The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945–1950

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Introduction

By definition, the cold war was understood on both sides of the conflict to be a global struggle that stopped short of direct military engagement between the superpowers (the U.S. and the USSR). In Europe, the putative center of that struggle, the geopolitical battle lines were fixed after the early 1950s, or they at least could not be altered by normal military means without provoking World War III—which would result in mutual annihilation. Therefore, each side hoped to make gains over the other by using more subtle, political, and often clandestine methods, winning the “hearts and minds” of people in the other bloc (as well as maintaining potentially wayward support in one’s own bloc), hoping to subvert the other side from within. The cold war was an enormous campaign of propaganda and psychological warfare on both sides. A vast range of cultural resources, from propaganda posters and radio broadcasts to sophisticated literary magazines, jazz bands, ballet troupes, and symphony orchestras, were weapons in what has recently come to be called the “Cultural Cold War” (Saunders 1999). Studies of the cultural cold war have proliferated since the late 1990s, most of which focus on U.S. cultural policy and are concerned with the European “theater” of this conflict (Hixson 1997; Fehrenbach and Poiger 2000; Poiger 2000; Berghahn 2001). East Asia, where the cold war was “hotter” than any other place on the planet from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s and where vestiges of the cold war still linger (most notably on the Korean peninsula), has been almost entirely neglected in the emerging literature on the cultural cold war, with the exception of a few works on the U.S. occupation of Japan (Fehrenbach and Poiger 2000, 45–80, 166–86, 224–36; Dower 1999; Sandler 1997) and studies of intelligence and “special operations” (Aldrich, Rawnsley, and Rawnsley 2000).

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I would like to thank my student Ehichung Chung for her assistance in obtaining research materials, as well as Ely Haimowitz, Theodore C. Conant, and Yomota Gorky Inuhiki for sharing their archival sources with me. Bruce Cumings, Lary May, and an anonymous reviewer for JAS offered many helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. I have also benefited from feedback on presentations of this research at Columbia University’s East Asian Institute and the Fulbright Forum in Seoul, South Korea.

The East Asian experience of the cultural cold war, like other aspects of that global conflict, was in many ways quite different from that in Europe. First, East Asia between 1950 and 1975 was the site of actual military conflict involving major cold war protagonists, especially the United States and—although sometimes indirectly—the People’s Republic of China (in Korea, Vietnam, and in a more limited fashion the Taiwan Straits). This meant that, although more combat resources were applied to this region, the cultural conflict was often cruder and less primary than in Europe, sometimes taking the form of simple wartime propaganda methods that bordered on the ludicrous, such as “loudspeaker wars,” which broadcasted propaganda across the Korean Demilitarized Zone. Second, despite the open nature of cold war conflict in East Asia, the leaders of the U.S. and USSR always saw Europe as the center of their struggle and consequently put their best cultural resources into this region. Finding an East Asian equivalent of a writer the stature of Arthur Koestler or of a magazine as sophisticated as Encounter backed by the CIA in order to fight the cultural cold war in the West is difficult. Third, because of the collapse of the Eastern bloc in Europe, sources on both sides of the cold war are now accessible to scholars (although as yet little work has been done on the Soviet side of the cultural cold war). This is not the case for East Asia, where access to relevant Chinese sources, to say nothing of North Korean and Vietnamese sources, is still quite limited and where “our” side remains somewhat reticent, as well. The cold war in East Asia is still seen by most scholars overwhelmingly in terms of military, political, and, to a lesser extent, economic conflict. As I will argue below, however, the cultural arena broadly conceived—from the realms of arts and letters to that of mass media and popular education—was the site of an intense political struggle in East Asia. This struggle was deeply implicated in the cold war that emerged in the late 1940s. Perhaps nowhere was this more the case than in Korea, the only country in East Asia occupied by both the U.S. and USSR after World War II, where the emerging superpower conflict imposed itself on a postcolonial society with far-reaching consequences, creating or deepening a political polarization that would profoundly affect and become inseparably linked to the world of cultural production. Such polarization was part of the conflict that became the Korean War and would long outlast the cold war itself.

This article is concerned with the origins of that postwar political polarization in the Korean cultural arena. The main focus is on the U.S. occupation authorities and the Korean cultural producers—educators, writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, and so on—who worked for or against the authorities. Due to a lack of data at this point, I will not be able to evaluate how culture and propaganda were received by ordinary Koreans, although there were certainly many opinions among the U.S. occupation authorities about how Koreans would and did respond to the cultural-political struggle going on around them. Although I will spend some time discussing cultural activities in the Soviet zone north of the thirty-eighth parallel, my primary concern is with American cultural policy in South Korea up to the early stages of the Korean War, ending with the U.S.–UN–Republic of Korea (ROK) recapture of most of the

1 Nevertheless, much groundbreaking work has been done in East Asian cold war history, especially on the Chinese side (see, for example, Zhang 1995, 2001; Zhai 2000; Chen 2001). To my knowledge, however, none of the recent “cold war history” literature on East Asia has directly addressed the issue of culture; its emphasis on a relatively narrow range of political concerns, mostly at the level of the top leadership (Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong, in particular), makes this literature strikingly different from much of the recent work on the cold war in Europe.
peninsula in late fall 1950. Consequently I will not be able to go into the post-Korean War period, which saw perhaps for the first time the significant penetration of American culture into (South) Korean society. It is only after the Korean War, I would argue, that a real "reorientation" (in the contemporary American occupation lingo) of Korean society and culture can be seen in which the U.S. played an enormous role as both a model and instigator of cultural change. From the American perspective, the period from 1945 to 1950 was largely a time of lost opportunities, frustrations, and a growing sense that the U.S. was losing the cultural cold war in Korea to the communists. The Korean War would permanently alter the American perception of the terms and importance of this struggle for the "hearts and minds" of the people, both in Korea and elsewhere in East Asia.

Korea, American Occupation, and the Cold War

Korea is a peculiar case in U.S. post–World War II occupation policy. In theory a liberated country, South Korea (the American zone south of the thirty-eighth parallel) was treated by the U.S. more like an occupied enemy country (Cumings 1981). The most prominent aspect of the U.S. attitude toward Korea in the initial year or two of occupation, however, was neglect. In addition, if the occupation of Korea was an afterthought of U.S. military planners, then culture was an afterthought of an afterthought. The United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) neither had a clear cultural policy nor paid much attention to cultural matters in South Korea until fears of communist subversion arose in the latter part of 1946, when the USAMGIK belatedly recognized it had a public relations problem in Korea. Even then, the Americans paid little attention to intellectuals and the Korean cultural world as such but finally began to put efforts into promoting a positive image of the U.S. within Korea, utilizing both American and Korean resources. By 1947 the USAMGIK began to fear losing ground in the propaganda war against the Soviets and started a more proactive propaganda campaign of its own, which the U.S.

2For a more extensive treatment of North Korea in the immediate postliberation years, see Armstrong 2003.

3One of the crucial elements of U.S. cultural policy in the post–Korean War years was the active collaboration between U.S. government agencies and private foundations in cultural activities abroad. U.S.-based foundations such as Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie played major roles in promoting American cultural exchange with postwar Europe (Berghahn 2001). In Asia, perhaps the most important American private organization cultivating "local talent" (as opposed to merely bringing in American artists and cultural products) from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s was the Asia Foundation, established as the Committee for Free Asia in San Francisco in 1951. In post–Korean War South Korea, the Asia Foundation supported, among other projects, the leading literary magazine Sasangye, art and literature prizes, and movie production.

