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Author(s)	Derek Elley
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HEAVEN CAN'T WAIT

(GAU SEI SAN GWAN)

(HONG KONG)

An Entertainment Today/United Filmmakers Organisation production. (International sales: UFO, H.K.) Produced by Eric Tsang. Executive producer, Lee Chi-ngai.

Directed by Lee Chi-ngai. Screenplay, Lee, James Yuen, Lam Oi-wah. Story consultant, Peter Chan. Camera (color), Bill Wong; editor, Cheung Siu-hei; art direction, Cheung Ying-wa; costume design, Ng Lei-lou. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Forum), Feb. 18, 1996. Running time: 107 MIN.

With: Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Andy Chan Siu-chun, Karen Joy Morris, Bowie Lam, Alex To, Kent Cheng, Lawrence Cheng.

(Cantonese soundtrack)

A broad comedy about religious shysters in contemporary Hong Kong, "Heaven Can't Wait" is too local in its humor and references to go wide in the fest circuit. It's a rare solo directing turn by Lee Chi-ngai, who, with partner Peter Chan, has produced some of the best relationship comedies of the '90s. Pic did a so-so HK\$10.2 million (\$1.3 million)

on local release last summer.

Popular star Tony Leung Chiu-wai ("Cyclo") is Fung, raised in a Buddhist temple, who runs con tricks with his friend, Chi (Bowie Lam). When Chi gets greedy, splits with Fung and goes on to become a famous TV prophet, Fung gets his revenge by persuading a two-bit actor, Chun (Andy Chan Siu-chun), to dress up as a priest and perform phony miracles.

As Fung planned, this attracts the attention of Chi, who makes every effort to lure Chun to his side. The only problem is, Chun comes to believe he really is a Christ-like figure.

Like several other of Lee's pics with Chan (especially "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Father"), the movie has an otherworldly slant that acknowledges a reality beyond the visible present. The focus here, however, is comedy of a very cynical kind, joshing the media (through the character of a female reporter hoodwinked by Fung), local H.K. superstitions and Buddhism in general. Beyond the territory itself, the audience for this is, frankly, limited.

Perfs are fairly expansive across the board. The music track uses excerpts from Carl Orff's "Carmina Burana" and the fifth movement of Mahler's Third Symphony. Tech credits are OK. —Derek Elley