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The Tentacular Reach of USIA/S in Postwar South Korea

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Abstract

The information and propaganda activities of the US Information Agency (USIA) in South Korea from 1945 to 1960 accelerated the global dominance of the American film industry in an effort to combat communism. Succeeding the US Information Service (USIS) in Korea in the aftermath of the Pacific War, USIA did its work with the explicit approval of the US Congress and the Eisenhower administration: USIS collaborated with the US military and cooperated with the US film industry to produce, distribute, and exhibit commercial and noncommercial pro-American motion pictures. It also assisted the South Korean government and its military in nurturing pro-American values that further influenced the local film industry and founded the local television industry. While the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA) and United Nations Civil Assistance Command in Korea (UNCACK) also assisted in the aftermath of the Korean War, no group was as well organized as USIS in working with the Korean government or reaching out to the public, including to Americans at home who quarreled with the US agency's total and unidirectional influence.

Introduction

The evolution and expansion of the information and propaganda activities of the US Information Agency (USIA) in South Korea from 1945 through the 1950s, with its complex nexus of civilian and military powers in the US and overseas, extended and accelerated the global dominance of the American film industry and American culture in an effort to combat and supplant Soviet communism. From 1945 to 1948, the US military mobilized all media to promote American ideas of democracy and emphasized motion pictures as the ideal carrier of messages in a country where illiteracy, a lack of radio receivers, and an inadequate power supply persisted into the 1950s.

Succeeding the US Information Service (USIS) established in Korea by the American Military Government, USIA consolidated its overseas program (as USIS) with explicit approval from Congress and the Eisenhower administration in 1953. Despite the civilian takeover, USIS continued its collaboration with the US military and sought cooperation from the American film industry to produce, distribute, and exhibit commercial and noncommercial motion pictures to promote the American way of life and counter the military regime.

Cooperation was also offered by civil affairs programs conducted by the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA) and the United Nations Civil Assistance Command in Korea (UNCACK) in the aftermath of the Korean War (1950–1953). But no group was as well organized as USIS in working with the Korean government or reaching out to the general public, including Americans at home who also disputed the agency's unidirectional and total influence.

MacArthur Proclaims Order After the War

After Emperor Hirohito's surrender, which ended thirty-five years of Japanese rule on the

Korean peninsula, seventy-seven US military officers took over in his stead. Gen. Douglas MacArthur proclaimed that Korea would one day be free, but until then, Japanese officials were to be respected—as well as all American property and personnel.

The Japanese were replaced by Americans, and forceful protests flared against the new occupiers. In response to these volatile developments, Special Emissary Edwin Pauley, personal representative to President Truman, suggested classifying independence-seekers as enemies of the democracy that the US was installing in Korea. To assuage the problem of rebellious behavior, Pauley strongly recommended that the US carry on a propaganda-and-education campaign within Korea in order to "sell democracy and the four freedoms."[1] Without such a campaign, Pauley was concerned that the Koreans would hear only of communism, which he maintained "the Soviets were preaching as the highest form of democracy." Consequently, predating and anticipating the Smith–Mundt Act of 1948[2]—which, for the first time, committed the US government in a time of peace to conduct international information and educational exchange activities on a global, long-term scale—President Truman complied with Pauley's evaluation and replied:

> *We intend to carry on an informational and educational campaign to sell to the Koreans our form of democracy. [. . .] Our commitments for the establishment of an independent Korea require that we stay in Korea long enough to see the job through and that we have adequate personnel and sufficient funds to do a good job. I am, therefore, requesting the agencies concerned to see that means are found to ensure that General Hodge has the men and funds he needs to attain our objective.*[3]

Deliberate and Full-on Propaganda

Thus began a full-scale maneuver to eradicate leftist forces. The Department of Public Information (DPI) was established as the US American Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), the central mouthpiece to handle all information and propaganda operations by controlling every aspect of motion pictures and other media.[4] Instead of "propaganda," the preferred term was "information."

Prior to the arrival of the US military, the Korean motion picture industry was on its last legs, having been forced to nearly shut down its operations because of oppressive regulations that demanded it service the needs of the Japanese military. Under direct orders from the previous governor-general, it was composed entirely of Japanese staff, with a few Koreans as minor technicians. Upon the establishment of the American Military Government, the Korean Relations and Information Section (KRAI)[5] was formed to justify American occupation and "to slowly and carefully correct" the general impression that Korea was to receive complete independence immediately.[6] English replaced Japanese, and new people were appointed, including approximately twenty Korean personnel who were hired as translators and interpreters.[7] However, the centralized information office was maintained at the same level as under Japan in wartime.

Not surprisingly, it was soon discovered that KRAI did not operate well enough to cope with the revolutionary situation in South Korea. Thus it was reestablished as the Information and Intelligence (IAI) Section and tasked with expanded intelligence functions including sampling and control of public opinion. More Koreans were hired to perform intelligence activities. IAI's Motion Picture Sub-section was limited to the utilization of movie houses to disseminate information to Koreans and for the maintenance of constant liaisons with film producers. In October 1945, IAI made arrangements to procure US-made reorientation films from the War Department's Civil Affairs Division for release in Korea.[8] Aside from these activities, the Motion Picture Sub-section's duties

were not impressive until April 1946, after the reorganization of IAI into DPI in March.

Influencing People in Provincial Areas

Having discovered early on that the dissemination of information was difficult in the provincial areas, where access to radio sets was limited and few residents could read, DPI established the Mobile Education Section to deliver the program directly to the rural population by means of public address systems, motion pictures, dramatic sketches, posters, and leaflets. Until this time, the propaganda activities of the US occupation had been more or less centered in Seoul, with indirect communication with the wider population restricted to distribution of official leaflets and regular mobile public address broadcasts of news using city police boxes. On May 6, 1946, the first Mobile Education Unit—composed of sixteen members, including actors, speakers, and technicians—left Seoul by a special train to visit Chungchŏng-namdo (a western province in South Korea), where twenty-one shows, including the American motion pictures *Fury in the Pacific* (1945) and *Freedom of Education*, were presented in twenty days.[9] The train was made up of six distinctively painted cars and fitted with a recording studio, portable stage equipment, public address system, and motion picture projectors.

