

Redeveloping Design Education in Hong Kong?

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The Making of the Notions of Design

In Chinese-speaking societies, the word “sheji” (design) has a subtle distinction in relation to engineering, manufacturing, and construction projects. In industrial education, it usually has referred to scientific technology, production, and engineering techniques. For instance, early courses at the Hong Kong Technical College included “Structural Design” from the Department of Civil Engineering, “Transistor Radio Design” from the Department of Electrical Engineering, and “Jig and Tool Design,” “Procedure Design,” and even “Workshop Design” from the Department of Production Engineering.¹

These observations indicate how “design” and “design education” in Hong Kong initially aimed at providing technical input in industrial training, intended to develop the local industrial economy in the postwar era. This aim was far removed from any artistic advocacy, even though “art and design” had merged into a distinct category in everyday discourses. Since the 1960s, “visual art” and “design” have tended to be mentioned in the same breath in Hong Kong. Obvious examples include the Education Department’s change in the official subject title from “Art & Craft” into “Art and Design” in 1975. Furthermore, local art education syllabi and textbooks invariably have included “Graphic Design,” “Three-Dimensional Design,” and “Design Principles”; and of most of the design curricular, the like of “Art Appreciation” and “Art History” are indispensable parts. “Art” and “Design” seem to have an inevitably close relationship in Hong Kong—or do they? There was still public debate on whether “design” should be included into the visual arts funding category when the Hong Kong Arts Development Council was established in 1995.²

Although the problem of defining the difference between design/art/craft/technology has been the subject of more than a century of debate among industrial powers in the West,³ the idea of an allegiance between Art and Design has only been invented or adopted in the last thirty to forty years in Hong Kong. Is there then a necessary link between visual art and design? Why do we discuss the two ideas together so frequently?

In this paper, I will focus on the genesis and development of the current “mainstream” design education in Hong Kong (from the

- 1 Hong Kong Technical College, *Hong Kong Technical College Annual Report 1959/1960*.
- 2 For the public debates, see the following press articles: Leong, Koon Lai, (1995). “Sheji Guiru Shiyi Fen Yibeigeng, Hang Nei jiang Ban Luntan Pieqing Guanxi” (Design Sharing with Visual Art: A Symposium in the Profession to Clarify the Relation-ship). *Xianggang Lianhe Bao*, September 19, 1995; Fongji (1995). “Yizhanju Xuanju Timing Jiezhizai Ji, Zhiyi/ Sheji Yunnian Fenjia” (Election Nominations of the Art Development Council will be Closing, Visual Art/ Design are Preparing Their Separation). *Xianggang Jingji Ribao*, September 20, 1995; Lee, Kam Ping (1995). “Gongping de Shiyi Fanchou Dingyi” (A Fair Definition on the Realm of Visual Art). *Xianggang Lianhe Bao*, July 27, 1995; Kan, Tai Keung (1995 a). “Qing Gongping Duidai Yingyong Yishu (Shang)” (Treat Art Applications Fairly (First Part)) *Xianggang Lianhe Bao*, August 7, 1995; Kan, Tai Leung (1995 b). “Qing Gongping Duidai Yingyong Yishu (Xia)” (Treat Art Applications Fairly (Second Part)) *Xianggang Lianhe Bao*, August 8, 1995.



Figure 1 (above)
A 1935 advertisement.



Figure 2 (below)
A 1939 advertisement published in the 3rd
Hong Kong Products Expo pamphlet.

early 1950s–1970s), and examine how local education and industrial institutions have strived to interpret and incorporate the concept of “art and design” into their own shaping. In short, I ask how certain concepts find currency in a network of institutions which, in turn, shape the course of their own development and bias. How did these processes of conceptual integration and transition affect early design education in Hong Kong, and do they still have an effect today?

What Is “Design?” What Is “Design Education?”

