

The 28th ifva Awards
Asian New Force Category Jury Meeting

Jurors: Lee Isaac Chung (Chung), Clarence Tsui (Tsui), Ruby Yang (Yang)
ifva Representatives: Kattie Fan (Fan), Sandy Lai, Anson Yip, Vanessa Ying

Fan: Today, our mission is to select the award winners from these 10 finalist works. There is one Gold Award, one Silver Award, and also a Special Mention. The Gold Award has a cash prize of HK\$20,000, Silver Award has a cash prize of HK\$10,000, and for Special Mention, there is no cash prize. Even though the overall excellence of the Special Mention work may not be as good as other award winners, there may be something special to mention. That's why we have a Special Mention award in this category.

Let me give you a bit of background information. Clarence has also been the juror on an earlier round of selection. Altogether we received 405 submissions under this category. We went through 2 rounds of selections, the first round was a preselection, with three jurors helping us go through all the works, and then picking 67 works among the 405 submissions. Then, we have the first-round selections, with Clarence being part of the jury. Together with two other jury members, they picked the 10 finalists among the 67 shortlisted works. In today's round we are going to select the awards. Maybe Clarence can share with us why we picked these 10 works when we discussed them later.

Tsui: These are the works that I had a hand in selecting for the final round. Just a bit of background information. In the previous round, us three jury members saw some 60-odd titles. We had quite a long and heated discussion about the titles we had to include in this round. Of course, I do have my preferences, which were expressed in the previous meeting. Should I say what my preferences are, or whether we should start with a clean slate?

Chung: Either way you want to do it, that sounds great to me. It seems like the selections are all quite strong. I don't have any doubts as to why you picked any of them.

Fan: Maybe we can begin with the first one, *Neither Nor*, a Malaysian work.

Yang: I think it's a very ambitious work. It expresses the themes of race, politics, religion, and there's too much that's not expressed deep enough. Overall, the young cast were well-chosen, but I think it's too ambitious for what it tries to express. Structure-wise, it's interesting. The direction, for a Malaysian filmmaker, I think

it is a breakthrough.

Tsui: I agree with what Ruby said. There were quite a few issues that the director wanted to touch on, as evident from the archive footage in the end, about the establishment and founding of the Malaysian nation, but I don't see how it actually gels with the abstract narrative for the three young students. I mean, they went about with their own doubts and fears. But how it actually gels with the more explicit nature of the archive footage, I'm not sure. If the director hasn't included the archive footage in the end in such length, that would actually be better, in my opinion. But if the director were to show all these things about the multiracial nature of the Malaysian nation and what that means for the national narrative, it wasn't really shown that much in the proper narrative itself. I'm not sure how everything managed to come together.

Chung: I agree with what you both have said. I thought it's very conceptual. I thought it's interesting what the filmmaker is doing and trying to achieve. I thought the compositions were really strong. I thought the visual language was really good. The locations were really amazing. I thought they found some really great places to film. And I liked the film within a film that they were trying to do. I thought that was pretty clever. Although the actors were probably not professional, they were quite good. When that happens, there is a good director who's guiding the process pretty well. I think the strength of the director really came down to the acting and also the look of the film. But on that conceptual level and the emotional level, I didn't necessarily fully know what the concept was. Emotionally I didn't feel as much as I wish I had, but I thought it's still a very good film for what the person was trying to achieve.

Fan: Anything to add? If no. We can move on to the second one, *Split Ends*.

Yang: This is a very hot topic right now. I love both protagonists and the ending is not predictable. The set up with the key is very clever. It shows a slice of Iranian society and the attitude towards having a hijab and the young people trying to rebel. I think that's captured well. The woman was especially convincing for me, and even the officer is too. It's a very simple film with just the office setting, and I thought it's well-directed. It's simple and direct. It well achieved its goal.

