

## Challenges and Strategies in the Rule of Law Education for International Students in China<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *With China's increasing integration into the global governance system, the rule of law education for international students in China has become a strategic issue concerning the nation's legal image and social security. This paper employs the theoretical framework of "Legalization," analyzing the profound challenges currently faced in practice from the three-dimensional perspective of "obligation," "precision," and "delegation." These challenges primarily stem from the cross-cultural barriers to identification caused by the significant heterogeneity between the legal traditions of students' home countries and China's rule of law system, as well as the structural deficiencies within China's educational system for international students, such as the scarcity of specialized curricula and interdisciplinary faculty, a weak campus culture of the rule of law, and the failure of internal-external coordination mechanisms. To address this, the paper proposes a comprehensive set of optimization strategies. It advocates for the construction of a specialized core curriculum and innovative teaching paradigms, strengthening the development of a professional faculty, promoting a rule-of-law-based transformation of management models, and improving internal-external coordination and emergency response systems. The ultimate goal is to transform international students from passive recipients of rules into proactive identifiers with the culture of the rule of law.*

**Keywords:** *International Students in China, Rule of Law Education, Cross-cultural Adaptation, Identification Barriers, Mutual Empowerment*

### I. INTRODUCTION

With the deepening of China's role on the global stage, the rule of law education for international students has transcended the mere scope of administration, evolving into a strategic issue concerning national security, the image of the rule of law, and the development of cultural soft power. However, directly applying a normative system, which is endogenous to the logic of Chinese social governance, to a group of international students with diverse cultural and legal backgrounds presents self-evident tensions and challenges. Therefore, to reflect on the effectiveness of this educational practice, one must first return to its theoretical foundations: clarifying the core connotation of "legalization" and its evolutionary trajectory within the Chinese educational context is the starting point for dissecting the current predicament and exploring future paths.

#### 1.1 The Conceptual Definition and Origins of Legalization

Legalization, as a core analytical concept in contemporary international relations and comparative politics, provides a sophisticated analytical framework that transcends the traditional dualistic perspective of law and politics. It does not simply refer to the presence or absence of law but aims to measure and describe the degree

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of institutionalization along a multidimensional continuum. According to the authoritative definition proposed by Kenneth W. Abbott et al., legalization is a specific form of institutionalization composed of three core and independently variable elements, with its strength and form determined by different combinations of these three dimensions<sup>[1]</sup>.

First is Obligation, which is the binding force of rules. This dimension concerns the extent to which actors (such as states) are legally bound by a set of rules. At a high level of legalization, obligation means that actors are "legally bound," their behavior driven not merely by moral or political interests but subject to scrutiny and judgment under the universal rules, procedures, and discourse of international and domestic law. This implies that non-compliant behavior is no longer viewed merely as a policy failure or a conflict of interest, but will trigger "legal responsibility" and may activate specific legal remedies. Conversely, at the lower end of the legalization spectrum, rules may only have an advisory or politically promissory character, such as various "soft law" documents, political declarations, or agreements with broad exit clauses. While they can shape behavioral expectations, they lack strict legal compulsion.

Second is Precision, which is the clarity of rule content. This dimension measures the extent to which rules define required, authorized, or prohibited actions in a clear and unambiguous manner, thereby reducing the scope for discretion and arbitrary interpretation by actors. Highly precise rules provide clear behavioral guidance, enhance the predictability of actions, reduce transaction costs, and offer objective standards for monitoring and enforcement. A lack of precision is often the product of political compromise; it preserves flexibility for actors but can also lead to opportunistic behavior and endless disputes over interpretation.

Third is Delegation, which is the authority of third-party institutions. This dimension measures the degree to which the authority to interpret, apply, resolve disputes, and even legislate further is granted to neutral third-party institutions. Delegation is the most substantively significant feature of a legalized regime because it transfers interpretive authority from the disputing parties to an independent center of authority. A high level of delegation implies the existence of judicial or quasi-judicial bodies with mandatory jurisdiction and the power to make final decisions. In contrast, with low levels of delegation, dispute resolution may be limited to political negotiation, mediation, or conciliation between the parties, with outcomes entirely dependent on their will and relative power.

The origin of this analytical framework can be traced back to the legal positivism theory of the British legal philosopher H.L.A. Hart. In his classic work *The Concept of Law*, Hart proposed that a mature legal system is a combination of "primary rules" (as norms of conduct) and "secondary rules" (as norms of empowerment and procedure). The three-dimensional framework of legalization can be seen as a sophisticated "operationalization" of Hart's theory in the field of international politics. The dimensions of "obligation" and "precision" directly concern the nature of "primary rules," while the "delegation" dimension essentially represents "secondary rules," providing institutional guarantees for the operation of the entire rule system<sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, by examining these three dimensions, we can not only define what constitutes legalization but also more effectively evaluate and compare the degree of legalization in different international institutional arrangements, thereby providing a rigorous and powerful analytical tool for understanding the complex reality of global governance.

