Beijing Charter

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Professor Wu Liangyong

On the eve of the new millennium, we architects from all nations of the world gather in Beijing, an ancient capital of the Orient, for the 20th Congress which celebrates the year of Jubilee for the International Union of Architects.

The present is born of the past, and yet the future rests with the present. We are here to reflect on the past, to account for the present, and ultimately to formulate a conscious plan of action for a better and liveable human habitat of the 21st century.

The world's geographical distances have shrunk, although the regional disparities are growing. Yet this age has endowed all of us with a common mission. It requires us to come to terms with the present, face the challenges, develop a holistic thinking and co-ordinate our efforts.

1 coming to terms with our centuries

1.1 the 20th century: unparalleled construction and destruction

The 20th century has seen unprecedented magnificence and progress, and also incomparable calamity and confusion.

The 20th century has enriched the history of architecture in its unique manner: architects have played an admirable role in the reconstruction that followed the two world wars; technical and artistic innovations on a massive scale have introduced fine examples of design to the populous like never before.

But, this is not to deny that much of the built environment is still in a deeply unsatisfactory state. The very survival of humankind is under threat amidst squandering of the world's natural and cultural heritage. In affluent regions, redevelopment was often to become destruction by construction; in the poorer areas, pauperised masses are struggling to build their own cities of tomorrow.

Over the past century, the world has turned into a very different place. Yet one thing remains the same: we architects are again at a cross roads as a world profession.

1.2 the 21st century: a turning point

The diversity and complexity of the world has created much confusion; yet it is but part of the eternal process of change. The present century has seen remarkable reform and development in politics, economics, technology, and society, and the resurgence of human ideas. In the coming century, the pace of transformation is expected to accelerate, though its direction may be even harder to tell.

In the coming century, the coexistence of globalisation and pluralism will bring to a head the conflicts and the contradictions that characterise our age. On the one hand, modern means of communication have brought into close contact diverse cultures and traditions; global integration of production, finance and technology continues to dominate decision making. On the other hand, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening at an alarming rate; regional strife and financial uncertainties cast a sinister shadow upon the human habitat.

Whilst we should not take on tasks outside our professional remit, it would be both irresponsible and foolish to ignore the torrent of social and cultural change that is redefining the scope of the architectural profession. A conscious reconsideration of the role of 21st century architecture calls for our enthusiasm, strength and courage.

2 the challenges that we face

2.1 interwoven questions

Nature's revenge
The industrial revolution unleashed tremendous human power, yet many a triumph over nature was achieved at a harrowing cost. The past century has seen population explosion, encroachment of farm land and deterioration of water, air and land resources. Environmental crises impinge on the very existence of humankind.

We do not know enough about the ecosystem, yet ecological disasters have revealed its fragile confines. From a historical point of view, we do not own the world that we live in: we simply have it on loan from our children. In what state shall we hand over town and country to our children? In what way can an architect contribute to the future of human civilisation through planning and design?

Overwhelming urbanisation
To better their lives, people congregate in the city, where science, technology and culture have brought about productivity that had never been foreseen. The 20th century has seen the brightest lights, so far, of metropolitan life. Nevertheless, the century ahead is the true urban era as, for the first time in history, urban dwellers will outnumber those who live in traditional rural ways.

Yet, hardly had the slums been demolished, did the cities see the resurgence of an underclass. Segregation of the rich and the poor, congestion of traffic and land use, and persistence of noise and emissions have worsened in cities large and small. Can our cities survive? We build the cities; yet why do we feel so powerless when we attempt to make any change? In what way can we shape the urban habitat, as it shapes us at the same time? Will the traditional concepts survive in the cities of the next century?

Technology as a double-edged sword
In the past century modern technology increased productivity to a degree never before experienced. New materials, new structures and new equipment have provided unique opportunities for the designers of the 20th century. Modern means of communication have brought the diverse cultures into close contact.

Technology has led mankind to a new cross roads, yet we are still in the process of harnessing its power and potential. Technology modifies the traditional relationships between man and nature, and thus constantly challenges the existing norms of life styles and values. In what way can humankind derive benefits from technology, whilst avoiding the harm of which it is shown to be capable?

