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Masochist Men and Normal Women

TANG SHU SHUEN AND *THE ARCH* (1969)¹

YAU CHING

TANG SHU SHUEN was one of the very few woman directors working in Hong Kong cinema in the 1970s and in Chinese cinemas before the 1980s.² In what ways do her films address this special position of hers, explore, and/or challenge the gendered conditions of her times? What are the implications of the strategies found in her films and media representations of her that might further our understanding of feminist politics specific to the cultural-historical context of Hong Kong? This chapter explores these questions, focusing on Tang's debut work *Dong furen* (*The Arch*, 1969).

SHAME AS FANTASY

Discussion of Tang's work tends to privilege sexual difference by naming her first as a woman. The Hong Kong premiere of *The Arch* in 1969 sparked many writings on the film and Tang Shu Shuen in Hong Kong media. Most notably, *Chinese Students' Weekly*, an influential newspaper that played a key role in introducing international arts and literature to youth from the late 1960s to the 1970s in Hong Kong, responded to the

film enthusiastically with a half-page review by film critic Sek Kei on September 26, 1969. The following passage was printed in boldface and concluded the review:

If only you could just think for a while: it is *she, this woman*, who despite all difficulties, managed to single-handedly create a film truly honest to herself, and further enable the importance of Chinese cinema to be recognized by people around the world; this should suffice to render you *ashamed* of yourself to the utmost [*italics mine*].³

The male discourse propagated by Sek Kei here relates this problem of female authorship to the male psyche (shame) via a national and/or racial discourse ("Chinese cinema"). From a culture in which the construction and propagation of a racial/national discourse (*Chinese cinema*) is a man's job, recognizing the achievement of a woman who makes the first step becomes shameful. Sek Kei chooses a strategic path.

Rey Chow's application of psychoanalysis to Chinese cinema and literature⁴ might help us understand Sek Kei's presumptions, positions, and the dilemmas behind his apparently peculiar responses to Tang's work. Examining the cultural premises of "a predominant feeling surrounding the impression of modern Chinese literature: a profound unhappiness, an unabashed sentimentalism, a deep longing for what is impossible,"⁵ Rey Chow uses Laplanche and Deleuze to turn Freud's formulation of masochism on its head, by not only prioritizing masochism as the primary position in the structure of sexuality and of subjectivity but also locating its origin in the "preoedipal." The masochist/infant is intricately bound up with the fantasies of submission to the mother figure. To seek pleasure in pain is to know what it is to suffer from pain in the first place, meaning that the subject has to identify with the suffering object. Contrary to Freud's relegation of masochism to a passive role and sadism to an active one, the internalization of a suffering object to produce subjectivity in Laplanche is read as neither active (as in "seeing") nor passive (as in "being seen"), but reflexive (seeing oneself). By identifying with the mother and desiring a fusion with her, the infant sees itself in her idealized image that endures pain. Chow argues that such an emotional excitement and transference of suffering opens up a space where both the mother and the child are activated, and where they achieve their mutually dependent subjectivities through fusion and fantasy, which should be seen as constitutive of culture, rather than preoedipal. Chow suggests,

in a later book, that the writing of national culture in modern China typically takes the form of an aesthetic preoccupation with the powerless; the possibility of empowerment amid massive social, political, and cultural destruction might arise from constructing and observing the powerless as a spectacle: "[T]his sympathy becomes a concrete basis of an affirmative national culture precisely because it *secures the distance from the powerless per se*. . . . Such pleasure gives rise, through the illusion of a 'solidarity' with the powerless, to the formation of a 'unified' community."⁶

68 It is tempting to read these two analyses as continuous rather than distinct. A modern Chinese person, in the process of seeking empowerment and constituting subjectivity for her/himself, exhibits a need to negotiate a position *between* that of (over-)identifying with the powerless, as the masochist, and that of gaining just enough distance to enjoy that suffering self as spectacle, as a narcissist. Both these structures of desire have to be grounded in a fetishizing of one's self-image. By producing an agency based on a certain self-reflexivity via fetishization, narcissism and masochism could then be read as intricately bound up with each other. Sek Kei's words cited previously could be seen as showing masochistic and narcissistic tendencies to (over-)identify with this Hong Kong Chinese woman director, to reclaim her (almost) as the mother, because she has done what he sees as his own responsibilities and desires. On the part of the male critic, his representation of this lone female Chinese artist against the world, who has managed with her integrity to overcome all difficulties and to achieve worldwide recognition for Chinese cinema, betrays an (over-)identification with her via her suffering. This identification with pain is of course facilitated more than anything else by its ability to produce pleasure, through his taking pride in the self-image of his community (Hong Kong) and race (Chinese). Even the self-flagellation, the flaunting of his "shame" at not being able to fully occupy that dominant leadership image of hers, carries an overtone of enjoyment. After all, there wouldn't be any flaunting without pleasure.

The male readiness to submit and condemn himself is here overlaid with an awareness of his distance from the spectacularization of femininity. In this scenario, the more the man whips himself, the safer and the bigger he becomes. He achieves and perpetuates agency as the ultimate inheritor of Chinese culture by assuming a position apparently even lower than that of the female artist. If in Chinese culture, the human subject gains value in the eyes of the beholder through suffering, then by melodramatizing his suffering to a greater extent than the female artist and giving it a higher value, the male critic also gains a voice of greater

significance. He reclaims his position of power by locating himself within a however-imagined national and racial conscience via guilt. Sek Kei's critical responses could be seen, therefore, as aiming at a display of his ego more than about Tang's authorship.

