

**The 27th ifva Awards
Asian New Force Category Jury Meeting**

Jurors: Chalida Uabumrungjit (Chalida), Hsiao Ya-chuan (Hsiao), Ray Yeung (Yeung)

Organizer Representatives: Kattie Fan (Fan), Sandy Lai, Sammy Wong, Helen Lam

Interpreter: Cecilia Wong

Fan: Today our mission is to select the awards. This year we had 282 eligible entries in the Asian New Force category. Our pre-selection had already selected 70 submissions from the bigger pool. Then we had a first-round jury who helped us select the 10 finalist works that you had seen. Today we are going to select the awards, which are the Gold Award, Silver Award and Special Mention.

First of all, we will go through the 10 works one by one. You can give some comments or views on what you think about the works. Then we will proceed to the second half, where we will select the awards. If there is no question, we can begin to talk about the films. The first film is *The Secret of My Birth* from China. Ray, would you like to begin first?

Yeung: I really like this film. The story is very beautiful. It tells a very personal story. I like the cinematography; I think it's very pretty. We know that the budget is low, but I still feel the shots are well-selected. I think the use of music is also good. The conversations they have, there's not a lot of dialogue, and it was used quite effectively. There are some very clever elements in the film, like the goldfish. Used as a device, it is very clever. At first the father says he put the goldfish there for feng shui purposes so he will get a son, then later on, the girl tries to affect the birth by pouring the fish soup into the fish tank. I think it's very interesting and clever. All the characters are very well-rounded as well, like the mother who also loves the daughter, and there's the scene of them together which is quite touching. The film is also quite humorous, with the ritual she has to do and then they have to dance on the beach at the fire. That brings out the culture of the area, Chaozhou, and I think that's something interesting for international audiences. It's also interesting that at that moment she has her period, and the screenwriter uses that as a symbol that she's grown up, and that's the reason why her father cannot do the ritual, because she is unclean. That is very ironic and very clever. The use of sound is also very good, like there are moments that the filmmaker uses the chanting very cleverly when they're doing the ritual. Later, the filmmaker uses the firecrackers to cover up

the little girl's crying. The ending is also good, it's almost a perfect ending because she's worried about the family bringing in a son, and her status is going to be lower in the family. But in the end, they don't get a son, they get another daughter, and that shows a type of Chinese culture where they place a lot of importance on having a son, and women's status is much lower in society. In the end, the little girl who's making all these gestures to get rid of her brother, in a way she is successful, but she also loses as well because her parents are upset with her and she also has a certain regret at the end of the scene. For a short story, it is very complete.

Chalida: First of all, I'd like to say that it's a very good selection, so that's going to be tough, there are 10 good films in different ways. It depends on what elements we want to highlight because each film has its own strength. I think it's fun when you have to select films that are good. The first film is a bit slow for me to engage. At the beginning I can't engage with the story so much. The end scene is very interesting and powerful where no one wants the baby sister. It has a strong effect on me. It is a slow burn and finally it connects with me emotionally at the end. It's an important subject; in Chinese culture the girl is always a bit inferior.

Hsiao: I think this film is enjoyable, including the performance, color and cinematography. I have a small question about the script. There's something I don't quite understand. It is the part in the latter part of the film later when she asks her mother, do you like us children? Her mother replies that all parents love their children. After that, she had prepared a bowl of soup for her mother, but she took it and poured it into the fish tank. At this time, I don't know if she is moved, so she decides not to hurt her brother, or she doesn't want to hurt her brother at all? If she takes the soup to the kitchen and dumps it, then I can understand, now I don't know if she still wants to hurt her brother or not. I thought she doesn't want to hurt her brother because she was moved by her mother. I don't know if you have this problem. If she is moved by her mother, the effect is more beautiful, because it means she has gained a little understanding. As a short film, it's still a good story, but this point bothers me a bit emotionally.

Yeung: My understanding of the fish soup is that the grandmother said the green bean soup is bad for the baby, the fish soup is not bad for the baby. The fish soup is actually good for the baby.

