

On Diversified Design Education in an Information Age

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Abstract

Multi-layer and poly-directional development trend is the inevitable situation for contemporary design education development. This is influenced and determined jointly by the intersectionality features of the design disciplinary, the status quo of information society development, and the history of design education development. This article summarizes the currently available educational study results and research experience in the field of design education. It makes discussions on the development significance to the design education. The article also offers preliminary discussions on how to go out of the design education dilemma in the information age so as to make its due contributions to the progress of the design education cause in China.

Key words: Information age; Design education; Meaning; Dilemma and strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Design is natural. Design is life. Design is human. Design is art. Design is to go further into every moment of our life and becomes an inseparable part of our life. "Design" means decorative things in most people's dictionaries. In fact, however, there's nothing deeper than the connotation of design. Design is the soul people's innovation (Steve Jobs, the creator of Apple Inc.).

When the design colleges are built one after another, the design departments are set up in colleges. Streams of students go to study the design discipline which was within people's sight but beyond their reach. The design education has its unprecedentedly good period of time now: the sharp increase of both students and wealth. The market economy and the law of value change the discipline proportion of art education with the social progress. This is a matter worthy of our pleasure. We should know that the essential purpose of design is to solve a problem. So in nature, the design education we have now should be a discipline which trains the students' abilities to solve problems. If the design courses are lacking of target object and fail to find a breakthrough in the restrictions, or they become the results of somebody who plays design or "pure art", it means that there's something wrong in our understanding of the word *design* (Yang, 2005, p.2). Where's the target of China's design education in the twenty-first century?

1. MEANING OF MULTIDIRECTION DESIGN EDUCATION

1.1 To the Benefit of Satisfying the Needs of Market to Different Levels of Design Personnel

There's constantly detailed division of work in social production under the push of modern science and technology. The market's needs to the talents also show the features with multilayers and poly-directions. This is also true in China's demand of design personnel. At the same time, the enormous market prospects and broad development potential in China have made such needs more urgent. Different personnel has different advantages, personalities, and study requirements. Different institutions also have different requirements to the talents. Therefore, there is positive significance to solve the above-mentioned issue to develop the multidirectional design education.

There is a wide range of work for design talents, which includes research, development, creation, survey, and promotion. Different work fields and different division of work in the same field require different abilities of the design personnel. The poly-direction design education is able to cultivate core design personnel with professional theoretical knowledge and innovative capabilities. At the same time, it can train the design talents with intensive and professional practice foundation and technical abilities. Therefore, it satisfies the customized requirements of the society to the design talents with different levels and aspects (Yan, 2003, pp.62-66).

1.2 To Be Good to Train Students' Innovation Awareness & Comprehensive Abilities

The development in the information age requires people to have maximum expansions on thinking and field of vision. The diversified design education introduces and carries out the diversified culture, ideas, and awareness by expanding roads for the students within the field of thinking. While giving classes, teachers not only lay stress on the inheritance to and promotion of the essence of traditional art culture, but also guide the students to pay attention to the western consciousness, culture, and their trends. In this way, the students will have clear understanding of the cultural trends and differences among different nations and regions. Based on the above, the students will learn how to use innovative thinking in their design process. They will make analysis to the mutual relationship and influences between design, art, economy as well as culture with diversified cultural attitude in the information age. That's why they can design the new products which are more suitable to the market requirements. There's advanced information in the information age (Wang, 2006, pp.174-175). But too much information also causes the students to disperse their attention. We would tell the students to broaden their visions at classes. We ask them to look more in order to accumulate their knowledge and theory. However, *vision* does not mean *view*. Not all the information we gathered is useful. We need to find out the useful information from the vast messages. Therefore, cognition is very important to us. Since the students have less accumulation of experience, they have fewer restrictions in making design. They may become unrestrained for design. But the guidance to them is also critical. This needs the teachers not only to have more accumulation of different areas, but also to find good information from different aspects. They can focus on their targets from different circles. In this way, they may enhance the students' innovation abilities in design study.

The study of a culture should not be limited to the attention only to the culture itself. Other different cultures are needed for reference and comparison. That is, we need to break down the restrictions in the perspectives of time and region. Based on the overall trend of human society development, we will make cross-disciplinary and comprehensive observations from the international angle.

