

The 24th ifva Awards
Asian New Force Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members: Vincent Chui (Chui), Yang Li-chou (Yang), Rita Wong (Wong)

Organizer Representatives: Kattie Fan (Fan), Jaspa Tang (Tang)

Fan: The mission of today's meeting is to determine the awards for this category, including Gold, Silver and Special Mention, the winner of which can receive HK\$30,000, HK\$20,000 and a certificate, respectively. This year, we received a total of 229 entries, and after two rounds of jury deliberations, we selected the 10 finalists. We can discuss the films one by one for the record and then nominate award winners. The first film is ***Prove It***.

Chui: First of all, among the 229 entries, there are many outstanding works, including a few dance films. This is a good work, but a bit too simple as a narrative film. We are not really clear on why the main character gives up dancing at first, and there are not too many layers to the story. However, the last scene is a lively display of movement and rhythm. All the first-round jurors liked it.

Wong: I like dance films and pay attention when I see them. This film includes many outdoor scenes, market and daily life locales, allowing us to observe local customs. The story is quite smooth but not very deep, and even though it talks about finding the passion for dance in everyday life, the message is too shallow and simple. Visually, it is more interesting.

Yang: There aren't many ideas in the work until the last scene in the market, which turns everyday behavior into bodily movements of dance. I was touched but I feel that it has no chance (of winning).

Fan: The next work is ***Gentleman Spa***.

Chui: What do you think of the last scene: who does the fat guy touch?

Yang: I think there are two interpretations, one is the guy he likes, the second is Kevin, who works at the spa. I know that actor in real life.

Chui: This is a bit strange. In the end, I am not too satisfied. I like this work because few gay films cast unattractive actors to play the lead. I understand the character's feeling of inferiority, but the only thing that is not satisfied is the last scene. It's a bit unclear; it's open ending, but what goes on is not clear.

Yang: What attracted me more was the dialogue at the beginning and the way they test each other out is interesting. At the end, I believe he gets together with Hai, the guy he likes. For me, the film is a fun exploration of love, a grope in the dark, and that's why the director does not move the camera up to show their faces. This is an interesting imagery for me. Massage parlor is a place for physical contact. The characters always meet indoors, but the last scene is outdoors. They turn the venue for physical contact outside. It is not so important who the person is. What is important is that they go from indoors to outdoors to touch each other, which represents a very good reversal for me, a change in their relationship.

Wong: I like LGBT movies very much. The actor is very good. As Vincent said, gay films rarely feature characters who do not look too smart as the protagonist. Initially, the character feels ashamed and inferior until he opens himself up by learning massage and expressing his love to that man, which must not be easy for him. The director is very detailed in his depiction of the character's fear and need for intimacy. I also wonder who the person is in the final scene. I think it's the person he likes.

Chui: But Hai ignored him previously.

Wong: Hai gives the main character many chances, he is not sure about his feelings. The main character is a big contrast with the other person with a nice figure, but the former is innocent and cute. The two form a big contrast.

Fan: The next work is ***Manicure***.

Wong: The subject matter of this work is very special but the development is weak. After reading the synopsis, I expected the story to develop further but in the end there is not much. I don't gain any greater understanding about the background story. I only know that the villagers have a strong sense of tradition and oppose the protagonist, which is a pity.

Yang: I like this film. Every competition has its guiding principle. **ifva** cites the ability to challenge media function and provide creative aesthetics, and also the spirit of independence. Many films confront sensitive topics head on, be they narrative films or documentaries. In the past, films like ***A City of Sadness*** used indirect means of telling the story of the February 28th incident. As the audience of this film, we only know a little bit about their cultural background. From it, we can get an inside view of their society, which represents a type of independent spirit. The film presents a picture of their culture, gender, desire, etc. I find it moving because it is a kind of direct confrontation.

Chui: I thought the subject matter of this film is very unique at first. The story is very surprising. But when I watched it for the second time, I thought the plot only has one moment of surprise. However, films from west Asia have one advantage in that the imageries are very attractive. The cinematography of ***On the Border*** (one of the finalists) is very good, yet films from west Asia look very rich. For example, the color and art of the pharmacy scene is very distinctive and visually exciting for me. So even if the plot is not very complex, the imagery and locale are captivating and attract my attention. In recent years, there have been many films about transgendered people, but I didn't expect Iran to tackle this subject. The problem they face are immense, which they show in the film. As Director Yang said, this film confronts a sensitive topic. Even in a more liberal place such as Hong Kong, transgender people face many difficulties. The subject matter is very bold for Iran.

