Building “New Shanghai”: Political Rhetoric and the Reconstruction of the Shanghai Racecourse, 1949–65

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To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1547402X.2019.1583923

Published online: 18 Apr 2019.

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This article explores the communist reconstruction project that transformed the famous Shanghai Racecourse into the complex of public space that now includes the Avenue of the People, People’s Square, and the People’s Park. It examines the case of the Shanghai horse racing track as an example of the larger Chinese Communist effort to embed political power into Shanghai’s physical space. By demolishing colonial-era landmarks and refashioning them into public space, the CCP hoped to establish legitimacy and win the hearts and minds of the Shanghainese. By inscribing political promises into concrete structures in the center of Shanghai, the CCP attempted to infuse the daily activities of city dwellers with the new rhetoric of nationalism, patriotism, and internationalism. We argue that the racecourse reconstruction did contribute to the realization of these goals, as the urban corollary to land reform, which ostensibly transferred land and the built environment from the clutches of “old-society” rulers into the hands of the ordinary Chinese people. Ironically, however, the project still maintained and re-affirmed the spatial layout of the colonial city, highlighting how deeply the layered etchings of power are carved into the physical spaces of everyday life.

KEYWORDS: nationalism, patriotism, internationalism, political power, transformation of space, political rhetoric, Shanghai racecourse, PRC history

On May 27, 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took Shanghai, at once a great prize and a crucial test for the CCP. Inside and outside of the newly founded People’s Republic of China (PRC), people watched intently as the Communists “stormed into the cities from the countryside.” Could an army of itinerant guerillas hold power and maintain stable government in an urban context? Could a rural-based Party of peasants administer Shanghai’s vast and densely populated metropolis? Could revolutionaries whose strategy was built on dispossessing landlords and empowering farmers win the support, trust, and enthusiasm of urbanites? These were genuine questions, but the Party’s rhetoricians were confident. If the redistribution of land, transferring it from old “feudal” rulers into the hands of the people, had
fired the rural revolution, then a similar reconfiguration of urban space might well mobilize the city’s masses. As the Shanghai Student Federation proclaimed in their May 28th manifesto, the Party would lead the Shanghai Chinese to take back their city. “From the foundation of wreckage and destruction wrought by our enemies,” the manifesto exhorted, “let’s build a new People’s Shanghai! We call on all of the people in the city to heed that grand slogan, to build a new People’s Shanghai by standing up and getting to work right away!”

On May 30th, when the Central Committee sent a telegram celebrating Shanghai’s Liberation, they concluded with a rousing, “Long Live the new Shanghai!” This marked the Central Committee’s first use of the phrase “new Shanghai” and emphasized the Party’s promise to reclaim and renew the city. On August 3, when Shanghai Party Committee Secretary, Rao Shushi, set out the guiding principles for Party work in the city and greater East China, he once again linked Communist transformation with the destruction and reconstruction of physical space, referring to Liberation Daily editorial that called on people to “smash the enemy blockades in the fight to build a new Shanghai.” And in 1950, when Mayor Chen Yi commemorated the one-year anniversary of the city’s Liberation, he attempted to rally urbanites to participate in reshaping their city, urging, “The people of Shanghai must use their power to overcome difficulties and fulfill their duty to build a new Shanghai!”

There was, of course, a metaphorical dimension to this rhetoric, but the CCP’s vows were also quite literal—the new government intended to mobilize the people of Shanghai to destroy the physical structures built by China’s “imperialist enemies” and erect, in their places, new buildings, new roads, new parks and new spaces, all of which were to be controlled by and accessible to the people. Obliterating the “Old Society” (a shorthand for a recent Chinese past in which the nation suffered under imperialist invasion, feudal tradition, and capitalist exploitation) was as much about concrete structures and physical spaces as it was about political and ideological categories. This paper explores the CCP attempt to radically alter space in Shanghai, focusing on the largest of the construction projects: the transformation of the famous colonial-era racecourse into a massive central complex consisting of People’s Square, People’s Park, and People’s Avenue. Along with the city parks that infamously barred Chinese from entering, the racecourse was a visible symbol of the Opium War’s unequal treaties and their imperialist aftermath. Soon after the CCP arrived in the city, they announced that they would demolish the track, a space long owned by and identified with the privileged foreigners who had ruled over Shanghai’s Chinese population, and rebuild on its wreckage a
place for ordinary Chinese people and their now-solely Chinese political leaders to gather and celebrate the promise of a new, strong, independent China. The success, to that point, of the Communist revolution owed much to the Party’s insistence that it offered a radical break with the past, and thus a key part of the CCP plan to consolidate urban power and win the hearts and minds of city dwellers was to inscribe that promise of a new future right into the architectural structures within which Shanghai residents experienced their city and their daily lives. The racecourse reconstruction did contribute to the realization of these goals, even as the project ironically maintained and re-affirmed the spatial layout of the colonial city.

NATION, POWER, AND SPACE

In 1908 Georg Simmel argued that space is more social than natural and that a multitude of elements, including the workings of power, were hidden in plain sight and could be illuminated through attention to “the sociology of space.” Henri Lefebvre and Robert Park have since shown that the spatial and the social demarcate one another and that the social production of space gives it a complex and contradictory nature, which in turn permeates all facets of social action. Thus, mapping the connections between space and social actions is essential to understanding economics, politics, culture, and society in any given place and time. Michel Foucault argued that we learn much about the nature and operation of political power by examining the way states organize space to facilitate surveillance and reorder the way individuals experience their daily lives. Furthermore, as Paul Rabinow stressed, modern states create architectural and other concrete structures to symbolize the cultural superiority of one power over another, especially in colonial encounters. James Holston expanded that line of inquiry, showing how government-funded public buildings function as a new form of political control by making domains of daily life into targets of national intervention. All of these scholars make clear the crucial role that built space plays in the modern technologies of power: One important way states implement social and political control is through their manipulation of space.

A number of researchers have explored these connections between space and power in the Chinese context. Wang Mingming has investigated how the distribution of public buildings and local concepts of time and space have created and reinforced understandings of power. Tian Yipeng has demonstrated how the

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PRC’s *danwei*, or “work unit,” system constituted the spatial geography of communist cities. Ye Yajian and Shi Mingzheng have explored the influence of the state in the reconstruction of public parks. And Wu Hung and Chang-tai Hung have separately chronicled the ways the Chinese Communist Party remade the physical spaces of Beijing to inscribe a new political culture into the built environment of the city. Certainly, as these and other scholars have shown, the Communists were not the first state to seek to revolutionize society through the revolution of space. Richard Belsky has written on the Qing state’s co-optation of native-place lodges to further their goals of national unity. Chen Yunqian has recounted the way that in the Republican period, the newly built “Zhongshan parks” propagated through spatial forms the national heroism of Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan); reorganizing those public spaces, creating parks that were simultaneously places of leisure and vehicles for ideological education helped enable the rising nation-state to control and influence its citizens. As Chen notes, this process was especially effective when parks became spaces for popular movements and symbols of nationalism, such as during the war of resistance against Japan.

After 1949, the CCP similarly attempted to create public spaces that could symbolize and serve the state’s nationalist and populist aims by building public squares in every large city. Like the expansion of Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, transforming Shanghai’s racecourse into People’s Square was a key part of this process. As Wu Hung and Chang-tai Hung have both shown, Tiananmen, once the gateway to the emperor’s “forbidden city,” constituted, for the Communists, a physical instantiation of a feudal China, which could be refashioned to emblematize the end of feudalism. Similarly, as Robert Bickers has demonstrated, Shanghai’s many memorial statues, erected by and for foreigners, were remnants and reminders of China’s colonization, and their destruction could symbolize its break from foreign

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12 Tian Yipeng & Qi Si, *Danwei shehui dezhongjie: Dongbei lao gongye jidi dianxingdan- weizi beijingxia de sheqiu jianshe* (The end of work unit society: community construction under the typical state system in North China’s old industrial base areas) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 71–79.
16 Richard Belsky, *Localities at the Center: Native Place, Space, and Power in Late Imperial Beijing* (Cambridge, IL: Harvard East Asia Center, 2006).
18 Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing; Chang-tai Hung, Mao’s New World, 25–74.*
domination. Thus, like other revolutionary states, Chinese revolutionaries remodeled and reconstituted these and other “traditional” spaces and structures to be more consistent with the new political cities they wanted to create. The creation of new places, however, was only half of an important couplet; visibly “smashing remnants of the Old Society,” was an equally important part of the CCP’s politicization of space. This is especially well illustrated by the Party’s plan for the Shanghai Racecourse, known around the world as a playground for foreign colonizers.

