

THE TRIADS

Rise of the Chinese Mafia

3 x 52' and 90'

YAMI₂
PRODUCTIONS

arte

SYNOPSIS

Known to be the most powerful, richest and most influential mafia organizations in the world, little is known about the triads. Who are they, what are their activities, their strategies? What place do they hold in the Chinese history? What is the nature of the link between them and the Chinese state?

Alongside key protagonists and exclusive interviews - triad leaders, repentants, victims, police officers and members of the intelligence services - this breathtaking investigation takes us into the world of these powerful criminal organizations to reveal their active role in the world of criminal activities and their far-reaching influence on the geopolitics and economics of our time.

EPISODES

A person with extensive tattoos on their arms and hands is shown in a workshop setting. They are wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, a gold watch, and a large gold ring. They are holding a small object with a wooden stick. The background is filled with various tools and materials, suggesting a craft or manufacturing environment.

Episode 1 - Gangsters

Episode 2 - Businessmen

Episode 3 - The world belongs to them

EPIISODE 1: GANGSTERS



In this episode, we follow "**The Ciggy**", a young member of the **Bamboo Union triad** who tells us about his entry into the mafia, his initiation, his first acts of arms and how he was attracted by the legendary history of the triads and some of its characters. This allows us to enter this story and understand where the triads come from. In parallel, an old man, **Lau**, speaks about his beginnings, 40 years ago, in the **14K of Hong Kong**. He takes us into the violent underbelly of the city, reveals the sordid trafficking that enriched the triads and their leaders, the fight against the British police, but also the cinema, in the hands of the triads.



Tattoos, initiation rites, martial arts, the triads are surrounded by deeply rooted traditions. But the mythology shouldn't make us forget that the real purpose of the organization is to make money by all means, including the most brutal.

Appearing in the 17th century following the fall of the Ming dynasty, the triads build their myth around the fight against China's enemies. But their opportunism soon made them switch from one side to the other in the blink of an eye, offering their services to the Chinese nationalists as well as to the French and British colonial forces or to the Japanese occupiers. Mao's victory marked the end of their existence in mainland China. The triads then went into exile to two new territories where they established themselves and thrived: **Hong Kong and Taiwan.**



Alongside historians, former investigators, and members of the largest Hong Kong and Taiwanese triads, we shed light on the first steps of Chinese organized crime until its heyday. This first episode immerses us in the dark alleys of **Taipei and Hong Kong and in the gleaming casinos of Macau**, with all kinds of trafficking, power games with the colonial authorities, the rise of new chiefs and the internal war between triads.

