
Chen Bo'er and the Feminist Paradigm of Socialist Film

THIS CHAPTER PRESENTS THE LIFE and work of the feminist revolutionary artist Chen Bo'er. My historical narratives in this and the following two chapters intend to highlight an integral part of state feminists' endeavors to transform a patriarchal culture with a socialist feminist cultural production. While the ACWF used the popular magazine *Women of China* to engender cultural transformation, feminists working in film production were pursuing the same agenda with no less enthusiasm but with a more powerful medium. Film, in this context, was envisioned by them as a crucial tool in their feminist transformation of an ancient "feudalist culture," and is used here as a central site for an investigation of the politics underlying reproduction, transformation, dissemination, and eventual discontinuation of a May Fourth New Cultural feminist heritage in a socialist cultural revolution. Delineating state feminists' distinctive contentions in the cultural realm, this part of the narratives parallels the stories of the ACWF's struggles in Part I in terms of chronology and historical contexts. The life of Chen Bo'er, a pioneer of a socialist feminist cultural revolution, serves to illuminate this obscured historical process.

Chen Bo'er's life history is emblematic of the erasure of the socialist feminist cultural front. Film studies in and outside China have shown remarkably little interest in her, despite the fact that she was one of the most important figures in the film industry in the early PRC. A famous movie star and renowned feminist social activist during the 1930s, Party secretary of the CCP's first state-owned film studio in 1946, director of the art department of the Central Film Bureau and the founder of the Beijing Film Academy upon the establishment of the PRC, Chen Bo'er played a major role in shaping socialist filmmaking in revolutionary China.¹ Moreover, she left a rich

body of visual and textual records. Scholarly inattention to such an important figure in the history of socialist film is symptomatic of deeper problems that go beyond the obvious gender bias in knowledge production in a post-(or anti-)revolutionary age. The causes of her systematic erasure will be analyzed further in a later chapter, along with all the socialist feminists who have claimed our attention in this volume. I turn here to her life and work with the certainty that Chen Bo'er merits the historian's attention.

THE RISE OF A LEFT-WING MOVIE STAR

Chen Bo'er, originally named Chen Shunhua, was born to a wealthy merchant's family in Anbu, a small town in Chaoan County, Guangdong, in 1907.² Although Chen was the darling of her parents, her mother, as the first concubine of her father, was treated with disdain by Chen's grandmother and her father's wife, which was a source of unhappiness throughout her childhood.³ The troubling disparity between being a beloved daughter of a locally revered and wealthy merchant and her subaltern position in the hierarchy of a large, polygamous family fostered in Chen both a strong will and an empathy for the sufferings of the lower classes, especially among women. She expressed a daring spirit in her early teens when, with a few other girls, she cut off her long pigtail in emulation of women soldiers in the 1911 revolution, which was a scandalous act in her small town. Benefiting from her father's wealth and reflecting the practice among the elite families to gain social status by sending their daughters to missionary schools, Chen was able to escape the confinement of the small town by going to Nanjing and Shanghai for high school.⁴

In school Chen Bo'er demonstrated multiple talents. She was respected as a good essay writer, a violinist, and an actor who usually played the leading role in amateur dramatics. A native speaker of Cantonese, she learned Mandarin in middle school, which became crucial for her career on stage and screen. She also became fluent in English, as her high school in Shanghai was run by U.S. Southern Baptists. After joining protests against the Nationalist Party's massacre of Communist-affiliated union workers in Shanghai in 1927, she was expelled from her high school.

Back in her hometown, she encountered two young men who would play a large role in her political and personal life. Mei Gongyi⁵ and Ren Posheng⁶ had been cadets in the Huangpu Military Academy but left after the split

between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party in 1927. The left-oriented young men taught Chen Bo'er about the Soviet Revolution and Marxism and suggested that she return to Shanghai for college. To save some money for school, Chen worked as a teacher for a year in Hong Kong, where her father had residency and a business. In 1928 Chen, along with Mei and Ren, enrolled in the Shanghai Arts College, a hub of left-wing artists and writers run by the underground CCP. There she became involved in the Shanghai Art Drama Troupe (SADT). Founded in October 1929, the SADT was the first drama troupe organized by Communists who were involved in the avant-garde performing art as a form of politically engaged activism.⁷ Chen played the female leading roles in two of the five new spoken dramas it staged. Acting in these plays shaped her future career, inaugurating her reputation as a fine actor and connecting her with social networks of left-wing artists who shared a belief in the transformative power of art.

At the time, the Nationalist Party (NP) was intensifying its censorship and persecution of the left, and when, on February 7, 1931, it executed twenty-three underground CCP members, including five members of the Left-Wing Writers Association,⁸ Chen and her lover Ren Posheng, also a left activist, decided to retreat to Hong Kong where in April 1931 they married.

Chen Bo'er taught English in a middle school in Hong Kong and gave birth to two sons in a span of three years. Subsidized by both their wealthy merchant families, the couple enjoyed a comfortable life. But national crises made the public-minded young mother restless. Japan invaded Manchuria in September 1931 and attacked Shanghai in January 1932. Although a truce was reached in May, the danger of Japanese domination and colonization of China loomed large. Chen felt the urge to leave the British colony and return to social activism in Shanghai. In early 1934, she gladly accepted the invitation from her friend Mei Gongyi to teach English in the new school he opened in Shanghai, leaving her young sons in the care of her natal family. Her teaching career was brief, however, as the government soon shut down Mei's school. Chen then began to earn a living by writing essays for the city's largest newspaper, the *Shanghai Daily* (*Shenbao*).

In these essays Chen clearly articulated her feminist position and patriotic concerns. In the 1930s Shanghai already had a substantial number of women students and professionals as a result of the promotion of women's education by both the public and the government since the late Qing Dynasty. These educated women, who were among her friends, classmates, and colleagues, were Chen's primary readers. Writing mostly on the topic of "the women

question," Chen expressed both her inheritance of a May Fourth feminist discourse and her evolution since her exposure to socialism that led her to criticize what she understood as the limits of May Fourth feminism.

History tells us explicitly that women have been bullied in society. Yes, we have attributed this problem to the harmful social institutions of the past. Therefore, from the toppling of the Qing emperor to the May Fourth movement, calls for women's emancipation have been quite loud in public discourse, which created an opportunity for women's self-emancipation. However, the sound wave has, after all, remained only a sound wave. It has not actually enabled women to achieve real emancipation and gain equal social status.⁹

Discontented that the movement for women's emancipation remained at the discursive level rather than generating structural changes, Chen held educated women responsible for failing to push for substantial social changes. She was most disappointed in those women who enjoyed the class privilege to acquire a higher education and were called "new women" but chose to return to domesticity rather than engage in social change. In examining these privileged women, she adopted a Marxist class analysis to approach "the women question." Unlike most May Fourth feminist writers who treated women as a homogeneous group without making distinctions among them, Chen differentiated the privileged ladies of the rich from poor laboring women:

Taitai and misses¹⁰ have material abundance and enjoy a romantic and luxurious life. Their life cannot be described as tragic, but represents self-degeneration. Therefore, I place the laboring women masses at the center [of "the women question"]. Their life is too dark to be imagined by others. They are downtrodden by feudal power and abused by men. Under these multiple oppressions, what would the future of Chinese women be? Only to bury their lives in death day by day!¹¹

As early as 1934 Chen declared that her concern was not with the emancipation of women of her own class but women of the working class. Her writings, however, were mostly in line with the framework of the May Fourth feminist pursuit of human rights, which could also have been a response to NP censorship of revolutionary advocacy in a mainstream newspaper. Her language located her safely in mainstream May Fourth feminism: "Women must stand up to fight. We should believe we are human beings, not slaves. We are not born to be possessions of men, let alone their toys!"¹²

But what was the relationship between educated women and the suffering women of the laboring class? In these writings Chen aimed to raise the consciousness of privileged women by making them aware that their own educational and career opportunities did not mean that women were already liberated. They had to pay attention to "the great majority of women who are still groaning under multiple oppressions." While continuing her consciousness-raising effort, she contended that "because so-called liberated women have directly received the education of bourgeois society, they are not aware of their own status, let alone of the numerous other women by their side who are awaiting freedom and liberation!" She did not think that educated bourgeois women would undertake the liberation of the majority of Chinese women. This disappointment with women of her own class made her look for other allies for the grand task of achieving equality between men and women, which "is related to the entire human race's freedom and equality."¹³

In her writings during this period, Chen unambiguously expressed a women-centered vision of human emancipation and a solid identification with lower-class women, though in her perception the women of the laboring class were passively "awaiting" their liberation through others' actions rather than their own agency. This stance reflects left intellectuals' self-conception and their attitude toward the lower classes, that is, left intellectuals themselves as the enlightened vanguard of human emancipation. Chen Bo'er eventually changed her position on this matter. A strong feminist, she was attracted to the CCP in her search for a political force that shared her dream of an equalitarian society and demonstrated capacity for bringing actual social change. "Animated by a spirit of mutual help for the sake of human race, we should unite in order to shoulder a task of such magnitude." Chen wrote with a conviction in the unity of like-minded idealists who aimed at the grandiose task of building a new world for the human race.¹⁴

The obstacles that radicals faced within Chinese society were formidable, and the situation was further exacerbated by Japan's threat to colonize China. The second most frequent topic of Chen's essays was national salvation. In her accounts of political events of the early twentieth century, she recounted proletarians' struggles against capitalists and intellectuals' struggles for democracy and against imperialism. She emphasized the spirited activism of people of different walks of life in their struggle against various forms of domination, revealing how much she herself was inspired by retelling these stories. Chen deplored imperialist invasions and described the sadness of Chinese people under Japanese occupation. "Our country is about to perish,"

Chen exhorted her readers. "To be slaves is hard. With a heart filled with grief and rage, we should shout loudly, 'It's time to roar, China!'"¹⁵

It is difficult to detect the author's gender identity in these essays on politics. The strong emotions conveyed by the deliberate choice of dramatic language generate an image of a man arousing huge crowds in a public square with his magnificent voice and theatrical gestures. Nothing in these writings would lead readers to imagine the author as a young woman with a petite physique. Chen meant to convey the May Fourth feminist ideal that a woman should not be confined to her feminine body in her social actions. To be human was to live an androgynous life outside the constraints of gender boundaries. In confronting national crises, she would definitely not retreat and leave the front to men. By performing in a traditionally masculine domain, Chen and her cohort of feminists sought to demonstrate that women could be equal political actors. In assuming a male voice, Chen was expressing more than her nationalist sentiments; she was also demanding an equal place in the public sphere.

