

"Rule of Law in the Square": A Legal Culture Square from the Perspective of Social Space Theory

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Abstract: *Over the past two decades, China has built more than 12,000 rule-of-law culture squares, which have become important material carriers for legal education and rule-of-law construction in the new era. Rule-of-law culture squares are not only an integral part of urban public spaces, but also a vivid manifestation of the deep integration of rule-of-law culture with social life. They are increasingly becoming important places for the public to access the law and perceive the rule of law, bearing the important functions of disseminating the spirit of the rule of law, shaping legal beliefs, and building social consensus. Currently, the construction of rule-of-law culture squares still faces two prominent practical dilemmas: the formalistic problem of "uniformity across cities" and the problem of insufficient public participation. To address this, we should promote the integration of rule-of-law culture squares into daily life scenarios to enhance the public's sense of closeness and identification, and realize the localization and localization of square construction; at the same time, we should create rule-of-law culture spaces that combine interactivity and aesthetic appeal, promoting their transformation from one-way educational platforms to multi-functional activity centers, so that rule-of-law culture squares truly become important platforms for local rule-of-law practice and promote the deep integration of rule-of-law construction and local social governance.*

Keywords: Rule of law culture square; Rule of law culture; Social space theory; Rule of law construction.

1. Introduction

Since China launched its first five-year plan for legal education in 1986, the construction of a rule-of-law culture has always been a long-term and fundamental task in comprehensively advancing the rule of law and building a socialist rule-of-law state [1]. With rapid economic development, the media for legal education have gradually expanded from traditional forms such as bulletin boards and radio broadcasts to tangible public spaces such as squares and parks. The construction of "rule-of-law culture squares" has become a core approach to building grassroots legal education platforms. In June 2021, the State Council's report on the implementation of the "Seventh Five-Year Plan" resolution on legal education released data showing that more than 3,500 rule-of-law culture theme parks, more than 12,000 squares, and more than 34,000 corridors had been established nationwide [2]. From bustling cities to remote towns, from newly built urban areas to old neighborhoods, rule-of-law culture squares have appeared either as newly built modern landmarks or through the renovation and upgrading of existing sites, becoming important landscapes in urban spaces that combine legal publicity and public service functions. As Li Deshun stated, the construction of a rule-of-law culture can promote "viewing the rule of law as a basic and universal 'way of life' from the overall appearance and cultural nature of the nation and society." [3] The Party and the state hope to embed legal publicity and education into the daily lives of the people through this tangible facility.

While academia has achieved a certain number of theoretical and empirical research results in the field of legal facilities [4], most focus on traditional venues such as "judicial institutions" and "courts," with relatively little theoretical discussion and empirical research on the emerging legal facility of rule-of-law culture squares [5][6][7]. In existing research, Liu Bin defines rule-of-law culture squares as legal facilities, considering them "architectural sites used to promote the spirit of the rule of law and implement and safeguard the legal system," representing the explicit material manifestation of rule-of-law culture [8]. Li Qirui and Lin Fang emphasize that rule-of-law culture squares are "both a relatively independent materialized socio-cultural space and a conceptual cultural domain without geographical significance." [9] The expositions of the spatial shift in legal research by scholars such as Zhu Yaliang, Xie Yao, and Tan Jun provide an important theoretical foundation for the study of rule-of-law culture squares [10][11][12][13]. Building upon previous research, this paper uses socio-space theory to conduct a specialized study of "rule-of-law culture squares," clarifying their institutional evolution and theoretical connotations, analyzing the dialectical relationship between the rule of law and space, pointing out their construction dilemmas in light of current practices, and ultimately proposing an improvement path that upholds tradition while innovating [13], aiming to respond to the cutting-edge issue of "the spatial shift in law" and provide useful reference for the construction of socialist rule-of-law culture.

2. The Institutional Evolution and Theoretical Connotation of the Rule of Law Culture Square

The transformation from a traditional political square to a rule-of-law culture square is not a simple matter of assigning a theme, but rather a process of policy evolution and institutional succession. A rule-of-law culture square is not merely a material facility, but an organic whole possessing objective, subjective, and social spatial attributes; its theoretical connotations require in-depth interpretation from the perspective of social space.

1.1 The Historical Dimension of the "Rule of Law Culture Square"

The birth of the rule of law culture square is a product of the continuous advancement of China's legal education and the gradual improvement of relevant policies. Its development has gone through three key institutional relays, and it has finally become an organic facility of a society governed by the rule of law.

