

Disappearing Politics and the Politics of Disappearance: Female Subjectivity, Left-Wing Films, and the Representation of 1930s Shanghai in *Center Stage*

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Abstract

This paper examines the intertextual structure and its dynamic employment of (de)constructing female subjectivity in Stanley Kwan's *Center Stage* (1992). In this study, I suggest how the film's fundamental reconstruction of the life experience of Ruan Lingyu (1910-35) is intertwined with representational erasure of 1930s Shanghai that in turn testifies to Hong Kong's own subjectivity. I focus on the places in *Center Stage* where remakes of certain scenes of Ruan's films along with original footage are inserted into the reconstructed narration of Ruan's life. By examining the appropriation of these clips in *Center Stage*, I demonstrate how a parallel is created between the female characters' experience in these 1930s films with the purported situation of Ruan Lingyu on the reconstruction level. I argue that in the filmmaker's effort to seemingly reconstruct the female subject, the narrative in fact serves to de-politicize the 1930s films, especially the leftist ones. With the postmodern meta-cinematic structure of this film, not only does the reconstructed female subjectivity dissolve in the self-reflexive move, but the leftist progressive ideologies are also undermined. The representational erasure of the leftist elements on the discursive level is supported by the art direction in *Center Stage*, in which painted paperboards are used as background. On these two intermingled discursive and visual layers, Kwan tackles the apocalyptic anxiety of Hong Kong society in the 1990s with a unique representational hegemony of 1930s Shanghai.

Keywords

Ruan Lingyu, *Center Stage*, left-wing film, subjectivity,
intertextual, depoliticization, Hong Kong

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