Buddhism through Film (BSTC2013)

Semester 1

Thursdays, 1:30-3:20

MWT2
LECTURER

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TUTOR

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TIME & VENUE

Mondays, 1:30-3:20, MWT2

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Film is an important medium for reflecting and constructing not only contemporary cultural values, but also religious sentiments and stereotypes. In this course we will explore: a) how Buddhism is portrayed through films and documentaries produced in Asia and the West, particularly in terms of its doctrines, rituals, practitioners, and institutions; and b) how Buddhist films may be used as forms of religious expression, practice and mission. Students will train to critically assess films and documentaries as multi-layered texts that use sound, vision and symbolic referents and examine some key issues that emerge from recent academic scholarship on the religion–film interface.

COMPUTER AND TECHNOLOGY RULES

This course is a computer and mobile free zone. In principle, computers, cell phones, smartphones, and other electronic devices are prohibited during the lectures. In this course we will be practicing the art of being actively present, observing, listening, and participating. You are encouraged to bring a notebook for taking notes during the course and writing down key points from each lecture.

DISABILITY

Any student who has a documented disability and may require special arrangements (seating, testing, etc.) should consult the instructor in person at the beginning of the course so that provisions can be made.
READING & VIEWING MATERIAL

All the reading and viewing material (films, documentaries, articles, etc.) will be uploaded on moodle for students to study before each lecture.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

General expectations of student performance and assigned grades
About Plagiarism
http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism

I. Attendance and Participation (25%)

You are expected to attend lectures each week and actively participate in in-class group exercises. One hour weekly tutorials are optional. All assigned readings and films should be studied and viewed prior to attending each weekly lecture. Students are expected to make their own arrangements to view the assigned films each week.

II. Mid Term Quiz (35%)

In the middle of the term, there will be a comprehensive mid-term quiz based on the reading material, lecture notes, and films that have been covered in class until the time of the quiz.

* No make-up quizzes will be scheduled.

III. Final Essay Paper (40%)

Select one documentary or feature film from those assigned in this course and write an approx. 2000 words critical review essay that: (a) identifies and discusses (clearly, logically, and critically) the Buddhist themes of the film; and (b) incorporates through citations relevant reading material (books, articles, etc.) assigned for this course as well as, other sources from the library, and insights from the course lectures and tutorials.

1) An electronic copy should be uploaded through the Turnitin link available in moodle.

AND

2) A printed copy of your assignment should be submitted at my mailbox (CBS, 4th floor). Submission of written assignments:

* Late and incomplete submissions will incur grade reduction.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR ESSAY

1) Clear Structure and Organization:

The essay should have an introduction, a main body with headings or sections, a conclusion / summary, and bibliography.

2) Style of Scholarly Writing. One is careful with the choice of words and one does not reproduce colloquial or conversational modes of expression and jargon. The use of thesaurus is encouraged. Proper use of citations and quotations is expected. All contributions of other writers should be noted
through accurate quotations (judiciously selected and sparingly used). The final product should be carefully edited for accurate spelling and competent usage of English punctuation, syntax and grammar.

3) Understanding of Sources and Arguments.

Familiarity with most of the readings assigned each week during the course and some of the main issues discussed in class. The bibliography should include a minimum of 5 sources incorporated and cited in the main text or footnotes of the essay (not just listed in the bibliography). Internet websites, lecture notes, magazines and non-academic publications do not count towards the minimum sources. You may utilize any of the assigned readings for this course towards the bibliography of your assignment.

CITATION CONVENTIONS

If necessary, and for the purpose of providing additional information (not citations), use footnotes, not endnotes. All references to sources should be in the text (author/year' including page number(s) where appropriate. Depending on the sentence construction, the citation will appear as Smith (1997) or (Smith 1997), or if relevant, (Smith 1997: 274). Bibliographical entries at the end of your essays should be alphabetically arranged and full information given as follows:


RESOURCES

A large selection of texts on Buddhism (introductory and specialized) are available at the HKU Main Library.