The first institutional relay established the spatial carrying capacity of squares. The term "square" first appeared in central government documents in the early days of the People's Republic of China during the urban renewal and National Day celebrations. In 1958, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued a "Notice on Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China," requiring that "all localities should open or expand a number of central squares for mass gatherings and the dissemination of Mao Zedong Thought." [14] The design of squares during this period followed principles such as openness, axial symmetry, and unobstructed views. Their function was strictly limited to political gatherings and propaganda, establishing the politicized nature of squares and defining their value as spatial carriers for mass gatherings and information dissemination.

The second institutional relay infused the square with legal elements. Since the reform and opening up in 1978, the focus of national work shifted to economic construction, and supporting legal systems were successively introduced, making legal education a necessity of the times. In 1985, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council approved the "Five-Year Plan of the Central

Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Justice on Popularizing Basic Legal Knowledge to All Citizens," which for the first time designated the "square" as a space for legal education, proposing the establishment of fixed legal publicity windows in the central squares of large and medium-sized cities [15]. Unlike temporary and mobile publicity methods such as banners and streamers, legal culture publicity windows, as long-term fixed publicity devices, began to appear in large numbers in people's field of vision. This marked the "square" as an important spatial carrier for legal education, and legal elements were thus systematically integrated into the square space.

The third institutional relay formalized the legal culture square. In 2001, with the launch of the Fourth Five-Year Plan for Legal Education, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Construction jointly issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Legal Publicity and Education Bases," encouraging the construction of legal culture squares or corridors integrating artistry and knowledge in densely populated areas. This policy finalized the legal culture square's design from three dimensions: name, space, and function. In terms of name, "legal culture" became the core theme; in terms of space, the display windows expanded into systematic legal facilities; and in terms of function, the square added multiple functions such as education and leisure in addition to gatherings and publicity. Subsequently, existing squares across the country were successively transformed into legal culture squares, formally establishing their position as legal culture bases.

From the perspective of the evolutionary logic of the three institutional relays, the formation of the rule of law culture square is the result of the integration of the national demand for legal education and the expansion of public space functions. It has gradually transformed from an initial political tool into a social space with multiple functions such as legal publicity, public life, and social interaction.

1.2 The Theoretical Connotation of the Rule of Law Culture Square

From a traditional perspective, rule-of-law culture squares are often viewed as purely material entities, i.e., objective spaces. However, from the perspective of social space theory, space is not an isolated physical entity, but rather a practical category that carries social connotations such as power, production, life, and interaction. As Zhu Yaliang stated, the essence of social space is "objectivity transformed by the subjective or the subjective objectified, an organic whole that integrates the subject's will, external objects, and social recognition." [16] Therefore, understanding the social space attributes of rule-of-law culture squares requires clarifying the relationship between objective space, subjective space, and social space.

Objective space, the material foundation of a rule-of-law culture square, refers to the tangible existence of the square's buildings, sculptures, publicity facilities, and gardens—a physical form that people can perceive and touch. Subjective space encompasses the public's perception, emotions, and experiences of the rule-of-law culture square. It includes individual subjective feelings and value judgments, as well as collective resonance—collective memory, emotional attachment, and value consensus—and is crucial for the square's transformation from a "physical space" to a "meaningful space." Social space, the organic unity of objective and subjective space, is a practical category formed by the combination of the subjective will and external objects created by the people's practical activities; it is the core essence of a rule-of-law culture square [10].

The social spatial attributes of rule-of-law culture squares are reflected in their two core characteristics: publicness and legitimacy. On the one hand, the daily interactions and social exchanges of the people in the squares endow them with a distinct public nature. An individual's use of the square space implicitly acknowledges the will of other individuals in the community; the individual's social space is

subordinate to the public social space, while the group's social space directly demonstrates its publicness. The realization of this publicness relies on universally recognized consensus norms within the community, such as legal norms, customs, and moral standards. On the other hand, the social space of rule-of-law culture squares possesses clear legitimacy, a result of joint recognition by national law and local regulations. At the macro level, policy documents such as the National Five-Year Plan for Popularizing Legal Knowledge provide national-level legitimacy for the construction and existence of rule-of-law culture squares; at the micro level, the management regulations and ordinances for rule-of-law culture squares issued by various localities constitute supplementary recognition of the squares at the government, community, and public levels.

Based on this, the core definition of a rule-of-law culture square can be summarized as: a series of buildings and facilities themed around rule-of-law culture, equipped with functions of legal publicity and education, serving as a venue for mass and cultural daily activities, and conducting rule-of-law construction and legal education for the public; an open, outdoor public social space. This definition clarifies its material carriers and core themes, while also emphasizing its social spatial attributes and practical functions, revealing the essential characteristics that distinguish rule-of-law culture squares from other squares and traditional legal facilities.

