

And the Winner Is...

Politics and International Film Festivals

An undergraduate thesis submitted to the Department of International Comparative Studies for Graduation with Distinction at Duke University under the advising of Dr. Guo-Juin Hong.

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Cover artwork was designed by the author. Images were found on the Festival de Cannes and the Pusan International Film Festival archival websites; bibliographic information is located in the bibliography section of this work. The image of the globe can be found at <http://www.maps-world.net/images/globe-africa-countries.jpg>.

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Preface

Standing on the platform at the Gare de Lyon subway stop in the 11th arrondissement of Paris creates an eclectic mix of sounds. There may be the shuffle of a woman's feet and her rolling grocery bag or the hustle and bustle surrounding hundreds of people getting on and off the train to go home to their families during rush hour. The trains screech, the whistles blow, and the bells chime at the arrival of every train. Even though these sounds change and fluctuate depending on the day of the week or time of day, the one constant is the rustle of newspapers and the discussions taking place among friends. The conversation is constantly shifting to reflect whatever the average Parisian finds important in that day's news. During my 2008 summer in Paris, some of the most intriguing conversations I overheard were about popular culture and political thought. On a regular muggy morning while waiting to ride to the Musée d'Orsay, conversation was plentiful. There was a discussion about whether Venus or Serena Williams was more likely to win the French Open; another was a debate about whether Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton would make a better president. The conversation I found most intriguing took place between a man and woman discussing the latest news from the Cannes Film Festival. The woman muttered to the man standing next to her that she was disturbed by the idea that the French film, *Entre les Murs*, had won the Palme d'Or at Cannes, the first French film to receive the honor in several decades. She seemed like a relatively average Parisian; she pulled an empty flower-covered rolling grocery sack and wore brown pants with a plain t-shirt. When she talked she tugged on her tan purse strap slung over her shoulder and ran her hand through her short brown bob hairstyle. It intrigued me that an award at a film festival could create this sort of intense reaction.

In my next French Culture class, we explored the complex relationship that exists between French people and the institution of the Cannes Film Festival. The internationality of the film festival has created competing emotions in France because while the French see it as their own, it must encompass the entire world. The tensions between these differing purposes are among the common tensions felt between Cannes and the French public for the entire month of May when the festival is in full swing. From here our discussion quickly moved toward the relationship between film and politics. Many films possess the potential to be used in a political manner. In particular, the international film festivals because of their popularity and influence provide excellent stages upon which to debut politicized thoughts. Additionally the awards presented at these festivals can give the impression that festivals promote some political ideas over others. This is especially relevant at Cannes, which is often thought of as the most powerful, influential, and grand international film festival in the world. After this discussion and these thoughts, every time I saw a newspaper, heard a conversation, or watched any television coverage regarding the film festival I began to understand that there was an inherent strain as the festival promoted some political ideas over others.

When I actually saw the film that had upset the woman on the subway I understood how its provocative images of a changing France might upset someone accustomed to seeing her France in a different, more traditional light. With the award, the festival actually made a political statement about the changing ethnic composition of France's population. *Entre les Murs*¹ follows the life of Mr. Marin during a semester of teaching a French language course to middle school students in an ethnically diverse neighborhood of Paris. The telling moments of the film are the discussions between Marin and his students, mostly from North African countries and the Middle East, about what it means to read, write, and speak like a French

¹ Laurent Cantet. "Entres Les Murs." 128 minutes. France: Sony Pictures Classics, 2008.

person. A tangible cultural divide exists in how they each view the “real France”. The overarching theme of the film is Mr. Marin’s struggle to adjust to new cultural identities each year as well as his successes and failures. For a French woman experiencing the effects of the influx of immigrants on her culture and the tension and changing dynamics of what it might mean to be French, this depiction probably would have startled and perhaps even disturbed, especially as it became the image of France publicized by the festival.

This encounter sparked my interest in international film festivals and how films are used to make political statements. The more I began to explore all of the pieces that together produce the two to three week extravaganza, the more I uncovered strong political undertones present in international film festivals. Each of these discoveries reinforced my idea that the festivals are actually an intriguing place to study international politics because all levels of the festival, from participants to judges to presidents, can incorporate political motivation. Nonetheless the “festival” atmosphere and focus on film as an art form still create an environment where other attractions thrive; politics is not the only focus. The rich celebrities, grandiose architecture, and hungry media allow the politics to quietly remain an actor although not in the spotlight. The atmosphere embodies the potential to explode with political statements.

Film as a medium of expression offers elements that no other art form has the opportunity to present to its viewers. Watching film is not a passive activity; in actuality it creates a conversation between what the viewers see and what the movies display. The conversation that occurs has the possibility to focus and project certain political ideas. International film festivals must show some films with the potential to make political statements in order to create the possibility of having an impact on the geopolitical scene. This gives the festival more importance beyond to those interested in art. The festivals succeed at bringing political ideas to

the surface through their awards. The awards garner the media attention necessary to impact the entire geopolitical scene.

Introduction

Film has several key elements that can create meaning and ambiance for the audience. In my opinion audiences most readily identify with the plot of the film first. What happens to the characters and in what manner gives the audience a direct idea of the purpose and meaning of the film. The way images are projected on the screen also influences how the film is received by the audience, although in a more indirect manner. The overall experience is affected by presentation. The composition of the scene can also affect the reception by the audience. The lighting, shot width, and camera angle are all aspects of a scene that can alter the mood of a film and shape meaning. Lastly, what the audience hears during a viewing also has an impact on reception. A scene changes completely when a Beethoven symphony plays in the background instead of looming, ominous footsteps. Changing any of these aspects of a film could alter not only the audience's reaction, but even the overarching point that the film attempts to make. Through any of these persuasive aspects of film, politics can enter.

According to scholar Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, art can hold subliminal and meaningful political messages because it is initially constructed as an art form as opposed to a political tool. He says that artists are "taught aesthetics primarily before ideology. Color and line, for example, went into painting instruction before the latest party line on socialist art."² People can be attracted to the art and politics independently or as one. Although Goldfarb references a different form of art in this interpretation, the implications for film are similar. Cinematography is taught before the politics. He acknowledges however that politics cannot be separated too far from art because the artists "are under significant pressure to operate in some way that is related

² Jeffrey C Goldfarb, "Why Theater? Sociological Reflections on Art and Freedom, and the Politics of Small Things," *International Journal of Politics* 19, no. 1/2 (2005): p. 58.

to the bottom line” of their funding.³ While art can be theoretically independent of politics, in reality the political aspect may sometimes be required to attract the funding required for the artists to continue producing. Politics, in many instances, is not far removed from aesthetic production. In this manner, artists occupy a complicated and precarious space where they cannot completely control their own productions.

Film can reflect its political climate because its creators are influenced by their environment. Leif Furhammar, a film scholar, states that “the cinema does not exist in a sublime state of innocence, untouched by the world; it also has a political content, whether conscious or unconscious, hidden or overt.”⁴ Film cannot escape being embroiled in political discourse. Film reflects contemporary thought. At times, these thoughts revolve around international politics. Furhammar furthers his argument by saying that “even if feature films do not have the authority to determine political opinions and actions to any significant degree, they can operate covertly with political consequences.”⁵ Films that appear politically insignificant and non-ground breaking can still politically influence an audience. As film scholars Mark Sachleben and Kevan Yenerall state, “the medium of film is ripe with possibilities for addressing some of the seminal political concepts and realities of our day.”⁶ Film holds much potential for reflecting the political climate.

While a substantial amount of research has been completed on international film festivals and politics in film separately, the politics present in international film festivals have not been closely examined. Research chronicling film politics in a specific situation, such as the Cold

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Leif Furhammar and Folke Isaksson, *Politics and Film*, Translated by Kersti French, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁶ Mark Sachleben and Kevan M. Yenerall, *Seeing the Bigger Picture: Understanding Politics through Film & Television*, Edited by David A. Schultz, Vol. 9, Politics, Media & Popular Culture, New York: Peter Lang, 2004, p. 280.

War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Bush administration, has been explored,⁷ but exploring the politics at the actual international film festivals has not been as popular. International film festivals *do* provide an interesting venue to explore the politics of the films; and also the politics of the judges, critics, and festivals themselves. Each group is permitted to express its political views in their part of the festival. The filmmakers can express and explore political idea in their films. The critics can make their opinions and political thoughts known through their comments and reviews. The political disposition of a festival becomes apparent through the award recipients. My goal in this thesis is to examine politics at international film festivals and further the discussion on implications of politics in film.

Two film festivals in particular, the Cannes Film Festival in France and the Pusan International Film Festival (PIFF) in Korea, provide an intriguing dichotomy of two different types of festivals. I chose Cannes because of my personal experiences with the festival when I studied in France. I became deeply invested in my topic. Global media closely follows the Cannes Film Festival. Strikingly, the festival is also considered by many observers to be the most important festival. It has become popular not only because of the beautiful celebrities and wealthy high-profile participants who flock to it each year, but also because of its perceived historical and political importance. Since 1947, films shown at the festival have made political statements about various global issues. The politics as well as the celebrities have created a scenario in which each relies upon the other; and, neither could survive without the other's presence. Studying Cannes unveils a history of politics, regardless of era or geopolitical

⁷ This type of research has been prevalent mostly in film studies, area studies, and history. For examples of some research regarding these topics, please see the following works. Ronnie D. Lipschutz, *Cold War fantasies: film, fiction, and foreign policy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001; this book discusses the use of film by the U.S. during the Cold War that molded ideas of the USSR for the American public. David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001; this work displays how Nazi propaganda film fueled unity in Germany . Douglas Kellner. *Cinema wars: Hollywood film and politics in the Bush-Cheney era*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010; this piece examines films produced from 2000-2008 in America that directly oppose conservative ideology on hot-button topics such as the environment and terrorism.

condition, at international film festivals. This film festival has become a standard bearer among international film festivals.

I also chose to examine the Pusan International Film Festival (PIFF) because though it is not yet at the same level of popularity and influence as Cannes, the undertones of politics are still present. PIFF was created to promote Asian films and directors to an international audience, to acquire more admiration for Asian film genres, and to secure funding. Although PIFF was created to advance a specific region in the film industry, politics are integral. It has become one of the most prestigious festivals in Asia and the global film industry is beginning to pay more attention by submitting more non-Asian films and jury members to participate.⁸ Because the festival began in 1996, its progress and the way politics have played out markedly differ from that of Cannes. These two festivals, one old and one new, provide windows into the various ways politics function in the world of international film festivals.

To examine the politics of an international film festival, it is helpful to investigate participating films. The politics in the films will either coincide with those of the festival or they diverge. The examples detail the politics in the films, and the reception indicates how they were received. Depending on the films and the political aspirations of a particular festival, treatment will vary. The first Asian film to win an award at Cannes during the existence of PIFF was *The Eel* in 1997.⁹ While it won the Palme d'Or at Cannes for seemingly political reasons to be discussed later, it did not receive recognition at PIFF. The politics that Cannes embraced in the film were not as important to PIFF, exhibited by the discrepancy in awards. The next Asian film

⁸ Derek Elley. "Pusan Ups Ante with More Pics & Preems: Big Titles Pepper Fest's Most Ambitious Lineup." *Variety* 412, no. 7 (2008): p. A7.

⁹ "Awards 1997," *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/1997/awardCompetition.html>.

to win an important award at Cannes¹⁰ during PIFF's existence was the Korean film *Oldboy* which won the Grand Prix in 2004.¹¹ This film also did not win any awards at PIFF. However, when it did not win the top prize, the majority political sentiment fell in line with a different film. This is an important moment at Cannes because the desire to make political statements on global events is very evident. These two films, interacting with two different festivals with different results, pose compelling questions as to how global politics become an inherent part of international film festivals. I argue that international film festivals operate as venues used by their organizers and jurors to further their own political agendas. The powerful attendees as well as global media attention make the festivals influential tools for publicizing political standpoints. The creation of film allows for politics to intersect with creativity. News of political commentary travels quickly through the numerous global media outlets. The films coupled with the media at these festivals are a breeding ground for the emergence of politics.

The implications of politics at the film festivals are twofold. First, the festivals gain notoriety because they become about something supposedly more profound than art: they also become about the contemporary global scene. This gives the festivals an importance beyond the artistic and aesthetic world. Secondly, the festivals become a place where global sentiment regarding world events can be expressed. As Griselda Pollock says, "art is one of the social practices through which particular views of the world are constructed, reproduced, and even redefined."¹² Varied political viewpoints are possible through film because the filmmaker can bring what they want and the festival organizers can reward what they want; both perspectives are subject to manipulation. Additionally, as Hwa Young Choi Caruso states while referencing

¹⁰ The most relevant and prestigious awards at Cannes are those that are international in nature. The largest of these would be the Palme d'Or.