In Hong Kong, or in other Chinese-speaking societies, the concept of design is translated from that of Western industrial powers. According to Matthew Turner, uses of the word “*Sheji*” (design) in China can be dated back to the 1920s; it first appeared in *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary with Chinese Translation*, published by the Shanghai Commercial Press in 1924.⁴ The word “*sheji*” also could be seen in advertisements in Hong Kong as early as the 1930s;⁵ and tentative plans of so-called “design education” already were under discussion in the mid-1950s.⁶ Nevertheless, the public was still vague about their understanding of “design” until the late 1960s. In a 1969 radio interview about industrial education in Hong Kong, the host began with a question for Mr. Lam Hon Chiu, a lecturer at Northcote College of Education (and a part-time lecturer at the Hong Kong Technical College), about the difference between “industrial and commercial design” and “business administration.”⁷ From this question, we can recognize how the concept of “design,” which we understand today, was still quite unfamiliar to the populace in the 1960s. Interestingly, in a Hong Kong Technical College Annual Report of the same period, the Commercial Design course was grouped under the Commerce Department of the institution.⁸ Therefore, it is important to appreciate how and why the notion of “design” has been indefinitely ascribed by the respective education sectors in Hong Kong, and how it gradually developed into a new subject distinct from the technology and engineering disciplines. I believe that this constituted a significant part of the development of the meaning of “design” in Hong Kong, and its appropriation by educational institutions and by other “interested parties.”

According to the *Annual Report of Education* for the 1954/55 academic year, the Chinese Manufacturers Union had made an offer to contribute HK\$1 million to the Hong Kong government towards the cost of the new campus for the Technical College (afterwards named the Hong Kong Technical College) in Hung Hom, Kowloon. New departments of Production Engineering, Textile Engineering, Industrial Chemistry, and Industrial Design were proposed,⁹ and “industrial design” became an official agenda item for the first time. By the end of 1957, the new campus finally was completed, and an evening class in “Commercial Design”¹⁰ was started in the 1959/60 academic year, with thirty-three on-the-job students enrolled in the

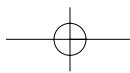
3 See, for example, Misha Black, “Lecture to the Institution of Mechanical Engineers”; (September 1972); and Misha Black, “Craft: Art or Design?” Talk to the Institute on College Craft Education, Northampton (April 13, 1976); in Avril Blake, ed. *The Black Papers on Design: Selected Writings of the Late Sir Misha Black* (London: Pergamon Press, 1983); and personal notes attached to Misha Black, *Report of Prof. M. Black on Industrial Design Education in Hong Kong, 10 April 1972* (Internal document, School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University).

4 Matthew Turner, *Ersatz Design—Interactions Between Chinese and Western Design in Hong Kong: 1950s–1960s* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Royal College of Art, 1993), 32.

5 Ibid., 17.

6 Director of Education, *Hong Kong Annual Report by the Director of Education for the Financial Year 1954/1955*, 48.

7 Interview published in Radio-Television Hong Kong, ed.) *Gongye Jiaoyu Zhinan: Jieshao Xianggang Gongye Xueyuan ji Molichenshan Gongye Xuexiao* (Guidelines to Industrial Education: An Introduction of the Hong Kong Technical College and Morrison Hill Technical Institute), 1969, 72.

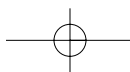


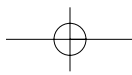
- 8 Hong Kong Technical College, *Hong Kong Technical College Annual Report 1959/1960*.
- 9 Director of Education, *Hong Kong Annual Report by the Director of Education for the Financial Year 1954/1955*, 48.
- 10 Interestingly, the Chinese translation for the Commercial Design Course, “*Shangpin Meishu Sheji Ban*” [Class in Artistic Design for Commercial Products] was not equivalent to the English title. The concept of “art” has been attached to the Chinese term “commercial design,” which shows that the idea of design had been closely identified with art. See *Hong Kong Technical College Commercial Design: 1962 Class Students’ Handbook* (1964).
- 11 Hong Kong Technical College *Hong Kong Technical College Annual Report 1959/1960*.
- 12 Interview published in Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) (ed.), *Gongye Jiaoyu Zhinan: Jieshao Xianggang Gongye Xueyuan ji Molichenshan Gongye Xuexiao* (Guidelines to Industrial Education: An Introduction of Hong Kong Technical College and Morrison Hill Technical School), (1969), 76.
- 13 The subjects offered by Canton Municipal Arts Institute in the 1920s included: charcoal sketching (from geometric models, still life, utensils, plaster models to figure drawing and landscape painting), art history, color theory, perspective, anatomy, and pattern construction. See Zhao, Shiming, “The Establishment and Development of the Canton Municipal Arts Institute” in *The Hong Kong Alumni of Canton Municipal Arts Institute Newsletter*, (Issue 1, 1963):1.
- 14 RTHK interview, 1969, 72–73.
- 15 This statement had been repeated by the governor, and was quoted in speeches by members of the Chinese Manufacturers’ Association. See, *The Special Record of the 18th Exhibition of Hong Kong Products* (Hong Kong: The Chinese Manufacturers’ Association, 1960), 9. What also is interesting here is that Black did not use the word “design,” this might be due to the unfamiliarity of the term to the manufacturers.