3. Rule of Law Culture Square: The Dialectical Relationship Between the Rule of Law and Space

The core value of the rule-of-law culture square lies in its deep integration of the rule of law and space. In this social space, the rule of law and space are not simply a "carrier and content" relationship, but rather form a dialectical relationship of mutual conditionality, mutual transformation, and transcendence. This dialectical relationship is the core theoretical logic behind the rule-of-law culture square's ability to transform "legal indoctrination" into "rule-of-law recognition," and it is also the key difference between it and other legal education platforms.

The core theory of the rule of law culture square lies in the dialectical unity of the rule of law and space. The two are mutually conditional and transform into each other, and achieve sublation and ascension in practice, together constituting the operating logic of the rule of law culture square.

3.1 The Rule of Law and Space are Mutually Conditional

From the perspective of intellectual history, the connection between space and governance has long been a focus of ancient scholars. In ancient Greece, Aristotle pointed out in **Politics** that the size and scale of social space directly affect the form and efficiency of governance: excessively large spaces weaken connections between citizens, leading them to neglect public interests; excessively small spaces cannot support citizens' resource needs and limit the diversity of social classes—both are detrimental to good laws and governance. During the Enlightenment, Montesquieu further argued in **The Spirit of the Laws** that laws are closely related to the material conditions of the state (climate, land, geographical location, size of territory, etc.), and different objective environments will give rise to different legal systems and social governance models [17].

Although traditional theories have explored the connection between space and the rule of law, space has long been regarded as a "prior container," an inanimate fact. As Kant stated, space is "the basis and stage for our skillful games." [18] Marx, however, reconstructed the concept of space as a "social fact of nature" connected to the purpose and form of practice, emphasizing that space is not naturally occurring but shaped and altered by social relations, the level of productive forces, and human activities. This

view laid a materialist foundation for understanding the relationship between the rule of law and space. The Chicago School of Urban Studies in the early 20th century, through fieldwork [19], discovered that the organization of social space profoundly influences people's social interactions, lifestyles, and emotional belonging. There is an interaction between social space and social culture: different social spaces exhibit different social cultures, and cultural characteristics, in turn, influence the use and planning of social space [20].

This demonstrates a certain correspondence between different geographical spaces and different legal forms [21]. The mutual conditionality between the rule of law and space is reflected in their interdependence: on the one hand, the rule of law requires space as a carrier of "visibility." Abstract legal concepts and norms can only be perceived and understood by the public through concrete spatial forms (such as sculptures in squares, display windows, and legal corridors). Without the support of space, the rule of law can only remain at the textual level and is difficult to integrate into daily life. On the other hand, space needs the rule of law to regulate and define it. The rule of law provides a guarantee for the orderly operation of space by defining the "accessible/inaccessible" boundaries and the "usable/prohibited" functions. Without the permeation of legal elements, a square is just a meaningless empty space and cannot become a social space that combines legal education and public service functions.

3.2 The Mutual Transformation Between the Rule of Law and Space

The dialectical relationship between the rule of law and space is not only reflected in their interdependence, but also in their mutual transformation. The rule of law can transform abstract legal norms into tangible and measurable physical spatial forms, realizing the spatialization of the rule of law; while space can transform from a passive carrier of the rule of law into an active producer of the rule of law, realizing the legalization of space.

The spatialization of the rule of law refers to the transformation of abstract legal norms into concrete spatial forms through a series of methods, allowing the public to perceive them intuitively. This transformation is mainly manifested in four forms: first, scale transformation, where the law defines the legal boundaries of squares through red lines and land use designations, restricting space based on indicators such as scale, floor area ratio, and greening rate; second, installation transformation, where the law embeds the concept of the rule of law into spatial installations by stipulating the correct use of symbols such as the national flag, national emblem, and rule-of-law sculptures; third, scene transformation, where the law integrates rule-of-law practices into spatial scenes by stipulating procedures for constitutional oaths and rule-of-law publicity activities; and fourth, physical transformation, where the law transforms legal norms into constraints on the public's physical behavior by stipulating prohibitions on smoking and noise pollution. Through these four transformations, the abstract concept of the rule of law becomes a tangible, visible, and audible reality for the public, realizing the implementation of the rule of law in space.

The rule of law in space refers to the idea that space is not merely a carrier of the rule of law, but rather emphasizes its ability to actively produce legal concepts and shape legal behavior. In Lefebvre's theory of "spatial production," space possesses a productive nature, encompassing the interweaving of physical, psychological, and social dimensions, and can promote the reproduction of social relations, thus transforming space from a passive to an active role [22]. In a rule-of-law cultural square, abstract legal norms regulate physical space through bodily behavior, while social and cultural normative systems further shape and constrain individual bodily expression through customs, beliefs, and morality.

