Xi-Modi handshake can create a new world order

Sudheendra Kulkarni

When Mr Narendra Modi met Mr Xi Jinping for the first time at the BRICS Summit in Brazil in July last year, India’s Prime Minister told China’s President something highly significant, “India and China are two bodies with one soul.” What is no less significant is that Xi recounted this when he visited India in September 2014. “These words reveal the connection between us,” President Xi said. This means that the Chinese president and the Indian prime minister are on the same page, concurring with what is written on the book of history — namely, that a deep spiritual bond connects our two great Asian civilizations.

There is a memorable photograph from Mr Xi’s visit to India, when both he and Mr Modi sat together at Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat, and spent a few moments spinning Mahatma Gandhi’s charkha. This has a profound meaning. For Gandhi, the spinning wheel was a powerful messenger of peace and harmony, both in human and cosmic realms, and this message echoes the teaching of Confucius and other great Chinese gurus.

CONTINUES ON B2
Modi's Xi'an visit has symbolic, substantive value

FROM B1

Gandhi's vision for future India-China relations was articulated in a letter he wrote in 1942: "As a friend of China, I long for the day when a free India and a free China will cooperate together in friendship and brotherhood for their own good and for the good of the world."

As Mr Modi pays his first prime ministerial visit to China this week, both he and Xi should use Gandhi's words for their guidance because these have a ringing relevance for today, tomorrow and forever.

We are both neighbors. And it is the obligation of neighbors to live in friendship and cooperation for mutual benefit. But India and China are not just neighbors. Together we account for a population of 2.6 billion people — nearly one-third of the global population. Therefore, how we relate with each other has a major impact on the affairs of Asia and the world.

Although our historical trajectories have been different, we both have now arrived on the global stage as leading nations of the world. China's rise, in economic terms, has certainly been more spectacular. This, and its growing weight in global affairs, is a development of historic importance, which simply cannot be ignored.

Within the span of a single generation, China has lifted a vast majority of its population from poverty and backwardness. It has also achieved breathtaking progress in many fields of human endeavor. For these achievements, China deserves the respect and admiration of the international community, including India.

Similarly, Chinese leaders and people should know that their southern neighbor is making impressive strides in many fields. These, combined with the enormous wealth of India's spiritual, cultural and artistic heritage, is giving birth to a strong, prosperous and self-confident nation that will occupy its rightful place in the emerging new world order alongside, and on an equal footing with, China.

Zhongguo and Yindu: much more than nomenclatural affinity

It is necessary for the young generations in both India and China to recognize that the civilizational connections between India and China were extraordinarily friendly.

Indeed, scholars tell us that in the very names of "India" and "China" is contained an amazing proof of how each country introduced the other to the world outside. The Sanskrit word Yindu, which means "China," is one family under Heaven. In Sanskrit, we Indians have a similar wise thought — Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which means "The whole world is one family."

About India's spiritual gift to China, no less a person than Lu Xun, the greatest Chinese writer in modern times, has observed: "Since ancient times India has communicated with us, made great presentation to us, whether it is philosophical thought, or religious belief, or morality, or art and literature. Even brother and relatives would not be so generous."

Buddhism built the first major bridge across the mighty Himalayas to connect the peoples of India and China. Looking back at our shared past, we cannot but wonderstruck by the enormous power of Buddha's teachings to overcome this forbidding physical barrier. Our hearts must bow in reverence and gratitude before all those saffron-robed monks who traveled on foot from India to spread the message of universal love and brotherhood. Along with Buddhism, Hinduism also traveled to China, as is evident from the frescoes of Hindu deities in many places in that country.

In the footsteps of Kumarajiva, Xuan Zang, Tagore and Ji Xianlin

Although China embraced Buddhism, there are many examples of how Indians also began to learn Buddhism from China. The best-known name here is that of Hsuan-tsang or Xuan Zang (AD 599-664), the Buddhist monk and translator whose travels in India became legendary. His knowledge of Buddhism was so profound that Indian scholars respectfully called him Mahadeva, which means a divine teacher.

