

DIRECTED BY
ALFRED SUNG

PRODUCED BY
OSCAR®
WINNER **RUBY YANG**

双缝

THE LAST STITCH

INHERITANCE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP
SHANGHAI - HONG KONG - TORONTO





THE LAST STITCH

— PRESS KIT —

Language

Cantonese / Mandarin / English

Subtitles

English / English & Traditional Chinese

Length

70 minutes

Release Date

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Website

<http://thelaststitchfilm.com/>

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Production Company

An Alfred Sung Production

One-line Description

This story of the cheongsam takes us from Shanghai to Hong Kong and Toronto, reflecting the history of the Chinese diaspora and the decline of traditional tailoring.

Long Synopsis

The cheongsam was once the daily attire of all Chinese women, no matter what their size or shape. Under the skilled hands of a tailor, even an ordinary piece of fabric could be shaped into a beautiful garment that transformed the wearer into an elegant figure. Each button, sleeve, and collar were testament to the accomplishments of these traditional craftsmen.

Shanghai was once the capital of the cheongsam and base to many a master tailor. But during the unstable years of the Communist Revolution, many of these skilled craftsmen fled to Hong Kong. One of those forced to relocate was Master Sung and his family, including his son Tommy. Growing up in the trade, Tommy was apprenticed to his father as soon as he was old enough, learning the skills of the two generations of tailors who'd come before him. When his father passed away, Tommy worked hard with his wife Connie to keep the family business going, despite the growth of the mass-produced garment industry.

Like many of those who had come of age in a Hong Kong ruled over by the British, the imminent handover of sovereignty to China in 1997 greatly worried Tommy and Connie. Unwilling to face the instability this promised, they decided to emigrate to Canada in 1996. Arriving in a foreign land with their two sons, the couple made good use of their tailoring skills, rebuilding their family business from the ground up. Twenty years on, they're now ready to retire. But what will happen to the traditional skills that have been in their family for three generations? Are their sons interested in this inheritance?

In 2016, Tommy and Connie's eldest son, Alfred, decided to return to the family home in Toronto from Hong Kong to explore his family's story and find out what the future holds. It's a story that takes us from Shanghai to Hong Kong and Toronto, reflecting the history of the Chinese diaspora as well as the rise and fall of traditional craftsmanship.

Short Synopsis

Born to a family of tailors, Tommy Sung grew up in the trade. When his father died, he and his wife Connie took over the family business.

In 1996, facing the imminent handover of Hong Kong to China, the couple decided to emigrate to Canada. There, they successfully rebuilt their business making traditional Chinese cheongsam. Twenty years on, they're ready to retire. But what of the skills that have been handed down in their family for three generations?

This story takes us from Shanghai to Hong Kong and Toronto, reflecting the history of the Chinese diaspora as well as the rise and fall of traditional craftsmanship.



Story Background

In the suburbs of Toronto in Canada, there is a home tailoring workshop. When customers arrive, they are greeted at the front door by the courteous hostess of the house, who shows them down into the basement where the workshop is located. There, hard at work, the customers will find an old craftsman, a man of few words. Covering the walls, they will see old photos of Repulse Bay in Hong Kong, and on the radio, they'll hear Cantonese-language programs being broadcast live all the way from that far-off city. This old craftsman is Tommy, and the hostess, his wife Connie, both traditional tailors for nearly half a century. Their home workshop is known on the grapevine as the "last place in Toronto where you can get a handmade cheongsam". It is also the family home of this film's director, Alfred, a home he had left behind for 16 years.

The Sung family first became tailors in the later years of the Qing Dynasty in Shanghai, where they made Western clothing. They continued to gain renown for their craftsmanship during the Republic of China. Then, following the Communist Revolution in 1949, they were forced to move to Hong Kong, where they set up a small tailoring business in the Repulse Bay Hotel, a beach resort catering to the upper classes of the colonial era.

