

*Exploring Local Movie Market as the Field of Cultural Democracy and Social Media Practice*

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**Abstract**

U.S. Hollywood industries not only earn enormous profits globally but also present soft power of the United States. The Ministry of Culture in Taiwan (R.O.C.) plans to promote Taiwan's movie industries as flagship business to promote the nation's economy but this plan encounters setbacks. This implies that movies promoted and produced by public policy to develop cultural economy fail to attract enough local movie viewers' attention to go to movie theaters. In contrast, Hollywood movies enjoy a huge success in Taiwan. However, after *Cape No. 7* rewrote the history of Taiwan's local movie box office in 2008, some local movies turn popular in Taiwan. This paper analyzes most popular comments on 11 popular movies collected from social media PTT, the most popular Bulletin Board System in Taiwan, to explore how the Internet users might make some local movies salient to explain a possible missing puzzle between local movie industries and Taiwan's film policy. Applying the concept that box office as the market of cultural democracy, this author explores how discussion in PTT can be a breakthrough against Taiwanese traditional ideology in local film.

Keywords: Movie box office, cultural democracy, film industries, public policy

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## Introduction

Taiwan's Ministry of Culture, a governmental branch responsible for the development of film industry, aims to foster an environment suitable for the development of internationally competitive film and TV industries, as well as cultivating innovation in production and marketing<sup>1</sup>. However news shows a different story that the Ministry of Culture faces a loss of its investment in movie and TV creative industries<sup>2</sup>. In contrast, some local movie production turns profitable and especially Taiwanese Movie Box Office shows that movies with good quality which represent Taiwanese daily lives, collective memories, community issues, dreams or shared social emotions of majority Taiwanese can beat Hollywood movies in Annual Taiwanese Top 10 Movie Box Office from 2010 to 2014 after the popularity of the movie *Cape No.7*. As the development of Taiwanese film industries is concerned, it seems that there are something missing between public policy and business management. The popularity of *Cape No. 7* is highly discussed about how it opens the Taiwanese movie market for local movies in 2008 and how it reflects the consciousness of Taiwan.

One of reasons for the success of *Cape No.7* is the users of PPT, the most popular Bulletin Board System in Taiwan, which pushed the first Taiwanese craze for watching local movies in 2008 after Taiwan viewers' long-term disappointment in local movies. This study explores whether PTT users still mobilize movie viewers to support Taiwanese popular movies. When local movie market is still weak to compete with Hollywood movies, produced with high concepts and high cost, would these local movies beat Hollywood movies with the support of PTT users? This study explores whether and how Taiwanese first choose some movies and later mobilize Taiwanese to support Taiwan movies by studying users' postings of Movie Bulletin Board of PTT.

## Literature Review

After *Cape No. 7* rewrote the history of Taiwan's local movie box office in 2008, more local movies turn popular in Taiwan. Film awards and professional film reviews are commonly criticized as not friendly to some local movie production. However, movies appraised by officials and experts in this field promote movies that Taiwanese generally are not interested. *Cape No. 7* as an extremely case shows that in the information society citizens can promote and push a movie to become the best box office in Taiwan. Based on the model in the information society in Finland, at heart information society is a dynamic relationship between business and society, mediated by the state (Castells, Himanen, 2002). Media content reproduces signs in a nation that convey cultural order which is followed, conducted, and challenged by their nationals. However, one of the Taiwanese film phenomena is that meanings conveyed by signs in the movie generally cannot attract Taiwanese for reasons. It is common to see officials and professional

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from the Web site of the R.O.C. Ministry of Culture in 11/1/2015  
<http://english.moc.gov.tw/article/index.php?sn=2736>

<sup>2</sup>文化部委外 立委踢爆 近 7 成文創投資失利，中時電子報 Retrieved on 10/16/2015 from  
<http://www.chinatimes.com/newspapers/20151014000465-260102>

experts blame local movie viewers as with low tastes. However, it may contain myth waiting for scholars, enterprisers and policy makers to solve and explain why the government's movie policy to develop economy encounter setbacks. Castells and Himanen (2002) uses a model to explain four sources of legitimacy: political legitimacy in which the political system is the mediator between citizens and state; social legitimacy as the welfare state; cultural legitimacy coming from the nationalist project underlying this nation; economic legitimacy coming from economic growth and wealth distribution from business(p.148). National identity, social homogeneity and xenophobia are factors from them to explore the idea of citizens in a market society. The three are key factors this study will use to explore the missing puzzle between business and public policy to explain why not enough Taiwanese choose to support local movies produced by Taiwanese government's movie policy.