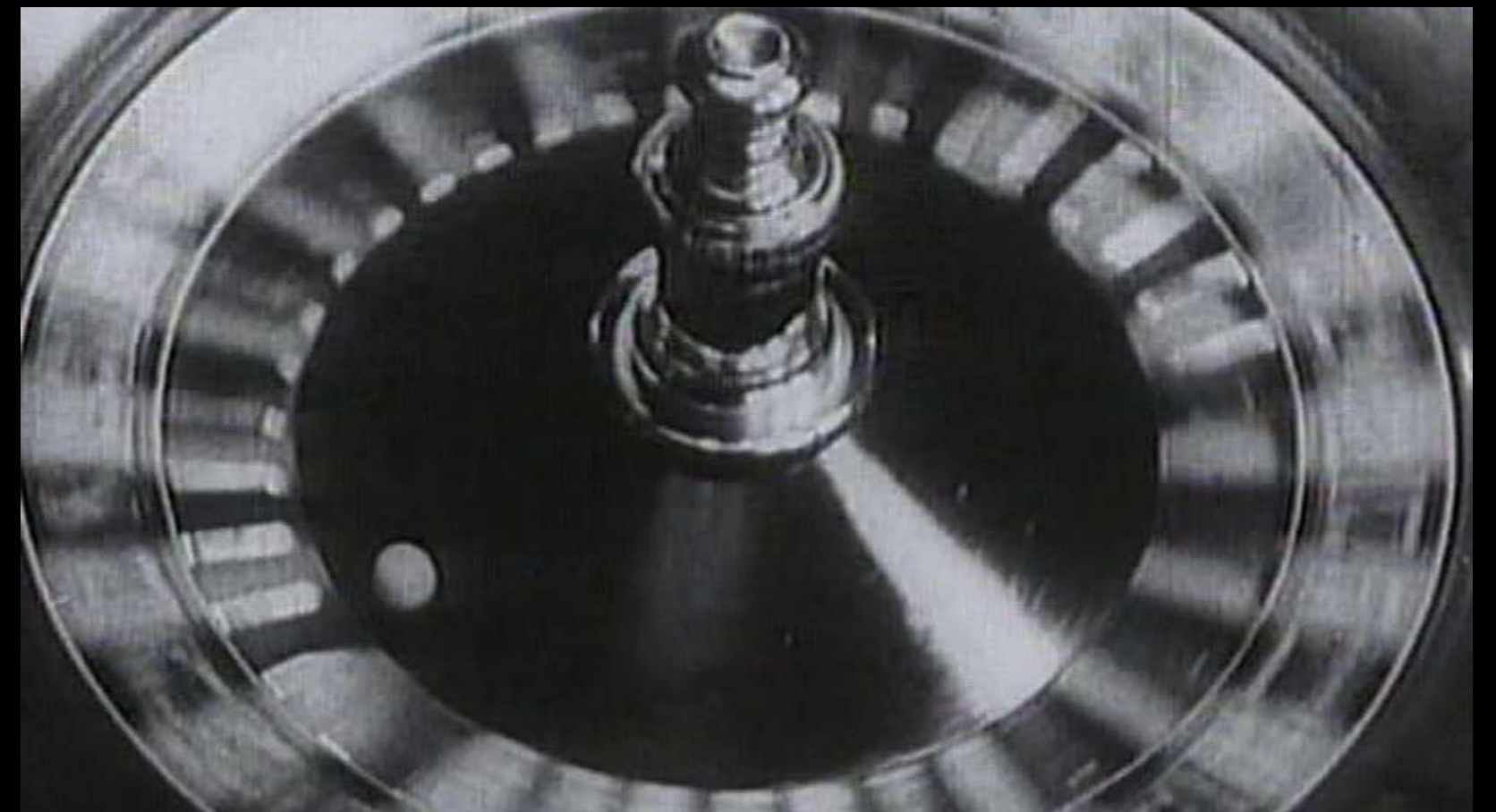
EPISODE 2: BUSINESSMEN



Episode 2 mainly follows the **Iron Tyrant**, who has reached the top of the **Celestial Alliance**, in a context where the triads are trying to become businessmen. One of the main objectives is to better control a part of the underground economy, in Asia and in the West. He tells us, from the inside, how a triad is managed today.

Over the years, the members of the triads adapt, renew their business and take on new costumes: film producers, casino managers or respectable businessmen. All of them benefit from the flourishing economy and the progressive opening of China to the market economy. Trafficking and money laundering is a flourishing business, while Hong Kong cinema makes gangsters and mafiosi the new heroes of its films. But the time of the handover of Hong Kong and Macau is approaching and the return of the CCP to these two territories does not look good for the triads. Unless the triads join forces with their old communist enemy?

The triads will make the **South of China their new Eldorado**, becoming actors of the economic development of the country, while the Chinese businessmen come for money laundering in the casinos of Macau. The Chinese mafia becomes the "go to" bank for shady business. But this brutal enrichment generates corruption at all levels of society and petty crime begins to flourish in China. **When Xi Jinping takes over, it is time to clean up:** he begins a major anti-corruption campaign that brings down local godfathers, his political enemies and overly powerful businessmen. He takes over the reins of the economy and is not afraid to use the hard way. His ambition is to keep hold of power and to spread the Chinese dream to the rest of the world. The triads will have to deal with this new player.



