

The Teaching Practice Research of International Student Urban Design Course in China University: International Urban Design Course in HKU and TJU as Cases

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Key Words: International Student, Urban Design Course, China University

Abstract:

In recent years, more and more international students are coming to china as exchange students or pursuing dual-degrees. Some of them choose to study in urban planning or urban design course while their undergraduate background are architecture, sociology, engineering or geography and so on. More and more architecture and urban planning schools began to start the urban design course for international students. Most of them choose the project approach as the teaching method which can kindly fit for a three months or half a year course schedule. But they also notice the problems as coordinating the group design work, guiding the design direction, supplementing the design expertise or understanding the planning policy of china.

This article take the urban design course teaching process in the University of Hongkong and shanghai Tongji University as cases. It will address different approaches in urban design teaching for international students and compare the work of students. The teaching process combine diversified teaching modes like lecture teaching or social survey but all around a real design project. The participants of the course including the professors from different background, the manager or designer of design company and the local government. The article try to provide a new method for other Chinese university which can be used in future teaching.

1. Introduction:

In the age of globalization, talents also flow all over the world. In the process of rapid urbanization, with its booming and large architecture market, China attracts not only numerous large-scale international design agencies to expand their business in the mainland, but also thousands of foreign students to study and work in China. The policy of education internationalization has become a key focus of Chinese colleges and universities in this new period. An increasing number of Chinese universities conduct joint-teaching programs, exchange programs and other programs with internationally known universities, which not only promote the Chinese students to go abroad, but also create a more diverse platform and environment to attract overseas students to study in China.

Planning and design is an industry with a strong local flavor, and the international teaching of this major is facing a problem of localization. China's architectural planning education system has shifted from meeting basic needs to dealing with rapid urbanization, sustainable development and social changes of over 1.3 billion people and so on (Bryson, B.W, 2012). Especially in China's current unique

political, economic and social development environment, a key problem faced by Chinese colleges and universities in setting international student-oriented design course is to make the overseas students gain an correct and accurate understanding of the differences in the development of China and overseas countries in a short time, and build a design thinking system with compatibility of global vision and local context in the development of thought. Due to differences in urban planning education course at home and abroad, the international students, who studying planning and design courses at Chinese universities, have relatively diversified backgrounds, coming not only from different countries and regions, but also from different specialties such as architecture, landscape architecture, geography, sociology and engineering design. This also makes the students and teachers face more challenges.

The author once attended the Faculty of Architecture in The University of Hong Kong, studying urban design postgraduate course, and now works as a part-time teacher in College of Architecture and Urban Planning in shanghai Tongji University, teaching international student-oriented urban design courses. By experiencing international teaching as both student and teacher, the author has developed a profound feeling of Chinese educational practice under this special historical background, and also identifies a lot of problems and challenges which exist in this area.

2. Status Quo of International Student-Oriented Urban Design Course Teaching at Chinese Universities

With the booming of Chinese design market and the increased support of Chinese government's various policies to attract foreign students to come to China, more and more foreign designers and students swarm into China, gathering in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen and other cities. Take Tongji University for example, in 2013, it recruited a total of 5123 overseas students, with an increase of 33% compared to 2010; the number of overseas students recruited accounted for 13.9% of the total number of students in Tongji University. Among them, there were 1227 students to study in including the majors of architecture and urban planning, accounting for 24% of the total number of overseas students, and this number is growing rapidly. In response to the rapid growth of the overseas students, it is the addition and promotion of various special courses by each university to meet the need of overseas students.