Upon completion of the newly established Mobile Education Unit's second trip, the first item on DPI's press release announced its successful two-week tour of Kyŏngsang-bukto (a province in the east of South Korea), during which a stage play, *Bridge in the Mountains*—a drama based on Korean history since 1905, with an all-Korean cast—and the American motion picture *The Battle of Iwo Jima* (or *To the Shores of Iwo Jima;* 1945) were the feature attractions.[10] Obviously, the exhibition of this "spectacularly beautiful and terrible film, by far the best and fullest record of a combined operation,"[11] along with *Fury in the Pacific*, was a strategic move to showcase American superiority over the Japanese and diminish heightened local disaffection by affirming that the US shared a common enemy with Korea. Shot in glorious Technicolor, *To the Shores of Iwo Jima* closes with the following excerpt from the recording of President Roosevelt's speech to Congress asking for a declaration of war against Japan the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor: "With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph. So help us God." Although these films were originally produced for an American audience, with *Fury in the Pacific* specifically produced for the War Finance Division to promote the purchase of war bonds as well as to enlist new recruits—the images of wounded American soldiers and the scorched bodies of Japanese soldiers are certain to have left a profound impression on the Korean audience. Following the success of these traveling shows, the Mobile Education Unit was subsequently dispatched on three-week tours every month with varying educational programs.

DPI's Motion Picture Section also expanded its activities greatly in the spring of 1946. All motion pictures, both domestic and imported, were to be reviewed prior to exhibition, and from April 6 through June 25, 1946, the Motion Picture Section licensed 328 motion pictures to be exhibited throughout South Korea.[12] This figure includes educational films, which also underwent censorship, although no censorship fee was ever assessed. Moreover, there was no import duty assessed on educational films, and the law requiring permits for visual education aids for all film formats (16mm and 35mm) excluded those for the US Army.[13] In April 1946, the Motion Picture Section also created an office in Seoul for the Central Motion Picture Exchange (CMPE, or Chungang Yŏnghwasa) to be the centralized distribution branch of American films.[14] Included among the imported American films were newsreels depicting world events, for which the CMPE branch provided Korean commentary on the soundtrack.[15]

The Motion Picture Section of DPI, in addition to producing short films and controlling all aspects of motion pictures, was now specifically responsible for editing and superimposing Korean soundtracks on American films. A total of nine documentary films on the American concept of democracy were adapted for exhibition in South Korea, with rewritten scripts and dubbing in Korean, including titles such as *The Nation's Capital* and *New England Village*.[16]

That same month, the American Military Government finally repealed all Japanese acts and codes for the regulation of motion pictures. However, it maintained Japan's repressive wartime policy of requiring production companies to submit a written application in both Korean and English, including translations of all titling and sound dialogue in English to be considered for the certificate of approval, and it also gave the Motion Picture Section the sole authority to issue a license after censorship, from alteration to complete elimination of the film.[17] In this way, local films were censored during all phases of filmmaking, from preproduction to exhibition. Also, licenses were required for exhibitions to more than fifteen people, and unlawful films were subject to seizure. This formally authorized DPI to interrupt the use of motion pictures by leftist groups, such as the Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Tongmaeng (Chosŏn Film Union, or CFU), whose members were interested in distributing Soviet films and documenting the formation of people's committees and an independent nation—to be discussed further in the third chapter. Subsequently, many of the film events organized or sponsored by CFU were prohibited, and there were frequent reports of violent skirmishes and obstruction, including the arrest of the supervising members of film events.[18] CFU members and the film community protested against these ordinances and subsequent American Military Government actions to no avail. Instead, DPI further antagonized the Korean film community by raising the ticket price for domestic films to between ₩200 and ₩300, while the ticket price for Hollywood films was set at ₩120. This action provoked further protests from the local film community, which were ignored, and many CFU members and other leftist filmmakers ultimately fled to North Korea, where conditions were more favorable.[19] The prohibition on leftist filmmakers from freely producing and distributing motion pictures stood in stark contrast to the increasing use of propaganda films by the Mobile Education Unit of DPI and conflicted with the very subject matter and message it sought to promote, including *Need for Good Government*, *Democratic Justice, The Meaning of Democratic Freedom*, *Korea Must Be United*, and *Art of Self-Government*.[20] Without irony, these propaganda films were distributed and exhibited in every province, followed by special lectures delivered to the rural population.

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Foreign and Korean films were watched for content detrimental to the American form of democracy, and American films were censored for content likely to offend Korean sensibilities. In New York City, the army's Civil Affairs Division (CAD), Motion Picture Section, was in charge of "the reorientation, reeducation, and democratization of the people of the occupied areas—Germany, Austria, Japan, and Korea—through the use of effective films."[21] For this purpose, the head of the

Motion Picture Section, Lt. Col. William C. Rogers, sought recommendations from the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) for lists of commercial and noncommercial films suitable for reorientation.[22] In Seoul the Motion Picture Section under the American Military Government was responsible for the licensing and protection of copyrights of owners and producers through its centralized control over the local film industry.[23] As for the CAD-chosen films, it was CMPE's responsibility to distribute them, along with Hollywood features, to all Korean motion picture theaters.

In cooperation with the local Motion Picture Section, the newly established Visual Education Section—also functioning under DPI and its Bureau of Public Contact—was made responsible for projecting short films and documentary slides to emphasize current, local problems and suggest ways of solving them. It also enlisted speakers to transmit the desired information and build a closer personal contact with the Korean public.

Along with such expansion of activities and increased specialization of DPI, the department was "Koreanized" in terms of personnel, contacts with Korean editors and publishers, hiring of visible Koreans chiefs, moving American staff to the USAFIK Headquarters Annex building, and leaving Korean staff in the Capitol. In February 1947 the American Military Government was renamed the Namchosŏn kwado chŏngbu (South Korean Interim Government; SKIG), and the American military governor continued to rule South Korea. SKIG, having no real authority, ceased to exist once the Republic of Korea (ROK) was established in 1948.

