

# The Symbolic Value Of Design Education At The Guangzhou Academy Of Fine Arts

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## Abstract:

The main subject of this study is the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (GAFA), the most representative design school in Southern China. The study has three main objectives: (1) Explore the Symbolic Value of GAFA for Design Education Reform. (2) Investigate the Distinctive Features of Design Education at GAFA. (3) Analyze the Outcomes of GAFA's Design Education. The research methodology employs a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative research. It involves collecting literature and conducting interviews with key figures involved in GAFA's design education reform for document analysis, thereby identifying key terms. Additionally, through a questionnaire survey, it gathers data on the perception of GAFA among faculty members from design institutions in South China influenced by GAFA's design education reform. This process aims to analyze the symbolic significance of GAFA as a symbol. Clarify the impact of GAFA's design education on Chinese design education; Present the symbolic significance of GAFA's design education and its achievements. Situated in Southern China, GAFA is deeply influenced by Lingnan culture. Its design education vividly demonstrates the impact of regional culture. Therefore, GAFA's design education represents a valuable case study within China, offering significant research value.

**Keywords:** GAFA Design Education The Symbolic Value.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

GAFA is situated in Guangzhou, the most economically developed city in southern China. Influenced deeply by Lingnan culture, Guangzhou embodies characteristics of openness, inclusivity, innovation, diversity, and a focus on commerce.

Early in Economic reform and Open up period, GAFA boldly embraced new concepts and models, benefiting from the distinctive traits of the Lingnan culture. In the transition, GAFA's design education showcased typical characteristics of southern Chinese design institutions, gradually extending its influence from the southern regions (Guangdong, Guangxi, Shenzhen, Hunan, Hubei, Hangzhou, Nanjing, etc.) to other parts of China. Throughout this progression, educators like Gao Yongjian, Yin Dingbang, Zhao Jian, and Chen Xiaoqing, among others, generated substantial teaching achievements and published relevant works, receiving high acclaim within the industry. Their contributions have had significant and far-reaching effects on the southern region and even nationwide. Students, faculty, and alumni of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts applied the knowledge and skills gained in design education to the market economy.

#### 1.1. Time Background

The development of GAFA's design education is deeply intertwined with China's political system reform. In 1979, China initiated its transition into a market-oriented economic system, marking a pivotal moment in the nation's economic trajectory. During this period, GAFA's design education underwent significant transformations. The inception of reforms post the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978 paved the way for internal changes and external engagement, heralding China's journey toward modernization. Subsequently, monumental advancements unfolded across economic, political, social, and diplomatic spheres. China embarked on a series of economic reforms, transitioning from a planned economy to one oriented toward the market. This rapid transformation fostered the growth of private enterprises and welcomed foreign investments and technology, expanding market opportunities and resources for the design industry. This economic shift corresponded with the meteoric rise of the Chinese economy, which not only improved living standards but also heightened demands for enhanced quality of life and cultural consumption. These evolving market needs greatly propelled the design industry in Guangdong, exemplifying the sector's remarkable growth within the broader context of China's "Reform and Opening Up."

The era of "Reform and Opening Up" symbolized China's integration into the modern global community, marking a transition toward consumerism. As living standards soared, the nation's rapid economic growth solidified "Made in

China" as one of the world's most recognizable labels. By the second quarter of 2009, China's GDP had surpassed that of Japan, positioning it as the world's second-largest economy. This milestone underscored China's forty-year journey in establishing a robust industrial manufacturing system, encompassing a comprehensive supply chain and a vast consumer base within the ambit of reform and opening up.

### 1.2 Market Background

The interdependence among industrial production, the market, and design constitutes a pivotal relationship. Market demand emerges as the principal propeller shaping the evolution of the design industry. Hence, the evolution of design is intricately connected to alterations in consumer consumption patterns. This section will delve into the metamorphosis of Chinese residents' consumption habits spanning the last four decades, the phases of industrial advancement, and the impact of market fluctuations on the realm of design.

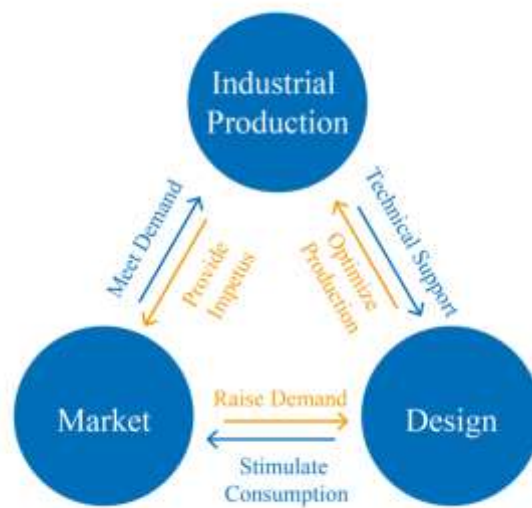


Figure1.1 The relationship between industrial production, markets and design.