Tsui: I like the film a lot. It's quite an audacious attempt in criticizing what's happening right now in Iran. The dialogue and the screenplay are pretty good in terms of the heated conversations and acerbic one-liners, which illustrate quite well the power dynamics between the authorities and the helpless masses who are subjected to tyranny. The aesthetics is not exactly very new. The social realist approach towards the problems faced by the Iranian people, it's done very well but not

exactly very innovative. Maybe I'm a more pessimistic guy, but the ending looks too happy ever after. They just rebel against the authorities by removing the hijab and taunting the authorities to film them—it's a bit fantastical, which I'm not sure it's a pro or con-given what we know about what's happening in Iran, the gloomy situation there, I have doubts about that. This is a very well-made film, but it doesn't give me any pleasant surprises in terms of the approaches the director was trying to do.

Chung: I quite like this one. There is a nice light touch in talking about issues that are quite serious. I thought it was very funny. As soon as the man untangles his hair, the woman says, "They're jealous." I thought that was so funny. It sucked me into the film from there. I quite liked the characters, and the police chief is presented as a villain, but at the same time he seems very human. At one point, he is talking to his wife on the phone, and it's clear his wife has a lot of power over him, which I thought was pretty clever. It is done quite well, and I liked the hopeful nature of the ending as well. It was fantastical, but I felt in this situation it felt as though they were making a hopeful comment within something that can often seem hopeless. Something good they did was putting a lot of slices of life happening in the police station. I don't know how they filmed it, but that kind of thing is really hard to pull off, to convincingly show the life happening inside the police station. That's not so easy to pull off when you're doing fiction or even documentary because the people are so aware of the camera being there. In that sense I thought the filmmaker did a great job with that. I quite enjoyed this film.

Fan: We can move on to the next one, *Grey Solar Game*.

Yang: It took me a while to get the whole narrative of the film. It's very fragmented because I'm sure they shot with very limited resources so there were never enough close-ups to get to know these siblings, except for the outside. I'm so glad I saw it on the big screen because it would be very hard to judge on a small screen. This is a free form film, which I like a lot because you can see how they really live. It is like a documentary. I know they live in poverty and are just barely surviving, and they're being discriminated, but I don't know their caste, and so for me it was very hard to really get into their situation. I really like the casualness of the film though.

Tsui: I agree with Ruby in terms of how it takes a while to get into the scheme of things for this abstract film, but the more I watched it on the big screen, the more I was drawn into the poetics and atmospherics of it. The fact that the filmmaker didn't really spell out the particulars of the circumstances faced by the characters, I think that appealed to me, or else it would be a conventional documentary spelling out the poverty faced by these characters in rural India, or the COVID

situation. These are things we might have learned in other titles, but in this film, it's more about sucking the viewers into this particular situation. It's beautifully done, the editing, I find several moments in which the filmmaker pasted together different images very well. For example, I remember that sequence in which the boy looks at this tower with dark clouds, then it cuts to himself alone, a speck of a human being in a large field. I find these moments quite captivating. For me, I do find it quite different. At least the filmmaker was trying to do something different with an issue that we might have heard before in terms of the problems or difficulties faced by the rural underclass in India. This is something which I quite like.

Chung: I was curious what Ruby and Clarence would think about this one, because I quite enjoyed it, too. I was surprised by it. When I was first watching it, I immediately just dismissed it. Then as I kept watching it, I just thought, oh, this is actually really beautiful. And it was beautifully composed and edited. And what stood out to me with it was that I felt a very deeply humanist portrayal of people. I loved how all the children seem to always be composed with a trail or a path that is going vertical on the frame. And I noticed any time you see money that's always in a close up and you feel the power of money, you don't see the faces, you just see like the money that's exchanging hands. And the industrial shots also feel very jarring. But then you have these moments of nature and of children. And I felt like the filmmaker was saying something very beautiful about life, but also about the difficulty of life as well. And I thought it really worked well for me. The sounds were really good. I wish I saw it on a bigger screen, but I didn't. Anyway, I thought it was a beautiful film.

Fan: The next one, *The Lighting*.

