

22nd ifva Asian New Force Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members: Ernest Chan (Chan), Katherine Lee (Lee), Shen Ko-shang (Shen)

ifva representative: Kattie Fan (Fan), Emily Ng (Ng)

Fan: Today, we have to select the Gold, Silver and Special Mention winners from the 10 finalists. The Gold Award winner will receive HK\$30,000 cash prize and a Blackmagic Video Assist, the Silver Award winner will receive HK\$20,000 cash prize, the Special Mention winner will not get any cash awards but will receive a certificate. I hope we can discuss the works one by one and provide entrants with your advice and comments.

Lee: What is the voting procedure?

Fan: It varies every time, and depends on your discussion. We can nominate award winners and then discuss them and come to a decision.

Lee: We will vote in the end?

Fan: Only when we cannot come to a consensus. I hope each of you will agree to the jury's collective decisions. The first film is *Submarine*.

Chan: I like the work's set design. That house is probably a set, and they must have spent a lot of effort making this set, which I find impressive. The dancing scene in the bar is impressive as well, it looks nice and suits the film's main theme.

Shen: I like this film because it is like a metaphor for life. Even though it is a realistic story, it is talking about how the world at large is going one way while you want to remain behind. It turns a very specific story into a fable. At the end of the story she follows along with everyone, but turns back at the end. This is like people wanting to preserve their values in the face of adverse situations, but one person cannot change the wider world. I have a question: the lead character has a tattoo that appears three times, the first time is when she's at home, and the tattoo is on her left hand, but it's on her right hand when she is at the bar. When she looks back it is on her left hand again. I was bothered by this because I didn't know the meaning behind it. I wasn't sure whether it is a symbol or a mistake.

Lee: I think it's a mistake.

Shen: I spent a lot of time thinking about this, and wondered what the cultural meaning could be.

Lee: The background of this film is garbage collection, which is a global problem. The set-up of this film is interesting and it is easy to get into the story. I like the fact that the lead character is a woman who faces the world alone, while the rest of the people are like sheep who don't know why they are leaving, she alone decides to remain. Not only does she need to face herself, but also her family's opposition. Overall the film is smooth, but the ending is not

memorable.

Chan: Right, the beginning part is strong, but the ending is weak.

Shen: At the end of the film, she looks back and then walks forward again. This is a way for the director to signal to the audience, it is using performance as a means of expression rather than telling the character's life story. That's why the film was an "A" film at the beginning for me, but it went to "A-" or "B+" at the end, so the film is a "B+" film for me.

Fan: The next film is *Microphone Test: A Letter to Huang Guo-Jun*.

Chan: To me this is a special film that is very different among the others. The most interesting thing is the story-telling method, which uses live action characters and turns them into animation. However, the audiences need to know who Huang Guo-Jun is to get into the film. This film requires audiences to have certain prior knowledge in order to communicate with the work. I think it is trying to respond to Huang Guo-Jun's writing. He was a Taiwanese writer of fiction and short essays who committed suicide at a young age, and the director of the film attempts to dialogue with the writer's works. The attempt is very interesting, but audiences need to have some basic background.

Shen: The story uses Huang's writing as its text, which talks about a film director, and the director appears in the mirror reflection in one of the scenes and is involved in the filming. Then the film's narrator, who is a female, reads out a letter from Huang to his mother, and also talks about the narrator's friend who also makes films. The work is interesting in terms of its points of view, about whose story it is, why this story has to be told, who is the cameraperson and who is the story-teller. All these characters become animation, and what is the relationship between these characters and the director. After watching this film, we won't feel for the characters because the director does not want you to be emotionally involved. He wants you to try to understand these characters from a bystander's point of view, and that's it. It is not trying to tell a complete story, and this approach has two advantages. The first is that it is dialectical, and secondly, it recognizes that video is a distinctive medium. I appreciate that it attempts this dialectical approach, which I find meaningful. However, whether it is the best work has to be seen in comparison with other works.

Lee: I know nothing about the background of the main character, so I found it hard to get into the film at first. Also there are too many characters, and I get confused about their relationships. I like the fact that it uses animation to describe these characters' everyday lives. I don't mind that it uses this method of presentation with many characters. I treat features and shorts the same way, it's fine as long as the film is enjoyable. However, the characters and their complex relationships was one factor that bothered me when watching this film, and I kept trying to find the film's focus, but I couldn't locate it. However, I think this work is worth encouraging.

