

# The Busan International Film Festival in Crisis or, What Should a Film Festival Be?

Darae Kim, Dina Iordanova, and Chris Berry

The Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) was launched in 1996 in the shipbuilding center of Busan, South Korea's second largest city, with an ambitious first edition that screened 169 films from 31 countries.<sup>1</sup> In a short period of time, Busan (originally Pusan) grew into a focal point of international attention and a destination of choice for the new filmmaking then beginning to thrive across the Asian continent. A number of articles and even a monograph were published about it.<sup>2</sup> For the past decade or so, the festival screened some 300 films from over 70 countries every year and continued to consolidate its reputation as the largest and most respected film festival in Asia.<sup>3</sup>

BIFF's nineteenth edition was held in October 2014 and screened 312 films from 79 countries to 226,473 audience members.<sup>4</sup> Despite such outward signs of success and continued growth, the festival is now undergoing a crisis that is threatening its future, on the eve of its twentieth anniversary.

Are such difficulties specific to Busan, or do they indicate a more general trend that results from new configurations in the public space of cinema and new managerial approaches to culture at large? This dossier combines a report on the Busan International Film Festival crisis with larger questions regarding film festivals. Three short essays consider the Busan festival situation from different perspectives, followed by a conversational exchange that aims to spur further thinking.

## Part I: Should a Film Festival be Virtuous?

**Darae Kim**

The BIFF crisis began with the documentary *The Truth Shall Not Sink with Sewol* (다이빙벨, Lee Sang-ho and Ahn Hae-ryong, 2014), detailing what were believed to be incompetent rescue efforts related to the South Korean ferry disaster of early 2014—a tragic accident in which more than 300 people, mostly high school students, lost their lives.<sup>5</sup> Or perhaps it began when BIFF selected the film to be screened in

its Documentary Showcase section. Or perhaps, even more precisely, it began when BIFF refused the request by Seo Byeong-soo, mayor of the host city, to remove the film from its lineup. While the film's inclusion did not initially cause much fuss, by the time the festival opened, both screenings of the film had sold out and there was a great deal of attention being paid to it by both the media and the public.<sup>6</sup>

*The Truth Shall Not Sink with Sewol* had caused a stir even before it premiered at BIFF.<sup>7</sup> The subject matter was highly contentious: the casualty numbers in themselves were appalling, but the emotional effect that the sinking of the *Sewol* had, and continues to have, on South Korea is immense. Even disregarding the causes for the sinking of the ferry, the disaster was one bungle after another. It was briefly reported that most of the passengers, and all of the students, were rescued, and further “inconsistent and inaccurate announcements” from the authorities followed.<sup>8</sup> These reports were published by the majority of South Korean media without much effort to check for accuracy.<sup>9</sup> The highly criticized rescue efforts proved to be almost completely futile. The passengers were repeatedly told to stay inside the sinking ship, which proved fatal for the majority of them.<sup>10</sup> Public rage deepened as video recordings from recovered phones showed the grim reality inside the ferry: students waiting patiently for the rescue that never came.<sup>11</sup>

Given the highly polarized political situation in South Korea, it is understandable that the documentary would provoke extreme reactions.<sup>12</sup> It is also important to note that the Korean title of the film translates literally as *Diving Bell*. A diving bell was the piece of equipment that served as a focus of civilian efforts during the attempted rescue, in contrast to any efforts made by the government or with its approval. The metaphor featured quite heavily in the media.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the very title of the film was sufficiently suggestive that it was guaranteed to trigger a strong reaction.

The attention paid to the film and the festival's refusal of the mayor's request led various cineastes, including Bong Joon-ho, director of *The Host* (괴물, 2006), to criticize the attempted suppression.<sup>14</sup> Yet, despite increased scrutiny by Korean and international media and some unrest surrounding

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The impressive architecture of the Busan Cinema Center



the actual screening of the film, the nineteenth edition of the BIFF wrapped up, seemingly without further impact.