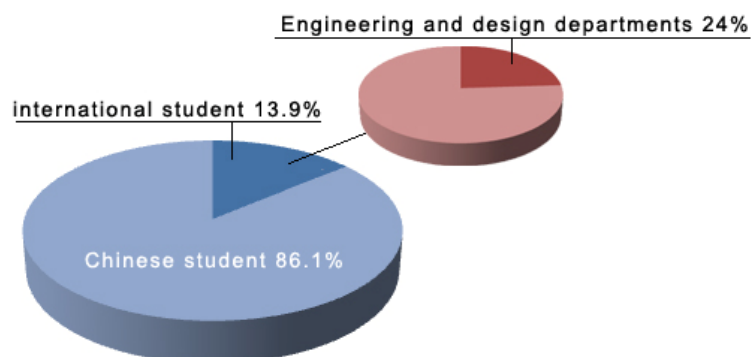


Figure 1. The student composition of Tongji University

Urban design course is an important component of urban planning professional education. Due to China's unique urban planning system, compared with overall planning, detailed planning and other courses needing a lot of expertise and understanding of national, local laws and regulations, urban design has greater flexibility, inclusiveness and innovation, which is of higher compatibility with architecture, landscape and other specialties and is easier to be used into internship or work by overseas students after graduation. Thus, urban design has become one of the most popular courses in overseas students in China during the study of planning and design.

Early in 2008, The University of Hong Kong has noticed the development trend of urban design. The university has opened a post-graduate course of urban design within its Faculty of Architecture and run it as an independent department with class hours of one year, becoming China's first university to set master degree in major of urban design. Enrollment targets are selected in a balanced way from the students coming from Hong Kong, the mainland China and overseas countries. By now, the university has awarded more than two hundred students majoring in urban design a postgraduate degree.

Figure 2. 2010 Admissions Advertisement of HKU Urban Design Post-graduate Course in Magazines

Since the 1990s, led by College of Architecture and Urban Planning in Tongji University, some universities' professional departments in the mainland China have begun to try to conduct joint design collaboration on a regular basis with some universities that are famous all over the world. With the deepening of internationalization, the joint design courses are increasing in frequency and expanding in scale. These joint design courses usually take residential design, urban design and conceptual planning as the main contents. For instance, during the planning period of the 2000 Shanghai World Expo, Tongji University carried out a joint design competition in the theme of World Expo together

with a number of universities in various foreign countries, receiving student works from 28 universities in 14 countries. Among the student works, the proposed plan to arrange the Shanghai World Expo along the Huangpu River aroused great attention and contributed to selection of the final World Expo site after being submitted to the Shanghai municipal government.(Wu Changfu,2011) From unscheduled joint design work camp, regular summer school of international students to long-term joint teaching with double degree, Tongji University has gradually been improving its international teaching system, become a front runner among universities with design major in mainland China, and continuously delivers relevant experience to other universities. Different from The University of Hong Kong, colleges and universities in mainland China cultivate a larger number of students and are more diverse in course selection. Compared with the full English teaching system of The University of Hong Kong, however, Tongji University and other domestic universities are faced with many difficulties, including the transition from Chinese teaching system to English teaching course system, the lack of teaching materials of relevant courses, and the absence of senior experience.



Figure3.The Historical Process of Tongji University International Architecture & Urban Planning Education (Wu Changfu,2011)

3. Framework and Practice of Urban Design Course in The University of Hong Kong

3.1 Background of course setting

The University of Hong Kong has formed a high international teaching system at an early time due to its unique geographical location, historical and political context. Many international students, who are interested in China, would like to choose Hong Kong as a spring board to understand China. The inheritance of full English teaching system and the British education system make international students encounter no obstacles in studying in The University of Hong Kong basically. Thus, The University of Hong Kong does not open the same courses specialized for international students as universities in the mainland, and stresses the diversification of the student composition. The

University of Hong Kong has been laying emphasis on enrolling students with different nationalities and professional backgrounds from the opening of postgraduate course of urban design course, with students from Hong Kong, the mainland China and overseas countries each accounting for one-third of proportion respectively. Its courses are also considerably diverse, taking into account the needs of the students with different expertise and capabilities. This paper is to focus on the comparison of representative graduation design courses.

