THE INGENUITY OF AGEING: AN EXPERIEMENT TO EXPLORE THE ROLE OF DESIGNERS AS A MORAL SUBJECT

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ABSTRACT

As a dialogue with the advocates of the idea of 'design process as *Things'* of which designers become facilitators and supporters for design process, we attempt to argue that designers should understand their role as a moral subject and their values in design should be revealed and discussed with design participants. Regarding the ways of deliberating values in design process, we employed Ricoeur's ideas of utopia and ideology as the key concepts guiding the design of our experiment with a group of retired academics in China. We argue that designers could accomplish this task through a critique of ideology and of identifying utopian elements from the participants. In conclusion, we maintain that both designers should align with the critical role of designers as a moral subject so as to ensure better design 'outcomes' that could improve lives for our future selves.

INTRODUCTION

As a team with a sociologist and a designer-researcher, we began our collaboration five years ago and have worked to research the role of designers in the design process. We endorse Participatory Design (PD) out of the belief that the user's involvement would enhance the quality of the design outcome and that the practice wisdom of users is an invaluable resource during design (Ho *et al., 2011;* Ho and Lee, 2012). However, we question the current PD development that designers are relegated to a secondary position vis-a-vis that of participants, and eventually merely playing the supportive role in the design process. It turns out that designers are no longer necessary for direct negotiations with participants and that issues around the quality of design have been left undetermined. We argue that designers should play a critical role in the field of design, especially when this profession has much been involved in the pursuit of social change, since the political and moral judgement of designers would play a part in setting the goal of social change. For the purpose of the demonstrating how designers live out their moral values, we draw our experiences from our one-year experiment involving a group of older people that are actively ageing on a university campus in China.

WHEN DESIGNERS MEET PARTICIPANTS

We learned that almost every approach to PD emphasises the need to rethink the roles of the participants, especially those who are known as 'users' or co-creators. In the PD framework, the design process is generally understood as a problem solving process. Correspondingly, users' identity has been confirmed as an experience and resources provider who could contribute much to design. However, in the current discussion within the field of PD, designers are re-positioned to a supportive role rather than a contemporary of other participants (Bjogvinsson, *et al*., 2012). Designers' roles are also reshaped as 'developers, facilitators, and generators'.

It has been suggested that designers may take up a new role in the task of *infrastructuring* public *things*, and of supporting future appreciation and appropriation of design at use time (Ehn, 2008, 94; see also Bjorgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010; 2012). This view is a tricky re-relegation of designers from the role of active participants to that of supportive participants.

Ehn (2008) has proposed a new conception of the design process in a way that the participation process as a design process is for the realisation of a 'socio-material assembly' conceived as *Things* which could be interpreted as 'the outcome of the design process. A design process has also been divided into two parts: design-for-use and design-in-use.

Of most importance, because design-for-use could not restrict the possible range of the ways of using the outcomes from the design process, in the process of design-in-use, there always new ways of interaction and application, that would result in innovative appropriation of the design outcomes. Generally speaking, design process is inevitably characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity. In the light of this understanding, design projects could not be guided by any engineering perspective, which is rationalist in nature and could not be informed by a top-down perspective that would finally hinder adaptation to the changing conditions.

Conversely, design process should be regarded as *Things*. Ehn further characterised the social domain of the design process in which all parties are inevitably involved in an entangled design-game where participants, whosoever they are, have constructed *'a socio-material design thing, a meaningful potentially controversial assembly, for and with the participants in a project'* (2008, 94).

According to Bjorgvinsson, *et al.*(2012), designers, in this new version of PD, have a new challenge of which PD *'is seen as a way to meet the challenges of anticipating or envisioning use before actual use, as it takes place in people's lifeworlds'* (Bjorgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012, p. 104). In order to facilitate meeting such challenges, designers of PD should prepare opening up the possibility of use as design or design-after-design. This task has been termed as *infrastructuring*.

In our view, this idea brings designers to a new domain where designers have been assigned a fundamental obligation to design events, such as Yschumi's suggestion of 'event architecture' by which controversial things are opened up to support multiple, heterogeneous and controversial design-games in use. Manzini and Rizzo (2012) also constructed a new typology of the role of designers as *triggers, codesign members and design activists* that designers pick up the duty of supporting a platform or infrastructure for negotiations or even serving as the trigger and design activist of design initiatives.