With ongoing political tensions, the first project of the reorganized DPI was to appease the bitterness Koreans felt toward the US occupation for the violent suppression of the popular uprising in the fall of 1946. Once again, the objective was to persuade Koreans to keep away from disorderly activities and observe the instruction of the American Military Government. Reflecting the urgency of the situation, in October 1946, all radio facilities were utilized to disseminate news to refute anti-occupation propaganda and assure the continuation of the normal conduct of American Military Government activities. At this time, radio was the only mass medium readily available for full use by the American occupation. Hence, the Radio Bureau arranged for US Army representatives to discuss all major issues related to the uprising and urged national cooperation against violence and disorder.

To further redress the growing antagonism against the US and its occupation, the information program in Korea was accelerated after meetings between American personnel in Korea, New York City, and Washington, DC. What followed was an increase in personnel and funding for the expansion of the propaganda programs and a closer collaboration between the two departments in the inauguration of information centers in Korea, with greater participation from the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs (OIC).[24]

In Washington Roberts requested that OIC periodically provide DPI with new materials it had developed in order to augment services and materials being supplied to the information centers in Korea by CAD. The demand for new materials included:

> *1. News picture service; 2. Display picture service ("a series of 18 displays consisting of from 40 to 60 subjects dealing with 'Americana'" to be furnished in 1947, as well as six exhibits); 3. Film strips, which in the future will be titled in Korean and both master and 10 copy prints furnished that deal with public health, education, agriculture, etc.*[25]

The demand received a quick endorsement, and all requested materials were to be supplied by the State Department, with additional financial support provided by the War Department. With motion pictures, in particular,

> *Arrangements are being completed for the titling of news reels in the Korean*

language in Japan, which will expedite their movement to Korea. No further section has been taken to change any established channels for the dissemination of documentaries or feature pictures in Korea pending clarification of the entire program in Japan and Korea pursuant to a complete report which is being prepared in the field for Mr. Pare Lorentz.[26]

Roberts's visit secured additional qualified personnel from Washington. Among the newly mobilized public relations and information specialists—dominated by experienced journalists—was James L. Stewart, who was appointed the director of public information as well as the public relations advisor to Hodge in February 1947.[27] Stewart was a war correspondent in China beginning in 1939 for Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). He was appointed director of psychological warfare in the China Theater in 1944 for the Office of War Information (OWI) and the War Department, and from October 1945 to January 1946, he served as director of information for the State Department in northern China.[28] Thereafter, Stewart became a central figure in American propaganda activities in Korea. On February 15, 1947, he took over the advisory position of DPI, which had been held by Col. Newman since September 1946. He also functioned as the public relations officer of USAFIK (succeeding Roberts), and he was the chief architect of the Office of Civil Information (OCI) that soon took over the very duty formerly charged to the DPI: a department that was now nearly completely staffed by Koreans.

The New Propaganda Machine: The Office of Civil Information

In May 1946, despite orders from the US War Department prohibiting the production of complete motion pictures in oversea theaters,[29] Gen. Hodge approved the production of *Korean Newsreel* for the dual purpose of informing and educating his troops and photographically documenting US Army activities in Korea for the home front as required by the War Department. The newsreels were produced on a monthly basis on 35mm film format, and they were 850 to 950 feet in length, running approximately ten minutes. The signal officer of USAFIK was in charge, with production by the 123rd Signal Service Department and the processing handled in Tokyo. The newsreels were intended to be shown with commercial entertainment films.[30] As for content, the scope of *Korean Newsreel* was promotional and included special military activities, information on Korean life and customs (particularly activity that showed what Koreans were doing to help Americans), points of scenic and historical activity in Korea, and sports and social activities. In this way, the US military's role as ambassador included promoting Korea and Korean culture to American troops in Korea and American civilians at home. As the need for improving US Korea relations heightened, *Korean Newsreel* was succeeded by *Progress of Korea* on January 19, 1947, which became a "bi-weekly" (i.e., twice-monthly) series.[31]

To put it bluntly, OCI was the United States government's propaganda machine for Korea that did not hesitate in "stressing the excellences of the American system in contrast to other systems" while sticking "to the truth."[32] This denouement completely ignored DPI's original objective noted earlier: "To give the benefit of American training and experience to Koreans, so that when the American forces withdraw they will possess at least basic understanding of the techniques and methods of democratic publicity procedures in the fields of motion pictures, radio, press relations, etc."

Working outside the jurisdiction of SKIG and the American Military Government, the new organization's first responsibility was to create goodwill between Koreans and the American

occupying forces; “second, to develop wide understanding and acceptance of American foreign policy and the American system of life; and third, to create a basic friendliness between the governments and peoples of [South Korea and the US] so that a heritage of goodwill will remain when American organized strength departs.”[33]

USIS

The American Military Government was dissolved with the establishment of the ROK, and US troops were withdrawn in October 1949 under the direction of Maj. Gen. William F. Dean, who succeeded Gen. Hodge as the commanding general of USAFIK. Chief civil affairs officers continued their function as advisors to the incoming Korean government officials.

Among the civil affairs officers who continued their function was James Stewart, who headed OCI until June 1949 and continued his supervisory role through the Korean War after OCI was taken over by the State Department and transformed into USIS during the 1950s and even after USIA was established on August 1, 1953.

