

## FILM REVIEW: A SIMPLE LIFE

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“A Simple Life” or “Sister Peach” is a 2011 Hong Kong drama, directed by Ann Hui and based on a true story of the family of producer and co-film writer of the film Roger Lee. Andy Lau and Deanie Ip play the leading roles. Deanie Ip, who played the main role, won the Volpi Cup in nomination “Best Actress” at the 68th Venice Film Festival, where the film was premiered, and also won a dozen awards in the same category at the other film festivals and film awards. Also, the film itself has received several awards. The director of the film, Ann Hui originally presented the movie as the last one in her career, but after its success, she decided to continue filming.

In the center of the story is the servant Chung Chun Tao (Deanie Ip) who served the Leung family for nearly 60 years and has raised four generations of this family. She keeps an eye on Roger Leung (Andy Lau), working in the movie industry. And when Tao suffers a stroke, she says to Roger that she wanted to leave her job and stay in a nursing home, but she is uncomfortable with Roger, taking care of her. At this time, Roger realizes how important Chung Chun Tao is for him.

The film received critical favor mostly, although opinions have divided: from neutral, that highlight only a few minor flaws, to enthusiastic. In particular, the famous critic Roger Ebert praised his picture with a maximum mark and said that “It expresses hope in human nature. It is one of the year's best films” (Ebert 2012).

After detailed study of Roger Ebert’s film, review posted on his personal website *Rogerebert.com* one can make such a conclusion: Mr. Ebert really loved this film and he was not confused by some of the other critics’ comments, such as Neil Young, a staff film critic for *The Hollywood Reporter*, who said that “118 -minute running time - much too long for

what is indeed a pretty "simple" affair" (Young 2011). In truth, the plot is really not complicated, so Mr. Ebert mostly paid attention to the emotional component of the film.

A colleague of Mr. Ebert, Rachel Saltz gave a more detailed description of the plot of the movie in her article in the *New York Times*, and allowed us to look at the film with the documentary side, assessing the work of the film's director Ann Hui. She notes that "Ms. Hui, a rare successful female director in the Hong Kong film industry, drew her story from real events, and the movie retains a tonic flavor of the everyday: its drama unfolds simply, without explosive moments but not without emotion. She and her two excellent leads keep the film buoyant" (Saltz 2012). She, as well as Niel Young, spoke about the simplicity of the plot, but also agreed with Roger Ebert regarding emotional narration.

After detailed study of both Roger Ebert's and Rachel Saltz's reviews can be concluded that Ms Saltz watched a movie with a critical eye, and that she was not interested in the success of the film, though she liked it. Mr. Ebert, though, caught the emotional component; he wrote a review which will appeal to fans of the drama and it was obvious that he admires the movie and at the same time he praised that fact that film has no difficulties during viewing. "A Simple Life" paints portraits of two good people in gentle humanist terms. It filled me with an unreasonable affection for both of them. Here is a film with the clarity of fresh stream water, flowing without turmoil to shared destiny. No plot gimmicks. No twists and turns. Just a simple life" (Ebert 2012).

Considering the description of the plot in these two reviews, Ms Saltz made this more detailed, but simpler, while Mr. Ebert made the description much more colorfully and with the use of concinnous language and demonstrating insightful knowledge of analysis and context. It seemed as if he was waiting for this movie all his life "During a meal, he puts out his hand, knowing she will be standing behind him with a bowl of rice. No words" (Ebert 2012).

Both critics provided brief information about conventions and techniques, but Roger Ebert called the film "melodrama" and in Rachel Saltz's, review reader can find such words "Ah Tao finds a tentative social life in the home, a place that Ms. Hui doesn't sentimentalize or make into a cautionary tale. There too she emphasizes the distance between people. The occasional overhead shot shows a busy warren of atomized spaces, with a sense of each keeping to each. The film's bleached-out palette, with its muted colors - and the sometimes harsher fluorescent light of the home - heightens the atmosphere of loneliness" (Saltz 2012).

*The Rotten Tomatoes* website, which contains all the film reviews, "A Simple Life" gained 7.5 points out of 10 and 92 % positive reviews (Flixter 2012). As for the box office, in China, after being shown for only a few days, the film made \$ 5.2 million and the movie which has \$ 5.4 million budget it gathered \$ 6,2 million worldwide. "A Simple Life" recouped its budget, but it is not a blockbuster, that is why it is not earned the worldwide fame and that is actually good, because obtaining the status of art-house cinema, this film became integral for the intellectual circles.

Based on two different reviews, by Roger Ebert and by Rachel Saltz, we can conclude that both movie critics liked the movie; however, Roger Ebert liked it more. They did not say anything bad about the movie, and the film's gaps highlighted by Mr. Ebert were presented as advantages. Both critics agreed that the "A Simple Life" is very emotional, and it is worth the time that the viewer was going to spend on it. Enjoy watching "A Simple Life"!

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