

FILM REVIEW

Having built a reputation as an articulate genre director through works such as *One Nite in Mongkok* (旺角黑夜, 2004) and *Protege* (門徒, 2007), Derek Yee (爾冬陞) returns with *Shinjuku Incident* (新宿事件), a crime drama about the plight of Chinese illegal immigrants in Japan that has been banned in China for its violent scenes.

Yee's first collaboration with Jackie Chan (成龍) is being hyped as the action star's first attempt at serious acting, as Chan plays a character fighting to survive in a dark, grimy and morally complex underworld.

Set in the 1990s, the film begins when Chinese refugees are swept ashore on a Japanese beach. Among them is Steelhead (Chan), a simple, honest mechanic from northern China who has come to find his long-lost love, Xiu Xiu (Xu Jinglei, 徐靜蕾).

Steelhead joins hometown pal Jie (Daniel Wu, 吳彥祖) and other illegal immigrants in Tokyo's Shinjuku district, where they eke out a meager living doing work that Japanese themselves are unwilling to do. After finding out that Xiu Xiu, who now goes by the name Yuko, is married to Japanese gangster Eguchi (Masaya Kato), Steelhead turns to crime to build a better life for himself.

But when Jie gets his hand cut off after inadvertently falling afoul of a Taiwanese gangster (Jack Kao, 高捷), Steelhead throws his lot with Eguchi to protect his friends. Steelhead becomes the leader of a Chinese gang that is the governing force of the underworld in Tokyo's Chinatown, though he tries to go clean by running legitimate businesses. As rival yakuza syndicate plot against his gang, Steelhead finds himself caught in a web of intrigue, avarice and betrayal.

As with *Protege*, his film about drug trafficking that shows a deep understanding of the machinations of the criminal underworld, Yee spent years conducting research for *Shinjuku Incident*. Both movies weave dramatic sentimentality with tight action sequences and sudden spurts of gruesome violence, which in the case of *Shinjuku Incident* involve a severed hand and disfigured face.



This time, Jackie Chan isn't joking

The Hong Kong funnyman and martial arts star's first foray into serious acting has been banned in China for its gruesome scenes

BY HO YI
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Film Notes

SHINJUKU INCIDENT (新宿事件)

DIRECTED BY: DEREK YEE (爾冬陞)

STARRING: JACKIE CHAN (成龍) AS STEELHEAD, DANIEL WU (吳彥祖) AS JIE, XU JINGLEI (徐靜蕾) AS XIU XIU, MASAYA KATO AS EGUCHI, NAOTO TAKENAKA AS KITANO

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN, CANTONESE AND JAPANESE WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH

RUNNING TIME: 119 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

From migrant workers toiling in sewer drains and landfills to the turf wars between rival gangsters, each segment of this bulky narrative is strong and gripping. Overall, however, the film strikes one as a composite of discrete vignettes rather than a cohesive whole. And while Yee is adept at eliciting raw, direct emotions through a melodramatic form of storytelling that he deploys with great skill, he can overdo it. Some of his characters — such as the junkie played by Louise Koo (古天樂) in *Protege* — come off as overly exaggerated caricatures.

There's a fine supporting cast that includes veteran Japanese thespian Naoto Takenaka, Hong Kong's Lam Suet (林雪) and Taiwanese actor Kao, but Chan's performance is the main point of interest. In this, his first foray into serious acting, Chan puts aside his goofy charm and kung fu stunts and makes a decent stab at acting purely for dramatic effect. But he often seems uncomfortable or perhaps even unable to express nuances of emotion or wear any look on his face other than one of grim stoicism, when so much more is needed for this film and its morally ambiguous lead character.

Without the slapstick and kung fu, Jackie Chan, left, has trouble pulling off the range of emotions that his role in *Shinjuku Incident* requires.

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