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Building Consensus on High-Quality Development in the Planning and Design Professions and Education

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1 Introduction

The urban built environment is in a continual state of evolution. Around 1999, a small urban green space was created along a street when a major urban road was widened. In early autumn 2007, while conducting fieldwork on urban streets with students, I observed that this green space was enclosed by a ring of metal railings. I suggested to the students that the railings were unnecessary. Given its location, the needs of the surrounding community, and the size of the site, the space was well suited to conversion into a neighborhood park. The students looked perplexed. One remarked, "Isn't having trees and a lawn good enough?"

Influenced by my widely discussed 2018 speech, "A Human Habitat That 'Makes Enemies' of People,"① Beijing launched an initiative to remove unnecessary railings. This green space was opened up in 2019.

Several months ago, I passed the site again and found it enclosed by construction hoardings. Curious about the work underway, I climbed onto a nearby pedestrian overpass and saw that a path was being constructed through the green space. Three steps had been built at each end of the path, with no apparent provision for an accessible ramp. This design was evidently inconsistent with the relevant design standards and laws. After some effort, I contacted the project's design and construction teams and arranged an on-site discussion. The project team explained that three steps had been deliberately incorporated to prevent electric bicycles from riding through the space; an accessible ramp had not been considered. During the site visit, I also discovered that the project appeared to involve nothing more than constructing a path. After confirming that no seating was planned, I began to question such designing. The project team responded that "seating would encourage people to linger, creating management troubles." I pressed the point: given the substantial need for outdoor rest and social interaction among people living or working around this space, why construct a path while discouraging people from using it? The response was that, following the removal of the railings, people entered the green space and caused patches of grass bare.

Against the backdrop of economic development and market transformation, Landscape Architecture—and, indeed, Architecture and Urban and Rural Planning, the other two disciplines commonly regarded as the three pillars of the built-environment professions ("planning and design professions" hereafter)—faces a severe contraction in professional demands. Yet the phenomena I have observed, namely, the inability to deliver satisfactory work and the failure to approach professional tasks with due diligence, are widespread across different regions. One particularly troubling question is why firms that secure project commissions do not strive to deliver outcomes that exceed the minimum requirements of design standards, surpass market expectations, and meet higher standards of professional practice that they set for themselves.

With the implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Building Accessible Environments[1] and the Ecological and Environmental Code of the People's Republic of China[2] (hereafter, the Building Accessible Environments Law and the Ecological and Environmental Code, respectively, or collectively, "the two laws"), establishing a new consensus on quality within the planning and design professions has become an urgent priority. Professional

① This speech can be accessed via the official website of YiXi Talk.

quality is both a product of disciplinary consensus and an objective to be pursued. Whether the professions can respond to the expectations of the state and the public depends on their ability to reach a shared understanding of fundamental issues, including statutory responsibilities, professional ethics, institutional arrangements, education, and market mechanisms.

2 The Two Laws Impose Unprecedented Statutory Responsibilities on the Planning and Design Professions and Education

As China's first dedicated legislation on the construction of accessible environments, the Building Accessible Environments Law, which took effect on September 1, 2023, establishes a mandatory requirement that "the accessible facilities shall be planned, designed, constructed, inspected for acceptance, and delivered for use simultaneously with the main structure, and be effectively connected and integrated with the accessible facilities in the proximity." The law also explicitly requires accessibility-related knowledge to be incorporated into the curricula of relevant disciplines and into professional qualification assessments. The Ecological and Environmental Code, which took effect on August 15, 2026, establishes a systematic framework comprising five parts: General Provisions, Pollution Prevention and Control, Ecological Conservation, Green and Low-Carbon Development, and Legal Liability and Supplementary Provisions. It stipulates that "an ecological and environmental impact assessment shall be conducted in accordance with law when formulating a development and utilization plan or undertaking a project with ecological and environmental impact; any development and utilization plan that has not undergone ecological and environmental impact assessment in accordance with law shall not be organized or implemented." It also advocates green and low-carbon planning and design concepts and advances the development of green, low-carbon, and climate-adaptive cities. Together, the two laws—one centered on people and the other on land and the environment—address the same fundamental question: what social responsibilities should planning and design assume? In doing so, they establish a minimum threshold for professional quality in the planning and design professions.

