Captivating Hearts and Minds:
The Attempted Americanization of Asian Cultures, 1945-1970

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the interaction between Asian societies and the United States Information Agency (USIA), the official propaganda apparatus of the United States, during the “cultural Cold War,” in which the United States, China, and the Soviet Union attempted to use culture – books, films, festivals, language, television, the popular press – as propaganda to attain foreign policy goals. While the political, military, and economic histories of the Cold War era have been well researched and debated, the cultural dimensions of the Cold War, particularly in East and Southeast Asia, have been largely ignored. Culture, however, mattered, and understanding US and Asian interactions and exchanges within a larger transnational history of a liberalizing postwar Asia reveals the critical role cultural values and products played in shaping individual Asian citizens’ ideas about themselves, their society, and America’s foreign policies during the Cold War era.

The types of propaganda products employed by USIS branches in Asia during the cultural Cold War included the printed word through posters, newspapers, magazines, and books in both English and local language translations designed to undermine Soviet and Chinese foreign policies while lionizing the United States. The agency likewise employed film and television to project American superiority while entertaining and capturing the largest possible audience for its propaganda messages. Furthermore, USIS officials encouraged the acquisition of English as a second language to open new channels of communication and to reduce tensions in nations facing an increased presence of American personnel.

This use of US cultural products to fight the Cold War not only acted as propaganda to win hearts and minds, but also shifted cultural practices in Asia toward a globalized version of American culture bolstering U.S. economic, political, and military power in the region. The
creation of new spaces and opportunities for cultural consumption and practices is traced primarily in Thailand, the Philippines, and Japan across target audiences ranging from local student groups to authoritarian military leaders who both embraced and resisted aspects of American technology, values, and institutions they found relevant to themselves, their communities, and their nations in the second half of the twentieth century.
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List of Abbreviations

ACLS: American Council of Learned Societies
ASE: Armed Service Editions
AUA: American University Alumni Association (US –Thai binational center)
CAO: Cultural Affairs Officer (Under USIA)
CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
CIE: Civil Information and Education Section (Under United States Occupation of Japan)
CMPE: Central Motion Picture Exchange (United States in Korea)
CPI: Committee on Public Information
ECA: Economic Cooperation Administration (Becomes MSA in 1951)
FOA: Foreign Operations Administration (Forerunner to USAID)
IBS/TV: Informational Broadcasting Services (Under USIA, both radio and television)
ICS: Information Center Services (Under USIA)
IIA: United States Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs
IMG: Informational Media Guarantee
IPS: International Press Service (Under USIA)
MAAG: Military Assistance Advisory Group (United States in South Vietnam)
MDAP: Mutual Defense Assistance Program
MDU: Mobile Development Units
MFU: Malaysian Film Unit
MIT: Mobile Information Team
MOPIX: Motion Picture Studios (Under USIA)
MSA: Mutual Security Agency
OCB: Operations Coordinating Board
OSS: Office of Strategic Services
OWI: Office of Wartime Information
PAO: Public Affairs Officer (Under USIA)
PCLS: Philippines Center for Language Study
PRS: Program Planning and Evaluation Staff of the Office of the General Manager
PSB: Psychological Strategy Board
PSC: Program Steering Committee (Oversight for joint US-Thai psychological operations)
RSC: Regional Service Center
RTG: Royal Thai Government
SCAP: Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers
SEATO: Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
USAFIK: United States Armed Forces in Korea
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
USAMGIK: United States Army Military Government in Korea
USIA: United States Information Agency
USIE: State Department’s Office of Information and Educational Exchange
USIS: United States Information Service (The name for all USIA operations conducted outside the United States)
USOM: United States Operating Mission (Name given to USAID program in Thailand)
VOA: Voice of America
Introduction

*Captivating Hearts and Minds: The First Step in US Plans to Reshape and Reform the Peoples and Cultures of Asia*

Wherever we are in the world, whatever we are doing in faraway places – many with strange-sounding names – we are doing it not for power, not for territory, not for domination, or for influence. It is none of these things that we want. We want nothing that someone else has. We are there because we have to be. We are there so that the free choice of peoples to select their own pathway to their own future can be preserved. We are there because the United States… gave our word, and our pledge, and our commitment. And we keep it.

President Lyndon B. Johnson, 4 March 1965

Shortly after 10:00 p.m. on the evening of 4 March 1965, President Lyndon Johnson delivered these remarks to a dinner meeting of industry leaders to explain his strategy for winning America’s new war in Vietnam. Coming just as the United States became fully committed to an all-out ground invasion requiring an additional 700 million dollars from Congress, the talk gave the president an opportunity both to reassure and to inspire the American people. Johnson noted that, “We must be ready to fight in Viet-nam,” yet he stressed that, “the ultimate victory will depend upon the hearts and minds of the people who actually live out there.” This speech is frequently cited as the first invocation of the notion of winning “hearts and minds” to refer to US anti-insurgency efforts or “pacification” in the Vietnam War, as President Johnson publicly announced his intention to take his Great Society program of cultural and economic development to Asia.

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2 “Remarks at a Dinner Meeting of the Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc.”

3 The American idea of “winning hearts and minds” has complex origins in the history of Christian theology and missionary work in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The biblical terminology (Philippians 4:7) was frequently used when referencing successes in conversions and “civilizing” missions, literally the sites where the “peace of God” inhabited new converts. John Adams also frequently used the term in reference to the American Revolution but always within the context of changing religious sentiment and peace within the United States. The term was not used to address anti-communism or anti-insurgency until the late 1940s. However, by the time of...
Rather than a new policy of the US government to deal specifically with military concerns in Vietnam, President Johnson’s plan to “win hearts and minds” represented an ongoing effort of US policy makers, businessmen, and Cold Warriors to transform and direct cultural development in Asia after World War II. They were little interested in “winning” anything other than the ideological and economic battles supporting their own constructions of a postwar world, where American cultural products and ideas – magazines, books, films, television shows, identities, and language – shaped and solved Asia’s problems while bolstering US economic, political, and military power. This vision of dominance by the United States required a passive, receptive, and static Asian audience, whose hearts and minds, as President Johnson said, “in faraway places,” waited to be won.

For their part, peoples and societies in Asia had already faced their own problems head-on in the second half of the twentieth century. As a result of the world wars – namely the protracted destruction of Europe, the strengthening of the United States’ and the Soviet Union’s global presence, the legacies of Japanese Empire, and the beginnings of decolonization – cultural institutions changed rapidly across Asia throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Leaders and organizations that had helped throw off colonialism quickly filled the vacuum of power as the Japanese Empire disappeared overnight in August 1945. These peoples reimagined a world free of colonial oppression yet tied to the global economy in ways that benefited their new regions, new nations, and local communities. A decolonial drive to build new cultures and imagine new paths forward in a world of uneven power relations between Cold War hegemonic states fueled this transition, reworking and reevaluating cultural norms and remaking structures of everyday life.

Johnson’s famous address, “hearts and minds” as a site of contestation frequently appeared in US government policy documents and ideology.
life in Asia. It was this very process of transformation that the government of the United States sought to control and direct with its cultural programs throughout Asia.

The main agency responsible for tapping into and steering these new cultural developments in ways that supported US policy goals was the United States Information Agency (USIA), the formal propaganda arm of the United States government from 1953 to 1999. With origins in the Office of Wartime Information, Nelson Rockefeller's Institute of Inter-American Affairs, and the State Department’s Information and Educational Exchange (USIE) programs, this Cold War agency acted abroad on behalf of the United States to “tell America’s story to the world.”\(^{4}\) Similarly, however, the USIA operated covertly, creating propaganda materials and services that undermined and redirected indigenous cultural production, shifting basic lifeways toward habits and practices supportive of US power. These efforts, officially dubbed “cultural programming,” sought to transform cultural practices, beliefs, identities, and everyday values among Asian audiences as a method for winning the ideological and economic power struggles of the Cold War. Moreover, they relied on the successes and failures of already ongoing local and indigenous efforts to transform Asian societies and institutions.

Established in 1953, the United States Information Agency inherited, coordinated, and expanded a number of US State Department, military, and semi-private organizations developed during the first half of the twentieth century. This growing information and propaganda apparatus was only known as the USIA within the United States. All field operations, branch locations, and materials produced for overseas consumption in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America carried the moniker USIS, the United States Information Services. The explanation for the difference is twofold. Firstly, various USIS cultural projects began under the US State

\(^{4}\) This was the official motto of the United States Information Agency since its creation in 1953.
Department throughout the 1930s and 1940s as part of its overseas library and educational programs. These operations provided the bulk of USIA political and material assets at the agency’s inception. Secondly, US government policy makers and field operatives felt that “services” sounded more benevolent and less imperialistic than “agency,” particularly given the rise of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the international intrigue it conjured in Cold War environments. The subtle distinction between the terms USIA and USIS – both the same US government organization – constituted an important difference for an agency where all operations occurred within foreign nations. Field operations, according to internal USIA histories, stood “pre- eminent,” always shaping the actual cultural and propaganda work of the agency among its various targets.\textsuperscript{5} Focusing primarily on the locations and efforts of USIS officers and their actions in the field helps to reveal the incredibly ambitious projects and uneven results of US cultural programming across various geographies and spaces during the Cold War.

Although the United States Information Agency operated USIS branches around the world, the “Far East,” a term used by the US government to inscribe a region from Burma to Japan and from Eastern Russia to Indonesia, created a special problem for the agency and its predecessors.\textsuperscript{6} In the nations of Europe and the western hemisphere, officials and businesspeople frequently encountered and relied upon cultural traditions, foods, lifestyles, economic practices, and languages similar to the American experience. In Asia, however, Americans found very little they understood or connected to their personal lives.\textsuperscript{7} While the world wars helped to stimulate

\textsuperscript{6} Perhaps hinting at the US racial construction of the “Far East,” Australia and New Zealand did not appear in the region until the late 1950s and early 1960s in most memos and regional reports. Instead the USIA and the State Department included these nations in “Europe” for program purposes.
\textsuperscript{7} This would likewise become a major problem for US foreign policy in Africa as decolonization and African unity movements gained ground in the late 1950s and 1960s.
both a popular and scholarly interest in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia during the first half of the twentieth century, most Americans inside and outside of the government remained largely unaware of the various political, economic, and cultural systems of Asia in 1945.⁸

The US geographic designations of the “Far East” directly corresponded to the former Empire of Japan, which rapidly expanded and collapsed during the first half of the twentieth century, helping to stimulate large-scale nationalist, anti-colonial, and eventually non-allied movements in Asia.⁹ Some local elites and military leaders across the region gained momentum for their nationalist or pan regional movements through collaboration with the Japanese for their own purposes of preservation and expansion. Others fought against the Japanese in hope of gaining independence or maintaining favor with their “home” colonial governments. Immediately after Emperor Hirohito’s 14 August 1945 radio announcement ending the war, these same local centers of political and military authority proclaimed their independence from Japan and from their previous colonial masters, creating new structures of government and nationality, if only on paper. Likewise, Chinese Nationalists and Communists resumed their own full-scale military campaigns against each other even as the Japanese disarmed and repatriated.

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This moment of confusion, relief, struggle, and decolonial energy immediately after World War II crystalized the desire of the United States to capitalize on the transformation of everyday social practices and cultural habits in Asia. Twenty-first century works such as Christina Klein’s *Cold War Orientalism* and Naoko Shibusawa’s *America’s Geisha Ally* demonstrate how popular media, gendered discourses, and material culture reoriented American thought and practices, thus enabling US actors to participate in Asia’s postwar development toward capitalist democratic culture even while they promoted ideas of American superiority and control during the Cold War. Although these scholars explore changes in American cultural practices regarding Asians during the Cold War, much less is known about the desire of the United States to transform and direct cultural practices of Asians or the actual structural and institutional changes that occurred as a result of overt and covert efforts made by the United States to control the transformations of cultures in Asia.

Until recently, authors writing on the USIA have largely ignored these issues of cultural transformation and covert practices. Despite writing specifically about the agency responsible for cultural programming, most narratives penned by former employees or political scientists primarily deal with the overly bureaucratic origins of the agency, debates within the United States about funding and political ideology, and the alleged “successes” or “failures” of the agency within a Cold War context. These works focus on the potential benefits and future lessons to be learned about “public diplomacy” or “telling America’s story to the world,” and relegate any questionable aspects of the agency’s large-scale propaganda endeavors to the

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excesses of McCarthyism or the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{11} Novel studies by Asian scholars and historians utilizing Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asian sources shed light on some of the manipulations and long-lasting effects of the cultural transformation efforts of USIA programs in Asia.\textsuperscript{12} Likewise, recent scholarship by Kenneth Osgood attempts to expose the propaganda and intelligence aspects of the USIA officers who “saw themselves as the foot soldiers in the battle for hearts and minds” or as the “ideological shock troops” of the United States during the Eisenhower administration.\textsuperscript{13} However, a comprehensive approach tying covert USIA cultural programming into the field of new Cold War history while taking Asian actors and participants seriously has yet to be fully realized.

Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the historiography of the Cold War has undergone a rapid transformation from narratives of “big policy” between bi-polar contenders, the United States and Soviet Union, to a broader understanding of the conflict that includes both new methodologies and new actors. Rather than simply focusing on who started the Cold War, the role of “the superpowers,” or how the conflict spread from Europe across all parts of the globe, these new Cold War histories have included


\textsuperscript{13} Kenneth Osgood, Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 104.
multiple parties from the “third world” as rational actors and reframed the spatial and temporal landscapes of the postwar period. This reframing has led to two major developments fundamentally reshaping the field – namely, a focus on the role of culture and ideology during the Cold War, and a new emphasis on the players and actions of the “third world” and non-aligned nations both inside and outside the standard Eurocentric chronology of the conflicts.

The first major development in the field of these new Cold War histories has involved examining how culture was both created and deployed as part of what has best been seen as an ideological restructuring of the world. These new studies focused on the lived experiences of individuals from the bottom up rather than from top down, allowing for a more complex and nuanced look at the creation and long term effects of a “Cold War culture.” Paul Boyer’s *By the Bomb’s Early Light* examines the distinctly apathetic social and cultural structures created to insulate the American psyche in the immediate afterglow of a world filed with atomic weapons.14 Margot A. Henriksen’s *Dr. Strangelove’s America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* employs film analysis and popular culture studies in her investigation of the “radically changed forms of culture” that resulted from the revolutionary technologies of atomic weaponry. These transformational developments of mass cultural consensus and dissent, Henriksen argues, added both to a growing sense of superiority and to a mounting chaos within the various strands of American culture in the 1950s and 1960s.15 Other works such as Alan Nadel’s *Containment Culture* and Elaine Tyler May’s *Homeward Bound* argue that the idea of “containment” became the predominant metaphor in American arts and entertainment as well as in family and home

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life. Christina Klein in her work *Cold War Orientalism* demonstrates how liberal values reminiscent of New Deal ideology allowed for some middle-class white Americans to embrace metaphors of integration and “open doors” as they welcomed newly decolonizing Asian nations into the “free world.” This is not to argue that the Cold War was responsible for all the changes and cultural transformations in the second half of the twentieth century, yet, as Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert state, Americans “seeing the world through this dark, distorting lens [of the Cold War] and setting global and domestic policies to counter these fanciful as well as real threats” created “the largest impact of the Cold War.”

These histories of cultural formations caused by and perpetuating the Cold War must be separated from discussions of the “cultural Cold War” in which government agencies in the United States and the Soviet Union attempted to use culture – arts, literature, theater, films, festivals, television, the popular press, and all manner of material culture – to attain their political, economic, and military goals. Frances Stonor Saunders’s groundbreaking work in this field examines the clandestine role of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in promoting abstract and highbrow “arts and letters” among European intellectuals to achieve political victories over the communists. Some scholarly treatments, such as Penny Von Eschen’s *Satchmo Blows up the World* and Andrew James Wulf’s *U.S. International Exhibits During the* 

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Cold War, observe the deployment of specific cultural forms and sites—in this case American jazz music and cultural exhibits respectively—while others such as David Caute’s The Dancer Defects deal with a more comprehensive analysis of all forms of cultural deployment on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The majority of these works focus on the United States and the Soviet Union, while some excellent newer works by authors such as Marc Frey, Ingrid Muan, and Jennifer Lindsay endeavor to understand these processes and events in Asia from a non-Eurocentric vantage point.

These newer works focusing on areas outside of a strict Euro-American perspective demonstrate the second major development of the new Cold War histories. By taking the third world and non-aligned nations and actors into consideration, these authors greatly expand the historical understanding of the Cold War as multiple global phenomena tied to alternative chronologies and narratives of decolonization, global capitalism, and empire. This process began with the ending of strict archival control by the Soviet Union. Exploring newly opened Soviet archives and alternative forms of historical analysis that eschewed US triumphalism for balanced views of the past, historians began to reconceptualize the origins and cause of the Cold War in ways that focused on the values, fears, and hopes of both government leaders and civil society in the United States and the Soviet Union.

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23 Melvyn P. Leffler, A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Ralph B. Levering, et. al, Debating the Origins of the Cold War:
spatial and geographical reference of the Cold War even further, depicting the “third world” as an important site of conflict between the United States, an “Empire of Liberty” and the Soviet Union, an “Empire of Justice.” This narrative and others like it demonstrated a form of continuing imperialism in which US and Soviet policies and interventions shaped the development of Africa, Asia, and Latin America during the Cold War.24

While Westad’s arguments kept a standard chronology of the conflict and continued to see the United States and the Soviet Union as the key players in the Cold War, his ideas about how the “third world” – geographically, ideologically, militarily – played a central role in the conflict tapped into and promoted a new historical analysis that examined the third world in its own right or even as central to the Cold War. In particular, historians currently seek to explain how the Cold War, or a variety of Cold Wars, felt locally and attempt to (de)construct alternative chronologies for the events. Heonik Kwon’s The Other Cold War, for example, argues that there was no singular Cold War experience, especially in the third world. He demonstrates that many attempts to create a cohesive Cold War analysis have fallen short of making distinctions based on location, leading to a misunderstanding of the war’s end and its legacies in the contemporary world. The narrative that the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall or the end of the Soviet Union, Kwon suggests, is a Eurocentric fantasy that ignores the realities on the ground in a number of places across Asia, the Americas, and Africa. One example might come from Vietnam, where until recently families whose children fought on the side of the American-cooperating South were publicly shamed and situated in re-education camps. The families were

not allowed to perform funerary rights for their non-communist/anti-communist dead soldiers. These real and powerful narratives and legacies of the various Cold War conflicts are erased or subsumed under the blanket of the United States’ victory over the Soviet Union in the more commonly held chronology of a singular Cold War that excludes the peoples, spaces, and histories of the third world.25

Two recent edited volumes, *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* and *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture*, composed by a number of historians, political scientists, and cultural studies scholars from around the globe, represent the cutting edge of this sort of research as well as the new standard of multi-national production of knowledge. The main argument of these works is that there was no singular Cold War in Asia. For those in China, Korea, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other nations and non-national entities, there were a series of deadly and destructive civil, revolutionary, or anti-insurgency wars that at times attached themselves to and interacted with the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. This methodology begins to question not only the Cold War as a historical event but also as an analytic category in general. These scholars further show that rather than adopting narratives about the superpowers attempting to win the “hearts and minds” of Asians, Africans, and South Americans, historians should begin to analyze the period from the inside out by looking at how both elites and non-elites in all of these regions used the “Cold War” frameworks and narratives perpetuated by the United States and the Soviet Union to their own advantage in the promotion of their own agendas. This level of analysis goes well beyond simply recognizing the third world as an important part of the Cold War story by demonstrating how regional actors in the third world co-opted and navigated the allegedly hegemonic

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ideologies in their own timeline of events relating to anti-imperialism, decolonization, and the creation of new cultures and nationalisms.26

While my study speaks to these new approaches that fairly and fully represent Asian actors by taking seriously their participation in the various Cold War conflicts that composed the second half of the twentieth century, it also argues that the history and ideology of the Cold War, decolonization, and empire should not be separated into distinct genres, eras, or lenses for historical analysis. This is particularly true when considering the role of the United States in Asia after World War II. Recent works that examine US Cold War policy in Asia from a conceptual and methodological framework oriented around the study of empire and imperialism engage with a growing body of literature in both world and American history that repositions the role of the United States within a global context of America in the world. Abandoning the methodological constraints of modernization theory, dependency theory, or “traditional” Cold War narratives allows for an analysis of US imperial power that connects America’s previous history of empire, itself often ignored or seen as unique (or as uniquely unimportant), with postwar hegemonic and uneven relationships or power.27

From the immediate postwar years until the 1990s, the majority of studies of the United States’ presence in Asia found focus through a highly politicized lens of modernization theory and Cold War frameworks that blended history with attempts to explain the need for America’s

presence in the region. Fighting communism, promoting freedom, and encouraging economic models based on free market capitalism both created and perpetuated the history of the period. Under this general consensus, the benevolent US occupation of Japan built up a strong and trustworthy Pacific neighbor, the wars in Korea and Vietnam formed part of an international cooperative effort to prevent the insidious spread of worldwide Communism, and US policy in regard to China and other communist nations secured American freedom by liberating the masses from feudal “Asian” systems, colonization, and misguided revolutions. In short, the United States did not in reality want to be in Asia. The practical necessity of doing so simply protected and perpetuated the American way of life.28

The end of the Cold War – for the United States and the Soviet Union, at least – and the general turn toward cultural and world history provided historians with a much more interesting set of tools for asking questions about the United States’ presence in Asia in the twentieth century. Historians began to detail the continuity of American empire throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and composed new case studies of Cold War attitudes and foreign policies within imperial contexts. These histories connected US military, economic, and political models from the colonization of the Philippines and the occupation of Japan to the Korean War and the “police action” in Vietnam. Colonial “experiments” originating in the Philippines were reiterated, repeated, and retested across Asia for more than eighty years29

28 There are quite literally thousands of works by historians, politicians, and journalists that support these views. One of the earliest histories that encapsulates the entire spectrum of this methodology is J.H. Brimmell, *Communism in Southeast Asia: A Political Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

Collectively, these new comparative frameworks and broader interpretations of the United States’ empire in Asia have allowed historians to create a wide array of interesting case studies that in many ways escape the inertia of the previous historiography and help historians to embrace categories such as gender, development, culture, and nation building through the lens of empire and the Cold War simultaneously. Mire Koikari’s *Pedagogy of Democracy* argues that US “Cold War imperialist feminism” imposed versions of white American domesticity on Japanese women, effectively denying the agency of those women who had struggled to improve their own standing in society even during the height of Japanese fascism in World War II.\(^{30}\) Michael E. Latham’s *The Right Kind of Revolution* and Nick Cullather’s *The Hungry World* explore the societal and environmental impact of hastily constructed and ill-conceived modernization and development projects such as dams, “green revolution” farming practices, and dictator-supported export oriented economies developed to secure US control of heavily contested resources in the third world.\(^{31}\) More politically based narratives, such as Gregg Brazinsky’s *Nation Building in South Korea* illustrate that in most cases, US efforts at nation building failed because they took on too much of an imperialistic character for Asians to tolerate. For South Korea, US attempts to install democracy succeeded, Brazinsky argues, as a wide-range of factors converged to prevent South Koreans from seeing Americans’ “efforts to transplant

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their economic or political systems as a new form of colonialism” as in most other decolonizing nations during the Cold War.32

This dissertation fits into and expands on this new Cold War historiography by examining how the actions of both Americans and Asians working for the USIA’s cultural development programs shaped and directed the transformation of new cultural patterns in Asia during the Cold War era, particularly during the years 1945 to 1970. These years witnessed the deepest US government involvement in Asian cultural programming and represented the height of American efforts to employ indigenous teachers, businesspeople, soldiers, artists, and government officials to remake economic, political, and social structures through cultural practices in Asia. These years also encompassed the greatest period of decolonial energy among Asians dedicated to remaking their own worlds in ways at times accommodating and at other times hostile to US power in the region.

The first chapter examines the rapid growth and expansion of US information and propaganda activities during the first half of the twentieth century. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, US agencies in coordination with private business developed massive structures and new technologies that allowed for the rapid dissemination of information and propaganda around the globe. These communication networks served to support growing US imperial projects among newly acquired territories in the Caribbean and Pacific. Later the US government put these same methods and technologies to work delivering propaganda and morale support on behalf of wartime efforts in Europe and Asia. By the beginning of the Cold War, this growing apparatus shifted from supplying news, propaganda, and information to the world into a

conduit of information designed to lionize American culture and create people and nations that would support the polices of the United States. These attempts to shape and direct cultural transformations in Asia came fully into force with the creation of the United States Information Agency in 1953.

Chapter two argues that the newly formed United States Information Agency, building on the successes of previous information and propaganda networks, sought to capitalize on the growing global demand to learn English as a second language. These efforts helped to shape the American version of English into the informational and cultural language of the world. As a genuine demand to learn English arose in the decolonizing world, USIS branches across Asia began large-scale programs that incorporated English teaching into their propaganda and cultural programming apparatus. The agency supplied much needed resources for English-language education while also increasing the demand to learn English with huge grants, exchange of person programs, funding to ministries of education, book programs, and movie distribution. In general, the agency sought to create the impression that English was the language of the future – or at least should be the second-language of every nation in the world.

Chapter three focuses on the use of USIS print media as part of larger propaganda efforts in Asia. Beginning in the early 1950s, local and regional offices produced a massive amount of printed materials ranging from wall posters and newspapers to full length academic treatises. Published in dozens of languages, these materials promoted the United States, derided communism, and encouraged, USIS agents hoped, cultural practices that aligned with US political, military, and economic goals. Moreover, fully permeating print culture in Asia with the ideas, systems, and infrastructures supportive of US policies and power required USIS officers to attempt to control the location of print media consumption. By opening libraries and information
centers, the agency created new spaces for reading and print culture across the region. Concurrently the agency expanded the spatial location of print culture by placing posters, newsletters, and pamphlets in temples, remote villages, and the workplace to deliver propaganda to the widest possible audiences.

Chapter four extends its gaze to the USIS’s use of visual media – newsreels, film, and television – to affect cultural transformation and changing postwar attitudes in the “Far East.” Tapping into the growth and success of “global Hollywood” and local Asian film production after the end of World War II, USIS visual media programs attempted to reform and rehabilitate societies previously exposed to fascism, communism, and revolutionary nationalism. Through the agency’s visual media programs, local USIS offices created original films and television programming that both reiterated the evils of communism and extolled the benefits of America cultural values through capitalist, liberal, and democratic lifestyles. In addition, USIS officers in the field disseminated the new technology required for visual media production and consumption as well as increased the availability of both local-language and American-made films and television programs in schools, markets, libraries, theaters, and eventually homes across East and Southeast Asia. Only by capturing larger and larger audiences across Asia, USIS officers argued, could cultures in the “Far East” be recalibrated to function within an increasingly globalized “Free World.”

Finally, chapter five examines the combined role of all USIS cultural programming in promoting unified nation-based cultural ideologies in individual nation-states across Asia. Accessing all available media resources, language learning techniques, and information delivery methods, USIS officers worked to encourage a singular nationalism within these foreign nations. These USIS efforts both encouraged minority groups such as the large populations of Overseas
Chinese in East and Southeast Asia to embrace the state and helped governments in Asia to develop their own culture-based nation building programs in an attempt to create strong independent nation-states. USIS officials hoped this would help prevent communist influence and support regional prosperity while also incorporating the newly-strengthened states of Asia into uneven relationships of power supportive of the US political and economic superiority deemed necessary to win the Cold War.

Throughout these chapters, I seek to demonstrate the agency of Asians in determining the ultimate impact of the United States on their cultural forms, production, and practices in the early years of the global Cold War. The “Coca-colonization” or Americanization of Asian cultures, to the extent that it occurred, cannot be seen as an irresistible force or as the sole product of market forces, but rather as a contested process that occurred largely as the result of a series of long-term and frequently covert collaborative efforts between Asians and the USIS cultural programming operatives as the United States sought to win the Cold War by captivating, and remolding, hearts and minds across Asia.
Chapter 1

Bringing the “Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe”: Cultural Offensives in an Information Empire

American culture, for us, is what American culture does… The Information Officer, the Film Officer, the Radio Officer, the translators, the projectionists, indeed the whole USIS staff must participate in a post’s cultural program. In this way alone will our cultural activities contribute to the total mission.

USIA Director Theodore Streibert, 24 October 1955

Immediately after the founding of the United States information Agency in August 1953, Theodore Streibert, the agency’s first director appointed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to oversee the official information and propaganda apparatus of the United States, began his campaign to add more cultural programs and cultural suasion efforts to US foreign operations. Returning from an initial fact-finding tour aimed at maximizing overseas intelligence and informational activities in South Asia and the “Far East,” Streibert strongly argued that the cultural programming efforts of all USIS operations “must be strengthened, and strengthened in a practical way” to “achieve results.” Convinced that demonstrating “American cultural achievements and aspirations can influence political attitudes and actions” in Asia, Streibert called for a general shift in US informational and propaganda activities aimed at winning the new Cold War “cultural offensive.”

This emphasis on culture represented a novel approach to information delivery and propaganda efforts by the United States government. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, US agencies, in coordination with private business, developed massive

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structures and new technologies that allowed the rapid dissemination of information and propaganda around the globe. At first these channels of communication served to support growing US imperial projects and interests among newly acquired territories in the Caribbean and Pacific. Later the US government put these same methods and technologies to work delivering propaganda and morale support on behalf of wartime efforts in Europe and Asia. By the end of World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War, this growing apparatus morphed from being a channel supplying news, propaganda, and information to the world into a normative network designed to transform cultures and create peoples and nations that would support the policies of the United States. These US attempts to shape and direct cultural transformations in Asia came fully into force with the creation of the United States Information Agency in 1953. This Cold War agency’s primary purpose was to use all forms of information delivery, media sources, and local assets to engage in cultural programming aimed at depicting the superiority of American culture and transforming the culture of Asian peoples and nations to create new subjects more receptive to US economic, military, and political power.

Beginning with the communication of information at the most basic levels through the teaching of the English language, structures of information delivery and manipulation originated as a tool of US empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Information transmission and programming quickly adopted a variety of technologies and media such as film and the printed word to convey more messages in a spectrum from the material to the ideological. These efforts sought both to increase the amount of media exposure in Asia and to shape the types of messages conveyed to the masses about the United States and its role in the region. During both World War I and World War II, these new channels of communication and
information delivery operated primarily as conduits to support wartime propaganda efforts and to help the Allies achieve victory.

At the conclusion of World War II, these structures of information delivery transitioned from propaganda, US military morale services, and wartime information distribution into a complex set of subtler “cultural programming” activities designed to rehabilitate postwar Asia and forge lasting relationships of power between the United States and newly decolonizing nations. To maximize returns on its information and propaganda programs, the United States analyzed emerging segments of Asian societies and economies, “cultivating specific target groups” within the reconfiguring states of the “Far East.”\(^3\) US agencies and programs attempted to create both the supply and the demand for informational and cultural programming by supporting upcoming local groups and identity formations while also formulating media to be specifically consumed by those groups.

As these programs became more successful and specific, the US government formed the United States Information Agency to oversee and manage its growing emporium of information and cultural change. While other US agencies, such as the CIA and the State Department, continued their own informational and cultural programs, the majority of these responsibilities shifted to the new agency. The USIA’s mandate as a transmitter of information, depicted at home and abroad as absolutely factual and neutral in regard to the expanding ideological struggles of decolonization and the Cold War, allowed the agency to operate in areas not otherwise amenable to the United States. This growing reach and targeted focus contributed to the expanding role of culture in the growing US information empire.

\(^3\) “The Campaign of Truth and Its Application by ICD,” 13 September 1951, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
Informing the First Half of the Twentieth Century

With the expansion of its empire into the Pacific during the late nineteenth century, the United States government faced a growing need for new channels of communication and exchange between the United States and nations in Asia. US policy makers, missionaries, and entrepreneurs sought to explore innovative methods of communication as they charted unfamiliar territory in formal colonies and novel marketplaces. While this flow of information was not entirely one-sided, the main thrust of US government efforts was less interested in collecting information from abroad and more focused on assuming the role of sole provider of valuable information to the peoples of Asia.

Communication of information at the most basic level began through the teaching of the English language to residents of recently acquired colonies and trading partners. To create an infrastructure capable of transmitting information from US policy makers and businesses to audiences in the “Far East,” the United States first needed to promote a common language and method for processing information. Teaching English served as the first step toward creating this infrastructure and produced intellectual, military, and economic bonds between various nations in Asia and the United States while promoting, on a small scale, some aspects of American culture abroad.

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4 The expansion of the United States overseas empire is usually seen as commencing with the “closing of the frontier” in 1890 and the acquisition of U.S. territories in the Caribbean and Pacific as a result of the Spanish-American War. However, recent scholarship has not only pushed back the dates for US empire, but has also attempted to abolish artificial chronologies and distinctions between Indian Wars, slavery, westward expansion, and overseas empire. See for example: Walter L. Hixson, American Settler Colonialism: A History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Walter Johnson, River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Amy S. Greenberg, Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Aims McGuinness, Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).
Teaching English as a foreign language began in the British Empire as a form of colonial power and control. The British employed English as a medium to conduct trade, to help convert new subjects to Christianity, and to separate elites from the masses of imperial subjects. Missionaries, traders, and officers of the British government educated select members of the indigenous upper classes in the English language in order to collect converts, increase trade, and enable political control. However, the British tended to favor educating the masses of their subjects throughout the empire in local languages rather than English. As Janina Brutt-Griffler argues:

British policies limited the number of the students exposed to the formal teaching of English to meet the local demands for English-educated subjects of the empire. It left the bulk of the population to be educated in the local language or, at most, to acquire the rudimentary elements of the English language.5

It appeared simply too dangerous, too expensive, and too impractical to educate all the subjects of empire in English. In the nineteenth century, at the height of British power, colonial officials engaged in the teaching of English in dozens of colonies and outposts around the globe, but it was likewise seen as a “dangerous weapon, an unsafe thing, too much of which would lead to a discontented class of people who were not prepared to abide by the colonial system” meant to be most beneficial to the British.6 For the colonizers, English served as a useful tool for economic and political gain, but only when tightly controlled.

