

**GATEKEEPING THE ARTS:
NATIONAL POLICY, STUDENT PERCEPTION AND THE ART AND
DESIGN ENTRANCE EXAMINATION IN CHINA**

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ABSTRACT

With the development of higher education in China, the educational policy and strategy has been changed from '*jingyingshi jiaoyu*' [elite education] to '*dazhonghua jiaoyu*' [mass education] over the last decade. Since the end of twentieth century, there has been a significant phenomenon of the rapidly increased applicants for art and design undergraduate studies, which has been called 'Art Study Fervour' [*yi kao re*]. Envisaging the increasing number of applicants, the art examination, generally known as a pre-sessional test of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) [*gaokao*], plays the role of a 'filter' to select the 'appropriate' students to start their art and design undergraduate studies.

The main aim of using the current art examination, from the perspective of art institutions, is to select the students by testing their technical ability. However, from the contemporary perspective, understanding student choice within the entry system should be equally of importance in the development of educational policy and practice in higher education participation. To critically review the use of art examination has been a cutting point for this study. It stimulates critical reflections on the appropriateness of preparatory and introductory approaches within the process of student choice, and more importantly, the implication of the problems derived from the educational system on students' experience leading them to their future destination. Hence, it is important for both applicants and institutions to identify the factors that might influence student choice, including accessible sources of information for students to facilitate their choices of higher education. In particular, focusing on students' motivation, their behaviours towards institution and subject choice become central in this research.

This research sets up an original perspective to investigate the entry system towards art and design higher education in China, and to critically re-examine student's educational choice on institution and subject studies. The influential factors, in particular the current entry system and art examination, in shaping students' motivation, have been revealed and analysed, in order to develop new understanding of student experience, institutional strategy and art education in China with its impacts in the social and cultural context.

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CHAPTER ONE

Research Background and Methodology

Chinese higher education since twentieth century has experienced a spectrum of significant changes accompanied by the social, economic and political transformations that have taken place to meet the needs of socialist construction since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In the final quarter of the twentieth century, the higher education sector was characterised by elite education (*jingyingshi jiaoyu*), with steady development in terms of student intake. With the extreme expansion in the higher education sector since the end of the twentieth century, China has one of the largest systems of higher education in the world (Yang 2004). Mass education (*dazhonghua jiaoyu*) has been achieved more advanced than scheduled in the process of expansion. Having created many more opportunities for Chinese students to access higher education or tertiary education,¹ this movement has at the same time, inevitably, generated some specific phenomena in society. During the past decade, one of the most striking initiatives has been the rapid development of art and design in higher education, a field that has expanded into one of the largest subject areas, with numbers of enrolments increasing annually and the growth of institutions and departments across the country. The phenomenon known as 'Art Study Fervour' (*yi kao re*)², referring to students' enthusiasm for applying for art and design undergraduate studies, has subsequently attracted broad attention from the public.

¹ Amongst other international bodies, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) became an ardent advocate in the 1980s for substituting the term "higher education" with "tertiary education" in the international higher education policy arena, including all post-secondary institutions in any given system (Guri-Roseblit, Sebkova and Teichler 2007).

² Unless otherwise stated, translation in this paper is by the author.

As background to this study, this chapter introduces the transition in Chinese higher education within a framework of political, economic and social change, with an emphasis on understanding the rationality behind the extreme expansion of enrolment that began in 1999. The first section is an introduction to give a navigation of this study. In the second section, I draw an overview of the policy developments regarding the massification of higher education in China, and discuss the changes to educational policies that have stimulated the rise in opportunities in higher education. In turn, this reveals a dynamic interaction between the higher education market and the political, economic and social environment. In section three, I then focus on the phenomenon of 'Art Study Fervour' to examine how educational policy shapes and interacts with society. I illustrate the changing patterns in the art and design higher education arena in light of expansion since 1999. My reflection and interpretation in terms of the dramatic growth in this particular sector is concluded in light of the political, economic and sociological dimensions respectively. In section four, the methodology designed and conducted, as well as the ethical considerations related to this research, will be introduced. The rationale for using a multi-strategy research method, combined with qualitative and quantitative approaches, is explained in depth in this section, as well as the key case study chosen.

1.1 Introduction

In China, the transition from secondary education to art and design higher education has a special route in comparison with other subject areas, which includes preliminary art examination in the entry system and one-year foundation training as the first year of undergraduate studies. However, there is still a common barrier, a unified examination in Chinese educational system, for all of the university applicants. The National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) in June annually, the so-called *gaokao*, has become the most crucial mechanism to examine candidates' academic performance in secondary education and plays the role of a filter to select qualified students in the entry system of higher education.³

Considering that drawing techniques are necessary for art practice in higher learning, applicants should participate in art examination (*zhuanke kao*)⁴ as the first step to demonstrate their artistic capabilities for their future studies, whilst attending the NCEE is the second stage, which is consequently recognised as the cultural examination (*wenhua ke kaoshi*) amongst art and design students. In the entry system, the art examination is of equal importance of the NCEE. It may contain either (or both, to certain art institutions) levels of examination, namely, the provincial examination (*sheng tong kao*) and the institutional examination (*xiao kao*). Through the art examinations, applicants are required to obtain a pass certificate (*zhuanke hege zheng*) in order to further participate in NCEE. The

³ The NCEE is commonly implemented as the entry assessment for regular Higher Education Institutions, namely full-time four-year university (*benke*) and three-year specialised college (*zhuanke*) courses, which embraces independent or privately funded colleges and advanced vocational and technology colleges. In this thesis, recruitment for part-time adult education, television education and exam-based self-taught education in the post-secondary level will not be discussed specifically, unless where clearly indicated.

⁴ *Zhuanke kao*, in English, actually means 'professional skills examination'. In this thesis it has been translated into 'art examination' on the basis of its content, function and impact.

marks obtained in both the art and cultural examinations will then determine whether applicants can be accepted by the art institutions they have chosen. Regardless of the changes that have happened in the art and design higher education sector in the past century, and reforms to the NCEE system, the main mechanism of art examination – sketching (*sumiao*), colouring (*secai*) and quick sketching (*suxie*) – has been consistent. Facing the largely increasing number of applicants in China, this mechanism has been widely viewed as an effective approach to select candidates for a wide range of subject areas in art and design higher education.

For being successful in art examinations, exam-oriented preparation appears to be vital in this transition period. The majority of applicants choose to participate in various ‘Pre-Exam Training Courses’ (*kaoqian ban*). The training approach seems to be sufficient for improving students’ capabilities to take the art examinations. Even those who have no practice background in art and design can be possibly trained to participate in the examination with this intensive course between three and six months during their final year at secondary school. Unlike the role of secondary schools in educational system, the Pre-exam Training Courses are mostly run by private training bodies or individual tutors to develop students’ technical skills for the art examinations largely. It generates a kind of non-institutional teaching and learning towards the art examination for higher education institutions, but at the same time, has become a particular preparatory approach available for students.

Once entering into an art institution, students, however, cannot initiate their chosen subject study immediately in the first year. A foundation programme has been designed and placed as the first year of any four-year courses. Within the foundation year, some common and essential skills of art or design practice are taught, including drawing and painting again. Upon successful completion of the foundation year, students will be able to undertake their subject studies that they were initially enrolled with or choose a subject area from a broad direction. This model has been described as ‘two-stage tuition’ (*liangduan shi*) at undergraduate level in order to respond to the policy of ‘strengthening the foundation’ (*hou jichu*) for higher learning in art and design. Compared to the ‘Pre-exam Training course’, the foundation programme is an entirely institutionalised production and certainly takes different effect in the transition period.

In the present Chinese context, implementing the current entrance examination for art and design higher education represents two perspectives from the policy-makers. First, following the expansion of higher education since 1999, the number of art and design applicants has increased significantly. This phenomenon is widely acknowledged as ‘Art Study Fervour’ (*yi kao re*) in China. Envisaging the large amount of applicants, it is believed that examining students’ ability in realistic drawing may ensure a fair access in admissions, as the drawing and colouring techniques are more measurable in comparison with other aptitudes, for example, creative practice. This strategy corresponds well to the guidelines of the NCEE, namely ‘fairness (*gongping*)’, ‘equality (*gongzheng*)’ and ‘transparency (*gongkai*)’. Indeed, *gaokao* has a significant status not only in

educational system, but also, in the social and cultural context as it creates hopes, aspirations and life-changing opportunity for Chinese families. Although the expansion in the higher education sector is remarkable in the past decade, the demand of participation in higher education is still over the supply of places. Therefore, seeking social justice has been a priority in the entry system of higher education for policy-makers. Secondly, using the current art examination is not merely a 'practical compromise'. As a matter of fact, realistic sketching has been deeply rooted in every stage of Chinese modern art and design education. It has been considered in general as a tradition or a soul of Chinese art academies. Basically, realistic sketching has been regarded central in fine art practice, as well as the primary skill to further develop any artistic or design studies. It can be therefore accepted as an effective approach to selecting potential students for a wide range of art and design courses.

Higher education has never been compulsory for students to participate in. Understanding students' motivation and behaviour in choosing higher education institutions, in particular art and design courses, has become one of the research focuses of this study. It could be a common understanding that students' choice of studying art and design is fundamentally in relation to their personal interests or talents. However, in reality, with such an entry system, many students consider art and design study as an alternative way or a kind of shortcut to higher education when the requirement of the cultural examination is relevantly lower. For Chinese families, the aspirations of higher education are mainly derived from a conventional cultural value – pursuing a successful career through education. Consequently, passing *gaokao* has been a key mission to

many Chinese students, which inevitably shapes their perception and behaviour in their educational choice. Studies on students' choice can help to understand the complexity of the marketplace in higher education better.

With these phenomena and issues, this research aims to examine the national policies and the entry system to art and design higher education under the background of the extreme expansion in higher education sector in China, and to historically review not only the development of higher education, but also the important role of sketching in Chinese art education. The appropriateness of art examination has been critically discussed, as well as the current entry system. This enables me to develop a range of new perspectives from the existing discussions on the phenomenon of 'Art Study Fervour', and meanwhile, to conduct an important survey on student decision-making and experience in the transition period towards higher education in China. Through the case study on a paradigm art institution in China, China Academy of Art (CAA), some key findings and interpretative understanding in student motivation and perception on their choices of institutions and subject areas are reflected critically. It has become a cutting point to this research to review critically the impact of the current entrance examination on Chinese art and design higher education.

This thesis is structured around two major lines of research, namely national policies and institutional strategies of the entry system on the one hand, on the other, students' perspective and influential factors on their choices. Chapter One sets a scene for this study and outlines policies and strategies transformed from elite education to mass education in higher education arena, including the rapid

development and expansion in art and design sector. In this chapter, the government intervention in launching the massification strategies is revealed and discussed. It identifies that the expansion was mainly in the field of elite education, which coincidentally matches with a traditional mind-set of pursuing a prestigious university in the society. Likewise, through the analysis of the phenomenon of 'Art Study Fervour' from the political, economical and social perspectives, the research questions are specifically addressed. What was the students' motivation to choose art and design higher education beyond their personal interests and experiences? Does the current entrance examination have any impact on students' choice? A multi-strategy of methodology for this research is introduced, which integrates quantitative and qualitative research to fully understand the research focuses from both macro and micro scales.

Chapter Two focuses on the entrance examination of art and design higher education, that consists of the NCEE and the art examination. The generic processes and contents of both the examinations are explored and analysed. As an examination to select 'talents', the NCEE generated not only an exam-driven education system in China, but also stimulated an enthusiasm in exam success in the society, which can be linked with the Civil Service Examination in Imperial China. This chapter also points out the rationale of adopting sketching and colouring as the main mechanism of art examinations has both historical and contemporary dimensions, where realistic visual techniques play an important role in Chinese modern art education.

Chapter Three demonstrates the major case study of China Academy of Art, including the discussions on their policies, strategies and practices in admission with a large number applicants, assessment criteria and procedures, and foundation programme in the first year of undergraduate studies. Those strategies are first in line with national policies to ensure a fair access, and then further developed to re-adjust the exam-led outcomes from the Pre-exam Training courses. A series of interviews with participants at CAA, including teaching staff and members of their senior management, become significant first-hand materials from the institutional point view for the research development.

In Chapter Four, I focus on students' perceptions and experience in choosing art and design higher education based on the questionnaire analysis and further discussions in focus groups as an extension of the case study of CAA. It provides a theoretical framework of existing literatures on student educational choice and builds up a perceptual model of choice of art and design in the particular Chinese context. In this chapter, I also examine the influential factors on student choice from external determinants, individual circumstances and the educational system. The findings are largely based on the results of data analysis and personal reflections by individual participants.

Finally, Chapter Five considers the current situation and future challenges derived from the implementation of marketisation and internationalisation of higher education in China. Facing the competitions in the dynamic educational marketplace, the central role of entrance examination in admission nationally may be challenged. Student choices become the central concern while some

tentative strategies are raised at both pre-undergraduate stage and in the foundation year. As a conclusion of this study, this chapter highlights the original research findings and draws out, in particular, two significant impacts generated by the entrance examination on student experiences of both educational choice and higher learning in art and design. The discussions are also extended to some critical reflections, suggestions to policy-makers, and potential directions for future research.

1.2 The Change in Higher Education: From Elite towards Mass

Martin Trow's (1972) identified his classification of the three stages of higher education development, namely elitist, mass and universal higher education, which has been widely accepted by academics and educators in China (Bie and Yang 2009). The classification was originally defined based on the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which here refers to the percentage of the age group between 18 and 22 years old enrolled in higher education in China.⁵ GER at 15% or below is considered to be the rate of elite education, while the ranges from 15% to 50% and over 50% are referred to as mass and universal education respectively. This transition has been achieved in many economically developed countries. For example, on average, 57% of secondary school graduates in OECD

⁵ In the glossary of 'Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008', Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is defined as 'Total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group corresponding to this level of education. For the tertiary level, the population used is that of the five-year age group following on from the secondary school-leaving age. GER can exceed 100% due to early or late entry and/or grade repetition.' Available at www.unesco.org/education/gmr2008/annexes/annex7.pdf [accessed on 26 September 2013]. In China, the Ministry of Education (MoE) modified the statistical method of GER in 1998, with the numerator of the fraction expanded to encompass a wide range of regular university and college, postgraduate, adult, military academy, self-taught and exam-based education. For more information, see: www.moe.edu.cn.

(the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries went on to university in 2006, compared with 37% in 1995 (OECD 2007).

Correspondingly, for many developing countries, the elitist-mass education paradigm has become a standard model for the development of higher education systems (Scott 1995). 'Massification of higher education' was coined by Scott and underpinned by the aspirations for widening participation. On the basis of this terminology, in this section, the paper will examine chronologically the development of the higher education sector and the process of massification since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, in order to identify the interaction between the higher education system and its political and socio-economic context. I consider three main periods, namely, 1949-1977, 1978-1998 and 1998-2010.⁶

During the first period, the three decades from 1949 to 1977, the transformation of higher education experienced significant influence from social and political changes. However, it was mainly the highly centralised mode of governance and the state-planned economy system that affected the development of the higher education sector. In 1949, the GER of higher education was extremely low, just 0.26%, while the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) was 205 (China Statistical Yearbook 1985). 'Mass Cultural Education' (*dazhong de wenhua jiaoyu*) was first promoted in the Common Guidance Principle by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in China (He 1998, p. 1). It

⁶ Since 2008, the annual growth of student intake numbers has kept up a stable increase but slowed down, which creates a lesser impact on the research focus of this study. 2010 was the final year of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2006-2010), which included a series of national political and economic development initiatives in China. Although expansion has been controlled since 2007, the changes in higher education during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan have still been revisited in this study.

was clearly stated in article 41: 'The cultural education of the People's Republic of China is a New Democracy education, namely national, scientific and mass education.'⁷ The first national conference was held in 1950 and the aim of higher education was underpinned. Higher education therefore became much more accessible to Chinese people with middle, lower-middle and working-class origins (Yang 2004). Hayhoe (1989, p. 68) also noted,

To educate workers for national construction who will have a high cultural level, who possess modern scientific and technical accomplishments and will serve wholeheartedly the people by means of the teaching method known as 'the unity of theory and practice'.

Lacking experience of the schooling model, the Chinese government developed its educational system by 'learning from the Soviet Union', with this strategy being applied in the higher education sector until the mid-1950s. From 1949 to 1952, a countrywide adjustment of colleges and universities (*yuanxi tiaozheng*) was accomplished and enrolment increased 69% (Gu 2004). As a result of this, during the First Five-year Plan period (1953-1957), the annually increasing rate of students enrolled in higher education was 18.2% (*Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian* 1984). In the late 1950s, with strategic planning, the speed of the proliferation of higher education was accelerated tremendously by the central government. The paper of 'Instruction in Education Work' was released in 1958 (National Education Research Institute 1984, p. 232). It pronounced that it would 'popularise higher education within 15 years and pursue quality during the 15

⁷ This common guidance principle was announced on 29 September 1949, and has been seen as the temporary constitution of New China. Source: <http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/84/info4984.htm> [accessed on 26 September 2012].

years thereafter'. In fact, the period from 1958 to 1960 was historically distinctive as the political mass movement of the Great Leap Forward (*da yue jin*) in industrial and agricultural production. As Hayhoe (1989, p. 72) recorded, 'To respond to the political call, the number of higher education institutions grew from 229 in 1957 to 1,289 in 1960 and the number of annually enrolled students tripled.' However, due to the devastating effects of the famine in 1959-1961 and the economic failure of the Great Leap Forward, disparities between the financial input that had been placed into educational construction and the demand of rapidly increased student intake numbers led higher education to a status of imbalance. There had been the expectation that this massive expansion could be achieved without the loss of academic standards, and that graduates could all have status with appropriate jobs at different levels assigned to them. But soon, it became clear that the state could not easily absorb such a huge number of new entrants (Hayhoe 1996, p. 97). By the early 1960s, academic standards were invoked for limiting both the number of institutions and the scale of enrolment in the formal system, which was described metaphorically as a 'hard landing' (*ying zhuolu*) (Xie 2001, p. 143). Astonishingly, 882 HEIs, 68.4% of the total, were closed from 1961 to 1963. A great number of students had to stop their studies. Actually, with the Great Leap Forward, the development of education was decelerated for a few years.

The achievement of the national economy and expansion of the higher education sector could not, however, be maintained when Mao launched his Cultural Revolution in 1966. During the so-called 'turbulent decade' (*shinian dongluan*) (1966-76), the higher education system suffered tremendous losses, especially in

terms of student intake, which dropped significantly in accordance with the political and social circumstances of the time. Between 1966 and 1969, there was no new recruitment in the formal higher education system. Instead, there were many short-term training classes, which largely focused on political mobilisation (Hayhoe 1996, p. 100). In 1970, the intake number was 47,815, 59% less than the intake of 1949. Furthermore, among those participants, there were 41,870 'worker-peasant-soldier students' (*gong nong bin xuesheng*) (Xie 2001, p. 148). As will be discussed in a later chapter, the entrance examination was discontinued after 1967, and the entry criteria in that period were entirely based on recommendation, which meant that students' political performance and family background became more important than their academic capabilities.

The second period as identified in this chapter began in the late 1970s, when economic reform and an open policy launched, and lasted until 1998, the year prior to extreme expansion. In China, the reform decade is usually seen as beginning in 1977-1978 when Deng Xiaoping returned to power.⁸ The transition of the Chinese economy from a centrally planned system to a market-oriented one led it into a spectrum of influential changes in education. The target of educational reform was now on establishing a socialist education system with Chinese characteristics rather than meeting political needs. Recruitment of student was resumed in 1977, as well as the National College Entrance Examination. In the winter of that year, 5.7 million candidates took the exam and

⁸ It was in 1978 that China adopted its reform and open-door policy with the Third Plenum of the 10th Central Committee commenced in Beijing in 1977.

273,000 were admitted.⁹ Six months later, the exam was undertaken once again to respond to the increased demand. The number of candidates increased to 6.1 million, while 404,000 students were subsequently enrolled (National Education Research Institute 1984, p. 519). Suspending NCEE for nearly ten years had caused great anxiety in the society already. Thus, resuming student intake for higher education stimulated extreme enthusiasm and aspiration for academic learning among the young generation and brought new hopes to them for a different future. However, the state financial capacity could not provide sufficient funding in supporting the operation of higher education institutions. Pepper (1990, p. 134) noted, 'Economic reforms aimed to break up the over-centralisation of economic power and socialist distribution. Universities had also been told that free state-subsidised higher education would be phased out, and new policies were introduced in line with reform.' For example, higher education was always free of charge from the establishment of New China right up to 1985 when the policy was changed. Those students who were not enrolled within the state plan (*jihua nei*) had to pay a certain amount of the so-called commissioned training fee (*weipei fei*), which was sponsored by their future work units.¹⁰ A few years later, in 1989, a self-financing policy was applied for most new entrants at regular higher education institutions.¹¹ Higher education therefore, as a pricing

⁹ Deng Xiaoping, the new leader of the Chinese central government, chaired the National Symposium of Science and Education on 8 August 1977, and was determined to resume student intake for universities. Submitted afterwards by the Ministry of Education, the paper of 'Suggestions on Admission Policies of Higher Education in 1977' (*Guanyu 1977 nian gaodeng xuexiao zhaosheng gongzuo de yijian*), in which the NCEE was re-introduced to the entry system, was approved by the State Council.

¹⁰ This was noted in the paper of 'Decision of Education Reform of Education System of the CCCP (Central Committee of the Communist Party) of China', released in 1985 by the State Council.

¹¹ Tuition fees officially jumped from 200 RMB per year in 1989 to an average of 5,000 RMB in more recent times (Guo 2007). Fees formed approximately 37% of the average Gross National Income (GNI) per person in China (World Bank China 2007), and some educators called for a halt to further increases (Ji 2007).

service, became a part of the marketplace, which, from an economic perspective, became one of the driving forces in terms of expansion in later years.

To draw a general picture, the scale of higher education maintained a steady development, with an annual average increase rate of 8.5% from the early 1980s to 1998, which matched the growth of the national economy.¹² The expansion experienced two differentiated stages with distinct approaches in terms of strategic implementation. By 1985, the development was characterised by the emergence of many new institutions. The number of HEIs increased from 598 in 1978 up to 1,061 in 1985 (Diagram 1), while the average student intake expanded accordingly and the GER went up from 1.56% to 3.68%. The pattern of this expansion was described as *Waiyanshi fazhan* (extensional development), which provided sufficient places in order to adapt to the progressive demand for higher education (Bie and Yang 2009, p. 3). Still, due to the highly centralised governance, further development of higher development was restricted. As Yang (2004) described, 'It brought severe suffering from the overlapped setting of disciplines, inefficiency of utilisation and imbalanced allocation'. With a merger wave initiated in 1992,¹³ the launch of new HEIs was carefully controlled. Indeed, the number was reduced from 1,075 in 1989 to 1,022 in 1998 by means of the reform. Mok (2005) also argues that 'university merging in China should not be simply understood as pure higher education reform but rather as fundamental

¹² Over the two decades, China's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) succeeded in obtaining an average annual growth of about 10%, while the average annual inflation rate was kept under 3% (Yang and Wang 2009, p. 3).

¹³ The merger of higher education institutions was considered to be one of the most important approaches to educational reform. A prologue began with the merger between Jiangxi University and Jiangxi Polytechnic in May 1993. The institution was given a brand new name, Nanchang University, named after the capital city of Jiangxi Province (Bie and Yang 2009, p. 40). However, most of these mergers were top-down decisions, in that the state decided which institutions had to merge (Cai 2006).

change in the higher education governance model, from an interventionist state mode to an accelerationist state mode.'

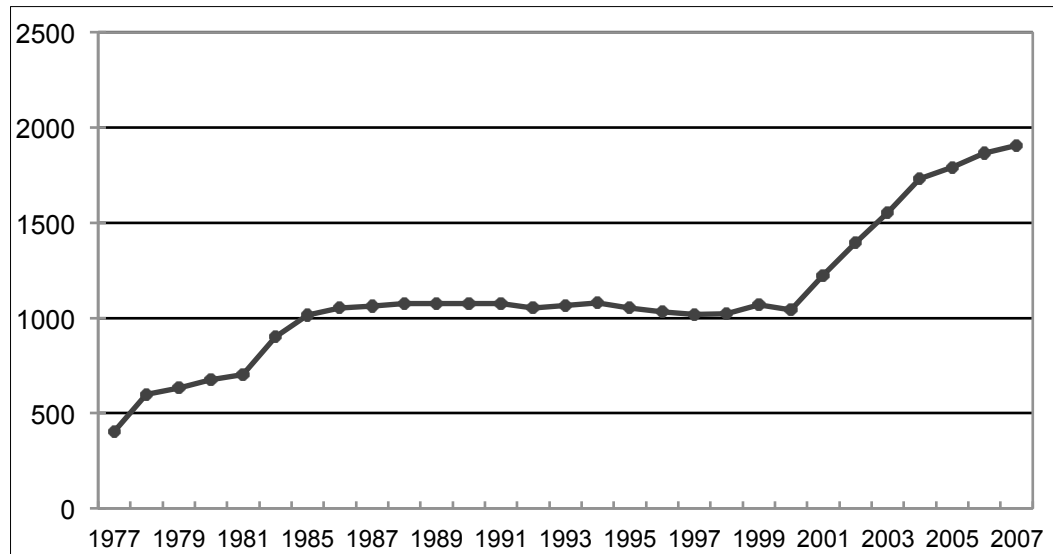


Diagram 1: Number of Regular Higher Education Institutions (1977-2007).

With the emergence of the 'knowledge economy', in the 1990s, the demand for skilled workers with multiple and transferable skills to engage with complex tasks and technologies led countries to invest more in higher education and to encourage more of their citizens to participate in higher education (Gibbons *et al.* 1994). Higher education institutions were treated as the pool of knowledge, and now had a new role in 'knowledge transfer'. (Wedgwood 2006). The government thus made policies to increase the participation of higher education as a strategy for improving national competitiveness. From the early 1990s, on the one hand, the student intake number was generally increased in every single institution to meet the demand from society throughout the decade. On the other hand, as a key policy, the importance of 'strengthening national power through talent' (*rencai qiangguo*) and 'developing the country through science and education' (*kejiao xinguo*) was acknowledged and introduced into the Ninth Five-Year Plan

(1996-2000). GER reached 9.76% in 1998 (Xie 2001, p. 252). This development was identified as *neihanshi fazhan*: relatively, the inner strength of HEIs. The mission was mentioned explicitly in 'Principles of Education Reform and Development in China' (Central Committee of CPC and the State Council 1993). Its aims were 'to continue the strategic development of the inner strength of higher education, and to make every effort to enhance quality and efficiency'. The strategy of extending the potential capacity of individual institutions was widely promoted throughout the country and applied continuously during the process of massification in the early twentieth century.

The first year of the third period is 1999, which is regarded as a key turning point and marks the embarkation of China into the realm of mass education. Similar to the growth of China's economic development over the three decades that had gone before, higher education now developed to an astonishing extent within one decade (Yang and Wang 2009). GER was initially targeted at increasing from 9% in 1999 to 15% by 2010 (State Council 1999). However, with government intervention, this climbed up to 11.5% in 2000 and strikingly reached 15% in 2002, which was seen as the launch of mass education. The State Council (2007) reported that GER had already reached 20% by 2005, and that further expansion up to 2010 would lead to an estimated rate of 25%. Zhou Ji (2007), the former Minister of Education (2003-2009), stated that the number of recruited students had grown from 1.08 million in 1998 to 5.4 million in 2006. This periodical expansion lasted for eight years, although it began to slow down markedly in 2007 (Diagram 2).

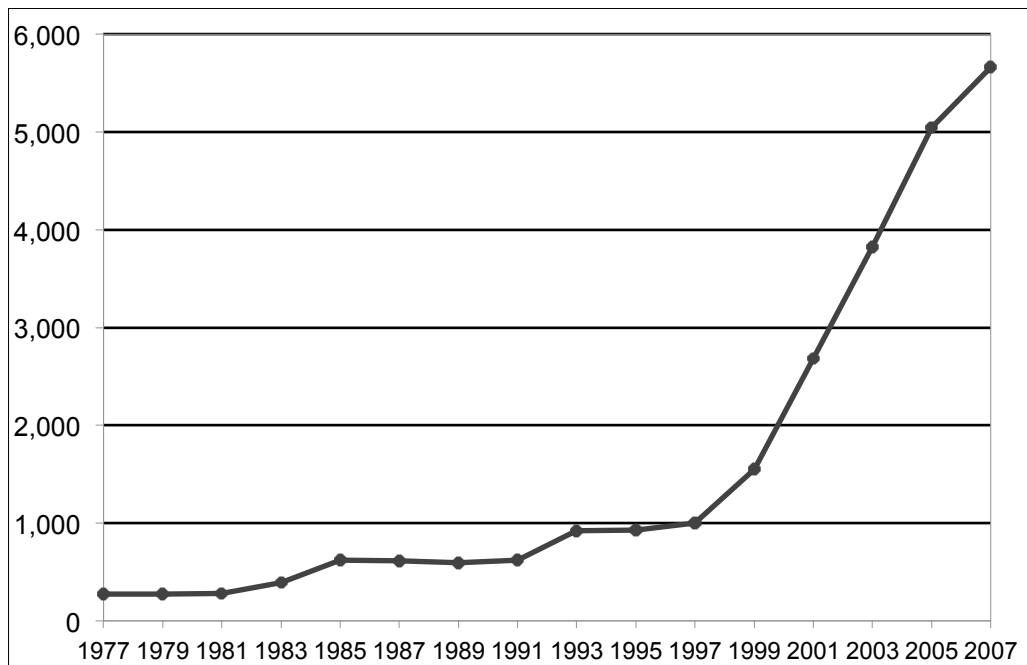


Diagram 2: Student Intake Numbers (Thousands) of Regular HEIs (1977-2007).

Higher education in China witnessed the transition from elitist education to mass education within a decade and entered a fast growth era, the so-called 'leap forward' (*kuayue shi*) development period. GER in 1999 increased by 47.4% in comparison with 1998, with 510,000 students being additionally enrolled. From his economic perspective, Tang Min (1999), an economist for the Asian Development Bank, proposed increasing higher education participation in 1998 as one way to ease China's economic problems.¹⁴ He believed that doubling enrolment over the following three years would increase consumption by about 100 billion RMB, which amounted to 0.5% of the GDP. This was underpinned by the recognition that education investment within Chinese families had always been one of the priorities for expenditure. In early June 1999, only one month

¹⁴ China was still suffering the effects of the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s. A proposal of *Doubling the Amount of Enrolment of Higher Education* was drafted by Tang Min. It was submitted to Premier Zhu Rongji in December 1998 and was considered as a provisional strategy to stimulate the Chinese economy (Bie and Yang 2009, pp. 4-5).

prior to the NCEE,¹⁵ the proposal was approved and put into immediate practice.

A few years later, Li Lanqing (2003), the former vice premier in China (1997-2003), outlined four major reasons and beneficial effects of this movement:

First, the rapid development of socialist construction requires more talent with high profiles; second, the aspiration and demand for entering into universities is broad among Chinese families; third, it will stimulate the consumption of education and domestic demand greatly, and the employment problem in the labour market will be relieved provisionally; finally, in favour of the expansion, the intense competition of student intake for HEIs will be reduced accordingly. The burden of exam-oriented teaching and learning will then be released and all-around education (*suzhi jiaoyu*)¹⁶ will be enhanced at the primary and secondary level.

From the governmental perspective, educational expansion is basically considered to be capable of facilitating numerous favourable changes for individuals and nations on a long-term basis. Hannum and Buckman (2003) discussed their assumptions about the consequences of educational expansion for economic and social development: '1) educational expansion is essential to national economic development, as better educated citizens are more productive; 2) it narrows social inequalities within nations by promoting social mobility; 3) it contributes to the development of a more democratic society, as more educated people are able to make more informed political decisions.'

¹⁵ The date of the NCEE was 7-9 July until 2002; from 2003, it was moved to 7-9 June.

¹⁶ All-around education – literally, the development of morality, intelligence and physique – has been promoted since 1985, and is discussed in 'Decisions on Reform of Educational Structure' (State Council 1985). It stands opposed to the phenomenon of 'Pursuing the Success of the NCEE Unilaterally' (*Pianmian zhuiqiu shengxuelu*), which existed widely in secondary schools due to the extreme competition of the NCEE.

However, despite the favourable factors, many educationalists continuously challenge the consequences derived from the leap-forward development, especially expressing their concerns about resource allocation, the staff-student ratio and the quality assurance of teaching and learning if the expansion is not accompanied by a substantial investment in higher education (Xie 2001, Pan 2004, Yang 2003). Since the speed of educational expansion far exceeded the growth of the national economy between 1999 and 2006, the level of support for teaching and learning declined in many institutions. For example, literature resources per capita in 2000 were nearly 50% lower than the standard regulation set by the MoE in 1996, as well as the measurement of educational occupancy. In particular, the number of teaching staff increased by only 78%, while the student number increased by 225% between 1998 and 2003 (Xie 2001). Additionally, increasing participation has the effect of lowering the entry requirement of cut-off score of the NCEE and enables weaker candidates to enter into universities as well, which has caused a further overloading of teaching activities. The quality maintenance of education has therefore been taken into account by the central government and has become the new mission for the development of higher education. The student intake number in 2007 was carefully controlled and a series of guidance documents were published with the aim of preventing progressive problems derived from expansion (Bie and Yang 2009, p. 19). Government leaders have started to put more effort into improving the quality of higher education and have promoted the concept of pursuing world-class university and academic rankings.¹⁷

¹⁷ The mission can be read in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan issued on 11 October 2005. Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2006-01/16/content_4057926.htm [accessed on 31 October 2011].

In addition, there has been much debate in relation to appropriate approaches to the recent extreme expansion in higher education. First, compared with the transition to massification in other countries, the process of increasing participation in China since 1999 entailed an immediate shift under government intervention. The mode of expansion mainly proceeded from the previous 'inner strength' feature, which has been defined in another way as 'potentiality exploitation' (*waqian*) (Yang 2001). Yang (2006) described the situation as 'an expansion of traditional elite higher education'. The conventional mind-set of entering into higher education continues to influence parent and student choice. The vocational function of higher education has been introduced into society along with mass and universal higher education. As he indicated, 'It helps elite higher education institutions be closer to practical needs and thus strengthens the adaptability of the whole higher education sector.' In China, vocational and private education in the higher education sector has to face stiff competition from public universities, and have thus experienced slower advancement. The development of vocational education in China can be traced back to the early 1980s. Its programmes are still closely linked to the localised industry. Nevertheless, compared with four-year universities, vocational colleges have always been considered a second choice for Chinese parents and students who have been influenced by the lure of the traditional elite establishments and their espoused values. In the Chinese educational market, research-based universities have been the mainstream during expansion, and they have also benefited from tuition fees as a channel of financial income.

Opponents of expansion argue that pressure in the labour market has increased, while the employment of high school graduates has been deferred. For example, the number of college graduates increased from 1.15 million in 2001 to 2.12 million in 2003 (Wang and Liu 2009). In 2006, the total number of graduates from higher education institutions reached 4 million, but the demand in labour market in China was only 1.66 million. Such an enormous number of graduates put huge social stress on the employment opportunities available and attracted widespread attention from the government and mass media. According to the blue paper issued by the Chinese Academy of Social Science (2008), about 20% of university graduates in 2007 failed to find employment within six months of their graduation. Unemployment has become one of the most significant challenges in present-day Chinese society. Affected by such pressures, about 80,000 secondary school graduates in Shandong Province chose not to participate the college entrance exam in 2009, which created sensational news headlines as reported by mass media. The main reason was that students from rural areas were worried about their employability after graduation (Wang 2010). Students from less prestigious universities also tend to feel it is even more difficult to find a proper job in relation to their studies. However, in fact, although the number of graduates increased, there is still a shortage of qualified technicians within the field of industry. This leads to suspicions from the general public about the quality of education and appropriateness of training in universities and their appropriateness to career development. As a contributor to the expansion, Tang argues that, 'rather than reducing participation, it is more

important to reform the structure of higher education fundamentally to adapt to the dynamic education and labour market.¹⁸

On the basis of the observation of higher education development in the above three periods, I will articulate my reflection as follows. As a cultural system, education always mirrors many aspects in society, in terms of ideologies, values, democracy, equality and equity. In this mass education era, increasing participation (IP) is the first step in the improvement of the educational levels of the people. In addition to IP, widening participation (WP) is a differential and more complicated concept to be addressed. Watson (2006, p.6) refers to WP as a 'portmanteau concept' and commented thus:

The basic point is that widening participation is not just, or even primarily, about minorities. The equation of (class) × (gender) × (ethnicity) × (age) × (location) is a very complex one, and is now being added to by newly prominent variables such as disability.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Research Programme's (TLRP's 2005) definition of widening participation is comprehensive:

Widening participation is taken to mean extending and enhancing access to and experience of HE, of people from so-called under-represented and diverse social backgrounds, families, groups and communities and positively enabling such people to participate in and benefit from various types of higher education. These could include people from socially disadvantaged families and/or

¹⁸ Source: <http://finance.sina.com.cn/economist/xuezheshuib/20060303/08162387982.shtml> [accessed on 4 March 2010].

deprived geographical areas, including deprived remote, rural and coastal areas or from families that have no prior experience of higher education. Widening participation is also concerned with diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender, disability, and social background in particular HE disciplines, modes and institutions. In addition it can also include access and participation across the ages, extending conceptions of learning across the life course, and in relation to family responsibilities, particularly by gender and maturity.

Widening participation in higher education can be treated as a longstanding attempt to increase educational opportunities available to more proportion of the social groups. In terms of social justice, expansion theoretically enables higher education institutions to recruit students from a wider section of society into a broader structure of higher education. However, as Yang (2003) indicates, 'during the early stages of expansion in China, there was clearly not an equitable distribution of access across society. On the contrary, regional disparities – for example, between urban and rural areas, as well as between coastal and interior areas – increased due to the imbalance of economic status and basic education.' Despite these geographical factors, Ball *et al.* (2002) argued that 'those young people with access to rich and diverse forms of social, cultural and economic capital¹⁹ were likely to be 'embedded choosers'. University for this group was seen as part of a 'normal and necessary' step between school and career.' Apart from these factors, the effects of the massification of higher education on the quality of teaching and learning, the efficiency of the entry system, institutional financing and marketing have made up the new key debates in the national and international higher education arena.

¹⁹ 'Cultural capital' is a sociological concept that has gained widespread popularity since it was first articulated by Bourdieu, who originally used the term in 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction' (1973). It will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

1.3 'Art Study Fervour' in China

As illustrated in previous sections, China has recently witnessed a much faster pace of growth in the higher education sector than at any previous time in its history. This section will focus on the development of art and design education, which has accelerated tremendously amid the extreme wave of expansion that started in 1999. The phenomenon has been widely accepted by society as 'Art Study Fervour', with many educators describing it as an explosive development (Tong 2007).

In general, as a distinct subject area, the higher learning of art commenced in specialised institutions in its traditional form.²⁰ Prior to its expansion, the schooling of art was characterised by small-class teaching and learning, normally 5-15 students per class in most art institutions in China. According to Pan Lusheng (2005), this conventional teaching mode was beneficial to individual practice and stimulated creative thinking during the learning process. One-to-one tutorials were widely adopted as the main teaching method, focusing on individualised instruction and encouraging interaction between tutors and students as a means of following the philosophy of so-called 'elite education'.

Nevertheless, over the past decade, traditional art education has been influenced by the launch of mass education at the higher education level. To respond to the

²⁰ In China, art-based subjects mainly consist of fine art, design, performing art and music.

call for extreme expansion, since 1999, the application numbers for art and design at tertiary level have increased significantly. For example, by 2001, the accumulated number of graduates of the art and design undergraduate programmes was only 178,000 (Pan 2005, p. 5). Yet, by 2008, the annual intake number in the country had reached 300,000.²¹ According to statistics from the Ministry of Education in 2001, the enrolment figure of art and design undergraduate studies overtook many traditionally favoured subjects, such as literature, law and medicine, and become one of the top ten in-demand subjects (Qu 2001). The case of Shandong Province can be reviewed as a representative example, due to it having the largest number of applicants in all of China, while Henan, as the second largest, had only half that amount. In 2007, for instance, there were more than 169,000 art student applicants in Shandong Province alone, with 82,000 in Henan Province and 35,000 in Zhejiang Province.²² Reviewing the increasing number of applicants in Shandong alone, it can be seen that expansion has been quite unprecedented (Diagram 3).²³

²¹ Interview with Xu Ping, Vice Dean of the School of Design at CAFA. He reviewed the art and design education development within eight years at the IDA congress in 2009 in Beijing. Interview conducted by anonymous interviewer. Source: <http://c.chinavisual.com/2008/12/18/c54111/index.shtml> [accessed on 9 January 2010].

