THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF AN INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE: A STUDY OF CHINA BEHIND

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Tang Shu Shuen (Tang Shuxuan) was born in 1941 in the Yunan Province of China, grew up in Hong Kong and Taiwan, then left for the U.S. to study filmmaking at the University of Southern California. When she returned to Hong Kong in the 1960s, the colony was going through massive industrialization and commercialization. Registered industrial undertakings almost tripled within this decade, increasing from 5,980, employing 230,000 people, in 1961 to 14,754, employing 561,563 people, in 1969 (Hong Kong Committee of the International Council on Social Welfare 1970).

The late 1960s were a period of crisis. Politically, it witnessed unprecedented class struggles brought by the anti-colonization protests of students and workers in 1966 that widened to become mass anti-imperialistic demonstrations in 1967, later co-opted by Maoists. Generally speaking, late 1960s and early 1970s were a period when Hong Kong underwent intense social dichotomization between colonial oppression and nationalistic sentiments. Culturally, Hong Kong was at a crossroad. Youth publications and social clubs flourished. Importation of Western counter-culture happened concurrently with debates about Chinese nationalism and the status of Chinese language in the British colony.

This historical convergence defined Tang's authorship in many ways. Tang's debut feature, The Arch (Dong Furen), was shot during the uprisings in 1966-1967 when the Cathay film studios were deserted. It premiered at the Hong Kong City Hall in 1969. Using a black-and-white period drama, primarily studio shooting and some professional actors, this eyebrow-raising debut generated a significant amount of critical attention in Hong Kong and abroad, but was a commercial failure in Hong Kong. Tang threw herself right into production of her second film soon after she left The Arch in the hands of an influential French distributor (Fong 1974: 20). Pierre Rissient, an established film critic, arranged for its theatrical run in France, "from cities to villages", apparently achieving a "continuous full house for four months" in Paris.1 Tang's second film was first entitled The Dissidents, later evolved into China Behind (Zaijian Zhongguo, 1974). It is focused on a heated but highly repressed topic during the 1960s and 1970s- the Cultural Revolution- and chose to adopt a black-and-white, realist, almost "documentary-like" photographic style with a mainly non-professional cast and crew. The film was shot in Taiwan but set mostly in China. These two films established Tang as one of the most important "art film" directors in Hong Kong's cinema history by Law Kar (1983) and Lau Shing Hon (1984). Both held her early two films as "pioneering" and of an "extraordinary talent".

Having studied and lived in Taiwan and the U.S., Tang returned to Hong Kong of the 1960s as an outsider:

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 1975: 28).

It is in such a context, where Tang Shu Shuen's cultural identity has been problematized by her experience of a series of border-crossing 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, not only in terms of ethnicity but also gender. As a stranger returning to a place she knew as a child but has 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, which was constantly being marginalized 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 female subjectivity impossible. Tang's physical experience of border crossing could then be translated into a mise-en-scène that destabilized hegemonic ideas of nationality, sexuality and the family. Her struggles involved an anticolonizing conscience and courage and a postcolonial consciousness, much at odds with the colonizing, patriarchal and capitalizing climate of the time. Seen in the context of Hong Kong cinema, The Arch posed an unprecedented overt critique of the oppressiveness of Chinese tradition toward women. By bringing these interrogations from a period drama to the contemporary present, Tang's second film, China Behind, further pushes the boundaries of the existing socio-political institutions to such an extent that it was banned by the Hong Kong colonial Government when it was completed in 1974. It was not officially released until 1987, and has never been theatrically shown.

Beverle Houston (1994:271) asks regarding the "problem of Dorothy Arzner": How can the female auteur be "positioned in a history of film that is the history of the structure and development of its institutions and practices"? This essay on the challenges and questions raised by China Behind is inevitably also a study on cultural ownership and the exercise of power in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s. To further understand the possibilities and limits of Tang's authorship, it is crucial to examine the operations of the colonizing political institutions as well as the colonized, cultural institutions, and the ways in which these institutions have worked to reinforce and perpetuate each other. This article will address three inter-related institutions and historical practices of Chinese and Hong Kong cinema, in relation to a reading of the subversions and challenges posed to these institutions by China Behind, which not only seeks to depoliticize an over-political narrative but also seeks to repoliticize it. The institutions and practices discussed are: the traditional focus on Chinese cinema as a medium for ideological communication and political mobilization, the advocacy of social and socialist realism in Chinese cinema, and film censorship policy in Hong Kong.

Cinema as Revolutionary Tool

In early 20th century, most of the films shown in China were foreign-made. Early Chinese cinema was heavily influenced by the conventions of Beijing Opera. The May Fourth Movement in 1919 revolutionized Chinese language, literature and art first and foremost, through its advocacy of the use of the vernacular in all aspects of life. When it became possible for intellectuals to read and produce literature in the vernacular, naturalistic spoken drama was also brought to the stage and soon after, to the screen. In the wake of the Japanese Imperial Army's invasion and seizure of Northeast China in 1931, and the Japanese bombing of Shanghai in 1932, May Fourth intellectuals, interested in the role cinema played in the public sphere, began their association with film work, many of whom contributed to the reorganization of cinema towards social consciousness and humanistic concerns. Modern drama and film productions shared their talent from a similar pool of westernized intelligentsia.

Before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chinese Communist artists founded, acquired and/or dominated successful film studios in the 1920s and 1930s, including Mingxing, Lianhua and Diantong. Not all the films by leftist or "progressive" makers did well commercially. The majority of the film market at the time still consisted primarily of foreign films, in particular American, and screen versions of the "mandarin duck and butterfly" style of popular fiction with melodramatic plots and stereotypical characters, which grew with the advent of sound (Link 1981, Clark 1987). Yet, a realist tradition grounded in patriotic sentiments and portrayal of social struggles, epitomized by "classics" such as The Goddess (Shennu, Wu Yonggang 1934), The Highway (Dailu, Sun Yu, 1934), Street Angel (Malu Tianshi, Yuan Muzhi, 1937), The Spring River Flows East (Yijiang Chunshui Xiangdongliu, Cai Chusheng and Zheng Junli, 1947-8), has always been held in high regard in

Chinese film history:

Chinese film has its own realist tradition. We cannot discuss this central issue without first mentioning left-wing films of the 1930s and 1940s. With the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese invasion, and civil strife among the people, the situation was exceedingly acute. Society was experiencing violent upheaval[...] ultimately making it impossible for film, "to undergo self-consciously pioneering experiments, or to pursue more exquisite, complicated and abstract aesthetic styles. It simply couldn't neglect the needs of the people" (Xia 1987: 35).

