



STORY 99

## CHINESE CONNECTION II

**A**llan Chen studied Finance and Economics at Tianjin University, came to Singapore in 1994 as an audit trainee and while working, qualified for his ACCA and also did a part-time MBA at NUS. He later joined a multinational company and became a Singapore citizen. In 2002, he decided to take the plunge and join Wearnes as it was looking to supplement the management team in China.

He recounts: "I knew that Wearnes had gone to China very early on and had plans to expand. China was a strategic location for Wearnes and I thought that my background, having worked in Singapore most of my working life and being originally from China, would be an advantage."

He first found himself posted to Shenyang in Northeast China, well known for its bitterly cold winters and biting winds. But it was not just the cold he had to contend with.

What was more of a shock, he says, was the work attitude, culture and mindset of the Chinese. It did not help that his wife of six years, whom he met in university, was then working in Singapore as an auditor.

As part of the team that was tasked to iron out issues in Wearnes' China property developments, such as difficult joint venture partners and complaints from unruly property owners, he knew the job was never going to be easy. But he was quite unprepared for the lack of respect for the law and for settling disputes through proper channels.

He has witnessed angry customers coming to protest at the office, lying down on the floor and refusing to move until they are forcibly evicted by security guards. He says it is a reflection of the environment that these people would come and demand unreasonable amounts of compensation for defects, despite the company offering to rectify them.

He is pleased however, to be part of the team to have settled many of these issues. "The team is supportive and with the backing from headquarters, we know we have the power to deal with such problems."

One difficulty which he found hard to get used to though, was the loneliness in Shenyang in the initial years when he returned to China. While his apartment was just a five minute walk from the office, he preferred to spend his time in the office as it was less lonely. He was eventually posted to Shanghai and his wife left Singapore to join him in 2004. They had their first child in Shanghai.

For now, his base is in Shanghai, but he believes he will eventually return to Singapore to live and work.