

# Ideals on the “Shanghai World Expo” and “Cosmopolitanism”

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From the first “World’s Fair” in London in 1851, 160 years later in the year 2010, the fair is finally being held in Shanghai. Shanghai is not a city that lags behind the times, and in the first half of the twentieth century joined the ranks of London, Paris, and New York as an “international metropolis.” Yet, the “World’s Fair” was previously always held in Europe, America, Japan, or other industrialized nations, and was never held in Shanghai, which brought pain to the Chinese people. Historically, the reason why the fair was never held in the city was not because it lacked the willingness or ability to do so. On the contrary, from the 1880’s, Shanghainese from all walks of life actively attended the World Fair, as all previous “Chinese Pavilions” were successively built, shipped, and sent for display from the city. Shanghai is also not a city that lacks the ability to organize large scale international events. With the complete backing of the entire city, it three times, in 1915, 1921, and 1927, held the “Far East Asian Olympic Games”, with people from all circles hoping these were in preparation for submitting an Olympic bid. The custom’s house, Shanghai’s Chamber of Commerce, the “Southern Seas Industrial Association” and “Jiangsu’s Educational Council”, have multiple times held national “games” (exhibitions) in Shanghai, as a way to practice for the undertaking of the “World’s Fair”. Therefore, the reformist Zheng Guanying, writer Lu Shi’e, activist Liang Qichao, and revolutionist Sun Yat-Sen, all suggested that the “World’s Fair” should be held in Shanghai. This is also to say that Shanghai’s “World Expo Dream” began over one hundred years ago.

During the Japanese War of Aggression against China from 1931 to 1945 and the Chinese Civil War from 1945 to 1949, Shanghai’s “glory days” ceased to exist, and the city entered into a period of decline with its “Olympic” and “World Fair” dreams dashed. In the 1950’s, China enacted a closed door policy where only the northern borders with the Soviet Union and other countries were open. The southeastern seacoasts, however, were subject to sanctions and blockades and were thus excluded from the international community. Shanghai, at one time the most open city in the world, had been locked behind a heavy iron curtain and of course there were no more discussion of the “World’s Fair”. It can now be said, that for the city and people of Shanghai to hold the “World Expo” in 2010, is not really something completely new. To a considerable extent, the “World Expo” is a form of apology and compensation from modern history to Shanghai.

100 years ago, Beijing was certainly not a city with an “Olympic Dream”, but in 2008, it held an Olympics that was the pride of the nation. 100 years ago, Shanghai was already an ambitious “international metropolis”, who’s natural endowments spurred its desire to host large international events, this is a city who at the same time had both “Olympic” and World Expo” dreams. In 2010, Shanghai finally achieved the status of host and is now holding the expo. The world finally gave Shanghai a great opportunity and Shanghai wants to return the favor by giving the world a surprise. For two decades, the Shanghainese people have anxiously wanted to shake off the shackles of the old system and through the “opening up and reform policies”, again obtain the recognition of the international community; the “World Expo” has presented Shanghai with its biggest opportunity. In the five years spent organizing for the event, the seemingly on the surface very calm Shanghainese were actually holding a lot of emotion inside, and were full of pride and confidence for this once in a hundred year

opportunity. What they are proud of is an international city with a modern destiny. The mood regarding this expo seems to be less about a “the pride of a nation” and more about the “pride of a city”.