4In the U.S. occupation of Germany, on the other hand, control of the cultural apparatuses (publication, broadcasting, etc.) and support among the intellectuals were much greater concerns, although hardly the most important aspects of occupation policy (see Schivelbusch 1998). American occupation planners had a similar concern in Japan (Dower 1999); in both cases, "reorientation" away from Nazism and militarism, respectively, meant transforming political, social, and economic structures and institutions in the occupied countries, as well as altering the mindsets of the local people. For the latter, of course, censorship and manipulation of cultural production were essential. As we shall see, "reorientation" in Korea was not an active U.S. policy until the Korean War.
was conducting not only in Korea and other "front-line states" in the emerging cold war but also around the world. This was the point at which Korea became part of the global cold war.

The Korean War was a turning point in the cultural cold war globally, as well as in Korea itself. What makes the Korean case distinctive is that the Korean War was not just a direct military conflict but also the only instance throughout the cold war period of "rollback" in action, that is, the military occupation of a communist territory by anticomunist forces led by the United States. The planners of the three-month U.S.-UN-ROK occupation of North Korea envisioned, but never put completely into practice, a program of "reorientation" of the North Korean population away from communism and toward American-style democracy. This was the only case in history in which an American occupation of a defeated enemy country was combined with what might be called "de-communization," analogous to "de-Nazification" in Germany and de-militarization in Japan. As such, the occupation of North Korea not only stands as a useful microcosm of cold war history but is also a suggestive and unique example of American anticomunist (or, rather, postcommunist) cultural policy in action; it possibly even affords some insight into a future united Korea, should the peninsula be unified on South Korean terms, although it certainly must be kept in mind that both South and North Korea now are very different places from what they were half a century ago.

We can trace roughly three stages in U.S. cultural policy toward Korea between the Japanese surrender and the Korean War: a period of apathy, from August 1945 to the end of 1946; alienation, in which a growing number of intellectuals became disillusioned with the U.S. occupation and moved north to the Soviet zone, from early 1946 to mid-1947; and activism, with the U.S. occupiers finally paying serious attention to the problems of propaganda and information, from mid-1947 to 1950. This late-1940s change of direction is of course directly linked to the emergence of the U.S.-Soviet cold war, and in this process the U.S. authorities in Korea—as well as elsewhere along the cold war front—expressed a growing concern with, and then a kind of faith in, the malleability of the human mind to propaganda and indoctrination in this global struggle. An important underlying assumption of the U.S. propaganda offensive from 1947 onward, and especially in the Korean War, is that communists, and Asian communists in particular, had a peculiar talent for indoctrination (what became popularly known through the Korean War as "brainwashing"), to which a society with a large and unsophisticated agrarian population such as Korea was unusually susceptible and which had to be countered with a vigorous indoctrination and education campaign on the American side. Although literature, theater, and other cultural media were important means of disseminating pro-Western propaganda, film was the medium par excellence which was thought to be most effective in the propaganda war. Film as propaganda was widely, and often thought quite effectively, used in World War II—notably in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (Taylor 1998), but Americans were no pikers in this regard. The films in Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* film series for U.S. military personnel were small masterpieces of the fusion of art and propaganda. As a reaction to the sophisticated use of film as propaganda on the communist side, the U.S. information policy put its energies and resources into the production and dissemination of politically oriented films, primarily documentaries, from 1948 onward.

*The term "brainwashing" was first popularized in the English-speaking world during the Korean War by Edward Hester's (1951) book *Brainwashing in Red China* (Gleason 1995, 92).*
Education and Intellectuals in the Early Occupation Period, 1945–46

From the vantage point of the Korean War, the U.S. military looked back on the 1945–48 occupation of South Korea with considerable self-criticism. In 1950, the U.S. Army acknowledged that the first year and a half of the occupation was “not productive in the field of reorientation” (National Archives, RG 319a, 10). U.S. cultural policy in Korea was quite unclear before the Korean War, with the partial exception of education, for which the military government (MG) had a rather consistent, if somewhat ill-conceived, policy. Schools in Korea had been closed since the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945, and one of the MG’s first priorities was to reopen the schools. As the MG later admitted, however, “American education personnel were all but totally ignorant of Korean educational conditions,” relying on missionaries and especially the Japanese for information (Occupation, 1). On 10 September, an education officer was sent from Okinawa; he read everything he knew about Korea in the Joint Army-Navy Intelligence Service (JANIS) report on the boat to Inchon. After briefings from Japanese and Korean officials of the colonial Department of Education, the MG education officer met with sixteen “eminent Koreans” in the field of education on 16 September and out of this group founded a seven-member Korean Committee on Education (Occupation, 15).

The MG’s General Order No. 4 called for all public elementary schools to be reopened by 24 September 1945 and private schools to be reopened with the permission of the American authorities. In a rather quaintly Americanized language, the order proclaimed that there would be “no racial or religious discrimination” in schools, the language of instruction would be Korean, and “teaching of no subject and observance of no practice inimical to Korea” would be allowed (SKIG 1947, 4). In practice, however, the MG maintained the Japanese system and retained Japanese administrators when schools were reopened 24 September (Occupation, 16). The ultimate goal of the U.S. planners was an education system fully staffed by Koreans but structured along American lines.

Education would be a much more problematic area than the occupation planners had anticipated. The MG was faced with the “bewildering restlessness of student bodies and faculty members during [the] first two years of occupation,” especially student and faculty strikes, which were a frequent occurrence until 1948 (Occupation, 2). The MG sarcastically noted that “exuberance over the Japanese surrender has led students into assuming [that] freedom means student control of a school” (SKIG 1947, 6). Some of the MG’s problems stemmed from the poverty and economic dislocation of postliberation Korea, in which textbooks were almost nonexistent and educational facilities deplorable; some arose out of the political and personal disputes that emerged in the schools, the most important being left-right conflicts and accusations of collaboration with the Japanese. Some of the problems were clearly of the MG’s own making, a result of its ignorance and insensitivity.

One notable example of this insensitivity was the use of school buildings for billeting occupation personnel. General John R. Hodge, commander of U.S. occupation forces, prohibited this on 29 September, but his prohibition was not widely circulated or enforced. When the U.S. Army’s Twenty-ninth General Hospital first moved into Ewha Women’s University, Ewha President Helen Kim (Kim Hwal-lan) protested, and the hospital was moved to the scientific school at Keijo Imperial University, destroying many faculty papers and a great deal of scientific equipment.
in the process. The hospital remained on campus until fall 1948, by which time Keijo Imperial had been remade into Seoul National University (SKIG 1947, 8).

The restructuring of elementary and secondary education along American lines went relatively smoothly. The area of higher education was where the U.S. military government faced its greatest difficulties. Strikes by both students and professors recurred throughout the first two years of occupation, the largest and most violent being the Seoul National University strike that began in late 1946. The SNU strike began over the proposed merger in accordance with USAMGIK Ordinance No. 102 of ten colleges in Seoul into one university, which was strongly opposed by students and faculty. After the formal merger in August 1946, trouble began with registration in October for fall semester. Student unrest reflected their opposition to the resignation or dismissal of left-wing professors, as well as the merger itself (Ch'oe 1988, 20).

Some attempt was made to encourage U.S.-Korean education training and exchange, but this had not gone very far before the Korean War. By 1949, just over one hundred Koreans were studying in the U.S. on government scholarships, in contrast to some six hundred in the USSR. The U.S. set up a teacher training center in early 1948 with twenty educators from the U.S. and a student body of some eight hundred Korean teachers (Occupation, 112). The U.S.-sponsored English Language Institute, founded in 1946, was renamed the American Language Institute in January 1947. The USAMGIK's long-term plans included the compilation of English-language textbooks, the establishment of a language clinic, and the creation of an American cultural center "where East and West may amicably meet" (Occupation, 122). The Fulbright program, established by Congress in 1946 for promoting cultural exchange between the U.S. and foreign countries, set up an office in Seoul in April 1950. The Korean War delayed the Fulbright program in Korea for the next several years. Not until well after the war ended did educational exchange between the U.S. and South Korea reach the level of exchange between the Soviet Union and North Korea in the late 1940s.

