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Abstract

Teaching international relations and politics with popular films has become more widespread over the last decade or so. This paper discusses our attempt to use popular films in our unique classrooms where students with diverse ethnic, cultural, national, political, and religious backgrounds study international relations and politics. In fact, our school, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, in Japan is uniquely international or multinational: about nearly a half of our students are from over 60 different countries and regions, and the rest are Japanese. Students are allowed to register courses in English as well as Japanese according to their language capabilities. As a result, students in courses taught in English are fairly multinational. The range of topics taught through popular films cover theories and concepts such as realism, liberalism, and imperialism and issues, including the role of regimes, international institutions and NGOs involved in global governance, in particular after the end of the Cold War. We also attempt to update a list of films by including those featuring post-cold war nationalism, UN interventions, and globalized economy. Our findings suggest an increase in students' interest in the topics covered.

Key Words

Pedagogy, Teaching Aid, Popular Films, International Relations, International Politics

Introduction

Our institution, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), in Beppu City, Japan is perhaps uniquely international/multinational; nearly a half of our 5,800 undergraduate students are from over 60 different countries and regions although a large number of these are from East Asia.¹ The rest of the students are Japanese. Students are allowed to register courses in English as well as Japanese according to the language that they have chosen for admission (although they are required to take a certain number of courses in the other language). Over 80% of non-Japanese students choose English for admission. As a result, students in courses taught in English have diverse national and linguistic identities. This type of classroom could be a precursor of the coming educational environment for many international universities and colleges in the world since they have started to attract more students from outside of their countries and regions where they are located (e.g. see Halliday 1999). However, this is a challenging environment for instructors who have taught and been educated in a traditional classroom where most students share a native language, nationality, culture, and history. Even in situations where students are mostly studying from a similar perspective, the challenges of teaching international relations to students acclimatized to modern media, technology and the modern pace of change in international affairs require imaginative teaching methods to engage students more effectively (Kacowicz 1993).

We therefore wondered if there was a better way to teach such diverse undergraduate students in our courses in international relations (IR) and international politics (IP). At our institution in common with other international universities, international and intercultural communication and understanding among students from different countries and regions are often emphasized. Students also expect to gain from such international environments and furthermore to work in an international environment (multinational corporations, international organizations, etc.) after graduation. Accordingly, IR and IP courses are popular and important for our students in general, and we would like to help students in achieving these goals. But, as noted above, we have noticed that it is not easy to teach such diverse students in IR and IP courses. One of the possible ways that we considered was to use popular films as lecture materials in our courses; hence, we showed popular films in classes and considered how to use them in order to improve our teaching strategies and skills, as well as students' understanding of IR and IP-related courses.

In this paper, we first discuss the reasons we decided to use popular films as a teaching aid in IR and IP classes along a review of the now fairly extensive academic literature on this topic. Subsequently, we introduce the popular films that we used and discuss why we chose them and how our students responded to them. Finally, we present the lessons we gained from our experience, and how it may provide insights for instructors of multinational IR and IP classes.

Why Films for Our Multinational Classroom

"Films are one of the most common and most powerful instruments for dispensing information about the world we live in and the myriad interactions among its countries and peoples," according to Gregg (1998, pp. 2-3). Indeed, using films to teach IR and political science-related courses has been becoming more popular than before. One of the reasons for this popularity is probably the availability of recorded films for consumers. Films are now produced on DVDs and other media which are easy for non-technical people to obtain and show. Also, today many classrooms at many universities and colleges in, at least, developed countries possess audio-visual equipment; indeed, almost all of APU's classrooms have AV equipment, a personal computer with a DVD player, and a modern projection system and/or large monitors. Inherently, for more and more instructors, the visual image is an acceptable tool to teach a variety of subjects. In the meantime, we as instructors, despite our differing specialties and teaching interests, know that students in general are increasingly visually-oriented. In our institution, too, students in general appreciate popular and documentary films in the classroom as they believe that visual images give them more concrete ideas about subjects than an instructor and/or assigned readings can abstractly or tediously explain in words. We know this from students' verbal or written responses after lectures. At the same time, we can see that many students experience difficulty in reading traditional textbooks. Our students' proficiencies in English vary greatly as many of them speak English as their second and third language.² In addition, they are from a variety of countries and regions, so their educational backgrounds and views on the world and world history vary considerably. In addition, we know that many students try to learn from other materials such as low quality websites rather than assigned textbooks, mainly because they are reluctant to spend their money on traditional (expensive) textbooks. More importantly, we can imagine that it is not easy for many students to understand abstract ideas, including IR theories and concepts, from their secondary-level education. Having considered these issues, we believe that popular films can be one solution or tool which will make students more willing to learn in IR and IP classrooms. In this section, we review the existing literature on teaching IR and IP with popular films and discuss how we intend to incorporate them in our classrooms.

