Lost in Translation:
An Exploration of Professional Values in Cross-cultural Design Practice

by

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ABSTRACT

LOST IN TRANSLATION: AN EXPLORATION OF PROFESSIONAL VALUES IN CROSS-CULTURAL DESIGN PRACTICE

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This thesis is an investigation Globalization has drawn Canadian design firms to projects in many parts of the world and cross-cultural design projects are now a significant part of landscape architecture practice. However, currently there are few studies that discuss the issues and challenges associated with these projects.

Through exploring the relationship between professional values and the design process, this research intended to identify issues and provide resolutions associated with cross-cultural design projects.

A literature review and interviews of experienced design professionals show that professional values affect the design process. In a cross-cultural design project, different value systems from multiple cultures interact and influence each other, creating issues and challenges, but also inspiring new design ideas.

The research suggests that understanding values and the professional value system could help landscape architects identify issues and improve both the processes and the products of cross-cultural design projects.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgement iii

Table of Contents v

List of Figures vii

List of Tables viii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

1.1 Introduction 1

1.2 Personal Motivation 1

1.3 Research Goals and Objectives 3

1.5 Thesis Structure 4

Chapter 2: Methodology 6

2.1 Method 1: Literature Review 6

2.2 Method 2: Key Informative Interview 7

2.2.1 Designing the Interviews 7

2.2.2 Interviewee Identification 8

2.2.3 Key Informative Interviews 8

2.2.4 Interview Questions 8

Chapter 3: Literature Review 10

3.1 Part One: Culture and Cross-cultural Design Projects 11

3.1.1 Define Culture and Cross Cultural Design Project 11

3.1.3 Synthesis from Both Perspectives 18

3.1.4 Cultural Interaction: a Light from Cultural Relativism 20

3.2 Part Two: Professional Values and the Design Process 22

3.2.1 The Landscape Architect’s Professional Values and Value System 22

3.2.2 Gaps in the Current Literature 27

3.2.3 Values in the Decision-making Process 29

3.2.4 Influence of Professional Values on the Design Process 35

3.3 Literature Review Discussion 37

Chapter 4: Interviews 39

4.1 Introduction 39

4.2 Interview Results 41

4.2.1 Theme 1: Interviewees’ Professional Background and Core Design Values 41

4.2.2 Theme 2: Cross-cultural Design Project Experiences 44

4.2.3 Theme 3: Values and Design Process 53

4.2.4 Theme 4: Lessons and Value Shifting 58
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2.5 Theme 5: Other Influential Values</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.3 Results Analysis</strong></td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Background analysis</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Professional Core Values</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3 Issues and Improvement Strategies for Cross-cultural Design Projects</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 5: Discussion</strong></td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Landscape Architects’ Professional Values and Value System</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Value Shifting</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Issues for Cross-cultural Design Projects</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Fundamental Issue: Globalization vs. Localization</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Strategies for Improving a Cross-cultural Design Project</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.1 Strategies: Communication &amp; Information Exchange and Learning Process</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 A Further Step: A Professional Value System as an Evaluation Tool</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 6: Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Research Summary</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Significance of the Research</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Areas for the Future Research</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix 1-Research Ethics Board Certification</strong></td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix 2-Interview Guide</strong></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Thesis Structure 5
Figure 3.1: Literature review part one road map 11
Figure 3.2: Components of culture 12
Figure 3.3: A combined view for cross-cultural design project 13
Figure 3.4: Cultural overlap and distinctions 21
Figure 3.5: Literature review part two road map 23
Figure 3.6: Ian Thompson’s landscape architecture core values 24
Figure 3.7: Ian Thompson’s landscape architecture ethical elements 24
Figure 3.8: Asimow’s model 29
Figure 3.9: Decision tree model 31
Figure 3.10: ACF value system structure 33
Figure 3.11: Proposed landscape architect’s value system structure 35
Figure 3.12: Designer’s value system affects design decision-making process 36
Figure 3.13: Landscape architect’s professional value system 37
Figure 4.1: Interviewees’ basic information 40
Figure 4.2: Interviewees’ projects locations around the world 40
Figure 4.3: Culturally sensitive community center 45
Figure 4.4: Channelized river in China 50
Figure 4.5: Traditional Bedouin tent 51
Figure 4.6: Bedouin tent outdoor at night 52
Figure 4.7: Typical Southern China farming village 56
Figure 4.8: Interviewees’ professional beliefs and core design values 65
Figure 5.1: Comparison of landscape architects’ professional values 71
Figure 5.2: Value shifting through learning process 74
Figure 5.3: Globalization vs. Localization 77
Figure 5.4: Information exchange and learning between Canadian landscape architects and other culture’s clients 80
Figure 5.5: Evaluation step two: identify values 85
Figure 5.6: Evaluation step two: identify potential problematic areas 86
Figure 5.8: Evaluation step three: make suggestions 87

List of Tables

Table 1: Major issues of cross-cultural design projects 19
Table 2: Resolutions for cross-cultural design project 19
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Canadian design firms have been increasingly involved in cross-cultural projects, due to the growing global economy creating new demand and overseas markets. These are exciting times for Canadian landscape architects both in terms of business and design opportunities. However, opportunities are coincident with difficulties and cross-cultural projects do not often go as smoothly as planned. Based on the researcher’s work experience, there were many issues associated with cross-cultural design projects, but these issues were hard to clearly identify.

When reviewing the literature, the researcher found there were few studies done by landscape architects on the subject of cross-cultural design. This creates difficulties for landscape architects who want to learn about this subject.

1.2 Personal Motivation

The motivation for this research came from the researcher’s experiences. The researcher never felt easy working on cross-cultural design project, particularly in China. Born Chinese but professionally trained in Canada, the researcher considered
herself a Canadian designer. While working for a Chinese design firm, the researcher felt like a ‘foreigner’.

When it was necessary to discuss design principles, strategies, or even management issues with Chinese colleagues, the researcher realized there were differences between herself and her Chinese colleagues. The researcher experienced a social phenomenon, the so called “reversed cultural shock”, which means “a person who conceptualized the anxiety and frustrations associated with the absence of familiar signs and symbols associated with daily social interactions” (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2012).

“Reversed culture shock” according to Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman (2012) has six signs:
1. psychological strain;
2. sense of loss and feelings of deprivation;
3. feelings of rejection by the new culture;
4. confusion in role expectation, values and feelings;
5. surprise and anxiety at the realization of cultural differences; and
6. feelings of impotence at the inability to cope with, or integrate into the new environment.

When the researcher had opportunities to get involved in cross-cultural design projects, “cultural differences in design” had been exposed as a significant problem by every party who’s involved in the project. When the firm had to collaborate with foreign designers, these differences caused problems with every party.
It appeared to the researcher that these “cultural differences in design” might relate to one’s value system, representative of “confusion in role expectation, values and feelings” as noted above (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2012). Other signs could explain some personal feeling, but professional problems might relate to more in-depth factors such as values. Instead of considering them as “cultural differences”, it might be more appropriate to describe such phenomenon as “value differences”.

These experiences and the assumption of potential value differences led the researcher to pursue this topic further and consider what factors within cultures and design practice caused these differences, and how the resulting problem might be resolved. Thus this thesis started from solving the researcher’s own confusion. Thoughts and conclusions generated from this study and research will definitely have impacts on the researcher’s future professional career.

1.3 Research Goals and Objectives

The goals of this study are to investigate issues associated with cross-cultural design projects and identify strategies to improve design practice and to explore the role of professional values in cross-cultural design.

In order to reach the goal, the objectives of the study are:

1. Define culture and look for cultural difference factors.
2. Identify issues associated with cross-cultural design projects.
3. Understand Canadian landscape architects’ professional values.
4. Understand the role of professional values in the design process.
5. Develop strategies for improving cross-cultural design projects.
1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis contains six chapters, structured as shown in Figure 1.1. Chapter 1 serves as a general introduction of personal motivation, goals and objectives. Chapter 2 explains the research methodologies. Chapter 3 is a literature review of a wide range of theories and studies to establish the theoretic foundation. Chapter 4 documents the results of interviews with Canadian landscape architects. Chapter 5 establishes the relationship between the literature and interviewee results, and makes comparisons between the two. Chapter 6 provides a conclusion for the study.
Figure 1.1: Thesis Structure.
Chapter 2: Methodology

There are two types of research methods used in this research. A literature review is used for theoretical development, and qualitative data is gathered from interviews with professionals.

2.1 Method 1: Literature Review

Literature review is a commonly used research method. Through reviewing previous credible literature and any other published materials, the researcher gathers information and communicates to the reader about knowledge which relates to the research topic. More importantly, a literature review should summarize highlights and limitations in the literature, and formulates guidance for future research (Taylor, 2012).

The objectives of this literature review were the following:
1. To identify characteristics and issues associated with cross-cultural design project.
2. To understand the concept of a value system and its role in the design decision-making process.
A broad range of literature was reviewed. By gradually trying to understand problems arising in cross-cultural design projects, several arguments had to be examined. Theories and literature from other fields of knowledge were reviewed and connected to landscape architecture.

2.2 Method 2: Key Informative Interview
The interview method was used to collect additional information. The interview is another method common used in landscape architecture research. Its purpose is to understand who, when and why, and is often used in research of design process or project evaluation (Deming & Swaffield, 2011).

2.2.1 Designing the Interviews
The interviews were designed to obtain relevant data from practitioners. The interview was semi-structured, allowing flexibility and adaptability for the interviewer to adjust questions and pursue information during the interview.

Compared to a traditional in-person interview, other methods and tools provide more ways to collect data, and allow great flexibility in research time and location (Silva, 2012). Online and phone interview are considered alternative methods. As a result, because of the arrangement and availability of the interviewees, two interviews had to be conducted over the telephone. Other interviews were face-to-face interviews, which was a great experience for the researcher and much first-hand information was obtained.
2.2.2 Interviewee Identification

The researcher identified a list of potential interviewees through searching the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects (OALA) and Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA) member list, and through professional networking. The researcher had decided on looking for 5 to 10 interviewees who met the following criteria:
1. Canadian landscape architects with over 5 years of practice experience who had been professionally educated in landscape architecture.
2. Canadian landscape architects with experience in cross-cultural or overseas project and who ideally had played a leading role in the projects.

The timing factor and expenses were constraints in finding enough ideal interviewees and conducting interviews. In total 7 professionals were interviewed.

2.2.3 Key Informative Interviews

The interviews were conducted as one-to-one following an interview content and consent process approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of Guelph. Interviewees were contacted by telephone and email and agreed to talk about their projects and work experiences with the researcher. The researcher tried to review as many interviewees’ previous project materials as possible in order to have some background understanding of the interviewees. REB approval is attached in Appendix 1.

2.2.4 Interview Questions

Interview questions were needed to help interviewees to describe and discuss their cross-cultural design experiences. Interviewees were asked to talk about their
experiences and insights of cross-cultural design projects. What kinds of issues they experienced, and how did they solve or manage these issues? Did they think their value system had influenced the design?

A more detailed description of the interview and results is presented in Chapter 4 Interviews. The “Interview Guide” is attached in Appendix 2.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

The literature review attempts to answer the following questions: What are the issues associated with a cross-cultural design project? Are there any strategies to improve design practice? Theories and literature from other academic fields have been reviewed in order to answer these questions.

The literature review is divided into two parts, according to the relevancy. Part one focuses on culture and cross-cultural design projects and reviews existing literature in regards to culture and a cross-cultural design project. Part two focuses on professional values and their role in the design process. This topic leads to exploring other basic questions: what is a design process and what role do values play in a design process?
3.1 Part One: Culture and Cross-cultural Design Projects

Part one of the literature review explores the areas shown in Figure 3.1.

