

A Simple Life

Cert PG Hong Kong 2011 118 mins

Crew

Director	Ann Hui
Screenplay	Susan Chan and Yan-lam Lee
Cinematography	Nelson Yu Lik-wai
Film Editing	Chi-Leung Kwong and Manda Wai

Cast

Andy Lau	Roger Leung
Deanie Ip	Chung Chun-Tao
Wang Fuli	Roger's mother
Qin Hailu	Ms Choi
Anthony Wong	Grasshopper
Sammo Hung	Director Hung

Synopsis

Hong Kong, the present. Chung Chun-Tao ('Ah Tao') has worked as an amah for the Leung family for over 60 years, ever since she was a teenager. Now she just looks after Roger, a film producer, who is the only member of the family still living in Hong Kong.

One day, Roger comes home to find that Ah Tao has suffered a stroke. In hospital, she announces that she wants to retire to a nursing home. Roger helps Ah Tao accede to her wish, but as he gives ever more of his time to her needs, he comes to realise how much she means to him.



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- The film premiered at the 68th Venice International Film Festival where Deanie Ip won the Best Actress award for her role as Ah Tao
- Filming took place over two months in Mei Foo Sun Chuen, a private housing estate in Kowloon. It houses around 75,000 people in 13,500 flats.



Reviews

If you've ever watched, say, a film by the Japanese master Ozu, and wondered why nobody makes understated family dramas delivering essential truths anymore - then this awards-laden Hong Kong production from veteran director Ann Hui is definitely for you. Based on the true story of the film's producer Roger Lee and his servant, it's essentially about how we define family bonds, following Roger (action star Andy Lau in a serious change of pace) and his elderly family maid Ah Tao (stalwart character actress Deannie Yip) after she suffers a stroke.

No, it doesn't sound like the stuff of pulsating drama, but the film's unhurried way of letting us surmise the rippling ramifications of this situation is very touching. Stoic Ah Tao has been working as an in-house maid for workaholic film industry bachelor Roger. She has cared for him since he was a baby, but for all the time she's put in, does their relationship amount to anything more than master and servant? Moreover, as Roger begins to realise her place in his life (he's professionally successful but emotionally a desert), we note the contrast between his relaxed demeanour with Ah Tao and stiffer relationship with his grande dame of a mother.

Lau's astute performance is rather like the film as a whole - at first you think it's underdone, but it's actually cannily judged to favour genuine feeling over pushy sentimentality. As indeed is Deannie Yip's marvellous central turn as a woman who yearns to belong but whose inveterate submissiveness is shaped by decades of deference and class difference. An exquisite and wise moment of celluloid portraiture.

Trevor Johnston, Time Out London, August 2012

New wave veteran Ann Hui is renowned for her reflective, socially aware character studies. Here, she tackles the issues facing Asia's ageing population with grace, dry wit and a Venice-winning turn from Deanie Ip.

A Simple Life is about the role-reversal between a young master (Andy Lau) and his family maid (Ip) after a stroke puts her in a nursing home. Slowly, the boundaries of age and class fade, and the two develop a quiet, loving bond. It's not for the impatient; its rewards are in its drifting, everyday nuances, presented without slipping into treacly sentiment. The running time is generous, but Ip's performance is worth every minute.

Simon Crook, Empire Magazine, August 2012