Silverman appropriates Lacan's analysis of the "inside-out structure of the gaze" to discuss the ways in which the male psyche is as "fundamentally exhibitionistic" as the female, as dependent upon the gaze of the Other, only that he wants to be seen as (and to see) not just himself but as *the subject looking*.⁷ If we use Silverman's argument to read Sek Kei's discussion of Tang's work, the male critic could be seen as precisely exhibiting himself as the subject looking at the woman director whom he sees as similar to him (race), yet different (gender determines entitlement). Contrary to Freud's belief that the male infant progresses from preoedipal to oedipal in linear fashion through a recognition of sexual difference and a separation of identification and desire, the Chinese male subject in question is *simultaneously* obsessed with sameness and difference: the desire to identify and the desire to separate. Because of Tang's perceived/suspected "superiority" within the race, "woman" is used by Chinese male critics repeatedly as a signifier to undermine her entitlement to a cultural authorship; thus she is *always* coined "female/woman director," in order to reduce her threat toward the male entitlement to culture.

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WOMAN AS ORIGINAL SIN

I have spent time discussing Sek Kei's review not just because he has been widely recognized in Hong Kong as one of the most prominent critics since the 1960s; his writings carry widespread repercussions. He was also one of the few critics who has seriously interpreted Tang's films and has written about all of them. More importantly, Sek Kei's position epitomized many of the problems the authorship of Tang would later encounter. Throughout her career, Tang's work has been consistently ghettoized into the image of the "woman"—into the sexed body—as a means of co-opting her subjectivity into the production of *his* national/racial culture. These interpretations directly contradict Tang's texts, which persistently foreground and challenge the hegemony of the unified race and nation-state.

To name Tang as "woman" is, ironically, a way to exile "woman" from culture, to individualize her and to isolate her to a position that "sounds" historically transcendent. Repeatedly suppressed from the scene of



FIGURE 2.1 Photo for an interview with Tang Shu Shuen as published in a local magazine (courtesy of Tang Shu Shuen)

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history, Tang constructs for herself a subversive location, a place to resist the male spectator's insistence to *look* at her, through her control of her image and her work. From all the photos I have seen of her, Tang is either wearing sunglasses or has her back against the camera (fig. 2.1). Similar to Arzner's underrecognized representation of relations between women, as Mayne has observed,⁸ Tang is never discussed in the context of the history of other Chinese woman directors, hence systemically depriving her of a cultural tradition and a community of women. Indeed, Tang's singularity is always highlighted: "Lone Rider,"⁹ "first and last iconoclast of Hong Kong cinema,"¹⁰ "pioneering."¹¹ While *The Arch* focuses on relationships among a grandmother, a mother, and her daughter, Tang's later works are increasingly interested in exploring the possibilities and problems of forming communities of women. In her last work, *The Hong Kong Tycoon*, for example, the representations of the talk-show hostess cum porn star Tina Leung and the Miss Hong Kong runner-up Lisa Lui, which exploit their stereotypical personas while at the same time breaking them, calls attention to the collaborative authorship between Tang and her actresses. "Female friendship acquires a resistant function in the way that it exerts a pressure against the supposed 'natural' laws of heterosexual romance."¹² Surprisingly though, none of these female-to-female relationships within the film texts and beyond have ever been discussed.

How is *The Arch* received outside the Chinese context? During the theatrical run of *The Arch* in New York, Vincent Canby critiques the film in a descriptive passage that reads more like a personal attack:

The Arch is a Chinese film conceived, I suspect, after its director, Tang Shu Shuen, a wealthy young Chinese girl who studied at the University of California, saw too many movies that had won film festival prizes in the 1950's and early 1960's. . . . It is a fearfully pretentious little movie that does no real service to Art, whose name it evokes in almost every muted, though anything but subtle, image, any one of which could be hung on a restaurant wall. Blossoms fall, streams burble and valleys are misty in the dawn. Tear off a page, let's see what we have for May. . . . We don't see too many films directed by women, and hardly any directed by Chinese women, which may be why the critics in Paris have been so extravagant in their praise for such a singularly uninteresting talent. . . . They are the pushy devices of an occidental sensibility, of a director without the courage to be modest.¹³

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What fascinates me in Vincent Canby's criticism are the grounds he evokes at the expense of discussing the film itself. He starts by critiquing Tang Shu Shuen first for being too young, too wealthy, and most importantly, too Westernized, then somehow his article descends into a series of racist and orientalist images from restaurant wall to misty valleys. The former has little to do with the film except for the stereotype that all Chinese own restaurants. The use of the latter demonstrates, like all other images, that he did not take the film seriously. Why is Tang's employment of cinematic strategies expected to be "modest," except perhaps for the fact that she is "Asian" as well as "woman"? With her biographical data constantly evoked as a source of either speculative idolization or groundless criticism, it seems no surprise that Tang Shu Shuen resists further supply of such information.

CHINESE AS COLONIAL SIN

As a Chinese woman who grew up in Hong Kong and Taiwan, received her college education in the United States, then chose to come back to Hong Kong to work as a filmmaker,¹⁴ Tang Shu Shuen finds herself negotiating, not so much between the so-called East and the so-called West, but rather between several contradictory discourses that expect her, on the one hand, to

manifest as much "pure" and "original" Chineseness in her work as possible (the Canby position), and, on the other, to be "Westernized" enough to mark her difference from the "locals" and gain recognition for Chinese cinema abroad (Sek Kei's position). In the latter, however contradictory it might sound, the woman director is still expected to maintain a certain integrity of "being Chinese," because betraying that identity threatens racial unity and pride, to which the male critic has direct access, has rights to protect, and views as part of his property. The paradox of the game is that she is expected to gain recognition for Chinese cinema in the West, but the more recognition she gains from the West, the more suspicious she becomes as a qualified Chinese director. Either way, she is suspicious enough as a woman to start with.

