

Commemorare e seppellire i compagni morti: Cimiteri dei martiri rivoluzionari in Cina e Nord Corea

Commemorating and burying dead comrades: Revolutionary martyrs' cemeteries in China and North Korea

Il documento esamina vasti cimiteri costruiti per seppellire o commemorare i "martiri" caduti durante le guerre rivoluzionarie o civili nei due paesi comunisti, la Cina e la Corea del Nord. La legittimazione dei governi è sempre stata una questione importante in questi luoghi di sepoltura e la recente ristrutturazione dell'esistente, così come nuove costruzioni, in entrambi i paesi mostrano l'attualità della politica. Interessante è anche il modo in cui simbolismo architettonico, scultoreo e paesaggistico sono stati impiegati per la costruzione di immagini che a volte provocano messaggi ideologici intenzionali.

The paper examines the state sponsored, often vast cemeteries built to bury or commemorate the fallen 'martyrs' during revolutionary or civil wars in two Communist countries, China and North Korea. The legitimization of governments has always been an important issue with such burial sites and recent renovations of existing, as well as new constructions, in both countries show the continuing relevance of the policy. Of interest is also the way in which architectural, sculptural and landscape symbolization were employed to construct imagery that sometimes defies intended ideological messages.



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I. Revolution

“Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is, necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.” Karl Marx¹

The clearing out of the ‘muck of ages’ invoked here by Marx inevitably involves a Herculean effort and those engaged in such a struggle must be prepared for chaos and violence out of which the longed new and more just society would emerge. In order to gain an understanding of the complex ideological messages embedded in the cemeteries that were built to commemorate the dead revolutionaries a brief look at the historical background is essential.

In China the revolution was a particularly protracted one and involved a series of revolutions. What began with the quickly repressed Boxer Uprising of 1900 to overthrow the corrupt Manchu court in 1900 succeeded in 1911 with the insurrection led

by Sun Yat-sen, which led to foundation of the Chinese Republic under the leadership of the nationalist Kuomintang Party (KMT) which could not prevent large parts of the country, especially the north, to fall under the control of warlords. Japan’s imperialist control over Manchuria and Mongolia (began during the Russo-Japanese war and continued during World War I) triggered further revolts in the south of China and resulted in the May 4 Movement of 1919 which rejected the demands imposed in China during the Versailles Conference and hence the revolution became an anti-imperialist fight for independence, in which the Chinese Communist Party, founded in 1921, took an active role. The nationalist party under Chiang Kai-shek succeeded in taking Shanghai and Nanjing in 1927 but the alliance between communist and nationalist revolutionaries proved to be short-lived when in the ensuing power struggle, the KMT engaged in mass exterminations of their erstwhile allies. The communist revolutionaries led by Mao Zedong fought against nationalist forces as well as Japanese forces. The defeat of Japan in 1945 eliminated the latter enemy but the civil war continued until 1949 when the Red Army had forced Chiang Kai-shek to withdraw to Taiwan and had managed to wrest control from the remaining warlords. This nearly 50 year long war had cost the lives of millions

of civilians and soldiers alike. China was also drawn in to the Korean War from 1950-1953 when thousands of volunteers fought another revolutionary war against the US and South-Korean forces.

Korea had been under Japanese control since the late 1890s and finally annexed in 1910. The Korean revolution was thus from the beginning a struggle for national independence, with the communist party being the most important faction. It was an agreement between the Russia and the United States that divided the Korean Peninsula at the 38th parallel in 1945. Helped by Soviet Russia Kim Il Sung set up the Provisional with the capital Pyongyang, while the US supported the regime of the ardent anti-communist Syngmann Rhee. From the perspective of North Korea the invasion of southern territory and ensuing civil war, which saw substantial US and Chinese military interventions, were a continuation of the anti-imperialist revolution. The end of this bloody conflict saw the establishment of the Soviet-backed Democratic People’s Republic of Korea which continues to be ruled by the Korean Communist Party under Kim Il Sung’s descendants, largely with the support of the People’s Republic of China.