²² Interview with Weng Zhenyu, the former Director of the Administrative and Recruitment Office, China Academy of Art, 18 May 2007, Hangzhou. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews in this thesis were conducted by the author.

²³ As the national figures for applicants of higher education art and design are unknown in published sources, I have illustrated the figures of Shandong Province as a representative case.

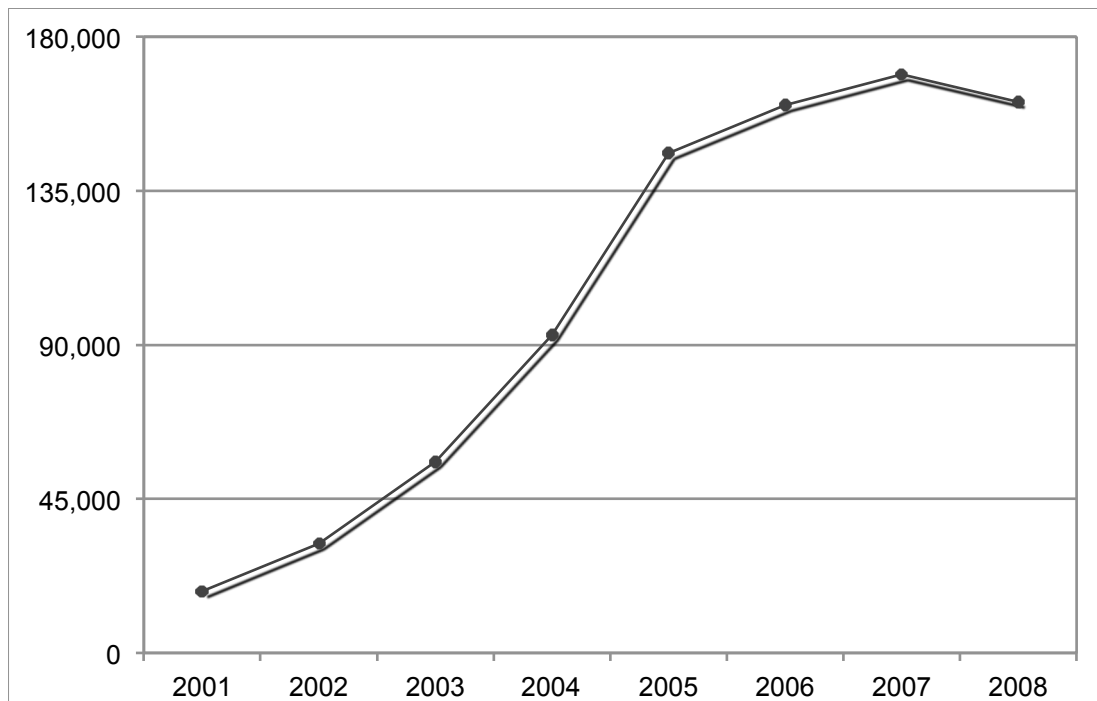


Diagram 3: Numbers of Applicants for Art-Based Subjects in Higher Education in Shandong Province (2001-2008).

This movement has generated not only an increase in applicants for art and design in higher education, but also the growth of institutions and faculties, which have been nationally encouraged by the government across the country. By 2006, of the 1,867 regular HEIs, 760 institutions and universities had art-based courses²⁴ (Ministry of Education 2007).²⁵ The sum total of art-based courses now number 2,988, while the number of art and design courses is 2,096. These statistics clearly show a rapid growth of art institutions and departments since the first fine art department was established with the founding of the China Academy of Art in 1928²⁶ and the rapid and sweeping expansion that followed

²⁴ In China, art-based subjects at undergraduate level mainly consist of fine art, design, performing art and music. In this study, the entry system of performing art and music has not been included. Art and design students in this research refer to fine art and design students in general.

²⁵ Information obtained from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 23 March 2006.

²⁶ The earliest established major related to art in China is 'Music Composition, Techniques and Theory', founded in 1927 at the Shanghai Conservatoire of Music (known before 1949 as the National Conservatoire of Music).

from the end of the twentieth century (Diagram 4). As Tang (2007) critiques, nowadays it might be much more difficult to point out those institutions *not* offering any art-based courses in China.

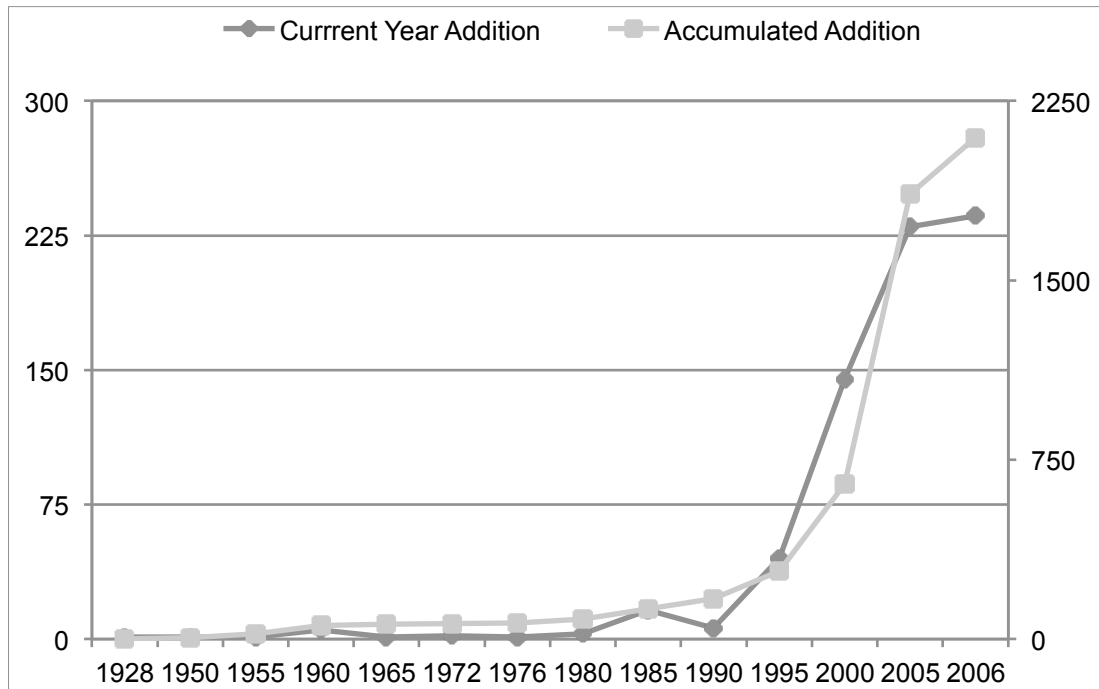


Diagram 4: Growth of Art and Design Courses in Higher Education in China (1927-2006).

Meanwhile, the pattern of art and design higher education in China has changed, particularly in the field of design education. Traditionally, the media of art production at the tertiary level were mainly confined to the area of fine art. *Guo you ban diao*²⁷ had always taken a dominant role over the long term in art education history. This structure was mainly based on the Soviet pattern of art education, which China had borrowed in the 1950s. The former ‘Arts and Crafts’

²⁷ These abbreviations of the four main art subjects institutionally and traditionally recognised in China respectively mean Chinese painting (*guo* for *guohua*), oil painting (*you* for *youhua*), printmaking (*ban* for *banhua*) and sculpture (*diao* for *diaosu*).

(*gongyi meishu*),²⁸ as a form of applied arts, had been less valued in art education circles when compared with fine art practice. Art and crafts courses were commonly considered to be more technique-based and designed to fit specific job requirements. This pattern did not change until the 1980s, with the launching of reform and the open door policy. Opportunities to study abroad,²⁹ in particular the faculty-training programme, brought back the Western experience of contemporary design education and inspired its development in China (Pan 2005, p. 12). Added to this, on the one hand, many higher education institutions tended to establish design-related specialties strategically to meet the needs of the transformation of society. On the other, this strategy technically avoided competition with traditional art academies in fine art education. It had taken more than a decade to experience the transition, not only in terms of the title but also the content and diversification of contemporary design education. In 1998, *Gongyi meishu* was isolated from the category of fine art and subordinated directly to art-based subjects in the 'Directory of Subjects in Regular Higher Education Institutions' (*Putong gaodeng xuexiao zhuanye mulu*). In the meantime, the subject title of 'Arts and Crafts' was officially replaced by 'Art Design' (*yishu sheji xue*).³⁰ This structural change laid the ground for the offering of more choices for students in art and design in the higher education arena during the movement of massification.

²⁸ The title of *Gongyi Meishu* in China has appeared under different names through the history of art education, including decorative art and applied art (Yuan 2003).

²⁹ The majority of those who went abroad for study were middle-aged faculty members. Most had returned by the mid-1980s and many took up leadership positions in their own universities. By the late 1980s, it was common for many department deans, vice presidents and even presidents to be a part of this group (Hayhoe 1996, p. 119).

³⁰ This was announced by the Ministry of Education in July 1998 with the implementation of a new 'Directory of Subjects in Regular Higher Education Institutions' (*Putong gaodeng xuexiao zhuanye mulu*), which was the fourth adjustment in the history of New China (Yuan 2003, p. 238).

Expansion in art and design higher education has attracted wide attention from society. Many educators discuss its impact through critical analyses of the causes of this phenomenon based on their personal experience, as I cited previously. Additionally, many debates refer not only to the phenomenon of 'Art Study Fervour' itself, but also reflection on the growth of contemporary art and design education in China. Tong (2007, p. 271) comments that Chinese art and design higher education has experienced a typical change and development along with the extreme expansion of university enrolment. Some criticism is based on the survey of sociological aspects in relation to the phenomenon (Zhang 2006, p. 114). I argue the following three points may be of particular interest in terms of the interpretation of this phenomenon as research background in this chapter.

The first point emphasises political strategies, in particular the tendency to promote mass education in the higher education arena and at a time when universities were frequently merging. As Powney (2002, p. 11) states, 'supply and demand is not constant and can be affected by political changes such as the decision to expand the overall numbers entering higher education, or to target particular groups or professions'. Affected by the structural adjustment and Soviet-derived system of the 1950s, some units within universities were separated or repositioned into specialised institutions. By 1953, there were nine specialised art institutions in total. The former Central Academy of Arts and Crafts (*zhongyang gongyi meiyuan*) was separated from the Central Academy of Fine Art and founded independently in 1956, with the aim of fostering 'senior talent' to serve the art and craft industry (Yuan 2003, p. 167). However, during

the wave of mergers in the 1990s, this strategy changed. HEIs were enthusiastic in pursuing a large and comprehensive (*da er quan*) mode by building an integrated and diversified structure of disciplines. Some specialised institutions strategically merged with universities. For example, the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts merged with Tsinghua University in 1999 and was simply renamed the 'Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University'.³¹ The joint proposal submitted to the Ministry of Education stated:

... considering that the combination of Science and Art is an important tendency of comprehensive disciplines, Tsinghua University has put the construction of a faculty of art into its main strategies of adjustment... The merger has complementary advantages and mutual benefit for both sides and is corresponding to the state spirit of higher education reform. (Hang, ed. 2006, p. 88)

Bao (2006, p. 47) pointed out that, as a matter of fact, this merger could hardly shape the effect of complete change within the university's internal structure. It was merely a one-way acceptance of Tsinghua, which was anticipated to achieve the goal of becoming a world-leading university. Apart from merging, many universities began producing their own art-related courses or departments to respond, in their own way, to the call from mass education. As argued previously, with the boost of contemporary design education, by 2007 1,125 out of 1,909 HEIs were offering 'Art Design' at the tertiary level (Tong 2007, p. 271). Even those that are not seen as having relevant core capabilities in this field, such as

³¹ Source from the official website of Tsinghua University: http://ad.tsinghua.edu.cn/yxweb_en/viewcontent.jsp?pid=2&columnid=23 [accessed on 20 February 2013].

Shanghai Finance University or Tianjin University of Finance and Economics, also established themselves in the Art and Design sector in recent years.³²

Expansion occurred at all levels of higher education institutions in China. As one of the leading art institutions in the country, student numbers at Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA) increased from 600 to 3,000 during the movement of expansion.³³ At this institution there have been a plethora of newly founded subjects and schools since 2002, including the schools of design, architecture and humanities, and the college of city design. In addition to CAFA, the other top seven academies have witnessed an even more accelerated growth in many cases. For example, the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts is characterised by its newly expanded campus built in 2004, which at 270,000 square metres is the largest in the country. By reviewing the annual intake of numbers at undergraduate level, the China Academy of Art (CAA) in Hangzhou has received 1,600 new entrants per year and celebrates the largest student intake in China.³⁴ As a key element of this study, the transformation at CAA will be introduced in more detail in a later chapter.

The second point relates to the potential considerations of HEIs from an economic angle. As noted in section one, since the self-paid tuition system was launched in the higher education sector in 1989, despite government funding, the regular HEIs have benefited from tuition fees as an alternative stream of

³² Education Management Information, Centre of Ministry of Education (2004) *Zhongguo Yishu Jiaoyu Yinxiu (Shang)* [Database of Chinese Art Education Information (Vol.1)]. Zhengzhou: Henan Art Press, p. 50.

³³ CAFA is the only art academy of higher learning directly under the Ministry of Education. It was founded in April 1950 by incorporating the National Beijing Art College and the Fine Arts department of Huabei University. Chairman Mao Zedong inscribed the name for the academy.

³⁴ Interview with Weng Zhenyu, 18 May 2013, Hangzhou.

income. Subsequently, many institutions have emerged with strategies for the launching of art-based courses from this perspective. In comparison with the traditional liberal arts and sciences, tuition fees charged for art and design are much higher. The range of fees for art-based courses varies from 8,000 RMB to 15,000 RMB per year. Some institutions – for example, the Shanghai Institution of Visual Arts – charge 22,000 RMB per year.³⁵ The funding from tuition fees likely relieves the pressure on the shortage of resources of the public sector, generated by expansion (Tong 2007, p. 276). Meanwhile, small class sizes have disappeared from most art institutions. Instead, as a new phenomenon, lectures holding 60-100 students have become popular. The staff-student ratio has thus changed, which reflects the input and allocation of resources within the institutions. For example, in 2007, as one of the top eight art academies (*ba da meiyuan*) in China, Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts enrolled 8,000 students at the tertiary level, while the staff-student ratio was 1:23.5. This far exceeded the standard staff-student ratio set by the Ministry of Education for evaluation criteria of 1:11 (Ministry of Education 2004). Other art institutions seemed to achieve a better balance, but still fell below the standard requirement. CAFA has 2,500 undergraduate students with a ratio of 1:13.9. There were 6,000 students at tertiary level at CAA with the respective ratio being 1:12 (Tong 2007, p. 274).

Another example of particular interest in relation to this point was one of the most topical issues of 2009. Courses unrelated to art and design, such as cookery and nutrition studies, educational technology studies and so on, began to appear

³⁵ Source: www.siva.edu.cn [accessed on 20 February 2015].

in the Directory under the category of art and design courses, and frequently used the same mechanism of recruitment to share the market with other art institutions. The MoE announced in December 2009 that 313 undergraduate courses unrelated to art and design were allowed to continually recruit students in 2010 by using the same mechanism and procedures in accordance with art-based courses. Meanwhile, 11 subjects and 68 courses failed to pass the evaluation and were therefore excluded from the category of art and design in the Directory.³⁶ Ironically, when the media circulated this promulgation, they coined the headline ‘*Shanzhai* courses of arts have been banned’. The term was derived from a popular element of modern terminology and related phenomena in recent years, i.e. it referred to a cultural value of imitation, pastiche and fakery.³⁷ Those courses were consequently considered to be equal to the *Shanzhai* products, which are mainly profit-oriented.³⁸ In reflecting on this phenomenon, it can be argued that on the one hand there is potential for such institutions to lower the entry criteria of the NCEE on those courses to increase student numbers, while on the other they could set high tuition fees for art-based courses. Attempts to use the same entry system and thus take advantage of ‘Art Study Fervour’ partly mirror a utilitarian attitude to student intakes at participating institutions.

³⁶ Source: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/edoas/website18/70/info1261724150771470.htm> [accessed on 16 February 2015].

³⁷ Source: <http://ks.zjol.com.cn/05ks/system/2009/12/28/016185114.shtml> [accessed on 16 February 2015].

³⁸ *Shanzhai*, literally mountain fastness, refers to the mountain stockades of warlords or thieves far away from official control. The definition of *Shanzhai* has expanded recently into many areas, and there have been many debates on these phenomena. However, proponents argue that this culture is from the grass-roots and for the grass-roots, which can be seen as self-expression. For further discussion on *Shanzhai*, please see: Canaves, Sky and Ye, Juliet. ‘Imitation Is the Sincerest Form of Rebellion in China’. *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 January 2009, A1.

The third point can be reflected on in the context of Chinese cultural and societal experience. Since embarking on reform and opening up, the fast growth of the national economy has laid a feasible foundation for the so-called cultural and creative industry (*wenhua chuangyi chanye*), which is a rising enterprise encompassing the production of art, design, media and exhibitions. The UK took an early lead in this field and is widely recognised as having played an innovative role with its government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) producing the first Cultural Industries Documents in 1998 and 2001. These documents define creative industries and classify them into the following thirteen separate fields: advertising, architecture, art and antiques markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, and television and radio. In general, the field has been defined as encompassing 'those which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (DCMS 2001, p. 4).

Over the past few years, the most developed cities in China, such as Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan, Nanjing, Hangzhou and Shenzhen, have been moving from the manufacturing boom to a non-manufacturing boom, namely the creative industries, as a product of the 'new economy'. For instance, in 2007, the increasing rate of creative industries in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen was 19.4%, 22.8% and 25.9% respectively, while the growth of GDP in these three cities was 12.5%, 13.5% and 15.0% (Li 2009). In the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, 'creative industry' was listed as being a pillar industry to 'enhance the economic

structure', with the aim of growing the national economy from a new source.³⁹ Influenced by the changes taking place in this industry, the supply and demand in the higher education sector have both increased. To be an artist or designer, for a young person, is equal to a fashionable career and lifestyle, while art institutions serve as talent pools for the industry. Choosing art and design at higher education is now considered the right approach for many. However, added to this is the fact that an increasing number of graduates face unemployment, as discussed in section one of this chapter. Job vacancies in this specific field are mostly found in coastal and economically developed cities and areas. Competition has become increasingly intense amongst graduates. As one of the results of the extreme expansion, the job market can scarcely accommodate or filter a large stream of art and design graduates with high expectations and little experience in a short period. Consequently, it has generated a great deal of anxiety regarding employment opportunities. Many graduates have to seize chances to work in other fields in the meantime. Some have also consciously postponed their move into employment by applying for postgraduate studies in China or by going abroad. The significant increase at graduate level actually triggered the function of filtering, and only delayed employment. Although Bereday (1973) indicated in his study 'on the transition to mass higher education that enrolments need not be closely linked to the numbers the economy can absorb, since a continual upgrading of various kinds of positions can be expected with the stimulus of mass higher education', the situation in China is still one of the most popular topics for discussion in society.

³⁹ It was approved by the executive meeting of the State Council in September 2009. Source: http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2009-09/26/content_1427394.htm [accessed on 9 January 2014].

In the 2010 annual session of the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the former Premier (2003-2013) Wen Jiabao announced that the central government would allocate 43.3 billion yuan to boost employment that year.⁴⁰ However, in spite of supportive policies, this social problem has been challenged by not only increasing the number of graduates, but also tackling the conventional mind-set of Chinese families in choosing careers, which is mostly influenced by the conventional elite education system.

Despite aspects sketched out above, I would argue that the current entry system to art and design at undergraduate level can be considered a key driving force in the impulsive phenomenon of 'Art Study Fervour', which can potentially change the attitude and behaviour of students, parents, institutions and society. It can be argued that the entrance examination, on the one hand, strongly frames students' perception of higher education and becomes a burden of teaching at the secondary level of education. On the other hand, the criteria of assessing talents may greatly impact on quality maintenance in the higher education arena. Apart from the appropriateness of the entry system itself, there has been much debate on its social consequences and, in particular, fairness as one of the missions. For example, although there is a national enrolment plan to balance the national and regional levels, each province still has the authority to determine its own qualification boundaries for receiving students locally and nationally, which also means that universities have different entry criteria for accepting

⁴⁰ Source: http://www.china.org.cn/china/NPC_CPPCC_2010/2010-03/05/content_19529901.htm [accessed on 13 March 2010].

candidates from different geographic regions. Subsequently, the phenomenon of the so-called 'NCEE Immigrants' (*gaokao yimin*) has appeared in recent years, referring to groups of families who relocate to big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, in order to give their children an advantage in the competitive arena of the NCEE. Xiong (2010) pointed out that this phenomenon reflects an imbalance of distribution of educational resources, not only with regard to quotas for enrolment, but, more importantly as regards the significant imbalance of the allocation of educational resources at secondary level. Likewise, another issue about special concessions in the NCEE has been frequently debated. Students are awarded extra marks according to their social background, for instance, whether they are minorities, foreign nationals, military casualties and so on, or based on a distinctive performance at high school. As reported in *China Daily* in 2009, 19 NCEE candidates received 20 extra credits for their model ship performance in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, even before they took the exams. It had been observed that 13 of these 19 were children of local government officials, and the rest were the children of high school teachers.⁴¹ Therefore, although the experiment of this entry system has been very slow in moving towards the process of transformation in higher education, the importance of reform in the NCEE is clear both in an academic and practical sense in China (Yang, 1998; Yang and Liao, 2003; Yang, ed., 2006; Zhang, 2006). I discuss the transformation of the current entry system – in particular, the pattern of the entrance examination for art and design undergraduate studies – as a cutting point of this study, in Chapter Two. The following chapters are intended to provide details that illustrate the

⁴¹ Source: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90882/6671469.html> [accessed on 8 August 2010].

broad lines of analysis as research background offered in this chapter, and examine the argument raised in this chapter.

1.4 Methodology of the Research

In the previous sections, I outlined the changing context for higher education in line with the shift in China's economic and social policies, in particular the phenomenon of 'Art Study Fervour' in relation to art and design undergraduate studies. This debate stimulates critical reflection on the appropriateness of the entry system and, more importantly, the implication of the influences derived from the system on student choice in higher education and future directions. In this section, I explain the methodology adopted and the ethical dimensions of this research. As Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) suggest that,

There have been two broad methodologies in researching educational choice processes. The first is to identify the factors that influence parents and students by using questionnaire and interview processes. The product of such research is typically a form of prioritised listing, showing that some factors are more influential than others. The second approach is based on an ethnographic research tradition and draws on the key assumption that choice processes are unique, eclectic and unpredictable at the micro-scale level of individual choice. Although the broad patterns of choice may emerge from the macro-scale summation of such 'stories', the reality of choice lies in personal experiences and accounts of choice by individuals. The use of extended, in-depth, qualitative research methodology is an essential requirement in researching such a view of choice processes.

Individual choice is usually made on the basis of the analysis of various influential factors, for example, family involvement, schoolteachers' advice,

personal aspirations, social connections, and etc. To fully understand how does a choice formed requires both macro and micro scale investigation and analysis. As Creswell (1998) argues, 'Researchers should make the most efficient use of both paradigms in understanding social phenomena. This study employs multi-strategy research with a quantitative investigation through preliminary data collected by questionnaires and the qualitative methods of in-depth interviews and focus groups as an alternative way to collect data.' The term 'multi-strategy research', which is coined by Layder (1993), is for a research project that integrates quantitative and qualitative research. It is geared to addressing different kinds of research questions (Bryman 2004, p. 452). According to Ragin (1994, p. 51), 'On the recognition of choice which is dependent on personal histories, experiences, perceptions and interpretations of the influence of implicit and explicit socio-economic and cultural pressures, qualitative methodology has been developed for use.' The preliminary quantitative research prepared the ground for qualitative research by selecting people for interview participation.

Literature Review

The literature review approach aids the establishment of a theoretical framework for this research. According to Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001), 'The research on educational choice grew rapidly during the 1990s in the West, and there is now a sound theoretical and evidence-based foundation for our understanding of many choice processes, especially in the area of choice in relation to higher education entry.' Indeed, this stimulated the appearance of

many key insights which inform the central concern of this study, for example, the student experience in terms of the choice process and approaches towards art and design in higher education.

The review mainly examines the student decision-making process from the broader literature in the context of marketisation in higher education. Firstly, the available knowledge on barriers to participation in higher education was researched and reviewed accordingly. Barriers might be sociological, institutional or financial; they might also be differential among the particular subject disciplines and related to the learners' prior educational pathway. Secondly, the theme of student experience in relation to the educational decision-making process was taken into account. The discussion of barriers to participation and the awareness of the significance of student experience simultaneously provide the foundation for a better understanding of choice processes.

The review also explores expansion in art and design higher education within the relevant policy and social contexts. The existing literature in China is mainly relevant to the critique on the phenomenon of 'Art Study Fervour' or the massification in higher education. However, there is an obvious lack of theory and study about students' experiences when choosing art and design at the higher education level.

Theoretical studies on national entrance examinations or aptitude tests and their social consequences have been undertaken in China and in the West (McDonald,

Newton, Whetton and Benefield 2001, Yang and Liao 2003, Zheng 2007a). For example, there have been a number of studies on the traditional Civil Service Examination (*Keju*) in China and its influence on the contemporary *gaokao*, with the interpretation of cultural values and traditional mind-set of pursuing success through this system (Liu 2001). In particular, with the transition from elite to mass higher education, the adaptability of the entry system requires reconsideration at both the theoretical and practical levels. There are also a few studies relating to the experimentation of *gaokao* itself and the reform of application and selection in the entry system (Yang 2006, Zhang 2006, Zheng 2007b).

The literature review was regularly revisited during the research. Apart from searching the literature found in articles, reports, conference papers and official publications, other primary and secondary resources have been collected and analysed. For example, an unpublished database containing subjects, disciplines and institutions of art and design was obtained on visiting the Ministry of Education in Beijing and the Shanghai Municipal Education Examinations Authority, and this presents a complete list of art-based disciplines and institutions at the tertiary level from 1928 to 2006 in China. The documentary resources of the exam-oriented preparatory materials, leaflets and websites for promotion and admission were also gathered from many art institutions.

Case Study

The case study research method has been defined as being an empirical inquiry

that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin 1984, p. 23). Furthermore, the case study can ‘develop a theory which can help researchers to understand other similar cases, phenomena or situations’ (Robson 2002, p. 183).

There are three main sampling criteria selected for this case study. First, there is CAA, with a long history that can be traced back to 1928. It was established as the first comprehensive art academy by the eminent educators Cai Yuanpei⁴² (1868-1940) and Lin Fengmian⁴³ (1900-1991). To respond to the strategy of the development of higher education, CAA has expanded rapidly since 1999 and is now China’s biggest art institution, and one of the most influential and specialised, with three campuses in Hangzhou, namely Nanshan, Binjiang and Xiangshan, as well as the School of Design, which is a faculty of the Academy based in Shanghai. It also has the most complete range of degree offerings and programmes of study across a wide area of art and design disciplines.⁴⁴ Among the top eight art academies in higher learning, it is neither under the direct administration of the Ministry of Education, as is CAFA, nor subordinate to a comprehensive university like the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University. In consideration of its independent position and local management structure, it represents the majority of 31 specialised art academies across the country. Second, the number of student applicants for undergraduate studies at

⁴² Cai served as the provisional Republic's Minister of Education in January 1912 and took the position of the Chancellor of Beijing University in 1917.

⁴³ Lin spent the early years of his career in Europe, moving to France to study painting in 1920. In 1928, with encouragement from Cai Yuanpei, he helped found the China Academy of Art, becoming its first principal.

⁴⁴ China Academy of Art is one of the top eight art and design institutions (*ba da meiyuan*) in China and is as famous as the Central Academy of Fine Arts and the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University, which are the top three art institutions.

CAA is high, which keeps the acceptance rate extremely low. For example, only 1,600 out of more than 30,000 applicants coming from different provinces across China are accepted every year since the expansion.⁴⁵ They may apply to attend the examination at the main campuses in Hangzhou or at examination venues near where they are themselves based, as managed by the CAA admissions office. Students who apply for CAA are also allowed to apply to other art institutions, in case of failure. Therefore, as a key case study, the samples collected from CAA were not confined to the local educational market, but are nationwide. Third, CAA has been a leading academy in the field since 2002 for its use of a single mechanism – sketching and colouring – as criteria to select potential students for a wide range of art and design disciplines. In this research, the study on the development and the mechanism of the entrance examination at CAA has been a cutting point to review critically its impact on the process of student choice within the entry system.

As one of the earliest institutions practising ‘two-stage tuition’ (*liangduanshi jiaoxue*) within four-year undergraduate studies, the foundation year at CAA has been reviewed in order to identify the terminology of ‘preparatory’ and ‘introductory’ approaches and its significance. This structure of higher learning is adopted by most art institutions in that they set the BA first year as a foundation year, something which CAA has been doing since 2000 and CAFA since 2002, with the aim of responding to the educational strategy known as *kuan koujing hou jichu* (‘to widen the entrance and to strengthen the

⁴⁵ Interview with Weng Zhenyu, 18 May 2007, Hangzhou. Unless indicate,

foundation’). During the foundation year, students are combined into major groups based on their broad directions. For example, there are three directions at CAA for foundation training: namely, the plastic art branch, the design branch, and the image and media branch.⁴⁶ Additionally, on completion of the foundation year, most students are rearranged back on the course programme for their further undergraduate studies, in which they initially chose. Only the top 5% of students with the highest achievement in the first year are allowed to choose their subjects by the end of the first year. This regulation is set to balance the demands from students who eventually meet their own interests, which could be different from their initial choices.⁴⁷ In comparison to CAA, CAFA is a particularly good example in terms of this arrangement. Students may determine their subjects by the end of the foundation year based on their own interests. CAA had a one-year trial in 2003 following CAFA’s model, but this ended unsuccessfully. In 2010, CAA was leaning towards resuming the exercise of 2003 after struggling for a few years.⁴⁸

A network was developed at CAA for collecting preliminary resources and conducting fieldwork. A documentary analysis of institutional policy and strategy was conducted. The literature recourses of CAA, including *China Academy of Art Newspaper*, provided regularly updated information. For example, the review of

⁴⁶ The image and media branch was derived and isolated from the plastic art and design branches in 2007. Interview with Wang Xiaoming, Head of Image and Media Branch, foundation department of China Academy of Art, 10 November 2008, Hangzhou.

⁴⁷ Interview with Professor An Bin, the former head of the Foundation Department of China Academy of Art, 9 November 2008, Hangzhou.

⁴⁸ Interview with Weng Zhenyu, 3 January 2010, Hangzhou.

shiwu jihua (the Tenth Five-Year Plan, from 2000-2005)⁴⁹ and the perspective of *shiyiwu jihua* (the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, from 2006-2010)⁵⁰ reflect the development strategy of CAA in relation to the national education policy.

Permission was obtained to access the venues of the entrance examination at CAA to witness the processes of both examination and assessment in 2006, which provided an in-depth understanding of the procedure of the entrance examination.

Interviews were largely carried out at management level, and faculty fellows were sought out for their insight and reflection on the current entry system and the expansion of higher education in art and design. The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of key stakeholder groups, namely senior management, admissions, and academic and student representatives.

As a comparative example of the Western system, in the UK entry to an art and design degree is normally a bit more complicated than entry to other degree courses. There is no such equivalent 'entrance examination' in the UK, but applicants are interviewed and must provide support for their application with visual evidence, such as a portfolio of work, to get onto a three-year undergraduate course (Diagram 5). Apart from the evidence of applicants' aptitude needed in the procedure, application routes are more diversified. In

⁴⁹ 'Review of works during the past tenth-five-year at China Academy of Art', *China Academy of Art Newspaper*, 1 January 2006, pp. 1-8.

⁵⁰ 'To speed up the development towards world leading university - interview with Xu Jiang, President of China Academy of Art', *China Academy of Art Newspaper*, 28 February 2006, pp. 2-3.

most cases, students have experience of taking a foundation year as a process of discovery. In England and Wales, art and design foundation courses – the full name is Level 3 Diploma in Foundation Studies (Art and Design) – provide a bridge between the kind of study undertaken at GCSE and A Level and the type of work students will do on courses offered at degree level (Burnett 2008, p. 5).⁵¹ Divided into three phases in one academic year – exploratory phase, pathway phase and confirmatory phase – foundation courses can be interpreted as being introductory and preparatory. They not only prepare students in the techniques and skills needed for art and design practice, but also help them to explore their creative interests and abilities as a basis for their choice of undergraduate studies.⁵² As Burnett commented, ‘there is probably no better way to prepare for a specialist degree course than by completing foundation studies.’

The entry system for art and design higher education in the UK has been reflected on as a comparative example for this research in order to seek a better understanding of student choice processes and student experiences during the preparatory stage. The Western experience would not be able to replace the Chinese entry system, but it does offer a different perspective from which one can critically reflect on and proffer possibilities for further development in the current situation in China.

⁵¹ In Scotland, the usual system is for degree courses in art and design to be four years in length, with the first year being a diagnostic course - the equivalent of a foundation course (Burnett 2008, p. 10).

⁵² Interview with Professor Tom Jones, former Head of Foundation, Birmingham City University Institute of Art and Design, 22 June 2007, Birmingham.

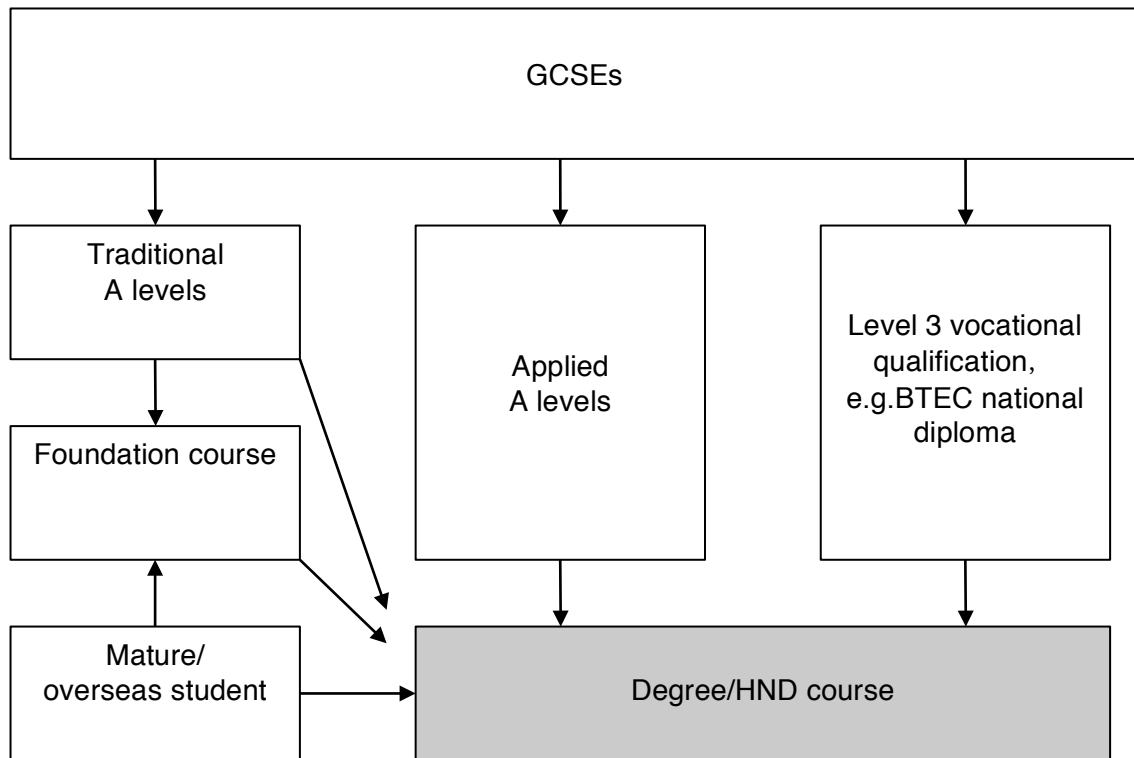


Diagram 5: Art and Design Degree Course Entry in the UK (Burnett 2008)

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were completed by students enrolled in 2008 when they were in the second semester of their foundation year. Analysis of the questionnaires identified the key factors influencing their choice of higher education entry and revealed interaction between these factors. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were carried out on completion of the foundation year. These were designed to follow a qualitative approach. Based on the initial questionnaire information, semi-structured questions were employed for use with focus groups as well in the interviews with participants. By using a qualitative approach, their personal experience was addressed in order to better understand the choice process.

The questionnaire aimed to analyse the students' motivation, to understand the phenomenon of the increase in applicants, and to measure the perception of the entrance examination process in the survey of first year students at CAA. It also helped to have a generic picture of the preparatory approaches to art and design in the higher education system in China.

The questionnaire was designed and conducted at CAA in April 2009. The data was collected to review their previous experience in preparing and taking art examination, in particular, their reflection of one-year foundation programme. According to the enrolment plan, the total intake number was 1,555 in 2008.⁵³ Apart from the School of Architecture, Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Department, and Art History Department, all foundation year students – 970 in total – were required to take the full year foundation programme. The foundation is generally divided into three branches as previously introduced, with 420 in the plastic art branch, 300 in the design branch, and 250 in the image and media branch. Because of the random classification in the plastic art branch, the sample of 60 students for questionnaires was selected by inviting two 30-student classes to participate. The sample selection in design and image and media branches seems more complicated, since the entrants are classified into 13 subject areas (Table 1).⁵⁴ Therefore, in order to understand the student experience in general at this initial stage, questionnaires were intended to cover a comprehensive range of relevant areas when sampling a total number of 60.

⁵³ See <http://www.caa.edu.cn/zhaosheng/pages/jianzhang/19.htm> [accessed 10 May 2008].

⁵⁴ Telephone interview with An Bin, Head of the Foundation Department, China Academy of Art, 8 May 2008.

Design branch	Student Number	Image and Media branch	Student Number
Graphic Design	75	Photography	50
Textile Design	25	Film and TV Advertising	50
Fashion Design	50	Animation	50
Industrial and Product Design	75	Web Design	25
Comprehensive Design	25	Illustration	25
Exhibition Design	25	Web Games Design	50
Artistic Design	25		

Table 1: Subject Area and Intake Number in Design and Image and Media Branches at CAA in 2008

The self-completion questionnaire was comprised of five sections: 1) participants' personal information, including gender, secondary education background in relation to art and design, parental educational background, and current major and level; 2) perception and motivation in applying art and design higher education; 3) factors influencing the choice of institutions and subject areas; 4) experience of attending pre-exam training and art examinations; 5) reflection on the learning during the foundation year and choice of subject area in relation to a future career (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was pre-tested with a group of students in a foundation school in Shanghai.⁵⁵ On average, the questionnaire took between 10 and 15 minutes to complete. The respondents

⁵⁵ The foundation programme was run by the Academy of International Visual Art in Shanghai. For more information, see: www.aiva.com.cn.

were asked for their opinion about the difficulties of completing the questionnaire. There were no problems with participants understanding the questions or instructions presented.

Interview and Focus Group

In this research, a 'narrative' approach was used for data collection through focus groups and interviews in order to hear the participants' 'voices'. This would allow them to express their personal experience in the decision-making process. It also involved sharing perceptions with other stakeholders. As Gray (1998, p. 2) states:

A narrative approach to inquiry is most appropriate when the research is interested in portraying intensely personal accounts of human experience... One of the major strengths of such a means of conducting inquiry is the ability to allow readers who do not share a cultural background similar to either the storyteller or the researcher to develop an understanding of notices and consequences of actions described within a story format.

Gray also added, 'The benefit of considerate and careful negotiation will be a story allowing an incredibly personal and multi-faceted insight into the situation being discussed.'

In comparison to questionnaires, interviews provided qualitative insights for this research by exploring the interviewees' personal reflections based on their own experience and expertise. A number of in-depth interviews were conducted with educators, policy-makers and researchers to seek their understanding and

reflection on the current entry system and the expansion of higher education in art and design.

Based on an analysis of the questionnaire, the in-depth interviews were conducted by selecting representative samples. Interviews were followed up and focused on students' individual experience and their perception of choosing higher education and future destination. As the participants were from the same institution, CAA, and of the same age, the methodological approach of selecting the candidates in this research was designed in consideration of student gender, family background, types of school in secondary education, experience in attending pre-exam training school and different branches of foundation department that they were studying with. In addition, students who gave some specific answers on the questionnaires were invited to attend the focus group interview. This strategy was to ensure that various experiences and background of candidates could be covered. Considering that those participants knew each other, they would feel free to talk about their own 'stories' and share with the others about their personal experience and opinions. Two focus groups of interview were conducted in April 2010 respectively with six participants in each, in order to deepen the understanding and strengthen the analysis of the results from the survey. In addition to the open-ended discussion questions, data was collected on the individual perspectives of participant. The focus group script used to draw out evidence in relation to the aims of this research was constructed with a number of themes in mind: 1) potential influences from the family context, the social context and the educational context; 2) the potential influence from the current entry system, in particular the art examination; 3)

student experiences of preparatory training prior to university studies and the one-year foundation course within the structure of undergraduate studies.

