

## Talent show

Students designed this pie waggon with the "Gong" system to bridge the communication gulf between employers and employees.



In China, a great population is migrating from rural areas into big cities each year. Can our designers provide solutions for the several problems occurring during this social change? What have they already done? This time, the professors and students from the department of Innovative Design Engineering, RCA London, have travelled to China. They cooperated with the graduate school of Tsinghua University's industrial design department, producing a series of solutions based on 3 weeks' research which help to create better life for the new immigrants of the cities.

## DESIGNING FOR THE MIGRATORS



图 Eric Gregory Powell



" GoSchool is a straight forward educational project to be used at the special schools that teach only the children of the new immigrants. The design of teaching cards not only can increase interactions between students and volunteer teachers but also helps teachers to prepare for lectures more easily. Migrated Vases is a realization of different groups of people's imagination of their ideal Chinese vases. It tries to illustrate people's memory of traditional culture, which is deeply affected by the urbanisation. Words of Mouth system turns all potential spaces into mini billboards, making it easier for new city residents to find jobs. "

The big migration of people from villages going into the cities also happened before in the Great Britain during the industrial revolution period in the 19th and 20th century. It had caused many social and environmental problems as well. However when China has come to this stage, both its sheer number of migrations and its speed of cities assimilate the new migrants have greatly surpassed its British precedent. So what exactly can the designers do regarding this big social change of China?

On day in the April of 2009, a group of design students and tutors from the Royal College of Art (London) and Tsinghua University (Beijing) are having a presentation of their exhibition "The Rural and Urban Areas of China" in the courtyard of Tsinghua University Library. The exhibition has included 11 design solutions, and their owners one following the other is explaining the concept behind and the realization of each work. Professor Ashley Hall from the Innovative Design Engineering department is the leader of those who are from RCA.

The Rural and Urban Areas of China is not just the title of the exhibition. Also it is the main subject of study of the western students during their stay in China. They have spent 3 weeks studying the key points about the life of new migrants, which are employment and well-being. Ashley has let the students to go into rural areas of China and stay with the local residents. Then he asked them to imagine how people from the village will react once they moved to big cities. The western students have themselves become 'the new migrants' when they were in those small villages. Some don't even know how to find drinkable water if without the help of the local. But at least the students still got some money. On the other side, the peasants-turned job seekers have almost no fortune to spend in the city. They can only survive by finding a job. And that is what Ashley wanted the students to realize.



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"LUTA" provides the technology for peasant-worker to recycle the organic waste, in order to benefit their life in the city. "Bon Bon Carts" is resembled from the original chinese pan cake cart, contains fresh vegetable and fruits on one side and recycling organic waste for the other side.

How to help a job seeker to find something in the shortest time? Students have come to the idea of a system called W.O.M.(word of moth.) that uses all possible spaces to advertise . Advertisement and contact details of a job seeker can be patched on the person's shoes and bags. It doesn't necessarily need to be visually pleasing as long as it is a direct way of broadcasting. Also the bottom of the shoes can be changed into a printing plate of one's job seeking advertisement. On each road one walks, every time the person steps into some liquid an advert can be printed. Another way to stop unemployment is become self-employed. Bon Bon Carts is the evolution of a vehicle traditionally used for selling Chinese pan cakes. It has a recycling system of fruits and vegetables. With Bon Bon Carts one can set up their own food business and people working in the office are given new choices of healthy snacks. Sometimes job vacancies do exist, but due to the inefficiency of the existing communication platform they couldn't reach the right person. According to this, a new network for broadcasting information is created, which makes sure the information from employers will eventually reach the potential employees. Companies can submit their job vacancies on line and the information will be turned into local radio broadcast which will be received by people at the places where they eat.



The well-being of the new comers is another big issue. How to resolve the problem of not being able to communicate with one's family members who are still in the rural area? How to help them receiving health care and other social well-fare services? What do they do for leisure time? How to help their second generation to get good education? Facing these questions the students have also provided a group of solutions. Digital Red Envelope helps city workers to transfer money to their families in villages. A health care system (Flex Insurance) based on mobile phone service provides an easy way for peasant-turned workers to buy health insurance. A group project called Migrated Vases explores how one's living environment and cultural background change one's creativity. LUTA (green tower) provides education for migrants on how to recycle organic waste, helping them to achieve better lives in the city. GoSchool education project encourages college students to become volunteer teachers of special schools for new immigrants' children.

Although the 3 week's study have generated many ideas, Professor Ashley, who is also a designer himself, thinks that it seems impossible to resolve all the problems occurring when people flooding into the big cities during the process of urbanization. Designers can only try their best to change the reality, but the real cause of the problems will fundamentally remain. "We don't expect students to resolve all the problems. But we do hope they can study on micro scales and find solutions for some of the aspects of this social issue, from employment to communication, health care and education. Designers can create economic values for big companies. They can also create solutions for social problems. However the designer can't make much effort without the support from the government and the nation. Only with the encouragement from the local government can there be more designers working in this field, making sure there are less and less people feeling lost in between the rural area and the city.