



2 Film festivals in Asia

Notes on history, geography, and power from a distance

Julian Stringer

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The history of film festivals is inseparable from the geography of film festivals. When critics and historians seek to understand how and why festivals were first established, as well as how and why the number of all manner of events has proliferated so dramatically in recent years, it is necessary that they also consider where festivals have (or have not) been set up and where they have (or have not) flourished. The spatial dimension of analysis complements the temporal dimension. Each constitutes the other's shadow.

Despite the fact that geographical analysis potentially provides one of the key approaches to film festival studies, this method remains to date relatively underdeveloped.¹ However, there are indications that this situation may be in the process of changing as new scholarly endeavors are brought to maturity. For example, the important *Film Festival Yearbook* series published by St Andrews Film Studies has already devoted volumes to East Asia (Iordanova and Cheung 2011) and to the Middle East (Iordanova and Van de Peer 2014), while the first volume in Palgrave Macmillan's equally important Framing Film Festivals book series is given over to Africa (Dovey 2015). It is to be hoped that similar future publications will chart this terrain in ever-greater depth and detail while also extending the focus to other regions of the world.

What does a geographical approach contribute to the scholarly understanding of film festivals? The entwining of an examination of space (geography) with time (history) is significant for a number of reasons. First, apprehending the spatial characteristics of any festival provides a potent means of grasping its relevance to social practices: in other words, because space is always socially produced as well as continuously situated, each and every individual event is embedded in historically specific social relationships.² Second, developing this methodology allows researchers to identify geographically meaningful patterns among festival locations on all continents across time.³ Third, and inescapably related to this endeavor, it also illuminates the extent to which groupings of festivals constitute a global circuit or network of interrelated phenomena (Stringer 2001; Iordanova and Rhyne 2009). Finally, pursuing geographically-oriented research opens up the question of similarities and differences among diverse events, especially as these relate to the comparative workings of power—a vital issue which inevitably



1 arises once any historical or contemporary aspect of festivals is subject to the
2 slightest degree of analytical scrutiny.⁴

3 These last two points—that festivals constitute a network of interlinked
4 junctures and that power relations unavoidably flow between and underpin
5 its constituent parts—are especially worth pursuing in the context of the
6 present chapter. Some scholars have questioned whether a film festival circuit
7 really exists, asking if it is helpful to conceptualize such a sprawling collection
8 of seemingly random and disparate events in relation to one another
9 (Iordanova and Rhyne 2009). Yet as I argue below, there is at the very
10 minimum at least one perfectly good reason for claiming that a circuit does
11 indeed exist, and, moreover, that its underlying power structure may be
12 revealed by historical examination of its spatial characteristics. The fact I am
13 referring to is a key datum that has nevertheless been frequently and upset-
14 tingly overlooked by the scholarly literature.

15 In order to establish the terms of the analysis that follows, two further
16 assertions are worth highlighting at this point. One, it is necessary to under-
17 line the core observation that the film festival is originally a European phe-
18 nomenon; it is a creature of the Europe region that then went global. This is
19 one of the key arguments made by Marijke de Valck in her pioneering mon-
20 ograph *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*. In De
21 Valck's words:

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23 Film festivals started as a European phenomenon. The first festival was
24 organised on New Year's Day 1898 in Monaco. Other festivals followed
25 in Torino, Milan, and Palermo (Italy), Hamburg (Germany) and Prague
26 (Czechoslovakia). The first prize-winning festival was an Italian movie
27 contest in 1907, organised by the Lumiere brothers [...]. *La Mostra Inter-*
28 *nazionale d'Arte Cinematographico* [Venice] was the first film festival to be
29 organised on a regular basis [...]. The immediate post-Second World
30 War period offered Europe its first festival boom. Film festivals were a
31 purely European phenomenon during this period and more and more
32 countries decide to follow the example of Venice and Cannes, and found
33 their own festivals. Events were organised in Locarno (1946), Karlovy
34 Vary (1946), Edinburgh (1946), Brussels (1947), Berlin (1951), and
35 Oberhausen (1954), among other places. Like the first festival in Venice,
36 these festivals were all established for a combination of economic, polit-
37 ical, and cultural reasons.

