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“A Big Dying Vat”

The Vilifying of Shanghai during the Good Eighth Company Campaign

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*This article demonstrates how the popular perception of Shanghai as a decadent city was heightened during the campaign for Emulating the Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road and argues for the central role of cinema in shaping the symbolism of Shanghai's locales. The campaign, which peaked in 1963, was linked to the Lei Feng campaign and was an important preamble to the Cultural Revolution. The Good Eighth Company campaign shifted the emphasis from Shanghai's image as a revolutionary bastion to that of a reactionary stronghold, a “big dying vat” that might contaminate the revolutionary forces and that needed to be brought back into the socialist fold. Using internal Party documents, the author maps out the campaign; by examining films, culminating in *Sentinels under the Neon Lights* (1964), the author also traces the dynamics that made Nanjing Road into a metonym of Shanghai's depravity and redefined the city's revolutionary status.*

Keywords: *cinema; parades; propaganda; Sentinels under the Neon Lights; Socialist Education Movement; Cultural Revolution*

Among popular perceptions of Shanghai, two contradictory characterizations stand out. On the one hand, the city has been portrayed as an ideological epicenter—the birthplace of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the model for organizing the urban proletariat, and the place where the leaders who shaped the Cultural Revolution and the more recent economic reforms honed their skills. On the other hand, Shanghai has earned the reputation of a metropolis where unchecked

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economic growth has followed colonial depravity sustained by prostitution, gambling, and cinematic illusion. In this view, the city offers an alternative modernity, a nation-within-a-nation that resisted Communism and continues to undermine socialist ideology.

I will argue that the notion of Shanghai's decadence owes as much to Communist propaganda of the 1960s as to actual social conditions or pre-Liberation descriptions. The CCP's initial mixed feelings about urban centers, and Shanghai in particular, may be glimpsed in Mao's reference in 1949 to the bourgeoisie's "sugar-coated bullets" and the simultaneous recognition of that class's essential role in maintaining urban economy (Gaulton, 1981: 35-39). Shanghai's image has repeatedly oscillated between these two emphases, in accordance with the changing political climate. Yet it was only in the early 1960s that the rhetoric began to disregard class distinctions and to identify Shanghai's locales and even its idiom as menaces to the Communist goals.

Key to understanding Shanghai's post-1949 reputation is the campaign for Emulating the Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road (*xiang Nanjing lu shang hao balian xuexi*), whose name alludes to an army unit that participated in Shanghai's liberation. Although the story of the Good Eighth Company has remained largely unnoticed—ignored by Western scholars and taken at face value by Chinese writers—it lay at the foundation of an intensive political campaign that peaked in 1963. Linked to the better-known campaign for Emulating Comrade Lei Feng, it was an important preamble to the Cultural Revolution. The campaign, which started by promoting frugality and commitment to socialism, was also harnessed to support the authority of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). In its later phases, the campaign changed Shanghai's dominant image: once viewed as a revolutionary base, it became a reactionary den that had to be put right before it could join in building socialism.

To analyze the development of the Good Eighth Company campaign, I rely here mainly on two sources—internal documents and propaganda films. The declassified archival material provides a unique insight into the making and machinations of a political campaign. Even though the available documents do not cover the entire chain of command, we can glimpse how the campaign was planned and launched, which propaganda teams and units were involved in its

staging, and how it developed as the ideological agenda changed. The public images, in contrast, help us to trace the evolving perception of Shanghai's liberation. The Good Eighth Company campaign is better understood as part of the CCP's ongoing project of portraying Shanghai's liberation in the visual and performance arts, including documentary and feature films. As part of a larger study that examines the documentary impulse that led Chinese cinema to fashion itself as a chronicler of history, this article explores the relationship between the real-time footage of the city's liberation and the replication of such recognizable images in propaganda films. My intention is not to measure the impact of the campaign, a project that would require other research tools, but rather to inquire into how the propaganda apparatus was employed to change the city's image.

The scope of this essay goes beyond the study of the specific campaign, exploring not only its precedents but also the role of cinema more generally in shaping the symbolism of Shanghai's locales. It also examines the value attached to specific public spaces, singled out as emblems of the CCP's power. Municipal and national authorities have used urban landmarks such as Nanjing Road to invoke and shape collective identity, history, and memory. To respond to the call of Cheng Tongyi (1996a) for "Nanjing Road Studies" and to continue the inquiry into earlier instances of "inventing Nanjing Road" (see Cochran, 2000), one must first acknowledge the various ideological uses to which Nanjing Road was put since 1949.

I begin by considering cinematic portrayals of Shanghai's liberated spaces from 1949 to 1959, in particular, the documentary footage in *A Million Heroes Descend on Jiangnan* (*Baiwan xiongshi xia Jiangnan*, 1949; dir. Qian Xiaozhang) and the feature films *An Orphan on the Streets* (*Sanmao liulang ji*, 1949; dir. Zhao Ming and Yan Gong [uncredited]) and *The Battle for Shanghai* (*Zhan Shanghai*, 1959; dir. Wang Bing). I then examine the Good Eighth Company campaign and the role played in it by the film *Sentinels under the Neon Lights* (*Nihongdeng xia de shaobing*, 1964; dir. Wang Ping). Taken together, these analyses attest to Shanghai's emergence as a text, a place whose spatial parameters are continually deterritorialized to a symbolic level. Films have taken over the battle for Shanghai, and cinema has become the continuation of war by other means.

*SPECTACLES OF VICTORY:
SHANGHAI'S LIBERATION*

Central to the manipulation of the image of Shanghai, and of Nanjing Road in particular, were the pageants staged on the road and their filmic renderings. The street spectacles and the footage documenting them established the spatial associations and visual tropes for portraying the city's liberation. Details such as the routes taken and the iconography employed in the pageants, as well as the nuances in portraying the parades, are key to understanding Shanghai's status following its liberation.

Immediately after the PLA entered Shanghai on 25 May 1949, the forces made efforts to commemorate the event by staging parades and recording them. As in many places throughout China, the takeover was followed by military and civilian marches through the city's main streets, stressing the warm welcome extended to the liberators. First came a pageant on 28 May in celebration of the PLA's entry into Shanghai; that very day, Chen Yi, commander of the Shanghai arena, was declared mayor of Shanghai and chairman of the Shanghai Military Directive Committee. On 6 July 1949, Chen reviewed a military parade, including the display of various weapons. Tanks, some decorated with red stars, rolled down Nanjing Road. Adding an ideological tinge to the parade was its dedication to commemorating the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 7 July 1937.

A second military parade followed on 8 October to celebrate the official declaration of the People's Republic of China the previous week. It was somewhat smaller in scale—the first military parade reportedly was attended by 1.5 million people, the latter by a million. The route included again the Bund, Nanjing Road, and other major thoroughfares. The staples of liberation parades were evident in abundance: national flags, five-pointed stars, photographs of Zhu De and Mao. Big drums beat the rhythm. The banners on display conveyed China's role in promoting world revolution; for example, a sign carried by women dressed to resemble the Statue of Liberty declared "Unite, Women of the World!" Some bore references to Shanghai's early revolutionary history, such as "Here the Chinese Started Rising!" The floats included mock-ups of industrial machinery, an airplane, and a locomotive. The processions ended at the horse racing track at the

western end of Nanjing Road, where a rostrum was erected and where dancing troupes and drummers performed for the large audience.¹

To produce the floats, organize the crowds, and coordinate the marching teams clearly required much guidance and reflected a concerted propaganda effort. The parades served basic educational purposes—many citizens, for example, would not yet be able to recognize Mao's effigy, so a large portrait captioned "image of Chairman Mao" was propped up at the entrance to the largest department store on Nanjing Road (illustrated in *Shen bao*, 26 May 1949, 1). It was equally important to generate enthusiasm and demonstrate widespread support for the PLA. The newly founded *Liberation Daily* described the three continuous days of celebrations as "more joyous than New Year's" ("Shanghairen," 1949). An earlier article detailed how soldiers and citizens shook hands and encouraged each other: as the locals shouted, "Long live the PLA! Long live the CCP! Long live Chairman Mao!" the soldiers replied, "Hail to the people of Shanghai! Defeat Taiwan, liberate the entire country!" ("Shiwei youxing shengkuang," 1949). Some reports were aimed at allaying the citizens' fears of the soldiers. According to the *China Weekly Review*, within a week after Shanghai's liberation, reassuring songs were being sung in Shanghai's streets. These included such lines as

The PLA, what are they like?
 Their good hearts love the people,
 Fair play and high morale,
 Never take a grain of the people's rice. ["Songs of Liberation," 1949: 14]

The soldiers were praised for not abusing the residents, even to the extent of refusing offers to help dry their soaked clothes ("Shanghai renmin," 1949; see Figure 1).

