

The 13th ifva Open Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jurors in Attendance: Herman Yau (YAU), another mountain man (Stanley Wong)

(WONG), Anson Mak (MAK), Elaine Chow (CHOW), Dr. Philip Lee
(LEE)

Organizer Representatives: Bobo Lee (BOBO), Mickey Choi (CHOI)

YAU: Some of the films are well made. What makes it difficult to make a choice is that some of those films with have good content were made with poor techniques, and vice versa, so it is difficult to make a decision. I like ***Merry X' mas***, because it shows concern for the underprivileged, and among the trend of showy techniques employed by young filmmakers nowadays, it is a drama made with the down-to-earth style of a documentary. Many scenes of the film hit the nail right on the head, I like it.

The script of "Siu Ming" is pretty ordinary, although with professional actors, the film is made in a very ordinary manner.

Acting in "***Game Boy***" is very imbalanced. On the one hand we have Lee Ting Fung, an actor we often see in commercial films, who shows traditional professionalism, on the other hand the rest of the actors demonstrate traditional amateurism. The same editing method applied to three separate plots actually weakens the tension in the drama. It uses flashbacks inter-cut to express a scene that is not represented in the main narrative, this should be better saved for the final scene. The choice of adopting the style of a genre film to an otherwise humanistic film doesn't seem to work.

Variable is experimental in its content, but the form is traditional, which doesn't match. Artistically, the masks used in the film look very unprofessional in today's standard and in comparison with other finalists.

"Hearse Driver" is very ordinary, a typical film about life, death and love that young people would make. It seems everybody would have made such a film in their twenties.

Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching is fun to watch and playful, from my perspective as a film-maker. I think making a movie isn't always that serious. He talks about identity with playfulness in today's cyber context.

Salmon has an extraordinary script, but the whole film isn't well managed, the acting and the directing are awkward, with lighting and cinematography not in tune with the script.

"**Lover Psychosis**" is also one of those typical films made by twenty-somethings. It seems that the text on screen is important to the filmmaker, but the font size is too small and speed too fast to read, but anyway those text are not so crucial for understanding the film. The narrative technique is good, demonstrating the tension of reality.

The Young Dream. Although I haven't totally grasped what the director wants to say, but the directing and narrative skill and acting, especially the girl, are very good, And the script as well, though I don't know what exactly is the message, but I can follow the story. I like this film, the cinematography is especially outstanding.

Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee is pretty ordinary in its subject matter, but using Kim Hyun-hee is quite special though. It is made professionally, is one of my choices.

WONG: It is always not easy to make a choice. **Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching** said it's a documentary, but there are some works that are quite realistic, such as **Merry X' mas**. **Variable** is more abstract, more conceptual, kind of like a stage performance. It is difficult to compare, so I start with creativity. I agree with you that some works are in the confines of convention pre-determined by the script, so I dropped those works.

If I am to choose among the 10 films, I'll pick one that is rounded in all respects including techniques, acting and plot, and it will be **Merry X' mas**! It gets the point, it is a drama but at the same time reflects reality. The acting is natural and real, makes me feel something after the screening. I like it very much.

For **Variable**, I got your point, but I still put it among the top three or four in my list, because I appreciate that the director uses an alternative angle to shoot a film, despite its flaws. Just as other drama films may have flaws in acting or technical aspects, but this one I appreciate its alternative angle, and the implication of the suppressed lives of Hong Kong people. Other points about its failure I agree with you.

Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching is interesting, but he fails to

deeply explore this subject matter to make the film more refined. I don't mean he should give a grand message or get it across in a serious way, but as he has a good subject matter, and today we have internet, the way this story begins and how it's told are very good. But the ending ... I wish to see more. It should have been better.

MAK: I have similar feelings about *Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching*. It started in a good direction, but I think a self-reflexive documentary can be better if --actually an individual is socially and culturally positioned in society-- he could go deeper about his formative years. Actually he did, for example the part about how he goes to the little Wong Tsz Ching's home in a village, but he could go deeper. I want to see more about his childhood in the village, but there isn't much. It is very playful. Although it is a documentary, it has many creative tricks, I like that too, but I would like to see him talk about himself more, like he said he has hepatitis, but he just told us the fact. I can't see more about his relationship with his family, about his family in Canada etc, I want to see more documentary elements.

Among these films I also like *Merry X' mas* most. I don't know how much the director agrees with or is aware of Dogma, but he has already used it a lot, whether he wants to or not. Dogma's original intention was to find an alternative way apart from the Hollywood formula. I think this film comes from the tradition of Dogma and realism, especially the shots about the girl doing some apparently boring things, such as repetitive acts of daily life, which would be banned from mainstream cinema because they consider them boring, just like she repeatedly looks at her coloured pencils in a very narrow room. I think it's great.

