



SECRET SHARER is a film screened by Kino Ken at McConomy Auditorium in Oakland as part of the 2015 Carnegie Mellon International Festival of Films. Below is his review of that film.

**China / Thailand 2014 color 103 minutes subtitled live action feature
dramedy Premiere Productions / The U.K. Film & TV Production Company PLC
Producers: Peter Fudakowski, Michal Kwiecinski, Tom Waller, Noah Weinzweig,
Henrietta Fudakowski**

17 of a possible 20 points

******1/2 of a possible *******

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

- 2 Direction: Peter Fudakowski**
- 1 Editing: Jaroslaw Barzan and Max Tersch**
- 2 Cinematography: Michal Tywoniuk***
- 1 Lighting: Maitree Wannachotec**
- Special Visual Effects: Khansit Techawanvevkn**
- 1 Screenplay: Peter Fudakowski, parallel to Joseph Conrad's novella
A SECRET SHARER**
- 2 Music: Guy Farley* Orchestrator: Andrew Pearce***
- 2 Production Design: Pongnarin Jonghawklang**
- Costume Design: Preeyanan "Lin" Suwannathda**
- 2 Sound: Kacper Habisiak* and Marcin Kasinski*
(Supervising Sound Editors); Annop Jaikaew* (Sound Recordist)**

- 1 Acting
 - 2 Creativity
- 17 total points

Cast: Jack Laskey (Captain Konrad), Zhu Zhu* (Li Wang, wife of Captain Wang), Ching-ting Hsai (Mong Lin, former captain of Konrad's ship), Leon Dai (Captain Wang), Si Qin Chao Ke Tu* (Engineer), Sittinont Ananvorakkun (Assistant Cook), K. M. Lo (Chang), Aroon Wanasbodeewong (Steward), Ying Wang (Yang Shu's girl), Bao Yin Ni Mu Hu* (Yang Shu), Guo Zhongyou* (Cook), Song Bin Zhu (The Boss), others

One of several recent film productions based on writings of Joseph Conrad, SECRET SHARER, from director Peter Fudakowski, is a significant adaptation which certainly cannot be accused of slavish fidelity to original text. In this new setting, murderous male first mate has been replaced with seductive, homicidal female navigator. Retained is Conrad's setting in the South China Sea along Thailand's Gulf of Siam.

This time, however, an anonymous "Boss" has concocted a scheme to wreck his own ship in order to collect insurance money. He hires a Polish captain to accomplish this. Captain Konrad replaces an alcoholic incompetent who, demoted and miserable, now must serve under a foreigner's command.

Newly promoted to skipper and unsure of himself, Konrad is further burdened with a mutinous crew who suspect exactly what his employer plans to do. Initially, they know far more about ship and owner than the newcomer.

Taking advantage of a novice's inability to enforce discipline, the crew departs without obtaining shore leave in order to obtain alcohol, potted plants, and food supplies. Partying wouldn't be overlooked, either.

Their chief officer is stranded alone on board an unfamiliar ruin of a vessel. He must impatiently await whatever dawn reveals. No returning sailors appear. Night brings heat, restlessness, and obstruction of the rope ladder connecting main deck to sea level. When Konrad investigates, he's amazed to descry a naked woman tangled in its lowest reaches.

She asks for help. By maritime law, he must offer it. Though this situation is certainly a compromising one.

Li Wang is exhausted and taciturn, disinclined to reveal any motive for a nude nocturnal swim. This compels her reluctant host to at least temporarily afford covert refuge in the bathroom section of his cabin. At the moment, there's no need to explain why. Fortunately for both of them, all Konrad's subordinates are still relishing unsupervised free hours ashore.

To Konrad's further amazement, next to seek his assistance is a group of searchers from a ship riding at anchor close by. This group includes a fellow captain who wishes an interview. With him are two companions bent on enforcing his request. They are also determined to thoroughly search for a missing crew member, wanted for murder of their first mate.

Konrad protests vainly, then watches in horrible fascination as justice executors comb one compartment after another of a floating hunk of junk, intent on ferreting out concealed refugee. By some miracle, they fail to spot a trembling trespasser with upraised knife.