It goes without saying that this social realist tradition with its golden age set among the left-wing films of the 1930s and 1940s is also a male-monopolized tradition. The only female authors working during the same time would be the Chinese-American Esther Eng, who was literally unmentioned in any study of this period, and the writer Eileen Chang (a.k.a. Zhang Ailing), who remained in the role of the scriptwriter and was often considered an "alternative" to the discourse of social realism, partly due to her interest in gender relations and family business. As Reynaud (2000) has noted in relation to the Cahiers auteurs, one common strategy to exclude women from cannon formation is to designate issues around family, body and/or gender as "private" issues, thus not social, universal or political enough to be serious.

The rise of the Communist Party in 1940s exploited the social realist tradition and pushed it in (its own) "socialist", propagandistic directions. At the influential Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art held in the Spring of 1942, Mao Zedong emphasized that literature and art should serve, above all, political purposes, and that artists should learn from and speak to "the worker/peasant/ soldier masses". Mao propagated the presumption that the more complex a work was in artistic terms, the less it should be trusted politically: "Insofar as a work is reactionary, the more artistic it is the more harm it can do to the people and the more it should be rejected" (McDougall 1980: 78).

Mao's Yan'an talks not only further accentuated the relationships between Party, artists, and audience but also further theatricalized Chinese cinema to an extreme. By the end of 1965, most of the few films produced were celluloid versions of Communist operatic morality play, many of which were on military subjects. By 1966 the list of criticized films had lengthened to include many works that allegedly peddled a "bourgeois" rather than a correct, "proletarian" view of the Chinese past. Jiang Qing held such a high regard of the significance of film as a medium for influencing audiences that she closed down all feature film production for over four years. From 1966 to 1970, many older artists suffered imprisonment, violence, physical deprivation or exile to labor reform camps. All but a handful of the movies made in China in the previous seventeen years were banned (Clark 1987:125-9).

Social Realism

This sense of urgency to use cinema to make political statements, governed by the Party or not, has affected and produced a tradition of Chinese-identified "serious" filmmakers, including those outside China. Cantonese films made in Hong Kong before the 1960s have drawn mainly from the strong Chinese theatrical tradition, emphasizing the spoken word and its social consciousness. Roger Garcia (1982) traced the social realism found in Hong Kong Cantonese cinema of the 1950s to the tradition of colloquial drama developed from the May Fourth Movement and the relationship of this development to a sense of political urgency:

It is interesting that, at the very moment when the European avant-garde was moving from representational forms to modernist abstraction, the Chinese avant-garde adopted for revolutionary purposes, the mode of representational realism. (103)

In this film tradition which Garcia calls a "non-montage cinema", long takes were preferred; close-ups, jump cuts, oblique camera angles were avoided. "The camera was an observer, like the theatre audience" (Shu Kei 1982: 120). The historical politicization of Chinese cinema has led the film critic Ma Ning (1987: 63-92) to characterize the work of the "New Filmmakers" of the PRC of the 1980s as participating in "a process of depoliticization" in order to assert their subjectivity. The work of Tang Shu Shuen could also be seen as a conscious depolitization and repoliticization of Chinese cinema.

Amidst the intensely political climate of the mid to late 1960s when The Arch was conceived and produced, Tang consciously departs from a direct interrogation of contemporary political ideologies by setting the film in a distant past. In the publicity pamphlet of The Arch, Tang (1969: 5) declares to have paid special attention to "the theories of the Western concepts of cinema art", by departing "from the traditional ways of film making in China" and attempting "to go back to the method by which Chinese characters (word-symbols) were originally constructed" (emphasis mine). Tang's strong emphasis on formalistic devices, including visual manipulation and her montage-oriented approach, significantly subverts the theatrically based realist tradition of the Chinese drama, the dogma of the PRC films during the 1960s, and the conventions of the Hong Kong Cantonese films of the 1950s. She seeks to reinvent her own tradition which negotiates between the visual-orientation of the Chinese ideograms ("word-symbols", "each Chinese character is a picture in itself") and the cinematic language she has adopted from her Western education. Her focus on "private" issues like mothering the family and female desire further depoliticizes her drama yet repoliticizes it in terms of gender and sexuality.

While China Behind, with its focus on four youths fleeing Communist China during the Cultural Revolution, could be easily seen as a political drama, I would argue that it is also a depoliticized one. A year after China Behind was banned, Tang spoke about the inability of the Hong Kong censorship system in comprehending her "depoliticized political drama":

China Behind was banned in Hong Kong, because it was feared that it would hurt Hong Kong's relations with its neighboring country. That film uses the Chinese Cultural Revolution as a backdrop. Apparently it could be seen as loaded with political ideologies, but its point of departure has absolutely no intentions for political advocacy. What I wanted to explore was when a human being lives in a particular environment, what her/his reactions (to that environment) would be like (Sing 1975: 27).

Orientalism

In order to argue for the autonomy of creativity (against strong social currents no doubt), Tang advocates the binary opposition between "art" and "politics" and refuses to address the ideological content of her film texts:

I am not interested in politics. If I make a film to talk about a modern Chinese person, I won't put the emphasis on the social reality. I don't like social comment. That's something very superficial, very shallow, very low. Society, country; those are all human creations. Throughout several thousand years - it (society) either exists in one form or another, and they are all so similar[...] Art should go beyond the social and the political to deal with essential human condition... (Tang as interviewed by Lu 1970: 33).