first year.¹¹ In his radio interview, Mr. Lam Hon Chiu recalled that the course mainly included the two categories of “basic design” and “classified design” (for industrial and commercial products). The former involved studies in design principles, color theory, perspective, printing technique, principles of composition, drawing, and the study of new industrial processes; while the latter included studies in trademark and poster design, intaglio printing, textile patterning, packaging design, window display and interior decoration.¹² In the classification of the subjects, “design” seems to have been removed from the technology and engineering disciplines to form part of a fine art type of training. This particularly was obvious in the content of the “basic design” teaching, which revealed a close affinity to the curriculum of the Canton Municipal Arts Institute in the 1920s.¹³ The subjects contained in “classified design,” on the other hand, pointed to various applications, primarily in the decoration and marketing of products rather than to the more technical aspects of product manufacturing in the earlier sense of the word. Reading between the lines of the interview, Mr. Lam seemed to have identified a new realm of “visual design” which was supposed to be undertaken by a profession other than the technical personnel in the factories: “The design course is not to train technicians or craftsmen, but designers... who could collaborate with technicians or craftsmen in order to serve the function of designing and improving industrial and commercial products.”¹⁴

Whether consciously or not, it is perhaps not accidental that the notion of “design” should be associated with “art” or visual art training. This practice is not so much inherited from the foreign traditions as from the social and industrial rhetoric in Hong Kong during the 1950s and ‘60s. At that time, the manufacturing industry in Hong Kong was about to take off, and there was an awareness of how to raise the market competitiveness of the products. Within the industrial and commercial sectors, one of these measures was to improve product appearance. Sir Robert Black, then Governor of Hong Kong, emphasized in his speech at the opening ceremony of the 18th Exhibition of Hong Kong Products: “...it concerns the need to improve the appearance and the labeling of our products. An attractive packing is a silent and effective salesman.”¹⁵ The so-called “appearance and labeling” at that time generally referred to the means of packaging or sales promotion and the like, which were seen as types of “additives” for product promotion.¹⁶ “Attractive appearance” had become a brand-new capital for the manufacturing industry to promote sales. No wonder that the concept of “design,” originally subordinated to the realm of technology and engineering, began to draw closer to the notion of visual or fine art. This, in turn, spurred on the local synthesis of “art and design.”

It was, perhaps, as a “silent salesman” that the first evening class in commercial design offered by the Hong Kong Technical





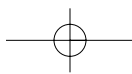
- 16 In order to conform to the governor's promulgation, the 18th Hong Kong Products Expo in 1960 held the first "Package Decoration Contest" and "Stall Decoration and Display Contest," and even "Product Photographic Contest." The main focus was to improve the appearance of products, and to deal with the "visual design" of product displays. Even the winner of the essay-writing competition held by the Expo—champion of the women's category, with the title of "Use Hong Kong Products to Beautify Our Homes"—stressed the "beautifying" function of the products. Ibid, 62–63.
- 17 The expectations of the industrial sector regarding design, however, went beyond this. For instance, Sir Chung Sze-yuen, an influential industrialist, then chairman of the Federation of Industries, had long been proposing his three-prong approach: (1) [The manufacturing industries] must strive to climb up the technological ladder in design, in quality, and in the production of the existing products; (2) They must diversify their productions into those requiring higher and more sophisticated technological skills; and (3) They must intensify trade promotion in existing markets and develop new ones. See Chung Sze-yuen, "Hong Kong's Postwar Industrial Development" in *Silver Jubilee Exhibition of Hong Kong Products* (The Chinese Manufacturer's Association, 1967), 48.
- 18 See interview of Shum, Sing-york and Ching, Yeun-kai, "Industrial Education in Hong Kong" in RTHK (ed.), *Gongye Jiaoyu Zhinan: Jieshao Xianggang Gongye Xueyuan ji Molichenshan Gongye Xuexiao* (Guidelines to Industrial Education: An Introduction of Hong Kong Technical College and Morrison Hill Technical Institute, 1969), 16.
- 19 See Lam Hon Chiu (RTHK 1969, 73–74).
- 20 See *Hong Kong Technical College Prospectus* (1967/68), 54; and the Hong Kong Technical College's poster of the Design Graduation Show, 1971.
- 21 RTHK interview, 1969, 73–74.