However, the repercussions were far from over. Soon after the festival closed, the festival was hit with two audits, one by the Busan Metropolitan City and one by the Board of Audit and Inspection (BAI).<sup>15</sup> The motivations were seen as “dubious” by some, despite claims by the BAI that it had been scheduled since the start of 2014.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the Busan Metropolitan City provides major funding to the festival.<sup>17</sup> Rather than allow the festival adequate time to process its audit results and make any required improvements, the Busan Metropolitan City instead distributed a press release that identified areas they considered problematic and asked BIFF Director Lee Yong-kwan to step down.<sup>18</sup> The festival’s response was to deny “the city’s claims about mismanagement.” Lee refused to resign, calling it “an absurd situation” and stating that he had “no intention of quitting and will continue to prepare for the festival’s twentieth anniversary.”<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, Lee did step down from his position as acting president of the Busan Cinema Center, BIFF’s main venue, a position he had accepted only half a year earlier.<sup>20</sup> This action was followed by a joint statement issued by South Korea’s twelve film industry groups, including the Korean Film Producers’ Association, who were resolutely critical of the stance that the local authorities had taken.<sup>21</sup> On February 9, 2015, BIFF held a public hearing in Busan, followed by a press conference on February 11. On February 13, a task force of seventy organizations in the film industry publicly deplored the situation, a move that marked the first time in ten years that the South Korean film industry had taken a collective action of this scale.<sup>22</sup>

The situation continued to escalate. International encouragement poured in. Thierry Frémaux, director of the Cannes Film Festival, and Alberto Barbera, director of the Venice

Film Festival, sent statements of support, as did numerous distinguished international filmmakers, including Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Tsai Ming Liang, and the Makhmalbaf family.<sup>23</sup> On March 10, when BIFF held another public hearing in Seoul, Lee revealed that he would be effectively “stepping down from [his] post as executive director. A new face, whom Busan City and the film community can agree upon, will take over the position.”<sup>24</sup> The change in directorship was scheduled to take place following the twentieth edition of the festival. At this writing, the festival was reportedly still being audited by the BAI and no appointment of a new director acceptable to the authorities had been announced as of the end of April 2015.<sup>25</sup>

With Lee preparing to resign amidst protest, the question arises: what should a film festival be? At this moment in time, it seems that BIFF is trying to hold the high moral ground in the face of adversity. But I wonder: is it the role of a film festival to be morally upright? Indeed, such a question may sound like I am pondering the Socratic query of how one should live. Indeed, I find myself asking repeatedly, “What is a film festival’s duty?” or “How can a film festival be good?” It seems to me that this is not only a question of morality. When it comes to film festivals, thoughts inevitably include such ethical considerations as duty, obligation, and virtue. But should a film festival be virtuous?

## Part II: Who Owns a Festival?

### *Dina Iordanova*

On February 26, 2015, I posted an alarmed commentary, “Is the Busan IFF to Self-Destroy?” to an online listserve that is a global forum for academics interested in the study of film festivals to alert the academic community to an unfolding crisis.<sup>26</sup>



**BIFF jury badges and paraphernalia**

A few years earlier, in the context of a project that scrutinized Asia's film festival landscape, I had rated the Busan festival very favorably, even above the Hong Kong International Film Festival (Asia's oldest festival, dating back to 1977).<sup>27</sup> In my view, Busan had gained a competitive advantage both because it had a better budgetary provision and because it had been launched at an opportune political moment, just as Hong Kong was plunged into a period of political insecurity leading up to the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from the UK to China. BIFF's smart moves included the decision to brand itself early on as "a window for Asian cinema" rather than as a national showcase.

Under the politically skilled leadership of vision-driven former diplomat Kim Dong-ho, the festival had entered the spotlight in a particularly decisive manner, courting international journalists and securing high-profile media coverage. It was efficiently run, with impeccable PR. The festival also benefited from political stability: with a significant percentage of its funding in the form of a secure government grant, it was a festival that enjoyed a privileged position precisely because it could "avoid entering into complex budgetary arrangements with sporadic funders and sponsors who may not be committed over the long term."<sup>28</sup>

Well, just a few years later, I need to revisit this last claim. In view of recent developments—interference in programming decisions, excessive financial scrutiny, and pressure on the festival's leadership—I find myself wondering if the secure government grant is such a blessing. And how about the festival's attempts to respond in a virtuous manner to what comes across as a straightforward hardline style that seems better suited to the military?

