

International Input and Innovation Focus: Chinese Programme Graduates First Student Cohort

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UWN reported in March that China was stepping up its drive to lure overseas talent in its bid to become an innovation economy. An example of drawing on such talent is the Shanghai-based DeTao Masters Academy (DTMA), which was launched in 2010 with the aim of fostering leading-edge developments by having aspiring Chinese innovators work with top experts in the creative industries from all over the world.

At the heart of the DTMA model are some 500 experts, designated as ‘Masters’, who are recruited globally from universities and industry and invited to make regular visits to China. The Masters share their knowledge and skills – including the ‘tacit knowledge’ that is key to successful innovation – with Chinese students and professionals. One mechanism for such sharing is a programme of enriched majors, designed by the foreign Masters, that runs alongside the undergraduate programmes of the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts (SIVA).

Whereas SIVA is an integral part of China’s national higher education system, DTMA is a commercial company set up to work in synergy with Chinese HEIs to raise the quality and relevance of their programmes. Not being subject to China’s national quality assurance system for higher education, DTMA sought another route for quality recognition and has achieved this through the Quality Platform developed by the International Quality Group of the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA/CIQG).

The DTMA Advanced Classes Programme: Graduation of the first cohort of students

DTMA’s creation was partly sparked by the Shanghai Expo in 2010, where the talents of many global leaders in the creative industries were on display. Some of the first Masters were recruited from among the architects of the most impressive of the Expo’s national pavilions (e.g. Israel, New Zealand, Austria, Denmark). Several of these early Masters are still deeply engaged in teaching for DTMA, which adopted an unusually holistic approach to the role of Masters in the innovation process by linking their work closely to the development of Chinese industry.

DTMA also stressed the importance of the Masters’ tacit knowledge and its implication for the teaching programme: “tacit know-how represents judgemental wisdom accumulated through years of practical experiences, and can only be demonstrated in the context of problem solving and decision making... this requires

an immersive, simultaneous and interactive process of problem solving in which followers can soak themselves in the decision making context and comprehend the nuances as well as the holism behind the judgements of the Masters”.

The Masters responded enthusiastically to the opportunity. Nathan Wang (Master of Music from California) said DTMA was ‘a dream come true’. Matias del Campo (Master of Architecture, Austria) called it ‘the epicentre of an earthquake in architecture’. Timothy Jacob Jensen (Master of Design, Denmark) has substantially expanded his business in China through his association with DTMA. Haim Dotan (Architect and Poet, Israel/USA), who viewed DTMA as a ‘unique opportunity to build ecological cities’, achieved fame by designing the Zhangjiajie glass bridge that opened in 2016 and instantly became a world attraction.

DTMA’s teaching activity is centred on the close partnership with SIVA and the offering of enriched majors, designed and implemented under the guidance of a small number of DTMA’s Masters, to highly selected cohorts of students. Student recruitment began in 2013 for two majors, *Strategic Design and Innovation* and *Creative Animation*. Their first cohorts of 40 students graduated in June 2017.

Eight additional majors were opened in 2014: *Product Design (Sustainable Furniture Design)*; *Visual Communication Design (Branding, Identity and Public Space)*; *Performance (Spanish Guitar)*; *Cultural Industry Management (Brand Strategy and Management)*; *Environment Design (Ecological Architecture Design)*; *Environment Design (Themed Environmental Design)*; *Fashion and Apparel Design (Fashion, Knitwear, Sportswear Design)* and *Art and Technology (Technoetic Arts)*.

By 2017, 684 students were enrolled in the Advanced Programme. In addition to the SIVA Bachelor’s degree, they will receive a DTMA Certificate of Completion signed by their respective Masters.

International Recognition

As an alternative provider of higher learning outside China’s formal higher education system, getting international recognition was an early imperative for DTMA. Fortuitously, as the Advanced Programme was being offered, the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation was developing, through its International Quality Group (CHEA/CIQG), a “Quality Platform”. As an external quality review designed for non-traditional, innovative providers, it seemed a particularly appropriate mechanism through which DTMA could gain international recognition. The primary focus of the Quality Platform is on the articulation and achievement of learning outcomes, which was a rather new concept for quality assurance in China.

DTMA proposed its Advanced Programme as a pilot test for a Quality Platform review in April 2015. Following the submission of a self-review there was a visit by external assessors, who had an opportunity to see students’ work and interview various stakeholders. In the light of their report CHEA/CIQG granted DTMA the status of a “Quality Platform Provider” in December 2015. This designation will figure

on the certificates issued as a supplement to the SIVA degrees awarded at graduation.

The granting of CHEA/CIQG Quality Platform status was based on several factors. The curriculum outlines for the Advanced Programme courses are mainly designed by DTMA Masters and include a market survey in the relevant industry to justify the need for the class and the objectives/goals of the programme. From these are derived the learning outcomes; a teaching plan; a course description and evaluation; a course outline; student admission and selection requirements; the grading system; and pointers to career prospects. The courses are taught by a team of teaching staff and aim for a learning environment that is student-centred, inquiry-friendly and practical in nature, reflecting close ties with industry. Most adopt a project-based approach and group work enables students to share their skills and different cultural perspectives in achieving the learning outcomes.

Continuous evaluation of students through portfolios, yearbooks and workbooks supports the assessment of learning outcomes. Assessment is underpinned by assessment criteria and a clear and transparent approach to grading. Students get feedback on how well they achieved the learning outcomes and, in their turn, provide written evaluations of the learning process.

The Advanced Programme meets post-secondary level education expectations – another requirement of the Quality Platform review - because its courses are used as elements of SIVA's four-year degree programmes.

Given DTMA's unusual profile and teaching style, there are few institutions to which it can be compared. However, the vast and distinguished experience of industry and academe that DTMA Masters bring to their work facilitated both formal and informal benchmarking in developing curricula and assessing students.

The Quality Platform review process itself helped considerably in articulating and framing the DTMA educational model by creating a wider shared understanding of its concepts and terminologies that could promote consistency in formulating student learning outcomes.

Looking to the Future

DTMA has created a new model for higher education in symbiosis with China's traditional university structures. This Advanced Programme, driven by internationally eminent Masters, has been exceptionally well received by students, parents, industry and partner institutions.

The international assessment of the SIVA-DTMA Advanced Programme demonstrated the excellent quality of the content and teaching with its basis in marketing surveys in industry and the primacy of student learning outcomes. DTMA has become an important pioneer in the development of Chinese higher education through its demonstration of flexible, student-centred learning with a focus on project work related to the practical application of the subject matter. The students are likely to absorb from these international Masters some of the tacit knowledge and

understanding of real-world contexts that is essential for achieving holistic innovation in their areas of work.

We believe that this model is relevant to the development of teaching and learning in higher education worldwide, although a key question concerns its scalability. How far can the impact of the scarce resource of DTMA's Masters be extended by training local Chinese experts to offer the DTMA Advanced Programme of comparable quality in a sustainable way? Now that DTMA is extending the programme to higher education institutions beyond Shanghai we may obtain answers to this question.