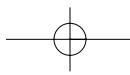
College in 1959 founded the roots of local professional design education. Design was seen as being about "visual beauty" or "attractive appearance," and according to popular opinion, visual beauty was a derivative of visual art. Giving industrial products a beautiful appearance then was what design was all about. It was not surprising, therefore, to find that "design education" in Hong Kong had come to pick up on merely the "art school" model, leaving other industrial concerns untouched.¹⁷

The Definition of a Designer

In the 1960s, the industrial sector was keen on promoting local industrial education. Among other requests, it urged the government to provide appropriate training for industrial personnel and to run formal training programs to upgrade existing manpower for the technical and manufacturing sectors. Human resources in Hong Kong's industrial education system, at the time, could be classified into four levels: engineer or technologist, technician, craftsman, and operator. Engineers or technologists mainly were trained at universities under more "theoretical" courses; while the rest were trained at technical institutes or within the relevant industries by more "practical" instruction.¹⁸ The main obligation of Hong Kong Technical College was to help upgrade the level of qualification for the respective practitioners in the industrial sector, i.e., from the level of operators to that of craftsmen, and from craftsmen to technicians and technicians to technologists, etc.¹⁹ If we define a designer's qualification to be one between that of the engineer/technologist and the technician/craftsman, we may consider "design" to be a brand-new skill deriving from both technological theories and manufacturing practices.

Accordingly, Hong Kong Technical College had been planning to establish a Department of Industrial and Commercial Design by 1967, with the objective of offering courses to help enhance technicians' and craftsmen's understanding of new trends and novel knowledge, to affirm their own tastes, and to strengthen their confidence in expressing ideas in written and graphic form.²⁰ Mr. Lam Hon Chiu attempted to prescribe the following requirements for a designer's training: a student should: (1) possess a high level of skills which enable him to employ sketches and design methods to express his unique ideas; (2) be exposed to creative design studio practices; (3) be able to serve in factories as a design-trainee so as to develop his ability in real practices; (4) be familiar with various technical procedures employed by factories in Hong Kong; (5) develop his creativity and train himself to adapt to changing circumstances including adopting measures to solve problems, and stimulate his curiosity to enrich his knowledge; and (6) become a practical designer with a unique personal style.²¹ Hence, a designer should at least possess the technical know-how of a technician, on the one hand, and also an attitude to create, plus the ability to solve





problems and be familiar with design techniques and knowledge; in other words, demonstrate a new form of technical competence coupled with a sense of artistry and openness.

The Institutional Shaping of Design Education

In just a decade, the commercial design class had evolved into a department at the Hong Kong Technical College. The main directions for setting up the Department of Industrial and Commercial Design were listed in the 1967/68 program scheme, which stated that a designer's training could be achieved through three learning stages. The first included the teaching of "basic elements common to all design" including "the visual approach to ideas" which consisted of "color, pattern, style, texture, graphic presentation, lettering, sourcing ideas, and rendering." The second stage aimed at tackling "particular problems of separate crafts. For example, three-dimensional work such as display and interior design would begin to diverge from two-dimensional work such as printed textiles, commercial art, lettering, and signwriting." In the third stage, students would have to become involved in design practices within local industrial environments, with emphases being placed on local products and international standards.²² This was all planned in an attempt to raise the design standards and the professional qualifications of local technicians and craftsmen.

