

The Value of Cross-Cultural Design Learning on Interior Design Education

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The Asian Conference on Education 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Globalization and cross-country migration due to education, work, and tourism have increased cross-cultural interactions between various countries. These cross-cultural interactions occasionally create diaspora communities of families from countries with different cultural backgrounds. Advances in transportation, information, and communication technology also make it easier for people from different cultural backgrounds to interact with each other. Facing this situation, education in design colleges needs to equip students to meet the needs of user groups from different cultural backgrounds through cross-cultural design. This study aims to understand the value of cross-cultural design learning. This study uses a case study research method. The case study is about ten cross-cultural interior designs belonging to mixed Japanese and Chinese families, which ten students designed. The things analyzed are (1) how to dialogue differences between Japanese and Chinese cultures, (2) how to represent the dialogue between the two cultures in a hybrid design, and (3) the values learned from the resulting hybrid designs. The results of creating hybrid designs are lessons on thinking in a middle way, having an open attitude, tolerance, respect, and prioritizing dialogue between cultural differences.

Keywords: Value, Cross-Cultural, Design, Education

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Introduction

The background of the study consists of national and international conditions. Indonesia has a national condition as an archipelagic country with 17,508 islands (Law Number 6 of 1996 concerning Indonesian Waters). It encompasses 1.340 ethnic groups (Central Statistical Agency Census, 2010), which makes Indonesian society a pluralistic society that lives with cultural differences. In terms of international conditions, Indonesia displays advances in transportation, communication, and information technology so that people from different countries and nations in various corners of the world can interact with each other and migrate for work, education, or social interaction. Jakarta, the capital city of the Republic of Indonesia, is a cultural "melting pot" where Indonesian citizens from various ethnic groups and foreign citizens from various countries and nations interact and influence each other with different cultural backgrounds.

This cross-cultural interaction sometimes results in marriages and families with different cultural backgrounds. In this case, art education, including design education, must educate prospective designers to be aware of and appreciate differences. Cross-cultural interactions and activities that influence each other intensively between different cultures can produce new cultures that are mixed and hybrid. Furthermore, design education, in this case, interior design education, must educate students to be creative in producing hybrid design innovations due to cultural dialogues that vary from the backgrounds of the occupants of the living space. This study aims to (1) study the value of cross-cultural design in general and cross-cultural interior design of living spaces, specifically, and (2) teach these values to students taking design education in general and interior design education in particular.

The research uses a case study research method, and the analysis variables are derived from the experiential learning theory. The case study research method can serve the research needs to obtain specific knowledge, namely the value of cross-cultural interior design education seen from a specific context. In addition, it also provides the ability to capture the reality of the learning process of value systems derived from cross-cultural design education in the Department of Interior Design at the University of Pelita Harapan.

Cross-cultural design education uses an experiential learning approach that provides design experience with real clients, aiming to provide students with a simulation of the complexity of problems and the actual process of designing living spaces when dealing with family clients from different cultural backgrounds, where students must unite the differences in views, opinions, preferences and needs of clients. The case study is a lesson in interior design of a living space from a cross-cultural family consisting of a Japanese husband and a Chinese wife living in Jakarta. The group consisted of ten students aspiring to be prospective home interior designers. The problems to be answered are (1) how to dialogue Japanese and Chinese cultures into a cross-cultural system that is the background of the design of a Japanese-Chinese family home, (2) how to represent the results of this dialogue into a cross-cultural design that is mixed and hybrid, (3) learning the value of design hybridity, (4) how students can gain life lessons from the value of this cross-cultural design.

Methods

The case study research was preceded by the development of a theory, in this case, the theory of experiential learning, from a social psychologist, David Allen Kolb. The theory of experiential learning (Kolb, 2014) states that effective lessons are obtained from four stages

in the learning process, namely, (a) concrete experience, learning through direct experience; (b) reflective observation: reflecting on experience; (c) abstract conceptualization: learning from experience, (d) active experimentation: testing results or practicing learning outcomes. After developing the theory and obtaining the analysis variables, the next step is to collect case study data using the Korean cultural literature study method and observation and interviews of users from Korean and Japanese cultural backgrounds. The data collected relates to the profile, cultural background, needs, desires, and flow of activity of users. From these data, perceptions of the user's cultural background are produced. Then, the user's cultural background is analyzed to produce programs, concepts, and design implementations. The design results are re-analyzed to reflect the Korean and Japanese cultural values represented by ten design results. The next step is to evaluate ten alternative design solutions created by ten students based on the criteria of fulfilling the needs and representing the identity of Korean and Japanese cultural values. During the design process to evaluation, the values learned by students from cross-cultural design lessons are analyzed, and how they learn them through direct experience designing clients from different cultural backgrounds is studied. The stages of the research are described by the method as follows:

