A miracle of Taiwanese cinema
- CAPE NO.7

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I. Introduction

For many years, people in Taiwan have tended to take seeing Hollywood’s movies, as a more first-class recreation. Fortunately, thanks to the diligence of unceasingly Taiwanese directors, Chinese-language cinemas gradually have well box-office. “Cape No.7” brings the incredible miracle to the market of Chinese-language cinema. After “secret”, which was directed by Jay Chou, “Cape No.7” hit a box office among Chinese-language cinemas.

For us, moviegoers, we find that there are many significant meanings lying behind these movies, including Taiwanese history, culture, local custom and practices and so on. The paper will probe into this film- Why Cape NO.7 could attract so many people to go to see it? What is the meaning lying behind this story? We will introduce this movie, including director, summary, and characters. Moreover, we will discuss its influence on Taiwan, movie industry.

II. Thesis

A. Director

a. Biography

He was inspired by an old friend in military service and then decided to contribute himself into cinema industry. He worked as a production assistant for a Taiwanese-language serial drama. However, to realize the dream of being a director, he decided to make a short film spending his own money so that he could learn more from it and catch others attention on his work.

In 1999, his first short film, “About July”, was finished. Due to it, he catches some people’s attention gradually.

In 1995, the director, Chen Kuo-Fu, discovered Wei’s potential and asked
him to work with him to produce the movie, “Double Vision”. And he became the assistant director in this film.

In 2000, he wrote the historical film script “Seediq Bale.” In order to carry on his dream of shooting this film, he raised NT$2.5 million to shoot a five-minute demo clip. The response to this short film was very overwhelming, even a few foreign film distributors were impressed by it and interested in purchasing the rights to release the film in markets overseas. However, with a tight budget of only NT$250 million, Wei Te-Shen knew that it would be impossible for him to shoot the film. However, he still wanted to give it a shot. Of course, even after Wei completed the demo clip, he was unable to find a willing party to finance the film. Consequently, this project was thoroughly put aside.

Despite his failure to raise funds to make “Seediq Bale,” Wei Te-Shen did not lose faith. Instead, he wrote the screenplay for a project called “Cape No. 7” and decided to shoot it. However, “Cape No. 7” faced a number of problems, the biggest of which was still the capital. In spite of the hardship and the pressure from lack of capital during the filming, Wei Te-shen still finished it. Out of everyone surprise, it has the fabulous success to break the box office record for a Taiwan-made movie.

b. Filmography

- **Director’s productions**
  - 1999: About July
  - 2008: Cape No. 7
- **Plan’s productions**
  - 2002: Double Vision
- **Assistant Director’s productions**
  - 1996: Mahjong
- **Writings**
  - 2000: Seediq Bale
- **Continuity Clerk**
  - 1993: Top Cool (Determined To Soul)

B. The introduction of the movie

a. The original concept for the story
The original conception for the drama came from a story heard by Director Wei. The story was concerning a postman who spent two years trying to figure out the address written on a letter, hoping to send the letter to its anticipative receiver. Nevertheless, his efforts were in vain in the end. “It got me to thinking that if this was a love letter that had been tossed about for 60 years before reaching the hands of its rightful owner, this would by all means make for a beautiful love story.” Wei said This served as the conceptual foundation for the story.

b. Setting

Northern Japan, with snowflakes fluttering about, and Hengchun, the tropical southernmost area of Taiwan, served as the distinct backgrounds for a romance involving people from different countries and different generations. Hengchun is a place filled with music, including everything from the rock music during the Spring Scream festival, to conventional old melodies. Besides accommodating tourists temporarily, this town is home to villagers with an unsophisticated mindset. Hengchun is a vivid, disordered, and prosperous township. Wei said, “How to bring all of these factors together was the toughest job. I spent one year conceiving the screenplay.”

c. Plot

Back in the 1940s when Taiwan was under Japanese domination, a Japanese teacher was transferred to Hengchun, falling in love with a local girl with the Japanese name Kojima Tomoko. After the Surrender of Japan, he was compelled to return to his motherland, Japan. On his trip back home, he wrote seven love letters showing his regret and affection for Kojima Tomoko, who he left behind in Taiwan.
After more than 60 years, Aga, who is introduced as a rock band singer, finding no success in Taipei. After returning to his hometown, Aga's step father, the Town Council Representative, arranges him to be a postman by trade, replacing the senile Uncle Mao’s position, who breaks his leg in a motorcycle accident. One day Aga encounters an undeliverable piece of mail from the daughter of the Japanese teacher. After her father’s death, she finds the letters and decides to send them to Taiwan. Regardless Uncle Mao’s warning, Aga still opens the package deliberately. However, the old Japanese-style address Cape No. 7, Hengchun County, Takao Prefecture could no longer be found.