Interviews and focus groups were all tape-recorded for subsequent transcription, and were analysed using a classification of content approach.

Ethical Considerations

All the information gained throughout this research was treated with due respect, integrity and sensitivity. As with almost any research project there is an ethical dimension to be considered, in particular here, where there are issues relating to choices and experiences in educational markets. As Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) demonstrate,

There are two particular issues involved in researching choices – firstly, the problem may provide distinct market advantage to either individual organisations or particular groups of parents; and secondly, there is a need to consider the personal significance to individuals of the consequences of current or past choices in educational markets. Research data on choice, buyer behaviour and market activity by consumers has real commercial value in the marketplace. Yet, academic research is distinct from market research and focuses on an objective social science process, seeking a better understanding of a particular socio-economic system, and maintaining objectivity when providing a balanced critique to inform public domain understanding.

Working with individuals clearly imposes ‘standard’ ethical constraints on the researcher, such as confidentiality of data, the respondent’s right to withdraw from the research, and the minimisation of intrusion (Ibid). This research

envisaged a number of significant ethical challenges derived from investigating real people and real experience in their choice processes which might be sensitive or negative for them to recall. It is also important to be aware that, in some cases, participants might change their behaviour because they know they are being studied (Bryman 2004, p. 512).

The participants of this investigation were fully informed that their personal information would be protected and all questionnaires and records would be shredded once the study was complete. This notice was put at the head of the questionnaire paper since the respondents' contact information was required for the follow-up interview arrangement. The participants of the focus group at CAA were selected and invited by myself, with arrangements being made by telephone. During the course of the focus groups, the nature of this research and the process of each focus group were explained to all participants from the beginning and the permission of tape/video recording was obtained. Participants were also informed that their responses would be genuinely anonymous in order to prevent them worrying about their identities as CAA students.

Prior agreement or 'informed consent' was secured from the appropriate participants, including students and high-level administrators, for the eventual use of any data or information gained through interviews and case study research, with identities being indicated in this research. Transcripts of the interviews were returned to interviewees for checking and comment. When participants showed reluctance to give responses regarding the current situation or the impact on the reputation of institutions, especially regarding the

institutional administrators, the records of individuals' involvement were to remain specifically confidential.

Archival research raised another ethical issue, namely, the subsequent use of archive materials for publication purposes. As the copyright lies with the archive, seeking permission for its use ensured the proper conduct of the research. For example, the databases obtained from the Ministry of Education in China have not been published. I presented a formal letter with an explanation about the nature of this piece of research with my contact information to gain permission to access the databases. I agreed that the data would only be used for academic study rather than for any commercial purpose. A copy of the databases was provided to me on the same day.

CHAPTER TWO

Examination for Art and Design Higher Education

In the previous chapter, I outlined the rapid expansion of higher education since 1999 and the phenomenon of the so-called 'Art Study Fervour' which has developed in China in recent years. Chinese higher education has witnessed significant changes in the past decade and is moving towards greater diversity in the light of unprecedented economic growth and the demand for a skilled workforce. However, the NCEE is still the sole mechanism for selecting qualified students for the regular Higher Education Institutions. It has held the role of 'sifter' since its national implementation in 1952 (Liu 2001, p. 330). The NCEE is seen as one of the most important and competitive exercises for demonstrating ambition and the ability to study at higher education level; for some it has almost reached the status of a divine ritual, which can determine entire fates and future prospects. Success in the NCEE will enable students to progress to a desirable institution, and it is therefore generally understood as being a significant stepping-stone in pursuing a promising career that can lead to, hopefully, a high quality of life. In particular, the prospect of the NCEE helps to generate a widespread enthusiasm, or fervour, for success in exams that provide entry into higher education. Traditionally, successful entry into university has been the highest ideal in Chinese society, one that remains strong in today's mass education era. This cultural value assigned to higher education is not a contemporary phenomenon but is deeply rooted in Chinese tradition, arguably since AD 605, when the Imperial examination was first introduced. This can be considered as the ancient Civil Service Examination (*keju*) (Liu 1997, p. 354). In

section one, I introduce the role of *gaokao* in the current entry system and discuss the common social consequences of both the *gaokao* and *keju* systems.

In section two, I discuss the procedures and features of the entrance examination for art and design, which constitutes one of the specialist provisions in undergraduate studies. This extra art examination enables applicants to obtain a pass certificate and then to gain permission to participate in the cultural examination that is held every year in June.⁵⁶ The marks obtained in both the art and cultural examinations determine whether or not applicants are accepted or refused by the art institutions they have chosen.

In section three, I review the tradition of adopting sketching as a realistic skill in art education in order to explore further its legacy and central role in the entrance examination today. In China's modern history of art and design education, sketching has provided a basis for a wide range of art practices. It has become the most important device used by art institutions in selecting applicants. This training mode – using one of the drawing techniques used in Western realism – was introduced into China with the modernisation of its education system in the 1920s, when traditional Chinese painting was gradually being abandoned in art education. In the post-1949 era, although conventional realism was replaced by Soviet socialist realism, sketching still remained the

⁵⁶ Interview with Weng Zhenyu, 27 October 2005, Hangzhou. The recent change in the content of the 'art examination' at the China Academy of Art (CAA) – from multi-test on techniques to a single art examination – was implemented in 2002.

core of the Chistyakovian curriculum of skills training.⁵⁷ It is deeply rooted in Chinese art and design education.

2.1 The Entrance Examination for Higher Education

The educational system in China today has four categories, namely primary education, secondary education, higher education and adult education, managed by different tiers (Diagram 6). A nine-year compulsory education system has existed in China since 1986. It begins at the age of 7, continues to the age of 15, and includes elementary education and junior secondary education. On completion of junior secondary education, students are required to sit a locally administered entrance examination if they wish to continue their studies to senior secondary level. At this pivotal point, there are two routes that students can choose: the regular high school stream and the vocational stream.⁵⁸ Students in the vocational secondary stream will, upon graduation, enter a vocational college by taking a special unified entrance examination, *san xiaosheng*⁵⁹ *gaokao*, held in May every year. They may also take the NCEE in June if they are applying to the regular higher education institutions as 'social students' (*shehui sheng*).

⁵⁷ Pavel Chistyakov (1832–1919) was a Russian painter and teacher of art. The pedagogical system he developed, as part of a struggle against the inert system of academism, played a huge role in the development of realism in Russian art during the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁵⁸ This latter stream is categorised into vocational schools, art schools and 'schools for skilled workers', generally known as *sanxiao*. For more information, see <http://www.edu.cn/20041203/3123354.shtml> [accessed on 25 January 2013].

⁵⁹ *San xiaosheng* literally means 'students from three kinds of school'. It refers to students from art schools (*jixiao*), specialised secondary schools (*zhongzhuan*) and vocational high schools (*zhigao*), which are all categorised under the vocational stream of secondary education.

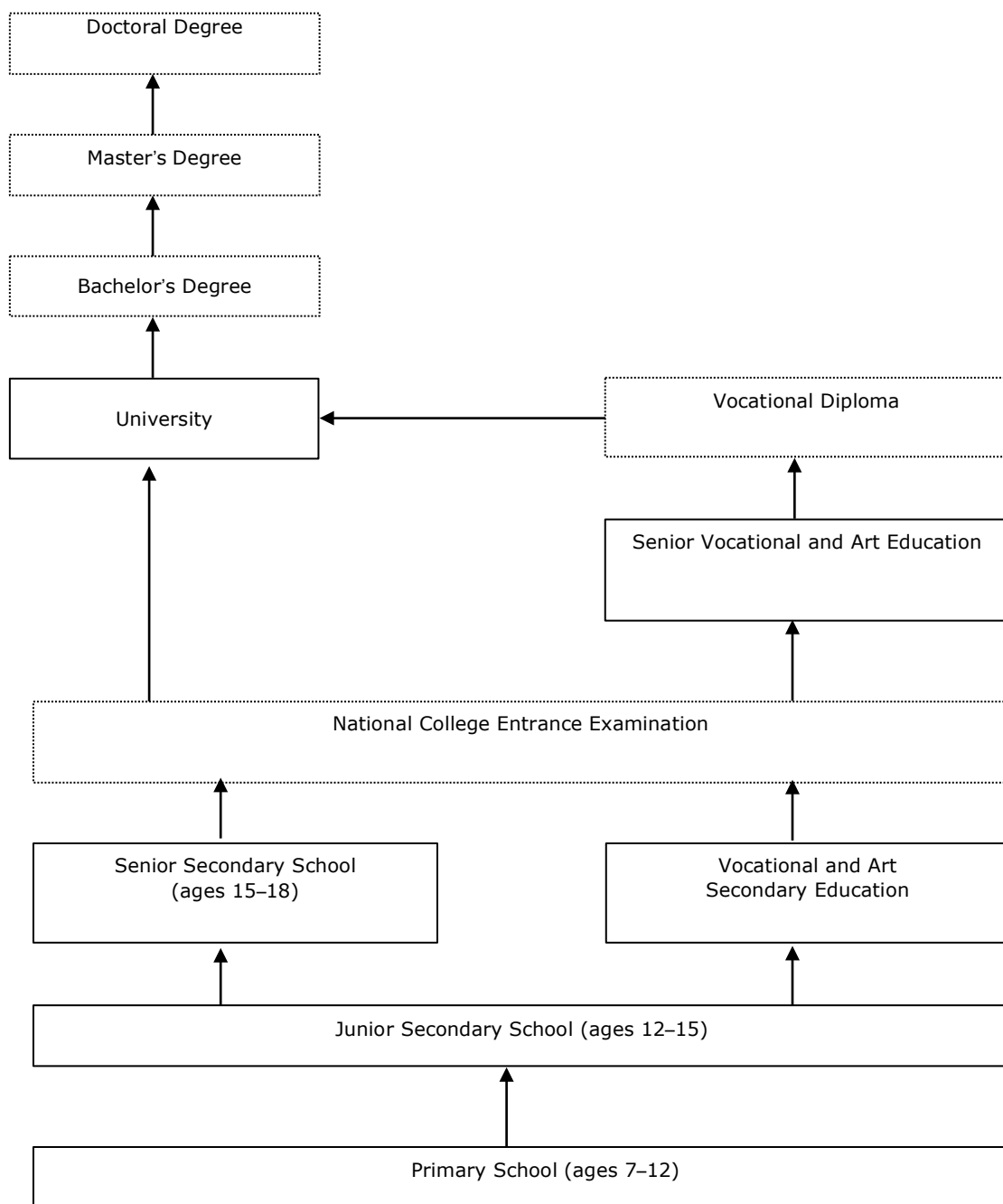


Diagram 6: Current education system (art and design) in China since 1986

In line with central government priorities, the Ministry of Education in China takes the responsibilities to make policies and strategies, including student recruitment plans or quotas for higher education institutions (*gaoxiao zhaosheng*

jihua).⁶⁰ The Ministry of Education has overall authority for supervising and implementing plans. Provincial recruitment plans, university quotas should apply annually, since the number of higher education participation and graduates is controlled by Chinese government to meet the economic and social needs. The places offered at Tier One universities are limited to top 10% of *gaokao* candidates whilst in Tier two universities, roughly 20% of the rest candidates can be enrolled. The student quotas in national-level universities are decided through the negotiation between the Ministry of Education and the universities, by considering the institutional capacity and national strategy. In provincial-level universities, student quotas are worked out by the provincial education authority, under the guidance of the Ministry of Education.

The NCEE is held over two to three days on 7, 8 and 9 June annually. Applicants should be qualified to get the senior secondary school certificate and pass High School Graduation Examination (*huikao*) are eligible to take the exams.⁶¹ On top of the examinations themselves, other essential requirements have to be complied with. These cover, for example, sound physical health, obedience to the law of the country and possession of permanent residence in the province.⁶²

Three major subjects – Chinese, mathematics and a foreign language – are compulsory, while six subjects – physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography

⁶⁰ In 1977, a quota system was introduced into higher education. Every year, the central government imposes a quota on the number of candidates admitted to qualified public or private universities. Students within this system are granted a diploma or degree upon graduation.

⁶¹ The *huikao* examination is an essential part of secondary education attainment obtained over Years One, Two and Three. It also influences students' applications for university. As part of the reform of the NCEE, *huikao* is increasingly being integrated into a *gaokao* score in order to reflect a comprehensive overview of three years' performance.

⁶² Minister of Education-Regulation for Enrolment of Higher Education Institutions. Source: http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_297/201001/79905.html [accessed on 11 March 2012].

and political studies – are optional.⁶³ Applicants are required to choose one to three subjects from the science/engineering or art/humanities categories, based on their potential major subjects at university. In some provinces, a comprehensive test in science or humanities has been introduced as an additional requirement in the admission system.

In the majorities of places in China, candidates have to complete their college application prior to taking the exam. Namely, applicants do not yet know their examination mark when making their college applications. In China, there are four tiers of higher education institutions in the entry system. First Tier refers to the Early Admission. Military schools and institutions that offer specialised education or training are within this tier. The number of institutions is small in this tier. Significantly to notice, enrolment in art institutions is to include in this category, because of the additional test for artistic skills. There then follows the period when the major national universities carry out their recruitment, which is known as Tier One of the college recruitment process in China. Other main universities recruit their students in Tier Two, and Tier Three is for vocational colleges. The college application form is thus divided into the above four tiers. Each tier can contain four to six choices of institution and course. These four tiers carry out their enrolments at different times.

The NCEE score is recognised not only in Mainland China, but also in other areas, for example, Hong Kong and Macau. Candidates make their applications

⁶³ English is the most popular foreign language, while Japanese, Russian and French are also commonly applied for as one of the options.

separately for most Hong Kong universities by providing their NCEE results and attending interviews. However, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the City University of Hong Kong can recruit students directly through the NCEE enrolment system. Most recently, in 2012, the University of Sydney announced that students who obtained an NCEE score and attained a Tier One result (i.e. acceptance to a major university) could apply directly for admission on to an undergraduate programme at the University.⁶⁴

Although many Chinese educators have called for reform of the NCEE and the admissions system, this has for nearly sixty years been the sole criterion in the entry process by which students are assessed, based only on examinations.⁶⁵ From 1952 to the present, except for periods of disruption of education during the Cultural Revolution, this examination system has remained the critical means by which students are selected at the tertiary level. Nowadays, the NCEE is no longer unified across the country, but it is still administered uniformly within each province or municipality. As Pepper (1990, p. 141) noted, 'In 1984, Shanghai started to take the lead in an experiment to 'decentralise' the process by allowing its students to take a set of locally prepared examinations. The attempt to decentralise national unified examinations has so far achieved mixed results. In view of the large population, it is still seen as impractical to remove the entrance examination from the entry system for higher education.

⁶⁴ Source: <http://sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=8687> [accessed on 11 March 2012].

⁶⁵ Although there have been various reforms to the NCEE over the last three decades, the three basic subject areas – Chinese language, foreign (mostly English) language and mathematics – have remained the three major areas of focus (He 1998).

As a nationwide examination, the NCEE guides the entry system towards greater social justice, to which in China the terms ‘fairness’, ‘equity’ and ‘transparency’ are applied.⁶⁶ Proponents believe that the intention of the NCEE, to a large extent, is to ensure that individuals enjoy fair access to higher education through a highly centralised mechanism (Zheng 2007b, p. 4). Pepper (1990, p. 142) commented, ‘In any event, the national entrance examination is also regarded as a safeguard against the unfair advantages that favouritism and connections inevitably bring to the enrolment process.’ This spirit has been expressed in a popular slogan, *fenshu mianqian renren pingdeng* (‘everyone is equal in front of marks’), which has been widely promoted in Chinese society since its first appearance.

The concept and purpose of comparative fairness in a talent-selecting examination can be traced back to China’s dynastic period. *Keju*, the Imperial examination in Chinese history, was implemented during the Sui Dynasty (581-618) by Emperor Yang of Sui (569–618). Before *keju* was commenced, most appointments were based on recommendations from nobles and officials.⁶⁷ Essentially, there were two fundamental objectives of *keju*: to encourage candidates to attend the examination without recommendation or restrictions of any kind, and to select the elites for the state’s bureaucracy in accordance with the examination results.⁶⁸ Theoretically, anyone in China, regardless of wealth or social status, could be selected to take the post of government officials through

⁶⁶ Following on from Shanghai’s experimental decentralisation of the NCEE, eighteen provinces and municipalities have so far followed suit, including Beijing, Zhejiang and Jiangsu.

⁶⁷ The origin of this system can be traced back to the Han Dynasty.

⁶⁸ Yang Xuewei, former President of the National Education Examinations Authority.

the test. This tradition was only brought to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶⁹

The abolition of *keju* was one of the most significant changes in China's education history. Broadly speaking, there were two main reasons for its termination. Firstly, the conspicuous limitation of *keju* was its use of a stereotyped writing format, *bagu*,⁷⁰ though naturally the style of the language used in the examination came to reflect the incorporation of many new ideas during the development of modern society. Secondly, with the development of national capitalism following the Opium War (1839–42), the ideology of society had changed. In 1898, the Hundred Days of Reform (*bairi weixin*) was launched by the Emperor Guangxu (1871-1908) and his supporters in the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912). During this process, there was a proposal to reset the form of *keju*, replacing the *bagu* with another type of essay on political discourse (*celun*), and to establish a new style of education.

I will not analyse the system of *keju* in detail in this thesis but, instead, will refer to its function in the selection of talent and its influence on the modern entrance examination, in order to establish a dialogue between them. There are many similarities and differences between the two systems of examination. As many scholars have indicated, the influence of *keju* and its legacy are still present in the current entry system (Liu 1996; Zheng 2007). In Yu and Suen's research, the common social consequences of both systems have been discussed:

⁶⁹ *Keju* had existed for about 1,300 years in China. It was abolished in 1905.

⁷⁰ *Bagu*, literally 'the eight-legged essay', refers to the text that had to be written advocating the doctrine of Confucius and Mencius, and the Confucian school of idealist philosophy claimed by Zhu Xi and Cheng Hao.

Unfortunately, not all people can pass *keju* or NCEE. Therefore, both the *keju* and NCEE systems function as a sorting machine which filters people into those who pass and can move upward in the social stratification with a bright future and those who fail and will need to stay at the lower rungs of the social ladder with a higher uncertain future. Eventually, the two testing systems unintentionally promote the polarisation of society. (Yu and Suen 2005, p. 25)

In addition, both examinations encouraged an exam-driven education system, a characteristic noticeable even at earlier stages of education. In the period of the Imperial examination, *keju* stimulated the development of widespread private education (*sishu*), by breaking the nobles' control over education, and provided opportunities for all sections of society. With only a small hope of success, candidates put all their efforts into predicting what would be examined. As Pepper (1996, p. 49) observes, 'Rote memorisation and recitation were the standard teaching methods, past and future examination questions the specific focus.' Because of the consequences of doing well in the exams, enthusiasm was no longer for learning in itself but was, rather, focused on ways of achieving the best examination performance. Yu and Suen also point out:

... the fever toward doing well in the exams, instead of leading to enthusiasm toward education, can lead to a great deal of effort expended on non-productive or counterproductive activities such as cheating, test coaching, and teaching toward the very specific content or style of test questions. (Yu and Suen, 2005, p. 30)

Exam-oriented education (*yingshi jiaoyu*) is widely criticised nowadays in China (Yang and Liao 2003, Wang 2007). Within this environment, the content of teaching and learning in secondary schools has inevitably been determined by

the content of examinations, so as to help students and parents realise their dreams of higher education. In order to change this historically entrenched style of education, in 1999 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council of the People's Republic of China released *Decisions on Conducting In-Depth Education Reform and Comprehensive All-around Education*, which can be seen as a milestone in China's educational development. It also encouraged the reformation of the current NCEE as one of the approaches to achieve quality-oriented education (*suzhi jiaoyu*) in the compulsory and post-compulsory stages. The mission statement reads:

To speed the reformation of the system of entrance examination and assessment procedures, and to shift the status of 'a single entrance examination for life'; to encourage provincial government with proper conditions to conduct pilot studies on multiple entrance examination, and to extend the admission autonomy of institutions and the opportunities for student choice; to build up a more scientific and equal system of selection and admission for higher education entry with various choices.

However, with the continued existence of the NCEE, the nature of basic education remains unchanged. The NCEE is still acting as the 'conducting wand' within education, influencing the teaching and learning in Chinese schools.

Aside from exam-oriented teaching and learning methodology, I have argued that the traditional cultural value attached to being a scholar through the institutional educational system affects many Chinese families' decisions regarding higher education. This enthusiasm for going to university has endured

in Chinese society. *Wangban jie xiapin, weiyou dushu gao*⁷¹ has been a popular saying throughout Chinese history, used to encourage children and young people to study hard for a better future. It literally means that all professions are lowly, while only studying possesses a high value. It also indicates the attitude of the ruling class towards all professions: they are lower-class, whereas academic study is a higher-class occupation. Scholarly official jobs were greatly prized by the ruling class. The saying originated in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and the idea it expressed was widely known for thousands of years, familiar not only in the dynastic period but also in modern China. Regardless of social stratum, higher education has been seen as the most powerful mechanism for transcending students' social origins and providing them with more opportunities to find decent jobs. For students from rural areas, in particular, studying and working in urban areas are the most attractive pathways to a different future.

In this section I have given an outline of the unified entrance examination for higher education in China and the exam-oriented environment derived from the NCEE, which begins at an early age and puts huge pressure on students and families throughout the country. I have also argued that striving for exam success is not a new phenomenon in China. *Keju* and its legacy remain deeply engrained in Chinese culture due to the dominant influence of traditional educational philosophy over more than a thousand years. More importantly, the current unified entrance examination and entry system for higher education, on

⁷¹ Wang Zhu, *Shentong Shi*, 'Wonder Child' poem.

the one hand, sustains enthusiasm towards education, while, on the other hand, it becomes a social force which can change the behaviour of participants, schools, parents and society. As I discussed in Chapter One, the fervour for the art examination has been the most significant phenomenon during the expansion of higher education. In the next section, I will examine in detail the entrance examination for art and design higher education in China.

2.2 The Entrance Examination for Art and Design Higher Education

The entry system for art and design higher education, being one of the specialist provisions, is distinguished from that for the other subject areas. Applicants are required to take two stages of examinations within the undergraduate entry system. At the first stage, applicants are invited to participate in art examination to demonstrate their ability and aptitude for possible future studies in art and design. The art examination is a part of the NCEE and is held every year in the spring.⁷² It may contain either or both levels of examination, i.e., the provincial examination and the institutional examination, whereby applicants are tested for their artistic capabilities in the practice of art and design through sketching, colouring and quick sketching. At the provincial level the examinations are arranged regionally, by the Provincial or Municipal Education Examination Authorities, and run in January. After the art examination at the provincial level, some institutions may request that student applicants take an art examination at

⁷² An instructional paper for art examination from the Ministry of Education is announced annually and conveyed to the regional educational committees for the operational issues in general and any policy changes.

institutional level, organised independently in February or March.⁷³ In China, there are 31 independent art institutions and 13 general universities out of 760 universities with art and design courses. Only those forty-four institutions have the authority to administer the examinations nationally and to set the content of the art examination and entry requirements.⁷⁴ Other art institutions which are not eligible to organise cross-provincial examinations can still host institutional examinations on campus. According to the timetable for all these examinations, normally published in December, individual students may apply to a number of art institutions through their participation in these institutional examinations. By the middle of April at the latest, the results of the institutional examinations are announced and reported to the Provincial or Municipal Education Examination Authority. Successful students are granted the Certificate of Art Skills (*zhuanye hegezhen*), qualifying them to progress to the next stage of the entrance examination – the cultural examination (*wenhuake kaoshi*), held in June. Normally, the number of certificates given by each institution is about four times the designated quota of the eventual enrolment to ensure the necessary quantity of candidates for the next stage. The cultural examination includes three mandatory subjects, namely Chinese literature, mathematics and one foreign language, as well as one or two optional subjects in the liberal arts and science, as outlined in the previous section. Consequently, candidates are selected and enrolled by art institutions based on the results of all these examinations.

⁷³ According to an instructional paper from the Ministry of Education, private universities and independent colleges are not allowed to organise institutional examinations. Other art institutions can use the result of the provincial examination to admit students or organise institutional examinations. See: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/> [accessed on 3 January 2012].

⁷⁴ Since 2004 those higher education institutions have had authority from the MoE to have greater autonomy in the entrance examination. See <http://edu.beelink.com.cn/20041228/1755035.shtml> [accessed on 3 January 2012].

The respective weighting between the art (provincial and institutional) and cultural examinations can be varied each year depending on the number of applicants, and is decided individually and regionally by art institutions. Basically, if candidates pass the art examinations and attain the minimum requirement of the local higher institutions, they can be enrolled by one of the following two methods. In the first, as long as their cultural examination results reach the cut-off mark set by the institution, candidates will be admitted according to their art examination marks in descending order. Or their marks in both examinations are multiplied with a certain coefficient and then added up. The weighting might be, for example, 60% for the art examination and 40% for the cultural examination. This flexible weighting varies between different institutions and subject areas in order for appropriate candidates to be selected. In the second method, students are admitted according to their cultural examination results, from the highest down among the successful candidates in the art exam. These two processes are usually employed in different art and design subjects. In the practice-based areas, including, for example, fine art, visual communication and interior design, candidates' art exam results are given greater weight by the first method, while in the more theoretical areas such as art history and art education the second method is applied.

The current entrance examination for art and design higher education has largely inherited conventions from the 1930s and 1940s (Zhang 2011, p. 144). Regardless of the changes that have happened in the art and design higher education sector in the past century, and whatever the reforms to the *gaokao*

system, the content of examinations and criteria of assessment have generally been kept constant. There is normally the trivium of three hours' sketching, three hours' colouring and an hour of quick sketching. In addition to these skill-led art exams, students are required to develop a creative project (*chuang zuo*) performed in three to six hours, which aims to test their imaginative and creative abilities. After the enormous expansion of enrolment in 1999, however, the creative project was largely abandoned in the entrance examination at both provincial and institutional levels. Only a few institutions, such as the Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA) and Tsinghua, still keep this tradition. As Zhu Di explained, 'Yet, the abilities in plastic art, such as drawing skills, are crucially needed for both fine art and design students, and have been the core of the examination. Creativity should share an equal importance in selection. Although CAFA discarded this part of the examination for a few years, it was eventually reinstated, as our new entrants were found to be lacking in creative thinking abilities and many concerns were raised by teaching staff at CAFA.'⁷⁵

However, to a great extent, this element of assessment is not popular in art and design higher education institutions in China. Sketching and colouring have always been kept as the mainstream. CAA is one institution that concentrates strongly on sketching and colouring. Song Jianming, the vice president of CAA, emphasised the importance of sketching and colouring in art and design studies: 'From my perspective, drawing techniques are the foundation of art. They may reflect an ability in depicting nature and people, which is a basic quality even for

⁷⁵ Interview with Zhu Di, former Director of the Administrative and Recruitment Office at CAFA, 23 June 2005, Beijing.

designers.⁷⁶ In fact, the enthusiasm for, and appreciation of, sketching can be traced not only in the contemporary era but also at every stage of the development of Chinese art education during the modernisation of society. The role of sketching will be reviewed historically, and its importance in art education will be explored in detail in the next section.

The sketching examination tests candidates' aptitude in plastic art in various ways, for example life-drawing and drawing from memory. Life-drawing assignments usually consist of sketching still objects, plaster models and head portraits of live models. These tasks aim to evaluate students' abilities in the techniques of composition, perspective, proportion and structure, as well as their powers of observation and expression of characteristics. Still-life sketching has been transformed since the early 2000s by requiring students to draw particular objects from memory. All they are given are the names of the objects to be drawn and their numerical quantities. For example, the sketching examination of Jilin College of Art in 2006 constituted a free composition of 'a jar, a spoon, an apple, a pear, five hawthorns and a white lining cloth', while at Jilin University the relevant objects were 'an apple, a wine glass, a jar with a lid, a casserole, a white lining cloth, a plate and a knife'. There is not a major difference in subject matter between these two examples, and most of the objects would not be unfamiliar to candidates. Compared with regular still-life practice, however, drawing from memory requires not only skills in sketching and layout, but also, more importantly, use of the imagination.

⁷⁶ Interview with Professor Song Jianming, Vice President, CAA, 20 February 2006, Hangzhou.

There has been another interesting change in the post-1999 era. Still lifes or models are not always the subjects for sketching and colouring within the art examination. Sometimes students are asked to copy realistically from a photograph, or to draw a given scene from memory. In the 2013 provincial examination of Shandong, the content of the sketching exam was ‘a free composition featuring a shoulder bag, a bugle, a ping-pong ball and bat, two oranges, two milk boxes and one white shirt’.⁷⁷ With the exception of the bugle, the objects appeared in photographs given to students at the examination venue. Although there has been some debate on this common method of assessment, it has still been accepted by many institutions. Only some prestigious art academies, such as CAFA and CAA, use life models in the portrait sketching part of the art examination. As Zhang Jianping comments, ‘Due to then large demand of entrance examination, using photographs is an easy and economical way to conduct the examination of drawing, but compared with life-drawing it lacks analysis, perspective and reflection. It might lead the examination in the opposite direction.’⁷⁸

Meanwhile, training in technique is believed to be effective for the examination. Hence, the emergence of the so-called ‘Pre-Exam Training Courses’ (*kaoqian ban*) offered by private schools, often seen as an ‘efficient’ way of preparing for the entrance exam. Even those without any background in art practice can rapidly be trained on these courses during their secondary education, sometimes in the

⁷⁷ Source: *Qilu Wanbao* (Qilu Evening News), electronic version of 21 January 2013: <http://weifang.iqilu.com/wfyaowen/2013/0121/1430865.shtml> [accessed on 17 August 2013].

⁷⁸ Interview with Zhang Jianping, Principal of Huashan Art School, 21 August 2013, Shanghai.

final year. The training is sufficient to enable them to take the art examination. The tutors are normally teachers or students at art institutions with full experience of the exam. The teaching and learning mainly focuses on techniques by addressing the key points and various demands of the examination and assessment. Each year, the artworks awarded the highest marks at the top academies dictate the direction of the assessment process. For pre-exam training schools, this is very helpful, as they can then reflect on apparent trends and tastes and plan the following teaching year accordingly. The most striking example of this has been the teaching of how to paint an apple in 19 steps with a set of particular strokes and colors for the visual structure (Zhang 2011, p. 146). I will discuss this preparatory approach in detail in Chapter Three.

As I introduced previously, only for art courses – mainly in art and design, but also including music and the performing arts – is there the requirement of an additional art examination prior to the cultural examination. Art courses thus possess an entry system that is unique within the higher education sector. It is difficult for observers to discover how many applicants truly have a strong interest in art and design, but the way the entrance examination system operates might indicate two reasons why students choose art courses for higher studies. Firstly, because the result of the art examination does not affect applicants for non-art-related subjects, choosing art offers an additional opportunity for students to gain access to higher education. According to the schedule of art examinations, students may apply to more than one art institution every year by travelling across the country to participate in the exams at provincial and institutional levels during February and March. On average, one student will

apply to four or five institutions, and some will apply to as many as forty. This particular group has been described as 'Art Candidate Force' (*yikao dajun*). Tong (2007, p. 277) from personal experience knew of a candidate who toured four provinces and twelve examination venues to apply to 38 institutions within 52 days. A news article titled 'Candidate Force start to travel around 6 cities and attend 7–8 examinations from today' implies the phenomenon was still attracting media attention in 2010.⁷⁹ As one of these candidates described:

Compared with others who only take the NCEE in June, we gained many more chances to apply to universities by taking art examinations. I will apply to fifteen art institutions this year and hopefully be admitted by one of them. On 8 February, I will take the first exam at Shandong University of Arts and I'll then participate in the exams at the University of Jinan and Shandong University of Technology. After that, later in February, I will move to Weifang and Qingdao to attend the exam organised by Shenli College, China University of Petroleum and other better art institutions in Beijing.⁸⁰

Considering the expense of so much travelling, some candidates have to sleep overnight in train stations and eat fast food to save money. Others choose to join tours, the so-called *daikao tuan*, organised by private bodies or pre-exam training schools, which provide a comprehensive service, arranging everything for candidates during the examination season.⁸¹ These tours are normally led by art teachers and students studying at prestigious institutions who are willing to share their experiences in taking the examinations. In addition to daily living and

⁷⁹ Source: *Qilu Wanbao* (Qilu Evening News), electronic version of 22 February 2010: <http://www.qlwb.com.cn/display.asp?id=486057> [accessed on 7 March 2012].

⁸⁰ Source: <http://www.ms211.com/gaokao/gaosanshenghuo/g3sh2006-02-09-01.htm> [accessed on 7 March 2012].

⁸¹ Source: <http://www.mkao.cn/Exam/info/200912/12569.asp> [accessed on 7 March 2012].

travelling arrangements, the tours provide exam-oriented training and offer advice on making university applications.

The second factor in the popularity of art courses, in comparison with other subject areas at university level, is that the demands of the cultural examination are reduced significantly when the art examination results are factored in. Before 2006, scores in mathematics were not included in the final results. Some students gave up mathematics at an early stage once they had decided to choose art. For example, some students simply left the exam paper blank in the cultural examination.⁸² Although this policy was changed by the Ministry of Education in 2006, with the purpose of enhancing the candidates' academic attainment, the cut-off line for the art and design undergraduate course is normally 60% of that applied in other ordinary institutions in the Tier Two group. 'Choosing Art' for study is sometimes considered an ideal alternative path or even 'shortcut' to higher education for less confident applicants participating in the intellectual competition of the NCEE. The lower entry requirement in the NCEE results in many students turning to, or being advised to, study art during their secondary studies, if they find their academic attainments insufficient for choosing other subject areas. An interview with two candidates, Siqi and Yifan,⁸³ serves as an illustration of art being considered the perfect alternative route into higher education. Both anticipated studying art, even though they had no opportunity to

⁸² Source: People Online on 6 February 2006: <http://edu.people.com.cn/GB/44065/4077317.html> [accessed on 18 August 2013].

⁸³ Student interviewees are all annoyance in this research.

visit art museums or galleries beforehand, and had little knowledge about the courses they had chosen.⁸⁴ As Siqi states:

My parents deliberately encouraged me to practise painting because they wanted me to go to a prestigious university to study whatever subjects I could. I will therefore select some leading institutions and apply for the subject with the fewest candidates in order to avoid competition. It doesn't matter whether I like it or not, I will complete my first degree first and determine my future career after graduation.

As observed in Chapter One, 'Art Study Fervour' has been a striking phenomenon in China, following the expansion of enrolment in higher education. The account of the art examination's role in the entry system for art and design higher education covers issues that may form part of the experience of every artist or designer in China. In importance, it is the equal of the cultural examination within the entry system. The influences that the art examination has had on students' choices to study art will be revealed in Chapter Four, by presenting more evidence from students for analysis. As well as its impact on student choice, the art exam showcases another interesting element – sketching and colouring skills. The sketching part, in particular, has been at the centre and has played a representative role in examining students' abilities in realistic drawing in plastic art. This will be historically reviewed and discussed in the following section.

2.3 The Role of Sketching in Art Education and Examination

⁸⁴ Interview with Siqi and Yifan, candidates at CAA, 10 November 2008, Hangzhou.

As introduced in the previous section, sketching, colouring and quick sketching have been the main contents of the art examination, and have been considered the critical techniques for producing realistic visual work. Interestingly, these techniques were not 'Chinese' originally, but were introduced from the West in the late nineteenth century. They have played a crucial role in Chinese modern art and design education.

How is it that these 'imported' techniques now play such a dominant role in Chinese art education? In this section, I will review historically the development of these Western art techniques in China, in particular the practice of sketching, and discuss how they have influenced China's modern art education system, and their impact on the art examination as a mechanism to select artistic talent.

Art education in China can be traced back to the dynastic period. The first art academy, the Institution of Chinese Painting (*huaxue*), was founded in the Song Dynasty with the purpose of selecting painters for the Emperor. It was later replaced by *huayuan*, painter societies or academies, which had two branches within the Imperial court for the purpose of recruiting, training and producing art (Pan 2004, p. 5). This traditional art education was inherited from masters via a one-to-one apprenticeship (*yituzhi*) system.

In this study, I shall focus on the development of the modern or institutionalised education system, taking the founding of the first modern school in 1895, the Beiyang Public School (Beiyang Gongxue), as the start of China's higher

education history (Yeh 1990, pp. 93–103).⁸⁵ With the development of national capitalism, to follow Western experience had become a way out at that time. The abolition of the traditional examination system, *keju*, in 1905, opened the door to Western culture, science and technology to be introduced into the Chinese educational system. Western drawing techniques were studied as one of the essential tools of Western technology, and were mainly introduced through missionaries in the late nineteenth century. One of the most representative and best-known examples, the Tushanwan Arts and Crafts Centre at Xujiahui in Shanghai, was opened by the Jesuits in 1864 for orphans to serve the needs of the Catholic Church and, at the same time, to teach Western art and crafts. These, undoubtedly, differ greatly from the traditional skills of Chinese art. As Darwent describes: ‘In the painting room boys were taught drawing and tracing, and they copied the pictures of ecclesiastical subjects for churches and schools and for private purchase.’ Interestingly, he continues: ‘Whether the Chinese can be taught to paint imaginative subjects “out of their head” or to paint from nature is not settled by the work done here’ (cited in Sullivan 1996, p. 30).

Over the same period, alongside the indirect adoption of a Western model of art education, the other notable feature in the Chinese experience was the Japanese influence on art education. As Hayhoe (1996, p. 19) commented, ‘This is fairly evident in the legislation for a modern educational system modelled on Japan’s that was passed in 1902 and 1903.’ The terminology of *yishu* (art) was introduced from the West through Japanese scholars. After Chinese scholars

⁸⁵ Beiyang Gongxue is the forerunner of Tianjin University. The history of Chinese higher education normally takes 1895 as the date of the starting point of the modern university.

translated the Japanese term into Chinese (Li 2004). In 1902, when Western-style drawing and painting were included in the curriculum of all schools, there was an urgent need for teachers. Two teacher training schools opened accordingly: the Beiyang Normal School (Beiyang Shifan Xuetang) and the Liangjiang Normal School (Liangjiang Shifan Xuetang). Courses in drawing, oil painting and watercolour were taught by Japanese instructors. By 1909 there were 461 Japanese teachers in schools and colleges in China, of whom sixteen were listed as instructors in drawing and painting (Sullivan 1996, pp. 27–8). At the same time, encouraged by the government, a large number of Chinese went to study in Japan. Those who returned became important promoters of Western drawing skills through their teaching in Chinese schools from 1902 to 1911. For example, Li Shutong (1880–1942) was one of the pioneers who studied at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1905. He was the first Chinese artist to develop the woodcut as an art form and to stress the importance of teaching advertising and commercial art in art schools. He was also the author of the first book introducing Western art history to a Chinese audience (ibid, p. 29).⁸⁶

In the period preceding 1911, Japan could be considered the most important model for the government and for educators, artists and cultural reformers. However, this situation had been changed after the revolution of 1911.⁸⁷ China had already begun to turn away from Japanese educational ideas and to look, instead, towards American and European models. Studying abroad remained

⁸⁶ Li Shutong's history of Western art for the Chinese reader was never published, and the manuscript was lost (Sullivan 1996, p. 29).

