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Source: *Feminist Studies*, Fall, 2005, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Fall, 2005), pp. 519-551

Published by: Feminist Studies, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/20459044>

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*“State Feminism”?*  
*Gender and Socialist*  
*State Formation*  
*in Maoist China*

*Wang Zheng*

ALTHOUGH THE COMPOUND PHRASE “state feminism” has a relatively short history, it has acquired various meanings in its transnational usage. Evolving from an early usage of “state feminists,” referring to feminists employed as bureaucrats in positions of power or women politicians who promoted gender equality policies in Scandinavia, “state feminism” has been conceptualized to enable scholarly examinations of the institutionalization of feminism in state agencies in a variety of political and economic systems.<sup>1</sup> The term has also been adopted in scholarly discussions of the Chinese socialist state’s gender policies but with a significant twist.<sup>2</sup> When applied to China it often portrays a paradoxical image of a state patriarch championing women’s liberation, although with vacillation and inconsistency. The conceptual chasm deserves a close examination. Does the chasm reflect fundamentally different sets of relationship of gender and the state between socialist state and capitalist state? Or could it be as much a function of intellectual parameters of feminist scholars as that of political realities under investigation? This empirical study on gender and Chinese socialist state formation attempts to shed some light on this curious phenomenon.<sup>3</sup>

Studies on gender and the Chinese socialist state have convincingly

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argued for the existence of a socialist patriarch.<sup>4</sup> Sharp feminist critical lenses that have enabled dissection of patriarchal state power, however, often get blurred when it comes to the examination of pro-women policies or laws passed by the state. It is never clear how pro-women laws and policies got to be initiated and passed by a patriarchal centralized power structure. Indeed, a methodological difference exists between studies on women and socialist states and studies on feminism in capitalist democratic states. In the latter case, documenting feminists' engagement with state power and identifying individual feminist actors in the process of shaping pro-women policies or institutions often constitute the main body of a study. Works on "femocrats" in Australia and the Netherlands are good examples of in-depth ethnographic studies of a transformative political process.<sup>5</sup> However, a parallel study on socialist state feminism has yet to be seen. The lack of desire or imagination to excavate women's role in the policymaking process in the socialist state may have much to do with a fast-held assumption about the socialist state: it is too centralized and monolithic to have any space for women's intervention. The story that follows questions the assumption of the total dominance of the socialist patriarchal state. To some extent, this study also questions conceptualizations of masculinist state power in any political system that rule out possibilities of women's subversive action in state processes. The issue here is not only to recognize women's agency but also to reconceptualize state power. Can a feminist theory of state critical of all dimensions of state power also account for sites and effects of feminist negotiation and intervention in dispersed state processes? Different from Wendy Brown's preoccupation with "finding the man in the state," finding women in the socialist state is the focus of this article.<sup>6</sup>

A women's organization, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), does often appear in discussions of Chinese state feminism or official feminism. However, it is usually defined as no more than an organ of the party-state that takes on the project of making Chinese women into statist subjects.<sup>7</sup> Seen as a coherent part of the patriarchal state, the women's organization curiously loses its gender. Gone with it is also women's agency. A common explanation for women's social advancement is that what women gained in the Mao era (1949-1976) was a result of the state's

top-down measures, or the Chinese variant of “state feminism.” As a recent study claims, “Under state-derived feminism, agency becomes the monopoly of the party-state. Changes in gender relations are inspired from above and mobilized through the organizational channels of the ACWF. The party-state, through the ACWF, defines the causes, methods, and vision of change and serves as the guardian and male protector of women’s rights and interests. Although women can be mobilized for change, they cannot be their own agents of change.”<sup>8</sup>

A key problem in this interpretation, as well as in other studies of a similar nature,<sup>9</sup> is the ambiguity of the nature of the ACWF. Is it an embodiment of the “male protector” or a representative of women, or both? Founded with the endorsement of top leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in April 1949, the All-China Women’s Democratic Federation (later renamed the All-China Women’s Federation) was designed as an umbrella of existing women’s organizations in the country. The ACWF continued a long history of *funü gongzuo* (women-work) in the CCP, which had recruited feminists and adopted their agenda at its inception in 1921—a moment when the feminist movement was at its peak. “Women-work” historically included mobilizing women to accomplish tasks for the CCP revolution and addressing issues concerning women’s interests, welfare, and equal rights. Both components were seen as complementary to each other and crucial for engaging women in a political process for women’s liberation. Women-work, however, was subordinate to the Party’s “central work”—never becoming a Party priority. The tension between women-work and the Party’s central work has been a constant reality for communist women in charge of women-work, as we will see below.

Led by women Party members who had rich experience in women-work in the Communist revolution, the ACWF went through rapid institutional development in the early 1950s and set up local branches at each administrative level, reaching down to rural villages and urban neighborhoods. By 1953 there were already over 40,000 officials of the Women’s Federation system nationwide working above the township and street level.<sup>10</sup> This large number of women officials usually vanishes in much of the discussion of state feminism in China. Where do we place them and their women-work in our understanding of socialist state building?

“Relocating” these women requires us to reject a view of the party-state as a coherent, seamless, and monolithic body and to open up inquiries that allow us to see in detail the fissures, gaps, disputes, contestations, and conflicting goals and interests in the internal workings of the state apparatus. Investigating the historical process of the Women’s Federation’s institutional development is such an inquiry that attempts to provide a glimpse of this complicated and unstable terrain.

Based on archival research and interviews of retired Women’s Federation officials in Shanghai, this paper focuses on the Shanghai Women’s Federation’s (SWF) activities around its grassroots organization, the women’s congress, in the early 1950s and explores the following issues. First, how did the SWF participate in socialist state building? Second, how did its participation transform the social landscape? Third, what can its struggle of institutional building tell us about gender politics in the state process? Examining these questions, this paper attempts to explicate a gendered process of “socialist state building” and to reconfigure the concept of “state feminism.”

#### EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE WOMEN’S FEDERATION IN SOCIALIST URBAN CHINA

One month after the People’s Liberation Army had entered Shanghai, on June 26, 1949, the preparatory committee for the Shanghai Democratic Women’s Federation (renamed the Shanghai Women’s Federation later) was established. It immediately started to investigate and register existing women’s organizations in order to “unify the Shanghai women’s movement.” Of the twenty-two existing women’s organizations in Shanghai that had been either CCP peripheral organizations or sympathetic to the CCP before 1949, the SWF identified six as *jiating funü* (housewives) organizations and combined them to form the Shanghai Housewives Association on August 22, 1949.<sup>11</sup> It took some debate within the SWF before it decided to include housewives in women-work. The class standing of housewives, in the CCP perception, was dubiously close to bourgeois. So it was necessary for officials in the SWF to stress that of one million Shanghai housewives (all women without stable employment at the time were lumped into this category), the majority were not bourgeois parasites but lower-

class and poor women. Appealing to Engels's theory of women's liberation, they argued that "her work is unpaid and has no significance for social production, but she is not a sheer consumer in society."

