

The 16th ifva Open Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jurors in Attendance: Ann Hui (HUI), Ip Yuk Yiu (IP), Shek Kei (SHEK), Lorna Tee (TEE),
Vernie Yeung (YEUNG)

Organizer Representatives: Teresa Kwong (KWONG), Kattie Fan (FAN)

HUI: I like *disabled novel*, which I find quite refreshing and interesting. It handles the juxtaposition of different realities very well. Very often those of us who make films or are involved in creativity may observe people on the streets, but it is hard to come up with fresh ideas and feelings. This film gives me a lot of feelings. Also it is very quiet, and uses very few elements.

SHEK: He director only used subtitles.

HUI: Usually such works are hard to do because they can often appear cliched and boring. But I was never bored when watching this film.

SHEK: Is it because it is short?

HUI: Perhaps, but I didn't mind. I just kept watching, and I felt that its observations and the feelings it creates are exactly those that I experience when I am in this city. Usually films like this are hard to do well, but I was never bored. I don't very much care for *The Ripple*. The director tried his best, and the filmmaking is alright. The plot is a bit unexpected and the story-telling is good. The acting has the same problem as all student films, which is a bit amateurish. Perhaps they cannot find good actors, yet this film really needs some. I think this work ought to be encouraged, but its technique is a bit too standard. I don't particularly like it, but it is a promising work.

I really like that documentary about the granny, *This Pair*. The director's power of observation is very good, and she is good at capturing the relationship between the family members. The scene where the mother and granny quarrel is good, and the shot with the mother sitting on the bed with her leg up is especially well-done. The best part about the film is showing them reconciled and having tea. The director touches upon different layers, for example, with one or two scenes she manages to show how the uncle's wife treats the family. I find the film multi-layered and rich. As a documentary it is objective, yet at the same time shows the director's concern and involvement. That's why I like the film very much.

Tsoi Yuen Villagers is more standard. It is a good work that strives to find the balance between Confucianism and rationality. The use of shots and their lengths are well thought-out. The director likes to use visual means to express his feelings towards the protagonist, like showing him at work and selling vegetables. Even though these scenes are sometimes boring, they are nonetheless meaningful. Most young directors are afraid of boredom. In portraying the protagonist's labor, the director shows objectively that he likes this sort of life. For a young director, this is a good attitude.

TEE: His technique is more conventional.

SHEK: I think the works this year are more conventional, proper and professional. The works do not attempt to be experimental. Some of them are lacking from a story-

telling point of view. For example *The Decisive Moment* is very professionally done and has a good subject matter concerning the ethics of photo journalists. However he could have delved more deeply, the ending is too predictable and some scenes are too contrived. *The Ripple* is not bad, but his story-telling is questionable. At the end the family gathers for dinner, the mother cries, but when she says that the father really loves the family, it is as though the conflict the film has built up is completely resolved. Yet the audience wants to know whether the father is having an affair with the other woman, who seems to be merely his colleague. It is as though a chunk of the story is missing.