English had similarly transformed into an instrument of US empire by the end of the nineteenth century. However, unlike the British colonial policy of exploiting the knowledge of English to control economic and political systems in its empire, Americans’ use of English

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language education was more directly involved in the creation and definition of subjects. Teaching English to or withholding knowledge of it from slaves, Native American populations, and European immigrants of non-British descent created a system of hierarchical control over who identified as an American, who the nation considered “white,” and who could claim positions of power within the United States. As the US empire moved overseas toward the end of the nineteenth century, the English language became a tool of colonization and subject creation in Hawaii, Central America, and the Philippines.

During this period of US colonialism and expansion, English teaching became a military tool of the utmost importance, particularly in the Philippines. US soldiers landing on the island of Corregidor in 1898 began teaching English even before the official occupation began. The soldiers realized that “unlike the former Latin American colonies of Spain, not all Filipinos spoke Spanish.” They reasoned that English-language instruction could create a common communications medium while also helping to establish military control.7 Military Governor General Arthur MacArthur saw English as a central component of the US occupation and regularly communicated with his subordinates on methods for expanding English-language education in schools throughout the archipelago.8

By the time the Insular Government was established in 1901, English proved a central component of US rule. The military government opened more than 1000 public schools, all emulating the “American public school system” with English as the medium of instruction. Colonial officials believed that these school were the surest way to transform Filipino culture and “pacify the people” in the United States’ new colonial possession until such time as Filipinos

could govern themselves. Emilio Aguinaldo, the first president of the Philippines and a leader of the resistance to the US occupation, was captured and taken before MacArthur in March 1901. He had it explained to him that the United States’ plan for the Philippines was essentially “to have lots of American school teachers at once set to work to teach the Filipinos English and at the same time keep plenty of American soldiers around to knock him on the head should he think he is ready for self-government before the Americans think that he is.” This dual focus on language and military force continued throughout the colonial period as “English was systematically promoted as the language that would ‘civilize’ the Filipinos” newly under control of the United States.

These military teaching programs, designed as a tool to teach English to a large portion of the Filipino population, lacked direct oversight and qualified instructional personnel. The United States nonetheless managed to create a social order in which English operated as the language of learning and progress, an ability to aspire to and to attain even at the expense of one’s native language. During the US colonial period in the Philippines, English became what Renato Constantino has termed “the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past,” a tool US officials used to educate a people “no longer as Filipinos, but as colonials.” To be a good Filipino, and a good subject of the US empire, one had to speak English.

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With US power becoming more secure in the Philippines, the English language took on a new international role as a widely recognized lingua franca of science, technology, commerce, and “progress.” With the 1919 defeat of German, Austrian, and Ottoman forces in World War I, British and US power continued to grow both economically and linguistically. Scientific journals, academic conferences, and international organizations such as the League of Nations turned to English and French rather than the common tongues of the defeated.13

As English transitioned into a global language and instrument of US foreign policy, print media produced by the United States accordingly took on a more direct propaganda and informational role abroad. Since its inception, mass print media has been employed by governments, businesses, and citizens’ groups to change the way people feel about political issues, social problems, consumer goods, and war. Within the United States, book and newspaper editors, journalists, and authors shaped the debates surrounding the independence movements, constitutionalism, westward expansion, and the Civil War.14 With the increasing spread of the English language during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these same print materials were directed outward in support of the US empire in the Pacific, West Africa, Mexico, Panama, and the Caribbean before coming to full fruition in a global system of US print propaganda supporting Wilsonianism during World War I.15 While the United States began to experiment

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14 The historiography of the subject is incredibly rich and can be viewed through almost any lens of American life, from government agencies to the African American press to business journals and pop culture magazines. For an examination of the origins of this process within the United States and its evolution during the early years of the Republic see Marcus Daniel, Scandal & Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
with the printing of propaganda and information messages in foreign languages such as Chinese, Spanish, Korean, and French, the bulk of US materials still consisted of English-language books, posters, and pamphlets directed at intellectuals and policy makers in Europe, Latin America, and Asia.

In June 1919, with the Great War over and the United States returning to a peacetime footing, the official governmental apparatus for the mass publication and distribution of propaganda materials was largely dismantled as US citizens became disillusioned with the ideas of “propaganda” and international intervention in the interwar years.\(^{16}\) However, the technological means and ideological impetus for the distribution of US-produced print media remained and thrived as the number of English speakers continued to rise around the globe. American novels, magazines, and journals capitalized on these trends to increase market share and recognition subtly.

While the written word explained the specifics of US policy abroad and catered to those fluent in or learning English, films produced by the United States prompted a more visceral reaction from a wider audience base. Just as with the printed word, the United States’ use of visual media for propaganda purposes is nearly as old as the technology itself. Invented in France in 1895, film swept across the United States before the end of the nineteenth century. In the early years of the twentieth century, French films dominated the industry and captivated US audiences. Many US filmmakers and government agencies worried about the possible negative influences that French-made products might have on US citizens and, moreover, they realized the political and economic potential of US-made motion pictures both inside and outside of the United States.

US film producers spent the next decades creating an alternative cinematic experience for people within the United States as they attempted to remove the French influence from the US film experience and increase their profits from the industry.17

In creating an American film style, producers of many of the earliest motion pictures developed at least a mild sense of xenophobic nationalism that coincided with a global expansion of scientific racism, the reification of “national industries,” and expanding US imperialism outside of the continental United States. The first major Hollywood film, the controversial 1915 Civil War epic Birth of a Nation, expanded on this motif, creating new image-capture technologies and production methods while also seeking to justify and affirm white supremacy and the unique superiority of the United States.18 As showings of Birth of a Nation began across the country, film also took on a new role in accordance with the growing conflicts in Europe. Both Hollywood and the US government began to employ film to encourage positive public opinion about US policies regarding the looming war. At first, US films and newsreels promoted the ideas of neutrality, then readiness if war should come, and finally, by 1917, strategies about how best to participate in and win the conflict.19

Following the entrance of the United States into World War I, film became a major aspect of President Woodrow Wilson’s propaganda strategy and greatly increased the expansion of US films around the globe. President Wilson assigned the task of visual media propaganda to the Committee on Public Information (CPI), a forerunner to the USIA. The CPI established a

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Foreign Films Division which both created original content and funded the American film industry with the stated task, according to George Creel, the Director of CPI, of not only controlling all “war and educational pictures,” but also Hollywood, thus ensuring that “the entire charge of every comedy and dramatic picture that went out from the shores of the United States” would be to support US propaganda efforts. In his autobiographically-informed study of the CPI, Creel explained that “delighting the rustic populace with ‘the wonders of America’” through film served a critical purpose in the war effort. He claimed:

To millions unable to read, to literate millions unreached by newspaper or magazine, to city audiences and village crowds, the screen carried the story of America, flashing the power of our army and navy, showing our natural resources, our industrial process, our war spirit, and our national life.

For Creel, “fighting with film” not only helped to win the war in Europe, but also succeeded in carrying “the gospel of Americanism to every corner of the globe.” After 11 November 1918 and the end of the Great War, however, CPI’s official duties receded and by 30 June 1919 Congress voted to dissolve the agency completely.

Despite the closure of the central propaganda wing of the United States government, US film continued to thrive abroad in the interwar years. The work of the CPI during World War I had helped to turn Hollywood and its international distribution system, particularly in Europe, into a slick standardized industry capable of mass-producing motion pictures and ready to capture the world market. US motion picture directors, producers, and advertisers transformed the industry into a truly global phenomenon by continually refining their products and advertising methods to undercut and restrain Asian and European film makers in a rush to

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dominate the industry at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{21} By the mid-1930s, despite robust film production in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union, Japan, India, and China, Hollywood films accounted for eighty percent of all films screened worldwide and contributed more than $200 million yearly to the US economy, making motion pictures one of the United States’ leading material (and cultural) exports.\textsuperscript{22}

During the interwar years the United States’ use of educational programs, informational distribution, and controlled media content continued to expand, creating enormous structures of communication and information delivery. Despite turning away from direct propaganda and efforts to stir opposition to the Central Powers, the information networks of the United States prospered and reached further afield. These channels of communication and distribution created new economic opportunities for US goods and services overseas while helping to shape and define the role of the United States in a more linguistically and technologically integrated world. With the onset of World War II, the United States once again directed these networks and structures to deliver powerful messages of pro-American nationalist sentiment across Asia.

\textbf{Information Offensive during World War II}

During World War II, US government informational programming efforts expanded in terms of the number of people reached and in their geographic coverage. Technological breakthroughs in radio, film, printing, and other mass media allowed for more rapid distribution on news and propaganda than ever before. At the same time, the programs transitioned from their

colonial origins dedicated to pacifying subjects, capturing markets, and expanding territory into hybrid military programs aimed at garnering support for US political efforts among civilian audiences. These programs attempted first and foremost to expand the reach of US propaganda and bring Asian peoples and nations in line with America’s military and political goals of winning the war.

As with previous US efforts to extend information and communication capabilities, language teaching played a critical role. During the first years of US participation in World War II, the US War Department began a “scientific language program” centered on a “practical control of the spoken language” that would be needed by US soldiers in the field. Facing yet another “global war” where armed forces “were to be on duty in the far corners of the earth,” the Army Department of Education created a series of pamphlets and books printed with a “phonetic or simplified spelling” along with “phonographic records” designed to teach the basics of any language. They reasoned that “every man in uniform could be a good will [sic] ambassador and a better soldier by teaching him quickly and easily to converse in strange tongues” necessary for communication in Europe and Asia.23

These early efforts were succeeded by a much more intensive set of course materials created in close cooperation with the America Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), a nominally private federation of scholarly organizations that in 1941 began, in their own words, “developing teachers, teaching materials, and instruction in all languages not normally taught in the United States, yet likely to be necessary in the war effort.”24 Officially dubbed “Basic Courses” by the

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23 “Language Went to War,” 3 September 1947, Prepared by the Army Education Branch, War Department Special Staff, 1, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
24 Proposed Forward of “American Service Forces’ Foreign Language Texts,” J.M. Cowan, 22 November 1945, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
US Armed Forces and ACLS publishers, these materials sought to provide US soldiers with the equivalent of 150 to 200 hours of class time, providing any soldier with a “knowledge of 1000 to 1500 words, a good pronunciation, and a fluency within the limitations of this vocabulary.” After finishing the course, the soldier “is successfully launched as a speaker of the new language, and to learn more need only talk with the native speakers” in his area. According to the Army Department of Education, this “minor miracle” of language-learning helped the United States in part to win the war.\textsuperscript{25}

These supposedly miraculous language learning materials spread throughout many US commands and Army units in all areas of the globe during and after the war. As one military officer wrote, “yes, language teaching followed the Army to war, and now in our post-war era, these courses and their wealth of material remain for the benefit and use of our huge peace-time Army.”\textsuperscript{26} One soldier who found these materials particularly useful was Navy Lt. Lawrence Kiddle on assignment in Peru. Kiddle, who in civilian life had been on his way to becoming a professor of Spanish at the University of Michigan, oversaw an experimental three and a half month program at the Peruvian Naval Academy teaching English to the upper echelon of Peru’s military. Using the simplified US Army Spanish-language teaching material from World War II as a guide, and generating sound recordings and simplified English texts of his own, Kiddle created a program that could “be either self-teaching or for use with classes.” And, Kiddle concluded, “the results had been very good.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25} “Language Went to War,” 2-4.
\textsuperscript{26} “Language Went to War,” 3.
\textsuperscript{27} “English Courses for Use in Other American Republics,” 12 June, 1945, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
The results were so good in fact that the US State Department, in coordination with the American Counsel of Learned Societies and the War Department, decided to transform and incorporate these materials created for military command purposes into civilian cultural programs for use throughout the “American Republics,” a geographical construction the US government used to conceptualize and contain the formerly Hispanicized world of the Caribbean, the Philippines, and Central and South America. By March 1946, the “Technical Manual El Inglés Hablado” was in use in the Centro Cultural Paraguayo-Americano located in Asunción, Paraguay, and “English studies” became an official tool “of great value in furthering the program of international cultural operations” carried out by the US government. From this point forward, English-language education became a central aspect of American cultural development and anti-communist policies around the globe.

After the start of World War II and the entry of the United States into the conflict after the 7 December 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, print media – as with English-language communication – again became a key source of propaganda and information delivery for the US government. On the home front, newspapers, pamphlets, textbooks, and training manuals helped to engage and outrage the populace, motivating Americans to make war and consider new worlds of peace. Abroad, US policymakers censored and sponsored various forms of print media to comfort allies and condemn their enemies. In these published word wars, books became particularly important both as symbols of the rapacious enemy and as beacons of hope for the future. The Office of Wartime Information (the OWI, the forerunner to the CIA and the USIA) repeatedly conjured the image of Nazi book burning at home and abroad to demonstrate the

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28 Untitled Memoranda from Carl A. Sauer, State Department Division of Libraries and Institutes to Major General Edward F. Witsell, 18 March 1946, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
unrestrained evil of European fascism even as Nazi propagandists embraced the idea and practice of book burning in their own propaganda to demonstrate ongoing efforts to purify ritualistically German literature, bodies, and thought.29

In a more literal way, the US government tied printed material and print culture to wartime efforts through the mass production and distribution of Armed Services Editions of paperback books (ASEs). These books, ranging from the classics of Euro-American literature to more recent US pop culture novels, accompanied almost every US soldier in every theater of war. By the end of 1943, the US government routinely printed millions of copies of ASEs per month. The easily portable paperbacks not only provided soldiers with entertainment, escapism, and justification for their service, but also created a new culture of reading and educational pursuits among the United States fighting men and women.30 Similarly, the production of these more than 120 million “free books” for US soldiers during the war caused an economic boom in the paperback book publishing and manufacturing sectors of the US economy. The massive investments in publishing and the close cooperation between the US government and book publishers led to technological innovations in paperback publishing and a widely expanded share of the global book markets for US publishers during and after the war.31

Along with the boom in printed material that allowed US propaganda and print materials to disseminate across the globe, the war also led US policymakers to rethink the spatial and

geographical locations of printed propaganda use. Instead of simply focusing on the product and its delivery – for example, by littering the streets of Europe or Asia with propaganda leaflets and pamphlets – US policymakers envisioned the creation of centralized propaganda centers in which citizens and subjects of other nations would willingly come to read and be exposed to US news, information, and propaganda. These programs began in 1942, when the US State Department opened its first library and reading room in Mexico City, providing literary materials and creating new spaces for reading and relaxation in what became a template for US Information Centers in the postwar years. These information centers, libraries, and reading rooms served as key locales for distributing, testing, and observing the results of printed propaganda.

Just as with the mass-scale production of printed materials during wartime, the US government again involved itself in the production, distribution, and control of motion pictures as part of its growing political and military efforts during World War II. By the late 1930s, film acted as a critical element in modern warfare with all combatants and imperial governments relying on newsreels, documentaries, and entertaining feature films to help spread information and propaganda aimed at mobilizing their nations for war. With World War II emerging as the first fully cinematic war, in early 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt – an ardent supporter of film in propaganda – authorized the OWI and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to conduct propaganda activities involving the use of motion pictures both inside and outside of the United

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33 See Chapter Four.
Similar to the CPI efforts during World War I, the approaches of these newly founded agencies focused both on creating innovative content specific to their needs in the various theaters of war and on cooperating with Hollywood production agencies in their efforts to disseminate the “correct” image of Americans and the United States abroad. These efforts not only had a tremendous impact on the war and US entertainment industries, but also created long-term structures that shaped the ability of the US government to deploy mass-media for foreign policy goals.

Deploying Culture in the Postwar Settlement

At the conclusion of World War II, US information and intelligence programs shifted from a direct wartime propaganda footing and reoriented toward cultural programs designed to rehabilitate postwar Asia. Initially led by the United States military, these newly designed cultural programs sought not to defeat a foe but to incorporate recently formed nation-states into new constellations of power with the United States. Later, as direct military occupations ended in Korea and Japan, even if tentatively and with great unease, the US State Department and other US agencies continued to operate through these same formal and informal information channels in an attempt to shape cultural developments in Asia. By working to transform the cultural practices of Asian nations, the US government hoped subtly to shape the postwar decolonizing world in ways supportive of US power.

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With the United States’ defeat of the Empire of Japan, and the resulting occupation of Japan, Korea, Okinawa, the Japanese Mandated Islands (Nan'yō-chō), and the Philippines, many of the US military’s programs, previously focused on winning the war, turned toward creating a peacetime settlement.\(^{37}\) Military-led programs centering on English language teaching in the newly created geographical space of the “Far East” began immediately as the most direct form of information and cultural exchange. As part of the occupation and rehabilitation of the economies, societies, and cultures of these areas, US military forces set to work teaching English not only to encourage communication with new friends and enemies or to open new markets for US material products but also to serve as “an effective and welcome part of the psychological offensive” to recalibrate societies in Asia.\(^{38}\)

This emphasis on combining English teaching with military and psychological objectives can perhaps be most clearly observed in the formation of the new Republic of Korea. On 12 September 1945, when the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) officially dissolved the government of Japan in Korea, it declared English the official language of the nation.\(^{39}\) Before the end of 1945, USAMGIK opened the Military English Language School in Seoul for the dual purpose of educating prominent South Korean military officers in the English language and exploring greater military collaboration between US soldiers and Korean nationals “so that they could more readily assist American advisors” in the field.\(^{40}\)

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37 These areas of occupation were spelled out in SCAP General Order Number One, 17 August 1945, Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruments for the Surrender of Japan.
39 This proclamation remained in place for all formal government documents until the official turnover of power to the South Korean government on 15 August 1948.
Likewise, a “civilian” American Language Institute was founded in 1946 by the United States Army Forces in Korea (USAFIK) for the purpose of educating “government employees, university students, and teachers, mostly teachers of English,” and to administer English-language exams to Koreans “applying for grants to the US.” Through these schools and institutes, many in the Korean elite sought to keep their status by acquiring the liberators’ (or victors’) language. US forces, both military and civilian, in turn cooperated more closely with elite English-speaking Koreans for the duration of the occupation even as they hoped these groups would help spread English to the masses.

The US occupation officially ended on 15 August 1948, with the election of Syngman Rhee as president of the newly formed Republic of Korea. Despite, or perhaps in preparation for, the transition from military occupation to “independent” international cooperation, the US government slowly transformed these former military institutes into civilian cultural programs heavily influenced by the growing cultural cold war. The US Army decided that the American Language Institute would be converted to a binational center for the teaching of American English before the end of 1950. An official in charge cited both the link to Latin American centers and the great program potential when he noted that the institute would address itself at the outset primarily to the teaching of English, but in due time it will assume the same character as those now in existence in the American Republics to include for example, cultural activities, lectures, seminars, etc.

41 “Notes on Conversation with Dr. Han Sehi, Director ALI, Subject: Educational Program of American Language Institute” 21 May 1949, box 1, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files 1946-1966; NARA.
43 “United States Information and Education Program for Korea,” 28, 9 March 1949, box 1, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files 1946-1966; NARA.
During this period, which historian Charles K. Armstrong has characterized as an “active propaganda phase” of US foreign policy in the Koreas, American cultural programs, of which English language teaching was only one facet, rapidly expanded setting the stage for massive increases in USIS activity throughout the peninsula.44

In Japan, the Eight Army Occupation Forces likewise began to reconstruct English language education programs, both imported and local, that had been successful before the Pacific War. In 1923, the Japanese Department of Education had hired Dr. Harold E. Palmer, a British linguist renowned for innovative educational techniques, as an advisor on English studies. During the 1920s and 1930s, Palmer, working with the Japanese government, gave instructional seminars, wrote textbooks “especially designed for Japanese students,” and established “an institute for English-teaching in Tokyo.”45 His 1929 textbook Eigo no Rokushūkan (English in the First Six Weeks) became popular as a guide for local teachers of the English language. The linguist Okakura Yoshizaburo combined some of Palmer’s materials with Japanese methods that had earlier developed after the founding of the Yosho Chosyo (Institute for Western Document Research) in 1862. In 1937, Okakura published his collected works, Eigo Kyoiku (English Language Teaching), which stressed a variety of methodologies for English language education and argued that it “was a part of human development” that should be embraced by the Japanese people as one aspect of national progress.46

However, during the wartime years, the Empire of Japan removed English language education from most schools across the empire. Teaching English was severely circumscribed

45 “English Teaching in Japan,” 1.
and the Japanese government policed the use of loanwords based on English, officially prohibited as the language of the enemy.\textsuperscript{47} When US military personnel began to reintroduce the subject, they found little foundation for the teaching of English. According to Virginia Geiger, a State Department officer working for the Eighth Army Education Office in Kyushu, a tremendous demand to learn English existed among large segments of the Japanese population. However, indigenous teachers trained during and before the war to teach English utilizing Japanese pedagogy appeared to Geiger as simply inadequate in every regard. She reported:

   The average Japanese teacher of English has none of the concepts of educational psychology which we follow. His students are only numbers to him; he gives them no opportunity to drill, no encouragement to creative production of English. He seldom smiles; he preserves an attitude of tension and fear among his students.\textsuperscript{48}

Geiger had some hope for the future, noting that the “younger teachers occasionally differ from this pattern” by following more closely the US model recently taught to them. She worried, though, that “they do so only at the risk of their professional reputations” given the inevitable end to US occupation. “Once the army leaves,” she feared, “the older teachers will again come into full power” and “end the trend toward better English teaching,” which the United States had “only just initiated.”\textsuperscript{49}

To combat this potential loss of US gains, Geiger recommended expanding English language education programs through civilian channels, specifically through USIS information and cultural centers, thus tapping into the Japanese desire to learn English and improving US efforts to control developments in Japan. These programs seemed indispensable for US commercial and political interests. As she argued:

\textsuperscript{47} Masaki Oda and Tomoko Takeda, 95.
\textsuperscript{48} “English Teaching in Japan,” 2.
\textsuperscript{49} “English Teaching in Japan,” 2.
Over and above the inestimable value of our raising the standards of English-teaching in order to render more successful our books, our newspapers, our radio programs, we can through this program create an immediate channel through which American people and ideas can readily pass. I suspect that one of our trump cards in Japan will prove to be guidance in the field of English teaching.50

The “open sesame to their minds,” or the minds of any Asian peoples Geiger claimed, lay in continuing these English teaching efforts through civilian channels, as cultural programs with new materials, new American experts, and “great tact.”51

These civilian cultural programs that required great tact belonged to the realm of the State Department’s “cultural diplomacy” mandate, unofficially in operation to varying degrees from the time the United States entered World War I. The State Department’s Office of Information and Educational Exchange (USIE) and Division of Libraries and Institutes led the way by working through a growing number of embassies, USIS posts, libraries, information centers, and binational centers.52 This role was made more tangible by the 1948 US Information and Educational Exchange Act (known as the Smith-Mundt Act), which officially shifted US propaganda from a wartime to peacetime footing. The stated primary objective of USIE in the field was “to influence people and make friends for the United States.” USIE officers recognized that the idea of “cultural work” had been based “to a large extent on the Latin American pattern” of US economic development schemes, but believed the techniques and practices of the program could be “easily adapted to the needs of the Eastern Hemisphere.”53 The USIE adopted strategies

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50 “English Teaching in Japan,” 3.
51 “English Teaching in Japan,” 3.
52 The State Department’s Office of Information and Education Exchange (USIE) primarily operated through overseas posts know collectively as United States Information Services (USIS) stations or branches. In 1953, all USIS branch offices and posts transferred to the authority of the United States Information Agency (USIA). The moniker, however, remained the same and all overseas USIA posts continued to be called USIS offices.
of working with local informants and governments as well as promoting top-down global policies to promote English.

One of the first places where the USIE focused its efforts was the Philippines. The prevalence of English-language education and the United States’ connection to elite Filipino culture had halted abruptly in 1942, when Japanese military forces invaded and occupied the archipelago for the duration of the war. On 14 October 1943, the Empire of Japan declared the Republic of the Philippines an independent nation with Tagalog (Filipino) as the national language. Japanese functioned as a semi-official second language of the nation because some Japanese leaders hoped it would bring the Philippines into the fold of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Japanese occupation forces closed and destroyed many English-language schools, collected and burned English-language books, and quickly sundered what little hold English had over people outside the elite Filipino population.

After the war, the US government actively sought to erase this wartime legacy and reestablish English as the official second, or even first, language of the Philippines, picking up the legacy of education from the prewar years and shaping the Philippines as a model nation in Asia. The USIE hoped to capitalize on any remaining “‘equity’ in the existence of English knowledge in the Philippines” that had accrued from the US colonial period and wartime efforts. By 1951, USIE officers believed that any “delay means that the present deterioration of knowledge reported by Manila” would allow that “‘equity’ to be lost.”

54 The field officer writing this report in 1951 talked about the last ten years (1941-1951) as if they had all been under Japanese occupation. The occupation lasted from early 1942 until late 1945. Perhaps the officer felt that US efforts at English teaching had been too minimal during the early years of the Republic of the Philippines established on 4 July 1946. See “Financing English-Teaching Textbooks and Recordings for Philippines,” John Devine, 1 June 1951, box 5, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files 1946-1966, RG 306; NARA.
dismay that “English, at one time practically a universal language among Filipinos,” had “lost ground heavily in the last ten years,” especially under the “long Japanese occupation.” According to information officers in the field, “the setback” to US “cultural programs has been catastrophic” and could only be repaired if English teaching became “one of the highest priorities” of the USIE’s growing cultural programming.55

Still officially considered one of the American Republics by the State Department in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Philippines presented a great opportunity to test practices first enacted in cultural programs from the USIE’s offices in Latin America and the western hemisphere.56 With an initial investment of $50,000, four Fulbright-sponsored teachers, four USIE English-teaching specialists, and a newly created record set of forty-eight audio lessons, the USIE hoped to “stem the deterioration of English-teaching” in more than 2000 schools. USIE sought to “actually bring about a wide-spread revival of English in the public schools and, eventually, throughout the country.”57 Despite not being able to recruit the four Fulbright scholars as scheduled, the USIE deemed the program very successful as English was propagated throughout the islands both by the US and the Filipino governments.

The Philippines did not serve as the only newly formed nation in which the USIE found success in its English teaching efforts. By the end of 1952, the agency had a dedicated English Teaching Branch, with expanding English teaching programs running in information centers and

55 “Intensive Programs of English‐Teaching in Selected Critical Countries”, 1, Undated 1952, USIE, box 4, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files 1946-1966; NARA.
56 While the United States granted the Philippines independence on 4 July 1946, for policy planning purposes, the US State Department continued to group the Philippines with various countries of Latin America. State Department planners believed that the Hispanic heritage and former status as colony of the United States created similar economic, political, and cultural needs among these nations. By the mid-1950s, the Philippines had become a part of Southeast Asia in the eyes of the State Department research teams.
binational centers across Asia from Korea to Indonesia and from Burma to Japan.\textsuperscript{58} The USIE even had secret plans to begin teaching English in Mainland China “assuming US recognition of [the] Chinese Communist Regime.”\textsuperscript{59} Teaching classes, producing textbooks, screening educational films, and training national teachers of English in various methodological approaches, these information centers, according to internal documents, “operated by aggressive trained staffs,” used cultural programs “as their ammunition” against communism. Each information center was “a bit of America in a foreign country” that existed “for the sole purpose of instilling the ideas of democracy and a peaceful free world into the minds of foreign nationals,” in large part through instruction in American English.\textsuperscript{60} By 1952, the USIE estimated it would spend an estimated $527,612 on “English teaching materials development and distribution” alone as part of these rapidly expanding programs.\textsuperscript{61}

Despite the high-speed growth, large-scale funding, and successful application of English language teaching across Asia, the programs remained uncoordinated within a larger-scale US foreign policy and lacked many specific educational resources. Multiple US government agencies and semi-private organizations competed for space, staff, funding, and legitimacy while simultaneously promoting English abroad. It was clear to the State Department that it should be taking full “advantage of the tremendous increase in foreign interest in learning American English” through courses “stressing US ideology and institutions,” but the department had yet to

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\textsuperscript{58} Binational centers operated as ostensibly private civil institutions for English language education and cultural exchange. In fact, the USIS covertly funded and operated these centers as well. See Chapter two.
\textsuperscript{59} “OEX Staff Study on Future China Programs,” from William C. Johnstone, Jr. to Mr. Colligan, 6 December 1949, box 1, Cultural Operations Division, Far East Libraries and Centers Branch, P 55 Central Files 1949-1955, RG 306; NARA.
\textsuperscript{60} “US Information Centers: General Justification” Division of Libraries and Institutions, 15 December 1950, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files 1946-1966, RG 306; NARA.
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develop a clear sense of how these programs might apply to US foreign policy writ large.62 Their English teaching efforts were seen as an essential instrument for cultural programming designed to prevent communism, spread democratic sentiment, and “promote the development of a friendly attitude toward the United States”; these language tools likewise worked as a marketing device that would “ensure an ever widening public for books, magazines, and films from the United States.”63 Many USIS posts still lacked clearly defined directions to enact these cultural programs. This changed in 1953, as the newly formed United States Information Agency took over all of these programs officially.

Just as the United States government set about redeploying English language teaching programs for a postwar world, new print media programs and technologies were redirected and redefined as central aspects of the US cultural programs in Asia. During the first half of the twentieth century, print culture in Asia had flourished. Aside from the colonial press and book services, hundreds of local newspapers and publishers had distributed their products across the region. Printed media played a major role in widespread social debates, in the growth of anti-colonial nationalism, and in recreation and enjoyment until the early 1940s.64 These printed works tapered off during the final years of the war, but as wartime censorship and rationing relaxed and decolonizing nations sought to assert their independence and economic strength, print culture again flourished across Asia. Printing houses reopened and newsprint began rolling,
incorporating new technologies and materials that greatly enhanced the scale of print culture. Just formed educational systems required new textbooks, and novel forms of industry sought to extend their markets through the growing field of commercial advertising. Both the United States and the Soviet Union attempted to attach their nations to these various processes and to influence the growth and direction of new cultural elements expressed in print media across the region.

During this worldwide early postwar print boom, USIS offices across Asia reported back to the US government that the United States was losing the fight to Communists across all platforms of printed materials. Everywhere USIS officers looked, anti-imperialist and “communist-inspired” newspapers, magazines, and books – many of them locally authored and produced – were on display. These allegedly “communist-inspired” materials, printed in both English and local languages, cost less than US printed products, contained more specific ideological content, and gained increasing popularity among readers from the growing middle class seeking to expand their scientific, economic, and political knowledge.\(^{65}\) The prescription, according to US policymakers, called for a massive infusion of pro-American and anti-communist print materials designed to repel and replace unfriendly materials.

In the years immediately following World War II, books played a small-scale but significant role in the policy agenda of the US State Department and the military. These agencies gave away surpluses ASE paperback books and technical manuals from the United States’ postwar industry boom by the hundreds of thousands, primarily through USIS libraries, government gift programs, and the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA – forerunner to US AID) projects, including the Marshall Plan and the Point Four Programs, the earliest postwar

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\(^{65}\) The Soviet Union sponsored some of these programs and publications through the Communist Information Bureau (COMINFORM) founded in 1947, however, local nationalists, revolutionaries, artists, and intellectuals published many of these materials on their own in accordance with their own postwar goals.
US technical assistance programs. In occupied Germany and Japan, regarded by US officials as rather “bookish countries” that had suffered under years of internal censorship and fascist propaganda, occupiers saw open access to a wide variety of books as “just the prescription to heal the mental and moral incapacitation” of the defeated.66 However, these various disorganized programs did not particularly aim at addressing communism or creating pro-American sentiments, nor did the programs focus on putting books into the hands of decolonizing peoples looking to create alternate cultural and social constructions.

The uncoordinated and undirected aspects of these programs gained more critical attention with the 1949 victory of the Communists in China, the worsening situation in Germany that culminated in the 1949 establishment of the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Unions’ successful detonation of the atomic bomb, and the 1950 beginnings of Korea’s civil war. These shocks helped propel US print propaganda efforts forward in step with Cold War tensions, as demonstrated by President Truman’s Campaign of Truth. When USIS officers in East and Southeast Asia examined the ideas, ideals, and motivations of potential leaders – those government bureaucrats, students, military officers, and business trailblazers who served as propaganda targets – they found that these groups had much greater access to books and other printed materials written by Chinese and Soviet authors than from US sources. The Psychological Strategy Board (PSB), a group of advisors to the National Security Council on issues of psychological warfare, found that the Soviet-produced *Short History of the Communist Party* had perhaps eclipsed the bible as the “largest selling book in the world” and that the Soviets had already produced and distributed nearly a billion books in as many as eighty-nine

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66 Hench, 225-227.
languages aimed at promoting “Communist ideology.”67 Worse still, according to officers in the field, many Asians seemed more sympathetic to the anti-imperialist tone of communist, Marxist, and Maoist tracts, written both in English and local languages, available at rock bottom prices in almost every bookstore across Asia.68

Even the American popular press realized the problems confronting US foreign policy efforts in Asia. In a biting editorial piece, “America’s Bookless Santa Claus,” Stanley Young, a guest writer for the Saturday Evening Post, elaborated on the situation and claimed that in terms of foreign policy, the United States appeared “on the world stage as a reluctant and somewhat inarticulate Santa Claus with a heavy pack” loaded with “dams, seeds, and anti-toxins” but few if any “ideas.” Meanwhile, the Soviet Santa arrived in “the East,” his pack “stuffed with books, magazines, and tracts,” brought “straight from the ever-rolling printing presses of Moscow and Peking” and accessible “in all Eastern languages and dialects.” Moreover, according to Young, “the public men and women of the East are primarily intellectuals… with fierce beliefs and doubts from their own colonial period.” Despite laboring “toward a change in their material circumstances,” Young argued, these future leaders judged the United States “based on what our books reflect, what our words say, and not just on what our ‘things’ do” – a frightening proposition for many Americans given the uncoordinated nature of US book programs and the success of the Soviets.69

Likewise, despite the Allied forces’ victories in Germany and Japan, visual media propaganda remained an important aspect of US foreign policy throughout the world as the

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68 “Information Center Service Monthly Progress Report,” 18, December Report 1953, box 8, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
government sought to create new cultural patterns supportive of US power or to generate outright consent to the hegemony of the United States.\textsuperscript{70} Unlike 1919, when the US government quickly disassembled its overseas propaganda apparatus in the aftermath of World War I, such programs remained and thrived after 1945. Visual media, both government-made and Hollywood-produced, took on a central role in the propaganda and cultural missions of the US occupational governments to “rehabilitate” the people of Europe and Asia, particularly in Germany, Austria, Korean, and Japan.\textsuperscript{71} The State Department likewise deployed film among dozens of new USIS libraries and Information Centers to demonstrate the multiple benefits of adopting US products and friendship in the postwar world.

