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## The Shanghai Expo as a Sacred Space

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### EXPOS, SACRED SPACE, AND ENTERPRISE ANTHROPOLOGY

World expositions (expos) have a history of 150 years, dating back to the London Expo of 1851. They have been subjected to study from every angle in various fields of research, including historical science, architectural history, art history, history of technology, social science, ethnology, information science, and the study of civilization.

The modern Olympics, held first in 1896 in Athens and every four years since, are similar to world expos. Permanent theme parks such as Disneyland, which first opened in 1955 in Anaheim, Los Angeles, also have something in common with expos. Studying all three would thus make a valuable comparative research project.

Now, why discuss expos in this IFBA international forum devoted to “enterprise and sacred space”? It is immediately obvious that expos have played a leading role in priming economies and acting as springboards for economic growth. Most expos in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries signaled technological progress and economic growth, and even in the eco-friendly twenty-first century, their basic character remains unchanged. It is also obvious that the engines of economic growth are nations and enterprises, to whom expos have offered opportunities to exhibit briskness (or false presence). In this space they compete, vying for prestige. Selected athletes compete with one another at the Olympics; at expos, featured architects and designers do the same. Athletes who win medals may land advertising deals, while architects and designers who win reputations earn greater prestige. Winners in both cases increase their prospects in future business ventures.

Expos surpass the Olympics in terms of business, however. At expos, enterprises demonstrate products and leverage technology in construction and exhibition, hoping to leverage their experience there in future business opportunities. Nations aiming at economic prosperity then increase investment activities, so that expos create unmatched levels of cooperation (collusion?) between nations and businesses. As case studies in business research, then, expos provide far richer material than the Olympics do.

Still, it would be unwise to conclude that expos are devoted exclusively to business. Participation in expos itself has political significance for nations, and national events occurring at the sites are not exclusively preoccupied with diplomatic and ceremonial functions. Mainly on days designated as National Days, important dignitaries visit pavilions to experience various aspects of the relevant country’s culture.

Expos are therefore important not only for economies, but also for politics and culture. How expos integrate these is an interesting object of study from a business administration point of view. In particular, for host nations, an expo provides a rare opportunity to develop political and cultural presence against a background of economic development. Following the example of Japan, which hosted the Tokyo Olympics (1964) and then the Osaka Expo (1970), China hosted the Beijing Olympics (2008) and then the Shanghai Expo (2010). Brazil is also preparing to host the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016 and the Sao Paulo Expo in 2020. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are rising to the forefront of the world, and expos and Olympics go hand in hand with national and municipal business administration strategies.

So expos are a huge enterprise for nations and businesses, as previously mentioned. What significance do they then have from an anthropological viewpoint? The first thing we think of is that expos are large-scale celebrations of humanity, ethnic groups, and civilizations. Humankind has not yet achieved any festivals that surpass expos. They are the primary festive spaces for crystallizing human wisdom and desire. Expos boast their largest scale as temporally structured spaces.

Next, what makes expos sacred spaces? Following Durkheim's classic definition of sacredness — things set apart and forbidden — expos are separate from people's daily lives and subject to various visible and invisible regulations (rules and taboos). Just as Disneyland has become a "sacred place" that Americans want to visit at least once in a lifetime (Notoji 1990: 204), an expo is a destination that citizens of the host nation yearn to visit while it is being held. But the difference between theme parks and expos is that the latter are ephemeral, like dreams: they last for only half a year. In this respect, they are similar to seasonal festivals and annual events that leave no trace behind when they are gone: both enhance their sacredness by adhering to their principles. The short lifespan of expos' pavilions and exhibitions distinguishes them from theme parks and museums. The brief life of expos also contributes to their sacredness. They are also held in a tidal fashion as annual events — once every five years, smaller Expos are held more often, by host nations. In this regard, expos differ from other temporary events.

Above all, expos appeal because they unfurl extraordinary exhibitions and astonishing events in many places every day. People stand in line for hours, then rush to be seated at rare exhibits and stirring events. The difficulties of approaching and witnessing these events elevate their sacredness. Enduring many hours of waiting deepens one's impression of the events—and sometimes also one's disappointment. Verbal surveys of expo attendees, rather than formal questionnaires, should be used for anthropological research.

In short, as humanity's largest-scale enterprises and festivals, expos prove to be eligible objects of study for business anthropology and enterprise anthropology.

