Counter-Espionage Films and Participatory Surveillance in the Early PRC

Dr Xiaoning LU (SOAS)

5pm, March 1, 2017 (Wednesday), Rooms 8 & 9, FAMES

All seminars take place on Wednesdays (unless otherwise arranged) at 5pm in rooms 8 & 9 in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Tea will be served at the same venue at 4:45pm. All are welcome!
Abstract  Is Big Brother an apt metaphor to characterise everyday experiences and social practices of surveillance in the early People’s Republic of China (PRC)? What role did cinema play in the actual surveillance culture that contributed to the production of the vigilant and responsible socialist subjectivity in socialist China during the heyday of the Cold War? This lecture examines the counter-espionage film (fante pian) produced in the early PRC, with special attention paid to the 1950 film *The Might of the People* (Renmin de ju zhang, dir. Chen Liteng). Through an examination of cinematic narratives and formal strategies in relation to the prevalent geopolitical discourses and the two political campaigns to suppress counterrevolutionaries in 1950s China, this lecture aims to shed light on how this particular genre was configured into a surveillance culture predicated upon the political mobilization of the masses and in turn modelled participatory surveillance — a mode of surveillance in which the masses act as surveillance agents instead of surveillance subjects in order to safeguard national security.

Speaker  Dr Xiaoning Lu is Lecturer of Chinese language and culture at SOAS, University of London, where she teaches courses in Chinese-language film and modern Chinese literature. Prior to joining SOAS, she has taught comparative literature and sinology at the University of Munich in Germany. Xiaoning’s research focuses on the relationship among the aesthetic, the affective, and the political in the making of modern Chinese identities. Her recent writing on various aspects of Chinese cinema and culture appeared in journals and edited collections, including *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, and *Words and Their Stories: Essays on Chinese Revolutionary Discourse*.