

This can really help, as overall the Chinese are quite friendly towards business practitioners, particularly from India. We have never faced any animosity in that nation, and have found that Indians are even more valued than westerners. The Chinese believe that India has given the world a lot of thought leadership—through icons such as the Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi—and that we offer a better social model with a greater focus on human values. This viewpoint has proved extremely beneficial for the company in China, and enabled us to spread our network throughout the country. Today NIIT is present in 192 locations across 66 cities in China, enrolling around 50,000 students for our two-year plus programs. We have already partnered with over 140 universities and colleges in the country and the road ahead seems brighter. Our success in China proves, without doubt, that despite the yin and the yang, the pulls and pushes, the positives and negatives, the country is a wonderful destination to do business in. When I look back at our engagement in China, I cannot help but add that I have found it to be an extremely pragmatic nation, unlikely to drag in personal prejudices when business is at stake. Take the instance of China's rather fractious relationship with Japan.

In thought and ideology, China may find itself on the opposite side of the fence with Japan, but it doesn't let this impact its business across the border. Japan remains China's second-largest trading partner!

This, in all likelihood, is also the reason why China, despite its less-than-stable political relationship with India, continues to strengthen trade with us. While trade between the two countries stood at Rs.4,500 crore a decade ago, it is now Rs. 225,000 crore. China is India's largest trade partner and that itself speaks volumes. While, of course, this trade is slightly skewed to the Chinese side, we are sure and hopeful that this will change.

The Chinese also have the ability to "compartmentalize" matters with ease, so they can keep the problem areas out from their pure "business dealings." It will be important to keep this in mind as we move forward, and as China becomes more and more important to our business outlook. It is our experience and belief that if any Indian company does not have a China strategy by now, it will not exist

beyond 2020. By that year, we expect to see a multi-polar world where the U.S., China, India and Europe would be the four key pillars contributing to the majority of global GDP.

Both India and China offer mega markets with billions of micro consumers. Companies that do not address these colossal markets will not survive. As of now, almost 90 Indian companies have a presence in China. China is coming to India. We are seeing much more collaboration than ever before. Competition is giving way to such collaboration. And in this environment, it is not just the business aspect that one must focus on. Interestingly, when it comes to establishing a cultural connect with China we, as Indians, are almost halfway there! It may be amusing to hear, but China not only appreciates our IT, but also our beauty.

Whether it is a taxi driver or a shop keeper—most Chinese know and love Bollywood and the "stars" of both the big and small screens. Walk down the corridor of the NIIT office in Shanghai, and you are likely to encounter several screensavers that flaunt photos of Abhishek Bachchan and Sushmita Sen!

Interestingly, glimpses of India's social milieu are already extremely visible on Chinese shores. It seems like the two nations, which were linked in ancient times through the spice and silk routes, are now rejuvenating these old ties again. It gives me a great sense of pleasure and comfort when I enter a pub, bar or disco in Shanghai and hear the familiar strains of a popular A.R. Rahman number!

It's the same in a DVD shop, when I find peeking at me from behind the shelves, the latest that Bollywood offers. Zee TV, which is broadcasting in Chinese, has a huge fan following for its soaps in Shanghai. A performance by tabla maestro Zakir Hussain ended in a standing ovation, where nearly 80 percent of the audience was Chinese. Need I say more?

With so much of commonality and connect, it is not surprising that after years of solitude, both the nations are eyeing one another with renewed interest. However, it will take true commitment on both sides for this interest to turn into a mutually beneficial partnership and for the two nations to build a relationship based on mutual respect and admiration. ■

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