

## Film Review: 'A Simple Life' Celebrates the Transcendent Beauty of Human Selflessness

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on May 4, 2012 - 9:06am

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CHICAGO – The inherent drama of reality is trickier to capture on camera than one might suspect. Cinéma vérité failed as soon as filmmakers utilized manipulative techniques to contrive on-camera drama. The staged shouting matches, comedic barbs and tearful breakdowns prevalent on Reality TV are as phony (or, dare I say, phonier) than the human behavior witnessed in scripted productions.



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

So many films that purport themselves to be realistic depictions of life rely on clichéd misunderstandings and third act revelations to fuel the dramatic conflict. This is an easy alternative to exploring human relationships unbound by the limitations of a formula. As one of the essential figures of the Hong Kong New Wave, Ann Hui avoids such constructs like the plague. There's more reality-per-frame in her new film, "A Simple Life," than there is in TLC's entire programming schedule.



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Here is a film about two good people who have become devoted to helping one another in their hour of need. They aren't lovers but lifelong friends. One is an elderly maid, Ah Tao (played by veteran character actress Deanie Ip), and the other is her beloved client, Roger Leung (Andy Lau). The prologue informs us that Ah Tao has served four generations of Leungs for the last sixty years, and Roger is the only family member still remaining in Hong Kong (his mother and other siblings have moved to America). Ah Tao has been a part of his life for so long that it's only when she suffers a sudden stroke that he realizes just how much she means to him. When Ah Tao reveals her decision to retire and move into a nursing home, Roger makes no attempt to have her reconsider. He realizes that the tables have flipped, causing him to be the caregiver, a role he is only too happy to fill. It's touching to see how both friends passionately argue for each other's interests, whether it's Roger interrogating a nurse about excessive medical costs or Ah Tao interviewing prospective maids about their kitchen skills. There's poignance in Roger's professional career in the film industry, since it was Ah Tao who secretly smuggled film magazines for him against his parents' wishes when he was still a child. Now Roger is repaying the favor.

*'A Simple Life' stars Andy Lau, Deanie Ip, Wang Fuli, Qin Hailu, Eman Lam, Anthony Wong, Hui Bik Kee and Chin Pei. It was written by Susan Chan and Roger Lee and directed by Ann Hui. It was released May 4th at the AMC River East 21 in Chicago. It is not rated.*



[Continue reading for Matt Fagerholm's full "A Simple Life" review.](#) [12]



Deanie Ip and Andy Lau star in China Lion's A SIMPLE LIFE.  
Photo credit: China Lion Entertainment

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