

Using Hollywood Films to Teach Democracy: SCAP Film Policy in Occupied Japan

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What do the following films have in common: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) a Walt Disney cartoon; *My Friend Flicka* (1943) starring Roddy McDowall; *Meet Me In Saint Louis* (1944) directed by Vincente Minelli and starring Judy Garland; *Mr. Bug Goes to Town* (1941) a musical comedy cartoon; *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950), starring Betty Hutton; *Northwest Passage* (1940), a Western directed by King Vidor, starring Spencer Tracy; and *All About Eve* (1950) starring Bette Davis, and directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz? The U.S. military chose these films, and several hundred others, to help “reorient” and “democratize” the Japanese people, after their defeat in World War II. The seeming randomness of the choices, when added to the mundane and sometimes silly subjects of the films, makes the idea laughable. What I want to talk about today is how these American films carried ideology in two ways — in their content and in their form; in what the films said and in how they were brought into Japan and distributed.

In many ways, the United States government’s use of Hollywood films to teach democracy to the Japanese is a straightforward example of popular culture being ideological, a form of cultural diplomacy. The General Headquarters, Supreme Commander Allied Powers operating in the person of General Douglas MacArthur, controlled Japan for six and a half years.¹⁾ SCAP’s Theater and Motion Picture Division reported that they had reintroduced commercial foreign films as soon as possible although “approval of selected films was required to insure the choice of imports . . . would best aid the democratization program, affording the people, long isolated from the rest of the world, additional means for familiarization with the life and thinking of other peoples.”²⁾ The Occupation forces, collaborating with American film studios, intended the Hollywood films to aid in the reorientation of the Japanese people after World War II. But the films did additional ideological work as well.

The polysemic nature of popular culture content continually worked against the expression of strong ideas in individual films. The Americans supervising the film program, and the Japanese watching the films, took a wide range of meanings from the reorientation movies. As well, the miscellaneous Hollywood movies chosen (*All About Eve* and *Mr. Bug Goes to Town*?) showed both the difficulty of using commercialized popular culture for propaganda purposes and the ideological confusion of any particular piece of popular culture. The American

¹⁾ I find the best overview of the Occupation to be John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: The New Press, 1999).

²⁾ General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, “Theater and Motion Pictures,” *History of the Nonmilitary Activities of the Occupation of Japan, 1945–1951*, 5: 30–31.

official in charge of the importing Hollywood films admitted that “because of the intangibles involved, it is obvious that there will be differences of opinion as to whether reorientation value is present in many pictures and, if present, the degree to which it is present.”³⁾ The ideological messages embedded in the films’ content remained so difficult to read that no one — not the American film companies, the importers, SCAP, or the Japanese public — agreed on which films sent what messages.

This doesn’t mean that the films didn’t send messages, but that their content was supplemented by a capitalist ideology contained in the film’s production and distribution systems. The Japanese learned about American life from the stories the films told, but even more directly from the ways in which the films were made and sold. These Hollywood films, and their exportation to Japan during the Occupation, contained ideas about American popular culture, the proper role of the state in relation to the media, and the world-wide role of U.S. cultural exports. While the fight over the films’ content happened in the foreground, an even more important ideological move happened in the background as a government supported, privatized, and commercialized media system grew and spread in mid-century.

SCAP’s ideological crusade, operating on the two fronts of content and form, benefited from Japanese good will and met some Japanese resistance. Before the War, Japanese viewers had seen and loved American films. Charlie Chaplin, “Uncle Charlie” as he was called in Japan, received an enthusiastic reception during a 1932 visit. One magazine, *Eiga no tomo*, celebrated the seventh birthday of “Mikki Kun” (Mickey Mouse), in 1936, by showing him surrounded by his American friends including Chaplin, Garbo, Cantor, Keaton, Beery, Groucho, and Laurel.⁴⁾ Until very late in war preparations, American films continued to be shown in Japan and, of course, Japanese viewers remembered American films even during the war. Historian Miriam Silverberg recounted that Tokyo film students, voting after Pearl Harbor, chose “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” as the best foreign film of 1941.⁵⁾