This permits the film to proceed rather mechanically. Unwanted sailors depart. Dawn brings reunion with jubilant seasoned voyagers, somewhat intoxicated and minus feminine companionship. Others may desert ship. Not these loyalists. Despite its dilapidated condition, the corroded hulk is still their cherished home.

What has been hiding must stay covert. For Konrad is in no frame of mind to debate ethics with Chinese subordinates. So a game of hide-and-seek is played out, two against the house. Any neglected clue can result in charges of murder, insubordination, accessory to a crime, and perjury. Stakes are high, as only three possible outcomes loom: confession, death, or escape. Like it or not, a dependent human has become entrusted to the Polish expatriate by a quirk of situation. Konrad must either succeed privately or publicly fail in her liberation. No other man aboard can share his privilege or burden.

Several oddities prevent this lavish production from being a total triumph. One is over-reliance on bare skin. Even assuming everyone depicted to be broiling under a tropical sun, there's insufficient rationale for constant scanty attire.

Secondly, no compelling reason is advanced for intrusion of Cuban cigars and music. Perhaps the director is a fan of Caribbean rhythms. That does not give justification for shoehorning it into an otherwise lushly expressive score.

Third, computer graphics utilized in a climactic imminent shipwreck scene are too murky to sustain credibility. Obvious overkill causes the plot to momentarily derail, leaving viewers in the lurch, wondering precisely what is supposed to be happening. Does Konrad dream the unanticipated midchannel rock? Has Li betrayed him? Is the director merely ratcheting up suspense again by creating an unnecessary obstacle? Or is he trying too hard to superimpose an image essential to Conrad's text but superfluous to this modern variation?

Fourth, actor Jack Laskey is less than persuasive as inexperienced captain. He alternates between lust, responsibility, greed, and selfishness. Konrad's final nobility blossoms only through embarrassment triggered by Li's awareness of his contemplated treachery. It seems imposed from outside, not the consequence of mature internal deliberation.

Fifth, lighting is not always appropriately intense. At several key dramatic moments, it becomes difficult for viewers to see just what is present and what is not. Since the director is also toying with a notion his entire tale is but a dream in Konrad's head, murkiness could seem appropriate. But that would cheat an audience which, as tense climax approaches, are emotionally invested in a realistic seafaring drama, one unfolding in the traditions of *MOBY DICK* and *THE SEA WOLF*.

There are rewards, though, which must also be enumerated.

Cinematography by Michal Tywoniuk repeatedly lends epic grandeur and scope, capitalizing on exotic locales with stately measured pans. Guy Farley's poignant, expressive score is a major asset. Except when diverted into Caribbean settings. The soundtrack, available from Caldara Records at <http://www1screenarchives.com>, is likely to become a collector's item. Every lap of sea wave and creak of moving door is captured in full sonic splendor by sound recordist Anop Jaikaew, skillfully reinforced by discernment of supervising sound editors Kacper Habisiak and Marcin Kasinski.

Worthy of special citation are Guo Zhongyou's affable cook and Zhu Zhu's alluring fugitive torn between desire for friendship and necessary flight. Bao Yin

Ni Mu Hu portrays decisively a truculent, hotheaded Yang Shu. Si Qin Chao Ke Tu's dutiful, coolly effective engineer is also a standout.

Peter Fudakowski's screenplay sometimes trades in too much of author Conrad's precisely detailed labyrinths of prose for injections of contemporary humor. Male bonding between cook and sous-cook is hardly true to the basic story. It glaringly subverts true Conrad adaptation, political correctness notwithstanding. That does not, though, diminish overall accomplishment in representing dramatically a young man's crisis of conscience.

Shooting locations were chosen wisely, for the most part, with only a concluding scene being extraneous. Interior scoping of a Chinese factory suggests a very different kind of story than this one, with powerless anonymity pitted against hammerheaded bureaucracy. Political dictatorship is not an issue of SECRET SHARER, It's best left to other motion pictures scripted and directed by natives of the area.

Due to several obscene comments and gestures, disproportionate nudity, and very mature themes, SECRET SHARER must be judged praiseworthy entertainment solely for adult audiences. It is scheduled to begin nationwide commercial release in June, 2015 throughout the United Kingdom.