U.S. Industry and Technology in the Cultural Cold War: Case Studies of Korea and Japan in mid 1950s

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Introduction


Although the significance of the cultural aspects of the Cold War was already pointed out by scholars such as Elaine Tyler May (1999) more than a decade ago, recent studies have increasingly revealed that the Cold War was really a “total” war, as Osgood has aptly pointed out, including competitions over modern housing, electrical appliances, fashion, food, hobbies, movies, sports, technology, and lifestyle as a whole. Especially after the successful development of thermonuclear bombs, it became less realistic to solve international conflicts through the armed confrontations of the superpowers. Information, knowledge, technology, and cultural resources assumed more importance than ever as the “weapons” of the Cold War, turning it into the Cultural Cold War.

Although there is no established definition of the term “Cultural Cold War,”
the existing scholarships in this field have mostly dealt with the state-sponsored, image-control campaigns using what we generally perceive as cultural resources, such as literature, music, art, films, architecture, and various exhibitions. Sanders, for example, explored the ideological offensive by the Central Information Agency (CIA) using literature, journalism, music, and art. Masey and Morgan focused on international exhibitions organized or displayed by the United States Information Agency (USIA). Von Eschen examined the American jazz musicians' overseas tours sponsored by the State Department. In sum, the existing scholarly works have more or less focused on the U.S. government agencies such as USIA, the Department of State, CIA, and the President himself. There are some important exceptions to these practices. Matsuda has examined the key role the Rockefeller Foundation played in the U.S. cultural programs for Japan, which brought about “permanent dependency” of Japanese intellectuals on the U.S. generosity. Osgood has integrated U.S. businesses in his discussion of President Eisenhower's propaganda campaign. Alvah has focused on the American military wives as the “unofficial ambassadors.” Tanikawa has explored the Hollywood motion picture industry’s cooperation with the U.S. government. Overwhelmingly, however, scholars of the Cultural Cold War have discussed what the U.S. government agencies did in other countries and how they were received.

The present paper attempts to stretch the boundaries of the existing Cultural Cold War studies in three major ways. First and foremost, it will complicate the meaning of “culture” in the context of the Cold War. It will argue that the Cultural Cold War was not simply a competition over which culture was superior or inferior, but it was a process to create a psychological and cultural foundation on which liberal, capitalist modernity would be constructed in newly independent countries. The U.S. cultural programs overseas, therefore, intended to form hegemonic knowledge, conceptions, norms or desires that would support the U.S.-centered, Western political and social order. Second, it will shed new light on the roles of non-governmental actors of the Cultural Cold War, especially the U.S. industry. It will demonstrate that the U.S. businesses did not just cooperate with the state, but were an integral part of the Cultural Cold War project. Third, it will point out the important roles that media, especially company or state-sponsored documentary films, played in the U.S. cultural projects overseas.

To explore the above issues, the present paper will introduce two concrete cases. The first case is the construction of power plants in Korea immediately after the Korean War armistice. Pacific Bechtel Corporation, the largest construction company in the U.S., constructed steam power plants in Korea in cooperation with the U.S. government and the United Nations Command (UNC). Pacific Bechtel later made a documentary film portraying the construction process, More Power to Korea, which was procured by the USIA as one of the “USIS films” shown all over the world as a “weapon” of the Cultural Cold War. The second case is the “Atoms for Peace” campaign promoted by the Eisenhower administration beginning in December 1953. The U.S. government held “Atoms
for Peace exhibitions” in major cities all over the world, where USIS films such as *A is for Atom*, produced by the General Electric Company, were shown to millions of people in thirty different languages. In Japan, the Atoms for Peace campaign attempted to change the national concept of atomic energy. While the Japanese were already fascinated with potential values of atomic energy during the occupation period, it was only after the U.S. government started the campaign that medical, agricultural, and industrial applications of atomic energy were grouped together and given a new name: the “peaceful use” of atomic energy. The Atoms for Peace campaign has divided the use of atomic energy into binary oppositions—“peaceful” and therefore “good” use, and the “non-peaceful” and therefore “bad” use. The former included medial, agricultural, and industrial applications including power generation, and the latter indicated the production of nuclear weapons.