¹¹ "Awards 2004," *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/2004/awardCompetition.html>.

¹² Qtd. in Hwa Young Choi Caruso, "Art as a Political Act: Expression of Cultural Identity, Self-Identity, and Gender," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 39, no. 3 (2005): p. 76.

writer Arthur Danto, “art is political in consequence, even if politics should not be its immediate content.”¹³ International film festivals incorporate the balance between film and politics that Danto describes.

In Chapter One, I will historicize both film festivals to show how international politics have been an integral part of them since their inception. Chapter Two introduces the two films that I chose to focus on and their receptions, the critical responses, and their respective political implications. The Conclusion analyzes why film festivals continue to incorporate and encourage the inclusion of global politics in their institutions. Ultimately I show the interplay between international politics, film, and the powerful individuals that flock to festivals in search of fame and exposure.

¹³ Qtd in. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Chapter 1: Welcome to the World of International Film Festivals

The festival as an institution has its own underlying political ideology. Politics gained a space in the festivals through their acceptance and incorporation by the initial organizers of the festival. In this chapter I will examine the political evolution of the two festivals, Cannes and PIFF. The foundations and histories of each festival provide insight to how politics evolved within the context of these festivals. While the festivals differ in origin and evolution, the presence of politics foundationally connects them.

Festival de Cannes

Cannes is *the* international film festival. An account from Cari Beauchamp and Henri Behar, two repeat attendees, explain why: “Within a ten-block strip bordering the Mediterranean, thirty thousand people from throughout the world converge for that fortnight to see and be seen, buy and be bought, sell and be sold, review and be reviewed, promote and be promoted, and/or somehow be a part of the movies.”¹⁴ Festival participants have an abundance of opportunities to showcase their political views and to influence a global audience. At its inception however, politics did not play such a significant role. The Festival de Cannes initially began as Le Festival International Du Film.¹⁵ The title is evidence that the festival creators had the intention, since the beginning, for the festival to be multinational. The festival was conceived in the 1930s to compete against the Venice Film Festival, the premiere film festival in Europe at the time, and its

¹⁴ Cari Beauchamp, and Henri Behar. *Hollywood on the Riviera: The inside Story of the Cannes Film Festival*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992, p. 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

fascist propaganda.¹⁶ From the perspective of the organizers of the new festival, Fascist Germany and Italy in part through the Venice Festival maintained too much influence on the media and film industries in Europe. The idea of Europeans being exposed only to film promoting fascism, strong central governments, and the superiority of certain races over others prompted many politicians in France to push for a new type of festival. Philippe Erlanger, a government official, suggested the idea of “a festival of ‘the free world’” to British, French, and American participants in the Venice Film Festival.¹⁷ This new festival would represent the opposite of the political ideals that Venice promoted: primarily democracy and liberalism. Initially some feared that any competition for the Venice Film Festival would exacerbate an already deteriorating Italian-French relationship. Organizers solved this potential problem by changing the official goal of the festival from encouraging a specific type of politics to instead promoting French tourism and French film.¹⁸

The city of Cannes was selected to host the festival first because of its key location on the beautiful and popular Mediterranean, and second because of its extremely powerful and wealthy hotel interest groups. They were more than thrilled to have a cultural festival that would bring more vacationers to spend money at their businesses. This move was mutually beneficial to the government to appease the Italians, because the location seemed economic as opposed to political, and to the hotel owners to increase profits. The first festival was scheduled to begin on September 1st, 1939. On that same day, Germany invaded Poland, and two days later France along with the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. As a result, the festival was

¹⁶ Kieron Corless, and Chris Darke. *Cannes: Inside the World's Premier Film Festival*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2007, p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁸ Corless, *Cannes*, p. 14.

postponed first until December, 1939 and then until March or April, 1940. After Germany invaded France in May, 1940, it was put on hold indefinitely.¹⁹

After the end of the war, organizers of the festival proposed September, 1945. However this could not happen as France's infrastructure could not handle an event of that magnitude so soon after occupation. The earliest possible start date became September 20, 1946. Politics were evident in the festival even before its official beginnings.

The summer before this proposed starting date, money was extremely tight and very few participants, journalists, or tourists were expected to attend.²⁰ Robert Favre Le Bret was named the first Secretary General of the Festival, a position held political importance as he was suggested by Erlanger. Le Bret was chosen in order to further ideas that Erlanger found important. A former journalist and government employee, Le Bret was chosen as the best intermediary between the French government and the French media because he had powerful connections in each realm.²¹ He wanted the festival to become "an event where countries could be assured of total equality and total equity," another idea that would shape the type of politics present at the festival.²² The city of Cannes and the French Foreign Affairs Ministry financially backed the festival; therefore, funds to advertise and support this large event were very minimal in the aftermath of the war. To the organizers' surprise, many journalists and film critics came: over 1000 tourists arrived and many nations sent delegations and submitted film for competition.²³ The festival took place in a casino in Cannes and generated much-needed revenue for the city.²⁴ The festival evolved as a strong financial event for the nation as well.

¹⁹ All information from this paragraph is paraphrased from the same source. *Ibid.*, 14-6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²¹ All information above this citation regarding the life of Robert Favre Le Bret comes from the same source. Corless, *Cannes* p. 16.

²² Qtd. in Beauchamp, *Hollywood*, p. 43.

²³ Corless, *Cannes*, pp. 17-18. Additionally, the countries included in the first festival are from Europe and North America: France, Italy, the US, Sweden, Denmark, the UK, Portugal, the USSR, Switzerland, Egypt, Romania,

The rest of the 1940s established the traditions and customs of the festival. There were many technical difficulties as the films were initially required to be in their original format with no subtitles. The implementation of this rule reflected a desire for films to be judged in their purely original form. Because of the difficulties this created for the multi-lingual audience, translators were gradually incorporated to make the films understandable to everyone. This logistical issue had to be resolved to continue to further Cannes' political idea of inclusion as proposed by Favre Le Bret. Hollywood films saturated a lot of the festival because of a stipulation in an American post-occupation agreement with France. Many American films were banned in France during Nazi occupation, therefore causing many American production companies to lose potential revenue by restricting their European market.²⁵ "There was four years' worth of backed-up Hollywood product capable of turning a profit on French screens."²⁶ To achieve American goals, the United States required that their films be shown in France more frequently than those of any other nation. This led to American films winning prizes at much higher rates than other countries and gaining a lot of international exposure.²⁷ The politics also caused a market effect where American films generated higher profits because of their hyper-exposure. Additionally, as more socialites, royalty, and stars congregated in Cannes, the idea of the festival as a huge party cultivated. The presence of stately dinners, frolicking on the beach, and showing off expensive, designer gowns grew exponentially.²⁸ This fun and light-hearted atmosphere somewhat diminished as the onset of the Cold War caused great tensions between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. delegations, but the institution of glamour as a specific custom of the

Mexico, Czechoslovakia, Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, and India all submitted films to the festival. "Official Selection of 1946." *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/en/archives/1946/allSelections.html>.

²⁴ "Festival in Date," *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/about/festivalHistory.html>.

²⁵ All information in this paragraph before this citation comes from the same source. Corless, *Cannes* pp. 18-21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁷ Corless, *Cannes* pp. 26-7.

²⁸ Beauchamp, *Hollywood*, pp. 45-6.

festival began in this time period.²⁹ Politics did sometimes take a back seat to other aspects of the festival that were less controversial or contentious.

The architecture of the festival changed in 1947. Creation of the new Palais des Festivals began in order to accommodate the festival's growing popularity.³⁰ The festival needed space for press conferences, displays, and representatives of a booming international film market. The festival also fell under a new bureau in the government, the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), which fell under the Ministère de la Culture. This bureau was created specifically to address French film issues, furthering the idea that the government was concerned and wanted to be involved in what transpired at Cannes.³¹ This change incorporated more government action as well as interest in the festival. The French government fully invested in the occurrences of Cannes because its repercussions could affect other French international relations. While considerable improvements for the festival occurred in the 1940s, there were also setbacks as the festival was canceled in 1948 and 1950 because of monetary issues.³² The 1950s was a more continuous period for the festival, but also one with ever-increasing controversy.

In the 1950s, the festival grew immensely in both popularity and size. It even became a ritual, both in France and abroad. It was expected to take place annually in a grandiose and remarkable manner. At this point it could even be seen as an attempt to create a utopia where everyone in the world could come together, no matter what might be going on between governments or groups, and enjoy quality films that reflected a politicized era.

²⁹ Corless, *Cannes*, p. 27.

³⁰ "Festival," <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/about/festivalHistory.html>.

³¹ Benjamin Craig, "History of the Cannes Film Festival," *Cannes – A Festival Virgin's Guide*, Cinemagine Media Limited, <http://www.cannesguide.com/basics/history/>.

³² Corless, *Cannes*, pp. 231-2.

[Cannes] is a mini-United Nations, which shows how extraordinarily important and diversified Cannes has become, with far-reaching ramifications. There are contacts you make and contacts you renew. People from your industry whom you've never met before; friends and colleagues whom you never have the time or the possibility to meet with the rest of the year, because you're busy, they're busy, or they live in another country [are there]. Where else would you meet the French and the Spaniards and the Italians and the Scandinavians and the Russian[s] and the Japanese and the Cubans?³³ Even though a desired harmony existed among certain attendees, the politics and agendas fostered through political actions did not create a utopia. Instead a venue for political ideology manifested. The political agenda involving the entire world in the background superseded everything.

Jean Cocteau served as the President of the Jury in 1953, 1954, and as an honorary member in 1957.³⁴ He contributed to the festival a sense of artistic credibility because of his renowned work as a surrealist film producer. He also gave an eye-opening account of how the jury functioned in his various journals and press releases. Presiding over jurors with various opinions became even "more difficult by the political tenor of the times."³⁵ He did not enjoy the "backroom quibbling and rumour-mongering"³⁶ that occurred when the jurors selected the winner. The debates and conflicts were inescapable because jurors could not fully escape their biases. Even as a supposedly neutral jury, each member came forward with a personal political sentiment. Those wishing to fully distance themselves from the politics cannot achieve pure objectivity.

In 1951 the festival moved to April to promote more tourism and to compete more with other European film festivals.³⁷ Additionally the festival welcomed Japanese films for the first time and films from the Soviet Union again as their participation varied throughout the 1940s.

³³ Beauchamp, *Hollywood*, pp. 25-6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 379, 382.

³⁵ All information above this citation relating to Jean Cocteau is summarized from the same source, unless otherwise noted. Corless, *Cannes*, pp. 31-5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁷ Craig, "History," <http://www.cannesguide.com/basics/history/history2.asp>.

For these countries, it would seem exciting to be included in the global festival. The reason for these events was in part because “rules were changed [to enable] the countries with the largest film production to present three films, while others were entitled to one.”³⁸ Previously there was no maximum or minimum, which allowed for Cannes to decrease the number of films from certain countries while increasing others. The Americans dominated while those from the Soviet Union felt snubbed, a reflection of the Cold War and France’s allegiance to the United States. International conflicts occurring at this time played themselves out on the international film festival stage. The rule change emphasized all countries being included regardless of economic wealth and also the importance of preventing domination by a particular country. This change signaled a shift toward international inclusion. Cannes was striving for an all inclusive utopia feel at this time—politics was the easiest mechanism. The United States was upset by this rule because they saw their revenue and popularity shrinking, but others, such as the Eastern bloc, were extremely pleased as they felt that a few countries were less likely to overshadow everyone else³⁹ and the festival would also become more international. Ultimately, the festival became more inclusive and more representative of an increasingly globalized political landscape.

For the rest of 1950s, many of the traditions now thought of as “customary” were created. In 1952 the permanent home of the Palais Croisette was completed.⁴⁰ In 1954 the palm leaf was added to the trophies and much more attention was shown to the young starlets who used Cannes as one of their high-profile events of the year.⁴¹ The Palme d’Or as we know it today replaced the previous biggest prize, the Grand Prix du Festival, for the international competition in

³⁸ Corless, *Cannes*, p. 28.

³⁹ All information in this paragraph above this citation comes from the same source, unless otherwise specified. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

⁴⁰ Craig, "History," <http://www.cannesguide.com/basics/history/history2.asp>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

1955.⁴² This same year many of the films and stars blacklisted by the United States House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) were awarded prizes and welcomed at the festival much to the opposition of many in the official American delegation.⁴³ This was one of Cannes' way of commenting on international politics of the time; with these actions Cannes condemned the actions of the HUAC.

