

Developing an Evaluation System Compatible with Internationally First-Class Law Firms

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Abstract: Evaluation systems for law firms play an important role in enhancing transparency and professionalism in the legal services market. At present, evaluations of international law firms are largely conducted by market-based ranking institutions such as Chambers and Partners and The Legal 500. In China, however, existing law firm assessment mechanisms are primarily associated with regulatory oversight and administrative review, and relatively limited attention has been given to the systematic evaluation of international legal service capacity. This paper employs comparative and institutional analysis to examine the development of law firm evaluation systems in both domestic and international contexts. It identifies several institutional characteristics and limitations in China's current evaluation mechanisms with respect to assessing internationally oriented legal services. Based on this analysis, the article proposes a conceptual framework for evaluating law firms engaged in international legal services. The framework is developed from three dimensions: evaluation subjects, evaluation objects, and evaluation indicators. Specifically, it suggests that market-based third-party institutions may serve as the primary evaluators, while judicial administrative authorities and bar associations provide supervisory and regulatory functions. The evaluation objects should reflect both the professionalism and the public-oriented nature of legal services. In addition, the article proposes a structured indicator system covering law firm service teams, international legal service business activities, and internal management. The framework developed in this study provides an analytical perspective for examining law firm evaluation mechanisms and contributes to the broader discussion on the institutional development of international legal services in China.

Keywords: Lawyer; Law Firm; International Law Firm; Foreign-Related Legal Services

Introduction

In 2023, the goal of "cultivating a number of internationally first-class arbitration institutions and law firms" was formally proposed.^[1] As of January 2024, Chinese law firms have established 180 branch offices in 35 countries and regions.^[2] These branch offices provide legal service support for international economic and trade exchanges in fields such as energy, infrastructure, intellectual property, and taxation.^[3] However, China's evaluation system for internationally first-class law firms remains at a preliminary stage of development. It lacks sufficient attention to factors such as legal technology, client satisfaction, and the capacity to provide international legal services. As a result, it is difficult to meet the needs of assessing the level of internationalized development of law firms and to provide references for enterprises in selecting legal service providers. In this regard, it is necessary to strengthen research on the evaluation of internationally first-class law firms and to establish an evaluation system suited to the developmental characteristics of Chinese law firms.

1. Concept and System Overview

The evaluation system for internationally first-class law firms is a system used to determine whether a law firm has reached an internationally first-class level, whether it possesses the capacity to provide comprehensive services, and whether it facilitates clients in selecting legal service providers. Exploring such an evaluation system cannot be separated from clarifying the concept of internationally first-class law firms. However, it should be noted that the evaluation system concerning internationally first-class law firms is not isolated from the broader evaluation system for law firms. Rather, there exists a relationship of continuity and development between the two. Therefore, a discussion of the evaluation system for internationally first-class law firms may begin with existing evaluation systems in China and abroad.

On the one hand, existing academic research has discussed international law firms and internationally first-class law firms, addressing the question of what internationally first-class law firms should be like. For example, Li Xiguang argues that international law firms should possess "extensive industry experience, a vast global network, a professional level of management, and strong international competitiveness."^[4] Wang Jinxi maintains that internationally first-class law firms should demonstrate a

[1] Wang, Y. (2023). Xi Jinping emphasizes strengthening foreign-related rule of law during the tenth collective study session of the CPC Central Political Bureau: Creating favorable legal conditions and external environment. Chinese Government Official Website. Retrieved October 29, 2024, from https://www.gov.cn/yaoqian/liebiao/202311/content_6917473.htm?jump=true.

[2] China Lawyer. (n.d.). Implementing the "Five Hopes" of the Ministry of Justice Party Group: Practice record – Industry trends. Retrieved October 30, 2024, from <https://www.acla.org.cn/info/abb1c484050f433db ee37750edadfcad>.

[3] Strengthening Rule of Law Construction to Serve High-Quality Development and High-Level Opening-Up. (2023). *China Law*, (6).

[4] Li, X. (2021). *Research on Legal Protection Mechanisms for China's Overseas Investment* (p. 116). China Social Sciences Press.

significant scale and revenue, specialized human resources and legal service products, governance and technology commensurate with their scale, as well as active engagement in cultural development and the fulfillment of social responsibilities.^[5] Yuan Huazhi contends that the objective framework of international law firms includes first-class strategic support, professional services, governance capacity, a strong talent pool, innovation capability, and brand influence.^[6] This view further proposes evaluation factors such as participation in the formulation of international and regional rules, the number of international corporate clients, the presence of professional managers, and intelligent and digital infrastructure.