Publishing political essays on national salvation, Chen's simultaneous writings on the women question demonstrate that at no time did the agenda of national salvation subsume her gender-specific concerns. Fighting for national salvation and fighting for women's liberation were not mutually exclusive, but intrinsically interrelated. Chen and other feminists who eventually joined the CCP shared a common understanding that full participation in public affairs was an integral part of women's liberation. Women's empowerment and development could not be separated from their integral involvement in social transformation, unrestrained by their gender. Moreover, for a feminist identified with the CCP, national salvation was part of a revolution that promised to lead to a new independent China; women's liberation was central to this vision.

As Chen earned a precarious livelihood through her writing, her friend Mei Gongyi suggested that she might find an acting job in Shanghai's film industry. Underground CCP artists were infiltrating film companies in order to transform film production and recruiting left-oriented young actors for films scripted by left-wing writers.¹⁶ Initially Chen hesitated; she liked acting but hated the media's sexist treatment of women film actors. Persuaded by her close friend and a left-wing former professor, Chen decided to join their efforts to transform film as part of their revolutionary activism.

In late 1934 two films with Chen playing the leading female roles catapulted her to stardom. *Fate of Graduates* (*Taoli jie*) the first Chinese film with



FIGURE 16. Chen Bo'er in the early 1930s. Courtesy of the Beijing Film Academy library.

comprehensive sound effects produced by the underground CCP-run Diantong Film Company, was an instant hit. Allegedly, the film brought many students to the Communist Revolution. It depicted how two idealistic young students' lives were destroyed in a capitalist society replete with injustice, inhumanity, and corruption. By 1938 Chen had made three more films, in the last of which she played a role based on a real young heroine Yang Huimin, who bravely delivered a national flag to the besieged Nationalist troops in the battle against Japanese in Shanghai in 1937.¹⁷ A journalist commented in 1940: "Chen Bo'er's acting and style occupy a very important position in the heart of youth who love freedom and pursue a bright future. As with the roles she plays, Chen herself has a persistent and brave character. She has determination. She is fearless. She dares to speak out and to act. Whatever she promises she will deliver."¹⁸ Chen was regarded as a role model for left-oriented youth, in addition to being a movie star adored by her many fans (fig. 16).

What made Chen Bo'er stand out among all the movie stars during this period? The films in which she acted presented critical social realism, a new

artistic genre introduced by left film producers who portrayed social relations in capitalist society in a critical light. More importantly, because she took acting as part of her revolutionary pursuit, Chen never limited the scope of her intellectual, political, and social activities. In between her acting roles, she continued to contribute critical essays to women's magazines and film journals.

In "The Female-Centered Film and the Male-Centered Society," published in *Women's Life* in 1936, Chen presented an important feminist critique of the film industry in capitalist society. She analyzed the relationships among marketing, the public adulation of female stars, and patriarchal culture. Rather than proof that women were becoming the center of a modern industry, Chen argued that the promotion of female stars showed that the capitalist film industry used women's bodies to make profits. After asking "[Why] the audience extols female stars rather than male stars? Why their desire toward female stars centers on her mystique, her hot seductiveness, or beautiful face and physique?" Chen articulated a concept of "the male gaze" that, in interesting ways, anticipates British feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey's famous theorization in 1975 that explicated a passive/active and spectacle/spectator relation in the sexist cinematic apparatus's representation of women and men.¹⁹ With none of the psychoanalytical tools Mulvey took from Freudian and Lacanian theories, Chen nonetheless emphasized the psychological effects of unequal gender power relations on women viewers of films.

In a male-centered society, politics, the economy, and all the ruling powers are in men's hands. Thus all the laws, morality, customs, and norms are shaped by men's biased positions. Aesthetic views are no exception. They too are shaped by men's biased preferences. . . . Women in such a society have unconsciously conformed to its demands. For instance, using makeup was not originally in women's nature, but in order to cater to the preferences of a male-centered society it has become female nature. This explains why female audiences have similar views toward female stars as that of male audiences. The difference is that the male audience's view expresses the direct preference out of a dominator's psychology, while the female audience's view arises from the psychology of the dominated to unconsciously cater to the preferences of the dominator.²⁰

The power relations between the dominator and the dominated, in Chen's analyses, explain women's conformity and consent to masculine aesthetic standards. Refusing to naturalize femininity, she detailed the social con-

struction of women in a male-centered society. But her greatest effort in this piece was to dispel the mystique of female movie stars and admonish women not to take the market-packaged movie stars as a model for advancing their social status. Although she herself was already a movie star, Chen ended her essay by suggesting that if film could not be revolutionized it should be abandoned. "Women's pursuit of freedom and equality requires the efforts of all walks of life. If film cannot shoulder the responsibility of guidance but is mistaken as an ideal haven and leads people to escape from reality, we would rather have no film!"²¹

This conclusion was somewhat ironic, given that Chen had gained social recognition and discursive power precisely through her stardom. But by stripping away the aura surrounding her, the essay revealed the author's honesty and audacity. More importantly, this essay by a young movie star unambiguously expressed a critical feminist stance against a patriarchal capitalist society and enunciated Chen's vision of film playing a transformative role in changing the male-dominated society and advancing *all* women's pursuit of freedom and equality. This "manifesto" of a feminist movie star would be put into practice when she became a leader of socialist film a decade later.

Chen's critique of the leading female role she played in *Revolutionaries* (*Shengsi tongxin*) enables us to understand the attractions of the Communist Revolution to Chen and her cohort of feminists. Zhao Yuhua, the protagonist Chen played, follows her lover to join the Nationalist Revolution in the mid-1920s when the NP and CCP were allied. Chen criticized the May Fourth theme of "love revolution" in the film as outdated and called on her audience to join in the salvation of their country.²² Educated women in cosmopolitan cities like Shanghai already enjoyed autonomy in their love life and choice of spouse, which had been a prominent goal of the May Fourth feminist agenda. Now, with Japan's escalating aggression in China, national salvation, rather than love and sexuality, must become central in many young feminists' engagement. This shift in focus was historically contingent, and its gender implications were surprisingly progressive.

Although many feminist scholars define nationalist movements as predominantly masculine, the massive participation of Chinese women in the national salvation movement destabilizes this gender definition. Modern women sought to transgress gender boundaries and claim equal rights in what had historically been an exclusively male space. When high-profile women played prominent roles in the national salvation movement in China, they rewrote norms for gendered space as well as reshaped their own gender

subjectivities. In the political arena, Chen and other elite women staged gender performances in multiple forms and media riding on the vehicle of the nationalist movement.

Chen participated in a wide range of public activities before she joined the CCP. In 1935 she worked with other women celebrities in Shanghai to establish the Shanghai Women's National Salvation Association and Young Women's Club. At the end of 1936, she organized and led a group of women to visit the troops at the Suiyuan front, bringing donations from Shanghai citizens and performing street theater.²³ Upon returning to Shanghai from the trip north, Chen joined Song Qingling and other celebrities in protesting the NP government's arrest of the seven leaders of the National Salvation Association of All-Walks in 1937.²⁴ Chen went with Song Qingling, Shen Zijiu, and nine other celebrities to the Suzhou Court demanding to be arrested for the "crime" of being patriotic.²⁵ In addition to such performance acts staged in public spaces that attracted extra attention because of their gender transgression—their leadership in political events—Chen also took on inconspicuous traditional feminine tasks to support those at the front. As Shen Zijiu reported in *Women's Life*, Chen would go to He Xiangning's home after shooting her scenes in the film studio to do voluntary work.²⁶ "We could often see this dazzling star quietly sewing winter clothes for soldiers, or deftly rolling gauze with two hands, or kneading tiny cotton balls. In the evening she would follow the group and climb onto the truck sending these goods to the brave soldiers on the battleground in the east."²⁷ Here Chen was praised for crossing class boundaries by engaging in manual labor generally done by household servants in elite families. With quite wide media coverage by women journalists who portrayed her with respect and admiration, by 1937 Chen Bo'er had emerged as a multifaceted celebrity on the national stage.

Her private life was mostly concealed from the prying tabloids that gossiped about her husband's wealth and his abandonment of her. No one guessed that Ren Posheng was involved in the CCP's underground work, which required his frequent absence and low profile. A profound tragedy in Chen's personal life was buried even more deeply. In early 1935 when Chen was in Hong Kong with her husband and two young sons, the hot-tempered Ren beat their one-year-old child to death.²⁸ The heartbroken young mother took her remaining son with her back to Shanghai and hired a nanny to care for him. Their friends were told that the baby had died of a sudden illness. This inexplicable tragedy left a deep scar on her marriage.

Chen continued working as an actor, writing political essays, and agitating for national salvation. She forged an identity as an independent social activist, artist, and woman warrior while shouldering the responsibility for her son with the help of his nanny. Her life was now entirely independent from her natal family, her husband's family, and her marriage. The large-scale movement of educated women like Chen Bo'er from their secluded inner chambers to the outer public space was simultaneously inspired by and acted upon feminism and nationalism, the two ideologies that powerfully combined to produce new subjectivities of women in early twentieth-century China. But for Chen, Marxism provided a critical lens for her to understand the world around her and to envision her role in it. *Transformation* and *resistance* are two key words that lent coherence to the various ideological strands she embraced and to her existence as a revolutionary feminist.

THE MAKING OF A REVOLUTIONARY ARTIST

Chen Bo'er was formally but confidentially accepted by the CCP in August 1937.²⁹ At the end of 1938 the Party sent Chen to Yan'an, the base area regarded by many left-oriented young people as the center of resistance against Japanese invaders and the embryo of a new China. Chen had been longing to go to Yan'an ever since she watched a documentary film of life in Yan'an made by Edgar Snow in early 1937.³⁰ To work on a special assignment of the Party, Chen sent her young son to a boarding school in Chongqing and went to Yan'an alone.