Relocated to Nanjing Road in 1862, the racecourse was the third track built by the Shanghai Race Club, an organization founded by five British merchants in 1850. In the 1860s, the Club organized several days of races in the spring and again in the fall, and over the years, they increased the frequency of the events. For nearly five decades, the Club was open only to foreigners. No Chinese were allowed to join until 1908. Horse-betting, raffles, and copious cocktails contributed to the racecourse’s reputation as a decadent pleasure for the wealthy and an unsavory danger for those without the financial cushion to take the risk. In 1934, as clashes between the Communist and Nationalist forces, invading Japanese armies, and repeated natural disasters led Shanghai to swell with hungry refugees, the Race Club erected an opulent, 10-storey club building, with teak-paneled restaurants, libraries, bowling lanes, and a grandstand rumored to be the longest in the world at 330 feet.

Local residents regularly expressed indignation at the way the racecourse shamelessly celebrated imperialism, long before the CCP took Shanghai. When the Communists ensured that the Race Club would transfer ownership of its properties in 1951, it was not difficult to cast this as a win for the people.

Beginning in 1951, the Party-state remade the racecourse into an area ostensibly dedicated to and reserved for the People. With People’s Avenue at its heart, and People’s Square and People’s Park on either side, this new complex of public space was meant to physicalize the transformation of the Old Society, marked by imperialist oppression, into a New Society, built by and for ordinary Shanghaiese. Onto the buildings and grounds of the People’s space, the state attempted to inscribe their political ideals.

Nationalism, Patriotism, Internationalism: Reconstructing the Racecourse as the Physical Embodiment of Communist Rhetoric

The Chinese Communists were not the first modernizing reformers to propose concrete spatial changed to Shanghai. In the early years of the Republic of China, Sun Yatsen proposed to “Build an international Hong Kong and Shanghai,” abbreviated as “The great Shanghai plan” or “The New Shanghai” plan.
The Guomindang (KMT) “Greater Shanghai” plan envisioned a political center in the five sections of Huangpu district, with the municipal government of the new regime symbolically located on the west side of what was to become People’s Square.  

During the 1920s and 30s, the KMT government also attempted to reconstruct the national image by altering urban space. Civil war and other challenges left their plans unfinished, but they did make great strides toward the construction of a politically symbolic, and physically concrete, new Shanghai. It was the CCP, however, that truly succeeded in forever altering the way Shanghai residents imagined and used urban space. A key part of destroying old Shanghai and building new Shanghai was the re-creation of physical space to embody the defining elements of Chinese Communist rhetoric in the early-PRC period: Nationalism, Patriotism, and Internationalism. If the racecourse, one of Shanghai’s most famous landmarks could be transformed from a symbol of China’s colonial submission into a public space showcasing new China’s international emergence as a strong, patriotic nation, such a transformation could emblematize the triumph of the ordinary masses over their formidable imperialist conquerors. Toward that end, the CCP not only reconstructed the physical space, razing elements of the racecourse and reclaiming others to create People’s Avenue, Square, and Park; they also reordered the use of that space by holding mass denunciations of external imperialist aggressions, rallies aimed at internal political mobilization and internal unity, and demonstrations in support of socialist allies.

As Yang Kuisong has shown, the People’s Republic of China (a new communist regime, in a “backward” country, within the structure of the cold war duopoly) had extremely limited choices in foreign affairs and international relations, but the CCP worked within those limitations to stir and strengthen nationalist sentiment among PRC citizens. The KMT government had, in 1928, tried to force colonizing powers to renegotiate the unequal treaties that had led to China’s colonization, but they had been unsuccessful. The Communist government instead refused to negotiate, and as soon as their national victory was in sight, Mao proclaimed the PRC would “make a fresh start,” “clean the house before inviting guests,” and “lean to one side”—all of which amounted to canceling treaties and eliminating Western influence in China. These bold actions in the realm of foreign policy gave many

Japanese government also formulated a “Plan for the construction of Greater Shanghai,” but it was never realized. See Wang Ronghua, ed., Shanghai da cidian (Shanghai dictionary) (Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2007) vol. 1, 633.

24 Xin Shanghai baoshe (New Shanghai newspaper office), “Xin Shanghai xinnian jinianj: Da Shanghai” (New year commemorations of the New Shanghai: Greater Shanghai), 1930, SHDAG, Y15-1-66, 45–72, 81–84; Shanghai chengshi guihua zazhi bianceuan weiyanhui (Committee for the compilation of Shanghai journal of urban planning), Shanghai chengshi guihua zazhi (Shanghai journal of urban planning) (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1999), 67; Wang, 633. Zhong-gong Shanghai lishi shilu, 129.


Chinese people a sense of restored self-respect and engendered loyalty to the state that had taken such a stand.27

In that context, calls to reclaim the racecourse, that symbol of imperialist hegemony, reached a fever pitch, building on longstanding resentments that had been stoked by politicians and pundits well before the CCP took Shanghai. In fact, while both the KMT and the CCP made great use of the racecourse’s colonial associations, they were not the ones who first imbued the space with that symbolism. The track had long been recognized by colonizers and colonized alike as the spatial expression of foreign colonial power: celebrations in honor of the coronations of King George V, in 1911, and King George VI, in 1937, were held on track grounds. And in each year of the 1920s, the U.S. Marines held a drill and a flag raising ceremony at the track, in celebration of U.S. Independence Day.28

After the Japanese invasion, the mayor of Shanghai’s special city administration, Wang Guozhen, had been determined to take back the venue, which the Japanese army had occupied in 1942 (allowing races to continue until the early spring of 1945).29 While Wang never succeeded, the restitution remained a hot issue for the city council and for many city residents.30 In February 1946, when 200,000 Shanghai residents gathered at the track to welcome KMT leader Chiang Kaishek to Shanghai, Chiang delivered a speech emphasizing the track’s symbolic meaning:

Eight years ago we could not have held such a meeting at this racecourse. Because of these eight years of arduous resistance by our compatriots, we have won the respect and the sympathy of the allied forces and of friendly nations, we have rescinded the unequal treaties and taken back the concessions, and the Chinese nation has now achieved freedom and independence.31

A number of subsequent events, including the raising and then destruction of a national flag on track grounds, contributed fuel to the fire.32 In 1946–47, Shanghai News (Shenbao) and other media outlets published a series of reports that emphasized the track’s associations with imperialist exploitation, and the Shanghai City Council heard several debates and suggestions from the public, all focused on the issue of racecourse reclamation. In these discussion, the course was treated as a forced enclosure by the English colonizers, as illustrated by popular sayings such as “one horse for an Englishman, two flows of tears for a peasant,” or “it doesn’t

27 Yang Kuisong, Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jianguo shi yanjiu (Research on the early years of the PRC), (Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2009), 1–3.
28 Xiong, 7.
29 Advertisement: Shanghai xinchun da saima” (Shanghai spring horserace), Shenbao, 14 February 1945, 1.
30 “Shanghai shi canyi hui” (Minutes of Shanghai City Council), 13 September 1946, 124, 146, 247, 257, 366, 367, 267 and 1947, 124, 146, 247, 257, 364, 367, 267 all discuss the restitution of the racecourse, in SHDAG, Q109-1-1034.
31 Shenbao, ed., Shanghai shi renmin shouce (Shanghai resident handboo) (Shanghai: Shenbao chubanshe, Nov. 1946), 4–5.
matter whether they are buying or selling land, the foreigners always make extra profit.” As Zhang Ning has shown, bitter memories of colonial oppression had collected around the racecourse, and it was not difficult for the CCP to fan these flames. By taking a resolute stance in favor of restitution, the CCP easily won public support, on that issue at least. And the new state certainly maximized the racecourse’s symbolic value after the takeover of Shanghai. On May 25, 1949, when the PLA entered the city and raised the first red flag, they did so atop the Yong’an Company building, less than 200 meters from the track. On October 1, 1949, the first of the soon-to-be ubiquitous red flags with five stars was raised inside the racecourse itself. The flag pole, installed on track grounds by British naval forces, had once been part of a mast on an invading English warship.