II. Revolutionary Martyrs

“This (revolutionary) army embraces the

spirit of moving forward unstopably and of overwhelming all enemies, but never to be overcome. Under any circumstance, as long as there is one man left, he must fight to the end." Mao Zedong²

(Fig. 1) This image from a popular Chinese poster shows such fighter. Blown out of the violent chaos of warfare he appears lifted off into a apotheosis, a transfiguration into the almost divine heroic martyr, "who would not only sacrifice part of their own interests, but also their own lives without hesitation, for the sake of revolutionary interest and needs", according to the revolutionary general Zhou De.³

The etymology of the word 'martyr' in most European languages derives from the Greek and meant originally 'witness'; the current meaning arose in the 13th century to characterize the Christians who publicly testified their faith and were put to death as a result. In Chinese, the word *lieshi* 先烈 consists of a part 列 that means 'order, position, row,' and the bottom half which symbolises fire. The second sign 士 is an honourable word for "man".⁴ *lieshi* have long history in China; ever since the since Warring States period (475 -221 BC) officials who had lost their lives as result of maintaining moral integrity in the face of state brutality. In the 20th century the word was given a new

relevance to refer to revolutionaries killed in action who served as models for the living.⁵

Insurrectional Martyrs Cemeteries (1911-1937) (Fig. 2)

The first martyrs' cemetery served as a mass burial place and monument for some eighty of the revolutionaries who had perished during the failed uprising against the Qing government in March/April 1911. Once the rebellion had succeeded the Nationalists (KMT) constructed it between 1912 and 1921 at the Yellow Flower Mound in Huanghua Gan in Guanzhou (Canton). The image above shows the Martyrs' Tomb and behind it a memorial wall made of stones, surmounted by a "Statue of Liberty, symbolizing the martyrs' noble spirit of fighting for freedom and democracy" according to the official description.⁶ The cemetery is entered through a monumental gate and a straight path leads to the tomb. The design is in keeping with the modernizing trends in Chinese architecture at the time with its borrowings from western culture, such as could be seen in the foreign concessions in Shanghai and other treaty ports.

The first martyrs' cemetery had been built within the city of Guangzhou and served to bury the first significant dead of the uprising. The second important martyrs'



黄继光
一九四二年，黄继光同志在抗日战争中英勇牺牲，成为中华民族英雄。他为了民族的解放事业，献出了宝贵的生命。他的事迹永远铭刻在人们心中，激励着我们继续奋斗，为祖国的繁荣富强而努力。

Fig. 1 Zhang Hongti, 1992, May, Huang Jiguang - educational posters of heroic persons, <http://chineseposters.net/themes/models.php>

cemetery was built on the prestigious Purple Mountain, close to Nanjing between 1933 and 1935, during the time when the Nationalists were in power. It was a Nationalist cemetery for officers and soldiers killed in the Northern Expedition and during the battle against the Japanese in Shanghai. (Fig. 3)

As can be seen on the poster that is displayed at the site that is now a “Scenic spot”, the cemetery on the far right was built on the grounds of Linngu temple. It is next to the sumptuous mausoleum of KMT leader Sun Yat-Sen that had been completed five years earlier in 1928. On the left side is the tomb complex of Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang from 1405. That all these burial sites benefit from excellent *feng shui* is typical for the Nationalist respect for pre-revolutionary Chinese burial customs.

The Linngu cemetery has a similar in layout as the mausoleum of Sun Yat-Sen and consists of a sequence of front gate, memorial archway (with quotations by Chiang Kai Shek and Sun Yat-sen), a sacrificial hall with memorial stele inscribed with names of the Fallen), the memorial hall and the cenotaph Pagoda, designed by the American architect Henry K Murphy, who worked on the master-plan



Fig. 2 The Cemetery of Huanghuagang Martyrs, in http://www.asiavtour.com/China_Guangdong_Guangzhou_The%20Cemetery%20of%20Huanghuagang%20Martyrs_Photo%20Gallery_a389_s10_c1594.html
Fig. 3 in http://www.magic-citynews.com/R_P_BenDedek_33/Sun_Yatsen_s_Mausoleum_Nanjing10017.shtml



