

Introduction-Integration-Innovation: Exploration and Practice of Higher Design Education Talents Cultivation Model in the Context of New Liberal Arts: The Case of Birmingham Institute of Fashion and Creative Art

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the present situation of cooperative education in China's art disciplines, points out the deficiencies during the development and puts forward some countermeasures and suggestions based on its approach of "introduction, integration and innovation" while studying the case of the Birmingham Institute of Fashion and Creative Art. It aims to cultivate a group of new design talents with design creativity, practical ability and international vision by inheriting Chinese excellent traditional culture to strengthen cultural self-confidence.

1 Introduction

The issue of "talent cultivation" and its construction is a very hot topic in academia and a proposition that has been constantly explored, especially in today's globalized economy and internationalized education, where the new technological revolution and industrial changes have caused great changes in the professional structure, theoretical orientation, presentation and dissemination of traditional design disciplines, thus not being able to meet the diversified needs of talent development. Therefore, education innovation and opening to the outside world have turned into significant measures to serve the strategy of a strong education nation in the new era, to promote the sustainable development of cultural industries and to establish our country's cultural self-confidence, which is the core meaning of the construction of the new liberal arts. How to build a design education system that supports the development of comprehensive literacy of contemporary college students has been the key to the cultivation of "new liberal arts" talents.

2 History of Design Education

During the 19th-20th centuries in the West, it was known as the "Machine Age". The standardized batch products resulting from the industrial revolution transformed the traditional handicraft production methods so that the concept of modern design began to emerge. At the level of art and design, design forms that conformed to industrial production had not yet been formed, and the combination of plastic art and art design became an important direction for design practice and exploration. In the early stage of

modernist design, design styles in line with the industrialized production model were explored following a series of design practices such as Bauhaus, Constructivism and Stylistic School. However, the modernist design represented by Bauhaus focused too much on rationality and functionalism, but neglected the emotional needs of people. Therefore, in post-modernist design, advocating pluralism, focusing on individual expression and historical context has become a critical orientation of design, and at the same time, the integration of design with science, economics, engineering and other disciplines has become increasingly close, showing the characteristics of wide fields and multiple levels. In order to meet this development trend, interdisciplinary learning has become an indispensable part of design education. In 2017, Hiram College took the lead in proposing the concept of "New Liberal Arts" and began to reorganize teaching and learning, attempting to integrate new technologies into courses such as philosophy, literature, and language to provide students with an integrated interdisciplinary learning experience¹. The "new liberal arts" reform was officially launched.

In contrast, the mainstream of traditional Chinese academic classification is Confucian classics, history, philosophy and literature². In modern times, influenced by western studies, modern design education has been introduced and gradually established with the international academic system only after the reform and opening up in 1978, and has gone through three stages in design education: pattern education, arts and crafts education, and art and design education – a completely different background from the history, culture and political system of modern design development in the West, so the Western education system is not in line with the structure

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and heritage of traditional Chinese academics. As a country with 5000 years of oriental civilization, China needs to build its discourse in the international arena through an innovative cultural system. The “new” connotation of “new liberal arts” in China is mainly focused on three levels, namely, the intersectionality of disciplinary patterns, the practicality of academic interests, and the plurality of disciplinary innovations³. Since many of its basic concepts come from the West and are strongly dependent on its academic system and discourse system, it exposes the weakness of its research, and it is imperative to localize the Western design education system.

3 Features of Internationally Cooperative School-running

The modern design originated in England, and the design education system was formed in Germany. In recent years, in the context of the “new liberal arts”, the structure of design disciplines has been optimized, adjusted, transformed and upgraded at a significantly faster pace. This kind of cooperation requires the “community” thinking of cross-cultural, cross-civilization, cross-system and cross-ideology cooperation⁴. As of February 2021, there are 143 non-independent legal persons of Sino-foreign cooperative education institutions in China, more than 70% of which were approved and established after 2012. 50% of the Chinese universities are “double first-class” universities; 15% of the foreign partners are QS World University Ranking Top 100 institutions; 25% of the foreign partners are QS World University Ranking Top 100 institutions. The foreign partners of 25% of the institutions are among the top 200 institutions in QS World University Rankings. Among the 143 Sino-foreign cooperative institutions mentioned above, only 19 of them offer design education, where 74% of the Chinese universities are “double first-class universities” and 16% of the foreign partners are QS World University Ranking Top 100.

