

From Legislation to Strategy: Understanding China's New Law on Foreign Relations

Emrah Yıldırımçakar *

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Abstract: States require both international and domestic legal frameworks to regulate interactions between national and international institutions, citizens, and foreign actors. The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国对外关系法), enacted in June 2023 and effective from July 1, marks the first and most comprehensive legal framework in China's legislative history for governing its external engagements across political, economic, legal, and security dimensions. More than a domestic measure, the law reflects China's ambition to institutionalize its expanding global role and harmonize domestic legal mechanisms with international commitments. Introduced during a period of intensified engagement with global governance, it coincides with President Xi Jinping's shift from Deng Xiaoping's Tao Guang Yang Hui ("hide-and-bide") approach toward a more proactive international presence, while maintaining the discourse of peaceful development and win-win cooperation. This study examines the strategic, political, and legal motivations behind the law's adoption, positioning it within China's broader foreign policy trajectory. Using a qualitative, document-based methodology, it draws on official statements, speeches, policy reports, and academic literature. The analysis considers the law not only as a legal instrument but also as a strategic tool to strengthen domestic-international linkages, consolidate foreign policy under centralized leadership, and project a coherent international image aligned with China's long-term vision.

Keywords: International Law, China, China's Law on Foreign Relations, Foreign Policy, International Politics.

* Asst. Prof., Avrasya University, Trabzon/Türkiye, ORCID: 0000-0001-6501-5471, E-mail: emrahycakar@gmail.com

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Mevzuattan Stratejiye: Çin'in Dış İlişkilerle İlgili Yeni Yasasını Anlamak

Özet: Devletler, ulusal ve uluslararası kurumlar, vatandaşlar ve yabancı aktörler arasındaki ilişkileri düzenlemek için hem uluslararası hem de ulusal hukuk çerçevelerine ihtiyaç duyar. 2023 yılı Haziran ayında kabul edilip 1 Temmuz'da yürürlüğe giren Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Dış İlişkiler Yasası (中华人民共和国对外关系法), Çin'in yasama tarihinde dış ilişkilerini siyasi, ekonomik, hukuki ve güvenlik boyutlarında düzenleyen ilk ve en kapsamlı yasal çerçeveyi temsil etmektedir. Bu yasa, salt bir iç hukuk düzenlemesi olmanın ötesinde, Çin'in küresel rolünü kurumsallaştırma ve ulusal hukuk mekanizmalarını uluslararası taahhütleriyle uyumlu hâle getirme arzusunu yansıtmaktadır. Küresel yönetimle artan etkileşim döneminde yürürlüğe giren yasa, Devlet Başkanı Şi Cinping'in Deng Şiaoping'in Tao Guang Yang Hui ("gizlen ve zamanını bekle") yaklaşımından, barışçıl kalkınma ve kazan-kazan söylemini sürdürmekle birlikte, daha etkin ve görünür bir uluslararası varlığa yönelik stratejisine denk düşmektedir. Bu çalışma, yasanın kabul edilmesinin ardındaki stratejik, siyasi ve hukuki motivasyonları inceleyerek onu Çin'in genel dış politika çizgisi içinde konumlandırmaktadır. Nitel, belge temelli bir yöntemle yürütülen araştırma; resmî açıklamalar, lider konuşmaları, politika raporları ve akademik literatürü temel almakta; yasayı yalnızca bir hukuk metni olarak değil, aynı zamanda iç-dış bağlantıları güçlendiren, dış politikayı merkezi liderlik altında pekiştiren ve Çin'in uzun vadeli vizyonu ile uyumlu tutarlı bir uluslararası imaj oluşturan stratejik bir araç olarak değerlendirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uluslararası Hukuk, Çin, Çin Dış İlişkiler Yasası, Dış Politika, Uluslararası Politika.

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info@diha.org.tr

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Introduction

In June 2023, the People's Republic of China introduced a major legislative initiative in terms of foreign affairs by enacting the Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China, which officially came into effect on July 1, 2023. This law marks a significant development in China's legal and strategic posture, aimed at regulating its external engagements across political, economic, legal, and security dimensions. More than a domestic legislative action, the law reflects China's ambition to institutionalize its expanding role and influence in global affairs. Its scope is unlikely to be confined solely to China's international interests and role; it is also expected to foster a conducive environment for strengthening both domestic and external engagement.¹ This development is closely linked to China's deepening relations with international actors, institutions, and foreign individuals as an outcome of accelerating globalization and the rapid rise of China's economy and technological capabilities.