A few days before the theatrical run of *The Arch* in Hong Kong, a review in the *Hong Kong Times* exemplifies this paradox:

72 *The Arch* has received much praises abroad . . . but all this praise from Europe and America might not be from Orientals. It remains to be seen whether places that are full of the taste of the Chinese Race, would accept a film like this. . . . I believe those who like Tang Shu Shuen's work will not miss this opportunity [of watching the film], but it needs to be considered to what extent Orientals would accept especially stylish films of this kind [italics mine].¹⁵

As a translator, I find this last line of quote "but it needs to be considered to what extent Orientals would accept especially stylish films of this kind" extremely difficult to get through. It is one of those language gestures in Chinese posed as modest, reserved, courteous, even objective, but those who read it would sense the deeply harsh and satirical tone underneath. It is intended to work with the entire passage, especially echoing "places that are full of the taste of the Chinese Race." Its criticism targets not only the style of the film as selling out to Westerners, and the Western reception it has enjoyed, but most importantly, all Hong Kong people who might betray their cultural inauthenticity (not Chinese enough) through their enjoyment of a film "like this." All these people, according to the Chinese male critic here, have joined the lot who do not belong to places "full of the taste of Chinese Race." In order to preserve the unity of this "taste," those different are ideologically exiled to where the film and the Westerners are located.

The insistence of the local press on emphasizing (and criticizing) a "Westernized" image of Tang Shu Shuen, in fact in Westernizing Tang Shu Shuen as an image, coincides with the demands of a Hong Kong society

caught up in a manufacturing boom tailor-made for Western markets.¹⁶ Hong Kong colonial policies in the late 1960s to 1970s, partly responding to the youth and labor movements of 1966 and 1967, strategically sought to incorporate many emergent youth cultural formations, resulting in institutionalizing a series of trade shows, beauty pageants, concerts, dance balls, the founding of civic centers, and later international film festivals. Many of these programs sought to import Anglo-American culture and fetishize/delegitimize residual Chinese culture. Tang Shu Shuen's work, with its strong assertion of cultural entitlement and hybridity, thus becomes an intensified site for male critics to proclaim their own cultural identity when such identity is constantly under severe pressures of repression and assimilation. The tension produced by the politically constructed binary opposition between the so-called East and the so-called West, to which the whole society is subject, manifests itself in critics' readings of Tang.

Hong Kong was a very unfamiliar place to me. Although I lived in Hong Kong when I was little, my whole family moved to Taiwan during my high school days, then I went to U.S. for college. So, I was a stranger to both the place and the people of Hong Kong. When I shot *The Arch*, I didn't know a single soul in the film scene (Tang as interviewed by Sing Wah).¹⁷

73 It is in such a context, in which Tang Shu Shuen's cultural identity has been problematized by her experience of a series of border-crossings to start with (Hong Kong—Taiwan—U. S.—Hong Kong), that she sought to reconstruct and explore an imaginary (Chinese) tradition through representation in her first film. I would argue that this selective tradition was also an interrogation of her own identity, in terms of ethnicity as well as gender. As a stranger returning to a place she knew as a child but had since long lost, Tang chose to map her first feature on a remote and also lost Chinese society, from a piece of legendary history allegedly set in a village of Southwest China in the Ming Dynasty. While Tang deliberately chose to represent female subjectivity within a narrative from a residual culture that was constantly being marginalized and hybridized by dominant narratives of colonialism and Westernization, through *The Arch* she also discovered that the hegemonic processes, the sense of lived dominance and subordination within the ethnocentric Chinese tradition itself, in fact serve to render feminist agency impossible.

The Hong Kong cinema (including Mandarin and Cantonese) of the 1960s and 1970s was dominated by large profit-targeting studios. Not

knowing "a single soul in the [local Hong Kong] film scene," Tang finds her own transnational way of producing, writing, shooting, editing, scoring, sound-mixing, and distributing the film in a structure unique at the time, a structure in which the filmmaker has the last word in every step, a way of working similar to what would later be called "independent film-making." Law recalls the experience:

When shooting the film *Shu Shuen* broke many conventions. Shooting on set at Cathay Studios (now the Golden Harvest Studio), she did not follow normal practice. Subrata Mitra from India, who had worked with Satyajit Ray, imposed his own style of lighting and camerawork on the production. . . . Although local technicians were apparently antagonistic towards Mitra's working methods, he nevertheless succeeded in achieving a visual style appropriate to the film. *Shu Shuen* also post-dubbed and mixed her film in the United States (practically unique for the time).⁸

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Despite the lack of precedence and the antagonism of the Chinese technicians toward Mitra,⁹ Tang still insisted on a multiethnic and transnational production structure. This helped contribute to the *difference* of *The Arch* as a hybridized cultural product in the context of 1960s' to 1970s' Hong Kong, which was also struggling to reconcile contradictory forces within its own hybridity.

