

*Research on the Teaching Practice of Fashion Material Experiments
Through Exploring the Creative Process of Local Elements*

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Abstract

Combining creative professional design courses and using the expressiveness of textile materials to tell stories together with methods of play with new appearances of soft fabrics, this project will explore how to guide students to apply textiles as creative media, involving the design elements of Taiwan's landscape of literature to inspire methods and creative processes. Grouped students will be guided to fulfill the integrated projects of the topical subjects. They will investigate limitations and creative possibilities concerning the exploration of material experiments in a sense that the soft materials are attributed to labor works of the handicraft. Accordingly, the course will lead the students to explore the texture compositions of the fabrics, to review the transformation and accumulation of creativity in the process of project development. Based on the cultivation of students' awareness of local culture and environment, the main concept of the course of 'Practices of Developments and Applications of Fashion Materials' is to explore how the use of textile materials connecting images of local environment through text reading can be fed back in the research of teaching practice. This project will further explore how to connect in-depth the development of perceptual design practice through curriculum schemes; accordingly the manipulations of textile materials convey local concerns, as well as the developments of material practices and design applications which become a medium for revealing the identity of the land.

Keywords: Teaching Practice, Fabric Creations, Local Elements

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Introduction

This paper presents a teaching project run by the author, which is devoted to improving the local connotations connecting developing processes of textile designs, which make it possible to create design objects containing contemporary values.

Opportunities for connecting cultural innovation and contemporary value of materials

It is said that mastering the theme can profoundly explore material connotations from the connection of the stories. Students will be guided to carefully consider the beginning of their project study in the course. They will start with reading the local texts, and combine their practical works of textile practices. The diverse supports of techniques and references can be provided among the groups in the practical session, alongside professional supervision, which respectively concerns solutions for creative methods.

On the one hand, it is essential to practice creative thinking and, on the other hand, it is significant to be proficient in the technical training of textiles in proposing various possibilities of inspirational development combined with material manipulations. Furthermore, at the application level requiring a high standard of execution, this project will lead to students focusing on the study contents and creative themes, together with technical performances and material experiments, by which the opportunity to improve proficiency and completion of the integrated implementation plan could be offered.

Through this paper, I would like to suggest why it is important for this instructional program to explore the connection of textiles designs with local contextual elements in the literary texts. Through this execution of the instructional program, what can be achieved? This paper will present the teaching contents and progresses, in which selected developed cases of students' design works are included. And through this paper, by the developing processes of the cases suggested, I would like to explore how far the expected effects have been achieved. What was not achieved? What are the difficulties that lead to failure to achieve the expected results, and how to further modify the teaching plan in the future to improve the achievement of the set goals of the instructional program?

Extracting local elements for the development of material applications

To achieve the teaching objectives, this paper further proposes the ideal goal, as follows:

- (1) Explore the varied possibility of combining visual design with soft materials—using local elements in the development of practical applications to enhance the narrative performance of textiles.
- (2) To establish the identity of local culture through experimental textile creative methods and strengthen the correlation between textile manipulation of local elements and cultural connotations; teaching materials will be accumulated to become referential examples for students' further studies.
- (3) Guiding students to build up a mode of observing their creative processes through the integration of both peer inspiration and self-reflection.
- (4) The course demonstrates a completed example of idea development, from which students' works may achieve a practical standard which accommodates artistic quality.

