

CRIME: HONG KONG STYLE

A TIMELINE

To help you navigate your way round our explosive new season of crime films from Hong Kong presented by HOME, Manchester, here's a timeline of the key decades.

1960s

Economic revival in Hong Kong continues but social discontent and labour disputes become rife in the poorly paid workforce. Pro-China demonstrations take place toward the end of the decade.

Studios begin to produce cycles of films that reflect box-office successes. These include Cantonese melodramas, musicals, martial arts films and crime films. See *The Swallow Thief* (Yue Feng, 1961).

1970s

Hong Kong is identified as an 'Asian Tiger' economy with thriving high-technology industries.

At the start of the decade Shaw Brothers studio productions are vastly popular with directors such as Chang Cheh introducing a muscular and imaginative style to various popular cycles. These films also establish actors such as David Chiang and Chan Koon-tai as local stars. See *The Boxer from Shantung* (Chang Cheh & Pao Hsueh-li, 1972) and *The Teahouse* (Kuei Chih-hung, 1974).



Later in the decade crazy comedies made by the likes of the Hui brothers become vastly successful at the Hong Kong box-office. See *The Pilferers' Progress* (John Woo, 1977).

1980s

1982: Britain and China begin talks on the future of Hong Kong.
1989: The Tiananmen Square massacre leads to calls for the introduction of further democratic safeguards in Hong Kong as anxiety about the future rises.

Hong Kong 'new wave' brings a more cynical and realist approach to filmmaking that is very different to the studio-set films of the 1960s and 1970s. The influence of this more morally complex approach can be felt in the *The Killer Constable* (Kuei Chih-hung, 1980).

Hong Kong film industry enjoys success all over East Asia and beyond with Jackie Chan established as a major star.

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



1990s

1992: Hong Kong stock market crashes. Film industry not immune to financial insecurity that would follow.

1994: Hong Kong's legislature widens the proposed franchise but falls far short of universal suffrage. Anxiety regarding handover grows in some sections of Hong Kong society.

1997: Hong Kong is handed to the People's Republic of China (PRC) creating a Special Administrative Region that supports the idea of 'one country, two systems'.

Growth of piracy begins to significantly hit the film industry. Wider Asian financial crash impacts on Hong Kong's confidence.

Hong Kong film production levels are high and the influence of triad gangs is widely discussed as is their cinematic representation. See *As Tears Go By* (Wong Kar-wai, 1988).

'Big Timer' cycle of films is kicked off by the box-office success of *To Be Number One* (Poon Man-kit, 1991), which charts the rise of a gangster from humble origins.



As the handover to Hong Kong approaches some films begin to reflect the anxieties and worries of many living in Hong Kong. See *Too Many Ways To Be No.1* (Wai Ka-fai, 1997).



There is a growing concern that Hong Kong crime films are becoming obsessed with triad gangs and often merely celebrate their criminality rather than criticise it. See *Portland Street Blues* (Yip Wai-man, 1998).

2000s

Hong Kong society has to readjust to being part of the PRC.

2003: Hong Kong hit by the pneumonia-like SARS virus. Strict quarantine measures are enforced to stop the disease spreading. Hong Kong is declared free of SARS in June. Cinema production and attendances severely impacted.

Closer links to the PRC continue to develop.

Younger filmmakers reinvigorate the crime genre with new moral tales that reflect the complexity of Hong Kong's changing status and continued anxieties. See *Infernal Affairs* (Andrew Lau, 2002); *Beast Stalker* (Dante Lam, 2008).

Filmmakers such as Johnnie To use the crime genre to reflect on the handover and its impact upon Hong Kong and its citizens. See *Election* (Johnnie To, 2005).

Continued international interest in Hong Kong crime films is reflected in Martin Scorsese's remake of *Infernal Affairs*, *The Departed* (2006).

Filmmakers engage with the new moral and social issues facing Hong Kong. See the *Overheard* series (Alan Mak & Felix Chong, 2009/2011/2014).



2010s

2014: Tens of thousands of protesters take part in what organisers say could be Hong Kong's largest pro-democracy rally in a decade.

One of the results of the protests is a growing engagement with notions of a Hong Kong identity.

The continued popularity of the latest crime cycle allows for satirical works that poke fun at the genre's codes and conventions. See *Once a Gangster* (Felix Chong, 2010).

Crime films with a local flavour are produced by new, established and older filmmakers proving that the genre is still open to reworking and

reinvention. See *That Demon Within* (Dante Lam, 2014); *Wild City* (Ringo Lam, 2015).



PRE-1960s

In the 1950s, Hong Kong enjoys economic revival and the film industry develops. In 1958, the Shaw Brothers film company is established and with new studios production increases.

See details on the full *CRIME: Hong Kong Style* programme homemcr.org/hk-crime