From liberating production to unleashing consumption: Mapping landscapes of power in Beijing

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an analysis of two locales in downtown Beijing nominally set aside for public use, Tiananmen Square and The Place, as successively linked landscapes of power that define the shifting and relations between market and place negotiated by the Chinese Communist Party-state over time. However, whereas Zukin (1993) argues that such landscapes lack coherent values because of their subordination to capitalism's haphazard process of “creative destruction,” a salient feature of Beijing's shifting landscapes of power is the authoritarian Party-state's persistent mediation of market relations, and its subordination of the contradictions between market and place to the changing needs of the regime under market reform. Despite their apparent differences in intent and design, the shopping mall has eclipsed the public square as a key urban site through which the Party-state seeks to build a self-conscious and cohesive socioeconomic class of subjects over which and for which it seeks to rule.

In the summer of 2006, two years before the opening ceremony of the Olympics, Beijing city planners christened a brand new retail development just a few blocks from Tiananmen Square. Bordered by two high-rise office buildings and two luxury shopping and entertainment malls, The Place—as it is known in English—was designed to provide customers with a one-stop shopping experience that includes expensive boutiques, posh eateries, several movie theaters, and an upscale health club. The sweeping cantilevered plaza at the center of the installation serves both as a stage for public performances, and an open public square. The largest outdoor LED screen in the world looms six stories above it, beaming fantastic images to designed to delight shoppers, including four repeating video loops produced by state-owned Central China Television (CCTV) of dancing dragons, fireworks, and Chairman Mao Zedong atop Tiananmen six decades before, triumphantly declaring the founding of the People's Republic of China (Railton, 2007: 53). Thanks in no small part to the SkyScreen's appeal, the popularity of the new attraction can hardly be in doubt: several publication outlets both in- and outside the country ranked the massive Coca-Cola-themed display beneath the SkyScreen together with the opening ceremonies at Tiananmen Square as “top Olympic moments” of 2008 (Li, 2008; Madden, 2008: 22; Marketing Event, 2008). Indeed, the Beijing Bureau of Commerce estimates that during the Olympics, 200,000 foreign guests visited new retail and service operations in the capital including The Place, spending an average of 700 yuans per person (Guoji Shangbao, 2008).

As the evident success of The Place demonstrates, the regime's increasingly enthusiastic embrace of market reform has substantially reshaped the political geography of the capital, including that of its symbolic center, Tiananmen Square. In consolidating its claim to rising power status, the post-Mao generation of Chinese Communist Party (hereafter, CCP) and state leaders has committed itself to the distinctly entrepreneurial rebuilding of the nation's cities to attract private investment and stimulate consumption-based development. According to David Harvey (2001), this new entrepreneurialism centers on expanding the role of public–private partnerships in support of speculative projects, and a concomitant shift away from collective consumption in favor of a new political economy of place (Hall, 1998; Zukin, 1995). Cultivating new urban landscapes as cultural resources and engines of symbolic capital, China's city planners and real estate developers are quickly refashioning urban landscapes for visual consumption, investing in spectacular and iconic building projects to attract domestic and international tourists (Broudehoux, 2004; Mattern, 2008; Smith, 2008) and cultural infrastructural development projects aimed at securing global city status for its teeming metropolises (Broudehoux, 2007; Kong, 2007; Wu, 2000).

At the same time, the (re)construction of landscapes is an ideological project that acquires particular salience in nation-building as elites seek to unify broader support for specific agendas (Helmer, 1985; Holston, 1989; Johnson, 2008; Kong & Yeoh, 1997, 2003; Mace, 1976; Musgrove, 2002). Like the Mao-era corps of...
cadres that reshaped the Chinese capital after the 1949 revolution, the current generation of global and urban imaginative works from within and alongside the Party-state (Hsing, 2006a) aspires to use such projects to galvanize popular support for the regime’s agenda (Hubbard, 1996: 1445; Paul, 2004). Such efforts are particularly evident in Beijing’s new Central Business District (CBD), where, as Zhang and Jiang (2009: 80–81) remind us that due to its proximity to central Party and state offices, the still “frequently visible hand of government planning” has taken the place of the more unruly and unpredictable “invisible hand” played by market forces elsewhere in the world, effectively guaranteeing that “the overall shape of property development trends and the concentration of human resources mutually interact, and together reinforce the state of development.” Despite waves of market reform, the new urban entrepreneurialism in the Chinese capital is, as Wu (2003: 1694) underscores, fundamentally still a “state project in the post-socialist transition.”

