

Hong Kong on Location (Issue No. 12)
The Film Services Office Newsletter (2.2004 – 11.2004)

City of Many Faces—Location for Mega Productions the World Over

Since its inception six years ago, the FSO has witnessed overseas film, television and advertisement crews coming to film in Hong Kong. *Ultraviolet*, mentioned in the last issue, finally finished its Hong Kong shoot, which constitutes 80% of the film, between February and May. And sci-fi is not the only thing Hong Kong offers. French feature-length *La moustache* came to the territory in October to concoct romance and exoticism.

Hollywood Passion for Futuristic Ambience

The story of HK\$300 million production *Ultraviolet* takes place 1,000 years from now and Hong Kong with its modern cityscape was the backdrop of choice. Director Kurt Wimmer decided to shoot 80% instead of 20% of the film, as originally intended, in Hong Kong after his trip here to scout locations last November. In January the crew came to make preparations and Wimmer, accompanied by female lead Milla Jovovich and some 50 staff members, arrived in February. During the ensuing three months, we rendered assistance to the production at a total of 42 times.

So which venues in Hong Kong look futuristic? The director's choices included Cyberport, the Central District pedestrian footbridge network, the Central Plaza, the Arts Centre, the former District Land Office and Survey Office in Sha Tin, and Persee Cemetery. The crew also hired Shing Fung Studio in Sai Kung to build a Shanghai set. The application for the Central District pedestrian footbridge network was the most complicated. Besides two sections of the footbridge, they also applied to use a third section as base camp, to place the power van at the bus terminus, and to turn part of the IFC into a make-up room. And as the film is set in the future, pedestrians cannot enter the frame. Hence there were many applications for vehicular lane closure and for parking of filming vehicles.

Having spent HK\$100 million in Hong Kong, hired close to 120 local staff, and employed local companies in its post-production digital special effects, the film was undoubtedly a major booster for the Hong Kong economy.

French Romance at Victoria Harbour

Hong Kong was legendized by *The World of Suzie Wong* when the movie came out in 1960. French director Emmanuel Carrère had dreamt of filming a story set in the Pearl of the Orient since his sojourn here in the 1980s. His dream finally came true in October 2004 when he and a crew of 25 came here for a three-week shoot for *La moustache*, a film starring serious actor and actress Vincent Lindon and Emmanuelle Devos. Having hired 50 Hong Kong film industry workers and 450 extras, this HK\$45 million production was another vote of confidence in the territory.

Among Carrère's memories of Hong Kong, seaside views are some of the most lasting. There were 24 applications involving scenes either on the sea, by the sea, on boats, or by the pier (including Victoria Harbour, Sai Kung Public Pier, waters stretching from Ma Liu Shui to Kau Lau Wan, and the Kwun Tong public cargo working area). A number of government departments were made contact with, including the Marine Department, the Immigration Department, the Government Property Agency, the Lands Department, the Highways Department, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Police Force, the Transport Department, and the Architectural Services Department. All applications were approved with our facilitation. The crew also had their eyes on the Star Ferry and the Phoenix Vessel. We mediated on their behalf and the applications were approved. Phoenix Vessel voluntarily reduced the hire fees in light of the film's promotional value for Hong Kong.

Other Takes on Hong Kong

There were 19 other overseas productions hailing from eight regions that required FSO assistance. They included video films, documentaries, TV programmes, TV commercials and Wong Kar Wai's *Eros*, and the venues applied for included Bauhinia Square (TV drama by Guangdong TV Station), Tsing Ma Bridge (Japanese video film), Avenue of the Stars (Japan's Meiji Chocolate TV commercial), the Kowloon-Canton Railway (South Korean Dacom TV commercial), Gloucester Road with its famous traffic (Japanese Panasonic TV commercial), the busy Lockhart Road part-time pedestrian street (Japanese TV programme), the podium of Exchange Square (American documentary), and the celebrated Hong Kong red taxi (South Korean telecommunication advertisement). Hong Kong truly has a myriad of faces, each as appealing as the next.