At the same time, some Chinese law firms have also engaged in discussions regarding whether they qualify as "internationally first-class law firms." For example, DeHeng Law Offices employs a relatively large number of lawyers who are familiar with foreign laws and working languages, hold bar licenses in other countries, and are able to mobilize legal resources according to clients' needs to provide clients with one-stop, comprehensive legal services.^[7]

On the other hand, both China and international jurisdictions currently have evaluation systems for law firms and internationally first-class law firms. By analyzing the evaluation factors of these systems, it is possible to address the questions of what internationally first-class law firms should be and what they actually are in practice.

First, evaluation institutions such as *Chambers and Partners*, Legal 500, Law.com Compass, and The Lawyers Global have conducted assessments of international law firms. For example, *Chambers and Partners* evaluates law firms across more than 200 jurisdictions worldwide based on factors such as legal capabilities in selected practice areas and jurisdictions, client service, quality of team members, commercial awareness, diligence, and efficiency.^[8] Legal 500 ranks law firms in practice areas including antitrust, arbitration, capital markets, corporate restructuring, data protection, energy, intellectual property, mergers and acquisitions, private equity, and taxation.^[9] *Law.com Compass* and *Law.com International* publish reports on the top 200 global law firms based on indicators such as law firm revenue, partner profits, and number of lawyers. They also evaluate U.S. law firms according to metrics including law firm revenue, revenue per lawyer, average partner compensation, and profits per partner.^[10]

^[5] Wang, J. (2024). On cultivating internationally first-class law firms. *China Rule of Law*, (4).

^[6] Yuan, H. (2024). Anchoring objectives and striving to be pioneers in creating internationally first-class law firms. *China Lawyer*, (5).

^[7] Zhao, B., Cai, F., et al. (2017). *Supporting Chinese enterprises in going global: Landi International Think Tank Report 2016* (Vol. 1, pp. 251–253). China Social Sciences Press.

^[8] Chambers. (n.d.). Methodology. Retrieved March 9, 2026, from <https://chambers.com/about-us/methodology>.

^[9] Legal 500. (n.d.). Worldwide practice areas. Retrieved March 1, 2026, from <https://www.legal500.com/c/worldwide/practice-areas>.

^[10] Law.com. (n.d.). Rankings Hub. Retrieved October 29, 2024, from <https://www.law.com/rankings/>.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority of England and Wales issues the *Lexcel* standard, which covers "client care, risk management, personnel management, organizational structure and strategy, financial management, information management, and file and case management."^[11] Evaluations by The Lawyers Global include law firms' professional standards, brand value, transaction value, number of transactions, personnel count, number of offices, global presence, total partners, revenue, social responsibility, and innovation.^[12] Research from IE University indicates that evaluating law firms should focus on the capabilities of the lawyer team, client reputation, market share, and adaptability and innovation in technology—for example, whether artificial intelligence is used and whether technology training is conducted.^[13]

Second, while China has domestic evaluation systems for law firms, it lacks a systematic and mature evaluation system for international law firms. In 2003, the *Standards for the Evaluation of National Excellent Law Firms* set requirements regarding environmental quality, comprehensive management, and service quality. In the 2007 version, "environmental quality" was revised to "basic conditions."^[14] The 2010 *Annual Inspection and Assessment of Law Firms* included evaluation content such as lawyer team development, business activities, lawyer professional performance, internal management, administrative and industry-related rewards and penalties, and fulfillment of membership obligations.^[15] Articles 7 to 10 provide detailed listings of the evaluation content for team development, business activities, professional performance, and internal management (see Table 1). These assessment factors already reflect attention to trends in the large-scale development of the industry, but they lack evaluation elements related to foreign-related legal services, international legal services, and branch offices.

^[11] The Law Society. (n.d.). Lexcel. Retrieved October 29, 2024, from <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/firm-accreditations/lexcel/>.

^[12] The Lawyers Global. (n.d.). The World's Legal Industry Best Awards Program. Retrieved March 10, 2026, from <https://www.thelawyersglobal.org/awards>.

^[13] IE University. (2026). Biggest law firms in the world 2026: Global leaders in legal services. Retrieved March 10, 2026, from <https://www.ie.edu/uncover-ie/biggest-law-firms-in-the-world/>.

