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DIRECTED BY
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THE INFERNAL AFFAIRS TRILOGY

The Hong Kong crime drama was jolted to new life with the release of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, a bracing, explosively stylish critical and commercial triumph that introduced a dazzling level of narrative and thematic complexity to the genre with its gripping saga of two rival moles—played by superstars Tony Leung Chiu-wai and Andy Lau Tak-wah—who navigate slippery moral choices as they move between the intersecting territories of Hong Kong’s police force and its criminal underworld. Set during the uncertainty of the city-state’s handover from Britain to China and steeped in Buddhist philosophy, these ingeniously crafted tales of self-deception and betrayal mirror Hong Kong’s own fractured identity and the psychic schisms of life in a postcolonial purgatory.



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INFERNAL AFFAIRS

Two of Hong Kong cinema's most iconic leading men, Tony Leung Chiu-wai and Andy Lau Tak-wah, face off in the breathtaking thriller that revitalized the city-state's twenty-first-century film industry, launched a blockbuster franchise, and inspired Martin Scorsese's *The Departed*. The setup is diabolical in its simplicity: two undercover moles—a police officer (Leung) assigned to infiltrate a ruthless triad by posing as a gangster, and a gangster (Lau) who becomes a police officer in order to serve as a spy for the underworld—find themselves locked in a deadly game of cat and mouse, each racing against time to unmask the other. As the shifting loyalties, murky moral compromises, and deadly betrayals mount, *Infernal Affairs* raises haunting questions about what it means to live a double life, lost in a labyrinth of conflicting identities and allegiances.

Hong Kong | 2002 | 101 minutes | Color/Black & White | In Cantonese with English subtitles | 2.35:1 aspect ratio

INFERNAL AFFAIRS II

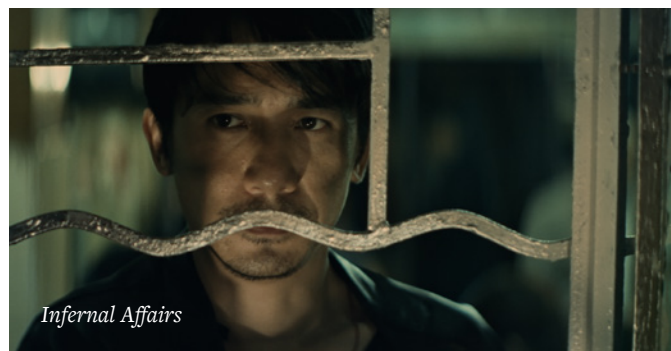
The first of two sequels to follow in the wake of the massively successful *Infernal Affairs* softens the original's furious pulp punch in favor of something more sweeping, elegiac, and overtly political. Flashing back in time, *Infernal Affairs II* traces the tangled histories that bind the trilogy's two pairs of adversaries: the young, dueling moles (here played by Edison Chen Koon-hei and Shawn Yue Man-lok), and the ascendant crime boss (Eric Tsang Chi-wai) and police inspector (Anthony Wong Chau-sang) whose respective rises reveal a shocking hidden connection. Unfolding against the political and psychological upheaval of Hong Kong's handover from Britain to China, this elegant, character-driven crime drama powerfully connects its themes of split loyalties to the city-state's own postcolonial identity crisis.

Hong Kong | 2003 | 119 minutes | Color | In Cantonese with English subtitles | 2.35:1 aspect ratio

INFERNAL AFFAIRS III

Tony Leung Chiu-wai and Andy Lau Tak-wah return for the cathartic conclusion of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, which layers on even more deep-cover intrigue while steering the series into increasingly complex psychological territory. Dancing back and forth in time to before and after the events of the original film, *Infernal Affairs III* follows triad gangster turned corrupt cop Lau Kin-ming (Lau) as he goes to dangerous lengths to avoid detection, matches wits with a devious rival in the force (Leon Lai), and finds himself haunted by the fate of his former undercover nemesis (Leung). A swirl of flashbacks, memories, and hallucinations culminates in a dreamlike merging of identities that drives home the trilogy's vision of a world in which traditional distinctions between good and evil have all but collapsed.