Fig. 4 Linggu Pogoda in http://www.magic-city-news.com/R_P_BenDedek_33/Sun_Yat-sen_s_Mausoleum_Nanjing10017.shtml

for Nanjing when it was capital under the KMT regime.⁷ (Fig. 4)

The architecture is different from Huanghuagong as it is more self-consciously Chinese in style and plays on the topographical links to the old Ming capital. The strongly didactic intention that incorporates the memorial of exemplary martyrs within a framework that evokes continuity with the past and the revolutionary aspirations of Sun Yat-sen is typical for the Kuomintang ideology that stresses 'national characteristics' alongside modernization.

Red Martyrs cemeteries (since 1949)

(Fig. 5) This painting shows one of the most famous Chinese Red Martyrs, Liu Hulan, a fourteen year-old probationary Communist who was beheaded by the Nationalist army during the Chinese Civil War. It was in her memory that Mao Zedong had penned the slogan *si de guangrong*, "glorious death".⁸ Already in 1944, Mao Zedong, stirred by the death of Zhang Side, a young peasant Red Army Soldier who was killed on September 5th 1944, had declared in his eulogy 'Serve the People': "All men must die, but death can vary in significance. [...] from now on when anyone in our ranks who has done some useful work dies,



Fig. 5 Feng Fasi, Liu Hulan died a martyr, 1957; oil on canvas (collection of the National Art Museum of China), 230x425cm in <http://en.cafa.com.cn/art-for-life-retrospective-art-exhibition-to-commemorate-the-100th-anniversary-of-birth-of-feng-fasi.html>

*be he soldier or cook, we should have a funeral ceremony and a memorial meeting in his honour. This should become the rule.*⁹ Like the 'red funerals' in Bolshevik Russia, the funerals and commemoration of dead communists broke with past burial traditions and by serving as examples to be emulated the dead, often of a very young age, were no longer just to be mourned by family members and local communities but became heroic martyrs to be commemorated collectively. In Chinese tradition the dead became ancestors and tutelary spirits to following generations. Dying without issue the young martyrs became honorary 'ancestors' to the post-revolutionary nation.

[Fig. 6] While the Civil War was still being fought, the first cemeteries for red martyrs were beginning to be built to commemorate revolutionary heroes, such as Red Army soldiers and civilians associated with the Chinese Communist Party, who were fighting the Japanese in territories controlled by communist forces as here in Handan. By 1949 the death-toll had risen sharply: the War of Resistance against Japan had resulted in the death of 600,000 Red Army soldiers and in the Civil War another 1.31 million soldiers died. The cult of the Red Martyr became increasingly important, both as an outlet for private



Fig. 6 JinjiLuYu Cemetery for Revolutionary Heroes, Handan City, 1946-1950, in <http://www.jjlylsl.com/uploadfile/jpg/2011-4/20114217135628.jpg>

grief and to unite the nation, while holding on to the idea that what the dead had given their lives for, was the new, communist, China. As Chang Tai-Hung pointed out "Through the martyrs fight and sacrifice against foreign imperialists and domestic capitalists (KMT), the CCP sought to invent and reinforce the solidarity of a Chinese nation as a shared community with common goals and collective experience."¹⁰

The Hundan monument shows a break from the Nationalist monument that stresses an uncompromising new beginning and a break with the past in its stark monumentality. The central feature, still a proudly erect to signify the ongoing vitality of the revolution, is no longer a pagoda or a ziggurat with a western style Liberty, but a simple tower crowned with a red star.