^[14] The basic conditions include modern office and communication facilities, information exchange platforms, Party-building activities, specialized division of labor, study of current political affairs, reserved funds for institutional development and social risk funds, professional liability insurance for lawyers, lawyers' social insurance, legal aid participation, and tax payment in accordance with the law. Comprehensive management includes archival management, mechanisms for democratic management and supervision, business management systems and conflict-of-interest review systems, financial management systems, regulations on legal service fees, personnel management systems, complaint handling and investigation systems, lawyer talent development programs, and the cultivation of law firm culture. Service quality includes service quality management systems, lawyers' study of professional ethics and practice discipline, reputation and recognition, awards and commendations received, as well as major contributions made. See Hunan Lawyers Association. (2016). Notice on the preliminary evaluation and recommendation of the National Excellent Law Firms and Lawyers 2011–2014.

^[15] Article 6 provides that an annual inspection and assessment shall be conducted for law firms. The primary purpose is to examine and evaluate whether law firms comply with the Constitution and laws, fulfill their statutory duties, and implement self-regulatory management. The specific assessment items include: (1) the development and composition of the lawyer workforce; (2) the conduct of business activities; (3) lawyers' professional practice performance; (4) internal management; (5) administrative rewards or penalties and industry disciplinary actions received; (6) the fulfillment of membership obligations to the lawyers' association; and (7) other matters that judicial administrative authorities of provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the central government deem necessary to inspect and assess.

This gap reflects the lag in the development of China's foreign-related legal service system. This lag is further evidenced by the fact that the Measures for the Administration of Law Firms include provisions for the management of branch offices,^[16] but lack regulations concerning overseas branches. Although the 2016 Opinions on the Development of Foreign-Related Legal Services attempted to set out provisions for foreign-related legal institutions, provide guidance for their establishment, and support law firms in setting up practice entities,^[17] judicial administrative authorities and bar associations have also actively conducted selection of foreign-related law firms, collected cases of foreign-related legal services, established talent and resource databases for foreign-related services, and carried out pilot programs for joint law firms.^[18] However, overall, evaluations of international law firms conducted by third parties remain limited. Compared with international law firm evaluation systems, China's law firm evaluation system is still at an early stage of development and has limited industry influence.^[19]

Team Development	Business Activities	Professional Practice Performance	Internal Management
Number, quality, and structure of lawyers	Number and types of cases handled; expansion of practice areas; service quality; business revenue	Compliance with laws and regulations, professional ethics, practice discipline, and professional conduct rules	Practice management systems
Education on political	Compliance with laws and	Legal aid, social services, and other	Fee, financial, and distribution

^[16] Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China. (2018). *Measures for the Administration of Law Firms* (2018 amendment).

^[17] Article 9 provides that efforts should be made to further develop foreign-related legal service institutions. A group of foreign-related legal service institutions with strong international competitiveness in terms of professional fields and service capabilities should be cultivated, and national and local demonstration institutions (or projects) for foreign-related legal services should be established. Guidelines for the development of foreign-related legal service institutions should be formulated in order to improve their internal organizational structures and systems for quality control, risk prevention, and profit distribution, thereby continuously enhancing the management capacity of legal service institutions. Domestic law firms should be supported in establishing practice institutions in countries and regions of major global economies through means such as setting up overseas branch offices, overseas mergers and acquisitions, and joint operations. Bar associations should adopt measures such as facilitating connections and providing key recommendations to create favorable conditions for domestic law firms to establish overseas branches. See Opinions of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council on the Development of Foreign-Related Legal Services (2016).

^[18] Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China. (2017). Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Justice on the Selection of 100 National Demonstration Institutions for Foreign-Related Legal Services; All China Lawyers Association. (2017). Notice of the All China Lawyers Association on Soliciting Cases for the Book "Typical Cases of Chinese Lawyers' Foreign-Related Legal Services"; Hunan Provincial Department of Justice. (2024). Hunan releases work plan for foreign-related legal services. Retrieved October 30, 2024, from https://sft.hunan.gov.cn/sft/xxgk_71079/gzdt/xyw/202408/t20240826_33438611.html; Guangdong Provincial Department of Justice. (n.d.). Notice on issuing the Implementation Measures for the Pilot Program of Joint Operations between Chinese and Foreign Law Firms in the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone. Retrieved November 7, 2024, from https://qh.sz.gov.cn/gkmlpt/content/10/10476/post_10476187.html#25295.

