

The 19th ifva Awards - Open Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury members: Felix Chong (Chong), Gary Tang (Tang), Mary Wong (Wong), Rachel Zen (Zen), Leung Man-tao (Leung)

ifva representatives : Teresa Kwong (Kwong), Kattie Fan (Fan)

Kwong: Thank you for serving as the jury panel members for the 19th **ifva**. The purpose of the meeting today is to select awards for the Open Category of the **ifva**. The Open Category is open to all Hong Kong residents age 18 or over, and while we place no limits on the subject matter and form, the works have to be less than 30 minutes in length. The cut-off date for **ifva** this year was 28 October 2013, and we received a total of 180 works this year. The three first round jury members picked over 50 works out of the 180, and then Felix Chong, Gary Tang and Rachel Zen chose the 9 finalist works, which you have all seen just now.

Over the years, **ifva** has developed into an event that covers Hong Kong and the Asia region. We accept works in different categories including animation and interactive media, etc. The aim of **ifva** is to encourage cultural exchange between Hong Kong and Asian media artists. In March each year we organize the **ifva** short film and visual media festival in which we invite Hong Kong and Asian artists to take part. We also arrange many educational events through various channels, as well as cooperate with past award winners on their feature film projects or short film distribution.

In addition to content, form and technique, **ifva** also emphasizes two criteria, independent spirit and creativity.

Zen: What do independent spirit and creativity mean?

Kwong: To me, independent spirit is the creator's position, his vision and how he manifests his creative vision through his or her work.

Zen: Are we talking about the work's nature and perspective?

Kwong: We are looking at the creators themselves.

Zen: That means their thinking? Does this view represent the organizers?

Kwong: This is just my view, and other people can have their views as well. As the event's organizers, this is the kind of ideology we wish to emphasize.

Chong: Last year a few jury members including myself made a definition of independent spirit, which included the artist's relationship with social context and his or her willingness to do things that few others in society do.

Zen: How do you weigh the balance between social context and conscience? If a work reveals a deep regard for social context, but on the other hand there is conscience, how do we judge? I understand that social context has to do with everyday life, but each person's interpretation is different, so how do you evaluate that?

Chong: This is very general, but using your definition, if a work offers a perspective different from the general public, we would define it as having independent spirit.

Leung: In the second round jury deliberations, did you apply the same principle and standard?

Chong: It was a bit vague. We each nominated works to be included among the finalists.

Leung: Did you discuss in detail the competition's principle and spirit?

Kwong: We briefly touched on them.

Zen: In the last round, we talked about whether to emphasize independent spirit, but you failed to convince me why independent spirit should be so important. To me, conscience has to come first. Some works are very successful in many aspects, and it is apparent that the creator has strong abilities and is able to express himself using the documentary format. However, viewing it as a media professional, I have real problems with the work, because it seems to show off the director's ability to cheat people. Cheating occurs in many professions, but this type of cheating will affect people's perception of mass media. That's why I highly question this work. I don't understand what is so great about independent spirit. There are 7 billion people in the world, so what if you are independent? The work's effect on the public is more important.

Leung: **ifva** has been around for 19 years, and it had always stressed being independent.

I think independent is not separate from conscience. In every age, the majority view, no matter in the areas of commerce, politics and ideology, there are many mainstream opinions. If a person has views different from the majority and is able to express it in a video, that takes a certain amount of courage and means that he or she has the conviction to hold views that are different from other people. This type of courage stems from the person's conscience and convictions, and viewed in this way, independent spirit and conscience may not be one and the same, but are certainly connected. I want to talk about the procedure for our discussion. We can start off with talking about definitions and then discuss which of the works fulfill these criteria. The other way is to explore the spirit and theme of the competition through discussing these works. It may seem ridiculous to talk about the works without first agreeing on the principles, but simply discussing principles and standards is not only time-consuming, but also abstract, because these principles and standards are realized through the works themselves. Rachel has expressed her views about this particular work. Can we start with discussing the works one by one?

Zen: I accept what you just said. However, *The Aqueous Truth* takes advantage of people's current distrust of the government, and we should talk about whether this distrust should be used this way. In our work, we have to think about what to use and how much to use, as well as what effect this will have on others, particularly young people. These are important considerations. There should be limits on expressing independent spirit, and we should consider whether to broach these limits.

Chan: I agree with Leung in that we should discuss these principles through talking about the works themselves. I don't think there is a big difference in our points of view. What Rachel talked about was what responsibility the artist has under the umbrella of artistic liberty. We should definitely consider a work's form and originality, even though content and vision are also important.

Zen: In the previous round of discussion, I queried the definition of independent spirit and creativity. The message I got was that independent spirit meant non-commercial. At first I was unclear about the definition of independent spirit, and so my interpretation was different from the organizers. After selecting the 9 finalist works, I now have a better idea.

Leung: With your consent, I'd like to begin by talking about the works one by one. And if, in

the process, we have questions about the independent spirit of a particular work, we can bring it up for discussion.

Chong: Based on Rachel's query about the moral implications of *The Aqueous Truth*, I watched it again today, and found the work to be a failure. Is it supposed to be funny, or is it trying to deceive people? If it is the latter, then the director should not use the text at the end, which was decidedly unfunny. In terms of plot, the film is well-crafted, particularly in the transition between scenes and its narrative. However, some of the acting is quite awful. After watching the whole work, I question the director's motives. He is doing something strange in a way he considers funny, but I don't see any merit in its aesthetics or film sense. After watching it a second time, it is the second work I eliminated.

Kwong: Before discussing the works, I should talk about the prizes The Open Category has one Gold Award, the winner of which gets a HK\$50,000 prize and a trophy, as well as the chance to visit a film festival.. We will provide the airfare and hotel costs, as well as photography equipment. There is also a celebratory banquet.

Fan: This year, we have Dorsett Hotel as our sponsor, which will provide a celebratory banquet for 30 people. This is the first time we have such an arrangement. A film is not the sole purview of the director, and this banquet gives the director and his cast and crew a chance to celebrate and give thanks.