## 1.2 The Connotations and Features of Legalization Education

Legalization Education is essentially a practice of normative socialization that internalizes the core elements of legalization into the cognitive and behavioral patterns of the educated. From a theoretical perspective, its connotation includes not only the transmission of the "precision" of a rule system—that is, defining behavioral boundaries through clear and unambiguous rules—but more centrally, it establishes the "obligation" of legal rules to bind actors and guides the educated to submit to the "delegation" of authority to

third-party institutions<sup>[1]</sup>. This process is, in fact, an extension of the "legalization of governance capacity" within the modernization of national governance into the educational domain. Its goal is to transform policies and norms into the conscious compliance of the educated through institutionalized educational pathways<sup>[2]</sup>. This educational practice transcends the mere popularization of instrumental legal knowledge and instead pursues a discursive system based on "rationality, technical knowledge, and argumentation," prompting individuals to engage in social interaction and dispute resolution within the legal track.

The core features of legalization education are its high degree of normativity, its cultural nurturing function, and its orientation toward social governance. Its normativity stems from the state's shift toward a rule-of-law-based model of social governance, which emphasizes safeguarding the normative operation of power and rights by establishing independent and authoritative monitoring and enforcement mechanisms<sup>[3]</sup>. Second, legalization education has a profound cultural nurturing feature. By "cultivating people with culture," it integrates the spirit of the rule of law into the minds and conduct of the educated through the strengthening of cultural confidence, causing them to develop a deep psychological attachment to legal obligations<sup>[4]</sup>. At the same time, this educational practice has a strong orientation toward social governance innovation. It aims to achieve an effective transition from traditional administrative control to a rule-of-law-based model of social governance by enhancing individual compliance literacy, thereby maintaining social stability and public order amidst complex social changes<sup>[5]</sup>.

In the specific context of Chinese higher education, legalization education exhibits a distinct dual characteristic: a deep coupling of universal moral cultivation and specific political ideology. The rule of law education in Chinese universities is not independent of the moral education system but is integrated into a broader "Grand Civic and Moral Education" framework, profoundly reflecting its essential characteristic as "ideological education in service of politics"<sup>[6]</sup>. This educational model not only includes the cultivation of citizens' basic moral character and universal behavioral norms but also carries the mission of transmitting the state's mainstream values and establishing individuals' identification with the national rule of law system. Within this logic, the goal of legalization education is not only to guide the educated to know the legal rules but, more importantly, to prompt them to internalize these rules as an inalienable political and social obligation and to fully respect the absolute authority of judicial and administrative bodies in the application of rules.

### 1.3 The Developmental Trajectory of Rule of Law Education in China

The evolution of rule of law education in China is not a paradigm shift within a single academic discipline but rather the inevitable result of the fundamental transformation of the national governance logic from a "rule by man" mindset to a "rule of law" approach. From a macro-strategic perspective, legalization has been established as "the necessary path to modernizing national governance," its core being the construction of a universally binding institutional framework through the legalization of the governance system and governance capacity<sup>[2]</sup>. Against this backdrop, the model of social management has undergone a profound rule-of-law-based transformation, emphasizing the resolution of social conflicts through the construction of a rule of law society and the use of rule of law means to achieve social management innovation<sup>[5]</sup>. This change in the mode of state governance constitutes the logical starting point and institutional environment for the vigorous development of rule of law education in China.

From the perspective of institutional transmission, the development of rule of law education in China embodies the comprehensive permeation of the state's will into the educational domain and its institutional coupling. Chinese national leaders have clearly stated that "ideological and political work is, at its core, the work of cultivating people," requiring that the spirit of the rule of law "permeates the entire process of education and teaching" to achieve the cultivation of individuals throughout the entire process and in all aspects<sup>[7]</sup>. This top-level design not only establishes the strategic position of rule of law education in the higher education

system but also closely integrates the observance of legal obligations with the cultivation of individual moral character through the core mission of "fostering virtue through education." From the perspective of disciplinary evolution, this process has moved from the early popularization of legal knowledge to the intersection of legal education, ideological education, and political education, ultimately forming a composite educational model under the "Grand Civic and Moral Education" framework<sup>[6]</sup>. In this model, legalization education is not merely the transmission of legal knowledge but, more importantly, it deeply implants national identity, legal obligations, and social responsibility into the value systems of the educated through "content homology" and "functional compatibility."

Entering the new era, the developmental trajectory of rule of law education in China shows distinct characteristics of cultural self-awareness and power supervision, further deepening its governance effectiveness in education. On the one hand, rule of law education has begun to emphasize the supporting role of "cultural confidence," advocating for embedding the spirit of the rule of law in the rich soil of excellent traditional Chinese culture and advanced socialist culture, thereby enhancing the educated's intrinsic identification with the legal order through "cultural nurturing"<sup>[4]</sup>. On the other hand, the advancement of the national supervision system reform, particularly the rule-of-law-based transformation toward the National Supervisory Commission model, has provided society with a more rigorous benchmark for the operation of power. This external macro-institutional change directly requires the education system to strengthen the awareness of normative power and supervision in talent cultivation. In summary, the evolutionary trajectory of rule of law education in China clearly outlines a path of progression from being driven by national strategy, to being embedded in the educational system, and finally to being deeply integrated with culture and governance. This trajectory not only provides institutional guarantees for the cultivation of Chinese students' rule of law literacy but also offers an indispensable background reference and practical logic for how to handle cross-cultural norm alignment and build a harmonious campus order in the education of international students.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