Tang fails to register that the representation of the "essential human condition" is exactly what the socio-political context is censoring. But in the context of Hong Kong, and to a certain extent, China, without a modernist tradition, art always needs to be legitimized by a social function. Tang's arguing for an autonomous position of art might be more radical than it sounds. In the midst of Jiang Qing's frantic attempts in repressing all depictions of Chinese reality, and churning out instead fantastical representations of an idealized China, China Behind strategically speaks to and about a present China which ideologically resembles much of its feudalistic past ("Throughout several thousand years... they are all so similar"). Using primarily black-and-white, handheld cinematography, location shooting and non-professional actors, in a style closer to post-war Italian neo-realism than to Chinese leftist realism of the 1930s and 1940s, China Behind revives the humanistic concerns of Chinese cinema that have been suppressed by the current political machine. Through such insistence, it foregrounds the political brainwashing and rejects the amnesia.

When The Arch was shown at Cannes and all over France, receiving critical acclaim and apparently box office success in Paris during 1967-1969, a new form of Orientalism, the figuration of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and Communist China as an idealized utopian culture by French intellectuals, was just taking shape. China was posited in a historically transcendent, feminine, maternal realm outside any patriarchal system. Lisa Lowe (1991) analyzes the idolisation of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the PRC by French intellectuals during the early 1970s, epitomized by works like Julia Kristeva's Des chinoises (1974), Roland Barthes's Alors la

Chine? (1975), and the avant-garde theoretical journal Tel quel (1968-1974), as part of a movement to critique earlier nationalistic ideologies within their own culture. The Chinese Cultural Revolution fills the intellectual and emotional gap left by the suppression and sense of failure from the French student revolts and workers' strikes of May 1968.

Tang chooses to demythologize a political reality which is itself being rapidly orientalized by European, especially French and later American, intellectuals. If we see China Behind in relation to these configurations of China and Chinese woman as the Utopian Other, then the "femaleness" of Tang Shu Shuen's authorship is not concentrated so much on her representation of the female body but more on the displacement and defamiliarization of China as the cultural Other, constructed not just by the West but also by the Chinese State machine itself. The "Great Proletarian Revolution" is manufactured as the fantasy of the State, positioning its citizens as symptoms. The "proletarian" is put in the position of the Woman, for the jouissance of the State apparatus. While the revolt of the woman in The Arch is manifest in her reconstruction of mise-en-scène within a site already constructed by the State, China Behind shows the individuals struggling to abandon their positions within that State/site altogether. Communist China populated not by humans but by the Cultural Revolution directed by Mao, is represented as a site that is increasingly unliveable.

When the four protagonists attempt to hitchhike to Weizhou, they are initially rejected and suspected by students on the truck. They manage to silence these red guards by starting to sing "The East Is Red" (Dong Fang Hong), a propagandistic song glorifying Mao as the Rising Sun. In another scene when they are being stopped and questioned by another group of Red Guards in Weizhou, they get away again by bursting into cursing, a signifier of being a "good revolutionary" through one's ability to denounce the hierarchical values embedded in the Chinese language itself, with its traditional emphasis on decency and lyricism. Political tools apparently for the production of solidarity and a national, revolutionary culture are represented as temporary tropes to suspend criticality of "the enemy", to achieve an individual or selfish goal, in a way not unlike Mao's project of the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese society which the protagonists find themselves in is like any other under a fascist regime, extremely seducible and vulnerable to political manipulation, and a collective subscription to the illusion of a homogeneous imagined community. The only position left for its citizens, is one of relentless self-sacrifice, as automaton (to be in synchronization with the State machine) and as spectacle (for all of Mao's enemies, including his opponent Lin Biao, whom the Cultural Revolution is arguably designed to defeat, and the capitalist societies of the West).

The Body from China to Hong Kong

Politically, Communist China at the time could be seen as engaged in the largest masochistic activity possible with Mao as the privileged onlooker. Hong Kong was perhaps the community at the time that had the most first-hand information about what was going on in China, and most affected by it emotionally and politically. Yet it was not directly engaged in the Cultural Revolution, at least not for any extended period of time. Many Hong Kong historians have studied the impact of the Cultural Revolution in contributing to a distinct Hong Kong identity. Lau Siu-kai and Kuan sin-chi (1988) in "Hong Kong as a Chinese Society," The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese write:

From the late 1960s to the late 1970s, the divergence in the paths of development between Hong Kong and China intensified. In this crucial decade, the pace of development of Hong Kong accelerated, producing enormous changes in the social landscape. In the same period, (China) was almost totally shut off from foreign cultural influences. If the normative orientations, life-style and mental outlook of the Hong Kong Chinese and the Chinese on the mainland were already quite different by the late 1960s, they became wide apart in the late 1970s. (1-2)

That decade of political turmoil just across the border produced an overwhelming sense of anxiety, empathy and vulnerability, and in several ways, constructed a self-conscious cultural identity of Hong Kong as a community through what Rey Chow (1993: 20-21) calls a "sense of immediacy of a particular diasporic reality",

which a lot of us growing up in the 1960s and 1970s of Hong Kong could relate to. Chow argues that memories of watching Chinese refugees swimming across the border are specific to a position caught "between two dominant cultures, British colonial and Chinese Communist." This marginalized position, which is not chosen by those from Hong Kong but one constructed by history, brings with it a certain privilege of observation and an unwillingness to idealize oppression" (Chow 1993:20-21). I would argue that it is with this particular "privilege" that China Behind is inscribed particularly as a Hong Kong film, although the majority of the film chooses to tackle the dominant culture of Mainland China, and most of the location shooting is done in Taiwan. If The Arch could still be mistaken as a nostalgic reworking of the origin of a lyrical Chineseness, set in an ancient, pre-industrial past and longed for by a Westernized Hong Kong woman, it is obvious that in China Behind, there is no origin, no safe space to ever fantasize of returning to.