We find this re-positioning of the designers in PD problematic. Firstly, when we are talking about PD and regarding designers for infrastructuring, designers turn out to be supportive members of a design project. This raises an issue of the legitimacy of using design knowledge in design. Secondly, it would leads to the exclusion against designers' involvement. Just as Manzine and Rizzo (2012, 202) have pointed out that

some examples of 'bottom-up social innovation can be considered as particular cases of participatory design: a participatory design, where, every often, no professional designers are involved'. Thirdly, given that reification and appropriation of design outcomes in the design process is full of negotiations and internal struggles, designers, as triggers and design activists, must learn how to negotiate with participants in the context of conflicts. Ability to deal with conflicts and disagreement during the design process is necessary and valuable. If designers become infrastructuring organizers, on what basis could designers endorse or refute some kinds of arguments in question.

We concede that design as a profession has more opportunities to go beyond commercial setting, which has been largely informed by a product-centric perspective, and make contact with a new design domain in which innovation is about social change. Design Activism is surely a case in point (Thorpe, 2012). The idea of Design for Social Innovation also sets a good example of the involvement of designers in the process of social change. For examples, the Malmo Living Labs, the Young Foundation in the UK and Manzini's DESIS network promoting the concept of 'collaborative services' are real attempts to bring forth social change. Once designers take the supportive role in this process, the goal of social change is seemingly set by participants rather than through the negotiation between designers and people. We find this re-positioning of the role of designers in PD is unacceptable.

THREE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS FOR BEING PARTICIPATORY DESIGNERS

In response to these issues arising from the new assigned role for PD designers, we point to three essential components which would constitute a responsible PD designers involved in facilitating social change through design process. Drawing from Hekman's conception of moral being, we argue that designers, just like any individual human being, are inevitably a moral subject. Being a supportive role in design activities just entails the irresponsibility of designers in being a moral subject. We also employ Ricoeur's critical theory to search for the values enshrined by designers to judge the quality of resultant design outcomes. We shall detail how we have applied Ricoeur's concepts of ideology and utopia to our experiment so as to show the significance of this kind of theoretical discussion. The third component is the idea of treating human action as a text on which designers' interpretative schema is applied.

A) DESIGNERS AS A MORAL SUBJECT
First of all, Hekman (1995) pointed out that every individual is inevitably involved in a moral language game in their daily lives. Designers participating in the design process are also involved in a moral language game with their counterparts. To Hekman, in every

culture, to become a person is to become a moral person. As she argued, *'my moral beliefs constitute who I am as a person. When I make a moral statement, I am not saying that I believe this is right but could just as well believe that something else is right. I am asserting that this is right; I would be a different kind of person if I believed differently'* (Hekman, 1995, 127). In other words, we should not define ourselves as designers without mentioning our moral judgement and belief. Once 'designer' as an identity has been endorsed and turns out to be a kind of subjectivity, we meanwhile assert our belief and moral judgement. This is what Hekman said of the 'form' of the employment of moral language game. This form is needed by everyone, no matter if one is a designer or just an ordinary person. Regarding the contents of the moral language game, we acknowledge that the morality of our culture is a historical product, and is always located, historical and contextual. This discussion has two implications. Firstly, designers have their own moral language games as their moral language content is specific, as long as the subjectivity of a designer is formulated. Secondly, there is a plurality of moral language games, like those in which participants are involved. This entails the possibility of having various kinds of language games. In the process of design, a designer should, in the light of his or her morality, determine which language games are regarded as hegemonic while others as marginalised moralities in a design process.

B) IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA

In order to formulate the distinction between hegemonic and marginalised language games, here we move on to Ricoeur's theory of ideology and utopia. This theory is insightful as it provides us with a framework to deal with the critique of ideology. In the design process, we have to illustrate the ideological dimension of the participants' appropriation and reification in order to ask participants to rethink their actions. This is important in the context of disagreement and conflicts. If we take PD *'as a way to meet the challenges of anticipating or envisioning use before actual use, as it takes place in people's lifeworlds'* (Bjorgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2012, p. 104), it is necessary to accept that colonisation of the lifeworlds exists and the critique of ideology should be conducted in order to accomplish de-colonisation.

For us, to conduct the critique of ideology is to expose the project's distorted visions of the world to designers ourselves and to the participants. In our view, distorted visions of the world protect the *status quo* and constitute a social domination. In PD, this task is of utmost importance as we oppose any domination. This view is certainly shared with Ehn and his colleagues as they are working towards *'infrastructuring in support for communication and community building free of coercion at use time'* (2008, 99).