- TEE: The story-line sets up certain things, but everything gets resolved as a result of one line.
- SHEK: This shows his story-telling technique is somehow lacking. However other parts of the film are alright.
- YEUNG: *The Ripple* is the most mature work among the finalists in terms of both lighting and acting. My favorite work is *This Pair*, which moved me the most because the director dealt with a subject close to her. She understands the whole situation. The first work I looked at was *Crimson Jade*, then *Cell*, followed by *The Ripple* and *This Pair*. When I watched *This Pair* I felt that it had won. *The Ripple* and *This Pair* have similar subject matters. I think that people who start out making films should begin by exploring subjects they are familiar with. *This Pair* uses the director's own family as the subject matter, which moves me a great deal. If it wasn't a documentary, it would still be a very good film. It follows the mother to the toilet, films them quarrelling, and people talking on the taxi. Many scenes leave an impression with me. *Tsoi Yuen Villagers* has similar technique, but the main subject is not someone the director is familiar with. Neither film is boring. *This Pair* is great because it tells the director's own story, and you can easily feel her point of view. However I feel that she should not have interjected.
- SHEK: This is based on real life. If the director feels she has something to say, she says it.
- YEUNG: I feel she should not have interjected at one point.
- TEE: She and her mother are cut from the same cloth.
- YEUNG: When the granny cries she butts in.
- SHEK: She felt she wanted to speak, so she spoke up. I don't think she needed to censor herself. Even though she never appears on camera, she puts herself in the work right from the start. Many scenes are very real, but her boldness lies not just in her honesty, but the fact that she shows us a lot of private things. It even makes me wonder if I should be watching this.
- YEUNG: I feel this film is like a revenge.
- SHEK: Luckily the film is saved by the ending. That scene with the whole family is very important. If it was just family quarrels then the film would not have been worth seeing. When I was watching it I felt I was intruding on this family. Luckily the ending scene saved the film.
- YEUNG: What moved me was seeing the granny and mother reconciled at the tea house the next day. This is a powerful ending.

- SHEK: I think this film deserves a prize. It has a depth that other films lack.
- YEUNG: I think film is an audio-visual medium, but *disabled novel* lacks the audio dimension. I don't know what to do with my ears when I watched it. It thought there was something wrong with the DVD.
- IP: The ten works represents an interesting phenomenon. Usually I like works that are raw, but I don't have any strong feelings towards *This Pair*. Some works are too refined and formulaic. I think two of the works manage to strike a balance between the two qualities. They are *21 years after.* and *17.9 18 18.1*. They both have good technique, yet are personal and have a sense of rawness. The directors of both films are my former students, and the director of *This Pair* is also a former student. The themes of both *21 years after.* and *17.9 18 18.1* are quite personal, but they use conventional filmmaking techniques to express them, and the execution is quite fine. Both works are almost like personal filmmaking with minimal crew, but the end result is quite fine, which I respect. I don't judge a film as fine or raw or its own sake, and I think both films strike a balance between the two. Both directors of *21 years after.* and *17.9 18 18.1* are in their early 20s. The technique of *21 years after.* is not new. It combines realism and narrative elements. The director is a young man who had just graduated, and he made this film after he left school. It is a film about politics and growing up, and is full of youthful spirit. It is ambitious in telling a story about his own political views, and the film combines the real and the imagined. By contrast, films like *Crimson Jade* and Fresh Wave works have funding support and are guaranteed exhibition, and they are more conventional in form. *21 years after.* was made by the director on his own accord after he graduated, which is rare to see.
- YEUNG: *21 years after.* uses a Bible quote at the beginning, which turned me off, but that's just a personal thing. After watching this film, I definitely think this film is worth recommending to others. *Crimson Jade* tells a realistic story, but its style is far from realism.
- IP: I don't care for *Crimson Jade*. This issue should not get such a treatment. I think it overly prettified, and it overly anesthetized the subject.
- YEUNG: In terms of cinematography, *The Ripple* is the most pretty and unpretentious, but I find it too mature. The execution, for example the editing, lighting and visuals are quite outstanding. But when I watched *This Pair* I found the message is much stronger, and *The Ripple* pales by comparison.
- TEE: *This Pair* is very honest, but *The Ripple* is a bit melodramatic, like a soap opera.
- HUI: I am ambivalent towards *21 years after.* Its cinematography is very film school-ish, and I didn't like it at first, nor did I find the story very convincing. However I sense the director's conviction as the film progressed, and I became affected. At first I didn't like his mannerism as well as the casting choices of the mother and the protagonist, whose acting skills are so-so. Some scenes are very melodramatic, like the scene where he runs on the street as he listens to the radio show, and the technique is copied from classic cinema. However in the scene with Tsang Kin Shing I sense his integrity, so I think this film ought to be encouraged. All the finalist works have great potential, and you can see the directors' conviction and beliefs in many of them. Even though many of the films are independent, their techniques are taken from other films. They are not as explosive as the indie films of old.