(Fig. 7) One of the most important and monumental of martyrs' cemeteries to be built after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 is Yuhuatai. The site is highly significant; located close to near Nanjing, the old Ming and erstwhile Nationalist capital. Since 1927, when the Kuomintang had gained control of the Chinese government, it had been a main execution sites for political enemies, especially Communists. According to CP sources, some 100,000 political prisoners



Fig. 7 Yuhuatai Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery (literally Rain Flower Terrace Hill) at Nanjing, 1950, in <http://www.chinaunique.com/arts.asp?id=2541>

and dissidents were executed in the area.¹¹

The aerial view above shows two approaches to the summit of the hill, marked again by a starkly modernist tower, some 42.4 meters, standing for 23 April 1949 when the PLA liberated the former KMT capital, *it stands to represent the martyrs' noble ideals*. The layout, not dissimilar to Nationalist cemetery on Purple Mountain is axial; a monumental entrance gate leads to a memorial hall, on to a pavilion engraved with writings by Lenin and Mao. The large rectangular pool of water is a new feature; an interval before the final ascent to the phallic tower at the top, inscribed in Mao Zedong's calligraphy with "Long Live the Martyrs".

The focal point from the other side, due to topographical constraints of the hilly site, is a monumental sculpture group, according to official descriptions it is the largest granite sculpture in China and *face expressions are being emphasized in order to impress visitors the lofty sentiment possessed by China's national heroes*.¹² (Fig. 8)

The architectural style betrays impact of Soviet architects and engineers that characterizes 1950s Chinese monumental architecture; Chinese traditional elements are generally reduced to roof

configurations, while the sculptures conform to a blocky socialist realism. The dominant colour is grey, with sombre conifer planting but the surrounding woody landscape is accessible through many path and allows oblique vistas of the cemetery.

During the first decades of the People Republic thousands of martyrs' cemeteries were built across China. All these cemeteries and memorial halls and parks became sites of red pilgrimages, the only tourist activity actively encouraged during the early years of the Republic and then, intensely, during the Cultural Revolution. Beijing, the new capital, underwent radical reconstruction, planned around the old symbolic centre of the Forbidden City, where the new fulcrum of State power was arranged around the newly created Tiananmen Square with the Monument to the People's Heroes, the highest structure on the Square, the most important. The capital also needed its own martyrs' cemetery. (Fig. 10)

Premier Zhou Enlai suggested "to build a permanent resting place for the revolutionary martyrs for the purpose of conducting revolutionary education – but nor only for martyrs abut for high official leaders, distinguished foreigners who championed socialist ideas".¹³



Fig. 8 in <http://www.absolutechinatours.com/Nanjing-attractions/Yuhuatai-298.html>

Fig. 9 in <http://www.chinaworkandlive.com/nanjings-martyrs-cemetery-a-haunting-place/>

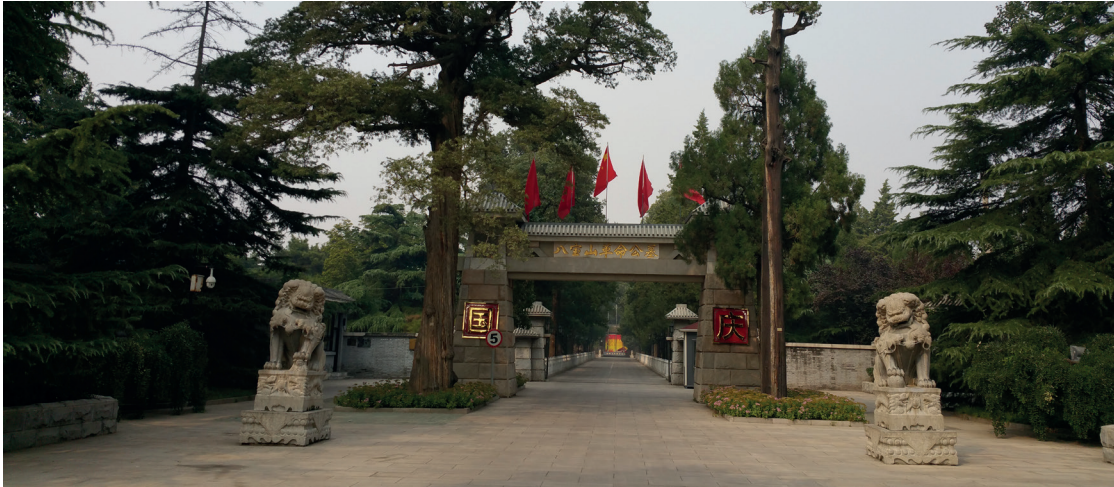


Fig. 10 Babaoshan Revolutionary Martyrs Graveyard near Beijing, photo by Gu Zong and Ji Haiyang.