## **SEVERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPO 2010 IN SHANGHAI**

Expo 2010 opened in Shanghai, China, on May 1<sup>st</sup>, and it continued until October 31<sup>st</sup>. A total of 246 nations and international organizations (189 and 57, respectively) participated—the greatest number in the history of expos. The number of participants was double that of

the Aichi Expo (2005), where 121 nations and four international organizations were represented. As for visitors, over 73 million attended in Shanghai, surpassing the Osaka Expo's 64 million. Only about 4.25 million of Shanghai's visitors came from overseas; the rest were from China, coming from every part of the country.

The theme of Expo 2010 was "Better City, Better Life." There were also five sub-themes: "blending of diverse cultures in the city," "economic prosperity in the city," "innovations of science and technology in the city," "remodeling of communities in the city," and "interactions between urban and rural areas." Five thematic pavilions were constructed: "Urban Pavilion," "Pavilion of City Being," "Pavilion of an Urban Planet," "Pavilion of Footprints," and "Pavilion of the Future." Not only the pavilions of each nation or enterprise but also the Urban Best Practices Area (UBPA) created exhibitions based on these themes. The guidebook explained, "The theme of Expo 2010 represents the common wish of all humankind for a better life in future urban environments. This theme represents a central concern of the international community for future policy making, urban strategies, and sustainable development."

The Expo's theme appeared everywhere on the streets of Shanghai (photo 1), along with *Haibao* ("sea treasure" in Chinese), the Expo's mascot doll (photo 2). Various slogans were also presented: "世界文明的盛会 我们大家的世博 (Prosperous Event of World Civilization: World Expo for All of Us)" (photo 3) and "精彩世博 文明先行 (Wonderful World Expo, Manners First)" were the ones I came across most often. The Chinese word "文明 (*wenming*)" has two meanings: "civilization" and "good manners," with the latter more commonly used. The motto of "和谐的城市 谦让的我 (Harmonious City, Modest Self)" was also prominent and suggested that the city wished to take this opportunity to improve its situation – something



Photo 1 The Main Theme of the Expo



Photo 2 Haibao, the Expo's Mascot Doll

more like “Disharmonious City, Egoistic Self.” This motto advocated that citizens learn good public manners and the virtue of modesty in order to form a better city. Cleaning the city was also encouraged. The catch-phrase “潔淨的城市 可愛的家 (Clean City, Pretty House)” (photo 4) was also established, and the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month was designated as a cleaning day to preserve the local environment. Such practices had never been seen before in Shanghai, and we must monitor the city carefully to see if they continue after the Expo.

The Shanghai Expo was staged in a downtown area, unlike the Osaka and Aichi Expos, which were held on the outskirts of their cities. The site was obtained by moving factories and residents out of the area. The Pudong and Puxi areas (to the east and west of the Huangpu River) had previously held a shipyard, an electric power plant, and numerous houses and apartments for low-income residents. The buildings of the shipyard and power plant were transformed into pavilions, and a chimney became a big thermometer. Evicted residents were compensated enough that most moved to apartments provided in the suburbs.

The Expo site consisted of two sections: Pudong and Puxi. The whole site was called a “park,” and it was 5.28 km<sup>2</sup> in area—the largest expo site in history. Tunnels and ferries connected the two sections, which had very different characteristics. Pudong was 2.38 km<sup>2</sup> and Puxi 0.9km<sup>2</sup>, so the ratio of the first to the second was about 13 : 5. The site had five zones: A, B, C, D, and E. Zones A through C were in Pudong, and Zones D and E were in Puxi (photo 5).

Some Asian nations had pavilions in Zone A, including China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. In Zone B were thematic pavilions—the Urban Pavilion, the Pavilion of City Being, and the Pavilion of an Urban Planet—in addition to the pavilions of international organizations and those of other Asian and Oceanic nations. The Expo Center and Expo Culture Center were also located in this zone, which, together with the Expo Axis, could therefore be called the heart of the Expo site. The Pavilions of European, American, and African nations were in Zone C.

Zone D contained the Pavilion of Footprints, pavilions of enterprises, the World Exposition Museum, and the Japanese Industry Pavilion . Zone E included the Pavilion of



