

Imagined America in Occupied Japan:  
(Re-)Educational Films  
Shown by the U.S. Occupation Forces to  
the Japanese, 1948–1952

Yuka TSUCHIYA

INTRODUCTION

In post-WWII occupied Japan, the U.S. Occupation Forces showed hundreds of educational documentary films to the Japanese people. The topics of these films varied from American culture to public hygiene and international relations. This paper will explore the imposition and reception of the educational program carried out by the Occupation Forces through films, thereby showing what messages the Americans tried to convey and how the Japanese audience read these films.<sup>1</sup>

There has been considerable scholarly discussion of commercial films in occupied Japan, most notably, for example, in Kyoko Hirano's *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema under the American Occupation, 1945–1952*.<sup>2</sup> John Dower also touched upon popular commercial films in *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*.<sup>3</sup> Few scholars have explored, however, the educational documentary films shown in the same period, in spite of their unique significance arising from the political messages encoded in the narratives. Akira Abe, a scholar of educational history, has dealt with the educational documentary films in his Japanese language book *Senryo-ki chiho kyoiku seisaku no keisei katei* [The Process of the Formation of Local Educational Policies in Occupied

---

Copyright © 2002 Yuka Tsuchiya. All rights reserved. This work may be used, with this notice included, for noncommercial purposes. No copies of this work may be distributed, electronically or otherwise, in whole or in part, without permission from the author.

Japan].<sup>4</sup> Using the records of the Occupation Forces, Abe listed 304 titles of educational films shown by the Occupation Forces and discussed the significance of the films in postwar Japanese local education. Since his study was made from the perspective of Japanese educational history, however, it regards the educational films as educational materials useful in the postwar Japanese schools rather than situating them in a context of U.S. foreign policy.

In contrast, this paper argues that the educational films in occupied Japan were part of the U.S. re-education policy for Japan, and in a larger context, part of the American postwar project to export the “consensus culture” overseas. The purpose of “re-education,” as explained in the U.S. policy papers, was to “effect changes in certain ideologies and ways of thinking of the individual Japanese” by using “all possible media and channels.” More concretely, the re-education policy aimed at eliminating militarism and the “anti-foreign complex” among the Japanese, and disseminating “democratic principles” and information on the “U.S. and other United Nations.”<sup>5</sup> Marlene Mayo has referred to the essence of re-education as “the extension of propaganda and psychological warfare into the peacetime era.”<sup>6</sup> James Tent, in his study of occupied Germany, has termed it a “catchword” to describe the conquerors’ attempt to democratize the defeated countries.<sup>7</sup>

Re-education, however, did not aim at any truly democratic society. As historian Charles S. Maier argues, the U.S. viewed the postwar world as “a tabula rasa” where it could build a “consensual American hegemony.” This consensus was based on the “commitment to productivity” in which political conflicts would be submerged as issues of secondary importance. West Germany and Japan, Maier argues, were the most successful examples of the U.S. politics of productivity, since these two countries became “massive economic forces that lack concomitant political weight.”<sup>8</sup> In this paper, I will stretch Maier’s thesis further to emphasize the manipulative information policies that the U.S. employed to establish consensual hegemony in the postwar world. On the one hand, the U.S. disseminated the mythic images of consensual U.S. society through educational films and other media, while on the other hand, it also intended to establish a consensual culture in other countries under its influence.

According to Godfrey Hodgson, the myth of a consensual society rests upon the idea of a “natural harmony of interests,” with everyone belonging to the mainstream culture on an equal basis. The only threat to such

a society came from communism, and therefore the U.S. and its allies in the “Free World” had to continue their “prolonged struggle” against it.<sup>9</sup> Outside U.S. national borders, such a myth served the U.S. imperial interest in two ways: in stopping people from revolting, both against U.S. domination *and* against domestic domination, and in establishing a unified bloc against Soviet influences. Edward Said, in his discussion of post-WWII foreign language programs in the U.S., has referred to a U.S. propaganda campaign, in which “what counts is not what people are or think but what they can be made to be and think.”<sup>10</sup> The evidence in Penny M. Von Eschen’s study supports this point. The Truman administration saw racial discrimination in the U.S. as its “Achilles heel in a propaganda battle with the Soviet Union for the allegiance of Africa and Asia.” Consequently, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) launched a radio and press campaign in African countries, attempting to project “positive images of black Americans as examples of American democracy at work.”<sup>11</sup> The Occupation Forces in Japan also manipulated the images of U.S. society and its relations to the world using the films. A utopian American society free of class, racial, and gender conflicts—and the desirability of the rest of the world coming to emulate it—was a recurrent theme in educational films shown in occupied Japan.

This paper will also emphasize the importance of the audience’s agency in interpreting the films. Peter Burke explains reception theory as a way to understand cultural transmission with an emphasis on the receivers “on the grounds that what is received is always different from what was originally transmitted because receivers, consciously or unconsciously, interpret and adapt the ideas, customs, images and so on offered to them.”<sup>12</sup> Further, George Lipsitz argues that films “resist univocal interpretations and inscribed ideological closures,” and are open to a variety of readings.<sup>13</sup> Lipsitz’s discussion is founded upon commercial films, and admittedly, educational documentary films might allow less freedom for the audience because of the overtly inscribed messages. Even so, my study establishes that audiences had some freedom in reading the films.