The long-term goal of organizing housewives is to liberate them from subordinate positions and to engage them in social production. The current goal is to prepare housewives intellectually and technologically so that our society will have a large reserve labor force. Meanwhile we should raise women's consciousness and make them understand that social liberation precedes women's liberation. Therefore we should closely connect social production with our work to support the front line. We should organize housewives and send some of them to factories and other occupations. The process of organizing one million housewives will gradually enable them to participate in various production departments.<sup>12</sup>

Although organizing housewives was a major effort of the new SWF, housewives were not perceived as its main constituency in 1949. "The Resolution on the Current Tasks of the Chinese Women's Movement" passed by the first national congress of the ACWF on April 1, 1949, stated clearly that "women workers should be the basis of the urban women's movement."<sup>13</sup> In the report on the first two months' work of the SWF, housewives ranked the last to be reached, following women workers, students, teachers, artists, and professionals. Establishing six contact lines to connect these various groups of women in Shanghai, the SWF intended to be an umbrella organization unifying all women, although with a clear awareness that its efforts might "bump and press" others.<sup>14</sup>

The emphasis on working-class women as the primary target group of urban women-work, although ideologically correct, soon brought the SWF into conflict with the newly established Department of Women Workers (DWW) of the Trade Union, which regarded it as its job to organize women workers. This conflict must have been a nationwide problem, for the ACWF stepped in, in 1949, to resolve it, by specifying that organizing women workers would be in the realm of the DWW of the Trade Union but that the DWW would be a group member of the Women's Federation at each of the levels of their hierarchical systems. Although this appeared to turn the DWW into a Women's Federation branch, by making the heads of the DWW a member of women's federations' execu-

tive committees, cooperation between the two organizations was guaranteed.<sup>15</sup> This model of cooperation between the two organizations, however, created a challenge for the SWF not faced by other urban women's federations because in Shanghai, the nation's largest industrial city with a population of more than 5 million in 1949, 170,000 women factory workers were removed from their agenda. The SWF had to actively look for an alternative constituency, a constituency that would define and legitimate its role in socialist state building. Organizing housewives, therefore, by their sheer numbers—more than one million—as well as their detachment from any other branch of the CCP organizational apparatus, soon became the SWF's central task, despite the general principle that women workers ought to be the basis of urban women-work.<sup>16</sup>

The identification of housewives as its organizational base led the SWF to explore new methods of organizing that had far-reaching implications. By late 1950 the Shanghai Housewives Association (SHA) had set up twenty-one district branches with individual housewives as members and through them intended to reach women in all neighborhoods. However, in late 1950 the ACWF urged local women's federations to speed up their grassroots organizing by forming "women's congresses" like those that had been created in the CCP-liberated areas to organize rural women. In the villages, women representatives were elected to a women's congress that in turn elected an executive committee to manage routine work relating to women. These women's congresses were representative bodies responsible for expressing local women's demands to the government and, in turn, explaining government policies to them. As such, it was hailed by CCP women leaders as the best organizational form for connecting women broadly and democratically. With the CCP's power extending to urban areas, the ACWF expected to establish women's congresses in cities as well.<sup>17</sup>

The SWF was quick to see the utility of its neighborhood-based housewives associations in this endeavor. The chair of the SWF, Zhang Yun, a Communist woman leader who had been involved in women-work since the 1920s, sent out work teams of SHA and SWF officials to selected neighborhoods to explore new methods of organizing women in urban areas. At the same time, however, the municipal government began imple-

menting a “mode of spatial organization” to organize the unemployed, self-employed, and nonemployed and placed its Department of Civil Administration in charge of organizing residents in Shanghai lanes<sup>18</sup> and streets into residents committees, constituted mostly by male residents, at least in its initial stage. A district government branch, called the “Street Office,” was set up in each precinct of a public security station to supervise about ten residents committees. And then, in December 1950, the SWF also decided to establish its grassroots organizations in the precincts of public security stations. In less than one year, women living in 10,009 lanes elected a total of 42,900 representatives and 6,000 chief representatives, and 120 housewives committees with 1,300 members were established.

The CCP’s creative ritual of mobilizing women was a well-developed practice in the Party’s long history, dating back to the early 1920s, of mobilizing the “masses.” What deserves our attention are the responses of women. The archival documents and memories of interviewees reveal that women were highly enthusiastic about participating in SWF mass rallies. In 1951 the Shanghai municipal committee requested that the SWF mobilize women for its “central work,” which at the time included a patriotic campaign against American imperialist intervention in Korea, suppressing counterrevolutionaries, promoting production, and improving state finances. A municipal directive specified that the SWF should organize women for a mass rally and parade on March 8, International Women’s Day, with the theme of protesting the U.S. rearming of Japan. The SWF successfully organized over 300,000 women to participate in the rally and parade, of whom 250,000 were housewives. The internal report reveals that many women joined the parade spontaneously.

Laoza District underestimated the number of participants. They thought five thousand women would come out, but actually ten thousand did. Among them were elements with complicated backgrounds such as prostitutes and bar maids, who created a sensation among the spectators. Although we originally decided not to ask old women to participate, there were also sixty- to eighty-year-old women traipsing along with the parade. There were also women parading with their kids. The spectators were so numerous that they crowded into the street and pressed the six parade lines into three lines. The police and guards were so busy keeping order that they were soaked with sweat.<sup>19</sup>



Although the theme of the parade was patriotism and anti-imperialism, interestingly, the report commented on its effect on women's empowerment. "Participants in the parade all felt that women have power and status now. Even men said, now women are a big deal. The Communist Party truly has its way, and even women are organized by them."<sup>20</sup> Leaving the praising of the Party aside, it is still clear that the parade had a gender overtone that both women and men recognized. If the CCP intended to use women to demonstrate popular support for their politics, women were also quick to utilize the new government power to cross gender and class boundaries. Parading in a public space with official endorsement, women in households and women of various subaltern groups all symbolically staged their legitimate position in the new political order. A patriotic parade carefully designed by the CCP was thus appropriated by women of different social backgrounds to produce political meanings important to them.

The parade had its special meaning for the SWF, too. From the beginning the SWF regarded it as a golden opportunity to mobilize women. Its plan for the March 8 celebration consciously aimed at combining the parade preparations with further organization of a representative system of women in residential areas. SWF's work did not rank high on the municipal agenda and ranked even lower at the district level. The municipal Party committee's attention and support was therefore a great opportunity not to be dismissed. Equipped with a mandate from the city authority, SWF officials were able to utilize district resources and assistance to extend its reach in neighborhoods and reportedly identified 5,792 new women activists in the process. Proceeding rapidly in the favorable political atmosphere, the SWF completed establishing the neighborhood women representative system and housewives committees in late 1951, which laid the institutional ground for the formation of women's congresses in the following year. Needless to say, women's impressive performance on March 8 enhanced the stature of the SWF in the eyes of the municipal authority as well as the public. It demonstrated that the SWF had a large constituency and had an important function in socialist state building.<sup>21</sup>

In 1952, the SWF decided to reach down further and replace chief representatives and housewives committees with a women's congress in the

jurisdiction of each residents committee. Women representatives elected by women in several lanes on the same block or adjacent area (usually with about five to six thousand residents) formed a women's congress. They in turn elected a women's committee that paralleled the residents committee. By early 1953, women in Shanghai lanes and streets formed 1,684 women's congresses with 16,964 members of women's committees and about 50,000 women representatives. Since then the women's congress has remained the grassroots organization of the SWF.<sup>22</sup> Zhang Yun's pioneering work in creating urban women's congresses and in organizing housewives was acknowledged by her supervisors. In 1953 she was promoted to the position of Vice President of the ACWF. Significantly, in 1953 its "Resolution on the Tasks of the Women's Movement" emphasized that work on housewives was an important part of urban women-work. Also in 1953, the revised Constitution of the ACWF specified clearly that the women's congress in rural townships and urban neighborhoods was the basic organizational unit of the national organization.<sup>23</sup>

This brief introduction to the development of the SWF inevitably erases the intensity and excitement experienced by SWF cadres and involved housewives in those days. I can only give a few sketches here to convey the extraordinary style of establishing a women's congress. In order to attract housewives to the first congress meeting and to make elected representatives proud of their new identity, the work teams would advertise the agenda of the meeting, which usually included talks by the district head and leaders of the SWF and special shows by professional performers. On the day of the congress meeting, housewives in each lane were organized to send their representatives away with fanfare. "The representatives all wore silk red flowers on their chests, walking in an orderly line, entering the auditorium. Behind them, teams of gongs and drums and *yangge* followed into the auditorium with drum beating and dancing. Every representative had a smile of pride and pleasure on her face."<sup>24</sup> Inside the auditorium, colorful silk flags were hanging all over and flowers were displayed on the platform. In some districts, representatives donated over one hundred silk flags and dozens of flower vases to celebrate the convening of the women's congress. But women's enthusiastic response could, at times, dismay SWF officials. One work report criticized, "Although it was

the representatives' wish to celebrate the founding of their own big family, it was still too extravagant and wasteful. . . . Shanghainese like to fuss in a grandiose style."<sup>25</sup>

#### FUDAIHUI (WOMEN'S CONGRESS)—

##### A PRECARIOUS EXISTENCE

The Women's Federation system, together with the nationwide Trade Union and Youth Association systems, have usually been perceived as arms of the centralized state that enjoyed institutional security in socialist China. The assumption neglects a history of precarious existence for the Women's Federation system, a history that sets it apart from the other two organizations. The story of securing its grassroots organizations—the women's congresses—epitomizes the tensions this gender-based organization aroused in the early days of state building.