As a point of deep intersection between the modernization of national governance and the transformation of the educational sphere, legalization education has become a widely discussed topic in both domestic and international academic circles, accumulating a rich and growing body of research. These works not only provide a multi-dimensional perspective for understanding legalization education in terms of conceptual definition and theoretical origins but also depict its complex landscape in both global and local contexts through practical experience and policy evolution. In the current era of increasing globalization and cross-cultural exchange, reviewing these research findings holds indispensable academic value and practical significance for deepening the understanding of the essence of legalization education and identifying the challenges of its promotion among specific groups.

### **2.1 Paradigms and Empirical Research in Youth Rule of Law Education Abroad**

Developed Western nations have accumulated relatively mature theoretical frameworks and practical experience in the field of youth Law-Related Education (LRE), with diverse paradigms that collectively highlight the key role of legalization education in shaping civic literacy. The American model is unique in the development of LRE, its core being the use of specific legislation, such as the Law-Related Education Act of 1978, to grant rule of law education an independent legal status, thereby elevating it beyond the scope of general civic education. A prominent feature of American rule of law education is the close cooperative relationship established between the education and judicial sectors, such as the joint development and promotion of legal education programs by bar associations through special committees like the Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship. In terms of teaching methods, the American approach emphasizes situational and

interactive learning, widely adopting case studies, moot courts, and role-playing to enhance students' critical legal thinking and their ability to apply legal knowledge to solve practical problems, rather than merely memorizing legal statutes<sup>[8]</sup>.

Developed Asian countries have also formed their own distinctive paths in rule of law education. Japan's experience is particularly noteworthy, as the cultivation of a rule of law spirit is integrated throughout its national education system. Starting from early childhood, Japanese education focuses on subtly cultivating students' sense of responsibility and duty through meticulously designed behavioral norms, reflecting its deep-rooted collectivist cultural foundation. Additionally, Japan relies on the Social Education Act to construct a three-dimensional education network involving the government, communities, and schools, ensuring that rule of law education extends from the classroom to social life and covers all citizens, thereby fostering a nationwide consciousness of the rule of law<sup>[9]</sup>. Further research on the legalization of vocational education in Japan reveals that its success lies in the government's ability to timely adjust and revise laws and regulations to adapt to economic development and industrial structural changes, for instance, by ensuring the timeliness and stability of laws through legislation like the Human Resources Development Promotion Act<sup>[10]</sup>.

The practices of other developed countries also offer diverse lessons. Germany, in its vocational education legalization, has deeply integrated enterprise practice with educational institutions through legislation, implementing a "dual system" model where enterprises bear significant responsibility in vocational training. The quality of vocational education is guaranteed by legally regulating teacher training and funding sources. South Korea's experience, on the other hand, emphasizes the proactive role of private schools in vocational training legislation. Through laws such as the Private School Act, it regulates the operational conduct of private educational institutions and ensures the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and the development of vocational education through sustained national investment via mechanisms like an education tax, thereby synchronizing it with the country's economic transformation<sup>[10]</sup>. A review of these diverse international experiences clearly shows that the effectiveness of legalization education is no coincidence; rather, it is highly dependent on a sound legislative guarantee system, effective cross-departmental collaboration between sectors like education and the judiciary, and targeted teaching methods that can stimulate student agency and adapt to their cognitive characteristics.

## 2.2 The Evolutionary Process and Logical Shift of Education Legalization in China

The development of the legalization of education in China is a grand process intertwined with the modernization of the national governance system, having undergone significant evolution and logical shifts at both the theoretical and practical levels. This process can be broadly divided into three key stages: exploration, establishment, and refinement. Its core connotation has gradually shifted from an early focus on constructing legal frameworks to a more complex application of legal means and rule of law thinking to regulate administrative behavior and optimize social management<sup>[11]</sup>. Within this shift, the legalization of education is defined as a comprehensive coordination process covering multiple dimensions such as educational relationships, educational conduct, and educational development. Its purpose is to clarify the rights and obligations of various educational actors through the authority of the law, ensuring the standardization and fairness of educational activities<sup>[12]</sup>. Under the guidance of the national strategy for modernizing governance, the logic of education legalization in China has undergone a fundamental leap, with the more forward-looking and inclusive concept of "legalization of education" replacing the previously narrower "governing education by law" approach. This transformation is not merely a terminological change; it reflects a completely new understanding of the depth of the rule of law spirit's permeation in the educational domain. The spirit of the rule of law should permeate every specific area of educational governance—including educational funding, the establishment of educational institutions, the exercise of administrative power, and educational evaluation—to achieve

comprehensive coverage of educational governance<sup>[13]</sup>. This demonstrates a shift at the national level from merely focusing on the compliance of educational management to pursuing the intrinsic rule of law logic and external supervisory effectiveness of the educational system and its mechanisms.