3.1 Geographical Distribution

From the perspective of regional distribution, Sino-foreign cooperative institutions are mainly concentrated in 10 provinces and cities along the coastal zone, and the trend of gradually spreading inland with the Yangtze River Delta as the center is formed. The seven coastal provinces and regions are basically areas with good environmental conditions, developed economies and high population carrying capacity. As a discipline serving people, design is unique in its practicality, applicability and operability, and in the new era, it is more and more closely connected with the market, industry, engineering and information technology². Therefore constant acceptance of new things is crucial for students of design disciplines to fully tap into their inherent potential and sense of autonomy. Relying on the advantages of these regions, some large-scale design exhibitions and conferences are often held here, providing students with more opportunities for academic exchanges and accelerating the cross-border integration of

disciplines; at the same time, relying on the strong economic strength brought by the rapid development of these provinces, they are able to supply Sino-foreign cooperation programs, which form a virtuous cycle of mutual promotion.

3.2 Philosophy of Schooling

In the context of the new liberal arts, traditional discipline construction can no longer effectively cope with and solve certain new problems, which means that Sino-foreign cooperative institutions must respond actively in operation and management, education and teaching, scientific research, campus culture and social services⁵. The philosophy of school management as a spiritual guide answers a series of theoretical and practical questions about the purpose, motivation, way and path of development⁶.

For example, Tongji University College of Design and Innovation is ranked 13th in the QS subject ranking of art and design and 6th by its partner university Aalto University in Finland. Its philosophy is “innovation-driven development, economic transformation and upgrading” of national and regional needs, integration of creativity, technology and business, focusing on the cultivation of international first-class “sustainable design and innovation” leader talents. It is evident that the university has taken the international reality as the guide to cultivating talents to promote the efficient integration and operation of design disciplines and realize the concern for the human life world. Another example is the Shanghai International College of Fashion and Innovation (SCFI), Donghua University, partnering with which the University of Edinburgh is ranked 16th in the 2022 QS Global University Rankings. Its philosophy is to cultivate students’ design creativity and design practice ability to become international design talents through international academic and educational cooperation. This greatly expands the diversity of students’ design horizons, thus expanding the breadth and depth of international cooperation and forming a favorable environment for innovation.

3.3 Talent Development

To respond to the development of the times and the new needs that arise with it, the organic combination of various disciplines through the method of borrowing, crossover, absorption and integration will build design into a high-quality discipline with better internal integrity and external independence⁷, so as to achieve the improvement of the quality of human resources training and the enhancement of social service capacity.

For example, New York University Shanghai (NYU Shanghai) is the first Sino-US research university in China founded by East China Normal University and New York University, and is one of the three degree-granting campuses in the NYU global system. The College’s curriculum is based on a generalist approach for the first two years of enrollment, followed by a professional training model for the second two years, and students are

able to customize their professional knowledge and skills modules. This helps students to break through the inherent concepts and social perceptions, while greatly mobilizing students' sense of autonomy to fully explore their inner potential and enhance the quality of talent training. Another example is The HBU-UCLan School of Media, which is a key comprehensive university jointly established by the Ministry of Education and the People's Government of Hebei Province, and is also a national first-class university supported by Hebei Province. The School of Media provides students with a talent training platform featuring a Chinese-English language learning environment, Chinese and foreign cultural integration, and close cooperation between schools and enterprises. This mode of training is oriented to the needs of society and the background of science and technology frontier and national strategy, which is bound to cultivate high-end talents with core competitiveness and good overall quality.

Through the analysis of the above excellent colleges and universities, the attributes, emergence and development, and boundaries of the concept of design education in my country are analyzed from the basic point of view of regional characteristics, school-running concepts, and talent training models. It can be seen that higher education is responsible not only for discipline construction, but also for college students' social adaptability, employment and long-term development. From the teaching level, there is an urgent need to build a multi-disciplinary curriculum system to promote students' comprehensive literacy. These experiences are of great importance for promoting the innovation of higher design education in Hubei Province, reflecting on the innovative paths in the process of local design education innovation practice, and exploring a realistic way to cultivate design professionals.