The parades—or at least reportage about them—conveyed the impression that Shanghai's citizens had been looking forward to their liberation. An article under the caption "Shanghai's people welcome the PLA with unparalleled enthusiasm and warmth" depicted the workers' embrace of the soldiers, declaring "We have united! We have united!" ("Shanghai renmin," 1949). The united front was spectacularly manifested when, in the words of the *Liberation Daily* headline, "a million soldiers and civilians paraded together; the entire city sang

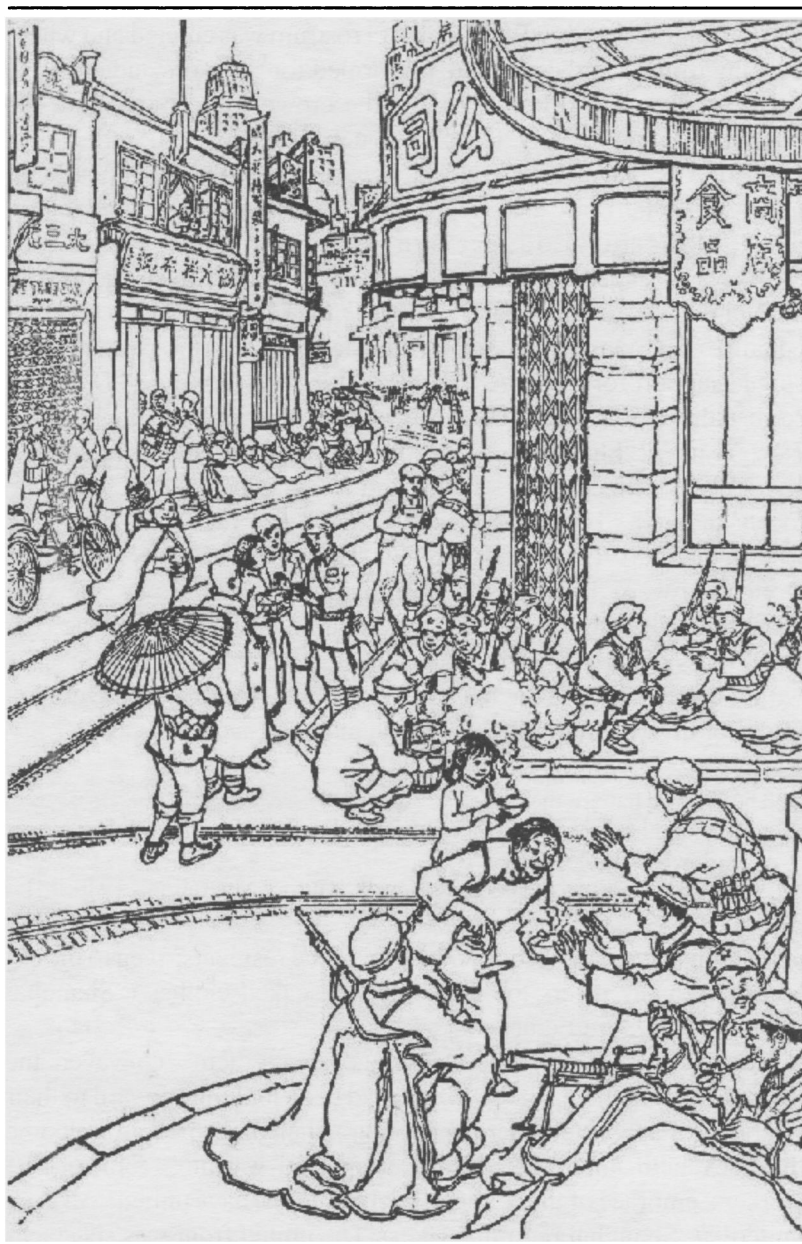


Figure 1. PLA soldiers politely refuse offers of food and blankets from Shanghai citizens. Woodcut by Zhao Hongben and Wang Guanqing, ca. 1959 (*Shanghai jiefang shinian zhengwen bianji weiyuanhui*, 1960: n.p.).

and danced to welcome its liberation" ("Baiwan junmin," 1949). The reports enabled readers to understand that Shanghai, as a city of the working class, had joined forces with the Communist soldiers.

The parades also became part of the drive to present the new China on film. Throughout the war, a camera team was placed in the front lines to dramatize the advance of the PLA, and the same cameras were used during parades. In addition, a special team was sent to Shanghai from Beijing to supervise the shooting (Gao Weijin, interview with author, 12 July 2001). The resulting footage, together with material filmed beforehand by the cinematography team of the Shanghai Film and Drama Association (*Shanghai yingju xiehui sheying dui*), was assembled into the documentary *A Million Heroes Descend on Jiangnan*. The use of multiple teams, discernible in the wide range of shooting angles, demonstrates the importance ascribed to the cinematic propaganda endeavor. Indeed, the film, which was distributed all over the country and screened before large audiences (Chen Huangmei, 1989: 2.6-11), helped the CCP to establish its legitimacy.

The documentary ends with images of Shanghai after liberation, foregrounding the PLA's control over the city and emphasizing the achievement of taking over the last important bastion of the Guomindang (GMD). The images also replicate the newspaper reports of citizens singing and dancing, throwing confetti on the rolling tanks, and touching them with admiration. *A Million Heroes* makes a clear statement in favor of the city's contribution to socialism, as it shows people mending war damage together—workers, soldiers, and intellectuals working side by side. The narrative even makes special mention of the patriotism of capitalists, and the film ends with the exclamation "Shanghai has been liberated!" Not only were Shanghai's liberators met by a welcoming population, the film emphasizes, but the city has also become an integral part of the socialist state.

PARADE AND PARODY: AN ORPHAN ON THE STREETS

The July parade was immediately used as material in a feature film. Responding to events as soon as they took place, the 1949 production *An Orphan on the Streets* integrates the documentary footage and modifies it. The film was based on Zhang Leping's 1947 cartoon series

of the same title, which depicts the adventures of the well-known cartoon figure Sanmao (literally, "Three Hairs"; on the cartoon, see Farquhar, 1995). Its director, Zhao Ming, recalls that to ensure his faithfulness to the cartoon, he often carried a copy of the book with him to the set. The film was originally conceived as a comedy in the style of Charlie Chaplin (Zhao, 1991: 128-33). The popularity of the Sanmao cartoons promised the film box-office success, and the initial plan called for a film and a sequel ("Sanmao jinxun," 1948). A caricature of Sanmao published in a Hong Kong film magazine anticipates Sanmao's transformation into a movie star (see Figure 2).