This legislation represents the first and most comprehensive legal framework of China's foreign relations in its legislative history. It is designed to harmonize China's domestic legal system with its international legal commitments by providing a unified and coherent legal structure for China in the context of managing both internal and external dimensions of its foreign policy.² Accordingly, the motivations behind the enactment of this law are rooted in China's long-standing strategic vision under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. While discussions on the need for such a law have circulated in Chinese political and academic committees for several years, its formalization coincides with a period of intensified Chinese engagement with global governance and international institutions. The law signals China's intention to play a more assertive and structured role in shaping the international legal order.³ In this context, one of the central questions addressed in this study is: What strategic, political, and legal factors prompted China to adopt this law at this historic juncture?

¹ Tang Zheng, "Foreign Relations Law of the People's Republic of China." *International Legal Materials*, 63, (2024): 627-636.

² Huang Huikang, "Milestone of China's Foreign-Related Legislation-A Review of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Foreign Relations." *Chinese Journal of Transnational Law*, 1 No 2 (2024): 95-116.

³ Wang, Zhiqiong June., Chen, Jianfu, "China's Foreign-Related 'Rule of Law': The Evolution of an Idea." *Hague Journal on the Rule Law*, (2025).

President Xi Jinping's approach represents a departure from the guiding principle of Tao Guang Yang Hui (韬光养晦) or "hide-and-bide" which was a hallmark of Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy strategy and followed by his successors. This principle emphasized maintaining a low international profile while focusing on internal development and avoiding confrontation.⁴ In contrast, Xi's foreign policy signals a shift toward a more proactive and visible global presence, while still adhering to the discourse of peaceful development and win-win cooperation. The Law on Foreign Relations must therefore be understood not only as a legal instrument, but as part of China's broader strategic effort to reshape its international image, consolidate legal mechanisms to support its global ambitions, and promote a more coordinated foreign policy apparatus under centralized state leadership.

This study implements a qualitative, document-based research methodology by integrating legal, policy and discourse analysis. It also examines official government statements, speeches by state leaders, and reports from key policy-making entities such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice to analyze the Law on Foreign Relations within China's broader foreign policy strategy. The analysis also includes relevant academic literature and policy documents to identify the legal, political, and strategic motivations underlying the enactment of this new law. This study is structured into four main sections. The first section begins with introduction by outlining the general framework, research question, and the design of the study. The second section explores the key messages and strategic considerations underpinning the Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China. The third section offers a critical analysis of the main arguments and policy implications embedded within the law. Finally, the fourth section concludes the study by summarizing the key findings and assessing the broader consequences of the law for the future direction of China's foreign policy.

1. The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China

The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China was a necessary step for China to further adapt to the evolving global order and the framework of

⁴ Wang, Zhiqiong June., Chen, Jianfu. "China's Foreign-Related 'Rule of Law': The Evolution of an Idea." *Hague Journal on the Rule Law*, (2025). Ming, Du. "International Economic Law in the Era of Great Power Rivalry." *Journal Of Transnational Law*, 57, No 3, (2024): 730-739.

international law. The Chinese leadership, under the administration of President Xi Jinping, sought to formulate a new approach to its engagement with the international community. Recognizing the ongoing transformation of the global landscape, President Xi emphasized the importance of multilateralism, the role of international organizations, and the development needs of Global South countries. He also underscored the significance of promoting a more equal, multipolar world order based on shared development and win-win cooperation.⁵ In the context of this strategic foresight, the Chinese government enacted a new law to govern its relations with the external world. The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China includes six parts, namely:

- ⇒ Part One: General Principles
- ⇒ Part Two: Functions and Powers for the Conduct of Foreign Relations
- ⇒ Part Three: Goals and Mission of Conducting Foreign Relations
- ⇒ Part Four: The System of Foreign Relations
- ⇒ Part Five: Support for the Conduct of Foreign Relations
- ⇒ Part Six: Supplementary Provision

In the first section, key principles such as safeguarding China's sovereignty, ensuring national security, protecting the interests of the state and the Chinese people, promoting national development, and striving toward the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation are strongly emphasized.⁶ These objectives are framed within the broader commitment to maintaining global peace and development. By prioritizing these principles, China aims to communicate its core foreign policy stance with the international community by highlighting its political and economic orientation centered on defending national values, securing both domestic and international interests, and promoting peaceful cooperation based on the concept of win-win development.