4 The New Path of Talent Training

The Bauhaus and Ulm are considered to be the origins of modern design education. The Bauhaus Institute of Design, established in 1919, proposed a teaching model that combined theory and practice, art and technology, and promoted the integration of various disciplines with design education, while encouraging students to create freely, with students having both practical and theoretical skills. These design educators brought the Bauhaus model to the rest of the world, laying a solid foundation for the modernist design style that lasted for decades. After World War II, the Ulm School of Design, under the influence of the Bauhaus concept, put forward the teaching concept of rationalist design as the core, with the intention of cultivating designers with a sense of the times, social consciousness, and modern awareness, forming the Ulm model. Entering the post-modernist period, it is obvious that rationalism can no longer meet the needs of the design. With the advancement of post-modernist design practice, concepts such as personalization, humanization and emotional design are gradually integrated into design education. China's modern design education was introduced only after the reform and opening up, and the education system and curriculum were borrowed from the

western modern design education model, but due to the short development time, some schools adopted the way of copying and reproducing the western education model, which led to the inadequate utilization of resources⁸. At the present stage of internationalization of art and design higher education, there is a phenomenon of "many lectures, but little practice", "emphasis on theory, not practice; emphasis on expression, not process", which ignores the personalized development of students and makes the gap between design talents training and social needs more obvious. These phenomena are against the original intention of internationalization of higher education in China, as shown in Figure 1.

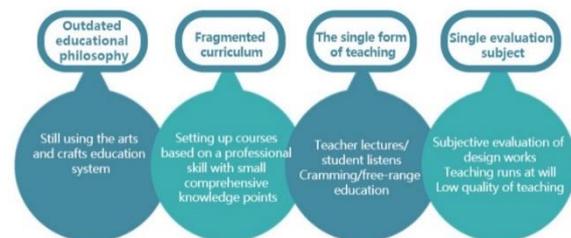


Figure 1. Four Problems of Traditional Design Education

Birmingham Institute of Fashion and Creative Art is organized by Wuhan Textile University in cooperation with Birmingham City University in the UK. In view of the above problems, the institute tries to reverse the misunderstanding of international design education and adopt the path of "introduction, integration and innovation" to internationalize design education in China through years of running practice. The aim is to update the cultivation mechanism of design professionals in China, consolidate the evaluation system of higher education teaching in design, return to the original intention of international design education in China⁹, and form a set of effective and distinctive education and teaching methods to guide students to establish the confidence of creative design, and enhance their independent learning ability and reflective and critical spirit through design practice activities.

4.1 Introduction of International Design Education Concept

Birmingham Institute of Fashion and Creative Art has studied and analyzed the British design resources, combined with the general rules of China's local higher design education, reasonably and effectively integrated foreign high-quality design education resources with China's existing education mechanism to innovate, while strengthening cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation, improving the current phenomenon of increasing convergence of design education content in China, reversing students' learning styles and broadening their professional learning. It also encourages equal exchange and cooperation between Chinese and British teachers in the teaching process of professional courses, draws on the advantages and experiences of both Chinese and foreign countries in the implementation of teaching evaluation mechanisms, optimizes the composition of the system,

improves the management system, and promotes standardized schooling. And a set of effective and realistic paths for cultivating design talents in cross-border education is formed around educational philosophy, teaching methods, process evaluation and quality assurance, which fully promotes the standardization of higher design education in Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools.

4.2 Integration of Localized Talent Cultivation Mechanism

In the context of the new liberal arts education, the close integration of the ideological and political course and the design discipline, and the adherence to the concept of “educating people with morality” to create a warm liberal arts classroom, will play a positive role in promoting the establishment of an education system with Chinese characteristics. For the comprehensive development of design talents, we should strengthen designers’ “independent learning”, “teamwork”, “active adaptation” and “reflective criticism” consciousness, and enhance their ability to handle forward-looking creative design and complex design projects. Besides, by comparing the current development of design disciplines in China and the UK, and the similarities and differences between modern and traditional design disciplines, the College has deconstructed and reorganized professional knowledge and skills, and built a “three-stage progressive” modular curriculum, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Three progressive creative module course clusters

While guaranteeing the integrity and systematization of the professional knowledge system of the design disciplines, it stimulates the generation of innovative thinking in a gradual manner.

