

# Volunteer Spirit, a beautiful landscape of the Shanghai World Exposition

Chen Xinhan

The long-awaited World Exposition in Shanghai commenced on the evening of April 30, 2010. The World Exposition, while boasting many visible and invisible landscapes, is displaying to us its beautiful scenery of the spirit of volunteers.

## 1. The World Exposition promotes the modern level of volunteer activities

While presenting its scientific achievements and industrial technology, its wholehearted embodiment of humanistic care and concerns toward the future of mankind, as a beating pulse of the contemporary humanity spirit, can be felt from the organization and arrangement of each and every World Exposition from its inception. A vague tension was felt in 1851 at the first World Exposition in London between the Victoria people's physical and spiritual relationships; and then, in the Paris World Exposition, France sought to reflect a core humanistic spirit agitated by the French revolution via its traditions of humanity and arts. The post-World War II World Expositions gradually developed themselves into a forum where a confluence of different cultures brought up common issues for discussion and communication, which inspired the thinking of a new generation and formed a variety of new cultural phenomena. The humanistic spirit embodied within, referred to as "the greater spiritual legacy of the World Exposition compared to its material heritage", are an inseparable, vital part to each World Exposition.

Shanghai World Exposition is held wherein it let visitors to view the world while being viewed by the world. What will Shanghai present to the world during the World Exposition? What legacy can the World Exposition endow for Shanghai? There should be not only the construction of ultra-modern buildings in park districts and advanced facilities of the Shanghai urban environment, but also tangible yet insubstantial strength felt from social facets, of which the volunteer spirit has been a crucial element. As said by Ma Chunlie, director of the Volunteer Department, PR and Media Services of the Shanghai World Exposition, "The volunteer culture has become the most beautiful landscape of the Shanghai World Exposition, leaving behind it a profound, cherished memory." Volunteer activities, an innate culture of the World Exposition, is also representative to the ethos of contemporary China undergoing tremendous transitions.

To trace its origin, the wellspring of the Chinese volunteerism can be said to have sprouted from the "Learn from Lei Feng" campaign in the 60s of the last century; a "Learning from Lei Feng Day," held every year on March 5, derives from this campaign. During the campaign in the 90s, a group of youth at the Railway Department raised up the "volunteer work" banner, indicating the positive impact China had received from the world volunteer movement. However, today's volunteer activities are not simply a resumption or continuation of the Learning from Lei Feng campaign. Under the context of China's social transformation, the development of volunteer services and organizations mirrors the maturity of citizen morals progress Reform and Opening progress, and reflects the efforts dedicated to the improvement of social protection institutions and efficient allocation of social resources.

The World Exposition is expected to attract more than 70 million visitors domestically and internationally, of which, 5% are from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and other overseas regions, 20% from Shanghai, 30% from the Yangtze Delta region, and 45% from other domestic provinces. It is unfathomable to carry out such a large-scaled exhibition merely on efforts of business planning or administrative deployment; it calls for, undoubtedly, the participation of volunteer forces from all social levels. To prepare for the opening of the World Exposition, Shanghai starts from May 2009 to recruit volunteers, attracting immediately more than 60 million applicants, among them young students, retired workers, company employees, even corporate CEOs and civil officers. Currently there are 77,000 volunteers working in the park districts and about 130,000 service-station volunteers spreading all over the municipality, who are enlisted from the city's 18 districts and counties, 53 colleges and universities, more than 200 communities and a broad range of enterprises. According to an incomplete statistics, the number of the city's varied kinds of volunteers has totaled 1.97 million, and that of the volunteer service projects, more than 300.<sup>1</sup> It is expected that in the World Exposition's 180-day duration, its volunteer populace will continue to expand, and its services increase. In Shanghai, volunteer activities have become a significantly influential social engagement. Volunteers are substantiating their motto, "Embracing our World Exposition with our performance", by their actions. Today, visitors from all over the world and the country are greeted, everywhere in Shanghai's public place, with the lovely blue Haibao mascot of the Shanghai World Exposition and smiling volunteers. The spirit of the Shanghai volunteers, shown in a most intuitive form, has constituted the city's most beautiful landscape.

## 2. Volunteer activities embody the theme of the World Exposition

Among the phrasing of the World Exposition theme, "City Makes Life Better", and its English version, "Better City, Better Life", which literary conveys a meaning of "better city makes better life", we find the two key words: "city" and "life".

"City" is a keyword of the World Exposition. Modern urban management theories has no longer understood municipal governance as purely a government-enforced administration, but rather, a closer tie and cooperation between administrative agencies and their citizens, which signify an active involvement of the public into communal affairs. The co-governance by the administration and public has become a trend among the topnotch metropolises in the world. In the areas where government facilities are limited and market machinery impotent, "the ample deployment of the self-management, self-service, self-education and self-monitoring functions by the public" has become an important aspect of urban management. Having citizens adequately informed of and actively World Expositioned to public opinions has been an inseparable task to the hosting and exhibiting process of the World Exposition. Shanghai Municipal government set up a World Exposition Coordination Bureau, of which actively seeking public participation is an important concern. Volunteer activities, constituting an important level in the World Exposition, are used to measure the public participation in communal affairs, for, volunteers by involving themselves into those

---

<sup>1</sup> For these figures, see Ma Chunlei: "May the volunteer Culture become the most profound memory in the Shanghai World Expo", *Liberation Daily*, March 19, 2010, page 20.

activities can learn more about the World Exposition, and in turn they can constantly bring up comments to improve it; in fact, volunteers did contribute many invaluable comments, which were adopted by the World Exposition Coordination Bureau in a timely manner. The capability to mobilize its citizens into playing a part in public affairs has become an important pointer to a government's urban management competence. Volunteer activities, through the operation of the World Exposition, are testing and witnessing the improvement of the city's management faculties.