EPISODE 3: THE WORLD BELONGS TO THEM

Episode 3 focuses on **White Wolf** and his incredible journey from an American prison to serving the Chinese Communist Party. To shed light on these practices, a former banker once close to the Chinese government testifies about what he was personally involved in.

Even today, under President Xi, the country is still withdrawn from the international scene. Engaged in globalization, it needs the world but does not know it. Its best allies are its businessmen, its traders, its diaspora and its economic strike force. And the triads are good at this game. They will help Xi to fulfill his dream of regaining his former imperial grandeur. This dream will first require the reunification of China, of which **Taiwan is now the last missing link**. The Taiwanese triads are there to infiltrate and put pressure on the island's independence and democratic aspirations. They have already helped the CCP to bring Hong Kong to heel. They acted as the ruling party's shadow militia to subdue the students and supporters of the **Umbrella Movement in 2014 and 2019**.



After fulfilling the dream of reunification, Xi wants to **extend Chinese influence to Southeast Asia, the "Silk Roads", Africa and into the heart of the West**. Private security companies, cryptocurrency companies, Chinese cultural associations, all are ways to extend his influence with the help of **the triads who have pledged their allegiance** to the new master of the game that Xi Jinping has become. International since their origins, the triads are now investing in the West. They are merging into the game of globalization, inventing new circuits for drugs at the same time as they invest in real estate in major Canadian or Australian cities and flood the world with fentanyl and other synthetic drugs.



HOW WE INFILTRATED THE TRIADS

The **Iron Tyrant** has never testified on camera. This former leader of the **Celestial Alliance** killers has just been elected supreme leader. After long negotiations, for the first time, he has agreed to open the doors of **one of the most powerful triads** in the world, present on all continents. With an incredible freedom of tone, he recounts his journey, his years in prison, his challenges, the internal issues of the triad. His personal challenge is to succeed in his position, to which he was elected by his peers, at a young age and despite a reputation for uncontrolled brutality. At the end of our shoot, he was arrested again, due to his tempered personality which leads him to loose control and make a mistake.

In exclusivity from his European exile, a Chinese businessman, **Desmond Chum**, close to a former Chinese president, tells us about his collaboration with the triads. He emphasizes also the way the Chinese government used them to carry out an operation against opponents in Hong Kong. Another witness, whose name we cannot yet reveal, from inside a triad, will tell us a little more about his links with the government.

We also follow **White Wolf**, who has given us exceptional access and whom we have met more than a dozen times. He is the former mythical leader of **Bamboo Union**, present in drug trafficking throughout the world, and so powerful that it brought down a Taiwanese president. Today White Wolf has put himself at the service of Beijing and, with his mafia followers, is preparing the ground for a possible invasion.

The young **The Ciggy**, a booming Bamboo Union executive who runs a hostess club, agrees to be followed in his daily life. As the others, he tells his story frankly, not hiding his doubts about the path he has chosen, not evading sensitive political issues. He reveals that he had a medical certificate issued so that he would not have to beat up Hong Kong opponents who had come to Taiwan.

Holger Chen is a dissident. He has left a triad, is not fooled by their system of control over their members and the deeply criminal nature of the triads. For having said it out loud, and criticized the links of White Wolf with the Chinese power, he was the victim of an assassination attempt, on which the police are investigating. An investigator will tell us more about the possible sponsors. We also met victims of the triads, kidnapped and sequestered in South East Asia, who will reveal the dark side of these ruthless organizations.

We also met two former members of the **Hong Kong 14K triad**, who disclose the triad's hold on the city, its deals with the government and its loss of momentum to the Taiwan-based triads.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS



THE IRON TYRANT

The leader of the **Taiwanese Celestial Alliance Triad**, the largest triad in the world. He tells us about his rise and his duties as the supreme leader of the triad. His interview took place just before his imprisonment.