Kwong: There is also a Silver Award winner, who will get HK\$30,000 cash prize, a trophy and a celebratory banquet. The final award is Special Mention, which gives recognition to works whose overall standard may not be on par with Gold or Silver Award winners, but contain certain aspects the jury panel wishes to encourage. It is up to the jury panel to decide what aspects of the work deserves special mention, the winner of which will get a certificate. If there are no further questions, we can begin discussing the works. The first one is *Journey*.

Zen: Should we rank the works now, or what?

Kwong: To warm up, we can start by discussing the works, and then vote.

Zen: The female lead is just so-so, and the character is not well written. The viewer does not know what the character wants. The director is very serious, but the audience may feel just as annoyed by the female lead as her husband in the film.

She keeps changing her mind about what she wants, so it may be best that they divorce in the end. The film touches on a rather banal and trivial subject common to many couples living in this city, which fails to move the audience. RTHK and TVB have produced many dramas similar to this one, so I don't find this work particularly attractive.

Kwong: Perhaps jury members from the previous round who selected this work may explain their reasons for doing so.

Chong: When I watched this film the first time, my impression was not bad, but watching it again on the big screen today brought out all its flaws, including its acting, camera work, etc. The overall impression is that this is a mediocre work that feels commonplace.

Tang: In the previous round, several works touched on the subject of the City of Dreams, and this one stood out among the rest. Watching it again today, I feel that the director may not have experienced the situations depicted in the film, the dramatic tension of which is not as great as he imagined. For example, what's so important about going to Europe for a year, and why should it lead to such consequences? It all seems rather contrived.

Leung: What it tries to achieve has been done very successfully in other films like *Revolutionary Road*, which is also about an idealistic husband and wife. That film provides ample opportunity to explore the issue of dreams and the forces that prevent people from achieving those dreams. *Journey* lacks the power to locate the couple within the social context, and consequently it merely seems like the story of this particular couple. Technically the film is inadequate and the acting mediocre. For example, it does not explain what going to Europe means for them, and why they find it so important. It does not satisfactorily portray the changing relationship of the couple, nor does it function effectively as social criticism.

Wong: If creativity means being non-stereotypical, then this work is just the opposite. This includes going to Europe. It turns Hong Kong people's imagining of Europe into a stereotype, and skips over many important aspects of the couple's relationship, and easily resolves the couple's conflict in the end. In terms of independent spirit, the work is not independent enough, including its form.

Kwong: If you have nothing further to add, let's move on to *The Echoes of Circles*.

- Zen: The English name is easier to understand than the Chinese.
- Leung: It talks about the corner of a circle, but I'm not sure what that means either.
- Zen: I think it describes the meeting of people. Circle, like this table, is a meeting place in which people meet to hear each other speak and explain his or her point of view. Echoes refer to people's viewpoints, which influence each other and accompany one's maturation.
- Leung: The Chinese title also contains a word that can mean "whisper." However, I find I cannot understand this film through its title. The work contains several layers of misplacement. The first layer contains images from different cities including Varanasi in India, Bangkok, Tokyo, Seoul and Hong Kong, and the still images from these cities are interspersed with different languages and dialects including Cantonese, Korean and Japanese. Another layer is the splicing together of these different languages and dialects so that viewers think the Korean speaker is responding to the Japanese speaker, but it is not necessarily the case. The final section contains a mechanized voice asking questions and answering in Cantonese, and the third layer is the communication between human beings and electronic equipment. The film is a juxtaposition of these three layers, although I'm not sure what the circle in the title refers to.
- Zen: The film ends where it starts, bringing things back full circle. The film depicts a blind person, who says that being alive is the best thing, and a boy who says that technology can't solve his problem communicating with his family. What he is saying is that one has to return to basics to satisfy one's needs.
- Wong: The film is very poetic. Using still images and voice-over, it creates different layers using languages from different countries to depict the conflict between human nature and technology/development. The artist takes a humanistic standpoint, and for this reason, I think its mode of thinking is over-simplified. Its aesthetics is very self-controlled, but I think the film could be developed further, for example, in terms of the relationship between nature and control, which the film only captured partially.
- Zen: If that was the case, then we only have to listen to the film. Why bother with the images? Its voice-over is good and the characters are enjoyable, except for the

third part, which is too deliberate and contrived. The first two sections are quite good.

Leung: I like the narrative in the third part. At first you assume that the voice belongs to a machine program, but upon further listening it is not the case. It's quite baffling.

Chong: It is a very advanced form of artificial intelligence.

Leung: In the section that comes before, the Korean speaking man talks about why we should communicate. The third section takes this one step further, and the mediated communication makes us unsure whether we are talking to a human being or not, which is an interesting point. I think it is a pity that the voice-over does not deliver more, and the film appears a bit simplified. It contains a lot of Asian imagery, and could have explored many more layers, like power. The film's imagery is very touristy, except for the part showing the Philippines, in which the Japanese girl talks about her relationship with another person on her own accord. This juxtaposition is very interesting, and it'd be better if it also contains references and analysis about power. What I mean is the relative position between people from different countries in Asia. If the director could put more effort into positioning different voices and locations, it would be more interesting. Now I feel that the film leaves many possibilities unexplored. Perhaps I'm over-interpreting it.

Wong: If this work were to be developed further, the screenplay has to be better. The work contains only two elements: picture and sound. Under these circumstances, the script, particularly the voice-over, should be written with more care, instead of simply talking about everyday matters. I feel this work is very poetic, but has the potential to be more political, too.

Leung: For example, the film shows Beijing's Chang An Street at the end, which is the centre of power in China. The film gives out many hints, but they are not developed further. Is this deliberate?

Zen: It leaves room for the audience to think, and the director doesn't care what you think about.