Chalida: I didn't totally understand it, to me it's kind of slow. There are so many things that are confusing for me in terms of culture. I get the sense of how the girl feels, she is hesitant about certain things, and she doesn't want to get

abandoned by the family. For me it's part of her hesitance about whether she should be doing this. When she goes to the old lady, at the beginning I didn't understand what's going on, but finally I got what she wanted to do and what she did. At the beginning there are many things that are not connected, maybe I don't understand the culture.

Yeung: The English subtitles are not very good. That's why it's more problematic for you if you don't understand Chinese.

Hsiao: I think it's a good work, it just has a small flaw, but it's still good.

Fan: Let's move on to the second film, *Asphyxia*, from Taiwan.

Chalida: Surprisingly, I like it. I didn't expect that it'd go in that direction. It's an interesting way to talk about domestic violence and present it in this way. I liked it when I finally realized this is what the whole thing is about. It's effective way to talk about domestic violence.

Hsiao: I have a little bit of a problem with the acting. The beginning part is not the same as the latter. In the beginning, the acting style and storytelling are more realistic. At the end, when the reporter asks him what he wants to say, he loses control and acts dramatically. I think many short films have similar issues, that is, when they want to create tension, the film takes on a different direction. I liked the first part and was looking forward to the ending, but the ending was too melodramatic.

Yeung: I also agree that the film has stylistic changes halfway through. The beginning has some nice atmosphere and the selection of shots creates good tension. I do find the acting problematic, like the woman's performance in the police office is not very convincing to me. I also have problems with the actor in the last scene where he reacts to the killing in front of the reporters. It feels very stagey to me. It doesn't feel naturalistic at all. I feel that the story has an interesting concept to show domestic violence, but it's not very effective because it was using domestic violence without really exploring the issue. The characters do not come across as being very complex to me. They seem more one-dimensional.

Fan: The next work is *Hawaii*.

Hsiao: I like this work. It deals with a difficult subject, which is what is reality, and whether my subjective experiences are the truth. This is a difficult subject matter, which it handles very well cinematically. It makes me realize that it

uses many subjectivities to construct the objective. I watched it three times, but the first time I didn't notice its circularity. When I understood what it was doing, I didn't feel that the director was showing off, but tried to balance sensibility and rationality.

Yeung: I really like the concept of the film. I think it's very interesting. I very much like the beginning, because we are put right in the middle of the argument. I feel the fight could have been shortened a little bit. In that sense it wasn't very even, the first part was too long and the rest of the scenes of different couples were too short. The beginning of the film was actually the end, because it goes around in circles. Once they get into the party, quite soon you realize what the director is doing, and there is an "aha" moment, and you realize this is very interesting. Maybe I'm not that familiar with the culture of that country, but it's very open about lesbian relationship or cheating, they don't make a big thing out of it and it is very natural and life-like. It shows a very nice representation of that age group, the social culture and dynamics of that country. It did that very well. I like this film; my only real issue is about the unevenness that I mentioned earlier. I wish it was more balanced.

Chalida: I like this film, too. I like the moment when they get off the car. I thought it'd be another driving film where people are behind the wheel and talking. Once you get off the car, the story moves so fast, and you start to pick out the names of characters. Without trying to explain too much, we tag along in the car and so many things happen in a short time, and you have to figure out what they are. The filmmaker has to be confident and have a clear mind to make this kind of film. Nowadays Iranian films are not just about women oppression, they explore other modern life and young people. It reminds me of some European films, like Antonioni. It's quite an interesting mood.

Hsiao: I wonder about the title, *Hawaii*. I don't know why it's called that.

Chalida: It doesn't explain anywhere. At first I thought that place is called Hawaii, it's like a resort.

