



PHOTO: SKYKIWI

A shot from *Sunshine Beyond the Rain* which will screen only on the internet.

Migrant drama kept out of the mainstream

By Carmen Gray

The failure of major New Zealand funding bodies to back young migrant filmmakers means some work is bypassing the mainstream.

Mandarin-language website Skykiwi is filling this funding gap. Last month it premiered New Zealand's first made-for-internet drama, *Sunshine Beyond the Rain*, a series about international student life.

The programme is made by Sails of Dream Entertainment, a production company of former international film students at the University of Auckland who have not gained a footing in the film industry.

Skykiwi managing director Ally Zhang says they wanted to give migrants an opportunity to show their talent.

"They had the theory but had never had a chance to practise it before. Now they can do that."

As well as financially backing the programme, Skykiwi provided shooting locations through commercial clients such as restaurants, a cafe and a shoe store.

Zhang says the success of *Sunshine Beyond the Rain* means Skykiwi plans to support more drama series being made.

"We would like to invest in more regional drama makers when they graduate from the University of Auckland. In the future we hope to get a lot of new scripts."

She says approaching major funding bodies for assistance is difficult for migrants in New Zealand.

"It's not just the language barrier, it's also the cultural difference. Most Chinese people think they're doing something which might not be important to the mainstream. They don't ask for help, or don't have the information and channels to get funding."

Sylvia Yang, executive producer of *Sunshine Beyond the Rain*, says her company did not bother applying to major funding bodies like the New Zealand Film Commission and Creative New Zealand as they doubted they would be receptive to their idea.

"It's a matter of finding the right group to sponsor you," she says.

Alistair Kwun, who runs his own public relations consultancy and deals with many young Chinese creative initiatives, says this sentiment is common with migrant artists.

"A lot of Asian and other ethnic people are looking at going it on their own and aren't applying for public grants, as these agencies don't really understand what they're trying to do."

"They are stuck at looking at traditional art forms which pander to a very white audience, and aren't in contact with what's happening in the youth market."



ALLY ZHANG

He says the rigid application process of the New Zealand Film Commission leads to talent which has not entered the industry by traditional means being overlooked.

"The criteria are really strict, and if you haven't made a short film already you're not on their radar."

The New Zealand Film Commission declined to comment, beyond reiterating its official stance that it backs "films made in New Zealand by New Zealanders on New Zealand subjects".

Zhang says productions like *Sunshine Beyond the Rain* play an important role in reflecting the lives of the migrants who have made New Zealand their home.

"It provides something for local Chinese society. The internet drama is like a mirror and we can see ourselves inside."

Kwun agrees. "Even for me who was born here, to see a programme full of Asian actors is just amazing – you never see that."

Beyond its appeal to Asian audiences and those wanting to see their nation's ethnic diversity reflected on screen, Kwun says the show presents "an urban and contemporary face of life in the Auckland CBD" – a more modern take on what New Zealand is about.

"It's fresh, it's something that's never been tackled before, and people like it."

There are plans to subtitle the programme in English to extend its accessibility. But New Zealand's limited access to broadband makes internet viewing difficult as a viewing platform for many households – unlike in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan where online films are popular.

Kwun says there is also a marked cultural resistance here to the possibilities offered by new technologies.

"People here are so conservative about how they absorb their media. We're heading there, but it's a very slow process."

Zhang says there is considerable interest in mainland China in such a show.

"Lots of local Chinese would like to know about what overseas students' lives look like, and there are limited resources for them to find out."

Yang says if *Sunshine Beyond the Rain* reached mainstream audiences it could help transform misconceptions about Chinese migrants.

"Asian characters are still quite stereotyped in the media. They always seem to show the not-so-positive side of it – the crime, the gambling, when there's probably only about one per cent of the population doing that."

Veggie film fest serves up meaty discussion

By Karen Tay

If you think vegetarians are all a bunch of wacky hippies, think again.

The Vegetarian Film Festival, being held on October 8 in Auckland and Christchurch, is out to educate people about the practice of vegetarianism.

"It's a good, non-confrontational way for people to see what vegetarianism is all about," says festival director Aaron Koolen.

The festival is designed to be entertaining, rather than just a "video night", adds Koolen.

Vegan movie snacks will be on sale before and after the sessions. And in case movie-goers are worried they won't find any food to their liking, non-threatening treats such as vegan ice-cream and popcorn will be on offer.

Films with a quirky twist will play alongside more serious documentaries such as *McLibel*, a real-life tale of two ordinary people who took on corporate giant McDonald's in a "marathon legal battle" spanning seven years.

"I'm sure McDonald's will find out about it at some point. It will be interesting to see what they do, because in the past they've been trying to distance themselves from those two activists. They probably won't care too much," says Koolen.

McDonald's communications manager Joanna Redfern-Hardisty says *McLibel* was made about another time and place and was "certainly not based in New Zealand". McDonald's suppliers sourced

two million kilos of lettuce and 330,000 kilos of tomatoes last year, she says.

A vegetarian diet is really beneficial because many health problems come from eating meat, says Caro Warburton, the manager of animal welfare organisation SAFE.

Warburton also owns Vegan Pet, a company manufacturing vegan food for pets.

The festival is a "fantastic idea" because it celebrates vegetarianism and shows non-vegetarians that it is a positive lifestyle choice, says Warburton.

She hopes more people will convert to vegetarianism so they can stop contributing to the "slaughtering of animals".

"If you really love animals, you don't want to contribute to the death of them," she says.

She will run a stall during the festival that sells vegan fudge as well as promoting the values of SAFE.

The festival will also be a source of inspiration for practising vegetarians, and hopefully they might bring some of their meat-eating friends along, says Warburton.

The Vegetarian Film Festival will be screening at the Academy Cinema in Lorne St, Auckland, on October 8 as well as at venues in Wellington and Christchurch.

Films on show

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