Many instructors of IR and IP have discussed the functions of films and their purposes in showing films in the classroom. Gregg (1998) argues that films dramatize concepts such as sovereignty and historical events, thereby making them more understandable to students, and additionally stimulating students to exchange their views and opinions in the classroom. Students can obtain visual images that represent an abstract idea or narrative of a past event from films. Kuzma and Haney (2001) present ideas on how to use popular and documentary films to stimulate students' interest in US foreign policy studies through which they expect their students to acquire knowledge of IR theories and history of US foreign policy, as well as critical thinking and communication skills. Weber (2001, 2009) has had students in US and UK watch popular films and encouraged them to critically analyze major IR theories and approaches such as realism, idealism, constructivism and neo-Marxism. That is, popular films for her students are texts that they interpret and

find truths and ideas which these theories rely on. Furthermore, Webber (2005) introduces the usage of a popular science fiction film, *Independence Day*, in her introductory IR course to teach realism and idealism, and a key concept, the nation-state. Meanwhile, Mikami et al. (2005) discuss popular films that are useful for IR studies, based on their experience at Hiroshima Shudo University. They use films to teach about history, foreign countries, and issues of international politics. Engert and Spencer (2009) identify four ways of using popular films in IR courses; films are used to illustrate historical events, to provide discussion materials for issues, to know other peoples' perspectives, and to understand and criticize theories. Finally, Boyer et al (2002) points to the possibilities of encouraging inductive learning by allowing students (in particular international students) to use film discussions to explain their own experiences and insights into political events which they have encountered personally. However, none of the previous studies on using films in politics classes consider how this method may be useful in particularly multinational classrooms.

Nevertheless, instructors point out drawbacks of film showing in IR and IP classes. Firstly, popular films may inaccurately depict historical events (Gregg 1998). We should be aware that popular films are for entertainment, not being obligated to be as accurate as academic or educational books. Secondly, similarly, many films may be biased on the basis of their film-makers' and audience's nationality and culture. Many films that are available in the global film market are from the US and other Western countries. Gregg (1998) asserts that Eurocentrism is especially problematic when such films depict Third World countries. Thirdly, some students may react to a film and become too emotional to learn (Kuzma and Haney 2001). A scene in a film may be too violent or activate a student's traumatic experience; hence, it may be destructive for such a student to learn something from the film. Fourthly, Gregg (1998) points out that film-makers may prefer to portray conflicts disproportionately, and films that feature conflicts tend to tell stories on the basis of realists' perspective. Lastly, as a more practical concern, showing a film is time-consuming, especially if we show the entire film (Engert and Spencer 2009). Today the duration of a popular film is around two hours or more.

Having considered the pros and cons above, we nevertheless think that films make an effective tool to teach IR and IP in our uniquely multinational classrooms. We believe that films work in the positive ways noted above, and that we can avoid the problems also noted, if we use films carefully. More importantly, we expect that popular films provide our students and us with common materials or information that allows us to discuss a teaching object with more concrete, visualized images. Our students are from a variety of countries and regions with somewhat different educational backgrounds, so we assume that some or many students would not follow what we, the instructors, take for granted. Moreover, we believe that using films as teaching materials in these diverse classrooms can encourage a multi-directional flow of information and knowledge, as students may use their various experiences to help inform their fellows about differing perspectives on international political issues. Hence, this study tries to contribute to the academic literature on using

films in teaching politics classes, by particularly focusing on their benefits or problems for diverse classrooms.

Seven Popular Films for Our Classes and Students' Responses to Them

We selected seven films for four different courses, Introduction to International Relations (IIR), Introduction to Political Science (IPS), History of International Politics (HIP) and Politics and Economics of the Asia Pacific (PEAP). The seven films were chosen to illustrate a variety of theories and concepts in international relations and politics, using political issues in various cultures and countries; it was considered that this would help widen their appeal to our own diverse students. At the same time it was considered important to select films which would illustrate issues which were applicable more generally for our international relations and politics classes. *Black Hawk Down* and *Blood Diamond* were selected for two IIR classes. The former was chosen to illustrate the major IR theories of realism and liberalism. The latter was used to discuss issues and concepts such as globalization, the North-South gap, and neo-colonialism. *No Man's Land* and *Battle in Seattle* were selected for two IPS classes. The former was used to teach about identity and ethnicity in politics; the latter for economic globalization. *Gandhi* and *Dr Strangelove* were chosen for two HIP classes; *Gandhi* to illustrate topics on imperialism and colonialism, while *Dr Strangelove* was to be used to discuss the Cold War. Finally *Still Life* was selected for one PEAP class to help students to understand politics and society in contemporary China. In following sections, we discuss how these films were used for their respective teaching objectives and what we learned from the responses of our students.

We used similar teaching strategies for all films and classes in order to ensure a minimum consistency of results. In general, lectures were given prior to the film showing in order to introduce theories, concepts, issues and events. We also emphasized possible biases in the film when necessary. The film was then shown, utilizing the English subtitles available on most of the DVDs (even for English-language films) to aid students' comprehension. The length of film shown for each class varied according to the contents being taught. In some classes no more than 20 minutes was shown, while in others an entire film was shown, across two teaching periods if deemed necessary. In two of the films, *Black Hawk Down* and *Blood Diamond*, a sheet of two transcribed dialogues which were being focused on was distributed in order to help students who might experience difficulty in understanding spoken English in the film. This strategy was used in one particularly large and diverse class, Introduction to International Relations, which contained mostly first year students, many of whom had little experience with academic study in English.