## I

The internal documents of the Occupation Forces clearly show that educational documentary films were part of the larger reorientation and re-education program framed by U.S. political interests. The educational

films were imported, edited, and distributed by the Educational Films Unit (EFU) of the Motion Pictures and Theatrical Branch (MPTB), within the Information Division of the Civil Information and Education Section (CI&E), which was one of the “Special Staff Sections” within Douglas MacArthur’s General Headquarters. (See Figure 1.) CI&E’s function was to disseminate democratic ideals and pro-American attitudes among the Japanese through various media. Radio, films, publications, public lectures and discussions, and even schools were understood as realms of information dissemination.<sup>14</sup> CI&E set up branches corresponding to each medium, such as the MPTB, the Radio Branch, and the Press and Publication Branch.

The responsibilities of these media branches were stated in a document titled “Political Information-Education Program” prepared by CI&E in June 1948, calling for the coordinated action of media branches to change the “cynical” attitudes of the Japanese people toward their government by making them aware of the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizens, to eliminate the “totalitarian” aspects in Japanese society, and to force Japanese recognition of the “benefits of living in a free, democratic state.” To carry out these objectives, the document further proposed some concrete “media plans.” MPTB was to 1) persuade Japanese film producers that their films can “contain a certain amount of political education material and still be entertaining,” 2) suggest to them possible “political education themes,” 3) distribute newsreels including “timely materials concerning political education,” 4) screen and distribute “Allied documentaries” produced in the U.S. and other Western countries, and 5) distribute 1,000 16mm film projectors for showing educational films. In November, this document was further expanded into a 158-page book titled *Information Programs*, which came to serve as the most basic reference material for all the CI&E officers.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear from these documents that the educational film program was aimed at the political re-education of the Japanese, intending to commit them to appreciate and protect the “free and democratic” world under the American hegemony. It is significant that the educational film program rapidly expanded after April 1948.<sup>16</sup> Although the “re-education” of the Japanese in pro-American democracy was built into occupation policies from the very beginning, this policy assumed an increased importance as the U.S. struggled to establish its hegemony in the areas where it saw a political power vacuum. The rapid expansion of educational films after 1948 should be understood in the global context in

which the U.S. was trying to export conveniently constructed images of itself and the world to counter the Soviet influence.

In the spring of 1948, the newly established EFU was actively engaged in the “media plans” mentioned above. Although the unit at first consisted of only two officers, Donald (Don) W. Duke and Major E. J. Hennessy, by the summer of 1949 three more people had been added. After April 1948, and especially toward the end of the occupation, other CI&E units were gradually diminished or dissolved. EFU, however, survived until the end of the occupation.<sup>17</sup>

Don Duke was engaged in the U.S. government’s overseas media programs throughout his career. His job-related movements illuminate the global scale of the U.S. information dissemination activities in the post-WWII period. Duke was born in 1917 and grew up in Davenport, Iowa. Before coming to Japan, he was working as a public relations officer and a “stage manager” for the Navy Department. He was thirty years old when he joined the occupation in July 1947. After returning to the U.S. in April 1951, he served the State Department as a motion picture officer (1952), spending some years in Bangkok (1954) and Bonn (1956) before heading the Department’s Production Division, TV Services (1960) and being appointed Special Assistant to the Director of TV Services (1962). He further served in Lagos, Nigeria, as an audio visual officer (1965), and, during the Vietnam War, was stationed in Saigon as a TV-motion picture officer.<sup>18</sup>

From spring to summer of 1948 was a vigorous time for Duke. The U.S. Department of the Army<sup>19</sup> was collecting and shipping hundreds of American and other Western documentary films to EFU, which was busy screening them to pick the ones that best fit the re-education purpose in Japan. The imported films had begun to arrive in early 1946, but the number dramatically increased after 1948. Between July 1946 and December 1951, the Department of the Army sent more than 800 films.<sup>20</sup> Although the Department was collecting documentary films from many different companies, it was also producing some original films specifically designed for use in the occupied countries.<sup>21</sup>

EFU sent the selected films to Japanese film companies, where they were “adapted” for the Japanese audience. “Adaptation” included translation into the Japanese language, the recording of Japanese narration, Japanese titling, editing, and duplicating. For the Japanese film industry, CI&E meant the survival of Japanese film companies formerly under the control of the Imperial government. At the same time, it provided

business opportunities for new companies.<sup>22</sup> The film “adaptation” companies competed against each other to win contracts with CI&E, and EFU took advantage of their competition.

Since EFU was expecting to receive a large supply of 16mm film projectors from the U.S. in June 1948, it needed to speed up the adaptation process. Duke ordered film-printing companies to operate seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, with three 8-hour shifts. Japanese companies, however, could not always meet Duke’s expectations because of illness among its workers, the result of poor living conditions and scarce food supplies, as well as a shortage of light bulbs, chemicals, and so on. Duke further organized a contest in “adapting” the American documentary series “This Is America” among six Japanese film companies to encourage their competition.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to “adapting” American films, EFU also started to order Japanese film production companies to produce original educational films. Unlike imported films, these films were especially designed to educate the Japanese. About thirty titles of the CI&E educational films were Japanese-produced. In some cases, other sections of the Occupation Forces requested MPTB to produce such films. In January 1949, for example, the Economic and Scientific Section (ESS) requested MPTB’s cooperation in preparing a script for a film dealing with the “grievance machinery of labor relations,” especially in the coal industry; as a result, *Safety Lamp: Grievances of Workers* (CIE191) was produced.<sup>24</sup> At other times, the request came from the Japanese government. *Model Health Center* (CIE131), for example, was produced as requested by the Ministry of Welfare.<sup>25</sup> There were forty-six Japanese film companies interested in producing CI&E educational films initially, but ultimately CI&E contracted with four big companies, Daiei, Toho, Shochiku, and Nihon Manga Eiga. Toho in particular had had a strong labor union and had produced leftist and antiwar films in the early occupation years. By the summer of 1948, however, the Occupation Forces had successfully purged the major leftist producers, substituting those cooperative with the occupation.<sup>26</sup>