Wong: I think the film is attractive, but because it throws out a big subject matter about hermaphrodites, I expected to see more. Other than people beating up the main character, I had hoped to see the story develop further. Many of the shots are interesting. For example, the scene in which they ride a motorcycle, you see them covered in mud, which shows the harshness of their society. Also, they have to go to the city to get the nail polish removal liquid, and you can see that the living conditions are difficult.

Fan: The next work is ***The Trader-Sovdagari***.

Chui: Previously, I have served on jury panel of the Open Category and saw that the visions of Hong Kong directors were very pessimistic. In fact, many films from poorer societies are equally hopeless while in more civilized places, films are often about capitalistic oppression. ***The Trader-Sovdagari*** is a very simple and direct record of the lives of poverty-stricken people. For example, that child has lofty ambitions, but he has little hope of achieving them. The director observes these details in a cool and objective way.

Yang: I like this documentary. It captures real life rather than just reiterating a story. It provides the taste and atmosphere of life. All the characters including the old women, trader and children are very objectively rendered by the camera in a three-dimensional way. The child is asked what his future dreams are. Maybe because there are outsiders, he does not answer directly, but his answer is written all across his face. His mother must have encouraged him to be a reporter, but he is too embarrassed to say it. That part moves me a lot. Sometimes things have no answer, and this is already the full answer, which is very touching to me. The trader finishes selling the potatoes and starts to play cards. I felt like I was watching life unfold and this had been a very enjoyable viewing experience.

- Wong: I like this work very much. It is not judgmental. It reminds me of the film ***Four Springs*** which I saw recently. It documents a way of life and uses the camera to reveal the people and incidents of this place. In this film, the main character is a trader, and even though he has a car, he does not act superior to others. In fact, he is like a connector uniting different people in this place. I like films that capture life and calmly observe it while letting the audience judge for themselves.
- Chui: They seem very poor to us, but for them this is life, and the film is not so clichéd as to say that they happy despite their poverty. Like the scene in which they are playing cards, the trader is asked if he is happy that he has sold everything, and he answers that if he sold everything in one day, he'd be even happier. This is their way of life.
- Wong: The people's dialogue is not very interesting but very lively. Like about buying shoes with potatoes.
- Chui: This is a Netflix production. RTHK would not do that.
- Wong: RTHK would probably add lots of voice-overs. This film just shows you things as they are.
- Chui: It is much bolder than RTHK.
- Fan: The next work is ***A Big Deal***.
- Wong: The work is very stylized and is infused with black humor, but to me it does not offer any big surprises.
- Chui: Has round frame been used before?
- Wong: Yes, in ***I Am Not Madame Bovary***.
- Chui: The whole film is like that?
- Wong: No, the frame goes from round to square and a few other shapes. I understand why the director of this film uses this device, it's because the theme is dark.
- Chui: The composition is quite nice.
- Wong: Because I had seen ***I Am Not Madame Bovary*** previously, I deducted some points off this film. However, the round frame matches the theme of the film and

the feeling of an absurd fable. On the whole, the film is just so-so, but the art direction is good.

Yang: I feel the same. The round frame reminded me of *I Am Not Madame Bovary*, and this feeling stayed with me throughout the film. As a short film, the level of professional craftsmanship is high. The story is interesting and worth reflecting on.

Chui: I haven't seen *I Am Not Madame Bovary*. I think the use of round frame and the composition is good, but I want to know about the ending. What happens to the two thousand yuan?

Wong: The two thousand yuan is evidence. He actually makes two thousand, but tells people he got four thousand and then tens of thousands.

Chui: That 30,000 yuan is his own money, and he only received two thousand?

Wong: Yes, he tries hard to complete the job and leaves his money to his ex-wife.

Chui: The story is quite interesting, and so are the characters. However, the ending is not satisfactory and leaves a lot of questions unanswered. I don't know if the audience is supposed to feel sorry for him, think he is a fool or be moved by him. The relationship between him and his ex-wife is not very strong. That person kills the main character because he knows that he will be killed by the main character?