During the films, students were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to investigate students' comprehension of the targeted materials and films being shown. More specifically, for each film about four or five comprehension questions were asked (testing objective understanding), one or two subjective comprehension questions (such as "this film helped me understand [topic]"), and finally two or three general questions (such as "I would be

interested in seeing more films about politics"). For each statement students were required to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed on a five point scale.³ The questionnaires were designed to provide data about the students' reception of the films, but at the same time to stimulate them to think about relevant issues during the films.

After each film a teacher-guided discussion of the issues raised in the films was conducted varying from around 20-30 minutes; during this time students were encouraged to ask questions on issues they did not understand, and peer-teaching strategies were also employed to enable students to inform each other on difficult or controversial points. This discussion stage was also intended to let students confirm and reinforce their own understanding of issues raised in previous lectures. Finally, two written questions were distributed to students to enable them to consider the issues by themselves further at home. Students then had to write short essay answers to the questions which were designed to test their general comprehension of the major theories and the film. By adding a writing component to the classes, it was hoped that the students would improve their understanding of the relevant issues through further deliberation, and also help them retain the information.

Black Hawk Down and Blood Diamond for Introduction to International Relations

Black Hawk Down was shown in our IIR classes to help teach the major IR theories - realism, liberalism, and constructivism.⁴ This film is based on an actual event, the Battle of Mogadishu in 1993. The US military, at the time, attempted to secure humanitarian aid in Somalia along with UN peacekeepers. The battle between the US military troops and local militias occurred when US troops attempted to capture local militia leaders. But this US operation fell into a disaster: 18 US soldiers died, as did hundreds of Somalis. The main portion of the film depicts combat actions and mainly focuses on US soldiers' courageous acts to save their fellow soldiers in horrendous situations (Coatney 2002). Accordingly, the film can be understood as one with biases towards American perspectives; however, we thought that some scenes and dialogues between characters would allow our students to think about the theories. In addition, other concepts such as the state (including failed or collapsed states), sovereignty, and war could be introduced based on the film content. We especially focused on the interrogation of a local weapon dealer, Atto, by US Army General Garrison as well as the chat between US Army rangers, including the protagonist, Sergeant Eversmann.

In the former, Atto represents realism. He refers to battles between local militia groups and says, "I do know about history. See all this. It's simply shaping tomorrow." He implies that it is a power struggle between different armed groups, through which a sovereign state would appear to control the country; such power struggles have occurred in many countries in the past. Atto also claims that it was a civil war that foreigners should not intervene in, a view that can be interpreted as representing that discussed by Hobbes in *Leviathan*. In the latter, Sergeant Eversmann is called "an idealist" by his fellow soldiers since he believes

that the US intervention would be to help local Somalis who happened to live in a conflict zone. The chat reflects a contrast between Eversmann and other soldiers who were there just because they were deployed by the US government. Eversmann announces, "We can either help or we can sit back and watch the country destroy itself on CNN." This scene is related to liberalism and constructivism, in contrast to the realist view presented in the former quote. Since Eversmann is called an "idealist," Eversmann can represent liberalism in IR. But, the intervention itself is more properly placed in the context of constructivism, which more strongly supports international intervention as a result of changing norms in international politics. Therefore, international intervention and sovereignty were also discussed in class.

Blood Diamond was also shown to discuss issues and concepts such as globalization, the North-South Gap, imperialism, and neo-colonialism.⁵ The role of multinational corporations in international politics was also referred to after showing the film. The film story revolves around so-called "blood diamonds," which are mined in a conflict zone and traded to finance military forces involved in the conflict. Two protagonists, a black man and a white man who were both born and raised in Africa, encounter each other in the midst of the civil war in Sierra Leone in the 1990s, and they are destined to uncover a controversial diamond mining and trading operation involving a rebel force and a multinational diamond mining and trading corporation. The black man was a local fisherman who is enslaved to mine diamonds by the rebel force, and the white man is an ex-mercenary who smuggles diamonds from Sierra Leone to Liberia for the multinational corporation. In the meantime, the corporation has agreed to cooperate with international authorities to exclude such controversial diamonds from the international diamond market.

Prior to the film showing, issues related to globalization, the North-South Gap, imperialism, and neo-colonialism were lectured about in class. The international trade of diamonds that the film presented clearly illustrates a negative aspect of globalization, by showing how diamonds are mined in a conflict zone, smuggled into a neighboring country, moved across Asia and Europe, and consumed in the United States as legitimated jewelry products. The antagonistic relationship between the black fisherman and the white smuggler, who are both African natives and eventually develop a friendship and help each other to achieve their respective goals, reflects a legacy of imperialism and colonialism. In addition, the multinational corporation allowed us to discuss the history of diamond mining and trading which has been dominated by a real corporation, and its history of being associated with the British Empire. A brief history of Africa was also introduced to clarify the relations between former colonizer and a colonized countries.