3.2 Basic framework of course teaching

The period of graduation design course is about 16 weeks, substantially occupying one third of the entire duration of postgraduate course, with a focus on guiding students to summarize the research methods and design techniques that has been learned during the entire phase of postgraduate study and comprehensively applying what learned into the graduation design. The course is divided into five phases: topic selection and research, Site investigation and analysis, design concept generation, work production and graduation presentation. The specific aspects of operations are: topic selection and discussion with teachers → literature reading and preliminary research report → freedom to choose study site and field research → presentation of site study report → concept development and discussion → improve the design outcomes → final presentation and report submission

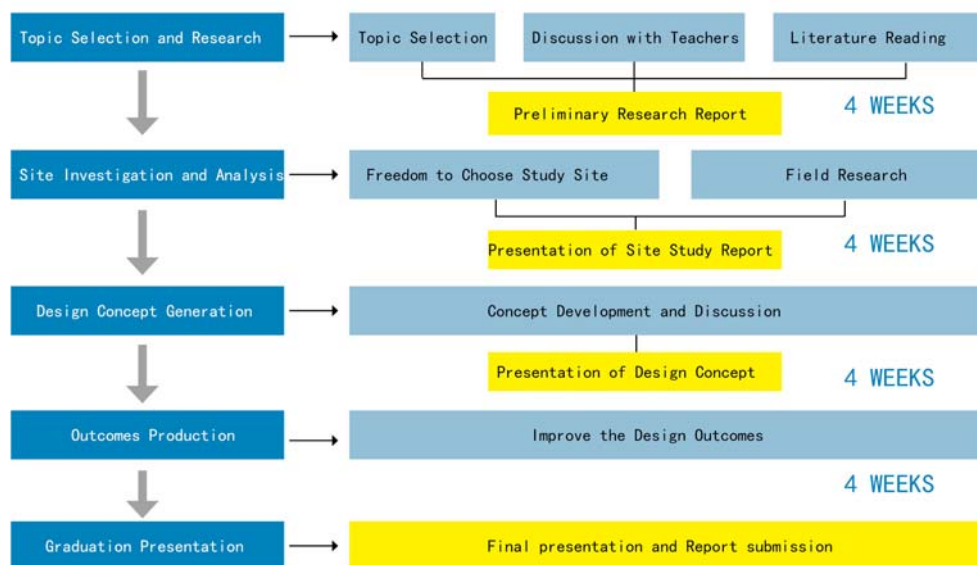


Figure 4. Schedule of Progress for Graduation Course in HKU

3.3 Features of course teaching methods

(1) Topic selection of design: freedom and independence of topic selection

The topic of graduation design course is determined by teachers, which is not limited to specific research direction, and the research framework is discussed by teachers and students together. For example, a teacher proposes the theme of "South China Factory City", and students in the class jointly select five cities in the Pearl River Delta class as the focus of research; what's more, the students are free to form five groups with members from 3 to 4 students, and each group is responsible for the

study on a city. Each member in the five groups jointly completes the research missions, while they also select their own design sites respectively and put forward their own topics, which will be reviewed by the tutor to ensure that their research topics do not depart from the general theme. Such a way of freely selecting topics without client makes the students conduct pre-research on the topics proposed by the teacher, collect all kinds of related material on their own and read relevant literatures, and select their interested direction to conduct in-depth research, greatly improving the students' autonomy and active learning ability.

Compared with the traditional way of selecting a "site" before determining a "topic", this way of selecting a "topic" before determining a "site" can better combine research and design, and motivate students to make proactive observation and consideration on the city. In order to select a suitable site, students are automatically to study the fields related to the entire city or region, so as not to confine their thinking by the red line boundary of the "site". If the traditional site-based design were a tailor, then this topic-based design would be like a costume designer taking responsibility for fashion shows. Selecting a site is like choosing the right model in order to fully demonstrate their creativity.

(2) Work pattern: group research and independent design

The work pattern of this course is basically equal to the mode of design work camp. Given that it is a graduation design and a personal achievement to be submitted, the course builds a model combining independent work and cooperative research. Before determining their own design sites, students must conduct research and studies in groups. Students of different nationalities and majors within a group can complement each other. For instance, when conducting investigation and interviews in mainland China, mainland students enjoy a language advantage and can help the ones who cannot speak Chinese; when looking up international literature or network data, international students can use English, Japanese, French and other familiar ways to find richer information. At the same time, different professional backgrounds can also give the students in a group multiple perspectives. 1 or 2 teachers work as tutors for each group to conduct daily guidance, adopt heuristic education method and guide the direction of group research. At the presentation of phased research achievements, all tutors debrief the students together and give guidance on more aspects, which can also form a competitive atmosphere among student groups.

