



CALL FOR PAPERS

SINO-AFRICAN LEGAL FORUM 2025 ON

THE RULE OF LAW AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

6 September 2025

1. Introduction

The interplay between the rule of law and the development of the digital economy is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in fostering sustainable growth across jurisdictions. As digital technologies advance, they create both opportunities and challenges that necessitate a robust legal framework. The rule of law provides the essential structure within which digital interactions occur, ensuring fairness, predictability and accountability. This legal foundation not only mitigates risks associated with digital activities - such as cybercrime and misuse of personal data - but also promotes trust among consumers and businesses. By establishing clear rules and regulations, the rule of law promotes innovation and investment, thereby facilitating the overall growth of the digital economy. Besides, as nations reform their legal frameworks to accommodate emerging technologies, it becomes imperative to examine how these reforms can support economic development while safeguarding individual rights.

Across various jurisdictions, trends in digital economic development reveal a complex relationship with the rule of law that is shaped by local contexts and priorities. For instance, countries like China have implemented comprehensive digital policies that serve as models for effective governance,¹ while many African nations emphasize inclusive digital strategies to

¹ Yi Wu, 'Understanding China's Digital Economy: Policies, Opportunities and Challenges' *China Briefing* <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/understanding-chinas-digital-economy-policies-opportunities-and-challenges/>

ensure equitable access to technology.² This divergence highlights the importance of tailored regulatory approaches that reflect regional or local needs and challenges. The implications of these trends are profound and underscore the necessity for scholars and policymakers to engage in dialogue about best practices in promoting the rule of law while fostering digital economic development across jurisdictions. In exploring this theme, it is crucial to consider how constitutionalism, intellectual property protection, data privacy, and responses to cybercrime can collectively enhance the resilience and inclusivity of the digital economy on a global scale.

The foregoing underscores the inevitable conclusion that the relationship between the rule of law and the development of a country's digital economy is far from incidental—it is foundational. Different jurisdictions have adopted different approaches to embedding the rule of law within their legal frameworks to foster digital economic growth. This necessitates a critical examination of these approaches, their comparative significance, and their broader implications for advancing constitutionalism in the digital age. Despite the profound importance of this relationship, there remains a notable paucity of scholarly engagement on the subject, particularly among legal scholars. It is against this backdrop that this call for papers seeks to address this gap, by inviting scholars to critically analyse the diverse ways in which the rule of law shapes and influences the development of the digital economy across different jurisdictions. African scholars should focus on developments in Africa only. Female scholars are particularly encouraged to submit abstracts.

Below are the subthemes that prospective submissions could cover.

2. Sub-themes

2.1 The role of constitutionalism in shaping the digital economy

The rapid and continuous advances in digital technologies, powered by 5G connectivity and artificial intelligence technologies, has not only provided enormous opportunities for economic development but also pose challenges which constitution makers did not fully anticipate. The major challenge today is how to adapt the present constitutional principles to this changing digital environment in a way that fosters innovation whilst ensuring that fundamental rights such as privacy, freedom of expression, and access to information are protected in the digital age. The papers under this sub-theme should address how constitutional frameworks are adapting to the new digital realities, whilst fostering an environment where economic growth and individual rights co-exist harmoniously. The papers should examine the extent to which contemporary reforms are expanding traditional constitutional concepts in a way that they align with the imperatives of advances in digital technology and the emerging digital economy.

The papers could also explore how constitutional rights, such as the right to equality and access to information, are impacted by disparities in digital access. They could also examine the role of governments in ensuring that underserved populations, including rural communities and marginalized groups, are not left behind in the digital economy. This could include assessing

² African Union, *The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030)* <https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38507-doc-dts-english.pdf>

the responsibility of states to create inclusive digital policies that promote universal access to technology and the internet as essential to the exercise of fundamental rights.

2.2 Protection of intellectual property in the development of the digital economy

Advances in digital technology continuously revolutionize the way authors', composers' and artists' works are reproduced, accessed, communicated and distributed. These technologies have dramatically altered the structure and economics of the business models under which copyrighted works are published and distributed to the public. This sub- theme focuses on the critical role of intellectual property protection in promoting innovation and creativity within the digital economy. Papers could explore how robust intellectual property frameworks can incentivize investment in new technologies while also addressing challenges such as digital piracy, copyright infringement, and the rapid pace of technological change. The papers could also encompass strategies and challenges in harmonizing intellectual property laws across jurisdictions, the impact of emerging technologies on traditional intellectual law concepts, and the need for adaptive policies that promote both protection and access to knowledge in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

2.3 Protection of rights and interests relating to data in the development of digital economy

With the emergence of data as a new form of production factor, the rights and interests relating to data are receiving more and more attention. For instance, when digital platforms collect gigantic amounts of data from the consumers, with or without their consent, and then generate lucrative profit, how to allocate these interests fairly among the various stakeholders, and to ensure the utilization of data doesn't infringe the rights of other relevant actors, is very critical for the healthy development of digital economy. Facing the reality that the sources of data are often deeply entangled, the ownership of data is also controversial under many circumstances. Therefore, how to protect these rights and interests against the backdrop of a rapidly developing digital economy needs further exploration.

2.4 Fighting new forms of crime in the development of the digital economy

The variety and sophistication of digital crimes, such as hacking, identity theft, ransomware, and the different forms of digital financial crimes, have increased exponentially with advances in digital technology. There is a need to explore how these crimes which could seriously impede digital economic development could be prevented and prosecuted. The papers under this sub-theme should cover how legal frameworks, law enforcement and international cooperation could address these diverse cybercrimes.

3. Timelines

The deadline for the submission of abstracts is 31 March 2025.

The abstracts should be no less than 600 words.

Abstracts should be submitted to cheng.mai@ecupl.edu.cn and cprao@qq.com but copy abdulrauf.la@unilorin.edu.ng and Charles.fombad@up.ac.za

Authors whose abstracts have been accepted will be notified by 15 May 2025.

The deadline for the submission of full papers (min. 5000 words) is 15 July 2025. Once a paper is accepted the author will be required to submit a short biography and a personal photo no later than 31 July 2025. The bio shall be no more than 150 words.

The Conference will be held on 6 September 2025.

4. Language and Venue

Language: Chinese and English (Simultaneous interpretation will be provided.)

Venue: Institute of Data Law, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, P.R. China.

5. Cost of participation

Participants will take full responsibility for their flight tickets. However, the hosts will cover the expenses for accommodation and meals of all participants during the conferences as well as their airport transfers within China. In addition to this, the host will cover the flight tickets of four participants whose abstracts are accepted based on the quality of the abstract and full paper on a “first come, first served” basis.

There is no registration fee for the conference.

6. Publication

Selected papers will be published in a special issue of an accredited journal.

7. Contact

Should you have any inquiry, please contact: cheng.mai@ecupl.edu.cn , cprao@qq.com or Charles.fombad@up.ac.za

8. Hosts

Institute of Data Law, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanchang, China.

Institute for Foreign-Related Rule of Law, East China University of Political Science and Law, Shanghai, China.

Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, South Africa

9. Organisers

Professor Chuanping Rao, Institute of Data Law, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanchang, China.

Professor Mai Cheng, Institute for Foreign-Related Rule of Law, East China University of Political Science and Law, Shanghai, China.

Professor Charles Fombad, Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Professor Serges Kamga, Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.