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JOIN US FOR A TALK ON

OFF-WHITE: YELLOWFACE AND CHINGLISH BY ANGLO- AMERICAN CULTURE

Sheng-mei Ma, Prof. of English
Michigan State University

Day & Time: October 17, 2019, 4:30-6:00pm

Place: Honors Commons, 212 C, Honors

College, M.D. Anderson Library 2nd floor

How do English-speaking novelists and filmmakers tell stories of China from a Chinese perspective? How do they keep up appearances of pseudo-Sino immanence while ventriloquizing solely in the English language? Anglo writers and their readers join in this century-old game of impersonating and dubbing Chinese. Throughout this wish fulfillment, writers lean on grammatical and conceptual frameworks of their mother tongue to represent an alien land and its yellowface aliens. Off-white or yellow-ish characters and their foreign-sounding speech are thus performed in Anglo-American fiction and visual culture; both yellowface and Chinglish are of, for, by the (white) people.

Off-White interrogates seminal Anglo-American fiction and film on off-white bodies and voices. It commences with one Nobel laureate, Pearl Buck, and ends with another, Kazuo Ishiguro, almost a century later. The trajectory in between illustrates that the detective and mystery genres continue unabated their stock yellowface characters, who exude a magnetic field so powerful as to pull in Japanese anime. This universal drive to fashion a foil is ingrained in any will to power, so much so that even millennial China creates an “off-yellow,” darker-hued Orient in Hollywood films to silhouette its global ascent.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Sheng-mei Ma is Professor of English at Michigan State University in Michigan, USA, specializing in Asian Diaspora and East-West comparative studies. He is the author of nine books: *Off-White* (2019); *Sinophone-Anglophone Cultural Duet* (2017); *The Last Isle* (2015); *Alienglish* (2014); *Asian Diaspora and East-West Modernity* (2012); *Diaspora Literature and Visual Culture* (2011); *East-West Montage* (2007); *The Deathly Embrace* (2000); and *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures* (1998). He is also the co-editor of four books, including *Transnational Narratives in Englishes of Exile* (2018), and the author of a collection of poetry in Chinese.