- Chan: Including it in the finalist round is one way to encourage this work, and is an appreciation to its creative intentions. It shows another way to make short films. Due to its complex structure, it is not easy to draw the audience into the discussion.
- Shen: It wants to say that we all have our lives to lead, and who is responsible for telling stories. We can tell our own stories, or tell other people's stories. I recommend this work for Special Mention.
- Chan: We can discuss this later. The next work is *Santé*. This is a self-written, directed and acted work of the lead character. It is a story about a Palestinian girl living in Israel as a person of different culture and race than the majority. She tells a simple and straightforward story, revealing some everyday occurrences, for example, how it bothers her to see a soldier on a bus, the perplexity of racial identity and the longing for freedom, etc.
- Shen: For me, the meaning of the work is very clear. However, there is nothing special about the shooting method. The mise en scène of some of the films is accurate. For example, the last scene where the main character dances in front of the barricades while the police and soldiers look on shows how the two sides view each other. This is a successful shot. Up till then, the film has been just average, but this shot is very successful because it does not stir up your anger. I quite like this film.
- Lee: Me too. The film is very accurate. The director plays the main role because she knows the character's psychological state very well, and her performance is very precise. When watching this film you follow along with her experiences, and she takes the audience into her life. The problems she faces happen in a lot of other countries. She does not want to criticize but to express the problems that many people face. I agree that the last shot is very good and leaves a lasting impression on me. This is my choice for Special Mention.
- Fan: The next film is *River*.
- Chan: This is a film about a young boy. The most special part is the scene where the boy meets his future self with his future girlfriend. The one who plays the future self is the director himself.
- Shen: It would be better if the director didn't appear in the film!
- Chan: The other thing the film does is playing with the aspect ratio. When the train passes, the screen becomes wider. It perhaps takes reference from Xavier Dolan's *Mommy*. The usage in here is reasonable, but I think it's a bit pretentious.
- Shen: The film concerns a young boy dealing with his father's death, and uses a few different time-frames to signal this condition: the present, the young man and his girlfriend, and the father floating in the river. This set-up is good, but there are many flaws. For examples, shots that follow people as they move across the frame are meaningless and take away from

the realism of the film. Also the scene where the cousin takes him out and they stop at a place for some noodles and then leave is unnecessary. I don't know why the scene is there. The realism of the dialogue, mise en scène, set design and acting keep wavering. The concept has its good points, but there are too many unnecessary elements in the execution and too many complicated thinking, so I think the execution of this film is immature and a failure.

Lee: The story is something the director has experienced or has feelings for. Telling a story like this within a countryside setting leads me to expect the film to be realistic, but the mise en scène affected my perceptions. I feel the director is trying to find a way to tell his story, but he tries a bit too hard. Like people who have just learned to use film to tell stories, he is a bit immature in his treatment.

Chan: The film seems to be a graduation film, that the director simply uses what he has learnt from foreign films, but fails to think about how to tell the story in his own way.

Shen: That's right, if he can concentrate on finding his own methods...

Lee: Even if his own method is crude, it will have more substance because it's his. Now he is just using other people's tools, and the outcome is not what he intends.

Ng: The next film is *Dadyaa – The Woodpeckers of Rotha*.

Chan: This is also a unique film with strong visuals, and requires a certain level of cultural knowledge to comprehend. My understanding is that there is a couple in a village in which everyone has left. They construct some wooden sculptures, using them to summon the souls of the people who have departed. In the end they, too, have to leave. As for why they have wooden sculptures? Perhaps it has something to do with their culture.

Shen: When watching the film I try to fill in the gaps with my imagination. Out of all the films, this one has the most striking images of nature, and its visuals are mesmerizing. However, in terms of storytelling...I assumed that the making of the sculptures is the old man's personal mission, and that the ending is his imagination. The film is about things that can be retained, and even these sculptures will eventually disappear with time. Perhaps the director created this film to honor a sculptor of wood that he likes. Because I didn't understand the story, it is difficult for me to give it high marks even though I liked its imagery.

Lee: I understand more about his creative intentions after reading the director's statement than watching the film alone. The story takes place in a locale far away from us, so he can make up his own rules. Within this world there are realistic and fantasy elements, but I don't understand how transitions between them. Perhaps due to cultural barrier, there are some parts that I cannot read. For example, is the singing supposed to be happy or otherwise? Also the subject matter is deep and not easy to understand.

