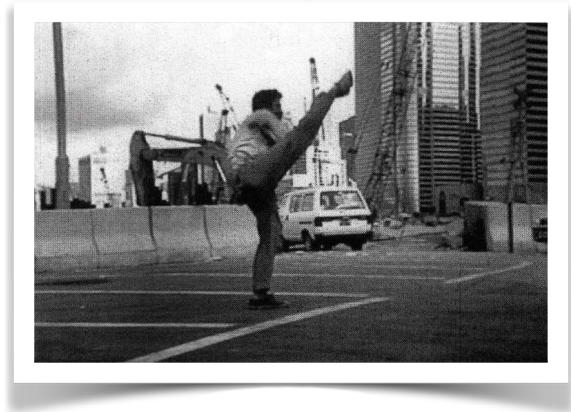


MADE IN HONG KONG

Director: Luc Schaedler | Switzerland 1997 | 76 mins.

July 1997 - what a media event! Journalists, presenters, film- and radio crews from all over the world came to document the return of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China, or the surrender of the last British crown jewel. Some were caught up in the wildest predictions. But only a day or two later, hardly anyone was interested in the six million people who had been left in communist custody. Some other «important» event had replaced «Hong Kong 1997» in the media.

«Made in Hong Kong»: Luc Schaedler, a long-time Asia expert and Hong Kong aficionado - he is to thank for some very important film cycles at Zurich's Xenix studio cinema in this respect. He began his Master thesis at the University of Zurich in 1995 on the subject of «Migration to Hong Kong» in the field of visual anthropology: After viewing dozens of films made in Hong Kong and intensive historical research, he traveled to Hong Kong for four months in 1996 and shot his Hong Kong documentary on his own, armed with a small Sony video camera (at the time the first digital camera on the market).



The result is something to be proud of: One-man filmmaker Luc Schaedler was in the right place at the right time - almost exactly one year before July 1, 1997: in popular Mong Kok rather than in the luxury district of Wanchai. His film is therefore one of the very few exceptions that have more to say about Hong Kong than just statistical sensations such as cognac consumption or the number of registered Rolls Royces. Of course, July 1, 1997 is a theme in Schaedler's film, but he does not focus exclusively on it, but rather tries to create a more complex portrait of this city with impressionistic images and the statements of his interviewees. That's why his film doesn't have an expiration date printed on it, quite the opposite of many a television or newspaper reportage.

«Made in Hong Kong»: that is Alexandre Astruc's idea of the camera-pen put into action. These are themes such as flight, arrival, poverty, adventure, Suzie Wong, architecture, illegal building structures, the real, the popular Hong Kong, illegal workers, money, business, freedom and last but not least the hand- or take-over, a compendium of known and unknown images: Airplanes over Kowloon City, the Star Ferry, but also the bowels of the Chungking Mansions made famous by Wong Kar-Wai, as well as wet markets, mah-jongg, small businesses in the quarters Yau Ma Tei, Mong Kok and Sham Shui Po, which are hardly visited by tourists. On the one hand, the media surrogates of Hong Kong's television commercials and Hollywood, on the other hand, the less glamorous but more lively counterparts in reality.

These are primarily six subjectively selected portraits of people who have stopped over in Hong Kong for various reasons. Apart from Guo, whose southern Chinese parents fled the communists, no one else was born in Hong Kong - a characteristic of this city. It is telling that Luc Schaedler interviewed the two Chinese Eric Lye and Guo, the two whites Peter and Nicole, as well as the Pakistani Afzal and the Indian Mohan. The fact that this is the case certainly has a lot to do with the originally chosen theme of «migration to Hong Kong» and is a real stroke of luck for the viewer: the comments of Afzal, from whose play about the migration problem «Achas in Chungking Mansions» a short excerpt is shown, and the incomparable humour of Mohan, owner of a textile shop in the Chungking Mansions.

The incomparable humour of Mohan, the owner of a textile store in Chungking Mansions, gives an insight into a world that is hardly to be expected in Hong Kong or is often forgotten. As in the rest of the film, the author refrains from commentary and instead gives a voice to those who otherwise have none: Thus, our image of Hong Kong becomes more complex and shows clearly that Hong Kong, despite its extremely fast growing prosperity, is still riddled with exploitation and great poverty. Among the Chinese, the mischievous architecture professor Eric Lye draws attention to Hong Kong's major housing problems, while the anarchist musician and journalist Guo shows a certain restlessness regarding the change of power. The diametrically opposed choice of the two whites is also interesting: There is Peter, the English colonial official who came to Hong Kong to really experience something for once, and the young South African journalist Nicole, who is certainly closest to the film author. While one is still enthusiastic after 20 years - «This is Asia, man!», Nicole strikes rather critical notes. She is the one who predicted back in 1996 that nothing but handshakes and fireworks would happen on July 1, 1997; and adds that the real changes would not be seen so soon.

Roger Fischer. Zurich, 1997 (translated by DeepL)