Tang's body of work demands to be recontextualized in a framework of multiple marginalization. In what ways can *The Arch* be read not as a quintessentially female or Chinese text, but rather one that strategically negotiates a woman *and* Chinese, perhaps a Hong Kong authorship, while exposing and challenging the cultural and historical constructions as such? In what ways does *The Arch* mark the beginning of a journey reflecting on sexual and gendered differences caught in the interstices of Chinese and Western imperialisms, and, in the end, become an interrogation of *her* non-identity, her "outsider" status for life?

OF CHASTITY BOUND

The folktale of *The Arch* was first documented in *A History of Humorous Folktales*, later reworked by Lin Yutang and included in his collection of short stories, *Chinese Legends*. In the original story, a widow is seduced by a servant the evening before she is to receive the Tablet of Chastity. She is

judged unworthy of the Tablet because of the scandal, and this leads her to commit suicide. Lin reworked the story into a satirical comedy in which a captain seeks shelter in a house with two generations of widows and a teenage daughter, whom he falls in love with and later marries. After their marriage, the widow seduces the servant, knowing that she would have to give up the Tablet. Then her son-in-law suggests arranging a wedding for her and the servant. The story ends on an ironic note with the village peers very disappointed and the village elder saying: The state of a woman's heart is really hard to figure out.

The most radical departure of Tang's film from these texts is the displacement of desire from that of the widow, Madam Tung and servant Chang, onto the mutual attraction between Tung and Captain Yang Kwan. Subsequently, a conflict is established between Tung and her daughter Wei Ling; both are drawn to Yang as their object of desire. This also manifests itself as a conflict between Tung's motherhood and her sexual desire. The film ventures into taboos of intergenerational incest and age (Yang, the man, is younger than Tung, the woman), and also challenges both female and male monogamy legitimized by the institution of marriage and Confucianism to a far greater extent than did the original folktale or Lin's short story. Tang's adaptation has invented strong female characters, revealing the tragedy from the women's points of view, and embodying much greater heterogeneity and contradictions.

After an introduction consisting of credits superimposed on landscape images followed by a series of activities performed by men, from soldiers to farmers, the narrative begins with Wei Ling looking—noting the arrival of the soldiers, and fantasizing—and hoping that they will stay with them. The beginning is framed with this juxtaposition between a male-dominated exterior marked by action, community, violence, and mobility, versus a female-centered interior overlaid with a sense of confinement, stagnancy, and solitude. The rest of the narrative leaves room for a constant challenge to the construction of this dualism.

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THE DAUGHTER LOOKS

The classic paradigm of woman as image and man as bearer of the gaze is problematized and subverted at the outset. When this apparently tranquil and secluded world of women is first disturbed by the villager who comes to inquire about providing accommodation for the captain, Tung

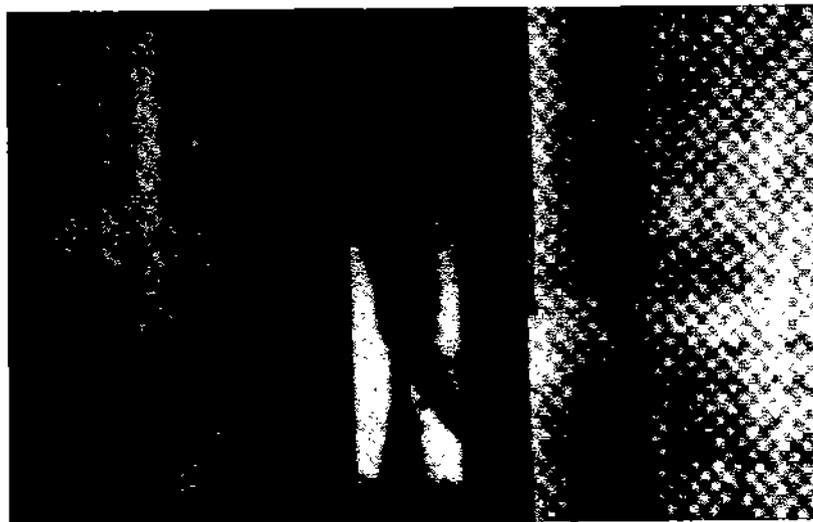


FIGURE 2.2 Still from *The Arch*, 1969 (courtesy of Tang Shu Shuen)

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is shown in a close-up sizing up the situation before she meets him at the door. Wei Ling rushes to a window, securing a good vantage point to look (fig. 2.2). During their conversation in the courtyard before the captain appears, the camera cuts back three times to a close-up of Wei Ling. In the first close-up, we see her listening intently to the conversation outside while slightly gazing not quite back to camera, pondering her future, which is being decided by this conversation in which she has no voice. In the second close-up, her face and eyes are seen peeping through the door, establishing her as the privileged voyeur of the scene, *before* Yang Kwan comes in (thus he inevitably takes up the position of one to be gazed upon). If the female gaze through the door could still be considered furtive, secret, and therefore quite passive, this change of point of view suggests a shift toward *active-looking* by aligning the camera's gaze (thus the audience's) with Wei Ling's. Yang Kwan's intrusion into this women-only space marks his entry into a site of female desire, offering himself as the object to be framed, surrounded (literally), evaluated, and desired. Tang's *mise-en-scène* carefully undercuts and challenges the impossibility of female desire under the patriarchal order by aligning our spectatorship with the gaze of women.

