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TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN
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Malaysian director bags prestigious Golden Horse award for debut film

Malaysian Chong Keat Aun bagged the best new director prize at the 57th Golden Horse Awards in Taipei yesterday for his feature debut *The Story of Southern Islet*, a fantasy film that explores supernatural beliefs.

"Movies are not great. It is the people who help make them that are great," said an emotional Chong in accepting the award, reported *Focus Taiwan*.

He said many people helped him make the film, but paid special tribute to one of the producers, a cameraperson and a mentor of his passed away shortly after the film was completed.

Chong also thanked his parents, whom he jokingly said have probably not yet realised that the movie is about them.

"When I was trying to secure funding for this film, many people told me that they didn't understand it, and I kept saying that maybe someday somebody will. And the Golden Horse Awards understood it," said Chong.

The Story of Southern Islet is about a Chinese couple who live near the Malaysia-Thailand border. After a quarrel with a neighbour, the husband faints and spits up blood and a rusty nail.

Desperate to find treatment for her husband, the wife begins to explore the diverse spiritual beliefs among the different ethnic groups in the region, hoping that one of them can help heal her husband.

The National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (Finas) congratulated Chong, who also won the FIPRESCI (International Federation of Film Critics) award for his debut feature film.

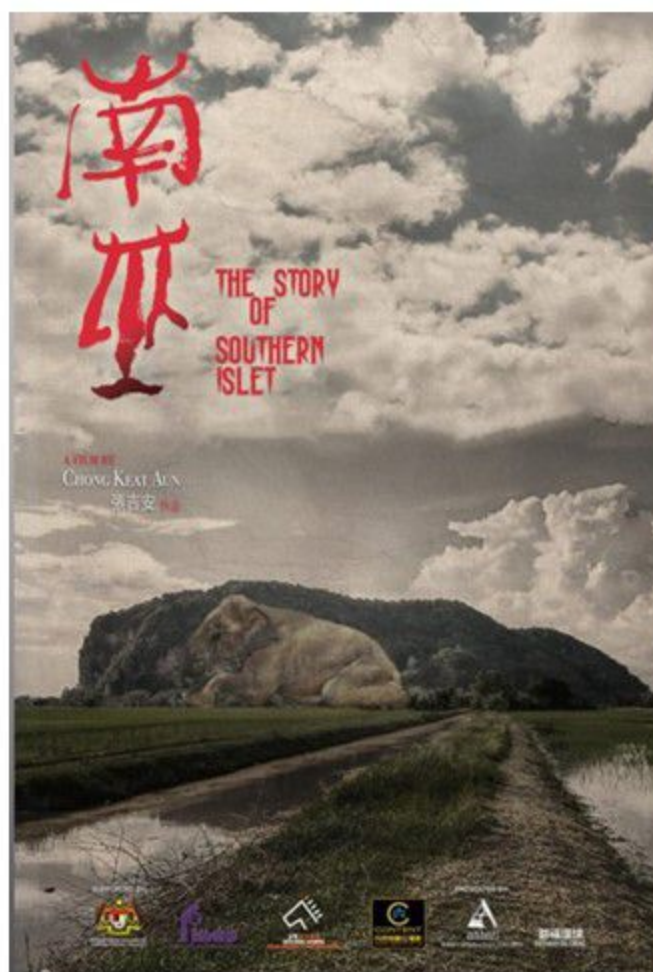
The film stars Season Chee, Pearly Chua, Jojo Goh, Mei-Sim Hoon and Ling Tang and also bagged the Best Film Award Best at the Istanbul Film Awards (IFA) in Turkey in September 2020.

Although Chong studied film in college, he worked as a radio presenter in Malaysia for more than a decade after he graduated. In 2017, he made his first short film, *Cemetery of Courtesy*, which was selected for the Busan International Film Festival.

The 57th Golden Horse Awards ceremony was held as a physical event Saturday at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in Taipei.

Thus far, Taiwan has had only 611 confirmed Covid-19 cases and seven fatalities, and cinemas throughout the country have remained open during the pandemic.

The annual awards, established in 1962, are considered among the most prestigious film awards in the world of Chinese language cinema.



Chong, who directed, wrote and acted in the film, was also nominated for best original screenplay.