
The 25th ifva Awards**Asian New Force Category Jury Meeting**

Jurors: Yamashita Nobuhiro (Yamashita), Boo Junfeng (Boo), Joyce Yang (Yang)

Organizer Representatives: Kattie Fan (Fan)

Fan: Today's mission is to select the awards for this category. Thank you for submitting your comments for each film. We have made a table to indicate your preference. Yamashita has indicated that he is very keen on *The City of Honey*, and the other two jurors have chosen this film as well. Maybe Joyce can begin and talk about your nominations first, and then Junfeng can talk about your choices as well.

Yang: I was in the jury for the last round as well and watched about 80 films, and the finalists were selected from the first round. To talk about the films that I would like to nominate, they are the ones that I gave 8 points. There are the ones we can talk about for awards. My personal favorite is the film *Touch*. I think it's very smart and close to teenagers' lives. I especially like the lead actress, how she can turn a flat story into a very amusing one. Another film I would like to mention is *The City of Honey*. This film is the shortest one, at only 7 minutes, but people can feel the power of the ending. At the beginning, we see the story is very flat, with two kids playing in a car, but in the end, you realize how brutal the reality is. That's why I really like this film. The third film I'd like to mention is *The Mortician of Manila*. I only gave the film an average score of 7, but this film really has independent spirit. It explores the life of a person who witnessed what happened there. I think this work deserves further discussion. The fourth film I'd like to mention is *The Remains*. This film is from Nepal, and it's rare that we see a film from there. It does not choose to explore hot topics but focuses on the philosophical lives of the people living there. It's more like a fairy tale, because in the middle of the film, the old man has a fish tail. I really like the part of the film when the old man meets a child at the end of his life. This image is very poetic, and this is something we should pay attention to because it's a very unique vision. Out of the 90 films that we saw, this is the only one from Nepal, and is a very special film.

Fan: Does Boo Junfung have any comments?

Boo: Can I ask a question about independent spirit? Can you define it more? What do you mean by independent spirit? If this such a key criterion, we should have a clearer definition of what it means.

Fan: When we talk about independent spirit, it's a broad idea. Many years ago, we could

easily make comparison between independent and mainstream in terms of the production budget. Now filmmakers use films to express their views with certain budget and in a personal, independent way. Independent spirit is uncountable in quantity or direct connect with money. It can be a concept. From my point of view, we shall look at the filmmaker's intentions and how they deal with social issues, or how they utilize the medium to tell stories. The definition keeps changing from time to time. It is up to the juror to define it.

Boo: Some of the filmmakers are in school, and some are from countries that have film commissions or support, so their works will be more polished, so it's kind of hard to decide what this independent spirit is on the production level. But if we look at what the films are saying and how they reflect the realities of their societies, it may be a more meaningful way of looking at it. The other two jurors can express their views on that.

Fan: Every year, the jurors' decisions may be different. When the medium was quite new, our award winners were awarded for how they use the medium to express their ideas. In recent days, most of us are more focused on social issues, for example about how globalization is changing the world and how to react to it. This year, we received over 1400 submissions and went through three rounds of jury meetings. Different jurors from each round have different things they find independent with the films.

Boo: Maybe I'll just go through the works that I like. *The City of Honey* definitely has strong form. When the ending came, of course it's shocking. At the beginning, the audience is drawn into the world of the children, which made the ending all the more shocking. I think it's a bit manipulative in how it delivered the punch, but for a short film, I guess it works. With *Mandatory*, I should have given it a 7; I should have given it less than *Viral Kids*, which I felt is stronger. I'll talk about *Viral Kids* first. The use of social media in the film is quite interesting. In the beginning, with the child singing, you think social media is a way of getting attention, and then they flip it around and you find that they are being exploited, and then the twist with the revenge comes at the end. I thought that was quite interesting. They are street kids, but some of them have access to the phone, and the empowerment that device can give you can mean very much. For me the message is quite special. I gave this film 7.5; I didn't like it as much as *The City of Honey*. *The Remains* was refreshing for me. Most films use drama to tell the story, but here you have the chance to look at the visual poetry. I read in the director's statement that the film was part of his journey of finding his cinema, and that, to me, is what independent spirit would mean. He is seeking to define his cinema; to me, that's quite admirable, especially coming from a country like Nepal, and he chooses to find his own voice. For that I gave him a very high score.

