China has outgrown its mistrust of international laws, not least in its maritime affairs, write Jerome A. Cohen and Jon M. Van Dyke.

Finding its legs

In the past few years, China has emerged as a knowledgeable group of policy leaders who have laughed derisively at the idea of nominating a Chinese specialist to serve on academic and government expert panels. The Chinese have been more self-assured in the global arena that they were during the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966, even fought a war against the UN in Korea to resolve ocean disputes? No, it was so lacking in international law that it could not even acquire it despite the efforts of a large number of capable friends. Now, it is increasingly realized that China has outgrown its mistrust of international laws, not least in its maritime affairs.

The PLAN, the People’s Liberation Army Navy, has been particularly responsible for multilateral ocean organization and maritime council initiatives. China has been active in the UN and actively participated in the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea, and another is a member of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. It has participated in international efforts to protect the marine environment of the South China Sea and its interests in the South China Sea. In addition, China and South Korea have agreed to implement a memorandum of understanding on the conduct of seismic surveys in the Yellow Sea called Seismic Rock by the two countries. It is no longer a question of whether China should follow the rules or not, but how it will proceed in the implementation of these rules. China’s approach is clear: it will follow the rules and implement them as part of its commitment to the rule of law in the South China Sea. Although China, as a member of the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea, China has a responsibility to respect existing legal frameworks, including those of the International Tribunal. By its active participation in these organizations, China has shown its commitment to the rule of law and its respect for international legal principles.

China has also been active in the UN and has actively participated in the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea, and another is a member of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. It has participated in international efforts to protect the marine environment of the South China Sea. In addition, China and South Korea have agreed to implement a memorandum of understanding on the conduct of seismic surveys in the Yellow Sea. Specifically, China has agreed to conduct seismic surveys in the surrounding areas of the Yellow Sea, and South Korea has agreed to provide technical assistance and support. China’s approach is clear: it will follow the rules and implement them as part of its commitment to the rule of law in the South China Sea. Although China, as a member of the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea, China has a responsibility to respect existing legal frameworks, including those of the International Tribunal. By its active participation in these organizations, China has shown its commitment to the rule of law and its respect for international legal principles.

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