

## 23rd ifva Open Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members : Fruit Chan ( Chan ) , Chan Hing Kai (Kai), Winnie Tsang (Tsang),  
Adrian Chow (Chow), Mary Wong (Wong)

Organizer representative : Kattie Fan (Fan)

Fan: First of all, thank you for being our jurors this year. You have just seen the 10 finalist works and other works from the first round, from which we selected the 10 works. In this round, our goal is to select a Gold Award winner, who will receive \$50,000 in cash, a Silver Award with \$30,000 cash prize and a Special Mention, with no money and a certificate. So, we have a total of two grand prizes and a Special Mention. We have just seen the 10 finalist works, and we hope to discuss them one by one. After that we will nominate award winners and then decide which work gets what.

Chan: Let's discuss the works in order.

Fan: The first work you saw was *Life on the Line*.

Chow: I want to hear some fresh viewpoints.

Tsang: You had discussed this film in the first round.

Chow: Yes.

Tsang: Personally, I feel that its technique is mature and the work is complete. The acting and other aspects are mature.

Chan: Sometimes being too mature can be a flaw. I don't quite know how to talk about this work.

Tsang: Too commercial?

Chan: That's right. It's too conventional. This kind of editing style can be found in five out of ten films in here. I feel that young people should not be so precocious.

Tsang: Perhaps the creator of this film had worked in the industry for some time.

Chan: That may be so. The work is complete, but also too complete. One can say that this is a problem with Hong Kongers in general. Perhaps because we have been influenced negatively by commercial films all these years, we think this is the way things have to be. Even though I have not watched short films for many years, it is still easy for me to spot outstanding works. This film, which is complete and without major flaws, seems commonplace to me.

Chow: My views are a combination of both of yours. I feel that the technique of this film is mature and the editing is professional, or one can say that the storytelling, acting and atmosphere are good. On the whole, it is full of commercial calculation. In particular, the filmmaker pays a lot of attention to music, and whenever the film reaches an emotional moment,

there would be music. The part in the end when the mother receives a phone call is especially gratuitous and melodramatic. I want to add that among the first-round works, many use this method of storytelling, execution and editing, and we chose this one because it is better than the others.

Wong: During the first round, we discussed this film at great length. I feel that many aspects of this film are commercial. But to be fair, the story has some merits. Because it deals with psychology, the telephone call scene conveys the female protagonist's psychological changes, which I think is well-done.

Tsang: The actors are able to deliver.

Wong: It's not just about whether this film is commercial. I agree with what Fruit Chan said, that the work is too mature, which can be a flaw. It is not outstanding, but is well-done, and the director explored the psychological aspect of the story well. For me, this film does not stand out among the 10 finalists because it is too formulaic. I remember Chan Hing Kai liking it in the first round.

Chow: I also gave it high marks, compared to others. Many works employ a realistic style, while others are effective but somewhat long-winded, or their stories are not attractive enough. This film is more well-rounded.

Chan: Technically, the film has some unnecessary flourishes, like the scene at the beginning when the girl is on the phone, the camera pans left and right, which shows a lack of confidence. This kind of technique is seen in many commercial films, and it's tiresome when there is too much of it. In the beginning, the character talks on the phone in the room and then the women come, and the camera moves back and forth. Sometimes, we make the same mistakes because we are afraid the audience will be bored. On the whole, many Hong Kong films are like that, which is technically competent yet lacking in confidence. If the director were more confident, she could have done away with the part with the boy on the phone, him going back and the medics going in, which would raise the artistic standard of the whole film. Now the film shows you everything. I don't know who the producer is, and if he helped spot these extraneous elements, which the film could have one without.

Tsang: Perhaps the director is also the producer?

Chan: No, there is a producer.

Wong: There are many people on this film. I don't know who the producer is, but there are many people involved with the film.

Chan: If you look closely, many elements are extraneous and the film is flawed in this regard. It is commercial in the sense that the story is catchy, the person on the phone just happens to encounter this case. The story is strong, and if the director was more assured, I would have liked the film more. Now there is too much technique dragging the film down, which is a pity.

Tsang: There is a part where he says he could kill himself, which is wrong.

Chan: From a human hatred angle it is acceptable.

Tsang: She could have used another way, like with facial expressions.

Chan: The director is scared that people will not get it with just facial expressions. I understand that, because some audiences won't get it.

Tsang: But that's wrong.

Chan: If she explains things at the end, then it's okay. Her technique seems acceptable but is actually majorly flawed. If only someone were there to pick up the pieces for her. I have seen this film many times, like at film festivals and at Fresh Wave.

Tsang: I should declare that I am one of the directors of Fresh Wave, so I knew about this film.

Wong: It's fine as long as you weren't involved in making this film.

Tsang: I didn't know this film could be eligible for this competition, so I did not consider my position.

Kai: I don't have anything to add regarding *Life on the Line*. This is a high-quality film in all aspects. Even though I could guess the ending from the start, I still enjoyed the film.

Fan: We will go through the works one by one. The next one is *Helen+Geller*.

Tsang: The director wants to convey certain messages through this work, but it is not very outstanding.

Chan: It's meaning is unclear. I don't quite understand it.