MPTB supervised the process of production, screened the preliminary versions, and made revisions. In January 1950, for example, MPTB screened and gave advice on *The New Police Force* (CIE167) prepared by a Japanese film company. It suggested that they delete certain “undemocratic” actions of the protagonist (policeman), such as “making registrations,” and instructed them to emphasize more “simple, demo-

cratic acts while on patrol duty” such as “speaking to local citizens, joking with children.”<sup>27</sup> Another example, *How To Hold A Meeting*, explaining the democratic proceedings of meetings, was produced by the Toho Studio in the summer of 1948. An American “Visiting Film Consultant” in MPTB, Mr. Simmel, gave advice to the producers. These films, therefore, were not *Japanese* films in any true sense. In fact, MPTB officers sometimes referred to them as “CI&E-produced films.” It was ironic that a “democratic” procedure was taught in such an authoritarian way—through the production of films ordered by the Occupation Forces.<sup>28</sup>

All of the evidence reveals the sheer enthusiasm of CI&E officers in showing educational films to the Japanese, which probably came from their belief that they were engaged in an important historical project to re-educate the defeated Japanese through educational films. Educational films in occupied Japan were never detached from the overall political objectives of the occupation, but were an important tool for keeping the Japanese under American hegemony.

## II

What concrete messages, then, did the educational films convey to the Japanese audiences in the service of such political objectives? CI&E distributed almost four hundred documentary films during the occupation and assigned serial numbers to them.<sup>29</sup> I grouped the 328 titles that I found in the CI&E records into eleven categories, shown below:<sup>30</sup>

- (A) Culture and Geography of Western Countries: 82 titles
- (B) America as Model of Democracy (including labor relations): 69 titles
- (C) Hygiene and Other Practical Information for Living: 30 titles
- (D) Japanese-produced films: 30 titles
- (E) The World United (including anti-communism): 24 titles
- (F) Education: 23 titles
- (G) Food and Natural Resources (including fishing and agriculture): 18 titles
- (H) Science and Technology: 14 titles
- (I) Sports and Recreation: 13 titles
- (J) Reconstruction of Countries: 7 titles
- (K) Others, Unknown: 18 titles

Because of the vast obstacles I encountered in searching for and identifying the films, I could not select and watch the films equally from each category listed above.<sup>31</sup> Even so, there are some common threads running through the films, and the threads changed chronologically.



I watched two out of nine films released in Japan in 1946. *Steel Town* (CIE7, Category B) was a wartime Office of War Information (OWI) film portraying the mobilization of the steel industry, produced by a highly successful director, Willard Van Dyke. Van Dyke started his career as a photographer on the WPA Art Project in the 1930s. From 1941 to 1945, he served as a producer for OWI and acted as liaison officer between OWI and a group of Hollywood writers providing scripts for OWI.<sup>32</sup>

The film shows a unified America where native-born and immigrant laborers work side by side in perfect harmony. Frank, the protagonist, is an immigrant man from the “Middle East,” who came to the U.S. forty-five years before and who has been working in a steel factory in Youngstown, Ohio. Teamwork among men of different ages and backgrounds rules the factory. The perfect teamwork of steel workers does not stop in the factory. They have organized a town orchestra, since “steel men got a habit of doing things together.” In private, Frank is raising a warm, Christian family “up on the hill.” Frank’s colleague, Fred, represents the union in the labor management committee, where the managers and workers cooperatively discuss “how to make more steel.” *Steel Town* portrays a classless America, where everybody is assimilated into the mainstream.<sup>33</sup>

The other film released in 1946 was *Freedom to Learn* (CIE4, Category F), which has many themes in common with *Steel Town*. The film first portrays an Iowa farmer whose father has immigrated to the U.S. from Bohemia. He believes in the value of education and sends his two children to school every morning. After the scene of children going to school, the film somewhat abruptly shifts its focus to the students’ lives at the University of Iowa. It shows education as an extension of everyday experience, comparing people going to church and students attending religion class, or people working in the cornfield and students learning about agriculture. The intended message is the value of education as the foundation of civilized, democratic life. However, the sight of the overwhelmingly white, homogeneous campus reveals the hollowness of such an ideal.<sup>34</sup> What the film actually underscores is conformity among American youth rather than democracy among diverse students.

These two early films show the creation of the unity and consensus myth during WWII. Lary May argues that “during the war patriotism became synonymous with the avoidance of class or cultural conflict as



well as the making of a new American Way of consensus.”<sup>35</sup> The wartime U.S. government regarded films as the ideal vehicle to convey such a message to Americans. OWI instructed filmmakers to portray American society as a new “melting pot” of “many races and creeds that shows that people can live together in freedom and progress.”<sup>36</sup> Both films reflect filmmakers’ efforts in this line.

In 1948, science, medicine and technology emerge as a key theme of the CI&E educational films. The science portrayed in the films is of a heroic and paternalistic nature. In both *Journey Into Medicine* (CIE 32, Category F) and *Streptomycin* (CIE 222, Category F), young, earnest, white, male specialists in white gowns—a symbol of scientific authority—save the future of civilization. *Journey Into Medicine* is an award-winning documentary of 1947 produced by Van Dyke. It shows the progress of a medical intern, Dr. Marshall. He first works at the Presbyterian Hospital for the Poor of New York and then at a public health center in Baltimore. In New York, Dr. Marshall treats children and babies from poor European immigrant families. In Baltimore, accompanied by an African American nurse, he visits African American families in a poor neighborhood. He is also actively involved in the campaign to defeat diphtheria. The doctors are always white (mostly men), and those who seek help are always the poor or the non-white, often children accompanied by poor parents. *Streptomycin* was released in November 1950, although its production date is unknown. The film portrays Dr. Waxman and his young disciples, who are working to combat diseases with newly-discovered useful microbes. Although the central figure is the elderly Dr. Waxman, the camera constantly catches the young researchers working under him.<sup>37</sup> Both films emphasize the role of science in establishing a stable and prosperous American society, and imply the importance of white manhood in such efforts.

