

The World of the Future

By

William R. Polk

Visitors to China have adapted an old joke to explain their reactions. Hong Kong, they say, is for pessimists but Shanghai is for optimists; put another way, Hong Kong is now regarded as a city of the 20th century but Shanghai is the city of the 21st century. To a person, visitors report being stunned by the dynamism of Shanghai. Along the river front, one can still see the remains of the city of a century ago, much as the British, French and Japanese left it. The buildings, then so grand that they caught the imagination of visitors, now appear squat and even dingy while all around them rise huge skyscrapers. Starting with its population of about 16 million people, every statistic spells explosive growth. But, even modern Shanghai is now being put in the shadow by what used to be its kitchen-garden across the Huangpu River, its suburb, Pudong.

Hardly a decade old, Pudong is separated from old Shanghai by the Huangpu River. It is still in the process of being built on a triangular peninsula of about 570 square kilometers fronting on the sea and is the permanent home to nearly 3 million people.

To learn more about what is happening in Pudong, I accompanied a group from the Arizona State University's W.P Carey School of Business to call on Du Jiahao, the governor of Pudong and a member of the Standing Committee of the Shanghai Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

Getting to Pudong from Shanghai is not easy. Despite the construction of super highways and tunnels, lines of the most modern and expensive automobiles form a solid

chain of traffic in both directions. At least one and a half million people move in both directions each day.

As one emerges from the tunnel under the river, he finds himself suddenly amidst buildings that dwarf even those of Shanghai itself. Few are as much as five years old. But what is to a Westerner even more impressive is that they are spaced out and tower over large expanses of carefully groomed gardens filled with flower beds.

Futuristic is perhaps the most apt word to describe the architecture. But it is not crowded. Since the government owns the land, it was possible to situate the new buildings in park land without concern, as in western cities, for price. It regards itself as a “National Garden Town” and proudly proclaims that it has 108.8 million square meters of open land or an average of 19.6 meters per person. Most of this open space is beautifully planted with flowers, bushes and trees.

The Chinese government has made Pudong the symbol of its drive to modernize and “open-up.” The extent to which it has succeeded is shown in two numbers: the first is that evaluating its production as though it were a separate country gives a yearly income of \$18.1 billion. The second statistic is that whereas in 1990, it accounted for 8% of the income of Shanghai, today, despite the explosive growth also of Shanghai, it accounts for 24% and expects to hit 33% within a decade. That is, whereas a high rate of growth for most economies is about 4% to 5%, Pudong has grown at a yearly average of 19.6% since 1990.

When the Government set out to make Pudong the model of what it wanted the new China to be, it hired some of the outstanding architectural firms of the world to design the buildings and parks. Naturally, each architect set out to build a monument. So

the buildings seem fantasies cast in concrete. One now under construction as a financial center is expected to be the world's tallest. The museum of science and industry was described by one observer as a futuristic space station, seeming not to rest on the ground but to hover over it. By building high rises, the planners left room for gardens below. And since the government owns all the land, it had not incentive, as in Western cities, to jam buildings together. So the impression of "monumentality" is heightened by the variation between flat gardens and soaring towers.

Clearly a major purpose of the project has been to attract foreign investors. A major target group has been the Chinese who over the last two centuries have moved to Indonesia, Formosa (Taipei) and North and South America. They are being shown rather than told that the future is here in China rather than in the places to which they or their ancestors went during the long times of trouble – the Boxer Rebellion, the Japanese invasion, the Civil War and the Cultural Revolution. All these are now in the process of being forgotten in the golden rush toward the future that Pudong symbolizes.

The overseas Chinese are not the only people being lured to Pudong. The international community is growing rapidly and is catered to by specialized schools for each major language group – English, German, French primary and secondary schools are available at European rates while Chinese language schools are free. A major new hospital complex is being developed in conjunction with the Harvard University Medical School. Sports facilities are about as good as they can get. And almost every fashion and retail company of note in the world has been encouraged to set up outlets.

But, of course, what really counts, Pudong Governor Du Jiahao told a visiting American delegation yesterday is the move into the area of major international business

organizations. To facilitate this and to keep a balance in both production and living arrangements, Pudong has been divided into four areas including a free trade zone of nearly ten square kilometers which plans to be the major transit point for trade in the Asia Pacific zone and for the vast Chinese market. The financial district has already attracted 71 of the world's major banks and other financial organizations and houses a stock exchange, a commodities exchange and a real estate exchange. The "Hitech Park" attracted \$6.5 billion worth of foreign investment during the last few years. And, lest the area become solely a white collar area, a 20 square kilometer manufacturing zone, which last year produced \$12.5 billion worth of goods and a housing development for the workers and staff, has been set up.

At the end of the Pudong triangle is the new international airport which is already one of the world's busiest, rivaling Chicago's O'Hare, New York's JFK and London's Heathrow. Far more than any of these, it appears as a huge park with hundreds of acres of roses, fruit trees, shrubs and lawns. And it is tied to the city by a \$1 billion bullet train that moves at an astonishing 400 kilometers an hour and so puts the downtown Shanghai just minutes away. In addition three metros are under construction. Private cars are limited to try to cut down on the already paralyzing traffic jams while buses regularly tour the area. But, addicted to bicycles, the Chinese still peddle to work in Pudong as everywhere else.

Perhaps most impressive of all, and a living symbol of the new China, the governor of this vast project quietly announced that he wants to go back to school himself to learn the skills he believes he needs to make the project work better. The Chinese

respect for education is a tradition that remains strong among even the most striking signs
of revolutionary change.

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