38 (2007: 47, 49)

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40 Two, a further and complementary position is that in more recent years it is
41 the Asia region that has emerged as especially important to the continual
42 advancement of the film festival.⁵ In terms of both festivals and associated film
43 industries, Asia constitutes the new vanguard; more exactly, as Dina
44 Iordanova (2011: 1) puts it, “[t]he most exciting developments in world
45 cinema over the past two decades are linked to East Asian countries such as



China, Japan and South Korea.” According to this reading, the significance of well-established European events like those staged annually in Venice, Cannes, and Berlin has shifted relative to the growth of newer festivals hosted each year in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Busan, and other East Asian locations.⁶

This chapter unravels an ongoing and paradoxical geopolitical arrangement concerning the rise of major international film festivals (as well as smaller events of all tiers of scale) in East Asia and other parts of the region. It does so by advancing a dual engagement with the issues of space and time identified above. On the one hand, the account offered below presents a brief overview of the historical importance and growing contemporary significance of the abundance of festivals now operative in this particular part of the world. On the other hand, it identifies continuities in Europe’s arguably secure position as the long-term locus of global festival power.

Film festivals in Asia

The history—or more properly, the histories—of film festivals in Asia has—or rather have—yet to be written. While a few specialist accounts are available and more work is currently being prepared, there has to date been little sustained examination of this important area of activity.⁷ However, when more detailed studies do start to appear, and in greater number, they will doubtless help to drive home a fundamental point—namely, that there is no one or singular “Asia.” Rather, there are multiple versions of Asia, and hence, various ways of comprehending and narrating the establishment and growth across decades of a large number of different kinds of festivals in this area.⁸ By the same token, future studies will need to grapple, too, with the full complexity of the crisscrossing historical and geographical trajectories that characterize and define the range of occurrences under discussion.

English-language academic research has focused in the main on three stages in the historical development of multiple kinds of festivals in Asia. First, from the mid-1950s a pan-Asian event, the Southeast Asian Film Festival—the oldest continuous film festival in Asia—fulfilled the important function of introducing Asian audiences and filmmakers to other Asian movies while building fresh business connections among industry leaders in several countries (Yau 2003; Lee 2012, 2014; Baskett 2014).⁹ Second, the decades from the 1970s to the 1990s witnessed the establishment of a series of flagship events in distinct parts of East Asia, including Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Busan.¹⁰ Third, recent years have brought the beginnings of a reconfiguration of festivals along the Southeast Asia axis, for example with the setting up of the Singapore International Film Festival and the Bangkok International Film Festival, alongside continued growth and vibrancy in East Asia.¹¹ Of particular significance in the latter regard are prolonged activities in the People’s Republic of China, especially the unceasing attempt by government authorities to push the recently established Beijing International Film Festival, a

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1 resource-rich “late adopter” (Strandgaard Pedersen and Mazza 2011) founded
2 in 2011, as a prestige event of global standing.

3 The dominant narrative that emerges from the various but still relatively few
4 published accounts of festivals in Asia currently available is of regional
5 cooperation coexisting with competitiveness inside a cauldron of geopolitical pres-
6 sures. In these terms, early initiatives such as the Cold War-era Southeast Asian
7 Film Festival, while notably reluctant to draw distinctions between the constitu-
8 ent parts of the region, nevertheless served only an ad hoc union of nations com-
9 prising a small number of “friendly” clients allied to the United States. By
10 contrast, the rise at the end of the twentieth century of major East Asian events
11 like Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Busan was stimulated by (among other complex
12 factors) ambitious city branding priorities on the part of ostensibly autonomous
13 local governments (Stringer 2001; Ooi and Strandgaard Pedersen 2010). More-
14 over, a further shift in the dynamic relations among Asia’s myriad festivals is
15 being driven at the present time both by enhanced prospects for ASEAN
16 (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) members such as Thailand and Malaysia
17 and the powerful global force of China’s spectacular economic growth.

