

# A DISCUSSION ON THE CHANGES AND PROGRESS OF DESIGN-RELATED TERMS

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## ABSTRACT:

Design styles and etymology of related terminology, while they started progressing and evolving since 1850s, left track in documents of modern design history. Various design professionalisms further created more terminology and jargons. In Chinese, what is the origin of the modern term “design” To answer it, this research sorts old documents, studies the etymology of design terminology, examines the interplay between the evolving terms.

Keywords: Design, tsuan, Sheji

## 1. PREFACE

In the literature of modern design history, various records reflected the actual evolution of design styles and design-related terms since 1850. From the Arts And Crafts Movement in 1850 to Art

Nouveau in 1880, as well as the emphasis on popular designs brought about by modernism in 1955, these terms had been constantly used in defining various styles in architecture, product, visual design and many others. Thus, various professional design terms and definitions were gradually developed according to different specializations. However, how did the term 'design' that we use today come about? Was design merely being transplanted horizontally from the West, Japan and other places? What was its evolution and background? Through the study of these issues, this paper aims to explore the causes for semantic changes in the word 'design' by organizing the history of design-related terms cited in historical documents.

## 2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WORD 'DESIGN' AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE WEST

The word 'design' came from the Latin word 'desegno'. However, the meaning of the word changed frequently and it was a word with several meanings. It was often known as a word that was easily confused. The historical changes of its meaning revealed that it had to constantly adapt to the means of production. From the following table, one can see how the word 'design' evolved from Latin to Italian to French. Designara (Latin)→disignrn (Italian)→disegno (Italian)→dessein (French)→design (English). In general, the word 'design' was used to refer to the draft or outline of a represented work, and the source for forming the most fundamental concept of each piece of work since the beginning of the renaissance period.

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, art terminology was created in Italy. The word 'Disegno' had both a narrow and broad meaning. Its narrow meaning was 'drawing'. However, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century theorist, Francesco Lancilotti, classified drawing (disegno), color (colorito), composition (compositione) and creativity (inventione) as the four elements of a painting. The broad meaning of disegno (drawing) referred to the artist's creative mind (Trattato dipittura, 1509). According to this, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century architect, painter and art historian, Vasari (Vasari, 1511~1574), regarded disegno more important than creativity, and considered as the source of all art. In 16<sup>th</sup>-century England, the word 'design' meant 'the plan to finish making something ... a draft for a piece of artwork'. However, its content already included the meaning of 'applied art object'. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Artist Baldinucci (Baldinucci, around 1624~1669), based on the broad definition of disegno, defined it as 'using lines to concretely express those ideas that were first in the minds of people, formed after imagination and then presented through sophisticated techniques'. Furthermore, he also

supplemented it with 'he would also affect the layout as well as the composition of lines and lighting layers. He would decide where to place the colors or to use other methods, and these methods were in fact displaying works that were already completed.' In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (1607), Zuccaro (Zuccaro, around 1540~1609), the founder of Accademia Di San Luca in Rome, believed that there should be differences between internal and external designs within a design, as mentioned in his 'Concepts of Sculpture, Painting and Architecture'.

Although it might be easy for one to realize the meaning of the word 'disegno', the meaning of the word was highly uncertain. On one hand, it might mean drawing, creativity and design, and on the other, it could also be considered as the draft of a creation. 'Disegno' was once used to describe an organization similar to a modern-day art academy. For example, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 'Florentine Accademia Del Disegno' was the name of a collective organization that included painters, sculptors, and architects in Florence. This might be the reason why the word 'dessin' in French meant sketching, and the meaning of 'design' in English was very similar to 'disegno'.

Industrial revolution that occurred from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had also driven a series of artistic reforms in Western Europe. Due to changes in the social environment and demands from the industrial sector, the perception of artistic education had slowly deviated from restraints of traditional academicism in pure artistic philosophy. The purpose of artistic education was no longer for training professional sculptors, painters, or artists for a particular social class, but for average citizens to possess artistic 'abilities' and 'industrial' basis to ensure the creation of various types of products that could improve the welfare of a country in the industrial society. On the other hand, art education also possessed similar functions as the 'written language'. In addition, it was able to utilize the capabilities of 'illustration' to attain the objectives for 'cognition' and 'expression'. However, when first faced with the impacts of the industrial revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning of the word 'design' was still limited to the art arena. In the first publication of Encyclopedia Britannica (1786), it was explained as, "The so-called 'design' refers to the harmonious balance between proportion, movement and aesthetics of lines and shapes of a piece of art. With respect to this explanation, the word 'design' has the same meaning as composition. One can reflect more on this by looking at its planes, three-dimensional aspects, colors, structures and make ups. When these elements blend as one, it would produce better than expected results." Due to demands of the social environment and industrial products, the content of art education in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was more for practical purposes. It was to cultivate the public's artistic qualities through the creation of practical products. Hence, the meaning of the word 'design' became closer to 'compositional design' in

