



## At the World's End • Tin Shui Wai

**Feature** 35mm 110min.

**Budget**

US\$1,000,000  
(HK\$7,800,000)

**Producer**

Ann HUI On Wah

**Production Company**

Class Ltd.

**HAF Goals**

Funds

### ■ Introduction ■

Tin Shui Wai - Hong Kong's most far-flung suburbia and a stone's throw from the Chinese border, is home to a huge enclave of grassroots Mainland emigrants. A few years ago, it was also the site of a family tragedy which rocked the community because the instigator publicized his intentions to his neighbors like in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. *At the World's End* is inspired by this controversial event, but it explores its kaleidoscopic social-historical elements through a fictional, artistic framework, with a narrative that backdates events from 3 days, 2 days and 6 hours before the incident through the testimonials of those close to the female protagonist.

### ■ Director/Producer ■

Ann HUI was born in 1947 and is undoubtedly one of the most important directors of Hong Kong cinema. A native of Anshan, Manchuria, she grew up in Hong Kong and received an MA in English and Comparative Literature from the University of Hong Kong in 1972. In 1974, she went to study at the London Film School. After she came back to Hong Kong, she joined TVB and then respectively, ICAC, and RTHK. During her four years in television she directed a total of 26 half-hour documentaries on local exotica and 17 one-hour drama programs shot on 16mm. In 1979, she went on to make her first feature *The Secret* which helped to inaugurate the HK New Wave. She has to date directed 18 feature films and two documentaries and won numerous awards. Some of her most acclaimed works are: *Boat People* (1980), *Song of the Exile* (1990), *Summer Snow* (1995), *Ordinary Heroes* (1999), *Visible Secret* (2001), *July Rhapsody* (2002), *God-dess of Mercy* (2004).

As associate producer, she has worked on the projects of Yim Ho, Xie Jin and Allen Fong.

### ■ Production Company ■

Class Ltd. was formed in 1994, and owned by Ann Hui. The company produced Hui's films *Summer Snow* (1995) and

*Ordinary Heroes* (1999). The former won the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and Best Actress (Josephine Siao) at Berlin IFF, Grand Prix at Créteil International Women's Film Festival, 4 Golden Horse Awards (including Best Picture), 6 Golden Bauhinias (including Best Picture, Best Director), 6 HK Film Awards (including Best Picture, Best Director) and the HK Film Society Awards for Best Film and Best Actress. The latter was nominated for the Berlin Golden Bear and won 5 Golden Horse Awards (including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress (Loletta Lee), 3 Golden Bauhinias (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor), and Best Picture at HK Film Awards.

### ■ Synopsis ■

In the police station's interview room, Mrs. Wong faces a video camera and records her affidavit.

Like many couples that live in Tin Shui Wai, Hiu Ling is a Mainland country girl married to a local working-class man, Lee Sam. As is common among such matches, Lee is older, unemployed, and paranoid about his wife's infidelity. Everyday, after taking his young daughters to kindergarten, he patronizes the restaurant where Hiu Ling works to keep tabs on her. Though he appears composed when he sees men leering at Hiu Ling, his repressed anger surfaces when he goes fishing. Each time he catches a fish, he violently pulls the hook from its mouth.

His dark side only reveals itself fully at night, when he sexually abuses Hiu Ling by penetrating her with a knife handle and piercing her thighs with a fish hook. Then he runs off to a nearby park to cry. In Mrs Wong's affidavit, Lee Sam has already foretold his murderous intent: "I will make news in Hong Kong - a murder from which nobody can escape."

Mrs Wong has tried to help Hiu Ling by introducing her to a young politician Hung Yin Lung, but due to government bureaucracy, the best he could do is to move them to a shelter for battered women.

The second person to give her affidavit is Siuli, who befriended Hiu Ling in the shelter.

In the shelter, Hiu Ling meets a new friend, Siuli, who also gives her affidavit in front of a video camera; she talks a lot about what happened in the shelter.