Cultural plurality and diversity are supported by the government and society in Taiwan; however, representativeness of collective national identity is a heatedly debated issue for Taiwanese who have different experience, history, memory, and tradition. After the director Wei Te-Sheng of *Cape No. 7* produced two more Taiwanese local stories, *Seediq Bale* and *Kano*, more Taiwanese learn about the history of Japanese colonial time period in Taiwan and they wonder why similar local knowledge during that time is missing. The subjectivity of Taiwan is highly discussed by viewers of these two movies about how some knowledge Taiwanese they might never think about<sup>3</sup>. In contrast, when Japanese government and business plan to design products for their nationals' consumption, they are very successful to promote Japanese national identity and further develop their national culture (吉野耕作, 2004, p.229) and the author emphasizes that scholars focus too much before about how nation and business successfully educate and communicate these messages about cultural nationalists to Japanese but they pay less attention to how Japanese are willing to consume there products and develop their cultural nationalism. Political system is the mediator between citizens and state through democratic representation and the sharing of information (Castells and Himanen, 2002, p.148). Media is an alternative source of information sharing. Shieu-chi Weng (2010) applies theories of collective memory and identity by using the "Kao-Hsion Incident" as an example to reveal different concepts and processes of mainstream newspapers and main social actors in the incident. This study explores whether the state policy discussed here fails to respond to the needs of citizens for similar information sharing for different ideology or social class and is not able to offer a collective national identity through public sphere. Is it possible that local social media redefine tradition, new perspectives of history, and collective memory of Taiwanese and further challenges ideology of Taiwan's movie policy and movie industries?

Once the movie content is able to stimulate Taiwanese viewers to go to theaters, another factor comes up and that is how the process of media consumption can possibly stimulate their social homogeneity. PPT can be used to discuss its members' norms, values and expectancies they observed in the movies based on the sanctions regulated by the PTT.

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<sup>3</sup> 臺灣歷史的十個轉捩點, 自由評論網, retrieved on 10/11/2015 from <http://talk.ltn.com.tw/keyword/%E6%AD%B7%E5%8F%B2%E8%BD%89%E6%8D%A9%E9%BB%9E>。

David Halpern treats three elements of social capital: network; norms, values, and expectancies; sanctions (p.9). Lin (2001) discusses the three elements of homogeneity principle as resources, action/interaction, and affection. He lists "...four elements—positions, authority, rules, and agents—collectively define the social macrostructure as a system of coordination for the maintenance and/or acquisition of one or more types of valued resources for the collectivity." (p.34) However, resources may be controlled by the state and business but the audience can show their affection and take action to the movies they like.

One typical critical point about grass roots in Taiwanese movies is that grass roots fail to widen their vision and satisfy themselves by "low taste" for entertainment. This idea is to blame some local movies that they lack international competitiveness. This concept explored in this studied here is "blind spots" of new vision of grass roots by connecting international competitiveness can be compared to what Castells and Himanen (2002) called "Xenophobia." One thing missing here about "Xenophobia" is that whether grass roots lack international competitiveness if they stick to their old professions? This deserves two dimension of exploration. First, in which way, grass roots should be presented in movies. Should images of grass roots be defined by grass roots or social elites? Second, in the public sphere, will discussion of grass roots imply those who support this kind of movies fail to accept the idea of progressivism?

This paper analyzes most popular comments collected from social media PTT, the most popular Bulletin Board System in Taiwan, to explore how the Internet users might make local movies salient when ecology of Taiwan official movie awards and traditional film critics usually do not consider the issue of Taiwan's subjectivity as important as local movie viewers. Considering the concept that box office as the market of cultural democracy, this author explores how discussion in PTT can be a breakthrough against Taiwanese tradition ideology of local film. RQ: How discussion in PTT can be a breakthrough against traditional ideology of Taiwanese local film?

