

The scope and pace of development in China highlight strengths and challenges of a command economy

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Ellen Lou and Michael Duncan of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, which has designed huge projects in China, say decisions can be implemented very quickly.

When Shanghai leaders talked about blending technology and education, developer Vincent Lo listened.

Within months of Lo's 2003 discussions with the powers of Shanghai's Yangpu district, planning started on Lo's 11 million-square-foot Knowledge and Innovation Community, aiming for a 2013 completion of the campus.

At about the same time, construction of the first building in another high-profile project, San Francisco's 303-acre Mission Bay biotech and research enclave, was taking shape — after a dozen years of planning, public outreach, false starts and political handshakes that crossed the administrations of four mayors.

About 100 acres larger than Lo's KIC, Mission Bay moved quickly by San Francisco development standards and continues to grow at a relatively breakneck speed. But when it comes to speed and scale of projects, China wins.

True, the image is that China's government can act boldly and decisively because its one-party system stifles dissent. But developers and designers with experience in the Bay Area and Asia say China's ability to pull off large-scale projects at lightning speed testifies more to a crucial blending of national vision with local political ambitions and the sheer availability of manpower.

From Finance Street, Beijing's 9.3 million-square-foot answer to Wall Street (but with open space and small gardens), to the KIC, China also is gaining a reputation for building sustainable projects.

"When you first get there, you think, 'We're never going to get (this done).' But it does," said Michael Duncan, a director in the San Francisco office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP. "I looked around Finance Street one day and I saw probably 3,000 people working on one project, 4,000 at another, 3,000 on another."

SOM designed the master plan for the KIC as well as the plan — and almost 20 buildings over eight years — for Beijing's Finance Street development. It also has designed the 56 floor Jinao Tower in Nanjing and the 2 million-square-foot Huawei Technologies corporate campus in Shanghai, among other projects.

Political will vs. political won't

Compare China's track record of combining speed, scale and, increasingly, sustainability to San Francisco, where issues like bicycle parking and shadows cast by skyscrapers have delayed projects, sometimes by years.

"One of the reasons China is so successful is that Aaron Peskin isn't there," said Jeffrey Heller of **Heller Manus Architects**, referring to the former president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and current chair of the San Francisco Democratic Party.

Heller Manus' projects include the master plans for Guangzhou's 1,453-acre central business district, the Emeryville Marketplace and the redevelopment of the mid-Embarcadero following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

"In China, they're far more capitalist than we are these days," Heller said. "They want to get things done. If there's a need for housing and economic development, they shape their policies around that — and then things happen. Here, things don't happen."

China's rate of change and the scale of projects is only accelerating, said Po Chi Wu, executive director of the **Global Innovation Research Center** in the School of Software & Microelectronics at Peking University and managing director of venture capital firm **ragonBridge Capital** LLC.

"There are 1.3 billion people — four times the U.S. — with a growing middle class of 200 million to 350 million that's the engine of industrial and commercial growth," Wu said. "That's driving the acceleration."



Spencer Brown

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Coming together

Lo's Shui On Land Ltd. and the KIC — like other large-scale projects such as Finance Street — are examples of how that is all coming together.

With the KIC, replete with a Wal-Mart Supercenter on the edge of the development, Lo hopes to create a community that fosters innovation and scientific breakthroughs.

"We are trying to replicate Silicon Valley," said Lo, a frequent visitor to the Bay Area, where he works with local adviser-partner Skip Whitney. "I know that's impossible, but we want to use Silicon Valley as a model."

A concrete example? Yangpu district leaders and Lo talked about creating "open universities," connecting the 14 universities and colleges that are the KIC's backbone.

"They just went in and took down the wall and built fences in the time that we'd be trying to get buy-in," said Ellen Lou, a director at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

It's speed with a purpose. Getting things done advances local party officials' ambitions to move up through the government ranks, KIC developer Lo said.

"The party makes a decision and it goes," Lo said. "And the mayor, if he doesn't do anything, he moves. There's an incentive to make decisions."

Knowledge and Innovation Community, Shanghai

Developer: Shui On Land Ltd.

Master Plan: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP.

Acreage: 206 acres.

Planning started: 2003.

Breakdown of potential development: 11 million square feet of gross floor area permitted, including high-tech, office, education, retail, residential, sports and open space.

Former use: Industrial, universities, historic Jiangwan Sports Centre.

First buildings finished: Four buildings that surround KIC Plaza, including live-work and residential blocks, in mid-2006.

Square footage built to date: About 2.2 million square feet of gross floor area, with a further 1.1 million opening this year.

Tenants to date: Oracle, Silicon Valley Bank, Baidu, Kaixin, EMC, eBaotech.

Missioni Bay, San Francisco

Developers: Farallon Capital Management/Mission Bay Development Group and the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, and individual site developers including Alexandria Real Estate Equities, Bosa, McCarthy-Cook, Avalon Bay Communities and Shorenstein Properties.

Master plan: Johnson Fain and SMWM.

Acreage: 303 acres.

Planning started: 1991; 1996 under the current plan.

Breakdown of potential development: 6,000 housing units, 4.4 million square feet of office/biotech, 2.65 million square feet for UCSF research campus, 878,000 square feet of hospital space, 500,000 square feet of retail.

Former use: Rail yard, heavy industry, warehousing.

First building finished: UCSF's Genentech Hall in October 2004.

Square footage built to date: About 1.5 million leaseable square feet of office and biotech labs, plus more than 1.3 million gross square feet for UCSF and 3,126 housing units.

Tenants to date: UCSF, Gladstone Institutes, Merck & Co., Celgene Corp., Presidio Pharmaceuticals, Five Prime Therapeutics, FibroGen Inc., Nektar Therapeutics (later this year), Old Navy headquarters.