These cases will indicate that the Cold War was not simply a power game between the states, but it was a process of forming hegemonic knowledge, ideas, desires, and expectations, which would provide the cultural and psychological bases for the U.S.-modeled capitalism. Such an analysis supports Odd Arne Westad’s argument that the Cold War was a competition over the “universal applicability” of ideologies and socio-economic systems, especially in the newly independent countries.\(^{14}\) The U.S. government assumed that industry and technology as a road to modern, affluent life should have a universal appeal. The U.S. cultural programs, therefore, showcased industry and technology, provoking yearning for affluence and modernity that they would bring about. The Cultural Cold War, in this sense, was a drive to spread a culture of free market, and a culture of technology.

Of course, a counter-argument is always expected that culture is fluid, and people receive culture with creative adaptation. Following this “reception theory,” people of the recipient country do not necessarily receive the U.S. cultural programs straight-forwardly, but they have freedom to resist, accept them selectively, or adapt them creatively. This argument is endorsed by the existing scholarship such as Von Eschen’s example of the State Department tour of black jazz musicians to the Third World countries.\(^{15}\) In the State Department cultural diplomacy, black musicians were supposed to be the epitome of racial equality that the U.S. was achieving. They nonetheless reminded people of persisting racial discrimination in the U.S., and provoked transnational comradeship in the common struggles against colonialism and racism. The Atoms for Peace case explored in this paper also reveals that the Japanese anti-nuclear feelings were not altogether “tamed” by the campaign. The Japanese welcomed cultural and educational programs on nuclear technology, but they fiercely resisted U.S. thermo-nuclear testing. These examples certainly indicate that cultural diplomacy can include a mixed message, and result in diverse reactions.

Still, the rosy images of the future supported by high technology and free enterprise had a powerful message to penetrate newly independent nations. The steam power plants in Korea and nuclear technologies in Japan were both a device
to glorify postwar, liberal, capitalist modernity. The U.S. industry did not just play a part in the U.S. cultural project overseas, but it was the core of the universal ideology and the mode of living which the U.S. tried to apply globally.

I. Bechtel Corporation’s Power Plants Construction in Korea

On June 23, 1953--approximately one month before the Korean War Armistice--NSC156, a report titled “Strengthening the Korean Economy” was submitted to the National Security Council (NSC) by a team headed by Henry J. Tasca, a career diplomat who would later become an ambassador to Greece and Morocco. The Tasca report proposed a new three-year plan for the economic aid to the Republic of Korea (ROK), which was approved by the NSC with some minor revision and became the official U.S. policy. The Tasca report pointed out five basic objectives of the U.S. aid to ROK: a) to support and expand the ROK armed forces; b) to release the U.S. armed forces from ROK; c) to strengthen the morale of the Korean people; d) to provide an example to the rest of free Asia (i.e., example of the assistance given by other non-Communist nations); and e) to strengthen the Japanese economy by promoting trade with ROK. For these purposes, the report recommended strengthening ROK’s “dwarf-like economy” and promoting the living standard of the Korean people. The three-year plan especially encouraged investment in agriculture, mining, industry, transportation, and electric power.\(^\text{16}\)

The U.S. government, however, wanted to offer the economic aid through the United Nations (UN), because “a move to make the economic assistance program a unilateral U.S. program would undermine the whole concept of collective action” which characterized the Korean War. The U.S. government tried to make the economic aid look like unified efforts by the “free countries.” At the same time, the U.S. government thought that “there must be complete coordination” between the U.S. and UN, and the assistant to ROK “should be coordinated, integrated, and implemented under one head.”\(^\text{17}\) In short, the economic assistance to ROK had to look like the coordinated efforts by non-Communist countries under the UN flag, while in fact, the UN policy was actually the U.S. policy, and the two were not distinguishable. Reflecting such a situation, the U.S. created the office of Economic Coordinator, who represented the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA) in Washington, and served the UNC in Korea at one time.\(^\text{18}\) The FOA was established by the Department of State after the Korean War armistice, and was responsible for economic and technological aid to non-Communist countries. In 1954, FOA’s functions were absorbed into the International Cooperation Administration (ICA).

C. Tyler Wood, an Army Colonel during the WWII, and a State Department official administering the Marshall Plan aid in the postwar era, was appointed the Economic Coordinator.\(^\text{19}\) He regarded himself as the “UNC Economic Coordinator,” in his correspondence with the ROK government, while his salary was paid
by FOA and he was sometimes called the “FOA Economic Coordinator” within the U.S. government. In any case, he was authorized to act in both capacities. He advised the ROK government on various issues including exchange rate, financial policies, and the “encouragement of private enterprise” through the Combined Economic Board (CEB). It was part of the UNC’s responsibilities, therefore, to enhance free market economy in ROK.

