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Creating an Anti-Communist Motion Picture Producers’ Network in Asia:
The Asia Foundation, Asia Pictures, and the Korean Motion Picture Cultural Association

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The Asia Foundation, a private non-profit organization, which was established in 1951, was actively involved in the motion picture industries in Asia since its first feature film project *The People Win Through* was produced and released in Burma in 1953. Roughly from 1953 to 1959, to win the battle for hearts and minds in Asia, The Asia Foundation had clandestinely supported anti-Communist motion picture industry personnel, ranging from producers, directors, and technicians to critics, writers, and general intellectuals in many parts of Asia. This article traces TAF’s motion picture project in Asia, focusing primarily on the early history of Asia Pictures in Hong Kong and Korea Motion Picture Cultural Association (KMPCA) in post-Civil War Korea.

In April, 1955, Kim Kwan-soo, President of the Korean Motion Picture Producers Association, received a call from Mary Walker, an administrative assistant of Philip Rowe, a Representative of The Asia Foundation (hereafter, TAF), a San Francisco-based non-governmental organization.¹ By the time Kim arrived at TAF’s newly constructed office in Seoul, the heart of postwar South Korea (hereafter, Korea), Rowe was waiting for Kim.² Before joining TAF, Rowe was involved in the occupation authority’s media policy in multifarious degrees as a director of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK)’s special unit for radio, library, film, and publication. In 1953, Rowe was transferred to the United States Information Service (USIS), a local branch of the United States Information Agency (USIA) which inherited the Office of War Information (OWI) and the Office of Inter-American Affairs. President Dwight Eisenhower made psychological warfare (hereafter, psywar) a vital part of his administration’s national security policy. And the administration, S. R. Joey Long argues, created USIA, ‘tasking it to align public opinion abroad with U.S. security objectives.’³ USIA, therefore, began to target ‘opinion-formers directly through books, motion pictures, and personal contact,’⁴ as Nicholas J. Cull reveals, and therefore the agency had maintained a close relationship with the country’s intellectuals, including Kim and other cultural elites.

Rowe, after greeting Kim, inquired whether he was aware of the newly launched Federation of Motion Picture Producers in Southeast Asia (FPA), and suggested that he be present at the Southeast Asian Film Festival, which would shortly be holding its second assembly in Singapore. The Southeast Asian Film Festival, renamed the Asian Film Festival in 1957, was an annual event of the FPA.⁵ Japanese film executive Nagata Masaichi, President of Daiei Studio, whose assembly meetings with film executives in Indonesia, Hong Kong, and the

Philippines, and Malaysia resulted in the formation of the Federation on 18 November 1953.⁶ The first annual Asian Film Festival took place in Tokyo in May 1954 but Korea was not invited while the Republic of China (hereafter, Taiwan) sent its delegates to the festival.⁷ TAF, Rowe stressed, would allocate three travel grants for attending the festival. With the ‘greenbacks’ given to him, Kim summoned two other film industry power men in this war-ravaged country.⁸ They embarked on the journey to Singapore, and that was the first inter-regional link Korean cinema made with the terrain’s film industry after the ruinous Korean Civil War’s armistice just a couple of years before.

It is worth noting that Korea’s taking part of the FPA was, intriguingly enough, not fostered by Japan or Korea’s own intention but by TAF’s sole proposition which aimed to make a ‘significant contribution,’ according to TAF’s official statements, ‘to development in Asia and to Asian-American understanding and friendship.’⁹ A number of unanswered questions should be raised here: Nagata Masaichi and other influential film executives in Southeast Asia initiated the FPA. Its objective was, at least on the official record, to ‘promote the motion picture industry in the countries of Southeast Asia and to raise the artistic and technical standards of motion picture and ensure cultural dissemination and interchange of motion pictures in the Far East.’¹⁰ Having considered this manifesto cautiously, then, what was the reasoning behind the Korean delegates’ unanticipated expedition to Singapore? For what purpose, likewise, did TAF assist the FPA and its annual film festival? And to what degree had TAF got involved with the regional film industries? Put somewhat differently, we should also ask why and to what extent Japanese cinema, which once fabricated and exploited an expansive cinema network in Korea and other colonized territories under the *Dai-tō-a kyōeiken* (Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere), reconnect with most of its former colonies, by way of the FPA, merely eight years after the end of the Pacific War (1941-45), and only several months after a cease fire of the Korean Civil War (1950-53).¹¹ To solve these puzzles, this article is a focused account on TAF and its short-lived motion picture project in Asia.

Under the leadership of Robert Blum who became the first president of TAF in 1954, this organization was actively involved in the motion pictures in Asia ever since its first ‘made-in-TAF’ feature film *The People Win Through* [*Ludu Aung Than*, 1953], based on a play written by Burmese Prime Minister U Nu, was produced in 1953.¹² Roughly from 1953 to 1959, to win the battle for hearts and minds in Asia, TAF had surreptitiously advocated anti-Communist motion picture industry personnel, ranging from producers, directors, and technicians to critics and writers in Japan, Hong Kong, Burma, Korea, as well as American and British motion picture producers in Malaysia and Thailand through covert activities. Drawing archival materials from the Asia Foundation Records at the Hoover Institution Archives and Robert Blum Papers at the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University, this article is primarily concerned with the origins and development of TAF’s motion picture project in Asia; Hong Kong and post-Civil War Korea as the central focus for analysis. With a view to explore the ways in which the United States government-led Cold War cultural policies had influenced the regional film industry in the 1950s, this study aims to investigate how and to what extent TAF and its field agents covertly acted to construct an anti-communist motion picture producers’ alliance in Asia, responded to local film executives’ various needs, and conflicted, construed, and negotiated with the constantly changing political, social, and cultural environments in Hong Kong and Korea during the project’s active operations. In the following pages, according to this logic, this article first traces the history of TAF and its major motion picture programs in Asia that include the FPA, the Asian Film Festival, and Asia Pictures. This study, then, considers a case of post-Civil War

Korea and scrutinizes Korean Motion Picture Cultural Association (hereafter, KMPCA), which was clandestinely financed by TAF, and its network with the FPA: how the studio was initiated, how it collaborated with the FPA and TAF, and how it gradually declined and evaporated by the end of the decade.