which we think and apply today. However, in terms of the balance between the application and aesthetics of an artwork as well as design development, these elements were still included within the scope of art and were not further emphasized on their practical purposes as mentioned in the trend of industrialization.

During the later period of the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were major changes in social and economic structures. The Arts and Crafts Movement in England triggered the 'technical' and 'artistic' separation. Crafts that were originally handmade were replaced by large volumes of machine-made 'products'. Industrial machinery brought about destruction of art. With social reformer, John Ruskin's thinking as a foundation, which advocated the re-integration of 'art', 'life' and 'labor', the Arts and Crafts Reform led by William Morris brought about the establishment of various craft associations throughout Europe and the United States at that time. After the World Expo was held in London, England in 1851, England realized the importance of the public's abilities in 'crafts' and 'arts'. Hence, pictorial education experience of pragmatism was implemented in general education. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Europe was enveloped and moved towards the development of industrial products in the wave of pragmatism. Large quantities of art expression rules in traditional empirical science such as reorganizing reasonable elements and other similar teaching materials in graphics and drawing were also used in the curriculum of the education system. In 1907, the Arts and Crafts Movement led by Morris triggered the establishment of Deutscher Werkbund in Munich. It further developed to be the unified body for combining industrial and artistic, mechanical and design, and the benefits of creators and pragmatists. Towards the end, it marched towards the goal of combining machinery production and art. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Encyclopedia Britannica (1974) gave a more detailed explanation for the word 'design' which stated, "Design is the planning and developmental process in one's mind when creating something. Any common entity that can only be expressed by using graphics or models cannot be considered as design upon completion. It can only be referred to as planning and proposal. The broad meaning of the word 'design' refers to making partial adjustments in order to create an effective overall body. As for confirming its related structure and details, one can consider answering the following four questions: 1. What kind of material to use? 2. What kind of technique is suitable for using this material? 3. Are the overall and partial portions in balance? 4. What is the overall effect to the viewer and the user?" At that time, the meaning of the word 'design' had already risen above the use of technical materials instead of being limited to composition.

Before the Industrial Revolution, 'art' and 'technique' were together. They were still in an inseparable state. However, with the introduction of machinery for mass production after the Industrial Revolution, 'art' and 'technique' were then separated. From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'art' and 'technique' began to separate due to the differences in techniques and materials. Judging by the explanations of the word 'design' by Encyclopedia Britannica in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'design' was still similar to the characteristics of art before the Industrial Revolution. The emphasis was more on the actual composition, color, proportion and aesthetics of the work. It emphasized on whether the artwork had a reasonable visual effect from the aesthetics point of view. In comparison to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'design' was based on planning, proposal and composition. The designer would place a good amount of emphasis on the use of materials and production techniques. There was also stress on the needs of the viewer and user instead of being limited to the thoughts and aesthetic view an individual. Hence, industrialized and pragmatic goals were created. Since then, the meaning of the word 'design' started to move from free art to the planning for practical purposes. The goal of 'art' was to exist for art creation and to escape from pragmatic and reasonable functions of daily lives. However, 'technique' became the 'means for advocating the industry', and started to be clearly divided from 'art'. After entering into mechanical civilization, design concepts of industrial products changed dramatically. Hence, the meaning of the word 'design' had also broadened due to social needs.