This section not only emphasizes the principles of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, but also emphasizes China's adherence to

⁵ Xinhua News Agency. "Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference on December 10, 2024." Accessed: August 5, 2025, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw_fyrbt/202412/t20241210_11541931.html

⁶ Ministry of Justice of the People Republic of China. "The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China." Accessed: July 10, 2025, http://en.moj.gov.cn/2023-07/11/c_901729.htm

Marxism-Leninism, the principles and thoughts of Mao Zedong, as well as the thoughts and principles of Deng Xiaoping.⁷ Furthermore, it strongly outlines the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which includes mutual respect for sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, territorial integrity, equality and mutual benefit, as well as supporting peaceful coexistence. These are presented alongside commitments to defending China's sovereignty, national security, dignity, honor, and the interests of the Chinese people.

The second section provides a general overview of the authority and functioning of the Chinese government in the context of foreign relations. It outlines the powers and responsibilities of various government entities as defined by the Constitution, relevant laws, and administrative structures. This section details the roles of national institutions at multiple levels, including provinces, autonomous regions, ministries, military commissions, and the State Council, highlighting how they operate within the broader framework of China's foreign policy.⁸ It also covers the functions of China's external institutions abroad, such as embassies and consulates, in representing and safeguarding national interests.

The third section sets out the goals and mission underlying the implementation of the Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China. It codifies China's foreign policy objectives by emphasizing the safeguarding of national sovereignty, security, territorial integrity, and the advancement of development goals. Rooted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, this section prioritizes multilateralism, international development cooperation—particularly within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as China's Global Security Initiative, Global Civilization Initiative, and commitments to global environmental governance.⁹ These objectives

⁷ Official Website of Communist Party of China (中国共产党新闻网). "The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China." (《中华人民共和国对外关系法》), Accessed: June 30, 2025, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0629/c64094-40023665.html>

⁸ Ministry of Justice of the People Republic of China. "The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China." Accessed: July 10, 2025, http://en.moj.gov.cn/2023-07/11/c_901729.htm

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国外交部). "The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China." (《中华人民共和国对外关系法》). Accessed: July 15, 2025, http://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjw_673085/zfxxgk_674865/zcfg/fl/202306/t20230628_11105189.shtml

collectively reflect China's ambition to shape a more balanced and cooperative international order.

The third section of this law also highlights the importance of strengthening human resource capacity in the field of foreign affairs, including measures related to the training, employment, management, and overall support of personnel engaged in international work. These provisions also reflect a strategic effort to professionalize and institutionalize China's foreign policy and prepares it to meet the demands of a more complex global environment.

The fourth section, in general, outlines the legal and institutional mechanisms for managing China's foreign relations in accordance with the Chinese Constitution and its relevant laws. It affirms that the state concludes or agrees international treaties and agreements and fulfills its obligations under such instruments in faith. The law also stipulates that the People's Republic of China shall protect the legitimate rights and interests of foreign citizens and organizations within its territory in accordance with domestic law. Additionally, it emphasizes China's commitment to strengthening both bilateral and multilateral dialogue on the rule of law by promoting international legal exchanges and cooperation. It also includes the engagement of China in law implementation and judicial affairs with other countries and international organizations in the context of concluded treaties or principles of equality and reciprocity. This section also underscores that all state institutions and societal entities bear responsibility for protection national interests in foreign exchanges. Individuals or organizations, whether within or outside China's borders that harm China's national interests may be held legally accountable.¹⁰ The law further encourages the development of robust legislation and institutional frameworks to support international legal cooperation, treaty implementation, general compliance in foreign affairs, as well as protecting China's external interests.