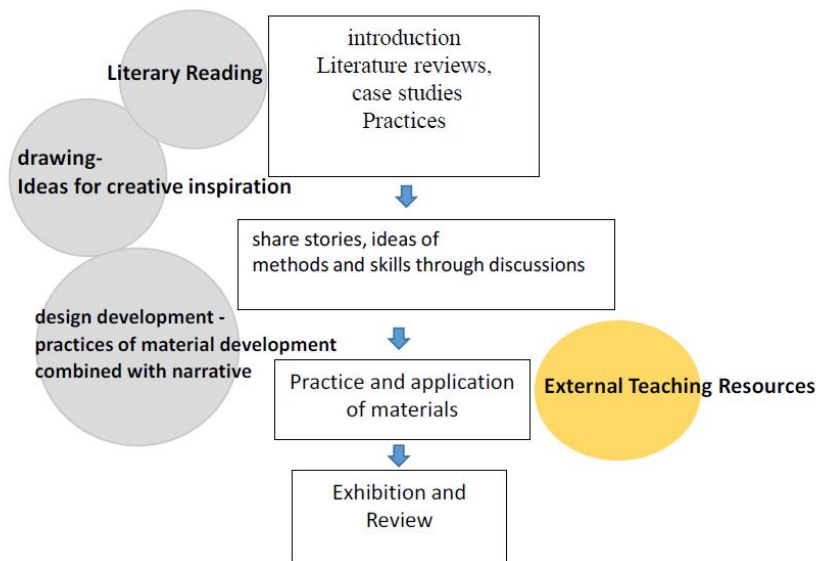


Figure 1: Shu-fang Huang, 2022, Outline of course structure.

Students' practices of textile creations connect local landscapes through the description and interpretation of text study in relating Taiwan literature. By this way, a possibility of building up the methods of connection between textiles and local connotations can be revealed, whereby the practices will bring out contemporary expressions with spirit of places of locals to deepen students' connection with their living surroundings, which become the references for cultivating students in exploring the connotations of innovative value.

Students practice several skills respectively to experiment with an integrated practical plan; they will be directed to observe the methods of individual practices, and will be introduced to a way to combine literary narratives with material developments. The roused stories should be exchanged between peers; that is to say, the series of discussions carried out in the class create mutual inspirations and develop horizontal ways of stimulation between the individual students. Recording and writing creative dairies are required in the process of idea growing, which is as a basis for reviewing their design thinking.

Explored design methods of associating the qualities of art beyond characters of decorations

Design creations with both qualities of applied arts and decorativeness connect cultural motifs; for example, the Dolce & Gabbana series on the fashion catwalk presented the surface designs of clothes with elements of the Mediterranean environment and images of cultural heritage (Dolce & Gabbana, 2019).

However, as early as the early 1970s, Robert Kushner (1949-, United States of America) began to engage in 'decorative' painting, 'He cited the view of culture of the Middle East that "art" and "decoration" are inseparable [...] from the graceful fluidity of the arabesque drapes.'

Kushner first began using textiles and fabrics with acrylic paint in his 1971 performance pieces. In these performances, the fabrics were both functional pieces and art objects when the costumes were installed on the walls as two-dimensional objects. Through his use of fabric, Kushner connected painting, decoration, and clothing, while also blurring

gender issues and questioning stereotypes of artistic practice and materials. (DC Moore Gallery, 2023)

Kushner's 'sensitivity to textiles can be seen in his collections that sit somewhere between "clothes" and "paintings", where his "paintings" are actually wearable before being hung on the wall to be admired' (Lu, 1990: 124). With the combination of creative expression and styles of cultural articulation in addition to a decorative attribution, textiles have become a medium to convey the creator's thoughts.

The idea practice is irrelative to the development of linear thinking; in this paper, the non-linear way of thinking will be applied to promote the methods of contextualizing the individual thinking process of students' design creations; whilst operating various fabric treatments, materials are arranged and combined in specific configurations or conceptual reorganisation. The visual lines, outlines or the patterns are continuously derived from these experiments, which could provide a possibility for creating textile works with rich expression and meaningful appearance.

With regard to the study cases of fabric creations and discussions of design thinking from practical works, 'the play itself may be an idea.' (De Bono, 1971, 98) The discovery of creativity may be obtained in the process of continuous experimentation, which allows the juxtaposition of opportunities to construct a series of things that have not been conceived and arranged and would not be easily constructed at the initial stage of the creative project; the spectators may be able to intervene at another level of observation. Besides, 'idea-sketching is a way of clarifying and recording the inner images (visualising ideas)' (McKim, 2002: 168).