I am curious about *Ceremony Night*. You gave it a high score. I am curious what it is about the film that made sense to you, or that spoke to you.

Yamashita: I think the story isn't that interesting, but the director's view on how he showed the audience the story is quite interesting, and is done in a very beautiful way. That's why I gave *Ceremony Night* a high score.

Yang: I like *Ceremony Night*. It's about the lives of the roller-coaster workers and that they are faced with the risk of being fired after the ceremony night. They don't have any rights or protections, and they are powerless people in this grand opening. What happens at the beginning of the story is a man's death, but everybody is trying to cover up his death instead of showing empathy for what had happened, and nobody wants to find out the reasons behind it. The story talks about the problems with the system; these people are not cared for or respected. I spent some time thinking about the ending because the lead character made many people lose their lives, and that ending is quite shocking as well. Definitely, there is a sense of revenge, but what is the director trying to say? He wants to say that this society and this system is very dangerous, if we don't care and reflect, and dig into the deeper into injustices, the whole system will go crazy. That point is a metaphor for society. Personally, I don't like the ending very much, because I find it unjustified, but I understand the anger and where it came from, it came from people who have been ignored by the social system, how people treat the death, the way the co-worker wants to hide the death and the dead body under the amusement park, while everyone else is enjoying everything above. It's like *Parasite*, in which poor people live in the basement while others enjoy a great life above. That's why I gave this film a high score.

Boo: I can see that the film is speaking about the working class, but I didn't quite get the upper-class part of it. I didn't read too much into the class commentary.

Yamashita: I really like *The City of Honey* because it's very simple and strong. Although it is very short, it can have a very strong impact. The second work I choose is *Paper Helicopter*, I don't think the story is very interesting but the girl's performance is wonderful and the director's skills are quite good, so I chose this work. I was a little confused when choosing the third film. From the score sheet it should be *Ceremony Night*, but now that I know I must take independent spirit into consideration, I'm a little bit confused. Now I'd like to choose *Viral Kids* as my third choice. The film is interesting, and I can feel the director's effort. These are my three award choices.

Fan: Are we going to nominate our Gold Award winner for this category? Joyce's preference goes towards *Touch*, right?

- Yang: Yes. I chose four films, should I remove one from the list?
- Fan: Maybe you can assign priority to your choices.
- Yang: Actually, I can remove *The Mortician of Manila*. I'd like to ask Junfeng and Yamashita your opinion of *Touch*. What do you think about this film?
- Yamashita: I think the story is not interesting, it's just fair, but the skill of the director is great. The girl performance is a bit flat at first, but by the end I really enjoy her performance.
- Boo: I was very entertained by the film, and I like the fact that she is such an unlikable character, but you learn to care about what she is feeling. The execution and the fact that film is told without dialogue is impressive. The reason I didn't rank it really high is that I've seen many Israeli films, and they get a lot of support, so I think it's not difficult for them to have something that is more polished and well-developed. Considering independent spirit and where it stands with this film, I didn't give it any extra marks. I appreciate that it tries to address the Arab world, and that the film makes the girl's concerns seem a bit silly compared to the other girl she's speaking to. But I can't help but feel that it's a little bit cursory.
- Yang: Thanks for the comments. I really agree that *Touch* is very polished and entertaining. When I watched it, I have doubts about the use of the war in Syria, I wonder the reason for using that, and whether using war as an element would give meaning to the film. I don't know if it's a strategical consideration or out of real concern with the war. So I agree with you. The main character meets the other girl on social media, but the problems of that other girl has never been addressed properly or more deeply. I think the film is lacking in that respect.
- Boo: I feel that the main character had used her, but I also feel that the filmmaker had used her, too.
- Yang: That's what I feel, too.
- Fan: You can prioritize your selections to nominate the Gold Award.
- Yang: I would say *The City of Honey*.
- Boo: *The City of Honey* for me as well.
- Yamashita: I also select *The City of Honey*.