The Birth of The Asia Foundation

Historian Tony Judt claims that the US foreign cultural programs, by 1953, ‘employed 13,000 people and cost US\$ 129 million.’¹³ Most of the expenditure, not surprisingly, went to the intellectual elites of Western Europe, but Asia increasingly emerged as a new ground zero with the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949.¹⁴ Lazar Kaganovich, Vice-Premier of the Council of Ministers, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), proclaimed that ‘if the nineteenth century was a century of capitalism, the twentieth century is a century of the triumph of socialism and communism,’ and the influence of the Soviets was spreading out over Asia.¹⁵ Certainly, having been threatened by the ever-expanding Communism over the region, particularly the establishment of PRC and the outbreak of the Korean War, it became necessary for the US government to construct a military bulwark and ‘free Asian bloc’ in the region. The Truman administration had identified Japan as the key to the balance of power in Asia. And as Bruce Cumings claims, the key members of postwar American politics, especially Dean Acheson, George Kennan, and John Foster Dulles, hoped to situate Japan ‘in a world system shaped by the United States.’¹⁶ With Japan, they aimed to construct a ‘free Asia’ bloc, a ‘great crescent’ of anti-Communist containment in Asia, which in the end would be more or less the non-territorialized colonies of dominant America. With the end of the occupation regime in Japan, which aimed to democratize the society and end the militarism (the Japanese Imperial Army), break up the *zaibatsu* (Japanese financial clique), eliminate rural landlords, and reform education in 1951 in tandem with the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan finally re-entered the international political system. And, in this political circumstance, TAF was born in San Francisco.

TAF was originally a creation of the executive branch intended to propagate the US foreign policy interests in Asia. It was established in 1951 as the Committee for Free Asia (CFA) at the height of the Korean Civil War ‘by a group of Californians who believed that a non-governmental American organization primarily focused on Asia could help to increase the desire and ability of Asians to resist Communism on their own soil.’¹⁷ Besides its headquarters in San Francisco and two external offices in Washington D.C. and New York City, TAF, as of 1954, had operated fourteen field offices in major cities, from Tokyo and Manila to Karachi and Rangoon. F. Sionil José, a renowned Filipino novelist, reminisced: ‘many of foundation representatives were academics with extensive knowledge of the region and of the countries where they are assigned.’¹⁸ Field officers, as Jose remembered, were mostly college professors in Asian studies, journalists, and former state officers. On top of this, the Board of Trustees was composed of twenty-two members who had distinguished careers in both academic and professional fields such as entrepreneurs, writers, educators, and film and media executives. Notable board members were: Brayton Wilbur (President of Wilbur-Ellis co.), Raymond B. Allen (Chancellor of UCLA), James A. Michener (Writer), Paul G. Hoffman (President of the Ford Foundation), and Eric Johnston (President of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)). It is hardly surprising that none of the board members was associated with the political realm as TAF wished to conceal TAF’s Washington network and underscore its non-governmental and philanthropic outfit.

Despite the ostensible identity, TAF received considerable financial support from the US government, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in particular, and it should rather be called a 'quasi-nongovernmental organization.'¹⁹ TAF's financial and political attachment to the CIA was not publicly acknowledged until its covert self was eventually unveiled by a former CIA agent which was printed by a leftist-inclined magazine *Ramparts* and later *The New York Times* that, in the end, scandalized the world in 1967.²⁰ Like other non-governmental philanthropic institutions that were operated in the battlefield of hearts and minds, such as Beacon, Kaplan, and The Borden Trust, TAF was another camouflaged association shaped and carried by the CIA, and followed the direction of the US foreign cultural policy.²¹ Victor Marchetti alleges that TAF was given the objective 'to disseminate throughout Asia a negative vision of Mainland China, North Vietnam, and North Korea,' and he continues, 'it [TAF] sponsored scholarly research, supported conferences and symposia, and ran an academic exchange program, a CIA subsidy that reached 8 million dollars a year.'²² Supporting journalists, writers, and opinion leaders and encouraging them to fight against the communist forces were TAF's primary activities. Robert Blum, the first president, acknowledged the strategic importance of the cultural sectors in order to win this psywar in Asia. He believed that TAF should enhance its support to the area of underwriting research, stimulate distribution of non-communist literature, and sponsor travel to key conferences and help various media publish 'free world' news and produce feature films. Motion pictures, among these areas, was one of TAF's most heavily invested projects, at least during the 1950s.

The Asia Foundation's Motion Picture Project in Asia

James L. Stewart, director of the program, was a mastermind and an architect of the motion picture projects within TAF activities. Born in Kobe, Japan, to Methodist missionary parents and raised in Hiroshima, Stewart studied journalism at Duke University and had worked as an Associated Press correspondent in Chongqing, China, from 1939 to 1944, then a war correspondent for CBS in the China-Burma-India theatre after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In 1947, Stewart began work as a public information adviser to the US Army in Korea and, two years later, became the first secretary and public affairs officer at the US Embassy in Seoul. He and his family settled in San Francisco in 1951, where he went to work for TAF.²³ Shortly after Stewart's arrival, Charles Tanner, an ex-USIS motion picture officer, joined as a Hollywood liaison and a motion picture program supervisor. Blum and Stewart highly valued Tanner's vast human networks and motion picture industry experience in Korea, the Philippines, and Japan. Supplementary to Tanner who was assigned to work in the headquarters in San Francisco, John Miller, a special motion picture officer in Tokyo, was dispatched to assist Tanner and Noel Busch who was a former *Life* magazine correspondent and TAF's new representative in Tokyo. Shortly after their new posts began, Tanner and Miller embarked on their first motion picture mission: wrapping up *The People Win Through*, the first TAF-financed feature film whose production had been slated a year earlier.