^[19] Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. (2024). Decision on further comprehensively deepening reform and advancing Chinese-style modernization.

ideology, professional ethics, and practice discipline	regulations	public-interest activities	systems
Professional study and vocational training	Representation in major or collective cases	Administrative or industry rewards and penalties	Tax payment in accordance with the law
Party-building activities	Supervision of lawyers' practice and handling of complaints	Annual assessment of professional practice	Practice risk management and institutional development funds
	Legal aid, social services, and other public-interest activities		Management of employed staff and support personnel
	Commendations received and complaints		Management of branch offices
			Management of internship programs
			Business records and practice files
			Firm charter and partnership system

Table 1. Relevant Provisions of the 2010 Annual Inspection and Assessment of Law Firms issued by the Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China.

2. Establishing an Evaluation System for Internationally First-Class Law Firms

An essential aspect of the foreign-related rule of law is the construction of a first-class foreign-related legal service system. As an important component of this system, internationally first-class law firms influence the effectiveness of foreign-related legal services. Against this background, establishing an evaluation system for internationally first-class law firms can provide law firms with clear guidance on their development direction. The following primarily designs a law firm evaluation system from three aspects: evaluation subjects, evaluation objects, and evaluation indicators.

2.1 Evaluation Subjects: Emphasizing Market-Based Third-Party Evaluation

At present, the evaluation systems for law firms in China—particularly with respect to both domestic and international law firms—are mainly conducted by several types of evaluators, including judicial administrative authorities and law firm self-evaluations, evaluations by clients, evaluations by peer lawyers, as well as assessments by other third-party market institutions. Judicial administrative authorities and bar associations have conducted evaluation activities such as annual inspections of law firms and the National Excellent Law Firms assessments. However, their primary responsibilities are supervision and management of law firms. Except in cases such as government procurement of public legal services, they are generally not recipients of legal services, and therefore have not personally experienced the services of law firms, making it difficult for them to conduct substantive evaluations of law firm services.

Clients, as the primary recipients of law firm legal services and the counterparties to engagement contracts, have direct experience of both the service process and its outcomes, providing a basis for evaluating law firms. Currently, evaluations by Chambers and Legal 500 take client feedback into account. For example, *the Legal 500* evaluation includes indicators of client satisfaction.^[20] In the Chambers evaluation, law firms participating in the assessment are required to submit information on key clients so that researchers can interview these clients.^[21] However, most clients interact with a limited number of law firms, and their experiences with legal services are relatively fragmented. Therefore, although clients can evaluate the services of the law firms they have engaged with, it is difficult for them to provide a comprehensive and objective assessment of a larger number of law firms.

Third, peers in the legal profession, because they engage in similar legal service work, share practical experience, modes of thinking, and professional discourse, providing them with the knowledge and capability to evaluate the services of other law firms. However, unorganized peer evaluations are often fragmented, with limited coverage, making it difficult to form a systematic and comprehensive assessment of legal services.

Fourth, based on the three types of evaluation subjects mentioned above, it is proposed that evaluations of internationally first-class law firms be conducted by market-based third-party evaluation institutions that fully incorporate client and peer feedback and operate independently of judicial administrative authorities and bar associations. These third-party evaluation institutions mainly include universities, newspapers and media, and market-oriented third-party evaluation organizations. For example, the Law Firm Research Center of China University of Political Science and Law conducts nationwide evaluations of legal service products, which include

^[20] Legal 500. (n.d.). Company overview. Retrieved March 1, 2026, from <https://www.legal500.com/about-us>.

^[21] Chambers. (n.d.). Methodology. Retrieved March 10, 2026, from <https://chambers.com/about-us/methodology>.

foreign-related legal services provided by law firms. In addition, international evaluation institutions such as Chambers and the *Asian Legal Business (ALB)* have already carried out a substantial number of law firm evaluations, accumulating significant experience.