U.S. Cultural Policy and Its Critics

By 1948, South Korean students seemed relatively pacified and the education reforms more or less in place. In other areas of culture, the USAMGIK made much less effort and paid little attention, and problems, although of a different nature, were also acute. A few Americans in the lower ranks of the occupation expressed their concern over these problems. One such person was Ely Haimowitz in the USAMGIK Department of Education. Haimowitz, a classical pianist trained at Juilliard, arrived in November 1945 to be the USAMGIK's advisor for music programs. He remained in this position until the South Korean Interim Government (SKIG) was created in August 1947 and then became an advisor on cultural affairs to General Hodge's Twenty-fourth Corps headquarters until December. Although Haimowitz was not a high-ranking member of the MG, he seems to have been the only officer with regular, sustained, and official contact with members of the Korean arts world, including not only Korean musicians but also writers and artists of various kinds.

Haimowitz took to his task with evident enthusiasm. His main work initially was setting up music education in schools and for teachers. Greatly impressed with the talent and discipline of Korean musicians, he helped build up the Korea Symphony
Orchestra, the Korean Opera Association, the Seoul Symphony Orchestra, the Seoul Conservatory, and the first Department of Music at Seoul National University. Haimowitz also brought a Korean director and concert pianist to New York for study at Juilliard and tried to promote Korean music in the United States. His special passion, however, was the discovery and promotion of "native" music in Korea. He frequently went to the countryside in search of rural music, and beginning in 1946 he promoted an annual farmer's music festival in cooperation with the new National Music Academy.

Along the way, Haimowitz encountered numerous frustrations and obstacles, not the least of which was the arrogant philistinism of the U.S. occupation forces that was exacerbated by official occupation policy, which discouraged fraternization, forbade Koreans from performing in the "American" theater (which had been the best theater in Seoul before liberation), and did not allow Koreans to be entertained in American billets. Another of the more irritating obstacles was the Yi royal family, which treated its palace grounds as private property rather than public cultural assets. The main Seoul zoo, for example, was the grounds of Ch'angdok palace; when the USAMGIK tried to put it under the jurisdiction of the science museum, royal family workers refused to take care of the animals. As a result, Haimowitz dryly noted in August 1946 that "one hippopotamus, one ostrich and one camel have died" of neglect (Haimowitz 13 August 1946, 35).

More serious was the effect of political polarization in South Korea on the arts world. Artists who were considered "leftist" were continuously harassed by the police and right-wing youth groups. The Farmer's Music Festival was blocked until the very last minute by Chang T'aek-sang, notorious head of the Seoul Metropolitan Police Department. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of South Korean musicians, artists, writers, and performers moved to the North.

By 1947, Haimowitz was quite disillusioned with the MG's behavior and policy in general and its cultural policies in particular. In 1948, he wrote a lengthy evaluation to the Civil Affairs Division bitterly complaining about the MG's myopic policies. While the Americans did nothing to help to train promising Koreans, Haimowitz said, "[t]he Soviets in North Korea make a policy of sending the finest Korean talent to the USSR" (Haimowitz, "Report on Korea" 1947, 41). Furthermore, Haimowitz recounted how the renowned modern dancer Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi returned to Korea from Shanghai in the spring of 1946 and approached his department about help in starting a school of Korean dance.† Receiving no response, a few weeks later she went to the Soviet zone; the Soviets sent her and her group to Moscow to perform, and on her return she was set up with her own dance school, the Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi Studio, which remained the premier dance school in North Korea until 1956, when it was merged with the Dance Department of the State Art Academy to become the State Dance School (Han 1957, 18). Ch'oe was honored with the rank of "People's Artist" in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK [or North Korea]), and her husband, An Mak, was also a prominent writer under the North Korean regime.

Haimowitz felt as though the USAMGIK had squandered the friendship of Koreans in the South through its arrogant behavior and its alignment with a right-wing minority. He concluded that American prestige depended on the good will of ordinary Koreans and intellectuals, "not [on] the wishes of a few selfish Koreans power-hungry and anxious to maintain themselves at our expense—a group whose edifice is

†Although Haimowitz here says that he met Ch'oe in the spring of 1946, his reports at the time indicate that they met in mid-June (17 June 1946).
bound to collapse upon our withdrawal because of its rotten foundations” (Haimowitz, “Report on Korea” 1947, 44).

Active Propaganda Phase, 1947–48

From 1946 to 1948, the U.S. treatment of information and culture as part of its foreign policy changed dramatically as the cold war emerged around the world. Congress reached a consensus in 1947 to establish a postwar propaganda effort. Psychological warfare, embodied in the Office of War Information that was abolished by President Harry S. Truman on 31 August 1945 (although it had never really disappeared), was revived. On the other side, the Soviets established the Cominform as a direct response to the propaganda success of the European Recovery Plan, or Marshall Plan, in Western Europe (Hixson 1997, 5–7). Culture, information, and academic exchange became new weapons in the cold war. This new cultural cold war took various forms, not necessarily linked to each other in an integral way: among the major landmarks were the Fulbright program, launched in 1946; the Central Intelligence Agency, established out of the wartime Office of Strategic Studies in 1947; and the Smith-Mundt Act, passed by Congress in January 1948 to promote “mutual understanding” between Americans and other peoples in the world. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 led to the implementation of National Security Council Directive No. 68, which is best known for its recommendation to increase military spending massively but also called for a substantial increase in funding for information services (Foglesong 1999, 57). In 1951, the Psychological Strategy Board was created to coordinate activities in information, propaganda, and psychological warfare among the State Department, the Defense Department, the CIA, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Lucas 1996).

The U.S. occupation in Korea reflected these policy changes in Washington. In mid-1947 the Office of Civil Information was formed as a staff section of the U.S. Army’s Twenty-fourth Corps headquarters in Seoul, the counterpart of the military government’s Office of Public Information (National Archives, RG 319a, 10). The United States Information Service (USIS) established an office in Seoul and branch centers in the provinces, beginning with Pusan in fall 1947, in Inchon and Ch’unch’ŏn in January 1948, and followed by offices in Ch’ŏngju, Ch’ŏnju, Taegon, Kaesong, Kwangju, Taegu, and on Cheju Island. Each provincial USIS center was to have a staff of ten to thirty Koreans and two Americans. Seoul headquarters would also have production units for motion pictures, exhibits, radio, and publication; a puppet-show unit was also developed in mid-1948. American-sponsored six-car “propaganda trains” traveled through South Korea in 1947 and 1948, reaching a peak of activity during the May 1948 presidential elections. The USIS began a mobile motion picture operation that was alleged to have reached every county in South Korea by mid-1948, although administration and equipment were poor.

In preparation for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea, the army turned the whole culture and information program over to the State Department on 1 January 1949, and emphasis shifted from information to cultural relations through USIS programs. The Fulbright program, for example, was established in Korea in April 1950, although it did not begin scholarly exchanges until 1960, due to the disruption of the war. Motion picture work also expanded, “but without adequate American direction,” the U.S. military later complained (National Archives, RG 319a, 10).
Among the important “private” initiatives in film was the Protestant Audio-Visual Committee, led by Presbyterian missionary E. Otto De Camp, which was the basis for the Christian Broadcasting Corporation that was about to be launched when war broke out.

Film would be an important part of the global cold war information program. American films had been shown in the U.S.-occupied areas on an ad hoc basis, but in the fall of 1948 the U.S. military began a coordinated program of documentary film production and dissemination for occupied territories. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPA) had sent representatives to occupied Germany and Japan, but the occupation authorities there complained that these representatives were “commercial agents, without judgment on re-education and re-orientation aims” of the military governments (National Archives, RG 319d, n.p.). For example, the film Johnny Belinda was criticized by the MG in Germany for glorifying rape and murder at a time when war criminals were on trial and facing possible execution (National Archives, RG 319d).