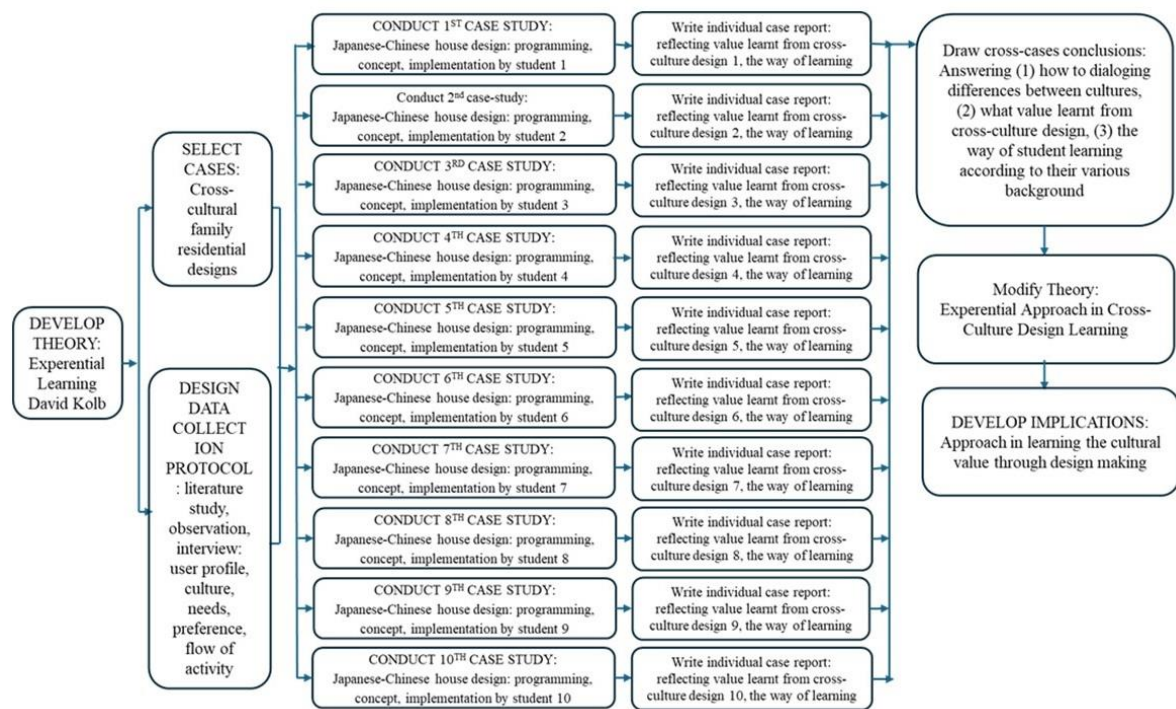


Figure 1: Case Study Research Method
(Adapted From Case-Study Research Model of Robert K. Yin, 2018)

Result

Concrete Experience in Designing Cross-Cultural Residence

Ten students learned to design the interior of a family living space with a Japanese-Chinese cross-cultural background. They conducted interviews, analyzed needs, identified design problems, and created programming, concepts, and design implementation. This design activity resulted in ten interior design cases with a Japanese-Chinese cross-cultural theme. Their designs combined the Japanese aesthetics of wabi-sabi and the Chinese aesthetics of the yin and yang balance duality. From the Japanese aesthetics of wabi-sabi, the value learned is

that beauty comes from simplicity and imperfection. It obtained the value of imperfection by applying natural elements that experience growth and change and asymmetric layout structures. Natural elements are applied, among others, by providing spaces open to the inner courtyard or back garden. When plants in the garden grow from shoots, become significant, but then wither, or from not yet flowering, flowering, then falling, it is a representation of change and, at the same time, imperfection. The beauty from imperfection comes from accepting things or elements that are as they are and run according to the laws of nature. As for the Chinese culture, it brought to light the duality of the balance of yin and yang, where two different or even opposing characters are present together in one space. These two design elements that have different images or design characters or shapes or materials or lighting and colors, when combined harmoniously, actually produce an interesting design and are varied and exciting.