Finally, whether universities of political science and law, newspapers and media, or commercially operated third-party evaluation institutions, all may be influenced by profit-driven motives. Therefore, particular attention must be paid to the neutrality and credibility of evaluations. To overcome the limitations of third-party evaluation subjects, the supervisory role of judicial administrative authorities and bar associations should be fully utilized. In this context, bar associations can issue evaluation guidelines concerning internationally first-class law firms and carry out accreditation of evaluations conducted by market-based third-party institutions, thereby exercising supervisory functions over the evaluation process. Judicial administrative authorities supervise the performance of industry self-regulatory duties by bar associations, reviewing their accreditation rules to prevent situations in which bar associations protect the interests of the profession at the expense of the public interest. At the same time, judicial administrative authorities and bar associations should, within an appropriate scope, share statistical data and other information on the legal profession to provide data support for market-based third-party evaluations. Finally, judicial administrative authorities and bar associations should offer mechanisms for supervision and feedback on evaluations, overseeing any evaluation activities that may disrupt the competitive order of the legal services market.

2.2 Evaluation Objects: Focusing on the Professionalism and Public Nature of Legal Services

Internationally first-class law firms primarily provide services to the international legal services market, which, to a certain extent, can be considered a "*society of strangers*." In other words, the factors maintaining the relationship between law firms and clients are not primarily based on personal connections characteristic of a "*society of acquaintances*," but on the quality of legal services. Legal services link law firms and clients at both ends, and the primary purpose of a legal services contract is the smooth delivery of those services. Such delivery is inseparable from the professionalism of legal services, which is manifested in multiple aspects.

First, the internal management system of a law firm should be standardized and scientific, capable of providing resource allocation support and incentive mechanisms for lawyers' cross-border services. In 2018, the Ministry of Justice issued the Measures for the Administration of Law Firms, which specify management systems including case management, fee structures, allocation systems, legal aid management, decision-making procedures, conflict of interest review, dismissal and disbarment procedures, personnel welfare protection, fund management, continuing professional education, annual practice assessments, and accountability mechanisms.^[22] These

^[22] Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China. (2018). *Measures for the Administration of Law Firms* (2018 amendment).

systems cover the basic matters of law firm management but still lack provisions related to the use of social media, online business promotion, and client data management. Evaluations of law firms in the context of internationally first-class law firms should take these aspects into account.

Second, law firms should have high-level teams capable of delivering high-quality legal services. For example, members of the law firm should be proficient in international legal rules and commercial practices and possess advanced foreign language skills, interpersonal communication abilities, and teamwork capabilities.

Finally, law firms should have sufficient financial strength and liquidity, providing the capacity to absorb operational costs. Legal services are not products in a "self-service vending machine"; rather, they emphasize handling specific matters and applying professional experience. In the relatively unfamiliar environment of the international legal services market—characterized by legal rules, commercial practices, and government policy management—the process of providing legal services is full of uncertainty and challenges, requiring law firms to maintain adequate financial and liquidity capacity.

In addition to professionalism, internationally first-class law firms should possess a certain degree of public nature. Article 13 of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Lawyers* (2017) stipulates: "No person who has not obtained a lawyer's practicing certificate shall engage in legal services under the name of a lawyer; except as otherwise provided by law, no person shall act as a litigation or defense agent."^[23] Compared with other non-lawyer legal service providers, internationally first-class law firms are, to a certain extent, protected under national law. This legal protection confers legitimacy on lawyers to provide services such as litigation and defense representation. While the law grants legitimacy to lawyers' services, it simultaneously imposes requirements concerning their public-oriented role. Furthermore, although internationally first-class law firms represent the interests of their clients, such representation may conflict with the public interest. Law firms that provide legal services to high-pollution enterprises, tobacco companies, or companies producing addictive drugs, while loyal to their clients, act in ways that may be contrary to the interests of the general public.

Chinese lawyers are not merely legal entrepreneurs seeking private gain. The 1980 *Provisional Regulations on Lawyers* stipulated that lawyers are legal workers of the state.^[24] The 1996 *Law of the People's Republic of China on Lawyers* defined lawyers as practitioners who provide legal services to society.^[25] Thus, the professional identity of Chinese lawyers has developed through stages as "state legal service workers" and "practitioners providing legal services to society," inherently possessing a certain degree of public-oriented character. On this basis, the 2007 *Law of the*

^[23] *Law of the People's Republic of China on Lawyers* (2017 revision), Art. 13.

^[24] *Provisional Regulations on Lawyers* (1980), Art. 1.

^[25] *Law of the People's Republic of China on Lawyers* (1996), Art. 2.

People's Republic of China on Lawyers explicitly stipulated that "lawyers shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of clients, ensure the correct implementation of the law, and uphold social fairness and justice."^[26] This provision has been maintained in the 2017 *Law of the People's Republic of China on Lawyers*, indicating that lawyers are required not only to possess professional competence but also to bear the obligation of protecting the public interest.

