

Anonymous Modern Design Education in Western China: A Case Study

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Abstract

Along with the rapid development of Chinese modern design since the 1980s, modern design education has grown in China. Many studies have already been conducted to examine the key aspects of this historical phenomenon, e.g., heroic figures and well-known institutes. This article, however, investigates the anonymous activities of modern design education in Western China that have long been ignored because of their mundane function. Methods such as document analysis, questionnaire, interview, and subjective understanding are used to achieve the goal of this article. Through research on the School of Fine Arts in a University of Science and Engineering in Western China, as a typical case, this article reveals that although the school lags behind many other design schools, modern design education at the school has experienced sustained growth since its rise in the twenty-first century. The school has made achievements in a difficult situation but suffers from a series of disadvantages and problems. Additionally, modern design education at the school is facing new challenges resulting from changes related to raised standards and intense competition. In conclusion, the value of relatively unknown educational organisations of modern design is becoming clearer, since they are closely connected to the everyday life of ordinary people in Western China and take on a great deal of responsibility in serving the general populace and the vulnerable groups in society. This article, therefore, tries to call attention to anonymous modern design education whose aspects are disclosed through a case study.

Keywords

Anonymity, modern design, education, Western China, case study

Introduction

Although there is no universal definition, modern design can be briefly defined as a creative activity that provides solutions to problems in various fields through planning and preparation, e.g., architecture, interior decoration, fashion, visual communication, and product (as well as service) in modern times, in which technology and aesthetics play a part. Meanwhile, modern design education aims to enable the educatees to learn design thinking and methods and acquire design skills through systematic training in an institution in order to meet the needs of design in the abovementioned fields. Chinese modern design has developed rapidly since its emergence in the 1980s (Hang and Cao, 2009; Li, 2008; Tao, 2013; Wang, 1989; Xu, 2015). Accordingly, modern design education has been growing in China for almost 30 years. Many studies focusing on key aspects in design history have been conducted to investigate this historical phenomenon through empirical research and theoretical reflection (e.g., Fielding and Chung, 1998; Fung and Lo Choi, 2002; Wong, 2005; Wu, 2011; Xiang, 2015; Yang, 2009; Yuan, 2014; Zhang, 2008; 2020). In practice, however, Chinese modern design education consists not only of “the celebrated”, namely the pioneers (e.g., Guanzhong Liu, Dingbang Yin, and Fuchang Zhang), historic events (e.g., the establishment of China Industrial Design Association and

Guangzhou Conference), and well-known educational organisations (e.g., Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Nanjing University of the Arts, Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, and Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, most of which are in Eastern China), but also of “the ordinary” education activities, which probably reflect more meaningful aspects and details. That is, not only the celebrated but also the ordinary parts should be taken into consideration when attempts are made to outline the main facts of Chinese modern design education. Hence, the concept of “anonymity” is introduced in this article to further investigate Chinese modern design education. As a term, “anonymous history” is rooted in studies of modern design history (Dilnot, 1984; Raizman, 2010; Sparke, 2019; Woodham, 1997) and expanded upon by Siegfried Giedion and Adrian Forty, who have both dismissed the “heroic approach” (Conway, 1987) and advocated for the importance of impersonal factors from a sociological perspective (Giedion, 1948; Forty, 1992). Arguing against the heroic approach of Nikolaus Pevsner who is a classical historian of modern design and wrote the earliest work on modern design history in the 1930s, Giedion advanced the anonymous history in the 1940s, shifting the focus from the “historic force of heroes” to a much broader view of the impact of “impersonal industrial technology”. Similarly, Forty strongly suggested that the attention of the historical research of modern design should be diverted from the classic work of design or the life of celebrated designers and should be drawn to the social context of design activities and the materialisation of social relations through design activities. Taking the same view, this study of anonymous modern design education will correspondingly pay closer attention to the anonymous practice, which is usually passed over in favour of the glorious heroes and events of modern design education, and endeavour to define anonymous practice from a sociological perspective. To call attention to this kind of educational practice (namely, the practice involved in unknown organisations within the less-developed areas), this research conducts a case study and develops a profile of anonymous Chinese modern design education, from which the various related contributions (which is concerned with achievements in a backward situation), difficult positions (which is concerned with problems arising in the sphere of institutional reform, management system, and staff recruitment), and prospects (which is concerned with opportunities and challenges in the future), as well as the social significance, will emerge.