In 2014, I accepted an invitation to serve on the festival's jury for its *New Currents* competition.<sup>29</sup> Such an involvement would allow me to observe the insider aspects of the festival operation, but little did I know then that my place on the jury would also allow me to witness a crucial turn in

BIFF's fate as well. Serving on the jury of a film festival is an honor that may appear glamorous but in fact, behind the scenes, jurying is usually exhausting and tedious. One trades the freedom to roam the festival for a commitment to watching films, out of duty, that are often not those one would have chosen; in exchange, jurors gain a privileged vantage point from which to see aspects of a festival's operation invisible to outsiders.

I had no reason to anticipate any controversy when I landed at Seoul's Incheon airport on the morning of October 2, 2014, but puzzling signs appeared immediately. In a limousine en route to the domestic airport for my flight to Busan, I browsed Korean English-language newspapers but did not find the expected article on the festive preparations in Busan, nor anything to celebrate the fact that films from half of the world's countries were to be showcased at BIFF. Neither was there any mention of filmmakers from around the globe gathering for the event.

Instead, the only article focused on a disputed domestic documentary, *Diving Bell*, that the festival had opted to screen. I found this curious (if not worrisome) at the time. Why? Because an international film festival is a major cultural event and thus a media event as well. During Cannes, for example, all major French and international media cover the festival on a daily basis; it is the same in Germany during the Berlinale and in Canada during TIFF, the Toronto film festival. However, in October 2014, Asia's major international film festival was taking place in Busan, and South Korea's English-language newspapers barely acknowledged the fact.

Later, during morning perusals of Korea's English-language press, I could not help but observe, with growing concern, that the festival appeared to be nearly nonexistent in the media landscape. The limited coverage focused on the excessively revealing décolletage of some Korean actresses, or, again, on discussions of this single documentary about the ferry's sinking and its two scheduled screenings.

On October 3, 2014, jurors attended a press conference moderated by Lee Yong-kwan, the festival's director (and, subsequently, victim of the controversy). Various questions were asked of all jury members, yet only Bong Joon-ho's measured and reserved response to a question about the documentary was reported. Further, the reporting was carried out in an exaggerated and bombastic style. The writer for the *Hollywood Reporter*, for example, declared that Bong had "condemned" the political interference in the festival's affairs. Later, after *Diving Bell* had been screened, all reports were again focused on this one film—and on the involvement of a well-organized paramilitary group that had displayed an



Lee Yong-kwan, BIFF's director, during the October 3, 2014 press conference

obviously orchestrated rage over the film and was used to stand in for public opinion at large.

It was as if nothing else in the festival mattered. Two incompatible narratives of the festival were taking shape and existed side by side: one, according to which nothing besides a single documentary was of importance at BIFF, and another (this writer's), which still regarded the festival as Asia's utmost celebration of global cinematic art. Alas, this second narrative never made its way into the public coverage of the festival. Some festival stakeholders—the sponsoring authorities who claimed to speak on behalf of audiences—had taken over the public space completely.

In order to understand the specifics of a festival, one needs to analyze the unique configuration of its stakeholders, from funders and patrons to participants and audiences, and to investigate how the play of power among them is constituted and enacted in the time and space of the festival and beyond. Only then can one properly understand how a film festival structures and narrates itself. Such an examination includes

scrutinizing a festival's "hardware" (venues, hub), "software" (films, programming, sidebars), and the "interface" of its components (the coverage, the parties) and only then analyzing how a festival inscribes itself into the context of its locality and insinuates itself into the global galaxy of other festivals.

Thus, on returning home I kept asking myself, "Who owns a festival?" BIFF's hardware owners (the city, which provides the bulk of the festival's budget as well as having funded the construction of the magnificent Busan Film Center, which opened in 2011) apparently felt that this financial stake entitled them to control not only the software but also the entire interface.