The dominance of this polity next door is represented not just in its mere scale but more so, in its aggressiveness to infiltrate every aspect of human life. Song Quan, Song Lan and Hao Dong all need to leave because their future is limited by their ("capitalist") class background, despite (or more accurately, due to) their privileged education. The relationship between Song Lan and Han Lun is put into crisis with the predictable prospect of them being sent to diverse areas of China, so they not only have to make a decision about their career but also have to decide on their love. Hao Dong chooses to leave, because China, with its iron curtain policy, offers few opportunities for a youngster who aspires to a much wider world accessed by American radio. These characters' ambitions, livelihood and emotional lives are all seen as invaded and curtailed by the ever omnipresent politics. In the scene where the announcement of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" is made through the megaphones on top of buildings, the intercutting of anonymous students' faces are shown one after another, all looking up as if submitting themselves to a higher voice of authority, finally culminating in a collective abandonment of books frozen in the air. This freeze-frame is soon followed by a series of bustling activities on campus, resulting in an endless production of "Big Characters' Posters", banners and slogans. People are seen stigmatized, tortured; some kill themselves to get out of it. The sheer abundance of anonymous violence represented by the mise-en-scène and editing of this sequence renders the subjectivity and sobriety of the central characters and their self-determined choice of leaving even more poignant.

Female Subjectivity

Song Lan, like the female characters in The Arch, is represented as a particularly active agent of her desires. Her subjectivity is emphasized at every stage of the film. Due to their different class backgrounds, Song Lan and her boyfriend Han Lun have to be assigned to different provinces by the State. The two lovers address this "fate" very differently. In the scene where she confronts Han Lun for his lack of psychological preparation in finding a way to address this separation, the camera is placed in a position that foregrounds Song Lan, achieving a semi close-up of her face, while Han Lun remains in the background, despite the fact that he seems to be the one undergoing greater emotional conflict. The focus of this scene is on Song Lan's assertion of her agency, forming a critique of Han Lun's procrastination and inability to articulate his feelings.

There are many ways in which Tang has used Song Lan's characterization to explore issues around Chinese femininity and subjectivity. In contrast to the male-dominated literacy represented in The Arch, Song Lan is emphasized as the character most akin to literature, among all the characters in the film, and dares even to criticize the State's policies in censoring all literature considered "not proletarian enough" among her peers. This critique of the lack of freedom of expression embodied in the film text could be ironically seen as a prelude to the censorship of the film in Hong Kong due to political reasons. Seen in this light, Song Lan speaks from not only her character, but from the privileged position of the entire film.

The representation of the female body in China Behind is worth more attention. In re-examining the "socialist feminist representations" of Chinese women in films made in Communist China in the 1950s, Esther Yau (1989) rightly points out that they help to legitimate the successful installation of a new social order hinged on repression, and specifically, on women's willing subordination:

Revolutionary heroines were often represented taking an active role in production and policy, while necessarily mediating, on the one hand, between their less forthcoming clan leaders and husbands who still held residual forms of power, and on the other, the male cadres who represented Party presence in the villages (7). Cinematic constructions of women during the Cultural Revolution further aim to mould women into robotic super-performers, with their tasks confined to fighting class enemies and seizing political power. Although mostly censored by Governments in the West, these hyperbolic profiles of heroines revolutionized the images of Chinese women as bearers of a political and economic order, and put women in more privileged positions of power than the assignments of pre-1949 Chinese films or the Hollywood production of China Dolls during the same period.

Yet, the elimination of femininity and the repression of the woman's libidinal energies and desires also violate her individuality. The instrumentalization of the human (male and female) body, the glorification of a robotic, emotional blankness, and the fascination with discipline reaches its climax during the Cultural Revolution. This political asceticism and fascism over the body is most starkly represented in the characterization of Song Quan. As a doctor professionally trained in dissecting and diagnosing the human body as a biological machine, he is committed to imposing discipline on his own body and on those of others. Just when they approach the shore, Hao Dong sensibly suggests that they share the milk they have brought in order to sustain their energy in swimming. Despite their sheer physical deprivation, Song Quan rejects the proposal, a response which could only be read as a internalized form of sado-masochistic punishment to reassert the order of the State through censoring one's own body.

The impossible continuation of the love affair between Song Lan and Han Lun, had they stayed in China, points to a system that refuses to register sexuality as an integral part of its citizens' lives. In a scene signifying the difference between two generations of women, Song Lan's mother, in an attempt to empathize with the younger generation's decision to leave Communist China, recollects fondly her fashion and cosmetics in the past, whereas her daughter has to wear "rough clothes" for her country. Raised in an ideology that suppresses all symptoms of the human body and polices desire, Song Lan, however, criticizes her mother for being "too much". China Behind stages this clash of ideologies through an argument of the historical relations between women and fashion, as a device to question the reorganization of the body, especially female, by the political machine, while not neccessarily prioritizing either position.

Through such, it foregrounds a diversity of women's subjectivity; here with contradictory positions of women seeking self-determination via control over their own body and its representation. It is also worth noting that in the end, the film does highlight the vulnerability of Song Lan's position against the current of a worldwide economy rapidly turning into "advanced capitalism". One of the characteristics of advanced capitalism, as noted by Williams (1977: 125-6), is the penetration of dominant culture into previously "reserved" areas of experience and practice, areas which might have been assigned as "private" or "aesthetic". Song Lan's hysterical laughter while appropriating a new image for her body at the hair salon in Hong Kong exposes the contradictions and ironies embedded in this ultimate act of release, in the ways she has allowed her body to be dominated by the new economy of capitalism. Since the subjectivity of Song Lan has been established throughout the film, as one who actively challenges capitalistic notions of femininity to the extent of policing one's bodily desires, the ending of her letting her own body to be transformed becomes also a moment of self-betrayal or disillusionment, a moment of subsuming one's subjectivity under the larger forces of Western capitalism.

The representation of Song Lan throughout the film, is, however, not as a self-sacrificing revolutionary heroine. The scene of Song Lan and Han Lun having (pre-marital) sex breaks the taboos of both Maoist asceticism and Chinese traditional culture by challenging the regulation of sex and reproduction through the institutions of heterosexual marriage and the state apparatus. Song Lan's image in China, apparently compliant with Communist ideology, of being dressed in a revolutionary uniform "just like the men's", is also subverted by her pregnancy, and her unscrupulous individualistic pursuit of the desires of her body through scooping rice with her

hands from a wood bucket in a village cottage, and attempting to kill the child who witnessed her act of stealing.