While the above outlines the structure for running the department at its early stage, it was likely to have been inherited from an early art-based curriculum, and had yet to develop into the kind of training that fulfilled the needs of the industry, i.e., "to give general training in design, backed by a sound knowledge of the main industrial materials and processes."²³ Based on the requests of the industrial sector, more timely and appropriate courses were added into the three-year Higher Diploma program in industrial design formally launched in 1968. On paper, at least, it attempted to map out a relatively comprehensive program catering for the needs of the industrial communities. It affirmed that the creativeness of the designers needed to complement the scientific knowledge and discipline of the engineer and the technician. And it attempted to ensure that the main emphasis of design training should coincide with the priorities of local manufacturing industries, namely, product design, apparel design, textile design, and graphic and packaging design, and that "the designer is a creative person whose skill in envisaging a product is highly developed, and whose technical awareness makes him an integral part of the production team."²⁴ Envisaging a product, according to the synopsis of the Graduation Show of the 1971 cohort, "can mean showing the future product in sketch or plan and elevation form, or it can mean making the prototype or mock up in three dimensional form."²⁵ This was reflected in the following outline of studies:²⁶

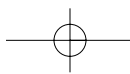
22 See *Hong Kong Technical College Prospectus* (1967/68), 55.

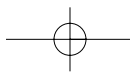
23 Hong Kong Technical College's poster of the Design Graduation Show, 1971.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*





1 Technical methods, materials and manufacturing procedures:

Textile knowledge, engineering knowledge, electrical knowledge, garment construction, business studies, and building construction.

2 Three-dimensional design:

Design projects in: furniture, environmental studies, industrial products, and prototype making in: metal and wire, plastic, fiberglass, timber, corrugated board, and plaster.

3 Graphic and studio skills:

Measured drawing, plans, elevations, sections, layouts, rendering in various media, representational techniques, diagrams, photograms, elementary photography, use of letter-forms and typography, silk-screen printing with ink, and packaging graphics.

27 The exhibition was co-organized by the two design programs of the Department of Extramural Studies, CUHK and the Department of Industrial and Commercial Design, the Hong Kong Technical College. The synopsis of the exhibition may be considered as one of the earliest public articulations of design principles in Hong Kong. See the brochure of the exhibition published by the City Museum and Art Gallery, 1969.

28 Ibid.

29 In the brochure, it is stated: "A section of the exhibition features the students' interpretations of these rules and principles (Fundamental Design Section); another section features the students' personal experiments with these rules and principles (Creative Design Section); and the last section shows how these rules and principles are applied to practical problems (Applied Design Section)."

30 This includes another two design exhibitions, entitled, "Design '71" and "Foundations for Art and Design," again presented by the City Museum and Art Gallery in May 1971 and September 1972, respectively. The former displayed works of the first cohort of Higher Diploma graduates from the Industrial and Commercial Design Course, Hong Kong Technical College; and the latter exhibited design works from students of the Certificate Courses in Fundamentals of Art and Design, offered by the Department of Extramural Studies of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), a similar course offered at about the same period with that of CUHK.

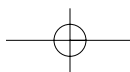
The practicality of the program could be seen in its specificity, which involved not only applications of various materials, skills, and processes, but also a general knowledge of different aspects of manufacturing. In short, judging from the program contents, the concepts of "industrial design education" appear to have transcended the early unitary emphasis on "beautiful appearance," and probably had begun to suit the ideology and development of the prospering light industrial sector in Hong Kong.

Apart from the design education model offered by the Technical College, another influential model is believed to have been that of the "fundamental design school." As early as 1967, the Department of Extramural Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) took its first step in running a new design course. The manifestations of an embryonic "fundamental design" can be seen in the introduction to the "Design: The Beginnings," exhibition held at the City Museum and Art Gallery in autumn 1969:²⁷

Just as there is grammar in language, there are rules and principles which underlie every work of design. These rules and principles enable the beginner to explore the various relationships and possibilities of form and color, and finally to arrive at individual creativity which is the main goal of any design training.

The organizers, in explaining the title of this exhibition stated: "This exhibition represents, not the historical beginnings of design, but the beginnings of individual creativity in design among a group of Hong Kong students who have chosen design as their career."²⁸ Reading between the lines and from the structure of the exhibition,²⁹ it seemed to favor an individualist attitude more akin to artistic creation than to industrial production.