![Diagram of Cross-cultural design project](image)

**Figure 3.1:** Literature review part one road map.

### 3.1.1 Define Culture and Cross Cultural Design Project

#### 3.1.1.1 Culture

There is no one single definition of culture. The definition provided by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) is considerably holistic. It has defined culture as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2001) (see Figure 3.2). UNESCO further recognizes that “whereas it is not always possible to measure such beliefs and values directly, it is possible to measure associated behaviours and practices and furthermore, culture may be defined “through the identification and measurement of the behaviours and practices resulting from the beliefs and values of a society or a social group” (UNESCO, 2009). This definition of culture suggested further investigation into values and value differences.

This definition indicated that within a culture, there are many components; values and value system are parts of it. In addition, UNESCO (2009) also said “whereas it is not
always possible to measure such beliefs and values directly, it is possible to measure associated behaviors and practices.”

![Figure 3.2: Components of culture.](image)

### 3.1.1.2 Definition of cross-cultural design project

Interestingly, there are few design studies discussing cross-cultural design and the practice of cross-cultural design projects. Through researching the literature, the researcher found a gap between design theory and design practice guidelines. Therefore, the researcher looked into cross-cultural design separately; on the one hand, to understand cross-cultural design, and on the other hand, to understand cross-cultural project management. In fact, the project management field has had much more research done in cross-cultural areas compared to design research.

Cross-cultural design “focuses on using design ethnography and cutting edge collaboration methods to understand users in different national cultures and to design appropriate solution for these groups” (Standord.edu).
From a project management perspective, a cross-cultural project refers to “the control and organization” of projects that involves two or more cultures (Pheng & Leong, 2000). It is not simply integration of a foreign client or a service provider. “Integration can be a daunting task as it involves maintaining a balance between global efficiency and being responsive to local cultural difference in the host countries” (Pheng & Leong, 2000).

While the design profession talks about how to design for foreign users, the management profession focuses on how to manage a project and ensure business success. To gain a holistic understanding of the definition, it is better to combine the two perspectives, as shown in Figure 3.3. In a later section, the literature review investigates research from both perspectives, and attempts to synthesize the two.

![Figure 3.3: A combined view for cross-cultural design project.](image)

**3.1.2 Issues for Cross-cultural Design Projects**

**3.1.2.1 From the design profession perspective**

Cross-Cultural Urban Design (Bull, 2007) documents a three-year international design education program. The participants of the program wrote about their experiences and insights, and collectively published this book. The book focuses on urban design and design projects; it gives insights and valuable propositions to
designers. Even though the book is not exactly a landscape architectural research, it is the most relevant study found related to landscape architecture. The book identifies the following major issues for cross-cultural design projects.

1. **Unprecedented complexity**

Because of the rapid spread of globalization and the complexity of clients and their issues, design solutions have become unprecedentedly complicated. Some key words demonstrate issues that need to be addressed: global market economy, democratic values, concern about sustainability, local traditions and values, urbanization, environmental change, immigration and population growth. In the history of design, architects, landscape architects and urban designers have not faced such a complex situation.

2. **Inefficient existing deductive and thematic approach to design, and standardized models**

In response to the first point, “planning and urban strategies no longer anticipate singular outcomes. Nor do they anticipated systematic, linear processes to achieve their outcomes” (Bull, 2007, p.115). Planning and design are reflections of globalization and complex societies. Standardized design principles, for example, western spatial hierarchy or American city structure, might not be appropriate and incapable of solving local problems in other cultures.

Involving local participation and international cooperation processes were necessary but created barriers which would not usually occur in a domestic project. Designers should expect changes in a design process and delivery process to deal with uncertainty throughout the projects.
1. Communication

The quality and efficiency of communication among diverse contributors are always problematic. Enabling adequate communication in design process is rather difficult, either verbally or interpretation of information. Again it requires innovative communication methods and avenues to encourage communication.

In the end, the book recommended four propositions to cope with these issues. The propositions cover four main aspects: approach, process, method, and outcome.

**Proposition 1.** Multiple and innovative formats for communication (approaches): In cross-cultural project settings, communication needs to generate ideas which recognize both local specificities and international standards. The communication format could be innovative and inspiring symposia, workshops and studios or reflective practices.

**Proposition 2.** Conceptual open-mindedness and cross-cultural inclusivity (processes): Designers consciously seek to adapt standard methods of analysis, design and decision-making. This requires willingness to practice and draw conclusion in an uncertain environment.

**Proposition 3.** Culturally responsive methodologies (methods): Suggests designers to rethink the relationship between standardization and localization. Globalization, “has its tendency towards standardization….includes ideas, ideologies, aspirations and thinking as well as products.” Responsive methods “must respect the ethical and philosophical traditions of people as well as the places” (Bull, 2007, p. 117).
Proposition 4. Accepting non-standard outcomes: A variety of project scales creates various design outcomes. Designers are directors of a complex drama where many acts and players interact.

In summary, the book suggested strategies for the designer: think globally and act locally and be willing to change. Furthermore, the authors recommend designers to understand globalization and demonstrate increasing recognition of local cultures and values, instead of insisting on an exportation of design standards.

However the researcher found these propositions couldn’t resolve all the issues experienced. For example working style differences in a cross-cultural design team, or complex legal and contractual issues.

3.1.2.2 From the project management perspective
From the project management point of view, Pheng and Leong (2000) identified four areas of concern in cross-cultural projects.

1. Organizational and national cultural and value differences
“Every organization has its own unique culture which is not quite the same as others” (Pheng & Leong, 2000, p. 309). “The organizational culture of an existing company reflects the national culture in strong forms. It is logical for members of an organization to resist plans to impose a culture that does not reflect their national values” (Pheng & Leong, 2000, p. 309). To avoid conflict, understanding between management and employees is critical.
When outsiders encounter a foreign nation or organization, lack of understanding and experience creates problematic communications and may lead to critical mistakes in the decision-making process.

2. **Cross-cultural communications**

Communication forms and methods vary from country to country. Moreover, the same forms of communication can be interpreted differently in different cultures. Communication does not only apply to language in cross-cultural management.

“(N)on-verbal signals … may have a significance which is different from what they are accustomed to in their own culture. When perceived wrongly, these signals may be interpreted differently in a different cultural setting” (Pheng & Leong, 2000, p. 310).

3. **Cross-cultural dispute resolution**

This depends on the culture’s characteristics, such as the level of tolerance of disagreement, localized strategies of resolving conflicts, etc.

4. **Cross-cultural negotiation**

“These problems occur because managers from the developed country tend to assume the responses and behavior of their clients in the developing country without really understanding what they want and what they can offer” (Pheng & Leong, 2000, p.310).

Pheng and Leong (2000) state the importance of values in project management. Understanding national values and organizational values and correctly interpreting language and manners would likely see reduction in issues such as disputes and
negotiations. The authors recommend managers recognize the hierarchy of values and the possibility of changing values. Furthermore, they suggest that being a cross-cultural project manager required not only communication and negotiation skills but also the need to understand and respond to foreign culture and values.

3.1.3 Synthesis from Both Perspectives

The synthesis from both a project management perspective and a design profession perspective, shows the major issues of cross-cultural design projects as shown in Table 3.1.

According to the literature, resolutions of these issues could resolve the problems mentioned above, and improve the design performance. Resolutions from both project management and design profession are synthesized in Table 3.2.

The results suggest that it is necessary to investigate both the project management and design professions in searching for a more comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural design projects.

The results show overlaps and differences between project management and design perspectives. Even though the design profession has to deal with particular design challenges, the project management research provided a perspective which was more practical and applicable to different professions.
Table 3.1: Major issues of cross-cultural design projects.

Design profession (Bull, 2007)
1. Unprecedented complexity.
2. Inefficient design approach.
3. Communication.

Project management (Pheng & Leong, 2000)
1. Organizational & National cultural value differences.
2. Communication
3. Dispute Resolution
4. Negotiation

Synthesis from both perspectives
1. Organizational & national cultural value differences
2. Communication
3. Management and negotiation
4. Inefficient design approach

Table 3.2: Resolution for cross-cultural design project.

Design profession (Bull, 2007)
1. Effective and innovative communication.
2. Be open-minded.
3. Use culturally responsive methodologies. Achieve a balance between localization and globalization.
4. Accept non-standard outcomes.

Project management (Pheng & Leong, 2000)
1. Understand and learn about different cultures and values, including national and organizational values.
2. Enhance communication and negotiation skills.

Synthesis from both perspectives
1. Understand and learn about different cultures and values, including national and organizational values.
2. Enhance communication and negotiation skills.
3. Use culturally responsive methodologies with a balance between localization and globalization.
4. Accept non-standard outcomes.
More importantly, the results recognize the importance of values and value systems and pointed out the crucial role values play in cross-cultural project integration. This observation was coincident with the definition of culture and cultural differences.

3.1.4 Cultural Interaction: a Light from Cultural Relativism

If values are one of the most important and difficult factors to deal with in cross-cultural project, are there any principles or guidelines to suggest how to handle our values and that of others’?

Established in the early 20th century by an anthropologist Franz Boas, his first statement of cultural relativism was “...civilization is not something absolute, but ... is relative, and ... our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes” (Wikipedia, 2013).

“Cultural relativism is among the most misunderstood yet socially charged concepts associated with anthropology today. While most American cultural anthropologists have utilized cultural relativism as a pedagogical and sometimes political medium to challenge ethnocentric western views and cultural practices and to promote an appreciation of cultural diversity, ethicists, philosophers and the general public have all too often embraced a view of cultural relativism that ostensibly allows repugnant customs and social practices to go unchallenged” (Ulin, 2007, p.803).

Despite the fact that there are millions of articles debating different schools of cultural relativism, the big question is always whether there should be a set of
universal principles of morality or values that can be applied to different cultures (Li, 2007).

According to some arguments, on the one hand, being respectful to ‘other cultures’ is natural and essential. On the other hand, it does not mean that ‘other cultures’ can practice certain traditions or behavior which have been universally recognized as “not right”, such as slavery, and gender inequity. There are countries and cultures that still use cultural relativism in an extreme way, to find excuses for such behaviors (Ulin, 2007).

As a result, it is critical and difficult to identify a set of universal values among all cultures. Universal values would require validation and acceptance by all cultures. In a sense, universal values are the overlaps between cultures (Li, 2007). Figure 3.4 demonstrates the idea of cultural overlap and distinctions.

Cultural relativism is a very complex theory, and a large part of it is beyond the scope of this research. However it offers landscape architects and designers an opportunity to think about a series of questions: Should designers apply a set of standard values and design principles to foreign cultures? To what extent should designers insist on
their own values, or accept others”? If universal values are worthy to promote among all cultures, are there any landscape architectural values worthy to be introduced to all foreign clients? Cultural relativism does not provide landscape architects any specific advice, but suggests some research questions for further investigation.

3.2 Part Two: Professional Values and the Design Process

Part One of the literature review has suggested the importance of values in a cross-cultural design project; to continue the line of research, Part Two tries to answer whether values are important in design. If so, what are the most important values for Canadian landscape architects? Finally, how do their values affect design? The literature considered in this part of the literature is shown in Figure 3.5.

![Figure 3.5: Literature review part two road map.](image)

3.2.1 The Landscape Architect’s Professional Values and Value System

3.2.1.1 The Landscape architect’s value system

A value is “a person’s principles or standards of behavior; one’s judgment of what is important in life” (Oxford, 2012). A ‘value system’ is a set of principles or standards for a person or a group (Wikipedia.com, 2013). A professional value system is a set
of values and principles that a professional should have, and provides guidance of on behaving properly; therefore landscape architects’ professional values are the values we as a landscape architect have. In addition, a landscape architect’s value system refers to a set of principles and beliefs to guide professional decisions.