Genius loci in default
The culture of architecture comes from a local accumulation of history. It manifests itself among the built forms and in day-to-day living, exerting a voiceless influence on the experience and behaviour of the inhabitants. In a sense, it is the soul of our cities, towns and villages.

However, globalisation of technology has made people more and more separated from their land. Standardised commercial production interrupts the evolution of local built forms. Traditional design techniques are confronted. Local identities fade away. What contribution can an architect make to bring back the soul of cities and towns which characterised them during the past centuries?

2.2 a common theme, a common future

The challenges we face are multifaceted and overwhelming. They are in fact the embodiment of complex social, political, economic and cultural processes at levels both local and global. Our discussion must not stop at the mere manifestation of such processes. Rather, an effective solution only comes from a thorough understanding of the dialectic nature of the forces which are shaping our built environment today.

The search for effective solutions at a global level is supported by our common aspirations for a sustainable future on this planet. Our world is an interdependent world. The future prospects of

one nation to a large extent rest on the future of other nations. By the same token, the future of architecture depends on an understanding and assimilation of the achievements of other disciplines and professions. It is this common theme that will bring us together to lay out a common future in the 21st century.

3 towards an integral architecture

During the past 50 years, the architects of the world have met to debate over a large number of issues. These debates have much furthered our understanding in all branches of architecture. It is therefore appropriate to review the progress so far and redefine the limits, the contents, and the organisation of our discipline and profession.

3.1 the theoretical premises

Over the centuries the role of an architect is constantly modified to suit the needs and requirements of its time. Where traditional methods are shown to be inadequate, new approaches are developed to take their place. Yet without exception, each redefinition pushes the boundary of architecture outwards for a wider coverage, as well as inwards for higher degrees of specialisation in the component parts. The 20th century is perhaps the most exemplary in this regard.

A wider coverage of its contents and finer degrees of specialisation have empowered the 20th century architect with unprecedented professional opportunities and potential, yet at a personal level, an expanding profession with growing specialisation can seem elephantine. In a sense, the architects' Tower of Babel appears to have fallen: it is increasingly difficult for one architect to grasp the expertise of a fellow colleague; although the body of knowledge has grown collectively, the outlook of any single designer tends to become paradoxically narrow and fragmented. The specialist expertise is brought together through financial ties and managerial skills, rather than a coherent intellectual framework. As a result, the role of an architect continues to be marginalised in the decision making over the human habitat today.

From the point of view of an architect, his or her ability to propose creative design solutions depends critically on the intellectual and professional spheres he or she commands. Narrow and fragmented individual outlooks cannot be made to work, however wonderfully the individual designers are managed externally. Nevertheless, any given person cannot and should not attempt to master the whole body of knowledge of our profession. Quo vadis?

Classical Chinese philosophers went to great pains to pinpoint the differences between methodology (alternatively translated as Dao or Tao) which concerns an intellectual framework, and methods (Fa) which deal with specific techniques. It is useful to draw on their wisdom in this matter. Whatever professional talents, expertise, or preferences an architect may have, these techniques can only realise their true value when guided by a larger, intellectual perspective. An architect may work in a specialised area by choice or chance, yet he or she must not lose sight of the profession as a whole and of the vast sphere of knowledge which is potentially at his or her disposal.

Past and contemporary masters have shown how their understanding of the Dao of architecture has helped them to achieve magnificent heights in design and planning. However although such understanding could be regarded as a luxury enjoyed by the masters in the past, it will increasingly become goods of necessity for all architects in the age of information explosion. In the rapidly expanding professional universe, an intellectual orientation that organises the body of knowledge and expertise and relates architecture to the wider processes that give shape to the built environment, is paramount.

So what does this methodology contain?

3.2 a fusion of architecture, landscape architecture and city planning

The professional identity of an architect in the wider world is focused on the built forms that are ultimately created.

Basically, the general theory of architecture is an integration of architecture, landscape and urban planning with the core of city design. However, the increasing scale and scope of modern development provide architects with great opportunities to deal with architecture, landscape and urban planning as a whole. This tripartite composition enables the designer to search for solutions within a wider sphere.