Yet, the Japanese, like others around the world, had reservations about the global spread of American films. The Japanese film industry, very well developed before the war, remained one of the few which had resisted American domination successfully. But, as art historian Donald Kiriara noted, the “American film industry was intertwined with the Japanese industry from the importation of the first Vitascope” and, for Japanese film companies, the problem remained of “limiting the commercial success of the American product while cashing in on the

³⁾ D.R. Nugent, Lt. Col., USMC, Chief, CIE Section to Charles Mayer, Central Motion Picture Exchange, 10 November 1950, Motion Pictures, Box 5155, Administrative Division, Civil Information and Education Section, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Record Group 331, National Archives at College Park, MD (hereafter cited as CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP).

⁴⁾ Miriam Silverberg, “Remembering Pearl Harbor, Forgetting Charlie Chaplin, and the Case of the Disappearing Western Woman: A Picture Story,” *positions* 1 (1993): 24-76. Thanks to Kerry Smith for calling this article to my attention and for all his help in my studies of Japan.

⁵⁾ Silverberg, “Remembering Pearl Harbor,” 61; see also Miriam Silverberg, “Constructing a New Cultural History of Prewar Japan,” in *Japan in the World*, eds. Masao Miyosi and H.D. Harootunian (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 115-143.

Hollywood film's undeniable popularity."⁶⁾

After the war, the Japanese had reason to worry about Hollywood competition. In her important book on the post-war Japanese film industry, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo*, historian Kyoko Hirano reports that, as the Occupation began, the Japanese film industry operated "at half its capacity." Only 845 theaters were open; 260 had closed; 166 were being used for other purposes; and 530 had been destroyed by bombings. Just three film studios produced feature films and four made documentaries and newsreels.⁷⁾ The Japanese film industry saw foreign films as competitors for movie goers, because of the lack of money available to Japanese studios to produce any films, because the lack of Japanese discretionary income made it difficult to buy movie tickets, and because of the lavishness of Hollywood productions. The SCAP files included translations of many articles, from Japanese movie magazines and newspaper cinema pages, complaining that American films were unfair competition for Japanese films.⁸⁾ The U.S. film industry worked with the Occupation authorities to bring Hollywood films into Japan in order to secure the post-war Japanese market for American exports. The Hollywood studios, in collaboration with the Occupation government, tried to teach the Japanese how, in a capitalist system, government and business might best cooperate to promote trade. The ideology carried by American film confirmed the naturalness of such a commercialized system and government supported system.

In this paper I will examine two films and then proceed with an overview of how films were chosen to be shown in Japan. I want to do both in order to show the way that the Occupation used both the form and content of Hollywood films to "reorient" the Japanese.

The film trailer for *His Butler's Sister*, described it as "the delirious story of a maid in a bachelor's home . . . who wants to be its mistress!" and noted of its star, Deanna Durbin, that "she's heading straight for your heart." A viewer could describe the film as a show business story presenting the lavish life style of its Broadway composer hero, a fairy tale vehicle for a growing child star replete with musical numbers to show off her singing, or a screwball comedy full of misunderstandings, misrepresentations, mistaken identities, and coincidences but, however categorized, it remained an unlikely piece of government propaganda or cultural diplomacy. Yet, the Occupation government approved *His Butler's Sister*, starring Deanna Durbin and *Madame Curie* starring Greer Garson as two of the first American films to be

⁶⁾ For a brilliant description of the relationship between the American and Japanese film industries, see Donald Kiriara, *Patterns of Time: Mizoguchi and the 1930s* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 39–58.

⁷⁾ Kyoko Hirano, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema under the American Occupation, 1945–1952* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 27.

⁸⁾ For some examples, see T. Omori trans., "Japanese Motion Pictures," Edited Translation, *Kinema Jumbo*, February 1948; K. Onishi trans., "The Advance of Imported Movies," Edited Translation, *Kinema Jumbo*, 15 April 1949; "Control on Import of Foreign Films and Japanese Pictures," Edited Translation, Helicopter Column, *Mainichi Shimbun*, 24 July 1951, all contained in Digests and Publications, Box 5235, Translation Unit, Executive Branch, Information Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

shown in Japan after the war ended.⁹⁾ While *Madame Curie*, a more serious film, detailed the love affair between two famous scientists as they struggled to discover radium, the irony of explaining the beginning of the nuclear age to those who had suffered the horrible consequences of it remains palpable.