As a morality tale, *The People Win Through*, based on a play of U Nu, deals with the gradual disillusionment of the idealist revolutionary Aung Min, who had joined the Communist insurrection. The play's message is that good democratic methods are superior to the evil totalitarian ways of the Communists.²⁴ Cascade Pictures of California picked up a film adaptation of it, written by Hollywood screenwriter Paul Gangelin, known for *The Scarlet Claw* (1944) and *My Pal Trigger* (1946), and the company sent out a film crew and its own filming equipment to Rangoon to begin shooting the film with an all-Burmese cast with local language in

late 1952. The budget of the film was US\$ 203,029, and TAF-Rangoon paid the production cost.²⁵ TAF's initial aim was to distribute the film to countries where the Buddhists occupied the majority of the population first then advance to American soil. The film, despite TAF's total support, failed to receive approving comments from both continents and performed defectively in Asia, even in Burma. With the high price they paid to learn from *The People Win Through*, TAF executives decided to fold their ambitious plan of the U.S. outreach of *The People Win Through*, after receiving a harsh criticism from Luigi Luraschi, the head of Foreign and Domestic Censorship at Paramount Studios. He wrote: 'In order for *The People Win Through* to be a good picture, it would have to be re-done.'²⁶ Blum, with disappointment, expressed:

This project illustrates the drawbacks of film production as an activity for TAF shows that financing the production of motion pictures would seem to be a method TAF should employ with great caution. We have therefore told our representatives that our activities in the motion picture field should generally be considered in the light of aid to Asian organizations making films as an organizing device and selective support to Asian commercial producers and distributors.²⁷

Instead of financing and producing theatrical films themselves, accordingly, TAF's motion picture men, Busch, Tanner, and Miller, had launched three new projects to win at the psywar. They would support: 1) the FPA and its mastermind Nagata Masaichi, financially and administratively, to instigate the anti-Communist motion picture producers alliance in Asia; 2) Hong Kong-based journalist Chang Kuo-sin and his Asia Press and Asia Pictures in Hong Kong to infuse healthy influence to the Communist-dominated film industry in the overseas Chinese communities; and lastly 3) Kim Kwan-soo and KMPCA in Korea in order to revitalize the war-torn country's motion picture industry and make the studio one of pro-democratic, anti-Communist members of the FPA.

Japan and Hong Kong, likewise, had been TAF's strategic grounds. Blum stated: 'the Communists, who consider intellectuals in Japan, as elsewhere, one of their chief targets, have so highly developed their propaganda organizational apparatus in Japan that they exercise virtual control over most of the publishing and movie industry.' Blum and TAF's motion picture project team had no doubt that Japan, the most advanced film producing country in Asia, should lead the organization. Nagata had never worked with the Communist-inclined filmmakers in his career, and was certainly TAF's qualified fit, although Nagata was placed on a list of war criminals during the Allied occupation period. The significance of Hong Kong, on the other hand, was mostly attributed to its geographical, political, and economic weight among overseas Chinese communities. Blum illustrated:

Throughout Southeast Asia it is apparent the Communists have switched their strategy from using overt red publications, which have been losing ground, to non-Communist media--especially newspapers, magazines, and movies. Floods of red propaganda materials aimed at the overseas Chinese are pouring into Asian countries, many in the guise of respectable publications. Since overseas Chinese look to Hong Kong as their intellectual and cultural center, CFA [TAF] believes that here lies a key to researching as many of them as possible in order to turn their support away from communist China.²⁸

TAF understood the importance of Hong Kong as the primary center in Asia for the production of Chinese films in the Mandarin language and viewed that the industry in Hong Kong had been heavily dominated by 'Communist producers strongly subsidized by Chinese Communist capital,' and the most successful Chinese films 'have by and large been Communist.'²⁹

Project Hong Kong: Chang Kuo-sin and Asia Pictures

The San Francisco office, with a strong support of Stewart, had acknowledged the vast market for Mandarin films such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Taiwan (one-third of the entire Chinese market), and assisted a Hong Kong-based young journalist named Chang Kuo-sin who had proposed a 'Tri-Dimensional Project for the battle for People's Minds' to TAF, then the Committee for Free Asia, in November 1951.³⁰ Chang's central idea aimed to offset the 'Red' domination of the Hong Kong media and help alleviate the non-Communist stake in the industry by setting up a publishing house, a film production company, and an intellectual club. All three components could mutually benefit each other and together they could churn out books and magazines, and produce films that would manifest 'traditional free values of China and the principles of the Free World.'³¹

The publishing unit, the Asia Press, came first. It was instituted and opened its doors in September 1952. The Asia Press had built an intricate configuration for the preparation, publication, distribution, and retail of anti-Communist materials in Chinese. Asia Bookstore, a retail outlet, launched in Hong Kong and Macau in 1952 and 1953 respectively. Chang, at an interview with *The New Leader*, highlighted the objective of his venture: 'Communist Literature fills many a bookstore here. Communist books and magazines are flooding Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia. Unless we can produce creative and crusading literature, we will lose the Chinese outside the bamboo curtain to the Communists.'³² On July 11, 1953, Asia Pictures was incorporated. It took over the existing Yung Hwa motion picture company in Hong Kong and officially commenced its productions. As Chang expressed, its aim was to:

Crusade against Communism, cleansing Chinese movie land here of Chinese Communist influence, producing pictures promoting the principles of democracy and freedom and condemnatory of Communist totalitarianism, acting not only as film producers, but also was watchdogs of people's conscience and minds....Our immediate objective in setting up our company is to beat the Great Wall. This is going to be our war-cry.³³

