



Linguistic Links with India

Mandarin classes and academic exchanges enhance mutual understanding between Taiwan and India.

BY KELLY HER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATIONAL TSING HUA UNIVERSITY

Students in the Taiwan Education Center at Amity University (left) and O. P. Jindal Global University (below) display works they created during their Chinese calligraphy and painting lessons.



When Tanushree Chandhok gained admission to Amity University in Noida, India in 2014, she aspired to become an economist. The now 20-year-old Indian woman has since sought to explore another career option in interpreting, a sector where demand for Mandarin-speaking talent is high and the supply of those who can skillfully perform the task remains low.

She made the decision during her freshman year after taking a language course at the Taiwan Education Center (TEC) on her campus. “Everyone studies [foreign] languages like French or German, but I feel that learning Mandarin provides a kind of potential that no other language does,” Chandhok says. “Meanwhile, the TEC has created a positive learning environment. My teacher’s creative teaching methods and words of encouragement keep me motivated and interested in the learning process.” After graduating from university, she plans to travel to Taiwan to continue her studies, noting that “it’s better to learn a language in its own real-life setting, and Taiwan is the best place to study Chinese.” Additionally, she wants to visit the island’s natural attractions such as its beaches and mountains, saying she has been drawn to the country’s beautiful landscapes ever since she first saw pictures of them during class.

Chandhok is among the approximately 3,000 students who have taken part in Taiwan’s Mandarin education initiative in India. Established in 2011, the scheme is administered by National Tsing Hua University (NTHU), located in northern

Taiwan’s Hsinchu City, and includes TECs at private universities as well as branches of the Taiwan Education Program (TEP) at several of India’s public colleges. It was launched with significant financial support from the Republic of China (ROC) Ministry of Education (MOE), with the ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs offering additional funding beginning in 2013.

To date, TECs have been established in eight Asian nations, such as Japan and Indonesia, as well as the U.S. state of Michigan. In India, the centers or TEPs have spread to five higher education institutions, namely Amity University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jawaharlal Nehru University and O. P. Jindal Global University, all in or near Delhi, as well as the Indian Institute of Technology Madras in Chennai.

Wang Wei-chung (王偉中), a mechanical engineering professor and senior adviser on global affairs to the president of NTHU, is in charge of the Mandarin program in India. He explains that the education scheme aims to help Indian students acquire knowledge of Chinese culture and Taiwan’s socio-economic



Jessica Wang, a Mandarin instructor from Taiwan, right, poses with Sourav Kabiraj, a student at Jawaharlal Nehru University (above).

Instructors with the TEC at Amity University teach students how to make Chinese dumplings as part of the cultural activities they incorporate into their lesson plans (right).





Taiwan's representative to India Tien Chung-kwang, sixth left, and Wang Wei-chung, a professor at National Tsing Hua University, fourth left, attend the opening ceremony of the Taiwan Higher Education Exposition in New Delhi on Oct. 17-18 last year.

conditions, as well as Mandarin skills. The professor emphasizes that learning a foreign language goes a long way toward enhancing cultural understanding. “Such knowledge is necessary to increase interactions among people from different countries, and can help facilitate the advancement of bilateral relations in political, economic and social spheres. We expect the TEC program to play a major role in promoting cross-cultural communication.”

Feng Ai-ling (馮愛凌), director of the TEC at Amity, says the university offers six elective foreign language courses. Among them, only Mandarin is taught by native speakers. Feng and the two other Taiwanese instructors at the school believe this adds to the allure of the TEC program.

“Besides providing courses at three levels—beginner, intermediate and advanced—we’ve designed collaborative projects to engage students in a variety of ways,” Feng explains. “The students are very receptive to the cultural activities that we incorporate into our lesson plans, such as learning how to make Chinese dumplings, write calligraphy and use chopsticks.” The number of students enrolled in the TEC program at the university, she adds, has been increasing every year.

Sabrina Li (李香君), who also teaches Mandarin courses at Amity, says the positive feedback she gets from her students

encourages her to constantly look for ways to teach more effectively. “We feel a sense of achievement when students develop language skills and an understanding about Taiwan and its culture,” Li says. “Meanwhile, I enjoy exploring Indian culture and customs, which are novelties to me.”

Like Chandhok, Sourav Kabiraj, a student at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi, opted to take classes at his school’s TEP, which was established in February last year. “I want to be different. While many people are learning French or German, I like to study Mandarin. I’m fascinated by the beauty of Chinese calligraphy,” he says. “It’s great to learn and practice the language

with the Taiwanese instructor.”