His Butler's Sister and *Madame Curie* illustrated the ideological complexity of using Hollywood films as propaganda in post-war Japan. In content, both films focused on the lives of women who were workers in addition to being sweethearts, wives, and mothers, an important propaganda point for the Occupation. Showing Deanna Durbin in such a role proved especially potent in Japan where she was enormously popular. An early post-war visitor to Japan wrote:

One of the first questions I was asked by Japanese friends when I arrived was whether there was any truth in the rumor that Deanna Durbin had died during the war. When I hastened to reassure them that Miss Durbin was alive and healthy and as popular as ever, they were more than visibly relieved.¹⁰⁾

Deanna Durbin's popularity showed the international reach of the pre-war American film industry, markets which Hollywood fought fiercely to maintain in the post-war world. A movie starring Deanna Durbin then, was uniquely suited to do several kinds of ideological work.

His Butler's Sister and *Madame Curie* operated on the levels both of content and of the film industry's economic organization. The different forms of ideological messages presented by Hollywood films became deeply intertwined with each other and difficult to untangle. For example, if Hollywood and the Occupation authorities picked Deanna Durbin for her pre-war popularity in Japan and her portrayal of a working woman, the film also supported her continuing success as a commercial actress, just as it did in the US when it was released in 1943. A fairy tale in form and content, *His Butler's Sister* tells a classic show business legend, designed to allow war weary Americans to escape their worries. In addition, the story depended on a peculiarly American view of the class system which maintained that the U.S. contained two kinds of people: very wealthy people and lucky hard working ordinary people who easily, and without any social or economic resistance from the rich, became wealthy. In many ways, "His Butler's Sister" presented a Horatio Alger tale of a plucky Iowa singer who, because of her good character and vocal ability, married a wealthy Broadway composer. Deanna Durbin's character magically attracted everyone she met and easily overcame all

⁹⁾ *His Butler's Sister*, videocassette, directed by Frank Borzage (1943: MCA Home Video, 1996); *Madame Curie*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (, 1943: MGM/UA Home Video, 1992); on the early showing of *Madame Curie* see Makoto Hori and Takashi Abe, American Movie Culture Association to Supreme Commander Allied Forces, Japan, 1 June 1949, Motion Pictures, Box 5072, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; for a list of "features released to date" that has *His Butler's Sister* as #1 and *Madame Curie* as #2, see CIE to Chief, Civil Affairs Division, "Feature Films, Shorts and Documentaries" 18 June 1947, Motion Pictures 1947, Box 5063, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; on *Madame Curie*, see Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 195.

¹⁰⁾ Yole Granada, "Glamour Replaces Banzai," *United Nations World* 2 (February 1948): 28.

obstacles to make her dream come true. The movie sold an escapist and materialist democracy, where everyone lived happily ever after, as evidenced by the two pianos in their fancy New York city apartment. The printed foreword shown on the screen, at the beginning of the American version, says:

The Foods, Drinks, Clothes, Shoes, Rubber, Gas and other articles consumed or used in this picture are purely imaginary and have no relation to any actual Foods, Drinks, Clothes, Shoes, Rubber, Gas and other articles of today, rationed or unrationed. Any resemblance is purely accidental. This is a fable of the day before yesterday.

Occupation officials probably believed *His Butler's Sister* presented women in a new light and supported the democratic ideal of individuals achieving through their own effort. In addition, Hollywood sought to begin their post-war efforts to invade the Japanese film market with an established star. The Hollywood film industry chose this film to send to Japan to build on Durbin's popularity, and because their instincts told them that fairy tales worked well for war-weary audiences. But the film even more directly presented the material abundance of the United States, as evidenced both by the commodities pictured in the film and by the lavishness of the Hollywood production.