The SWF's rapid development of grassroots organizations among housewives in 1951 generated ambivalent responses from different branches of the municipal and district governments. Anxiously exploring the ways of local governance in the big city, the municipal authority recognized the value of SWF's housewives associations; for when officials in the Public Security Bureau, the Department of Civil Administration, and the district governments were puzzling over whom to organize and how to approach residents, the Women's Federation at the level of each district had already hosted frequent meetings and workshops to train women representatives as grassroots activists in their neighborhoods. The gender-specific women's congresses with their emphasis on women's special needs were much more attractive to women than the early neighborhood organizations dominated by men. If a residents meeting was called by the male-dominated neighborhood organization, few women would attend; but if the meeting was announced jointly with the women's congress, many would.<sup>26</sup> Because male residents were an unstable force for neighborhood work due to their higher employment rates and because many had dubious political or social histories pre-1949 and were therefore considered untrustworthy, housewives became increasingly valued by the government both for being a stable workforce in their neighborhoods and for their political "purity." Thus, the municipal government emphasized the

importance of mobilizing housewives for neighborhood work and recognized the SWF's large role in organizing housewives to fulfill the Party's "central work."<sup>27</sup> In fact, many women representatives of the women's congresses were elected to the newly established residents committees.

Neighborhood work, a new term associated with the CCP's urban reorganization, encompassed all dimensions of urban management. Various orders and demands by different government branches were passed down through street offices to reach residents committees within their jurisdictions. A 1953 government report described the tasks of a street office in these words.

Its major work is the campaign. After the campaign concludes, there is still much work to finish. Besides that, the civil administration section requests it to work on relief and help families of military personnel and martyrs. The health section asks it to work on street sanitation, public hygiene, and immunization. The culture and education section asks it to run literacy classes and investigate the situation of school-age children. The district People's Court asks it to work on accumulated cases. The district Political Consultative Committee asks it to send out meeting notices and to report on how well representatives to the People's Congress connected with residents.<sup>28</sup>

The long list of tasks for residents committees also included collecting property and land taxes, rent, and scrap bronze; helping to sell insurance, local products, movie tickets, and patriotic bonds; fixing hazardous houses, dredging sewers, and repairing street lamps and wires. In short, neighborhood work covered everything in urban life except the production of commodities. Within the boundary of the miniature city—the neighborhoods—tens of thousands of housewives stepped out of their domesticity and broke gendered boundaries by engaging in all sorts of work in civil administration and public security. Many parts of the city saw an increasing physical presence of women who were "running" neighborhoods as, literally, "domesticated" social space—spaces that a few years earlier had been associated with gangland violence. Moreover, these highly efficient local managers worked without pay. In other words, identifying housewives for neighborhood work, the CCP found the most economical and effective way to address myriad pressing issues early in its experience with urban governance.

Nonetheless, although the SWF's role in mobilizing housewives for neighborhood work was valued by the government initially, its emphasis on women-work soon encountered problems. Facing the emergence of residents committees, the SWF's strategy in 1951 had been to place their officials in leading bodies at district and street levels doing neighborhood work and to select women representatives to work in residents committees. However, the SWF organized housewives not simply to fulfill the party's "central work." An important component of women-work was to address women's special needs, such as women's health and childcare, and to provide literacy classes and vocational training as a means toward women's liberation. Women's congresses were the vehicle for such women-work. But to the dismay of many an enthusiastic SWF official, they soon found that male officials in street offices and district governments were reluctant to deal with demands raised by SWF officials on issues relating to women's welfare. Although the SWF emphasized that its women's congresses were parallel organizations to the residents committees and should in no way be subordinated to or controlled by the latter, the residents committees swiftly became more powerful with their direct ties to district and municipal governments and public security bureaus. The SWF officials found the territory they first entered now being claimed by someone else.<sup>29</sup> Wu Cuichan, who was the director of a district Women's Federation in the 1950s, recalls, "When I was in the district, I worked with pilot sites in neighborhoods. I helped neighborhood Party secretaries and residents committees with their work. Thus people in the street office would welcome you. I could not singularly work on the women's congress. If I only stressed the work of the women's congress, people would see me as a nuisance. . . . In our contact with the street offices, to use an unpleasant term, we had to act obsequiously. They had power but we didn't."<sup>30</sup>

Department of Civil Administration (DCA) investigative reports described the women's congress and the residents committee as competitors who "vie for cadres, for the masses, and for work. If this one holds a meeting, the other will hold a meeting, too. . . . Even when both have worked on a task, they fight over who would give a talk on the work. Each regards itself as the one who accomplished the most."<sup>31</sup> How to address the messiness in neighborhood work became high on the DCA's agenda.

Apparently, women in the women's congress did not see themselves or their organization as secondary to the residents committee. Moreover, this competition at the local level was paralleled at the municipal level; although the SWF never considered its role secondary to the DCA, SWF officials were keenly aware of unequal relations at play in their daily work. Now, not because women's congresses were emphasizing women's special interests, but rather because they refused to play a subordinate role in carrying out "central work" in neighborhoods, they also became a nuisance to the DCA.

Wu's memory of a SWF official being seen as a nuisance by male officials is well substantiated by many documents in the SWF archives. On September 13, 1951, the director of the SWF, Zhang Yun, wrote a letter to the municipal Party committee, revealing that there was already strong sentiment against the SWF's work. The letter was to report on the consequences of a talk by the municipal leader Liu Xiao, with an apparently critical tone.

Liu Xiao in his talk suggested that the Housewives Association should concentrate on resident work in the neighborhood. We all think this is a glorious task. But because he did not make clear the relationship between work with housewives and other work, some party secretaries and directors of districts told district Women's Federation cadres, "From now on you should not agitate for autonomy [*nao dulixing*]. Comrade Liu Xiao said clearly that you should concentrate on neighborhood work." Such opinion reflects that some cadres have inadequate understanding of why we need women-work, why women should have their own independent organizational system, and why we should show concern for women's special issues, and so on.<sup>32</sup>

More than male officials' resentment toward women-work, what was at stake here was that male officials were denying the necessity of a women's organization. Significantly, in less than two weeks the municipal committee sent back a conciliatory reply to Zhang Yun's letter. Although it largely missed the point of her protest against male officials' hostility toward the SWF, it did instruct district committee members that if they misunderstood Liu Xiao's talk and disturbed the SWF's work, the municipal committee should be informed so as to check and correct such behavior.<sup>33</sup> This exchange is remarkably revealing of the relaxed political atmosphere within the Party in the early days of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The daring criticism by women cadres would soon disappear when political campaigns intensified. In 1958, Wu Cuichan was demoted for her “rightist tendency” simply because she had complained that the district party committee had not paid enough attention to the SWF’s work.