Fan: Let's move on to the next one, *Can You Hear Me?*

Yeung: I like this film, it's a black comedy, so it's not easy to do. The opening is quite scary and eerie to see those ghosts walking around. When you find out the guy is dead and you are introduced to his family, I think that's quite well-developed. Within a short time, we know all the family members and their characters. One thing that we rarely talk about is the struggle of long-term caregivers, the wife who has to look after someone who's sick for a long time. I thought that was

shown quite well, even though it was very short. The part where they suddenly accuse her of manslaughter, I think that's not necessary. The part about them seeing the guy who comes in, and he can see ghosts. I think the filmmaker was cramming too much in, we don't really need those elements. Later, we find out the dead person has an old lover, that twist is interesting and quite sweet. The two old men singing Chinese opera, of course I'd find that sweet. It's a nice ending for me. I think the acting and production design are very good. The film has elements you don't expect and is quirky. For a short film, it is very comprehensive. Black comedies are hard to achieve and the film is successful.

Chalida: It's good for what it's supposed to be, in terms of black comedy, the characters and the details. I think it plans to be something longer because it has different characters and their backstories. It works well for what it is and it's touching at the end. At the beginning I wasn't sure if they are lovers because the English translation is quite ambiguous. Maybe they're just friends who like to go to Chinese opera together.

Yeung: He did say they never had sex.

Chalida: In Chinese (dialogue or subtitle), it's quite clear they're lovers, right?

Yeung: I don't think they're lovers in the real sense, but emotionally committed.

Chalida: Is the actor professional or famous?

Hsiao: Yes.

Chalida: That's why he worked well. At the end the wife says I take him for a walk every day. It'd be perfect if it was a longer film to show the wife taking care of him and to show their relationship. It's good for what it's supposed to be, a heart-warming comedy.

Hsiao: I also feel that it's well done. The art direction and acting are both wonderful. I also feel that it is like a feature film because the structure of the film is very typical. You discover a secret, which is revealed to others, and in the process accidents happen. This sort of structure is very stereotypical, and the film lacks the experimental spirit of short films. Therefore, I am a bit hesitant about this work.

Chalida: When I say maybe it's a long film project, I mean it has many characters with backgrounds that can be expanded. Short films can be sophisticated and have a lot of elements, that's okay with me. This filmmaker may be planning a long

film, and this may be a pitch or pilot project, and it's a good pitch.

Fan: The next one is *FULL CIRCLE*, another film from Taiwan.

Chalida: It is beautifully shot and would be nice to watch on a big screen. I watched it on a computer, which is a disadvantage for this kind of film, because you really need to be immersed into the film. I couldn't get a lot from it, but I can feel it has one of the strongest cinematography.

Hsiao: This film is very different from the previous one, one is a narrative, one is poetry. It's like the difference between novels and poems. You can tell that the director wants to communicate a sense of cycle of life, like the life of eels from birth to death, which is like human birth and death. The film places the two cycles together. With a film like this, I can only judge it according to whether it is beautifully shot and whether it is poetic. It is the same with the film *PATH*.

Yeung: It's documentary style, very slow burn, showing a life cycle. It changed me, about whether I will ever eat pork again. I was shocked by what they put in the food for the pigs to eat. I thought, what are we putting in our body? In that sense, it's an interesting statement about the life cycle, and it makes me think about what I eat and what comes out, and how it affects my own self and my body. It's effective in that way.

Hsiao: Maybe his observation over life is this kind of cycle, including lots of ugly stuff. Life has its beauty and ugliness.

Yeung: It's very naturalistic as well.

Chalida: In the beginning, I did not read the title of the film, I only read the synopsis. The photography is beautiful, it's a universal theme. There are some scenes I pay attention to, but I don't see how it connects with the disgusting part, like the sea part that is so beautiful and poetic. If the film is about the cycle of life, it's too big a claim and a big statement. I look for something more specific in the details. Some parts I feel I lost connection with.

Fan: The next one is *SARIRA*, from China.

Hsiao: One can see that this film is eager to explore certain issues such as civilization, tradition and modern superstitions. The images are very formalistic, like the works of China's fifth generation film directors.

Yeung: Are you talking about the symbolism?

Hsiao: It includes both symbols and forms. It is a powerful film, but the visuals are a bit showy. I was not able to become emotionally involved in the film.