### **Part III: BIFF and the Ethics—or Politics—of Film Festivals under Neoliberalism**

*Chris Berry*

Darae Kim is right that the *Diving Bell* incident at last year's Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) must reopen

the question of what a film festival should be. When the mayor demanded that the festival cancel the screening of the documentary about the highly politicized issue of how the sinking of a ferry with the loss of many lives was handled—or mishandled—by the right-wing president, censorship and political interference loomed. And when the director of the festival, Lee Yong-kwan, was pressed to resign after refusing to cooperate, BIFF's credibility as an autonomous event and indeed the entire future of Asia's most important film festival seemed to be thrown into doubt. At this writing, it seems that the festival, as an autonomous institution, has stood behind director Lee and that he will preside over the festival's twentieth edition in fall 2016.

Although I am delighted that BIFF has resisted pressure from the Busan mayor, I am also saddened by these events, because I thought the very establishment of BIFF was a sign that South Korea had moved beyond authoritarianism. Although I have not been to BIFF recently, I went often in the early days, when Busan was still Pusan and BIFF was PIFF. Launching PIFF in 1996 was the crowning achievement of a public film culture that participated in the struggle during the 1980s and early 1990s to transform South Korea from an authoritarian top-down culture of control into a democratic and open society.

In those days, PIFF was a very popular and publicly accessible event focused on the old movie theatres clustered in the downtown area. It had not yet moved to the upscale resort of Haeundae, built its own dedicated cinema center, or introduced a highly complex system of accreditation and exclusivity. In the version of the history that I heard, government and business interests had attempted to establish international film festivals in South Korea before, but had been unable to guarantee that films would be free of censorship, so the local South Korean film world had refused to cooperate until Pusan agreed to those terms.

Thus BIFF indeed embodies a model of the film festival as public space, and of film culture as allied with a struggle for open and uncensored culture. It is this vision that appears to be threatened by current developments. Perhaps the mayor has decided that the city has moved on from the original hands-off agreement? Perhaps vulnerability to this kind of interference is the price for the relocation to Haeundae, with a much larger budget and higher dependence on city and corporate funding? Is this struggle over the future of BIFF also a struggle over what a festival should be under conditions of neoliberalism? Has an old model of a democratic public space provided by government with tax money given way to a discourse whereby the primary role of government is to reduce taxes and support the corporate world, accompanied



The arched gates of BIFF welcome global film audiences

by an unacknowledged practice of increased government repression? If so, what is happening in Busan has relevance not only for South Korean film culture but also for film culture globally, where film festivals all over the world have been transformed by the dynamics of neoliberalism.

Clearly I do have an idea of what I believe a film festival should be: to me, it is a political issue. To understand why a certain model of the film festival takes hold, and how to maintain or challenge it, it is necessary to focus on precisely those issues of power and interest upon which ethics seems to foreclose. Only then can a certain kind of film festival model be instated and defended. After all, film festivals do not have a particularly ethical pedigree. This might be a good moment to remember that film festivals were not launched to promote cinema culture as one of public participation. When fascist

dictator Benito Mussolini sponsored the world's first international film festival in Venice, Italy, in 1932, I doubt he had ethics in mind. Rather, his aim was to use film to promote himself and fascism at home and abroad. Berlin was funded as a showcase for the Western powers in the Cold War, and Karlovy Vary was the Soviet empire's response.

Even when it was not political interests spurring on film festivals, other kinds of vested interests have often driven film festival culture forward. Why are there so many more film festivals in Europe than in the United States? One reason is their link to the model of cinema as art promoted by European film industries as a counter to Hollywood's entertainment model. Why does the commercial film industry get behind an event like Cannes or the new Beijing International Film Festival? The red carpet moment promises huge publicity benefits for them.

Why do cities like Busan decide to invest in film festivals? One reason is to brand the city. Outside South Korea, very few people had ever heard of Busan before the film festival. If they knew anything about it, it was as a grim and grimy port city, not as a cultural center. BIFF changed all that and helped the city diversify its economic base at the same time.