In the rule-of-law culture square, the production of the rule of law by space is mainly reflected in two aspects: First, spatial form shapes the governance logic. The spatial layout and functional design of the square directly reflect the governance logic of the rule of law. The squares of ancient Athens, located in the city center, were complex spaces for commercial transactions, political discussions, and legal trials. This layout encouraged citizen interaction and debate, promoting the development of democracy and the rule of law. In contrast, ancient Chinese squares were far from residential areas and isolated from secular activities, becoming the political and religious spaces of the ruling class, reflecting the governance logic of autocracy. The spatial form of contemporary rule-of-law culture squares, with openness and inclusiveness at its core, combines legal facilities with leisure and cultural facilities, allowing people to encounter the rule of law in their daily rest and interactions. This reflects the governance logic of "popularizing the law for all and jointly building the rule of law," and this spatial form can subtly cultivate the public's awareness of the rule of law.

Secondly, symbolic systems shape behavioral expectations. Lefebvre points out that spaces under different concepts are different "semantic fields," and the symbols, images, and signs within them are all signals of social operation [23]. The symbolic system in the rule-of-law culture square, such as the towering rule-of-law sculptures that create a "law is supreme" perspective, and the rule-of-law corridor that transforms abstract rights into everyday experiences, continuously sends a situational suggestion to the public that "there are laws to follow, and laws must be followed." This symbolic system can shape the public's expectations for rule-of-law behavior, allowing them to gradually integrate from their own physical space into the social space as legal subjects, thus forming conscious rule-of-law behavior.

3.3 The Rule of Law and Spatial Transcendence

As the rule of law culture squares are increasingly integrated into people's daily lives, the relationship between the rule of law and space is gradually shifting from a one-way transmission of the rule of law to space to a cyclical generation of legal norms and spatial practices, achieving a transcendence and ascension of the two. This transcendence and ascension is a dynamic development characteristic of the rule of law culture square as a social space, and it is also the key to its ability to achieve legal recognition.

The first manifestation of this shift in approach is the transformation of state power: the state power behind legal education has not weakened, but rather has shifted from didactic to experiential, and from coercive to guiding. For decades, my country's legal education efforts primarily relied on one-way dissemination through bulletin boards, broadcasts, and leaflets, placing the public in a passive position. In contrast, legal culture squares, by creating an overall legal atmosphere and providing diverse legal facilities, offer the public a wealth of interactive, restful, and aesthetically pleasing functions, allowing them to actively experience and engage with the law in their daily lives. This represents a direct and effective transfer of state power in legal education.

The second manifestation of this transcendental evolution is the self-renewal of the rule of law and space. The practice of rule-of-law culture squares allows both the rule of law and space to dynamically adjust according to the needs of the people, forming a cyclical and generative relationship. For example, if a square emphasizes only practical functions while neglecting its legal connotations, the public will "vote with their feet," turning it into a parking lot or a square dancing area, thus stripping it of its legal attributes. Conversely, when the square space is filled with people's daily activities such as morning exercises, street vending, and camping, the state will adjust its management regulations accordingly, legalizing these "lively activities" and introducing new spatial rules such as "timed opening hours, noise limits, and activity categorization," allowing legal norms to adapt to spatial practices. This interactive adjustment ensures that the rule of law and space maintain a dynamic balance, achieving their mutual

development.

The third manifestation of this transcendence and ascension is the deep integration of the rule of law with daily life. The rule-of-law culture square, as a public symbol, is a legal carrier with state investment and a defined theme; yet, as a nurturing space, it also accommodates the public's daily use, such as physical exercise, socializing, taking children out, and taking photos [24]. Through this repeated use in daily life, the public gradually develops collective memories and emotional attachments around the square. Legal elements are no longer lofty concepts detached from daily life, but rather become a shared grammar and common topic of conversation. The rule of law, through daily life, descends from the high halls and reaches the people, being understood, accepted, and practiced by the public in a subtle and gradual way, ultimately becoming a lifestyle that the public voluntarily chooses.

4. The Real Dilemmas in the Construction of Rule of Law Culture Squares

Theoretically, rule-of-law culture squares possess enormous potential to promote legal education, cultivate faith in the rule of law, and improve social governance. However, in practice, due to deviations in construction concepts, planning and design, and operation and management, the construction of rule-of-law culture squares currently faces two prominent practical dilemmas: first, the formalistic dilemma of "uniformity across cities and lack of landmarks," and second, the initiative dilemma of "low public participation." These two dilemmas are interconnected and mutually influential, causing some rule-of-law culture squares to become mere "image projects," failing to achieve the transformation from "tangible coverage" to "effective coverage."

4.1 The Dilemma of Formalism: Uniformity Across Cities and Lack of Distinctive Features

China has a vast territory, and the natural conditions, customs, and cultural images of different cities and villages vary significantly. As a local public space, the rule-of-law culture square should reflect local characteristics and integrate local culture. However, in practice, rule-of-law culture squares in various places have shown a high degree of homogenization, forming a "one-size-fits-all" phenomenon of squares lacking distinctive features.