Figure 2: The Study of Implementation of Japanese Aesthetics *Wabi Sabi*
(Source: Meisya Kwee, Residential Interior Design Studio, Interior Design Department,
Faculty of Design, UPH, 2024)

In addition to the differences, Japanese and Chinese cultures have similarities in their outlook on life, which is related to naturalism. This view believes that humans are part of nature, so humans must maintain the sustainability of the natural environment and live side by side with nature in a harmonious, balanced sense. In the design of living spaces, intervening spaces between outdoor and indoor spaces and using natural materials are prerequisites for health and physical and psychological comfort. Indoor and/or backyard gardens provide access to natural lighting and ventilation for health and access to views to relieve stress. Using natural materials is non-toxic and provides psychological comfort because it brings humans closer to the texture and color of nature. Through the experience of designing living spaces for real clients with cross-cultural backgrounds, students learn to combine two different cultures, which have values of similarities and differences.



Figure 3: The Study of Implementation of Chinese Aesthetics: The Duality of Yin Yang Balance Concept. (Source: Kathleen Florencia, Residential Interior Design Studio, Interior Design Department, Faculty of Design, UPH, 2024)

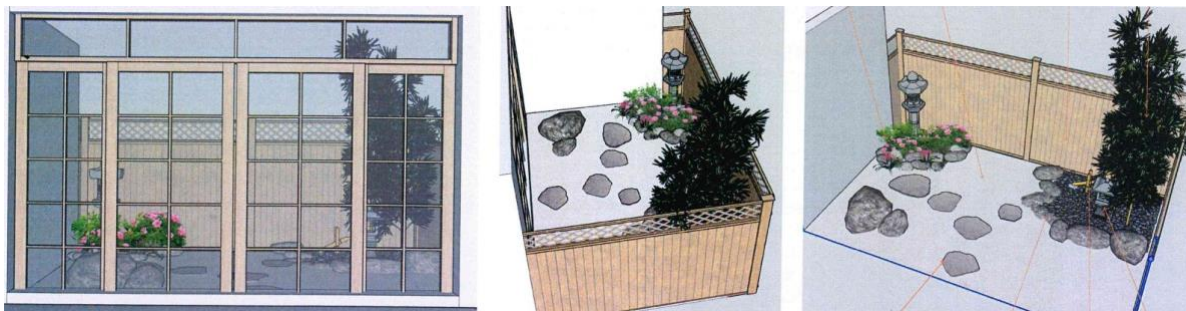


Figure 4: The Study of Implementation of Naturalism Ideology (Source: Jacqueline Johan, Residential Interior Design Studio, Interior Design Department, Faculty of Design, UPH, 2024)

Reflective Observation

After finishing the design, we interviewed each student about the values they learned during the cross-cultural design. The answers given by the students can be categorized as follows: The value of beauty comes from philosophical thoughts such as naturalism, wabi-sabi, and the duality of yin-yang balance. The value of dialogue between differences: Combining different characters creates an interesting and exciting design. The value of the middle way is that harmony is within reach because the occupants of the living space from different cultural backgrounds do not have or do not maintain extreme cultural characteristics. The husband who has Japanese culture does not demand a solid or thick representation of traditional Japanese cultural identity in the house but is more modern. Likewise, the wife who comes from Chinese culture does not demand a strong representation of traditional Chinese identity in the house's culture, but rather, it is more modern. Because both do not have extreme but moderate characteristics, a middle way can be taken to combine Japanese and Chinese cultural characters. (4) the value of prioritizing similarities over differences: Japanese-Chinese cross-cultural design can be done by prioritizing the value of similarities between Japanese and Chinese culture, namely implementing the naturalistic outlook on life.

Abstract Conceptualization

After reflecting on the cross-cultural design values, students learn to apply the cross-cultural design learning values. The step taken in this case is to conduct a dialogue between differences by combining Japanese and Chinese cultural values. An example is the value of

simplicity in Japanese interior design, influenced by the characteristics of Chinese design. For example, they use natural colors in the room's general color scheme, where red stands out as an accent. Another example is presenting decorative elements in abstracting plant shapes as decorative wall decorations or paintings or Chinese ornaments and paintings in the tatami room. The tatami room, which is usually simple and uses natural colors, is made more decorative, following the more decorative character of Chinese culture.