To watch the imagination of material operations to expand the connection of different perspectives can also achieve similar results; by quickly recording various drawing and patching through the process of reading literary texts, text analysis, transformation of images, analyzing distinct perspectives, and developing ideas from the depicted inspiration in a fleeting moment. Accompanied by using familiar materials in daily life, experimenting with the characteristics of textiles may be used as a means to strengthen creative thinking, in order to explore the spatial appearances of materials and clues to the creator's inner perceptions. The use of 'play' makes familiar materials or sophisticated forms connecting with the creators themselves and other sources of special experiences may become shaped.

The fields and practices of initiating inspirations

I. Assisting students in developing original ideas for their design projects. II. Ways of guiding the students' creative formations in relating the process of observation. The customised principles of design are loosened at the beginning of the study, which is replaced with the method of idea 'exploration'. In addition to the reading of narrative in relating local surroundings, well-prepared experimental materials will guide students to open up intuitive observations that may capture the ideas of creation and welcome the elements that can stimulate imagination to carry out the process of design making; finally, through discussion and sharing the implementation experiences among the peers, as well as reviewing the learning outcomes through experimenting displaying their works of results in an exhibition. The process is formed and summarized as follows:

(i) To reveal a field of inspirations

Creative experiments in the early stage – searching for the sources of creativity, exploring landscape elements contained in the literary which comprehend messages of local environments of Taiwan. The studies at this stage are the basis of creative experiments; the selection of the texts to be read and the places to observe can be related to personal preferences, and will reflect the characteristics of the project in progress.

(ii) To open up a way of viewing

An advanced stage of idea capturing – sketching. In order not to fall into repeated clichés and uninspired applications, students will be directed to draw sketches of the images and ideas which emerge from their textural reading. By this direction, the sketches can function as practice in gaining specific observations of intuitive perceptual experiences, so training the activation of imagination and arousing the hidden ideas in becoming visualised (McKim, 2002: 168).

(iii) Exploring multiple ways of forming ideas of observations

Ideas in the developing stage –by utilizing materials of easy acquisition and simple manipulation. To apply methods that are easily approached such as drawings or paper works for instantly practices in order to gain the inspiration in the progresses and of that the ideas may be become contextualized. Taking advantage of the lightness, thinness and the easy folding of paper to study and to capture the transformed images or the multiple aspects of viewing dimensions; in this way the elements of the local environment may emerge from the progress of exploration.

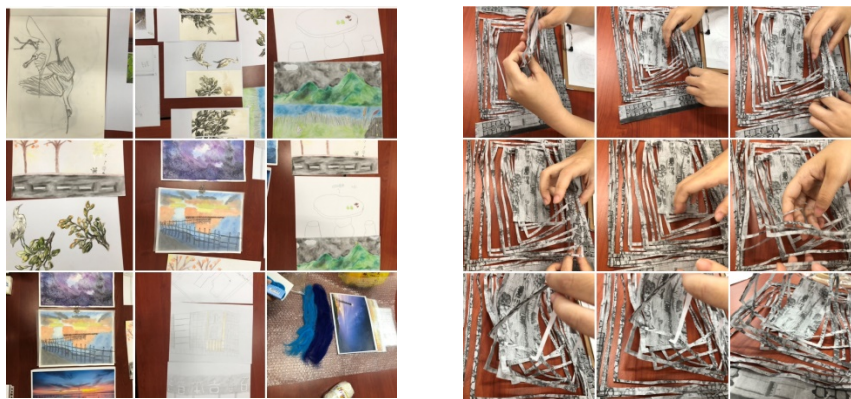


Figure 2 and 3: Shu-fang Huang (photographed), 2022.

Left: The stage of transforming literary reading into visual developments concerning local environments.

Right: Demonstrating the exploration methods of inspiration to students by means of plane drawings, paper cutting and manipulations.

(iv) Watching the inner operations of working

The extension of the idea of the soft material – step into the experiments of textiles.

At this stage, students repeatedly practice how to classify and arrange the ideas of making, alongside organising images which are obtained from previous study and patching the ideas

of material manipulating by the guidance of tutors together with the student's self-intuition. Students spend time observing the new forms created by printing, sewing, tearing, softening or folding the fabrics in the experimental process. The studies will receive feedback at any time in connecting the creative works of each stage through manual operations related to inner thinking and practical works as outer operations.



