

# 60 Foreign Experts in CHINA

## 外国专家在中国



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## **Gilbert Van Kerckhove: Love for His Second Home**

Tall and thin, appearing energetic and astute, Van Kerckhove was born in Belgium, and can speak French, English, Flemish, Portuguese, German and Spanish. In 1981, he became the first Belgian resident in Beijing. Over the next 20 years, although working as well in other parts of the world, he has always regarded China as his second home. His Chinese friends call him "Old Fan." He is currently the Managing Director of the China Strategy Consulting Co. Ltd.

In 1973, he went to Brazil after receiving a master's degree in electronic engineering. His first job was project manager for Siemens, in charge of a construction project for the Brazilian Telephone Office. His experience there made him realize that an underdeveloped country can also have top engineers and accomplish top-quality engineering projects.

In 1980, Van Kerckhove received an assignment in Beijing, and thus arrived in China. He said, "At that time, the whole world did not have enough knowledge of China. China was a riddle to most people in Europe. My family and friends were all against my decision to work in China, because they imagined it to be poor and dangerous." After they all failed to persuade him, each said in an exasperated way, "Go to China? Are you nuts?" Van Kerckhove likes challenges, so he came to China anyway.

As one of the first foreigners doing business in China, he set up the Chinese office of the Belgian ACEC company for a project. He secured a government soft loan for China, and carried out the China Henan Pingdingshan Power Station project. He moved to Shanghai as the General Manager for the eastern China region of France's Alstom Co., and was involved in such major construction projects as Shanghai's Subway Line 3 and the Jinmao Building in Pudong. The total value of the contracts exceeded US\$ 700 million.

Towards the end of 1999, Mr. and Mrs. Van Kerckhove returned to Beijing and set up their own company, the China Strategy Consulting Co., Ltd. They moved into their own home in anticipation of a longer stay in China. Soon afterwards, he accepted an invitation from the Investment Promotion Bureau to serve as a senior consultant to the Beijing municipal government. His job was to present Beijing and China to prospective foreign investors in a way readily understandable to foreigners, and to speedily answer questions from visiting foreign groups.

As a result of his close long-term cooperation with the Beijing municipal government, Van Kerckhove was recommended in 2001 for participation in the preparations for the Beijing Olympic Games. He became an investment promotion commissioner for Olympic projects on the Beijing Municipal Planning Commission. He mainly assisted in the decisions to construct large-scale Olympic venues.

Van Kerckhove proposed a unified bidding concept: Design-Construction-Financing-Operation. He did a great deal of publicity through the internet, explaining the unified bidding concept to foreign embassies, chambers of commerce and potential overseas investors, advising them on how to present a unified bid. He lobbied vigorously among key potential overseas bidders and maintained contact with dozens of embassies and chambers of commerce as well as hundreds of companies, writing more than 100 reports.

When SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic hit Beijing in the spring of 2003, work in many institutions came to a standstill. Yet preparations for the Olympic Games did not stop for a single day. For a time, the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) even moved its meetings to Van Kerckhove's home, for the sake of convenience. During this period, in order to enable the work of inviting tenders for the National Indoor Stadium to proceed smoothly in Hainan Province, Van Kerckhove was not only involved in busy preparatory work, but also took advantage of his extensive international connections to contact world-famous stadium operators, insurance management companies and risk management companies, inviting them to participate in the assessment work in Hainan.

He made many rationalization proposals in the course of assisting in the construction of the National Stadium (Bird's Nest) and the National Aquatics Center (Water Cube), becoming a key consultant on urban construction for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. He contributed extensive intellectual support and hard work to invite international tenders for the Water Cube and the Bird's Nest.

Van Kerckhove says: "I have a big mouth and a bit of courage." He spent a great deal of time and energy making presentations on the business environment in China.

as well as recommendations to foreign delegations at the request of embassies. He earned kudos from embassies and chambers of commerce. He called himself a "lobbyist" for Beijing and a "bridge" between the Chinese administrative institutions and foreign business organizations for the sake of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

He focused on how to make effective use of the Olympic venues and ensure sustainable economic development of Beijing after the successful staging of the Olympic Games.

### A Cultural Messenger

Van Kerckhove remains a cultural messenger with a warm heart for promoting exchange between Chinese and European cultures. He served as the representative of Belgium's internationally renowned sculptor, Olivier Strebelle, who donated the large sculpture Athletes Alley to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Strebelle's works are displayed in public places in 37 countries, including Belgium, Russia, Israel, Italy, Switzerland, the US and Singapore. Many of his works are brilliant models of large urban sculpture and attractions of cities.

