

18th ifva Awards - Asian New Force Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury members: Cheng Cheng (Cheng), Raymond Red (Red), Naomi Kawase (Kawase)

Organizer Representatives: Teresa Kwong (Kwong)

Kwong: The role of **ifva** is to provide a platform to discover and to nurture the next generation of talent in Hong Kong and Asia. Like other film competitions, we look at general criterions such as form and content, but there are two criterions that we would like to highlight and they are independent spirit and creativity. We can begin our discussion by going through the merits and weaknesses of each finalist.

Kawase: Maybe we could begin by rating the ones that we particularly like?

Red: I suggest we don't need to rate them now, but just mention the 3-4 works that we like.

Kawase: The film that I like the best is **The Other Side**. It is simple; however, the script is very pure. Through the mind of one boy, the film shows us the characteristics of that country. I felt it is very composed and I was very impressed.

Cheng: I agree!

Kawase: That's great! The other film that caught my eyes was a Chinese film, **The Home Gleaners**. This was a rather "too well done or overdone" film. The music, the action, the actor and the editing are all too well-done. Because it is too good, it concerns me. The little boy did a very good job with his acting. I want to ask you if he is a professional actor.

Cheng: No, this was his first work.

Red: Sorry, just to clarify, you might be a bit worried that the whole film feels professional. So you are worried about what kind of support that it received?

Kawase: That's not what I am worried about. It's just that there was a sad music for sad scene and things like that, which were too much arranged. I felt the same way for the ending.

Red: Were you worried about the film was too professionally supported with funding and production? To be honest, I sometimes get concerned about that. If we place so much emphasis on the independent spirit, if the filmmaker receives too much support, that is not being independent. It is not wrong to have support; filmmakers always apply for grants and get support here and there. And part of being independent is getting that support. But we never really know if all these things just fall on the filmmaker's lap. That is difficult to judge; that is being very technical

and very strict about it. Usually you just want to judge the film for what it is. But sometimes when I watch certain films, I somehow feel suspicious and wonder if the filmmaker really pulled this whole thing together. As a professional filmmaker, I go through that kind of struggle until now. Every film I make, I struggle to pull all the resources together. I have only done independent films so far. But I make a living making commercials and I see that as being spoiled. So I know the extreme as I rotate between commercials and independent films, and I still struggle with my independent films. I try to teach the young filmmakers to do it this way and that is the spirit of being independent, because you are not influenced by others. When the filmmaker receives too much support, however, we never know how much the filmmaker compromised to receive that support. Of course, there is no way to really find that out; we can't be detectives and find out the company in the credit and how much money they give to the filmmaker.

Cheng: So you are saying we should detach ourselves from thinking and suspecting what happened behind the camera?

Red: We try not to overdo that analysis but I am saying we do have to do that as well, to a certain extent. Obviously we can't really know what happened behind the scenes.

Cheng: I guess we have to define the meaning of "independent" amongst ourselves first.

Red: That's why when I am watching a film, I try to read all the end titles, the companies or if this was a university project or it was supported through a grant. Just to get an idea of how much support the filmmaker might have received.

Cheng: ***The Home Gleaners*** is actually a university project.

Kawase: The Beijing Film Academy, I believe, is a very high-level school.

Red: Yes, they do have that reputation. In a way, it is expected.

Cheng: Do we take that factor into consideration? Do we consider that film independent? As Teresa said earlier, there are two elements that we would like to emphasize for this category, creativity and independent spirit. Do we have a consensus or shared understanding on the definition of independent spirit?

Red: I think we pretty much understand the concept of it. When I pointed out things such as the support that filmmaker might have received, I don't want to be very strict about it. Let me tell you a story of an old famous director from the Philippines, Mike De Leon, who is considered one of the great directors from my country. Some people would criticize him for coming from a wealthy family, receiving support from a big film studio that started in the 1950s, or they (his

family) even owned the film lab. I don't know if that is fair criticism; the point is we should judge what his films are. Anyways, that was just an example. A student is definitely an independent filmmaker from the onset, regardless of whatever support that he has received.

Cheng: Sure, it seems like we have a consensus. Please continue with your picks, Ms. Kawase.

Kawase: I am okay with just these two works.

Red: So far you have only mentioned two works.

Kwong: I would also like to know why you didn't pick the other 8 films.

Kawase: As we continue our discussion, I am sure you will get hints and understand why I didn't choose the other 8 films.

Red: I want to ask don't you have a third film, even if it is very far from the first two that you chose.

