

18th ifva Award - Animation Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members: Lo Chi-ying (Lo), siuhak (siuhak), John Chan (John), Alice Mak (Mak),
Tamas Waliczky (Waliczky)

Organizer representative: Teresa Kwong (Kwong), Kattie Fan (Fan)

Kwong: The objective of this meeting is to select the awards for this category. Speaking of the objective of our competition, we would like to nurture the next generation of artists of moving image in Hong Kong and Asia; and we would also like to encourage the exchange between these artists. For the competition, we place our emphasis on content, technique and form, but there are also two elements that we would like to highlight: the independent spirits and creativity. Do you have any questions?

siuhak: Do we need to consider the backgrounds of the films? I see that several works are RTHK commissioned works, and therefore would have more funding or resources.

Lo: In the past, there had been RTHK commissioned works being included among the finalists in this category. In general they were longer works; because they had to be shown on TV, they were generally 13 minutes long. As far as I know, these works were produced independently, and RTHK did not get very much involved. I don't think we need to consider the work's production history.

Mak: The 10 finalist works are all Hong Kong productions?

Lo: They have to be Hong Kong productions. Some works may be produced by Hong Kongers studying abroad. They have to come back and make their applications to this competition.

Waliczky: I would like to let you guys know that I am teaching at City University and there is one finalist that is made by the student of City University. If you want, I can be absent from the discussion of this work. The film is called **Soeng**.

Kwong: Thanks for the information. That's okay.

Fan: We were talking about whether works are Hong Kong produced. One of the finalists works, **Half**, is a Hong Kong-China co-production.

Lo: Can you explain the rules about this issue?

Fan: Our rule says that the entrant must be a Hong Kong resident. If a work has more than one entrant, then half or over half has to be Hong Kong residents. If a work has three entrants, and two are not Hong Kong residents, then it is not qualified for this

category.

Lo: I understand. I believe you would have looked at the qualifications for all the finalist works.

Kwong: So we will start our discussion with **Half**.

Lo: I like this film. It is a lovely short piece, nothing special with the story and its execution though. It is a very lovely piece as a whole.

John: This is my first time watching this work in a theatre. I think one of the shots is very interesting. At the end of the film a character wearing 3D glasses looks out at us, while we look at him from our seats. This gave me a special feeling, which I hadn't noticed when watching it on a computer.

Mak: I don't really understand why I am fortunate enough to join this discussion today, because I feel I am just a regular film-goer who had been part of a few animations. I actually don't watch a lot of local or overseas animation works. That's why I feel that most of the finalist works are quite good and professionally made. As for this work, I agree with Lo in that the work is quite complete and well-made, but it is not very outstanding.

Kwong: It is our honor to have you guys as our jury members. Every year, we have 5 jury members for each category and they usually come from different backgrounds. Some of them might be practitioners, others might be scholars; you are definitely one of the key members of the local animation industry to be selected as our jury members.

Waliczky: I like **Half**, I think it is a very nice piece. It is not exceptional but it is nicely made. You get this very nice poetic humor; I like very much in the end when the two eyes meet and the stereoscopic glasses scene. The whole animation has this "Woody Allen" kind of feeling with jazz music throughout and a nice little character. So I like this piece.

siuhak: Actually I like this work the most, because his use of language is the most restrained and minimal. Every shot serves a purpose and breakdown of shots is very precise.

Kwong: We will continue our discussion with **Level Up**.

Lo: This is a very typical narrative film. The script is well-written and clearly expressed. The plot progression and theme is very clear. I have seen works with a similar theme, and this film's handling of the story and the description of the two characters is done very well. The only unfortunate thing is that its handling is too conventional and too similar to TV dramas, and therefore is not too innovative. On the whole this is a very

precise work, and the dialogue is well-written.

siuhak: I like the metaphor at the end about ghosts.

Lo: I think that is a very inspired touch. The director injected a very conventional element into the cyber-world, forming an interesting contrast. This deliberate choice by the director is quite well-done.

John: I have seen a Japanese work with a similar theme. I'm not saying that the director plagiarized. **Level Up** is about "stay at home" guys in Hong Kong. I think the director's use of font on the computer is too normal. He could have designed a more distinctive font.

siuhak: I thought his use of the font is deliberate?