I observed a similar stance toward science and medicine in more pragmatic films on hygiene. One example was *Home Care of Tuberculosis* (CIE 86, Category C). The film was produced in 1943 but released in Japan in November 1948. It seems to aim both at the training of public health nurses and at the education of the American general public. In the film, a public health nurse, upon a doctor’s request, visits a house where there is a TB patient. The nurse explains step by step to the patient and his family about the home care of a TB patient. From time to time, the scenes in the house are interrupted by a medical commentator underscoring and supplementing the important points in each scene. Although

this film features a white woman as the key figure, it shows that the nurse is working under the control of the white male doctor, her activities are authorized by the white male commentator, and she helps a white male patient who is eventually able to return to work as a breadwinner.<sup>38</sup>

The “American Way of consensus” created in the wartime films continued in the postwar films, with a new emphasis on family and gender. *Campus Boom* (CIE 73, Category F), released in December 1948, pictures the Syracuse University campus, which was extremely crowded because of the G.I. Bill of Rights. Male veteran students are unanimously portrayed in a favorable light, as “courteous, respectful, self-disciplined adults,” and also as good fathers and husbands. “Married students with children rank the top grades among the veterans,” the film explains. Women are portrayed either as the wives or future wives of the veteran students. While a married male student leaves home for campus, his wife, a baby in her arms, waves good-bye. A single veteran student participates in a campus festival with a female student because nothing “could be more festive than having a lively girl on your arm.”<sup>39</sup>

*Women At Work* (CIE 225, Category B), released in December 1950, shows that American women can work outside of the home, while maintaining “femininity.” The film portrays four women working in different workplaces. Hazel, a married woman with two children, works at an electronics factory to supplement her husband’s income so that they can live in a comfortable house and send their children to college. Joan is a secretary to a bank manager, and for her a job is merely an “interval between school and marriage.” Martha is a research assistant of “the institute of cancer,” the only woman in this film who has some professional ambition. Ann is a store clerk, who gave up her interest in music to support her parents because of her father’s illness.

Each of the four women represents certain realities in post-WWII America. Although the popular discourse encouraged married women to stay home (as Joan would probably do after marriage), the actual number of married women in the work force continued to rise. Since the postwar consumer culture made it difficult for many families to satisfy all their material demands on the husbands’ income, many wives decided to “help out” (just as Hazel did). In the meantime, the professionalization of women that had begun in the late-nineteenth century had never completely died out, and a small percentage of career-oriented women like Martha survived the “doldrums” of the conservative years. Further-

more, when men could not work as breadwinners (as in Ann's family), women simply could not meet the "norm" of public discourse.<sup>40</sup>

On the one hand, the film shows the diverse options available for women in postwar America. On the other hand, it assures the audience that American working women never lose their "femininity." All the women in the film wear feminine clothes and make-up and never forget to check the weather every morning to decide what to wear to work. Further, the film never shows non-white or very poor women. The film conveys a mixed message: American women are free and independent, while at the same time "feminine" and not threatening to men or to the overall conformity of American society.<sup>41</sup>

Although *Country Store* (CIE 223, Category B), released in November 1950, deals with a theme very similar to wartime films such as *Steel Town* and *Freedom to Learn*, a new emphasis was placed on the "freedom" of the people in a small town in Kentucky. The film shows how the small rural town is organically connected to the rest of America. Even though residents live in the countryside, they are always "well-informed by radio and press," and "interested in national and world affairs." They "freely express their mind" even though "their opinions may not be agreed with." "Here and everywhere in America, people like to hear all sides of the question and make their own decision," the narration concludes. However, in this homogeneous fictional town, no one seems to bring up a radically different view that might disturb the harmony. *Country Store* shows a utopia of "free-thinking" people, with no racial, class, gender, or religious conflicts.<sup>42</sup>

The theme of brotherhood among democratic countries appeared in 1948, but rapidly expanded in 1949 and 1950, with an increasing emphasis on the unity of the "free world." The earliest example is *Out of Ruins* (CIE 38, Category J), a Canadian film produced in 1946 dealing with the reconstruction of Greece. The film portrays Greece as a foremother of Western civilization, and a land of poor, yet free-thinking people. It shows the Allied aid to Greek reconstruction as a noble work, and views Greek children as "tomorrow's citizens, not only of Greece, but of the whole world." Running through the film is the message that a unified Western civilization will reconstruct the world.<sup>43</sup>

Along similar lines, *Border Without Bayonets* (CIE 142, Category E), released in February 1950, portrays the border towns of British Columbia, in Canada, and Washington State, in the U.S.A. The film explains

that “the border is well policed and supervised, but there is no need of an immigration office” because of the “mutual understanding and respect” between the two countries. Various scenes show the peaceful lives of the people in the border towns, and the film concludes with two national flags fluttering in the wind side by side.<sup>44</sup>

The producer, Jay Bonafield, was also involved with the production of two other documentary films during the 1940s, *Frank Buck's Jungle Cavalcade* (1941) and *Savage Splendor* (1949). These films dealt with American explorers capturing wild animals in the Malayan jungle and on the African plains, respectively.<sup>45</sup> Both narratives were characterized by a colonialist stance—civilized American men exploring “savage” lands. The narratives can be contrasted to the brotherhood of Canada and the U.S. portrayed in *Border Without Bayonets*. The border towns, inhabited mostly by white people, are positioned at the opposite end of an imagined linear progress of civilization from the Malayan and African “savage” lands.