18 The nascent literature on Asia generated by film festival studies encompasses
19 numerous dimensions of these interlinked phenomena. For example, scholarly
20 accounts demonstrate the role of city economies and infrastructures (Vogel
21 2012), port city settings (Lee and Stringer 2012a), and inter-city rivalries (Ahn
22 2012). (Just as the Hong Kong International Film Festival provided a model for
23 the Busan International Film Festival, the Beijing International Film Festival
24 appears keen to outstrip the achievements and profile of the Shanghai Inter-
25 national Film Festival.) Then, too, other commentaries pay attention to the dis-
26 crete networks, or counter-networks, that have grown up for particular forms of
27 cinema, including documentary (Nornes 2009), animation (Kinoshita 2012), and
28 gay, lesbian, and queer filmmaking (Kim 2007). Researchers have also discussed
29 connections with other forms of identity politics (Kim 2005 [1998]), meditated
30 on the representation of various Asian cinemas on festival screens (Zhang 2002;
31 Stringer 2005, 2011 [2002]; Wu 2007; Gerow 2013) and tracked the fortunes of
32 individual companies at domestic and overseas events (Sun 2015).

33 It is also necessary to be aware of the variety of events that make up the
34 totality of film festivals in Asia. Aside from the numerous major international
35 showcases already mentioned, these include mid-size celebrations of non-
36 corporate cinema (Seoul Independent Film Festival), long-established plat-
37 forms for short films (Image Forum Festival, based in Tokyo), television
38 festivals (Shanghai TV Festival), women’s film festivals (the Women Make
39 Waves Film Festival, based in Taipei), and so on.¹² All of these, as well as an
40 abundance of other kinds of audiovisual jamborees not listed here, will surely
41 have their parts to play in future assessments of activities in the vast swathes of
42 the Earth that comprise “Asia” broadly defined.

43 In navigating the numerous outputs that constitute this emerging body of
44 research, it is helpful to ponder a subtle distinction in critical terminology. Some
45 writers talk about “Asian film festivals”—a phrase that seemingly emphasizes the



cultural commonality, or “Asian-ness,” of the specific events in question. Against this, though, may be posited use of the simple pragmatic term “film festivals in Asia.” (This is obviously the wording adopted in the present chapter.)¹³ What are the benefits of this latter mode of expression? To begin with, it emphasizes the centrality of geography to any relevant inquiry. In addition, by refusing to ascribe a collective pan-continental identity to the region’s varied events, the notion of “film festivals in Asia” avoids smoothing over the (often highly significant) dissimilarities between them. Indeed, it reiterates instead the fundamental point that there is no one or singular regional unit; by contrast, “Asia” is a highly contingent term whose shifting meanings are subject to the divergent historical and cultural relations that various societies have to this imaginary entity. Use of this particular form of words similarly paves the way for other forms of spatial mapping, for example considerations of the local, the trans-local, the trans-regional and the trans-urban, joined with intellectual approaches to “media capital” (Curtin 2007), or the core location criteria underpinning the growth of specific production, distribution and exhibition centers. In short, the analytical descriptor “film festivals in Asia” carries several advantages. It assists in the battle against essentialist thinking while facilitating research methods that more fully account for the region’s historically complex, multilayered, and ever-shifting festival dynamics.

The term “film festivals in Asia” carries one further benefit as the basis for an historical and geographical analysis of regional events of all tiers of scale. Unlike the phrase “Asian film festivals,” which suggests a harmonious bloc of cognate happenings, it potentially introduces into these relationships suggestive notes of disjuncture and difference (Appadurai 1990). To put it another way, it more readily suggests the existence of power dynamics among the complex crisscrossing trajectories that characterize and define the range of the continent’s festivals. Events in diverse locations in Asia are linked to one another by coexisting and asymmetrical relationships of cooperation and competition, via shifting variables such as relative size and status as well as the ability (or inability) to attract and retain valuable resources like investment and sponsorship. For all of these reasons regional circuits of interrelated phenomena can be said to exist in Asia even if their ad hoc natures makes them difficult to perceive let alone identify.

Nevertheless, and regardless of which critical terminology is ultimately used, it is important to also grasp a more tangible way in which power dynamics shape and penetrate the film festival phenomenon in Asia (and elsewhere). This entails a very different form of spatial mapping. Let us therefore now turn to this highly suggestive yet frequently overlooked aspect of the international film festival circuit.

Power from a distance

While the summary outlined above shows that numerous methods exist for investigating conditions of force and influence among film festivals in Asia,

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1 the remainder of this chapter spotlights a more hidden side of the topic. This
2 perspective only comes into view when issues of history and geography are
3 placed in a fresh geopolitical context. Once revealed, though, it drives home
4 the argument that a global circuit or network of interrelated events does
5 indeed exist.