Underwritten by the Smith–Mundt Act of 1948,[34] the continuation of the intensive information-and-propaganda programs in South Korea was in response to the State Department’s concern that recognition of the ROK by the US and recognition of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) by the USSR would result in possible civil strife with the two rival governments competing for jurisdiction over the same territory, making it “essential” that

> *An adequately staffed, intensive information and cultural operation be conducted in Korea (a) to ensure the stability and promote the prestige of the Republic of Korea which has the support of the United States; and (b) to counter Soviet machinations against the Republic of Korea and US foreign policy. It is likewise essential that the programs inaugurated by the Army in Korea suffer no interruption by reason of Army withdrawal.*[35]

The “civil strife” was inescapable, and with the outbreak of the Korean War, Truman’s Cold War policy was confirmed and “spurred the approval of NSC 68, with its emphasis on the psychological dimension in international politics.”[36] Indeed, the “Korean War dominated the Senate hearings on the Campaign of Truth and Marshall Plan of Ideas” to lend general support for “battlefield propaganda and an explanatory information around the world” in coordination with the military response.[37] Thus, the US civil affairs teams, along with the Eighth US Army (EUSAK),[38] returned to Korea “and took up many of the same duties they had exercised during the earlier occupation.”[39] But this time, the government included the ROK, whose authority and legitimacy greatly depended upon its alliance with the US.[40] The concentrated focus of the US and South Korean governments on Cold War priorities triggered a deep cooperation between them, especially during and after the Korean War, when US commitment in Korea grew from “containment” to defending “freedom’s frontier.”[41] That the Rhee government shared a common Cold War ideology with the US is hardly surprising, but the ROK’s homegrown fervor against communism was unrivalled by American advances. In December 1948, the National Security Law (NSL) was promulgated to officially declare communism an act of high treason and formalize the removal or suppression of leftists and detractors of the new government.

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Aside from these mentions, no list, partial or complete, of USIS films locally produced and distributed in South Korea during this period could be found.[45] Production numbers, however, are available for at least the brief period before the Korean War, and it is worth noting that USIS was the biggest producer of motion pictures in South Korea at the time and, ironically, also provided opportunities for Korean filmmakers to hone their skills, including Pak Nam-ok, Korea's first female director, and Kim Ki-yŏng, an auteur director who came into prominence in the 1960s. As owners of the most advanced and fully equipped production facility in South Korea, USIS had increased its output of 16mm films to nearly 330 by 1949, a great majority of which had been produced since January 1948. Its monthly output at this time was approximately fifteen titles, with twelve to fifteen duplicate prints of each film. Of this monthly output, six were newsreels (four on world news adapted for Korean audiences and two on Korean news developments), between four and five were so-called features (i.e., slightly longer than the newsreel and devoted to one subject, either Korean or American), and the rest were classed as documentaries.[46] One year later, in January 1950, the production number was nearly halved to two newsreels and one documentary each month and two or three feature films a year.[47] While no official record of censorship for any of these USIS films could be found, on February 3, 1954, a memorandum from Mr. Peterson of the Office of Policy and Plans to Mr. John S. Voorhees of the Office of Private Cooperation under USIA's Media Service division noted, "As to both publications and motion pictures the only censorship possible is the same as those which may be imposed on any domestic work, i.e., advocating overthrow of the Government by force and violence, etc."[48] Indeed, the support of government, at home and in the field, was among the newly emphasized priorities identified by USIS in Korea.

These local productions were freely distributed and exhibited by USIS “at non-theatrical gatherings in the open, in schools, in government buildings, anywhere that a projection machine can be set up and people can sit or stand”[49] to continue the diffuse distribution of motion pictures begun by the former occupying US military. By this time, the USIS owned seventy or so 16mm projectors operated by its mobile film units, which made weekly tours from the ten information centers.[50] The more rural population of the country was reached in “four-wheel-drive and winch-equipped vehicles” that permitted travel over difficult terrain most of the year.[51] For some in these remote regions, visits from the mobile film units were the only opportunity to experience motion pictures. With reports of nearly 1 million people attending these outdoor screenings each month just weeks before the war, the USIS clearly contributed to nurturing a wider film culture in South Korea beyond the city centers. [52]

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From 1950 to 1958, William G. Ridgeway, who formerly worked in the US Armed Forces Radio Service in Seoul and the motion picture section of the army’s Information and Education Division, was largely responsible for the content and presentation of USIS-produced films in South Korea. With the outbreak of war, Ridgeway and the Motion Picture Branch of the USIS, a total of 350 people,[53] evacuated Seoul to relocate in Pusan in December 1950, which also served as the location for the ROK government in wartime until the Armistice Agreement was signed on July 27, 1953. Without the proper facilities to carry out its function, the Motion Picture Branch relocated again to settle into a small information center located in Chinhae, a port city in the southeastern region.[54] In Chinhae Ridgeway and his crew launched a weekly newsreel and began several Korean adaptations of American films. The distance from the USIS office in Pusan [Figure 1], and later Seoul, also meant greater autonomy and independence for the restored Motion Picture Branch, and soon it was churning out newsreels and documentaries of a higher quality and quantity at a more consistent rate.

Figure 1: USIS Pusan branch, 1951
[ohmynews.com]

Under exigent circumstances of the war, USIS newsreels were "designed to support the efforts of the Korean government and the U.S. in fighting the war. It was clearly propaganda. We called the communists just about every vile name you could think of, and used all kinds of statistics and facts that would bolster morale. It was the Korean government's policy to foster hatred of the communists."[55] The focus on the war was in response to the revised wartime aims and objectives of the USIS program in Korea, which included coordinating its operations with the "psychological warfare operations of the United Nations Command (in Tokyo) and its military forces in Korea" to give them tactical support.[56]

USIS objectives shifted again "after the cessation of hostilities" to return to former priorities, with an added emphasis on stabilizing the government. Hence, during reconstruction, the focus of USIS films shift from bolstering the war effort to engendering loyalty to the ROK and support for the US, and above all to instilling faith that the government would come to the aid of the Korean people:

> *The documentaries we made, or Q [sic] the American-produced films that we made adaptations of, would cover a wide range of things on government, education, agriculture methods, the United States—not necessarily always appropriate for Korea, but at the same time they would convey the idea that the government could help the farmer. We were trying to point out that the government is your friend—the Korean government is your friend—because, after all, there was a tremendous*

amount of bad press that existed before the war. And, of course, the communists left no stone unturned to paint the government in the worst light possible. The government had a pretty poor, well-deserved reputation from the beginning, making it easy for the communists.[57]