John: Actually he had to use the frame to show that it is a computer screen, but I feel he could have used a black font, and used a more stylish treatment.

siuhak: Or perhaps made it more interesting by playing with the idea of "conventional". I like the part where they carry the piece of meat around. It is quite funny.

John: I also like the part where they look for the money. It shows that the director is very detail-minded.

siuhak: The director also made use of sound effects, which is thoughtful of him.

Mak: My feeling about this work is just so-so. I think most of it does not need to be done in the form of animation. If he had used live action to express the cyper-world, the effect would have been more outstanding.

Lo: There is a strong Japanese flavor to the work, particularly the character design. I agree with you. The script is well written, and could have been made as a live action film.

Waliczky: My biggest problem with this animation is that it is too didactic towards the end. I like the story, its mood and the elements of traditional culture. Unfortunately, it was shown in a didactic way. While I appreciate the intention of the director, I thought the ending ruins this animation.

Kwong: We will continue our discussion with **The Room**.

Lo: I like this work. The theme is clearly expressed, with a danger element to the story. I think the director's design of the details is very refined, which creates a nice contrast and helps with creating a dramatic atmosphere, giving a suspenseful feeling. Even

though the dubbing of the dialogue is crude, I think it makes for an interesting effect, and represents the director's deliberate choice. The style and artwork are consistent, and create a distinctive world, which show that the director has put in much effort. Of course its style is not very innovative and clearly influenced by Scandinavian works. Putting in real objects creates a very interesting effect. I particularly like the broccoli. The dialogue is sparse but well utilized, and there is not too much extraneous dialogue. The work expresses its theme well, and is not bad. It provides an alternative perspective.

John: I like the design of this work, particularly the character design. All the characters are seen in profile in a style similar to paper cuts. I am also fond of the "big brother" character at the end. Aside from the story, the director tries to inject many unusual elements into the work.

Lo: This is a strongly stylistic work.

siuhak: I like the scene in which the character is standing on a chair and climbing up.

Lo: I think the director spent a lot of time considering every detail, and nothing is haphazard. For example the two times that they arrange the table, and how you first observe the earthquake from the shaking wine glasses.

Mak: I agree that this is a gorgeous looking work, a well presented fruit platter, but I think the presentation is a little over-done. Compared with the artwork, the dialogue seems awkward, especially the Hong Kong-style interchanges and child-like voices. The dramatic effect is not enough. If he had used string orchestra type of music, it would have been better than dialogue.

Lo: Initially I found the dialogue awkward too, but fortunately there is not a lot of it. To give you another point of view, I think the dialogue creates a bizarre feeling.

Waliczky: Visually this is a very nice piece with a surreal tone. The details are beautifully made and technically it is nicely made. I did not like the dialogue either. In several films, actually, this kind of dialogue is a bit cliché to me. This sort of "Wah" or "Wow" does not make much sense to a foreigner like me. It would be better to have real dialogue and better voice. Visually it is a fantastic piece, the animation is okay. The atmosphere of the film is very strong sometimes with this "outer world" surrounding the characters. This is an interesting, well made and unique animation.

Fan: We will proceed to discuss ***On Ba Gong***.

Lo: This film uses animation to express a fantasy theme. I find the structure strange and not too complete, and it seems to be composed of several different elements. Perhaps this is the filmmaker's idiosyncratic style. The artwork is very beautiful, like

it is from a picture book, and the texture is also well done. On the whole, the film suffers from structural problems, and I'm not sure what it is about. It has some themes, but sometimes it departs from them. I understand that animation can be like this sometimes. The length is slightly too long. Actually 10 minutes or more is not long, but it feels endless.

siuhak: I think it is well-drawn, but the animation is not that good. It would have worked better as a picture book.

Lo: He tells the story with the subtitles, which seems a waste of the animation.

John: I think the main theme of the work is belief. At the beginning, the main character relies on himself to stay true to his beliefs. Then he meets the "sea god", and discovers later that the world is full of sea gods-like figures. The theme is actually quite profound. Of course his presentation is a little chaotic, but I think it is a challenging topic. Actually several other works have equally profound themes. Perhaps the editing has room for improvement.