Evidently, Chang's primary target was the Great Wall (*Changcheng*) Pictures Corporation, a powerhouse of leftist filmmaking in Hong Kong. The Great Wall's productions enjoyed continuous box office successes in Hong Kong, PRC, and Southeast Asia from 1948 to the mid-1960s. A large group of Shanghai émigré, such as directors Yue Feng and Li Pingqian, producers Zhang Shankun and Yuan Yang-an, as well as actors like Shu Shi and Liu Qiong were all under the studio's long-term contracts. Yuan, a savvy businessman, launched the *Great Wall Pictorial* (*Changcheng huabao*), a sleek popular monthly magazine, in 1950.³⁴ *Great Wall Pictorial* was 'the best-selling one in town and in the Far East' and it was able to promote its pictures and stars successfully. Chang saw the magazine as one of the key factors of the Great Wall's commercial success. To create a counterpart of *Great Wall Pictorial*, Chang introduced *Asia Pictorial*, to be published by the Asia Press, in 1953.³⁵ It was, according to Chang, 'a most important publicity weapon.'³⁶

Chang recruited his close friend Walter Woo, a Portland-born, University of Michigan-educated Chinese American who had worked for Eastman Kodak and Paramount in America before joining Yung Hwa studio in Hong Kong as assistant general manager.³⁷ Woo was the ideal partner whose cultural backgrounds and careers in America gained TAF's conviction. Chang submitted an initial budget request of US\$167,000 to the Hong Kong office. Asia Pictures' first feature film, *Tradition* [*Chuan tong*, 1955], began filming on October 17, 1953 and location shooting was completed in December of the same year. Generally considered as one of the earliest gangster films in Hong Kong, *Tradition* is an epic about the battle between traditions – Chinese code of loyalty - and the corrupting vices that come with modernity. Tang Huang, the director, started out as a newsreel editor with the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) in Taiwan. And, as Chang indicated, 'He [Tang] was never associated with the Communist producers.'³⁸ Similarly, Wang Bao was chosen to play a protagonist because he had never appeared in any of the Great Wall pictures. The second film *The Heroine* [*Yang E*, 1955] started subsequently. Based on a well-known story of Xiang Fei, the Fragrant Concubine, *The Heroine* traces a life of a woman who was taken as a consort by the Qianlong Emperor of the Qing Dynasty during the 18th century. Chang explained:

I chose this story for its resistance against foreign aggression, loyalty to religion, country and husband upholding of personal dignity, Xiang Fei's struggle for personal freedom from a love-sick and aggression-hungry Emperor and her being victimized by an ancient version of *the Communist big lie* [author's emphasis]. They lied to her that her husband was still living and for the rest of her life she lived under this false belief.³⁹

Chang's ambition for the subsequent two years was to churn out three films per year with US\$ 20,000 budget each which was markedly higher than average for Hong Kong cinema at the time. And the budget would be covered by TAF. It was indeed a huge sum of money regarding TAF's budget allocation to Hong Kong. *Tradition* was Asia Pictures' official submission to the first Asian Film Festival. It, however, was the first film to be excluded by the festival committee from any consideration. Its negative portrayal of a Japanese general was an issue that violated one article of the festival regulations, that is: 'Films which are likely to hurt the national feeling of another country or territory.' *The Heroine* was, on the other hand, successfully screened at the Second Asian Film Festival in Singapore but the first two films from Asia Pictures had acquired neither critical acclaim at the Asian Film Festival nor local box-office triumph. Stewart became somewhat skeptical. Stewart expressed his doubt about Chang's capability as a producer and dispatched John Miller to evaluate Chang's studio and observe the Communist activities in the film industry, Miller, after spending two weeks in Hong Kong, concluded that TAF should not hesitate to continue or even increase, if necessary, its subsidization. He emphasized that TAF's choice lay between giving the entire overseas Chinese film industry to the communists 'by default' or 'making what may turn out to be a costly effort to save it.'⁴⁰

The fact that TAF was interested in Asia Pictures became 'public knowledge,' according to a journalist Lun-Zun Yuan (aka. L.Z. Yuan) who had joined TAF's San Francisco headquarters in 1951. Yuan, after watching *Tradition* and *The Heroine* in Burbank, California, with Frank Borzage and Luigi Lurashi, even suggested: 'If the "American Aid" is in the form of technical assistance, there is no need for secrecy....It would greatly enhance the prestige of Asia Pictures if it became known that some "Hollywood touch" has been given their pictures.'⁴¹ By the end of 1955, it was viewed that Asia Pictures was ready to streamline film production of

‘healthy’ Mandarin films.⁴² TAF, on the other hand, just launched another motion picture project. This time, it was in Korea: not only for the imminent fight against the Communists but to lift the standard of the country’s backward motion picture industry.

The Asia Foundation and Postwar Korea

The war damages to industrial offices, plants and equipment, public facilities, private dwellings, and transport equipment in the ravaged post-Civil War Korea were severe. The US government had poured 200 million dollars to the Syngman Rhee government’s decimated economy, which heavily relied on foreign aid, predominantly from America, for post-war reconstruction projects. In fact, between 1954 and 1959, about 70 percent of all reconstruction projects were funded by aid from the United States.⁴³ However, Korea as a whole had been neglected by TAF. Perhaps the nation’s recent war caused this desertion but more importantly the nature of strong anti-Communism among this war-torn Republic’s intellectuals did not ask for any impending action from the Foundation. Tanner, for instance, confirmed: ‘When thinking of Korea the first thought is that these people does not need to be persuaded away from Communism. They know its heavy hand too well.’⁴⁴ TAF-Seoul, accordingly, had a much belated inauguration, compared to other cities in the terrain.

