

# Comparative Study of Chinese and Australian Art Design Education

## Taking Visual Communication Design as an Example

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**Abstract**—Through the comparative study of the major of advertising design& production in department of visual communication in the college of art design of Guangdong Industry Polytechnic and the visual communication major in the college of art and design and architecture (MADA) of Australia's Monash university, this paper aims to find the commonalities and differences between Chinese and Australian art design education based on the comparison of the content of the curriculum, including the value orientation of training target, teaching concept and other related documents, basic data, to address the weak links and provide practical guidance and help for building world-class design education.

**Keywords**—*Monash University; visual communication design; comparative study*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Monash Art Design & Architecture (hereinafter referred to as MADA) affiliated with Monash university which was founded in 1958, ranked 50th in the major of art design among universities in the world. As China is building first-class vocational colleges in China and building first-class majors, the Guangdong Industry Polytechnic, looking forward to the professional future development strategy layout, takes the international advanced school-running model and the majors of high level from home and abroad as example with the international vision and strategic vision, to cultivate and build its professional features and advantages, and establish the dominant position of its majors in similar majors in China. In 2016, the college of art design of Guangdong Industry Polytechnic concluded a cooperation agreement with MADA to carry out in-depth cooperation in international exchange students, teacher exchange and teacher cultivation in the fields of visual communication design and industrial design, including. Therefore we are able to get close and comprehensive access to the world-class design education, and study it through field investigation, expert visiting, student discussion, literature and data analysis, visual communication professional curriculum content, including the value orientation of training target, school system, curriculum and study schedules, etc.

### II. VISUAL COMMUNICATION MAJOR IN MADA AND COURSE OVERVIEW

MADA's visual communication design major is dedicated to cultivating integrated innovative talents with cross-disciplinary thinking in multiple technologies. The training goal focuses on the needs of advertising, media, film and television, publishing and other industries. The authoritative experts and scholars in the field of design education, the industry leaders who are well known in the design industry and the top designers from the company together, have built a world-class professional and part-time teaching team combining theory and practice.

The courses offered focus on the cultivation of students' practical ability and innovative spirit, so the graduates have strong visual communication skills and creative thinking ability, and thus have strong employment competitiveness.

#### A. Course Setting of MADA Visual Communication Design and Its Features

At the present stage, MADA has a three-year study system for visual communication design, with a total of 144 credits. Contents of the curriculum include: conveying design theory, drawing, art design health and safety, visual culture, avant-garde design, design sociology, visual communication design principle, design research, design criticism, and optional courses. Four categories are included: studio practice courses (72 credits), design theory courses (36 credits), elective courses (30 credits) and painting courses (6 credits). Among them, the studio's practical courses and theoretical courses are the core courses of the major, which forms the basic teaching framework of the major; occupational health and safety (0 credits) is a compulsory course offered by MADA for all students to enable students to effectively deal with health and safety issues in design work. As can be seen in "Table I", clear teaching objectives and flexible curriculum contents have formed the prominent features of MADA visual communication design education.

**TABLE I. COURSES IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN MAJOR OF MADA AND CREDIT SETTING**

<b>144credits</b>	<b>Freshman year (48 credits)</b>	<b>Sophomore year (48 credits)</b>	<b>Junior year (48 credits)</b>
First semester	1. Studio practice courses (12 credits) 2. Painting (6 credits) 3. Visual culture (6 credits)	1. Studio practice courses (12 credits) 2. Design sociology (6 credits) 3. Optional courses (6 credits)	1. Studio practice courses (12 credits) 2. Design research (6 credits) 3. Elective courses (6 credits)
Second semester	1. Studio practice courses (12 credits) 2. Avant-garde design (6 credits) 3. Optional courses (6 credits)	1. Studio practice courses (12 credits) 2. Visual communication design theory (6 credits) 3. Optional courses (6 credits)	1. Studio practice courses (12 credits) 2. Design strategy and professional practice (6 credits) 3. Optional courses (6 credits)

### *B. Studio Practical Courses of Visual Communication Design*

The overall proportion of this course accounts for half of the total number of courses, and studio practice courses are offered every semester. The course content and teaching objectives are deepened with the improvement of students' professional level. In the studio, freshmen are free to explore and carry out project practice, learn 2D, 3D and digital media technology, and explore the possibility of multidisciplinary integration of visual communication design under the premise of mastering the technology. Sophomore and junior students gain comprehensive design practice skills and knowledge by participating in real design projects. Courses are organized by principal teacher (examiner) and assisted by the program coordinator. The study time includes 8 hours of class time and 16 hours of independent practical learning per week.