Xuan Zang brought copies of Buddhist scriptures to Xi'an.

Hsuan-tsang or Xuan Zang (AD 599-664), the Buddhist monk and translator whose travels in India became legendary. His knowledge of Buddhism was so profound that Indian scholars respectfully called him Mahadeva, which means a divine teacher. Xuan Zang brought copies of Buddhist scriptures to Xi'an.

Chinese President Xi Jinping (center) watches as India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (right) hands over a Bodhi tree sapling to the head Buddhist monk at the Big Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi Province, on Thursday. — AFP

Hsuan-tsang or Xuan Zang (AD 599-664), the Buddhist monk and translator whose travels in India became legendary. His knowledge of Buddhism was so profound that Indian scholars respectfully called him Mahadeva, which means a divine teacher. Xuan Zang brought copies of Buddhist scriptures to Xi'an.
MILESTONES IN INDIA-CHINA DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

April 1950
K. M. Panikker is appointed as the first Indian ambassador to China.

April 1954
Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai sign the “Panchsheel Agreement” in Beijing.

October 1954
Indian Foreign Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visits China. A Sino-Indian trade agreement is signed by that time and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in Beijing. Sino-Indian Friendship Associations are established in both countries.

September 1959
In Parliament, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru tables the first white paper on India-China relations. It contains notes, memos, speeches and letters exchanged between India and China between April 1954 and August 1955.

April 1976
After a 15-year diplomatic hiatus, India and China restore diplomatic ties to the ambassador level. K. R. Narayanan, India’s ambassador’s ambassador to China, while Chen Chaoqian becomes the Chinese ambassador to India.

February 1979
Indian Foreign Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visits China, holds important talks with China’s new helmsman Deng Xiaoping.

December 1988
Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visits China. Agreements are set up a joint working group on economic relations, trade, science and technology is signed.

November 1996
Chinese President Jiang Zemin visits India, signs agreement on confidence building measures.

February 2000
India and China sign a bilateral friendship agreement in Beijing to facilitate China’s early entrance into the WTO. A memorandum of understanding for setting up a joint working group in the steel industry is written.

January 2002
China announces the direct passenger flight. Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji visits India. MOUs signed in New Delhi covering cooperation in science and technology, outer space, tourism, sanitary measures, hydrological information. Premier Zhu calls for cooperation in information technology, economic cooperation and trade between India and China.

2004
For the first time, Sino-Indian bilateral trade reaches the US$10 billion mark.

January 2008
Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh visits China, meets Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao for bilateral discussion on trade, commerce, and other issues.

May 2010
President of India Pratibha Singh visits China.

March 2012
Chinese President Hu Jintao meets Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh in Delhi on the side lines of the BRICS summit. Both sides decide to celebrate 2012 as the “The Year of Friendship and Cooperation” and resolve to strengthen bilateral cultural exchanges.

May 2013
Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visits India. Areas on which agreements were arrived at include strengthening mutual cooperation in trade and safety and hygiene standards of farm and meat exports, enhancing cooperation in the field of sewage treatment and urban issues of mutual interest. MoU in the field of water-efficient technology signed.

October 2013
Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh visits China.

June 2014
India’s Vice President Hamid Ansari visits China.

July 2014
Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Brazil.

September 2014
Chinese President Xi Jinping visits India. Important areas of cooperation agreed upon during this visit include, specific projects for cooperation in the railways sector, balanced and sustainable development of economic and trade relations.

November 2014
Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in Brisbane, Australia.

February 2015
Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar visit China. The minister launches the “Visit India” year aimed at attracting more Chinese tourists to the country.

May 2015
Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in China for bilateral talks.

and yet come together, not in a uniformity that is dead, but in a unity that is living.”

One of the outstanding Chinese scholars who served as a cultural envoy between China and India was Professor Tan Yunshan, a renowned Buddhistologist, who became the first director of Cheena Bhashan.

