Graphic Design Education in China: An Analysis of The Stakeholders' Perceptions

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Abstract----**This research looks at the career preparedness of Chinese art education to see how the curriculum help students kick start their first job. The research uses questionnaires to gather information from three sources: the self-assessment of students, educator of the students and the art professional who are capable of assessing the ability of students.**

One of the interesting discoveries from the survey is that students underestimate the importance of professionalism skills (i.e., written communication, oral presentations, critiques, etc.) while overestimate the importance of design skills (i.e., theory, principles, methods, craft, etc.) and technology skills (i.e., programs, computer, coding, etc.).

Such a result leads to a counter-intuitive conclusion: in order for students to improve the performance of their work, art education should invest a little more on the skills that are not directly related to finish their work effectively and efficiently, but rather the skill that needs to turn their art skill into something meaningful in the practical context, skills such as Photoshop and web designing. And, and probably more importantly, skills about effective communication so that they can better communicate with their clients, colleagues, and supervisors.

Keywords----**Graphics, Design, Computer Design, Education, China**

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this exploration is not intended to be a direct attack to the education system. Graphic design curricula can have several functions. Given the fact that students will have vastly different career paths after graduated, the content of art education can never be a one-size-fit-all solution. The purpose of this study is to observe and interpret the implication of the results.[1]

There are valid counterarguments saying that art school is not the place that is solely and uniformly to train students to become the best employees. Enforcing the idea of ensuring smooth transition to professional art designers and improving the salary earning ability can be too materialistic. Art schools and colleges also have the task of sparking interest and promote knowledge. Making money and salaries can be one of the goals but not the only end. That being said, it will also be hard pressed to deny that at least some students are looking to use graphic design degrees to jumpstart their career. Schools cannot completely disregard the valuation of education to see whether it will help or detriment student's ability to join the workforce. There are considerable portion of students are usually looking for opportunities to become the workforce instead of being professors and scholars in academia. Most students who enter art school with the expectation that its education will facilitate their efforts to joining the workforce would inevitably seek hints about how well their colleges and universities can prepare them professionally.[2]

That this research can serve is for students to understand, from only the career standpoint, the career preparation value of graphic design schools. Some students are looking for the help of the graphic design education in order to help them to have professional success. As a result, such research can help students to establish their expectation and understand whether the art school is really the only one stop solution needed or one of the building stone to anther additional supplemental training down the road for their intended career trajectory.[3]

II. CONTRIBUTION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research result includes, but is limited to, five potential usages.

The first potential usage is for students set the unbiased career expectation of graphic design school. Some of the students inevitably will have some the expectation of using degree and diploma as an authentic certification and endorsement to create a pathway to professional success. Some students may go through such a length to assume art school education is once and for all solution to career development. Those who harbor such perception sometimes solely rely on these schools to acquire knowledge and probably dismiss and ignore other source of information that can be conducive to their professional preparation. Thus, this research can be a test or a

validation of such strategy and give them an idea of how graphic design schools can or, if they can, to what extent to prepared them professionally as a result.[4]

The second potential usage is for professors to consider whether they should adjust their curricula or keep them as they are. After seeing the research result of the efficacy of the business education of our schools, professors and educators might or might not want to adjust their current teaching style and focus in order to fit their expectation for students. Educators' motive can be multifaceted. For example, one of extreme is that these professors have the resolution to be the incubator to students seeking professional success and disregard anything else. If such a professor has seen the research result, maybe they will adjust their current teaching style in order to better to prepare students to succeed professionally if they find the current reality unsatisfactory.[5]

Another extreme case they can also be instructors who want to focus as much as possible to get students to be interested and enjoy graphic design. Therefore, they will teach whatever they find intriguing and fascinating to student. Unfortunately, not everything mentally stimulating can also professionally helpful. If they have seen that students are not going to professional benefit so much by following the school education anyway, but they can be more confident about focusing on helping students to explore knowledge or succeed in art theory research.