In terms of facility configuration, legal culture squares across the country basically adopt a fixed model of "corridors + display windows + pavilions + fitness areas + electronic screens." From planning and decoration to content arrangement, they are almost identical, giving people the illusion of "the same style." One scholar vividly described this phenomenon with a limerick: "Looking down, you see paving; looking straight ahead, you see fountains; looking up, you see sculptures; steps and flagpoles; symmetrical along a central axis; the end is a government office." [25] This highly homogenized construction does not stem from unified design standards, but is a product of local governments blindly following trends and formalism. Some local governments regard the construction of legal culture squares as a political achievement project, pursuing speed and quantity while neglecting local characteristics and actual needs, resulting in square construction that emphasizes appearance over substance and form over effectiveness [26].

From a cultural perspective, some rule-of-law culture squares lack exploration of local culture and traditional rule-of-law culture, and the implantation of rule-of-law symbols is simplistic and superficial. For example, rule-of-law sculptures in squares across various regions mostly use generic symbols such as scales, gavels, and mythical beasts, lacking integration with local history and local rule-of-law practices; the content of rule-of-law publicity is mostly national legal provisions and generic slogans, failing to incorporate local cases and customs, resulting in a disconnect between rule-of-law culture and

local culture. This "parachute" implantation of symbols causes rule-of-law culture squares to lose their regional characteristics and cultural individuality derived from concrete life experiences, becoming soulless "rule-of-law landscapes."

From a construction philosophy perspective, some local governments have fallen into the trap of prioritizing scale and landmark status, pursuing the construction of the "first," "largest," "tallest," "longest," and "most popular" rule-of-law landscape buildings in an attempt to establish a local image through iconic structures. However, this approach often backfires, wasting valuable human, financial, and material resources, and creating many buildings that are disconnected from people's lives and difficult for them to accept, thus lowering the reputation and evaluation of the squares among the public. When 12,000 squares are replicated in batches, and vertical scales and horizontal corridors become increasingly similar, the rule-of-law landscape slides into "symbolic excess" and "experiential fatigue": if the spatial design is reduced to nothing more than a photo op, the elements of the rule of law will degenerate into mere backdrops, leading to public apathy and indifference; if local knowledge and legal knowledge cannot be integrated and expressed, the tall and imposing sculptures are merely parachuted totems, blurring the lines between tradition and innovation.

4.2 The Dilemma of Initiative: Low Public Participation

The core value of a rule-of-law culture square lies in connecting the law with the people, and the key to its realization lies in the deep participation of the masses. However, in practice, public participation in rule-of-law culture squares remains superficial, with a lack of participation channels and insufficient willingness to participate becoming important factors restricting the square's function.

terms of participation, public involvement in the rule-of-law culture squares remains limited to their use, failing to delve into core aspects such as planning, design, operation, and management. On the one hand, the public actively participates in the "use" of the squares, such as square dancing, morning exercises, taking children out, and leisure activities. However, this participation is primarily recreational and has little relevance to the square's rule-of-law theme. On the other hand, the public lacks standardized channels for participation in the "planning and design" of the squares. Construction is often unilaterally led by the government, and the public's opinions and needs are not adequately considered or reflected, leading to a disconnect between the construction and the public's demands. Once the squares are completed, even if the public is dissatisfied with their design and functions, it is difficult to provide effective feedback and adjustments, ultimately resulting in a passive situation where "the government builds, and the public watches."

In terms of content, the legal activities at the rule-of-law culture square are monotonous and dull, failing to stimulate public participation. Current legal publicity activities in the square mostly take traditional forms such as legal text explanations, poster displays, and film screenings, lacking interactivity, interest, and experiential elements, and are not closely connected to people's daily lives and actual needs. For example, oath-taking ceremonies on Constitution Day and popularization activities of the Civil Code are mostly official-led rituals, with the public participating only as spectators, making it difficult to form a deep emotional resonance and legal experience. This one-way legal publicity leads to public resistance to legal activities in the square, resulting in a continuous decline in participation.

From the perspective of participating groups, the legal activities at the rule-of-law culture square have failed to meet the needs of different groups, especially neglecting key groups such as teenagers, the elderly, and migrant workers. For example, legal activities for teenagers are mostly didactic lectures, failing to design interactive and experiential activities tailored to their physical and mental

characteristics; legal education for the elderly focuses on anti-fraud knowledge, but the format is still mainly posters and leaflets, which are not adapted to the elderly's reading habits. This neglect of the needs of different groups makes it difficult for the square's legal activities to reach the core population and achieve the goal of universal legal education.