Another towering Chinese scholar who attached enormous importance to India-China fraternity was Professor Lin (1911-2009), Sandkrit and Pali scholar, translator and historian. Jī’s life is an enormously inspiring study in deep scholarship and yet come together, not in a uniformity that is dead, but in a unity that is living.”

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Friendship between India and China is not an option. It is a mutual necessity. It is also an indispensable factor for peace and stability in Asia and the world. The Modi-Xi handshake has the potential to create a new world order.

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Bollywood returns to win Chinese hearts

Yao Min-G

Credits roll, lights come on and the audience — mainly Chinese — stand up, screaming and cheering at the makers of the movie “PK” standing at the upper right corner of the theater.

As the lead actor, producer and director of “PK,” the highest grossing Indian film of all time, and 70th highest grossing movie of 2014 worldwide, get on to the stage, the screaming gets louder.

Director Rajkumar Hirani, producer Vidhu Vinod Chopra and lead actor Aamir Khan pose in Shanghai to promote the Chinese release of the film. The film officially will be released in the theaters on May 22.

Chinese comedian Wang Baoqiang gave the voice to the inquisitive alien played by Khan.

“We are very happy to bring the film here,” Chopra tells Shanghai Daily. “The most important thing is to bring the two countries and the people together, culturally. Politicians can make speeches and policy decisions, but we can join hearts.”

The film’s Chinese distributor hopes the film will mean “a comeback for Bollywood” in China. Indian movies once enjoyed a large following before the 1980s, but lost touch after that.

But the younger generation of Chinese, with big help from the Internet, are lapping up the latest films from the South Asian nation — complete with song and dance — and helping in gradually building up a market for Bollywood flicks.

“I was born after 1990, and found that younger people around him, those almost exactly the same problems as we do.

“The movie spoke to my heart, even in a language I did not understand,” says Zhang.

“Three Idiots” is considered the first Indian film to break the great wall of Chinese mainland’s film market.

It was No. 12 in the top 250 best movie list on popular film site douban, China’s IMDB, with a high score of 9.1 out of 10 from nearly half a million ratings!

The Bollywood film critical of India’s education system won hearts of many, especially the younger generation of Chinese, who watched it through different channels before the movie was officially released here in 2011.

On the Chinese mainland, “Three Idiots” rolled in about US$3 million in the fiercely competitive December Christmas and year-end season.

The box office was nothing compared to its domestic Indian or other overseas markets, but impressive considering it was released more than two years after the Indian premiere, competing with limited screenings in a market dominated by action-packed Hollywood blockbusters and domestic romance movies.

“India is a country of multiple languages and multiple cultures. In its diversity, we have our strength,” Aamir Khan tells Shanghai Daily.

“If we want to make ourselves relevant to any part of the world, we should be ourselves, we should be unique as what we are.”

“Three Idiots” marked the highest grossing Indian film released on the Chinese mainland film market. Only a handful of Indian movies were released in the past 15 years, not including the film festivals. Most of them were screened at very few theaters with even smaller box office revenue.

The success of “Three Idiots” and “Dhoom 3” shot up expectations on the satirical “PK,” which has already gained a large following in China through word-of-mouth publicity on the Internet and social media, despite its focus on religion, a topic not so crucial to average Chinese as it is to Indians.

It has already scored an 8.2 out of 10 from more than 40,000 ratings on douban — impressive considering it is yet to be released here.

“I was not interested in Bollywood before, or I knew nothing about it really. And when Aamir Khan was just a lot of singing and dancing,” says 33-year-old Liu Han, who was forced to watch the film with his girlfriend.

“It has changed my image of Bollywood movies. I did not think Indians or Indian movies could be so cynically humorous and critical at the same time, so outspoken about sensitive religious issues,” Liu says.