Of course, these two examples can be very ideal and rarely can be a reflection of reality. Educators will have their purpose and intent be a cocktail of different outcome. At the very least, with the help of information this research provided, they can decide whether they should or should not adjust their teaching styles in order to fit into their expectation to students.[6]

The third potential usage is for graphic design schools or departments of art school to rethink whether or not the adjust approach of their mission and objective. Some schools and colleges want to position themselves as very good, if not perfect, Launchpad for art career. In the meantime, other institutions desire to advertise themselves as go-to options for academic research. In either case, with the help of this research result, they can see whether their mission can be accurately implemented or whether they should change their mission. Similar to professors and instructors, schools can also have different purpose and ideas about whether they should brand themselves as a breeding ground for aspirant students to succeed professionally. Other schools may want to see themselves as a representative place for academic research. These mindsets are understandable and possible and art schools are free to have such focus and purpose.

If they have seen the effectiveness of the arts educations to students' later career development maybe they can decide whether then can more freely to pursue the pure exploration and research of knowledge or should they decided to adjust their mission in order to better help students to prepare professionally as their art schools are considered to be an ideal ground for professional education.[7]

The fourth potential usages for employers in the futures in order to assess how well graphic design education has prepared students so that they will have realistic expectation of how the recent graduate will help or to their business to growth and how they can integrate into the current setup of their entire team. Professional hiring companies have been well expected to want to prefer students with a prestige and adequate education so that they can hire the best talent. The design of such research is to testify whether they have the right expectation for art students who graduate from our school. The result can go either ways and can both have impact for their understanding. One possible opportunity is that art schools proved to be a reliable breeding ground for students to succeed professionally and in essence hiring personnel should feel more confident in hiring recent graduates from the schools. On the other hand, if they consider the in value and the effectiveness of the graphic design schools are very unsatisfactory in helping students to prepare professionally, then they might adjust the education expectation for students who graduated from art school.

The fifth potential usage is for policy makers to understand the value of graphic design education overall. Government's officials sometimes need to make decisions about whether to fund public schools or any specific program regarding the graphic design education. If they consider the effectiveness of graphic design education is not up to their standards to solve employment problems, then they might have different solutions in order to better help students to acquire jobs. However, government don't necessarily need to abandon or cease similar effort if that's the case. They can always explore other solutions or alternative. Finding an option undesirable is not always the bad news, it can be another step towards better solution.[8]

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching strategies and curriculum design of the Central Academy of Craft Art reflected people's cognition of design at that time. Actually, we used the terminology

"gong yi mei shu" (Arts and crafts) instead of graphic design in the period from the 1940s to the 1990s. "Gong yi mei shu" was used to refer to the designs and skills of making crafts to meet people's needs. The official endorsement of the term "gong yi mei shu" was the establishment of the Central Academy of Craft Art (Wong, 2011). Design mainly focused on special crafts. We exported them for foreign currencies and accumulated original capital for national industrial construction. The craft factories, which are all over the country, distort society's modern perception of design.[9]

Dr. Kan Tai-Keung, a Chinese artist and designer, with over three hundred awards, strongly advocated for the integration of traditional Chinese culture with the concept of Western modern design. "Uncle Kan" was also a dedicated educator who had taken an active role in promoting design education in Hong Kong, the mainland and abroad, inspiring numerous new generation of Chinese designers (Tong, 2012).

Walter Gropius, a German architect and founder of the Bauhaus School clearly put forward a new idea of the unity of arts and skills. Three major components evolving from Bauhaus design educating system were immediately applied to teaching practice. Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts was the first school introducing this teaching philosophy from Hongkong to design schools in mainland China. Among all the introducer, Wang Wuxie, Yin Dingbang, Wang Shouzhi, were the leading figures. The Central Academy of Arts and crafts and other colleges started applying "three major components" one after another. Modern design education has stepped out of the shackles of arts and crafts education with traditional handicrafts as the main content. This created a new situation of design education in China (Liu, 2012).[10]

At the end of the 1990s, it was a stage of reform and turbulence for higher education all over China. Colleges and universities were given greater autonomy under the important central educational policy "Outline for the Reform and Development of China's Education". Most national ministries and commissions no longer managed colleges and universities but gave rights to local governments and educational institutions. In this situation, some schools carried out large-scale merger and reorganization with the encouragement and support of the government. Some well-known universities in China expanded their scale through increasing majors and programs (Wong, 2005). The merger of Tsinghua University and the Central Academy of Arts and crafts is an example.