As socialist construction enters a new era, square activities are becoming increasingly diverse and widespread, encompassing not only cultural, economic, and political activities, but also integrating more and more people's daily participation, giving rise to many complex and comprehensive forms of activities. Today, the public's education level is no longer the blind, controlled state of the past, where "the people can be made to follow a path, but not to understand it." Social governance issues are becoming increasingly complex, making it even more important to adhere to the principles of "from the masses" and "to the masses," giving full play to the pioneering spirit of the people and enabling their wisdom to be concentrated and utilized under correct and scientific policies and laws. The construction of rule-of-law culture squares can provide the public with a comprehensive space for action, combining the resolution of practical problems with the resolution of ideological problems. Rule-of-law culture squares are precisely designed to "extensively carry out publicity and education work among the people, enabling them to understand the true situation and trends of China and to have confidence in their own strength." [27]

5. Improvement Paths for the Construction of Rule of Law Culture Squares

Addressing the current challenges in the construction of rule-of-law culture squares, the core of the improvement path lies in upholding fundamental principles while innovating: "Upholding fundamental principles" means adhering to the core values of the rule-of-law culture square, combining legal publicity and education with public service functions, and realizing the transformation from "legal indoctrination" to "rule-of-law recognition"; "Innovation" means innovating construction concepts, planning and design, and operation models, tapping into the spatial potential of the square, stimulating public participation, and promoting a qualitative change from "tangible coverage" to "effective coverage." Specifically, the improvement path mainly includes three aspects: tapping into the spatial potential embedded in daily life, creating interactive scene aesthetics, and achieving full public participation throughout the process.

5.1 Embedding the Culture of the Rule of Law into Daily Life

The unique value of a rule-of-law culture square lies in its status as a non-institutionalized legal space embedded in people's daily lives. Distinguished from serious institutionalized legal spaces like courts and procuratorates, it allows the public to access and understand the rule of law in a gentle and inclusive manner. Therefore, unlocking the square's spatial potential hinges on deeply integrating it into people's daily lives, cultivating a sense of familiarity and connection with the square, promoting a localized shift in square construction, and making the square a "rule-of-law space right at people's doorsteps."

In his book **Space and Place**, Yi-Fu Tuan argues that "familiarity" is key to transforming unfamiliar spaces into familiar "places," and is the foundation for humans to develop a sense of belonging and identity with a space [24]. Cultivating this "familiarity" for the public in legal culture squares requires addressing four aspects:

Firstly, improve the daily service functions of the square to ensure a safe "pause" for the public. A "pause" is the starting point for people to connect emotionally with the space. For an individual, a pause means rest or obtaining supplies, while for many, it signifies the commencement of social activities. The

rule-of-law culture square should improve its basic service facilities such as seating, pavilions, corridors, drinking water facilities, and restrooms, providing a sheltered space from wind, rain, and scorching sun, encouraging people to linger and explore. During these pauses, people will subtly absorb legal education by observing the legal symbols in the square and discussing legal topics with others. This "unintentional learning" is far more effective than one-way lectures.

Secondly, it is crucial to focus on the community attributes of public squares and build a space-based network of interpersonal relationships. People's sense of security and belonging to a space stems not only from the space itself but also from the people, services, and interpersonal relationships within it. For example, some people choose a particular square for square dancing not only because of its excellent facilities but also because they have formed a stable community within it. Rule-of-law culture squares should emphasize cultivating their own community attributes by hosting regular rule-of-law and cultural activities to attract people and build a network of interpersonal relationships based on the square. When people form a stable community within the square, they will develop a sense of belonging and be more willing to participate in the square's rule-of-law activities.

Thirdly, creating a refined humanistic atmosphere provides space for personalized experiences for the public. A genuine sense of warmth often arises from moments of mutual attention and interaction among people, and this warmth requires a refined humanistic atmosphere in the plaza. The planning and design of the plaza should not pursue uniform symbols and forms, but rather focus on providing personalized experiential spaces for the public, such as setting up distinctive legal landscapes, creating small communication areas, and preserving natural greenery. Allowing people to find their own "little corner" in the plaza—such as a bench for playing chess with friends or encountering a beautiful ginkgo tree—these personalized experiences will become unique memories of the plaza, leading to a strong emotional attachment.

Fourth, refine the details of the plaza's design, emphasizing the value of "insignificant events." Yi-Fu Tuan points out that "insignificant events can one day build a strong sense of place." [24] People's feelings about a plaza often stem not from its overall size, but from the small details of daily interaction, such as a stone tablet inscribed with a legal motto, a warm street lamp, or a clean rest area. Therefore, plaza construction should abandon the "scale-only" approach, refining the details from a micro perspective and focusing on the daily experience of the public. At the same time, the plaza's durability and stability should be maintained, avoiding frequent renovations to prevent negative emotions arising from sudden changes in the space as people build a sense of familiarity.