In Asia, the postwar US occupation efforts in Japan and South Korea focused heavily on using film to transform Japanese and Koreans in these recently belligerent Asian nations into democratic citizen-actors in the US-led “Free World.” On the first day that US forces occupied the Empire of Japan, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) created its Information Dissemination Section to control media production across Japan through the use of censorship and propaganda (SCAP soon changed the name to the Civil Information and Education Section, or CIE). Unbeknownst to the majority of Japanese, the CIE’s film production offices created and distributed hundreds of new educational and documentary films designed to transform the consciousness and culture of the defeated Japanese populace during the


occupation.\textsuperscript{72} The CIE disseminated these films through “audio-visual libraries” established in every prefectural library in Japan. Likewise, the CIE reviewed and examined all films, whether natively produced or imported from Hollywood, before they could be shown in Japanese theaters to ensure that they properly contributed to rebuilding the nation in accord with the principles of democratic capitalism required to turn “the uncivilized Japanese nation into a fellow citizen of the world.”\textsuperscript{73} Likewise, the US Army Military Government in Korea produced and distributed dozens of films and newsreels designed to promote the idea of a free and democratic society within South Korea. At the same time, the USAMGIK sponsored the Korean branch of the Central Motion Picture Exchange (CMPE), which controlled the importation of Hollywood films and allowed for the USAMGIK to dominate and surveil the local South Korean film industry before the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. During this period, only fifty-nine films were produced locally while approximately 140 Hollywood films were imported from the United States. For example, the USAMGIK imported dozens of dazzling Hollywood motion pictures such as \textit{Boys Town} (1938), \textit{You Can’t Take It with You} (1938), and \textit{Casablanca} (1942), fundamentally transforming the cinematic experience and visual culture of Korea. Later as USIS officers brought in the latest large-scale high-budget Hollywood films that overwhelmed audiences with new technologies such as the first color movies and grand scenes demonstrating the vast material wealth of the American middle class, local Korean productions could not compete. While the US government continued to make films in South Korea and to import


Hollywood motion pictures for the recreation of soldiers, local South Korean industries underwent a period of decline and struggled to turn a profit until the mid-1950s.\(^{74}\)

In areas outside of direct US occupation, in the second half of the 1940s, US government films and visual media likewise took on a role of rehabilitation and development aimed at both the individual and the nation. Here, the State Department rather than a military government acted as the primary producer and distributor of US visual propaganda. Foreign Service officers provided films directly to their target audiences of government leaders, military personnel, and intellectuals through private presentations and to a broader range of the middle class through the many newly opened USIS library branches and Information Centers scattered throughout most major cities in Asia.\(^{75}\)

Films screened directly to elites or shown in USIS centers consisted mostly of short English-language “how to”-style documentaries covering such topics as how to construct an outhouse, the role of the military in a democracy, or the importance of consistent voter participation. While demonstrating proper construction techniques and civic action, these films likewise contained a heavy dose of direct and indirect advertising of American products to help the fledgling nations of Asia materially recover from the war. Many of these documentaries and “how to” films originated as either military documentaries during the war or as films designed for educational or tourist programming within the United States. Lacking the country-specific propaganda of later films, these documentaries primarily worked as displays of American ideals.


\(^{75}\) By 1953, this included approximately forty-two center in thirteen countries in the “Far East” region. See, “United States Information Centers and Binational Centers Abroad: Summary,” 4 January 1954, box 1, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
and material culture. USIS officers also relied on US-produced newsreels depicting current
events through the lens of the successes of the United States or the United Nations to help place
all of these actions within the context of the now-forming “Free World.”

As the postwar settlements took shape and expanded the “Free World” in Asia during the
second half of the 1940s and early 1950s, US agencies increasingly employed information and
propaganda channels to deliver cultural messages designed to “influence people and win friends
for the United States” among the peoples and societies of these newly formed and rehabilitating
nations. State Department cultural programs replicated and replaced most of the wartime
information and propaganda efforts, reaching out through mass-oriented programs that would
soon be known as “public” and “cultural” diplomacy. Primarily targeting “Communists,
intellectuals, labor, youth, children, [and] government officials,” the State Department
envisioned a future where US cultural programming would “offset political upheavals,” cause
US-friendly cultural “developments in the international scene,” prevent “strikes sponsored by
anti-United States forces,” and cultivate a growing set of general audiences useful for US
purposes – specifically winning the ever-expanding cultural Cold War.76

The United States Information Agency and the Cultivation of Cultural Commonality

In 1953, with the Cold War consolidating as a palpable worldwide phenomenon and the
United States government convinced that information and culture held the key to victory, the
United States Congress commissioned a new agency – the United States Information Agency
(USIA) – to operate as the official news, information, and propaganda apparatus for the US
government. Under Reorganization Plan No.8, put forward through the offices of President

Dwight D. Eisenhower, the USIA inherited all information and cultural centers, all overseas library operations, the Voice of America (VOA) radio broadcasting responsibilities, and all USIS offices previously run by the State Department. The primary mission of the agency, President Eisenhower announced

shall be to submit evidence to peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress, and peace.

The official mission statement further encouraged USIS agents in the field to deploy information regarding “important aspects of the life and culture of the people of the United States” to achieve these policy goals.77

Theodore C. Streibert, the first director of the United States Information Agency, supported a particularly strong role for cultural programming in all future USIS field activities. Aside from simply demonstrating and promoting American culture and products, Streibert sought to reveal (and increase) the shared characteristics between US culture and the cultures of target audiences. In an October 1953 letter to President Eisenhower, Streibert reiterated that “the American people share fundamental beliefs and values with millions of other men and women we are attempting to win to our side, which should be made clear to other peoples.” If common cultural elements were exposed, highlighted, explained, and created in USIS propaganda, Streibert told the president, it would help the United States achieve its political goals and “cause other peoples to join us in achieving them.”78


In addition to creating common causes, Streibert argued that the versatility of USIS cultural programming allowed agents to reach and manipulate any target audience based on the current political, economic, or military goals of the United States. As the cultural side of USIS programming efforts took shape, Streibert circulated a memo to all foreign branch offices emphasizing the malleability and efficacy of cultural work in the field. The “precise aspects” of culture to be exploited should originate with USIS officers in the field, Streibert explained:

If he [the field officer] considers that he can best reach the intellectuals of his country through cultural means, then he will undoubtedly call upon the innumerable evidence of the maturity of American accomplishment in the arts, philosophy, and scholarship. If the school teachers are a primary audience group, he will probably base his approach to them on pertinent information he has available on American educational theory and practice. Similarly, to reach labor leaders or university students or army officers he will choose out of the cultural materials at his disposal those most calculated to carry weight for his objectives.

For Streibert, the cultural program obeyed no “hard and fast rule” as long as it led to people appreciating, emulating, and siding with the United States.  

With new directives in place to emphasize the superiority of American culture and its possibly shared interests with the peoples of Asia, USIS officers sought to create even more channels and conduits for information exchange. Just as in previous moments of US expansion, information programs focused on increasing and fostering a shared and common medium of exchange – the English language.

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Chapter 2

Tailoring English for Exploitation: US Efforts to Win the Cold War through Language

In many countries mastery of English is essential to the cabinet minister and the taxi driver in the conduct of their affairs…. The situation is tailor-made for USIA to exploit.

Richard N. Meyer, USIA Office of Policy and Planning, 22 October 1953

At the turn of the twenty-first century, English was one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and was the most commonly taught second language in almost every nation. This current proliferation of the language has been commonly assumed to be the end result of British imperialism, the legacy of which spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and dovetailed with the rise of American hegemony after World War II. However, this understanding skirts the truth. In the decades following 1945, the era of decolonization and the Cold War, the United States spent hundreds of millions of dollars and committed thousands of personnel around the globe to bring the “American” version of English to the world.

American officials, particularly in the United States Information Agency (USIA) and its State Department predecessors, saw English-language learning and education as critical to US foreign policy agendas. Unlike older British notions of creating and directing a common empire through language, American efforts focused on anti-communism, Americana, national independence, and the construction of new markets particularly for America’s booming media industries. American officials also realized that there was a tremendous and genuine demand around the globe for English language education as part of national development and independence programs. English served as a vehicle for propaganda that could be delivered

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1 “USIA English Teaching Programs,” 1, from Richard N. Meyer to Henry Loomis, 22 October 1953, box 1, Office of Policy, P 22 Program Files 1953-1967, RG 306; NARA.
worldwide to states that would otherwise not allow an American presence or that remained skeptical of the US government’s role in their internal affairs. More than simply facilitating communication, teaching English to foreign students, elites, and military officers could popularize American foreign policies, culture, and products abroad.

In the immediate wake of World War II, the United States concentrated on teaching English in its former colonies, to newly decolonizing nations, and to its defeated foes. According to American experts, these nations either had no “natural” second language given their previous colonization or were anxious to cast off the Dutch, French, Spanish, or German languages that had been foisted upon them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was reasoned that American English could, and should, fill that void. At the same time, the teaching of American English, primarily by white women working for the United States, began to take on a secondary didactic character heavily influenced by sentimentalism, integration, and tutelage, a complex of values Christina Klein has called “Cold War Orientalism.”2 As the Cold War and decolonization progressed in the late 1940s and early 1950s, USIA’s language programs shifted away from language teaching for communication and toward teaching English to impart American cultural norms, anti-communism, and media consumption within newly independent states across the American Republics, Africa, and Asia.

American officials regarded the USIA education programs, which worked in tandem with heavy doses of American propaganda, as amazing successes. USIA utilized both “direct” teaching methods to train individuals important to US cultural and psychological objectives and “indirect” methods that sought to win over schools, indigenous teachers of English, and various

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Ministers of Education. This two-tiered approach allowed for the widest dissemination of the English language and US culture. The goal was not simply to draw millions of “hearts and minds” into the American fold, but rather, through the use of English, to transform cultures particularly in Asia in ways that would make US power more legible to Asians and make Asian societies more adaptable to the western world. These programs not only had a tremendous effect on the international importance of the English language and its global diffusion, but also increased the reach of US imperialism as newly independent Asian and African nations shed their European colonizers during the Cold War.

**An Expanding Vocabulary of Power**

From its inception in 1953, the United States Information Agency became fully immersed in the international teaching of the English language. Building on programs enacted by the US military and the State Department’s USIE, the agency sought to develop a wide-reaching system for spreading American English around the globe. Within months of the agency’s founding, Henry Loomis, the special assistant to the USIA director, a high ranking CIA operative, and a future head of the Voice of America, pressed the agency’s Cultural Division (ICS) on the extent to which English teaching could be used in the “long-range political and propaganda potentials of the program” currently being crafted by the fledgling agency. In response, Richard N. Meyer of the ICS informed Loomis that the teaching of “American English” was an essential part of the current cultural programing conducted in the field and “USIS personnel” had “long been capitalizing” on the growing universal interest in learning the language. Meyer claimed that

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3 “USIA English Teaching Programs,” 1, from Richard N. Meyer to Henry Loomis, 22 October 1953, box 1, Office of Policy, P 22 Program Files 1953-1967, RG 306; NARA. The “I” in the acronym ICS stands for “information” and served as the first letter for most departmental designations in the USIA
“English is the international language” and had been “recognized as such by the whole non-communist world today.” He elaborated, as previously noted, that “in many countries mastery of English is essential to the cabinet minister and the taxi driver in the conduct of their affairs.” This global demand cutting across broad swaths of societies created, according to Meyer, a “situation” that was “tailor-made for USIA to exploit” through “carefully directed programs which make available American English-teaching materials and techniques.”

This situation proved even more promising given the fact that, unlike other transparently overt forms of propaganda, English teaching was “sometimes one of the few USIS activities acceptable to sensitive host governments,” such as those in “Afghanistan, Lebanon, [and] Indonesia” that might otherwise resist US cultural programing. English provided a proverbial foot in the door, a perfect “vehicle for Americana,” and a “unique” tool in the hands of USIS operatives. Unlike the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA) and other US agencies that carried out language training programs “designed eventually to raise the standard of living” or to train foreign nationals to work in the United States, the USIA’s English teaching was, in the words of Meyer, “a propaganda program” in “the best sense of the term.” The “primary objective is not language teaching per se; rather we utilize the universal interest in our language as a means of attaining USIA [cultural and psychological] objectives.” Meyer recommended that by 1955, in addition to the hundreds of people already employed by USIS stations around the world, the program be expanded to include “a minimum” of one advisor in Washington, three field consultants (one each in the “Near East,” “Far East,” and American Republics), “local American

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4 “USIA English Teaching Programs,” 1.
program directors working under the field consultants,” and the creation of new USIS materials for use overseas.\(^5\)

Meyer’s recommendations led to further study and more refined applications of various USIS English teaching programs within wider cultural efforts. By February 1954, the English Teaching Division formed a small team, later called the “Loomis group,” tasked with gathering old USIE memoranda and directives and conducting research on the best methods and practices to promote English for propaganda purposes. The department found numerous models of successful and effective English teaching programs, especially in Asia. It was observed that successful classes were conducted on both a large scale and in informal small-scale courses, that textbooks could be created for specific language groups, and, perhaps most importantly of all, that English teaching could be used to deliver propaganda clearly to specific USIS “target audiences.” In Taipei, for example, former English teaching officers based their approach “upon the judgment that the most effective means we have of getting to substantial numbers of students is by teaching their teachers. Hence we have concentrated our attention upon the advanced students at the Teachers College and Universities in the English Department, who will for the most part go into English Teaching as their career.” In Hong Kong, USIS officials had success influencing “newspaper men” by sponsoring courses with “special reference to the English of Journalism.”\(^6\) In Vietnam, US agents developed specifically targeted programs for local “Red Cross nurses,” high ranking officials such as the Director of Protocol at the Vietnamese Foreign Office and the Chief of Sports Section at the Ministry of Youth, and French military personnel

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\(^5\) “USIA English Teaching Programs,” 1-2.
\(^6\) “Target Groups Reached Through English Teaching,” p. 1-4, Undated 1954, box 1, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
“because of their need for English in maintaining” the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Saigon.\(^7\)

A 1953 memo from a USIS branch office in Indonesia perhaps spelled out most clearly this idea that English could be used for specific targets. According to the memo, the English language program proved

One of the most convenient, direct and effective channels to reach some of the most receptive Priority Audience Groups – Youth, Professionals, and Intellectuals – utilizing the products and services of every one of our other programs – films, books, pamphlets, special message material, etc. This Mission has already experimented successfully using English-language study materials to deliver impact messages discreetly incorporated as simple, beginner’s English exercise material. In view of the intense drive on here in Indonesia to promote the use of English, there is no doubt that this project could be successfully developed into one of our foremost and most effective programs.\(^8\)

This officer nonetheless went on to argue that the program in Indonesia did have its problems and would need new specific resources and teaching specialists to reach its full potential in the coming fiscal term.

These difficulties were not specific to Indonesia alone, but appeared in reports from most USIS posts with English language programs. Many problems stemmed from employing too few qualified English teachers or lacking adequate resources. US researchers observed that from 1945 to 1953, agents in the field frequently found suitable teaching materials in short supply, leading both to frustration and innovation. In Saigon, for example, USIS teachers attempted to use American personnel wielding Canadian-published French-language primers to teach English to French-educated Vietnamese and Cambodian elites.\(^9\) Perhaps the biggest obstacle was that the

\(^7\) “Target Groups Reached through English Teaching,” p.4.
\(^8\) “IIA Prospects for Indonesia: Schedule I-1 – Program Statement: Activities,” 9 May 1953, box 1, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
\(^9\) “English-Teaching Materials for Saigon” 1, Undated, 1950, box 1, Cultural Operations Division, Far East Libraries and Centers Branch, P 55 Central Files 1949-1955, RG 306; NARA.
current body of English teaching material was primarily created by the British and thus did not carry the ideological and cultural content needed to achieve USIA objectives. For example, in 1952, the director of the USIS binational English teaching center in Thailand reported on the glaring “inadequacy of appropriate lesson materials,” claiming that “practically everything that is available to students locally is of British authorship and reflects British methodology and usage.”

In Malaysia, India, and Hong Kong, US officials had to settle for introducing books such as *General American Speech Sounds* to supplement British language policies, but in areas with no long-standing and direct British presence, US agents actively tried to revise or replace materials from the United Kingdom. As USIS English teaching instructors wanted to avoid imparting “British concepts” to its students, the director noted, new materials had to be rapidly produced which turned into “practically a full-time job in itself.” According to internal researcher reports, the creation of pro-American USIS materials would be required for a successful program.

Based upon these findings, the Loomis group produced a voluminous five part report on the agency’s English language teaching programs, covering the importance of English teaching to US objectives, the “history, problems, and plans” of the agency’s various language policies, and an outline of the future “textbook and materials development program” that would allow for further expansion in the field. These efforts culminated in an untitled five page policy paper

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13 “Information Center Service Monthly Progress Report,” 5, February 1954, box 8, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P23 Subject Files 1946-1966; NARA.
summarizing the guidelines, justification, and effectiveness of the English Teaching Branch. This policy document distinctly outlined the value of the English Language teaching program for the highest policy makers in the USIA as well as for officers in the field.

The report called for the “immediate expansion and intensification” of all activities “conducted by USIS field posts which are designed to exploit the tremendous interest” throughout the Middle East and Asia “in learning American English” as part of the general psychological and cultural offensive of the US government. The demand for English language education appeared evident “throughout the two areas,” as most “national school systems had made the study of English compulsory in secondary schools” and “private institutions and language academies thrive on the fees of droves of people” in Asia “who want to study our language.” This “foreign interest in English” created the perfect platform for propaganda purposes, forming a “natural bridge” between the United States “and the nationals of each country – a bridge which USIS has not built but rather one which foreign countries, – even hostile regions – have unknowingly built themselves.”

This “demand,” according to the report, shaped the English language into a commodity of extreme value, “a product” that was “acceptable everywhere” the US government went. This American product was “unique” in its ability to reach into other societies and cultures. The report claimed that American English gave the “USIS a foot in the door” so that “opinion molders” would be easily accessible to the message which USIS officers must get across.” In propaganda terms, according to the USIS report, “no other field device or activity has the potential to bring nationals to us – every other activity must be taken to them.” Thus “the Minister of Education in

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14 Untitled English Teaching Branch Report, 1, 1954, box 1, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
the Near East or Far East who is faced with the problem” of creating “a curriculum for teaching English in secondary schools would not expect the Soviet Union to assist him, but would naturally expect the United States to give guidance and assistance.” When this concrete assistance entered the curriculum, the English Teaching Branch claimed, the USIS could create “the exclusive national school system orientation toward English” and “toward English speaking countries.” And, English teaching Branch reports reiterated, “whether we desire it or not, the voice through thousands of teachers for the interpretation of our thoughts, ideas, and actions” would be influenced.15

The influence to be gained from this unique American product rested heavily on the quality of the English teaching materials. “Non-American materials,” the English Teaching Branch argued, suffered from a number of failings, presenting either “a mutilated or artificial English which should not be used as a model for foreigners” or a version of the language that would not properly “orient learners toward a sympathetic acceptance of the US.” While British materials were acceptable, and “most widely used,” they had still been produced to “disseminate ideas calculated to provide acceptance for Britain and for British institutions abroad” and were “all British-oriented” rather than supportive of US aims. Worst of all were “nationally produced materials and anti-American slant materials” that did “much toward distorting America in the minds of millions of foreigners who study our language.” In light of these defective products, the stated goal of the English Teaching Branch became the “planning and modifying of English language curricula in all countries” of the world to control “the presentation of US life, culture,

15 Untitled English Teaching Branch Report, 2.
and politics,” thus “shaping the lines of study and thought in these countries” of value to the United States.16

To create the most impact, it was reasoned that American English as a distinct version of pronunciation, diction, and bodies of literature would need to be disseminated across the globe to allow for the insertion of American culture and, ultimately, American ideologies of democracy and capitalism. As one field officer commented in a 1954 collection of USIS operating assumptions, “the US should replace European countries as a model civilization” in the postwar world. American English, “pronunciation” and “texts,” at least in the eyes of this field officer, might literally help the United States in “overcoming French or German cultural preeminence” in the newly decolonizing world.17 This propagation of American English across what had recently been identified as “the third world,” took two distinct yet somewhat overlapping approaches as spelled out in USIS operating assumptions: a “direct” approach whereby the USIS taught to selected audiences and “target groups” of “foreign nationals” and an “indirect” approach through which USIS agents worked with textbook companies, book distributors, teachers, and various Ministries of Education in an effort to stimulate the desire to learn English and to increase the use of English as a second language among all Asian nations. Due to the overwhelming demand to learn English that cut across “the entire gamut of social groups,” even in the “neutralist countries of Asia and Africa,” USIS teachers and agents in the field agreed that they could “practice pin-point selection of target audience” groups as they capitalized on these two approaches.18

16 Untitled English Teaching Branch Report, 2-3.
17 “A Study of USIA Operating Assumptions,” O-21, Institute of Communications Research, Inc., December 1954, Office of Research and Intelligence, P 160 Special Reports, 1953-1997; NARA.
Direct Teaching

Through the “direct approach” outlined in the new English teaching operating assumptions, “USIS personnel, locally-resident Americans, and selected nationals” on US payrolls taught English courses directly to “members of target groups important to USIS objectives, such as government officials, professional people, and university students.” Utilizing these classes and teaching moments, the USIS created “person to person” experiences for “foreign nationals” that both taught English and educated them about “the life and thought and culture of the US.” These “thousands of personal contacts” could then be “utilized” and exploited, USIS officers argued, to their “full potential” by the agency to meet country-specific objectives.19 These “person to person” experiences were in part a lesson in themselves. If the medium really is the message, then the main thrust of the direct teaching program involved the choice of teachers supported or not supported by the USIA and the specific “targets” receiving an English-language education in USIS overseas programs.

The targets themselves usually included foreign nationals in positions of power, or those who would be in positions of power in the foreseeable future, and other members of society capable of promoting English to larger audiences. This included politicians, police officers, religious officials, university students, military personnel, scientists, national teachers of English, hospital workers, and clerical staff, where the USIS found “unlimited opportunities” and tremendous demand. In most cases, this demand genuinely originated with local elites and the United States simply tried to keep up with it. In the words of one USIS internal policy report, field officers believed that “there is complete unanimity on the question of national interest in

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learning English; it seems that everyone in the world wants to learn it.”

In Thailand, at the request of Field Marshal Phin, one of the leading military and political figures of the time, and, according to agency sources, “following repeated requests from individual officers as well as officials of the Ministry of Defense,” the USIS began instructing a “senior class of the Joint Staff College three hours a week” giving “them lectures on English in various topics.”

In Japan, Emperor Hirohito himself requested that “an American Christian woman” be hired “as the crown prince’s English-language tutor.” The Imperial Household Agency settled on Elizabeth Gray Vining, who “eventually taught English to all the unmarried royal children” and their classmates. This incredible demand from the uppermost elite promoted a further desire to learn English among the growing middle class in Asia as a means of achieving upward mobility. All over Asia, USIS field offices reported that “the more we increase enrollment the longer the queue becomes.” They simply could not find as many qualified American personnel abroad as they needed.

In general, American teachers of English in Asia were either paid USIS and military employees or unpaid “US wives,” sometimes perhaps more politely referred to as “dependents of US government employees.” For official USIS workers (including many women and Department of Defense personnel), teaching English could be an addendum to their regular workload with the US Mission. They might normally act as Public Affairs Officers (PAOs), be
stationed as military advisors, or work in newspaper production, but teach English on site as needed. On the other hand, “English teaching specialists” only worked in the language centers as their full time job. Among these specialists, the USIA paid many women for their services as direct employees, and in these categories women represented a much larger portion of the workforce than in any other area of USIA operations. In fact, Annis Sandvos, head of the English Teaching branch in the late 1950s, was one of the first women to fill such a high position in the agency.25 While binational centers and information centers were primarily managed and directed by men who created the propaganda aspects of the program, the actual coursework, instruction, and “direct” interaction was seen, largely, as women’s work. Echoing a long-standing tradition of “enlisting white women” to reproduce US linguistic and cultural values in foreign nations and settler communities, the agency believed women presented the perfect mixture of tutelage and delicacy as well as a non-threatening non-political nature and a willingness to contribute to US efforts.26 Agency reports assumed that women could more easily “avoid discussing politics or religion,” but needed reminding to be “doubly careful” if their husband worked “for our government or theirs” lest they “lessen his effectiveness.”27

USIS officers and programming reiterated these messages particularly for the so-called “US wives,” whose volunteerism greatly supported the direct English teaching programs. From the immediate postwar years and the US occupation of the Empire of Japan up through the

27 “Notes from Seminar Discussions: First Hour,” Bangkok Quarterly Reports, 1 December 1951, box 8, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files 1946-1966; NARA.
1960s, US mission wives were expected to aid in the English teaching efforts even if they could not be well-paid, or paid at all. In one of the State Department’s first English teaching endeavors in Asia, the American Language Institute in Korea, twelve Americans, “ECA and mission wives for the most part,” volunteered “with a “small payment for services” rendered to the occupational government.” In the USIE/USIS binational and information centers, wives were “persuaded to teach” out of “a sense of personal loyalty to friends among the staff members,” despite the fact that they were not viewed as very reliable employees. State Department officials complained that because they did “not need the money that is paid them,” when “their husbands” made “official trips to the provinces or to neighboring capitals, they accompany them,” leaving classes without instructors at a moment’s notice. Other times, the USIS depended on women who were required to accompany their husbands to more remote locations such as Chiang Rai, Thailand or Dalat, Vietnam to aid in the expansion of English language teaching in regions previously inaccessible. Throughout this time period, hundreds if not thousands of women “volunteered” in such programs around the world.

The issue of not paying these women for their services became somewhat of an internal embarrassment for the agency when in June 1962, Harold Urist, Chief of the ICS Teaching Branch, brought to the attention of his superiors that the USAID program paid the majority of their “US Government wives for teaching English to the nationals” in countries where the USIS did not. Urist noted that “on various occasions” his office “had been given the understanding that it would be contrary to Agency policy to pay USIS wives or, for that matter, any foreign service

28 “Notes on Conversation with Dr. Han Sehi, Director ALI, Subject: Educational Program of American Language Institute,” 1.
wives for teaching English” overseas. But, he wondered, “If one [US] agency can do this, why can’t USIA?” He wondered, would it not be better to “compensate them for their services?”31 The agency did begin to offer remuneration to more and more of these women, who comprised the largest percentage of their American workforce in the field of English teaching work. By 1963, only ten percent of the eighty-three female American teachers in Thailand remained uncompensated. However, in Japan, nearly one hundred percent of the program’s sixty-four women stayed unpaid laborers.32

Aside from the types of individuals conducting courses for the USIS, the location of the classes held also attained tremendous importance. Although direct teaching was sometimes conducted “on-the-spot” in small decentralized locations, usually English classes took place at one of the USIS information centers or binational centers where teachers had access to large classrooms, films, audio-recordings, and pre-made USIS course materials permeated with US culture and values. In 1954, USIA had forty-four such centers in the “Far East” alone. These centers stood at the heart of the agency’s direct English teaching program, exposing students to English-language materials produced by the agency’s media programs and creating a pro-American community atmosphere.33

Information centers primarily served as USIS library systems, which carried thousands of English-language books and films that could be used and lent out to students in coordination with their studies of the language. With their origins in the State Department’s earliest foreign

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31 “Payments to USIS Wives for English Teaching,” from Harold E. Urist, 11 June 1962, box 8, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
32 “English Teaching: Number of Americans Participating in USIS or BNC Programs in FY 1962,” From USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” and “English Teaching: Number of Americans Participating in USIS or BNC Programs in FY 1962,” From USIS Tokyo to USIA Washington, 10 January 1963, box 7, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division P 79, RG 306; NARA.
33 See Chapter 1.
libraries in Latin America, these centers were managed by local USIS stations and directly funded by the USIA. The primary purpose of these centers was as a conduit for all “information” produced by the total cultural and psychological program of the agency. They worked with schools, hospitals, and government groups, but any citizen of the country could visit the libraries and freely check out books, and occasionally films, for independent use. The centers often prided themselves on being the first “open-shelf” libraries in newly decolonizing countries. Including the libraries inherited from the USIE and those opened by the USIA in 1953, 158 centers operated worldwide, including forty-two in thirteen countries of the “Far East” alone.

Binational centers, on the other hand, served as semi-private institutes primarily concerned with teaching English, although they also promoted “academic and cultural programs” of regional interest. These centers, originally named “American Centers,” were nominally under the control of independent, “non-political” private organizations run by a board of directors composed of citizens of the United States and local “nationals”; they were designed to “actively engage in promoting a better understanding of the United States by conducting educational and informational activities” approved by the United States and host nations. These centers or institutes originated with Nelson Rockefeller’s business and social “interests” in Central and South America during the 1920s and 1930s, and in 1941, came into full US propaganda use as instruments of the wartime Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs’ programs designed to protect US economic and political investments in the western hemisphere.

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34 See Chapter 1.
35 “United States Information Centers and Binational Centers Abroad: Summary,” 4 January 1954, box 1, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
stated goal was a “saturation” of the hemisphere with American culture by placing a center in every “political capital” in the region. “As the most important city; the city representing the country’s industrial commercial dynamo; the citadel of conservative tradition and even reactionary opinion (usually a university town),” USIS officers reasoned that political capitals held the best chance of cutting across economic and social lines to reach as many people as possible.38 In 1945, two binational centers included English teaching as part of their cultural programs. By 1950, teaching English had become a standard practice at all of the more than thirty binational centers in the American Republics.

From a US propaganda standpoint, binational centers were incredibly successful in Latin America. They found an overwhelming “natural” demand for their English-language “product” while reinvesting the profits from this product to introduce propaganda and government programs in part designed to encourage a greater desire to learn English. In the first six months of 1950, the binational centers in the American Republics had already enrolled 48,620 students, whose tuition fees alone constituted seventy-two percent of the centers’ local income. This steady flow of revenue allowed the US government to buy and circulate new American texts, sponsor new locations and branches, and conduct various public propaganda programs attended by as many as half a million people a year.39 In 1952, the program expanded to include its first binational centers in Asia in the capital cities of Rangoon and Bangkok. By 1960, the USIA had multiple binational centers in Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, Laos, and Indonesia, with Bangkok’s American University Alumni Association (A.U.A.) being the most successful,

38 “Memorandum on General Policies and Principles Involved in the Department’s Program of Assistance to Cultural Centers,” 1, Undated 1949, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
39 “American Centers Program,” 2-5, Division of Libraries and Institutes Report, 10 November 1950, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
instructing more than 8,000 students a year and obtaining ninety-nine percent of its funding through tuition.40

As these multiple binational centers became more important to agency objectives, namely servicing a larger portion of the target audience in host countries, USIS officers continuously refined the “binational” nature of these programs. In order to avoid giving any “impression that they are simply propaganda agencies for the United States,” USIS officials carefully orchestrated the centers’ public image, instructing teachers to avoid “mass distribution, pamphleteering,” or “indoctrination” of any kind.41 Rather, US officials wanted to promote publically “the working application of an attitude that Americans in a foreign country and the people of that country benefit as they work together toward the realization of mutual goals.”42 On the other hand, US officials wanted to hide from public view the fact that they provided the majority of funding for the creation of new centers, hand-picked boards of directors, and controlled many aspects of staffing and programming. In the average binational center, the local USIS post choose the Center Director, the Director of Courses, and the English teachers. While these employees might have been theoretically “subject to supervision” from a board of directors that included both private American citizens and foreign nationals, they were “also responsible to USIS in matters that concern the interests of the USIS program.” This meant that employees of the centers “should be politically conscious” and report to “USIS staff meetings whenever appropriate.”

40 “Fact Sheets for Binational Centers,” 1960, box 11, Cultural Operations Division, Far East Libraries and Centers Branch, P 55 Central Files 1949-1955, RG 306; NARA.
41 “Memorandum on General Policies and Principles Involved in the Department’s Program of Assistance to Cultural Centers,” 3.
However, in many cases, the agency advised these teachers and directors to feign independence from the US government:

There may be situations, however, where the local political situation dictates a public posture of maximum detachment. Under such circumstances the public affairs officer may advise grantees to limit their visits to USIS offices and to deport themselves in a manner which minimizes in the public eye, their identification with the official American community.43

Moreover, it was advised that USIS posts “ought to discreetly obtain security checks on all teachers and other personnel before hiring them” to work in the centers. Of course, all such “security measures taken,” reports stated, should “not be known by either members of the board or by the employees” themselves, because the centers were, after all, “autonomous and could logically object to security measures as interfering in local affairs.”44

The idea that a board of directors might “logically object” to any USIS project constituted in itself a sort of fiction. Most binational centers, billed as spontaneous creations of private citizens, were founded, very discreetly, in arrangements between the State Department/USIA and the local host governments using American funds. USIS officers sat on the board of directors and in some cases built the programs from the ground up. In one particularly telling 1957 memo, Lionel Landry, the Public Affairs Officer of Indonesia, boasted over his creation of the binational center in Burma in 1952. He claimed that no cultural program “can afford to function without a bi-national center,” and he was “anxious to start up a ‘bi-nat’” in Indonesia as he had in Rangoon

43 “General Considerations Concerning the Nature of Binational Centers Program,” 4, Acting Director Abbott Washburn, 15 December 1960, box 9, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA. Underlining in original document.
44 “General Considerations Concerning the Nature of Binational Centers Program,” 5-6.
as soon as local assets could be “developed into reliable organizations.” In other more politically oriented centers, such as the semi-militarized Vietnamese-American Association center in Hue, the agency left black the names of the boards of directors or simply marked the forms as signed by “unknown” in official documents. In Laos, USIS officers as well as agents of Air America and the White Star Project, both funded by the CIA, held positions in the board of directors and teaching staff.

Controlling both the people teaching English and the location of the teaching, spatially as well as socially, binational centers allowed for USIS posts to reach specific target audiences directly with the types of pro-American anti-Communist materials critical to the their cultural and psychological objectives. However, the audiences were limited by the scope of the program, the number of USIS employees teaching English, the size of the information and binational centers, and the demand of specific audiences. To saturate the totality of society with the English language and its accompanying cultural messages and transformations, the USIA simultaneously engaged in more widespread “indirect” efforts.