The opportunity for the DCA to restrain the women’s congresses came in 1953 when the municipal government began a campaign to “rectify residents committees.” The campaign was to purge impure elements from residents committees as well as fugitives from the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries who were taking refuge in residential areas. The DCA used the campaign to resolve the problematic relationship between residents committees and the women’s congresses. It called for “a unifying leadership” in neighborhood work and created regulations that defined women’s congresses as integral but subordinate to residents committees. The chair of a women’s congress should be the deputy director of a residents committee in order to coordinate work between the two organizations; but the women’s congress was no longer allowed to conduct any concrete work on its own initiative beyond conveying women’s demands to the residents committee and carrying out tasks assigned by the residents committee. The municipal government formalized the DCA’s regulation in an official document, “Tentative Regulations on the Organization of the Women’s Congress in Shanghai Neighborhoods.”<sup>34</sup>

It is not clear if the SWF top leadership tried to resist this redefinition of the women’s congress and its relationship to the residents committee. What is revealed in the SWF’s work reports is that the major setback was taken hard by many of its officials. A dispirited sense of inferiority seemed to suddenly emerge, which led to the SWF leaders’ repeated criticism of officials’ complaints that women-work was not valued and was inferior to other work or was meaningless. Addressing women officials’ “inferiority complex” (*zibei sixiang*) appeared high on the SWF’s agenda. Special meetings were held to help women officials understand the “seriousness and peril in such thinking.”<sup>35</sup>

The rising sense of inferiority was not only an expression of women officials’ negative experience in seeing the women’s congresses role curtailed; it was also generated by the confusion over the nature of women-work and the crisis over the SWF’s identity following its defeat by the DCA. The

SWF was formed for the double purpose of mobilizing women to carry out the party's "central work" and protecting women's interests. In the first few years of the SWF, the part of women-work that served women's interests included literacy education, vocational training, formation of small-scale cooperatives, finding employment opportunities for poor women and women with skills, providing information on women's health and infant care, publicizing the new Marriage Law, mediating domestic disputes that jeopardized women's interests, and so on. By the end of 1952, 40,000 women entered gainful employment through recommendations by the SWF. By mid-1956, 69,000 women in neighborhoods had become literate and 360,000 were in literacy classes. Although the SWF's accomplishments in this aspect of women-work were impressive, its major efforts were in support of the Party's central work. Large-scale mobilization of women called for patriotic donations for the Korean war (evidently housewives' donations financed eleven fighter jets), reporting on counterrevolutionaries hiding in neighborhoods, participation in the five-antis campaign (by admonishing their husbands to be law-abiding),<sup>36</sup> support for the state-planned economy by not rushing on commodities controlled by the government, purchasing government bonds, and participation in the general election for the People's Congress. In order to obtain housewives' support for these "central" tasks, a major part of local SWF officials' routine work was to raise women's political consciousness. Newspaper reading groups, study workshops, and activist training sessions were regular activities organized down to the neighborhood level via the women's congresses.

This lopsided work pattern, a result of the SWF's following Party directives, was not unquestioned by women officials. In the biannual summary report on the SWF's work in the second half of 1953, the section reviewing its weakness contains a revealing paragraph.

Because we have not done a good job on improving our cadres' work, the Women's Federation cadres sometimes do not have adequate understanding of the important significance of raising women's political consciousness and improving their organizational level through campaigns. They often express doubts, such as, "It is correct to mobilize women to participate in the central political campaigns called by the Party. But what have women gained through



these campaigns? What have they given to women? What can we say about our special work for women?" After discussions on the second National Women's Congress, and after repeatedly reviewing our work for the general election campaign, cadres generally have improved their understanding in this respect. Still we must educate them again and again.<sup>37</sup>

These forceful critical questions by women officials contrast sharply with the vague generalization of "improved understanding." Instead of presenting a routine self-criticism to its superior—the municipal Party committee—the paragraph could be read as the SWF's top leaders' euphemistic way of conveying women officials' critical voices to the Party authority. At the same time, the passage confirms that it was a common strategy for SWF leadership to use the Party's campaigns to consolidate its organizational building.

If the SWF top leaders had misgivings about mobilizing women for the Party's central work because it overshadowed the work for women, they had more to worry about after the DCA placed the women's congresses under the residents committees. Inside and outside the SWF, questions emerged about the necessity of the women's congresses because they performed the same tasks as the residents committees; some even suggested that the women's congresses should be incorporated into the residents committees. The SWF's emphasis on the Party's central work, therefore, turned out to prove the redundancy of the gender-based women's congresses. Seeing the legitimacy of its grassroots organizations challenged, the SWF leaders took pains to present a coherent and legitimate identity of the women's organizations while attempting to justify its concession to the residents committees. In many talks given to local women officials, the SWF leaders made great efforts to explain the necessity of having a women's organization at the grassroots level. The primary reason was what later became a familiar story to people in the PRC: that women had been the most oppressed group in the old feudal society; that even though women's lives changed rapidly in the new society, feudal remnants still remained; and that a women's organization was needed to educate women to fight against feudalistic thinking and to protect women's rights in their struggle against feudalism.

The explanation of the relationship between women's oppression and

the need for women's organizations often sounded negative in its depiction of women. One talk went on at length to describe how women's long-term deprivation of any rights resulted in "their narrow-mindedness, conservative stance, dependency, lack of courage to struggle independently, lack of desire for advancement, lack of common sense, slowness in comprehending new phenomena, and lack of concern for things around them." A women's organization was needed to educate them and raise their consciousness so that they would be able to become a crucial social force in the construction of socialism.<sup>38</sup> As the deputy secretary of the SWF Guan Jian insisted, "The residents committee is mainly to address residents' welfare issues, whereas the women's congress is a political organization that constantly fights against feudal ideology. It seeks women's thorough liberation along with the implementation of the Party's general line. This task is not what the residents committee can fulfill."<sup>39</sup> As one SWF official explained, "In the past there were two systems of organizations in neighborhoods. Although they seemed to be two organizations, they had the same functions. Our women's organization did not have our own routine work. Moreover, in the central campaigns women cadres just played the role of a residents committee's cadre, without thinking from women's perspective."

The idea of an autonomous women's organization with its own distinctive role to play at the grassroots was appealing; however that was not the direction the SWF could take because declaring such autonomy would be politically suicidal. So in the same talk, this SWF official had to warn against that kind of enthusiasm. "We do not mean to separate from the residents committee now. In fact, although we have two sets of organizations, we still have one set of work. What distinguishes our work is only the perspective." She went on to explain what the different perspective meant. The examples given were all gender-specific services such as providing childcare for women who joined parades (the residents committee was responsible only for mobilizing women's participation); or, when mediating domestic disputes together with the residents committee, the women officials should approach the disputes from the perspective of protecting women's and children's rights.<sup>40</sup> In such detailed demarcations of difference between the two organizations, the SWF inadvertently advo-

cated a woman-centered approach as the principle for the women's congress. Thus, retreating from the center stage of neighborhoods, the women's congress nonetheless acquired a more conscious gender identity.

The controversy over the women's congresses in Shanghai certainly alarmed Zhang Yun, who was now the chief executive official of the ACWF. In 1955, she organized the first national conference on urban women-work. Speaking to the delegates, she did not hesitate to directly confront the situation in Shanghai and other cities undergoing similar experiences.