This article offers an analysis of two locales in downtown Beijing nominally set aside for public use, Tiananmen Square and The Place, as successively linked “landscapes of power” that represent the “fragile compromise between market and place” (Zukin, 1993) negotiated by Party and state elites over time. Yet whereas Zukin ties the rise and fall of such landscapes to such compromises, and capitalist-directed consumption space respectively, I aim to demonstrate, Tiananmen Square and The Place as metonymic representations of socialist state-directed public space and state capitalist-directed consumption space respectively, I aim to demonstrate, Tiananmen Square and The Place as a site of power, and to create and inspire in architectonic form the conditions of capitalism and the impersonal workings of the forces of “creative destruction,” one striking feature of the rise and fall of Beijing’s post-revolutionary “landscapes of power” is the authoritarian Party-state’s mediation of this process since 1949, and its persistent attempts to submute the contradictions between market and place to the needs of the center. In Zukin’s (1993: 269) reading of how “circuits of capital are formed in real spaces,” “liminality”—a state in which the stable hierarchical order of society breaks down—triggers “the process by which a landscape of power gradually displaces the vernacular.” Indeed, as Lee (2009: 33) rightly notes, during the final years of the ailing late imperial state, Tiananmen Square was seen as an “empty space” between the vernacular landscape of the common people and the outer reaches of the Forbidden City that was taken over and transformed “into a public space of political action ... struggled over and earned by the concerted efforts of people.”

Dramatically enlarged, reconstructed, and monumentalized in the first decade of Communist rule as the symbolic and sacred political center of the new Party-state, Tiananmen Square served as the locus of triumphant social mobilization and collective celebration during Mao’s reign, a spatial representation of the dialectical relationship between Party and revolutionary masses it sought to create and inspire in architectonic form. Emblazoned with Mao’s likeness and two enormous revolutionary slogans wishing “ten thousand years” to the Chinese Communist Party and to the great unity of the peoples of the world, the Square manifested the Party-state’s power to organize the forces of production, and mediate the effects of global capitalism for the greater good of the laboring masses. When pressed into active service on National Day and International Workers Day, the two chief political holidays in the People’s Republic, it served as a key site upon which the Mao-era Party not only mobilized, but also constituted, the revolutionary public on whose behalf it claimed to rule.

Yet as the Maoist agenda and the practices that supported it came under increasing pressure, particularly during the critical Cultural Revolution, the Square likewise became a lightening rod for contention by the very laboring masses it was designed to represent. During the liminal early stages of market reform, the repeated and tragic attempts at the “appropriation and transformation [of the Square] by groups who refused to accept their ‘displacement’” (Herskowitz, 1993: 417) at the hands of the post-Mao Party-state culminated in the series of demonstrations in the Square that ultimately resulted in the brutal 1989 crackdown. Wu (2005: 241–243) argues that since that time, a new generation of Chinese leaders have attempted to depoliticize the Square by restricting public access to the site, softening its edges with wider flowerbeds and larger expanses of green; and by constructing an adjacent corridor of intentionally apolitical cultural installations, like the new egg-shaped National Centre for the Performing Arts, in hopes of drawing attention to the regime’s growing “soft power” and “peaceful rise” (see also Kahn, 2007; Marvin, 2008).

The new landscapes of power that have sprouted up in Chinese cities since the deepening of market reform in the 1990s represent the latest iteration in the regime’s attempt to mediate the conflicts between place and market, and manifest in architectonic form the regime’s drift from state socialism to market socialism to what is arguably an emergent form of state capitalism (Lee, He, & Huang, 2006; Yang, 1996; Zhao, 2000). The orchestration of this process by central and local agents of the Party-state has been documented in recent works by Broudehoux (2004, 2007), Wu (2003), and Li and Ong (2009). I seek to build upon this literature in two ways. First, in comparing Tiananmen Square and The Place as metonymic representations of socialist state-directed public space and state capitalist-directed consumption space respectively, I aim to demonstrate the convergence of the regime’s engineering of urban environments to shape socio-political outcomes is a project with clear historic roots in the Maoist era, when urban and rural places were systematically claimed by the Party-state and redeigned to serve revolutionary ends. The Party’s transformation from a revolutionary to a ruling party may have altered its agenda, but has not yet diminished its reliance on the use of space as a tool for attaining its goals. Second, as I will show, such efforts both past and present are linked to the Party’s broader project of class formation as a means to effect social change and economic development, most recently under the auspices of Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents” and Hu Jintao’s “Harmonious Society,” successive programs that seek to recalibrate the Party’s relationship with the new middle-class alongside the deepening of market reform. Socio-spatial engineering has long comprised a seldom recognized and little-understood part of the CCP’s program of historical revolutionary praxis, and while it has by no means been uniformly successful or universally well-received, it remains a significant force in the shaping of the political geography of post-revolutionary China.

**Constructing the square**

As Wu (2005: 87) and others have documented, imperial Beijing was a city largely constructed during the Ming Dynasty on the ruins of the Yuan capital founded by Kublai Khan in 1267 and designed as a concentric set of three walled cities, each enclosing the other: the Outer City surrounded the Imperial City, which itself contained the Forbidden City. The outer city wall contained a bustling vernacular landscape that housed a restricted area reserved for the use of the imperial family, and an inner sacred center for the emperor himself (see also Li, Dray-Novey, & Kong, 2007; Zhu, 2004). Tiananmen, literally the Gate of Heavenly Peace, served as the front gate to the Imperial City, and marked the axial passageway through which the emperor exited to make his annual ceremonial observances, and from which edicts were issued in late imperial times (Meyer, 1991: 47). The site of a “dignified and peaceful protest” by patriotic students and scholars on May 4, 1919 that ended in tragedy, the open area before the gate was thereafter marked as a political public space sanctified by their act of self-sacrifice, and therefore, the site of a “defining moment in the development of modern China” (Mitter, 2004: 131).