Yang: It's an experimental try. It touches on whiteness and blackness, which is a very hot topic. But I'm not so sure about the approach- The use of technology that part, I'm not sure either. But I like the part when they tried to have the filming of the actor, the feeling, the lighting, the skin color and that mix. I like that a lot because that's the whole point. How do you light a person with a darker skin? People don't discuss it because it's so sensitive now. But then once they go into this technology stuff I immediately pulled back. But the thing is, this is the whole point of him trying to have technology and then human interacting. So I think it's a very good try. Maybe it's not perfect, but I think the discussion about this is very good, like lighting a dark-skinned person.

Tsui: I find the issue merits a lot of attention, because we always see science and technology as being neutral. But this type of activity reveals the inherent racism ingrained into technology itself. I think the filmmaker actually raised a very

important and relevant issue to be discussed. But I agree with Ruby that the approach itself is not exactly perfect in terms of the jumping in between the artificial intelligence, the digital image or the voice over the robotic voices. But I think that's what he was trying to say because we understand Cantonese, so we sort of understand how it is quite weird, the way the robotic voice was articulating all these stories in this strange, jarring, stilted Cantonese. But maybe it's the point that the filmmaker was trying to make is that, if we were to depend on artificial intelligence or robots, it will come up with strange results. That is the ingrained racism in detecting faces. I think the issue itself is quite extraordinary. It's something that we need to discuss, but the way that the filmmaker tries to attain this goal of instigating a debate, there are things that could be done better.

Chung: I think I felt the same as both of you with it. I felt the issue is a good one, and I thought it was great that the filmmaker wanted to explore that. I didn't feel as drawn into it as I wish I had. I'd want to feel the issue rather than think about it just purely intellectually. Some of the choices he was making, I felt like he was intentionally wanting to create a little bit of distance with the audience, like it's not meant to be a film that's easy to watch, I feel. It might be a very subjective thing, but for me maybe it's a little bit too conceptual for my own personal tastes. And at the same time, I thought about the issue as I was watching it. So, I thought that's a positive thing.

Fan: The next one is *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run*.

Yang: The production value and the acting are very good. But the intercutting with the pigs is so direct and it puts me off because you already tell me what to think as an audience. I back off a little bit immediately. I think it's a well-directed film, but the editing is a problem. Maybe it's in the direction. It has good intentions, about how China is such a competitive world and that if you are older, you get eliminated. That, I think, is part of what the director tried to say, but it's just that it's constantly telling the audience what you should think and how hard they try. For me, I don't want that to be influenced. It's a highly dramatic film for me, an opposite of the Indian film. But I rather have the Indian film. Let me just think. Let me just provoke the feeling. And as a viewer, I like it a lot more when it is not spelled out for me.

Tsui: It works really well as an allegory for the real race that we have to go through. And I agree with Ruby, now that you mention it, the bits about the pig and the squealing and all that, it's a little bit explicit. But maybe probably it's because of that when I watched it, I thought it's a fully formed, self-contained allegory about the problems or the pressure that we face in a modern capitalistic society. For me, I think the storytelling was done really well. It's quite taut, I don't see a single

spare frame. There is nothing that we could say is unnecessary. The style is pretty consistent. For me, it works. It's not exactly the way the filmmakers should do it, but in terms of pushing the message and also the aesthetics, I do enjoy it.

Chung: When I think about this film, some of the images instantly come to my mind. I think there's a close up of one of the actors when he's running in place and his face is kind of jostling in the frame, or I think about some of the sounds and the locations also. I think the filmmaker did a great job in capturing the beautiful images. The sound design is really incredible. Locations are great, the performances are really strong with this one. As Ruby said, the production design and the production value are really high. And I'd be curious what they were working with in terms of budget to pull it off because it's really stunning as a film. A lot of it worked for me. I felt the emotions the filmmaker was feeling and wanting to express. Of course, it's quite pessimistic and that's okay. Sometimes I wondered if I was missing some information. I wanted to know a little bit more, like the characters are always almost a symbol of things rather than actual characters. It took me a while to figure out that this is purely a story about symbols in a way. And in that sense, I thought that was interesting. This for me was one of the better films. I thought it was quite interesting and good to watch.

Fan: The next one is *Little Yellow Flower*.

