

NEWSLETTER

Approaching the law through sociology

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1. Previous educational engagement relating to the law.

I have been interested in law for a long time, ever since I was a second-year undergraduate sociology student. At that time, we were given the opportunity to select a minor discipline. Without much thought, I chose law, perhaps influenced by my father's learning experience in the field and the abundance of law-related books on my home bookshelf. Later, I had the chance to study jurisprudence, civil law, criminal law, and administrative law systematically in specific classes for minor students. Unfortunately, due to a tight schedule in my home department, sociology, during my third year, I didn't have any free time to study procedural law, which eventually resulted in my inability to obtain my minor certificate.

However, my interest in law hadn't faded away. After being accepted into my MPhil program in sociology, I had a fortunate three-month break without any academic pressure. During this time, I decided to prepare for the Chinese Bar Exam, also known as "The Chinese Legal Profession Qualification Examination." I regretted not having completed the minor program in law during my university education, and my decision to prepare for the Bar Exam was also motivated by my curiosity about the potential combination between sociology and law. I thought if I could successfully pass the exam, I could either head for a job in the legal profession or use this certificate as a stepping-stone to find an entrance to do some sociological research in the legal profession. The latter path was exactly what I chose later.

After passing the Bar Exam, I interned in various positions, including lawyer assistant, in-house counsel, and judge assistant, exploring different career paths in Chinese law like a law student. These diverse experiences collectively contributed to my increasing interest in the sociology of the legal profession. They also added up to my MPhil research on the organizational transformation of Chinese law firms.

2. How to relate the knowledge of law to sociology?

Apart from what I mentioned earlier, my knowledge of the law has also motivated me to delve deeper into the field of sociology. My research in the legal profession, specifically lawyers, has been more focused on the sociology of labor and the sociology of the profession. In this research, I have examined how the bureaucratization of Chinese law firms can impact the professional autonomy of lawyers.

On the other hand, I also developed an interest in the sociology of law during my preparations for the Bar Exam. While studying for the exam, I noticed that the knowledge required for law is similar to that of mathematics. Both disciplines aim to create a systematic, structural, and ideal intellectual world to evaluate and judge specific cases. However, unlike mathematics, the ideal world of law is designed to analyze and solve real-world conflicts, disputes, and puzzles. This led me to question how accurately the knowledge of law was employed in real-world cases, and whether there was a gap between what the law suggested and what was actually implemented. I later realized that this was the core of the sociology of law - to explore the gap between "law on books" and "law in action."

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From humanities to sociology

Kris

I'm now a first-year PhD student in sociology, and I majored in journalism as an undergraduate and got my MA in Intercultural Studies. Although all three disciplines focus on the same topic, their perspectives and research methods differ.

The main purpose of journalism is to train us to be journalists to report on events and issues objectively, focusing on the who, what, when, where, and why. We don't research a topic ourselves; even if we need academic explanations for in-depth reporting or investigative reporting, we interview academic experts instead of doing academic research ourselves. After graduating from the university, I had two years of working experience as a news editor and journalist. However, I found that journalism could not deepen my understanding of the society, so I chose to pursue a master's program in intercultural studies. It was here that I came to know the power dynamics behind cultural phenomena, and it was also during this period that I determined the topic I wanted to study during my Ph.D.

Moving from the humanities to the social sciences was a big challenge for me. First of all, I do not have a strong foundation of theoretical knowledge, especially since I am unfamiliar with sociological theory. Secondly, there is a big difference between the research methods of humanities and sociology; the former uses an analytical and critical approach, while the latter uses a scientific and evidence-based approach.

The transition in research methods was not that hard for me, because the methodology course had trained us well. However, the lack of theoretical knowledge of sociology has brought me great panic and anxiety. Graduate courses tend to assume that you have a certain foundation, and the truth is, I haven't even read the works of the founding fathers in sociology. Later, I found it was impossible to make up for my shortcomings in theoretical knowledge at once, so I adjusted my mindset and decided to give myself more time. I started reading theories related to my research topic first, which made me more relaxed and efficient. At the same time, I audited undergraduate classes to study sociology from the beginning. For example, I'm still studying Introduction to Sociology with first-year undergraduate students this semester and can still learn from the class.

Scholars are now drawing from a wide range of theoretical frameworks and methodologies to better understand complex social phenomena. My interdisciplinary background, especially the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies, could help me a lot and provide me with different research perspectives in my research. Secondly, I have done a lot of news reports and research on different topics in my previous studies and work. When I reflect on the previous topics from the sociological perspective, I always find many interesting and worthy aspects of research. In addition, I recently found that my study and work experience in journalism made it easy for me to find interview subjects; after all, we were told in the first journalism class that there's no one we could not interview.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

✓ Call for contribution:

- 11th Annual International Conference on Social Sciences. **Deadline: 9th April, 2024.** ([Abstracts Submission](#))

✓ Job Ads:

- Postdoc position, Faculty of Social Science, Charles University. **Deadline for Application: 29th April, 2024.** ([More Information](#))