



Abant Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi

Journal of Abant Social Sciences

2025, 25(3): 1396-1408, doi: 10.11616/asbi.1742535



The One China Policy and the Paradox of Taiwan's Recognition: Patron-Statehood, Strategic Exclusion, and Norm Contestation

Tek Çin Politikası ve Tayvan'ın Tanınma Paradoksu: Patron Devletlik, Stratejik Dışlama ve Norm Mücadelesi

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Geliş Tarihi (Received): 15.07.2025

Kabul Tarihi (Accepted): 12.09.2025

Yayın Tarihi (Published): 30.11.2025

Abstract: This article examines the question of Taiwan's recognition under international law in the context of the "One China" policy of the People's Republic of China. Despite meeting the criteria for statehood as defined in the Montevideo Convention, Taiwan remains largely unrecognized and is prevented from participating in international organizations. The study draws attention not only to the legal focus of recognition, but also to the fact that it is an interest and power-based process. The paper provides a broad framework for analyzing Taiwan's current status, including China's policies of patron-state strategies and a number of diplomatic pressure mechanisms. Finally, using Hegel's master-slave dialectic, Taiwan's struggle for subjectivation without recognition is theoretically discussed. The study aims to discuss the limits of the recognition regime in international law and the need for transformation through the case of Taiwan. The findings suggest that the Taiwan case demonstrates both the limits of the recognition regime in international law and the capacity of unrecognized actors to exercise functional international roles

Keywords: State Recognition, Hegelian Dialectic, One-China Policy, Taiwan, Patron-State Strategy

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Öz: Bu makale, Tayvan'ın uluslararası hukukta tanınma sorununu, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin "Tek Çin" politikası bağlamında incelemektedir. Montevideo Sözleşmesi'nde tanımlanan devlet olma kriterlerini karşılamasına rağmen Tayvan, büyük ölçüde tanınmamakta ve uluslararası örgütlere katılımı engellenmektedir. Çalışma, tanınmanın yalnızca hukuki odağına değil, aynı zamanda çıkar ve güç temelli bir süreç olduğuna dikkat çekmektedir. Makale, Tayvan'ın mevcut statüsünü analiz ederken, Çin'in patron-devlet stratejileri ve birtakım diplomatik baskı mekanizmaları politikalarını da içeren geniş bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Son olarak, Hegel'in efendi-köle diyalektiği kullanılarak, Tayvan'ın tanınmaksızın özneleşme çabası kuramsal bir çerçevede ele alınmaktadır. Çalışma, Tayvan örneği üzerinden uluslararası hukukta tanınma rejiminin sınırlarını ve dönüşüm ihtiyacını tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bulgular, Tayvan örneğinin uluslararası hukukta tanıma rejiminin sınırlarını ve tanınmamış aktörlerin işlevsel uluslararası roller üstlenebilme kapasitesini gösterdiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Devletlerin Tanınması, Hegelyan Diyalektik, Tek Çin Politikası, Tayvan, Patron Devlet Stratejisi

Atıf/Cite as: Meydan, V., (2025). The One China Policy and the Paradox of Taiwan's Recognition: Patron-Statehood, Strategic Exclusion, and Norm Contestation. *Abant Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 25(3), 1396-1408. doi: 10.11616/asbi.1742535

İntihal-Plagiarism/Etik-Ethic: Bu makale, en az iki hakem tarafından incelenmiş ve intihal içermediği, araştırma ve yayın etiğine uyulduğu teyit edilmiştir. / This article has been reviewed by at least two referees and it has been confirmed that it is plagiarism-free and complies with research and publication ethics. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/asbi/policy>

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1. Introduction

Apart from its constitutive or explanatory character, recognition is of such importance in inter-state relations that it is, in Krasner's words, 'the golden ring that political leaders hope to grasp' (Krasner, 2009). Rignmar (2002) also states that, "world politics is best described as a recognition game rather than as a prisoner's dilemma". However, in addition to the unclear nature of recognition, Taiwan's contested position in international system further complicates the situation. Although Taiwan meets the criteria for sovereign statehood, it has limited recognition in the international community and it is not a member of most international organizations, notably the UN. This shows that the concept of recognition in international law is shaped not only by normative but also political and strategic dynamics. The main research question of the article is: "By what means and to what extent does China's One China policy prevent Taiwan's international recognition, and what kind of a strategy of subjectivation does Taiwan develop in this process?"

