

old Chinese proverb states: "The mountains are high, and the emperor is far away." Here is a somewhat amusing example. During the Nationalist period in China, the government based in Nanjing declared that there be no government offices in the International Settlements in Shanghai. There

were already many there and it would have been costly and inconvenient to relocate them. Instead of voicing any opposition, Shanghai officials agreed with the policy. Meanwhile, they quietly renamed the offices located in the settlements.

### *Responsibility and Decision-making* ♦ ♦ ♦

*One less responsibility is better than one more.  
Unnecessary efforts bring unnecessary problems.*  
Chinese maxims

Much of social, economic and political activity in China is organized around groups. Even though decision-making is hierarchical and authority centralized, the process is consensual. Many people are consulted before a decision is ratified and implemented. The process is deliberate, time-consuming, and what most Canadians might consider excessively cautious. Implementing national legislation can take years since all levels of government have an opportunity to review it.

In our daily working lives in Canada, we have some degree of decision-making authority and we assume our Chinese counterparts have it as well. They do not. This has serious implications for getting things done in China. How do you know who is responsible for decisions? It is information not

readily volunteered. Who do you approach when you require a certain course of action? Often no one can tell you. It can be very frustrating.

The hierarchical structure of Chinese society is manifest in China's bureaucratic organizations. Decision-making is normally centralized among a few, often with very little, if any, downward delegation of authority. Chinese people prefer an authoritative leader who is considerate, capable, and who provides clear-cut directions. Individual initiative is unlikely to flourish in such an environment. If an employee or lower leader takes initiative, it may be viewed as being aggressive, encroaching on their supervisor's authority, or attempting to seek power. Assuming a high profile, standing out from the group by taking initiative, or