Whereas before the festival had operated on a rather lenient requirement for censorship, the de Gaulle administration greatly increased censorship, especially relating to the Algerian War and general colonialism in Africa.⁴⁴ The increase of censorship occurred under the guise of protection, but some Cannes enthusiasts felt that artistic freedom was being denied. The festival was required by its government to remove any political commentary on these events; the government feared hostility on either side. While Cannes was a tool used to make political commentary, sometimes the political commentary it made also had to be reduced for the sake of global relations. In 1959 the Marché du Film opened, allowing for more cultural exchanges and exposure to divergent viewpoints. It made the festival the first place for sellers and buyers to exist in an international film market, further broadening the ability of film to create change on a broader scale.⁴⁵ More than ever economic and political interests were affecting how the festival operated.

In the 1960s Cannes, like the rest of the world, experienced great change. Not only did the Marché du Film continue to attract various nations and international guests, but it also

⁴² While I will not explicitly historicize the Palme d'Or, its conception at this stage in the festival's history is important. In the future it becomes the most important prize awarded at the festival. Because of its importance, it also becomes highly politicized based on who receives the award, which country they are from, and how many times they receive it. For further information on the Palme d'Or, please see "A Brief History of the Palme d'Or." *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/aboutFestivalHistory/goldenpalm.html>.

⁴³ Corless, *Cannes*, pp. 41-2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴⁵ "Festival," <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/about/festivalHistory.html>.

permitted even more open exchange of films.⁴⁶ People were continually being exposed to new aspects of the world. Simultaneously, a sense of bitterness emerged among some contestants who felt that only well-established, senior directors' films were selected for the big awards. Many critics began to claim that newer artists were not being given opportunities to showcase their work, therefore stifling the film industry and favoring more established regions.⁴⁷ These critics attempted to make the festival feel more equitable if everyone was permitted to participate. Politically the results of the festival were not in line with everyone's thoughts: they did not seem equitable.

In 1961 the volatile state of world affairs impacted the festival. Security at the festival tightened because of the potential threat of Algerian violence. The Algerian War of Independence between France and its then-colony Algeria made festival-goers very nervous about potential threats, particularly because several French Ministers were present.⁴⁸ Geopolitics were not only discussed at the festival but they also actually played out here.

The rest of the 1960s consisted of social and political change. To appease the public and critics who wanted some lesser known directors to have the opportunity to present their work, in 1962 the organizers created the *Semaine Internationale de la Critique* specifically for new directors to display their talents.⁴⁹ This change was influenced by the political goals of Cannes to incorporate the entire world, not just those who were already established. In 1966 Olivia de Havilland was appointed the first female jury president, a title which she shared with a man.⁵⁰ Politically, this moved to at least show the international world that women were also qualified to evaluate film, if not yet by themselves. The end of the 1960s was a time of political distress for

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴⁷ Corless, *Cannes*, pp. 135-6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4.

⁴⁹ Craig, "History," <http://www.cannesguide.com/basics/history/history3.asp>.

⁵⁰ Beauchamp, *Hollywood*, p. 315.

the French. In May of 1968 the students in France posed a revolution. Workers' strikes almost caused the government to fall apart.⁵¹ As a result of the political unrest, the 1968 festival served as a platform for exposing these tensions. One director, Claude Miller, said that the festival "[had] an atmosphere of Cuba in the time of Batista."⁵² Festival organizers refused requests to cancel because of the strikes and incited anger from the students and strikers. However, once President of the Festival Robert Favre Le Bret received notice of a planned riot, he cancelled the festival. This political move was in support of the strikes as well as in opposition to them. Canceling the festival did indicate that the strikes were more important than a film festival. The manner and timing of the cancellation also suggest that Cannes did not want to have political upheaval at its venue.⁵³ External political events easily enter the festival and the politics within the festival often emerge, both of which relate to the state of global activities.

The 1970s allowed for even more political statements and ideologies to enter the festival as censorship decreased. The d'Estaing administration almost completely abolished censorship in 1975.⁵⁴ This allowed for almost any kind of film to be shown. Films displaying even the most extremist politics could be presented at the festival. Actually the Algerian film *Chronique des Années de Braise* won the Palme d'Or in 1975, as soon as the censorship rules were lifted.⁵⁵ While the atmosphere was "made especially tense by bombings and death threats connected to the presence of the Algerian film in the main competition,"⁵⁶ the festival gained recognition for

⁵¹ The significance of this event is relatively well known and researched. Works and students desired better education and employment opportunities. For further information, please see the following titles. Keith Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations*, New York, St. Martin's Press: 1993. David Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, Cambridge, South End Press: 2002. "France in May 1968," *Time* 166, no. 23 (2005): 16.

⁵² Corless, *Cannes*, p. 123.

⁵³ All information in this paragraph above this citation, unless otherwise noted, comes from the same source. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-134.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

truly being international through inclusivity. Those in charge of the festival felt as if they were at least commenting on an international conflict through their selection of this film. Cannes provided a space for political commentary and opining on global issues.

In the 1980s Cannes continued to function as a place to discuss and advocate for social justice issues both through its films and also by the countries and ethnicities rewarded for their work. Popular films included those about socialism and the changes in Communism.⁵⁷ As Corless and Dark state, “the discourse of ‘human rights’ and ‘democracy’ [became] the only game in town during the 1980s.”⁵⁸ This was somewhat of a result of the Algerian situation, but also of the explosion of political films that began to enter the festival after 1975. Cannes had to embrace this new theme because these were the films they were receiving *and* these films excited the international community. In these years, Cannes truly became, as what the *Libération* newspaper said it was, “a privileged mélange of cinema and politics.”⁵⁹

In the 1990s, no significant changes in the structure of the festival occurred. Politics remained integral and in fact, evolved as inextricable from the festival’s identity. In 1993 Jane Campion from Australia became the first woman to win the Palme d’Or.⁶⁰ Cannes was now indicating that women too are serious filmmakers and have a place among the internationally celebrated winners of the Palme. In 2000 the festival expanded its realm of influence by launching its official website.⁶¹ In 2007 Cannes celebrated another milestone with its sixtieth anniversary.⁶² For over six decades the festival involved itself in global politics and became an actor in the geopolitical landscape.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-164.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶¹ “Festival,” <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/about/festivalHistory.html>.

⁶² Corless, *Cannes*, p. 236.

The breadth of Cannes has grown since the first festival. The events that take place during the festival reflect geopolitics all over the world. The way juries, films, and critics interact revolves around the contemporary political setting. The interplay between the politics of the festival and the politics of the films highlights the continuous presence of a complicated political terrain extant at international film festivals and this terrain is established by the institution of the festival.

Pusan International Film Festival

Commentary on the Pusan International Film Festival (PIFF) cannot be chronicled in the same way as Cannes. The particular history and development of Korea, as opposed to the festival specifically, are extremely important to understanding political undertones present at PIFF. Specific political and cultural events from 20th century Korea affected the idea of politics of all of Asia. The Asian communities involved in PIFF bring these memories to the festival with them. In this section I will explore some important events that changed the perception of politics in Asia and that affect PIFF. These events offer a better understanding of the development of a strong film industry and how it culminated in a wildly successful and internationally popular Pusan International Film Festival.

A discussion of PIFF and the Korean film industry reveals the strong influence of other Asian countries on Korea. Some of the feelings are hostile or angry considering that sometimes the Korean position seems to be one of subservience to the other Asian nations throughout its history. The expansion of the film industry and having an important festival has given Korea a new way to more independently impact the Asian political landscape.

Between 1894 and 1910, Korea was invaded by China, Russia, and Japan. In 1910 it officially became a part of the Japanese empire, but previous years of an inability to self-govern

created resentment among Koreans toward these other nations.⁶³ As a part of Japan's empire, Korea was ruled strictly in order to exploit as many resources as possible. While this was a political move on Japan's part, the emotional, human toll left on the Koreans affected their opinions and relations with the Japanese for much of the 1900s. As Japan was striving to encompass the entire world in its empire, it became increasingly confident in its abilities to proceed as they wanted, especially as the Western powers took no action.⁶⁴ A lot of Korean hostility toward the Japanese resulted in a strong national unity against their oppressor. While the Japanese did give the Korean people some freedoms after including the peninsula in their empire, all progress of moving toward independence ceased when the Pacific War began in 1937.⁶⁵

While Japan was fighting the Pacific War, Koreans were subject to some of the cruelest treatment during the entire Japanese rule. The most valuable resource for the Japanese was the Korean people. They were often forced to work in hard labor jobs for little to no money and used as sex objects by the Japanese army.⁶⁶ National independence was granted after the defeat of the Japanese by the Allies in 1945, but what transpired during the era of Japanese rule in Korea left scars. The allies previously decided at the Cairo Declaration in 1943 that upon defeat of the Japanese, one half of Korea would be occupied by the Soviets and the other half by the Americans.⁶⁷ While this idea was not initially popular, Cold War tensions rising between the Soviet Union and the United States made it seemingly the only way possible for the two sides to

⁶³ General information in this paragraph may be found in the same source unless otherwise specified. Howard, Keith, Susan Pares, and Tessa English, *Korea: People, Country and Culture*, Edited by Keith Howard, London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 1996, pp. 20-8.

⁶⁴ The information regarding Western powers and their involvement during the Japanese occupation of Korea would deviate too far from the goal of this piece. Other sources can be consulted for more in-depth coverage of this topic. Gordon, Andrew, *A Modern History of Japan: from Tokugawa Times to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

⁶⁵ Howard, *Korea: People*, pp. 27-9.

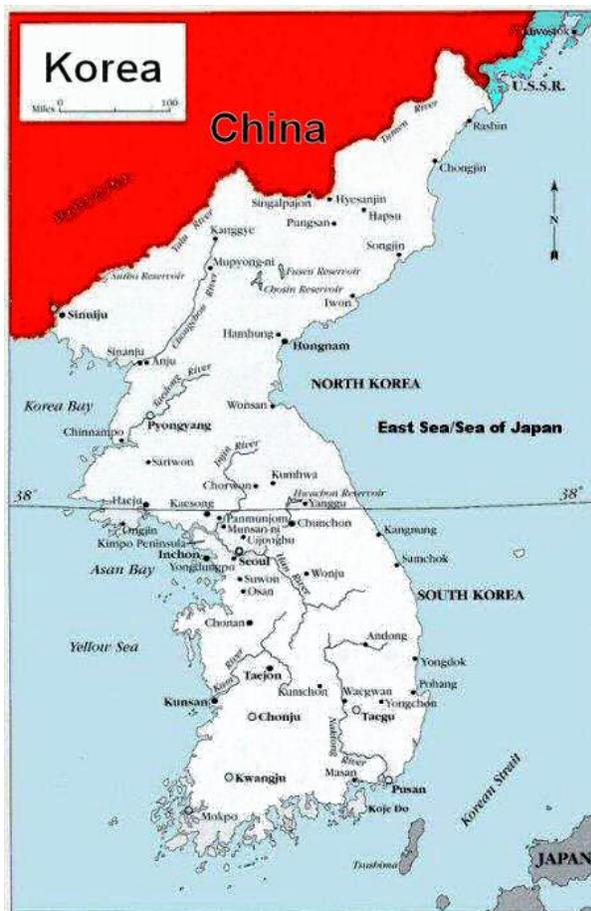
⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶⁷ Ha, Tae-Hung, *Guide to Korean Culture*, Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1968, p. 60.

reconcile. The result of this decision to split Korea in half remains a pivotal part in its history.⁶⁸

This identity was never fully resolved or solidified; the way the nation was split as was the way each person's identity was also.

The Soviet Union found its allies in the North in Kim Il Sung and the United States found an ally in Syngman Rhee of the South. Each side followed the political structure of its occupier: communism in the North and democracy in the South. The Republic of Korea (ROK) was established in the South in August of 1948 while the Democratic People's Republic of Korea



(DPRK) was established in the North of September of that same year, solidifying the division created by the Western powers. The tensions between the two erupted in 1950 into a three year civil war.⁶⁹ The results of the civil war were catastrophic as many families were torn apart and many former countrymen killed each other. The ramifications of this event changed the identity of many Koreans as their old way of life was destroyed and recreated under new leadership after the war. Nothing tangible came from the altercation, only a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) splitting the country

down the middle.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.

⁶⁹ The map of Korea shows political boundaries after the civil war. It can be found at <http://www.paulnoll.com/Korea/Maps/Korean-map-Korea-all.jpg>.

