

East meets West and West meets East

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SUBTITLE:

Understand how we can work better together by learning from both the West and East in order to create more globally aware designs for a better future,

ABSTRACT:

With historical dividing lines between the 'East' and the 'West' blurring for the first time, working globally is challenging every profession. Economies have always driven work patterns and new history is being created through: (1) Asia lifting the world out of recession instead of the USA which has never happened before (2) A need for the West to understand and adapt to the complexities of the East (3) Traditional perceptions in the West about the East, partly driven by the IT revolution, that the East is a doer community to be outsourced to rather than a thinker one and that UX is difficult to offshore (4) Design for emerging markets meaning first design in the West to later adapt for the East (5) Eastern designs not being up to global standards (6) Perceptions in the East about the West likewise that design is led from the West without awareness or regard for local thinking and a general unwillingness to give the time or a chance to incubate global work.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

1. **Background > Misconceptions**

Yahoo, Microsoft Research and Nokia have set up major design centers in proximity to the bottom of the pyramid markets. This has altered some of the design approaches of even a couple of years ago, where majority of the work going to BRIC countries was driven through off shored work sent to 'doers' and minimal research or design focus given to emerging markets. In the arenas of user experience, psychology, sociology and other disciplines shaped the profession in the East over many years towards a 'usability' driven approach. A broader user experience definition through the integration of design is relatively recent. In the East on the other hand and particularly in India, the 'usability era' was bypassed and the (continuing) trend set in of over 50% user experience professionals originating from design schools.

2. **Viewpoints > Communication styles**

One of the barriers often cited for successful collaboration is communication. While in China language is an additional factor, in India it is often not, yet continues to be an inhibitor. Communication protocols arising from cultural origins are the reason. Some of these are, not questioning anyone considered a 'higher authority' even against one's better judgment, not expressing to the face that there is a problem. From a user experience perspective, designing for different cultures was until recent times limited to localization. The required approach for true design

localization is to 'give far greater importance to cultivating a deep understanding of China's history, its culture, its economics, and its politics as compared with learning Mandarin'. For effective user experience design, understanding a people, culture and way of thinking is imperative, which takes time.

Though communication barriers seem insurmountable initially, humans are more similar than different. While language is an essential component, an understanding of core cultural characteristics like business approaches, ways, beliefs and values of people can go a long way in overcoming language barriers and informing design. For example, popularity of SMS in India, even in low-end cell phones has resulted in a multi-billion dollar practice of SMS voting on TV programs. Introduction of dual SIM cards for usage between Hong Kong and main land China is another example of a way of life. With time, patience, openness, acceptance and adaptability, an understanding on cultural differences happens and collaboration becomes possible.

3. Viewpoints > Copying vs. innovation

The East has acquired an unfavorable reputation of minimal innovation and a lack of IP protection. While much has been written on the issue of IP violations in these countries, there is also gradual realization that though unjustifiable, culture has much to play in this issue. The long history of a bureaucratic culture, lack of brand consciousness, ignorance about copyright infringement therefore viewing copying as a stepping stone to learning and inadequate regulatory measures are some reasons. Some experts say they believe the "shanzhai "(black market) phenomena is about being creative Chinese style. Patent filing, one indicator of innovation, has risen dramatically since around 2000 fueled considerably by presence of foreign companies in both India and China.

4. What is needed > Education and Training

Significant cultural, educational, technological, infrastructural, economic, and language diversities exist within both China and India. Defining a *design education* as well as practice is significantly more complex than in more homogeneous Western societies. Some critical imperatives by the East in this global collaboration are specialized training in UX, basic training integrated into the existing extensive engineering education to sensitize and mature developer attitudes towards users, and global alliances in UX education. China has made design a national priority and is pouring billions of Yuan into design education. Similar efforts in India are imperative as India lacks the experience, muscle or motivation needed to rapidly scale up to meet and support the UX market demands of a booming IT industry. This also presents an opportunity for more mature Western training enterprises to participate in the shaping of the new global user experience practitioner.

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