3.3 architecture as a process for human habitat

Metabolism is one of the fundamental rules in the development of human settlement. Architecture is the discipline that deals with human settlement, so it should regard the physical objectives of construction as a system of circulation. The life cycle of buildings should be regarded as a fundamental factor of design.

The life cycle of buildings not only includes the construction and running phases, but also includes processes aiming at lower resource costs, less pollution and grey energy consumption, recycling as much as possible, and reformation of environments.

On the aspect of urban settlement, factors such as planning, architectural design, historical preservation, adapted re-use of old buildings, urban rehabilitation, city renewal and reconstruction, utilisation of underground facilities, etc., should be integrated into a dynamic circulation system. This is a system for better architecture in the modern space-times of architecture. It is also an exemplification of the sustainable approach in urban planning and architecture design.

3.4 multiple technology rooted in indigenous cultures

To utilise technological innovation to its full extent is one of our basic tasks in the coming century.

Firstly, in the 21st century, various presentations of technology will co-exist, based on the fact that there are regional contrasts and imbalance in the development of technology.

Theoretically, it is necessary to adopt new technology from foreign sources and integrate it with local conditions to improve the local technological standards. If architects themselves can realise the ecological challenges mankind is facing, and adopt advanced technology creatively, then the buildings they design are bound to be sustainable and healthy.

Because of technological complexity, low-tech, light-tech and high-tech are different in scale and level. For each project, the choice of technological approach should be made according to the specific conditions. In other words, for the progress of every building project, different forms of technology should be integrated, utilised and improved.

As for the utilisation of technology, considerations on humanist, ecological, economic and regional aspects should be integrated. Different levels of innovation should be carried out in order to improve the level of architectural creativity. Many theoretical and practical examples are available today, and it is obvious that much more progress will be made in the next century.

Secondly, today's progress includes both science and technology. The development of technology must be related to human factors. As Alvar Aalto said, "the preservation of difference should also be strengthened. The development of architecture should be rooted in the regional background, and take the local conditions as its starting point in the search for better solutions. Based upon this, foreign ideas can be integrated into our own. This would finally lead to a human society showing both integrity and variety".

3.5 architecture of harmony instead of monotony

Architecture is by definition a regional product: buildings serve, and derive their significance from local contacts. Regional architecture is yet by no means a mere product of a region's past. Rather, it is derived from the concerns for its future. The significance of our profession lies in the creative designs that bridge the past and the future. We use our professional knowledge to guide an informed choice amongst the options that are increasingly opened to local communities. "The sharing of experiences among various countries and geographical regions must never be seen as a simple transfer of ready-made solutions, but as a means of stimulating local imaginations".

The localisation of modern architecture and the modernisation of local architecture is a common approach to be shared by all in the progress toward architectural proliferation.

3.6 art for the sake of the built environment

After the industrial revolution, urbanisation of increasing speed resulted in dramatic changes in urban structure and architecture forms. The physical environment has been led to anarchy. We should try to find order in the anarchy, to find beauty and harmony in the chaos.

To consider the relationship between architecture and its environments with traditional design methods is far from adequate. We have to look at architecture from a massive and urban view. Architectural thoughts should shift from single buildings to building complexes, to urban and rural regional planning. The holistic relationship with nature is another important factor that should be considered.

In the histories of all cultures, architecture became the ultimate manifestation of inseparable parts in fine arts, such as sculpture, painting, craftsmanship, etc. This should be one of our goals.

3.7 architecture for all

In many traditional societies, the architect played the part of master co-ordinator of all trades that built in towns and countries. Yet today, by the large majority, the architect is perceived as a style freak, irrelevant to real decision making. It is more appropriate to view architecture in its full socio-political context, rather than in the narrow techno-aesthetic sense of the term. Only in this way can architects "participate at all levels of decision making as professionals."

As social servers, architects should expand their professional services and visions. They should take an active part in social reform with a basic understanding of society and respect for the people. It is an architect's destiny to make everyone a home, to provide shelter for the poor and the homeless. The freedom of architectural design is by no means an excuse for ignorance of social responsibilities.

