3. Origin, background, and international aspects of the patent system

The patent is the longest-standing, best-known, and, arguably, most economically valuable form of protection of rights provided by the law of intellectual property. A patent is, in essence, the grant of a monopoly to an inventor who has used his or her skill to invent something new. Patents may cover entirely new products, enhancements to pre-existing products, or a new or improved process for performing an activity. This chapter begins with a discussion of the history and purpose of patents. It then turns to the international dimension of patents, covering the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property 1883, the Washington Patent Cooperation Treaty 1970, the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, the European Patent Convention, and the Patent Law Treaty. It also outlines the steps to be taken in obtaining a domestic patent.
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