Since residents committees were established in a few cities, some male and female cadres began to think of eliminating the women's congress at the grassroots level. This thought is not right. The residents committee is an autonomous mass organization of residents guided by the street office. The object of its work includes all male and female residents. The realm of its work relates to common issues and common demands of residents. Because the ideas and practices of valuing men over women still exist in our society, women still confront special problems in ideas, work, and personal life. Therefore, we must have a separate women's organization specialized in women-work. The women's congress is the grassroots organization of the municipal and district women's federations. Because the women's organization should not be eliminated, certainly its grassroots organization should not either.<sup>41</sup>

Apparently, to Zhang Yun in 1955, the women's congress in an urban neighborhood was no longer simply an organization to reach housewives but a solidly established component of the institution of the Women's Federation. The idea of eliminating the women's congress was absurd in the eyes of the top ACWF official who had worked hard to build the federation's institutional bases. Opponents of women's congresses justified their position by reference to a 1954 formal regulation on residents committees, issued by the central government, that specified formation of women-work committees as part of the residents committees. To this challenge, Zhang Yun's reply was firm and clear. If any neighborhood found setting up a women-work committee within the residents committee generated organizational repetition and waste of resources, then it meant the residents committee's women-work committee was unnecessary. "They may advise the local government not to set it up." The mes-

sage was simple: whatever you do, don't mess around with the grassroots organization of the Women's Federation. Zhang Yun added authority to her point with a quote from Lenin without specifying its source. "We need appropriate groups, special mobilizing methods, and an organizational format to conduct women-work. This is not feminism. This is an effective means for revolution."<sup>42</sup>

Not everyone heeded the ACWF top leader's adamant words. In 1956 the branch in the Shanghai People's Congress that managed local administration formally proposed a bill to eliminate women's congresses and to set up women-work committees under the residents committees as stipulated by the 1954 Regulations on Residents Committees. The Women's Federation appealed to the authority of the ACWF and reported the issue to Cai Chang, president of the ACWF, Zhang Yun, vice president, and Luo Qiong, a member of the executive committee of the ACWF, when these top women leaders visited Shanghai that year (their timely visit might have been a planned action to lend their prestige to the SWF as well as to settle the disputes over the women's congress). Cai Chang, who was the wife of Vice Premier Li Fuchun, at a meeting with the top officials of the municipal Party committee, the People's Congress, and the SWF gave a long talk on the women's congress, directly addressing three proposals, namely, merging the women's congress and the residents committee, eliminating the women's congress, and totally separating the women's congress from the residents committee. She defended the women's congress by appealing to the Party line, "It is not only beneficial for the work of the Women's Federation; more importantly, it helps to consolidate the connection between the Party and the masses and to consolidate the basis of the people's government."<sup>43</sup> Following this line, the women's congress should cooperate with the residents committee while clarifying its own functions. Cai gave detailed instructions on sorting out the institutional mess in neighborhoods that further confirmed the Women's Federation's presence along with the other two major municipal branches, the People's Congress, and the Public Security Bureau.

With Cai Chang's support and advice, the SWF resisted the move to eliminate the women's congress. Moreover, the SWF requested that the municipal government give the same financial support to the women's

Congress as it did to the residents committee and that women's congress executive committee members should receive the same subsidies as the residents committee members. The municipal Party committee might have had a better sense of the relationship between the women's congresses in Shanghai neighborhoods and the ACWF that was led by top CCP leaders' wives. It accepted the SWF's requests. But the battle was not over. In 1959 when mobilizing women in neighborhoods for the Great Leap Forward became the main job of the street Party committees, suggestions to eliminate women's congresses emerged again. The SWF had to engage in justifying the necessity of its grassroots organization all over again.<sup>44</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE TUG-OF-WAR OVER THE WOMEN'S CONGRESSES

What can we make of this tug-of-war over the women's congresses in the early 1950s in Shanghai? In what ways can it complicate our understanding of gender and the socialist state and "state feminism"? Most visibly, the story demonstrates that the relationship between the Women's Federation system and the Party was far from a one-dimensional story of subordination and dominance. The Women's Federation was no doubt an organ of the Party and Women's Federation officials were firmly identified with the Party's goal of socialist revolution. However, their identification with the Party did not exclude the possibility of expressing their own gendered visions of a socialist state. Indeed, the early days of the PRC witnessed diverse visions of a new China inside and outside the Party. Women in the Party thought their long-awaited moment had finally come: women's full liberation in the new socialist China. Despite the limitations in their understanding of women's liberation, women communists, especially those working in the Women's Federation, took it as their task to fulfill the Party's promise of women's liberation in socialism. The vision and methods of organizing housewives, as demonstrated here, were not granted by some abstract state patriarch but grew out of the Women's Federation officials' initiatives. The move to establish the women's congresses clearly expressed the top Women's Federation leaders' urgent sense of creating an institutional foothold for women in the incipient stage of a new state. With the Party's mandate of social reorganization, the Women's Federation grabbed

the moment to make its own institutional claims in the social transformation. The landscape of a socialist state was thus inscribed with women's vision and accomplishments that are all too often overlooked or mistaken as the deeds of the state patriarch.

Exactly because of the Women's Federation officials' keen awareness of gender conflicts and gender hierarchy in the formation of the socialist state, they were constantly looking for opportunities to enhance the status of the women's organization and to gain institutional power. Understandably, the time when the Women's Federation had the most power and resources was when the organization was most useful to a particular central task. As a result, the Women's Federation repeatedly demonstrated its faithfulness to the Party by enthusiastically throwing itself into the Party's central work. This pattern, disappointing to feminist observers, was in part a result of a conscious strategy theorized by senior CCP women leaders. For example, Deng Yingchao<sup>45</sup> in a talk to the Central Women's Committee, in 1948, even before the founding of the Women's Federation, presented this strategy when clarifying the nature of the Women's Committee. It was to be an advisory unit with full freedom to do research and make suggestions, rather than a governmental policymaking or executive branch. The committee should assist with general policies and ongoing campaigns and issues; only in this way "will our suggestions be timely and be considered by others." Timing was especially important.

In general, we should proceed with a consideration of the effect, not with our subjective enthusiasm. When we estimate that a suggestion won't be accepted, we should rather postpone it. At the same time, we should grab the right moment. That is, we should be cooperative, have a focus, foster and prepare for the right moment. A suggestion will be effective only when the time is ripe and we calculate others may accept it.

Following these instructions, Deng gave a concrete example of an effective intervention by the Women's Committee. The resolution of the land reform conference in 1947 included the importance of women-work after a long period of silence on the subject by the Central Committee. How did that happen? Deng explains:

(1) At the time of the retreat from Yanan, assisting in land reform, we asked the

Central Committee in its telegraph to local branches to request that they pay attention to women-work and collect material on women.

(2) Before the opening of the land reform conference, we first sent a notice to each representative, asking if they brought the material on women and telling them we hope they would include women-work in their land reform work report to the conference.

(3) We organized talks by representatives. Therefore, of 29 people reporting on their work, 19 talked about their women-work and mentioned the importance of women-work.

(4) My own speech was after the 19 representatives' talks. This is much more powerful than if I had shouted and yelled all by myself.

(5) After the land conference, we held a meeting of the Women's Committee, sent out a telegraph drafted by five WC members, and published a newspaper editorial on the subject.

(6) To further improve and consolidate our work, we proposed to hold a conference on women-work in December.<sup>46</sup>

Significantly, in the Chinese text (not identical to my translation), the sentence describing each action is without a subject. Subconsciously or not, the speaker was covering up her manipulative role behind the scene by leaving out the subject of action. Agency is nevertheless expressed in the Chinese text in conveying a clear sense of careful plotting, a tone of secrecy, and a marginalized subject engaged in a subversive act. Similarly revealing in Deng's language is that she often used "others" to refer to male power holders. Even though the whole talk was "politically correct," in the sense that Deng emphasized that women-work had to be a part of the whole of the Party's central work, the use of "others" obviously indicates the presence of a gender awareness of "us" and "them."