## **Method**

This research chooses 11 popular movies defined by Chen's study (Chen, 2014) as either listed in annual Taiwanese top 10 movie box office or listed in top one weekly movie box office in Lunar New Year's film schedules when they were released from 2008 to 2014. These movies analyzed in this studies are *Cape No. 7*, *Monga*, *Night Market Hero*, *Sediq Bale*, *You Are the Apple of My Eye*, *Din Tao : Leader of the Parade*, *David Loman*, *Zone Pro Site*, *Twa-Tiu-Tiann*, *Kano*, and *Café·Waiting·Love*.

R language program is used to collect data by crawling Movie Bulletin Board in PTT from January 2004 to May 2015. The data are saved as Excel files and text mining is used to identify related discussions in this study. If a member of Movie Bulletin Board likes a posting, the user can choose to "push" this posting as he or she support this posting or "hush" this posting as he or she disagrees or dislikes it. If a posting gets the number 100 calculated by the following formula: the totality of pushes minus the totality of hushes, it is defined as an "explosive" posting and the total of that is about 4 percent of the total

postings. To a certain degree, an explosive posing might suggest that it may contain key messages that will related to interaction among member users.

## Results

The number of posting in Movie Bulletin Board in PPT from 2005 to May 2015 went down from 2008 to 2012 but rose high sharply in 2013 (1500) and 2014 (over 2000) See Figure 1. These results may be related to postings deletion. However, if we compare 11 popular local movies listed in Table1. Three movies in 2014 *Twa-Tiu-Tiann*, *KANO*, *Café-Waiting-Love* have a total number of 1251 postings. Two movies *David Loman* and *Zone Pro Site* in 2013 have a total number of postings 126. *Din Tao* released in 2012 has only 5 postings. In 2011, a big harvest in local movie market, *Night Market Hero*, *Seediq Bale*, *You Are the Apple of My Eye* have a total number of 118 postings. *Monga* in 2010 has 16 postings and *Cape No. 7* in 2008 has 70 postings (See Table 1). Postings are most during movie theater release in 8 movies (See Table 2). *Cape No. 7* has even number of postings between during and after movie theater release and the reason is that the postings were old and might be deleted and members compare this important movie often with other movies. Only two movies, *You are the Apple of My Eye* and *David Loman* show that the numbers of postings after movie release are greater than those of during and before movie release. *You Are the Apple of My Eye* has even number of postings between before movie release and during movie release and the reason might be related to its disputed successful marketing strategies. *David Loman* as an extreme case that the most postings are after movie release and the reason might be that the director's criticism of Taiwanese official film awards draws PTT members' criticism and its premiere of local movie channel.

