

Shangri-la or eco-island?

North of the densely populated center of Shanghai, at the mouth of the Yangtze River, lies Chongming – the world’s largest alluvial island. Over the next dozen years, it will be developed into a laboratory for sustainable urban, agricultural, and ecological practices.



Measuring over 1000 square kilometers, Chongming is the largest alluvial island in the world and one of the largest islands in China. It is also one of Shanghai’s five municipal districts. With Dongping National Forest Park occupying almost 100 square meters at the center of the island, it is the last relatively untouched part of the greater Shanghai municipality. The island was formed of silt from the Yangtze River, and its fertile soil encouraged agricultural development. Thus, Chongming has remained relatively unaffected by contemporary ecological problems.



The soil, air, and water are clean, and should remain that way: The government of Shanghai has developed a comprehensive master plan to transform the island into an ecologically-oriented recreational zone and laboratory for sustainable urban, agricultural, and ecological technologies by the year 2020.



The master plan addresses five distinct zones: Dongtan wetlands to the east will be preserved in their entirety as a sanctuary for migrating birds. Dongping National Forest Park will be expanded and developed as Shanghai’s largest recreational area. In the northern part of the island, there will be stadiums and theme parks, with some land reserved for



ecological agriculture. To the south (today the most densely populated part of the island), residential districts will be developed and clean industries established. Dongtan, the island's economic center, will be developed as a green city that depends on renewable energy, rainwater, and fuel generated from kitchen waste. To the west, a large lake and an international exhibition and convention center are in development.

By 2008, the 25.5-kilometer Shanghai-Chongming expressway will be completed, including a 9-kilometer tunnel and a 10-kilometer bridge. When these are in place, it will take only 45 minutes to drive from Shanghai city center to Chongming. There is no plan for an environmentally-sound transportation system, and this has been the subject of criticism.

Nevertheless, the strategy for Chongming is progressive for China, a country with 20 of the world's 30 most polluted cities. The project is distinguished not only by the wide range of ecological measures, but by its global partners. The master plan was developed by the American firm of Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM), and universities throughout the world are working on its various aspects. The green city Dongtan is being designed by Arup UK (see page 28).