3 Proactively Fulfilling Statutory Responsibilities

The first principle of consensus in planning and design is to regard legal requirements as fundamental professional responsibilities[3]. In the main texts of the two laws, the terms corresponding to "shall" (mandatory obligations) and "must not" (prohibitions) appear 66 and 1 time(s), respectively, in the Building Accessible Environments Law, and 1,947 and 792 times, respectively, in the Ecological and Environmental Code. The two terms together account for 1.9% and 3.4% of the total word counts of the two laws, respectively. Today, professional quality is reflected in an understanding of statutory responsibilities and the values underpinning them, as well as in the ability to develop solutions to human and land-related problems that demonstrably satisfy statutory duties and applicable design standards. The Building Accessible Environments Law elevates accessibility from a matter of professional advocacy to a binding institutional obligation: a design firm's failure to comply with applicable design standards constitutes a violation of the law. The Ecological and Environmental Code establishes ecological and environmental impact assessment as a prerequisite that planning and development projects cannot bypass, while making green and low-carbon development a legislative objective and fundamental principle. Its Fourth Part, "Green and Low-Carbon Development," is devoted exclusively to this subject. Planning and design are thus no longer merely professional activities; they are explicitly recognized as statutory responsibilities carrying obligations to the public.

4 Rebuilding Professional Education on a Foundation of National Needs and Global Perspectives

The second principle of consensus is that education in planning and design must adopt a global perspective, engage with real-world challenges, respond to national and human needs, and reorient teaching and learning toward their fundamental educational purpose[4]. Since the beginning of the 21st century, China has increasingly assumed the responsibilities of a major country with a growing global role. The enactment of the two laws reflects this development and, at the same time, establishes higher expectations for the planning and design professions and education. Beyond compliance with these two laws, professional education in planning and design must cultivate the capacity to investigate uncertainties in the human environment and develop adaptive solutions. These uncertainties arise from climate change, the biodiversity crisis, land-system degradation, the pervasive spread of environmental pollution, the deterioration of marine environments, and mounting pressures on freshwater resources, together with many secondary environmental and resource-related challenges associated with these issues. Such challenges occur across the globe and

increasingly threaten human survival and security. Exploring solutions to the shared yet highly differentiated challenges facing humanity is an unequivocal responsibility of both the professions and their educational institutions.

5 Advancing Professional Qualification Systems Through Market-Oriented Reform

The third principle of consensus is that improving professional quality requires the establishment and refinement of effective market mechanisms. Market forces offer one of the most direct and effective means of driving continuous improvements in professional standards. Only when practitioners recognize that failure to respond to societal needs, pursue innovation, comply with design standards, or uphold professional integrity may result in their exclusion from the market can the professions move toward a sound and sustainable trajectory and develop a robust professional ethos. The establishment of systems for professional entry and qualification assessment has long been a goal of the landscape planning and design professions. The implementation of the two laws provides a compelling and firmly grounded justification for this objective. Designers should be authorized to sign planning and design documents and assume the corresponding responsibilities only when they possess the professional competence required to fulfill their statutory duties and explicitly accept the associated professional accountability. Legal requirements, market mechanisms, and professional qualification and entry systems must function as an integrated framework; none can be dispensed with.