The large sculpture Athletes Alley was conceived 20 years ago. It consists of five groups of stainless steel sculptures representing five athletes. It bears a caption reading "Citius, Altius, Fortius" (the Olympic motto: "Swifter, higher, stronger"). With Van Kerckhove's help, the sculptor spent two years improving his work. In mid-February 2006, the leadership of the Beijing municipal government agreed to accept the donation of Strebelle's artwork. This was the first case of Beijing accepting a foreign sculpture with an Olympic theme.

### Love for His Second Home

Van Kerckhove has lived in Beijing for more than 20 years and has witnessed all the changes from the very beginning of the reform and opening-up policy. He says, "Beijing has brought about changes in 25 years which developed countries took 100 years to achieve." He likes Beijing best because it exudes culture. He often "brags" to his foreign friends about how good it is to live in Beijing. He often strolls through the back lanes or *hutong* and goes shopping, attempting to mingle with local inhabitants. He often tries out his not-so-fluent Chinese on the elders he meets in the *hutong*. On weekends, he travels to outskirts of Beijing, such as to Miyun and Huairou.

He has learned from his personal experiences that these outskirts have not been adequately built up with public facilities. He believes that urban growth in China is already rapid enough, but that rural development is weak. Rural economic development does not mean more roads or houses alone, he adds, for more important are the

building of public service facilities. More funding should go into the areas of science, education, culture and health, while the financial burdens on farmers should be lightened so their purchasing power will be steadily increased. He was thus very glad to hear that the agricultural tax had been abolished.

Commenting on the construction of more satellite cities around Beijing, Van Kerckhove says: "Downtown Beijing has spread too much. How to reduce density while promoting the development of surrounding towns and villages – this has been a subject of my research. Satellite cities are a good idea."

Gilbert Van Kerckhove received the Magnolia Silver Award from the Shanghai municipal government in 1999, the Great Wall Friendship Award from the Beijing municipal government in 2004, and the Friendship Award from the Chinese government in 2005. As a special advisor for Belgium's Ministry of Foreign Trade, he was highly praised for his work and made a Knight of the Order of the Crown by the Belgian Crown Prince in the name of the King in 2004. In 1998, along with the heads of 10 foreign chambers of commerce in Shanghai, he organized a fundraising activity among expatriates in the city and donated 1.2 million yuan to disaster-hit areas, for which he was awarded the Shanghai Red Cross Medal.

(by Chen Weihua, adapted from the book *Internationalized Talents Are Bridges for World Communication*, 2007, China Media University Press)



## 北京奥运会经济顾问——范克高夫

### 最终来中国

范克高夫前前后后在中国生活了20多年，1999年他获得上海“白玉兰奖”，2004年获得北京“长城友谊奖”，2005年获得中国政府“友谊奖”。范克高夫作为比利时外贸部的特别顾问，他的工作得到了很高的评价并获得2004年比利时王子以国王的名义授予他的骑士勋章。1998年，范克高夫联合10个驻沪的外国商会主席组织发动了驻沪外国人的募捐义卖活动，募到120万元人民币捐给灾区。因此他荣获上海“红十字会奖”。

范克高夫高高的个头，瘦瘦的，但很精神，看上去很精明练达。他是比利时人，会讲法语、英语、荷兰语、葡萄牙语、德语、西班牙语等在内的7国语言。1981年，范克高夫成为北京市第一个比利时居民，虽然在此后的20年间，他的工作地点曾辗转全球多个国家，但中国在他的心目中始终是第二故乡，中国朋友都亲昵地称他“老范”。他现在是北京大策略有限公司总经理。

1973年，获得电机电器工程硕士的范克高夫去了巴西，开始了他的第一份工作，任西门子公司的项目经理，负责巴西电话局的建设项目。在巴西的工程经历和经验让范克高夫认识到，在不发达国家同样可以找到一流的工程师，完成一流的工程项目。

1980年，范克高夫接受了一项在北京的工作，来到中国。他说：“那时全世界对中国的

认识还非常不够，中国对于大多数西方国家的人来讲还是一个谜。家人和朋友一致反对我来华工作，他们说，中国贫穷而且危险。”每个人在劝说的最后，几乎都忍无可忍地高声质问他：“去中国，你疯了吗？”但是，喜欢挑战的范克高夫最终还是来到了中国。

作为最早来华的外籍商务人士之一，范克高夫来到中国组建比利时ACEC公司的中国办事处，并为中国引进了第一笔国外政府软贷款，执行了中国河南平顶山的发电站项目，作为法国阿尔斯通驻中国华东地区总经理来到上海，上海地铁3号线及浦东金茂大厦等诸多重大项目的建设当年就是由他负责的，涉及合同总金额超过7亿美元。