Simultaneously, a local resort hotel, is organizing a beach concert featuring Japanese pop singer, Kousuke Atari; nevertheless, Aga's step father takes advantage of his position of county on holding the band consisting of natives. Tomoko, a Japanese fashion model with a good command of Mandarin, is given the complicated task of monitoring this hastily assembled band, led by Aga along with six other locals. For the sake of a frustrating training period, Aga and Tomoko unexpectedly begin a relationship. After series of unsuccessful search for owners of the seven letters, with the hotel maid’s assistance, the rightful recipient of the seven love letters, Kojima Tomoko, is eventually be found. Aga then goes back to the beach resort and performs a concert with this local band.

C. Characteristics

a. Relationship’s graph:
b. Chief characters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aga</td>
<td>a postman.</td>
<td>a leader of the band</td>
<td>He was a lead singer of a band in Taipei before he went to Hengchun. He once was disgusted with his stepfather, music, and even all the people whom he met in Hengchun. However, for the sake of Tanaka and the passion of those local people, Van’s heart gradually melts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomoko</td>
<td>a Japanese public relation activities planner.</td>
<td>a Japanese assistant of the band</td>
<td>She is frustrated with her work and those people in a local band that she needs to monitor. When time passed away, she perceives the meaning of friendship and love. Therefore, she embraces those people and the culture in Hengchun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>(※2.)</td>
<td>(Starred by)</td>
<td><strong>Profession:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomoko</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chie Tanaka</td>
<td>a worker in motorcycle shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frog</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ying Wei-Min</td>
<td>a pro postman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle Mao</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lin Tsung-ren</td>
<td>a alcohol-salesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malasun</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ma Nien-hsien</td>
<td>a traffic police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rauma</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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| (Starred by Min-Hsiung) |  
| --- | --- |
| **Dada** (※2.) | **Identity:** the keyboard player of the band  
**Introduction:** She is ten years old pianist in local church. She is a very independent girl facing the difficulties by herself, because she comes from a single parent family. |

| (Starred by Mai Tzu) |  
| --- | --- |
| **Profession:** a six-grade student |
| **Identity:** the keyboard player of the band |
| **Introduction:** She is ten years old pianist in local church. She is a very independent girl facing the difficulties by herself, because she comes from a single parent family. |

D. Majors Themes

a. Second Chance

It seems that the real leading role of Cape No.7 is “Second Chance”, and other actors are just used to echo the subject:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aga</th>
<th>He is going to give up his dream of music. However, he meets a chance to achieve his idea when he returns his hometown.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tomoko</td>
<td>She had had many troubles since she worked in Taiwan. However, she has never expected expects that she would have a new opportunities of work and love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the seven love letters</td>
<td>It tracked back to sixty years ago, and ends up having the opportunity to be sent back to the girl who used to be very sorrowful after such a long time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thanks to “the second chance”, the flock of people who used to give up on their dream can mend their regret, and those who used to lose love regain love. As for the movie itself, “Cape No.7” is also a second chance and the opportunity of mending his regret toward him after “Seediq Bale.”

b. Hope

The director once said, “Every one should have an opportunity to star over again and those who is brave and diligent should not be neglected.” One of the massages conveyed by Cape No.7 is the importance of being positive toward life and of grasping
the second chance. Nowadays, many people work in Taipei from southern Taiwan. They go there with hope of having better life, and are challenged with constant frustration every day. However, as long as you keep trying hard and have faith in yourself, your dream will be fulfilled in the end. The belief seems to be proven through the success of Cape NO.7. Just like Wei, no matter how scarce capital he has, he refuses to give up his passion and hope, insisting on his ideals. As the proverb goes “God helps those who help themselves”, he succeeds finally.

b. Contrast

(1): In the past, the male Japanese teacher left; after sixty years later, it is the female leading character that was going to leave. Though the couples share the same fate, the options can vary. Aga and Tomoko decide not to follow the male Japanese teacher and Tomoko, because they don’t want to leave regret behind.