Liu’s stereotype about Indian films is shared by many Chinese, who know little about Indian movies or how it swept through the generation of their parents and grandparents in the 1980s and 1970s.

At that time, Western movies were rarely shown in China. Only a select few of foreign films were screened here. Among them was Indian film “Aawara” (known as a ‘hit’ in Chinese) that almost held sway over a generation of Chinese. It is almost a household name for those above 40 years old with its song, better known as the wanderer’s song, proving even more popular.

“It is a precious memory for my generation, part of our growth,” says the 45-year-old Chen Jianqiang, a post-production specialist with Shanghai Media Group. “The interest still holds and I am thinking about working on a feature film that touches on China-India ties.”

Chen has spoken to some of the younger people around him, those born after 1990, and found that they shared his interest in Bollywood films despite knowing little about them. They are attracted to the idea of a very different type of films from Hollywood or Chinese, with good music and dances with a mysterious, exotic and positive image.

“The definition of Bollywood is constantly changing, what was once the mainstream is no longer relevant,” Indian actor Khan says. "The good thing about Indian cinema is that the change indicates that something robust is happening. What at one time was considered experimental cinema, or off beat cinema, is becoming mainstream.”

Aamir Khan poses with Indian fans after the Chinese premiere of his latest hit film “PK” in Shanghai on Wednesday.
TAILORED FOR CELEBRITIES

Bivash Mukherjee

There are very few who manage to reach the heights — matter-of-factly — like Tony Daryanani does.

On a warm spring afternoon, Tony — he actually introduces himself as Tony The Tailor — drove to a posh apartment complex in the Bund, unaware of the identity of the “celebrity” customer he was supposed to take the measurements for a suit. He was led to the guest room, where, for the first time, he came face-to-face with Chinese legend and NBA star Yao Ming.

“For a second I simply froze ... and asked for water,” he says now with a smile. It was not that he was feeling the stress of dealing with a star name for the first time. It was the over sized task ahead of him that made him ponder for a while.

At 2.29 meters, the Shanghai native and eight-time NBA All-Star “was the tallest person that I ever had to dress up,” says Tony, who hails from India and prefers to be known by his first name.

“But he made me feel comfortable ... no star tantrums,” Tony says. “I asked for a stool and went about my work.”

Pressed further, he says, “He is a very simple person. He does not like bright shades and usually prefers blue, grey, light brown and beige colors. He said ‘I am tall and stand out in a crowd,’ but I managed to convince him to try out white trousers. After some coaxing — his wife joined in too — he agreed to give it a try. I did it for him.

He told me later that he wore it when he went out to play golf.

“I also made casual jackets for him, and a women’s suit for his wife Ye Li, who, like him, is also a former basketball player.”

Among the other big-name stars he enjoyed dressing up are India’s tennis ace and grand slam winner Leander Paes, his Canadian rival Milos Raonic, Hollywood actors Nick Nolte and Danny Glover to name a few.

“Leander has been my best client and has complimented me on my work. Whenever he is in Shanghai for the annual Tennis Masters Cup, we make it a point to meet.”

Art of tailoring

But all the accolades came after years of apprenticeship in Hong Kong. The art of tailoring was a gift he picked up from his father — “the best education I had.”

“We had a bespoke tailor shop in Hong Kong. I watched him use his gentle fingers effortlessly like it was an artist’s canvas. The more I watched him, the more I learnt.”

“I worked in Hong Kong for 27 years, during which time I also traveled to the United States, Canada, Japan, selling ‘mail order’ suits. It set me on the path where I am today.”

Then in 2004, China beckoned.

Three decades after Tony first started threading needles and learning to cut, he remains in the business as the owner of Tony The Tailor on busy Changle Road in Shanghai.

The shop itself is outfitted for a king, complete with sparkling chandeliers, imported silver-laced furniture, carpeted floor, a hand-made wall hanger from Rajasthan, a giant clock, and even a personalized bar with jazzy music playing in the background.