When Song Quan discovers on the hanging bridge that Song Lan is pregnant and accuses Han Lun to be responsible for her pregnancy, Song Lan, despite her physical state, stands up for herself and admits her own responsibility. Ironically, it is Han Lun who repetitively asks Song Lan and Song Quan to forgive him for her (Song Lan's) pregnancy. Chinese male masochism reinforces the ideology that the production and reproduction of national culture, discourse and babies are exclusively male responsibilities, hence the woman loses access to representation (including that of her desires) and to her own body. Whether in the "old society," in which the only position available for Tung is that of the spectacle framed by the erection of the Arch, or in the "new society" that censors sexuality per se, women's bodies are used in the production of a national culture that aims to repress women's agency. The scene of confrontation between Song Quan, Song Lan and Han Lun on the bridge, however, voices a possible critique of this specific formulation of Chinese phallocentrism via male masochism, when men are conditioned to take all the cultural and sexual responsibilities upon themselves and blame themselves for whatever goes wrong. Such masochism is interestingly, represented as unchanged within Communist ideology, despite its famous claim for having "women holding up half of the sky". On the same note, only Song Quan and Han Lun are initially seen to have guilty feelings about leaving, for not contributing to a national discourse which they have inherited (despite its running amok and its violence from which they suffer), not Song Lan herself.

These masochistic and narcissistic tendencies, produced to evoke sympathy and to reinforce the centralization of the male psyche as part of a performative Chinese masculinity, are again exposed and parodied in the end with Hao Dong's exaggerated confession to the church. In contrast to the (exclusively male) group swimmers' recitation of Mao's words in "recovering a national culture to conquer the enemies of the West" (emphasis mine), Hao Dong's "performance" is detached from the usual nationalistic, militaristic, utopian and / or ethnocentric discourse which disguises and legitimizes it; the fantastical and self-victimizing quality of such a discourse becomes even more foregrounded. Situating this in a Christian church not only signifies the identity of Hong Kong as a colonial city with missionary influences, but also highlights the vulnerability and manipulability of Hao Dong's new-founded community, easily seduced by master narratives, in a way not unlike the one he flees from.

Hong Kong Identity in Construction

Hong Kong is in many respects situated, in China Behind, on the same level as China itself. This is perhaps most radical in Tang Shu Shuen's vision in relation to the Hong Kong context. As a community mostly made up of refugees from China, Hong Kong residents need to see themselves as inhabiting a reality radically different from that of China, and in many ways, they also actively construct (while being constructed) their identities in contrast to that of China. As in part an outsider returning from the U.S., Tang Shu Shuen maintained a privileged criticality towards this society quite inaccessible to the people who have sweated hard to construct it. The society she found was one that offered a stable shelter and functional environment for many Chinese refugees to build families in, with a capitalized, westernized façade on the one hand, and intense class differences suppressed by the popular and political discourse on the other. The activist movements of 1966-1967 exploded some of that illusory sense of stability and led to a wave of emigration from Hong Kong.

The "riots" epitomized the sharp class conflicts produced by the manufacturing boom of Hong Kong of the 1960s. Under the "laissez-faire" policy of maximum profit at the expense of social equality, the lower working classes found their plight ignored and labor exploited endlessly. It was often the incoming Chinese refugees who did not have the privileged language skills (English) and in particular, those from areas other than Canton, who did not have a working knowledge of the dominant vernacular either (Cantonese) who went to the bottom of the barrel and suffered the most. Han Lun in China Behind cannot even work properly as a bus boy in the Hong Kong Stock Market because of his inability to speak Cantonese; Hao Dong, for all his political ambitions

ends up a factory worker, and is seen as "not fast enough" in an environment that prioritizes speed and a person's utilitarian value over thought, feelings, rhetoric or ideals. Song Lan, further limited by her pregnancy, can only make plastic flowers at home. Their new found predicaments all but reveal the violence of Hong Kong's colonial and economic structures.

Assessing the accumulation of factors which led to the 1966 "riots", The Far Eastern Economic Review (1966) remarks in its editorial at their outbreak:

The list of public grievances against the authorities of Hong Kong - some justified, some not so - is too long to be briefly detailed. But it boils down to one fact: the bulk of the population of a sophisticated modem community has no effective way of making its will felt in the Colony's administration.

The strategic depoliticization in developing the Hong Kong community was for the British Government, not only a trope to legitimize its colonial control amidst a time of worldwide decolonization, but also a means, ironically enough, of appeasing the dominant power across the border, China.

China in Front: Censorship

In relation to the censorship of China Behind, the chief censor Lebrun argued that the conservative Hong Kong colonial policies and legislature in the 1970s were only a "reflection" of the dominant conservative escapism in the society. I would argue that the policies and legislature themselves are also most constitutive of the dominance of conservative escapism. The monopolization of business-minded tycoons in the Hong Kong film industry was a result of colonial policies unique to Hong Kong. The industrial development of Hong Kong in the 1940s and 1950s, including that of the film industry, benefited greatly from the influx of Shanghai personnel and resources. Post-war Hong Kong films also continued the patriotic, social realist tradition of Shanghai films of the 1940s, whereas this tradition was becoming the target of debate within the increasingly monolithic Maoist ideology within China. On January 10, 1952, Hong Kong authorities deported eight Chinese film workers: "[...] on suspicion of too much activity on behalf on the Peking government [...] A second group of deportations - also including some film workers - occurred later in the month. This was a setback for the left-inclined studio of Hong Kong (Leyda 1972: 274).

The historical depolitization and commercialization of film production has always been an integral part of colonial policies. Colonization as a process of discursive repression, production and manipulation is implicated in the absence of certain ideologies and subjectivity in Hong Kong cinema as much as presence. The commercial and political "failures" of Tang Shu Shuen's works highlight the complexity of the political-commercial bond and the systemic erasure of the critical-minded Other, like Tang. In such light, the much-trumpeted laissez-fairism, as reiterated by Lebrun to be supposedly the bedrock of Hong Kong economic policy orientation, is a mere propagandistic façade. Historian Ming Chan (1996: 15) summarizes this context succinctly:

Not only were economic freedom and legal rights far from fully protected, but laissez-faire was a pretext for the deliberate official avoidance of the basic responsibility of a modem state toward its own people. The long record of the colonial regime's repression on behalf of big business and British management, via police and dubious judicial tactics against well-justified grassroots collective actions, substantiated popular suspicion that the economic and legal-administrative arms of the British establishment were one and the same.