⁸⁷ The revolution of 1911, also known as the Xinhai Revolution, overthrew China's two thousand years of imperial dynasty and established the Republic of China.

popular during this period, with America and France becoming the favoured destinations. Chinese art education and practice entered a prosperous era. Cai Yuanpei, another remarkable figure, played a key role in promoting art education throughout the country. After spending the years 1906 to 1910 in Germany and France, he was appointed Minister of Education on the establishment of the Republic in 1912. His notion of educational guidance, 'Substituting religions with art education' (*yi meiyu dai zongjiao*), profoundly influenced society. This philosophy informed educational strategies during the process of modernisation and also placed emphasis on the role of art education (Yuan, 2003). This development, to some extent, gave young artists further incentive to travel to the West and bring its ideology back to help modernise China. In the period up to 1949, Western influences were being introduced by Chinese artists who had returned from abroad and who then held influential positions. Under the Nationalist government, a number of private art schools sprang up across the country. For example, Zhou Xiang (1871–1933) founded the Shanghai Oil Painting Institute (Shanghai Youhua Yuan), which became known as the Shanghai Sino-Western Drawing and Painting School (Shanghai Zhongxi Tuhua Xuexiao). Liu Haisu (1896–1994), a former student of Zhou Xiang, later started his own school in Shanghai and introduced life-drawing into classes. By 1915 the school was registered as the Shanghai Painting and Art Institute (Shanghai Tuhua Meishu Yuan), and was later well known as the Shanghai College of Fine Art (Shanghai Meizhuan) (Zhang 2011, p. 40).⁸⁸ Courses included Chinese national (traditional) painting (*guohua*), Western-style painting (*xihua*), crafts

⁸⁸ Shanghai Meizhuan was named in 1921. In 1958, after merging with Suzhou Meizhuan and the fine art department of Shandong Art University, it was renamed Nanjing University of the Arts (Liu and Huang 2010).

and design (*gongyi tu'an*), sculpture and art education. Students were taught Western techniques, such as drawing and painting directly from models, landscapes and still-life objects. As Sullivan (1996, p. 31) has argued, 'the Shanghai Meizhuan was the true birthplace of modern art in China, owing largely to Liu Haisu's courage, energy, organisational gifts and total freedom from prejudice against any particular school of painting.' In the public education sector, Chinese artists and educators who returned from the West contributed significantly as academic leaders in the vigorous development of higher education. The first national higher education institution of art, the Beijing Fine Art School (Beijing Meishu Xuexiao), opened in Beijing in 1918.⁸⁹ By 1922, approved by the Ministry of Education, it had become a national art college (Guoli Meishu Zhuanmen Xuexiao), with departments of *guohua*, *tu'an* and *xihua*. The establishment of the National Beiping Art Academy has been generally recognised as a milestone in the history of Chinese art education. It led to an unprecedented growth of Chinese modern art institutions. Along with the Beijing art college, the government established Guangzhou Municipal College of Art (Guangzhou Shili Meishu Xuexiao) in 1922, initially with a department of *xihua*.

In 1927, in response to a call from the government for a practical emphasis on education, Cai offered Lin Fengmian (1900–1991), former president of the National Beijing Art College, the opportunity to set up a new art academy in Hangzhou. In 1928, the National Academy of Art (Guoli Yishu Yuan), forerunner of today's China Academy of Art, was founded under the direction of Lin

⁸⁹ The Beijing art college was the forerunner of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA). The name was changed to the National Art Academy in 1925, and in 1928 it became an art department of National Beiping University.

Fengmian as the first comprehensive art academy in China.⁹⁰ The mission statement of the academy reads: 'to introduce Western art and to reflect on Chinese art; to harmonise Western and Eastern art, and to create new art for today.' The academy teaching staff were mostly returning artists from France, though there were also many foreign teachers from France, England and Japan (Zhang, 2011, p. 42). The name of the institute was changed to the National Hangzhou Academy of Art (Guoli Hangzhou Yishu Zhuanke Xuexiao) in 1929. Outside the front line of art education in Beijing and Shanghai, many other art institutions were established around the country during the period. Examples include the art department of the National Central University in Nanjing and the Suzhou Academy in Suzhou.⁹¹ These art academies laid the foundation for a modernised art education in China, but it was one developed largely through a Westernised perspective.

For many Chinese artists in the earlier twentieth century, Western realism meant a revolution in ideas when compared with China's traditional forms of visual art, which were no longer adequate for expressing ideas and experience, particularly, during China's revolutions since the May the Fourth, the new cultural movement. Kang Youwei (1858–1927), one of the leaders during the Hundred Days of Reform, noted, 'Today industry, commerce and everything else is related to art. Without art reform these fields cannot develop.' He also deplored the lack of realism in traditional Chinese painting: 'It is totally wrong to regard literati spirit

⁹⁰ Lin Fengmian left for France under the work-study scheme in 1919, studied for a while in Dijon, and in 1920 entered the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, where he worked in the atelier of the highly academic Fernand Cormon (1854–1924), history painter, portraitist and teacher of Gauguin (Sullivan 1996, p. 38).

⁹¹ Nanjing was the national capital in 1927. The art department of the National Central University was the first art department in higher education when it was set up in 1905; it was revived in 1915 (*ibid*).

as the orthodox school of painting' (cited in Sullivan 1996, p. 28). As Li (2004, pp. 349-6) noted, 'He urged the introduction of the scientific methods of Western visual arts to reform China's own visual arts. Chinese painting was an expression of the feeling of the artist, but it was not true to life. Kang was willing to use the realistic skills of Western painting to reform Chinese painting.'

This tremendous change in approach to Western art took place after the revolution. Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), chief editor of the journal *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), criticised the Chinese painters in the Qing dynasty who only imitated masters' works.⁹² To him, Western realism could bring innovation to Chinese painting (Chen 1918, p. 86). Cai Yuanpei was also convinced that 'only Realism could save Chinese painting' though he regarded 'Western art as little more than a useful technique for representing objects' (cited in Sullivan 1996, p. 32). During periods of war, the role of art education was to contribute to the cause of saving the nation.⁹³ As Chang Shuhong commented, 'Realism is much more important and appropriate compared with Naturalism in this era. We need more practical and realistic artworks' (cited in Pan 2004, p. 146). Sketching, therefore, as one of the basic skills, was promoted in a wide range of art practice and educational fields to meet China's most urgent need, and became an important educational principle (ibid).

⁹² Chen Duxiu played a key role in the New Cultural Movement (*Xin Wenhua Yundong*). The opening shots in the battle for cultural reform were fired in September 1915 with the publication of the first volume of *Xin Qingnian*. Chen made a 'solemn appeal' to China's youth to take up the struggle and assume responsibility for creating a new culture.

⁹³ Before 1949 China experienced World War II; resisted and defeated Japanese invasion from 1937 to 1945; and endured civil wars between the Guomin Party and the Chinese Communist Party from 1927 to 1937 and 1945 to 1949.

Although some artists, for example Chen Shiceng and Wang Yacheng (Wang and Rong 1990, p. 534), expressed their concerns about realism and even criticised its promotion, the majority of artists of the era firmly believed that realistic skills were fundamental for Chinese art development. Xu Beihong (1895–1953) was one of the most influential proponents. Xu initially studied art at Tushanwan and then in Paris from 1919 to 1927 under the famous naturalist-artist Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret (1852–1929). Xu’s drawing and oil painting techniques were solid, academic and competent, and he passed on his learning to his many students when he took the leading role in the art department of the National Central University in 1928. His ideology and theories were a prominent and continuous influence on Chinese realistic art practice for the next half-century. He adopted what was considered, from a Western perspective at the time, an academic-realist approach towards painting that would later go on to inform the development of socialist-realist art within China.

With the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, art and art education were to be important elements of the process of socialist construction. In China, the relationship between art and politics had not been fully developed until the Yan’an Forum on Art and Literature in 1942. ‘Mao called for the direct subordination of all literary writing and creative arts to the political struggle, requiring those within the artistic professions to join the party ideologically as well as organisationally’ (cited in Hayhoe 1996, p. 62). Mao’s guiding principle, from practice to conceptual understanding, had significant and long-term implications for Chinese art production and art education. The realism represented by Xu Beihong, coincidentally, was compatible with Mao’s view that

art should be 'on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life' (cited in Sullivan 1996). The appearance of classical realism as a mainstream tendency in Chinese art practice and education was no longer driven by Xu but was a response to the new Communist leadership and socialist construction. In 1950, the name of 'Central Academy of Fine Arts' was adopted by the new regime to represent a model concept for art schools across the country, and Xu was appointed as its first president. As an educator in this role, he believed that what his students needed was a solid foundation in Western technique, in particular sketching skills and painting directly from nature (*shifa ziran*) (Pan 2004, pp. 49–51). As Qian recalled, 'The courses in our first year at CAFA were general ones, such as sketch training. President Xu subsequently extended this training to the second year. Students were informed that sketching had a significant position in our university life' (Qian 2009, p. 623).

In the 1950s, the Soviet aid programme was intended to help China with its construction of the whole country. The higher education sector inevitably fell under the influence of the Soviet model. Within the Chinese art establishment, Soviet socialist literature and art were largely respected and recommended. The impact of the Russian realists on the new generation of Chinese oil painters was considerable. Selected art students were sent to study in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the early 1950s, at institutions such as the Academy of Fine Arts and the Leningrad Academy. The Russian curriculum was transplanted into China. In 1955, the Ministry of Culture held a National Conference on Sketching Education (*quanguo sumiao jiaoxue zuotanhui*) at CAFA.

The Russian experience in teaching drawing was analysed at the conference, and the drawing system of Pavel Chistyakov as a pedagogical methodology was selected for promotion nationwide, confirming it as the only official teaching system in China (Chen 2006, p. 185). Chistyakovian pedagogy emphasised observational drawing, so students were trained to look at the objective world and to present it realistically in art, applying scientific studies as well as highly professional drawing skills. In this system, five stages of learning and practice were addressed. As stated in *A Course of Drawing*:

The first stage of learning drawing is studying geometrical objects. Such a study can help students to understand the variety of the structural principles of the objects around us... The second stage is to draw still lifes. Students can learn the basic process of assessing proportion, of rendering the materiality and the tactility of an object as well as the principles of composition... The third stage in the process of learning to draw returns to the central issue of art as realistic and art as representing the human image, especially the portrait. A student must know the inner structure of the head and see the facial features and the whole face as a combination of different plane surfaces... Studies of the anatomy of the human figure, including studies of the structure and movement of the human body, are the main task in the fourth stage. At the fifth stage, quick sketching is the main task. At this stage, besides drawing from observation, students are also required to draw from memory and imagination. (Solov'ev, Smirnov and Alekseeva 1958, pp. 39-41)

Apart from drawing techniques, the Chistyakovian system emphasised the ideas embodied within art works. Chistyakov treated art as an active force for social reform by expressing Communist views through artwork. This genre of narrative or thematic composition reflected Socialist politics. However, in this system, the artist's personal perception, understanding and emotion were not important, nor

was personal creativity. Therefore, students who employed this method nearly always shared the same artistic style.⁹⁴ And yet, it was believed that this particular style could only be achieved by the realistic techniques centred in sketching.

In the mid-1960s, with the political ‘brotherhood relationship’ between China and the Soviet Union broken, the Soviet curriculum was accordingly abandoned. However, the Chistyakovian system was still influential in Chinese art education for nearly forty years. During the Cultural Revolution, all art institutions were closed. The tradition of peasant art was encouraged and became the basis of a mass movement. People were sent out to Huxian in Shaanxi Province to learn peasant painting in response to the call of the political campaign. As Chen (2006) argues, ‘this essentially constituted a historical retrogression in art education, with simplified and homogenous art production in which personality, diversity and originality were largely neglected.’

With the resumption of higher education and *gaokao* in 1977, the Chistyakovian system was also reinstated in art education to support basic skills training. The second National Conference on Sketching Education, held in 1979, was another remarkable event. Although multi-form sketching was proposed at this conference, realist convention still remained a cult in the 1980s. Looking back at

⁹⁴ Although the Chistyakovian system was promoted mainly by administrative means within art academies all over the country, a number of teaching staff at Zhejiang Academy, the forerunner of the China Academy of Art, raised their concerns about applying this single teaching system. Pan Tianshou (1897–1971), when President of Zhejiang Academy, advocated line drawing (*baimiao* and *shuanggou*) as the fundamental training of *guohua* and criticised the artist Xu Beihong’s argument of ‘sketching as the fundamental of all plastic art’.

his own formative years at the Central Academy in the heady days of the 1980s, Fei Dawei⁹⁵ remarks,

Faced with the onslaught of modern art, the instructors maintained that the academy's responsibility was to provide an educational foundation, and the main content of this educational foundation was a 'strong foundation in realism'. The educational spirit of the academy at the time is best captured by the maxim: 'Only by achieving a strong foundation in sketching can one obtain artistic freedom.' (Fei 2011, p. 92)

If we call the artists who were educated in France or other Western countries in the early twentieth century the 'first generation' of modern Chinese artists, the second generation comprised artists who completed their education in the 1950s and 1960s under the influence of the Soviet style. The third generation was formed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, inheriting the complete set of skills from the second generation but also possessing their own personal language. Among these artists, there were always some debates on the prominent role of sketching in Chinese art education. Chen Danqing (2005) argues, although a realistic oil painter himself, discussed the inappropriateness of promoting sketching as the basic skill training in all forms of art and design education. In particular, he criticised the current recruitment system in art and design higher education which uses a single entrance examination and has adopted sketching as the main component.⁹⁶ He commented that sketching, as a basis, is an ultimate myth, a powerful hegemony and the most effective administrative means in

⁹⁵ Fei Dawei is one of China's most important contemporary art critics and curators. He was a major participant and organiser in the '85 New Wave Movement.

⁹⁶ Chen Danqing is one of the most influential scholars in contemporary China. He resigned from the Tsinghua Academy of Art and Design in 2004 to demonstrate his disagreement with the recruitment system in art and design higher education. Interview with Chen Danqing, on 23 November 2005, Shanghai.

Chinese art education sector. Clearly, to Chen, it has already lost its original function and become merely a device for examination.

Although the concern is being addressed, sketching still acts as a major training mechanism in Chinese art education at the present time. In 2009, an exhibition of 'Sixty Years of *Sumiao*' was held at the newly built Art Museum of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. The show exhibited more than a thousand pieces of sketch work produced in the post-1949 era. It revealed the crucial role of sketching as the core of Chinese art education over and over again, covering three generations of artists' work since Xu Beihong's time. When Jin Shangyi, former president of CAFA, appointed in 1987, and one of the most important art educators in China, reviewed the role of drawing in the initial development of design courses at CAFA, he observed,

At CAFA, drawing is the soul of our artistic practice, including not only fine art but also contemporary design since 1995. Attractive modelling and decent colour are highly requested and appreciated in every aspect of design. Drawing is not just about achieving a realistic likeness or accuracy, but also building up a particular culture. Learning photography even, for example, requires the foundation skill of sketching, such as the ability to outline a precise and accurate form and vivid scene. For example, the study of light in sketching will help to present a harmonious appearance when taking a picture.⁹⁷

Apart from the basic skills required for art and design, other functions of sketching were discussed at the conference of the exhibition, which investigated how to observe, analyse and transform objects to be drawn; for example, the

⁹⁷ Interview with Jin Shangyi, the former president of CAFA, conducted by Jiehong Jiang, 7 January 2010, Beijing, unpublished material.

scale of the body and the direction of movement (Qian 2009). This exercise can also reflect artists' understanding of the objective world and their own subjective expression (Zhan 2009). As Tan Ping (2009) commented, 'For me, sketching is not a single method of training; it forms the way of thinking.'

It is thus evident that sketching, as one of the approaches to drawing in realistic art, has established a fundamental position in the history of modernisation or, rather, Westernisation of Chinese art education. This technique was imported to China initially as a tool to challenge the visual language in traditional Chinese art and was seen as a symbol of modern expression from the early 1900s. Since the formation of the People's Republic, as the Soviet sketching method significantly influenced institutional teaching and learning, realistic art was widely promoted in Chinese art education. With the development of art and design education in contemporary China, sketching is still considered a foundation for all subject areas in art and design institutions. In particular, in the post-1999 era, it has been adopted in art examinations, together with colouring, as a single mechanism for selecting students for most art and design undergraduate programmes. Although there has been a series of reforms in the entry system, the central role of sketching in student selection remain unchanged. Students' abilities in realistic drawing are highly appreciated in art examinations, ahead of personal perception, personal emotion and, particularly, personal creativity. In the following chapter, I will use the China Academy of Art (CAA) as a case study to discuss the practice of adopting sketching in the entry system in both the elite and the mass education era. From an institutional perspective, is a realistic skills examination a unique element in the process of student selection? Is there any other consideration or expectation associated with this

testing tool? How does CAA interact with pre-exam training schools with respect to exam-led training? In this chapter, the strategies and admissions policies at CAA will be explored and illustrated as a contribution to the discussion about the unified examination and its responsibility towards social justice in China.

CHAPTER THREE

China Academy of Art: A Case Study

I discussed the current entry system and art examination for art and design undergraduate studies in China in the previous chapter, and revealed the sketching skills that have been used as a main mechanism in the art examination to select entrants for art institutions from a historical perspective. In this chapter, I am going to examine the relevant issues at the China Academy of Art (CAA) as a case study for this research. As introduced previously, there are three main reasons for its sampling. First is its representativeness among the 44 art-specialised institutions and comprehensive universities in China. As one of the most influential and demanding art institutions, CAA has dedicated itself to taking a leading role in many aspects. As Xu Jiang, the president of CAA, commented proudly at the Academy's eightieth anniversary in 2008, 'In China, there is no other academy like CAA that has kept such a high position and achieved such prominent attainments during every stage of its history.' In the past eighty-five years, it has been respected as a 'cradle' for promising artists, and a large number of now well-known practitioners either worked or studied there, including Zhao Wuji, Wu Guanzhong, Li Keran and Pan Tianshou. The school attracts students from all over the country to follow the masters. It shares a high reputation in the field of art education with the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), but unlike CAFA, which is directly administered by the Ministry of Education, CAA as an independent art institution is under the administration of the provincial government. As a mainstream organization, CAA follows the rules and regulations of both the MoE and the Provincial Education Examination

Authority in its recruitment and admission practices, including the implementation of the entrance examination.

The second reason for choosing CAA for this case study is that it offers a complete range of degree options and programmes of study in the visual arts, including fine art, design, architecture, multi-media and film. Its centre is located in Hangzhou, but it has multiple campuses. There are two in Hangzhou⁹⁸ and one in Shanghai. The Nanshan campus, located on the bank of the West Lake, is the oldest, having opened in 1957.⁹⁹ It was rebuilt in 2000 and now consists of a school of fine art,¹⁰⁰ a school of inter-media art, and a school of art and humanities. The Xiangshan campus was built in the early 2000s and has become the Academy's central campus. The school of design, school of architecture, public art institute, and media and animation institute are all on this campus. A third campus for the Shanghai Institute of Design has been strategically located in Shanghai Zhangjiang.

There are 6,500 undergraduate and 800 graduate students on the three campuses, making CAA one of the largest specialised art institutions in China. More importantly, in terms of recruitment and admission, the Academy has full experience in conducting single art examinations to select potential students and has succeeded in having a dominant effect in this field. As mentioned in previous

⁹⁸ Hangzhou is the capital of Zhejiang, which is one of the most wealthy and developed provinces in China, well known as a 'paradise on earth' for its beautiful scenery, and in particular the West Lake.

⁹⁹ Since it was founded in 1928, the name and the location of the academy have been changed several times. It was named the National Hangzhou Academy of Art in 1932, the East China campus of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1950, Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in 1958, and China Academy of Art in 1993.

¹⁰⁰ The school of fine art comprises five departments: traditional Chinese painting, calligraphy, oil painting, printmaking and sculpture.

chapters, the numbers of candidates applying to CAA are extremely high and have increased year on year since 1999. In 2012, the number of applicants reached an unprecedented peak of 89,000. In response to the challenge this presents – and providing the third reason for focusing on CAA as a case study – the Academy has been conducting a series of reforms and experiments in its entry system, in particular the institutional art examination. Wang Zan, the vice president of CAA, has commented that experiments in art examination at CAA have always been a paradigm for other art institutions in China.¹⁰¹

In section one, I discuss strategies and rationales in relation to admission policies and institutional examinations at CAA, in response to national policies and strategies for higher education entrance. In order to achieve fairness and equality in the admissions process, CAA has been implementing reforms in its entrance examination but drawing techniques have been preserved as the main criteria in art examination throughout. In section two, I reveal the patterns of each mechanism in CAA's art examination; in particular, the changes of content in recent years to illustrate the struggles that CAA have experienced and the persistence they have exhibited. In section three, I review pre-exam training courses, both for their preparatory role in art examination and for the other roles they play in the process of student applications to CAA. For example, apart from offering tuition, pre-exam training course providers also take the role of advisors to provide guidance for students and parents in making choices for future studies. Meanwhile, the strategy of making the BA first year a foundation

¹⁰¹ Interview with Wang Zan, Vice President, China Academy of Art, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

year is introduced and discussed in section four to reflect the challenges that CAA has been facing due to the current entry system and the need for attempts to 'reshape' new entrants after their exam-led training. The notion of 'foundation' will also be reviewed from the perspective of CAA management and teaching staff in this section.

3.1 Towards the Ideal of 'Equality', 'Fairness' and 'Transparency'

The strategy behind student intake at CAA is designed according to national and provincial policies and regulations for art and design higher education. Just as at other higher education institutes in China, the entrance examination at CAA plays a unique role in selecting talents nationwide annually, embracing provincial and institutional art examinations and cultural examination. As one of 31 independent art institutions, CAA's admissions activities must always comply with the instructions released by the Ministry of Education, including the MoE's approval of an annual enrolment quota. Since CAA is also under the administration of Zhejiang provincial government, candidates are required to take the provincial examination in December, followed by CAA's institutional examination, normally the following February. Candidates are not only from Zhejiang Province; they come from all over the country. They may sit the institutional examination at the local venues in Hangzhou or elsewhere in designated venues in other cities, such as Wuhan, Beijing, Shenyang, Chengdu and Shanghai, in order to maximise convenience for domestic students and to

attract more students to apply.¹⁰² As mentioned previously, with the rapid expansion of higher education since 1999, the application numbers for CAA have increased significantly. CAA has accordingly faced the challenge of conducting an effective strategy with regard to student intake. Priorities have included ways to organise fair examinations and ways to grade a large number of candidates. In order to achieve its targets, CAA has been practising a series of reforms in its institutional examination and admission system.

With the first stage of reform, the content of the examination was simplified down to sketching, colouring and a creative project, in order to reduce the degree of difficulty. In the era of elite education, there had been various mechanisms for selecting talents for different art and design courses at CAA. For instance, in the 1980s and 1990s, a student who applied for Chinese traditional painting was also required to undergo examinations in sketching, Chinese painting and quick sketching; more importantly, they had to be interviewed individually by examiners. Wang Zan has contrasted the art examination of the elite education era with the art examination of the mass education era, which is basically a single mechanism applicable for a wide range of courses. As one of the policy-makers in the institution, Wang summed up this change and indicated the rationale behind it:

As the national policy in higher education has shifted from elite education to mass education, the mission of higher education institutions in the new era has been changed. Therefore, the criteria of selecting talents for higher education are

¹⁰² See CAA prospectus, 2013.

different from the past. Our current art examination aims to assess candidates' basic skills in plastic art.¹⁰³

Song Jianming shared another example of art examination in the elite education era to back up the reform. He initiated an experiment in examination in 1989. All the candidates were required to spend a whole extra day on campus and to draw freely. There were no particular topics or media in this examination. Examiners made the rounds of the venue while candidates drew, and selected any talents they felt were above the ordinary. However, with such a large number of candidates following the expansion in education in 1999, Song commended the single mechanism of art examination, which has its own strengths from an economical and practical perspective. 'Facing about 70,000 candidates per year, this mechanism works effectively. It only lasts for three days and takes up relatively limited resources of our institution.'

After a few years' practice, the creative project was gradually abandoned during the second stage of reform. As I introduced in Chapter Two, the creative project used to be a major element of examination content, together with sketching and colouring. When Song Jianming recalled his own experience in art examination thirty years ago, he can still remember the creative project clearly. As part of the examination for the fashion design undergraduate programme, he was required to design a pattern featuring a rose and a butterfly in an ellipsis of 25 cm using 5 sets of colour.¹⁰⁴ However, with the number of applications increasing significantly, it was decided that the creative project would be excluded from the

¹⁰³ Interview with Wang Zan, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Song Jianming, 21 October 2012, Hangzhou.

art examination. As Song admitted, 'We have to employ a more practical approach. Our compromise is to test applicants in the most basic skills of drawing and colouring in plastic art. It would be difficult for us to test their imagination and creativity, which might lead us to a chaotic process of assessment.'

The consideration of feasibility was not the whole reason for abandoning the creative project. Since this project could potentially be predicted by inference from previous examinations, some pre-exam training schools helped students to prepare for it accordingly. Tutors gave their students a few topics that might fit in and some ideas for designing a work. This exam-led teaching and learning caused difficulties for institutions in assessing student's true level of artistic capacity. In Song's view, compared with the creative project, sketching and colouring were more skill-based practices. He indicated that, from these two examinations, the level of a student's drawing abilities could be judged on a much fairer basis.¹⁰⁵

However, this realization did not solve the problem in the conflict with pre-exam training schools. The dilemma has persisted, as the exam techniques of sketching and colouring can also be tutored through pre-exam training courses. When Liu Zheng, Director of Academic Affairs, explained the policy of reform for the 2009 intake, he expressed his concerns about exam-led preparation. 'Many pre-exam training schools excessively analyse and interpret the previous art examination

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Song Jianming, 20 February 2006, Hangzhou.

and provide students with intensified coaching to enhance their skills in drawing and painting. But those skills are more likely copying a standard procedure from memory in order to improve the art works in exams. Although some of the students passed the exam and were admitted into CAA, their weakness could easily be observed in their first year of study.¹⁰⁶

In the third stage of reform, from 2010, CAA initiated the addition of fast sketching as one of the main mechanisms in art examination to 'fight' the examined phenomenon. As Wang Zan confirmed, the rationale of adding a fast-sketching exam was based on students needing to prove their skills in plastic art, showing the ability to observe and capture objectives. Sketching requires rational thinking and is a scientific analysis of a three-dimensional space or object. Colouring is a reflection of a candidate's perceptual knowledge. More importantly, quick sketching skills can reflect a candidate's overall competence compared with sketching and colouring. These abilities have been agreed to be the basic skills of fine art, design and new media. In Wang Zan's view, a great artist or designer must possess the ability to sketch quickly. This requires sensitivity to daily life. In order to prepare for the art examination, Wang therefore opines that students should pay attention to enhancing their ability to observe and record movement, in particular the details that reflect characteristics, rather than paying attention purely to exam skills.¹⁰⁷ Apart from its role as a selecting mechanism, skill in quick sketching is seen by many educators as important for art and design undergraduate studies. Cao Xiaoyang,

¹⁰⁶ 'Major Changes of Art Examination at CAA for Next Year', *Qianjiang Evening News*, 17 December 2009, D6.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Wang Zan, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Director of the Foundation Studies department of CAA, has commented that quick sketching is not just a daily practice for students of fine arts such as Chinese painting, oil painting, printmaking and sculpture; it is also an essential way for design students to record ideas and processes.¹⁰⁸ Pre-exam training schools have admitted that the quick sketching exam presents a major challenge, as it is particularly difficult for a student to make a sudden improvement in a short training period.

Through its transformation of the art examination, CAA has continually sent a message to students, schools and society at large that students who are admitted should have comprehensive abilities in observation, thinking and expression.

This strategy can be read from their admissions policies of the time.

In order to attract applications from students with a high level of academic attainment, CAA has since 2010 conducted three approaches aimed at enrolling students who are in the top percentile in either the cultural or art examinations. First, any student in the top 20% of the art examination is admitted directly, as long as their cultural examination mark meets the Academy's cut-off point.¹⁰⁹ Next, any student in the top 5% of the cultural examination is admitted, as long as they also hold the Certificate of Art Skills.¹¹⁰ The other students are admitted from the highest down, according to the sum of 60% in the art examination and

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Cao Xiaoyang, Director of the Foundation Studies Department, China Academy of Art, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹⁰⁹ On average, the cut-off level of the cultural examination at CAA is 450 points, with full marks being 750. This cut-off point is much lower than at the key universities. For example, in 2013, the cut-off point of key universities in Zhejiang Province was 617.

¹¹⁰ The number of certificates issued by CAA is normally four times the designated quota of the eventual enrolment.

40% in the cultural examination. This strategy has been commended as a 'humane' mechanism for selecting distinctive students in either art or academic subjects.¹¹¹ The policy – in its abbreviated form – is known as 'gripping two ends' (*zhua liangtou*). Because of their exam-led training, students used to put more weight on drawing and painting practice. Many students spent almost six months on pre-exam training courses to attain the Certificate of Art Skills, then they would prepare for the cultural examination for only three months after the institutional examination. However, cultural understanding and intellectual quality are equally important for development in art subjects.

Another experimental reform in the admission system at CAA has been to recruit students into four major categories: plastic art, design, media and architecture. This is the so-called 'Broader Subjects Admission' (*dalei zhaosheng*).¹¹² The previous policy differed significantly. Students had to choose their subject area when they first applied to CAA. On the completion of their foundation year, most students were then placed on the course that they had initially chosen. Only the 5% of students with the highest marks in the first year were allowed to change their subjects at that point. However, this policy has been replaced entirely since 2012, and the new policy has been applied to all undergraduate courses at CAA. Students no longer choose a specific course for undergraduate studies during the entry process. They are now allowed to have a choice upon the completion of

¹¹¹ Interview with Weng Zhenyu, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹¹² Some courses are not part of these four categories. They include Chinese painting, calligraphy, sculpture, art history and design studies, which are known as the 'five minor areas' (*wu xiaokuai*).

their foundation year, and are then distributed onto the various courses.¹¹³ It is still not a free choice for every student. According to the 'Distributary Scheme of Undergraduate Studies' at CAA, a student's academic attainment in the foundation year is still carefully considered. The new policy has been implemented in response to the strategy of 'two-stage tuition' (*liangduan shi*) at undergraduate level. It aims to broaden the entrance process and to strengthen art foundation studies (*kuan koujing hou jichu*). Wang Zan confirms that this policy has its advantages in the entry system.

One of the main purposes of this change is to balance the number of applications and ensure student quality on each course. In the past, applications were clustered in some major subjects and caused high competition in the art examination for particular courses. On the other side, the policy can avoid students blindly choosing courses at application stage, with a lack of knowledge and experience.¹¹⁴

Clearly the reforms in art examination and admissions policy at CAA during the era of mass education have been an attempt to achieve two key targets: to control the quality of new entrants and to maintain a fair, equal and transparent entry system. I introduced the concept and strategy of seeking social justice through the higher education entry system in Chapter Two: the unified entrance examination is widely accepted as a useful mechanism to ensure a fairness of access in Chinese society. The Ministry of Education also commenced a 'Ten

¹¹³ The combined foundation department at CAA was established in 2007, merged from the previous plastic art, design and media foundation departments. I will introduce the foundation teaching and learning at CAA in the following section.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Wang Zan, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Principles of Transparency'¹¹⁵ policy toward universities' enrolment procedures in China to emphasise the importance of providing a so-called 'sunny admission platform' (*yangguang zhaosheng pingtai*). In interviews with senior members of staff at CAA, many of them mentioned that the Academy – as one of the leading art institutions in China – is a paradigm for others, and that its strategies have wide social consequences. Therefore, to carry out an equal, fair and transparent examination and admission system has always been a central concern.

As the former Director of the Admissions Office at CAA, Weng Zhenyu regarded himself more or less as a commander in the 'battle' of student intake.¹¹⁶ He believed the first key mission was to build up a scientific and transparent system in the admissions process. A digitised registration system was launched in 2005 to help more than 30,000 candidates sign up for applications on campus within one day. In 2011, CAA updated its online access system in order to collect candidates' personal information as a preliminary step. Weng shared his enthusiasm for improving efficiency through this electronic system:

In order to manage the registration system for signing up for the institutional art examination, our recruitment office started to cooperate with IT companies to design an electronic registration system to optimise procedures. In 2004, there was a long queue for registration over the whole night outside of the campus. We launched the new system in 2005 and it has made as much progress as can be fairly expected. Students' identity cards, portraits and personal information have been saved into a database. With the data, it will be much more convenient for us to analyse scores, age groups and regional distribution, and to work out

¹¹⁵ 'Ten Principles of Transparency' refers to enrolment policies, the qualifications of higher education institutions in recruitment, prospectus, enrolment plan, entry requirement, enrolment procedures, admissions results, appeal policies, violations and processes, and counterchecks.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Weng Zhenyu, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

the pass qualification results. In particular, it will help us to evaluate whether the arrangement of the examination tests fairness and equality.¹¹⁷

Modern information technology has been widely used in recruitment activities to enhance procedures, and also to release information efficiently to target audiences, for example through an official website. Students can obtain a prospectus, notices of application and art examination, and the result of an institutional examination through the Internet. Weng Zhenyu commented, 'The (CAA) website will help us communicate with prospective students, and with this interaction we may attract more students to apply to CAA.' He has even proposed to other top art institutions to create a joint 'art examination website' and has shared resources in order to facilitate recruitment for students and parents all over the country. He has also noted that setting up information channels in relation to applications is, at the same time, part of a strategy to achieve a transparent process in the area of student intake.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Weng Zhenyu, 30 October 2005, Hangzhou.



Figure 1: The examination venue of sketching examination at CAA

To ensure equality in the process of enrolment, CAA has a number of measures in place for conducting art examinations. For example, it is strictly forbidden to enter the examination venue without an Examination Attendance Card (*zhunkao zheng*). Candidates need to show the examiner at the venue both this card and an ID card. In addition, the examinee's name is anonymous on the exam paper. There is also always more than one examiner in a room (Figure 1). Song Jianming was able to give many examples of cheating during an examination, for example, students bringing small booklets with colouring samples to help them follow the steps and tips. Also – although not all students created exactly the same work – it was noticeable that they could remember the procedures of drawing and painting taught by the tutors on their pre-exam training courses and copied 'correctly' on the exam paper. To fight against exam-led training, annual changes in examination content have been a somewhat more passive choice for the

Academy. In the colouring exam in 2014, for example, students were required to paint a portrait of a live model, rather than still-life objects. Li Dujin, the current Director of the Admissions Office, indicated that this change was to break the routine of painting still-life objects that had been in place over the previous ten years, and that had already been a mechanistic practice. The new mechanism was a complete novelty for candidates and, as such, offered the opportunity to reflect a more sensitive perception through the medium of an artwork.¹¹⁸ Commentary in the media noted that it was far too difficult for those who had only prepared for the exam for a few months, and that many students felt very disappointed when they came out of the examination venue.¹¹⁹

If transparency and equality can be read in the application and examination procedures, then the mission in marking or grading is mainly concerned with fairness. Song Jianming confirmed the guidelines at CAA towards fairness from a sociological perspective: 'Examination has a very special place in Chinese society: it carries hopes and expectations, and means opportunities for Chinese families. Therefore, the criteria must be transparent. Otherwise it will be difficult to keep fairness in the entry system.'¹²⁰ In order to avoid individual bias during assessment, CAA has divided the examiners into different teams, each team consisting of four examiners. Every exam paper is reviewed and scored over three rounds by twelve examiners. After the three rounds, a supervisor doublechecks the results to ensure quality. Wang Zan has commented that, unless fairness in an art examination is guaranteed, art institutions cannot win

¹¹⁸ See <http://edu.people.com.cn/n/2014/0215/c1053-24369521.html> [accessed on 6 May 2014].

¹¹⁹ See <http://edu.zjol.com.cn> [accessed on 6 May 2014].

¹²⁰ Interview with Song Jianming, 20 February 2006, Hangzhou.

trust and confidence from society and will not attract further students to apply.¹²¹

In China, university entrance examinations have succeeded in being viewed as symbols of equality and fairness. It seems that either entrance examinations or admissions policies have been designed and delivered on the principles of social justice. CAA has without doubt made every effort to ensure that each candidate sees the examination as a fair process. Yet the Academy has still had to transform the art examination consistently since the rapid expansion in mass education in order to avoid exam-led learning. The 'battle' with the pre-exam training schools still continues. I argue that, to a large extent, the reform of entrance examination cannot effectively solve the problems. Although the increase of entering into higher education happened in all social groups in China, the expansion has been mainly achieved in traditional elite universities. The aspiration of higher education and the concept of entering into prestigious universities are deeply embedded in Chinese society. As a competency based entry system, students with higher family socio-economic status may get favours from their previous educational background and social connections when they make their higher education choice. This group of students are more advantaged than others. For example, they may access to more sources of information through family social networks. In particular, as discussed in the previous Chapter, in order to get a higher score in NCEE, Chinese families may make every effort to help their children. Pre-exam training is definitely an effective way. With financially

¹²¹ Interview with Wang Zan, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

advantaged students being able to obtain much higher quality service and polish their drawing skills at training schools, fairness and equality cannot realistically be achieved in the process of admissions, if the entrance examination still emphasises the importance of techniques. Social justice seems somehow still to be only an ideal for the Academy.

In the meantime, the art examination is aimed at evaluating candidates' basic skills in drawing and painting for their future studies. However, a student's creativity cannot be reflected in the current art exam system. As a compromise, CAA has to put more focus on drawing techniques as one of the entry requirements. The policy-makers perhaps expect that four years of undergraduate studies will provide teaching in creative thinking if a student's skills are good enough already. More importantly, approaches to assessment always convey a message from the Academy to society; in particular, these affect the teaching and learning in secondary schools and pre-exam training schools, which might influence students' choices significantly. In the following section, I will consider the art examination and grading system in detail to examine expectations on the part of the Academy.

3.2 The Art Examination at CAA

Since the extreme expansion in higher education in China, the art examination at CAA has been transformed so that it consists mainly of sketching, colouring and quick sketching. In this section, I will discuss the way in which the examination is conducted and the changes of content in recent years, as well as the marking

process and criteria, which may be helpful in further understanding the Academy's own considerations. In 2006, I was permitted to visit the examination venue in Hangzhou in order to gain a perceptual experience about the exam. I was not allowed to take any pictures, but noted that the atmosphere at the venue was unique; different from other examination situations that I had experienced. I was brought to one of the biggest examination spaces, the stadium in Xiangshan campus, to witness a sketching exam in progress. In one of the rooms, there were more than 600 candidates sitting the exam. It was very quiet in the room except for the sound of sketching. The students all looked engrossed. More than 30 examiners were walking around, like 'guards'. I was allowed to stay for only ten minutes, but was still impressed by how spectacular the occasion was. This vivid experience will be combined with other materials collected through interviews or publications to explore the nature of the examination.

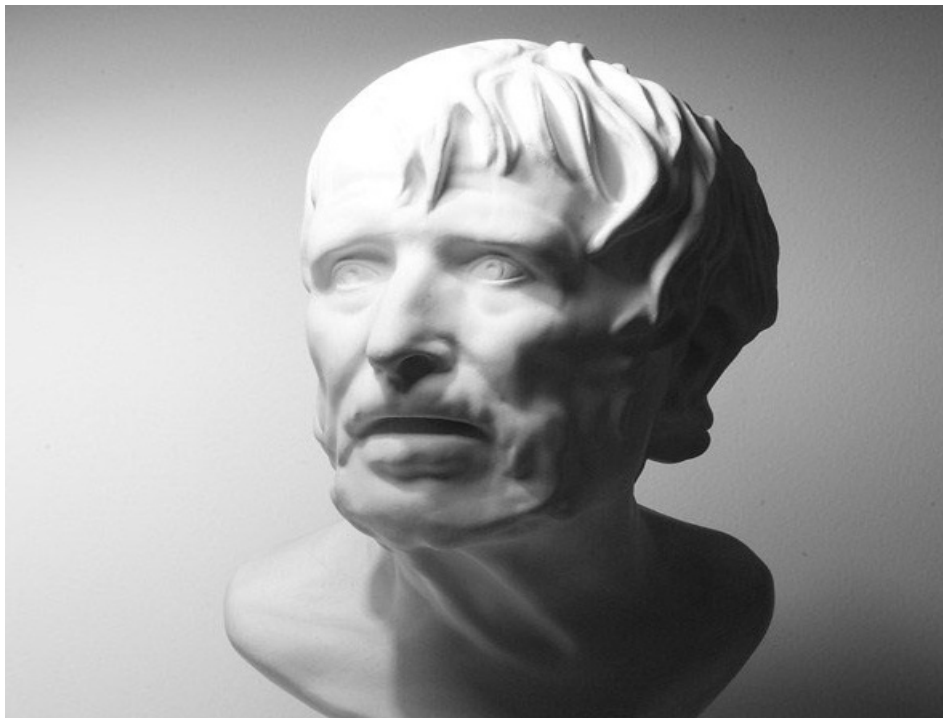


Figure 2: A sculpture of Voltaire for sketching practice.