Chong: Watching it on the big screen today made me realize how bad the photography is. I don't agree that the Thailand section is touristy. I pass by that spot often and stare at it a lot. It is where the Four-Faced Brahma shrine is located, and is an

interesting location. It is a chaotic place where you often find women dancing at the shrine, while the traffic is very busy and there are always traffic jams. When the car is stuck in traffic, I would look out the window at that spot. I have always felt that it is a very dramatic location, a place worth filming, but I haven't found a suitable story to go with it. When watching this film on the big screen, I realized the director, like me, has not really thought through what it is he wanted to capture. In the same way, the futuristic garden at the end is also neither here nor there. The director had not really considered what he wanted to portray, but simply felt that the location seemed symbolic, and so he filmed it.

Leung: The Four-Faced Brahma shrine is very interesting. On one side there is the Skytrain, and motorcycles driving by, and on the other side there is the Four-Faced Brahma. There are many layers to that location, with many different colors and speeds, all co-existing in one place...

Chong: But the director of this film chose the most boring spot from the top of the pedestrian bridge, probably the Skytrain station, maybe because it's the most convenient.

Tang: The part with the police car is a bit of a waste and seems wrong for the scene, and so is the electronic voice. When I was watching it, I felt the film deals with personal emotions. Usually when we speak of emotions, we associate them with certain contexts. Perhaps something happened or there are certain experiences that caused us to express certain emotions, but these are not present in this film. I think the first two sections are ok, and successfully portray a sense of alienation, but the third section seems to be about an altogether different topic. The voice-over in the first two sections is very personal, but the final section is too obvious.

Chong: I think he chose the wrong images. If the images in that section were more humanistic, it could achieve that kind of effect.

Kong: The next work is *Invisible Rock*.

Zen: I ranked this work 9th, because I cannot stand the casting a young man in the role of a child, which caused me to cringe. This work is similar to *The Little One* in describing the hurt caused by a mother, but does not portray that sense of hurt very well, and so the audience is unable to identify with the main character.

- Wong: Compared with *The Little One*, I prefer ***Invisible Rock***. This work expresses the personal feelings of the director, and at least remains in that state, while *The Little One* tells a very turbulent story without first allowing people identify of the underlying feelings.
- Chong: This work stands up well on the big screen, and the images are rich with textures of light and shadow. It is heavily influenced by Gothic rock culture, and is very dark. The images like rabbit man and lace curtains made me smile because I did this kind of stuff in the 1990s while studying in university. However, in the last ten years or more, many universities, including Baptist University, stress creative industries, which produced works like ***Journey***, and left out people who go to the extremes. On my first viewing of this film, I felt its reference to Italo Calvino cringe-worthy, but it was ok on the big screen, perhaps because I was surrounded by sound. The same thing happened with ***God Bless All Parents***, the street market-like atmosphere of which made the film even more painful. ***Invisible Rock's*** attempt at something so old-school in this day and age felt alright to me, and I was not too turned off by it, even though I did not give it the highest mark. This work is very personal, to the point of being pretentious. The line in which the character says, "I sleep with boys but I'm not gay" is pretentious to the extreme. I see the work as a dark wave version of a Yonfan film. It is an acquired taste, and I enjoyed it.
- Leung: With his cinematography, he is qualified to make music videos for The Sisters of Mercy. He references Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* to tell a story about a **journey**, but it is a bit contrived. He uses childhood experiences to connect with Calvino, but the relationship between the two is not clear, and it is difficult to explain within the limited scope of the work. His art direction is very good, and if this was the Youth Category, I would give him an award, but in the Open Category, I have to judge it according to more mature standards, such as how he deals with the questions I posed just now.
- Chong: I agree. When I made student films, I also tended to insert all my favorite elements into my films. This director must be very enamored with Calvino. He uses *Invisible Cities'* idea of a traveler going around carrying his own past, which keeps changing. If the director only cited parts of the book, it'd be ok, because his mother left for another woman and made him the way he is.
- Wong: I'm not saying this work deserves the Gold Award, but among all the works, this one is the most original, even though it is not the best.

Tang: Its visuals are beautiful, and this is especially apparent on the big screen. However I don't like the fact that he fills his work pretentiously with literary texts, which I consider self indulgent.

Chong: He is a literatus.

Zen: You say that his visuals are beautiful, but to me they are old-fashioned, and I've seen plenty of stuff like this before.

Chong: In the days when we shot films in 16mm, most of the works were like this one.

Leung: It has a very 1980s style.

Kwong: The next work is *Yeung Yeung with Cows*.

Zen: I ranked this film very highly. Watching it on the big screen did not change the work much for me, but the light in her eyes is even more apparent. This lady is a mystery to me. What is the reason for her deep bond with cows? The last part in which she hopes that the owner would look at his cow is very reasonable. The cows look beautiful, and each one has its own personality. The lead character is very attractive, and the film demonstrates humanistic concern. The scene where she gets angry and scolds people is also good, because it shows a different side of her, for no one can be perfect. I wonder how she makes a living, and where her money comes from? The film does not make this clear.

Leung: I think the film is not comprehensive enough. Yeung Yeung is quite a famous figure in the animal protection field, and many people have written about and filmed her. The topic touches on a lot of issues including Lantau Island planning, agriculture, etc. What is wrong with cows just wandering around on the hillsides? The distinctive thing about Yeung Yeung is her stubbornness. She does not care what people say about her, and simple does as she pleases. No matter whether this is a good thing or bad, it is an attractive trait. If the director can portray some background information, then Yeung Yueng's distinct character will be more apparent. Now it seems that the film is only about the world of the cow home, as if director has only just met her, finds her interesting and starts filming her. I don't know how long he spent making this film, but he has not left the confines of the cow sanctuary, nor does he attempt to film the cows outside of the sanctuary.

Halfway through the film, I wondered whether he would venture outside, but in the end he doesn't, so the vision of the film is limited. Even though I agree that his portrayal of Yeung Yeung is filled with affection, it suffers from a lack of detachment.