Chen was to lead a "Group Inspecting Women and Children in the War Zones" with the ostensible mission of establishing connections between women in the war zones and those in the rear. The six young Communist women traveled through war-affected areas in northern China for fifteen months, collecting information, conducting educational workshops among rural villagers, and involving themselves in local resistance work. Despite the danger, hardship, and fatigue, Chen managed to write several reports and articles, three of which reached the journal *Women's Life*, which had moved from Shanghai to the wartime capital, Chongqing. These writings illuminate a profoundly transformative experience.

In "Impressions of Three Representatives with Bound Feet," Chen described with excitement and admiration how rural women "have shouldered the double tasks of national restoration and women's liberation" and

"walked out of their extremely feudal rural families with their heads held high."³¹ She focused on three village women in their mid-fifties who led local resistance work despite their bound feet. Chen conveyed the immediacy of these illiterate women's voices with lengthy quotations from their speeches at rallies and her interviews with them. Her reportage serves as an ethnographic record of the transformation of gender norms in rural villages taking place when social institutions, including the family, had been reorganized by the resistance movement. It demonstrated that CCP feminists' insistence on "double tasks" of national restoration and women's liberation in their organizational work at the grassroots mobilized and empowered rural women.

Zhang Shufeng, one of the three women leaders with bound feet, declared: "Before the resistance, I did not know what constituted a human being. . . . The resistance war is really wonderful. It has brought out the human spirit of many villages. I am one of those who benefited. . . . My status has been improved since a wife who cooks and raises children now has something to do for the country. No one calls me old woman (*lao pozi*) any more. They all address me as director, chair."³² Geng Ruzhang, another leader, told Chen: "Now women in north China are liberated and freed. . . . You can see women involving themselves in all kinds of activities, treading on mountain paths and climbing over the mountains. . . . Women of north China have all come out of their straw huts."³³ Zhang Qingyun, the third leader, commented that the tasks the Women's Salvation Associations performed "are not inferior" to men's tasks, which "smashes the views of those who have always shown contempt toward women and girls."³⁴

From her distinctive feminist perspective, Chen communicated the way in which rural women took resistance activities as a golden opportunity to break out of gender constraints in patriarchal families and villages, to "come out" to enjoy the spatial and social mobility that had formerly been solely the prerogative of men. Their effortless deployment of terms such as "being a human being," "women's liberation," "freedom," and "resistance war" showed their active embrace of a political language that fused May Fourth feminism and a CCP version of nationalism that combined national salvation with social and interpersonal transformation. They articulated new subjectivities shaped by the CCP's "women-work" for the war effort in the rural base areas. In exuberant prose, Chen described not only the transformation in these rural women's lives and minds but her own transformation as well.

Encountering these strong, capable, and heroic rural women with a clear political consciousness profoundly affected Chen, who had grown up in the

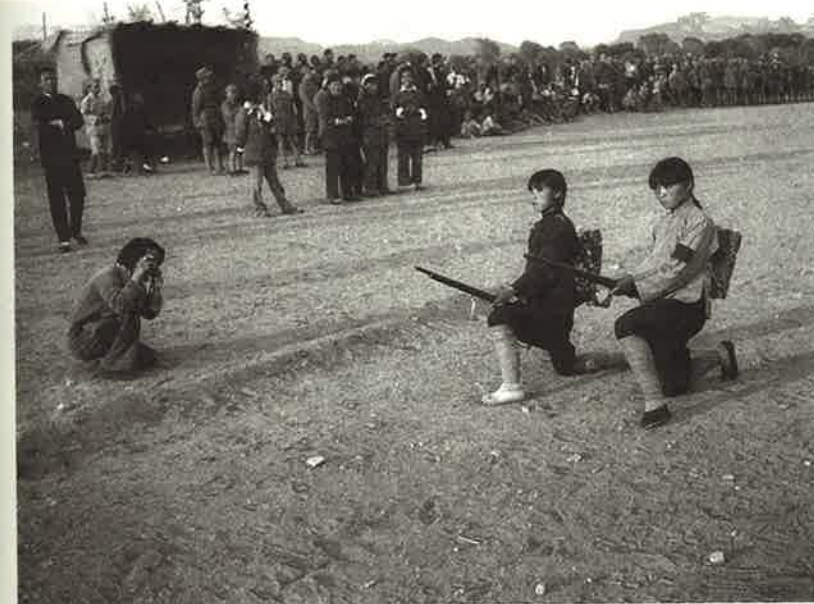


FIGURE 17. Chen Bo'er photographs rural women militias. Courtesy of the Beijing Film Academy library.

urban elite that had habitually imagined lower-class women as passive victims waiting to be liberated and uplifted by better-educated women. With undisguised euphoria, Chen turned her reporting into a paean to rural women. Many touching episodes in the three women's lives were described visually, as if they were movie scenes. For instance, these women with tiny and deformed feet had great difficulty walking on icy dirt roads and snow-covered mountain paths. To attend an important meeting far away, they tripped and fell again and again, and finally had to crawl on the frozen ground and roll down the snowy slopes, arriving at their destination with injuries all over their bodies. These scenes were etched so deeply in Chen's mind that she later represented them visually in her *Daughters of China* (1949), the first film featuring revolutionary heroines. In her report, she expressed her admiration: "Indeed, the unbreakable spirit demonstrated by these rural women, with bound feet, throughout their hard struggles constitutes the most precious poetry in the resistance war. They have written the most brilliant chapter in the history of the women's movement" (fig. 17).³⁵

Baptized in the unbreakable spirit of rural women in the resistance war, Chen developed the strong conviction that artistic representation should

faithfully render the emerging subjectivities of heroines who would otherwise be unknown beyond their local communities. The report on the three women with bound feet signified this urban elite artist's conscious facilitation of the entrance of subaltern subjects into mainstream discourse. Several years later she found in film a more powerful medium to carry out her mission and express her passion.

In 1940 the Inspection Group arrived in Chongqing, where Chen picked up her eight-year-old son and brought him back to Yan'an. This second period in Yan'an marked a new chapter in Chen's life. She became a lively and prominent figure in Yan'an's cultural life by staging new dramas for which she worked as director and playwright. The most influential play produced in Yan'an, *Comrade, You Are on the Wrong Road!* (1942), depicted political struggles inside the Communist Party for the first time. Director Chen Bo'er introduced several innovative practices in producing a play on a military and political subject. Pursuing a mass line in artistic creativity, she recruited 90 percent of the actors from soldiers or officials who had extensive experience in warfare and were from working-class or rural backgrounds. Besides acting out their own lives on the stage, the amateur actors were invited to revise the play whenever they saw fit, including its language. She also experimented with collective directing by forming a group of directors with the participation of military officials. This mechanism was intended to transform artists' tendency toward individualism. The mass line and collectivism seemed to enhance the play's artistic quality, and it was recognized as the first spoken drama in which soldiers did not walk and talk like urban intellectuals. Directing the play provided Chen with a valuable learning experience, particularly with regard to enabling amateur actors recruited from the lower classes with little formal education to express themselves in artistic representation.³⁶ Her pioneering practices in cultural representation of the soldiers and peasants were emulated by cultural producers in the early PRC.

Chen won multiple awards for artists and Party members in Yan'an. The recollection of the writer Ding Ling, who was also in Yan'an, provided an explanation of Chen's popularity other than her stardom. "She was in poor health, and yet her meals came from the big pot shared with all (some artists had meals from the pot of middle size). Nevertheless, she took it naturally and joyfully. I never heard anybody say that Chen Bo'er complained about the life there. That was very rare among artists or intellectuals who had come to Yan'an with some social status."³⁷ The movie star lived in a cave in Yan'an like everyone else and had no special privileges. She had heart disease, which the



FIGURE 18. Group photograph of the participants in the Yan'an Forum on Literature and the Arts in 1942. Courtesy of the Beijing Film Academy library.

rudimentary medical system in Yan'an was unable to diagnose or cure. Chen fainted several times during rehearsals, but once she was back on her feet she would continue working intensely. Although this community of artists and intellectuals was often entangled in personal grievances, no memoirs or recollections show any trace of resentment toward her. On the contrary, her name usually would draw instant praise from my interviewees. Lu Ming, who had known Chen Bo'er since he was a young boy in Yan'an, even claimed, "Chen Bo'er was a flawless person!"—a comment made in the context of his emphasis that there was no gossip about Chen in Yan'an.³⁸ The group picture taken after Mao gave his famous talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts in May 1942 makes her respected status in Yan'an evident. The petite paragon Chen Bo'er was placed in the center, along with a woman artist named Zhang Wuzhen, between Chairman Mao and General Zhu De (fig. 18).

Today, both in and outside China, Yan'an is largely remembered for the CCP's rectification campaign, in which many Communists were punished or persecuted for "incorrect" views. Mao's Yan'an Talks are often highlighted

avant-garde
Chen Bo'er
at Yan'an

for his alleged agenda of disciplining intellectuals and regulating artistic creativity. Chen Bo'er's story reveals the flaws in the dominant narrative. Rather than being forced by Party leaders to undergo a political and personal transformation in order to represent workers / peasants / soldiers in literature and the arts, a frequent charge lodged against Mao's Talks during the post-socialist period, Chen's sense of herself and society had been shaped during her affiliation with left-wing artistic pursuits in Shanghai and been further transformed by her fifteen months of fieldwork in the war-affected rural villages before hearing Mao addressing the subject. She had consciously changed her own subjectivity in order to shoulder the task of transforming the world. In writing about revolutionary rural women, she had anticipated Mao's views for artistically representing the new subjectivities being forged in the crucible of war and revolution.