Hong Kong | 2003 | 118 minutes | Color/Black & White | In Cantonese with English subtitles | 2.35:1 aspect ratio



PRODUCTION HISTORY

INFERNAL AFFAIRS

Befitting a film franchise about dual identities, *Infernal Affairs* (2002) was initially influenced by the work of John Woo, the action director who, in the 1990s, traded his legendary status within the Hong Kong film industry for a career in Hollywood. As Alan Mak, the codirector and coscreenwriter of *Infernal Affairs*, explained to Hong Kong Cinemagic, “Around 1998, I saw [Woo’s] *Face/Off*, and I really liked that movie . . . The surgery about changing the face and body, however, was really not believable. So, with that movie as inspiration, I began to start to think about a story in which two people swap identities. *Infernal Affairs* really started from there.” While Hong Kong cinema had previously depicted the city-state’s notorious triads, no movie had yet shown gang members working within the police force as duplicitous moles, a twist on the well-worn trope of the undercover cop.

In the film’s screenplay, cowritten by Mak and Felix Chong Man-keung, Lau Kin-ming, the triad mole, and Chen Wing-yan, a police officer acting as a double agent within that triad, play a deadly game of cat and mouse. According to Mak, “having a script before a project comes together” was, at the time, “not common in Hong Kong.” In the case of *Infernal Affairs*, a finished script proved advantageous when it caught the attention of both Tony Leung Chiu-wai and Andy Lau Tak-wah, two of China’s most popular actors: Leung would go on to play Chen, and Lau would go on to play his namesake.

The screenplay wasn’t entirely satisfactory to everyone involved with *Infernal Affairs*, however. Marketers asked that the script incorporate more action sequences. While Mak considered adding another three or four minutes of action, his codirector, Andrew Lau Wai-keung, refused, believing, as Mak put it, that compared with violence “drama is really more attractive to the audience.” (Director Andrew Lau is not to be confused with actor Andy Lau.)

Infernal Affairs began production at a difficult moment for the Hong Kong film industry, which was facing a slump in the early 2000s. At this time, Andrew Lau had taken a risk by establishing his own production company, Basic Pictures. For *Infernal Affairs*, its inaugural project, he partnered with Media Asia Films, a distribution company making its first foray into production. The film was budgeted at 50 million Hong Kong dollars (roughly \$6.5 million in current U.S. currency), with a third of that money going to the cast. For Lau, this was a coup, since investors initially projected an even split between cast and production costs, while Lau wanted production to receive the bulk of the funds.

Lau was not only the director of *Infernal Affairs* but also, along with Lai Yiu-fai, one of its cinematographers. Indeed, Lau had been a director of photography before becoming a director, and this background made him especially invested in achieving a distinct visual style for his films. Having previously worked with Christopher Doyle on Wong Kar Wai’s *Chungking Express* (1994), Lau enlisted the renowned Australian cinematographer as a “visual consultant” on *Infernal Affairs*. According to Lau, Doyle “spent lots of time in the film laboratory . . . getting the color timing right so that the colors would look the way I had wanted them to look. I wanted to design all the lighting, but I didn’t want to have to fiddle with the lights a lot on location.” In essence, Lau and Lai took charge of cinematography during production while Doyle bolstered the results in postproduction, emphasizing the metallic, blue-and-gray sheen of Hong Kong’s disorienting, postmodern spaces.

A success upon its release in December 2002, *Infernal Affairs* has frequently been credited as single-handedly reviving the Hong Kong film industry. Ironically, since the movie was itself influenced by Hollywood, *Infernal Affairs* would in turn influence a Hollywood production: Martin Scorsese’s *The Departed*, the 2006 remake that won Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, and Best Film Editing. This was the first time in cinema history that Hollywood had remade a Hong Kong film.



Infernal Affairs II

INFERNAL AFFAIRS II AND III

The critical and box-office success of *Infernal Affairs* encouraged Lau, Mak, and Chong, at the behest of Media Asia, to reunite for two sequels that would add several layers of narrative complexity to a fairly straightforward initial installment. For *Infernal Affairs II*, this complexity helped compensate for the loss of stars Leung and Andy Lau from the first film. Rather than have a brother seek revenge for Chen's murder—a trope used in action sequels such as *A Better Tomorrow II* (1987)—Mak and Chong wrote a prequel script that takes place in three different years (1991, 1995, and 1997) in order to trace the events leading up to *Infernal Affairs*.