To address the film needs of reorientation, the Motion Picture Program Abroad was initiated in September 1948. That month, Kenneth C. Royall, secretary of the army, met in New York with Eric Johnston, president of the MPA, to ask whether “the American motion picture industry could supply sufficient one and two reel films to meet the needs of reorientation and reeducation in these occupied or liberated countries” (National Archives, RG 319e, 1). MPA Vice President Francis S. Harmon analyzed all short films that had been produced since 1941; in October he wrote back with a suggested list of seventy-eight films, of which the MPA could supply half, with the rest to be produced by the Motion Picture Section of the U.S. Army to fit local conditions. “The entire film program overseas should present the American way of life,” Harmon wrote, and he proposed that “a limited number of documentaries which deal directly with our basic institutions spell out in a manner quite unnecessary for American audiences, the successful operation of our democratic processes for Germans, Austrians, Japanese and Korean audiences” (National Archives, RG 319e, 1). The program needed more films “which deal with the daily life and work of average Americans, the cultural and educational activities of American communities, music, art and religion, the manifold activities of women, and with the successful operation of our democratic institutions.” The films should “avoid the flavor of propaganda” and present their subjects “in an objective manner designed to let the facts speak for themselves” (National Archives, RG 319e, 2-3). The films should be sensitive to the devastation and poverty of the occupied areas and “avoid picturing the United States as a land of abundance and luxury.” Rather, they “should show the simplicity of living in the United States.” The main emphasis of these films should be on democracy in action, “the grass roots pushing upward ... common men working in association to solve their problems, whatever their nature.... We should aim to show in each picture, in miniature, 140,000,000 people who live democracy in their daily action” (National Archives, RG 319e, 3, emphasis in original).

Thus was born the Motion Picture Section (MPS) of the Reorientation Branch of the Army’s Civil Affairs Division, which adopted the following as its statement of purpose: “The reorientation, reeducation, and democratization of the peoples of the occupied areas—Germany, Austria, Japan and Korea—through the use of effective film” (National Archives, RG319e, 3). Furthermore, the mission statement declared that “our initial reorientation task is to expose the essential falsity and depravity of police state ideology; to mirror for our audience the catastrophic results of this ideology for all mankind; and to rekindle a sense of moral responsibility in the
occupied peoples.” This was a program clearly designed for the defeated enemy states, Germany and Japan; Austria, which had voluntarily merged with Nazi Germany, might also be seen as a case of reorientation away from “police state ideology.” But, how did this apply to Korea? If anything, a police state was emerging, not disappearing, in the form of Syngman Rhee’s dictatorship in South Korea since August 1948; if the reference was to the Japanese colonial police state, then the U.S. occupation had egregiously failed to remove the most active and notorious vestige of that state, the colonial-era police force itself. What Koreans were to be reoriented toward was clear: American-style liberal democracy. But, from what were Koreans to be reoriented? By fall 1950, the Americans would have the answer to this question.

Up to 1948 the activities of the Motion Picture Section of the Office of Civil Information in Korea had been “mainly confined to [the] censoring and licensing of movies from South Korea, advising of Korean Motion Picture Section, Department of Public Information, and adapting of several American documentaries for Korean consumption” (National Archives, RG 319, 1). With the new Film Reorientation Program, the MPS launched a newsreel series called Progress of Korea dealing with Korea-specific issues, starting with a newsreel on the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK); nine more newsreels came out in quick succession, including several on the South Korean elections. In fall 1948, MPS was producing one newsreel a week, some made entirely in Korea, others with sound recorded in Korea but printed in New York. As the Office of Civil Information described it, “the editorial intention was to report on film these events exactly as they happened utilizing the narrated sound track to point up [sic] the free and democratic principles being used, the genuine desire on the part of the American occupation to aid and strengthen the love of freedom and the wish for sovereignty on the part of the Korean people” (National Archives, RG 319). The motion picture program was continuously plagued by language barriers, poorly trained technicians, shortages of supplies and equipment (16-millimeter stock ran out in April 1948, forcing the MPS to borrow from Japan), and, not least, the severance of electric power from North Korea in May 1948, on which the South had been almost completely dependent for its electricity needs.7

South Koreans themselves had begun to produce newsreels shortly after liberation, although it took some time to begin the production of feature films. Film production after liberation was in a chaotic state. The Japanese had developed an extensive motion picture industry in colonial Korea, but it was run at the top levels entirely by Japanese. With the outbreak of the Pacific War, the existing ten private film companies were abolished and replaced by a single, government-run Chosen Motion Picture Company (Anderson and Richie 1959, 151). Although the Japanese left behind the film equipment, there were few trained directors, no producers to speak of, and a limited number of movie houses—ninety-nine theaters for a population of twenty million, all of which had been owned by Japanese before liberation (O 1949, 2).8 As a result of

7Before the Korean War, some 90 percent of Korea’s hydroelectric power sources were located in the northern part of the peninsula. For several months the USAMGIK and the North Korean People’s Committee, the central government of North Korea, disputed the amount of payment the South owed the North for electricity transfers. The North finally cut off power to the South on 14 May 1948, throwing USAMGIK’s economic reconstruction policy into turmoil.

8O Yong-jin, a novelist and playwright, was from the North, where he was briefly involved with film production under the Soviet Civil Administration before migrating to the South. After the Korean War, he worked for the Asia Foundation’s Asia Cultural Film Company, which established a film studio on the outskirts of Seoul. At the Asian Film Festival in 1956, the film of his play Sijip ganun nal (The wedding day) became the first South Korean film to win an international prize.
these limitations, some filmmakers returned to producing cheap, 16-millimeter silent films designed to be accompanied by a pyōnṣa, or “live narrator” (known as benshi in Japan, where the practice originated). Kinodrama, a combination of film clips and stage acting originally from Russia and introduced to Korea by Japan in 1919, also made a comeback (Lee and Choe 1998, 25). A number of silent and sound films with a nationalist motif emerged in those years and dealt with the lives of anticolonial patriots such as An Chung-gún and Yun Pong-gil. Most of these so-called liberation films, at least in the opinion of contemporary critic O Yong-jin, were technical and artistic disasters (O 1949, 2). Few survived the Korean War.

The U.S. military government gave something of a boost to the Korean film industry at the beginning of the occupation, when the Army Press Department asked the Koreans to make newsreels (Lee and Choe 1998, 83). Many Koreans were employed in the Civil Information documentary program; after the creation of the Republic of Korea in August 1948, the U.S. Army moved its film operation to Chinhae, where it continued to produce Liberty Newsreels (Lee and Choe 1998, 96). The new Syngman Rhee regime had its own Office of Public Information, which produced government newsreels called Korea News. The Ministry of Defense set up a film studio in Pusan, and both the air force and navy had film units. Sin Sang-ok, who became one of South Korea’s top directors before he was allegedly kidnapped by North Korean agents in the late 1970s, began his film work in the air force film unit (Lee and Choe 1998, 100–101). Feature filmmaking had finally resumed by 1947, and in 1948 and 1949 a number of films with anticommunist themes were produced. The most successful of these anticommunist films was Han Hyŏng-mo’s Songbyongul Ttulgo (Break down the castle wall), based on the suppression of the Yŏsu Mutiny in 1948 (Lee and Choe 1998, 87). Syngman Rhee even had a hagiographical film (Yi Sungman kwa Tongnip hyŏphoe [Syngman Rhee and the independence club]) based loosely on his early career as an independence fighter. Unfortunately, no copies of that film appear to exist at present.