Chen's practices of cultural representation of the voiceless were integral parts of her revolutionary effort to transform hierarchical power relations that were deeply embedded in Chinese society and culture. Indeed, these practices could only be created by artists who had faith in the transformative power of cultural production. As literary scholar Liang Luo shows in her study of Tian Han, one of the founders of Chinese spoken drama, the Chinese avant-garde artists initiated socially engaging performance art since the early twentieth century, and "going to the people" was an intrinsic principle in their aesthetic and political pursuits.³⁹ Xiaobing Tang in his recent work on a history of the street theater movement in China delineates the emergence of "public theater" as a "paradigmatic development" in the 1930s, particularly in the resistance war against Japan. He emphasizes: "A fundamental commitment to the nation in crisis thus underlay the street theater movement and many other artistic activities during this historical period. This commitment also determined that a genuine artistic avant-garde in modern China must aspire to transform its audience as well as its practitioners through the same dynamic creative process."⁴⁰

Having been immersed in the avant-garde artistic ethos of the early twentieth century, Chen Bo'er was by no means a singular case, except for the fact that her strong feminist consciousness allowed her to pay more attention to lower-class women among "the people" and direct more energy to transforming a gender-inflected "feudalist culture." In any case, during the early 1940s Communists were still on the political, military, and cultural fringes and very far from attaining state power that could suppress artists' "free expression." Situating Mao's Talks in the trajectory of artist Chen Bo'er's epistemo-

logical development and subjective transformation offers us an understanding that is close to that historical milieu, rather than an interpretation motivated by the desire in the post-Mao era to condemn the CCP's authoritarian state. The Yan'an Talks were by no means a monologue singularly produced in the great leader's mind for the purpose of controlling Party members and harnessing artists' creativity, but rather Mao's theorizing of Communist cultural producers' innovative practices. He cogently articulated a vision of cultural revolution that had long been shared among revolutionary artists such as Chen Bo'er.⁴¹ In this sense, he was preaching to the converted who had voluntarily abandoned their urban privileges to reside in the caves of a desolate rural periphery for the sake of realizing a dream of transforming China, regardless how many variations of the dream there might be. For the Communist artists in Yan'an, subscribing to the familiar tenets of Mao's Talks on literature and arts that articulated a clear sense of mission functioned as a confirmation of their identity in a community, imagined and / or real, of revolutionary cultural transformers. The effects and significance of Mao's Talks necessarily vary when the audience and the context against which they are transmitted change, a point to which the following chapters will return.

CREATING A FEMINIST PARADIGM FOR SOCIALIST FILM

After the CCP took control of the northeast region upon Japan's surrender, Zhou Enlai sent Chen Bo'er to join the takeover of a Japanese film studio in 1946. The Northeast Film Studio (NFS), later renamed Changchun Film Studio, became the first state-owned film studio of the PRC. The Party also sent to the NFS Chen's old friend and partner in three films, the renowned filmmaker and actor Yuan Muzhi, who had just returned from studying film in the Soviet Union. Chen was appointed Party secretary of the NFS and put in charge of the Department of Art, while Yuan became the director of the NFS. Chen's estranged husband, Ren Posheng, had long been remarried to another woman in the CCP, but the news did not reach Chen Bo'er until 1946.⁴² In 1947 Chen and Yuan married, much to the delight of their friends and fans.

With the full support of Yuan Muzhi, Chen energetically organized the production of documentary films and feature films.⁴³ She was heavily



FIGURE 19. Chen Bo'er in Xingshan. Photo taken in 1947 when Party leader of the northeast region Zhang Wentian and his wife Liu Ying visited the NFS. From left to right: Zhang Wentian, Wu Yinxian, Chen Bo'er, Liu Ying, and Yuan Muzhi. Courtesy of Lu Ming.

involved in the production process from screenwriting to final editing, though as a matter of principle she did not list her name in the credits. All of her contemporaries emphasized Chen's central role in this early stage of exploring a socialist film paradigm that represented workers/peasants/soldiers as Mao's Yan'an Talks directed.⁴⁴ As Lu Ming told me in our 2012 interview, "Chen Bo'er was the soul of Xingshan."⁴⁵

In Mao's original enunciation, the workers/peasants/soldiers who were the subject of revolutionary cultural representation were genderless. In patriarchal societies, however, gender-unmarked subjects are commonly understood as men, setting a norm for humanity against which women are defined as deficient. Expressing her feminist vision in filmmaking, Chen Bo'er initiated a women-centered representation of workers/peasants/soldiers by promoting the production of films featuring revolutionary heroines. In 1946 the filmmakers in the NFS were predominantly young Communists from Yan'an who had little experience or even exposure to filmmaking.⁴⁶ Chen's artistic expertise and political power gave her full authority over the entire process of film production, from training young scriptwriters, cinematographers, and directors and selecting scripts for production to adding the final

editing touches to a film. Within one year of intensive training and creative work in a euphoric atmosphere, eight new scripts were selected for production, two of which portrayed revolutionary heroines.

The process of producing the first revolutionary heroine film *Daughters of China* (*Zhonghua nüer*) was not a smooth one. A young Communist woman from Yan'an, Yan Yiyan, with no experience in screenwriting, was assigned to write a script about the Communist resistant force in the Northeast areas in the war. After two months of fieldwork in the military force, Yan collected numerous stories about heroic soldiers. One—about eight women soldiers of the Northeast Resistance Troop—touched her deeply but she could not find enough source material. Apparently, in a battle against Japanese troops, in order to protect the main force from the Japanese attack, the women decoyed the Japanese troops away. Being chased to the riverbank, they heroically resisted capture by jumping into the roaring Songhua River. The legend of eight women martyrs was depicted in an oil painting, but Yan could only find the real identity for one of the eight women who had been a schoolteacher before joining the resistance. Chen Bo'er strongly encouraged Yan to follow this finding to do more research. Yan spent another three months collecting material. In the end Chen Bo'er and Yan co-authored the script by incorporating many heroines' stories that Yan had collected. While Chen Bo'er regarded it as her responsibility to provide hands-on training to young scriptwriters and directors, she also insisted on letting their names appear in the credits rather than her own. Yan was credited as the sole scriptwriter of the film.⁴⁷

The finished script depicted an international community of women, including two Korean women, who demonstrated remarkable strength and courage in fighting Japanese fascism. Yan Yiyan had originally hoped to give equal treatment to each of the eight heroines but the director Ling Zifeng rejected the idea.⁴⁸ The two got into a heated argument until finally Chen Bo'er was called in to mediate and helped revise the script, following Ling Zifeng's suggestion that just one of the eight women should become the major protagonist and to develop a central narrative line around her life story.⁴⁹ Chen Bo'er portrayed this main character, Hu Xiuzhi, in the image of those courageous rural women she had encountered and even created a long scene in which a wounded Hu Xiuzhi tenaciously crawled on the mountain in order to return to the troop's campsite, a way for Chen to visually commemorate the deeply etched memories of those bound-feet rural women representatives in the resistance war.



FIGURE 20. *Daughters of China* (1949). Hu Xiuzhi carries her martyred comrade toward the roaring river.

Ling Zifeng was also a first-time young director who loved the Soviet Union's films that the NES used as models for teaching young filmmakers. He imitated the Soviet classic *Chapaev* (1934) that portrayed a Soviet Red Army commander who became a hero in the Russian Civil War. Transposing its setting to a Chinese scene and its cinematic language for a hero to depict a Chinese heroine, Ling Zifeng inadvertently accomplished a significant subversion of Hollywood classical representation of women that objectified women in the male gaze. As film critic Dai Jinhua comments, "The new classical revolutionary film genre successfully dispelled the particular discourse inherent in Hollywood's classic cinematic narrative mechanism (that is, the shot sequence of male desire / female image and male gaze / woman as object of gaze) when it eliminated the narrative of desire along with the language of desire."⁵⁰ The heroines in *Daughters of China* stood tall, full of autonomy and courage. Absent of sexual desires and the male gaze, the sublime subject of war heroines was constructed to induce viewers' admiration and awe (fig. 20).

Viewers responded enthusiastically to this first film portraying revolutionary heroines. Many women revolutionaries perceptively grasped its gendered significance as celebrating women's contribution to the revolution. They were

relieved to see that revolutionary heroines' extraordinary sacrifices in the war were commemorated. "Their names are forever engraved in history," a woman viewer declared.⁵¹ Male viewers were also deeply moved by heroines' patriotic devotion to national salvation. As one film critic wrote: "The whole film, especially its climax and ending, exudes a profoundly solemn and tragic tone through its natural simplicity, which induces in the audience an aesthetic of the sublime."⁵² Having just emerged from wars that had involved the participation of numerous women, China in the 1950s did not yet have a social context for fearing women's "masculinization," hence the public's enthusiastic praise of women's heroic sacrifice in the fight against fascism.⁵³ The first revolutionary heroine film was appropriately dedicated to the first international women's conference the PRC hosted—the All-Asian Women's Congress convening in Beijing in December 1949.

In 1950 the NFS finished another thirteen feature films, three of which portrayed revolutionary heroines. Of the five films featuring women's leading roles, four were based on life stories of actual Communist women.⁵⁴ Chen Bo'er thought that film was the best medium to faithfully represent the history of the Revolution, including women as well as men activists whose "magnificently glorious stories must be made known in all corners of China and to the whole world."⁵⁵ She constantly instructed young filmmakers to portray real people and events: "The most touching scene is a real scene."⁵⁶ Her own encounters with remarkable women during the war had convinced her that what ordinary people could do in an extraordinary time went far beyond anything artists could imagine. Thus it was of paramount importance for filmmakers not to create stories from their own imagination but to portray real historical figures as faithfully as possible. In order to facilitate realistic representation, she required filmmakers to conduct a period of fieldwork among the people they were about to represent. This practice, called *xia shenghuo*, entering the life, was later institutionalized in China's socialist film industry in order to reduce the gap between the knowledge of educated artists and the lived reality of workers / peasants / soldiers.

Representing revolutionary women as the main protagonists of films also expressed Chen's astute grasp of the new subjectivities that had emerged among Chinese women during the course of the Communist Revolution and the resistance war. A socialist feminist who prioritized the transformation of a patriarchal culture and the disruption of the mutually reinforcing and oppressive power relations between gender and class, Chen saw representing

women workers / peasants / soldiers as powerful historical actors as an indispensable revolutionary cultural practice. In a talk on her efforts to create a new paradigm for socialist film, she emphasized: "The backward reality is gradually receding to the past. New and beautiful characters full of vitality are emerging in large numbers in front of us. We must affirm that these are the people our film should represent."⁵⁷ Revolutionary heroines were prominent among them. Chen's emphasis was entirely consistent with Mao's Yan'an Talks in terms of who should be the subject of revolutionary cultural representation, but her artistic embodiment of the new revolutionary subjectivity placed women at the center of the silver screen. In sharp contrast to the major mode of visual and literary representation of Chinese women as victims of oppression by left-oriented artists since the May Fourth era, Chen's films of revolutionary heroines articulated a new feminist perspective that showed women on the historical stage initiating actions for social and personal changes rather than merely waiting to be rescued.