- Fan: We now have the Gold Award. How about Silver?
- Yang: I am voting for *Viral Kids*.
- Yamashita: Everyone gave *Viral Kids* a high score. Even if it cannot get Silver, I hope it can get some other award because I really enjoyed it.
- Boo: I'm okay with *Viral Kids* getting Silver.
- Yang: From the beginning, I was impressed with the camera movement of *Viral Kids*. The mise-en-scene is so difficult if the story is happening in the streets. The story is not just about one kid, but a group of kids, and the placement of camera angle is very smart and thoughtful.
- Boo: In terms of the filmmaking, it's very thoughtful even though the aesthetic is very chaotic. It's quite clear that a lot of thought went into it. There is a part with kids coming out of a school, and I think they timed it to the end of the real school because I don't think they can afford so many extras. It looks like a lot of things were timed to real situations and the crew just went there with a small camera and shot it. I think that's something quite special about the film.
- Yamashita: The camera keeps shooting the children from their eye level, which is very thoughtful and nice.
- Fan: It seems we all agree to give *Viral Kids* the Silver Award. Now for Special Mention. We didn't call this prize the Bronze Award because there may be some films that may have elements that are special to mention, but maybe their overall excellence is not as good as the Gold and Silver awards. That's the reason we call it Special Mention, so when choosing this award, you can think of the reasons behind it.
- Yamashita: Should Special Mention be judged by the balance for the movie, or just from the point of view of the judges?
- Fan: We named this award Special Mention instead of Bronze because we are not ranking it third among the ten films, but we want to highlight some special elements inside the film. Maybe the story is very special but the execution is not good enough to get Gold or Silver, or the concept behind the film is very special and thought-provoking, but the technical part is not as well as others. Special Mention is to highlight some parts inside the film, it may not be the balance of the film, as you mentioned. It is up to the juror. Any nominations for Special Mention?

Boo: I would like to advocate for *The Remains* because I feel that if we talk about independent spirit, this film fits my definition of it. If we talk about encouraging filmmakers towards further exploration in their filmmaking, I personally am curious and would like to see more from this filmmaker. But feel free to disagree with me.

Fan: Any other nominations?

Yamashita: I have two nominations. One is *Touch* and the other is *Paper Helicopter*. These are two very different kinds of movies, and I cannot decide which one is suitable for Special Mention. Because we talked about independent spirit, I think *Touch* is suited for this theme, and I choose it for Special Mention.

Yang: I'd like to advocate for *The Remains* because I don't think there's an independent voice in terms of the film industry in Nepal. I find *The Remains* to be a surprise not just because of the country it's from, but also because it uses lighting, sound and local landscapes so well. It's a story, a poem happening in a landscape, and the director has designed and captured a lot of beautiful, poetic things and put them into a flowing picture. Because we are choosing Special Mention, I think the film's poetic touch is one of the specialties of this film.

Yamashita: I agree that *The Remains* is quite different from others, so I would also like to choose this film for Special Mention.

Yang: You don't need to compromise, you can share more thoughts.

Fan: Is this the conclusion? If you all agree, then *The Remains* will be our Special Mention.

Yamashita: I think *The Remains* is really not like a movie, but just like a painting, going from one scene to the next, which is interesting. This is my point of view from my heart.

Yang: Is it okay if I shared more about *The Remains*? For me, *The Remains* is not entertaining at all. I read the director's notes that *The Remains* refers to the last few days of the old man. It talks about what people have to do before they die in the tradition of Nepal. So, it's a very spiritual journey that the old man takes before he dies, and that's how I understand the story behind the images.