When Communist troops took Beijing in February 1949, the new regime claimed Tiananmen Square as the site of its own symbolic
origination, and consecrated it as not only public, but also civic, space on the brink of a new era. Accordingly, shortly after the 1949 inaugural ceremony of the founding of the People’s Republic, Mao ordered that a new square be built before the gate “big enough to hold an assembly of one million” people (Wu, 2005: 8), replacing the old imperial architecture with a vast, dynamic, and open public plaza modeled on Moscow’s Red Square (Yu, 2008: 576, 578).

The Square’s expansion, which began in November of 1958 and was completed ten months later, was portrayed in the state-run press as a spontaneous mass movement (qunzhong yundong) of engineers and construction workers directed by the vanguard Party leadership. However, in fact, the Party’s decision to expand the Square and construct the Ten Great Buildings was remanded to Beijing municipal authorities on September 5, 1958, who, within three days, convened a “mass mobilization meeting” of over a thousand architects and engineers to inform them of their decision. Experts from around the country were flown to the capital and informed that they had five days to draw up a set of blueprints (Wu, 2005: 112–114) to, in the words of the People’s Daily, “expand the vast carnival realm created by the people” (wei guangda renmin liaokuo de kuanghuan tiandi) in time for the tenth anniversary celebration of the founding of the People’s Republic (Renmin Ribao, 1959).

As Bray (2005: 92) has demonstrated, these urban collectives aimed to not only increase labor productivity, but were also self-aware socioeconomic classes that responded readily to the direction of the vanguard Party. But during the May Day and National Day celebrations, the masses and the Party elite alike abandoned these smaller collective work and residence units for the vast open reaches of Tiananmen Square, where they faced one another directly: the leaders assembled on the rostrum atop the gate to receive the revolutionary masses; and the revolutionary masses performed orchestrated spectacles and display the products of their labor, as evidence of the revolutionary enthusiasm that inspired them, and their collective triumph over the forces of global capitalism. As Wu (2005: 99, 23) argues, Tiananmen Square itself served as a social-revolutionary catalyst in architectonic form: the masses that gathered there to participate in the vast state spectacles were revolutionary because they responded to the Party in power and performed at its direction, “no longer scattered individuals but...part of an immense body of ‘friends and comrades’”; the Party rightfully claimed the rostrum because it was capable of mobilizing and harnessing the power of the masses, particularly for the attainment of collective and revolutionary ends. Class enemies, counter-revolutionaries, and other “non-people” were excluded from such assemblies, except when they were forced to participate as “struggle objects.” The celebrations held in the Square, therefore, did not merely mobilize the masses—it convened a particular type of public, largely of the Party’s own making, and a revolutionary mass for which and on whose behalf it claimed to rule.

Contesting the square

As Zukin (1993: 16) points out, while “powerful institutions have a preeminent capacity to impose their view on the landscape—weakening, reshaping, and displacing the view from the vernacular,” a landscape of power is also a “contentious, compromised product of society.” Over time, the extraordinary political power invested in the Square invited contestation from the very revolutionary masses for which it was ostensibly designed, a process that arguably began in the Cultural Revolution. In August 1966, Mao added a new twist to the official events held in Tia-nanmen by welcoming no fewer than eight assemblies of young Red Guards from across the country into the nation’s sacred political center. At the first of these rallies, held shortly after sunrise on August 19, 1966, Chairman Mao broke with both tradition and official protocol by descending the rostrum to mingle with the crowds, signaling that the formal barriers between the leaders and the led should begin to dissolve. As a result, soon thereafter, the balance of sovereignty over Tiananmen Square began to tilt precariously in favor of the masses. At the conclusion of the National Day celebrations in 1966, when Mao insisted upon mingling with the crowds in a motorcade, the masses surged forward, trapping the motorcade. Ten people were trampled to death and nearly a hundred were injured. That same year, rebellious Red Guards demanded that the name of Tiananmen Square be changed to reflect their distinctly proletarian and revolutionary aspirations instead of the imperial past, a move that Chairman Mao ultimately opposed (MacFarquhar & Schoenhal, 2006: 108–109).

