

### Justin Lin's Fast and Furious Camerawork Before Fast and Furious

*Better Luck Tomorrow* is directed by Justin Lin and was made in 2003. Justin Lin portrays the struggles of Asian American teens dealing with the rigors of getting into college, the pressures of partying, and the illegal activities of drug dealing. The film opens with Ben (played by Parry Shen) and Virgil (Jason Tobin) laying leisurely sunbathing and smoking cigarettes. When all of a sudden they are interrupted by a cell phone ringing underneath the ground. Ben and Virgil frantically tried to claw the cell phone out of the soil and cease its incessant ringing. As this is the cold opening to the film, Justin Lin immediately introduces us to how easily these characters lives can be turned upside down. Ben and his friends could be sunbathing, playing basketball, or watching porn, It doesn't take much to send them on the edge of sanity. This is the ongoing tension of *Better Luck Tomorrow*. **Through a flurry of quick cuts and rave-esque music Lin immediately shows us the fast-paced monotony of Ben's school life.** As a graduating high schooler myself, the film does a great job with showing the 0 to 100 nature of being a high school senior. One moment you're at the leisure of your weekend and the next you're at the perils of college apps. The music of the film is very much a narrative tool in the way it is edited into every scene, rather than a gradual fade in the music is injected forcefully into key moments and character actions. This accentuates the tension in the film and further solidifies the fast-paced nature of Ben's life. Ben further complicates his life when his friends convinced him to drug deal.

**Ben's academic and extracurricular life is not the only reason why him and his friends resort to drug dealing. They frequently face stereotypes based on their race and the societal assumptions of how an Asian should perform at school. These are the factors that drive Ben and his friends to resort to dealing and doing drugs.** This downward spiral shows Ben to be a tragic character. Ben's only priority is to maintain his grades and accumulate money through drug dealing. **Furthermore, Ben's character serves as a warning against the dangers of over academic pressuring and peer pressure.** Perhaps if the film went on for longer, the movie would show us what would happen if Ben didn't get into the college of his dreams and what his life would become after college. As the film progresses, Ben reveals he views doing well in school is his escape from drug dealing. This validates the theory that he is peer pressured into being a drug dealer and not, primarily, of his own accord.

The reason why *Better Luck Tomorrow* is an poignant and relatable film is in part because of the casting. The main ensemble cast all does an admirable job. We as the audience genuinely feel like all the characters are friends and have been dealing drugs for years. The standouts in the cast are Parry Shen and Jason Tobin. Parry Shen does a great job in portraying the pain on Ben's face as he witnesses and commits morally heinous crimes. Jason Tobin plays an unhinged and not to be messed with Virgil. Jason Tobin is really mesmerizing in the film. **His small lengthy stature is a brilliant contrast to how threatening Virgil can become in the movie.** Every time Virgil pulls out a gun the audience's eyes are locked on him, making the faces of fear on his costars totally believable. **The film thrives in fast and furious camerawork, superb editing, and realistic performances.** That is not to say that *Better Luck Tomorrow* is a

flawless film. There are some pacing problems and some of the characters motivations are not fully explained. The standard love triangle trope is employed by having our love interest, Stephanie, already having a boyfriend. However, the reasons why Ben and Stephanie build their chemistry between each other feels forced. Stephanie's boyfriend, Derek, is fine with Ben hanging out with her even though Derek harasses Ben. Moreover, the final action scene where Ben and his friends decide to rob and ultimately kill Derek for his money just comes off tacked on. They only seem to want to rob him because he is richer than them, even though Derek was paying them. The narrative answer to that would be that Ben and his friends are just being brash but it was like the film was running out of run time and budget to come up with a concrete reason. This is a film, till this point, succeeds at giving its audience concrete reasons why characters are motivated by their actions. Throughout the whole movie the buildup to those motivations feels like a slow burn but to quickly glossed over these motivations make the flaws a bit glaring. **Regardless of the flaws *Better Luck Tomorrow* is a mature, relatable, and gripping story. The film thrives in fast and furious camerawork, superb editing, and realistic performances.**