Films dealing with the unification of the “free world” rapidly increased toward the end of the occupation, and particularly after the outbreak of the Korean War. *United Nations Answers Aggression* (CIE238), *United Nations and World Disputes* (CIE245), *As Russia Sees It* (CIE253), *Under the United Nations Flag* (CIE 262), *The Fight for Freedom* (CIE264), *International Free Trade Union* (CIE293), *Communist Footprints* (CIE303), *The People's Response* (CIE314), and *Partnership for Peace* (CIE316) were all “UN or Department of Army pictures we have released since the Korean War, which are anti-communist in nature,” according to Don Duke.<sup>46</sup>

Many of the CI&E educational films showed an imagined America, a harmonious, prosperous society free from racial, class, gender, or religious conflicts. No class war, no racial uprising, and no rebellious women existed in this imagined consensus society. Unified America was at the same time the leader of the unified “free world.” Even though the consensus society was a fiction, when the majority of Americans believed in the fiction, it began to assume a real power to suppress dissension, as one can see in the repressed and “homeward-bound” 1950's. The U.S. government wanted to extend the myth (and the real suppressing power) of consensus to the rest of the world that was now a “blank sheet” in their eyes.

## III

It is admittedly a difficult job to evaluate how Japanese audiences accepted the inscribed messages in these educational films. It was only in March 1950 that CI&E began to collect audience reactions systematically, although, even before that, EFU had been incorporating audience's reactions reported by Japanese theater managers into the "EFU Weekly Reports."<sup>47</sup> As for any first-hand responses by Japanese audiences, I found only 565 sheets of audience reports submitted to the Occupation Forces between June and November 1950.<sup>48</sup> Although this data, collected only during a half-year period, does not provide us with much opportunity to assess reactions in the long-term, they still offer some insight into the Japanese audiences' reception of the films.

Audience reactions were recorded on several different forms. One form was a half-letter-size sheet titled "Film Receipt." This was literally a receipt of educational films checked out from CI&E, including date, film titles, the signature and title of the receiver, the number of people attending the screening, and "comments." Another form was also a half-letter-size sheet titled "Educational Film Attendance Report," which included the same information as the "Film Receipt" and also the exact place of the screening. Still another type was a variety of ruled paper on which members of the audience wrote comments freely. In all these forms, the reporter, representing the audience, summarized the reactions of the audience in the "comment" section. Some wrote only "Very good," or nothing at all, but others wrote detailed comments.

It is important to know who wrote these comments, because such comments might indicate different meanings depending on whether they represent only a small minority of elite population or include the lower middle-class to working-class people. Judging from the titles of the reporters, they seem to represent a relatively wide band of upper to lower middle-class backgrounds. Although some of them were obviously the local elite such as teachers and village officials, not all reporters belonged to the well-educated or relatively wealthy class. They included, for example, leaders of the local dairy farmers, representatives of various obscure associations, and supervisors of work places. Some of them wrote comments in English, indicating their high educational level, but the majority wrote in Japanese.<sup>49</sup> Also, the reporters did not write their own reactions, but summarized the reactions of the group that they were

representing, although probably such “summaries” inevitably reflected the reporters’ bias. Although it is difficult to determine exactly what groups among the Japanese population these comments represented, it can be assumed that they reflected the opinions of a wide range of middle-class people, including the lower middle-class.

There are clear patterns in their reactions—enthusiastic comments on certain films, and relatively passive comments or no comments at all on others—although few wrote negative comments, understandably because they probably did not want to challenge the authority of the Occupation Forces. One thing that struck me the most was the materialistic reactions of the Japanese audiences. They did not react very much to the abstract political messages or overtly educational contents. For example, democracy and the harmonious living in small towns that I discussed in the previous section did not interest the Japanese people enough for them to make any comments. Also, one commentator frankly wrote that the Japanese-made educational films such as *For a Bright Home Life* (CIE211)—apparently a didactic film—were “rather boring.” Instead, the audiences were most interested in three themes: science and technology, sports (particularly baseball), and recreation (particularly square dance).

Admiration for the advanced science and technology of the U.S. was repeatedly expressed by many writers. For example, a man representing a group named *aoba-kai* [the Green Leaves Association] who watched *Modern Highway* (CIE143) was impressed with the American highways, which looked like “beautiful patterns,” and wished that someday they would also have similar highways in Japan. Modern technology was closely associated with increased production. A commentator from the Ministry of Fishery was “deeply impressed with *Men and Machine* (CIE70)” because the film showed “production power as the foundation of human life and social administration.” The “scientific” way of fire prevention, the “scientific” way to combat disease, and the “scientific” way to practice sports, etc. were commended by many commentators. Even *Atomic Power* (CIE36) gave a “wonderful impression to the audience about science and human [sic]” according to one woman commentator. [Original in English.]

