

2010

“A Wildly Weird and Wonderful Event”

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive>

 Part of the [Asian History Commons](#), [Asian Studies Commons](#), [Chinese Studies Commons](#), and the [International Relations Commons](#)

“A Wildly Weird and Wonderful Event” (2010). *The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012*. 800.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive/800>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the China Beat Archive at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

“A Wildly Weird and Wonderful Event”

May 5, 2010 in [Interview](#) by [The China Beat](#) | [2 comments](#)

For updates and insights on the 2010 Expo, one of the first places we turn is [Shanghai Scrap](#), where Shanghai-based writer Adam Minter has been following the story for almost two years. Minter's Expo posts cover topics such as [the emergence of Haibao](#) (September 2008), [the renovation of the Bund](#) (December 2009) and [demolition of neighborhoods](#) (October 2009), and an ongoing in-depth investigation of the twisted saga of the U.S. pavilion (most recent [post](#)[here](#); full archive [here](#)). Minter also has an [article and slideshow](#) about the Expo at [The Atlantic](#). In the wake of last Saturday's opening ceremony, we posed a few questions to Minter via e-mail, and his responses appear below.

1) What — if anything — surprised you about the Opening Ceremony?

I was astounded at how archaic it appeared. The people with whom I was watching it compared it to a CCTV variety show, circa 1985. The fireworks, however, were spectacular.

2) What — if anything — has surprised you about how the first couple of days of the Expo have gone in terms of news coverage, buzz in Shanghai, crowd or street responses?

I've been surprised at the negative undertone in the state media's coverage of the event. The stories are positive, of course, but they're sprinkled with mentions of over-crowding, lines, and heat. The lead *Shanghai Daily* story on the second day, for example, pointedly noted that the Expo Bureau had limited admission to 204,000 to prevent over-crowding; for months, they'd been touting the fact that the Expo grounds hold 700,000 on peak days. On a personal note, I applaud the decision: the grounds simply can't handle more than 200,000 people.

3) What should we keep our eye out for, or pay attention to, as the event continues?

Shanghai Daily reported 150,000 no-shows on an opening day that attracted 204,000. Now, these numbers need to be taken with a grain of salt, but even so they do seem to suggest that significant numbers of people are choosing not to come to the Expo. Why? I suspect that reports of over-crowding and lines are the culprit. It'll be interesting to see whether this trend continues. I'm sure that the organizers are doing everything they can to change the situation on the ground and — more importantly — change the story in the media. Let's see.

I'm also very curious to see how some of these pavilions hold up for the next six months. They are temporary structures, with temporary features, and I wonder how the June rains and the humid heat of July and August will impact them. For example, the wicker skin of the Spanish pavilion, beautiful as it is, strikes me as wholly inappropriate to the Shanghai climate.

But look, for all of its problems and over-crowding, the Expo is a wildly weird and wonderful event, and I think anyone interested in China's place in the world would be making a mistake if he or she didn't make a few visits, just to see how this thing evolves. At a minimum, there will be some terrific performing arts programs over the coming six months (Herbie Hancock, a giant Bollywood extravaganza, etc) worth keeping an eye out for.

4) Any final thoughts on living in Shanghai at a time when most countdown clocks have just hit zero, even though the [AccessAsia.co.uk clock](#) still has months to go before it zeroes out when the Expo ends?

To be honest, aside from the inconvenient security checks and traffic, I don't think that the Expo is having a very significant effect on the city — at least, not yet. I know many blame the recent demolition boom on the Expo — but I'm of the opinion that those demolitions would've happened, anyway (especially in the wake of the economic stimulus-induced building boom). That's not to excuse them, but rather to say that the blame needs to be properly apportioned.

In any case, my university days were spent in Hyde Park, Chicago, site of the 1893 World Colombian Exposition. The landscape of the neighborhood was shaped by the event, and there are still a handful

of buildings that remain from it. Like many people who have lived there, I became fixated on the history of the event and its impact upon Chicago. I own too many books about it, and even today, when a new novel or non-fiction work concerning the 1893 Expo is released, I have a hard time resisting it. So, for me, at least, it's an unexpected and welcome twist and treat that I find myself living in a city that — in its own way — is trying to replicate a little bit of what Chicago did a century ago. I intend to enjoy the moment.

Tags: [Shanghai Expo 2010](#)