Promoting a localized approach to square construction is central to cultivating a "friendly experience." The planning and design of the square should delve into local culture and traditional legal culture resources, organically integrating them with modern legal concepts. For example, local legal history, legal figures, and classic cases can be incorporated into the square's sculptures, display windows, and legal corridors; local folk culture and traditional arts can be combined with legal publicity to create legal culture activities with local characteristics. The legal culture square should become a carrier of local culture, allowing the public to experience the charm of local culture while engaging with the rule of law, thereby enhancing their sense of identity and belonging to the square [28].

5.2 Building a Rule-of-law Culture Square with Interactive Scene Aesthetics

"Rule of law culture venues are a new arena for positive interaction between the construction of rule of law culture and the construction of rule of law ideology." [9] The current formalistic dilemma of rule of law culture squares stems from their design concepts remaining at the stage of "propaganda and

education centers," treating the square as a mere carrier of rule of law propaganda while neglecting the public's interactive and experiential needs. Therefore, the core of innovative design concepts lies in creating interactive scene aesthetics, integrating rule of law concepts into the overall design of the space, allowing the public to experience the beauty of the rule of law through interaction, experience, and participation, and promoting the transformation of the square from a "propaganda and education center" to an "activity center."

Interactive scene aesthetics refers to the deep integration of legal elements with the spatial form, facility design, and event planning of a plaza, constructing a multi-dimensional, immersive legal experience scene that makes the public the main participants in the legal experience, rather than passive spectators. Its creation hinges on three key aspects:

First, the systematic construction of legal scenarios activates the public's desire for active exploration. Legal facilities in a legal culture square should not be isolated or fragmented, but rather form a systematic and interconnected legal scenario. For example, the legal corridor can be transformed from a simple informational display window into a "legal learning center," "task center," and "collaborative discussion center" for the public, featuring interactive elements such as legal knowledge Q&A, legal case analysis, and legal handicrafts. The square's fitness trail can be transformed into a "legal trail," displaying legal maxims and short stories on both sides, allowing the public to encounter legal knowledge while walking and exercising. Through this systematic scenario construction, the public's curiosity and desire to explore are stimulated, encouraging them to actively engage with and understand the rule of law.

Secondly, a multi-sensory legal experience should engage the public's physical senses. The dissemination of the rule of law should not be limited to the visual level but should encompass multiple senses, including sight, hearing, touch, and smell, allowing the public to experience the essence of the rule of law through physical contact. For example, legal sound installations can be set up in public squares to play legal maxims and songs; tactile sculptures of the rule of law can be installed, allowing the public to experience the meaning of legal symbols through touch; and legal gardens can be created, combining legal elements with greenery and flowers, allowing the public to experience the influence of the rule of law in a natural environment. A multi-sensory legal experience can make the concept of the rule of law more deeply rooted in people's hearts and form a more profound legal memory.

Thirdly, the design of scenarios should be tailored to different groups to meet the needs of diverse people. The design of the rule-of-law culture square should consider the physical and mental characteristics and learning habits of different groups, creating targeted legal experience scenarios. For teenagers, interactive scenarios such as a rule-of-law science museum, a rule-of-law game area, and a mock court can be set up, allowing teenagers to learn about the rule of law through games and experiences. For the elderly, scenarios such as a rule-of-law teahouse and an anti-fraud propaganda corner can be set up, using lectures, operas, and storytelling—forms that are popular with the elderly—to conduct legal education. For migrant workers, labor law consultation points and rule-of-law rights protection service stations can be set up to provide targeted legal services. This segmented scenario design allows the square's rule-of-law functions to reach a wider audience, achieving the goal of universal legal education.

The ultimate goal of creating an interactive aesthetic experience is to transform the rule-of-law culture square into a comprehensive legal "venue," rather than merely a platform for legal propaganda. This "venue" encompasses not only legal propaganda but also public services, cultural entertainment, and community interaction; it allows the public to learn about the rule of law, engage in daily activities, and

build interpersonal relationships. When the square becomes an "activity center" that the public is willing and eager to participate in, its function of legal propaganda will naturally be realized, and the concept of the rule of law will be subtly disseminated through the public's daily interactions.

5.3 Activating the Initiative of the Main Body: Realizing the Participation of the Masses Throughout the Process, and Making the Square an Incubator for Local Rule of Law.

The core issue of low participation in the construction of rule-of-law culture squares lies in the failure to activate the initiative of the public, and the lack of effective public participation throughout the entire process of construction and operation. Therefore, the key to activating this initiative is to build a mechanism for public participation throughout the entire process, making the public the main actors in the construction, design, operation, and management of the squares, transforming them from "squares built by the government" into "squares of the people's own," and making them incubators for local rule-of-law practices.