Figure 4: Shu-fang Huang (photographed), 2022. Ideas forming through the experiments on textile surfaces through printing and material manipulations.

(v) The performance of the textiles

The performance of soft materials – to fulfill the proficiency in the manipulation of fabrics and carry out methods of practices when exhibiting the resulting works. At this stage, students confirm the theme of their respective studies and select textile materials for final development. Furthermore, progress will be directed into a completed presentation of fabric designs with regard to a professional expression of exquisite details of works and installations. By this experiment, the explanation of the respective ideas and the exploration of individual experiences concerning design creativity can be communicated through the expression of works in an installation.

In one of the examples, the gained ideas originate from reading the selected literary texts of *Yan Zhi Pen Di*, (胭脂盆地, Rouge Basin) (Jian, 2004) that is described as follows. Observing the bustling and colourful city of Taipei, was attracted by the colourful associations of 'rouge'; as the student read through the texts, a personal experiences and emotions expressed in words were reflected. This is an inclination to a sort of inner reflection, with observation of the interlacing images of space, time, place and seasons; through the brush strokes, the young artist tried to describe the complex emotions contained in the words.



Figure 5: Cai Zhen-yan (蔡甄諺, 2022), creative stage of idea developments of student's experiments. The project was executed under the author's instruction.

The content of the above figures is explained as follows: a. The dialogue between time and space, sketching of stone table (above) and drawing of natural landscapes (below), in which the images gained from reading the literary texts; b. Drawing of imagination through text reading relating the environmental elements, in which the kapok trees are included; c. Application of environmental elements – taking kapok flowers as motifs for practising on pattern designs; d. Further developments of creative ideas – the stone table and stools are filled with the textures and colour of pencil; e. Creative developments concerning material manipulations – to apply ideas of the previous drawings of natural landscapes by experimenting on the felts.

Taking the city of the 'Rouge Colour' as the initial exploration for design creation, the above pictures are parts of the initial developments of a study case: As a dialogue in time and space, in a place where lay a stone table and stools in the description of the texts is a space for people to rest, which echoes the spatial images of people coming and gone by. At the beginning of the study, the student used pencils to draw; for further development, partially coloured on the shaddocks, teapot and teacup, where the color is occupied only a very small proportion in the drawing. Later on, the small yellow plastic tubes and white beads were attached onto the details of the picture for decoration. On the other vision of textual imaginations, environmental elements such as kapok trees and flowers were applied to become motif of pattern designs. This also echoes the seasonal scenes of the blooming of kapok flowers in a muggy and crowded city, as described in the literature reading.

At the beginning, the student simulated a situation and feeling in the literary texts, using pencil drawing for the outline of stone tables and stools; only the grapefruit and tea sets applied colours, In the development process, the student believed that the stone table and stools were the relics of Axi (a character in the texts); therefore, the non-colour drawing of pencil was applied, and there was a sense of contrast between the past and the present (Fig. 5-d). After discussions and suggestions from peers in the course, the stone table and stools

were applied gray with pencils thereafter, which appears a more stone-like texture. She was also satisfied with the effect of this development.



Figure 6: Shu-fang Huang (photographed), 2022, Cai Zhen-yan (蔡珍彦), 2022, student's works in the exhibition curated by the author.

Compared with the depictions of the city, another study of literary *Lights and Shadows Along the Mountains* is also a textual description, which is full of imageries.

On an ancient path, people used their feet to cross mountains and ridges, stepping their own shadows into the shadows of the mountains, and walked like this for more than 400 years.

On this ancient path, the purple butterflies the size of a palm spread their wings as beautiful as the lights and shadows in the moments, and flew through the years for an unknown amount of time...

The end of each route seems to be a beginning of the other route; the same for butterflies, when a space is closed, the other one will appear before one's eyes... (Guo, Han-chen, 2013)

A student, her experiments combined with imaginal scenes of ancient path, was inspired by the textual description, on which the people figures overlapping with purple butterflies which has special colours and textures. The depictions of images of aboriginal people on the pathways in an ancient scenery surrounded by the lights and shadows of their nature, which are very similar to the twilight. Such a design experiment is where the creative inspiration begins.