The story of *Madame Curie* existed in a similar tangle of ideological messages. *Madame Curie* presented an international, rather than an American story, albeit with an overlay of American values. With a Polish heroine who studied, married, and worked in France, the film represented the winning allies in the recent war. For ideological and economic reasons, Americans sought to keep out films from other countries, while insisting that American films showed the Japanese the rest of the world. *Madame Curie* allowed the U.S. government to hide their attempts to strengthen the post-war international position of Hollywood films behind a film that presented an international story. Neither the Occupation authorities, the Hollywood or Japanese film industries, or the Japanese film audiences, thought about or discussed these propaganda points in relation to these two films. Rather, the films were part of a rougher, less self-conscious effort to aid the information activities of the Occupation

As convoluted as their missions were, *His Butler's Sister* and *Madame Curie* provided clearer messages than the films that followed. At first, the Occupation's goal with regard to American films was to import as many as possible and provide a rough oversight of their content. The lack of hard currency available in Japan to pay for film importation and the reluctance of commercial film makers to wade into a war zone, meant that the U.S. government spent much of its time cajoling studios to send films, including *His Butler's Sister* and *Madame Curie*. As conditions changed and more films became available for importation, the Occupation officials became concerned that each film demonstrate "reorientation" value and that's when the trouble started.¹¹⁾

¹¹⁾ The two memos which outlined the rules about film imports were known as Circular 12 (published 5 December 1946) and Circular 8 (published 8 April 1950), see General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, "Circular No. 12: Admission of Foreign Magazines, Books, Motion Pictures, News

There were two main protagonists in the story of how American films were chosen to be shown in Japan. The Motion Picture Branch of the CIE (Civil Information and Education Section) decided which films would be let into Japan and how the films would be categorized. The CIE had four categories: banned, allowed in with edits, reorientation and entertainment. The CIE worked in collaboration with the Motion Picture Exchange Association (MPEA) which was a trade group representing nine Hollywood film studios formed to work with the U.S. government in thirteen areas around the world just after WWII.

Primary responsibility for overseeing the importation of films into Japan during the Occupation lay with the Theater and Motion Picture Branch of the Civil Information and Education Section (CIE). Japanese newsreel producer Iwasaki Akira, who dealt with CIE workers daily, reported that they were “not soldiers” but “pleasant young men who made me feel as though I had known them as close friends for years. Back home in America, they had been journalists, students, labor union activists, or industrial designers — all people who had been involved in intellectual professions.” He further wrote that the Americans in CIE had no race prejudice and were not hierarchical, calling each other by their first names. According to the Akira, the Motion Picture Branch consisted of “conscientious and progressive New Dealers and Marxist leaning leftists who were eager to do everything within their power to quickly and accurately carry out their mission of rooting out Japan’s remaining militarists and democratize Japan.”¹²⁾ Congruent with their New Deal reformism, the Motion Picture Branch saw themselves as educators of the Japanese.

CIE’s partner was the Motion Picture Exchange Association (MPEA) and the MPEA embodied the close relationship between the Occupation authorities (the agents of the U.S. federal government) and the American motion picture industry. The MPEA, a trade industry group representing the large Hollywood studios, was formed in 1945 to overcome the problems of exporting films into Germany and soon expanded to serve other international markets, principally Japan under the Occupation. A 1949 “Operation Report” of the Motion Picture Branch in Germany noted that they cooperated with the MPEA in order to “maintain a high standard of American imported films” so that the films “serve our reorientation objectives in Germany as well as maintain American picture making prestige in the post war world.”¹³⁾

and Photograph Services, Et Cetera, and Their Dissemination in Japan,” 5 December 1946, Records Section, Box 8521, Civil Censorship Detachment, SCAP, RG331, NACP; General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, “Circular No. 8: Admission and Dissemination of Foreign Magazines, Books, Motion Pictures, News and Photograph Services, Et Cetera, and Business Relating Thereto,” 8 April 1950, Miscellaneous File, Box 1274, Legal Section, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP. For a complaint about how the program worked see Irving Maas, Vice President and General Manager, Motion Picture Export Association to General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, 9 March 1951, Motion Pictures, Box 5088, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

¹²⁾ Iwasaki Akira, “The Occupied Screen,” *Japan Quarterly* (July/September 1978): 303–4.