Sketching, as I discussed in Chapter Two, plays a crucial role in Chinese art education. It has been treated as an essential skill in all forms of art and design, and has been adopted as one of the main mechanisms for art examination since the modernisation of art education in China. I have introduced some examples of sketching exams in China already: for example, some institutions ask students to draw objects from memory. At CAA, the sketching exam usually consists of figure drawing, such as a head portrait of a plaster bust, a head portrait of a life model or a half-length portrait of a life model, depending on the course. The sketching of plaster busts has been widely adopted for design courses, with sculptures of Voltaire, Napoleon II, Homer and Agrippa (Figure 2) the most frequently used. Students who apply for multi-media courses are normally required to draw a head portrait of a life model. The half-length portrait of a model is generally required for the sketching exams of plaster art courses, such as oil painting, printmaking and sculpture. Compared with the head portrait, the half-length portrait requires the exhibition of more drawing techniques, for example, to show body proportions, spatial perspective, physical movement and texture of clothing. This explains why it is commonly applied for selecting students for plaster art courses, since to an extent they should have a more solid base in those skills. The sketching exam lasts for three hours. Candidates are divided into groups. Every twenty students share a model.¹²² In the first half an hour, students normally study the movement and proportion of the model and begin to work on the structure of the portrait. Over the next two hours they draw the

¹²² Interview with Wang Zan, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

details, complete with the effects of light and shade. They may have another half an hour in which to adjust their work. Candidates are required to prepare drawing materials – usually pencil, charcoal, charcoal pencil and spray fixative – by themselves. At the same time as students are given the examination content, they are also given the evaluation criteria. For the sketching exam, there are basically four dimensions of assessment: namely, an accurate form and structure, a good visual expression, completion of the drawing, and free use of drawing materials.¹²³

Colouring has long been of equal importance in the art examination at CAA, whether during the elite or the mass education era. The format was commonly to paint a group of objects from memory in three hours. Those objects were chosen from daily life, for example, fruit, flowers, containers, stationery or kitchenware. Candidates were given a description of the objects, complete with quantity and colour, or else they were given a black-and-white composition of a picture to paint using warm and cold colours. Examiners judged the works according to the arrangement of tones, the control of colour and black lines, the texture of the objects, further depiction of details, appropriate treatment of white space and true-to-lifeness. For example, in the colouring exam of 2009, the content was ‘a bunch of flowers with green leaves in a dirty-yellow-coloured vase, three apples, a glass, a yellow cloth and a greyish-green cloth, all in warm tones’. In the exam of 2011, the topic was ‘a corner of the park’ and a black-and-white picture of the scene was provided.¹²⁴ However, in recent years, the trend for the colouring

¹²³ Interview with Guan Huaibin, art examiner, China Academy of Art, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹²⁴ Interview with Weng Zhenyu, 30 October 2005, Hangzhou.

exam has changed in favour of the painting of still-life objects in order to avoid mechanical practice. In 2013, a set of still-life objects – a purple umbrella, a pair of green rubber boots and a towel with grey stripes – was assembled on the floor for students to paint. Wang Zan commented that these objects were not difficult to paint, but for those who had only had exam-led training the task would be unusual, and the sudden change might expose their real abilities. If candidates were in the habit of observing everyday objects and practicing their craft, the task should not present a problem.¹²⁵



Figure 3: An examination paper of quick sketching

Quick sketching is a category that was added as recently as 2009. The score awarded for quick sketching is up to 60 points, while sketching and colouring

¹²⁵ Interview with Wang Zan, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

receive a maximum of 100 points each. The quick sketching exam lasts for only one hour (Figure 3). Sometimes candidates are given a picture to imitate in order to show their quick sketching skills. For instance, in 2012, the quick sketching task was to imitate a representation of *The Thinker* by Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) in half an hour. On other occasions, candidates are given a topic to draw from memory, such as ‘a scene with a woman, a young man and an old man waiting for a bus’ in the exam of 2010. In 2014, life models were widely used for quick sketching. Students were required to observe the movement of the model and to complete the sketch in one hour. This change will be discussed later in the section. Three major evaluation criteria are used to assess a student’s work after this exam. First is the appropriateness of form and structure, which is quite similar to the criterion for judging sketching. The second key point is depiction of movement, since quick sketching requires more concentration on this aspect. The third is the student’s ability to express epitomisation and expression. As I mentioned in the previous section, the main purpose of introducing quick sketching was to select talents with all-round drawing skills. Changing the content of the exam may help to judge a candidate’s real ability in drawing and their instant response to express their thinking.



Figure 4: A miniature booklet contains classic examples of painting and sketching

For any candidate, getting a high score in the art examination means guaranteed entry. This means that – apart from the drawing techniques and tips that can be learned from pre-exam training courses – students are prone to considering various means for improving perception of their art works (some of these means have resulted in ‘legitimate plagiarism’). For example, pre-exam training school tutors teach students how to remember the various steps of sketching and how to make the drawing match the Academy’s tastes. It is more or less like an implicit standard or preference when select examination papers from the pool. Every single academy may have its preference. As introduced previously, the traditional art education is still influential to contemporary art and design education, in particular the learning approach of the apprenticeship system. The heritage of the Academy that form the style may inherit not only through the

daily teaching and learning, but also selecting potential apprentices who may continue the line of the traditions.

In colouring exams, some candidates take great risks to smuggle in a miniature booklet, which contains classic examples of painting, so that they can imitate these forms and colours during the exam (Figure 4). In addition, since painting materials are to be prepared by each candidate personally, many students choose a ready-made set of painting colours known as 'CAA grey' (*guomei hui*) or 'sophisticated colour grey' (*gaoji hui*) (Figure 5). This box contains between 64 and 80 shades of grey, produced by local manufacturers, to help students in exams, since they will no longer need to mix these colours by themselves.¹²⁶ This phenomenon has arisen due to the Academy's perceived preference for greyish tones, as An Bin has explained.¹²⁷

It is clear that every effort is made by the Academy to find an effective approach to sorting students from a large pool, in which essential skills in drawing and painting need to be carefully considered. Every year, approximately 260,000 examination papers from all seven examination venues are centralised in Hangzhou campus. Compared with the workload of organising the examination, marking or grading is equally heavy for CAA. As it is impossible to digitise the art works, papers are viewed and judged on an individual basis by examiners who

¹²⁶ The most famous manufacturer is Zang's Art Stationery, which is owned by a team of CAA graduates. The 'CAA grey' brand of painting colours is Claude, and it is now the top sales item in the market.

¹²⁷ Interview with An Bin, former Director of the Foundation Department at CAA, 9 November 2008, Hangzhou.

are also teaching staff at CAA. But still, the whole process lasts nearly one month.



Figure 5: A ready-made set of painting colours known as 'CAA grey'

As mentioned, normally one examination paper is reviewed and assessed by twelve examiners over three rounds of grading. The examiners are grouped together in threes. In the first round, any obviously weak works are eliminated. Over 50% of candidates will still receive a pass in this round. In the second round, the passed papers are classified into top, middle and low grades. Specific marking is only done in the final round. After that, a supervisory team double checks the results and reassesses any extremely low or high scores. On average, an examiner has only a few seconds – no more than a minute – to judge, with two members of administrative staff holding up the paper, and giving a mark may take a little longer. Although there are a few standard criteria given to the examiners previously, their own subjective judgement inevitably factors into the process. I had a chance to watch some marking in 2005, in addition to my visit to

an assessment venue. In an extremely large space, thousands of sketching papers were laid flat on the floor.



Figure 6: Assessment venue at CAA

The room was full of the smell of lead refills (Figure 6). Every examiner was holding a special stick and trying to pick up the ‘talented’ candidates’ papers from among the rest.¹²⁸ I was struck by the sheer numbers of papers and the quick speed of the selection. When I discussed the process with Western colleagues who had seen it as well, I found their perspective even more interesting. Mick Durman had his own experience in 2004 when he visited CAA. He was invited to watch the marking process, of which he had no previous knowledge. He walked around and kept picking up failed papers and questioning the criteria of assessment. Probably, for Chinese examiners, the preciseness of drawing can be judged instantly. However, it was not easy for colleagues from the West to understand the use of standard mechanisms to select talent and the

¹²⁸ I requested a failed paper from CAA in 2013 as an example for my research, but was refused due to the confidentiality of the Academy.

criteria for judging successful or unsuccessful art works among many similar pictures. In particular, it was noticeable that there was no significant difference between the drawings or paintings whether applicants were applying for fine art, design or media courses.¹²⁹ Obviously, likeness, for example, is not always a criterion on accessing sketching.

Just as the strategies and policies for admissions have been changed significantly in recent years at CAA, so a transformation of the content of the examinations has become another means to achieve targets in student intake. Interestingly, many changes were announced only two months before the art examination, via CAA's official website. In addition, some of the changes were widely reported through public media, which, for the Academy, represent another channel to communicate with prospective students and society in general.

Regarding the changes to the art examination, first, more requirements or tasks were added. In the sketching exam for plaster art courses in 2008, students were required to include the model's hands in the portrait, which was commended as a much more difficult and complicated drawing task for those who might not have had a lot of practice in their daily courses in secondary school or pre-exam training school. The degree of difficulty in drawing hands is almost the same as for drawing a head. Although many pre-exam training schools provide intensive training in drawing hands, some students still fail to draw them well in a short time period. They may be able to draw a head perfectly, but they cannot draw

¹²⁹ Interview with Mick Durman, former Dean of the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, Birmingham City University, 10 March 2010, Birmingham.

even the correct shape of a hand. From the Academy's perspective, this change in requirement can help with judging the candidates' basic skills effectively, for example, their ability to convey proportion and detail. Chen Hui, a candidate in 2009, admitted that she had been studying drawing for only one year. Because of her confidence in cultural subjects, however, she applied to CAA as her first choice. Nonetheless, after studying CAA's prospectus, she realized she could only choose design courses due to the content of the art examination. She was not confident enough to attend other sketching exams, which required a portrait with hands. This phenomenon is known as *ling pi xi jing*, which refers to the exploration of an unconventional approach as a compromise.¹³⁰ In order to pass the art examination, many students estimate the success rate on the basis of admissions policies rather than their own interests, as entering into CAA is their ultimate target. I will give more examples in the following chapter.



Figure 7: Comparison of ordinary sketching and linear sketching

¹³⁰ Source: <http://learning.sohu.com/20080128/n254919599.shtml> [accessed on 11 May 2014].

Secondly, the routines of examination content have been changed. For example, since 2010, students who apply for design courses have been assessed on their skills at sketching head portraits of life models instead of plaster busts. As Li Dujin has explained, 'CAA has been using plaster busts for many years already. These busts can be easily obtained from art shops for students' daily practice. Some pre-exam training schools even instruct students on how to remember a mechanical way to draw as a short cut. These works have been successfully "disguised". In order to pick up students who have a solid skill in sketching, we now offer substitutes for the drawing objects we have frequently used. We believe that those students who have prepared only for plaster busts are unlikely to be able to improve their skills in drawing portraits of different people in a short time. In the future, we might alternate the two mechanisms in the sketching examination in order to give the secondary and pre-exam training schools a reminder.'¹³¹ Another case can be found in the sketching examination for media courses. This has been reformed from ordinary sketching to linear sketching (*xianxing sumiao*). The language of drawing is different in these two forms (Figure 7). The former requires subtle gradations of light and shade, while the latter focuses on accuracy of structure with singular lines.¹³² This change was in line with the launch of the 'Broader Subjects Admissions' policy. As Wang Zan explained, 'The ability to use lines to sketch a life model is important for media students, for example in the field of animation or moving images. Each subject

¹³¹ Interview with Li Dujin, Director of the Admissions Office at CAA, conducted by Art China, 21 November 2009. Source: http://art.china.cn/education/2009-11/21/content_3255166.htm [accessed on 11 May 2014].

¹³² The traditional line drawing (*baimiao*) in Chinese painting and structural sketching (*jiegou sumiao*) are both in this field.

area in higher education has its own requirements in teaching and learning. This change may therefore help us to select “appropriate” students.’¹³³

Thirdly, the level of difficulty in the art examination has been raised. The art exam of 2014 has been commented on as the toughest for many years. A group of Year One students from the Foundation Studies department at CAA took on the task of being models for the life drawing session, not only in the sketching and quick sketching exams but also in the colouring exam. This was entirely new to most candidates and posed a major challenge. In the past, the majority of models were middle-aged, or sometimes even elderly. Drawing young models was therefore immediately a strange novelty. Since the candidates hadn’t had any previous practice, many were very disappointed when they came out of the examination venue. In addition, as they admitted, painting faces using properly mixed colours, especially maintaining control of cold and warm tones, is much more difficult than painting still-life objects. Some candidates didn’t even finish. Cheng, a candidate in 2014, exited from the colouring examination venue much earlier than scheduled. He expressed his deep depression about the change in examination content. ‘There were twenty candidates in our group. The model was a young man wearing a grey coat. However, the background wall was greyish-white. It was really difficult to paint the contrast. I had to take the liberty of painting his coat in a red colour.’ In his nervous state, Cheng was scarcely able to recall any features of the model, except for his long hair, once he was out of the venue. Cheng had prepared for six months in a pre-exam training school in

¹³³ Interview with Wang Zan, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Hangzhou. The first four months of training were aimed at passing the provincial art examination. In the last two months, there was no training at all in painting a portrait using colours.¹³⁴ For Cheng, the task was entirely out of his realm of expectation and became a disappointing experience. The media went on to comment that this was the most difficult exam in CAA's history.¹³⁵ However, it was not the only message that the Academy wanted to spread. As Wang Zan commented, 'The coloured portrait is indeed the highest level in art examination, but it is an essential element of art practice. We are not promoting the fact that our barrier to entry is very high. What we might be saying is that there should be no short cuts in a student's daily practice.'¹³⁶

Obviously, in all the art examinations at CAA, a student's drawing and painting abilities are highly valued. In particular, accuracy in recording objects from memory or from a still-life subject has become the common entry criterion for a wide range of subject areas. This practice, like a code, informs not only the secondary or pre-exam education but also the teaching and learning in undergraduate studies. The propensity toward realistic drawing may have its roots in the history of Chinese art education, as I discussed in the previous chapter, or may reflect an expediency in student admission in the era of mass education. However, as a precondition for art and design higher education, it has had importance attached to it for a long period and has already caused a significant impact on basic education.

¹³⁴ Interview with Cheng, a colouring exam candidate at CAA, conducted by a reporter from Zhejiang Online, 16 February 2014. Source: <http://ks.zjol.com.cn/05ks/system/2014/02/16/019861527.shtml> [accessed on 18 May 2014].

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Interview with Wang Zan, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Although the exam content and requirements have been changed almost every year, the main purpose has been to avoid taking on the 'wrong' students who cannot draw realistically, or who seem to draw perfectly but 'varnished' by intensive training prior to the examination. For the Academy, to win the 'battle' against the pre-exam training schools has become one of the key rationales of the reforms in art examination. The pre-exam training schools usually have their own interpretations of application information and training methods. In fact, very few students are confident about sitting art examinations without any pre-exam training. The competition, with the possible unfairness, is already in place at the pre-exam training stage. It is hard to say at this point whether exam changes have helped CAA select students effectively, as the 'battle' is still ongoing. However, with the sudden changes, many students have altered their initial plans and subject areas as a compromise. They would rather sit an examination that is easy to handle in order to realise their dream of entering the Academy. In the next section, I will introduce the training courses for CAA at pre-exam training schools to explore their perspective on art examination and the preparatory approach.

3.3 Pre-Exam Training Courses

In the previous sections, I have discussed the reform of admissions strategies and the changes of art examination content at CAA. It is quite obvious that conflicts with exam-led training have become a major driver in the reform. The pre-exam training course is neither in the general secondary educational system

nor an extra-curricular programme. But it has become a key pathway for those who want to choose art and design for their undergraduate studies. Prior to art examinations, students usually spend three to six months on this full-time training outside of high school, with the particular aim of learning techniques for drawing and examination skills for the provincial and institutional examinations. Many students 'intelligently' choose a pre-exam training school that is specialised in training geared to a particular art institution. For example, students who are applying to CAFA or Tsinghua will generally not consider attending pre-exam training schools in Hangzhou, whereas applicants for CAA come from many other provinces especially to Hangzhou for their pre-exam training. Thus, many pre-exam training courses have very localised features, acting somehow like 'parasites' on their respective art institutions.

Students at pre-exam training schools are usually divided into groups of beginners, intermediate learners and skilled students. 'Beginners' refers to students who have changed direction and come to art and design at a relatively late stage, namely the final two years of secondary school. Some of these students are not good at academic subjects and have been advised to choose art and design courses by schoolteachers or their parents. As mentioned before, the entry system of art and design undergraduate studies has been seen as a short cut for many candidates. At the pre-exam training stage, the learning purpose is to grasp every method or technique to help the student pass the provincial art examination. Many pre-exam training schools therefore provide specific training programmes for provincial art examinations in the first three months of study. By comparison with institutional art examinations, the provincial examinations

are much easier. Also there have been relatively few changes to provincial examinations. For beginners, it is necessary to learn and practice fewer techniques when preparing for the institutional exams.¹³⁷ For intermediate learners, the target is usually to pass the institutional art examination, for example CAA's entrance exam. Interestingly, because of the different requirements of art examinations, many candidates have to choose subject areas according to the content of the art exams, which they might have more confidence in passing. Tutors at pre-exam training schools play the role of advisors to students on their choices as well. Yang Jianlin, Deputy Principal of Wu Yue Art School in Hangzhou, has discussed the fact that although he has (astonishing) no background in art practice he can still advise on students' choices of higher education based on his analysis of previous art examinations and information about admissions to each art academy. For example, students who are good at linear sketching might be recommended to apply for media courses at CAA. Yang has also admitted that due to the recent changes in CAA's art examination, many students in this group may find difficulties if they are not fully prepared. Annually, approximately 15-20% of candidates drop out of the institutional examination at CAA. Yang therefore recommends that his students apply to more than eight institutions at the same time in order to increase their chances.¹³⁸ He called this strategy *dongbian buliang, xibian liang*.¹³⁹ It indicated that you have to maximise the opportunities to ensure the result you expected. In addition to beginners and intermediate learners, students who already have

¹³⁷ For example, in the sketching exam for the provincial art examination of Zhejiang, drawing a head portrait from memory has been a set task for many years. Interview with Yang Jianlin, Deputy Principal of Wu Yue Art School, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹³⁸ Interview with Yang Jianlin, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹³⁹ A popular saying, literally meaning 'darkness in the East, but lightness in the West', referring to the notion that when one door shuts, another opens.

good techniques in drawing attend pre-exam training courses to secure results in the art examination. For these candidates, drawing and painting skills are not the purpose of learning at this stage. For them it is the examination skills they can learn at pre-exam training school that can largely help them in this intensive competition. For example, without proper exam-led training, students in this group may get a lower score in the art examination than some intermediate learners. In sum, the pre-exam training course has become a basic common pathway to success. I will introduce more student cases in Chapter Four to explain further from the students' perspective.

The teaching and learning at pre-exam training school is strictly conducted in an 'enclosed' environment, from 8 in the morning until surprisingly 11 in the evening. Many students spend more than 12 hours in daily practice. Some studios are available for 24-hour use. Dormitories and a canteen are usually on campus. Students are not allowed absences without schoolteachers' and parents' permission. Conventionally, students join the full-time programme from July or August and finish in February, just prior to the institutional examination.

Imitation, as a traditional practice approach, has been widely recommended.

This teaching method is particularly effective for those who are elementary and intermediate learners and have only a very short period to prepare for the art examination. However, the idea is not to imitate any particular masters' art works, but rather various examples for art examination purposes. These examples are prepared by teaching staff at pre-exam training schools, or are selected directly from a published volume of high-score art examination papers.

The steps of drawing break down to composition, outline, drawing, colouring and

improvement. These mechanical steps also cover the use of drawing pencils and painting colours, direction of lines, and modelling techniques. Students simply need to follow and memorise the steps. Life drawing is not popular in this 'fast-food style' of teaching. Apart from the intensive training, many pre-exam schools will try to predict the content of examination by using chance. As Li Hongfeng, Principal of San Taishan Art School, has noted, 'Study of previous art examinations is very important to pre-exam training schools. For example, we predicted the "life painting of a portrait" in the colouring exam at CAA last year, as we noticed that it was set on a small scale in the previous year's CAA examination. So our students spent about 30% of their time on this skill after the provincial examination.'¹⁴⁰ Bai Taling and Wu Yue, among other pre-exam training schools, have noted that they successfully predicted the task as well. This kind of experience brings much confidence to schools. They take the difficulties arising from the reform of CAA's art examination and put them to their advantage in the competition with other art schools. Li also added, 'Life painting of a portrait is not easy to grasp. However, I believe in the near future there will definitely be some standardised teaching methods for this preparation.'¹⁴¹

In Hangzhou, there are more than two hundred pre-exam schools for art examination training. Most of them geographically surround the Xiangshan campus of CAA. Before 2007, they mainly used to predominate in Binjiang, where the main venue for holding CAA art examinations was located. When CAA's

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Li Hongfeng, Deputy Principal of San Tai Shan Art School, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Xiangshan campus opened in Zhuantang town, many pre-exam training schools relocated along with CAA to this urban fringe of Hangzhou. When I visited Zhuantang in 2014, I was struck by the number of billboards advertising pre-exam training schools lined on each side of the roads and highways. These posters were even more dominant than the image of CAA. To be physically located next to the Academy has been the best choice in this fiercely competitive world of pre-exam training schools. As Xiao Jia has analysed, from a pre-exam training school perspective, first, visibility in the market is a priority to be considered. When candidates come to Zhuantang for admissions information on CAA, they can see the images or advertisements. Secondly, an excellent geographic location provides convenience for students attending examinations after their training. Meanwhile, during the training, students may have close contact with the Academy through attending public events, such as art exhibitions or shows organised by CAA.¹⁴² For example, in the case of Wu Yue Art School, an introduction on their website emphasises that it is located very close to the campus of CAA. This 'closeness' becomes a key selling point for the school in recruiting students.¹⁴³ On the one hand, the 'closeness' is geographic and physical. In actual fact, it does not necessarily provide much extra 'convenience' for students, as they will only attend examinations at CAA once, over the course of 180 days. On the other hand, I argue, the 'closeness' is spiritual. It suggests a possibility or a fantasy of inclusion in the same academic environment, and offers the students an intimacy with their potential future academy – an admired destination, and a springboard for their artistic ambitions.

¹⁴² Interview with Xiao Jia, the founding principal of Bai Taling Art School, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹⁴³ Source: <http://www.wuyueart.com/wuyuegaikuang/zhongxinjianjie/22.html> [accessed on 15 November 2013].

This 'closeness' can also be found in people networking with CAA. Many of the pre-exam training schools advertise that their courses for the CAA institutional examination are conducted or supervised by teaching staff or graduates from CAA. Xiao Jia graduated from CAA Shanghai in 2006. In his biography, he indicated that he was one of the top three in the institutional examination at CAA Shanghai in 2002. His sketching and colouring works were included in CAA publicity showing outstanding examples. As one of the leading members of the student body, his own experience showed his full understanding and knowledge of art examinations, which is to some extent convincing for prospective students. Yang Chaofan, headmaster of Wu Yue Art School, also has a role teaching at CAA. Among the teaching staff at Wu Yue, many tutors are – like Yang – graduates of CAA. Moreover, teaching staff at CAA are sometimes invited to give lectures to training school students.¹⁴⁴ The whole image shows a very close connection with the Academy and therefore intimates that the teaching towards the art examination will be accordingly pertinent. Many frontline teaching assistants are also current students at CAA, and they spend much more time with students daily. In this field, a teaching qualification is not necessary. The key criteria for choosing teaching staff are either bringing in reputations in recruitment or having full understanding of examinations. The latter need can be met by university students, as they have their own experience in preparing for and attending the entrance examination. Even new entrants were recruited to teach at pre-exam training school, especially from prestigious art institutions. Xiaole

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Yang Jianlin, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

was in the first year foundation course when he attended a focus group interview for this research. As he mentioned, 'When I was studying at a pre-exam training school in Hangzhou, my tutor was only a first year student at CAA. My college and subject choice was greatly influenced by him at that time. When I became a university student, he recommended me to teach at this school. Both he and I were driven by money, I have to say.'¹⁴⁵ This phenomenon is because teaching resources are not always sufficient in those schools. One teacher normally needs to supervise approximately 100 students. In addition, exceptional students at pre-exam training schools are sometimes appointed as teaching assistants to help their classmates. Song Zhen shared his own experience when he was still a pre-exam training school student. He had been assigned into Group A, meaning a group of top students. Pupils in this group were required to instruct other groups of students in drawing techniques, following their teachers' requirements. Their experience and tips significantly affected other students' learning direction.¹⁴⁶

In order to attract more prospective students, some pre-exam training schools use their websites to publish a list of names of successful students who achieved the pass certificate or were admitted to CAA through their training in the previous year. This seems to be much more convincing than any other form of advertisement. For example, Bai Taling shared their achievement of 2011 on the website: out of 125 students who sat the institutional exam at CAA, 87 students obtained the pass certificate, thus proving the high success rate. Wu Yue Art

¹⁴⁵ Focus group interview with Xiaole, student at CAA, conducted on 4th April 2010 in Hangzhou.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Song Zhen, lecturer at China Academy of Art, 11 November 2008, Hangzhou

School is another well-known institution in Hangzhou, with thirteen years' history. On their website, it is highlighted that seven Wu Yue students have won the national first prize in CAA's art exams in the past. From 2009 to 2014, there were on average 150 students who received the CAA pass certificate every year.¹⁴⁷ I also visited San Tai Shan Art School and conducted an interview with its principal. A list of students' names was featured on the wall of the reception area to show the achievement of the previous year in order to attract the attention of visitors. According to the school's statistics, from 2004 to 2013, 17 students won the national first prize and 125 entered the annual top ten.¹⁴⁸ These statistics are all compiled by individual pre-exam training schools. I believe few people will check the accuracy of the names and statistics. However, the information is taken as one of the key factors when most students and parents choose pre-exam training schools.

Because of the increasing numbers of applicants to CAA, the new economy of pre-exam training has boomed. Among the pre-exam training schools in Hangzhou, there are about twenty large ones, which can recruit more than 300 students per year. These big institutions can make upwards of 10 million RMB in revenue. Bai Taling Art School, established in 2002, is one of the biggest schools in the pre-exam training market in Hangzhou. With 13 years' development, its newly opened centre in Zhuantang contains seven main buildings, with a dormitory that can accommodate more than 500 students per year. Among them,

¹⁴⁷ Source: <http://www.wuyueart.com/wuyuegaikuang/zhongxinjianjie/22.html> [accessed on 15 November 2013].

¹⁴⁸ Source: <http://www.santaishan.com/santaishan/about/introduction/61.html> [accessed on 15 November 2013].

there are about 300 students applying for CAA. For each student, the tuition fee is about 4,000 RMB per month. A six-month programme will cost about 25,000 RMB. Students need to pay an extra 1,500 RMB per month for living costs. Some pre-exam training schools even offer special programmes that promise a tuition fee refund if the student cannot pass the exam after training. Of course, those students need to pay a higher tuition fee for this 'guarantee'. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, pre-exam training schools also organise 'examination round trips', accompanied by schoolteachers, for students during the examination season. Students will be charged a fee for this service, too. In Hangzhou, some companies have already started up that are specialised in providing services to students and pre-exam training schools. Apart from the pre-exam training market, other sectors of industry surrounding examination have sprung up around the Academy.¹⁴⁹ Art shops, bookstores, canteens and hostels have suddenly appeared in this remote area over the past few years. Every year, as soon as the CAA prospectus is published, related materials such as hand models, painting colours and books can be easily found in the town's art shops. Obviously, 'CAA grey' must be the most demanding painting material in those shops.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Xiao Jia, 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.



Figure 8: Reference books for preparing art examinations

Apart from the materials for drawing practice, reference books to show students good samples in bookstores are very demanding. Those books include outstanding works of sketching, painting and fast sketching picked from previous examination papers. Leading institutions' names are always used to attract consumers. According to the interview with shop assistants at Shanghai Bookstore on Fuzhou Road, the sales in this category is around 600 per week, which has always ranked top among all the categories. There are more than 500 different books selling at the same time that published by about 200 publishers (Figure 8).¹⁵⁰ With the criteria of art works reflected from those reference books, students may easily get a clue to understanding the criteria of a particular art institution. However, I would argue, learning the techniques from those

¹⁵⁰ Shanghai Bookstore on Fuzhou Road is the biggest bookshop in Shanghai. Interview with Xu, shop assistant, on 15 March 2015.

demonstrations or imitate those outstanding sketching and painting may largely restrict students' imagination and creativity in their art practice. The way of practice seems to be a shortcut, but definitely not healthy for their future development.

The rapid development of pre-exam training schools and the new associated economy indicates a growing demand for exam-led training and preparation in the Chinese educational market. From the students' perspective, although the content of art examination has been kept simple, almost every candidate relies on this specific pathway to reinforce drawing techniques and examination skills in order to take part in the intensive competition. With the admission information of art institutions sorted and provided by pre-exam training schools, it has been believed that students can make more rational choices in university applications accordingly. In particular, they can focus on their visual practice and leave the rest of the administrative work to the school, for example making applications on behalf of students. Since most families have limited knowledge in the area of art and design, they are inclined to place their trust in the art schools because of their 'professionalism' and see them as a stepping-stone to the Academy. From the Academy's perspective, the pre-exam training programme is a 'double-edged sword' (*shuangren jian*). On the one hand, discussions about and criticism of this exam-led preparatory approach have never ceased; changes in art examinations at CAA have been implemented almost every year to avoid exam-led training and the recruitment of 'wrong' students. On the other hand, the schools help the Academy, to some extent, to fulfil tasks in promotions, such

as delivering admission information, gathering and preparing candidates, and organising groups of students to attend the entrance examinations.

For students, experiences at pre-exam training schools can be very similar. However, they are inclined to believe that their tutors' expertise in art examination will largely affect the result, which means a unique chance in the entry system. This result-oriented conception significantly influences the teaching and learning at preparation stage. How to conduct the training effectively to ensure more students obtain the pass certificate has become a priority for pre-exam training schools to consider. Therefore, for these private training schools, the success rate of getting entrants into higher education in the previous year, especially to CAA, is directly associated with the numbers of student intake in the following year. The nature of their focus is no longer to foster all-round prospective students for art and design higher education, but rather to make a success of their skills training business.

3.4 Foundation Training in the First Year at Undergraduate Level

With full awareness of the consequences of pre-exam training programme, CAA not only changes the entrance examination strategies frequently to avoid recruit those who are only prepared for the examinations, but also commences a remedy- the foundation year strategy- to polish up new entrants. As I introduced in the previous chapters, CAA was one of the first institutions to apply the model of 'two-stage tuition' in its four-year undergraduate programme, launching this in 2000. Stage One is the BA first year, the so-called foundation year, isolated

from the faculties of undergraduate studies. The following total period of three years refer to Stage Two. There are three branches in the foundation department (*jichu bu*): namely, plastic art, design, and image and media. Before the new 'distributary' (*fenliu*) policy launched in 2012, students were first admitted onto courses, then distributed among the three directions of foundation study. Upon completion, they had to revert back to the course they had initially chosen and were not allowed to change their course freely. Since 2012, this has been changed, as the policy of 'Broader Subjects Admissions' has commenced. Students may now determine their subject areas within those broader directions at a later stage of the foundation year. Although some strategies in admissions and foundation studies launched to optimise the resources of students, national policies in entrance examination and the structure of undergraduate studies give very little space for the Academy to manoeuvre. As Cao Xiaoyang, the head of the foundation department at CAA, has commented, 'The foundation department is stuck in the middle of the entrance examination and professional studies. So we take responsibility for preparing the new entrants and at the same time monitoring admissions activities, including the effectiveness of the mechanism of selecting students. However, we have limited participation in the art examination though we have to accommodate the consequences of exam-led training and the entry system.'¹⁵¹

Leading on from the impact of the current entry system and exam-led training programme, there are indeed many challenges in teaching and learning during

¹⁵¹ Interview with Cao Xiaoyang, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

the foundation year. The first challenge is to change the habits that many new entrants bring from their pre-exam training programmes. Every year the acceptance rate of entrance is very low at CAA and those 1,600 new entrants must already have strong skills in drawing and painting, but – as they usually only prepare in the sketching of plaster busts for art examinations for design courses – many are not able to sketch from life if there was no such requirement in the exams they took. Even in recent art exams, while life drawing has frequently been required, students are not used to observing details of models, but rather drawing from memory as they already practiced – for example, thousands of eyes or noses at their pre-exam training school. In addition, as a result of exam-led training, some students can only work on a three-hour sketch or painting, as oriented by the length of an art exam, but they are not equipped to work on projects that may require a much longer time frame. In the face of this, teachers at foundation level have to apply different approaches purposely. As An Bin has pointed out, in order to challenge the inappropriate perceptions of ‘brainwashed’ students, a wide range of sketched works have been printed out on boards to show to new entrants, for example, Reubens’s art works.¹⁵² These works are very different from the works used in practice for examinations and are supposed to help students to construct a new knowledge system, including methods of observing and thinking. Students are then required to practise drawing objects differently, as the mechanical methods that have been learned on pre-exam training course are useless for this practice. Cao Shu has given some further examples in his teaching practice. In the first semester, he usually

¹⁵² Interview with An Bin, 19 November 2008, Hangzhou.

organises field trips for students so they can practise life drawing, for example depicting flowing water and live fish in streams, rather than copying from masters.¹⁵³ Xiaoxi had been studying at foundation department from 2009 to 2010. As she confirmed, 'After six months study here, I haven't seen any courses in relation to my future direction. Interestingly, we were required to learn the drawing and sketching skills again and break through the way we used in pre-exam training school. I felt I had made a big progress in my drawing skills, which is very different from what we had learnt before.'¹⁵⁴ Xiang recalled his suffers in abandoning the set of drawing formed before and the difficulties he met in his foundation year. As he noted, 'I found it is almost impossible for me to change. I was trying to break my mindset but felt confused in experimenting a new way to draw. My thinking has been stuck for a long time. It was like, you move forward a bit but you step back a lot. I have spent almost six months to adjust.'¹⁵⁵

In general, the sketching module in the foundation year aims to teach different ways of observing, transforming and expressing, emphasising an integrated process of practice. Although I understand that the teaching methods and learning outcomes of drawing in the foundation department are a completely different proposition from exam-led training, I would argue that learning different drawing techniques, as well as thinking through drawing, still plays a central role in foundation studies and, in particular, is significantly responsible for 'reshaping' new entrants.

¹⁵³ Interview with Cao Shu, lecturer in the foundation department at CAA, 14 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹⁵⁴ Focus group interview with Xiaoxi, student at CAA, conducted on 3rd April 2010 in Hangzhou.

¹⁵⁵ Focus group interview with Xiang, student at CAA, conducted on 4th April 2010 in Hangzhou.

The second challenge is how to prepare the new entrants for the following three-year professional studies. This leads to another discussion regarding the notion of 'foundation' in art and design higher education. If the 'widening the entrance' policy can be reflected from the reforms in admissions at CAA, the main strategy at foundation level is to respond to the policy of 'strengthening the foundation' (*hou jichu*). Yet, as I discussed in Chapter Two, the debate about foundation studies has never ceased in China, whether in the elite education era or the mass education era. Cao Xiaoyang was appointed head of the foundation department at CAA two years ago. From an interview with him, I discovered his ambitions for the reforms commenced over the previous two years, but at the same time his struggle for the expected learning outcomes to fit into the current system. As Cao admitted, 'Although the foundation department has been established for more than ten years, it doesn't mean we have a full understanding about the content and the mission of teaching at this particular stage. We are still adjusting the structure and testing the learning outcomes. But one thing is already clear. Our educational system must be dynamic to meet the demands of society. CAA, as one of the leading art institutions, has a long history and good reputation in fine arts, which has become groundwork of the Academy already. Therefore, realistic skill is a key requirement and respected as a common foundation for all forms of arts. Of course, this skill is very different from the mechanical skills that students learn at pre-exam training schools. What we can encourage is the use of this skill as a basis for creative works.'¹⁵⁶ As I discussed before, sketching has been considered central to establish students' artistic capability and played a key role

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Cao Xiaoyang, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

in the art examination. Xu Jiang, the president of CAA, recently held a panel meeting, along with other senior management staff, in the foundation department. While discussing issues with teaching staff, he emphasised the following strategy: 'Based on the current structure and content of the courses, other teaching and learning approaches – for example, fieldwork, traditional painting, calligraphy, book reading and workshops – can be widely applied in order to foster students' perceptions.' He added, 'Sketching is still at the core of our teaching. It is key for studying the rules of plastic art, and provides a "deep" foundation for all forms of art.'¹⁵⁷ In the foundation year, drawing is still one of the core course modules for all three directions. It is considered a comprehensive form of training for combining observing, thinking and skills on the one hand; on the other hand, the training method can test students' patience, which is viewed as an important challenge for a future designer or artist.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, in Cao Xiaoyang's view, the foundation year is also about students' understanding, ways of thinking and working habits, in particular; a starting point for their aspirations and interests.¹⁵⁹ He adds, 'We have to admit that students have different characteristics. This needs to be very much considered during the process of teaching, especially at foundation level, as it might significantly affect students' future directions. In comparison with lectures, group projects and fieldwork are more effective for observing a student's speciality. In group work, students can take different parts based on their own abilities and interests. I don't believe every student should be an artist or a

¹⁵⁷ 'Panel Discussion with Foundation Department, Chaired by Xu Jiang', the website of the foundation department at CAA, 23 June 2014. Source: <http://jcb.caa.edu.cn/NewsView.asp?id=1267> [accessed on 26 June 2014].

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Cao Shu, 14 November 2013, Hangzhou.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Cao Xiaoyang, 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

designer in the future. In fact, many students find jobs in other fields after graduation. So what we can do is inspire them at this stage.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, considering the impact of current entrance examination, art institutions have to make their own strategies to help their students who might not be inspired to pursue a career in art and design area after graduation.

Although students are taught in the broader subject divisions and can choose their subjects by the end of the foundation year, the implementation of this policy has become another challenge for the Academy. In the process of entry, candidates receive very limited introductions to the courses on offer at universities, as well as insufficient instruction in relation to their individual needs for academic development. First, it is not possible for the Academy to implement introductory approaches such as open days – a normal practice in schools and universities in the West – to invite potential applicants to get to know the physical and academic environments for their future studies. In the case of China and CAA, with such a vast number of applicants, further promotion is obviously not a priority. As An Bin has stated, ‘If this were something we were to execute next year, to have even say five open days there would be at least 3,000 students per day coming through the door, if not more, let alone all the parents.’¹⁶¹ Secondly, the major sources of information in terms of applying to universities are the pre-exam training schools. Their analysis of information and advice are largely based on the university’s accessibility. In the absence of an introductory approach or learning experience, many students and/or parents

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Interview with An Bin, 19 November 2008, Hangzhou.

make their decision based only on the reputation of the universities and access possibilities, i.e. success rates of entrance candidates, while the student's personal interests and future goals are largely overlooked or are of lesser concern. Compared with the previous 'distributary' policy, the current one shows consideration of students' personal interests and allows them to have a choice during the foundation year, if this is in line with regulations. However, the connection with other faculties is still not sufficient. Students can only attend introductory public lectures for subjects in the final two weeks, and then make their decision accordingly. More importantly, some students are even found to be lacking interest in art and design courses in general, or are still puzzling about their future direction although they have been encouraged to appreciate the chances they have obtained, also to change themselves through learning at the foundation stage. With regard to Chinese cultural values, there is a popular saying, *Gan yihang, ai yihang*, which encourages people to be self-motivated in their career development, whether the job was their own choice or not. However, Xinmo, from a student's view, didn't agree the arrangement entirely.

During the time at foundation year, we had been asked to practice drawing skills from day to day. I didn't have a full picture of my subject until I entered into the second year. Then I found there were big gaps between my previous understanding and the realities. I thought my subject 'Image and Media' is more related to media studies, such as Film and TV communication. Now I realise the content of the course is advertising. To be honest, I felt I have been cheated by the course title when I applied.

As a leading art institution in China, CAA has always been one of the most demanding places for candidates. Students who are accepted by CAA are viewed

as 'victors' in this intensively competitive arena. Furthermore they are all believed to have very strong potential to grow into 'top talents' over the following years. How to select those 'elites' from a large pool is a key target. CAA has been committed to its admissions and recruitment strategies, in particular, with a series of experiments in its entrance examination to seek an effective and efficient entry system. Certainly, this entry system always needs to be in line with national policies, ensuring fairness, transparency and equality in the admissions process. This applies not only to CAA; other art institutions in China have very similar experiences. Many of these used to follow CAA's path in setting up their art examinations. Therefore, as a case study of this research, CAA is able, to a large extent, to represent the majority of art institutions as regards admissions.

