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**Abstract**

This article explores the life and images of Huang Bamei (1906–1982)—a female bandit, guerrilla leader, and women’s organization coordinator. During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), Huang was involved in smuggling and trade with pro-Japanese forces. The Nationalist authorities recruited her troops and hid her past by portraying her as a wartime heroine and model housewife. Yet, in later times she participated in guerrilla warfare and was portrayed as a pirate queen and a Han traitor, and her roles and images changed dramatically with the wars. Drawing on government archives, newspapers, memoirs, and films, this article examines how Huang developed survival strategies during turbulent times and how competing regimes used her images discursively to promote various social and political agendas and stimulate Chinese patriotism and war commemoration in different historical periods. Through a close reading of the life history of a woman made legendary by the state and the media, the article shows how Huang’s changing roles and competing representations were deeply embedded in the wartime politics of modern China and Taiwan. The author argues that Huang’s guerrilla practices, as well as her involvement in banditry, formed an integral part of not only her survival strategies but also a range of options for achieving legitimization.

**Keywords:** Huang Bamei, pirate queen, female bandit, heroine, Second Sino-Japanese War, Chinese Civil War, Taiwan

**Introduction**

On December 13, 2014, China observed its first national day of remembrance to mark the seventy-seventh anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre of 1937. Media representatives and officials flooded into Nanjing to attend the ceremony. In Shanghai, the “Stalingrad on the Yangtze” that had fended off Japan’s invasion before the massacre, a ceremony was held at Jinshanwei Battle Memorial Park, where the new “Jinshanwei Resistance War Historical Archives” displayed an exhibit of locally renowned

figures who participated in the war. One such figure was Huang Bamei 黃八妹 (1906–1982), a woman famous during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). Many visitors might have been unaware of Huang Bamei’s wartime history, but a special guest, Huang’s grandson Xie Weike 謝維克,<sup>1</sup> and a Shanghai University professor who had studied Huang’s history, Xu Youwei 徐有威, were witnessing a significant moment in the commemoration of this woman.<sup>2</sup> Although the exhibit apparently ignored how Huang had joined the Nationalist Party to battle the troops of the Chinese Communist Party, it presented to the public the mysterious tales of this “Double-Gun Woman Huang Bamei” (*Shuangqiang Huang Bamei* 雙槍黃八妹). Since the 2014 exhibit, Huang’s stories have surfaced on social media, history channels, and websites.

An interesting parallel took place across the Taiwan Strait, on the island of Taiwan, where Huang had spent the latter half of her life. Contrary to the mainland Chinese view of Huang as an “anti-Japanese heroine,” Taiwanese narratives of her life have focused on the second phase of the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949) and the cross-Strait conflict between the Nationalists and the Communists from 1949 to 1955. The enemy in these accounts subtly shifted from Huang’s role with the “Japanese devils” (*riben guizi* 日本鬼子) to that with the “Communist bandits” (*gongfei* 共匪) while the regimes across the strait competed for a louder voice in Huang’s narratives by focusing on her role either in the Second Sino-Japanese War or in the Chinese Civil War. The experiences of displacement compelled many mainlanders (*waishengren* 外省人) who had retreated to the island following the civil war to reminisce about their roots and the places they had called home.<sup>3</sup> One such place was Dachen 大陳, a group of islands where Huang Bamei had both participated in guerrilla warfare and taken care of widows and orphans. Although many in Taiwan have forgotten that Huang was once known as a notorious “pirate queen” who raided coastal communities and fought against the Nationalists, the mainlanders viewed her as a righteous woman who had led her people through these turbulent moments.<sup>4</sup> The trauma of the retreat to Taiwan had produced a completely different picture of Huang, but to many who had experienced this bitter history, Huang was still a “woman with a hero’s virtues” (*jin’guo yingxiong* 巾幗英雄) who had bravely defeated fierce enemies throughout a difficult period.

It is not surprising that tales of Huang Bamei fighting the enemy were utilized to promulgate patriotism in the commemoration of the war.<sup>5</sup> Yet, like the images of many

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<sup>1</sup> For Xie Weike’s account of this exhibit, see Xie (2014).

<sup>2</sup> For Xu Youwei’s brief account of Huang’s life following the exhibit, see Xu (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Although in recent decades scholars have paid increased attention to the life histories of mainlanders, there remains an omission of the social, cultural, and political aspects of mainlanders’ migration following the Chinese Civil War. For the most comprehensive study so far, see Yang (2012).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *United Daily News*, March 20, 1954, 3; March 21, 1954, 3; March 23, 1954, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Historians have examined how political regimes and literati mythologized Chinese “national heroes” in order to preach Chinese patriotism, shape Chinese national identity, and promote

heroic figures in Chinese history, Huang's images were consciously appropriated by later commentators to suit their various needs and specific circumstances. Most current narratives primarily pay attention to Huang's extraordinary experiences as a guerrilla leader who won various battles with the aid of undertrained mercenaries. Few devote sufficient attention to the evolving portrayals of Huang Bamei in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong and how actors with various interests and views confronted, negotiated with, and responded to the maneuvering of her images and memories. Such neglect probably arises from the fact that Huang Bamei's stories had been neither extensively mythologized by the Nationalist and Communist governments nor used largely in the discourse about "recapturing Taiwan" (*shoufu Taiwan* 收復台灣) or "launching a counterattack against the mainland" (*fangong dalu* 反攻大陸). It is also likely that her notorious acts of raiding coastal regions and killing Nationalist and Communist soldiers had long caused the regimes across the strait to downplay her role as a bandit. Nevertheless, as argued in this article, Huang Bamei's multiple images have been discursively used to promote various social and political agendas and stimulate Chinese patriotism and war commemoration during different historical periods. Following the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, her competing images as heroine and pirate queen became sources of exoticism and romance in film and fiction across East Asia, particularly in Japan, mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> Whereas Huang's images as a heroine had been utilized in wartime to mobilize the masses and reconstruct the roles of women, images of her as a sexually unrestrained woman outlaw were also produced and circulated, primarily by her opponents.<sup>7</sup> As a result, to understand how the media and political regimes manipulated a woman's image during and after the wars, it is intriguing to look at Huang's competing representations in light of the vicissitudes of cultural and national imaginations, as well as her tortuous journey through a turbulent era in modern China and Taiwan.

To comprehend the process of the production of Huang Bamei stories, it is important to note that, in a period that continued the trend of what Philip Kuhn calls "parallel hierarchies of militarization" in orthodox and heterodox organizations (1970, 165–188), Huang encountered a culture in which the boundaries between "bandits" and "soldiers" were blurred. Mercenaries, both legal and illegal, called their enemies "bandits" (Lary 2010, 59).<sup>8</sup> Like many local gangs, Huang Bamei and her group engaged in smuggling and banditry while waiting for opportunities to join the establishment to obtain benefits and resources. The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War gave her

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political propaganda. See, for example, Cohen (2009), Sun and Huang (2004), Shen (2000), Jiang (2006), and Croizier (1977).