6 Groupings of festivals in Asia—and, by extension, in all other parts of the
7 world—constitute linked phenomena because the continent’s events dwell in
8 the orbit of an organizing core. For instance, some secure sizeable com-
9 petitive advantage by trumpeting their “official” status. Others, such as “unof-
10 ficial” public exhibitions in China (Nakajima 2006), build identities as
11 subterranean alternatives to these formally sanctioned showcases. What and
12 where is this focused center? And who gets to bless some festivals while side-
13 lining others?

14 The International Federation of Film Producers Associations, or Fédération
15 Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films (FIAPF), was
16 founded in France in 1933 as, among other functions, the regulatory body for
17 film festivals worldwide. This is a key role it has retained ever since. The
18 organization’s purpose is explained in the mission statement available on its
19 website (FIAPF 2015):

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21 FIAPF’s members are 35 producer organizations from 30 countries on
22 five continents, FIAPF is the only organization of film and television
23 producers with a global reach. FIAPF’s mandate is to represent the eco-
24 nomic, legal and regulatory interests which film and TV production
25 industries in five continents have in common. [...] FIAPF is also a regu-
26 lator of international film festivals, including some of the world’s most
27 significant ones. FIAPF International Film Festivals Regulations are a
28 trust contract between the film business and the festivals who depend on
29 their cooperation for their prestige and economic impact.¹⁴

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31 FIAPF’s role as a regulator of international film festivals is to facilitate the
32 job of the producers, sales agents and distributors in the management of
33 their relationships with the festivals [...]. Accredited festivals are expected
34 to implement quality and reliability standards that meet industry expecta-
35 tions [...]. FIAPF’s role is also to support some festivals’ efforts in achiev-
36 ing higher standards over time, despite economic or programming
37 challenges which often stem from a combination of unfavourable geo-
38 political location, budgets, and a difficult place in the annual festivals’ cal-
39 endar. This is particularly relevant in the context of the unequal levels of
40 resources and opportunities between film festivals in the Southern and
41 Northern hemispheres.¹⁵

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43 As Dina Iordanova (2009: 27) perceptively notes, FIAPF constitutes the “only
44 clearly articulated attempt to ‘network’ festivals officially according to certain
45 criteria.”¹⁶ These principles encompass, most pertinently, the organization’s



notorious global accreditation system, whereby all manner of events are divvied up into four separate categories: Competitive Feature Film Festivals (also known as the “A-list”), Competitive Specialized Feature Film Festivals (also known as the “B-list”), Non-Competitive Feature Film Festivals, and Documentary and Short Film Festivals. Events that fail to secure, or do not care to pursue, accreditation status are obliged to function without FIAPF’s assistance. While for some festivals not being involved with FIAPF is certainly an option—as the cases of the Hong Kong International Film Festival and the Sundance Film Festival, to cite just two, readily attest—such an arrangement also carries potential downsides. For the weight of FIAPF’s international gravitas and clout is such that any event that does not participate (for whatever reason) in its accreditation process runs the risk of being perceived as a maverick outsider. More specifically, it will be shut out from accessing “the flow of quality cinema” that ostensibly marks the “special position within the assigned regions” (Iordanova 2009: 28) enjoyed by those festivals that do work closely with the organization.

Festivals in Asia in a position to play the FIAPF game can expect to benefit in numerous ways. They are cushioned by the sanction of official status and granted formal visibility on the global festival map. This in turn can result in enhanced branding and other commercial opportunities. In particular, monetary and symbolic values attach like limpets to FIAPF’s “A” and “B” lists, and these may form influential pull factors in the scramble among rival events to secure precious (and ever more mobile) transnational investments. The prestige that accompanies ratification by FIAPF depends, in part, upon adherence to the organization’s assorted rules: these stipulate, for example, just how many premieres and other kinds of films must be shown at such-and-such a category of event. By these and other means, FIAPF-friendly festivals are in a position to cherry-pick (albeit competitively between themselves) the most sought-after new titles of world cinema while non-accredited events have to make do as best they can.