Boo: I try not to read anything before I see the films, and when watching *The Remains*. I was quite taken by the images one after the next. There's a constant flow of

water in the film, when I see the old man and the child, I get the sense that the film is about life. Even though I didn't completely understand the voice-over, as it went along, I felt that there was something that someone at the end of their life would look at. I can imagine this can be a very contentious film, especially if it got the first or second prize. As a Special Mention, it encourages a different kind of exploration of cinema, and allows me to open my mind to look at what else is there in cinema you can look out for.

Yamashita: I understand everyone's points of view regarding *The Remains*. I also think this film is totally different from the rest. Also it is a new vision and the scenes are beautiful, but when I watched the film, I did not get any excitement from it. I expected more from a poetic film like this. I think the film is too beautiful.

Boo: I can see where that is coming from.

Fan: Are there any other nominations for Special Mention?

Yamashita: I cannot name a film for Special Mention because none of them is very special.

Yang: Are we going to discuss *Ceremony Night*, because this film ranks 4th. Junfeng, would you like to talk about *Paper Helicopter*?

Boo: At the beginning I thought this film was special. I really wanted to like it. Especially the first few shots when they go to the doctor to ask for the donkey, the way it was shot is really interesting. Then when the brother and sister are sitting outside and staring into space, I thought it was very interesting. As it went on, the subtitles didn't help because I couldn't understand them, sometimes, I have to read it a few times to understand what they are saying. As the film went on, it changed; it became simpler and is just about the race. It tries to make the race exciting but doesn't quite get there. It lost me and I didn't quite like it so much anymore. At the beginning, I wanted to like it.

Yamashita: I also think that the story of *Paper Helicopter* is not really interesting. At the very beginning I also felt a sense of anticipation. I feel the lead actress is great.

Yang: In terms of the storytelling of *Paper Helicopter*, I totally agree with you both. This is the only film in which it is not easy to follow the story. There is some problem with the narration, but I agree the casting is good. I like the girl's face. I really want to see this story about a girl winning a donkey race, and in the middle, the story has a lot of twists, but the film doesn't manage to explain the twists very well. Some scenes are a little bit manipulative, they are not natural but feel designed. That's why I didn't give this film a very good score.

Boo: Can we talk a little bit about *The Swing* because I see that Joyce's score with this film is quite low, while Yamashita and my score are relatively okay. I want to take into consideration that a lot of the filmmakers here are men, and I want to look at a woman's voice. Also, this film comes from a place where we've never seen a film from. In the spirit of what Special Mention is supposed to mean, maybe we can talk about this film.

Yamashita: I anticipated more from the beginning, but after watching the film, the story isn't that great. It's just a simple story. The location and casting are good, but the story-telling part is not as good as I thought.

Yang: I like the story, but I have to say it is very predictable. At the beginning I knew what's going to happen at the end. With the scene in the principal's office, it is not presented very well. The actress in that scene was not presented very well, and that's why I didn't give it a very high score.

Yamashita: I have a question for everyone. Is Special Mention awarded for the director or can it be for the casting?

Fan: It's for the film in general.

Yamashita: Should we choose this work because of the skill of the director or the cast?

Fan: It should be mainly for the director, but if you think that the acting or the cast is worthy of mention, then it could be an area to give out the prize. I'd like to emphasize that the prize is given to the director and the film itself rather than to the actor.

Boo: For *Ceremony Night*, when I read the artist's statement, the film is about the fear of being rejected, it's one of the filmmaker's biggest fears, which he tries to recreate with this film. What do you understand of that? What is the rejection? I'm thinking if I'm missing the thing about class or is this his intention?

Yamashita: It's a bit difficult for me because I cannot understand all the subtitles. About rejection, I think everyone in this beautiful amusement park is enjoying themselves, but this guy has a sense of anxiety and nervousness, and the contrast between the two is shown in the film. Personally, I experience anxiety when everyone else is having a good time, so I think that's what the director is showing this situation, and his skills are great.

