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National Days Past: Five Things to Read or Look At

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To complement the last post on revolutionary anniversaries, here are some places to turn to get a sense of how October 1 has been marked in China between 1949 and 2007.

1) Let’s start with National Day 1950: for an idealized vision of the celebrations held that day, look at this poster.

2) For a fascinating discussion of past National Days that combines memories of personal experience and analytical moves rooted in the discipline of art history, see Wu Hung’s excellent Remaking Beijing.

3) For a look back at National Day 1984, when the 35th anniversary of the founding of the PRC was marked, see this very interesting Danwei post, which tells you why it was so significant that a sign simply saying “Hi” to Deng Xiaoping figured in that year’s march.

4) For images of this same parade, including shots of floats (now looking very dated to the say the least) that were meant to show how “advanced” China had become in Deng’s early years in power in terms of providing the people with attractive consumer goods, watch the Long Bow Group’s “The Gate of Heavenly Peace,” a film that focuses on 1989 but includes a visual survey of the first decade of the Reform era.

5) To see some of the curious ways that National Day has recently become part of China’s global “Charm Offensive” and otherwise linked to international currents, see the slide show accompanying last year’s Xinhua piece “China’s National Day Celebrated Worldwide”–a show that, despite the title, is devoted largely and peculiarly to shots of Brazilian Samba dancers performing inside of the PRC (in Mao’s hometown of Changsha of all places).