⁷⁰ Howard, *Korea: People*, pp. 52-7.

Because of Pusan's location in South Korea, the politics most prevalent at the festival are also those associated with the South. They believed in capitalism and the free market. A general historiography of some of the developments of the South gives a good idea as to the political events that have shaped the ideas of a lot of people who created PIFF. First after the war, Syngman Rhee used the powerful and wealthy United States as an ally to assist with reconstruction. Rhee's focus on strict military control prevented him from seeing the social changes that began to occur as more people were moving to the cities, becoming better educated, and becoming more aware of national and global issues because of increased availability of the press. When he fell out of power, another "oppressive"⁷¹ regime ruled during the Third Republic. In the Fourth Republic, discussions of reuniting with the North occurred but nothing fruitful took place as the public vehemently opposed that position. His rationale was that the South would have more resources to materials as well as a stronger military, but this did not outweigh the anti-Communist feelings or the historical animosity that still existed. The separation caused permanent damage.⁷² The Fifth Republic was marked by the military rule of General Chun Doo Hwan who often brought troops into urban areas to control crowds and suppressed public opinion and political opponents. Many of the Korean people did not like their political ideas being restricted and Chun quickly fell out of power. In the Sixth Republic, a more democratic Kim Young Sam, of the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP), came into power. He became the first Korean President to not have been in the military in 1992 since the Civil War.⁷³ This marked an important change from the South moving toward more democratic policies.

The progression of Korean film does not follow a particularly similar pattern as the history of the 20th century in that it is not subject to as many external forces. The film industry

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷² All information in this paragraph, unless otherwise cited comes from the same source. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-52.

⁷³ All information preceding this footnote, unless otherwise noted, comes from the same source. *Ibid.*

had more of an opportunity to develop on its own, still impacted by politics but from an internal point of view. The first substantial films to make an impact on Korean politics were films produced after World War II and liberation from Japan. Many of the films produced in this time period were labeled “Liberation Films”⁷⁴ because they depicted either the cruelty of the Japanese in their colonization of Korea or heroes fighting for an independent Korea. Independence was one of the key themes, reflecting Koreans’ idea to decrease foreign influence. Along with Liberation Films, there was a niche of the film industry produced by the American government that intended to give their approval of the South and to praise the strength of the national character of the Koreans. Some of the animosity developing between different ideologies was also seen in films of the late 1940s, as they often centered on the tension between those promoting communism and those supporting free-market beliefs. The politics of the North and the South dominated film production. These types of films continued until 1950 and the outbreak of the civil war which, along with families and the political landscape changed film.⁷⁵

Per the government’s instruction, the film industry shifted its focus away from aesthetics and to creating a film that would propagate the goals of the war between 1950 and 1953. In the South this meant anti-communism and in the North it meant portraying the United States as evil. To achieve these goals, many of the films produced during this time period were documentary in style, whether they were actual documentaries or not. The purpose was to evoke certain political feelings that the public would believe and want to embrace. There were a few non-military films that were produced, that often tried to take an artistic approach to the horrible effects the war had on people’s lives, but they were comparatively small in number and their importance was not

⁷⁴ The term “Liberation films” was taken from a definition created by Lee Young-il, Lee, and Choe Young-chol, *The History of Korean Cinema*, Translated by Richard Lynn Greever, Vol. 12, Korean Studies Series, Seoul: Jimoondang Publishing Company, 1998. pp. 85-6.

⁷⁵ All information in the above paragraph comes from the same source, unless otherwise noted. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-98.

truly felt. After the war, similarly to after World War II, many films used the Korean War as the center of their plot to discuss something larger, often family, nationality, or international cruelty. While each film was not explicitly political, the content of films were inspired by political events. In this manner, the political events of the era were being reinforced by film. After the decline in war film production, the artistic aspect of film improved.⁷⁶

Although South Korea was left in poor shape with very little money and very little energy, the film industry rebounded from a lull period quickly. This can be attributed to new technology that allowed for producing films in more modern studios with much better equipment. The government provided funds for filmmakers and wanted to be involved in the film industry in order to have a venue through which to promote their own ideas as to the general public.⁷⁷ Additionally the aesthetics originally very prevalent in Korean film surged back into the industry as many people, post-war time, wanted to be entertained but also enjoy something they found artistically beautiful.⁷⁸ Comedy and action films also became very popular and these enhanced genres continued to attract movie-goers. In 1957 the first Korean film was shown at an international film festival. *The Wedding Day*,⁷⁹ a comedic film about the difficulties of marrying a daughter to an honorable man, was shown and won an award at the Asian Film Festival of that year.⁸⁰ These films were not attempts to impact the political landscape directly, however they did politicize a recovering Korea. After years of turmoil and distress, Koreans were producing films that were jovial and purported to entertain. Seemingly, the lack of politics in these films was a political move to move beyond the past.

⁷⁶ All information in the above paragraph comes from the same source, unless otherwise noted. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-110.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷⁹ The Asian Film Festival was one of the first international film festivals to highlight Asian films. Lee Byeong-II. "The Wedding Day." 78 min. Korea: Dong A Films Co., Ltd, 1956.

⁸⁰ Lee, *The History*, p. 114.

1961 was the beginning of a change to the boom that had occurred in the post-war years of the 1950s. It was the year that the Motion Picture Law was enacted in order to diminish the number of production companies in the market and give the government more control of what was produced.⁸¹ This placed a strong censorship on films being produced and greatly reduced their ability to present political ideas different from those of the government. Additionally it was designed to create more aesthetically high quality films. The goal of this project was to use the Korean film industry to promote very specific Korean political ideas.⁸²

Korean film in the 1960s and 1970s continued to be used as a political tool for the government. All of the films that were focused on demoralizing communism and promoting the values of the Korean government made Korean films less appealing to many Korean citizens, especially younger generations. There was no way to connect with the identity of the audience, and these types of politics were focused on a small group. There were a few attempts to regenerate some excitement, such as soft pornography and the melodrama. The reason neither of these held any permanence as an answer to the lack of innovation in Korean film of the time was because they were both too formulaic. Neither option appealed to a significant audience because nothing innovative was being created to excite the audience. The chance of development was temporarily stifled. New genres of the 1980s were able to give a spark to the fire of Korean film and encourage the nation to become deeply involved in the industry. The 1980s saw the introduction of several new film types that revived a diminishing market. Women's films and action film became popular. Additionally, the idea of creating films that made social commentary appealed to many people who felt that their government had controlled the arts for too long and that the censorship had completely removed their ability to depict lived experiences.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-4.

⁸² All information in the above paragraph comes from the same source, unless otherwise noted. *Ibid.*, pp. 145-8.

Once there was an option for artists to utilize their creative spirit, the popularity of Korean film increased.⁸³ While there were more options, especially after the Motion Picture Law was relaxed in 1986, there was again an extreme flooding of the market. Yet this time the market was not only flooded by domestic films, many international films sold in Korea, thereby competing with Koreans for their own audiences and money. Internal and external politics competed against each other for followers for ideological and financial reasons. This competition would become an essential part of the market and the winner would be the one who would be able to find the political ideals that most identified with the audience.⁸⁴

From 1988 to 1991 Korean cinema underwent many huge changes, mainly because of the events occurring on the peninsula. The Olympics were held in Seoul in 1988. With the coming of the summer Olympics comes many things, such as corporate sponsors, new infrastructure, an influx of news media, and the eyes of the rest of the world on every aspect of a society. With the input from numerous cultures, specifically those from the West, Korean film makers found themselves in the awkward place of trying to take advantage of their new ability to voice their opinions while at the same time trying to make the ever-popular Hollywood style and political ideas fit into the Korean mold. International tensions resurfaced when foreign politics entered the Korean space. Veteran directors were not able to keep up with the changes, but the new group, including directors such as Park Chul-Su, Shin Seung-Su, Jang Sun-Woo, and Ha Myung-Jung embraced and took advantage of it. While these directors might not necessarily all function in the same genre or use the same ideology in their approach to expressing their ideas, they all definitely can be considered part of the break from the traditional. They emerged from the same

⁸³ Unless otherwise noted, all information in this paragraph from the same source. Yi Hyo-In, *Korean New Wave: Retrospectives from 1980-1995: The 1st Pusan International Film Festival*, Seoul: The Pusan International Film Festival, 1996.

⁸⁴ All information given above in this paragraph comes from the same source. Lee, *The History*, pp. 274, 250-1.

era and film school and created a new approach to Korean film. This movement lasted until approximately 1992 when a new movement added another element to it.⁸⁵

1992 saw the introduction of large-scale capitalism into Korean film. The politics of film had moved far away from commentary on war to relating strictly to the commercial viability. Many new directors came onto the scene, producing films at comparatively higher rates to those of veteran directors. Backing for films started to come from huge enterprises. Romantic comedies instead of films criticizing the Korean way of life gained popularity. These forces working together increased the market for domestic and international films, as well as creating a video market for people who wanted to watch films from different areas or not necessarily when they came out in theaters.⁸⁶ The ever-increasing presence of Korean film in international markets and festivals would lead to the conclusion that at some point Korea should get to make its own determinations about what films were the best and the most artistic. This conclusion became a reality in the form of a film festival. The result was PIFF in 1996 through the assistance of foreign and domestic film connoisseurs as well as academics. An international festival in Korea was fruitful as its industry was surpassing those in China, Taiwan, and Japan, some commentary from it on the rest of the Asian market would become necessary. PIFF was created with an identity that also had political issues, like its home, South Korea. It thrived because of how much international attention it received, and according to one of its founding directors, Kim Dong Ho, because “[PIFF] invites the best quality films from all over the world”.⁸⁷ How to resolve these two competing forces of promoting Asian films with gaining international recognition has been a struggle that the festival directors have been working on almost since its inception.

⁸⁵ All information in this paragraph, unless otherwise noted, comes from the same source. Yi, *Korean New*.

⁸⁶ All information in this paragraph about this citation comes from the same source. *Ibid*.

⁸⁷ Lalit Rao, "An Interview with Kim Dong Ho," Koreanfilm.org, <http://koreanfilm.org/kimdongho.html>.

As it celebrates its 14th festival in 2009, PIFF was not initially seen as a threat to other festivals focused on Asia; in fact many critics and those involved in the international film community thought the festival would eventually go bankrupt. However its longevity and continually increasing popularity has made it a premier festival. The ability of Korean film makers to continue to impress at other festivals and in international markets drew people to their home to find other undiscovered talent. As the magazine *The Economist* thought, their work was “youthful”⁸⁸ and innovative compared to the action blockbusters that many Western nations were producing. Directors were trying to discover a way to return to aesthetic, creative filmmaking and Korea had the recipe. The festival also created somewhat of a media whirlwind by incorporating films from North Korea in competition in 2003 which was “the first public showing of North Korean films in the South since the peninsula was divided.”⁸⁹ This festival too capitalizes on the international political climate by making commentary on politics, often those in Asia.

It also created the Pusan Promotion Plan (PPP) in 1999 in order to gather Asian film directors together so that those with production companies could easily shop movies they might want to financially back. This gave directors more opportunities to promote their films to wider audiences that might want to support more varied types of political agendas. In 2006 this became a full market known as the Asian Film Market. This was the first time Asian film makers could go to one place and have a very high chance of finding investors. In 2005 PIFF also came up with the idea of the Asian Film Academy (AFA) in order to give students interested in film the opportunity to take short courses with some of the best Asian directors in the world. This furthered PIFF’s goal of promoting Asian film making by molding a new generation

⁸⁸ "New Wave; South Korean Cinema," *The Economist* (2004).

⁸⁹ Mark Russell, "Korea Is United, at a Film Festival," *The International Herald Tribune*, October 10 2003, 1.

influenced directly by Asian directors. Likewise these new filmmakers would have political agendas cultivated from the beginning because of the politicized directors with whom they worked. AFA also builds a strong network and brings this community of directors closer together.⁹⁰ Much of PIFF's success has come from the local government's acceptance of the standard proposed by the directors of the festival who request that the local government keep censorship to an absolute minimum. The government has respected these wishes for the most part and allows art to continue to be shown to the people with little interference. At the same time in 2008, eighty-five European films were shown at the festival, beating the highest number ever by almost 30 films.⁹¹ While PIFF continues to showcase Asian films and art, its popularity is also beginning to attract high-numbers of Western films whose makers see the Korean market as another place to incur profit. If this movement continues it will threaten to saturate the festival and will begin to directly contradict the principles upon which the festival was created.