### *C. Optional Courses of Visual Communication Design Major*

The content setting and the arrangement of the optional courses, which accounts for one quarter of the total courses, follow the trend of industry development and the change of market demand, mainly including digital media, printing and publishing, animation, sound and video, digital interaction, 3d design, packaging design, environment design, etc. Students can choose to build related knowledge and competence independently according to their own interests and career development. The optional courses on the whole reflect the trend of keeping pace with the times and they are open and practical.

### *D. Visual Communication Design Theory Course*

The theoretical courses offered by MADA's visual communication design major include: visual communication design theory, design sociology, avant-garde design, visual culture introduction, design research, design strategy and professional practice or design criticism. The theoretical courses are evaluated through research papers. The assessment method of theory course is mostly: research paper

### *E. Drawing Course*

Drawing course is opened in each major in MADA. Through learning this course can students master correct observation methods, drawing language expression and the use of various drawing materials to develop the required artistic practice and knowledge skills, including the aesthetic context and aesthetic criticism of history, theory, philosophy and painting in preparation for the development of the further design courses. The teaching time of drawing course is set as follows: 4 hours of studio (atelier) study per week under the guidance of teachers and 8 hours of student independent study per week.

## **III. COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE COURSES OF SIMILAR MAJORS IN GUANGDONG INDUSTRY POLYTECHNIC AND MADA**

It can be seen from "Table II" that there are lots of similarities in the features of the courses in the two schools: the professional curriculum in both schools are composed of theoretical courses, practical courses and optional courses; courses are set in accord with the rules in design education and the cognitive level of students in both schools; knowledge and skill that can meet the requirements of current job as well as future career development is offered to students based on local industry needs in both schools; students' design thinking and Design execution capability are cultivated; the courses offered basically cover several major fields and contents of visual communication design.

**TABLE II. COMPARISON OF THE VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN CURRICULUM IN GUANGDONG INDUSTRY POLYTECHNIC AND MADA**

Monash Art Design & Architecture (MADA)	Guangdong Industry Polytechnic		
	<i>Basic and quality courses</i>	<i>Professional basic courses</i>	<i>Professional core course</i>
studio practice courses (72 credits) painting (6 credits) visual communication design theory (6 credits) visual culture introduction (6 credits) design sociology (6 credits) avant-garde design (6 credits) design research (6 credits) design strategy and professional practice (6 credits) 144 credits in total	ideological and moral cultivation and legal basis (4 credits) Introduction to Mao Zedong thought and the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics (4 credits) career planning for college students (3 credits) innovation ability (1.5 credits) sports (3 credits) military sports (2 credits) college English (8.5 credits)	professional guidance (2.5 credits) innovation thinking training (2 credits) composition design (2.5 credits) business illustration (2.5 credits) Modeling basic training (2 credits) image synthesis processing (2.5 credits) integrated creative application (3 credits) paper design (2 credits) digital media foundation (2 credits) graphic design history (2.5 credits) market and consumer psychology (2.5 credits) adornment design (3.5 credits) graphically creative design and production (3.5 credits) font design(3.5 credits) carton structure and packaging design (3.5 credits) advertisement case analysis (2.5 credits) packaging orientation and planning (2 credits) traditional decoration design (3.5 credits) network integrated technology (3 credits ) new concept packaging design (6 credits) plane thematic project design (5 credits)	format design and production (3.5 credits) package decoration design and production (3.5 credits) advertising design and production (3.5 credits) logo design and VI design and production (3.5 credits) book binding design and production (5 credits)
			<i>Extended courses</i>
			vector graphics rendering (2 credits) photography technology and application (2 credits) inner department optional courses (8 credits) public optional courses (5 credits) internship (15 credits)
Total Credits: 144 credits	Total Credits: 135 credits		