On February 2, 1954, Wood, President Steve D. Bechtel of Pacific Bechtel Corporation, General Coulter of the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA), and President Wesley McAfee of Union Electric Company met with President Syngman Rhee of ROK. Bechtel and McAfee were visiting ROK during their around-the-world trip. They were studying possibilities of the commercial use of nuclear power at that time, so their trip was perhaps related to nuclear business. It was the construction of steam power plants, however, that President Rhee and the four Americans discussed on that day. According to Jerry Komes, executive vice-president of Pacific Bechtel who would later lead the project in Korea, it was President Rhee who asked Pacific Bechtel for the construction. Komes later told an interviewer that Rhee had complained, “the Korean needed electricity,” and “the U.S. had agreed to help, but all that had happened so far was that studies had been done.” After Bechtel gave Rhee “an impromptu lesson on dealing with the U.S. government,” Rhee asked Bechtel, “Will you take charge of the project.” However, it is not clear from the U.S. archival documents who first proposed such a project. As mentioned above, electric power was one of the emphasis areas of the U.S. three-year aid plan. Perhaps it was Wood, therefore, who first proposed the idea.

Pacific Bechtel had already long been a U.S. government’s favorite contractor. Since the company built the Hoover Dam in the 1930s, it had received orders of many U.S. government projects including defense facilities, oil fields, airports, sea ports, railways, and highways. In the postwar years, Bechtel was involved in many of the nuclear weapon-related projects, including the “Doomsday Town” experimental site in Nevada, the “Material Testing Accelerator” in Berkeley, California, and the “EBR-1 Nuclear Reactor Test Station” in Idaho. Under the Eisenhower administration, it developed into “the world’s largest purveyor of nuclear power.” Also, Steve Bechtel was a personal friend of President Eisenhower, and contributed to his reelection campaign in 1956. Eisenhower appointed him to a number of government posts including a team of business executives “to work with Under-Secretary of State Douglas Dillon in drafting a report that would determine policy for distribution of foreign aid and development loans.” Eisenhower later commended him for his “spirit of initiative and the sense of firm conviction that are essential to our democratic life itself.” The Eisenhower administration’s initiative in encouraging private businesses’ participation in foreign policy placed Pacific Bechtel in favorable light, since it had been one of the most cooperating companies with the U.S. government.

After the meeting with President Rhee, Steve Bechtel called J. Perry Yates,
Vice President of the company in San Francisco. Yates immediately sent a team of three engineers for preliminary investigations in ROK, with their travel expenses covered by the FOA. In early June, an official contract was concluded between Pacific Bechtel, the ROK government, and Korea Power Company, a private company tentatively established for this contract. The FOA paid the construction expenses as aid money, which went to Pacific Bechtel. The ROK government paid the expenses for the acquisition of land and roads. These expenses were paid out of the “counterpart fund,” the system in which the U.S. government could specify how to spend the profits yielded by the U.S.-aided business.

There were some important reasons behind the establishment of a new private company, which would later be called Korea Electric Power Company (KEPCO). First, the U.S. government regarded the construction project as the “prototype for US/UN financed investments hereafter” and it was not desirable to make an “exception” to the “spirit of free enterprise” from the very beginning. Therefore, the new power plant had to be run by a private company by any means. Second, the U.S. government wanted to avoid the awkward appearance of taking over the former Japanese colonial institutions. For this purpose, the U.S. needed to disband the electric companies established under the Japanese colonial rule, and to set up a brand new company. Third, if a new company is to be established, it would become the “first monument in the field of free enterprise.” It was an ideal opportunity to infuse the concept of free economy in the minds of the Korean people. For these reasons, the U.S. government hastily created a nominal Korea Power Company for the purpose of contracting. Later, however, a real private company was established and named KEPCO. The new private electric company was intended to be a symbol of modern, capitalist society, quite consciously distinguished from both Japanese colonialist and Communist social orders.