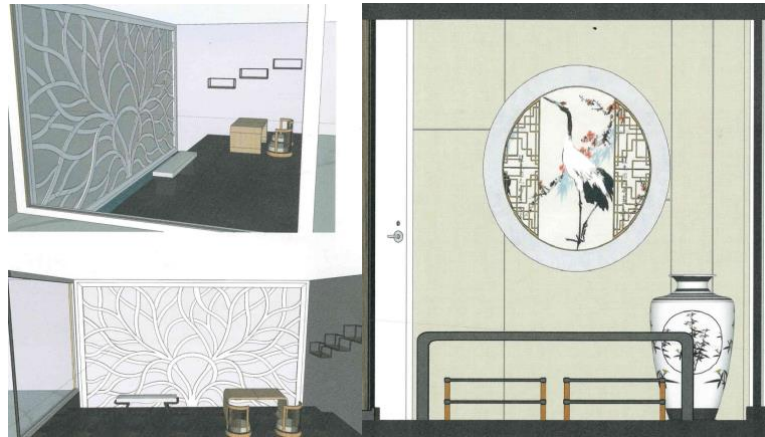


Figure 5: Study of Implementation of Dialogue among Differences Between Chinese and Japanese Cultures. (Source: Sharilyn Kambey, Residential Interior Design Studio, Interior Design Department, Faculty of Design, UPH, 2024)

Active Experimentation

Client feedback assesses the student's ability to convey the design concept clearly and whether the design is by the client's initial Terms of Reference (TOR). The terms of reference provided by the client relate to security, safety, physical and psychological comfort, and client needs and preferences.

In addition, because the client is a designer too, the client also assesses the quality of the presentation images provided and whether the design images created follow the design concept expressed, whether the design concept can be put into the design accordingly, and whether the design represents Japanese and Chinese culture.

From this section, students learn to accept confirmation, evaluation, and criticism of users when dialoguing with Japanese and Chinese cultures and combining Japanese and Chinese designs. This section is part of the validity of the research results because it is a phase to evaluate whether the positive values learned when conducting cross-cultural design get positive responses, approval, or support from clients in line with client needs.

Discussion

How to Dialogue Differences Between Japanese and Chinese Cultures

In our attempt to dialogue the Japanese and Chinese cultures, we first discussed Japanese and Chinese cultures by studying the Japanese and Chinese cultural systems. To understand a culture, we must first understand the perspective of that culture. As a culture, Japanese and Chinese cultures have universal elements of culture, such as belief systems, outlook on life, economic systems, technology, society, language, and art.

From these universal elements of culture, we learn the cultural values behind them. For example, from the Japanese cultural outlook on life, we learn the concepts of *wabi-sabi*, *bikan*, *mottainai*, *taru wo shiru*, flexibility or contextuality of meaning, the concept of *ma* about the value of empty space and transitional space, and naturalism. Meanwhile, examples of values from Chinese culture are the duality of yin-yang balance, familism, the concept of the middle way *chung-yung* and back to naturalism. After understanding each other's cultural perspectives and aspects of similarities such as naturalism, it is clear that it can be the same starting point for combining Japanese and Chinese cultures. Meanwhile, there are differences because in Japanese culture, there is an appreciation for the value of flexibility, and in Chinese culture, there is the concept of the middle way, *chung-yung*; both cultures have an open attitude towards differences.

The existence of this open attitude towards differences is the entry point for holding a dialogue. Thus, we learn that to dialogue differences, first, there must be an understanding of each other's perspectives, and second, there must be an open attitude towards differences and a willingness to take a middle path or compromise.



Figure 6: The Study of Dialoguing Japanese and Chinese Culture Through Dwelling Design
(Source: Jennifer Welly Mulyanto, Residential Interior Design Studio,
Interior Design Department, Faculty of Design, UPH, 2024)

The students reinforce this through their opinion that cross-cultural design is a strategy to make the design more interesting rather than simply displaying Japanese culture or Chinese culture. For example, when displaying a design representing Japanese cultural identity, the room appears minimalist through simple shapes, natural materials, and neutral and soft natural colors. However, when this Japanese space is influenced by Chinese cultural elements such as Chinese painting and red color accentuation, the Japanese space that was initially minimalist can appear not monotonous but more exciting and dynamic. The complementary combination of opposing characters, such as soft and natural colors as general or main colors and strong color accents or functional shapes as general or primary shapes and decorative shapes as accentuations, creates balance, or what in Chinese culture is known as the concept of *yin-yang* balance.