In our classes, the first one hour of the film was shown. Students were encouraged to pay attention to the dialogues between the white smuggler, Archer, and a female American journalist, Bowen, as their conversations succinctly summarize how blood diamonds have been mined and traded across the world. A sheet of transcribed dialogues was provided to

each student. Students were then asked to answer a questionnaire which tested their comprehension and asked for their opinions on studying IR with a film.

Regarding the two films shown in these IIR classes, a majority of students showed a positive attitude toward showing films to study IR and IP. For example, 80% of students who watched *Black Hawk Down* strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "Watching the film made me more interested in the course." In addition, 86% of them strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "I would be interested in seeing more films about IR or IP." Likewise, 75% of students who watched *Blood Diamond* strongly agreed or agreed with the former statement, and 81% of them strongly agreed or agreed with the latter statement.

One point of concern when selecting these films for our classes was the level of dramatic violence depicted in the films; in *Black Hawk Down* shootings and deaths of soldiers and local Somalis are quite graphic, and in *Blood Diamond* a rebel force massacres villagers with guns and swords. In fact, several students complained about such scenes in their comments, and one of them, a female student who watched *Black Hawk Down*, asked us to choose a film with less violent and bloody scenes. However, somewhat alleviating our concerns, in response to the statement that 'brutal scenes (like chopping someone's hand) should not be shown in a class', on average just 27% of students agreed, while 39% of students disagreed and 33% were neutral on the matter; nevertheless, the result demonstrated that some care is required to take into account different students' attitudes to violence in films. This is reinforced by the finding that while only 21% of Korean and Indonesian students and 20% of Vietnamese students agreed with the statement, 28% of Chinese students agreed - indicating some difference in cultural sensibilities. In the meantime, regarding *Black Hawk Down*, a student noted in the comment section that he once thought the film was just an entertainment with battles but after the class, he noted that the film made him think about issues like international humanitarian aid. This is a positive aspect of this film showing project.

Another point of concern was the degree of understanding of various theories and concepts which were meant to be demonstrated by the films. In classes of *Black Hawk Down*, most students showed understanding that realism and liberalism were represented by the two characters, Atto and Eversmenn, through writing short essays to one of the two written questions. However, some students had problems with Eversmenn and liberalism. According to them, Eversmenn supported international cooperation and liberalism while acting like a realist as a US soldier. In response to the statement "Diamonds mined in a conflict area to finance a rebellion are evidence of the world's globalized economy," for the classes of *Blood Diamond*, while 54% of students agreed or strongly agreed, 46% of students did not know, or disagreed. As part of the aim in showing the film was to demonstrate some of the problems with globalization, this result raises some concerns about how far some students were able to understand the more subtle aspects of the film.

Many students gave positive comments on the film showing in class. For example, a female student from Thailand who watched *Black Hawk Down* said, "This film made me feel more interested in IR--how countries act when something is wrong in another country. Also I can understand the ideas of realism and liberalism clearer." A female student from South Korea noted, "It is very great because I can more easily understand what the international relations is about. The film shows diverse aspects of international relations. Therefore, it makes students more interested in the subject and want to know about it more," after watching *Blood Diamond*.

Meanwhile, several students noted or suggested that they would not buy diamonds in the future after watching *Blood Diamond*. This type of response was not what we intended to elicit with the film, although, it could have been expected before the class. According to a *Time* article (Robinson and Ressler 2006), the impact of the film on the world's diamond market was a controversial point at the time of the film opening, and the diamond industry stressed their continuous effort to keep out such diamonds from the market. We should have clarified this point in the classroom.

These films were both shown in large foundation classes, and their topics led to quite involved debate between several students on various topics - some of which had been introduced previously and some which students raised themselves. Such examples of peer teaching and discussion are particularly valuable in classes with diverse students with different perspectives, and help to provide the multi-directional flow of information as proposed above.

No Man's Land and Battle in Seattle for Introduction to Political Science

No Man's Land was shown in our IPS classes when we teach major theories and concepts in political science and comparative politics.⁶ This film is based on an actual event, the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995), an international conflict and a part of the Yugoslav Wars (1991-1995). Many communist governments lost legitimacy among their nations in the early 1990s because of the end of the Cold War and the following systematic changes. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is remembered as one of the most tragic cases – ethno-religious conflicts tore an imagined federation into eight new states. This film could be used for IIR classes; however, we thought it would be useful to help students understand issues related to politics of identity and the so-called "convergence of identity" (Parekh 2008) in particular, which in this case was used by politicians to fuel a series of ethno-religious conflicts in a failed state.

Conversations between the two wounded soldiers are the highlight of the movie. Čiki (Bosniak) and Nino (Bosnian Serb) are caught in a neutral zone that was called "no man's land." The two conflicting actors, originally from the same village, show their nationalistic sentiments in a series of arguments with each other, though they have some doubts about the justifications and meaning of the war. Ironically, because of the tension, the commonest

and most typical forms of nationalism – protection of *our* development from threats from lethal competition with the enemies (Gellner 1997) are gradually reconstructed in their mind.