¹³⁾ Office of Military Government for Germany (U.S.), Motion Picture Branch, “Operation Reports,” March 21, 1949, reprinted in *Film and Propaganda in America: A Documentary History, Volume IV, 1945 and*

Meeting these two objectives — to import good films and to re-open markets for American movies — deeply involved Occupation authorities in both Japan and Germany in the movie business.

Illustrating the close relationship between the government and the film industry, the first head of the MPEA in Japan worked for the CIE and was paid by the State Department.¹⁴⁾ The MPEA began in Japan at “the express invitation” of Occupation authorities in 1946 and Nugent, recalled that “for more than a year . . . the Association operated directly under the CIE Section.” Nugent described how the Occupation later licensed the MPEA with an independent administrative structure but noted their “close cooperation . . . in the selection of films to be exhibited.”¹⁵⁾ Charles Mayer, the second director of the MPEA who headed the organization until its dissolution in 1951, perfectly blended government service and industry experience. Mayer worked as Twentieth Century Fox’s Far Eastern Manager between 1924 and 1942, and served during the war as officer in charge of film entertainment under the Far East Command in New Guinea and Manila. Familiar with both the American film industry’s Asian activities and with the military, Mayer proved a useful insider in both worlds.¹⁶⁾

In Japan, the MPEA schemed to make a profit on showing films in Japan; worked with Japanese film distributors and movie houses to get their films shown; lobbied for and publicized American films in Japan; protected and extended the market for American films; and helped distribute newsreels and documentaries that accompanied the feature films.¹⁷⁾ Large and small matters occupied the time of the MPEA. Charles Mayer complained to Occupation authorities that a Japanese film plagiarized the Warner Brothers’ feature, *Dark Victory*; argued with Japanese film reviewers over their “anti-American” comments and threatened to cancel previews for critics of American films; protested the film quota system to General MacArthur; tracked comments about American films in Japanese newspapers; and maintained a voluminous

After, eds. David Holbrook Culbert, Richard E. Wood, and Lawrence H. Suid (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990-1991), 81; for a description of the work of the MPEA see Guback, “Shaping the film business in Postwar Germany,” 255, and Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany*, 65.

¹⁴⁾ CIE to G-1, “Clearance for Paramount Representative,” 23 June 1947, Motion Pictures, 1947, Box 5062, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

¹⁵⁾ D.R. Nugent, Chief, CIE Section to Fair Trade Commission, “Motion Picture Export Association,” 1 July 1949, Motion Pictures, Box 5072, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; see also Central Motion Picture Exchange, “License to Engage in Business in Japan,” 27 May 1947, Motion Pictures, 1947, Box 5062, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

¹⁶⁾ Chief, CIE to Office of C-in-C, “Info on Charles Mayer,” 12 October 1951, Motion Pictures, 1951, Box 5088, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

¹⁷⁾ The MPEA represented Columbia Pictures International Corporation, Loew’s International Corporation, Paramount International Films, Inc., Republic Pictures international Corporation, RKO Radio Pictures, Inc., Twentieth Century-Fox International Corporation, United Artists Corporation, Universal International Films, Inc., and Warner Brothers Pictures International Corporation. See Irving Maas, Vice President and General Manager, Motion Picture Export Association, to General Douglas MacArthur, 9 March 1951, Supply Branch, Box 5233, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

correspondence with the CIE about individual films.¹⁸⁾

The main jobs of the CIE and the MPEA involved their negotiations over which American films, and how many, were admitted into Japan. All American films, shown in Japan between 1946 and 1951 came through the MPEA. In part this was to minimize the bureaucratic fusses of having the CIE dealing with separate studios; in part because of currency problems; in part to compete with national cinemas, such as that of the USSR and Britain which always had government help and a united front when moving into the international arena. The high degree of cooperation between the government and the industry provided a model for a private, commercialized entertainment industry that had freedom of content but depended on government help to be profitable.