Methodology

Questions and Approaches

Through a case study, the research aims to answer the following questions: (1) What is the present situation of anonymous modern design educational practice in an institution in Western China? (2) What key features has such a practice produced in terms of achievements, disadvantages, and problems? (3) what are the prospects for the improvement of Western Chinese modern design education in the future? Responses to these questions will be instructive for ascertaining the meaningful aspects of anonymous modern design education in Western China and calling attention to this kind of educational practice.

The School of Fine Arts in a University of Science and Engineering in Western China, is an art and design education institution. The department of design has been practising the teaching of modern design for about 20 years and is chosen as the object of study because of its relatively unknown position in Western China. The approaches used here include document analysis, questionnaires, and interviews. Generally, based on primary or secondary sources, document analysis is an effective means applied to providing evidence or supporting statements in historical research (Tosh, 2002). It is employed in the archival research of this study to compile

basic information (e.g., alumni information and curriculum) on the practice of modern design education in the school. Questionnaires and interviews, approaches frequently implemented in sociological surveys to generate statistics or measure public opinion (Burke, 2015; Giddens, 2001), are used to obtain information on the historical background of the school or the opinions of students, teachers, and managerial staff, which are connected to comments on the performance or prospect of modern design education in the school. In addition, subjective understanding, an approach derived from “understanding sociology” (Weber argues that “subjective understanding”, instead of “outside observation”, is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge. See, Weber, 1978; 2017), is employed to interpret the relevant facts and ascertain their meaning. Specifically, the method of subjective understanding is applied to determine the implications of the information or the remarks empirically collected from the participants through questionnaires and interviews, the meaning of which cannot be determined directly from the empirical evidence. This method is also used to make comments or subjective judgements about the significance of this kind of educational practice. Since the author had worked for the school as a faculty member for more than 10 years, this method is employed to examine the way the school is managed, which the author was familiar with through his everyday work.

Participants

Participants in the research included students, teachers, and managerial staff from the School of Fine Arts at the above mentioned University. For the questionnaire, based on a random selection of the list of students offered by the chairs of the teaching and research sections (environmental design, fashion design, and visual communication design), numbers of students from the department of design (including undergraduate and postgraduate students) were chosen as the respondents to anonymously answer the questions. The group interviews were conducted with five teachers from the department of design, who have extensive teaching experience with modern design, and none of them is currently holding a managerial position at the school. The deputy dean of the school and three chairs from the teaching and research sections (environmental design, fashion design, and visual communication design) of the department of design were interviewed by the author personally.

Data Collection

All documents from which the information has been collected in the research are official files from the archives of the above mentioned University or of the School of Fine Arts. There are no data regarding the School of Fine Arts from outside publications. The documents include the official records of alumni information filed in the archives of the above mentioned University, the student curricular schedules filed in the School of Fine Arts, and the list of students offered by the chairs of the teaching and research sections. The questionnaire included two prompts: (1) Has the curriculum of the department of design increased the students’ ability to solve design problems? (2) Please explain your reply. The questionnaires were sent out to the selected students by e-mail via the chairs of the teaching and research sections (environmental design, fashion design, and visual communication design). In the group interviews, each interviewee discussed the problems caused by the inefficient managerial activities (the names of interviewees are withheld from this article). The individual interview with deputy dean covered what factors hinder the practice of modern design education in the school and what strategies could be developed to improve modern design education at the school. For the individual interviews with the chairs from the teaching and research sections, the historical

background of the practice of modern design education in each teaching and research section were discussed. In brief, the collected data help in revealing the achievements, disadvantages, and problems of modern design education at the school.

