

Submitted: International Law with Chinese Characteristics

As a victim of Western colonialism and imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries under “unequal treaties” and “universal” international law, China has—especially since the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949—felt little obligation to faithfully comply with international law for any reason other than self-interest. Whether denouncing it as bourgeois in the early Cold War or disregarding an international law of the sea tribunal’s adverse decision in 2016, the People’s Republic of China has often shown a conflicted loyalty to a system of law it views as foreign. While China did join other developing nations in seeking to create a new system of international law in the 1950’s based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, China has recently shown that as a Great Power it is willing to break even these purportedly key fundamentals of international law when it suits its interests. Thus, for the People’s Republic of China, international law is merely the continuation of international politics by other means.