How to Represent the Dialogue Between the Two Cultures in a Hybrid Design

Design hybridity is done through adoption, adaptation, and adaptation strategies. Adoption strategy is taking cultural or design elements that already exist, without criticizing, in the sense of simply copying. An example of an adoption strategy in implementing naturalism is

the provision of an inner courtyard surrounded by a building mass to channel natural lighting and ventilation around the space. An adaptation strategy is taking cultural or design elements from the past. However, when applied to a modern interior, the existing elements are adjusted to modern needs and contexts regarding shape, size, material, color, and processing technology. An example of an adaptation strategy in implementing naturalism in interior design is providing a green wall in a room when the occupant has a limited land area to provide an inner courtyard. Adaptation strategy presents design elements or culture from the past in a new way. One example of an accreditation study applied by students to implement naturalism is presenting plants not in physical form but through the abstraction of the organic form of plants.



Figure 7: The Strategy of Implementing Naturalism in Japanese-Chinese Hybrid Design.
(Source: Deo Alrego, Meisya Kwee, Sharilyn Kambey, Residential Interior Design Studio, Interior Design Department, Faculty of Design, UPH, 2024)

The Values Learned From the Hybrid Designs

The values learned from the Japanese-Chinese hybrid design are the views and attitudes towards differences, starting from being open to differences, accepting differences, understanding differences, appreciating differences, and dialoguing differences to produce something new. In the context of design lessons, this new thing is creativity and innovation to solve design problems that come from client needs and represent the user's (client's) cross-cultural identity. This also teaches students that design is not just about results, design is not just about the work process, and more than that, design is a value system. Design as a material culture is a medium for communicating or representing the value system in the cultural system that produces it. When creating a design work, designers must understand the cultural system of the user; likewise, when appreciating a design work, designers must use the perspective of the culture where the design was produced.

The Way of Learning the Value is Influenced by the Student's Character and Background

When we interviewed students about the lessons they learned when experiencing the cross-cultural design process, different students had different perspectives or saw different sides. There was a category of students who emphasized the aspect of similarities and saw it as the beginning of opening a dialogue between different cultures. It also turned out that this category of students came from a Chinese cultural background. He felt that the same cultural background between the designer and the client helped the designer to understand the client's needs, for example, in terms of applying feng shui in Chinese culture (one of the clients came from a Chinese cultural background). In this case, the student had the character of someone comfortable when in an environment with the same culture. When faced with differences, he saw the potential for dialogue if the differences were not too extreme or thick. When people from different cultural backgrounds do not defend their differences and are more willing to see similarities, the path to dialogue between differences is more open (more potential for dialogue).

On the other hand, a category of students prioritizes the aspect of difference. This category of students is enthusiastic and likes differences because they consider it a challenge or opportunity to produce something new, unusual, something not often seen or encountered in their surroundings. This category of students sees cross-cultural design as an opportunity to produce interesting and exciting (not monotonous) designs. This is produced by a category of students with a character who likes challenges or unusual or everyday things, the type of person who likes unique and challenging things. We can find another group of students who fit into the category of people who can see the intersection between aspects of similarities and differences. One of the things highlighted by this category is technological developments in the design of living spaces in Japanese and Chinese cultures. Although Japanese and Chinese cultures both develop living space technology, the character behind the technological system being developed has differences.

Japanese culture, in this case, develops living space design technology that still requires residents to work, make an effort, or move. However, the residential technology developed in Chinese culture, such as smart homes, seeks to provide optimal comfort to residents so that residents do not need to do as much as possible. The opinions of this category of students are interesting and still need to be tested in other studies. The areas the students observe are influenced by the areas of interest in their daily lives, such as technological progress. Thus, each student's life values are influenced by their character, personality, way of thinking, cultural background, or things in accordance with personal interests.

Conclusions

The value of cross-cultural design lessons is learning to accept, face, understand, appreciate, and dialogue differences to find new things. A positive attitude to face differences is needed because, amid global social conditions, students who are prospective designers will face clients and colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. The attitude of prioritizing understanding different cultural perspectives to find similarities at an essential level is needed to open dialogue between different cultures. The attitude of seeing differences as challenges and opportunities to present newness is needed in design education because design science aims to find new things that are more creative and innovative to solve complex human needs. Analyzing aspects of similarities and differences in culture helps build awareness that these two aspects are always in cross-cultural interactions. Cultural identity is constructed by the intersection or meeting point between similarities and differences.

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