Chow: My view is that the director tries to be stylized, like the use of extreme close-ups and weird angles as well as the editing style and use of color. The sound design is interesting, with the deliberate altering of people's voices so they don't sound human. However, the sound balance is uneven. This treatment can be seen as a metaphor, and it's saying that mainstream discourse has become so absurd that it is no longer human. It has become very difficult to communicate with others; there is now a generational conflict in which people no longer understand one another. This is a good attempt, although the execution can be more economical, such as with the sound effects. The jump cuts are overused and they seem repetitive.

Wong: I find this film distinctive. Just as with *Life on the Line*, the director wants to convey certain messages and tries to do so in a more experimental way. On one hand, it deals with the issue of hearing impaired people in Hong Kong and does so without the cliched social concern angle. I quite like the way the film deals with sound from the perspective of the hearing impaired. In addition to sound, there is also touch, such as touching the tree and the throat. In contrast with *Life on the Line*, which stresses plot development, this film is about feelings, and the sound is also expressed through feelings, which makes this film special. As Director Chan said, the director of this film could have done better. Now the film is rather vague, and he could

have added more concrete elements so that the audience can understand more. Now it's too vague.

Kai: I feel that the director chose to make a 13-minute film because he does not want to tell a complete story, because otherwise he could have made a longer film without much difficulty. So, he definitely wants to make a less concrete film about feelings. Technically, aspects such as the sound volume is not done well, but I like the film because I was really scared. It is able to inspire fear in me and convey feelings with such simple methods.

Chan: If the director was bolder, he could have done away with the sections about sound, which would have made it better. The filmmakers of some of the more conventional entries make a great deal of effort, but they are more conservative in their approaches. The one about going to Mars also has the same issue.

Tsang: It has a distinctive theme.

Chan: Yes, but it is too nagging, and the way he deals with family love is annoying. He does not go far enough with the main theme. Why does he want to tell a story? I don't understand.

Kai: Some people are like that.

Chan: It's okay to tell stories, but you only need to go so far to convey a story. All the entrants are too nagging.

Fan: Let's go straight to *Horizon*.

Tsang: *Horizon* seems to have a theme, which it tries to convince the audience. It is a bit repetitive, which makes it hard to get into the story. It seems like the story is told by the same person.

Chan: It's okay if one treats it as a cult film, but it's not quite there. It touches on some concrete topics such as familial relationships and love between father and son. What does it try to say? It should just concentrate on the sci-fi part.

Tsang: I am not sure whether it is just part of the imagination. It just brings out the theory that the Earth is flat.

Chan: That's right, it seems that those elements are there, but the story does not focus on them. It tries to be an all-encompassing film with a bit of everything. The filmmakers are afraid that without familial relationship the film is not well supported, and it's the same with other elements, and as a result, it misses out on a lot. The theory that the Earth is flat is interesting, and you should try to prove it, yet the film doesn't do that. If the characters were more off the wall, they'd be more convincing, but now, it just seems like a normal father-son relationship, which does not sit well with the other weird stuff. Perhaps those are just the director's ideas, but in terms of execution, the overall effect is not very good.

Chow: I was discussing this film with Mary just now, and I feel that the film is strangely positioned. Does it want to be realistic or convey metaphors that audiences can understand?

Now the film is in-between. The style, execution and color are similar to TV dramas instead of film. All these elements, together with the score, convey a realistic and somewhat old-fashioned impression. The main theme seems to change a lot. At first it is about chasing dreams, but then it becomes something else. Often, when films like these talk about chasing dreams, they tend toward romanticization, but when the old man appears, there is dialogue and exchange, revealing that everything is just a struggle or conflict between truth and interests. I wonder if chasing dreams or going to space is a metaphor that gives the audience room for imagination. However, I feel that this is not too obvious. Even though I picked this film for the finalist round, it is not my favorite. The filmmaker spent a lot of money building the set, and the space travel part feels like *Interstellar*, the atmosphere is greatly influenced by that film. It spends a great deal of money on the set, but I wonder if the focus of the production is wrong. This has to do with the filmmakers' intentions, if they want to have fun with making a film on this topic, then it's okay, but if their intentions were to inspire audiences to reflect on certain themes, then they placed the focus on the wrong things.

Wong: I feel that the filmmakers are proposing a metaphor, such as work, fear or interviews. They want to explore the theme of chasing dreams in Hong Kong. Going to space is to hold on to one's beliefs, which is the central theme of this work. The problem is that this metaphor makes the spaceship a symbol, but what does that man want to do the most? Of course, many people in Hong Kong cannot find their dreams, but it is unnecessary to use spaceship as a metaphor. What do the filmmakers want to express with the spaceship? I don't see what is so distinctive about this symbol, or why it is necessary to use spaceship as a symbol. The second problem is the characters. The three characters are not convincing, and in terms of storytelling, they are too vague. Watching this film immediately after *Monkey Business*, I feel that the characters in the latter are much more realistic. When the old man appears and says, "Why did you take my oranges?" it appears that the film is going in a realistic direction, but the whole thing does not turn out to be so. The son is good and the father is good, and the whole quest is perfect. I feel the characters are flat.