This is the method for us to have clearer understanding of the values and the weak points of a culture. The researchers may keep their own broad visions at the same time. Thus it can be seen that the poly-directional design education can cultivate the cross-cultural ideas of the design personnel under the contemporary times when we are in the information age. The training of the cross-culture ideas is the necessary element to develop the comprehensive accomplishments and innovation abilities of the design talents.

1.3 To Be in Favor of the Development of China's Design Industry Under Information Age

The information technology revolution gives rise to the global development trend in various aspects such as economy and culture. The common development of diversified cultures represents the mutual influence of different cultures. Such influence has the two-way nature. China needs to learn and make reference to the advanced results of the world culture. Meanwhile, the excellent Chinese culture also goes to the world through the push of the information technology so that it is known to other people in the world. Thanks to the strong support of the information age, the diversified culture study enables people to fully master the overall situation and the most recent changes and development of the world culture. At the same time, such study will find the cultural advantages of its own nation and culture by means of comparisons and better position its development in the world. The multidirectional development of the design education is able to guide the students to refer to the world design culture in the information age. They will abandon the parts which are obsolete and are out of accord with the times. Then they will develop and carry forward the traditional factors with realistic values. The students study and use for reference the foreign design contents which are suitable to the development of the design industry of their own countries. So the design art cause in China may stand the serious test of the changes and the development in the information age. It will continue to have exchanges with other parts of the world and carry forward its own cultural characteristics at the same time (Kang, 2006, pp.199-200).

2. DILEMMA OF MULTIDIRECTION DESIGN EDUCATION

2.1 Excessive Dull and Stale Curriculum Provision

On talking about the art design education in China, nobody can deny the contributions it made in the past. However, the current design education continues to use the previous higher education system. Although the colleges are unceasingly set up and introduce some new curriculums and some excellent teachers come out, such measures cannot change the whole education system (Li, 2001, pp.54-55).

Less attention is given to the disciplines which are associated with the design education such as marketing, consumption psychology, new technologies, and new materials and their applications in the real life. So the design education structure in China is very unitary. No sound and multidirectional system was taken into shape. The education system at present fails to meet the needs of the society to the interdisciplinary talent education. It becomes the barrier to improve the comprehensive attainments of the design talents in China.

2.2 Lack of Innovation and Practice of Teaching Principles

The design education in most colleges in China does not have innovations on curriculum provision and it maintains the comparatively old education principles. The students from such colleges are like the products from mass production in factories. Not having innovation abilities, they cannot meet the requirements of the ever changing market. In the design discipline of China's colleges, some majors represented by the graphic design art are lacking in systematic and authoritative theoretical text books which are compatible with the needs for the talents in China's market economy development. Some teaching theories are still adopting the old mode. There is no innovation and breakthrough according to the social development trend in the information age. This requires the attention of the society (Gao, 1999, p.13).

2.3 Blind Discipline Positioning and Poor College Management

There has been increasing demand to design talents since the booming development of socialist market economy in China last century. So correspondingly there are more numbers of high schools, technical secondary schools, and colleges setting up the design discipline. According to the data, there were more than 400 higher institutions in China which offer the design discipline at the end of last century. This figure is still on the rise. However, since these colleges established the design discipline in a hurry just in order to meet the market demand, they have the problems like the poor teaching abilities, the lack of sound and professional teaching facilities, and the insufficiency of management experience. They do not have deep understanding to the specific details concerning the market needs to professional design talents. They also do not care about the teaching specialties of the design discipline on the art training of the students, the teaching methods, and the practice of the students. They are lost in a fog to the complex issues such as the cultural knowledge reserve the students should have after graduation, the practice skills, the innovation abilities, and the student's capabilities to respond to the market changes. The poor management not only results in the awkward comprehensive design abilities of the students, but also obstructs the poly-direction development of the design education.

3. STRATEGIES FOR MULTIDIRECTION DESIGN EDUCATION

3.1 Making Teaching Contents Plentiful for Design Education

Our design education should be multidirectional. The curriculum contents can be combined with the market practice and other disciplines. We should give high concern to the multiaspect and multilayer requirements to knowledge and culture in the design education. The systematic education courses with common specialties should be set up. On this basis, teachers should guide the students to find their respective advantages and interest so that they have the options to learn the knowledge for deepening. The colleges need to stick to the multidirectional thinking, enrich the students' cultural and artistic knowledge reserve. They should construct the knowledge network among different disciplines by promoting the students' widening and deepening of their understanding to the majors they are learning. Now the colleges are introducing some new courses, setting up new subjects and using new techniques. The purpose is to try to establish the knowledge points in their teaching in the new times. These knowledge points are connected with each other and can be taken into a complete knowledge chain.

