

## The 23<sup>rd</sup> ifva Awards Asian New Force Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jurors: Ellen Kim (Kim), Tom Lin (Lin), Ying Liang (Ying),

Organizer Representatives: Tobe To (To), Kattie Fan (Fan)

Fan: Thank you for your time. Today our mission is to select the awards: Gold, Silver and Special Mention, altogether three prizes. Our usual procedure is to talk about the films one by one, and then nominate award winners. If there are no questions we can begin one by one, with the first film, ***A Human Being is Good***.

Lin: I was a little bit confused. Is this three short films? A trilogy?

Fan: It's three titles put together. You can regard it as one work.

Lin: It felt to me like a YouTube project, and if so I understand, because nobody wants to watch anything long on there. I thought it was cute, and the repetition adds to the humor. By the third time, you know what he is playing with and what he's doing. But when it got to the third time, it was a little exhausting because it was the same thing. If it was one short film, then it doesn't really work for me. If they are three little snippets on the internet, they're fun and you can watch them in whatever sequence you like, but as one short film, the third section for me is a total let-down because it's the same exact thing.

Kim: I was surprised that my opinion is exactly the same as Tom.

Ying: Because I was also on the first round jury, this is the second time I watched the film. For me it's a good experience watching it on the big screen. For me, the form is strong, and the use of visuals is interesting. It looks very low-budget. It is fun, cute. Among all the finalists, this one is the most like a short film. But I agree with you (Lin) that it's just a funny film, and you don't care more about the characters' lives and the whole picture. When discussing this film in the last round, we thought this may not be the best one among the finalists. This year, the Asian New Force Category is not very strong overall.

Lin: Yes, I was a little disappointed.

Ying: For the first-round jury, we felt it was a little difficult to select 10 finalists.

Lin: Out of 400 works? Really?

Fan: 369.

Lin: I was surprised there are no short films from Mainland China among the finalists. In the past when I watched short films, very powerful ones were coming out of

Mainland China.

Fan: Last year or the year before, we had two or three finalists from China. The winner from a few years was a Chinese film.

Lin: I was wondering if it had something to do with their film industry going in one direction, in a very commercial direction. Do you see that happening in South Korea?

Kim: Many short films are portfolio films. They would have action sequence to show they have the ability to direct dynamic action scenes. The unique aesthetics of short films is not easy to find in Korean shorts.

Fan: A similar situation is happening in the Open Category for local shorts as well. Since Ying was involved in the first-round jury, maybe you can give more information on why films were selected as we discuss individual films. The next one is ***Tea Land***.

Lin: I agree a lot with what Ying Liang had said about this film.

Kim: I was thinking of so many different things when watching the film. In Korea, we have migrant workers, and it is not very common to deal with such characters in story-telling. In many features they are depicted as “others” within a homogeneous society. I was surprised that in Taiwan there are such diverse groups. There is another film about fishermen. There are two films from Taiwan among the finalists, why do both deal with immigrant workers? Maybe it’s part of the **ifva** spirit to look into different minorities, or something like that? This film is not very new and fresh for me. In terms of storytelling and filming, it’s not very original.

Lin: I know this director and I’ve seen his previous works. To add on what you said about the two short films from Taiwan, that their subjects are both immigrant workers, it’s the atmosphere of Taiwan society at this moment. Taiwan has become a very politically correct place in terms of ideology. A lot of minority issues are being pushed in a more drastic direction. For example, the issue of gay marriage. Taiwan is looking to perhaps becoming the first place in Asia to legalize gay marriage, and this is because of people being suppressed and are now coming out. It’s the entire atmosphere where you feel this is the right thing to do for a lot of young people, that it’s the right thing to support minorities and gays, and to embrace a more liberal ideology. I have seen many short films about immigrant workers, a lot of them are very well made. It bothers me a little bit that it’s becoming such a big thing in Taiwanese short films. In the past couple of years, those short films are winning a lot of awards abroad, and it has become the fashion for young filmmakers to seek out these subject matters. In a way it’s a bit strategic on the young filmmakers’ parts. Some are minorities who are making these films about themselves, but there are also privileged, middle-class Taiwanese students who

seek out these subject matters because they feel it's important that they speak out for minorities. Unfortunately, they are the ones getting attention. I've seen filmmakers making stories about themselves, but because they are not part of a minority that is gaining attention, their short films, though well-made, are overlooked.