Kai: The filmmakers put a lot of effort into the production, even though it is immature and a bit conventional. However, we should be tolerant of such flaws. Is it the filmmakers' intention to make a realistic film that shows the Earth is flat? They want to explore the truth using an absurd story.

Tsang: But the father seems sick, like he has old men's disease.

Kai: The content is not mature, but I think their intention is to use a realistic style of storytelling.

Chan: That's not a problem. Sometimes realism and dreams or fantasy can be intermixed. Romantic realism is quite popular these days. I feel that the subject matter is right, but the execution is faulty.

Kai: Using an *Under the Lion Rock* style to tell a fantasy story is interesting, but this film is not entertaining.

Chan: That is hard to do.

Kai: So, the result is not bad. At least they are willing to spend the money.

Wong: That's why it is a finalist.

Kai: They deserve encouragement.

Fan: If you have nothing further to add, then let's move on to *Call Me Mrs Chan*.

Tsang: This is a short documentary. It is well-made and quite moving. The voiceover is not her own?

Wong: There is a voiceover, but I'm not clear on the meaning.

Tsang: Is it in Fukien dialogue? The filmmaker got another person to do the voiceover.

Chan: Perhaps the subject can't be recorded, or does not know how to express herself.

Tsang: As a documentary, does that not take away from the realism?

Chan: It's not a very good film, but it is complete and normal.

Tsang: The filmmaker provides no background.

Chan: No, the subject matter is interesting, and so is the character. In Hong Kong, characters like this one who engage in such dirty work are the underdogs of society, et they contribute to the prosperity of Hong Kong. This subject matter is good, and could be done well. However, the film does not go deep enough. Perhaps this is the director's intention, ad she just wants to depict a day in the life of this person. The subject's relationship with her husband is only lightly touched upon. The director does not let us see a lot. Of course, the character protests that her work is dirty and not worth filming, but if the approach was more mature it would be a better film. The director brings out many issues in the interviews, but if she were able to guide the topic better, the film would benefit.

Tsang: The voice is not hers?

Chan: The voiceover is not hers?

Tsang: No.

Chan: But you are not fooled. She should not have stated the person's name on the title card.

Tsang: But if she didn't, then that shows disrespect for the voiceover person.

Chan: The film could be better.

Kai: The information on the subject is good, because she lets the director film her however she wants. However, the interviews are not so deep. The director could have dug deeper.

Chan: It's a choice whether to just focus on a day in her life or to go deeper. Within this city, Hong Kongers can look out into the city and know how many people clear garbage for a living. If the film can talk about this group of people, its scope can be expanded.

Tsang: With 40 units on each floor, and there are so many floors, it's a tough job.

Chan: It's not easy.

Tsang: She does not wear a mask...

Chan: They usually don't when they work.

Tsang: Wouldn't there be lots of germs?

Kai: I am doing research on a similar topic. They really are like that.

Chan: They don't mind.

Wong: They would wash their clothes there, but that's a dirty place.

Chan: As long as their clothes are clean, they are okay. They don't usually mind.

Wong: I agree with what you say. But I feel that the director gives audiences room to think within the ten or so minutes. A few days after the first-round jury meeting, there was an item in the news that immediately reminded me of this film. It's a news story about someone falling down there and dying without other people noticing.

Tsang: Is that shot added in later? Or had someone fallen down there before?

Chow: The film mentions that something like that had happened before.

Tsang: I'm not sure if the shot was added in later or was it there before.

Chow: That news story came out after the film was completed.

Wong: If the shot was added after the news story, then I think the director is attempting to link the film with what's happening in society. Of course, her vision could be wider still, but she tried her best. However, I don't know if the voiceover is the director herself.

Tsang: No. She merely let the voiceover read out her research.

Wong: The information conveyed is real, and it is told by the subject herself without interfering with the images. The film does not make the subject's life look sad, the director does not resort to such techniques to depict lower class people. Instead she films them singing, and shows the subject's life in a matter-of-fact way.

Tsang: Yet the effect is all the sadder.

Wong: The spaces she depicts, and the dialogue with the husband is well-presented within the ten minutes.

Chow: This is my favorite film. One of the reasons I like it is that the director does not try to preach any big messages, but simply shows the subject's daily life and follows her around for one day so that audiences can get an impression of her life. I feel that the film is effective, and through the subject's actions and words, we understand her life. I like the fact that the director uses many subjective point of view shots, which helps the audience identify with the subject and feel her hardships. The subject does not speak about anything deep, but she mentions two things that we may not know before, and city-dwellers like us may have neglected. The first is not to kick garbage into the trough because people had previously fallen in. The second is that they don't drink a lot of water before work because there are no toilets. This is common knowledge in their line of work.

Tsang: The subject does not deliberately bring these topics up, but we understand how pitiful their lives are.

Chow: There are 40 units on each floor, and 17 floors in a building.

Tsang: The dialogue is very good.

Wong: Small details like not having wheels are well-done.

Kai: I may be biased because I happen to be researching this topic, so I know quite a bit. I feel the film only scratches the surface.

Tsang: Perhaps it's a matter of the film's length.