The relationship between the ROK government and the UN/US economic aid agencies was not always cordial. President Rhee frequently stated his intention to resume hostilities to unify Korea, and the U.S. government in turn warned him that economic assistance was conditioned upon ROK’s cooperation in carrying the armistice into effect. Wood also had difficulties with President Rhee. The U.S. government records refer to the “acrimonious” discussions between Wood and Rhee regarding many issues, such as the proper exchange rate, price stabilization, and Rhee’s accusation that the U.S. aid was benefiting the Japanese economy. Reflecting such a troublesome relationship, there were often confrontations during the construction of the power plants, too. The typical pattern was that the ROK government failed to meet the needs of Pacific Bechtel, and the Economic Coordinator complained to the ROK government, often threatening to discontinue or shrink the aid programs. For example, in November 1954, Pacific Bechtel requested the use of property, which was formerly used by the U.S. army, as the camp for the construction workers. The Korean government initially rejected Bechtel’s request because the property belonged to a primary school, and was only
temporarily used by the U.S. army. Pacific Bechtel reported the rejection to Wood, who immediately demanded the Korean Minister of Commerce and Industry to accept the request. A similar pattern was repeated throughout the construction project. Another example was in July 1955, when the ROK government failed to make available local currency to cover the expenses for the first quarter of the fiscal year 1956. The Acting UNC Economic Coordinator wrote to the Minister of Commerce and Industry, that it would become “necessary to release Korean employee within the next two weeks” if the fund was not available, and Pacific Bechtel even had “rights to discontinue further efforts” in the construction project. These examples show that the UNC Economic Coordinator had a high hand over the ROK government. Although Rhee regarded Wood as “unfriendly” to ROK and even demanded a replacement of the Economic Coordinator, he could not overrule Wood’s authority.

Pacific Bechtel's construction of steam power plants was primarily a measure to strengthen the ROK economy to stand against the Communist north. At the same time, however, it was a project to introduce a concept of free market economy, whereby recasting postwar Korea into the U.S.-and U.N.-led world order. The U.S. business played a central role in designing a new country. Bechtel was not merely cooperating with the U.S. government, but occupied an integral part of the U.S. universal project to export capitalism. The following section will further explain that the U.S. project did not only accomplish the visible construction of power plants, but it was also aimed at nurturing something intangible—people’s desire to accept a modern, capitalist way of living.

II. The USIS Film More Power to Korea

From the late 1940s through mid 1960s, the USIA distributed approximately 1,700 USIS films to over eighty countries in about thirty different languages. These films were part of the U.S. cultural diplomacy to win the “hearts and minds” of people all over the world. About sixty percent of these films dealt with U.S. society, culture, technology, industry, etc., and the remaining forty percent featured countries other than the U.S. All of the films were shown outside the U.S. because the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 had prohibited materials for overseas information activities from being used domestically. The USIS stationed in each country selected and released USIS films suitable for pursuing U.S. interests in that particular country. About one tenth of the USIS films were originally produced by private companies and later “acquired” by the USIA. These films were called the “private industry films” among the U.S. government agencies. A variety of industries produced those films. Especially, petroleum, steel, and other mineral companies, such as Esso Standard Oil Company and National Steel Corporation, produced many films. So did electric and atomic energy companies such as General Electric Company and General Dynamics Corporation. Also conspicuous were machinery, automobile, and construction companies such as
Caterpillar Tractor Company, Ford Motor Company, Morrison-Knudsen Company Inc., and Pacific Bechtel. In mid 1956, the USIA encouraged private companies engaged in foreign trade to produce more documentary films, thereby promoting the outsourcing of USIS films.34

*More Power to Korea,* produced in late 1956 at the completion of the steam power plants, was one of those “private industry films.” Both its script and the actual film are available at the U.S. National Archives.35 This is a fairly rare case, when many of the USIS films have already been lost and only the scripts are remaining. In some cases, two versions of the scripts—one written by the private company and the other revised by USIA—are stored at the National Archives, thus it is possible to know what changes were made.36 Concerning *More Power to Korea,* however, only the USIA script is available—the same version as the actual film. It is not possible, therefore, to know whether the USIA made any changes, and what the original Bechtel version was like.37

As the introduction, the film opens with the Bechtel’s company logo, followed by a list of names of the film crew, with an illustration of an electric power tower on the side. The traditional Korean palace music becomes louder, as the court orchestra playing the music in the palace appears on the screen. The palace room is lit with light bulbs hanging from the ceiling. The light indicates that Seoul has enough power to electrify the palace. Following the explanation of the Korean War and the devastation it left on the people of South Korea, the film points out “an urgent need for domestic production of manufactured goods.” However, many mills and factories stood idle due to lack of power, because “the greatest developed power resources lay north of the 38th Parallel.”38 This is why the FOA (later ICA) decided to sponsor the construction of three modern steam-electric power plants by Pacific Bechtel.