While the decor is out-of-the-ordinary and exudes an old-world charm, this no-frills tailor who deals in high-quality fabric including a wide range of wools, silks, and tweeds, boasts regular customers from as far away as US, UK and Germany. Most of them return for his bespoke suits and top-notch tailoring while he himself is dressed to the nines.

Tony insists that he stands out from his many competitors because of efficiency and attentive service.

“I handle everything myself, from checking the fabrics to importing them. All my fabrics are imported, I sell quality. My customers are diverse — from diplomats to business men to artists and performers. I check every detail depending on the occasion. People like my personal touch and as long as they are happy, it works for me,” Tony says.

“It was hard initially with all the competition around but I also had confidence in my skill. That helped eventually to settle down in a city that is now as good as my home.

“Besides, Shanghai has love to get dressed. They are a cultured lot and aware of the latest fashion trends. I have done wedding suits for them, tuxedos, sports jackets, top courts ... almost everything.

“I have tried complicated dresses like sequin jackets for stage performers,” he says with an air of satisfaction that one feels after a job well done.

Yet, there have been occasions when it was not “business as usual.” During the deadly Sichuan earthquake in 2008 that killed nearly 65,000 people, Tony thought up a unique scheme that helped in raising desperately needed clothes for the affected victims.

“I put in a paid ad with a local magazine. I offered a massive rebate for new shirts and suits in exchange for their old ones.

“What followed was something I had not bargained for. The very next day a crowd had showed up outside my shop.

“From 11 o’clock in the morning I just stood in my shop till late in the evening, jotting down measurements for new suits while they left behind their old ones. I made sure they were usable. That was the busiest weekend I had in Shanghai. As the crowd grew bigger, it came to a point where I had to tell them I would accept only one suit per person.

“In a matter of hours I had handed out receipts for 120 suits and managed to raise over 300 suits in exchange, all of which went for charity!”

It was the start of a long-time association with Shanghai.

Tony Daryanani with two of his star clients — China’s basketball great and NBA star Yao Ming (top) and India’s grand slam winning tennis ace Leander Paes — during trials of their custom-tailored suits. Tony says style-conscious men want their suits designed to perfection, even choosing their fabric, style and colors. — Wang Rongjiang
A romantic boat ride in God’s own country

Saibal Dasgupta

There are few places in the world where your eyes need to adjust to the natural beauty of the surroundings. Kerala’s deep greenery and the glassiness of its endlessly stretching waterways is one of them. It is a waking dream.

The province of Kerala is located at the lowest tip of India at the point where land meets the Indian Ocean. Dozens of alleyways created by the sea’s backwaters cut through the vegetation covered land.

Ride a boat on one of the backwaters, and you will find yourself relaxing even while enjoying. One of the best places to hire a boat is the ancient city of Allepey, which is the starting point for dozens of vessels that sail the narrow strip of water with mangrove forests, and tall palm trees lining the sides.

The boat crew catches fish and serves you along with an assortment of meats, rice and vegetables. Most of the dishes are cooked with coconut that range from creamy tender ones to mature fruit. The boat rides through the setting sun, parks in a safe place for the night, and takes off as a golden dawn breaks into the sky.

“Kerala is a great wedding and honeymoon destination. We want to encourage young Chinese couples to lose themselves to the joys of nature in different places of Kerala,” says Sheik Pareeth, director at the government-run Kerala Tourism.

For Chinese travelers, it is double bonus because Kerala is one of the few places in India where pork is easy to find. So is beef. Seafood drawn fresh from the Ocean is in abundance.

One of Kerala’s most famous resorts, the Coconut Lagoon in Kumarakom, features a wide range of delicatessen meats and cheese imported from different parts of the world, and restaurants filled with Europeans savoring them along with hot, tangy dishes of Kerala.