Chan: She could have made the film five minutes longer.

Chow: One of the reasons why I included this film in the final round is because I think that most of the works in the Open Category are of average standard. As a jury member, my job is not just to determine which works have higher technical standards, but to act as a kind of curator, so I think about how to curate a program for this competition or festival. First of all, there are not that many documentaries among the entries, and secondly, this film reveals the lives of the underclass eking out a living in prosperous city such as Hong Kong, which I think is worth presenting in this independent film competition or festival. That's why I think the film deserves a place among the finalists.

Wong: In the first round, all three jurors agree about this work. I agree with Chow. In terms of technique, this film is inferior to *Even Ants Strive For Survival*. However, the message and meaning behind the latter film is not new to us, whereas through this film, I understand the process behind garbage disposal in public housing estates. For someone who had not done any research in this area, this aspect of society is new to me. The film does not need to explore deep issues, but succeeds in inspiring you to think more deeply.

Fan: You have anything else to add? If not, we move on to *Liu Yang He*.



Tsang: The script of *Liu Yang He* is very complete. The two characters are conveyed in a simple manner, revealing the relationship between Hong Kong and China. I am not sure why the director chooses Cantonese opera and Liu Yang He?

Chan: Is the Cantonese opera place Lau Yuk Chui's home? I thought it's just somewhere on Temple Street.

Tsang: That's her, but the shot does not show her face.

Chan: It's a conventional film.

Tsang: Quite mainstream.

Chan: It's not really mainstream, but it's conventional. It does not have major flaws, but it's not particularly good. But it's smooth and reveals another sort of Hong Kong-China relations.

Tsang: The film touches on a few subject matters.

Kai: The production is meticulous, and many of the scenes are well-designed.

Chan: Yes, the director puts his heart into it, and achieves high artistic standards.

Wong: I wrote the juror's comments on this film, so let me say a few words. The female protagonist is well written, and its depiction of Hong Kong-China relationship is not purely adversarial. In this relationship between the two characters, they don't really understand one another, and they part in the end. The prostitute does not get married like in most cliched stories, but she returns to her hometown. I see distance as the main theme—distance between China and Hong Kong, between prostitute and customer, and between men and women. The strength of the film is that it does not dramatize the situation as compared with other films, and the director is good at depicting small details. The script leaves room to the imagination, and I thought about this script the next morning after seeing the film. It is a complete film; however, it lacks the use of film language.

Chan: The director does not need to play with film language. He treats the subject well and is an assured director and delves deep into the couple's relationship. The woman fulfils her mission after spending so many years in Hong Kong, giving up her youth in the process. If the director were smart enough to show the character giving up instead of saying it overtly, it'd be better and would be a stronger statement about Hong Kong-China relationship. Now the film is just about their relationship. As a short film, this work has merits. It is well-made and does not have major or minor flaws.

Tsang: Perhaps when she sings Liu Yang He, it shows she wants to return home.

Chan: She has to go back because she can no longer earn a living in Hong Kong. This is not a sad character, she is happy-go-lucky. If the screenwriter wrote the character in a more matter-of-fact way, it would be more acceptable. If I were the creator, I would have dug deeper.

Wong: His treatment of small details is good.

Tsang: Like the bowl.

Wong: Yes, the scene with the bowl is good.

Chan: He is a good director, and aspects of the film are meticulous.

Tsang: And the point with holding a cigarette with a hair clip.

Wong: And charging extra for massage.

Kai: I think the director is overly objective.

Tsang: He has to make you feel that the characters have known each other for a long time.

Kai: The whole film is overly objective.

Chan: That's right, he is objective.

Kai: And meticulous.

Chan: The director does not dig deep enough. About digging deep, if it was too deep, a film would not be good, but now this film does not dig deep enough. The two characters that reflect Hong Kong-China relationship can be explored further, and there is a lot of leeway in terms of how the film can be executed. This film is enjoyable; there are no major or minor flaws.

Kai: In the last round, I mentioned that we expect more from Lau's performance. But perhaps this is the director's deliberate choice.

Chan: He must have done his research. If it was a different cast, would the film be better?

Wong: The female part is no easy to play. It'd be difficult if it was not played by a professional actor.

Chan: I disagree.

Kai: It would take far longer to film.

Tsang: The man is also a known actor.

Kai: His performance is more consistent.

Chow: This is a well-rounded film, and I don't have much to say. Most aspects of the film are well-done. The script leaves some things unexplained. The male protagonist had previously worked in finance, but somehow, he got into an accident and lost his arm?

Tsang: He got rich from working in finance, but he got into an accident on a race car and had his leg amputated.

Chow: He could have continued working in finance.

Wong: It's a kind of trauma.

Chow: It's strange that he then becomes a social worker.

Wong: Yes, that is strange.

Chow: That does not matter much.

Tsang: Careers in finance are often short-lived.

Wong: Maybe it is a metaphor about being quick on his feet, and that the character cannot compete with others.

Chan: In finance, you work until 35 years old. If you can't rise to the top before age 40, then it's difficult to go on.

Tsang: Perhaps he had fallen behind after taking along break. This is not a major concern for me.

Wong: But it is strange that he switches to become a social worker.

