

CITY CINEMATHEQUE
An Island of Stories: Recent Films from Taiwan

In 1989 I was teaching a graduate course on how films explore memory. Three Taiwanese students were in the group. After several weeks, they approached after class and presented me with a couple of vhs tapes. "Please take a look at these, professor. There are some interesting things happening back home." And so I came to see my first films by Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien. Thirty years later, they are recognized giants in the history of cinema, the subject of books and retrospectives around the world. Both would now be in the course on memory.

The five film selection *An Island of Stories: Recent Films from Taiwan* seeks to do for spectators today what those students did for me so many years ago: to open the door to a treasure trove of films thrilling in their diversity and pure cinematic craft. If there is a question that animates and unites the films, it is "what does it mean to be Taiwanese?" This is less an identity crisis than a candid self-examination. That sense of inquiry takes different shapes as the directors choose stories, genres, characters, and styles to bring a vision of Taiwan to the screen.

In less than seventy-five years Taiwan has catapulted from being a poor colonial outpost to a wealthy society driven by a knowledge-based economy. How did that happen? What is the price of success? The movies answer in different voices. The immensely popular *Cape No. 7* uses the Hollywood musical tradition of young people putting on a show to explore the history of Taiwan as a crossroads. The chilling neo-noir *Soul* x-rays the Taiwanese family in the way David Lynch looks at America. The intimate naturalism of *Thanatos, Drunk* takes a candid look at the losers in the Taiwanese race to prosperity. In *The Road to Mandalay* Taiwan becomes the promised land to which impoverished young people from Myanmar risk their lives to reach. The female centered gangster epic *The Bold, the Corrupt, and the Beautiful* weaves a tale deception and collusion worthy of the Corleone family.

No film, of course, can tell the whole truth about being Taiwanese. But taken together the five movies project a beautiful prism, each color telling its own part of the story in its own light.

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Saturday 9pm / Sunday 9pm / Friday midnight

Cape No. 7 directed by Te-sheng Wei / 5, 6, & 11 Oct

A box office sensation in Taiwan beating the record set by *Titanic*, the film braids together a romantic comedy about putting on a rock show with a serious melodrama about an intercultural love affair set during the Japanese colonial occupation of the island.

Soul directed by Mong-hong Chung / 12, 13, & 18 Oct

A young sushi chef collapses. When he regains consciousness he claims to be someone else. Is this a problem of psychology or demonology? The film twists and turns in ways that would please Bunuel, Hitchcock, and Lynch.

Thanatos, Drunk directed by Tso-chi Chang / 19, 20, & 25 Oct

All families experience crises. But some families are a crisis without end. Brothers Rat and Shanghe operate at the margins of Taiwanese society. They are the left behind, the ones who need to reinvent their lives on a daily basis to survive.

The Road to Mandalay directed by Midi Z / 26 & 27 Oct, 1 Nov

Two young people meet as they flee Burma (Myanmar) to seek a better life in Taiwan. But they get waylaid in Thailand as they struggle to find jobs that will finance their journey into a fully modern Taiwan.

The Bold, the Corrupt, and the Beautiful directed by Ya-che Yang / 2, 3, 8 Nov

Madame Tang uses any means necessary to improve the lot of her all female family. Each step forward in their fortunes is a step back in their humanity. There is more than one way to murder someone.