A keen promoter of this design ideology was Wucius Wong, who worked at the City Museum & Art Gallery, and also was a



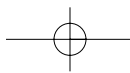


Table 1

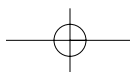
	Department of Extramural Studies, CUHK	Instructor(s)	Department of Industrial and Commercial Design, HKTC	Instructor(s)
Group A: Fundamental Design	Two-dimensional Design; Three-dimensional Design; Color and Design	Wucius Wong	Printmaking Design	John Hadfield
Group B: Creative Design	Experimental Design	Wucius Wong	Decoration for Room Dividers	John Hadfield
Group C: Applied Design	Graphic and Display Design; Individual Projects	Joseph Au John Chan Chui Yung-sang Patrick Chung Fay Ming-gi Joseph Fung King Chia-lun Henry Steiner Van Lau Jennie Wong James Wong Wucius Wong	Textile Design; Display Design	John Hadfield
			Graphic Design; Packaging Design	Tso Po-kwong

31 See Wucius Wong, *Principles of Two-Dimensional Design* (NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1972); and *Principles of Three-Dimensional Design* (NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1977). The Chinese versions of both books subsequently were published in 1974 and 1980, respectively.

32 At the turn of the '70s, subjects which had been called "art" were renamed as "art and design." See *Art Bulletin* No. 1 (January 1971). Published by the Syllabuses and Textbook Committee, Education Department, Hong Kong; which carries an article by a lecturer, David Pun, of the Commercial and Industrial Design Department of the Hong Kong Technical College entitled, "The Meaning of Industrial Design to Secondary School Students" Also see *Suggested Syllabuses for Secondary Schools: Provisional Syllabuses for Art and Design (Form I – III). One of the Series of syllabuses recommended by the Curriculum Development Committee* (Hong Kong: The Government Printer, 1975).

part-time lecturer in the design program at the Department of Extramural Studies, CUHK. He launched a number of exhibitions of students' work,³⁰ which had started to arouse public interest and academic attention in design, and he also devoted a lot of effort to popularizing what he believed to be the basic principles of design—fundamental design—through his writing and publications.³¹ The concept quickly became an essential element of the official art and design syllabus in primary and secondary schools.³²

In comparing the projects offered by the Department of Extramural Studies at CUHK with those at the Department of Industrial and Commercial Design, Hong Kong Technical College (Table 1), we can draw two preliminary observations: (1) the program requirements of the former are relatively generic and obviously devoid of the physical resources needed for industrial training, while the latter are more "industry oriented" (including the likes of decoration for room dividers or textile design), and yet more graphic in nature; and (2) the instructors have primarily graphic and fine artist backgrounds, and none have experience in manufacturing industry. This may explain why the projects, by and large, are oriented towards graphic decoration, and why the school of "fundamental design" had such a lack of commensurate resources (both facilities and expertise) for "proper" industrial development.





In this sense, the foundation of all design learning is “visual language”: language comes before design. Fundamental design means the study of visual elements and principles, the pursuit of alternative images, forms, and spaces in order to create, and to look for perfect formal (graphic or three-dimensional, etc.) qualities. The characteristic (like that of traditional art training) is to allow ample space for experimentation and creativity without actually becoming involved in the complicated processes of manufacturing. This, in other words, was less resource intensive, and it could become an easy model which lent advantage to the promotion and popularization of design, and reduced potential stress when facing the potential resource constraints of the respective societal, educational, and industrial demands.³³

Perhaps, unconsciously, this idea of “design” gradually was molded into a large scale by those who took a more “unconstrained” attitude towards design education. From the perspective of running a school, the resources needed for this model of design training could be relatively modest, and it could certainly achieve the purpose of cultivating personnel in design, in a rather generic sense.

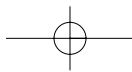
Negotiating Schools of Thought

There were good reasons, therefore, that discourse in “design” and its education orientation had drawn close to the realm of visual art, or to so-called “decoration and packaging” (later called graphic design or graphic communication) at the expense of the early technical conceptions of design training mentioned above. This kind of change gradually was brought about and argued for by various interested parties and schools of thought promoted by the respective authorities. Adding to this, resource constraints imposed on the institutions also had led to the “simplification” of the curriculum of local design education. If divorced from technological knowledge and technical know-how, design training would only become formalistic, favoring appearance and styling, but not “design” in the full sense of the word.