The time line of research process was as follows. First, the author visited the archives of the above mentioned University on 8 June 2020 and consulted the official records of alumni information stored in the computer. Second, the questionnaire was administered between 2 July 2020 and 19 July 2020. Third, an individual interview was conducted with the deputy dean of the school in his office room on 10 July 2020, and it lasted 30 minutes. The students' curricular schedules at the School of Fine Arts were examined by the author on the same day. Another three individual interviews were conducted with the chairs of the teaching and research sections (environmental design, fashion design, and visual communication design) by telephone the next day, and the interviews lasted 15 minutes each. Then, two separate group interviews were conducted online. The first one was conducted with three teachers on 15 July 2020 and lasted 35 minutes. The second one was conducted with the other two teachers on 4 November 2020 and lasted 27 minutes.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative analysis are employed in the process of data analysis. Quantitative analysis is used to analyse the quantitative information collected from the documents, questionnaires, and interviews. First, 10 official records of alumni information over the period from 2010 to 2019 were examined (see Figure 1). It is found that the lowest number of students graduated from bachelor's programmes related to modern design is in 2010 (195 graduates) and the highest number is in 2012 (365 graduates) during the period. The average annual number is 281 graduates. Second, the information collected from the questionnaires were analysed (see Figure 2). A random sample of 30 students were chosen as the respondents, which approximately account for 10 percent of the annual number of graduates from bachelor's programmes and master's degree programmes. There are 26 students who responded to the questionnaire, and the response rate is 87 percent. Among them, 14 respondents are female and 12 respondents are male (54 percent and 46 percent respectively). Third, 17 copies of the student curricular schedules were also analysed regarding the change of the courses set in the past 17 years. In addition, 5 teachers participated group interviews, and 3 teachers are female and 2 teachers are male. Their teaching experience are 16, 10, 6, 11, and 12 years respectively, and the average teaching experience is 11 years.

Qualitative analysis is used to understand and interpret the information obtained from the interviews. First, the content of the group interviews was summarised. It indicates that the problems caused by the inefficient managerial activities are mainly concerned with the regulations of the tutorial system, the examination system, the arrangements of the teaching tasks, and the performance of the decision makers (along with their managerial team). Then, the content of the individual interview with the deputy dean of the school was generalised. It reveals that the geographical location and the recruitment of new members are the factors hinder the practice of modern design education in the school, and localisation and internationalisation strategies should be developed to improve modern design education at the school.