To perpetuate its foothold in China through Hong Kong, the British government devised various strategies. Due to its geographical proximity to China (and arguably, its dependence on China for primary materials and natural resources), Hong Kong was seen by Britain from the outset as undefendable if invaded by China. As early as 1896, Sun Yat-sen, then a Hong Kong resident, during a series of revolutionary attempts to plot the overthrow of the Qing government which culminated in the successful 1911 revolution, was issued an Order of Banishment from the British colony, where he had studied as a medical student and which he was using as a base to host political meetings. The order only stated: "That the said Sun Yat Sin [sic] is, in the opinion of the Governor in Council, dangerous to the peace and good order of the colony."2 In response to Sun's request about what

exactly he had done that would constitute "a breach of British law on British territory," Stewart Lockhart representing the Hong Kong Government replied bluntly:

I am directed to inform you that this Government has no intention of allowing the British Colony of Hong Kong to be used as an Asylum for persons engaged in plots and dangerous conspiracies against a friendly neighboring Empire, and that in view of the part taken by you in such transactions, which you euphemistically term in your letter "emancipation of your miserable countrymen from the Tartar yoke," you will be arrested if you land in this Colony under an order of Banishment issued against you in 1896. (emphasis mine)3

This led to an inquiry by Michael Davitt, an Irish member of the House of Commons, who had suffered from imprisonment himself because of his efforts in organizing the Irish Independence Movement (Vaughan 1996: 27-35, Thomas and Thomas 1997: 57, Connolly 1998: 137). At the time of his arrest, he was known as having "personal links with the activist élite inside and outside parliament" (Vaughan 1996: 28), a position not unlike that of Sun Yet-sen. Involved in running guns at his youth, Davitt advocated the Fenian premise that armed Irishmen should be available to strike for Irish independence upon his arrest. But as an MP, he was ambitious and pragmatic enough to discard physical force in order to argue for cooperation with parliamentarians. Given his background, Davitt was probably expressing a sense of identification with the anti-imperialistic, revolutionary efforts of Sun Yat-sen. But seeing no other supporting voices in the Parliament, Davitt didn't insist on a critical stance. His initial inquiry forced Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies to justify the expulsion. Even Chamberlain himself felt that the banishment was of "a most arbitrary character, which might arouse much criticism, if its contents were known to some members of the House of Commons."4 Chamberlain must have considered himself fortunate to be able to get away with the following presentation to the House of Commons without arousing further inquiries:

[...] there seems to have been no doubt that he was implicated in a conspiracy against that Government which made and makes his presence in Hong Kong undesirable.5

Lockhart's reply first and foremost registered publicly the importance of a mutually dependent relationship with China ("friendly") due to its being so close ("neighboring") and its dominant political power ("Empire"). Chamberlain, knowing well that bowing to Chinese imperialism would be a risky argument to adopt before the House of Commons, translated that into a threat directed against the colonial rule of Hong Kong ("that Government"), although not without ambiguity.

I have quoted this historical incident in detail so as to trace a history of British political censorship in Hong Kong, in a form specific to Hong Kong, which acts parasitically and arbitrarily according to its perception of response from a Government other than its own, with or without the legislative regulation of the British Parliament. In response to a cartoon depicting a Qing Dynasty without a head, published in the People's Paper in Hong Kong in 1907, the (British) Hong Kong Government further passes "Ordinance no. 15", stating that "We the Hong Kong Government, for diplomatic reasons, will banish all newspapers, books, literature, pictures, which could be circulated in China and create emotional disturbance for the people there" (Cheng and Yim 1992: 91). Despite the various changes of government in China between 1896 and 1974, the basic principle of British censorship in Hong Kong - that not only protected the British rule but the Chinese rule as well - did not change. An article outlining the "new standards of Hong Kong film censorship" in 1973 shows the "threat to Hong Kong's friendly relations with its neighboring regions" as a major criterion for constituting a ban (Ming Pao Weekly 1973: 4-5). Unlike censorship based on depictions of sex and violence which could be partially regulated by the X Certificate, political censorship often produces more of a show/no show situation. The kind of political censorship that Hong Kong suffers from is also unique in many ways. A comparative review of the history of film censorship in the U.S. might offer us some insights. The First amendment of the U.S. Constitution grants its citizens the right to freedom of speech; the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that motion pictures as a medium of expression were entitled to its protection in the famous Miracle case in 1952, its first in film censorship for thirteen years. Justice Clark, speaking for the court, found "sacrilegious" to be an unconstitutional licensing

criterion. For the majority of the licensing cases heard by the U.S. Supreme Court after the Miracle case, the power of the censors continued to be cut back. When the New York censors refused to license Lady Chatterley's Lover, the film version of the D. H. Lawrence novel, on the grounds that the film was immoral in presenting adultery "as a desirable, acceptable, and proper pattern of behavior", the five Court members of the Supreme Court voted to reverse the New York order unanimously, because based on the "freedom to advocate ideas" guaranteed by the First Amendment, "speech dealing with sex at the level of ideas did not lose its protection merely by attractively portraying behavior that offended conventional moral standards" (Randall 1970: 53). These rulings have far-reaching effects. Hollywood movies in the 1960s had never been freer nor more provocative in content, in detailing erotica, nudity and violence. They have also given rise to new genres, including the "exploitation" genre in the 1960s and 1970s, the nudist camp, "girlie" and sado-masochistic comedies. The changing content, aesthetics and permissiveness of the imported American films affected the taste and demands of the local audience in Hong Kong, forcing the limits and standards in local production to adapt.