It is impossible to harvest a soft-power or city-brand benefit unless people are going to the films and reading about the festival in the media. And this is where the question of audience comes into the picture. The mandate for funding festivals as a public service—along with social services, health care, education, and so on—has faded, while festivals like BIFF have grown under these conditions by harnessing business and state support in the name of promoting local industry.

Some people rush to film festivals because they hope to see their favorite star in the flesh. I do not really care if there are any stars in attendance. Yes, I want to see new films and especially films that I cannot see in the commercial cinemas. But I also want to see a space opened up for discussion of those films and for their participation in the wider public culture. The determination of young cinephiles in Europe produced a space for this kind of culture in Cannes, Berlin, and elsewhere post-1968, and the same aspirations were part of what shaped BIFF and what it stands for.

Regardless of whether *Diving Bell* was a "good" documentary or not, Lee Yong-kwan's determination to screen it, come what may, was a clear sign of BIFF's ongoing commitment to the idea of what a film festival should be, despite all the changes since its inception. The uproar online and in the South Korean press that followed the actions against Lee indicates that the South Korean public also continues to be committed to a strong public culture of openness and debate.

If it is indeed true, as Dina Iordanova and Darae Kim suggest, that the bulk of funding for the festival comes from the city, then this underscores the importance of understanding stakeholder interest and power, and the importance of diversifying funding sources if independence is to be maintained. Furthermore, the dramatic quality of the *Diving Bell* incident at BIFF is a reminder of the importance of putting all the industry boosters, soft-power pushers, commercial sponsors, city branders, and so on at every film festival worldwide on notice: unless a festival retains the support of a committed public that feels it is a vital part of their local cultural life, the festival cannot help them to achieve their aims, either.

#### Part IV: A Conversation: So, What Should a Film Festival Be?

**DINA IORDANOVA: What is happening at BIFF is certainly worrisome. However, similar situations are popping up elsewhere. At a conference in Italy in November 2014, Italian sociologist Vittorio Iervese, a member of the selection committee of the veteran leftist Festival dei Popoli in Florence, said that in an increasingly politicized environment many festivals have to start fundraising from scratch every year.<sup>30</sup> Festival organizers have been complaining that such pressure inevitably depletes the autonomy of a festival, especially where funding is progressively linked to local elections. Is this a general trend? Is it perhaps the case that the "age of the programmer" is over, and the new era is now one of "the city administrator"?<sup>31</sup>**

CHRIS BERRY: Dina is quite right to see what is happening at BIFF as part of a larger crisis in the film festival world. But it is not so new: Marijke de Valck herself already noted the passing of the "age of the programmer" and its replacement with what she calls the "age of the director" some time ago.<sup>32</sup> She was marking a historical tipping point whereby film festivals became such large operations with so many stakeholders that programming and the satisfaction of audiences became less central to the event, as dealing with sponsors, municipal funders, and so on necessitated a shift to a director who could oversee such elements, along with the programming. Perhaps this watershed could be said to mark the neoliberalization and globalization of film festivals, as they ceased to be municipal contributions to culture for local populations and became internationally networked.

From this point of view, the city administrator is one of the stakeholders the director has to deal with. Although I agree

that in many cases this city administrator has a particularly large stake, I have not yet come across instances where they are actually running the festival. Given the recent announcement of the closure of the Abu Dhabi festival, it is clear that dependency on local election outcomes alone is not always the source of the problem.<sup>33</sup>

Any perspective on BIFF needs to consider the economic crises suffered by numerous festivals in Western Europe in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, which have led to massive reductions in municipal funding and to festivals facing cut-backs and survival issues. Udine's Far East Film Festival (FEFF), which is going into its eighteenth year in Italy, is the main example of post-crisis cuts and dependency on election outcomes that I have witnessed.<sup>34</sup> In 2012, the fourteenth edition even deployed the slogan "Save the Panda."<sup>35</sup> It is said that the collapse of Rome's big push to become a major festival was also due to a change at the municipal level and withdrawal of funding support after the resignation of its founder, cinéophile mayor Walter Veltroni.<sup>36</sup> Either too much or too little funding from state sources can certainly destabilize film festivals.