The Arch establishes a variety of female gazes, vernacular, desires, and fantasies, so that female subjectivity and agency threaten to penetrate the contrivance of the diegesis at any minute. In this introductory

sequence, when Yang Kwan meets Madam Tung and Wei Ling's grandmother for the first time, Wei Ling is supposed to be hiding. Shielded from Yang's male gaze and carefully using the half-open door to block out most of the camera gaze, Wei Ling is seen, together with the viewers, as the most active onlooker in the scene, defying the passivity of "hiding." When Yang Kwan is finally accepted into the house, after some negotiation from the villager, Wei Ling is seen, slightly smiling, showing approval and happiness, which also helps the viewers to conclude the scene with positive expectations from her point of view. After this establishment of the female gaze, Wei Ling is shown in the next scene engaged in a verbal and physical expression of fantasy and desire, slightly rocking her body and gazing at the distance, a posture suggestive of longing and imagination. This strategic use of a medium shot of her enables the audience to both observe her body posture, as well as identify with her facial expression.

After this use of *mise-en-scène* to establish Wei Ling's desire for the only man around, she conversely begins to express something else verbally. She asks Grandma if Yang looks like her dad. She then identifies with this male figure: "If I were a man, I would be able to join the army too. Then I could go to many places as well. Only if dad hadn't died." This opening sequence positions our identification with Wei Ling by privileging her physical and emotional experiences, with her vantage point, fantasy, and desire even to the point of naming the family taboo of a parent's death. It is noteworthy that her fantasy and desire are expressed via an identification with masculinity. It could well be argued that Wei Ling's desire to *have* Yang Kwan is more a symptom of her (repressed) desire to *be like* Yang Kwan herself, a symbol for freedom and power that her mother, as an epitomé of femininity, is deprived of. This sets up a pretext for her further assertion of physical and intellectual independence later on.

Throughout the film Wei Ling's strength is portrayed in her defiance of fixed gender presumptions of femininity ("We don't need the protection of others"); her courage in voicing and pursuing her desire (by initiating all the actions in courting Yang); her intelligence (through her ability to verbalize Tung's anxieties); (her retorts against Grandma and Tung of not wanting to be a woman like Tung or the Confucius *Junzi* ["gentleman"] quoted by Grandma); her beating Yang at chess; the independence of her thinking (an argument with Tung about the meaning of female self-sacrifice and insisting on continuing her courtship with Yang despite Tung's disapproval); the spontaneity and carefree nature of her actions (playing

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along the river; exploring the woods without fear); her refusal to bow to social confinement; etc.

As a counterpoint to Tung's concern with normativity and tradition, Wei Ling's ability to externalize her desire through her interaction with the natural environment, including river, horses, trees, and plums, serves as a contrast to Tung's tendency to internalize her feelings and thoughts and renders Tung's silence and aloofness rather denaturalized. The operations of the forces that have brought Tung to where she is become exposed and questionable. This centralization of Wei Ling's subjectivity is particularly radical considering that her character is played by one of the popular teenage idols of the time, Chow Hsuan. The construction of Wei Ling's character in the film significantly departs from the spectacularization of Chow Hsuan's body in the popular press during the production of *The Arch*.²⁰

THE MOTHER DESIRES

The Chinese title of the film reads *Dong furen*, literally translated as "Madam Tung." In all the newspaper ads for the film during its theatrical release, Tung's head image is used to represent the film. Tung's subjectivity is achieved through variable positions of enunciation, including through silence and repetition. Whereas Yang expresses his desire toward Tung by composing, writing, and reciting poems out loud, Tung's desire is represented through her reading and hearing; both of these activities are marked by an internalization of an external environment while Tung remains silent. Tung's discovery of Yang's love poem amid a classroom full of children's voices and her complicity in keeping that a secret signals to Yang her wavering heart. The more her lips are sealed, the more one sees that internal norm within her (*The Arch*) destabilized. When Wei Ling, the monk, and Yang Kwan are playing the game of drinking wine and composing a poem spontaneously out loud, the camera stays with a close-up of Tung on her bed, keenly listening. Yang's poem about his desire to reach the lonely Princess of the Moon and keep her company becomes the constitutive element in a cinematic centralization of Tung's fantasy and desire, to break away from her own loneliness and be accompanied.

According to Cowie's use of psychoanalysis, "fantasy is not the object of desire, but its setting"; "Fantasy as a *mise-en-scène* of desire is more

a setting out of lack, of what is absent, than a presentation of a having, a being present."²¹ The *mise-en-scène* of Wei Ling and Yang's marriage scene is also the *mise-en-scène* of Tung's fantasy. The representation of Tung's subjectivity through internalization reaches a climax in this scene, in which the *mise-en-scène* is done in such a way that the audience is forced to stay with Tung, and does not follow the actions of the newlyweds. Tung's point of view is so privileged that it is almost impossible to witness the marriage from outside her subjectivity. Her desire is most vividly represented in this scene when her object of desire is becoming absent, a lack, right before her eyes (and ours). Not only is she again seen as the one keenly watching (without body movements) and her silence again existing in stark contrast with the hustle and bustle of the rest of the scene, but the marriage is also shown to be internalized and disrupted by her subjectivity through a series of visual and sonic flashbacks. In (re)experiencing the repetition of Yang's poem in Tung's voice, the audience sees and hears Tung's mind in action and her reconstruction of the entire setting of the marriage for herself. The viewing experience of the audience is forced to be located within her *mise-en-scène* of desire, fantasy, and loss. "The subject is present and presented through the very form of organization, composition, of the scene."²² Tung's subject position is clear and invariable as the "I" of the story. In the end, she is the sole subject who "lives out."