However, as CAA has admitted, there are still many compromises and challenges in this area. For example, drawing and painting techniques have been unique criteria when assessing and grading. Even as a leading institution in pushing ahead with its reforms of the art examination, CAA has continued to apply sketching and colouring as the main mechanisms in art examination for a long period, especially in the post-expansion era. In contrast, assessing a student's other capabilities or potentials – especially, their creativity – has reluctantly been edged out of the art examination process. Policy-makers at CAA would say this strategy is effective in seeking fair access in admissions. They believe that drawing skills are easier to measure and compare than other capabilities, such as creativity. I would argue, apart from the consideration of national policies, the perception of emphasising the realistic drawing skills for all forms of art and

design could be another key driver. This identification was formed with the modernisation of Chinese art education at the beginning of the twentieth century, when CAA was founded, and has been promoted continually in every historical stage in China. Somehow, it has been viewed as a fundamental and strength of the Academy, and something that needs to be carried forward and enhanced. Additionally, although the struggles with pre-exam training schools have stimulated the transformation of the art examination, exam-led training still critically shapes students' perspectives. This preparatory approach has become the only path for applicants to follow. The result-oriented training might be useful for entering into the Academy. However, a student's personal expression in art has been largely ignored, and even lost in the sameness of exam papers. Again, little experiences related to subject areas could be acquired through either secondary education or the pre-exam training programme. The programme during the foundation year might be regarded as being of much help in changing students' ways of drawing, or giving them some freedom to choose future subjects. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the lack of sufficient knowledge or experience of art and design courses during the process of entry, some students may find their personal interests in some courses during the foundation year; others may decide to change direction if they realize their only target was entering into 'top institutions' in the first place. In the following chapter, I will focus on students' opinions about the new 'fervour' in choosing art and will analyse the variables that influence their experiences and decision-making.

Chapter Four

Choosing to Study Art and Design: Student Perceptions

The period prior to the end of the twentieth century was characterised by a significant excess of demand over supply of higher education places. Nowadays, participating in higher education is no longer limited to an elite group but has become the prerogative of all classes in society. The demand for participation has increased largely along with the expansion of higher education. In consideration of the explosion in participation rates and the consequences of this, it has become increasingly important to understand the educational marketplace, the key factors in and barriers to higher education participation, and factors that relate to subject choice at undergraduate level. These elements contribute to planning and strategizing not only at institutional level, but also nationwide.

The phenomenon of 'Art Study Fervour' in China is not merely a reflection of growth in the field of art and design higher education. The new enthusiasm represents an increasing demand from society, which also mirrors the choices of both higher education and career destinations. Since the end of the last century, art and design undergraduate courses have become one of the fastest growing subject areas in China. I introduced the background and analysed this phenomenon through political, economic and social angles in Chapter One, in which institutional perspectives were emphasised. However, as the entry system is an interactive process, selection is not a one-way mechanism on the part of institutions. Studies on students' choice can help us understand better the complexity of the marketplace in higher education.

Why do students choose art and design higher education? It is quite common for students to report choosing art studies because they enjoy and have a strong passion for art practice. However, a student's personal interests and particular abilities have traditionally been a relatively minor consideration when choosing further studies. Perhaps students receive influential information from others, for example their parents, peers or teachers, which helps to facilitate their choice. Alternatively, they may be attracted by the perceived glories of creative industry and dream of being an artist or designer. The circumstances of student choice are multiple, and there are many possibilities. Notwithstanding, the emergence of the art examination often attracts students towards art and design subjects. The art examination, as a selective mechanism in the entry system, plays the role of 'gateway' to higher education, as well as to the arts. Due to the lower requirement of the cultural examination, art and design have been seen as a relatively easy means of access, compared to other subjects. Even those who have no background in art practice can be trained to participate in the art examination by attending a Pre-Exam Training Course during their final year of senior secondary school.

Drawing on evidence from questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, this chapter examines some theoretical and empirical issues relating to student choice: in particular, the key factors that influence student choice of college and subject in art and design, in the light of the phenomenon of 'Art Study Fervour' in China. In the first section, a model of Chinese students' choice in art and design higher education will be identified, which comprises the existing theoretical framework of student choice and is a preliminary model for this research. In

section two, the social, economic and political environment relating to art and design higher education and professional development in China – in particular, the growth of cultural and creative industries in recent years – will be discussed to reveal the external impact on students’ choices of university and subject. In addition, the involvement of advisors, such as parents, peers and teachers, will be examined to reveal their influence. I also identify the influential variables in individual determinants, which may be constrained by social environment and family involvement, relating particularly to aspirations towards higher education. In sections three, the impact of educational system in China will be revealed, including the current entry system of higher education. The traditional cultural value of education is going to be highlighted. In section four, I will discuss the impact of the art examination, in view of data collected from the survey to reflect the participants’ perspectives on the balance between the likelihood of entry and personal interests, as well as the content of art examination and their preparation approaches.

4.1 Modelling Choice of Art and Design Higher Education in China

In the higher education sector, university participation is not compulsory and can be seen to reflect changing patterns in the educational market. In China, if higher education institutions represent a macro-market for Chinese students, then the China Academy of Art (CAA) could, as a case study, be recognised to be a micro-market in this research, covering most factors that have an effect on students while at the same time being affected by more locally defined factors. However, as understanding Chinese students’ behaviour in choosing art and

design higher education is the central focus of this study, macro models are used here to conceptualise the supply and demand features in this field. Generally, on the one hand, uncovering the factors that influence student choice, especially with the background of the expansion of higher education participation, will enhance student decision-making. On the other hand, it will stimulate the improvement of university educational services and marketing strategies in the higher education arena.

There are many studies drawing out key principles in relation to students' choice of education. Theories on educational choice had been produced since the 1960s, in line with the study of employment opportunities and career pathways (White 2007). Theoretical perspectives have continually changed over the decades, and debates have never ceased. For example, the perspective of social reproduction has been popular at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in which Bourdieu and Passeron's work (1990) on understanding how 'social networks' and 'cultural capital' shape the 'habitus' of individual students and impact on their decision-making has been applied as an explanation. On the basis of this theory, Simpson (2001) confirmed that 'social capital and cultural capital, largely represented by parental influence, have a significant impact on the choice of subject.' However, some researchers have argued that this concept is theoretically incoherent and commented that the measurement of 'capital' is misleading (Sullivan 2002, Blackburn 2003). Another theory of 'rational action' appeared in the late 1990s. As Goldthorpe (1996) argues, 'It proposed an argument that people behave according to their personal interests and attempt

to maximise the utility of their decisions.’ Again, opponents viewed this theory as an over-simplification of human action and behaviour (Sullivan 2002).

In the same era, other theories – such as factor-based studies – have been explored and examined. Institutional selection has been seen to be a rational and pragmatic, multi-factorial and highly complex process, which can be influenced by cost, information, access, academic achievement, and life and school experience (Moogan and Baron 2003). Institutional image and reputation have a significant effect on decision-making. These powerful influences are extremely persuasive in the process of searching and selecting institutions (Keling 2006). Students value the reputation of a college, rating it highly as an influential factor in the choice process (Murphy 1981; Keling 2006). Meanwhile, Conner (1999) argues, ‘Choosing a subject is a key limiting factor in an initial information search, and that for the majority of students choosing an institution is constrained by the availability of the subject and the nature, reputation and organisation of the courses in that subject.’ Some researchers also argue that influence from family and school is crucial in student choice (Archer and Hutchings 2000). As one of the influential factors, Taylor (1992) identifies sources of information as either ‘formal’ or ‘informal’, distinguishing respectively between information from careers advisors and information provided by parents or friends. Research on students’ choices in higher education has paid more attention to parental or familial influence on young people’s understanding and their motivation for choosing higher education (Ball et al. 2002; Archer & Hutchings 2000). According to Payne’s research (2002), ‘parents or family members can have a pervasive influence in shaping young people’s attitudes to

education over a long period of time, though some young people may reject such influence.' Although friends' or peers' influence has been investigated, 'establishing the degree to which friends and peers are involved in any stage of decision-making is fraught with difficulties', in particular in the area of higher education choice (White 2007, p. 22).

Aside from the influential factors, as Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) indicate, 'the act of making choices is not an instantaneous or even short-term period of decision-making, but a momentary external expression of the balance between a wide range of internal and external, social, cultural and economic perceptions.' They also argue for a more integrative approach that acknowledges the dynamic nature of decision-making in a changing environment. Connor (1999) suggests that 'choice is the product of the interaction of two key influences – students and their advisors on the one hand, and the educational system on the other.' Bredo (1993) suggests that 'not only are these two elements interacting but they are also themselves both subject to external social, economic and political influences.'

Much of the prior research is based on the metaphor of 'barriers' applied to participation in higher education. For example, higher education is not intended to be available to all and is, to a large extent, based on the selection system, which might be one of the most important barriers. Gorard et al. (2004, p. 124) suggest that participation could be radically widened through the adoption of a policy of open access:

... a more consistent policy of abolishing the need for prior qualification and the system of selection in terms of qualification-overcoming (inverse) ageism of the current system – would transform the higher education sector. It would truly widen in addition to increasing access.

Based on the existing theories, a number of models have been experimented with to understand student behaviour around educational choice. Many educational models are derived from the models of purchasing behaviour and the consumer decision-making process. Various models have been used to explain decision-making in such analyses, and while each provides some useful perspectives all have limitations in their applicability (Paton 2007). The following three categories of models are representative in studying post-compulsory education. First are the structuralist models (for example, Gambetta 1996). These models view choice as a result of institutional, economic or cultural constraints over which students do not make conscious choices. Second are the economic or social capital models, which explain that student' decisions are sometimes driven by economic considerations. For example, the decision-maker will seek to optimise the utility or benefit of their choice (Becker 1975). With this model, students have been constructed as 'autonomous choosers', who make active and conscious decisions about their transitions after the age of 16 (Peter and Marshall 1996). The third category of models is based on the importance of personality and subjective judgement in the choice process. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) illustrate a combined model with a decision-making process, which is a three-phase model: Predisposition, Search and Choice. The student, in the predisposition phase, decides whether or not to continue their education at a

higher level; then, in the search phase, they gather information on institutions and courses; then, in the final phase, they choose institutions and priorities.

With these models, it is argued that choice is a rational process that is constrained by a realistic perception of opportunities and shaped by individual personality (Payne 2002, p. 13), based on the assumption that students usually maximise utility and minimise risk (Kotler and Fox 1995). The rationality is seen in terms of promoting self-interest and utilising a base of information and life experience to make decisions. Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2004) examined an integrated model of choice in their research, derived from the existing three categories of models and applied to study choices and process in the context of education. In Foskett, Dyke and Maringe's model, the above theories were developed and integrated into a combined theory to emphasise the complexity and dynamics in the selection process and the multi-determinants on educational choices. As they (2004, p. 9) indicated:

Choice is simply an expression of the preference that exists at a particular moment, and is subject to change and modification on any timescale. Although 'choice' is not a rational action in a strict sense, it is also not irrational or random. Choices that are made or exercised will reflect some active process by the chooser, but that process will have been based on partial evidence, perception and circumstance rather than any rational, comprehensive and objective search for, and weighing of, evidence. In particular, the role of perception and individuality must be stressed in understanding the process.

It is important to note that student choice theory has been investigated by different researches and studies with Western socio-economic backgrounds.

There is, however, no existing model that is adequate to explain Chinese students' behaviour in this area. As a rapidly developing country, China has had a similar experience in higher education development to many Western countries, in that the extreme expansion in enrolment commenced at the end of the last century and higher education has been transitioning from 'elite education' to 'mass education', thus many more opportunities have been created for Chinese students to access higher education. However, as discussed in Chapter One, the expansion in higher education has distinct differences compared with Western experiences in 'widening participation' practice. In the UK, this policy aims to enable students from a wider section of society to engage in a broader structure of higher education. In China, the expansion mainly happened in the traditionally elite higher education sector. It reflected a conventional concept and demand of higher education in society. Despite the expansion of higher education, the demand in society still predominantly exceeds the supply of places, due to China's large population. Meanwhile, choice in higher education in China is still characterised by a strong selection system, similar to the UK's experience in the mid-1990s, for example.¹⁶² The highly centralised entrance examination for student intake at higher education level shapes the attitude and values of Chinese families as regards university participation and has caused a large-scale exam-led form of learning in Chinese society. Therefore research into higher education participation based on the current educational system in China needs

¹⁶² Expansion of higher education participation rates from 14% in the late 1980s to 33% in the mid-1990s, though accompanied by the use of funding models from the Higher Education Funding Councils which required very substantial reductions in the unit of resource for HE institutions, resulted in strong competition and increased empowerment of young people as choosers in the Higher Education marketplace (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown 2001, p. 24).

to address social and political context, as well as studies of students' educational choices.

Although the context of choice differs in various countries or marketplaces, the principles and methodologies for studying educational choice in previous researches – for example, into the influential factors on an individual's educational choice – have real value for this present research. A preliminary framework was therefore built on the basis of those existing theories.

Questionnaires and interview questions were designed within the framework.

However, it is also clear that choice is an outcome of a complex interaction between influential and contextual factors. Thus the findings of this research might shed light on other areas beyond the outcome of previous studies and change preconceptions accordingly.

In this research, one of the aims is to examine educational choice in a particular context: the selection of art and design higher education in China. Based on existing theories and an investigation into the current entry system for art and design higher education in China, a preliminary model of choice of art and design has been identified to distinguish from general choices in this research (Diagram 7). This model shows interactions among the three components contributing to choice, namely individuality, educational system and external environment. The model also provides a broad conceptualisation of the processes. Individual factors may be the determinants of the choice, embracing students' personal aspirations, interests, experience, characteristics, etc. when students play the role of 'chooser'. For example, in the field of art and design, students who have a

passion for the arts may naturally convert their interest into their choice of university. During the selection process, however, their attitudes towards and perceptions of higher education and career are highly likely to be formed, shaped and constrained by external influencers in the socio-cultural and economic contexts. In the process of interacting with the external environment, students are not only subject to influences on their values or attitudes, but they also acquire advice through different sources to facilitate their choices, for example from parents and family connections, teachers at secondary schools and pre-exam training schools, siblings, friends and the media, whether pro-active or reactive, explicit or implicit. From a broad social perspective, cultural values related to the student's choice are formed by and inherited from the society in which they live. In addition, educational policies, such as expansion of higher education, stimulate aspirations and enhance influential factors to a macro scale. As there is no 'free' choice for students choosing higher education, the entry system of higher education institutions also plays the role of 'barrier' in student choice and influences their decision significantly. Students may consider pathways and estimate possibilities of entry based on their previous academic performance and training experience. In order to improve their success rate, they may decide to attend exam-led training programmes, which have become a normal practice, since they are supposed to be effective and helpful in achieving the 'benchmarks' in entrance examinations.

Using this preliminary model, I will examine in the following sections the influential factors in choosing an art and design undergraduate programme in the unique Chinese social, economic and political context. And, to better

understand the choice process, the interactions of educational system, individual circumstance, and external influence and involvement will be discussed with the findings from data analysis.

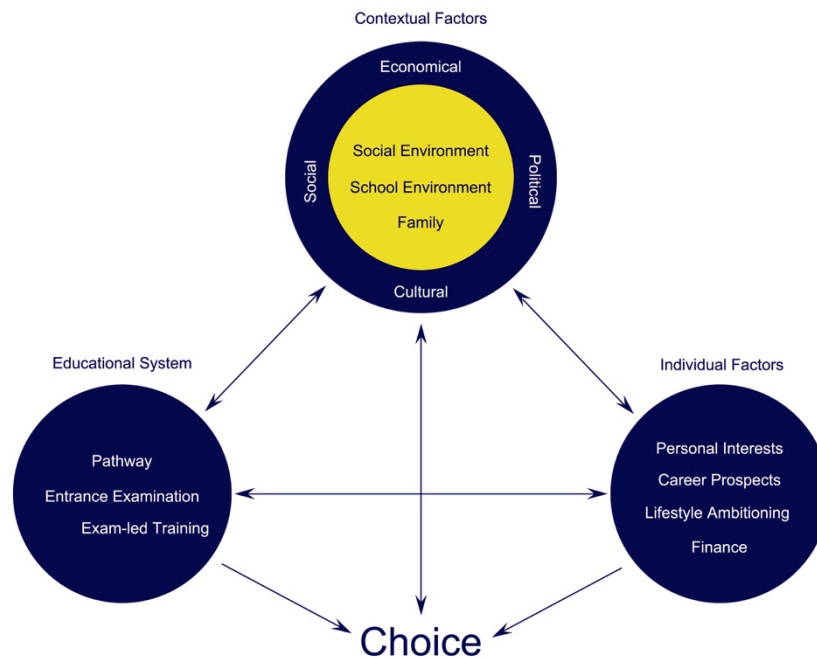


Diagram 7: Model of choice in art and design higher education in China

4.2 Influence from external determinants and individual factors

According to Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001), the social context of choice refers to two levels, namely the broad socio-economic and cultural environment and the immediate social and leisure life of an individual, the latter of which can be described as an individual’s socio-economic and ethnic background or lifestyle. The social context comprises people, processes, and cultural values, each of which contributes to the whole environment and individual’s life.

Influence from socio-economic environment

Over the past three decades, China's economy has been growing at a rapid pace and the social demand for higher education has increased hugely. It is clear that the implementation of a 'Higher Education Expansion' policy has had a positive impact on supply. The policy has not only contributed towards opportunities of entry, but has also stimulated consumption or investment from Chinese families in education, which, at the same time, has stimulated domestic economic development and employment opportunities. Meanwhile, in China, many industrial and economical focuses have been shifted from rural to urban areas. To a great extent, the urbanisation of China has been one of the most important factors in this phenomenon of economic and social transition. Migrants from rural areas flowed increasingly into 'first-tier' cities, such as Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, initially attracted by the prospect of high gross incomes. Along with the increase in migrants, the urban development has been boosted, for example by new residential areas, commercial and business buildings, industrial parks and creative parks, which have appeared at an unprecedented speed of construction. The level of urbanisation in China increased from 18% in 1978 to 30% and then 39% in 1995 and 2002 respectively (Song and Dong 2007).¹⁶³ According to the 2010 national population census data in the sixth bulletin, the population living in cities and towns was 660 million, 49.68% of the total

¹⁶³ This level refers to the ratio of the non-agricultural population to the total population.

population, an increase of 13.46% compared with the 2000 census.¹⁶⁴ As Song and Dong (2007) have argued,

Urbanisation in China is a comprehensive process involving transformations in many areas, including the management of spatial expansion via modern urban planning, the administration of land use changes via land policy reforms, the process of rural-urban migration, and the development of public finance systems. All these transformations are part of China's transition from a centrally planned economy to a socialist market economy.

The policy of urbanisation, together with Higher Education Expansion, increased the demand for higher education nationwide. Even those from poor families or rural areas could now get the chance to receive higher education at prestigious universities and, at the same time, move their *hukou* to urban areas where the universities are located.¹⁶⁵ This residency status is a precondition for people who wish to live and work in major cities, and is very difficult for those holding rural *hukou* to obtain. Therefore, for those from rural areas, *gaokao* (National College Entrance Examination) constitutes the only chance for them to change their identity status and move to a major city, such as Shanghai or Beijing.

It can be seen that student choice in post-compulsory education is inevitably constrained by socio-economic and environmental factors. I have already discussed the fact that a rising sphere of activity, the so-called 'cultural and creative industries', has been booming nationally, along with urbanisation. The

¹⁶⁴ Source: 'Mainland China has reached 1.339 billion of the total population of urban and rural population': <http://www.china-daily.org/China-News/Mainland-China-has-reached-1.339-billion-of-the-total-population-of-urban-and-rural-population-of-nearly-flat/> [accessed on 7 July 2011]

¹⁶⁵ *Hukou* is a residency status to identify a person as a resident of a particular place. It is commonly held with household registration records and other personal information. The Chinese household registration system contains two broad sectors, namely urban *hukou* and rural *hukou*.

Chinese government has taken full notice of the importance of this industry and introduced it formally in 2004, initially defining it as a 'cultural productive force' (*wenhua shengchanli*).¹⁶⁶ This terminology in China has generally combined creative industry and cultural industry, which are similar terms but with boundaries. This industry not only accounts for a substantial element of economic growth, but has also been one of the driving forces in promoting the cultural identity of a country with over a significant history. Moreover, in the 17th Conference of the CCP, cultural and creative industrial development was regarded as a national strategy. Influenced by information through all kinds of channels, about 83.8% of recipients of this research agreed that the career development in the field of art and design is promising, whilst 86.4% expressed their aspirations of being an artist or designer on account of the lifestyle (Table 2). Certainly, lifestyle is not only an aspiration or ambition based on influences from family or friends; it is also connected to social environment or context, and becomes a significant factor in student choice as regards higher education. For example, Ziyue indicated her motivation for choosing art and design courses: 'I initiated my art practice from childhood, and I like all art and craft works. So I visit galleries and museums quite often, as there are many art shows and exhibitions. I always dream that I can be an artist in the future. I really like the working mode, which is full of freedom.'¹⁶⁷ Indeed, reflected from the survey, students had kept receiving messages from the external environment that shaped their aspirations for higher education and future career. On the one hand,

¹⁶⁶ Source: 'Creative Industries with Chinese Characteristics: An Interview with Professor Zhang Jingcheng': http://orgnets.net/urban_china/jingcheng [accessed on 10 July 2011].

¹⁶⁷ Focus group interview two, conducted on 4 April 2010 in Hangzhou. Participants in this research, including Ziyue, Xiang, Yanji, Xiaole, Shasha and Ran, are all anonymous.

the cultural environment has been always indicating the importance of university degree, which has been derived from the traditional cultural values. On the other hand, the development of creative and cultural industry is visible and close to their daily life, which convince them of a promising future. I will connect with the relevant beliefs of Chinese families in the following part.

No.	Agree	Partially agree	Not agree
1. Career development in the field of art and design is promising	36(30.8%)	62(53%)	19(16.2%)
2. Being an artist or designer is an expected lifestyle	72(61%)	30(25.4%)	16(13.6%)

Table 2: Some results of questionnaires of the survey

Family involvement

The broad socio-economic context shapes not only an individual's aspirations and attitudes, but also their families'. Family involvement is yet another complex and diverse variable in decision-making. First, family members' values directly and significantly shape their children's perception of higher education participation. The aspiration towards higher education usually forms at an early stage, prior to the selection process of higher education. For example, the traditional cultural value of being a scholar has been in existence for thousands of years. Therefore, being successful at *gaokao* has become a common goal in Chinese society. The belief in this value can be seen to be reflected in the phenomenon of 'education favour', in particular parents' aspiration and full support for their children's educational achievement. In the questionnaire survey, less than one-third of parents (17.8%) received four-year undergraduate

education themselves. With the full awareness of the importance of a university degree, they hope their children will have a better life than they have. This perception can be tracked from their choice-making for primary schools, junior schools and high schools. In order to ensure the obtainment of a better education for their children, there has since the 1980s been a phenomenon of paying a 'choice fee' (*zexiao fei*) or buying facilities as a donation for entering target schools at the compulsory education stage in China. Families also need to pay more if their children don't meet the entry requirements of the school. 'Catchment Based Approach' (*jiujin ruxue*) is one of the key characteristics in the entry system of compulsory education. Many parents have had the experience of buying a house and relocating near favoured schools to reach this 'objective' condition. In China, spending on education has traditionally taken up a large part of family expenditure. The schools most favoured by Chinese parents are those 'key' public schools (*zhongdian zhongxue*) that were established by the government to serve as a model for non-key schools.¹⁶⁸ Although a discussion around paying a choice fee is not the focus of this study, from this phenomenon the anxiety and aspiration of parents to pursue a better education for their children is revealed. Therefore, at a higher education level, institutions in China like CAA become very demanding. For art students, CAA is respected as the first-tier/key university.

Xiang is from Hunan province. When he decided to apply to CAA, he received full support from his family, as they all believed it was the right decision and CAA

¹⁶⁸ The key public schools in Chinese educational system are equivalent to UK's grammar schools.

was 'good enough'. He said, 'Their support encouraged me greatly when I prepared for the entrance exam.' Chunmei had a different experience when she made her application:

'In my dad's opinion, if I chose art I had to apply to CAA or other prestigious art institutions. But, by that time, CAA was not my target. I wanted to apply to a comprehensive university with an art and design department rather than a specialised art academy. This was because I didn't like the idea of an institution that was only full of art students. I wanted to communicate and learn from other students in different faculties. However, my parents didn't agree with me and I was required to apply to CAA.'¹⁶⁹

University reputation is always a significant factor to be considered in the choice process. Big names like CAA are already well-known in Chinese society. In the questionnaire survey, one respondent described CAA as a 'Palace of Art' (*yishu diantang*), which fascinated him. It is of course not a hard choice for parents either, even though they may have no education experience or background related to art and design. Some respondents, however, declared that it was their own decision to choose institutions and subject areas, with family involvement not necessarily a direct factor. In the questionnaire survey, 61% of respondents agreed that their choice of art and design undergraduate courses were largely related to their previous practice in *huahua* (literally, meaning to draw and to paint). In China, students who are able to or fond of *huahua* are considered to have talents in art. This notion will be discussed in later chapter. Only 15.3% of respondents chose to entirely disregard this factor. Family context, however, can

¹⁶⁹ Focus group interview one, conducted on 3 April 2010 in Hangzhou. Participants in this research, including Chunmei, Yufei, Xiaoxi, Xinmo, Shuwen and Fang, are all anonymous.

still have an imperceptible involvement in cultivating children's hobbies. As Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001, p. 154) indicated, 'the motivation for entering into higher education falls broadly into three linked but discrete areas – the study of subject of interest, the pursuit of a particular career, and the pursuit of improved economic gain.' Obviously, if family members are professionals in art and design, their children are usually brought up within an artistic environment. It can be viewed as one of the forms of cultural capital obtained from their family. Students with this cultural capital may have much more strength in applying art and design higher education. As Shumei confirmed, her family support and influence was one of the reasons for her to choose art. Her grandma and grandpa like oil painting and taught her a lot from childhood and make her like painting very much. She was then sent to some after-school classes to learn drawing formally by her parents.

Xinmo and Xiaoxi also learned creative drawing from an early age. They were both taught by family members, but had no experience in attending any other after-school activities. Xinmo was influenced by her parents and intended to apply for fine art at CAA. Xiaoxi added, 'I grew up in a family with a tradition of going in for art. My auntie is an art teacher, whilst my uncle and grandma are painters. They all taught me drawing and painting. I therefore received crucial influences from them. I dreamt of being an artist when I was a child, so I insisted on learning drawing for a very long time.'

Participants from families with a non-art-related background also mentioned similar experiences. In this survey, only 12.3% of the respondents identified

family connections related to art and design, but 61% of respondents admitted that they had had experience of attending art classes after school. Exploring from the focus group interview, childhood hobbies in relation to art practice can be found in almost every participant's description. For example, in order to get a good chance of recommendation from a school as additional references when applying to further schools, parents have become used to sending their children to after-school activities, such as painting or instrument and music classes, to prepare distinctive talents for future competition. It has become fashionable in China to attend extra-curricular classes. There is a popular saying, 'A good education gives your child a headstart in life', which has been widely promoted in contemporary China.

Influence from educational advisors and peers

Compared with choosing arts as a hobby, university and subject choice is a more complex practice to be considered. Interestingly, only 32% of respondents admitted that their parents were involved in choosing institutions, even if most of them might have shown their support in the choice of art and design as a broad direction in the first instance. Choosing institutions and subjects was usually informed by the ways in which students addressed themselves in relation to their peers and teachers, in particular tutors at pre-exam training schools. In Chinese culture, in general, students are always supposed to obey teachers' instructions. A schoolteacher's advice is highly respected by both students and their parents. In China, there are no staff who exclusively play the role of careers advisor at secondary school level. Class teachers (*ban zhuren*),

equivalent to UK's 'form teachers', and subject teachers (*renke laoshi*) usually share responsibilities as regards consultation over student educational pathways and career guidance. They are sometimes involved in the final decision on choosing universities and subjects, as they are understood to be experienced in the educational system. As a result, their attitudes inevitably shape students' perceptions of choice. As Shuwen reflected, when she felt the workload at junior school was becoming more and more heavy, her after-school art class was suspended for a short period. However, her schoolteacher suggested that she should pick up drawing again and move towards future studies at an art institution. He also advised that she should first apply to an art-specialised high school, as her academic attainment in other subject areas would not be good enough if she wanted to get into a university. Shuwen is not a special case. As I introduced in previous chapters, many students have had similar experiences. I will introduce more case studies in later sections. Unlike Shuwen, Ran did fine at cultural studies and was able to get into university without any difficulties. He was interested in art and crafts as well, and always won praise from his art teachers. When he was at junior school, his class teacher discovered his talent in art and encouraged him to pursue a career in that field. Indeed, in China, schoolteachers' advice has been always respected and influential to students and their families. Some suggestions may be offered based on their daily observation of students' abilities and preferences. Or, they might consider the possibilities of entry and students' academic attainments, and offer advices on some practical and effective pathways, such as choosing art and design and taking art examination. Those advices are mainly derived from their own understanding, knowledge and experience.

If secondary schoolteachers' usually give students general advice as regards art and design studies, tutors at pre-exam training schools provide more specific information and suggestions on choosing institutions and subject areas. In the questionnaire survey, the influence from tutors on pre-exam training courses ranked top. 67.8% of respondents ticked 'Yes' when asked if these tutors had had an influence, which is a much higher percentage than 26.2% of schoolteachers (Diagram 8).

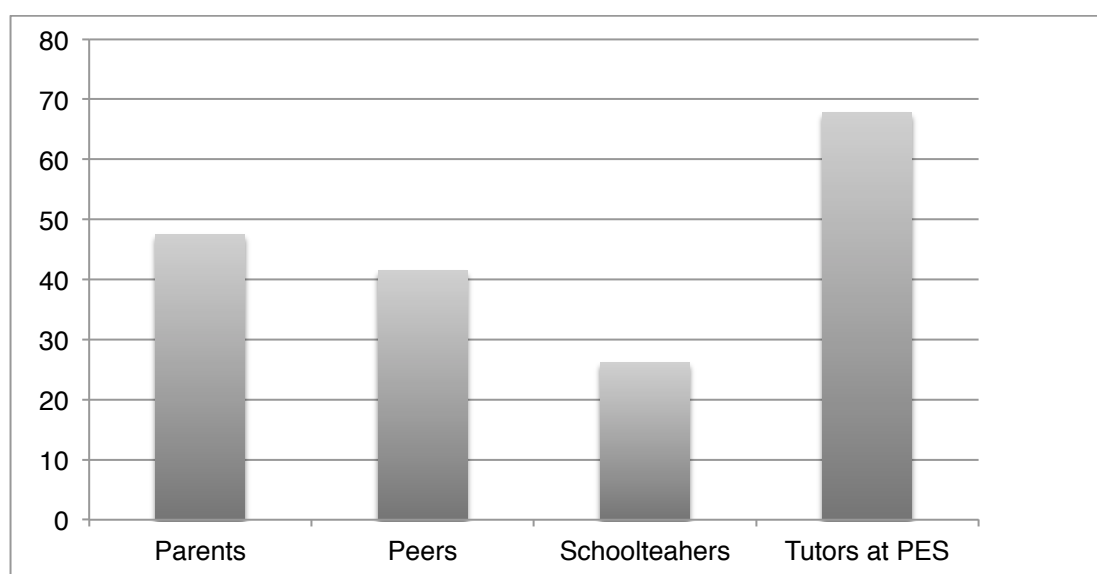


Diagram 8: Influence from parents, peers, schoolteachers and tutors at PES on choice of institutions

During students' study at private training schools, contact hours with tutors are long, as many schools provide an 'enclosed' environment for this intensive training. Students become convinced that their tutors have full experience and expertise in preparation for art exams, and that they understand the entry system effectively. Tutors' backgrounds in relation to prestigious art institutions are viewed like a 'corona' on their heads. When Shuwen decided to apply to art institutions, she enrolled in a pre-exam training school in Hangzhou to ensure

she could pass the art exam. On this programme, most of the tutors had graduated from top art institutions in China, which made Shuwen firmly believe that she could achieve the target as long as she followed their teaching. Her personal tutor had graduated from CAA. He seemed to be very familiar with CAA's entrance exam and gave a particular emphasis on the CAA style of drawing and painting. Without hesitation, all the students in his group applied to CAA. Ran also studied with a pre-exam training school during his final year of high school. His tutor was still a final-year student in the new media department at CAA. Luckily for Ran, in addition to the preparation for exams, his tutor gave his students some extra tuition on new media after class. As Ran notes,

Compared with drawing skills, this area was very new to us and attracted me very much. It required us to learn a lot of things, for example, a particular way of thinking and some basic skills. Although the daily practice for the exam occupied most of my schedule, I still tried to find time to do some work to explore this area. When I did my applications, new media was subsequently my first choice.

Similarly, when Xiaole was studying at pre-exam training school, he was very active in trying new techniques and enjoying the transformation from an ordinary practice to incorporating some creative experiments. His tutor had graduated from an art institution in Germany, majoring in fine art, and often shared his worries that contemporary art in China was not as prosperous as in the West. Following on from his tutor's suggestion, Xiaole abandoned his original choice of oil painting and adopted a new course called 'comprehensive arts' (*zonghe yishu*) instead. Although at that time he still didn't have a clear picture about the course content, and only understood from his tutor that it would be like avant-garde or experimental art, he found himself lucky enough to have

made the right choice for himself. Reflected from the above examples, tutors' advices can be found really important on students' choices, particularly the choice of institution and subject. They may not introduce some experiments that are different from sketching and painting practice consciously and systematically. However, the experience that those students had is more or less like a part of introductory approach, which influenced their choice significantly. I will further discuss the adoption of introductory approach in this stage in Chapter Five.

In addition to the work of teaching, tutors are required to play the role of advisor in university applications consultancy. The owners of pre-exam training schools, to a great extent, only care about the success rate of getting into art institutions that might be directly associated with the numbers of student intake in the following year. Many students felt that they were controlled physically and mentally during that stage, more or less like being 'brainwashed'. They didn't really have the freedom to make choices of their own. For example, as many students embark on exam-led training at a late stage, tutors will recommend institutions and subjects based on the possibilities. When Yanji reflected on the support she received there, she complained, 'My pre-exam training school only cared about the pass rate for the art examination. Our personal interests and career direction were less important for them.' In Xiang's experience, his tutors always reminded them, 'It doesn't matter which course you are enrolled on; just remember your target is getting into CAA. If you can successfully get an offer, you can then say you are the winner in this battle.' Fang was not in the same group as Yanji and Xiang, but she had a similar observation: 'My tutor was good at

teaching plaster bust sketching, so it was suggested to us that we should choose a design course as our subject. We were not allowed to apply to institutions in north China, such as the Communication University of China. They didn't want us to waste our time participating in the art exam there, as the style of drawing is completely different from that at CAA.'

In comparison with the influence of tutors, the influence of peers is not that striking in this research. However, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001, p. 210) indicate that 'choices are made that give credibility to the individual in the eyes of those around them of personal importance, particularly their peers'; and Yanji and Xinmo both mentioned that, among their peers, CAA was one of the most popular institutions for the mainstream. Nonetheless, the psychology of conformity might be considered as a 'lesser' factor. Young people bring together their preconceptions of careers, pathways, courses and institutions with the pursuit of a choice that will secure social approval in terms of maintaining self-esteem and peer group acceptance (Foskett, Lumby and Maringe 2003). In Xiaoxi's case, she reflected that the reason she chose CAA was mainly because of the encouragement of her peers. One of her parents' friends lives in Hangzhou and her daughter was a graduate of CAA. When Xiaoxi visited them in Hangzhou, she was impressed by the overall image of CAA given by the daughter's description. For Xiaoxi, a peer's view and advice was very different from speaking to parents. She perceived it as more objective and impersonal. So she made up her mind to apply to CAA and studied at a pre-exam training school in Hangzhou, where she confirmed with her tutor that choosing CAA was a wise decision. Xiang, meanwhile, recalled that his primary aspiration of enrolling at

CAA was stimulated by an encounter with some CAA students when he was in Year 11. He was very impressed by them and enjoyed conversing with them. Full of admiration for those students and their institution, he put CAA as his first priority in his choice set.

With the rapid social and economic changes taking place in China, decisions related to higher education and career directions have become more complex than before. The traditional employment patterns that parents experienced are no longer applicable to the younger generation. For example, the concept of a 'job for life' was only attached to the socialist economy of the past. Nowadays, the job market is dynamic and complicated, which brings uncertainty and risks to those 'choosers'. However, there is one crucial ideology that has never changed. Obtaining a prestigious university degree is highly meaningful, not only to an individual but also to his or her family. Therefore family involvement in educational choice can be found at every stage, whether dominantly or recessively. Even if the parents' opinion might not be the key determinant in choosing institutions and subject areas, it is clear that a family's values play a significant role in informing young people's understanding and conceptualisation of higher education.

Although about 90% of the participants of focus group interviews admitted that they were fond of art from their childhood, their decision of choosing art and design undergraduate courses was made at a relatively late stage. 30.2% and 56.3% of respondents acknowledged that they had chosen their direction within their first and second year of high school or their final year of school

respectively. Only 7.6% respondents were thinking about choosing art and design courses at an earlier stage. I would argue that the institutional environment and educational experience are two factors that influenced their choice, interacting closely with the educational system, in particular the selection system. I will analyse the responses from students and discuss the details in the next section.

4.3 Influence of the Educational System

Education has been highly valued in China all through Chinese history, as discussed previously. In order to meet demand from society, educational policies, in particular regarding the selection system, have put fairness and equality as the uppermost priority. This ideology has been implemented throughout the educational system. The pathways that students follow and the choices they make interact with the educational system at each junction. For most Chinese families, no matter what the route, the anticipated destination is a higher education institution. The path to university has therefore become a 'main road'. In order to stay on this path, not only students, but also parents and schoolteachers, make huge efforts to pass all kinds of examinations, in particular *gaokao*, in this highly selective competition. In this section, the influential factors in the educational system will be discussed in regard to two dimensions, the direct impact made by the entry system and the indirect influence from the school environment and teachers.

The direct impact of the entry system is mainly because of the power of *gaokao*. In the higher education entry system, the result of *gaokao* is the unique determinant that is considered for student intake. As introduced in Chapter Two, candidates are selected based on the marks merged from the art examination and the cultural examination,¹⁷⁰ in which the proportion of importance of the cultural examination normally ranges from 40% to 60%, depending on the institution. In the questionnaire survey, about half of the respondents agreed that 'Choosing art is a kind of shortcut to entering into higher education'. 71.1% of the respondents acknowledged the fact that a 'lower requirement in the cultural examination' affected their choice accordingly. For example, although Xiaoxi emphasised that her personal experience in art practice from an early age was the main reason for her to choose art, she also mentioned that her academic achievement at senior secondary school had dropped significantly and she worried about her future if she were to fail in *gaokao*. As suggested by her family, she attended a pre-exam training school in Hangzhou and started her journey in preparing for art examinations. Ziyue faced the same dilemma as Xiaoxi. She found it was too difficult to catch up on her academic studies in senior secondary school. As soon as she decided to take the art examination, she went to a pre-exam school in Beijing, though she had already been taking supplementary tuition for her academic studies for two years.

Yufei was the one of the participants who attended *gaokao* more than once. He tried five times before he was enrolled by CAA. Regardless of failure in *gaokao*

¹⁷⁰ 'Cultural examination' here refers to the National University Entrance Examination that takes place in June.

year after year, he persistently made applications to art institutions with big names, including CAFA and Sichuan Fine Arts Institution. He admitted that his failures in the first four years were mainly because of his poor performance in the cultural examination. However, he had a strong desire to be accepted by a prestigious university. He had been trying to apply for sculpture, architecture and fine art studies over the previous five years, but finally was accepted onto a course named 'media and image'. Compared with fine art, the art examination for media is less difficult. Yufei seemed happy enough, as he had finally achieved his goal. As he described, 'My target was very clear. When I decided to participate in higher education, only big names attracted me. I will only have one university degree in my life, so I had to wait until I could get what I wanted.' Applying CAA was really not easy to Yufei as his academic attainments were not satisfied. In order to balance the final result, he had to choose a subject with an easier art examination to enhance the chance of entry. With a strong motivation for prestigious institutions and persistence, he achieved his 'target' eventually. In fact, Yufei was not the only one to have this consideration. 61.7% of respondents admitted that they cared about the ranking of institutions and subjects when they made their choice set. I will discuss the influence on subject choice in a later section.

Due to the present entry system, chances of access to higher education have been optimised for students. For those who have no confidence in passing the cultural examination, choosing art means they have a better chance. Fang's academic performance during her secondary education was merit level. She therefore brought this advantage to her selection process, although she also had a very

short period of training in drawing and painting skills in her final year. Her target was to pass the art exam first, even if with a low mark. Then she would be able to use her *gaokao* score to balance the final result. More importantly, she chose a subject which required a higher proportion of the *gaokao* score.