**Photo 3** “Prosperous Event of World Civilization, World Expo of All of Us”



**Photo 4** “Clean City, Pretty House”

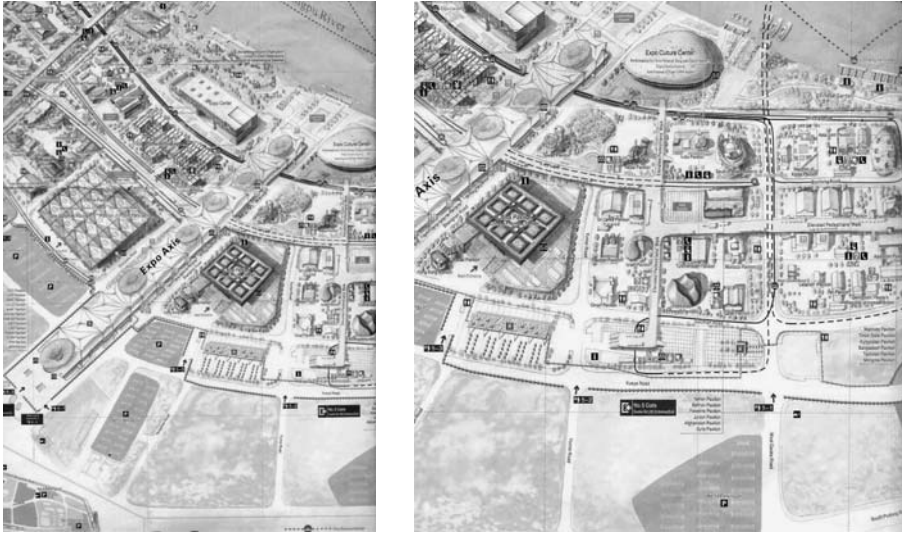


Photo 5 Zoning of the Expo Site

the Future, more pavilions of enterprises, and Urban Best Practices Areas (UBPA). The Osaka Case (pavilion) was included in one of the joint pavilions at UBPA.

Now I would like to mention some characteristics that can be observed from the site plan. First is the Expo Axis, which divided the Pudong section into two parts. This was a huge structure, 110 meters wide and 1000 meters long, with two stories above ground and another two underground. It offered various services, including catering, entertainment, commercial, and conference services. It was decorated with six structures shaped like inverted cones, the Sun Valleys. These allowed in sunlight and fresh air and sent both underground, at the same time conserving energy. At night, the structure was beautifully illuminated and delightful for visitors to observe. If we regard the Expo Axis as Axis Mundi, the buildings near it take on more symbolic significance. In fact, the China Pavilion and thematic pavilions faced each other across the Expo Axis. The Expo Center, used for VIP receptions, ceremonies, events, and press conferences, and the Expo Culture Center, with a capacity of 18,000 people and space for various performances, also faced each other across the Expo Axis (photo 6).

The China Pavilion, consisting of the National Pavilion and China's Joint Provincial Pavilion, was far larger than any other (photo 7). The National Pavilion centered on the themes of Oriental Crown, Splendid China, Ample Barn, and Rich People; it looked like a big red crown. The building was outstanding and could be seen even from afar, but it may have been overwhelming to people standing directly under it. The structure was built to resemble traditional architecture, or "*dougong*." A grid of nine vertical and horizontal crossing roads, as mentioned in the ancient book *Zhouli*, formed its cultural foundation. In contrast, China's Joint Provincial Pavilion supported the National Pavilion like a pedestal. This design compared the National Pavilion to the sky and the Joint Provincial Pavilion to the ground. Around the China Pavilion were located small but original pavilions representing



**Photo 6** Symbolic Buildings around the China Pavilion



**Photo 7** China Pavilion

Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. This arrangement might suggest that the majestic China Pavilion was accompanied by the small pavilions of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. In fact, the Macau Pavilion was shaped like a rabbit because Macau was returned to China in 1999, the year of the rabbit. Macau is known as the Jade Rabbit, and its landform also resembles a rabbit (photo 8). However, according to Dr. Cao Jiannan, a folklorist, if we recall an old tale that a rabbit lives on the moon, the China Pavilion can be regarded as the sun and the Macau Pavilion as the moon. In fact, the wall of the Macau Pavilion was made of half-reflective mirrors, and its brochure explained that “during the day, the exterior reflects the magnificent China Pavilion in a deeply symbolic acknowledgement of Macau’s

links to China, its motherland.” It would be accurate to conclude that Macau compares itself to the moon, which reflects light from the sun.

To the east of the China Pavilion, one could see a lineup of pavilions representing Japan (photo 9), the Republic of Korea, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (which was participating in an Expo for the first time). To the west of the Expo Axis stood pavilions of European and African nations, with those of American nations at the western end. The pavilions were thus arranged as on a world map centered on China. Of course, there were exceptions: for example, the Oceania pavilions were to the west of the Expo Axis, and the pavilions of Middle Eastern and Central and South Asian nations were in Zone A. The main point, though, was to give the impression that the Oriental Crown, standing high over the site, was at the center of the world.

