https://doi.org/10.7577/formakademisk.5725

Yang Zhang
Professor (PhD)
Nanjing University of the Arts
zhangyang@nua.edu.cn

Lusheng Pan
Professor (Doctor of Arts)
Shandong University of Art & Design
xxgk@sdada.edu.cn

Editorial II
Design education in China
a brief overview

DESIGN EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA

China's design education stems from education in craft and fine art. The beginning of China's design education can be associated with artist Li Ruiqing, who was a scholar of the Imperial Academy. During the late Qing Dynasty, in 1906, he established the subject of 'Crafts and Pictures' at the Nanjing Educator School, which is now Southeast University. During the next 100 years, China's design education passed through four stages: a focus on patterns and crafts, crafts and ornament, ornament and design, and creative design. The Japanese model of design, which is reflected in the first three stages and can be traced back to the Bauhaus design education system, had as its purpose 'to educate the Craftsman-Artist' (Chapkova & Zhang, 2019; Bredendieck, 1962, p. 15). Therefore, art and ornament have long been considered important parts of design, and the history of China's design education represents the development history of fine art institutes to a certain degree (Wu, 2001).

Several of the fine art institutes can trace their history back to the early 20th century, such as the Central Art Academy and the China Academy of Art. A few can trace back their development to the period of the Second World War, such as the LuXun Academy of Fine Arts and the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. However, the rapid development of the economy has led scholars like Zhao (2006) and Li (2011) to realise that design education should satisfy the enquiry of industry and cultivate the consciousness to solve human survival problems. That is, the urgent need for excellent industrial products to improve people's lives led to the need for advanced designers (Li, 2011). As a result, the degree committee of the National Department changed 'Craft and Art' into 'Art and Design' in 1998, which further affirmed the value of design to the pursuit of industry. Upon entering the new century, the methods and approaches of design changed with the development of information technology. The design courses in many institutes were adjusted to adapt to the new trend and redeveloped to suit different requirements, such as cultivating students' creativity (Pan, 2007).

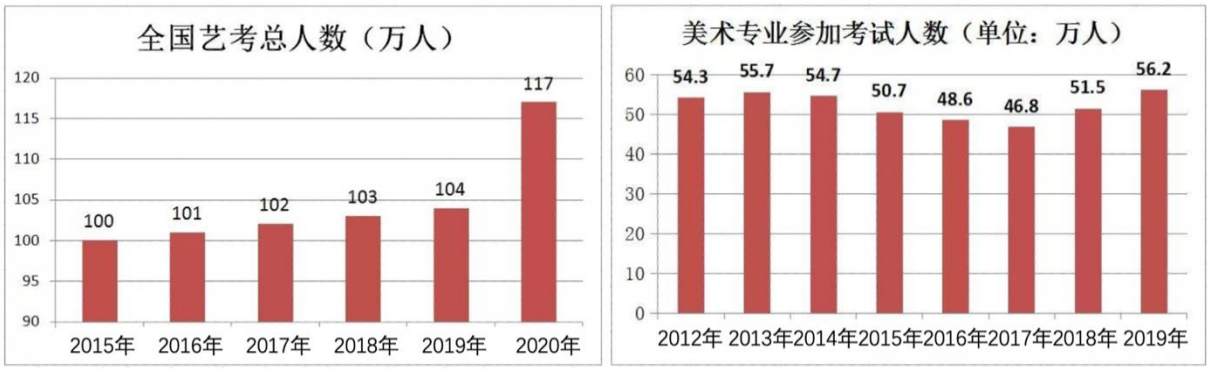
Due to the country's encouragement of the creative industry, the demand for talented designers greatly increased. Higher education began to attract more students with the advent of the 21st century (Figure 1). As the number of design students rapidly increased, most fine art institutes

transformed themselves to be more inclusive and comprehensive institutes by adding new design programmes. In addition, a few universities established design programmes, such as Tongji University (setup in 2000) and Chongqing Jiaotong University (setup in 2000). As of the end of 2016, the number of higher education institutions in China offering design majors exceeded 2,000. In the same year, the number of new design major students exceeded 540,000. This number included students with a background in science and engineering, and, since that time, the number of students studying design and related majors has remained above two million every year (Xu, 2017).

The development of design education in China indicates that the understanding of design is deepening, as increasing numbers of designers agree that design should serve people and play a key role in industrial progression (Li, 2011). Moreover, these designers believe that whilst design is related to art, design and art are based on different concepts. This distinction demonstrates the transformation of the relationship between Chinese design and design in the rest of the world as well as the relationship between art and design. This change represents our newly developed understanding of design, a change in the definition of design talent and a change in our understanding of the future. Universities are now offering more project-based courses that address different social problems than courses that focus on artistic projects (Zhao, et al, 2019).

In China, students who want to study design can undertake the Fine Art professional examination as part of the college entrance examination for arts (however, students can also take the normal college entrance examination to study design). In Figure 1, the left graph shows the number of students who took the Art College Entrance Examination between 2015 and 2020. Note that in 2020, this number reached 1.17 million. The number of students completing the Fine Art professional examination each year accounts for approximately 56% of the total number of art students nationwide. The righthand graph in Figure 1 shows the number of students who took the Fine Art professional examination from 2012 to 2019.

