

On construction of a code of professional ethics for industrial designers in Taiwan

Manlai You* and Yuchien Hu**

* National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, Department of Industrial Design
Yunlin, Taiwan, youm@yuntech.edu.tw

** National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, Department of Industrial Design
Yunlin, Taiwan, g9631701@yuntech.edu.tw

Abstract: In order to promote the ethical value, many professional associations establish professional code of ethics for their members. With the establishment of an industrial design code of ethics would be of great help for designers when facing ethical issues. This research aims to set up a code of ethics for industrial designers in Taiwan. The research process consists of two phases. First, codes of ethics from design associations' websites in the world are collected for reference. Six codes of ethics from overseas are analyzed and compared to construct a basic framework of aspects relating to the design stakeholders. Second, based on the analysis result, in-depth interview and questionnaire survey are then conducted to solicit opinions and views of practitioners, promoters, and educators. It is concluded that although the ethical issues extracted from the international codes of ethics are not all of equal importance, they are all significant to designers in Taiwan. The result of this study could not only be a reference for drafting a formal code of professional ethics for industrial designer in Taiwan but also for other professional organizations to the establishment of their respective code of ethics.

Key words: *Design ethics, Design philosophy, Design issues*

1. Introduction

There has been a long time when the ethical concepts exist with Chinese culture. Ethics helps connect the relationship among people and maintain social harmony. However, with the advancement of technology and development of economy, the interactions among people are getting complicated nowadays. The traditional ideas and behaviors from generations could not catch up the high speed of social transition, and, as a consequence, a degradation of ethics in professional conducts as well as in social life. Cai [1] considers that since people can neither go back to traditional agricultural society nor live an independent life far away from modern society, the only best way is, on the basis of old values, to increase new values which may be appropriate in modern society. Furthermore, since the service of industrial designers involve in a variety of social interests such as users' safety, intellectual property rights, sustainability and material choices, etc., the establishment of a professional code of ethics would be a useful material in education and a good guideline for professionals when facing ethical issues. Xu [2] considers that the behavior standard of designers is an important subject, and it is also an inevitable tendency to make ethical design a concrete standard. You and Yang [3] also indicate that establishing a design code of ethics is a practicable way. Internationally, the professional organizations of industrial design (ID) in America, Canada, and Hong Kong all have already established code of ethics for their industrial designers. In contrast, though Taiwan has set up its ID association (China Industrial Designers' Association, CIDA) for over

40 years, the establishment of a code of ethics for industrial designers is still lacking. Therefore, on the wake of ethical awareness in society, it is highly urgent to construct Taiwan's own code of ethics for the ID profession.

First, this study collected and analyzed code of ethics of professional design organizations in other countries. After the analysis, a framework consisting of the basic aspects of the code of conduct of industrial designers was then outlined, and we then made in-depth interviews to solicit views of design practitioners, promoters, and educators. Based on the opinions gathered, a preliminary code of ethics with 88 items was then drafted. Finally, through a questionnaire survey, the perceived relative importance of each item as considered by the ID practitioners and the ID educators was then obtained, for further refinement and final proposal of the ID professional ethic code. The following are how we collected and analyzed the codes to outline the framework of code the ethics, and what we concluded from the interview and questionnaire survey.

2. Survey of Design Code of Ethics

To draft a code of ethics for industrial designers in Taiwan, we take existing codes of ethics from design organizations of other countries as references. We collected references from six design association websites. They are International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), The Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), Association of Chartered Industrial Designers of Ontario (ACIDO), Chartered Society of Designers (CSD), Design Institute of Australia (DIA), and Industrial Designers Society of Hong Kong (IDSHK). These codes were accessed from their respective websites, on April 28, 2008 (ACIDO, IDSA, IDSHK), August 3, 2008 (ICSID), and November 13, 2008 (DIA).