Along with the National Pavilion, the pavilions of international organizations such as the UN, International Red Cross, and Red Crescent were in Zone B of the Pudong section. In other words, the Pudong section was a space for nations and international organizations, while Puxi was dedicated to enterprises and cities.

Puxi could be roughly divided into two parts: pavilions of enterprises, and UBPA. The former occupied about three times as much space as the latter. There were eighteen pavilions representing enterprises; however, apart from those of Japanese Industry (photo 10), Republic of Korea Business, Coca-Cola, and CISCO, all belonged to national or private enterprises in China (photo 11). Here visitors were given a strong sense of China’s remarkable progress in science and technology and the growing presence of its companies. The space also demonstrated a future dramatically affected by new technology in the fields of transportation, energy, and telecommunications.

The UBPA was also future-oriented, and innovative city practices from around the world were exhibited there (photo 12). Judging examples based on four criteria—“livable cities,” “sustainable urbanization,” “conservation,” and “utilization of cultural heritage and technological innovations in built environment”—the practices worth exhibiting and promoting were selected from 113 entries. Fourteen separate pavilions (including five Chinese ones)



**Photo 8** Macau Pavilion



**Photo 9** Japan Pavilion



and 59 examples (including twenty Chinese ones) were exhibited in the joint pavilion, UBPA was established for the first time as a presence at an expo. This was suitable for the Shanghai Expo, with its theme of “Better City, Better Life.”

The Puxi section placed “actors” of enterprises and cities at the core. If we regard the nations and international organizations of the Pudong section as the main actors of the present age, Puxi’s enterprises and cities can be regarded as leading forces in the future. In addition, we need to discover what intention lay behind the allocation of zones. Of course, the sections cannot be classified simply as “present-oriented” or “future-oriented.” It is unlikely that one outstanding planner conceptualized and designed everything at the Shanghai Expo. It seems rather that the Expo was designed by consensus among many people at universities and in public office. It would be an interesting research project to clarify the sequence of events that led to the classification of the zones.



**Photo 10** Japan Industry Pavilion



**Photo 11** Pavilion of Chinese Private Enterprises



**Photo 12** The Theme Pavilion of Best City Practices

## STAGING AS A SACRED SPACE

I would like to point out some features related to sacredness that I found at the Shanghai Expo. They are not yet organized as categories, but remain only as points.

1. The Expo's opening ceremony was held on the evening of April 30th. Executives from the Chinese government, including Hu Jintao, and foreign VIPs such as France's President Nicolas Sarkozy participated in this ceremony, which was broadcast inside and outside the country. Fireworks launched from the Huangpu River elevated the celebratory mood. However, only those who were invited could attend the ceremonies and events at the Expo site. The public saw the fireworks from afar, from Huangpu Park in *Waitan* (the Bund). The sacred place was beyond their reach (photo 13).
2. There were eight gates at the Expo site, and each required a security check. Security checks were also conducted at every train and subway station. An oppressive level of security was maintained. Armed police were posted not only within the site but also at important places outside it, such as transportation stations (photo 14). About 900,000



**Photo13** Sacred Place from Afar



**Photo 14** A Subway Station

- people, including volunteers, were involved in security for the opening ceremony. The world-class cultural ceremony required world-class security precautions.
3. Long queues were observed in front of popular pavilions. Reservation tickets were distributed at the China and Taiwan pavilions, and people waited in long lines to get these tickets. Even on the opening day, when only 200,000 people visited the expo, in the China Pavilion, the wait was four hours long. Four thousand tickets were distributed at 9:30am and another thousand at 6:00pm in the Taiwan pavilion. As soon as the gate opened, people rushed to get tickets, and by 5:00pm they were turned away from the line. At the Japan Pavilion and the Japanese Industry Pavilion, waits of three to four hours were usual. The longest line I observed was at the Saudi Arabia Pavilion, where people were told they would be waiting for nine hours (photo 15). They must have decided that fifteen minutes of 3D images were worth the wait. The capacities of theaters for 3D, shows, and other forms of entertainment were limited, so organizers moved people in rotation. This was safe and logical and probably the most manageable choice for organizers, but it made for long lines. Each line also worked as a barometer to indicate its pavilion's popularity, and high expectations contributed to feelings of sacredness.
  4. 3D images were very popular at this expo. These were not like the moon stone of the Osaka Expo or the frozen mammoth at Aichi. In Shanghai a virtual experience was produced at various pavilions, and the most outstanding was Saudi Arabia's. A newspaper reported, "The pavilion features a 1,600-square-meter IMAX screen, said to be the largest in the world. Visitors stand on a moving belt to watch a 15-minute movie that makes them feel like they're flying over the country's deserts and cities" [Expo Daily 2, May 2010]. At the Japanese Industry Pavilion, TERUMO Corporation displayed a high-definition 3D image entitled "A body fighting a virus." There, mist fell from the ceiling at the end of the show. Since visitors are no longer surprised by 3D images, pavilions had to find new experiences or amusements to provide: hence additional devices such