In the subsequent phase of independent design, the students conduct design based on the site selected by themselves and finally submit personal graduation design results. In the phase of personal design, since the topics of each group member are in correlation, group members still can make cooperation, help and offer advices to each other. In the final phase, all students in a class complete together the general report of the research, during which members of the class and groups share out the work and collaborate with each other. Members in a group are free to choose a group leader, get the task and work in cooperation with a due division of specialization, in which the tasks involve aspects including the preparation of report framework, making of drawings, writing of contents, typesetting of report and so on.

Such a work pattern can complete and deepen the achievements of every student and make their achievements as a part of the overall results, which can not only ensure each student to independently finish their own design, but also stress the importance of cooperation and collaboration in process of design and research.

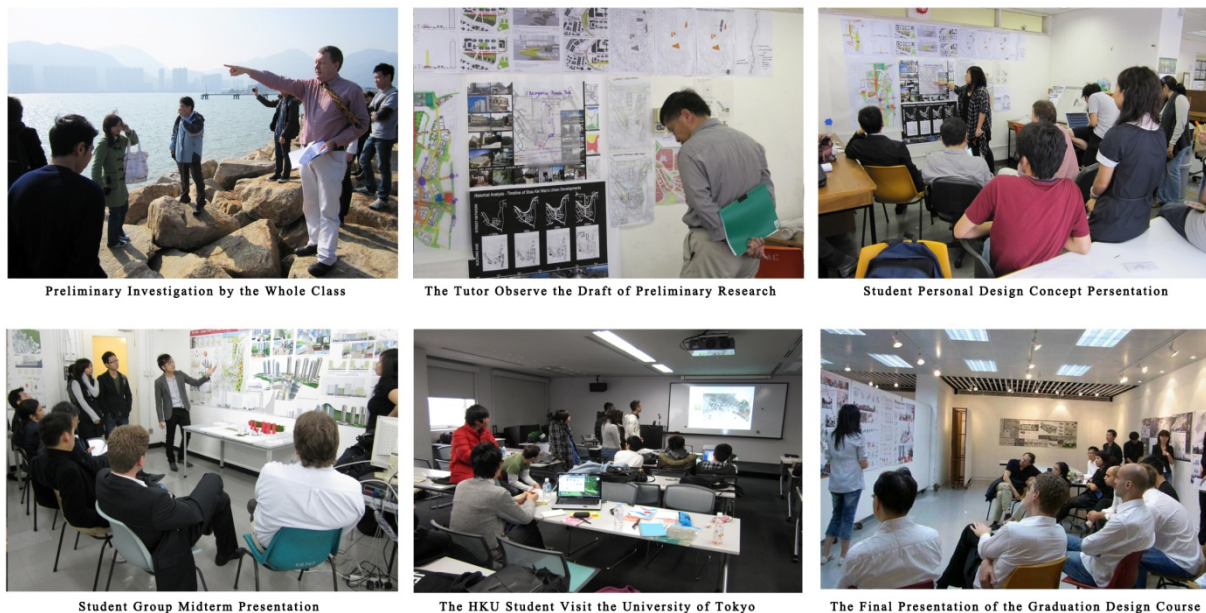


Figure 5: Pictures of the Urban Design Course in HKU

(3) Tutorial mode: joint teaching and diversified guidance

The University of Hong Kong not only has the most powerful and qualified teachers in China and Asia, but also can leverage external forces. In terms of teachers of graduation design course, in addition to the teachers within faculties, it also hires designers in outside organizations or companies to work as part-time teachers, constituting teacher groups with 5 to 8 members. 1 or 2 teachers work as the tutors of each student group to deliver guidance, achieving the teaching level that each teacher can guide 2 or 3 students and realizing full exchange between students and teachers. In the whole course duration, phased achievement report will be held every two to three weeks and student groups need to report to all students and teachers, which allows students to get more guidance from different angles. In the mid reporting and final reporting phase, in addition to the fixed members in teacher groups, teachers in other departments, owners of design agencies outside the university, real estate developers, famous designers and other well-known experts in different fields are invited to debrief the students and provide comments and advices. Experts' opinions are different at times, even contrast sharply with each other, which process can also develop critical thinking skills of students.