Leung and Lau's replacements proved easy to cast, since Shawn Yue Man-lok and Edison Chen Koon-hei had played the younger versions of Chen and Lau, respectively, in the opening sequences of *Infernal Affairs*. This time, however, Yue and Chen would star throughout the film, and thus they learned to imitate their older counterparts in gesture and speech in order to help create continuity with the original film. Other actors from the first film also reprised their roles in *Infernal Affairs II*, most notably Anthony Wong Chau-sang, as Superintendent Wong, and Eric Tsang Chi-wai, as head gangster Hon Sam. Rounding out the new cast was Francis Ng Chun-yu in the role of Ngai Wing-hau, another mob boss, who is the common enemy of Wong and Sam. For *Infernal Affairs III*, with its complicated jumps between past and present, the filmmakers brought back Leung and Andy Lau, as their original iconic characters, and Kelly Chen Wai-lam, as psychiatrist Lee Sum-yee.

Because the filmmakers made him Chen's half brother, Ngai added to the series a Shakespearean element of familial jealousy and betrayal that had only been implicit in the first *Infernal Affairs*. Indeed, Mak and Chong modeled their sequels after the Shakespearean *The Godfather: Part II* (1974): *Infernal Affairs II* relates its predecessor's backstory in much the same way that Francis Ford Coppola's movie depicts the origins of Vito Corleone, and *Infernal Affairs III* takes place both before and after Chen's

death, just as *The Godfather: Part II* features alternating story lines set in two different time periods.

More than that, with *Infernal Affairs II* and *III*, Mak and Chong deepened and expanded the thematic scope of the series to include further ideas from Buddhist philosophy, as well as an exploration of the social consequences of the 1997 transfer of Hong Kong from British to Chinese control. In this sense, the third film's settings played a major role. For one of its scenes, *Infernal Affairs III* features a rendezvous among triad leaders at the Tian Tan Buddha, a monument on Hong Kong's Lantau Island, thus recalling the films' frequent references to Buddhism's Avici, the lowest level of the hellish Naraka realm.

For one of *Infernal Affairs III*'s most significant locations, the filmmakers chose Cyberport, a business park in Hong Kong's Southern District; the complex stood in for police headquarters. Cyberport, the facade of which is made up entirely of windows that look out on the beautiful Telegraph Bay, was not yet in operation during production—and so the initial release of the film provided an up-to-the-minute evocation of Hong Kong's postcolonial emergence as a city of the future, not only in its sleek elegance but also in its intimidating scale. As in the first *Infernal Affairs*, corporate architecture and its human-dwarfing aesthetics parallel the characters' confused and shifting identities.

Infernal Affairs II and *III* were released only months apart, with the first sequel arriving in Hong Kong theaters in October 2003 and the second arriving in December. Like the first *Infernal Affairs*, which brought its creators multiple Best Picture and Best Director awards, *Infernal Affairs II* and *III* won honors on the Asian awards circuit—including, for *Infernal Affairs II*, the Hong Kong Film Critics Society Award for Best Film; and, for *Infernal Affairs III*, a Golden Horse Best Actor award for Andy Lau—and turned healthy profits at the box office. They even impacted *The Departed*: though that film takes its main narrative elements from the first installment, its epic canvas speaks to its debt to the series as a whole, one of Hong Kong cinema's most popular and influential achievements.

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHIES

ANDREW LAU WAI-KEUNG

Andrew Lau Wai-keung was born on April 4, 1960, in Hong Kong, where he was raised along with his five siblings. Growing up, he became interested in photography, and also developed an antipathy toward Britain's colonial rule of Hong Kong.

After graduating from high school, Lau began working at the Shaw Brothers studio, where, in 1984, he received his first screen credits as a camera assistant. In 1987, he shot his first films as a director of photography, including Ringo Lam's

City on Fire. His cinematography for Wong Kar Wai's *As Tears Go By* (1988) earned him a Hong Kong Film Award nomination in that category, and his subsequent contributions to Wong's *Chungking Express* (1994), on which Christopher Doyle also served as a cinematographer, brought him international renown.