The repetitiveness and the rapidity in editing highlights the pitch and "speed" of her emotional turmoil, which is in ironic contrast with the apparent immobility of her body. The exaggerated presence of those moments in her psyche foregrounds the stillness of her body. Like the use of freeze-frame in those key moments of her life, the authorial inscriptions are used primarily to disrupt diegetic time in order to highlight a woman's interiority. Tang herself articulates it as such:

Freeze frame is internal experience; it freezes the important moments and extends them. That's what Proust called "the philosophy of time", and also what we Chinese have as an old saying "Once turning your head you realize a hundred years have passed." You must have this experience too, just a very brief moment, you feel it as very long, very long.²³

The audience is led to a dialectical experience of time and agency, not one conventionally dominated by words, actions, or a linear progression of events and space, to prioritize a kind of temporality similar

to what Modleski adopts from Kristéva's "Women's time" to speak of the "Woman's film," a *different* kind of temporal experience inseparable from space.²⁴ If we compare *The Arch* with *Charulata* (1964), directed by Satyajit Ray, another film that shares the same cameraman, Subrata Mitra, and which also narrates the repression of a woman's desire and her loneliness pitted against the repressiveness of monogamy and marriage, we find similar strategies used in representing time, such as freeze-frame, flashback, slow zoom, and a minimal use of close-ups. What distinguishes *The Arch*, though, is the representation of the inaccessibility of female bodies, contrasted with an emphasized accessibility of their minds, achieved in part through Tang Shu Shuen's language of repetition: women's bodies turning and their minds returning. When Yang has an extended absence from Tung's house, and both Tung and Wei Ling have been waiting for his return, his appearance at the door is strategically match-cut with both Tung and Wei Ling turning to the camera. The women's slight change of posture produces an emotional significance that registers their desires through space, between a significant absence and presence. After Yang has become Tung's son-in-law, and they meet each other in the courtyard, it is again Tung's extended silence and her body turning around and away that marks her emotional departure. The audience will follow Tung to revisit emotionally and psychologically this site of separation again and again in later parts of the film. The more we see her turning to leave, the more we realize the unlikelihood of her ever leaving.

Repetition and return are perhaps for the women in melodrama "manifestations of *another* relationship to time and space, desire and memory,"²⁵ and this difference is not sufficiently accounted for in a patriarchal understanding of normativity, subjectivity, or agency. Further, I would contend that it is exactly because a woman like Tung could be moved without moving in a world that prioritizes moving over being moved, that the woman suffers repeatedly. What distinguishes *The Arch* from many conventional melodramas is that it uses the *dominating* forlornness of this particular woman's experience of time and space to critique the dominant society's relationship to time and space. It does not show any attempt to use the male discourse to provide any closure, not even an ironic one. Quite the contrary. During the course of the film, *The Arch* uses various filmic strategies to carve out, to open up, to accelerate an intensity of Tung's interior space, highlighting all the various *open* possibilities of her desire, which is in turn positioned to throw the social, cultural, and

political structures that forcibly impose an impossibility onto her into serious question.

PRICE FOR NORMATIVITY

I suggested earlier that the subversiveness of the courtship between Wei Ling and Yang is, in part, based on the possibility of role reversal: of their exchanging positions of active and passive, voice and silence, pursuer and pursued. The scene of "the morning after," however, shows Wei Ling adopting the most stereotypical feminine position, indulging herself in an endless list of caring "do's and don'ts" for her husband about to depart for his routine journey, and ending up in a tiny cuddled position in his embrace. The gender roles once challenged by Wei Ling herself seem to snap back to "normal" once heterosexual desire is consummated. This irony highlights a problem within the strategy of role reversal itself: however attractive to female spectators as a temporary device to equalize power relations, it still relies on and therefore reinforces a dualism that inherently perpetuates the subjugation of women as the Other.

In comparison, role reversal is seen as a possible self-positioning at times in the love affair between Tung and Yang, but it is constantly renegotiated and destabilized. As a woman possessing unusual literary and medical skills, Tung is seen going out to cure the children of neighbors while Yang stays home and reads. Reasserting his masculinity, Yang asks to accompany (and protect) her, but Tung refuses. However, Yang's access to Tung's library also leads to his repossession of a cultural tradition and patriarchal order that "the Word" dominates. Unlike a Eurocentric tradition that might ghettoize the semiotic as the realm of the feminine and the disruptive,²⁶ a true Chinese *Junzi*, according to Confucianism, is to be capable both as a warrior (*wu*) and as a scholar (*wen*). By accessing Tung's—in fact, her late husband's—literary collection, Yang gains ultimate mobility of *ye wen ye wu*: the privilege to move freely between *wu* and *wen*; the ability to announce his desire to Tung through his use of lyrical words and to Wei Ling through his actions. Tang herself has consciously situated the "origins" of Chinese culture in the formation of its literary tradition. The "Director's Notes" in the publicity pamphlet used for the premiere screening of *The Arch* at Hong Kong City Hall begins like this:

The Arch departs from the traditional ways of filmmaking in China and attempts to go back to the method by which Chinese characters (word-symbols) were originally constructed.²⁷

82 Tung's struggle in *The Arch* could be read as a constant negotiation within a structure that privileges men's access to these word-symbols and men's organization of time and space through the power of signification. When the film begins, the villagers have been waiting for the Word of the Emperor, which will confirm the construction of the Arch. The Emperor's Word and the words on the Arch signify the pride of a community unified only through the members of a group imagining their bonding with one another. While the Chinese Emperor rules by some form of cosmological dispensation and is literally called "Son of Heaven," his possession of the Word is legitimized and demonstrated by his privileged access to ontological truth. Men's privileged access to literacy also legitimizes their dominance and inheritance in the social, political, and cultural order accordingly. The desirability of both men in *Charulata* is marked by their automatic access to words: one using them as a political tool, the other for literary composition and singing songs. Charu's desire toward both of them is negotiated through her seeking access to both privileged realms of literacy. Sexual and gendered difference in *Charulata* manifests itself first and foremost in men's and women's different relations to language, in particular to the written word.

