

The World from the Ground Up

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Shanghai Expo 2010: Better City, Better Life

The Beijing Olympics of this past August, with all of its urban redevelopment, state-of-the art electronics and showmanship, and thrilling competition gave China an enviable position of pre-eminence on the world stage.

The Middle Kingdom is preparing for a return engagement.

In only seventeen months, the World Expo will open in downtown Shanghai, China's second-most important city and its capital of 21st Century commerce, culture, and vitality. Opening on May 1 and running through October 31, 2010, the festivities will be situated in areas surrounding the Nanpu and Lupu Bridges which traverse Shanghai's main river, the Huangpu River. The Expo zone covers just over 2 square kilometers and currently contains an industrial park including older factories, a steel plant, warehouses and shipping-related facilities. Event organizers expect an influx of approximately 70 million people into Shanghai over and above its roughly 13 million strong permanent citizenry.

With an estimated 5 million Expo visitors coming from foreign countries, this exposition promises to be the most heavily visited in history if projected visitor goals materialize. Among extensive planned improvements to the city's infrastructure, hosting capacity and perhaps some post-Beijing, redoubled media exposure.

What is a World Expo?

The World Exposition (Expo) or World's Fair, as it is also known, is a large, public exhibition that has been held in a number of major cities world-wide since the mid-19th century. It has been hosted by many different countries, the vast majority of which being western, since its inaugural ceremonies commenced in London in 1851 under the verbose title, "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations." In past eras the Expo has centered on different themes reflecting culture and industry relevant to the times. In recent history the dominant theme has been a showcase of the nations: each country erects a national pavilion and displays some recent inventions or indigenous products but more importantly tries to brand itself to the world. Some of the budgets for these pavilions can run north of \$20 million. For an example of the lengths to which a participating country might go, the Japanese have released a magnificent artist's rendering of their proposed pavilion and can be seen [here](#).

Perhaps the most lasting and famous structure erected for a World Fair is the Eiffel Tower in Paris, constructed for the 1889 World's Fair which could certainly claim the title of "successful" in terms of longevity and ubiquitous renown. Although a single structure such as the Eiffel Tower is the exception rather than the rule, much infrastructural renovation and construction occurs in and around the immediate vicinity of the Expo itself and, in the case of Shanghai, around the entire region.

Pushing to Build a Legacy

The Shanghai Expo will take place during the execution of some ambitious complementary infrastructure projects. A large-scale project currently moving forward is the general expansion of rail lines in China by a mindboggling 26,100 miles by 2015. Some of these lines carry commodities from mining towns in the north to ports in the south for shipping overseas. According to the World Bank, Chinese rail lines already carry 25% of the world's railway traffic on just 6% of its track length—an exercise in traffic management if ever there was.

Another recent improvement is the Lupu Bridge; named for the two districts—Luwan District and Pudong New District—that it connects. These two districts will house the bulk of the Expo activity. The Lupu Bridge is an engineering marvel. Its main arch spans 2,460 feet, boasts six traffic lanes and has a total length of almost 2.5 miles. It is considered to be the longest arch bridge in the world. Other ongoing projects include major upgrades and expansion at the international Pudong Airport, the Dalian Road Tunnel, the Xiangyin Road Tunnel, and a much-needed subway network which should reach 11 lines by 2010 according to the Expo website.

Outside of Shanghai, the government has constructed the world's largest deep-water port. Located at the end of the 22-mile Hangzhou Bridge, the Yangshan deep-water port, combined with facilities on the mainland, is the second-busiest port in the world and is rapidly climbing toward the top spot which it should take in 2015.

Not all projects, however, have gone as planned.

One particular infrastructure project that has seen its share of negative media spotlight is a high-speed rail line. In September of 2006, the magnetic levitation (MAGLEV) upgrade to Shanghai's bullet train was purportedly stopped due to "...electromagnetic radiation concerns..." The upgrade was a proposed extension of eight kilometers to the world's only commercially-operating high-speed MAGLEV train which would have expanded the line to reach the heart of the Expo hub from the Pudong Airport roughly 30 kilometers away. However the party secretary of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the CPC, and the MAGLEV rail extension's biggest proponent, was removed from office for crimes concerning Shanghai's pension fund and the leadership shake-up has had a delaying effect on the MAGLEV project. Government officials have recently stated that a renewed effort to build this line will commence in 2010 and be finished in 2014 which some observers note is optimistic from a budgeting standpoint

Shanghai Expo Online

The organization in charge of chartering and ensuring the successful completion of Expos the world over is the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE). The organization's stated mission is two-fold; "To oversee the calendar, the bidding, the selection and the organization of World Expositions and to establish a framework allowing countries to cooperate under the best conditions as organizers of Expositions or as participants through national pavilions."

Recently, V. G. Loscertales, Secretary General of the Bureau of International Exhibitions (BIE), released a statement describing an interactive website called Shanghai Expo Online. The site is to display the participating countries' pavilions electronically for those interested in seeing the pavilions and other attractions but not willing or able to physically travel to Shanghai. This

website, according to Mr. Loscertales, is the first of its kind to offer realistic 3-dimensional representations of participating country pavilions and will open the Shanghai Expo to many more millions of people around the world who have the ability to go online. The site will have many language options as well to reach the widest viewing audience possible.

One of the main purposes behind establishing an online version of the Expo, according to Mr. Loscertales, is "...to bring the world to the world." He elaborates by saying, "The Expo site in the city of Shanghai will bring China a glimpse and a vision of each your countries. The Expo online will bring your countries beyond borders to the finger tips of each person with internet access on the planet, that is billions of citizens of all ages, races and walks of life."

The Secretary General is also a firm believer in the power of the internet to bring added visibility to the Expo long after the ceremonies in Shanghai have concluded. Suggesting that "A second way in which the Expo Online can fulfill a cultural mission is by creating a permanent virtual legacy for the Expo that will enhance and complete the cultural heritage of each physical Expo. Expo Online will be accessible by everyone long after the physical Expo has closed thus providing a virtual destination for all sorts of publics [sic].

He finally feels that Expo Online will appeal to a broad swath of the world community interested in current and future Expos. "Shanghai 2010 Online will be a destination for many different publics [sic]: for the curious public looking at exploring the world, for the Expo experts that are doing research on World Expos, and even for future organizers who will look at the online project as a benchmark to improve and innovate their own Expo."

Final Word

Once again, China will be combining widespread infrastructure projects with a high-profile event that invites the world's attention. In the same way that the Olympics became a political pretext for redevelopment in Beijing, the Expo is providing motivation for certain urban projects in Shanghai. And to the extent the Expo itself is a continuation of China's public relations effort to the world, many people will view the Expo as an encouraging surge in Asian interest for participating in global cultural exchanges. But more importantly, the Expo and the infrastructure improvements that surround it may continue to boost Shanghai's position in East Asia as a city that rivals Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Singapore for commerce and lifestyle.

For more information about the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai, China, explore the following websites:

<http://www.expo2010china.com/expo/expoenglish/oe/es/index.html>

<http://en.expo2010china.com/>