

# Student wins film award

Singaporean Alvin Lee wins Best New Director Award at the China Short Film Golden Hummingbird Awards

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A bittersweet film about organ donation by a Singaporean film student has won an award in China's first national-level awards for short films.

Titled *Seed*, the 16-minute film is written and directed by Alvin Lee (above), 25, who is studying directing at the Beijing Film Academy.

His work beat 10,000 other submissions to win the Best New Director Award at the China Short Film Golden Hummingbird Awards. He received the trophy at an award ceremony on Dec 10 at Oriental Salt Lake City in Changzhou.

The film employed Chinese actors and was filmed in Beijing. The story is about the emotional visit a couple pays a little boy who received the donated heart of their dead son. The actress who played the transplant recipient's mother, Qin Yu, was nominated for Best Newcomer Performance.

Currently in his third year of his bachelor's degree programme, Lee came up with the story after coming across a short YouTube clip with a similar premise.

Because the film was set in Beijing, he had to get into the "Chinese mindset" regarding organ donation.

Speaking over the telephone, he says: "There's a saying that when a person dies, the body should be complete and intact. So it's very



hard for (the couple) to donate their child's organs."

The head of this year's jury was acclaimed director and actor Feng Xiaogang.

The China Short Film Awards are the country's first national-level event for shorts and were first held in 2012.

Local film-maker Royston Tan was previously named Best Director for his short film *Popiah* at what was then called the China International Short Film Awards in 2013.

Lee himself is no stranger to awards. He had won the Grand Prix Award at the 2012 Very Short International Film festival with *Timeline*, which is about the relationship between an ex-convict and his mother.

He also nabbed the Best Director and Best Sound Awards at the Singapore Short Film Awards last year with *Bon Voyage*, which is about his

relationship with his grandmother.

He graduated with a diploma in digital media from Singapore Polytechnic in 2011 and had thought about applying to film schools in the United States after national service.

But he preferred being in a Chinese-speaking environment. "I grew up in a very traditional Chinese family, I did wushu (martial arts) and I studied Chinese literature."

The fact that the Beijing Film Academy had such a stringent selection process – he was one of 26 successful candidates winnowed from more than 1,000 applicants over six stages of examinations – was also a point in its favour.

He figured that the learning environment would be a very good one, given the quality of the cohort.

With a scholarship from the Info-communications Media Development Authority, he signed up for the course.

At the academy, instructors and speakers include famous alumni such as Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang and Xie Fei, as well as film-makers from abroad such as South Korea's Kim Ki Duk, Japan's Yojiro Takita and France's Luc Besson.

The one who left the deepest impression was Kim, known for directing feted arthouse films such as *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... And Spring* (2003).

Lee recalls: "He was one hour late because he was drunk. (But) he's a very nice and humble guy."

After his graduation in 2018, he plans to start work on a feature. As to whether he will be based in China or Singapore, he says: "I think six hours is very near for me to fly either way. But I'll definitely come back to Singapore as that's where my home is."

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*Seed*, directed by Alvin Lee, stars (above from left) Qin Yu, Cui Yang and Pan Ruo Yao.

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