Tsang: Perhaps he has become resigned.

Wong: But social work is not something that you just go and do.

Kai: This part is too deliberate. Honestly, the character is more like a social worker than a former finance worker.

Wong: He does not seem like he worked in finance.

Tsang: Perhaps the director is being ironic by setting up a contrast between a social worker and a prostitute.

Chan: Not necessarily.

Chow: Not necessarily. Social workers have sexual needs too.

Fan: The next work is *Even Ants Strive For Survival*.

Tsang: This is an innovative work. It talks about the future, which is a good subject matter.

Chan: It talks about another type of Hong Kong-China relations.

Tsang: Many people talk about this kind of topic, and they all have a futuristic feel.

Chan: Among the 10 works, the visuals of this one is the best. The editing and other elements are mature and well-executed. The director does not try too hard. The content fits well with the current situation of Hong Kong, and so this film is visually powerful.

Kai: I quite enjoyed this film.

Chan: The style of this film is like the art films of the 1960s, which used to be popular, but in recent years has become increasingly rare. I was impressed when I saw this film, especially because this style of art film has been abandoned. You can ask people from that generation, like Shek Kei. The art films from that era are all non-sensical but are supported by a strong basis in social issues. I think the visuals of this film makes it stand out from the rest.

Wong: The film won a cinematography award in another competition. It contains a great deal of literary references, the more obvious ones being *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*. These two references are put into the Hong Kong context, and mixed in with references from the Japanese film series *Tetsuo*, which makes this film enjoyable. Even though I like this film, its message is common knowledge; it does not deepen our knowledge nor are there outstanding viewpoints. The visuals are very sharp and pleasing, and I give the film high marks for that.

Kai: He only raises problems and accusations.

Wong: And this kind of accusation is well known to us prior to watching this film.

Chan: When so many works that are complete talks about family love and other issues, a work that does not have much dialogue stands out, while the ones about memory and relationship with mothers become annoying. I have to state this on the outset. But if you did not pay attention to that, then it didn't matter.

Wong: How you look at the film plays a role as well.

Chow: Absolutely. I like all films that deal with such subject matters. Even if these are issues that the audience is familiar with, you still try to bring them out to them in different ways; such efforts will not be in vain. That is why I appreciate this film. My only criticism, which was mentioned in the last round, is that the interrogation scene is too long, especially because it deals with a situation that we are all familiar with. However, I asked myself afterwards if this was deliberate, and if the director made the scene long and repetitive so that the audience can feel a sense of oppression. This is possible. I also appreciate its experimental nature.

Chan: After watching the 10 finalist works, I appreciate the importance of being creative. No matter how complete the film, it has to give audiences a sense of excitement. Of course, I cannot approach this issue from the perspective of someone who had been doing this for many years, because this director is doing it for the first time, so of course he tries to play it safe. That's why I think that as a creator, being creative and innovative should be the most important concern. What is innovative about this work? Every film festival has themes that it wants to draw out, and that's why I stress innovation.

Wong: I agree, and innovation can be seen in different ways. This film is innovative in form. Innovation, like you say, can be applied to mainstream films, but it can also be applied to

content. Some issues will never be explored in mainstream cinema, but independent films can deal with them. So, that can be a type of innovation.

Chan: Independent films need this kind of innovation all the more. Independent means free from interference, and it's best if people attempt things that nobody else had dealt with. However, that's not an easy path.

Fan: *Monkey Business*.

Tsang: I don't know if the director is being self-indulgent, so this feels a bit long.

Chow: I like this film a lot. The filmmaker is able to convey a real sense of decadence, and that kind of decadence is not something I understand because we are from different eras. For example, the girl does not know the slang for "break-in", or what Quaalude is. I discover that this generation of young people do not know the slang terms of my generation. I don't understand them, and they don't understand me. Precisely because the filmmaker uses this method that we don't understand to convey things that young people may not understand, the effect is interesting. Some parts are crazy, like finding sanitary pads means a woman had been there. Of course, the filmmaking technique is amateurish and is not a polished, flawless production. But this rawness matches well with the feeling that the film tries to convey.

Kai: Among all the works, this one really reflects what young people think, and it does so in an honest way. Even though youth points of view are presented in other films, they are more crafted and lacks the honesty of this film. Young people nowadays are like that. This method of filming makes me think that we should not have deliberate framing; this film feels like a short film that you see on the internet, which I like. The first time I saw this film, it was on a computer screen. Watching it again on the big screen is even more stunning. It is absurd and interesting. I like it.

Wong: I think the section in the middle about the exchange is repetitive, but upon second viewing, I appreciated it more. Also, the film's setting is interesting. It reflects the lives of young people, and we can see many settings unique to Hong Kong, like back alleys, broken apartments and rooftops, and many scenes showing the run-down areas of Shum Shui Po is nice to watch. The three characters are halfway between being able and unable to act. The young man comes from a wealthy family and so he lives a carefree life, and when his parents give him money, he ignores them. He tries to act cool, and in the end gets cheated by the girl while the people around him egg him on. I think the story is complete in depicting a run-down world of back alleys and showing the relationship between people of different generations. Watching it again, I appreciate elements in it that I don't often see in independent films.