In this framework, recognition is considered not only as an indicator of sovereignty but also as a way of gaining a place in the international system, gaining existence and becoming subjective. At this point, Hegel's master-slave dialectic provides the theoretical basis for the study. China's strategy of manipulating and suppressing Taiwan without recognizing it transcends a classical patron-state relationship and turns into a model of "negative sovereignty" that refuses to recognize but controls. On the other hand, Taiwan, despite its lack of official recognition, creates space for itself in the international arena with its economic, technological and political capacity, and strives to become recognized without being recognized. By analyzing this struggle both at the level of normative law and at the political-ontological level, the article aims to show to what extent the phenomenon of recognition has become a constitutive, conflictual and strategic area in today's international system.

This study analyzes Taiwan's struggle for recognition in the international system within the framework of international law, asymmetric power relations and China's One China policy. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Hegel's slave-master dialectic, the study addresses the problem of recognition not only in a legal context but also in a broader framework of a struggle for existence and subjectivity. The first part of the paper discusses the legal framework and practices of recognition, taking into account Taiwan's exceptional situation. In the second section, attention is drawn to the status of Taiwan and China's repressive policies in this context. In the following section, it is discussed how China displays a patron state identity within the framework of its policies to isolate Taiwan. The fourth section uses Hegel's master-slave dialectic to interpret Taiwan's development in the process of de-recognition as a construction of subjectivity. Through this dual reading, the ontological as well as legal aspects of recognition are emphasized, offering a new perspective on the position of unrecognized entities such as Taiwan in the international system. In the final chapter, the study discusses the international law-power struggle, the influence of China, a regional and global power, on the non-recognition of Taiwan and its policies in this context are discussed.

2. Recognition in International Law

In international law, the existence of a state is a combination of both subjective and objective elements. The Montevideo Convention sets the objective framework here and links the existence of the state to 4 basic criteria: a permanent population, a territory, an effective government and the capacity to establish relations with other countries (Montevideo Convention, 1933). While these criteria define the objective aspects of statehood, the implementation of recognition is often determined by politics (Grant, 1999, pp. 8-10).

Recognition theories in international law literature have been shaped around two main approaches: declarative and constitutive theories. According to the declarative theory, if a political unit meets the Montevideo criteria, it has the status of statehood whether or not it is recognized. According to this approach, recognition is merely a legal declaration registering an existing situation (Crawford, 2006, p. 27). The constitutional theory, on the other hand, argues that for a political unit to be considered a state, it must be recognized by other states. According to this theory, recognition has a constitutive function for the

formation of statehood (Lauterpacht, 1947, p. 28). Although the declaratory theory emphasizes that a state exists independently of recognition, recognition has clear practical legal effects in areas such as diplomatic relations and treaty-making.

Although the debate on the nature of recognition in international law is mostly shaped around declarative and constitutional theories, more flexible approaches that transcend this binary distinction have recently been developed. Jure Vidmar (2012) emphasizes that recognition does not directly create statehood, but has important legal effects in international relations. Recognition, in his view, is a consequence, not a cause, of statehood, but the presence or absence of recognition largely determines the extent to which an actor has access to the international legal system. This approach places recognition in an intermediate position, neither fully constitutive nor fully dysfunctional. Similarly, Daniel Högger (2013) argues that the "principle of effectiveness" lies behind recognition. According to Högger, if a political entity has de facto established its sovereignty - for example, if it has established public order within its borders and has a permanent population and government - this requires it to be recognized as a state in law. In this context, recognition is not only a political process but also a normative act that determines the legal status of states. As a matter of fact, states such as Taiwan, which meet the Montevideo criteria, face serious difficulties in their integration into the international system due to their lack of recognition is a consequence of the fact that recognition, although not theoretically constitutive, has important legal consequences in practice.

This fundamental difference stems from the difference in the two theories' approach to the nature of recognition. Whereas explanatory recognition considers recognition as a purely technical process far removed from the question of existence, constitutive theory recognizes that recognition is a prerequisite for statehood. In practice, recognition can be applied in different ways between these two theories, with unrecognized but influential states (Taiwan, Palestine, Kosovo) and recognized but ineffective states (Somalia, Libya) existing within the same system.