Phillip Rowe became the first TAF-Seoul representative in 1954. The budget apportioned to Korea, nonetheless, was substantially low. The Seoul administrative team had to operate activities with a very tight budget; its 1954/55 expenditure was only US\$ 137,279, one-fourth of what the Hong Kong office received during the same period. Delmer Brown, Tokyo representative and a former University of California-Berkeley professor in Japanese history composed a letter to Blum so as to bring more considerations to Korea. Brown laid emphasis on the need of more financial and administrative support for Korea:

A private organization like TAF has an important mission to help Asians gain a better understanding of, and to implement, those ideas and ideals that lie at the heart of a free way of life. Such works, on some counts at least, is more important in Korea than in some of the larger, wealthier, and more heavily populated areas of Asia, for south Korea (like Vietnam and Taiwan) constitutes a laboratory situation where, among the same people, the free way of life and the communist way are North being tried. If in Korea, or in Vietnam and Taiwan, the intellectual situation is permitted to deteriorate to the point where people will turn to the communist solution, it will be interpreted throughout the Asian world, as strong evidence that the ideals and processes of the free way of life will not work in Asia.⁴⁵

The budget for the Seoul office had gradually increased. TAF-Seoul paid particular attention to the cultural field, which was regarded as ‘an extremely important one in Korea.’⁴⁶ Major projects were mostly in the arena of education, publication, and cultural matters. In the cultural sectors, hitherto, USIS-Korea had already been overseeing radio, library, film, and publication operations. Roughly twenty Americans and over 170 Koreans staffed USIS-Korea in 1954.⁴⁷ The means that USIS-Korea exploited to conduct its operations were fourfold: audio, audiovisual, experiential, and literary that, in many parts, inevitably overlapped TAF’s core cultural activities. Moreover the audiovisual section of USIS-Korea had constructed well-equipped motion picture studios in Chin-hae and Sang-nam, which were near the wartime capital, Pusan. USIS-Korea hired Korean filmmakers and was churning out localized propaganda films and the weekly

newsreel film 'Liberty News.'⁴⁸ In 1954, according to Han-Sang Kim, all the movie theatres in Korea were showing USIS movies: shorts, documentaries, and news regularly, and 3.75 million audiences saw them every month. USIS even produced a theatrical feature-length film *The Box of Death* [*Jugeomeui sangja*, 1955].⁴⁹ TAF had to set up distinguishing cultural programs in order to avoid unnecessary rivalry, and would not to be treated with suspicion or rejected from the nation's growing intellectual communities.

TAF-Korea, in consequence, focused on the local cultural elites, and brought in American educators, scholars, and technicians to the cultural field. As Brown pointed out that 'there is a deep interest, on the part of all Koreans, to learn about the Western (and particularly the American) way of doing things,' Post Civil War Koreans were trying desperately to learn English, to read English books, and to learn about American life. In its first year, six English teachers were placed in five major universities for the English Teacher's Program in Korea. In the category of publication, TAF-Korea supported three literary magazines: *Modern Literature* [*Hyundae Munhak*], the oldest one of its kind; *World of Thought* [*Sasanggye*]; *The Literature and Arts* [*MunhakYesul*], and the first popular magazine for women, *Women's Garden* [*Yeowon*]. 'The Freedom Writer's Award [*Jayumunhaksang*],' which was given to the writers who fled from North Korea and wrote books containing eyewitness accounts of experiences in North Korea, was inaugurated in 1954. The first awardee, Chang Cheol-su's book *A Captive Life in North Korea* (1954) became a national bestseller. A significant portion of the budget was also allocated to the research center where local university students and scholars were able to access English-language magazines and books donated by various institutions of America.⁵⁰ Greg Barnhisel argues that books became 'a central weapon' in the US cultural-propaganda campaign, which aims at an audience of 'elite opinion-makers,' sought to present 'an image of the US as a well-meaning liberal democracy whose civil liberties and democratic institutions ensured that it would mature past whatever shortcomings from which it might currently suffer.'⁵¹ TAF-Korea also supported the National Museum, the Microfilming project of historical records, and the Folklore Society in Korea. But their most heavily invested project in 1955 and in subsequent years was the Korean Motion Picture Cultural Association (KMPCA).

Korean Motion Picture Cultural Association (KMPCA)

Korea faced an abrupt influx of migrant workers after the Civil War. The number of Seoul residents hiked. The population of Seoul more than doubled to reach 1.5 million by 1955 from a mere 650,000 in 1951. Along with the overflow of migrant workers to the metropolis, postwar Korea faced a rapid influx of American culture, i.e. 'core' modernism. Charles Armstrong delineates that the cultural arena 'broadly conceived--from the realm of arts and letters to that of mass media and popular education--was the site of an intense political struggle in East Asia.'⁵² He accentuates that postwar Korea has been penetrated profoundly by American culture, perhaps on a level that no other country in Asia has reached, and the position of the U.S. government and its cultural agencies such as Christian organizations, Boy Scouts, 4-H Club, and private foundations: Rockefeller, Ford, Carnegie, and TAF were crucial to shaping the attitude toward the American modernity.

Certainly post-war/post-colonial Korean people encountered material goods produced by an advanced capitalistic economy, and, as Chungmoo Choi argues that 'the seduction of, desire for, and resistance to the power of fetishistic late capitalism weave the tapestry of the post-colonial nation's history.'⁵³ A sudden arrival of Hollywood films, its alluring charm of what Miriam Hansen called 'vernacular modernism,'⁵⁴ fascinated postwar Korean civilians.