#### A. Different Positions and Roles of Studios in Teaching

Studio practice courses, as the foundation of design education throughout, is a feature of Australian art design education. The studio course teacher is usually a professor with rich experience in teaching and design practice. The studio has relatively fixed staff and complete professional facilities, with the advanced professional equipment and infrastructure in line with the trend of industrial technology development. There are technical staffs in the studio to provide professional consulting services for students so students can use all kinds of equipment and tools with online booking or showing their certificates. The whole process of creativity, design, production and production from concept to finished product in the studio can be completed. With humanized design of teaching mode and teaching environment, the classroom atmosphere is free and active, and students of other departments can also participate in learning through application. Through continuous cooperation with enterprise units and some virtual design projects, the studio enables students to timely understand the development trends and demand for talents of the market and industry. Different from MADA studio as the core teaching platform, the establishment of studio in Guangdong Industry Polytechnic, due to the large number of students, insufficient teaching resources and equipment and poor environment, can only be the practice place which provides a teaching demonstration effect.

#### B. Differences in Curriculum Setting and Organizational Form

Both are three-year programs, but the difference is that Guangdong Industry Polytechnic is a junior college while MADA provides bachelor's degree for students. As can be seen from "Table II", MADA's courses are mainly about specialized courses, theoretical courses and practical courses, with the total number of courses in 3 years is only about 10; in contrast, in Guangdong Industry Polytechnic there are over 30, mainly in terms of professional fields and knowledge distribution. The introduction of knowledge courses in humanities and society and the integrated knowledge courses from concept to creativity to production are lacking to integrate the courses.

#### C. Different Degree of Participation of Students in Learning

In MADA, a large number of teaching activities are completed through students' independent learning. In addition to the required pre-class preparation, homework review and extended reading, many courses are completed by students independently through online teaching and online teaching. Besides compulsory courses, students can choose courses and research directions independently according to their own interests and hobbies. The high degree of freedom to select courses meets education requirements of different types and levels of students. The student-oriented education concept permeates every aspect of teaching. While the optional courses in Guangdong Industry Polytechnic are mostly formal. Due to the insufficient

participation of students in optional courses, the optional courses are of low value for students and considered useless. MADA attaches great importance to students' analysis and understanding of actual cases in the course. Without fixed textbooks, teachers usually recommend students to read books instead. Moreover, the book list is updated at any time, which has higher requirements on students' autonomous learning after class.

#### *D. The Difference in Composition and Management of Teachers*

MADA teachers are divided into full-time and part-time teachers. With a rather small percentage of the entire teaching team, full-time teachers are responsible for the organization and implementation of teaching, the control of teaching process and the setting of teaching objectives; while a large amount of practical teaching is done by a team of part-time teachers composed of artists and designers from the society. With relatively high turnover rate, part-time teachers bring cutting-edge design knowledge and technology to students. Their rich practical experience makes the connection between students and enterprises closer and becomes a bridge for the design practice between the society and students. However, as the personnel system of China's colleges and universities still needs to be reformed and explored, the teaching of Guangdong Industry Polytechnic is basically carried out by full-time teachers with low turnover rate. Many of them are academic, but few have really been involved in the design practice and have rich experience in the industry

#### *E. Different Methods of Teaching Evaluation*

The principle of "process assessment" is carried through in the teaching evaluation system of MADA, the purpose of which is not just to detect students' learning, but to attach more importance to the cultivation of students' ability of thinking, analyzing and understanding. The evaluation includes both theoretical and practical learning, combining the practical learning based on studio with theoretical learning mainly in forms of lectures and lessons. Each course is comprehensively evaluated through the submission of paper documents (books, signs, and works), electronic documents, class presentations, customer and peer reviews, individual works, and teamwork skills. In general, the course assessment method of Guangdong Industry Polytechnic is the course or project assignment, which defines students' grades based on their merits and demerits and their normal attendance rate. Such is a lopsided evaluation method.