Yang: My understanding is that person has been rejected from the ceremony, from the

system in which the working class is unseen. That's how I understand rejection in the story.

Boo: I can see that.

Yang: We have three films now. Which one are we going to choose?

Yamashita: I choose *The Remains* as Special Mention.

Asian New Force Category award winners

Gold Award

The City of Honey

Moein Ruholamini (Iran)

Silver Award

Viral Kids

Arjanmar H. Rebeta (Philippines)

Special Mention

The Remains

Manoj Babu Panta (Nepal)

The 25th ifva Awards Asian New Force Category Juror's Comment***Touch***

Joyce Yang: The protagonist was impressive to facial express vivid and subtle feelings, leading up the whole story. Without a single line, but the rhyme of narrative goes very smoothly, mixed with good sense of humour, which truly belongs to teenagers. An easily accessible theme had been unfolded and went further to address the war shadows on teenager's life in Syria.

Boo Junfeng: Engaging, clever storytelling revolving around a young female lead whose confident façade hides an insecure interior. Speaks of self-centred generation who lives on social media, but handicapped in real life.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: With totally no dialogue in the conversation using only the smart phone, it was amazing that I could watch the whole film until the end with joy. It is a story about the protagonist who was fearful to communicate with others, took the last step out of the comfort zone. It was a very universal theme because it was a story that was common in all eras though the method was different. I felt a little bit of warmth at the end of the movie.

Ceremony Night

Joyce Yang: The composition of images, especially lighting, is thoughtful and contribute to the theme. The setting of whole story is full of metaphor, echoing the movements happening in many places in the world, including Hong Kong.

Boo Junfeng: Strong, visual ending, but not sure what the film is saying. The sense of revenge feels sensationalized and unjustified.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: One man's suspicion turns into anxiety and goes crazy little by little in the end. The location sense is very interesting with the contrast between the disturbing emotion of the protagonist and the glorious amusement park. Last shot of the playground equipment was very interesting and at the same time very shocking that I think it was very great.

The Heavy Burden

Joyce Yang: A straightforward story. Narration is neat. The suppressed emotion amongst the three generations of men is touching, heightening the atmosphere of the ending. The on-point camerawork and framing are the glue that holds it altogether. The outdoor and indoor scenes are both presented successfully.

Boo Junfeng: Shows the absurdity of national borders and the humanity that transcends them. Seems to draw parallels between donkeys and human life, but I can't quite grasp the symbolism of it.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: The film is made using a donkey's point of view and the effort can be obviously seen. The location is great, and the story is easy to understand. But I wanted something more expressive and something new. I felt that especially the music was a factor that made the whole work feel flat. The story, the music and the production are well organized, but on the other hand, I expected something that would catch the audience's hearts.

Paper helicopter

Joyce Yang: Paper helicopter Intriguingly crafted a well-structured story of a girl's bravery, hope and friendship with plot twist and it all paid off. It is not easy to handle an assemble of casting with so many same-aged kids. The leading actress surprised me. As the central character, she delivers this conventional story properly. However, more balanced treatment among young actors would have better result.

Boo Junfeng: Starts off promising with child actors and interesting visual language, but it lost me after a while.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: It was good that the children were still being children. In particular, the gaze of the starring girl was wonderful. It showed both the strength and the weakness of the whole movie. Directing and shooting were cute but also somehow feeling hard-boiled. The director's mysterious talent was interesting. And I would really want the sister and brother who play the leading role could become "Gucci" model.

Viral Kids

Joyce Yang: The strength of this film is its street shooting treatment. Handheld camera has been utilized throughout the whole film. It follows viral kids across the city, revealing the problems hidden in the dark, for instance, the politician's campaign slogan. The city becomes a rich context of the story. Furthermore, the compound social media elements is the highlight.