Probably because it was already a popular cause, the reclamation of the racecourse became the centerpiece of the CCP’s resolute policy towards former colonial powers, and the symbolism was bolstered by other anti-colonial actions on the part of the new state. When an American created a disturbance during a July 6, 1949 parade to commemorate the “7/7” anniversary of resistance against Japan, the “American criminal” was arrested for trying to incite a quarrel. He had been the former vice-consul to the US consulate in Shanghai. The man’s capture was cast as a win over foreign powers, by a new government who, not incidentally, had also taken into custody the former US consul general in Shenyang. To further stoke mass enthusiasm for racecourse reclamation, the city organized a massive demonstration, on May 1, 1950. A total of 60,000 people, including the PLA garrison in Shanghai as well as citizens from all classes (led by the workers), rallied on track grounds. There Liu Changsheng, Chairman of the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions, called attention to yet another anti-imperialist struggle, by exhorting the people of Shanghai to further develop the movement to “Resist America and Aid Korea.”

The CCP took an uncompromising stand against the former imperialists, stripping them of power at the level of law and policy, such as when the second session of the 7th plenum passed a resolution eliminating special privileges once enjoyed by foreign nations. And the central leadership stressed that a similar

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33 Incidentally, British national Byron Constabe re-registered the name Shanghai Race Club, and used it to promote his project “The Royal Enclosure” as a business in Shanghai. While the Club runs no races, it does conduct social events with a stated goal of introducing Shanghai consumers to the tradition of English racing and the finest English race horses. The new Club’s website can be viewed at http://www.theshanghairaceclub.com/ (accessed 14 Oct 2018). See also Charley Lanyon, “One British Entrepreneur revives Shanghai Race Club for China’s Aspiring Classes,” South China Morning Post, 24 Oct 2013.

34 “Cong Paomating dao Renmin Guangchang: Shanghai Paomating shouhui yundong” (From Racecourse to People’s Square: The movement for the return of the Shanghai racecourse), Zhonggong yanjiuyuan jindai shi yanjiusuo jikan, vol. 48 (2005): 99.

35 Huang Yuejin, ed., Shanghai Renmin Guangchang (Shanghai People’s Square) (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2000), 11.


38 Xiong, 11.
stand be taken across the country and that the masses be mobilized to participate in
the “fight against the remnants of reactionary forces until victory is achieved,” as a
telegram from Beijing instructed Shanghai’s city government. Eradicating physical
structures with “reactionary traces” was an important and highly visible part of this
larger effort. Demolishing colonial buildings and monuments provided concrete evi-
dence of the new state’s ability to destroy the old. In March 1951, the Bureau of
Public Works contacted the Shanghai Municipal Government to discuss the destruc-
tion of the memorial, in Fuxing park, to the famous French aviator, René Vallon. In
May, the Municipal Government approved the plan, which included replacing
Vallon’s likeness with a statue of the beloved author Lu Xun, and ordered the
similar destruction of a “reactionary monument” at the Longhua Temple. City
leaders further instructed the Bureau to conduct a comprehensive survey to find
and remove any reactionary vestiges that remained in the city. At the same time,
the municipal Culture and Education Committee later reported, numerous Shanghai
residents were writing letters to the new government, expressing their support for
these efforts to demolish, replace, and rename these “reactionary remnants.”

The racecourse, a monument to British notions of Euro-superiority, had long been
protected by “gunboat diplomacy,” and thus razing parts of it to the ground and
replacing it with a Chinese public space emblematized the new government’s nation-
alist promise to fight for the people.

On May 3, 1951 the Municipal Party Committee’s Propaganda Department
issued a resolution: as Shanghai had no space suitable for large-scale parades in
honor of Labor and National Days, the city would mobilize volunteer youth
laborers to begin transforming the track into such a space. On August 6, the
Propaganda Department proposed their plan for the conversion, and the
Military Control Commission then instructed the Foreign Affairs Office and
Bureau of Land Administration to draw up a set of practical measures for the

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39 Shanghai renmin geming shi huace, 381.
40 René Vallon died when he fell from a great height onto the Shanghai racecourse on May 7,
1911. Shanghai Shi Renmin Zhengfu Gongwuju (Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Public Works),
Shanghai shi Renmin Zhengfu Weihua (Shanghai Municipal Government, Culture Department),
“Guanyu chaichu Fuxing gongyuan jiu Huanlong jinian ta gaijian Lu Xun xiongxiang de pitu”
(Reply regarding the destruction of Fuxing park’s Vallon monument and replacing it with a bust
of Lu Xun), 9 August 1951, SHDAG, B172-4-234, 6–14.
41 Shanghai Renmin Zhengfu (Shanghai Municipal Government), “Guanyu chaichu fandong-
pai canliu beishi shi zhishi zonzhao de tongzhi” (Notice regarding compliance with the order to
destroy reactionary remnant monuments), 12 May 1951, SHDAG, B172-4-234, 5–6.
42 Shanghai Shi Renmin Zhengfu Wenhua Jiaoyu Weiyuanhui (Shanghai Municipal Govern-
ment Culture and Education Committee), “Guanyu benshi ge qu fandong yiji chuli yijian de han”
(Opinion letters from all over the city on handling reactionary remnants), 24 December
1952, SHDAG, B172-4-234, 8–11.
43 Zhang Ning, 97–136; Shanghai Renmin Zhengfu zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (Committee for
the compilation of Shanghai People’s Government annals), ed., Shanghai zhengfu zhi (Shanghai
government annals) (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2004), 806, 807–11.
44 Gongqingtuan Shanghai Shi Gongwei ban’gong shi (Shanghai Communist Youth League
office of the Working Committee), “Guanyu xiujian renmin guangchang tuanyan qingnian ying
ji ji caijia de tongzhi” (Notice that Communist Youth League members should enthusiastically
take part in the effort to People’s Square reconstruction), 7 September 1951, SHDAG, C21-2-
137, 1.
Four months later, in August 1951, the Shanghai Military Control Commission declared that the project would begin immediately. On September 6, 1951, the first plenary meeting of the management board for the reconstruction discussed the issue of the name: it was unanimously decided to remake and rename the racecourse as People’s Square, in which the people themselves would attend mass rallies and demonstrations (and thus it was projected to have the capacity to hold 80,000–100,000 people). In fact, People’s Square was only one piece of the proposed public venue. While the southern part of the track would be transformed into a square and the northern part of the track would become the People’s Park, for which Mayor Chen Yi personally inscribed a sign. The wide, parade-ready People’s Avenue would begin from Tibet Middle Road and run northwest between the Square and the Park, completing the new public space. Over time the CCP would cement the area as a cultural center by transforming some of the city’s best buildings into cultural facilities: onetime residential buildings in the racecourse complex would become the Shanghai Library, the old Chung Wei Bank building was to be the Shanghai Museum; the Canidrome with its stands would be transformed into Culture Square; the Shanghai Cotton Exchange would be the Museum of Natural History; and the Shanghai Race Club, that ultimate symbol of imperialist culture, would showcase Chinese culture as the Shanghai Art Museum. Converting these old building into modern facilities with high-quality equipment, was to exemplify Shanghai’s emergence as a cultural center for the people under the leadership of the Party.