- Shen: For me, this film is between a rock and a hard place.
- Fan: The next film is *White Tunnel*.
- Chan: The story is quite clichéd, but as an animation, it gives audiences a different impression. You see this kind of story a lot in TV series, but expressed as animation, there is a greater sense of absurdity. The scene where the ghost of the old woman appears creates a mysterious atmosphere to the work.
- Shen: In Taiwan, the animation and film industries do not work well together. A common problem with Taiwanese animation is the screenplay, which often lack cinematic story-telling skills. This animation suffers from the same problem. The story is clichéd, and the theme is about filial piety. I agree that this kind of treatment gives the film a unique atmosphere, but animation should try to do what live action is incapable of. I wondered if this film would be equally valid if it was done by real actors? I think it would, so this film does not really live up to the full potential of animation, and the screenplay is unimpressive. I don't really like this film, although I appreciate its strong points.
- Lee: The animation is effective, and the background and character design are strong. However, I don't know whether the characters are Taiwanese, which shows that this is a universal story. I give the film high marks in this regard. However, the story is like an animated version of TVB's *Mystery Beyond*, a series of supernatural morality tales. At the beginning of the film, I had high expectations, which the latter part did not satisfy.
- Chan: I thought the woman would open the suitcase in the ending, but for some reason they skipped it intentionally. This arrangement weakened the impact of showing that she learns her lesson. The next film is *Wild Tides*. The film is set in the south of Taiwan?
- Shen: This is Yun Lin in central Taiwan. The land subsidence problem there is severe.
- Chan: The director is adept at making use of the landscape as part of his storytelling, which I find attractive. I appreciate the fact that he incorporates a lot of local scenery into the work to talk about a teenager's struggles.
- Shen: The actors all look like they are non-professionals, and the side cast consists of local residents. The protagonist's father owes people money, and he is looked down upon and people won't hire him as he goes and looks for work. He shoulders the troubles brought to him by his father and is in a state of rebellion. He is a stubborn and proud young man. The character set-up is very successful. At the end of the film, he braves the rising tides to try to find the missing keys. The last shot is very long, allowing the audience to see the character's complex state of mind. On one hand he must deal with the burdens of life, and on the other he is scared. But there are some flaws with the film. For example, the movement of the camera in relations to the actors is mostly successful, but there are a few

times when the camera fails to follow the actors' movements. With the dialogue, the protagonist goes to different places to look for work, but the questions he asks and the responses he gets are identical, whereas they should be different according to the people's line of work and social positions. The director was not able to handle these kinds of details, but as a student work it is very successful. The director uses minimal means to tell a young man's coming of age story.

Lee: The director is very successful in dealing with non-professional actors, who are capable of fulfilling the director's requirements. Judging from the actor's performance, I give high marks to the director. I quickly became interested in the protagonist, and I also like the long shot at the end. Not only does the protagonist need to shoulder the pressure of losing his father, he has to seek acceptance. When he gets rejected, it's not just about losing a chance to work. When he gets a job at last, he loses the set of keys. The sense of guilt he feels makes him want to get them back right away. As he goes into the water, he does not know what the future holds. The keys function as a motif, which symbolizes the keys to life. He loses something that he has just gained, and I am very touched by this film. This is my choice for the Silver Award.

Chan: The ending is very powerful. It is both part of the plot as well as a metaphor for his life.

Fan: The next film is *The Manliest Man*.

Chan: This is the most dramatic film out of the 10 finalists; it's a story about divine retribution which satirizes a male chauvinist society. It is very effective in involving the audience into the story with its simple plot. I find the scene in which the lead character chases the doctor with an axe a bit strange, because everyone just keeps on singing and nobody tries to stop them.

Lee: Perhaps in that world, it is common for people to hit one another.

Chan: That scene is suddenly quite surreal to me.

Shen: The story is attractive. The infanticide scene at the beginning shocked me, and after that, you expect to see the protagonist's sense of powerlessness. However, the latter part of the film is more clichéd, and the birth of the second daughter is too predictable, which is a pity. The scene you talked about is surreal because you don't know if people are celebrating, it's not clear if they are excited or indifferent. On the whole, the story is predictable and even though the shots are good enough that you watch it till the end, it does not leave a very good impression. I don't feel I have witnessed some new vision or new theme, and there are few surprises.

Lee: The beginning part of the film is well done and I was impressed. The father character is very good, and from his experiences I can see the absurdity of that society. However, the story becomes clichéd as it develops; it is overly melodramatic. The doctor character is not

very successful. You know he's a bad guy as soon as he appears; it's like watching a TV drama. The subject matter is very real and shocking, but the storytelling is too melodramatic.

Chan: *Anchorage Prohibited* is a very unique film. It uses visuals instead of dialogue to tell its story, and its visuals are striking, of which most of them are long shots. The story is not complex, but it's filled with details revealing the character's emotional layers. A scene that impressed me is one where the father takes the infant to the seaside. One can imagine that he wants to get rid of it. His wife comes up from behind him and takes the baby away. By steering away from sensationalizing the scene, it allows the audience to discover and experience the truly dramatic elements. The whole scene is expressed in film language, which I really appreciate.