Similar to Deng Yinchao's manipulative moves during the debate over land reform, ending with a drastic increase in rural women's participation in land reform and rural women's organizations, the SWF's active role in the CCP's reorganization of Shanghai also resulted in a rapid development of the Women's Federation's urban grassroots organizations. These cases demonstrate the agency of Communist women doing women-work and explicate gender negotiations within the Party power structure. More significantly, these cases reveal a pattern of the Women's Federation's strategy that has so far received little scholarly attention.<sup>47</sup> The limited space here

does not allow more documents on other similar cases. But briefly, from land reform, the 1950 marriage law (a pro-woman law drafted by the Women's Committee headed by Deng Yingchao), paid maternity leave, to the law to protect women and children's rights in the post-Mao reform era, every pro-woman policy or legislation resulted from women officials' successful maneuvering behind the scenes, rather than from some favor granted by a benevolent patriarch. The CCP's on-again-off-again emphasis on women's interests, observed by many feminist scholars, was not because the Party was simply unable to make up its mind, but rather it was the result of successful or failed feminist maneuvers within the Party. In the least congenial political circumstances, CCP feminists adopted an inactive stance on promoting women's interests and withdrew to the bottom line of survival by following the dominant Party line. When the political atmosphere changed and new opportunities emerged, they would swiftly jump at the opportunity to raise women's issues and to expand and consolidate women's organizations. "State feminism" in the Chinese socialist state, after all, is no less an expression of feminist contention within the state than it is in capitalist states.

The Women's Federation's enthusiastic work on housewives also led to redrawing gendered social spaces in socialist state formation. Historically, the local administrative system—*baojia*—had been run by men, and many neighborhoods in Shanghai had been gangsters' spheres. Mobilized by the SWF, women stepped into the male space and became managers of local governance and community service in socialist China. In 1954 women already constituted 54.6 percent of the members of residents committees and the percentage has kept increasing to well over 80 percent in Shanghai in the post-Mao era. Extending their domesticity to the management of the "socialist big family," these women turned neighborhoods into a female space. Along with a gendered transformation of social spaces was the construction of new identities for many of the women involved. Many a lower-class woman who had been a subaltern by both gender and class became a speaking subject for the first time in her new role as a neighborhood cadre. I examine the transformation from housewife to neighborhood cadre in another study.<sup>48</sup> What should be emphasized here are, (1) that the SWF played a large role in making women into state subjects, a point stressed by



many feminist critics; and (2) that such state subjects, like the socialist state formation, were not made entirely according to a prescribed masculinist script (if there were such a script), but embodied complicated contestations between gender and class at both institutional and individual levels. In an interview with two veteran Women's Federation officials, Wu Chuichan and Cao Shunqin, when Wu described how male officials in local governments sniffed at women-work, Cao cut in vehemently: "That is why we need a women's organization!" Cao listed various strategies the Women's Federation deployed to subvert male monopoly of power in different branches of government, for example, creating the March 8 Flag Bearer (*sanba hongqishou*) in 1960 as a measure to break the male monopoly of "labor models."<sup>49</sup> "No one would fight with us over March 8," she commented with a cunning smile.

The SWF's negotiation with masculinist power was not only expressed in what they did, but also in what they did not do. Zhao Xian, who succeeded Zhang Yun as chair, mentioned her disagreement with the pronatalist policy of the Party in the early 1950s. "At the time the Party emulated the Soviet Union, calling upon women to become glorious mothers. The Soviet Union lost half of its population in WWII. But China had a large population. Women had to go out to work. How could they be glorious mothers? So we did not advocate that women become glorious mothers." (It was this interview that explained why I never came across any reference to "glorious mothers" in the SWF's files.) Unfortunately, the quiet refusal to follow the Party's policy in this case did not go unnoticed. It was listed as one of Zhao Xian's "mistakes" in 1957 when she was labeled a rightist and removed from her position.<sup>50</sup> This meaningful example would go unnoticed by the historian focusing on what the SWF did, had not Zhao Xian recounted this story that meant so much to her. How many more such quiet resistances by women have been buried in history?

## CONCLUSION

The Chinese feminist engagement with the state took place in a quite unique political context. In the early 1950s, the heritage of an earlier feminist discourse combined with Engels's theory of women's liberation provided leverage for communist women to maneuver for gender equality.

In contrast, in the West the emergence of state feminism was in the context of autonomous feminist social movements. If a feminist discourse that had long been an integral part of the modernity project in China was not necessarily less powerful than political pressure from a feminist movement, women in the CCP were, nevertheless, constrained by a history of the CCP's suppression of "bourgeois feminism." They would always find themselves walking a fine line between advocating women's interests and being named "bourgeois feminists" for seeming to insist on the primacy of gender issues. Their intense efforts to theorize the relationship between women-work and the Party's "central work" reflected CCP feminists' keen awareness of this central dilemma. In short, communist women's fight for women's equality coexisted with the real danger of stabs from behind for that very fight.

This unique paradox largely explains the strategy of communist women's intervention as well as the puzzle that such intervention has long gone unrecognized. To make a feminist maneuver effective, it was best to do so under the rubric of the Party's "central work" or statist projects, unnoticed by masculinist leaders. Deng Yingchao, in her 1948 talk, had this advice to women officials: "Because we cannot do women-work singularly or in isolation, the accomplishment of women-work cannot be expressed as a singular and isolated phenomenon either. Therefore, we should work in the spirit of a nameless hero."<sup>51</sup> The necessity to be a nameless hero (appropriating CCP terminology again) speaks volumes about the treacherous political environment where inside feminist agitators functioned. It also complicates scholarly investigations and feminist theorization. The open speeches or formal publications of communist women were mostly in CCP official language. Evidence of their commitment to statist projects is abundant. How do we tease out possible hidden feminist intervention from apparent reiteration of statist production? Furthermore, how do we conceptualize a feminist contestation that both subverts patriarchal dominance and reproduces masculinist language and subjectivity? Wendy Brown's caution against state-centered feminists' possible production of "regulated, subordinated, and disciplined *state* subjects" makes tremendous sense in the Chinese context.<sup>52</sup> Still, what is illustrated here is not an either/or case. The mixed effects of sub-

versive actions coded in compliant language deserve future studies.

The tug-of-war over the women's congresses can also be read as part of a process of demarcating institutional boundaries in the formation of the socialist state. Political scientist Timothy Mitchell suggests that we "examine the political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between state and society is produced." He emphasizes that

We must take such distinctions not as the boundary between two discrete entities but as a line drawn internally, within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained. The ability to have an internal distinction appear as though it were the external boundary between separate objects is the distinctive technique of the modern political order.<sup>33</sup>

Although Mitchell's object of analysis is the postwar capitalist state, his insights are useful for thinking about the formation of the Chinese party-state. In the initial stage of building a state apparatus, various CCP branches had to negotiate and define their territories. By specifying the subordinate role of the women's congress to the residents committee, the municipal government drew a distinct line that curtailed the institutional capacity of the SWF and defined the secondary status of this "mass organization" to government branches. The SWF's summary of its work in 1954 reveals its recognition of such institutional containment in these words: "We have now further clarified the nature of women-work and found the correct method of women-work (mainly assisting work [*peihe gongzuo*]). We must conscientiously work on what we should do. For that which should not be done by the Women's Federation we should suggest the concerned party do. We have reduced our blind enthusiasm in our work."<sup>34</sup> Regardless of its needed service to mobilize housewives and its proved capacity to work with women in neighborhoods, the Women's Federation was simply not allowed to play the leading role in local governance. This was the first hard lesson for the Women's Federation officials who were blindly enthusiastic about women's full participation in socialist construction. At the institutional level, unequal gender relations in the Party were naturalized, consolidated, and legitimated by the internal distinction between the "government" and the Party-led "mass organization," a distinction full of ambiguity but nonetheless taking on "the appearance of structure" in the Communist state.