Mak: I find the work rather perplexing. I'm not sure if I should like the main character. At the beginning the director seems to want people to feel sorry for him, but later on we discover that he is just an ordinary character. On the whole, aside from the imagery, this is quite an average work.

Waliczky: For me this story is also confusing. It also seems a bit contradictory. The drawings and the illustration are nice and the story looks like a fairytale. I find it strange that the main goal of this story is that this lonely man wants a girl, but he does not want love, he just wants a girl. At first he gets an air-inflated girl, and then he wants to grow girls. In the end he even says all these girls are boring. It is quite strange. I wonder what he really wants. I would suggest the director, I am not sure if it is a he or she, to think a little more about what the story is really about, whether this is a fairytale or a sexual story. The drawings are nice but the drama is not clear and the goal is missing.

Fan: I think the director is a girl.

Waliczky: Maybe she thinks this is what the boys want, they just want a girl.

Fan: Let's move on to discuss *Puppets*.

Lo: At first I found the visuals quite interesting, but as the film progresses I think it is too symbolic, which makes it hard to get involved with the story, and also difficult for the story to reach a climax. In the world of string puppets, the relationship between men and women seem ambiguous. I find this aspect of the film difficult. Perhaps there is a great deal of meaning to the story, but without dialogue it is hard to understand.

The background music is also strange—sometimes there is music and sometimes there isn't, and there are often large gaps in between music. Perhaps this is a stylistic choice, but I don't know how it helps the film. It is a bit too long, with some parts that are repeated, which is hard to take in. Undeniably, its visuals and artwork are outstanding, especially the symmetrical backgrounds, like the two symmetrical rooms. I think this kind of work needs a recognizable theme in order to leave an impression upon the audience. Otherwise the outstanding imagery is wasted.

siuhak: I quite like the first shot with the Star Ferry. The texture and background are good. However the second half is too long. It could have been half its current length.

Lo: It's more than 10 minutes, but feels longer.

Mak: I agree. The work lacks characters that are worthy of respect, loveable or even likable. The male lead is problematic, and so is the woman (she just wants to buy many bags). It is not easy to get the chance to make animation, so why choose this theme?

siuhak: It tries to explore people who are controlled by society or women.

Mak: But the film is repetitive.

siuhak: It is also lacking in novelty. Puppets, darkened images and film-look filters have all been used before. But as a student work it is laudable.

Lo: I also feel that the director spent a lot of effort in making this animation.

John: I agree that the latter half is too long. For example, the part when he says at the end, "What are you waiting for?" Because the work does not have dialogue, this part is a bit awkward. I agree with siuhak. If this is a student work, the fact that the director is willing to try this is commendable. As a 3D work, the director spent a lot of effort creating this animation.

Waliczky: I also think that the 3D is very interesting and the character is really interesting as well. Actually this film is one of the few which looks much different here from watching it at home. I am wondering if something is missing with the sound here. I do not remember the complete silence while watching it at home. I am not sure if you guys have the same experience. When I watched it at home, it seemed like there was a continuous soundtrack. But when we watched it at the cinema, there was the awkward silence. I do not know if one channel is missing here. It is very bad. Maybe when I watched it at home on DVD, I did not pay attention to the sound as much. But here at the cinema, it was quite obvious and made the film seem slow and boring. But at home I did not feel that way. I agree that the story is not very clear and it does not present a friendly world. All the characters are really strange and

seem to hate each other. It is a depressing piece but visually it is very interesting. I think I can understand what the director wants to tell, but dramatically it is not easy to find out when and why these characters start to hate and torture each other. I think this director is talented and he should have done a better job with editing. Visually it is very strong. In general, some of the pieces look very different now here in the cinema, but not in a good way. Maybe these animations are made in compressed videos and when they are shown in high quality projectors, the quality is not as good.

Kwong: We will now proceed to discuss ***The First Meal***.

Lo: It's an interesting animation. Quite simple.

Mak: This animation is pretty.

John: I think the story is complete, and the ending is good. Its depiction of the relationship is quite good, and the story is touching.