Our question is then how to accomplish free of coercion. We accept Ricoeur's idea that the critique of ideology is not equivalent to the elimination of ideology. One of the necessary step to achieve free of coercion is not the elimination of ideology, but the search for the moves to go forward. In his view, human beings can never step outside the ideology itself. Our way out is to step inside ideology and search for the possibility of moving forward. His search is supported by his belief that ideology should have a social dimension apart from distortion: *'If social reality did not already have a social dimension, and therefore, if ideology in less polemical or less negatively evaluative sense, were not constitutive of social existence but merely distorting and dissimulating, then the process of distortion could not start'* (1986, 10).

To Ricoeur, the 'positive' side of ideology is its role to serve an important role in supporting and legitimising authority and *the status quo*. Ricoeur pinpoints a social dimension of ideology, which is said to be the source of identity and integration for communities and therefore something constructive. To put it simply, ideology has not only the negative dimension of distortion, but also the positive side of legitimising authority and the source of social identity and social integration. Thus, we could understand Ricoeur's conception of ideology at the superficial level where ideology represents a kind of distortion. But at a deeper level, it provides a belief in the legitimacy of authority and the identity on which communities can be built.

By the same token, Ricoeur employed a similar method to understand utopia. At the superficial level, it only represents some sorts of fantasy or story or escape with little grounding in reality. Despite this negative dimension, utopia provides the rupture and challenges so that a dynamic vision of possibilities is kept. The positive dimension of utopia is its ability to call a society into question from an imagined, possibly critical, vantage point. *'Utopia is the mode in which we radically rethink the nature of family, consumption, government, religion, and so on. From 'nowhere' emerges the most formidable challenge to what-is'* (1991, 184).

Utopia and ideology constitute a practical circle, which could not be decoupled, as it is the unrelieved circle of the symbolic structure of action. Moreover, Ricoeur argued that this circle is not vacillating continuously but becomes a spiral and progressive orbit. As he maintained, *'it is too simple a response, though, to say that we must keep the dialectic running. My more ultimate answer is that we must let ourselves be drawn into circle and must then try to make the circle a spiral. We cannot eliminate from a social ethics the element of risk. We wager on a certain set of values and then try to be consistent with them; verification is therefore a question of our whole life. No one can escape this. Anyone who claims to proceed in a value free way will find nothing'* (Ricoeur, 1986, 312).

We take ideology and utopia as polar opposites of a single *'cultural imagination'* that *'mediates and*

integrates human action through interpretive schemas that both constitute and distort a society. It is the same symbolic structure that is prefigured in narrative discourse that also constitutes social life as the cultural imagination' (Kaplan 2003, 62).

In our analysis of the design process as an active way of accomplishing desirable social change, we should focus on how ideology and utopia are constructed through different discourses. In other words, even if we endorse the view that the design process is a *thing*, an assembly with an entanglement of many different design games. We should go further to identify the ideology and utopia embedded in those discourses and to carry out a critique of ideology and the hermeneutic of suspicion.

C) HUMAN ACTIONS AS TEXTUAL ELEMENTS
Given that the design process is a kind of *Thing*, *'participative, entangled, meaning-making design games'* (Ehn, 2008, 95) in which different language-games are involved, we could take this design process as a kind of text. We do disagree that everything in the reality is text, but we would argue that all human action could be understood *'as if' it were text because of the similarities between text and human action, such as the fact that the methodology of human interpretation could be applicable to both'* (Langdridge, 2004). Thus, design activities as human actions could be taken as 'textual' elements.

In the light of this, we would take the process of reification, in the language of Bjorgvinsson *et al.*, as a kind of textual manifestation. In the encounter of reified material or non-material objects emerging from the design process, we have a choice: whether we should search for its 'inner meanings' like a kind of 'as-if' text or give a critique of it. We should elaborate more on this choice.

In our experiment of engaging retired intellectuals in Mainland China, we explored our ways of identifying the positive and negative sides of both ideology and utopia from participants. In the context of disagreements, we could point out the positive dimensions of one party and show that to their opposite counterparts, whereas in the context without conflicts, we could highlight the positive dimensions of ideology and utopia in order to establish the objective of the design process