Wong: It's not clear.

Chui: I can't say that it is unreasonable, but it seems to be a bit one-sided.

Yang: In terms of film industry standards, the film is clever and scores high marks. For me, that character is laughable but in the end, we see a person who is at the edge of society, and through him we see the changes that are happening in China. The character finds himself unable to return to his former simple life. He is stuck and can only establish his own meaning and value by bragging and lying. The question you raised is what is interesting to me about the film.

Chui: Is this director relatively young? Maybe this is my problem, but when I look at the works of young people, I often feel that the story is told but the emotions are not quite there. It seems that there is not enough time for the emotions to be communicated, but they think there is enough time.

Yang: The number changes from 2,000 to 4,000, 20,000, and 200,000. That is my understanding of China, which is based on numbers. The director uses this

method to satirize this understanding of the meaning and value of people, which is determined by numbers. The actual sum is two thousand, not 200,000 like he said.

Fan: The next work is ***Nur***.

Yang: In this competition, this work falls in the middle. We only have three prizes, and it is difficult to convince me that this work should get a prize. It tells a good story. The interesting thing is that the story happens in a border region, and the line separating different regions is very strong. Although we don't know a great deal about Israel, we have some idea, and this film expressed the situation there in a powerful way, while the characters are well-portrayed.

Wong: I also think that the director just succeeds in telling a story smoothly and expressing the relationship between the older generation and the young. However, this subject matter is very common and there is nothing very special about this film. I think it is just ok.

Chui: Out of dozens of films in the first round, there is a very interesting phenomenon, which is that documentaries are more dramatically intense than narrative films. In many dramas, nothing much happens and the plot is very flat. This has to do with the fact that young people nowadays do not like to express their feelings. They only show emojis on WhatsApp! This film has dramatic ups and downs and scenes of the girl quarreling with her family. Among the dozens of first-round entries, this work stands out as a result. I also like the ending. The protagonist flees through an underground tunnel, which I think is powerful. But when I look at the film on the big screen, some of the production is not very well done probably because it is a student film. I agree that it is not necessary to consider this work for awards.

Fan: The next work is ***On the Border***.

Chui: When viewed on the big screen, the cinematography is really good. Not only is it beautifully shot, one can tell that the filmmaker takes care with the mise-en-scene and captures the sense of hopelessness in this town on the Korean border. Dramatically, it is one of those very flat films. The main attraction is the cinematography, which looks better on the big screen.

Yang: Many of the works are stories about borders, like the previous work and this one. For me, ***Temporary*** (one of the finalists) is also a story about borders. I especially like the performance of the young boy, which is textured. This teenage boy has hopes for the future, he is brave and fearless. Unfortunately, we don't have a best actor award. Aside from cinematography, the acting in this film is also outstanding.

- Wong: This work expresses the confusion and loneliness of a teenager living in this place. I feel very strongly about this story. Through imageries and small details, the film powerfully portrays the loneliness of this teenager.
- Chui: Nowadays, literary films all feature this kind of expressionless acting style and glacial plot. The story is very simple, but the cinematography and performance inspire the audience to think.
- Fan: The next work is **Luzon**.
- Chui: It does not show the names of the crew members at the end. It is a Singapore work, I thought it was Taiwanese.
- Tang: There are two explanations behind this. The crew members are Chinese, and because the subject matter touches on the South China Sea, they do not want their names to appear. The other reason is that the monster at the end ate them all, so there are no names.
- Chui: I like the film very much because it does not rely on dialogue. The plot unfolds over ten minutes with twists and turns in the story. The only thing I don't like is the middle part, which keeps showing close-ups of the barrel, and one cannot even tell where the two boats are in relation to one another. It may be due to a lack of resources
- Yang: It is very clever to use a barrel to express a most complicated political relationship in the simplest way. The director has a strong personal style, but the work is a bit monotonous. This story about an episode in the South China Sea is too long for me. I like some of its small details, like the radio that receives Taiwan broadcast, thus showing its sphere of influence. The director is very clever in using these little details to convey the concept of space.
- Wong: There is also a Macau film that was filmed on the sea. The director told me that the production was very difficult. This work is very clever in that it doesn't rely on dialogue but just sound. The story is very simple and conveys a sense of power struggle. The ending is surprising. Although it is a sudden leap into sci-fi, the film is interesting on the whole.
- Chui: This film is worth being shown again. It is smart and interesting and deserves to be seen by more people.
- Yang: The subject matter about the relationship between three countries is too grand.

