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Taipei Suicide Story

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Taipei Suicide Story* (2021), directed by KEFF.

Keywords

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John Lyden is Professor of Religious Studies and the Blizek Professor of Religion and Film at University of Nebraska-Omaha. He was been the Editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film* since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



Taipei Suicide Story (2021), dir. KEFF

In this film, there is a hotel designed specifically for those who wish to complete suicide. You check into it for one night only, and you either complete suicide that night or you check out the next day, if you changed your mind. The staff cleans up the mess and takes care of your body. Everything is done very professionally, and impersonally.

But there is a woman who checked in a week before, and neither killed herself nor checked out. The man who runs the front desk tells her that that is against the rules, and she has to make up her mind. For her part, she felt comfort being in the hotel, surrounded by other lonely and hopeless people, so that she did not need to die immediately—but neither did she want to live. She is suspended in her decision, between life and death.

These two connect that evening and form a sort of friendship. He confesses that he has given up his dreams, as he found that it is better to admit to being a failure and not care about anything in life. She envies his ability to avoid disappointment in this way, to expect nothing from the world. For her own part, she wanted a life with meaning, but has no more hopes for that.

These two lonely people are both living without meaning, but one has made peace with a meaningless life and the other has not. He cannot and does not tell her what to do, but it is clear that he begins to care for her, in spite of warnings from a co-worker to avoid attachments to clients. It is a sad world in which suicide is acceptable, and no one can say anything to stop it. People will make their own choices, and ultimately the choice to end one's life is just as incomprehensible and irrational as the choice to not end one's life: no explanations can be given for such decisions that will satisfy everyone. But that does not mean we should accept suicide. If we can have real human connection, as these two characters do, that could supply them with a reason to live. Perhaps we seek for Grand Meanings in life, missing the fact that our relationships are the real meaning in life. And yet not everyone sees that. This film is a poignant reminder of the need to connect, to find value in others, and to not take anyone's life for granted.