This CCP-sponsored non-governmental women's mass organization apparently does not fit existing conceptual categories of women's organizations. It is within both the state apparatus and the local communities. Recalling their work in the 1950s, veteran Women's Federation officials in interviews all insisted that the Women's Federation was a mass organization, not a branch of government. Wu Cuichan, who had worked both as a local government official and a Women's Federation official at different times, summarized the difference between the two most succinctly. "They had power, but we didn't." In other words, Women's Federation cadres have always seen themselves as working outside the government, assisting the government but without governmental power. The Women's Federation officials' emphasis on their non-governmental status is not a new pretext invented for the 1995 Fourth U.N. Conference on Women in order to attend the NGO forum. Rather it is substantiated by a long history of producing and maintaining boundaries between the government and the "mass organizations" in the CCP's power structure.

Exactly because of the ambiguous location and elusive identity of the Women's Federation system, any theory based on a rigid conceptual line between state and society would fail to illuminate or explicate the complicated dynamics and multiple power relations operating in the daily practices of an organization that claims to serve as a "bridge" or "linkage" between the Party and women. It requires grounded historical research to examine its diverse, unstable, and often hidden activities in different historical periods in order to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between Chinese feminism and the socialist state as well as gender politics in the PRC. Fully recognizing that in the Mao era the Women's Federation was the only legitimate women's organization *defining* women's interests with the authority of the Party, that it did involve itself heavily in statist projects, and that even the first generation of Women's Federation officials could be more bureaucrat than feminist, I nevertheless insist that closer scrutiny shifts our understanding of this Chinese Janus whose other side has long been veiled. Unveiling the subversive and constructive feminist side helps to reveal the complexity of power relations in the formation of the party-state and to reconsider the meanings of CCP feminists' practices, especially in local communities.

The obscured Chinese state feminists' interventions should be highlighted in our study of the PRC not only for a better understanding of gender and socialist state formation, but also for a clearer view of the prospects of what this widespread and deeply penetrating women's organization may be capable of doing in the ongoing socioeconomic and political transformations in today's China. My interviews with current SWF officials indicate that neighborhoods (now refashioned as "communities") have, during this past decade of accelerated privatization, once again risen in importance in the eyes of various government branches. The Women's Federation again faces serious challenges from competing official institutions that are eager to create a niche in this terrain. As a solidly established institution, the Women's Federation is no longer worrying about the existence of its grassroots organizations but is consciously concerned with what kind of role it may play in the current social and political transformation. In other words, the Maoist socialist revolution has long been undone, but this huge national organization of women established in the early Mao era still lives on. And it lives on in a new political context: the era of post-U.N. Women's Conference when global feminist issues and perspectives have been made legitimate topics for circulation in the Women's Federation system by a new cohort of Women's Federation officials. This gender-based organization, with its institutional roots in the Mao era but its theoretical outlook now being shaped by contemporary global feminisms, is bound to introduce interesting dynamics to the process of decentralization and privatization in China.

#### NOTES

1. See Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy G. Mazur, eds., *Comparative State Feminism* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995) for a detailed discussion of the evolution of the term.
2. See Mayfair Mei-hui Young, "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women's Public Sphere in China," in *Spaces of Their Own*, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Young (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 35-67.
3. The conceptual difference also exists in some studies on state feminism in non-Western countries. These studies assume the role of the state in changing gender rela-

- tions and promoting women's social advancement without examining feminists' agitation in the state. I do not claim that my findings on China can speak for other non-Western countries, although my question on methodology may have more general implications. For studies on state feminism in non-Western countries, see Mervat Hatem, "Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (May 1992): 231-51; Jean Robinson, "Women, the State, and the Need for Civil Society: The Liga Kobiet in Poland," in *Comparative State Feminism*, 203-20; and Jenny B. White, "State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman," *NWSA Journal* 15 (Fall 2003): 145-60.
4. Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, Family, and Peasant Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Phyllis Andors, *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); and Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985).
  5. For works best illustrating a different methodology in investigating state feminism in the West, see *Comparative State Feminism*; and Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).
  6. See Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995). Brown's concept of the late modern liberal state is not monolithic, but dispersed and diffused. However, women's expanding engagement with the state, although briefly acknowledged, does not figure in her conceptualization of the state.
  7. See Tani Barlow, "Theorizing Women: *Funü*, *Guojia*, *Jiating* (Chinese Woman, Chinese State, Chinese Family)," in *Body, Subject, and Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), and "Politics and Protocols of *Funü*: (Un)Making National Woman," in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, ed. Christina K. Gilmartin et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). Also, Louise Edwards, "Constraining Women's Political Work with 'Women's Work,'" in *Chinese Women—Living and Working*, ed. Anne E. McLaren (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 109-30. Different interpretations of the ACWF's role in the post-Mao era appear in *Chinese Women Organizing*, ed. Ping-Chun Hsiung et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2001).
  8. Jude Howell, "Women Politicians and Change" (paper presented at the Political Studies Association Fifty-first Conference, 10-12 Apr. 2001, Manchester, UK).
  9. See Wang Qi, "State-Society Relations and Women's Political Participation," in *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation*, ed. Jackie West et al. (London: Macmillan, 1999).
  10. There are three nationwide hierarchical mass organizations organized by the CCP: the Trade Union, the Youth Association, and the Women's Federation. The Trade Union organizes women and men workers by workplace and includes the Department of Women's Workers at the national, provincial, and municipal level and a committee of women workers at the workplace. The Youth Association follows a similar pattern, organizing students at schools (middle school and up) and working youth in workplaces, without gender distinction, at national, provincial and municipal levels. The

Women's Federation differs from the other two and parallels the governmental administration system, with women's federations at the national, provincial, municipal, district, street office, and neighborhood levels. Also, a woman official responsible for women-work was placed in government administration offices—both the street offices and the neighborhood residents committees. Officials of the various levels of the women's federations are appointed by the Party committee at the same administrative level (e.g., the chair of the Shanghai Women's Federation is appointed by the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the CCP rather than by the ACWF). The exceptions are: (1) the women's congress which is elected by residents of a particular neighborhood, and (2) the executive committee of the women's congress which is in turn elected by elected representatives of the congress.

The figure of 40,000 officials appears in Deng Yingchao's report to the second Women's Federation National Congress in 1953. See "Sinianlai zhongguo funü yundong de jiben zongjie he jinhou renwu" (A summary of the Chinese women's movement in the past four years and future task), in *Zhongguo funü yundong wenxian ziliao huibian* (An anthology of source material on the Chinese women's movement), ed. Chinese Women Cadres School (Beijing: Chinese Women's Press, 1988), 2: 171. The two-volume anthology is classified as internal document, which is not for public circulation.

11. *Jiating funü*, literally, family woman, is a term that emerged as a contrast to the new term "career woman" in the 1930s.
12. "Guanyu jiating funü gongzuo de jidian yijian" (Views on the work on housewives), Shanghai Archives 1949, box C31, file 1, and record 2. (All archival work is in the Shanghai Archives. Hereafter only date and numbers for box, file, and record are provided). Reclassification of "housewives" was achieved eventually by both the Women's Federation's redefinition of the class standing of this group and the theory of women's liberation that defined those participating in social production as "liberated women." "Housewives" thus became backward elements as well as lower class in the public perception. The irony is that identifying housewives as its main constituency, the SWF failed to gain esteem in the eyes of "liberated women," urban professional women.
13. "Zhongguo funü yundong dangqian renwu de jueyi" (The resolution on the current tasks of the Chinese women's movement), in *An Anthology of Source Material*, 2: 23.
14. "Shanghai shi minzhu fulian choubiehui liangge yue gongzuo gaikuang" (Summary on the two months' work of the preparatory committee for the Shanghai Democratic Women's Federation), 1949, C31-1-2.
15. See Zhang Yun, "Guanyu nügong gongzuo de jige wenti" (About work on women workers), in *An Anthology of Source Material*, 2: 38. "Shanghai shiwei guanyu funü gongzuo de jue ding" (Shanghai Party Committee's decision on women-work), and the letter to Zhao Xian from Tian Xin and Wang Zhiya, 31 Mar. 1950, 1950, C31-1-9.
16. Because there were diverse groups of women in this one million, lumping them together into one category might also have been an SWF strategy to gain more institutional power.
17. *An Anthology of Source Material*, 2: 32-33, 41-42.
18. A "lane" in Shanghai usually has walls to separate it from another lane. This architec-



tural design became the material basis for the CCP's social reorganization. One lane usually had one or several residents groups, and in the jurisdiction of a residents committee there were about one dozen residents groups from several lanes. The mode of spatial organization was not entirely an innovation of the CCP. Historically China had a *baojia* system that managed local population by residency. The system was enforced in Shanghai during the Japanese occupation in World War II and continued by the Nationalist government in the late 1940s. When the CCP took over the city, it set up local public security stations according to the spatial division of the *baojia* system. What was new in this reorganization was that women replaced men as neighborhood managers. For a detailed discussion of this gendered social transformation, see Wang Zheng, "Gender and Maoist Urban Reorganization," in *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 189-209.