Accompanying this logical shift, the rule of law education in universities has been endowed with deeper political and ideological functions. The evolutionary trajectory of the legalization of education in China clearly reveals a complex process that moves from passively adapting to the construction of the national rule of law, to actively integrating into the modernization of national governance, and finally to deeply integrating the spirit of the rule of law with ideological education. However, despite the increasing emphasis on legalization education at the theoretical and policy levels, in practice, especially in the context of cross-cultural education, it still faces numerous challenges<sup>[14]</sup>, which provides a necessary problematic awareness for further in-depth research.

### 2.3 Research Findings and Limitations on the Rule of Law Education for International Students in China

In response to the growing population of international students in China under the "Belt and Road" initiative, the academic community has widely recognized the urgency and necessity of providing them with rule of law education and has begun to explore the systemic failures observed in practice. From the macro perspective of the right to education, China, as a major host country for international students, not only bears the international obligation to protect their individual "right to development" but has also affirmed its domestic responsibility at the constitutional level to guarantee the educational rights of all types of students<sup>[15]</sup>. However, existing research also widely reveals that international students in China generally have a weak consciousness of the rule of law and an insufficient awareness of legal risks, which has become a significant social factor leading to illegal and criminal phenomena<sup>[16]</sup>. The current rule of law education for international students is still in a "rudimentary" stage, characterized by arbitrary educational practices, a common problem of "emphasizing rule indoctrination while neglecting concept cultivation," and a lack of support from the underpinnings of Chinese culture<sup>[14]</sup>. This situation prevents the rule of law education from effectively shaping students' legal thinking and behavioral patterns, making them more prone to using "self-defined standards" to handle disagreements when encountering cultural conflicts, thereby triggering crises of social order<sup>[16]</sup>. At the same time, when implementing rule-of-law-based student management, universities often continue to rely on an administrative management mindset, neglecting the rights students enjoy as citizens, which results in management models that fail to fully embody the spirit of the rule of law and thus diminishes their effectiveness.

In terms of exploring educational models and strategies, the academic community has proposed some beneficial attempts and ideas. For instance, the concept of "convergent management" advocates for integrating Chinese laws, national conditions, cultural norms, and the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind into rule of law education, aiming to cultivate students' deep identification with China<sup>[17]</sup>. Meanwhile, some scholars believe that "cultivating people with culture" can integrate the spirit of the rule of law into students' character, thereby promoting their psychological identification with legal obligations<sup>[4]</sup>. However, these strategies still face challenges in practical implementation. A comparative study of Chinese and American rule of law education models reveals that China's approach still tends toward a "linear and relatively static model," while the American model emphasizes a "spiral and dynamic model," stimulating student agency through interactive teaching and cooperation with the judiciary. This difference in models, coupled with the diversity of international students' cultural customs and thinking patterns, makes it difficult for existing educational models to meet their varied needs.

### **III. THE VALUE AND IMPLICATIONS OF RULE OF LAW EDUCATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

The advancement of rule of law education for international students has a significance that far transcends the scope of a mere management tool. It holds irreplaceable strategic value and profound influence across multiple dimensions, including national governance, social order, cultural transmission, and individual growth. This burgeoning field is not only an inevitable choice for addressing the challenges of globalization but also a concentrated manifestation of China's image as a responsible major country.

#### **3.1 The Inherent Requirement for Maintaining Social Order and National Security**

The implementation of rule of law education for international students is, first and foremost, an intrinsic and fundamental requirement for maintaining China's public order and national security. With the in-depth implementation of the "Belt and Road" initiative, China has become a major global destination for study abroad. The scale of international students in China continues to expand, with a particularly significant increase in the number of students from countries along the "Belt and Road" <sup>[15]</sup>. However, this rapidly growing group generally has a weak awareness of the rule of law. Existing research indicates that due to differences between their home countries' legal cultures and China's legal system, as well as the "rudimentary" and "arbitrary" nature of the legal education they receive, their ability to identify legal risks is insufficient. Their behavioral patterns can easily conflict with China's social order, leading to frequent violations and even criminal acts, posing a potential threat to campus and even public order<sup>[14]</sup>. Against this backdrop, the core function of rule of law education is to systematically regulate the behavior of international students and guide the formation of their legal consciousness. Specifically, by providing precise interpretations of Chinese laws and regulations, it can effectively eliminate students' ambiguity about rule boundaries, making them clear on what constitutes legal versus prohibited conduct. At the same time, the education should focus on internalizing their understanding of legal norms, so that they comply not merely due to fear of external punishment, but out of an internal identification and a conscious assumption of legal responsibility, thereby forming a value system where the law is supreme. This will ultimately ensure that when facing disputes or conflicts, international students can seek resolution through legitimate legal channels rather than resorting to "self-defined standards."