This film barely scratches the surface.

Chui: The topic about the Chinese threat should resonate with many people.

Fan: The next work is *Temporary*.

Chui: There are many moving elements, but I don't know why it is structured this way. Many small details such as painting the green screen and the final section about the real temporary worker are interesting.

Yang: The only thing I don't like is the last part with the temporary worker. I think the story should end when the three of them ride away on motorcycles. This work place is like a stage, and I feel like I have watched a stage play. That final part is their curtain call. Cutting back to that person feels a bit wrong but the director may have her own ideas. I liked everything before that a lot. This may be my favorite film, maybe because I make documentaries myself. The director tells you that they are actors, but for me this is a documentary. I really like the fact that they chose this work place, which is like a very clean stage on which we observe the characters without interference. The personalities of the three people are very clear. I am from Taiwan and I have seen many people's so-called documentaries, but this one is more real than all the rest. The work has a great impact on me because it has achieved what many documentary filmmakers want to do. No matter how hard you try, this is the most you can achieve. This director comes closer to the truth than I have been able to. Most documentaries start off by introducing its characters to the audience, by showing their family and what their homes looks like, but this documentary lets you see who the characters are. It is about these three people, father, mother and son, acting on this very pure stage, forming a very interesting dialectic and dialogue about truth and fiction. The film represents a great breakthrough in terms of creative possibilities and independent spirit.

Wong: I like it as a whole. The last section is okay for me. The director must have done a lot of research to understand the situation of the temporary workers. The man at the end talks about his relationship with his parents, which reinforces the family-like relationship of the three characters. This documentary is very inspiring to me. Many documentaries are produced in Macau, and I hope filmmakers do not just rely on conventional methods. This film is a good example. It presents the three main characters in a three-dimensional way while the man at the end helps people better understand the difficulties of temporary workers.

Yang: In general, documentaries start off by introducing the names of their subjects. This film allows the characters to be anonymous and simply appear as man, woman and young man. They represent a large portion of temporary workers and their

anonymity makes it easier for people to identify with them.

Fan: The next work is ***The Sea Recalls***.

Yang: This is another documentary, and it goes back to a more conventional format. It is interesting in that initially, we assume that the film is about why those people got killed, but in the end, it becomes an exploration of the director's inner world. This is a film about saying goodbye, but for me, it is a bit overwrought with the music constantly driving up the emotional pitch. Since it was screened right after ***Temporary***, the two form a great contrast because the latter work has no music and is very clean, while this work has a lot of music along with the sound of waves and slow-motion images.

Chui: As I said earlier, narrative films tend to be very dull with little dramatic ups and downs, while the documentaries among the finalists tell stories in different ways. I like the sense of suspense at the beginning of the film, which then turns its focus towards the director and his family. There is a reference to the involvement of the military, which I guess is a sensitive subject in Thailand. Although it is ultimately about the director's family, the film also raises some social issues. I don't dislike the use of emotional music, and for many viewers, this makes the work easy to digest. However, I feel that the ending part seem endless. It goes from an emotional scene of their childhood and then cuts to a wide shot of a man standing in front of the house, which is an imagery reconstruction of their family, and then to the director hugging his mother, which I feel is really too much.

Wong: I don't have many special views about this work.

Yang: ***On the Border***, ***Temporary*** and this work are all stories about the border.

Wong: Last year, we had a program on Chinese films, and all the works were about cities or towns on borders.

Fan: If you have any nominations for awards, you can voice them now.

Wong: My top three are ***The Trader-Sovdagari***, ***Temporary*** and ***On the Border***.

Yang: My Gold Award nominees are ***Temporary*** and ***The Trader-Sovdagari***.

Chui: I like ***Manicure***, ***The Trader-Sovdagari*** and ***The Sea Recalls***. I also view ***Temporary*** favorably, but I don't know much about experimental documentaries. It captures my attention but I can't say I understand its intentions completely. ***Gentleman Spa*** is also good.