## 奥运会顾问

1999年底，范克高夫与夫人又回到北京，成立了自己的公司——北京大策略有限公司，搬进了自己买的房子，“希望更久地留在中国”。刚到北京的范克高夫，接受了北京投资促进局的邀请，成为北京市政府的高级顾问。他向来华的外商介绍北京的情况，用外国人更容易理解的方式来诠释中国和北京，及时回答来华国外代表团的各种疑问。

由于与北京市政府长期的密切合作，2001年，范克高夫被推荐参加奥运会的筹备工作，成为北京市计委奥运项目的投资促进专员，主要协助确定大型奥运场馆的建设项目。范克高夫提出联合体投标的概念：设计-建设-融资-运营，并利用网络扩大宣传，解释联合体概念。对大使馆、商会及潜在国外投资商做了大量的解释及引导如何组建“联合体”的工作，跟踪游说国外重点潜在投资商参加项目投标，接触交流了几十家大使馆及商会、数百家公司，写了百多份报告。

2003年，北京遭遇“非典”，全城许多机构的工作都陷于停顿状态，但奥运会的筹备工作却一天也没有因此而停顿。有一段时间，为了方便，北京市奥组委甚至将筹备会议设在范克高夫的家里召开。在此期间，为了使在海南召开的国家体育场馆招标工作能够顺利进行，范克高夫不仅参与各种繁琐的招标准备工作，而且，利用自己在国际上丰富的人脉关系，联络世界著名场馆运营商、保险管理公司及风险管理公司来海南参与评标工作。

范克高夫在协助国家体育场和国家游泳中心大型奥运场馆的建设工作中，提出了大量的合理化建议，成为2008北京奥运会城市建设方面的一个关键的城市顾问，在“水立方”和“鸟巢”的国际化招标进程中都凝聚了他的智慧和汗水。

范克高夫说：“我有一张大嘴和一些勇气。”他花费了大量时间和精力根据各使馆的要求，义务给外国代表团介绍中国的商业环境、提供建议，得到了大使馆、商会的好评。他则自称是北京的“说客”，为北京2008年奥运会“搭建中国管理机构和外国商业团体之间的桥梁”。

范克高夫接下来的新课题是：如何在成功举办2008年奥运会之后，使奥运场馆得到有效利用，让北京的经济实现可持续发展。

## 文化使者

范克高夫也是热心中西文化交流的使者，他担任了比利时世界著名雕塑家斯特贝尔先生为北京捐赠雕塑作品的代表，将大型雕塑——“运动员之路”，献给2008北京奥运会。

斯特贝尔先生是世界著名的雕塑家，他的艺术作品分布在世界各地37个国家的公共场所中，他的许多作品成为城市的大型艺术雕塑及城市的亮点。在比利时、俄国、德国、以色列、意大利、瑞士、美国和新加坡等国家均可以看到他的大型作品。

20年前斯特贝尔先生以奥运为主题的大型雕塑群概念设计——“运动员之路”是由5组不锈钢雕塑组成，高低不等，排列在公园或大道上。马路的起始处放置两个标牌，拉丁语：citius, altius, fortius；中文：更快、更高、更强。在范克高夫的协助下，艺术家斯特贝尔的雕塑经过两年多的修改和完善，2006年2月中旬北京市人民政府主管领导同意接收斯特贝尔的捐赠，这是北京第一个接收国外奥运雕塑的艺术品。

## 热爱第二故乡

范克高夫居住在北京20多年，见证了改革开放以来的全部变迁。他说，“在发达国家中用了100年发生的改变，北京只用了25年就做到了。”对北京的印象，老范说，“这是我最喜爱的城市，充满了浓郁的人文气息。”范克高夫常向他的外国朋友们“炫耀”生活在北京的好处。老范还常常串胡同、逛市场，走进寻常百姓的生活圈中去，操着生硬的汉语和胡同里的大爷大妈攀谈几句。每当周末他到京郊去走走，对密云、怀柔等郊区县，他能够叫得出名字说得清方位。

老范亲身体验了远郊区县服务设施的欠缺之后，他认为中国城市的发展速度已经够快了，农村则是一块“短板”。发展农村经济并不仅仅是修路盖房子，更重要的是农村的“软件”——公共服务体系的建设。在科教文卫领域，应加大投入的力度，减轻农民的各项负担，不断提高农村人口购买力。当他听到中国取消了农业税之后，便忍不住拍手叫好。

对北京周边日益兴起的卫星城建设，老范说：“北京的城市中心区铺得太大，如何能够分散人口密度，同时带动周边村镇发展一直是我研究的课题。卫星城就是个好主意。”

（文/陈炜华 原载《国际化人才世界沟通的桥梁》2007年中国传媒大学出版社，本文有删改）