THE EXPERIMENT: FRAMING AGEING INNOVATION DESIGNED BY INGENIOUS OLDER PEOPLE
To us, *'improving the quality of goods and services and the quality of life for the elderly' could be seen as an objective for social change. Our original plan is to translate the experiences of PD to the situation in China and see if the role of PD in accomplishing social change could be maintained in the social situation of modern China. What we have done is 'to engage design in change'.* The reason for choosing China as a place for

case study is related to the conventional image that China does not advocate the form of democracy as open as those institutions in the US and European Countries. Relating to the experience of PD, the democratic system in the industrial system of the Scandinavia countries certainly facilitate the adoption of the rationale of PD which has its roots in the movement towards democratisation of work places whereas in China this sort of movements seems unattainable. However, we discovered that engaging design in change has already occurred in the lifeworlds of Chinese people. They had practised their 'ordinary design' for their lives in retirement. Our concern then is not to prove the existence of the possibility of engaging ordinary people in design activities. Instead, we aimed at showing that it is possible to transform individual efforts in design ordinary lives into design at communal level in China. We anticipate to find out a kind of localised mobilisation of participation in design through our study of the Chinese retirees in PD.

During searching for design partners in China, we found an interesting situation at Tsinghua University in Beijing; one of China's most renowned universities, it is an important centre for nurturing talent and conducting scientific research. Tsinghua University has just celebrated its 100th anniversary with more than 30,000 staff members and students. In addition to current students and staff members, there are over 50,000 residents living on campus who support staff members and their families. For instance there's a kindergarten, primary and secondary schools and a shopping centre to support the community. It works like a town. Interestingly, over 6,000 retirees are still living on campus, and many of whom are scientists who hold respected social status as subject experts, as well as mentors to many of China's current key political leaders in the Communist Party, the ruling party in the Chinese government. We decided to conduct a study of this unique NORC of retired academics.

These retired intellectuals have developed their own ways to continue their work lives after the official retirement age. They are not the commonly perceived 'old people' who request our help. Instead they are people who develop tools to help themselves. It is very important for us to learn these 'tools' from these ingenious older people so that we can employ them to our future selves. We are particularly interested in how these retired people design and develop their own ways to tackle ageing. We are also interested in whether they could be convinced and mobilised to organise a participatory research/design project. We determined to conduct our labs there since according to our evaluation there is a high possibility for mobilising people to participate in design activities.

THE METHODOLOGY: BUILDING A PARTICIPATORY DESIGN COMMUNITY
This project has two main sessions. The first part is to achieve the mobilisation of participation. We conducted

interviews in order to persuade the retirees to participate in this design project. The second was the participatory design labs in which design ideas are collected and discussed. The first session of this project started with personal observations and later through interviews. Upon the data collected through interviews, we identified interviewees' matters of concern and their utopia that, in our view, is the driving force by which participants get involved in the design process. This tactic is important as this would give the participants an clear idea of what they themselves would like to change, what foci on which they have the desire to 'make a difference' In our interaction sessions, we had a number of tactics to identify ideology and utopia, including:

(a) The identification of the 'Other' in the sense that any ideology would inevitably position the 'Other' as 'competing', 'less desirable' and even 'confrontational', the establishment of the 'Other' would help reinforce one's identity in a community;

(b) The encouragement of self-narratives, showing the interviewees that in conflicts an actor will be entrenched in an ideological position which gives no alternative ways of being or self-narrative to the interviewee him-or-herself;

(c) The recognition of positive elements in what is currently upheld by the 'Other' in order to show how kinds of difference making could give belief to the interviewer;

(d) The recognition of the importance of the positive elements to 'Other's' lived experience;

(d) The concept of 'emplotment' is introduced to ask the interviewees to draw together the fragmentary episodes of their own life into a unified narrative through the telling of one's life story; and

(e) Envisioning utopian alternatives which should be realisable (if not, it would turn out to be a fantasy) and not be fragmentary (if not, it would turn out to be subject to free reign). The guideline in this respect has been summarised by Langdridge that the participants *'must be guided away from mere fantasy and instead encouraged to focus step-by-step on practically realizable aspects of their utopian reconciliation, working back from their utopias to the present such that they can identify a route out of the conflict and/or better understand the nature of the conflict itself (2005, 230)'*;

In our analysis section, we focused on themes by which we could delineate the trajectory of our analysis. Here we focus on two issues: the concept of *Tsinghua Ren* and the perception of communal efforts in dealing with ageing. In respect to the study of the concept of *Tsinghua Ren*, we conducted interviews, data analyses, testing out our interpretation with the interviewees and finally persuaded participants by mobilising them in our 'design festivals'. They were further engaged through PD workshops in conjunction with Chinese traditional festivals on campus, examining if design activities would bring forth 'good' design ideas from the participants. With this in mind, we employed the insights from our analysis of ideology and utopia interviews to design our PD workshops. The following is a tentative analysis of the interviewees.