### 1. Transformation Stages in Resident Consumption

#### **First phase of resident consumption transformation: 1978-1984**

In 1978, China transitioned from a planned economy to a market-oriented era, initiating the release of productivity due to transformations in production relations and factor allocation. The nation shifted its focus from singularly pursuing heavy industrial production to prioritizing the development of

agriculture and light industry. People's consumption needs to be transitioned from fulfilling necessities to embracing material and cultural desires. Significant increases occurred in residents' income and consumption levels, with household appliances emerging as the primary category of consumption during this period.

### **Second phase of resident consumption transformation: 1985-1998**

In 1985, China's economic system reform continued to deepen, introducing market mechanisms in fiscal, financial, foreign trade, commercial, and pricing sectors, sustaining economic growth until the onset of the 1997 financial crisis slowdown. During the early 1990s, urban residents' consumption patterns began to upgrade, marking the first phase of upgrades in household appliances, including color televisions and double-door refrigerators, as primary durable goods demanded. The consumption characteristics of residents during this period still reflected subsistence-focused consumption, lacking emphasis on quality and design, marking a phase driven by quantity satisfaction. Service-oriented consumption such as education, tourism, and entertainment began to develop.

### **Third phase of resident consumption transformation: 1999-2012**

In 1998, China entered the phase of monetizing housing distribution, where purchasing commercial housing became a major area of consumption, alongside a surge in automobile consumption. The consumption level of Chinese urban residents transitioned from a modest to a prosperous level. Urban residents prioritized enhancing their quality of life, marking the third significant leap in consumption structure that led to both quantitative and qualitative changes in design demands. Design requisites continued expanding from industrial product domains to encompass education, entertainment, sports, leisure, and other service sectors.

The Canton Fair's influence on the development of GAFA's design education manifests in four aspects.



Figure1.2 Four Major Facilitating Roles of the Canton Fair in GAFA's Design Education.

Design stands as a crucial bridge connecting industrial production and consumer markets. Through the lens of design education and reflecting on China's reform and opening up over the last 40 years, notable advancements have been witnessed across diverse sectors encompassing the economy, cultural progression, energy innovation, rural reforms, and environmental preservation. During this period, China experienced rapid economic expansion, catalyzing significant shifts in the sociopolitical terrain and altering the consumer behavior and mindset of its populace.

GAFA, an art and design institution situated in the southern region, garnered national attention in the 1980s, emerging as a phenomenon worthy of thorough exploration. From 1979 to the present day, the trajectory of GAFA's design education has been marked by fluctuations. In its initial two decades, owing to its profound integration with the market economy, GAFA surged ahead, spearheading significant reforms in design education across South China and subsequently catalyzing a nationwide wave of transformative changes. It held a pioneering position in domestic design education during this period. However, after 2010, GAFA's developmental impetus gradually decelerated. Examining how GAFA became emblematic of the successful convergence between design education and the market economy during the early phases

of China's socio-economic reforms could offer valuable insights into the factors influencing GAFA's evolution in design education.

The article views GAFA's design education as a symbol and analyzes the reasons for symbol formation from the perspective of Peircean semiotics. Symbols are utilized to express and interpret meanings; any meaning requires expression through symbols, and there are no symbols without meaning, nor any meaning devoid of symbolization. (Zhao Yiheng, 2016) The aim of examining how GAFA's design education becomes a symbol is to understand the era's changes through the lens of design education.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopts a mixed research methodology, employing both qualitative literature analysis and quantitative color extraction research methods to analyze the symbolic value presentation of GAFA's design education. Firstly, literature analysis will be conducted on the documentation of Mr. Yin Dingbang, extracting keywords describing the reform of GAFA's design education. This aims to comprehend GAFA's design education as a symbol of reform and the content reflecting its symbolic value. Relevant interview literature and comments from other design education researchers on the reform of GAFA's design education will be comprehensively analyzed based on these "keywords." Secondly, content sorting and analysis will be conducted on interview transcripts from 10 GAFA teachers, providing insights into the details of GAFA's design education reform from 1978 to 2004. Lastly, a questionnaire survey will be employed to gauge the perceptions of teachers from design institutions in South China regarding GAFA's design education. This aims to understand the most representative educational reform outcomes of GAFA and, in conjunction with the content of GAFA teacher interviews, address the research question: What societal impacts has GAFA's design education generated ?

In order to obtain information on GAFA's design education, literature documentation serves as crucial material for the argumentation. The first part involves gathering interview data from key figures closely involved in the GAFA design education reform, including Mr. Yin Dingbang, one of the founding members, as well as individuals like Zhao Jian, Wu Weiguang, Liu Luwei, Ying Mengyan, and Chen Xiangjing, who participated in and witnessed the reform. The second part includes gathering literature data on the national discussions sparked by GAFA in design education. The third part involves collecting and organizing timelines and achievements of GAFA's design education development.

