

## The 21st ifva Asian New Force Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members: Bede Cheng (Cheng), Lav Diaz (Diaz) and Lim Kah-wai (Lim)

ifva representative: Kattie Fan (Fan), Diana Cheung (Cheung)

Fan: The mission of this meeting is to select award winners for the Asian New Force category, one Gold Award, one Silver Award and one Special Mention. You can go through the ten works one by one to warm up, or if you already have some works you want to nominate, maybe we can select three each and focus on those films.

Lim: My top films are *The Translator*, *Unfortunately* and *Playgrounds*. These are my three choices. But if I can select another two, I would recommend *Turtle* and *Running*.

Diaz: My top three are *Playgrounds*, *Under the Sun* and *Unfortunately*.

Cheng: I'll pick *Translator*, *Playgrounds* and *Unfortunately*.

Fan: All of you have chosen *Unfortunately* and *Playgrounds*. Two votes for *The Translator* and *Under the Sun*. Maybe we can talk about *Unfortunately* and *Playgrounds* first?

Lim: For me, *The Translator* is quite similar to *Playgrounds*, because through these films we can know about situations that we were not familiar with before, through cinematic language. Both explore the marginal people like refugee, poor labor in our world nowadays. Their point of view is not in stereotype and even open our eyes. Technically I think *The Translator* is better than *Playgrounds*, especially in the cinema. When I saw *Playgrounds* in the cinema, there is some problem with the sound, especially the last part. Probably it's a projection problem, not from the film itself. *Unfortunately* is very interesting, because it just uses two long shots to explain the situation of the two people. At the beginning we don't know what is happening, and it is very suspenseful, and suddenly we know the answer. It's quite out of my expectation. From their conversation we may guess something might have happened, but we don't know what, and when the ending happens we feel very shocked. The structure and style of this film is very suitable for a short film, but *The Translator* or *Playgrounds* could be extended to a feature film. If I was a filmmaker I would extend *Playgrounds* and *The Translator* to a longer version and explore more. It depends on what kind of short films we think about.

Diaz: I really like *Playgrounds*, it talks about how we develop mistrust, it says a lot about what's going on in the world now as human beings. The message is very strong for me, and the technical issue is immaterial. The characters are strong and fully developed, they interact well. The discourse on morality is very strong for me. I am also interested in *Unfortunately*. The form and how he develops the horror towards the end is very strong, it's a film that I want to watch again.

- Lim: To hear the dialogue again.
- Diaz: I also like the form, how the filmmaker detaches himself from the characters and watching the whole canvas, and it works well.
- Cheng: Watching *The Translator* on the big screen with a real audience feels different. I look for the quality of universality, whether this story can take place in another culture or another country. I first time I watched *The Translator*, I thought it was so-so, but I wasn't that impressed. Now there are dozens of films about Syrian immigrants, so my initial reaction was it's another one of those films. It's about this kid who has a crush on this bigger girl and the only way he can feel he has the power over her is over the issue of language. No matter what situation or social status you're in, you're using whatever power you have to exert your control over people. This happens everywhere, and is very common in China. This makes the story interesting, it's not just about the Syrian migrant worker and how poorly they are. It is using this set-up to tell a story about how even a little kid with minimum power tries to achieve control over others. I liked *Unfortunately* the first time I watched it, but the second time was just so-so. Maybe because I've watched it once before, I thought the dialogue feels too long. Of course the dialogue is very well-written. It doesn't have to happen in Iranian society, it can happen in Hong Kong today--a man not feeling confident in his marriage and his jealousy rises and ends up a tragedy. The director is very confident, having the camera just sitting there for 15 minutes, and then films the other character. As Ka Wai said, the director uses the medium of short film very well, which simply tells an instant in the lives of some people. With *Playgrounds*, the characters are well developed, and the driver is not just a hero, but someone who wants to do the right thing. In the end, he doesn't get the reward he's looking for, which happens in reality. This group of Tamil workers who lost their kid, but has him returned. I don't see why they should feel grateful for what the driver has done for them. People who are under-privileged are not necessarily grateful or nice, so the film breaks the stereotype. Bangalore is an up and coming city, but their buildings are built by people who are poor. This is a story that can happen anywhere, not just in developing countries.
- Diaz: There are cases like this where kids are kidnapped, and when they are brought back, money is demanded. So it's about mistrust.
- Cheng: It's not just the rich exploiting the poor, but the poor is also exploiting the poor.
- Diaz: Poverty brings out the dark side of human beings.
- Lim: I have a problem with *Playgrounds*. The last scene focuses on the guy who brings back the kid. We need one more cut to show the family. From the beginning we see the driver, and then we see the kid's family. We can imagine their relationship and background, but we need to know more about the family.