Sometimes their admiration extended to well-organized social resources, which they viewed as the result of material prosperity. The representative of a railway museum, after watching *Museum of Science and Industry* (CIE94), wrote that he hoped “to have such institutes in our

country.” Another commentator, from *CIE Film Sketch No. 26* (CIE173) and *For a Bright Home Life* (CIE211) “learned how American living standard is high,” and keenly felt the need “to modernize our home life more effectively [sic].” [Original in English]. At other times, writers simply admired the American film technology. Some commentators from rural areas said nothing about the film’s contents, but enthusiastically expressed their fascination with American color film. A male village official in rural Fukushima Prefecture wrote: “Our village is surrounded by the mountains and there is no entertainment except for some magazines, newspapers and radio. Some villagers go to watch movies a few times a year, but most of us had never seen movies before. The excitement of the farmers who watched color films was beyond description.”

American sports in general, and particularly baseball, were popular themes. *Baseball Swing King* (CIE113) “made people . . . interested in baseball,” and *Little League Baseball* (CIE206) helped people “understand that baseball is a sport that should be recommended” because it “unites the people.” *Vacation Sports* (CIE132) was shown in the plaza in front of the City Hall of Wakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture. The audience (approximately 3000 citizens) were “totally interested in the film and admired it in various terms.” The same film was also shown at a school in a small village. Students “cried out in admiration” at the fascinating scenes of water sports. “This is just the kind of film only the American people can make,” the writer admiringly reported.

Parents and children of a rural elementary school in Fukushima Prefecture enormously enjoyed *Square Dance* (CIE213). The commentator summarized the audience’s view of the square dance as “a very good dance” because “men and women, young and old can dance all together” and because it would create a “civilized nation” [*bunka kokka*]. At another elementary school in the same prefecture, the audience was “greatly interested in the square dance” which “came from America,” and was “modern,” and “uplifting.”

Several commentators accurately received the encoded messages of American consensus society in terms of race, gender and family. *Pueblo Boy* (CIE171) surprised the audience because “such a tribe is also living a civilized life in the U.S.” A man from the Tokyo Labor Office commented on *California Junior Symphony* (CIE139) that the “beauty of the film” lay in the “children of diverse racial groups getting together without any discrimination” to form the orchestra. The audience also realized that there were no rebellious women in American films. Students of



a private school in Tokyo watching *Women's College in America* (CIE83) “changed their mind” about American women, because the film showed humble and calm women students, while they had previously thought American women to be pleasure-loving and flamboyant. Dairy farmers who watched *American Stock Raising* (CIE84) and *Cattle and the Corn Belt* (CIE312) felt that American youth were trained to be farmers “under the reliable government and understanding parents,” and commended the films’ emphasis on harmonious family life as the key to successful business.

These audience reactions suggest that the CI&E educational films successfully imported the ideal of conflict-free and production-oriented “consensus culture” that Maier and Hodgson have discussed. The audiences were overwhelmed with the material prosperity of American society and its comfortable, “civilized” life and wanted to emulate it. The advanced technology, baseball and dance—symbols of the affluent society—were *apolitical* and *political* at the same time. They obscured political issues under the guise of innocent entertainment or the optimistic idea of progress, while such an *apolitical* innocence was at the same time the key element of the “consensus” to which the U.S. government was *politically* committed. By buying into the fiction of consensus, the Japanese audience was also accepting the power of the myth to suppress dissension and unite the nation toward the shared goal of economic growth, thus contributing to the creation of “massive economic forces that lack concomitant political weight” that Maier has pointed out.

In the apparently successful importation of the consensus culture, however, the Japanese people had their own agency, because they reacted to the encoded messages selectively. The Category B films portraying the U.S. as the model democracy and Category F films showing the U.S. as the leader of the free world did not impress the Japanese audience as much as more practical or entertaining topics. Category B and F films were the most political and propagandistic in their encoded messages, but the Japanese did not necessarily buy into them. Instead, they appreciated the films that inspired them in their own desire for affluent and comfortable lives. In other words, they were choosing the messages they wanted to hear, and also converting them to serve their own convenience, to “unite” their own people for reconstructing the country, and to make their own life “uplifting” and “civilized.” John Dower defined the occupation as “democratic revolution from above,” but at the same time acknowledged the healthy and energetic “popular consciousness”

of the Japanese that resisted the American imposition. In the present study, too, a certain resiliency in the Japanese audience was observed.

Most significantly, however, the Japanese spontaneous reading of the films and the American message of consensus did not conflict, but rather supported each other. The Japanese audience cast their desire for an affluent future on the films, while their desire was supported and encouraged by the films' message to ignore dissension and focus on leisure and production.

It should be noted, however, that the Japanese commentators cited here did not represent the whole Japanese population. Mire Koikari, in her gender analysis of occupation policies, argued that it was only middle-class women who benefited from occupation policies, while the resistance of the working-class women was brutally suppressed. The reporters cited in this paper were not necessarily the "elite," but more or less belonged to the middle-class.<sup>50</sup> The working-class people who were most likely to dissent from the picture of consensus society—and therefore most likely to be suppressed by the power of consensus—were not represented in the audience reactions.

#### CONCLUSION

Toward the end of the occupation, Donald Nugent, Chief of CI&E, addressed the Japanese audience when a new CI&E film was released: "I am happy to say that the motion picture branch of our section has played an important part in the rebuilding of Japan, through its production, release and distribution of educational films."<sup>51</sup> The U.S. government and the Occupation Forces seemed satisfied with the successful exportation of U.S. consensual hegemony to Japan.

The Japanese people, however, did not passively receive the imported ideal. The educational films in occupied Japan should be understood neither as one-way cultural domination by the U.S. nor as entertainment freely chosen by the Japanese people. While the U.S. government clearly intended to re-educate the Japanese through the films for their own political interests, the Japanese audience shrewdly took advantage of the films as self-motivating tools for material prosperity.