**English As Indirectly Taught**

The “indirect” method of English teaching adopted by USIS branches aimed, according to reports, to encourage massive numbers of the “vast and impressionable audience” in Asia to internalize English as a natural second language, thereby greatly increasing the long term use of English in foreign nations, creating expansive markets for American media products, and

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45 Foreign Service Memorandum, from Lionel Landry to Abbot Washburn, 2 March 1957, box 3, Office of Policy, P 22 Program Files 1953-1967, RG 306; NARA.
46 “Fact Sheets for Binational Centers,” 7.
orienting entire populations toward US policy. Working toward “the establishment of English as a strong second language in countries of political importance,” USIS agents, operating through “national teachers and educational officials” in foreign governments, trained local teachers in American methodology and culture, created textbook materials that carried appropriate American values, and offered “advice and assistance to national education officials” in various Ministries of Education to gain official sanction for the English language, thus propagating the American system of culture and education throughout the land.⁴⁸

Top policy makers at the highest levels of the USIA considered this indirect method more effective and efficient for long-term goals than direct teaching. In a 1955 Operations Committee meeting, Director Theodore Streibert voiced his concerns about “a lot of fuzzy thinking about English teaching,” particularly in regard to types of programs and their implementation. Streibert noted that some agents appeared too “intrigued with the idea of teaching materials” or hoped to “indoctrinate just by teaching,” when the program’s real “purpose should be the stimulation of English teaching – rather than the specific job” of instruction. He reinforced the idea that such stimulation should include “working with the education ministries, seminars [for national teachers of English], etc.” He also made clear that the ultimate goal of the program was not to continue teaching English through agency programs indefensibly. “The advocates of English-teaching tend to think in terms of a job that’s never finished,” Streibert said, but they “ought always to think in terms of when it will end” -- meaning when everyone in the world spoke English.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ “English Teaching Specialists Memoranda,” from Frank L. Dennis to Mr. Stephens and Berding, 10 November, 1955, box 1, Office of Policy, P 22 Program Files 1953-1967, RG 306; NARA. Underlining in original document.
Perhaps the most effective route to this indirect proliferation of English came through teaching Asian nationals to be teachers of English as a foreign language through the American method and using American materials. Aside from instructing local teachers of English during the regular courses offered in information and binational centers (local teachers of English regularly made up a large portion of the “target audience” in such centers), USIS posts and “travelling field consultants” promoted, sponsored, and ran large-scale seminars specifically geared at indoctrinating these critical wholesalers of America’s linguistic products. At these seminars, teachers not only improved their ability to teach English but also had the opportunity to learn about “an American kitchen, a coke party, road-side parks, drive-in theaters, seasons, hospitals, isolating disease, DDT, people who have helped make the US great – foreigners – fun in the family, barbecues, steakfrys, community spirit, the newspaper, advertisements” and other aspects of American life.\(^5^0\) These seminars provided, according to English Teaching Branch, “the point of contact between the direct and indirect teaching programs” in that USIS employees “directly” taught “classes to improve the teachers’ own English” while shaping the teachers’ thoughts and opinions through “lectures on linguistics, methodology, American literature, history or fine arts, and social activities calculated to increase group solidarity and provide a sense of identification with United States culture.”\(^5^1\)

Originating from earlier US government programs in the American Republics, Southeast Asia, and the Occupation of Japan, these seminars hosted by USIS officials intended both to “establish direct contact with teachers as a high priority group” and to ensure that “the presentation of US life, culture, and politics continuously given in classrooms by teachers of

\(^{50}\) “Notes from the Seminar Discussions: First Hour Seminar Materials,” 2, 1 December 1951, box 8, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files 1946-1966; NARA.

\(^{51}\) “The English Teaching Program,” 3.
English” would be of program value to the United States.\textsuperscript{52} Coordinating with information centers, binational centers, and local Ministries of Education, USIS personnel found an ever-increasing audience for these special seminars. The first seven seminars conducted in 1945 attracted only 245 teachers, but by 1960 USIS posts conducted more than eighty seminars for more than 6500 national teachers of English in more than thirty countries.\textsuperscript{53} In concert with the growing audience, the effectiveness of the program was observed by US agents around the globe. One of the earliest pieces of evidence came from the Dominican Republic, where in 1950 a teacher-training seminar held in the capital gathered eighty-seven teachers of English as a foreign language, “representing practically every major city and town in the country,” for a two-week course in “teaching methods, linguistics, and American civilization.” After the seminar, Joaquín Balaguer, the Secretary of State for Education and Fine Arts, and soon to be long-term president of the nation, wrote a letter to US Ambassador Ralph H. Ackerman calling attention to “the efficient and meritorious work carried out by Miss Faye Bumpass (US grantee) during the Seminar.” Specifically, Balaguer informed the ambassador that based on Bumpass’s recommendations “concerning methodology,” the Dominican Republic would be increasing “the number of hours which are devoted to the teaching of this subject both in the normal and secondary schools as well as in the last two years of primary school.” The embassy relayed the news to the State Department, claiming that “this seminar was the decisive factor in overcoming certain opposition which openly and covertly was endeavoring to reduce the number of hours of English instruction in the public schools to a point where it would, to all intents and purposes,

\textsuperscript{52} Untitled English Teaching Branch Report, 3.
cease to be of any value” to the United States.54 As USIS officers in Asia conducted their own seminars in local branch locations, similar reports of success rolled in from Burma to Japan.

Having “improved their knowledge of modern instruction[al] techniques,” these teachers returned from the seminars to their schools and universities accompanied by a host of “textbooks and visuals aids,” including books, magazines, training films, pamphlets, and radio receivers, designed by the US government to “open new avenues of understanding” and promote American culture.55 Textbooks, “one of the most important influences molding the youth of a country” according to USIS reports, were chief among these. Field operatives agreed that “a great many democratic ideas” could “be subtly conveyed even in English lessons.”56 The program to create and disseminate these textbooks began with localized and uncoordinated efforts of the US military and State Department almost immediately after World War II. However, in early 1949, the State Department launched a dedicated program specifically for the creation of high-quality textbooks for distribution in Southeast Asia to, in its own words, “intensify” its “present activities,” along with psychological operations designed to increase English proficiency, open new markets for American products, support American military and political policies, and “promote the development of a friendly attitude toward the United States.” This program sent eighteen American “curriculum specialists” to each country of Southeast Asia, except the Philippines, to conduct linguistic analysis, study current textbooks, and make contacts with national teachers and ministries of education to “bring about a real awareness of the interests of

54 “Evidence of Effectiveness: Special Seminar for National Teachers of English Held by Center in Ciudad Trujillo, Dominican Republic,” 10 November 1950, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
56 “English Teaching as an Aid to Other USIS Activities,” Undated 1954, box 1, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
the United States” in Southeast Asia. In total, the program created and distributed more than 114,000 English-teaching textbooks to eight countries at a total cost of $715,765, the equivalent of more than $7.1 million dollars today.57

Creating English-teaching textbooks of “program value” quickly became a major aspect of US cultural programing in Asia. When Mao Zedong pronounced the establishment of the People’s Republic of China on 1 October 1949, plans were immediately set in place to create a series of textbooks for the Overseas Chinese populations of East and Southeast Asia. Deemed “one of the most highly effective means for spreading pro-United States and ‘ipso facto’ anti-Communist propaganda,” this element of the English teaching program simultaneously helped the Southeast Asian posts to reach “extremely large number[s] of Chinese,” among them “many carriers of Communist doctrines,” and to prepare propaganda materials that could make their way back to Mainland China, all for just under $160,000 of State Department funds.58 Similar programs began in Korea, where textbooks with “considerable information content” circulated throughout the peninsula in the months before the outbreak of the Korean War.59 In Japan, where a USIS officer reported amazing “receptivity in every segment of Japanese life in the learning of English,” textbooks offered “a promising field” in the promotion of “the infiltration of sound American ideas.”60 In 1954, the USIS printed and distributed 10,000 textbooks each for Laos,

59 “Escalation of Korean Funds: English Teaching Project,” 13 February 1950, box 1, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
Cambodia, and Vietnam, “to be used in classes that are invariably overcrowded” in these newly autonomous countries.  

Acting on the principle that one of the best ways of “presenting information on American culture” was through the “American content” in “text books and class discussions,” the USIA continued to produce and distribute hundreds of thousands of English learning texts to dozens of countries throughout the 1950s. USIA produced its own special line of books, *Let’s Learn English*, and gave special grants to the ACLS, the University of Michigan, Cornell, and other universities and presses to produce various texts that carried pro-American messages designed specifically for learners of English as a foreign language. Continuing to expand the program, the USIA eventually attempted to create one universal textbook for teaching English that could be used in every secondary school in the world. In 1959, working behind the scenes with the National Council of Teachers of English and book publisher McGraw-Hill, the USIA began producing a six-book series designed for students between the ages of twelve and fourteen and covering the first two years of language learning. By 1961, the book series *English for Today* had undergone field testing, probably in teacher training seminars, and appeared ready to be deployed. USIS officers in the field, however, found serious problems with the real-world application of the textbook. In Thailand, it could not be used because the United States Operating Mission (USOM) had already contracted with the University of Michigan to help the Thai Ministry of Education produce a book specific to Thai-English exchanges. In Japan, USIS

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64 “Textbooks for Teaching English in Secondary Schools Abroad,” from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington, 17 June 1961, box 24, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
officers reported that despite official Ministry of Education control over materials, “local authorities (prefectural governments, boards of education, school administrators, and even teachers, themselves) enjoy considerable leeway in the selection” of “supplementary materials” and thus, it would be nearly impossible to persuade the majority to use one specific text.65 However, the largest challenge to the textbook series came arguably from the USIA’s biggest success story, the Philippines.

The English teaching program in the Philippines had reached a level of success unmatched in any other area of USIS activity. “The school systems were,” according to Public Affairs Officer Richard Barnaley, “almost a creature of American Government,” and were “regarded by most Filipinos as the greatest contribution of the United States to the Philippines.” Moreover, by the early 1950s, English had been (re)adopted as the language of education past second grade. Most major newspapers chose to print in English, the Philippines Congress adopted English as its official language, and many people “especially the Visayans (middle islands)” preferred “English to Tagalog for nationwide use.” Yet, when the USIS Manila tried to introduce the universal textbook *English for Today*, it met with tremendous resistance. The most vocal opponents of the textbook came from the State Department and the “Rockefeller-supported” Philippine Center for Language Study (PCLS), which operated “under UCLA auspices” and regularly cooperated with USIS English programs in the field.66

In a lengthy internal memo, J. Donald Bowne, Director of PCLS, and Lois McIntosh, a graduate of Columbia’s Teacher College and linguistics expert, systematically refuted not only

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the idea that the textbook should be used for the Philippines, but also that the very idea of producing a “universal” textbook for the Teaching of English was possible or desirable. Their first concern stemmed from the fact that the US government seemed to believe that English needed to be taught as a “foreign language” in the Philippines. In a “country where English is the important medium of instruction in the schools, is the language of commerce, of government, of the courts, and is spoken by a large percentage of the population,” it appeared “doubtful,” they argued, “that many Filipino teachers feel that they are dealing with a foreign language when they teach English.” They clarified that many Filipino speakers of English sound strange to Americans not because they cannot speak English properly or because it is a second language, but because they are speaking their own version of the language. The authors explained that in “countries in Asia” with “a recent history of colonialism,” speakers do not want to sound “as an American or Englishman might.” Instead, to reflect positively on their “patriotism,” they include local words and sounds “only understandable to a fellow countryman” with shared memories and experiences.67

The bigger problem for the linguists, however, revolved around the idea that that one textbook could be mass produced and distributed across East and Southeast Asia without specific reference to the languages and cultures already present in the areas of instruction. Along with social, linguistic, cultural, and political differences, there was also a tremendous variation in school systems and appropriate ages for students to begin the learning process. They likewise feared that such a broad language textbook would necessarily focus too much on “American ideas and institutions,” with a “serious risk of offending local sensibilities in areas striving

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toward nationalistic maturity.” Louis McIntosh was particularly insistent on this point, arguing that “nationalism is a very potent force in Asia today,” and maintaining that if textbooks were not carefully tailored to each society, the United States would face criticism for trying “to make ‘little Americans’ out of the learners.” She reminded USIS officials that if they acted too heavy-handedly in their use of “the English language to superimpose ideas about the United States’ mores, culture, and living standards” the agency might find its teaching programs “in serious trouble.” In short, she maintained, USIS Manila should not jeopardize its tremendous gains.68

Class is Never Out

Acknowledging both the high level of its success in the Philippines, and the new limitations made obvious by those successes, the USIA moved forward with its English teaching programs by taking “other less direct avenues,” such as special radio programs, English-language television, Hollywood films without subtitles, and expanded teacher training schools.69 The agency published an academic magazine, English Teaching Forum, in cooperation with the Institute for Modern Languages, for circulation among instructors in higher education that contained subtle but perceptible levels of pro-American content. It also introduced the Ladder Book Series that presented canonical American literature in simplified English appropriate for mid-level students of English. In what became a new template for teaching English to more “developed” areas, lower levels of propaganda were mixed with higher levels of public-private cooperation, university support, and local interpretations of educational achievement.

68 “Preparation of Series of Textbooks for Teaching English in Secondary Schools Abroad,” p. 6-7.
69 “Purpose of Agency Support of English Teaching Activities,” from Director George V. Allen to Arthur Vogel ICS, 18 December 1959, box 24, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
The success of the program hardened demand and helped shape new people and societies in Asia that saw English, not unproblematically, as the world language of political, intellectual, and economic prosperity. Given the right materials created and supplied by the USIA’s rapidly escalating print media program, the subject of the following chapter, the USIA’s targets would, agents hoped, indoctrinate themselves.
Chapter 3

Medicine for the Soul: Print Propaganda to Cure the Creeping Epidemic of Communism in Asia

Communism, in reality, is not a political party. It is a way of life—an evil and malignant way of life. It reveals a condition akin to disease that spreads like an epidemic; and like an epidemic, a quarantine is necessary to keep it from infecting the nation.

J. Edgar Hoover, 26 March 1947

In 1951, just over one billion people in eighty-five countries read propaganda materials published both overtly and covertly by the United States government. Roughly speaking, this meant that every literate human on the planet faced exposure to US propaganda and printed materials that year. The US government achieved this gargantuan feat by printing and distributing over 110 million pamphlets, leaflets, magazines, and posters; this saturation also included placing 8.6 million column inches of press and photographic material, the equivalent of 53,750 full newspaper pages, into more than 10,000 foreign periodicals. Moreover, the US government published, translated, and distributed tens of millions of American books supporting US interests and ideology while opening hundreds of libraries, reading rooms, and Information Centers to make available and observe the consumption of all of these new printed products in what was only the beginning of the growing cultural Cold War.

The United States Information Agency, building on the successful propaganda programs and commercial success of US print materials during World War II, spearheaded these propaganda efforts and transformed printed media into one of the primary weapons in America’s cultural Cold War and into the longest-lasting form of cultural exchange between the United

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2 “International Press Service Fact Sheet,” 9, 1952, box 8, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
States and the rest of the world in the second half of the twentieth century. Motivated by a growing consensus among US policymakers that communism was a “malignant way of life” that “spread like an epidemic,” USIS officers prescribed printed materials as both a preventive and a cure for this “creeping disease.” Capitalizing on skyrocketing literacy rates in newly decolonizing nations, the end of wartime censorship and rationing, technological innovations in mass printing, and growing local business interests, the USIS worked to renovate print culture, and the ideas it expressed, to expunge the disease of communism from foreign societies. These efforts became particularly focused and prolific in Asia, where US officials argued that the fundamental differences between US and Asian cultures provided the greatest opening for a communist infection to spread into new markets, governments, and local populations.

To disseminate preventive and curative ideas and ideologies in print form, local USIS officers utilized both fast-acting and long-lasting forms of print media. Fast-acting print media, such as newsprint, magazines, propaganda posters, and pamphlets, acted as a prophylactic against communist ideas. Rapidly created, widely circulated, and easily disposed of in reaction to shifting policies, these materials produced shock, shaped news, explained current US actions, and influenced people’s immediate responses to local or international events and actors, trying to prevent local readers from coming into prolonged contact with communist ideas on their own terms. USIS officers utilized more long-lasting print media such as books in English or local language translations in an attempt to immunize more permanently their target audiences from

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3 “Speech Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities,” J. Edgar Hoover, 26 March 1947 and “Kennan to Secretary of State” (The Long Telegram), 22 February 1946, FRUS 1946: 696-709. The metaphor of Communism as a disease originated early in the Cold War and profoundly shaped America’s Cold War culture along the same lines as metaphors of containment, bridges, and gaps. Although this quote from Hoover spoke to the domestic situation within the United States, many US government agents equally projected this sentiment outwardly toward all other nations.
the plague of communism. These materials, developed as thought-provoking catalysts, required more processing time and production planning as the agency attempted to influence, alter, and redirect the beliefs, discourses, and life-long daily practices of their target audiences by greatly expanding the market for US print products and ideas abroad.

To infuse print culture in Asia with the ideas, systems, and infrastructures supportive of US goals, USIS officers not only worked to control the types of materials available to elites and general readers, but also sought to control where and how people consumed these materials. The agency created new spaces for reading and print culture by opening libraries and information centers in all major cities. It simultaneously expanded the spatial location of print culture and the spread of specific propaganda messages by placing posters, newsletters, and pamphlets in temples, remote villages, and the workplace. Moreover, the agency operated various systems of surveillance, producing hundreds of reports, surveys, and questionnaires to observe consumption habits and determine which reading materials served as the most effective means of delivering propaganda to various target audiences.

Of course, little of this could have been accomplished without the cooperation and collaboration of local governments, business communities, and religious leaders. These groups frequently supported and encouraged US efforts to build new cultures of print media within their organizations, communities, and nations as a means of pursuing their own interests. Along with benefiting from the scientific and technical informational content contained in US printed propaganda, leaders across Asia hoped to direct all cultural development programs within their nations to embolden more economically powerful and secure nation-states. USIS officers encouraged this behavior, but only to the extent that local cultural development coincided with stated agency goals, namely the quarantine and eradication of global communism.
**Fast-Acting Relief**

By 1950, US policy makers clearly had spelled out the problem: the United States stood to lose the propaganda battle abroad as the disease of communism continued to spread. In response, President Harry S. Truman and his National Security Council staff promoted the “Campaign of Truth,” an “emergency measure called into being by the mounting urgency of the threat of anti-US Soviet propaganda” being disseminated across a variety of media formats. The basic purpose of the campaign aimed “to create rapidly a psychological strength and resistance to Communism and Soviet imperialism” particularly “in other countries” with the greatest “danger of Communist domination.”

During a 20 April 1950 address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, President Truman explained this new and more aggressive form of overseas propaganda to the American people:

> The cause of freedom is being challenged throughout the world today by the forces of imperialistic communism. This is a struggle, above all else, for the minds of men. Propaganda is one of the most powerful weapons the Communists have in this struggle. Deceit, distortion, and lies are systematically used by them as a matter of deliberate policy.

President Truman provided an obvious remedy to the situation, claiming that the United States must “meet false propaganda with truth all around the globe,” particularly in the “Far East” where “millions are restlessly seeking to break away from the conditions of poverty and misery that have surrounded them in the past.” Unless US propaganda programs, namely printed materials, increased their reach and power, Truman warned, “we will lose the battle for men’s minds by pure default.”

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4 “The Campaign of Truth and Its Application by ICD,” 1, ICD Program Planning and Evaluation Staff, 13 September 1951, Box 2, Information Center Service, English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files 1946-1966, RG 306; NARA.

Although perhaps originally designed to tell “the truth” about the United States, democracy, and the Free World, the Campaign of Truth, quickly dubbed the “psychological offensive,” initiated a series of fast-acting counter punches to fight off anti-Americanism, anti-imperialist nationalism, and “Soviet imperialism” infecting the newly forming geo-bodies of Asia. Based on the Campaign of Truth format, USIS offices and libraries in the field underwent “a major shift in emphasis from a general dissemination of information (the ‘full and fair picture’ approach) to a calculated concentration of effort on specific targets” through the use of emergent mass media and literacy. The main publications branch in Washington, D.C. produced “pilot models” of these targeted materials, which were then shipped to the field to be “edited, translated, and adapted for local use” before production and printing, primarily by thousands of local employees, at Regional Service Centers or in USIS offices, depending on the needs of individual programs. In the first six months of the campaign alone, “75 million copies of leaflets, pamphlets, magazines, and posters were distributed in 40 languages” to approximately ninety local branches.

The first dose of printed products largely consisted of pamphlets, leaflets, posters, comics, and other cheaply produced print matter reminiscent of wartime propaganda. These materials, according to an internal production report, needed “contents ranging from factual accounts of American history to hard-hitting exposés of Communist duplicity.” For example,

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6 For an examination of the concept and development of “geo-bodies” in one particular Asian nation (Thailand), see Thongchai Winichagul, Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).
8 “International Press Service Fact Sheet,” 7.
an early poster for general use in all areas portrayed the Liberty Bell in the background as a
group of young men and women discussed freedom, suggesting the positive-message nature of
the program. However, USIS Bangkok at the same time produced *Rice Harvest*, a poster
depicting Chinese Communist soldiers stabbing and lashing Thai rice farmers forced to ship their
grain harvests to Soviet and Chinese cities situated under a setting sun resembling both the
symbolic hammer and sickle of the USSR and a burnt red skull (see Figure 1).  

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11 “Rice Harvest,” Wall Poster Produced by USIS Bangkok, Printed RSC Manila, 5 June 1951.
Figure 1: USIS Poster, *Rice Harvest*, depicting Thai farmers forced by a “Communist” blade to ship their rice to China and the Soviet Union. The caption reads: “Who would come to dominate you… What would probably be the driving force?” “Rice Harvest,” Wall Poster Produced by USIS Bangkok, Printed RSC Manila, 5 June 1951.
As the United States increasingly involved itself in the Koreas’ civil war, USIS printed and distributed tens of thousands of such negatively themed pamphlets and posters, of which *Rice Harvest* was just one representative example, throughout East and Southeast Asia to undermine the perceived advances of communism in the region. One month, USIS Bangkok distributed 117,000 copies of the photo book *Communism Aims at World Domination*, while in Japan USIS officials circulated 20,000 copies of *Russian Self-Taught*, a cartoon mock dictionary of Soviet slogans.\(^{12}\) In an average week in French-occupied Indochina, USIS officials hand-delivered 1400 copies of *Free World #3* to “major pagodas” while also placing 147 photographs with pro-American captions across three “information halls” in Vientiane, Laos.\(^{13}\)

Along with pamphlets and posters, USIS agents printed and widely distributed comic strips and comic books at the global and local level to spread their message to both children and adults. Comic strip projects helped to bridge the gap between literate and illiterate members of society while carrying USIS content messages in ways that appealed to almost everyone at some level. Perhaps the most successful of such projects was the Washington, D.C. designed and produced (but unattributed) *Little Moe*, “a widely circulated anti-communist comic strip in which the diminutive hero regularly got the better of the communist commissar.”\(^{14}\) The strip relied on wit and irreverent humor to undermine the seriousness of communism’s messages and social critiques. The award-winning strip ran weekly from 1953 to 1961, to the delight of audiences

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14 Oiseth, 10.
around the globe. Such light and fun comic strips were included in more than 5,000 “indigenous newspapers and magazines,” reaching an estimated 300 million subscribers who, USIS agents hoped, learned to laugh at the ideals and tenets of communism before ever really understanding what, if anything, alternative economic and social ideas had to offer them or their communities.\textsuperscript{15}

Comic books, however, often depicted much more serious indictments of particular communist actions within local communities and societies as shown through captivating vignettes. Following the “comic book technique, with narrative, continuity, suspense, and characterization,” according to a confidential State Department memo, reached “an extremely wide and diverse audience” while removing “the stigma of propaganda” from otherwise scathing depictions of communism. Printed in color (a rarity at the time in many areas), and sold as cheaply as possible through regular commercial channels with false “local attribution,” these comic materials scared and entertained millions of readers with the horrors of communism and the greatness of the United States.\textsuperscript{16} One example, \textit{They Saved Our Village}, narrated through the voice of a Thai, Filipino, Malay, Korean, Vietnamese, or Chinese village elder depending on the translation and location of sale, told the story of a small rural community struck by the “dreaded pox” for which no cure was known. Despite objections from the village’s only communist instigator, a lazy, out of work sailor who had once travelled to the USSR and frequently muttered of “American Imperialism,” the village elder sought help by sending a message to an “American Public Health station” many miles away. When the village messenger arrived, American doctors and nurses, along with one American-educated indigenous worker “sprang into action,” loading their modern jeeps full of strange and wondrous medical supplies. With motors roaring, this

\textsuperscript{15} Oiseth, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{16} State Department Coversheet for \textit{It Happened To Us} Comic Book, 13 July 1951, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
“caravan of mercy” arrived, purging disease from the community and even curing the village communist of his true and more fundamental illness (see Figure 2).\textsuperscript{17}

Figure 2: This page taken from the English proof of the USIS- produced comic book \textit{They Saved Our Village}, tied communism and disease while also depicting the benevolent use of the United States’ superior technology and medicine. \textit{They Saved Our Village}, INP Publications Branch, first field use 26 April 1951, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{They Saved Our Village}, INP Publications Branch, first field use 26 April 1951, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
While comics, pamphlets, and posters demonstrated the immediate dangers of Soviet imperialism and allowed for the representation of large-scale themes of anti-communism and pro-Americanism, USIS agents still needed a fast-acting medium for rapidly explaining current events and US foreign policies to the increasingly literate mass societies of East and Southeast Asia. For this goal, USIS officers turned toward newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals. In the immediate postwar years, newspaper publishing and journalism flourished across Asia. Building on the widespread and vibrant print cultures developed in major population centers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thousands of editors, printers, journalist, and publishers returned to work reestablishing newspapers, broadsheets, and magazines that had been temporarily shuttered due to the war. Despite the advances in radio, television, and newsreel film since the 1920s and 1930s, almost all trusted information about current events and acts of government still came via newspapers and journals viewed as more reliable, affordable, and verifiable by the middle class.

To capitalize on these growing industries and readerships, USIS agents provided local publishers and printers with daily packets of free articles, photographs, essays, and serialized books intended to influence the shape and reportage of locally printed materials without direct attribution to the United States. These programs began in the late 1940s and early 1950s as a stopgap measure for local news media in US-occupied Germany and Japan, where news reporting could only operate under direct military supervision. In some cases, Washington, D.C. provided the majority of materials that could legally be printed under occupation. Direct military management steadily decreased in the early 1950s, yet the demand for high quality news and informational materials remained. The International Press Service (IPS), originally a section of the State Department but transferred to USIA control in 1953, acted as the agency responsible for
providing the bulk of these materials to the growing media sector in the 1950s and 1960s. Much like the Associated Press (AP) and the United Press International (UP/UPI), IPS ran its own editorial desk that created a news bulletin and political summary five days a week to be electronically delivered to embassies and USIS branch offices. ¹⁸

This information bulletin service, known as the “Wireless File,” quickly grew to be the largest and most widely distributed news provider in the world, eclipsing both the AP and UP news services within a few years of its creation. However, according to Wilson P. Dizard Jr., a former USIS officer, an expert on international communication, and a semi-official biographer for the agency, its subjects differed considerable from other private news agencies. “The basic daily File,” according to Dizard, “averaged eight –to-ten thousand words, heavily weighted toward U.S. government official text,” as well as agency-manufactured “news stories of direct regional or local interest to USIS posts,” that appropriated the texts at their discretion.¹⁹ IPS likewise delivered tens of thousands of news pictures per month to USIS offices to accompany their news stories. This provided embassy staff and USIS officers with official copies of major speeches and policy decisions as well as articles, essays, editorials, commentaries, pictorials, and op-ed pieces to feed local news outlets that frequently could not afford to purchase private news services or hire international reporters. By 1952, news from the Wireless File was regularly placed into more than ten thousand foreign news outlets and extended access to approximately 100 million people as they reached for their morning papers.²⁰

This incredible amount of placement dominated news media in smaller nations and in those countries attempting to get an independent press off the ground. For example, in a typical

¹⁸ Oiseth, 7‐9.
¹⁹ Dizard, 158-160.
²⁰ “International Press Service Fact Sheet,” 2.
week in Saigon in 1952, on the single subject of US economic aid to Indochina, USIS officials placed two complete articles and nineteen photos across three Chinese newspapers, three French newspapers, and four Vietnamese newspapers largely without attribution to the United States. According to Howard Simpson, the USIS Saigon station press officer at the time, these results were even more impressive than they might seem as newspapers in the region usually arranged the photographs “with heavy captions taken from [USIS] press releases.” Overall, this was “highly indicative” to Simpson “of the widening influence of USIS on the local press” across the region.\(^{21}\) In Japan, the USIS placed materials not only in approximately 500 national and local newspapers, but it also secretly contributed to the student press of major universities and high schools throughout the country.\(^{22}\) In Laos, USIS officers lamenting the “primitive” state of literacy and language in the country, coordinated with the larger United States Operations Mission (USOM, the overseeing body of US AID and military cooperation) to create their own unattributed newspaper for the placing of USIS and friendly local content.\(^{23}\)

Over the course of the 1950s, the program became so successful that the Wireless File could hardly keep up with local demand and placement. By June 1954, the USIA central branch in Washington, D.C. increased its production rate to six days a week as publishers and Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) reported “increased placement of press materials” in all overseas newspapers and publications.\(^{24}\) James Crane, a USIS cultural officer operating in the “Far East,” reported that even in Japan—arguably the nation with the largest independent press in the region

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\(^{22}\) USIA 2\(^{nd}\) Report to Congress January 1 – June 30, 1954, p. 22.

\(^{23}\) “Laos Book Translation Program,” undated 1956, box 8, Information Center Service, Publications Division, Translation Branch, P 61 East Asia and Pacific Country Files 1948-1960, RG 306; NARA.

with circulation numbers that are still the envy of US media corporations – the USIS had little
difficulty convincing “mass-circulating newspapers” to “carry a respectable portion” of agency
content. Crane claimed this held true throughout East and Southeast Asia precisely because the
Wireless File provided light and positive articles alongside heavily anti-communist themed work.
“The ‘soft’ Americana and cultural-mutuality articles,” such as “Asians in the U.S., publicity on
the exchange programs, American appreciation of various facets of Asian culture, etc.,” Crane
argued, constituted a necessary portion of the propaganda program “in order to disarm editors to
accept more thematic policy-interpretive articles when the chips were down.”25 Using this
method, thousands of articles and essays with heavy policy content, such as “Soviet Newspaper
Warns Against Religious Intoxication” and “Communists Fail to Capture Youth,” were
published daily across the region shaping, the agency hoped, local opinions on subjects from the
peaceful use of atomic energy to the US exit from the Vietnam War.26

Along with newsprint, USIS branches in East and Southeast Asia promoted and produced
millions of magazines for both popular and academic consumption to carry content designed
quickly to reshape thought and culture in Asia. This began almost immediately after World War
II, according to USIS intelligence reports, when the agency and its predecessors brokered secret
deals with “American magazine publishers to receive their newsstand returns” and to redistribute
them through volunteer organizations overseas, local businesses, and their own library programs.
Thus, magazines written in English and intended primarily for US audiences, such as Time,
Newsweek, The Saturday Evening Post, and many others made their way at reduced or no cost
into foreign circulation, promoting US culture, language, products, values, and understandings of

25 “Evidence of Effectiveness in Cultural Affairs in the Far East,” James Crane, 27 August 1958, box 2, Office of
Policy, P 22 Program Files 1953-1967, RG 306; NARA.
26 Sample headlines selected for a USIS created text demonstrating its success in the field. See Oiseth, 52.
the postwar world. Despite the glossy finish and prestige that came from these genuine cultural
products from the United States, these magazines had a major drawback – they could only be
fully accessed by educated elites and members of the growing middle class who read English.27

The US government set out to solve this problem by using authentic locally produced
magazines to disseminate its message. For propaganda purposes, magazines and journals already
produced locally had a tremendous advantage as their built-in readership trusted the source and
often felt personally attached to the materials. In some cases, USIS offices simply provided
secret funding to magazines “seen as a credible source of anti-communist information,” such as
the Thai publication Sapdha Sarn (News Weekly).28 However, the agency generally found it more
expedient or beneficial to insert material directly into these local products to reach specific
audiences in reaction to local conditions.29 For example, USIS Manila produced a condensed
Cebuano translation of Carlos P. Romulo’s Crusade in Asia – a book which detailed the 1953
presidential election of Ramon Magsaysay and the Filipino victory over Communism – and
arranged for its serialization in Alimyon (Fragrance), a magazine produced in Manila but
primarily circulated in Cebu, Bohol, and Mindanao where USIS agents worried that locals had
misunderstood the role of the United States [particularly the CIA] in Philippine politics.30

27 “Field Circular No. 4: Subject: American Business and the USIA Program Overseas,” Director Theodore C.
Streibert, 1 April 1954, UD WW 294 Office of Research and Intelligence Special Files 1953-1957, RG 306; NARA.
28 “USIS Country Plan for Thailand,” 12 May 1958, box 9, Information Center Service, Publications Division,
Translation Branch, P 61 East Asia and Pacific Country Files 1948-1960, RG 306; NARA.
29 Due to the fact that USIS branches had a relatively free hand in how they placed both attributed and
unattributed materials in local periodicals, it is incredibly difficult to determine the quantity and frequency with
which agency products were placed in magazines across Asia. The branch officers did not always record these
efforts and given their continual emphasis on including more unattributed or locally attributed materials into their
various programs, it is a safe guess that the majority of materials have no direct attribution to the USIS or the
United States.
30 “ICS: Small Book Translation Program,” USIS Manila, 20 September 1955, box 9, Information Center Service,
Publications Division, Translation Branch, P 61 East Asia and Pacific Country Files 1948-1960, RG 306; NARA. As it
turns out, the CIA massively intervened in the 1953 elections even as both political parties vying for control of the
Philippines fought to gain favor with the United States before voting began. See Nick Cullather, Illusions of
Building on their success of publishing in local weeklies, USIS offices and the Manila Regional Service Center (RSC) began publishing their own magazines (both attributed and unattributed) designed to look like authentic local products. The most prolific of these works in East and Southeast Asia, *Free World*, adopted an innovative new model called the “core concept.” Published in more than ten languages and distributed in every country in the region, the magazine consisted of approximately fifty to seventy-five percent “hard core” articles, op-eds, and pictorials designed for “Far East” regional use. The remaining “soft core” of the magazine could be modified by individual USIS stations to meet various local and linguistic demands.  