3. Evaluation Indicators: Establishing an Indicator System Focused on International Legal Services

Quantifiability is one of the key characteristics of conducting evaluation activities.^[27] The evaluation indicator system for internationally first-class law firms should include indicators that can be quantitatively scored. At present, China has already established relatively well-developed evaluations such as the National Excellent Law Firms assessment and annual inspections of law firms, but there remains a gap compared with the goal of cultivating internationally first-class law firms, requiring the addition and optimization of indicators based on existing standards. Academic and practical discussions have considered factors such as the development of specialized talent teams, the quality and capacity of global legal services, and internal governance and management systems.^[28] However, in specific evaluation activities, relying solely on these broad evaluation factors is far from sufficient. It is necessary to further design concrete, quantifiable indicators that can be scored, thereby establishing a systematic and complete indicator system. In this regard, the following discussion proposes several evaluation indicators that can be assigned scores and used to calculate a total score. The specific point values and calculation methods for these indicators remain subjects for further research.

3.1 Law Firm Service Team Indicators

Lawyers are the primary resource of a law firm and one of the key indicators for evaluating a law firm's level. To enhance cross-border legal service capacity, law firms need to actively cultivate talent for foreign-related legal services. Currently, "there are only slightly more than 7,200 lawyers in China who are proficient in handling foreign-related legal matters," and "only slightly more than 300 lawyers are capable of independently handling cases before the World Trade Organization Appellate Body,"^[29] reflecting a serious shortage in China's foreign-related legal workforce.

To emphasize the importance of foreign-related legal talent and to use evaluation as a driver for talent development, the evaluation indicators for internationally first-class law firms should include specific metrics on the development of international legal

^[26] *Law of the People's Republic of China on Lawyers* (2007 revision), Art. 2.

^[27] Weber, M. (2010). *Economy and Society* (Vol. 2, trans. Yan Kewen, p. 1114). Shanghai People's Publishing House.

^[28] Excerpts from the Symposium on "Actively Developing Foreign-Related Legal Services and Cultivating Internationally First-Class Law Firms." (2023, December 13). *Legal Daily*, p. 12.

^[29] Xi, J. (2025). Advancing the comprehensive rule of law in a solid manner (February 25, 2019). In *Selected Works on Xi Jinping's Rule of Law* (Vol. 1) (p. 249). Central Literature Publishing House.

service teams. For example, these indicators may include: the number of lawyers with overseas educational backgrounds, the number of lawyers holding licenses in multiple jurisdictions, the number of lawyers with practice experience in multiple jurisdictions, the number of lawyers with experience providing legal services across multiple jurisdictions, the number of lawyers engaged in international legal service research with demonstrable research outputs, and the proportion of lawyers holding multi-jurisdictional licenses relative to the total number of lawyers in the firm.

In addition, in 2017, the Ministry of Justice conducted evaluations of lawyers' professional competence, covering areas such as criminal law, family law, corporate law, finance, securities and insurance, construction and real estate, intellectual property, labor law, foreign-related legal services, and administrative law.^[30] Since then, judicial administrative authorities and bar associations in various regions have carried out professional competence assessments of lawyers, with evaluations also covering foreign-related legal services. On this basis, evaluation indicators for international law firms can consider "the number of lawyers specializing in foreign-related legal services."

3.2 Law Firm Business Indicators

Traditional business development indicators for law firms include the annual volume of legal services provided, legal service revenue, types of legal services offered, awards received by lawyers related to their practice, publication of practice-related journal articles by lawyers, and participation in seminar presentations. For the development of international law firms, additional specific indicators can be established under the category of law firm business indicators.

First, revenue and types of services. The scale and revenue of international legal services are key indicators for assessing a law firm's capacity for international legal practice and an important measure of the foundational development of an internationally first-class law firm. Specific metrics include: revenue from a law firm's international legal service practice, the proportion of international legal service revenue relative to the firm's total revenue, the types of international legal services the firm can provide, the number of jurisdictions covered by the firm's international legal services, the duration over which the firm has provided international legal services, and representative cases of the firm's international legal service work.

Second, service influence. A law firm's and its lawyers' ability to engage with international institutions is a key indicator.^[31] The influence of a law firm's international legal services can be observed through metrics such as: the firm's participation in international commercial cooperation, awards or recognition received from governments or professional associations across multiple jurisdictions, collaboration with foreign law firms in practice, establishment of overseas branch offices, and awards received from other legal service evaluations.