Hollywood cinema had immense popularity among the audiences, and filmmakers in general and many film workers dreamed of adopting the ‘advanced’ Hollywood studio system. Under the strong influence of American goods, way of life, and cultural products, Fordism was regarded as an ultimate norm to be adopted and followed to achieve modernization. Constructing the state-of-the-art soundstages, adopting a Fordist-type mass-producing assembly line and its effective management system, and ‘borrowing’ modern technologies such as synchronizing the sound, color cinematography, special effects, and camera works were all Korean film executives’ ultimate dream. They, however, lacked on everything: equipment, sound stages, modern filming techniques, and, most importantly, money. Oh Young-jin,⁵⁵ a notable playwright, critic, and motion picture distributor, visited America from December 1953 to February 1954. USIS sponsored his cultural tour to the United States. Oh visited Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco in order to secure the distribution rights of Hollywood films to Korea and build relationships with American writers, critics, and educators. In San Francisco, Oh called on TAF. Tanner asked him about the current status and problems of the Korean film industry. Oh responded:

There is no production under way in Korea. The only organizations equipped to carry on such activities are the UN and USIS. No Korean producers or any combination of them has equipment. However, there is a distinct need for motion picture production in Korea for many reasons, one – at present there is little entertainment available for the people and this becomes a serious void when viewed in the light of conditions which exist there.⁵⁶

After his departure, Tanner and Stewart had a lengthy meeting to discuss the ways in which TAF could facilitate the recovery of the Korean film industry. Both men had once served in Korea and dedicated themselves to boost up the nation’s cinema. Rowe had a deep interest in cinema. He was a former right arm of Stewart when he was working for USIS. He asked for Stewart if TAF could support the motion picture industry in Korea. John Miller was instantaneously assigned to conduct an initial field research in Korea. He spent two weeks in January 1955. He met Cho Tong-je, Oh Young-jin, Lee Byung-il, Lee Yong-min, and Kim Kwan-soo. Miller’s recommendation was to provide basic motion picture production equipment to a non-profit holding corporation in Korea. They initially agreed to set up a new institution named KMPCA.⁵⁷

It was right after the third Asian Film Festival in Hong Kong in 1956 when the motion picture project in Korea finally took off. The San Francisco headquarters had been decreasing its relationship with the FPA, as well as cutting back on budget for other major motion picture projects in Japan and Hong Kong. It was chiefly due to TAF’s gradual policy changes, from direct involvement toward more nuanced and indirect support to the intellectuals and opinion leaders, local organizations, and activities that are compatible with ‘free world objectives’⁵⁸ but also attributed to Nagata Masaichi’s incompetence of leading the organization. Robert D. Grey compiled a long evaluation report after talking with William A. Seiter, a veteran Hollywood film producer, who had observed the third event in Hong Kong as a Hollywood representative. Grey was critical about the festival and Nagata’s leadership:

The federation itself is incapable of effective direct action on behalf of its member association. It has made no real progress toward the solution of major problems confronting the Asian picture industries, nor has it even established within its framework

the organizational means for approaching work along these lines....the Federation itself is still essentially a paper organization whose function, and value, is mainly to coordinate and to provide the framework within which cooperation among the member associations can more easily take place. Even this aspect of the Federation's contribution has been weak.⁵⁹

For Blum, motion picture project turned out to be costly but ineffective business as already proven well from TAF's prior experiences in Japan, Burma, and Hong Kong. Blum emphasized that 'we [TAF] should not involve ourselves in direct production in the future' but he was positive about backing up of local motion picture organizations.⁶⁰ TAF's gradual lessening of the FPA, therefore, contributed to turn their consideration to Korea. Moreover, and perhaps the single crucial factor for this, Blum had an engaging meeting with President Syngman Rhee in October 1956. Rhee inquired of him if TAF would bring an American motion picture expert to help the Koreans raise the standards and the educational content of their motion pictures.⁶¹ The San Francisco office, again, dispatched Miller to Seoul shortly after. This time, Miller was committed to stay much longer. He ended up staying for six months in Seoul.⁶²

Miller, right before his departure for Seoul, made a short trip to Los Angeles to purchase necessary filming equipment for KMPCA. TAF had approved a sum of US\$ 58,000, one third of the year's entire program budget in Korea. Consequently, one 35mm Mitchell camera and other technical equipment including an automatic film developer and lighting facilities arrived in Seoul in July 1956.⁶³ TAF indicated that consideration must be given 'to the aims and ambitions of the people who make or want to make pictures.'⁶⁴ KMPCA was now converted into a rental agency of the equipment. Since the Korean film industry of the time seriously lacked filming equipment, KMPCA's Mitchell camera, the only one in Korea available for commercial pictures, in fact, became a dream of film directors in Korea.⁶⁵ But the situation in Korea had radically been transformed. While he was staying in Korea, Miller had witnessed that the Korean film industry was entering a crucial period of its growth and development. *Madame Freedom* [*Jayu buin*, 1956]'s astonishing success in the domestic film market boosted the whole industry. In tandem with this, USIS, UN Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA), and the US Military Aid Groups have competitively allocated endowments to Korean government agencies for the purpose of equipment and for the construction of motion picture facilities. Moreover, Hong Chan, a successful theatre and motion picture producer, was under construction of what would become the biggest motion picture studio in Korea, with the support of the Syngman Rhee government.⁶⁶ Miller, however, emphasized that TAF's investment to KMPCA will be used most appropriately in the ways in which he and TAF motion picture team believed. He wrote:

It is highly unlikely that private enterprise will be able to compete with government, when government has sufficient equipment to supply all the needs of the industry. Assuredly, present practices do not create a climate conducive to the development of private enterprise in equipment rental and laboratory activities. It may be proposed that the new equipment given to the various ROK (Republic of Korea) government agencies will not be used by film makers who are making commercial entertainment films.⁶⁷

Miller, as well as Stewart and Tanner, truly believed that the entertainment film is one of the most powerful, social, cultural and political forces in the world today. But, he thought, the war-torn nation's intellectuals, as well as the government, paid little attention to the entertainment

film as they believed that films are for the poor and unsophisticated civilians. ‘It never happened in Communist countries,’ Miller continued, ‘when a Communist regime takes over they immediately put all mass communications groups under their control. They are particularly interested in film making and film people...North Korean films are technically superior to the ones made in Seoul.’⁶⁸ Supporting commercial filmmaking was, in the end, TAF’s strategy to distinguish its motion picture project from other United States-led cultural programs in Korea.