"Life" is yet another key word of the World Exposition. As better city life increasingly becomes a focus of attention, the quality of life, of the good or bad, has gone beyond concerns as economic indicators and urban facilities, and pertained to serious issues such as the public's spiritual well-being and citizen quality; the rearing of a people points to not just the public literacy and education, but also a citizen spirit in engaging public undertakings and society-rewarding behaviors. Surveys on many top-tier cities show that a high quality of life, a high satisfaction level on all aspects of life, and a bliss and happiness on the spiritual well-being are vital to their citizens' willingness to assist others and do good to their societies, resulting in a favorable social ethos and high morality. Therefore, a city's volunteer spirit, or its citizens' willingness to partake various public-spirited undertakings, reflects the level of cultivation of its citizens and its quality of life. The World Exposition provides an excellent opportunity for Shanghai to develop its volunteer spirit. The active involvement into the World Exposition-related volunteer services, by the Shanghai citizens, denotes a fervent public spirit of the Shanghaiese who care about social welfares, and who, during the process of partaking, are witnessing the flourishing of the volunteer spirit throughout the metropolis. These have constituted a living index against the investigation on Shanghai's quality of life and the making of Shanghai citizens.

### 3. Long-live the volunteer spirit! May it enjoy a wide spreading and lasting promulgation!

Volunteer spirit is often understood as "dedication". Participating public activities and thus contributing to the society, of course, are a dedication, and of altruistic nature. Yet this understanding alone is not enough. The volunteer's speech in the "Volunteer Forum and the 32nd Cultural Forum" is well said: "The activities of volunteers are not so much dedication as they are a gain. As the ancient Chinese thinker Lao Tzu in his *Daodejing* points out, 'unselfishness is the greatest selfishness'; this can best describe the volunteer spirit. We must utter our sincere 'thank you' to those who being helped, for it is precisely during the process of helping them that we have exerted our own value and experienced what constitutes happiness."<sup>2</sup> Combining dedication and gaining, the volunteer spirit embodies "dedication, friendship, mutual assistance and solidarity"; to sum up into one word, it is "love", as expressed by the lyric of the World Exposition's theme song, *The World*, "Your love is our world."

How to perpetuate and spread the volunteer spirit? "How to create a sustainable cultural atmosphere and environment for the volunteer service practices during the World Exposition, and cast them into a behavior model of participation and assistance, which is to be willing

---

<sup>2</sup> *Liberation Daily* reporters Cao Jing & Wei Huang: "A cultural proposition of the Expo volunteers", *Liberation Daily*, March 13, 2010, page 6.

followed by every citizen, regardless he is or not with a volunteer status?" In the light of the proliferation of material fetishism during a transition period, the ethos of the so-called "forward-looking for money" instead of "people" has caused a landslide of social morality, leaving behind a series of issues for us to ponder about.

For the post-World Exposition era, I deem it important to strike the two key points for the preservation and flourishing of the volunteer spirit: first, institutionalize to perfect it. Organizing volunteer activities is a highly professional work. The incentive machinery it uses is completely different from the mechanism of market competition and governmental administrative apportionment. This requires us to rule out overt utilitarian volunteer activities and avoid those deployed by labor-apportioned administration; at the same time, we need to study the internal mechanism of voluntary activities as a whole under market economy to make it in accord with the latter while transcending the latter's utilitarian nature; we want it to adhere to the voluntary principle while avoiding being drifted away from organizational guidance. The perfection of institution though, is not to be achieved overnight.

Second, law enforcement must be adopted. A year ago, in June 2009, the Thirteenth Shanghai People's Congress had just passed the "Shanghai Volunteer Ordinance". The regulation, while reflecting the achievement made in and the thoughts given to the development of the Shanghai volunteer activities, also functioned to stamp a potent legal confirmation upon it. The promulgation of the Ordinance is not only targeted at the World Exposition, but also for Shanghai, whose increasingly aging society calls for the establishment of a social security institution. Volunteer service, as a commendable, morally uplifting behavior, is worthy of promotion and protection, "especially when the principles espoused by market economy, such as 'equivalent exchange', 'clear property right', 'indented contract' etc., had penetrated into areas of morality and life, and had become corrosive to the humanistic spirit of dedication, regulation and adjustment by laws have become imperative."<sup>3</sup> Without doubt, as to how to protect, through legal enforcement, volunteer activities from being contaminated by the "smells of cash", and as to how to resist the harmful "public service principles", we need to count on the steady improvement of regulations.

---

<sup>3</sup> "Cherish the volunteer spirit with the rule of law", *Liberation Daily*, June 9, 2009.