In July 1949 Chen was transferred to Beijing for a new appointment as director of the art department of the Central Film Bureau (CFB); at the same time, her husband, Yuan Muzhi, became head of the CFB. As one of the key leaders of China's state-owned film industry, she pushed for the wider circulation of films showing heroines, both in China and internationally.⁵⁸ Of the twenty-six films produced under her direction by state-owned film studios nationwide in 1950, she insisted on selecting the two films with revolutionary heroines produced by NFS, *Daughters of China* and *Zhao Yiman*, to enter the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in Czechoslovakia in 1950.⁵⁹ But in the CFB's debate about which film to send to the festival, there was resistance centered on these films' artistic quality. Some authoritative figures deprecated *Daughters of China* as a documentary film rather than an "art film." Chen defended the film passionately and reportedly threatened, "How can we face the Party and the people if such a film as *Daughters of China* is not allowed to be in the film festival! I will have to resign from my position as the director of the Art Department!"⁶⁰ Chen succeeded in sending these two films to the festival.

The awards that followed, the first international prizes won by films made in the PRC, served as a high appraisal of Chen's artistic vision in creating a new paradigm for socialist film and consolidated her leadership. *Daughters of China* won the Freedom Fight prize and the star of *Zhao Yiman* won the Best Actor prize. The prestige garnered by these international prizes swiftly silenced any critiques of the films and confirmed Chen's artistic judgment

and political vision. The enthusiastic public acceptance of both films also sent a strong message to Chinese filmmakers who might previously have not shown much interest in revolutionary heroines that this subject was well received internationally as well as domestically.⁶¹

Then a totally unexpected critique of a film by Chairman Mao in May 1951 created new dynamics in the film industry. *The Life of Wu Xun* (*Wu Xun zhuan*) made by a private film studio in Shanghai, was a biographical treatment of a historical figure in the late nineteenth century. An illiterate poor man, Wu Xun was committed to building schools for poor boys and begged to accumulate the necessary funds. A well-known figure in his hometown, Wu Xun had been commemorated by generations of officials and elite men as an exemplary figure for promoting educational opportunities for the poor. Touched by Wu Xun's life story, director Sun Yu began writing the script in 1948 and had completed most of the shooting when the CCP took over China in 1949. Sensing that the original story line no longer suited the new political environment, he made many revisions and turned the story into a tragedy of a poor man whose dream of equal opportunity for education was co-opted and manipulated by the feudal ruling class. The film was screened in February 1951, warmly received by many Communist leaders including Zhou Enlai, and highly acclaimed by both film critics and general public.

Just as director Sun was elated by the huge success of the film, Mao's severe criticism of *The Life of Wu Xun* appeared in the Party's newspaper *People's Daily*. Obviously unaware of the specific process in which the film was produced, he criticized filmmakers for not studying the new class forces, characters, and ideas that had emerged in the past century in China as the basis for deciding what to praise and extol. He especially condemned CCP members for "totally losing their critical faculties in the face of such a film promoting feudal culture and even surrendering to reactionary ideology." "Reactionary bourgeois ideas have already eroded a militant Communist Party. Isn't this a reality?"⁶² Mao's harsh attitude toward a film by a nonparty member director and approved by most CCP leaders shocked everyone involved. But no one challenged the great leader, who, after all, had just led the CCP to victory over the NP. The film industry was the first to experience a political campaign in which confused artists and Party officials frantically tried to figure out a politically correct socialist production of film.⁶³

In contrast to those "fuzzy headed" filmmakers and officials, Chen Bo'er's insistence on representing new historical forces and new characters who were powerfully embodied by revolutionary heroines was now appreciated in a

new light. Chen herself joined the critique of *The Life of Wu Xun*, expressing her dislike for a poor man who behaved obsequiously in front of the rich and the powerful. Considering her passion for powerful heroines who dared to take up arms to fight against oppressors, her negative opinion of Wu Xun and her disapproval of the film may have been a genuine expression of her deeply held convictions rather than merely a political performance. Her political analysis of the director and actor in their artistic creation of the role of Wu Xun revealed her identification with Mao's thesis that artists should first transform their subjective world in order to create proletarian art. Her stern criticism of filmmakers' petty-bourgeois positionality was openly published in the July issue of the film magazine *New Film*.⁶⁴

It was unclear whether Chen felt uneasy about the effects of her harsh criticism of her old colleague and friend in Shanghai or whether she sensed the political pressure that Mao's critique imposed on filmmakers. In any case, in November 1951 on her way back from an official trip to Guangzhou, she insisted on making a special stop in Shanghai to meet with filmmakers there, even though she was seriously ill. Chen was warmly welcomed by a large group of admiring filmmakers when she entered the conference room. She started to address the audience in an extremely weak voice, "Comrades, I am here to hear your criticisms of our work." Everyone realized instantly how tired she was. Filmmakers at the meeting knew that whatever political pressure they were enduring did not have much to do with this leader from the Central Film Bureau. They replied that they had no criticisms to offer and insisted that she rest rather than keep talking. Chen tried to speak, but her voice faded away entirely. In a few hours she died of heart failure in hospital.⁶⁵

After her death, a larger-than-life figure emerged as Chen Bo'er was elevated from her obscure, altruistic position behind the films she produced. Memorial speeches and articles were published widely in Party newspapers and film magazines. At the memorial services held by the Shanghai municipal government in Shanghai and central government in Beijing, her colleagues, friends, and students poured out their profound grief over the loss of their beloved "comrade Bo'er," eulogizing her as a gifted artist, a devoted revolutionary, and a magnificent soul. Young filmmakers swore to take Chen Bo'er, the people's artist, as their model. Chen's old friend Xia Yan, who was now in charge of culture and art in Shanghai, characterized Chen Bo'er in his memorial speech with these perceptive words: "Chen Bo'er's passing is a colossal loss for the cause of Chinese people's film. Revolution is never a

smooth journey. When people from a petty bourgeois background embark on this journey, they tend to encounter frustrations, failures, or loss of direction. In this respect, comrade Chen Bo'er's spirit of never succumbing to difficulty and forever sticking to the right direction is profoundly valuable for all of us to emulate."⁶⁶ Amidst the political campaign critiquing *The Life of Wu Xun*, Chen was identified and commemorated by her peers as an exemplar of the correct direction for a film industry in disarray.

Chen's feminist endeavors behind the scenes were recognized and openly acknowledged by her long-term feminist friends in the CCP. Deng Yingchao, the deputy chair of the All-China Women's Federation, articulated a gender agenda as she expressed her grief: "Just as the new China's film industry is developing rapidly, and just as we were expecting you to make more and bigger contributions, my dear comrade, you suddenly departed. This is a loss to our party, people, and women!" Deng enumerated all the activities in which Chen had been involved on behalf of women and children: "When you became the director of the Art Department of the Central Film Bureau and the associate chair of the Art Committee, you strongly insisted on making more films extolling remarkable Chinese women. We will never forget all these things."⁶⁷ Shen Zijiu, the editor-in-chief of *Women of China*, described Chen's recent meeting with her and Kang Keqing, another leader of the ACWF, to ask for their help in producing scripts. "We had tremendous expectations of comrade Bo'er. Women and children in the new China need her films to help lead and organize the cause of women's liberation and children's education."⁶⁸ In addition to losing a dear friend, these senior feminists mourned the loss of a feminist leader who held a powerful position in their concerted efforts to transform patriarchal culture in socialist China.

CODA

In the years after Chen Bo'er's death, strong heroines were featured as leading protagonists not only in films but also in operas, plays, posters, and other cultural forms. Images of strong women workers, peasants, and revolutionary leaders were ubiquitous in socialist China, sweeping away the cultural representations of women as sexual objects or as passive victims of feudal or capitalist oppressions that had predominated before 1949. These images of heroines highlighted their unfailing devotion to the revolutionary cause and socialist construction. The dominant mode of gender representation became

the basis for post-socialist critics' arguments that women in the PRC were made into "statist subjects" or masculinized by assuming male roles and conforming to male standards in the public arena, which meant they became alienated from their supposedly innate femininity.

Various post-socialist critiques of practices relating to women and gender in the socialist past share a common conceptual framework: that the authoritarian patriarchal socialist state manipulated its citizens in order to consolidate its power, and that cultural representation, under the rubric of "party-state propaganda," was a major means of manipulation or brainwashing. It assumes that men were the sole authors of that complex revolution, dismissing the existence and even the possibility of socialist feminist visions and practices aiming to empower the oppressed. A profound lack of interest in investigating women's participation in historical change, which is a typical characteristic of masculinist thinking, is ironically embedded in these condemnations of an all-mighty patriarchal power. Even studies on feminist activities in the PRC do not depart from the conceptual framework of a seamless patriarchal party-state. Chinese women in the socialist period thus appear only as victims, puppets, or tools of a manipulative dictatorship in the global production of a hegemonic anti-socialist discourse—in short, an objectified "other."⁶⁹

The lack of interest in a feminist founder of Chinese socialist film by post-socialist scholars contrasts sharply with Chen Bo'er's peers and students who have made repeated efforts to keep her memory alive. Essays recalling Chen's life appeared in the early 1990s when the ninetieth anniversary of the birth of Chinese film was approaching. Several of her male colleagues who were retired officials in the film industry expressed their wishes to see a biographic film of Chen Bo'er (unaware that revolutionary heroines had long been an obsolete subject in post-socialist cultural production). Activities to commemorate Chen culminated in 1995 when a memorial conference dedicated to her was held in her hometown of Chaozhou, where gray-haired veterans of the socialist film industry unveiled a newly erected statue of Chen Bo'er with Xia Yan's inscription on the memorial tablet: "People's artist comrade Chen Bo'er is immortal."