Kawase: We talked about creativity and independent spirit. I thought we wanted to focus on the films that impressed us the most. With the other films, I wasn't certain why the filmmaker wanted to make this film. You ask me to judge those films but I can't chose the third film

Cheng: I have to agree with Ms. Kawase with those two films, but I would like to cross out ***the Concrete Heaven***, the animation, which is the one that I like the least.

Red: It is always difficult to judge different forms. This is an experimental animation. It is difficult to compare traditional narratives with an experimental animation. Usually I look at the film for what it is trying to achieve within its own category. I felt that film was quite different strangely. But when you look at the techniques and what it was trying to say, it wasn't very clear. In a way it wasn't pushing the envelope for experimentation as well as an animation film. Maybe that's why I would have given it a lower point even without comparing it with other films. That in itself is a minus for that film.

Cheng: Okay! So I totally agree with Ms. Kawase. I love ***The Other Side*** and ***The Home Gleaners*** for the exact same reasons. I just watched them as a normal moviegoer; I sat there, I laughed and I cried. They moved me very much. I didn't care how the directors made their films, but I really wanted to keep watching and following how the stories unfolded. It was a very satisfying experience in that way. I didn't put much thought to their independent spirit; I simply enjoyed watching them as a regular person. I really enjoyed watching them besides their technical

aspects. I would give thumbs up to these two films. If I have to pick a third film, it will be between *When the Sunset Disappear* and *Malchiki*. The former took place during China's Cultural Revolution. It began with a very loving and peaceful scene with elderly people having fun. This scene was told by one of the grandsons. At the very beginning, through the voice-over, he said this was the last time that I had seen them together. I wasn't really expecting anything really dramatic in the middle or towards the end of the film. When the police came in, everything turned around and I thought it felt like something that could happen to our society today, not necessarily politically but economically or culturally. Just when we think we are enjoying peaceful time, there is no war, a tsunami could happen out of nowhere and a nuclear plant could get out of control, and the government tries to suppress the flow of information. There are all these time bombs that are planted around us and we are not aware of them. We could be having fun. *When the Sunset Disappear* reminded me that we should be aware of what kind of society that we are living in. It got me thinking about many things. As for *Malchiki*, for some reasons, I like the topic of youthfulness. The story is set in a strict, a very disciplined and serious backdrop, the cadet school at the navy. People are not supposed to have fun; they are just supposed to follow orders. They are trained to be killers. When you are a kid or when you are an adult living under that same roof, you could sense that youthfulness within yourself. That is something you really treasure because that is something that no one can take away from you even though the characters seems to be living in a prison-like environment. They might be able to take away your freedom or your money, but they can't take away your feeling youthfulness or your desire to long for love, relationship and nostalgia. And that is wonderful.

Red: I want to clarify, is it a military school or are they drafted?

Cheng: I think it's a cadet school, which is training them to be navy soldiers.

Those are the officers that are training them. So I like those two films as well: *When the Sunset Disappear* and *Malchiki*.

Red: when I am watching a film, I try not to think of the other films, but instead focus on what the filmmaker attempts to do, the message that he/she tries to convey and if he/she is achieving it. At the end of the day, it's about if the film communicates to me. I don't think we are going to have any trouble, for the best two films for me are the same: *The House Gleaners* and *The Other Side*. They are so strong and they are narrative films. Some filmmakers might think this is unfair maybe the jury leans towards the narrative films, but we can't escape the fact that the narrative films speak very well. If there is an experimental film or an animation film, and I judge them for what it is since I believe it is a fair way to judge them; it might be difficult to compare it with a narrative film. Anyways, those were the two films that are the most powerful. They both had that impact; they were very well-made.

They were simple and minimalistic, I wouldn't call them old-fashioned, yet they contained their own language and their stories were very clear. They both dealt with the all important aspects of telling a story and gave me, being a foreigner, the background of their culture, their people and their living conditions. It was very powerful filmmaking. The other thing with short films is that I see a lot of short films that actually communicate very well and they are considered good films. Yet, many of them seem to have the tendency that the filmmaker seems to want to do a feature film, yet he/she just couldn't do it perhaps due to lack of budget and support, so he/she ends up making a short film. I don't have this kind of feeling with these films. They are short films; they are powerful as they are given their length. I always like that in a short film, for that is what sets a short film apart from a feature film. I always say we are uplifting the tradition of the short form, which is a legitimate form of cinema like the feature film. These are the kind of films that achieve that purpose. They lift the short form as a powerful contribution to cinema, just as powerful as a feature film. That's what makes them stand out.

Now I would also like to mention films that somewhat created some impact or caught my attention, but I am kind of confused by them. I noticed **Malchiki** because it had a very clear story and I related to it. It was a guys' story about falling in love.