Another impact of recognition is observed in terms of its legal consequences and political effects. A recognized state can establish relations with other states in many aspects such as political and commercial relations, become a member of international organizations and in these respects is considered a subject of international law. The unrecognized unit faces serious difficulties in these matters. These difficulties, however, do not preclude their continued existence as de facto states. In this respect, recognition is not only a technical procedure, but also a political act that provides legitimacy to states (Koskenniemi, 2006). In some cases, recognition can even serve as a strategic tool in inter-state relations. Therefore, the recognition or non-recognition of a state also indicates the foreign policy strategy of the recognizing state. In this respect, recognition is not only a label that determines status, but also a signaling and positioning tool (Krasner, 1999).

In conclusion, recognition in international law is both a normative and a political process. While the Montevideo criteria constitute the technical basis of statehood, the process of recognition is a struggle for international legitimacy shaped on this basis. Actors with statehood but limited recognition, such as Taiwan, are one of the most concrete examples of this contradiction. Therefore, the phenomenon of recognition should be considered not only as an international legal procedure but also as a struggle for subjectivation, sovereignty and representation.

3. The Historical Evolution of Taiwan's Political Status

In order to have an idea about Taiwan's political and legal status, it is first necessary to understand the historical transformation of the island and the powers that have ruled it. From the mid-16th century to the present day, Taiwan has been an administrative area between the Western colonial powers, Japan and China. The region was first explored by Portuguese ships in the early 16th century, and Dutch forces arrived in the region in the early 16th century and established a military presence. Although Spain dominated the region for a short time in 1626, this control did not last long and Spain was expelled from the region by the Dutch in 1642. In 1662, the Qing Dynasty defeated the Dutch, and this time Chinese rule

over the island began. Between 1683-1895, China ruled the region, this time under the Qing Dynasty. (Copper, 2020: 49-53; Wang, 2006: 2)

The period after this date covers the Sino-Japan struggle in the region after the Western colonial powers left the island. In fact, a war broke out in 1894 due to the two countries' struggle for sovereignty over Korea, and Japan emerged victorious. The Shimonoseki Treaty signed at the end of the war in 1895 is important because of its decision on the status of Taiwan at that time. Accordingly, with the Treaty, it was decided that Taiwan would come under Japanese control (Gold, 2016). In other words, from this date onwards, a period of approximately 50 years of Japanese colonization began in the region.

During this half-century period, Taiwan was considered an extension of Japan and efforts were made to move away from Chinese culture and adopt Japanese culture (He, 2015: 75). In 1937, the invasion of Manchuria by Japan, which took advantage of China's problems and was on the rise at the time, and the Marco Polo Incident that erupted between the two countries brought about the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-1945 (Binghui and Wang, 2006). The war would later be linked to World War II through the Asia-Pacific front, and became, so to speak, the front line of World War II in Asia.

After 8 years of fierce fighting, Japan announced its unconditional surrender and a series of documents were published, including the legal status of the Taiwan region (Zhu, 2022: 237). The Cairo and Potsdam Declarations are two of them, and they are important for the status of Taiwan. In fact, according to the Cairo Declaration of 1943, before the end of the war, it was decided to terminate all agreements involving relations between the two countries, including Shimonoseki, which linked Taiwan to Japan. The Potsdam Declaration, established after the war in 1945, decided to fulfill the terms of the Cairo Declaration. This was followed by Japan's signing of the Instrument of Surrender in September 1945 and the formal transfer of Taiwan to Chinese control in October 1945 (Chiu, 1996: 4).

Chinese control over Taiwan after Japanese rule was not very successful. In fact, after the island was annexed to the mainland, Chiang Kai-shek appointed Chen Yi to the island, and the Yi administration caused dissatisfaction among the islanders in terms of problems such as corruption and nepotism (Roy, 2003: 60-61). In addition, although the Chinese mainland wanted to make the island Chinese again, there was a population that was ideologically and culturally alienated from the mainland due to the long Japanese rule. In addition, internal turmoil in mainland China prevented the Nationalist leadership from focusing on Taiwan.

In terms of internal unrest on the Chinese mainland, it was a process between the nationalists and the communists, which intensified in 1946 and culminated in the victory of the communist faction in 1949. Following the communist victory, the People's Republic of China was established under the leadership of Mao Zedong, while the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan, where the Republic of China continued (Taylor, 2009). This has resulted in China being ruled by two different regimes and is the basis of the current Two-China problem.

