



**Too Much: Melodrama on Film**  
**UK Premiere of 4K Restoration**

# The Arch

## **The Arch** Dong fu ren

Director: Tang Shu Shuen aka Cecile Tang  
Production Company: Film Dynasty Productions  
Executive Producer: Paul D. Lee aka Li Chaozong  
Producer: Tang Shu Shuen  
Production Supervisor: Chiu Ding aka Zhao Ding  
Production Assistant: Chen Zhe  
Assistant Director (Interiors):  
Yih Chia-tai aka Ye Jiatai  
Assistant Director (Exteriors):  
Tsao Wen aka Cao Wen  
Post Production Assistant:  
Yu-tu Tang aka Deng Yaozu  
Screenplay: Tang Shu Shuen  
Director of Photography (Interiors HK):  
Subrata Mitra  
2nd Unit Photography (Exteriors):  
Chi Ho-che aka Qi Hexi  
Additional Photography: Hal Harrison, Les Blank  
Special Assistant: Shi Meiying  
Lighting: Liu Pei  
Editors: Les Blank, C. C. See aka Si Shi  
Decoration: Lau Wen aka Norman/Luo Wen  
Set Decorator: Pau Tien-ming aka Bao Tianming  
Props: Chang Yi aka Zhang Yi  
Costumes: Liu Chieh-hui aka Liu Yin-fei/Liu Xianhui  
Wardrobe: Wu Chiun  
Make-up: Sung Hsiao-kiang aka Song Xiaojiang  
Titles & Optical: Consolidated Film Industries  
Music Composed and Performed by:  
Liu Tsun-yuen aka Lu Zhenyuan  
Panegyric and wine verses composed by:  
H.L. Sung  
Captain Yang's poem composed by: Dr S.S. Kwong  
English Titles: Xue Erwen  
Sound and Mandarin Dubbing:  
Ryders Sound Services, Inc.  
Sound Effects: Del Harris  
Cast:  
Lisa Lu (*Madam Tung*)  
Roy Chiao Hung (*Captain Yang*)  
Hilda Chou Hsuan (*Dong Weiling, the daughter*)  
Li Ying (*Old Zhang*)  
Wen Hsiu aka Man Sau/Wen Xiu  
(*Grandmother Dong*)  
Liang Jui aka Liang Yui/Liang Rui (*monk*)  
Wan Li aka Man Lei  
Wu Chiun aka Wu Cun  
Tang Shu-shen aka Shu Chen  
Chiu Szu-wen aka Zhao Siyun  
Tang Shu-chan aka Shu Zan  
Chang Yu-chuan aka Zhang Yuquan  
Hung Kao  
Wu Po aka Hu Bo  
Jojo Cheung  
Hong Kong 1968  
95 mins  
Digital 4K (restoration)

Restored in 4K in 2025 by M+ at Silver Salt  
Restoration laboratory, from a 35mm print  
preserved by University of California, Berkeley Art  
Museum and Pacific Film Archive and from a 35mm  
print preserved by BFI National Archive.

The restoration of *The Arch* is made possible by the  
support of CHANEL, M+'s Major Partner.

+ pre-recorded intro by Tang Shu Shuen

How radical Tang Shu Shuen's period melodrama must have seemed in 1970, arriving in a Hong Kong film industry dominated by kung fu and opera films, and still a decade or so away from the New Wave it anticipates. Tang, who was born in Taiwan and studied in the US, was something of an outsider in the Hong Kong industry, even before her gender is taken into account, but she was one of the most original of any filmmakers active at the time (and the bravest – her follow-up, 1974's covertly-shot *China Behind*, was one of the first films to address the excesses of the Cultural Revolution).

Set during the early Qing dynasty, *The Arch* focuses on a respected widow whose life is disrupted when a soldier is billeted to the house she shares with her daughter. The emotional turmoil and social disapproval aroused by the ensuing love triangle is vividly suggested in an intensely subjective mode that's been described as a mix of Mizoguchi, Alain Resnais and costume drama. The black-and-white cinematography by Subrata Mitra (DP on Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy* and others) is achingly beautiful, but it's how the measured pace is often disrupted by rapid *nouvelle vague*-inspired editing (by Les Blank!) – employing freeze frames, jump cuts, dissolves and montage – as well as the unusual use of traditional instrumentation, voiceover narration and sound design that really make *The Arch* spellbindingly unique.

James Bell, *Sight and Sound*, October 2015

## Director's notes

*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. It is not surprising that this method corresponds closely with the theories of the western concepts of cinema art. For each Chinese character is a picture in itself which conveys an idea, a feeling and a romance of its own.

The story of *The Arch* is subject to many interpretations. Some see in it a conflict between the force of tradition and the force of natural human feelings; some see in it a story of the irony of fate; some see in it the psychological development of a character, and some see in it another love triangle. Whatever the interpretation may be, the story is about a woman tormented and the effect of her inner conflicts upon the other characters. That to me, as the author-director, is the interesting thing.