Cheng: Coming of age?

Red: I am relating to both of the main characters as somewhere in between; I might be aging but I still feel like a young man, so I can understand what the officer is talking about "not having enough time to fall in love" and so on. It's well made; it's very engaging and entertaining. But I think it's not that close to the first two films. Another film that I noticed was **One Shoe Walks Barefoot**. I had mixed feelings about it. I was entertained as I watched it for what it was. It didn't seem to be telling a very big message but I did understand it; it was amusing and playful, mixing animation and the idea that who was dreaming, this real girl or the car worker. I liked the theme of dream versus reality duality and I have done that in my film. It is something personal. I found it amusing.

Cheng: It is amusing but it reminds me of the French film, **Amelie** so much that I can't differentiate the two films. **Amelie** seems to have a huge impact on this work. Don't you think?

Red: It could be. It's true. Many filmmakers get a lot of influence this way, but I think it did have some original ideas. Like I said, I was entertained, that's why I mentioned.

Cheng: It is entertaining; it was nice to watch.

Red: But it was very far from the first two in terms of overall performance.

Red: The other film that I noticed and I don't even know if I liked it, but I felt something for it. It was the ***Female Directors***. I actually want to hear your honest opinion about it.

Cheng: From a female director? (All laughed)

Red: I don't understand the language so I was just reading the subtitles. I was feeling for them. I had no sense if they were good actresses; I thought they were and the film felt real. And I guess that's what struck me. This was not very original; so many filmmakers have done this kind of pseudo-documentary. Yet, for what it was trying to achieve, it felt convincing. I found this love triangle very amusing and that's the only thing that struck me. I have seen several experimental films that were very similar to this one. Yet, it did communicate to me as I felt that the characters were real. You can understand the language?

Cheng: Part of it. The characters spoke in mandarin and in their local dialects.

Red: That would be interesting; they were shifting dialects?

Cheng: No, we all speak mandarin but people from different provinces have their own dialects.

Red: I know China is such a big country and there are so many dialects, similar to the Philippines. So I find the small details interesting: how one of the characters wants to acquire the resident permit in Beijing. That was just amusing for me. At the same time, the two characters are fighting over this old guy, which was very amusing for me. I just noticed this film. It is very far from the top 2 films, just another film that I noticed.

Cheng: It struck me when I first watched it. It is not something new. Yet I think the most important and the hardest thing for any artist is to be totally honest about himself/herself. As directors, we can hide behind the camera and project a different image of ourselves easily. That is easy for people to do. The most precious thing is to be totally and utterly honest. This film struck me because it felt very real and that is the hardest thing to do, in front of or behind the camera. And that is something I really treasure. It was good.

Red: I was wondering how much of this film was real.

Cheng: I don't know.

Red: I thought it was all acted out.

Cheng: It was supposed to be scripted. At the end credit we could see a scriptwriter. By

the way that they presented it, it felt like it was scripted. That is something I really encourage people to do with their script; this film contains something dark and contemporary, which reflects the current social situation in China: for young females or youngsters going to work or to pursue their dreams in a major city, they could end up...

Red: Being picked up by an old man.

Cheng: Yes. That is really contemporary and the director is really upfront about it. I really enjoyed watching it.

Red: That's why I kind of notice this film.

Kawase: As a female director myself, I find it difficult to say much about this film. This film really didn't give me much feel of love as a person. I feel like this is a very trivial movie; anyone can make this kind of film. In order to see your inner self, you must be able to find something that you didn't notice before; you elicit what is inside and how they could impact your life. If you can't really pursue that in a film, I don't think it's really worthwhile making that film. The problem was I didn't feel much love in that film.

Cheng: Yes!

Red: I agree and that's why I said I just noticed it. I did feel something but in its totality I am not saying it's a great film. It's also not original as I have seen it done before. Maybe I was intrigued by how much of it was real; they did look real.

Cheng: I think they are sincere. But I guess Ms. Kawase just pointed the most important part here, it is really trivial.

Red: That they are in love with the same old guy?

Cheng: Not necessarily, I think it's more the way that they presented it. They seem to be trivializing a trivial matter. That's the disappointing part.

Red: Or maybe it's worse. They are trivializing a very sensitive and important issue, it's their condition. Young girls, that are desperate and needing money in a city, fall for a rich old guy that is offering them money.

Cheng: He is more like paying for something.

Kawase: I would like to talk a little bit about *Malchiki*. This was shot on film. I really felt that was how it was made. I rent a 16mm camera when I started making films. I think this movie really touched me and its filming was well-planned. It was also

beautifully made and I believe it was done based on the basic principles of filmmaking.