Films are particularly useful to teach about issues of identity, as characters' identities can be demonstrated clearly through character-based plots and narratives. However, popular films are perhaps prone to portray biased images regarding identity, and so should be used with caution (Shaheen 2003). Before the film, students were given a lecture on the politics of collective identity, namely self-determination, nationalism, and political arguments of self-interest. They were also given a short lecture on the background of the Bosnian civil war, and the reasons for the situation the two soldiers found themselves in. The questionnaire they were given for this film tested students' perceptions of the protagonists' identities, as well as the identities of other actors such as the UN soldiers. For example, both of the Bosnian soldiers were able to converse easily, and even discovered that they had lived in the same village, and had some common friends before the war, yet had acquired opposing identities in the time afterwards. Students were also asked to judge how useful the film had been for them to understand issues of political identity.

An example of the response was from a female student from South Korea who was inspired to think about her own country's situation, watching *No Man's Land*. In her questionnaire response, she noted, "While I was watching this film, I was thinking about the Korean War. In this film, the Serb and Bosniak are fighting each other because of religion and independence. However, South and North Koreans were fighting because of different politics....The film was funny, but on the other hand, it was sad." It can be seen from this comment that students, while being from diverse backgrounds and nationalities, were in many cases able to understand the basic points being made in the films and apply them to their own knowledge - an important aim of using films to teach IP. And it was noteworthy that some students understood a positive aspect in the politics of identity. For example, a male student from Bangladesh noted, "This movie gave us some idea about the cultural similarities in these groups [the Serb and Bosniak] that we could not get only by studying history of politics of a nation." On the other hand, it also shows the limits of students' understanding of the film on one showing - the South Korean student was not able to understand that the Serb and Bosniak were also fighting primarily due to political differences.

Seventy-three percent of students agreed that the film had helped them understand about different identities, and 70% of students agreed with the statement "this film helped me understand more about the connection between identity and politics," - two of the main points about which the film was being used to teach. However, the response to the statement "the Serb and Bosniak soldiers' conflict seemed to be based on their ethnic identities" was much more mixed, with 55% of students agreeing and 39% disagreeing. As

one major point of the film is to emphasise the small difference in the protagonists ethnolinguistic identities, and the more prominent role of national identities and politics in the conflict, this represents some misunderstanding on the part of the students; not unexpected due to the complicated nature of the topic. However, it may show a need to rephrase the question for clarity, or give the students more in-depth knowledge on the topic.

Battle in Seattle was used to illustrate some issues on economic globalization in our IPS classes.⁷ The film depicts the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle, a symbolic event that illustrated some problems in globalization. Firstly, the WTO delegates failed to reach an agreement to launch a new round of trade negotiations. In other words, there was a dichotomy between the developing countries and the developed, regarding free trade. Secondly, the WTO ministerial conference in the heart of Seattle was overshadowed by a large anti-globalization demonstration, led by thousands of activists. This film was introduced to the students to allow them to understand the normative challenge of globalization in political theory; sovereign states are no longer self sufficient, and billions of people are in competition with each other. It was also hoped that the film would help students visualise in concrete terms the various political actors and interests which compete on the global stage. Amongst the protesters are, for example, anti-globalization activists, ecologists, and anarchists, who, despite having different philosophies and interests, are all united in the common goal of stopping the WTO conference. Other notable political actors include an anti-riot police officer, satellite TV reporters, and the beleaguered Mayor of Seattle.

In the lecture prior to the film showing, issues on globalization were discussed, including such issues as global governance, the democratic deficit in international organisations, the effect of globalization on domestic politics, and the increasing limitations on states' control over their own affairs. Immediately before the film, students were provided with a short introduction talking more specifically about the WTO and issues in world trade negotiations that were relevant to the film. The questionnaire distributed included comprehension questions testing whether the students recognised the protesters' goals, and the problems faced by different political actors with competing interests. Other questions asked whether the students felt the film had helped them understand about democracy and globalization issues.

Responses from the surveys showed that many of the students had had a positive image of the WTO and similar international organisations, but after watching the film, students reappraised their opinions. One student noted that "I thought the WTO was trying to give us a more peaceful time and also save nature but what they are doing is not always positive to all [people]. There are some big [gaps] between rich people and poor people." Another student noted that "I was little shocked of the treatment of poor countries by the WTO. WTO is an international organization though. I wonder why this dispute cannot be solved..." It is clear from these comments (and from general interactions in class) that most of our students have a generally positive view of globalization - as they are directly

benefiting from it by being able to study in a foreign country; films like these therefore provide a new perspective for such students. This movie was also a good case study to be compared with other similar situations. A male student from South Korea commented, "It [the movie] made me think of the case in Korea...there were huge protests against FTAs [free trade agreements] and police suppressed them with violence. It was good to see movies that I was able to compare with my country." This is one of the goals of teaching comparative politics - systematic study and comparison of the world's political systems and exploring patterns and regularities among political systems. In many cases our students are from somewhat elite sections of society in their own countries, and so may be sheltered by their lives and their national media from the difficulties faced by less fortunate parts of their countries; for example in China (where many of our students come from), items about other governments' human rights violations, anti-government protests and other sensitive issues are routinely censored in the media.