(1) Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis is a research methodology, an approach that involves the

systematic analysis and interpretation of a wide variety of written or printed materials, such as documents, archives, records, correspondence, news reports, statutes, and historical papers. This research will locate, collect, and organize important documents related to educational design in GAFA through GAFA's historical documents, book resources, valuable interview materials, and authoritative media websites in order to understand information about GAFA's past events, social phenomena, policy changes, and cultural evolution. Literature analysis can be used to obtain historical data, to gain insight into a specific topic, or to analyze and explain changes and trends in a subject.

(2) Survey

Research is a data collection method that involves posing specific questions to a

particular group to gain insights into a broader population. Surveys serve as significant data resources. In this study, a survey was distributed via the "Wenjuanxing" platform to the WeChat group "Chinese Design Schools (Southern China)" comprising 499 members. A total of 351 valid responses were received. The survey is divided into three sections, comprising a total of 13 questions.

(3) Interviews

Interviews are a process of obtaining information, data, and insights by engaging in direct communication with respondents. Typically, interviews involve purposeful questioning and answering, aiming to explore, explain, understand, or evaluate specific themes, issues, or phenomena. Interviews can take structured, semi-structured, or unstructured forms, depending on the identities of the subjects and the specific research needs. In this study, we employ methods such as expert interviews and one-on-one interviews to acquire detailed and in-depth information related to the symbolic analysis of GAFA's educational design.

The purposes of this study were to (1) explore the Symbolic Value of GAFA for Design Education Reform, (2) investigate the Distinctive Features of Design Education at GAFA, and (3) analyze the Outcomes of GAFA's Design Education. Moreover, the research questions were to ask the questions as follows: (1) What value has GAFA's design education had on China's design education?, (2) How is the symbolism of GAFA's design education manifested?, and (3) What societal Outcomes have GAFA's design education?

The following was the outline of the research methodology:

**A. Population:** Document Analysis: Baidu Scholar retrieved a total of 193 documents related to "Yin Dingbang," the dean of the Design School at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (GAFA). These documents encompass literature on design education, personal interviews, and academic publications. From these, 13 articles were selected as research samples, consisting of 11 papers from the "Yin Dingbang and the GAFA Phenomenon Academic Seminar" held in 2019 and 2 important interview records. These 13 samples have been meticulously curated to best embody Yin Dingbang's thoughts and educational concepts. The literature includes summaries of Yin Dingbang's design philosophy, interviews with him, and research articles, collectively presenting an objective perspective on Yin Dingbang's understanding of GAFA's design education.

This study focuses on the literature of Yin Dingbang, who was actively involved in the reform of GAFA's design education from the 1970s to the early 20th century. Through his organization and leadership, Yin Dingbang made GAFA a symbol of design education in the southern region.

The core of this study lies in exploring the symbolic value of GAFA as a representation of the transformation of Chinese design education from traditional arts and crafts to modern design paradigms. The reform in design education at GAFA is deeply entwined with the era of China's rapid economic growth. In response to the talent development needs arising from economic growth, major academic institutions during that period were contemplating changes to their traditional educational models. GAFA stood out amongst these institutions by implementing the most profound and comprehensive reforms, whose effects continue to resonate to this day. As a representative symbol of design education in southern China, this study will analyze three key areas:

- 1) Explore the Symbolic Value of GAFA for Design Education Reform.
- 2) Investigate the Distinctive Features of Design Education at GAFA.
- 3) Analyze the Outcomes of GAFA's Design Education Symbolism.

#### B. Research Tools

**Interviews:** This study conducted interviews with 30 individuals who have either previously worked or are currently working at GAFA. Finally, the interviews of 10 individuals, including the deans and senior faculty members of the School of Design at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (GAFA), were selected as

