

## CRIME: Hong Kong Style



*Too Many Ways to be No.1* (Wai Ka-fai, 1997)

There has undoubtedly been a recent revival of interest in global Chinese cinemas. For the most part this has focused on films produced in the People's Republic of China (PRC), perhaps the best example being the BFI's recent *Electric Shadows* season. Building on this interest, and further developing audiences initially fostered by such events, this programme of films and public engagement events is designed to introduce to new audiences, as well as reminding older ones, the innovative contribution of the Hong Kong film industry to the ever popular genre of the crime film.

This programme will represent much more than the stereotypical images of triad gangsters wielding machetes on the neon-lit streets of Kowloon – though there may be some machete wielding going on. Rather, it will re-centre the influence of Hong Kong filmmakers on one of global cinemas most enduring genres, and in doing so ensure that *CRIME: Hong Kong Style* excites, entertains and even educates audiences across the UK.

In order to achieve its aims, as well as including films from the 1980s and 1990s 'golden era' of the Hong Kong gangster film, this programme will include works from the 1950s, 60s and 70s, revealing the complex and rich heritage of Hong Kong crime films, many of which are unknown to UK audiences. The programme will also include striking contemporary Hong Kong crime films that show an awareness of its history in their self-reflexive style and reworking of the genre's codes and conventions.

It is envisaged that across the programme there will be a number of accompanying public engagement events that will enrich audiences' experience of these films and enhance their understanding of their contexts of production and the aesthetic strategies employed by the filmmakers. There will also be opportunities for audiences to further engage with the season through Q&A and workshop sessions with visiting practitioners from Hong Kong.

Together, the films and public events included in *CRIME: Hong Kong Style* will shed new light on the history, creative personnel and legacy of what has historically been one of the world's most significant film producers, the Hong Kong film industry.

## The Films:



### Possible Titles Include:

The careful selection of titles will of course be central to the overall success of the programme. With this in mind, the selected films have all helped define the Hong Kong Crime Film and the list below includes a sprinkling of films and filmmakers that audiences may already be familiar with (*Police Story*, *A Better Tomorrow*, *Infernal Affairs*, *Election*; Jackie Chan, John Woo, Johnnie To, Wong Kar-wai) alongside those that may be lesser known and rarely shown in the UK.

It is envisaged that in order to deliver the fullest experience to audiences *CRIME: Hong Kong Style* will selectively utilise imported prints which will be facilitated through the organisers' relationship with the Hong Kong Film Archive who will help source key older titles.

#### **Tradition** (Tang Huang, 1955)

One of the earliest Hong Kong gangster films and one that helped establish a generic narrative staple, *Tradition* focuses on the battle between tradition and modernity as Wang Hao's gangster struggles to maintain his godfather's traditions.

#### **The Dreadnaught** (Chan Man, 1966)

Patrick Tse Yin stars in this influential crime drama about two lifelong friends on the opposite sides of the law who fall for the same woman.

#### **The Teahouse** (Kuei Chih-hung, 1974)

The Cheng Chi teahouse is a pivotal place within its community, providing local citizens respite from the encroaching criminality outside that is all around them. As gang activities increase owner Wang Chen decides it is time to stand up for the ordinary person. *The Teahouse* is a tough, sinewy, low budget film that has now become recognised as a classic of its era.

#### **Bald Headed Betty** (Chung Sum, 1975)

Actress Lam Kin-ming created a huge stir in Hong Kong with her performance as a poor factory girl who is forced into prostitution. When she attempts to escape the

triad punishes her by shaving her head and the young man who helped her is beaten to a pulp. Made during a time when the city lived in fear of widely reported organised crime, *Bald Headed Betty* depicts the triad members as ruthless and brutal bullies.

**Jumping Ash** (Po-chih Leung, 1976) Considered as a precursor to the Hong Kong new wave that appeared later in the decade, this drug smuggling drama is notable for its use of real locations, including Amsterdam's Chinatown, to create a tough, almost social-realist vision of Hong Kong's international crime scene.

**The Pilferers' Progress** (John Woo, 1977)

A broad slapstick comedy based on a pair of jewel thieves, here John Woo is venturing into territory that will be distinctly unfamiliar to his many UK fans. *The Pilferers' Progress* is an example of Hong Kong comedy and its crazy best and proves that Woo is more than simply a master of more than 'heroic bloodshed'.

**The Killer Constable** (Kuei Chih-hung, 1980)

The Dowager Empress' ruthless security chief is sent to the south to recover stolen palace treasures and hunt down its thieves. As his men are killed one by one, he finds himself questioning his faith in the system he has vowed to uphold. A period set crime film, *The Killer Constable* bridges the gap between the Shaw Brothers studio films of the early 1970s and the more cynical approach of the Hong Kong New Wave. It is considered by many as director Kuei's finest hour (and 38 minutes).

**Banana Cop** (Po-chih Leung, 1984)

*Banana Cop* is another of Po-chih Leung's distinctive contributions to the Hong Kong film industry. Gangster informant, Ping Pong Ball, is brought to London's Chinatown by Inspector Yip, a straight laced cop, to track down a triad leader. Once again, with *Banana Cop* Leung makes striking use of real locations to create an authentic atmosphere.

**Police Story** (Jackie Chan, 1985)

Following his disappointment with the US produced *The Protector* (1985), Hong Kong superstar Jackie Chan wrote and directed this crime story vehicle to showcase his wide variety of skills in front of and behind the camera. The result is a hugely influential blend of action, comedy and crime and perhaps one of the greatest films ever made.