4. Taiwan's Recognition Problem and International Positioning

If the fulfillment of the Montevideo Criteria were automatic recognition, Taiwan would be recognized by sovereign states in the international system because it fulfilled the four criteria. In these respects, Taiwan functions as a state in the classical sense (Crawford, 2006: 197). But when the Montevideo criteria, as well as constitutive and explanatory theories are brought into the equation, a complex picture emerges. For while Taiwan is a state according to the constitutive theory, according to the explanatory theory its statehood status is disputed.

The starting point of Taiwan's recognition problem in the international system dates back to 1971, when the seat at the UN was transferred to the People's Republic of China. Accordingly, General Assembly Resolution 2758 ended the right of the Republic of China - i.e. Taiwan - to represent China at the UN and transferred Taiwan's seat at the UN to the Beijing administration, i.e. the People's Republic of China. In this way, the People's Republic of China was recognized as the legitimate representative of China (United Nations, 1971).

After Taiwan lost its seat at the UN, it was systematically excluded from almost all UN organizations. Therefore, while for China, the process since then has meant a break in isolation and greater integration into the international system, for Taiwan, on the contrary, it has brought about a more isolated process. After this, Taiwan stopped playing a zero-sum game with the PRC and started to aim for participation in international organizations as part of its pragmatic foreign policy, and within the framework of this goal, it started to accept the participation of both units (PRC and ROC) in the same organization (Hickey, 2006: 69). This change in strategy began to have an impact in the 1990s. After this period, Taiwan started to gain membership or observer status in various organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank and APEC (Sebnalkova and Kucera, 2012: 150). One of Taiwan's most important memberships is the World Trade Organization membership it obtained in 2002 (Wang, 2006: 155). Despite this success, today Taiwan still does not have full membership in most international organizations, and China's pressure policies in the international system are one of the most important reasons for this.

On the issue of Taiwan's recognition, China's refusal of dual recognition and its insistence on the One-China policy have been effective, even though Taiwan seems inclined to accept it. (Rich and Dahmer, 2020: 364). China's refusal of dual recognition by pursuing its One China policy has forced countries to choose a side in a sense, with most of them unable to afford to cut ties with the People's Republic of China, thus sacrificing Taiwan in this difficult choice. China has maintained this repressive policy on Taiwan recognition, especially regionally, with no Southeast Asian country willing to risk double recognition. In fact, Papua New Guinea, which is not an official member of ASEAN but has observer status, switched its diplomatic relations from Beijing to Taipei and back to Beijing within only 16 days (Leifer, 2001: 178).

While Taiwan was officially China's representative before China took over the UN seat in 1971, today it is officially recognized by only 12 countries, mostly island states and developing countries (MOFA, 2024). This is a reflection of China's policy of pressure in the international system. Nevertheless, Taiwan refuses to completely isolate itself from the international system and endeavors to maintain economic and political relations, albeit unofficially, with countries despite China's policy of pressure. In this sense, Taiwan has had to implement a multilateral policy or "engagement without recognition" (Cooley and Mitchell, 2010). As of January 2018, Taiwan is known to maintain unofficial relations with more than 50 countries, including major powers other than China (Rich and Dahmer, 2020). Despite all repressive policies of China, Taiwan maintains relations with some countries such as the US and Japan at the unofficial embassy level under the name of Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Offices (Copper, 2020). This is an indication of Taiwan's de facto foreign policy-making capacity. In this context, Taiwan has pursued a multi-pronged campaign, which can also be called flexible, elastic, pragmatic diplomacy, to expand its living space and defend Taiwan's international personality (Wachman, 2007:8) despite China's encirclement, and the acceptance of dual recognition is one of these policies. Alongside these multifaceted policy strategies, Taiwan has also seen significant change and development in its domestic system. Accordingly, while in the past Taiwan was a pariah state with diplomatic isolation, today it has become a model country due to its economic development and success in the democratization process (Copper, 2020).