<sup>6</sup> Historian David Ambaras (2018) explores how Chinese maritime space became a zone of fantasy in postwar Japan. He examines the life of a pirate queen, Nakamura Sueko (1909–?), and novels featuring pirate leaders in South China Sea, including Huang Bamei.

<sup>7</sup> For recent studies of women in wartime China, see Hershatter (2007, 2018), Guo (2018), Barnes (2018), Ma (2015), and Li (2010).

<sup>8</sup> For a recent study of China's militarization during the Republican era, see McCord (2014).

an opportunity to extend her influence, as the Nationalist military recruited bandits, secret societies, and local armed groups. The authorities hid her past by portraying her as a “patriotic woman”; yet fears of her potential threat to local communities did not cease until the end of the Chinese Civil War. After the Nationalist government had retreated to Taiwan, Huang conducted guerrilla warfare against the Communist forces. The turbulent time had provided her with ample opportunities to switch allegiances and join forces with different sides. Her multiple images, together with the discursive construction of villains and heroes, made her stories popular both during and after wartime.

Moreover, as many scholars argue, violence and illicit force—including banditry, piracy, feuding, and secret societies—were long-standing, integral elements of Chinese society (Lewis 1990; Ownby 1996; ter Haar 2000; Robinson 2001; Rowe 2007; Wang 2004; Antony 2010, 2016; Davis 2016; Wang 2018). Recent studies also argue that increased illicit trade and underground activities were closely related to the expansion of political regimes and the development of political economy in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia (Tagliacozzo 2005; Thai 2018; Ambaras 2018). Legitimization was jointly constructed by the trend of local militarization and the ways people approached order and disorder in wartime China and East Asia. The arguments within this article echo the scholarship that notes how violence and disorder had long been “sanctioned” by both the state and ordinary people in Chinese society. Huang Bamei’s guerrilla practices, as well as her involvement in banditry, formed an integral part of not only her survival strategies but also a range of options for achieving legitimization.

Recent studies have also reassessed the practice of collaborators during the Second Sino-Japanese War, challenging conventional approaches that either adopt moral judgments or presume a clear boundary between collaboration and resistance. These studies explore various figures and groups that worked with pro-Japanese organizations, ranging from puppet regimes and intelligence groups to merchants, local elites, and army agents (Wakeman 1996, 2000, 2003; Barrett and Shyu 2001; Brook 2005; Zanasi 2008; Xia 2017). Unfortunately, we still know little about how nominal characters and marginalized groups strategized their actions between competing regimes and connected with them in order to survive this turbulent time. The Huang Bamei stories reveal a precious example of a female outlaw who managed to maintain an alliance with regimes and local armed groups throughout wartime. She experienced tension with the Nationalist army during their collaboration and conflicts with the pro-Japanese organizations while they were working together. The newspapers and literature described her as either a “Han traitor” or a heroine, contesting images that not only demonstrate how regimes and media developed various ways of characterizing this woman but also expose her complicated actions and changing roles throughout the war.

Furthermore, recent studies explore how Chinese women participated in a wide array of work in social, cultural, and political spaces in wartime (Li 2010; Guo 2018; Barnes 2018). Gail Hershatter (2007, 2018) examines how women participated in wars, revolutions, and various campaigns during and after different battles. Hershatter (1997)

and Christian Henriot (1997) respectively explore how women were dragged into the sex industry and how they acted and responded to the existing institutions under China's social, cultural, and political circumstances. Zhao Ma (2015) explores lower-class women's tactics of coping with poverty during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Dan Shao (2005, 2011) examines the life of Aisin Gioro Xianyu (Yoshiko Kawashima, 1907–1948), whose identity was torn between being a Japanese, Chinese, and Manchu bannerman. Louise Edwards (2016) explores the lives and roles of several women warriors and spies, as well as their experiences of being drawn into “total militarization” of society. Based on the findings of these groundbreaking works, this article adds to the understanding of a woman who participated in smuggling and banditry to survive poverty, gained connections with regimes to sustain her own groups, and emerged as a pirate queen and guerrilla leader to endure the turbulent wars in modern China and Taiwan. The case of Huang also demonstrates how the images of a female outlaw were manipulated by competing regimes for differing political agendas, while Huang herself also developed strategies for dealing with these regimes and armies in World War II and the Cold War.<sup>9</sup>

Lest we think that we have garnered enough fragments of Huang Bamei's life, we should note that the richness of her literary representations, together with the scarcity of her appearances in official documents, may make her disappear inside the conventions of her own stories. Most narratives exaggerate her shooting skills and her bravery in fighting to such an extent as to make them seem legendary. The retrospective construction of her bandit past, including the stories about her collaboration, and sexual relationships, with gang leaders, also raises doubts about the accuracy of all of these accounts. Moreover, although there exist in the literature abundant details regarding her famous acts of killing “Japanese devils,” it remains unclear how she defeated the well-equipped Japanese forces with her undertrained soldiers. As argued in this article, Huang's changing roles in wartime, as well as her competing representations under different circumstances, were an integral element of wartime politics in modern China and Taiwan.

### Early Life in Jiangsu and Zhejiang

Numerous sources have depicted Huang Bamei's legendary childhood deeds, but there are few known records of her early life. Sources reveal that Huang was born in 1906 to a poor family in Jinshan County of Jiangsu Province. Although she had the maiden name of Cuiyun 翠雲 (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 141),<sup>10</sup> she was widely known as Bamei 八妹

<sup>9</sup> For recent studies of life on the front lines and the complicated relations between Taiwan, China, and the United States during the Cold War, see Szonyi (2008) and Lin (2016).

<sup>10</sup> *Wenshi ziliao* 文史資料 (Literary and historical materials) is a source compiled and edited under the guidance of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Although the collections in this source may not be accurate in their accounts of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, this article has made careful use of many memoirs and social surveys particularly for their value in representing local perspectives.

(eight, or the eighth, sister). Some sources assert that *Bamei* refers to her being the eighth child in the family (Chenke 1939a, 1939b); others suggest that Huang got this name because she had a pair of downward-sloping eyebrows that look like the Chinese character for “eight” (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 141). Bamei’s surname—either Wang or Huang—also remains a mystery.<sup>11</sup>

Huang Bamei’s hometown—either Fuwangdai or Hehengdai—was located right on the border of Shanghai and Huang’s ancestral place, Pinghu County, which faces south on Hangzhou Bay. Over the past two centuries, this region had become a hub for travelers and migrants, as well as for the transport of goods. The Huangs resided along the canal of Huanggutang 黄姑塘, which connected the towns between Zhapu 乍浦 and Jinshanwei 金山衛 ever since the eighteenth century (Zhu 2012, 174; *United Daily News*, May 6, 1982, 3). The residents along the southeast coast had long been involved in smuggling and piracy. From a young age, Huang assisted her father in selling and transporting smuggled salt (Ding 2013, 207; Zhu 2012, 174). Records suggest that in addition to smuggling, Huang’s family managed several small businesses. Her mother Huang Xiuzhu 黄秀珠 operated a small dramshop that sold wine, sticky rice dumplings, and spiced broad beans. Her father set up a gambling table at the shop, where he took a fee from each gambler and earned a portion from each pot (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 141). This lifestyle seems to have greatly influenced Huang’s life and career. Throughout her prime, smuggling and small business were an integral part of Huang’s career and survival strategy, regardless of her roles in the military and local communities.