The main body of the film shows, in turn, the construction process of the three power plants--Tangin-Ri, near Seoul; Masan, near Pusan, and Samchok, on the east coast—and the training of young Korean engineers in the U.S. The film portrays the Pacific Bechtel workers and engineers as strong, reliable and heroic men. They discuss the plans in their San Francisco office, order materials, and dispatch engineers to Korea. They “used almost every available means of transportation for their reconnaissance trips.” The film shows Pacific Bechtel men using helicopters, caterpillars, jeeps, boats, and cranes, highlighting the power of technology. As the construction started, the company built housing for construction workers, complete with mess halls and recreation facilities. They introduced the American-style comfortable life to the otherwise dull and dry atmosphere of the construction sites. On Christmas Day, the American construction workers invited local children and gave presents.

While the construction was going on, forty-two Korean engineers were sent to the U.S. for a nine-month training program. They were expected to operate and maintain the completed power plants after Pacific Bechtel engineers leave ROK. According to the FOA records, Pacific Bechtel first requested the ROK govern-
ment to pay the training expenses, but the ROK government replied that it was short of dollar funds. Pacific Bechtel, therefore, asked Wood to arrange FOA funds to cover the expenses.39 The curriculum was developed by the cooperation of University of California and Pacific Bechtel. They learned everything necessary for building and operating steam power plants, and also took English lessons. They visited major U.S. companies such as Pacific Gas and Electric Company to observe their technology. They also visited Manhattan and enjoyed sight-seeing. At the end of their program, they had a banquet in San Francisco and received certificates of completion. They were dressed in suits and ties and looked more Westernized than when they first arrived in San Francisco. They sailed back to Korea, and instructed their Korean co-workers at the nearly completed power plants.

One interesting feature of the film is the insertion of clips from other USIS films. For example, it includes a Korean language USIS newsreel clip reporting the start of the power plant construction. It shows English and Korean language signboards built on the construction site:

Tangin-Ri Steam Power Plant
25,000 kw Capacity
This Plant Being Constructed for the Republic of Korea
with American Aid Provided Through the Foreign Operations Administration U.S.A.
Engineering and Construction by Pacific Bechtel Corporation

The logo marks of Pacific Bechtel and the FOA are illustrated on the signboards. Another clip from a USIS film shows the ceremony to light the boiler when the plant was finally completed. It is not clear whether these scenes were inserted by the USIA after it acquired the film from Pacific Bechtel or they were originally integrated in the film, but a combination of the government film and the private company film symbolized the closeness of the two parties.

The last scene of More Power to Korea emphasizes how the power plants benefit the Korean workers. This scene also indicates the ideal direction for Korea’s future. Assistant Operator Kim Myoung Soo is introduced as “typical of educated young Koreans employed at the plants.” He is dressed in Western clothes and appears to be a diligent and intelligent young man. He comes home from work to his modest dwelling where his family--wife, a baby son, and his parents--are waiting. The family dining room is lit with light bulbs, and they have plenty of food. The narrator explains that “soon his household and thousands of others would for the first time enjoy the benefits of dependable domestic electricity.” “Each of the new power plants symbolized as well as sparked,” the narrator continues, “reconstruction and the growth of industry in South Korea, contributing to a better life” of people living there.

In sum, More Power to Korea emphasized generosity and the moral legitimacy of the U.S. government and business, and celebrated their technology and pro-
fessionalism. It also portrayed a happy and affluent family as the outcome of industrial development to be achieved under the U.S. tutelage. Pacific Bechtel was not just cooperating with the reconstruction, but it represented for a new standard of living, a new way of thinking, and a new mode of society which the U.S. government was pursuing in postwar Korea.

On December 17, the ICA in Washington dispatched telegram to ICA and UNC offices in Seoul and Tokyo:

The people of Korea, who have viewed this film--officials and private citizens alike--undoubtedly now have a far greater appreciation of the tremendous task involved in the construction of these electrical power plants, and the part additional electrical power is playing in the rehabilitation program in Korea.40

To the degree that the telegram sounded self-congratulatory, it also revealed the ICA’s intention to provoke the Korean feeling of “appreciation” for the U.S. government and business. By showing abundant U.S. technological, material, and educational resources, and the small but important change brought about in the everyday life of a Korean technician, the U.S. government tried to nurture the Korean audiences’ “appreciation,” and probably desire for the U.S.-model modernity. The steam power plants portrayed in the film did something more than just generating electricity--they conveyed a message that private business and technology would bring about affluence.