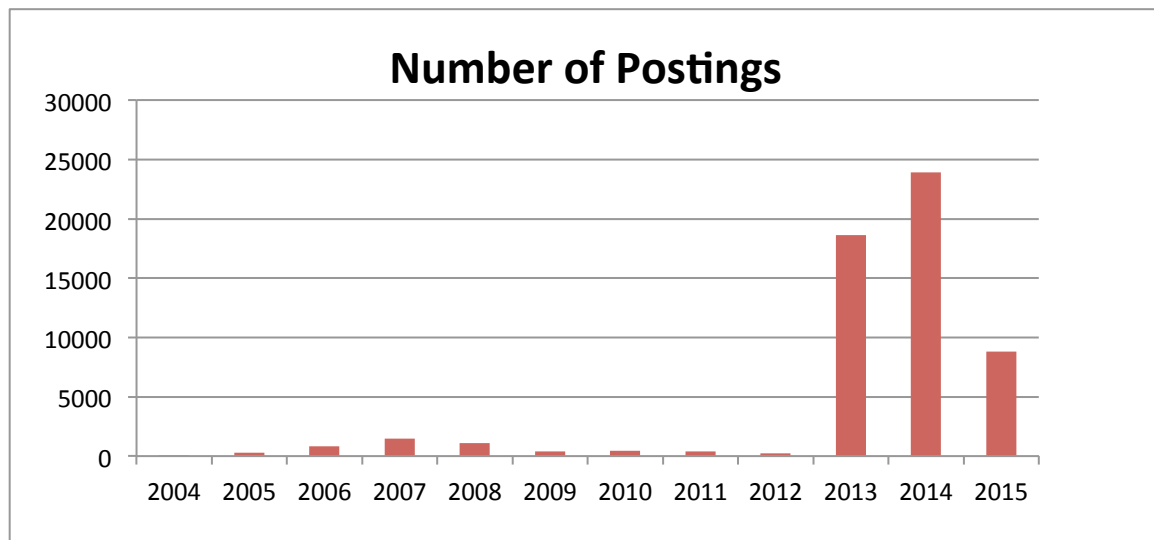


Figure 1: Number of Members' Postings in Movie Bulletin Board in PPT from 2005 to May 2015

The ranking of posting numbers before movie release in order are *KANO*, *Twa-Tiu-Tian*, *You are the Apple of My Eye*, *Sedic Bale*, *Cape No.7*, *Zone Pro Site*, *Monga*; *Night Market Hero*, *Din Tao : Leader of the Parade*, and *Café-Waiting-Love* with only one posting and *David Loman* with 0 posting<sup>4</sup>. The ranking of posting numbers during movie release in order are *KANO*, *Twa-Tiu-Tian*, *Zone Pro Site*, *Cape No.7*, *Sedic Bale*, *You are the Apple of My Eye*, , *Monga*; *Café-Waiting-Love*; *Night Market Hero* with only 2 posting and *Din Tao: Leader of the Parade* with only 1 posting; again, *David Loman* with 0 posting in this category. The ranking of posting numbers after movie release in order are *Kano*, *David Loman*, *Cape No. 7*, *You are the Apple of My Eyes*, *Zone Pro Site*, *Sedic Bale*, *Twa-Tiu-Tian*, *Monga*; *Din Tao : Leader of the Parade*, *Café-Waiting-Love* and *Night Market Hero*.

In short, *KANO* won the most attention in all three categories: before, during or after movie release. *Cape No. 7* has little attention before its release. The least attention gained here is *Night Market Hero* with a number of four. The same director's another movie *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* gained the second highest attention in total postings. Another movie gained very few attention here is *Din Tao : Leader of the Parade* with a number of five. *Café-Waiting-Love* has also gained few attention only 10 postings. The same director's another movie *You are the Apple of My Eye* won the fifth attention. *Zone Pro Site* ranks Top three most attention in Table 1. *David Loman* has a different development when it gets no attention with 0 posting before and during movie release; however, after the theater stops showing it, it has 40 postings, the second highest among the 11 movies.

**Table 1: Number of Members' Postings in Movie Bulletin Board in PPT for 11 popular movies in Taiwan from 2005 to May 2015**

Movies	Number of postings before movie release	Number of postings during movie release	Number of postings after movie release	Postings won pushes between 51 to 100	Explosive Postings (reaching 100)	Total Postings
<i>Cape No. 7</i>	6	32	32	6	2	70
<i>Monga</i>	2	9	5	1	0	16
<i>Night Market Hero</i>	1	2	1	0	0	4
<i>Seediq Bale</i>	7	26	16	11	11	49
<i>You Are the Apple of My Eye</i>	19	19	27	8	9	65
<i>Din Tao : Leader of</i>	1	1	3	0	0	5

<sup>4</sup> The last dates of movie releases on theaters are hard to be confirmed when re-run movie theaters are considered; therefore the result of *David Loman* should be carefully explained.

<i>the Parade</i>						
<i>David Loman</i>	0	0	40	2	1	40
<i>Zone Pro Site</i>	3	64	19	5	1	86
<i>Twa-Tiu-Tiann</i>	21	103	7	4	0	131
<i>KANO</i>	94	869	147	86	24	1110
<i>Café-Waiting Love</i>	1	7	2	0	0	10

The ranking of Explosive Postings in order are *Kano*, *Seediq Bale*, *You are the Apple of My Eye*, *Cape No. 7*, *David Loman* and *Zone Pro Site*; *Monga*, *Night Market Hero*, *Din Tao: Leader of the Parade*, *Café-Waiting-Love* with no explosive post. In contrast, Ranking of total postings in order are *Kano*, *Twa-Tiu-Tann*, *Zone Pro Site*, *Cape No. 7*, *You Are the Apple of My Eye*, *Seediq Bale*, *David Loman*, *Monga*, *Café-Waiting-Love*, *Din Tao: Leader of the Parade*, *Night Market Hero*.

