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## **The 26th ifva Awards - Asian New Force Category Juror's Comment**

Jurors: Kuo Ming-jung, Brillante Mendoza, Felix Tsang

### ***Weekend***

Kuo Ming-jung: The visual style is simple but effective; right to the point. The film asks us to ponder the mundane way people get used to state violence as part of their life (and the implication that they may not challenge it).

Brillante Mendoza: Two powerful shots that speak volumes. We saw an ordinary family that exist in an archaic society. The narrative and the voice of the filmmaker are clear. This for me is an ideal short film.

Felix Tsang: Very simple static shot, but a very powerful story that turns on its head. Appreciate the audacity of the director to choose to let the audience believe one thing that is seemingly mundane, but at the end twists it around.

### ***Heading South***

Kuo Ming-jung: The girl neatly characterizes a new generation caught in transition. No one, including her father's new wife, is portrayed unduly negatively. Growing up, torn between her parents and two different lifestyles, the girl suppresses her inner emotions, revealing more, her confusions about what the future holds. Accomplished, professional filmmaking, notably the editing and cinematography, but to the extent of leaving the viewer hoping for a stronger personal voice from the filmmaker.

Brillante Mendoza: The journey of the child took us from innocence to impurity. The protagonist took us for a ride in full circle both dramatically and narratively. The child's performance is commendable but the narrative lacks syntax.

Felix Tsang: Touches on sensitive issues within Mainland China, ie. the cultural assimilation of the 'han' people with other small tribes, which is a very timely issue considering the current social and political landscape. All told through the eyes of a young girl who has landed in this foreign place. Taken away from the beauty of nature, but plunged into a disgusting world of misogyny and forced cultural assimilation. Very daring story to be told under the current landscape of China.

***Mina's World***

Kuo Ming-jung: A girl assumes responsibility for a killing committed by her mother. The girl escapes and searches for her mother who has begun a new life and rejects her daughter. In hiding, the girl reflects on the meaning of 'home', recalling a painting from her detention centre.

Seemingly an attempt to critique Iran's judicial system and punishment processes, however, the film is somewhat elliptical making its intentions rather elusive. As such, it's difficult for the viewer to fully engage with the film.

Brillante Mendoza: The narrative is not clear and the film language is not consistent. The film lacks vision and focus.

Felix Tsang: Shows the troubles of being a female in Iranian society, and even betrayed and abandoned by her mother. She tries her best to escape, but ironically cannot escape death by a snakebite. Is the snake a phallic symbol of the poisonous male figure in society? No matter how hard women try to escape, they will meet their bitter end in the hands of men.

***The Child of Nowhere***

Kuo Ming-jung: Somewhat typical short film about a child from Taiwan. Focusing mostly on mood, it therefore, lacks a strong narrative spark. The observational style and lack of events makes it difficult for the viewer to fully engage with the character's feelings and psychology. The film also feels rather too long, again perhaps a result of the rather singular tone that the observational mood presents. It may fare better in a shorter length.

Brillante Mendoza: Too predictable and simplistic. I don't understand the vision of the filmmaker despite the length of the film.

Felix Tsang: Heartbreaking story, and very beautifully shot, but I'm not sure whether this story has the political edge that other stories have. The kid is good, and the father son relationship really shines, which makes it even more heartbreaking when he leaves the kid in the end. However, in this type of competition, are we looking at projects that have the most interesting social/political commentaries? Those projects are more daring. This is heartbreaking, but it's not something we haven't seen before.

***The Visit***

Kuo Ming-jung: The director has a good grip on human emotions from its characters. A film with a lot of details to read into it without forcing any message on the audience - the girl is a key lead for the story. The film lets us see or understand the difficulty and anticipation the adult has to negotiate.

Brillante Mendoza: The performances are believable but the film as a whole did not move me. Maybe because the information that were provided are not clear and transitive.

Felix Tsang: Based on a true story, this film explores the struggles of fair legal opportunities in Iran through the lens of a child. With great performances from the lead actors, we have an insight into the legal rights of family visits and the rights of a prisoner in Iran. This short film allows us to reflect on a broken judicial system, which is now a very timely subject around the world.

***One Night Two Threads***

Kuo Ming-jung: Narrative structure, editing, cinematography, directing and acting seem to lack imagination. It's hard to see the potential.

Brillante Mendoza: I did not find the film pretentious despite its melodrama. The simplicity of the narrative is commendable considering the cultural insinuation that the filmmaker was trying to evoke.

Felix Tsang: Relevant message about modern day women, but the acting and shooting style did not resonate with me.

***Drifting***

Kuo Ming-jung: In the beginning the film seems to cram too many ideas into it: one child policy, son being dressed up as a girl to get away birth control, son grows up wanting to dress as a woman and the family house facing demolition.

Still, with minimum dialogue, the characters are convincing, the film has a real cinematic eye with space and composition, to find a way for lighting to create different situations, connect past and present. It's a very modern visual and in line with contemporary Chinese cinema.

We get to know the protagonist and share his frustration when he drives at dark round and round in circles. A talent to look out for.

Brillante Mendoza: The narrative structure is too vague despite the political issues that the film was trying to project. The ensemble performances is commendable.

Felix Tsang: Beautiful visual composition, and very interesting insight into the effects the 'one child policy' has on families around China, as well as exploring issues of sexuality, family, and acceptance. This coming-of-age tale allowed us to have an insight into this family's life, and it was a refreshing take on the subject with an interesting visual style and intriguing subject matter.

***God's Daughter Dances***

Kuo Ming-jung: The brain and heart lies with the protagonist, but the characters may come across as somewhat stereotypical. Acting from the lead is convincing and the ending is the strongest part of the film.

Brillante Mendoza: The social and political commentary about gender issue in a military service that was presented in a comedic way is effective and commendable. It was not forced and assuming. I enjoyed the film.

Felix Tsang: Truly enjoyed this one! This story highlights the issues of transgendered people. Very committed performance from the lead actor, however, the ending is a little awkward, but also liberating in a way.

***Coffin Maker***

Kuo Ming-jung: Not completely sure about the story. Too many gaps and questions in the film leaving one unable to properly understand what is really the core of the film - it seems to be about a moral decision but it's perhaps rather vague for viewers.

Brillante Mendoza: The couple's dilemma in an exploitative and abusive society was not clearly presented. Ergo, we did not sympathize with the protagonist. There were too many questions in my mind that I was trying to process and put together that I lost the grip of the narrative.

Felix Tsang: Another stellar entry from Iran. With powerful performances by the two leads, and intricately constructed characters by the writer and director, they were able to take us through this struggle between necessity and religion - choosing between the life of your daughter and the so-called religious rules that had to be followed. What is more important?

***I am Wounded***

Kuo Ming-jung: Editing and narrative structure are not entirely convincing and it is unclear what the film wants to say. A lot remains unexplained. It doesn't really get to build a broader picture of the situation people like this family are living in.

Brillante Mendoza: The narrative was cluttered and complicated. There was no definite film language. I did not sympathize with any of the characters.

Felix Tsang: I'm afraid to say that this piece was not my cup of tea. I can appreciate the hard life of the two brothers, but I could not really get into the story, maybe because of the 'rough' filmmaking style.

**Asian New Force Category award winners**

**Gold Award**

***Weekend***

Ario Motevaghe (Iran)

**Silver Award**

***Drifting***

Bo Hanxiong (China)

**Special Mention**

***God's Daughter Dances***

Byun Sung-bin (South Korea)