Yeung: I see this more as a black comedy about a monk who has a toothache. It's interesting in a comedic sense, that he has a toothache and he is unable to do the one thing he is supposed to be able to do, and that is chanting. Chanting is supposed to give him tranquility and peace, and because he is unable to do the chanting, he is unable to get tranquility and peace. It works in that ironic sense, that somehow the director wants that to symbolize religion in modern society where you cannot find peace and therefore you are unable to have tranquility because of all the noise in the world. So later when his master dies and the temple is being removed, he still tries to get hold of something, and therefore he tries to rescue the Buddha's head. And it is in trying to save the Buddha's head that it's helping him get rid of the bad tooth. By doing that, he's able to chant again and gives him the tranquility at the end, the peace that he's been looking for at the beginning of the film. The film has an interesting, ironic philosophy that it's trying to portray, although it is a bit over-slow and pretentious.

Chalida: This is another film that's disadvantaged to watch on a small screen. There's a lot of dark parts. The cinematography reminds me of films from Eastern Europe or former Soviet Union, in a good way, with the black and white aesthetics. To use toothache as a thing to start the narrative, it starts the journey and you watch how it's going to end. It's quite sophisticated, it's also a festival film. I'm not surprised it's been selected to so many festivals like Pusan and so on. It's a good film on its own, it's good for what it is, but it's not the first film of its kind. I always have some reservations about black and white, do you have very good reasons for making it in black and white? In the end, it's effective in black and white rather than color.

Fan: The next one is *The Exchange* from Israel.

Chalida: I feel nothing bad about the film, but when you put it among the ten films, it's not my top rank. The acting is good. At the end, it talks about things happening again, but we don't have the next episode to follow.

Yeung: The choice of shots and editing is very sophisticated and professional. It's one of the most professional films of the lot, the selection of shots really supports the story. The performances are good and the character development is also good. The whole story is solid. My only issue with the film is that it's not very fresh. I feel I have seen this movie before, a story about brothers having different personalities and goals in life, and are brought together at a dying

relative's death bed, and all their histories come out. It's a story I've seen many times. About their differences, I don't feel there's anything particularly fresh or culturally specific. In terms of filmmaking, it's very polished.

Hsiao: This is a small story about what is violence. Sometimes indifference can be a form of violence. That's the message I got from the film. I quite like this perspective. Being indifferent and not understanding is a kind of violence. I like a line in the film, "You are all Nazis." The casting and acting are very good.

Fan: The next one is *A Little Circus* from Japan.

Yeung: The film is very charming. It's a documentary style film, a slow burn. At the beginning you don't know what's going on with this bunch of boys in the circus, but you feel they're having fun. They have a sense of purpose and are proud of what they're doing. Later on, because of COVID, they can't work anymore. To survive, the main character has to work at a building site. We can see that because of his age, he gets a lower wage than everybody else. All these are done in a naturalistic way, it almost feels organic, I didn't feel it was contrived. At the end when his friends from the circus come to cheer him up, I thought it was a very sweet moment. It shows the kind of friendship and kindness, which is very simple but very enchanting. The boys are not actors, but they come across as very natural and they do a good job. I find the film very sweet.

Chalida: I watched the film before reading anything. The production is good, it is lively and fresh. I am surprised it's a Japanese film, an NGO film to help with fundraising. I like the film very much. It talks about hardship in life and young people. It's one of the films I quite enjoyed.

Hsiao: I feel this is a lovely film that wants to be seen by a wide audience so that people will understand and help these children. But as a creative project, it is not sufficient. It is too much like a promotional film. I want to encourage this film and hope that more people can see this film. The team behind this film have very definite aims; they hope to help these children with this film.

Fan: The next one is *PATH* from India.

Chalida: In Indian films recently, they have this thing about tracking shot. Have you seen the film *Pebble*? It's an independent Indian film. It has an extreme wide shot and walking tracking shot. Once they open the suitcase, it can be compared with the black and white Chinese film (*SARIRA*). The

cinematography is nice, the landscape is artistic. In the beginning I wasn't aware it's about COVID, so many people in India died. It's very solid when you have those elements together.

Hsiao: This is a simple film, I quite enjoy it, but I don't have much to say about it.