Midway through *The Arch*, just when Tung registers her desire toward Yang by suggesting the planting of some chrysanthemums in their garden, a letter is delivered that announces that a recommendation has been made to the Emperor about the imminent granting of the Arch. The camera pans across the garden, revealing diverse reactions of the characters. Grandma is seen as the most welcoming, Yang the most anguished, and Tung the most ambivalent. The assertion of a political order as signified by the use of an imperial language in the letter, and a specific organization of time through a linear progression of bureaucratic procedures, is seen as an undesirable and irreconcilable disruption to our identification with Tung's experience of her kind of time and desire. The arrival of the Emperor's Word in Tung's life is not unlike the arrival of the television in Cary's life in *All That Heaven Allows* (1956). An omnipresent medium finally formulates a resolution to their lives and presents itself as a material condition, perceived and approved by all. Yet it is also the moment when both women most acutely feel their desires violated and are in a

tremendous state of loss about the potential of their lives, which seems to have been brushed aside. In Tung's case, it is compulsory to show gratitude. She has to kneel to receive the Arch.

Public order and its specific organization of time and space is seen in *The Arch* as mediated by an imaginary community spirit and feudal values. When Tung carves out space for expressing her anguish and frustration by killing the chicken and running to the mountains (all done in silence), we witness the villagers carving out their space overarched and protected by the Emperor's privileged words. Like those from male critics who code Tang as the "Woman" (director) because of her demonstrated talent, these words from the Emperor code Tung as the "Woman" through her demonstration of "Chastity." Tung's silence becomes a site of resistance against a system of language that ultimately Otherizes her. In this language, she is positioned to use her dead husband's surname and is, therefore, ultimately nameless. Tung's negotiation could be seen as intrinsically a struggle of a subject seeking the sign of her own existence outside herself, in a discourse at once hegemonic and indifferent. Through maintaining the boundaries of social categories such as "Woman," "demonstrator of Chastity," and "Madam," she subordinates her being for the price of a name, that is, for the possibility of existence. The moment she accepts the Arch is the moment when choice becomes impossible for the subject in order to be.

83 The film ends with Tang's small, upright, unmoving body pitted against the huge, upright, unmoving Arch. Not unlike the women's catfight on stage in *Dance, Girl, Dance* (1940), which could be read simultaneously as a reassertion of patriarchal oppression and a site for theatricalization of female friendship, Tung's minimal body language may be held as both representative of internalized oppression and of resistance to the spectacularization and fetishization of the Chinese female body, especially seen in the context of the actress Lisa Lu Yan's career, who starred in the stage productions of *Flower Drum Song* and *The World of Suzie Wong*, and in films like *The Mountain Road* (1960, opposite James Stewart) and *Tai-Pan* (1986). While the representation of Lisa Lu Yan's body in *The Arch* could be read as a protest to a cross-cultural phallogocentric language populated by American cowboys, European sinophiles, Chinese emperors, husbands, scholars, and captains, I would not rule out its potential to be taken as a form of female self-policing and silencing. I read this moment of simultaneous contradiction as a strategy for survival, one that renders various, even oppositional, positions of identification possible, and also

makes the authorial inscriptions of the female author to be less explicitly identifiable, thus more difficult to be ghettoized.

PRIVILEGE OF DISTANCE

The mise-en-scène of Tung's fantasies and desires is undercut by the mise-en-scène of the construction of the Arch: the erection of the norm reasserting itself *within* her. Do the men in *The Arch* suffer from the same kind of internalization of prohibition that Tung suffers from? Lao Chang says he has been *watching* her in pain. His suffering, the construction of his interiority, stems from the distance imposed by spectatorship; his position and ability to watch the suffering subject and his self-reflexivity produced through his identification with her. It is this privileged distance, of producing power, pleasure, and pain through watching the Other suffer, not the suffering *per se*, I argue, that constitutes a privilege of narcissism and masochism inaccessible to women in Chinese culture.

Without access to a language that registers her name, all the space Tung has is within herself rather than outside. She is deprived of a system that allows her to produce a form of agency through creating a distance from her own suffering. Her killing of the chicken could be seen as a desperate transference of herself onto another being, however temporary. Her running away would then be an attempt to physically take leave of herself. The ultimate mobility of the men is marked by their ability to negotiate their distance with their own emotional identification, which is ideally in direct proportion to the degree of suffering the woman internalizes. When Yang meets Tung in the courtyard as the son-in-law, Tung's emotional signification (her body turning in silence) and Yang's identification with her (his being moved and embarrassed) becomes too much to watch/bear for him and he, therefore, arranges to have Wei Ling leave with him right afterward. Likewise, Chang also chooses to leave the scene, to get farther from the spectacle of the suffering object. The distance between the signification of suffering and the male subject needs to be constantly inspected and reworked in order for the male subject to have any kind of narcissistic and/or masochistic pleasures. The repudiation of an identification without distance constitutes these subject positions of masculinity, at times through physical departure and verbal denunciation, like Yang Kwan and Lao Chang in *The Arch*.