According to the local narrative, Huang was sent as a child bride to a Wu family several miles north. The Wus opened a barber shop at Qianyu 錢圩 village, and Huang’s fiancé studied at the Longmen Normal School (Longmen shifan xuexiao 龍門師範學校) in Shanghai. Huang was reported to “have a rough character and have been keen to attack and confront” (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 141). In the end, the Wus found it inappropriate to keep her in the family, and they abrogated the agreement and sent her back home (Zhu 2012, 174; *Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 141). It remains unclear if this tale is true or not, because no official documents mention her early marriage experiences.

Like her marriage story, the stories of Huang’s gun-shooting skills exaggerate her tough and masculine character. Many sources narrate how she developed a strong body at a very young age. She was known to have started shooting practice at the age of twelve and to have mastered shooting with both hands by the time she was just fifteen (Zhu 2012, 174). Local tales even claim that Huang once encountered two pirate ships at sea and swiftly killed nine pirates with just two guns (Zhu 2012, 174).

The media also produced rumors and narratives on Huang’s sexual affairs with influential figures. According to retrospective narratives, Huang had an affair with a salt

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<sup>11</sup> Both Wangs and Huangs had established their villages in the area where Huang Bamei and her family resided. Her father reportedly had a matrilineal marriage with the Huangs and was called by his wife’s surname. See *Jinshan wenshi ziliao* (1991, 141) and Zhu (2012, 174).

merchant in Pinghu, Shi Lianyuan 施連元 (or Shi Dianyuan 史殿元), while connecting with both an anti-smuggling squad and the chief smuggler of the Lake Tai Gang (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 142). The stories seem to have exaggerated the number of men with whom Huang had slept, and fed rumors that she had an affair with Xu Ashu 徐阿書, the leader of the Lake Tai gang, to extend the influence of her Pudong gang, which covered parts of Shanghai, Jinshan, and Hangzhou Bay.<sup>12</sup> There are numerous illustrations of the gap between the ways that the media presented Huang and what her life was actually like. The local stories claimed she had a salacious life, which allowed her to expand her business and network of influence through sexual relationships. Yet, no other sources confirm the relationships between Huang and these leaders, except for the later reports made by a well-known newspaper, *Shen Bao*.

In 1931, Huang hit the headlines, as Xu Ashu had initiated a large-scale robbery in Ganpu 澉浦 town by Hangzhou Bay. The Jiangsu government quickly assembled a fleet and eventually defeated Xu's army. During the investigation, the followers of Xu confessed that "Wang Bamei" and her inmate, "Shi Dianyuan," played an active role in the revolt and provided many rifles for the rebels' use.<sup>13</sup> The Jiangsu police also discovered that a large proportion of the robbers came from Zhapu and Pinghu, instead of Xu's Lake Tai region to the north. However, because the police were still looking for clues about the Zhapu groups, they were unable to capture the fleeing couple. Xu and his chief lieutenant were beheaded right after the investigation, and during the following year Huang and Shi hid in various places.

In 1932, almost a year after the incident of Xu Ashu, Huang emerged to raid many areas of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Using an alias, "Woman He-Zhang" (*He-Zhang shi* 何張氏), Huang robbed, kidnapped, and murdered ordinary people. She took this opportunity to hijack a steamship and rob eight wealthy families. She is reported to have shot dead various officers when she robbed the steamer.<sup>14</sup> After this incident, Huang again managed to escape, but the government started to watch this increasingly notorious gang leader.

In July 1933, the Jiangsu provincial police finally captured Huang Bamei at the Shanghai International Settlement. Although Shi Lianyuan was with Huang at the scene, he fled without being caught. The policeman discovered a colorful picture of Huang Bamei, which, according to *Shen Bao*, was identical to one that had been found during the investigation of Xu Ashu. Huang was quickly transferred the next morning to the First Special District Court of Shanghai. In the official report, Huang's real name was Wang Bamei, but she claimed that she was "Woman Zhang-Wu" (*Zhangwu shi* 張吳氏), who had an old mother at home and a six-year-old with her husband Zhang Jinsheng 張金生. She further claimed that she had never known any person called "Shi Dianyuan." The water

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<sup>12</sup> *Shen Bao* 21662, August 3, 1933, 13; 21629, July 1, 1933, 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Shen Bao* 21629, July 1, 1933, 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Shen Bao* 21661, August 2, 1933, 14.



police challenged the credibility of Huang's claim before the court<sup>15</sup> and subsequently, the case was handed over to the water police for further investigation.

In the following month, the police obtained more information from Huang Bamei, and she confessed that she had cohabited with Shi Dianyuan for three years. However, she denied joining Shi and Xu's Ganpu revolt and claimed that she was in Songjiang during the incident. She also denied her role in the hijacking of the steamship and the murder of the passengers. Moreover, she contested the allegation of her participation in the North River Gang's robbery, which was led by Gao Guiyou 高貴有. She admitted that the firearms detected in the Ganpu revolt belonged to her but claimed that they had been grabbed by Xu's followers without permission. She further denied any involvement in the plotting of any of these revolts or robberies.<sup>16</sup>

Whether or not Huang had told the truth, her confession did not convince the military judges. In three weeks, Huang and Gao Guiyou were sentenced to death.<sup>17</sup> The case caught the public's attention. On August 3, 1933, *Shen Bao* published the confession of Huang Bamei. Although this was not the first news report featuring Huang, it was the first in which Huang's photo appeared (figure 1). The picture does not seem to show any viciousness; however, in accordance with the court ruling, which sentenced her to death, the newspaper article stated, "This female bandit has extraordinary arm power. She is abnormally atrocious. She runs extremely wild in Jiangsu and Zhejiang. She sweeps all and could never be beaten."<sup>18</sup>

Although Huang had not confessed to any charges regarding the robbery, the *Shen Bao* reporters firmly believed that her execution was only a matter of time.<sup>19</sup> However, Huang's family had already started to work behind the scenes to save her. According to the accounts of Jinshan residents, Huang's mother asked a Nanqiao 南橋 man named Li Tianmin 李天民 to help Huang. Li's brother-in-law Shen Menglian 沈夢蓮 was a district police director. He asked the authorities to be lenient with Huang, and she was soon released from prison. Afterward, Huang was reported to have lived at Li's house and helped his family manage their teahouse. Rumors spread that during her stay in Nanqiao, she had an affair with a man of local influence and made a living by managing gambling and other small businesses (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 142; Jiaxin 1939). Although the *Shen Bao* reports did not emphasize her sexual life, except for her cohabitation with Shi Dianyuan, popular tales incorporated her sexual activities into her post-trial stories, even though she stayed away from the public view and continued her small businesses as a rather ordinary person.