**A Better Tomorrow** (John Woo, 1986)

A landmark and highly influential Hong Kong crime film directed by genre specialist John Woo, here on more familiar territory, *A Better Tomorrow* not only kick-started the "hero gangster" genre which came to define Hong Kong cinema of this period but also established an influential cinematic style that was unique to Hong Kong and would soon be exported to the world.

### **As Tears Go By** (Wong Kar-wai, 1988)

Wong Kar-wai's directorial debut, *As Tears Go By* centres on the story of Wah, a tough gangster who is continually looking out for his best friend Fly, whose relationship with Ngor makes him question his life choices. Including a stellar cast of Andy Lau, Jacky Cheung and Maggie Cheung, Wong's film's influence on contemporary Hong Kong crime films can still be seen over two decades after its release.

### **To Be Number One** (Poon Man-kit, 1991)

Ray Lui, as mobster Ng Shek-ko, majestically leads this epic, and highly influential, crime drama that in true generic style follows the rise and fall of a gangster from humble beginnings. Supposedly based upon a true story, but clearly influenced by Hollywood classics, the success of *To Be Number One* kick started a cycle of 'rise of the gangster' films in Hong Kong.

### **Too Many Ways To Be No.1** (Wai Ka-fai, 1997)

Released on the eve of Hong Kong's handover to the PRC in 1997, this darkest of dark comedy centres around a seemingly minor decision which brings about two very different fates for an unlucky small-time gangster played by Lau Ching-wan. This work is typical of writer-director Wai Ka-fai's exploration of fate and its role in our lives. *Too Many Ways To Be No.1* is a delirious and excessive masterpiece.

### **Infernal Affairs** (Andrew Lau, 2002)

Bringing together two of Asia's biggest stars, Andy Lau and Tony Leung, *Infernal Affairs* became a world-wide hit upon its release and remains one of Hong Kong's most famous and influential crime films. At its core it is a classic cops and gangster cat and mouse story and was later remade by Martin Scorsese as the award winning *The Departed*.

### **Election** (Johnnie To, 2005)

Johnnie To is one of Hong Kong's most important contemporary filmmakers and *Election* one of his greatest works. It focuses on the election of a new triad leader and explores a string of issues from generational conflict to tradition and loyalty. At the same time *Election* is a pointed satire of post-1997 reunification Hong Kong politics.

### **Beast Stalker** (Dante Lam, 2008)

A muscular thriller that centres on Nicholas Tse's psychologically battered cop and Nick Cheung's desperate and warped assassin. This film took Lam's work to a new level and with its kinetic visual style contributed to the re-imagining of the Hong Kong crime film.

### **Once a Gangster** (Felix Chong, 2010)

*Infernal Affairs* (2002) co-writer Felix Chong's directorial debut offers an interesting twist on the gangster genre. In this subversive comedy two respected gang figures fight to avoid becoming the boss.

### **That Demon Within** (Dante Lam, 2014)

Action maestro Dante Lam is once again behind this taut psychological thriller. Reclusive and distant cop Dave (Daniel Wu) is increasingly haunted by his violent memories of a gang who use traditional demon masks when committing their crimes. Truth and imagination begin to blur in this stylish piece that brings a new energy to the Hong Kong crime film.

### **Wild City** (Ringo Lam, 2015)

The director of one of the most influential Hong Kong crime films, *City on Fire* (1987), returns to the genre with this exciting neo-noir. Starring Louis Koo and Shawn Yue, Lam's film offers a cat and mouse tale as a former cop and his wayward brother quickly get out of their depth as they take on a gang of Taiwanese gangsters.

### **Key Guests:**

The season will open with Hong Kong crime film maestro Ringo Lam's latest critically acclaimed *Wild City* (2015). Ringo Lam will be invited to a gala opening of the season in Manchester with a view to his visiting other major partaking venues at the start of the season.

It is also hoped that writer and director Felix Chong (*Infernal Affairs*, *Overheard*) will visit the UK to take part in a series of Q&As after screening of his work and be the focus for a number of screenwriting Master classes. Whilst based in Manchester it is hoped that Felix Chong will also be available to visit other tour venues.

### **Other Supporting Events/Materials**

Central to the offer of *CRIME: Hong Kong Style* will be a series of supporting events and materials that will also be made available to partaking venues. These will include:

- A series of themed contextualising talks and introductions delivered in an accessible, audience friendly, style by experts in the field. These could include topics such as 'Gender and the Hong Kong Crime', 'Crime and Hong Kong Cinema', 'John Woo and the Reinvention of the Hong Kong Crime Film' or 'Hollywood and the Hong Kong Crime Film'.

- Contextualising Programme Notes for all films and key directors which would be made available electronically for partaking venues. All of these would be all be specially commissioned for the season ensuring that the content is focused on adding to audiences understanding and enjoyment of the season.
- Podcasts with filmmakers and genre aficionados which explore the films, directors and trends of Hong Kong crime.

Curator of the season, Andy Willis, will be available to host Q&A events, lead workshops, as well as provide contextualising talks and to introduce screenings.

**Andy Willis** is a Reader in Film Studies at the University of Salford and Senior Visiting Curator: Film at HOME. He has curated and co-curated a wide variety of film related seasons and events including *Visible Secrets: Hong Kong's Women Filmmakers* (Cornerhouse and selected UK tour, 2009), and the official film programmes for the Asia Triennial Manchester in 2011 and 2014 with Sarah Perks. He has written widely on Hong Kong cinema, co-editing (again with Sarah Perks) a special edition of *Film International* in 2009 devoted to Hong Kong cinema since 1997, and co-editing the books *East Asian Film Stars* (with Wing Fai-Leung, Palgrave 2014) and *Chinese Cinemas: International Perspectives* (with Felicia Chan, forthcoming Routledge, 2016).