On September 7, the city government held the People’s Square groundbreaking ceremony at what was still the racecourse. Vice-Mayor Pan Hannian proclaimed that the construction symbolizes the great strength of the people of Shanghai who are relying on their own labor to remake the old Shanghai and build the new Shanghai. This place, once known as ‘an adventurers’ playground,’ was the hotbed of imperialist evils, it was truly harmful to the people of Shanghai. Now it has returned to the people. Now we must rely on our labor to transform this evil place, this place harmful to the people of Shanghai, into a place useful and good for them.

The day after the ceremony, 2,100 China Youth League (CYL) members joined 700 construction workers and 1,200 porters to start construction. Following the
example of Soviet Youth League members, who volunteered to build the “youth city,” and of Beijing Youth League members, who volunteered to build Tiananmen Square, the CYL members answered a call from the City Work Committee and spent their school vacation participating in voluntary labor on the racetrack renovation. The media enthusiastically celebrated the CYL effort claiming the youths wanted “to take the great imperialist gambling house that sucked the blood of the Chinese people and the barracks of the imperialist army that invaded China and rebuild them into a park for culture and leisure and a People’s Square that celebrates the beauty of the working people.”

The actual construction began with People’s Avenue, which was largely completed by October 1. But when the city began launching parades along the Avenue, for the October First National Day and the May First Labor Day, clouds of unattractive and unhygienic dust rose up from the stone and cinder surface to engulf the marching troops and their audience. Shanghai residents proposed the road be resurfaced with higher-quality materials, not only to improve parade conditions but also to enable normal car transit outside of the festivities, thus mitigating traffic in the surrounding area. In 1954, the municipal government agreed to a proposal from the City Construction Committee to rebuild and resurface the thoroughfare and open it to cars in order to “ease the traffic in the city center and also give residents a place for leisure.” The city voted down a proposal from Soviet experts to demolish part of the southern grandstand on Huangpu road and transform the city axis. They decided to maintain the original road path and lay 22.79 meters of granite down the center. By 1956, People’s Avenue had 260 pillars separating the various lanes, with lights specially designed in the shape of palace lanterns. Four green areas were laid at the four corners of the road, in front of the reviewing stand, and a traffic island was constructed in front of the Culture Palace at the intersection of Tibet and Huangpi Roads.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, People’s Avenue was one of the symbols of Shanghai. Like the Park Hotel, images of the avenue were printed on towels, cups, notebooks, suitcases, and similar everyday products. Many urbanites did feel that the Avenue belonged to the people. One Shanghai resident happily recalled living on Qipan Road, just near the avenue, when he was a child:

There was a pedestal in People’s Square with a lantern-like lamp, which had about 72 lights at the time. Its base was a large stone disk, solid and beautiful. The edge of the disc had two layers, the bottom layer served as a seat where

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50 “Zai women weida de zuguo li: liangqian duo ge qingnian tuanyuan xiujian Shanghai renmin guangchang” (In our great country: More than 2000 Youth League members rebuild Shanghai’s People’s Square), Ningbo dazhong (Ningbo Masses), 15 September 1951, 4.
51 Huang Yuejin, ed., Shanghai renmin guangchang (Shanghai’s people’s square) (Shanghai: Shehuikexue yuan chubanshe, 2000), 12–13.
52 A set of residential houses on the eastern side of People’s Avenue was demolished in 1952, so that the eastern access point could be enlarged in the shape of a loudspeaker. In 1953, 90 privately owned buildings were demolished, so that the thoroughfare could be widened. From then on, the 560-meter-long and 100-meter-wide People’s Avenue ran unimpeded. Shanghai Shi Gongwuju (Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Public Works), “Xinjian renmin guangchang gongyuan 1952 nian gongcheng jiuhua renwu shu” (Assignments for the 1952 construction project to rebuild People’s Square and Park) December 1952, SSDAG, B326-5-3, 6.
53 The damaged granite was paved in 1979. Shanghai chegshi guihua zhi, 63, 304.
54 Yuan Nianqi, Shizi jietou (Crossroads) (Xuelin chubanshe, 2004), 112.
people could rest, sitting in the sun or under the moon, while children amused themselves by climbing up and down. Kids in the neighborhood played football, rode bicycles, and even arranged fights in the avenue.  

Construction on People’s Park began in January 1952. Turning an “imperialist adventurers playground” into a playground for the people was a politically symbolic project for the new state, but the CCP was also fulfilling a much more practical need for more green space in the city. In 1949 the city center had a total green surface (including parks, nurseries and squares) of 84.5 hectares, equivalent to 0.2 square meters per capita. The Soviet standard for northern cities at the time was 1.2 ha of public green areas for 1000 residents; Shanghai was 60 time less than that. The scarcity of green areas was obvious, yet in 1950, the Bureau of Public Works had attempted to reduce parks to a maximum of 13 in the city. Their plan had further included the elimination of all children’s parks. Soon after, however, during the first meeting of the second session of the People’s Congress, several districts complained that there were too few parks in the city and requested the maintenance of existing parks and the construction of new ones. In response, the city ordered the reopening of 10 parks, 4 of which were for children, but the reopened spaces were small and located in suburban districts, so they did little to extend the city’s green space in general and nothing at all for the heavily populated central districts. Thus, when People’s Park, with its 1,885,000 acres of green, opened right in the heart of that city center, residents were delighted. On the Park’s opening day, “City residents came from near and far, and first-day visitors reached the quite unexpected level of 400,000.” The Bureau of Public Works probably did not need to exaggerate when they wrote that the park became “the center of joyful singing and dancing for all city residents, making them feel deeply the happiness and pride of being people of the new China. Even international friends come to see this imperialist-tainted casino transformed into the people’s playground.”

People loved the park, in part because they had participated in its construction. Overall, residents contributed 49,200 h of labor and all of the 248 tons of stone used for artificial hills. Several agencies, organizations, and individuals donated

55 G. Yang, email message to author, 12 July 2016.
56 Many local records and reference works list incorrect dates for the construction of People’s Park. See Shanghai Gongwuju, Yuanchang Guanlichu (Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Public Works, Office of Parks Administration), “Pijian renmin gongyuan zongji” (Summary of starting work on People’s Park), December 1952, SHDAG, B326-5-3, 7.
57 Shanghai Gongwuju (Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Public Works), “Yuanchang guanli chu 1949 nian gongzuo nianzhong zongjie” (Parks Administration office 1949 year-end work summary), 21 Jan 1950, SHDAG, B257-1-14, 8.
58 Shanghai jianshe bianji bu (Shanghai construction editorial department), Shanghai jianshe 1949–1985, (Shanghai construction 1949–1985), (Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe 1989), 81.
60 Shanghai jianshe bianji bu (Shanghai construction editorial department), Shanghai jianshe 1949–1985, (Shanghai construction 1949–1985), (Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe 1989), 81.
61 “Pijian renmin gongyuan zongji,” 2, 9.
rare trees and other vegetation for a total of more than 2,000 plants, with a survival rate of 96%, thanks to the care of the workers. The enormous amount of time, material, and energy that Shanghainese contributed to the reconstruction effort can be contrasted with the near absence of the otherwise ubiquitous Soviet advisors. The track transformation is often compared with or linked to the CCP’s other most famous reconstruction project—the expansion of Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. The two efforts were certainly similar in their desire to inscribe Communist legitimacy and revolutionary nationalism into the physical spaces and built environments of China’s major cities, but it is very interesting to note that while Soviet experts were instrumental in the Tiananmen expansion, they seem to have played almost no role in the racecourse renovation.