- Diaz: The discourse is more on the dark side of humanity and mistrust. It's a choice the filmmaker makes not to show too much of the family. It's about the lost kid and how these two parties engage with this.
- Lim: The scene where the two guys see each other, their expression is very strong. The editing is very strong to show the power in that scene. I think in the last part, we still need one more cut.
- Diaz: As filmmakers, we have many choices, and this was his choice. He chooses to focus on this guy's paradoxical look in reaction to the money.
- Lim: I can understand.
- Cheng: The whole film is shot at night, it's quite a challenge. Comparatively, *Unfortunately* just has the camera sitting there for a long time.
- Lim: About *Under the Sun*, I want to say something about the form and style. There has been quite a lot of this style of film in China, to show this kind of disturbed situation.
- Diaz: It's a horror film, it's horrifying. Your senses are working to understand what's happening.
- Lim: I like the first and second shots, at the station and with the family. After that I got a little bit bored.
- Cheng: We've seen a lot of films like this from China, like in the Hou Hsiao-hsien style.
- Lim: Also the sound, it's very pretentious to show the economics of China from the news. But the camera work, the track shots are very good.
- Fan: Aside from these for films, do you have any other nominations?
- Diaz: All of the ten films are very good. *The Translator* is very good, had they put more emphasis on the power of the kid and language instead of a love story, it'd be stronger.
- Cheng: The message about the power of *The Translator* doesn't come out till the end.
- Diaz: It's a well done film. The discourse is good, and the visual power is strong.
- Cheng: My film is restoring some Bruce Lee films, one of which, *Fists of Fury*, is about Japan occupying China. The main villain is a Japanese collaborator, who says "You can't call me a translator." When watching *The Translator* I immediately thought of this character in a Bruce Lee film. There are many stereotypes of refugees, but these are using I-Phones.
- Fan: Are you ready to nominate the Gold Award winner?

Diaz: All ten films can get awards. They're good.

Lim: For me, *Unfortunately*, *The Translator* and *Playgrounds* are all very good. It depends on what you think is the purpose of short films and the meaning of these prizes. As film language, they are all well done. If the award is about exploring the ways about short films, then I would push for *Unfortunately*. As the level of completion, including technically and performance, I think *The Translator* is more complete than *Playgrounds*. In the first shot of *The Translator*, it shows the border and the truck, then the place they work in, and then you see the girl. The editing is very smooth. And when the two characters meet at the fun fare, it's very suspenseful because you don't know what she wants.

Diaz: I feel it should push the subject matter more, not just about refugees, and explore more issues.

Lim: It could be extended to a feature. It has a lot of characters and potential to become a feature.

Cheng: I'm split between *Playgrounds* and *The Translator*, the latter film looks better technically. *Playgrounds* looks a bit rough. But if you need to shoot a film at night all over the city, there are a lot of constraints for the filmmakers.

Diaz: That's the politics and humanity of the film, its roughness and rawness. It's not a clean film, but it's powerful.

Cheng: With *Playgrounds*, the title is ironic. I lean towards the *Playgrounds*.

Diaz: Me too.

Lim: I agree with what you said about *Playgrounds*. It's a very good film.

Diaz: It's a powerful film, with its vision of humanity and the state of the world now, the mistrust. It's all there.

Fan: Do we all agree that *Playgrounds* gets Gold?

Lim: I agree.

Fan: And Silver?

Lim: *Unfortunately*.

Diaz: Why not *The Translator*?

Lim: Maybe Special Mention? For me *The Translator* is similar to *Playgrounds*, and *Unfortunately* is quite different from the two.

Cheng: Out of the 70 works, there is nothing else like *Unfortunately*.

Diaz: It's also a horror film. The discourse is great, and the device with which he did it. It's very clever and amazing.

Cheng: It's about how a relationship can take a bad turn and go tragic.

Lim: The editing point is quite good, and just at the right time.

Diaz: It's well written and acted. The actors are great.

Fan: We have Gold and Silver Awards. Special Mention will be *The Translator*?

Diaz: Yes.

#### Asian New Force Category

##### **Gold Award**

##### *Playgrounds*

Shamik Sen Gupta, Pallavi MD (India)

##### **Silver Award**

##### *Unfortunately*

Sharokh Dolkou (Iran)

##### **Special Mention**

##### *The Translator*

Emre Kayis (Turkey)