

The 20th ifva Asian New Force Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members: Ernest Chan (Chan), Yuni Hadi (Hadi), Ruby Yang (Yang)

ifva representatives: Kattie Fan (Fan), Diana Cheung (Cheung), Wa Choi (Choi)

Fan: Thank you for being our jurors this year. Let us begin our discussion. As a suggestion, you can discuss the works one by one, and then nominate the Gold Award winner.

Yang: Okay. I go first? I think the first one (*The Free Man*) is really well-done - the cinematography and the story-wise. Very much Taiwanese style. I have a feeling that it is not independent, that it is supported by the Taiwanese government. Is this his first film?

Cheung: Not sure.

Yang: I think it's a very competent work. Creativity is pretty good. I've seen this kind of work. It has very good craft.

Hadi: The lead actor is very good. Is the film from Malaysia?

Chan: The director is Malaysian, but the film is made in Taiwan.

Cheung: The crew is from Taiwan.

Hadi: We are going through the films one by one?

Fan: We can go through them one by one. Do you have any comments you would like to add for *The Free Man*? Otherwise we can move on to the next one.

Chan: I agree with Ruby. The film is well-done technically. The story is a bit cliché, but the cinematography, lighting, storytelling, editing and also acting are good.

Yang: Well done, well cast.

Fan: The next one is *The Baby*.

Yang: The two women are very natural. I'm very surprised. They left a lot of things open. Obviously she is hiding something and is conflicted with her situation and apparently she's an unwed mother. It reflects on the social situation, and they left things open. I like that. There's something very real about it. It's done with a university, and you can tell it's a first or second film. It's a very good try. It's a film about women's situation in society, and I think the spirit is very good. It depicts the desperate situation of unwed mothers.

Hadi: It's one of my favorite films because I think the energy of the film is very good. Once you enter the story, the energy reflects what the woman is feeling. It's very intense until the end when she lets everything go. The director captured that very well. It reveals many things about the society through dialogue, which is very natural. Like the fact that the kid does not have ID card, as an illegal person, what will she do in the end? It's not over-ambitious. It knows what it's trying to say and it's strong in the acting, and I think it's very successful.

Yang: I like that she's taking the bus at the end, and facing an uncertain future.

- Chan: I very much appreciate the work. I think the director may not have a big budget to make the film, but within the limitation of the budget, he made a quite simple but intense drama. I enjoyed watching this film.
- Hadi: He managed to get shots of the baby sleeping, which is good. It's a strong film, and I was surprised it's from a male director.
- Chan: He is quite sensitive in his storytelling.
- Fan: The next one is *Dad's Fragile Doll*.
- Yang: The craft and intention is very good. The story repeated itself a bit too much, and I think it could have been tightened. But again it's a good way to show a young people's perspective about the political situation. It's a well told story about the political and intellectual repression. It's well-intentioned, and the execution is pretty good, too.
- Hadi: I agree that the story could be tighter. In the middle it got a bit lost, and it's not necessary to go so far. Obviously, the director wanted to use a child and the imagination of the child together. The seriousness got through because of the black and white and very simple animation, creating the feel that makes you understand the situation of the story.
- Chan: The animation is quite well-done. I appreciate that the director emphasizes the power of the camera in the story. With the camera, the young girl has the power to resist what represses her.
- Fan: If there is nothing to add, we'll move on to *Falling Land*.
- Yang: I think the 3D animation is nicely done. It's a meditation about the land. It's a good artistic piece, and in a way a meditation about Earth and Science. It's a beautiful piece.
- Hadi: I agree that it's very beautiful. I wasn't sure if it's successful in marrying the two languages, whether it made the story stronger. I enjoyed it as an abstract piece.
- Chan: It's quite poetic and beautiful, but the voice-over is a bit odd for me, especially the Mandarin part, it is a bit pretentious.
- Yang: I can see he's trying to experiment with the technology and Earth underneath. It didn't quite work for me, but it's a nice try.
- Chan: I agree. It's a good try.
- Fan: The next one is *International: Silent within Noise – An Account of the Chinese Animation*.
- Yang: To me it's very funny. I enjoyed it very much and I think it's quite clever. That sense of humor is very rare from China. Of course there is less respect for intellectual property, and other people's work are used as "reference". But he did it as a satire which is good. It has many funny elements, like having real people talking and the animation react to them. I applaud him for using this sort of representation.
- Hadi: It's a unique way to talk about the state of animation. But for me, it was slightly challenging to keep up with the subtitles.