Like many other aspects of public life in South Korea, the film world soon split into left and right. Working outside of the MG-sponsored system, the left-wing Chosŏn Film Unit produced its own newsreels and held film events in the months following liberation. While more conservative members of the film community complained of domination by “left-wing sympathizers and underground North Korean agents,” (O 1949, 2) left-wing filmmakers and fans faced harassment by the right wing. The right-wing government that emerged by 1947 strictly censored film for both political and social content (abolishing kissing scenes from foreign films, for example—the opposite of U.S. occupation policy in Japan, which encouraged the portrayal of such behavior in films shown to the Japanese), and conflict over film and politics went up to the highest levels of occupation authorities. Indeed, the immediate cause for the closure of the Soviet consulate in Seoul by order of the USAMGIK on 2 July 1946 was a dispute over Soviet film.

The MG had suspected the Soviets in the American zone of espionage and agitation almost from the beginning, and despite much evidence that these activities were carried out by South Korean leftists without Soviet assistance, the MG blamed every strike and anti-MG protest on the Kremlin. General Hodge seems to have been particularly annoyed with the Soviet consulate’s use of film for propaganda and profit—especially profit. In January 1946, the MG learned that the Soviet consulate was renting films to Korean theaters “on a commercial basis” and showing them throughout South Korea (National Archives, RG 338, 296). General Hodge informed the head of the Seoul consulate, Aleksandr Sergeivich Polianskii, that “commercial
ventures of such a nature are not deemed to be in keeping with the status of your office” (National Archives, RG 338, 296). On 22 February the Motion Picture Section of the Department of Public Information gave permission for the consulate to show three documentary films which all dealt with the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II; four other films, including Sergei Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible, were denied permission to be screened (National Archives, RG 338, 298). Still convinced that the Soviets were abusing their films for propaganda and commercial purposes, the USAMGIK banned all Soviet film screenings in the American zone on 9 March. Finally on 27 April, General Hodge gave Polianskii his ultimatum: the Soviet consular presence in a zone of American military occupation was itself “highly irregular,” and the functions of the consulate, beginning with its film program, were to cease immediately—unless the Soviets agreed to a reciprocal American consular presence in Pyongyang, where the U.S. had “important manufacturing, missionary, cultural and residential property” (National Archives, RG 338, 303). This American demand was deemed unacceptable; Moscow ordered the consulate closed in June; and Polianskii, his family, and his staff left by train for Pyongyang on 2 July.

The Soviet Zone

In Korea, as in Eastern Europe and Germany, culture played a much more central role in Soviet occupation policy, at least in the initial stages, than it did for the U.S. occupation policy. Soviet occupation authorities succeeded in cultivating support among local intelligentsia and dominating the cultural apparatuses to a degree their American counterparts often envied (Naimark 1995, 398). This partly reflected, of course, the state control of culture within the Soviet Union itself and its application abroad. In the Soviet system and its East European offshoots, culture was treated in a way similar to the economy, with centralized planning, explicit quotas, and warlike “campaigns” (Bahro 1981, 39). North Korea under Soviet occupation followed this approach very closely. As a State Department study of the DPRK observed in 1951: “[m]ovie and theater attendance, the number of lecture meetings, the distribution of newspapers and books, and even estimated radio audiences were set forth in advance in the economic plans as production quotas that the responsible officials and organizations were required to meet” (Department of State [1951] 1961, 92).

This was the period of “Zhdanovism” in the USSR, with the cultural sphere dominated by the policies of Stalin’s cultural tsar, Andrei Zhdanov, and “socialist realism” the dominant mode of expression. After a period of relative intellectual freedom that lasted less than two years, the North Korean literary scene would enter its own “Zhdanovist” phase of state-dictated socialist realism in spring 1947 (Kwon 1991, 59; Myers 1994).

The Soviet cultural presence in North Korea included the Soviet Information Bureau; the international book agency, Mezhdunarodnaia kniga (International book), which distributed Soviet books and journals in Korean translation; the Soviet news agency, TASS; and Sovexportfilm, a branch of the Ministry of the Cinema Industry (National Archives, RG 332, 18). Soviet theater, dance, music, film, literature, and art were widely promoted in North Korea. After the DPRK and the USSR signed an

9The three Soviet films permitted were Moscow Victory Parade, March Toward Vienna, and Surrender Ceremony on the Missouri.
agreement in early 1949 on cultural exchange, North Korean dance troupes, literature, and arts were brought to the Soviet Union. Between 1945 and 1950, some seventy Russian and Soviet literary works were translated into Korean, along with hundreds of technical works, histories, scientific texts, and journals (Lankov 1995, 314). Russian was made the official second language of North Korea, becoming compulsory in senior middle school in 1947 and lower middle school in 1948. In 1949, English was discontinued and replaced by Russian as a requirement for entrance to Kim Il Sung University.

The main channel for cultural exchange between the USSR and North Korea was the Korean-Soviet Culture Society (Cho-Sso munhwa hyŏphoe), a branch of the Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), which was established in North Korea in November 1945. Its flagship journal was Cho-Sso ch'insŏn (Korean-Soviet friendship). Cho-Sso munhwa hyŏphoe claimed a membership of 1.3 million in late 1949, making it one of the largest social organizations in North Korea, with branches throughout the country down to village and street-level pan (neighborhood) (Department of State [1951] 1961, 110–11). A corresponding organization was established in Moscow, and in 1956 the name of the organization was changed to Cho-Sso ch'insŏn hyŏphoe (Korean-Soviet friendship society). Similar to the United States Information Service (USIS) in Seoul, Cho-Sso ch'insŏn hyŏphoe was designed to promote cultural exchange and propagate positive images of the occupying country. Cho-Sso ch'insŏn ran articles praising Soviet socialism and Soviet culture, as well as translations of Soviet works. The bulk of Cho-Sso ch'insŏn, however, was devoted to Korean writers and articles on North Korean political affairs, with Soviet-related articles relegated to the back sections (see figs. 1 and 2). One early issue, for example, begins with a lead article by Kim Il Sung addressing Korean scientists, writers, and artists, and is followed by an article by Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik on the “historical development of democracy” (minjujuui ŭi sajok palchon) (National Archives, RG 242a, 8–75). This was quite unlike the USIS journal Amerika, which consisted almost entirely of American texts in translation (see figs. 3, 4, and 5). Soviet cultural policies in North Korea, as the USAMGIK in the South grudgingly acknowledged, gave much more space and encouragement to Korean cultural expression—so long as it was not critical of Soviet occupation policies—than did similar U.S. occupation organs. As a 1947 U.S. Army intelligence report explained:

The Soviets have created considerable good will by placing special emphasis on native Korean culture. Drawing on their vast fund of experience in working with minority groups in the USSR, the Soviet advisors on cultural affairs have encouraged the study of native folk dancing, literature, and music. . . . This attention given to the national culture will continue to pay large propaganda dividends to the People’s Committee. (National Archives, RG 332, 19)

Like the Americans, the Soviets put a priority on reforming education in their zone of occupied Korea. Almost immediately, colonial-era textbooks were replaced with Soviet texts in translation. Dozens of ethnic Koreans were brought from the USSR in order to train North Korean teachers (Yang and Chee 1963, 127). In 1946 North Korea and the USSR set up a program of sending 150 Korean students a year

10VOKS was formed in 1925 in the USSR, and the alleged success of VOKS in promoting Soviet culture abroad helped justify a major U.S. government-sponsored “cultural counter-offensive” in the 1950s under the auspices of the United States Information Agency (National Security Archives 1954, 4).
to the Soviet Union for three- to five-year programs of study, and by the end of 1949 more than 600 North Korean students were in the USSR (Department of State [1951] 1961, 62). No less a figure than Paek Nam-un, the leading Marxist historian of the colonial period and minister of education in the first DPRK cabinet of 1948, proclaimed after a visit to the USSR in 1949 that Koreans must closely follow the example of Soviet education and study the “new type of Soviet man,” paying particular attention to Soviet science, the “world’s leader” (Paek 1950, 3–4).