Behind its comic tone, filmmakers at the left-wing Kunlun Studio mounted pointed social criticism—as did Zhang Leping's cartoons. As the English title suggests, the plot follows Sanmao, a homeless child, through the streets of Shanghai. He is the victim of the city's affluent society as well as of the criminal underground; yet resourceful as ever, Sanmao keeps bouncing back. In one of the film's more poignant moments, its hero observes the Children's Day celebrations. Unable to enjoy candy with the richer children, Sanmao locates a seemingly more egalitarian space on the streets. When a children's band parade marches by, he joins the scouts and is soon stepping in unison. Yet he is dressed in rags and barefoot, whereas the others are wearing smart paramilitary uniforms and shoes. While the loudspeakers blare slogans emphasizing children's welfare ("Children are the protagonists of the state's future! We must cherish the children and respect them!"), a gendarme throws Sanmao out of the ranks. After Sanmao organizes his own marching troupe of street urchins, the police beat them and chase them away. Sanmao's experience, limited to being an onlooker from the sidelines, demonstrates the reliance of the pre-Liberation parade on spatial demarcations of class.

The concluding sequence provides a marked contrast to the Children's Day parade. The film, originally planned for release in 1948, was banned by the GMD; it was cleared for screening only after the PLA took over Shanghai. During this delay, a scene was added in which Sanmao experiences a turn of fortune concurrent with the political change (Cheng Jihua, 1998: 2.243). As the director explains in his memoirs, the new ending was produced in haste, in the fervor of Shanghai's liberation (Zhao, 1991: 128-33). It takes place immediately after the PLA's entry to the city on 25 May, as Sanmao's friends



Figure 2. Mi Gu, "The Manners of a Star: Promotion of Brother Sanmao's First Screen Appearance." A caricature anticipating the adaptation of Zhang Leping's cartoon strip into a film (*Dianying luntan* 2, nos. 5-6 [2 July 1948]: n.p.).

drag him to a parade and push him to participate. Welcomed into the dancing crowds, even when he is unable to follow their coordinated steps, Sanmao beams with joy. The film concludes with an overview of the parade, accompanied by a song in praise of the PLA. (Zhang Leping would later depict similar scenes of Shanghai's liberation in his cartoons—see Figure 3.)

The juxtaposed parade scenes convey to viewers that the city is a reflection of the social system at large. The parades display power by reappropriating urban spaces. After Liberation, the downtrodden classes are welcomed and encouraged to reclaim the streets and their right to power. The symbolic linkage between the power structure and the parades also motivates the film's narrative, and the concluding images of the parade resolve Sanmao's prolonged sufferings.

The conclusion of *Orphan* also bespeaks the need to root Shanghai's symbolism in a concrete spatial and historical setting. The ending sequence both reconstructs the 6 July parade and seamlessly blends in documentary footage. The film cuts back and forth from the studio shots of Sanmao and his friends to images from the actual parade, presented as if they are taken from Sanmao's point of view. In weaving the documentary film into the background of the studio shots, *Orphan* blurs, in *Zelig*-like fashion, the line between historical documentation and filmic fiction. Documentary footage and popular culture—whether feature film or cartoon—reinforce each other as tools of social criticism.

Orphan stands as a reminder of the importance of cinema within the propaganda machine in the new China. As soon as Shanghai was liberated, docudrama was used to reshape the historical record. Sanmao's symbolic reclaiming of city spaces is emblematic of how cinematic fiction took over as a privileged representation of history. Zhao's film acknowledges the ideological value of spectacles, from the parades to cinema itself, but plays down the movie's manipulation of images. *Orphan* sets the pattern for later representations of Shanghai's liberation, using cinematic fiction to regulate the spectacle in the guise of conveying an authentic image. At the same time, the film establishes a theme that would later come under attack: namely, that Shanghai's residents were socialist sympathizers and willing participants in the revolution.



Figure 3. "Huanhu jiefang" (Hailing liberation). The concluding image in Zhang Leping's *Sanmao ying jiefang* (*Sanmao Welcomes the Liberation*) (Zhang Leping, 1979: 96).

THE SILVER SCREEN BATTLE FOR SHANGHAI: THE 1950s

During the 1950s, Shanghai's liberation was often commemorated in essays, the visual arts, and films. By and large, these representations continued in the vein established in 1949. The ideological and cinematic paradigms set forth in *An Orphan on the Streets* are apparent in Huang Zuolin's *For Peace* (*Weile heping*, 1956). Devoted to contrasting the suffering of pre-Liberation days with the joy of living in the new China, the narrative juxtaposes pre-1949 parades and the PLA parade. Early in the film, a student demonstration "against oppression and for freedom" takes place along the Bund. The film uses a montage of documentary and directed footage. Mounted police beat the students and arrest many of them. After the Liberation, however, the imagery changes to the masses happily parading and dancing.

Throughout the various political campaigns of the 1950s, Shanghai's image in literature and film remained a positive one. Films such as *The Undying Transmission* (*Yong bu xiaoshi de dianbo*, 1958; dir.

Wang Ping) foregrounded the city's status as the cradle of the proletarian revolution. In some cases, the emphasis shifted to showing how members of the city's bourgeoisie, despite their initial reluctance, completed a process of reform and collectivization. Notable examples include Zhou Erfu's novel *Shanghai Morning* (*Shanghai de zaochen*, 1958) and Tang Xiaodan's movie *City without Night* (*Bu ye cheng*, 1957).

The official line was made clear in 1959, during the tenth anniversary of the PRC's founding: publications, some by prominent leaders, represented the city's socialist makeover as the realization of its revolutionary potential (see *Shanghai jiefang shinian zhengwen bianji weiyuanhui*, 1960, esp. Zhang Chunqiao, 1960). In the same year, the PLA's August First Studio released the largest production to date on the city's liberation, *The Battle for Shanghai*. Despite its adherence to the war film genre, the movie focuses on Shanghai's takeover as much as on battlefield scenes. The spectator is frequently reminded of the revolutionary value of the coastal metropolis. As the regiment commander observes Shanghai with his binoculars, he declares, "What a wonderful city! Here was our Party born!" It is made clear that the city eagerly awaits its liberation and will welcome the PLA. Even during battle, the army prepares itself for the parade. Under enemy fire, a fighter approaches the commander, shows him his medaled shirt, and asks, "Walking down Shanghai's streets like this I'll look like a PLA soldier, won't I?" Parading through the city streets is presented as the final goal that would reaffirm the PLA's heroism in the eyes of Shanghai's residents.

The Battle for Shanghai ends, as expected, with the PLA marching through Shanghai (this film, too, seems to use documentary footage, though of more recent vintage than 1949). The tone is set by the PLA commander's final comments:

We have triumphed. In the last one hundred years, the people of this heroic city have suffered much and been humiliated. Today we have finally thrown off the shackles of slavery and stood up! The liberation of Shanghai marks the ultimate annihilation of imperialism's expansionist power in China. It shows that the Chinese people have achieved independence and liberation forever.

The speech presents Shanghai's fall as the final vindication of the revolutionary cause—the end of the anti-imperialist battle that started, according to Maoist historiography, in 1839.

The Battle for Shanghai further underscores the ideological significance of the military victory by foregrounding the parade and juxtaposing it with previous pageants. It features a parade staged by the GMD on the eve of the PLA offensive. The scene is based on an actual incident—on 24 May, a day before the decisive battle, the GMD assembled a "victory parade." The Bund was closed off to traffic as bands marched, children sang patriotic songs, and red and blue streamers were thrown from above. A last-ditch attempt to boost morale and create a smoke screen for the evacuation that had begun on 21 May, the parade was regarded by contemporary observers as a farce (Barber, 1979: 142). *The Battle for Shanghai* makes the most of the event to ridicule the GMD. Its soundtrack features off-key band music that clashes with the officials' vacuous phrases broadcast over the PA system. The spectacle is turned against the parade's organizers; a bystander urges his friend to leave, only to be told, "You don't get to watch a farce like this every day without paying for tickets!"