4. Framework and Practice of Urban Design Course for International Students in Tongji University

4.1 Background of course setting

On the basis of years of experience in holding international urban design work camps, the Department of Urban Planning of Tongji University officially in 2010 opened urban design course for double-degree, jointly cultivated international students with full English teaching method. The students are mainly from Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Berlin Institute of Technology, Georgia Institute of Technology, University of Hawaii, University of Colorado, Polytechnic University of Milan and other universities, with nationalities covering a total of 12 countries on four continents. This course is also a public elective course for postgraduates in Tongji University.



Figure 6: Sources of International students

4.2 Course teaching objectives and framework

Given that the target students of this course are mainly the international students who just come to China, the main objectives of the course is to encourage students learn courses, seminars and courses design, apply cutting-edge design methods and tools and think the planning and design methods against the rapid development of Chinese cities on the basis of understanding China and local environment. At present, the course duration is 17 weeks in all, divided into three phases and six parts. The three phases include observation and analysis of site, generation of design concept, design outcomes production and final review, and six parts are visit to site → site analysis report by groups → personal design conception → regrouping of students according to the plan, submission of group achievements and conduction of midterm presentation → modification, improvement and deepening of planning and design → final defense and design comment at the end of term.

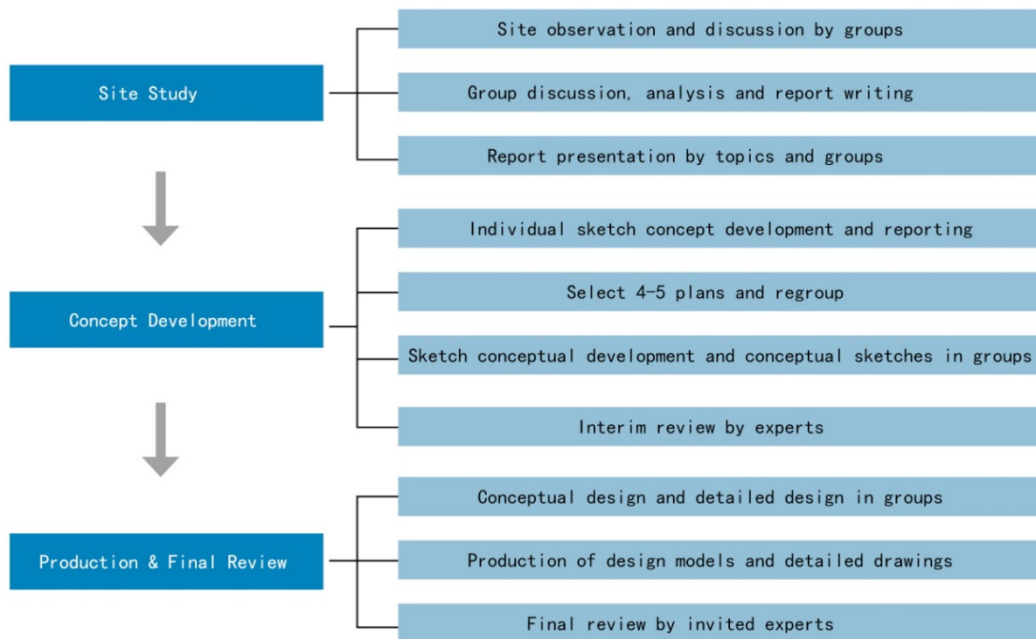


Figure 7. Schedule of Progress for International Student Urban Design Course in Tongji

4.3 Features of course teaching methods

The course continues to adopt free design and learning environment of design work camp in terms of teaching methods, and achieves innovations and breakthroughs in many aspects including design topic selection, work pattern, auxiliary lectures, design assessment methods, etc.