Boo Junfeng: Strong social commentary about the exploited children on the streets. Interesting twist about the use of social media as empowerment, rather than mere exploitation.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: Shooting with a feeling of floating, I feel that effort was put all along the way which made it interesting. I was impressed by how the children's crisis was presented was not imposed onto the audience. There was music and dynamism. And I thought that it was possible to portray the theme of "darkness" just like a movie.

The City of Honey

Joyce Yang: Starting from a childish scene but ends with the portrayal of terrorism. Leaving audience horrified with how close and sudden death was to those innocent children. It is brutal but the mere truth is presented to the audience. The narration is guileless but successfully made its point.

Boo Junfeng: Conceptually strong film about the dreams and aspirations of children set in the horrors of war. The ending is almost manipulative, but it works for the brevity of a short film.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: It is a very simple and short movie but an amazing movie that resonates in the heart. I was impressed with the one cut scene that shows the contrast between the innocent children who were in the scrapped car and the terrible reality outside. The last gunshot was only shown by the sound which brought the imagination of that moment that there were other murder cases elsewhere. I could experience the horror and sadness at the same time. The director is very talented.

Mandatory

Joyce Yang: The dilemma and paradox the soldier faces provoke deep reflection on the state apparatus. Enjoy the setting of the narration and understand the intention behind all scenes. However, the story is more like formulated than naturally derived from characters.

Boo Junfeng: The story is polished and well-executed, with nuanced characters – you could feel the soldier’s dilemma within a short span of time.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: Directing, shooting and music were all technically wonderful. And I think the skill of the director is powerful. The message of the work was all conveyed to the audience, but it does not leave a lingering sound. For me, a little unsatisfaction remained.

I personally instead of just showing everything in the film, the director could challenge himself of not showing everything.

The Mortician of Manila

Joyce Yang: With the real-life tragedy and horror involved, this powerful documentary delves in the situation in Philippine after the new drug law had been put in place. At the heart of the film is the old man who runs funeral business in town. The film left ambivalent feelings towards the old man. From his perspective, death is something close but also distant.

Boo Junfeng: Familiar subject in Filipino films, but seen through the interesting perspective of a mortician. Many powerful moments captured. It is impressive that the filmmaker captured the moment the family of the deceased meets the mortician, and managed to follow and develop the portraits of each of them.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: While watching the movie, I thought about “death should be equal to all mankind. However the weight of death might be different depending on race, country and class”. Through the funeral house, various distances to death were shown and it was interesting. The distance between the director and the subject was always calm so that the audience can keep calm and watch the whole movie till the end. The shot of children and the dog makes us feel the vitality. It was great that the death and vitality were both shown in the movie.

The Remains

Joyce Yang: Cinematography is elegant, and the musical background and natural sound help to sustain the delicate mood. With the aesthetic touch of the story, it has achieved a winning spirit of tranquility. Most importantly, it lets elderhood meet childhood in a poetic and philosophical way.

Boo Junfeng: Strong visual poetry about life – the continuing motion of the river flow is mesmerizing. The use of cinema as a poetic medium is a breath of fresh air compared to the other films.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: It seems like a chain of images rather than a movie. And the images were all beautiful. Characters and the landscape were shown as a part of nature. Rather than connecting one cut to another cut, you could say that one cut finished after another. And I felt like I had seen dozens of paintings. It was a work between painting and movie. Location was great.

The Swing

Joyce Yang: Well-crafted story, depicting good person in critical times and the sacrifice is the swing, representing the existing good things. There seems to be references from other Iranian films. There are issues with acting. Some side actors are not as good as leading ones.

Boo Junfeng: The device of trying to create warmth in the cold is simple and effective in evoking a sense of desperation and love. The dramatic moments in the film are not its strongest.

Yamashita Nobuhiro: The shooting was gentle and I liked it. It felt universal and powerful though it was a small story. It was straight forward on the direction of the characters and it successfully showed the charm of characters. However, the impression of the hard time of the leading role was a bit weak. Instead of a story about the rise of humanity, I felt like it's just a "story". I would like to have more surprise and discovery.