Against this, capitulation to FIAPF inevitably leads to an individual festival relinquishing a measure of control over its own destiny. Power is deferred elsewhere. Moreover, while the effects of FIAPF’s accreditation system have spread far and wide, critics note its ongoing idiosyncrasies. For instance, the decree that at any point in time only one festival from a given nation can be included in the “A-list” spurs events to vie with each other for this coveted status.¹⁷ The logic of distinguishing between events in the “A-list” and “B-list” categories has also been questioned. Such a seemingly arbitrary way of cordoning off comparable festivals has

raised eyebrows because it places smaller and less established events such as Shanghai in the same league as Cannes and Venice, among the 12 festivals in the first category. The second category, or “competitive specialised” section, endorses 26 film festivals, including the Pusan

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1 International Film Festival, which is widely regarded as Asia's most
2 influential film festival and more prestigious than Shanghai.

3 (Shackleton 2007)

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5 In line with virtually all of FIAPF's actions, the exact justification for such a
6 precise ordering of particular events is seldom given public airing.¹⁸

7 In short, FIAPF ranks individual events on the international film festival
8 circuit, distributes rare resources, controls prestige, and consolidates the sense
9 of an interlinked global festival network. For all of these reasons it must be
10 deemed a significant force in the organization of film festivals in Asia. Like
11 some outsize butterfly-effect, FIAPF's daily exertions generate magnified
12 repercussions on the other side of the world. It touches events of all tiers of
13 scale—even those that want nothing to do with it can scarcely avoid the
14 sweep of its structuring influence. Yet despite this, critics and historians
15 appear to know next to nothing about how the organization itself actually
16 functions. Based on the available evidence, it seems to be a self-appointed
17 cabal staffed by shadowy figures charged with mysterious portfolios. There is
18 no reason to suppose that this state of affairs is likely to alter anytime soon.

19 It is in these terms that power from a distance operates upon film festivals
20 in Asia (and elsewhere). FIAPF's singular capabilities extend both across space
21 (from its geographical roots outside the continent) and time (from the secure
22 international profile it has managed to maintain for an impressive eight
23 decades). If the film festival is indeed a European phenomenon, a creature of
24 the region that then went global, it is not just because the first events were
25 founded in Europe. It is also because the economies and cultural politics of
26 festivals in all parts of the world have always had to contend with the simple
27 fact of FIAPF's existence. Moreover, while the dominant narrative that
28 emerges from published accounts of festivals in Asia is of regional competition
29 coexisting with competitiveness, one of the hands that stokes the cauldron of
30 geopolitical pressures within which all of this takes place belongs to FIAPF.
31 The organization represents the most visible power structure in the festival
32 world. Attending to its influence can thus only enhance comprehension of
33 the complex relationship between global and local power dynamics in festival
34 histories and geographies.

35 The festivals and associated film industries of China, Japan, and South
36 Korea may today be in the vanguard of world cinema. Prospects may be
37 looking up for events located in ASEAN countries as well as other hitherto
38 less active parts of the continent. But the unchanging paradox is that for all
39 manner of festivals in Asia important business continues to germinate thou-
40 sands of miles away, behind closed doors, from inside a certain address: the
41 International Federation of Film Producers Associations, 9, rue de l'Échelle,
42 75001 Paris, France.

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Conclusion

This chapter has sought to offer a brief narrative of the historical importance and growing contemporary significance of film festivals in Asia. At the same time, it has pointed to a habitually neglected trait of the globalized festival circuit—namely, the power and influence wielded on it and through it by a spectral organization of uncertain characteristics.

The preceding case study’s relevance to the historical understanding of film festivals more generally is twofold. On the one hand, many events in Asia embody distinct identities and unique stories. Their innovations, in conjunction with the continent’s continuing economic strength and China’s high ambitions for its media industries, are likely to drive the festival circuit for years to come. On the other hand, the fact that festivals in Asia have to deal with FIAPF’s regime of global power is indicative of experiences shared the world over by untold numbers of (otherwise very dissimilar) kinds of events. FIAPF may be based outside a particular region, but it will typically play a strong hand on activities in that region all the same.

At the same time, it is important to observe that scholarship on this topic would benefit from increased knowledge and understanding. Nuances of thought deserve to be developed. For example, for how much should FIAPF’s long-standing pedigree and pivotal role in the global organization of festivals count when set against the growing consequence of the other interrelations—cultural, economic, geographical, historical, and political—that also impact upon circuits, or counter-circuits, of festivals in Asia? FIAPF is symptomatic of how power relationships constrain festivals and exercise a systemic authority on otherwise disparate events. Yet in today’s digital and increasingly interconnected world, new forces and synergies may well rise to challenge FIAPF’s authority.