In the 1990s, Lau started to develop a parallel career as a director and producer. His directorial debut, *Against All* (1990), was followed later in that decade by no less than eighteen films, including six entries in the *Young and Dangerous* series. During this

time, Lau founded, along with screenwriter Manfred Wong Man-chun and filmmaker Wong Jing, the Hong Kong-based production company BoB and Partners Co., Ltd. Lau and Wong would collaborate on films such as *The Storm Riders* (1998) and *The Legend of Speed* (1999).

In 2002, one year prior to the dissolution of BoB, Lau founded his own production company, Basic Pictures. Through Basic, Lau produced, codirected, and acted as cocinematographer on *Infernal Affairs* (2002), the influential crime thriller that would provide the basis for an Academy

Award-winning U.S. remake, *The Departed* (2006). For his work on *Infernal Affairs*, Lau won Best Director awards from the Hong Kong Film Awards, the Golden Bauhinia Awards, and the Golden Horse Awards. The thriller *Confession of Pain* (2006) earned him a Best Cinematography statue from the Hong Kong Film Awards. *Affairs* also initiated a fruitful partnership with codirector Alan Mak and screenwriter Felix Chong Man-keung, who went on to work with Lau on *Infernal Affairs II* and *Infernal Affairs III* (both 2003), among other titles.

In 2014, Lau's first U.S. coproduction as a director (with Andrew Loo Wang-hin), *Revenge of the Green Dragons*, was released. To date, his last film was *Chinese Doctors* (2021).

ALAN MAK

Alan Mak was born on January 1, 1965, in Hong Kong. Starting in 1986, Mak attended the School of Drama at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, from which he graduated in 1990.

In 1992, Mak began working in the Hong Kong film industry as an assistant director on various projects and then debuted as a director with *Nude Fear* (1998). *Stolen Love* (2001), which Mak also directed, began his creative partnership with screenwriter

Felix Chong Man-keung. Together, Mak and Chong wrote the screenplay for *Infernal Affairs* (2002), while Mak codirected the film with producer and cinematographer Andrew Lau. For his direction and screenwriting, Mak won accolades from the Hong Kong Film Awards and the Golden Bauhinia Awards; he also took home a Golden Horse Award for Best Director.

The success of *Infernal Affairs* led to two sequels, both of which Mak once again codirected with Lau and cowrote with Chong. Lau, Mak, and Chong also

collaborated on *Initial D* (2005) and *Confession of Pain* (2006), while Mak and Chong codirected and cowrote *Overheard* (2009), which won them awards for Best Director from the Hong Kong Film Critics Society.

Since 2010, Mak has directed seven films, including two sequels to *Overheard*. His last completed film to date, *The Procurator*, was delayed from its projected April 2022 release due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At present, he is directing the action thriller *Under Current*.



Alan Mak (left) and Andrew Lau Wai-keung (right)

TRIVIA

Infernal Affairs' original Cantonese-language title, *Mou gaan dou*, literally translates as “the unceasing path”—one of the film’s many references to the Buddhist Avici hell, where suffering never ends.

According to codirector Andrew Lau Wai-keung, *Infernal Affairs* marked “the first time in Hong Kong film history that a full orchestra was used for a film score.” Prior to *Affairs*, synthesizers were employed to approximate the sound of full orchestras.

Lee Sum-ye, the name of the psychiatrist played by Kelly Chen Wai-lam, is a Cantonese homophone for “your psychiatrist.”

In *Infernal Affairs*, the number four is visible on a far wall when Chen (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) and Wong (Anthony Wong Chau-sang) enter a stairwell before a shocking death occurs. The number is considered bad luck in China. Later, when Chen and Wong wait in front of an elevator, the digital counter skips the fourth floor.

The climactic scene of *Infernal Affairs*—a confrontation on the roof of a skyscraper—was filmed on location atop the North Point Government Offices.

An alternate ending to *Infernal Affairs* was created for the Mainland Chinese and Malaysian markets, which prohibit films from depicting criminals as triumphant.

The former Fanling Magistracy is used as the Kowloon West police station in *Infernal Affairs II* and *III*. The building was abandoned in 2002 and, since then, has been used by Hong Kong film productions to represent courthouses or police precincts. Currently, it contains the Leadership Institute for the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups.

In *Infernal Affairs III*, Dr. Lee's notes about Chen can be seen on a couple of occasions. In both instances, the text—written in English—describes a formerly blind person named May who has regained sight.