Back to this film. For me the storytelling was a bit too smart, and so loses a bit of genuine-ness to the characters. You have these great characters who are being put into this weird genre subplot of a murder, or one freak death and then a murder. There is one scene in which the young man who died at the beginning, he's having sex with a woman outside, and somebody is walking in the hallway and sees them and starts masturbating...

Ying: That's the Vietnamese man.

Lin: The plot twist felt a little forced. It's not to say you can't mix the two kinds of filmmaking, but with this one, it doesn't mix them well enough. By the two kinds of filmmaking I mean realism and also stories involving a lot of coincidences. The whole film starts with a coincidence of this guy suddenly dying, but before he dies, she has to hide the money. It's very careful plotting, but it's too smart and not to its advantage. When you can feel the plotting and the manipulation of the filmmaker, that's a certain kind of filmmaking, which is fine, but it does not work very well with this film.

Ying: Watching it a second time, I feel the director and actors mixed in a lot of different elements in the story, such as immigrants, runaway people, sex. Later the story looks too compressed, which is not a good thing because the captain looks very simple. I don't know why there are so many immigrant workers, including two from Vietnam and three from Thailand. The Vietnam men looks like he has some sexual designs on the Thai woman, but he has a wife. It made me a little confused. The production value is very high, but there are problems with the storytelling and characters. I can't relate to the ending and don't understand why the character made the choice to bring the body of the man back, because I did not feel the friendship between them.

Lin: Maybe it's unintentional, but for me, the film felt exploitative of these characters. Especially the scene with the young girl taking a bath: why was that nudity necessary in the film? On paper it would make sense to show the hardship of these workers, but it was shown in a way that it felt like it's leaning towards entertainment, in the sense of telling a good story. That was a little uncomfortable for me when I was watching this short film.

Kim: In Taiwan, is there support for foreign or migrant filmmakers? The point you make about political correctness, I'd rather see a work by minorities themselves, a film

by people who really understand these workers. Maybe the film will not be as well-made, but a more truthful voice will be found. This kind of work will be much more interesting for me.

Lin: There's always a debate concerning making films about people who are different from you, and how much you understand of them. It doesn't bother me for someone to be making a film about another culture as long as you do enough of your homework and really get in there. If you are making a film about aborigines, go live there for a couple of years. I don't know how much homework this director did, but as an audience I didn't feel there is enough authenticity to it.

Fan: The next one is **Nocturne**.

Ying: I also wrote something about **Nocturne**. The style is really like Taiwan New Cinema—long shot and slow pace, so-called low concept, not melodramatic. It's part of history, but put in a personal story and focuses on a micro-group in a family, which is interesting. The film within a film idea is good, but not very fresh. Between the real life and drama there is a gap which is interesting to fill. The music and the ending titles are interesting. The running time of 20 minutes made me feel not enough to explore the characters. I also question why he chose this style and form. Maybe because it's based on an autobiographical novel. It's an interesting film about the history of Singapore and Malaysia. The concept about filming and the love story is not very fresh to me.

Lin: I have a question for Ellen. Can you tell the difference the characters speaking in Mandarin and Hokkien?

Kim: I can tell they are speaking in dialect of Fujian. I read the artist statement that it's part of an omnibus project dealing with Chinese dialect, and I totally understand why he chose to use that kind of form to juxtapose the film itself and the scene, so that you can connect the language in the fictional form and how difficult it is to correctly represent it, to show how difficult it is to make a film in this original dialect. I think the form fits in well with the mission of this project, so I didn't think it was unnecessary. The artist did very well, I may not choose it as the best film, but I think it has its own virtues.

Ying: There are some elements that it shares with **Tea Land** in that they both look like the shorter version of a feature. The production value is good. But with the storytelling, some parts I don't understand, and don't know why they used this kind of form.