Red: It definitely felt very commercial and professional.

Kawase: I think this filmmaker studied in a film school, if I remember correctly from the credits.

Cheng: In St. Petersburg.

Red: Since you mentioned the music, I have to mention *The Home Gleaners*, I felt it was over-scored in some scenes. I just felt the arraignment of the music was a bit overdone; although it was an orchestral music yet it sounded a bit electronic. It was a very personal thing. It's a minor comment; the music worked in the film. For my taste, I would tone it down a bit. When they were walking in the rubbles, I would tone it down a bit since it's already a very dramatic moment. I would have brought it down a bit, not just the volume but also the arrangement of the music. It's not a major thing, but rather a personal preference.

Kwong: So anyone wants to say anything about the Taiwanese film *A Reunion Night* and the Turkish film *The Blue Identity*?

Cheng: They are both nice films.

Red: *The Blue Identity* was interesting. I lived in Berlin many years ago so I could recognize some of the places in the film that was shot there. It was an interesting "a day in a life" for two Turkish men. They are very different. One is older than the other. You realize their situation. I wouldn't say it's engaging even though it shows mood, scenes and what they go through during their daily world. Ultimately, the message was about this situation of having the "blue identity". I just felt that it didn't come through very clearly, I am not sure if I missed any subtitles but in the end the director established that message. If that was his main message, I thought he could have integrated it more into the story. We witnessed what a Turkish refugee went through in one day living in Germany. Maybe it could have been stronger if the message was more integrated more clearly into the story. Otherwise I felt something for it. Kawase: I think they are both nice films too.

Red: It seems like nobody has said anything about *Martha Must Fly*.

Cheng: I have no specific comment. Red: It is technically good and the director tries to experiment in the beginning. I actually understand what the director tries to impart. She knows how to handle actors and to express thoughts, ideas and feelings through scenes. Ultimately, it was disappointing because it is something too personal and a very common story. At first, it felt something like a different story

but the ending ruined it. I have to admit that theme of being fatalistic is exactly the same as one of my earlier short films. I am not saying mine is a better film. It is just a very common film that I see in so many other student films. The theme of “flight” is a very universal theme and it is very easy for film students to come up with a story around that theme.

Cheng: As a form of escape from our daily life. It didn't intrigue me as a whole.

Red: In its totality. This is good. I think we are unanimous with the films that we like; we are just different with the films that we dislike.

Kwong: Maybe we can start discussing the award recipients. Could each of you please choose 3 films?

Cheng: Let's talk about the Gold Award first.

Red: We are unanimous with the top two films, we can just pick from those two, ***The Other Side*** and ***The Home Gleaners***, and 4 other finalists left to consider for Special Mention: ***When the Sunset Disappear***, ***Female Directors***, ***Malchiki and One Shoe Walks Barefoot***.

Kwong: Please nominate the film for Gold Award.

Kawase: I have a choice already and I pick ***The Other Side*** for the Gold Award.

Cheng: I have no debate on that. I am just thinking technically those two films are equals. They both dealt with enlightening topics in China and Israel respectively. It shows people the social situations in these two countries. As a whole, I prefer ***The Other Side***; it is more complete and slick. Yet, I actually cried twice while watching ***the Home Gleaners*** and didn't shed any tears while watching ***The Other Side***. I am not opposed to either film to be picked for Gold Award, so I don't have a preference.

Kawase: I actually cried while watching ***The Other Side***. As for ***The Home Gleaners***, it gave us many tearful scenes however I did not cry. As Raymond mentioned, the movie was best matched and the music inserted at the right moment. As I said earlier, this movie was too well made. As for ***The Other Side***, while it didn't strike me with as much impact, but the background or the countries held such sadness that those problems left a big impression on my life of reality. For this reason I was very moved.

Red: Of course the ball was a very powerful metaphor.

Kawase: On top of that, the ball in fact belonged to the late brother, who died during the

war. This little boy wanted to be connected with someone from the other side of the wall by playing that soccer ball.

Red: What was really powerful with those two films was that they were telling stories that were rooted in their own realities. As a foreigner, I feel like I have witnessed a unique story into the human conditions from watching these two films. I have to admit that the plus factor came from their main characters. As long as the kids are good actors, the films never fail. They were both very good in these two films. I didn't exactly cry in both films, maybe I am a cold-hearted bastard. I am too logical; I look at the sadness and emotions as something more conceptual. I felt strongly and emotional about these two films. That's why it's so difficult to decide between the two. They are very different stories yet they evoke similar emotions in me. We are not setting out to decide only this type of story should win and I think it's just a coincidence that these two films are about kids. Having kids in these two stories, I feel it implies an unknown future and that's what kids tell us in these films.