Yang: I thought this is a really well directed film. It's interesting how it was placed right after *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run*, because they are totally different. After *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run*, this is so quiet. It is more a character study. And this one has an absolutely beautiful setting. We're drawn into the character right away because he's just by himself and doing the sort of work that nobody wants to do by making woman look beautiful, but he's a guy. That says a lot. And the set is very nice, the spare setting of a rural house in this beautiful setting. Gradually we know about him, about him as a child, being abused by the father and their difficult relationship. And the metaphor of the ants, I guess maybe people are just like ants and being killed. And then the flowers, the spurt of life for the kids to recognize the flower. There's a lot of metaphor in there without spelling it out. I thought this is really well conceived, well directed, well-acted. An excellent film, in my opinion.

Tsui: I think this is indeed a very visually impeccable production. The actors did a very good job in evoking the emotions within themselves and the sets and the production design. But I find the narrative itself quite bare-bone, it's a bare-bone narrative. Maybe a bit too large because it could have been a much shorter film. Not that the length matters, but for me, the story itself is about the schism between the father and the son. By the first third of the film, we already know that that's

the theme. It's about reconciliation, which we could see from very afar that it's going to arrive sooner or later. But it takes quite a while to for all these things to come together, and it's quite protracted. So for me, it's a bit much to do about too little. In contrast to *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run*, there's a lot of meat which could be skimmed from the production itself.

Chung: Strangely, I kind of have a similar view with Clarence. I watched *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run* and then I watched this one, and I wondered why this one didn't work as well for me as *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run* because I think there are some similarities with them. And this might be very subjective and also somewhat go to just the way that some biases I have when it comes to looking at people. But I felt like with *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run*, you have a portrait of people who are in a miserable situation, but it feels as though that is being put on them by a system or by something else. But with this film, *Little Yellow Flower*, I just felt like the filmmaker was often touching upon an ugliness that comes out of ourselves. I think that's fine. I don't think human beings are perfect by any means, but it just didn't resonate that well with me. The extent to which he went into very miserable moments with these characters which is coming out of themselves and when that happens, I wonder if the filmmaker is really noticing something that's true of humans or is the filmmaker putting that judgment upon people. Even though there is a more hopeful ending, it didn't work for me somehow. I didn't feel the film was earning it for me just because of how low the lows were, when he was hitting the high at the end, it was almost unbelievable to me that this kind of reconciliation would happen, so I wasn't able to go there. It felt like the filmmaker was creating that and pulling that string rather than making it feel as though these are actual people who came to a feeling of reconciliation by the end. Now, that's all negative, what I just said. On a positive level, I agree with everything you all said. It's so well composed, it's so well edited. The locations are great. A lot of the images are very strong and really successful. Even the job of him photoshopping the women and the way the filmmaker portrayed that, it was really well done. There's a lot in the film that shows this filmmaker is very talented, but it was maybe the ethos of the film that was very hard for me to get into.

Fan: The next one is *Please Hold the Line*.

Yang: It's a very conventional drama, but it's well directed, it's not anything that surprised me. It's about a girl coming of age and being tempted and facing a crisis in her life. But for me, it's very simple. The father is a little silly, and the bad people are really bad. There's no nuances about the script. For me, it's just very simple story, quite well directed, but not enough nuances for me.

Tsui: Indeed, it's very simple and straightforward. It's about scammers scamming scammers and scammers being scammed. I don't know what you guys think, but for me, it's a simple and straightforward crime thriller. It depends very much on the twists and turns. Some of the twists and turns are not exactly that logical because at the end, when the daughter, even if she were to put on the most different Mandarin speaking voice, how could the father not recognize his own daughter's voice? He is duped into thinking that he won the jackpot, but this is your daughter. There are several instances in which the plot itself doesn't really convince me that much. I think it could have been better in that sense. Because it's a melodrama, the narrative should be convincing, but I don't find that very convincing.