ANALYSIS 1: INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF '*TSINGHUA REN*'

Throughout the year's study, we interviewed over a dozen retirees (figure 1) through the existent network of the Tsinghua Association of Senior Scientists and Technicians and Tsinghua Gerontology Centre. All of the members we met were ingenious older people, improving their quality of life through their own ways with self-initiated activates for ageing well. Many of whom are locally famous for their new ways of retirement living. Instead of conducting formal interviews, we conducted 'creative dialogues' with them in their homes or work places. In our analysis, there is a central concept around which they have attached their identity and status. To us, it is a kind of ideology, which is to a certain extent a distorted social imaginary.

Figure 1: Portrait photos of retired intellectuals

We intensively 'interviewed' four retirees during our fieldwork and this gradually developed into a kind of partnership for co-investigation. The data was collected and analysed through the techniques of theme analysis guided by the 'open coding' method of Classical

Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1978). Basically, they stressed their identity as being part of the *Tsinghua Ren* in the sense that they belonged to the community of the University of Tsinghua. We could not find any clear boundary of such a community and clear criterion for membership, but they would say that it was better both physically and socially to live within the Tsinghua campus. Certainly, *Tsinghua Ren* is a social imaginary among the interviewees. We tried to describe how this identity shapes their daily practice and living in terms of their Quality Of Life (QOL) profile provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO): *Being, Belongings* and *Becoming*.

BEING (WHO ONE IS)

The interviewees rarely showed any great changes after their retirement. As all of them were living within the campus, they kept a key identity of *Tsinghua Ren* and one of the changes after retirement was just more focusing on their personal health. Perceiving this pioneering university in the Mainland China as a first-class university, they were proud of living in the community. Their concern over personal health was about their own physical ability to continue their contribution to the university and nation. Many retirees are keen to keep fit and fully committed to maintaining their health. They used their run-down apartment building (four to five storey block with no lift) and took their old bicycles to poorly accessible communal areas to maintain fitness and flexibility. For example, a retired electrical engineering professor: retired for 20 years, has played ping-pong every day at 4pm. He was happy to play with anyone in the facility. He explained that, *'Playing ping pong is good for my body as well as meeting new and old friends!'* In addition, he and his wife, who was also a professor of engineering, had a habit of going to the Summer Palace, a national park next to the university, every morning. They commented *'we come here every day between 8am and 11am when it is the best time to take in oxygen for our bodies'*.

Another case reveals the dialectic nature of ideology. Professor Styling likes to dress up every day as she had a view that being decent is a form of life within Tsinghua, *'Tsinghua Ren* should behave in a way of decency', she expressed. In one occasion, she expressed her resentment against other female workers in front of us. Clearly, Tsinghua Ren as a social imaginary in her mind is a cohesive community but with social disparity. She despised those ladies on campus who did not dress up as good as her. This story reveals the ideological dimension of the Tsinghua University Campus as a cohesive community. In reality, it is easy to find Tsinghua residents of various socio-economic status. But this story also shows the utopian idea held by Professor Styling. She expected all *Tsinghua Ren* to be well educated and living in a decent lifestyle. While the ideological conception that the Tsinghua community was composed of refined and educated people gave her a kind of distorted picture, the non-congruence between

the utopian social imaginary and the real situation also provides the drive and motivation for her to participate in the communal association. She participates in communal activities and even organised a number of academic activities to make public the contribution of the Tsinghua retirees. She expects that better social exposure of the retirees' activities and social contribution to the nation will give the pride and self-esteem of the group a boost. Indeed it will support all Tsinghua people and therefore they would live up to her ideal *Tsinghua Ren* imaginary.

The non-congruence between utopia and the ideological social imaginary brings forth positive effects to the group. Especially when building motivation towards participation in our design study. After the identification of this concern concern among the interviewees, we highlighted the possibility of doing and designing some 'good' communal activities for all the people in the Tsinghua campus. The result of this finding becomes the effective tool for persuasion in the mobilisation of participation.

On the other hand, we found that the belief in the 'ideological' existence of the *Tsinghua Ren* community provides our interviewees with a clear sense of belonging and a social identity, a topic we should elaborate more on later sections.