In this way, USIS became a public relations arm of the ROK since its reputation and public image were closely tethered to those of the US. This included privileging President Rhee, who suffered from general disapproval by the local population—including American military and civilian personnel. However, the relationship between USIS and the Rhee regime was not always favorable, nor were all USIS films approved by Korean censors.[58] For example, a newsreel depicting a political rally by the opposing party was withheld from release by the Rhee government, which felt it contradicted the (false) newspaper and radio reports that only a few thousand people were in attendance at the rally rather than the more than five thousand participants shown in the film. Surprisingly, in a small but significant move toward democracy, the censure lasted only a week or so before the National Assembly vetoed the ban and approved the film for release, under heavy pressure from James Stewart. The disagreement is also significant since the post–Korean War newsreel disavows the reconstruction-era USIS policy to bolster the Korean government. Aside from such incidents, however, there were apparently "no real problems" for USIS films, which is in line with the slogan shared by USIS and the ROK after the truce: "We will work together as we fought together."[59]

As USIS grew stable and its objectives shifted focus on reconstruction, the relationship between the US and the Rhee regime diminished. This is in part a response to Rhee's increasing authority and intransigent opposition against any critical opprobrium. Recognizing that public democratic messages would antagonize the South Korean government, USIS's new long-range goals were:

(1) to preserve the hearty friendliness toward America which is characteristic of the Korean people, if not of their leaders, and (2) to cultivate all groups which might be in a position to influence succeeding ROK administrations.[60]

This meant persuading top-level ROK officials to become amenable to diverging agendas by targeting "press and radio personnel; second-level officials; education, business and professional leaders; students, ROK Army and ROK police; and the general agricultural populace"—namely, everybody. The last group—made up of mostly illiterate farmers, of course—was primarily informed by motion pictures and posters, whereas the elite received their messages of economic aid and "the theme of Free World unity in the face of Cold War" through publications and personal contacts as well as motion pictures.[61] Back in Washington, USIA dedicated six months to establishing an Information Policy Coordinating Committee in Korea, which was composed of representatives of all US civil and military agencies involved in economic aid and civil assistance as well as public information work, which, for the first time, led a coherent and comprehensive publicity campaign in South Korea. Some of the new committee's actions included:

A. The choice of a slogan "Strength for Korea from America" to be stenciled on all economic and military aid goods.
B. Joint production of motion pictures and radio programs by USIA and the military command concerning U.S. aid in Korean reconstruction. (Motion pictures are considered the most effective medium of information in the ROK).
C. Production of posters and instructional booklets by the Army Psychological

Warfare Section for distribution through USIA to the ROK Army.[62]

Among the successful joint productions was *Liberty News*, the USIS Korea field office's weekly one-reel news magazine that featured diverse topics including the Korean national police, public health issues, traffic safety, and US national elections, among others. Some of its content was supplied by Washington and assembled from various American and international footage. It was preferred, however, to produce all educational films locally, based on USIA assumptions that it was difficult to convey their themes to those who were unfamiliar with the props (e.g., consumer goods, such as the refrigerator) in American films, which hardly stopped Hollywood films from being distributed.[63] According to official reports, motion pictures—particularly the newsreel that played theatrically and nontheatrically—were the most effective means of reaching large audiences, both civilian and military, in South Korea.[64] And the weekly newsreel proved to be effective well into the 1960s, as judged by the demand for more prints by Korean exhibitors.[65] But there were detractors as well, and the Rhee administration attempted to censor *Liberty News* on several occasions. In 1956 the Ministry of Education demanded the removal of shots of the opposing presidential candidate, Sin Ik-hŭi, who died suddenly in May during his campaign. In 1959 a Korean cinematographer working for USIS was chased down by police officers for filming protesters from Rhee's opposing party.[66] These are but a few of the examples of skirmishes between USIS and the ROK provoked by the newsreels alone.

"In recognition that motion pictures were the most effective medium in South Korea, the local output of films increased from fifteen to eighteen a month, using Korean actors and respected elders to lend credibility, especially when they were shown in remote regions to unsophisticated audiences. These audiences were reached by mobile units, train, or jeep as they were under the American Military Government. By the late 1950s, however, the ROK Army had its own mobile film unit that frequently patrolled the northern border, servicing projectors and exchanging propaganda films. In fact, the ROK Army was a heavy user of USIS films, and it had hundreds of its own trained projectionists and mechanics tending to the twenty-five or so projectors borrowed from USIS."

In 1955 nearly eighty commercial theaters exhibited USIS films. By 1960 USIS films reached nearly three quarters of an estimated total of 420 theaters[67] in the southern zone, including a handful of small, rural establishments equipped with 16mm film projectors.[68] In recognition that motion pictures were the most effective medium in South Korea, the local output of films increased from fifteen to eighteen a month,[69] using Korean actors and respected elders to lend credibility, especially when they were shown in remote regions to unsophisticated audiences. These audiences were reached by mobile units, train, or jeep as they were under the American Military Government. By the late 1950s, however, the ROK Army had its own mobile film unit that frequently patrolled the northern border, servicing projectors and exchanging propaganda films. In fact, the ROK Army was a heavy user of USIS films, and it had hundreds of its own trained projectionists and mechanics tending to the twenty-five or so projectors borrowed from USIS.[70]

USIE

As USIS in Korea cooperated with the ROK to deliver wartime propaganda as part of the US

military response to the communist threat and invasion in South Korea, the Office of US Information and Educational Exchange (USIE) in Washington responded to Truman's Campaign of Truth by preparing a more hard-hitting offensive against the Soviet bloc and communist propaganda for the home front and abroad. The first of USIE's efforts was the production of a special newsreel titled *United Nations Aids the Republic of Korea*, seizing on Truman's success in obtaining a UN resolution supporting action against North Korea to emphasize it as a coalition response.[71] Nearly one thousand prints were made of the film in twenty-two languages, and it was shown to an estimated 30 million people around the world. In the capital, the Korean War "confirmed" Truman's Cold War policy and "underlined" the need for Congress to act, leading to the approval of National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68), "with its emphasis on the psychological dimension in international politics." The discussion can be summarized as follows:

