

# Brattle Theatre Film Notes: **Infernal Affairs**

( Hong Kong, 2002. R. 101 min.  
Cast: Andy Lau, Tony Leung Chiu  
Wai, Anthony Wong Chau-Sang,  
Eric Tsang; Writer: Felix Chong;  
Cinematographer: Yiu-Fai Lai;  
Producer: Andy Lau; Directors:  
Wai Keung Lau, Alan Mak

**H**ard-boiled and fast paced is  
one way to describe the  
Hong Kong action thriller  
"Infernal Affairs."

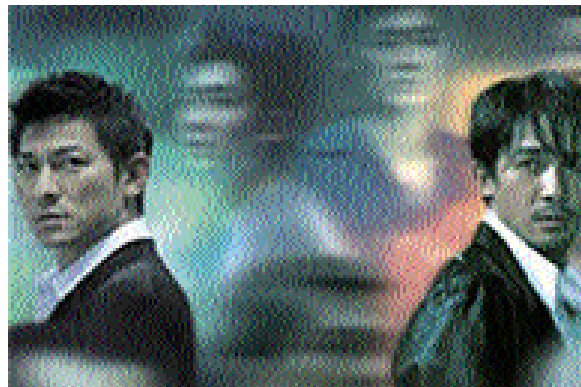
**T**he film, which runs from Nov.  
19 until Nov. 25 at the Brattle  
Theatre in Cambridge, heralded  
a new wave of Hong Kong cinema  
for many critics. It combines  
terse storytelling with sleek film-  
making. Directed by Andrew Lau  
and Alan Mak, it tells the story of  
two moles – one, an under-  
cover cop in the mob for the  
last 10 years (Tony Leung as  
Chan Wing Yan) and the other,  
a mob member planted into  
the police force (Andy Lau as  
Lau Kin Ming, not the director)  
– and the cat-and-mouse hunt  
to find the other.

**O**riginally released in  
2002, the film grossed  
more than HK \$55 mil-  
lion in the Hong Kong territory  
alone – the second-highest  
grossing film in Hong Kong his-  
tory ("Shaolin Soccer" holds the  
record) – and spawned two  
sequels, "Internal Affairs 2" and  
"Infernal Affairs 3." In trying to  
explain the film's success, co-  
director, Andrew Lau, told the  
French Web site, HKMania.com,  
that they tried to preplan every  
scene, accounting for lighting,  
action and details.

**"W**e began this with a com-  
plete script, thoroughly  
cut out, specifying the  
lightings of each scene," said Lau.  
"It is rare in the cinema of Hong  
Kong. We also tried to inform the  
public, of us to bring some closer,  
to make it again proud of the cine-  
ma of Hong Kong."

**L**au began his career as a cine-  
matographer, working on films  
such as "Where's Officer Tuba?"  
in 1986 and "Chungking Express" in  
1994. He started his directorial  
career with 1987's "The Ultimate  
Vampire" and has since worked on  
movies like the "Best of the Best"  
series (1996), "Young and  
Dangerous" series (1996); "The  
Duel" (2000); and "The Park" (2003).

**H**is co-director, Alan Mak, also  
told HKMania.com that the  
script took three years to  
write. He said that the taste of the  
Hong Kong public shifted from  
action movies in the 1980s to  
romantic comedies in 1990s. He  
said that he believes that the suc-  
cess of "Infernal Affairs" is due less  
to nostalgia for Hong Kong cine-



ma's glory days, but to a new  
approach to a familiar genre.

**"T**he films of action and the  
stories of cops and gang-  
sters contributed to the rep-  
utation of the cinema of Hong  
Kong, and one turned in the 1980s  
of many films on the underworld,"  
said Mak. "There is a certain amount  
of nostalgia in 'Infernal Affairs,' but  
I believe that the public is espe-  
cially sensitive to a new approach  
of a familiar kind, with the intro-  
duction of a pinch of Buddhism  
and new topics like the choice,  
pity, of chivalrous spirit."

**T**he stylized action sequences  
of "Infernal Affairs" remain true  
to the Hong Kong cinema of

the 1980s. Hong Kong cinema  
experienced a resurgence in the  
1980s and early 1990s with the  
release of films like director John  
Woo's "A Better Tomorrow" (1986)  
and "The Killer" (1989) both with  
action star Chow Yun-Fat. The films  
were known for their choreo-  
graphed action as well as the inter-  
nal moral conflicts of the main char-  
acters.

**"I**nfernal Affairs" also adds a  
level of intrigue. While the  
movie has some very exciting  
action scenes, the psychological  
impact of the duplicitous roles  
takes its effect on the undercover  
cop and gangster. In a Sept. 24,  
2004, review, The New York Times  
film critic Elvis Mitchell describes it  
as a "vibrating terseness that is usu-  
ally found in the writer and  
director Michael Mann's work.  
The picture uses disconnect-  
edness and alienation to drive  
the drama, rather than  
depending on bullet-time  
choreography to keep the  
audience riveted or, for that  
matter, awake."

**T**he intersection of action  
and drama remains one of  
the unique facets of films  
like "Infernal Affairs." Both ele-  
ments remain integral in the  
overall feel of Lau and Mak's film,  
rather than tacked on. One of the  
characteristic marks of Hong Kong  
action films, the formula hasn't  
translated effectively in the recent  
Hollywood films by crossover  
director John Woo (think "Mission:  
Impossible II" in 2000 and "Hard  
Target" in 1993). It will be interest-  
ing to watch whether Martin  
Scorsese will be able to capture  
the tautness of "Infernal Affairs" in  
his adaptation called "The  
Departed," slated for a 2006  
release.

- Jason Nielsen