WEBSITES

- Academic study resources, Dharma Net International
- Bright Lights Film Journal
- Film-Philosophy, Edinburgh University Press
- International Buddhist Film Festival, Buddhist Film Foundation

TIMELINE OF LECTURES

SEPTEMBER 5
Lecture 1. The Main Doctrines of Buddhism
* No film viewing

SEPTEMBER 12
Lecture 2. The Buddha and His Teachings
* Documentary: The Buddha: the Story of Siddhartha (USA, 2010)
SEPTEMBER 19
LECTURE 3. FILM STUDIES AND BUDDHISM
* No film viewing

SEPTEMBER 26
LECTURE 4. LIFE AS A MOVIE
* Feature Film: The Truman Show (USA, 1998)

OCTOBER 3
LECTURE 5. THE CONCEPT OF KARMA
* Feature Film: Running on Karma (Hong Kong, 2003)

OCTOBER 10
LECTURE 6. THE THREE POISONS
* Feature Film: Travellers and Magicians (Bhutan, 2003)

OCTOBER 24
LECTURE 7. THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS
* Feature Film: Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring (Chun qu chun you lai) (Korea, 2003)

OCTOBER 31
LECTURE 8. REINCARNATION
* Feature Film: Cloud Atlas (USA, 2012)

NOVEMBER 7
LECTURE 9. MIND OVER MATTER
* Feature Film: The Matrix (USA, 1999)

NOVEMBER 14
LECTURE 6. BUDDHIST MEDITATION
* Documentary: Walk with me (USA, 2017)

NOVEMBER 21
LECTURE 11. DEATH AND COMPASSION
* Feature Film: Departures (Japan, 2008)

NOVEMBER 28
LECTURE 12. OVERVIEW OF COURSE CONTENTS AND OBJECTIVES
* No film viewing
THE LIST OF FILMS FOR THIS COURSE

DOCUMENTARIES

1. The Buddha: the Story of Siddhartha (USA, 2010)
   DVD, 2h. Documentary; Director, David Grubin; English
   [http://library.hku.hk; AV 294.3 B92 G]
2. Walk with Me (USA, 2017)
   DVD, 1h 34min. Documentary; Director, Marc J. Francis, Max Pugh
   [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2331100/]

FEATURE FILMS

1. Running on Karma (Da Zhi Lao) (Hong Kong, 2003)
   DVD, 93 min. Directors: Johnie To and Wai Ka-Fai
   [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0374184/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1]
2. Cloud Atlas (USA, 2013)
   DVD, 2h 52min. Directors: Tom Tykwer, Lana Wachowski
   [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1371111/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1]
3. Travelers and Magicians (Bhutan, 2003)
   DVD, 1h 48min. Director, Khyentse Norbu; Bhutanese with English subtitles
   [http://library.hku.hk; AV 791.43 T779]
4. The Truman Show (USA, 1998)
   DVD, 1h 43min. Director: Peter Weir
   [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120382/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1]
5. Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter…and Spring (Chun qu chun you lai) (Korea, 2003)
   DVD, 108 min. Director, Kim Ki-dŏk
6. The Matrix (USA, 1999)
   DVD, 2h 16 min. Directors Wachowski Brothers; English
   [http://library.hku.hk; AV 791.43 M43]
7. Departures (Okuribito) (Japan, 2008)
   DVD, 130 min. Director, Takita Yōjirō; Japanese with English subtitles
   [http://library.hku.hk; av PN1997.2_O28 2009]

RESOURCES

A large collection of texts on Buddhism (introductory and specialized) are available at the HKU Main Library. The required film materials for this course are available on moodle and as DVDs for same-day viewing at the Main Library.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

________. "Imagining Nothing and Imaging Otherness in Buddhist Film," in Imag(in)ing the Other: Filmic Visions of Community, eds. David Jaspers and Brent Plate. Scholar's Press, 1999.


Karunadasa, Y. 2013. *Early Buddhist teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice*. Hong Kong: The Centre of Buddhist Studies, the University of Hong Kong.


_______. “Seeing and Being Seen: Distinctively Filmic and Religious Elements in Film.” *Journal of Religion and Film* 3(2), 1999.


**FILMOGRAPHY**

I. DOCUMENTARIES

25. Arising Light: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Birth of a New Era in India. Dir. David Blundell. India/USA [28 min].

II. FEATURE FILMS
1. Broken Blossoms. Dir. W.D. Griffith; Silent. 1919. USA.
10. The Truman Show. Dir. Peter Weir. 1998. USA.