3.2.1.2 Ian Thompson: landscape architect’s professional values

If landscape architects’ professional values guide design decisions, then what are the most important values for landscape architects? Ian Thompson (2000), a British landscape architect and scholar is among the few who have written on the subject. His PhD research was on a landscape architect’s professional values. His research has been published in a book *Ecology, Community and Delight: sources of value in landscape architecture* (2000). Through investigating historical sources and interviewing 25 British landscape architects, he synthesized three core design values for modern landscape architects: valuing aesthetics, social responsibility and ecological awareness.

He used these three values to evaluate a design, the so-called “tri-valent design”. According to the three core values for landscape architects, he argued that a better design solution should perform well in relation to all three values, but he also recognized that in reality, a design project, which only contains one or two core values, could also be successful. Therefore, he is promoting the tri-valent design knowing the difficulty of achieving it in design practice.

However, he also found through interviews that “while these values may be mutually supportive, situations may arise when they are in conflict. If an individual designer believes that the social aspects of his job are very significant and that consultation is
important, then that designer’s situation becomes correspondingly more complicated, for now he must not only reconcile his own conflicting values but must give particular weight to the values of others” (Thompson, 2000). Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7 illustrates the three design core values and ethical elements.

**Figure 3.6**: Ian Thompson’s landscape architecture core values.

**Figure 3.7**: Ian Thompson’s landscape architecture ethical elements.
3.2.1.3 OALA & ASLA Codes of Ethics

OALA Code of Ethics

The OALA Code of Ethics and Professional Practice provides guidance for landscape architects. “The code expresses in general terms the most important standards of ethical and professional conduct by which members of the OALA are expected to abide” (OALA, 2006).

The first professional ethics principle states,

“the assumption that landscape architects have ethical responsibilities towards themselves, their clients, society, and their profession -- in short to whomever might be significantly affected by the member's practice of landscape architecture” (OALA, 2006)

Some principles were complementing this basic one, for example, section 3.6 states,

“Members must never place their own commercial interests, or the commercial interests of their client or employer, above the health, welfare and safety of the public or the integrity of the profession” (OALA, 2006).

A second fundamental principle is the stewardship principle which states:

“According to this principle, landscape architecture is the application of the art and science of organizing elements on the earth's surface for human use and enjoyment, combined with a commitment to the protection, preservation and enhancement of the earth's environmental resources” (OALA, 2006).

This principle echoes with all three values that Ian Thomson talked about: aesthetic, environmental and social responsibilities. However from the principle it is hard to tell
which value weighs heavier than the other. The researcher interprets social responsibility as higher than environmental and aesthetic values, but others might read and practice differently.

As expected, there are also ethical principles in regard to business behaviors and other social activities involving the landscape architecture profession, such as rules of collaborating with other professionals.

**ASLA Code of Ethics**

Similar to the OALA’s Code of Ethics, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Code of Ethics indicates their fundamental principles by stating:

“(T)he professional of landscape architecture was built on …dedication to the public health, safety and welfare, and recognition and protection of the land and its resources” (ASLA, 1999).

Social and environmental or scientific values can be gleaned from this statement. Interestingly, even though the statement did not mention aesthetic value, the importance of art and pursuing of aesthetic values can be demonstrated from the practice and actual work of the American landscape architects.

ASLA has demonstrated and strongly emphasizes legal procedure and principles, which leaves an impression that American landscape architects are considering law as their highest standard of principles. This might be a reflection of the American cultural preference towards respecting law and legislative processes.


3.2.1.4 Other literature

There is very little other literature discussing the landscape architect’s value system. The profession tends to discuss the characteristics of the profession rather than consider them as values.

In Davorin Gazvoda’s article (2002), the author summarized that “landscape architects must be familiar with both a wide range of knowledge from the field of natural sciences and artistic creativity at the same time.” This statement echoes with Thompson’s environmental and aesthetic values, but excluded the social value.

An article by Seamus W. Filor (1994) emphasized “cultural and ethical values - personal and social” as being a part of landscape design. Furthermore “society, the ultimate client the profession serves, is ever-shifting in its perceived values and aspirations”, therefore, “landscape proposals must take account of these unpredictable changes, and be robust and flexible enough to adapt to and accept future uses and demands.” Compared to Davorin’s opinion, Filor focused on social value, and considered aesthetic and environmental issues as “a range of technologies”.

These articles summarize scientific, cultural and ethical values for landscape architects.

3.2.2 Gaps in the current literatures

Through reviewing the literature, some gaps among these studies were identified. First of all, every list of professional values was different; they had focused on different aspects of the profession. Different historical time periods and cultural background could have a large impact on the development of values. Ian Thompson
developed the value system for British landscape architects (Thompson, 2000), which possibly represented the British style of landscape architecture.

Through other literature, the researcher found more design values besides environmental, social and aesthetic values; there were also scientific, cultural and ethical values for landscape architects.

Compared to British landscape architects, Canadian landscape architects might have different values. Unfortunately, the researcher did not find any Canadian research in this field. Therefore, this research presented an opportunity to investigate Canadian landscape architects’ professional values.

Secondly, Thompson argued that he was not able to find a rigid hierarchy of values, or to find some overarching values which might bring the three values together. “A multitude of divergent values was appearing … and to force them into an artificial structure would be violence” (Thompson, 2000). However, he did not deny the possibility of a value hierarchy, as his finding showed that landscape architects generally give precedence to social value. Furthermore, he concludes there might be some other value system theory to provide a more sophisticated value system structure. Finally, Ian Thompson’s research and other literature did not explain how value systems interact with design processes. In other words, the mechanism between a value system and landscape architectural design was not addressed.

Hence, to understand how professional values influence design, designers will need a more sophisticated theory of value systems and theories for design processes to provide a better framed normative theory.
3.2.3 Values in decision-making process

3.2.3.1 Design as a decision-making process

Design has been considered a problem-solving process and also a decision-making process (Rowe, 1987).

![Diagram](image)

Figure 3.8: Asimow’s model (Rowe, 1987).

Earlier designers developed various problem-solving models, such as Asimow’s staged-process model shown in Figure 3.8 (Rowe, 1987). This model pointed out four key steps of design: analysis → synthesis → evaluation → communication. Asimow’s model seemed to explain well those problems that were well-defined (Rowe, 1987). “Once a problem has been defined, its solution is made directly accessible in terms of that definition” (Rowe, 1987, p.48). However, not all processes could be so rigorous and well-defined. The model did not explain by what means “do we advance from analysis to synthesis” or “how is it that unique solutions are often rendered to problems, when the information processing that takes places seems so straightforward?” (Rowe, 1987, p.51).
Newell, Shaw and Simon (1957) developed another theory, which soon after was called the information processing theory of problem solving. Soon this theory became one of the most accepted design process theories. Rowe in the book *Design Thinking* (1987) explained the theory as,

“proponents of the new theoretical perspective sought to explain problem-solving behavior by way of basic information processes…a small, finite number of basic mechanisms for processing information, mechanisms that could be grouped or arranged into strategies, or programs in the computer sense” (p.50).

Shown in Figure 3.9, this decision-making model seemed rather simple. As described by Rowe (1987, p.50), it can be used to explain many daily decisions we make, such which transportation mode to use to go to work.

This theory has advantages in showing alternatives for a decision maker to choose from. It allows people to track the thinking process, and helps designers to focus on the design process and identify the justification or rationale for every decision. Research has concentrated on using this information-processing model to determine and evaluate factors which influence decision-making (Rowe, 1987).
Figure 3.9: Decision tree model (Rowe, 1987, p.53-54).
3.2.3.1 Hierarchy of values and value shifting

What is the determinable factor for making decisions? According to a political theory, Advocacy Coalition Framework theory (ACF), one’s belief system (also called value system) plays a central role in the design decision-making process.

Developed in the 90’s, Paul Sabatier (1991) urged scholars to develop better theories and empirics for understanding policy-making processes. ACF is now considered one of the most promising processes in understanding the decision-making process and has been applied and assessed in different professions (Fenger, 2001). Despite the fact that ACF was developed for explaining large political policy-making processes, the researcher found that its value system structure was applicable to understanding professional values and relevant to helping understand the landscape architect’s decision-making process.

ACF proposes a three-tiered belief system structure; Figure 3.10 demonstrates the system structure. At the highest level are ‘deep core’ beliefs. These are fundamental values that people hold, regardless what political sides or coalitions (we may say whatever organization or profession) they are in. Every organization has its deep core beliefs, such as “individual freedom” or “social equality.” The “policy core” at the next level, demonstrates fundamental value priorities. And the third level is the “secondary aspect”, which focuses on specific policy preferences and policy outcomes (Jenins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994).
Deep core beliefs are very stable and resistant to change; they are almost like a religious belief. Policy beliefs on the other hand are easier to modify through communication and through “gradual accumulation of evidence”. Secondary aspects, are assumed to be more readily adjusted with new data and experience (Jenins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994).

The value system structure is central to the decision-making process. It suggests that values translate into actions and behaviors. According to this theory, through internal and external information exchange and learning process, beliefs and values will change (Jenins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994). When values shift, they lead to changes in action and outcome. The change of values comes from the learning process within and between the organizations. According to ACF, this critical learning process requires a decade or more to change core values and deep core beliefs (Fenger & Klok, 2001). The value shifting process could appear as a top-town process or bottom-up process. For example, enough new data or new evidence could shift secondary aspects and then lead to changes in policy core values, or a shift from deep
core belief could result in tremendous shifting at lower levels (Jenins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994).

The theory has been used in many fields of research, from planning projects to political movements. These topics seem irrelevant to landscape architecture; however, it echoes with the idea of understanding values in the decision-making process. For example, it was used to understand the stakeholders’ value system in a natural area protection project (Weible, 2006). According to Weible, “(t)here is a growing recognition that public policy controversies are driven more by value differences than by technical deficiencies. Unfortunately, we have yet to develop, test, and refine systematic approaches for understanding political systems” (2006, p.95) This research used ACF as a theoretical basis for understanding the political context, via an analysis of stakeholder’s value system. The research showed that over a long period of time, different stakeholders determined and shifted their positions on California marine protection area policy (Weible, 2006).

3.2.3.2 Landscape architect’s value system structure

Therefore, when considering design as a decision-making process, landscape architects should also have a professional value systems to guide design decisions. A proposed value system might look similar to the ACF value system structure (see Figure 3.11).
This structure suggests that a landscape architect’s beliefs and core values will determine the design outcome. In other words, design outcomes are the results of the landscape architect’s value system. Furthermore, the designer’s value system could be changed through learning from within or outside of the profession, resulting in changes in design outcomes.

It is impossible to draw out every value of the professional value system due to the limitations of this research. However this proposed value system structure provides a framework that helps identify the landscape architect’s professional value system, and explain the design process from a new perspective.

3.2.4 Influence of Professional Values on the Design Process
The literature lead to looking at design as a decision-making process and revealed the importance of values in the decision-making process. It is concluded that professional
core values are influential in the design process. Figure 3.12 shows how the designer’s value system may affect the design decision-making process.

**Figure 3.12**: Designer’s value system affects design decision-making process.
The existing literature proposed some core design values for landscape architect: social, environmental, scientifically, aesthetic, cultural, and ethical values (see Figure 3.13).