In this regard, during the 1960s and ‘70s, and while local “design education” was still in the making, several proposals for its future were under consideration. For instance: Sir Misha Black, from the United Kingdom, was invited to evaluate the status of Hong Kong design education and to propose models for upgrading local professional design programs. His recommendations, among others, included, that, “(1) The Department of Mechanical Engineering should be allowed to develop specialization in product engineering, and the Department of Electrical Engineering should be invited to consider the viability of such an option for a few of its students; (2) all engineering departments should include familiarization lectures within their courses in the social and aesthetic aspects of engineering design; (3) the Department of Architecture at the University

33 The lack of resources was evident in the *Final Report of the Polytechnic Planning Committee*, July 1971; in which it considered relocating the Industrial & Commercial Design Department because the Technical College was to be upgraded into the Hong Kong Polytechnic:

This area of study is offered at the Technical College. It was thought that it would be advantageous for students studying in this area to have ready access to the engineering and technology workshops to do technical processes in their experiments on materials, and in making prototypes of their designs. However, as long as this department is provided with design workshops equipped with hand tools and comparatively simple and inexpensive machine tools, the needs of the students can be met. In any case, the training of students is such that they themselves are not capable of using complicated workshop equipment. For the production of difficult designs, students can always come to the college at Hung Hom [i.e., HKTC] to seek the guidance from the workshop staff on the technical aspects. It is, therefore, considered that this area of study should be sited in Wan Chai [i.e., Morrison Hill Technical Institute]”; 38.



should establish a course in industrial and interior design, the industrial design content being oriented towards the needs of the building industry but not restricted to it.”³⁴

But why was this set of plans not accepted and carried forward, when the Design Department of the Technical College, and the design course at the Department of Extramural Studies (CUHK) were able to develop? This probably was due to the lack of clarity in the classification of local education hierarchies; especially when designer training was defined as falling between that of engineers and technicians (see above); and hence, a designer’s vague “professional” qualification would make educational institutions difficult to find it a place, and therefore unable to solicit proper resources for its development.

Another example: in order to prepare for the upgrading of the Technical College to the Polytechnic in 1972, the College’s administration established an advisory panel at the end of 1969, “to draw up priorities in the formation of courses, and to lay down a curriculum for each course and ensure that it meets the needs of industry” for the Department of Industrial and Commercial Design.³⁵ At that time, Professor Michitaka Yoshioka of Chiba University in Japan was invited to assist in the process of completing the report, which proposed a broader outlook on industrial design training than the ones implemented later on. In the first place, the report confirmed the need for five different kinds of programs within the industrial and commercial environments. The programs, which ideally were to be offered in a four-year mode, included: Product Design (electrical and mechanical products); Product Design (general products such as furniture and three-dimensional design, etc.); Apparel Design; Textile Design; and Graphic and Packaging Design. The resulting qualification was set at the level of technologist (at the undergraduate level). Program contents were suggested in an initial three-year mode:³⁶

Design Theory—comprising design semantics; design iconics; ergonomics; and sociological, economics and aesthetic aspects;

Relevant Studies—comprising material science; mathematics and computer familiarization; physics; advanced English; psychology; marketing and market research; and history of subject;

Studio Practice—comprising all practical design work; project work; observational drawing; color study; and drawing office procedure; and

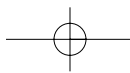
Workshop Practice—comprising materials familiarization; relevant techniques; model and prototype making; bench work and advanced machine work.³⁷

34 Misha Black, *Report of Prof. M. Black on Industrial Design Education in Hong Kong*, April 10, 1972. (Internal document, School of Design, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

35 Hong Kong Polytechnic Advisory Panel, *A Programme for a Course in Industrial Design to Be Incorporated Within the Polytechnic*, 1969. (Internal document, School of Design, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.



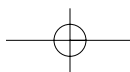
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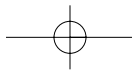
It is evident that this proposal differed a great deal from the earlier articulation, and that it was not so removed from the distinctive technical characteristics of the technology and manufacturing sector. But why was this substantial proposal not adopted? The obvious explanation was a lack of resources. Later in 1973, and in preparation for the transition from the Technical College to Polytechnic, Professor Yoshioka was formally invited to write program proposals for two departments. The recommendations he made in his 1974 report had become compromised; they now consisted of two categories of subjects which included: (a): introduction of engineering fundamentals; introduction to basic tools and machine operations; introduction to graphic semiology, media and materials; introduction to design fundamentals; and (b) art appreciation (history of human intelligence with visual aids); history of design; design methods; ergonomics; properties and fabrication of materials; and social behavior of various regions (preferential behavior). All of the above would be supplemented by lectures including product design surveys, analysis and development, etc.³⁸ Originally conceived as a four-year course with an international perspective, again the program was not adopted within its original intention.