Lin: For me, it was surprising. When we got to the shot of the woman looking into the camera for a long time that was surprising for me. As a short film, I agree more

with Ying Liang, that it does not have enough strength to stand on its own, that it feels like it's part of something bigger that I don't understand, like it's an exercise. Afterwards I read that it's part of an omnibus, and I get it. The mood and atmosphere are good, but does not have the strength to stand on its own. When he jumps from the period story into reality about the filmmakers, that's fine, but when you jump into the real world, that world needs to be real. I laughed at the line when the director says of the actress, "I need her to be natural" when he is not natural himself. It wasn't good acting of the actor playing the director. That part felt faker than the fake film they are making. From that point on, everything about the production side of that short film felt fabricated to me. It didn't have the realness that a form like this requires. It does have some merits and surprises.

Fan: The next one is ***About the Maritime Drifters***.

Lin: This is the only documentary. In the middle of watching this film, I was secretly hoping that it'd turn out to be a narrative, and everything is staged, and I'd be very impressed!

Kim: The interviews with the business owners were very interesting.

Lin: They were interesting in that they were showy, in a way. For a documentary about maritime drifters, I was hoping for a bit more insight. It sheds light on the situation and tries to give equal time to different parties to have their say. It was interesting in the choice of answers she tries to give us from the establishment, from the agency and the government, which do not show them in a good light. The filmmaker cuts from one answer to a contradicting one, and I remember the audience laughing when the workers say they were signing blank documents, and then the next scene the agents say, "That's impossible, we don't do that." It's the filmmaker being just and not being just. Because it is only 20 minutes long, it didn't take any deeper than getting accounts from different sides. She starts the documentary with a funeral, with this person dying, but we don't hear much about it, we don't learn about the death any more, which was disappointing. I wanted to learn how this young man died from different parties. If the workers, agency and government were all talking about this one thing, it could be a more focused documentary. But because of how vast the filmmaker wants to show this subject matter, it didn't feel the 20 minutes was not enough.

Ying: In the last round, we were not able to pick a good documentary, and this one is better than the others. As a student work, it's not bad. It is about a real case, and they did good research. It gives voice to Taiwan fisherman in a fair way. This kind of editing gives a sense of drama. Of course, there are problems with this work, in that it does not focus on the subject: the relationship between the fisherman and his boss. They are students and so not very sensitive about this kind of characters, and don't know how to explain the situation. The scene where they are fixing the

nets because they want to get work is interesting, but there are only three or four shots, including a high angle shot of the immigrant worker fixing the net. We cannot really relate to the situation. What are their feelings and relationship with these strangers? If the filmmakers can capture the stories about this kind of workers, they can touch a lot of different audiences from all over Taiwan. Now it's just like a TV documentary or news program.

Kim: It's a good work for its short duration, but I agree that it's necessary to do a deeper and longer documentary on this subject. A documentary filmmaker cannot help taking one side, there are some interesting interviews with the captains and owners, but if you want to take the fishermen's side, it's more meaningful to show their real lives in a deeper way. It's worth it to show just one man's life. If the director wants to continue with this subject, she can go in this direction.

Lin: The shots of the nets were not done by the filmmaker, I think. They are shot by the agencies to show how fast the workers can work. Because they were students, the distance they went with this documentary was not far enough. We do get on the boat, but we are never out to the sea with them. We see them living on the boats and their lives at the port, but never see them out in the sea. That's something I was hoping for. They talk about working 24 hours, but I never saw what that looked like.

Fan: Let's move to the next one: ***Death of the Soundman***.

Ying: I like this film a lot. On the second time watching it some things surprised me, like the ending. They always shoot some political images such as the flag and the leader of Thailand, which is interesting. It is humorous and original. I can accept the style, even though it is a bit slow. The sound is a character in the short film.

Lin: I like it. I appreciate the maturity because it is very serious in its execution, but it doesn't take itself very seriously. It's light on its feet even though it's dealing with a subject important to the filmmaker, which made it accessible. It's an accessible film about film sound. I particularly found the part in the zoo very entertaining. It's a very delightful film.