The scene also underscores that parades were battlegrounds for political propaganda. As the cars roll through the streets and distribute flyers, other flyers rain down upon the watching crowd. Released from the rooftops by members of the Communist underground, they state that the battle over Shanghai has already begun and that GMD forces have been decimated. The parade disperses and the gendarmes rush to find the underground activists. By implication, while the ground troops wage war in the fields outside Shanghai, the ideological battle is being fought on the city streets. Even though the film includes elaborate scenes of urban warfare, it impresses on the viewers that the fiercest battle takes place in the spectacle of the parade. Jeffrey Wasserstrom (1991: 275) has argued that student demonstrations in pre-Liberation Shanghai provided a street theater that challenged the GMD pageants and prepared the ground for the Communist takeover. The parade scene in *The Battle for Shanghai*, like the ending of *An Orphan on the Streets*, shows how contention could occur even over a single event, as official marches could be given alternative meanings. The parades of the late 1940s and their filmic documentation

established that vying for the use of public space was a crucial part of the fight for control and legitimacy.

These parade scenes follow the pattern laid out by *A Million Heroes Descend on Jiangnan* and *Orphan on the Streets*, portraying the city as an unwilling captive of the GMD and stressing the citizens' welcome of the PLA troops. The soldiers admire the city as the cradle of the revolution, the local underground plays an important role in preparing the ground for liberation, and the population is sympathetic to the cause. The concluding parade is accompanied by calls from the sidelines, "Welcome the PLA! Long Live the PLA!" The film celebrates the reunion of the revolutionary forces within and outside the city and depicts the takeover of Shanghai as their ultimate victory.

THE GOOD EIGHTH COMPANY: ANATOMY OF A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

The struggles over Shanghai were not yet over. One of the essays published on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the city's liberation singled out the exemplary behavior of a specific company. "The Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road" associated the stories of bravery, self-sacrifice, and revolutionary conviction with a single identifiable symbol and brought them up to date. The newspaper set the tone for a carefully controlled propaganda effort that, over the next four years, grew into a major political campaign that changed the city's image. The Good Eighth Company campaign revised Shanghai's portrayal as a revolutionary stronghold, representing the metropolis instead as a menace to socialism and as the PLA's nemesis.

The essay, which appeared in *Liberation Daily* on 23 July 1959, describes the commendable behavior of a PLA company that had guarded the city since its liberation. Although originally based in Pudong and called the First Company of the First Battalion of the Special Regiment of the Eastern Arena Guard Brigade, the company was transferred to patrolling duties in the vicinity of Nanjing Road in 1956, reassigned as the Eighth Company of the Third Battalion of the Shanghai Garrison Regiment. The company is cited as a model for proletarian thought, and vignettes extol the soldiers' frugality, hard

work, honesty, and diligent political study (Lü, [1959] 1960; Cheng Tongyi, 1996b).

The *Liberation Daily* article was followed by a documentary film bearing the same title, produced by August First Studio and completed in July 1960 (dir. Lu Fang). It records the daily life of the company in staged tableaux typical of contemporary propaganda. The commentary details the soldiers' thriftiness—instead of spending their money on the merchandise in Nanjing Road, they donate part of their earnings and send the rest to their families. They mend their own gear and help civilians. In an especially dramatic scene, a commune presents the company with a banner expressing its gratitude. The man in charge says: "The Good Eighth Company has always been our model for emulation. Your spirit of hard struggle will always be the backbone of our progressive forces!"

The *Liberation Daily* article and the documentary film do not differ significantly from earlier accounts of Shanghai's liberation. They recycle reports from 1949 that cite the troops' courtesy toward Shanghai's citizens, and they reflect the need for economizing just as the disastrous consequences of the Great Leap Forward began to be felt. Even though the consumerism of Nanjing Road is mentioned as a temptation to be avoided, the city is mostly lauded for its past and present virtues. The documentary begins with unequivocal praise for the metropolis: "Shanghai is a city with a glorious revolutionary tradition. It is also a city resplendent with the beauty of the blossom of the Great Leap Forward in the midst of our country's socialist construction." Descriptions of the Good Eighth Company included elements that appealed to other agendas, however, and the Good Eighth Company would soon be reintroduced as the focus of a full-fledged campaign.

The campaign's first stages did not betray any major policy change. In June 1960, the Nanjing Military Region Command issued a directive to "emulate the Eighth Company, to catch up with the Eighth Company, and to surpass the Eighth Company" (Xu, 2002: 56). The interest in the Company was easily linked to developments such as the emphasis on "four-goods companies" (*sihao liandui*),² adopted at the October 1960 meeting of the Enlarged Meeting of the Military Commission (Zhongguo renmin geming junshi bowuguan, n.d.: 2). The

Youth League's Shanghai Council started organizing small-scale activities around the legacy of the Good Eighth Company in September 1960 (Gongqingtuan shiwei xuanchuanbu, 1963).

By 1963, the campaign was gaining steam, even though publications continued to recycle well-known tropes. The *PLA Magazine* of 30 March 1963 contained several long articles and an accompanying editorial on the Good Eighth Company. The essays elaborate on and embellish the anecdotes about the company's frugality and helpfulness found in the 1959 essay ("Wubi baochi," 1963; "Jianku zuofeng," 1963; "'Hao balian' de gushi shuobuwan," 1963). Many of the reports were penned by a correspondent borrowed from the Shanghai Garrison, Zhang Zheming (Zhang Zheming, 2002: 20). Interest in the Good Eighth Company received a public stamp of approval on 12 April, when the company's political commissar, Captain Liu Renfu, was summoned to a meeting with Zhou Enlai in Zhongnanhai. On 25 April, the company was officially renamed "the Good Eighth Company" (Cheng Tongyi, 1996b: 568).

These formalities might seem innocuous, but internal documents reveal that the leadership's endorsement of the company was the first step in an orchestrated campaign with far-reaching objectives. In mid-April, while the leaders in Beijing were promoting the Good Eighth Company's fame, the Propaganda Team of the Chinese Communist Youth League Shanghai Council was organizing meetings to determine how the campaign was being received, after which it issued a report on elements that should be emphasized or dropped (Gongqingtuan shiwei xuanchuanbu, 1963). The team's approach bears some resemblance to the focus groups used by modern advertisers. The early stages of the campaign should be regarded as a pilot launch, with the activities of local cadres creating opportunities for feedback and input. The Propaganda Team of the Shanghai Workers' Association, for example, convened a meeting on 19 April 1963 "to strengthen the socialist education of the working masses, and to learn from the 'Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road' even better progressive thought and ways to conduct bitter struggle" (Shanghaishi zonggonghui xuanchuanbu, 1963). A circular of the Chinese Communist Youth League Shanghai Council, composed on the same date, outlines the campaign's goals:

(1) To emulate [the Good Eighth Company] in raising the red flag of Mao Zedong thought, persisting in the fighting spirit to promote proletarian thought and annihilate capitalist thought, maintaining throughout a high level of class alertness and a staunch proletarian stance. Although they were physically located in the bustling city, they came out spotless, repelled the onslaught of the "sugar-coated bullets" of the capitalist class, and remained forever the revolutionary fighters of the proletarian class.

(2) To emulate their sublime thought of selfless determination, putting others before themselves, viewing the collective as primary, and seeing to others first. Competing in how much one contributes, not in how much one can enjoy. Regarding building socialism stone upon stone as one's utmost happiness.