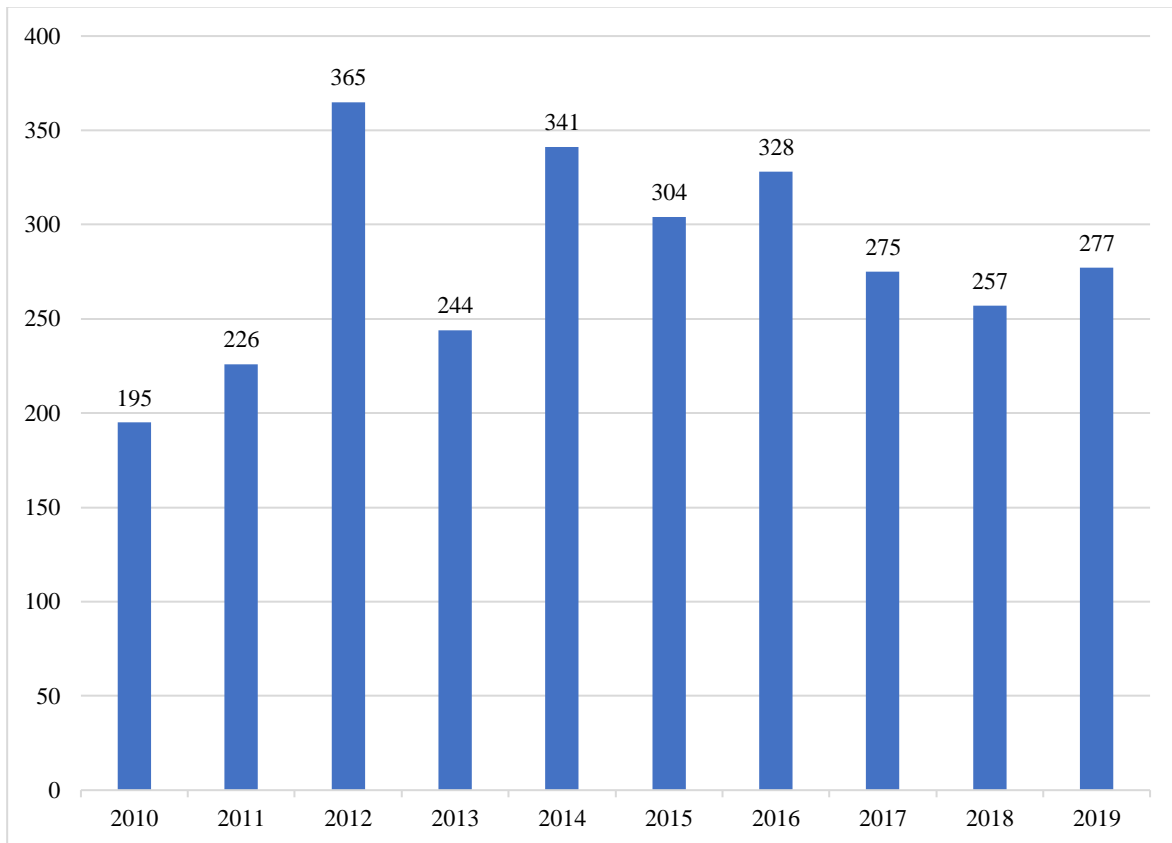


Figure 1. The annual number of graduates over the period from 2010 to 2019

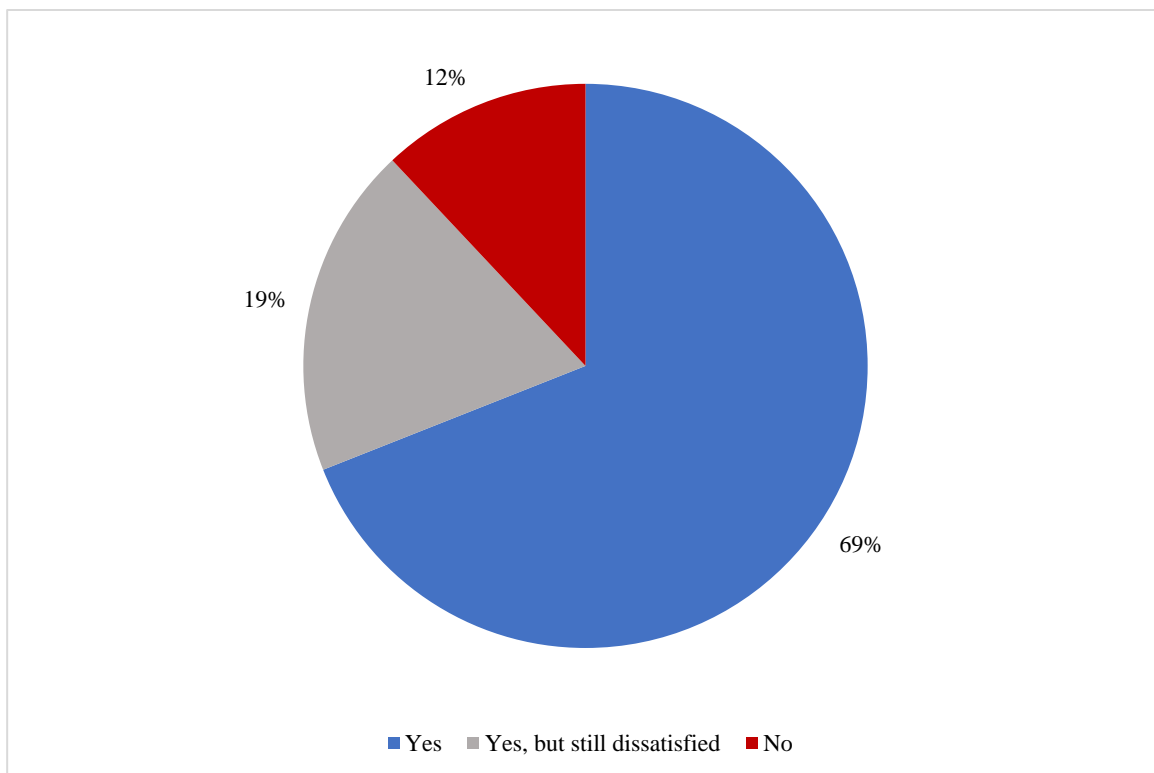


Figure 2. The students' opinions on the curriculum of the department of design

Findings and Discussion

Historical Background

The gap between Eastern and Western China in terms of economic growth and modernisation was reflected in the differing progress of modern design education in these two areas. Since the idea of modern design was introduced and adopted in Eastern China in the 1980s, e.g., Guangdong province (Wang, 1989), Chinese modern design education was first provided in the coastal areas. Therefore, the development of modern design education in this school can immediately be seen to be “lagging behind” when compared with that in universities and academies in Eastern China. The rise of modern design education of Eastern China was in the mid-1990s (Yuan, 2014), yet modern design education activities in this school (in Western China) did not begin until the early twenty-first century because the demand for modern design education only became strong enough to reach Western China during that period.

