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Still from *Still Human*, included on Karen Fang's Top 4 Streaming Hong Kong Cinema Picks



Image Courtesy of Karen Fang

## This Week's #HCASArtistPicks: Karen Fang's Top 4 Streaming Hong Kong

# Cinema Picks

Hong Kong holds a special place for film lovers seeking to find some mooring in our current crisis. As everyone who rewatched *Contagion* in recent weeks knows, Hong Kong could be the origin of the next global pandemic because of its population density, centrality in global travel, and cultural history of animal-human food practices. And just as Soderbergh's cinematic cautionary tale drew on the territory's 2003 experience with the SARS epidemic, it was precisely [Hong Kong's memory of SARS that helped them to respond to our current coronavirus outbreak](#) so effectively.

If you're anything like me, though, I'd rather weather these long weeks at home by distracting myself with the delights that for decades made Hong Kong film one of the world's most exciting cinemas outside of Hollywood. With its mercurial economy and fast-paced life, Hong Kong has always taught those who knew to watch how to live in the moment and what the future might be like. So here is my list of four free or almost free Hong Kong movies to divert us from current headlines. Forget about *SARS Zombies* (an otherwise unremarkable 2013 horror film that might also be too close to home), and enjoy instead these reminders of what Hong Kong has always done well, and what they can do to show us how we will persevere beyond this.

## [\*The Man from Hong Kong\*](#)

Jimmy Wang Yu and Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1975, 126 min.

*No Time to Die* is delayed because of COVID-19, but if you need your Bond fix now let's kick off our program with this brash 1975 Hong Kong copy starring former flying swordsman star Jimmy Wang Yu playing a decidedly modern and cosmopolitan agent of the Royal Hong Kong Police, who flies to Australia to apprehend a Chinese criminal. Complete with exotic locales, debonair seductions, an over-the-top villain and a show stopping theme song, *The Man from Hong Kong* is an under appreciated gem from a film tradition whose impact and imagery was always bigger than expected.

## [\*Still Human\*](#)

Oliver Siu Kuen Chan, 2018, 115 min.

This quiet 2018 indie flick about the friendship that develops between a disabled man and his Filipina helper will recall the 2017 Kevin Hart-Bryan Cranston dramedy, *The Upside*, as well as the 2011 French film, *The Untouchables*, on which *The Upside* was based, but Hong Kong's *Still Human* is a profoundly intimate and local movie whose depiction of marginalization is far more subtle. In recent years Hong Kong has become mired in political and economic uncertainty, and although *Still Human* is not explicitly political its very existence is a stark reminder of fortitude in the face of overwhelming odds. The film's director was barely 30 years old when she won the small government grant that enabled her to make this, her first film, and the two starring roles are played by a part-time social worker who heard about the casting call on Facebook and veteran Hong Kong actor Anthony Wong Chau-sang, who willingly did the role for free after being blacklisted by the film industry for his vocal support of local protests against China.

### *As Tears Go By*

Wong Kar-wai, 1988. 102 min.

In what now seems like an impossibly beguiling experience of mandatory confinement, fans of Wong Kar-wai's swooning 2000 romance, *In the Mood for the Love*, may remember a scene where a man and woman who are falling for each other but are married to others are trapped in a room overnight, but can neither escape or consummate because of the danger to their reputations. A little over a decade earlier, Wong's gift for doomed eroticism was first apparent in his 1988 breakthrough film, *As Tears Go By*, which stars pop heartthrob Andy Lau and former Miss Chinatown Maggie Cheung in the full glory of their youthful twenties. Cheung's character—which in some versions of the film title is called "Mong Kok Carmen"—has tuberculosis, so if you don't mind this other reminder of our current moment of respiratory distress, you'll appreciate how it serves Wong's signature romanticism.

### *My Life as McDull* \*\*\*Family Friendly\*\*\*

Toe Yuen, 2001, 76 min.

Hong Kong film isn't known for animation, but in 2001 local audiences were captivated by this cartoon adaptation of a popular home-grown comic series. Like the comic, the film version portrays the experiences of an average pig growing up in Hong

Kong, hopeful and eager despite his modest upbringing by a working single mom in the city's dense middle-class housing. Whimsical pastel graphics and innovative compositions charm even while conveying the reality of everyday life in Hong Kong. Kids and parents alike will love this upbeat and dutiful piglet, but anyone can take heart in this unlikely role model who always believes that good things are in store. Free throughout April.

[Karen Fang](#) is a film scholar and cultural critic who writes about visual and literary arts. She is the author of [Arresting Cinema: Surveillance in Hong Kong Film](#), a juror and commentator for museums and film programs around the globe, and a contributor to the nationally broadcast public radio series [Engines of Our Ingenuity](#). Karen's newest project is a book about *Bambi* artist and Disney Legend Tyrus Wong. She is a Professor of English at The University of Houston, committee member for the [Museum of Fine Arts, Houston](#), and on the board of the Houston Cinema Arts Society.

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