(1) Topic selection: real topic design and real client

In each year, before the starting of the course, the university communicates with Shanghai planning administrative department or other proprietors with need of practical research and design, and chooses a real and convenient design site. After the starting of the course, the client publishes the design task. In the process of scene teaching, real design topic and real client can better stimulate students' interest and responsibility. The selection of design topics also pay attention to representative sites and instances, for instance, the design topic in 2014 is urban design of cruise port in Baoshan District of Shanghai. For China's current rapid growth of cruise tourism industry, Baoshan Port, the current largest cruise home-port in China, is faced with the problem that how to conduct the construction of related facilities. Such a topic leaves a plenty of imagination space. The real client of this topic - Shanghai Baoshan Cruise Port Company, has great interest in that how the overseas students, coming from areas with more mature cruise culture, design the cruise port in China. During the past four years, the topic of the course cover from macro scale - such as Scenario of Shanghai in 2040, middle-scale (50-80 ha) - such as transformation and renovation of Tinglin Town to microscopic scale - such as Core Open Space in Central Jinshan District of Shanghai (about 10 hectares) and other distinctive topics. Cooperative client includes multi-types of organization covering from governmental planning administrative department to actual construction organizations.

Teaching groups and client agree not to strictly limit the design works submitted by students, but the client can make their own opinion on the design requirements and design achievements of students throughout the process. One hand, it does not limit students' thinking and innovation; on the other hand, it can guarantee certain reality constraints, avoiding ideas without any border. This flexible design assignment can allow students to combine their interests, specialties and field awareness, to further refine the design conditions and always immerse in the active process experience.

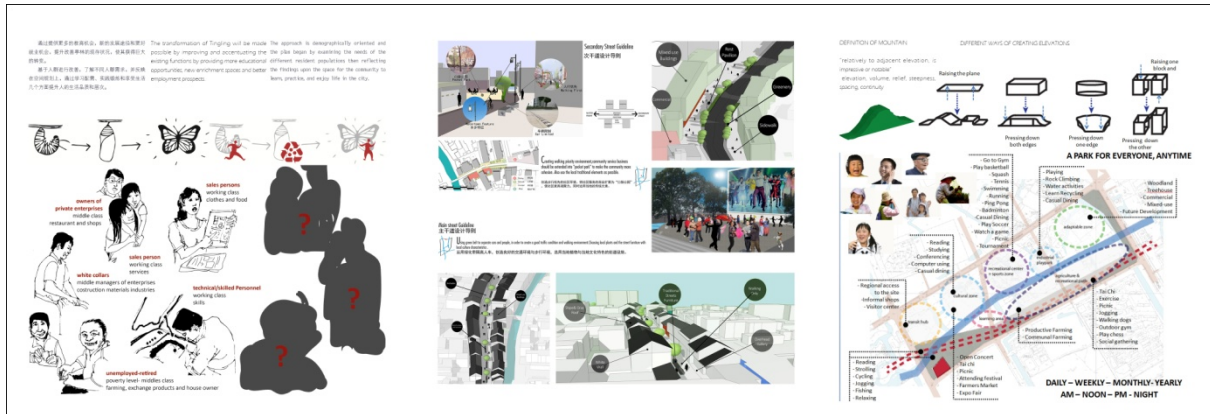


Figure 8. Some Student Works while Express Their Concepts

(2) Work pattern: personal creativity and group cooperation

The course takes the work pattern combining independent work and group work. At the phase of site research, teachers arrange 4 to 5 students with different professional backgrounds to form a group, and make them carry out site research and analysis from different perspectives of society, economy, space and humanity. In the successive phase of concept generation, each student works independently to show individual creativity by using drawings, text, hand-painting, video and other means, forming a kind of "brainstorming" effect. This process is also a process of mutual learning and inspiration among students, between students and teachers.

Teachers choose 4 to 5 creative ideas with great potential and features in all ideas proposed by students, encourage students to choose the idea they interested in, and ultimately form design teams with 4 to 5 members. Teachers consciously guide students to form groups according to different professional backgrounds and different nationalities, to take advantage of mutual learning in the context of cross-cultural and inter-professional environment. Students in different design teams can work together, assign tasks on their own, and independently reconcile the differences. For planning and design industry, this collective studio model is common in the future works of students. Therefore, students are required to form a sense of cooperation with mutual respect, coordination and convergence. In this process, teachers are mainly responsible for coordination and guidance, using heuristic teaching method to break the traditional step-by-step teaching method of planning and design course, carrying out work around developing students' independent thinking skills, innovation ability, practical ability and spirit of cooperation.