BELONGING (CONNECTIONS WITH ONE'S COMMUNITY)

The second level of the QOL profile is about the sense of belonging to community and environment. In our analysis, the retiree's sense of belonging has been granted by the identity of *Tsinghua Ren*. This group of ingenious older people grew up together as classmates, colleagues and neighbours. They also went through the political transformation of China and learning to live as a collective. Nevertheless, their social integration among *Tsinghua Ren* is supported by the ideological tenets that Tsinghua University was one of the components of their nation, the People's Republic of China. They had to accomplish their lifelong contribution to the nation even if they were retired from their formal academic positions at Tsinghua. As they say, *'Once a Tsinghua Ren, Always a Tsinghua Ren'*. They would not consider terminating their work and innovation. Professor Styling recollected her days in the Tsinghua laboratory. She said that in every working day, the researchers there were anxious as the people from the Prime Minister's Office would ring them up and ask if there were any progress and discoveries from their work. She was proud of being a member of the Tsinghua laboratory since this research office had a strong link with the social development of the nation and a good relationship with the authority. As we have argued, *Tsinghua Ren* is a kind of imagined community in the sense that it is ideological, but the identity provides the claim to constitute an identifiable community, the Tsinghua community. This ideological imaginary does not only create the ground for them to

accept the legitimacy of the Tsinghua University but also the ground to accept the legitimacy of the political authority of the nation.

On the other hand, the *Tsinghua Ren* identity has a competing the '*Other*', which is the *Peking University Ren*. *Tsinghua Ren* is frequently compared with *Peking University Ren*. As an interviewee pointed out, within the academic field and the central government of the Mainland China, there has been a wide-spread belief that *Tsinghua Ren* are strong at scientific disciplines whereas *Peking University Ren* at humanistic subjects. *Tsinghua Ren* had long been motivated to focus on scientific discovery and innovation in order to maintain this social imaginary about *Tsinghua Ren*. Two retirees' experiences demonstrate this orientation. For 40 years, Professor Physics worked as a nuclear power expert under the government's agenda and contributed to military development. Retirement also meant freedom for him, where he can work on self-initiated projects related to his own expertise. Originally trained as a physicist, in his second year of retirement, he invented a new method of X-ray body scanning, which got a national patent with investment to continue research for its applications. After eight years, he received a second round of investment and is working with young researchers to develop new social applications of this technology in the healthcare domain. He claimed that being a Tsinghua professor also entailed a continuation of innovation in order to live up to the ideal of scientific *Tsinghua Ren*.

Professor Oxygen's experience of his own self-initiated project had a more difficult path. As a trained chemist, he was also given the task of researching nuclear development during his whole academic career. After retirement, because of his own health, he started to research oxygenation, especially through eating and drinking. He called the liquid form of oxygen Fitness Oxygen, which was patented nationally. He claimed that his innovation of liquidised oxygen had a higher degree of purity in comparison with those produced by the American factory. All the research was carried out in his own kitchen or laboratory at his previous department outside of school hours. More importantly, he used his own body for the first test of his invention. He got support from a voluntary elderly group (including retired medical experts, professors and physicians) to help him to conduct a long-term trial. He aims to prove that this new product could help our bodies to get many health benefits. After ten years, the production was limited because it was an alternative health care concept that required formal clinical trials. However, he has a blog that many people read every day. In his narrative about his personal development, he regards his knowledge as his involvement in Tsinghua University which was also the major academic institution contributing to the development of his nation. Clearly, the identity of being a *Tsinghua Ren* has not only legitimised the existence of Tsinghua as a community but also legitimised the authority of the nation.

We see that the social imaginary of *Tsinghua Ren* does not only constitute a distorted picture about the existence of a cohesive *Tsinghua Ren* community but also provides a strong imagined community to which the retirees attach socially. Through this attachment, they endorse both the legitimacy of the university but also the nation. Meanwhile, it also constitutes an *Other* with which *Tsinghua Ren* must compete. The ideological social imaginary in terms of *Tsinghua Ren* results in a very positive social effect: social integration is maintained and motivation to design lives after retirement is groomed.

BECOMING (ACHIEVING PERSONAL GOALS, HOPES, AND ASPIRATIONS)

As we have argued, the dreams of utopia are important, as they bring forth positive impacts on the motivation of people to seek social change. In our case, the utopia we identified among the interviewees was a sense of becoming which is really about actions that go beyond individual expertise to transfer knowledge to everyone so that others can age well.

