

World Popular *Life of Pi*

Ang Lee Fulfilled His Dream of 3D Film in Taichung

Life of Pi, a fantasy masterpiece directed by Oscar-winning director Ang Lee, caught world's attention immediately after its release. Being a Taichung citizen, one is also proud because 70% of the film was shot here. Ang Lee told global media that, "Without Taiwan, there would not be such a film."

Ang Lee, an internationally renowned director, was first attracted to Taichung while he served in the army at Chengkung Hill. At that time, he was impressed by the climate here, which was possibly the best in Taiwan. He thought Taichung would be one of the most appropriate places to make films one day. Therefore, when the opportunity enabled him to shoot a film back to Taiwan, Taichung became his first choice.

Jason Hu, the Mayor of Taichung City, supported Taiwan film industry during his former public service as head of Government Information Office. While Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* won the Goldener Bär in Berlin Film Festival, Mayor Jason Hu was among his *Pushing Hands*. When Mayor Hu learned that Ang Lee was about to start a new film, he took the initiative to raise some fund to cover the location scout and invited Ang Lee and his crew to Taichung. Shih Jing-wen, Director of Information Bureau stated that despite favorable conditions such as free settings provided by countries including the US, Australia, India, and Mainland China, Ang Lee opted for Taiwan, a place he adored, under Mayor Hu's sincere invitation.

Fulfill His 3D Cinema Dream in Taichung

Life of Pi, a 3D cinema masterpiece, was finished due to common efforts of hundreds of film professionals from Hollywood and Taiwan under the leadership of Ang Lee. Since its trailer was released simultaneously in the world towards the end of July, the film elicited fervid discussion among zealous audience. Acclaimed by American media as an unprecedented 3D film, it was also considered a strong competitor for the Oscar Award. All the ocean scenes, including the wreck and the



On November 5th, 2012, Ang Lee promotes *Life of Pi* in Taichung City.

leading actor's wandering scenes, were mostly shot in the manmade Wave Tank and hangars in Shuinan Airport, Taichung. The footages were then polished via visual effect.

Life of Pi was elected for opening in New York Film Festival. It was the first 3D film during the 50-year history of the Festival. Moreover, Ang Lee became the first director who had three films selected for the opening and closing ceremonies. Talking about the most difficult part of shooting the film, Ang Lee mentioned that it was like crossing the Pacific. It was hard indeed. The hardest part was the film looks easy, but water and 3D are both hard to handle. Fortunately, more than two thousand staff members accompanied him to work in Taiwan and abroad for four years. He was really touched.

Taiwan's Various Possibilities are Suitable for Filmmaking

Adapted from an international bestseller, *Life of Pi* is a film about a young man in wreck wandering at sea for 227 days. The story describes how he faces predicament and seeks rebirth after a seemingly imaginative ocean adventure. The ambivalent friendship between "Pi" and the tiger moves the audience. The film scope encompasses three continents. Taiwan was the main shooting spot. Through 3D filmmaking, Director Lee led all to witness the most unusual trip of fantasy. While it was first released in the US on September 28, Ang Lee told media members that he was determined to come back to Taiwan to make the film because "Taiwan was willing to do anything extensively for me, more and more." He said, "He was pleased this time to be back here in Taiwan. Everyone was passionate. There was not too much bureaucracy." In his opinion, Taiwan is full of various possibilities, almost everything can be found. For instance, the Indian sub, the Caucasians in the French pool were all found in Taiwan. In addition, the Mexican Coast was also shot here in Taiwan.

"Unknown about 3D, I was first engaged in a 3D film. I desisted from shooting it in Los Angeles for the high cost. I could only risk making it in Taiwan. Thanks to



Mayor Hu of Taichung City invites all the crew members in *Life of Pi* to enjoy night market food.

Taiwan's whole-hearted support, the film was done," Ang Lee said. Gratitude goes to Mayor Hu for offering such a wonderful shooting spot as Shuinan Airport. "Staying in Taiwan was a risk as well as homecoming, especially for such a film on adventure. I think except Taiwan, there is no place which can render such a difficult film with budget and method like these. Being a Taiwanese, I am rather proud." Director Shih also commented that more than once, Ang Lee mentioned to her that Taichung is just perfect for filmmaking. The climate, people, inexpensive life as well as government cooperation are just marvelous.