When viewed by region, it can be seen that some provinces and cities had a higher proportion of art examinees, for example, the proportion of art examinees in Shanxi province in 2019 was 69%, and it was even higher—74%—in Jiangsu province. The proportion of candidates in the design major generally accounts for more than 50%, which means there were about 250,000 to 300,000 students who applied for studying design each year. If we include design candidates with a background in science and engineering, the number of candidates doubles (Sohu News, 2021).



The number of students who took part in the Art College Entrance Examination (numbers of students represent ten thousands)

The number of students who took part in the Fine Art Professional Examination (numbers of students represent ten thousands)

FIGURE 1. On the left side, the graph shows the number of students who took the Art College Entrance Examination between 2015 and 2020. On the right side, the graph shows the number of students who took the Fine Art professional examination (from: https://www.sohu.com/a/498295663_689880).

Shandong, the hometown of Confucius and Mencius

Founded in 1973, Shandong University of Art & Design (SUAD) is located in Shandong province (Figure 2), the hometown of Confucius, whose perspective on education was, 'tell me, I will forget; show me, I

may remember; involve me, I will understand' (Xunzi, BC255, Wang, ed. 2016). SUAD has been heavily influenced by the educational spirit of Confucius, which emphasises that in the learning process, hearing, seeing, recognising and acting are four progressive relationships, and only through practice can we truly understand and master knowledge. As one of the pioneers of design education reform in China, SUAD advocates for obtaining knowledge from experience.

SUAD pays great attention to the cultivation of students' creative thinking by involving students in the learning process and design practices. For example, SUAD's lecturers and students have participated in many key national and provincial design programmes and projects, such as the official poster of the Beijing Olympic Games, the visual image system of the 11th National Games, and the Shandong Week of the World Expo in Dubai (Figure 4). In addition, SUAD was a leading institute in the construction and operation of the Shandong Exhibition Zone of China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industries Fair (ICIF), the Theme Exhibition of the Shandong Regional Development Strategy, and Shandong Week at the Astana World Expo in Kazakhstan.

SUAD has also presided over a range of landmark design tasks, including the Shandong Pavilion for the Shanghai World Expo, the artistic and creative design of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Qingdao Summit, the design of the National Day Reception and the achievements exhibition for the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. SUAD was also one of the organisers of the 13th National Art Exhibition, which provided a communication platform for art and design education and careers. Indeed, design is one of the first-class disciplines in Shandong Province. According to the 2021 Ranking of China's Best Soft Science Disciplines, design at SUAD is in the top five, which puts it amongst the top 5% (Figure 3). This ranking evaluates disciplines from perspectives such as educational resources, teaching scale and structure, talent cultivation, academic research, social service, academic talent, projects and achievements, and international competitiveness (Shanghai Ranking, n.d.).

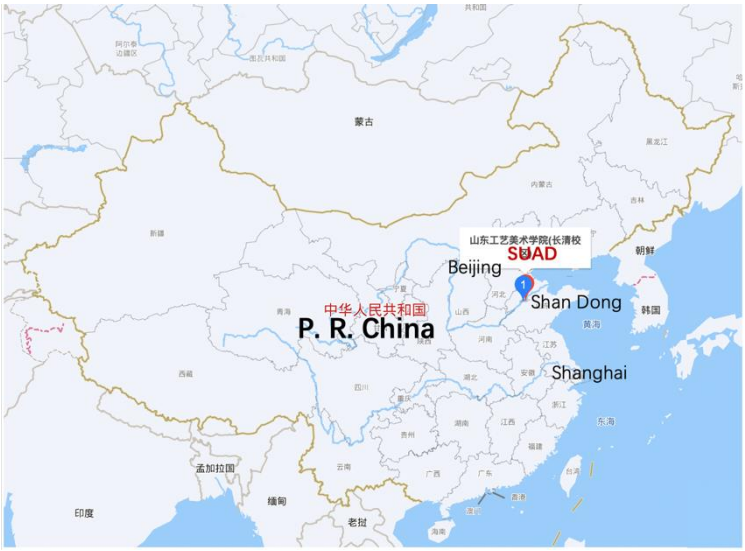


FIGURE 2 AND 3. Location of SUAD (figure 2).2021 Ranking of China's Best Soft Science Disciplines (from: https://www.sdada.edu.cn/info/)(figure 3.).

SUAD is committed to an open strategy, making it one of the first design institutes in China with a cosmopolitan vision. It has established extensive educational cooperation and international academic exchange relationships with higher education institutions in more than 40 countries and regions, signed agreements or Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with universities and research institutions, and expanded a series of overseas cooperative education projects based on abundant international resources. SUAD is the first design institute in China which applies de Bono's creative methods, including the Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking in its workshops (de Bono, 2017). Moreover, SUAD is an

institution member of the International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media (CUMULUS). In 2008, as a member of the International Council of Design (Ico-D), it hosted alliance meetings and educational exchange activities promoting communication between SUAD and institutes overseas. In 2021, it successfully organised the 6th International Conference for Design Education Researchers, Learn X Design 2021 (Bohemia et al., 2021) with the Design Research Society (DRS), Oslo Metropolitan University (Norway) and Universidad del Desarrollo (Chile).