The series of cross-fades of endless misty mountains and valleys that ends and begins the film, which Vincent Canby hates so much, highlights the naturalization of a self-perpetuating order that even Chang the servant can choose to leave and Tung the woman cannot. The ultimate glorification of womanhood is represented as the ultimate condemnation. The moment she enters history is the moment she realizes she will always be left out.

Heaven and earth are not good to the beings that they produce, but treat them like straw dogs.²⁸

This well-known Daoist principle acknowledges the constructibility of human society by "Heaven" (the Emperor) and "Earth" (nature), and propagates the inevitable oppressiveness of such constructibility through its absolute (unnegotiated) indifference. Nature is seen as the reason for—and the extension of—the violence of culture.

THE FILMMAKER TO BE

In revisiting and analyzing the peculiar position of Tang's as a "woman" filmmaker in the late 1960s, I have attempted to illuminate the psychological and political processes of racialization and feminization, which could very well reinforce similar ideological values comparable to the phallographic dismissal of female authorship. I argue that the responses of these critics to *The Arch* are directly related to their inability to comprehend the discourses of feminism and anti-nationalism articulated in the film. As a "Chinese film" made by a "woman filmmaker," *The Arch* poses a critique of the values (of "being Chinese" and a "woman") that it ostensibly promotes. In the end, the cinema produced by *The Arch* is a heterogeneous representation that embodies contradictory desires: forces not necessarily reconciled or unified by the cinematic apparatus or the diegesis. Through isolating her into the one-of-a-kind "woman director" not directly related to the ethnic context of being Chinese in Hong Kong or the cultural, historical context of Hong Kong female authorship in the 1960s and 1970s, the local press went through a ritual of partly disowning her. The Hong Kong media culture of the 1960s and 1970s—another budding imagined community not unlike the village in *The Arch*—needed to find a route to simplify the issues of identity that Tang's authorship foregrounds and still be able to claim part of that authorship as its own.

If we regroup Tang's gender and cultural identities, and put her in the context of one of a few Hong Kong Chinese woman film directors, preceded by others like Ren Yizhi and Esther Eng, this signifier will risk an exposure and perhaps even a reexamination of a patriarchal lineage and its inheritance of culture, which is exactly what *The Arch* in part critiques. I argue, in this chapter, that Tang's representation of female subjectivity and its marginalization within a patriarchal and nationalistic tradition in *The Arch*, together with the images in which she has been represented, becomes a (self-)representation of marginality produced by a culture of which she is and is not a part of.

NOTES

1. This chapter is rewritten from Chapter 1 of Yau Ching, *Filming Margins*. Most of the arguments have been substantially condensed for this publication.
2. A Chinese woman filmmaker before Tang particularly worth noting is Esther Eng (1915-1970), whose work I have discussed briefly in *Filming Margins* and *Xing/bie guangying* (*Sexing shadows*). I would like to thank Law Kar for introducing me to Eng's work in the 1990s.
3. Sek Kei, "Dong furen" (*The Arch*). All translations from Chinese to English in this chapter are mine.
4. Rey Chow, "Loving Women," 121-170.
5. Rey Chow, "Loving Women," 121.
6. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 135-136.
7. Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," 143.
8. Judith Mayne, "Lesbian Looks," 118.
9. Lau Shing-hon, "Tang Shu Shuen," 360.
10. Stephen Teo, "Hong Kong Cinema," 140.
11. Law Kar, "The Significance of *The Arch*," 163.
12. Mayne, "Lesbian Looks," 118.
13. Vincent Canby, "The Arch," 8.
14. All the biographical data was collected through personal interviews with Tang Shu Shuen at her home in Los Angeles in 2002 and 2003.
15. Wai Chi Chuk, "Liangwei guopian qingnian daoyan" (Two young Chinese directors).
16. See, for example, G. B. Endacott, *A History of Hong Kong*, p. 314, and Matthew Turner, "Hong Kong Design and the Roots of the Sino-American Trade Disputes," 51.
17. Sing Wah, "Yu Tang Shuxuan tan dianying" (*Talking about Film with Tang Shu Shuen*), 28.
18. Kar, "The Significance of *The Arch*," 163.
19. Tang recalled in an interview how Subrata Mitra had conflicts with the Hong Kong film crew; one of the examples she cited was that Mitra, in order to achieve a certain kind of cinematic look, rejected the conventional lights available at the Cathay Studios and

chose to build his own lights with paper mounted on wood instead. The Hong Kong film crew members looked down upon these cheaply built lights and threw them down from a slope in the middle of the shoot. The film crew members called Mitra "Ah Cha," the derogatory term for South Asians living in Hong Kong, many of whom were commonly seen at the time as associated with jobs like security guards.

20. See, for example, Lui Yi Tin, "Chow Hsuan Talks about the Love Script," 27.
21. Elizabeth Cowie, "Fantasia," *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis*. London: Macmillan, 1997, 123-165.
22. *Ibid.*, 134.
23. Lu Li, "Tang Shuxuan fangwen ji" (Interview with Tang Shu Shuen, 1970), 30.
24. Tania Modleski, "Time and Desire in the Woman's Film."
25. *Ibid.*, 336.
26. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," 113.
27. Tang Shu Shuen, "Director's Notes," 5.
28. Lao Zi, *Dao De Jing*, 12.