Fig. 11 Some of the simple 1950s graves from the Mao era at the back with newer graves, photo: Gu Zong and Ji Haiyang.

The government chose the grounds of the old Honoured Nation-Protecting Temple, which had been a popular burial place for eunuch officials. After their remains were disinterred and relocated, the remains of revolutionary martyrs from other cemeteries were moved to the newly laid cemetery. Babaoshan is a garden cemetery, with shade trees and orderly rows of graves and lacks the axial layout and monumental structures of the commemorative cemeteries with their mass burials. It was instantly popular and quickly became the most honoured place for eternal rest. It had to be enlarged several times.

(Fig. 11) shows some of the simple 1950s graves from the Mao era at the back with newer graves, showing more traditional floral motifs in the foreground.

In the decades following Deng Xiaoping's reforms that resulted in 'capitalism with Chinese characteristics',¹⁴ as people eagerly pursued personal gain and materialist values rather than collective socialist goals, the cult of the red martyrs lost much of its appeal. At the same time efforts to push for wider ranging political reform, which culminated in the mass protests around the Monument to the People's Heroes on Tiananmen Square in 1989 were brutally repressed. In

recent years, reacting to both increasing complaints at corruption and a perceived loss of social cohesion brought about by mass migration to the more prosperous cities and the effects of the one-child policy, the government made efforts to harness the power of the martyrs once again. Yet this was not to be renewal of the Red Martyr and the word 'revolutionary' has been avoided. While some of the neglected old martyrs' cemeteries were spruced up they were often renamed without that epithet. (Fig. 12)

In May 2012 a vast new, Martyrs Cemetery was built in Chuan-Shan Su, in Tonjiang County. It assembles the remains of some 25,000 Red Army soldiers in a monumental and strictly symmetrical layout that combines the longitudinal axis of earlier nationalist commemorative cemeteries with individual though strictly uniform graves, marked simply with a single red star. This brand new cemetery evokes some of the World War I sites along the Austro-Italian frontier. (Fig. 13)

A year after the inauguration of Chuan-Shan-Su, the Chinese government declared a new Martyrs Day. Martyrs are now redefined as "*people who sacrificed their lives for national independence and prosperity, as well as the welfare of people in modern times, or after the First Opium*

War.¹⁵ The new teleology is 'prosperity'. The 'revolution has been dropped but martyrs are still part of the ideological apparatus. This year Martyrs Day, on the 29th of September, was celebrated again with a highly choreographed ceremony on Tiananmen Square and simultaneous celebrations have been ordered to take place in all of the 5000 martyrs cemeteries across China. This has helped to keep many of these sites from neglect and decay but to what extent the martyrs will watch over the CCP and their hold on power remains to be seen. (Fig. 14)

*China has rallied to honor and remember deceased national heroes on Martyrs' Day. President Xi Jinping led senior leaders, in paying silent tribute and offering flower baskets at the Monument to the People's Heroes.*¹⁶

North Korea

(Fig. 15) Korea, having suffered a cruel occupation by Japan for half a century and then being engulfed in a bitter civil war in which the north lost over eleven percent of its population,¹⁷ has no shortage of martyrs, many of whom did fight in a revolution against Japanese of western imperialism. Yet, in contrast to the PRC there are few war cemeteries in North Korea. The most important symbolic site



Fig. 12 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2776550/China-honours-fallen-Martyrs-Day-ceremonies-including-memorial-service-World-War-Two-victims-country-s-huge-230-000-square-metre-cemetery.html>

Fig. 13 Martyrs Cemetery in Chuan-Shan Su

on Mount Taeseong near Pyongyang was built in the mid 1970s . (Fig. 16)

It serves as the honorary burial place for Kim Jong Suk (Kim Il Sung's second wife and mother Kim Jon Il), as well as guerrilla comrades such as Kim Chaek on O Jin U; only about one third of those commemorated here died after 1945 and hence.¹⁸ The main layout of this hillside cemetery consists of a straight axis beginning with monumental gate from which stone steps lead to a platform flanked by monumental statues depicting fighters in action. The 150 graves are all marked with a bronze bust set on a plinth and a huge red stone flag provides an unusual and theatrical backdrop. (Fig. 17)