As political order in the capital steadily degenerated over the next three years, Premier Zhou Enlai issued an “Emergency Notification” in January of 1967, closing Beijing’s stores and banks, rationing daily necessities, and forbidding the sale of nonessential consumer goods; the State Council quickly followed with a ban of Spring Festival celebrations in an attempt to spare the already fragile urban networks of the city. By October 1972, security had become so lax that one morning an unknown number of Beijing residents spontaneously dug up and carted away more than twenty thousand chrysanthemums that had been planted in the center of the Square beneath the gaze of a nearby People’s Police substation, despite the efforts of twenty officers to halt the destruction (Mu, 2008: 66–68).
When Premier Zhou Enlai passed away three years later in January of 1976, liminality shifted into overt challenge. Despite an official order banning public displays of mourning, between one and two million Beijing residents silently lined the main thoroughfare used to transport the remains of Zhou Enlai in a defiant gesture of grief and respect for the fallen premier. Others gathered in the Square, laying white paper wreaths at the base of the Monument to the Peoples’ Heroes beneath Zhou’s inscription on its south face, which were promptly removed by police. Several weeks later, on the eve of the annual observance for the sweeping and repair of family tombs, a new mountain of white paper wreaths appeared at the monument to honor Zhou, which were also promptly removed and destroyed. On April 5, defiant residents placed an immense portrait of the late premier on the monument’s north face directly opposite Mao’s own, deliberately obscuring the inscription written there in Mao’s hand. That evening, authorities forcibly cleared the square of mourners and the thousands of impromptu memorials left behind, and subsequently charged that the incident had been cooked up by followers of accused counter-revolutionary Deng Xiaoping (*Renmin Ribao*, 1976a, 1976b). Undeterred by the brutal suppression, the mass gathering was reenacted a year later, with some of the mourners swearing oaths of loyalty to Zhou Enlai only yards from the construction site of Mao’s own mausoleum. During the tomb-sweeping observances in 1978, demonstrators again gathered before the newly completed Memorial Hall housing Mao’s remains to demand a similar monument to commemorate Zhou Enlai (*Cheater*, 1991: 72–77).

By November 1981, the frequency of small disturbances in the Square prompted officials to post a new notice forbidding demonstrations, rallies, public speeches, leafleting and the display any propaganda materials in Tiananmen Square (*The Globe & Mail*, 1981). Nonetheless, in 1985, a crowd of two thousand students marched around the perimeter to protest Japan’s “second invasion” of the Chinese mainland (*Burns*, 1985: A4; *Gittings*, 1985). The following year in December, wall posters calling for reform appeared on Beijing campuses, triggering street demonstrations and rallies in the Square. Although the rallies ended without incident, Beijing municipal authorities formally banned all unauthorized public gatherings, particularly those taking place in the Square (*Burns*, 1987: 56).

This ban was ignored by the students who began gathering in Tiananmen Square to mourn the April 5, 1989 death of Hu Yaobang, a reform-minded leader purged for failing to suppress the protests of two years before. This time, the student movement earned broad-based popular support and international sympathy, and even erected its own monument—the Goddess of Democracy—directly facing Mao’s portrait on the Square before army troops trucked in from the remote northwest finally succeeded in clearing the area in the early morning hours of June 4th, with heavy loss of life.

Diffusing the square

In the wake of the tragic events of 1989, *Wu* (2005), *Marvin* (2008) and others have argued that the regime made concerted attempts to defuse what *Perry* (2001: 176) refers to as “the magic, mimetic connection” Tiananmen Square holds for would-be challengers to CCP rule. In the months after the crackdown, the Dengist regime commissioned a new statue depicting a worker, farmer, soldier and intellectual, each carrying the tools of their respective trades, to represent the unity of the Chinese people on the spot where the Goddess of Democracy briefly stood. Additionally, in the replacement of some of the vast paved areas of the Square with lawns to “soften” its hard edges, *Wu* (2005: 241–243) reads a broader attempt to displace the Mao-era politics of collective engagement with a post-Mao politics of distraction, pointing to the introduction to the space of a seasonal round of “soft monuments”—“temporary installations constructed to celebrate the founding of the country and other important occasions...often designed as a group to transform the Square into a theme park.” Others likewise rued the Square’s commercialization during the 1990s through “the relentless incursion of snack bars, newsstands, book kiosks, commercial photo and historical costume booths and other such businesses advancing onto this treasured site” (*Liu*, 1999: 34) as the model of centralized state power it represents appeared to erode beneath the bundling rush of market forces. As *Dutton* (2005: 165) wryly notes of the success of post-Mao depoliticization: “One can challenge a claim to truth, but how does one challenge a theme park?”

Needless to say, market reform has radically transformed urban public space in China (*Gaubatz*, 2008), with Mao-era public squares being rapidly replaced in an epidemic of “mall-building fever” (*jian shangchang re*) (*Kong*, 2000). As *Dai Jinhua* (2002: 213–216, 220) noted, beginning in 1995 and 1996, the names reserved for China’s new privately-owned and operated commercial installations—‘mansion’ (dusha), or “center” (zhongxin)—began to be superceded by “square” (guangchang), a term not traditionally used to describe buildings, but instead “closely linked to the remembrance of modernity and revolution.” In Dai’s view, the appropriation of Mao-era language to describe these new landscapes of power constitutes “a political transgression, signifying to the nation the gradual metamorphosis from socialism to a capitalist market economy,” and an attempt “at the very least to mask the significance of political mass movements with a happy shopper’s heaven.” No longer a public site set aside for direct engagement between the leaders and the led over issues concerning the production, reproduction, and redistribution of capital, these new plazas represent depoliticized spaces devoted to a celebration of the newly stratified relations of consumption. As one local public planning expert recently observed of this change, “At the time of the PRC’s founding, owing to economic backwardness, the majority of [public] squares were used for mass assemblies, celebrations and similar activities.” However, following the adoption of market reforms, and “the Party and the state’s emphasis on constructing a spiritual civilization,” now “the content of ‘square culture’ (guangchang wenhua) is rich and varied,” characterized by frequent karaoke gatherings, folk dancing, and displays organized by local philatelists, so as to appeal to “the broad strata of urbanites, and their various cultural lifestyle needs” (*Zhang*, 2008: 16–17).