We analyzed the codes of ethics of all these associations and found that most of them are constructed on a structure based on the responsibility of designers in relation to the stakeholders of his service, i.e. other people or organizations. This agrees to the suggestion of Ye [4], who mentions that code of ethics can be set up on the basis of the professional's rights and obligations to his stakeholders. Based on designer's stakeholders, we structured a framework of eight aspects: 1) the association, 2) the profession, 3) the public, 4) colleagues, 5) employers/clients, 6) employees, 7) design students, and 8) design users. We then classified all basic items mentioned in the articles of these codes into them. Similar items were then merged and their main ideas extracted as design ethical issues.

Table 1 shows the framework with the result design ethical issues (except those in italics). The design ethical issues in each stakeholder aspect are ordered according to their frequencies, or the numbers of times mentioned, from large to small, in the original codes. From analyzing international codes of ethics, we learned the basic framework of a code of ethics and the general design ethical issues of concern. However, whether this structure and the issues are also suitable to the designers in Taiwan remains to be explored. Therefore, in the next section we will conduct in-depth interviews and a questionnaire survey to further research how to construct a code of professional ethics for Taiwan designers.

3. Interview and Questionnaire Survey

In the in-depth interview, we purposively sampled 11 designers, including 5 practitioners, 3 promoters, and 3 design educators, who are senior in this profession and have more or less related to CIDA, such as current or former members of the executive board or even the board director. In the interview, they were firstly briefed to the concept of code of professional design ethics and the work we had done in investigating the international

associations, and the result of this investigation. Then they were asked to express their opinions to the general concept as well as to the structure and design ethic issues as mentioned in the previous section. They might express the relevance of these to the industrial designers in Taiwan. In addition, they might also suggest to adding other related issues or even revising the existing ones.

As a result, most interviewees agreed the significance of design code of ethics. They considered that the establishment of a code of ethics would not only prevent unnecessary conflicts and reduce social costs but could also be used to train new industrial designers as well as designers-to-be in universities. In addition, concerning whether the design ethic issues mentioned are incomplete, some interviewees suggested that would be more comprehensive if some related new issues could be added. We then added these new issues also in Table 1, coded them, in italics, as: II-14, 15, 16, III-7, IV-8, and VI-7.

Table 1. The Framework and Ethical Issues

Stakeholder	Design Ethical Issues	Association#
I. The association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 1. Abide by design code of ethics * 2. As prerequisite the laws to abide by the code * 3. Laws appear to be at variance with the code; the designers shall take actions + 4. Set up the complain duct of negotiation + 5. Designers who contravene the code may be punished by the association + 6. Accept the decision of the association + 7. Providing a forum for the ethical concerns 	B,C,H,U
II. The profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ** 1. Concerned about the innovative design service of high quality * 2. Keep the honor and dignity * 3. The rules about personal interests conflict with the professional duty * 4. Publicity material must be factual statements * 5. Conduct the projects with honesty and integrity ** 6. Avoid plagiarizing and accepting instructions of plagiarism ** 7. Maintain sufficient professional knowledge * 8. Seeking challenging assignments + 9. Participation in activities and programs if possible * 10. Being honest and fair in serving the public * 11. Further education + 12. Publish in trade, professional and other journals ** 13. Avoid enter or judge competitions at the same time * 14. <i>Conduct the projects with passion</i> * 15. <i>Maintain sufficient design ethics knowledge</i> + 16. <i>Publish design ethical journals</i> 	A,B,C,H,I,U
III. The public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 1. Protect the ecology and the environment * 2. Sustainable use and increasing recycling * 3. Enrich human well-being * 4. Continuously aware of the possibilities offered by new technologies * 5. Use the influence with others to produce work * 6. Enrich cultural identity * 7. <i>Try to create classical designs to avoid wasting</i> 	A,B,C,H,I,U
IV. Colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 1. Should not accept the project in which another designer is already engaged * 2. Offering constructive criticisms * 3. The rules of recommend the client another designer * 4. Tend to compete fairly with colleagues ** 5. Designers could only take the credit under the consent of the team * 6. Issue only truthful public statements * 7. Be supportive to another designer * 8. <i>If the designer accept payment from recommend, shall take all the responsibility</i> 	A,B,C,H,I,U
V. Employers/ Clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ** 1. Fairly charges ** 2. Treat all information as confidential * 3. Avoid working for clients who are in direct competition with each other ** 4. Establishing clear contractual understandings * 5. Act in the client's interests * 6. The rules of designer's name associated with a design ** 7. Issue statements to the public with the authorization * 8. The actions that designers shall take when they have reservations about the project 	A,B,C,H,I,U
VI. Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 1. Support their professional development ** 2. Establishing clear contractual understandings * 3. Provide appropriate work environments * 4. Provide challenging assignments * 5. Provide adequate compensation for their work * 6. Credit employees for their accomplished work * 7. <i>Provide flexible working hours</i> 	C,U
VII. Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 1. Provide opportunities for internships with designers * 2. Respect students' rights to ownership of their designs * 3. Credit students for their accomplished work + 4. Advocate implementation of sufficiently curricula 	C,U
VIII. Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ** 1. The importance of health and safety * 2. Consider the needs of all potential users * 3. Think of the whole value chain ** 4. Humanization of technology 	I