To be sure, there were Soviet consultants in Shanghai. In December 1949, for example, the State Administrative Council had invited two Soviet experts to supervise the work of city construction and management in Shanghai, and in March 1950, the city formulated an “urban reconstruction and future development” proposal, based on Soviet urban planning. As late as September 1953, Soviet advisors were still active in this area with a third Soviet planner taking a supervisory role in the development of Shanghai’s “master plan.” Thus it is significant to note that the racecourse restructuring committee did not receive any complete proposals from Soviet experts related to the reconstruction of People’s Square and People’s Park. Furthermore, the records of the Bureau of Public works, which was responsible for city planning, suggest that there was no Soviet supervision or collaboration in the racecourse renovation. Given the heavy Soviet involvement in the Tiananmen project, as well as the USSR’s bountiful experience in the creation of socialist public spaces, their lack of participation in the racecourse reconstruction is puzzling—unless perhaps it was purposeful. The tight associations between the racecourse and imperialism might have made city planners reticent to allow intervention from yet another foreign power (and one of China’s former colonizers at that). The track renovation was, after all, intended to be the ultimate physical embodiment of the CCP’s nationalist rejection of foreign domination. Self-reliance in the Shanghai racecourse renovation further embodied the nationalist slogan of “building the people’s new Shanghai on the basis of our willpower.”

The fact that the Party undertook such a large-scale construction project during a period when finances were extremely tight (as was the case in the first few years after

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63 “Xinjian renmin guangchang gongyuan 1952 nian gongcheng jihua renwu shu,” 14.
64 Even as the new state did take Soviet advice on the Tiananmen effort, Beijing mayor Peng Zhen vocally expressed his opposition to regularly relying on Soviet models. See Hung, Dibiao, 1, 53–54. See also, Tan Gang, “Xingxiang suzao yu zhengquan gonggu: jianguo chuqi Nei Menggu muqu de xingbing fangzhi gongzuo” (Reshaping physical appearances and consolidating power: the effort to cure venereal disease in Inner Mongolia during the early PRC period), 21 shiji (February 2014): 141. On disputes between Soviet experts and Chinese city planners, resulting in lack of concrete Soviet influence in many places, see Hung, Dibiao, 4–13.
65 Shanghai chengshi guihua zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (Committee for the compilation of Shanghai urban planning annals), ed., Shanghai chengshi guihua zhi (Shanghai urban planning annals) (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1999), 88–89.
the national takeover) meant that the renovation of the racecourse had an important political function. As the Bureau of Public Works said explicitly

Besides expanding green areas, the main point [of the racecourse reconstruction] is its deep political significance: The victory of the Chinese people’s revolution drove away imperialism, giving new life to this land that had formerly suffered under the dark rule of oppression. To build a People’s Park, to make it into the playground for the Chinese working people who have achieved new life, is a rich and vivid lesson in patriotism for the people of the whole nation, and especially for the people of Shanghai. Therefore, building the park is not only an urgent practical necessity; it is also of great political significance.67

It was crucial to the CCP that the space of central Shanghai continue to remind passersby that they were now “the masters of their country.” Especially in the early years of the PRC, ordinary people were regularly told that under the CCP, they could take back their country and change their own fate. When ordinary people volunteered to tear down a vivid symbol of imperialism and replace it with a public space of their own, this confirmed their role as masters, and aroused enthusiasm and the loyalty towards the Party and the nation. People’s Square was the physical foundation for the consolidation of CCP power.

The Square served as the foundation of governance in other ways as well. For example, Zhang Jishun has shown that China’s first general election (1953–54) was similar to the political activities held in People’s Square. Like the Square, the election was also a stage, on which urbanites competed.68 The election, like the nationalist and patriotic celebrations, confirmed the right of the Chinese to rule their own country, under the CCP. As Chen Yi said,

The victorious struggle of the people of Shanghai proves one truth: the Chinese people don’t depend on the strength of imperialism. Not only they can manage a big city like Shanghai, they can manage it very well, they can transform it well, and in the future they will certainly rebuild it well!”69

THE CARNIVAL OF POLITICAL CEREMONY

As Shanghai celebrated its third year of Liberation, Mayor Chen Yi stressed the city’s achievements in throwing off colonialism:

Shanghai has already gone from a city that relied on an imperialist economy to a city that can develop independently; Shanghai is no longer a city that serves the imperialist, reactionary powers, and has instead become a city that serves the people and serves production; Shanghai has largely eliminated the poisonous remnants of imperialism and its running dogs, and has started

67 Xinjian renmin guangchang gongyuan 1952 nian gongcheng jihua renwu shu,” 2.
69 Liu, 614–15.
on the road to normal, healthy development. This is what most deserves commemoration, what most deserves congratulations!70

The racecourse occupied a key symbolic place in this rhetoric, and a key physical place in its embodiment: Celebratory exhibitions, which contrasted Old and New Shanghai, highlighted the visual transformation of the track under the CCP by displaying photographs with captions like “The pre-liberation race track has now been transformed into beautiful People’s Park.”71

Like Chang’an Avenue, which ran between Tiananmen’s Gate and its public square, People’s Avenue, similarly boarded by the square and the park on either side, became the primary location and the obligatory path for mass rallies and parades. Though it was smaller than Chang’an in terms of length, width, and reputation, for Shanghaihainese People’s Avenue had an equivalent status, and like Tiananmen Square, the newly constructed People’s Square became the most common site for patriotic rallies and demonstrations against foreign imperialism. Commemoration is a constituent element of political ceremonies, and in December 1949, the CCP proclaimed new mass holidays and festivities, to clearly mark the end of the old society and the birth of a new era. Communist holidays included Youth Day and Army Day, but the two with the most political significance were the May First Labor Day and the October First National Day. Before 1978, these two days were characterized by mass gatherings and parade, which were carefully planned and highly orchestrated.72 The National Day celebrations, for example, were the responsibility of a specially constituted command and preparatory committee, headed by the mayor. Those powers appointed the leadership and the members of the parade administration group, a lineup of almost 70 people, which included prominent figures from the Party, the government, the army, and the realms of culture and arts.73 The National Day command could issue decrees and strictly regulate everything from the parade route and pattern to the alignment of the army and mass organizations.74 In order to make the celebration “as fun as possible” and “happy but not messy,” the preparatory committee carried out a rigorous selection process for each year’s participants. Contingents of paraders were tightly organized: they were divided in groups of 60, 240, 1,200, and 6,000 members (small group, medium group, large group, and detachment, respectively). Each was assigned a captain, a vice-captain, a liaison, a propagandist, and a disciplinary officer.

70 Liu, 614–15.
71 “Fa diguozhuyi xibao Zhongguo ren xuehan de da duchang: paomating” (French imperialist gambling house sucks the blood and sweat from the Chinese people), SHDAG, H1-21-8, 11; “Jiefang Taiwan xuanchuan gongzuo zhanlanhui zhaopian: guoqu de Paomating” (Pictures from the liberate Taiwan propaganda work exhibition: the former Racecourse), SHSDAG, H1-15-17, 47.
72 Hung, Mao’s New World, 75–110.
73 Shanghai Renmin Zhengfu (Shanghai Municipal Government), “Huadong ji Shanghai shi ge jie renmin qingzhu 1952 nian guoqingjie choubei weiyuanhui (caoan)” (Committee to prepare for the Huadong and Shanghai all-peoples 1952 National Day celebration (draft measure)) 29 September 1952, SSDAG, B55-1-1, 1–3.
Among the matters needing attention was the need to preserve the purity of parade participants, meaning people who had labels such as “rightist” or “bad element” were excluded. Expectations were strict: parade groups had to attend the parade, rain or shine, and in preparation for the event, organizers were to work with the groups to provide education on political thought, organization, discipline, and safety.\(^75\)

The May First and October rallies and demonstrations were also sites for the delivery of state propaganda to a mass audience. Municipal authorities gave important speeches, analyzing the current political situation, emphasizing the most recent and urgent political tasks and campaigns, and calling for people from all circles to devote themselves to the fight.\(^76\) In 1952, the city government issued the propaganda outline for the National Day celebrations, which instructed announcers to concretely describe the great successes of our cause, point out that our nation is about to enter a new phase of construction, warn that we must see through the US imperialists’ aggression plots and war tactics. In short, the entire situation is beneficial to our nation and to the peace and democracy camp.\(^77\)