**Table 2: Rankings of Number of Members' Postings and Explosive Postings in Movie Bulletin Board in PPT for 11 popular movie in Taiwan from 2005 to May 2015**

Movies	Explosive Postings (reaching 100)	Ranking of Explosive Postings	Total Postings	Ranking of Postings
<i>Cape No. 7</i>	2	4	70	4
<i>Monga</i>	0	x	16	8
<i>Night Market Hero</i>	0	x	4	11
<i>Seediq Bale</i>	11	2	49	6
<i>You Are the Apple of My Eye</i>	9	3	65	5
<i>Din Tao : Leader of the Parade</i>	0	x	5	10
<i>David Loman</i>	1	5	40	7
<i>Zone Pro Site</i>	1	5	86	3
<i>Twa-Tiu-Tiann</i>	0	x	131	2
<i>KANO</i>	24	1	1110	1
<i>Café·Waiting·Love</i>	0	x	10	9

It is obvious that *Kano* is the most popular one in this analysis because it touches the issue of subjectivity of Taiwan with the same reason as why *Cape No. 7* is popular in 2008. Members of PPT Bulletin Board discuss postings and share their emotions as the sense of Taiwan consciousness is awoken. As one of post shows,

Taiwanese culture has a high level of low self-esteem for Taiwanese who adulate the West and consider western culture is better than ours. If people study abroad and get degrees from the West, Taiwanese consider them higher class. Taiwanese theme is hard to be appreciated as fine pieces in movies to Taiwanese like me. After I saw *Cape No. 7*, this shame about my low self-esteem about Taiwan is tumbling, I despise my low self-esteem and redefine what a good movie is after I watch *Cape No. 7*.



*Kano's* postings show members' support and a strong identification for its director's efforts to discover new facts during Japanese colonial time in Taiwan. Detail facts about the background of the movie and disputes about the languages used in the movies show the conflict ideas of members' national identity. In fact, it is the disputes that makes this movie special and it will be common to see disputes like this since cultural pluralism in Taiwan is encouraged by the local market to explore movie viewers' interest as the *Cape No. 7* opened Taiwanese interest to create their symbols by exploring and discovering their history, collective history, and tradition.

In terms of social homogeneity, explosive postings in Movie Bulletin Board in PPT show higher interest in local movies with aesthetic views and less emphasis on entertainment. Except disputes about discussions in national identity, it is common to see members criticize about low tastes and too many not serious plots about local grass roots. Whether more images of grass root for entertaining values shown in Taiwanese local movies is a good phenomenon is debatable as a PTT member criticizes:

...movie themes about similar plots like grass roots' bitterness or jokes with low tastes are everywhere in Taiwan movies but only few production are taking movie seriously...the mind of movie viewers will build up the vision of movie production in the future...

In fact, this study finds that local movies about grass roots with emphasis on entertainment values are not popular in explosive postings analyzed in this study. However, number of postings of two movies *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* (103) and *Zone Pro Site* (64) and still rank high as the second and the third when number of postings for each movie is counted. In contrast, these two movies rank low in the ranking list of explosive postings. It seems that explosive postings of Movie Bulletin Board in PTT has different views on movie selection of discussion. Schudson discusses U.S. values of egalitarianism and market society when he explores how a revolution of newspaper started in 19<sup>th</sup> century (1978). He cites Nevins and Commager's description as the proof of its age of egalitarianism: "faith in the common man; belief in political equality; belief in equal economic opportunity; hatred of monopoly, special privilege, and the intricacies of capitalistic finance" (p.25). Schudson describes that a democratic wave swept the country when cheap media content (newspaper) are available and informal manners are common. As Miller and Yudice (2002) cite Tocqueville to describe the idea as against artistic transcendence. They describe, "An egalitarian philosophy, in keeping with upwardly mobile immigrants, supposedly flattened tastes through cultural relativism, denying in the process the age-old route to artistic distinction provide by a socially hierarchical rank order."(p.36) How to define visions of movies and which directors are serious about movies turn issues of discussions on the postings studied here. However, in terms of social homogeneity, members discuss about values, norms, expectation, and sanctions are encouraged by members for they are against some members whose values disagrees with the director Wei Te-Sheng of *Cape No. 7* about local identity.