The implementation of this rule of law education is closely aligned with the macro-strategy of modernizing China's national governance. It is not only a concrete manifestation of enhancing the "legalization of governance capacity" at the university management level but also a crucial pathway to achieving "social management innovation" and building a "rule of law society"<sup>[2]</sup>. By serving as an early warning mechanism, rule of law education conducted at the beginning of their studies can effectively deter potential illegal acts by students at an incipient stage, thereby reducing the costs of social governance and ensuring the safety and stability of their study and life in China. The significance of rule of law education for international students lies in its ability to effectively address cross-cultural legal conflicts, prevent potential social risks, and ultimately provide a solid rule of law guarantee for national security and social harmony.

#### **3.2 A Strategic Measure for Showcasing China's Rule of Law Civilization and Enhancing National Soft Power**

Rule of law education for international students is a crucial strategic nexus for China to demonstrate its own rule of law civilization and enhance its national soft power within the global governance framework. Against the backdrop of globalization, the international community's emphasis on the principles of the rule of law is growing. China is actively advancing the modernization of its national governance system and capacity, making legalization a core strategy for governance and a fundamental principle for institutional construction. At the same time, education, as a medium for transmitting the state's will and social norms, has its legalization process endowed with the mission of conveying China's rule of law philosophy and governance model to the

world<sup>[13]</sup>. Through rule of law education for international students, China aims to construct a new international discourse system, interpreting the global meaning of the rule of law through its own practices.

The core of this educational practice is to deeply convey to international students the intrinsic logic and cultural essence of the socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics. In the process of education, students can not only understand the precise regulations of China's legal system but can also gain a deeper perception of the spirit of the rule of law and the legal culture behind it. This includes the fundamental principles established by the Constitution, the socialist core values that serve as the soul of China's rule of law construction, and the modern rule of law practice system constructed by the new sixteen-character policy of "scientific legislation, strict law enforcement, just judiciary, and law-abiding by all"<sup>[18][19]</sup>. Through the cognition and internalization of these principles, values, and practical policies, international students can understand how China's legal system protects citizens' rights, maintains social fairness and justice, and how state power is constrained and supervised within the framework of the rule of law<sup>[3]</sup>.

As a strategic tool for cultural export and soft power construction, rule of law education helps to correct one-sided or negative perceptions of China's rule of law that may exist in the West, thereby establishing China's image as a responsible, fair, and transparent rule of law country in the international community. When international students experience and identify with China's rule of law civilization through their personal practice and study, they transform from passive recipients of education into proactive communicators of "China's story," becoming envoys for "people-to-people bonds" that connect China with the world<sup>[17]</sup>. This kind of identification, based on direct experience, is far more persuasive than external propaganda and can effectively enhance the international appeal and influence of Chinese culture<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, the rule of law education for international students is not only an important channel for achieving the global communication of China's rule of law civilization but also a profound strategic choice for enhancing China's discourse power and soft power in international education governance and global affairs.

### 3.3 An Effective Pathway for Promoting Individual Holistic Development and Cross-Cultural Integration

Rule of law education for international students holds irreplaceable value for their holistic individual development and their deep cross-cultural integration with Chinese society. This education transcends the scope of mere professional skills training, aiming to cultivate students with comprehensive qualities, including tolerance and the consciousness, knowledge, attitude, and skills to recognize and adapt to cultural diversity. Through rule of law education, international students can acquire the ability for mutual respect, understanding, and unity among different ethnic groups, societies, and countries. This is not only a guarantee for their academic success but also an important foundation for their future career development and global competence<sup>[17]</sup>. The cultivation of this ability directly responds to China's demand for high-level international talent in the era of globalization, enabling them to become friendly envoys with cross-cultural communication and cooperation capabilities<sup>[15]</sup>.

Especially within China's unique educational context, the connotation of rule of law education has been further enriched and deepened. It is not an isolated transmission of legal knowledge but, through cultural edification and conceptual guidance, helps international students form a deep identification with Chinese culture and the spirit of the rule of law, effectively bridging the cognitive gaps, behavioral conflicts, and even "culture shock" that may arise from cultural differences. This education views the law as a "minimum standard of morality," emphasizing the intrinsic consistency between law and morality. It guides students to understand and accept Chinese law from the perspective of cultural confidence, thereby strengthening their psychological attachment to the logic of China's rule of law<sup>[4]</sup>. By combining rule of law education with China's national conditions, culture, and socialist core values, it guides students to understand the value judgments behind the law, thus establishing a deep identification with China's rule of law at both the emotional and cognitive levels<sup>[18]</sup>.

Rule of law education aims to cultivate in international students a progressive faith in the rule of law, moving from "knowing the law," to "abiding by the law," and then to "using the law" and even "believing in the law"<sup>[20]</sup>. This process requires students not only to clearly understand the precision of legal norms but, more importantly, to internalize law abidance as a conscious obligation and to be able to rationally use legal means to seek solutions when encountering problems, submitting to the rulings of legal procedures. Through the cultivation of this comprehensive rule of law literacy, international students can more effectively integrate into Chinese social life, reduce friction and misunderstandings arising from unfamiliarity with laws and regulations, and achieve success in their studies, social interactions, and careers<sup>[16]</sup>. This educational practice can empower international students to become friendly envoys promoting understanding and cooperation between different civilizations, actively participating in the "people-to-people bonds" project constructed by the "Belt and Road" initiative, thereby realizing a virtuous cycle of individual growth and global mutual learning.