The School of Fine Arts at the above mentioned University, once known as the Department of Fine Arts in a Teachers College in Western China, was founded in 1986. This Teachers college and another three colleges were integrated into a brand-new university in 2003. In the beginning, fine arts education had played a leading role, and the teaching of modern design was marginalised in the school. In that early period (around the 1990s), the school provided only a three-year diploma of “modern design-like” education programme under the speciality of “arts and crafts”. Nevertheless, with the surge in demand for modern design education across China since the beginning of the twenty-first century, educational reform aiming to promote the teaching of modern design was adopted to confront the new challenge, as many other fine arts schools had already done. In 2004, the school began to offer a bachelor’s degree, and a modern design education programme, classified under the speciality of “fine art”, was launched. Meanwhile, a teaching and research section of design was established. It was not until 2008 that modern design education was divided into three programmes, namely, “environmental design”, “visual communication design”, and “fashion design”. The teaching and research sections were divided accordingly. Finally, environmental design, visual communication design, and fashion design were approved as the independent specialities and began offering bachelor’s degrees in 2015: different programmes have been set up, e.g., “interior design” and “landscape design” fall under environmental design, “visual design” and “new media design” fall under visual communication design. Since 2015, the school has offered two master’s degree programmes, namely, environmental design and visual communication design, under the speciality of “art and design”. Currently, there are more than 1,000 undergraduate students, about 120 postgraduate students, and 76 faculty members at the school (the statistics were collected in 2019). Approximately two-thirds of the students are trying to obtain a degree in modern design.

Achievements in A Difficult Situation

Although the situation indicates the “backwardness” of the region at the macro level, the progress seen in modern design education is compelling and has remained stable in this school since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The number of students graduated from school over the period from 2010 to 2019 testifies to this. As the chart shows (Figure 1), the annual number of graduates from bachelor’s programmes related to modern design, e.g., environmental design, visual communication design, or fashion design, has seen a moderate increase despite the fluctuations within this period.

Furthermore, the students' curricular schedules, which are compiled by each teaching and research section every year, prove this progress as well. The compulsory theoretical courses set in 2005, 2008, 2015, and 2018, for instance, make a marked difference. A comparison of the schedules presented in the table (Table 1), shows that there were no theoretical courses directly related to the issue of modern design in 2005; the course "modern design history" was introduced in 2008 to improve the understanding of modern design by offering a historical perspective. In 2015, "Chinese art history" and "foreign art history" were removed from the curriculum because the independent specialities of modern design were approved, and the introductory course "an introduction to art", which provides a brief overview of the history and principles of art, was introduced as a substitute for the removed courses. These changes strongly demonstrates that modern design history, supplanted art history, playing a major role in the theoretical system of modern design education in the school. Since 2018, the course "modern design methods" has been part of the curricular offerings, with the aim of encouraging students to carry out their design tasks through the scientific processes and using reliable methods. To some extent this change illustrates that the teachers and the decision-makers behind them have seen the logic in promoting modern design education at the school. Progressive changes have also been found in other professional courses. "Infographics design" and "user interface design", for instance, were introduced as elective courses in the visual communication design programme in 2012 and were set as compulsory courses in the students' curricular schedules in the visual communication design speciality in 2015. This indicates that the school is struggling to keep up with technological changes in today's information society. The course "ergonomics" is another important example. The course, which is irrelevant to traditional art education curricula, was introduced in the environmental design programme as an elective course in 2008 and then became a compulsory course in the environmental design speciality in 2015. Again, the topic of this was determined to be one of the core subjects of the compulsory courses in 2018. These changes suggest that the school attaches increasing importance to the factors of humanised design in the reform process.