Six popular movies appear no significant explosive postings are *Monga*, *Night Market Hero*, *Din Tao : Leader of the Parade*, *David Loma*, *Zone Pro Site*, *Twa-Tiu-Tiann*, *Café·Waiting·Love*. Only in the last movie, the major plots of which is not about grass roots. For other five movies, their major plots center grass roots such as gangs, night market, traditional cooks, and leaders of religious parades or grass roots' dialect. Robertson (1992) identifies four major components of the conception of globality as national societies, selves, world system of societies, and humankind. He emphasizes that there is a heightening of “civilizational, societal, ethnic, regional and, indeed individual, self-consciousness” in an increasingly globalized world (p.27). See Figure 2.

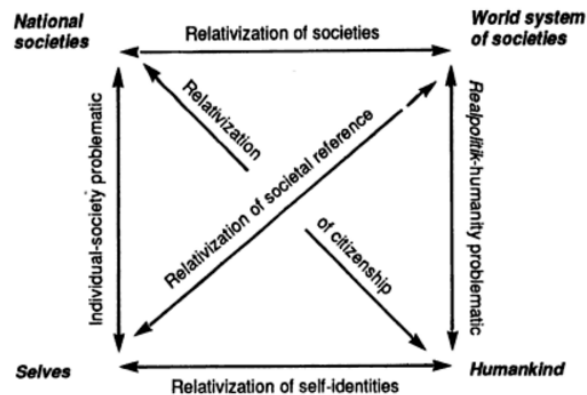


Figure 2: Global Field by Roland Robertson *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, sage publications, p.27, 1992

This study suggests that the characteristics of these postings in PTT Movie Bulletin Board reflects two meanings. First, its users reflect values more likely those of people living in northern part of Taiwan. Second, its users are more likely movie fans with a higher artistic standard than other Internet users. When half-explosive postings in PPT for 11 popular movies in Taiwan from 2005 to May 2015 are counted, *Din Tao : Leader of the Parade*, *Night Market Hero* only has single digit posting. The movie characteristics are grass roots and presented in a less artsy style. In contrast, *David Loman* shows the negative images of grass roots gains no attention but get lots of negative postings after movie release. In contrast, *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* gets the second highest number of half-explosive postings but without any explosive posting and that deserves to explore the reason of it. *You are the Apple of My Eye* gains less attention in this comparison; however, the director's another movie gains much less attention when the love theme of his novel seems no longer attracts members' discussion.

Table 3: The Number of Members' Postings Counted as "Half-Explosive" Postings in Movie Bulletin Board in PPT for 11 popular movies in Taiwan from 2005 to May 2015

Movie Titles	"Half-Explosive" Postings
<i>Cape No. 7</i>	6
<i>Monga</i>	2
<i>Night Market Hero</i>	1
<i>Seediq Bale</i>	7
<i>You Are the Apple of My Eye</i>	19
<i>Din Tao : Leader of the Parade</i>	1
<i>David Loman</i>	0
<i>Zone Pro Site</i>	3
<i>Twa-Tiu-Tiann</i>	21
<i>KANO</i>	94
<i>Café·Waiting·Love</i>	1

**Discussion:**

This paper finds that explosive postings collected from Movie Bulletin Board in PTT focus on the movie of *Kano* but pay less attention to movies emphasizing on entertaining values when 11 local popular movies are analyzed. *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* gets the second highest number of half-explosive postings and the total postings but without any explosive posting. *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* might imply more cultural interpretation in Taiwan's local market. Although members may want to make some local movies salient; six local popular movies with higher entertaining values are not highly discussed when explosive postings are analyzed. Further studies can explore how possibly the idea of egalitarianism may help Taiwan to improve local movie markets and connect local movie viewers with local movie industries.

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