For example, in any given issue there might be an article on the US victories in the Space Race, the evolving role of SEATO in geopolitics, or the cultivation of a new strain of rice designed to increase export potential, but in the Thai edition readers might find an article on King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s birthday with a full color picture designed to be cut out and kept at home while in the Taiwanese version readers might find a feel good piece on high-mountain tea cultivation. This mix of regional and local reportage made the magazine particularly popular among primary school educators across the region who frequently reported using the magazines as examples of current events in their classrooms.  

By the mid-1960s, it had a monthly circulation exceeding 457,000 copies and served as the flagship magazine for the Manila RSC that published eighteen different periodicals in fourteen languages.

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31 For an explanation of this format in general see Oiseth, 65.


USIS officers depended on all of these products from, posters and pamphlets to newspapers and magazines to deliver fast-acting relief for individuals, communities, and nations confronting the new realities of a postwar world infected by the plague of Communism. These materials allowed agents on the ground to address changing US policies quickly and to shape news stories of particular regional and local importance before they were placed into a context promoting communism, anti-Americanism, or a sympathetic attitude toward the Soviet Union or China. However, these materials were not necessarily helpful for promoting any new long-term cultural values required to build up societies’ immunity to the Red Menace. For that, USIS turned toward more long-lasting treatments and more permanent forms of the written word.

**Books: The Long-Lasting Treatment**

Unlike the fast-acting print programs that reacted to current and local events to prevent people from unchallenged exposure to Soviet thought and sympathies, USIA’s more long-lasting print media programs sought to stimulate ideas and cultural patterns primarily among the upper and middle classes of East and Southeast Asian societies, leading them to democratic thinking, a love of America, and an immunity against the evils of Communism. In this pursuit, the agency envisioned books as its most powerful tool. Just as the value of US ideas printed in permanent format led President Roosevelt famously to exclaim during World War II that “in this war, we know, books are weapons,” so too, did USIA officials fighting the cultural Cold War shape books into a powerful delivery vehicle for propaganda distribution and the molding of Asians’ minds.34

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In 1953, faced with the realization that global communism had far outpaced the United States in creating a “permanent literature” to shape the postwar world, the PSB launched the “Doctrinal Program,” a new series of propaganda measures designed to transform foreign cultures and inoculate “the Free World” against communist thought. Centering on philosophical, religious, economic, and documentary-based texts, the Doctrinal Program enacted a “planned and systematic attack” to transform the “inter-related body of ideas, whether consciously organized or not,” which reflected “the manner or content of thinking characteristic of individuals or classes,” within “a particular type of social belief and structure,” or which provided “a body of principles for human aspiration” within every foreign nation.35 In the following months, the United States Information Agency gained “the most direct responsibility to implement the Doctrinal Program” through the overt and covert creation and distribution of books aimed at specific target audiences.36 Moreover, in response to Cold War realities on the ground, Asia became a primary focal point of the program as USIS officers fought to “strengthen Asian understanding and support for the principles of democracy,” to increase “Asian awareness of the positive dangers of Communism,” and to “demonstrate to Asians that their problems” would “best be handled within the framework of the Free World community of nations.”37

Building on the concept that works of permanent literature constituted “the most lasting and pervasive carriers of ideas and the ideals of freemen,” Richard Humphrey, Chairman of the Doctrinal Program Working Group and head of USIA’s ICS, envisioned books as a powerful conduit of propaganda. Humphrey argued that books served as “a primary connecting channel in

35 “PSB D-33: Definition (Annex ‘A’),” 29 June 1953, FOIA.
Under Humphrey’s guidance, the agency massively increased its cultural and ideological warfare program both by translating thousands of existing American texts into local Asian languages to ensure a broad delivery of materials and by writing and producing hundreds of new titles that carried unique USIS messages designed to reach specific target audiences. USIS branches then disseminated these new books through innovative forms of distribution and advertising created to ensure the widespread use and acceptance of US books abroad.

The first major problem addressed by USIS officers in the field was simply producing enough new books carrying the correct dose of program content formatted and accessible to Asian readers in their own languages. This led to the creation of mass-scale translation programs designed to reach millions of literate but not yet English speaking readers in Asia with mainstream materials from the United States. While the US government and private US printing industries had greatly expanded their translation efforts during and immediately after World War II, they largely neglected Asian languages beyond what was required for the production of small pamphlets, posters, and the like. A 1950 internal review of USIS library operations found that while the Soviet Union spent approximately five million dollars publishing books in Chinese alone, the entire USIS translation budget came in at just over $164,000. The Translation Department translated only six books that year, with fifteen scheduled for 1951.

However, with President Truman’s Campaign of Truth, the US government extended “a large-scale translation program into the Eastern Hemisphere,” placing a much “greater emphasis

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38 “Criteria for Overseas Book Program,” 11, 28 June 1953, box 1, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
39 “1952 Budget Background Materials,” Division of Libraries and Institutes, 15 December 1950, box 2, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
on utilization of local publishing outlets and on books exposing Soviet imperialism and
Communist police-state methods.”\textsuperscript{40} One of the first major successes came in Southern India,
where in late 1951 USIS Madras produced 200,000 copies (selling 162,017) of ten books in four
vernacular Indian languages. The first of the books, the Telugu-language translation of \textit{Russian
Purge and Extraction of Confession} by F. Beck and W. Godin, sold very well and encouraged
local publishers and book sellers to approach the USIS for more book translations.\textsuperscript{41} By 1953,
USIS offices had the program up and running across East and Southeast Asia, meeting with good
results. In Singapore, the USIS translated \textit{Capitalism in America, USA: The Permanent
Revolution}, and \textit{The Anatomy of Communism} into both Chinese and Malay and fostered enough
commercial success to encourage further publication.\textsuperscript{42} In most cases, readers and reviewers
consumed and discussed these translations unaware of the materials’ US sponsorship. For
example in February 1954, an article appeared in the Korean magazine \textit{Moon Yae} debating the
merits of the translation of fiction and non-fiction Anglo-American works into Korean.
Unbeknownst to the author, three of his example translations – \textit{O Pioneers}, \textit{The Scarlett Letter},
and \textit{Capitalism in America} – had been secretly funded by USIS Seoul.\textsuperscript{43}

Building on these successes, USIS offices massively ramped up translation projects
across the region and the globe. In the second half of 1954, the agency translated 280 editions of
books into dozens of languages and, by the end of 1955, the USIA celebrated its 2500\textsuperscript{th} edition

\textsuperscript{40} “Staff Paper no.2: The Campaign of Truth and its Application by ICD,” 13 September 1951, box 2, Information
Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
\textsuperscript{41} “Information Center Service Monthly Progress Report,” 15, December Report 1953, box 8, Information Center
Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
\textsuperscript{42} “Information Center Service Monthly Progress Report,” 18-19, December Report 1953, box 8, Information Center
Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
\textsuperscript{43} “Information Center Service Monthly Progress Report,” 23, February Report 1954, box 8, Information Center
Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
translated by the Agency. USIS Japan operated by far the most prolific and by all accounts the most successful translation program in the region. Of the 294 American titles translated into Japanese in 1954, forty-four were paid for and produced by the USIS, or approximately fifteen percent of translated materials. In 1955 this increased to twenty-two percent as sixty-one of 275 translations were conducted by the Agency. In 1956, Joseph S. Evans, USIS Japan’s PAO, observed the critical nature of the program arguing that these translations allowed ideological works such as Ann Rochester’s books *American Capitalism* and *The Nature of Capitalism* to appear in the Japanese market. Evans claimed that without the program, the immature Japanese marketplace only allowed for “technical manuals, mystery stories,” or damaging “books like *Blackboard Jungle* and *Over Sixteen*” that highlighted US racial tensions and the nation’s alleged sexual irreverence respectively.

It was not just Evans who had high praise for the value of USIS translations in Japan. Many Japanese intellectuals and elites valued them as well. In November 1955, Professor Saito Hikaru of Tokyo University wrote a book review article for the newspaper *Nippon dokusho shim bun*, discussing the revival of great American literature. He reviewed four recently available texts – *Short Stories in America* by R.B. West, *The Modern Novel in America* by Frederick J. Hoffman, *Age of Criticism* by William Van O’Conner, and *Literature in the United States* by M. Cunliffe – pointing out the new emphasis on style and his own high expectations for the future of American literature. Saito was particularly enamored with Cunliffe’s work, claiming that, “this is

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the latest and handiest book on American literary history [available].” Of course, Saito had no way of knowing that all four book translations had been USIS projects designed to promote American literature in Japan. In Fukuoka, Kotabe Keijiro, the chief editor of Kyushu’s leading daily newspaper the *Nishi nippon shimbun* and a self-proclaimed Socialist, attributed much of his current thinking about the Soviet Union to works secretly translated by USIS Japan. It thrilled agency officers when Kotabe reported that he recommended David Dallin’s *Soviet Russia and the Far East* to all of his editorial staff at a newspaper with a circulation in the millions.

However, not all book translation programs in East and Southeast Asia operated so successfully. In the Philippines, Thailand, and Laos, the programs ran aground on a variety of issues. These branch offices often commented on the low literacy rates, complained of limited funds for book translations, and found better results with fast-acting media preparations such as pamphlets and posters. According to USIS officers in the Philippines, linguistic variety created a major problem for translators as well. Effective propaganda in the archipelago required the distribution of materials in several languages and, by 1955, the Manila office did not even have an employee literate in Chinese despite being a high priority audience for the USIS in Luzon. In Laos and Thailand, USIS field officers not only reported high illiteracy rates, but also frequently referenced a general linguistic lack of sophistication in the languages themselves that made their work difficult. In 1958, John DeNoia, the first USIS Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO)

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49 “ICS Book Translation Program,” USIS Manila to USIA Washington, 24 October 1955, box 8, Information Center Service, Publications Division, Translation Branch, P 61 East Asia and Pacific Country Files 1948-1960, RG 306; NARA.
in Laos, reported on “the difficulties of translating material into Lao,” noting that because “the vocabulary is not rich” and “the grammar is primitive,” any “material with advanced ideas and complicated structure would be impossible to translate adequately [from English].”

Similarly, in 1959, Louis A. Fanget, the chief of Publications Division in Washington, D.C., reported with some hyperbole that “the book translation program in Bangkok has become almost inactive” in large part due to “the difficulty of expressing complex western thoughts adequately in the Thai language which has a limited vocabulary.”

In these areas where translation programs proved inadequate, or where USIS officers simply needed more materials that could not be obtained from books already published in the United States, the agency developed programs designed to support and create new local materials in easy to understand formats. Across Asia, USIS branches wrote, sponsored, subsidized, and printed the types of books that they required to create locally effective materials with specific program goals. The USIS employed both American and “local writers” to pen original content for the agency. These authors, at least sometimes unaware of their US patron’s participation, contributed to “USIS or vernacular publications” by “writing books” that appeared to be purely local or independent products. For example, USIS Laos, in coordination with the Lao Ministry of National Education, sponsored Maha Sila Viravong to write *Kingdom of Laos: A History of Laos*, the first ever history of Laos written by a Lao author. In a public announcement reprinted in the local Laotian press, Tay Keolouangkhot, the Director General of Education for Laos,

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50 “Memorandum: Possibilities for Book Translations Program, Laos,” 7 April 1958, box 8, Information Center Service, Publications Division, Translation Branch, P 61 East Asia and Pacific Country Files 1948-1960, RG 306; NARA.
52 “Evidence of Effectiveness in Cultural Affairs in Far East,” 2.
commented on the book and noted it was “particularly significant” as it was “not a translation from any foreign book” but rather the “fruit and result of patient research” by a Lao scholar. While Director Keolouangkhot acknowledged that USIS had helped with production by printing all 50,000 copies of the book to be used in local schools as their primary history textbook, he did not publicly reveal the extent to which the USIS controlled the content of the book, which predominantly emphasized the role of the royal lineage and downplayed anti-French and independence movements within the nation.53

Similarly, original books promoting the goals of local branches were sponsored and produced across the region. In Thailand, the USIS worked with the Thai government to produce and popularize Nai Sathien Patharangsi’s book *Tibet*, a biting critique of Chinese foreign policies and China’s treatment of Buddhism in the Himalayas. While USIS Bangkok probably did not directly fund Patharangsi while he wrote his book, the agency pre-purchased and distributed 3500 copies of the 8000-copy run to “the most important Buddhist temple[s]” and “to influential officers in the Thai military,” ensuring the educational and financial success of the project.54 In Japan, where USIS officers sought to kindle popular interest in American literature and writing styles, USIS Tokyo fully funded Natori Junichi’s *Amerika Bungaku Monogatari* (The Story of American Literature) by paying Bunshindo, a Japanese publishing house, to produce the prints and by purchasing a quarter of the first copy run for distribution in program use. This was the

53 There are some discrepancies in the story of the production of this book. The Lao government publicly claimed to have produced 50,000 copies of the text, whereas internal USIS documents put the number at 10,000. Also, despite the fact that the idea for the book originated with USIS Laos (and is counted by the agency as one of its original productions), it is unclear from the sources how much coaching or direction the author received from either governments’ agents. See “Book Translation: History of Laos,” 19 December 1957, box 8, Information Center Service, Publications Division, Translation Branch, P 61 East Asia and Pacific Country Files 1948-1960, RG 306; NARA.

54 “Thai Language Book on Tibet,” 25 June 1959, box 9, Information Center Service, Publications Division, Translation Branch, P 61 East Asia and Pacific Country Files 1948-1960, RG 306; NARA.
eighth original book produced in Japan in 1956.\textsuperscript{55} By 1962, the agency had secretly written or funded approximately ninety-four originals in Japan alone.\textsuperscript{56}

In addition to locally specific products designed to meet particular branch needs that catered to acceptable local cultural concerns, the book production programs also created mass produced thematic works designed for regional use, primarily to alert Asians to the threat of “Red imperialism.” For example, in 1956, the USIA in Washington, D.C. contracted with W.W. Kulski, a popular anti-Soviet writer and professor at the University of Syracuse, to author a short book on Soviet imperialism based on an outline written by the ICS. The USIA hoped the work, seemingly authored by a private academic expert, would demonstrate the socially destructive forces of communism and counteract the anti-colonial propaganda and rhetoric of the Soviet Union and “Red China,” particularly among intellectuals and religious leaders.\textsuperscript{57} Various iterations of Kulski’s final critical text circulated in several languages across Asia and, in 1959, the work even made its way into the scholarly magazine \textit{Russian Review} under the title “Soviet Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism.”\textsuperscript{58} The agency secretly underwrote another such text in 1956, Edward Hunter’s \textit{Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defined It}, after making editorial revisions to help clarify the dangers of communism, the various techniques used on American POWs in Korea, and “the methods by which [communist] brainwashing” could be defeated. Edward Hunter, a CIA operative posing as a journalist well versed in Asia, had created and


\textsuperscript{57} “Book on History of Imperialism,” Memo From Andrew Berding to Franklin Burdette, 16 April 1956, box 4, Office of Policy, P 22 Program Files 1953-1967, RG 306; NARA.

popularized the term “brainwashing” in the United States and abroad five years earlier in his first, CIA-sponsored, publication *Brainwashing in Red China*.\(^{59}\)

Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, USIS branch offices produced hundreds and perhaps thousands of such new texts coupled with tens of thousands of agency-translated book titles across Asia to inoculate the populace against communism and anti-colonial nationalism.\(^{60}\) In 1960 alone, the agency translated and produced more than 15,000,000 copies of more than 650 individual titles. According to USIS reports, this accounted for roughly fourteen percent of all exported American books that year.\(^{61}\) By 1963, those numbers had grown to as many as 17,000,000 copies distributed worldwide.\(^{62}\) These massive increases in the production of written material required an equally massive effort, according to USIS officials, to “get the right books into the right hands of the right person” and to minimize any bitter taste that might arise from this US government-sponsored proliferation of books.

**A Spoonful of (American) Sugar**

As USIS officers across Asia created a wide range of new books and print materials in the many languages required for the region, they likewise began to address the major problem of product delivery. Recognizing that, just as with other medications, an endless stream of print

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\(^{60}\) The number of original books written and sponsored by the agency remains a mystery. The USIA conducted new book production, particularly “secret” projects, under the book translation branch and thus new book numbers cannot always be separated from other translation figures in the records.


\(^{62}\) The numbers get a little shaky here as some sources stop counting “donated material” distributed by the agency and only focus on commercial sales. However, keeping 1960 levels constant reveals a large increase in those sales and the book program itself throughout the 1960s.
propaganda produced by the United States could be hard to swallow, agency personnel developed inventive delivery techniques to act as a spoonful of sugar aiding in the consumption of their written propaganda throughout Asia. Working semi-anonymously through local institutions and private businesses, USIS officers learned to deliver, distribute, and demonstrate agency materials in a variety of formats. The three main aspects of these evolving programs included creating and sponsoring libraries and book collections to draw in readers, promoting the usefulness of texts, such as “student editions” to create value, and opening new avenues for the advertising and promotion of American books in Asian markets. Through these techniques, USIS officers hoped to smooth the distribution of a wide range of US print propaganda aimed at preventing the spread of communism and anti-Americanism among both the English speaking elites and the growing middle class in East and Southeast Asia.

The first and most successful promotional program sponsored by the USIS officers created new spaces for contact between Asian readers and American books by building a variety of libraries, reading rooms, and Information Centers in the region. USIS officials found that these places where students, white collar workers, and intellectuals could read and relax helped to promote literacy, allowed access to otherwise unobtainable print products, and often created a good impression of the United States through the library’s presence itself. These USIS library programs originated from three separate but overlapping US government programs in the 1940s. In 1941, the US Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (IIA) had contracted the American Library Association to build the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin in Mexico City as the first of multiple libraries constructed under the “Good Neighbor” program in Latin America. Beginning in 1942, the Office of Wartime Information (OWI) began its own separate program organizing overseas libraries in thirty-five countries across Europe and Asia in support of its wartime
propaganda efforts. And, in 1945, shortly after the close of World War II, the United States military governments in Germany, Japan, and Korea opened dozens of “Information Center libraries” in occupied territories. The largest of these, the Amerika Hauser library system in Germany, accounted for fifty full library branches and as many as “137 smaller reading rooms spread through the American zone.”63 Between 1947 and 1949, these three library programs condensed and coalesced under the aegis of the US State Department and, in 1953, 158 centers operating worldwide, including forty-two in thirteen countries of the “Far East,” officially transitioned into USIS Information Centers.64

Providing books, magazines, music, plays, and guest lectures, these Information Centers (ICs) quickly became hubs of activity for reading and recreation, particularly among students and white collar workers between their late teens and early thirties. While enjoying the latest in stylish American furniture, heating, air conditioning, and even occasionally a snack bar, these foreign nationals had a chance, USIS officers hoped, “to learn the truth” about the free world and its enemies. Librarians and USIS agents designed local ICs both to promote the culture and “intellectual inheritance of America,” particularly the “ideas of Freedom” and democracy, and to ensure visitors acquired various methods for “understanding and combatting Communism” in their communities. Much of this influence came from the printed word as the average IC

64 “United States Information Centers and Binational Centers Abroad: Summary,” 4 January 1954, box 1, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
routinely stocked thousands of books, magazines, newspapers, and agency-produced posters and pamphlets.\(^{65}\)

The centerpiece of every IC consisted of “open shelves,” in contrast “to ‘closed’ shelves guarded in the old tradition by a custodian,” where USIS librarians claimed patrons openly selected and accessed the “unfettered knowledge” that constituted “free people’s greatest strength.”\(^{66}\) Beginning in the early 1950s, though, the books and magazines available in ICs were divided into two main types of propaganda “shelves” for program use. The “Positive Shelf” consisted mainly of books on “Americana” designed eventually to convey “the evolution of the basic concepts of genuine modern democracy” and to encourage Asians to adopt “maturing cultural values.”\(^{67}\) The “Communism Shelf,” on the other hand, provided books designed to expose “the hypocrisy of various Communist appeals” through “cogent facts and documented, scholarly arguments.” In the words of Theodore Strieber, the first director of the USIA, these “Communism shelves” sought to liberate Asians who had become “unwitting tools of a ruthless strategy aimed at human enslavement.” By illuminating the “unvarnished truth about Communist performance” and ideology, Strieber claimed, these volumes demonstrated “there can be no neutrality” in the worldwide struggle “between slavery and freedom.” The Communist shelf included books such as Max Beloff’s *Soviet Policy in the Far East, 1944-1951*, C. Grove Hanes’ *The Threat of Soviet Imperialism*, and Richard Crossman’s *The God Who Failed*, works that agreed with and reinforced Strieber’s message to “thinking people” curious enough to embrace

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\(^{65}\) “Criteria for the Overseas Book Program,” 28 June 1953, box 1, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.

\(^{66}\) “Criteria for the Overseas Book Program,” 3.

\(^{67}\) “Development of ‘Positive’ Shelf,” Working Group on Doctrinal Bibliography, 1 July 1954, box 2, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
American texts.68 By the mid-1960s, these Information Centers saw more than thirty million patrons partaking of their services each year.69

In addition to creating new spaces and locations to encourage Asian readers to engage with agency-produced and endorsed print materials, USIS officers also sought to entice readers by demonstrating the practical value and usefulness of their products in consumers’ everyday lives. To this end, USIS branches promoted and published propaganda materials in textbooks, technical manuals, children’s reading primers, English-language learning materials, scientific journals, travel brochures, and other formats the agency believed would be self-selected for Asian consumption. The agency found that these “useful” products purchased or read for practical applications could also carry heavy program content without arousing suspicion, particularly if the products appeared to be from a private or non-official entity and were cheap enough to undercut all other competition.

The most widely accessed and dispersed useful products the USIA produced originated in the agency’s Low-Priced Book Programs that manufactured high quality yet artificially low-priced paperback books specifically designed to “emphasis the values of American life and institutions” while exposing “the contradictions within communist dogma.”70 These books, produced in two varieties – the Student Edition series and the Ladder Edition series – appeared to Asian readers to be cheap, entertaining, and non-partisan books helpful in their study of the modern world. The Student Editions contained unabridged works of biography, political science, literature, popular science, and philosophy in both English-language and local language.

70 “Low-Priced Book Program Newsletter,” 1 February 1960, box 4, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
translation. The Ladder series covered similar content, however, it contained condensed materials rewritten in slightly simplified English when in translation.

These low-priced book programs first originated in early 1956 with an experiment conducted by USIS Tokyo to stimulate sales of mass-produced program-oriented books in the Japanese commercial market. The “Jiji Project,” named after a Japanese publishing company that frequently collaborated with USIS news and information production in Japan, flooded the Japanese paperback book market with three titles in Japanese translation – Bela Kornitzer’s The Great American Heritage, Eileen Chang’s The Rice Sprout Song, and Margret O. Hyde’s Atoms Today and Tomorrow – to increase sales and create a “buzz” around US materials. Selling for ¥100 (approximately $.27 at the time) and bound with a “permanent type cover instead of the usual paper cover” previously “characteristic of all low-priced books in Japan,” Jiji books caused a stir in the publishing industry before the books even hit the selves. In the weeks leading up to the book series’ release date, three major literary trade newspapers, Nippon tsushin, Dokusho shimbun and Tosho shimbun, all praised the style and content of the new series, with Nippon tsuhin dedicating a full-page to reviewing ten forthcoming titles in the series.71

For both USIS officers and Jiji publishing, the Jiji book program was an immediate success. Books appearing to be native Japanese products published by Jiji Tsushinsa, translated by the most prominent Japanese authors of the day and carrying messages supporting USIS policy, flew off the shelves in every major bookstore in Japan. Jiji Tsushinsa immediately

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began reprinting. USIA officers in Washington, D.C. took note of the incredible success of this low-priced book experiment in Japan and in the following years rolled out similar programs in Burma, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam, where the books were frequently adopted by local school systems and English teaching institutions. USIS officers in the field continually reported on the ability of Student and Ladder Edition books to “combat Communism” and “promote knowledge and appreciation of American life, culture, and democratic institutions,” particularly when local publishers “preserved the non-attributed character of the program.” By 1960, the agency facilitated the publication and distribution of approximately 2,000,000 low-priced books per year almost entirely through commercial sales.

This reliance on commercial sales for the distribution of US print materials was nothing new for USIS officers in the field, who regularly explored a variety of advertising and cross-promotional methods to disseminate their products. The same printing presses that rolled out cartoonish anti-communist broadsheets to be pasted to the sides of Lao temples and Filipino market buildings in upcountry towns also printed fliers and promotional posters in Japanese and Thai in support of academic books arguing that the world should look to the United States to understand the peaceful uses of atomic energy. USIS officers worked diligently by covertly placing articles in local newspapers that advertised for overtly published USIS magazines which in turn promoted local publishers carrying unattributed USIS book publications that encouraged the consumption of American print materials in an endless feedback loop.

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73 “Low-Priced Book Program Newsletter,” 1-6.
One of the best examples of these cross promotional activities can be seen in the USIS attributed publication *Beisho dayori (Journal of American Books)*, a monthly Japanese-language book review magazine designed for the promotion of US print culture in Japan. Each issue contained twenty to twenty-five reviews of US books and three essays on US culture through literature. First published in 1954, *Beisho dayori* circulated among thousands of publishers, translators, labor unions, libraries, schools, and bookstores each month to endorse books of program value. The books promoted in *Beisho dayori* included agency originals, agency translations, and privately published books from the United States that suited agency requirements. In short, according to Leon Picon, USIS Tokyo’s Book Translation Officer in the second half of the 1950s, the magazine contained reviews of any “books the Agency was pushing” at the time. It likewise promoted all other forms of USIS print propaganda, often through advertisements and commentary.75

Largely received as an academic and informational source, *Beisho dayori* became a hit with Japanese literary critics and journalists seeking the best books originating in the United States. On 25 June 1955, in the *henshū techō* (editor’s notebook) section of the morning edition of *Yomiuri shimbun* – one of Japanese largest daily newspapers – a lengthy article appeared in support of *Beisho dayori* arguing that, despite being published by the United States government, the magazine did not constitute “the imposition of cultural propaganda.” Rather, the editor found the magazine “a surprisingly convenient pamphlet for knowing about the new books appearing in America.” The author reiterated the magazine’s review of Erwin Canham’s *New Frontiers for Freedom*, a USIS endorsed book on the positive nature of capitalism in the United States.76

76 “*Henshū techō,*” *Yomiuri shimbun*, 25 June 1955.
Throughout 1950s and 1960s, USIS Japan found *Beisho dayori* to be one of the most influential publications for promoting its own products to publishers, editors, and educators across Japan.

Relying on these new spaces and promotional materials to sweeten the appeal of US propaganda, USIS officers in the field worked tirelessly to ensure a steady overall increase in the consumption of US printed materials throughout the region. Creating comfortable environments for reading, adding practical value to texts, and developing consumer awareness through advertising allowed USIS officers to transform the landscape of print culture and its propaganda value in Asia. “The improving levels of literacy in the underdeveloped areas” of the world, agency reports argued, demanded wider distributions of American thought and culture. “Even without Communist competition” in the cultural cold war, USIS officers reasoned they had an “overriding necessity to supply leadership” to the “developing” world. “In its many forms,” agency officials claimed, the printed word reached “the mind and heart of every literate creature” in Asia and transmitted “a lasting impression concerning the life and culture of the United States.” This burst of funding and effort flooded local markets, libraries, school, and homes with anti-communist pro-US printed materials frequently disguised as indigenous products or privately produced and distributed US goods. Often exceeding the number of locally produced newspapers, magazines, and books in the region, these USIS materials not only spread the US government’s message of anti-communism and American cultural supremacy, but also transformed what and how people across Asia read in the second half of the twentieth century.

However, despite their best efforts to disseminate American culture, products, and ideas throughout the region, USIS officers in the field could not stop infectious communist ideals from spreading in all parts of Asia, nor could they fully constrain the development of anti-American or

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77 “Importance of the Book,” undated 1960s, box 5, Office of Policy, P 22 Program Files 1953-1967, RG 306; NARA.
“non-aligned” thought in these regions through print alone. To supplement these ongoing efforts, USIS agents sought to incorporate visual media – newsreels, film, and eventually television – to increase coverage, reach illiterate audiences, dazzle the people of Asia with US technology and wealth, and find new channels of communication to reach the widest possible audience.
Chapter 4

A Captive Audience: Visual Media and the US Rehabilitation of the “Far East”

We, women prisoners in the Cell House, are very thankful to the USIS.... Some of the pictures, particularly those about music, sports, etc., have high educational and cultural value, and we like them very much. The pictures about Communists though do not portray the real way of life and attitudes of the Communists. We feel that such pictures will only promote rancor and animosities among our people. We welcome moving pictures that have educational and cultural value and those that promote peace and democracy.

Celia Mariano, 31 August 1953

In early November 1953, in a special section of the Philippines’ National Penitentiary responsible for detaining criminals arrested for “subversion and rebellion” against the state, approximately 150 prisoners took a break from the boredom of their regular scheduled captivity to watch the latest locally produced newsreels and films in both Tagalog and English covering political news and daily life in the Philippines. Divided into two groups, one consisting of Huk guerrilla commandos captured by the Philippines Armed Forces and one composed of high-ranking members of the Philippine Communist Party, these prisoners spent several hours stretching out, socializing, and enjoying the diversions created by the newly installed mobile projectors and screens offering visions of the outside world in their otherwise barren prison corridors. After the inmates took in both the short features and the film, open-ended questionnaires circulated among the audience asking for the prisoners’ reactions, feelings, and observations about their visual experiences. The prison, it turned out, did not show these films simply to entertain political and military prisoners. Rather, these special screenings formed the basis for a unique experiment conducted by the United States Information Agency to examine

1 “Motion Pictures: Reactions of Philippines Communists to USIS Films,” Ralph R. Busick, 12 November 1953, box 2, Motion Picture Services, P 234 Country Files, 1953-1954, RG 306; NARA.
the propaganda value of visual media and its ability to “reindoctrinate,” reform, and rehabilitate “persons exposed to communist ideology.”

After screening the films and collecting the questionnaires, USIS Manila staff members, led by Felix Aguiling, Jr., spoke with the prison inmates and asked them to expand on their reactions, particularly toward *His Honor the Citizen*, a story of an upstanding Filipino mayor leading his village community through democratic reforms and socioeconomic development. USIS agents reported that among the Huk commandos and soldiers, the movies seemed to have a positive effect, reminding them of home, demonstrating honest governance, and incorporating “good themes.” However, soldiers also told their interviewers that these films “overstrained one’s credulity about the nature of Philippine politics.” Some doubted the mayor really existed and informed the USIS agents that in real life such a democratic mayor would be a model communist. Among the “hard-core” political cadres, containing such notable communist leaders as Celina Mariano, William Pomeroy, Jose Lava, and Amado Hernandez, USIS officers met with more sarcasm and disbelief, but these prisoners also appeared more “fearful of the effectiveness” and future successes of the agency’s visual media propaganda programs.²

The agency was particularly interested in the opinions of Celina Marino and her husband William Pomeroy, a white US Army veteran expatriate formerly stationed in the Philippines during World War II, who, according to agency reports, played the role of “chief Communist propagandist(s)” before their arrest. While Marino and Pomeroy assured USIS officers that the films could not “change the minds of any of the people” in their particular “cell block,” they worried that the USIS “should have more success on the outside, with people who had no contact with Communism.” According to USIS records, Pomeroy, who later wrote in one of his memoirs

that he had flatly refused to talk with USIS operatives, spoke highly of the quality of USIS film and appeared most nervous of their success.³ During the interview, he told Aguiling, “as one propaganda man to another, your documentary films are the only ones I would call effective. We cannot deny the pictures in them. Of course they do not show the entire picture.” “The ordinary person,” Pomeroy commented, might “take anything at face value” and be easily influenced by the agency’s products.⁴ The agency agreed and, over the next two decades, the United States Information Agency built an enormous visual media propaganda apparatus designed to capture the imaginations of people across Asia through the use of newsreels, movies, and television.

Unlike other private industry visual media programming designed to represent artistic content, provide entertainment, project a particular political statement, or sell a specific product, USIS film and television services sought to shape the views of Asians so that their very culture and ideas about the world – past, present, and future – could be reformed and rehabilitated, enabling Asians previously exposed to fascism, communism, and revolutionary nationalism to function successfully in the new society of the “Free World” envisioned by the United States. Through the agency’s visual media programs, local USIS offices created original films and television content that both demonstrated the evils of communism and extolled the benefits of America’s capitalist, liberal, and democratic lifestyles. In addition, USIS officers in the field went to extreme lengths to ensure the delivery of their message by disseminating the technology required for visual media production and consumption as well as by increasing the availability of both local language and American-made films and television programs in an ever escalating mission to expand the size of their audience abroad. In effect, the USIS replicated the prison

experiments conducted in Manila thousands of times over in schools, markets, libraries, theaters, and eventually homes across East and Southeast Asia. Only by capturing audiences across Asia could cultures in the “Far East” be reformed and rehabilitated to function within a US-centric global society.

**Double Feature: Arresting Depictions of Communists and Americans**

Given the intensifying Cold War in Asia, signaled and reinforced by the 1949 “loss of China,” the launching of President Harry Truman’s Campaign of Truth in 1950, and the 1950 eruption of war on the Korean Peninsula, the role of film in USIS programming took on a new dimension of hyperbolic anti-communism as it increased in scale of production and geographical scope. Motivated by the fear that communist ideas and ideology had penetrated and corrupted the minds of millions of Asians, USIS offices across the region refocused and redoubled their efforts on cultural rehabilitation and reform through newsreels, documentaries, and feature films. Building on the successes and collective knowledge of SCAP’s CIE film programs in Japan and the State Department’s local USIS libraries and information center film projects, visual media emerged as a central aspect of USIS propaganda throughout East and Southeast Asia.

The USIS visual media programs took two basic overlapping directions designed to work in tandem to ensnare the minds of Asian audiences and rehabilitate cultures in the region to root out any possible communist offenses while promoting US hegemony. The first direction involved producing and distributing a large number of anti-communist films and newsreels intended to demonstrate the “failures” of communist cultural practices and political actions. These films, most prevalently produced in the first half of the 1950s, primarily dealt in shocking images and painful ironies designed to leave audiences “scared straight” and looking for a
suitable alternative to communist political and social values. The second direction of USIS films provided the alternative by promoting the United States as a model society and leader to be emulated by other states of the Free World. Produced in ever increasing numbers throughout the 1950s and 1960s, these films depicted the various cultural values, technological developments, and material successes available to Asian nations if only they would transform themselves to be more like the United States.