This section of the Law introduces important provisions aimed at enhancing China's institutional and legal capacity in foreign relations. It also grants the state the authority to impose "countermeasures and restrictive measures" in response to foreign actions

¹⁰ Official Website of Communist Party of China (中国共产党新闻网). "The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China." (《中华人民共和国对外关系法》), Accessed: June 30, 2025, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0629/c64094-40023665.html>

deemed detrimental to China's sovereignty, security, or development interests. Furthermore, it also emphasizes establishing a special financing mechanism to support foreign relations activities and ensuring that financial resources are aligned with China's economic development and global goals.

The fifth section extends the extraterritorial scope of the Law on Foreign Relations by asserting that entities and individuals abroad may fall under its jurisdiction if their actions are deemed harmful to China's national interests. This provision applies broadly across various domains, including diplomatic, commercial, cultural, military, and non-governmental interactions. It reflects China's growing importance on protecting its interests beyond its borders and signals a more assertive legal posture in international affairs. Moreover, the law requires that foreign nationals and organizations operating within China comply with Chinese laws. Failure to do so may result in restrictions on their travel, residency, or operational activities within Chinese territory.¹¹

Chapter Six of the Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China was only consisting of the Supplementary Provision, which specifies the date on which the law comes into effect. According to this provision, the Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China officially entered into force on July 1, 2023.

2. China's Political Strategies Through the Lens of Law

The right to defend national sovereignty has become a significant subject of discussion for nearly all nations and states, and it remains one of the most prominent issues within the legal and constitutional frameworks of independent states worldwide. In this context, the Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China reaffirms China's firm commitment to safeguarding state sovereignty and protecting the rights and interests of the Chinese people. On the other hand, it is argued that the law also serves as a strategic tool to counterbalance and challenge Western-led unilateral sanctions and restrictive measures, positioning China to assert greater influence in shaping the global legal and political order.¹² However, the purpose of this law may also aim to bring China

¹¹ Ministry of Justice of the People Republic of China. "The Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China." Accessed: July 10, 2025, http://en.moj.gov.cn/2023-07/11/c_901729.htm

¹² Samovich Yu, V., "The Law on International Relations of the People's Republic of China: what worries the West?" *Juridical Journal of Samara University*, 10, No 2, (2024): 79-83.

closer to the Western world by fostering its multilateral cooperation, as well as promoting more constructive multilateral relations.

Since the 1990s, the ongoing advancement of globalization has significantly transformed the nature of foreign relations, expanding the range of actors involved, the scale of interactions, and the content and form of engagement. As a result, the interaction between domestic legal systems and the international order has become increasingly frequent and complex. In this context, strengthening foreign relations legislation and enhancing the rule of law in external affairs has emerged as a global trend. This shift seeks to align foreign relations practices with the broader domestic legal environment, although the legal logic applied to international affairs often differs from that governing internal matters. In recent years, globalization has encountered serious challenges, while strategic competition among major powers has intensified, giving rise to a more adversarial approach to foreign relations law. Despite these developments, prior to China's enactment of its Foreign Relations Law, few states had adopted comprehensive foundational legislation specifically governing their foreign relations.¹³ As a result of these development in international arena, to maintain and expand its multilateral engagement with international actors, China has increasingly recognized the need to pursue a more proactive and strategically coordinated foreign policy.

China is actively working to improve its law of foreign relations to create a legal framework that protects both national and international interests while enhancing its competitiveness in the global economy.¹⁴ As part of this effort, China seeks to strengthen its relations with international actors, organizations, and institutions to sustain economic growth and advance cooperative initiatives such as the BRI. Like many other nations, growing interdependence has prompted China to reassess its foreign policy and related legal structures. Consequently, to foster more effective international dialogue and cooperation, it was essential for China to make its legal and political intentions more

¹³ Cai Congyan (蔡从燕), "Foreign Relations Law: Six Comments." (对外关系法: 六点评论), *International Law Studies (国际法研究)*, 2 (2024):41-51

¹⁴ Jia Shaoxue, "Regulation of relations complicated by a foreign element in the People's Republic of China: legislative basis and practice." *Lomonosov Law Journal*, No 4, (2024): 149-173, <https://doi.org/10.55959/msu0130-0113-11-65-4-9>.

transparent and comprehensible to the global community.¹⁵ Consequently, this was expected to facilitate deeper political, economic, and cultural engagement between China and the rest of the world.