“Government Support”

This is the title of an article in *Locations*, the annual publication of the Association of Film Commissioners International in Los Angeles. The official publication of Locations Global Expo 2004, held last April in LA, praised the Hong Kong government for its help in the making of *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life*. For the sixth year in a row, the FSO put up a booth at the Expo jointly with the Hong Kong Tourism Board to promote Hong Kong as the ideal backdrop for movies. A total of 222 exhibitors from the world over were in attendance, compared to 141 last year. Being highlighted for praise by the official publication turned out to be fabulous promotion for Hong Kong.

In October, the FSO took part in the Busan International Film Commission and Industry Showcase for the third year in a row. Out of the 50 exhibitors, Hong Kong attracted 120 visitors. We explored co-production opportunities with South Korean filmmakers and shared experiences in facilitating location filming with the Seoul Film Commission. Hong Kong's specialists in prop gun filming were, moreover, invited to share their professional expertise with South Korean filmmakers. Hong Kong also became the star at the Ninth Pusan Film Festival. Director Fruit Chan was a member of the jury and Wong Kar-wai's *2046* was the opening film. All 5,000 tickets to the film were sold out in less

than five minutes.

Local Films Stay Close to Heart and Home

Despite increased joint filming projects between Hong Kong and the Mainland, thanks to CEPA, local filmmakers are still very much attached to the city they call home. In the last ten months, 42 local productions of different genres sought our services for a range of problems.

Divergence with a Hitch

Benny Chan's HK\$30 million film starring Aaron Kwok, Ekin Cheng and Angelica Lee came to us 28 times with requests involving locations in Central, Admiralty, North Point, Fo Tan, the East Kowloon Corridor, Hong Kong Science Park, etc. But the opening scene at the airport was the most interesting.

The Airport Authority agreed to let the film company use part of the airport for a two-day shoot. In one of the scenes, three policemen wielding handcuffs and toy guns were supposed to escort an important personage away from the airport. As handcuffs and toy guns are generally prohibited at the airport, the Airport Authority reconsidered the request and indicated that handcuffs might be given discretionary approval. But time was running out, the film company decided to use flexcuffs instead. The Airport Authority also reviewed the policy on prop weaponry and informed the FSO of the outcome (please refer to the paragraph "When Props 'Threaten' Airport Safety" for details).

Digging Trouble at The Election

This Johnnie To film starring Louis Koo, Simon Yam and Tony Leung Ka-fai finally began shooting in October after a long preparation. One of the scenes involved digging a hole at Kam Shan Country Park to hide a triad token. The film had obtained the approval of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department but ran out of time to apply to the Water Supplies Department. With our assistance, the department gave them a speedy approval. But on 1st November, the day of the shoot, filming was stopped by the Water Supplies Department, which claimed that the company had not mentioned anything about digging. We explained to them that, due to an oversight, the company had just made the request to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and that the shoot had to finish on time as one of the actors was leaving Hong Kong afterwards. The department requested the company to sign a letter of undertaking wherein it promised to compact the soil after digging. Filming resumed but in that afternoon, they were stopped in the middle of digging by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, which complained that the hole was bigger than originally indicated. With our liaison, the film company agreed not to expand the hole and filming continued smoothly.

As the shoot failed to finish on time, the film company applied to take up where they left off a few days later. The departments were worried that the hole could be dangerous to visitors and rain would erode the soil. They asked the company to cover the site with

waterproof canvas and properly cordon it off with warning signs in both English and Chinese to alert visitors. The latter did as it was told and shooting resumed several days later.

Harmony of Land, Sea and Sky for *S04*

The cameras keep rolling for large-scale Hong Kong productions. *S04*, directed by Stanley Tong, may have left its tracks in India, Xian and Shanghai, but this action-adventure begins actually in good old Hong Kong. The opening scene starring male leads Jackie Chan and Tony Leung Ka-Fai was filmed in May. It involves Chan on a boat which is supposed to be his home. The company had its eyes on the former Wan Chai Working Area and made enquiries with us on which government departments to contact.