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<sup>15</sup> *Shen Bao* 21629, July 1, 1933, 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Shen Bao* 21662, August 3, 1933, 13.

<sup>17</sup> *Shen Bao* 21684, August 25, 1933, 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Shen Bao* 21662, August 3, 1933, 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Shen Bao* 21699, September 9, 1933, 14.



Figure 1. The first published photo of Huang Bamei accompanied by the sensational commentary: “This female bandit has extraordinary arm power. She is abnormally atrocious. She runs extremely wild in Jiangsu and Zhejiang. She sweeps all and could never be beaten.” Source: *Shen Bao*, August 3, 1933, 13.

### From Most Wanted to Anti-Japanese Heroine

The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War provided Huang with a great opportunity to restart her career. The Nationalist army needed to recruit local armed groups to conduct guerrilla warfare. In late August 1937, the Chinese spymaster Dai Li 戴笠 formed a unit called the Special Task Force of the Jiangsu-Zhejiang Operations Committee (*Su-Zhe xingdong weiyuanhui biedongdui* 蘇浙行動委員會別働隊, hereafter STF). Later, renamed the Loyal and Patriotic Army of the Jiangsu-Zhejiang Operations Committee (*Su-Zhe xingdong weiyuanhui zhongyi jiuguojun* 蘇浙行動委員會忠義救國軍, hereafter LPA; Guofangbu qingbaoju 1962, 1, 4, 7–8), this unit became an important part of the Chinese secret service during the Second Sino-Japanese War. One of the most influential committee members, Du Yuesheng 杜月笙, controlled three of the five major branches (Guofangbu qingbaoju 1962, 8). Because Du had headed the Green Gang (*Qing bang* 青幫) and associated underground societies for a while, he was familiar with “soaking up” (*shoubian* 收編) local toughs and guerrilla members.

Huang and her followers had never received any military or intelligence training, and she might not have survived the Japanese invasion without funding or government connections. However, like many local gang members, she was not able to join the formal structure of the STF, and hence had no formal record in the STF or the LPA.<sup>20</sup> During the first four years, Huang either allied herself with local forces, possibly including the Japanese-allied Ding Xishan 丁錫山, or fought on her own. At some point during this period, she met the man who later became her husband, Xie Yousheng 謝友勝, a Zhapu native. Xie was believed to be a division captain of the Jiangnan Forward Marching Corps (*Jiangnan tingjindui* 江南挺進隊), a troop that had recruited local gangsters while maintaining connections with the Nationalist army (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 142–143; Liu 1983; Jiabin 1939).

The Battle of Shanghai in 1937 had destroyed many regions surrounding Shanghai. Without connections to either pro-Japanese or anti-Japanese forces, Huang and her followers would have been attacked by both the Chinese and Japanese armies. Yet the severity of the situation did not take away public criticism of Huang's enlistment in pro-Japanese forces.<sup>21</sup> In August 1938, after Huang was captured from a pro-Japanese organization, *Eastern Pictorial* (*Dongfang huakan* 東方畫刊) issued a picture of the captured pirate leader (figure 2). The photo of Huang Bamei conveys that a recent "Han traitor" (*hanjian* 漢奸) with a pale face and stereotypical dark sunglasses has been captured by the government armies and is engaging in pleasantries with the Nationalist authorities. The intriguing combination of treacherous and optimistic images reflected the ongoing situation in China, in which various "Chinese" armies opportunistically wandered between different camps. The caption reads, "Wang Pa-mei [Wang Bamei], the notorious pirate queen who joined the bogus regime in Shanghai, being captured by our guerrilla forces in Pootung [Pudong]."<sup>22</sup>

On the contrary, Ding Xishan, who had turned on his Japanese allies and captured Huang and other pro-Japanese soldiers, was widely praised by the media. In November 1938, *Shen Bao* praised Ding for his generous attitude toward pro-Japanese leader Xu Hongfa 徐鴻發. The reporter asked Xu Hongfa to learn the lessons of Huang Bamei and Li Tianmin, who had fought on the side of Japanese and been gravely defeated by Ding. The reporter also said that Huang had "forfeited her integrity" (*shijie* 失節);<sup>23</sup> in a later

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<sup>20</sup> Although some sources asserted that Huang had been recruited to the LPA through the help of Du Yueheng, the official records in the *Gazetteer of the Loyal and Patriotic Army* make no mention of Huang in any of the LPA's branches in different periods.

<sup>21</sup> In addition to Chinese sources, including *Jinshan wenshi ziliao* and *Dongfang huakan*, documents written in Japanese and English mention Huang's connection with the Japanese army during the early period of the Second Sino-Japanese War. See *China Weekly Review*, May 14, 1938, 306, and *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 7, 1938. Thanks to David Ambaras for these sources, which are also cited in his book (Ambaras 2018).

<sup>22</sup> *Dongfang Huakan* 1938, 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Shen Bao* 23,232, November 3, 1938, 11.

issue, a reader of *Shen Bao* called Huang a “Han traitor.”<sup>24</sup> It is intriguing that Huang was soon recruited by the Nationalist troops, but Ding Xishan left the LPA and established his own pro-Japanese army.<sup>25</sup> The portrayal of Huang changed dramatically, and the media started to praise her brave resistance against Ding and other pro-Japanese elements.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 2. Photo of Huang Bamei, the “notorious pirate queen,” being captured by Chinese guerrilla forces. Source: “Zhanzheng zhaopian” (1938, 10).

In 1939, a magazine in Jiangxi, *Friends of the Wounded* (*Shangbing zhi you* 傷兵之友), published an article aimed at creating a legendary image of Huang Bamei. The article depicted Huang as an active member of the “greenwood” (*lülin* 綠林) heroes. It described how her compatriots called her “the Double-Gun Heroine Wang Bamei,” and her shooting skills impressed all the members of the outlaw societies (*jianghu* 江湖). According to the article, Huang Bamei’s past was undoubtedly one of banditry. This past had nourished her “chivalry and courage,” and Huang Bamei “had long washed her hands of the matter of greenwood [banditry and chivalry].” When the Japanese troops destroyed her hometown, Huang, a “hero of chivalry and openheartedness,” called up all patriotic youth and fiercely fought against the enemies. Even after her boss was bought and seduced by the Japanese, Huang insisted on standing at her post and protecting her country (Jiaxin 1939, 8).

<sup>24</sup> *Shen Bao* 23,328, January 25, 1939, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Shen Bao* 23,481, July 14, 1939, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Academia Historica, No. 008-010701-00019-010.