It would be a mistake to assume, however, that this transformation was the byproduct of an impersonal processes of
gentrification and “creative destruction”: the term “square culture” was coined in 1994 by a Deputy Vice Minister of Culture and chair of the Chinese Mass Culture Study Association, who called upon state cultural offices at all levels to seize the opportunity presented by market reform to vigorously promote “square arts” (guangchang yishu) of all types (Gao, 1994: 374–378). “Square culture,” defined as “the construction and use of a city’s open public space for the carrying out of political, economic, and cultural exchange activities so as to thereby create an enriched and characteristic cultural ambiance,” quickly emerged as a buzzword in Chinese urban planning discourse, arguably as a method for “building a city’s distinctive brand,” while at the same time “stimulating domestic demand and cultivating mass desires for cultural products” (Liu, 2004: 131, 133). Quickly shedding the class-based and production-focused managerialism of the Mao era for the less divisive language of cultural developmentalism, municipal authorities in the 1990s threw themselves into a flurry of activity Wang (2001) describes as “culture fever” (wenhua fei). In Beijing, for example, the Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Department and Bureau of Culture united with numerous other state, Party, and mass organizations to declare 2001 “Beijing Square Culture Year,” scheduling six thousand open-air film showings, and 28,000 art exhibitions and performances in both public parks and private-owned public spaces, and enlisting the participation of local hotels, catering companies, and local merchants in a collective effort to “advance the progressive forces of culture in line with effective methods for practicing the key idea of Jiang Zemin’s ‘Three Represents’” throughout the capital (Lu, 2001: 1, 4).

What is perhaps most striking about the magnitude of such state-led activity is the degree of coordination that continues to obtain, despite the proliferation of decision-makers engaged in urban development projects over the course of the reform era. Countering dominant interpretations of this process as a simply “state-led urbanization,” Hsing (2009, 2006b: 576–577) sees China’s new urban entrepreneurialism as the result of an “intrastate struggle” waged between “two sets of statist players:” municipal government actors, who seek to expand their control over the land within their jurisdiction, and the old “socialist land masters”—“central-level government, party and military units, and state-owned enterprises”—who retain “exclusive use and management rights over the land that they occupy.” In addition to these state actors, Wang (2001: 91–92) points to the increasingly important role played by private capital, which frequently succeeds by fusing its profit-making potential with the political and ideological agendas of Party-state branches at various levels, and relying upon the capacities of its powerful partners to expand market reach. In her research on new cultural venues in Beijing, Wang concludes that it is no longer possible to disaggregate the agendas of state and capital: instead, she draws attention to mounting evidence of “the sometimes complicitous coexistence, and sometimes conflicting relationship, of the state and the market, public and popular culture, and state-owned and private enterprises in China.”

However, as the case of The Place demonstrates, struggle and competition between various levels of the state and Party do not invariably obtain: complicity and cooperation between private and public, and Party and state, actors in contemporary urban politics can indeed succeed, particularly when development projects are constructed to simultaneously serve multiple uses, and multiple interests, over time. The Place, according to its Strategic Planning Director, “represents a new commercial form using its own style of activist participation” to facilitate the realization of a broader state agenda (Guan, 2007: 47). Indeed, from the project’s inception, the private developers at Aozhong Xingye Real Estate partnered with local Party and state officials at the municipal and district levels, and a profit-making enterprise owned by a central government ministry, to design the layout of the complex. One of the installation’s two office towers houses the Trends Group (Shishang jijuan), a high profile joint venture involving China’s Ministry of Tourism, Hearst Communications, and the International Data Group (Fowler & Qin, 2006). A powerful, profit-generating multinational conglomerate fusing state power with commercial media enterprises to promote domestic travel, leisure, and consumption, the Trends Group originally grew out of the Ministry’s modest reform-era publication, China Tourism News (Zhongguo luyou bao). By August 1993, the newsletter division of the Ministry decided to expand this effort into a bi-monthly fashion magazine for China’s nascent consumer market (Chen, 2009: A12); within five years, the division partnered with Hearst Communications and the International Data Group to produce the Chinese versions of Cosmopolitan, Good Housekeeping, and National Geographic, among other well-known publications. Notwithstanding its cooperation with well-known international partners, the Trends Group continues to signal in its domestic operations an orientation congenial to Ministry concerns, for example, reporting favorably on trends to develop “red tourism” (hongse luyou) to historic sites associated with China’s revolutionary past in 2005, designated by the Ministry as the “year of red tourism” (Vanity Fair, 2005); publishing a photo layout and design for a range of real estate advertisements; and enlisting the participation of the new middle class to secure social and political support from local officials at the municipal and district levels (Trends.com.cn, 2008); and prominently featuring extensive interviews with celebrities who discuss their membership in and evolving relationship with the Communist Party (Esquire, 2007). The CEO of Trends Magazine, a graduate of Harvard Business School, once boasted that it is known “within China as the Whampoa Military Academy of domestic fashion publishing professionals,” after the famed training ground that once served as the cradle of the Chinese revolution (Xiong, 2003: 50).

