

BREAKING NEW GROUND IN LEGAL EDUCATION

Groundbreaking Ceremony

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Mayor Xu. Chancellor Hai. Faculty and staff colleagues. STL students. Distinguished guests.

It is my honor and privilege to speak to you this morning.

This is a very special moment – for our community and for the entire world of legal education. It is a moment when we join together to celebrate groundbreaking.

We celebrate the groundbreaking vision of the city of Shenzhen and of Peking University. We celebrate a vision that, three years ago, led them to create a groundbreaking new kind of intellectual enterprise – an experiment in legal education – to be carried out here in University Town. And we also celebrate the groundbreaking vision of the city of Shenzhen and Peking University that, today, has led them to create a new kind of architectural enterprise, an exciting new home in physical space – where that pioneering legal education will take place in the future.

The teaching philosophy of the Peking University School of Transnational Law calls for us to begin with the most precious raw material of legal education as it has developed in different forms around the world. It then calls for us to innovate, to add new elements that reflect the way transnational law has been transformed in the twenty-first century. The result must be a new educational form, at once timeless and futuristic.

So every STL student begins his or her studies by reading an English translation of the play *Antigone*. *Antigone* was written thousands of years ago by the Greek playwright Sophocles. With that play, we lead

our students play to wrestle with some of the most fundamental questions about the authority of law. And we do so by using the teaching method of another famous Greek thinker, Socrates.

We use this teaching method – the Socratic method – to help our students to think like the very best lawyers. We show them how legal problems look completely different, depending upon the perspective you use to approach them. They learn that the most profound understanding of such problems comes when a lawyer is able to hold those different perspectives in mind at the same time, to think in three dimensions.

This use of the Socratic method developed very well in American law schools during the twentieth century. But it was mostly developed through the study of one legal system – the common law system – through the eyes of a single legal culture.

STL had to carry that concept forward to a new level. We are located in Shenzhen, China's City of Progress and Change. And we are part of Peking University, China's University of Progress and Change. In order to be a worthy child of these two great parents, STL must ensure that our students will be able to use their thinking skills effectively in a world with more than one legal culture, more than one language. We have to ensure that our students will be effective legal bridge people. We have to enable them to move comfortably and effectively from culture to culture, from perspective to perspective, developing original and beautiful solutions in environments that present cross-cultural legal challenges.

And so our curriculum continues to evolve and advance in ways that are found nowhere else in the world. Our students master American law and Chinese law and have a healthy exposure to other legal systems as well. Our students explore the many different roles that lawyers play – not only as advocates in court, but as deal makers, problem solvers, negotiators, judges, and scholars. Our students are pushed to become fully bilingual in Chinese and English. And we are developing programs to make them fully bicultural – to arm them with the soft skills they will need to live effectively in more than one culture.

Two years ago, Chancellor Hai and Vice Chancellor Zhang told me that they wanted STL to have a building that would reflect the pioneering

spirit of the school. They asked me to help them identify an architectural firm that could design the perfect building where STL can carry forward its mission.

Kohn Pedersen Fox is the perfect firm for this task. KPF has a long history of designing and building world class university buildings. And it has a long history of designing and building world class non-university buildings in China, including in Shenzhen. But the firm had never done a university building in China before, and so they were excited by the special challenges of STL.

The building that they have produced is, in my opinion, a work of true architectural genius. To the eye, it is striking. It is modern and complex, and at the same time it is warm and welcoming. The central space of the building will be filled with light, lifting the spirits of everyone who enters. And it is designed to be a place for intellectual conversation – where students and faculty have an almost infinite variety of places to continue discussing the law after class is over.

When we go inside, Jill Lerner and James von Klemperer will show you a model of the building and describe the theory of how the building works. I must confess I have been absolutely dazzled by the way in which they have created a design that reflects the spirit of the education that we are trying to provide.

For example, just like the law, the building looks completely different, depending on the perspective with which you approach it. But those perspectives are harmonized elegantly and beautifully when you move to see the building in three dimensions.

And the building also integrates many different architectural cultures into an original, creative new style. Some elements of the building refer to ancient Greece, the world of Socrates and Sophocles. Some refer to contemporary Shenzhen. All of them speak to our shared future – our need to harmonize differences as we transcend boundaries.

This morning I want to express my gratitude to Hai Wen and to the leadership of Peking University for their commitment to this project. Just as the university has never waived in its support for STL, so too

the university has consistently pushed us to move forward with this building, to ensure that our school has a home worthy of its mission.

And I also want to express my deep gratitude to the city of Shenzhen for its support – for our school, and for this building. This building is not a typical university building. It takes vision and courage for city leaders to use a small building, an academic building, as the location for architectural innovation. A building of world-class quality also requires an extra level of financial commitment, and the city of Shenzhen has stepped forward with tremendous generosity to pay more than half the total costs of this building. Of course our fundraising efforts are not over – there are still opportunities remaining for private donors to make a huge difference in ensuring that the final building’s overall quality is truly world class. But even the most generous private philanthropist will be able to know that his or her contributions are not alone – they will have been more than matched by the public commitment of the city of Shenzhen.

From the time of its founding, STL has been a groundbreaking institution. This morning we celebrate that feature of our school. But, even more, we celebrate today the fact that we live in a groundbreaking city, as part of a groundbreaking university. With these amazing partners, we are able this morning to put shovels in the ground and begin construction of a new kind of building. A building that takes academic architecture in China to an entirely new level. A building that takes law school architecture worldwide to an entirely new level. A building that will attract visitors from around the world, as people are drawn to celebrate, once again, the spirit of progress and change that has brought us all to live, work and study in this truly magical place.