5. One-China Policy: Strategic and Diplomatic Meanings

Basically, the One China policy argues that there is only one China with a sovereign Chinese government in the international system, which includes not only Taiwan, but also Hong Kong, Macau. However, the policy has also been advocated by Taiwan - that there is only one Chinese state with a legitimate ROC government. In fact, the One China policy was adopted by the 1992 Consensus between the two countries, where both sides recognized that there is One China, but they had different interpretations of One China (Blanchard and Hickey, 2012: 7; Sehnáková and Kučera, 2012). China's basic approach to the One China policy is evident in the following statement: "There is but one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, and the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China." (MOFA, 2024)

It is important to distinguish between the concepts of the One China Principle and the One China Policy. The One China Principle refers to the official Chinese doctrine that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China and should not be recognized as a separate state by other countries. In contrast, the One China Policy means the practical application of the principle in China's foreign relations, such as diplomatic strategies to prevent Taiwan's recognition, its exclusion from international organizations, and the management of cross-strait relations (Yu, 2025). While the principle gives the ideological and legal foundation, the policy contains the strategic and diplomatic measures taken to uphold it.

The One China policy is the most important policy China has at its disposal to prevent Taiwan from obtaining *de jure* recognition. Because for China, the non-recognition of Taiwan by international organizations and sovereign states means that they indirectly accept that the region belongs to the mainland, it is in a sense a solution to the Taiwan problem for China (Chao and Hsu, 2006: 47-48). It is important to note here that one of the reasons why China's One China policy has been largely successful to date is indirectly due to Taiwan's past policy. The Taiwanese government until 1988 adopted the One China policy just like China, but from the opposite perspective, arguing that Taiwan was the sole representative of China (Jacobs, 2006). Although this approach was abandoned by Taiwan with the pragmatic/flexible policy adopted in the 1990s and was replaced by the two-China policy, it paved the way for China to gain significant power in the international system.

In general, the One China debate corresponds to the "Who is China" debate. Both Taiwan and China adopted the One China policy based on the idea that China is themselves, but this policy was abandoned by Taiwan and is now recognized in different forms such as two China, one China one Taiwan, one China two government, one China two entities etc (Zhu, 2022).

In contrast to Taiwan's changing stance on the one-China policy, China's stance has largely remained consistent. In fact, Xi Jinping expressed his views on this issue as follows: "though the mainland and Taiwan are yet to be reunified, they belong to one China and are inseparable parts of the country" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, 2013). China's determination to pursue this policy is expressed as follows: "the sovereignty and territory of China have never been divided and will never be divided, and Taiwan's status as part of China's territory has never changed and will never be allowed to change" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, 2025).

While China's approach to the One China policy has evolved since Mao – toward Taiwan differed in certain respects- subsequent administrations under Deng and Xi have consolidated a more consistent position. In this context, after the 1992 Consensus, Taiwan, under the leadership of Lee Teng-hui, put aside the Who is China debates and started to recognize mainland China, albeit in a limited way. In 1999, Lee Teng-hui laid the foundation for the two-state theory, which was continued by Chen Shui-bian in the early 2000s, according to which both mainland China and Taiwan are states (Sheng, 2002). With the Ma Ying-jeou administration in 2008, the two-state theory began to fade and the idea that the mainland belongs to the Republic of China according to the Constitution was adopted (Chen, 2022). Tsai Ing-wen, who took office in 2016, completely rejected these approaches, rejecting the Consensus and returning to the One China principle, in contrast to the Ma Ying-jeou administration's approach, which also embraced the 1992 Consensus. Arguing that accepting the 1992 Consensus was a rejection of the Republic of China and not endorsed by the entire island, Chen Shui-bian proposed a Taiwan Consensus in response (Zhu, 2022).

6. Taiwan in the Framework of Hegelian Dialectics of Recognition and The Patron-State Logic Behind Taiwan's Diplomatic Isolation

Taiwan's position in the international system needs to be read not only in legal and political terms, but also in terms of relations of subjectivity and recognition. In particular, China's One China policy and Taiwan's quest for recognition in spite of it can be re-read within the framework of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. According to Hegel (1977: 178-184), the individual must be recognized by another subject (self-consciousness) in order to become a subject. However, this relationship of recognition emerges in the historical process within the framework of asymmetrical power relations: basically, the master-slave

dialectic is called the fatal struggle of two self-consciousnesses aiming to gain recognition (Meydan, 2024). The party that emerges from this asymmetrical power struggle as superior by gaining recognition becomes the master, while the other party becomes the slave, unable to gain recognition and therefore dependent on the superior party (Hegel, 1977). The master desires to be recognized, but recognition by the slave is inadequate recognition on his part. The slave recognizes the master, but is not recognized himself. This asymmetrical relationship begins to unravel as the slave transforms nature through labor and in the process becomes aware of his own productive power (Hegel, 1977).

