

FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS AND MARKET REGULATIONS AS ELEMENTS OF COMPETITION—CASE STUDIES FROM CHINA’S INTERNATIONAL TRADE

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ABSTRACT

Norms and standards (especially food standards) are often analyzed according to two main dimensions: As the products of a technical/technological expertise; and as an element of regulation of markets. Using the theories of the sociology of markets and of the Economics of Convention, this article argues that far from just being neutral, technical tools, norms and standards are important elements of competition among firms and countries. This theoretical framework is particularly helpful for analyzing how China is now trying to reshape the rules of international trade, after decades of first learning and then making use of these rules. This analysis is conducted through two case studies in agro-food trade. The first shows how the U.S. success in imposing a global norm at the Codex Alimentarius for the use of ractopamine in growing pigs (against China's and the European Union's position) was partially curtailed through the takeover by the Chinese company Shuanghui of Smithfield (the largest American pork producer). The second case analyses how China, via a change in

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its import legislation, is currently influencing the development of global norms in food safety and, beyond that, the international dairy market. The interesting point in these cases is China's ability (due to the organization of its economic and political system) to reshape international norms and standards at the advantage of its own producers by means of various instruments (technological/scientific; private; legislation): The competition, then, is not only on price and/or quality, but also on the implementation of rules and standards.

KEYWORDS: *food safety, international trade, standards, the People's Republic of China, dairy industry, pork industry, ractopamine*