Wong: When I watched it, I felt the work to be unfinished. Making a film about a woman and cows should not just focus on her and cows, but rather how the whole society views this strange person. The work does not have anything related to the society surrounding the main character. Even though it is quite adept at capturing the countryside and the sounds, as well as a sense of oppressiveness, I feel that it does not do a good enough job of exploring the social issue.

Zen: Is this by a Baptist University student?

Chong: He is a student of Ying Liang, and studies at the Academy for Performing Arts. I would not consider how much creative liberty he has. He chose to depict this simple character within this confined space, and simply brings out this character's sense of obsession. In the end, he successfully portrays what most directors hope to bring out in their works, which is a character with a beautiful soul, and to me, that's enough. As a documentary, you may have high expectations of it, but I just view it as a character portrait. Looking at her mud encrusted hands on the big screen, I cannot but feel touched. Another point is the Yeung Yeung came from a rich family, but her family does not support her, forcing her to live in the present condition, yet she remains cheerful.

Leung: I am not expecting him to make a film about a very broad social context, for example, about the controversy concerning animal rights, etc. I merely suspect that he did not spend enough time on the subject.

Chong: He probably filmed for around three days.

Leung: If only he could follow this person around for a month or even six months, he could have got a more in-depth portrayal of her.

Chong: Last year, I saw another work by one of Ying Liang's students, which also did not clearly delineate the issues, but it was enjoyable nonetheless. That was also a student work that was finished over one weekend. When looking at a work, of course we do not take into account the production period. When I saw **Yeung**

Yeung with Cows on the big screen today, I felt if I was the director, I would spend more time exploring this woman's relationship with cows. Perhaps this student is too enamored with her, and is not interested in the world outside.

Leung: Actually, her neighbors don't like her.

Wong: You can't really make a documentary in two days.

Leung: **Sister Kam** focuses on an even smaller area, but it is highly complete.

Chong: I disliked **Sister Kam**. He focuses his attention on depicting the lower class, but at the same time he is consuming her.

Wong: Why is that?

Chong: He is showing off her misfortune and down-troddenness. Watching the film, I feel Kam's situation is not so terrible, yet the film insists on showing how awful her life is. Why does it choose to portray her that way? The director keeps asking her if her life is hard--is that necessary? He does not respect her job as a dishwasher, and does not show her washing dishes. Rather, the film is focused on her oral history, like her having been a Red Guard, etc., which is all very symbolic. Then I looked at the credits, and found that it is done by the same group of people as *Beautiful Life*. However, I gave *Beautiful Life* the highest mark.

Kwong: Do you have anything to add about **Yeung Yeung with Cows**?

Tang: I like it better this time around, because I can see the cows better, and they are beautiful. As for **Sister Kam**, I feel that the director is not interested in depicting Kam the person, but rather is using her as a means to an end. What he really wants to talk about is Hong Kong's current situation, while **Yeung Yeung with Cows** is about the relationship between the woman and her cows. The cows are also the main characters in the film, and his portrayal of this relationship is very successful. I don't know Yeung Yeung as a person, but I feel moved by the film, mostly because of the close-ups of cows.

Zen: One of my friends had worked for Yeung Yeung as a volunteer, and she watched the film with me at APA. She had many reactions when viewing the film. She said she had never seen Yeung Yeung with rings on her fingers, nor does she cover her

rice with white towels. She had never seen her dressed so neatly before. I thought that is normal, for she is being filmed. I believe Yeung Yeung has a lot of say in how the film was made, and what she allowed them to film. That was part of the limitations they faced. They are only students, and cannot really control her.

Wong: However, they must have planned out the film before they started filming.

Zen: I'm sure they had, and the teachers would make them prepare. But once they got on location, it's a different story. If each of you went out to make a film about Yeung Yeung, you would have come back with different results, for the filmmakers' age, background and character may influence your work.

Kwong: The next film is *Beautiful Life*.

Zen: This is a pleasing film, and all the jury members liked it in the previous round. It is a well-balanced work, and the master of the house is very sweet, and even though the wife is tough, she comes across as an ok person. It is good that the main character is an Indonesian maid who can speak Cantonese. The film depicts both a sense of hope and life's tribulations, which the characters bear with fortitude. Their lives are no different from ours. The little girl plays an integral part in the film. She is very natural. Even though she does not have many scenes, she has a pivotal role.

Leung: I think *Beautiful Life* is a sweet film. There are no villains. Even though they only give her \$2000 in wages, which can be seen as exploitative, the family is not bad. They are not the kind that beat up the maid, nor is the maid a typical exploited proletariat who awakens to her class consciousness. From a positive angle, the film is tolerant and does not easily pass moral judgment or condemn people. On the other hand, he wants to show the political/identity awakening of an Indonesian maid in a way that is palatable to most Hong Kongers. If he depicted the employers as cruel exploiters who beat the maid, local viewers would be turned off. Now the end result is pleasing. I'm not saying he made a bad film. Rather, the director cleverly takes a middle-of-the-road approach in depicting this issue.

Wong: The name of the film is *Beautiful Life*. You can criticize it for being too clever, and I agree that it could be more critical, but as an independent film, it strives to present matters in a non-stereotypical way. Out of all the works, I like this one and *God Bless All Parents* the most. Both these films present their stories in a layered

way with very distinctive characters. On the whole *Beautiful Life* is well done, but of course it is not perfect.

Leung: I find that it lacks a critical edge.

Tang: What would this edge be?

Leung: For example, it could show us the employment agency.

Tang: I feel this film presents a mature left-wing perspective. Just as in Ken Loach's films, no matter if it's a happy or unhappy film, you cannot find a real villain, for the villain is the system. In *Beautiful Life*, the villain is the whole agency system. The lower class, including the husband and wife and the maid, all tolerate and understand one another. That's why I don't think one has to look for a particular edge, for that is how the situation is presented.