Back to Professor Styling whom has been a professor of micro-electrical engineering even though her original field is chemistry. She once explained to us her viewpoint of current education: *'Students are now trained without hands-on ability and they are incapable of solving diverse problems outside their own expertise... however, when we studied, we were trained with the principle of problem solving and hands-on ability that can apply to any subject.'* Since retirement, she has worked as the office manager for the Tsinghua Association of Senior Scientists and Technicians where she was promoted and enjoyed active engagement with external organisations and current students. She appeared to be dissatisfied with the current forms of knowledge transfer within Tsinghua. But she knew that current educational approaches were affected by the rational model of knowledge transfer at the expense of experiential learning. She told us her analysis of the teaching approach of the university and expressed that when the university became 'modern', it would inevitably result in the dominance of administrative calculation and rational arrangement. Hence, hands-on teaching and job placement were no longer popular in modern teaching. It could be said as a fantasy if one expected to change such a strong tide of education philosophy. But her 'utopia' appeared to be more manageable and achievable. She just designed more linkages between external organizations and current university students through which students could gain direct application experience and hands-on training at the workplace. Her dream of utopia, the restoration of the teaching method used in her good old days, motivated her to participate in communal activities.

These retirees' stories demonstrate that they have the motivation to design new ways of continuing the glory of being a *Tsinghua Ren*, a preserved or even distorted vision of their community. It is distorted, as *Tsinghua Ren* is not a real entity. At the personal level, they solved their basic needs of being, i.e. as retired people solving ageing problems. They were working hard to make sure that they themselves are ageing well. Of most importance, they were also concerned about how their experiences can help others within the community and beyond. All this was supported by the non-congruence between the utopian ideal of *Tsinghua Ren* and its current situation, and all these are also supported by the utopian and ideological social imaginary of *Tsinghua Ren*.

As a group of ingenious people, they are working and stimulating each other to tackle persistent myths about old age, a culturally based fear of ageing. At the same time, they were dissatisfied with the image of weak *Tsinghua Ren*. It is clear that this unique situation of collective living has become an incubator that allows innovations to happen. They are constantly developing ways to maintain their quality of life (being, belonging and becoming). The way for achieving this is the formation of the ideological social imaginary in terms of community to which members have a strong sense of attachment and belongings.

ANAYLYSIS 2: COMMUNAL EFFORTS IN DEALING WITH AGEING

How can our findings relate to design practice and research? In our second stage of study, we attempted to employ the concept of 'ingenuity of ageing'. Here we believe that design can be a social tool for co-designing ideas for a better world based on inspiration from interactions with socially marginalized people such as older and disabled people. After the completion of the first stage of 'creative dialogues' and analysis, we demonstrate how the investigation of a group of ingenious older people in China could be taken as a case to understand the social contexts of ageing. In the next step, our aim is to set up a design platform to evaluate whether designers could on the one hand accomplish infrastructuring for democratic innovation through the design process and on the other present a critique of social distortion that exists among the participants.

To enable older people to investigate their ingenuity of ageing, we explored the *Design Festivals* (figure 2) method in this project: five pop-up design stores were set up during five traditional festivals in the Chinese calendar. These design interventions were on an *ad hoc* basis but there are essential components: First, we put emphasis on the traditional values of being respectful to our ancestors. We took this as a chance to test if most retirees would take this opportunity to figure out some innovative methods to show their respects to *Tsinghua Ren* and their appreciation of unity. The festivals include the Spring Festive for the unity of families, the Qingming Festival, the festival to commemorate the

dead, the Dragon Boat Festival, a festival with high appraisal of loyalty, the Mid-Autumn Festival, September, a traditional festival for people to get together with their families, and the Chong Yang Festival, which was also named as the Elderly Festival, underscoring one custom as it is observed in China, where the festival is also an opportunity to care for and appreciate the elderly.

Figure 2: Design Festivals on university campus

Finally, we collected a variety of innovative ideas about the welfare of Tsinghua residents such as *Elders restaurant to maintain their health, Greener burial method, e.g. tree burial, Body donation advice, Class to learn how to take care of the old*, etc. Throughout the process of this stage, we found few disagreements and conflicts as participants had a strong inclination to do something for the imagined *Tsinghua Ren*. It seemed that they were thinking of the common needs of the *Tsinghua Ren*. They had mentioned nothing about the needs arising from poor families, gender and university students and the staff. It seemed that their thoughts were not in terms of any identity and social status different from *Tsinghua Ren*.