Architecture is a science that serves the people. A society-wide understanding and participation in architecture would be very helpful in making better environments. Not only should the end users participate in the design process, but so should the decision-makers; support and policies from governments would be especially effective.

The cultural and architectural education of a decision-maker is a determining factor for the quality of a building project. In this sense, the understanding of architecture should be emphasised in every society.

3.8 learning architecture

The progress of future architecture lies in the progress of architectural education, which results in the growth of a new generation of architects. Architects and architecture students must have a responsible professional spirit and a comprehension of environmental ethics. They shall work for the benefit of society as a whole, try to carry out strategies that contribute to the overall quality of human settlements.

Architectural education must expand its concerns. An open system of knowledge should be set up. It is the goal of architectural education to make a student able to learn, to research, to express and to organise. Each architectural student should be educated to be open-minded, to utilise new technological advances, and to create on the basis of professional knowledge.

Architectural education is a life-long task. The education of environmental awareness should start at kindergarten, and continue in middle school, professional schools and adult education facilities.

3.9 towards an integral architecture

Half a century later, it is necessary to re-emphasise words of Gropius, "My idea of the architect [is] as a co-ordinator, whose business is to unify various formal, technical, social and economic problems that arise in connection with buildings ... I believe that new architecture is to dominate a far more comprehensive sphere than building means today. And from the investigation of the

details, we shall advance towards an ever-wider and profounder conception of design as one great cognate whole."

The development of architecture asks for both analysis and integration. But now, the focus should be on integration. The introduction of a general theory of architecture does not demand of architects that they be professionals with all abilities (which is impossible), but requires them to have better professional knowledge, a better philosophical way of thinking, in order to be better problem-solvers and theory developers.

We are facing a world full of contradictions. The contrasts between globalisation and localisation, internationalism and nationalism, universality and individuality, flexibility and stability, etc., are forever increasing. The future development of architecture needs our understanding and processing of these contradictions. Any contemporary building project can be regarded as a collection of the contradictions above. Every architect has to deal with these contradictions professionally, to decide between freedom and rules, art and science, traditional and modern, heritage and innovation, technology and place, assimilation and diversity, etc. The general theory of architecture is a dialectical process of these contradictions.

4 all pathways for a common destiny

The objective world is an interwoven complex of change and variety. It is neither possible, nor desirable to search for identical technical solutions. For centuries, holistic thinking has been the corner stone of the eastern philosophies. Today it is becoming a common heritage and blessing of the global village: "For all the means in the world there is but one end, for all the concerns there is but one destiny." Our concerns may lead us to the following conclusions:

Firstly, seeking the point of integration in the world of interwoven complexity. Many ancient Chinese philosophical and artistic sayings emphasised the importance of integration and holistic thinking.

20th century architecture has celebrated its triumphs and miracles, but these are mere fragments of history. To lead the architecture of the new era to a common destiny, we should try to find those fragments in history that made unique contributions, that made milestones in human civilisation. With the integration of these fragments, and returning to our basic concerns, we may find the spirit of a new architecture, the doctrine of a new era, and the opportunity for new creations in the 21st century.

Secondly, different ways lead to common destinations.

Given the regional contrasts, every nation should have its own particular way of development. Only with these "different ways", can human civilisation continue in a sustainable manner.

As the old western saying goes, "all roads lead to Rome". There may be no common roads, but there is a common future. That future when all mankind lives in his blessed environment.

Therefore, an architect should devote his life to the pursuance of humanism, quality, capability and creativity. It is his responsibility to build a better environment with the limited natural resources on this planet.

At the turn of the century, we have grasped the theme of the new era, and have found out the basic contradictions, and are reaching for the concurrence of our agenda. It should be seen that the beginning of the new century is only a spot in the continuous thread of civilisation. The research we are doing today is just a beginning of the co-ordination by mankind for our common goal, a beginning that is supposed to make changes.

We look forward with caution and optimism to the historic duty of building the 21st century human habitat. Yet, we are set for a new exploration for common theme and methodology. From this standpoint, we look forward to the future and to the mission that will reshape the future.

Prof. Wu Liangyong
School of Architecture

Tsinghua University
Beijing 100084,
P.R.China