Beyond deciding which films had “reorientation value,” the CIE also concerned itself with the ratio of “reorientation” films to “entertainment” films. The CIE and the MPEA agreed that the most popular American films lacked reorientation content, but their importation would be necessary to keep the MPEA profitable and operating, and to keep the Japanese going to the movies. But if there were too many entertaining movies, the “reorientation” message would not be heard. The head of the Motion Picture Branch wrote, “CIE is anxious to maintain such a ratio between motion pictures . . . of positive usefulness and those which are merely harmless that the latter will not swamp the former.”¹⁹⁾ As a result, the CIE imposed quotas on the MPEA — so many films of reorientation value versus so many purely entertaining.

At this point, the CIE tried to define “reorientation” value. Films would be classified as having “reorientation” value “because of what they say, because of the attention they attract to admirable aspects of American life, or because they are recognized generally as superior examples of mature and intelligent American motion picture entertainment.”²⁰⁾ Despite this statement, confusion reigned over what reorientation value was and how to find it in a film. The Motion Picture Branch maintained a constant concern with only two issues: they worried about violence, just as they did in Japanese films; and maintained a belief that any film that depicted white Americans mistreating people of other races should be banned.²¹⁾ This made

¹⁸⁾ Charles Mayer to Lt. Col. D. R. Nugent, CIE, 12 April 1948, “Plagiarism of DARK VICTORY story,” Motion Pictures 1948, Box 5066, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; K. Morimoto trans., “Mayer Bans Newspaper Movie Critics from American Film Previews,” Edited Translation, *Shimbun Kyokai Ho* 27 October (no year), Digests and Publications, Box 5235, Translation Unit, Executive Branch, Information Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; GHQ, SCAP to Irving Mass, Motion Picture Export Association, Supply Branch, Box 5233, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; Charles Mayer to Col. D.R. Nugent, 14 February 1950, Motion Pictures, Box 5081, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

¹⁹⁾ D.R.N., CIE, to Asst. Chief of Staff, G-2, “Control of Foreign Publications and Pictorial Productions in Japan,” 9 July 1946, Records Section, Box 8521, Civil Censorship Detachment: SCAP, RG331, NACP.

²⁰⁾ D.R. Nugent, Lt. Col., USMC, Chief, CIE Section to Charles Mayer, Central Motion Picture Exchange, 10 February 1951, Motion Pictures, Box 5088, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

²¹⁾ For one example among many, see D.R. Nugent, Lt. Col., USMC, Chief, CIE Section to Charles Mayer, Central Motion Picture Exchange, 4 November 1950, Motion Pictures, Box 5155, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

Westerns particularly problematic.

But, other than those two considerations, the process was so confusing that, prior to a CIE decision, importers couldn't tell if a particular film would be classified as "reorientation," "entertainment," or banned all together.²²⁾ Struggling with this problem, the head of the Motion Picture Branch wrote to the MPEA, "that they are based on novels of Theodore Dreiser in itself does not qualify 'Place in the Sun' and 'Carrie' for designation" as reorientation films."²³⁾ Despite such warnings, individual film studios and the MPEA presented films as "historical" or "famous" to sway the reviewers in their favor.²⁴⁾ And that a film had literary or historical antecedents often seemed to help it gain the valuable "reorientation" label.

The murkiness of the criteria, and the seemingly random application of them to specific films, particularly annoyed American film studios. In August 1951, the Vice President and General Manager of the MPEA, Irving Maas, who worked out of Los Angeles, complained about a particular CIE reviewer and his decisions. Maas wrote:

If *Annie get Your Gun*, *Showboat*, *Look for the Silver Lining*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, rate for reorientation category, I must insist that *Phantom of the Opera* rates equally. The music in *Phantom* is outstanding Possibly the thinking . . . which confuses me most of all is . . . approval of certain types of pictures which deal with sordid situations and abnormal people For example: *Harvey*, *Glass Menagerie*, *All About Eve*, and *The Heiress*.²⁵⁾

The memo included other comparisons of films classified reorientation with similar ones not so favored. Confessing to the problem, the head of the Motion Picture Branch replied that "that error was probably made, out of desire to be generous, in attaching reorientation value to such pictures as *Northwest Passage*, *Mr. Bug Goes to Town* and *Annie Get Your Gun* rather than to such pictures as *Northwest Mounted Police*."²⁶⁾