![Professional Value System](image)

**Figure 3.13**: Landscape architect’s professional value system.

### 3.3 Literature Review Discussion

Part One suggested culture by definition has various components and values are one of the crucial components. When talking about cross-cultural design, designers are facing not only difference in traditions or languages, but also differences in values. From both management and designer’s perspective, the literature suggests many issues may arise in cross-cultural design projects. Differences in values and poor communication are the main reasons for these issues.

In addition, the literature from cultural relativism persuaded people to think about cultural interactions at a deeper level. Is it appropriate to apply a set of standard value principles? Should the values be modified to fit local cultures? If so, to what extent should a designer insist on his own values and persuade others to accept non-native
values. Finally, is it possible to find common values in various cultures, so that different parties in cross-cultural projects have something in common as a base?

Part Two suggested that values and value systems are important in the decision-making process. When considering the design process as a decision-making process, it is appropriate to suggest that professional values could determine both the design process and design outcomes. The literature also suggests a value system hierarchy structure and identifies several professional core values for landscape architects.

Parts One and Part Two have pointed out the importance of professional values. In a cross-cultural design project, value differences cause problems. To solve the problems, designers’ should identify core values for themselves and their foreign clients. The value system hierarchy structure could help to identify values and understand how different value levels affects behaviors.

The next chapter presents the findings of interviews of Canadian landscape architects who have had cross-cultural design experience. Through these interviews, the researcher investigated issues experienced in cross-cultural design projects, and whether the professionals considered value differences to be a problem. If so, what were their strategies for solving these issues?
Chapter 4: Interviews

4.1 Introduction

As stated in Chapter 2 Methodology, the purpose of interviews was to obtain data from cross-cultural design project practitioners. The interviews were designed to address the following objectives: first, to identify issues for cross-cultural design project; second, to identify strategies for solving these issues; and third, to understand the Canadian landscape architect’s professional values and how professional values influence cross-cultural design.

Interviewees are numbered according to the sequences of their interviews. The number does not categorize them into certain group. Those selected to interview were all educated as Landscape Architects and now hold titles that include Landscape Architect, Urban Designer and Planner. These individuals work in a variety of settings in the public, private and education sector. In terms of professional experience, they have practiced from 10 years to more than 40 years. A summary profile of those interviewed is presented in Figure 4.1.

All the interviewees had more then 5 years of overseas working experience and in total over 10 years of professional practice. For those whose had over 20 years of
experience, they had as least 10 years of overseas experiences. All the interviewees’ works covered most areas of the globe, including Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa (see Figure 4.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Titles</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landscape architect</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban designer/ Planner</td>
<td>Large organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 10 years of practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 over 30 years of practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 over 30 years of practice</td>
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<td>4 10 years of practice</td>
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<td>5 over 30 years of practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 over 40 years of practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 20 years of practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4.1**: Interviewees’ basic information.

**Figure 4.2**: Interviewees’ projects locations around the world.
4.2 Interview Results

The interviews were conducted by talking to each interviewee in person or on phone, lasting from half an hour to more than two hours. These interviews were semi-structured; therefore, their responses might not directly answer the questions, and the researcher had to ask slightly different questions according to the conversation situation.

The interview results are organized into five themes. The results are presented in the same order.

1. Identify interviewee’s professional background and their core design values.
2. Interviewee’s cross-cultural design projects experience, any issues, any strategies for solving these issues.
3. The role of values in the cross-cultural design process, and whether differences in values influenced the cross-cultural design project.
4. Lessons from the experiences, and whether there was value shifting happening.
5. Other influential factors for cross-cultural design projects.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Interviewees’ Professional Background and Core Design Values

Interviewees’ Professional Background

All the interviewees had a professional degree in landscape architecture. Some interviewees had other professional degrees such as architecture and urban design. Four of them studied in Ontario and the others trained in the United States. They had all practiced in the private sector. Five of them are still actively practicing in the private sector as principal designers and business owners; two interviewees, interviewee1 and 4, currently work in the public sector as landscape architects and planners.
Design Core Values

All of the interviewees started to indicate their design principles and core values automatically at the beginning of the conversation. They found it necessary to clarify their principles before going into any further discussion of design.

Interviewee 2 said, the most important event influencing landscape architectural design was “the process” or “the ecological analysis process”, advocated by Ian McHarg back in the 60’s and 70’s. It was the time when the interviewee was in a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture program and he studied under several faculty members who were students of Ian McHarg. Therefore they used McHarg’s ecological planning method, which focuses on the process and suggests that through the process, a design outcome will evolve. It was also the time when the environmental movement was blooming; professionals and students were all exploring more environmentally sound technology and design for the future. “The McHargian process” has proven to work well in all this professional’s years of practice; therefore, the interviewee believed in it, and always approached design in this way.

Interviewee 2 said that there were different ways to name this design process, for example, LEED or “triple-bottom line design”. For this professional, terms changed over time, but the central idea was the same. Design was about coordinating environmental, social and economic values, and landscape architects had always worked under this idea.

Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 5 expressed similar opinions. Interviewee 3 talked about McHarg’s ecological analysis process and environmental design approach as
design principles, and stated McHarg’s design process had a big influence on North American’s landscape architecture. He said that Canadian design was not distinct from the work of others in the world, but many great Canadian firms and designers were using such principles, working around the world and building up their reputation.

Interviewee 5 was Ian McHarg’s student while in university. Therefore he was a strong believer and follower of “the process”. Interviewee 5 is currently involved in major environmental planning, restoration and engineering projects. He used “the process” as his fundamental design principles in every case.

Interviewee 6 also mentioned Ian McHarg’s environmental analysis process, but he also emphasized the cultural, spiritual and economic value of a project. The economic value is essential for both clients and the designer, and the sustainability model in fact contains all these values.

Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 4 are both working for the public sector. They focused on promoting democratic processes such as public participation and policy making. They promoted planning policies include promoting sustainable design, creating green space system. They tended to discuss design from a planning policy point of view.

Interviewee 1 said that the priority of landscape architecture was place-making, which considers people at first, then a transit system, a green system and so on. With experiences in the private sector, it was to this Interviewee’s advantage to know how to produce a good design that conformed to policy. Interviewee 1 also thought that a
sustainable design was necessarily universal because it matters to people’s survival. Therefore, there should be no difference between regions or cultures in applying sustainable design.

Interviewee 7 had abundant knowledge in architecture, engineering and landscape architecture, having received professional education in all these fields. He had worked and lived in China for over 10 years for large international private design firms; therefore he was very familiar with Chinese market and Chinese clients. Although not pointing out design core values directly, this Interviewee mentioned cultural and environmental values through conversation.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Cross-cultural Design Project Experiences

Interviewees provided many stories with regard to their experience in cross-cultural design projects. Especially for those who had over 20 years of practices, they had a great number of stories, which reflected on every aspect of a design project. Typical stories have been presented selectively; their comments and insights are presented in paraphrased text.

Interviewee 1

Interviewee 1 had about 8 years of experience in the private sector before coming into the public sector. Interviewee 1 had worked in an international design firm, and participated in projects all over the globe.

When asking about Interviewee 1 cross-cultural design experiences, interviewee 1 first talked about the projects interviewee 1 is involved with in current public sector job. The municipality Interviewee 1 works for has a big immigrant population from
southern and eastern Asia. Therefore, the planning department required a new community center to reflect these different cultural groups’ preferences. The design turned out to include many cultural symbols and incorporated functions for different cultural activities and events. To respect cultural difference is an important principle for this municipality. Figure 4.3 demonstrate one of the community centers Interviewee 1 talked about. The use of color and the building programme considered cultural activities and cultural symbols.

![Figure 4.3: Culturally sensitive community center (Perkins + Will, 2012).](image)

When talking about overseas project and international cultural experiences, Interviewee 1 said in some cases the project needed to deal with a complex local social situation. For example, in a project in London, problems were caused by two
adjacent communities - one richer and one poorer located on two sides of the project site. In other cases, the different cultural experiences, for example, it was hard to imagine doing planning in Hong Kong the same way as Canadian cities. Social and cultural differences existed, such as in population, land size and cultural perceptions in regards to planning and design.

When asked about specific problems experienced when working on cross cultural projects Interviewee 1 replied that Interviewee 1 had experienced problems in detail design and construction. It was hard to control the construction and detail design in a cross-cultural design projects simply because designers had no control of the local contractor and often were not being asked to produce detailed drawings. This was because many times, local design firms produced the detailed drawings. She had a project in China, where the contractor did not use the proper methods and materials; therefore the finished landscape did not look like the original design, and had quality failure very soon after being built.

**Interviewee 2**

Interviewee 2 had many years experience of working around the world, and currently has many projects in China. With the tremendous amount of experience in practice, he first of all talked about differences between cultures. The Middle East, Europe and China all had very different cultures, in many different aspects, from governmental behavior to clientele’s preference. Cultural differences existed in all levels of interactions. The designer had to learn a lot of customs along the way; during the process he needed to be familiar with a lot of requirements. There were many issues, and the biggest problem was to maintain “the design process” while needing to communicate design ideas to foreign clients.
“The process” was the most important design principle for Interviewee 2. China was very unique and difficult in this sense because Chinese clients back then did not understand or require such a design process. Chinese clients preferred “story telling” rather than following a defined design process.

Another problem was the in legal contracting issue. Interviewee 2 said, particularly in China, contracts could always be changed, resulting in a change in fees and working procedures. This could cause many problems for designers and managers.

To solve these problems, Interviewee 2 learned to understand what the clients really wanted and found good communication was the key. Interviewee 2 also found that providing design options to clients and letting them participate in the design process was a good way to promote “the process” and to better explain design intentions. Ultimately, efficient communication and establishing close relationship also lead to better results in the contracting phase of the project.

**Interviewee 3**

Interviewee 3 spoke highly of his business partners in China. Good partners had made the work in China so much easier and the results were good experiences for him. Having good relationships with local partners and clients, his firm conducted many successful design projects overseas.

China had a bad reputation of treating designers as a product provider rather than a partner. Therefore having a good client who could understand the designer’s intentions and was willing to accept new ideas helped to build trust and make sure the project would go well.
Also, Interviewee 3 mentioned the importance of “marketing” the design. To use the word marketing might sound inappropriate for a design, but he noted a designer should understand business reality and try to promote one’s ideas. Such “marketing” or “packaging” skills were important in dealing with foreign clients, who might not necessarily understand and be familiar with North Americans’ design approach.

While talking about the reasons resulting in bad overseas designs, Interviewee 3 believed these cases came from unqualified design firms. In his opinion, such firms were not able providing good design in their home countries, and also were not able to do well in foreign countries. These firms did not follow good design principles and processes; their only intention was to make profits, which he described as being irresponsible in any country.

**Interviewee 4**

Interviewee 4 mentioned the biggest problem was the project process being continually interrupted. He worked and lived in Shanghai, China for three years, working in an international firm. He complained about clients always changing their minds at the last minute without any notice and asking for additional design services.

Also, designers’ rights and personal lives were not acknowledged. For example, in China, clients would call a designer’s personal cell phone number at night and ask about work. Designers and design firm were not considered as partners of the clients but rather as product manufacturers: Chinese clients asked designers to produce exactly what they wanted, rather than letting designers coordinate with them and following a design process.
Another issue Interviewee 4 talked about was communication problems. Not only was there a language difference, but more troublesome was the information exchange. Clients often were not able to provide enough information, such as background materials. During the project process, such inadequate information exchange created big problems for designers to make a design decision and keep the project on schedule.

**Interviewee 5**

Interviewee 5 currently is working primarily in China on environmental design and engineering projects, for example river ecosystem restoration. One issue in such projects related to China having less environmental awareness and knowledge in the field of restoration. Also, Chinese clients did not recognize sustainable development principle and the need for protection and restoration of environmental qualities of the project. Secondly, it was hard to find local engineers to produce drawings and construct the work using proper methods. Furthermore, communication and contracting issues were frequent, particularly legal issues related to contracting and fees.