#### **IV. CHALLENGES IN THE RULE OF LAW EDUCATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

Although China has elevated rule of law education to the height of national strategy and continues to explore it at both the theoretical and practical levels, the rule of law education for the international student population still faces numerous complex and deep-seated challenges. These challenges not only stem from the heterogeneity of cross-cultural backgrounds but are also intertwined with the inherent limitations of China's current educational system for international students, jointly constituting obstacles to the realization of effective rule of law education.

##### **4.1 Deep-Seated Obstacles in Cross-Cultural Legal Identification and Adaptation**

The primary challenge for the rule of law education of international students is the deep-seated cross-cultural identification barrier rooted in their diverse cultural backgrounds, which involves disparate legal traditions, behavioral norms, and value judgments. The legal systems inherited from students' various home countries—whether the case law tradition of the common law system, the dominance of codified law in the civil law system, or a fusion with local customary law—all exhibit significant heterogeneity with the socialist rule of law system with Chinese characteristics in terms of philosophy, legal sources, and judicial practice<sup>[16]</sup>. This heterogeneity directly leads to cognitive biases and interpretive disagreements when students try to understand regulations. For example, regarding regulations on public order, control of specific commodities (like drugs), and academic ethics, international students may exhibit behavioral deviations due to different tolerance levels or enforcement logics in their home country's legal culture, which are inconsistent with Chinese legal expectations.

In addition to explicit legal differences, the intrinsic diversity of religious beliefs and lifestyles also constitutes a deep-seated impediment. The religious or community customs held by some international students may, in specific situations, be accorded a binding force higher than secular law. These norms may not be fully compatible with the generally secular public life norms of Chinese society. If there is a lack of sufficient and strategic rule of law education guidance, the conflict in this internal normative system can easily trigger psychological distress and even manifest as deviant behavior, thereby hindering their internalization of Chinese legal norms as personal obligations. This cultural level of discomfort and conflict not only undermines the practical effectiveness of rule of law education but may also lead students to resort to informal or extra-judicial and extra-administrative means to resolve legal issues, thereby damaging the authority of China's rule of law system. In summary, these deep-seated cross-cultural barriers are not limited to the understanding of specific legal articles but, more critically, concern a deep-seated identification with China's rule of law philosophy, institutional authority, and the cultural logic behind them.

##### **4.2 Structural Deficiencies in the Educational System for International Students**

The profound structural deficiencies in China's current educational system for international students, in terms of institutional design and resource allocation, significantly constrain the effective implementation of rule of law education. At the level of strategic importance and curriculum construction, universities generally fail to elevate rule of law education to its due core position in talent cultivation. Research shows that most institutions still treat this work as a "rudimentary" or "discretionary" matter, lacking targeted planning<sup>[21]</sup>. This lack of attention directly leads to the absence of a specialized curriculum system. Existing teaching content often consists of a mere listing of legal knowledge and fails to touch upon the cultivation of rule of law concepts, making it difficult to achieve the fundamental shift from "knowledge indoctrination" to "rule of law thinking shaping." Related to this, the professionalism and quantity of faculty have become key factors constraining the quality of rule of law education. High-quality rule of law education requires teachers who not only have a solid legal professional background but also possess outstanding cross-cultural communication skills and international education experience. However, the personnel currently responsible for the management and rule of law education of international students in universities are mostly daily administrative staff or counselors, whose legal literacy is generally inadequate. They lack the professional knowledge and skills to explain laws to cross-cultural groups and often face language barriers<sup>[22]</sup>. This structural problem with the faculty severely limits the depth and breadth of rule of law education, making it difficult to effectively convey the essence of the spirit of the law and the profound connotations of the rule of law culture, which seriously affects international students' understanding and identification with the law.

The lack of a campus rule of law cultural environment and the failure of management coordination mechanisms also constitute major obstacles to the implementation of rule of law education. The creation of a rule of law culture depends on fostering an immersive institutional environment and a diversified platform of activities, allowing international students to experience and perceive the spirit of the rule of law subtly and pervasively. However, the rule of law promotional materials and activities in many universities are still predominantly in Chinese, with rigid content presentation. They fail to fully consider the linguistic and cultural backgrounds and reception habits of international students, making it difficult for them to actively participate and integrate into the campus rule of law cultural construction<sup>[21]</sup>. At the same time, the lack of an institutionalized and efficient coordination mechanism between various functional departments within universities, and between universities and external government departments such as public security and immigration, often leads to information silos in handling daily affairs involving international students' violations, emergencies, or legal disputes. This increases management risks and the possibility of legal disputes escalating<sup>[22]</sup>.

#### 4.3 Profound Tensions Between the Policy Level and Practical Implementation

The effectiveness of rule of law education for international students is also constrained by the deep tensions between macro-level national policy direction and micro-level practical implementation. Although the Chinese government has issued a series of policies emphasizing the legalization and regulation of the management of international students, such as the Administrative Measures for the Enrollment and Cultivation of International Students by Schools, at the specific implementation level, these regulations often face problems of incomplete supporting rules and insufficient operability<sup>[10]</sup>. The lack of "precision" in these normative documents makes it difficult for policy intent to be effectively realized in areas that support the key development needs of international students, such as internships and employment, thus affecting their holistic development and future competitiveness in China.

