

# Preface

When Ma Yongzhen tried to collapse the Green Lotus Mansion... when Tung was trapped in an attic in Kowloon Walled City awaiting sweeping machine-gun fire... when Mark forced Kit to acknowledge Ho as his brother... they paved the way for a new future in the face of death. Wah Dee, Fly, Crippled Ho, Chan Ho-nam, Chicken, Dagger, Ghost, Jim Yam, Lok, Jimmy and Panther all followed this path, bringing much drama and commotion to the Hong Kong underworld on the silver screen with their lives and deaths.

In comparison to genres such as *wuxia*, kung fu, melodrama, Cantonese opera and comedy, all of which enjoyed considerable success in Hong Kong, local gangster films emerged relatively late. They began to take shape during the 1970s and did not become prevalent until John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* broke box-office records in 1986. From then on, however, it became an indispensable

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genre in Hong Kong cinema. The industry not only produced large quantities of mob films, but many of them became huge blockbusters which, more importantly, were made with exceptional quality. Despite being relatively young, from a cinematic history point of view, it is an essential genre and tradition in the local context. Its uniqueness is particularly highlighted when Chinese and Taiwanese film culture are taken into consideration – Hong Kong cinema is the only place in which gangster films gained a following.

While there is much literature surrounding important mob film directors such as John Woo and Johnnie To, few works examine these features from a genre perspective. In addition to bringing into the spotlight the contributions made by innovators to the development of gangster films in different time periods, this book looks at how external factors – the change in social culture and the evolution of censorship, for example – have influenced the genre, and also attempts to explore mob films using the logic inherent in this film type. Different writers offer their personal perspectives into the research in hopes that we may learn more about gangster films, while filmmakers' recounts of their creative processes provide us with further insight. This collection of essays by researchers and interviews with the creative minds behind Hong Kong mob films is the first step of what will hopefully be a journey of exploration into the genre.

[Translated by Johnny Ko]

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