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From Eileen Chang to Ang Lee: Lust/Caution ed. by Peng Hsiao-yen and Whitney Crothers Dilley

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Peng Hsiao-yen and Whitney Crothers Dilley, editors. *From Eileen Chang to Ang Lee: Lust/Caution*. New York: Routledge, 2014. xi, 216 pp. Hardcover \$145.00, ISBN 978-0-415-73120-1.

Ang Lee's espionage thriller *Lust/Caution*, adapted from a short story by Eileen Chang, inspired vociferous commentaries and heated debates upon its release in 2007. The present work assembles the latest critical responses to the film and its literary inspiration from scholars in Taiwan and internationally. In doing so, it offers rich insight on the process by which Lee brought Chang's story to the screen as well as on the political controversies each artist provoked. Most contributors effectively incorporate a variety of modern critical approaches in their analysis of the themes of adaptation and betrayal, performance and identity, gender and sexuality, and power and manipulation. More importantly, some authors skillfully relate these themes to the complex historical and sociopolitical contexts of both sides of the Taiwan Strait as well as the rest of the globe.

The introductory chapter by the editors, Peng Hsiao-yen and Whitney Crothers Dilley, sets out by summarizing debates on eroticism, patriotism, and national identity that Lee's film initiated, following up with a survey of the vicissitudes of twentieth-century Taiwanese politics. Despite the film's setting in Mainland China during the Sino-Japanese War in the 1940s, and despite its transnational production and reach, they argue, "the uniquely Taiwanese national sensibilities and sentiments disclosed in *Lust/Caution* cannot be overlooked" (p. 4). Indeed, this sense of innately Taiwanese consciousness looms large, constituting one of the volume's key concerns. Its remaining chapters are grouped into three parts.

Part 1 focuses on adaptation, examining the processes of adapting literature for film and basing fiction on historical events. The four articles it comprises present divergent, sometimes conflicting, views of adaption as translation, betrayal, transformation, or consumption. In chapter 1, Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh proposes to go beyond the habitual concern with how faithfully a work has been

adapted. Instead, invoking Julia Kristeva's theory of "intertextuality," she focuses on the interplay, dialectics, and tension between the film adaptation and its literary source. Yeh perceptively analyzes how Lee's film translates what is essential yet implicit in Chang's original story—the dialogue between caution and lust—by adding to it the alternate shots of a German shepherd (a symbol of caution) and the couple's lovemaking.

Notably, Cecile Chu-chin Sun in chapter 2 uses the very schemata of fidelity and infidelity that Yeh seeks to circumvent. By her account, both the story and the film lack a convincing integration of the characters with the original historical event and context, resulting in textual incoherence. Sun goes on to fault the author and director for failing to offer "a clear conception of what they each want to convey in their works" (p. 36). Sun's view, however, largely disregards the intrinsic value of ambivalence and ambiguity in literary and filmic creation. Her concluding remark that Lee "is not yet a director of wisdom on a grand scale" (p. 49) places her piece nearer to the realm of evaluative assertion than critical argument.

Chapter 3 argues that Ang Lee's film has transformed a local Chinese story into one of global significance. Jon Eugene von Kowallis attributes the film's warm reception in Europe to its valorization of love in a time of political and martial chaos. Specifically, he suggests that Europeans' past experience with occupiers and puppet regimes disposed them to empathize with the characters' plight.

Chapter 4, by Darrell William Davis, evinces an ambition to tackle a number of issues. These include the theme of Chang's story, the sex scenes in Lee's adaptation, cannibalism, and class. Davis manages to weave them all together with the thread of consumption, illustrating how Wang Jiazhi's consumption allows her to pose as a bourgeois seductress, a performance that paradoxically consumes and cannibalizes her. Davis further argues that Ang Lee's adaptation itself can be seen as a form of consumption, absorbing the spirit of Chang's story and embodying it cinematically.

Part 2 concerns itself with the theme of performance, the means by which issues of love, subjectivity, and identity are all placed under scrutiny. In chapter 5, Hsiang-yin Sasha Chen calls attention to the motif of caution, which the great mass of audiences overlooks in its fascination with the sex scenes. Chen contends that the historical context of the film is permeated with an atmosphere of "extreme suspicion and intense caution" (p. 86), thus making the Freudian notion of Eros impossible in public circumstances. Far from accentuating Eros, the sex scenes instead reveal the helplessness of individuals living in wartime.