6 Upholding the Minimum Standards of Professional Ethics

The fourth principle of consensus is that the professions must establish clear and enforceable ethical standards. The two laws incorporate the development of inclusive, accessible environments, ecological conservation and restoration, and green and low-carbon development into the responsibilities of planning and design. The professions must therefore be capable of safeguarding the rights and interests of users of public and everyday environments, including their life safety, dignity, and physical and mental well-being, while also fulfilling their responsibilities for sustaining the land and the long-term viability of human societies. Professional quality in planning and design must now be understood as the outcome of a systematic process grounded in legal requirements, professional knowledge and skills, professional education, and evidence-based solutions. These are not merely matters of knowledge application and technical proficiency; they also concern the maintenance of fundamental professional standards—that is, professional ethics. Only by upholding these ethical standards can the professions achieve professionalization and high-quality development and earn public trust. Solutions to problems involving land and the environment cannot be reduced to a collection of equally valid opinions, much less to self-referential judgments unsupported by external scrutiny. Designers and professional organizations must develop effective mechanisms for professional self-regulation and establish clear rules for self-governance. These mechanisms are essential to the continuous improvement of general professional competence and demonstrated professional competency, thereby safeguarding the sustained quality of professional practice[3].

7 The Widespread Adoption of Artificial Intelligence Creates Unprecedented External Conditions and Opportunities for High-Quality Development in the Professions

The division of labor is a major driver of social and civilizational progress. The widespread adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) has created unprecedented opportunities for finer-grained specialization, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and the practical application of knowledge and technology, as well as for innovation and creative problem-solving. AI offers extraordinary advantages for revitalizing the planning and design professions while maintaining high standards of quality. However, realizing AI's potential depends on a fundamental prerequisite: recognizing that the planning and design professions serve countless individual living beings and that every planning or design project is a unique case. The significance of these individuals and cases for planning and design lies in four interrelated characteristics: 1) the rich details through which differences in land and human life are expressed; 2) the infinite combinations and relationships among these details; 3) the changes that unfold over time; and 4) the diverse, often contradictory and problem-laden forms of life, geographic spaces, and wider worlds that emerge from these interactions and upon which human survival depends. Human life and the challenges associated with it are inherently uncertain, with no universally applicable solutions. Understanding these challenges is itself a dynamic process. Exploring potential solutions is therefore an intellectually stimulating and never-ending endeavor. AI offers substantial opportunities to deepen our understanding of these challenges and investigate possible solutions. Only by adopting this understanding

of the future of planning and design can each planning proposal and design project become an innovative response to improving the well-being of the land, the people who depend on it, and other forms of life. Only then can the statutory responsibilities established by the two laws be genuinely fulfilled, and the practical experience gained through implementation contribute to the global body of knowledge on sustainable development.

Around 2004, Landscape Architecture faced a profound tension between the development opportunities created by rapid urbanization and the stagnation of prevailing disciplinary ideas. This tension stimulated scholars to envision new perspectives for the development of Landscape Architecture[5–7] and prompted candid and vigorous debate on related issues[8–10]. Through these discussions, participants with differing perspectives identified common ground and reached a consensus on the need to accelerate the establishment and development of Landscape Architecture as an academic discipline and professional field. This consensus initiated a period of rapid growth from 2005 to 2021. As urbanization shifts from expansion-driven growth toward the improvement of existing urban areas, Landscape Architecture has once again reached a critical juncture at which a new professional consensus must be forged.

The choice is stark: "To be, or not to be: that is the question."

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规划设计行业和教育在质量高位上发展需要的共识

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1 引言

城市建成环境一直处在某种意义的演化状态。1999年前后，一条城市主干道路拓宽时形成了一片街头绿地。2007年初秋，我带领学生在城市街道上进行田野调查，看到这片绿地被一圈铁护栏围着。提示学生，这些护栏可以拆除。无论从空间位置、周围社区的使用需求，还是地块大小来看，这里都适合建设一处街心公园。同学们满眼困惑；有人说："树和草坪，不是挺好的吗？"

在2018年我发表的那场广为人知的"'与人为敌'的人居环境"演讲的影响下①，北京开启了拆除不必要护栏的行动，这片绿地于2019年开放。

数月前，路过此地，发现这片绿地被施工围挡包围了。出于好奇，爬上附近的过街天桥，看到施工人员正在修建一条穿过绿地的小路。小路的两端各有3级台阶，均未见设置无障碍坡道的迹象，显然不符合相关设计规范和法律的要求。辗转联系到项目设计和施工单位，并与相关人员进行了现场交流。项目方解释说，担心小路建成后电动自行车会骑上去，特意设置了3级台阶，没有考虑修建无障碍坡道。现场发现工程似乎仅限于修建一条小路。确认了项目方没有设置座椅的计划后，我开始质疑这种做法。项目方回应："座椅吸引人停留，会给管理带来麻烦。"我继续追问：这片街心绿地周边有非常强的户外休息和交流需求，为什么要修建一条不希望人们使用的小路？项目方的回答是：因为护栏拆除后，有人进入绿地，造成了草坪斑秃。