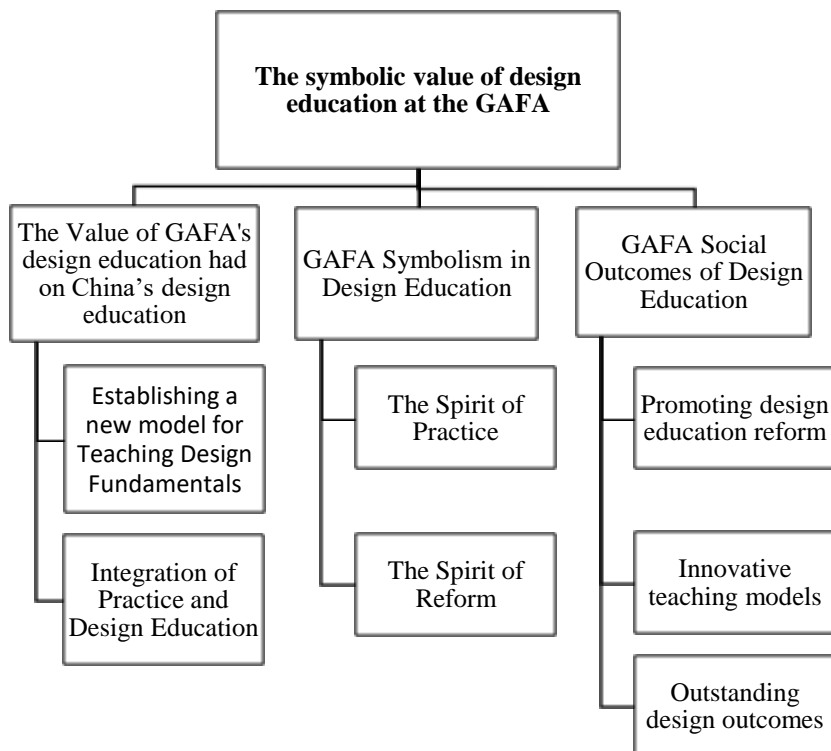


samples. These ten teachers have been working in the design department at GAFA between 1979 and 2022.

This study will involve interviews or literature analysis of 10 teachers from the Design Department of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (GAFA). These ten teachers have been working in the Design Department at GAFA from 1979 to 2022. They have worked in three major disciplines of the Design Department: Visual Communication Design (formerly Interior Design), Architecture and Environmental Art Design, and Industrial Design. They have witnessed crucial periods of transformation and development in the academy's design education, playing key roles in its progression and reform. Their individual expertise has also gained wide recognition within the design education community.

Survey: This research distributed questionnaires to the WeChat group of "Southern China Design Institutes" through the "Wenjuanxing" platform, consisting of a total of 499 members. 351 valid questionnaires were received. The survey sample ranged from 23 to 60 years old. In terms of occupation, 78.5% of the sample were teachers from higher design institutes in Southern China, 13.2% were design professionals, and 8.3% were from other professions.

### C. Conceptual / theoretical framework:



### III. Results

## Survey and Analyze

### (1) Par I: About GAFA's Characters and Achievements

No.	Part I: About GAFA's Characters and Achievements
01	Do you consider GAFA a model for design education in the South?
02	Which of the following Hiromi teachers do you know?
03	Please select the design works of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts that you know?

#### Analysis of Question 01:

Confirming whether respondents recognize GAFA as representative of Southern design education. Among them, 82.34% of the respondents believe that GAFA is an exemplary representation of Southern design, proving the validity of GAFA as a symbol. Through studying it, we can understand the characteristics of design education in the Southern region.

#### Analysis of Question 02:

97% of the respondents are familiar with Yin Dingbang, followed by 93% who know Cao Xue, and 70% who are acquainted with Zhao Jian. Yin Dingbang led GAFA in the late 20th century to reform design education. Zhao Jian succeeded Yin Dingbang as the head of GAFA's design education. Cao Xue serves as the dean of GAFA's Visual Arts and Design College. The three individuals have different academic achievements; Yin Dingbang is renowned for establishing the design discipline, Zhao Jian spearheaded the second design basic education reform at GAFA in 2004, and Cao Xue gained wide recognition due to her contributions in production, learning, and research. She notably contributed to the creation of "Bing Dwen Dwen," the mascot of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.

#### Analysis of Question 03:

Among GAFA's design achievements, the most influential is the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics mascot, "Bing Dwen Dwen," followed by the visual image design for the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games. The Dongguan Yin Cheng Hotel project was designed by GAFA's school-run enterprise, Jimei Design Engineering Co., Ltd. It became a five-star hotel in China completed entirely by a Chinese design team. Options in the survey included the China Pavilion Exhibition Designs at both the Aichi Expo in Japan and the Shanghai Expo in China, which were also designed by "Jimei" Design. GAFA's design

education remains aligned with the market and insists on a production-learning-research teaching model. Its design outputs have had a strong impact from 1995 to the present.

(2) Part II: About the Characteristics of GAFA Design Education

Part II: About the Characteristics of GAFA Design Education	
04	Please select the art school that you think has the best integration with the market economy in the early period of reform and opening up.
05	Do you think the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts is connected to China's market economy reform?
06	Have you heard that the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts was once called the "Merchant Academy"?
07	When GAFA is mentioned, which of the following characteristics comes to mind first?
08	Have you heard of "Guangdong Jimei Design & Engineering Co.
09	What do you think are the reasons for the success of GAFA's school-based enterprise, Jimei ?
10	Do you think the three major Compositions design played a positive role in the early stages of basic design education?
11	"What is the impact of the three Compositions on design education in China?

Analysis of Question 04:

72.93% of respondents believe that the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (GAFA) had the most influence in the 1990s. This aligns with the city of Guangzhou, which experienced the fastest economic development in China during the 1990s. The city's rapid growth in the commercial environment fostered a quicker development in understanding and practicing design education

compared to other cities in mainland China. This reflects the closeness of GAFA's alignment with the market economy during that specific period.