Arguments over the meanings of particular films were only one aspect of the growing

²²⁾ Robert M. Lury, Eagle Lion Classics, Inc. to Donald Brown, GHQ, SCAP, 30 March 1951, Motion Pictures, Box 5088, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; see also D.R. Nugent, Lt. Col, USMC, Chief, CIE Section to Edmund Goldman, Columbia Films, Lt, 21 November, 1951, Motion Pictures, 951, Box 5088, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

²³⁾ D.R. Nugent, Lt. Col., USMC, Chief, CIE Section to Charles Mayer, Central Motion Picture Exchange, 28 August 1951, Motion Pictures, Box 5088, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

²⁴⁾ J.E. Dagal, Warner Brothers, First National Pictures, Inc. to Charles Mayer, Central Motion Picture Exchange, 22 August 1951, Motion Pictures, Box 5088, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; see also Thomas L. Blakemore to Don Brown, Information Division, CIE Section, 20 July 1950, Motion Pictures, Box 5111, Administration Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; Charles Mayer, Central Motion Picture Exchange, to D.R. Nugent, Lt. Col., USMC, Chief, CIE Section, 31 October 1950, Motion Pictures, Box 5155, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

²⁵⁾ Charles Mayer, Motion Picture Export Association to Lt. Col. D. R. Nugent, CI&E, 16 August 1951, Supply Branch, Box 5233, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; Extract from Letter from Mr. Maas, NY, Letter No. 512 dated August 8, 1951, Supply Branch, Box 5233, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

²⁶⁾ D.R. Nugent, Lt. Col, USMC, Chief, CIE Section to Charles Mayer, Central Motion Picture Exchange, 4 October 1951, Supply Branch, Box 5233, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

complexity of the Japanese film market. MPEA members sought to set up individual distribution deals, while American film companies not members of the MPEA sought to enter the Japanese market. By the end of 1951, MPEA dissolved, individual companies took over responsibility for importing and distributing their films in Japan (often in collaboration with Japanese studios), and CIE handed oversight over the import process to the Japanese government.²⁷⁾

If the reorientation value of specific films was difficult to establish, the relationship between the American film industry and the U.S. government became the most important export. After World War II, the U.S. film industry needed and sought to open new markets, and Japan, with its fondness for American film but relatively little penetration by the U.S. into its film industry, proved irresistible to American movie companies. The Occupation meant that the U.S. government controlled the Japanese market and paved the way for American films. Thus, the Occupation's reliance on the ideology conveyed by commercial films depended both on the contradictory content of the films and on the business arrangements made to import such films into Japan.

Ordinary Japanese filmgoers may have viewed all of this quite differently. For them, kissing remained the most important issue. Before the war, no films shown in Japan had kissing scenes. The Japanese government had censored international films, cutting all kisses, and no Japanese film had included one. The Occupationaires thought that kissing in both American and Japanese films would show the Japanese how open societies with equality between the sexes operated. Culturally, the Japanese found all this emphasis on kissing confusing since kissing had been an intensely private act. In his essay, "The Japanese Kiss," Donald Richie explained that "the social role that kissing takes in Japan is narrow. It does not mean affection or reverence or sorrow or consolation or any of the other things it can mean in the West. It means just one thing and that is the reason for the ambivalence which surrounds it."²⁸⁾ While the Occupation set off a new wave of decadent and sexually explicit literature among the intelligentsia, regular movie fans spent their time debating whether kissing was "Japanese" and lining up for films which included it.²⁹⁾

Historian John Dower lists *Madame Curie* and Deanna Durbin's *Prelude to Spring* (the

²⁷⁾ Irving Maas, Vice-President and General Manager, Motion Picture Export Association to Brig. Gen. K.B. Bush, 30 April 1951, Supply Branch, Box 5233, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; Charles Mayer, Managing Director, Central Motion Picture Exchange of the Motion Picture Export Association, Inc. to Lt. Col D.R. Nugent, 8 September 1951, Supply Division, Box 5231, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP; D. R. Nugent, Chief, CIE Section to Charles Mayer, Central Motion Picture Exchange, 26 September 1951, Motion Pictures, Box 5088, Administrative Division, CIE Section, SCAP, RG331, NACP.