### **IV. ANALYSIS AND SOLUTION OF THE GAP BETWEEN THE TWO SCHOOLS**

#### *A. Improving the Education Mode and Setting up Correct Education Concepts*

In MADA, the scale of each class the visual communication major is strictly limited to 20 people, in order to make sure that every student can fully enjoy the teaching resources provided by the school, thus realize the exquisite teaching mode of small class teaching, tutorial

system. On the contrary, due to the leapfrog development of China's higher education, the serious gap between the number of students in school and the resources available for each student of the two schools, even the two country, is becoming increasingly prominent, seriously affecting the sustainable development of design education. MADA courses emphasize the cultivation of students' independent research spirit and independent learning ability. The objective of talent training is biased towards practicality and strictly implemented in teaching, so their employment rate is relatively high. With fewer courses which are strongly-targeted and the optional courses take a large percentage, students enjoy a high degree of freedom in learning.

Designing education is essentially a professional education. It has dislocation design of educational goals and career trends with other majors such as management and financial accounting in junior and undergraduate, higher professional education and higher general, applied and research universities. However, the design of education's universal education attribute means that no matter the specialty and undergraduate, higher occupation education and ordinary higher education are all designed to cultivate designers meeting the current needs of the society. At present, China's career education is still in the exploration stage, and there are two trends that deserve our attention:

First of all, the education reform paradigm has a single standard, which overemphasizes the dislocation development of vocational education and regular higher education. In the reform of higher vocational education, art design and other majors, such as engineering and economics, are incorporated into one framework, which restricts the cultivation of the comprehensive quality of designers. Higher vocational education has become a vocational training school and skills training class.

Secondly, it does not follow the design rule of education itself and pays too much attention to the acquisition of practical skills, without sustained attention to the student's career and the cultivation of students' creative thinking ability and other comprehensive qualities. The spoon-fed education method is adopted in the school so students have poor independent learning ability, weak career development, poor lifelong learning ability, and lack of motivation for sustainable development.

#### *B. Improving Standards and Increasing Investment to Achieve Exquisite Education High Quality*

By comparison, it can be clearly seen that MADA's courses are progressive and closely related to practice. Full credits of the courses of each academic year must be gained before the courses of the next academic year and there are interlocking logical and theoretical relations among courses. With contrast to the strict requirements in MADA, students in Guangdong Industry Polytechnic can graduate on condition that they gain corresponding credits within the three years. This causes the low expectation of students to themselves, that is, they will be happy with their study as long as they pass the exams.

At the present stage, Guangdong Industry Polytechnic is gradually promoting the studio construction. However, due to the imbalance between the number of students in the school and the equipment of the training site, only limited resources can be allocated to each student. Under the current situation, the studio can only provide excellent students with professional practice chances which have teaching demonstration effect. In MADA, the practical studio courses are compulsory for students and there are professional equipment with full-period instruction of mentors and technicians. By contrast, Guangdong Industry Polytechnic is much weaker in cultivating students' practical ability,

### *C. Actively Implementing Teaching Reform*

The student-recruiting ways should be improved so that a diversified design talent training system can be established. Guangdong Industry Polytechnic should encourage students with different majors to apply for design colleges and universities, so as to diversify the source of design students. Students of other majors are encouraged to take design courses or apply for a second major in design, to realize the interdisciplinary integration of visual communication design. New major are set up and the adjustment of teaching contents are according to the market changes and needs and the specific teaching effect each year. Teachers should cultivate the creative thinking of students in class and pay attention to systematic teaching, encourage their creativity and team-work spirit. Diversified visual communication design talent training system should be established. Interdisciplinary and applied disciplines should be developed and the proportion of optional courses should be enlarged to improve the development of students' comprehensive quality and ability. The curricular system in which the professional direction is too detailed and the course content is narrow in traditional design teaching should be changed to expand the scope of students' knowledge, enhance their humanistic quality, and improve their comprehensive quality from multiple perspectives.

## V. CONCLUSION

The current career education has ushered in a new development opportunity. The construction requirements of high level professional construction project for Guangdong province first-class vocational colleges is "serving development, exquisite education, strengthening characteristics and striving for first-class". In face of the overwhelming force of the Internet digital media technology over traditional advertising industry, Guangdong Industry Polytechnic must fully recognize its gap with world class design education, try to find its deficiency; strive to deepen the teaching reform in the construction period of four years; promote the coordinated development of various work and gradually narrow the gap with benchmark schools; cultivate and build its own professional characteristics and advantages, make use of the geographical advantages of Guangdong province and the pearl river delta, and take advantage of Belt and Road Initiative to establish the leading position in similar majors and in the similar colleges and universities in China.

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