The U.S. government regarded motion pictures as “the most effective medium of information in the ROK.” Until 1954, the USIA had put emphasis on the “theme of preventing unilateral resumption of hostilities by the ROK” in their information dissemination programs. Toward the end of 1954, however, the U.S. government judged that such likelihood diminished. The USIA program was also “aimed more at the long-range objective of preserving a friendly government in Korea.” The USIA stenciled a slogan “Strength for Korea from America” on “all economic and military aid goods” to ROK, and produced many films and radio programs on U.S. aid in reconstruction.41 The acquisition of More Power to Korea from Pacific Bechtel took place in such an environment. The purpose of USIS films such as More Power to Korea was to nurture amicable feelings among the Korean people towards, not only the U.S. government and business, but also the ideology and goals they represented for.

Historian Heo Eun of Korea University has argued that the U.S. officials viewed postwar Korea as the “frontier” of the American civilization. The U.S. tried to expand its cultural hegemony not by denying Korean nationalism, but by “absorbing” it, thereby recasting the Koreans as the “Korean nationals and pro-American world citizens at one time.” He has concluded, however, the U.S. cultural expansionism ultimately failed, as Koreans were disillusioned by the U.S. military hegemony and the strategic intervention in the ROK-Japan relations.42 Pacific Bechtel's construction of steam power plants in ROK and the subsequent
filmmaking affirms his argument of nationalism. The project tried to provoke “national” desire for modernity, but such modernity was to be built on pro-American social order. At the same time, the Pacific Bechtel case might add a new perspective to Heo Eun’s discussion of U.S. cultural expansionism. In this case, it was not so much the American civilization as a universal ideology of free enterprise that the U.S. government was trying to extend to postwar Korea.

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to evaluate the degree to which such ideology was accepted by the Korean people. Considering the “developmental dictatorship” of the ensuing Park Chung-hee regime, the U.S. efforts to “sell” the universal free enterprise ideology seemed unsuccessful. This does not immediately mean, however, that the U.S. did not have any influence on the formation of a hegemonic idea that industry and technology would bring about affluence. Although it is not possible to give any evidence in this paper, such a hegemonic idea might be related to the “science and technology boom” of the 1960s.43

III. President Eisenhower’s “Atoms for Peace” Campaign

On December 8, 1953, President Eisenhower gave the famous “Atoms for Peace” speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations. He declared the U.S. leadership in the application of atomic energy to agriculture, medicine, and electric power, and at the same time proposed the establishment of the International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEA) to prevent uncontrolled nuclear proliferation. Immediately after the speech, the U.S. government started a large-scale overseas information campaign. Eisenhower’s speech was printed in ten different languages and enclosed in the overseas business correspondence of numerous U.S. private companies. The USIA introduced examples of the peaceful application of atomic energy through films, radio, TV, exhibitions, magazines, and newspapers.44 The purpose of the Atoms for campaign, according to the Department of State, was three-fold:

1. to provide evidence of the declared U.S. intention to share the benefits of atomic energy with their friends abroad
2. to promote closer ties of cooperation between other nations and the U.S.
3. to assist in maintaining U.S. world leadership in this field.45

Japan presented a particular problem for the U.S. government in promoting the global Atoms for Peace campaign. Although the major U.S. objective in relation to Japan was “a firm alliance in the Pacific,” the Japanese people tended to display “atomic hysteria” toward anything related to nuclear energy, and it presented an obstacle to the smooth relationship between the two countries.46 After the “Bikini Incident” of March 1, 1954, in which Japanese fishermen were exposed to lethal doses of nuclear fallout in the Pacific after the U.S. thermonu-
clear testing, resulting in the death of one of the fishermen six months later, the Japanese anti-nuclear movements gained momentum and anti-American feelings grew.\(^7\) The Department of State perceived it important for U.S.-Japan relations to “remove the strong Japanese notion that atomic and nuclear energy is primarily destructive.”\(^8\) The U.S. government needed to “tame” Japanese anti-nuclear feelings that could harm the U.S.-Japan relations. Therefore, in addition to the above three objectives, the Atoms for Peace campaign for Japan was especially aimed at disseminating the concept of “peaceful use” of atomic energy and dissociating it from atomic bombs and thermonuclear testing. Cultural resources such as exhibitions, documentary films, books, magazines, newspapers, radio broadcasting, and the exchange of persons were mobilized to change the Japanese “notion” of nuclear energy.