Former leader of the **Taiwanese Bamboo Union triad**. He has now become a revered wise eminence and looks back at 50 years of evolution of the triads between local fights and geopolitical issues. After 10 years of detention in the United States for the assassination of an opponent, he is back in Taiwan where he is a staunch supporter of the CCP.

WHITE WOLF



DESMOND SHUM

Chinese oligarch in exile. A key figure in the Chinese economy who tells us from the inside about the workings of state capitalism and its widespread corruption.





MISTER PING

Ex-member of the 14K, drug dealer in the underworld of Kowloon in the 1970s and 1980s. He embodies the dark side of **one of the most powerful triads in Hong Kong.**

Deputy chief of one of the biggest Taiwanese triads, we follow him between his hostess bar, the temple where he prays and a karaoke session. He represents the new generation of mafiosi.

THE CIGGY



SHARON KWOK

World expert on triads, exiled in Australia.



NATHAN LAW

Student leader of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. Exiled to London following China's takeover of Hong Kong and the adoption of the National Security Law, he is a figure of opposition to Beijing and testifies to the role of the triads in the anti-democratic repression.

Repentant mafia member, he hosts a successful Youtube show and denounces Beijing's grip on Taiwan.

HOLGER CHEN



MARTIN PURBRICK

Former British police intelligence officer in Hong Kong for over 30 years.



MARK CALNAN

Former FBI member who participated in the hunt for Tse Chi Lop, the biggest drug lord in Southeast Asia.



FILMING LOCATIONS

If **Hong Kong** is the triads' favorite territory, this documentary series also travels to **Taiwan**, where we discover in an unprecedented way how the mafias at the service of Beijing try to develop their hold while clashing with the country's democratic forces. We will also travel to the **United States, Canada, Australia and France** to follow in the footsteps of the triads in the West.

ANTOINE VITKINE

AUTHOR AND DIRECTOR



Antoine Vitkine is a French journalist and award-winning documentary filmmaker. Born in 1977, he graduated from Paris Higher School for Political Sciences and holds a master's degree in international relations. Since 2001, he has directed 24 documentary films for major French and international television networks.

Among the most notable:

- **Salvator Mundi: the astonishing affair of the last Vinci**
- **Putin's revenge**
- **Gaddafi, our best enemy** (awarded the prize for the most exported French documentary in 2012)
- **Magda Goebbels, First Lady of the Third Reich**
- **Attacks in the heart of power**
- **Bashar Al Assad, the master of chaos**
- **MBS, Prince of Arabia**
- **What does the Pope want?**

He has also written three essays, including *Mein Kampf, history of a book*, translated into 11 languages.

YAMI 2 EXPERTISE

For more than 15 years, Yami 2 has been a pioneer in the production of ambitious investigative films on organized crime in the world and also on modern China. ARTE, the European reference channel for documentaries, even considers that we have invented a new genre in documentary: historical investigation.

Our objective: to understand and explain the world we live in today by exploring the history of power mechanisms.

With a catalog of thirty films and series, it has been developing internationally, working in co-production or pre-purchase with some fifteen European broadcasters (including BBC, ARD, ZDF, Rai, RTE), American broadcasters (PBS, Questar) and Asian broadcasters (NHK, Thai PBS, TVNZ).

YAMI 2'S SELECTED TRACK RECORD



Mafia and Republic

by Christophe Bouquet, Pierre Péan
and Vanessa Ratignier

ARTE - 2017 - 3x60 min

This documentary series explore the rogue bonds that linked the Corsican mafia and politicians from all sides for three generations. Based on archive footage and explanations by historians, journalists, judges, and witnesses, this series analyzes the obscure mechanisms that enabled an unknown but all-powerful criminal organization to spread to all continents and to access the wheels of power.



