
Preserving CIE Films: The Case of Kiryū City, Gunma Prefecture

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In fall of 2004, through the introduction of Dr. Shizuko Shiba, who was at Hiroshima University at the time, I came to learn of CIE¹ films in the possession of Kiryū City Public Library in Gunma Prefecture. In an effort to protect the films from deterioration, plans were made for their donation to the National Film Center (NFC), then affiliated with the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo (it is now independent as the National Film Archive of Japan [NFAJ], but hereinafter will be referred to as the NFC). Following the conclusion of negotiations, 136 films were safely transferred to the NFC in September 2005. All 136 films were release prints for movie screening, and among these were untitled films and works of the same name. The fiber cases were opened and the condition of the film inspected. Excluding films that could no longer be rewound due to deterioration, 85 works comprising 88 films (3 flammable, 85 non-flammable) were selected for preservation. After undergoing necessary copyright procedures, the films were formally donated to the NFC in March 2006. Most of the surviving CIE films in Japan are 16mm, which can be screened with a projector that is convenient to transport and operate. However, the films kept by the city of Kiryū primarily consisted of 35mm reels, likely because the films were screened in general movie theaters between regular entertainment movie showings. The movie projectors that were installed in these movie theaters used the larger 35mm film, as the projectors did not need to be moved after installation. Compared to 16mm film, a single frame on 35mm film contains more than six times the surface area, resulting in significantly higher image resolution, which makes the film suitable for screening on large screens. From the standpoint of film preservation, the fact that the CIE films of Kiryū were captured on such high-resolution 35mm film made them an extremely valuable case. In practice, it was common for show organizers to borrow a movie projector and CIE film as a set from audiovisual libraries and then personally transport these to the screening venues, such as community centers and schools, for screening. Such an arrangement was possible for 16mm film, due to the convenient nature of the movie projector and film. However, as there were more movie theaters than usual in Kiryū, which had a thriving textile industry and vibrant cultural entertainment scene, general movie theaters were used as venues for CIE film screenings, and it is likely that the 35mm film was specially produced for loaning to these movie theaters.

The 85 donated, non-flammable films were stored in special conservation storage (at 5°C, 40% humidity) on the basement-level second floor at the Sagamiyama Branch of the NFC. Furthermore, films that

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produced the smell of acetic acid due to deterioration (vinegar syndrome) were stored in a special room (at 2°C, 35% humidity) on the basement-level first floor. The three flammable films, which are classified as a “Category 5 Dangerous Substance” under fire safety laws, were stored in a private storehouse for dangerous substances (8° C, variable humidity) in Ichihara City, Chiba Prefecture.

As the films *Themes from the U.S.* and *Views of America* are flammable, the video and audio for these were preserved separately in the form of duplicate negatives (internegatives). These, in turn, were used to create prints for screening. Similarly, duplicate negatives and screening prints were produced for the non-flammable films, beginning with films that were designated for planned future screening or exhibited considerable deterioration. Telecine (the transfer of film to video) was also carried out for a total of 115 films, including 27 films that could not be preserved due to deterioration, as the films could be transferred without use of perforations.

In March 2006, the CIE Film Research Group (consisting of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies at the University of Tokyo, and Nippon Eiga Shinsha) obtained permission from the NFC to use reproductions of the films for research activities and acquired the complete reproduced collection of the aforementioned 115 films (however, due to duplicates, the number of unique works stands at 109).

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As part of the Documentary Film Archive Project, the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies at the University of Tokyo has made part of the collection available to some researchers. However, due to copyright issues, the collection is currently managed through username ID and password and is unavailable to the public.

In the past, movie screenings required projectors and films that had to be transported by way of bicycle trailers, ferries, horse-drawn carriages, and sleighs, as well as the extensive preparations of many personnel. Yet today, it is possible for a movie to begin playing instantly over the Internet for even a single viewer. It is my hope that these films will continue to reach many people into the future, bringing them the experience of living in an entirely different era.

¹ [Editors' note] The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Civil Information and Education Section (SCAP-CIE) was an extensive propaganda and “education” program throughout post-WWII Japan designed to instantiate democratic, market-based ideologies through varied media and spaces. Its operations were later absorbed and managed by USIA. For further scholarship on SCAP-CIE, USIS, and other US media operations in Japan, see the excellent works of Dr. Yuka Tsuchiya of Kyoto University, especially her forthcoming book, *Science, Technology and the Cultural Cold War in Asia: From Atoms for Peace to Space Flight* (London: Routledge, 2022).