For Interviewee 5, the lack of environmental awareness was the biggest issue. As a student of Ian McHarg, he firmly believed in environmental design and the difference in environmental beliefs between him and his clients created many problems. For example, in many projects, Chinese engineers and officials insisted on channelizing the river course. Figure 4.4 shows a channelized river and naturalized river in China.
Interviewee 5 concluded that the education system did not teach concepts and techniques of sustainable development knowledge and the government did not have a policy to support sustainable design.

Since most of the large-scale environmental projects were public projects, Interviewee 5 needed to deal with governmental policy and bureaucracy, which sometimes required changes in policies. It was extremely hard to persuade governmental officials to accept the designer’s proposal if policy changes were required.

Interviewee 5 had to learn the reality of working in China very quickly. To promote his environmental design, Interviewee 5 asked to be allowed to construct a trial project, restoring a short distance of the riverbank as a showcase for his clients. The trial project was a success and once his clients saw and learned the benefits of such restoration, they started to accept this kind of design and asked for more.
Interviewee 6

Interviewee 6 had over 40 years of practical experience around the world. With projects in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Asian and North America, he had established a truly international reputation in landscape architecture and design.

He told many stories of his cross-cultural experiences. One story was particularly interesting, relating to a garden design for Kuwait clients. The Bedouin have a rich and fascinating tradition and culture. The client took him to a traditional tent in the desert and invited him to their family dinner. At night, the Bedouin like to be with their family and sit in a circle under the starry sky. The interviewee was fascinated by such a unique culture and decided to incorporate their traditions into the garden.

According to the clients, in tradition Bedouin culture they do not have a certain garden style. They had hired a French designer prior to the interviewee and the French designer proposed a combination of a formal French garden and Italian garden. Interviewee 6 saw this plan and did not think such a design was appropriate. Instead, he tried to enhance the local traditions and created a garden style which they had never had. Figure 4.5 shows a traditional Bedouin tent, and Figure 4.6 shows the outdoor environment of the tent at night.

![Traditional Bedouin tent](greecemedtravel.com, 2012)

**Figure 4.5**: Traditional Bedouin tent (greecemedtravel.com, 2012).
After communicating with the clients, Interviewee 6 learned that Bedouin were very strict in prohibiting girls and boys from meeting physically. Therefore, the fence of the garden needed to be wide enough to become a barrier, yet thin enough to let everyone see through. Also clients prefer geometric shapes rather than organic or curving shapes. Because they like order and need to know where members of their families are, a curving shape plane or structure might block sightlines. Therefore the interviewee adjusted his organic shape design into a square space. The last problem he had to solve was that the clients wanted to have an outdoor movie space in the garden so that families could watch movies in the night or get together like they used to in their tent. However, they also needed separation in the space, to separate girls or wives from seeing males who were not part of the family. After solving all these problems, the clients chose his design instead of the French garden design.

Interviewee 7 has worked and lived in China since 2004, serving in a large international organization. When asked what did he think were the issues associated with cross-cultural design projects, he said that he used to experience many problems
but they were no longer issues anymore because he solved them by being patient and communicating well. He said to be patient with the clients, listen carefully to them and understand what they really wanted.

Interviewee 7 did talk about issues in management. The biggest problem was to find qualified local staff. Compared to other foreign companies, his firm emphasized hiring a local design team, now comprising 30 percent of his staff. Using this approach has advantages in cultural and social aspects of the project. However, the local professional education system does not provide graduates with the full range of skills and knowledge his Canadian design firm required and he therefore also needed to include Canadians among his employees.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Values and Design Process

Theme 3 presents findings from the interviews on the role of values in the cross-cultural design process, and whether value differences influenced a cross-cultural design project.

In general, interviewees had no difficulty relating value differences with practical issues. They realized many of the issues in design projects were reflections of different values, and knew the importance of understanding and adopting local client’s values into their designs. Furthermore, some interviewees talked about beliefs and core values. Core values could influence practice. Landscape architecture as a practical profession was always under such influence.

From the public sector point of view, Interviewee 1 represented the desirability of strong policy power from the top. Interviewee 1 works in a municipality where its
planning department established a strong focus on sustainable development. With such enforcement, the official plan for the entire municipality and approvals of new developments had to follow strict environmental design regulations, whether it was a large-scale green system plan, a public transit plan, or a high urban density development. According the interviewee, with these policies and enforcement on all proposals, the municipality turned out to be very advanced in sustainable urban planning compared to many other Ontario cities, and created a great positive impact on other municipalities.

Also from the public sector’s perspective, Interviewee 4 mentioned that in Canada, public participation was not only unavoidable in the planning process, but also considered important. In the projects he works on, coordinating public participation and different levels of governments were his major tasks. These democratic processes were time consuming, and many times reduced efficiency, but as a public organization they always tried their best to maximize their effects. In contrast, during his time in China, he did not see that happen due to the difference in political system and design culture.

Interviewee 2 talked about how the Chinese political culture had determined the design outcome. He learned from the experience that when presenting to Chinese government officials, normally in a meeting room, there was a form of democracy: everybody around the table would speak their opinions. However, it was always the head official at the end of the table who made the decision, regardless of whether other people liked or disliked the design. In contrast, if the head official had spoken first and set the tone for the meeting, other officials would not make any controversial
comments. He learned that in order to win a project in the Chinese public sector, he needed to please the head official.

To understand different values and value systems, communication is essential. Chinese residents had different life styles and values so designers need to understand their lifestyles. For instance, some Chinese communities emphasized shared common space, public activities and required less privacy, while other communities required more privacy and less disturbance from public activities. These differences reflected different values associated with environmental and personal needs. Therefore, designers need to be aware of such differences and design accordingly.

Interviewee 3 had always understood values as being an important factor in the decision making process and how important some values such as political value could determine how society functions. Learning recent Chinese history, he felt that big political events such as the Cultural Revolution had a great influence on current Chinese society and as a result, Chinese people were being impious with respect to their traditions and culture. To him, there was a disconnection between traditional Chinese culture and modern culture, and it was a shame to see a historical culture that showed such disconnection and disrespect for its own culture. This problem had influence on his projects in China. When clients showed no interest in traditional Chinese style or heritage, it was hard for a foreign designer to persuade them to protect heritage sites or get inspiration from local traditions. Luckily, Chinese people are now starting to show interest in their heritage and increase their knowledge of traditional cultures.
Furthermore, Interviewee 3 said that to create a safe and healthy environment for people was the duty of landscape architecture profession. This goal was applicable to every project, and it was universal for every culture.

Interviewee 5 designed a golf course and resort project in southern China about 10 years ago. At that time, the area was undeveloped and maintained its farms and villages, reflecting a very traditional southern Chinese rice farm landscape. The designer asked whether he could keep the rice farm and village’s buildings as a heritage site, and design the golf course around it. The developer, however, wanted to remove everything. The designer was shocked that the local developer did not see any value of these heritages buildings and landscape; however he failed to persuade the clients.

He realized that different people perceived landscape and landscape values in different ways. Particularly foreigners and locals would see local features with very different values. He felt bad to destroy these beautiful natural and cultural heritage areas. Figure 4.7 shows a typical southern Chinese farming village such as the one mentioned by Interviewee 5.

![Figure 4.7: Typical Southern China farming village (fsfl.gov.cn, 2012).](image)
Interviewee 6 said that value and value shifting existed not only in cross-cultural design. Certainly, in cases like a Bedouin garden, differences in family ethic values and social order values were apparent, but within Canada, people still need to face value differences, for example, when interacting with native people. Often, the values could not be transferred to reality. Interviewee 6 gave a Canadian example. The Canadian government promotes sustainable development; however when Capital Hill in Ottawa needed renewal, the government could not accept a sustainable design approach for it. Therefore, there was always a disconnection between a value and realizing it.

But he also acknowledged that it was easier to deal with Canadian problems than foreign problems. For example, in a Morocco project, the clients refused to use a sustainable method to deal with a rising sea level issue. Interviewee 6 argued with the clients that promoting sustainability was one of their governmental policies. The client laughed at him, and told him that was only on paper. If the clients had no sustainability in their value systems, it could be very difficult to get them to be willing to invest extra money and to achieve an environmental solution. In this case, Interviewee 6 had this fundamental divergence with the clients and resigned from the project at the end.

Interviewee 7 mentioned that there were difficulties in applying environmental design, and Chinese contractors had little understanding of environmental engineering and lack of technology.
4.2.4 Theme 4: Lessons and Value Shifting

Theme 4 tries to find out what lessons have the interviewees learnt from the experiences, and whether value shifting happened.

Interviewee 4 said, it was necessary to protect one’s own interests, especially working overseas. However, he did not mention any shift of his design values or design principles. He designed the similar way in China as in Canada.

Interviewee 2 said, that if the client accepted the design, they accepted the values represented in the design. Clients looking for foreign designers oftentimes meant they were looking for something they did not have, certain knowledge or new ideas. Therefore, such clients were open to new values and ideas from foreign designers. It was relatively easy to work with such clients. On the other hand, if the designer and the clients could not agree, or the client asked for unreasonable service, he would rather quit the job to protect himself and the design firm. Therefore having great clientele was critical.

In terms of shifting values, Interviewee 2 said that he had always insisted on design with “the process”. First of all, following the process produced great design results. Secondly, with years of communicating and coordinating with clients, they were more familiar with such design methods now. Therefore, the process had proven to be a great design method.

Most importantly, Interviewee 2 believed, was to hold on to his principles and know the priorities. Because “the process” was his design core value, he learned to insist on
it. Although economic values and business were important, when the clients were using designers in an inappropriate way, designers need to know when to quit.

Interviewee 3 said that to learn from other cultures was necessary. The knowledge exchange between different cultures was not only inevitable but also can promote creativity and advance design. In trends, a young Chinese designer might have more potential than a North American designer because they learned the modern Western way of design, and also have tremendous knowledge from their own culture.

Interviewee 5 had many unpleasant and pleasant experiences in doing environmental design in China; he learned to accept the differences. There was no right or wrong way of doing design, but for him, he would continue to do design the way “it should be”- “follow the process”. Meanwhile, Interviewee 5 learned about the importance of culture. Cultural values were very different, which took a lot of learning and understanding.

Shifting client’s values took a lot of communicating and persuading, but Interviewee 5 believed that environmental design was beneficial for people’s health and safety; it was needed regardless of the culture. In other words, environmental safety and human comfort were common in all cultures; as the ultimate goals for landscape architect, these core values should not be changed.

Interviewee 6 believed shifting value was difficult but possible. In a Morocco resort development project, similar with Interviewee 5’s Southern China golf course project, the clients asked for a resort development on a local natural landscape. Through in-depth investigation with local residents, the designer proposed a design which
respected local landscape heritage and cultural features. The clients accepted the design, and highly praised a protective approach to local culture. This was a good example of showing that by providing good design alternatives, values and ideas could be changed. Interviewee 6 said design was about providing alternatives, and making the invisible visible.

Furthermore, Interviewee 6 was fascinated by the diverse cultural and spiritual traditions and values around the world. Spiritualism and religion had big influences in local life and values, and he found North American designers were good at the scientific analysis and environmental design because of their education and training, but not as good in understanding the cultural aspect. To reach a more comprehensive design, designers needed to think about enhancing cultural and social values in a sustainable design.