Chung: Yeah, I agree with that. It took me out of the film for a moment because I wondered whether I'd recognize my daughter's voice. I thought the writing was quite nice. I thought as a narrative piece it was written very well with a good twist at the end and a moral awakening. I like moral awakening films, something about that resonates with me. Somehow this one worked better for me than *Little Yellow Flower* in terms of having a moral awakening by the end. But I do agree there are some things that weren't working so well in the execution. At the same time, judging by the level of means that they had, the amount of money they might have had for this production, I thought I thought they did quite well with the limitations that the filmmaker and the team had. Also the acting was quite strong. I thought the call center guys were well casted and there were a lot of small directing decisions that I respected, and I thought were done pretty well.

Fan: The next one is *Kalaal*.

Yang: That the concept is good. Through a shoe polisher, you don't see their faces, just the shoes. And you kind of imagine the class and their faces and all the stuff. I like the concept a lot, and the ending is bittersweet for me. It's just a very simple film. It's another entry from India, but this one doesn't have the depth, even though at the train station, you see different kinds of people come in and treat the people differently. But as a dramatic film, maybe it's too simple. That's my take on this.

Tsui: It's quite interesting how the director tackled the very well-trodden issue of class relations with just shoes and feet and how when you just show feet and shoes, you actually know a lot more about the people wearing them or the people owning these feet. Conceptually I think it's quite good. That's why I think it merits a bit of attention, because from the point of view of looking at whether these filmmakers would have the potential to progress, I think this filmmaker does have a bit of a potential in terms of tackling well-trodden issues and in other ways. I

think this is not the most perfect of films or the most full-fledged of productions, but it's still something that warrants some discussion or merits.

Chung: I agree with both of you on everything you all said, and I do like that the filmmaker tried this. It felt like an experiment in a narrative, and I liked that the filmmaker did it and also pulled it off in many ways, pulled off a story like we can watch and understand what it's about and what the issues are. And it's probably the team didn't have as much of a budget as some of the other films in this selection. But I thought it's quite nice what the filmmaker pulled off.

Fan: The next film is *Graveyard*.

Yang: I like this a lot because it's very simple and it's just about one thing. How do you deal with your child who died by accident, and reflects Iranian society- women's right to bury her own baby. What this woman has to go through, all this grief, but yet she has to do this, and the husband is not around to help. For me, it's a glimpse of the society that people don't discuss in film. And it's a very sad ending, showing how they value life also and how they respect life. I think it's a strong film.

Tsui: I appreciate the very different approach the filmmaker used in talking about the issue of women's rights, but not in a social realist way, which we tend to see quite a lot in films, like, for example, *Split Ends*. The use of shadows and also the woman moving about, desperately trying to attain a good burial for her child, and then failing to do that and running from one place to another. It was done in sort of widescreen, which relegates the woman into one speck of a person in this vast in different landscape. The helplessness and the claustrophobic nature of the story really grabs me. I think it's a more innovative or different way of looking at the issue of the of suppression of women's rights in Iran, or the suppression of women in society. This is a film which I preferred more than *Split Ends*, if I were to choose between two films from the same culture or the same issue.

Yang: In the toilet scene, there was something that said a lot about the women. In that scene where she tries to wash the baby, wash herself, there's a woman putting on makeup. It's subtly implied she's in some kind of profession. Whenever she moves from scene to scene, there's a veneer of a different society, and that's subtly said without forcing it on the viewer. I like that a lot.

Chung: I might be disagreeing with you both on this one, which we can. Please don't judge me. But I love the look of it. I thought it looked so good. It was composed so well. It was very elegant, and the atmosphere was very strong. When I was watching, what I had a hard time with was that often I would wonder, is the

director a man? I kept thinking that when I was watching it because I felt like the portrayal of this woman, there's so much of her in her victimhood, that she's a victim. And the whole situation, there was so much morbidity. *Split Ends* was a lot stronger for me in or I prefer that approach to what was being said because I often wonder if films like this really set out to do what they are trying to do. If it is far too dark, I feel like it only cements the idea that someone is a victim. If a woman is portrayed as a victim, then it becomes harder for women to not be seen as victims, if that makes sense. I always have that worry when it comes to cinema and the way we present people of different cultures and people of poorer countries and also of women, that if we do too much of victimizing of them, that maybe we're not actually doing anything to help them. So that's my big gripe with it. Otherwise, I do find it is interesting that it's a very expressionist sort of film and not documentary style, as Clarence was saying. And I thought it makes you think a lot of things, about what it is to be a woman in Iran, like what Ruby was saying. It's just a personal bias about some political stuff, I guess. And I don't know if it's fair or not, but that's my point of view.