This description was typical in that it emphasized Huang's patriotic spirit while downplaying her bandit past in favor of her courageous present. The story of Huang in this issue of *Friends of the Wounded* was copied and plagiarized by many later reports. From 1939 on, many similar reports appeared in the media, mixing fictional accounts with folklore and historical facts. The magazine *Frontline* (*Qianxian* 前線) published a fictional work featuring Huang Bamei. Writing under a poetic penname, "A Dust Man" (*Chenke* 塵客), the author compared Huang with two literary figures—the heroine Mulan 木蘭, a legendary female warrior in Chinese literature, and the double-spear-carrying warrior Huang Ping 黃平—and asserted that neither was greater than the modern-day heroine Huang Bamei, because she had rescued the nation from its plight. To demonstrate Huang's extraordinary life, the author traced her patriotism to her childhood. The young Huang Bamei once lamented the weakness of the nation on the shores of the West Lake, a place that has influenced poets and literati throughout Chinese history. She then quickly learned and mastered various martial arts, including climbing walls, leaping onto roofs, running fast, and developing quick reflexes. Empowered with these skills, Huang, an honest woman, made use of her feminine charms to attract the "beastly" Japanese officers and killed them with her guns upon being sexually harassed (Chenke 1939a, 45–48; 1939b, 23–24). Huang's intriguing combination of femininity and chivalry was at the heart of these narratives; both the state and the media needed a motivating case like her—a legendary woman whose diverse images merged heroine and outlaw—to unite the people in the fight against the enemy.

### The Games behind the Battles

The year 1940 marked a turning point in Huang's career. That year, she joined the army of Mao Sen 毛森, one of the top intelligence leaders of the Nationalist government and a major commander of the LPA.<sup>27</sup> Mao had just escaped from detainment by the Japanese government and had established a new base at Shaolu 紹魯, Zhejiang. Under the instructions of Dai Li, Mao founded the Western Zhejiang Operations Corps (*Zhexi xingdongdui* 浙西行動隊) to recruit pirates, bandits, and local toughs (Mao 1999). This was a new opportunity for Huang to work as a government soldier, and it was close to her familiar territory.

As Mao Sen commented shortly after the founding of the new corps, Huang "brought her men and guns to hang upon me." He described her as "a common woman who was kind and gentle and had Buddhist beliefs." He downplayed her previous smuggling background by stating that "she had made a living by selling salt with her husband, Xie Yousheng." Mao's remarks avoided Huang's prior background of banditry and piracy. However, he admitted that this "army of great chivalries" (*daxia budui* 大俠部隊) was hard to control because there were many "runaway fugitives" (*wangming zhi tu* 亡命

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<sup>27</sup> For Mao Sen's role in the LPA, see Guofangbu qingbaoju (1962, 11).

之徒) and “true men of outlaw societies” (*jianghu haohan* 江湖好漢). Borrowing words that Dai Li had said to him, Mao stated, “These people killed humans without batting an eye; they either killed the enemies or killed their own people” (Mao 1999, 121). Mao, of course, needed these tough people to help the corps’s work behind enemy lines. He assigned Huang and Xie the task of detecting hiding enemies and establishing underground networks in order to detect the activities of Japanese armies and the pro-Japanese organizations.

Mao admitted that Huang’s being female played a role in her guerilla work. He stated that Huang Bamei combined the images of “double gun” and “woman” and one who “carried some mysteriousness and made a loud splash.” Although her troop was merely “a crowd of undisciplined people” (*wuhe zhi zhong* 烏合之眾) and “simple peasants and peddlers,” after several months of training, they began to take shape as a guerrilla force and were able to make use of villagers for their intelligence work (Mao 1999, 120). In fact, other commanders also mentioned Huang’s female status, especially after she entered the government’s military system. Ruan Yicheng 阮毅成, who headed the Civil Affairs Office of the Zhejiang Provincial Government in wartime, recalled that some officers in the provincial government believed that “a woman who had never received education and could not read a word” could not serve as a guerrilla commander. Ruan defended Huang, arguing that “anyone who keeps the nation in the mind could serve as commander, male or female, regardless of education level” (Ruan 1983, 93). Hence, the appointment was made, and Huang became the commander. According to Mao, she enjoyed being called “Commander Huang” (Ruan 1983, 93).

In the following years, Huang took part in several battles, especially in western Zhejiang (“Fuyun jiyao: Nüjie Wang Bamei jiang cong shang qianxian” 1943). While she built connections with the Nationalist army, she inevitably encountered forces with diverse political agendas. According to a later account by the Communists, Huang and Xie were captured in 1942 by the New Fourth Army, an experienced Communist force with a high level of discipline. No further evidence shows any correspondence between Huang and the New Fourth Army, but Huang and her people—according to the Communist account—were released after a brief “education.” (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 143). In 1943, following the effect of the alliance between China and the United States in expanding the Pacific War against the Japanese, the LPA received training and arms from the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO). The U.S. military also assisted Huang’s troops by offering eight new submachine guns and four new pistols (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 144).

Not surprisingly, after Huang entered the Nationalist army, the state apparatus began to promote her image as a commander. In October 1945, *United Pictorial* (*Lianhe huabao*) published a full-page report featuring Huang Bamei and her guerrilla warfare. Interestingly, the title of the report was “Colonel Huang Baimei” (*Huang Baimei shangxiao* 黃百梅上校), with an additional title in a larger font, “The Double-Gun Woman General Huang Bamei.” Like “Huang Baiqi” (黃百器), the name “Huang Baimei” (黃百梅) was an alias given by the Nationalist authorities, as it sounded more elegant

than the vulgar “Huang Bamei.” In the description, the editors intentionally avoided mentioning Huang’s bandit and pro-Japanese past. Instead, she was depicted as a righteous person who voluntarily fought against the Japanese and led a large crowd of female comrades (*nü tongzhi* 女同志). This account emphasized that these heroines “can serve as spies in civil affairs and work as warriors in military affairs.” Unlike previously published photos, which emphasized her image as a pirate, in this report, Huang is shown dressed in a military uniform (figure 3). Her face looks serious and majestic, even where she is pictured with her child and husband (“Huang Baimei Shangxiao” 1945, 13).



Figure 3. “Colonel Huang Baimei” (*Huang Baimei shangxiao* 黃百梅上校) in a report emphasizing that such heroines “can serve as spies in civil affairs and work as warriors in military affairs.”  
Source: “Huang Baimei Shangxiao” (1945, 13).

The promotion of her heroic and patriotic images soon encountered an embarrassing turning point. In 1945, Huang returned to her hometown and led the Pinghu Community Defense Corps (*Pinghu ziweidui* 平湖自衛隊).<sup>28</sup> After only a couple of months, however, she was said to have triggered a revolt against the government. The media reported that Huang had left her post at the Pinghu security corps with hundreds of followers and a large number of firearms and headed to the Lake Tai area. They further reported that in addition to her mutiny (*huabian* 譁變), Huang raided local communities along the lake and sent her soldiers to scout the military forces of the local government (“Shuangqiang Wang Bamei huabian ru Taihu” 1946, 4). *Shen Bao* also received information that Huang attempted a rebellion but was soon countered by the local defense corps.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Shen Bao* 25,668, September 15, 1945, 1

<sup>29</sup> *Shen Bao* 24,514, May 17, 1946, 2.