In the early twenty-first century, when China is even further removed from its revolutionary past, significant efforts to remember Chen continue. On a snowy day in December 2011 a group of women and men in their eighties gathered at the Beijing Film Academy for a conference commemorating its founder. These were the early graduates of the Institute for Performing

Art, which Chen Bo'er established in 1950 and later developed into BFA. When I asked conference organizer Chen Wenjing why she devoted so much effort to organizing the conference and compiling a volume of memoirs by Chen's students, the frail 82-year-old woman described the strong and complex sentiments that drove her to take action, even though she herself was very ill. First, she could simply not tolerate the erasure of the founding figure of the BFA by its current male leaders, who commemorated only their male predecessors. Alongside this distinctive feminist statement, Chen Wenjing articulated an "outdated" socialist sentiment with a sense of legitimacy and passion. "Chen Bo'er told us, first be a revolutionary and then be an artist. China today needs the spirit of Chen Bo'er. We now lack the concept of being a revolutionary!"⁷⁰ At a time when the Communist Revolution has been totally derailed and demonized in an age of global capitalism, those who had experienced it felt an urgent need to present their own testimony. In this context, a feminist revolutionary devoted to eliminating inequality and pursuing social justice, Chen Bo'er symbolizes the revolution with which her students identified. Chen's early death kept her revolutionary identity intact, for she bore no responsibility for the subsequent metamorphosis of the Party from a leader of resistance movements to an entrenched bureaucratic ruling class leading China into a form of state capitalism. Remembering the revolutionary spirit of Chen Bo'er is tantamount to a tacit declaration of the necessity of a socialist feminist revolution that would embody her radical vision of overturning all unequal power relations and social hierarchies.

Significantly, a year after the conference, Chen Wenjing's persistence in pressuring the BFA leaders to commemorate Chen Bo'er's pioneering role in both film industry and film education triumphed. On December 22, 2012, the all-male BFA leaders unveiled four bronze busts on campus to commemorate the BFA's founding figures. Chen Bo'er was listed as the first, followed by the other three male leaders.⁷¹ Chen Wenjing succeeded in her resistance to the erasure of Chen Bo'er from the BFA history. But now, ironically, her tremendous efforts behind the scenes are erased in the Academy's official visual and literal representations that only credit the current male leaders of the BFA for remembering its founding members. The erasure of women's key roles in engendering important changes is a routine practice in a male-dominated society.

31. Peng Zhen at the time headed the "Group of Five" that had been formed in July 1964, in charge of revolutionizing the cultural realm in response to Mao's request. But in 1966 four out of five top officials in this group including Peng Zhen would be condemned and removed from their positions. The "Group of Five" was replaced by the "Central Cultural Revolution Group" headed by Chen Boda in May 1966. Peng Zhen and Chen Boda clashed at a meeting of the Party Secretariat in January 1962. When Peng suggested that all the Party leaders, including Chairman Mao and Liu Shaoqi, should take responsibility for their mistakes in policies of the previous years, Chen rebutted, "We have done a lot of messy stuff. Do we want to hold Chairman Mao responsible for all that? Do we want to check Chairman Mao's work?" See Lin Yunhui, "Zhonggong bada weishenme meiyou Peng Zhen fayan? [Why was there no Peng Zhen's speech at the Eighth Congress of the Party Central?], in *Yanhuang chunqiu* [Chinese History], no. 9 (2015): 10–15. This article traces Peng Zhen's continued insistence on the necessity to include Mao in the Party's self-criticism.

32. Dong Bian, "Cai dajie-nü ganbu de zhiying he laoshi," 82. Peng Zhen would be the first official banished from the power center by Mao in 1966 for his refusal to collaborate with the radicals in the Party who were assisting Mao in his launch of the Cultural Revolution.

33. Late in 1965 in a similar manner Peng Zhen dismissed another condemning article, "On the New Historical Play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*." But this time his resistance to an incriminating class analysis applied to his colleague Wu Han led to his downfall. Authorized by Mao behind the scenes, the famous article signaled Mao's offense on the "bourgeois headquarters" in the Party.

34. *Zhongnanhai* is the name of part of the royal residence and imperial court in history. When the CCP took power, it became the residential area of top party leaders as well as the site of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council. The name signifies the power center in the PRC.

35. Dong Bian had made a similar move early in 1966. She asked Tian Jiaying to submit a request for Mao's inscription for *Women of China*. But by then the relationship between Mao and Tian had already become estranged. Mao did not even open the letter sent by Tian, a gesture of contempt that contributed to Tian's despair.

36. Dong Bian, "Xiang funü xuanchuan shehui, xiang shehui xuanchuan funü."

37. Both Hu Qiaomu and Chen Boda claimed that they recommended Tian Jiaying to Mao. See Hu Qiaomu, "Wo suo zhida de Tian Jiaying" [What I know about Tian Jiaying], in *Mao Zedong he tade mishu Tian Jiaying* [Mao Zedong and his secretary Tian Jiaying], ed. Dong Bian, Tan Deshan, and Zeng Zi (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1996), 165; and Chen Xiaonong, *Chen Boda zuibou koushu huiyi* [Chen Baoda's oral memoir in his last days] (Hong Kong: Yangguang huanqiu Press, 2005), 78, 89. In the commemorating articles by Tian Jiaying's friends and Dong Bian, only Hu Qiaomu is mentioned as the one who recommended Tian to Mao. It could be that Mao solicited a recommendation from both his secretaries.

38. Ye Yonglie, *Mao Zedong de mishumen* [Mao Zedong's secretaries] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1994); and *Mao Zedong he tade mishu Tian Jiaying*. For

a description of Chen Boda in Yan'an, see Shi Zhe, "Wo suozhidao de Chen Boda" [What I know about Chen Boda], *Wenshi jinghua* [Essence of culture and history], no. 8 (2002): 50–57. Shi Zhe served as Mao's Russian translator since the Yan'an period. In this piece she attributes the cause of the infamous persecution of Wang Shiwei and his "anti-Party group" to the grievances of those members of the Political Research Institute against Chen Boda, who was the director of the institute. For Chen Boda's ups and downs, see Ba Tu, "Chen Boda zai 'wenhua dageming' zhongde chen yu fu" [The ups and downs of Chen Boda in the Cultural Revolution], in *Dangshi Zongheng* [Perspectives of the Party's history], nos. 3–5 (2004): 9–12, 11–15, 20–23.

39. Peng Xianzhi, "Mao Zedong he tade mishu Tian Jiaying" [Mao Zedong and his secretary Tian Jiaying], in *Mao Zedong he tade mishu Tian Jiaying*, 91. This was Mao's response to Tian Jiaying's oral report that conveyed rural officials' views on how to address rural poverty and low productivity. But Tian did not heed Mao's instruction and continued to solicit support from other top party leaders, including Liu Shaoqi. Peng was Tian's assistant from 1950 until Tian's death in 1966. His eighty-page memoir of Tian constitutes one fourth of the volume that takes the title of his piece as the book title.

40. Hu Qiaomu, in *Mao Zedong he tade mishu Tian Jiaying*, 166.

41. Both Hu Qiaomu and Dong Bian remembered Chen Boda's resentment of Tian Jiaying's re-editing Mao's three volumes. Zeng Zi, email to author, October 5, 2010.

42. Zeng Zi, email to author, September 17, 2010, cited her sister Zeng Li's witness of the scene.

43. I have not found any evidence that Chen's attack was ultimately a charge against Peng Zhen, who in 1964 was entrusted by Mao to head the "Group of Five," though it could have been a stone intended to kill multiple birds.

44. No mainstream historians have paid any attention to this incident, either. No male officials, including Chen Boda, ever mentioned this incident in their memoirs.

45. See chapter 1.

46. See chapter 2.

CHAPTER FIVE. CHEN BO'ER AND THE FEMINIST PARADIGM OF SOCIALIST FILM

An early version of this chapter was first presented in Chinese at the International Conference on *Chinese Women and Visual Representation*, Fudan University, Shanghai, December 16, 2011.

1. The Beijing Film Academy, originally called the Institute for Performing Art when Chen Bo'er founded it in June 1950, was intended to train a new generation of actors and screenwriters for a socialist film industry.

2. Chen Bo'er's tombstone gives the year of her birth as 1910, and most secondary works use that date. I follow her biographer, Wang Yongfang, who had access to

Chen's personal archive and found the date 1907 on her brief autobiography. Wang Yongfang, interview with author, December 13, 2011. Chen may have given the 1910 date herself when she was entering the film industry in 1934.

3. After her mother, her father had a second concubine.

4. This account of Chen Bo'er's early life is based on a biography of Chen, Wang Yongfang, *Mingxing, zhangshi, renmin yishujia: Chen Bo'er zhuanlue* [A star, soldier, people's artist: A biography of Chen Bo'er] (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 1994), and a documentary film produced by the Central TV Station in 2009, *Yan'an liren* [Yan'an women], that includes an episode on Chen Bo'er. The original site has been changed to CNTV Jishitai [Recording History], <http://jilu.cntv.cn/humhis/yananliren/classpage/video/20091109/108650.shtml> (re-accessed May 22, 2016).

5. See Mei Gongyi, *Baidu.com*, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/5055527.htm> (accessed April 10, 2013).

6. See Ren Posheng, *Baike.com*, www.baike.com/wiki/%E4%BB%BB%E6%B3%8A%E7%94%9F (accessed May 22, 2016). For Ren Posheng's military activities in the New Fourth Army, see "Xinsijun sishi zai Guobei" [The fourth division of the New Fourth Army in Guobei], *Guoyang online*, www.gy233600.cn/bendi/info-6346.html (accessed April 10, 2013).

7. Spoken drama was an imported form of performing art that acquired its culturally specific meaning in Chinese elite's pursuit of modernity since the early twentieth century. For an in-depth study of the relationship between avant-garde art and politics in modern China, see Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

8. Xia Yan, who was an underground Communist leading cultural activities of Shanghai's left-wing artists including the SADT, narrated in detail these activities of the 1930s in his autobiography, *Lanxun jiumeng lu* [Languid recollections of old dreams] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1985). For the NP's persecution of Communist artists, see 186–88. Xia Yan will be the subject of the next two chapters.

9. Xiao Chen (one of Chen Bo'er's pen names), "Nüzi de liutongbin" [Women's common errors], *Shenbao Fukan* [Shanghai Daily Supplement], May 9, 1934, p. 3.

10. At this period, *taimai* (Mrs.) was a term for married women of elite families. Married women of lower classes were addressed as "wife of so-and-so"; e.g., Xianglin's Wife (see chapter 6). "Miss" was also never applied to unmarried women of the poor. For a study of changing meanings of *taimai* in the Republican era, see Hou Yanxing, "Jiejie, xingbie yu shenfen: minguo shiqi 'taimai' de wenhua jiangou" [Class, gender and identity: The cultural construction of 'taimai' in the Republic period] in *Lanzhou xuekan* [The Journal of Lanzhou], no. 3 (2011): 178–96.