Tsui: It's too miserable, isn't it?

Chung: That's what I worry. But that's a very subjective personal taste thing. If you all love it, I totally respect that, too. I think that's great. I don't judge that at all.

Yang: I think women are still kind of largely victims in Iran, and that's unfortunate.

Chung: There's a woman director named Makhmalbaf. Have you seen any of her films from Iran?

Tsui: You mean Mohsen Makhmalbaf's daughter?

Chung: Yeah. I forgot her first name. I thought her films are really striking.

Fan: The last one is *Big Day*.

Yang: I feel the actress is excellent. She's very, very good. It's about a woman who tries to conquer her life at a very late age. And I think the script is quite well done. It's like a mini Taiwanese drama series. It could almost be for television because everything is set so well and it is really well directed and the production value is very good. It's about the relationship of elderly couples, and there are hardly any films made about this. I like it for that reason. At the end I thought, it's so melodramatic. Everything was just contrived. The last shot for me was a bit too much.

Tsui: I find it quite melodramatic in a way too. That's exactly what I thought when I was watching, especially the scene in front of the temple when the camera was going like this, and I felt like it's going into TV drama mode. I think it's really well done. And as you said, the topic of elderly couple falling apart and the inability to reconcile: these are things which we rarely see these days in our youth-oriented cultures. But the recollections of death and betrayals and family breakdowns, it's a bit too conventional. It's not something that we haven't seen before. And the unsurprising contrast between the elderly couple and the young, blissful couple getting married again is something that has been done quite a few times before. Among all the titles, this is not exactly the most innovative or independent, even though it's really well done. It's an acting showcase. The two actors are really good but the narrative from which they emerge is a bit cliché, like it's made for television.

Chung: I saw it in a similar way as both of you. I thought the husband was a very strong actor. I was curious if he's very experienced. I thought, wow, he's really good. Have you seen him before in anything?

Tsui: Maybe, but I can't exactly recall where I've seen him. But maybe he pops up in bit parts here and there. I'm not sure.

Yang: I think the actress might be quite well known. She looks familiar.

Chung: I had similar thoughts as I was watching it, it did feel very melodramatic, but at the same time I enjoyed it as a subject. I tend to like stories about marriage. It was interesting to watch it. I naturally gravitate to the subject, but I did feel maybe at times it was melodramatic, but the ending felt at least realistic. I respected that. I was worried that it would end with them tearing up the divorce papers and kissing and stuff like that. I'm glad it didn't end that way.

Tsui: I like the way the woman walked away from her ex-husband with her head held high, not with getting going all teary. It doesn't picture the woman as a victim and getting all sentimental about the man. So there's something new in that in that sense. But in terms of the whole structure, whole narrative is about the marriage falling apart and with the explicitly spelled out dialogue about infidelity, maybe it's a bit conventional for me.

Fan: We can proceed to the next part, which is to nominate award winners. Let's see if any of you have any nominations. We can begin with the Gold Award.

Chung: Do you think it would be helpful if we just listed how we ranked each film? Ruby and Clarence, did you do that? Did you rank them? I wonder if there's something

that shows up pattern wise for all of us.

Tsui: If we are to give out two awards and a Special Mention, one way of doing it is to put out top three and then see whether there's some kind of an overlap. Would that be a good way to do it?

Chung: That sounds good to do the top three at least. I might type it out so that it's faster. That's how I ranked my top three: *Split Ends*, *Grey Solar Game*, *I Have No Legs*, and *I Must Run*.

Yang: Can I have four?