Table 1. The compulsory theoretical courses set in 2005, 2008, 2015, and 2018

2005	2008	2015	2018
Chinese art history	Chinese art history	modern design history	modern design history
foreign art history	foreign art history	an introduction to art	an introduction to art
an introduction to art	modern design history		modern design methods

Additionally, the school has developed a localisation strategy aiming involving traditional cultural heritage through which the characteristics of local culture and crafts, e.g., "Za Ran" (tie-dye) and "Cai Deng" (illuminations of Spring Festival), have been integrated into the curriculum. Both "Za Ran" and "Cai Deng" are traditional crafts that are the representative of local Zigong culture. *Za Ran*, also described as "Shu Xie", has earned a reputation for its tie-dyed textiles, which are made using a solution made from natural material, e.g., indigo, that produces a unique dyed effect. *Cai Deng* is well known for the characteristic lantern decorations in the parks and on the street during the Spring Festival. This kind of illuminations at the Lantern Festival has allegedly been popular in what is modern-day Zigong since the Tang or Song Dynasty. Over time, the tradition developed into a lantern show that has proven to be

the best showpiece for the city, not only communicating local culture but also promoting the creative economy of the city with the assistance of renewal techniques and materials. In one of the individual interviews, the deputy dean, who manages academic research, argued that the localisation strategy will help preserve the traditional cultures, customs and lifestyles, reach a compromise between localisation and modernisation in design, and sustain the growth of modern design education at the school as resource that will continue to be available.

On the other hand, the school has also followed internationalisation trends. Teachers are encouraged to study or undertake research abroad to obtain international education experience. There are several teachers who completed their degrees or conducted research in Europe, North America, Japan, and South Korea thus far. Moreover, since 2019, the department of design has started an international programme under the visual communication design speciality in cooperation with a university in America. In the first term, 102 students entered the school and experienced the programme; they study at their home university for the first three years and then have an opportunity to study in the United States for the fourth year if they passed a language test.

Disadvantages and Problems

Nevertheless, the achievements are shadowed by some disadvantages or problems. First, as a school that grew out of a fine arts institute, its modern design education system obviously bears the characteristics of the traditional art education model. The remnants of the traditional model then became the key components of so-called art-type modern design education at the school (contrasted with “engineering-type” modern design education, which originated from Bauhaus and the Ulm School of Design) (Wang, 2015), and pedagogical limitations of the system are sometimes encountered. Specifically, this kind of system, which exists not only in this school but also in many other schools with the similar transition backgrounds, is always oriented around visual expression instead of problem solving and depends on artistic (e.g., intuition, inspiration, or the unconscious) instead of scientific (e.g., logic or reason) training methods, disregarding modern design’s ability to inform decisions and find solutions (The aforementioned theoretical course “modern design methods” is considered a remedy to this problem). According to the question about whether the curriculum of the department of design has increased the students’ ability to solve the design problems, 12 percent of respondents replied “No”. Additionally, some respondents still expressed their dissatisfaction with the curriculum even though they replied “Yes” (Figure 2). The survey results suggest that the curriculum and the teaching methods at the school fail to sufficiently overcome the difficulties arising from the transition from a traditional to a new curriculum.

The old-fashioned management system at the university is another limitation. The managerial activities at the school have been deeply influenced by the patriarchal concept that defines management as “control” instead of “service”, which impedes the effort to embrace “teacher-centred” management and hence affects the development of teaching and research in the school. The advancement of academic research, for instance, has been severely dependent on the strategy of academic research being led by administrative preferences instead of personal preferences. That is, the decision-makers of the school are inclined to exert an administrative force (even pressure) on teachers to drive them to pay more attention to their academic contributions. Meanwhile, the academic interests of the teachers have been ignored to some extent, particularly those interests that cannot be realised as an instant contribution expected

from the upper levels of administration. Consequently, this situation gives rise to the strange circumstance in which only those academic activities whose results are in accordance with the goals of the administration can be properly promoted. Otherwise, research that merely represents personal academic interests are likely stifled, if not completely prevented. Nevertheless, in regard to the value of academic research, the approval of the administration can hardly be equated to the value of the research itself, although the encouragement coming from the former sometimes promotes the rise of the latter. This phenomenon reveals a meaningful mechanism that has worked in the educational organisations whose development lags behind. In other words, due to backwardness the university heavily relies on the effect of administrative power to reduce stagnation and catch up with more advanced schools. Meanwhile, individuality has been undervalued. Moreover, based on the group interviews with several teachers, a number of problems caused by the managerial factors related to the teaching of modern design have emerged. The interviews with the teachers revealed the following information.