Lo: The length is a bit too short. It could have been arranged better. Now it's too minimalistic.

Mak: I would have liked to see more meals and different types of food.

Lo: Now there are only two meals. The length of time the father spends waiting for his son is too short. I also don't understand why the son doesn't return home right away after leaving prison. He hesitates for a period of time before going back, and it is not clear why.

Mak: I feel there is a religious aspect to the story.

Lo: At the end there is a Bible quote. Tamas also asked me whether this is a religious promotion piece. I don't think that's the case. Perhaps it's just a coincidence. That quote is closely tied with the theme of the work. But I feel on the whole the story could have been told better. The artwork and design are quite good.

Waliczky: I also like it visually but the story is too short. I still, as I told you in the first round, have problems with this quotation from the bible. It is a bit too religious for me; the quote seems to be an illustration. It is a nice animation but a bit too short and a bit too simple. And the quotation from the bible in the end is a bit too much for me.

Kwong: We will now move on to ***Under the Lion Crotch***.

Lo: This film has a strong MV style. In this day and age I feel that there are some who feel this way, and try to express it via songs. The whole thing feels subversive. The

lyrics to the song are quite distinctive, and on the whole I feel this work is interesting, although I don't know how to critique it. siuhak, you have worked as a lyricist, how do you like the lyrics?

siuhak: The lyrics are original?

Lo: I believe so.

siuhak: I think this is quite a good piece. Even though it is hardcore, it is well suited to the mood in Hong Kong today, so it is a timely work. The bloody ending is well expressed.

Mak: This work reminds me of the local band LMF. It goes "bang bang bang" like swearing, as if it is smacking our faces. It is quite cathartic. This is my favorite work.

siuhak: I don't like the title of this film. I don't think the director needed to state his intentions so plainly.

John: The title comes from the song "*Under the Lion Rock*".

Waliczky: Of course I do not know these local connections but this is my really favorite film from the very beginning. I think it is very strong from every point of view. I like something that is realistic and it is especially important that young people take care of politics and have an opinion. They are critical of things. Visually it is very strong. It might seem naïve but it is really art. Everything is made professionally. The quality of the video is a bit flickering. It looked better on DVD. But otherwise I think it is made professionally. The film is not too long and the sound is good; it is a very professional mixture and a strong mixture. I like this piece very much.

John: I think this work is very interesting. Among the finalist works, many have local elements that foreigners may not be able to fully appreciate, but I think this work can be enjoyed by locals and foreigners alike. When the MV started, I was not even reading the subtitles, and was not aware that it is a Cantonese song. As the film progressed I was absorbed, and found the work complete. At the same time there is a different layer of meaning behind it.

Kwong: We will now proceed to discuss ***Howl the Mobile Fatty***.

Lo: This film is too much like comics, and as such it has too much dialogue. The shot design is quite good, but the use of animation is not up to par, which affected the rhythm of the story. Some parts of the story could be faster. As a comics it is already quite good, and there is not much difference by turning it into animation.

siuhak: I think it is a matter of the subject matter. Some scenes should be like those in "*Neon*"

Genesis Evangelion” to bring out the right effect, but now the story is too banal. Also I feel the director is too greedy, and the film is over long, which affected the overall impression.

John: I think on the whole, the story is okay, however the some background knowledge about the social events depicted is needed. There are a great deal of local elements, so people outside of Hong Kong may not be able to get too involved with the film.

Lo: The story itself is an entertaining adventure story. However, it is lacking in good action scenes, or powerful shots. The scene with the motorcycle bursting in feels slow.

Mak: I agree with what siuhak said just now. If this is a film with a \$10 million budget, he would be able to have those kinds of effects. Otherwise, it is just a comics book. The problem with this film comes from its format.

John: I think the fight scenes at the beginning are powerful. If he injected more effects it would have been better.

siuhak: I believe this animation was done by one or two people. It is a very trying task.

Lo: The imagery is good. Many animations rely on software for their action. But even with the help of software, the rhythm and kinetics could have been better, and the timing is a little off.