Kim: It worked in two ways for me. One is the sound, and I really appreciate the sound of the zoo and the many different animals. The second thing that worked is the humor. Usually, Thai humor does not translate very well for me, but this film worked.

Lin: Thai commercials are funny as hell.

Kim: I know what you mean, I have seen funny Thai commercials. Anyway, usually for the commercial comedies, it's very difficult for them to have the same impact as in

their local culture. But I think the humor in this film is universal. The guys who are very serious about their work are funny to the audience, and the film works for everybody. Good work.

Ying: About the casting. The two characters look too similar.

Lin: But that's what's funny to me, that one is the master and the other is the apprentice, but they both look the same, and both very nerdy. And you can imagine the assistant turning into the master one day.

Ying: Perhaps they can be nerdy with different styles.

Fan: The next one is ***Are You Volleyball?!***

Lin: I like the kids, they are well treated and fun to look at. I appreciate where the filmmaker is coming from. He's trying to tell a kind story, a story that can bring more peace in the world. But the execution is very conventional. It's a nice short story, and it doesn't do anything else besides that. I don't know if it's an intentional choice to cast the soldiers. Were these actors playing Americans or they can't find white actors to play this part? It did not feel like English is their first language but that's the language they are communicating in. That for me was a little troubling. They look similar to the refugees.

Kim: I think the film is very commercial. It works very well, but if someone is expecting an artistic short film...I am not against it, it's a good story, well made and very touching, but for this festival, I'm not sure. As a jury member I cannot choose this film, but as an audience, I enjoyed it.

Ying: The story is not very fresh to me, but the cast performed well, including the kids and the adults. It's not an easy film to make. The running time of 14 minutes is good. In the last round all the jury members liked it.

Fan: The next one is ***Tshweesh***.

Lin: I find this very interesting. I even went back and started researching on it, trying to figure out what the name means, what is going on in Lebanon and why Beirut is represented in this way. I was impressed by its execution. It's stylistic in a very non-threatening way. I like the way the film approaches these characters on their rooftops having their own lives, doing these different things. I could have done without the woman with the headphone, and I read about what the filmmaker was getting at, and I went to look at Antonioni's ***La Notte***, and they open in exactly the same way, and I understood it was an homage to Antonioni. One thing I had trouble with is once they got to the ending where the planes are flying above and there's bombing, I was wondering if it was worth the wait. The audience have been in it for

a long time, and the bombing felt like a punch line, but it came a little too late for me. When it came I didn't even think I needed it, because the whole atmosphere in the beginning was interesting enough and threatening enough, in a way. I felt this threat all along, especially when none of the people can get reception on their TVs. There is something going on in the air, and it's threatening. It would have benefited by being a little shorter, and I would still be able to get what I was supposed to from it.

Kim: This is the one I chose for the best film because it remained in my mind all night. It takes a lot of effort to make, it shows you the landscape very well without any leading characters. I've always believed in having strong characters for storytelling, but this film worked without any clear storytelling. You feel the people on the rooftop could fall any second, there is a very real feeling of threat in their daily lives. In the end, when the attack came, they still continued their daily lives as if nothing happened. The close-up shot of the girl in the swing was...

Lin: I agree it's very evocative.

Kim: The swing is coming into the house and outside on the balcony. It felt it is like a metaphor: you can be safe in your daily life, but in a second, you can be in a very dangerous outside world. The way the director thinks and interprets through his images makes this a great work for me.

Lin: What's your take on the woman with the headphones? I couldn't understand her. This is the only character we're following, and listening to what she's listening to. But I have no idea what she's doing—walking into an old house, looking at this and that. I didn't get it. Maybe if you know Antonioni you'd know.

Kim: I didn't get it but it didn't bother me.

Ying: I don't know the background of the filmmaker, but I feel she loves Beirut in the same way that Antonioni loved Milan. She uses the woman to go through the city from the top to the ground, going into the buildings. She really likes the city.

Kim: The woman is like a decoration, if you take out her scenes, the film could still work. It was the flower on the cake.

Lin: For me, the flower on the cake is the little girl on the swing.