Figure 7: Ke, Bei-ling (柯蓓伶), creative stage of idea development of student's experiments. The project is executed under the author's instruction.

The above images show the practice works of combining the ancient pathway with people figures, overlapping with images of coloured and textured butterflies; and the further developments of the study of practicing embroidery applied images with textiles and threads.

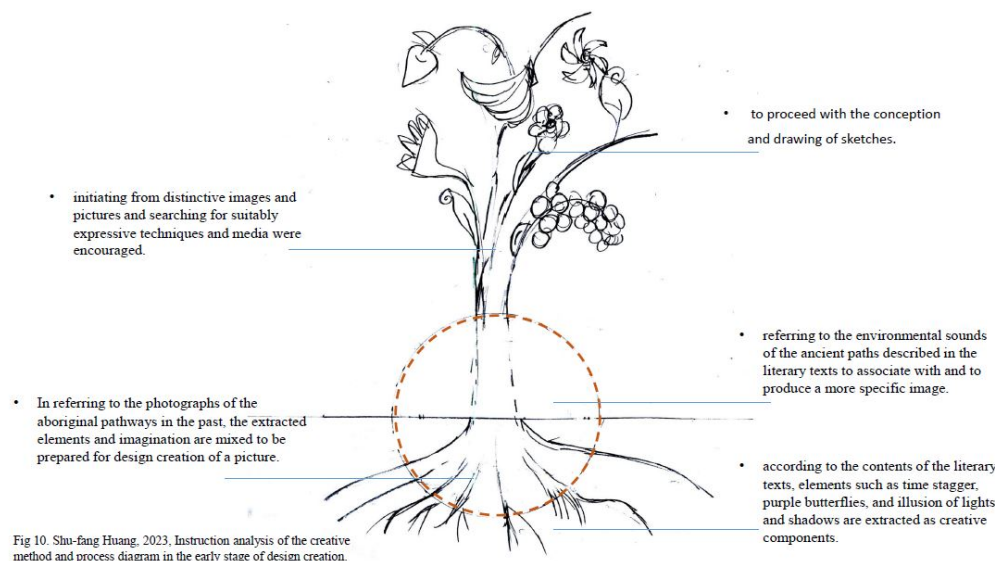


Fig 8. Shu-fang Huang, 2023, Instruction analysis of the creative method and process diagram in the early stage of design creation.

With regard to the instruction analysis of the creative method and process diagram in the early stage of design creation, the further explanation is as below; that, according to the contents of the literary texts, elements such as time stagger, purple butterflies, and illusion of lights and shadows are extracted as creative components. In referring to the photographs of the aboriginal pathways in the past, the extracted elements and imagination are mixed to be prepared for design creation of a picture. Furthermore the student refers to the environmental sounds of the ancient paths described in the literary texts to associate with and to produce a more specific image. The study was initiated from distinctive images and pictures and searching for suitably expressive techniques and media were encouraged, in order to proceed with the conception and drawing of sketches.

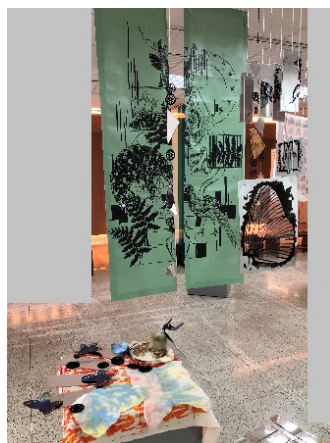


Fig.9. Shu-fang Huang (photographed), 2022, Ke, Bei-ling (柯蓓伶), 2022, student's work in the exhibition curated by the author.

In addition to receiving guidance from the course instructor for the creative study, reciprocal learning through peer feedback is also essential to find diverse perspectives, which is significant in helping students in building up individual methods of design so as to widen their ways of viewing.