The FSO discovered that this area, formerly under the jurisdiction of the Marine Department, is now under the Lands Department. As there is a seawall, approval of the Civil Engineering Department would also be required. Time was tight but with our mediation, the applications were given speedy approval and filming began on the dot. The company also wanted to moor two freighters. As the venue had a heliport, they needed to seek approval from both the Marine Department and the Government Flying Service. We contacted the units on their behalf and both gave the green light on condition that the highest point of the ship was lit at night to ensure the safety of helicopters.

***Breaking News* Begins with Bangs on Long Street**

What strikes you most about *Breaking News*, the Johnnie To film that hit the screens in June? The seven-minute single-take opening gun battle? In hindsight, there was little wonder that the director had specifically chosen a very long street. The only venue that can be used to film this type of scene is Chun Wing Street in Tai Kok Tsui. The Urban Renewal Authority hired out the vacant shop spaces along the street for the sake of building the set and we coordinated the road closure and filming vehicle parking applications. Filming was twice postponed, and accordingly, we relayed the new requests to the relevant departments. No objections were raised by either the Transport Department or the Hong Kong Police Force. With the groundwork laid, the famous breath-taking, one-take scene opens with a bang.

***Sha Po Lang's* Castle Peak Ordeal**

Wilson Yip's *Sha Po Lang** is a story transcending time and space that stars Donnie Yen and Simon Yam. Yip had wanted to set the film at the former Castle Peak Hospital quarters. However the premises were in the middle of being handed over. Technically they are now under the Social Welfare Department but arrangements had not been officialised and the keys were still with the Lands Department. The Social Welfare Department told us that there should be no problem with the hire but the Lands Department politely rejected the application on grounds that the premises were now reserved for social welfare purposes. On behalf of the film company, we explained the difficulty of finding the right location. Moreover, the hire was only temporary and the venue was still awaiting redevelopment. The Lands Department accepted the application

and agreed to give a speedy approval. With the cooperation of both departments, filming proceeded on schedule.

When It's all up to Lady Luck

Over the past ten months, we rendered our services to 43 local commercials and ten promos. Sometimes the requests were close to impossible. Sometimes the problems were completely unexpected. But luck was on our side every single time.

Inauspicious Wedding

The promo of the Registration and Electoral Office reminds voters to register by drawing a parallel with the need to register a marriage. The production company wanted to hire the Cotton Tree Drive Marriage Registry or the City Hall Marriage Registry for filming purposes. We spoke to the Immigration Department, which replied that though hiring was not a problem, the dates applied for were all auspicious days for marriage. This meant that the registries would be too busy to entertain the filming crew. The department then proposed to hire out the City Hall Marriage Registry on an inauspicious day. The company acquiesced and the 'knot' was tied.

Hints on Using the Conveyor Belt

If you want to film the airport's luggage conveyor belt, remember to file an application for the belt's electricity supply. The CSL1010 advertisement was given the go-ahead by the Airport Authority to film the belt, but on condition that it was powered off. The production company came to us for help and at our persuasion, the Airport Authority agreed to power on the belt on the day of the shoot.

Laundry Alert

The promo for the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme of the Environmental Protection Department needed shots of industrial waste polluting water sources at a hospital laundry. We made enquiries with the Hospital Authority and found out that of the three laundries under their jurisdiction, only the one belonging to the Correctional Services Department could be considered for hire. The department, however, had reservations as prisoners were responsible for the laundry's daily operation. Luckily the Hospital Authority managed to persuade another laundry to change its mind and filming went ahead without a hitch.

Avenue of the Stars Makes Its Entry

Avenue of the Stars, the new tourist attraction, made its location debut this May. The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Jockey Club Tai Kok Tsui Integrated Services Centre produced a seven-minute promo to promote a youth employment project, in which three youngsters discussed their career prospects on the stellar avenue. We applied to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, which agreed to consider the request despite

the absence of precedents. The application was not only approved but processing fees were also waived. Meiji chocolate and movie *12.58 Seconds** were also given the green light to film on the Avenue of the Stars in July and October respectively.