> *The Korean War dominated the Senate hearings on the Campaign of Truth and Marshall Plan of Ideas in July. Marshall, with none of his old diffidence, called for a "dynamic procedure . . . in this conquest of the mind"; Eisenhower spoke of the decisive "value of morale" and called truth "our T-bomb," whereas a rising star, Acheson's Special Consultant John Foster Dulles, went so far as to argue, "the question of whether we have a general war or not may hinge, very largely upon the relative effectiveness of the Communist propaganda and the Free World propaganda."*[72]

Issued on April 14, 1950, and approved by Truman on September 30, 1950, NSC-68 escalated Cold War activities, including increases in USIE and military budgets. From 1953 to 1963, for example, the budget for USIA (successor to the International Information Administration, or IIA) rose 86 percent, while the entire federal budget grew at the rate of 48 percent.[73]

In this way, the use of noncommercial motion pictures grew exponentially in the postwar reconstruction period, matched by the establishment of more than triple the number of motion picture theaters during the American military occupation. In truth, despite the shortcomings of the public information programs during the American occupation, the concentrated information campaign of USIA had a smoother run than its predecessors by exploiting early channels of communication and distribution. There is also greater evidence of cooperation between the ROK and the US during this period, just as there is ample evidence of contention and conflict between the two countries, particularly from the Rhee regime, whose authority was increasingly challenged by student demonstrators calling for democracy. They ultimately succeeded in crushing the authoritarian government after the April 19 (1960) Revolution. To wit, the US Army's information-and-propaganda apparatus in the aftermath of World War II had a lasting impact on media control and distribution channels, continued by USIS and the ROK, that bolstered the statist authoritarian regime while paradoxically promoting ideals of democracy, modern technology, and benevolent governments. The broad dissemination of noncommercial films also enriched local film culture, while also forcing viewer positions and interpretations by Korean lecturers and filmmakers that ultimately challenge any straightforward argument of cultural imperialism.

TABLE 1: HISTORY OF THE U.S. ARMY MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN KOREA (USAMGIK)
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION (DPI), 1945-1948

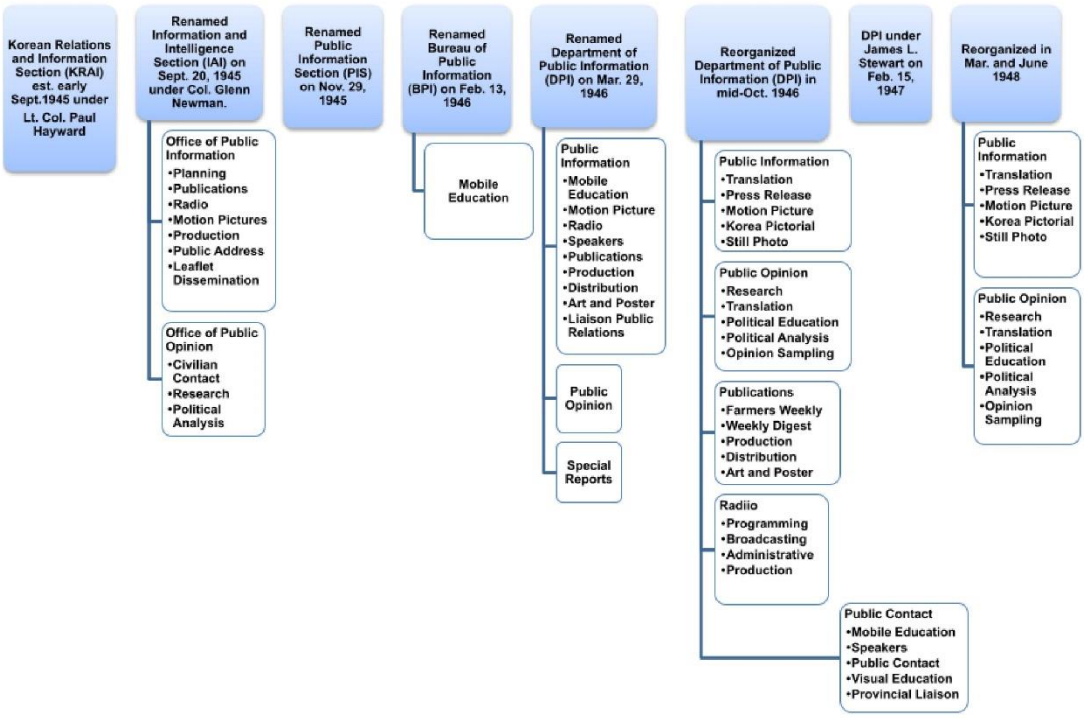

Table 1: History of the DPI
[Table designed by Sueyoung Park-Primiano]

About the Author

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[1] "President Truman to Ambassador Edwin W. Pauley, at Paris," July 16, 1946, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1946, The Far East Volume VIII: 713, http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1946v08; and General Hodge Official File, 1946, Box 1, Record Group (RG) 554, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

[2] President Truman approved this act, also known as the "United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948," on January 27, 1948. See Thomson, *Overseas Information Service of the United States Government*, 1–14.

[3] FRUS, 1946, Vol. VIII: 713, http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1946v08, and General Hodge Official File, 1946, Box 1, RG554, NARA.

[4] This predates Jacques Ellul's observation that for mass media to be really effective as propaganda they "must be subject to centralized control" and they must be total. See his *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York, NY: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 1965), xvi–xvii, 102–3.