The anti-communist aspects of the agency film program in Asia fully developed in the immediate aftermath of the Korean War. In the middle of 1953, USIS offices in the “Far East” began an overall policy shift that, according to a USIS report to Congress, “turned from [an] emphasis on statements about the United States to [a] wide dissemination of facts that advance the cause of the United States,” particularly the eradication of global communism. Heavily influenced by the communist “crimes” committed during the Korean War – the agency was, after all, officially established just as the war came to a close – early USIS visual propaganda materials promoted anti-communist themes as shown through the lens of “failed” communist actions in Asia. Taking the form of documentaries “reporting” in local languages on the failures of the communist forces in Korea or the simultaneous banality and atrocity of daily life in “Red China,” these films utilized “simplicity and repetition” and “hammered away” on various themes encouraging Asian societies to despise communism and those who espoused it.5

For example, the agency film Korean Story, a twenty-minute documentary short, reviewed “the entire history of [North] Korean aggression” on the peninsula that led to war while the film An Unpleasant Subject cataloged “Communist atrocities” during the conflict. These films and several others like them particularly emphasized that “prisoners of war” often “refused

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to return home to their communist ‘paradise’” after the armistice halting open hostilities on the peninsula had been signed. Conflating Chinese and Korean perspectives, these materials repeatedly argued that “despite the traditional love of the Chinese for their families, these prisoners refused to ‘go home’” if it meant returning to the communist way of life that they themselves had learned to hate. Other films, such as When the Communists Came and Free China’s Fighting Men, served as warnings against Asians sympathizing with communist causes or looking to emulate the communist way of life.6

Along with general films on “Red Chinese imperialism” and the communist aggressions on the Korean peninsula developed for use across Asia, local branch USIS offices likewise began sponsoring, producing, and distributing films with anti-communist messages designed to inspire the hopes and allay (or provoke) the fears of local populations within various USIS regions and sub-regions throughout the 1950s. In the Philippines, agency films focused on the final days of the Huk rebellion and utilized films such as the satirical This is My Home, a short depicting the fate of a typical barrio under communism, to highlight the ever-present dangers of infiltration from both foreign and domestic sources.7 In South Vietnam, to assist the government “in the grim task of avoiding Communist domination,” USIS officers produced and screened “special” anti-communist materials for “hundreds of thousands of refugees” in specially constructed camps for Northern Vietnamese who “sought a new life.”8 In 1955, USIS Japan spent an estimated $17,000 secretly bankrolling a feature film with a storyline revolving around “Soviet spy

7 “Script: This is My Home,” Original 1952, remade for regional use in 1957, box 43, Motion Picture and Television Services, Laboratory Services, Film Versions, 1953-1965, A1 1098 Movie Scripts, RG 306; NARA.
activities in Japan,” a common concern among many right-wing Japanese at the time.⁹ By the beginning of 1955, USIS reports to Congress proudly proclaimed that, “among movies attacking communism,” seventy percent “were produced in the overseas missions using the locale and language of the area being filmed.”¹⁰

Despite producing hundreds of such anti-communist films in the first half of 1950s, the role of agency-produced visual media slowly shifted toward more constructive content films that depicted the many successes of American culture and technology and showcased local cultures and technology in transition, if only by small increments, to more “American” models of responsible world citizenship. These films and newsreels, similar in character to CIE films produced during the occupation of Japan, used various depictions of Americana – industrial development and mechanization, fashion, schooling, sleepy towns, music, scientific discovery, leisure activities, celebrities, and geographies – to demonstrate and exalt the advancements and benevolence of the United States, justifying its position as first among equals within a newly emerging postwar world. The USIS also sought to democratize the populace of Asia through film, highlighting local cultural tropes, settings, and events to connect with audiences and demonstrate the success of peoples and nations who would join the United States as liberal citizens of the Free World.

Films featuring Americana and cultural themes constituted by far the largest segment of USIS films and newsreels created and shown abroad in the 1950s and 1960s. These films depicted cultural life within the United States as both the cause and effect of a uniquely

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American sense of freedom and democracy. Intertwining ideas of technological development, economic growth, personal liberty, and democratic practices, these films sought to impart to their Asian viewers the necessary and sufficient conditions for creating democratic capitalism and joining the other “mature” nations of the world. For example, the film *Freedom to Learn* narrated the story of several “plain little towns” in Iowa where “deeply religious” and “practical people” built schools and universities by converting sun to corn to hogs to tax dollars. These Iowans then took it upon themselves to enshrine the “freedom to worship, freedom to govern themselves, and [the] freedom to learn” in their communities so they and their families might harvest the rewards of “these beliefs they planted like the corn in the soil.”

Another example, *Tom Shuler – Cobbler Statesman*, a cartoon short depicting the activities and life of a small town cobbler turned federalist politician, demonstrated the merger of constitutionalism, free thinking, and a desire for individual economic improvement in the formation of the United States. The cartoon humorously illustrated to Asians, according to a report to Congress, the “advantages which result from [the] removal of trade and political barriers.”

These two films represent only a fraction of the thousands of titles produced on the confluence of Americana, technological development, and democratic capitalism. Films such as *Abraham Lincoln – A Background Story, Helen Keller in Her Story, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower* developed biographical sketches of successful and prominent Americans, while other films such as *Farming for the Future, Historic Death Valley, Corn, and Tobacco Belt* expanded on the agricultural developments and geographic uniqueness of the United States.

11 “Script: Freedom to Learn,” box 11, Motion Picture and Television Services, Laboratory Services, Film Versions, 1953-1965, A1 1098 Movie Scripts, RG 306; NARA.

films *Free Labor Goes Forward* and *Freedom of the Press* addressed particular rights and liberties that framed cultural expression within the United States. Genres such as scientific discovery or technological advancement, as in the films *Fifteen Days in Space*, *Falcon Dam*, and *Journey into Medicine*, focused primarily on the material resources available to societies with “American” values such as ingenuity, persistence, cooperation, private enterprise, and the belief in freedom of occupation and the intellect. Other scientific films, such as *A is For Atom*, *The Atom Industry*, and *Atomic Power for Peace*, demonstrated a combination of the scientific hegemony and the maturity necessary to insure a peaceful application of nuclear power.

Regardless of the particular topic of the documentary, news clip, cartoon, or feature, these films all worked to demonstrate that American culture – its tastes, fashions, histories, beliefs, and daily practices – represented the best aspects of the modern world and could, perhaps should, be imitated by people around the world to increase productivity, representation, and freedom.13

Along with these various USIS films that promoted the strength and superiority of the United States through depictions of American economic, scientific, and cultural life, the agency also produced a genre of film designed to demonstrate the peaceful intentions and cooperative nature of the United States to the various peoples of Asia. These films sought to reassure Asians struggling with revolutionary, independence, and nationalist movements that the United States was not another imperial power. These films instead depicted the United States as a friend seeking to help Asian societies, economies, and cultures to recover from the damages of colonialism, fascism, “backwardness,” and the threat of communism spreading in the second half of the twentieth century.

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13 For all references to film titles and a lengthy, although partial, list of officially and overtly produced Agency films created before 1965, see the National Archives Register: Motion Picture and Television Services, Laboratory Services, Film Versions, 1953-1965, A1 1098 Movie Scripts, RG 306; NARA.
To combat the idea that the United States represented a new imperial power in Asia, USIS films and news clips emphasized the participation of the United States as a cooperative partner uplifting the region. For example, several USIS films featured Japan and the Philippines as independent nations that had benefited from the friendship of the United States. Films such as *Japan Joins the Free Nations*, *United Nations and Japan*, *Philippine Rehabilitation*, and *Philippine Progress* were dubbed in multiple languages and shown across Asia to promote the idea that the United States would help fledgling democracies – even their former enemies – become stronger more independent nation-states. The film *This is My Philippines*, for example, narrated to audiences across the archipelago that Filipinos as members of “the first Christian democratic nation in Asia,” should take pride in the “Western teaching” that enabled great figures such as Jose Rizal to led the country into their current era of progress. Skipping over the period of US colonization, the film explained that “the promise of Freedom” fulfilled by the United States in 1946 allowed the Filipino people to develop fully into a singular nation ready for a stake in the Free World.\(^{14}\)

At the same time, newsreels such as *Belgian Troops in Korea*, *Philippine Troops in Korea*, *Greek Troops in Korea*, and *Thailand’s Troops in Korea* sought to deemphasize the problematic perception that the United States constituted the main foreign belligerent in the Korean War and focused instead on the international and cooperative aspect of the United Nations’ “police action” on the Korean Peninsula.\(^{15}\) Hawaii and Alaska represented another

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14 “Script: This is my Philippines,” 26 June 1957, box 43, Motion Picture and Television Services, Laboratory Services, Film Versions, 1953-1965, A1 1098 Movie Scripts, RG 306; NARA.

15 Very little research has been conducted to examine the roles and motivations of the so-called supportive players in the Korean War who chose for various reasons to fight and die for the ideals of the United Nations. However, for an extensive literature on the use of “police action” as a political and propaganda convenience for justifying the Korean War within the United States see Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67-95.
problem for USIS film producers seeking to downplay any connotation of US imperialism in the Pacific. Before and after 1959, the year both Alaska and Hawaii acquired statehood, the agency produced several films such as *Hawaii, USA* and *Alaska, the 49th State*, which depicted these new states as a central and “authentic” locales of the American experience. In these films, the USIA featured the landscapes, histories, peoples, and cultures of the region to demonstrate the diversity and inclusiveness of the United States. Rather than symbolizing an imposition of US power, statehood – as these films assured their Asian audiences – fulfilled the long standing US promise of economic success, modern life, and national unity in these former frontier territories.¹⁶

The United States extended this promise of economic success, modern living, and advanced development to cooperative Asian communities, at least in film. To further demonstrate that the United States was not an imperial power, but rather a dedicated and friendly neighbor, USIS officers in the field produced a variety of short films and news clips demonstrating the benefits of US technical, agricultural, and military aid in the nations of East and Southeast Asia. Films such as *Technical Assistance for Thailand, New Horizons in Philippine Agriculture*, and *More Power to Korea*, screened throughout the region, exhibited the technological and educational progress on offer from US-Asian cooperation and sought to create a sense of partnership in the imagined futures of Asian audiences. Likewise, local USIS offices frequently supported other US governmental and private civic groups producing films for USAID, American universities abroad, Chambers of Commerce, the Peace Corps, and military

development and training programs that lacked local film crews and production equipment. These films highlighted current cooperative efforts while hinting that further integration and acceptance of US guidance would lead to stronger and more independent nation-states.

Aside from cataloguing, demonstrating, and promoting American culture and touting the benefits that might arise from replicating it in other societies, USIS filmmakers likewise sought more directly to reform and remake individual Asian cultures through film. To accomplish this, the agency secretly funded and supported local filmmakers and film industries (at least sometimes without their knowledge), whose indigenous cultural products aligned with US goals and objectives. When such films and filmmakers could not be found, USIS officers funded and produced their own versions of “Asian” visual media. Depicting Asian cultures not as they actually existed, but through the lens of US policy goals and propaganda, these media products created, reified, and promoted aspects of local and national cultural practices that USIS officers hoped would lead toward capitalist, democratic, and nationalist sentiments in the region. Acting as funhouse mirrors reflecting an “American-like” liberal-democratic distortion of Asian cultures, values, and practices back to themselves, the films produced by USIS officers sought to push the nations of East and Southeast Asia away from communism and toward a Free World as led by the United States.

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17 Typically, USIS agents in the field cooperated with, or at least monitored, almost all other groups representing the US government or the American people within a given country. Work with USAID (formerly the Technical Cooperation Administration, TCA) began at least by 1952 and cooperation with the Peace Corps began before the first personnel shipped out from the United States in the early 1960s.

18 USIS utilization of “locally produced films on cultural subjects” appeared relatively early on in agency programming and, at least according to some reports, “tended to be more effective than Agency-supplied titles.” See “Evidence of Effectiveness in Cultural Affairs in Far East,” James Crane, 27 August 1958, box 2, Office of Policy, P 22 Program Files 1953-1967, RG 306; NARA.
During the 1950s and 1960s, local USIS offices funded dozens of local feature films to help stimulate and promote the cultural products and values they desired across Asia. For example, in 1955, USIS Saigon co-produced one of the first feature length Vietnamese-language films *Bird in a Cage (Chim Lông)*. According to Myriam L. Johnston-Hallok, the Assistant Mopix Production Officer in Saigon at the time, this “sugar coated anti-communist propaganda pill” wrapped in an opera-like production written and directed by Phạm Duy, the most popular folksong composer of the era and featuring Mai Tram, a leading actress of the day, served as a “poignant tale” of the dangers presented by a divided Vietnam.\(^{19}\) A year later USIS agents collaborated with CIA operative Rufus C. Philips III and Vietnamese Secretary of Defense Nguyễn Đình Thuận to fund and assist Bùi Diễm in producing the now classic film *We Want to Live (Chúng Tôi Muốn Sống)*, a story of love and loss set against the devastating 1952 communist land reforms.\(^{20}\) Shown across South Vietnam, these movies evoked visceral reactions from audience members who, according to actress Mai Tram, felt “shocked by the injustice and tyranny of the Communist,” and shouted “Down with the Communists!” wherever her film screened.\(^{21}\) In Korea, USIS officers secretly co-wrote and produced the now famous director Kim Ki-yǒng’s first feature film *Boxes of Death* (1955), a story depicting a communist operative infiltrating a village on the pretext of returning a soldier’s ashes to his family. William Ridgeway, the USIS MOPIX officer in Korea, remembered that using the “the ashes of a dead hero for cover was considered vile of the communists by our audience.” “This was the reason I


used it,” Ridgeway explained. In Japan, USIS staff worked closely with a number of local film production companies and by 1955 had secretly produced at least five “anti-communist” or “national defense promotion”-themed feature films. Contracted through local Japanese movie production companies, these films packaged clear warnings against radical labor and communist student movements into slick and entertaining movies aimed at a mass audience. The most popular of these films, *Jet Vapor Trails in the Dawn* (Jettoki shutsudō dai 101 kōkūkichi) an action-romance film valorizing and promoting Free World-friendly nationalism and the Japanese Air Self-Defense force, was released in 1957, and screened in more 2200 theaters, drawing more than fifteen million viewers around the country (See Figure 3).


Figure 3: This poster advertised the film *Jet Vapor Trails at Dawn*. USIS Japan covertly sponsored the feature film as part of its broader efforts to promote anti-communism, alleviate fears of remilitarization, and support specific forms of national culture hospitable to the United States. Author’s private collection.
Aside from covertly funding, endorsing, and promoting specific film productions that matched Agency needs, USIS officers likewise set out to create their own “Asian” visual cultures through film, newsreels, and television shows. Some films, such as *The Arts of Japan*, *Thai Buddhist Customs*, and *A House, A Wife, and a Singing Bird* (Indonesian), translated into multiple languages and shown throughout the region, portrayed Asian culture, as one USIS officer put it, as “manifestations of U.S. interest in the cultures of other people.” These films depicted aspects of Asian culture that USIS officers saw as encouraging peace, democracy, and national unity. Shown transnationally, these films were meant by the agency to demonstrate how Asian societies might learn from their “good” neighbors already engaged in cultural practices approved by the “Free World.” Moreover, the title shots in many of these films contained captions attributing the documentaries to the USIS to further demonstrate that the United States literally endorsed these cultural practices amongst Asians.24

In addition to agency films promoting a specific type of culture, USIS field officers likewise created new cultural formats and representations through mock indigenous products that appeared to represent both “traditional” and “progressive” aspects of cultural production in postwar Asia. The visual materials took a wide variety of forms and delivered an array of negative and positive programming based on agency needs. In the Philippines, for example, USIS newsreels and films worked to project a society of “model” Filipinos bound together by a common ethnicity, religion, culture, and history.25 In other nations such as Korea and Cambodia, USIS officers created a plethora of “indigenous” visual media products attempting to foster a

25 See earlier description *This is my Philippines*.
common sense of “Korean-ness” or “Cambodian-ness” in and through art.\(^{26}\) In Laos, USIS films and newsreels, attributed to the Royal Lao Government, celebrated King Sisavang Vong in the first ever films made using Lao soundtracks and featuring footage of the king. Capturing and increasing the grandeur of the religious and civic ceremonies surrounding the then longest-reigning Asian monarch, these films demonstrated to the Laotian people the roots of their freedom, religion, and heritage as embodied in the institution of the monarchy.\(^{27}\) In Indonesia and Malaysia, USIS recorded and produced “traditional” shadow puppet plays infused with subtle anti-communist messages and used films to promote President Sukarno to his own constituents as a reputable international leader of a Free World nation.\(^{28}\)

Perhaps the widest reaching and unique of these efforts to create new cultural formats took place in Thailand and Laos, where USIS agents appropriated and transformed mohlam singers – traveling folk musicians found across Southeast Asia – into props for pro-American and anti-communist newsreels and films designed to reform Asian society. Mohlam singing troops, usually composed of three to five people, both men and women, traveled from town to town providing entertainment, news, and local gossip mixed with bawdy humor and regional music. Beginning as early as 1953, according to USIS officer Earl Winston, agents in the field “developed anti-Communist themes for songs of the native mohlam singers.” USIS Agents traveling into remote locations, particularly into the upcountry areas, brought these musicians who gathered “thousands of people sitting around on the ground” to hear subtle propaganda


\(^{27}\) *4th USIA Report to Congress, January 1 – June 30, 1955*, 16.

messages. By 1957, “through their cleverly worded verse sung in a well-understood dialect,” hired mohlam singers were deemed capable of “conveying almost any message” to a willing audience by USIS reports.

That same year, USIS Laos began adopting mohlam singers into their programs with great success. On one particular mission in remote northern Laos, after a showing of the film “Alaska, the United States [sic] newest state” failed to connect with any villagers, USIS officer Paul F. Gardner remembered mohlam singers saving the event through their “risqué and off color” humor filled with “anti-Communist messages.” Finding the singers so successful and their own films somewhat ineffective, USIS officers in Laos hit on a novel idea to create short films of mohlam singers in a style similar to Chinese (soap) operas. However, according to USIS officer Gerard M. Gert, these novel productions first screened in 1961 were not simply original Lao stories set in 16mm film. Rather, a second generation Danish American named Niels Bonnesen, the main film producer on the project, reworked the mohlam stories through the lens of his favorite author Hans Christian Anderson. “All the Danish characters became Lao,” Gert recalled. “We would dress them up in Lao historical costumes” and film “sing-songs and plays” to be shipped to every corner of the nation. Promoting the values of Lao self-help, the strength of the Royal Lao government, pro-Buddhist values, and an appreciation of US economic aid, the

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mohlam program, Gert proclaimed, constituted “one of the most effective [propaganda] things we did in the country.”\(^3\)

Within a year, USIS officers in Thailand reported their own success producing mohlam films. Copying the new Lao models composed of twenty to thirty minute clips, but with “pro-Thai government theme[s],” USIS officer Paul Good recalled the films worked particularly well as a propaganda vehicle in the rural northeast. Good explained that “the villagers liked the mohlam groups better than, of course anything that we could import from outside, even if it had been dubbed into Thai because they knew the mohlam. They were comfortable with the dialect. It was their speech and they were comfortable with the means.”\(^3\) It is less clear, however, if the villagers felt comfortable with the new messages or realized how these “authentic” messages arrived in their communities.

These films, and the thousands of live mohlam performances that continued under USIS auspices, seen by millions of people in Thailand, Laos, and parts of Cambodia, caused a massive revival of the art form in Southeast Asia. Soon, films of “authentic mohlam singing,” infused with US propaganda, screened across the region, or to put it in the words of a USIS report to Congress, “wherever USIS and Lao teams can float down a river or drop from a helicopter with a portable generator and movie projector.”\(^3\) Through this wide distribution, USIS officers hoped to reach into every corner of the region no matter how remote or difficult to transverse to ensure


that no one escaped the growing networks of visual media and the locally produced propaganda efforts of the agency.

**Locking Down the Industry**

As agency propaganda took on new cultural dimensions and specific visions for a future constituted entirely by “Free World” Asians, USIS officers worked to expand and control film distribution and promotion networks while incorporating those in local film industries – Asian writers, directors, cameramen, projectionists, and technicians – to support the growing visual media propaganda efforts of the United States. By building directly on lending networks and local production practices that originated during the US occupation of Japan and with State Department efforts to rehabilitate Asians after World War II, USIS officers facilitated both localized and transnational networks of visual culture reliant on Asians themselves to increase the spread of agency materials and to prevent people from escaping the reach of “Free World” ideology and propaganda.

Building networks for US film distribution in Asia began during the years between 1945 and 1952, the years of the occupation of Japan, as CIE officials (re)established large networks of audio-visual libraries for distribution in every prefecture of the reforming nation. Similarly, during the second half of the 1940s, State Department personnel began compiling and screening American film catalogs and holdings in various major cities of Asia, primarily stored in embassies and USIS Information Centers ready to be deployed to specific target audiences as the need arose. In 1953, the newly formed USIA inherited all of the various catalogs from CIE, the
State Department, and the earlier USIS offices. This allowed USIS agents to tap directly into and build on both the successful CIE programs employed by US occupation forces and on the libraries and networks of propaganda films employed by the State Department in Information Centers across Asia to create massive film distribution systems.

The most prolific of these new distribution networks extended across Japan, where USIS Tokyo continued CIE policies of distribution and film lending with few changes from the US occupation model. The main film lending system, comprised of audio-visual libraries in all forty-six prefectures and supervised by the Japanese government’s Prefectural Boards of Education, circulated thousands of American-made films officially endorsed by USIA as well as hundreds of locally produced CIE and USIS film and newsreels. With Japanese-dubbed versions of diverse titles such as *Individual Rights in Public*, *Where Are the Germs*, *The Amazon Awakens*, and *Nanook of the North*, these libraries provided a variety of entertainment and educational opportunities. In early 1954, USIS Japan reported that in all prefectures, agency and locally-made films circulated in the thousands among students, teachers, labor groups, hospital workers, and various technicians seeking to improve their trade. Schools in particular utilized the film catalogs on offer, and USIS estimates claimed that “approximately 70 percent of the total number of films available for in-school use in Japan, at all grade levels, are USIS films” obtained through prefectural audio-visual libraries. In addition to audio-visual libraries, USIS offices

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35 Despite USIS branches opening in Japan during the occupation, and serving more than three million patrons during 1951 alone, the transition from SCAP facilitation to USIS control was not always even or productive in large part because of the differing goals of the two programs. See “Planning for Japanese Takeover,” Lawrence S. Morris, 15 January 1951, box 5, Cultural Operations Division, Far East Libraries and Centers Branch, P 55, RG 306; NARA.
37 “USIA; IMS; Use of Specialized Types of USIS Film,” USIS Tokyo to USIA Washington, 12 February 1954, box 2, Motion Picture Services, P 234 Country Files, 1953-1954, RG 306; NARA.
across Japan lent films and newsreels directly to a variety of public and private organizations, such as the Osaka Industrial Efficiency Institute that employed USIS films in special seminars on “personnel management.”

Despite Japan being, in the words of one USIS official, the “most remarkable example” of housing a robust and systematic film lending system, USIS stations throughout Asia operated similar systems and networks for film distribution to schools, government offices, military posts, and labor organizations, often at the request of the local organizations themselves. In the Philippines, for example, Brigadier General Pelagio A. Cruz, Commanding General of the Philippines Air Force, and 2nd Lieutenant Antonio A Attenza helped establish a long-term film exchange with USIS Manila, borrowing 16mm “films, projectors, and other equipment” to use as the Air Force educated “regular airmen and recruits undergoing basic and technical training.” “For the student,” Attenza reported, USIS films aided in “grasping the subject matter” and more easily “absorbing every detail contained in the subject without any necessity of further explanation.” Later, General Cruz thanked USIS Manila, claiming that without the program, the “Troop Information and Education program would be seriously handicapped.” By 1958, USIS branch offices had established many such networks and relationships, with approximately fifty main distribution nodes through which agents provided thousands of documentary films to receptive target audiences in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Vietnam. USIS agents reported that from university towns and shipyards to Buddhist primary schools, demand could barely be met among

38 “USIA; IMS; Effectiveness of USIA Films,” USIS Tokyo to USIA Washington, 2 April 1954, box 2, Motion Picture Services, P 234 Country Files, 1953-1954, RG 306; NARA.
local people and governments, who saw USIS films as a “window on the world” and repeatedly asked “not only for the continuation, but if possible, the expansion of the present film programs.”

To extend their networks further and increase exposure to American products, USIS agents incorporated and supported Hollywood and the American film industry in their propaganda efforts. From the first half of 1950s, building on the censorship and sponsorship programs of the immediate postwar period, the USIA actively sought to include Hollywood directly into its overseas film projects. In some of the agency’s most closely guarded secrets, USIA officers operating through the offices of Cecil B. De Mille – the USIA’s “chief consultant” in Hollywood – exploited the private sector, and, in their own words, “obtained the services of the industry’s top-level professionals and technical staffs at minimum cost.” While the USIA could not control Hollywood production per se, the agency did gain access to the facilities and production values of the American film industries. During this early period, the USIA found its overseas production capabilities too limited and relied on Hollywood equipment, actors, and processing to produce large-scale theater-wide anti-communist films such as *Poles are Stubborn People* (produced via Paramount) and *Rape of the Baltics* (produced via Warner-Pathé).

Despite the fact that USIA officers never gained the control over Hollywood for which they hoped, the agency nevertheless sought to promote certain Hollywood films in Asia as an indirect tool to aid in US propaganda efforts. For example, the Informational Media Guarantee

40 “Highlights of the Far East Film Program (Schools, Colleges),” William H. Giltner, 9 June 1958, box 3, Office of Policy, P 22 Program Files 1953-1967, RG 306; NARA.
42 The extent to which USIA controlled, or at least manipulated Hollywood, is widely open for interpretation. A “smoking gun” document in which the agency reports that “means have been developed to exercise influence on almost all elements of the theatrical motion picture industry” is perhaps all that remains on record of these extremely secretive programs. For opposing viewpoints on the extent of USIA control of Hollywood in the United
Program (IMG) allowed for the importation of Hollywood-produced films into dollar-short areas through a cleverly designed exchange of currency swaps through which the USIA acted as a foreign trust on behalf of Hollywood corporations. Built on the 28 May 1946 Blum-Byrnes agreements that sought to relieve French debt by opening the nation to the US film industry and thousands of American films never before screened in France, IMG became an official apparatus of the Marshal Plan and ECA activities, and then the USIA, throughout the world.\textsuperscript{43} The program worked by allowing film distribution companies in select dollar-short nations to purchase USIA-approved films from American production, distribution, and exporting companies using their local currencies. Then, American film companies “sold” their foreign currencies at a favorable rate to the USIA, which in turn used the foreign currencies to fund its local information programs in various nations. The program, particularly active in Asia, guaranteed more than $66,000,000 worth of such media sales in ten dollar-short nations, including Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, in 1959 alone.\textsuperscript{44} This program and others like it allowed USIS officers subtly to censor Hollywood film distribution even as they used these films to expand their visual media reach.

In addition to supporting certain Hollywood distribution chains and films, USIS officers secretly funded a number of ostensibly independent film companies and other governments’ film propaganda networks in Asia. This began in the late 1940s, when the US Army sold film and camera equipment to the Malaya Film Unit (MFU), a British colonial government apparatus

\textsuperscript{43} For further information on the role of the Blum-Byrnes Agreements see Rémi Fournier Lanzoni, \textit{French Cinema: From Its Beginnings to the Present} (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002), 148-150.

\textsuperscript{44} 14\textsuperscript{th} USIA Report to Congress, January 1 – June 30, 1960, 16, 28.
designed to defeat communism and support the interests of Britain in the Malay world through film, in exchange for dollars obtained through the sale of tin and rubber to the United States.\textsuperscript{45} The USIA continued secretly to fund and support this anti-communist organization by providing USIS-produced films and film staff throughout the 1950s, particularly given the MFU’s goals to target ethnically Chinese residents of the Malay Peninsula. Similarly, USIA agents quietly funded and coproduced films with the Singapore-based Cathay Film Services, which produced films for the Hong Kong Film Unit, another colonial apparatus of the British government.\textsuperscript{46} These activities enhanced USIS film networks and created yet another method for distributing US visual media.

As USIS officers created, in their own words, “the most far-reaching film distribution network in existence” through films, newsreels, and televised programs designed to both “provide credible documentation” of American culture and to display the dangers of communism to the world, they likewise sought to coopt and incorporate local media productions to ease costs and create authenticity within their propaganda materials.\textsuperscript{47} While World War II had exhausted much of the local film and visual media industries across East and Southeast Asia, hundreds of local writers, directors, producers, actors, cameramen, technicians, and projectionists survived and needed employment. USIS field officers sought to capitalize on this. By coopting and (re)building local film production and industry, USIS agents gained the capacity to produce films locally, catering to immediate propaganda efforts. For USIS officers in the field, capturing the

\textsuperscript{45} “Communication and Public Opinion in Malaya: A Survey of Selected Sources,” November 1954, box 24, Office of Research and Intelligence, P 78 International Survey Research Reports, RG 306; NARA.

\textsuperscript{46} The records of these operations remain classified and were primarily conducted off the record. Only traces remain of these programs in the USIA archives, and the amount of USIA support remains unclear. See “Classified USIA Projects,” Henry Loomis, 29 January 1954, Office of Research and Intelligence, UD-WW 294 Special Files, 1953-1957, RG 306; NARA.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
imaginations of Asians and rehabilitating culture in the region required a contained and well-behaved supporting cast.

During the US occupation of Japan and the Korean War, the US government built two motion picture studios (designated MOPIX studios) in Asia as part of their propaganda apparatus to deter communist offenders and rehabilitate the free populations of the “Far East.” The two studios – located in the American embassy in Tokyo and just outside Pusan in South Korea – allowed the US government to produce its own films in local languages to meet specific propaganda needs. These MOPIX studios grew into large-scale operations completely dependent on, and exhausting the supply of, Asian actors, writers, technicians, directors, and cameramen. For example, by 1951, MOPIX Korea employed all the skilled film technicians available – more than eighty Koreans – and eventually resorted to hiring workers with little or no background in the arts and training them to produce visual media propaganda as part of USIS’s wartime efforts. William Ridgeway, head of the USIS film unit in Korea, recalled:

> All of my Korean staff members had other skills, because in those days almost all of the people in motion picture production started off as floor sweepers in commercial theaters, there they were able to work their way up through the ranks, so to speak. Most of them had little or no formal training in the arts. To have been a bricklayer earlier and a scriptwriter today was quite normal. Consequently we had a large reservoir of talent in the organization.

The aspects of the operation supplied by the USIS were the funds, the training, the management, and the raw stock film, but Asians provided the labor and direction.48 This use of local writers and production staff allowed MOPIX Korea to create novel propaganda films based on traditional puppet shows and local customs, carrying, in the words of one classified report,

“specifically anti-Communist” themes that perfectly “fit the local situation.” Likewise, MOPIX Tokyo, originally under the tutelage of the US Army and USIS motion picture officer Harry Keith, “developed excellent color processing capabilities,” according to USIS reports, relying almost solely on “Japanese talent and production equipment.”

Led by regional hubs in Japan, the Philippines, and later Thailand, this method of producing films on the spot with locally hired actors and production staff served as a model for all future USIS productions in East and Southeast Asia. MOPIX Tokyo continued to facilitate the majority of final film processing in the region in the 1950s and 1960, while other regional hubs handled more specific technical and developmental processes. The Philippines took on a unique role as a training area for “local personnel” from across Asia. By 1955, Filipino and American operatives in USIS Manila had already trained a large number of other Asian nationals to use film equipment, produce films, and operate successful mobile film units. In addition, USIS transferred and transported Filipino motion picture specialists across the region to establish new local film operations at various USIS outposts across Southeast Asia. For example, between 1954 and 1955, USIS Saigon built a film production industry in Vietnam from the ground up, as USIS agents “gradually assembled,” according to Myriam Johnston-Hallock, the Assistant MOPIX Production Officer in South Vietnam, several “Filipino camera crews, film editors, writers, and narrators to train Vietnamese” production staff working for USIS and the

49 “The Problem of Southeast Asia,” 5, 1 November 1949, box 1, Cultural Operations Division, Far East Libraries and Centers Branch, P 55, RG 306; NARA.
By 1957, USIS Saigon constituted the largest USIS film production unit in the world, with at least three Filipino writers and directors, three American personnel, and dozens of Vietnamese cameramen utilizing 35 mm video cameras and trained by USIS crews from the Philippines. USIS Bangkok MOPIX, staffed by three American officers and thirty-six “local [Thai] employees,” likewise took on a unique role by 1959, serving as the regional “technical servicing” center with “supervision of local employees in the maintenance of all motion picture equipment, projectors, generators, mobile units, public address equipment, and all motion picture production equipment” in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

By 1960, all major branches and even minor USIS outposts in the region operated their own film production units with local employees outnumbering American officers by one-to-ten and even one-to-twenty-five, allowing USIS materials to take on a local flavor and context while still being produced under the direct supervision of American personnel. In combination with ever increasing networks of distribution and promotion of USIS-produced and approved Hollywood films, these processes drew Asian participants into the growing visual media apparatus of the United States government and created the beginnings of a panopticon effect within the culture of visual media production and consumption in Asia.


“Inspection Report USIS Thailand, 10 October 1959, box 3, Office of Administration Management Division, P 124 Inspection Reports, 1958-1962, RG 306; NARA.

The exact percentage of US personnel to Asian employees varies from branch to branch, however, all inspection reports in the second half of the 1950s and 1960s demonstrate that local employees constituted an overwhelming majority of MOPIX staff. See individual inspection reports in Office of Administration Management Division, P 124 Inspection Reports, 1958-1962, RG 306; NARA.
Capture and Release

As various branch offices of the United States Information Agency produced and distributed an incredible variety of local and international feature films, newsreels, cartoons, and documentaries during the 1950s and 1960s, USIS officers in the field realized that they would likewise need to create an equally large, diverse, and captive audience for the consumption of US-produced visual media products and propaganda. Pursuing this goal through multiple channels, USIS agents first created new spaces and locations designed to attract audiences eager to consume American films. In rural locations that could not be served through centralized film libraries and Information Centers, USIS officers physically transported projection equipment and film reels to ensure complete coverage of the countryside. Moreover, as economic systems recovered from World War II and globalization increased, USIS production teams embraced the new Cold War technology of television as a method for expanding their propaganda programs and beaming the presumably rehabilitating reach of American culture into every household in East and Southeast Asia.