Interviewee A (male, the teaching and research section of visual communication design, 16 years' teaching experience): *I strongly disagree with the regulations of the tutorial system. It does not mean that I deny the system itself, but the regulations are full of confusion and conflicting information. The students are required to choose the different tutors for different tasks, e.g., course selection, contest, and postgraduate entrance examination, yet these tasks cannot be divided so clearly. It is also unreasonable in terms of the timing and the method of tutor selection. From my point of view, this decision has been made blindly. It is the consequence of insufficient communication between the decision-makers in the chair positions and the teachers who are on the front lines.*

Interviewee B (female, the teaching and research section of visual communication design, 10 years' teaching experience): *I think the examination system failed to adapt to the nature of some courses in which the performance of students can only be assessed properly by the exercises outside the classroom. However, the rigid and dogmatic system has the students sit for the examination in the classroom. It is quite ridiculous that the teachers who offer the course and know the course best have no right to choose the means of testing by themselves. On the other hand, those who have the right to choose the means of testing are not involved in teaching.*

Interviewee C (female, the teaching and research section of visual communication design, 6 years' teaching experience): *There is a serious conflict between the standards of examination and the syllabus of those courses which must be lectured by different teachers simultaneously. It produces the side effect that the content of examination does not always match the content of lecture sometimes and also results in the uneven quality of the teaching. Indeed, it is caused by the loosed preparation of lectures in groups. But I am not sure whether the management has learned such information, as this trouble has been around for a long time. Nobody has taken any managerial action to change it.*

Interviewee D (male, the teaching and research section of environmental design, 11 years' teaching experience): *In my opinion, the way the teaching is managed is very*

problematic. In terms of the teaching arrangements, the tasks have arbitrarily been divided among the teachers in each teaching and research section, disregarding the strong points of each teacher. The teachers have been burdened by these tough arrangements. Sometimes the teachers have failed to convey the full content of lectures because they did not have enough time to prepare and digest the content of the course with which they were not already familiar. Hence, I think some lectures are becoming a matter of routine, with the result that the students who have attended the courses and learned the limited knowledge will not be able to confidently meet the challenge of design tasks in the future.

Interviewee E (female, the teaching and research section of fashion design, 12 years' teaching experience): *I think that the decision makers (with their managerial team) who are leading an organisation that offers design education should be well cultured and should have a long-term vision. They should also be well informed through communication with qualified scholars in the field of design research. Furthermore, they should show full consideration for teachers who are on the front lines, and the relationship between them should be equal rather than hierarchical. However, as regards the issue discussed here, the managerial performance of the school is quite poor. As a result, the teachers do not feel good about the requirements, although they superficially agree with them. There are some inconsistencies. I just think this problem interferes with the initiative of the teachers.*

The interviews gave a snapshot of the negative effects of management on educational practice. As these interviews disclosed, the teachers do show some disagreement with the method of management, although they concealed their dissatisfaction in their mind and seldom expressed it publicly. On the other hand, the decision-makers and managerial staff become accustomed to this management style and thus take it for granted that the organisation is running smoothly in this way. These hidden conflicts, however, are likely to increase inefficiency in management.

The recruitment of new members who are competent in teaching modern design is troubling the school as well. Objectively, the university's location is a considerable disadvantage for the school, which is eager to attract qualified teachers. Compared with Chengdu or Chongqing, which are both centres in Southwestern China, the city of this university has a rather marginal location. This factor has the school run into difficulty with recruiting excellent young teachers, for whom cities such as Chengdu or Chongqing are more alluring. At the same time, the requirements for achieving strategic targets are challenging the teachers who have been working for the school. The above mentioned dean indirectly suggested that these demands are beyond the capabilities of some teachers at the school and is hoping this situation will be remedied by recruiting new members.

In addition, the school's overall development is encumbered by its outdated educational infrastructures and facilities. The designers of the buildings, which were constructed in the campus around the 1980s, could hardly take modern design education functions into account. As described in the brief history of the school, this reality is a result of the delayed development of modern design education in Western China, and the designers then could not foresee the rise of modern design education at this school in the twenty-first century. Consequently, many students, as well as a number of young teachers who are less tolerant of the poor teaching

conditions, have complained in private that the school buildings are so antiquated and not equal to fulfilling their task. Similarly, the underdeveloped facilities present other difficulties. For example, the lack of laboratories and equipment for some postgraduate courses is a serious impediment to the completion and quality of academic research.