John: I think the voice dubbing could be better, and there is too much dialogue. If the animation itself is not up to par, more attention should be paid to dubbing.

Waliczky: I like this piece because it has these connections to Hong Kong and I think that is very important. It is metaphoric that there is a rural city inside a park. I like this film as it seems to be an irony or it is being critical of Hong Kong. I also like the comic sense but the voice is again a problem for me, the primitive sound of “aiya” or “yaya”. It is so simple and cliché because this is what we see in the TV series. I think in general the biggest problem for young animator around the world is to deal with the sound, to find a good studio, to find good actor or actress or to buy the right of good music. My advice is that if somebody cannot make good dialogue, then please don’t do dialogue. That was my only big problem with this film; it was a bit too long as well. But it was funny and I like this criticism of the situation in Hong Kong.

Kwong: We will now proceed to discuss **Soeng**.

Lo: This is a work with strong a MV flavor. It is simple and easy on the eyes; also the theme is clearly expressed. The main character is stuck in a crowded city, and needs to go on a trip to take a breather. Of course music plays an important role, and

the visuals are good with their greyish tones. If there is more texture with the main character's facial features, it would be even better.

siuhak: This work feels like a trailer for a feature film.

Mak: How does the film end?

Lo: The sun appears, and the city background disappears, and seems to suggest that the main character has found some release. It is a very clear ending.

Waliczky: It is a professionally made music video. Nice composition with nice effects. For me, as a foreigner, I find it interesting that here in Hong Kong many young people seem to think: I do not want to work, I do not want to go to office, I do not want to have lots of papers and I want freedom. Of course this is a general feeling for young people. We do not want the strict rules and we do not want to follow what our fathers' footsteps. Never in my whole life have I seen so many films on the same topic with office, computer, school and learning. In some cases the young guys commit suicide in the end. This is much better as in the end the protagonist finds freedom and go to see the ocean.

Kwong: We will proceed to discuss the last finalist *Fishing with Popo*.

Lo: This is a very individualistic work. Parts of it are very moving. I particularly like the part where the granny meets the tiger. I feel that every old person has had unbelievable experiences. This part of the film is very interesting and dramatic, and is well suited to animation. Its flaw is that it is a little too typical, and the treatment is relatively basic. I have seen many similar works in the past. However this work resonates with me, and I found the story captivating. If there were more effects it would be better.

Mak: I also like the part with the tiger. Compared with the typical documentary about grandmas, the director makes good use of animation techniques, and the work is quite poetic.

Lo: I agree very much. I think the director must have started with only some photos and sound recordings. It takes skills to join these data together.

Mak: I think the part where grandma sees the tiger is funny.

Lo: That is very inspired.

John: I think this type of subject matter is hard to handle, because the whole story relies upon the grandma, so the film depends on the grandma's expression. Some old people may be more talkative, which will make the work more substantial. As an

outsider and a member of the audience, I found that aside from the part about the tiger, the rest of the film is a bit loose.

Waliczky: I like this film because it contains a personal touch. I enjoy the tiger scene very much as well. I think perhaps it is a bit problematic to have two or three graphical styles; the tiger scene is really different from the horoscope scene in the end. As a foreigner, I have seen several films about grandmother here and I find them all beautiful. Ever since moving to Hong Kong, I can see young people here have a great connection with their grandmothers and I do not see that in Europe anymore. Many old folks live alone there. It is touching for me to see a young person to make a moving tribute to her grandmother. The dialogues are very good here because they are real dialogues. The drawing is nice and I like this piece even with its weaknesses.

Kwong: We have finished discussing all 10 finalists. Could each of you nominate 3 films for award consideration?

Waliczky: I would nominate ***Half, Under the Lion Crotch*** and ***Fishing with Popo***.

Mak: My picks are exactly the same: ***Half, Under the Lion Crotch*** and ***Fishing with Popo***.

siuhak: I have the exact same picks as well: ***Half, Under the Lion Crotch*** and ***Fishing with Popo***.

Lo: I would nominate: ***Half, The Room*** and ***Under the Lion Crotch***.