Through the years, Interviewee 6 became more humble and listened more carefully to local people and clients. Still now he was constantly fascinated by how diverse and unique cultures were. Not only at large cultural or social level, but also at a personal level. To understand clients at a personal level was critical. With an open attitude and learning spirit, Interviewee 6 learned a lot about world cultures and tries to stay personally in touch with those he has met through his work.

Interviewee 6 said that North American designers should learn from diverse world cultures. There were many intelligent and fascinating local designs which are great knowledge resources for North American designers. One such example is learning from traditional designs, such as the traditional Chinese courtyard house.
Interviewee 7’s firm has a professional influence in China because it was one of the earliest foreign design consulting firms to enter the Chinese market. With this advantage, the firm became a standard-maker for the Chinese design professions, and received a leadership position in the market. Its partnership with the government allowed it to be involved in many official policy-making processes, and their knowledge and suggestions were respected and adopted widely. With this tremendous advantage, Interviewee 7 said that the firm was able to accomplish many influential projects and introduced new technologies into China. These projects had changed local perceptions towards design professions. At the same time, the firm has adopted their marketing and management strategies to better fit into Chinese culture.

After 10 years working in China, Interviewee 7 personally had learned to become more adaptable and flexible. Communication and patience were his strategies to deal with Chinese clients. He strongly believed that local projects should be conducted at local offices. He argued that a team of Toronto designers would be great doing Canadian designs, however if they know nothing about China and the Chinese market, then they shouldn’t be the leading designer for a Chinese project. Therefore, firms should have clear and rational international strategies to get the most from their different offices.

4.2.5 Theme 5: Other Influential Factors

Are there any other values that influence a cross-cultural design project? Interviewees mainly talked about influences related to political pressures and economic values.

Ian Thompson (2000) did not mention economic values in his tri-value system. Economic values are not only the first concern of any real-estate developer, but also a
priority for design firms. Any design must ensure the client’s economic benefits, and the bottom line is that a design firm is still an organization whose ultimate goal is to maximize profits.

Interviewee 2, Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 6, with their experiences in design practice and business management, had all talked about the importance of economic values. A successful design needs to balance cost and result in profit for their clients. Meanwhile, making a profit is also important for every design firm. Senior designers and firm owners inevitably need to get involved and manage the business aspects of the firm.

As mentioned earlier, political values and political leaders also have a great influence on landscape architecture and planning projects. Designers who deal with foreign or cross-cultural clients need to understand this.

Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 6 talked about history and social issues of other countries. Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 4 are currently working in the public sector; their projects somehow reflected their political beliefs. For instance, they mentioned sustainable development policies and democratic planning policies. They concluded that such knowledge had helped them to understand their foreign clients more in depth, and better control their design projects.

Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 5 talked about how they suffered from not being familiar with the local political environment and political traditions, particularly when trying to win a governmental project.
Interviewee 7, on the other hand, talked about the success of his firm, largely because they can be involved in the local bureaucracy and had become part of the political system.

4.3 Results Analysis

4.3.1 Background analysis

The interview results show differences between the public and private sectors. Interviewee 1 and 4 are both working in public sector. Their attitudes toward design were different. They were more concerned about public welfare, policy-making, and coordinating relationships between different levels of government and the public. They considered sustainable development or public participation the right thing to do. As Ian Thompson noted, public sector professionals are standing on the moral high ground (Thompson, 2000). Their public duty granted them power to force private developers and the private sector’s designers to follow the rules. Most importantly, they understood that their power of policy-making was a great tool to make changes in the world, and their decisions could have a great influence on everyone.

In comparison, interviewees from the private sector talked about the strong force coming from the governments. Good policies could help designers to reach more advanced design outcomes, while bad policies could become a barrier. Meanwhile, designers from the private sector need to maximize profits for clients and for themselves. Therefore they emphasized the importance of emphasis on economic value.

Furthermore, interviewees who were business owners or company managers showed a strong belief in the need for control in both design management and business
development aspects. Keeping the business alive and building a professional reputation for their design firms were these interviewees’ priority tasks. They considered business strategy as being very important in their practice. Also, interviewees often discussed human resource problems and staffing problems. Ultimately, interviewees emphasized the importance of managing their business, which played a crucial role in the design process. This seemed particularly important when dealing with foreign clients and overseas markets.

Interviewees were involved in various project types, including landscape architecture projects, urban design and planning projects, and sometimes were asked to provide design guidelines for governments. Therefore, they often had a wide range of knowledge and professional skills and expertise.

4.3.2 Professional Core Values

Professional Beliefs

Several interviewees mentioned that the ultimate goal for landscape architecture profession was to create a safe, healthy and ecologically-friendly environment for people. They believe such environment and designs are desired for all their clients and local people regardless of the cultural background. Their professional value system is shown in Figure 4.8.

There was no interviewee saying that they gave up on their design principles. In contrast, they showed a strong belief in their core design values. In many cases, interviewees tried to use knowledge and design solutions to persuade foreign clients to accept their core values and design style. From this point of view, professional value systems are particularly important.
To communicate better is to shift other people’s values from a practical level to a higher level. For example, with years of doing environmental designs in China, Chinese clients and local people started to see the benefits of these projects, and over time environmental awareness has been highly promoted.

**Core Design Values**

According to interviewees’ responses, they have some core values in common. First, interviewees emphasized the importance of scientific analysis and the design process. The process is what distinguishes North American landscape architects from others. The process in many cases is understood as an environmental design method.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 4.8**: Interviewees’ professional beliefs and core design values.

Secondly, interviewees focused on enhancing the cultural/spiritual value. Particularly in overseas projects it sometimes was their first concern. Obviously cross-cultural design had to deal with cultural differences constantly. More importantly, all interviewees had treated different cultures respectfully. Instead of being forced to handle different customs and traditions, they considered cultural differences as source of inspiration and creativity. They expressed admiration and a positive learning
attitude toward foreign cultures, and believed cultural and knowledge exchanges could be great help for advancing design.

Thirdly, is the social value. Every society always has complex social problems, rooted from its culture and history. Understanding local culture and society are important for cross-cultural design.

Fourth, is economic value. Although economic value has not always been taught in design class, it is an important factor in a real project. The business aspect of the landscape architecture profession is rather hard to control; therefore it becomes one of the most difficult problems in design project management.

And fifth, there is political pressure influencing a designer’s behavior and decision-making. Particularly in a cross-cultural project, the landscape architect needs to learn local political traditions and the legal system in order to make sure the firm is operating legally and design is appropriate. Therefore, political influence, even though it is not a core design value for landscape architects, is a strong influential force.

Value System Development

All interviewees had received a Canadian or North American professional education. Their design beliefs had been embedded since then, and through years of practice, they had enhanced the beliefs and values which had proved to work well. It is possible that some values had been given up because they did not work, but interviewees did not mention that. However, it is obvious the importance of one’s early professional education. Many interviewees could identify influential people and
knowledge they had been taught from their university studies. This knowledge became their professional foundation.

When asked whether their core values changed over time. More interviewees answered that they had learned to be more open to other cultures, and more humble to knowledge. They also emphasized their need to listen to clients more carefully and to understand clients’ values in more detail.

4.3.3 Issues and Improvement Strategies for Cross-Cultural Design Projects
The major problems identified by the interviewees were interruptions in the design process and communication problems. The most common improvement strategies were to better communicate with those from other cultures and to be adaptable.

1. Process being interrupted
“The process” had two different meanings. The first was Ian McHarg’s environmental analysis and design process. This process emphasizes scientific thinking. Ian McHarg is one of the most influential landscape architects, and his analysis and design process is one of the most important and widely taught design methods in Canadian schools. Secondly, there is the process of business communication and the negotiation process, and to some interviewees, a knowledge exchange process. Management of a design project is equally important as the design process. When the management process has been interrupted, a designer is unlikely to be able to go through the design process. To conclude, these two processes can be considered as a combined decision-making process. Design and management are two processes working simultaneously in a design project.
Unfortunately, interviewees talked about how both processes were constantly interrupted in overseas projects due to the different business culture and social system. Even so, they sometimes still managed to achieve good design solutions. They had to spend extra effort in dealing with unexpected interruptions, and they were forced to learn to better control the process. In fact, they tended to select partners and clients who were able to coordinate a workable process with them, and such a partnership was a key to their success.

2. Value differences

Value differences are obvious for many interviewees. Interviewees showed observations and understanding in different value levels. They had comments on detailed design levels, such as different preferences for colors or shapes, or on higher levels such as combining historical development, religious traditions or complex social values.

Interviewees presented wide interests and a deep understanding of other cultures’ traditions and values, and this knowledge helped to ensure their cross-cultural designs were appropriate to local communities and the environment.

Finding the common ground for designers, clients and users is necessary. Understand the differences, but reaching towards a common goal is the starting point for all cross-cultural collaborations.

3. Communication problems

Foreign languages and cultural traditions may result in miscommunication. Furthermore, different project management styles and business traditions can have a big impact on the communication process. For example, Chinese clients may not
know what information should be provided to designers, which may cause designers extra effort because of wrong information.

Different interviewees mentioned several communication strategies. A couple of interviewees talked about marketing skills. They learned about the clients’ preferences, and presented design in a way to meet client’s customs and preferences. Alternatively, some interviewees kept their Canadian way of doing design, but focused on letting clients understand their approaches. This required concrete knowledge and research; evidence and successful case studies were found to be very convincing.

**4. Business and project management issues**

There were several issues related to business and project management. Owners and managers have to make sure of the survival of the firm while keeping a reputation for design quality. Project management becomes important in this sense. Designers not only need to produce good design, but in reality, they also need to win the clients and sell the designs.

Therefore being good at project management and business strategies is necessary. Especially in foreign markets, business traditions and laws are different. Learning the differences and managing them are difficult for every business owner and manager. They have to develop good business partners along the way. These partners are in fact critical to their success. Most interviewees mentioned the importance of having good local partners.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter makes comparisons between the literature review results and the interview results, and discusses their similarities and differences.

5.1 Landscape Architects’ Professional Values and Value System

Comparing the literature review and interview results, both revealed contain values like environmental, social and cultural values. For context, whereas Ian Thompson did not identify a professional belief system, the interviewees mentioned that the ultimate goal of landscape profession is “to create a safe, healthy and ecologically-friendly environment to meet people’s needs.” Interviewees did not mention aesthetic, scientific and ethical values. Instead, they talked about economic value.

Environmental values should be differentiated from scientific values. The term "science" includes a broad range of fields of study such as physics, psychology, environmental sciences and social science. The interviewees did not mention any other fields of science other than environmental science, so this researcher concludes that for landscape architects, the term “science” refers more to environmental science. In core design values, it is appropriate to say that Canadian landscape architects emphasize environmental values.
Since the ultimate goal of landscape architecture profession is more important than other values, the researcher believed it is appropriate to consider it as professional belief, which sits on top of the value system.

![Diagram of Professional Value System](image)

**Figure 5.1**: Comparison of landscape architects’ professional values.

The aesthetic value is obviously important for a design, but why were there no interviewees to point it out? It is probably because the aesthetic value is so fundamental to design that everyone knows its importance. Therefore there is no special need to discuss it separately. The researcher suggests that the professional belief should include aesthetic value within the statement: the goal of the profession
is “to create a beautiful, safe, healthy and ecologically friendly environment to meet people’s needs.”

Economic value is a value mentioned by interviewees but not in the literature review, partially because the interviewees were involved in the management of the firm deeply, and they realized that economic value needs to be considered in all design and business decisions. However, at this time, the researcher cannot be certain whether this is a core value for landscape architects, or a core value for a design company.