In late 1946, a Shanghai-based magazine, *Begonia* (*Qiuhaitang* 秋海棠), published an article titled “She Shot Her Husband to Death with Her Own Hands [*qinshou jibi qianfu* 親手擊斃前夫]: The Motivations behind the Renegade Double-Gun Wang Bamei!” A large subtitle read, “The Captain of the Community Defense Corps Wanted More Than What She Got. She Feared Being Reported and Now It’s Too Late for Regrets.” The article reported that, although Huang had never changed her pirate ways, many people still wanted to engage in profitable relations with her and honored her as a godmother. The reporter thus lamented, “A nearly forty-year-old woman had more than one hundred godsons.” As to her rebellion, the author argued that it was partly because she had been a “little emperor” for too long and was not satisfied with her current title of county defense corps captain. Another reason, as the article explained, was that the Zhejiang provincial governorship had just changed from Huang Shaoxiong 黃紹雄 to Shen Honglie 沈鴻烈, and it remained unknown whether the new governor would try to suppress her revolt (Nuofu 1946, 9).

The conspiracy theory was echoed by numerous media outlets. Whereas some of them argued that the government “did not treasure a talented person like Huang” (Sanguan 1946, 7), others asserted that Huang simply intended to expand her territory and that her present behavior was not different from what she did in wartime (Zi 1946). Interestingly, even after all of this criticism, the local government quickly pursued those producing “fake news.” Under this pressure, *Shen Bao* corrected its previous report,<sup>30</sup> and many new reports emerged to defend Huang. Some of these reports argued that Huang was not present when her troops initiated the rebellion (Shenyan 1946); other reports asserted that a bandit did appear on Lake Tai but was not Huang Bamei (Xiao 1946). One report denounced the previous reports as groundless rumors and claimed that Huang had become determined to be a “woman of good family” (*liangjia fu* 良家婦); even though she “had never been fettered by love in her whole life,” she now had a teahouse and worked as a “boss’s lady” (*laobanniang* 老板娘; Qiaosan 1946, 5).

Despite all these manipulations of public opinion, the media continued to report on Huang’s activities after the Second Sino-Japanese War. In 1946, *Starlight* (*Xingguang*) magazine published a satirical comic titled “The Illustration of Huang Bamei’s Stepping Down” (figure 4). The exaggerated size of Huang seems to portray her as a “local tyrant” (*tu huangdi* 土皇帝). Whereas the little sailors under her command carry flags claiming that Huang is going to return to her own room (*guishi* 歸室), the lone boat drifts on the water and sails to nowhere (Heniuier 1946). The Second Sino-Japanese War resulted in fame for Huang, but it also took away her halo as the battles came to an end. Now the nation’s enemies were far away from the doorstep and the existence of Huang was just as annoying as other bandits. Although her stories still seemed alluring to certain people, to the communities who feared her raids, these tales were no less haunting than the previous turmoil.

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<sup>30</sup> *Shen Bao* 24,597, August 8, 1946, 2.





Figure 4. “The Illustration of Huang Bamei’s Stepping Down,” portraying Huang as a local tyrant, in *Starlight* magazine. Source: Heniuer (1946, 3).

### The Last Dance

Despite all of these frustrations, Huang kept herself quite busy after the war at her seaside hotel in Zhapu. In November 1947, a traveler published an account of his tourist experience in an article in *Shen Bao*.<sup>31</sup> After this article, many reporters, writers, and travelers flooded to Huang’s hotel. Some writers wrote fiction based on Huang Bamei stories.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, many government officers, diplomats, and American military consultants visited Huang at her resort.<sup>33</sup> Even on the eve of Zhejiang’s 1949 “liberation,” many tourist groups visited the hotel, and Huang enthusiastically guided them to “patriotic” sites and nearby attractions.<sup>34</sup> In this relatively short peaceful time, Huang was elected as a representative of the Pinghu County council; she opened several shops, invested in real estate, and gave many invited talks about her battles against the Japanese (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 144–145).

In 1948, Huang was invited to join the Songjiang bandit-suppression committee to prepare for battle against the troops of Ding Xishan, who had become a commander of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>35</sup> Huang was assigned to collect intelligence information from the Communist armies. She also mobilized guerrilla and reconnaissance corps in Jinshan, Haiyan, and Pinghu (*Jinshan wenshi ziliao* 1991, 145). In the spring of 1949, Mao

<sup>31</sup> *Shen Bao* 25012, November 2, 1947, 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Shen Bao* 25162, March 7, 1948, 5; Ding 2013, 206–212.

<sup>33</sup> *Shen Bao* 24728, December 17, 1946, 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Shen Bao* 25586, May 13, 1949, 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Shen Bao* 25335, August 27, 1948, 5.

Sen invited Huang to participate in guerrilla warfare along the coast of Zhejiang and Jiangsu. After the fall of Shanghai, Huang was forced to move to the isles of Yangshan 洋山, close to the seaward side of Hangzhou Bay (Yang 1989). Mao, who had moved to Xiamen and later initiated a new secret service army, the Anticommunist and Patriotic Army (*Fangong jiuguojun* 反共救國軍; Lin 2015, 82–84), recruited Huang and Xie to form a branch within this new army, the Haibei Combat Corps (*Haibei zongdui* 海北縱隊). During their one-year stay in Yangshan, Huang and Xie continued to battle opposing elements on the isles.<sup>36</sup> They broadcasted a statement to the mainland convincing their “compatriots in the bandit’s zone” to resist Mao Zedong and wait for their Taiwanese compatriots to rescue them.<sup>37</sup> They also sent their son and daughter to Taipei to continue their schooling.<sup>38</sup> At times, Huang visited Taiwan to attend meetings with Mao Sen and Nationalist officers.<sup>39</sup> While in Yangshan, Huang also reportedly allied with local figures through the sworn brotherhood (*jiebai* 結拜) ritual, in an attempt to strengthen her rule over the isles (Yang 1989).

A turning point occurred in March 1950, when Huang and her army defeated some Communist forces close to Zhapu, Xie’s hometown, at the inner region of Hangzhou Bay.<sup>40</sup> This was not uncommon, because Huang and Xie had a wide variety of connections along the Bay and had been involved in trade and shipment of goods from the mainland to Zhoushan 舟山 and Taiwan. Yet, within a month, the Communist forces fiercely attacked Yangshan and Zhoushan. By mid-May, many of the forces on Zhoushan had retreated to Taiwan. Xie brought their son and a group of soldiers to look for his former allies in Pinghu (Pinghu shi shizhi bangongshi 2009, 74–75; Mao 2016, 210). Huang stayed in Yangshan for few weeks and then led the last remaining troops to retreat to Dachen (Yang 1989; Zhou 2011, 94).