TEE: The ten works are not independent or creative enough. They are all good works, but none is very independent or creatively outstanding.

HUI: Actually *Cell*, *Styx* and *17.9 18 18.1* are not so Confucian- they are more crazy. The story of *Styx* is quite absurd, yet its acting and lighting made me believe in the story. The boy is especially good. It is a flawed but interesting work, and makes me think about the presence of evil in the world and what to do about it. The structure of *Cell* is interesting and the story is meaningful. I like *The Decisive Moment*. It should be an epic, but there is not enough time to develop the story. It only contains key moments, so the effect is a bit dramatic. Overall all the finalist works are very promising.

TEE: Yet I don't see any exciting new voices among them. The ten finalists all have their good points, but none contain things I haven't seen elsewhere before.

HUI: All the works are flawed, and their flaws are in direct proportion to the work's ambition. The bigger the ambition the bigger the flaw.

SHEK: Is *The Decisive Moment* based on a true story? Did people really shield bullets with their bodies? If it is true a lot of people should know about it.

YEUNG: The film interviews a guy at the end.

SHEK: That's an actor.

TEE: Perhaps it's adapted from a true story.

YEUNG: *17.9 18 18.1* has a great deal of creative freedom. A lot could be decided in the editing room. It is an experimental film, but I find it not experimental enough. It is a bit passé, and reminds me of experimental films from the 1970s. Whether deliberately or not, even the sound effects have a 1970s feel.

TEE: Because they want to try something experimental, it is best to use a low-tech method, which would be more fun as well. Using more modern methods would cost a lot of money. Since it is low-tech, it has a 1970s feel to it.

YEUNG: In this day and age, experimental works appear out-dated.

SHEK: Many mainstream and non-mainstream sci-fi films like to return to the past, which is not a problem. The story of *17.9 18 18.1* is not convincing, and there are not sufficient sci-fi elements. The cinematography is alright, but not expressive enough. You say *disabled novel* should have an audio dimension, but you can treat it as a silent movie. Yet the film is too simple.

YEUNG: Even silent movies have music.

SHEK: Not always.

YEUNG: Maybe this is just a personal reaction.

IP: I don't have very strong feelings towards *disabled novel*, but I think it consciously uses the lack of sound to achieve an alienating effect. The absence of sound can be a sound strategy as well. I'm not saying it uses this strategy well, but when watching it, I understood why the director does not want me to become too involved in the story. I was very self-aware when watching it. There are no true silent films in the world. By not having sound you are already making a

statement that you are deliberately excluding sound. He turns language into a textual element and puts it in the subtitles, and he does it in a self-conscious way, even though it's not done very well because the text is too fragmented. The ten works do not include any confrontational or aggressive experimental works. **disabled novel** deliberately challenges certain expectations by purposely not giving me certain pleasure, which I understand. Yet I agree that the ten works are not too strongly experimental.

YEUNG: **disabled novel** is more like an installation than a film.

IP: If it was an installation it would have been a failure because I would leave after 30 seconds. Now you are forced to watch it in discomfort. You want to wait and see if the sound would come on.

HUI: Whether or not the works are experimental is not the most important concern, but whether the works are interesting. The ten works are derived from the humanistic tradition. They talk about people's lives, be they positive or negative, and seriously and intelligently explore social issues. For example **21 years after.**, **This Pair** and **Tsoi Yuen Villagers** have a neutralizing, almost moralistic attitude. This is a good thing. They are not just concerned with the medium and visual elements, but are about the artists' points of view. These are the most important qualities in a work, and will make these films endure the test of time.

YEUNG: **Tsoi Yuen Villagers** is good, but it reminds me of a TV documentary.

HUI: Should we give awards based on whether the work has potential or whether it has integrity? The two are different.

SHEK: Every person can have his or her own standards, and we can bring them up for discussion.

YEUNG: I think we judge whether or not it is a good film, not whether it is experimental, its technique is old or new, or whether it is complete. We should just select a good film.

TEE: But there are many ways to define what is good.