An extensive school system was established within a year after liberation and was expanded further in the 1948 economic plan and the 1949–51 two-year economic plan (Department of State [1951] 1961, 76). Schooling was to begin with five years of compulsory primary school (inmin bakkyo, or “people’s schools”), followed by a three-year lower middle school, and then a three-year higher middle school. Graduates of the higher middle schools could attend technical college or university, including Kim Il Sung University, which was established in October 1946; higher education was to be funded by state scholarships (National Archives, RG 332, 18). Two aspects of the new education system seem to have been particularly popular and stand in contrast to the more conservative education reforms in the American zone. One was that, in contrast to the elitist education of colonial and precolonial times, schools were open to members of all classes, giving preference to children of workers and peasants. Second, the regime made a concerted effort to attack illiteracy, promoting the use of phonetic hangul, instead of Chinese characters, and setting up courses to teach reading
in villages, factories, and among the military (Schramm and Riley 1951a, 761). The regime claimed to have brought literacy to more than two million farmers by 1949 (Department of State [1951] 1961, 76). Unlike in the South, education in the North was free at the elementary levels and heavily subsidized by scholarships at the higher levels. On the other hand, the propaganda content of education was high, and students protested the politicization of education numerous times during the Soviet occupation. The largest student protest was in the city of Sinuiju in December 1945, which provoked a response from the Soviet and North Korean security forces that ended up killing dozens and injuring hundreds (Armstrong 2003, 63).

In addition to the promotion of literature and the arts in a much more direct and proactive way than was done by the Americans in the South—we have already seen the case of Ch’oe Sŭng-hŭi, Korea’s leading dancer, who was rebuffed by the Americans but embraced by the Soviets—popular culture and the mass media were important concerns for the Soviet occupation authorities. Mass media of the time included radio and, perhaps more important, cinema. Stalin had once said that “[t]he cinema is the greatest means of mass agitation. The task is to take it into our own hands” (Taylor 1998, 49). Both the Soviet occupation authorities and the Koreans trained under them would take this dictum to heart, and cinema would play a key role in the political socialization of the DPRK. By the 1970s, DPRK cinema would even come under the close supervision and patronization of Kim Jong Il, the current North Korean leader.  

"For a more detailed description of the early North Korean film industry, see Armstrong 2002."
Figure 3. Cover of USIS journal Amerika, captured by the North Koreans during the Korean War, and recaptured by the Americans. Note the Russian handwriting, which identifies the title of the journal and gives its date (April). Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.
The Soviets were much more generous than the Americans were in assisting Koreans in developing a local film industry, especially considering that nearly all colonial-era film equipment was in the American zone. According to the playwright O, who was active in filmmaking circles in Pyongyang at the time, the Red Army signed a film production agreement with the People's Political Committee of South P'yongan Province in 1946 and brought in film equipment and Soviet technicians (1949, 1). Offers of training and good wages drew many aspiring filmmakers from the South. In 1948 the DPRK established a film studio, eliminated the tax on movie theaters (something the South Korean government did not do until the late 1950s), set up a system of subsidized food and housing for Koreans involved in filmmaking, and sent many film artists to the Soviet Union for training. Evaluating film in North Korea in 1949, O acknowledged that “[a]ll production, of course, must always faithfully mirror the party line. . . . But within that BIG limitation, the quality of the product was and is good, and the output is steadily increasing” (1949, 2).

What is striking about the “party line” in early North Korean films, however, is the degree to which Korean nationalism, and not pro-Soviet “socialist internationalism,” is the recurring theme. For example, in a 1949 issue of the DPRK journal Yonghwa yesul (Film arts), Kim U-sŏng, vice chairman of the Ministry of Culture and Propaganda, wrote at length about the political importance of film in North Korea (see fig. 6). Although much of his statement on the nature of cinema reiterates the standard Stalinist approach to film, the content of Kim’s piece—beginning with the title “Unification and Independence of the Fatherland and the Mission of Film...
Artists"—stresses nationalist themes over praise for the USSR. Similar to the other arts, cinema in the Soviet Union was the "pinnacle" of creative achievement, and the mission of cinema in Korea was to be an instrument of positive state policy under the "revolutionary guidance" of the Soviet cinematic model. Later in the text, the author claims that North Korean cinema had become a state product "under the guidance of our nation's heroic leader Premier Kim Il Sung" (National Archives, RG 242b, 5–12). The political purpose of cinema was to fill the masses with patriotic fervor; Soviet cinema was the model, but Korean nationalism of a particular North Korean variety comprised the propaganda content.

This approach is most strikingly evident in the first feature film produced in the DPRK, Nae Kobyang (My hometown), which was released in 1949 (see fig. 6). Although the North Korean film industry produced fewer films than the South Korean film industry—a grand total of two feature films was made in North Korea before the Korean War, as opposed to some three dozen in the South—the technical and artistic quality of Nae Kobyang is arguably higher than that of any South Korean film of the liberation period. Nae Kobyang stars the leading actress of the colonial period, Mun Ye-bong, who had played the title role in the first sound version of The Story of

12Early North Korean films are difficult to obtain, to say the least. I am grateful to Yomota Gorky Inuhiko of Meiji Gakuin University for giving me a video copy of Nae Kobyang from his personal collection. Several North Korean documentaries from the late 1940s were seized by American forces during the Korean War and are now in the U.S. National Archives. See National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 242, Motion Picture Films, Series MID.
Ch’unjyang in 1935 and later was awarded the title of “People’s Actress” by the DPRK government. Although the influence of Soviet cinematic technique is obvious in Nae Kohyang, the Soviets themselves are not even mentioned.

The film tells the story of the founding of the DPRK through the experience of Kwan-p’il, an impoverished farmer’s son who joins the anti-Japanese partisans in Manchuria in the late 1930s. On 15 August 1945, Korea is liberated—but not by the
Russians. An intertitle proclaims, “Patriotic General Kim Il Sung overthrows Japanese imperialism and liberates the Fatherland.” Kwan-p’il joins the new regime in Pyongyang and becomes a cadre in the Korean Workers’ Party, even meeting Kim Il Sung himself, who is shown in brief documentary clips. Finally, dressed smartly in a cadre’s suit, Kwan-p’il returns to his hometown as a government official. There he is greeted by a crowd of welcoming villagers and is emotionally reunited with his ecstatic mother and his village sweetheart, Ok-tan, played by Mun Ye-bong. The last words of the film praise the “gift” of land that Kim Il Sung has given to the peasants of Korea:

Ok-tan: Oh—General Kim Il Sung has given the land to our peasants.
Kwan-p’il: Yes. From now on, the land belongs to the peasants forever.

Nae Kobyang is a remarkable encapsulation of the fundamental myths that would shape the DPRK’s image of itself for decades to come. It is nationalist state propaganda in the form of a technically and artistically sophisticated (for its time and place) feature film. North Korea, we are told, was not founded under the auspices of the Soviet Red Army but is the legitimate product of a revolutionary, anticolonial armed struggle led by Kim Il Sung in Manchuria. This collapse of class struggle into anticolonial national struggle, and the embodiment of that struggle in the person of Kim Il Sung in his role as an anti-Japanese resistance leader, foreshadowed by some two decades the central theme of the “juche cinema” of the late 1960s and after (Kim 1996).¹³

In many ways, Nae Kobyang is a more successful film than its counterparts in the South, the patriotic “liberation films.” Or at least, this is how it would appear from what we know secondhand—few of the South Korean films have survived. South Korean film lore would suggest, for example, that Yi Sungman kwa Tongnip hyophoe, which attempts to create a filmic hagiography of former South Korean president Syngman Rhee in much the same way that Nae Kobyang glorifies Kim Il Sung, was an artistic disaster best left forgotten. In the microcosmic cultural cold war emerging between South and North Korea, the North concentrated its cultural and economic resources far more directly on the “struggle for the hearts and minds of the people” than did the South. Within a year of Nae Kobyang’s release, however, the North-South political competition would erupt into a brutal fratricidal war that would draw in both the U.S. and China.