随着经济发展和市场转型，风景园林学及同属人居环境学科"三驾马车"的建筑学和城乡规划学（本文简称"规划设计行业"）均面临严峻的业务萎缩。然而，我所观察到的"做不好事情""不好好做事"的问题，在各地比比皆是。令人痛心的是：为什么承接项目的企业不努力将项目做得比设计规范要求的更好、比市场期待的更完善，甚至达到更高的职业标准？

随着《中华人民共和国无障碍环境建设法》[1]和《中华人民共和国生态环境法典》[2]（以下简称《无障碍环境建设法》《生态环境法典》，或"两部法律"）的实施，规划设计行业达成新的"质量共识"迫在眉睫。行业质量是专业共识的产物和目标，行业能否回应国家与公众的期待，取决于能否在法定责任、职业伦理、制度、教育和市场等基本议题上达成共识。

2 两部法律对规划设计行业和教育提出了前所未有的法定责任要求

作为中国无障碍环境建设领域的第一部专门法律，自2023年9月1日起施行的《无障碍环境建设法》确立了"无障碍设施应当与主体工程同步规划、同步设计、同步施工、同步验收、同步交付使用，并与周边的无障碍设施有效衔接、实现贯通"（所谓"五'同步'一'贯通'"）的刚性要求，同时明确要求将无障碍知识纳入相关学科的教学和职业资格考核内容。2026年8月15日起施行的《生态环境法典》，系统构建了涵盖总则、污染防治、生态保护、绿色低碳发展及法律责任和附则的五编框架，确立了"编制有关开发利用规划，建设对生态环境有影响的项目，应当依法进行生态环境影响评价。未依法进行生态环境影响评价的开发利用规划，不得组织实施"的要求，并倡导"绿色低碳规划设计理念"，推动建设"绿色低碳和气候适应型城市"。两部法律基于"一人一地"，一起回答了一个根本问题：规划设计究竟应当承担怎样的社会责任？这个问题为规划设计行业的"质量"设定了底线要求。

3 主动承担法定职责

规划设计的第一重共识，是将法律要求视为自身的基本职责[3]。两部法律的正文中，体现法定责任的"应当"和禁止性规范的"不得"的表述，分别出现了66处和1处、1 947处和792处；"应当"和"不得"合计分别占两部法律总字数的1.9%和3.4%。在今天，行业质量不仅体现在对法定责任及其背后价值内涵的理解，也体现在能否针对人与土地面临的问题，提出符合法定职责和设计规范要求的解决方案。《无障碍环境

① 可通过"一席"官方网站检索获取该演讲。

建设法》将无障碍从职业倡导上升为制度义务，设计单位违反设计规范即构成违法。《生态环境法典》将生态环境影响评价确立为规划与项目不可逾越的前置程序，把低碳绿色发展确立为立法目标与基本原则，并将“第四编 绿色低碳发展”独立成编。规划设计由此从一种职业行为，被明确为承载公共责任的法定职责。

4 以教育重塑为根基，服务国家需求，面向世界确立专业使命

第二重共识是，规划设计教育必须以世界眼光面向真实世界，响应国家需求和人类需求，重塑教与学的育人本质[4]。进入21世纪以来，中国逐渐发展成为承担更多全球责任的大国。两部法律的诞生正是这一发展进程的产物，同时也对规划设计行业和教育的未来提出了更高要求。除落实两部法律的要求外，规划设计专业还必须培养学生针对人类环境的不确定性问题开展相应研究，提出适应性解决方案的能力。这些问题包括气候变化、生物多样性危机、土地系统退化、环境污染全域化、海洋环境恶化和淡水资源压力，以及由此衍生的种种次级环境或资源问题。它们遍及世界各个角落，危及越来越多人的生存和安全。围绕人类所面临的共同但千差万别的难题探索解决方案，是规划设计行业和专业教育责无旁贷的使命。