Kawase: With *The House Gleaners*, there was an old man whose story was embraced. Towards the end of the film, he went back to his home, the house was open and there was no one around, that's how it ended. As for *The Other Side*, however, I was attracted to the last shot. We were able to see both sides of the wall and that made me think a lot. It is not that which side of the wall is right or wrong. Through giving us a look at both sides of the wall, we are forced to check our point of view.

Red: That division was both symbolic and literal at the same time.

Kawase: In the Chinese film, at the last scene, I saw some rubbles. Do you know if it was filmed in an existing site?

Cheng: It was a location.

Kawase: It was a re-developed area?

Cheng: It's not demolished, just rubbles.

Red: I have to admit that *The Home Gleaners* had a strong emotional impact on me, for it reminds me of my own short film, *Anino (Shadow)*, which won the Palm d'Or in Cannes back in 2000. It dealt with a very similar theme. It was about a down and out photographer in Manila. He was a very poor man who took photos for people and got paid for doing that. It was a dying job as the digital camera became more popular. I had a little boy actor in that film as well and *The House Gleaners* reminded me so much of that experience. Having said that, on a more conceptual side and since I do make experimental films, I find *The Other Side* a stronger film. It is both philosophically and psychologically stronger; I like films like that. So what am I saying. I guess I will choose *The Other Side* for the Gold

Award.

Cheng: So it's 2 votes to 1 vote and I am okay with this.

Kwong: So the Gold Award goes to ***The Other Side***.

Kawase: I can embrace you and hold your tears (All laughed)

Kwong: So does everyone agree that the Silver Award will go to ***The Home Gleaners?***

Cheng: Yes please.

Kwong: What about the Special Mention Award?

Kawase: I would nominate ***Malchiki***.

Red: I am thinking, from a very practical or pragmatic point of view, meaning I am trying to serve the goals of the Special Mention Award. ***Malchiki*** is a good film, but I have to say I would lean towards to a more independent and more gorilla type of film. I would even nominate ***Female Directors***, which is that type of film.

Kwong: So you will nominate the ***Female Directors?***

Red: I have mixed feelings about it actually if I consider this type of guerrilla or underground filmmaking, as we said, the ***Female Directors*** isn't that original, and maybe it doesn't deserve encouragement.

Cheng: No, it shouldn't be encouraged.

Red: Yes, then they will make more of this type of film. I am arguing with myself right now. I am torn between encouraging/supporting and recognition based on merit. If we are just trying to recognize a work based on its merits, then I would pick ***Malchiki***. I am struggling within myself the purpose of the Special Mention Award and how it can become more useful to the young filmmakers. I try to take that into consideration.

Cheng: I think you have the right intention to encourage films like the ***Female Directors***. As a whole, however, I don't think we should encourage what she produced to be done again. I totally understand your struggle. Let me put you out of your misery. I would choose ***Malchiki***. So you have to decide, unless you are strongly opposed to it.

Red: I am not. ***Malchiki*** is actually the best film in the 4 remaining finalists. So I was just struggling with the meaning of the Special Mention Award.

Cheng: If you ask me, I would actually pick ***When the Sunset Disappear*** for my taste. But it would not work if we all each come up with a different work. I agree that ***Malchiki*** is the best among the rest. Would you support ***When the Sunset Disappear*** if I switch to it, because I am not going to support the ***Female Directors***.

Red: I didn't dislike ***When the Sunset Disappear*** but I was kind of lost and I knew I was missing something culturally.

Cheng: Due to the cultural background?

Red: Yes, while I was watching it, I had to follow the subtitles and I felt I missed something cultural or innate from that film as a foreign jury. That's why it didn't strike me as that strong of a film.

Cheng: And you are not alone, because the Cultural Revolution doesn't show up in the textbooks in mainland China. So you are not alone, 1.3 billion are on the same boat with you.

Red: Okay, I will pick ***Malchiki*** instead. I realize it would be an even bigger problem if we don't give that recognition to this film.

Kwong: So this year, the Gold Award goes to ***The Other Side*** from Israel. The Silver Award goes to ***The House Gleaners*** and the Special Mention Award goes to ***Malchiki***.

Asian New Force Category

Gold Award

The Other Side

Khen Shalem

Silver Award

The House Gleaners

Zhang Siqing

Special Mention

Malchiki

Ilya Kazankov