War and Occupation

The Korean People’s Army (KPA) struck south across the thirty-eighth parallel on 25 June 1950. The KPA included hundreds of “cultural officers” who attempted to reconstruct the educational and cultural system in the South along North Korean lines. The political, economic, social, and cultural transformation of the previous five years in the North was instituted in one stroke, over a matter of three months, in the KPA-occupied South. When General Douglas MacArthur led the UN forces against the North Koreans and then across the thirty-eighth parallel in September and early October, a countervailing transformation was then imposed on the North. This military conquest of a communist society was a unique experience in the history of

¹³Juche, usually translated as “self-reliance,” was the highly nationalistic and even autarkic ideology that became the DPRK’s “ruling principle” of politics, as well as culture, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was very closely associated with the “cult” that burgeoned at that time of Kim Il Sung and his family.
Table 1. Support for North Korean Regime, 1946–50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>1946</th>
<th>1950</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factory and Common Laborers</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Archives, RG 497, 2.

the cold war in every respect, not least of which was the opportunity to reform the minds of a population “brainwashed” by communist propaganda.

The U.S.-UN-ROK occupation of North Korea from early October to late November 1950 offered an unprecedented opportunity for Americans to study the “psychology of communism.” In October–November 1950, the United States Air Force commissioned a psychological study of refugees from North Korea and South Koreans who had lived through the ninety-day communist occupation of the South. The study concluded that the communist “monopoly of information” had been “at least 90% effective” (Schramm and Riley 1951a, 765; Schramm and Riley 1951b). Nevertheless, there were “cracks” in this monolithic information control: people had secretly listened to radio broadcasts from the South; rumors from the outside spread through well-established networks of friends, relatives, and neighbors; even if active resistance was minimal, there were those who quietly refused to believe the propaganda.

After five years of a highly compressed revolutionary experience in society, economy, politics, and culture, enthusiasm for the North Korean system had already begun to wane. According to interviews with North Korean residents conducted by U.S. military personnel during the UN occupation, mainly in the areas of Wonsan and Hŭngnam on the east coast, support for the communists had fallen most sharply among the peasants, who had originally been the greatest beneficiaries of the reforms (National Archives, RG 497, 2–5). Although the numbers may reflect more the U.S. military’s obsession with quantification than they do observable reality, these interviews with North Korean residents in order to determine their attitudes toward the UN forces do suggest the varying degrees of disillusionment with the DPRK regime according to one’s social group. Measuring from a high point of support for the regime around the time of the spring-summer 1946 reforms (including land redistribution to the poor peasantry), the following “disillusionment statistics” emerge (see table 1).

Support for the regime had dropped the most among farmers. Among industrial workers, support for the communist program had lessened but was still substantial. Support was highest among intellectuals and students, both in North Korea and in the areas of South Korea that had been occupied by the KPA. The high degree of support for communism among educated Koreans was worrisome and meant that the reeducation of this group would need to be a priority if reorientation of the society as a whole were to be successful. The U.S. military was optimistic that the majority of students who opposed the UN intervention could “be swayed by deeds” and come to understand that “only by joining their new government [i.e., the U.S.-UN-ROK occupation] can they realize the Korea they all hope for” (National Archives, RG 497, 5). Clearly a new kind of reorientation—something similar to the process still underway in defeated Germany and Japan—was an urgent task for the UN forces.
Table 2. Reorientation Classifications for Occupied North Korea, Comparison of South Korean and U.S. Programs

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION BUREAU, DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

"Plan for Information and Education Operations in North Korea," October 1950

Ideological classification (in descending order of reliability):
1) Patriots (political criminal; underground political worker)
2) General people
3) Communist sympathizers
4) Communist indoctrinated one
5) Communist soldiers and policeman

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
"Reorientation Plan for Korea," November 1950

Ideological classification ("with overlappings and shadings between them"):
1) Well-indoctrinated communists operating secretly or biding their time until circumstances seem more favorable to their cause.
2) Thoroughly disillusioned former communists and communist sympathizers, relatively sophisticated politically.
3) Those with grievances against the communist regime but not of enough political awareness to link their grievances with its ideology.
4) Idealists favorably disposed toward democracy, although probably vague about its meaning, including many Christians.
5) Conservatives clinging to ancient ideas and ways.
6) Those who distrust and hate all non-Koreans.
7) The inert, without interest in ideas and resistant to even emotional appeals.

occupying the North, a task the UN command suggested had to be pursued in conjunction with, and was as equally important as, the military operation itself.

The South Korean Department of National Defense first proposed a plan for "the conversion of communists north of the 38th parallel" in October 1950, an English translation of which the U.S. Eighth Army in Korea forwarded to General MacArthur in Tokyo on 28 October (National Archives, RG 319b, 1) (see table 2). The ROK plan called for a multimedia operation that would eliminate all visual and aural evidence of the communist regime in every province, county, and village. Propaganda units at each provincial seat would consist of two painters, two theater artists, two musicians, and one religious leader, and these units would make extensive use of strongly anticommunist refugees from the North. After the "cleansing and extinction of communist-inspired music," for example, "newly made songs, martial music and lyrics inspiring racial spirit" would be "propagated and publicized throughout the broadcasting system and various recitals, street marches and broadcast cars" (National Archives, RG 319b, 2). Individuals would be categorized according to ideological orientation and would then be reeducated: in descending order of political reliability, (1) patriots (i.e., political criminals, underground political workers), (2) general people, (3) communist sympathizers, (4) communist indoctrinated one [sic], and (5) communist soldiers and policeman (National Archives, RG 319b, 4). "All should be tolerated but those who are the enemy of our race and who ran to the communism by his will," the plan stated, and "those who are tolerated should be persuaded to
make public his reconversion through the communiqué, radio broadcast, message, etc.” (National Archives, RG 319b, 8).

The U.S. responded with its own, slightly less ominous-sounding plan for changing the hearts and minds of the North Koreans. American planners did not intend for Rhee's forces to reorient North Korean society on their own. Practically from the moment UN troops crossed into North Korea, U.S. commanders were concerned about the ROK's troops' de facto control of North Korean territory, which would subvert the UN command structure. In mid-October, the U.S. Army sent Colonel Alfred Conner Bowman, who had directed the postwar allied government in Trieste, to Japan to meet with American occupation leaders for a discussion of North Korean reorientation. Colonel Bowman flew to Seoul on 20 October 1950 and then to Pyongyang two days later, accompanied by the ROK's minister of education, the minister of welfare, and the minister of defense, as well as Ewha Women's University President Helen Kim, whom Bowman described as "one Madame Kim, a Columbia University graduate, now said to be Public Information Officer for the ROK government and, as I was informed later, a notorious troublemaker" (Bowman 1950, 7).

By 29 October, Syngman Rhee was in Wonsan, North Korea, giving a speech that praised the defeat of communism and the unification of the Korean peninsula under the auspices of the ROK. The Americans, who on the whole were not terribly fond of Rhee and his abysmal human rights record in South Korea, had a different idea. U.S. military planners envisioned an American-run military government for the North, similar to the 1945–48 military government in the South or the military government in Germany. By the beginning of November, it was clear that General MacArthur—who opposed the term "military government," if not the practice—would oversee a civil administration in North Korea but, similar to the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) in Japan, would "play down the MG aspect and make it seem as routine as possible" (Bowman 1950, 14).