Hot Spots and Underdogs

Each year Hong Kong's TV stations produce a large number of dramas. Our services were used by 14 of them. The more memorable requests involved favourites such as beaches, as well as off-the-beaten-track choices such as desludging operations.

Large Set on the Beach

The story of TVB's new drama *Sunshine Heartbeat* abounds in beach scenes as the story revolves around beach volley ball. TVB encountered problems in hiring two beaches. They wanted to use Lido Beach for 12 hours a day but the Leisure and Cultural Services Department could only make the beach available from 8 am to 6 pm. The Cafeteria Old Beach application involved building a set of two three-level spectator stands. It was rejected by the department for safety reasons. At our persuasion, the crew was allowed to use Lido Beach from 7 am. We also made enquiries to the Architectural Services Department and the Buildings Department about the safety of the set, while the TV station reinforced measures to ensure the set fulfilling safety standards. Finally that application, too, was approved.

Desludging Worries

Ha Yu plays a desludging worker in *Sweet Grandson and Grandpa**. The crew sought green light from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department to use a desludging vehicle and make imitation desludging workers uniforms. The department discussed the request with us as it had never handled anything like it. At our urging, the request was given speedy approval and everyone was happy.

When Props 'Threaten' Airport Safety

Cops and robbers films often need to use toy guns or handcuffs when shooting at the airport. The Airport Authority recently discussed such applications with the relevant departments and the FSO was informed of the outcome. Items such as firearms, ammunition, prohibited weapons, dangerous goods (including toy guns, handcuffs and batons) are not allowed inside the airport premises. If an application involves fake guns, handcuffs and batons, the authorities will consider it case by case. If approved, the props have to be handed over to the airport's security company both before and after filming. The experience of *Divergence* shows that film companies should lodge their applications with the Airport Authority early.

Worry-free Applications

Since its inception six years ago, the FSO has used its experience with the industry to discuss with government agencies and helped simplify application procedures. Among them requests for road use have been on the rise, reflecting the orientation of industry needs.

Lane Closure

The past ten months have registered up to 80 lane closure applications. The annual total is expected to break last year's record of 102. Nga Cheung Road, mentioned in the last issue, continued to be a favourite of TV commercials, TV dramas and films. Another hot spot, Shek Mun, was the target of lane closure of four dramas by TVB and ATV for explosion scenes involving car accidents. This service was also used for movie premieres. Films including *Jiang Hu*, *The Twins Effect 2* and *2046* held premiere activities at Times Square and Cyberport. Lane closure was necessary in all of them as a crowd control measure.

Parking of Filming Vehicles

Since the request procedure for parking of filming vehicles was in place last year, applications have surged, registering 86 in the last ten months. Besides closed lanes, other outdoor or even indoor building locations also require the use of power vans and crane vehicles for ease of indoor and outdoor coordination. Our formulation of the procedure with the relevant departments has brought improved convenience to users.

Tsing Ma Bridge

The proposed guidelines for filming on the Tsing Ma Bridge were piloted early last year and there were seven applications in the last ten months. In the guidelines, applications are categorized into four modes. They are, in ascending order of complexity, : 1) filming from the tower of the bridge (from a fixed position); 2) filming with camera car or camera mount of an extensive scale; 3) filming on the lower deck of the Tsing Ma Bridge; and 4) filming within a closed part of a lane of Tsing Ma Bridge. The more complex the category, the more stringent the limitations and conditions are. For example, in February, a United Asia Finance advertisement applied to shoot a bird's eye view of Tsing Ma Bridge from Tsing Ma Tower (Mode 1). The only departments they had to consult were the FSO and the Highways Department, as long as they complied with safety precaution measures such as not to use any lighting and ensuring that the filming equipment would be fastened to avoid any hazard. Airwave chewing gum applied for closure of the lower deck of the bridge (Mode 3) to film its advertisement. The guidelines specified that if there is a problem with the traffic on the bridge, e.g. bad weather, the filming would have to stop to allow drivers to use the lower deck, and that four departments had to be consulted. Mode 4 applications have greater implication on the traffic from the airport and Ma Wan to the urban areas and hence are placed under closer scrutiny by the departments concerned. For details, please contact the FSO.

