Monument to the People’s Heroes

In September 1949, the first plenary session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference was held in Beijing. At the conference, some committee members proposed to establish a commemorative object in an important location within Beijing, in memory of the people’s heroes who had sacrificed for the liberation of PRC. All committee members came to the consensus of that proposal and agreed to have this commemorative object built in the central location of Beijing, which was the center of Tian’anmen Square. In the same year on September 30th, the day before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the cornerstone of the monument was laid. At the cornerstone laying ceremony, Mao Zedong, the leader of PRC at that time, also read the epitaph of Monument to all the people on the square. The construction process started in August 1952 and completed in Apr 1958. Covering an area of 3000 meters square, the monument, about 463 meters south of Tiananmen Square and 440 meters north of Zhengyang Gate, is up to 37.94 meters high and weighs over 10,000 tons.¹

From the name of People’s Republic of China, of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, of the Monument to the People’s Heroes, and even to the inscription carved on the front of the monument in Mao’s own hand writing that reads “Eternal glory to the people’s heroes”, it is not hard to see how important the concept

of “people” is to every Chinese citizen.² For example, a monument in Western society is generally used for commemorating one person and one event only, whereas the Monument to People’s Heroes is to commemorate numerous people and events in the past century. The epitaph drafted by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai on the back of the Monument reviewed all the struggles made by Chinese people to fight for national independence. In accordance with this theme, the reliefs carved on the Sumeru base depict a series of historical events that best represent the people’s revolution and people’s war of liberation. The eight chosen major revolutionary events are Anti-Opium Movement at Humen in 1839, the Jintian Uprising in 1851, the Wuchang Uprising in 1911, the May 4th Movement in 1919, the May 30th Movement in 1925, the Nanchang Uprising in 1927, the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1931 to 1945, and the Yangtze River Crossing Campaign of the Chinese Civil War in 1949.³ The focus is not only on the past event itself, but also on the accomplishment Chinese people have achieved.

Sculptors carved 172 figures on the reliefs. The creative principle of the Monument was set as expressing collective instead of individuals. Among all these figures, none of them were any specific historical or heroic figure in history. Chinese know who was the one that led them to destroy illegal opium brought in the country by British traders; Chinese know who was the one that led them to overthrow the feudal society and emancipate hundreds of thousands of ordinary civilians; and Chinese know who was the one that led them to defeat the Empire of Japan and demolish Japanese imperialist’s action to expand its influence into Asia as a whole. Chinese all know that. It couldn’t be denied that Communism’s ideology has, to some

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² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
extent, influenced how Chinese view collectivism and individualism. History isn’t created by any specific individual. It is determined by the people.

The Monument these days has become a patriotic education base, a standing Modern history book of China, and a place where national leaders come to commemorate people’s heroes on special days. Tourists come from all over China, and even from other countries, to visit the Monument and stand in great awe of it. When they come to pay a visit to the monument in the heart of the people, what they see is the national traditional culture and the spirit of the times of China. As for students who have only learned these revolutionary events in text books, they will often be impressed when really looking at the Monument. Not only does the Monument to the People’s Heroes commend the immortal achievements of the people’s heroes, but it also is an architectural masterpiece with highly artistic value. On memorial days, the whole Tian’anmen square will be blocked for a ceremonial use. National leaders, representatives of people, and descendants of heroes will gather at the front of the Monument to show their most sincere respects. As time passes by, there is a growing spontaneous awe from people for the Monument and the history behind it.

Thanks to people’s heroes who sacrificed in the revolutionary war, we can now live in a time of peace. Visiting the Monument is our contemporary way of remembering them and build a connection with them. At the end of this video, I would really like to end up with another epitaph carved on the back of the Monument, for it is not only a memorial to the past people’ heroes, but also as a motivation for people fighting for the future of China nowadays.

“Eternal glory to the heroes of the people who laid down their lives in the people's war of liberation and the people's revolution in the past three years!

Eternal glory to the heroes of the people who laid down their lives in the people's war
of liberation and the people's revolution in the past thirty years!

Eternal glory to the heroes of the people who from 1840 laid down their lives in the many struggles against domestic and foreign enemies and for national independence and the freedom and well-being of the people!”

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4 Ibid.