Ying: In the last round this was not the favorite, because we all saw it on the computer.



Yesterday I saw it on the big screen, and it looks like a masterpiece to me. It is like poetry about Beirut. I like the shot of the airplane coming, and you can see two young people making love on the rooftop. This film is among the top two for me.

Fan: Let's continue with ***One More Experiment***.

Ying: This is among my top two.

Lin: I didn't find it interesting. I get where the filmmaker is coming from. I had a hard time with this one, I just can't get into it. You can see the filmmaker put a lot of effort into creating a realistic futuristic environment, but it was just too in-your-face intellectual, especially with the ***Stalker***-like monologue. I love Tarkovsky, and *Stalker* is my favorite Tarkovsky film, but to see it in this light, it didn't feel genuine for me.

Kim: One of the roles of films is to give a unique experience. I had a very good experience throughout the film. I like the futuristic and deserted set, and the experience with the actor is unique. The sequences are very long, and in the latter part of the film, the acting is very different, which I appreciate. The film is dedicated to actors and film art.

Ying: In the second half of the film, he becomes another person. The dialogue has a lot of subtext. The actor's performance is the main thing that touched me, letting me know that this filmmaker really loves human beings and has a lot of hope for the future. At the beginning, the scene with the fat people watching the film is very nourishing. With the scene in the booth, I can really feel the energy of the actor. The filmmaker is very smart and uses a very simple way to explain the theme. He really believes in the future, and with his storytelling, I got his message.

Fan: The next one is ***VOICE***.

Ying: It's an interesting film with no dialogue, and depends on scenes, action and dancing. The relationship between the stay at home guy and the tree is interesting. But I didn't get enough out of the film. The budget looks low, and shows that the filmmaker is eager to make this film.

Lin: I find it charming. It is basically a silent film with no dialogue. Everything is conveyed through images and sound. It's an exercise in loneliness about this man, but it didn't go any further than that. Although the film is enjoyable, I didn't get any more from it. It's a well-executed idea and a good short film.

Kim: I like it, it could be my recommendation for Special Mention. The main character has a simple life, he does not have contact with anybody, and his face looks so

sad. For me it's a sad film, a film about loneliness. It's well made, using limited actor and set, but gives you certain feelings and emotions. I like the scene where the character becomes a dried-up tree. It's a simple, emotional and beautiful short film.

Ying: The story development is good, finally the woman leaves, but one thing changed in the man's life. However, the character is a little weak. The lonely, isolated man is a good character, but I think you need a little more to form the whole picture. Maybe he had loved somebody or had bad experiences. The film can be better. The film is low budget and not easy to make.

Kim: It's like Haiku poetry, an abstract short film and he kept things simple. Maybe it lacks something, but adding something may not solve the problem.

Lin: If I had to find one thing disappointing with this short, it's the fact that the shadow is coming from a plant, but the plant is never treated as a character. It's only the shadow of a plant becoming a woman, and then the plant dies or something. But for me it didn't die, it's just withered. Maybe it's winter and the leaves fall off, but you wait for spring and the woman will be back. He never treated the plant as a living thing. At the end I expected him to do something, like throw away the plant or buy another one? It's more about the shadow than the plant, and it is disappointing that it does not focus on the plant, which would have made it better. But as it is, there's nothing wrong with it.

Fan: The last one is ***Gray Umbrella***.

Lin: I like this one, a bit in the same way as ***Death of the Sound Man***, but this one is more provocative. It's interesting, funny, and a great use of fantasy and surrealism in a short film. Just as in ***Death of the Sound Man***, the director knows what he is doing is silly, like the constant tapping of an umbrella on the head, the choice of a balding actor. He's using humor to get across his message about habits, about what we fight against. It's a small idea but has large meanings, like what are the things that are suppressing us. In the beginning we fight it, but then it becomes a constant and we get used to it, but getting used to it does not mean it's right. For me it's a really good short film, and did all that in 8 minutes. It's very professionally executed; the filmmaker had a good idea and he thought of every single shot and how to execute it. The look, sound design, the way each shot is composed—everything is so well-calculated. It has a lot of heart and a lot of brains. Out of the 10 finalists, this is one that I can't find any fault with. It's my number one film.