With the Trends Group secured as an anchoring tenant, developers designed the retail and entertainment functions of The Place around it as a “social condenser” of a distinctly post-revolutionary type. At the news conference announcing the opening of the installation, the general manager of Aozhong Xingye Real Estate gratefully acknowledged the close support and direction he received from municipal and local district government officials, as well as the Beijing Municipal CBD management board, in shaping The Place as an enclave for the “corporate elite and high-paid white collar professionals” who live and work nearby, including the employees of the Trends Group, and state-owned Central China Television, headquartered only a few blocks away. The geographic clustering of this new rising class of urban professionals alongside a high concentration of foreign businessmen and consular officials, he noted, “greatly expanded the latent capacity of the area as a high-end consumer market” (Yang, 2006). Spurring such synergies are district Party Committee officials and the local Chamber of Commerce and Finance (jinrong shanghui), who facilitate networking opportunities by co-hosting and publicizing a regular round of social events at which CBD-based professionals can mingle freely, participate in recreational sports activities, and stage karaoke competitions (Chaoyangqu Zuzhibu, 2009a, 2009b).

The Place thus serves as not only a geographic node around which members of these emerging urban classes frequently congregate, but also as a sort of “ground zero” for the fashioning of new forms of individual and collective identities that subtly embed transnational cosmopolitan consumerism within a nationalist and pro-Party agenda shaped by central elites. As Tomba (2004: 6–8) recently noted, since the 16th Party Congress of November 2002, Chinese central leaders have committed themselves to the “building of a well-off society in an all-around way” by stimulating domestic consumption to sustain economic growth, and by nurturing the new middle class to secure social and political stability. Literary and social critic Meng Fanhua (2004: 107–108)
argues that *Trends Magazine*, the Group’s flagship publication, has from its inception marketed itself as the chief spokesman for this new and rising social strata. The inaugural issue was relatively “cautious and low-key” in putting forth the magazine’s luxury consumerist orientation, but nonetheless clearly announced,

*Trends* is not about blind consumption, and even less about debauchery; *Trends* is about realizing actual worth, cultivating appearances, and taking comprehensive care to reframe the quality of one’s character (*suzhi*) in the domain of consumption. As a tourism and consumer periodical, *Trends* will reflect the latest domestic and international trends, and will serve as a practical guide advising on every kind of civilized consumption, from the six essential elements: counseling on what to eat, where to live, what to do, where to travel, what to buy, and how to amuse oneself (as cited in Meng, 2004: 108).

Feature columns prominently included “A Look at White-Collar Beauties’ Lives” (*Bailing liren de shenghuo guan*), “Luxury Homes and Furnishings” (*Jingping changlun*), and “Trends Shopping” (*Shishang gouwu*). Moreover, as Zhou (2000: 144) observed, Trends and its sister magazines effectively market a lifestyle to China’s new bourgeoisie defined by its patronage of branded, locally-contextualized urban sites of consumption: not merely coffee bars and nightclubs, but also boutiques and luxury shopping malls in general, but, in addition to The Place, Beijing’s Lufthansa and Xidan Shopping Centers. Shanghai’s Paris in the Spring, and Guangzhou’s Daxin Department Store. The persistent promotion of this type of recursive, place-bound consumer lifestyle is facilitated by the regulatory regime set by the Party-state. State Press Administration authorities limit the foreign generated content of the Chinese version of *Cosmopolitan* to no more than 50%, allowing the Trends Group to tailor magazine content to suit local tastes, and therefore also to meet local commercial needs (Xiong, 2003: 51). Accordingly, in a letter to potential retail tenants, the developers of The Place promised that the full range of powerful resources represented by the Trends Group would provide a wealth of cross-advertising and joint promotional opportunities to the retailers leasing space in the two vast malls (Zhi kehu han, n.d.). Trends Group publications routinely publish information on the latest products available for purchase at retailers housed in The Place, and reviews of bars, discos and eateries within the compound, and on celebrity sightings and promotional events staged in the mall’s vast plaza. These have included so-called annual “pink ribbon” campaigns to raise breast cancer awareness, the designation of The Place as an official “Olympic culture square” in August 2008, and, most recently, a winter celebration for which six snowblowers filled the stone plaza with manufactured snow on the last day of 2009 to entice residents to the mall for a New Year’s count down (*Rennmin Ribao haiwai ban, 2009*). In language reminiscent of the Mao-era claim that the newly enlarged Tiananmen Square would act as a “vast carnival realm” for the masses, Municipal Bureau of Culture and Chaoyang District Government officials inaugurated the cantilevered plaza as a new people’s “carnival ground” (*kuanghuan changdi*), although presumably one more congenial to Beijing’s well-heeled revelers with shopping dollars to spend than to the revolutionary peasant and proletarian masses of yore. The Party and state luminaries on hand promised to attend and welcome the masses, but to otherwise allow “every city resident to play protagonist” in the festivities, which included “arranged live improvised performances,” and a team of teachers and students from Tsinghua University’s Academy of Fine Arts working to produce a larger than life replica of the new Chinese urban ideal: “a family of three and their minivan” in snow, described by the deputy director of the district Party committee as “a representation of average people today” in the capital (*Beijing Ribao, 2009: 3*).

