standardization case library and knowledge base, and provide staff with continuous learning resources. It is also necessary to establish a standardization professional talent pool to cultivate a team of compound talents who are familiar with business work and proficient in standardization.

4.4.2 Supervision and evaluation methods for the implementation of innovation standards.

Establish a "three-in-one" evaluation system: first, self-evaluation by government departments, which is carried out through data monitoring, on-site inspections, etc.; second, third-party professional evaluation, which is independently carried out by universities,

research institutions, etc.; third, social participation evaluation, which collects feedback through enterprise satisfaction surveys, business environment experience officers, etc. Evaluation indicators should cover multiple dimensions such as execution efficiency (such as the compression rate of time limit for handling matters), service quality (such as the one-time completion rate), and enterprise sense of gain (such as the extent of cost reduction). Evaluation methods should focus on diversity and scientificity. Adopt a "four-dimensional" evaluation method: in terms of quantitative evaluation, rely on the big data of the government service platform to analyze the implementation of standards, and find implementation deviations through data mining; in terms of qualitative evaluation, organize standardization experts to conduct on-site inspections and in-depth interviews to understand the actual situation of standard implementation; in terms of benchmarking evaluation, select international advanced standards and domestic benchmark regions for comparative analysis to find gaps and deficiencies; in terms of social evaluation, collect feedback from market entities through large-scale enterprise satisfaction surveys and the business environment experience officer system. At the same time, introduce blockchain technology to ensure the authenticity and immutability of evaluation data ^[9]. The evaluation subjects should be diversified. Establish an evaluation model characterized by "government leadership, participation by professional institutions, and public oversight." Government departments will be primarily responsible for daily oversight and self-assessment of standard implementation. Cultivate and develop a group of professionally qualified third-party evaluation agencies, and, through government procurement, bring in accounting firms, law firms, management consulting firms, and other professional entities to participate in the evaluation process. Establish a system of public supervisors, inviting deputies to the National People's Congress, members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and business representatives to serve as supervisors to oversee standard implementation. Furthermore, establish a database of evaluation experts, including university scholars and industry experts, to participate in the evaluation process.

4.4.3 Improve the dynamic optimization mechanism of standards.

Improve the rapid response mechanism for standard implementation issues, integrating channels such as the 12345 government service hotline, government service platforms, and

dedicated enterprise service windows to establish a "green channel" for reporting standards issues. Collected issues will be categorized and handled according to urgency and scope of impact, with general issues responded to within five working days and complex issues addressed within 15 working days. Establish a regular standard review system, forming a review committee composed of government departments, industry experts, and corporate representatives to conduct comprehensive assessments of standards every two to three years, focusing on their applicability, advancement, and operability. For standards with issues identified during these reviews, prioritized revision plans will be developed to ensure continuous improvement. For standards addressing new technologies and emerging business models, innovative management mechanisms should be established. Pilot programs will be implemented under the "sandbox" standard management system, establishing standard testing grounds in specific areas such as free trade pilot zones and high-tech parks, allowing for controlled, innovative practices that transcend the limitations of existing standards. Establish a rapid standard development and revision channel to streamline the development process for urgently needed standards and shorten the development cycle. At the same time, a standard early warning mechanism will be established to track the development of international standards and industrial technology trends, analyze standard needs in advance, and make good standard reserves.

4.4.4 Strengthen the application of assessment results.

Incorporate standard implementation into the annual performance appraisal system at all levels of government, giving it greater weight. Establish a "red and black list" system for standard implementation, giving preferential treatment in project allocation and funding to regions and departments with strong implementation results. Those with poor implementation will be summoned, notified, and given deadlines for rectification. Improve the reward and punishment mechanism, commending and rewarding units and individuals for outstanding standard implementation and holding those who seriously violate the standards accountable. Furthermore, establish a database of typical standard implementation cases, summarize and refine advanced experiences and innovative practices, and promote them through on-site meetings, training sessions, and other means.

4.5 Strengthening international standards coordination and mutual

recognition

In the context of global economic integration, strengthening international standard coordination and mutual recognition is a strategic measure to enhance the international competitiveness of China's business environment. We should focus on promoting work from three dimensions: First, deeply participate in the formulation of international standards, establish professional teams in advantageous fields such as artificial intelligence and digital economy, improve the "enterprise needs-industry organizations-professional institutions-government departments" coordination mechanism, and promote more Chinese standards to become international standards. Second, take the lead in launching standard mutual recognition pilot projects in open platforms such as free trade pilot zones and cross-border e-commerce comprehensive pilot zones, establish a Chinese and foreign standard comparison database, formulate the "Cross-border Standard Mutual Recognition Management Measures" in key areas such as medical devices and food certification, implement the "Standard Mutual Recognition White List" system, directly adopt the international standards included in the list, and significantly reduce the compliance costs of foreign-funded enterprises ^[10]. Third, deepen the "Belt and Road" standard cooperation, build a multilingual standard information platform, jointly formulate group standards in areas such as infrastructure and cross-border e-commerce, and establish a personnel exchange training mechanism. At the same time, we should improve the international rule docking mechanism, establish a dynamic monitoring system to track the trends of international standard organizations such as ISO and IEC, increase the international standard conversion rate in key areas to more than 90%, and actively participate in standard coordination under the WTO/TBT agreement. By systematically promoting international standard coordination, we can not only facilitate the operation of foreign-funded enterprises in China, but also enhance China's institutional voice in global economic governance. Data show that the implementation of mutual recognition of international standards has increased the export competitiveness of enterprises by more than 15% and the satisfaction of foreign-funded enterprises by 20 percentage points. In the future, we should further expand the opening and cooperation of standards, transform China's industrial advantages into rule advantages, and provide standard support for the construction of a new development pattern ^[11].

5. Conclusion

In summary, standardization is not only a tool for technological governance but also a crucial institutional arrangement for modern governments to improve the quality of their institutional provision and optimize the business environment. By reducing institutional transaction costs, enhancing government service efficiency, and strengthening market transparency and predictability, it provides solid support for building a stable, fair, transparent, and predictable business environment. Going forward, we should further strengthen the strategic positioning of standardization and incorporate it into the overall modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity. We should promote the deepening of standards from the "technical level" to the "institutional level," achieving a leap from "having standards" to "using standards" and then to "trusting standards." At the same time, we should emphasize the people-oriented nature of standards, centering on the needs of businesses, to enhance their practicality and sense of benefit. Against the backdrop of profound adjustments in the global economic landscape, standardization will become a crucial lever for China to participate in global governance and enhance its institutional openness. Only by guiding high-quality development with high standards can we seize the initiative and secure a future in the new round of international competition.

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