Kai: No filmmaker or creator would write or make films this way.

Chan: We could not have made this. Even the acting is bad.

Kai: But this type of absurdity is funny.

Chow: That's right.

Wong: None of the characters have proper jobs, and some are just freelance. The whole thing looks good when put together.

Kai: The filmmakers make no attempt to explain the characters' backgrounds, which is interesting.

Wong: But we can understand their backgrounds. Among the 10 finalists, this is the most unique.

Fan: Do you have anything to add? If not, we move on to *Sammy*.

Chan: This one is also about Hong Kong-China relations.

Tsang: There is nothing special about this, it is the same kind of film.

Chan: Very conventional.

Kai: Neat and tidy.

Chan: It's not bad.

Tsang: Realistic? Truth.

Chan: Films like this are hard to comment and difficult to highlight different elements. Everything including the directing is mature. The script contains all the elements it should have, but after watching this film, it's hard for me to say how I feel or give comments.

Chow: I appreciate his intentions and his willingness to discuss what is happening in China.

Chan: The director definitely has heart, making an independent film about controversial topics.

Chow: The film on the whole is average. Some elements are old fashioned, like the acting and script. Other techniques such as parallel editing is good and well-thought out. Even though I gave the film high marks, I cannot say it is very distinctive.

Chan: I would give it high marks too, but it is not my first or second place.

Wong: I also think the filmmaker has good intentions. It brings out an issue about whether one should continue to reveal the truth even when it is hurting someone? The film explores deeply a reporter's attitude. The ending, which shows him holding the pen and turning away, is not good. I find it pretentious. It wants the audience to consider whether he will go back and do it, which is pretentious. That is only a symbol, so it should not be too deliberate. On the whole the film has good intentions and wants to reveal a reporter's struggle within the context of Hong Kong-China conflict.

Chan: Perhaps he is a good student and understands plot structure. That's why the character takes the pen back.

Fan: The next work is *Piled Cloud*.

Chan: This one is also about Hong Kong-China relations.

Tsang: It is about drifting. Is the lead character the director himself?

Chan: The lead character is cool looking and is a much sought-after actor.

Tsang: The younger guy.

Chan: I don't know.

Tsang: Both have Mainland accents.

Chan: Is the younger one from Baptist University?

Wong: I think so.

Kai: Yes.

Tsang: This film is just average.

Chan: I can only say I appreciate the director's calm composure, as well as the strong sense of rhythm and straight-forward reactions. Young directors like this style of presentation, but this can be dangerous since it can become the mainstream. Lately I've seen too many films of this kind. I like this film. Fortunately, the director is not haphazard.

Chow: The first time I saw this film, I didn't like it because the pace was too slow.

Chan: This is an art film structure.

Chow: Slowly, I began to understand that the director is trying to tell a story with images rather than dialogue. I appreciate the fact that this film talks about Hong Kong-China relations in a deeper way. In many films, Hong Kong-China relations is depicted as adversarial, or a kind of exchange as in *Liu Yang He*, while this one is interesting. When a Hong Konger and Mainlander live together like that, some sort of relationship is formed that is different from the usual adversarial kind. This is closer to reality, which is more down-to-earth and not like the war of words one usually sees on the internet. This film depicts how Hong Kongers and Mainlanders live alongside one another in ways different from how we usually see them in society.

Wong: I like the film's imagery, such as the two characters with different identities passing by one another. Also, images of the tenement building and windows. The location is well-chosen. The small details are done well, like DVD and blue ray discs. Would you say the two characters understand one another? I think not. They are two drifters who pass by each other like ships in the night. They have conflicts, but it does not have anything to do with power struggles between Hong Kong and China, and the ending is not a happy one, simply showing that they pass by one another. I quite like the fact that the film uses images to convey emotions.

Chan: There are one or two parts that I like, which is the art direction and aesthetics. Perhaps the director did not change anything in the apartment except for added a few decorations, but the structure of the building is beautiful.

Wong: Perhaps they just took away some things.

Chan: I think that people living in this kind of place don't have much possessions. I don't know why, but they tend to have taste that is at odds with their positions in society. I often go on location scouting, so I know such people's identity and tastes. I think the art direction of this film is good, which helps it a lot. The two characters are nice to watch, even when they don't say anything. I find this work mild and tolerant. The theme of this year's finalist is Hong Kong-China relations.

Kai: You really believe that the characters live there, which is difficult to achieve. Often, it's hard to enter into the characters' lives.

Wong: You believe that the character of *Liu Yang He* really live there.

Chan: No, I think it is a combination of different spaces.

Kai: That film has deliberate art design, whereas this film is down-to-earth and believable.

Wong: The colors in the shots of the city and the sea match.

Chan: The art direction of this film is among the best out of all the films. It is even better than the other film that spent so much on building the set. We haven't mentioned art direction so far and had only been discussing plot. The director of this film is assured and not greedy, which is hard to do.

Fan: If you have nothing to add, let's move on to the last one, *Deep Flight*.

Tsang: Adrian, can you talk about the music in this film?

Wong: We had a heated discussion about this one in the last round.

