

New Asia

The Most Expensive Event In History

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The same principle applies to China. Of course, there's nothing really dangerous with Beijing blowing tens of billions on a gargantuan block party, but the need to do so reflects a weakness of the Chinese system. Beijing's leaders poured all this cash into Shanghai to express national pride and reinforce the legitimacy of the one-party state. [As Paul French of Access Asia said](#) in connection with the Shanghai Expo, "In China today, the nonpolitical is in fact deeply political."

And the excessive spending signals something even more troubling. The same abundance of resources that permits Chinese officials to put on the oversize Expo also allows them to engage in monumental nation-threatening efforts. The Three Gorges Dam, built at a cost of \$37.2 billion, is the world's most expensive engineering feat and an environmental disaster. Worse, the \$62 billion South-to-North Water Diversion Project will dwarf the dam in both scale and detrimental ecological effect. And Beijing's ongoing buildup of its military will just encourage Asian nations to band together to contain China.

Chinese leaders have obviously forgotten Deng Xiaoping's maxim of "bide time and keep a low profile." Their country would do better, it seems, with fewer resources and more modest ambitions. In the meantime, if we don't think about the larger implications, we can all enjoy the benefits of Beijing officials overdoing it at the 2010 Expo in Shanghai. See you there.

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