- Chan: It's quite quick.
- Hadi: Yes, it's quite quick and also because you want to enjoy the animation. There're a lot of things on screen at the same time. It might have worked better without subtitles, but then I wouldn't understand it. The topic is an important one, but perhaps the ending could have been better. Of course it is a huge topic to undertake for a short film, and I'm not sure where you can go with it. It's an issue that's very close to the heart of the director, obviously.
- Chan: It's interesting to see the director presenting the interviews that way, and also in using the interviewee's animation work to represent himself/herself? It's interesting to see a work like this. It's playful and enjoyable.
- Yang: The way they use this way to provide satire on the industry is quite original. I can understand Mandarin, but it's still too fast for the audiences to take all the information in. Obviously this work is for Chinese audiences.
- Fan: Let's move on to *Cup Noodle*.
- Yang: Is this from Macau?
- Chan: It's done by Macau students studying in Taiwan.
- Yang: It's a good twist. The subject matter is a bit too light for me. It's a twist, with a friendship at the beginning that turns into something else, and using one take. Both actresses are pretty good. I think they are not professionals. The concept is very good. For a student film, it's pretty good.
- Hadi: I quite like it, and if it had a bit more realistic setting, it would have been more successful in getting across the emotion. I like the actresses a lot. When they started out they are playing, and then suddenly there are instant noodles, and the other girl never notices but obviously you have two cups of instant noodles there—you can smell it. So the set-up is very strange, it could have been a little more natural and maybe use the environment to create the tension, or something like that. But I like the twist, and the actresses gave a good performance.
- Chan: I agree with you two. It's a good student film. It's a very good try to make a simple film in one take, with a simple setting and story, and quite good acting. But the subject matter is too light for me.
- Fan: The next one is *When the Sky Ends*.
- Yang: For a while, I thought it's a documentary. And then I thought, that couldn't be because it is too set up. The people are so real, and I know they probably have challenges. I think it's an excellent way of telling their own stories within the setting of a mental hospital. The filmmaker has a lot of respect for these people. The filmmaker must have spent time with them...
- Hadi: To gain their trust.
- Yang: Yes. It's a wonderful film, without demeaning any of their sicknesses. It gives dignity to these people, telling us that they all have their own dreams and want something more in life.

This is one of my favorite films.

Hadi: They could easily be actors, because they are so natural. And when they revealed in the end that it was really shot there, it's really great. I like that they kept the theme simple, it's just about personal hopes and dreams. Even though there are so many characters, it's not overly complicated. The way the story unveils is quite conventional, but it's the kind of story that requires a not so complicated way of telling, and they don't try to be fancy. That's what I like about it. It's very honest and direct. It was very moving.

Chan: I was surprised to learn that the actors are actually mental patients at the hospital. It was quite touching when I found out it's their own story. It's quite moving.

Fan: We move on to *I EXIST*.

Yang: I'm not sure about this film. It's shot by the kid, and then it's being edited heavily with some strong representation.

Hadi: The director is the editor.

Yang: I am not sure of his intentions. That shot of the soldier with the girl is very disturbing. That sort of friendliness is dangerous. It could easily be a propaganda film, in my opinion, because you can easily use children to make a point. I have very mixed feelings about it. It's interesting that he said "my film has participated in more than 30 international film festivals".

Hadi: The film would have been better with some sort of context. Why do they have a camera? Is it an experiment? You're not sure why the kids are shooting, how is the filmmaker involved in this relationship? If you had that sort of context, either through the director's statement, or in the film itself, that would give us a better understanding of the film. Obviously the subject is very large and important, but as you said, there are many ways to bring in the subject of children, and there are many ways to exploit the situation, so I don't know. I didn't understand the context of the project.

Chan: I thought the director gave the cameras to the children to let them express themselves. At the end, I had the feeling that the director is making use of the children to express what he wants to say. It's quite disturbing for me.

Hadi: It says here that he's been involved with the project for three years, but it doesn't really come through. Three years' worth of footage is a lot.

Yang: The subject is so important, but it's captured in just ten minutes. There's not enough, and there's not enough context.

Hadi: If he'd shot for three years, I'd like to see more.

Chan: But in these 10 minutes, things keep repeating, so it's not enough for me.

Yang: There's a boy who keeps running. Is it that he wants to escape the camp? I don't know, those are the unclear points.

Chan: It's quite ambiguous. I think the boy is trying to grab the camera.