Pamper your bodies or rejuvenate yourself with deep oil massage, a treatment done by health practitioners from the Ayurveda system, which is somewhat similar to traditional Chinese medicine. In fact, Kerala has emerged as the most important health tourism destination in India because of its Ayurvedic medical treatments, massage facilities, clean air and water and extremely good food.

The province has many names, and faces; Land of elephants, Land of Spices, Land of Coconuts, and as Kerala Tourism describes it as “God’s Own Country.”

It is easy to find out why if you walk through the tea gardens in the hills of Munnar, take the boat ride from Kollam and Allepey, laze in the sandy beaches of Kovalam in the regional capital of Trivandrum, look into spice gardens, visit the churches in Cochin or go around temple hopping. Better still, when you watch the heavily masked dancers play out scenes from legends in the Kathakali dance form.

There are surprises along the way. We came across chefs trained in five-star hotels at a relatively small hotel, Munnar Tea Country Resort, on top of one of the hills. In the Cochin coast, you see vast fishing nets hanging in space as some kind of bamboo and rope crane that can dip into the sea one moment, and jump out with huge quantities of fish caught in the net in the next moment.

For the history lover, there is a church in Cochin where Vasco da Gama, the 14th century explorer and the first European to discover India, was buried. His body was removed and taken to his home country, Portugal, for a second burial.

One of the highlights of Kerala’s sightseeing is living in a forest lodge like Aranya Nivas in Thekkady. It is an exotic experience spending the night in a dense forest filled with the calls and cries of wild birds and animals, and taking the early morning ride in the nearby lake where elephants come to bath and splash water in gay abandon.

Kerala has one of the lowest crime rates, and there is little for tourists to worry about. It is also extremely well connected through an extensive network of bus, train and boat services. Travelers flying from Singapore can get direct airline connections. The other alternative is to fly into India through New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai or Bangalore airports, which are connected to Chinese cities with direct flights, and then move on to the cities of Trivandrum or Cochin by train or air.

(Saibal Dasgupta is Times of India correspondent in Beijing. He can be reached at asiaoverview@yahoo.com)
A House for Mr. Tata; An Old Shanghai Tale

Bejan Dadabhoy Tata was a distant cousin of his boss Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata (R.D. Tata), who himself was a first cousin of India’s tycoon Jamshedji Tata. In the summer of 1904, the same year B.D. Tata sailed east to help expand his cousin’s business, R.D. Tata’s French wife gave birth in Paris to their Eurasian son. They would name that boy Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata — J.R.D. Tata.

From Hong Kong, some Parsis soon migrated northwards to Shanghai, even before the French government had negotiated with the Qing Dynasty for its own wedge of land that would be called the French Concession. By 1854, the Parsis had established a Zoroastrian cemetery in Shanghai on Fuzhou Road. In 1866, right next to the cemetery, they built a fire temple at No. 538, Fuzhou Road.

Fast forward four decades and innumerable clipper voyages, to alight on Shanghai’s riverfront, in the early twentieth century, right behind the house of the French consul general, at No. 8, Rue du Consulat. Bejan Dadabhoy Tata has prospered in the east, he has married and had children; his wife Naja and their older children; his wife Naja and their older boys have settled here in Shanghai.

On 20 May 1919, Naja gave birth to her last two children, a pair of boy-girl twins, Jehangir Bejan Tata and Aloo Bejan Tata. The Chinese term such a birth dragon–phoenix twins, the best combination of all that. And then, in those days, when Parsis came to Shanghai, or to the Bund, they usually stayed long enough to catch the first flight out to Hong Kong.

Five buildings of B.D. Tata’s estate were completed in 1935. He named the big house Avan Villa, after his mother. The Tata family moved west across the International Settlement, past the racecourse, into their grand new residence.