At roughly the same time, the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–1953) dramatically influenced the fate of Taiwan. The United States changed its attitude toward Chiang Kai-shek and intended to establish collaboration with him to resist Communist China. Right after the fall of Zhoushan, Madame Chiang initiated the Chinese Women’s Anticommunist and Anti-Soviet-Union Association (Zhonghua funü fangong kang’e lianhe zonghui 中華婦女反共抗俄聯合總會) and invited Huang Bamei to serve on the committee.<sup>41</sup> While Huang was awaiting her next guerrilla missions,<sup>42</sup> she was

<sup>36</sup> Academia Historica, No. 005-010100-00113-005.

<sup>37</sup> *Central Daily News*, December 7, 1949, 2.

<sup>38</sup> According to Huang Bamei’s grandson, Xie Weike, Huang was Xie’s second wife and they jointly raised Xie’s son, Xie Xuanzong 謝玄宗, and their adopted daughter, Huang Ande 黃安德 (private Facebook correspondence with the author, December 15, 2019). However, according to a later account, Xie seemed to have two sons, since he brought one to Pinghu, where both he and his son were executed (*Central Daily News*, June 29, 1951, 3).

<sup>39</sup> *Central Daily News*, December 8, 1949, 2; December 31, 1949, 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Central Daily News*, March 25, 1950, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Central Daily News*, May 27, 1950, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Academia Historica, No. 008-011001-00003-007.

assigned to care for widows and orphans in Dachen. Due to the new alliance between Chiang and the United States, an American journalist came to visit the Chinese Women's Association and interviewed Huang, focusing primarily on Huang's guerrilla service rather than her new role in the women's organization.<sup>43</sup> In November 1950, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States reached a new secret agreement with the Nationalists to expand their joint guerrilla program targeting China's southeast coast (Lin 2016, 207). In February 1951, a new company, Western Enterprises Incorporated (WEI), was formed as a front in Pittsburgh. Within a month, WEI established an office in Taipei's Yuanshan area and started to recruit guerrilla leaders to join the program (Lin 2016, 207–208).

WEI quickly contacted Huang Bamei, attempting to convince her to sign an agreement to fight as a U.S. proxy. Huang's friends, including the National Assembly delegate Dai Guyin 戴谷音 and former Secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Government Zuo Shuping 左曙萍, suggested that she not sign the contract, probably because Chiang's government had long been suspicious of the United States and the CIA. The Nationalist government eventually agreed to grant Huang land for her guerrilla soldiers to build houses and make a living farming and also promised to build an orphanage for veterans' families and to give them allowances so they could settle down. In exchange, Huang agreed not to sign the contract with WEI and shifted her work from guerrilla warfare to the women's organization (Zhou 2011, 95–97).

Shortly after these negotiations, Huang was assigned to serve as Commissioner of the Zhejiang Branch of the Chinese Women's Anticommunist and Anti-Soviet-Union Association (Liu 1983, 142). She still seemed to take part in some maritime battles, but her major job was to take care of widows and the children of fallen soldiers.<sup>44</sup> In June 1951, the Nationalist-sponsored *Central Daily News* reported that Huang's husband and son were both killed in Pinghu, and she took no further action but to apply for compensation from the government.<sup>45</sup> In late 1952, Huang was reportedly planning a campaign to return to the mainland and go "deep into the back of the enemy."<sup>46</sup> No sources reveal whether she made it to the mainland, but records published more recently suggest that her husband's actual execution happened in that year (Pinghu shi shizhi bangongshi 2009, 74–75), and her plan may have had a connection with that event. Regardless of Huang's misfortune and the fluctuations in U.S.-Taiwan relations, Huang now devoted herself to the welfare of the Dachen women and children. She asked the general public in Taiwan to assist or to donate to this cause.<sup>47</sup>

Before the Dachen Retreat in 1955, Huang had spent most of her time in Dachen. Due to the lack of administrators there, she not only handled women's and children's

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<sup>43</sup> *Central Daily News*, July 14, 1950, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *United Daily News*, February 19, 1953, 2; February 24, 1953, 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Central Daily News*, June 29, 1951, 3.

<sup>46</sup> *United Daily News*, September 29, 1952, 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Central Daily News*, February 27, 1953, 4; June 3, 1953, 4. See also *United Daily News*, March 26, 1954, 3; August 17, 1954, 3.

affairs but also mediated local disputes. Especially after 1952, Huang and her fellows mediated civil cases within the troops and transferred suspects to military justice units.<sup>48</sup> She also helped transport goods to impoverished residents, organized famine relief after disasters, distributed newspapers and magazines, and dealt with various civilian affairs.<sup>49</sup> Through all her efforts for the Dachen community, Huang developed a bond with the Dachen people that lasted long after the war.

### Remembering the Heroine

After late 1951, when Huang promised not to join the U.S.-led guerrilla program, the Nationalist government began promoting her heroic images through media and films. Film producers joined in the fever and started producing “anticommunist” movies, including Huang Bamei stories.<sup>50</sup> Some movie commentators also compared the Huang Bamei movies to other *wuxia*-genre (martial heroes) films and action movies that featured pirates and smugglers.<sup>51</sup> To cheer the soldiers and the Taiwanese people, the Nationalist authorities also asked Huang Bamei to help promote patriotism with other famous females who fought against Communists, including Hong Yuejiao 洪月嬌, Yin Guixiang 尹桂香, Luo Chunhua 羅春花, and Zhang Ximing 張熙明.<sup>52</sup> In 1957, when Taiwan was celebrating Women’s Day, the media once again promoted Huang’s stories as a wartime heroine who fills the role of “woman managing the housework” (*Nüzi chaoci jiawu* 女子操持家務).<sup>53</sup> Even though she had kept up her wild and vigorous lifestyle in both her public and private spheres,<sup>54</sup> it was far from her previous life of killing enemies. Huang seemed to enjoy her new role in patriotic education and women’s organizations.

Challenges came once again after Huang had settled down in her post-military life. After the Dachen Retreat, hundreds of thousands of Dachen refugees flooded to Taiwan. Because Huang had served in the Dachen women’s organization, many such refugees came to seek help from her. In 1955, Huang brought about eighty orphan children to the

<sup>48</sup> National Archives Administration, No. A300000000A/0041/3-3-3-7/170, No. A300000000A/0041/3-3-3-7/178; No. A305000000C/0044/1571.1/2643.

<sup>49</sup> National Archives Administration, No. A300000000A/0042/3-3-3-7/045, No. A300000000A/0042/3-3-3-7/053, No. A300000000A/0043/3-3-3-7/223.

<sup>50</sup> *United Daily News*, December 17, 1951, 3; June 1, 1954, 6.

<sup>51</sup> *United Daily News*, August 9, 1954, 3; June 11, 1959, 6.