These festivals are very different in their background. Cannes has come to cater to an inclusive, almost utopia-like vision whereas PIFF has made its objectives and purposes clear in promoting Asian powers when it comes to the film industry. Cannes is older and steeped in historical significance that has crossed borders nationally, regionally, and internationally. PIFF has existed for less than two decades and has only had so many years in order to comment on historical changes in global politics—although it has somewhat begun with the inclusion of North Korean films. Cannes is also the main market for films and investors for the entire world: so many directors want to make sure their films are not only shown at Cannes but also win prizes because the wealthiest of investors attend in hopes of finding the next big project. PIFF has

⁹⁰ Kim Ji-Seok, "World's Most Fanatical Film Festival," *Koreana* 20, no. 3 (2006): 4.

⁹¹ Stuart Kemp, "Pusan Becomes Home of European Expansion," *Hollywood Reporter* 406, no. 29 (2008): 1.

begun to tap into this resource with the creation of the PPP, but is still marketed as the place to find Asian films. All of these differences create different pressures for each festival and for each director who enters his or her films. To please juries at both audiences seems almost impossible as the two festivals seem to have conflicting agendas.

The politics required to make an impact at Cannes versus PIFF both depend on the current political climate. While they both obviously have political agendas that may seem very different, how they actually function for particular films could vary depending on the political climate. The festivals and their backgrounds are important to think about how politics have been used there before, it is equally important to understand and see how contemporary politics affect each festival.

In the next chapter I examine what happens when films are in both festivals and the results at each. Because these films are each perceived to have political meaning, I want to uncover if and how the politics affects their specific reception. These two films also incorporate aspects of national identity, which is one aspect of the politics that is included at these festivals. As Dina Iordanova states, the festivals “are all related to shaping identities...[and] they serve as transcultural mediators...[to give] the perception of the image of a certain ethnic community.”⁹² How do film festival participants reconcile the politics and images they see on the screen? How were certain people able to use their power to influence this?

The Eel is a Japanese film directed by Shohei Imamura⁹³ based on the novel *On Parole* written by Akira Yoshimura. It gave Imamura his second Palme d’Or at Cannes in 1997. While it also received great praise abroad, in Japan and the rest of Asia it was seen as a slow film that

⁹² Dina Iordanova, and Ruby Cheung, "Introduction," In *Film Festival Yearbook 2: Film Festivals and Imagined Communities*, edited by Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung, 1-9, St Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2010, p. 4.

⁹³ Asian names typically list the family name before the given name. In this piece I will follow this rule. For example, Imamura Shohei has the given name of Shohei and the family name of Imamura. The preservation of this form is to keep names in the form in which they are typically expressed.

furthered the Western stereotype that relationships between Asian people are strange and awkward. *Oldboy* is the second film in a South Korean trilogy titled *The Vengeance Trilogy* directed by Park Chan-Wook which won the Grand Prix (2nd place) at Cannes in 2004. While it received high-acclaim from Western critics and recognition from the jury led by President Quentin Tarantino, some South Koreans found it upsetting because of the violence, but others flocked to it, solidifying it as a cult classic. The examination of these two films will show how each festival, through its individual identity, and each film, based on its components, comment on contemporary politics.

Chapter 2: In Competition

By studying these two films, I highlight the complex manifestation of political desire in the festivals, focusing on the different interplays of international politics at the international and the regional levels. Indeed, the fact that one festival has a longer history and is more popular than the other is not what makes these two case studies challenging, but, rather, the interplay of their political ideologies. The two films, *The Eel* and *Oldboy*, highlight how political desires by the filmmakers, festival organizers, jurors, and critics involved in the festival can alter the results. *The Eel* shared the Palme d'Or, the premier prize, in 1997 at Cannes and *Oldboy* won the Grand Prix there, second place, in 2004.⁹⁴ The fact that one festival celebrated and awarded the two films with prizes and another did not is not what makes these two case studies provocative. These two films from Japan and Korea, respectively, succeeded at Cannes, the supposedly “global” festival, but failed at PIFF, the festival that claims to dedicate itself to the promotion of Asian film and their directors. The politics of these films resonated more strongly with the political under and overtones of Cannes and less with the political ideologies that flourished at PIFF.

These two cases of course are not the only instances when a film won at an international festival but did not win at its regional or national festival. As I will show, national identity is one of the most heavily contested aspects of politics at the festivals. National identity plays into the idea that festivals want to comment, in some fashion, on international politics. National identity is integral to film festivals because “festivals that promote political agendas...aim to foster understanding and togetherness between different groups, thus creating a specific kind of

⁹⁴ “Awards 1997,” *Festival*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/1997/awardCompetition.html>. “Awards 2004.” *Festival*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/2004/awardCompetition.html>.

ephemeral 'imagined' community."⁹⁵ Building off of Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined community,⁹⁶ Iordanova asserts that the international festivals strive to bring people from different nations together to create a new, more cultured community. Iordanova reinforces the idea that the politics used at festivals address some international issues and in some cases might try to offer a blueprint for resolution.

The Eel was the earliest film that won a major film at Cannes after PIFF began in 1997. It provides an opportunity to view the differences between what was praised at PIFF and Cannes. In examining *Oldboy*, I explore PIFF approximately ten years after its creation to see continuities throughout its first decade and to see how the politics of the film aided in its win at Cannes. Depending on what each festival was looking for in international and identity politics, these films were viewed differently. Looking at both films in relation to their reception at Cannes gives valuable information into what the festival organizers and majority of voters were emphasizing as far as identity and in turn international politics. While the distribution of awards does not allow insight into any truths, it does provide information on what the particular perception of international politics was in one place versus another.

It is important to understand what was happening at each festival when the two films were chosen. In 1997 when *The Eel* won the Palme d'Or, Cannes celebrated its 50th anniversary.⁹⁷ In addition to this they had just awarded the first Palme d'Or to a woman, giving the perception that it was moving more toward inclusivity of traditionally underrepresented groups. Additionally the director, Imamura Shohei, had already won the Palme d'Or for *The*

⁹⁵ Dina Iordanova, "Mediating Diaspora: Film Festivals and 'Imagined Communities'." In *Film Festival Yearbook 2: Film Festivals and Imagined Communities*, edited by Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung, 12-40, St Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2010, p. 22.

⁹⁶ Benedict Anderson, "Introduction," In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 1-7, London: Verso, 1991.

⁹⁷ Craig, "History," <http://www.cannesguide.com/basics/history/history4.asp>.

Ballad of Narayama in 1983, making him the first Japanese director to win the award twice.⁹⁸ He established himself inside and outside of Japan. As stated before, PIFF was just starting up and just figuring out how its own promotion of Asian identities would mesh with the rest of international politics. The focus was very much on promoting Asian films in the international market, both economically and culturally, yet also gaining popularity internationally which would mean slowly incorporating more non-Asian aspects.

In 2004 *Oldboy* was produced by director Park Chan-wook, well known from the success of his first film in *The Vengeance Trilogy*. While the other two films in the trilogy did not win major awards at international film festivals, they did garner him a popular following in Korea.⁹⁹ At Cannes it seems that he was highly favored by Jury President Quentin Tarantino who had recently directed his own revenge film in *Kill Bill* which came out in 2003 and 2004.¹⁰⁰ However the winner that year of the Palme d'Or was Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* which was a political move by the jury supporting Moore's extremely anti-American President George W. Bush opinion.¹⁰¹ It seems that *Oldboy*, or any other film for that matter, really had no opportunity to win competing against Moore's piece because *Fahrenheit 9/11* appealed to a predominating set of politics among the global audience. At PIFF, one of the major changes since its inception was the Pusan Promotion Plan (PPP) began in 1999 that was designed to increase the likelihood of Asian films finding financial investors. While the introduction of the PPP is definitely a plus for new Asian directors, to some extent those other directors who were no longer in need of financial backing did not need or directly benefit from this service. It might have been a disservice in that the PPP was a result of PIFF's dedication to finding, promoting,

⁹⁸ "Awards 1997," *Festival*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/1997/awardCompetition.html>.

⁹⁹ Ebert, Roger, "Oldboy," [rogerebert.com, http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050324/REVIEWS/50310001/1023](http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050324/REVIEWS/50310001/1023).

¹⁰⁰ Manohla Dargis, "The Violence (and the Seafood) Is More Than Raw," *The New York Times*, March 25 2005.

¹⁰¹ "Awards 2004," *Festival*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/2004/awardCompetition.html>.

and rewarding lesser-known directors. In that aspects the goals of the festival seemed to somewhat change to not only promote Asian films in the international market, but especially to assist those who had no previous influence or record abroad to find somewhere to start. From that perspective Park and *Oldboy* would need no assistance, and not have a chance for a prize.

The judges and organizers of international film festivals do not only appraise art but also create social commentary through awards. As art is a creative medium, the artists often reflect society around them and it is easy for those at the festival to use art to make their own observations as well as social commentary. One way that the festival organizers do attempt to include both aesthetics and commentary is by incorporating all types of artists, directors, actors, writers, etc., in the juries.¹⁰² All of these people can make statements about politics without being politicians. The people of the jury hold significant power over the political commentary projected by the festival.

Because international film festivals are structurally based on nationality,¹⁰³ it is hard to escape the international politics. It is quite easy for the jurors, as discussed above, and the festival organizers to further their political ideas. The festival organizers in turn select each member of the jury and therefore have the ability to know and shape their political spread.¹⁰⁴ The organizers also have great power in what the festival projects.

As each festival has different goals, the politics present will also be different. The organizers strongly influence over what gets projected, as they choose the jurors, and what the span of political sentiment will look like for the entire jury. It seems relatively easy to structure

¹⁰² The juries of Cannes at the 1997 and 2004 festivals will be examined later in this chapter. Using those two years as examples, it is evident of the diversity in profession and nationality of the members of the jury.

¹⁰³ Each film that is entered in the competition is identified by its national category. Likewise each jury member is also identified by nationality. Consult archives from either year discussed here to view this. "Awards 1997", *Festival*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/1997/awardCompetition.html>. "Awards 2004," *Festival*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/2004/awardCompetition.html>.

¹⁰⁴ "Cannes Film Festival Juries," *Cannes – A Festival Virgin's Guid.*, Cinemagine Media Limited, <http://www.cannesguide.com/festival/juries/>.

the majority-wins vote. As we take a closer look at the two films, it is imperative to highlight the politics involved in the actual receptions and perceptions of the film to better understand how film festival can use their influence on the international political scene.

*The Eel*¹⁰⁵

The Eel chronicles the story of a man named Yamashita who reenters society after serving an 8-year prison term for murdering his wife. The film displayed many aspects of human nature that could be used politically to insert social commentary about Japanese people. In the film, Yamashita is very closed off from humankind and builds his strongest relationship with a pet eel. The female lead in the film, Keiko, allows an abusive boyfriend to impregnate her because he is rich. The characters and their reactions to problems allowed some people at the festivals to claim certain stereotypes as typical of Japanese identity. It is not simply the jury and the festival organizers who are able to make political comments, the international press also becomes involved. The combination of these three groups collectively generates ideas about an identity based on this film.

There are some themes in the film that those making political comments at the festival gravitate toward. These would typically be themes that would make a specific community unique; if there was nothing especially new to say then the festival could not have as great an impact. Gaining knowledge about the rest of the world is one of the main propelling factors. The first relates to the title and the pet eel that plays a very important indirect role in the plot as well as the characterization of Yamashita. Yamashita uses the eel as his main source of companionship after he is betrayed by his wife: after humankind has hurt him he can only relate

¹⁰⁵ Imamura Shohei. "The Eel." In *Great Directors*, edited by Eisei Gekijo Co Ltd. Japan: New Yorker Video, 1997. This film is also referred sometimes by other texts by its Japanese name, "Unagi."

to an animal. Those with the power to project identity clench onto this idea and extrapolated it to reflect a negative rigidness in Japanese identity.

The second theme is the depiction of relationships between men and women. All of the male-female relationships in the film are dysfunctional. They all involve abuse, and one actually includes murder. The way those shaping identities at the festival are able to use these relationships are by again extrapolating them to general Japanese tendencies and life. Additionally it relates to the first theme of awkward interpersonal relationships. As Yamashita finds comfort in an eel, he cannot find comfort in a woman. Because all of the relationships in the film are dysfunctional, it is easier to extrapolate the theme. It seems to project the reality of a stereotype regarding Japan. These two themes were the most important upon which festival participants commented. This becomes political when entering the realm of national identity. When observing the different reactions, it is important to remember how the personalities of each festival, as chronicled in Chapter One, may also effect the results.