Seventy-four percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "this film helped me understand more about the relevance of globalisation to domestic politics", showing a subjective increase in students' understanding due to the film; however in response to the statement "the protesters all had similar goals" there was a difference in opinions, with 49% correctly disagreeing, but 19% agreeing and 31% not being sure. This response indicates some degree of uncertainty or lack of comprehension of a key issue in the film, which should perhaps be addressed more explicitly in future lectures on these issues.

Gandhi and Dr. Strangelove for History of International Politics

Gandhi was used for a HIP class, to help teach about the topics of empire building and colonialism.⁸ The purpose of the lectures on these topics was first to give the students an idea what colonialism was and meant in history. *Gandhi*, which covers the life and activism of Mohandas Gandhi, is set primarily in two colonial situations, firstly in late 19th century South Africa, and secondly in early 20th century India. The first setting shows a case where the colonisers completely subjugated the native population so that it seemed almost natural that "blacks" and "colored" people should be treated as second class citizens in their own country. In the case of India, a more subtle kind of colonialism is shown, where local elites were co-opted or manipulated by the British, and existing cultural divisions and societal stratification were exploited to the colonisers' advantage. Thus students could learn about the various ways in which colonisers were able to control and administer such large empires despite their own relatively small sizes. Finally, some later sections of the film showed the problems which political leaders face in creating new, artificial national identities and nations, topics which had been covered earlier in the course.

In the lecture prior to the film session, an overview of the growth of European global empires and the reasons for their formation was given. Immediately before the film was

shown, a short introduction was given to familiarise the students with Gandhi's background and difficulties in dealing with condescending or discriminatory colonial attitudes. Very detailed explanations were deemed unnecessary, as the film is self-explanatory, but a general explanation has been found to aid students' understanding of the specific topics being presented. The survey questionnaire distributed for this film was designed to test their comprehension of the film (for example "Gandhi respected the British Empire's laws at first" agree or disagree), and query their opinions about using the film to teach the topics (for example, "watching the film helped me to understand about colonial policies - agree or disagree").

As with the other films, some students watching this film were surprised to find similarities between their own experiences and some of the problems portrayed; a female student from South Korea, after watching *Gandhi*, noted, "There was the same time in Korea, too. I was surprised the same threats from colonials, Japan and England." She had apparently connected the Indian experience with her own country's experience of Japanese colonialism. Other students remarked on the need to be critical of the films (a point which had been emphasized by the instructor through the course) - "I think that movies can be a good way to illustrate things that are otherwise impossible to get across in normal history classes, however one has to be aware of the potential bias of the movie maker as well as the glorification of certain people/events (Ghandi)." This kind of comment is illustrative of the attitude that many of the more thoughtful students had on these films. In this particular case, the instructor had commented on the fact that a large part of the funding for the film had come from the Indian government, which may be reflected in the negative portrayal of the Muslim leaders in the film, and the lack of criticism of Gandhi's own political views. Although some students may think about these issues, in general it is necessary to guide students into thinking about sources of funding for the films, directors' political views and other potential sources of bias.

Dr Strangelove was used to illustrate some issues about the Cold War, in the same HIP course.⁹ *Dr Strangelove* is another critically acclaimed film, which is nevertheless unfamiliar to current students. The film is a parody of the idea of "mutually assured destruction" (MAD) which sustained the nuclear build-up during the Cold War era between the US and USSR. Students on this course on previous occasions had shown some general knowledge of the Cold War, in particular the situation of their own countries during that time; however they did not have more detailed ideas about the reasons for the problems during that time, and about the specific issues which made it such a dangerous series of conflicts.

In this film, a deranged American general sends a squadron of nuclear-armed planes to preemptively attack targets in USSR. The subsequent scenes depict the difficulties in communication between the president, his defence officials and scientist, in addition to the more obvious difficulties in communicating the problem safely to the Soviets. The film demonstrates the absurdities of having such potentially destructive weapons technology

without proper safeguards and preventative lines of communication between adversaries. The lecture before the film showing covered political issues and international relations during the Cold War, including the reasons for the stand-off, and material on the proxy wars fought between the two countries based on ideology and power politics. The film was introduced to allow students to experience the paranoid fears and climate which existed at the time in a more tangible fashion than might be possible through lectures or readings. It was also hoped that students would gain some insight into the practical problems faced in international politics when there were no lines of communication between adversaries, when lines of command were tenuous, and when defence officials had too much influence over foreign policy. Finally, students were guided into considering the possible role of international institutions to prevent such situations from occurring.

