

## SPACE, SIGNS AND SYMBOLIC POWER IN CHINESE CRIMINAL COURTROOMS

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The right to a fair trial as a fundamental human right is now widely accepted by the international community (McConville, 2011). While the notion of a fair trial is typically associated with procedural safeguards that are expressly provided in law, such as the right to counsel, the right to defending oneself, fairness can be reflected in architectural or spatial dimensions (Tait, 2011). Courtroom design, apart from achieving its main functional objectives, is the embodiment of institutional values of “trust, hope and faith in justice and fairness” (Hammer, 2010). The design consists of a sign system through which society tries to communicate its ideal model of the relationship between legal professionals and other involved in judicial proceedings” (Greenberg, 1975, as cited in Wolfe, 1995, p. 595). Aligning with this perspective, this paper takes a close reading of the space and signs in Chinese criminal courts, in an attempt to probe how the symbolic domination is framed in the field. It begins with a thick description of the physical design and the layout of Chinese courts, and then proceeds to look into how the defendant is presented in the public space and how the trial participants are positioned. Situated in the background of rapid social changes China has experienced throughout the years, the paper discusses how layout of Chinese courtrooms reflects its the complex history of legal reform, professional evolution and political values. It will also show how the courtroom is constructed semiotically as an institutional context constituting the performative stage on which legal dramas unfold (Ng, 2009). Ultimately this paper argues that investigation into the architectural design and space in Chinese criminal courtrooms will shed light on the understanding of Chinese judicial value, ideology in justice and its “interactional dynamics” (Ng, 2009, p. 82).

### ***References***

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