Leung: Ken Loach's films makes you reflect, but can this film cause Hong Kong people to reflect? Watching it, it is easy to come away with the feeling that "the maids are exploited, but we have a hard time as well." It does not have quite the same effect on you as a Ken Loach film. This film makes people understand the world of Indonesian maids and that it should be respected, and that's about it.

Chong: If you talk about Ken Loach films, it has to do with culture. The English are capable of satire, while Hong Kongers are more humble, particularly the poor. The good thing about this film is that it contains all the elements you mentioned. Every character has the potential to become bad. The director skillfully manipulates the drama in a precise way, and pushes things only so far before backing down. The father and mother character could have become villains. I gave the film high marks because of the director's grasp of the issue, which is very precise. The actors are very good, and can communicate a lot with just a subtle expression. I'm not sure if it is deliberate, but he achieved the desired effect.

Leung: I agree that the film is good. I just wished that he could inject the elements that I mentioned, then the film will be much more powerful. Now it's not powerful enough.

Zen: In one scene, the husband phones the maid as soon as he gets off work. Does he need to call her so early? Ok, I accept that he may be hungry and wants to have dinner. If you ask me, that's human nature--being able to order someone in an

inferior position to do your bidding. When they have dinner, he thanks her, but that's only on the surface. Because you have the power to order the girl around, you act polite on the surface. And since you've paid her \$2000, you can use her, and your kid likes her too. Is the husband good to the maid? I don't think so; he only does it for his own survival. Strangely enough, I like the wife more. Even though she is demanding, at least she is genuine and doesn't hide anything, while the husband is two-faced. If the film can be more critical of the husband and wife, it'd be better. Now it's too well-rounded, and not human enough.

Wong: The little girl plays an important role in making things so smooth. If she wasn't like that, the whole film would be different. The fact that the girl is good to the maid is critical.

Leung: This is very realistic. Many Indonesian maids enjoy good relations with the kids.

Chong: This is especially true of maids in housing estates, the kind that sleep on the balcony and get \$2000 in wages with no time off. I've seen many cases like this. There is a big housing estate near my office, and sometimes I would see Indonesian maids playing with kids, so I know that they enjoy good relationships. I later did some research and found out that Indonesia only abolished slavery in the 1960s. The mindset of Hong Kongers and Indonesians may produce a certain sense of harmony, even though there are also many cases of people abusing their maids. As a director, he could only pick some elements to explore, and within these parameters, he has done a good job. For a 30 minute film, he cannot do much more. However, the ending is a bit rushed.

Kwong: The next work is *The Little One*.

Zen: For me, I find this work shocking. I will not try to convince you, since we are different. The director spent a great deal of effort designing the music, visuals and characters. The screenplay is simple and effective, and explores human nature in a shocking way. I particularly like the fact that the director cast this soft looking girl, but deep down she is scheming. She had been abused from a young age, and must find a place for protection. She looks so innocent but is cunning. I admit that the director does not explain this part well, I understood because I'm a professional viewer. When the boy appeared, I wonder why he became someone like that, but I soon forgot, because the actor is very good. His mother is the only person he could rely upon, but she committed suicide, it left him feeling insecure. That is why

he never says anything, for what can you say under such circumstances? He feels he has no place in the world, but that doesn't mean he would not take the rap for his elder sister. These storylines allow us to see the goodness and evil in human nature, and is quite shocking. Much of the film is well thought out, and sometimes the results are good but other times not so good. The spinning shot is too long, because the actor does not deliver the scene well. The scene portrays her inner feelings but the actor's performance is not rich enough. You have to admit the actors are well chosen and are not stereotypical. The actress' acting skills are insufficient because she is young. I like the work's economy and its incisive depiction of human nature.

Tang: The Chinese title refers to a wild dog and a cat. The wild dog is probably the younger brother, or perhaps the situation in which she finds herself. I find the film unfocussed. It was not until later into the film that I realized the girl is the main character. Only when the father said, "It's not the first time I touched you" did I realize the extent of the girl's dissatisfaction and anger. I feel the film spent too much time on the step-brother and sister love affair, and only in the later part of the film did it become clear that the real subject of the story is how the girl tries to protect herself. That's why I feel that the storytelling is not well balanced.

Chong: Watching a second time gave me a worse impression compared to the first time, because I feel the story is too fake. As Tang pointed out, its storytelling is too loose and confused. The director keeps inserting incidents as soon as the story flags, which is why the story seems unbalanced. This is the girl's story, but it could also be told from the brother's perspective. However, it keeps going off track, and the director keeps putting in scenes she finds interesting. The director could have just used a couple of scenes to depict the brother sister relationship, but she was afraid that the audience may be bored. Watching the film is like looking at his Final Cut timeline, which is no fun at all. I liked it the first time because it is similar to old French films, but watching it a second time revealed its editing logic.

Wong: If you say *Invisible Rock* is a typical film from your age, then this film is typical of this day and age. Nowadays, young people really like stories like *Journey Under a Midnight Sun*, but that TV series was good because it tells the story of extreme characters in a convincing way. However, this film places its story in an everyday reality, which fails to offer convincing context such dramatic inter-personal relationships. For example, it seems like the film is forcing us to believe in the way this girl behaves, but her transformation is not believable.

Leung: I understand that the film wants to subvert our expectations. We initially think that the boy, whose mother had committed suicide and has gone to live with another woman, is the one who needs to struggle to survive, but now the girl becomes such a character. Should it not explain how she came to be this way? The film could have answered this question in many ways, including the brother-sister relationship. Up till the middle of the film, I thought this would be a story about that kind of relationship. If the director did not put in the story about the bird, the whole point of the story would not stand. The film relies heavily on that story, otherwise the point is not obvious. If the story is not just about the girl, but a story about the boy and the girl, it would be more balanced, and the boy taking the rap for him becomes voluntary rather than being a set up. If not for that story, our assumptions about the girl's devious plans are no longer valid, and the whole thing just happens organically. I think the film would be better without that story, because it now seems as if the director does not know what she wants. Many of her designs at the beginning are good, like the fact that you never see the faces of the adults or their faces are blurred, which gives the impression that this is the world of children. The film has too many disparate elements, but what is it trying to say in the end?

