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VQFF 2017: Taxi Stories offers intimate look at class and sexuality in three Asian cities

by Craig Takeuchi on August 17th, 2017 at 5:43 PM

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Taxi Stories

While migrant workers and globalization have been topics covered in news stories and documentaries, this drama feature brings an intimacy to those issues by following individuals in three Asian cities.

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In Hong Kong, affluent, pregnant housewife Monica (Coraline Cao) becomes increasingly reliant upon her pretty but perpetually sad-faced maid Dewi (Indonesian pop star Shanty).

Meanwhile in Beijing, when taxi driver Zhang (Wen Chao) picks up the rich, young, gay Nick (Nathan Chu), Zhang becomes fascinated by when Nick makes out with another guy in the backseat.

Over in Jakarta, as teenage Adi (Aji Santosa) bears the labour of filling in for his drunk uncle's bajaj taxi, he meets a beautiful Australian tourist (Rebecca Lake) who he falls for.

Class, sexuality, and crosscultural relations intertwine in each of these stories, with the disparities between wealthy and impoverished manifesting in the unequal power relations within the characters' relationships.



Taxi Stories

TAXI STORIES

Unfortunately, not all of the performers are able to convey the nuances and depth that the emotional challenges of the narratives. Their shortcomings become particularly apparent when all three stories take dark or dramatic turns.

Monica's self-absorption and emotionally detached inappropriateness offers potential for intrigue. Cao's low-key approach captures some complexity of those aspects but ultimately comes off as somewhat lifeless. Stronger performances are delivered by Shanty, Wen, and Chu.

A subplot about an Indonesian sex worker, Serafina (Nazyra C. Noer), who harbours affections for Adi, is underutilized.

What works well is how the narrative defies stereotypical expectations about gay characters, thus integrating them into the storylines in ways that go beyond just their identities. In fact, filmmaker Doris Yeung's ability to develop all of the film's characters in diverse and multifaceted ways allows the work to more fully illuminate the intricacies of how economics impact personal relationships in contemporary Asia.

Taxi Stories screens at the 2017 Vancouver Queer Film Festival today (August 17) at 9 p.m. and on Saturday (August 19) at 4:30 p.m. at SFU's Goldcorp Centre for the Arts.

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