Most importantly, the U.S. political goals and the Japanese reception did not contradict each other, because the image of classless consensus served both the American hegemony and the Japanese economic reconstruction. The middle-class Japanese admired the U.S. material

prosperity that was based on consensual hegemony, and showed no hesitation in emulating it. Just as the dominant group of Americans embraced the fiction of consensus and contributed to the emergence of an affluent but repressive culture of the 1950's, the Japanese audience accepted the ideal of consensus and dreamed of a prosperous and harmonious society. Although it is difficult to measure the long-term impact of the CI&E educational films, the films may have helped unite the Japanese in focusing their energy on economic growth and leisure, while suppressing any doubt about such unity and conformity.

By showing the overwhelming affluence of U.S. society, the films might have also renewed the Japanese inferiority complex and yearning for Western culture, which had long existed within Japanese society. The films re-affirmed the West-centric notion of the linear progress of civilization and technology, and encouraged the Japanese to work hard toward it to maintain their honorary position in the "Western" hemisphere. The educational films taught the Japanese middle-class that it was their legitimate and feasible goal in the postwar world to devote their lives to economic and technological growth under U.S. hegemonic protection.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The educational films were shown not only in big cities but also in rural villages all over the country, and even on whaling ships. The Occupation Forces imported 1,300 American-made 16mm film projectors called NATCO (named after the manufacturer, the National Company) in order to show the films. The films became popularly known to the contemporary Japanese people as "NATCO films." In this paper, however, I will refer to those films as "(CI&E) educational films," the most commonly used term in the records of the Occupation Forces.

<sup>2</sup> Kyoko Hirano, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema under the American Occupation, 1945-1952* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Abe Akira, *Senryo-ki chiho kyoiku seisaku no kesei katei* [The Process of the Formation of Local Educational Policies in Occupied Japan] (Tokyo: Kazama-shobo, 1983). Hereafter, the names of Japanese authors of Japanese-language publications are shown with family names first. For Japanese authors who mostly publish in English and use the Western form of family name last, I have followed their own practice.

<sup>5</sup> The State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, SWNCC-162 series (July 1945-February 1946), The Records of SWNCC, microfilm, roll no. 14, the National Diet Library, Tokyo. The original documents are stored at the National Archives II, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>6</sup> Marlene Mayo, "Psychological Disarmament: American Wartime Planning for the Education and Re-education of Defeated Japan, 1943-1945," in *The Occupation of*

*Japan: Educational and Social Reform*, ed. Thomas Burkman (Norfolk, Va.: The MacArthur Memorial, 1980), 78.

<sup>7</sup> James Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Charles S. Maier, "Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Policy after World War II," *International Organization* 31, no. 4 (1977): 607–32.

<sup>9</sup> Godfrey Hodgson, "The Ideology of the Liberal Consensus," in *America In Our Time: From World War II to Nixon, What Happened and Why* (New York: Doubleday, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 292.

<sup>11</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 125–28. Mary L. Dudziak also mentions the U.S. propaganda campaign in Africa. Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review* 41 (November 1988):61.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 196.

<sup>13</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 176–7.

<sup>14</sup> This responsibility of CI&E was described, for example, in the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee policy paper, SWNCC162/D, "Positive Policies for Reorientation of the Japanese" (19 July 1945).

<sup>15</sup> National Archives II at College Park, Maryland, RG 331, GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5305, file 12 and 15. Hereafter, all the GHQ/SCAP, CI&E records are stored at the National Archives II.

<sup>16</sup> According to Abe's study, only nine educational films were released in 1946, and all the rest were released after 1948. Abe, *Senryo-ki*, 722–9.

<sup>17</sup> Sato Hideo, ed., *Rengo-gun saiko-shireikan soshireibu minkan-joho-kyoiku-kyoku no jinji to kiko* [Personnel and Organization of CI&E, SCAP], vol. 2 of *Sengo kyoiku kaikaku shiryō* [Postwar Educational Reform Documents], (Tokyo: Kokuritsu kyoiku kenkyu-sho, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> Department of State, ed., *The Biographic Register* (1974).

<sup>19</sup> The Army Department's Reorientation Branch, Civil Affairs Division, located in New York, was in charge of this task.

<sup>20</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5308, file 9.

<sup>21</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5308, file 6.

<sup>22</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5305, file 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5305, file 3.

<sup>25</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5305, file 4.

<sup>26</sup> Matsuura Sozo, *Senryo-ka no genron dan'atsu* [Suppression of the Freedom of Speech under the Occupation] (Tokyo: Gendai janarizumu shuppankai, 1969), 174–83. Ironically, Toho's Educational Film Division, where CI&E films were being produced, was the last stronghold of the leftist producers, which the president of the company described as "composed of 90 percent of Communists [sic]." GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5305, file 8.

<sup>27</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5308, file 6.

<sup>28</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5305, file 9.

<sup>29</sup> CI&E records include a film numbered 397, although I have not found all the titles up to 397.

<sup>30</sup> When a film extended over more than one category, I assigned just one category, judging from the central theme of the film. As for those films whose contents I could not determine, I tried to make the best guess from the titles.

<sup>31</sup> Finding the actual films was a time-consuming process. Many of the imported films were re-named when they were “adapted” for the Japanese audience, and the new titles were further translated into Japanese. Each imported film, therefore, had three different titles, two in English and one in Japanese. Since the U.S. archives store the films under the original titles, I needed to find out the original titles first, then search in the archives’ database. In some cases the original titles sounded too general (such as *Brazil or New Zealand*) to narrow down the search.

<sup>32</sup> *Directors/Filmmakers*, vol. 2 of *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers* (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1984), 546.