Some foreign design institutions cooperated with China started running joint programs, starting a new round of design education mode. However, cooperative programs mainly focused on clothing design and graphic design and were limited by government policies. By 1998, there were about 270 design-related academic programs established all over the nation (Wong, 2005).[11]

Graphic design was officially renamed as "yi shu she ji" in 1998. There were more than 300,000 people engaged in graphic design, and nearly thousands of institutions of higher education and teaching institutions provided graphic design courses, and the number was still growing. There was a strong call for studies of traditional craft into the modern application of design to develop the national identity. The importance of inheritance and development of national folk decorative art was highly emphasized.

Nowadays, design education had entered into a period of fast-track development. Teachers were not only about teaching theoretical knowledge but also cultivating students' ability of independent thinking and analysis using advanced technology. The schools reduced the courses that were not suitable for the development of today's market and introduced more attractive teaching of graphic three-dimensional design. In addition to the required courses such as Photoshop and Corel DRAW for students majoring in graphic design, there were also software-related classes, for example, InDesign, Flash, Desktop Author, and Audit. Colleges like China Academy of Fine Arts had courses on virtual-reality space design, experimental conceptual design. Students were guided to use electronic tools and intelligent design software to carry out graphic design work so that they could finally possess strong command over various categories of graphic software and skills that conform to the trend of the times (Pan,2018).[12]

IV. FOUNDATIONAL COURSE

As early as the 1960s and 1970s, western art schools began to gradually take out drawing from the list of foundational courses. However, the drawing class based on the sketch, together with color training is still the mainstream of Chinese graphic design fundamental education.

Pan Gongkai, the Dean of the Central Academy of fine arts, introduces that they insist to set up basic drawing courses for first-year students both in the school of design and the school of architecture. This practice is almost the same as other Chinese universities. For example, the school of design and art of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts offers drawing class, such as human body sketch and color painting. It is believed that solid basic training is good for

students' precise cooperation of hands, eyes, and brain, and improve their technical ability and aesthetic ability (Duan, 2010).[13]

In an analysis of more than 46,000 graphic design job postings, drawing skills are not listed in the top 25 and are even not a requirement in most graphic design job descriptions (Ashley, 2017). Most western art colleges put their focus on the foundational courses that foster creativity and innovation, exposing students to many aspects of design thinking and providing them with an interdisciplinary perspective about design. According to Mattias, a professor at the school of art, Germany Kassel University, Chinese students tend to learn drawing skills to develop their imagination, while German students strive to explore their creativity by using skills. What missing for Chinese students is creativity (Yang, 2009).

For western art schools that no longer teach drawing skills, the basic education of graphic design is diversified. Mikkel Bogh, Dean of the Institute of visual arts at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Denmark, said "We are giving sketch training only to those who want to learn drawing. If some students think that sketch is very helpful for their future work, they will go to study. The art creation is not limited to sketch but coordination." (Duan, 2010) Taking the graphic design course of the Central Saint Martin Institute of Art and Design for example, freshmen are required to make an attempt at all majors in the graphic field, including computer design, manual printing, illustration, advertising, photography, and short film production, etc. The teacher will introduce the relevant knowledge clearly, and then let them explore and digest information by themselves (Wang, 2010).[14]

V.   WRITING CLASS

Within universities, art and design programs normally do not have high status. The admission requirement of cultural performance for Chinses art students is relatively low compared with other students, so graphic design has become a shortcut for the majority of candidates to enter university. Every year, a large number of candidates apply for this program, lacking literacy skills. Unfortunately, schools do not realize this problem and not pay attention to cultural courses. The writing class seldom exists when reviewing numerous course requirements and descriptions within the undergraduate design programs in China. Courses are typically projected oriented and concentrate on technical skills. Students graduate with perfect portfolios but poor writing skills.[15]

The importance of design writing should be addressed.

Writing skills are incredibly important in nearly every profession. Designers need to convince a client to buy their design. A design plan with flawless textual content, eliminating grammar and spelling errors is required. Also, designers have to make contributions to the community for future generations through writing..