Kabiraj also plans to go to Taiwan to pursue further education and experience the local culture after he graduates from university in May this year. “To gain an in-depth understanding of Chinese culture, one has to learn traditional Chinese characters. Taiwan is the best place to do that,” he says. “I intend to use my Mandarin skills in my future career as I would like to become a diplomat to help expand India’s ties with Taiwan and mainland China in various fields.”

Jessica Wang (王潔予) is the TEP instructor at JNU and the only native Mandarin-speaking teacher at the university. Similar to Feng and Li, Wang says she endeavors to increase student engagement through a diversified curriculum and finds cultural topics can best capture her pupils’ interest. Hence, she often utilizes multimedia presentations and organizes activities to introduce her students to the customs and traditions linked to Taiwan’s



A Taiwanese university representative, center, explains his school's programs to Indian visitors at the 2015 Taiwan Higher Education Expo in New Delhi.

major holidays like Chinese New Year and Moon Festival, as well as the island's cuisine and heritage. "Many of my students knew nothing about Taiwan before coming to my class," she says.

Apart from facilitating the language program, NTHU started organizing the annual Taiwan Higher Education Exposition in India in 2012. The expo has become an important event that helps Indian students get information about academic and vocational programs provided by Taiwan's universities, as well as scholarship and internship opportunities. Thirty-five representatives from 12 Taiwanese universities and the Taipei Computer Association participated in the 2015 edition, held at the Park Hotel in New Delhi on Oct. 17-18. The two-day fair attracted more than 1,000 visitors.

Tien Chung-kwang (田中光), Taiwan's representative to India and the head of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center (TECC) in New Delhi, says Taiwan can promote its soft power by enhancing international awareness of Mandarin and the country's tertiary education system. He is happy to see that educational

ROC national Violet Doshi, right, and her son display a Mandarin textbook. Doshi, who lives in Mumbai, has been teaching Mandarin to businesspeople and children for more than 10 years.

collaboration between Taiwan and India has intensified over the last few years.

According to tallies released by the TECC's education division, as of November last year, 59 Taiwanese universities had signed 99 memorandums of understanding with 69 Indian counterparts on academic cooperation including dual degree programs, joint research projects, student exchanges and the establishment of sister university ties. Meanwhile, the number of Indian students pursuing higher education, Mandarin studies and internships in Taiwan increased from 588 in 2012 to 814 in 2014.

The educational programs initiated by the ROC government, Tien states, promote friendship and understanding between the people of the two nations and have proven popular among Indian youths. In particular, Mandarin fluency is considered by many to boost their chances of getting higher-paying jobs. Tour guides who can speak the language, for example, reportedly can earn double the typical salary for such positions, he adds.

ROC national Violet Doshi (史紫蓉) has lived in Mumbai with her Indian spouse since 1998. Her experiences exemplify why learning Mandarin is becoming more popular in the South Asian nation.

"There's been a growing interest among Indians in learning Chinese," she says. "Some people study the language because they want





Tourists crowd around the Taj Mahal in Agra, India, one of the most popular tourist destinations in the South Asian nation. Tour guides who can speak Mandarin are in great demand in the country.

to do business with mainland Chinese or Taiwanese companies, or to be tour guides, who are paid well and in great demand.” Doshi has been teaching Mandarin to businesspeople and children and working as a tour guide for more than 10 years.

Her life has gotten even busier now that she also works as an independent on-site interpreter. “As more and more events and trade shows are organized in India by the Taiwan External Trade Development Council, and as greater numbers of Taiwanese trade missions visit the country, demand for interpreting services has surged,” Doshi explains. “Thanks to the expanding commercial and tourism ties between Taiwan and India, I’ve got more work opportunities.”

Likewise, ROC national Jennifer Tseng (曾小莉) settled in Mumbai after marrying her Indian spouse in 2004. She chairs the Taiwan Chamber of Commerce Mumbai and is enthusiastic about promoting exchanges between the two nations not only in the fields of trade and investment, but also culture and education. “Many Indian youngsters want to learn Mandarin but cannot find teachers or places to learn,” she says. “I hope

the TEC program can be offered not only in India’s universities but also high schools, many of which currently offer European language courses.”

NTHU professor Wang has visited India about 20 times and witnessed the country’s rapid growth over the decades. “There are so many opportunities in India,” he says. He believes that given Taiwan’s competitive advantages in higher education services and high-tech industries, the nation should step up efforts to expand its presence in the Indian market. “We’ll strive to establish more TECs in India once we get enough funding. It’s our expectation that the young men and women who participate in our Mandarin programs will be at the forefront of promoting all forms of cooperation and exchanges between Taiwan and India.” ■