Chong: Perhaps the director thinks the scenes involving brother-sister relationship is too well shot, and doesn't want to throw them away, while the part with the father is not that good.

Leung: If it wasn't for the story about the bird, the story becomes one about the sister and brother, so I wonder if the director really knows what the point of the story is?

Chong: Is this film done by a City University student?

Zen: The director's name does not appear in the end credits.

Chong: This is very much a City University student style film. They consider the director's ideas to be the most important, including a film's narrative. Their films often revolve around a single idea.

Leung: Editing plays a determining role in their works, which can be both the most outstanding element and the biggest flaw, depending on the film.

Wong: That's because of Patrick Tam.

Chong: Every university is different. In the same way, Baptist University is influenced by Lam Lin Tung.

Kwong: The next film is ***Sister Kam***.

Zen: I like this film. The director uses simple techniques to depict this character, but her story is nonetheless moving. Her life is like any one of us, she toils ceaselessly under difficult conditions, and humbly accepts whatever circumstances life brings. When she talks about her friend leaving her, she said it three times, which moved me tremendously. Every person, no matter what experiences they've had, deserves our respect. Even the most humble people hope that we could treat them with respect. This is the most indelible impression I got from the film.

Chong: Kam respects life, and her life philosophy seems to be "this is life". However, I feel that the camera is consuming her. It talks about the difference between the front of this Mong Kok restaurant and the back, and how people celebrate New Year's Eve at the restaurant, while in the back alley a decrepit character like this is toiling away. She is both humble and accepting. I don't think the director consumes her on purpose, he just went over the line. He assumes that by showing her humility, he can reveal a certain aspect of society. This is my feeling when watching the film a second time, while I liked it the first time. Watching it on the big screen revealed these problems, including his interview strategy.

Zen: What do you mean by interview strategy?

Chong: For example, her talking about her gambling and working as a butcher in China. A little bit of that is ok, but the film has a great many such segments, as if to tell us how lowly she is. The director does not put her down, but he keeps revealing her past. This kind of editing technique only serves to bring about the opposite effect.

Zen: Is this lowliness something you impose upon her or intrinsic to the film, since I don't feel the same way.

Chong: I think the director made an error and caused me to have this kind of feeling.

Leung: I would compare this film with ***Yeung Yeung with Cows***. Both are portraits of a single person. The subject of ***Yeung Yeung with Cows*** is a unique, a million in one character, while ***Sister Kam*** is an ordinary and common figure.

Chong: That is why the director of *Sister Kam* has to dig so hard.

Leung: This character is so common that it is easy to make her into a symbol. She is a typical person, so how should she be treated? He has to make this typical person not so typical, so has to dig around for more stories, such as her personal history. I think her status as a new immigrant is interesting, in that Kam's thinking is very Hong Kong. She only sleeps four hours a day and works until 2 o'clock in the morning. She does not complain, except to say that she wishes she could have more sleep. Yet at the same time, she hopes the restaurant will be busier. She is very typical Hong Konger, and this new Hong Kong is doing a job that old Hong Kongers would not do. That is why her new immigrant status is valid to me. Many cleaning jobs in restaurants throughout Hong Kong are filled by new immigrants. The director did not spend too much time on this film, but it is clear that he is not a student but a mature filmmaker. He captures moments like Kam taking a nap, and a scene where Kam throws the trash out. The camera is across the street filming her when she arrives at the trash collection depot, in which a fat lady loudly complains about Kam, but we do not hear what she is saying. This is a very meaningful detail, and it takes a skillful director to capture it. This film is highly complete. Back to the question of whether the director is consuming her. He keeps digging into her personal history in order to make her less stereotypical. Interestingly, her job as a dishwasher becomes the most distinctive thing about her. At the end of the film, when the camera returns to the street, she disappears, whereas she stands out in her place of work. I think the film lacks depiction of her work process. If the director could spend more time showing how she washes dishes, it would be better.

Wong: Is he the artist who won the Hong Kong Arts Development Awards for Young Artists last year?

Kwong: Yes.

Wong: I also compare *Sister Kam* with *Yeung Yeung with Cows*. *Sister Kam* is a very rich work, and attempts the difficult task of describing this character within a confined space. With her interviews, she reveals a great deal about herself, and the director keeps cutting to images of water, which seems symbolic. However, the editing makes her life more abstract, and the film does not reveal how she lives, her work process and what her relationship with other restaurant staff is, etc. I like

the scene where she is being scolded by the lady in the garbage depot, which is interesting. I also like the idea of filming the whole film in the back alley, but the feeling I get is very static and stagnant. I think the director could have captured more aspects of her life.

Leung: The back alley is not depicted with any richness, and the location becomes an abstract symbol. The work process I speak of includes how she manipulates this space, where she puts her clean and dirty dishes, etc. If you can see her working while being interviewed, you can get a sense of these aspects, which are important to Kam, who spends more than ten hours a day in that space.

Wong: That is because the director confines her to this small space. As you say, Kam has certain freedom to arrange this space according to her needs. However, the director has the preconception that due to her lowliness, she is entrapped by this space.

Chong: Compared with *Yeung Yeung with Cows*, the dishes are the equivalent of the cows, which are dirty but yet we find them beautiful. As for *Sister Kam*, he could have shown how the dishes go from dirty to clean. You see in some of the shots that the water is clean, but why are the shots so brief? It's because the director does not care about the dishes, and focuses too much on Kam.

Tang: This made me feel uncomfortable too. I feel the director is not interested in exploring Kam, but merely uses her as a symbol in an attempt to portray Hong Kong society through this case. The subject does not have to be Kam, but anybody, from whom he could have extracted the shots he wants.

