

A Passage to India

It was over a decade ago that I had my first contact with Indians. At that time, I was studying in California Institute of Technology in the United States, where there were many Indian professors and students who impressed me most with the following two accounts: firstly, they were particularly proficient in English, with strong accent though, which made it difficult for others to, if not used to that, fully comprehend; secondly, they were extremely capable of computer

applications by their first-class software programming skills. They would always talk about India with deep pride while making China the inferior between the two.....

Amidst the rise of China, Kunming was able to greet a large number of Indian guests, among whom were professors from Indian EDI (Entrepreneurship Training College). They held many lectures in Kunming, with which they would hope to interact with Chinese businesses and establish partnership mechanisms. I was fortunate enough to be invited to attend several of their workshops, where I managed to arouse their interests with some of my business experiences and insights. Many times after the workshops, they would propose that I give lectures to their students in India. At the end of last year, Professor Sunil Shukla of EDI College visited Kunming and, again, presented his personal invitation. Thus, my trip to India in early 2011 finally came true.

The week-long lectures progressed smoothly, during which Indian students



Prof. Zhang mingling with Indian Students.

greatly cheered my accounts of the success stories of Chinese enterprises, Chinese-style marketing concepts and successful experiences in regard to business innovation and competition among Chinese enterprises. In my opinion, my successful marketing of these 'business experiences' was largely attributed to China's rapid growth over the past thirty years.

After the lectures, with the arrangements by the College, I took a week-long tour of the city of Ahmedabad, where I traveled to almost every corner while visiting many heritage sites and witnessing both old and new faces of this town. The city's old part was antiquated, yet fairly clean, where most ancient sections, now open to tourists on their journey, provided you with real-life experiences of how Indians led their lives a hundred years ago. The especially hard to come by was that, on the two-kilometer or so long pedestrian street, people still displayed their authentic lives, with no disguise or 'tourism'-driven peddling at all. It seemed as

if the ancient city was dragging you into the distant past.

During my encounters with the students and local Indians, by employing the fineness of their ideas, I began to understand India, its customs, attitudes and values. Especially during the contacts with the Indian middle class, my impression toward India underwent a gradual transition. All well educated, these Indian elites devoted themselves to works and lives with full

enthusiasm and utmost diligence. Relatively speaking, the education level of Chinese middle class was far below that of its Indian counterpart.

At nearly every scenic spot in India, you would see a lot of elementary school and middle school students, whose shiny smiles on their faces and their curiosity and friendliness toward foreign tourists persisted in our memories. These children would flock to let you take pictures for them. With every shutter flash, from the other side of the lens, came their joy, rooted in innermost heart. This scenery simply can never be encountered in China. Ahmedabad city also had its newly developing districts, where you could see the locals busy with construction projects, though at a slower pace. However, the looming profile of the new city made us begin longing for the better future.

Indians deeply admire China's achievements today, and are also amazed at China's rapid growth over the past three decades. From their point of view, to a large

extent, both China and India share many similarities: a large population, unbalanced development, low labor costs, both being third world countries, long and splendid history and culture, once sharing the same religion—Buddhism and suffering from slavery by imperialism, both situated in Asia and so on. What made China embark on a fast track of advancement? Why did China achieve such remarkable results within merely thirty years? Indians still could not read China.

Over ten days of visit and intensive observations, as well as multifaceted interactions with many locals somewhat made me recognize some problems during the course of India's economic growth. Perhaps it is these problems that have hindered India's rapid economic advancement.

Firstly, the lifeline of India's economy is basically in the hands of the upper-middle class elites. There are quite many well-developed family businesses in India. However, the fact that 40% of Indian population lives below the poverty line is a huge burden for the national economy. Yet state-owned enterprises especially large ones barely exist. It is reported that except for the enterprises owned by the central government, most of the nationwide 1,160 state-government-owned enterprises are in poor conditions. Even India's state-owned railroad industry does not show its granted advantage and competitiveness. Conversely, inefficiency and bureaucracy have made it out of the question for India's railway system to turn into the locomotive of the national economy. In China, however, increasingly powerful large and medium-sized state-owned enterprises have played a pivotal role in China's national economy. The remarkable efficacy of the Chinese government's macro-control is absolutely ascribed to the state-owned enterprises' strict enforcement of orders and bans.

Secondly, in my view, the majority of the Indians at the bottom of the society do not even have chances to change their fate, one reason being fatalism and the other being the limited room for employment and personal development. Indian citizens generally accept the traditional hierarchy, defined by management theory as each individual's correct 'positioning' for himself, where

citizens at the bottom of the society would 'feel at ease under all circumstances' once they are rightly positioned. On some streets in India, I saw a lot of young labors, their eyes glittering with intellect (Indians are very clever), law-abidingly making bread-winning by running tiny street vending businesses such as milk tea stalls, with no more than fifty-dollar total assets. From my perspective, this is a huge waste of human resources.

Thirdly, in general, very few premarital Indian women join labor force, while their chances of getting employed is even slimmer once they get married. This owes to the idea that married women working would discredit their husbands' capabilities. Such social values directly expel a large number of capable and minded Indian women from the labor force. In contrast, Chinese women play a key role in all aspects of social economic development by their unparalleled contribution to the national economy. Recently, it has even been reported by some foreign media that Chinese females' future status and roles would outweigh those of their male peers. With human resources being considered huge competitive advantage in the 21st century, a vast number of outstanding women's inability to exert their influences is definitely a significant loss.

Fourthly, over the years, China's participation in the globalization of world economy has always been charged with its 'low cost'. However, among the great many countries of low-cost production factors

worldwide, why is China the only one that has managed to excel on world economic stage and has created many renowned Chinese industrial brands? In deed, 'low cost' has double connotations with one being low-cost production factors such as labor, natural resources, land, raw materials, etc., and the other being humans' value-creating abilities. More than three decades of Chinese people's collective studies, hard-working and adventurous spirits, as well as the country's social stability and generally perfect market system all have contributed to the full release of Chinese people's initiative and creativity, and China's unique reputation of its 'low-cost capability'. Therefore, China's low-cost is not only in terms of production factors, but also reflected by the low cost of Chinese people's value-creating capability. From this aspect, the Indians did not fully comprehend China.

Above being my personal views and experiences, I believe that India's success and future bewilderment are backed by its complex yet unsimplifiable social, religious, political causes and so forth. While discussing these views with locals, I was greeted with appreciation, recognition and also questioning. It is just these candid interactions that generated my favor and respect for India. On my flight back to China, my mind was filled with India. While I was glancing back at Indian land from the airplane, one voice popped up from my innermost heart: Cheers, India! ★



EDI, Director, Dr. Awasthi, Dr. Shukla Dr. Zhang and His Wife(From left to right)