Shen: The story is related to globalization, and the tragic fate of foreign workers who are not in full control of their own lives and what they must do to survive. It talks about a universal problem. Secondly, its use of film language is very direct, and every shot is absolutely essential. The film has few shots, but the messages they convey are very clear. The film follows this couple on this particular day. They go to look for work, but see a notice in front of the door. Without any dialogue, the film conveys their predicament. When they sit in the bus, the wife stares at her husband for a very long time. You wonder if she is angry at the world at large. The details in the film are well thought-out, and each shot carries complex messages. In the last shot they have their arms around one another. It is night time, and they are back at the same spot. You see a kind of determination in their eyes, but you don't know what they have decided. The director knows fully how to use film language is, and how much room for imagination to leave to audiences. Even though we may not know that they are selling the baby, it does not matter, for the scene can be interpreted as the couple trying to get money so that they and their kid can survive. This is a successful film that deals with an important issue, using the time-span of a single day.

Lee: I completely agree with what you said. The film is highly accurate. The two actors need not have complex expressions, but you know full well their states of mind. Before reading the director's statement, I did not know that workers can be dismissed if they have children, but I don't need to know this in order to understand the predicament the couple face. In the first scene, you don't see the infant so you don't know they are trying to sell the baby. However, you see the anger in the mother's face and how she blames her husband. Her acting is not dramatic but very real, and makes you follow them on their journey. Their predicament is having this baby whom they love very much; it's not as if they want to get rid of it. They become more and more desperate as the film progresses. In one scene, the mother crouches down, and this simple shot expresses her emotional state. The theme of this film is a worthy one, which the storytelling method is able to support. This makes for a very touching film.

Chan: It trusts that the audience is able to make sense of the story without any dialogue.

Fan: The last film is *Dad And The Son*.

Chan: It is a story about a young boy. Compared with *River*, I like this one better. Although there might be elements taken from Kiarostami or other films.

Lee: Like *River*, this is also a nostalgic film about childhood memories, but when put together, these memories may not make up a complete story. The plot is quite simple, and seems infused with personal emotions. The boy sees that the lamb has died and drinks the rice wine. Then he and his father go back and forth on the road. Are they going to see a doctor? Does he make up with his father?

Chan: His mother's death and his father selling the lamb make him hate his father, and at the end they seem to make up.

Shen: If this is the case, then the last shot is unclear. We don't know if they have made up or have decided not to go to the hospital. That's why the film doesn't leave much of an impression.

Chan: We have discussed all 10 works. It seems that there are three or four films we agree on.

Fan: We can nominate the Gold award winner.

Shen: My nomination for Gold is *Anchorage Prohibited*.

Chan/Lee: Mine too.

Fan: Now we can decide on the Silver.

Lee: I nominate *Wild Tides*.

Chan: I nominate *Santé*. They each have their own strengths, which we can discuss.

Shen: Did you notice the flaws that I mentioned in *Wild Tides*? No doubt I am harsher about Taiwanese films.

Chan: Perhaps it's a language issue, because I didn't pay much notice to that.

Lee: When you said it, I agree that some of the shots are not very smooth, but that does not affect how the story is expressed. The film successfully conveys a simple and complete story. *Santé* is my choice for Special Mention because this is an important theme that the director expresses in a non-judgemental manner. One film expresses the state of mind of a young boy, the other reveals a social situation in a dramatic manner. For me the storytelling of *Wild Tides* is more advanced and the expression more well-rounded, while *Santé* uses a more conventional dramatic format, so I gave it a lower mark.

Shen: Before its last shot, I did not give *Santé* very high marks. Its production is more predictable

and not very imaginative. It is important that a film allows the audience to participate in its imagining, and in this regard, *Wild Tides* is superior to *Santé*.

Chan: I agree to give *Wild Tides* the Silver Award.

Shen: I also agree.

Fan: Now we will consider Special Mention.

Shen: My vote goes now to *Santé*.

Lee: I thought nominating *Microphone Test: A Letter to Huang Guo-Jun* for Special Mention is a way to encourage the director, but I place my vote for *Santé*.

Chan: Including it in the finalist round is a form of encouragement.

Asian New Force Category

Gold Award

Anchorage Prohibited

Chiang Wei-liang

Singapore

Silver Award

Wild Tides

Lu Po-shun

Taiwan

Special Mention

Santé

Sabrina Khoury

Israel