(3) To emulate their good manners of hard struggle, diligence, and thriftiness. To see glory in hardship and simplicity, to see shame in extravagance and waste.

(4) To emulate their diligent study, modesty, and sincerity, without arrogance or rashness, cautious and conscientious in their relentless advancing of the revolutionary spirit. [Gongqingtuan Shanghaishi weiyuanhui, 1963: 2]

Other internal memorandums followed, using similar phrasing. While most of the wording comports with earlier descriptions of the company, the first item emphasizes class struggle and identifies capitalists not only as the internal enemy but more specifically as exerting their influence in the metropolitan environment. The company's revolutionary values are juxtaposed with Shanghai, a place that requires "high class alertness" to the danger of being tainted.

The memorandum both formulates the propaganda goals months before the campaign would be launched in public and explicitly outlines the campaign's scale. It calls for publishing material on the Good Eighth Company in newspapers, for organizing reading sessions of that material, for holding conferences on questions such as "how to emulate the Good Eighth Company," and for using stories, drama, blackboard bulletins, broadcast stations, and exhibitions. The directive sums up the aim: "Every frontline Youth League branch, every team and youth group, should study the political thought and working experience of the Good Eighth Company to become . . . 'a revolutionary crucible' and 'a fighting collective' like the Good Eighth Company" (Gongqingtuan Shanghaishi weiyuanhui, 1963: 2).

The campaign picked up speed within a few weeks. On 8 May, the *People's Daily* published an editorial extolling the Good Eighth Company ("Yongyuan baochi," 1963); on the next day, the political commissar of the PLA published a detailed paper laying out the importance of the campaign ("Zhongguo renmin Jiefangjun zong zhengzhibu," 1963). The document draws on the internal memos cited above, often repeating their phrasing word for word. The drafting of all Worker Association and Youth League units, the mobilization of diverse art forms, and the use of eminent Party mouthpieces demonstrate the campaign's central place in contemporary policy.

In response to the directive to disseminate the message in various forms, the campaign produced a multimedia extravaganza. Among the artifacts I have come across are comics books (see Figure 4), prose and poetry, a Good Eighth Company Mao badge, scrolls in the style of a New Year's painting (*nianhua*) (see Figure 5), and a woodcut, included in a manual so that amateur painters could retrace it on propaganda billboards (see Figure 6). As I will discuss in detail below, a theatrical play and a film were also produced to tell the company's story. Of special interest is a set of twenty-two 77 × 53 cm posters that, if hung on the walls of a large room, tell the full story of the company (see Figure 7). With its high-quality reproductions of photos, oil and brush paintings, military documents, statistical tables, and slogans writ large, the poster set shows the soldiers as avid students of Mao Zedong thought, frugal, caring, and incorruptible. In their entirety, the images establish an iconography of the Good Eighth Company, recognizable through the soldier mending his straw sandals or guarding the high-rises with a rifle in hand.

The staging of the Good Eighth Company is reminiscent of the tactics used for promoting the spirit of Lei Feng, and the two campaigns were explicitly linked. The soldier Lei Feng was held up as emblematic of the self-sacrificial attitude required of all citizens, and the campaign to emulate him established the PLA as the model of selfless patriotism and bolstered the Mao cult. As early as 19 April 1963, the memorandum outlining the Good Eighth Company campaign stated that the company was a "collective Lei Feng" and that "emulating the Good Eighth Company is the in-depth development of the activities 'to emulate Comrade Lei Feng'" (Gongqingtuan Shanghaishi



Figure 4. "After the brethren of the Eighth Company occupied Shanghai, they took on the duty of guarding Nanjing Road. The fighters were extremely excited: Shanghai has become the people's; protecting the great Shanghai of the people is so glorious!" A soldier guards the parade celebrating Shanghai's liberation. Plate from the 1963 comic book *The Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road* (Du et al., [1963] 2003: 5).

weiyuanhui, 1963: 2-3). Indoctrination activities focused on Lei Feng and on the Good Eighth Company were conducted hand in hand.

A report on the campaign's progress dated 3 July explains, in hyperbole typical of campaign rhetoric, that "formerly many workers would talk, eat, and drink, would not mind politics that much, and would not want to study. Yet after the great influence of the progressive thought of Lei Feng and the Good Eighth Company, the phenomenon has been reversed at once, so that now they show a new willingness to seek study and progress" (Zhongguo caimao, 1963: 1). Through 1964, the two campaigns proceeded simultaneously, using similar propaganda strategies. On 5 May 1963, Mao appeared in public to write the slogan "Emulate Lei Feng"; on 1 August, in celebration of PLA Day, the Great Helmsman composed a ditty titled "Balian song" ("In Praise of the Eighth Company"):



Figure 5. Gao Shan and You Chongren, *The Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road*. Watercolor painting in the New Year's painting (*nianhua*) style. Two of a four-handscroll set, dated June 1964 (*Zhongguo renmin Jiefangjun disanjie meishu zuopin zhanlanhui xuanji*, 1965: plate 104).

The Good Eighth Company is a legend throughout the world
 Why? for its strong will
 It has served the people for decades
 Repelled corruption, forever unsullied. [Cheng Tongyi, 1996b: 564]



Figure 6. A PLA soldier mends straw shoes (in red, in the original), with the Shanghai skyline in the background (in black). Painting manual plate (Nanjing budui zhengzhibu xuanchuanbu, 1975: n.p.).

The poem equates self-sacrifice with active resistance to capitalist corruption, a theme central to the campaign.

Like the drive to emulate Lei Feng, the Good Eighth Company campaign (in its 1963 form) is better understood in the context of the Socialist Education Movement of 1962-1965, which identified the most immediate danger as a Soviet-style "revisionism," and of the "five antis" campaign, which singled out urban corruption (see MacFarquhar, 1997: 334-48). The Good Eighth Company campaign thus served as a preamble to the Cultural Revolution. It emphasized the PLA, rather than the Party, as the guardian of revolutionary ideology, and it bolstered the Youth League as a center of power.



Figure 7. "Posters on the deeds of the Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road." The first of a twenty-two educational poster set, ca. 1963 (Zhongguo renmin geming junshi bowuguan, n.d.).

Furthermore, its stress was on fighting the enemy within (to return to Mao's metaphor of "sugar-coated bullets"), especially the recidivist tendencies within forces seemingly loyal to the Party. The *People's Daily* editorial of 30 March 1963 cited above dubbed the counterrevolutionary elements "cow demons and snake spirits," a phrase that would appear in the paper again in Chen Boda's editorial in *People's Daily* on 1 June 1966, "Sweep Away All Monsters and Demons," and become synonymous with the "counterrevolutionaries" targeted during the Cultural Revolution. In its ideological agenda, rhetoric, and organizational structure, the Good Eighth Company campaign helped to set the stage for the later upheaval.

Yet the Good Eighth Company campaign also stands out among contemporary political movements in addressing Shanghai's urban spaces and shaping the city's symbolic imagery. Unlike most campaigns, this one focused on a specific city, and even on particular locales within it. In another exceptional case, that of the model farm at Dazhai, the place had been unknown before the campaign associated

with it. In singling out Shanghai, in contrast, the propaganda had to wrestle with well-established impressions of the coastal metropolis. The campaign shifted the delicate balance in Shanghai's perception as both a revolutionary bastion and reactionary stronghold to emphasize the exclusion of the bourgeoisie from socialist society. In so doing, the drive came close to condemning the city as a whole. Even though the immediate target was limited to "capitalist roaders," a small section of the population, the rhetoric attacked "the dregs of the old society," "the bustling city," and Nanjing Road. Although it is impossible to pinpoint the objective of the slogans—indeed, they were intentionally vague—the phrasing suggests animosity toward Shanghai because of its past as a capitalist bastion and because of its continued importance as an urban center.