When Tan Zhenlin, the third secretary of the Communist Party’s East China Bureau, who presided over that year’s celebration, ended his speech, he led the masses in: “Long live the PRC!” “Long live the CCP!” “Long live the great leader of the people, chairman Mao Zedong!”\(^78\)

In 1953, the National Day gathering began precisely at 8 pm sharp, when the orchestra played “The East is Red.” Soon after, searchlights of all colors illuminated the square, fireworks blazed and firecrackers banged, and the masses cheered and chanted the slogans noted above.\(^79\) In that year, Chen Yi used the occasion of the National Day celebration to call on the people of East China and Shanghai to “mobilize, increase production, increase income, practice strict economy, reduce expenses, complete and exceed quotas, complete the struggles and the plans of


\(^76\) In the first few years, National Day propaganda was the responsibility of the Municipal Propaganda Bureau, but starting in 1955, the editorial bureau of the “handbook of current events” (Shishi shouce) took charge of formulating that year’s propaganda outline. See Shanghai Shi Weiyuanhui Xuanchuanbu (Shanghai Municipal Committee Propaganda Department), “Shishi shouce bianji bu Xuanchuanbu guanyu muqian guojixingshi he women de renwu de xuanchuan tigang” (Handbook of current events Editorial Department, Propaganda Department, outline of current propaganda duties related to National Day), 24 April 1955, SHDAG, B56-2-3, 34–43.


\(^78\) Huadong ji Shanghai ge jie renmin qingzhu disanjie Guoqingjie choubei weihui (East China and Shanghai preparatory committee for all-people’s celebration of the third National Day), “Guanyu Tan zhengwei zai guoqingjie youxing de jianghua caogao” (Draft of Comissar Tan’s National Day demonstration speech), 29 Sept 1952, SHDAG, B55-1-1, 5.

1953, thus preparing the conditions for the 1954 national plan. The 1958 May First celebrations centered on the theme of “responding to the Great Leap Forward” and thus the related festivities had to “show the happy mood of the city’s working people and display the revolutionary drive of the city’s working people in every battlefront.” They needed to “reach the Great Leap Forward’s targets to convey the working people’s spirit (under the guidance of the CCP) to ‘achieve greater, faster, better economic results, gather up courage, and strive for progress’.”

State media amplified these efforts, to reach beyond the participants and attendees. In 1959, Shanghai People’s Broadcasting broadcasted live from the May First and National Day parades and rallies. Throughout, radio and TV commentaries all stressed the positive response to every appeal from the Central Committee. Regular, coordinated propaganda from the “People’s Daily,” “Liberation Daily,” and other Party media constituted a discursive political space to bolster the physical space of the renovated racecourse. Corresponding activities in those two coordinated spaces created the sense of an organic unity thus constructing the image of the nation and the Party and molding the identification of the masses.

Of course, domestic matters were not the only focus of CCP propaganda and mass mobilization. In the early PRC period, the Party used the term “internationalism” (guoji zhuyi) to stress that political movements must consider the conditions of people all over the world and should not be focused solely on the interests of one particular nation or country. Liu Shaoqi, chairman of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, argued that nation was directly connected to class, meaning that national struggle was directly connected to class struggle. Liu and other leaders claimed that proletarian nationalism was different the nationalism of the capitalist classes. The basic principle of the proletariat’s nationalist perspective, and its treatment of nations around the world, was that effective revolutionary praxis should develop by identifying the fundamental interests of the masses in one’s own country, as well as the interests of the masses worldwide. For the CCP, the nature of the proletarian class meant that it resolutely opposed all forms of national oppression and supported all nations in freely organizing and forming alliances with the end goal of realizing world socialism. City leaders also used Shanghai’s new public space to rally support for their international policies as well.

In fact, of the 19 mass gatherings (over 50,000 people) held in People’s Square between 1949 and 1965, 13 were of the type discussed above, gatherings to declare sovereignty internationally and to mobilize internally, while 6 were in support of allied socialist nations struggling against imperialism. The Culture and Education Bureau of the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions organized an August 1950

80 Liu, 651.
81 Shanghai shi renmin zhengfu (Shanghai Municipal Government), “Guanyu shiwei youxing de quzhong zuzhi gongzuo tongzhi” (Notice regarding work with mass organizations for the demonstration), 20 Sept 1958 SHDAG, A29-2-68, 1–2.
82 Shanghai dianshitai (Shanghai television broadcasting), “Guanyu ‘Wuyi’ ‘Wusi’ jiemu anpai he jianguo shizhounian jieu gongzuo xiaojie” (Brief summary of the work for the tenth anniversary of the founding of the PRC and for May First and May Fourth), 9 April 1959, SHDAG, B92-2-537, 1.
Army Day demonstration to oppose the U.S. invasion of Korea and Taiwan. That same year, National Day activities included a demonstration (at the racecourse) of 700,000 soldiers and civilians against imperialist wars of aggression. As the tables below indicate, organized mass campaigns such as that to Resist America and Aid Korea became an important tool for the Party to create internal coherence and went hand-in-hand with the anti-imperialist rhetoric that had accompanied the calls to convert the colonial racetrack. As the Shanghai Municipal Committee declared,

More than three quarters of the city’s population took part in the great Resist America, Aid Korea Campaign, thus receiving extensive education in patriotism and internationalism; wiping out the self-hatred and the mindset of loving, fearing, and worshipping the U.S. that had been inculcated by more than a hundred years of imperialist control; establishing national self-respect and self-confidence; and cultivating public interest and concern for politics and current affairs.

As far as the Committee was concerned, this demonstrated that the Resist America Aid Korea campaign not only succeeded in mobilizing the revolutionary masses; it also, and even more importantly, endowed Party work with legitimacy. The Municipal Committee and the City government had “asked people from all walks of life to participate in the six important tasks of increasing production and practicing economy in support of the Resist America and Aid Korea Campaign,” which included “carrying out deep patriotic and internationalist education; universally keeping the patriotic pledge; continually developing the upsurge in patriotic contributions; taking extra care of soldiers and their families; and eradicating imperialist remnants.”

Such rhetoric continued throughout the 1950s and 60s, and demonstrations to reinforce the anti-imperialist stance of the PRC were even more symbolic when held in the massive public space that the Chinese people had taken back from their onetime colonizers. In July 1956, more than 100,000 people took part in the “meeting of the Shanghai people to protest the Anglo-American armed aggression in Lebanon and Jordan, and to give support to Middle Eastern people’s war of liberation.” Just two months late, in September, over 250,000 people took part in the “meeting of the Shanghai people in support of our government’s ‘declaration concerning territorial waters’ and prime minister Zhou Enlai’s ‘declaration about the situation in Taiwan and in opposition to the military menace of US imperialism’.”

In February 1961, more than 80,000 people took part in the “meeting protesting imperialism and its agents’ killing of Congo’s prime minister Lumumba, supporting the Congolese people’s righteous struggle in defense of national independence and national unity”; in April more than 500,000 people once again visited the public

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84 Shanghai Shi Zonggonghui Wenjiaobu (Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions, Culture and Education Department), “Guanyu qingzhu bayi jianjun fanmei qinliu Chaoxian, Taiwan shiwei youxing zongjie” (Summary of the demonstration in celebration of army day and against the US invasion of Korea and Taiwan), 14 August 1950, SHDAG, A22-2-20, 87.
85 Liu, 610.
86 Zhonggong Shanghai lishi shilu, 56
complex for the “meeting in support of Cuba’s struggle against US imperialism”; and in December, at least 700,000 people participated in the “rally in support of the Congolese people against American and Belgian imperialists’ war of armed aggression.” In February 1965, “the people of Shanghai” once again denounced imperialism, opposing “the US expansion of the Vietnam war, and supporting the national struggle of the Vietnamese people against America.”

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, one could frequently hear legions of voices shouting in unison, “People of the country unite, let’s liberate Taiwan and Tibet! Oppose the American imperialist invasion of Taiwan and Korea!” and “Expel American imperialists from south Korea!” and “Get out from Taiwan, part of our national territory!”