A=DIA, B=CSD, C=ACIDO, H=IDSHK, I=ICSID, U=IDSA.

During the in-depth interview, some interviewees indicated that the issues such as II-2, 5, and 10 are not issues which exclusively apply to the ID profession, but fundamental ethical principles all citizens have to abide with. Some of them even considered that these are so basic that it is not necessary to be mentioned explicitly here. However, we thought that in order to help designers understand these basic rules, even these rules are known to everyone, we still decide to keep these issues unchanged and put them into the questionnaire survey phase.

The issues in Table 1 were then used as questionnaire items to survey a larger sample of designers and design educators on the perceived importance of each item. The questionnaire-items adopt a 5-point Likert scale: with the value '1' being very unimportant and '5' very important. A total of 291 questionnaires were sent to design educators and industrial designers by e-mail and postal mail, and 100 (34%) of them were returned as valid. A statistical analysis shows that the overall importance of the items has an average of 4.27 (SD=0.28) ranging from 3.54 to 4.77. With all the questions having an average value higher than 3 indicates that the subjects more or less agree the importance of all the items. The items are then classified into three groups according to the average values: 1) 3.5-4.0: somewhat important, 2) 4.0-4.5: important, and 3) 4.5-5.0: very important, and marked with '+', '*', and '**', respectively, in Table 1. There are 12 issues considered to be very important with Taiwan designers and they should have the highest priority to be included in the design code of ethics in the future. The 41 issues considered to be important should also be considered preferably. However, the 8 issues considered as somewhat important, since are not as significant as the other two groups, may be optional or merged with similar issues in the future construction of the code of ethics.

4. Conclusion

The construction of a code of professional ethics for industrial designers can not only awake designer's ethical sense of responsibility but also prevent him from being requested by a third party for illegal or unethical behaviors. If a designer does not comply with the code, it would be difficult for him to behave in society and among other designers. Through the process, we have constructed a framework and the related issues of a code of ethics for the ID profession in Taiwan. Most issues extracted from the international codes of ethics are also meaningful for designers in Taiwan. The result of the interviews as well as questionnaire survey all indicate that local practitioners, promoters, and educators agree that, for the case of Taiwan, all these ethical issues are important, though not all of equal importance. A subsequent follow up of this study would be drafting of the code itself. The result, after further discussion and revision, should then go through its formal ratification and eventual establishment of the professional code. The process and its result of this study, in addition, could also serve as a reference for other professional organizations to the establishment of their respective code of ethics.

References

- [1] Cai Shuli, 2003, The Value of the Existing of Professional Ethics (in Chinese), In Proceedings of Conference on Theory and Practice of Holistic Education, Fujen Catholic University Press, pp.1-27.
- [2] Xu Ping, 2007, Forum of Design Ethics Education of 2007 National Design Education Forum (in Chinese), Art & Design, vol. 174, no.10, pp. 49-50.
- [3] You Bowen and Yang Meiwei, 2007, Design Ethics (in Chinese), Journal of Design Research, vol.7, pp 82-96.
- [4] Ye Kuangsh, 1990, On Professional Ethics (in Chinese), Journal of Social Sciences and Philosophy, vol.12, no.3, pp.495-526.