In addition, heady questions can be asked about how FIAPF’s status as regulator of international festivals relates to its core business as an organization of film and television producers. To be sure, when it comes to the latter area of activity the fundamental Eurocentrism of the FIAPF enterprise is self-evident: of the 15 accredited A-list festivals, nine are based in Europe. But FIAPF simultaneously appears to be exerting a declining influence on the world’s associated movie industries. Consider in this respect the fact that while half of FIAPF’s member nations are European, half are not. Furthermore, that among the countries listed in 2013 by UNESCO as the most productive filmmaking nations are several (including South Korea, the United Kingdom, Italy, and France) that do not belong to the international trade group that ostensibly promotes their industries.¹⁹ Such figures provide tantalizing glimpses into the true complexities of the trade and traffic in cinema internationally, but they remain glimpses all the same. A substantial geographical analysis of the history of film festivals in Asia, and in the entirety of the world for that matter, cannot be told until a more precise cartography of FIAPF’s connections to specific industries, as well as its presence in particular countries and continents, is mapped much more fully than it has been to date.

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1 In conclusion, culturally- and historically-specific geographical analysis of
2 spatial dynamics will always reveal something of interest and importance
3 about the international film festival circuit. More than that, it will always
4 reveal a power relationship. Unravelling the true diversity and impact of these
5 conditions of force and influence among film festivals in Asia is a daunting
6 but exciting challenge for the future. To undertake it will require the com-
7 bined talents and efforts of a dedicated cadre of researchers toiling away on
8 multiple fronts. This task will hopefully be achieved once a sufficient cohort
9 of scholars is able and willing to undertake the endeavor.

11 Acknowledgments

12 Thank you to Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist for gener-
13 ous feedback on an earlier draft of this chapter.

16 Notes

- 17
- 18 1 For examples of existing studies, see Stringer (2001), Harbord (2002: 59–75),
19 Falicov (2010), Ooi and Strandgaard Pedersen (2010), Bissell (2012), Lee and
20 Stringer (2012a), and Gutiérrez and Wagenberg (2013). At the time of writing, no
21 researcher has attempted to produce a substantial geographical analysis of the
22 history of film festivals: in these terms, the field has yet to be mapped. On the
23 other hand, many accounts of the establishment and growth of individual events
24 do exist and these often provide useful information on the reasons why a new
25 initiative was established in this or that particular destination. Indicative examples
26 of such work include Smith (1999) and Corliss and Darke (2007).
- 27 2 Besides geography and history, a third especially important aspect of film festival
28 culture is the role of human agency, or people, organized into business practices.
29 As well as providing one of the few attempts to produce a historical chronology of
30 festivals, De Valck (2007), along with Elsaesser (2005), proposes a valuable model
31 of actor-network-theory. Word constraints prevent a people-centered and
32 business-oriented perspective from being pursued here. However, recent forays in
33 this direction may be found in Rhyne (2009), Loist (2011), Fischer (2013) and
34 Stringer (forthcoming).
- 35 3 Film Festival Studies may benefit greatly from extended consideration of the
36 “spatial turn” in geography, history, and other academic disciplines (see, *inter alia*,
37 Lefebvre 1991 [1974]; Soja 1989; Davis 1992 [1990]). Although not directly con-
38 cerned with festivals, two recent collections (Rhodes and Gorfinkel 2011; Hallam
39 and Roberts 2013) provide stimulating analyses of various aspects of location and
40 the moving image.
- 41 4 This is to say that the film festival is inherently political. Scratch the surface of any
42 of its geographical or historical dimensions and you will always find a power
43 relationship.
- 44 5 Due to lack of space, I put to one side here consideration of the definition of the
45 concepts of “Asia” and “Asian cinema.” For relevant discussions of these topics,
see, among other sources, Berry et al. (2009) and Eleftheriotis and Needham
(2006); see also note 8 (below). The Udine Far East Film Festival, held annually in
Udine, Italy, is one of the most important annual showcases of what it terms
“popular Asian cinema.” Its programming philosophy and rationale is analyzed by
Lee and Stringer (2012b).