Oldboy

Oldboy is the second installment in *The Vengeance Trilogy* directed by Pak Chan-wook. While the plots of the three films are not related, the major theme of revenge for a terrible deed by the protagonist recurs in each film. Park says that he wanted to work on this trilogy because he “wanted to deal with social and economic class divisions within South Korea,” and through revenge stories he would be able to do this.¹⁰⁶ He stated that his intentions were to create something for the nation. In several interviews Park explains that he includes so much violence in order to confuse the audience and force them to look at people as neither good or bad nor to show neither sympathy or hate. Essentially he attempts to force the viewers to be confused by their own reaction and ask themselves the key question, which is reiterated several times in

¹⁰⁶ Park as quoted in Esther K Chae, "Park Chanwook," *Bomb* 96 (2006): pp. 86-91.

Oldboy, of “even though a man may not be better than a beast, does he not have the right to live?”¹⁰⁷ This is a deep ethical question that he actually relates to the nation when he states that the film tries to address South Korean problems.

The first installment, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, tells the story of a brother who tries to save the life of his sister by donating an organ on the black market, but in an unfortunate twist he does not have enough money for the actual operation even after securing the organ. In his pain and agony over knowing that he was unable to save his sister, he brutally murders the people who have tricked him on his journey. While *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* did not win any international film festival awards, it did introduce some of the themes present in *Oldboy* and created a popular following the trilogy would enjoy.¹⁰⁸ The third film is *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* which debuted in 2005.¹⁰⁹ It tells the story of a young woman who wants revenge on the child murderer who framed her for murder and separated her from her daughter for many years. Both of these stories surrounding *Oldboy*'s emergence indicate that deep personal stories as well as strong emotions are ingredients for wanting revenge.

And to complete the trilogy there is of course *Oldboy*.¹¹⁰ Although the reception of *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* was mostly positive from critics and film academics, most Korean audiences saw it as so tragic that it could not be taken as a serious cinematic piece; *Oldboy* received completely different domestic and international attention.¹¹¹ Perhaps they were not yet

¹⁰⁷ As quoted in Kim Young-jin, *Park Chan-Wook*, Translated by Colin A. Mouat, Korean Film Directors, Seoul: Seoul Selection, 2007, p. 51. Additionally all information in this paragraph, below the previous footnote, comes from this source as well.

¹⁰⁸ The film referenced above can be found at Park Chan-wook, "Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance," In *The Vengeance Trilogy*, South Korea: Studio Box, 2002.

¹⁰⁹ The film referenced in this paragraph can be found at Park Chan-wook, "Sympathy for Lady Vengeance," In *The Vengeance Trilogy*, South Korea: Panorama, 2005.

¹¹⁰ All references to *Oldboy* come from the same viewing. Park Chan-wook, "Oldboy," In *The Vengeance Trilogy*. South Korea: Starmax, 2004.

¹¹¹ Kim Young-jin, *Park Chan-Wook*, Translated by Colin A. Mouat, Korean Film Directors, Seoul: Seoul Selection, 2007, pp. 44-45.

used to Park's provocative, shocking style of filmmaking. Park describes the change of heart as something that was natural for Korean audiences as they moved through the decades and Korean history. He describes the 1980s as a period of fear for many South Koreans especially politically and the anger from that time period just simmered in the public's opinion, waiting to escape. He did not find that he lived in "a culture where one expresses anger in an aggressive way...and [he] find[s] it stifling". Likewise according to Park other directors have used violence in similar ways for some of the same reasons.¹¹² As Park portrays these feelings as related to the state of the nation, they enter into the national identity discussion.

The story follows Oh Dae-Su as he tries to figure out who imprisoned him for 15 years. After many close attempts at discovering who put him in prison, it is evident that a game is being played. The man fooling Oh finds this revenge a game, as if something is to be won. He often states the ethical question to Oh of "do you seek revenge or do you find the truth?" The path of revenge and anger is also often depicted as never ending while the path to truth can have reconciliation. The national identity politics related to South Korean identity and *Oldboy*, and the entire trilogy, focus on perceptions of the revenge theme. As this is the main theme throughout, as well as the one emphasized by the director, it is easy for festival participants to attach to and use in order to make prolific observations that will comment on international affairs and give the festivals a higher sense of importance.

What the Films Wanted to Show...

The production of a film is not completed by one single actor, director or producer. It is instead a group effort with the final result being a work that incorporates thoughts and suggestions from any number of people. At the same time, there is definitely intentionality to

¹¹² The quote and information concerning Park's thought prior to this footnote come from the same source. Chae, "Park," pp. 86-91.

what is shown and depicted; the difficulty comes in actually saying from whom that intentionality came. The films carry a meaning that can be understood when viewing it from an artistic, cinematographic perspective. There are also interviews and accounts published by the directors that give some insight into their thoughts and opinions of the piece. While these may be biased or altered depending on how the film was received, they are still one way to approach evaluating what was shown and perhaps why.

The Eel was directed by Imamura Shohei, a Japanese director who first made an impact on the international scene when his film *The Ballad of Narayama* won the Palme d'Or in 1983.¹¹³ Even though he did enter the international film community 14 years before the introduction of this film, he was still not well-known. He mostly focused his efforts in Japan, developing his artistic skills at the university level and working under Ozu Yasujiro and Kawashima Yuzo. The main difference between the two was that Ozu presented an "official" Japan that was based in "the world of refinement and composure, of order and decorum, feudalistic organization, and the virtues of self-abnegation and fidelity"¹¹⁴ while Kawashima was a proponent of the "real" Japan that was "in constant flux and motion."¹¹⁵ Imamura was mainly a follower of Kawashima even though he did appreciate the artistic qualities present in Ozu's films from the 1950s. Imamura rebelled against his family life that favored a more traditional idea of the "official" Japan, and instead found that the changes occurring in Japan after WWII pushed him to look at more of what he considered to be the "real" aspects of Japanese life. He did not want to project images of Japan that only depicted tea ceremonies, submissive women, and simple stoic characters; he wanted to direct movies that explored less-agreeable and the

¹¹³ Awards 1983," *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/en/archives/1983/awardCompetition.html>

¹¹⁴ James Quandt, "Pigs, Pimps and Pornographers: A Brief Introduction to the Films of Shohei Imamura," In *Shohei Imamura*, edited by James Quandt, Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 1997, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

down-to-earth side of Japan that may have consisted of anything from extreme naturalism, to abundant aggression, to new temptations.¹¹⁶ Some of these thoughts are reflected in *The Eel* when Yamashita kills his wife, when Keiko's mother wants to essentially sell her daughter to Eiji, and when the fight at the end erupts into a town brawl. Imamura's goal in all of his filmmaking is to present an aspect of Japan and Japanese culture that he sees as the average, everyday experience.¹¹⁷

The main goal of Imamura's filmmaking is to counteract an opinion that he sees as false. He sees the traditional images of Japan as wrong and misleading to people who want to understand the actual Japan in a contemporary sense. In his films he desires to show an image of Japan that stays away from romantic ideals and instead promotes the interactions and relationships of actual complex people. It is especially important to acknowledge that Imamura has crafted his films with the idea of showing his audiences a realistic version of contemporary Japan that will allow all of its intricacies to be exposed. Differences between the rich and poor, the urbanites and suburbanites, and two generations are examples of things that all need to be shown candidly in his opinion. While these are his desires as an artist, the perception of what he produces may not be the same.

In *Oldboy* Park created an engaging piece where the major theme of revenge for a terrible deed was repeated numerous times. Park says that he wanted to work on this trilogy because he "wanted to deal with social and economic class divisions within South Korea," and through revenge stories served as the setting.¹¹⁸ Through the use of his violence he attempts to force the viewers to be confused by their own reaction and ask themselves key ethical questions. Some of

¹¹⁶ Imamura Shohei, "Traditions and Influences," In *Shohei Imamura*, edited by James Quandt, Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 1997, pp. 129-31.

¹¹⁷ Imamura Shohei, "My Approach to Filmmaking," In *Shohei Imamura*, edited by James Quandt, Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 1997, pp. 125-7.

¹¹⁸ Chan-wook as quoted in Chae, "Park".

these can be found in *Oldboy*, for example“even though a man may not be better than a beast, does he not have the right to live?”¹¹⁹ This question touches on a very simple yet complicated human moral question. Throughout the entire series, and specifically *Oldboy*, he emphasizes the differences in classes and status as well as the question of what is deserved. The conclusion of each installment signifies that sometimes even the cruelest violence makes people feel better about their situation. Other times, the cruelest violence does nothing for reconciliation. What his characters come to conclude is that reconciliation and forgiveness is an internal struggle rather than something that can be permanently fixed via external actions.

This film directly speaks to these ideas of forgiveness coming from inside. Two characters were driven to obsession and madness when uncovering their own past. They were angry at others for events that were really their own doing. It may be necessary to release some of the emotion through violence, and Park reaffirms this idea in interviews when he speaks of the need for Korea to experience those feelings as an entire nation, as was previously stated. From their history that was explored in Chapter One, it would not be too difficult to perceive that some Korean people had built up anger. While of course these are only Park’s opinions that he chose to express in an artistic piece, the film was popular in Korea and abroad. Those who were watching identified with some of the revenge material.

Although Park directed this film partly to display to Korean people how to overcome a tragedy and move beyond anger, the mechanism that he chose to do it makes us arrive at this intersection. The film was entered into an international film festival and became not only a platform for Park to try to assist fellow Koreans, through expression of new emotion, but also a place for international festival participants to use to insert their opinions on the situation.

¹¹⁹ As quoted in Kim Young-jin. *Park Chan-Wook*. Translated by Colin A. Mouat, Korean Film Directors. Seoul: Seoul Selection, 2007, p. 51. Additionally all information in this paragraph, unless otherwise noted, comes from this source.

Whether they will agree or disagree with Park, they can use it to make international political statements.

What the Jury Saw...

At Cannes, *The Eel* created a positive buzz about a relatively unknown Japanese film, and it actually won the Palme d'Or, even if it did so in *ex-aequo* (in an equal tie) as it shared the award with *Ta'm E Guilass* directed by Abbas Kiarostami from Iran.¹²⁰ The prize is only shared when the jury cannot come to a joint decision, meaning that in 1997 both films provided a case for being the best at the festival.¹²¹ Additionally in the Cannes archives available on their website, there were no articles or videos posted as to why it won the award or why it had to share the prize. Answers to these questions would be too speculative, but it does give the image that no one from the jury had anything particularly spectacular to say about the film, which is ironic since it won the most important prize. While Imamura wanted to depict a different side of the Japanese character that may not always be emphasized in art and the jury rewarded him for his work, it is not entirely evident that the jury was rewarding what Imamura was attempting to emphasize in a more realistic Japan. There are accounts from critics however that might give a glimpse into what the jury was rewarding based on their own statements and claims about the film—these will be discussed later.

The jury president at Cannes in 1997 was French actress Isabelle Adjani. She was accompanied by three other actors, Paul Auster of the US, Gong Li of China, and Mira Sorvina of the US; four directors, Luc Bondy of France, Tim Burton of the US, Mike Leigh of the UK, and Nanni Moretti of Italy; one author, Michael Ondaatje of Canada; and one artist, Patrick

¹²⁰ "Awards 1997," *Festival*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/1997/awardCompetition.html>.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Dupond of France.¹²² The jury only had one member from East Asia, the prominent Chinese actress Gong. The other nine members were from Western Europe and North America. The feelings that resonated about the film, for it to win, had to have been supported by a good percentage of the Western European and North American jurors. The appeal was cross-cultural and resonated with people beyond the Japanese viewer. In this sense, it succeeded in working for the festival as a political tool. They awarded it the top prize, and in the same moment expressed a positive reaction to Imamura's approach to portraying a specific type of Japan.

The jury at Cannes is important because though a small group of specifically selected people, the results they come to can influence how the entire world views the international film industry. As a symbol they are supposed to represent a microcosm of the world, but the way they are handpicked by the festival organizers does not necessarily allow for this to be true. The organizers can shape a jury in whatever political direction they might wish. This is extremely important to Cannes and the international film industry because it appropriately displays the bias inherent to all juries and reminds us that a film winning an award was not inevitable, but to some degree planned.

The Eel's lack of recognition at PIFF is an indication to certain international politics even in its omission. Imamura has experience at PIFF, therefore he should be familiar with what the festival desires to project on the international political scene. The main hurdle with this film in the festival would have been the fame of Imamura. PIFF is very blatant in their promotion of young directors who have little support. Imamura does not fit into that category, and regardless of whose film was the best, if the films do not continue this PIFF legacy, then they cannot win.