- Yang: I interpret it to mean he wants to get out. For me, it seems unfair to use that kind of image to portray the children. That's why I'm not sure about this film.
- Fan: We move on to *The Great Escape From Cafe City*.
- Yang: Is the director a commercial filmmaker?
- Chan: I think so.
- Yang: It's very playful. It's a good way to make a satire on micro-cinema. It's well shot, well acted. He's a talented director. It's not a cliché, it's fun. I enjoyed the film a lot. You can tell it's a fresh director.
- Hadi: I enjoyed the film, too. The subject is very contemporary, and I was laughing because nowadays there are many so-called YouTube filmmakers who become very popular, and they are hired by companies to make these micro-films. Sometimes people ask me if I've heard of a certain filmmaker. When I said no, they would tell me that he is the biggest thing on YouTube. So it's interesting to see impacts of young filmmakers today. It plays out really well. It has a good rhythm and good craft. It's fun and I like it a lot.
- Chan: Maybe the director has to make a living by making a lot of micro-films, so this is his reaction towards the cliché formula of this kind of works. He has turned all his anger and frustrations into this playful work. I quite enjoyed watching this film.
- Hadi: Is the actor the same as *The Free Man*?
- Cheung: I have the same feeling. I have to figure it out. They look very similar.
- Yang: They are both very handsome. I think in *The Free Man*, the guy has more of a gangster look, or maybe it's just the way he acts.
- Fan: So we move on to the last one, *The Endless Road*.
- Yang: In a couple of scenes, especially the ones with the husband and his daughter, they must have been there for a long time, in order to gain people's trust. I think the intention is very noble. In the election scene, the filmmaker was not being stopped. I think I've heard of these two filmmakers. He actually did a very good film about kid acrobats. I have a little problem with this film. The little kid—the grandson—felt staged.
- Chan: With him playing with the gun.
- Yang: Yes, that was a bit too much. I saw his first film in China, and I liked it very much. There's something about this film that bothers me. I like the film very much, but he uses the young boy too much, like with him hearing by the door. I think that's unnecessary. The scene would have been very powerful without the boy listening. In the gun part...alright. As the documentary, I will leave it as a picture, When he first introduces the boy, he's all cute and smiley with the rabbit. That's ok, but when he went to sleep...I like the film very much because of the subject. It's very powerful. But there's something there that bothers me a bit. I am torn. As a documentary filmmaker, I know what you can do with editing, and things can be staged to make the story more powerful. He used the kid a couple of times too much. It's too intentional. I like the parts with the parents and the grandparents which are very real and moving.

- Hadi: This documentary is one of my favorites. The title, *Endless Road*, and the way the story ends suggests there is so much more for the story to continue on. I like the contrast between the parents' marriage and her own, and this subject overtakes the whole family. The mother is amazingly strong. Some parts, as you said, looked staged, like the scene of the father watching TV and eating, it's composed very beautifully. I didn't mind it so much. Some documentary filmmakers are aware of things like that, and for me, it's okay. I just wish there is more to the documentary. It would also help if I know what the timeframe was.
- Chan: It's a very powerful documentary. It's quite amazing that the director can capture the conflict within the family. He has to gain the trust from the family members to let them express the conflict in front of the camera. It's not easy. I agree with Ruby. The kid part is a problem for me.
- Yang: There's a limit to where you go in a documentary, because it's a powerful enough story already, and those things are unnecessary.
- Hadi: When he does that, it's more to push the point of what's going to happen to the next generation, which is the child's life. He represents a lot of children in China facing similar issues.
- Fan: Are we ready to nominate the awards? Just a quick recap. We will have three prizes for the award winners, including Gold Award, Silver Award and Special Mention. If you have any ideas, we can directly nominate the film that will get the Gold Award.
- Yang: I'm ready.
- Hadi: For me, a short list of films is *The Baby*, *Where the Sky Ends* and *Endless Road*, in no particular order.
- Yang: I second *The Baby*, *Where the Sky Ends* and *Endless Road*.
- Chan: Same for me too.
- Yang: Now is the hard part. Can we go for Special Mention first? My choice for Special Mention is *Endless Road*.
- Chan: *Endless Road* for me too.
- Hadi: I agree.
- Fan: A very quick decision. Now for silver and gold.
- Hadi: I'm more inclined to *The Baby* getting Gold because I quite like the simplicity of the story. I personally really enjoyed that and it was very successful in what it's trying to do.
- Yang: I agree. You can tell the filmmakers behind *Where the Sky Ends* are more experienced. And he managed to cast the people. With *The Baby*, he probably needs more help in making more films. His heart is into it, you can tell.
- Chan: I agree.

Asian New Force Category

Gold Award

The Baby

Ali Asgari (Iran)

Silver Award

Where The Sky Ends

Jacki Berman, Gilad Cohen (Israel)

Special Mention

Endless Road

Jin Hua-qing, Shi Xin-jie (China)