Fan: Sure, this is just for narrowing down the selection.

Yang: I have *Graveyard*, *Yellow Flower*, *Split Ends* and *I Have No Legs*, and *I Must Run*.

Tsui: I have *Grey Solar Game*, *I Have No Legs*, and *I Must Run*, and *Graveyard*. I would like to recommend *The Lighting* and *Kalaal* for Special Mention, but maybe this is something that we could discuss later.

Fan: We have one title that has three votes, but sometimes the work with the most votes doesn't mean that you like it the best. Yet at least this shows that all of you like it. Also, I don't know if you have any nominations that you really want to push. Even though the work may only have one or two votes, maybe now is the chance for you to say a few things about it.

Tsui: I'll just throw something out for discussion about Special Mention. For the Gold and Silver awards, it's quite obvious these are the winner and the runner up. But the Special Mention, should we regard it as the third prize, or maybe a Special Mention would be a completely different concept. For example, a Special Mention would be for a film which has its flaws, but is something with the potential for something better and bigger. It's just that he or she might not have realized his or her potential with the lack of resources for the production that he or she submitted this time round. I don't know what we should do with this Special Mention.

Chung: I do like that idea that we are trying to encourage somebody.

Tsui: That's why that's why I had *The Lighting* and *Kalaal*, especially for *Kalaal*, because obviously it couldn't really compare them in terms of its production

values with, for example, *I Have No Legs and I Must Run* or *Grey Solar Game* or *Yellow Flower*. The filmmaker may manage to come through with something with a very different concept and with better resources, he might be able to do something bigger and better. The same goes for *The Lighting*. The way that he did it might not be the most perfect. I don't know what you think about the Special Mention. Should we have some different way of thinking about that?

Chung: I lean towards *Grey Solar Game* for Special Mention because it felt like it had very limited means. I would say *Grey Solar Game* may be better than *Kalaal* for me.

Yang: You can tell the filmmaker of *Grey Solar Game* is more mature because of the editing. Everything works well, every shot, despite all its low resources, you can tell he captured it really well, with the editing and the color. Whereas *Kalaal*, it's a good concept, but it's not executed well as a director. I would definitely give *Grey Solar Game* a Special Mention or even Silver award because for India, if they have some resources, it will mean a lot to them. For me, I'd rather give someone who'd like the encouragement and could do something next.

Chung: I respect that, I agree with that.

Yang: For the filmmaker having no resources, maybe they can use the prize money to make the next film. I think we should judge more the kind of the potential or the intention of the film.

Tsui: I think it fits with the rest of the awards, because it says that independent spirit is one of the most important assessment criteria in our competition. The lack of resources translates as independence in a way. This is probably something that we have to bear in mind.

Chung: Maybe.

Yang: I agree.

Tsui: Would there be a Special Mention for *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run* or nothing at all?

Chung: Maybe. I was just thinking that one gets the Special Mention because we're respecting that it's well made.

Tsui: So, Special Mention for *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run*. We do appreciate the quality of it.

- Yang: The hard question is the Silver and Gold awards.
- Chung: Ruby, you mentioned that you would be open to *Grey Solar Game* being the Silver. I'm curious if you would still feel that way, because that would feel right to me.
- Yang: Okay. And I would nominate *Graveyard* to be Gold. It's between that and *Split Ends*, I think we can agree to pick one.
- Tsui: I think I'm fine with this because I already picked *Grey Solar Game* and *Graveyard*.
- Chung: This one's a little tough for me, but I guess I don't mind it. I think it's a respectable film, so I would be happy to go along with you guys on that.
- Yang: I liked *Split Ends* quite a bit. But Clarence reminded me that it is a more conventional type of filmmaking. You see it quite a bit, but whereas with *Graveyard*, I appreciate it differently. It tells of the Iranian society in different layers when she goes outside, whereas *Split Ends* stays in the one location. Filmmaking wise I think *Graveyard* is more challenging.
- Chung: For the record, I will say I thought the acting was quite good in *Graveyard*. It felt very real, every character felt very real. I thought that was really good.
- Tsui: I agree with Isaac because you brought up a very good point about the filmmaker, this miserabilist approach towards social problems in terms of making the whole story as tragic as possible. I think this is probably a discussion that we film critics would have when we're critically looking at films from other countries. Your thinking was sort of similar with that, in terms of how filmmakers are always trying to evoke some kind of a tragedy and miserable circumstances in order to gain attention maybe, or to make their films worthier. I don't know whether this is your concern.
- Chung: I think that is a concern for me. And how that works within Western film festivals where films like that often get noticed because it confirms a Western view that someone from a culture that is non-Western is living a miserable life in some way. I've always had that political concern. I made a film in in Rwanda where I thought a lot about those issues as well. For instance, when I saw *Grey Solar Game*, you get the sense of how hard life is, but you also get a profound sense of how good life is there. Not to say that means that life isn't hard or we shouldn't do anything for people there, but it makes me, as a viewer, want to be doing more for them as a people because I realize they are human beings. There's something very similar