New Books

The new *Production Directory 2005* and the *Guide to Filming in Hong Kong 2005-06* of the FSO are rolling off the press soon. Interested parties can request these publications from the FSO.

Production Statistics

In the first ten months (January to October) of 2004, 42 local productions had difficulties in applying for location shooting and sought the Film Services Office's assistance for 200 times.

Production Co.	Title/director	No. of Assistance
Milkyway Image	Throw Down/ Johnnie To	5
	Breaking News/ Johnnie To	18
	Yesterday Once More/ Johnnie To	1
	The Election/ Johnnie To	2
Film Power, Jing's	Moving Targets/ Wong Jing	6
	Error Love is a Many Stupid Thing/ Wong Jing	1
Singing Horse	The Attractive One/ Matt Chow	4
	Three of a Kind/ Joe Ma	5
Pinnacle	One Nite In Mongkok/ Derek Yee	13
	Crazy in the City/ James Yuen	6
	Mr. Beast*/ Derek Yee	4
Same Way	Explosive City/ Sam Leong	1
	Till the End of the World*/ Mak Kai-kwong	1
Land Fortune	New Police Story/ Benny Chan	1
Abba	Happy Hero*/ Vincent Kok	1
	Super Model/ Vincent Kok	2
Anytime	Jiang Hu/ Wong Ching-po	10
	The Skinny Guy*/ So Kai-hong	2
	Bear Come and Go*/ Wong Ying	2
Brilliant Idea	Love Battlefield/ Cheang Pou-soi	8
Jettone	2046/ Wong Kar-wai	3
Profit	Six Strong Guys/ Barbara Wong	7
Hau Lian Zhan Dui	Butterfly/ Yan Yan Mak	1
Icon	Love on the Rock/ Dante Lam, Chan Hing-kai	2
Far Sun	Colour Blossoms/ Yon Fan	2
S&W	Full Time Body Guard*/ Marco Mak	5
People's	Heat Team/ Dante Lam	1
	A1/ Gordon Chan	5
Times	New Life at Wits End*/ Leung Hong-wah	1
Wonder World	SO4/ Stanley Tong	4
Stage Empire	Sha Po Lang*/ Wilson Yip	19
Classmates	Insects Never Know*/ Lo Chi-leung	9
Colourful Base	6 AM/ Adrian Kwan	1
Jing's	Big Case*/ Marco Mak	1
Film Station	Divergence/ Benny Chan	28
Applause	Dumplings/ Fruit Chan	5
MediAdvertising	The Twins Effect 2/ Corey Yuen, Patrick Leung	3
Global	Police Notebook*/ Mak Wing-lun	1

HomFaith	Jing Wu Family*/ Stephen Fung	4
Media Asia	Seoul Raiders*/ Jingle Ma	1
United Filmmakers	Ah Kiu and Ah Jiu*/ Lee Man-ming	2
ST	12.58 Seconds*/ Chan Hok-yen	2

We provided assistance to 4 overseas productions for 69 times.

Production Co.	Title/ Country	No. of Assistance
Salon Films	Ultraviolet/ USA	42
Foxy Brown	La moustache/ France	24
Jettone	Eros/ USA	2
October	Legend of the Wind/ South Korea	1

We provided assistance to TV commercials, TV dramas, promotional videos, music videos and student projects for 174 times, and location suggestion for 212 times as well as location scouting for 54 times.

* Literal translation. Official English title is not available.

Editor's Note

Thank you for your support for the FSO Newsletter. We will publish the latest FSO news on our website, so please remember to check it for updates.

Contact us

This newsletter is produced by the Film Services Office of the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority. For any enquiries or suggestions, please contact the Film Services Office
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