19. "Shanghai shi fuwei gongzuo gaikuang baogao" (Shanghai women's committee's work report), 1951, C31-1-31.
20. Ibid.
21. "Fuwei guanyu jinian sanba guoji funüjie gongzuo fangan" (The women's committee's plan for the celebration of March 8), 1951; "Quanshi sanbajie youxing renshu tongjibiao" (Citywide statistics of people in the parade on March 8), 1951, C31-1-31.
22. Shanghai Women's Gazetteer Compilation Committee, ed., *Shanghai funüzhì* (Shanghai women's gazetteer) (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2000), 265. In 1996 there were 2,809 women's congresses in Shanghai. Besides the neighborhood-based women's congress, currently the Women's Federation's grassroots organization also includes a "women-work committee" in each work unit, organizing women in gainful employment. "Grassroots" may be a misnomer here since the organization did not grow spontaneously out of local community but was part of state building. The linguistic difficulty here suggests the existence of an under-theorized phenomenon in the PRC.
23. *An Anthology of Source Material*, 2: 179, 181.
24. "Jiangning qu diyi paichusuo jiating funü daibiao huiyi dianxing shiyan zongjie baogao" (A summary report on the work for the housewives congress in the first police station in Jiangning District), 1951, C31-2-57. *Yangge* is a form of folk dance.
25. "Funü de zuzhi qingkuang" (The situation of organizing women), 1951, C31-2-57.
26. "Dui jinhou jiedao linong jumin weiyuanhui zuhi de yijian" (On future organization of residents committee), 1951, C31-2-57.
27. "Gei shiwei bangong ting de baogao" (A report to the office of the municipal Party committee), 13 Sept. 1951, C31-1-37.
28. "Guanyu muqian banshichu zuzhi jigou qingkuang ji jinhou yijian jianbao" (Briefing on the Street Office's organizational structure and suggestions for future work), 20 July 1953, B168-1-772.
29. In 2004 Zhao Xian, the second chair of the SWF, told me unequivocally, "The women's congress came first, and the residents committee came later. The residents committee was staffed mostly by the cadres of the women's congress and neighbor-



- hood work was mostly done by women cadres.”
30. Wu Cuichan, interview with author, Shanghai, China, 1 July, 2002.
  31. “Shanghaishi jumin weiyuanhui zhengdun gongzuo qingkuang baogao” (A report on the work on rectification of the Shanghai residents’ committees), 23 Oct. 1954, B168-1-14.
  32. “Gei shiwei bangong ting de baogao” (A report to the office of the municipal Party committee), 13 Sept. 1951, C31-1-37.
  33. “Shiwei pifu” (The municipal Party committee’s reply), 26 Sept. 1951, C31-1-31.
  34. “Shanghaishi jumin weiyuanhui zhengdun gongzuo qingkuang baogao” (A report on the work on rectification of the Shanghai residents’ committees), 23 Oct. 1954, B168-1-14.
  35. “Benhui guanyu linong zhengdun zhong funü gongzuo de tongbao” (On woman-work in the rectification of neighborhood), 1954, C31-2-235; and “Shanghaishi fulian 1954 gongzuo zongjie” (Shanghaishi fulian’s review of work in 1954), 1955, C31-1-95.
  36. In 1952 the CCP started a five-antis campaign targeting business owners. The five antis included anti-bribing, anti-tax evasion, anti-stealing state property, anti-fraudulence in production, and anti-stealing financial information. The SWF took much effort to include wives of business owners in this campaign, urging them to persuade their husbands to follow the Party’s policies.
  37. “Shanghai minzhu fulian 1953 nian xiabannian gongzuo zongjie” (Shanghai Democratic Women’s Federation’s review of work in the second half of 1953), 1954, C31-1-75.
  38. “Linong funü daibiao huiyi de xingzhi renwu buke baogao” (A talk on the nature and tasks of the neighborhood women’s congress), 1954, C31-2-235.
  39. “Huiyi jilu” (Notes on Guan Jian’s talk), 1954, C31-1-100.
  40. “Linong funü daibiao huiyi de xingzhi renwu buke baogao.”
  41. Zhang Yun, “Guojia guodu shiqi chengshi funü gongzuo de renwu he dangqian jixiang juti gongzuo baogao” (A talk on the tasks of urban women-work in our country’s transitional period and current work) in *An Anthology of Source Material*, 2: 216.
  42. Ibid.
  43. Zhao Xian, “Yi Cai dajie zai Shanghai shica” (Remembering Sister Cai ‘s inspection in Shanghai), in *Shanghai fulian sishi nian* (Forty years of Shanghai Women’s Federation) (Shanghai: Shanghai Women’s Federation, 1990), 8.
  44. “Guanyu Shanghaishi fulian jiceng fudaihui de zuzhi wenti” (On the organizational issues of Shanghai Women’s Federation’s Women’s Congress), 1956, C31-1-161; “Benbu 1959 nian gongzuo jihua” (A work plan for 1959), 1959, C31-1-248.
  45. Deng Yingchao was a renowned young feminist leader in the May Fourth period (1919-1924) in Tianjin. She then joined the Communist Party and married Zhou Enlai in 1925. She played the major role in incorporating May Fourth feminist ideas into the first Marriage Law of the PRC.
  46. “Deng Yinchao tongzhi zai zhongfuwei huiyi shangde fayan” (Deng Yinchao’s talk at the meeting of the Central Women’s Committee), in *Zhongguo funü yundong lishi ziliao 1945-1949* (Historical documents of the Chinese women’s movement, 1945-1949) (Beijing: Chinese Women Press, 1991), 240.

47. Ellen Judd, in *The Chinese Women's Movement between State and Market* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), observes a similar strategic pattern in the Women's Federation activities in the 1980s to 1990s.
48. Wang Zheng, "Gender and Maoist Urban Reorganization," in *Gender in Motion*, 189-209.
49. March 8 Flag Bearer is an honored title granted to selected exemplary female workers and professionals. The title not only expresses official recognition of a woman's remarkable accomplishment, but also comes with some privileges as Labor Models would have. March 8, International Women's Day, has been observed since the early days of the CCP, a sign of the Party's commitment to women's liberation.
50. Zhao Xian, interview with author, Eastern China Hospital, Shanghai, 13 Sept. 2004. For a discussion of women's resistance to the Party's pronatalist policy, see Tyrene White, "The Origins of China's Birth Planning Policy," in *Engendering China*, 250-78.
51. Deng Yingchao, "Deng Yinchao tongzhi zai zhongfuwei huiyi shangde fayan," 241.
52. Brown, *States of Injury*, 173.
53. Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect," in *State/Culture*, ed. George Steinmetz (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 77-78.
54. "1954 nian Shanghai fulian gongzuo zongjie" (A summary of Shanghai Women's Federation's work in 1954), 12 Apr. 1955, C31-1-95.