The party itself has likewise taken a particular interest in The Place, and established a new branch committee in the complex. One of the so-called “two new” types of grassroots Party organs founded in recent years to build the Party’s constituency among new social and new economic organizations in the reform era, as of October 2009 The Place Party Committee boasted twenty-two Party members (*Beijingshi Cishan Xiehui, 2009*). According to Central Party directives, “two new” grassroots party branches focus on “unifying and educating” employees where they are based, “actively leading their organizations to carry out a variety of mass cultural activities and cultivating enterprise culture and entrepreneurial spirit” through the implementation of the Party’s new “brand culture strategy” (*pinpai wenhua zhanliu*) (*Zhibu dongtai, 2008*). In an April 2009 bulletin on the efforts of “two new” Party branches in Beijing’s CBD to “go deep into, study, and practice scientific development,” The Place Party Committee reported that, “as a Party branch in a large-scale private enterprise, it would use its position to carry out activities that would ‘strengthen the mechanisms of Party-building work over the long-term’ throughout Beijing’s CBD (*Zhonggong Beijingshi Chaoyanganguwei, 2009*). Indeed, in response to an April 14, 2009 order issued by the Chaoyang District Party Secretary for all grassroots Party organizations to assist in relief efforts in the wake of the Wenchuan earthquake, The Place Party Committee collected donations totaling 1300 RMB for earthquake relief (*Chaoyangqu Zuzhibu, 2009a, 2009b*). Likewise, during the Bazaar Celebrity Charity Night held at The Place in September, the editor-in-chief of the Trends Group publication reminded its online readership, 

On the sixtieth anniversary of our nation’s founding...public charitable organizations have done important work according to the agenda laid out by the Party-state...We tell ourselves that we must persist in this to the end, because of not only the Party-state and stars and celebrities, but also the ordinary people who follow and sustain *Bazaar* magazine—all of these are our staunch supporters (*Tong, 2009*).

As the foregoing demonstrates, the fusion of the commercial interests represented in The Place with the agendas of the “socialist land masters” of the Party-state and the urban developers at the municipal and district levels has created an upscale profit-making lifestyle center that caters to Beijing’s new middle class while overtly signaling loyal support for the Party and its goals. In preparation for the sixtieth National Day, for example, The Place ran an interlinked series of promotions designed to appeal to its customer base: consumers using state-owned Bank of China debit cards to make purchase totaling various amounts during the National Day holiday were eligible to receive prizes ranging from Coca-Cola logo lock-tight food storage containers to courtesy tickets to view the new patriotic blockbuster film, “The Founding of the Republic” (*Jianguo Daye*) at one of The Place’s movie theaters. Further whetting the appetite for patriotic and pro-Communist luxury consumption, in the run-up to the 2009 National Day, the vast SkyScreen debuted a newly expanded 3D panorama version of the original historic footage of Chairman Mao declaring the founding of the PRC followed by scenes representing more than 2000 years of Chinese history; the new version of concludes with the same scene with which it began, but this time staged by the all-star cast of “The Founding of the Republic,” by way of offering a free preview of the film for mall-goers (*TimeOut Beijing, 2009*) (Fig. 1).

Unlike the rather overt statement of centralized power represented by nearby Tiananmen Square, The Place and other such urban sites exude an ambient power that works instead through somewhat more subtle and indirect practices of seduction and invitation (*Allen, 2006*; cf. *Kong & Law, 2002*: 1505). Masquerading as free and open public spaces, such privately-owned public spaces practice an
elaborate “politics of exclusion” that not only restricts public access, but also ultimately “excludes politics” (Goss, 1993: 26–27; cf. Crawford (2004 [1992])), and, in the eyes of some, represent the “end of public space” (Mitchell, 1995; cf. Sennett, 1992). In promotional literature targeting potential investors and tenants, The Place is described as an urban retail environment that “fulfills the five human senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch...an exciting place to sing, dance, or do whatever you want to relax yourself from the stressful day” (Market Positioning, n.d.). However, as was the case with the supposedly spontaneous movement of engineers and architects that expanded the Square during the Mao era, the ruse is once again easily exposed: when a hundred young Beijing residents attempted to stage an impromptu event at The Place on International Pillow Fight Day in 2008, they were instantly met by five vans, two police vehicles and a Ford Escalade. The more than sixty policemen that emerged from the vehicles put to an immediate end to the frivolity, and any notion that The Place would tolerate even playfully spontaneous masses armed with bed pillows (Quinlan, 2008).