about us that I feel. But with *Graveyard*, I worry if we only look at the people in it as victims and not as people. But this is my own personal bias.

Yang: I'm looking at the artist statement. He says he's just wants to show the issues. That's what he said, "I really hope that through the film the world would know some of the Iranian problem through the appropriate lenses." He didn't say, have pity on us or something.

Tsui: I think even though the protagonist in *Graveyard* is a victim in more ways than one. But when I watched it, it reminds me of a film noir in terms of how the protagonist is proactive when I watched it. I'm not sure if it's paradoxical or anything. The young woman has tragedy bestowed on her, but at least she's trying to find a way herself to get out of it by trying to look for her husband, trying to get her baby buried, and in the end, delivering the corpse in a box to the graveyard as a very small gesture of protest or subversion. I was thinking whether this would elevate her from our usual way of looking at victims or victimhood that we see in films about women in Iran.

Yang: I think she's doing something that's important. With *Split Ends*, everyone knows that these two guys are going to be arrested, but the film stopped right at the happy ending. But it's not realistic because they will go to jail. For me, in *Graveyard* the woman is trying do something even though it's out of their control, but she's struggling against society. I think she's actively doing something. For me, this is important. Maybe she doesn't have to, but she's going around to do something. It shows her finding her husband at night. What really stayed in my mind is the scene where she runs out and leaves her passport and runs out of the clinic knowing that the man is not going to help, the doctor is not going to help her. She takes things in her own hands, and that's so important.

Chung: I guess there is that element. I wondered what if I was missing anything in terms of Islam, I know the rules around burials are so important and there's so much care that goes into a burial. I wondered about that element, too, and wondering if I'm missing anything when it comes to the decisions that she's making, because my understanding of Muslim funerals is limited. It raised a lot of questions for me as I watched it. Again, if you both feel it's Gold, I will go along with it and I would not be upset at all.

Yang: The story supposedly takes place within 24 hours because that has to be done in 24 hours.

Chung: I will fully support that.

Fan: I think it's very important to have this kind of discussion. Issac, what you said can be a reminder to the filmmakers. Is it somethings they can be more sensitive about? Especially in this situation in the world, not only in Hong Kong, how they react to the topics and the subject matter that they want to interpret or how to portray the characters in their films. I think this kind of discussion is very important reminder to all the filmmakers. This is also one of the reasons why we always insist to have the transcript. It would be quite easy to just give out some marks and the films with the highest score will be the winner. What's more valuable is, behind the prizes, we see the same films from different perspectives. I'm very happy that in today's meeting I can hear lots of professional points of views and perspectives and how you see films from different angles. And although at the end we will only have one Gold award and I think you all agree that *Graveyard* will be the Gold and the Silver goes to *Grey Solar Game*, and Special Mention for *I Have No Legs, and I Must Run*.

(The jurors agreed.)

Asian New Force Category award winners

Gold Award

Graveyard

Ali Daraee (Iran)

Silver Award

Grey Solar Game

Seemonta Halder (India)

Special Mention

I Have No Legs and I Must Run

Li Yue (China)