FIGURE 4. Design activities and projects in SUAD (from: https://www.sdada.edu.cn/info/).

Chinese design education in the future

Adhering to the spirit of the motto 'heavenly creation and human ingenuity' (Song, 1637, Pan, ed. 2020), SUAD believes that designers should respect the laws of nature, science, and design, regard people's needs as the essence of design practice, treat the sustainable development of mankind as the measurement of value and apply creative thinking, all of which form the characteristics of its design education. It takes on the mission of talent training, scientific research, social service and cultural inheritance to realise the philosophy of serving the society with design, leading the lifestyles with design. Yet, SUAD is not the only design institute in China that continues to consider the future of design and design education. An increasing number of design institutes in China are considering design education based on their own advantages and characteristics and trying to reform their design courses. For

example, the focus of design courses has transformed from methods and technology-oriented solutions to a problem-oriented approach, including social and environmental issues.

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasises that education, science and technology, and talents are the essential and strategic support for building a modern socialist country (Xi, 2022). Education is a future-oriented pursuit and also the driving force of future social reforms. The establishment of a talent training system, promoting the integration of disciplines, deepening cultural communication and mutual learning, and striving for world-class quality will be the focus of education development in the future. Given the uncertainty of the future, the traditional education mode of knowledge dissemination has been challenged. In the future, training global design talents will become a new goal and a new starting point for global design education. Design education should provide the right direction for talent cultivation by applying types of creative thinking based on big data, deep learning and artificial intelligence. A fundamental goal should also be setup relating to the issues of economy, politics, culture, society and ecology. In this way, an open, equitable and sustainable intelligent educational platform with design as its core can be established.

REFERENCES

Bohemia, E., Nielsen, L. M., Pan, L., Börekçi, N. A. G. Z., & Zhang, Y. (Eds.). (2021). *Proceedings of the DRS Learn X Design 2021: 6th International Conference for Design Education Researchers (Vol. 2).* Design Research Society. https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/learnxdesign/learnxdesign2021/.

Bredendieck, H. (1962). The legacy of the Bauhaus. *Art Journal, 22*(1), 15–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.1962.10794356

Chapkova, H., & Zhang J., (2019). 包豪斯与日本设计教育的相互影响. [Mutual influence between Bauhaus and Japanese Design Education], *Time + Architecture*, *03*, 38–42. https://doi.org/10.13717/j.cnki.ta.2019.03.007.

de Bono, E. (2017). *Six Thinking Hats: The multi-million bestselling guide to running better meetings and making faster decisions.* Penguin.

Li, L. (2011). 价值论:设计研究的新视角. [Value: A new perspective on design research]. *Journal of Nanjing University of the Arts (Arts and Design Edition), 02*, 1-3+161.

Pan, L. (2007). 设计教育. [*Design Education*] (pp. 83–85). Shandong Fine Arts Publishing.

Shanghai Ranking. (n.d.) https://www.shanghairanking.cn/rankings

Sohu News. (2021, October 15). *2022 Art College Entrance Examination Trend Analysis Report.* https://www.sohu.com/a/498295663_689880

Song, Y. (1637). *天工开物.* [Exploitation of the works of nature]. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House. (Transcript, Pan, J., 2020).

Wu, L. (2001). *艺术设计学科的专业基础课程研究.* [Research on the professional basic courses of art and design discipline], [PhD thesis, Nanjing University of the Arts]. https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=zcLOVLBHd2y_yjd_qmfVNpoK0oKnxeSI-8_C3TVLmfDI1gM_XAU0Gep8jYenKbkI2nBMpXmFnHUcGrQKc8h4sMwrvrkNPKWgqgw3p3_Hgwp9Ocm8-pWVUYcLvtoUv0qrZwtHuU5fr7MG558u4XWbqw==&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS

Xi, J. (2022). *中国共产党第二十次全国代表大会报告.* [Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China]. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-10/25/content_5721685.htm

Xu, P. (2017). 设计、教育和创造未来的知识前景—关于新时期设计学科"知识统一性"的思考. [Design, education and creating future knowledge prospects—Thoughts on the 'knowledge unity' of design disciplines in the new era]. *Art Education, Z6*, 45–49.

Xunzi. (BC255). *荀子·儒效篇.* [Xunzi·Ruxiao]. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House. (Transcript, T. Wang, 2016).

Zhao, J. (2006). 关于空间设计教育中的实验性. [The experimentality in space design education]. *Art Journal*, *03*, 41–43.

Zhao, J., Zhang, P., Tong, Y., Zhang, R., & Hua, D. (2019). *新时代院校教育转型实践研究.* [Research on the practice of educational transformation in colleges and universities in the new era]. Nanjing University Press.