Hegel's dialectical structure on recognition can be adapted not only to the process of individual subjectivation but also to the position of unrecognized states at the international level. In this framework, non-recognition can function not as a political deprivation, but rather as a unique site of subjectivation. As Rebecca Richards and Robert Smith (2015) put it: "For most, it is the Holy Grail, a mythical achievement that will exist only as an aspiration. Regardless, the quest for recognition, and existence within the space of non-recognition, carries powerful political agency within these unrecognized states." This statement reveals that unrecognized actors are not only marginalized, but can also be productive and resilient political subjects. In this context, Taiwan is one of the examples that embodies this agency by existing outside the space of recognition.

China's policy towards Taiwan has a similar structure in this context. China does not recognize Taiwan as a political subject and tries to prevent its foreign relations, international integration, in short, its visibility as a state. Taiwan, on the other hand, continues to strive to be recognized as an independent entity. Recently, however, this effort has evolved from China's recognition of itself to recognition by other states and institutions. From this perspective, Taiwan, similar to the slave figure in Hegel's dialectic, fights for recognition by working, that is, through economic production, democratic institutionalization and soft power strategies. China, on the other hand, prefers to use pressure in international relations such as diplomatic and economic sanctions to prevent Taiwan from being recognized. Some countries, such as Panama, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, have derecognized Taiwan and established diplomatic relations with China (Newman, 2020: 115). This corresponds to a subject relationship in which the master does not recognize but continues to control.

Taiwan's economic development and democratization process, which began in the 1960s, accelerated in the 1970s and 80s, and was finally carried out by Tsai Ing-wen in 2016 under the name of "decisive diplomacy" (Zhu, 2022: 60), coincides precisely with Hegel's master-slave dialectic. In fact, Taiwan, which has not been recognized by China despite the long period of time that has passed and has not been allowed to be recognized by other states, has focused on its own modernization, just like the slave in the master-slave dialectic, who, like the slave in the master-slave dialectic, transformed himself through labor and became free.

Taiwan has proactively strengthened its economic and democratic resilience in the face of China's diplomatic isolation efforts. Since 2016, the New Southbond Policy has enhanced bilateral relations with ASEAN, South Asia and Oceania, especially in bilateral trade. It has sought to reduce its economic dependence on China by shifting to markets such as the US, EU and Japan (Scimia, 2023; Mark and Graham, 2023). These economic maneuvers have also strengthened Taiwan's democratic structure. Factors such as strong electoral participation and public support for democracy indicate that democratic processes are working (Bush and Hass, 2021). Therefore, by using economic development and democracy values as diplomatic tools, Taiwan is conducting soft diplomacy against China's soft power.

China's diplomatic pressure mechanisms within the framework of the "One China" policy are not only a foreign policy approach based on material resources, but also a hegemonic form of the battle for international recognition. China excludes Taiwan from full participation in international organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization, and pressures other states diplomatically to avoid recognizing Taiwan as a sovereign state. For instance, since 1971, most countries have switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, and Taiwan participates in international sporting events under the name "Chinese Taipei" due to Beijing's insistence (Rich and Dahmer, 2020). In this respect, China

has become a “patron state” that determines Taiwan's foreign relations and international visibility and exercises domination over it.

In international relations, the concept of the “patron state” is associated with the influencing of foreign policy decisions, especially of weak states, by powerful actors. The client-state relationship traditionally manifests itself in forms of asymmetric dependence in the areas of security, diplomacy and economic support. The patron state recognizes its client, grants it limited autonomy and in most cases supervises its external relations. This structure usually operates on the basis of mutual interests, but as it involves a hierarchical power relationship, it is often not possible for the client to act fully independently (Carney, 1989). However, the situation is different in the case of Taiwan. While China tries to construct Taiwan as a “client state”, it does not recognize it politically and wants to directly control it. Therefore, rather than the classic patron-client dynamic, this relationship is characterized by a strategy of manipulation and exclusion without recognition. This indicates a hegemonic relationship that is not only based on material power, but also includes a symbolic and subjectivity dimension.