Kim: You can interpret this film in many different ways. You can think about the political meaning, or it can be about daily life. It makes you think in a deeper way

- Ying: Last round, we almost missed this one. The reason is maybe because it's too short. For me, I'd compare it with ***Tshweesh, One More Experiment*** and ***Death of the Sound Man***. Running time should not be a factor, the idea is the most important. The structure is interesting and the use of voice-over makes it different from other films.
- Fan: At this point, jurors could nominate one or two films that they think should get the Gold Award. Ellen has already mentioned one, and for Tom, ***Gray Umbrella*** is your first choice.
- Ying: I'm not sure.
- Lin: What is Ellen's choice?
- Fan: ***Tshweesh***. So far, we have shortlisted 4 films: ***Tshweesh, One More Experiment, Voice, Gray Umbrella***.
- Kim: ***VOICE*** is just for Special Mention.
- Lin: I think it's clear that we are in line that we are more impressed with these five films: ***Tshweesh, One More Experiment, VOICE, Gray Umbrella*** and ***Death of the Sound Man***.
- Kim: I have a question: why do you include a Russian film in an Asian award?
- Lin: I thought it's just done in Russia and it's an Israeli film. Here it says the director is from Russia.
- Fan: Russia is eligible.
- Kim: I don't understand. I thought this category is more about the cultural identity than territory. I thought you want to discover Asian new force, so why you want to pick a Russian film for that? I like the film very much, but...
- Fan: In our rules and regulations, we include Russia in the list of countries we accept submissions from. We have had this category for around 10 years, and in the beginning, nobody questioned why we include Russia, but in the past three or four years, there have been more questions about it. We are planning to review this.
- Lin: Russia has its own culture, music, literature. I like Russian culture, it's fascinating to me.
- Kim: ***Tshweesh*** is my choice for Gold, Silver is ***One More Experiment***. The other three I like equally.

- Lin: My Gold would be **Gray Umbrella**, my Silver would be **Tshweesh**. My Special Mention is **Death of the Sound Man**.
- Ying: My Gold is **One More Experiment**, Silver is **Tshweesh**, Special Mention is **Death of the Sound Man**.
- Lin: All three of us have different Golds.
- Kim: If we assign Gold 3 points, Silver 2 points and Special Mention 1 point, then we can already decide.
- Lin: This is too scientific.
- Kim: Usually Special Mention goes to the film favored by minority jury members. For me **Gray Umbrella** should get Special Mention.
- Lin: Let's just talk about the Gold. The Beirut film for me is second place. It's a good film and well-made, so even though it is second place for me, I have no problem with it getting the Gold. I'm more okay with that getting the Gold than **One More Experiment**, because I thought it's just an okay film. If we are fine with Gold and Silver being **Tshweesh** and **One More Experiment**, respectively, then Special Mention is a choice between **Death of the Sound Man** and **Gray Umbrella**. I'd be okay with **Death of the Sound Man** getting Special Mention, but feel bad for **Gray Umbrella** because it is, for me, the best-executed film.
- Ying: For me, the first and second place films are almost the same level, so it's up to you.
- Fan: So Gold Award goes to **Tshweesh**, Silver goes to **One More Experiment**. How about Special Mention?
- Ying: Can we give to both?
- Fan: It's possible if you really want to. They both get a certificate.
- Kim: **Death of the Sound Man** and **Gray Umbrella** both deserve Special Mentions.
- Lin: It also has to do with programming. Watching a short work like **Gray Umbrella** last after 3 hours of other short films was a nice relief, especially since it's a good work. That was a factor for me.

## **Asian New Force Category Awards Winners**

### **Gold Award**

*Tshweesh,*

Feyrouz Serhal / Lebanon

### **Silver Award**

*One More Experiment*

Sergey Vlasov / Russia

### **Special Mention**

*Death of the Sound Man*

Sorayos Prapapan / Thailand

*Gray Umbrella*

Mohammad Poustindouz / Iran