I see in Madam Tung the helplessness of all of us. She exemplifies the ludicrousness of mankind, the futility of morality, the futility of intelligence, the futility of knowledge and of ethics – the fact that we cannot escape anguish and torment.

For it is pointless to conclude what is right or best for her to do. Her suffering comes not as the consequence of the choice she makes, for one way or the other one lives on. The ludicrousness is that we are forever forced to choose between insidious choices, significant to us because of the inherent weakness of human nature: the vulnerability of our feelings, the limitedness of our wisdom, and our inability to transcend our experiences – our lack of the cosmic sense.

## **Too Much: Melodrama on Film**

### **UK Premiere of 4K Restoration: The Arch**

Dong fu ren + pre-recorded intro

Sun 9 Nov 12:20; Fri 14 Nov 20:50

**The Eternal Breasts** Chibusa yo eien nare

Sun 9 Nov 14:50; Fri 21 Nov 20:45

**The Life of Oharu** Saikaku ichidai onna

Sun 9 Nov 18:10; Thu 20 Nov 17:50

**Now, Voyager**

Mon 10 Nov 18:00 (+ intro); Mon 24 Nov 20:40

**Stella Dallas**

Wed 12 Nov 18:00 (+ intro)

**7th Heaven**

Wed 12 Nov 20:35

**A Cottage on Dartmoor**

Fri 14 Nov 18:20; Sat 22 Nov 12:30

**Melo-dramarama**

Sat 15 Nov 11:00-17:00

**Far From Heaven**

Sat 15 Nov 18:00; Thu 20 Nov 20:50

**The Cranes Are Flying** Letyat zhuravli

Sat 15 Nov 20:45

**Written on the Wind**

Sun 16 Nov 11:00 BFI IMAX

**Brief Encounter**

Sun 16 Nov 14:45 (+ 80th Anniversary discussion)

**Stella**

Sat 22 Nov 15:00

**Madame X**

Sun 23 Nov 12:20 (+ intro); Sat 29 Nov 20:40

**The Wicked Lady** + panel discussion on

Gainsborough melodramas

Sun 23 Nov 14:50

**Madonna of the Seven Moons**

Sun 23 Nov 18:20

**Splendor in the Grass**

Mon 24 Nov 18:00

**Mamma Roma**

Fri 28 Nov 18:15 (+ intro)

**Olivia**

Fri 28 Nov 20:45

**Spring in a Small Town** Xiāochéng zhī chūn

Sat 29 Nov 12:40

**Volver**

Sat 29 Nov 18:10

**Leave Her to Heaven**

Sun 30 Nov 15:10

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Every character in *The Arch* has good intentions, and is without a pronounced tragic flaw. But the story does not turn out to be a happy one. And that is our lot. So what is there to offer as a comfort but tolerance of each other's weaknesses and compassion for each other's pain.

For a first directing project, *The Arch* is extremely complicated material. But because of its psychological nature, it offers a great deal of freedom for cinematic expressions and challenges creative use of the medium. I attempted to present this dramatic story in a simple detached manner, hoping only to show how similar are people, their needs, their feelings, and the predicaments they face, everywhere in the world. And how time will never change this.

## **Praise for ‘The Arch’**

‘*The Arch* is one of those rare films which rekindle my hope that cinema is capable of being an art form.’ – Edward Albee

‘*The Arch* by Shu Shuen is one of the most charming films I have ever seen. It is a kind of morality play executed in the spirit of Old China. Its serene mood of majestic tranquillity gives us a remarkable insight into a strange ancient world. Its pictures of breathtaking beauty and the action of its leading lady is simply superb. I am eagerly looking forward to Miss Tang’s next film.’ – Fritz Lang

‘I was so deeply moved by *The Arch*, aesthetically and humanely. Shu Shuen has achieved a film of poetic beauty, and in this particular era of explicit and vulgarised sensuality this treatment of contained passion is more powerful, reaches an intensity quite rare in films ... I admire a woman so young to have completed such a refined and enduring classique.’ – Anaïs Nin

‘One leaves the theatre feeling grateful, feelings assuaged, feeling that there truly is such a thing as human brotherhood and sisterhood, that passion stems from the soul and not the guts – in short, that there is hope for a better, brighter, cleaner world.’ – Henry Miller

‘Miss Shu Shuen reaches straight out for an enormous theme in her first work. In *The Arch* she gives us a film of great beauty and maturity, an astonishing debut.’ – Karel Reisz

‘A film with many magnificent scenes. Interesting direction ... A promising talent.’ – Josef von Sternberg

## Production notes

Suggested further reading: Ching Yau, *Filming Margins: Tang Shu Shuen, A Forgotten Hong Kong Woman Director* (Hong Kong University Press, 2004)