Throughout the second session, our activities revolved around the theme of their utopian dream. This was about the Tsinghua residents ageing with dignity - participants kept using their own ideal picture to, on the one hand, evaluate the current situation of Tsinghua Campus, and on the other to search innovative ways to realise their utopian dreams. We would attribute the smooth process

of service and program design witnessed in the workshops to the 'right' identification of the common concern of the participants, the future of the ageing *Tsinghua Ren*, and we also attributed it to our highlighting of the utopian dimension of the *Tsinghua Ren*, with which participants found no disagreement. If we compare our project with that organised by Bjorgvinsson et al. (2010), we start with our mission to 'create' and to 'conjure up' the matters of concern for the targeted participants whereas Bjorgvinsson *et al.* took the neighbourhood associations' matter of concern as given. In our view, focusing on the construction of the objectives of a PD would reveal more the salience of the role of designers as design triggers.

All along the design process, we should keep identifying the utopian elements emerging from the participants and keep avoiding the promotion of any innovation that would jeopardise the solidarity of *Tsinghua Ren*. This is the reason why we, as triggers, co-design members and design activists, would not encourage Professor of Styling, the longest term collaborator throughout the process, to organise any activities to change or modify the lifestyle of those she dislikes. We would not promote any private business-oriented activities, such as helping the professor who produces oxygen water at home, because this type of design activity would bring harm to the participants as a community. Given that we endorsed the idea of *Tsinghua Ren* as a *good* identity, a sense of social integration would help participants to foster a view that those who have different ideas and expectations are not one's enemy, and to strengthen the belief that further negotiations and conflict reconciliation is possible.

The second session ended with a number of proposed plans. We had no resources to actualize the ideas. However, we did have a session on the next possible steps. The aim of this session is to see if we could summarize our experiences in such a design process. We asked the participants to evaluate the feasibility of its implementation and actualisation. After a number of rounds of discussion, they reached the conclusion that all resources were controlled by the management of the university and what the plans need was the 'green light' from the management. However, most expressed that it was unwise to have any unconventional actions since the management was the iconic figure of their community. This conclusion seems to indicate again the paradoxical nature of our understanding of the social reality. On one hand, the central management of the university turned out to be the barrier against the actualization of their design proposals, but on the other, it served its utopian function in formation of the iconic figure of the *Tsinghua Ren*. How could the whole design project deal with this paradox? This question leaves us a big puzzle for our future study.

CONCLUSION

Our one-year experimental study demonstrates the new role of designers as design activists and the importance of the idea of designers as a moral subject has been spelt out. By using Ricoeur's idea of ideology and utopia, we could on the one hand analyse participants' dreams and distorted visions of the world and on the other, have the perspective to know what social situation they would like to change. This is to enhance the social awareness. In our design process, we made use of interview data to identify the foundation on which the participants acquired their communal sense. In our case, it is the concept of '*Tsinghua Ren*'. This concept provides a strong sense of collectivity, to which the participants are keen on contributing. Although collectivism seems to be a factor restricting people from chasing individual accomplishments, in our case, such a collective sense becomes a strong reason for the retirees to live out their sense of being, belonging and becoming. When we focus more on the common goodnesses of the '*Tsinghua Ren*' in the second session of our research process, the participants were really excited in searching and designing for their 'virtual' community. In the second sessions, we also identified the barriers against their implementation of the proposed ideas through the discussion on the role of the management of the university. In this session, a majority of the participants came to the conclusion that the management of the university was the genuine leader of their community but simultaneously it was also the barriers against their proposals as they estimated that the management would take financial constraint as the reason for not implanting their proposal. To the participants, they were aware of the necessity for dialogues and negotiations between them and the senior management of the university. However, in the design process, we also reported to the participants that their idea of being a '*Tsinghua Ren*' would entail social exclusion. Their image of a good and decent '*Tsinghua Ren*' would exclude those who could not live up to their standards, whatsoever the standard set. To us as the designer and design organizer, PD is a moral, political and social practice in which the morality endorsed by designers should be deliberated in the interactive process with the participants. Designers would not be happier with doing infrastructuring and avoid being involved in moral and political negotiations. When taking the design process as a *Thing, which* has an unpredictable occurrence and is characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty, designers should have a solid perspective on their roles and missions and clear command of their moral practices. Of course, we have not done anything to examine the extent to which our analysis is also suffered ideological colonization. We are not able to show if our research practice could lead to more 'positive' design outcomes for the participants and the retirees at large. To some extent, our position as research activists is free of critique and examination by any parties. Throughout the process of data collection and analyses, the skills and techniques were also subject to the management of the researchers. This needs another round of deliberations in order to reveal the openness of our design research format which is

supposed to be full of uncertainty, ambiguity and free of professional manipulation. In other words, the goal of being free of coercion in the PD has not been reached through our experimental lab in Tsinghua.

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