

Document Citation

Title	A one and a two...
Author(s)	Derek Elley
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	2000 May 22
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	20
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Yi Yi, Yang Teh-ch'ang,, 2000

A ONE AND A TWO . . .**(YIYI)****(TAIWAN-JAPAN)**

A 1+2 Seisaku linkai presentation of an Atom Films production for Pony Canyon/Omega Project. (International sales: Capitol Films, London.) Produced by Shinya Kawai, Naoko Tsukeda.

Directed, written by Edward Yang. Camera (color), Yang Wei-han; editor, Chen Bo-wen; music, Peng Kai-li; production designer, Peng; sound (Dolby Digital), Du Du-chih; associate producers, Yu Wei-yen, Osamu Kubota; assistant directors, Wang Yu-hui, Yang Shih-ping. **Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (competing), May 14, 2000. Running time: 173 MIN.**

With: Wu Nien-jen, Elaine Jin, Issey Ogata, Kelly Lee, Jonathan Chang, Chen Hsi-sheng, Ko Su-yun, Michael Tao, Hsiao Shu-shen, Adrian Lin, Yu-pang Chang, Tang Ru-yun, Hsu Shu-yuan, Tseng Hsin-yi.

(Mandarin, Hokkien and English dialogue)

By DEREK ELLEY

A movie of formidable intelligence and observation, marbled with moments of magical abstraction, "A One and a Two ..." re-establishes Taiwanese filmer Edward Yang as a world-class filmmaker following a wobbly past decade in the wake of his last fully successful feature, "A Brighter Summer Day" (1991). Story of a businessman's midlife malaise that fans out into a multigenerational portrait of the lessons in life that humans just keep on missing, pic is an enormously ambitious undertaking that actually justifies its close-to-three-hour running time. Fine tuning by some 10 minutes would aid occasional lapses in pacing, but in any event, given the realities of the marketplace, the movie faces a tough theatrical sell beyond festival dates and highly specialized sites.

Though clearly a more mature work (filmmaker is now in his early 50s), "One" revisits some of the themes in Yang's impressive feature bow, "That Day, on the Beach" (1983), with subjects such as old loves; the small, often unwitting betrayals of friends and family; and the scars of previous lives that everyone carries forward with them. "One" brings greater overall clarity and more assured variations in emotional tone than in Yang's previous two pics, "A Confucian Confusion" and "Mahjong."

Putative central character is N.J. (Wu Nien-jen, a prolific scripter in his own right), now in his mid-40s with a wife, Min-min (Elaine Jin), and two kids, teenager Ting-ting (Kelly Lee) and young tyke Yang-yang (Jonathan Chang). N.J. is a partner in a successful Taipei computer firm that must nevertheless constantly innovate to stay ahead. In this case, that involves hooking up with a well-known Japanese games designer, Ota (Issey Ogata). N.J. is assigned to do the liaison work.

But N.J.'s mind is less than 100% on his job. As in "That Day, on the Beach," Yang uses a sudden tragedy as a trigger for several characters to re-evaluate their lives. In "One," it's the collapse of Min-min's mother (Tang Ru-yun), who's at home in a coma. Also, N.J. has just bumped into his first love from 30 years ago, Sherry (Ko Su-yun), happily married to a Chinese-American businessman.

All around N.J., additional emotional confusion is building up. His indebted brother-in-law, Ah-Di (Chen Hsi-sheng), marries the pregnant Hsiao Yen (Hsiao Shu-shen), much to the distress of his sharp-tongued ex-g.f., Yun-yun (Tseng Hsin-yi). N.J.'s wife consults a spiritual guru to ease her stress. And his daughter Ting-ting starts seeing Fatty (Yu-pang Chang), b.f. of her new neighbor friend, the high-strung Li-li (Adrian Lin).

Things come to a head when N.J. goes to Japan to conclude his firm's deal with Ota, little realizing that back in Taipei events are unraveling fast on both the business and family fronts.

Characters take some sorting out during the buoyant first reel, centered on the wedding of Ah-Di and Hsiao Yen, but thereafter are clearly defined, despite the large number of players. The way in which Yang juggles the different strands during the first hour, laying seeds that will grow subsequently, is impressive in its own right.

More gratifying, however, is the way in which he paces the script over the long running time, with N.J.'s visit to Japan (at the hour-and-three-quarters point) containing a major surprise that energizes the movie for its final lap.

Aside from N.J.'s wife, who remains fuzzily defined, the movie is full of sharply drawn smaller characters and richly drawn major roles, any of which could have launched movies of their own. The Japanese businessman, who gradually bonds with the reticent N.J., is a special delight, despite a handicap: Their scenes must unfold in a second language, English. Partly thanks to the chemistry between Ogata and Wu, these sequences have none of the awkwardness of the English dialogue in Yang's previous "Mahjong."

The younger players are also finely cast, especially newcomer Lee as the shy teen, Ting-ting, who wishes the best for everyone, and the 8-year-old Chang as Yang-yang, through whose precocious, inquiring eyes the mistakes of the adult world are often observed. It's the sequences around Yang-yang that occasionally lift the pic into a dimension beyond the purely everyday.

Aided by typically sharp, richly colored lensing by ace Taiwanese d.p. Yang Wei-han, recalling his sterling work during the '80s for director Chang Yi, the picture is a consistent delight to the eyes. Occasionally, helmer Yang lingers too long on a visual, or inserts scenes (such as an emotional solo by Jin) that hinder momentum, but the large variety of characters and consistent strain of ironic humor keep the picture mostly moving forward.



GRAND MOMENT: A teen (Kelly Lee) shares quiet time with her grandmother (Tang Ru-yun) in Edward Yang's "A One and a Two..."