The introductory lecture for this film introduced specific issues which the film covered, in particular the idea of MAD, and the practicalities of implementing such a policy in an age before inter-continental ballistic missiles. As noted by Lindley (2001), students were informed that many of the details about how the military forces were organised in the film were based on facts; however one student was prompted by the film to comment that "Films no matter how accurate still tend to be over-exaggerated to the point that it is difficult to consider them as a source of historical/political knowledge. I think that documentaries would be far more helpful in studying politics." This comment (in common with the comment on *Gandhi* mentioned above) shows that some students have a healthy skepticism of popular films' factual accuracy, although this also may point to the need to address these issues more fully prior to the showing. If students are too skeptical of the films being shown even when they are generally seen as being accurate or objective renditions, it may affect their ability to understand political situations. Conversely, students may be too trusting of films portrayed as objective documentaries.

Regarding survey questions on these films, students seemed to indicate that their own understanding had improved. In response to the statement 'the film helped me understand the tense international situation during the Cold War,' 74% of students agreed or strongly agreed. Their responses to comprehension questions also indicated understanding - 80% agreed that "the film shows that mutually assured destruction (MAD) was a very risky idea", and equally 80% correctly agreed with the statement "General Turgidson believed the US could win a nuclear war" (General Turgidson is a character who advises the President on defense, and represents the defense establishment during the Cold War). These points were important to the understanding of the most key issues in this lecture, and so indicate some success in aiding students' understanding.

***Still Life* for Politics and Economics of the Asia Pacific**

Still Life was chosen to help students learn about politics and society in contemporary China.¹⁰ The film is set against the background of the mammoth Three Gorges Dam project, and follows two main characters as they try to find long lost family members in a town,

Fengjie, which is slowly being demolished as the reservoir waters rise after the dam has been constructed. The film, shown to a small class of mainly third year students, was somewhat challenging to understand as the story does not make very direct comments on the political situation. This is because the film was made for Chinese audiences, and so was subject to censorship regulation by the Communist Party of China; hence, it refers to political and social problems through the characters' stories and through visual clues. Commoners' problems in dealing with state-owned enterprises, local government officials and criminal elements taking advantage of the situation, in addition to the far off directions of the central government, are depicted in the film's background.

Students' were given an introduction to the problems of the dam construction project, and in previous lectures they had studied Chinese political economy more generally, as well as similar problems in other countries in the region. Hence it was expected that they would be able to comprehend some of the problems which were alluded to. In their comments, some students demonstrated they had appreciated the insight into local problems given by the film. One student commented, "I liked this movie because it did show what happened there and how it affected local people" - students are often appreciative when given concrete, contextual examples of political issues affecting real characters' lives, which they can relate to more than distant, dry overviews given in typical lectures.

In the discussion following the film, some students were able to discuss the political issues raised in the film. However, a few students (who had perhaps not absorbed enough background knowledge in previous lectures) were a little confused - reflected in one comment, "perhaps a film with a more obvious political theme [would be better]." The student who made this comment had clearly not grasped the political significance of the scenes shown.

This mix of results was also reflected in the response to the survey questions. In response to a comprehension-testing statement, "there appear to be two social and economic classes in the town," 86% of students agreed as expected. However, in response to the statement "communist ideals are still important in the town", just 48% of students disagreed as expected, 38% of students were not sure and 14% agreed. This may reflect some students' lack of knowledge about what communism means, or their lack of understanding of the film, indicating that further explanation was required on these points.

Nevertheless, 86% of students felt the film had helped increase their understanding of economic problems in China, while 57% thought their understanding of political situation in China had increased (with 33% being neutral on this question). Further consideration of how to use such complex and subtle films in a multinational politics classroom is clearly required.

Did Using Films Help Our Students Learn?

On the whole, our experience and results indicated to us that our students had improved their understanding of the topics in IR and IP covered by the films. Most students were able to answer the simpler comprehension questions correctly, and their subjective impression was that their own understanding had improved. Some responses indicated less understanding of complicated issues, indicating that it may be necessary to concentrate on these issues in class more carefully in future. Additionally, some films made students draw parallels between the film narratives and their own countries' politics. This was another positive aspect of showing films in class, enabling more active learning for students. In addition to answering questions on the political issues posed by the instructors, in most of the film classes some students were able to provide comments on other students' questions, or there was some opportunity for students to debate certain issues from their differing perspectives. These aspects of the classes were perhaps especially valuable given the wide cultural perspectives available in our classes, and we believe that these opportunities should be maximized so that students can take advantage of the diverse multinational environment developing in modern universities. While students in a mostly mono-cultural and mono-nationality classroom can provide different perspectives, the variety in multicultural and multinational classrooms provides for a richer experience; the combination of showing popular films with themes familiar across cultures, which are at the same time being received and commented on in different ways by a variety of students can be a powerful provider of insight and knowledge on international politics for students.

Some students complained that an entire film should have been shown - for example one student who watched *Battle in Seattle* noted that "I think that the next time we watch a film in class we should follow through with the whole movie in order for the students to understand what is portrayed in the movie." A few students, however, also remarked that it would be better to only show a few relevant scenes. It is clearly rather difficult to judge how much of a film to show in order ensure students' understanding of the relevant issues. Some films may not be understood unless shown in their entirety; for some others, it may not be appropriate to show irrelevant scenes (one student commented after watching *Gandhi* that "if movie scenes are carefully selected and arranged they will provide narrative and visualized information to learners making the covered topic more relevant or meaningful to them...") In any case, there are always time constraints in class. At our institution, a regular class is 95 minutes. Today many popular films need more than two hours to be presented. It is not practical to show the whole of a film by using the entire class meeting or two class meetings. In many cases clips from a film can be used in order to stress the points that we want students to focus on. Waalkes (2003) emphasizes this point, using several scenes from different films to introduce the state as a concept in international politics studies. A possible option for students who want to watch an entire film is to reserve a DVD in a university library and ask them to watch it there.

