

# A CLASS ACT

LEADER OF AN INDIAN FIRM ENGAGED IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION IN CHINA LOOKS BEYOND CLASSROOM

By INDRAJIT BASU in KOLKATA

Ask Vijay K. Thadani what NIIT means for China and the techie-turned-tycoon says it isn't just a teaching shop. Of course, it's a lot more than another training institute. "It's a global talent development corporation, a skilled manpower builder," avers the dapper co-founder and CEO of the India-based IT education company. "We are ambassadors of Chinese youth (and) are trying to help them understand the strengths of India and China and develop a mutually beneficial partnership between the two countries," says Thadani, the main architect of NIIT's phenomenal rise from a local institute to a global institution. "We also help Chinese youth to achieve their potential, aspiration and ambition to play a leading role in the global IT space," he says.

Thadani established NIIT in 1981, and 10 years ago led it into becoming the first Indian IT company to address China's needs in skills development. He was also among the first to spot China's potential in the global IT software arena, and the transformation it required to become a global force.

"We saw an extension of the model we had used in India in that country," he says, recalling that India faced large-scale unemployment alongside a great demand for trained youth in particular areas. "When China realized that beyond their strength in building world-class infrastructure and manufacturing industries, their education system could do with outside help, we stepped in."

Since 2001, NIIT's China operations have expanded to more than 170 locations, across 25 provinces. Besides IT education and training, in 2005, Thadani started NIIT's software development business in China.

An early start obviously helped NIIT, but Thadani was innovative as well.

For instance, he crafted the "NIIT Inside model" which embedded its courses in the IT curriculum of Chinese universities and colleges. That, he says, enables Chinese students to take up a four-year Bachelor Degree program or a three-year Associate Degree program right after the 12th grade. Currently 129 universities and colleges in China have embedded NIIT programs in their courses.

Having trained more than 100,000 IT professionals who have found jobs in companies such as IBM, China Telecom, Hewlett-Packard, and Bank of Shanghai, NIIT is turning to its next goal of turning out more Chinese IT graduates annually than all of the country's universities combined.

In 2003 NIIT won an award for

being the "Annual Best Placement and Best Training Institution" by *China Computer Gazette*. Other accolades followed: "Most Influential IT Education Certificate Brand in China", the "Best IT Training Curriculum", both in 2004, and the "Best Training Institute by Undergraduates" in 2007.



**While (China and India) are culturally Yin and Yang, in the global business arena, it is time now to address the world not as Yin versus Yang but Yin and Yang.**

VIJAY THADANI, CEO, NIIT

"Those awards not (only) said that we are the best but are expected to remain the best," Thadani says. "NIIT will strive hard to remain that way and (the awards) also reassure us that we are adding value to the youth."

As the center of economic activity slowly shifts towards Asia, especially India and China, he thinks it imperative for the youth in the two countries to see the two sides as being together "rather than as opposites".

Sino-Indian relations, he says, will be dictated less by their political equations, and increasingly by their economic and trade relations. "There was an older belief that said for good trade relations, there has to be good political relations. The India-China example has shown that you can build a strong trade relationship which can build good political relations. The booming trade between the two countries

is already leading them to improve their political relations," Thadani says. "In fact the next level of trade relationship will be built on the basis of education and culture."

Small wonder then, that he is willing to take a stake in the collaborative potential of the two most populous nations of the world.

He suggests that the current trend is towards software applications being developed in different parts of the world with their respective expertise contributing to large developments. China and India can achieve a lot by combining their acts, Thadani says.

"Together we can make one plus one eleven. And while the two countries are culturally Yin and Yang, in the global business arena, it is time now to address the world not as Yin versus Yang but Yin and Yang."

*Indrajit Basu is a Kolkata-based writer for China Daily Asia Weekly*

## BIO

**Vijay K. Thadani**  
Chief Executive Officer, NIIT Limited & Founder, NIIT University

### Career History

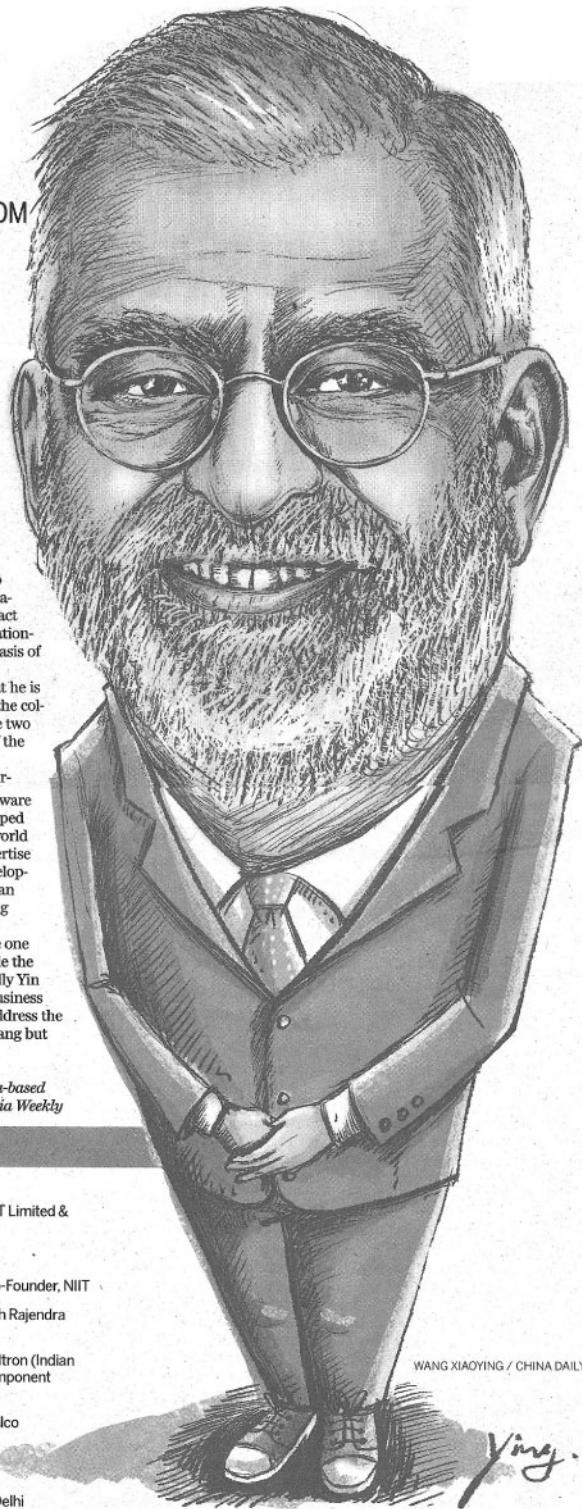
**1981-present:** CEO and Co-Founder, NIIT

**1981:** Co-Founded NIIT with Rajendra Pawar

**1974 - 81:** Worked with Keltron (Indian state-owned electronic component manufacturer)

**1972 - 74:** Worked with Nelco (Indian privately-owned electronic component manufacturer)

**1972:** Graduated from IIT Delhi



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