#### Analysis of Question 05:

According to statistical data, 74.93% of respondents chose options that were "associated." This indicates that the majority believe that the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (GAFA) has a connection to China's market economy reform. While some respondents chose "not associated," their proportion is relatively small. This conclusion is drawn from statistical data and holds a certain level of objectivity.

#### Analysis of Question 06:

"Business School" was an early nickname given to GAFA by society, representing GAFA's close alignment with the market. This designation signifies one aspect of GAFA's close integration with the market.

The conclusions drawn from Questions 04 to 06 collectively suggest that GAFA's successful design education is closely aligned with the market after the reform and opening-up period. The impression projected by GAFA is that it is closely linked to commerce.

#### Analysis of Question 07:

The most prominent feature of GAFA's design education, which is the emphasis on practice, reform, and commercialization, gained support from 63% of respondents. These three characteristics are correlated with the subsequent influence of the Lingnan culture on GAFA's design education.

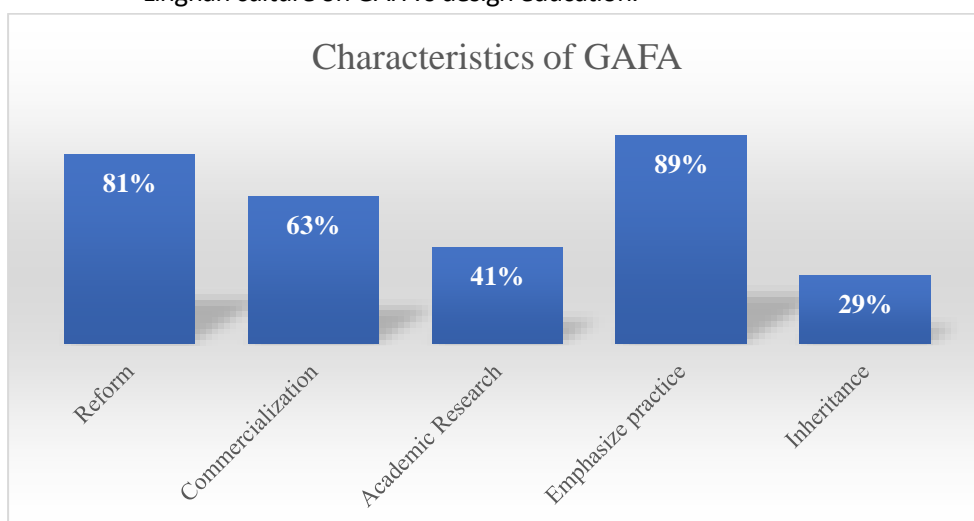


Figure 4.1 Result of Question 07

#### Analysis of Questions 08-09:

81% of respondents have heard of Jimei Design Engineering Co., Ltd., which is the university-run enterprise of GAFA. It acts as a link between GAFA's Production, learning, research education models, connecting with society. Among the respondents who were familiar with Jimei Company, 75% attributed its success to the combination of theory and practice.