Despite the terrible conditions in the shelter, Hiu Ling makes up her mind to leave Lee Sam. She tries to divorce him on grounds of his molesting their daughters, but due to inconclusive evidence, the social worker just advises her to go back to Shenzhen to stay with her sister Hiu Fan temporarily. Lee Sam stalks Hiu Ling and threatens her with a knife in front of the neighbors. Then he begs Hiu Ling to go home with him.

Back in Tin Shui Wai, the cycle of abuse continues, until the police takes her away, first to a hospital and then back to the shelter. Conditions there have improved, thanks to championing by Siuli, who plans to introduce Hiu Ling to a feminist politician at a rally. However, at this critical moment, Hiu Ling gets a call from Lee Sam threatening to kill their daughters. She hurries back to see him fishing by the river with the two girls. He grasps her hand tenderly and pleads with her to make love for one last time.

At 2pm, the surveillance camera in the elevator records the Lee family before the door is shut to the outside world. An ominous silence follows.

Last to give her affidavit is Hiu Ling's sister Hiu Fan. She recalls their childhood of abject poverty in Sichuan. As the eldest daughter, Hiu Ling ventured into the city to work at the age of ten, and returned with a color TV hoisted on her shoulder, and an unwanted pregnancy at 15.

Lee Sam, who fathered the child, is persuaded by her parents to divorce his wife in Hong Kong. An uncouth construction worker in Hong Kong, he becomes king of the hill in the village, and lord of the manor. He starts up a small business, and everything seems rosy for their marriage, despite a shady affair with Hiu Fan. But the going gets tough, and the family of four end up back in Hong Kong via Shenzhen. On his last night in Sichuan, he demands to feast on dog meat. To please him, the house is smeared with the blood of Hiu Fan's beloved puppy.

The camera turns back to Hong Kong. The Tin Shui Wai apartment is also soaked in blood. The police gets a call from Lee Sam, who alleges that his wife has killed their daughters, then committed suicide. He then cut his belly thrice and collapses in his own pool of blood. The autopsy reveals gruesome data of multiple knife slashes on all three female bodies. Hiu Ling's

fatal wound came from the back, thus contradicting Lee Sam's earlier testimony. He dies 12 days later.

We come back full circle to the film's beginning. Reporters barricade Tin Shui Wai as Mrs Wong scuttles out of her home with a suitcase. Lee Sam's older son disowns him in public. Hiu Ling's relative Ah Chu sits on a bench in the hospital, weeping at the sight of the girls' horrific deaths. When he exits, he is approached by the press to buy pictures of the deceased. He walks away, his face streaked with tears.

## ■ Director's Statement ■

Hong Kong has always been my subject – the way the people live, feel, interact, their joys and sufferings. In this case, I think we are just working the subject backward from the point of the murder. Especially for me, the relationship between the husband and wife crystallizes the problem of interaction between Hong Kong people and the many Chinese immigrants, who flooded into the city after 1997. The couple's plight from the moment of meeting in Shenzhen, to married life in the girl's hometown in Sichuan, and then being dumped at the world's end in Hong Kong - is a saga of the many stages of lifestyles and confrontation typical of the lower classes after 1997.

The moment we visited Tin Shui Wai, the scriptwriter and myself felt we had a film. Tin Shui Wai is new, wide in dimension, kinked up like a typical happy-happy-land in comics complete with cycling paths but the residents are shabby, forlorn, and despairing, living on the edge of society: there never was a better image of Hong Kong at the present moment. And on this note we proceeded to write the script, which we hope will be a poignant depiction of life rather than purely a crime story or a thriller.

I envision the film therefore to be modern-looking, almost colorful although bleak, part breaking into a surreal state, like some Magritte painting. We are considering shooting it in HD for the slightly stylized flatter colors, in a manner which is restrained, then suddenly breaking into lyricism and violence. Although realistic, it will not be documentary-like. The ending should be chilling rather than blood-smattering.

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