

THEO 360-25: SEM: ETHICS & RELIGION IN ASIAN FILMS

Viewing religious Asian films
&
Viewing Asian films religiously

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TR 10:00-11:15 a.m. (Alter 201)

Office Hours: by appointment

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Offered as an elective within the University Scholars Program, the Gender and Diversity Studies Minor, and the Ethics/Religion & Society (E/RS) component of Xavier University's undergraduate program, this seminar for university scholars and theology majors/minors seeks to introduce students to contemporary Asian films by well-known directors. It is as much about the study of ethics and religion in Asian religions through Asian films, as it is about the use of ethics and religion to study Asian films. Because many American students have limited exposure to Asia, and Asia is so distant, geographically, culturally and linguistically, from what most American students are familiar with, Asian films provide the best, lowest cost alternative to field trips in the study of ethics and religion in the Asian world.

We will be viewing nine films from India, China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Vietnam to facilitate discussion of the various dimensions, consequences and implications of issues in ethics and religion in Asia. In addition, we will also use the doctrines, ethical precepts, rituals, symbols and aesthetics of Asian religions to understand and explore the layers of meanings which are portrayed visually and audibly in these films. The goals and objectives of this course are:

- (1) to think and discuss critically about film from ethical and religious perspectives;
- (2) to learn how to watch a film critically and understand how its plot, narrative, character development and symbolic imagery interact (and to a limited extent, specific film styles and cinematic techniques) at different levels to convey nuanced layers of meanings and portray underlying or explicit ethical and religious issues;
- (3) to cultivate a critical awareness and appreciation of ethical and religious themes and symbolism in film;
- (4) to elicit from you the possible solutions to a moral-ethical dilemma and your evaluation of a character's or a community's moral-ethical decision(s), as well as the wider implications of specific moral-ethical position(s) through your developing receptivity, critical analysis, careful reasoning, intuitive insight, and further research;
- (5) to foster critical insight into ethical and religious perspectives of traditions other than one's own through the medium of film, as well as gain a deeper understanding and conscious awareness of the rich diversity, plurality and complexity of Asian moral imagination;

- (6) to encourage you to perceive theological and religious studies as a speculative, creative, imaginative and critical enterprise; and
- (7) to achieve the above objectives through written assignments, critiques, seminar discussions and short, informal presentations which serve as introduction to the films which we will be viewing.

As an E/RS elective, this course is also structured to further the E/RS objectives of: (1) heightening awareness about the ethical and religious dimensions of socially significant issues; (2) enabling students to use philosophical and theological methods and principles effectively in the analysis of socially significant issues; (3) enabling students to understand and evaluate the ethical and/or religious content of Asian films; (4) helping students integrate moral reflection and religious analysis into their study of a chosen major or minor; and (5) encouraging the development of a worldview that is oriented to responsible action.

The nine films which we will be watching in this course are:

Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love, dir. Mira Nair, 1996, color, 114 mins (English)

Monsoon Wedding, dir. Mira Nair, 2001, color, 115 mins. (Hindi, Tamil, Urdu, English subtitles)

The Burmese Harp, dir. Kon Ichikawa, 1956, black & white, 116 mins (Japanese, English subtitles)

Why has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?, 1989, color, dir. Bae Yong-kyun, 137 mins (Korean, English subtitles)

Raise the Red Lantern 大紅燈籠高高掛, dir. Zhang Yimou 張藝謀, 1991, color, 126 mins. (Mandarin, English subtitles)

Ang Lee (Li An 李安)'s Confucian fatherhood and family series:

Wedding Banquet 囍, 1993, color, 108 mins. (Mandarin, English subtitles)

Eat Drink Man Woman 飲食男女, 1994, color, 124 mins (Mandarin, English subtitles)

Shower 洗澡, dir. Zhang Yang, 2000, color, 94 mins. (Mandarin, English subtitles)

The Three Seasons, dir. Tony Bui, 1999, color, 108 mins. (Vietnamese, English subtitles)

WARNING

Several of the films which we will be viewing in this course may contain scenes of explicit violence, brutality, nudity, sex and offensive language. This is not intended as an attempt to desensitize students, but rather, to enable them to discuss the relevant issues that these films introduce. The directors of these films have considered these elements to be integral to the development of their films, and we will accept their artistic vision.