IP: I think we can recognize a director's potential with special mentions, and the grand prize should go to good films.

SHEK: Many films are morally sound. **The Ripple** is about familial love, **The Decisive Moment** talks about journalistic integrity. Yet **Styx** does not try to be good. Actually in real life, many people think about revenge.

IP: I agree that **Styx** is more morally ambiguous. It also has good art direction. However I don't think it manages to probe the dark side of the soul, and it is lacking in terms of editing and mise-en-scene. Compared to other works, its theme is rather unique, yet the ending is too light. It would have been better if the director went all out.

KWONG: Please select three favorite works, or vote to eliminate works that have no chance of receiving prizes.

IP: There are no outstanding works this year. The ten works are all somehow flawed.

HUI: I choose **This Pair**, **disabled novel** and **Crimson Jade**.

IP: I choose **21 years after.**, **Tsoi Yuen Villagers** and **17.9 18 18.1**.

SHEK: **This Pair**, **Styx**, **The Decisive Moment**.

YEUNG: **This Pair**, **Tsoi Yuen Villagers** and **The Ripple**

TEE: **Styx**, **21 years after.**, **This Pair**.

KWONG: Nobody voted for **Cell**, so we can eliminate it. **This Pair** got four votes, while **Styx** and **21 years after.** each received two votes. Can we decide on the Gold Award now?

SHEK: I think the Gold award should go to **This Pair**.

(Ann Hui, Vernie Yeung and Lorna Tee agree.)

KWONG: Aside from **This Pair**, are there other nominees for the Gold Award?

IP: Purely as a point of discussion, I recommend **21 years after.**

SHEK: Both **21 years after.** and **Crimson Jade** are propaganda pieces in the sense that they aim to propagate certain messages.

TEE: **21 years after.** is not the kind of propaganda that the mainstream can embrace.

IP: **Crimson Jade** is propaganda, but I wouldn't describe **21 years after.** this way. It is a film with a certain political stance.

YEUNG: Is what it tries to propagate correct?

SHEK: That depends on your point of view. I have no problem with propaganda as long as it is well made. **21 years after.** has its own moral stance, while **Styx** tries to probe the complexity of human nature.

TEE: There are no good guys in the film. They are all bad.

HUI: I agree that this director has potential. He forces me to think about things I would not otherwise consider. The cinematography is good, like the scene where he teaches the girl how to use a knife, and both of them have their backs to the camera. The color in the fairground scene is very garish. Its visuals, lighting and acting make me believe in this world. However, the story is flawed.

YEUNG: I was not convinced by **21 years after.** at first. By the end I felt this film is worth recommending to others.

IP: I suggest giving the Silver Award to **21 years after.**

TEE: I agree, because there are very few such films in Hong Kong.

SHEK: There are programs like that on TV, like during the 5 District Resignation movement.

TEE: I don't care about the political message of **21 years after.** Politics is just a way for this young person to engage with this city. The way he initiated the project himself, and made it with almost no crew shows a strong independent spirit.

HUI: I vote for **Styx** as the Silver Award winner. As a documentary **Tsoi Yuen Villagers** is honest and believable, yet I don't think it has any spark. Compared to **21 years after.**, I find **Styx** more impressive. I would give the former points for its political conviction and conviction, but its plot is more commonplace and lacking in imagination. I think the technique of **Crimson Jade** is good, and the technique and vision of **Styx** is better than **21 years after.**

SHEK: **Crimson Jade** is very professional, but it is too deliberate and pretentious. For example, everything in the police station and the clothes are all green.

TEE: Can we give both **Styx** and **21 years after.** the Silver Award?

IP: I think that's acceptable.

YEUNG: I agree.

KWONG: Which work should get special mention?

YEUNG: I vote for **Crimson Jade**. It's shocking to me in a low-key way.

TEE: Actually its filmmaking is anything but low key. Perhaps the acting is, but the treatment is very heavy handed.

