

Dai Jinhua

“In Vogue: National Ethnicity and Cultural Politics: *Lust, Caution* and China’s *Lust, Caution* Phenomenon”

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

4:00 pm | Maude Fife Room, 315 Wheeler Hall

Dai Jinhua will first ask: how do the various interpretive strategies revealed in the film text and its reception help us understand the mythological status of Ang Lee (a Taiwanese American), the renown of Eileen Chang (Taiwanese author of the short story on which *Lust, Caution* is based), and the nostalgia for 1930s Shanghai that became a vogue in China, these three phenomena constituting an intertwined palimpsest of cultural politics?

Second, she will address the intricate entanglements and transformations in the film concerning the national ethnicity of “China” that are simultaneously overlooked and indicated in both the acclaim and denunciations. When Ang Lee was praised by the mainstream media in both China and Taiwan as, respectively, “China’s leading light” and “Taiwan’s leading light”, but condemned by mainland scholars who castigated him as “the disgrace of Chinese people” and “a traitor,” these epithets revealed a shift in the image or self-image of “China” as well as the manner of writing about it. What do these debates tell us about the intrinsic speech-acts of political transformations, the constitution of a new mainstream ideology, and the significance of the role of the new middle class in contemporary China?

Finally, Dai Jinhua will examine *Lust, Caution* in the international context of spy films. It analyzes this genre as a narrative genre of the Cold War but more importantly a latent yet globally emergent cultural sign of the demise of the Cold War and the passage into the new millennium. She will conclude by posing a set of questions about the multifarious positions that accompanied the phenomenon surrounding *Lust, Caution*: Which nationality, or should we say, ethnicity, does *Lust, Caution* represent? Is this a unified nationality/ethnicity or a dispersed one? Does this film express loyalty? Or is it a betrayal? The controversy surrounding *Lust, Caution* signifies the deep, lingering echoes of the year 2008 -- China’s “Olympic year” (and also the year of the Tibetan incident and the Sichuan earthquakes) and the year 2009 -- the fantastical and absurd overture to the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

With responses by Wendy Brown (Heller Professor of Political Science, UC Berkeley), Linda Williams (Professor of Film Studies and Rhetoric, UC Berkeley), Lisa Rofel (Professor of Anthropology, UC Santa Cruz). Introduced and moderated by Pheng Cheah (Professor of Rhetoric, UC Berkeley).