11. Chen Bo'er, "Zhongguo funü de qiantu" [The future of Chinese women], *Shenbao Fukan*, May 19, 1934, 1.

12. Ibid.

13. Chen Bo'er, "Nüzi zhiye moluo de yuanyin" [The causes of the decline of women's careers], *Shenbao Fukan*, July 16, 1934, 3.

14. Ibid.

15. Chen Bo'er, "Wuyue yougan" [Sentiments in May], *Shenbao Fukan*, May 12, 1934, 1.

16. For left-wing artists' infiltration of the film industry, see Xia Yan, *Lanxun jiumeng lu*, 231; he specifically mentions Chen Bo'er and Yuan Muzhi, 288.

17. The five films Chen starred in are *Qingchun xian* [On Youth], Shanghai Star Studio (1934); *Taoli jie* [Fate of Graduates], Shanghai Diantong Studio (1934); *Huishou dangnian* [Remembering the Past], Hong Kong Global Studio (1935); *Shengsi tongxin* [Revolutionaries], Shanghai Star Studio (1936); and *Babai zhuangshi* [Eight Hundred Heroes], Wuhan: China Film Studio (1938). Chen's role in her last film was the first resistance war heroine represented in films. Her acting as a war heroine received high acclaim.

18. Xiao Hua, "Chen Bo'er oufang" [Interview with Chen Bo'er], *Funü shenghuo* [Women's Life] 8, no. 11 (March 1940), 12.

19. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

20. Chen Bo'er, "Nüxing zhongxin de dianying yu nanxing zhongxin de shehui" [The female-centered film and the male-centered society], *Funü shenghuo* 2, no. 2 (1936): 62–64.

21. Ibid., 66.

22. Chen Bo'er, "Guanyu Zhao Yuhua" [About Zhao Yuhua], *Mingxing banyuekan* [Star Biweekly] 7, no. 4 (1936).

23. Chen Bo'er was hailed as the first woman actor who brought the popular street theater to the front to enhance the soldiers' will to resist the Japanese invaders. Her stardom also added much publicity to the new street drama *Put Down Your Whip!* in which she played the daughter. See Xiaobing Tang, "Street Theater and Subject Formation in Wartime China: Toward a New Form of Public Art," in *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, E-Journal no. 18 (March 2016): 32. <https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-18> (accessed May 12, 2016).

24. Song Qingling (1893–1981), wife of modern China's founding father Sun Yat-sen, became the vice president of the Central Government after the founding of the PRC.

25. Committee of the Annals of Shanghai Women, ed., *Shanghai funüzhishi* [The annals of Shanghai women] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2000), 633–34.

26. He Xiangning (1878–1972), a senior member of the Nationalist Party, played a leading role in the women's movement led by the Nationalist Party during the first United Front between the NP and the CCP and chaired the Chinese Women's Resistance Association in the 1930s. She joined the Communist government after the founding of the PRC and chaired its Committee of Overseas Affairs.

27. Shen Zijiu, "Chen Bo'er cong zhandi laixin" [A letter sent by Chen Bo'er from the front], *Funü shenghuo* 8, no. 1 (1939): 11.

28. In his biography of Chen Bo'er, Wang Yongfang described the baby's death as caused by a sudden illness, but he revealed the true cause to me when I asked why

Chen always took her son with her while engaging in busy activities, instead of leaving him with his father. Wang Yong Fang, interview with author, Beijing, December 13, 2011.

29. The NP and CCP formed a Second United Front to resist the Japanese invasion in 1937, which meant that the NP stopped both military combat against the CCP-controlled base areas and its arrests of underground CCP members. But the CCP's new recruits from NP-controlled areas kept their affiliation secret, given what the CCP had learned from the first alliance with the NP. After the First United Front was broken, the NP hunted down many CCP members. Keeping its members' identity confidential also allowed them to function in NP-controlled institutions and in the larger society as nonpartisan figures.

30. Edgar P. Snow (1905–1972), an American journalist who interviewed Mao Zedong and other Communist leaders in Yan'an and published books and articles on the Communist Revolution, the most famous of which was *Red Star over China* (1937), screened his documentary at Peking University, an event Chen Bo'er attended during her trip to the North in 1937.

31. Chen Bo'er, "Sange xiaojiao daibiao yinxiangji" [Impressions of three representatives with bound-feet], *Funi shenghuo* 8, no. 11 (1940): 15.

32. Ibid., 17.

33. Ibid., 19.

34. Ibid., 20.

35. Ibid., 20.

36. Yao, Zhongming, Chen Bo'er, et al. *Tongzhi, ni zoucuole lu!* [Comrade, you are on the wrong road], in *Beifang wenyi* [Northern literature and arts], ed. Zhou Erfu, vol. 3 (Beijing: Xin Zhongguo chubanshe, 1949). Chen Bo'er's article "Directing" in the volume gives a detailed review of the process of creating this highly acclaimed experimental drama and her rationale for many innovations.

37. "Zhonghua quanguo wenxue yishujie lianhehui changwu weiyuan Ding Ling tongzhi jianghua" [A talk by comrade Ding Ling, standing committee member of the All-China Literature and Art Association], in *Renmin yishujia Chen Bo'er tongzhi jinian teji* [A memorial series on the people's artist comrade Chen Bo'er] (Beijing: Xin dianying chubanshe, 1952), 12. The CCP had an internal hierarchy in Yan'an. "The big pot" meal and "the middle pot" meal were different qualities and quantities of food provided for the lowest-ranking and mid-ranking officials; "the small pot meal" was reserved for the top leaders.

38. Lu Ming, interview with author, Beijing, July 18, 2012. Chen Bo'er's niece, Chen Tilan, also made the same remark about Chen being a perfect person without a flaw in my phone interview with her (June 3, 2012).

39. Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China*.

40. Xiaobing Tang, "Street Theater and Subject Formation in Wartime China,"

45. In this illuminating study of the historical origins of Mao's Yan'an Talks, Tang notes that many urban, left-wing artists experienced "culture shock" when they traveled into rural areas to present street theater during the resistance war and real-

ized the necessity of two-way transformations, similar to what Chen Bo'er experienced in the war.

41. Examining the left-wing films in a critical light, Vivian Shen also shows that what appeared in Mao's Yan'an Talks for the most part had already surfaced in left-wing artists' ideas and practices in the 1930s. Vivian Shen, *The Origins of Left-Wing Cinema in China, 1932–1937* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

42. Many CCP couples were separated during the long war and had no means of communicating or even hearing about each other. Ren Posheng became an officer in the New Fourth Route Army in the resistance war, operating mainly in base areas in East China.

43. Chen Bo'er and Yuan Muzhi played couples in the films of the 1930s and remained close friends since their first film together. Yuan was invited by Zhou Enlai to Yan'an to make films. He collaborated with Chen in the production of some stage dramas before he went to the Soviet Union to study filmmaking.

44. Shanghai-based director Xie Jin told Greg Lewis in an interview, "We learned a great deal about how to make *gongnongbing* (worker-peasant-soldier) films from the Dongbei (later Changchun) Film Studio." See Greg Lewis, "The History, Myth, and Memory of Maoist Chinese Cinema, 1949–1966," *Asian Cinema* 16, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2005): 171–72. In this article Lewis expresses his disagreement with Paul Clark's conceptualization of Yan'an versus Shanghai to explain the conflicts in the socialist film industry, as his interviewees did not reveal such tension. If Lewis knew who led the Northeast Film Studio, he would have a strong argument against Clark. The top leaders Chen Bo'er and Yuan Muzhi were both from the Shanghai film community of the 1930s and went to Yan'an later. The experiences of the leading couple of the socialist film industry disrupted Clark's thesis. Changchun Film Studio no longer exists. But on the site of the studio a film museum has been built. A group statue of founders of the studio is placed in the introductory hall with Chen Bo'er in the center.

45. Lu Ming (who worked with Chen Bo'er in NFS), interview with author, Beijing, July 18, 2012. See Lu Ming, *Zhongguo dianying qishizai: Qinli, shilu* [Seventy years of Chinese film: Personal experience and recording] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2012), 346. Xingshan is the location where the Northeast Film Studio was first established. In 1946 the CCP expected additional military engagement with the NP in Changchun; therefore, the equipment left by Japanese in the Manchuria Film Studio was hurriedly shipped by train to the remote coal-mining town of Xingshan. Meanwhile, the CCP also maneuvered to have the NP send the CCP underground members, the movie star couple Jin Shan and Zhang Ruifang, to represent the NP to take over the Manchuria Film Studio after the equipment had been safely shipped away. The tremendous takeover efforts of a film studio demonstrate the importance of film industry in the envisioning of a socialist state by the CCP leaders. Zhou Enlai was directly involved in planning the takeover of the film studio.

46. Most of the technical personnel who had worked in the Japanese-owned Manchuria Film Studio stayed at their posts after the CCP's takeover, including many Japanese technicians.

47. Yan Yiyan, "Diyici xuexi: *Zhonghua Nüer de xiezuo jingguo*" [The first learning experience: The process of writing *Daughters of China*], in *Zhonghua nüer dianying wenxue juban* [The script of *Daughters of China*] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1958), 53; and "Mianhuai Chen Bo'er tongzhi" [Remembering comrade Chen Bo'er], *Xin wenxue shiliao* [Historical Sources on New Literature] 4 (1980): 181.

48. Yan Yiyan, "Guanghui de dianfan" [A glorious paragon], *Dazhong dianying* [Popular Film] 1-2 (1952).

49. "Lin Zifeng Koushu: Dajia guanwojiao feng daoyan" [Interview of Lin Zifeng: People called me a crazy director], in *Women de janyu shengya* [Our performing careers], ed. Lian Jing, Lu Hua, and Guo Jinhua (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2008): 106-33. Also, Lu Ming, interview with author, Beijing, July 18, 2012. Lu Ming still remembers the big fight between Yan and Lin over the narrative structure of the script. Yan did not want to delete any of the touching stories of the heroines she collected. Only Chen Bo'er was able to convince her of the necessity of sacrificing those stories.

50. Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, ed. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow (London: Verso, 2002), 102. But without historical research, Dai assumed that the heroines were not narrated in the gaze of male desire but in the gaze of authorities ("this gaze is of course male"). This assumption led to her famous thesis of patriarchal masculinization of women in socialist cultural representation.

51. Yu Hua, "Lishishang yongyuan liuzhe ramende mingzi: *Zhonghua nüer guanhou*" [Their names are forever engraved in history: After viewing *Daughters of China*], *Dianying wenxue* [Film Literature], no. 3 (1959): 82; Ya Su, "*Zhonghua nüer guanhou*" [After viewing *Daughters of China*], *Xin Zhongguo funü* [Women of New China], no. 7 (1950): 17.

52. Meng Liye, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishushi: 1949-1965* [A history of cinematic art in the new China: 1949-1965] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2011), 43. Hung Liu, an overseas Chinese artist who had watched *Daughters of China* in her childhood in China, revisited this film half a century later on her research trip to China. Still deeply moved by it, she decided to create a series of large-scale paintings based on the screen images of *Daughters of China* depicting how the heroines carried their dead comrade while wading through the roaring river, which she completed in 2008. The power of the heroines conveyed by Hung Liu can be accessed via her website: www.hungliu.com/daughters-of-china.html. This work is in the permanent collection at the Denver Art Museum.

53. The film received high acclaim in the Soviet Union as well. Film critics there recognized the similarities between *Daughters of China* and *Chapaev* right away, hailing it as a landmark in the move toward realism in Chinese cinema. See "Su gedi shangying *Zhonghua nüer*: Qian Xiaozhang baogao canjia guoji yingzhan qingkuang" [On the screenings of *Daughters of China* in the Soviet Union: Qian Xiaozhang's report on the situation of participating in the international film festival], *Wenhui bao* [Wenhui Daily], September 5, 1950, p. 3; "*Zhonghua nüer zai*

Sulian" [*Daughters of China* in the Soviet Union], Li He, reporter of Xinhua news agency in Moscow, *Wenhui bao*, August 11, 1950, p. 3. For a study of the impact of Soviet film on socialist films in China, see Lu Ming, "Sulian dianying zai Zhongguo gaishu" [On Soviet films in China], in *Zhongguo dianying qishizai: qingli, shilu*, 149-50.

54. In addition to *Daughters of China*, the other three films with revolutionary heroines are *Baiyi zhanshi* [Soldiers in White Coats], *Zhao Yiman*, and *Liu Hulan*. *Baimao nü* [The White-Haired Girl] was based on a popular opera originally created in Yan'an depicting a poor young peasant woman's resistance against sexual violence and oppression of a landlord.

55. Chen Bo'er, "Gushipian congwudaoyou de biandao gongzuo" [Scriptwriting and directing feature films from the scratch], in *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao: 1949-1979* [Source material on Chinese film studies: 1949-1979], vol. 1, ed. Wu Di (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 64 (hereafter cited as Wu Di).

56. Lu Ming, interview with author, Beijing, July 18, 2012.

57. Chen Bo'er, "Gushipian congwudaoyou de biandao gongzuo."

58. Private film studios still managed their own production in the early 1950s.

59. When *Zhao Yiman*, a biographical film about a Communist woman leader who was captured, brutally tortured, and eventually killed by the Japanese, had immediately followed *Daughters of China*, some film critics expressed disapproval of making two films featuring revolutionary heroines. See Zhong Dianfei, "Kanle *Zhao Yiman* yihou" [After watching *Zhao Yiman*], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], July 9, 1950, p. 3.

60. Cao Jisan, "Chizha fengyun Chen Bo'er" [An all-powerful Chen Bo'er], *Tianjin ribao* [Tianjin Daily], May 15, 2009, p. 15.

61. The Karlovy Vary International Film Festival drew many filmmakers from socialist countries. Having just emerged from long and brutal struggles against fascism, many shared a commitment to films representing anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggles. In that context, the extraordinary Chinese revolutionary heroines touched a highly sympathetic chord in viewers and judges.

62. Mao Zedong, "Yingdang zhongshi dianying *Wu Xun Zhuan* de taolun" [We should pay attention to the discussions of *The Life of Wu Xun*], *Renmin ribao*, May 10, 1951, p. 1. The article appeared as the editorial without Mao's name. Collected in Wu Di, vol. 1, pp. 92-93.

63. For more discussion of the impact of the criticism of *The Life of Wu Xun* and Mao's wife Jiang Qing's involvement in this event, see chapters 6 and 7.

64. Chen Bo'er, "Cong *Wu Xun Zhuan* tandao dianying chuanguo shangde wenti" [On issues of filmmaking based on *The Life of Wu Xun*] *Xin Dianying* [New Film] 1, no. 7 (1951): 10-13.

65. Actor Zhong Xinghuo (who was present at the meeting with Chen Bo'er), interview with author, Shanghai, August 29, 2012. Also see Zhong Jingzhi, "Zhuiyi Chen bo'er tongzhi zuihou de rizi" [Recalling the last few days of comrade Chen Bo'er's life], *Dianying yishu* [Film Art], no. 3 (1991): 49.

66. Xia Yan, "Daonian Chen Bo'er tongzhi" [Remembering comrade Chen Bo'er], *Wenhui bao*, November 29, 1951, p. 8.

67. Deng Yingchao, "Daonian Chen Bo'er tongzhi" [Remembering comrade Chen Bo'er], *Renmin ribao*, November 13, 1951, p. 3.

68. Sheng Ziji, "Zhonghua quanguo minzhu funü lianhehui daibiao Sheng Ziji tongzhi de jianghua" [The talk by comrade Sheng Ziji, representative of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation], in *Renmin yishujia Chen Bo'er tongzhi jinian teji* [A memorial series on the people's artist comrade Chen Bo'er] (Beijing: Xin dianying chubanshe, 1952), 14.

69. The lopsided scholarly treatment of Chinese women in the first versus second half of the twentieth century is best illustrated in a book that surveys the English scholarship produced in recent decades. See Paul J. Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2012.

70. Chen Wenjing, interview with author, Beijing, July 19, 2012. See also the conference volume edited by Chen Wenjing, *Women zai zheli chengzhang* [We grew up here], in the Beijing Film Academy library.

71. See "Zhongguo dianying jiaoyu dianjizhe, kaituozhe tongxiang jiemu yishi zai woyuan longzhong juxing" [Our Academy holds the grand ceremony for unveiling the bronze statues of the founders and pioneers of Chinese film education], Beijing Film Academy website: www.bfa.edu.cn/news/2012-12/22/content_57470.htm (accessed January 14, 2016).

CHAPTER SIX. FASHIONING SOCIALIST VISUAL CULTURE

An early version of this chapter was first presented at the "Conference on Nines," University of Michigan, December 5, 2009.

1. The Shanghai Municipal Archives has made available over two thousand volumes of the Shanghai Film Bureau from 1949 to 1966. The collection contains a wealth of primary sources, ranging from meeting minutes of Shanghai film studios and the Film Bureau and five-year plans about making films to notes on numerous interactions between the central leadership in the film industry and actors, directors, producers, and studio managers in Shanghai and elsewhere. Not everything related to film is accessible, but the archives nonetheless demonstrate the complexity of situations in the film industry and often yield surprises. For the first study that systematically researched archival documents on Shanghai film industry, see Zhang Shuoguo, "*Shiqi nian*" Shanghai dianying wenhua yanjiu [A study of the "seventeen years" of Shanghai film culture] (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2014). In the 2011 anthology *The Chinese Cinema Book*, edited by Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward (London: Palgrave Macmillan), socialist films receive the attention of one chapter, "The Remodeling of a National Cinema: Chinese Films of the Seventeen Years (1949–1966)" by Julian Ward, but there is still no trace of archival research by film scholars cited in the chapter. See pp. 87–93.

2. The cultural dimension of the Cultural Revolution is rarely examined in scholarship on China. Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), captures the importance of the cultural transformation agenda in the history of the CCP.

3. See Paul G. Pickowicz, "Zheng Junli, Complicity and the Cultural History of Socialist China, 1949–1976," in *The History of the PRC (1949–1976)*, special issue of *China Quarterly* 7 (2007), ed. Julia Strauss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 194–215; Paul G. Pickowicz, "Acting Like Revolutionaries: Shi Hui, the Wenhua Studio, and Private-Sector Filmmaking, 1949–52," in *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, by Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 256–87. Both articles focus on artists who were persecuted during the Mao era. Film historian Paul Clark's careful research in the 1980s yielded a complex picture of making socialist films and a reperiodization of the Cultural Revolution. Although he astutely pointed out that "divisions within the creative ranks served as warning against a simplistic differentiation of Party versus artists," he nevertheless organized the book around the framework of a tripartite relationship among party, artists, and audiences. The insertion of audiences significantly complicates power relations in a so-called totalitarian regime, but the dichotomy of party versus artists remains at the conceptual level. Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 53. In Clark's more recent work with a much more complex analytical framework, he recognized that "[f]ilm was prominent from the early rumblings of what became the Cultural Revolution storm in 1964." However, without archival research, he missed the opportunity to trace Xia Yan's pivotal role in the contentions of the cultural realm and only mentioned him briefly as a film writer. See Clark, *Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 110. Greg Lewis noticed a meaningful discrepancy between historiography of Chinese socialist films and the film artists' memories of their experiences in making socialist films as a result of his interviews of film artists. However, he again missed the opportunity to dig deep into the discrepancy by conducting archival research to verify his interviewees' memories and to understand the discrepancy in the context of historical ruptures rather than simply in the differences of cohorts. See Greg Lewis, "The History, Myth and Memory of Maoist Chinese Cinema, 1949–1966," *Asian Cinema* 6, no. 1 (2005): 162–83.

4. Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922–1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 207.

5. Film historian Paul Clark characterized Xia Yan as an important artist who held a merely nominal official position. See Clark, *Chinese Cinema*. To date, Xia Yan's central role in socialist film production has received attention outside China only in a brief study of non-Chinese language: Sergei Toroptsev, "Xia Yan and the Chinese Cinema," *Far Eastern Affairs* 4 (1985): 126–31 (Institute of the Far East, USSR Academy of Sciences).

6. A sixteen-volume anthology of Xia Yan's works (9.2 million words) was published in China in 2005; many collections of his works edited by himself or his