I agree with Herman about *Variable*. It has a good story, it was made in the form of a drama film, but it would be more appropriate if it moves closer to avant-garde cinema, to have more abstract images, or to employ the method of conceptual video art. Actually it is a sad thing to note that all the films were made in the drama mode, nothing comes from the tradition of video art. Actually such subject matters may be best represented by means of conceptual video art. Anyway it is a variation on the story film, which is worth some merit.

For *Salmon*, I focus on its overall production design rather than just on directing or acting. It was shot in an empty house fitted with tables and chairs and plastic partitions, and because it was in a village, the croaking of the frogs made the environment very eerie. Its intention is good and the story is good too, it created a half real setting, as its production design gives a somewhat surreal feeling. The

deaf, blind and mute are all metaphorical, but I don't like it when the director exposed the truth behind the story. It is too direct, it shows that they are just picking on each other instead of helping out, but I think it is better left unsaid, should be more subtle.

If I have to choose my favourites, they are ***Merry X' mas***, ***Variable***, ***Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching*** and ***Salmon***.

CHOW: It is very difficult to choose among the ten, so I just remove what I don't like, and what remain are: ***Merry X' mas***, ***Variable***, ***Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching*** and ***Salmon***. Really the same as yours!

What you said I also noted and have thought about it, but at this moment I am not very sure, because as a documentary, I don't like ***Merry X' mas***, whether it is in Dogma method or not. Its use of handheld camera achieves what is needed in independent cinema, but the way it talks about poverty, if I am to find creativity, I can't find much in it. I agree with another mountainman that this is the most well finished work. I can't find any flaws in it, but neither can I find any creativity.

Variable is more experimental, but it fails to hit the main point. He has made much observation about the world, and the concept is OK, just when put it into practice it turned sour. This is the one to be removed among the four I have chosen.

The following two films are hard to choose. After I saw ***Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching*** for the first time it was my favourite. Its theme of soul-searching is very interesting, and actually the fundamentals of philosophy is to search for your own identity. It is interestingly playful. But I don't like it when it digresses and gets lost. It seems to be going personal, and I agree that it doesn't dig deep enough, just as you want more he goes away. But I do think it got something like a male version of "The Double Life of Veronica". I give it relatively good credits for its creativity and concept, and there's no problem about its realization, just that the supporting shots aren't so well made. But speaking of concept, I like this one most.

Whereas ***Salmon*** is a different matter, it is a parody on human nature. The overall plot is good, I don't mind its flaws because that give it the feel of indie films, and I won't expect it to be refined and perfect. It reminds me of "Shallow Grave", that surreal situation of people being trapped in one place, and this enhances the

essence of the film. Although this is kind of raw, I like it.

LEE: I didn't think so much when I watched those works, I only looked at them from the perspective of storytelling. To me, *Merry X' mas* is obviously outstanding, if you say it is not creative, I'd say nowadays it is difficult even to tell a story that touches people, and I like this story. Actually I think some of the works are good in creativity, concept and idea, just that I'm more traditional and I tend to focus on the narrative. The problem with today's young people is that, everybody is creative, but the most basic thing is storytelling, and they can't do it properly. I focus on more basic narrative techniques.

I think *Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee*, "*Game Boy*" and *The Young Dream* are also good, I like them better personally. Those works such as *Salmon*, I agree that they are good. For me *Merry X' mas* is the best, while I'm totally open about other works. To some extent it is difficult to make the decision. Apart from the best one, all of them are possible.

WONG: During the first viewing I like the alienation in *Salmon*, as surreal as a stage performance. Actually the art direction is good and it has a good sense of space. Although the subject matter of disabled people is in itself difficult, I just can't accept the details in the acting of the "blind" guy. Starting from the first shot, how come he has to be supporting himself when he walks? This flaw cannot be compensated by other things I like about it.

YAU: It shows that the director actually doesn't know much about the underprivileged.

CHOW: Acting is the weakest part in the film. All three of them are problematic. We have to take into account acting as well.

WONG: Otherwise it is quite good on the whole.

YAU: I have chosen top three, in which *Merry X' mas* and *The Young Dream*, I don't mind which of them comes first, but I hope the three award-winning films will feature these two.

LEE: I don't quite understand *The Young Dream*, but I like it.

YAU: Actually I got something from it, just don't want to say what it is brashly. It really

feels like Terayama Shuji's film (ed: The Chinese title of *The Young Dream* makes reference to Terayama's Pastoral Hide and Seek).

WONG: The girl acts really well.

YAU: Very good indeed.

CHOW: Feels like a Japanese film.

MAK: If only on cinematography I agree that this is good.

YAU: It really is poetic. The third one I chose is *Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee*. My choices are *Merry X' mas*, *The Young Dream* and *Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee*.