²⁸⁾ Donald Richie, "The Japanese Kiss," *A Lateral View: Essays on Culture and Style in Contemporary Japan* (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 1992): 225.

²⁹⁾ On post-war literature and the Occupation see, Jay Rubin, "From Wholesomeness to Decadence: The Censorship of Literature under the Allied Occupation," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 11 (Winter 1985): 71-103.

Japanese title of *His Butler's Sister*) as two American films which owed their success to kissing scenes.³⁰⁾ CIE also pushed Japanese film makers to include such scenes and the first Japanese film with a kiss was *Twenty-Year-Old Youth* released in 1946.³¹⁾ Kissing operated in the realms of both form and content. The American film industry understood that Japanese audiences had to accept Western forms of sexuality in order for American films to succeed in the Japanese market.

A 1984 film by Japanese director, Masahiro Shinoda, provides the best evidence of the interest generated by the new policy on film kissing. The film, *MacArthur's Children*, presents a moving autobiographical account of the ending of the war, the impact of the war trials, the coming of American soldiers, and everyday life in rural Japan after surrender. One of the film's important scenes features the children protagonists eagerly waiting in the movie theater for the "first kiss" shown in a Japanese film.³²⁾ *MacArthur's Children* at once reminds contemporary viewers of the range of issues vying for Japanese attention during the Occupation and the key role that movies continued to play in peoples' everyday lives. The power of the Occupation officials, the relationships among American and Japanese films, the attempts to convey political, cultural, and economic meaning in movies, and the range of responses by film audiences to ideological messages inserted into film can be seen in this one scene where giggling kids, in a darkened theater, watch film actors kissing.

The American use of popular culture during its Occupation of Japan turned into an important moment, a crucial site, where the fact that ideology existed in both the form and content of popular culture became clear. Popular culture most often acts like the Wizard, in the film version of the *Wizard of Oz*, (1939) manipulating levers and buttons to create a show, while saying "pay no attention to that man behind the curtain." In this transnational setting, the seams showed. The Occupationaires didn't conspire with the movie studios to hide what they were doing; rather the ideology presented by structure of the culture industries was so strong that everyone saw it as natural and reproduced it unthinkingly. The arguments over content and how it was read by different audiences distracted attention from "the man behind the curtain." The U.S. film industry and the government acted together to protect the market for American commercial film, while also focusing on finding movies that "taught democracy." No one challenged the idea that a commercialized media best represented democracy as government and industry spent time figuring out which films could be classified as "entertainment" and which as "reorientation." At the end of the Occupation, American popular culture, with government support, had taken important steps to cement its dominant global position.

I am not arguing that content doesn't matter, that popular culture isn't open to many interpretations, or that audience members don't make meaning out of what they watch. Rather,

³⁰⁾ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 150.

³¹⁾ Hirano, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo*, 154-170.

³²⁾ *Setouchi shonen yakyūdan* [MacArthur's Children], directed by Masahiro Shinoda (1984).

I contend that the content is only one component of a complex set of ideologies presented by any popular culture form. Often the economic, political, and global structure gets taken for granted as observers focus on the arguments over the meaning of an individual film. Such misdirection helps obscure the importance of the capitalist form to the content, as well as the complex ways in which the form operates. Moments and sites where American mass media existed in a different culture help foreground the intertwined nature of form and content. The importation of Hollywood films into Occupied Japan as teaching tools showed the importance of the U.S. government to the content and spread of American cultural products, and called attention to the particular form of American commercial mass media and its effect on content.

When he said, “If you want to send a message, call Western Union,” movie mogul Sam Goldwyn understood the messiness of passing on a coherent ideology via a commercially produced popular culture. The sweet and unattainable fairy tale starring Deanna Durbin and the serious story of the first nuclear scientist may well have confused Japanese viewers trying to understand the minds and culture of their Occupiers. On the other hand, popular culture, in this case Hollywood movies, contained powerful ideologies beyond their content, in their industry’s economic structure; in the films’ form of presentation; and in the ability of the U.S. government, in close collaboration with the American film industry, to dictate what the Japanese saw.