KMPCA, in 1957, received another substantial grant of US\$ 50,000 for installing modern sound recording equipment. For its three-year investment plan, TAF had gushed approximately US\$ 140,000 and became TAF’s ‘most highly funded project.’⁶⁹ Their principal aim, assisting to produce one or two ‘technically acceptable’ Korean films for the Asian Film Festival through KMPCA, was no different from TAF’s objectives for the Asia Pictures in Hong Kong. But they refused to provide financial support to individual film projects. Having been involved with and financed numerous films, from *The People Win Through* to *Tradition* and *The Heroine*, Blum became incredulous about this. He wrote:

Past ventures of TAF in subsidizing or assisting individual motion pictures have almost invariably resulted in great complications and few successes. We have been working toward more and more toward the principle that we would not assist such individual ventures and the proposed Korean project would be a departure from this principle.⁷⁰

The Korean delegates could not submit any feature film to the Third Asian Film Festival in 1956 but as soon as TAF’s equipment donations to KMPCA were completed, Lee Byong-il, a KMPCA executive member, commenced a shooting for *The Wedding Day* [*Sijibganeun nal*, 1957], based on a play written by Oh Young-jin. It became the first official submission to the festival and won the best comedy film award at the fourth Asian Film Festival in Tokyo. It was indeed the country’s first achievement at the international film festival, the whole country was excited and one film critic proudly wrote: ‘Our [Korean] film industry successfully proved that the cinema can participate in the movement of rebuilding the country. Now it is time to move on and acquire dollars in line with Rhee government’s export-encouragement policy!’⁷¹ Korean film critic Lee Min, along this line, proudly proclaimed:

Korean cinema is now paving a way to the world at least in Southeast Asia. Korean cinema had a warm response at the 4th Asian Film Festival, which is the biggest achievement Korean cinema ever made. We can export our cinema to Southeast Asia, and, ultimately, acquire foreign currency.”⁷²

Acquiring foreign currency, especially the US ‘greenbacks,’ was the utmost mission for the Syngman Rhee government’s decimated economy.⁷³ Having witnessed the achievement of *The Wedding Day* and subsequent local box office successes, the whole film industry in Korea, as Stewart and his motion picture team had anticipated, was boosted and the number of theatrical films produced in Korea skyrocketed, from 6 in 1953 to 108 in 1959. The city residents hiked, and, accordingly, these new patrons in the end paved a way to the golden age of Korean cinema in the 1960s.⁷⁴ An iconic director in the 1960s Korean cinema, Shin Sang-ok stood out in the late 1950s. Shin produced and directed his first major commercial success, *A Confession of a Female College Student* [*Eoneu yeodaesaengui gobaek*], in 1958. And backed by the films’ handsome profits, Shin established Shin Films, the most influential motion picture studio in the 1960s.⁷⁵

Conclusions

During the active operation of Asia Pictures and the Asia Press, from 1951 to 1959, TAF had granted funds to both companies and the total amount reached to almost a million US dollars.⁷⁶ However, TAF's most expensive project to create a healthy, non-Communist Mandarin film industry in Hong Kong, led by Asia Pictures, was nowhere near success. Chang had produced nine theatrical films throughout the period of operations but none of them stood out in the 1950s Chinese diasporas market in Asia. Chang's two companies failed to strive for self-sufficiency and generate profits. Apparently, by the end of the decade, Chang and his companies grew to be a burden to TAF as they were responsible for the two companies and their administrative deficits. John F. Sullivan, Stewart's replacement, had been critical to TAF's motion picture programs since its inception. Sullivan emphasized, 'Asia Pictures' contribution to the Chinese cinema has been minor.'⁷⁷ Asia Pictures was conceivably TAF's worst defeat. TAF's earliest scheme was to endorse Chang and his two companies in the first two years then retreat immediately once he became a self-sufficient and autonomous motion picture executive. But this initial design turned out to be a rather calamitous one. Chang deliberated himself as an 'agent' of TAF whereas they [TAF] regarded Chang as a 'partner' and his two companies a 'joint enterprise' for a common goal. Chang, hence, had relentlessly requested to subsidize his corporations. J. F. Richardson, Hong Kong representative, wrote: 'As long as TAF in effect owns the two companies, Mr. Chang will depend and rely on us for additional investment to cover their deficits.'⁷⁸ In March 1959, TAF supported Chang to construct a second sound stage and it was their last motion picture subsidization in Asia. On March 31, 1961, TAF irreversibly turned over ownership of Asia Pictures and the Asia Press to Chang.⁷⁹ Having struggled with financial deficits due to the constant flops at the local box office, Chang utterly ceased the operation of Asia Pictures before long.

This essay has mapped the ways in which the short-lived TAF's motion picture project aimed to construct the alliance of anti-Communist film producers in Asia by supporting some of the ideologically 'correct' motion picture executives in Japan, Hong Kong, and Korea. As discussed earlier, what TAF's motion picture project team had hoped for was to 'minimize or eliminate the effectiveness of leftist anti-Free world influence' in the region's cinema and win the psywar against 'ever-thriving' Communist forces.⁸⁰ To achieve this mission TAF supported the FPA and its mastermind Nagata Masaichi to construct the 'healthy' network of anti-Communist motion picture producers in Asia; Chang Kuo-sin and his two companies in Hong Kong to promote anti/non-Communist cinema; and Kim Kwan-soo and KMPCA in Korea to boost up the very backward motion picture industry. They, however, failed to obtain notable fruition in the end. What they overlooked was political instability, intensifying sentiment of nationalism which often incorporated with the Communism or the Red Scares, and foreign currency regulations that made it difficult to purchase or borrow raw stocks and new and modern filming equipment from America. And, most importantly, TAF's strategic partners in the region, markedly Nagata, Chang, and Kim were incapable of leading 'Free World' organizations and lacked sufficient experience in the motion picture industries. Their blatant ideological stances called into question of commercial values that were necessary to attract local audiences. In other words, they ultimately failed to construct a network of anti-Communist motion picture producers in the region that TAF had hoped for.⁸¹

But, ironically, the network was eventually resuscitated and successfully facilitated in the 1960s by non-political motion picture executives in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea. From 1964 onward, the region's two developing states — Korea and Taiwan — and its regional media

capital, Hong Kong, dominated the festival and the FPA. Li Han-hsiang, President of the Grand Motion Picture [*Guolian*] in Taiwan, reminisced.