Ethical value was been noted in the literature review, not in the interviews. However, the interviews did not suggest that interviewees have no ethic standard. On the contrary, Canadian landscape architects showed high ethical standards and appeared to operate under the professional codes of ethics. In some case, when interviewees found a situation was forcing them to give up their professional beliefs or lower their practice standards, they stated they would rather resign from the project. These results suggest that ethical value and ethical standards are so deeply held inside the professional value system that it does not need to be mentioned.

In the end, the comparison results shows that the core design values are diverse because different landscape architects with different backgrounds and professional paths have developed different core values. This research is not meant to develop a professional value system for all Canadian landscape architects. Instead, the research is trying to identify some core design values and design beliefs for Canadian landscape architects to consider. It is helpful for landscape architects to know what do we have in common and what are the differences.
Furthermore, the three-level value system is useful in assisting landscape architects to identify priorities. This value system can be used to evaluate design and design processes. The application will be discussed in later sections.

5.2 Value Shifting

According to ACF value theory, from an organizational point of view, value shifting happens through a long period of time - at least 10 years. When asked whether interviewees’ professional values have changed over the years, they tended to say no; they were consistent over time in their professional value system in most cases.

It might be hard to observe rapid value changes on a personal level. However, the interviewees talked about shifting values in a foreign country, and they see clients change. Interviewees talked about how their successful environmental projects had gradually transformed the client’s perception of landscape architecture and urban planning (see Figure 5.2). When communication occurs, it is important to have an open-minded attitude. Values become flexible, allowing information exchanges. Even though core design values and professional beliefs are hard to change, information exchange enables a learning process and eventually leads to value shifting.

Furthermore, according to ACF value theory, beliefs and core values are hard to change. The interview results supported this argument. Interviewees firmly persevered in their core values and professional beliefs, which sometime caused conflicts with their clients and eventually made some willing to resign their projects. This might also relate to the professional ethical bottom-line. Even though the ethical bottom-line is not in the scope of this research, it suggests a future research direction.
**Figure 5.2:** Value shifting through learning process.

### 5.3 Issues for Cross-cultural Design Projects

The literature review suggested four major issues for a cross-cultural design project, which were combined from a project management perspective and design perspective:

1. Organization & national cultural and value differences
2. Communication
3. Management and negotiation
4. Inefficient design approach

Interviews results also indicated four major issues:

1. Process being interrupted
2. Value differences
3. Communication problem
4. Business and project management issues
Comparing the two, the results are highly matched. Value differences, communication and project management issues were recognized and discussed in both the literature review and interview results.

The results confirmed that the project management process and design process are working simultaneously. Similarly, as the literature review results suggested, the close relationship between project management and design has been reviewed in literature. Project management is currently less important in landscape architecture education. This result suggests that perhaps it is important to teach student basic business and management skills in professional education because it is an essential part of this profession.

Echoing with literature review results, the interview results also suggest value differences could cause problems. It is seldom being discussed in landscape architecture, but in fact, values and value systems are important research area in the social science and humanity field. By recognizing the importance of a professional value and value system, landscape architects certainly can identify core values and professional beliefs, which will better guide the design practice and design outcome.

Also, the literature review suggests the relationship between values and the decision-making process. Landscape architects have always emphasized the design process, especially the analysis process. Therefore, the knowledge of values guides the decision-making process. Also, landscape architects could find a way to better control the process by studying values and value system.
The interview results suggest that Canadian landscape architects’ core values have been constructed mostly during the education process, and reinforced in practice. This reminds us how critical education can be in shaping people’s value system. It is not surprising when interviewees mentioned the difficulties in finding qualified employees who come from other education systems.

Business and project management issues are significant for any size of design firm to consider. Interviewees also are business owners and managers; their business priority has a big influence on their projects. According to the literature, from the project management perspective value differences result in conflicts and issues in organizational level and national level, as well as in the business negotiation process. These issues have been reflected through interviewees’ experiences.

5.4 Fundamental Issue: Globalization vs. Localization

In the literature review, Bull’s book, Cross-Cultural Urban Design (2007), suggested strategies for cross-cultural design practitioners to think globally and act locally. Globalization and the increasing recognition of local cultures and values seem to be two opposite sides of cross-cultural design. Employing international standards and an universal design approach, while adopt a local design traditions is a way to mitigate the problem of an inefficient design approach.

Globalization involves many components, and it is not only being recognized as a political and economic integration process (Walck & Bilimoria, 1995); it is also seen as a cultural process. “On the cultural level, this has been the great challenge of pluralism: the breakdown of taken-for-granted traditions and the opening up of multiple options for beliefs, values and lifestyle” (Berger, 2000, p.16). Since this
research has focused on values and beliefs, this understanding of globalization summarizes nicely the issues being discussed here.

Figure 5.3: Globalization vs. Localization.

On the one hand, Canadian landscape architects believe in “standard” design approach processes such as Ian Mcharg’s analysis process and also business processes and legal procedures. They want to push the standards globally because it is the comfortable way of doing design, and is believed to be successful and rational. On the other hand, as soon as theses professionals entered a different cultural environment, they were amazed by local cultures and realized their designs needs to be adjusted to be culturally appropriate.

Through interviews, interviewees had all expressed similar ideas, and talked about the difficulties they experienced when trying to integrate globalization and localization, not only in design approach and design outcome, but also in business strategies. Interviewees used different management approaches to manage their local and
overseas offices. Meanwhile, getting into the foreign market and building partnerships with local clients were also testing landscape architects management skills and business strategies.

Once again, just like any other big issue, globalization is a very complicated situation, and not possibly fully understood and improved upon by this research and by a group of landscape architects. However, Canadian landscape architects, from their own unique position, have developed some strategies to ease the conflict and produced a better design service to the world.

5.5 Strategies for Improving a Cross-cultural Design Project

The literature review offered suggestions for improving cross-cultural design project issues:

1. Understand and learn about different cultures and values, including national and organizational values.

2. Enhance communication and negotiation skills.

3. Use culturally responsive methodologies and strive for a balance between localization and globalization.

4. Accept non-standard outcomes.

The interviewees have generally reinforced these strategies. In particular, they talked most about the need for communication and being adaptable to other cultures.

Comparing the literature review and interview results, what they have in common are enhancing communication and becoming adaptable. In the discussion of values and value systems, the research is suggesting that from a landscape architect’s point of
view, to resolve the conflicts between globalization and localization, there is not much significant change we can affect, other than being adaptable within the globalization process and to be patient with respect to communication.

5.5.1 Strategies: communication & information exchange and learning process

5.5.1.1 Communication

For clarification, communication is a means rather than a goal. The goals for communication are in fact first, to identify common values between parties, and then allow information exchange and a learning process.

When there are multiple cultures, it is inappropriate to make a judgment towards other cultural traditions or values because each culture is unique and respectful. However, because cultures are interacting with each other, a set of universal values should be accepted by all cultures. The universal values are the common ground supporting international or cross-cultural activities. Without these universal values, there are no standards or regulations towards any behavior.

The same principle applies to cross-cultural design. In doing cross-cultural design, interviewees discover a common ground for clients and themselves, in which they all need to create a safe, healthy, environmentally friendly environment. Such a need is desired for all clients; it is the very reason they need to hire a landscape architect. With this common need, landscape architects and clients can start working together. Even though there are conflicts during the process, it is because clients and landscape architects see different ways of achieving this goal. Through appropriate communication, these differences can be identified and unified.
5.5.1.2 Information exchange and learning process

Allowing an information exchange and learning process to happen is in fact, according to ACF theory, a process of value shifting. The internal and external learning process of an organization is the reason for values being changed over time (see Figure 5.4).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5.4**: Information exchange and learning between Canadian landscape architects and clients from other cultures.

Interviewees’ responses suggested that through showcasing successful projects and constantly promoting environmental design and advanced environmental engineering technologies, eventually the client’s value system shifted, adding environmental value to their value system, along with international standards of business. Therefore, it is a value shifting process being realized through communication.

On the other hand, from other cultures Canadian landscape architects learned about diverse cultural and social values, as well as local political and business standards.
Through the learning process, both Canadian landscape architects’ and foreign clients’ value shifted.

In the end, “being open minded” or “being patient” is in fact to allow these information exchange processes and learning processes to happen. This attitude is intended to ensure the possibility of successful communication.

Through learning and communicating with many clients and users who come from all around the world, Canadian landscape architects gradually realized that they have advantages in environmental design and international standard business rules and approaches. Meanwhile, local cultures have a diverse cultural and social significance, as well as different political and business traditions. Therefore, the exchange occurs mainly in these areas.

5.5.1.3 Business and project management strategies

When a Canadian design firm expands into an international market, a challenge raised immediately is how to visit the overseas project site? How to interact with the clients? What are the laws and business regulations there? Eventually, managers need to decide whether it is good timing to get into an international market. Is the firm capable of doing and managing a cross-cultural project?

According to interview results, firm size had an influence on management strategies. Smaller designs firm with less local and international resources might be able to afford to open an international office. Larger firms, often times a big group of business organizations, have the resources to establish a global office network.
However, this does not mean that smaller firms cannot survive in the competition of
the international market. Small firms with specialties in certain design areas could
become well-known internationally, for example, a specialty golf-course design.
The challenges for a small firm, according to the interviews was, first of all, the
difficulty to get resources such as human resources or capital resources. Secondly, it
is hard to be involved in a foreign bureaucratic process, which eliminates its
professional influence. Finally, small firms are vulnerable to sudden changes in a
contractual or financial crisis. In order to overcome these challenges, small business
owners have to gain individual responsibilities for managing a firm, and they have to
put more effort into learning foreign cultures in order to provide good cross-cultural
designs.

Compared to small business owners, large firm managers had less personal
responsibilities in a firm, and they do not necessary become an expert in foreign
culture because the firm can afford to hire more local staff, who can ensure the
cultural aspects are appropriate.

However, large firms have challenges in managing global resources. One of the
interviewees had particularly talked about the hardship of establishing a proper global
development strategy for the firm. With so many offices and so much staff around the
world, how do you decide which office should have more responsibilities in certain
projects? Some managers tend to use the “best designer” to be in charge of all
international projects, where as other managers believe it is more important to rely on
local offices and native staff to handle projects within their areas.
By all means, these problems and strategies are ultimately different kinds of responses to globalization. There is no right or wrong in business strategies. Most importantly, it has to be appropriate with the firm’s reality and ensure design quality.

5.6 A Further Step: Example of a Professional Value System as an Evaluation Tool

Taking the research results further to application, this section demonstrates the use of the professional value system as an evaluation tool for design. The value system is used to guide the decision-making process that combines both the project process and the communication process. In this example, the ACF value system structure is used to identify professional values and make comparisons between different professional value systems. It is also used to identify and target potentially problematic areas and provide resolutions to these areas (refer to Figure 3.11).

The example shows the main steps in the evaluation by comparing a Canadian landscape architect to a hypothetical Chinese landscape architect. It shows what could happen in a project communication process.

The first step is to use the ACF professional value system structure to identify professional values. Similar to the literature review and interview, one of the first objectives was to identify the Canadian landscape architect’s core design values. The results might be incomplete and vary from person to person, but it is the starting point of understanding people’s values and priorities. In the example, the Canadian landscape architect is using the findings from the interview to identify professional values (refer to Figure 3.11 & Figure 4.8).
It is difficult to identify people’s values. There needs to be a theoretical foundation and practice. A thorough understanding of the research subjects requires much effort and communication.

*(recall) Figure 3.11:* Landscape architect’s value system structure.

*(recall) Figure 4.8:* Interviewee’s professional belief and core design values.

The second step is to make comparison with the other’s value system. For example, a Chinese landscape architect might have the professional value system shown in
Figure 5.5. When the Canadian landscape architect had to collaborate with the Chinese landscape architect in a cross-cultural project, a comparison would need to be made to identify their commonalities and differences.