- Wong: ***Gentleman Spa*** is also among my top 5.
- Yang: I choose ***Temporary*** because the aim of this competition includes encouraging creativity and independent spirit. All the finalists deserve the Gold Award, but I consider the aim of the event first. To me, ***Temporary*** is a powerful documentary; its technique is solid and the professionalism is above standard, so not giving it an award is unreasonable.
- Fan: If you were to choose one Gold Award winner, which would you choose?
- Yang: Taking into account the aim of the competition, I choose ***Temporary***, if we don't need to consider that, I may choose another film.
- Chui: I do not disagree.
- Yang: If the Gold went to ***Temporary***, can we give second place to ***The Trader-Sovdagari***?
- Wong: I struggle with which work displays independent spirit.
- Chui: To me, ***Temporary*** is very special, but I wonder if it's because I haven't seen many works like this. Works like ***The Sea Recalls*** which originates from personal experience may seem distinctive a few years ago, but in the past few years I have seen many films like that. For example, a Hong Kong woman made a very good film called ***32+4*** a few years ago. ***Temporary*** made a deep impact on me. More down-to-earth works like ***The Trader-Sovdagari*** are plentiful, although it surprised me somewhat that it can be seen on Netflix. Interestingly, many narrative films nowadays are like ***The Trader-Sovdagari***.
- Yang: In Taiwan, narrative films are made like documentaries, while documentaries are made like narrative films.
- Chui: Even though I don't know how to praise ***Temporary***, I feel it is quite good.
- Wong: ***Temporary*** is my top choice because it attempts and experiments with new forms, while from a personal angle, I choose ***The Trader-Sovdagari***. I am okay if Gold Award goes to ***Temporary*** and Silver goes to ***The Trader-Sovdagari***,
- Chui: Audiences chose ***The Sea Recalls*** for People's Choice award after last night's screening. This award does not have prize money, right?

- Yang: I didn't expect that the audience like the Thai film the most.
- Chui: It is the most palatable.
- Fan: The award is called People's Choice, and we have this in order to give audiences a chance to participate and let them consider what they would do if they can choose award winners and encourage them to look more carefully at the works. Do you decide that Gold Award goes to **Temporary** and Silver to **The Trader-Sovdagari**?
- Chui: Or shall we discuss further?
- Wong: Do you have other options?
- Yang: What do you think of the two narrative films from China?
- Wong: I quite like **On the Border**, it is quite good.
- Yang: Between **On the Border** and **A Big Deal**, I prefer **On the Border**. Is there a problem if we give both prizes to documentaries?
- Fan: We don't have any preference in this regard.
- Chui: Yang reminded us that we should choose works that are distinctive. In the past few years, digital technologies have become better and better, and we have also unconsciously raised our standards. **The Trader-Sovdagari** is well-made, and it is about a place that we have seldom seen, so we are curious about it. However, its form is not that distinctive. I always remind myself not to judge things from perspective of my own youth, so from this angle **On the Border** is interesting. I also like **Manicure**, but it is not so special. It's only the environment that makes the story meaningful.
- Yang: I can accept that. I am convinced by your argument. These works are all very solid.
- Wong: My initial choices were **The Trader-Sovdagari**, **Temporary** and **On the Border**. If I was an organizer for a film festival, I would want audiences to see different genres of films including documentaries and narrative works. I agree with either **The Trader-Sovdagari** and **On the Border** getting an award. If granting awards is a way of drawing audience attention to certain works, then giving an award to a narrative film is a reminder to audiences, a way to alert them to certain developments in different film genres.

- Fan: Does anyone oppose giving the Silver Award to ***On the Border***?
- Yang: I can accept that.
- Fan: How about Special Mention? Are there any works you wish to mention? Are there any elements in certain works that you want to applaud?
- Chui: I think providing screening opportunities to works is more important than awards. Works like ***Luzon*** and ***The Sea Recalls*** are worth recommending to audiences.
- Wong: For Special Mention, I pick ***Luzon*** or ***Manicure***.
- Yang: Between the two, I pick ***Luzon***.
- Fan: This director had previously taken part in **ifva** with ***Anchorage Prohibited***, which is also about the sea.
- Yang: ***Luzon*** is very ambitious.
- Chui: I agree.
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Asian New Force Category award winners

Gold Award

Temporary

Hsu Hui-ju (Taiwan)

Silver Award

On the Border

Wei Shujun (China)

Special Mention

Luzon

Chiang Wei-liang (Singapore)