If we closely analyze the spirit of the “World Expo” and the “Olympics”, there are both similarities and differences between the two. The spirit of the Olympics is to unearth man’s potential and be “faster, higher, and stronger”; it’s a very healthy mentality. The spirit of the World Expo is more about encouraging people from all nations to put forth their best before the world to see, where a feeling of fraternity emerges. However, the modern day Olympics are about the people of a nation who form a “national team” and engage in fierce competition for medals. In the process of competition, the development of feelings of confrontation between athletes and spectators will inevitably rise, and if handled poorly, these emotions can be turned into feelings of “nationalism”. Yet today’s “World Expo” is different in that it not only has “Country Pavilions”, but also “Corporation Pavilions”, “Non-Governmental Organization Pavilions”, “Regional Pavilions”, “City Pavilions”, etc. It is not about competition, but is about cooperation; it is not about beating someone else in order to win, but about putting yourself on display, appreciating others, studying others, and therefore is more suitable in developing cross cultural and civilization exchanges, as well as overcoming individual shortcomings by learning from the strong points of others. A scholar from an older generation once said: “Everyone is beautiful in their own way, and should put this beauty on display. At the same time one should appreciate the beauty in others; we should have an open mind towards different kinds of beauty and that these various types of beauty should live in harmony with one another” this summary is a very appropriate description of the spirit of the “World Expo”.

No matter whether from a historical, realist, or future development perspective, the 2010 Shanghai World Expo has no reason to be considered as an event of “nationalism”. The Shanghai World Expo should be considered as the staging of a huge “cosmopolitan” experiment in China’s most liberal city. A city “where people from all regions and countries of the world congregate and live together”, Shanghai, was a “cosmopolitan” city 100 years ago. In the past 20 years since the “opening up and reform policy”, history has allowed Shanghai to regain its place on the world’s center stage, and the citizens of the city hope that this original “international metropolis” will again enter the ranks of the “world class cities”. The ideal of “cosmopolitanism” has once again appeared in 21<sup>st</sup> century Shanghai, and the citizens of the city are even more conscious and aware that there is an opportunity to be integrated with the world. To solve the various problems of Shanghai’s urban development, a return to history or “cosmopolitanism” are perhaps the only two dependable paths. In short, making sure that different groups of people from all over the world do not lose the main essence or diversity of their culture, but that they share a common space, work together to hold an event, to build a home for all of humanity, is what “cosmopolitanism”, is what humanities common ideal, and is what Shanghai instinctively advocates.

“Nationalism” includes “Chineseness”; “cosmopolitanism” includes “globalization”; both terms have their own rationalities and biases. If handled incorrectly, they may pose mutual damage to each other and cause mutual conflict. But if handled well, then they will be able to overcome their shortcomings by learning from the strong points of the other and will be mutual complimentary. In the process of preparing for the World Expo, how to get rid of this contradictory entanglement is one of the keys to holding a successful event. It can be seen, that in the five years spent preparing for the expo, the staff worked hard to avoid falling into a trap of nationalism by opening their hearts and developing a lot of space for

“cosmopolitanism”. In preparing for the event, of course there is the desire to display the comprehensive style of Chinese culture, but even more so, what needs to emerge are the cultures from all provinces and regions of China, that represent China’s domestic “cultural diversity”. While expressing “Chineseness”, it is even more important to emphasize that these various and diverse cultural characteristics are on display as a background to “cosmopolitanism”, in order to avoid putting “China” in opposition to the “world”.

Ultimately, what emerges in front of the people of the world at the Shanghai World Expo is basically a “cosmopolitan” environment. What we see is that the majority of the pavilions have been built by Chinese foreign joint groups. For example the “Main Pavilion”, the “Enterprise Pavilion”, even the “Chinese Pavilion”, all have had numerous European, American, and Asian designers, engineers, and local people team up and work together to build them. Professionals from Germany, France, the U.K., and America at the expo construction site have taken on extremely important roles. A French friend once told me: “the opening of the ‘World Expo’ is probably greater than that of the Olympics. Because of the engineering of the expo, Shanghai has attracted foreign talent, some of them being ‘Chinese returning from abroad’, some of them are ‘foreigners’, and some of them are Hong Kongers, Macanese, Taiwanese, European or American “foreign Shanghainese” that have been born and raised in Shanghai”. The extent of Shanghai’s internationalization has thus been elevated, and on top of that, when the “American Pavilion” encountered some financial difficulties, it was companies like “Haier” and other Chinese enterprises that reached out a helping hand. The American pavilion is from America, and is built from the financial backing of Chinese and International joint ventures, thus it itself is a “cosmopolitan” example of cooperation.