II. COURSE FORMAT, POLICIES & REQUIREMENTS

- (a) Completing your reading assignments, and watching the assigned films. Whether you decide to stay for the in-class screening or view the film on your own if you cannot attend the in-class screening, you are responsible for knowing the content of each film and recording your thoughts in your journal (see paragraph (c) below).
- (b) Questions. Please view each film carefully, with these 8 questions in mind:
- (1) How does the film understand, interpret and portray certain specific aspects of the religious tradition in which the plot is situated (e.g., doctrines, traditions, customs, ritual, ceremony, gestures, music, signs, symbols)?
 - (2) What role does the film give to human experience? Is human experience of various kinds (e.g., experiences of poverty, oppression, beauty, love, etc.) its starting point?
 - (3) How does the film frame and resolve specific moral-ethical issues?
 - (4) How do the various characters in the film make certain specific moral-ethical choices? Why do they choose a certain choice over alternative(s)?
 - (5) Are there other specific significant or thought-provoking points in this film? Do you agree or disagree with the film's portrayal of these points? Why?
 - (6) What questions or unresolved issues do you have with respect to this film?
 - (7) How does this film relate to your life experiences and/or the assigned readings?
 - (8) Any other important points?
- (c) Journal keeping. This journal is intended to assist in your recall and comprehension of each assigned film. How you keep this journal is up to you. You may use a spiral-bound notebook, a looseleaf binder, or an electronic journal. However you keep it, this journal is meant to be a personal record of your learning in this class. As such, you would be the only person who will ever read your journal. After each film viewing, I will ask you to take out your journals and write in them, recording your thoughts with respect to the questions raised in (b) above. Your journal notes, together with your background reading and further research will form the basis of the seminar discussion on each film.
- (d) Five Papers. You will be required to write five papers on the following films:

<u>Paper #</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Due Date</u>
(1)	Three Seasons	16 Sep
(2)	Monsoon Wedding	9 Oct
(3)	The Burmese Harp	30 Oct
(4)	Eat Drink Man Woman	20 Nov
(5)	Wedding Banquet	9 Dec

Each paper should be a six/seven-page (max: 10 pages) double-spaced critical analysis of the assigned film, responding to the questions specified in paragraph (b) above, and based on your personal observations and insights about the film as you have recorded in your journal. This is a critical analysis of the assigned film, and therefore it should neither be a

summary or review of the film, nor a mere summary of your journal. **The critical analysis is due in-class on the days specified above.** Late submissions will be penalized with **a one-letter grade deduction.**

- (e) Attendance and participation in the seminar discussion of each film on the days indicated in the syllabus.
- (f) End of Course Reflection Paper: A six/seven-page (max: 10 pages) double-spaced reflection paper to be written *after* 9 December 2003, on what one has appropriated from the films and seminar discussions. This reflection paper is to be left for the instructor at Faculty Services in Hinkle Hall on or before **13 December 2003.**
- (g) Computation of Grades:
- | | |
|------------------|------------|
| Paper #1 | 15% |
| Paper #2 | 15% |
| Paper #3 | 15% |
| Paper #4 | 15% |
| Paper #5 | 15% |
| Reflection Paper | 15% |
| <u>Seminars</u> | <u>10%</u> |
| | 100% |

III. TEXTBOOKS

The following textbooks are available at the university bookstore:

(i) Required Textbooks

Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 9th ed (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2002)

Our Religions, ed. Arvind Sharma (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco 1993)

(ii) Recommended

Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2001).

IV. RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

(a) Books

Approaches to Popular Film, eds. Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995)

Explorations in Theology and Film: Movies and Meaning, ed. Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997)

New Image of Religious Films, ed. John R. May (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1997)

Religion in Film, eds. John R. May and Michael Bird (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982)

Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film, eds. Joel W. Martin and Conrad E. Ostwalt, Jr. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995)

Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon, 1996)

(b) Internet Resources

Journal of Religion and Film <http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/>

General Resources on Asian Films

Asian Film Foundation <http://www.asianfilm.org/>

Asian Film Connections <http://www.usc.edu/isd/archives/asianfilm/>

East Asian Film <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/Asianfilm.html>

Chinese Films

Chinese Movies <http://www.sh.com/culture/film/movie.htm>

Chinese Movie Database <http://www.dianying.com/en/>

Chinese Cinema <http://www.chinesecinemas.org/>

Indian Films

India Film <http://www.indiafilm.com/>

Yahoo! India Film <http://in.movies.yahoo.com/>

Links to India Information – Movies <http://www.india.com.ar/india213.html>

Japanese Films

Japan on Film <http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/cjs/films/index.html>

Yahoo Film Directory (in Japanese) http://dir.yahoo.co.jp/entertainment/movies_and_films/

Korean Films

Korean Film Archive http://www.koreafilm.org/eng_index.html

Korean Film Commission <http://www.kofic.or.kr/english/index.asp>

General Resources

Internet Movie Database <http://us.imdb.com>

All Movie Guide <http://www.allmovie.com>

Complete Film Listing <http://www.corona.bc.ca/films>

V. COURSE OUTLINE, SCHEDULE & READINGS

Essays and extracts marked ** in this syllabus are available for viewing and downloading from the library's electronic reserves.

26 Aug: Introduction

READING: *Understanding Movies*, chs. 1 & 2.