Although pre-exam training schools are excluded from the national Chinese educational framework, the demand for exam-led training cannot be overlooked. The pre-exam training course can be seen as a spontaneous educational product derived from the current entry system towards art and design undergraduate studies. In order to receive full preparation, many students decide to leave their senior school early and take private tuition at training schools. As Xiaole noted, 'Studying at pre-exam training school made me feel that I was capable of taking art exams.' Indeed, for many prospective students, choosing the right pre-exam training school might be just as important as choosing the right university. Xiang did his pre-exam training in a small room with only a few other students. The tutor was a Year One student at CAA. Xiang unfortunately failed to pass that year's art exam. When he decided to change his place of study, he visited more than ten training schools and studied the styles of students' drawing to make sure that the tutors were experienced enough to prepare students for CAA's institutional exams. After a year's training at a new school, Xiaole's art exam score was much improved and he was eventually offered a place at CAA.

The indirect influence of the entry system is mainly delivered at secondary school, and in particular through schoolteachers. Conceptually, *gaokao* is compared to a 'ruler' to measure students' academic attainments and, at the

same time, it is described as a 'mirror' to reflect the quality of teaching in senior secondary schools through the students' marks. The mechanism has, on the one hand, generated an enthusiasm for education, or rather 'examination fervour' in society. On the other hand, it has made a significant impact on secondary education, from curriculum to school environment.

China's exam-oriented education has been widely criticised. The reforms in curriculum at secondary level have attempted to change the current situation and develop all-round educational system rather than pursuing high examination scores only. Although the reform aims to establish a new evaluation system of learning outcomes, the influence of an exam-oriented system of education has been deeply embedded in society. Subjects that are tested in *gaokao* are always emphasised, while others, such as music and PE, are less regarded. Moreover, only tested subjects are offered in the final year of senior secondary school for examination preparation. The high stakes resulting from *gaokao* bring considerable pressures on students and their parents, and have even caused psychological problems, such as a deep fear of failure and anxiety for those who continually remain at lower end of academic attainment (Davey & Higgins 2005). In the final year of senior secondary school, in particular, students' workload at this stage is very heavy with massive homework and examination. This phase has been described as 'a final sprint' towards *gaokao*.

In Chinese educational system, the phenomenon of exam-led teaching and learning is common. Students' learning in primary and secondary education is always stressful and boring. Compared with daily routine at school, attending

afterschool classes may be more interesting. It has become an 'objective cause' for some students to initiate their learning in drawing. While discussing the pressure of academic studies in the focus group interview, Xiaole gave a straightforward example from his own experience. He said,

When I was in junior secondary school, I worked less hard than before. So I was frequently disciplined by my parents. One day, when my mom sent me to a weekend art class, I found it was much more entertaining than studying. I could release myself from reading books and doing homework at home and play with my mates.

This experience, rather than others, became Xiaole's focal point. It was as if a 'seed' of art was planted in his heart, as he noted. Shuwen had a different experience. When she found she was facing pressure over academic studies at junior school, she picked up her brush again and took the advice of her class teacher to apply to an art-specialised senior school. As she said, 'If I'd forced myself onto a normal track, I don't think I would have been accepted by any universities. But now I am at one. And it is CAA: a dream place for anyone.' Lin selected Tongji University as her first choice. As she explained,

Tongji University is in the category of key universities in China. Attending the art examination has become the only option for me to be accepted by a prestigious university, as my cultural subjects are not good enough. I only started to learn drawing last year. I don't think I will get a high score in the art examination. I don't care what course I choose. I only hope I can get an offer from an institution. Even if I end up finding out that I am not interested in this course in this course, I will persist until I get the degree.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Interview with Lin, a student in a pre-exam training school in Hangzhou, 12 November 2008, Hangzhou.

However, as mentioned in the previous section, many respondents indicated that their decision to apply to study arts was made at a very late stage. This can be explained by the fact that in many cases students displayed 'exclusive' choice behaviour. White (2007) identified this typology in his research:

Exclusive choices start from the premise that some outcomes are to be avoided. Subsequent choices are then structured around this consideration. Exclusive choices are common, presumably because of the restricted range of alternatives faced by students choosing options.

Certainly, pressure is placed not only upon students, but also upon their schools and teachers. Schoolteachers also play the role of advisor when parents or students look at academic performance and alternatives in choices. In the Chinese educational system, the school is the convergence point of aspirations between students and their families. Schoolteachers – and in particular class teachers – enjoy high respect and accreditation among students and parents. This is because, on the one hand, only schoolteachers can give an all-round judgement on their students' performance, plus the guidance they offer young people is more or less 'objective'. On the other hand, teaching and learning in class has been formulated to be a one-way mode of input. The teacher is at the centre of the learning process. Students are not allowed to criticise or to raise their own questions. Learning outcomes are only reflected in test papers. With this ideology in place, the guidance of schoolteachers is considered infallible and has high reference value.

However, arising from a school environment and social context, a schoolteacher's advice may to some extent reflect the strategies, priorities and perceptions of the individual school, as well as common values in society. From an objective point of view, it is not easy to extrapolate a schoolteacher's opinion or suggestions on educational choice from the possible impact of the above. The schoolteacher's role is, in fact, complicated. Apart from being an educator, they serve their school at the same time. Even more broadly, they also serve the educational system, their schools having been established either by government or independent bodies.

For example, the reputation of both public and private schools is always carefully guarded. In China, the university acceptance rate of a senior school has traditionally been one of the most important benchmarks in measuring the quality of teaching. It has great meaning to a school not only to show the community how successful it is, but also to act as a crucial index for government in evaluating a school's performance. Therefore, at a senior school, there is always a target of achieving a certain rate of participation at higher education level and a particular success rate for students entering leading universities. These images, perpetuating strong cultural values in relation to the pursuit of high academic achievements, have permeated daily activities at schools. As a practitioner in the school, the teacher has been placed in a position of promoting and carrying out school strategies. Thus, pressure comes from students and parents, but also from school and society. Only when a school has achieved a satisfactory rate can the teachers' contribution be acknowledged and their

personal incentives be boosted accordingly.¹⁷² The schoolteacher's role is diverse when he or she is involved in student choice. Knowing the individual student's capability well, their advice is considered a significant factor in making choices. Meanwhile, as a key person delivering a school's strategies in the educational system, their advice can hardly be isolated from the value of pursuing collective success and benefit. This value system has led to a status in China that the aim of teaching and learning at pre-university stage is mainly to prepare students for *gaokao* and increase the acceptance rate of higher education maximally. As Fang noted,

Our school expected all its students to go to university. Many of my classmates were accepted by leading universities in engineering, management and accounting courses. It was a priority for us and drove us to work harder and harder at school. Although my academic attainment was not outstanding, my class teacher suggested that it was worth trying for art and design courses at Tsinghua University through taking art exams.

Fang followed her teacher's advice but failed. However, she was still thankful for the guidance.

The parents' meeting is another effective channel for a school to intervene in students' choices. Parents have long consulted their children's class teachers on the subject of university and subject choice during this meeting. It is also a forum for them to receive information about educational policies and changes in the school, and, more importantly, to discuss the options for their children based

¹⁷² Interview with Qi Yongchang, former Director of the Administrative Office, Shanghai Municipal Education Examinations Authority, 31 March 2013, Shanghai.

on their academic achievements. The influence from school and schoolteachers is conveyed back through parents to their children. Students who have no strong motivation for pursuing a particular direction take it as a useful reference when they have to make an 'exclusive' choice.

In China, the higher education entry system has become the main constraint in students' choice, but at the same time it has stimulated the demand for art study in the marketplace through direct and indirect influential factors. In fact, the participation in art and design higher education has been greatly affected by the entry system and by the political environment in general. In recent years, it has been reported that Art Study Fervour has actually cooled down in many parts of China. This change has largely been found to be present due to changes in educational policies. For example, in Shandong Province, the number of participants in art exams in 2009 was 54,000, which represented a decline of about 40% compared with 2008. The reason was mainly because of the implementation of unified provincial art exams from 2009. Students needed to pass the unified art exam first, and then take institutional exams.¹⁷³ CAA is another example in identifying the influence of policy changes. As discussed in Chapter Three, the content of art exams has been altered almost every year. Students whose techniques in drawing and painting had been newly prepared found there was no chance for them to pass.¹⁷⁴ In 2013, the application number was 85,000, while in 2014 it was 75,000. The decrease number was 10,000.¹⁷⁵ Changes in policies have not only been implemented in the art examinations. In

¹⁷³ Source: <http://www.yk211.com/html/ykdt/JGJ48.html> [accessed on 5 January 2013].

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Weng Zhenyu, 12 March 2014, Hangzhou.

¹⁷⁵ Source: <http://www.caa.edu.cn/> [accessed on 4 March 2014].

order to change the negative impression of institutions recruiting academically weak students, the Chinese Ministry of Education revised the proportion of importance of the cultural examination from 60% to 70% from 2014, as a national benchmark for institutions to implement.¹⁷⁶ Those who give up cultural studies in formal education in order to attend pre-exam training may have less chance of being accepted. In the process of university entry, students' behaviour is inevitably shaped by educational policies, supply of opportunities in higher education and restrictions presented by entrance examinations. With the purpose of being accepted by intent institutions, students and their advisors carefully calculate success rates and hope to find the best route within the system. Those motivations are usually derived from the concept of utilitarianism, which normally exists in the behaviour around purchasing. Decision-makers will seek to optimise utility or benefit from their choice. In China, seeking personal benefits from the operational system cannot only be found in the educational market; it also has an extensive influence on other choices, such as career choice.

4.4 Influence of the Art Examination

Art examination has become a unique mechanism used to access a student's ability of practice in the entry system of higher education in China. This ability mainly refers to drawing and painting skills, in particular, the accuracy in recording objects from memory or from a still-life subject. No matter whether the unified exams or institutional exams, the majority of features come under a

¹⁷⁶ In September 2013, MoE announced a newly revised policy in a paper of 'Notice on some issues about student intake in art Institutions in 2014'. Source: www.moe.edu.cn [accessed on 5 October 2014].

common ideology, which is to ensure fair access in the entry system. First, candidates are required to complete their works within a fixed time scale, ranging from one hour to three hours. For example, in CAA's exams for the 2015 intake, tests in quick sketching, painting and sketching were specified to be accomplished within one hour, two and a half hours, and three hours respectively.¹⁷⁷ Pace control therefore has been a further ability required in the exam. Secondly, the difference in measurement for selecting students for various courses is mainly related to level of difficulty in art exams. For example, in many sketching tests, recording from plaster busts is widely used for selecting design students, while sketching of still-life models is usually applied in the test for plastic art courses. It is clear from the perception that students who want to study plastic art should have a stronger foundation in realistic drawing and painting abilities.¹⁷⁸ Thirdly, there are students who choose particular subjects but undergo a broad form of evaluation. For example, for fashion design and graphic design, candidates are tested with the same exam contents and evaluation criteria. It seems that by comparing the generally common appearance of students' work in exam papers, students who have better techniques in drawing will be more clearly distinguished. Fourthly, the content and requirements of the art examination have been changed very frequently. The purpose of this has been to avoid encouraging students who have only learned exam techniques at pre-exam training schools.

¹⁷⁷ Source: <http://zb.caa.edu.cn/pages/message/2015011001.html> [accessed on 20 January 2015].

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Song Jianming, 20 February 2006, Hangzhou.

As discussed, the examination has been intended to present an image of fairness and effectiveness for the whole of society. In the art examination, candidates are assessed based on their techniques, which have some summative standards. These standards will determine whether students are qualified to participate academically at a higher education level. However, the standards focusing on 'abilities' in drawing may have very few connections with the professional fields in which the undergraduate courses are situated. In particular, with the limitation of the standards, it may not be possible for students to follow a programme of studies of personal interest. As discussed in the previous section, for many Chinese students and families, art examination as an entry system to some extent means an 'instrument' on the special track leading to higher education. In this section, influence from the content of art examination on student choice has been revealed.

Reflected in the survey, there are two principal levels of decision-making influenced by the content of the art examination at CAA, namely final choice of institution and choice of subject direction, which is constrained by what is available at the institution.

Unsurprisingly, it has been a common practice for many Chinese families to follow the procedure of choosing a set of target universities and then searching course availability. This perception is confirmed by the survey. A number of participants mentioned that they weren't enjoying their current course as much as they had expected, but no participants showed dissatisfaction at the institution. Some participants had experiences in or had considered applying to

other leading art institutions in China. Certainly, CAA was not the only choice for these candidates. However, among other factors, the art examination was listed as a key determinant in their eventual selection of CAA. Yufei had six years' experience in taking art examinations at CAA. He could be, 'one of those who know the art examination at CAA the best.' He also added,

I did research the admission policies of other institutions at the same time. But I found it was not easy to attend other institutional exams if you already prepared for one particular institution. For example, the art exam for design courses at CAFA requires a test involving a creative project. I have absolutely no experience of that. I applied for the Sichuan Institute of Plastic Arts once, though, because I found the art examination there was very similar to CAA's.

Like Yufei, another participant Fang attended the art examinations of both Tsinghua and CAA in the same year. According to her experience, as she recalled:

The venue of the Tsinghua examination was Hangzhou. The number of applicants was much smaller than for CAA. I felt the examination was disorganised. There was no chair to sit on, and I had to hold my drawing board all the time. It might have been because they only recruit two or three students from Zhejiang every year, so they didn't pay a lot of attention to this examination venue. More importantly, the drawing and painting style that Tsinghua preferred was very different from CAA's. It would be very difficult to prepare for both exams.

Although Tsinghua, as a leading comprehensive university in China, possibly enjoys a better reputation than CAA, it is not that popular among students in south China, for example Zhejiang Province. Geographic location could be one of the obvious reasons. But more importantly, the uncertainty of the art

examination and higher cut-off points in the cultural examination arguably are two main factors for its lack of popularity.

To the majority of the participants, once the decision about the institution has been made, the second step in the choice process is to decide a subject area. It is quite common for students to announce that their subject selection decision is simply down to their genuine personal interests, but in fact, choices can have been made also largely based on the considerations of job opportunities. As White (2007) indicated, 'Enjoyment rationales were only ever given in relation to choices relating to subject and never connected to other factors by students.' But he also added, 'A key factor relating to students' enjoyment of a subject is previous experience.' Reflected in the survey, the factor of enjoyment in art has been widely found in students' choice of art and design higher studies. The evidence of this factor in subject selection can be observed, but the constraints presented by the art examination are also a primary issue to be considered at the same time.

Essentially, in terms of subject choice, there are two categories of students in the survey. In the first category, participants clarified that their choices of course were in connect to their personal interests or a long-term practice in art and deisgn. Xinmo, for example, began her practice in both traditional Chinese painting and sketching at a young age. As her parents are both professional artists in the field of traditional painting, she was taught by them and acquired information in this area. Influenced by her parents, her priority of subject choice, as her personal interest, was traditional Chinese painting. Her second choice was

between film and TV advertising and design. For her, one of these subjects was to become a back-up option oriented by employability after the university.

Comparing the content of the examinations in these two back-up subjects, however, she found she had more confidence in passing the exam for media and image, as this would consist of the sketching of a head portrait and she had more experience in this kind of practice. Unfortunately, she failed in the exam for traditional Chinese painting, but she was able to enrol on the course for media and image. In this particular case, I argue, it is not simply the failure of the exam, but more importantly, the alternative options, which appeared to be easier to get through the entrance exam, had led the participant to abandon personal interest. Another participant in the survey, Fang, was enrolled in animation at CAA. She discussed,

I am luckier than Xinmo. I chose animation because I had a lot of interest in it, although my previous target was not CAA. My tutor suggested I apply to Tsinghua, as he thought my academic attainments would be high enough. So I was a minority in my pre-exam school, practising sketching of life portraits for the art examination at Tsinghua, while most of my classmates received a lot of training in plaster statues for the design courses at CAA. When I changed my mind and decided to apply to CAA, I found that animation was on the course list that would require the skills of life portraiture. Although my tutors disagreed with my decision, as animation is not a strong area of study and has a very short history at CAA, I insisted.

Fang is a student who successfully combined her personal interests and the skills she had that were applicable for art examination. But according my research, this success appears to be a very rare example. And sometimes, yet, how to connect one's personal interests to any particular subject area could be confusing with

lack of introduction of the art and design subjects in higher education. For example, when Yanji was making her subject choice, she wanted to stay with the subject area of fine art that she enjoyed through her practice of drawing and painting. The participant considered that this kind of practice could only possibly be developed into an artistic career. Yanji had been practising drawing since she was eight years old and continued her interests through practice at secondary school. However, she had little understanding in the area of any design subjects. Without any introductory courses for other options, her mind was set firmly, and therefore, her subject choice was only going to be made within the area of fine art. Envisaging her own possible disadvantage in art exam, she gave up her favourite subject, painting, but decided to apply for sculpture instead at CAA. As she explained, 'it is only because in the sculpture exam, painting from memory is not included. But as I can see, sculpture is a subject within fine art department, at least.' In order to avoid any weakness in art exam, and to secure a place in higher education, one's personal interests could be insisted, and yet, at the same time, interestingly, compromised. On the one hand, Yanji's personal interests in art were only established through after-school activities and pre-exam training, which featured only in drawing and painting, and were not necessarily 'accurate' when knowing very little about design. On the other hand, to attend an 'easier' exam, her compromise of choice within the area of plastic art could only lead to the subject of sculpture, which, ironically, as indicated in the focus group, she knew nothing about.

Chunmei also reported that her choice was partially related to her enjoyment. She explained,

I was supported by my family to choose CAA in the first place. So my aim was simply to be offered a place there. When I made my choice of subject, I firstly reviewed their course list, then looked into the entry criteria for each course, then narrowed my choice to those for which I felt most certain I could pass the exam. Among those courses, advertising attracted me the most. I really like watching TV and would like to work in the media industry.

In Chunmei's case, her choice showed a connection to her enjoyment and also to her vocational aspiration. But still there was a tie to the art examination. The requirements of the art examination had become a precondition prior to personal interests, which could be compromised, readjusted, or reconfirmed.

In the second category, participants demonstrated careful considerations of how to maximise opportunities by choosing an 'appropriate' exam for future subject studies, whilst their personal interests had been completely disregarded. Xiaoxi's subject choice was made based on her limited technical skills acquired through her pre-exam training and the entry requirement of relevant courses. She introduced,

In my pre-exam training school, our tutors emphasised the practice of sketching a head portrait much more than plaster busts. So I searched CAA's admissions information looking for subject areas that required the former skill. Although I found that the course didn't exactly conform to my expectations and imagination once I entered it later, I'm assuming I will still continue my studies and try to learn more for my future career development.

Obviously, the exam-oriented choice does not help with the further study at the undergraduate courses. This is especially harmful for those who had very little

information about the art and design subject areas available at CAA. Other than a course list and entry requirements, there is no actual course content of each subject on the official website of art institution in China, most representatively, for example, CAA, nor is this usually available in the admissions prospectus. Students may either speculate on the content judging by what they perceive from course titles in their textual form or they may consult their parents or teachers who might have some relevant educational, business or social experience.

Xiaoxi's decision-making as regards her choice of subject area was a typical case in this category. Such students clearly recognise their strengths and weaknesses in art examinations and make a 'rational' choice in order to achieve their target. Compared with Xiaoxi, some decisions can be made or changed all in a sudden dependent on temporary experience of practice and psychological perception of the art exam. As she noted,

I switched my choice from design to plastic art just one day before we had to submit our online application form. It was because when I practised the sketching of plaster busts that day, I suddenly lost all my confidence and found my work to be unsatisfactory. I urgently searched for other courses that required sketching of life portraiture to replace my initial choice. I ended up being enrolled onto the oil painting course. However, in my foundation year, as we were having too many courses in drawing and painting, I was really bored by those realistic skills. At the end of the year, when there was a chance for me to change my subject, I decided to study new media instead. From my understanding, this course will contain some contemporary concepts and should be much more interesting.

To many, art exam becomes certainly a primary orientation for subject choice. This may cause consequently a disconnection between personal interests and their undergraduate studies, which will well lead to students' career destination. I will be discussing this in detail in the next chapter.

From CAA's perspective, the techniques for sketching life portraits are more difficult to acquire than for plaster busts. Thus, the sketching of a life portrait is normally required for plastic art, which includes subjects such as oil painting and printmaking. This arrangement mainly arises from the concept that 'learning in those programmes requires stronger skills in drawing and painting'. However, as Shuwen went on to reflect,

I think it is more difficult to get a high score in the exam for drawing plaster busts compared with that for life portraits. I don't mean the skills in terms of the difficulty, but the rigour criteria of assessment. I studied many previous samples of students' CAA examination papers and got that impression. So I continued to apply for printmaking as my subject to study.

Shuwen's statement was very different from the others. Indeed, the standards are always relative in comparison. Many students might choose design due to an easier technique for drawing plaster statues in the art exam. It has become a popular choice. However, at the same time, this causes high competition among the group and thus a lower pass rate, and in consequence, it becomes harder to be distinctive. The power of the art examination in shaping students' decision-making has been presented clearly in this category.

Throughout this chapter, I have addressed some key influential determinants in student choice of art and design higher education in China, including institutional choice and choice of subject to demonstrate a model of choice and decision-making in this specific area. As illustrated in section 4.1, the three components in the model, namely external environment, educational system and individual factors, provide a background or context to choice. At the same time, the people involved in each component act as explicit or implicit ‘influencers’ in the process of choice. The urbanisation and the development of creative industry in contemporary China have stimulated further aspirations in art-related learning and employment. In this social context, the attitudes and values of students and their parents are inevitably affected. Although parental intervention in choosing institutions and subjects did not prove to be dominant in this survey, the family context of values – in particular, enthusiasm in relation to pursuing a university degree – has a great impact on children’s attitudes and becomes a guiding ideology when post-secondary decisions are made, as discussed previously. Of course it is not only the family context that is of consideration, but also the wider context of secondary schools. The access rate of higher education participation has been highly valued in such schools. The impact of educational guidance from schoolteachers has also reinforced the perceptions of parents and their children.

In this study, the educational system, which embraces the entry system of higher education as a significant influential factor, has been stressed. Within the entry system for art institutions, the art examination plays the role of a selective mechanism for choosing appropriate students for professional studies. Choosing art therefore is commonly considered by those who have relevant experience,

interest or, especially, aptitudes. However, it is the art examination that gives a special track to higher education for students with low academic attainments. With evidence addressed, choosing art has been seen to be a 'strategy' for many Chinese students to optimise their opportunities of university entry. No matter what their potential, any student can attend the art examination with the help of a pre-exam training course. The skill-based examination and preparation has largely stimulated the numbers of students choosing art institutions on the one hand. On the other hand, it is clear that students' institutional and subject choices have also been influenced by the single angle of assessing their drawing techniques, as reflected in examination papers. Consequently, for many students, choosing art has been a 'pragmatic' approach to ensure advantages and success.

By analysing students' perceptions of the art examination, I have two reflections, as follows. First, although many students explained that their subject choices were derived from their personal interests or experience, this factor was mentioned by participants who gave more than one reason for their choice, and the content of the art examination was still at the heart of their concerns around choice. In fact, for many students, their art practice within drawing and painting has been limited – essentially, realistic drawing, and sometimes traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy. In the secondary-school curriculum, there is virtually no course that bears any relation to a design programme or other career-related development. Without an introduction to an alternative, students tend to stick with their drawing practice. It would be very hard for them to judge which other direction might be more suitable or enjoyable. It is even more difficult for institutions to select 'appropriate' students who have the potential to

develop in art and design higher education. This will lead us to further discussions in the next chapter.

Secondly, the current entry system, especially the entrance examination for art institutions, may have the effect of leading students in opposite directions. In contemporary China, higher education should foster the development of talents with human qualities and professional competence. Acknowledging the role of the entrance examination for higher education, assessing students' aptitude for future development must be the central concern in the system. The entry point for higher education may well be the most significant factor for the majority of students in their educational pathways – instructive or at least indicative, leading them to their future career development. For example, at CAA, the number of graduates is approximately 1,600 per year. According to internal statistics, in 2014 only 11.12% of graduates continued their studies at postgraduate level in China, whilst 3.73% chose to go abroad for further studies. The majority of graduates, 85.15%, entered the job market after graduation, with an employment rate of 93.67%.¹⁷⁹ Student choice of subject, made before university and adjusted on completion of the foundation year, is crucial, not only for their higher learning but also, ultimately, for their career development. They may only be able to form a vague picture of their future career when the introductory approach is absent from the choice process; in particular, apart from drawing and colouring practice, their experience before university may be entirely irrelevant to other subject studies. Many students reflected that it was difficult

¹⁷⁹ Unpublished statistics obtained from Weng Zhenyu, March 2015.

for them to connect their subject choice and future career at the point of entry. It demonstrates the fact that, although student choices should have been made with an eye to an eventual career destination, the ways in which students prepare for undergraduate studies, undergo the university learning experience and prepare for their future career are disconnected.

Chapter Five

Challenges and Alternatives

In China, like in other countries, young people's choices are to some extent formed by individuality, constrained or facilitated by the socio-cultural and economic contexts. In the arena of educational choice, conventional values of success pertaining to the educational system also persist in shaping young people's behaviour through familial, institutional and social influences. However, as choice is an interactive process, student selection also impacts on the educational system. To some extent, it is a student's choice of institution and subject that stimulates a change of supply in the higher education market. For example, the recent 'Art Study Fervour' phenomenon in China reflects not only the newly 'oversubscribed' subject of art and design, but also the significant development that has occurred in expanding the supply in higher education. As introduced in Chapter One, the growth of institutions and faculties in art and design higher education has been prominent. Increasing numbers of places for art and design learning has been considered a strategy to meet the demand from society. This interaction between students/consumers and higher education institutions/providers illustrates the feature of supply and demand in market theory.

With this perspective, choice has become an outcome of consuming services and products in the specific context of an education market. The provision of products and marketing strategies by education providers shapes student choice in the first instance. The student, as a consumer, then undertakes explicit or

implicit decision-making, within the range of availabilities, based on personal perceptions, experience and influential factors from the external environment. In the higher education arena, massification has led not only to an expansion of participation, but also to a diversification of providers and products. Institutions in the higher education sector are operating in a more competitive recruitment market and need to be clear about the consumers they are trying to reach. This expansion stimulates institutional strategies on meeting students' needs in the process of choice-making. Internationalisation is another challenge for higher education institutions. The marketplace is not limited to a single region or country. The impact of internationalisation is felt both internally and externally, and again reflects the interaction of supply and demand but in an internationalised marketplace. In the first section of this chapter, changing patterns in the Chinese higher education marketplace will be addressed and the challenges in this complex and dynamic context will be added into the backdrop for us to understand better trends in the future.

Many students might be under the impression that they have made 'rational' choices regarding art and design higher education in China. For them, the 'rationality' cannot be separated from the conditions supporting or constraining their choice. It means a balance of, on the one hand, their academic achievement and the possibility of entry, and on the other hand their personal aspirations and family expectations. Academic achievement is deeply embedded in the value system of Chinese students and parents alike, reflected in the enthusiasm for sitting entrance examinations and entering into higher education. Compared with this ultimate goal, a student's self-interest and enjoyment are less

important. In the choice process, it has been noted that sources of information for Chinese students to access are not sufficient, and the experience supporting their choices is mostly exam-oriented. Essentially, in China, students are not yet considered as 'consumers', as the marketisation of higher education is still at an early stage. In section two, on the basis of the survey in this study, I will analyse the needs of prospective students for art and design higher education in China, and will offer a pilot strategy, as an alternative consideration, to enhance students' experience when they make their choice of institution and subject. The marketing theory is articulated in the strategy, which is therefore also a strategy to improve the quality and services offered by higher education institutions in order to meet the needs of their 'customers'.

In section three, as a conclusion of this thesis, a new understanding of the impacts of the current educational system, in particular the entry system of art and design higher education, on students' institutional and subject choice will be illustrated in order to highlight the original knowledge of this research, while in the meantime to shed a light on some directions for future research.

5.1 The Marketisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education

In China, the economy has achieved steady growth since the reform and open-up policy launched. According to China's central government website, Premier Li Keqiang indicated in his government work report that the gross domestic

product (GDP) reached 63.6 trillion *yuan* in 2014, an increase of 7.4%.¹⁸⁰ Although the growth of GDP is predicted to slow to 7% in 2015, the growth in economy is still marked compared with Western countries. Along with this growth, the demand for higher education has continued to boom. In 2013, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) reached 34.5%, i.e. 34.6 million students on campus, while the total number of regular higher education institutions was 2,491.¹⁸¹ With regard to the booming economy, social context and rapid expansion in the higher education sector, there are two major challenges that need to be addressed in this study, namely marketisation and internationalisation in the Chinese higher education marketplace.

Debates about the notion and application of marketisation in the education sector have never ceased since the extreme expansion in higher education in China. The notion of marketisation (*shichang hua*) was introduced from the West in the 1980s, along with the concept of an education market. As universities are mostly non-profit and in the public sector, the phrase 'quasi market' (Le Grand 1990) has been applied to describe its nature. It is distinct from the 'free market' due to government intervention in many aspects – for example, the number of places at universities, access, funding distribution and institutional management. Marketisation policies and mechanisms have therefore been introduced to the higher education sector in many countries. In favour of marketisation strategy,

¹⁸⁰ Source: <http://lianghui.people.com.cn/2015npc/n/2015/0305/c394298-26642056.html> [accessed on 6 March 2015].

¹⁸¹ Source: www.moe.edu.cn [accessed on 15 January 2015]. As I mentioned in Chapter One, GER in China was 9.76% in 1998 and the number of higher education institutions was 1022.

students may gain more benefits from the improvement of services and the variety of programme delivered in higher education institutions.

However, marketisation has also been misconceived as '*chanye hua*', literally industrialisation, though it has a closer meaning to commercialisation (*shangye hua*):¹⁸² in the Chinese language, marketisation and commercialisation have some semantic similarities. Opponents have argued that education has always been a 'special' sector and should not be industrialised. Seeking social justice has been its priority. In this area, the government plays a leading role in distributing funding and implementing control of the sector. According to these advocates, supply and pricing should be regulated by the government, rather than following market demand (Yuan 2003). The most influential voice came from the Ministry of Education. In 2007, at the press meeting of the Seventeenth National Congress, the former Minister Zhou Ji emphasised that the MoE had been implacably opposed to the implementation of commercialisation. As he explained,

The nature of education should be non-profit. Yet, with the massification in China, some operations in the higher education sector have been commercialised, for example the massive expansion in student intake and increasing tuition fee policy, when those strategies are designed with economic considerations.

Indeed, there have been many developments in relation to this phenomenon in the higher education sector. In line with the extreme expansion of student intake, the provision of places in higher education institutions has been increased. As

¹⁸² In contrast to the notion of marketisation, I have preferred the translation of 'commercialisation' to identify the nature of this phenomenon in this debate.

introduced in Chapter One, as one of the strategies to meet the needs of expansion, many comprehensive universities have elected to add new courses or to establish new departments or faculties in the field of art and design. In addition, the higher tuition fee charged for art and design courses, in comparison to other subjects, has been identified as a consideration. The funding from this fee can partially cover any shortage of resources from the government. The economic pattern in the operation has, to a large extent, been pointing to commercialisation. Compared with art institutions, pre-exam training schools have only one funding resource – students' tuition fees. Although private schools and colleges in China are registered as non-profit organisations, the operation in those training schools is definitely market-oriented and commercialised. The education programme and services provided by pre-exam training schools can be treated as their products for consumption, and the highest economic rewards have always been expected. This market is derived from the entry system of art institutions but has an independent operation system. Supervision from local government is much less evident than for public sector institutions. When a student chooses a pre-exam training school, the quality of service is their first priority. This idea of quality is mainly reflected in success rates in the art examination. I argue that the emphasis on drawing and painting techniques is in fact preventing potential innovation in the curriculum of art and design higher education. At the same time, it has created a self-perpetuating market in pre-exam training. Tutors at the pre-exam training schools are often graduates of the same institutions, and they promote their experience in pre-exam training and art examination to emphasise the importance of exam-led training. It creates an unhealthy process of entry. On the one hand, the pre-exam training industry

emerged in order to meet students' needs for taking art examinations. On the other hand, as a commercialised operation, it has significantly shaped students' perceptions and choices as regards higher education and furthermore had a great impact on universities' strategies. The entry system and art examination simply reproduce an overly narrow definition of quality, which is unsuited to the contemporary globalised context.

Despite lack of support from central government, there are some proponents who persist in affirming that marketisation is a separate concept and cannot be identified with commercialisation. These advocates argue that marketisation policies are aimed at improving efficiency, enhancing competitiveness and encouraging high quality programme in higher education institutions (Yang 2006). In China, it is still hard to say if there is, strictly speaking, a 'market' in the higher education sector. Governments have made great commitments to disseminating rules and regulations about funding, the entry system, curriculum, institutional management and so on. For example, the university entry system is centrally controlled. Both higher education institutions and students have very limited space to balance their demands. Their perceptions are significantly constrained by the unified entrance examination. Higher education institutions put principles of fairness and equality above the effectiveness of the selective mechanism. Criticism of the effectiveness and efficiency of the National College Entrance Examination has never ceased. The rationale of unified entrance examination is entirely opposed to the notion of a 'free' market. However, the entrance examination, like other aspects of China's education system, is changing. Reforms have been implemented. For example, as an experiment in

some regions, responsibility for examination content has been handed over from the Ministry of Education to provincial education and examination authorities.

Decentralisation appears to be a trend in the higher education sector.

Due to the current entry system, students are used to carefully calculating the advantages and disadvantages of the routes that lead them to higher education, and to making choices to ensure maximum benefit. If the higher education sector still cannot be an entirely free market from the government's perspective, then introducing some marketisation policies may be beneficial to both higher education institutions and students. The competition stimulated by marketisation policies encourages providers to pay more attention to their customers' needs and preferences. Thus, higher education institutions will not only focus on how many places they can offer; instead, ways to improve quality and service – for example, through interactions with potential students – will be the central concern. Meanwhile, as Jongbloed (2003) noted, 'In market-driven systems, individual choice behaviour is stressed. More emphasis is placed on the individual entity.' Reliable and adequate sources of information and enhanced experience at different stages in the choice process may change students' behaviour in choosing institution and subject. A pilot strategy will be discussed in the next section.

In spite of the challenges from marketisation policies, the internationalised marketplace in the higher education sector should be added into the dynamic context to understand better student choice in contemporary China. As one of the national strategies and policies, it has been fully supported by the central

government. Essentially there are two main approaches to undertaking internationalisation policies in the Chinese higher education sector. The first is through encouraging Chinese nationals to study abroad and, in turn, attracting foreign students to study in China. Dispatching students, teachers and scholars abroad was initiated from the late 1970s with the open-door policy and reform in China.¹⁸³ In order to strengthen economic development, academics were mostly selected from leading universities and sent to the West for further study, funded by the government. Meanwhile, a number of policies regarding encouraging returnees to devote themselves to socio-economic reconstruction for the country have launched since 1990. Many returnees have joined higher education institutions and taken positions at senior management level. In addition, separate from the state-funded students, the number of self-paid students has increased at an unprecedented rate. For example, in 2014 the total number of students abroad was 459,800, of which the percentage of self-paid students amounted to more than 92%.¹⁸⁴ Compared with Chinese students studying abroad, the number of international students in China is relatively small. For example, according to a statistic from the central government in 2009, the total number was 238,184 from about 190 countries.¹⁸⁵ A terminology of ‘cross-border tertiary education’¹⁸⁶ has been used to explain the policy in this

¹⁸³ From 1979, Deng Xiaoping signed a series of agreements with the US, UK, Germany, France and Japan respectively for student exchange programmes to take place within a few years. This strategy was added to basic state policies afterwards. The first formal policy, entitled *The Regulations of Sending Students Studying Abroad* was approved by the State Council in December 1986 to ensure the implementation of this policy. Source: China Education Diary, 31 December 2008.

¹⁸⁴ Source: www.moe.edu.cn [accessed on 3 February 2015].

¹⁸⁵ Source: http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2010-03/22/content_1562026.htm [accessed on 5 February 2015].

¹⁸⁶ This terminology was clearly defined at the OCED conference in 2003. Cross-border tertiary education refers to situations where students, teachers, programmes, institutions/providers or course materials cross national borders. For further reading, please see <http://www.oecd.org/edu/research/37477437.pdf> [accessed on 6 February 2015].

realm. Conceptually, internationalisation was mainly treated as concentrating on the cross-border mobility of individual students and scholars.

The other approach has been developed as a second step based on the achievement of the previous strategies. With the increasing demand for going abroad for study, Chinese universities started to deliver transitional or 'progression' programmes at undergraduate level, which were mostly accredited or accepted in cooperation with universities overseas, for example, 'two plus two' or 'three plus one' models. Under these models, students may stay in Chinese institutions for a couple of years and access to overseas Universities for top up courses. Meanwhile, Western universities have been allowed to open overseas campuses in China under the supervision of central government. University of Nottingham, Ningbo is a representative model, which works in partnership with a local private university, Zhejiang Wanli University. Through this approach, Chinese universities obtain not only an internationalised profile, but also a new perspective of a globalised educational market. From the students' point of view, joint programmes create more places in higher education and increase opportunities of university entry if their families are able to pay a higher tuition fee than for regular programmes. It has become a market-driven practice attracting numerous students.

Both approaches to the image of internationalisation thus inevitably impact on the local market in China. Student mobility has become a new issue for Chinese government. Many students with high academic attainments choose to go abroad for undergraduate and postgraduate studies, while the number of returnees is

still small-scale. Sitting globally recognised exams, such as IELTS, TOEFL and SATs, in order to apply to overseas universities, has become a phenomenon in China. In contrast, in the local market, the number of students sitting *gaokao* has declined. For example, in 2012 there were 9.15 million examinees sitting in *gaokao*, decreasing from 9.33 million in 2011.¹⁸⁷ This is not only because of a decrease in the age cohort; it also because of the increase in students going abroad. In this particular market, *gaokao* is no longer a barrier. The influential factors from the entry system and entrance examination play different roles when students decide to apply to overseas universities or joint programmes. Although a few students choose this pathway due to their low academic attainments and their lack of confidence in *gaokao*, it is believed that there is no direct influence from *gaokao* when they make their institutional and subject choice, unless they are applying to institutions, such as the University of Sydney, that use *gaokao* scores as a reference.

In the field of art and design, student numbers studying abroad have continually increased over the past ten years. However, the majority of overseas universities have different entry requirements from the Chinese system. For example, a portfolio of art works is required in the admissions process for most practice-based courses overseas. This has created a dilemma for Chinese students. The Chinese educational system does not prepare students for an internationalised art and design education environment. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the crucial role of sketching in Chinese art education has been continually acknowledged for

¹⁸⁷ Source: www.moe.edu.cn [accessed on 25 March 2015].

almost a century, and the impact of this tradition on the current examination in Chinese art and design higher education is clear. The preparation process for applying to Chinese art institutions has been concentrated on skills training. Lacking other practice and experience, it is therefore very difficult for students to prepare a full portfolio to submit. However, for those who have no relevant training in exam skills, or who have less interest or aptitude for realistic drawing, applying for overseas art institutions becomes an alternative. As a gateway to art and design higher education, the Chinese entry system and art examination might constrain the choice for prospective students who have other strengths, such as creativity, forcing them to turn to international institutions for further development. If the current entry system cannot be changed, it is obviously one of the critical challenges for Chinese art institutions to envisage the development of the new internationalised market and the competition derived from it.

In order to meet the entry requirements of art institutions in Western countries, attendance at portfolio preparation courses has become more and more popular in China. Apart from the challenges presented by the different selection criteria, students may find difficulties in choosing a subject for their university studies. In secondary education, there is no opportunity for students to enrich their knowledge about different subject areas and career development through their own experience. Faced with this uncertainty, some students choose to attend a one-year international foundation course in China. These foundation courses are mainly developed based on the Western mode, such as art and design foundation courses available in the UK. They present a special pathway for students to have a smooth transition and, at the same time, to experience various media and

subject areas within a certain period to discover personal interests and potential academic strengths. Experimental practice is emphasised within this introductory approach.

In fact, with the implementation of internationalisation policies, on the one hand the quality of teaching and learning and research in Chinese higher education institutions has been strengthened; international networks and dialogues have been built up by student and scholar mobility, as well as new perspectives of the higher education arena; and this inner development, together with raised internationalised profiles, enhances competitiveness among higher education institutions. On the other hand, such institutions in China have to face a more complex environment in connection with the global educational market, in which marketisation as a strategy has been widely acknowledged. Competition and consumer needs should be fully evident and understood in the changing and diverse educational marketplace, which has become one of the most challenging factors in the dynamic context of contemporary China.

5.2 The Importance of Student Experience in Choosing Art

In China, marketisation policies are at a critical turning point for application in the higher education arena. Places of higher education are still characterised by a significant excess of demand over supply, although the participation rate has increased substantially over the last decade. This market, as part of the public sector, is centrally managed, including admissions, administration and quality assurance. It is difficult for universities to be flexible about entry criteria and

thus to be more supportive to applicants in their choice process. Marketing-driven strategies are constrained in admissions activities. The art examination plays the role not only of gatekeeper to art and design higher education, but also special entrance to leading art institutions.

