Three Thousand Sky-Scrapers

This number of sky-scrapers will be built in Shanghai, the city hosting the world exhibition «Expo» in 2010. So Shanghai itself, as the Chinese government plans, will become the main Chinese exhibit. Such city has been seen neither in Europe nor in America yet. China enters the 21st century not just as a superpower, but as a super-superpower. Everybody is to understand this already in 2010.

There are not three, but «only» two thousand sky-scrapers in Shanghai yet. But one more thousand will be added within the next few years. Thus «Moscow-Beijing» can be sung with the words «Moscow-Shanghai», if not «Shanghai-New York». However nations go ahead.

Yuri Mikhailovich Luzhkov builds sky-scrapers in Moscow too, there will be «only» 20 times less sky-scrapers than in Shanghai though. But the population in the Russian federation is also less than in China. So Moscow and Shanghai have common problems. Not only in building sky-scrapers.

According to the article by Howard French in the New York Times newspaper «Shanghai’s Boom: A Building Frenzy», in Shanghai, like in Moscow, they cry for architectural heritage. In the 19th and the 20th centuries Shanghai managed to create a unique urban environment, without any «Expo». By 2010 only odds will remain after this environment, because the ends will be wiped out. The architects loving their city are in despair. Although any «struggle» with authorities or protest letters are out of the question in China. Everything is done only under the government’s decrees. There is one decree now - to destroy everything and to build luxurious glass wonders, superfast railways, a seaport and an airport. Probably they will ask the citizens of the old Shanghai to go out for a while. The new buildings, housing not only shops and offices, but also elite apartments, will be beyond ordinary Chinese people’s means. Nobody knows the place they will go. It is only known that sale or distribution of the new apartments is under the authorities’ control, and the important people won’t be out of their share. Unimportant people will have only themselves to blame. But this is an old rule of our world. And we know it.

Before the opening of «Expo-2010», «the Olympic Games-2008» will take place in Beijing, so possibly Beijing and Shanghai are «competing», giving joy to one and a half billion ordinary Chinese people. By the way, they are going to take strong measures for clean water: in the Huanglu river that flows across Shanghai it will be safe to bathe.

But it is difficult to say how this new Manhattan will look like. New York was not built in a day, and the time has decorated it with some features of historical architecture environment, with some patina of epochs. If Shanghai will shine like a cut glass or an aluminum kettle, it will be good, but with time it will cause some tiredness. Europe has experienced it. And as a result after the War they had nostalgic mood for old city centers.

Brazilian citizens are familiar with something like this. They experienced it in the new capital built by Pritzker laureate 1988, a communist Oscar Nimeier.

Recently the second architect from Brasilia Mendes da Rocha has also received the Pritzker Prize. He believes that an architect must change our Universe perception, always doing something new.
что архитектор обязательно должен изменять наши представления о Вселенной, всегда делать нечто новое.

Что ж, со времен строительства Бразилии Лусию Коста и Нимейером прошло уже почти полвека. Небоскребы за это время стали повыше и постеклянее. Но изменилось ли в принципе то, что предопределило неудачу города, — его социальное вырождение?

Едва ли. Скорее, наоборот. Социальные проблемы новых городов стали еще острее. И никаких особенных нововведений в этот процесс не внес даже сам Мендес да Роха. Почему же китайские власти, во всем желающие опередить остальной мир, не додумались до того, чтобы предложить миру нечто невиданное, какой-нибудь «гуманный» город, построенный по заветам Конфуция, с уважением к старым людям и родителям? Вероятно, этого не произошло потому, что новая китайская бюрократия не считает нужным связывать культ Конфуция, и вообще почитаемые в стране традиции, с тем, что она сегодня делает практически. Как говорится, «мухи отдельно – котлеты отдельно».

Well, it is almost half a century since Brasilia was built by Lucio Costa and Nimeier. Skyscrapers have become higher and more glassy within this time. But has the city’s social degeneration that predetermined its failure changed?

Not likely. Just the other way round. Social problems of new cities have become more acute. Even Mendes da Roha has brought no special innovations in this process. Why Chinese government wishing to leave behind the rest of the world have not hit upon the idea to offer to the world something unprecedented, a «humane» city built after Confucius’ precepts with respect to old people and parents? Probably it has not happened because the new Chinese bureaucracy does not find it necessary to link Confucius cult and worshiped traditions in general to what it practices today. So to say, they «separate the sheep from the goats».