Chow: This director also made another film, which did not make it into the finalist round, but I like the other one a lot more than this one.

Tsang: The other film also has no dialogue?

Chow: It has voiceover.

Wong: Both works are experimental.

Kai: He goes quite far in that the sound and image don't match.

Chow: The two are completely out of synch.



Wong: This film has the same style.

Kai: The images of that film is more repetitive whereas this one is stronger in terms of imagery.

Chow: In comparison I like that one better. There is no voiceover but has rich imagery, while it is more difficult to try to catch the subtitles.

Tsang: Also, the subtitles are long.

Chow: The theme has to do with nature and how we must protect it, and condemns humans for commercializing nature, etc. This is worthy of recommendation and encouragement, but I don't like the form.

Wong: I don't think this work is worthy of the main prize, but as an experimental film, its imagery and narration are interesting. His images are pure, but the text and voiceover are too long. I think what he wants to do is to mix images of nature with things related to cultural historical background, but what is the result? Since he contemplates nature and culture, he uses images and voiceover to achieve his goals.

Kai: His subtitles and images contrast with one another, but this film is milder.

Wong: This work is full of cultural and historical elements.

Kai: You need to chew on this film in order to understand its meaning.

Wong: On one hand, the film talks about nature, but at the same time, it contains important cultural and historical background as contrast. I think this is the effect the director is trying to achieve.

Chan: It is filled with subtitles, and if you miss a little bit, you don't know what's going on.

Tsang: That's right, because the subtitles and images are not linked.

Wong: They do not match.

Chow: I don't like this aspect.

Chan: It makes for difficult viewing.

Kai: At first, I skipped forward, and later on I went back to watch it.

Chow: Does the filmmaker want me to look at the subtitles or the images?

Fan: Having discussed all ten works, we now move to the most crucial part. First of all, do you have anything to add about any of the works? Which works do you want to nominate for prizes?

Chan: Let's shortlist a few.

Tsang: Do we give marks, or what?

Fan: Let me sum up what we have discussed. We now have 6 short-listed works: *Life on the Line*, *Call Me Mrs Chan*, *Liu Yang He*, *Even Ants Strive For Survival*, *Monkey Business* and *Piled Cloud*. These works were chosen by all of you, but that does not mean they got the highest marks: *Even Ants Strive For Survival*, *Monkey Business* and *Piled Cloud*. Do you want to nominate the Gold Award?

Chow: It's difficult.

Wong: We have to pick one?

Fan: That's right. Normally, we give out one Gold, one Silver and one Special Mention award.

Chow: Let me go first. I like *Call Me Mrs Chan* and *Even Ants Strive For Survival*. However, I don't think either deserve Gold since I think a film's technique and execution have to reach a certain standard to get Gold, but I like these two films precisely because they are rough around the edges. Films like *Life on the Line* has good technique, but I think in terms of subject matter and meaning, other films are more deserving.

Chan: As a filmmaker, I have to take into account both creative and technical aspects as well as the completeness of the work, no matter the length. That is why for me, first place is *Even Ants Strive For Survival* and second place is *Piled Cloud*, while Special Mention is *Monkey Business*. *Call Me Mrs Chan* is not bad, but having made documentaries myself, I think it lacks something. If the work is five minutes longer and reedited, or if the packaging is improved, the work will be better. It's a shame because the subject matter is good. *Piled Cloud* is an assured work in terms of aesthetics and its depiction of Hong Kong-China relations. It does not have much dialogue and does not waste words. The visuals of *Even Ants Strive For Survival* are very good and its depiction of Hong Kong-China relations is the most ambiguous among all the works, yet the message comes across in an ironic way. Its imagery is the most outstanding among independent films in recent years. *Monkey Business* is about the young people of this generation. It is more unrefined and is also about how society is affected by Hong Kong-China relations. Most young people today cannot see any future. The themes behind these works are very clear.

Kai: These three are also my picks. I think *Even Ants Strive For Survival* is the best in terms of its technique and storytelling. My second place is *Monkey Business* because it offers a contrast. Even though it is rough around the edges, it reflects contemporary youth. *Piled Cloud* is my choice for Special Mention. Between *Piled Cloud* and *Monkey Business*, the former is less dramatic and expresses its theme less strongly.

Tsang: I also choose *Even Ants Strive For Survival*, while *Call Me Mrs Chan* is Special Mention. For second place, I am torn between *Monkey Business* and *Liu Yang He*. The two are different, but technically, *Liu Yang He* is much better. *Monkey Business* captures contemporary youth, which makes it distinctive. I don't want all the films to be about Hong

Kong-China relations, so I'd rather choose a film like *Call Me Mrs Chan*, which lets people know about Hong Kong.

Wong: It's a difficult decision for me. Let me start with Special Mention, which I give my vote to *Call Me Mrs Chan* and *Monkey Business*. I also agree that the Gold Award should strike a balance between technique and subject matter, and I like both these works: my choice for Gold is *Piled Cloud* and Silver is *Even Ants Strive For Survival*. The message of *Even Ants Strive For Survival* is very direct and does not leave much room to the imagination. In comparison, *Piled Cloud* is also about Hong Kong-China relations, but it leaves room to the imagination. Even though I agree that *Even Ants Strive For Survival* is technically better than *Piled Cloud*, the aesthetics of the latter and the sense of being adrift fits in with the present time, and the film conveys the current state of Hong Kong-China relations, whereas *Even Ants Strive For Survival* is very unambiguous and technically competent, but leaves little room to the imagination.