WONG: I think *Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee* is acceptable, it is not just drama, but there is special effort to piece up the two incidents, and makes a point. Though the ending is too sentimental.

YAU: Its techniques save the day. Very old fashioned.

WONG: Defeats its playfulness at the beginning.

CHOW: This is why I cannot choose it. The ending and the beginning totally don't match.

YAU: Although both of them are about the self, *Merry X' mas* should be given recognition, as we should give merit to films on social issue. If the jurors have to bring out a message, it should be this one.

MAK: Yes, *Merry X' mas* is the only film that has touched me, I was on the verge of tears at the ending of the film.

CHOW: Let's put it like this: many of the films have endings that are actually anti-climaxes, a good ending should be like the graceful landing of a gymnast, but most of these films are just like landing on the wrong foot.

YAU: *Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching* is unable to sustain, though the beginning is interesting.

WONG: There isn't enough time to bring it to perfection, now it's just a mix of everything. It's fun, and if they could spend more time on it I believe it will be even better.

CHOW: isn't as aggressive, and the director can get hold of the situation.

YAU: It makes the most of the filming technique using a handy camera, whereas *The Young Dream* doesn't have this. *Merry X' mas* has demonstrated that we can make films even with our mobile phones.

CHOW: The music in *The Young Dream* is also very good.

WONG: Except *Salmon*, my views are in line with yours. My choices are *Merry X' mas* and *Variable*, which I don't mind them getting the awards. *Variable* is in a similar situation as *Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching*, we appreciate its departure from the mainstream drama films, but each has their own strengths and weaknesses. *Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee* and *The Young Dream* I wouldn't mind either, but I would like to highlight *Merry X' mas*.

MAK: *Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching* is a big pity, because it just fails to develop. For example the grandfather actually knows the father, but suddenly the film gets lost. There are many things to be revealed in a dinner or an interview, I want to see more, but the director didn't put them in.

CHOW: Actually this is a typical problem among these works. They show us whenever they made anything and whatever they have something to say, even in a very immature stage.

Voting on:

Merry X' mas, *Variable*, *Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching*, *Salmon*, *The Young Dream*, *Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee*.

BOBO: According to the number of votes, the Gold Award goes to *Merry X' mas*, the Silver goes to *The Young Dream*.

MAK: Do we all agree on the result? Or should there be two Silver Awards?

CHOW: Still I prefer *Variable* and *Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching*, whereas the two films we have voted for the Gold and Silver are superior to those

because there isn't major faults in them, while *Variable* and *Wong Tsz Ching* have noticeable flaws, but if we compare them to *The Young Dream*, they are less complete... I am thinking, what is the purpose of this competition that we have been doing for the last thirteen years? The Gold and Silver they deserve it, but for the rest of the works which we see potential in them, can we give them some more recognition? We see they have achieved something, but now they got nothing. I think we should give one more.

LEE: If according to the votes, the next one should be *Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee*.

YAU: *Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee* is too highly crafted. This is called "Independent Film & Video" competition, but this is not a bit independent. This work could be a stepping-stone for him to get in the commercial mainstream industry.

MAK: I won't choose these films, because they are too formulaic, albeit more complete.

LEE: What is our definition of independence here?

YAU: It depends on the scale, and is a kind of spirit that is beyond words.

BOBO: It means those films which were free from commercial consideration, and also the subject matter and area of concern all demonstrate the spirit of independence.

LEE: If based on this spirit, then I think *Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching* is closer than *Variable*.

MAK: Among these ten I can't see any of them dare to do something extraordinary.

LEE: Just according to the spirit of independence I think *Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching* is better, but if you say *Variable* is better I am Ok with it.
[*Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching* is given Silver Award]

BOBO: There's also Special Mention.

YAU: If this "Special Mention" actually means the fourth best one in the list, I give up. ... If there's a "Special Mention" in Oscar, we'll all expect it to be something very special.

LEE: Even in Cannes, the Special Mention is an extraordinary prize.

BOBO: But we are actually giving it credit because of its uniqueness.

LEE: ***Goodbye, Kim Hyun-hee*** is too commercial... then it seems to be ***Variable***.

CHOW: If we use independence as the criteria, then ***Salmon*** is also possible.

YAU: But it is too flawed.

CHOW: Yes.

[Special Mention: ***Variable***]

BOBO: The Gold Award goes to ***Merry X' mas***, Silver Awards go to ***Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching*** and ***The Young Dream***. Special Mention goes to ***Variable***.

Open Category

Gold Award

Merry X'mas

Jevons Man-kit AU

Silver Award

Wong Tsz Ching in Search for Wong Tsz Ching

Tsz-ching WONG

Silver Award

The Young Dream

Tze-chun CHOW, On-ching LAI

Special Mention

Variable

Wai-kit WONG