The Chinese government views the Foreign Relations Law as a timely response to the evolving global context. As it is declared by the Ministry of Justice of People's Republic of China, the world is currently undergoing in a century that profound changes unseen, and it is marked by unprecedented instability and uncertainty. Within this complex and volatile international environment, China faces mounting external pressures and challenges. While many states possess well-developed legal systems governing foreign relations, enabling them to pursue strategic objectives through legal instruments that China had long lacked a foundational legal framework in this domain. The Foreign Relations Law aims to rectify this gap, equipping China with the legal tools necessary to respond more effectively to external challenges and mitigate associated risks. By formalizing core legal systems related to foreign affairs, this legislation enhances China's capacity to engage in legal struggles with strategic focuses. It is expected to play a crucial role in safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and development interests, while also reinforcing national dignity and honor of China on the global stage.¹⁶

In line with this political approach, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China spokesperson stated that under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, the Chinese government has actively sought to influence the development of the global economy. It advocates for the construction of an open world economy grounded in cooperation, economic interdependence, and the pursuit of mutual benefit and win-win outcomes. Within the framework of genuine multilateralism, China emphasizes the importance of equal rights, opportunities, and rules for all nations, aiming to foster a more inclusive and balanced global economic order.¹⁷ To this end, China aims to

¹⁵ Jorgensen, Malcolm. "Political Framing in China's Foreign Relations Law: International Law and 'Fundamental Norms Governing International Relations.'" *Chinese Journal of Transnational Law*, no1, (2024):117-136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2753412X241261033>.

¹⁶Ministry of Justice of People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国司法部). "The Significance and Role of Foreign Relations Law." (对外关系法的重大意义和作用), Accessed: June 8, 2025, https://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/zwgkztzl/xxxcgcxjpfzsz/fzsxllqv/202307/t20230703_481901.html

¹⁷ Xinhua News Agency. "Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference on December 10, 2024." Accessed: August 5, 2025, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/fyrbt/202412/t20241210_11541931.html

establish more expanded political, economic and cultural relations with more international orders, with the aim of pursuing a relatively more proactive posture compared to the past decades.

The enactment of the Foreign Relations Law represented a significant legislative development not only for China but also within the broader context of global legal practice. At its core, this legislation is a necessary step for China as it continues to pursue deeper relations with international actors, to improve the institutional and legal frameworks to manage its foreign relations, and to safeguard its national sovereignty, security, and development interests. It also reflects China's effort to modernize its national governance system and capacity while promoting greater coordination between domestic legal development and its engagement with the international legal order. Moreover, in light of the shifting dynamics of great power competition, the Foreign Relations Law of China functions as a vital legal instrument, establishing a new front in the legal dimensions of international strategic rivalry.¹⁸ As Jorgensen conveyed, according to President Xi Jinping, the guiding principles of China's approach to international law are rooted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, that were a component of the a legal struggle which is regarded not as an end in itself, but as a necessary means to safeguard core national interests and to contribute to the establishment of a more equitable and rational international order and Principles adopted at the Bandung Conference in 1955.¹⁹ in this context, in the modern era, China revisits and compares its new and old law to enact the better legislation for its increasing influence in international affairs.

Some researchers argue that the efforts by the United States and certain Western countries in recent years have provided a critical backdrop for the enactment of China's new Law on Foreign Relations. In this context, safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and development interests stands as a central objective of the legislation. As

¹⁸ Cai Congyan (蔡从燕), "Foreign Relations Law: Six Comments." (对外关系法: 六点评论), *International Law Studies (国际法研究)*, 2 (2024):41-51.

¹⁹ Jorgensen, Malcolm. "Political Framing in China's Foreign Relations Law: International Law and 'Fundamental Norms Governing International Relations.'" *Chinese Journal of Transnational Law*, no1, (2024):117-136; Huang Huikang, "Milestone of China's Foreign-Related Legislation-A Review of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Foreign Relations." *Chinese Journal of Transnational Law*, 1 No 2 (2024): 95-116.

China's development trajectory enters a phase marked by both strategic opportunities and heightened risks, alongside growing uncertainty in the international environment, the concept of "struggle" has assumed greater importance in foreign-related legal practices and the formulation of this law. Nevertheless, cooperation remains the underlying goal of China's foreign relations legal framework. Legal struggle is regarded not as an end in itself, but as a necessary means to safeguard core national interests and to contribute to the establishment of a more equitable and rational international order.²⁰ The recent attempts to improve the laws governing China's foreign relations and its new cooperation initiatives reflect the Chinese government's principle of striving for continuous improvement.