5 依托市场化改革驱动职业资格体系发展

第三重共识是，提升行业质量必须建立健全市场机制。市场化的力量是推进行业品质持续提升最直接、最有效的途径——当从业者意识到，不回应社会需求、不追求创新、不遵守设计规范、不恪守职业操守就可能被市场淘汰时，行业才有望真正走上正轨，并逐步形成牢固的职业精神。建立职业准入与资格审查制度，一直是景观规划与设计行业的长期诉求。两部法律的实施，为这一诉求提供了坚实的依据。设计师只有具备履行法定职责的专业胜任力，主动承诺相应的专业责任，才能在规划与设计文书上签字并承担相应责任。法律要求、市场机制和职业资格准入制度三位一体，缺一不可。

6 守住职业伦理的底线

第四重共识是，行业必须确立清晰的职业道德底线。两部法律将无障碍包容性环境建设、生态保护与修复、绿色低碳发展纳入规划设计的工作职责。规划设计行业必须承担起保障公共和生活环境中使用者的生命安全、尊严和身心健康等权益的责任，以及支持和维护土地与人类社会可持续发展的职责。因此，当今规划设计行业的质量，应当建立在法律要求、专业知识与技能、专业教育与循证方案的基础之上。这既涉及知识应用和技术问题，也涉及能否守住专业“底线”的职业操守问题，即职业伦理。只有守住职业伦理底线，行业才谈得上专业化和高质量发展，才可能获得社会信任。土地和环境问题的解决方案绝非可以“众说纷纭”，更不能成为“自言自语”。设计师和行业组织应当具备职业自律能力，并建立相应的自我管理规则，才能推动职业能力和专业胜任力普遍而持续地提升，进而为行业保持高质量状态提供保障[3]。

7 人工智能的普及为行业高质量发展创造了空前的条件和机遇

社会分工是社会文明进步的重要动力。人工智能（AI）的应用普及为精细化分工、跨领域协作，以及知识与技术的应用和创新创造了前所未有的条件，使“想到就能做到”成为可能。AI为规划设计行业在质量高位上振兴奠定了前所未有的便利。然而，AI能否真正为我们所用，存在一个前提：我们是否认识到，规划设计行业服务的对象是无数生命个体，而每个规划或设计项目都是独特的个案。这些“个体”和“个案”对规划与设计的意义体现在以下几个方面：1）土地和人的生活包含表征它们差异性的丰富细节；2）这些细节之间存在无穷的组合关系；3）它们伴随着时间发生种种变化；以及，4）由此产生的人们赖以生存的多样且充满矛盾和问题的生活形态、地理空间和寰宇世界。人的生活及其面临的问题充满了不确定性，没有一致性的解，人们对它们的理解也处在动态变化中，为这样的问题探讨解决方案因此充满了刺激，是一项永无止境的工作。AI为理解这些问题和尝试可能的解决方案提供了巨大的便利。只有以这样的视角认识规划设计行业的未来，才能使每一个规划方案和设计案例都成为改善土地及其使用者、生命万物福祉的创新实践。两部法律提出的法定职责要求才可能真正地得到落实，由此积累的实践经验也才可能成为全球可持续发展知识体系的一部分。

2004年前后，景观设计学面临着高速城镇化带来的发展机遇与学科观念停滞不前之间的巨大冲突，激发了学界对景观设计学发展的憧憬[5–7]，并围绕相关议题展开了开诚布公而热烈的讨论[8–10]。各方在求同存异的基础上达成共识，认为有必要加快设立和发展风景园林学科（专业），由此开启了这个学科2005年至2021年的快速发展历程。在城镇化从增量发展向存量提质转型的过程中，景观设计学被重新置于达成新共识的关键窗口。

“背水一战，还是苟且偷生，是一个必须做出的决定”。