<sup>33</sup> Willard Van Dyke, *Steel Town*, no. 6 of *American Scene*, 35mm, 27min., Office of War Information, 1944. All the films cited in this paper are stored at the Motion Picture, Sound, and Video Branch, National Archives II at College Park, Maryland.

<sup>34</sup> *Freedom to Learn*, no. 9 of *The American Scene*, 35mm, 17 min., U.S. Information Agency, no date.

<sup>35</sup> Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 173.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>37</sup> Willard Van Dyke, *Journey Into Medicine*, 35mm, 39 min., Affiliated Film Producers, Inc., 1947. (Copyrighted in 1957.) Herbert Kerkow, *Streptomycin*, 35mm, 10 min., Department of the Army, no date.

<sup>38</sup> The film’s original title was *The Role of the Public Health Nurse*, 35mm, 16 min., the National Tuberculosis Association, 1943.

<sup>39</sup> Frederic Ullman, Jr., *Campus Boom*, 16mm, U.S. Information Agency, no date.

<sup>40</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women’s Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> The film’s original title was *American Working Women*, 35mm, 20 min., U.S. Information Agency, no date.

<sup>42</sup> *Country Store*, 35mm, 20 min., Department of the Army, 1950.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Reed, *Out of the Ruins*, 35mm, 10 min., the National Film Board of Canada, 1946.

<sup>44</sup> Jay Bonafield, *Border Without Bayonets*, 16mm, 16 min., U.S. Information Agency, no date.

<sup>45</sup> *American Film Institute Catalogue of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States, 1941–1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 818, 2085.

<sup>46</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5308, file 7.

<sup>47</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5308, file 6; Box 5305, file 8.

<sup>48</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5269, file 5. Hereafter, all the audiences’ comments were cited from file 5.

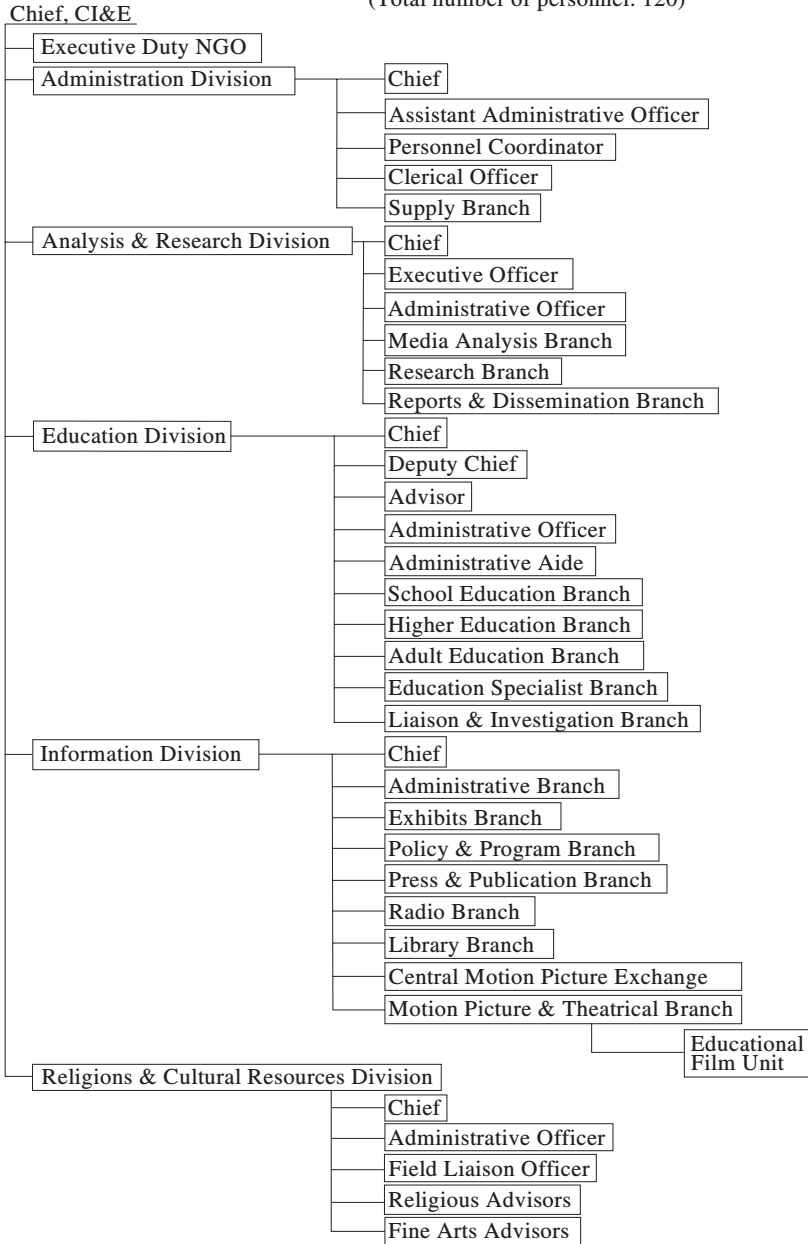
<sup>49</sup> Most of the comments cited in this paper were originally written in Japanese, and translation is mine. For those comments originally written in English, I indicate this in parenthesis [ ].

<sup>50</sup> Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 25; Mire Koikari, “Gender, Power, and Politics in the United States Occupation of Japan, 1945–1952” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> GHQ/SCAP, CI&E, Box 5308, file 7.

Figure 1.

The Organization of CI&E, July 1948  
(Total number of personnel: 120)



Source: Hideo Sato ed., *Rengo-gun saiko-shireikan soshireibu: minkan-joho-kyoiku-kyoku no jinji to kiko* (Tokyo: Kokuritsu kyoiku kenkyu-sho, 1984).