While the emphasis of the rallies changed from festival to festival and from year to year, it was consistent in that it stressed the identification of the masses with the nation and the Party. Without exception, all associated events began with the anthem and the raising of the flag, and all participants, from the Party, the administration, the military, or the masses, all sang the anthem and saluted the flag. As research on the anthem and the flag has shown, singing in unison, with the flag in sight, created in individuals a sense of unity with the nation, and reinforced feelings of national humiliation as personal humiliation, rousing individuals into a willingness to sacrifice themselves for their country. As Elizabeth Perry argued, emotional mobilization was a crucial factor for the success of the Chinese revolution. And thus, although commemorative events were orchestrated by the state for obvious political and propagandistic purposes, they were also a treat for residents, creating a festival atmosphere in Shanghai. Even when conditions were less than favorable, mass celebrations drew crowds. On the afternoon of October 2, 1949, for example, it rained hard in Shanghai. A rally in defense of world peace and celebration of the new state was scheduled to begin at the as-yet unrenovated track at 4:30. Organizers had “estimated that 10,000 people would take part, but over 40,000 showed up. Several work units and individuals voluntarily stood in the square braving wind and rain, beating gongs and sounding drums, emotions running very high.” Reports noted that participants’ clothing was soaked through and “over 80 people got ill because of the wind and cold.” Yet people stayed. later recalled this day, noting that even as “medical personnel were busy providing emergency treatment … the mood of the crowd rose higher and higher, 40,000 people as

88 Records of all events taken from Zhonggong Shanghai Shiwei Dangshi Yanjiushi (Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Party History Research Office), ed., Zhonggong Shanghai lishi shilu (1949–2004) (Annals of the Shanghai Communist Party), Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004. In 1954, a May First demonstration and parade was organized but the details are unclear. See Liu Shufa, ed., Chen Yi nianpu, vol. 1, 659. Whether May First or October First demonstrations and parades were organized is unclear in the records, which omit these two years. Records from 1951, 1957–1960, 1962–1964 are similarly unclear.
89 “Paomating nei hongqi si hai Hushi qishiwan ren da youxing” (Red flags everywhere in the Shanghai Racecourse during the 700,000-person demonstration) Ningbo shibao (Ningbo Times), 3 Oct 1950, 1.
92 Huang, 19.
one, paying no attention to wind and rain, passionately going on ... because inside them the sun of the new China had risen, and they were full of light and joy. They were full of the beautiful feeling of being the masters of their country.”

Before the national takeover, the Party had successfully created a festival culture in their northern base areas, rousing emotions that mobilized people, strengthened their collective identification, and fostered cohesion between soldiers and civilians, all of which contributed to the CCP’s effective consolidation of power in the pre-49 period. After 1949, the CCP continued using this successful method. As a Shanghainese, born in 1943, recalled

the most anticipated event was, of course, the October 1 nighttime fireworks display in People’s Square. That was a big night for us residents of Huile Alley because watching fireworks on Shikumen on Huile Alley was just as good as watching from the front-row seating in the stands. At that time, relatives and friends would come early to set up their free wicker chairs, benches, and small stools before the city began controlling traffic. This was a unique honor for the residents in the upper areas.

In Shanghai, major rallies used emotion work to forge crucial and effective links between the Party and the people, and the large central public space within which the celebrations took place, served as a regular reminder to the Shanghainese who would pass through the area repeatedly in their daily lives. They would be reminded of that year’s political messages, the calls to oppose tradition, destroy the old order, and welcome the new socialist era. They would recall the powerful emotions they felt as they celebrated concrete changes, such as the transformation of an imperialist racecourse into a People’s Square, as they shouted, “Long Live the PRC!” “Long Live the CCP,” “Long live Chairman Mao!” The former racecourse had become a constant reminder of the Communist promise, confirming in people’s everyday lives the legitimacy of the Party and the centrality of Mao Zedong’s in Chinese modern revolutionary history.

City leaders reinforced the ties between the enjoyment of the new public spaces and political participation by encouraging people to make a day of rallies and demonstrations by spending leisure time in the park. On the Labor Day and National Day holidays (May 1 and October 1, respectively) festivities combined large-scale parades down People’s Avenue and demonstrations in People’s Square with individual and family visits to the People’s Park. Such park events came to be grand occasions as leaders from all over Shanghai, East China, and even sometimes from Beijing, visited the park where they left their podiums to celebrate with thousands of ordinary people. During the 1950s and 60s, the tradition of passing

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93 Huang, 19.
95 B. Shen, interview by author, 27 May 2016.
97 Huang, 14–15.
holidays in the park gained popularity as large groups of young workers and students staged their “Youth League day” or “Pioneer day” activities there. In addition to providing a space for these young people to “express deep love for the nation, the party, and the future,” the park was open at night and thus became a popular place for expressing love of a more personal nature as well. In fact, People’s Park and the Bund were the only two public places for lovers in Mao-era Shanghai.

As Shanghai’s residents thus came to enjoy the public spaces for leisure, and would willingly attend mass festivities there, city leaders worked to keep political meanings front and center in people’s minds, to emphasize the message that only in the new China could people enjoy the spaces of their own city. As the 1953 National Day Organizing Committee wrote,

The social gatherings during the National Day celebration displayed the joyous feelings of city residents from all walks of life as they celebrated National Day, and they provided all residents with a profound lesson in patriotism. Female workers chanted ‘We would have never even dreamt that tonight we could wear skirts and knitted shirts and sing and dance on the grass of People’s Square, under the fireworks. Without Chairman Mao, how could we have such a life? And this is just the beginning.’

That committee also stated their aims quite explicitly, noting that together, the National Day festivities must

do deep educational work in teaching love for the nation, the party, and the military … and strengthen the intimate relations between the Party, the people’s Government, the trade unions, the China Youth League and the masses, thus uniting and educating even larger groups of people from every social stratum.

The National Day preparatory committee endeavored to further ensure organization and dedication in 1953 by choosing workers, students, and PLA soldiers as the backbone of mass gathering groups, as they were seen as not only politically reliable but also as very enthusiastic. Those who were selected for participation received admission tickets, which they could neither transfer nor lose. Those who were not selected could still take part in various celebratory activities in the area. In the early years of the PRC, May First and National Day were the only large-scale mass events, and they continued all night out in the open. Therefore, those who were chosen to participate in the national day festivities were celebrated by Shanghai’s other residents for the qualities that earned them that honor, especially political reliability. Such praise in the early PRC, when political campaigns were frequent, not

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98 Shanghai renmin qingzhu 1953 nian Guoqingjie choubei weiyuanhui zhiihuibu lianhuan bangongshi (Shanghai office of the preparatory committee command for 1953 National Day celebration get-together), “Guoqing lianhuan gongzuo de chubu zongjie” (Summary of the first steps in the work related to the National Day get-together), 23 Sept 1953, SHDAG, B55-1-3, 85.
99 “Guoqing lianhuan gongzuo de chubu zongjie,” 85.
only provided a powerful personal safeguard but also glorified the person who received it. Those who had not been selected, but hoped to win a spot in the future, admired and cultivated the qualities they observed in the chosen ones, sacralizing the celebrations, and their location, within the political culture (Table 1).101

The arrangement of the city further deepened the effects of mass celebrations. During the festivities the city’s physical appearance emphasized the three ardent loves: love for country, love for the Party, and love for chairman Mao. Main streets such as Nanjing Road, Tibet Road, and Yan’an Road were decorated, as were shops and other work units. The cinemas on all sides of People’s Square were decorated and all city theaters were required to project a slide show of slogans such as “long live the PRC!” “long live the CCP!” “long live Chairman Mao!” Even the public buses were festooned. In 1954 the Park Hotel, one of the tallest buildings in Asia, straight across from People’s Square, was draped in an enormous red banner, on which was written “long live the great leader of the Chinese people Chairman Mao Zedong” and similar slogans. In 1955, the May First celebration plan required decorations to use the celebration of May First to oppose the war schemes of American imperialism, to oppose the use of nuclear weapons, to liberate Taiwan, to push the people of Shanghai and the people of the whole country to make great efforts to complete the 1955 national construction plan, and to safeguard peace in the Far East and the world.103

THE CORE OF THE NEW SHANGHAI: REVOLUTION OR CONTINUATION?