(3) Auxiliary lecture: expanding thinking and understanding

Since the courses set for one class once a week with only 3 to 4 hours each class, this decides that most students should complete their design works in spare time and the class time is quite valuable. In addition to centralized communication and teachers comments, courses introduce a mode of auxiliary lecture to more fully utilize class time. Many professionals are invited to offer seminars. Composed of Professionals includes teachers in other schools, such as departments of landscape and architecture, some experts in field of urban problems outside the university or executives of design companies and the like. Lecture topics are freely chosen by professionals, basically related to design tasks of students. These lectures provide students with a broader vision and more diversified perspectives, greatly stimulating students' creativity. For example, in course of design of Tinglin Town in Shanghai, a sociology expert, who specializes in Chinese urban and rural changes, is invited to talk about the changes in urban and rural life styles and spaces during the process of China's rapid urbanization, to make students who just come to China understand the uniqueness of Chinese urban and rural areas. In subsequent design, a student analyzes the spatial characteristics of Tinglin Town in the perspective of changes in human composition, and thus forms an interesting concept.

(4) Assessment method: scenario professional review team

Throughout the course, students have many opportunities to report the results, and make phased reports to client in accordance with the needs of the client. In the phases of mid-presentation and final presentation, professional review teams, composed by teachers in other schools, clients, designers from design companies and course teachers, make comments on students' achievements from various perspectives and areas of expertise.

Students are grouped to make report, and express their programs mainly in the form of PowerPoint. The limited time of group presentation is 20 to 30 minutes. Each member of the group is required to participate in presentation to promote cooperation and specialization among team members, as well as foster and examine students' oral presentation ability. After the group reports, the professional review teams propose questions or suggestions respectively in the defense of 5 to 10 minutes. In the process of teaching over the years, this part is usually fully exciting, and the confident and excellent expressive skills of international students leave a deep impression on reviewers and teachers.

Professional review teams give scores after hearing the reports and defenses of each group according to groups' design concept, achievement presentation, field reporting, group cooperation and other aspects. The rankings submitted are a part of students' final achievement assessment. This assessment method is a part of scenario teaching, so that students have the opportunity to showcase their ideas and listen to various views.



Figure 9: Pictures of the Urban Design Course in Tongji University

5. Demonstration and Dissemination of Teaching Results

5.1 Combing design task and research, forming and publishing special reports

In the urban design course of The University of Hong Kong, the design topics are without so many constraints and most designs are no-client tasks, which prefers to conduct research and interpretation of the spatiality of some cities. The whole design course consists of research and design. Students need to submit not only design results, but also research reports on the design bases. Students and students groups are closely linked in research contents and share out works in a cooperative manner. In this process, design results of each student, and research results of student groups and common outcomes of all students together constitute a final report on the selected topic with rich contents and diverse perspectives. Such achievements already have detailed first-hand research data and professional analysis and demonstration. With the students' individual designs, questions proposed can be solved in various and creative ways. The final reports are different from the books compiling students' assignments, but a research report with a certain depth and height.

In design courses conducted in The University of Hong Kong in the past few years, several books are compiled and published in themes of "the South China Factory City", "Urban Villages in Pearl River Delta" and other topics, and these books get a good social feedback. As an attempt to combining teaching and practice, the students also participated in compilation process of books while doing design tasks, which greatly increase their interest in the course, since their achievements are not just "assignments", but also published "works".



Figure 10: Published Special Reports of the Urban Design Course in HKU(Stefan.A.L,2013)

It is worth noting that in order to compile a book containing some expertise and attracting to the public with readability, students and teachers can design and formulate framework and template of contents to be published when students' researches and designs enter a certain phase. At the time of completing the final designs and researches, students should take into account the contents to be published and fill the achievements of their own and groups into the template in order to ensure books to be published in a more unified form. In addition to the content of students' work, a number of experts are invited to make comments on the writing of topics, so that the final book is more professional.