44 J. Stringer

- 6 The Venice Film Festival was founded in 1932, the Cannes film festival in 1946, and the Berlin International Film Festival in 1951; the Hong Kong International Film Festival was founded in 1977, the Shanghai International Film Festival in 1993, and the Pusan International Film Festival in 1996. The latter changed its name to the Busan International Film Festival in 2011. 1
- 7 Bibliographies of key readings have been assembled by Fischer (2011) and by Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist’s Film Festival Research Network (2015). A new collection of writings on the burgeoning number of Chinese film festivals, edited by Chris Berry and Luke Robinson, is forthcoming. 2
- 8 This truism also applies of course to other regions of the world such as Europe and the Middle East. For an indication of the inevitable brevity and tentativeness—given word constraints—of the treatment offered in this chapter, consult the definition of “Asia” offered by the *Collins English Dictionary*: 3
- n the largest of the continents, bordering on the Arctic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, the India Ocean, and the Mediterranean and Red Seas in the west. It includes the large peninsulas of Asia Minor, India, Arabia, and Indochina and the island groups of Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka; contains the mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush, Himalayas, Pamirs, Tian, Shan, Urals, and Caucasus, the great plateaus of India, Iran, and Tibet, vast plains and deserts, and the valleys of many large rivers, including the Mekong, Irrawaddy, Indus, Ganges, Tigris, and Euphrates. 4
- For references to scholarly work on festivals based in the continent of Asia but outside the vital centers of East Asia, consult Fischer (2011) and the Film Festival Research Network (2015). 5
- 9 As Yau explains (2003: 279, 290), this event was established in 1954 under the title of the Southeast Asian Film Festival; it was then renamed the Asian Film Festival in 1957 and subsequently as the Asia-Pacific Film Festival. Forty-seven editions were held between 1954 and 2002. 6
- 10 The Tokyo International Film Festival was established in 1985. On the Hong Kong event, see Wong (2011); on Busan, see Ahn (2012). 7
- 11 On the Singapore International Film Festival, established in 1987, see Chan and Chua (2011); on the Bangkok International Film Festival, established in 2003, see Kong (2009). 8
- 12 The dates of the founding of these respective events are Seoul Independent Film Festival (1975), Image Forum Festival (1986), Shanghai TV Festival (1986), the Women Make Waves Film Festival (1993). 9
- 13 The discussion that follows is adapted from Lee and Stringer’s (2013) analysis of “film noir in Asia.” 10
- 14 Cf. Welcome note of the FIAPF website, www.fiapf.org/default.asp (accessed August 28, 2015). 11
- 15 Cf. “International Film Festivals” page on the FIAPF website, www.fiapf.org/intfilmfestivals.asp (accessed August 28, 2015). 12
- 16 See also Ma (2012). 13
- 17 This situation goes some way to explaining the nature of the Beijing International Film Festival’s current relationship with the Shanghai International Film Festival. As the latter is classified under the Competitive Feature Film rubric, nominally putting it on equal terms with Berlin, Cannes and Venice, the former gives every impression of striving to usurp its position. 14
- 18 For a sense of the intensely political nature of all of this—as well as some indication of the correspondingly high stakes involved—consider one of the rare public statements, uttered in 2007, by then-FIAPF president Andres Vicente Gomez (who was succeeded in the role in 2009 by Luis Alberto Scaella), in defense of the organization’s decision to include Shanghai in its first category (quoted by Shackleton 2007): 15



1 Considering on one hand that piracy in China is still a very critical concern for
2 the film industry, and on the other hand, the current access market restriction
3 for foreign movies, FIAPF strongly believes in the role of the Shanghai
4 International Film Festival. This event is one of the rare legitimate windows to
5 offer and to promote a large selection of foreign movies to a numerous local
6 audience with optimum screening conditions.

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Further reading

Many of the key works on film festivals in Asia are listed in the References. As already indicated, more complete bibliographies have been compiled by Fischer (2011) and by the Film Festival Research Network (2015). Students wishing to keep up to date with relevant developments on the festival circuit are recommended to consult the excellent website *Film Business Asia* (www.filmbiz.asia). To date no history of FIAPF has been published. Indeed, its internal workings remain a complete mystery.

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