John: I would nominate: ***The Room, The First Meal*** and ***Under the Lion Crotch***

Kwong: Can we cross out the works that are not mentioned? ***Level Up, On Ba Gong, Puppets, Howl the Mobile Fatty*** and ***Soeng?***

ALL: Yes.

Kwong: So that leaves us with 5 remaining works. ***Half*** has 4 votes, ***The Room*** has 2 votes, ***The First Meal*** has 1 vote, ***Under the Lion Crotch*** has 5 votes and ***Fishing with Popo*** has 3 votes. The last round of vote just reflects your picks for the top 3. We will now discuss the recipient of the Gold Award. Could each of you nominate 1 film for the Gold Award?

Waliczky: As I told you before, ***Under the Lion Crotch*** is my favorite.

Mak: Me too. I would nominate ***Under the Lion Crotch***.

John: I would nominate ***Under the Lion Crotch***.

- siuhak: I would nominate **Half**.
- Lo: I would nominate **Half** as well.
- Kwong: So **Under the Lion Crotch** receives 3 votes and **Half** receives 2 votes. You can discuss the merits and weakness of these 2 works further.
- Lo: They are totally different works in many ways. I like them both. **Under the Lion Crotch** is a good reflection of the social situation in Hong Kong right now and it comes at the right time. Young people put their thoughts into a music video; it might seem naïve but it contains a strong message. **Half** is very soft and provides very good entertainment. Within the framework of ifva, I think **Under the Lion Crotch** is more deserving for its content.
- siuhak: I feel that **Under the Lion Crotch** is well in-tune with world trends in terms of both modeling and execution.
- Mak: I feel that the subject matter of **Half** closer to universal values. Its imagery may seem old fashioned, and films with themes about love and camaraderie would win prizes next year or the year after, but **Under the Lion Crotch** could only be seen as impressive this year.
- siuhak: I also think that **Half** can better stand the test of time, and its artistry as animation is of a higher standard. **Under the Lion Crotch** is closer to the modern MV aesthetics. In terms of artistic treatment, **Half** is slightly better. I especially like the use of glasses at the end, and I was touched by it.
- Waliczky: I also like **Half** very much as it is a very nice and sweet film. My favorite, however, is **Under the Lion Crotch** because it has a unique local connection to the situation in Hong Kong. As for **Half**, this can be either positive or negative, it could work everywhere and it could have been an American film. It is a very nice film but it could happen everywhere. **Under the Lion Crotch**, however, cannot work elsewhere and that makes it more unique.
- siuhak: I find the energy behind **Under the Lion Crotch** is more negative. Even though it is powerful and hardcore, it is comparatively more negative; it seems like it's blowing off steam. Although I think emotional venting as a work's primary motivation is actually alright.
- Mak: When I saw **Half** I was pleasantly surprised, but when I saw **Under the Lion Crotch** I was wowed, the surprises kept coming at me. I think the purpose of animation is to be hit with such surprise and impact.

Kwong: So do we need to vote again for the Gold Award?

Lo: I don't think so; I change my mind and nominate ***Under the Lion Crotch***.

Kwong: So 4 votes go to ***Under the Lion Crotch*** and 1 vote goes to ***Half***. The Gold Award goes to ***Under the Lion Crotch***. What about the Silver Award?

Lo: According to the voting now, the silver award should go to ***Half***.

Kwong: Sure. What about Special Mention?

Waliczky: I would nominate ***Fishing with Popo***.

siuhak: Can you explain the purpose of Special Mention?

Kwong: As I said earlier, the Special Mention Award is intended for a film that contains a particular element that deserves encouragement from the jury members even though its overall performance might not be deemed enough for award consideration,

siuhak: I would pick ***Fishing with Popo***.

Lo: Me too.

Kwong: Any other suggestions for the Special Mention Award? If not, the Special Mention Award will go to Fishing with Popo. Great, we have settled the awards for the animation category. The Gold Award goes to ***Under the Lion Crotch***. The Silver Award goes to ***Half*** and the Special Mention Award goes to ***Fishing with Popo***.

Animation Category

Gold Award

under the lion crotch / Wong Ping

Silver Award

Half / Lai Xueyi, Lin Hongrui

Special Mention

Fishing With Popo / Lilian Fu