As discussed in the previous section, by emphasising competition in the educational marketplace, institutions and students become more aware of the consequences of their decisions (Jongbloed 2003). Reflected from the case study survey of CAA, only 19.2% of participants expressed that they were 'very satisfied' with their current subject, whilst 24.1% marked 'not satisfied'. All these respondents had experienced one-year foundation studies and had chances to change their subject areas at the end of the year. Inferring this fact from the evidence, CAA's policy on offering opportunities for adjusting subject areas did not solve the problem. If students' initial choices of subject are not well-informed or are only based on their personal interests, the three-year journey through undergraduate studies after their first year may not be an enjoyable experience. The consequences of their choice navigated by the entry system, to the participants on the one hand, may lead them to difficult situations in academic learning and career development. To the higher education institutions on the other hand, to optimise the utility of the current entry system to select potential talents is certainly one of the challenges in the on-going higher education reform.

Today, in China, it might not be possible to design an assessment which can evaluate a candidate's overall capability and aptitude. The current entrance examination only appears to be an alternative for practicality, or as a

compromise, to seek social justice. However, social justice in the entry system is idealistic, as influences from family members, social connections and schoolteachers, together with an individual's own educational experience, bring different social and cultural capital to choosers. The reproduction of social and cultural capital cannot represent an entire equality of outcome. For example, students' experience in different pre-exam training schools and their tutors' involvement may differ. Consequently, social justice cannot be ensured with the current entry system. In the current climax of mass education, with the expansion of higher education providing increased participation, the aspiration to social justice is inevitably undermined. How to ensure students' choices are well informed will be a central concern when government and higher education institutions undertake reforms and engage in new policies.

Among the influential factors on student choice, the influence of the entrance examination is obvious and distinctive. Facing the dilemma of the entry system, I argue, however, that there are still possible strategies to be developed to improve the experience of prospective students in choosing institution and subject. In the process of post-compulsory education choices, individual factors such as participant perceptions and attitudes are crucial when they make decisions, while parental direct involvement is less of a deciding factor. However, reflected in the case study survey, many students' motivation for choosing CAA and their particular subject area was found to have been misled by both sources of information and the entry system. Based on their respect to higher education, only 'official' information or channels of admissions can be trusted, whilst other accessible resources are anyway limited. Moreover, with lack of knowledge and

experience, choosing institution and subject is mainly reliant on advice from parents, peers and schoolteachers. Apart from problems with sources of information, as discussed in the previous chapter, utility maximisation of choice is one of the major motivations for those participating art and design higher education. Traditional cultural value has consistently shaped their decision-making behaviours – for example, pursuing a prestigious university's entry opportunity is always of top priority. However, in the mass-education era, systems of higher education will become diverse, rather than singularly the expansion of elite universities. Higher education providers will no doubt strengthen their roles in this huge segment market to meet the needs of varied student groups. Thus, comprehensive information about entry opportunities should be provided to enhance students' understanding of higher education and to help them make informed choices. A pilot strategy to enhance student choice in favour of art and design higher education in China will be discussed mainly in the following two areas: adequate and accessible information, and exploratory practice.

As Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) noted,

Understanding the sources of information that young people access to facilitate their choices of higher education is important both for potential applicants and for institutions. From the applicants' perspective, this can enable key information channels to be used to ensure information reaches them in the right form in the right time to enhance their choice process. From institutions' point of view, the same process can ensure their marketing and promotional strategies are enhanced in a competitive arena, and, at the very least, failure to use the

right channels in the right way will disadvantage their performance in the market place.

In the questionnaire survey, student access to facilitate their choices in institution and subject was investigated. Information channels were presented in different groups: publication sources, institution website, word of mouth and secondary publication sources (Diagram 9). Publication sources are traditionally seen as the most official and reliable channel to be referenced when making applications. In China, all the candidates who sit *gaokao* are given a guidance handbook of university application preliminaries, which is published by Provincial Education and Examination Authorities. Updated admissions information and course lists for each institution are included. Students may request prospectuses of particular institutions for further information, such as overall introductions to the institution and its entry requirements. The prospectus and the handbook were respectively listed as the second and fourth most important channels in the survey. With the development of information technology, most institutions have also built up their own websites to share campus information in teaching and research. Students can also access a separate webpage of admissions, which is usually managed by the admissions office, to search for information and official notices. However, only 53% of respondents in the survey of CAA thought the website of the target institution was an important channel and used it for an information search. The handbook, prospectus and university website are commonly treated as 'official information' for higher education admissions. Students and parents also use secondary publication sources for reference through online and offline media. Admissions

information in those media is quoted or interpreted from first-hand sources. For example, *Meikao wang* is a website that provides comprehensive information about art examinations and admissions for art institutions.¹⁸⁸ Interestingly, these websites are usually run by private companies. A number of commercial advertisements for pre-exam training strikingly appear on the front page of such websites, together with art examination policies. Because of the commercial image, the reliability of the information becomes of concern. Thus, secondary resources have lagged behind other channels in the survey.

¹⁸⁸ www.mkao.cn. This website was set up in 2009 and has become one of the most popular information websites as regards art examination and admissions for art and design higher education.

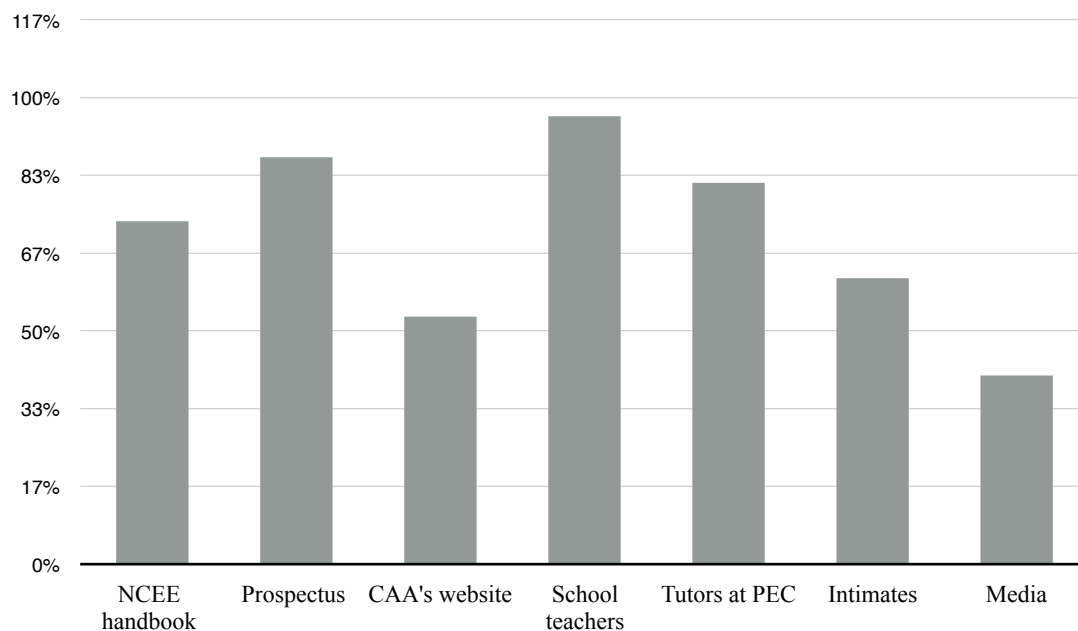


Diagram 9: Importance of information channels in institution and subject choice

With the lack of a formal advisor's position in secondary education, information from intimates, including parents and peers or schoolteachers, becomes more important, although information from these kinds of channels is usually incomprehensive and can be personal. Nonetheless such channels are much easier to access compared with others. Reflected in the survey, schoolteachers were the most influential channels, agreed by 96% of participants. Third in the ratings was the channel of tutors at pre-exam training schools. Information from intimates was considered to be less important than information from either schoolteachers or tutors. Teachers, in particular, seem to be most highly regarded as having the experience to provide information and suggestions regarding university entry.

Clearly, students are used to acquiring information that is easily available. In many cases, their choices are influenced by either conscious or unconscious

preconceived information from people around them. It is clear that accessing effective sources of information is an important component of student experience. I propose that there are two main means to enhance student experience in choosing art and design higher education.

First, an effective support and guidance structure in delivering information needs to be considered and undertaken. Publication sources and university promotion channels are considered weak through this research. Currently these channels provide fragments of information, but they reveal a lack of management and coordination. In China, there are 31 independent art institutions and 13 schools of art and design in comprehensive universities that can deliver institutional art examinations and set entry requirements based on national instructions. Details of admissions and art examination information for those 44 institutions are generally released separately. Students have to collect all the data from different publication sources. Apart from general guidance in university application, other channels of collecting this information mainly consist of schoolteachers, tutors at pre-exam training schools, peers or Internet. Essentially, within a closed system, students are used to accepting information passively and making and/or changing their decisions instantly without an exploratory approach. In addition, there is a pressing need to recognise the risk that students who cannot rely on social and cultural capital are poorly informed in the choice process. Although a centralised source of information may guarantee delivery of some essential information, it cannot effectively cover or provide every detail when students have particular interests or a need for further specific information. Ways to avoid information asymmetry and to

provide full support for all applicants should be considered by policy-makers. Adopting appropriate marketing strategies will go some way to ensuring the equality of sufficient information being obtainable by every potential student.

The following strategy might be considered as a practical example. In order to cover a wide range of potential candidates and to deliver information through immediate forms of communication, information technology could be applied, for example through websites and social media. These types of resource are not constrained by location or timing. Students may subscribe and search for news, announcements and enrolment activities by easily using computers or mobile devices. The resources could be centrally managed by a third-party organisation that is authorised by national administration. Apart from admissions and art examination information, introductions to each institution, teaching and learning environment, facilities, employability of graduates and rates of student satisfaction could be included to meet the needs of prospective students. This strategy would largely avoid information asymmetry in the process of choice. Art institutions, as service providers, would be presented together in the light of consumer demand. This approach would help students make their institution and subject choice in a way that is comparable no matter what the individual's circumstances. Considering the infeasibility of arranging full-time careers staff in every secondary school, a virtual career advisory service through ICT seems to be more practical. Students could discuss institution and subject choices and future directions with online careers advisors. Frequently asked questions could be noted and listed online for other students' reference. With the function of

online consultancy, students' attitudes towards choosing art and design could change if the guidance were effective.

Secondly, as direct contact sources, such as campus visits and career consultancy, are largely absent in sources of information that Chinese students can access, some feasible recruitment strategies of institutions should be reviewed to find other possibilities at operation level. Campus visits have traditionally been an important recruitment activity internationally. Institutions take the opportunity to present an image of the campus and programmes to prospective students and at the same time to interact with them to answer questions face to face. However, as indicated previously, due to the dramatically increasing number of applicants in China, it is not possible to arrange such campus visits at Chinese art institutions like CAA. There is no department in the administrative structure charged with hosting student and parent visits, nor do such art institutions have marketing departments.

As reflected in the focus group interview, many participants mentioned that they had not been fully informed about the content of the course that they had chosen. Indeed, information regarding course details or programme specifications is very difficult to obtain from publication sources or institutional websites in the choice process. Plus, with a lack of direct contact sources, students may even confuse titles of courses and find themselves unable to link up with planned future developments or career directions. Again, if information and communication technology can be applied, art institutions may open a so-called 'virtual campus'. Through web pages, applications and software, institutions could influence

students' university choices by communicating detailed information concerning programmes and ideology through online delivery of studio visits, current and past students' work, teachers' recommendations, graduation shows, lecture videos, alumni achievements, etc. In order to apply this approach, universities should understand well their 'consumers' preferences and then design customer-oriented marketing strategies to improve students' first-hand experience of the entry system. Moreover, many students make their choice based mainly on their views of the reputation of educational providers, of which they might have only some rough ideas from informal channels. Provision of more detailed information may help to avoid poor decision-making.

It is clear that websites and social media can be of great help in providing relevant information to choosers today in China, particularly with the huge numbers of applicants. However, it has been observed that essential information in relation to subject choice has been almost completely absent from either official websites or other media such as CAA's newly developed official Wechat application,¹⁸⁹ which could be the most effective interactive platform for disseminating information and receiving enquiries from prospective students. The lack of any introduction to subject studies reflects the confidence of institutions such as CAA, who receive thousands of applications annually; or, in other words, arrogance, with no regard to any foreseeable recruitment crisis or any competition, whether national or international. But this particular kind of confidence, or arrogance, I argue, overlooks the student experience of choosing a

¹⁸⁹ Wechat has quickly become the most popular form of social media in China, since international sites are largely blocked in the country, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. It has been recorded that, as of 2014, Wechat had attracted more than 600 million users.

subject area, and consequently undermines the quality of learning and teaching. CAA's current website and Wechat have been utilised as decorative 'façades' to promote themselves as one of the leading art institutions, or as propaganda instruments to respond to China's political agenda. As discussed previously, highlighting the prestigious reputation of the institute will certainly meet the expectations of the participants, and this pride must continue. However, without appropriate introductions to subject areas, although the Academy might attract even more students to apply in the future through such a political (or cultural) strategy, it does not necessarily attract the 'right' students. There are always ways to set up platforms or mechanisms to provide sufficient information, as I have suggested. The problem is not one of practicality; it is, rather, the way in which the importance of student choice can be better understood and addressed.

Enhancing student experience in accessing adequate sources of information may increase informed choices as regards higher education. Yet, as art and design undergraduate studies require a great deal of individual practice, self-interest remains one of the key drivers for this learning mode. Practice is crucial for students to explore personal interests and strengths when making their subject choice. However, in China, student practice is limited to certain areas, for example drawing and painting, before they enter university. In addition, as has been identified in the previous chapter, there is the influence of the art examination as a single mechanism to select students based on their preparation and practice. As the unique preparatory approach, pre-exam training programmes offer exam-led training and discipline, rather than a systematic and functional preparation for undergraduate studies. Arguably, in China, the current

selection system, *gaokao*, and secondary education have created a form of examination preparation that is out of step with the competition in an internationalised education market. Due to the narrowness of this preparatory approach, and the emphasis of the elite-technical training, it fails to maximise the breadth of student abilities.

Lack of a wide range of experiments and progression, it is hard to claim that subject choice is an area of informed decision-making. Unlike in the UK, the foundation year in China is contained within the structure of four-year undergraduate studies. Choosing a subject comes prior to the art examination and the foundation year. There is neither a chance for students to recognise the common principles and distinctive characteristics of disciplines, nor to implement a learning and practice process to explore their skills and concepts of art and design higher education, let alone career direction. Considering the current educational system in China, it is not yet possible simply to move the foundation year out and isolate it from undergraduate studies. To acknowledge the multi-functionality of the foundation year and to refigure the course structure and learning outcomes may become a way out.

Thus, as a second broad area of this pilot strategy, ways to help students improve personal understanding and explore self-interest, in particular acquiring essential skills for art and design undergraduate studies, will be discussed in two stages, namely the pre-application stage and the foundation year stage.

In the pre-application stage, the majority of students are studying at pre-exam training schools. As I introduced in Chapter Three, the arrangement of teaching and learning is very intensive during this phase. With the pressure of the art examination, it may not be possible for schools to add much training in other essential abilities for art and design practice. However, the introductory course in relation with progression opportunities could be organised within the pre-exam training process. For example, students could have the option of attending workshops, lectures and seminars and going on educational trips for various subject areas, to be delivered by pre-exam training schools. This would be equivalent to the 'exploratory' stage in many foundation programmes in the UK. It provides students with an introduction to techniques, processes of practice and essential knowledge that are relevant to the area of specialism. Students' understanding and experience gained throughout the courses, together with adequate sources of information, could identify their personal preferences for future study and inform their decision-making positively.

As this strategy is proposed in the context of the current entry system, a policy of fair access is still a prerequisite to be considered. In the case of the art examination operating as usual, students' experience of attending introductory courses could be added as a compulsory reference requested by art institutions. For example, students could get credits for various modules, which they would provide when they made their applications. With this policy, private schools would doubtless manage their teaching and facility resources and offer the introductory course to their students. As discussed, many teaching staff at pre-exam training schools are lecturers or graduates from leading art institutions.

Their specialist knowledge and experience should be enough to help students form some ideas about subject areas and explore their interests for future study. This has already been found in some cases of participants attending focus group discussions, as I mentioned in the previous chapter. However, only when it is formalised as an institutional policy or strategy can every single candidate benefit from this approach.

In the foundation year stage, for example at CAA, as long as students are enrolled into art and design institutions they are required to receive a great deal of skills training in order to reform their habitual ways of drawing learnt on their pre-exam training courses. Drawing ability is still at the core of teaching and learning at this stage, as it is regarded as an essential skill for observation, recording, analysis, speculation, development, visualisation and communication for art and design practice. However, with the implementation of the policy of 'Broader Subjects Admission', students are now allowed to choose a specific subject area for undergraduate studies at the end of the foundation year. It brings great flexibility to students if they only have to decide a broad direction – for example, design – at the point of entry. Their experience during the foundation year should, certainly, be of equal importance for subject choice. A broad-based study of art and design, learning generic knowledge and skills, should be provided at this stage as a preparatory approach, in line with personal direction and interest. If the current course structure can be adjusted, I suggest the reinforcement of contextual studies, studio-based projects and integrated projects for new entrants to develop their contextual and critical awareness of visual imagery and to enhance their capacity for learning, communicating and presenting. These

projects could be carried out according to teacher briefs or they could be self-directed. Students can then identify their strengths and personal senses of direction through a systematic exploration. Some perceived knowledge about subjects might change accordingly.

Aside from the course structure, facilities and resources should be shared and linked up to improve students' learning experience. Currently, the foundation programme at CAA, for example, has relatively little connection with other departments. Teachers from other departments usually give introduction lectures at the end of the year. Even in the same campus, there is neither communication between foundation students and others, nor arrangement for foundation students to use studios and other facilities in various departments for their visual practice. Teaching and learning is indeed an isolated operation at foundation department. In addition, possible field trips to workplaces in relevant industries would help to enhance students' understanding of career directions, and to adjust their previous choices if necessary accordingly.

Generally, in the art and design sector, a student's experience plays a crucial role in shaping their motivations as regards educational choice, in particular subject and career choice. In this study, I propose a pilot strategy that ranges from enhancing information provision to improving students' learning experience at the pre-university stage and in the foundation year. This strategy is designed on the basis of the research findings on students' motivation and the current system of Chinese art and design higher education. These alternatives are important for current developments and reforms in higher education. For policy-makers and

practitioners, the strategy sheds light on the importance of the quality of student experience. How to enhance student experience as regards educational choice in China's context is still an open-ended discussion. In the dynamic marketplace of higher education, marketing and admission strategies should be reviewed and adjusted simultaneously by government and institutions to help students make informed choices for their studies and future career destinations.

In China, realistic sketching are seen in general almost an 'omnipotent' skill of practice as the primary base to further develop any artistic or design studies and even careers. In the international context of contemporary art and design education, this understanding is no longer relevant. Student experience of practice through these two stages as I suggested needs to be designed to physically perceive the future subject area in addition to the enhanced and updated information.

5.3 Conclusion

This research developed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the current Chinese context and sets up an original perspective to investigate the entry system for art and design higher education in China. It, on the one hand, explores national policies on the development of art and design higher education and reveals the political intervention through the development of institutional strategies of student intake. On the other hand, it builds up a perceptual model to critically examine students' perceptions and experiences on educational choices with regard to institution and subject study in this particular transition period.

The influential factors – in particular, the educational system and art examination – in shaping students' motivation, have been revealed and analysed, in order to develop new understandings of student experience, institutional strategy and art education in China, with its impacts within the social and cultural context.

The concept of 'gatekeeping the art' refers to not only a barrier for potential students to choose art institutions but also a strategy for art institutions to select 'talented' students from a large pool. To some extent, it has stimulated both supply and demand in art and design higher education sector in China. From the institutional perspective, ensuring a fair access has become a priority in conducting art examinations for student intake. Envisaging huge numbers of applicants, a simplified and standardised art exam becomes the only option. The realistic drawing skill, as an essential ability for all forms of art and design practice, is commonly accepted in art education arena. The central role of sketching has been kept in every historical stage of art education development. However, this technical based examination has generated an unexpected exam-led training on the one hand. On the other, the ideology derived from the examination affects the teaching and learning inevitably in art and design education, in particular, student choice of institutions and subject areas.

In this research, the key influential determinants in student choice of art and design higher education have been examined through a model with three interactive components, namely external environment, individual factors and educational system. Student, as a chooser, may have personal aspiration or

attitude on choosing institution and subject area. Those perceptions are clearly formed and shaped by many factors, such as socio-economic environment and family involvement. For example, as one of the most important concepts, the traditional cultural value of 'academic success' has an inherited impact on the perception of students, peers, parents and schoolteachers. Consequently, amongst the sources of information, to many students, advice from schoolteachers or tutors at pre-exam training schools appear to be most valuable, especially, to introduce 'shortcut' and 'tips' to the success in the exams. To optimise utility or benefit from an educational choice has been always one of the key considerations. When the art examination can provide a special route to higher education, art and design are favoured beyond personal aspiration. Students' academic interests and their future employability are less considered in comparison with the pass rate in art examinations towards higher education, in particular, those well-known universities including prestigious art and design institutions. Choosing art is an alternative and, very possibly, an efficient way to knock on the door.

The singular student admission process through art exams has been seen as problematic not only by those who operate a different entry system outside China, but also by Chinese art institutions themselves. This mechanical entry system mechanical is designed to select, ironically, students who can be creative and who have diverse capabilities and possibilities for art and design practice. I argue that the development and execution of such an entry mechanism has created two significant impacts on student experiences of both choice and higher learning in art and design.

The first impact can be explored through the relationships between student personal interest and subject choice, and between their art practice before undergraduate studies and during higher learning in art and design. In consequence, these two pairs of relationships clearly present problems for future career development. In China, a personal interest in art and/or design, in general, refers to the ability to *huahua*, or, in English, 'to draw and to paint'. For many, the capability of *huahua* can be learned by individuals themselves or can be introduced by their proud parents, as a 'hobby' in addition to academic studies at primary and secondary education level. In terms of a 'hobby', in comparison with other 'orthodox' subjects, such as Chinese, English and mathematics, it is generally considered less serious or important. *Huahua* becomes merely a bonus to top up a student's ability to enter higher education, or indeed a useful form of back-up to create an alternative, or even a shortcut, if needed, for access. This implies that, despite the numerous after-school art clubs available at pre-university stage, art education and creative practice in China have still not been recognised as one of the important subject areas that are believed to connect to a prosperous career, but are instead viewed as secondary, or as something additional to what should be done. In general, the understanding of art education is usually attached to the notion of *huahua*, and this personal interest forms an overall background to the process of subject choice. In the contemporary context of education, however, art and design do not necessarily mean only *huahua*, i.e., drawing and painting, or are not necessarily even relevant to it. This becomes particularly problematic when those art and design subjects are not properly introduced prior to the choice-making. Specific subjects

in the field of art and design studies are, in fact, not chosen through the practical experience of *huahua* but are, rather, largely based on a thorough consideration of the entry requirement and the mechanism of art examination. Personal interest appears only to be indicative rather than decisive in the process of choosing subjects. Furthermore, I argue, the pre-exam training, propagated by the entry system, purely to develop *huahua* techniques only for realistic visualisation, does not construct a necessary introduction to higher education; on the contrary, it develops a kind of ‘inappropriate’ confidence to study certain subjects, and, more crucially, creates a critical gap of learning experiences before and after the exam. Transformations or translations of drawing and painting skills to some subjects – for example, fashion or interior design – are required to extend the participants’ pre-exam learning to their undergraduate studies. The practice of *huahua* with the relevant exam-oriented training before university functions as a bridge to transport participants to their art and design higher learning, but it is a broken one. It is a false bridge, looking from a distance as if it will help. The crisis is only realised when the actual journey is experienced.

The second significant impact is potentially and significantly on China’s art and design higher education in general. In the Chinese educational system, there is always a standard – sometimes an idealistic one – to promote the notion of ‘education equality’ in many aspects; in particular, in the process of admissions for higher education. Obviously, participants are encouraged to be ‘distinctive’ through the exercises of art exams, which consist of the practice of drawing or painting exactly the same subject (Figure 9). Paradoxically, candidates are asked to be ‘distinctive’ within conformity, or to be ‘different’ within the ‘same’. The

'same' is also shaped by a set of criteria, including an adherence to the quality of realism, and, more importantly, the institutional taste that I discussed earlier. The criteria set for the art exam of realistic drawing and painting are essentially idealistic. The participants are encouraged to approach the criteria, getting more and more closer, infinitively, but it seems never possible for them to seamlessly reach the criteria. Therefore, 'distinctiveness' can only be judged when a student's work is considered to be closest to that very 'standard'. Excellent work in the exam can only 'symbolise' but never 'represent' the 'standard', which itself remains elusive. Fatally, this formulation continues on to the students' learning experience in higher education. Even when participants go into any specific subject area, there are still 'standards' and institutional tastes for them to pursue or to conform to. This is in fundamental opposition to the essence of art and design education, which is essentially grounded in creativity, innovativeness and criticality. Beyond the area of this study, further research is needed to discuss such issues in China's art and design higher education, for example, the 'standard of art', including the notion of 'institutional taste' or ideas relating to the traditional Chinese notion of 'following the masters'.



Figure 9: Examination papers of colouring portraits

The new knowledge this study is developed through an innovative perspective, which was originated from the cultural, social and political contexts of entrance examination in China, and which can stimulate specific investigations to Chinese art education in the international arena. Apart from the study of the impact of art examination on Chinese students' choice of art and design higher education, there are still some other dimensions or directions derived from the entry system for future research. For example, first, at the pre-university stage, how has the art education in secondary education been influenced by the entry system, and especially, when student experience on experimenting various media and techniques at this period is largely absent? Secondly, during higher education, this study indicates an even more crucial problem. With the standardised criteria required in art examination, there has been a danger that student's individuality can be obliterated from the exercise of the examination and daily practice for exam preparation. Thirdly, It is often inferred that student

choice of a subject area, higher learning and career development should be linear. At the post-university time, choosing art and design higher education, as a specific area, indicates an explicit direction for career development. Identifying influences from the educational system on students' career development – in particular, their experience and the consequence of their educational choice – requires further exploration and investigation in future research.

It is also anticipated that this study provides not only a significant reference to students, parents, educational practitioners and policymakers, but also insight and inspiration for future research. Although policy and strategy for higher education entry are made necessarily based on the value judgment as well as practicality, student educational choices are vital for their higher education experience and for their career destinations. Policymakers need to effectively address the influential factors that affect students' decision making to participate in art and design education and make them become fully aware of the influences derived from the current entry system as a matter of urgency. On the one hand, universities should entirely understand their 'consumers' preferences and then design customer-oriented marketing strategies to improve students' first-hand experience in the entry system, including both preparatory and introductory approaches in the transition period. On the other hand, this research will benefit Chinese students as higher education participants and their parents when they make educational choices at pre-university stage. At the starting point of the new economy of creative industry in China, this study generates a different voice. It critically reflects on the 'fairness' of the entry system, the appropriateness of art examination, and ultimately the prosperity of the development of Chinese art

and design education. A new policy for 'gatekeeping' the arts is to be developed for the future of China's art and design higher education, and more importantly, for the new generations of creative individuals to come.

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LIST OF SELECTED INTERVIEWEES

The following selected interviews were conducted and translated into English by the author (unpublished), listed by the names of interviewees.

Professor An Bin, 安滨, former head of the Foundation Department of China Academy of Art, interviewed on 8 May 2008 and 9 November 2008, Hangzhou.

Cao Shu, 曹树, lecturer at the Foundation Department of China Academy of Art, interviewed on 14 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Professor Cao Xiaoyang, 曹晓阳, director of the Foundation Department of China Academy of Art, interviewed on 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Chen Danqing, 陈丹青, a scholar in China, interviewed on 23 November 2005, Shanghai.

Professor Guan Huaibin, 管怀斌, art examiner and lecturer of China Academy of Art, interviewed on 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Li Hongfeng, 李红峰, deputy principal of San Tai Shan Art School, interviewed on 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Professor Mick Durman, former Dean of the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, Birmingham City University, 10 March 2010, Birmingham.

Qi Yongchang, 齐永昌, former Director of the Administrative Office in Shanghai Municipal Education Examinations Authority, interviewed on 31 March 2013, Shanghai.

Professor Song Jianming, 宋建明, vice president of China Academy of Art, interviewed on 20 February 2006 and 21 October 2012, Hangzhou.

Song Zhen, 宋振, lecturer of China Academy of Art, interviewed on 11 November 2008, Hangzhou.

Professor Tom Jones, former head of Foundation of Birmingham City University Institute of Art and Design, interviewed on 22 June 2007, Birmingham.

Professor Zhu Di, 诸迪, former director of the Administrative and Recruitment Office of Central Academy of Fine Arts, interviewed on 23 June 2005, Beijing.

Professor Wang Zan, 王赞, vice president of China Academy of Art, interviewed on 13 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Weng Zhenyu, 翁震宇, former director of the Administrative and Recruitment Office of China Academy of Art, 27 October 2005, 18 May 2007, 18 May 12 November 2013 and 12 March 2014, Hangzhou.

Xiao Jia, 肖佳, founding principal of Bai Taling Art School, interviewed on 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Yang Jianlin, 杨健陵, deputy principal of Wu Yue Art School, interviewed on 12 November 2013, Hangzhou.

Zhang Jianping, 张建平, principal of Huashan Art School, interviewed on 21 August 2013, Shanghai.

LIST OF CHINESE TERMS

bagu 八股. Literally the eight-legged essay.

ba da meiyuan 八大美院. Top eight art academies.

baimiao 白描. The traditional line drawing.

bairi weixin 百日维新. The Hundred Day's Reform.

ban zhuren 班主任. Teacher who is in charge of a class.

Beijing Meishu Xuexiao 北京美术学校. Beijing Fine Art School

Beiyang Gongxue 北洋公学. Beiyang Public School.

Beiyang Shifan Xuetang 北洋师范学堂. Beiyang Normal School.

celun 策论. A type of essay of political discourse.

chanye hua, shangye hua 商业化. Commercialisation or industrialisation.

da er quan 大而全. Large and comprehensive.

da yuejin 大跃进. The Great Leap Forward.

daikao tuan 带考团. Art examination tours, organised by private bodies or pre-exam training schools, which provide a comprehensive service, arranging everything for candidates during the examination season.

dalei zhaosheng 大类招生. The so-called 'Broader Subjects Admission' Policy.

dazhong de wenhua jiaoyu 大众的文化教育. Mass Cultural Education.

dazhong hua jiaoyu 大众化教育. Mass education.

fenliu 分流. Distributary Policy.

gaokao 高考. The National College Entrance Examination (NCEE).

gaokao yimin 高考移民. National College Entrance Examination immigrants, refers to groups of families who relocate to big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, in order to give their children an advantage in the competitive arena of the NCEE.

gaoxiao zhaosheng jihua 高校招生计划. Student recruitment plans or quotas for higher education institutions.

gong nong bin xuesheng 工农兵学生. Worker-peasant-soldier students.

gongyi meishu 工艺美术. Arts and crafts.

gongyi tu'an 工艺图案. Crafts and design.

gongping gongzheng gongkai 公平公正公开. Fairness, Equity and Transparency.

Guoli Beiping Yishu Zhuanke Zuexiao 国立北平艺术专科学校. The National Beiping Art College.

Guoli Yishu Yuan 国立艺术院. National Academy of Art.

guo you ban diao 国油版雕. The abbreviations of four main art subjects institutionally and traditionally recognised in China, respectively mean Chinese painting, oil painting, printmaking and sculpture.

Guoli Hangzhou Yishu Zhuanke Xuexiao 国立杭州专科艺术学校. The National Hangzhou Academy of Art.

guohua 国画. The traditional Chinese painting.

gaoji hui 高级灰. Sophisticated colour grey.

guomei hui 国美灰. CAA Grey, referring to the Academy's perceived preference for greyish tone.

huikao 会考. The High School Graduation Examination.

huahua 画画. Literally both drawing and painting.

huaxue 画学. Chinese Painting.

huayuan 画院. Painter societies or academies, which had two branches within the Imperial court for the purpose of recruiting, training and producing art.

jiegou sumiao 结构素描. Structural sketching.

jingying shi jiaoyu 精英式教育. Elite education.

jiujinruxue 就近入学. Catchment Based Approach.

jiaxiao 技校. Vocational School.

kaoqian ban 考前班. Pre-Exam Training Schools.

keju 科举. The Civil Service Examination System.

kuan koujing hou jichu 宽口径厚基础. To broaden the entrance process and to strengthen art foundation studies.

liangduanshi jiaoxue 两段式教学. Two-stage tuition

Liangjiang Shifan Xuetao 两江师范学堂. Liangjiang Normal School.

pianmian zhuiqiu shengxuelu 片面追求升学率. Pursuing the success of NCEE unilaterally

putong gaodeng xuexiao zhuanye mulu 普通高等学校专业目录. Directory of Subjects in Regular Higher Education Institutions

putong gaoxiao 普通高校. The regular higher education institutions.

renke laoshi 任课老师. Subject teacher.

sanxiao sheng 三校生. Students of vocational schools, technical schools and Schools for Skilled Workers.

secai 色彩. Colouring.

shanzhai 山寨. A popular piece of modern terminology and related phenomena in recent years i.e. referring to a cultural value of imitation, pastiche and fakery.

Shanghai Meizhuan 上海美专. Shanghai College of Fine Art.

Shanghai Tuhua Meishu Yuan 上海图画美术院. Shanghai Painting and Art Institute.

Shanghai Youhua Yuan 上海油画院. Shanghai Oil Painting Institute.

Shanghai Zhongxi Tuhua Xuexiao 上海中西图画学校. Shanghai Sino-Western Drawing and Painting School.

shehui sheng 社会生. Literally 'social student', refers to those who have not been through the educational path of senior secondary school, but taken vocational educations instead.

sheng tong kao 省统考. The provincial examination.

shinian dongluan 十年动乱. A ten-year period of turbulence, the official description of the Cultural Revolution.

sishu 私塾. Private education in Imperial period.

shifa ziran 师法自然. Painting directly from nature.

shiwu jihua 十五计划. The Tenth Five-Year Plan.

shuangren jian 双刃剑. A double-edged sword.

sumiao 素描. Sketching.

suzhi jiaoyu 素质教育. All-around education.

Tushanwan 土山湾. A place at Xujiahui in Shanghai

waiyanshi fazhan 外延式发展. Extensional development.

waqian 挖潜. Potentiality exploitation.

weipei fei 委培费. Commissioned training fee.

wenhua chuangyi chanye 文化创意产业. The cultural and creative industry.

wenhua shengchanli 文化生产力. Cultural productive forces.

xiao kao 校考. The institutional examination.

xian xin sumiao 线性素描. Linear sketching.

xihua 西画. Western-style painting.

Xin Qingnian 新青年. The journal of New Youth.

Yi kao re 艺考热. Art Study Fervour.

yi meiyu dai zongjiao 以美育代宗教. Substituting religions with art education.

yishu 艺术. The modern concept of *yishu* (art) was imported from the West by Japanese scholars, became part of modern Chinese terminology and expressed a modern concept of art.

yishu diantang 艺术殿堂. Palace of Art.

yingshi jiaoyu 应试教育. Examination- oriented education system.

yituzhi 艺徒制. An apprenticeship in traditional art education system.

yangguang zhaosheng pingtai 阳光招生平台. Sunny admission platform.

yuanxi tiaozheng 院系调整. A countrywide adjustment of colleges and universities.

Zhongyang Gongyi Meiyuan 中央工艺美院. The Central Academy of Arts and Crafts.

zexiao fei 择校费. The choice fee for a particular school entry.

zonghe yishu 综合艺术. Comprehensive arts.

zhigao 职高. Vocational high school.

zhongzhuan 中专. Secondary technical school.

zhongdian zhongxue 重点中学. Key public schools, equivalent to UK's grammar schools.

zhuanke 专科. Three-year specialised college.

zhunkao zheng 准考证. Examination Attendance Card.

zhua liangtou 抓两头. Gripping Two Ends Approach.

zhuanye hege zheng 专业合格证. Pass certificate in art examination.

zhuanye kao 专业考. *Zhuanye kao*, in English, actually means 'professional skills examination'. It has been translated into 'art examination' on the basis of its content, function and impact.

Appendix 1

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY*

Part One:

Personal Information

Surname _____

Gender Male Female

First Name _____

Year of Birth _____

Branch of Foundation _____

What qualification had you achieved?

- High School Students (or equivalent qualification)
- Previous High School Graduates (High Examination Review Class Students)
- Bachelor Students or Associated Degree Students

What's your parents' educational background?

Father:

- Technical Secondary School or less
- Secondary School
- College Diploma
- Bachelor Degree
- Bachelor or above

Which type of secondary school have you been studied?

- Ordinary High School with Specialisation in Art and Design
- Ordinary High School
- Vocational School for Art and Design

Mother:

- Technical Secondary School or less
- Technical Secondary School
- Associated Degree
- Bachelor Degree
- Bachelor or above

Does your parents' profession in related to art and design field?

- Yes
- No

Which art institutions did you apply for?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Note: Please complete the Part 5 if you are currently studying at High Education Institutions.

Part Two:

Intention and Motivation on Applying Art and Design

Please rate the following terms based on your perspective in relation to the phenomenon of ‘Art Study Fervour’ in China.

	Not agree			Strongly agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Although ‘Art Study Fervour’ is a phenomenon in China, ‘Choosing Art’ will be a kind of shortcut to higher education for students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Choosing a good art institution is more important than choosing a subject.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. It is not easy to get a job with art and design background and qualification.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please rate the following factors that affect your choice on art and design higher education studies (your motivation).

	No affection			Strongly affect	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Lower criteria of cultural examination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Personal interests and practice experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Career development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Lifestyle of being artists and designer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Parents’ expectation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Recommendation from friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. School teacher’s advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Educational background towards art and design studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Expansion of higher education in art and design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Promotion of art institutions (Brochure, website, fairs, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Pre-exam training course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part Three:

Choosing Institutions and Subjects

How did you get the information of applying institutions that you chose?

- Guidance of applying universities and colleges
- Prospectus of art institutions
- Website of art institutions
- School teachers
- Teachers of Pre-exam training course
- Parents and friends
- Press medias
- Educational fairs

Do you think you have got enough information to support your choice?

- Not enough
- Basically enough
- Fairly enough

When did you have intention to choose art and design as your future studies?

- During primary school
- During junior school
- During high school

Which subject area will you choose? (What's your subject area?)

- Fine art
- Graphic design
- Textual and fashion design
- Industrial design
- Exhibition design
- Photography
- Animation
- Advertising design
- Multi-media design
- Architecture and interior design
- Illustration
- Web games design
- Others

What's your career plan after graduation?

- In relation to your subject area
- Other art and design related area
- Not related at all
- Not sure

Please rate the factors that affect your choice on your subject area.

	No affection			Strongly affect	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. A hot subject with better future career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. On the basis of its ranking within national art institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Course structures and faculties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Personal experience on the practice in this subject area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. University reputation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Less applicants and less competition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Parental expectation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part Four:

Entrance Examination and Pre-Exam Training Course

Please rate the following terms based on your perspective in relation to the entrance examination and preparatory approaches.

	No affection			Strongly affect	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. It is quite necessary to attend a pre-exam training course to achieve your target university entry.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. It is trainable technique for sketching and colouring within 3-6 months to meet the requirement of technical examination.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Sketching and colouring are basic skills for all forms of art and design education.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. You will not get a higher score if you can't prepare the examination to meet the typical requirement by the institution you applied.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you attended the Pre-exam training course?

- Yes No

How import did the Pre-exam Training Course help you apply for your undergraduate studies?

- Not at all
 A little bit
 Not that important
 Fully support

What's your purpose to attend the Pre-exam Training Course?

- To improve the drawing skills
 To gain more information about the mechanism of the entrance examination and to get exam-oriented training
 To find out personal interests based on art practice
 To acquire the more professional guidance towards subject and university application

**Part Five:
Reflection on Subject Choice**

How do you satisfied with your current subject area?

- Not satisfied at all
 Not satisfied
 Not sure
 Satisfied
 Very satisfied

**If there is any chance for you to re-choose your subject, what will be your choice?
Please specify _____**

Why would you change your area?

- Better future career
- Not interested in current subject
- Personal interests
- Other reason, please specify _____

Why didn't you choose this subject?

- Difficult to reach the entry requirement of this subject
- Know little about this subject before making the decision
- Not in the list of subjects for recruitment in this institution
- Other reasons (please specify) _____

* This questionnaire is designed by the author and translated from a Chinese version.