

Reinventing the good earth

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REINVENTING THE GOOD EARTH

Kongjian Yu



The good earth is generous in providing human beings with all kinds of services. It is productive, mediating, life-supporting, and culturally and spiritually meaningful. But for centuries we have invented increasingly complicated artificial systems to replace nature's capacity in providing these free services: we call this "engineering". We have also invented specific criteria to define beauty and

urbanity that eventually reshaped our physical landscape at the sacrifice of the good earth's authentic beauty, and we call this "art". Time has proven that we are now at the brink of losing our nurturing earth. It is time for landscape architecture to reinvent the good earth with a new kind of engineering and a new kind of art.

An alternative infrastructure: Civilization, over the course of centuries, has been defined in part as the control of natural processes and patterns. From the origin of the city to its "modernized" form today, natural forces and patterns have become increasingly controlled and dependent on artificial processes. This standard of civilization is built on heavily engineered gray infrastructure. What would an alternative city look like if its natural forces are respectfully used and not controlled? The key is to design the city around the ecological infrastructure. Ecological Infrastructure (EI) can be

understood as the necessary structure of a sustainable landscape (or ecosystem) in which the output of the goods and services is maintained, and the capacity of those systems to deliver the same goods and services for future generations is not undermined. What makes the concept of EI a powerful tool for the alternative ecological urbanism is its marriage with ecosystems services. EI builds a bridge between ecological urbanism, disciplines of ecology, ecosystems services and sustainable development. It is the bridge between smart development and smart conservation.

A new landscape aesthetics: in addition to civic engineering, the other human inventions relevant to the good earth are beauty and art. For thousands of years, the urban elite – the so called civilized people – have claimed the right to define beauty and good taste in an assertion of their "superiority" and power. In trying to elevate city sophisticates above rural bumpkins, people have rejected nature's genetic goals of health, survival and productivity. Landscaping and city building is another branch of this "art", by far the most visible and extensive one. So it is time for a new aesthetics: a high performance "Big Foot" aesthetics. The new landscape aesthetics is built on the criteria of the good earth with its generosity in providing human beings with all kinds of services. Under these criteria, a new aesthetic landscape shall be: productive, mediating, life-supporting, culturally and spiritually meaningful.

We must reinvent the good earth.



Red Ribbon Park, Qinghuangdao, China, 2007