[5] According to official history, policies and practices of KRAI and its successors were different from those of the Japanese Office of Information. It claimed that the Office of Information had been mainly a censoring organization that suppressed freedom of speech and the press, but KRAI was a releasing organization that protected said freedoms. To the contrary, KRAI and its subsequent bureaus also controlled and censored all Korean media, in addition to executing propaganda. Indeed, the confiscation of all essential media and communication facilities was among the first tasks in which KRAI was involved, including the joint takeover, with the Communications Bureau of Military Government, on September 16, 1945, of all ten of the Korean Broadcasting Corporation's radio stations operating south of the 38th parallel. See "History of the Department of Public Information," Box 39, RG554, NARA.

[6] "History of the Department of Public Information."
[7] Ibid. The core of this information office had been recruited on August 23, 1945, from the Psychological Warfare Detachment of the XXIV Corps, USAFPAC, stationed in the Philippines. Key personnel included its commander, Capt. Tuke (later promoted to major), two other officers, and eleven enlisted men.

[8] Cha, "Media Control and Propaganda in Occupied Korea, 1945–1948," 195–6, 233.

[9] *Fury in the Pacific* is available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7KsOfVm8Bs. This nearly twenty-minute, black-and-white film "was the first film produced jointly by the American Army, Navy and Marine Corps for public showings. Nine photographers were wounded, and one killed in the crew of 39 which took the footage for this story of the landings on Pelelieu and Anguar in the Palaus." The commentary was written by Capt. Charles Grayson of the US Army, and it was distributed by Warner Bros. for the Office of War Information (OWI) in March 1945. See MacCann, *The People's Films*, 167.

[10] Press releases, May 6 and June 19 and 25, 1946, Box 23, RG554, NARA. *The Battle of Iwo Jima*, also known as *To the Shores of Iwo Jima*, is available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBuXgQRz3II. This Oscar-nominated film "was the first American military picture made according to a carefully worked out battle-plan script," and it was the work of 106 navy, marine, and coast guard camera operators, edited at Warner Bros., and released by United Artists for OWI. See MacCann, *The People's Films*, 167.

[11] Press releases, May 6 and June 19 and 25, 1946.

[12] Press release, June 25, 1946, Box 23, RG554, NARA. According to Kyun Kim, by September 1946 more than four hundred foreign titles were released, of which most were American films. See "The American Struggle for Korean Minds: US Cultural Policy and Occupied Korea," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1995), 244–5. These figures obviously include noncommercial "reorientation" films; Hollywood features were not shown until after the establishment of CMPE in April 1946.

[13] *World Trade in Commodities, Motion Pictures and Equipment, Motion Picture Industry in South Korea*, January 1949, clipping files, South Korea (1949–1988), Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (MHL).

[14] CMPE's role as a subsidiary of the Motion Picture Export Association is fully discussed in the next chapter.

[15] Press release, April 8, 1946, Box 23, RG554, NARA.

[16] Other titles are not identified. See press release, December 24, 1947, Folder 2, Box 25, RG554, NARA.

[17] There were no mentions of censorship guidelines to be found among the USAMGIK and USAFIK records. This is contrary to the very detailed list of suggested and prohibited subjects drafted by the Civil Information and Education (civilian) and the Civil Censorship Detachment (military) censors of the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers (SCAP) during the American occupation of Japan. See Hirano, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo*.

[18] Newspaper accounts of CFU and the Korean film community's protest against the ordinance can be found in *Chayu sinmun*, October 19, 20, 24, 1946; *Sŏul sinmun*, October 19, 24, 39, 1946; *Chosŏn ilbo*, October 24, 1946; and *Tonga sinmun* in "Sinmun kisa ro pon Chosŏn yŏnghwa [Korean cinema seen from the news reports], 1945–1957," 55–9.

[19] According to Armstrong, "offers of training and good wages drew many aspiring film makers up to the North, some (according to O Yŏng-chin) with stolen U.S. Army film equipment." See Charles K. Armstrong, "The Origins of North Korean Cinema: Art and Propaganda in the Democratic People's Republic," *Acta Koreana* Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 2002): 13. After this suppression, the next leftist film movement in South Korea would not occur until the 1980s as part of the democratization movement against the Chun Doo-hwan military regime.

[20] Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP), *Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea*, No. 11 (August 1946), 87.

[21] MPAA, general correspondence, Reel No. 13, MHL.

[22] The chief of CAD's New York field office was Brig. Gen. Robert A. McClure. In addition to cooperating with CAD, MPAA supplied the Overseas Branch of the Army and Air Force Motion Picture Service with entertainment films for the soldiers stationed in Europe and the Far East Command. MPAA, general correspondence, Reel No. 13, MHL.

[23] *World Trade in Commodities.*

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[24] OIC was established by the US Department of State on August 31, 1945, made up of what remained of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) and OWI from WWII. It was renamed the Office of International Information and Educational Exchange (OIE) in the fall of 1947 and split into the Office of International Information (OII) and Office of Educational exchange (OEX) on April 22, 1948. It was led by Assistant Secretary of State William Benton, a specialist in advertising, until his resignation on September 30, 1947; he was succeeded by George V. Allen in January 1948. See Thomson, *Overseas Information Service of the United States Government*, 6–7.

[25] Rankin Roberts, "Progress Report on Accelerated Program of Information and Political Education for Korea," November 25, 1946, Box 1, RG554, NARA.

[26] Roberts, "Progress Report on Accelerated Program of Information and Political Education for Korea." No record of Pare Lorentz's involvement could be found.

[27] Other recruits include Charles Coultman, formerly director of field operations, as deputy director of DPI; Arthur Reef, formerly the executive editor of *Parade*, as deputy director of DPI for American affairs; Walter Kiley, formerly director of public relations for the Greater Boston Committee, as chief, Bureau Public Contacts, DPI; William Ryan, formerly special editor for international news, as chief, Bureau of Public Information; and Thomas Michelmore, formerly city editor of the *Chicago Sun*, as chief, Bureau of Publications. See Roberts, "Progress Report on Accelerated Program of Information and Political Education for Korea."

[28] Press release, February 7, 1947, Box 24, RG554, NARA.

[29] War Department, letter to occupation commanding generals related to departmental policy on overseas photography in "Photographs, etc. (1946)," May 23, 1946, Box 19, RG554, NARA.