Prospects

The problem discussed at the end of the last section will be addressed first. Another campus for the school was completed in 2021. The new buildings and facilities, designed with a full consideration of the functions of modern design education, began to serve all the students and teachers of the department of design. This time, those planning the new campus wisely asked for advice about the functional details of the buildings and facilities in advance. They collected the information by meeting with the faculty members, who voiced their requests. Along with the progressive improvements in educational infrastructures, a high-speed railway entered service in the same year. This railway links the university's city with Chengdu and Chongqing, integrating the city into the "one-hour economic circle" in Southwestern China, centred around Chengdu and Chongqing. The economic exchange and the cultural communication among the cities will be significantly increased. It is believed that this improvement will benefit the school in terms of human resource.

Continuous social modernisation, which leads to certain demands for modern design, will assure design education a place in modern China. Beyond any doubt, this school and its department of design will make steady progress in improved circumstances, although they are currently in a backward position, and their adopted policies, such as localisation and internationalisation, have been making steady progress. Nevertheless, the strong demands for modern design in China also raise the standards of Chinese modern design education. The higher standards are challenging the school to improve its modern design educational practice. The reform of the management system is becoming the most difficult challenge because it affects all aspects of educational practice. The old-fashioned management method should give way to the modernised methods in which "teacher-centred" is not just a slogan and the boundary between executive power and academic freedom is clearly defined. Otherwise, the school will suffer from inefficient modern design education that may not be perceived by the decision-makers but will weaken the school's every effort to modernise. In any case, the tasks involved in modernising the school's management system cannot be whitewashed by the modern or post-modern styled buildings and interior decorations on the new campus.

Conclusions

As a case study of anonymous modern design education in Western China, this research presents some aspects of current educational practice in terms of the achievements, disadvantages, and prospects at a specific school; these subjects have rarely appeared in traditional studies whose focus is normally on celebrated pioneers, historic events, or well-known educational organisations. This research investigates the School of Fine Arts at the above mentioned University and found that although this school lags behind its eastern peers, the modern design education at the school has been experiencing a sustained growth since its rise in the twenty-first century. The school has made great efforts to improve the educational practice of modern design and encourage teachers and students to involve themselves in relevant academic research. These attempts have resulted in achievements such as a stable annual number of graduates, the improvement of the curriculum, and incorporation of

localisation or internationalisation strategies aimed at future development (as illustrated above under the subtitle “Achievements in a difficult situation”), as well as in the disadvantages and problems characterizing the school’s transition, training methods, old-fashioned management system, recruitment of faculty members, and outdated educational infrastructures and facilities (as illustrated above under the subtitle “Disadvantages and problems”). Some limitations, e.g., the replacement of infrastructures and facilities, are becoming moot, while the other challenges, e.g., the reform of the management system, should be seriously concerned if the school wishes to improve under the changing conditions related to rising standards and intensified competition in the field of Chinese modern design education (as illustrated above under the subtitle “Prospects”). The investigation draws the following conclusions. First, anonymous design education practice is an integral part of Chinese modern design education. Although attracting little attention, the practice has been in progress. Second, anonymous design education practice makes achievements in a backward situation that means a series of disadvantages and problems, meanwhile facing new challenges.

Incidentally, according to John Ruskin and William Morris, modern design is obliged to serve the public, as well as to assist “the insulted and injured” portrayed by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Unknown designers, instead of stars, are most likely to provide the design services for the populace in Western China. Although the star designers are leading the way, they are still a minority in this area. The significant demands of the public for modern design, e.g., the interior decoration of a little restaurant or the signage at a local market, have been and will be satisfied by unknown designers. As, in large part, they have been the product of anonymous modern design education, schools and academies that undertake the unknown teaching of modern design are becoming increasingly valued. These institutes, therefore, will take on more economic and moral responsibility. This is the very reason why attention should be turned to them. Their rise and development suggest the need for higher-quality design activities, which have become more connected to the everyday-life of ordinary people in Western China.

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