Jehangir Bejan Tata remembers every inch of that white mansion. “It was a seven-bedroom house with five bathrooms. It was three floors, the ground floor, first floor and second floor and basement. The ground floor [had] parquet flooring, and as you entered the small hall [and turned] to the left, there was a bigger hall, then my mother had a prayer room. The first floor consisted of four bedrooms. My mother and father had a bedroom each with an adjoining passage, which served as a closet for clothes, and then my eldest brother had one there. There was a study, and from there, there was a large room — now we call it the living room — we used to call it the sitting room, and next to the sitting room was the dining room. And there were two beautiful murals, one known as a bas-relief, was like a sculpture on the wall, it was done by a well-known Shanghai-based Russian artist by the name of Poudgoursky. One was a mural in the dining room. And I think that if these two things were still there, I think the murals in that one would be worth in the millions. I’m not joking, Ms Saran, I’m not joking.”

Excerpts from “A House for Mr. Tata: An Old Shanghai Tale” by Mishi Saran.

The full piece was first published in “Travelling In, Travelling Out: A Book of Unexpected Journeys,” (HarperCollins Publishers India, 2014).
I was warmly welcomed into New Delhi, India’s capital city, in early March last year with bright yellow tulips and a red dot on my forehead. I had come to this beautiful, spiritual country, for a voluntary teaching assignment at a local government school.

It was during my voluntary work that I discovered the art of making chapatis (Indian flatbread). I saw our cook use a rolling pin on a flat surface to roll small wheat flour doughs and give it a pancake-like shape. He would skillfully throw them on the stove, flip it once or twice and take it off just in time. I even learnt to make basic Hindi, India’s national language.

I visited the beautiful and ancient Delhi landmarks Kastur Minar and Red Fort. The India Gate, Parliament House and Connaught Place gave me a sense of modern India. I found peace of mind inside Humayun’s Tomb, Gandhi Memorial Garden and Jama Masjid and ended with a trip to magical Taj Mahal. Memorable Garden and Arabic architecture, very similar to the buildings we have along the Bund.

In a desperate bid to find inner peace I became a student of Ashtanga Yoga at a very famous yoga institute in south Mumbai. Slowly, yoga became my passion. By the end of the year, I completed the certificate course in yoga. Yoga taught me how to be present and how to let go of the past. I became rooted, calm and more confident. Most importantly, I felt happier! My daily life in Mumbai became organized with yoga in the morning, French class in the afternoon and a bit of Mandarín teaching in the evening. I commuted by local trains which can be a good test of endurance. One day, while taking a stroll in Kala Ghoda in south Mumbai I was attracted by a gorgeous blue dress displayed in a boutique. I knew I could not afford it but could not stop stepping inside. I struck up a conversation with the designer. She not only made it affordable to me but we managed to start up a friendship. I would talk to her often. It was a big help in a foreign country.

Soon I was pinning to see the rest of India. One long weekend, I drove with some of the friends I had made in Mumbai to Pune, which was refreshing green and lots of fun.

Pune gave me the confidence to go further and explore southern India. Chennai welcomed me with its profound historical and academic atmosphere. Although the rickshaw drivers were not always friendly, I observed something impressive on the bus. On every crowded bus I took, pass- sengers would pass on the change and tickets back and forth for each other. Having checked out south India, I took a flight to Goa, Assam, in northeast. I enjoyed the friendly city and the wildlife sanctuary. Two days later I took a ride on the zigzag mountain up to Cherrapunji, the wettest place on Earth — and it was actually raining! I enjoyed the refreshing air and the waterfalls.

Darjeeling is a crescent town rest- ing on the Himalayan Mountains, with its famous tea plantations, Tibetan monasteries, various wildlife and breathtaking beauty.

I stayed in India for nine months and was told many times that I had an Indian soul. Maybe. India can be bewildering at first, and amazing and confusing and you spend some time there. It is a nation with ancient wisdom, kindness and forgiveness. I fell in love in Delhi and the goodness deep down in every one of us.

I went to India as an international volunteer, and came back learning so much more than yoga. Now I call Mum- bai my second home and am ready to go back to India anytime — for more knowledge and experience. Why not?