^[30] Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China. (2017). Pilot plan on establishing lawyer professional competence evaluation system and assessment mechanism.

^[31] Wang, J. (2024). On cultivating internationally first-class law firms. *China Lawyer*, (12).

The quality of a law firm's international legal services is also an important indicator. This can include, for example, the alignment of the firm's international legal services with the government policies, court regulations, and professional association oversight of the relevant jurisdictions. Other indicators may include the typical response time for providing international legal services, clarity and transparency of fee rules and standards, clarity of dispute resolution mechanisms regarding fees, compliance with jurisdiction-specific anti-money laundering regulations, and whether the firm pays special attention to differences in rules such as lawyer confidentiality across jurisdictions.

Client satisfaction with the law firm's international legal services. Currently, evaluations of law firms conducted by China's judicial administrative authorities and bar associations primarily rely on expert assessments by government officials or industry association personnel, with limited incorporation of feedback from individual or organizational clients. Although some evaluations have begun to consider client feedback, the proportion of client input is generally low, limiting its influence on the assessment of legal services. Existing evaluation indicators tend to focus on the law firm's "hardware and software" aspects, often overlooking client perspectives.

^[32]Accordingly, indicators could include: client evaluation scores of the international legal services provided, clients' willingness to recommend the law firm, the duration of the client-law firm legal service relationship, clients' intention to reuse the law firm's services, and complaints lodged by clients against the law firm.

3.3 Law Firm Internal Management Indicators

Internationally first-class law firms should possess professional management systems and technologies commensurate with their scale and revenue.

First, law firms should have a mature and systematic lawyer practice management and evaluation system. In addition to assessing lawyers' compliance with the Constitution of China, laws and regulations, professional ethics, and practice discipline, law firms should also consider lawyers' understanding of and compliance with international treaties, international practices, rules of professional conduct in different countries, and commercial transaction customs, as well as their ability to handle multi-jurisdictional legal conflicts.

Second, law firms should have a scientific governance structure. This includes internal decision-making mechanisms, profit allocation systems, career development mechanisms, and conflict and dispute resolution procedures related to the provision of international legal services. It also encompasses the compliance and normative quality of decision-making in foreign-related legal services.

Third, law firms should maintain a systematic risk management system. International legal services involve diversified risk types, increased complexity of risk levels, and

^[32] Wang, J., Zhou, W., & Gao, Y. (2019). Research report on legal service certification standards. *China Justice*, (1).

potentially severe consequences. Law firms should fully consider practice-related risks, improve lawyer professional liability insurance, ensure compliance in cross-border legal services, maintain separation between firm and personal funds, and consistently retain sufficient solvency capacity.

Finally, law firms should establish management and incentive systems related to lawyers' public service obligations.

4. Conclusion

This article examines the institutional design of law firm evaluation systems in the context of the growing development of international legal services. By comparing domestic evaluation mechanisms with the practices of international ranking institutions such as *Chambers and Partners* and *The Legal 500*, the study identifies a key limitation in the current framework in China: existing law firm assessment mechanisms are still largely associated with regulatory oversight and administrative review, while relatively limited attention has been given to the systematic evaluation of law firms' capacity to provide international legal services. In response to this gap, the article proposes a conceptual framework for evaluating law firms engaged in international legal services and analyzes the evaluation system from three dimensions: evaluation subjects, evaluation objects, and evaluation indicators.

Within this framework, the study suggests that market-based third-party institutions may serve as the primary evaluators, while judicial administrative authorities and bar associations perform supervisory and regulatory functions. In terms of evaluation objects, the assessment of law firms should take into account not only the professional competence involved in legal services but also the public-oriented nature associated with the legal profession. Regarding evaluation indicators, the article proposes a structured system that includes indicators related to law firm service teams, international legal service business activities, and internal management. By integrating these elements, the proposed framework offers an analytical perspective for understanding the institutional design of law firm evaluation mechanisms in the context of international legal services.

At the same time, the framework proposed in this article remains primarily conceptual. Issues such as the quantification of evaluation indicators, the weighting of different indicators, and the operationalization of evaluation criteria require further empirical and methodological research. Future studies may examine the application of the proposed framework through empirical data, comparative case studies of law firms engaged in international legal services, or quantitative analyses of evaluation indicators. Such research may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of law firm evaluation mechanisms in the evolving global legal services market.