5.2 Publishing the teaching process and experience of design course as the teaching materials

Compared with the experimental and social study of design course of The University of Hong Kong, international student-oriented urban design courses in Tongji University are the pioneer and pathfinder in mainland China, and pay more emphasis on the normalization and instruction of course setting. Tongji University sums up relevant experiences of course by educational innovative practices in recent years. It summarizes the international student-oriented design course in terms of course description, framework, content, teaching methods, teaching achievements, etc., and publishes what summarized in the form of thematic teaching materials. This paper shares the experiences of Tongji University with other domestic colleges and universities, to better promote the construction of international course and platform in domestic design colleges and universities, and make up for the lack of teaching materials in this field. Selection of design works of graduated students in the teaching materials also can be used as references for students to understand the requirements of design course.

6. Summary of Experience and Anticipation of Future Development

6.1 International student-oriented urban design course — problems and experience

In recent years, educational work for international students in China has achieved remarkable development, but the author still detects some problems based on the hands-on experience. Domestic universities, like Tongji University, still fall behind their foreign counterparts in teachers, sources of students, and educational resources, though they have established a course system for international students.

Teachers responsible for the course oriented to international students are mostly graduates of domestic universities or overseas returnees, while teachers who have working experience in foreign schools are difficult to introduce. In addition, international teachers are lacking and only a few participate in the teaching activities in the form of short-time exchange or lectures. What's worse, unlike in Hong Kong, it is difficult to introduce social forces, such as part-time teachers into teaching international students, and there is no such educational fund. In terms of the source of students, most international students study in China in the form of educational aid or cooperation and the proportion of self-funded international students is relatively low. Besides, the existing courses are designed to meet the requirements of double-degree and international exchange students. Some universities lack a long-term plan for the education of international students, and do not attach importance to the number of students to be enrolled, majors, student backgrounds, and source of students. (Li Xiangning,2010) As a result, the source of students is unstable, student backgrounds vary, and it becomes difficult to teach students in accordance with their aptitudes. Moreover, compared with foreign universities which provide a great many auxiliary materials or a complete librarian system for students, in domestic universities, international students often have trouble in finding books or materials to learn more about China and they find it impossible to access some foreign websites which are blocked by the government for security while they stay in china.

In an international appraisal of the globalization work of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, international expert advisors, apart from affirming the achievements the School has made, proposed that globalization level should be further improved by setting one international language as the uniform language used in teaching and research, increasing the number of international teachers, and putting more emphasis on the link between teaching and social practice. (Wu Changfu,2011)

6.2 Development trend for the international student industry in China

The deepening of economic globalization has made the international education service industry among the major industries of a country. Owing to the political, economic, and cultural benefits brought by international students, countries around the world makes the development of the international education services a significant national strategy. For example, the nearly one million international students flocking into the UK not only bring enormous economic benefits to the country, but also help to elevate the technical strength and resolve the lack of high-level technicians. Compared with

developed countries, the education work of international students in China is still at its early development stage. Among the postgraduates in top universities around the world, international students usually account for 20% to 40%, sometimes even higher than 50%. However, this proportion at the most famous Chinese universities is only around 20%. With Chinese universities paying more attention to the internationalized education, the number of international students is expected to be on a sharp rise in the future. To improve the competitiveness of Chinese universities in the international student market, designing focused and attractive courses plays an importance role.

In this process, indiscriminately copying the educational system of western countries does no good to improving the competences of Chinese universities. For instance, as for planning education, the original purpose of selecting overseas students in China stems from the increased demand of understanding and research on Chinese cities. Some scholars believe that the universality of globalization and English in the teaching of international planning makes planning, design and related teaching more susceptible to the traditional design thinking way of English-speaking countries. The non-English speaking countries have few opportunities to demonstrate and disseminate their planning experience and knowledge to the international community. (Klaus R. Kunzmann,1999)Therefore, in the era of globalization, assimilation of international experience and exploration of local experience have become two key points, which has received increasing attention in today's China. Various colleges and universities in the guidance of internalization of university management also have shifted from unidirectional learning of international experience to bi-directional development of both output and input. In this paper, The University of Hong Kong and Tongji University are different in course setting and same in combination of international advanced educational philosophy and local practical education ideas, which can be used as case study for China to explore the international education.

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