Modernity, Globalization and its Moral-Ethical Implications in Contemporary East Asia

(i) Vietnam

28 Aug: *Shower*

READING: *Understanding Movies*, chs. 3 & 4.

2 Sep: *Shower*

READING: *Understanding Movies*, chs. 5 & 6.

4 Sep: Seminar Discussion

READING: *Understanding Movies*, chs. 7 & 8.

(ii) Vietnam

9 Sep: *The Three Seasons*

READING: *Understanding Movies*, ch. 9.

11 Sep: *The Three Seasons*

READING: *Understanding Movies*, chs. 10 & 11.

16 Sep: Seminar Discussion

Reminder: Paper #1 on *The Three Seasons* due in-class today.

Gender and Caste in India: A Classical Presentation

OVERVIEW READINGS: *Our Religions*, ch. 1; **Vasudha Narayanan, "Brimming with *Bhakti*, Embodiments of *Shakti*: Devotees, Deities, Performers, Reformers, and Other Women of Power in the Hindu Tradition"

18 Sep: Kama Sutra

23 Sep: Kama Sutra

25 Sep: Seminar Discussion

Gender, Family and Caste in India: A Contemporary Presentation

30 Sep: Monsoon Wedding

2 Oct: No Class – Fall Holiday

7 Oct: Monsoon Wedding

9 Oct: Seminar Discussion

Reminder: Paper #2 on *Monsoon Wedding* due in-class today.

Enlightenment and the Zen Koan: A Korean Zen Buddhist Perspective

OVERVIEW READINGS: *Our Religions*, ch. 2; **Philip Kapleau, “The Private Encounter with the Master”; **Eido T. Shimano, “Zen Koans”

14 Oct: Why has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?

16 Oct: Why has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?

21 Oct: Seminar Discussion

War, Suffering and Non-Violence: A Japanese Buddhist Perspective

OVERVIEW READING: *Our Religions*, ch. 2

23 Oct: Burmese Harp

28 Oct: Burmese Harp

30 Oct: Seminar Discussion

Reminder: Paper #3 on *The Burmese Harp* due in-class today.

Filial Piety, Confucian Ethics and Gender Relations in Confucian Families

OVERVIEW READINGS: *Our Religions*, ch. 3; **Patricia Ebrey, “The Chinese Family and the Spread of Confucian Values”; **Mary Gallagher, “Women and Gender.”

Additional Required Readings for <i>Raise the Red Lantern</i> : **Jeannette Delamoire, “Women as spectacle in Zhang Yimou’s ‘Theatre of Punishments’”; **Joann Lee, “Zhang Yimou’s <i>Raise the Red Lantern</i> : Contextual Analysis of Film Through a Confucian/Feminist Matrix”

4 Nov: Raise the Red Lantern

6 Nov: Raise the Red Lantern

11 Nov: Seminar Discussion

Ang Lee’s Confucian Fatherhood and Family Series

OVERVIEW READINGS: *Our Religions*, ch. 3; **David K. Jordan, “Filial Piety in Taiwanese Popular Thought”; **Walter H. Slote, “Psychocultural Dynamics within the Confucian Family”

Confucian Ethics and Father-Daughter Relations in a Contemporary Chinese Family in Taiwan

13 Nov: Eat Drink Man Woman

18 Nov: Eat Drink Man Woman

20 Nov: Seminar Discussion

Reminder: Paper #4 on *Eat Drink Man Woman* due in-class today.

25 Nov: No Class – Instructor at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) Conference

27 Nov: No Class – Thanksgiving Day

Confucian Family Ethics and Homosexuality in a Chinese-American Family in New York City

2 Dec: Wedding Banquet

4 Dec: Wedding Banquet

9 Dec: Seminar Discussion

Reminder: Paper #5 on *Wedding Banquet* due in-class today.

11 Dec: Review

12 Dec: Reflection Paper due at Faculty Services in Hinkle Hall.

VI. THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT GRADING GUIDELINES

(approved by department: March 20, 2002)

Grades indicate a professor's assessment of a student's academic performance and not a student's effort. In accordance with University policy, letter grades in undergraduate theology courses mean the following:

A (92-100) = Exceptional academic performance (that is, uncommonly high academic achievement, which demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, uncommon skills in critical analysis and effective communication, and imagination).

B (84-91) = Good academic performance (that is, high quality academic achievement; demonstrated competency in the discipline above the average or standard).

C (76-83) = Satisfactory academic performance (that is, academic achievement that meets an average or standard level of competency in the discipline).

D (68-75) = Minimal academic performance, sufficient to pass.

F (67 and below) = Failure.

Please consult the website of the Theology Department for information on specific grading guidelines on written assignments.

VII. ACADEMIC HONESTY

The instructor expects all work that appears under the student's name to be that student's own, and will follow up on evidence that a student has plagiarized material. If an incident of cheating or plagiarism is established, the instructor will give a final grade of F for the course.