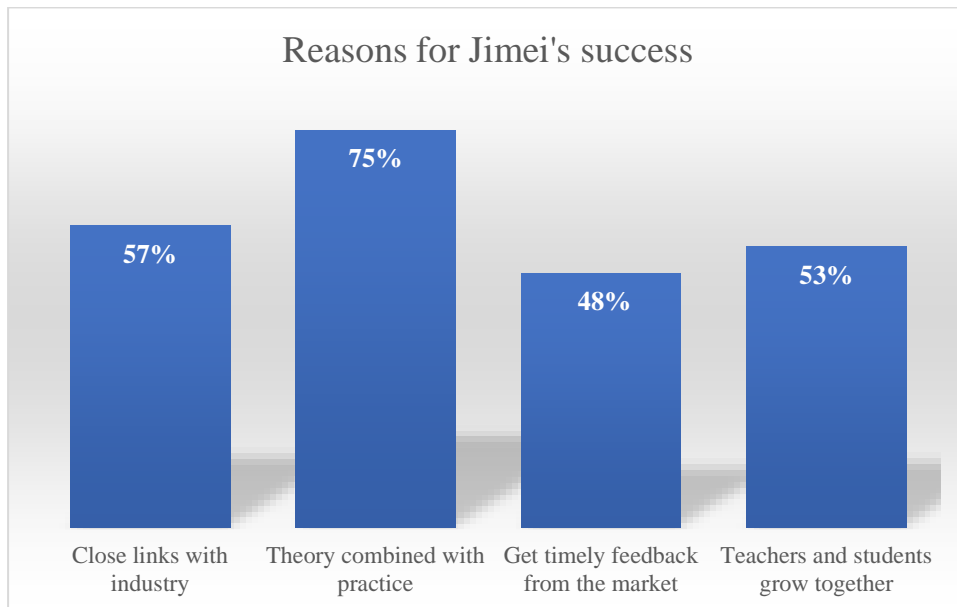


Figure 4.2 Result of Question 09

#### Problem 10 Analysis:

Based on survey data, it can be confirmed that the "Three Major Composition Design" was first introduced from Hong Kong to GAFA. This serves as significant evidence of GAFA being a pioneer in design education reform. The data also illustrates that during the early stages of foundational design education, the "Three Major Composition Design" played a proactive role. The majority of participants believe that the "Three Major Composition Design" was beneficial in the early stages of design education. Specifically, 42.45% of respondents who chose "very useful" indicate that most people find the "Three Major Composition Design" helpful in foundational design education. Furthermore, 52.14% of respondents who selected "somewhat useful but limited" acknowledge that while the "Three Major Composition Design" had some effectiveness, it also had its limitations. The "Three Major Composition Design" typically includes flat composition, three-dimensional composition, and color composition, covering fundamental design knowledge. For beginners, it aids in establishing basic design thinking and observation methods. It played a crucial role in the early stages of modern design education in China.

**Problem 11 Analysis:**

The "Three Major Composition Design" teaching system is best known for its influence in driving reform in Chinese design education, followed by its sparking of deliberations regarding design education. These two widely acknowledged characteristics align with the discussions in historical research on the development of Chinese design education.

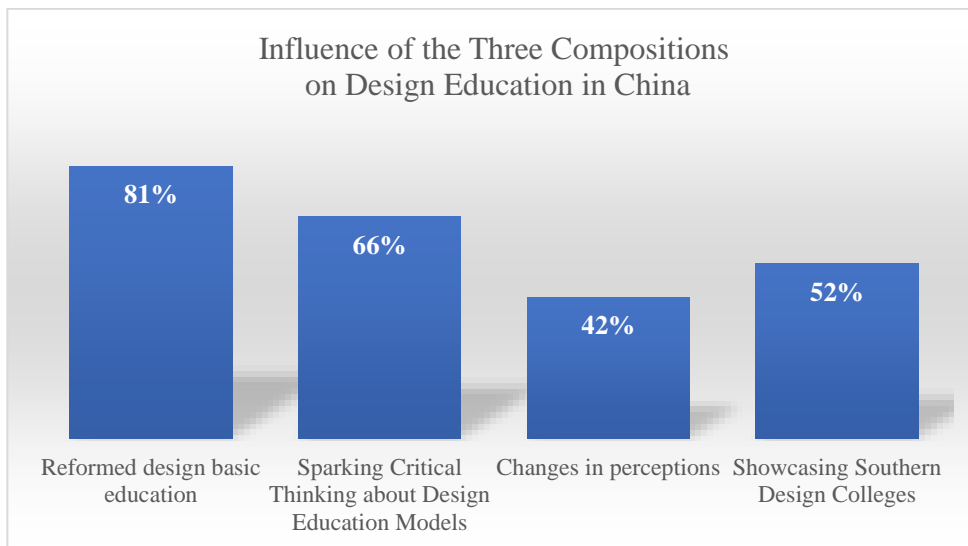


Figure 4.3 Result of Question 11

**(1) Part III: on the geographical advantages of GAFA**

Part III: on the geographical advantages of GAFA	
12	What is the impact of the geographic location of Guangzhou on the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts?
13	What do you think are the influences of Lingnan culture on design education at GAFA?

Part three of the questionnaire aims to demonstrate the geographical influence on GAFA's design education.

**Analysis of Question 12:**

89.17% of respondents believe that Guangzhou, known as the "Millennial Commercial City," holds the most significant influence on GAFA, followed by the influence of the Canton Fair. Being a Millennial Commercial City, Guangzhou's vibrant economic environment provides opportunities for interaction and cooperation between Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (GAFA) and the business community. This environment also offers the institution greater resources and opportunities for practical

teaching. Additionally, as a hub for China's manufacturing industry, Guangzhou provides ample practical teaching resources and bases, aiding in enhancing students' practical abilities and competitiveness in employment. The Canton Fair, being China's largest import-export trade fair, brings further opportunities for collaboration between GAFA and industry. Lastly, Guangzhou, as an open-minded city, is conducive to embracing various new educational ideologies and teaching methods, thereby advancing the educational development of GAFA.

#### Analysis of Question 13:

Through the questionnaire survey, 88% of respondents believe that "openness," and 78% of respondents believe that "pragmatism" are influential aspects of Lingnan culture on GAFA's design education. These results corroborate the outcomes of Question 07, emphasizing the importance of practice and reform. The pragmatic attitude of GAFA's design education emphasizes market principles and practicality, while its open-mindedness encourages the institution to bravely pursue reforms in design education.