Under the guidance of this creative method of design, many students have constructed their own creative contexts. Most of them use literature reading and its environmental descriptions for the first time to draw forth ideas into developing concepts of creativities of textiles. However, the introduction of this creative method provides the active inspiration for students' projects that are generally agreed by the students who attend the course. One of them considered that the major inspiration to her is 'let me start to learn to think of the emotion provoked in the literary texts in relation to the creation of the work.' (2022, Questionnaire A) likewise, 'I can analyse the literary texts from different angle and then add my own ideas to proceed with creative work.' (2022, Questionnaire B) The other students show a careful thinking that 'to understand the author's ideas of emotion can be said to be a sort of cultivation of empathy; in the creative process [of mine], I often transformed my viewing into the author's perspective to sense the surrounding' (2022, Questionnaire C).

In addition, the students' mutual feedbacks in the course of study are important. For example; by referring to a no longer existing building in a business zone in Taichung (a city located in west-central Taiwan), it seems that the collected story was once blocked for some reasons in the process of a student's study. After several discussions with instructor and peers, her aspects of study and ways of experimenting practical works changed; along with her constantly accumulated ideas of study and continually examined possible methods through generating some manuscripts, drawings, collages, as well as recording in detail for reviewing creative processes, etc. In looking for accessible possibilities, the student finally developed an individual way of creation and her development become well performed, enabling peers to learn from each other:

The creation process of the theme of 'Dragon Heart Shopping Mall' (Long Xin Shang Chang, 龍心商場) is very attractive project. At the beginning, the creator shown to the audience mates the historical evolutions in the article is only some textual narratives; however she further searches for visual records, historical photos and street scenes. It has been a different experience. Every week, I listened to the peer sharing her story of Long-xin Shopping Mall. Its evolutionary process is like a scroll with the excavation of references by the creator; the viewers perceived the gradual unfolding processes of experiencing ups and downs. Initially from a mere description of texts in an article, the creator gradually collected and accumulated information, until she can present a complete appearance of the study project, and has found some scarce records such as images of tokens utilised in the old times, newspapers and magazines related to the stories of the department store in dates of prosperity, etc., I anticipate that the final work must be very meaningful. (Huang Ke-ying, 2022)

From the feedbacks of the survey respondents, it is clear that the guidance of design creativity given through practical studies of the students in the course allows the mutual disturbance and stimulation to be created through mutual communications among of textual reading, image creations, manipulations of materials and textures. Taking advantage of progress with each step of time, in the teaching field of design, this interactive process has created a sort of vividness, moving along with a lot of expectations.