4.2.1 Contextual Learning Theory

creating learning contexts to effectively design learning content and design practice arrangements; providing activity opportunities to observe or simulate design practice processes and thinking processes; creating a positive atmosphere, cross-interactive and consultative discussion-based learning models; condensing development plans, and summarizing and reflecting on learning goals and personal growth;

4.2.2 Reverse Design Theory

emphasis on curriculum design, defining learning

objectives around learning outputs¹⁰, emphasizing innovative thinking development; summarizing teaching experience to design curriculum content, emphasizing creativity training for professional design talents; providing a variety of interactive methods to match design practice, design motivation and growth support.

4.2.3 Disciplinary Creation Theory

Through the construction and implementation of modular course clusters, we expand students’ horizons and stimulate innovative thinking; integrate interdisciplinary knowledge and inspire students’ minds; and promote multidimensional interaction and active associative exploration.

4.3 Innovative System of Continuous Growth of Student Success

At present, the evaluation of design teaching in most domestic colleges and universities still follows the presentation and final effect of assignments as the judgment standard¹¹, and the evaluation system of the college adopts a multi-dimensional and multi-modal evaluation approach. That is, it implements a five-dimensional academic evaluation system to strengthen the evaluation of the whole process of creative design, which effectively counteracts and promotes design teaching and dynamically guarantees the teaching quality, as shown in Figure 3.

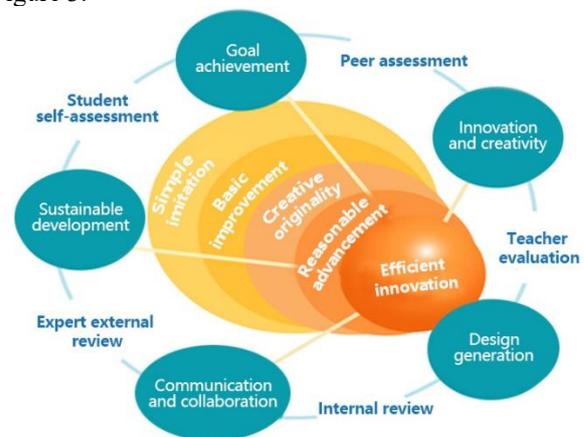


Figure 3. The five-dimensional academic evaluation system

In other words, the five dimensions of “goal achievement, innovation and creativity, design generation, communication and collaboration, and sustainable development” are set in the evaluation content to ensure the quality control of students’ learning process and the fairness and reasonableness of the evaluation of the level of academic achievement. It solves the subjective and one-sided evaluation method based on the result and effect in the teaching of design professionals, and evaluates the students’ sense of acquisition, teaching methods and course effects, so that the evaluation feedback can play a positive role in improving the teaching process¹². Besides, the college also introduced the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), which uses five forms of

evaluation: student self-assessment, peer assessment, teacher evaluation, internal review and expert external review, and innovatively introduced a third-party evaluation system. In the evaluation criteria, five levels are adopted: simple imitation, basic improvement, creative originality, reasonable advancement, and efficient innovation. It not only guarantees the objectivity and rationality of the teaching results in a multi-channel and three-dimensional way, but also tests the scientificity, standardization and feasibility of the professional teaching system. Students can adjust their subjective learning status according to the feedback and objective information and continuously improve their comprehensive quality.

5 Conclusion and Prospect

The key point of the construction of “New Liberal Arts” is to lead the direction of the discipline and respond to social concerns¹³. With the globalization of the economy and education today, it is undoubtedly in line with the needs of the times to carry out sino-foreign cooperation in running schools. Due to the huge differences in the concept and cognition of design education between China and foreign countries, this paper takes the Birmingham Institute of Fashion and Creative Art as an example to integrate Chinese and foreign design education philosophy, talent training mode and academic evaluation system to promote each other and effectively provide necessary educational support for the benign development of design students, so as to create a model of localized disciplines, which is of great significance to the cultivation of design talents in the new era.

*Foundation Project

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