There is no memorial hall only a huge plaque with a bronze medal to collectively honour the assembled martyrs. Pride of place at the very centre and right before the red flag goes to Kim Jon Suk. The cemetery is singularly exclusive as it is strictly reserved for the Manchurian partisans.¹⁹ (Fig. 18)

But it is the small group comprised of surviving veterans or their immediate descendants of the Manchurian partisan that wields power in North Korea. (Fig. 19)



Fig. 14 September 29 2015 Tiananmen Square.
Fig. 15 The poster above shows Kim Jong Suk, holding Kim Jong Il, behind Kim Il Sung and other partisans in Manchuria.



Fig. 16 Symbolic site on Mount Taeseong near Pyongyang
Fig. 17 Honorary burial place for Kim Jong Suk
Fig. 18 The huge red stone flag

Kim Il Sung himself and now his recently deceased son, Kim Jong Il, are both buried in the so-called Palace of the Sun, the previous presidential palace that has been turned into a mausoleum for the embalmed remains of the Dear Leader and the Great Leader. The cemetery is also closely associated with the legitimization of power in North Korea, so as to re-assure the ruling elite of the continuing loyalty of those to aspire to wield supreme command. In 1985 for instance, in preparation to his succession, Kim Jong Il ordered a costly renovation of cemetery. It was on this occasion that the statue of his mother Kim Jon Suk was placed in its present position, which also signals a move on the part of the Kims to underline the revolutionary credentials of their female ancestor. The second most important cemetery, known as the Fatherland Liberation War Martyrs Cemetery, on Sinmiri-Hill, is now part of the sites now shown to foreign visitors and dignitaries. It was opened by the present ruler Kim Jon Un on July 25th 2013. (Fig. 20)

According to North Korean news report: Marshal Kim Jong Un suggested building the Fatherland Liberation War Martyrs Cemetery and gave scrupulous teaching on its site and the ways and means for the building. He said our Party is the owner of

the graves of the People's Army martyrs, known and unknown, who sacrificed themselves in the Fatherland Liberation War.

While Kim Jong Un assiduously pays homage to the Manchurian partisans on Mount Taesong, the new cemetery is more inclusive as it commemorates the martyrs of the Korean War. It is a gesture that acknowledges the contributions of people not connected to the small group of partisans. Although there had been memorials and other war cemeteries before this is by far the grandest and shows a desire to widen legitimacy across the population in the early period of Kim Jong Un's reign.

In terms of the layout it resembles some of the Chinese war cemeteries with its rows of identical tombstone, each with a photograph of the fallen. (Fig. 21)

Towering above the orderly rows of graves is an extraordinary state hewn of white and red marble, no simple tower here let alone a pagoda but spelling out with brutal simplicity Mao Zedong's famous dictum that 'political power grows out from the barrel of a gun'.

The North Korean article describes the monument in these terms:

The memorial tower of the People's Army Martyrs with the height of tens of meters is



Fig. 19 The Manchurian partisans

Fig. 20 The opening by Kim Jon Un on July 25th 2013

Fig. 21 Rows of identical tombstone, each with a photo of the fallen

composed of a rifle, a bayonet, a national flag and a Republic Hero medal. It portrays in a peculiar style of formative art the ideas that the country, happiness, future and final victory are all guaranteed by weapons. In front of the memorial tower, there is a wreath-laying stand "Soul of Heroes" representing martyr's coffin. In the area of the semi-circled cemetery, there are graves of over 500 fallen fighters on 9 tiers according to the years of their death.

In conclusion it is clear that in countries who won their existence through a liberation struggle and through revolutionary tactics and where a single party maintains control overall political control, the dead who fell in turbulent times never lose their symbolic relevance. This is also true for Vietnam, not discussed at this conference due to time constraints.

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Fig. 22 The memorial tower of the People's Army Martyrs