In 1951, when the Party took possession of the Shanghai racecourse, they spoke for the first time of transforming the racecourse into a space to commemorate and celebrate the country and the nation. They proposed the transformation of the racecourse into People’s Avenue, People’s Square, and People’s Park, to reorder space in Shanghai so that people’s everyday activities would occur in spaces that evoked and reinforced their roles as new political subjects. Yet, while the CCP exhorted urbanites to completely eradicate the “feudal remnant” that was the race club grounds, the concrete changes they made were not as revolutionary as it seemed. A 1953 version of the Shanghai urban planning map the city center fell just short of replicating its earlier boundaries under the foreign powers and the KMT. By 1959, the People’s Square, Park, and Avenue complex, sitting as it did on a


103 Shanghai renmin qingzhu Wuyi Guoji Laodongjie bangongshi (Office of the Shanghai people’s celebration of May First International Labor Day), “Guanyu buzhi jige zhuyao gaolou dasha jufu biaoyu de qingkuang cailiao” (Materials concerning decorating important buildings with slogans), 28 April 1954, SHDAG, B56-2-2, 7–9.
TABLE 1.
The Major Mass Gathering Held in the Old Area of the Race Track by the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and by the Municipal Government Between 1949 and 1965.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Kind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Racetrack</td>
<td>Soldiers and civilians from Shanghai</td>
<td>Commemoration of the 12th anniversary of 7/7 (War of Resistance against Japan) and celebration of Shanghai’s Liberation</td>
<td>Over 1,500,000</td>
<td>Political commemoration and celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Racetrack</td>
<td>Soldiers and civilians from Shanghai</td>
<td>Demonstration to defend peace and celebrate the establishment of the Central Government</td>
<td>Over 500,000</td>
<td>Political demonstration and celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Racetrack</td>
<td>Workers from Shanghai joined by “people from all walks of life” (各界群众)</td>
<td>Celebration of Labor Day (the workers’ pickets reviewed the troops)</td>
<td>Over 600,000</td>
<td>Political celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Racetrack</td>
<td>PLA garrison in Shanghai and “people from all walks of life”</td>
<td>The first National Day</td>
<td>Over 750,000</td>
<td>Political celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Racetrack</td>
<td>PLA garrison in Shanghai and “people from all walks of life”</td>
<td>Political rally to “Oppose the US and support Korea” and to suppress counter-revolutionaries</td>
<td>Over 60,000</td>
<td>Political parade and demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Parade from Huangpu District to the Racetrack</td>
<td>People from Shanghai’s inner and suburban districts (divided by district into 30 parade units)</td>
<td>International Labor Day</td>
<td>Over 2,430,000</td>
<td>Political celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>People’s Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life”</td>
<td>International Labor Day</td>
<td>Over 600,000</td>
<td>Political celebration and parade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>People’s Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life” from Shanghai and Eastern China</td>
<td>Meeting in mourning of Comrade Stalin</td>
<td>Over 800,000</td>
<td>Political mourning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>People’s Square</td>
<td>People from Shanghai and Eastern China (Chen Yi, Tan Zhenlin, Chen Pixian, and Fan Hannian also attended)</td>
<td>Mass demonstration with workers at the center to celebrate international Labor Day (with the workers at the center)</td>
<td>Over 600,000</td>
<td>Political celebration and parade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>People’s Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life” (Chen Yi also attended)</td>
<td>Parade and rally for the 4th anniversary of the founding of the PRC</td>
<td>Over 1,000,000</td>
<td>Political celebration and parade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Participants Description</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>People's Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life”</td>
<td>demonstration to celebrate socialist transformation</td>
<td>Over 100,000</td>
<td>political celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstration to resist the Anglo-American armed aggression of Lebanon and Jordan, and to support to the Middle Eastern people's war of liberation</td>
<td>Over 100,000</td>
<td>political protest and rally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>People's Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life in Shanghai”</td>
<td>Demonstration in support of the government’s “Declaration concerning territorial waters” and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai’s “Declaration on the situation of Taiwan Strait” and to oppose the military menace of US imperialism</td>
<td>Over 250,000</td>
<td>political protest and rally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>People's Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life”</td>
<td>To celebrate the 10th anniversary of the founding of the PRC</td>
<td>Over 600,000</td>
<td>political celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>People's Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life”</td>
<td>To celebrate the 11th anniversary of the founding of the PRC</td>
<td>Over 100,000</td>
<td>political celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>People's Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life”</td>
<td>Meeting to oppose the killing of the Congolese Prime Minister Lumumba “by imperialism and its agents” and to support the Congolese people’s “righteous struggle in defense of national independence and national unity”</td>
<td>Over 80,000</td>
<td>political protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>People's Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life”</td>
<td>To support Cuba’s resistance against the US rally to support the Congolese people’s resistance against “the American and Belgian imperialists’ war of armed aggression”</td>
<td>Over 500,000</td>
<td>political protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>People's Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life”</td>
<td>Demonstration to denounce the US expansion of the Vietnam war and to support the Vietnamese people’s resistance against the U.S.</td>
<td>Over 700,000</td>
<td>demonstration and parade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>People's Square</td>
<td>“People from all walks of life”</td>
<td>Over 2,300,000</td>
<td>Over 2,300,000</td>
<td>political protest and parade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*People's Square, and specifically of People's Avenue, could hold a maximum of 200,000 people, so the claims that “millions revolutionary masses” attended these rallies is false. However, the spaces may have been near or at capacity.

Liu, 635.
former landmark of colonial Shanghai, the heart of the foreign concession, reaffirmed the centrality of the space the foreign invaders had carved out. People’s Square, People’s Park, and People’s Avenue did indeed become a space for the Chinese people, but even today, the outline of the old circular track is still identifiable on any street map, a highly visible remnant of old Shanghai. In that sense, the new regime once again poured new socialist wine in old imperialist bottles; the CCP reimagined but could not fully relocate the physical embodiment of power.

Nevertheless, the changes in the early-PRC period were profound. Imperial China had not provided large arenas for mass public demonstrations, and public gatherings tended to take place in temples and teahouses, which, limited their capacity and maintained, at least symbolically, the power structures of traditional China. The creation of large public squares did thus verify and celebrate an element of mass participation in politics, and the socialist remaking of the Shanghai racecourse did garner support for the new state. Just as the CCP gained popularity in the countryside by the seizing and redistributing land, so the Party won hearts and minds in Shanghai by taking back the colonial racecourse and redistributing its land to the people. By allowing Shanghai residents to smash (literally) the remnants of their colonial past, the CCP fostered collective national identification, and by creating, on the ruins of the racecourse, an important social space that Shanghai residents came to view as their own, the CCP inscribed its version of nationalism, patriotism, and internationalism into daily urban life. Much like Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, the Shanghai’s People’s Square area drew on older spatial mappings of city space and borrowed from other state attempts to spatialize power around the world. But these efforts still revolutionized the social and political lives of the people who lived in Beijing and Shanghai.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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104 Li Xiaocong, “Xingzhi yu yixiang: 1500 nian yilai Zhongguo chengshi kongjian de chuantong yu bianhuan” (Design and Intention: Legacy and Change in Chinese Urban Space over the past 1500 years), in *Dushi fanhua: 1500 nian lai de dongya chengshi shenghuo shi guoji xueshu yanjiuhui lunwenji* (Flourishing Cities: Collected papers from a Symposium on the History of East Asian Urban Life over the past 1500 years) (Fudan daxue wenshi yanjiuyuan, Harvard East Asia Department, 2009), vol. 1, 293.