The first and perhaps most productive method USIS agents employed for entrapping a large audience revolved around creating new spaces and locations for the screening, enjoyment, and discussion of films throughout Asia. Officers in USIS Information Centers (ICs), Libraries, and Cultural Centers set up projectors, large screens, comfortable chairs, and even theater-style popcorn machines to lure target audiences to USIS films. These programs, officially beginning in 1953 but having roots stretching back into the wartime years, provided information and education for a wide variety of people and organizations, such as teachers crafting course materials, labor unions preparing to organize, medical personnel establishing best practices, government workers streamlining operations, and military officers planning for the future. Youth
and student groups constituted the largest of these many target audiences as USIS officers screened films designed to engage and entertain young audiences, encouraging life-long consumption of visual media products among future leaders.56 By the end of 1953, USIS officers in Information Centers across Asia had shown hundreds of thousands of film clips at more than 120,000 screenings to as many as thirty million people.57

Developed into sites of relaxation, entertainment, and education, USIS Information Centers, officially sanctioned portals to American culture and life, operated as the main sites of film consumption outside of commercial theaters in most major urban areas in Asia throughout the 1950s. Due to increasing demand, new branches opened, film showings increased, and audiences grew. For example, in the first half of 1956, in the Manila Information Center, more than 900,000 people attended “exhibits” primarily composed of lectures and film screenings.58 In 1957, the Hong Kong Information Center opened a permanent 100-seat theater that took reservations and screened multiple hours of free color film each day.59 That same year, the Kyoto Information Center personnel treated approximately 625,000 people to a “lecture and movie” in

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56 Of the specifically stated State Department target groups for film worldwide, “youth” led the way as a category. This was followed by “intellectuals and professionals,” “labor,” and “government officials” in what became a model for USIS film deployment. See “Chart: World Target Groups,” 8 March 1950, box 3, USIA Advisory Commission on Information, P 21f Records Relating to Information Programs, 1948-1953, RG 306; NARA.

57 The numbers get a bit murky, especially as USIS facilities switched from State Department to USIA control. Also, the records do not always clearly distinguish between Information Center Showings and Mobile screenings (discussed below). See “USIA Quarterly Statistical Reports January—March 1953, April—June 1953,” 6 November 1953, Bureau of Social Science Research, The American University, box 3, Office of Research and Evaluation, P 160 Special Reports, 1953-1997, RG 306; NARA.


less than six months. Even smaller stations provided far greater numbers of films to ever increasing audiences. For example, in the second half of 1957 in Battambang City – a provincial capital in northwest Cambodia – the local USIS office screened films 523 times (almost three a day) to more than 518,600 Cambodians. Many Information Centers printed monthly pamphlets and schedules informing patrons of upcoming events, film times, and recently added library holdings to ensure that audiences continued to expand and fill USIS auditoriums (see Figure 4).
Figure 4: Information Center Monthly Program for Bangkok May 1958. This general example of an IC program advertised the films, talks, exhibits, and general hours for the center. Typically, the cover of the pamphlets depicted local audiences participating in USIS programs such as watching a film, reading books, or listening to music. See box 20, Cultural Operations Division, Far East Libraries and Centers Branch, P 51 Country Files, 1947-1965, RG 306; NARA.
In addition to expanding film libraries and distribution networks through urban areas and institutions, USIS officers created new and innovative methods for delivering propaganda films via “mobile units” directly to rural communities and remote locations throughout the region. These mobile units, with a legacy stretching back to the European battlefields of the First World War, primarily consisted of a jeep or other all-terrain vehicle outfitted with a 16mm projector and several reels of film ready to travel to the most inaccessible village or outpost. USIS officers relied on the effective nature of mobile unit programs from World War II, the immediate postwar years, and the Korean War as blueprints for their own army of mobile units, which rapidly expanded into the countryside across Asia. By the end of 1953, USIS mobile units successfully screened films to thirteen million villagers, hill tribes, minorities, and “agrarian” peoples in the “Far East,” many of whom, according to USIS sources, had never before seen a film.

These mobile unit showings, screened on a spontaneous basis in fields, camps, cliff sides, and deep jungles, acted a staple delivery method for the USIS officers capturing large audiences that otherwise would not gain exposure to US visual media products. Within a year, every USIS branch had some capacity to take films to even the most remote locations. In 1954, USIS officers in Saigon deployed mobile units to “each refugee [and prisoner] camp” in South Vietnam to help in “reducing Communist subversion potentialities.” In 1955, USIS “boat-mobiles” plied the Mekong, bringing the first films with Lao and Cambodian language soundtracks to the people along the river. In South Korea, Hong Wan-Pyo, an employee of USIS Pusan, piloted a mobile

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63 For the inception of US mobile units see Creel, 273.
64 “Quarterly Statistical Reports: January – December 1953,” 7 May 1954, box 7, Office of Research and Intelligence, P 160 Special Reports, 1953-1997, RG 306; NARA.
film van across the country screening USIS films to rural school students.\textsuperscript{67} USIS Manila even converted a surplus Air Force transportation bus into a “mobile science demonstration” vehicle delivering “scientific films” and compatible demonstration materials to far-flung schools across Luzon.\textsuperscript{68} Many of these mobile units carried their own small scale film and photographic equipment to capture footage and images of any friendly receptions among hill tribes and minority groups to be reused in later USIS propaganda efforts.\textsuperscript{69}

By 1961, USIS operatives stretched the use of mobile units to the limits, employing automobiles, boats, helicopters, and even elephants to deliver their material deep into the countryside to tens of millions of people across the porous borders of East and Southeast Asia. In areas where transportation broke down or where rocky hillsides made machine-assisted transportation impossible, USIS officers disassembled film equipment, and operated “foot-mobiles,” in which they literally carried – or where officers at least hired porters to carry – agency films to their ever increasing audiences in Asia.\textsuperscript{70}

This incredible expansion of USIS film networks and distribution systems during the 1950s and 1960s coincided with the global technological revolution of television, which agency officers hoped would provide even more opportunities to reach people directly and capture the minds of individuals not in the group setting of a fair, festival, classroom, or night on the town but in their own homes and places of work. Efforts to exploit television for overseas propaganda began as early as 1950, when Karl E. Mundt, a stridently anti-communist Republican Senator

\textsuperscript{67} 7\textsuperscript{th} USIA Report to Congress, July 1 – December 31, 1956, 30.
\textsuperscript{68} 12\textsuperscript{th} USIA Report to Congress, January 1 – June 30 1959, 18.
\textsuperscript{69} See Chapter Six.
\textsuperscript{70} In the records, around 1960, the specific audience numbers become very difficult to determine. USIS reports often conflate numbers from film, mobile units, and various newly emerging television programs. However, from this point in time, it becomes commonplace to see reports claiming that as many as half a billion people in Asia were exposed to USIS visual media products each year.
from South Dakota, took to the American press to advertise television as “America’s mightiest weapon” in the battle against communism. In an op-ed piece entitled “We Can Give the World a Vision of America,” Mundt claimed that while communists had their “great allies – hunger, ignorance, and fear,” the United States possessed a much stronger force for propaganda – television. Mundt believed that by projecting the correct “vision of America” across the globe, American television could “turn neutrals into friends and friends into strong and reliable allies for the U.S.” Moreover, “utilizing local talent,” and “speaking local dialects,” programs “could be geared directly to the interests of the people.” Mundt pictured Japan as a test case, arguing that for only $4,600,000, the USIS “would effectively blanket Japan from tip to tip,” and “bombard an entire people with new facts and new ideas” designed to demonize communism and lionize the United States.\(^\text{71}\) In 1951, Mundt and other senators successfully introduced legislation to Congress officially sanctioning US-utilization of television abroad – and a propaganda star was born.\(^\text{72}\)

By the end of 1953, USIA had a small television operation through its Voice of America Broadcasting Services office (IBS/TV) that both distributed American television abroad and encouraged the use of television itself as a global medium of mass communication. It provided roughly an hour and forty-five minutes of new agency-produced materials to twenty-four television stations in nineteen countries across the globe each week. Likewise, IBS/TV cleared approximately 300 agency films for TV use abroad.\(^\text{73}\) USIS-produced weekly news shows, not attributed to the United States, constituted the largest portion of the agency’s early television

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programing. One internal USIA report noted that “there are no visual credits to VOA, USIS, or any government source contained in this [news] program, so that in effect, when the [foreign] broadcaster uses this material he gets the credit from the audience for presenting it,” thus disseminating US-approved news materials and supporting local television programming. By the middle of 1954, IBS/TV offered foreign television broadcasters a variety of programs – “special events, business, industry, travelogues, cultural shows” – that, according to USIA reports, filled “tremendous gaps in overseas programming schedules,” and at the same time transmitted “some very important” propaganda and cultural messages for the United States.74

Although many of the agency’s earliest television efforts were addressed primarily to Europe and Latin America, the “Far East” generated widespread interest amongst USIS officers in 1953 as (semi)private television stations opened in both Japan and the Philippines. Television stations in South Korea and Thailand followed within the next three years. Moreover, in 1953, Japanese factories began production of their own cheap television sets for both domestic use and for international export.75 In the second half of 1955 alone, the number of television sets in the “Far East” increased by more than 460 percent.76 This burst of new television activity in Asia (as well as Latin America) caused IBS/TV to reconsider its programming goals and methodology. An internal agency report noted that until 1955, IBS/TV primarily distributed materials “originally intended for domestic [US] consumption and then adapted them, as far as possible, 

75 The Japanese television industry developed due to genuine internal demand yet received tremendous assistance and direction from the United States. See Simon Partner, Assembled in Japan: Electronic Goods and the Making of the Japanese Consumer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), particularly chapter 3 “The Vision of America: Bringing Television to Japan.”
76 “Summary Minutes of the Broadcast Advisory Committee,” 16 December 1955, box 179, Television Services, UD – 12W 45 Subject Files, 1959-1961, RG 306; NARA.
for overseas use.” However, the report noted, this approach negated the opportunity to create materials “targeted at specific audiences,” particularly in Asia where increasing demand for television rapidly exceeded supply. “Our primary intention,” the report spelled out, “is to ‘capture’ air time at each station in every country from the very inception of telecasting by providing material that will be useful to the strategic program” of individual USIS offices.77

Under these new agency guidelines, local and regional USIS branches gained responsibility for filming and producing at least half of all newsreel footage for use in Asia wherever a new television station or relay tower arose. IBS/TV continued to provide televised news content and pro-American television programming such as *The World through Stamps* (Craven Productions) and *The Magic of the Atom* (Handel Production), but, local USIS officers also created original content designed to captivate their particular Asian audiences.78 At first, these local materials primarily consisted of local USIS films shortened or reformatted for television uses. For example, in 1953, USIS Tokyo produced and distributed a news series on “American assistance to the Kyushu flood victims,” which, according to one USIS report, “the Japanese themselves did not adequately tell in their own newsreels.”79 In the Philippines, early USIS-produced news footage demonstrated the benefits of democracy under President Magsaysay. In other areas such as Indonesia and Cambodia, without television broadcast capabilities until 1962 and 1966 respectively, USIS officers simply displayed the technology for television at fairs, festivals, and in their own Information Centers.80

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77 “Extract from Minutes of Meeting Broadcast Advisory Committee,” 18 February 1955, box 179, Television Services, UD – 12W 45 Subject Files, 1959-1961, RG 306; NARA.
78 Ibid.
Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the popularity of television expanded across East and South East Asia, USIS officials sought to get in on the ground floor by saturating foreign broadcasters with massive amounts of televised material for distribution among all television stations. For example, by 1959, USIS Thailand produced twelve regularly scheduled television programs that were shown on both of Thailand’s broadcasting networks and accounted for eight hours of television programming a month. In addition, USIS placed more than seven films per month – approximately twenty-five percent locally produced – on both stations and produced several “‘live’ TV shows featuring,” according to a USIS report, “high Thai officials who tell their own people of the benefits of U.S. aid.” “These programs have become so popular,” the report elaborated, “that Ministers and other top-level officials are eager to participate because of the prestige they and their Ministries get from such participation” on television.81 “All TV output,” additional USIS reports claimed, concentrated “in various degrees on depicting the strength of American civilization” to their Thai audiences.82 Local branch offices crafted similar programs of various sizes and success in the Philippines, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Japan. By 1959, Romney Wheeler, the Chief of USIA Television Services, proudly reported that “television promises to become one of the most important USIS media, limited only by the funds it commands.” Wheeler elaborated on the propaganda potential of television, claiming that as “most foreign countries have only one TV network,” the situation “permits USIA to find a captive audience” for their local products.83

82 “USIS Country Plan for Thailand,” USIS Bangkok, 12, 10 July 1959, box 9, Information Center Service, Publications Division, Translation Branch, P 61 East Asia and Pacific Country Files 1948-1960, RG 306; NARA.
83 “Office Memo: IOP Meeting,” 30 July 1959, Ralph Block, box 5, Information Center Service, P 7 General Subject Files, 1953-1965, RG 306; NARA.
USIS use of television programming, film distribution networks, and Information Center screenings continued to increase in size and scope throughout the 1960s, both creating new content and supplying an increasing amount of USIS films and television content to people across Asia. The agency predicted that funding in the “Far East” for television programs would increase by fifty percent between 1962 and 1967, while funding for local production of motion pictures increased in excess of 400 percent.\(^{84}\) By 1965, the USIS estimated that on a weekly basis its most popular news segment in Japan, \textit{TBS Report}, played across twenty-one stations to an estimated audience of more than eleven million people. That same year, USIS films played on various Japanese television channels more than 2,300 times.\(^{85}\) Overall that year, USIS stations placed 13,000 hours of televised content in eighty-seven countries and utilized USIS motion pictures and television to captivate a global audience exceeding an estimated 750 million people, most of them in Asia.\(^{86}\)

\textbf{Reel and True Rehabilitation?}

During the 1950s and 1960s, the United States Information Agency built an enormous visual media propaganda apparatus designed to capture the imaginations of people across Asia and to project a reshaped vision of Asian and US culture and ideas about the “Free World.” Through the agency’s visual media programs, local USIS offices both created original films and television series to achieve political goals and to create new spaces and frames of reference for the consumption of this burgeoning form of mass media. By demonstrating the evils of

\(^{84}\) “USIA Five Year Projection Plan FY 1963 thru 1967,” 15, box 30, Information Center Service. English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.

\(^{85}\) “ITV Placement Report,” 8 April 1965, box 287, P151 Office of Policy and Programming, RG 306; NARA.

communism and the benefits of American lifestyles in literally and metaphorically moving images, USIS agents hoped to reform and rehabilitate the people and nations of Asia to function successfully in the emergent global society envisioned by the United States. Creating new visions of Asian culture on the screen and in the minds of the people, agents hoped, freed nations from any remaining colonial or wartime bondage and allowed societies to develop into model nation-states.
Chapter 5

Building Nations through Culture: Encouraging “Free World” Nationalism and Cultural Independence

Instead of “explaining” US policies, we must boldly assert US determination and capacity to help Asians progress in freedom. Instead of emphasizing anti-communism, we must encourage nationalism and independence.

USIA 5-Year Projection Report, 18 May 1962

In the early evening of 4 February 1962, the pilot trip of the first joint USIS-Thai “mobile information team” led by Thai Ministry of the Interior official Charoen Pantong arrived back in Bangkok after a lengthy propaganda tour of the nation’s isolated Northeast provinces. With a complement of seven field officers and two beaten-up surplus World War II US Army jeeps, this group covered 2600 kilometers, visiting 20,000 people across forty villages in just under two weeks. Designed, according to mission reports, “to establish a firm basis of friendship and trust among villagers” while educating them on the “traditions and customs” of Thailand, the information team discussed local issues with village elders and temple abbots, handed out pictures of the king to each household, featured dozens of films on impromptu screens of stretched bed sheets, and distributed basic supplies to several regional temples and schools.

Upon returning to Bangkok, Robert Lasher, the USIS representative of the mobile information team, sent a report back to Washington, D.C. detailing what he perceived to be the many successes of the trip. At nearly every stop, Lasher reported, people reacted positively to the team and seemed genuinely excited to meet with officials from the Thai government. Captain Charoen Pantong entertained village leaders and monks with amusing stories that mixed traditional folk humor with anti-communist themes. Everyone appreciated the USIS-produced

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films depicting the beauty of traditional dancing, the elegance of the monarchy, and the increasing strength of Thai industrialization as depicted through its growing state railways. Likewise, village schools and temples valued the paper supplies, charts, and maps provided for free by the information team.\(^2\) Perhaps most importantly of all, Lasher later told State Department officials that the team had brought at least in some small part a shared sense of Thai identity to many villagers who “had never heard of the King, the Prime Minister or, in fact, the Government of Thailand.” Increasing the villagers’ sense of being Thai through cultural identification, it was argued, helped bind these “isolated” people to the nation-state, preventing separatism and foreign communist influences. This shared sense of a national culture, USIS officers hoped, would strengthen Thailand as a whole, ultimately bringing it closer to US cultural norms and helping to maintain its position as the United States’ leading ally in Southeast Asia.\(^3\)

This mobile information team’s expedition, and the dozens that came to follow it across Thailand, represented just one facet of the growing USIS emphasis on helping foreign nations in Asia to develop national cultures that supported US military, economic, and political power during the 1950s and 1960s. With a sense that winning on the cultural front served as one clear path to winning the wider Cold War, USIS officers in the field combined their total programming efforts in support of nation-based cultural programming that they believed likely to lead foreign nations to respect and emulate US culture. Armed with expansive and vibrant programs utilizing various education methods, printed matter, and visual media, this culture-forward emphasis


\(^3\) “Department of State Memo: Work of Mobile Information Team in Northeast Thailand,” Edward E. Rice, 26 March 1962, box 3, Department of State Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs 1956-1966, RG 59; NARA.
sought to foster positive nationalism to rehabilitate postwar Asia and create new states with intellectual and cultural practices supportive of US power. At the same time, many local and national governments welcomed at least some aspects of these programs relying on US funds and cultural efforts to support their own local structures of governmental power.

Beginning in the mid-1950s, as USIS operations in Asia fully developed into a series of multimedia machines for disseminating information and causing cultural change, some of the agency’s earliest efforts to create national culture and a sense of shared cultural heritage occurred in USIS programming aimed at Overseas Chinese communities. Encouraging these people to self-identify with the wider nation in which they lived, agents argued, removed some of the risk that these communities – frequently economically and politically successful in their own right – might side with mainland China or turn revolutionary against their geographically bound nation-states. Later, in the early 1960s, with escalating US interest in the ongoing conflicts in Laos and Vietnam, USIS officers refocused their energy of helping the governments of individual nation-states develop their own programs designed to spread a shared national culture amongst their citizens. These programs, carried out across Asia, developed most completely in the border regions of Thailand, where USIS agents worked to increase state power and create a unified national identity to help prevent the possibility of communist infiltration in one of the United States’ strongest allies. These USIS programs designed both to bring people into a shared culture of the nation and to help nation-states distribute normative cultural messages to their farthest borders represented a culmination, if not the most imperialistic application, of all USIS efforts in Asia.
Overseeing Chinese Populations

Some of the earliest USIS attempts to generate nation-based cultural unity within the various states of Asia developed as a result of US efforts to encourage Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia to integrate fully with their nations of residence. By downplaying unique Chinese qualities and demonstrating mutually shared cultural practices and interests, agents hoped to prompt Chinese communities into completely embracing the culture and politics of their “home nations” rather than their recently-turned communist “homeland.” Further, USIS efforts sought to highlight the destruction to Chinese cultural life and society that had occurred in mainland China as a result of Maoist government practices. For groups that choose to retain their ethnic, linguistic, and national identity as partially or primarily Chinese – whether integrated into their home nations or not – officers further sought to reiterate the “melting pot” republican ideology of the United States in hopes that such ideas would create the “good” types of Chinese associated with the US-backed Republic of China based in Taiwan rather than Mao Zedong and the communist-run mainland.

As early as 1949, overseas USIS posts reported to Washington, D.C. that most countries of Asia had a “Chinese minority problem.” Previously, reports argued, some “minorities within these minorities” operated as communist agitators who created minor headaches for the governments of states such as Thailand and Indonesia. However, with the growing Cold War and the proclamation of “a communist regime in [mainland] China” under Mao Zedong, USIS officers feared that “the millions of Chinese scattered through Southeast Asia” would turn away from geographically prescribed nationalism and “feel the political pull of their homeland,” thus embracing the internationalism of global communist movements. Somehow, US field officials
reported, “we must influence Chinese minorities in Far Eastern countries in our favor” or lose them to the communists.⁴

Although cohesive programs developed slowly, by 1952 USIS officers operating in Asia had established a working “country plan” for Overseas Chinese living in Southeast Asia that sought both to demonstrate the superiority of the “Free World’ and to convince Chinese communities that communist China was “neither capable of nor [sic] sincerely interested in providing support and protection for Chinese minorities overseas.” Moreover, by “playing up Peiping [Beijing] policies” of “confiscation, executions, [and] regimentation,” USIS officers attempted to convince Overseas Chinese that the “expansion of Communist power” acted “contrary to the interests” of all Asian peoples. The long term goals of the program, according to internal reports, aimed at encouraging the complete “integration of Overseas Chinese into the cultural, political, and economic life of the host country without identifying the US with specific policies of [the] SEA government regarding Chinese minorities.”⁵ In attempting to achieve these long term goals of persuading Overseas Chinese to self-identify with their particular nation-state, USIS posts in Bangkok, Singapore, Saigon, Jakarta, and Manilla reached out to local communities and distributed a large variety of unattributed pamphlets, posters, films, and newsprint in various Chinese dialects.

⁴“The Problem of Southeast Asia,” 2-4, 1 November 1949, box 1, Cultural Operations Division, Far East Libraries and Centers Branch, P 55, RG 306; NARA.
⁵The idea of a “Country Plan” for Overseas Chinese played an interesting role within the USIA and the State Department. As far as this author has found, these US agencies did not base any other “country plans” on other ethnic or religious minority groups. Attempting to integrate these communities into their nations of residence of birth while simultaneously beginning with the presumption that these various populations categorically constituted a “country” in the same way that nation-states such as Japan or Thailand did reveals some of the limits of American thinking on the issue at the time. Likewise, the agency reasoned that Hong Kong and Taiwan should not necessarily be included under these headings as these countries occupied more legitimate national spaces. See, “USIE Plan for Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia 1951-1952,” Drafted in FE Command, 1 December 1951, box 4, Cultural Operations Division, Far East Libraries and Centers Branch, P 55 Central Files 1949-1955, RG 306; NARA.
Targeting businessmen, intellectuals, students, and labor, USIS Chinese-language materials primarily originated in Hong Kong or Taipei and, produced in tandem with British and Guomindang (GMD) governments, chiefly focused on the negative aspects of Communist rule in Southern China – the assumed homeland of the majority of Overseas Chinese. Pamphlets such as Red China: Red with Blood utilized photographs of public “people’s trials” and groups executions smuggled out of China by British operatives and the CIA to demonstrate to southeast Asians that in Communist China, “terror rules, for no person can ever be sure that he will not be next.” “Happiness,” the pamphlet informed readers, “is dead in China. The Communists have murdered that too.” Other pamphlets, such as Little Comrades, focused on parents’ fears for future generations by depicting portraits of young Asian children next to mock communist quotations and ironic statements designed to expose the failures of communist policies. One panel, for example, congratulated a small child for having opted to “volunteer” in Korea. Another panel displayed a child picking his teeth to “get that last grain of rice.” The pamphlet reminded the reader that under communism, “food is might scare these days!” (see figure 5).

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Figure 4: A proof frame from the pamphlet *Little Comrades*. This USIS produced pamphlet played on the fears of Overseas Chinese parents and depicted what might happen to their children under a communist régime. “Little Comrades,” first printed in Chinese perhaps as early as 1951 but later reprinted in Chinese, Vietnamese, and Burmese, box 1, Press and Publications Service, P 46 Master File Copies of Field Publications, 1951-1979, RG 306; NARA.
Other forms of information delivery, such as film and person-to-person exchanges of “Chinese nationalists” conducted by the USIS, likewise played a large role in these early efforts and demonstrated what might happen to Overseas Chinese communities should they side with communists from the mainland. In the Philippines, for example, USIS Manila helped the Secretary of the Chinese Nationalist Party of the Philippines to sponsor a five-man speaking tour group composed of former communist POWs who had refused to return to the mainland after the Korean War. This group toured the archipelago meeting with other ethnically Chinese Filipinos and provided “the truth to the masses” regarding the horrors taking place inside mainland China. To prepare the men for their speaking tour, USIS officers arranged for a private screening of several films which visually emphasized the successes of the “free Chinese” and the villainy of communism. Including titles such as *Korea Story*, *Free China’s Fighting Men*, and *When the Communists Came*, these films depicted harrowing escapes from the Red Army, “Red Aggression” in Asia, the destruction of traditional Chinese village life under communism, and the successes (and projected future successes) of the Nationalist Chinese in Taiwan.9

The film *When the Communists Came*, which depicted the horrors of starvation and indoctrination faced by a refugee from mainland China under Mao’s government, according to USIA reports, struck a particularly strong cord with the POWs.10 They told officers that “the very events depicted had been the pattern of their lives under the communist regime in Red China.” One of the POWs, Lt. Wu Chih Ling, relayed that the cherished practice of filial piety

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9 “Information Center Service Monthly Progress Report,” 26, April Report 1954, box 8, Information Center Service, English Teaching Division, P 23 Subject Files, RG 306; NARA.
had completely disappeared in the villages under the communist terror. Children now informed on their families’ activities even if it meant execution for their parents. Wu revealed to USIS officers that “his own father was killed by the communists after being betrayed by Wu’s sister who had been subverted.” After these private screenings, the ex-POWs borrowed the films to show at their speaking events, which drew large audiences throughout the country and, USIS officers proudly reported, proved “especially effective in the Chinese Communities.” Filipinos recognized the content of the productions as a form of pro-US propaganda. For example, the popular pro-US magazine Bataan – published in the United States – ran an article titled “Ex-Reds Tour Philippines for the U.S.” In the article the unnamed author seemed ambivalent about the tour, claiming that the USIS made “good use of five of the former Chinese communist prisoners that refused to go back to the Reds during the big Korean POW exchange,” by having them depict the horrors of communism. The article noted that the Chinese speakers toured the country, “lecturing on the existing evils in China under communism,” and also played “two anti-commie [propaganda] films” that bore USIS-production credits. While viewers may have been skeptical as to the accuracy of the reportage and its sources, they could not avoid the final message of the film: if their communities allowed communism to develop, all of the “horrors and miseries” suffered in the film and by their guest speakers “would unfold in their own land.”

In addition to depicting the negative aspects of rule by a Communist government, such as the destruction of village cultural life and “Chinese values,” USIS officers likewise sought to

11 “Chinese Ex-Communist Returnees from Korea Cooperate with USIS Philippines,” 8 April 1954, box 2, Motion Picture Services, P 234 Country Files, 1953-1954, RG 306; NARA.
14 Free China’s Fighting Men, USIA Productions, 1953, Film Reel, Series: Moving Images Relating to U.S. Domestic and International Activities, 1982 – 1999, RG 306; NARA.
demonstrate to Overseas Chinese the long-term benefits of integrating their social and cultural practices into their wider nations. By adopting the cultural practices of their home countries and assimilating more fully into the nation-state, USIS officers claimed, Overseas Chinese would gain more physical security and economic success for themselves and their communities. To support these goals, USIS agents conducted a number of programs at the institutional and individual level utilizing all manner of media and information exchange. One method that USIS officers found particularly useful in their goal to encourage assimilation among Chinese minority groups involved placing Chinese and local language materials side by side in predominantly Chinese libraries, schools, association houses, and workplaces. For example, USIS agents produced films and new stories depicting events of national importance to Indonesia or Thailand, but with Chinese-language sound tracks. USIS-produced *Free World* and *World Today* magazines printed in Chinese frequently featured articles covering the “good” Chinese people of Taiwan and Hong Kong as well as provided stories relating to local news and the national culture of their target regions, such as Thai advances in agriculture or Indonesia’s developing economy rather than only “Chinese” topics. USIS libraries in predominantly Chinese areas furnished the shelves with pamphlets, posters, newspapers, magazines, and books in equal parts local language and Chinese-language materials. These dual language or side-by-side language materials primarily focused on the success of the individual nation in material and cultural terms. USIS officers hoped to create a transference process through these products linking Chinese readers to the successes of the nation.

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15 For further information on these magazines and their malleable applications see chapter four.
16 See for example “USIS Country Plan for Thailand (for 1960),” June 1959, box 9, Information Center Service, Publications Division, Translation Branch, P 61 East Asia and Pacific Country Files 1948-1960, RG 306; NARA.
Aside from presenting the benefits of assimilating into each particular nation in which Overseas Chinese communities resided, USIS officials likewise sought to use the idea of an American “melting pot” to demonstrate the more generalized benefits of a multicultural yet integrated society. This approach allowed for agents simultaneously to promote the “greatness” of the United States’ diverse and multiethnic society while also encouraging cultural and even racial conformity among the Chinese within a broader national framework. By the mid-1950s, branch offices in Asia regularly produced pictorial exhibits and news reports “showing” the Overseas Chinese, according to USIS reports, “American success in amalgamating different racial strains” to benefit the nation. By 1959, these materials included films treating Alaskan and Hawaiian statehood, “emphasizing the melting pot factor” in the formation of the United States.17

The film *Hawaii, USA*, for example, claimed that if Overseas Chinese visitors traveled to Hawaii, they would find the people very familiar. “The people who live here,” the narrator pronounced, “look very much like those of any large American city where there are many races.” In Hawaii, the narrator said, “you see Filipinos, Portuguese, and Puerto Ricans --- Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese… Each national group in Hawaii has made its contribution to the State’s culture.” In the final metaphor of the film, the narrator stated that the various “layers of lava were laid one on another by countless eruptions of the past,” slowly forming grand and picturesque mountains just as the various races and cultures—“the people and their way of life” – pressed and melted together to form the various layers of society, forging “this part of the United States, Hawaii, U.S.A.” Blending ideas of racial and cultural integration while skipping over tricky issues of colonization, economic imperialism, and resistance, these films depicted

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17 “USIS Country Plan for Thailand (for 1960),” June 1959, 30. For more on these “statehood” films see chapter five.
Asians and native people as active, if perhaps subordinate, participants in the United States in an attempt to demonstrate the mutual benefits, even the “picturesque beauty,” of assimilation for both the nation and for minority groups.18

Despite reports of success in these first waves of USIS programming aimed at encouraging Overseas Chinese to embrace a more unified national culture and the nation-state, the extent to which these programs affected various communities is difficult to determine. Many factors other than US cultural work affected ethnically Chinese communities in ways that American operatives could neither predict nor control. By the late 1950s, most nations in Asia from Korea to Indonesia had enacted some form of anti-Chinese laws or policies ranging from light additional taxation on Chinese import/export businesses to outright punitive prohibitions on Chinese schools, newspapers, and community organizations.19 These government activities regularly put extra strain on relationships between central governments and ethnic Chinese enclaves and further frustrated USIS officers hoping to encourage a peaceful and smooth transition process for assimilation.20 In addition, information and propaganda from mainland China likewise stuck a thorn in the side of USIS officers seeking to promote specific cultural assimilation policies. Despite the efforts of the United States and Taiwan, pro-Communist and “neutral” materials emphasizing the successes of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) continued to be consumed with great interest among the Overseas Chinese, particularly in newsprint and educational programs. Information, and misinformation, about the PRC’s

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19 For an early example of these sorts of laws popularized across East and Southeast Asia in the 1950s and early 1960s, see the Philippines Republic Act No. 1180, “The Filipino Retail Trade Nationalization Act,” 19 June 1954. This act prohibited all retail trade by “aliens” – primarily the Overseas Chinese – other than US citizens.

economic and policy programs – such as the 1958 Great Leap Forward – fascinated Overseas Chinese audiences forced to form opinions based on misleading and partial information at best. This came as a particular concern for USIS officers in Southeast Asia, where ethnic Chinese resided in large numbers and remained an economically powerful minority.\(^{21}\)

By 1960, multiple USIS reports concluded that “the ever troublesome question of how to distribute materials effectively to Chinese communities,” and thus how to convince them to embrace the growing national cultures of the state, had “not yet been solved.”\(^{22}\) By all accounts, self-integration of Overseas Chinese communities into the state had occurred at some level through multiple government efforts, educational programs, marriage, USIS cultural programming, and a growing rejection of mainland Chinese politics and persecutions. However, this slow moving process was far from totalizing or complete. The uneven nature of acculturation continued to pose concerns for US policy makers and for the various nations of Asia that sought to assimilate or in extreme cases liquidate their minority populations.

**Taking National Culture on the Road**

As various USIS programs aimed to encourage the Overseas Chinese to embrace the national culture of their particular nation-states of residence, other USIS programs sought to help individual nation-states conduct their own cultural standardization and assimilation programs. Cooperating with the needs and direction of states in Asia, USIS officers promoted the national

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characteristics, values, goals, and successes of the nation among minorities and communities separated from centers of political control. These programs, in existence to a lesser degree since the conclusion of World War II, transitioned into major operations in early 1960s. With the growing wars in Vietnam and Laos and the changing political and military situations across East and Southeast Asia generally, USIS programs refocused on creating and promoting a strong and straightforward form of nationalism that could be easily digested by the masses. Stable nations with uniform societies and cultural practices, USIS officers reasoned, provided Asian states with the best defense against separatist and communist influence that ran counter to US interests.

In 1962, according to program development reports, USIS officers in the field began planning to “evolve” their work in Asia to combat the rise of anti-US sentiment and the growing ideological conflicts around the war in Vietnam. These political and military changes, coupled with “the awesome developments of communications, transportation, and education” in Asia, as one planning document stated, compelled “not only a shift in how we [USIS officers] tell our story but in what we say.” The report elaborated:

Instead of “explaining” US policies, we must boldly assert US determination and capacity to help Asians progress in freedom. Instead of emphasizing anti-communism, we must encourage nationalism and independence. Instead of defending ourselves against charges of colonialism, we must stress the danger of new colonialism from Red China.