As for facilities, the suggestion of the Advisory Panel was to establish: a mechanical workshop; an electrical engineering workshop; a tailoring and dressmaking workshop; a dye, roller-print, and weave workshop; a press-print and experimental workshop; a timber workshop; a paint workshop, a plaster workshop; and a photography workshop with darkroom. It requested that the design department do its best to establish independent facilities.³⁹ But these proposals had been curtailed due to the shortage of space and resources and, as a result, the program concerning the “electrical and mechanical” side of product design disappeared from the later reports and departmental discussions. In fact, until quite recently,⁴⁰ the design department at the Hong Kong Polytechnic continued to exclude the more technical and scientific aspects of design in favor of styling or visual-based design. We can see that design courses have suffered the fate of being screened and simplified from the early planning stages to the final process of implementation.

Apart from the program’s duration and resource constraints, the shortage of various kinds of professional design personnel also contributed to the unitary style and practice in design teaching. Teachers and designers had distinct professional competencies and expertise. Those who were willing to teach full-time did not necessarily have strong industrial and technical backgrounds. They would not necessarily have been able to conceive course materials and projects relevant to a comprehensive context of industrial production; or it would have been difficult for them to apply creative experimental outcomes to specific industrial and commercial settings. The Design Department at the Hong Kong Polytechnic

- 38 Michitaka Yoshioka, “Self Observations and Exploratory Study on the Scope of Design in Education Within the Hong Kong: A Report Submitted to the Academic Committee and the Board of Governors of the Hong Kong Polytechnic, Oct. 1974” (Internal document, School of Design, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University).
- 39 Hong Kong Polytechnic Advisory Panel (1969), “A Programme for a Course in Industrial Design to Be Incorporated within the Polytechnic” (Internal document, School of Design, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University).
- 40 Now it seems to be quite different from the past, especially with the craze for information technology, where IT education is under the government’s advocacy and support. At the end of 2000, the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, held the “3rd International Conference of Computer-aided Industrial Design and Conceptual Design,” jointly organized with the Industrial Centre of the same university. Participants started to discuss anew the relationship between design, technology and manufacturing industry. The resources allocated today perhaps facilitate the creation of a design education that would be quite distinct from the previous endeavors.





often received complaints from external consultants about the lack of appropriate instructors—especially in the fields of product design and costume design—during the internal review process. The opening remarks of Professor Yoshioka's report explained the scarcity of the ideal design teacher:⁴¹

...being the latter part of the twentieth century with highly developed scientific, technological skills and the overwhelming inflow of information in various forms, coupled with complexities in management, distribution and consumption systems, it is well-nigh impossible to locate an instructor fluent in overall global knowledge... There is an obvious inadequacy of staff members especially with regard to the many areas in the field of design that need to be covered. It is understood that there has been great difficulty in terms of staff recruitment and, as a result, sometimes staff members are increased not so much as to fill the need to carry out certain study programmes which have been neglected due to the lack of qualified teachers, but just for the sake of increasing manpower....

Staffing was, and perhaps still is, a major factor in the development of any nascent design program; the availability and appropriateness of human resources directly affects program planning, design assumptions, and practical orientation. The knowledge an instructor possesses will determine the outcome of the teaching, program and its orientation, and of the students' competencies and perspectives. These perspectives in turn will help to shape future concepts of design and design education.

In Conclusion

The issues Hong Kong faced are not, in effect, new or unfamiliar, but they were and are of prime importance. Design education, especially in a community such as Hong Kong which in many ways is still culturally "self-contained," is of fundamental importance to the development of design practice, concepts, methods and, above all, in the formation of a respected and respectable design profession. The fact that the fundamental decision-making process that underpinned the establishment of design education in Hong Kong was largely resource-driven not only characterized its future, but also demonstrated a lack of willingness to understand the potential offered by design. Hong Kong industry still is suffering from its effects. Predicated on shortsightedness and a lack of vision design education, to this day, has served to constrain and stultify the proper development and appreciation of professional design in Hong Kong.

41 Michitaka Yoshioka, Report (1974), 8 and 13.