On the other hand, China's decision to promulgate the Foreign Relations Law is not solely driven by the need to establish a legal framework to support its expanding global presence; it is also closely tied to the broader strategic vision reflected in its recent international initiatives, namely, the Global Security Initiative (全球安全倡议), the Global Development Initiative (全球发展倡议), and the Global Civilization Initiative (全球文明倡议). These initiatives collectively aim to reshape global governance in line with China's values and interests. Additionally, the evolving dynamics of China–United States relations, coupled with the increasing uncertainty surrounding the effectiveness and stability of international treaties and legal norms, have further influenced China's decision to codify its foreign relations through domestic legislation.²¹ Accordingly, such an adaptation to the realities of world politics represents a significant transformation of the international image of China as an emerging power, with implications for its political, economic, technological and military posture.

It is also argued that China's recent legal and strategic initiatives, including the Foreign Relations Law, are closely linked to the broader ideological framework of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the pursuit of common prosperity and

²⁰ Cai Congyan (蔡从燕), "Foreign Relations Law: Six Comments." (对外关系法: 六点评论), *International Law Studies (国际法研究)*, 2 (2024):41-51.

²¹ Moritz Rudolf, "China's Foreign Relations Law: Balancing Struggle with Beijing's Responsible Great Power Narrative." Accessed: August 1, 2025. <https://npcobserver.com/2023/07/03/china-foreign-relations-law-struggle-responsible-great-power-narrative/>

following a more proactive foreign policy.²² These developments reflect China's long-term objectives to reduce its reliance on foreign technology, enhance its dominance in high-tech manufacturing, and promote indigenous innovation in areas such as advanced robotics and digital infrastructure. As part of this strategy, China aims to achieve 70 percent self-sufficiency in high-tech industries by 2025 and seeks to attain a leading position in global markets by 2049, which is the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. In parallel, China has adopted a more assertive foreign policy posture in recent years. This shift underscores the necessity of reassessing and recalibrating its legal frameworks in engagement with international actors, organizations, and communities to align with its evolving global ambitions.²³

The motto "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想) has become synonymous with the model of socialism advanced under Xi Jinping's leadership.²⁴ This ideological framework is closely linked to the Four Comprehensive Strategies (四个全面战略布局), which were formally introduced during the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017. These strategies include building a moderately prosperous society, deepening reform, governing the nation according to the rule of law, and strictly governing the Party.²⁵ Another central objective of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is to adapt core socialist principles to China's unique historical, cultural, and economic conditions. Under Xi's leadership, this vision also encompasses the modernization of China's governance system and its transformation into a more globally influential power. Its ultimate aims include eradicating poverty, improving living standards, and positioning

²² Fan Xin, and Song, Xiaoyu. "The Development Logic of Capital under Socialism with Chinese Characteristics." *Marxism & Reality*, 01, (2023): 93-101.

²³ Ming Du, "International Economic Law in the Era of Great Power Rivalry." *Journal Of Transnational Law*, 57, No 3, (2024): 730-739.

²⁴ Han, Zhenfeng (韩振峰). "Comprehensively study and understand Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era (全面学习领会习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想)." People's Official Website, (人 民 网) Accessed: April 12, 2023, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0412/c4053132662345.html?eqid=cf6f468800036f5800000005648f3224>

²⁵ John Garrick, and Chang Bennett Yan. "Xi Jinping Thought." *China Perspectives*, 01, (2018): 99-105.

China as a leading force in global political and economic affairs.²⁶ Many of these goals, such as poverty eradication, progress in political and economic development, and improved living standards, have been largely achieved. However, these achievements are based on Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening-up policies. It is also important to note that progress in these areas has accelerated significantly under Xi's administration.