## 2. THE EAST INFUSED THE CHINESE TERM 'TSUAN' INTO THE CONCEPT OF DESIGN

The World Expo was held in Vienna in 1873 (the 6<sup>th</sup> year of Meiji period). The exposition was usually the venue for collectively showcasing industrial techniques at that time. It was the time when Japan began to be interested in visiting and exploring industrial techniques of Europe. In the meantime, Japan was also surveying the export market. Therefore, Japan sent 6 industrial trainees to participate. The organization of this exposition used the word 'design' as the critical word of its concept. At that time, Notomi Kaizirou, a ceramics technical officer, was one of the 6 trainees who represented Japan. In order to find a term that could reflect the word 'design', he coined the term 'tsuan'. Watabe Motofune, a craft researcher who had been active in Meiji, Taisei, Showa periods, once said, "The term 'tsuan' was coined with the considerations of traditional Japanese terms 'drawing' and 'script'. It was a new term by translating the word 'design', for

participating the Vienna's World Expo. In addition, the term 'yijiang' was also used to mean 'design' in Japan. In the 16<sup>th</sup> year of the Meiji period (1884), the book 'The 'yijiang' Rules of Watermills' was published in Japan. According to related works in Japan, the 2 translated meanings of 'yijiang' and 'design' were either based on their original meanings in Chinese characters or arranged according to their meanings literally. For the term 'yijiang', the meanings of thought and design were implied in the word 'yi' and the word 'jiang' refers to intention, thought and technique. Therefore, the combined meaning would be 'ability to create' (creative design). For the term 'tsuan', the word 'tsu' meant plot and picture, while 'an' meant consideration. Therefore, the combined meaning would be 'display thoughts'.

Words or terms related to 'tsuan' still exist in Japan, Taiwan and China today. As the term 'tsuan' was made up of Chinese characters in the Japanese language, it was easily accepted by the Chinese. The term 'tsuan' was widely used. Therefore, the Chinese translated the word 'design' as 'tsuan'. The earliest record of 'tsuan' being included in Chinese dictionaries might be in 'Ci Hai Dictionary' published in 1935. The English word 'design' was placed after the term in the dictionary. In addition, it was defined as "the plan to arrange shape, structure, color and decoration before creating works of art, craft, architecture and others. This type of planned picture is called 'tsuan'. There were architecture, weaving, ceramic, metalwork, woodwork, decoration and advertisement tsuan"

However, since the introduction of pictorial study in China, it served the purpose for establishing academic disciplines, promoting industries, developing ethnic pictures and absorbing external nutrients. However, one could see that its development was actually not detached from the social background and economic basis at that time. From the late 1970s, China became interested in design. It realized the huge differences in arts from perception to style. Especially with China's accelerated industrialization process, the lifestyles of Chinese people were catching up with the people from the West. As the level of consumption rose, latent contradictions became apparent rapidly. At that time, some theorists began to amend the concepts of arts and crafts. It was only confined to works of art, craft and architecture and its main content included style, model, pattern, and other visual elements. Products were often established by their external forms and decoration designs instead of practical designs. With such understanding, the original meaning of 'design' was only expressed partly. From 1950 to 1980, as there was a lack of in-depth study regarding pictorial concepts, terms and meanings shrank further. At that time, it only meant the techniques to create patterns and drawings. Therefore, many specialized books and textbooks equated 'tsuan' with pattern. Hence, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was an appeal for restating

the meaning of 'design'. In fact, there was a strong urge to amend its content. In the meantime, quite a number of people in Hong Kong and Taiwan who were under the influence of certain usage proposed to change its course entirely. It would mean to change the concept and term to 'sheji', which meant 'design'. Obviously, using 'sheji' to replace 'tsuan' was to emphasize the consistent principle of having practical and aesthetic value. This marked the beginning of China's design movement. It was consistent with the usage in Hong Kong and Taiwan so that it could be easily recognized by international organizations and beneficial in entering other parts of the world. (Chu Ko Kai, 2006).

Taiwan had the most direct impact by Japan as Japanese education was implemented during Japanese occupation. After the war (around 1952), the concept of 'design' had already been formed in Taiwan. Before this, the term 'tsuan', was generally accepted as 'design'. In 1967, an article named 'Current Status of Taiwan Design Education' in Japan's Idea Magazine pointed out, "In Taiwan, the foreign word 'design' was translated as 'sheji' in Chinese and 'design' terminology was treated as the translated terminology of 'sheji'. According to estimation, the work was done 15 years from now (1955). In addition, the history of design education also started during the same period." According to the text mentioned above, the history of design education started as early as around 1950. Professor Shih Tsui Feng referred to the text above and point out that, "The design courses within the college curriculum possessed definite positions in modern design. It started in the fall of 1962..., in 1958, since the establishment of art design faculty in National Taiwan University of Arts, craft and graphic courses were offered. In 1964, the contents were gradually changed to industry design." One could easily understand this from the description of 'tsuan' in the book 'Art Design 123' published by Kao Shan Lan in 1972. "When one mentioned art design, others perhaps would associate it with 'tsuan' art, as they might think 'tsuan' meant art design. From a modern point of view, this might be a misunderstanding. Art design was broad but 'tsuan' was just a required factor of it... By comparing modern art design and 'tsuan' art in the past, there were huge differences in terms of content and form evolution. In older 'tsuan', content was just a small portion of art design..." From the description above, one would realize that before the maturity of terms, concepts and other terminologies related to 'design' in Taiwan, it was clearer that 'tsuan' had been in fact treated as the equivalent of 'sheji'.