The concept of a patron state describes a relationship in which one state exerts significant influence and directive power over another state through economic, political or military means. In such relations, the patron state gains an indirect determinant role in the foreign policy preferences of the actor it patronizes by making it dependent to some extent (Cooley and Nexon, 2020). China demonstrates this kind of patronage relationship by manipulating countries that do not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan through various means of economic and diplomatic pressure. In particular, many developing countries refrain from recognizing Taiwan in order not to risk their trade and investment relations with China, indicating that China acts as a *de facto* patron state in the international arena. In this context, China, in a sense, prevents the recognition of Taiwan by providing economic and diplomatic incentives to developing countries, especially in Latin America (Borges, 2025). In addition, it pressures countries not to conclude free trade agreements with Taiwan and exerts pressure to exclude it from the organizations established in this context (Maizland and Fong, 2025). It is also argued that by offering infrastructure and development opportunities in underdeveloped countries through dollar diplomacy, China directs countries to China instead of Taiwan (Bock and Parilla, 2024).

Therefore, it is possible to say that China acts as a patron state in the context of the One China policy. The economic and political ties that China has developed with many countries that do not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan ensure that these countries do not recognize Taiwan. China establishes a strong dependency relationship especially with developing countries through economic aid, infrastructure projects, and trade agreements. While these countries are able to grow through their relations with China, they accept China's diplomatic isolation policy towards Taiwan and thus become dependent on China. China's repressive mechanisms under the One China policy are not only a form of foreign policy based on material resources, but also a hegemonic form of the struggle for international recognition. To prevent Taiwan from becoming an independent state, China excludes it from international organizations and discourages other states from recognizing Taiwan. In this respect, China is a patron state that determines Taiwan's foreign relations and its position in the international system, and exercises domination over it.

7. Between International Law and Power Politics: The Tension of Recognition

The tension between international law and recognition policy has long been debated from both normative and practical perspectives. Koskeniemi (2006), in this context, explains the two fundamental functions of law within the framework of the “apology” and “utopia” dilemma: Law can be used as a tool to legitimize existing power relations (“apology”) or it can be based on normative ideals detached from reality (“utopia”). The case of Taiwan offers a concrete example of this dilemma.; while international law's claim of equality and equal status for states remains valid, the recognition policies imposed by major powers push Taiwan into a cornered position within the international community. This situation highlights the point where the normative demands of law clash with power politics.

Krasner's (1999) concept of "organized hypocrisy" is suitable for explaining how states appear to adhere to norms while simultaneously pursuing strategies to maximize their own interests. In the matter of Taiwan's international recognition, states appear to formally recognize legal norms, but in practice, they pursue a different policy due to strategic and economic relations. This dual behavior makes the tension between international law and power even more apparent.

The concept of "quasi-state" developed by Jackson (1990) reveals the power inequalities behind the international community's claim of equality. Taiwan has been denied full membership in many international organizations and is positioned in the gap between its legal status and its practical influence. This situation calls into question the international community's claim to equality and shows how power politics shapes the law.

From a constructivist perspective, Wendt (1992) argues that international identities are constructed through mutual recognition relationships. The lack of recognition limits Taiwan's international subjectification and weakens its global identity and political agency. In this context, recognition can be understood not only as a legal issue but also as a process directly related to identity and international subjectification.

Postcolonial and critical literature assesses China's pressure to recognize Taiwan as inconsistent with international law's claim to universality. Antony Anghie's critique of hegemonic norm production reveals how power relations shape the law (2005), while China's discourse of "international law with Chinese characteristics" demonstrates how normative law is shaped by international power balances. In this context, Taiwan stands out as a concrete case where universal norms of international law intersect with power politics, revealing that recognition issues have not only legal but also political, normative, and identity dimensions.

Taiwan's lack of recognition as a result of China's coercive policies such as the One China policy, despite meeting the classical criteria for statehood, reveals the nature of the recognition process between law and power. This is an area where international law and international politics operate with different rationalities. While law operates on the assumption of equality based on principles and rules, international politics is based on power asymmetries and calculations of interests (Koskeniemi, 2006). Recognition in international law therefore ceases to be a technical procedure and becomes a mechanism for distributing legitimacy. The functioning of this mechanism is highly sensitive to the preferences and pressures of great powers. China's patronage relationship over Taiwan stands out as an example that politicizes this mechanism (Bush, 2021).

