Religion and Hong Kong Film

RLG290Y (Summer 2025)
University of Toronto Summer Abroad Program
Professor Ken Derry

Course Description:

For decades, Hong Kong had the third-largest film industry in the world. Hong Kong productions, particularly action movies, have had an incredible impact on world cinema. This course will offer a unique look at Hong Kong films through the lens of the academic study of religion. We will start by showing how several different theories of religion – such as rites of passage, or conceptions of the "sacred" – can be used to understand Hollywood movies like *Mean Girls*. We will then apply these theories to several popular and influential Hong Kong films, including John Woo's *The Killer*, Stephen Chow's *Shaolin Soccer*, and Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express*. Whether you are new to Hong Kong cinema or you are a long-time fan, this course will show you a new way to think about these amazing movies!

Evaluation:

The requirements for this course are as follows:

Class participation.. 10%
Online participation 10%
Critical reflection 10%
Presentation.. 20%
Final project 25%
Final test... 25%

Films and Readings:

All required films will be available to watch online. All required readings will be posted as pdf files on Quercus. A few of these will offer details about the history of Hong Kong and Hong Kong film. Most of the readings will present a particular approach to studying religion, and will not directly concern the specific films we will be discussing. The point will be to *apply* the ideas from the readings to the films.

Course Format:

RLG20Y will be taught entirely online, with a mix of synchronous and asynchronous elements. We will meet each day over zoom to discuss films and ideas, and you will give your presentation over zoom to the rest of the class. You will watch the films online on your own time. There will also be short recorded lectures with course content, and other brief videos, that you can watch online at your convenience.

Instructor:

Dr. Ken Derry is Associate Professor (Teaching Stream) in the Department of Historical Studies, University of Toronto Mississauga, focusing on comparative religion and modern culture. He has been teaching at UofT since 1996 in the areas of religion and literature/film, religion and violence, and world religions. His research includes publications on Indigenous traditions, religion and North American literature, Hong Kong religion and film, early Christianity, superheroes, and *Star Wars*. Ken has received numerous awards for teaching and student service, including the 2013 UTM Faculty Teaching Excellence Award, the 2022 UofT President's Teaching Award, and the 2023 3M National Teaching Fellowship.