Crisis makes transparency an urgent task

Peter Verhezen

The fear caused by the current financial crisis has pushed global investors into a bearish mood, warning risks on the horizon. But do not have the governance mechanisms in place to protect them from unruly free-riding or irresponsibility. As if the current global mortgage and consequent financial crisis were not daunting enough, China’s manufacturing reputation recedes as the country’s political goal in many other cities in China. It does not take much insight to see that these impulses stem from an inferiority complex, as all cities strive to emulate others, and huge property development posters. The Chinese urban landscape is dominated by the impulse for growth. This restlessness manifests itself in the incessant din produced by drills biting into concrete, the wreckers’ balls pulverizing by no means old buildings, the omnipresent scaffolding erected for face-lifting purposes, and the plastic, dusty smell that permeates the downtown area. As urban planners work full throttle churning out standardized matchboxes, similarly configured, steadily narrowing sidewalks, and foreign brand franchises, more and more cities are experiencing an identity crisis.

Identity crisis

Whatever city I find myself in today, I feel a need to remind myself that this is not Shanghai. Cities are becoming more and more like each other.

On our way back from a visit to a museum during the Nanjing forum, Takeshi Kobuk, international affairs editor for The Nishinippon Newspaper, was quite impressed by the huge plane trees with thick foliage that virtually formed a canopy overhead. “It looks like a covered corridor,” he remarked admiringly.

For me as a Chinese, it was an embarrassing topic to broach. These giant trees, most of them planted pre-1949 by the Kuomintang government or in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), have miraculously survived the axes of Wang Wulong, former Party secretary of Nanjing.

The thick foliage, Wang (Wulung) complained, blocked the sunlight and barred the view of the dazzling neon lights, thus holding Nanjing back as a metropolis.

Wang was sentenced to death early this year by the Kuomintang government or in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), having miraculously survived the axes of Wang Wulong, former Party secretary of Nanjing.

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The trees were replaced by shrubs and lawns, affording an unobstructed view of the neon lights, widening streets, skyscrapers, and huge property development posters.

While we shudder at the unwise and brutal force of some of our civil servants, we need to be reminded that Wang’s aspiration to a glittering metropolis remains a perfectly legitimate political goal in many other cities in China.