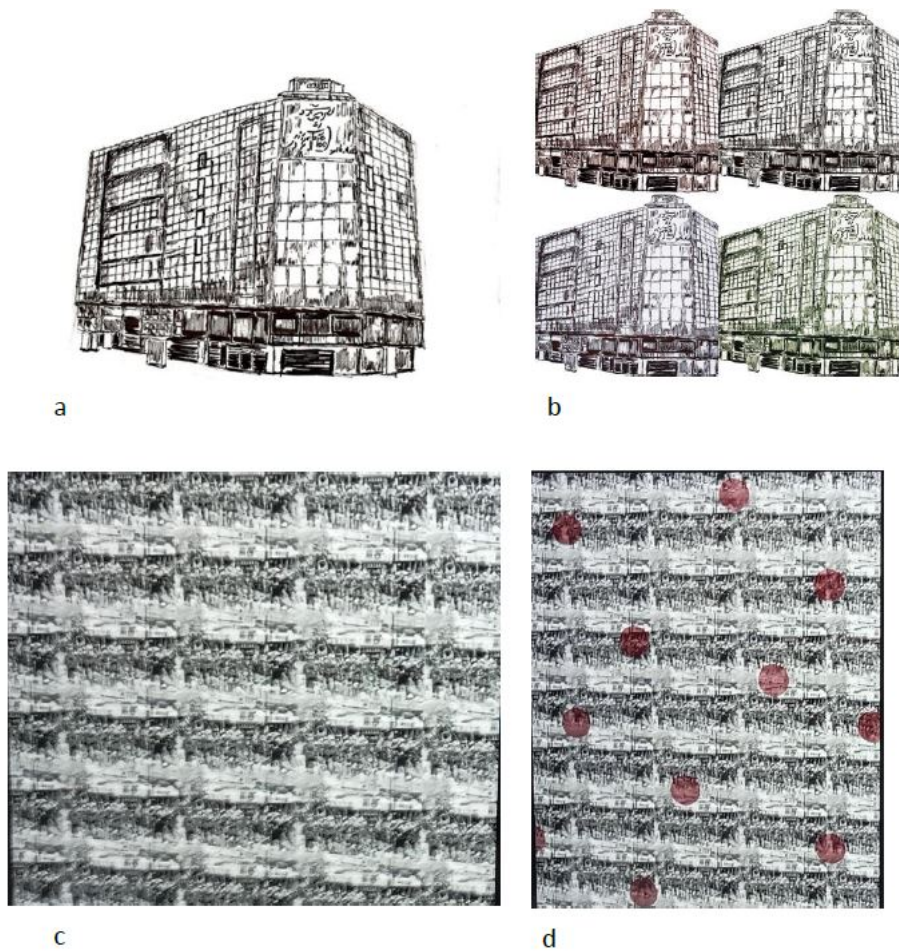


Fig.10. Shu-fang Huang (photographed), 2022, Huang, Qi-wen (黃琪雯), 2022, the processes of the student's project.

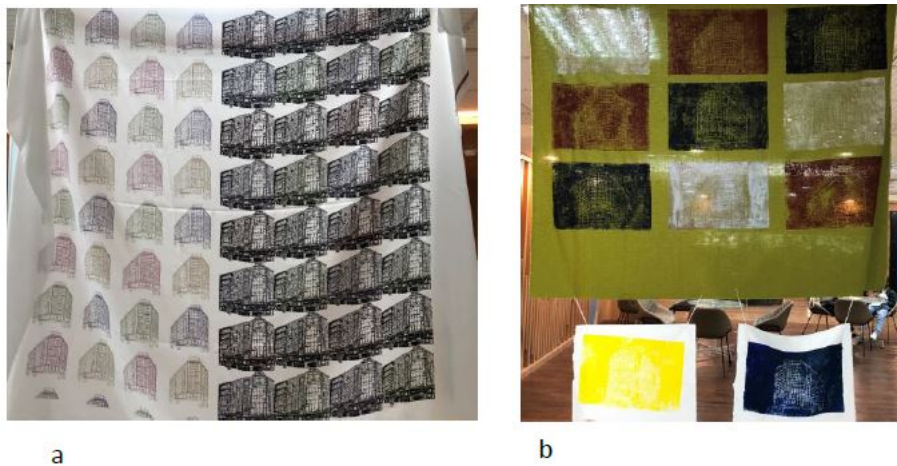


Fig.11. Shu-fang Huang (photographed), 2022, Huang, Qi-wen (黃琪雯), 2022, student's works in the exhibition curated by the author.

Conclusion: The possible contribution of the teaching achievements

By practicing the application of methods revealing inner thinking of design and experimenting with expressions of multi-materials, allows students to explore the potential integration of the material expressions of textiles concerning literary descriptions of

environmental textures relating to the place of locals. By this way, the teaching project helps students explore the creativity of textiles and learn to build their individual methods of design studies.

Students implement an integrated theme-based design plan; in the course, they were encouraged to observe potential developments concerning the exploration in relation to the inspirations obtained from textual reading. Through practicing their workings, students learn respective methods of problem solving in the process of material making. Furthermore, through experimentation and presenting the completed works in an exhibition to review the results of study, the expected outcomes of design works and the developed design methods can be shared to the communities and other teaching applications concerning creative project of designs. The contributions of the teaching project can therefore be reviewed.

In addition, the perceptions, overlapping the unique imaginations, and scenes of the intersection of time and space form new possibilities through reading literary texts, it seems to be different from merely visiting the actual fields without sufficiently associating the textual explorations. Connecting the design developments of fashion materials through literature reading can inspire students to create more profound connotations of design, as well as an opportunity for promoting potential cultivation of identity imbedded in local places for the participants.

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