

Malaysia's Chong Keat Aun wins best new director at Taiwan's Golden Horse Awards for film inspired by Kedah childhood



Malaysian director Chong Keat Aun of 'The Story of Southern Islet' poses with his Best New Director award at the 57th Golden Horse Awards in Taipei November 21, 2020. — Bernama pic

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 22 — Malaysian Chong Keat Aun has added to his growing trophy cabinet after winning the best new director gong at the 2020 Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan last night, for his debut feature film *The Story of Southern Islet*.

According to the *Focus Taiwan* publication,

Chong had, when receiving the award, thanked those who helped him to produce the film, as well as his parents whom he said may not have realised that his film was about them.

Focus Taiwan said the film revolves around a Chinese couple staying close to the Malaysia-Thailand border, and begins when the husband faints and spits up blood and a rusty nail after quarreling with a neighbour.

The story then follows the wife as she seeks out healing for her husband by exploring the spiritual beliefs of different ethnic groups.

In a video excerpt of his award acceptance speech that was posted on the Golden Horse Awards' Facebook page, Chong had said: "When I was writing the script, I was told by many people who were not willing to finance the film, including in Malaysia, that no one will understand it. I said someday somebody will understand it. The result is the Golden Horse Awards understands it."

Chong, who also acted in the film, was nominated for best original screenplay at the Awards but did not win in this category.



According to a previous Golden Horse Awards Facebook post, the film is a semi-autobiographical film, with a large part of the screenplay featuring memories from his childhood and his observations of his father removing a curse.

Earlier on November 20, *The Story of Southern Islet* also won the International Critics Prize (FIPRESCI Prize) at the Golden Horse Awards from The International Federation of Film Critics, with Chong receiving the award personally from acclaimed film director Ang Lee.

The film was also on November 19 awarded the Network for the Promotion of Asia Pacific Cinema (Netpac) award, with the jury noting: “Based on the director’s childhood experiences, this unconventional supernatural film resurrects memories from home where gods, humans and shaman coexist, combining a well-paced and mature narrative with a unique visual style.”

Also, on November 19, the film was granted the Observation Missions for Asian Cinema Award from the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival Executive Committee.

In September, the same film was awarded Best Picture or best film at the Istanbul Film Awards.

Previously, the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (Finas) had on Facebook cast a spotlight on the film by describing it as a mystic film inspired by true incidents in the 1980s in the area around Gunung Keriang in Kedah.

The film includes Jojo Goh, Season Chee, Pearly Chua, Mei-Sim Hoon and Ling Tang among its cast.