## VI. DISCUSSION

GAFA was a symbol of China's design education reform from the end of the last century to the beginning of the 21st century. The symbolic value of GAFA design education lies not only in the batches of excellent design talents it cultivates, but also in the cultural spirit and innovative driving force it conveys. As a southern design school deeply influenced by Lingnan culture, GAFA design education integrates unique qualities of regional culture such as openness, pragmatism, and innovation, forming a unique educational system. As a typical representative of southern education in China, it has the characteristics of daring to try and innovate, fully integrating with business, and daring to use education models that meet economic and social needs. These characteristics are not possessed by mainland Chinese universities and have become symbolic values of GAFA.

GAFA became a pioneer in the reform of design education at the end of the last century, first facilitated by China's implementation of reform and opening up, and also due to the Lingnan cultural environment as the soil for the emergence of modern design education. As a millennium old commercial capital, Guangzhou's people, government, and institutions are sensitive to market demand compared to mainland China, which has always admired agricultural culture. GAFA is located in the south, far from the political and cultural center of the Central Plains. The spirit of freedom and autonomy allows GAFA to carry out reforms without

carrying too much traditional ideological pressure. The advantages brought by its geographical location naturally give GAFA the courage and determination to try new things. At the appropriate time and place, GAFA's leading figure in design education reform, Yin Dingbang, naturally entered a stage of rapid development in design education.

Since its establishment, GAFA has always adhered to the educational philosophy of "paying attention to reality and serving society". The needs of the country and society are a powerful driving force for the continuous progress of GAFA. Especially in the wave of reform and opening up, GAFA actively explores and practices a new model of "art (design) serving society" by leveraging Guangdong's unique advantages as a forefront of reform and opening up. Currently, GAFA has established an efficient and practical "government industry academia research application" linkage system to better serve society. Through this system, GAFA closely cooperates with governments, enterprises, research institutions, and others to jointly participate in national economic and cultural construction and major social practices. This linkage model not only strengthens the connection between schools and society, but also provides students with rich practical opportunities, cultivating their awareness and ability to serve society. In the process of serving society, GAFA has undertaken a large number of national level major cultural projects. With a high sense of responsibility and mission, GAFA has contributed a batch of artistic masterpieces to the shaping of the country's image and cultural inheritance. At the same time, GAFA has cultivated a large number of design talents active on the front line of society. They have made positive contributions to the development of social and cultural undertakings with their talents and efforts.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The following conclusions are drawn from this study:

Firstly, GAFA has played a positive role in promoting the reform of modern design education in southern China and even the whole country. The wave of China's reform and opening up in 1978 first affected Guangdong. Guangzhou, where GAFA is located, is the provincial capital city of Guangdong. Due to the rapid development of the market economy here, GAFA felt more satisfied than the mainland. The old model of arts and crafts education was unable to cultivate talents suitable for industrial production needs, and the concept of design education fell behind the times. GAFA introduced the "Three Major Composition Design" of education from Hong Kong, becoming the earliest institution in the country to carry out design education reform. GAFA's bold practice of design education



reform has sparked national reflection on "arts and crafts" education. From 1982 to 1990, Chinese art schools organized multiple meetings to discuss the model of modern design education. The success of GAFA's "Compositions design" education has led to young teachers from institutions such as the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, and Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts being sent to study at GAFA. The phenomenon of central government learning from local universities has never been seen before. In 1997, undergraduate education in China expanded enrollment. According to data from the official website of the Chinese Ministry of Education ([www.moe.edu.cn](http://www.moe.edu.cn)), in 2007, 1125 higher education institutions in China admitted students majoring in "art and design". Due to the programmatic and rational nature of the "Three Major Composition Design" teaching model, which is easy to understand, a large number of institutions adopted the "Three Major Composition Design" model for their basic design courses.

Second, GAFA pioneered the education model of "integration of production, learning and research", which adheres to the core spirit of "practice". Since the establishment of the predecessor of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, the Central and South American College, the school has clearly defined the educational philosophy of combining theory with practice and serving society in its "school seal". This concept laid the foundation for the later industry university research model, Fundamentals. In the 1980s, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, relying on its geographical location and policy advantages at the forefront of reform, recognized that design was an industry that "served" the market and society. Faced with the era of scarce design education technology and theory, teachers and students could only quickly understand the skills and knowledge required for the design profession by practicing from the industry and market. In order to smoothly connect industry, teaching, and theoretical research, the college has established Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts Jimei Design Engineering Company, which is a comprehensive enterprise integrating design, production, construction, and service. The company has undertaken a large number of design projects, providing valuable practical opportunities for students and strong support for the research and teaching of the college. This model not only emphasizes the theoretical learning of students, but also emphasizes the cultivation of practical abilities and innovative thinking. At the same time, all disciplines and majors of GAFA also actively respond to this model, making full use of their own talent and professional advantages to carry out internal integration and external introduction. GAFA's oil painting department, printmaking

department, art education department, sculpture department, and Lingnan Painting School Memorial Hall, among other art disciplines, actively carry out cross disciplinary horizontal infiltration and vertical expansion, forming a cluster development of the "industry academia research" model. The college has also made positive contributions to the development of local economy by continuously promoting the transformation and application of scientific research achievements through cooperation with enterprises and society.