Despite their radically different natures, since meeting and falling in love in the early 1970s, Tommy and Connie have been working together to keep their family tailoring business going. With Connie looking after all the affairs of the business and making plans for the family's future, the introverted Tommy has been able to concentrate on making clothes. Despite the ups and downs of family life, the rise and fall in demand for traditional tailoring, and the challenges brought by their move to Canada, this couple have worked and lived together without change for 40 long, happy years.

Both Tommy and Connie have always assumed that the traditional skills handed down to them over three generations would die with them. But then, unexpectedly, their youngest son, 37-year-old Simon, asks to be taken on as his father's apprentice. And their oldest son, Alfred, who has already returned to live in Hong Kong, comes back to Toronto to see what the future holds for his family's story.

Featuring



Father Tommy

Father Tommy, in his 60s, was born in Shanghai and grew up in Hong Kong. He learned the tailoring trade from his father at a young age. For the past few decades, he only focused on the tailoring work at hand, leaving life decisions such as immigration to his wife Connie. Whether in Hong Kong or Canada, Tommy's world only consists of his tailoring work and craft.



Mother Connie

Mother Connie, in her 60s, was born in Guangzhou and grew up in Hong Kong. She started working in a garment factory as a youth after quitting school. Whether big or small decisions, she has the final say in Sung's tailoring business. From a young age, she has been on her own without a family. This gave her the confidence to make big decisions: emigrating from Hong Kong and changing the tailoring business to focus on Chinese cheongsam.



Alfred Sung

Documentary director, Alfred, 40, has been recording his family's daily life since he was young. He filmed his parents' careers as tailors, as well as documenting their lives in Hong Kong before immigrating to Canada. In 2016, he returned from Hong Kong to Toronto to complete this documentary and to observe how his family and other Hong Kong expatriates adapt to life in Canada.



Simon Sung

Youngest son, Simon, in his 30s, immigrated to Toronto with his family at teenage. While working at a local Hong Kong newspaper branch, he experienced the lack of security at his white-collar job. As a result, he started learning his parents' tailoring craft from the ground up to see if he has what it takes to continue the family business.



Director's Statement

In 1999, I was a new immigrant to Toronto, Canada and a university student majoring in history. At the time, the people in Hong Kong and Hong Kong expatriates were unique individuals with a clear understanding of their identity. I remember the Canadian Chinese community being largely represented by a group of Hong Kong immigrants who immigrated in the 70s to 90s. Those who had the ability strived to support the newcomers from Hong Kong: to help the community with adjusting to Canadian society and to ensure they maintained connections with Hong Kong.

This was in the age without internet, so we looked forward with anticipation to all activities within the Hong Kong community. We attended the *City of Glass* movie screening hosted by the Hong Kong University Alumni Association. We also watched the movie premiere of *The Storm Riders* and the screening of *Citizen Hong Kong* together.

Citizen Hong Kong was the first full-length documentary film I saw. I deeply remember watching the streets of Hong Kong, hearing the Cantonese dialogue, and seeing the familiar Hong Kong faces on the silver screen. I was touched by each shot, and I cherished the feeling of nostalgia. That feeling no longer exists in today's connected world where everything can instantly appear in front of you.

I then decided to study filmography, hoping to showcase my family's story. I wanted to make a documentary that people referred to in the future to learn more about the past. *Citizen Hong Kong* was a reference for me, but it ended there. I did not get into the film department, and my career in Hong Kong was unrelated to films. So my documentary was forgotten, and the footage was put aside.

The Handover left Hong Kong in an unsettling position and gave rise to the popularity of documentaries, and I benefited from it. Through an opportunity made possible by CNEX and the Hong Kong Documentary Initiative, *Citizen Hong Kong* director, Ruby Yang, became my mentor and producer.