When the film first came out, Ang Lee, busy with promotion, made a special VCR to show his appreciation to Taichung citizens. He was particularly grateful to the Taichung citizens for taking care of his crew. Around 400 filmmakers were taken here to Taichung by Ang Lee to accomplish the task. Many of them were along with the entire families. Some students attended school for one semester, or even two. They were deeply impressed by the strong friendship and material support. All praised the convenience of living in Taichung. Shih Jing-wen said, a first-class group led by Ang Lee stationed in Taichung with crew eating, living, and working with their families is beneficial to boost economy in Taichung.

International Group Introduced New Film Technology

According to Ang Lee, *Life of Pi* was shot in Taichung, it meant that he had led the entire Hollywood group here. With colleagues creating a dream here in Taiwan, he hoped that everyone would be proud after seeing it as it was a common effort among all participants. Director Shih pointed out that Ang Lee was rather demanding in terms of filmmaking. It took a long time to shoot and produce *Life of Pi*. Time spent in Taichung alone was close to an year. Each shot and each detail were thoroughly considered. Most audience would not be able to tell that the main setting was no other place than the Wave Tank with artificial waves and the old hangars in the original Shuinan Airport. The film was then polished by computer animation in the virtual studio.

During the shooting, the most state-of-the-art film technology, soft and hardware included, brought here by Ang Lee impacted Taichung's film industry tremendously. The infrastructure of shooting *Life of Pi*, which cost hundreds and millions of Taiwan dollars, would stay in Taichung. The Wave Tank worth of millions will remain in Shuinan Airport. It is the world top and first Wave Tank in Asia. With air pump and 12 throttle valves, it can control incoming and outgoing amount of water independently to create thousands of wave types. It also mimics the changes of water effect of tides and tempests. Even a foreign company known for wave-making software wanted to borrow it. The most noteworthy is the Wave Tank was built by a topnotch group with distinguished technology, with all operation expertise in the domestic hands.

Moreover, the current filmmaking techniques of the Hollywood team, hardware technology, and property creation have immense influence on the future film, cultural and creative industries in Taichung. Prior to this film, there was no such a film of international scale being shot here in Taiwan. This time, via the impact of *Life of Pi*, the world was informed that Taichung is an ideal spot for filmmaking.

Integrate Abundant Resources to Promote Film Industry in Central

Taiwan

According to Director Shih, Mayor Hu and the Central Government endeavored to attract Ang Lee here for filmmaking. It not only brought the classic working formula of Hollywood here, but also enabled many Taiwanese participants to witness and acquire lots of professional knowledge. Before its shooting, Ang Lee brought his crew to some schools for face to face technical instruction. He invited plenty Taiwanese filmmakers to participate in as well. Because Ang Lee came to Taichung to



On November 11th,2012, we demonstrated the most state-of-the-art Wave Tank in the world to the public.

work on *Life of Pi*, a Mid-Taiwan Movie Promotion Park was initiated and started. The planned area is to include film supporting center as well as image archive, cinema museum to function as a documentation, collection, interaction, education and culture center. It will let people understand the filmmaking process, history as well as future development of film industry in Taichung.

After combination of Taichung City and County, it possesses rich natural resources including mountain, metropolitan atmosphere, airport, harbor and other features. For a filmmaker, it was an absolutely ideal environment. After Ang Lee started it and left the best Wave Tank of the world in Shuinan Airport, Taichung City Government began planning to construct the Mid-Taiwan Movie Promotion Park in hope of establishing the media center here. With it as the basis, Taichung will embark on the world stage. Using the cooperative formula started with Ang Lee working here in Taiwan, Taichung is looking forward to drawing more international group.

Shih Jing-wen made no secret that privacy during the filmmaking is to preserve sense of mystery before the film released. She emphasized that it is expected that the film can bring surprise to all, as Ang Lee suggested, and bring everyone to the fantasy adventure, which belongs to Taichung, Taiwan and the world.

This article is quoted from “Enjoying Taichung Nov.2012”.