Thirdly, from the "Three Major Composition Design" to "Composition studies". The "Three Major Composition Design" of GAFA are designed to promote basic education nationwide, not only relying on borrowing from Hong Kong's education model, but also relying on GAFA's continuous research and systematic construction on "components". In order to have a deeper understanding of composition design, GAFA's teacher Yin Dingbang invited the founder of Japanese composition studies, Naosu Asakura, to the school in 1989 to provide composition training for teachers and students. In 1990, GAFA sent Teacher Chen Xiaoqing to Japan to conduct a research project on composition with the founder of Japanese constitutive studies, Naosu Asakura. In 2003, Professor Chen Xiaoqing received full funding from the Japan International Exchange Fund to conduct research on the design of the Jinxiu New Media Space at Tokyo University of the Arts. In 1997, Japanese graphic design master Fumio Fukuda was invited to GAFA to hold an exhibition and offer courses. After a series of research and teaching practices, GAFA has successively published composition textbooks and created local Compositions design education methods.

Fourthly, GAFA's design education is a result of respecting the laws of social development and market orientation. The spirit of daring to "reform" led GAFA to rapidly grow from a secluded university in southern China to a design school with nationwide influence at the end of the last century. Another important significance of the symbol GAFA is "reform", which means facing challenges in an innovative way. Starting from the earliest reform of design education models, the country pioneered the "production, learning, and research model", introduced and written modern design history, and created the industrial design profession GAFA's design education has always been portrayed as a reformer. The reform of GAFA is based on market demand and industrial development, and is not bound by traditional design concepts and ideas.

Fifthly, the success of GAFA benefits from the opportunity of China's reform and opening up, as well as the developed

industrial economy, advantageous geographical location adjacent to Hong Kong, and the open thinking and practical spirit of Yin Dingbang, an important figure in discipline construction. The three factors of "favorable timing, location, and people" make GAFA a symbol representing the "practice" and "reform" of southern design education. Chinese society has entered the market economy through the policy of reform and opening up, which is the reason for the reform of design education. The rapid development of GAFA is also due to its location in Guangzhou, where the Lingnan cultural background is inclusive, innovative, pragmatic, and business oriented, making GAFA design education sensitive to the needs of the times. Collaborating with the key figure - Yin Dingbang at critical moments, GAFA's design education has gained nationwide influence over the past 20 years, becoming a classic symbol of design education in southern China.

This study is based on the development of GAFA design education, with the aim of analyzing the reasons for the success of GAFA design discipline development from the symbolic significance of symbols. GAFA has been established for 70 years, from the Arts and Crafts Development Education Exhibition in the 1950s to modern design education today. The core of its development is to uphold the spirit of "practice" and "reform".

In 1989, GAFA's design education was separated from arts and crafts. The three majors of industrial product design, decoration art design, and environmental art design, as well as the Industrial Design Research Office, were transferred from the Department of Arts and Crafts to form the Design Department. The original craft department retains the majors of dyeing and weaving art design, clothing art design, and decorative art, and establishes folk art research rooms and decorative studios. In 1997, the Department of Technology and the Department of Design merged to form the Design Branch of GAFA, which is a secondary college. Although the success of GAFA design education stems from the use of the "three major components" teaching model, arts and crafts design has not stagnated. It has shifted from serving handicrafts and inheriting folk crafts to serving public art, emphasizing the integration of arts and crafts into society, while also connecting with new science and technology, and breaking through from the direction of materials science. The spirit of GAFA design education: "reform" and "practice", fully connecting the characteristics of society, has been promoting the development of GAFA.

Nowadays, GAFA's college construction proposes "local responsibility" and "systematic thinking" as two important keywords, relying on the "Bay Area Art Innovation System" of the Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area to embark on a

new journey. The Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area, where GAFA is located, is a world-class urban agglomeration consisting of 11 cities including Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, etc. It is not only a demonstration zone for cooperation between the mainland and Hong Kong and Shenzhen, but also an external window and important support for the construction of the "the Belt and Road". The new system of art creation in the Bay Area includes six dynamic innovation clusters: social and technological innovation, art technology industry, art urban-rural construction, cultural heritage protection, cultural and creative life, and visual culture dissemination. (Fan Bo, 2023) Its goal is to break the resource system and governance structure formed by the original disciplinary and professional settings and teaching and research organizations. GAFA is based on national and social needs, and strives to achieve organic integration between teaching and research, social services, and cultural heritage on the basis of resource sharing and talent interaction. We hope to explore an innovative development path that is highly consistent and deeply coordinated with the national and regional economic and social development of higher art education.

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