Chow: I want to know if the team behind *Piled Cloud* is from Taiwan.

Fan: No, they are from Hong Kong.

Tsang: Is that a requirement of the competition?

Fan: Yes.

Tsang: The theme of *Piled Cloud* is wider. It is about people, Hong Kong-China relations as well as drifters.

Wong: It looks at Hong Kong-China relations in a more humanistic way, as part of our everyday lives. Yet how do you situate Hong Kong-China relations within everyday lives? *Even Ants Strive For Survival* is more narrow in this regard because everything is so beautiful, while *Piled Cloud* is more humanistic.

Kai: My consideration takes into account the perspective of young people in Hong Kong, so I give *Even Ants Strive For Survival* higher marks. *Piled Cloud* is not bad, yet the story is told from the perspective of a mature man and a young man from Mainland China.

Chan: Of course, *Even Ants Strive For Survival* is more fitting with Hong Kong society nowadays, and we need to respond to the times. *Piled Cloud* could have been made any time between ten years ago and ten years later, while *Even Ants Strive For Survival* is of the here and now. It fits the current social climate. The director is young, and young people are able to understand this film. I don't think it is too direct. Films about human relations can appear any time. As for Special Mention, I don't mind whether you give it to *Call Me Mrs Chan* or *Monkey Business*.

Fan: Adrian has not picked the Gold Award film yet.

Chow: The two films are suitable for Special Mention.

Wong: If all of you decide on *Even Ants Strive For Survival*, I will go along with it.

Chow: Whether *Even Ants Strive For Survival* or *Piled Cloud* gets Gold depends on the angle from which we look at them.

Kai: I agree with Fruit Chan that *Even Ants Strive For Survival* reveals the confusion and fear of contemporary youth, while *Piled Cloud* offers a contrast.

Chow: You can say that *Even Ants Strive For Survival* is very local while *Piled Cloud* is more humanistic in its depiction of Hong Kong-China relations, which makes it Leftard.

Chan: Many directors are capable of making a film like *Piled Cloud*, which is more placid and undistinguished, while *Even Ants Strive For Survival* reveals the negative atmosphere of this point in time and reflects the current social situation. The filmmaker's technique is also superior.

Wong: *Even Ants Strive For Survival* befits the situation in Hong Kong at this time, while *Piled Cloud* stands apart from current problems. I also support *Even Ants Strive For Survival*, it's just a matter of giving it Gold or Silver.

Chan: I think *Even Ants Strive For Survival* can serve as a kind of example. Nowadays, students make all kinds of short films and employ various techniques such as parallel editing. *Even Ants Strive For Survival* shows that to really make a film, one should simply focus on the main subject.

Wong: Both films are interesting. One is passionate while the other is more austere. They can both serve as examples.

Chan: *Piled Cloud* can serve as an example to show that one does not need to be ostentatious. *Even Ants Strive For Survival* does not have *Piled Cloud*'s sense of composure, but it has energy, the kind of energy that Hong Kongers need.

Wong: Yet it is unlike *Life on the Line*.

Chan: That one has too much. It's enjoyable but does not leave a strong impression.

Kai: It's subject matter and expression are not strong enough.

Chan: The director need not use the crisis angle. The main theme is okay, but students nowadays watch too many mainstream movies and this is the result.

Fan: Just now, three jurors chose *Even Ants Strive For Survival* for Gold Award, Mary picked *Piled Cloud* for Gold, while Adrian has not made a choice. Three people have chosen *Piled Cloud* for Silver, including Chan Hing Kai, Fruit Chan and Mary. You have also all mentioned *Monkey Business*, so please pay attention to this work when discussing awards.

Wong: I think we agreed that *Monkey Business* should get Special Mention.

Kai: I chose it for Silver Award, but it doesn't matter. I gave it similar marks as *Piled Cloud*, but *Monkey Business* is more local.

Tsang: Does anyone choose *Liu Yang He*? It was the Fresh Wave Gold Award winner.

Wong: If it was a choice between *Liu Yang He* and *Piled Cloud*, I choose *Piled Cloud*.

Chow: I also vote for *Piled Cloud*.

Chan: Me too.

Kai: I have seen *Liu Yang He* at two other short film competitions. I think the film is not sufficiently creative.

Tsang: I don't mind. I wasn't the juror in that competition.

Chan: Perhaps I know such lower-class people too well.

## **Open Category Award Winners**

### **Gold Award**

*Even Ants Strive For Survival*

Ren Xia

### **Silver Award**

*Piled Cloud*

Wong Cheuk-man

### **Special Mention**

*Call Me Mrs Chan*

Chan Hau-chun, Chui Chi-yin

*Monkey Business*

Wong Hoi-yin, Suen Sui-hung, Wong Chung-yan, Wong Ka-man, Chan Hoi-yu