

The paper argues that it is the diversity of clients (varied by ownership) that causes Chinese lawyers to respond in flexible and adaptive ways to their clients' problems. Thus the content of their advice varies according to the clients' characteristics and background while the form of the advice is more uniform, reflecting the culture of the legal profession in China. There are differences between partners and associates; associates are less able to reach this level of professionalism as they are more subject to client influence and less powerful within the firm.

Given that we know next to nothing about the inner workings of elite law firms in China, this paper makes an important contribution in describing and explaining how the profession of elite lawyers is being shaped in one of the most rapidly growing legal markets in the world. The paper is well-written and with the exception of some minor grammatical errors readable and precise. I have several comments and questions that might be addressed in order to improve the paper for publication.

1) As stated above, the author argues that the diversity of client types is (causally) responsible for the work mode of Chinese elite lawyers. This causal argument places much importance on the diversity of clients and therefore raises some necessary questions:

Is the diversity of clients unique to China or is this a more general causal argument? Do elite lawyers in developed economies deal with clients in a more uniform fashion or are there other types of diversity (such as publicly-held vs. private companies) that come into play?

Is this diversity of clients in China related to ownership or to culture? The examples of foreign clients given in the text seem to place more emphasis on culture (or lack of cultural knowledge) than on ownership per se. The difference is important for what it implies about the development of the Chinese legal system. If ownership is the key difference then we should expect that as reform continues and deepens (particularly privatization and corporatization of SOEs), these differences between firms should decline over time. Less diversity might change the behavior of lawyers.

If, on the other hand, cultural differences are key, we should expect this diversity to continue and even become more salient as foreign investment in China expands. Does this also have implications for the legal system more generally as more law firms internationalize their practices?

2) While the role of the state figures in some of the literature that is reviewed, the state's role in shaping professionalism seems to drop out of the paper. But it seems crucial to our understanding of how elite law firms function in China. The paper should either clarify that it is only explaining one dynamic of professionalism (relationship with clients) or deal with the role of the state directly. I wondered, for example, whether or not elite firms have Communist Party cells, whether top partners are asked to take

positions in associations or organizations through which state or party influence might be exercised. Finally, I wondered generally whether lawyers are ever pressured by state actors to take (or drop) certain clients or even to work out clients' deals in particular ways. This kind of influence would be highly unusual in other contexts, but not in the Chinese one.

3) The distinction between partners and associates is somewhat confusing and does not have enough evidence to back it up. The author finds that partners deal with clients all in the same way, but that this "same way" really means an ability to adapt and shape their advice to each client, so of course the work that partners do for clients is not all the same but the strategy that they use to please clients and do their work well doesn't vary by ownership. Associates are different or at least they feel different when they respond to specific questions. I would like to see more evidence of how associates' behavior differs and specifically how associates are more subject to client influence. It seems to me that the difference between partners and associates is mainly a function of experience and learning not power or autonomy (except for the fact that more legal expertise seems to increase the confidence of lawyers, which then may increase autonomy).

The example that the author gives to show a separate point further confuses this issue of difference between partners and associates. The author finds that an associate tries to present legal advice to a foreign client in the same way that she had done in the past for domestic clients. However, she is shown by a more senior colleague that one must tailor advice to the client based on their background and expectations. In this example, the associate wants to deal with clients uniformly while the partner tailors his advice to fit the client. This seems to go against what is stated in the paper on the differences between partners and associates and also seems to suggest that the key difference between associate and partner behavior is experience.

COMMENTS IN THE TEXT:

Page 2 line 4: should read "How is the meaning of professionalism constructed.."

Page 2 para 2 line 3 typo United States

Line 9: delete why do: should read: why have these high status corporate lawyers developed...

Last line: seemingly patronage behaviors (awkward phrase and vague)

Page 7 second full para line 2 "in their overlook" awkward phrase

Page 8, line 8 should read: "and whether their professionalism is endangered is still open to question

Page 11 line add "which," after professionalism

Page 16 first full para line 1: no 's' on variation

second full para line 1: change to "having in-house counsel"

page 19 first para: no 's' on behavior