HUI: I know Cheung King-wai well, and I've commented on the rough cut of this film, so I shouldn't say anything. However this film has won a lot of overseas awards. Technically it's one of the best works in this competition. So if you were to exclude it, you should give an adequate explanation.

YEUNG: Technically, **The Ripple** is better than **Crimson Jade**.

HUI: **The Ripple** is technically sound, but not outstanding.

YEUNG: **The Ripple** is very standardized.

TEE: **The Ripple** is very preachy. It tells you that you should go home and have dinner with your family.

HUI: I don't mind that. The actors who play the son and daughter are both good.

SHEK: But its story is not complete enough. As for **Crimson Jade**, one way of looking at it is that it has already received many awards, so you should give other works a chance.

HUI: That's not right. All the works should compete on an equal basis.

IP: I agree with Ann. But I don't think **Crimson Jade** is that creative, and it is not independent enough. I don't see the director's point of view. It is just a well-made film. It doesn't excite me.

HUI: I don't have to choose **Crimson Jade**. I'd rather vote for **The Decisive Moment**, since its aesthetics and casting is interesting.

IP: Special mention is a special award, and many works deserve to be recognized. For example, the casting of **The Decisive Moment** is interesting, and **Tsoi Yuen Villagers** is simple but has its own well-considered aesthetics. Its subject matter

is rare to see, and not over-aesthetized. The director is self-conscious about what he is doing, and the film strikes just the right notes.

YEUNG: I agree. I think the protagonist in *Tsoi Yuen Villagers* is quite attractive and real. Even though I cannot hear some of what he says, I nevertheless think he is charming. The other visual elements are beside the point.

TEE: The director treats a very current topic with restraint, which is commendable.

HUI: This film matches ifva's spirit.

SHEK: But it's too much like a RTHK program.

IP: It is quite poetic, and is above the level of most RTHK shows.

TEE: It has a certain romanticism. It makes me want to be a farmer!

SHEK: I vote for *The Decisive Moment*.

KWONG: So far the works nominated for special mentions include *The Decisive Moment*, *Tsoi Yuen Villagers* and *Crimson Jade*.

IP: It is only special mention. There is no prize money involved.

HUI: Let's vote to decide.

SHEK: This film tackles a big subject. The portrayal of the world of news is very realistic, which is hard to achieve.

YEUNG: If he made this up, he did a good job.

(The jury members vote, and *The Decisive Moment* receives 4 votes.)

TEE: I have something to say about *The Decisive Moment*. The middle part of the film where the woman talks directly to the camera is awful.

IP: I suggest giving two special mentions, the other one to *Tsoi Yuen Villagers*. The two films are very different, and it is appropriate to give special mentions to them, whereas I would not put them in competition for the Gold or Silver awards because they differ in quality. However special mentions can be used to recognize achievements in certain areas, so we can pay tribute to the production and casting of *The Decisive Moment* on the one hand and the subject matter and poeticism of *Tsoi Yuen Villagers* on the other.

YEUNG: *The Decisive Moment* starts off well. It hides a certain secret, but in the end I feel let down by the secret. The girl getting into a car accident is not a surprise.

HUI: Are we giving out too many awards?

IP: No, because special mentions only get a certificate.

KWONG: Our bottom line is that as long as you don't give awards to nine out of ten works, it's fine. The point of competitions is to award outstanding works.

IP: The number of awards is about the same as previous years.

KWONG: Let me sum up. The Gold Award goes to ***This Pair***, Silver Award goes to ***Styx*** and ***21 years after.***, while two special mentions go to ***The Decisive Moment*** and ***Tsoi Yuen Villagers.***

Open Category

Gold Award

This Pair

WONG Yee-mei

Silver Award

Styx

YAU Hon-pong

Silver Award

21 years after.

LO Chun-yip

Special Mention

The Decisive Moment

WONG Wai-kit, HUI Chi-kin

Special Mention

Tsoi Yuen Villagers

SHEK Yi-ching, YIU Wing-ho, TANG Heng, SEUNG Yu-hang, HO Fung-lun