Leung: I like this work, but there is a sense of imbalance in that that the of character could easily be turned into a symbol, which is the opposite to *Yeung Yeung*. How to turn this symbolic character into a human being? The director's solution is to let Kam tell her stories through interviews. Her stories are the jobs she has done since she was young. She takes pride in being able to perform these tasks with skill.

Chong: But she does not talk about the job she is currently doing.

Leung: Yes, that's where the problem lies. She says she knows arithmetic because she was a fishmonger, she was a butcher, knows the best cuts of pork, and she also knows how to farm. She describes these skills with pride. Her attitude is to perform

her job to the best of her abilities. If that is the case, then why not show her doing dishes?

Wong: The director has a stereotypical view of her job.

Leung: Which is a waste! The character respects her job so much. Why can't the director recognize her job more?

Tang: Or perhaps tell us what wisdom she draws from her work.

Wong: Even though her job is lowly, what has she gained from it? The director did not consider this, and quickly jumped to the conclusion that her job was oppressive.

Chong: I have seen a news program on the subject of minimum wage, which showed dishwashers. The dishwashing lady describes how she washes a big tray of dishes, and she has to be both quick and thorough. It is actually a highly skilled job.

Wong: If he can find a way to show that, it would more effectively show how she is underpaid and exploited.

Kwong: The next work is ***God Bless All Parents***.

Zen: By the end of the film, you can see that the actors are starting to get tired. I'm glad to see the husband reappearing, whereas all along you only see a salesman. The situation that the director designed makes for a difficult shoot. The script is very good, and resonates with Hong Kong people. The rhythm in the latter part of the film is too flat, and there is not enough variation. The female character's performance is affected by the kid crying. By the end, everybody is tired, because this is quite a tough film to shoot.

Leung: I admire the filmmaker for giving himself such a difficult task. Making a film within this environment is quite difficult, which is why both its strength and weakness are obvious. The film's flaws lie in having to shoot it in this way, which places great demand on actors. I think some of the actors, particularly the father, is a bit weak, while the wife is not bad.

Wong: Its script is the best among all the finalists in slowly unfurling human nature. But it seems more like a stage play than a film. At first I found the film boring, and later

when I discovered that the story is about the husband and wife, I realized the part at the beginning is relevant. The dialogue between the salesman and the wife is brilliant and well written.

Leung: It's ok that the film uses one location and a stationary camera, and the noisy environment is quite good. However, that is all the more reason for the director to pay more attention to the acting, action and mise-en-scene. This is a difficult task, and if it's not done well, the film can easily become flat.

Chong: In the previous round of discussions, we talked about the problems with the film's cinematography. The camera is stationary, and sound editing is awful, the lighting is simply bright all over, while the art department just provided them with two random knives. But even a film like that could be good. You mentioned that the actors are deficient, but that is not so. These actors have acting ability, and the director could have asked them to do another take, or filmed cut-ins after they have completed the whole scene. Richard Linklater did a couple of films where the action takes place in just one location, but managed to use fluid camerawork, sharp dialogue and great acting within the span of a 90 minute film, so why can't this director? If he came up with this idea, he has the responsibility to execute it well. Otherwise, why not direct a stage play instead? Their grasp of dialogue and rhythm seem in danger of falling off the rails, so why doesn't he fix it in editing? To me this work is a fail, no matter how good the script is. You say that the woman's acting is good, but that's because the man is overacting so much, and it is clear that the director did not direct the actors. The latter part of the film is hard to watch as you can see the passersby looking into the camera, as well as the pregnant woman's fake belly. The background sound level stays the same no matter how many people are present, including the part where everyone looks at the main characters, which I find unacceptable.

Leung: Why did he set such a difficult task for himself?

Chong: Obviously he works in theatre, and perhaps does not know what cinema is about.

Kwong: If you have nothing further to add, we'll move on to the last work, ***The Aqueous Truth***.

Zen: I've said all I have to say about it.

Chong: I don't have anything to say either, for I have eliminated it.

Leung: This is a strange film. There are too many dramatic films already. Technically, if he wants to fool people, he should have done a better job. The music makes you suspicious of the whole thing from the start. I don't understand what the filmmaker is trying to accomplish. Having spent so much effort, is he trying to tell people that documentaries can lie? But tens of thousands of people have already made the same point. Is he attempting to explore people's mistrust of the government or infrastructure? He certainly didn't accomplish that. At the end of the film, the director tells us that it is all made-up, but concludes the film with a subtitle that says "I hope everyone can enjoy clean water", which puzzled me. The filmmaker as already made clear that it has nothing to do with water, but turns around and says clean water is important. I think he's made a film that he found amusing, but it is unclear what that accomplished. If it is just to explore the unreliability of documentaries or how easily people can be fooled by conspiracy theories, it seems frivolous.

Tang: I think the main point of the film is questioning whether we fear such things may happen, even though it hasn't happened yet at this point.

Wong: It's ok to tell the audience that they are watching a fictional film, as long as the work can make people reflect on the relevant issues. However, after watching this work, I only have the sense of being cheated, which seems to go against his aims, for it did not inspire me to reflect.

Chong: He's being mischievous, but nobody knows, for he didn't even break a window.

Leung: If only he went further in the scene with the politician or the water department official, it'd be more fun. What if the interview with To Kwan Hang was real? If he fools the legislator and find out what his reaction to the conspiracy is, the whole film will be more fun and powerful, because then you could really see the destructive power that conspiracy theory can yield.

Chong: When watching it the first time, I thought the director made a mistake somewhere, but this time around, I realize he does not know what kind of film he wants to make, which is a waste. If he could get Raymond Wong Yuk Man to raise a question about it in Legco, it'd be really funny.

Wong: He does not have the courage to go that far.

Kwong: You can now nominate three works that you think deserve awards.

Zen: ***Beautiful Life***, ***The Little One*** and ***Sister Kam***.

Wong: ***Beautiful Life***, ***Yeung Yeung with Cows*** and ***God Bless All Parents***.