What gives me hope is the pushback against these problems by cinephiles, local publics, and local film cultures. I hope that this moment, whether in the form of resistance to municipal and state interference in Busan and Istanbul or increased support from audiences at FEFF, might signal a struggle to maintain and further develop film festivals as sites of film culture and public events, part of the larger struggle for democratic culture in the twenty-first century, and not just as promotional tools for government and/or corporate players.

**DARAE KIM: In late January, Busan Metropolitan City had asked Lee Yong-kwan to step down, and the directorship of BIFF was actively being discussed when it was revealed that the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) is planning to make changes to legislation in order to allow them to start rating film festival entries.<sup>37</sup> Interpreting this plan as the first step in bringing censorship of films back to South Korea, there was an outcry from Korean filmmakers and KOFIC backtracked and delayed the decision.<sup>38</sup> However, its effects are already being demonstrated, by the subsequent cancellation of the Korean Academy of Film Arts' film festival, for example. Many cineastes in Korea believe the reason KOFIC did not recommend that the festival be exempt from rating is because of another film critical of the current government and police, *Self Referential Traverse: Zeitgeist and Engagement* (자가당착: 시대정신과 현실참여, Sun Kim, 2011).<sup>39</sup> The film industry in Korea beyond the film festivals is being affected as well. Recently, KOFIC cut off**

**financial support to two independent theatres, known for screening films that are not to the current government's taste—including *The Truth Shall Not Sink with Sewol* (다이빙벨).<sup>40</sup>**

**In early May 2015, BIFF's anxieties proved well founded. KOFIC cut funding to BIFF by nearly 50 percent.<sup>41</sup> The fact that KOFIC would so drastically cut its support for BIFF in the year of its twentieth anniversary—a time that would normally call for an increased budget—is difficult to interpret as anything other than an intimidation tactic aimed at all Korean film festivals.<sup>42</sup> The South Korean film industry must not buckle under this increasing authoritarian pressure. Although I agree that the pushback from cinephiles, local publics, and local film cultures is a sign of hope, I cannot help but worry that, in the current political atmosphere, this may simply not be enough. If the pushback that's already happening here is not sufficient, then what is?**

IORDANOVA: It appears that festival directors do still matter. There isn't much evidence (yet), as Chris points out, of city authorities actually running film festivals directly and dispensing with a director altogether. But one should not forget examples related to some of the most lavishly financed festivals—like those in the Arabian Gulf—that, while not run directly by the authorities, were instead started and ended by the respective city-states in short-lived cycles. The film festival in Qatar, for example, closed in 2013 without much outcry, with the closure presented as a "transformation."

If it is still the "age of the director," I cannot help but think that only a specific kind of director—a pragmatic survivor—can succeed in such circumstances. More and more, it is soberness and an ability to compromise, not knowledge of or love for cinema, that matter most for securing such jobs. Someone like an Henri Langlois, the legendary head of the Cinémathèque française, would not be likely to survive for long as a film festival director today—yet it was the defense of his uncompromising cinephilia that triggered clashes in Paris in the early months of 1968 and motivated the protests leading to the premature closure of the Cannes festival later in the same year. Such romantic episodes have become normative narratives in the way the film festival story is told, but I have serious reservations about the chances of such activism today. A range of global filmmakers and festival figures have collectively protested what is happening at Busan, yet this did not seem to stop the downward spiral that Darae describes.

I wonder if Busan would be in this situation if festival founder Kim Dong-ho, so well known for his diplomatic skill, were still the director? I am tempted to imagine that he

would have managed to cut the festival's losses sooner, rather than find himself on the current slippery slope. Alas, censorship is a sad fact of life: I believe it is important to assess realistically the reasons, extent, and possible effects of censorship. In the case of BIFF, those who are engaged in censorship are being named and shamed. I have trust that the built-in mechanisms of democratic public society will kick in and prevent this from going too far.