There are still many other positive examples of “cosmopolitanism”, some of which are quiet impressive. In the past twenty years of “globalization”, Europe’s developed countries have all experienced great shocks. Many of their factories, technology, patents, finances and intellectual resources have been lost to China, and thus many Europeans have lost their jobs and have strong feelings against China. However, in holding the World Expo and inviting the Europeans to display their national treasures, the majority of people were enthusiastically willing to contribute and send these items the long distance to Shanghai. Thus, at the expo we can see things such as Denmark’s national symbol, the “Little Mermaid” statue, which has never before left the Danish shores. There are also the “Good Luck Statues” from the Czech Republic’s Charles Bridge in Prague, the Grand duchy of Luxemburg’s “Golden Lady” statue, Nepal’s real relic of the Buddha’s body, etc. The cultural symbols from all nationalities that have left their native lands and come to Shanghai are taking apart of “cross-cultural exchange”. Even the British, French, and other big cultural countries, who seldom exhibit their museum’s national treasures on display outside of their borders, have sent some of these items to Shanghai. Paris’ Orsay Museum’s Cezanne, Monet, Van Gogh, and Gauguin have come; the Rodin Museum’s “The Thinker”, “Balzac”, “Bronze Age”, and the “Kiss” have come; the Berlin Museum’s old Babylonian “Ishtar Gate” has come; and the London’s British Museum’s Victoria Albert Museum’s collection series have all come to Shanghai. In this type of environment, the “cosmopolitan” picture is quiet impressive and people can really feel the enchantment of the ideal of “human unity”.

In the last one hundred years, Chinese intellectual circles have continued Herbert Spencer’s 19<sup>th</sup> century theories of “Social Darwinism”, thus, the so-called “natural selection, survival of the fittest” theory suggests that “nationalism” is perfectly justified and should be unrestricted. Yet humanity, in the name of promoting “nationalism”, experienced a series of bitter tragedies in the twentieth century, and thus the way in which we think about “nationalism”

needs to be thoroughly re-examined. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, emphasizing human cooperation, civilized dialog, and “cosmopolitan” cultural exchanges, should become the people of our generation’s rational spirit and moreover should be cultivated and development. From a “nationalist” point of view, us Chinese could, without a doubt, believe that every country in the entire world is enthusiastically participating in the Shanghai Expo because of “China’s rise” and their desires to reap the benefits of Shanghai’s market and earn profits. An even more traditional view point could be taken to say that it is because of “China’s Renaissance”, that there is a reemergence of the Ming and Qing Dynasties’ “tribute” system, where people from all over are coming to admit their allegiance to China. But having this type of attitude will distort the good intentions of all nations, reduce individuality, and the true essence of “cosmopolitanism” will not be understood.

The 2010 Shanghai Expo is a great opportunity for Shanghai, China and the world to come together. What we see is that, the good intentions of promoting cultural exchange, understanding and communication weakens confrontation and the competition of conflicts of interest, shortens the psychological distance between two sides, and slowly promotes a source of mutual trust and respect. The issue of cross cultural exchange has never been easy, but the Shanghai Expo is an unprecedented scale, has unprecedented enthusiasm, unprecedented participation, unprecedented..., but we must not be complacent or believe ourselves to be infallible. In the words of the Song Dynasty’s famous philosopher Lu Jiuyuan: “though China’s East and West are different, their thoughts and reasons are the same”. The cultural differences between the Eastern and Western world are of course great, but what we should really say is: no matter Chinese or Westerner, the many aspects of human nature are shared. If we can get rid of the myth of “nationalism”, permeate cultural ideas, decipher human nature, and have two way communications, we will reap many physical and mental rewards. In this sense, there must be human interaction before a new civilization can be born. The Shanghai Expo has presented us with an ideal stage for cross cultural dialog, upon which we can unfold the ideals of “cosmopolitanism”.