China not only refuse to recognize Taiwan but also systematically prevents third parties from recognizing Taiwan, redefining recognition as a "zero-sum game". States that establish relations with Taiwan face political and economic sanctions from Beijing, building a pressure structure that makes recognition processes less objective (Krasner, 1999). Recognition thus becomes a strategic tool rather than a legal one. These developments reveal the structural contradiction between the principle of equality in international law and the actual capacity of great powers to exert influence (Jackson, 1990).

Beyond this "legal invisibility", the case of Taiwan also shows that an unrecognized but effective international actor can exist. By maintaining unofficial diplomatic relations with many states and establishing functional partnerships in the fields of international trade and security, Taiwan has found ways to "exist without being recognized" (Hickey, 2007). This situation is also noteworthy in terms of international law: because an actor excluded by the existing system can find a place on the international stage without violating its rules, often precisely by abiding by them.

Therefore, the case of Taiwan is important as a case that tests the claim of universality of international law and reveals the political nature of recognition. It underscores how the "principled" architecture of law collides with the strategic logic of politics. At the same time, it highlights norm contestation in practice:

China does not simply block recognition but actively reshapes the recognition regime by enforcing the idea that Taiwan's recognition is illegitimate. The extent to which recognition is an independent process in international law is re-questioned through this example. The tension between the principled structure of international law and the strategic functioning of international politics thus becomes visible.

8. Conclusion

This paper highlights the complex nature of recognition in international law by analyzing Taiwan's recognition problem through the lenses of the One China policy, power dynamics, and the dialectics of political subjectivity. Although the Montevideo Criteria are the norms of existing international law on recognition, in practice, power dynamics and political interests play an asymmetrical determining role. In this sense, recognition becomes a tool of asymmetrical power relations rather than an objective characteristic of statehood.

Taiwan is an ideal example to expose this paradox. In fact, despite meeting the criteria for statehood, Taiwan has been largely excluded from the international community due to China's aggressive patron-state strategy and One China policy. However, this exclusion has also led to some positive developments for Taiwan. Lacking recognition, Taiwan tries to make up for this deficit through democratic consolidation, economic capacity and trade relations with a significant number of countries, reflecting a political subjectivity constructed through labor. This situation can be read within the framework of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, showing that recognition is not a passive form of one-way validation, but an active process through which the unrecognized are also subjectivized through labor.

The Taiwan issue is increasingly becoming a strategic arena for US-China competition. Both powers are striving to demonstrate their influence and capabilities in this area. Beyond its legal status, Taiwan has become a symbolic and practical emblem of geopolitical competition, exerting a certain influence on global power balances and regional security structures. In this sense, recognition policy, combined with global competition, is increasing Taiwan's role in world affairs.

The Taiwan issue must now be addressed not only in terms of technical details related to recognition, but also in terms of the resilience of the international legal order regarding competition between major powers. In this regard, the competition between the US and China demonstrates that Taiwan problem has been instrumentalized as part of broader struggles over the authority to determine norms on recognition. Therefore, Taiwan serves as a case that tests the capacity of international law to preserve its universality in the face of political competition.

The contradiction between legal status and political efficacy reveals the normative tension in the structure of international law. In fact, the narrow and rigid framework of recognition and non-recognition in the current international legal structure is insufficient to explain the changing nature of political presence. Therefore, there is a need to consider recognition in a broader framework that is distinct from traditional approaches. Concepts such as *function-based participation* and *representation in the absence of recognition* should be considered to support the participation of cases such as Taiwan in the international system and at the same time prevent the legitimacy of the international legal structure from being questioned.

Rather than addressing this problem only within a doctrinal framework, international law should approach the issue within the framework of inclusiveness, normative coherence and international justice. Therefore, sovereignty should also be considered within the framework of a common goal, free from subjectivity. At this point, recognition should be redesigned as an objective, pluralistic and dynamic process, not as a tool shaped by the interests of powerful states. From all these points, Taiwan's recognition problem shows that political existence should not depend solely on external approvals. Recognition in international law should therefore take on a more inclusive character, reflecting the fragmented international system and the right of all entities to be seen, considered and represented.

Finansman/ Grant Support

Yazar(lar) bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

The author(s) declared that this study has received no financial support.

Çıkar Çatışması/ Conflict of Interest

Yazar(lar) çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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