

Original Research Article

Development of the Undergraduate Major of Applied Jade Sculpture Design Based on Regional Resources

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Abstract: The School of Jewelry at West Yunnan University of Applied Sciences was founded to meet the market demands during the economic transition and address the challenges confronting the local industrial development, which also makes full use of the local advantage of sufficient jade resources. However, it is indeed a challenge to develop distinct regional features for its major of jade design and to meet industrial and market demands on talents by developing a unique curriculum. As a teacher at the jade sculpture design major, School of Jewelry at West Yunnan University of Applied Sciences, the author is trying to offer some personal insights into this problem from the author's teaching practices and observations about the jade industry in Yunnan. The jade sculpture design major should focus on an in-depth integration of craftsmanship and design, inheritance and innovation, academic and fashion, education and industry, school and society, so as to lead the whole jade industry in Yunnan in its transformation and upgrading.

Keywords: Regional Culture; Jade Resources; Major Construction; Curriculum

The initial development of the jade industry benefited from the reform and opening-up policy in China. After a fast growth for nearly three decades, however, it has now failed to meet new demands deriving from market revolutions and has been sluggish for a long period of time. Compared to coastal areas such as Shanghai, Suzhou, Fujian and Guangdong, Yunnan is landlocked, which leads to its weak industrial foundation in jade. Furthermore, the techniques, design expertise and aesthetical levels of the craftsmen here are of varying qualities. The industry and the academia share a view on how to address the challenge: cultivate more talents through higher education institutions, which may have more advantages in more professional training mechanisms, so as to bring new vitality to the jade industry in Yunnan and contribute to its development.

The School of Jewelry, West Yunnan University of Applied Sciences, is located in Tengchong, Yunnan Province, China. Founded in 2015 after approval from China's Ministry of Education, it officially started admitting students from 2017. The School shoulders various responsibilities, including: developing the jade culture, serving the industrial development, reinvigorating west Yunnan's economy. It is committed to the transformation and upgrading of the jade industry in Yunnan.

1. Base its development locally

The local features of jade are quite distinct in China's several major jade industry clusters. For example, the jade sculptures in Xinjiang are primarily made out of Hetian jade; Liaoning Xiuyan are primarily made out of Xiuyan jade; the jade popular in Nanyang, Henan is Hetian jade and Dushan jade, with others being complimentary; in west Yunnan Province, people prefer jadeite, Huanglong jade, Nanjiang red agate and lamber. Different kinds of jade have their unique features, which make them suitable for different techniques and designs. The artistic and economic values of jade can be fully unleashed only by producing individualized designs that best utilize its features.

Yunnan Province has the most minority ethnic groups in China and therefore has distinct local cultures, which is a unique natural advantage for artistic designs and the founding of design majors. It is exactly local cultures and artistic resources that Yunnan Arts University has based its development on. It fully integrates talent cultivation, major construction and local cultural features, and positions its design majors on "design for Yunnan", which gives the school unique and distinct features.

The jade sculpture major construction at the School of Jewelry has to be based on local demands and resources and fully integrates Yunnan local cultures. In addition, it has to be oriented to meet the new demands from the industry during an economic transition and from the emerging middle-class consumers, to develop a major with distinct local features.

¹ **About the author:** Weiping Lu, male, a teaching assistant at the School of Jewelry at West Yunnan University of Applied Sciences, focuses on the digital innovation of jade sculpture.

2. Concepts and principles for the construction

The author proposes a construction principle of “local, inheritance, re-make, contemporary life scenarios” with the author’s own teaching practices at the School. “Local” means to highlight the local industrial demands and resource advantages. “Inheritance” highlights the inheritance and consolidation of local cultures against the background of traditions. “Re-make” means to re-make artistic designs based on local cultures. “Contemporary life scenarios” highlights a cultural confidence, spirit of the times and life aesthetics. The concepts and principles aim to reinvigorate jade sculpture and make it a part of contemporary lives through the School’s academic advantages and innovations; so as to produce modern designs that feature both oriental aesthetics and international visual arts characteristics.

3. Curriculum framework

Following the above principles, the jade sculpture design major’s curriculum should focus on an in-depth integration of craftsmanship and design, inheritance and innovation, academic and fashion, education and industry, school and society. The two major teaching platforms and three major curriculum systems should be utilized for practical teaching purposes.

The teaching platform of history of humanities and social sciences teaches students to focus on the thoughtfulness and culture of designs and develops their creativity through several non-visual arts courses and lectures on major’s history and theories, society and cultural research, marketing, etc.

Platforms are also established for students’ internship, entrepreneurship and practice by creating studios open to enterprises. Off-campus internship and research bases are established in several leading jade development regions in China for students to learn. A platform is established for cooperation and communication between school and society, education and market, students and designers by carrying out several projects targeting Yunnan local cultures and urban fashion designs. These platforms allow students the opportunity to work with and learn from leading jade designers and masters and to participate in the market operations, so that they may develop a better understanding about social demands, receive professional trainings, evaluate their study progress, enhance abilities to address practical problems and start businesses.

The visual arts fundamentals courses aim to establish a link between design basics and the jade sculpture major, by linking two transitions from painting modelling to design modelling and from design modelling to design concept. On one hand, students acquire correct observation and showcase methods through training, so that their painting and 3D modelling abilities are enhanced, qualification as a professional art designer is developed, knowledge in artistic theories and humanities is enriched and aesthetics are enhanced. On the other hand, such design courses as “introducing Yunnan intangible cultural heritage into campuses” and “intangible cultural heritage and fashion” guide students to pay attention to the status quo of intangible cultural heritage in Yunnan, to keep their enthusiasm for design and to develop research qualifications in them, laying solid foundations for future studies.

The material and technique courses focus on the research on jade materials. Experiments are set for students to in depth understand the features of different kinds of jade materials, so that they may better incorporate design concepts, modelling ideas and material features. Students may also systematically study the techniques of traditional jade materials while exploring new ones. Their craftsmanship abilities and passion for it may also be enhanced.

The jade medium design courses lay a particular emphasis on the “design” of products, featuring the designs of jade as fashion decorations and furnishings as the main teaching contents. The courses focus on relevant innovations and progress and new trends in fashion design and spatial furnishings. It breaks the traditional norms in the implied meanings of jade decorations and furnishings to accomplish innovations in the design of new decorations and furnishings.

The above two teaching platforms and three course systems complement each other to fully enhance students’ abilities in observing, making and thinking and develop their aesthetics to meet their demands for major, profession and development.