In the beginning, design concepts in the West adopted Chinese characters 'tsuan' as part of its design terminology. This opened up different points of view that were unlike oriental aesthetics in art. However, as 'tsuan' also implied 'design', its literal meaning was confused in the Chinese

language. Therefore, it was gradually used to imply techniques for creating patterns, drawings or planar art which was different from the meaning of 'design' expressed in the West.

### 3. CONCLUSION

By organizing the history and studying the evolution of design-related terms cited in historical documents, the conclusions are as follow:

#### 3-1 The term 'design' gradually changed due to social changes

Before the Industrial Revolution, 'art' and 'technique' were often treated as one and they were not differentiated. The term 'design' was still confined to arts and aesthetics. It could mean drawing, creativity and design or could also be treated as the draft of a creation. At that time, disegno was also used to refer to a type of association similar to an art college as drawing was an important and required course in college. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the narrow definition of disegno was drawing and its broad meaning referred to the creative mind of the artist. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, disegno was regarded more important than creativity and considered the source of all art. It represented the draft for a piece of artwork and its content began to include the meaning of applied artwork. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, disegno was defined as using lines to concretely express those ideas that were first in the minds of people, formed after imagination and then presented through sophisticated techniques. After the Industrial Revolution, the definitions of 'art' and 'technique' were differentiated due to social changes. As there were major changes in design concepts of industrial products, the meaning of 'design' also had to be broaden due to social needs. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, art education started to move towards pragmatism and the definition of 'design' was included in the context of art. However, it was not extended to focus on pragmatism in the wave of industrialization. Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 'art' and 'technique' were then separated due the development of techniques and materials. Designs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were usually based on plans, proposals and composition done in advance rather than individualistic thought and aesthetic point of view. Therefore, pragmatic goals started to exist and design began to move from free art to the planning for practical purposes.

#### 3-2 Usage of the term 'design' in the East began from Japan

The World Expo was held in Vienna in 1873. The organization of this exposition used the word 'design' to illustrate its concept. At that time, in order to find a term that could reflect the word

'design', the term 'tsuan' was created. 'Tsuan' was coined with the considerations of traditional Japanese terms 'drawing' and 'script', and was the translation for 'design' to meet the needs of the World Expo in Vienna. As for Taiwan, the foreign word 'design' was used as early as 1950s. It took 10 years for the 'design' language to become today's broad field of terminology in the design arena. Before that, the term 'tsuan' which mainly implied decoration, had contributed modestly in defining the meaning of 'design' for the industry. Under the influence of Hong Kong and Taiwan, China proposed to change its entire course and altered its concept and term. Therefore, it was replaced by the term 'sheji' Using 'sheji' to replace 'tsuan' was to emphasize the consistent principle of having practical and aesthetic value.

### 3-3 There were different angles of exploration for design-related phrases

As the Chinese characters used in Japan were easily accepted by China, China also translated 'design' as 'tsuan'. From 1950 to 1980, as there was a lack of in-depth study regarding pictorial concepts, terms and meanings shrank further. At that time, it only meant the techniques to create patterns and drawings. This was because the earliest art and craft industries were based on weaving, ceramics and printing. Hence, patterns were also mistakenly relayed to others as 'tsuan' after a period of time. Therefore, at the end of 1970s and beginning of 1980s, there was an appeal for restating the meaning of 'design' and a strong urge to amend its content. 'Design' is a word with multiple meanings. However, the word 'Sheji' in Chinese is a term with only one meaning. One has to make use of the context to verify the actual meaning of words with multiple meanings instead of replacing them with the word 'Sheji'. Therefore, with respect to design-related terms in Chinese, one should view it from a wider angle and the possible translations might mean makeup, structure, composition, rule, idea, creative design, picture, plan, draft, drawing, design plan, image, model and so on.

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