Yeung: It takes a while before you know what's going on. It's about a guy carrying this box, you know there's something in the box and it's a slow discovery. Once he opens the box, it makes me question the film because the box is way too light to have a corpse in it. That's a big problem for me, the director hasn't been taking it seriously. The box would have to be a lot heavier, and it'd be more interesting to have the guy really struggling with this box. It would make the film more effective if the box was heavier. It was too artificial for me when I found it was a corpse. The part where he dresses the corpse is touching. The part I really like is the last shot, it's beautiful and memorable. But I can't forgive the box.

Hsiao: Is that his wife or child in the box?

Yeung: The wife is in the box, right?

Chalida: Or the mother?

Yeung: Either the wife or mother, it's someone close to him.

Hsiao: Is it the one who gives him a bottle of water?

Yeung: My guess is like in a lot of Indian movies, they have this supernatural element. It might be a spirit. I didn't see it as a real person. I thought the corpse is the wife because of the way he put the jewelry on her body, it seems more like romantic love rather than respectful behavior.

Fan: The last one is *K's Room – the Creation and Destruction of the World*.

Chalida: This one is hard for me because of the layers they have in Chinese. It's hard to compare with others because it's quite different from other films. I feel the filmmaker did a lot of research to use the footage and text. I don't have enough knowledge to understand it deeply. Maybe it needs some other context. I can only understand it on the surface and I cannot go deep into it. I may have to do some research on the text.

Hsiao: This film is about the White Terror period in Taiwan, which lasted from the

1950s to 1970s. A dictionary writer, Mr. K., whose dictionary is well-known in Taiwan, was imprisoned. The sentences mentioned in the film came from this dictionary. It is ironic that dictionaries are supposed to free our minds, but this person lost his freedom. But if you didn't understand this background, you may not understand this film, which is a pity.

Yeung: It's difficult to compare, because this is an experimental short, not a narrative short. With experimental shorts, it's about the feeling and mood they are trying to convey. This film is about imprisonment and freedom, and it is trying to explore the idea of liberty. What it brings out is who would be reading a dictionary religiously over and over again? It's someone who's very bored and has nothing to do and is just repeating something all day long. He's using that to show the boredom of being in prison. The filmmaker is trying to use humor, like with the sentences, "If I were a bird, I would be flying. But I am not a bird." This ironically shows his situation and his hopes. It's quite successful in showing that kind of boredom and frustration of losing your liberty. But as an experimental short, the format itself is very dated. The split screen and format give me a very 1980s experimental film feeling. It doesn't feel modern to me. For an experimental film, it needs to be more modern.

Fan: Next, we can have a discussion on the awards. As mentioned, we will have 3 prizes, the Gold Award and Silver Award, these are the best and second-best works considering the overall excellence. I'd like to explain about the Special Mention. We have this award instead of bronze because we'd like to see if there are films that have something special to mention, recognize, or encourage. You may use this prize to highlight some unique characteristic of that film. Now you may nominate the awards directly, or you may choose two or three films that you like most.

Yeung: I like *The Secret of My Birth*, *Hawaii* and *A Little Circus*.

Hsiao: I choose *The Secret of My Birth*, *Asphyxia*, *Hawaii*, *Can You Hear Me?* and *The Exchange*.

Yeung: I want to add *Can You Hear Me?*

Chalida: For me, it's *Asphyxia*, *Hawaii*, *Can You Hear Me?*

Fan: All of you have chosen *Hawaii* and *Can You Hear Me?* We can begin with this. Do you have any Gold Award nomination right now? We can start with that.

Hsiao: I like *Hawaii* very much.

Yeung: My Gold is *The Secret of My Birth*.

Chalida: If I pick one, it'll be *Hawaii*.

Fan: So two jurors picked *Hawaii*. Ray, would you say something to defend your choice?