The British Council, speaking for Hong Kong's cultural policies, was quoted in the 1950s as saying "Everything American has reached this Colony except the baby-sitter."6 It seems that the British Council has missed something here. The debate between the systems of censorship and legislature in the U.S., for example, has never reached this colony. The Hong Kong Courts have never interfered with orders of the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (hereafter, TELA) in spite of the question of legality of their practice. The Courts of Hong Kong have also never linked issues of civil liberties, including the rights to freedom of speech, to any film censorship cases. TELA, whenever possible, demonstrates its absolute authority to refuse to issue exhibition permits to films, based on the speculation that a film will "upset the friendly relationships of Hong Kong with its neighboring regions" (in the case of China Behind and If I Were For Rea/Jiaru Woshizhendi) or "incite violence and its contempt for the law " (in the case of Dangerous Encounters- 1st Kind/Diyi Leixing Weixian). These rulings based on speculations were never discussed in relation to the issue of "advocacy of proscribed conduct" and its impact on human action: as the American Court asked in the Kingsley Pictures case, is there sufficient evidence in the film to show that advocacy of an idea would be immediately acted upon? In the case of China Behind, four young people are shown illegally crossing the Chinese border to escape to Hong Kong. There is an extensive portrayal and debate of their backgrounds and ideological beliefs which frame their actions and behaviors in reasonable terms within the film. How does that representation constitute sufficient data for a direct incitement to crime, beyond the level of suggesting an idea- an idea that has been suggested everyday in the Hong Kong newspapers of the 1970s reporting refugee influx from China?

Ian Peleg (1993) in "Censorship in Global and Comparative Perspective: An Analytic Framework", argues that censorship practices in "liberal democratic" regimes (particularly the U.S.) are less restrictive than those of totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, because they allow lively political debates on public policy issues, and it is private citizens and organizations, and not governments that mobilize censorship initiatives. Whether this smacks of "White, Western, patriarchal and bourgeois privilege" (Jansen 1993: 199) or not, the lack of public discourse on film censorship is a serious problem in Hong Kong. Unusually well-documented, the battle fought by director Tsui Hark for his film Dangerous Encounters- 1st Kind in 1980 was groundbreaking in helping the public understand the workings of Hong Kong film censorship7.

During the time when he was negotiating with Tsui, Lebrun was reported to have made it explicit that a laissez-faire attitude in managing the economy of Hong Kong should not translate into a laissez-faire attitude in managing its civil liberties:

At the Zonta Club, he donned "it" (the general public) with a different hat to propose his plans for introducing film-classification according to age-groups... such classifications would enable "sex films" that had reached "the permissive standards of Western films" to be released in the territory. But, he was a little worried that the "general public" might not be as liberal since "public opinion... was not ready to accept a complete laissez-faire

attitude" (Tan 1996: 90).

Among other things, the chief censor's self-righteous, condescending and paternalistic attitude in relation to his imaginary "general public" was unprecedentedly exposed in this case. Most importantly, this sudden exposure of political repression and bureaucratic proceedings in the public arena regarding media censorship led to a series of scandalous investigation in the 1980s which further ruffled the colony's censorship nest. The most important findings came from Frank Ching, a freelance journalist. He filed two reports with the Asian Wall Street Journal in 1987, entitled "Hong Kong Plays Political Censor For China: Colony Government Retains Illegal Powers To Block Films That Might Offend Beijing" and "Memo Disputes Colony's Claim on Censorship" (1987a: 1-9, 1987b:1-6). They included minutes from the Hong Kong Government's Executive Council's closed-door sessions, which showed that film censorship practices had been illegal since 1953. The documents showed that the colonial government had been advised by their legal advisers as early as 1972 that such practices were likely to be illegal. Rather than advocating remedial action, the government continued to give censors unfettered discretion to regulate, censor and ban films. Ching also noted that films since 1973, especially those which depicted China unfavorably, were invariably banned, inferring the existence of a "conspiracy" between the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. One of the first films that were banned under this "conspiracy" was China Behind.

In the end of China Behind, the characters find themselves caught between two worlds: their over-politicized, mainland Chinese backgrounds and an apparently "depoliticized", Hong Kong colonial ("laissez-faire") capitalism. Hong Kong itself is also visually framed between these two worlds: the influence of China signified by the glaring lights that say "Long Live Chairman Mao" on top of China Bank in Hong Kong's Central District, and a colonialist, materialist economy that counts individuals as exploitable, suppressible labor, overseen by the Queen's photo, the Hong Kong Hilton and its like. It is these unique structural limits of a Hong Kong identity which China Behind addresses. It is the same uniquely Hong Kong structure that seeks to strike a delicate balance between two systems that finds China Behind intolerable and needs to be barred from being seen at all. China Behind, with its original title The Dissidents, became a dissident itself, not in China but in Hong Kong. Although completed in 1974, China Behind was not released in Hong Kong until 1989, when the Chinese Government was considerably liberalized, and the Cultural Revolution was renounced officially in China as a mistake, primarily to legitimize the rule of Deng Xiaopeng and his "non-ideological" reform policies. China Behind, as an independently made film, which utilized primrarily the director/writer's personal resources, trained a non-professional crew and cast, mainly comprised of photojoumalist Chang Chao-tang and film students8, and was designed to articulate an issue heartfelt by the Hong Kong audience in order to make a difference locally and internationally at that time. However, if a case like this had happened in the 1990s, one can speculate that as soon as a film is censored, it would have become a bestseller among pirated VCDs (Video CDs) in the shopping malls of Mongkok the next morning, thanks to the omnipresent hegemony of advanced capitalism. In the days of Hong Kong when home video had not yet arrived, piracy of filmed representations was quite impossible, rendering China Behind literally impossible to be seen. The unique historical conditions of Hong Kong in early 1970s renders the suppression of Tang's authorship much more absolute than it would have been in other times.

But as Annette Kuhn (1988) and Tan have argued along Foucauldian lines of thought, censorship systems could be productive as well as prohibitive. Produced within "an array of constantly shifting discourses, practices, and apparatuses" (Kuhn 1988: 127), China Behind marked the beginning of an era of political film censorship in Hong Kong by "producing" the issue of politics as a taboo in Hong Kong cinema. It demonstrates a supreme colonial power operating by overriding legal and media apparatuses and constitutes another imperial power, the neighboring country, as a hegemonic center from which Hong Kong people only elusively thought they have fled from. The production of fear translates into a discourse of self-censorship. Very few Hong Kong films seek to confront issues of "politics", especially regarding those of China. Even in times when the society was filled with

anxiety about its political future, such as around 1984 when the Sino-British Declaration was signed, Hong Kong films that aim at any political relevance still remain at the level of allegory: by using another time -1941 in Hong Kong 1941 (Dengdai Liming, Leong Po-chih, 1984), 1940s in Love in a Fallen City (Qingcheng zhi Lian, Ann Hui, 1984), or another place - Vietnam in The Boat People (Touben Nuhai, Ann Hui, 1982), Shanghai in Shanghai Blues (Shanghai zhi Ye, Tsui Hark, 1984) and rural Fujian in Homecoming (Sishui Liunian, Yim Ho, 1984) to implicate indirectly the situation of Hong Kong (Li 1994).