The release of the Quality Standards for Higher Education for International Students in China (Trial) marks a shift in national emphasis from quantity expansion to quality assurance in international student education. However, as a "trial" document, its authority is relatively low, making it difficult to be quickly

transformed into a binding, concrete responsibility that universities must undertake<sup>[10]</sup>. This limited policy authority also means that when implementing quality standards, universities may lack sufficient motivation and institutional pressure, thereby affecting the universal improvement of the quality of rule of law education.

The prominent problems at the policy implementation level are also reflected in the time lag between the shift in national macro-policy and the actual adaptive capacity of universities. The dynamic shift in China's international student policy from "cautious opening" to "scale expansion" and then to "quality first" presents a significant mismatch with the actual adaptive capacity of universities, especially those in less developed regions. Many institutions lack experience in receiving international students, and their human resources, management systems, and infrastructure have failed to keep pace with policy adjustments<sup>[23]</sup>. This mismatch between management capacity and policy requirements directly leads to the ineffective implementation of policy intent at the grassroots level, resulting in uneven effectiveness of rule of law education across different universities and making it difficult to form a unified and efficient educational system. This tension between macro-level policy design and micro-level practical implementation constitutes a non-negligible deep-seated obstacle to the rule of law education for international students.

## **V. OPTIMIZATION STRATEGIES FOR THE RULE OF LAW EDUCATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

Facing the multiple challenges presented in cross-cultural adaptation, system construction, and policy implementation for the rule of law education of international students, it is imperative to construct a set of professional and operable educational strategies. This requires not only innovation in educational content and form but also the integration of top-level institutional design and resource allocation, to transform international students from passive recipients of rules into proactive identifiers and practitioners of the rule of law culture.

### **5.1 Constructing a Specialized Curriculum and Innovative Teaching Paradigms**

The optimization of rule of law education for international students primarily hinges on a fundamental paradigm shift from fragmented, reactive interventions to the construction of an endogenous curriculum system. This shift requires universities to elevate rule of law education from its current common state as a peripheral lecture or informal integration, and to institutionally upgrade it to a core compulsory course within the talent cultivation plan, granting it the same strategic importance as courses like Chinese language and national conditions. The pilot experience of "earning credits for learning the law" in some regions provides a valuable practical reference and a model for promotion for this institutional reform that directly links legal studies with academic evaluation<sup>[22]</sup>.

The fundamental elevation of the curriculum's status creates the necessary space for a qualitative leap in teaching content from "rule indoctrination" to "concept cultivation"<sup>[14]</sup>. The curriculum design should transcend the mechanical listing of legal articles and be differentiated and modularized according to the needs of international students from different majors and academic levels. For example, by adding content on medical-related laws and regulations for medical students and explaining economic laws for business students, the practicality and relevance of the courses can be enhanced. At the same time, the teaching content should deeply expound the intrinsic logic of the socialist rule of law theory with Chinese characteristics, the profound cultural underpinnings behind the law, and the practical strategies of "governing the country according to law," helping students to build a rational understanding of China's rule of law system, rather than just memorizing surface-level regulations<sup>[21]</sup>.

Matching the deepening of course content, innovation in teaching methodology is also key. It is essential to vigorously promote situational and interactive teaching models such as case studies, moot courts, and role-playing to stimulate students' learning agency and deep participation<sup>[8]</sup>. At the same time, the educational

domain should be extended from a single classroom to a diversified "second classroom." By fully utilizing new media platforms to deliver vivid and concrete legal popularization content in multiple languages, and combining it with activities like legal knowledge competitions and social practice, the appeal and effectiveness of rule of law education can be enhanced, while also providing rich practical support for institutional reforms like "earning credits for learning the law"<sup>[24]</sup>.

### 5.2 Strengthening the Development of a Professional Faculty and Cultivating Interdisciplinary Talent

The effectiveness of rule of law education for international students fundamentally depends on the construction of a professional and interdisciplinary faculty. The current common practice of having daily management personnel also serve as rule of law educators can no longer meet the deep-seated needs of the new era for the quality of international student education, constituting a "structural deficiency" in institutional practice. Therefore, building a full-time faculty team with a solid legal professional background, proficiency in foreign languages, and deep cross-cultural communication skills has become an urgent priority for improving the quality of education. Universities must make the recruitment and cultivation of such interdisciplinary talent a strategic task, providing them with continuous professional development support to ensure that rule of law education can transcend simple rule recitation and delve into the profound connotations of the Chinese legal spirit and rule of law culture. At the same time, providing rule of law literacy training for the existing international student management team is a key supplement to building an all-staff education framework. All management personnel, including counselors, head teachers, and dormitory administrators, are the primary responsible persons for implementing rule of law education in daily management. Through a period of training, they can master the necessary legal knowledge for handling daily affairs, enabling them to provide correct legal guidance at the first instance in their daily interactions with international students, and to organically integrate rule of law education into the entire process of "care, concern, and daily services"<sup>[21]</sup>. This model of integrating management behavior with educational guidance helps to build a ubiquitous, subtle, and pervasive rule of law education environment on campus, allowing the spirit of the rule of law to permeate every corner of international students' lives in China.