Public participation should be integrated throughout the entire process, encompassing the planning, design, operation, and management of the plaza, forming a closed-loop participation mechanism.

During the planning phase, a mechanism for soliciting public opinion should be established. This involves widely gathering public opinions and needs regarding the plaza's construction through various means such as questionnaires, seminars, and online voting. Understanding public expectations regarding the plaza's location, function, and facilities is crucial. These needs should be integrated into the overall planning of the plaza to ensure its construction aligns with people's daily lives and avoids formalism that results in "building for the sake of building."

During the design phase, participatory design should be incorporated, inviting community representatives, community workers, legal professionals, and designers to participate in the design process. This allows the public to directly express their ideas regarding the legal elements, facility layout, and cultural expression of the square, integrating their creativity and needs into the design scheme. This ensures that the square's design not only conforms to the rule of law but also reflects the will of the people and incorporates local characteristics.

During the operational phase, a community mechanism for public self-management should be established, encouraging residents to form volunteer service teams and legal culture groups to participate in the daily operation and event planning of the square. Residents should be allowed to independently organize activities such as legal lectures, legal-themed cultural performances, and legal knowledge competitions, with the government providing only guidance and support, thus fully leveraging the initiative of the public. Publicly-run activities are more aligned with the needs and preferences of the people and can effectively increase their willingness to participate.

During the management phase, a public oversight and feedback mechanism should be established, including suggestion boxes in the square and an online feedback platform, allowing the public to promptly offer opinions and suggestions on the square's facility maintenance, operation management, and activities. Simultaneously, a square management committee composed of public representatives, community workers, and legal professionals should be established to jointly oversee the square's daily management and ensure that its management aligns with the public's interests.

Making public squares incubators for local rule of law is a higher goal of full public participation. Rule of law culture squares should not only be showcases of national laws but also testing grounds and

incubators for local rule of law practices. Through full public participation, squares can promptly reflect local rule of law needs and incubate rule of law practices suited to local realities. For example, regarding common local disputes such as neighborhood and property disputes, the public can organize rule of law mediation activities in the square; regarding local characteristic industries, the public can conduct related rule of law publicity and services in the square. Making rule of law culture squares an important platform for local rule of law practices will promote the deep integration of rule of law construction and local social governance.

6. Conclusion

As an important carrier for legal education and the construction of the rule of law in the new era, the rule of law culture square has shouldered the important responsibility of disseminating the spirit of the rule of law, shaping faith in the rule of law, and building social consensus since its inception. It is not only an organic part of urban space, but also a vivid manifestation of the deep integration of rule of law culture and social life; it is not only a tangible material facility, but also a social space that embodies the dialectical relationship between the rule of law and space; it is not only a new frontier for legal publicity and education, but also an important venue for the people to access the law, understand the rule of law, and practice the rule of law.

As a new frontier for legal education and promotion, "rule of law culture squares" are deeply integrating into the daily lives of the people. These squares represent a significant transformation in legal education spaces, bringing abstract legal concepts into concrete daily life and laying an important material foundation for universal legal education and the construction of a rule-of-law society. However, the formalism and low participation issues that have emerged during their construction remind us that the construction of rule of law culture squares is not simply about "building squares and displaying legal information," but rather a systematic legal culture project. Its core lies in achieving deep integration of the rule of law with life, with the local community, and with the people.

Looking to the future, the construction of "Rule of Law Culture Squares" should always adhere to the people-centered development philosophy, further upholding tradition while innovating, and continuously enriching their cultural connotations and practical forms. On the one hand, it is necessary to deeply explore the excellent traditional Chinese legal culture resources and organically combine them with modern legal concepts, making "Rule of Law Culture Squares" an important platform for inheriting and promoting excellent traditional culture. On the other hand, it is necessary to closely integrate with the actual needs of socialist rule of law construction in the new era, actively explore and innovate methods of legal publicity and education, and utilize modern technology to enhance the interactivity and interest of rule of law culture squares, thereby strengthening the dissemination and influence of legal culture. At the same time, attention should be paid to the scientific planning and rational layout of "Rule of Law Culture Squares" to better integrate them into the urban spatial system and meet the growing legal culture needs of the people. The ultimate goal of rule of law culture squares is to make the rule of law a common belief and a voluntary lifestyle choice for the people. When every rule of law culture square becomes a "rule of law space at the doorstep" for the people, a public space that they love, recognize, and participate in, the rule of law will truly be integrated into daily life and become a solid cultural support for the construction of a rule-of-law China. Tens of thousands of rule of law culture squares will collectively constitute a beautiful landscape of a rule-of-law China, contributing unique cultural power to the great goal of comprehensively governing the country according to law.

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