Part XI of the UNCLOS lays out the legal framework for deep seabed mining activities in the Area. Several countries have already passed domestic deep seabed mining laws fulfilling their obligations under the Convention and the regulations promulgated by the ISA, established under the Convention. China passed its own deep seabed mining law in 2016. China’s deep seabed mining law aims at securing effective regulation of its sponsored contractors’ deep seabed activities and ensuring the contractors’ compliance with the rules and regulations issued by the ISA. China’s law pays tremendous attention to marine environmental protection during contractors’ deep seabed activities. This paper briefly describes the legal regime for international seabed mining, then illustrates China’s legislative actions, examines the key environmental provisions of China’s deep seabed law and analyzes the balancing of interests of multiple parties behind China’s emphasis on marine environmental protection during the exploration and exploitation of deep seabed minerals.

Keywords
UNCLOS, Deep Seabed, China’s Deep Seabed Mining Law, Environmental Protection, State Sponsorship
1. Introduction

China has a major interest in deep seabed mining. It currently holds four deep seabed areas for mineral exploration and considers expanding its investment in the deep seabed in the future. Since enacting its first Deep Seabed Law in 2016, China has been developing relevant rules and regulations. The purpose of the Deep Seabed Law is to: (1) secure effective regulation of its sponsored contractors’ deep seabed activities and ensure the contractors’ compliance with the rules and regulations issued by the International Seabed Authority (“ISA”), especially environmental rules and regulations; and (2) provide legal assurance for the contractors engaged in deep seabed activities. In particular, the Deep Seabed Law places much emphasis on marine environmental protection, which is one of the most important aspects of deep seabed mining.

This paper aims to answer the following questions: (1) Why has China been so active in deep seabed mining?; (2) What are the factors (legal and practical) that prompted China to adopt its first Deep Seabed Law and continue its work on developing relevant rules and regulations?; (3) Why is China very committed to marine environmental protection during deep seabed mining?; and (4) how did the interested parties behind deep seabed mining seek to influence the character of the legislation? This paper is composed of six parts including a short Introduction and Conclusion. Parts two, three, and four will discuss the beginning, international response and State sponsorship for the legal regime of international deep seabed mining. Part five will look into China’s legislative response to such international legal framework.

2. The Beginning of Deep Seabed Mining

In 1965, John L. Mero’s book, *The Mineral Resources of the Seas* introduced most of the currently available information regarding a kind of seabed resource, called ‘manganese nodules,’ which is mostly scattered on the seabed floor of the Pacific Ocean and other Ocean floors.1 This type of resource had already been discovered in 1873 during the *Challenger’s* Oceanographic Expedition, but it was not until after

---