

Rise of the Asian D-School

More students are opting for programs—and jobs—at home

by Elizabeth Woyke

Europe and the U.S. have long dominated design education, but Asian schools are quickly catching up. Having demonstrated their ability to teach engineering and technical skills, Chinese, Korean, Indian, and Taiwanese universities are now graduating thousands of design students every year. And a growing number offer programs in design strategy, innovative thinking, and sustainability.

Shih Chien University in Taipei, for example, is teaching "creativity management" classes. So is India's National Institute of Design. At Taiwan's National Cheng Kung University, a year-old graduate program called Institute of Creative Industry Design is fostering what one professor calls OCM thinking, for Own Culture and Manufacturing. Courses focus on topics such as creative industry planning and cognitive behavior research.

Global corporations chasing Asian consumer wallets are pouring money into research projects and workshops in design schools from Shanghai to Seoul. Oregon Scientific and Lavazza Coffee are teaming with graduate students at Hong Kong Polytechnic University to develop new business strategies. Levi Strauss, Estée Lauder (EL), and Ford (F) are tapping Shih Chien students for insights and designs. Autodesk Inc. (ADSK) recently funded a faculty research chair at the National Institute of Design in India.

The influx of interest, funding, jobs, and internships means Asian design students are starting to see opportunity at home as well as abroad. In India, domestic companies such as Videocon, an industrial conglomerate, are setting up design departments for the first time. Meanwhile, Korean, Japanese, U.S., European, and other global companies keep flowing into India. "In terms of job opportunities, it's a very good time," says Ravi Poovaiah, a professor at Mumbai's Industrial Design Centre (IDC), part of the India Institute of Technology.

The shift is seismic. "For years, we have sent our students to Europe and the U.S.," says Chiho In, a professor at Korea's Hongik University. "Now, we're also trying to build relationships in Asia." In fact, while the 11 Asian schools on *BusinessWeek's* Global Design School list boast numerous partnerships in Europe and North America, many also link to nearby Asian institutions.

A DRIVING FORCE

Sustainability is fast becoming a major issue in Asia, particularly in China. Beijing's Tsinghua University recently hosted a sustainable design workshop with Milan Polytechnic University. At Mumbai's IDC, it has been a driving force for years. "The Indian way of life is to not waste a thing," says IDC's Poovaiah. "It's part of how we look at products, too." That ethos is spurring IDC students to design fuel-efficient cars and bamboo products ranging from furniture to fixtures in its own Bamboo Lab.

Other schools take a broader view. Students at Hong Kong Polytechnic spent the summer of 2006 brainstorming ways design could assist rural ethnic minorities in China. One idea: Establish direct trade between farmers in the province of Yunnan and Hong Kong hotels that might purchase herbs for use in their toiletries. IDC students are designing mobile learning devices for migrant workers and carts for street-food vendors. "There are still so many things that need to be designed," says IDC's Poovaiah. "Asia is a gold mine of opportunity for designers."

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