Atoms for Peace exhibitions held in Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, Sapporo, and Sendai, were the ideal opportunity to change the image of atomic energy from one that was destructive and dangerous to one that was considered friendly and beneficial. A model medical reactor, medical devices, atomic train, and other nuclear technologies were displayed. The first of the series, the Tokyo exhibition in November 1955, was filmed and shown to people all over Japan as the USIS film titled *Power for Peace.* It was also translated into many different languages and screened overseas.\(^9\) Because the U.S. government had officially encouraged “participation of U.S. individuals, industry and private institutions in atomic power activities abroad,” the Atoms for Peace campaign in Japan and elsewhere was actively supported by U.S. private companies interested in the nuclear business.\(^10\) As mentioned in the previous chapters, Pacific Bechtel was one of those companies.

One area through which the U.S. business participated in the Atoms for Peace campaign was the USIS films. For example, *A is for Atom,* a USIS film repeatedly screened at exhibition sites all over the world, including Japan, was sponsored by General Electric Company, another U.S. company spearheading the nuclear business. It was an award-winning animation film produced by a major animation film company, John Southtron Production, for General Electric. The film features a humorous character Dr. Atom, who explains the mechanism of nuclear fusion and fission, its application to power generation, and the application of radioisotopes to medicine, agriculture, and industry. Atoms such as uranium and radium are portrayed as cute little characters, who visit each others’ houses, dance together, and sometimes go wild and bump into each other, causing nuclear reactions. Big cities are lit by nuclear power plants, and modern airplanes, ships and vehicles powered by atomic energy. The film ends with a big logo of the General Electric Company.\(^11\) The film created friendly and “tamed” images of atomic energy quite dissociated from nuclear weapons or thermonuclear tests that were controversial right at that time. At the same time, the film emphasized a modern, high-tech way of living made possible by the industrial application of atomic energy. It visualized the rosy image of modernity which humans should
strive for. High-tech businesses were expected to play the central role in such a rosy future.

The USIA distributed more than fifty Atoms for Peace films including *A is for Atom*, which were translated into thirty-three languages and shown in more than eighty countries. In Japan, twenty of them were shown in exhibitions, at schools, and “Atoms for Peace films shows” held in American Centers, citizens’ halls (*kominkan*), and special screening rooms set up in department stores. An estimated 4 million people participated in the total of 1,300 Atoms for Peace film shows. Four of the USIS films were shown on TV, and additional 3 million Japanese were estimated to watch the programs. Some of these films were produced by private companies such as General Electric. Even the government-produced Atoms for Peace films conveyed a strong message that modern technology and its industrial application would bring about a bright future for humanity. For example, *Power Reactors USA*, presented by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), introduced various types of nuclear power reactors being developed by U.S. private companies such as Westinghouse Electric Corporation, Consolidated Edison Company, and General Electric Company.

The Atoms for Peace campaign and the USIS films used in it reveal the essence of the U.S. Cultural Cold War project, i.e. universal application of the U.S. industry-led, technology-centered model of modernity. For this purpose, the U.S. government and industry created “tamed” and friendly images of nuclear energy. They also emphasized the “peaceful” motivations of the U.S. nuclear development, although in reality, they were developing nuclear weapons and nuclear reactors at the same time. As the next section will show, however, the Japanese audiences did not “buy” everything they heard, and selectively accepted the U.S. messages.

### IV. Effects of the Atoms for Peace Campaign and USIS Films

Recent scholarships have been demonstrating that the Japanese people were already fascinated with the atomic energy during the occupation period immediately after the war. Although they knew the dreadful effects of nuclear bombs, they nonetheless held optimistic dreams about the future possibilities of atomic energy. The Atoms for Peace campaign, therefore, did not create the Japanese enthusiasm about non-military use of atomic energy from nothing. The “entrance” and “exit” surveys the USIA conducted at the Atoms for Peace exhibition sites, however, suggest that the campaign further promoted such enthusiasm. According to the survey results, those who “personally expect to derive any benefit from atomic energy” in their lifetime rose from 74% to 85% before and after visiting the exhibition in the nation-wide average. In Hiroshima, those in favor of “Japan’s going ahead with atomic research on a broad scale” rose from 62% to 76%. At the same time, however, those who were “pessimistic about the ability of the big powers to use atomic energy only for peaceful purposes” remained the same around 50% before and after visiting the exhibits. These
results indicate that the Japanese visitors were fascinated by the benefits of atomic energy and wanted their country to promote its development. This did not mean, however, that they lifted their guard and criticism of the nuclear weapons development by big powers.