The catchy name of the company and of the campaign provides a typical example of the rhetorical slipperiness that conflated class issues with Shanghai locales. Nanjing Road became the icon of the campaign, and images consistently showed the soldiers on Nanjing Road and the Bund. But in fact, the company was originally stationed across the Huangpu River; and even when the soldiers were temporarily lodged in two downtown locations—the stables of the Horse Race Club and the Liu family compound on Qinghai Road—neither place bore a Nanjing Road address (Cheng Tongyi, 1996b: 563-64).³ Yet the company was renamed during the campaign to invoke Shanghai's main commercial street and was even portrayed as garrisoned on Nanjing Road itself.

The particular focus on Nanjing Road targeted Shanghai's history and foreshadowed the imminent change in the city's ideological status. The campaign's increasing emphasis on ferreting out the enemies of the people combined a vision of Nanjing Road as an unclean place with references to unrepentant capitalists, counterrevolutionary elements, and outright spies. Nanjing Road was fashioned as an emblem of capitalist enterprise and extravagant luxury and as a place that had already corrupted many armies. A sheet in the set of twenty-two educational posters, captioned "living in the bustling city, not sullied by a single fleck of dust," tells how soldiers had to contend with the residual "dregs of old society and hiding enemies." The illustrated scenes specifically name Nanjing Road as the location where soldiers on

patrol sternly rebuffed attempts at monetary bribery and sexual seduction (Zhongguo renmin geming junshi bowuguan, n.d.: 12).

The soldiers' achievement lies in their resistance to the temptations located on and represented by Nanjing Road. At times, the city as a whole is condemned. The *People's Daily* editorial quotes "the enemy" as saying, "Shanghai is a big dying vat. The Communist Party will enter red and emerge black" ("Yongyuan baochi," 1963: 1-2). The appellation "the Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road" folds within itself the conflict between the PLA's correct ideology, on the one hand, and Shanghai's counterrevolutionary spaces, on the other.

*"POISONOUS PERFUME": SENTINELS
UNDER THE NEON LIGHTS*

The full extent to which the campaign targeted Shanghai as a whole, and Nanjing Road in particular, may be glimpsed in the feature film extolling the Good Eighth Company, *Sentinels under the Neon Lights*. As part of the Good Eighth Company campaign, *Sentinels* redefines Shanghai's place in the revolution, attacks the city as a source of decadence and vice, and extends the PLA's mission to eradicating the city's evil. It focuses with unusual directness on Nanjing Road as a metonym of Shanghai's depravity.

The film, based on a stage play of the same title, was part of the PLA's contribution to the campaign. The script was written by the deputy political commissar of the Shanghai Military Command, Shen Ximeng, after his commander, Wang Bicheng, commissioned it in the spring of 1961. Originally titled "Nanjing lu jinxingqu" ("The Nanjing Road March"), the final version appeared in 1963 in the second issue of *Juben* (Bing, 1995). By April 1963, Youth League documents named it as an example of propaganda activities that should be attended by the masses (Gongqingtuan Shanghaishi weiyuanhui, 1963: 2). The play was performed around the country by the Nanjing Military Command's Frontier Theater Troupe, and in 1964 the Ministry of Culture awarded it a prize, presented by Mao Dun (Ge, 1997: 431-32, 437). It was soon adapted into a film, produced that same year by the August First studio. Zhou Enlai's choice of director was symbolic—Wang Ping, of *The Undying Transmission* fame, was associated with

Shanghai's wartime resistance as a member of the Shanghai Amateur Dramatists' Association (Shanghai yeyu juren xiehui) and was an actor in Kunlun Studios in the late 1940s. She became China's first woman director in 1952, and her reputation was further boosted when she was chosen as best director at the Hundred Flowers Awards of 1963 (*Zhongguo dianying dacidian*, 1995: 995-96; Chen Qingquan, 1964).

Sentinels' story line follows the company's exploits after Shanghai's liberation. In line with the political campaign initiated in 1963, the film is centered not on the soldiers' frugality but rather on their struggle against counterrevolutionary activists and other, more subtly subversive elements. The soldiers are entrusted with guarding Nanjing Road, yet the street teems with dangers that might catch them unawares, weaken their revolutionary resolve, and enfeeble the PLA as a whole. The film foregrounds the metaphor of the "big dying vat," first used in the *People's Daily* editorial. A citizen driving a luxurious car observes the soldiers enter the city and remarks, "Within three months, the Communists will lie face down in Nanjing Road, decay, mold, and rot away!" At first the company does not seem to rise to the challenge. The plot follows two soldiers who almost succumb to the allure of Nanjing Road. One, a Shanghai native, cannot stand the military discipline and runs away. The other is tempted by the city's luxurious lifestyle, dismisses his wife (who is also a comrade-in-arms and Party member), associates with women, and indulges in filmgoing. As his wife says, he "wasn't taken down by the enemy's gunfire, but fell amid the splendor of Nanjing Road!" Only after the soldiers realize the threat posed by Shanghai's lifestyle do they revert to the true revolutionary spirit. Reinforced in their ideological conviction, they depart for the Korean front.

Significantly, *Sentinels* was released just as the earlier films on Shanghai, *City without Night* and *The Battle for Shanghai*, were coming under direct attack (Nan, [1970] 1972). Reviews praising *Sentinels* (and the feature film *Lei Feng*, 1963; dir. Dong Zhaoqi) appeared practically alongside denunciations of *City without Night*, which was accused of "distorting history" in favor of Shanghai's capitalist class and promoting "capitulationism" (Sun Keyu, 1965; Xi, 1965). Soon after, *City without Night* would be repudiated for following the novel *Shanghai Morning* and exhibiting a lenient attitude toward "red

capitalists" (Shanghai dianying xitong da pipan xiezuo zu, [1970] 1972: 46).

Unlike the literary and cinematic works of the late 1950s, which emphasize Shanghai's contribution to the Communist victory and the benefit rendered by repentant capitalists, *Sentinels* stresses the city's subversive power. Like *The Battle for Shanghai*, it begins with the offensive on the city's outskirts and follows the PLA regiment as it takes over Shanghai, yet *Sentinels* does not declare the city liberated once the PLA enters it. In accord with Mao's emphasis in "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," to the effect that one should not relax one's vigilance after the coming of socialist society, *Sentinels* warns of becoming complacent while class enemies are still at large. Appropriately, the film opens with a scene in which the head saboteur wears a PLA uniform to disguise himself. The enemy, it is implied, is capable of appearing in any guise and infiltrating the revolutionary apparatus. While this theme has also been explored in many earlier anti-espionage films (such as *National Day at Ten O'clock* [*Guoqing shi dian zhong*], 1959; dir. Wu Tian), *Sentinels* diverges from the generic formula in attributing the danger not only to underground saboteurs but also to the manifest and accepted norms of the coastal city.

Sentinels puts forth starkly the message, implicit in previous films about Shanghai's takeover, that the city's streets are an ideological battleground. As the regiment regroups inside the city, the soldiers are told that they have been given a new mission. "Is it Taiwan?" they ask, and are given the answer: "It's Nanjing Road!" In other words, Nanjing Road is equated with the renegade province, a hornet's nest to be subdued and reformed. Earlier conceptions of Shanghai as exotic and nearly foreign are drawn on to portray the city, even when under PLA control, as an extraterritorial space that must be brought into the fold of the PRC—not simply by being occupied but by having its culture remolded. The idea is reinforced toward the film's end, when the task on Nanjing Road is equated with no less than the Long March and the Korean War. "In Korea as on Nanjing Road, we have the same single goal—to see the Revolution through!"

