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## CITIZEN HONG KONG – Press Release

*Citizen Hong Kong*, a feature-length documentary by Ruby Yang, has been shown in nine festivals and was broadcast nationally on PBS.

Last jewel in Britain's imperial crown, Hong Kong apprehensively rejoined China in 1997. Ruby Yang went back to her childhood home to see how it would reconcile its British past with a Chinese future.

Hong Kong is a free market dynamo. It is also a test case for China's human rights policy. Neither of these perspectives fits Ruby Yang's experience. To her, Hong Kong is a collection of highly cosmopolitan people, seasoned by past ordeals. How will they fare in the new era? She decided to focus on the transition generation -- those who are just now coming of age.

Five young Hong Kongers, equipped with video camcorders, helped her chronicle Hong Kong's step into the 21st century:

- Newly arrived from mainland China, high school senior Qi Ke Jia wants to fulfill her parents' dreams by getting into Hong Kong University. Relentless work puts her on a thin line between success and burnout.
- Ed Wu, a 34-year-old buyer for a music store, got stuck at home when his elder brother went abroad to study. He now fills his life, and his mother's tiny apartment, with Star Wars collectibles.
- Aussie expatriate Louise Wong returned to Hong Kong in search of a job and a sense of belonging. The job, as a radio reporter, was the easy part.
- Brothers Edward and Edwin Chan perform with the Hong Kong Deaf Theatre Troupe. Brashness and freeform improvisation get them through a raucous city . . . and give that city its competitive edge in a brawling world.

Hong Kong stands both to lose and gain by shedding its colonial status. Raised as a Chinese Briton, filmmaker Ruby Yang wonders whether Hong Kong can keep its special character as a cultural bazaar and fount of nervous energy. Her family's past is the film's historical backdrop; it brings dangers and opportunities into high relief.

Hong Kong is a city of constant comings and goings, a world of borrowed traditions where both abject failure and wild success lurk just around the corner. *Citizen Hong Kong* is an engaging portrait of ordinary people coping with circumstances beyond their control.

*Citizen Hong Kong* was funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Asian American Telecommunications Association, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Soros Documentary Fund and the Sidney Stern Memorial Trust.

## Filmmaker Profile

If she ever got to make a major documentary, Ruby Yang vowed long ago, it would be about Hong Kong's change of sovereignty. 1997 loomed over Hong Kong as soon as Britain agreed to cede the colony in 1984. The handover raised burning political questions. It also raised personal ones. Hong Kongers had to ask, "Do I want this gaudy hybrid culture to fade away? If Hong Kong becomes just another Chinese city, can I become just another Chinese?"

News reports of the actual handover featured Hong Kong's wealthy elite. Yang, who speaks Cantonese, addressed herself to ordinary people. She recruited her five co-workers through family, friends and footwork.



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For two years Yang and producer Lambert Yam shuttled back and forth from San Francisco to Hong Kong, filming interviews and events, helping the cast with their cameras, sifting through hours of footage. Yang and Lam used early samples of their work to attract funders: the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, N.A.A.T.A., the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Soros Documentary Fund. The film was eventually broadcast on PBS during Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, 2000.

Ruby Yang grew up and went to school in Hong Kong. Her parents fled there from China in 1949. The family emigrated to the United States when she was 21. She trained as a painter at the San Francisco Art Institute, and went on to earn a Master's degree in filmmaking in 1984. She has lived in San Francisco ever since. Her student film, *Elaine*, was in four festivals, including Ann Arbor and Cork, Ireland. Her short film *White Passage*, completed two years later, appeared in 10 festivals, including the San Francisco and Hong Kong International festivals. Awards include 1987 first prize in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's SECA competition.

In 1994 Ruby Yang saw the promise of video diaries when she edited *A.K.A. Don Bonus*, a prizewinner at the Berlin Film Festival which went on to earn an Emmy for the P.B.S. series "P.O.V." Don Bonus, a Cambodian-American, worked with director Spencer Nakasako to document his senior year in high school. Hurdling many obstacles, Don Bonus comes into focus as a funny and resilient raconteur.

As she does in *Citizen Hong Kong*, Ruby Yang wove together parallel stories in *Street Soldiers*, a public TV documentary directed by Avon Kirkland about the Omega Boys Club, a unique San Francisco institution. She also edited *China, Wild East*, a TBS history directed by Peter Kaufmann, and *All Power to the People*, a history of the Black Panther party directed by Lee Lew Lee for European TV.

She was the editor of *Xiu Xiu, the Sent Down Girl* directed by actress Joan Chen. The film premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and won seven Golden Horses, the Taiwanese Oscar, including Best Picture. She worked with Joan Chen again on the Hollywood film *Autumn in New York*, starring Winona Ryder and Richard Gere.

Since making *Citizen Hong Kong* Ruby Yang has made another film, *China 21* for public TV. Both films were shown on PBS stations as part of Asia Pacific Heritage Month. *Citizen Hong Kong* was also aired in Hong Kong, Taiwan and numerous European outlets. In 2000 she directed and edited *Silicon Valley*, a hugely successful 90 minute documentary for mainland Chinese TV, produced by Eric Xu, the co-founder of Baidu.com.. She served as Series Editor for Bill Moyers' *Becoming American - the Chinese Experience* which screened on PBS in 2003.

She is now based in Beijing, directing public service announcements and a wide range of documentary work as part of Chang Ai Media Project (formerly the China AIDS Media Project). One of their films, *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, which she directed, won the 2006 Oscar for Documentary Short Subject at the 79th Academy Awards. Their most recent documentary *Tongzhi in Love* premiered in June of 2008 at Frameline Gay & Lesbian Film Festival. The film won a Golden Gate Award for Best Documentary Short at the 2009 San Francisco International Film Festival.

Her latest documentary *A Moment in Time*, a one-hour documentary about the experience of the Chinese in San Francisco's Chinatown, told through the films they loved, will air on PBS in 2010.