Conclusion: making space for class

Unlike the successive American landscapes of power mapped by Zukin (1993), which are shaped by the fluctuations of the capitalist market and therefore appear to lack “coherent values,” what is most striking about the rise and fall of Beijing’s landscapes of power is the enduring presence of the Party-state at their center, and its persistent efforts to shape the process in accordance with its shifting aims. Although Tiananmen Square’s transformation from “empty space” to a “public space of political action” during the early years of the twentieth century occurred at the hands of patriotic students and ordinary youths, it was the Party-state that subsequently succeeded in redefining the Square not only as the symbolic center of the nation, but also as the locus of revolutionary class unity. Weakened by popular challenges in the last decade of Maoist rule and temporarily reclaimed by the masses at end of the first decade of reform, the post-Mao regime regained control over the space largely by emptying it of the public. Since the 1990s, authorities have vastly increased surveillance of the Square, encouraging the visual and virtual consumption of the site, and the use of other quasi-public venues, like The Place, to stage key events. Most recently, in marked contrast to the large-scale mass celebrations held in the Square in earlier decades, the 60th National Day parade was staged before a small invitation-only audience of spectators; ordinary Beijing residents were enjoined to stay home to view the pageantry on television. Those who did not heed the instructions were held at bay by a formidable security presence that began closing down roads and subway stops in the center of the city long before the parade began (Hutzler, 2009; Trouillaud, 2009). Barred from the Square and pedestrian overpasses spanning the city’s main thoroughfares, small groups of displaced patriotic residents lined the street on both sides of The Place to watch the National Day celebrations broadcast on the giant SkyScreen at the mall several blocks away. When asked by a reporter if he felt proud, one middle-aged worker craning his neck to watch the festivities broadcast on the SkyScreen replied: “Pride is pride, but I don’t have a permanent job. I’m just watching the fun, having a look” (Ceng, 2009).

The apparent popularity and success of The Place at the mall suggests that the processes of globalization and marketization have carved out new and expanding realms for the exercise of state power. As Mann (1997) pointed out over a decade ago, the weakening of “hard geopolitics” in the post-nuclear age has served to strengthen the involvement of state actors in the “soft geopolitics” of commercial exchange, and global trade negotiations. Under such circumstances, as Cery (1995: 620) notes, “the state itself becomes an agent for the commodification of the collective, situated in a wider, market-dominated playing field.” Despite the fact that it has purportedly begun to “wither away” to make room for the market, the post-Mao state has grown in both strength and capacity, facilitating public-private partnerships, constructing science parks and conference centers, drafting ambitious urban redevelopment schemes, and establishing a web of special enterprise zones. These interlinked strategies for the development of territorially fixed assets in the face of competitive pressures from without have increased the structural significance of the state as an institutionalized engine of capital accumulation (Brenner, 1998: 15–17), and, surprisingly, the significance and influence of the Party as well, which has likewise embraced the power of the market as a tool for social transformation (Pieke, 2009). Furthermore, while as Hsing (2009) notes, marketization and increased access to capital have resulted in a proliferation of powerful agents shaping urban land development projects, as the foregoing demonstrates, conflict and intrastate struggle are by no means the only, or even the most likely, outcome of the urban development process: municipal and central, and state and Party, actors are indeed capable of carving out spheres of mutual and sustained cooperation in the often contentious domain of Chinese urban politics.

The foregoing analysis of the Chinese state’s persistent role in shaping successive landscapes of power despite waves of privatization and market reform may shed additional light on geographies of power and consumption elsewhere, hopefully stimulating a closer examination of state-capital cooperation in urban environments closer to home, where the “enchanting myth of consumer sovereignty” (Korczynski & Ott, 2004) still reigns supreme. The spectacular fusion of state and corporate power behind the Mao show at The Place can be read as a noteworthy variation on a common theme in evidence, albeit in various guises and at disparate registers, at the Mall of America (Goss, 1999), Dubailand (Davis, 2006), and so-called “festival marketplaces” (Crawford, 2004: 131–132) that offer a heady blend of historically-grounded narratives of national identity and consumerist escapism. The well-documented proliferation of ambiguous social spaces in urban environments elsewhere, characterized in part by the extension of private methods of surveillance into formerly open public areas, is more than suggestive of the perpetuation of “a close connection between development capital, the state and the planning apparatus” (Cuthbert & McKinnell, 1997: 310; cf. Cuthbert, 1995), in well-established market economies as well as those that were formerly centrally-planned. The insertion of images of state power and national unity into privately-owned public spaces, as China elsewhere, demonstrates that the “politics of exclusion” practiced by the owners and designers of such landscapes of power do not, in fact, exclude all politics: rather, they actively serve to naturalize, and to project into everyday life, a politics favorable to those in positions of power, and apparently do so equally as well in overtly authoritarian socialist regimes, as in democratic capitalist ones.

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