



## **CSLS SPEAKER SERIES**

**Monday, March 18, 2019**

### **RACHEL STERN**

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Distinguished Chair in China Studies, U.C. Berkeley

### **“State-Adjacent Lawyering: How Chinese Lawyers Participate in Political Life”**

(co-author JSP student Lawrence Liu)

Looking beyond elections, what possibilities for political participation exist in an authoritarian state? This talk offers insight into this question by closely examining the activities and motivations of a group of “state-adjacent” Chinese lawyers who spend approximately 40 percent of their working hours conducting unpaid volunteer work to help the state govern effectively. Drawing on a database of biographical information on the 604 winners of the state-sponsored Outstanding Lawyer Award and twenty-seven semi-structured interviews with awardees, the talk will explore who is invited to participate in governance, how state-sanctioned political participation works, and the reasons why lawyers find these activities meaningful.

Empirically, drawing attention to this oft-overlooked group complicates our understanding of Chinese lawyers as either agitators for political liberalism or politically apathetic, and answers calls to treat the professions as variegated rather than monolithic. Conceptually, it also trains our attention on the liminal space between state and society, an in-between zone that we term “state-adjacent.” State-adjacent lawyers inhabit a boundary-spanning position that is neither entirely within-the-system nor outside-the-system, where they serve as trusted citizen-partners in governance. The biographies and experiences of this group suggest some Chinese citizens are better able to participate in politics than others, and that Chinese state capacity is greatly aided by the ability to outsource tasks to trusted private professionals.

**PLACE** Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Avenue  
**TIME** 12:45 – 2:00pm. Coffee and water provided. Bag lunches welcome.  
**INFO** <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/center-for-the-study-of-law-society/>  
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