<sup>52</sup> *United Daily News*, February 14, 1953, 3; March 20, 1954, 3; December 10, 1954, 2.

<sup>53</sup> *United Daily News*, March 8, 1957, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Huang Bamei’s grandson, Xie Weike, recalled that she asked her grandchildren to call her “Dada,” which he had understood as “grandmother” in the north Zhejiang dialect. After visiting his grandmother’s hometown decades later, he found that “Dada” means “grandfather.” This shows that Huang seemed to expect her grandson to treat her as a man rather than a woman. See *Central News Agency*, March 7, 2015, at <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/firstnews/201503070033.aspx>.

Ministry of the Interior. Huang and her followers had not received any support after the government had promised to build an orphanage and provide veterans' families with allowances. Madame Chiang quickly responded that the government would assist these children. Soon afterward, the Hua Hsing Children's Home (Huaxin yuyouyuan 華興育幼院) was established to accommodate the children from Dachen (Zhou 2011, 95–97). Although the government kept its promise by giving her lands, it did not give her funds to build houses there. Huang had to build a garment factory on her granted land in Dapinglin 大坪林 so that Dachen refugees could make a living through embroidery (Zhou 2011, 95–97). She continued to raise money for the Dachen people.<sup>55</sup> In 1959, Huang sent the fabrics they made to a merchant to sell at an international trade show in Belgium. The merchant's check bounced, so Huang brought the case to the police. Due to Huang's fame, this case became sensational in Taiwan. The two sides eventually reached a compromise, returning the full amount to Huang.<sup>56</sup> In 1961, Huang further requested that the government allow her workers to use the timber in a preserved forest (Zhou 2011, 95–97).

A 1959 movie about Huang, *Queen of the China Sea* (*Higashi shinakai no joketsu* 東支那海の女傑), was produced by Japan's New Toho Company (*Shintōhō* 新東宝) and issued by the Shaw Brothers Studio in Hong Kong. In the movie, Huang collaborates with the Japanese navy, falls in love with a Japanese second lieutenant, emerges as a pirate captain during the Second Sino-Japanese War, and even secretly ships a large amount of jewelry to Japan following the war.<sup>57</sup> The movie was quickly criticized by Huang and the Nationalist government. The media complained that a patriotic heroine was now being depicted as a Han traitor, whore (*dangfu* 蕩婦), and pirate queen due to the profit motives of the two film companies in their expanding market in Southeast Asia.<sup>58</sup> Furious about the movie, Huang Bamei hired a lawyer and filed a petition against the two film companies for slandering a "national heroine."<sup>59</sup>

The incident caught the attention of the Nationalist government, because it was promoting its campaigns against "Red China" by encouraging the stories of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Hong Kong refugees, and the suffering compatriots in Taiwan. The Shaw Brothers Studio quickly sent representatives to Taiwan and apologized to Huang and the Nationalist government.<sup>60</sup> This action did not end the dispute, as Huang claimed that Shaw Brothers had seriously harmed her image.<sup>61</sup> That year, the incident was selected by Taiwan's media as "the most regrettable news" in the world's cinema.<sup>62</sup> As Shaw Brothers intended to feature Wu Zetian—the only woman who ruled China as

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<sup>55</sup> *United Daily News*, October 20, 1957, 3.

<sup>56</sup> *United Daily News*, May 10, 1959, 3; May 13, 1959, 3; July 20, 1959, 3; July 24, 1959, 4.

<sup>57</sup> *United Daily News*, May 4, 1960, 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Central Daily News*, May 4, 1960, 8; *United Daily News*, May 7, 1960, 3.

<sup>59</sup> *United Daily News*, May 10, 1960, 3.

<sup>60</sup> *United Daily News*, May 20, 1960, 6.

<sup>61</sup> *United Daily News*, July 3, 1960, 3.

<sup>62</sup> *United Daily News*, May 10, 1960, 3.

emperor—in its next movie, and New Toho planned to promote its new series of Southeast Asia-themed movies,<sup>63</sup> the companies continued to negotiate with Huang and eventually won her forgiveness.<sup>64</sup> Shaw Brothers donated 50,000 Taiwanese dollars to the “righteous compatriots of Dachen,”<sup>65</sup> and the dispute was finally settled. The media in Taiwan praised Huang’s “broad-minded and tolerant spirit” and her behavior of “paying attention to the interests of the whole.”<sup>66</sup>

Ironically, this incident, which Huang remembered as a humiliation, was the only far-reaching discussion of her role and images during the postwar period. After that, Huang’s stories were featured in elementary school textbooks, but they never attracted much attention again in Taiwan. She passed away in 1982, in Taipei.<sup>67</sup>

Looking back, Huang Bamei herself might never have expected that she would turn from a bandit into a heroine and commander, or have to compromise her career due to suspicions between the United States and Taiwan. Likewise, she might never have foreseen that, after numerous efforts of assisting refugees and promoting patriotism, her bandit past would have been exposed to the public in a movie. As her life came to a peaceful end, Huang left behind complex memories and a tortuous life that no one else could ever comprehend.

## Conclusion

Like many “outlaws of the marshes” (*caomang yingxiong* 草莽英雄), Huang Bamei had an intriguing life peppered with competing images that were deeply embedded in the wartime politics of modern China and Taiwan. Political regimes recruited her troops in battles against different enemies, and some portrayed her as a wartime heroine and model housewife. Media and literary authors developed various ways of characterizing Huang and portrayed her as a patriotic “Double-Gun Woman” or a sexually unrestrained woman. To endure the wars, Huang swiftly shifted her roles from female bandit to guerrilla leader and women’s organization coordinator. As a result, the stories of chameleon-like Huang Bamei offer an excellent window onto the life of a female outlaw who not only managed to maintain an alliance with competing regimes but also escaped execution, reemerged, and interacted with existing norms while shaping and reconstructing herself within the values of women’s roles throughout a turbulent era.

Moreover, the life history of Huang not only reveals how an ordinary woman developed remarkable strategies during a difficult period, it also demonstrates how marginalized figures like pirates, smugglers, and female outlaws, who had wandered and fought from one place to another, had been dragged into the bigger historical narratives regarding modern China and Taiwan. Throughout the Second Sino-Japanese

<sup>63</sup> *United Daily News*, June 29, 1960, 5; January 20, 1961, 6.

<sup>64</sup> *United Daily News*, January 20, 1961, 6.

<sup>65</sup> *United Daily News*, May 3, 1961, 7.

<sup>66</sup> *United Daily News*, January 20, 1961, 6.

<sup>67</sup> *United Daily News*, May 6, 1982, 3.

War and the Chinese Civil War, Huang's stories were framed and remembered differently across the Taiwan Strait, as regimes in Taiwan and mainland China had targeted different enemies and created different narratives to commemorate the war. Soldiers and civilians who had worked with or fought against Huang also created diverse discourses about her in order to fit her into different social, cultural, and political contexts.

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