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Mayor Xu Kuangdi

Mayor Xu is in his second term as Mayor of Shanghai, and served previously as Executive Vice Mayor. His background is not in government service, however, but in academia as a metallurgical engineer. He only left academia in 1989, when he joined the city government at the invitation of then-mayor Zhu Rongji. His rise to the city's leadership was rapid, reflecting, no doubt, the admiration Zhu has for his pragmatic and effective workstyle. Xu also serves as Executive Deputy Party Secretary to Politburo member Huang Ju.

Mayor Xu is arguably the best-known Chinese leader in the U.S. in terms of the personal relationships he has with business and government leaders there. He has visited the U.S. numerous times; when in New York he attracts the likes of Henry Kissinger and Maurice Greenberg, and numerous luminaries are left outside the dining room door. The mayor enjoyed a small private dinner with President and Mrs. Clinton during their visit to Shanghai in 1998. The mayor won admiration from many in the U.S. when he pressed forward with a visit of 400 sister-city delegates to San Francisco despite the chill in bilateral relations that followed the visit of Lee Teng-Hui to Cornell University in 1995. His two daughters currently reside in the U.S.

Mayor Xu is gregarious and hospitable, with a personality that attracts Westerners to him. He is very proud of Shanghai and can go on at length about the city's achievements, particularly progress made in improving the environment. Though known for his willingness to think and act pragmatically, Xu remains carefully loyal to the Party line. While he seems devoted to his work in Shanghai, he has often been rumored to be in line for higher positions in Beijing and can discuss national and international issues thoughtfully.

He lived abroad in London and Sweden in the 1980's, where he learned his English, and reportedly better Swedish.

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