Figure 5.5: Evaluation step two: identify values.

In this case, the Chinese landscape architect has a high emphasis on aesthetic value but misses the environmental value and social value. The Canadian landscape
architect has less emphasis on aesthetic value. The differences are also reflected in the professionals’ beliefs.

With this identification, different parties could understand where the information exchange and value shifting should happen. These areas are also potential problematic areas that people should pay attention to.

Figure 5.6: Evaluation step two: identify potential issues.
In the third step, problematic areas are identified. Appropriate resolutions could be employed to improve or solve these problems accordingly. Figure 5.8 shows a list of suggestions.

**Figure 5.7**: Evaluation step three: make suggestions.

The professional value system is used as an evaluation tool in this example. It is hypothesized to be particularly effective in helping design collaboration and forming communication and improvement strategies.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Research Summary

The primary goal of this research was to investigate issues associated with cross-cultural design projects and to identify strategies to improve design practice. Several steps were taken to achieve these goals, which also formed the objectives of the research.

First, an in depth literature review was undertaken to learn about the definition of culture and cultural differences. The literature review provided the theoretical background for the research, and led the research to focus on values and value systems. Secondly, the literature review provided information on cross-cultural design projects from a project management perspective and a design perspective. From the literature, the research took a further step to review the literature of Canadian landscape architect’s professional values and to understand the role professional values play in the design process. This information was taken into account when developing informant interviews. Canadian landscape architects were interviewed to give their thoughts and experiences in regards to their professional values and cross-cultural design projects. Finally, a comparison was made between
the literature review and the interview results, and from this came suggested strategies to improve cross-cultural design projects for landscape architects.

The research concluded with a proposed design collaboration evaluation tool for landscape architects, using a professional value system structure as its core. Although the evaluation system is not fully established in the research, the research led to a starting point for the tool and direction for further research.

6.2 Significance of the Research

Personal work experience and literature have suggested the complexity of cross-cultural design practice. The landscape architecture profession has always had the potential to expand into a multi-disciplinary field.

Since currently there was little of the literature dealing with this topic, this research contributes to filling a gap between landscape architectural research and practice. This research also has the potential to identify relationships between a number of theories from other fields. Using theories that are seldom introduced into the landscape architecture profession, this exploratory research approach pushes the boundary of the profession, and provides a different perspective for landscape architects.

In practice, this research will be particularly useful for individuals and firms who are practicing in cross-cultural settings. At the same time, with a research component on landscape architect’s value system, landscape architects may apply the results of the study to better understand their professional value system and develop better design evaluation and project management approaches.
6.3 Limitations of the Study

During the research process, the research investigated many fields unfamiliar to the researcher and not commonly within the scope of professional education. Due to the fact that there was little literature specific to this topic, theories from social sciences, philosophy and political science have been touched on. The broad range of literature on the one hand formed a theoretical foundation for the study. On the other hand, because of its complexity and unfamiliarity, it is challenging to understand the knowledge and confidently apply it to landscape architectural research.

Another limitation of the study is the criteria-setting of key informants. The researcher had not expected such a diversity and variety between interviewees and overlooked some of the variables such as business organization structure and firm size. According to interview results, these factors turned out to be significant. Therefore, it was difficult to analyze the results following the preset criteria. The researcher also discovered interesting facts and comments, which needed to be discussed outside the scope of the criteria.

6.4 Areas for the Future Research

First of all, the importance of values and value systems is seldom discussed in the landscape architectural profession. One reason is because most professionals work in a local environment where they are familiar with the physical and social context, and where they have greater influence and have a holistic understanding of the design and project management process. In short, they know what they are doing and their value systems are not often challenged. However a cross-cultural design imposes a set of challenges which are difficult to describe and explain to people who have no such experience.
Secondly, in the Canadian professional education system, management and business strategies are not in the mainstream of education. More research should be done in this area. Educators tend to leave the student to learn from reality. The researcher had not realized the importance of management until listening to the interviewees. The gap between “ideal” landscape architecture and “practical” landscape architecture should be considered as part of a professional education program. Not that a landscape architecture students should learn how to manage a project or firm from taking a course, but at least students should be aware of management issues and be prepared to face them when they get into the practice.

Finally, the evaluation tool should be refined and more thoroughly discussed in further research. The researcher realizes that due to a lack of knowledge and experience, the evaluation tool is at its early stage of application. In order to make it useful for more landscape architects, the evaluation system requires research from social sciences fields such as sociology, economics, public management and administration. This is a door to a wide range of knowledge and a starting point to further research.
References


**Image References**

Figure 4.3

Perkins+Will. (2012). *Southeast Markham Community Centre + Library* [Image]. Retrieved from http://www.markham.ca/wps/portal/Markham/MunicipalGovernment/AboutMunicipalGovernment/MajorCityProjects/cclpsem!/ut/p/c4/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3gTiyBHZzc_g8Aw81AXA08vJ0v3UH9zYzNDE_2CbEdFAEPuq1o!/
Figure 4.4:


Figure 4.5


Figure 4.6


Figure 4.7

Appendix 1-Research Ethics Board Certification
The members of the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board have examined the protocol which describes the participation of the human subjects in the above-named research project and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2nd Edition.

The REB requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB. The REB must approve any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please complete the Change Request Form. If there is a change in your source of funding, or a previously unfunded project receives funding, you must report this as a change to the protocol.

Unexpected events and incidental findings must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Responsible Faculty, the safety of the participants, and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-council Policy Statement, 2nd Edition, requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, a final report and, if the approval period is longer than one year, annual reports. Continued approval is contingent on timely submission of reports.

Membership of the Research Ethics Board - General: S. Banerjee, Community Member; J. Carson, Community Member; C. Carstairs, COA; S. Chuang, FRAN (alt); K. Chuong, Graduate Student; J. Clark, PoliSci (alt); J. Devlin, OAC; J. Dwyer, FRAN; M. Dwyer, Legal; B. Ferguson, CME (alt); H. Gilmour, Community Member (alt); J. Goertz, CME; B. Gottlieb, Psychology; B. Giguere, Psychology (alt); S. Henson, OAC (alt); L. Kuczynski, Chair; R. Ragan, Legal (alt); V. Shalla, SOAN (alt); R. Stansfield, SOAN.

Approved:
per
Chair, Research Ethics Board- General

Date: ______________________________
Appendix 2-Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Time of interview : __________
Date : __________
Location : __________
Interviewer : Lian Liu
Respondent: ________________

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research. Your input is extremely valuable to the study. The study is to fulfill the requirements for my Master of Landscape Architecture degree, working with my advisor, Professor Cecelia Paine. Our contact information will be provided to you in a follow up email.

I will first provide some background of my study. The goal of this study is to discover how landscape architects make design decisions with respect to cross-cultural design projects. In particular, I want to shed some light on the progression of a designer’s value system over the course of their career and how this progression in values has influenced their designs. I believe with better understanding of professional value systems and decision-making processes, landscape architects and designers will be able to deliver better cross-cultural design, and more successfully manage such projects in the future.

This interview is a crucial method for obtaining information for my thesis. I will ask you to answer the questions in regards your professional experience and professional insights with respect to cross-cultural design projects. Meanwhile, I hope you can share with me your experiences in these types of design projects.
Can your name be associated with this study and the data you have provided? Can the name of your organization be associated with this study and the data you have provided? If not, I will ensure confidentiality of all information arising from our conversation and any project materials we discuss, without identify any of these information in the final thesis.

Before we start, may I have your permission to record this conversation?

Any transcriptions of the interview will not be included in the thesis. I will only present a summary of your answers, without any identification of your information and any possible information which could be led to your identities such as project name, firm name in the thesis. Do you have any problem with that?

The recording of our conversation will be stored on a computer solely operated by myself with password protection. I will destroy any recordings upon completion of my thesis. The computer and written notes will be kept in a locked room, and only accessible by myself.

Do you have any further questions regarding this interview before we proceed?

**Definitions**

First of all, I would like to give you some definitions, which will be important to the interview. These definitions and questions have been sent to you in advance prior to the interview.

**Cross-cultural project**: focuses on using design ethnography and cutting edge collaboration methods to understand users in different national cultures and to design appropriate solution for these groups.

**Values**: a person’s principles or standards of behavior; one’s judgment of what is important in life.

**Professional value system**: is a set of principles or standards to guide professional behaviors.

**Section 1: Understanding Canadian landscape architect’s value system**

I will start the interview with understanding your professional value system. In this part of the interview, I am interested in your entire body of work.

1. Where did you receive your professional education? Have you always been working in a Canadian design firm?
2. Can you extract your core design principles into values or beliefs? For example, if one of your core design principles is environmentally-friendly design, the values behind this are might be environmentalism or sustainability. Another core design principle for the landscape architect may be the stewardship principle (which is respecting the environment in its own sake and its function).

3. Ian Thompson, a British landscape architect has proposed three core values for landscape architect: aesthetics, social responsibility, and environmental awareness. Do you agree with these as core design values? Do you have any others?

4. Do you have an hierarchy for your core values? For example, do you consider aesthetic value to be more important than environmental value?

5. Do you recognize that you have a design value system? If so, is it apparent in your designs?

6. Do you think your design value system has changed over years, influenced by schooling and/or work experience? Is there any person or events, which have greatly impacted your thinking in this respect?

Now could you share with me some of your favorite design projects which best demonstrate the values and design principles you talked about before.

7. What was the central idea or concept of this project? Did the design reflect your design values?

8. During the process, did you run into a lot of issues with your client or other stakeholders? Do you think they understood your design intention and agreed with your design principles?

9. Was there any disagreement during the process? Do you think any disagreements had to do with the different values you and your clients were holding?

10. Could you say that the client and other stakeholders were sharing some similar values with you? If so, did this help to make the design and project more successful? If not, did it impede the project’s success at all?

Section 2: comparison made to cross-cultural project

1. When did you start getting involved in cross-cultural design? How frequently have you worked on cross-cultural design since then?

2. Did the design process proceed well? In terms of communicating with clients or other stakeholders, and in terms of project management, were there any issues?

3. Have you found it hard to fully understand clients or stakeholders from other cultural backgrounds?
4. Have you found you need to adjust your values or design principles to work with clients or other stakeholders from different cultural backgrounds in cross-cultural projects?
5. Do you need to adjust your project management strategies to deal with cross-cultural design projects?
6. Could you provide some examples of these experiences in projects from your earlier cross-cultural projects and more recent ones?
7. Did you need to compromise your design principles? How did you deal with the changes in the design that you could not agree on?
8. What reasons do you think caused these conflicts?
9. What are your strategies to avoid or resolve these conflicts?
10. Did you have public feedback on any of the projects? Did you take into account the social impact of these projects on the local community? If so, did consideration of social impact influence your work?
11. Have you noticed any change from how you used to design with respect to how you approach more recent designs in terms of design principles or project management?
12. What do you gain from these cross-cultural projects experiences?
13. Do you think you have influenced the approach of your foreign clients or colleagues over the years? If so, can you provide an example?
14. In concluding this interview, please tell me what you think are the important factors for a successful cross-cultural design project.

Conclusion
Thank you so much for participating in this interview. I really appreciate all your time and you sharing your design thoughts and project insights. Before we finish up, do have any questions or comments?

I’d like to remind you, there will be no further follow-up with respect to this interview and that you may withdraw from this study at any time if you have second thoughts. If you choose to withdraw, your interview data will not be used in my thesis. My final thesis will be made available to you digitally upon your request.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any comments or questions.

Thank you very much again.