Chong: First place ***Beautiful Life***, second place ***Yeung Yeung with Cows*** and third place ***Invisible Rock***.

Tang: First place, ***Beautiful Life*** and ***Invisible Rock*** and ***Yeung Yeung with Cows*** in by order of preference.

Leung: ***Sister Kam***, ***Beautiful Life*** and ***Yeung Yeung with Cows***, in no particular order.

Kwong: We can take out the works that got no votes: ***Journey***, ***The Echoes of Circles*** and ***The Aqueous Truth***.

Fan: You won't even consider them for Special Mention?

Kwong: ***Beautiful Life*** has 5 votes. Can it get the Gold Award?

(Everyone agrees)

Kwong: ***Yeung Yeung with Cows*** has 4 votes. Should it get the Silver Award, or are there other nominations?

Wong: Is it a choice between ***Yeung Yeung with Cows*** and ***Invisible Rock***?

Kwong: Yes. Other works only received one vote.

Zen: I don't have a problem with ***Yeung Yeung with Cows*** getting Silver Award.

Kwong: Are there any votes for ***Invisible Rock*** for Silver Award?

Leung: Certainly not from me.

Chong: My pick for Silver is ***Yeung Yeung with Cows***.

- Kwong: So the Silver Award goes to **Yeung Yeung with Cows**. How about Special Mention? **Invisible Rock** or others?
- Zen: I'll give my vote to **Sister Kam**.
- Leung: What is the Special Mention for? What qualities are we trying to recognize?
- Kwong: Rachel, why do you think **Sister Kam** deserves Special Mention?
- Zen: It's because no one would support my choice, *The Little One*, so I gave my vote to **Sister Kam**.
- Leung: I chose **Sister Kam** because I want to recognize its social concern. Even though I have talked about its inadequacies, both **Beautiful Life** and **Sister Kam** show recognition and concern for many of the lower classes in society.
- Chong: I chose **Invisible Rock** because this society no longer has any hysteria, so I choose to recognize it. Films nowadays society no longer treat literature with seriousness for it is becoming more and more anti-intellectual, so the director of **Invisible Rock** has done something naïve and without future.
- Zen: Why does society need hysteria?
- Chong: In recent years, most of the young people I've hired do not have any deep artistic conviction, and treat film only as media. From the time I was in film school to the present, I have always treated film as art, and do not wish it to become media.
- Leung: Compared with over a dozen years ago when I used to serve on **ifva**'s jury panel, the technical aspects of the works are a lot more mature, but their artistic vision is not as broad. Back then, there were many more experimental works. This year, only **The Echoes of Circles** and **Invisible Rock** are experimental, and the rest are quite unchallenging and rather mainstream. I am not fond of **Invisible Rock**, and if I were to recognize a more interesting work, I'd rather choose **The Echoes of Circles**. Even though its artistic vision is not complete, at least it is attempting something new.
- Zen: Then I change my vote to **The Echoes of Circles**.

Wong: To a certain extent, **Sister Kam** is also very obsessed.

Zen: **Sister Kam** is more convincing. I cannot accept the old-fashionness of **Invisible Rock**.

Chong: Perhaps we can look at it from a strategic point of view. Since we already have a drama and a documentary, should we consider other forms? Perhaps if we encouraged him this time, he would reference Calvino in a better way the next time around?

Tang: Perhaps instead of encouraging a certain form, we should think about the content. Gold Award is **Beautiful Life** and Silver Award is **Yeung Yeung with Cows**, and if we give Special Mention to **Sister Kam**, bit means that we are recognizing social concern. But **ifva** is not just about that. If we give Special Mention to **Invisible Rock**, we are encouraging self obsession, and rewarding the courage that young people have of putting their favorite things into their works. However, I don't know what we are encouraging if we gave Special Mention to **The Echoes of Circles**.

Leung: We are encouraging a work that pays attention to form and expresses itself through artistic form. The artistic form in this work is well considered, even though it may not be executed in the most satisfactory way.

Chong: I have attempted similar artistic forms when I was a student, and I did it much better.

Zen: You're blowing your own trumpet. Why don't you show it to us and we'll vote on it.

(They laugh)

Leung: Honestly speaking, I think **Sister Kam** is a better film than **Yeung Yeung with Cows** in that it is a more mature production. However, because of the flaws in its content and orientation, you are not too fond of it. So giving this film Special Mention seems strange, because the Gold and Silver award winners are both socially conscious. As for **The Echoes of Circles** and **Invisible Rock**, the former is very literary and self obsessed, while the latter has more exploration of form. Of the finalist this year, only this film and **The Aqueous Truth**, which most of you dislike, attempts to explore different forms. I have never dismissed **The Echoes of Circles**; I've only said that it's not good enough. However, it is more mature and

richer than *Invisible Rock*. Whereas *The Echoes of Circles* still has unexplored potential, *Invisible Rock* has tried its best.

Chong: Another solution is not give out any Special Mentions.

Wong: In fact *The Echoes of Circles* also has social concern.

Chong: Watching on computer, I gave *The Echoes of Circles* higher marks than *Invisible Rock*, but it is not too good on the big screen.

Leung: Just now I criticized its Bangkok section, but I am for awarding it Special Mention.

Chong: I propose giving two Special Mentions.

Kwong: If it is between these two works, we can vote for the following options: the first is two Special Mentions, the second is Special Mention for *The Echoes of Circles*, the third is Special Mention for *Invisible Rock*, while the fourth is no Special Mention. You can each vote once.

(The jury panel voted unanimously for two Special Mentions)

Open Category Award Winners

Gold Award

Beautiful Life / Chan Ho-lun Freddie

Silver Award

Yeung Yeung with Cows/ Wong Cheuk-man, Law Wan-i, Law Hoi-ki, Leung Wing-sze, Tang Ka-hei

Special Mention

The Echoes of Circles / Lam Kin-hung Joel

Invisible Rock/ Chen King-yuen