

# Riveting courtroom drama breathes new life into Hong Kong cinema

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The low-budget courtroom drama “A Guilty Conscience” has turned out to be the dark horse of Hong Kong cinema this year – the first local movie to exceed HK\$100 million (US\$12.7 million) at the box office.

The HK\$22.2 million movie, filled with touches of suspense and sarcastic comedy, was released on February 24, surpassing the 2022 local sci-fi blockbuster “Warriors of Future” in gross receipts.

Beyond money matters, the film marks a comeback for Hong Kong’s moribund movie industry by breaking the stereotype of local films as cop shows and martial arts adventures.

Written and helmed by Ng Wai-lun, the film stars actor, singer and stand-up comedian Dayo Wong as sharp-tongued barrister Adrian Lam, who attempts to redeem himself from past carelessness that landed an innocent person in prison.

This legal thriller finds Lam returning to the case in handling the appeal of a single mother accused of manslaughter in the death of her mute 7-year-old daughter. His investigation beats a path to the powerful Chung family, setting up a David-and-Goliath showdown for justice.

Ng, directing his first movie, was involved in scripting the 2021 film “Anita,” a biopic about the legendary Hong Kong singer Anita Mui. Ng said during a recent interview in Shanghai that it took him about 18 months to write the courtroom story.

“I had several talks with a barrister who inspired me with many interesting stories from judicial circles,” Ng said. “He told me about a judge who preferred to work as a barrister, and that led to the prototype of Lam in my story.”

The film ends with a courtroom climax that is compelling and dramatic.

“Originally, I wanted to shoot an action film, but in terms of the budget, I changed my mind,” said Ng. “So I included all the conflict of an action movie into a courtroom drama. I also



The cast pose with movie buffs after the film’s screening in the Chinese mainland.

added some comedic lines to refresh myself when I was tired writing the script.”

In the movie, the line “we believe that we are all equal, but the truth is that we’re not” is Ng’s call for more justice in the world, particularly where disadvantaged people are involved.

“This touching film reminded me of my own responsibilities,” said attorney and movie buff Zhang Yuxia. “Like the protagonist in the film, I also give legal assistance to people at the bottom of the social ladder. They are poor, but they still can live with dignity. The film will help dispel the notion that attorneys offer their services only to rich people.”

Hong Kong actress Louise Wong,



A poster for “Anita.” Hong Kong actress Louise Wong, known for her depiction of Anita Mui in the biopic, plays an innocent mother in “A Guilty Conscience.”

known for her depiction of Anita Mui in “Anita,” plays the role of Jolene, the innocent mother accused of killing her daughter. The performance is riveting.

At the movie’s special screening in Shanghai, Wong said it was quite a challenge to portray such a helpless, hopeless mother.

“Director Ng asked me to mess up my hair and soil my toenails,” she said. “He helped me to capture the mother’s dramatic emotional changes. I also studied sign language, since the mother had to communicate with her mute daughter in the film.”

The success of the movie is a shot in the arm for Hong Kong cinema, which was called the “Hollywood of the Orient” in its heyday.

In the two decades beginning in the 1970s, the industry produced talented Hong Kong filmmakers and actors, such as John Woo, Stephen Chow and Jackie Chan, and turned out time-honored kung fu flicks, cop movies and comedies.

Many productions, like “A Better Tomorrow,” “A Chinese Odyssey” and “Police Story,” impressed generations of movie fans. During that time, Hong Kong chalked up the record of more than 400 film productions in a year.

However, the golden age ended in the late 1990s, amid the Asian financial crises, the SARS epidemic and a rapidly shrinking market. In more recent years, the city’s film output was in the dozens.

It wasn’t until the screening of the 2016 crime film “Cold War 2” that the box office record for a Chinese film in