Yeung: I think *The Secret of My Birth* is very original in the sense that it completes the protagonist's journey. It brings out a serious subject but does it in a charming and humorous way. The plotting is very clever. It's a very traditional style of narrative, someone has a goal and there are many things she has to do. But it's done in an original way, like the girl finding the witch doctor and many other details that bring out the culture of that specific place. The question you had about the fish soup, how I see it is the girl wants herself to be the favorite, and she feels jealous that her parents will love her sibling and her equally. For me, the soup has no green beans in it and is not bad for the mother, she throws it out because she doesn't want the mother to drink that soup, which is good for the baby. At the end, the father's sister says, "It's probably your fault for throwing the soup in the fish tank." In terms of filmmaking, this is the most complete work for me.

Chalida: My top two are *Asphyxia* and *Hawaii*, my top choice is *Asphyxia*. If *Can You Hear Me?* doesn't get first or second, it shouldn't get Special Mention, because it doesn't look like that kind of film. It's good for what it is, but not a film worth a Special Mention.

Hsiao: *Hawaii* is good.

Chalida: If I don't change, *Hawaii* should get Gold. It is a difficult choice because each film has its own strength, and it depends on the point we use to judge them.

Hsiao: I feel that short films are not short feature films, just like there is a difference between short stories and novels. For example, I make features as well as shorts, and when I make short films, I would use a different kind of thinking. I would consider what sort of stories is suitable for a film of 10-20 minute duration. Short films are not like feature films, which is why it is a distinctive form. I like *Hawaii* not because it uses a one-shot technique, but because it tells a complete story in 20 minutes, using a distinctive story-telling technique. All 10 finalists are very good, and it is difficult to choose between them. For me, *Hawaii* is a true short film.

Chalida: If we have *Hawaii* as first and *The Secret of My Birth* as second, would you be happy with it? I look at it from the programmer's point of view. The ending really touches me and is very strong. Do you want to let *Can You Hear Me?* go or do you want to have it as Special Mention?

Yeung: I want to know why you think *Asphyxia* is so good? I would not select it, I find the performance not good and the last part contrived.

Chalida: I didn't have much expectation when I watched it, but in terms of plot, it leads me to a place I didn't expect, it's out of the usual route, and it works well for me. You expect it to be something but it turns out to be something else, which is reasonable. These days, when you watch a lot of films as a programmer, you watch for 3 minutes and you know how it's going to end. Many times, I can predict the film and what the next shot is. It's something nice for me personally in terms of watching short films. With short films, some are nice but they fall into certain categories. This film is more personal.

Hsiao: I like the first part of this film, and even though it has flaws in the latter part, it is among the five films I selected.

Chalida: For me, it's okay not to give award to this film.

Yeung: The scene where he kills the burglar is problematic. I just don't buy it. I don't feel that he could just kill that guy, then later on he gets arrested because that guy was trespassing, but why would he still be in trouble with the police and charged with murder? Then later on he acts out the scene in front of the reporters, I just don't buy it.

Chalida: I just want to note that I selected it at one point, even though I know it won't make it.

Yeung: Regarding *Hawaii*, I do like the film as well, but I find it a bit uneven. The beginning was very long, and I just feel that it could be better in the sense that we could explore all the other relationships a bit more. In terms of filmmaking, it's quite brave, although it's not that original. I have seen that kind of playing with cinematic time before. In terms of what kind of effect it leaves me with after watching it, it's not as powerful as *The Secret of My Birth*. *Hawaii* would be my Silver, but if both jury members prefer it to be Gold, then you know...

Fan: Do we all agree that *Hawaii* is the Gold Award?

(The jurors agreed.)

Fan: So *Hawaii* is the Gold Award. Would *The Secret of My Birth* be Silver?

Chalida: I don't mind that. It's very hard to choose anyway for the rest of them.

(The jurors agreed.)

Fan: How about Special Mention?

Chalida: It should be *Can You Hear Me?* because we all like it. Or do you want to pick others like *A Little Circus* or *The Exchange?*

Yeung: Out of this lot, I would choose *Can You Hear Me?* as Special Mention.

Chalida: I like it a lot, the filmmaker has the potential to be a good feature film maker.

27th ifva Asian New Force Category Award Winners

Gold Award

Hawaii

Morteza Fereydouni (Iran)

Silver Award

The Secret of My Birth

Li Jing (China)

Special Mention

Can You Hear Me?

Li Nien-hsiu (Taiwan)