Censorship is being met with dignified resistance by BIFF's current director, Lee Yong-kwan, and by South Korea's filmmaking community, who are trying to be as heroic as the "young Turks" who brought Cannes to a halt in the days of Henri Langlois. But while engaged with this domestic stand-off precipitated by the *Diving Bell* controversy, both sides are rapidly losing ground on a global scale. If the current situation is not resolved, the twentieth anniversary of BIFF will come and go even as the showcase for Asian cinema quietly moves elsewhere. The Beijing Film Festival may emerge stronger and claim the spotlight from Busan or it may be another festival that will manage to act even more pragmatically. Clearly, I am not very optimistic. What should a festival be?

**BERRY: My understanding is that the "age of the director" is precisely intended to mark the shift from the Langlois-style cinephile programmer to the pragmatic manager. In other words, that shift occurred a long time ago. In fact, I would suggest it is part of the current problem. For over twenty years now, such "pragmatists" have put sponsorship, city funder needs, and so on above their local audiences. They have introduced all manner of feudal "accreditation" systems that in fact alienate and exclude the ordinary ticket-buying members of the filmgoing public who could, if their festival were threatened, exert considerable influence to support and sustain it against threats, as has been the case for FEFF in Udine and its loyal public. In Busan's case, it remains to be seen how much the local population supports "their" festival. Do they still feel it is theirs? Time will tell.**

**I am optimistic that Busan will survive, even if transformed. The big question is what a transformed festival might look like. Are the only film festivals worthy of attention those dominated by business interests and red carpets? Would it necessarily be a bad thing to see the emergence of festivals that are more independent of government and commercial funders, operating on a smaller scale, with a strong commitment to cinema as a participant in local public culture?**

## Notes

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26. The full text of that posting on the “filmfestivalresearch” list-serve reads: “Dear friends and colleagues: A controversy about the situation with Busan IFF has been brewing now for more than a month, and it seems to have finally broken into the international public space, with an article in *Screen International*. Many of us have been involved with this festival in various capacities. Besides previous visits, I had the opportunity to serve on the New Currents jury in October 2014 when the contested documentary was screened and absorbed all media attention. Thus, I had no choice but witnessing these issues from the onset. . . . My concern over the petty domestic controversy turning deadly is growing now, especially given that we see new lavishly funded festivals eager to claim the Asian spotlight (Qingdao, Beijing). It seems to me that Busan—a fairy-tale story of a festival that grew out of the ambition of a bunch of dedicated people and earned well-deserved international accolades—is in danger of going down due to the stubborn short-sightedness of local apparatuses.”
27. Dina Iordanova, “East Asia and Film Festivals: Transnational Clusters for Creativity and Commerce,” in *Film Festival Yearbook 3: Film Festivals and East Asia*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung (St Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2011), 1–37.
28. *Ibid.*
29. The jury was presided over by Iranian director Asghar Farhadi and included also South Korean director Bong Joon-ho, Indian actress Suhasini Maniratnam, and French philosopher Jacques Ranciere.
30. Vittorio Iervese, speaking about the Festival dei Popoli at the “Film Festival Cartographies,” University of Reggio Emilia, Modena, Italy, November 18, 2014.
31. Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 165.
32. *Ibid.*
33. “Abu Dhabi to Stop Hosting International Film Festival,” *Daily Mail*, May 7, 2015. [www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-3071982/Abu-Dhabi-stop-hosting-international-film-festival.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-3071982/Abu-Dhabi-stop-hosting-international-film-festival.html).
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35. For further discussion, see Chris Berry, “Save the Panda: The 14th Far East Film Festival,” *Senses of Cinema*, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2012/festival-reports/save-the-panda-the-14th-far-east-film-festival/>.
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38. “[Editorial] Anachronistic Policies: Culture Sector Hit by Threats to Diversity,” *Korean Herald*, February 4, 2015, www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150204000774; 진형화, “영진위, 영화제 사전검열 일단 보류.. 불씨는 여전,” [Jeon Young-hwa, “KOFIC, Censorship of Film Festivals Delayed for Now. . . Potential Remains”] *Starnews*, February 3, 2015, http://star.mt.co.kr/view/stview.php?no=2015020308150395957&stype=1&outlink=1.
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