A comparison between China's current legal system and that of three decades ago reveals significant progress, marking a transition from a system predominantly characterized by the "rule of man" to one increasingly guided by the "rule of law."²⁷ Since the introduction of the reform and opening-up policies, China has developed a socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics, which has undergone continuous refinement. This system, while rooted in socialist ideology, is often seen as incorporating certain elements of Western legal traditions, resulting in a hybrid model that blends domestic and international legal principles. Through this legal transformation, China aims to demonstrate to the international community that it values the rule of law. At the same time, the Chinese leadership emphasizes that legal norms must be adapted to the country's unique national conditions and cultural values.²⁸ Therefore, the new Foreign Relations Law was designed with this dual objective in mind of aligning with China's national conditions and cultural traditions, while also addressing the demands of contemporary foreign relations.

According to the conveyance of Hu, President Xi Jinping, China's path to modernization reflects both the specific national conditions of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the common features shared by the modernization processes of other countries.²⁹ In this context, modernization with Chinese characteristics entails the modernization of a large population and the achievement of common prosperity. It also emphasizes harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, as well as a

²⁶ Yildirimcakar, Emrah and İnan, Erkan. "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and its Impact on the Rise of China." *Erciyes Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 70, (2025): 47-54.

²⁷ Cohen, Jerome Alan. "Chinese Law: At the Crossroads." *The China Quarterly*, no. 53 (1973): 139-43; Zhang Mo, "The Socialist Legal System with Chinese Characteristics: China's Discourse for the Rule of Law and a Bitter Experience." (December 1, 2010). *Temple International & Comparative Law Journal*, 24, (2010): 1-60.

²⁸ Zhang, Mo, "The Socialist Legal System with Chinese Characteristics: China's Discourse for the Rule of Law and a Bitter Experience." (December 1, 2010). *Temple International & Comparative Law Journal*, 24, (2010): 1-60.

²⁹ Hu Angang, *Modernization with Chinese Characteristics and Great Power: Understanding Xi Jinping's Governance*. Singapore, 2023, Springer.

commitment to peaceful development.³⁰ This model seeks to offer an alternative to Western modernization paradigms by aligning economic growth with social equity, environmental sustainability, and national stability.

In line with the developments in Chinese Foreign affairs and its law of foreign relations, the characterization of modern China is claimed to have connection with eight key factors. First, China has experienced significant growth in its GDP and per capita income. Second, the social and economic conditions of the Chinese population have undergone remarkable improvements. Third, the living standards of approximately 800 million people have changed substantially, with the majority no longer residing in rural areas. Fourth, the illiteracy rate has dramatically declined from 22.81% in 1982 to 2.67% in 2020, while the number of college students and above has surged from 6.2 million to 218 million. Fifth, China's social security system has become the largest globally. Sixth, China's comprehensive development trajectory is expected to elevate it to the status of a modern, moderately developed country by 2035. Seventh, having never experienced colonialism, China is perceived as possessing a unique potential to contribute to global peace and development. Eighth, China has transitioned from a low-income country to the world's largest developing country and emerging economy.³¹ These eight factors summarize modern China's approach to contemporary principles of foreign affairs. Moreover, they offer a concise ideological perspective on the Chinese government's domestic and foreign policies.

3. Legal Basis and Discussions

The inferences reached and the interpretations made in this study are based directly on the provisions of the Foreign Relations Law of the People's Republic of China, as well as its political rhetoric. Firstly, the emphasis placed on sovereignty, security, and development objectives in the general principles section aligns with the inference that China's security-oriented approach to foreign policy is strengthening and its pursuit of

³⁰ Moritz Rudolf, "China's Foreign Relations Law: Balancing Struggle with Beijing's Responsible Great Power Narrative." Accessed: August 1, 2025. <https://npcobserver.com/2023/07/03/china-foreign-relations-law-struggle-responsible-great-power-narrative/>

³¹ Hu Angang, *Modernization with Chinese Characteristics and Great Power: Understanding Xi Jinping's Governance*. Singapore, 2023, Springer.

international harmony through the "win-win" rhetoric continues.³² The prominent role assigned to central state bodies in the conduct of foreign relations in the Powers and Duties section directly supports the finding that foreign policy is increasingly taking on a centralized structure. The explicit codification of multilateralism through the BRI and other global initiatives in the Objectives and Duties section provides the legal basis for the findings related to development and global governance.³³ Both the commitment to international agreements and the authority to take countermeasures, when necessary, regulated under the section titled Foreign Relations System, support the conclusion that China is both seeking compliance with international law and developing a more assertive legal challenge against Western sanctions. Furthermore, the financing and human resources arrangements envisioned in the Support Mechanisms section are linked to the interpretation that foreign policy is becoming more professional not only legally but also institutionally, politically, and economically.