In November the State Department, in consultation with U.S. military leaders, drafted a "Reorientation Plan for Korea"—all of Korea—which acknowledged that "we must admit that communist propaganda developed a certain degree of success in both North and South Korea" (National Archives, RG 319a, 9). The State Department's priority would be information, and the reconstruction of the educational system would be handled by the UN Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as part of postwar rehabilitation. There was an enormous information vacuum to fill: the State Department's plan noted that "the North Koreans have been shut off from the outside world since 1941," when the Pacific War led to the Japanese blackout of Western news; the North Koreans were not even aware that the U.S.—not the Soviet Union—had defeated Japan in World War II (National Archives, RG 319a, 7). Under such conditions "it may be assumed that among the uneducated people shut off from the rest of the world there has been a good deal of acceptance of the communist line" (National Archives, RG 319a, 10). Therefore, an extensive, intensive, and appropriate program of reorientation had to be implemented immediately: "The mistakes of the United States Information Service in concentrating on too sophisticated media and on the cities must be avoided," the State Department noted, and USIS should instead focus on popular media and getting its message to the rural masses (National Archives, RG 319a, 10).

14Although I have not seen the Korean original, it is most likely that this term "reconversion" is a translation of chŏnhyŏng, or tenkō in Japanese, which was used in Japan and in Korea during the Japanese colonial period for the conversion of communists and socialists from their leftist ideology.
The prime media of reeducation would be motion pictures, puppet and marionette shows, speaker programs, exhibits, and *hangul* publications. In particular, motion pictures "offer the best media for use during the short-term re-education period" (National Archives, RG 319a, 19). The USIS motion picture production unit in Seoul needed to resume operation, and the USIS puppet section needed also to "be resumed as quickly as possible" (National Archives, RG 319a, 17). A key role would be played by returned North Korean refugees, who were to be sent back to their home regions in order to give public talks on the evils of communism and the benevolence of the UN. The USIS would coordinate this program through the use of mobile propaganda units and the establishment of reorientation centers in Seoul, Pusan, Taejön, Taegu, Kwangju, and Ch'ŏngju in the South, and Pyongyang, Hamhŭng, Wonsan, and Ch'ongjin in the North.

At the forefront of reorientation would be Christians, both native Christians and Western missionaries. The American authorities saw most Korean Christians as strongly anticommunist, especially those who had fled from the North, although perhaps a third of the Christians in North Korea had joined the progovernment Korean Christian Federation led by Kim Il Sung's mother's cousin, Kang Yang-uk. The State Department's plan was, in effect, to unleash the missionaries on North Korea. "As part of the program, missionaries should not only be allowed but should be assisted in reestablishing the large education and medical centers which were once maintained in the North," even assuming their old denominational geographical divisions: Methodists and Presbyterians in Pyongyang; Presbyterians in Sunchŏn, Kangye, and Chaeryong; Methodists in Wŏnsan; and Canadian Presbyterians in Hamhŭng (National Archives, RG 319a, 8). Particularly important would be the Protestant Audio-Visual Community in Seoul, with its substantial equipment and experience in reaching the countryside.

Although the people suggested to run the reorientation program at the center were all State Department and U.S. military government personnel, seven of the nine members in charge of field operations were "mish kids"—that is, children of missionaries born in Korea—including Horace G. Underwood of Yonsei University and his brother Richard, as well as E. Otto De Camp of the Protestant Audio-Visual Committee. The metaphors of religion and war, as well as the concerted use of Christian propagandists, gave the reorientation plan the flavor of a crusade: "Above all, those who direct the program must be adaptable and good Americans willing to tackle the work with evangelical zeal. Given proper weapons and adequate supplies and equipment, a few qualified Americans can accomplish a great deal in all of Korea and can lay a foundation which will facilitate the reconstruction and unification of the country" (National Archives, RG 319a, 32).

On 27 and 28 November 1950, representatives from the State Department, the U.S. International Information and Educational Exchange (USIIE) program in Korea, the U.S. Armed Forces General Headquarters—Far East, and the Department of the Army met to finalize the reorientation plan. The group proposed an Information and Education Program that would be run by State Department personnel "but [was] not to be identified as a U.S. program"—in other words, it was officially to be a UN operation (National Archives, RG 319a, 32). A ten-man State Department team was ready to be airlifted to Korea around 1 December, in order to carry this out. On the one hand, the obvious model for the Korean reorientation, and the source of much of its human and material resources, would be the still ongoing occupation of Japan. On the other hand, the task in North Korea would in some ways be far more difficult. For one thing, there was no private ownership of media in North Korea, and thus
private ownership and operation of newspapers and other media would have to be developed. For another, there was still a great distrust of Americans and ongoing propaganda being broadcasted from behind enemy lines to the North, as well as from China and Russia. The lack of material resources was acute, and much would have to be brought in from Japan. But, although onerous, reorientation was a priority "no less important than the maintenance of peace and order or economic rehabilitation." To begin with, a short intensive period of no more than twelve months of deprogramming would be implemented by forces on the ground, followed by a long-term consolidation and rehabilitation with the assistance of UN member states and international organizations. Priority would be given to visual media and to reaching the countryside.

The U.S. was faced with, in fact, a triple burden of reorientation, and the American planners seemed determined to make up for the mistakes and shortsightedness of the initial occupation of South Korea. The new reorientation plan sought to "undo whatever has been done to the minds of the people by the communist regime, the Japanese regime, and even the heritage of the pre-Japanese regime which stands in the way of their becoming adequate participants in an orderly, responsible, progressive and peace-loving democratic society" (National Archives, RG 319c, 1). This program was, to say the least, an ambitious one. It was, however, never to be put in place. On the very day reorientation plans were finalized, 28 November 1950, the U.S. Eighth Army began a headlong retreat south, in the face of a massive Chinese offensive (Stueck 1995, 128). Reorientation would have to wait.

Conclusion

The United States came belatedly to fight the cultural cold war in Korea, after recognizing that it might be losing the "struggle for the hearts and minds" of the Korean people to the Soviets and their North Korean supporters. The Korean War, and especially the U.S.-UN-ROK occupation of North Korea in fall 1950, offers a striking example of the transfer of symbols, methods, and mentalities of the antifascist struggle of World War II to the anticommunist struggle of the cold war. The reorientation program for North Korea, although never actually put into practice, was a blueprint for "converting" a populace away from communism in the same way that Germans and Japanese were supposedly being transformed from Nazis and militarists into peaceful democratic citizens. After the ceasefire in 1953, this experiment was halted in the North; but largely as a result of the Korean War experience, the U.S. would remain active in the cultural arena in South Korea, as well as committing itself to military defense and economic reconstruction. One could argue that in this respect, South Korea has been a significant success for the United States. Unlike many other countries in the developing world, the Republic of Korea remained almost free of open anti-American public sentiment until the democratic explosion of the 1980s (Shin 1995). Probably no other country in Asia—besides the Philippines, an outright colony of the U.S. for nearly half a century—has been influenced so deeply by American culture as has South Korea.

In the post—Korean War period, the encouragement of pro-American, pro-Western culture and attitudes was carried out by a wide range of actors, including the U.S. government and its cultural agencies; Christian organizations (both U.S.-based and Korean); volunteer organizations such as the Boy Scouts and the 4-H Club;
and private foundations, including Rockefeller, Ford, Carnegie, and the Asia Foundation. The influence of American culture in Korea, however, is both more subtle and more ambivalent than the Manichean mentality of the cultural cold war would have it appear. As elsewhere in the world, American cultural penetration into Korea has always had its critics, even if they were relatively quiet in the years between the Korean War and the 1980s. The alternative to Americanization is no longer “Sovietization,” but an assertive national culture; and issues such as the U.S. military presence in South Korea, the dominance of Hollywood over the local film industry, and unfair competition from American businesses have been the focus of intense debate and controversy over the past two decades. The emergence of South Korea as a major economic force under the umbrella of American military protection has led to a rethinking of the U.S.-Korean relationship at many levels, including the relationship between native Korean culture (however that may be defined) and an American culture that dominates the world to a degree barely imaginable in the early years of the cultural cold war.

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