

## Clear Water, Deep Water

In recent history, rare have been, if any, the occurrences where the same country had been selected to run in a row the Olympic Games and, two years later, the next World Exhibition. That China has been able to assume the burden of such responsibility, with its financial and other costs, would remain for long a real performance. Few nations would have dared to launch themselves in such an enterprise. With vivid memories of the 2008 Beijing Games' opening ceremony, rekindled by the official inauguration of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, of a lesser grandiose scale, the international community shares the joy of the *Haibao*, the mascot of the exhibition, freshly out of clear water, for these well deserved celebrations.

In most of its sections, this issue of 神州交流—Chinese Cross Currents》 would like to offer a variety of studies inspired by the “long march” of China towards the realization of some of its dreams. The lessons of history are first worth being recalled, even if their background has been quite painful. Moreover, the progress so evident in the evolution of Chinese society remains somehow burdened by a predicament where the development of urban life in many cities, old and new, on always some higher level of wealth, risks to leave behind the betterment of rural life without which cities could not survive. The challenges of urbanisation, widespread in East Asia, is not proper to China. But they present themselves in this country on a much larger scale and with a much higher urgency. Hence the discussion of the general theme of the Exhibition “City Makes Life Better”, even if, in the special pavilions dedicated to it, any obvious solution has still to be looked for, worked out and implemented.

That Shanghai had been chosen by Chinese authorities as the most promising candidate to be the site for the Exhibition would not surprise anyone knowledgeable about the city's recent history. Situated “on the sea”, open to commercial exchanges with and to artistic influences from overseas nations, Shanghai has only recently recovered her past glory. In ancient times, these exchanges and influences were focused “inland”, where the branches of the Silk Road that reached to Eurasia had made of Chang'an (the modern Xi'an) a centre where various cultural traditions have met freely during the Tang dynasty for three centuries. One would wish a similar creativity to the modern city and its Exhibition!

The world needs such celebrations, be they only some short pauses during which peoples and nations can meet and grow in mutual knowledge and a deeper understanding of their common endeavour. When the Exhibition closes down at the end of October, will it be considered as a happy period placed into brackets, so to say, at the end of the feast? Or will it be envisioned as a new stage that will remain open to new achievements? History will tell.

But despite the fact that urbanisation will affect the world in the coming years, with already more than half of the global population living in cities,<sup>1</sup> it might equally be possible that the World Expo be considered by some people as a distraction from more present or local problems and tragedies: even world media frequently report facts that claim for solution. Take for instance what news were made of for recent months: locally, the growing numbers of protests, occasionally violent, in Chinese rural townships; or, related to working and salary conditions, a series of attempted suicides in a large factory; or overseas, the debt crisis of some European countries that directly threatens the EU economic viability: are these news only “the tip of an iceberg”, or, as happened in the Gulf of Mexico, signs of a lurking crisis threatening a fragile stability floating on some “deep water horizon”?

685 words Yves Camus, Editor

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, 25 March 2010 – With 50.5 per cent or 3.5 billion of the people on Earth living in cities in 2010 and urban populations growing, often at the expense of rural areas, the global population as a whole has become more urban and less rural. Cf. [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/doc\\_press-release.htm](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/doc_press-release.htm), accessed on May 29, 2010.