

# CRIME: HONG KONG STYLE

**UK Premiere: Wild City (15) 迷城**

**MON 8 FEB, 18:10**

**Dir Ringo Lam/2015 HK/120 mins Louis Koo, Shawn Yue, Tong Li-ya**

**In Cantonese and Mandarin with Chinese and English subtitles**

Ringo Lam is the director of some of the most striking and influential Hong Kong crime films of the late 1980s and 1990s. These included *City on Fire* (1987), the film widely seen as a primary influence for Quentin Tarantino's first feature *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). During this period Lam also made a number of features that starred the Hong Kong star Chow Yun-fat, these included *City on Fire* as well as others such as *Prison on Fire* (1987) and *Wild Search* (1989). Lam's films, together with those of John Woo, particularly *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), helped popularise a violent cycle of Hong Kong crime films that explored brotherhood, honour and valour.

As the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China loomed Lam was invited to work outside Hong Kong on an action films starring Belgian martial arts actor Jean Claude Van Damme, *Maximim Risk* (1996). He returned to Hong Kong the following year to complete *Full Alert* (1997) starring the up and coming actors Lau Ching-wan and Francis Ng. After that he worked consistently including two more films with Van Damme, *Replicant* (2001) and *In Hell* (2003).

After a hiatus that saw him not direct a feature for twelve years – though he did contribute a section to the portmanteau film *Triangle* alongside Tsui Hark and Johnnie To in 2007 – Ringo Lam returned to the mean streets of Hong Kong as writer and director of *Wild City* in 2015. His actors once again, as they have in other periods of his career, represent some of the most popular of their generation. Here, Louis Koo as ex-cop turned bar owner T-Man, and Shawn Yue, as his street racer turned taxi driver brother Chung. Together these characters have to battle a ruthless gang of Taiwanese gangsters as they look to protect a young mainland woman Yun (Tong Li-ya).

It is interesting to consider the use of Taiwanese gangsters in *Wild City*. Whilst Lam has used them before, in *Full Alert* for example, for his latest film to be acceptable to the mainland Chinese censors they would have to be seen to

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have no links to the People's Republic, though we are told they sneaked into Hong Kong through the mainland. Here, unlike previously Lam will have had to consider the needs of the Chinese market. For all this *Wild City* remains a resolutely Hong Kong film, frantically driving, running and punching its way through the distinctive urban and rural landscapes.

Beyond its plot, *Wild City* like Lam's earlier work focuses on brotherhood and loyalty. Here these themes are mixed with ideas of honour and justice that are particularly relevant to post-handover Hong Kong. Released at a time when the umbrella movement protestors had crystallised many people's concerns about Hong Kong's identity and independence, *Wild City* once again shows that Ringo Lam is a director who can thoughtfully combine contemporary social concerns with bone crunching action.

Andy Willis (Season Curator, CRIME: Hong Kong Style)

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