Regarding the students' own opinions on watching films for international politics, 78 to 95% of the students who watched the films strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "I would be interested in seeing more films about IR or IP." For many students, the films seemed to bring IR theories and concepts to life in a more interesting way than normal lectures. Responses to the surveys showed a generally high level in students' confidence that their own understanding had improved, and generally good indications that actual comprehension of key political issues in the films had been achieved.

Conclusion

This study of using popular films to teach theories, concepts, and events in IR and IP showed that there are some positive and negative aspects of using films. As has been discussed, each film has its own merits and demerits as a teaching tool, and the methods of using them also depend on what the instructor wishes to concentrate on in their classes.

We believe, however, from our students' comments and the survey results, that our initial research hypotheses were in general confirmed; that is, films enable students to benefit from a more interactive, multi-directional flow of information which the showing of films along with lectures and discussions generates. Students seemed to engage more with the issues covered than in standard lectures, and they responded positively to the film classes. Most of them liked to see films in class, and their subjective feeling of having improved their knowledge, and objective understanding of less complex issues was confirmed by their survey responses. From the instructors' point of view, having students discuss various issues was a good way to develop the (often dormant) resources available in our multinational, diverse classes, i.e. the students' widely varying perspectives and knowledge of different cultures, societies and countries. This is an important plus point for instructors who work in particularly diverse, international universities or classes.

Nevertheless, more complex issues were difficult for many students to comprehend from the film and short lecture alone - indicating that films may not be appropriate for in-depth analysis of international politics. It could be possible to measure more accurately how much the students' understanding improved by asking them questions before and after the film in a more systematic way, and thereafter measuring the improvement (or reduction) in their scores.

On another note, some students complained about the lack of English subtitles in some films (as some DVDs of English films in Japan have no English subtitles). This will always be a difficult issue for students whose main language is different from the films' languages, and it is often difficult to obtain appropriate subtitles for films. Nevertheless, it may be possible to choose appropriate language DVDs more carefully to avoid this problem. Such problems of understanding were evident in other ways, as shown in some survey responses which did not catch the meaning of the question, and some students' comments about the difficulty of following the films. These kinds of problems are particularly important in a

class where the main language of instruction (i.e. English) is a foreign or second language for most students.

We also have to admit that, in some classes, we would need to develop more active learning environments. That is, some class sizes were too large, so that after showing a film, we did not have enough in-class discussions about the film and the materials that we wanted students to ponder. These classes had 100 to over 200 students, and only one instructor and one TA were conducting these classes. Although some students were actively engaged with post-film showing discussions, most students were passive at that time. This might also be due to some cultural aspects of those students (generally speaking, students from East Asian countries tend to be more passive during in-class discussions while students from Western countries and some other regions are more active). In this sense, smaller classes may benefit more from films.

In short, our attempt has just begun, and we need more experiences of teaching IR and IP through films. We also need a greater variety of films that would stimulate students to study IR and IP. Especially, we would like to find more films from non-Western countries that could provide different perspectives from American and European films. We also need to encourage students to exchange their own views and experiences with each other in class. In today's internationalized classrooms, students with diverse national and cultural backgrounds are indeed a major asset for learning. If students can more actively and positively express their different views and opinions using films, students, and also instructors, could learn how people from different backgrounds see the same things differently. This would lead to a better internationalized classroom for IR and IP studies.

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Notes

¹ See the Student Enrollment (as of May 1, 2010), available at [http://www.apu.ac.jp/home/modules/keytopics/content/Gakusei\(10.05.01.\).pdf](http://www.apu.ac.jp/home/modules/keytopics/content/Gakusei(10.05.01.).pdf)

² APU has some different admission criteria for the language proficiency. In the case of TOEFL, 500 in the paper-based test and 61 in the internet-based test are minimum requirements.

³ In this paper, 'agreed' means 'strongly agreed plus agreed', and 'disagreed' means 'strongly disagreed plus disagreed' unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Black Hawk Down was directed by Ridley Scott and released in 2001 in the United States.

⁵ Blood Diamond was directed by Edward Zwick and released in 2006 in the United States.

⁶ No Man's Land was directed by Danis Tanovic and released in 2001 in France.

⁷ Battle in Seattle was directed by Stuart Townsend and released in 2008 in France and the United States.

⁸ Gandhi was directed by Richard Attenborough and released in 1982 in India, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

⁹ Dr. Strangelove: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb was directed by Stanley Kubrick and released in 1964 in the United States.

¹⁰ Still Life was directed by Zhang Ke Jia and released in 2006 in China and others.