To further bridge the gap between theory and practice, universities should also establish an open faculty recruitment mechanism, actively bringing in intellectual resources from legal practitioners outside the university. Inviting experienced lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and officers from immigration departments as adjunct instructors or special lecturers can inject vivid case studies and authoritative practical experience into rule of law education<sup>[25]</sup>. These experts from the front lines of law enforcement and the judiciary can enhance the practicality, persuasiveness, and deterrent power of rule of law education through their personal experiences, making abstract legal articles concrete and tangible, and helping international students to more intuitively understand the practical logic and social effectiveness of China's rule of law.

### 5.3 Promoting the Legalization of Management Models and Cultivating a Campus Rule of Law Culture

The success of rule of law education for international students is profoundly dependent on the rule-of-law-based transformation of university management models and the cultivation of a campus rule of law culture. At the management model level, universities must vigorously promote the "convergent management" philosophy. This means, on the fundamental premise of fully respecting cultural differences, gradually achieving consistency for Chinese and international students in areas such as regulations, reward and punishment mechanisms, and rights protection and remedy procedures, to promote educational fairness and deep-seated campus integration<sup>[17]</sup>. This requires universities to thoroughly review and revise their current regulations, ensuring they are consistent with national laws and regulations, and to communicate them clearly and unambiguously to all international students in multiple languages. This move is not only a practice of the "precision" principle of legalization but also lays the foundation for building a relationship of mutual trust and

respect between teachers and students, and between Chinese and international students, through equal treatment at the institutional level.

In parallel with institutional construction, the cultivation of a campus rule of law culture is key to shifting rule of law education from external constraint to internal self-awareness. The rule of law culture should be an important component of campus cultural construction. By setting up rule of law cultural promotion columns, organizing legal culture festivals, and establishing rule of law-themed student associations, a rich and immersive rule of law atmosphere can be created on campus. The design of these cultural activities should fully consider the language habits and cultural backgrounds of international students, encouraging them to discuss rule of law issues in cross-cultural dialogues, and subtly enhancing their "inner endorsement and sincere belief" in China's rule of law<sup>[18]</sup>. This deep integration at the cultural level helps them to develop a sense of identification with China's legal order at the psychological and emotional levels, not just out of fear of punishment.

The legalization of the management model and the cultivation of a campus rule of law culture are a mutually reinforcing and complementary process. A fair, transparent, and standardized management system is the institutional soil in which the rule of law culture can grow. Conversely, a campus cultural atmosphere full of the spirit of the rule of law provides strong value support and a psychological foundation for the smooth implementation of legalized management. When international students feel the procedural fairness in daily management and experience the charm of the rule of law in campus activities, their concept of the rule of law can transform from passive acceptance to proactive identification, ultimately forming a stable faith in the rule of law.

#### 5.4 Improving Internal-External Coordination Mechanisms and Emergency Response Systems

The ultimate effectiveness of rule of law education for international students is highly dependent on the establishment of sound and efficient internal-external coordination mechanisms and emergency response systems, to achieve closed-loop management and risk control of international student affairs. Within the university, it is imperative to break down administrative barriers and information silos between functional departments, establishing a normalized mechanism of information sharing, clear rights and responsibilities, and collaborative work. This rule-of-law-based transformation of internal governance requires placing aspects such as the daily management of international students, academic supervision, disciplinary actions, and rights remedies under a unified, transparent, and well-documented institutional framework, thereby avoiding management loopholes and legal risks caused by departments "acting on their own." In tandem with internal integration, universities must proactively establish institutionalized strategic partnerships with local government departments such as public security, national security, foreign affairs, and immigration<sup>[24]</sup>. The connotation of this cooperation goes far beyond routine legal popularization lectures; it should focus on building a rapid-response, clearly-defined emergency coordination mechanism. This mechanism is designed to handle various illegal and irregular incidents involving international students in a swift, legal, and fair manner, thereby effectively preventing the escalation of incidents and the spread of negative public opinion. Through regular joint meetings, information reporting systems, and joint emergency drills, the collaborative governance capacity of universities and government departments in international student affairs can be significantly enhanced, providing a solid external institutional guarantee for the smooth implementation of campus rule of law education.

This design of an internal-external coordination system can not only provide authoritative practical support for daily rule of law education activities but can also offer an institutionalized solution for addressing the increasing legal risks related to international students<sup>[25]</sup>. When the internal management system of the university and the external law enforcement and judicial systems are seamlessly connected, the authority and effectiveness of rule of law education will be greatly enhanced, and international students' sense of reverence for

and identification with China's rule of law will also increase. The establishment of this collaborative governance model is crucial for ensuring that the rule of law education for international students moves from theory to practice, from campus to society, and ultimately serves the fundamental guarantee of the overall modernization of national governance.

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