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### Salaya doc wraps up with awards to documentary films from Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia and Indonesia

Films about public housing in Singapore, a spirit-worshipping cult in Myanmar, trafficking of workers in Cambodia and schoolgirls in Indonesia were awarded at the fifth Salaya International Documentary Film Festival, which wrapped up over the weekend at the Film Archive (Public Organisation) Thailand.

The top-prize Best Asean Documentary award went to the Singaporean entry, "03-Flats", which covered the city-state's Housing and Development Board apartment blocks. Directed by Lee Yuan Bin, "03-Flats" profiled three women at various stages of their lives who dwell alone in the HDB flats. They are a grandmother, a young artist and a colourful middle-aged woman (and her cat), who have turned the drab little spaces into comfortable and welcoming homes. The film also included 1960s newsreel footage that trumpeted Singapore's massive apartment-building boom and efforts to rehouse citizens that remain a legacy of founding prime minister Lee Kwan Yew.

Special mention awards went to entries from Myanmar, Cambodia and Indonesia.

Yangon Film School student Zaw Naing Oo's "Lady of the Lake" paid a lively visit to the spirit-worshipping cult of Pyun Su village, on the banks of Moe Yun Gyi Lake.

Cambodia's "The Storm Makers" was a raw examination of human trafficking as experienced by a young woman who was kept as a slave when she worked as a maid in Malaysia. A legacy and constant reminder of the ordeal is an infant son, born from when the woman was raped by another man while trying to escape her brutal employer. Her views are contrasted with the profile of man who runs a notorious recruiting agency in Phnom Penh, and a one-legged woman who hobbles from farmhouse to farmhouse, looking for more recruits. The film's name comes from the effect the recruiters have on villages, bringing with them dark clouds of despair.

And the Indonesian winner, "Die Before Blossom", directed by Ariani Djalal, examined the increasing focus on Islam in public schools, and the effect it has on girls from two middle-class families.

Jury members for the Asean documentary competition were Taiwanese filmmaker Chinlin Hsieh, a programmer from the International Film Festival Rotterdam, Thai filmmaker Waraluck Haransretawat Every and Apinan Thammasena from the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (Public Organisation).

"Without intrusiveness, '03-Flats' observes lives of individuals in their intimacy. By way of subtle contrasts - propaganda vs reality, the occupied/space vs the unoccupied/being - the film triggers a strong sense of loneliness, which inevitably leads to the questioning of urbanisation. The film does not only show negative side of urbanisation, but also the individuals' attempt to adapt themselves into urbanisation."

None of the directors of the winning films were present for Saturday's closing ceremony, but Singapore's Yuan Bin, sent an e-mail that was read aloud by archive deputy director Sanchai Chotirosranee. "Thank you Salaya Doc and the jury for the award. I am deeply honoured. I would like to thank my fellow filmmakers at the 13 Little Pictures collective for all their support. It has been a meaningful and fulfilling journey for me. With each new work, we meet new collaborators and I would like to especially thank the architecture research team headed by Dr Lilian Chee at the National University of Singapore. Thank you to the three women in the film - Madam Sim, Amy Tashiana and Tang Ling-Nah, for welcoming me into their homes and making the film together. This film is for everyone who calls Singapore home."

On "Lady of the Lake", jurors were "impressed by the poetic sensibility of an inhabited camera which, through the sensual fluidity of its movements, takes the viewers into the motions and emotions of tribal practices on the Moe Yun Gyi Lake."

"The Storm Makers", directed by Guillaume Suon and produced by Rithy Panh, struck jurors with its portrayal of the effects of human trafficking, "not only on individuals, but also the social level. The film was told via the well-rounded perspectives; the victim and agents who also were affected indirect way. The film shows the difficulties and hope of Cambodia for villagers. This should be a considerable issue in every Asean country and the forthcoming Asean Economic Community. The higher demand for labour to develop economic growth can easily lead to human trafficking problems."

The coming-of-age story "Die Before Blossom" profiled middle-class schoolgirls in Yogyakarta and their struggles to cope with an increasing focus on Islam in public schools, a once-secular institution that is now focused on "shaping millions of submissive and pragmatic children". Instead of lessons in maths and science, their days are filled with religious and cultural activities. "The film carries a feeling of desperation," the jurors said. "The silent voice and empty eyes of one of the two main characters are more than enough to display the deadly toxins of a society that cannot nurture the life of its own youth."

The top-prize winner and the three special mentions edged out entries from Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. The Thai entry "Echoes from the Hill" by film students Jirutitkai Prasonchoom and Pasit Tanadechanurat, was a succinct glimpse at the "Pgag K'Nyau" or "simple humans" in a Karen village in the mountains of the North, which is under threat by government plans to build the Mae Khan Dam and a national park.

The Filipino entry, "Nick and Chai" directed by Rowena Sanchez and Charena Escala was a heartbreaking visit with a young couple who lost all four of their children to 2013's Typhoon Yolanda. And "Madam Phung's Last Journey" by Nguyen Thi Tham took a ride with a travelling carnival troupe run by ageing drag queens.

Apart from the competition, Salaya Doc featured "The Look of Silence", in which an Indonesian optician confronts the people responsible for his brother's death at the hand of military rulers in the 1960s. There were also films by Indo-Dutch auteur Leonard Retel Helmrich, who was the director in focus and conducted masterclasses.

Festival audiences were treated to films by two of the jury members. Hsieh contributed "Flowers of Taipei: Taiwan New Cinema", which had various filmmakers and artists talking about the profound influence of directors Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-Hsien and the Taiwan New Cinema movement in the 1980s. Among those interviewed was Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul, who admitted being lulled to sleep by the languid pace of some of the films.

And Waraluck co-directed the festival's closing entry, "Y/Our Music", a tuneful study in contrasts between mor lam music of the rural Northeast and Western-influenced Thai indie musicians in Bangkok. The film had previously screened at the Busan International Film Festival and the South by Southwest Festival in the US. Hopefully more screenings around Thailand will be arranged.

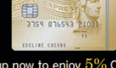
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