(2): One of the obvious contrasts shown in the movie is the two cities. The filming spot, Hengchun, also contain many contrasts due to its diversity. For example, the value of young men and elder are very different such as their perspectives toward their hometown. However, it’s the diversity and contrast that add colors to the old city.

c. Social Issues:

Although “Cape No.7” is a love and light-hearted movie, there are many social issues derived from it.

(1): In the film, the Town Council Representative once inquires why many people from other parts of country come to Hengchun to operate tourist business, but the native young man has to leave the hometown and be someone else’s worker. This is a very commonplace phenomenon in Taiwan: most of people would rather go to the big city for better opportunity and vision of jobs than stay their hometown when they grow up. In addition, they may seldom come back to their hometown because they had built up their own business here. So, many countries are suffering from aging of population now.

(2): The movie also mentions about BOT, the abbreviation of Build-Operate-Transfer, which means “A private entity receives a concession from the private or public sector to finance, design, construct, and operate a facility for a specified period, often as long as 20 or 30 years. After the concession period ends, ownership is transferred back to the granting entity.” (※3.) I think it is very unreasonable for the ocean and the mountain to be BOTed. There are still many things that shouldn’t be sold, especially our Mother
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Nature.

(3): Spring Cream Festival” is also a problem. Is “Spring Scream” really good for Hengchun? Although the tourists give rise to the financial development, they also bring the pollution to this beautiful beach. It seems that people who come from other cities have a great time during “Spring Scream”; however, what leaves to the natives isn’t wealth but piles of trash and polluted environment.

C. Reason for success:

a. Spirit

Our ancestors migrated to Taiwan centuries ago. Despite the bad condition, those pioneers preserved. Since then, not giving up easily becomes the spirits of “true Taiwan.” Likewise, we can see the spirits in Cape NO.7. For example, there are lots of characters who can not reach their dreams about music; however, in the movie, due to a second chance, they are able to show themselves on stage. In addition, this spirit can also be seen in Wei’s perseverance and insistence. So, Taiwanese is touched by this spirit. That is why so many people attracted by the movie.

b. Publicity

Traditionally, Hollywood movies always spend much money on publicizing to catch audiences’ attention. However, on account of lacking budget, director Wei can not promote Cape NO.7 in the same way. Owing to the touching and funny plot, many people compliment the film on their own Blog. Therefore, Cape NO.7 attracts more and more audiences to watch this incredible movie. The heated discussion on the Internet arouses bloggers’ attention. More and more people go to see the movie.

c. Plot

Recently, our society faces many problems such as rising oil price, a wide continued fluctuation of commodities and economic depression. Nevertheless, Cape NO.7 brings joys to the audiences who are under a lot of pressure and tension during their daily lives. This light-hearted movie presents our daily lives in the humorous way. The characters in the movie are similar to typical ordinary people we encountered everyday, so while the audiences watching this movie, they are familiar with all the situations and can’t help laughing. The movie offers a temporary outlet for the bored, restless life, serving as a
great recreation; therefore, this is the most important reason that people pour in the theater to enjoy the movie.

III. Conclusion

Cape No.7 has broken the box-office records of the Chinese-language cinema market recently, and even make a large profit. As a result, it makes Taiwanese people know that not only the Western but the native Taiwanese has the capability of producing astonishing films. This masterpiece, Cape No.7, also give people confidence in Chinese-language cinema. I firmly believe that it is a big breakthrough toward Taiwanese, for movie-makers and movie-goers alike. Thanks to Wei Te-shen’s determination, this movie can be finished even if he is faced with many serious problems in the process.

By doing this thesis, I realize how toilsome and complex it is to produce a film; moreover, I also understand what director wants to express thorough this movie. We can get strength from it, forget the harm or failure and cheer up to achieve our goal again. In addition, there are a large number of social issues in this film. I hope that with its popularity, more and more people can pay attention to those issues.

Sadly, despite copyright, some people still download films illegally on the Internet rather than go to the theater. After “Cape No.7”, I hope the Taiwanese cinema can become famous one after another. Needless to say, our support matters.

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