[30] Bill Buerkle, Major, Sig C, Photo Officer, to Commanding Gen. Hodge, letter, June 30, 1947, in "Motion Pictures (1947)," Box 19, RG554, NARA.

[31] See “Public Relations: Relations with Korea,” in “History of the Office of Civil Information,” May 30, 1947, through June 30, 1948, Box 39, RG554, NARA.

[32] James L. Stewart, “Report on the History and Growth of the Office of Civil Information,” USAFIK, November 10, 1947, Headquarters, United States Army Forces in Korea, Box 32, RG554, NARA.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Passage of the legislation in early 1948 allowed the US to pursue its first international information-and-propaganda program in peacetime.

[35] “Korea Takeover, 1946–48,” confidential letter, September 17, 1946 (after August 15 and before September 9, 1948, possibly from Frank Schuler) to members of the State Department’s Office of International Information, General Records of the Department of State, Records Relating to International Information Activities, 1938–1953, Box 127, RG59, NARA.

[36] Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 55.

[37] Cull, The Cold War and the United States Information Agency, 55–56.

[38] Previously responsible for the demilitarization of Japan at the end of WWII, the Eighth Army began operation in Korea in July 1950 to fight the war and remained in Korea to assist with its relief and rehabilitation and the United Nations Command.

[39] Steven Hugh Lee, “Military Occupation and Empire Building in Cold War Asia: The United States and Korea, 1945–1955,” in *The Cold War in East Asia, 1945–1991*, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, ed. (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 98.

[40] The United Nations was also involved, but its information activity is beyond the scope of this project.

[41] Evidence of greater American involvement in Korea includes $5.5 billion in military aid provided from 1953 to 1972, which came in the form of new weapons, equipment, supplies, and direct subsidies to the ROK, as well as special training of the ROK military by a powerful US military advisory group and a residual force of fifty thousand to seventy thousand American troops stationed in the ROK after the armistice in 1953. See Frank Baldwin, “Introduction,” in *Without Parallel: The American-Korean Relationship since 1945*, Frank Baldwin, ed. (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1974), 18.

[42] Wol-san Liem, “Telling the ‘Truth’ to Koreans: U.S. Cultural Policy in South Korea During the Early Cold War, 1947–1967,” (PhD diss., New York University, 2010), 105.

[43] Liem, “Telling the ‘Truth’ to Koreans,” 101.

[44] Han Sang Kim, “Uneven Screens, Contested Identities: USIS, Cultural Films, and the National Imaginary in South Korea, 1945–1972,” (PhD diss., Seoul National University, 2013), 22, 129.

[45] There is, however, an alphabetical list of USIS movie scripts from 1942 to 1965 available in the civilian records reference room for RG306 at NARA, without any description or details on production or distribution.

[46] *World Trade in Commodities*.

[47] James L. Stewart to Ambassador Muccio, “USIE Program in Korea,” January 11, 1950, Box 2540, RG59, Central Decimal Files, NARA.

[48] See “Legal and Exhibit Records,” Box 8, RG306: Records of the US Information Agency, NARA.

[49] Department of State, International Information and Educational Exchange Program, “Motion Picture Program, 1948–1952,” country paper for Korea, Box 6, RG59, NARA.

[50] The ten information centers were established by May 1948, and they were located in Seoul, Inchŏn, Kaesŏng, Chŭnchŏn, Kwangju, Mokpo, Pusan, Chŏnju, Taejŏn, and Taegu.

[51] *World Trade in Commodities*.

[52] Ibid.

[53] This figure is according to Ridgeway’s recollection and could not be confirmed by official records. More than likely, the large figure included more than the Motion Picture Branch personnel, many of whom were part-time and temporary contract workers.

[54] A US Air Force base was also located in Chinhae, wreaking havoc with the film crew’s sound recording.

[55] G. Lewis Schmidt and William G. Ridgeway. *Interview with William G. Ridgeway*. 1989. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000976/.

[56] Department of State, “Motion Picture Program, 1948–1952.”

[57] See Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 18.

[58] See Hŏ Ŭn, *Miguk ŭi hegemoni wa Han’guk minjokchuŭi: naengjŏn sidae, 1945–1965 munhwajŏk kyŏnggye ŭi kuch‘uk kwa kyunyŏl ŭi tongban* (Seoul: Korean University Press, 2008), the first full monograph on the history of USIA in South Korea that more fully addresses the adversarial relationship between the Rhee regime and USIS Korea.

[59] Schmidt and Ridgeway, *Interview with William G. Ridgeway*.

[60] “March 1–December 31, 1954: US-Korean Relations in the Postarmistice Period,” *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Volume XV: 1952, http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.

[61] “US-Korean Relations in the Postarmistice Period.”
[62] Ibid.

[63] “Study of USIA Operating Assumptions,” 1954, Vol. 1, Box 5, RG306, NARA, 19–20.

[64] William L. Grenoble and James B. Opsata, “Inspection Report of USIS Korea,” June 21–July 1, 1955, copy #14, Inspection Reports & Related Records, 1954–1962, Box 6, RG306, NARA.

[65] “USIS Seoul Field Message to USIA Washington,” June 4, 1965, Assessment Report—Korea 1965, Subject Files, Folder 1, Box 8, RG306, NARA.

[66] Kim, “Uneven Screens, Contested Identities.”

[67] This appears inflated compared to the figure of 225 screens in 1958 according to Young-il Lee in *The History of Korean Cinema*, 263.

[68] “Inspection Report, November 24, 1961,” Inspection Reports & Related Records, 1954–1962, Box 6, RG306, NARA.

[69] Department of State, International Information and Educational Exchange Program, Country Paper for Korea.

[70] Grenoble and Opsata, “Inspection Report.”

[71] Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 55.

[72] Ibid., 55–56.

[73] Leo Bogart, *Cool Words, Cold War: A New Look at USIA’s Premises for Propaganda,* revised ed. (Washington, DC: The American University Press, 1995), xxiv.

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