Anita Yu is a Chinese volunteer teaching Mandarin in India.

Namaste, India!

Left: Indian Pavilion inside Yiwu International Trade Center
Above: A bird’s eye view of Yiwu International Trade Center

Yiwu — a city of commerce and international trade

Pan Zheng

YIWU City in Zhejiang Province is one-and-a-half hours by bullet train from Shanghai, which is just 300 kilometers away.

Since the reforms and opening-up, Yiwu has been promoting commerce and trade and explored its own unique way of development.

In March, 2011, the State Council approved Yiwu’s plans to try out reforms in international trade. Yiwu also became the only county-level city in the country to pilot such a state-level reform.

The Yiwu Market has been declared by many international institutes, including the UN and the World Bank, as the biggest wholesale market for small commodities in the world. The market covers an area of more than 5.5 million square meters and has over 75,000 booths that sell more than 1.8 million kinds of merchandise.

There is an imported goods pavilion that stretches 100,000 square meters and sells more than 50,000 kinds of imported goods brought from over 90 countries and regions.

On the other hand, Yiwu’s merchant ships travel to more than 210 countries and regions around the world. More than 20 international wholesale giants such as Wal-Mart and METRO as well as over 30 famous domestic chain supermarkets have procurement offices in the city.

Every year, about 500,000 overseas visitors visit Yiwu to buy products. More than 13,000 people from more than 100 countries and regions have settled down in the city, including more than 1,000 Indian buyers.

In 2014, India was among the larg- est contingent of foreign visitors in Yiwu with more than 26,000 visitors. The city now has more than 9,500 international companies, including over 2,000 foreign-funded ventures.

Indian companies have set up 31 offices and 267 joint ventures in Yiwu. In 2014, the import and export trade volume between Yiwu and India reached US$1.09 billion — which was 38.1 percent from the year before.

Yiwu City also boasts well- developed modern industry for conventions, finance and logistics. It holds several state-level exhibitions such as Yiwu International Commodities Fair, Yiwu Cultural Products Trade Fair, Yiwu International Forest Products Fair and Yiwu International Tourist Products Fair, attracting a lot of foreign exhibitors.

Besides, Yiwu also participates in various international exhibitions actively. For example, several Yiwu enterprises participated at the 25th Indian Handicraft and Gift Exhibition in February and made a strong impact.

Yiwu is the first city in China to launch pilot operation of individual cross-border remittance business, the first county-level city in China to have the authority to register and manage foreign trade operators. The logistics industry of Yiwu takes up 321 prefecture-level cities across the country, and 18 famous international shipping companies have offices in the city to form an interna- tional logistics network.

The railway links Yiwu and Madrid in Spain directly. The city is listed as an international land port by the UN, while it is also a key border crossing point between Yiwu and Hong Kong.

As one of the most popular Chinese destination for international traders and visitors, Yiwu offers great scope for companies and businessmen to set up offices in the city, which is also known for its openness and tolerance.

Yiwu City in Zhejiang Province is one-and-a-half hours by bullet train from Shanghai, which is just 300 kilometers away.

Since the reforms and opening-up, Yiwu has been promoting commerce and trade and explored its own unique way of development.

In March, 2011, the State Council approved Yiwu’s plans to try out reforms in international trade. Yiwu also became the only county-level city in the country to pilot such a state-level reform. The Yiwu Market has been declared by many international institutes, including the UN and the World Bank, as the biggest wholesale market for small commodities in the world. The market covers an area of more than 5.5 million square meters and has over 75,000 booths that sell more than 1.8 million kinds of merchandise.

There is an imported goods pavilion that stretches 100,000 square meters and sells more than 50,000 kinds of imported goods brought from over 90 countries and regions.

On the other hand, Yiwu’s merchant ships travel to more than 210 countries and regions around the world. More than 20 international wholesale giants such as Wal-Mart and METRO as well as over 30 famous domestic chain supermarkets have procurement offices in the city.

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