To be perfectly honest, many awards at the festival were dished out under the special maneuverings of producers, who were doing a lot of PR, taking people for meals, etc. The ulterior motive for organizing a festival was to cement connections and help each other sell films. That was exactly how the particular festival was formed, under the arrangement of Daiei's representative Nagata Masaichi, Run Run Shaw, Korean director Shin Sang-ok and several prominent producers of the Philippines.⁸²

While TAF decided to discontinue its motion picture project in Asia, Run Run Shaw of Shaw Brothers in Hong Kong, the least politically engaged producer in the FPA, paradoxically, achieved TAF's key undertaking - healthy influence on the Communist-dominated film industry, led by Great Wall, in the overseas Chinese communities. It was carried out by Shaw whom Thomas Hodge, director of the Malayan Film Unit, called a 'non-political opportunist.'⁸³ In the late 1950s, as soon as Run Run Shaw grasped the family's movie enterprise in Hong Kong and Malaysia, he was anxious to employ the modern movie business system. Shaw set off an aspiring project, constructing the grandest movie studio ('Movie Town' in Clearwater Bay, Hong Kong) in Asia, and branched out the studio's market from traditional Southeast Asia to the Chinese-language 'world,' and even to the West. While operating a Hollywood-type assembly line, and mass-producing films for Chinese communities around the world at his multiple 'state-of-the-art' sound stages, Shaw dominated the territory. And it was Shaw who actually utilized the FPA network in the 1960s, not for TAF's ideological objective, but to stretch the studio's market in order to maximize the profits. It should therefore be noted here that TAF had eventually played a significant role in the formation of the inter-Asian motion picture industry network, in ways they never anticipated.

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Notes

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² Postwar Korea in this context denotes Post-Korean Civil War (1950-53) unless it is otherwise indicated.

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⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Democracy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 123.

⁵ This film festival started as the Southeast Asian Film Festival in 1954 and was subsequently renamed twice: the Asian Film Festival in 1957, then the Asia-Pacific Film Festival in 1982. Throughout this essay, I will use the Asian Film Festival for both Southeast Asian Film Festival and Asia-Pacific Film Festival unless otherwise indicated.

⁶ With Kurosawa Akira's *Rashomon* (1951), Nagata Masaichi (1906-1985) and his studio Daiei became the strongest and most respected motion picture company in Asia. *Rashomon* won the Grand Prix at the Venice International Film Festival in 1951. A year later, in May 1952, *Rashomon* even grabbed an Oscar, which garnered respect and jealousy simultaneously from other nations in the region. With the unprecedented success of *Rashomon*, Nagata's presence in Asia had rapidly been established. For more about Nagata, see Peter High, *The Imperial Screen: Japanese Film Culture in the Fifteen Years' War, 1931-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 314-321.

⁷ For more about the history of the Asian Film Festival, see Sangjoon Lee, The Emergence of the Asian Film Festival: Cold War Asia and Japan's Re-entrance to the Regional Market in the 1950s, in Miyao Daisuke (ed), *Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 232-250.

⁸ Yoon Bong-choon, Chairman of the Motion Picture Director's Association in Korea; and Lee Seong-cheol, Chief of the Motion Picture Unit, Ministry of Culture and Information (MCI). Kim was a dubious, rather opportunistic cultural elitist who served as an executive officer of the Association of Chosun Theatre Culture, a pro-Japanese organization which was established in 1942. After the liberation in 1945, however, Kim precipitously reformed his ideological stance, and got involved in the film industry. With his verbal fluency in both English and Japanese, Kim seized a chance under the US occupiers, and made his way to work with USAMGIK. Kim, paired with respected film director Choi In-kyu, produced several anti-Japanese films right after the liberation such as *Hurrah Freedom!* [Ja-yumanse, 1946], *An Innocent Criminal* [Joe-eobsneun joe-in, 1948], and *The Night Before Independence Day* [Doglibjeon-ya, 1948]. A year after the armistice, in 1954, Kim wore a new outfit: anti-Communism. Kim produced *A Cross in Gunfire* [Pohwasog-ui sibjaga] in 1955. In the same year, he was unanimously elected as the President of the Korean Motion Picture Producers Association.

⁹ Cho Tong-jae and Park Tae-jin, *Partner For Change: 50 Years of TAF in Korea* (Seoul: The Asia Foundation, 2005), 13.

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¹² For more about Blum's career, see Steve Weissman and John Shock, CIA Asia Foundation, *Pacific Research and World Empire Telegram* 3(6) (September-October 1972), 3-4.

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²⁵ Richard P. Conlon, Basic Position Paper TAF -Motion Picture Program (March 24, 1953), Japan Writer Project H-7 1953-54 file, Box 9, AFR.

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- ³³ Chang Kuo-sin, The Asia Pictures Limited (July 15, 1953), AFR, Box 9, Asia Pictures file.
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- ⁴⁰ John Miller, Review, Evaluation and Proposed Project Funding for Fiction Motion Picture Activity (June 25, 1954), AFR, Box 55, KMPCA file.
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⁸² Grace Ng, Li Han Hsiang's Long Men Zhen, in Wong Ain-Ling (ed.), *Li Han-Hsiang, Storyteller* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2007), 138-57.

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