Importance should be attached to the students' attainments in art and culture. During teaching, the teachers should impart to the students the knowledge about local customs, culture, and traditional ideologies of different countries, regions, and nations via the use of information technology. The students will be familiar with the special elements of folk arts of different countries. So the students will be flexible in responding to different design requirements in their future work. Moreover, more efforts should be made to the education of material discipline for the design students. The students will be trained, under the guidance of multidirectional thinking, to get the habit of making culture comparisons. The students will be cultivated to make full use of information technology and make it through all aspects of their study.

3.2 Improving the Disciplinary System and Intensifying Discipline Construction

Taking the ever changing market economy requirements under the information times as the basis, the colleges should improve the design discipline system according to their own advantages and features and work hard to perform discipline construction. This is the powerful measure for multidirectional development of design education. The colleges should not overlook the improvement of the discipline system while they are enriching the teaching materials. Governments and educational authorities should give support to college education in line with the local social conditions. They should properly delegate the power for discipline setup at a proper time in order that all colleges may expand and improve the discipline system according to the social needs and their own conditions.

In the meantime, the colleges should have sufficiently objective understanding to their respective teaching conditions. They should improve the vocational system of the design discipline, make the optimization and integration of disciplines, and construct the sound teaching assessment system aiming at multilayer requirements of local markets. After making reference to the teaching experience and results currently available, they should break down the binding of traditional teaching concept, innovate and develop the teaching management mode, and play the advantages of the design discipline in the market economy in the information age. They will look for cooperation with related disciplines in the horizontal direction. As to the vertical direction, they need to deepen the vocational and theoretical teaching for bachelor, master, and doctorate degrees. The colleges should make the requirements to the design talents by relevant employers as the breakthrough. Thus the design education will closely follow the steps of the changing market demands. At the same time, the colleges should work actively to look for the exchanges and cooperation with relevant international organizations. As a result, they will set up the new mode for the development of IT information based, three-dimensional, and multidirectional design education discipline.

3.3 Having Multidirectional Teacher Resources

Different from other disciplines, the teaching results of the design discipline have the features of more intuitive teaching achievements and strong marketability. The vocational skills of design teachers must be exercised and improve through incessant practice so as to adapt to the requirements of multidirectional design education development. The teachers should have professional and extensive knowledge reserves, strong vocational accomplishments, and social responsibility awareness that they should be able to keep their knowledge and skills advanced with the world development in the information age. Putting it more specifically, the teachers of multidirectional design discipline should have the high degree of abilities for self-improvement. They need to have profound and unique insights to the technologies associated with design and the changes of supply and demand in the market (Shao, 2013, p.96).

3.4 Adapting to Constant Market Changes in Information Age

In order to achieve the long-term multidirectional development, the colleges with design discipline available must better grasp the rules for the development in the information age and fit for the changing economic environment. The modern education system should have the roles and functions of education, research, and service. However, most colleges in China care more about the educational function of the design discipline by neglecting its promotion to social development. So the colleges need to change their mind and enhance their understanding of the development rules in the information age. They should work with companies and factories to establish campus

practice bases and technology development and research centers, so that the students are provided with a sound practice environment. The colleges should also facilitate the transformation of the teaching and research results into social production forces. Through these methods, the practice activities of the students are extended to the enterprises. The students are guided and encouraged to show their knowledge and skills by using them in the production. They will summarize the experience and lessons from their practice under the guidance of their teachers so as to correct and solve the problems. The design education will be further developed in the social development in the information age (Li, 2012, pp.106-107).

CONCLUSION

The needs of market economy development in the information age expedite all colleges to offer the design discipline. The uniqueness and the multidirectional development of the design education determine that many problems should be solved. This requires the people in the design education field to have objective considerations before giving scientific answers. It is necessary that the multidirectional development of the design education is under the multiple effects of economy, culture, and society. How shall we reinforce the understanding to the social development rules in the information age based on modern education theories and design practice? What shall we do to grasp the features of different colleges? We should have extensive knowledge, adopt other colleges' good points and avoid their disadvantages. A multidirectional and vocational design education system needs to be set up so as to satisfy the multilayer demands to different design talents and such people will better serve the market economy development in the information age. This is the issue of the times that we have to face today.

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