Chapter 6 provides important insights into the concepts of selfhood and dominance as they relate to performance. Susan Daruvalla links Zhang Xudong's invocation of "natural history"—the undocumented life experience lying beneath official histories—with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus"—a set of dispositions, sensibilities, and attitudes acquired through the experiences of everyday life.

In Daruvala's view, the way in which Wang Jiazhi conducts herself in the jewelry shop allows a repressed "natural history" to surface, for she relives the middle-class Shanghai "habitus" of courtship—a bourgeois practice deemed reactionary in the nationalist discourse. If Chang's story challenges the then-dominant ideology of political struggles, Ang Lee's film further exposes the very structure of dominance in an authoritarian party-state.

Also dealing with the question of selfhood, Whitney Crothers Dilley undertakes an impossible mission, attempting to discern "what is true in the character of Wang Jiazhi" (p. 121). Dilley, whose essay forms the seventh chapter of the anthology, asserts that Wang finds her true self through sex and performance. While these two factors play a crucial role in the formation and transformation of Wang's sense of self, Dilley's idea of discovering the "truth" in a character assumes that there exists a real, stable, and enduring self waiting to be found, ignoring that the self is a dynamic construct, forever being shaped and reshaped by social and political conditions.

Part 3 revolves around the controversy Lee's film provoked in the Sinophone world, exploring how history, politics, and identity manifested themselves in the production and reception of the film. Chapter 8, by Kien Ket Lim, identifies *Lust/Caution* as a film noir because it emphasizes "becoming" (a defining feature of the genre) rather than "being." What makes his reading particularly illuminating is the way it relates the conventions of film noir to politics. Like other noirs, *Lust/Caution* exploits the dramatic potential of moral ambiguity. In its case, ambiguity surrounds the moral line between loyalty to one's country and betrayal of it.

In chapter 9, Peng Hsiao-yen compellingly elucidates the ambivalent historical position of the film, which simultaneously reconstructs and deconstructs history and the discourse of patriotism. Unlike a woman of vanity depicted in the story, the film's Wang Jiazhi is a paragon of innocence. Such a portrayal, for Peng, betrays Ang Lee's intent to use the woman as a metonym for the first generation of Taiwanese mainlanders who once harbored an unflinching faith in patriotism. Lee quickly dismantles this nostalgic youthful ideal and exposes the artifice beneath it. Peng writes that Lee's reflective stance comes from his identity as an "outsider," an inhabitant of what Homi Bhabha calls "interstitial spaces."

In the last chapter, Chang Hsiao-hong focuses on two distinct affective reactions to the film—anger in Mainland China and tears in Taiwan—and explores why audiences responded so differently. She convincingly shows the reader that notions of *hanjian* (Japanese collaborator) and the present-day "global man" of flexible citizenship may overlap in Mainland China's reaction. The Taiwanese response, in her reading, demonstrates the possible collision of the double identity of Ang Lee's generation as patriotic in youth and diasporic now. In the course of making these transhistorical connections, Chang introduces a fresh theoretical framework to examine the transnational reception of a contemporary cultural product.

This full-length study, dedicated to one particular case of film adaptation, is a pioneering work in the field of Chinese literature and cinema, which the editors note “is the first of its kind” (p. 1). The volume builds its framework on adaptation studies, invoking classic and contemporary adaptation theories. Readers may hope that the authors could move a step further to explicate how what they have learned from this Chinese case study can supplement, modify, or contest Western approaches. The articles commendably narrate the layered reception of the film in Taiwan, mentioning not simply the tears of Lee’s generation but also the slight discontent of the Democratic Progressive Party. Yet, they tend to unduly simplify its reception in mainland China. The anthology would have profited from discussing more than “a marginalized group of enraged Maoist intellectuals” (p. 185) and the mouthpieces of the state apparatus. However, none of these issues should debase the originality, richness, and depth of this collection. More than an informative and thought-provoking research project on Ang Lee’s film adaptation, it is an exemplary interdisciplinary work, contributing invaluable new insights to film studies, literary and cultural studies, and gender and sexuality studies, as well as to identity politics, transnational cultural production and reception, and the history of modern China and East Asia.

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