This increased emphasis on encouraging nationalism, according to the program planning report, coupled well with people’s growing “demand to know” about their own cultures and the world around them, a sentiment “rising to flood tide in Asia” in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Moreover, as agents feared that Asia would “be the scene of communist subversion, infiltration, and insurrection for years to come,” this new focus on promoting nationalism through a shared
national culture allowed USIS officers to play their “required role in the US counter-insurgency program[s]” across the “Far East.”

To meet the goal of helping Asian nations bring nationalism “to greater numbers of people in wider geographic areas” within the state, field offices worked with local governments and businesses to incorporate pro-nationalism cultural content into all of their media programs developed since the end of World War II – print media production, films, slide-projection shows, music programs, speaking series, radio broadcasts, translation programs, and English teaching. The content and distribution methods varied from nation to nation. In some cases, USIS officers took a fairly subtle approach to the material in order to avoid direct calls for increased nationalism. For example, in Japan, where US interests sought both to endorse a culturally unified Japan and to downplay overtly militaristic nationalist sentiment, USIS agents worked with local labor and industry leaders to produce a series of magazine articles and news stories on allegedly “unique” Japanese management styles and practices. Penned by prominent Japanese thinkers and published through reputable local print houses such as Diamond Publishing Co. (but funded through USIS), these included articles by Fujibayashi Keizō on the “losses and gains” of preventing strikes and by Takamiya Susumu on uniquely Japanese “staffing problems and [their] roles in Japanese firms.” These works, circulated among business leaders, intellectuals, and labor unions demonstrated aspects of a normative shared culture different from and perhaps superior to “the West” yet did not specifically champion aggressive Japanese nationalism.

25 See, for example, the special feature Sutoraiku dōshitara fusegeru ka [How to Prevent Strikes] in Kindai Keiei [Management Today] Vol.2, no.3 (Jun.-Jul.) 1957 for one such case. Determining what proportion of these articles USIS officers wrote themselves versus what portion Japanese authors wrote is nearly impossible. That was after all the point of the program. Moreover, in each magazine, it is difficult to determine how many articles USIS officers
In the Philippines, on the other hand, agents utilized much more direct approaches, for example, publishing and distributing more than 20,000 pamphlets titled “Cultural Nationalism in the Philippines: Centuries-old Customs and Traditions Relived.” Falsely attributed to the Rotary Club of Manila, the pamphlet celebrated the work of Alejandro R. Roces, a distinguished Filipino artist, author, and public servant who sought to promote both hybrid and “traditional” Filipino culture through his position as founding member of the Far Eastern University (FEU) Cultural Research Group. The pamphlet, ostensibly based on the findings of Roces and “other Filipino educator[s],” sought to demonstrate the value of the work conducted by the FEU. Cultural Research Group and the importance of the university’s twenty seventh anniversary theme – “the benefits of Cultural Nationalism in the Philippines.” The pamphlet, utilizing the voice of scientific and historical research, claimed that the culture of the Filipinos represented “the meeting place of Eastern and Western Culture.” Filipinos possessed the best of “the Oriental influence” as “manifested by the people’s humility, hospitality, and warmth, traits which won the friendship and admiration of neighboring countries and other nations of the world.” At the same time that Filipinos represented the best of the “Oriental,” they likewise possessed, according to a “Filipino educator” cited by the pamphlet, “the dynamism, the force, the exciting and sharp coloration” of “Western civilization.” Building a sense of nationalism upon these shared cultural traits would not only allow the individual Filipino to become a “cultured man,” but, the pamphlet claimed, also served to uplift the nation as a whole.26

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While USIS officers began operating these cultural programs designed to increase a shared sense of nationalism and independence in every nation-state in Asia during the early 1960s, the agency’s most intense and pervasive efforts focused on creating a unified and standardized national culture in Thailand, the United States’ strongest strategical ally in mainland Southeast Asia. Before this “cultural turn,” early USIS efforts in Thailand primarily focused on cooperating with the Thai government to produce a harshly anti-communist brand of propaganda material collectively labeled by the agency as the “psychological indoctrination program” (PIP). Under the PIP, USIS officers collaborated with the Thai military, police, and politicians to produce damning news reports, films, and exhibit materials covering communist actions in the Soviet Union and China. Designed to produce visceral reactions of fear and anger throughout “the whole national structure,” these materials sought to create what might be termed a “Cold War culture” of anxiety and resentment among Thai people.27 According to Earl Wilson, the Chief Information Officer in Bangkok in 1954, USIS operatives likewise produced many “positive” materials that celebrated “Thailand’s national heritage, the King, the Buddhist religion, the natural beauty of the country, the family system, history, culture, [and the Thai] way of life” and encouraged Thai citizens to “reflect on those points from their own life and how things were getting better” in the nation. However, these materials appeared much less frequently in agency programming and assumed a secondary position behind “negative” materials that exposed the communist “strategy of world domination.”28

During late 1950s and early 1960s, the joint USIS and Thai government’s overt emphasis on negative propaganda materials transitioned rapidly into “positive” efforts to promote a sense of shared national values and cohesion within the state. By 1959, in step with wider agency programing in Asia, USIS Bangkok implored the Royal Thai Government (RTG), led by the strongly anti-Communist Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, to embrace with it a more nuanced and positive approach to nation building and anti-communist propaganda. While the long-range goal for USIS agents remained to demonstrate the “ideological superiority of the Free World” and “reinforce Thai awareness of Communist dangers” to the nation, the field operatives had also learned the value of creating a shared sense of nationalism amongst the people. Increased use of positive material that venerated the role of the monarchy, the Buddha, and Thai cultural life, USIS operative argued, would lead the nation to greater unity and security. Further, according to policy planning reports, if US and Thai government agents could “encourage Thai awareness of their own historical and cultural independence” through perceived “American interest” in their cultural traditions, Thai citizens would value their own traditions more and realize their basic “incompatibility with communist ideology.”

Field Marshal Sarit’s RTG generally approved of the new nation-based cultural focus in USIS programming, particularly as it supported reverence for the monarchy and the practice of Buddhism as state ideologies – two key elements of the government’s main political slogan: “Nation, Religion, Monarch.” The RTG began working with USIS officers to craft fresh approaches to cultural programs especially designed for use in the more isolated regions of

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Thailand’s Northern and Northeastern frontiers. Following the 10 August 1960 coup of the pro-US government in Laos, and the ongoing civil war that Thai and US policymakers feared would lead Laos further into the Soviet camp, Sarit approached the US government with increased urgency.31 In the summer of 1961, Sarit meet with US Ambassador Kenneth Todd Young multiple times at the US embassy in Bangkok to discuss expanding several economic, military, and informational programs, including USIS nation building operations. As a result of the meetings with Sarit, Ambassador Young proposed the formation of a “Program Steering Committee” (PSC) composed of top members of the USIS, CIA, SEATO, USAID (known in Thailand as USOM), and various military assistance programs.32

At biweekly meetings of the PSC beginning 15 September, the group worked on developing innovative “longer look” projects designed to strengthen the Thai state and to coordinate the “total US effort in Thailand” with the Thai government.33 One of the first major tasks tackled by the committee involved convincing Sarit of the serious need for “improved direction and coordination within the Thai Government of a country-wide information program.” Perhaps revealing the group’s frustration with their Thai counterparts (the people who ostensibly wanted greater US input and cooperation), the PSC further elaborated that USIS officers should

31 This increased urgency took on a personal note in part because the coup in Lao removed Major General Phoumi Nosavan – Field Marshal Sarit’s cousin – from power. Sarit served as one of the major supporters for his cousin’s regime in Laos and its failure despite the nation’s strong backing from the US military and CIA, greatly disturbed Sarit.
32 “Memo: Program Steering Committee” from Ambassador Young to all Country Team Members, 13 September 1961, box 3, Department of State Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs 1956-1966, RG 59; NARA.
33 “Policy Steering Committee Record, PSCR#1,” 15 September 1961, box 3, Department of State Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs 1956-1966, RG 59; NARA.
clearly “spell out the ways the US can help and what the Thais should be doing, with illustrations wherever possible.”

Despite these initial misgivings and disconnects between the PSC and the Thai government, Robert Lasher, the head of field operations and the primary USIS representative on the committee, continued to push for developing a joint Thai-US “political communication” project to help extend the Royal Thai Government’s power into the frontier zones bordering Laos and Cambodia. Working closely with the Thai Ministry of the Interior, Lasher proposed incorporating a fleet of “mobile information teams” (MITs) under the direction of the Thai government but advised and funded by USIS Bangkok. By distributing information, screening films, and representing the best of Thai culture to the far countryside via the mobile information teams, Lasher hoped, the RTG and USIS could provide cultural insights to villagers, gather information about the countryside and its inhabitants, and initiate one-to-one contact between government officials and their constituencies not fully incorporated (economically, racially, politically, culturally, or nationally) into the state.

On 15 January 1962, Lasher assembled the first mobile information team for a day of orientation and training at the Thai Ministry of the Interior’s Bangkok offices. In joint planning sessions, the ministry decided that Charoen Pantong, a mid-ranking Thai public servant fluent in Northeastern dialects, would officially lead the team while the USIS picked suitable printed and

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34 “Policy Steering Committee Record, PSCR#2,” 20 September 1961, box 3, Department of State Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs 1956-1966, RG 59; NARA.

35 The idea for mobile information teams was not an original notion per se. The USIS already operated several mobile film projectors and “bookmobiles” in its propaganda programs across Asia. Likewise, the Thai government had conducted mobile rallies and campaigns that celebrated national events, such as the semi-year Constitution Fairs since 1932. The MITs however, constituted the first mobile propaganda efforts jointly run by Thai and US operatives and applied all aspects of the US cultural and media programs – from film and print to music and public speeches – to promote national unity.
visual materials for raising awareness of national culture and the benefits of a strong independent state. The team spent the next two days planning their route, training in information gathering, and practicing media delivery at USIS headquarters in Bangkok before departing on their two-week pilot expedition to the northeast provinces. USIS reports happily recounted that “the Thais” (seven members of the eight-man team) became highly “enthusiastic” about the project and developed a sense of “the great importance of this venture” during their training with USIS operatives.\textsuperscript{36} The team first travelled northeast to the provincial capital of Udorn before visiting more than forty villages while completing a clockwise loop of Thailand’s largely unincorporated Northeastern border region (see Figure 6).\textsuperscript{37} Meeting villagers, giving lectures, showing films, collecting data on the villagers’ needs and perceptions of the government, and handing out pictures of the king to every household, the mission proceeded exactly as planned despite the team’s frequent interludes into what the MIT perceived to be “communist influenced” territory.

\textsuperscript{36} “Policy Steering Committee Record, PSCR\#14,” 16 January 1962, box 3, Department of State Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs 1956-1966, RG 59; NARA.

\textsuperscript{37} Of particular note, the team presumably visited villages in Laos in two different provinces. These cross-border efforts, conducted without the approval of the Lao government, further demonstrated the porous borders and problematic cultural and national identity of villagers in the frontier regions. See map in “Report: Mobile Information Team I First Trip,” Robert E. Lasher, March 1962, 23.
Figure 6: This map depicts the route of the first Mobile Information Team’s expedition in Thailand’s Northeastern frontier. The map, drawn by USIS agent Robert Lasher, highlights the main areas where the MIT visited villages and clearly shows that the MITs went into Laos in at least two different locations. “Report: Mobile Information Team I First Trip” Robert E. Lasher, March 1962, 23, box 3, Department of State Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs 1956-1966, RG 59; NARA.
With few serious difficulties along the road, Lasher returned to Bangkok two weeks later and presented his findings before the PSC. Lasher noted several “encouraging aspects” of the MIT’s tour emphasizing the cultural work and information gathering aspects of the pilot operation. He recommended the program be further funded, repeated, and expanded to lead the way in USIS cultural programming efforts in Thailand’s rural areas. Describing his “typical day” on the tour, Lasher recounted the team’s journey with the flair of an exotic adventure novelist. The team “would call on the Phujaiban [village leader] and other officials, prepare their lodgings for the night” at “a nearby school or other compounds,” and “often times do their own cooking.” The team then “greeted people, made short speeches in Isan [the local Northeastern Thai] dialect, visited the homes, and often took meals with the people in establishing initial rapport.” Lasher and his fellow Thai compatriots danced, drank, and generally engaged in every social opportunity available. At all but one stop, according to Lasher, the MIT “provided a uniqueness unfounded” in the history of the village: “the people had not seen a movie… did not know the amphur [district or county] officials… had not seen a car.” Around 7:00 or 7:30 p.m., the team captain Charoen started a series of movies and brief lectures regularly running approximately four hours. “To the team’s surprise,” Lasher explained, the USIS movies featuring the Thai king and his 1960 trip to the United States “proved most popular” as did the printed photographs – one of the King and one of the emerald Buddha statue – that the MIT circulated in the afternoon before the films began. The team noted the perception that these films screened during the trip increased the connection between these people and their government as well as increased the villagers’ admiration for the successes of the RTG.38

38 “Policy Steering Committee Record, PSCR#16,” 6 February 1962, box 3, Department of State Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs 1956-1966, RG 59; NARA.
Along with the novelty of movies and automobiles, Captain Charoen interspersed the films and talks “with familiar Thai legendary themes and personalities” and drew “analogies touching on current events,” such as the civil war plaguing the Laotian countryside. These exchanges primarily relied on the retelling of commonsense fables bearing warnings and depicting communists as villains. For example, Lasher recounted to the PSC that Charoen entertained the villagers with “an ancient story” from another village where “strangers came” and promised to teach the locals how to make gold. In exchange for all of the villagers’ cattle, the strangers honored their promise and imparted the secret teaching that if the people filled their baskets with sand, placed one brick in the sand, and set their baskets under their houses over night, they would wake to find that their bricks had turned to gold by the morning. The next day, with the strangers long gone having absconded with their new livestock, the villagers found no gold. The farmers “gullible enough to believe” the strangers, in Charoen’s telling, lost their meager wealth and sense of hope to “the communists,” the only people who “make this kind of [evil] promise.” These reimagined folktales endeared the MIT to the villagers while helping to bind rural Thai culture with anti-communist sentiment.

Impressed with Lasher’s report, the Program Steering Committee and the Thai government greenlighted a massive expansion of the MIT program. Lasher made several recommendations for the following trips, including distributing pictures in greater quantities, incorporating more cultural elements such as mohlam singers, keeping the number of men on the team to a minimum to improve efficiency and mobility, and bringing a polaroid camera both to capture images of success and create portable memorabilia for villagers. He also recommended

that future teams include a Thai health officer equipped with medicines, vaccines, and bandages to treat small-scale wounds, infections, and diseases among rural populations. Of course, Lasher argued, the program’s success rested entirely upon continued and increasing RTG support.41 The Thai government, likewise, strongly promoted the endeavor and envisioned three teams to be arranged on a rotational basis with a new team headed out and arriving home every two weeks. However, the RTG demanded longer training sessions for both Thai and USIS employees before they could be sent out to the countryside for extended periods. Based on a secret report by a Thai member of the first expedition that claimed “certain MIT individuals” had engaged in several “promiscuous acts with village girls,” the RTG demanded this additional training “to discourage incidents that may create resentment against the government officials instead of improving the attitudes of the villagers.”42 With these new mandates in place, the MIT program soon came to represent the largest and most successful aspect of USIS operations in Thailand.

Over the next two years the mobile information team programs expanded in terms of both their geographic coverage and cultural programming content. By the fall of 1964, the RTG and the USIS had conducted more than twenty large-scale official MIT tours. These operations sent teams to Thailand’s northern border with Burma, its eastern borders with Laos and Cambodia, and to the restive southern states bordering Malaysia. The mission of MIT units likewise extended to include providing medicine aid, encouraging community development projects, monitoring the availability of radio stations, and taking photographs of happy villagers meeting Thai and US personnel to be used in other USIS programs in Asia. For example, on the nineteenth trip, conducted just across the border from Laos between 14 September and 1 October

42 “Correction to Program Steering Committee Record #19 of February 27,” Philip M. Nagao, 8 March 1962, box 3, Department of State Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs 1956-1966, RG 59; NARA.
1964, the MIT included no fewer than thirty people providing a wide variety of services: a team captain, several regional governors and politicians, three police officers, a medical officer, an educational supervisor, a “sanitation” officer, a “public relations” radio monitor, a nurse, a “male nurse,” two mohlam singers, one musician, seven boat crew members, a veterinarian, and Robert Lasher the USIS consultant. This trip, designed to maximize “personal contact” between the Thai government and “backcountry villages,” continued to employ photos of the king and of the Buddha along with films demonstrating various aspects of Thai culture, but the addition of mohlam singers and veterinarian services created new spaces of interaction and, according to reports, an even greater appreciation for the state among the villagers. Rural peoples visited by the teams, according to MIT reports that continued to emulate exotic travel writing, could now show up early in the morning to receive free government school uniforms for their children, have their chickens vaccinated against avian cholera in the afternoon, drink a variety of alcoholic beverages with the team before dinner, watch movies and listen to speeches about Thailand’s cultural wonders in the evening, and stay up all night happily listening to folk music “until the last mohlam note [was] sung in the small hours” just before 2:00 a.m.43

Although these trips physically exhausted their crews and occasionally rose to the status of raucous pro-government parades, both the Thai administration and the United States deemed MIT expeditions as amazing successes. On the US side, every new USIS officer coming to Thailand in the 1960s had read Lasher’s “widely-distributed” and “legendary” reports in preparation for their jobs that would, in theory at least, occasionally require they participate in MIT missions. After reading Lasher’s reports of “drinking, eating exotic foods, and even taking

43 “The Nineteenth Mobile Information Team Trip, Nongkhai, September 14 through October 1, 1964, Undated 1964, Document 00182, Thailand Information Center Archive, Chulalongkorn University.
part in traditional folk dancing,” some new USIS officers such as Paul Blackburn felt that perhaps the agency should be taking a more tempered approach and not attempt “winning hearts and minds” by acting “just like the ‘Ugly American,’” the main character of a 1958 book by the same name emphasizing the inadequate and immoral aspects of US foreign policy.  

44 Most agents, however, praised the trips and remembered the successes over any potential ugliness. One USIS officer, J. Howard Garnish, recalled that the Thai personnel and USIS propaganda ensured that village-dwelling “Thais got a taste of Thailand rather than any other [communist] countries.” Later, when MITs revisited some of the villages of previous tours, Garnish remembered:

The villages still talked about the team visit, they still talked about the health aspect, they still had these pictures of the King and the Buddha on their walls. Yes, I think it was quite helpful in getting the Thais to identify with Thailand.

For Garnish, the program constituted the most successful long-term operations conducted by the USIS.  

45 Other officers, such as Earl Wilson, who later went on to be the psychological operations advisor to the commander in chief of the Pacific, remembered many successful aspects of the MIT program as well. For example, Wilson claimed, after the teams distributed pictures of the king to villagers and, “because the house[s] and shops had open fronts, in a few days we could go through these villages and see those pictures framed, hanging in every single one.” Also, when MITs brought mohlam singers on the tours, anti-communist messages easily passed to the “thousands of villagers sitting around on the ground” listening “until 2:00 or 3:00 o’clock in the morning.” These programs of utilizing native singers proved so effective, according to Wilson,

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that the agency later adopted similar programs in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and elsewhere worldwide.\textsuperscript{46}

For the Thai government, the MIT program jointly conducted by the USIS and the Ministry of the Interior developed into a blueprint for a number of other nation building projects, particularly as US interests and funding to the Southeast Asian nation increased. The Ministry of the Interior continued to invest time, resources, and personnel into the program believing that the operations helped to prevent the growth of Communism in the nation’s frontier regions. At the same time, the Thai Ministry of Defense began its own version of the program in June 1962. The first Royal Thai Army Information team, led by Colonel Lertrob Sitabutr, travelled to villages in northern Thailand and, according to reports, operated in a very similar fashion to their civilian counterparts by promoting the Thai cultural successes, speaking on the value of RTG aid projects, and building “interest in and loyalty toward King and country.” “The principal difference between the output of the army team and the civilian teams,” according to reports, “was a greater emphasis on the activities, services, and purposes of the Thai army,” particularly “its main role as the protector and defender of the independence of Thailand.”\textsuperscript{47} In addition, the RTG convinced the USOM to help fund Mobile Development Units (MDU) as part of the government nation building efforts. These “large-scale counter-subversion/counter-insurgency” programs sent mobile units to remote regions” to build roads, dig wells, and engage in various civic action programs. Modeled on the early successes of the MITs, the RTG deployed the first all Thai MDU to the countryside in mid-1962. By 1966, the government had sent more than

\textsuperscript{46} Earl Wilson, Oral History, 48.

thirteen teams into the field. All of these programs, independently conceived and developed by the Thai government based on the successes of MIT units, continued to be funded by US dollars and supplied with films, pamphlets, projectors, training, and American “observers” by the USIS in an attempt to create a specific brand of national culture desired by the Thai government and acceptable to the United States.

Searching for a Model Nation

With the development of complex nation-based cultural programs, USIS officers drew on all aspects of their informational operations and propaganda capabilities developed during the 1950s and 1960s to transform the structure of nation-states in Asia while highlighting the cultural excellence – perhaps superiority – of the United States. Working with local populations of minority groups, such as the Overseas Chinese, as well as cooperating with foreign governments looking to shore up their own control of their geographic territories, USIS agents approached the problem of building a national culture from multiple directions in hopes of developing a more perfect society receptive to the both the material and ideological presence of the United States.

As part of this problem solving effort, USIS agents began to search out a blueprint, a “model” Asian nation to hold up to others in hopes that its national culture would be emulated across the “Far East.” Despite the amazing democratization and economic success of Japan, it could not be used fully as a model for other Asian nations due to its wartime legacy, lingering concerns of indirect US influence, and its perceived rejection of Asia both before and after the wartime years. South Korea, despite representing perhaps the United States’ second most

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successful nation-building project in Asia, likewise could not serve as an example for all of its Asian neighbors as in the 1950s it suffered a catastrophic civil war that fractured the country with effects that lingered as a sign of the United States’ Cold War failures. Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam all suffered similarly in the eyes of USIS officers.

In early 1968, USIS program planning documents began to focus on the Philippines and briefly sought to hold up the Filipino national culture as an example for all Asians. As the Philippines had achieved independence and had best emulated the United States, Filipino national culture could be used, some USIS reports argued, as a model or template to create common state-based cultures in all the nations of Asia. The Filipino national culture, USIS documents claimed, included a belief in Christianity, a strong sense of liberalism, a drive toward democracy, a fluency in English, and a general “Americanization” not found in other Asian states. Based on this idea, the USIS branch in Manila began a study project designated as the “Model Country Study – Philippines” to assess precisely what “agents of change” had enabled the Filipinos to achieve this “national development” and if this information could be used to “develop USIS operational procedures for the third world” in general and Asia more specifically.49

While the results of the study proved inconclusive in terms of creating a singular blueprint to identify “agents of change” to “modernize” cultures or to cause “national development,” they did raise several questions among USIS officers in the field. In refuting the universality of the project, one USIS report stated that “the US, while well-meaning,” still needed “to arrive at a better visible understanding of Asian psychology and style to win the trust

and confidence of the Filipinos” themselves before the program could be deployed elsewhere.

Although the United States might like to use the Philippines as an Americanized model for other Asian nations to emulate, the report elaborated, the Filipinos had “a growing awareness” of their own “Asian identity and a very real desire for broader contacts with fellow Asian countries” that US policy makers could not yet understand.50

Regardless of these varying opinions, the project was short lived. In April 1969, a group of more than two thousand peasant farmers gathered under the auspices of the Filipino Agrarian Reform Movement (FARM) and planned to march on Manila demanding a vigorous implementation of land reforms across Luzon. President Ferdinand Marcos flew to meet the farmers and, to the surprise of USIS agents, pledged “to meet most of the marchers’ demands.” This protest, and other unexpected events during the course of the study, signaled to policymakers in Washington, D.C. that though the project provided “an important basis for an analytical framework,” perhaps a general blueprint for building national culture had yet to be refined. “Factual developments which were not anticipated by the study” might, USIS analysts reasoned, be just as likely to occur in any nation in which the agency operated.51

In light of these potential “factual developments” and the many other changing political, military, and economic transformations taking place across both the United States and Asia in late 1960s and early 1970s, primarily the flagging position of the United States’ military and political efforts in South Vietnam and the 1969 appointment of a new more ideologically driven USIA Director, Franklin Shakespeare, the USIA began to redirect its energies away from

culture-based counter insurgency and nation building in favor of more precisely delivered anti-communist information and propaganda aimed at the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc.
Conclusion: Cultural Turn (Away)

There are two schools of thought. One would describe cultural and educational exchange programs as “culture for culture’s sake” which would, at best, result in “mutual understanding.” The other would describe USIA as a “propaganda” program which, by manipulating the facts about the US and its foreign affairs, tries to gain acceptance for US policies.

Burnett Anderson, USIA Deputy Director, 18 September 1965

By the late 1960s, after unloading full magazine of twenty bullets into a jungle, village, or rice paddy with an M16 rifle, many American soldiers on tour in South Vietnam reached into their backpacks or belt pockets to remove a new kind of ammunition supplied by the United States Information Agency. While the bullets and cartridges remained the same, the innovative waterproof plastic wrapping conveyed a new message of hope to soldiers and civilians in Vietnamese script. Quickly littered on the ground during the reloading process, these wrappings spelled out the details of the South Vietnamese government’s ongoing Chiêu Hồi (Open Arms) program, secretly managed and guided by USIS officers in Saigon, which promised safe transit and reintegration for defecting soldiers from either the north or south. Once US forces left the scene of a skirmish or firefight, it was hoped that the Viet Cong or any of their associates, assuming they had not bled to death in the field, would read the wrappings and finally surrender in exchange for sanctuary and reconciliation. According to internal RAND Cooperation reports, the Chiêu Hồi program led to the “defection and neutralization” of nearly 200,000 “enemy adherents and personnel.”


2 Of course, these numbers continue to be much debated as contemporary reports noted that many so-called “defectors” were in fact Vietnamese civilians seeking refuge from the wars. See J.A. Koch, The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971 (Santa Monica: RAND Cooperation, 1973); Nguyễn Công Luyện, Nationalist in the Vietnam Wars: Memoirs of a Victim Turned Soldier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); and Robert J.
turning themselves in to the South Vietnamese authorities to be relocated into cities or strategic hamlets, they could expect to meet with many more aspects of the USIS’s cultural development programs, such as the film, television, English teaching programs, and lessons in their national culture. For the Vietnamese who decided not to stay in the jungle, USIS agents needed additional plans.

In early January 1967, US soldiers in Saigon embarked on Operation Cedar Falls, the largest ground assault of the American war in Vietnam. This massive search and destroy mission sent tens of thousands of US and Vietnamese soldiers into the Bình Dương Province immediately north of Saigon to root out Viet Cong and National Liberation Front (NLF) fighters who had turned the region into, in the words of one USIS report, a “Viet Cong sanctuary known as the ‘Iron triangle.’” The ground forces ripped through the heavily forested area, killing and imprisoning more than a thousand “Viet Cong” and displacing more than 6000 refugees, many of them children who had previously lived in twelve hamlets ostensibly controlled by communist factions. Military forces, in the words of a retired US Army officer, set about “uprooting the natives of these villages” and forcefully relocating the refugees into a “temporary camp” created in the provincial capital of Thủ Dầu Một, approximately twelve miles outside Saigon.

USIS personnel immediately set to work in the refugee camp distributing leaflets, plastering up posters, creating a camp newspaper, and screening a variety of Vietnamese-language pro-American and pro-South Vietnamese films such as *Vietnamese Mothers Heart*,

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Hope in the Highlands, and Our Future is Here. The highlight of the USIS media program, however, revolved around the five television sets dispersed throughout the refugee center, which broadcast “political speeches and Vietnamese Opera” (frequently written, filmed, produced, and transmitted by the USIS) in “telecasts from Saigon.” Dragged into the “Free World,” these displaced Vietnamese men, women, and children saw television, according to USIS reports, “for the first time in their lives” and could finally envision a future of “peace, freedom, unity, and progress” through American-sponsored modern life in Saigon.\(^5\) To complete the picture, USIS cameras with Vietnamese crews captured the military operation and life inside the refugee camp on brilliant 35 mm color film meant for distribution on television screens and through newsreels throughout the massive USIS networks and distribution systems around the world. USIS journalists crafted stories of the refugees’ success and their impending love for democracy and open markets. Relying on the common language of mass media, spoken more and more frequently in English, the US government made its pitch for the future of Vietnam and the future of the “Free World” to a captivated global audience.

To some USIS operatives, these programs in Vietnam that tied together counterinsurgency, nation building, and cultural and geographic relocation represented the agency’s best work delivering hard hitting propaganda in “the jungles and rice paddies” where “freedom was on the defensive.”\(^6\) For other USIS officers, these programs represented a complete breakdown of the agency’s main mission as it pushed too far into US wartime activities and crossed the line between the military counterinsurgency and the cultural effort to win friends for the United States. They argued, for example, that other Asians discovering the role of USIS

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\(^5\) JUSPAO Filed Memo #40: Psyops in a Refugee Camp,” 1-3.

involvement in military’s actions in Vietnam might be less likely to believe US materials on the benevolence of the United States’ food programs or the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Near the end of his tenure as director of the USIA in 1969, Leonard Marks started to question the role of overseas USIS activity, particularly the morality of US cultural operations that simultaneously printed beautifully illustrated books on America’s cooperative development projects in East and Southeast Asia and also resorted to printing messages on US M-16 ammunition wrappers imploring the enemy to surrender to US military forces in South Vietnam.7

If Director Marks seemed apprehensive about the direction of USIS policies and cultural programs in Asia in his final years on the job, Frank Shakespeare, the incoming director of the USIA in 1969, absolutely disdained them. Shakespeare envisioned the USIA as a purely anti-communist operation that should distance itself from counter insurgency, nation building, and issues involving decolonizing nations in favor of refocusing on the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc – the true enemy of the American way of life. In Thailand, Japan, the Philippines and other states in Asia, Shakespeare largely steered the programming away from nation-based culture programs that attempted to reorient Asian society to match American values. These programs, he mandated, should be turned over to their representative host governments which could focus their own efforts and resources on developing their individual sense of culture and nationalism. In short, Shakespeare believed the previous two decades of cultural programming conducted by USIS agents in Asia had simply not done any work to address the United States’ main foe, the Soviet Union.8

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8 These attitudes did little to endear Shakespeare to agents in the field. Many oral histories recorded by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training recalled this sea change and reflected on the Director as an
Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, USIS agents in Asia continued to teach English, fabricate newspaper articles, create films, and, although to a lesser extent, help in the construction of national cultures. However, they became more concerned with establishing “production and training centers” where USIS agents demonstrated the latest books, audio materials, films, and language lab equipment to teachers and education officials and provided access to privately produced US goods and materials. This “major educational and communications necessity” meant to “open the doors for better understanding of Western ideology” and eliminate “some of the cultural barriers that make the solution of political and economic problems inherently difficult” in Asia. According to officers in the field, these new directions and projects promoted by the USIA from Washington, D.C. took a less direct route than previous USIS branch programming and spent less energy attempting actively to transform the people and societies of the region. The agency also made greater overtures to “local schools systems,” where its operatives could “supervise the training of local teachers” in order to “improve instruction.” “Assuring appropriate content in [class] materials” further contributed to the agency’s efforts to reach students and reinforce a growing “youth” culture that would, operatives believed, naturally gravitate toward more liberal US policies.\(^9\) Other agency undertakings, such as the USIS role in Mobile Information Units, rapidly transitioned into programs operated and funded entirely by their host nations, or were cancelled for lack of funding. In the case of Thailand’s MIT programs, the RTG cancelled the teams’ activities shortly

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ideologue appalled by détente and dismissive of Asian policies. See the oral histories of Dan Oleksiw, Eugene Kopp, Paul Blackburn, J. Howard Garnish, and Richard Monsen for examples. Available at [www.adst.org](http://www.adst.org).

after US funding shifted away from cultural programs in favor of supporting more direct police and military buildup.\textsuperscript{10}

In much of the USIS-produced propaganda material circulated in Asia, USIS officers on the ground continually reported the tremendous success of their media and propaganda programs to spread American culture, products, and ideas. While it is true that many of USIA’s overall programming goals in Asia eventually occurred – the wide spread use of English as the second language of the region, increased consumption of US print and films, expansion of state-based nationalism, a love of (and sometimes a hate that stemmed from overexposure to) all things Americana, and fixed decolonization resulting in few if any truly “communist” countries in the long term – it is hard if not impossible to attribute these to the cultural work of USIS officers in the field. More realistically these results occurred in reaction to a combination of local and global transformations with which USIS agents cooperated, and at times struggled against, in the 1950s and 1960s. This is not to say that these programs had no effect on their target audiences. As officers in the field frequently noted, cultural efforts and informational programming provided the best results when attached to the already existent needs and goals of the communities in which they operated. USIS cultural programming acted more to highlight, enable, fund, produce, and then celebrate the aspects of US and foreign culture that agents saw developing in Asia as part of the new postwar and decolonizing world.

While other authors have explored the unique brand of “Cold War orientalism” that emerged as US writers and thinkers produced materials on the theme of “getting to know” Asian neighbors or “building bridges” between nations, or forming a tutelage-based hierarchical

relationships, these USIS programs highlighted an alternative model of US orientalism created for consumption and application abroad.\(^\text{11}\) Edward Said’s classical European “orientalists” sought to research, understand, classify, and document “traditional” culture, literature, and daily practices in Asia in order to manipulate various relationships of power and create uneven hierarchies that limited and defined the “oriental” other.\(^\text{12}\) USIS officers, on the other hand, largely eschewed deep research and mastery of local and regional cultures as they papered a veneer of presumably superior American cultures and products over the surface of existing structures. Asians were not dissuaded from practicing Buddhism, supporting a monarchy, speaking their native languages, or praising their nations. Rather, USIS agents encouraged the “unique” aspects of all of these cultural practices insofar as they could be reshaped to support US-style democracy, prevent communism, and sell American products. The cultural programs projected a new world where Asian peoples and societies that emulated the United States gained respect, funding, protection, and praise (even if feigned). US culture, promoted as a goal of modernization and progress, acted as a yard stick rather than a club.


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