During 1979-1989, according to Lebrun, approximately twenty films were banned from release for political reasons.9 One of the most discussed was the Taiwanese film If I Were For Real (Wang Tung, 1981), which, again, was banned in Hong Kong because it criticized the problem of bribery and bureaucratic hierarchy within the Chinese Communist Party. Despite (and probably due to) Frank Ching's reports and numerous other oppositional voices10, Governor David Wilson hastily pushed a Film Censorship Ordinance through the Legislative Council, instructing in Section 10(2)(c) the Film Censorship Authority to consider, during its appraisal of a film, "whether there is a likelihood that the exhibition of the film would seriously damage good relations with other territories"11. This of course serves as the best evidence to confirm Ching's "conspiracy" theory. Rhetoric like "neighboring regions" or "other territories", in Hong Kong's official books and the hearts of the "general public", is always understood as meaning China.

What was unique in Tang Shu Shuen's case was the timeliness of her political critique, which would have been groundbreaking in its representation of a not yet allowed public discourse if it had been released in 1974. Among other things, its issue-oriented approach, a rare bird in Hong Kong cinema of the 1960s, certainly signaled a possible direction and a lack to be filled in for the Hong Kong New Wave in the late 1970s and 1980s to come, and preceded, for example, the anti-communist perspectives and "the need to leave", voiced in the "New Wave classic" The Boat People, which became an instant box office success. Replacing the historical stature of China Behind, "Hui's work is now seen as the first Hong Kong picture to address the phobia and anxiety of Hong Kong people about 1997" (Teo 1997: 214). It was noted that the "miracle" of The Boat People-its ability of breaking the political taboo and being commercially released-was dependent on the fact that it was (ironically) produced by the Chinese-backed film company in Hong Kong, Sil-Metropole12. However, since its political connotations became too obvious from the audience reaction during its first run, it was never granted a re-run and its prints remain unavailable today.

The banning of China Behind not only exiled its political radicalism and vision but also killed its commercial potential in Hong Kong. When the ban was lifted in 1989, the year of the Tiananmen Massacre, Hong Kong people were much more concerned with their own future of facing a militaristic and chauvinistic China head on while the critique of the Cultural Revolution, even in China itself, had become just another propagandistic ploy. Despite being politically released in 1989, China Behind has never had a commercial run in Hong Kong. When it was shown for the first and only time publicly in Hong Kong before 1989, at the Hong Kong International Film Festival in 1984, Hong Kong film scholar Lau Shing-hon (1984) noted the historical significance of the film seen in its context:

The Arch and China Behind were the exceptions. The latter, as the only film that confronts the political tragedy in China at a time when the Gang of Four was still in power and the Cultural Revolution was praised as an achievement, proves to be the most important and courageous film of the seventies. (109)

The fact that such high praise from a local film scholar did not rescue the film from political or commercial censorship perhaps speaks the most about the multiple marginalization of Tang Shu Shuen's authorship. The changes in tone, aesthetics, genre and production structures of Tang's films after China Behind could also be seen as her efforts of claiming a greater ownership (and power) to a culture which was proven too conservative to fully register the stature of her first two films, either commercially or politically.

Footnote

Endnotes

1. I am quoting from the newspaper advertisement of The Arch when it had its theatrical run in Hong Kong in 1970.
2. CO129/283: 138; CO129/286: 338. The Hong Kong Public Records Office has compiled a guide to the CO129 Original Correspondence, the latest up to the year 1926, entitled CO129: Hong Kong Original Correspondence Contents. This entire case is also explained and examined in detail in K.C. Fok (1990: 36-66) Lectures on Hong Kong History: Hong Kong;'s Role in Modern Chinese History. Hong Kong: Commercial Press.

3. CO129/283:137.
4. CO129/286: 337.
5. CO129/286:338a.
6. Quoted in Stanley Reed, "Self-regulation or State Control? Film Censorship: An Analysis of Foreign Systems", British Film Academy Journal (Autumn 1956): 9, under the section describing film censorship regulations of Hong Kong in 1953.
7. Tsui Hark's account of his battle was printed as "Making An Appeal for the Third Time", Ming Pao Weekly 629 (November 30,1980).
8. Information on crew and funding was gathered from an interview I did in December, 1997, Hong Kong, with Cheuk Pak Tong, one of the assistant directors of China Behind.
9. Quoted from the editorial article "Re-examining the ever persistent Hong Kong film censorship system through the case of If I Were Real", Hong Kong Film Biweekly 264 (May 5,1989). Also see Tan, See Kam, "Ban(g)! Ban(g)! Dangerous Encounter - 1st Kind: Writing with Censorship", Asian Cinema (Spring 1996): 83-109. Tan's article documents and interrogates in detail the banning of Tsui Hark's Dangerous Encounter - 1st Kind in 1980, which is considered subversive to the colonial rule.
10. Emily Lau, "Sense and Censorship: Films Must Not Offend Peking," FEER (July 23,1987): 12-3; Chris Pomery, "Hong Kong '88: Censorship - Opening Up, Clamping Down," PEER (April 7,1988): 79-82. A joint report by the Hong Kong Journalists Association, Charles Goddard, Frances D'Souza and Kevin Boyle eds. (1993: 42) "Urgent Business: Hong Kong, Freedom of Expression and 1997" considers this section of the Ordinance a clear violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Bill of Rights.
11. Quoted from "A review of the limits of Hong Kong censorship through the case of If I Were for Real", Film Biweekly 264 (May 4,1989): 48.
12. "Passing Lights: Past Eight Years of Hong Kong Cinema"(Editorial), Film Biweekly 200 (November 6: 8)

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