I returned Toronto to finish filming and to complete the documentary. Twenty years later, my parents are entering another stage of their lives: from their prime years to their retirement years. The Canadian Hong Kong community has also aged. I suddenly realized that the responsibility of continuing and representing the community has now fallen on the shoulders of our generation. And the only thing I can do is highlight the stories and talents of Hong Kong people in my documentary, just like in *Citizen Hong Kong*.



Director Alfred Sung

From 2008 to 2014, Alfred worked at Hong Kong NOW TV and TVB Network Vision as Senior Research Writer. Since 2001, he has published six books, including two graphic novels *The Sung Family* and *The Sung Family 2*, both depicting the Sung family life. *The Sung Family* won the “Best Book of the Year” by Joint Publishing in 2006, the 60th Anniversary “Readers’ 10 Favourite Books” by Joint Publishing in 2008, and was a finalist of the “High School Students’ 10 Favourite Books” by HKPTU in 2006.

Alfred’s first feature film, *The Last Stitch*, received Hong Kong CNEX Pitching Master Workshop “Best Pitch” in 2014, resulting in funding by Hong Kong Arts Development Council and Hong Kong Documentary Initiative. Clips from *The Last Stitch* were featured in Canada’s CTV 2017 documentary *Canada in a Day*.



Producer Ruby Yang

Filmmaker Ruby Yang has worked on a range of feature and documentary films exploring Chinese themes as director, producer and editor. She won an Academy Award for Documentary Short Subject for *The Blood of Yingzhou District* in 2007, and a nomination in the same category in 2011 for *The Warriors of Qiugang*. She is also known for her feature documentary *Citizen Hong Kong* and the award winning documentary *My Voice, My Life*.

Yang lived and worked in San Francisco for many years, relocated to Beijing in 2004 and now lives in Hong Kong. She was appointed by The University of Hong Kong as Hung Leung Hau Ling Distinguished Fellow in Humanities in 2013. Her feature documentary *My Voice, My Life* was named one of “Hong Kong’s five most-notable films of 2014” by Wall Street Journal. Her 2016 documentary *In Search of Perfect Consonance* received the Excellence in Filmmaking Award at the Sedona International Film Festival. She just completed *Ritoma*, a mid-length documentary, which follows the nomads of Ritoma as they navigate the collision of tradition and modernity.

Yang is a member of the Directors Guild of America and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. She now heads the Hong Kong Documentary Initiative at The University of Hong Kong, which aims to nurture the next generation of documentary filmmakers in the region.

Stills



Sung's tailoring business was a well-known name in Shanghai.



Tommy teaching Simon in their home tailor workshop.



Simon witnessing his parents' work, sparking an interest in the craft.



Three generations of Sung's in their tailoring workshop.

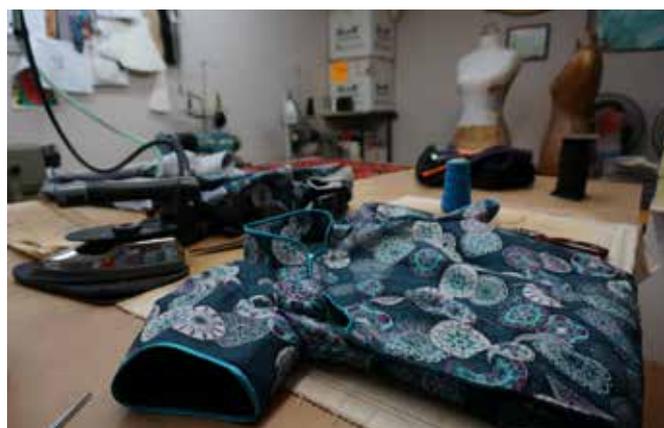


Connie is proud of each piece.

Stills



Apprentices of Repulse Bay Tailors in the 1960s.



End Credits

PRESENTED BY



香港藝術發展局
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Hong Kong Arts Development Council



Hong Kong Documentary Initiative

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PRODUCED & EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY Ruby Yang

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