The enactment of the Foreign Relations Law reflects the Chinese Communist Party's intention to institutionalize a more formalized framework for the conduct of foreign policy. The law seeks to align China's international engagement with its core security and development interests, while also enhancing the legal basis for countering external pressures. Formally, it is presented as a measure to strengthen China's capacity to resist foreign interference and unilateral sanctions, which Chinese authorities often characterize as part of a broader containment strategy pursued by the United States and its allies.³⁴ According to some analysts, the newly enacted law, which China frames as necessary to confront global uncertainty and external pressures is paradoxical when measured against its stated aspiration to promote a "harmonious international order."³⁵

³² Andrea Ghiselli, "Diplomatic Opportunities and Rising Threats: The Expanding Role of Non-Traditional Security in Chinese Foreign and Security Policy." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27, (2018): 611 - 625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1433584>.

³³ Gesti Anggraini, Adi Rio Arianto, Pradono Budi Saputro, "China's Global Strategy for The 21st Century of Silk Road: China and The Asia Security Architecture in Xi Jinping Government." *Bhuwana: Journal of Global Studies*. 1(1), (2023): 82-131. <https://doi.org/10.59408/bjgs.v1i1.59>.

³⁴ S. Glaser Bonnie, Moritz Rudolf, Interpreting "China's New Foreign Relations Law." The German Marshall Fund of the United States, July 15, 2023. <https://www.gmfus.org/news/interpreting-chinas-new-foreign-relations-law>,

³⁵ Robert Rust, "What China's Foreign Relations Law Tells Us About Its View of the International Community." September 11, 2023. <https://blog.ucs.org/robert-rust/what-chinas-foreign-relations-law-tells-us-about-its-view-of-the-international-community/>

In line with such critiques, it has also been argued that China's foreign-related "rule of law" create mixed implications for the promotion of United States-style rule of law and democratization. While the law may represent an alternative model of legal governance rooted in Chinese priorities, it may also reveal significant capacity limitations and contradictions in practice.³⁶

In sum, while the law aims to strengthen China's global influence, consolidate its sovereignty, and reshape international legal norms, it has also sparked renewed debate about China's ability to pursue a balanced strategy between protecting national interests and promoting global cooperation. While the Foreign Relations Law of the People's Republic of China is officially presented as a framework for peaceful development and multilateral cooperation, some of its provisions may have controversial implications under international law. Regulations regarding countermeasures and extraterritorial jurisdiction could potentially create tensions with the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs. On a practical level, this law could also provide China with the legal basis to defy Western sanctions, more assertively advocate in maritime law disputes, and promote its normative agenda in international organizations.

Conclusion

The new Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China was enacted to redefine the relationship between the Chinese people, institutions and foreigners, foreign institutions. It is deeply influenced by the doctrine of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics as well as Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy. While its primary aim is to safeguard China's national and international interests, the law also seeks to pursue a more proactive and self-confident foreign policy with the aim of advancing the principles of harmony, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation. By emphasizing core principles such as non-interference, the protection of national security, the safeguarding of development interests, and the promotion of multilateral cooperation, the legislation not only consolidates domestic policy coherence but also signals to the international community a more codified and predictable diplomatic posture. This law

³⁶ Matthew S. Erie, "Foreign Policy Implications for China's Foreign-Related 'Rule of Law'." *Orbis*, 67, no.4, (2023): 565-578. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2023.08.006>.

reflects China's determination to align its legal framework with its long-term strategic objectives, indicating that future foreign relations will be shaped by an increasingly symbiotic relationship between law and policy.

There are also some limitations for this study. One of the key limitations of this study, for instance, is the lack of empirical data on the long-term consequences of China's Foreign Relations Law due to its relatively recent nature. Since the analysis relies heavily on official documents, speeches of leaders, and policy reports, it is unlikely that the distinctions between strategic rhetoric and actual implementation can be adequately tested. Additionally, Moreover, the limited academic literature in the field of law leaves assessments largely at the normative and discursive level. These limitations suggest that the findings should be considered predictive rather than definitive, offering inferences about the potential relationship between law and the trajectory of Chinese foreign policy.

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