The film identifies the foreign-scented consumerism of Nanjing Road with the subversion of revolutionary ideals. As the regiment commander walks along the road's shop windows, he says: "If this

kind of thinking isn't corrected, we will not be able to stay on Nanjing Road!" His subordinate replies: "The conservative flavor of Shanghai is indeed detestable, but even more troubling is the perfume that assails the nostrils." The hardy PLA infantry signal their revolutionary spirit by their aversion to urban luxury. One soldier is almost driven mad by the jazz music and neon light penetrating his lodging (in order to pit the soldiers and the city against each other, the film departs from historical fact and moves the company's quarters to Nanjing Road).

The movie's title comes to represent a fundamental conflict, as if the sentinels were physically under attack by the neon lights. The set for the earlier stage version had already used the visual effect of the neon lights to symbolize the changing mood in various acts (Zhang Zhengyu, [1963] 1982; Sun Haoran, [1963] 1982). In the film, the ideological victory is marked by a shot in which a soldier overlooks the city, figuratively subduing the lights under his gun and his resolute gaze; his posture replicates the iconography in other artifacts of the campaign (see Figure 8). Toward the film's end, huge blinking neon lights on top of the Astor Hotel on Nanjing Road, at the time Shanghai's tallest building, spell out the slogans "Long live Chairman Mao, long live the CCP, long live the PRC!" The city lights, as well as Shanghai's spaces, are remolded to fit the new China, not only overcome by but also incorporated into the PLA's display of power.

Sentinels rewrites revolutionary history by remapping the concrete spaces of Nanjing Road onto a symbolic scheme. At a key moment, an underground Communist leader spells out the need to change the road's associations from successful capitalist enterprise to a battlefield sanctified by blood. The leader orates: "This Nanjing Road, from the horse race course to the Bund, has the blood of our martyrs spattered on each of its bricks. Some capitalists say that Nanjing Road was built by foreigners heaping pound sterling upon pound sterling. I say, No! It was opened with our working masses' hands, it was paved by our martyrs' blood!" (presumably an allusion to Jiang Jieshi's brutal suppression of Communist sympathizers).

The reference to the road's location, between the horse race course (*paomating*) and the Bund, frames Nanjing Road within powerful symbols of colonialism. Both landmarks constituted massive architectural interventions in Shanghai's spaces and served as emblems of Western power. The Horse Race Club in particular met with hostility.



Figure 8. An Eighth Company soldier guards the city. Frame from the film *Sentinels Under the Neon Lights* (1963).

As I have noted elsewhere, the races stood for a deceptive economy in which simulacra of time, space, money, and sex were perpetually exchanged for one another (Braester, 1995). The extravagant display of colonial control over space and capital at the races won the enmity of the Communist regime, and the Horse Race Club was dubbed “the great gambling den of imperialism in the Far East” (Fang, 1982). Soon after Liberation, the racetrack was razed to give way to People’s Park, an act that came to symbolize the literal erasure of the traces of “old society” and foreign extraterritorial rights.

These topographic allusions spell out the vying modes for representing Shanghai’s spaces. By redefining the meaning of Nanjing Road’s location, the underground leader’s speech restructures Shanghai’s symbolic landscape to match the concrete changes in the city’s layout. The consumerism of Nanjing Road is unmasked as a cover-up for colonial exploitation, and the PLA’s intervention puts the historical record

straight. It is therefore appropriate that this speech marks a turning point in *Sentinels*' plot, as the renegade soldier, nearly lured away by Shanghai's corruption, acknowledges his true revolutionary mission.

Sentinels also makes use of an actual incident in which Shanghai's spaces were contested by foreigners and reclaimed by the PLA. During the 6 July parade, a Jeep carrying William Olive, the former American vice consul, disregarded the special traffic arrangements. Olive was detained for violating traffic regulations, damaging public security equipment, and causing physical injury to a man on duty. The episode ended three days later, after Olive wrote a public letter of apology and was released from jail ("Diguo zhuyi," 1949). The incident, widely covered in the newspapers, was employed to underscore the PLA's role in maintaining law and order and its unbending attitude toward foreign powers. Control over city spaces stood for the CCP's jurisdiction over all of China, including Shanghai's former extraterritorial concessions.

A similar occurrence in *Sentinels* embellishes on the Olive case. The parade is disrupted when an unnamed American from the consulate drives his Jeep into the pageant. The use of the streets is literally fought over by two mutually exclusive power structures, one of which must give way. The Jeep continues unhindered until stopped by a soldier, who strikes a heroic and uncompromising pose. The American orders the crowd to scam and confronts the soldier: "What right do you have to stand in my car's way? Don't you know? Anywhere in the world, we Americans go through without hindrance!" Unlike Olive, this American is unrepentant, exclaiming, "We Americans have never had the habit of admitting guilt!" Drawing on the anti-American sentiments inflamed during the Korean War, the film doctors the events of 1949 to fit the political atmosphere of 1964. Accordingly, the crowd in *Sentinels* responds to the American's intransigence by shouting at him: "Shanghai has been liberated!" The American is eventually whisked away under PLA armed escort, and the parade resumes immediately. The American becomes the focus of a public spectacle that reaffirms not only the PLA's control over Shanghai's streets but also the city's new status and China's sovereignty.

At the same time, the parade scene in *Sentinels* introduces the conflict between the PLA's control and Shanghai's subversive influence by presenting Mandarin and the Shanghai dialect as vehicles of two

competing ideological discourses. When the American is stopped by the PLA, a local merchant (identified in the script as “a capitalist”) steps forward and tries to protect the foreigner in the name of Shanghai business interests. He initiates a dialogue in Shanghaiese with a local worker, addressing him arrogantly: “Little brother, you’re too young to know that when things have come to an impasse one must apologize!” A soldier who speaks Shanghaiese replies: “Hey, aren’t you Chinese?” When the capitalist answers, “What kind of talk is this?” the local resistance leader intervenes and says, also in Shanghaiese, “‘What kind of talk?’ Chinese talk!” He then switches to Mandarin and rebukes the capitalist: “Chinese people should speak in Chinese! We are all Chinese, aren’t we?”

By implication, the Shanghai dialect is condemned as marking separatist tendencies and as incompatible with pan-Chinese patriotism. The Chinese promoted by the revolutionary commander is Mandarin, spoken in a standard northern accent. A similar conflict takes place when a PLA soldier runs into a hoodlum, fittingly clad in a flowery, ostensibly Western shirt and selling *Life* magazine. By slowing the soldier down, the hoodlum helps a spy to get away. When the soldier asks (in Mandarin) which way the spy has gone, the hoodlum answers (in Shanghaiese), “I don’t know.” His dialect is construed as an ideological affront and a form of sabotage. This linguistic twist associates Shanghai localism with hypocrisy, political subversion, and resistance to the PLA.

At the time of *Sentinels*’ premiere, the ideologically superior status of Mandarin was still new. While it had been promoted as the national idiom by both the GMD and CCP, other dialects were at first marginalized rather than vilified. Indeed, a number of recent comedies had featured local dialects: films such as *Sanmao Learns to Do Business* (*Sanmao xue shengyi*, 1958; dir. Huang Zuolin) and *Are You Satisfied?* (*Manyi bu manyi*, 1963; dir. Yan Gong, codirector of *Orphan on the Streets*)—both in the Suzhou dialect—as well as *Zhuazhuangding* (1963; dir. Chen Ge), an August First Studio production in Sichuanese. The characters in these comedies fit the stereotypes associated with provincial dialects—unsophisticated but sincere and resourceful. In a contemporary report of Shanghai’s liberation, dialogue in Shanghaiese records the locals’ friendliness to

the PLA, as a rickshaw driver offers his help to a soldier: "Comrade, where are you going? Sit in *ala's* [Shanghainese for "my"] rickshaw" ("Jiefang Shanghai diyiri," 1949). Whereas in this earlier account the use of dialect demonstrates the camaraderie between citizens and soldiers, in *Sentinels* Shanghainese is stigmatized as a marker of treachery and separatism. In every respect, Shanghai local flavor, irrespective of class, is identified with unsound ideology and harmful practices.

