



A YOUNG COMPANY TAKES OFF FOR SHANGHAI

by Susan Helwig

Ask architect and planner Edward Leman which city in the whole world he would choose to work in during the next decade. The answer is: Shanghai.

Leman heads Chreod Ltd., Development Planning Consultants, an Ottawa-based company that has been working with municipal authorities in Shanghai since 1988. That experience placed him at the nerve centre while a giant city woke up:

“Shanghai is the place to be. The scope and dynamism of change is going to be unprecedented. Ten years from now, none of us will recognize the city. Speaking from a professional point of view, we wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.”

The very name Shanghai conjures up images of momentous times in China’s history. The wild and wicked city of the 1930’s. Outpost of war and hotbed of revolution in the 1940’s. Since then, with its 13-million people, Shanghai has been the major industrial engine for the most populous country on earth.

Today’s visitor can’t help but catch a whiff of excitement in the streets as this city drives ahead under China’s economic reforms.

Smartly dressed shoppers browse in the new stores that line some of the city streets. Sidewalk vendors offer goods for sale. Here and there a new development is under construction. Cars, buses, and bicycles jam the streets and flood into the intersections as everyone rushes to get ahead.

Leman is in a position to know what’s going on behind the facade of hustle and bustle.

His company, Chreod, had its first contact with Shanghai in 1988 when the Federation of Canadian Municipalities funded a program for coastal cities in China. The company organized a six-week training program for local officials seeking to modernize their methods for planning urban developments.

Since then, Chreod hasn’t looked back. In less than five years, the company has provided a wide range of consulting

services to the Shanghai civic authorities.

In 1990, the company advised planners on how to develop a land management strategy for the central core of the city. Next came an assignment from the Leading Group on Economic Reform, chaired by the Mayor of Shanghai, Huang Ju. Another contract allowed Chreod to help evaluate the master plan for Pudong, a vast zone opposite the old waterfront that has been set aside for new industrial projects. In a fourth, Chreod advised on high-tech computerized planning.

Leman has seen Shanghai’s planners jump from the old methods to the new. And with lightning speed.

He says in the past, city planners would use basic maps and then try to develop the necessary infrastructure. Now everything is being logged onto computers. According to Edward Leman, Shanghai will soon be fully mapped on GIS, geographic information systems. This will allow planners to evaluate new developments quickly and in detail. Mapping of water suppliers, power lines and transportation will be all there on the computer screen:

“By the middle of 1993, they will be ahead of Hong Kong and a lot of American cities.”

Chreod is a small company, employing fewer than 20 people at its Ottawa headquarters and using about 30 others as expert consultants. Its name comes from the Greek language, and means “creative destiny”.

If destiny first brought the company to China, Leman attributes the success of its next moves to patience and expertise. Chreod was able to bring in external financial help through such bodies as the Canadian International Development Agency and the Asian Development Bank. In addition, the company had the capac-

ity to introduce new technology. But most important was the company’s record in building personal connections with the local government.

Says Leman: “We have been working in a collaborative way that has engendered trust.”

Success in Shanghai left Edward Leman commuting from Canada. In the last two years, he found he was spending half of his time in Shanghai and Hong Kong. So, this businessman made the next step. Chreod now has an office in Hong Kong where Leman offers investment advice to companies and individuals who are planning projects in Shanghai.

How fast is Shanghai moving?

In one year, the city has signed 200 lease agreements for new projects. In one district, 60,000 people are to be re-settled to make way for new developments. Rapid transit lines are under construction. By 1995, the transport system will be radically changed with a new ring road and two bridges across the Huangpu River.

What Leman describes is a city filled with dynamic energy:

“I find it unique. A city with an incredible history of foreign involvement. A major metropolis that has been allowed to stagnate. Shanghai now has to do more that catch up. It has to catapult ahead to re-claim its position as the Dragon’s Head of the Yantze River Basin.”

Edward Leman admits there could be mistakes if development goes ahead too quickly. But he thinks Shanghai’s leaders have the political will to do things well and create high-quality projects.

This young Canadian urban planner has seen ambitious plans to modernize a great city. Shanghai in the 1990’s. There isn’t any place in the world that Edward Leman would rather be.