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## Reach for the sky

By Qiu Lin (China Daily)  
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**This computer-generated image shows the Shanghai Tower (left) which will stand beside Shanghai World Financial Center (right) and Jin Mao Tower (center) in Lujiazui financial district of Shanghai. Courtesy of Shanghai Tower Construction & Development Co, Ltd/ China Features**

When news came out last November that China's tallest building, the Shanghai Tower, had broken ground, many thought it was set to be a huge white elephant, with the global economic recession hitting China and businesses reigning in spending.

In 1999, Andrew Lawrence, a research director at Deutsche Bank, created the "skyscraper index" that showed how the world's tallest buildings had risen on the eve of economic downturns. Be it the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur in 1997, the Sears Towers in Chicago in 1974 or the Empire State Building in New York in 1930, all suggested that the construction of ever-taller buildings was a good warning sign of a looming economic slowdown.

Not so, says Gu Jianping, manager of the Shanghai Tower Construction and Development Co. In his view, the Shanghai Tower might be able to escape the "skyscraper curse", with the cost of building materials such as steel and cement falling because of the global economic crisis.

"The timing is great for us," Gu says. "Local companies now have the capability to build such super tall buildings."

The 632-m, 121-story building, which incorporates offices, shops and a hotel, will be Shanghai's crowning landmark in the Lujiazui financial center when it is completed in 2014. Built at a cost of more than 14.8 billion yuan (\$2.2 billion), it will tower over the 492-m Shanghai World Financial Center built by Japanese property tycoon Minoru Mori, currently the world's second tallest building with a trapezoid-shaped hole at its top, where a glass-enclosed observation deck offers views from floor 101.

It is not easy for such tall buildings to win the approval of city planners nowadays. Shanghai municipal lawmakers, for example, passed an amended urban planning regulation in 2003 limiting the number of tall buildings in the downtown area.

But the plan for the Lujiazui finance and trade zone in Pudong in 1993 exempted the Shanghai Tower from the regulation on building height. A panel of experts incorporated five design schemes from Britain, France, Italy, Japan and China and put on the drawing board a trio of super-tall buildings as three landmarks for the financial center, says Zhang Shiyu, deputy director of the Shanghai Urban Planning and Design Research Institute.

At the construction site of the Shanghai Tower, a score of red piling machines are drilling giant holes for steel casing deep into the ground to fill with concrete. Unlike other construction sites, the walled-off site of almost 400,000 sq m makes very little noise considering the scale of the project.

"We are using this pile-boring technique to lay the foundation because it causes less noise and little vibration, reducing disturbances to neighboring residents and buildings to the minimum," says Gu Jianping of the tower construction company.

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About 300 workers are working around the clock to lay the foundation for the tower, which consists of more than 900 piles, 1 m in diameter and up to 86 m deep, with a load capacity of 1,000 tons. It takes 40 to 50 hours to lay one pile and the foundation work is expected to be completed by the end of this year, Gu says.

The Shanghai Tower, designed by San Francisco-based Gensler Architecture, Design and Planning Worldwide, is made up of nine units stacked on top of each other. The inner layer of the double-skin facade encloses the stacked buildings, while a triangular exterior creates the second skin, or building envelope, which gently rotates as it rises. The spaces between these two layers create nine atrium sky gardens, visible through a transparent facade.

Gensler's design sits harmoniously beside two other buildings, the Jin Mao Tower and the Shanghai World Financial Center, Gu says. Meanwhile, the double-skinned building, with its unique taper, texture and asymmetry, reduces wind stress loads by 24 percent.

Even though the look is all about harmony, China's Internet users have questioned the economic returns on this super-tall structure. "The money could be better spent on low-income families and healthcare," one post says. "The economy is already going down, is it really necessary to build such a building?" asks another.

But Arthur Gensler and his team say their design means significant savings in heating and cooling costs through the "double skin". Rainwater caught on the building's funnel-shaped roof can be stored and used to flush toilets, while wind turbines will help provide enough electricity to power the building's outer lighting.

"The cost of maintaining a super-tall building is very high. For example, Jin Mao Tower costs more than a million yuan each day on operations," says urban planner Zhang.

But he notes that because land price in Shanghai, especially in Lujiazui, is exorbitant, it is economically wise to build skyscrapers to put land to efficient use.

"More importantly, it builds up Shanghai's image as a world financial center," Zhang says.

Elsewhere in the world, construction projects are grinding to a halt as financing runs dry and demand for office space in financial districts disappears, according to Emporis, the world's largest provider of global building data.

But developers have not been scared off. A slew of government-funded construction projects are underway to stimulate growth and create jobs. Examples include a massive subway project, a complete overhaul of the waterfront Bund, construction of the Expo zone and construction of luxury hotels and office buildings on the other side of the Huangpu River.

With the construction finance in place, plus investment from three State-owned enterprises - Shanghai Chengtuo Corporation, Lujiazui Finance and Trade Zone Development Co Ltd and Shanghai Construction Group - Gu says that the economic recovery should be well underway when the tower is completed in 2014.

In his view, Shanghai does not have enough Grade-A office space, with high standards of facilities and management that can meet the demands of international companies as can be found in New York, London or Hong Kong.

Akio Yoshimura, president of the Shanghai World Financial Center (SWFC), shares Gu's vision. The SWFC, which opened last October, is feeling the pinch of the global economic crisis. Some American and European companies, hit by the credit crunch, have delayed their plans to rent offices at the center, says Yoshimura.

But Yoshimura is confident that China's economy will look up in the second half of 2009 and the occupancy rate is expected to increase to 90 percent from the current 50 percent.



(China Daily 04/08/2009 page18)

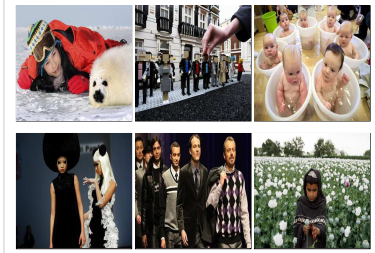
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