¹²² Even though some of these personalities could be classified under different titles, these were the ones listed in the Cannes archives and what the festival directors identified the jurors as. "Jury 1997," *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/1997/juryLongFilm.html>

PIFF works to uphold its initial idea of moving more Asian films into the international market as opposed to creating more space for those who are already established.

Even more so than *The Eel*, the reception of *Oldboy* at the Cannes film festival rested mainly on the composition of the jury. The President of the Jury was American Quentin Tarantino who had just released *Kill Bill* in 2003 which is actually very similar in terms of theme to *Oldboy* and the entire *Vengeance Trilogy*. *Kill Bill* chronicles a woman's journey for revenge on the man who attempted to murder her. Revenge and justification for extreme violence are just a few of the themes present in both films. It would make sense that Tarantino admired a film similar to one he had recently directed. While he did listen to the rest of the his jury that was composed of one writer, Edwidge Danticat of Haiti and the US; four actors, Emmanuelle Beart of France, Benoit Poelvoorde of Belgium, Tilda Swinton of the UK, and Kathleen Turner of the US; two other directors, Tsui Hark of China and Jerry Schatzberg of the US; and one critic, Peter Von Bagh of Finland, his opinions were obviously very important.¹²³ Again this jury composition only has one representative from East Asia. While the variation of nationalities among a particular jury might not alter their preferences or provide proof for their feelings on politics, it is showing that the festival directors chose this particular line-up. While a background is not the total determiner of what someone might come to be or an absolute predictor of that person's political opinions and beliefs, knowing what country and areas of the world the jury comes from does give an idea at least of what type of society in which most of their beliefs were taught and learned. Again while it is not clear exactly what political views they wanted to incorporate, it is evident that they desired to incorporate politics of a certain area and they achieved that with a mostly North American and Western Europe jury.

¹²³ "Jury 2004." *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/2004/jurylongfilm.html>.

The Palme d'Or in 2004 was awarded to American Michael Moore's *Farhenheit 9/11*, but this move seemed to be more political and historical as opposed to strictly based on cinematographic prowess.¹²⁴ This was a complicated time in world history, especially internationally when many strong nations questioned the Bush Administration and its decisions in relation to September 11th and Wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq. These events pitted certain parts of the world against each other. *Oldboy* was awarded the second prize, the Grand Prix.

At the Jury Press Conference, they convened to explain why some of the choices about winners and losers were made. The questions and comments focused on Moore's political stance and how that impacted their decision. Swinton from the United Kingdom commented on Moore's piece that "one of the reasons it is radical in its politics is because of its relation to the media. It starts and ends with a question. It is sophisticated cinema. It wouldn't have served its political end if it wasn't a good piece of filmmaking."¹²⁵ The politics surrounding the film definitely had to be addressed, even if Swinton said that regardless of politics, it was still a creatively well-done piece of art. But to contradict Swinton's stance and assert that politics played a large role, Poelvoorde from Belgium stated that at some level "the Festival is very politically correct; on the other hand, it is hard to not be."¹²⁶ One of the reasons Poelvoorde might question if it's even possible not to be politically correct is because of the festival's history of commenting on political events especially through the awards. The festival's history is full of so many instances of the jury and attendees acting based on political views that it has become difficult to not make political statements even when none is intended. The only person to comment on *Oldboy* however was Tarantino who said that it competed well with *Fahrenheit*

¹²⁴ "Awards 2004," *Festival*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/2004/awardCompetition.html>.

¹²⁵ "La Conference de presse du jury," *Festival de Cannes*, Translated by Courtney Jamison, <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/fr/article/41716.html>.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

9/11 to win the top prize but simply did not win the vote; no further explanation was given. The emphasis placed on Michael Moore and his piece seems to show that, while the film may have also been a quality piece of art, the jury just chose a different film to take the top prize and be the potential political statement. It also had enough cinematic value, according to Swinton, to make a case for it being a piece of art as well.¹²⁷

When seeing the political importance of Michael Moore's film, the question arises of did any other film even have a chance to win? Anti-Communism, the French-Algerian War, and the student revolts of the 1960s were all events that had a presence at Cannes, both directly through discussion and press releases but also indirectly through films that won prizes and were entered in the competition. There is space for various types of political expression. They cannot completely remove the political aspects of the festival that have played an important role for so long. Even though it did not take the top, most politically influential prize, *Oldboy* still fit nicely into the politics of international film festivals by providing a piece of art that also supposedly projected something about a nation. The film contained both identity politics and aesthetic value.

At PIFF the politics focus more on promoting new Asian directors as opposed to the general international community. Because it was created to promote Asian directors, the emphasis is more on providing new opportunities. *Oldboy* was screened in the category of "Korean Panorama" which made it very difficult for it to win any prizes. The main prizes at PIFF are awarded to films screened in the "New Currents" section, "Korean Cinema Today," or that are documentaries.¹²⁸ These are especially reserved for directors who need a bit more publicity and clout before becoming very well known in the international film industry. *Oldboy*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ "Pusan International Film Festival." Pusan International Film Festival, <http://www.piff.org/eng/html/archive/>.

was inherently at a disadvantage. No indication from the festival directors suggests as to why it was chosen for this particular category, but because of where it was placed essentially diminished any chance of a win. In this aspect both *The Eel* and *Oldboy*, because they did not have new directors, were less desirable to PIFF organizers as films that would be in contention for winning an award.

*What the Critics Thought...*¹²⁹

While the critics are not in charge of awarding prizes, they are still festival participants that can affect the way an international political statement is made. Their writings and evaluations of the films, as well as how the festival progressed, are an aspect of how the perception reaches the public. As was mentioned in Chapter One, the international media is part of the reason the festivals have such a broad reach, so it would make sense the media also make their own interpretations. Their commentary can directly affect how the public receives the political statements made by the festival through their awards.

As far as critical response to *The Eel* is concerned, most of the claims tend to run the same, but with a few variations. Almost everyone concurs that the plot is interesting enough, although there are some unnecessary subplots that do not add to the overall quality of the story or progression of the film. They also point to the fact that the personalities of the characters are deeply explored and examined in different situations so their true nature can be seen. This gives the impression that the film is very deep and thorough of the reality that it portrays. There were however a few outliers who had very specific comments about the movie.

¹²⁹ Because of the author's lack of knowledge of any Asian languages and the lack of funding resources to hire a translator, all sources in this section will be from English-based texts. While the author is aware that this creates an inherent bias in the research, there were not many other options. The author has still tried to present a fair equitable view in her research.

Many non-Japanese critics commenting on *The Eel* seem to at least concur on the idea that what Imamura has presented is an interesting take and a change of pace from many Japanese films available for international audiences in the 1990s. Most saw the characters, especially Yamashita and Keiko, as very complicated and they also appreciated the developments in the film that displayed the range of their personalities. The fact that this film was “removed from the mainstream cinema” was appealing to some in that it showed the expanding nature of what the international film market could recognize.¹³⁰ The serenity of the film was appealing too because it was “calm and quiet” while still providing a “dark and warm and silent” mood that was powerful to audiences.¹³¹ Those at *New Yorker Films* found the film to be “quirky, slightly offbeat, and [a] thoroughly unique take on the clash between ancient Japanese mores and modern-day madness.”¹³² In this case the battle between the “official” and “real” Japan that Imamura tried to express through his film making did have an impact on those viewing it. Some however, of course, saw things differently. A French critic, Michel Ciment, comments in an article in *The Independent* on the selection of *The Eel* for the Palme d’Or at Cannes as just “very average”. He also emphasized that much more emphasis was placed on the stars and the 50th anniversary that year as opposed to the actual films.¹³³ Additionally Jeremiah Kipp of the American Movie Classics corporation found the film to have “too many distracting subplots which somehow feel gauche and overcooked...[making] the central arc only [get] lost in the shuffle”. He also thought that “the humor [was] too broad and [was] forced” in the plot.¹³⁴ Each

¹³⁰ Anonymous, "Eel with Cherries Anyone?" *The Economist* 343, no. 8018 (1997): 81-2.

¹³¹ David Kehr, "The Eel," *Film Comment* 34, no. 5 (1998): 76.

¹³² Sasha Berman, "The Eel," New York: New Yorker Films, 1997.

¹³³ Quoted in "The Eel and the Cherry Share the Palm in Cannes," *The Independent*, May 19 1997. As stated before, the 50th anniversary of Cannes was in 1997 and much of the press coverage followed those who were being honored for lifetime achievements and impact in the film industry as opposed to specific films.

¹³⁴ Jeremiah Kipp, "The Eel," American Movie Classics Company LLC, <http://www.filmcritic.com/misc/emporium.nsf/reviews/The-Eel>.

of these critics saw the film, and tended to focus on aesthetic merit. However, the *New Yorker Films* did pick up on a change in the portrayal of Japan that Imamura was supposedly trying to create. For those who were able to grasp his attempt to include some politics about Japan, the film became political. But for those who missed that point, saw it as only a piece of art.

These viewpoints of the film are very important for an analysis of how the critics receive the films because they shed light into how the international viewer perceives this Japanese film. One British writer went so far as to describe the two winners as both “exotic” films that were preferred because of jury president Isabelle Adjani’s “defiant stance against English-language [films].”¹³⁵ This basically indicates that neither film was worthy of the award. The non-Japanese take of the film seems to be split among those who find the unique qualities in the film appealing and those who do not.

On the other hand, the Japanese critics seemed relatively surprised that the film was received so warmly and with critical acclaim. In an article from *The Daily Yomiuri* Aaron Gerow chronicles the story of *The Eel* and then goes on to compare this work to earlier pieces by Imamura. While he acknowledges the character development and ambiance created in the film, he also states that the focus on these points is “so old-fashioned” and “looks quite out of place in the nineties.”¹³⁶ As common with other writers writing in Japan, Gerow appreciates the intense focus on characters and showing the darker side of the human psyche, but he feels that Japan has moved beyond this to something new. He seems to feel that there is more variety in Japanese film today that was not utilized here by Imamura; they no longer have to feel boxed into a mold where character development is all that can be explored. Gerow does not think the film would be appealing to many new film goers nor does he see its composition as strong as some of

¹³⁵ Anonymous. "Eel," pp. 81-2.

¹³⁶ Aaron Gerow, "'The Eel' -- a Slippery Slide into Sentimentality," *The Daily Yomiuri*, 22 May 1997, 9.

Imamura's previous films. These other films reached their height of popularity earlier in the 1970s and 1980s when it was very in style to incorporate dark characters and questioned human actions.¹³⁷ While some were less impressed with *The Eel* than other Imamura films, Japanese audiences were still impressed and enamored with Imamura himself. For these reasons he was still regarded as a hero of the Japanese film industry and as an important person to learn from. Even though people gave a lukewarm reception to *The Eel*, there were people who, especially those in the film industry, were "immediately gripped by an outpouring of joy [over its success at Cannes]: It was as if the hometown baseball team had won the World Series."¹³⁸ His heroism still attracted the Japanese public to the film even if the film itself was not as powerful to them. Even though the public was surprised and may not have expected much from this Imamura film that they might have viewed as mediocre, they still reacted positively to the award because they were happy for their countrymen's continued recognition. The impressions of *The Eel* in Japan may not have been as shining as some of those from the non-Japanese perspective; however they were still very respectful of the man who directed the film because of his importance in the film industry and his importance in spreading Japanese culture around the world.

Much of the critical response to *Oldboy* in non-Korean newspapers and periodicals revolved around the shock scenes: the octopus eating, the tongue-eating, etc. However many Asian, Korean included, commentators chose to write about completely different things including the complicated plot, the different ways to view confusing characters, and interestingly enough the reactions of people to the grotesque images and violent scenes in the film. The Asian critics' focus on non-Asian critiques displays how the Asian audiences are concerned with the perceptions around the world.

¹³⁷ "Imamura Shohei," *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/en/archives/artist/id/2720.html>.

¹³⁸ Rob Schwartz, "Behind the Scenes Is Where He Preferred to Be," *The Japan Times*, June 8 2006.

A piece of information before examining the different responses from critics is the rise of Korean cinema all over the world, especially in Hollywood in the late 1990s which would be just before the release of *Oldboy* in 2004. Korean film gained much ground in funding and popularity in Asia, and was brought to Hollywood for American companies to capitalize on through remakes and borrowed cinematographic techniques. Hollywood “embraced” the Korean film industry by using some of their film scripts and casting their stars in leading roles.¹³⁹ The Korean film industry was a rising force in Hollywood and in the American film industry when *Oldboy* was released.