Photo 15 Nine Hours of Waiting

- as gusts of wind or rapidly moving chairs.
5. Nevertheless, the exhibition's value depended on its visitors' literacy. Dr. Tadao Umesao pointed out that "the value of information depends on the receiver," and I found this true in the following surprising case. The France Pavilion displayed important works from the Orsay Museum. Sculptures by Rodin and paintings by Millet, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Manet, Gauguin, and Bonnard were exhibited on the wall of a downward slope. About 30 to 40 percent of people took pictures through the exhibit's thick windows, but the rest just walked by, talking. They did not give even a sideways glance at the displays; nor were they attracted by the Louis Vuitton corner at the end of the gallery. I felt intimidated by this demonstration of Chinese power.
  6. Visitors to the France Pavilion could also see, through windows, French cooks working in a kitchen. At the Italy Pavilion, a dressmaker made clothes by hand (photo 16). The Belgium Pavilion made and distributed chocolates. In other words, Europeans had become "spectacles." In the expos of a century ago, "primitive people" and their lifestyles were viewed with curiosity. Now, craftsmen of advanced countries are viewed with aspiration.
  7. I conducted a simple verbal survey at the exits of the Japan Pavilion, Japanese Industry Pavilion, and Brazil Pavilion and interviewed people about their impressions of the exhibition, the shape of buildings, and the uniforms. The Japan Pavilion introduced the "toki" (ibis in Japanese, *Nipponia nippon*) as a symbol of the friendship between Japan and China, and the bird appeared in a play with a taste of Beijing opera. The uniform worn by female attendants was also inspired by the *toki* (photo 17). But few Chinese understood the relationship between the bird and the uniform, realizing the connection only after hearing it explained. At the Japanese Industry Pavilion, the INAX exhibition seemed to make a strong impression. Images of blue and white toilet bowls made using the Jingdezhef technique also drew attention. Access to the toilets was highly competitive, with only one in seventy visitors getting to use them. These "*Kirei, Kawaii, Kimochii*" (beautiful, cute, and comfortable) toilets were concrete realizations of the concept behind



**Photo 16** Dressmaker at the Italy Pavilion

the Japanese Industry Pavilion's exhibit. People also enjoyed the line-drawing animation presented by Uni-Charm. Few noticed the image on the pavilion wall copied from an *Ukiyo-e* by Hokusai Katsushika entitled "Red Fuji," though the attendants' uniforms had been inspired by this image. Again, some realized this only after it was explained to them. The exterior of the Brazil Pavilion was green and featured a wooden structure like the Bird's Nest at the Beijing Olympics. Europeans saw the color as that of a tropical forest, but a Chinese visitor saw in it the grass of a soccer stadium.

8. On June 12<sup>th</sup>, Japan's National Day, *Gonroku*-dance—which originated in Suita, where the Osaka Expo was held—was performed in the Asia Square (photo 18). Some of the dancers had performed the same dance at the Osaka Expo forty years earlier. The mayor of Suita City participated, using his own money. In the theater of the Japan Pavilion, traditional Japanese music was played. The "*Kawaii* Ambassadors," dispatched by the



Photo 17 Japanese Attendant



Photo 18 "Gonroku Dance" of Suita City

Japanese government with anime songs in Lolita fashion, were most attractive to young Chinese (photo 19). There was also a light portable shrine with lanterns featuring anime characters, newly built in Washimiya Shrine in Saitama Prefecture, which is famous as a sacred place for “*Otaku*” anime fans. Thus (photo 20) I happened to encounter a new Japanese sacred place expanding abroad with the help of its government.



Photo 19 Chinese and Japanese Lolita Fashion



Photo 20 Portable Manga Palanquin of Washimiya Shrine

## CONCLUSION

A world exposition is one of the biggest events in human history. It demonstrates competitive spirits in the items displayed, pavilions designed, messages dispatched, and technologies shown. It is embedded in national prestige and entrepreneurial endeavors. It is not a religious event, but it has a sacred element. An Expo site is a sacred space in which most evaluated values are presented in a closed setting. I have described many sacred elements that were found at the Shanghai Expo, from its zoning to its events. Integrating these elements with other findings is the next step.

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