Tiananmen

by Ian McMillan and Audrey Maurion

PBS/ARTE - 2019 - 2x57 min

Tiananmen tells the gripping narrative of a period of just seven weeks in which the whole future of China today was founded, where at various turning points the final outcome could have avoided the massive bloodshed. These turning points unfold over two hours in a story told with the drama and pace of a political thriller.



The story of drug trafficking

by Christophe Bouquet and Julie Lerat

ARTE - 2020 - 3x60 min

Major powers, pharmaceutical industries, banks, secret services: all have played a role in the spread of drugs and the emergence of the largest criminal organizations. A historical and worldwide investigation in three episodes.

Selected at the Realscreen Awards
Broadcasted on Questar

FOR 2023

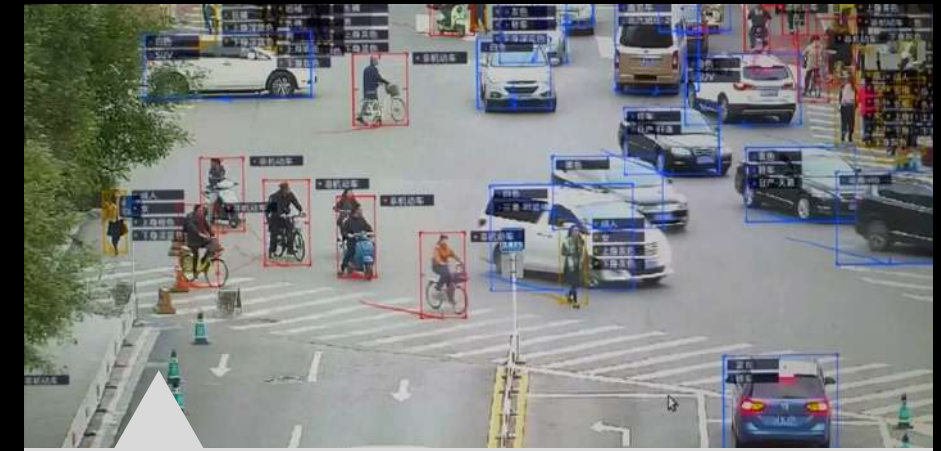


Mafia and banks

by Christophe Bouquet and Mathieu Verbood

ARTE - 2023 - 3x52 min

Mafias and Banks: two opposite worlds. They share the same taste for luxury, risk, and easy money yet they despise and fear each other and are both inextricably linked to the government. For a long time, criminals robbed banks, disemboweled and emptied their safes. It was not until the end of the Second World War that the mafias began to understand all the benefits they could make from banking institutions, and then from finance.



Laogai: Prison Nation

by Tania Rakhmanova

ARTE - 2023 - 2x52 min

The incredible and untold story of Chinese surveillance and repression system's invention, development, and improvement throughout decades. Since Mao, the CCP has organised the submission of the Chinese people by monitoring everyone and imprisoning anyone. The Uighurs are by no means the only ones imprisoned and our film convinces that the leaders of the recent protests will end up in the Laogai for an indefinite time.

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JOSEPHINE LETANG
*Head of
International Distribution
& Marketing*
j-letang@arteFrance.fr



ALEC HERRMANN
*Head of
Catalog and Video
Acquisitions*
a-herrmann@arteFrance.fr



AUDREY KAMGA
Sales Manager
a-kamga@arteFrance.fr
Canada, USA, South America,
Australia, New Zealand, Israel,
MENA Region



ISABELLE MONTEIL
Sales Manager
i-monteil@arteFrance.fr
UK, Ireland, Italy, Spain,
Portugal, Asia
language versions



MARLENE CHA
Sales Manager
m-cha@arteFrance.fr
Eastern Europe, Greece,
Africa
Worldwide inflight



FRANKA SCHWABE
Sales Manager
f-schwabe@arteFrance.fr
Germany, Austria, Switzerland,
Belgium, France, Netherlands
Scandinavia, Iceland