The writing class plays an important role in the graphic design curriculum in Western colleges. The writing intensive course" Contemporary Issues in Design" offered at Oregon State University explores contemporary cultures that affect designers through reading and writing. The course developer, Andrea Marks (2004) firmly believes that writing has a strong relationship with design. "The confidence in writing can help students think more critically and articulate ideas clearer, in turn, making them more capable designers." Their curriculum is not alone in the prospects of undergraduate education. The Parson School of Design in New York offers 2 classes of critical reading & writing engaging design in terms of forms and functions, histories and genealogies, and signs and symbols (Graphic Design Program, 2020).[16]

Furthermore, NC State College of Design has a particular Master of Graphic Design program titled Writing in Design. The goal of this program is to make reading, writing, and critical thinking essential components of the design. Students are actively engaged in the analysis of relevant issues (Melissa and Tarek). These writing classes thoroughly prepare students for the graphic design profession by developing their critical thinking, problem-solving abilities.

VI.   TEACHING QUALITY

From the perspective of our graphic design education system itself, Chinese art institutions are still using the education design system of Bauhaus which is nearly 100 years ago. Not only the thought is obsolete, but also there are great differences between the eastern and western cultures.[17]

Despite the system flaws, the problems could also be found in the class preparation. The art schools tend to have huge student enrollments. Take Sichuan Fine Arts Academy for example, in 1998, the number of undergraduates was about 1,000; in 2000, it was about 2,000; by 2012, the number had expanded to 7,000. Usually, there are more than 50 students in a class and some design majors have a student-teacher ratio of 30:1. Several teachers may even teach 500 classes a year. In this case, most schools are in a hurry to handle with inadequate teacher preparation. Most of the teachers don't change their

lesson plans for many years (Duan, 2019). Also, the majority of the college teachers who are engaged in education graphic design are just graduated. They are generally young and lack of teaching experience. As a result, the teaching quality in China seems to be poor, and there is no difference between each student.[23]

Curriculum development is critical to teaching quality, and it is rarely given priority in Chinese university departments. While the curriculum in western colleges emphasizes development in response to changes in the field, offering the latest trends, knowledge, and skills students need to succeed in the global environment. A dedicated group of faculties with strong backgrounds in the profession field provide courses that are tailored to each student's strengths and needs. Students receive individualized attention and interact more with teachers in classes that have 20 or fewer students.[18]

Karlsruhe University stresses the great importance of continuing evolvement. The appointment period of professors of Art and Design is 6 years, and the school keeps recruiting new professors once their contracts are terminated. They advocate a kind of spirit of renewal through such personnel replacement. Only in this way can they find the best talent in the society, maintaining new ideas and practical ability, and promoting the development of the school (Lin, 2000).[20]

The Kunst Gewerbeschule existed in German-speaking countries is another example of showing outstanding teaching quality. It is a vocational art school offering a certificate for satisfactory completion of a five-year program.[24] The Basel program concentrates on art and design education and has a small enrollment compared to a large number of students in Chinese programs. Students were carefully selected for admittance, and only chosen students were permitted to advance after the first year under the strong pedagogical approach (Graphic Design Teaching and Learning).[19]

VII. CONCLUSION

Interestingly enough, students and educators have a similar view of the importance of technology skill. They seem to be putting a larger emphasis on its importance as compared to the practitioners in the field. Again, it is possible that professors might find such skill important and lacking for the current curricula setup. These professors have successfully emphasized such a sentiment to students so that they also share a similar outlook in regarding the importance of technology skill. With regards to why additional technology skills are not as important as

expected, the fact can be that art professional sometimes delegates the job to someone else. In other words, it is one of the possibilities is that additional technology skills are not that important in the actual field of art. Art industry don't necessarily require newly trained designers to have the adequate technology skill and might have been delegated the task to people who are more experienced regarding such area. Another possibility is that the data might be somehow unfortunately biased so that it might not be reflecting the reality. It is probable that companies sampled somehow do not necessarily rely heavily on the keen technology skill for entry level graphic design position. Such a reduced focus on technology skill translates to a relatively lower emphasis on technology skill compared to the point of view shared by students and professors.

Nonetheless, even if a graphic design department realize the issue. it might be begging in the questions. Maybe there is not a proper way to design and offer professional training to students. It is relatively harder and relatively rare to have formal teaching in colleges and high schools they provide professional skill training specifically.

The existence of coronavirus has been forced schools and educators to rethink the platform medium of education. It is possible to online learning platform for professional training. Online learning has the benefit of low costs of propagating information with the help of electronic format and internet connection. It is not that the online learning does not exist before the year 2019, but rather the existence of the COVID-19 gets students to be more accustomed to such a device and the society has been more receptive to the idea of online learning. The psychological barrier is lowered, so online learning now has a better ground.

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