Significantly, *Sentinels* differs from earlier films about Shanghai's liberation in that it does not integrate documentary footage or location shots; even the parade scene seems to be shot in a studio. Insofar as a documentary impulse had dominated Chinese cinema until the 1960s, *Sentinels* signals a new embrace of the modern revolutionary style that would culminate in the Cultural Revolution. The film anticipates the stage aesthetics of the Cultural Revolution, when the model plays would replace local idioms with a standardized northern dialect and would appeal to operatic rather than cinematic sensibilities.

Even at the thematic level, the plot targets cinema as a source of evil. The movies, especially foreign productions, are portrayed as corrupting. One soldier's downfall begins when he is invited to watch a film, and the counterrevolutionary hoodlum sells photos of Hollywood stars. More than simply revealing traces of the stage production on which the film is based, the theatrical acting and stilted camera movements in *Sentinels* betray deep suspicion of the cinematic medium and its potential for documentation. The camera distances itself from actual places to create a space that can be manipulated at will. *Sentinels* is fundamentally a film against film. In this respect, too, the Good Eighth Company campaign undermined Shanghai's legacy and foreshadowed the Cultural Revolution.

RECONSIDERING SHANGHAI'S IDEOLOGICAL SPACES: QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The Good Eighth Company campaign rewrote Shanghai's history and demonized its locales and idioms. In light of the campaign's extensive reach through various media, we must reassess images of the city crafted before and after 1949.

Accounts of Shanghai in the 1930s had established the coastal metropolis as an icon of decadence, moral degeneration, and colonial extravagance. Films had already depicted the city as a place where the circumstances of the proletariat were dire. Yet friend was distinguished from foe by class; the entire city was not condemned. Films such as *Daybreak* (*Tianming*, 1932; dir. Sun Yu), *New Woman* (*Xin nüxing*, 1934; dir. Cai Chusheng), and *Crows and Sparrows* (*Wuya yu maque*, 1949; dir. Zheng Junli) describe the oppressed heroes as native Shanghainese. In contrast, the Good Eighth Company campaign, and particularly *Sentinels under the Neon Lights*, remolded existing stereotypes to fit the political agenda of the 1960s and in so doing implied a wholesale condemnation of the city. For example, *Sentinels* plays up the place of jazz and neon in the city's depravity. Are later conceptions of what Andrew F. Jones (2001) calls Shanghai's "jazz age" influenced by the scene in *Sentinels* in which a soldier's sleep is disturbed by Duke Ellington tunes wafting through the window? When Mao Dun's *Midnight* (*Ziye*, 1932) begins with the image of "a gigantic NEON sign," it connotes, as Leo Ou-fan Lee suggests (1999: 4), Western modernity and consumerism—but to what extent does *Sentinels* shape the belief that neon lights are a decadent spectacle that should be guarded against and regulated?

The Good Eighth Company campaign also suggests new dimensions of the Cultural Revolution. In line with the power struggles of the 1960s, the Good Eighth Company campaign portrayed Shanghai as a hideout for counterrevolutionaries and a menace to the true bearers of socialist ideology. In this way, the campaign foreshadowed the Cultural Revolution. The special attention paid to Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution, often attributed to the Gang of Four's personal ties to the city, should also be investigated in light of the orchestrated suppression of Shanghai's revolutionary legacy as early as 1963. The campaign portrayed the metropolis as the dramatic foil to the PLA, a negative force in conflict with the ideology of the revolutionary forces.

Insofar as *Sentinels* and the Good Eighth Company campaign more generally comported with the ideology and aesthetics of the Cultural Revolution, one may wonder why they did not figure more prominently in the propaganda of the late 1960s. A couple of factors worked

against them. Perhaps most important, the campaign was probably less effective than its initiators had hoped. Feedback from the early focus groups reveals that many younger people found the Good Eighth Company an irrelevant model (Gongqingtuan shiwei xuanchuanbu, 1963). Moreover, dwelling on Shanghai's liberation might also have drawn attention to the contributions of Liu Shaoqi, who organized underground resistance in the city, and of Chen Yi, who headed the forces that took over Shanghai. Both individuals ranked high on the Gang of Four's hit list.

Yet the Good Eighth Company continued to command respect. According to Xu Renjun (2003: 48), Major General Qin Hualong, the political commissar of the Shanghai Garrison, escaped persecution during the first stages of the Cultural Revolution because of his association with the renowned company. The tropes and images of the campaign remained in circulation, conveying contemporary messages. For example, *The Good Eighth Company: A New Tune Continuing the Revolutionary Songbook*, a comic book from 1971, shows the Eighth Campaign leading a Cultural Revolution rally in Shanghai's streets, raising Little Red Books, and carrying a banner with the slogan "Down with Liu Shaoqi!" (Nanjing lu shang hao balian, 1971: 33). In 1992, President Jiang Zemin wrote a calligraphy piece in memory of the company (Fu, 1996). As recently as 2001, the Shanghai Television Station produced a revised stage version of *Sentinels under the Neon Lights*. These residual images call for a clearer understanding of the afterlife and revival of political campaigns.

Indeed, the Good Eighth Company campaign was not the final attempt to assign a new ideological value to Shanghai via film. Two recent movies representing the city's liberation—*Once upon a Time in Shanghai* (*Shanghai jishi*, 1998; dir. Peng Xiaolian) and the mega-production *The Great Combat: The Big Battle over Ningbo, Shanghai, and Hangzhou* (*Da jinzhuan: Dazhan Ning Hu Hang*, 1999; dir. Wei Lian)—attest to the ongoing propaganda effort to rewrite the city's history. As long as Shanghai's past and future remain a major issue in political debates, its image will be contested in film. The battle over the coastal metropolis and its collective memory continues on the silver screen. Although Shanghai was fashioned as "a big dying vat," cinema time and again continues to paint over the city's image.

NOTES

1. The description is based on the documentary film *The Birth of New China* (*Xin Zhongguo de dansheng*, 1949) and footage reproduced in the recent documentaries *China, 1949* (*Zhongguo 1949*, 1999) and *New China* (*Xin Zhongguo*, 1999). On the days following the PLA's entry into the city, see extended reports in *Jiefang ribao* (9 October 1949), as well as *Xin Shanghai bianlan*, 1951: 461-63; *Shanghai waitan Nanjing lu shihua*, 1976: 185-91; Shanghai shi dang'anguan, 1989; *Dangdai Zhongguo de Shanghai*, 1993: 1.91-94.

2. The "four-goods companies" pledged (1) good political thought (*zhengzhi sixiang hao*); (2) good demeanor through solidarity, intensity, seriousness and liveliness (*san ba zuofeng hao*); (3) good military training (*junshi xunlian hao*); and (4) good management of life (*shenghuo guanli hao*).

3. That all the references I have encountered to the events of 1949 mention the company by its later name provides circumstantial evidence of the campaign's impact. Even informed eyewitnesses to Shanghai's liberation described to me the orderly occupation of the city by the PLA in phrases almost identical to those supplied in state propaganda, and they referred, anachronistically, to the Good Eighth Company.

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