The non-Asian opinions of *Oldboy* consist of confusion between intrigue and disgust all in one viewing. The film has been described as “[having] a madly mesmeric appeal” by Mark Kermode who also illustrates it as a “theatrical Greek tragedy, [with] modern screen violence and wince-inducing mistreatment of teeth and tongues...[as the] Nietzschean anti-hero confronts the monstrous truth” and also as “weirdly haunting.”¹⁴⁰ One side of the coin is complete fascination and engrossment while the other is scared. At the end Kermode dodges giving his own opinion by saying that it “reconfirms South Korea as the new home of adventurously unpredictable extreme cinema.”¹⁴¹ Likewise Irv Slifkin of *Video Business* says that it “oozes with nihilism and scenes of unsettling violence” but will gain a “healthy cult following...from fan boys and converts alike.”¹⁴² The tone suggests that he appreciates what the film has done and enjoys the violence, but does not see it appealing to mass audiences or those well in-tune with the artistic side of contemporary cinema. One writer describes as anything but usual when he says that it is “a breath of fresh air to anyone gasping on the fumes of too many traditional

¹³⁹ Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop, "Korea Take Hollywood," *Newsweek International* 154, no. 20 (2009).

¹⁴⁰ Mark Kermode, "Troubled Waters" *New Statesman* 133, no. 4710 (2004).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Irv Slifkin, "Oldboy," *Video Business* (June 27, 2005): 21.

Hollywood thrillers.”¹⁴³ Those non-Asians that were not completely fascinated with the violence include Roger Ebert who did still appreciate the film but “not because of what it depicts, but because of the depths of the human heart which it strips bare.”¹⁴⁴ This is a very powerful statement that posits Park’s ability to provide an appealing scene and also plot and not so much any sort of national identity. However, Park makes these traits about the heart about national identity when he relates it directly to South Korean history and identity, as was discussed earlier. He also contextualizes the importance of some of the grotesque images, specifically the consumption of the raw octopus: “living seafood is indeed consumed as a delicacy in Asia...[and] he wants to eat the life, not the food, because he has been buried in death for 15 years.”¹⁴⁵ Ebert makes a point indicating that the non-Asian perspective might not allow for complete understanding of the Asian mentality and also that Park added elements not just for shock value but actual meaning. Disagreeing completely with Ebert was Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* who found troubling that *Oldboy* received critical praise.

The fact that *Oldboy* is embraced by some cinephiles is symptomatic of a bankrupt, reductive postmodernism: one that promotes a spurious aesthetic relativism (it’s all good) and finds its crudest expression in the hermetically sealed world of fan boys. (At this point, it’s perhaps worth pointing out that the head of the jury at Cannes [in 2004] was none other than Quentin Tarantino.) In this world, aesthetic and moral judgments—much less philosophical and political inquiries—are rejected in favor of a vague taxonomy of cool that principally involves ever more florid spectacles of violence.¹⁴⁶

Dargis here seems disgusted that a film with no real meaning, in her opinion relating to philosophy or politics, is so praised. She says it is a reflection of the lack of quality cinema available, but her opinion only takes the violence for face value. As some other critics have said,

¹⁴³ James Berardinelli, "Oldboy," reelviews.net, <http://www.reelviews.net/movies/o/oldboy.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Roger Ebert, "Oldboy," rogerebert.com, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050324/REVIEWS/50310001/1023>.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Manohla Dargis, "The Violence (and the Seafood) Is More Than Raw," *The New York Times*, March 25 2005.

as well as the director himself, more is to be made of it. From the non-Asian opinions, there were some who enjoyed the film and others who did not, as to be expected. Their main focus however was the use of violence, action, and “shock” scenes. Except for a few mentions here and there, cinematic quality and aesthetic appeal was not praised.

The Asian perspective on *Oldboy* seems to be relatively popular. The entire trilogy has gained a huge following in Korea. While the following is mostly among young men as the non-Asian critics claimed that was the audience the film would appeal to, it has made such an impact that this type of thriller has emerged as a leading genre in Korean film. In approximately one year in movie theaters it generated almost three-quarters of a million dollars in Korea and almost fifteen million dollars world-wide.¹⁴⁷ Additionally Korean critics noted the popularity of the Japanese story, as *Oldboy* was originally a Japanese comic, in Korean pop culture. The young Koreans are “attracted to Japanese dramas because of their unique storylines and variety of genres.”¹⁴⁸ *Oldboy* certainly contains a rare storyline in an innovative, revived genre. These new stories are exciting and grabbing at large audiences. They also provide Korean filmmaking with new notoriety even if the techniques are borrowed from Japan. Additionally if they contain as much action and excitement as *Oldboy*, they will be sure to come with consumer value that inherently implants the images and themes in the minds of the public for longer—encouraging the prolonged appreciation and following of a certain type of film.

After examining these two films and what those involved with them tried to create versus what the juries rewarded versus what the critics saw creates the question of who is influencing whom and what is the real use and manipulation of international politics by each party? My comparison suggests that each body can influence part of the perception of a certain political or

¹⁴⁷ "Oldboy (2005)." IMBD.com, <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=oldboy.htm>.

¹⁴⁸ Cathy Rose A. Garcia, "Japanese Dramas Charm Korea." *The Korea Times*, November 15 2007.

identity issue, but ultimately combined is where they make an overall impact that reaches an international audience.

The use of identity at the international film festivals falls neatly into line with their use of politics. Part of politics on the international level deals with identity and what the different political bounds are that might alter or dictate that. Because of each festival's prestige and size, they are both able to take these films and given a chance to "promote their [cause] in the public sphere, be it the thriving national cinema or a foreign nation, the struggle for self-determination of a deprived stateless group, or the idea of cultivating a shared supranational identity by interacting in the diaspora."¹⁴⁹ Whatever a festival wants to promote, it can. And in these cases if promoting identity was the desire, as long as all of the groups working to cultivate the message came to the same conclusion then it usually worked. As Iordanova states, "often the people behind the festivals are political activists or have a specific agenda...[and] the events are strongly dependent on the personality of their programmers."¹⁵⁰ They have the freedom to mold the festival in an image that seems fit to them. Through the examination of the way the festivals use their power of selection to promote their political ideas and how certain films can fit into the mold, it is now evident why the festival organizers choose to validate their institutions by making it about politics. The politics gives the festivals much more influence and a reason for being. However as we can see from the perspective of the critics, the decisions rendered by the festivals on certain films do not necessarily appeal to everyone. Although the use of politics in festivals may turn some people off, they are still necessary to ensure the continuity of the festivals.

¹⁴⁹ Iordanova, "Mediating," p. 17.

¹⁵⁰ Iordanova, "Introduction," p. 6.

Conclusions: The Credits

One subset of politics present at international film festivals is that relating to national identity. As examined by the two films, the conclusions drawn by the festival participants may vary. However the overall conclusion drawn by the festival based on awards are quickly projected everywhere because of the media attention. One implication of this rapid movement is that these “[labels] indicate a stage of collective identity-development.”¹⁵¹ In this manner the festivals reward one specific identity in a film, but it becomes extrapolated to relate to a larger group of collective people. As Martin Spencer describes in his article about fluctuating identities of ethnic groups in America, there will be a tension “between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’.”¹⁵² The festivals create tension when a political move of theirs projects a new label for a particular society. When this occurs the issue shifts to an international political level that is a result of the festival but resolved on a broader stage.

As was discussed in the Introduction, art and politics can coexist harmoniously. Indeed in film, politics play an important role. The different aspects of politics’ presence in film were demonstrated through the examination of the two films in Chapter Two. As evidenced by their varied experiences at the two festivals, the presence of politics is not limited to the art but even extends to the perception of art. Each festival has its own history of political intercession and contribution that has fostered a unique identity. This festival identity and the politics present in the film combine to make political commentary. Although much of the action taking place at the festivals as well as in the films is overlooked, the politics are often the main thing absorbed beyond the international film festival audience.

¹⁵¹ Martin E. Spencer, "Multiculturalism, "Political Correctness," And the Politics of Identity," *Sociological Forum* 9, no. 4 (1994): p. 557.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

Those who organize film festivals want to incorporate politics in their agendas because they give the festival great recognition beyond the film industry. In this aspect the festivals need politics to remain important. To garner funding from private and public sources, they must be beneficial in a grander way than to just the film community; international politics is that way. The best and easiest way for the film festivals to comment on international politics is through the films that win awards and the important people who partake in them. According to Brian Johnson “a social conscience is one accessory no celebrity can afford to be without” at the festivals.¹⁵³ The history of the festivals dictates that no celebrity can come with only the intention of enjoying film. The social and political issues must be addressed as well. Johnson states that “global compassion is as vital as hair and makeup” for the celebrities in attendance.¹⁵⁴ Everyone in attendance wants to capitalize on the atmosphere to make statements about international issues at the international festival.

The atmosphere is created, as Lucy Mazdon states, by the festivals as a “media event that stretches way beyond its geographical boundaries...to take place on a thoroughly international stage.”¹⁵⁵ The festivals can stretch to different areas of the world because of their huge media following. The media following comes from the attendees of the festivals. Those who attend festivals range from actors, writers, directors, producers, politicians, musicians, and anyone else invested in the film industry. “The media quotient is high” in order to attract public international interest as these stars have a great following.¹⁵⁶ Many of these figures are famous and are followed by paparazzi. Because they are followed, they bring the paparazzi with them to the festivals. While the photographers document what the stars are doing, they are also documenting

¹⁵³ Brian D. Johnson, "Cannes with a Cause," *Maclean's* 120, no. 21 (2007): p. 55.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Lucy Mazdon, "Transnational 'French' Cinema: The Cannes Film Festival," *Modern & Contemporary France* 15, no. 1 (2007): p. 10.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Corliss, "Cannes Turns 60," *Time International (South Pacific Edition)*, no. 21 (2007): p. 55.

the action at the film festivals. In this light, any celebrity attending a large international film festival is advertising for them with their fame.

At Cannes for example, part of what attracts the media and what makes it a venue for propagating politics to the rest of the world revolves around the celebrities that attend: “Media coverage about Cannes tells us as much about the glamorous parties, the luxury hotels and the leisure activities of the participants as it does about the films.”¹⁵⁷ The media attention helps to draw international attention to all of the politics involved with the festival, with which the celebrities assist. The photographers can snap a shot of “the cream of world directors in formal dress entering the Grand Palais” which will attract a crowd because of the stardom but will actually showcase the presence of international politics to that crowd as well.¹⁵⁸ Writer Richard Corliss asks a poignant question related to the ability of celebrities to promote a film: “A global warming documentary may be seen by few, but if its producer is Leonardo DiCaprio, journalists will turn up in droves seeking an audience.”¹⁵⁹ The celebrities who thrive on the luxury and glamour of the festivals actually assist in promoting the political ideologies as well.

There are some celebrities who capitalize on their ability to attract media attention and use it to promote an important idea to them extremely well, as previously stated. Often this idea relates to international politics and the international film festival space is a worthwhile space in which to express these ideas. They can capitalize on the media that will follow their every move and not only allow the festival to make social and political commentary, but they too will step forward and express their own opinions. In 2008 for example Sean Penn, president of the jury, discussed concerns with the United States democratic presidential candidate Senator Barack

¹⁵⁷ Mazdon, “Transnational,” p. 17.

¹⁵⁸ Corliss, “Cannes,” p. 55.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Obama at the festival.¹⁶⁰ He used this stage to make a political point and because of the festival and its media following the point was gobbled up by the international media and sent all over the world.

Politics will remain an aspect of the festivals because the very necessity of what the festival needs to survive would be jeopardized without it. Politics makes the festivals relatable to people all over the world, not just those who are interested in cinematography. International affairs and politics transcend other divisive topics and make the festivals relevant for a broader audience. Likewise the politics bring the celebrities; it is at these festivals that they have the opportunity to establish themselves as smart, concerned people. With the celebrities comes the international media attention. The media attention attracts the concern of the government. At this point the festivals have gained the attention on a local, national, and international level advertising not only film or politics or celebrity but an institution where all three together can have a powerful voice. Any missing part of this recipe would eliminate the legitimacy of festivals as places to make an impact through political statements. If the festivals removed the political aspect, they would simply be a display of artistic prowess and accomplishment as opposed to what they actually are today: an institution where the combination of art, celebrity, and media combine to influence international politics.

¹⁶⁰ Singh, Anita. "Sean Penn Warns Barack Obama at Cannes Film Festival Opening." *The Telegraph*, 14 May 2008.

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