The Japanese fascination with the U.S. technology and modernity was also confirmed in a USIA survey on the reception of U.S. films. It was conducted in February 1958, with the 399 Japanese who participated in the USIS films shows,57 87% of those surveyed were “very much interested” or “somewhat interested” in films about the United States. Among these people, 70% were interested in “scientific developments,” 67% in “living conditions,” 65% in “atomic development,” and 62% in “industry in general.” Those were the most favored themes next only to “sports” (71%). 18% watched ten or more USIS films during the previous 12 months, and 35% had watched one to nine. 78% answered USIS films were either “very interesting” or “rather interesting.” 28% had watched USIS films about atomic energy. 49% of those surveyed thought atomic energy was “more of a boon” while 16% thought it was “more of a curse.”58 These survey results, although representing only a small portion of the Japanese population, indicated that they viewed science, technology--including nuclear technology--and lifestyle as the most intriguing aspects of the U.S.

The U.S. government concluded that the Atoms for Peace campaign in Japan was more or less successful. The USIA reported to the NSC in June 1956 that the “change in opinion on atomic energy from 1954 to 1955 was spectacular.” Through an intensive USIS campaign, “atom hysteria was almost eliminated” and by the beginning of 1956, “Japanese opinion was brought to popular acceptance of the peaceful uses of atomic energy.”59 Clark Goodman, a nuclear scientist of Massachusetts Institute of Technology who was also Assistant Director for Technical Operations, Division of Reactor Development, AEC, was sent to Japan by the Department of State in March-April 1956. Upon completing his tour, he reported to the Department:

During the past ten months the attitude in Japan has changed from one of considerable skepticism and some cynicism to one of remarkable awareness and receptivity toward the peaceful side of the atom. I doubt that any other country has shown a more favorable response to the President’s Atoms-for-Peace Program.60

The Japanese acceptance of the “peaceful use of atomic energy,” however, did not necessarily mean that the Japanese people became less critical about the U.S. nuclear armament and thermonuclear testing. The above-mentioned USIA report warned that the “favorable opinion began again to decline when the U.S. started a new test series in the Pacific.” The Operation Coordinating Board (OCB), the highest organization to coordinate various psychological and information operations, reported in February 1957 that “a firm alliance in the Pacific is not being achieved” and “Japan is no longer as closely aligned with the U.S.” Japan was
even “drifting away” from the U.S. Part of the reason was the “continued nuclear testing” which had an adverse effect on the attitude of the Japanese people toward the U.S.”

The Department of State also felt that “Japanese opinion, which had begun to accept enthusiastically the peaceful uses of atomic energy, has already swung noticeably back to the feeling that atomic energy is an unmitigated evil.”

Ultimately, the Atoms for Peace campaign could not change the Japanese mind concerning nuclear weapons and thermonuclear testing. The campaign, however, succeeded in nurturing a hegemonic knowledge on the “peaceful use” of atomic energy. Through exhibitions, films, lectures, and magazines, the word “peaceful use” was endlessly repeated. The term covered the use of atomic energy in medicine, agriculture, and industry including power generation. Such applications of atomic energy were not necessarily related to “peace” because electric energy generated by a nuclear reactor was used in the military purposes, too. The U.S., however, constructed a category of “peaceful use” and propagated it until it was accepted as a hegemonic notion. Even those who were against thermonuclear bombs generally accepted the “peaceful use” of atomic energy as the passport to a rosy future. The Japanese politicians and industrialists jumped headlong into nuclear business, without much opposition by the Japanese public opinion. The Japanese construction of nuclear power plants continuously increased, even after most countries, including the U.S., stopped constructing them after the Three Mile Island accident in 1979. In sum, the U.S. Atoms for Peace campaign successfully established a hegemonic knowledge about atomic power, which allowed the Japanese to accept scientific, capitalist modernity propelled by atomic power.

**Conclusion**

Through the examples of ROK and Japan, the present paper has explored the roles of industry and technology in the U.S. overseas cultural strategies in mid 1950s. It has argued that the Cultural Cold War was not simply a competition over which culture was superior or inferior, but it was a process to construct a hegemonic knowledge and norms on which liberal, capitalist modernity would be built. In Japan, the U.S. government successfully constructed a category called the “peaceful use” of atomic energy, and gained the national acceptance of the nuclear business. In Korea, although perhaps less successfully, the U.S. government agencies linked the expectation for affluent life with free market economy.

The U.S. businesses occupied the central part in the U.S. attempt to spread the universal idea of liberal, capitalist modernity. Especially, energy-related companies such as Pacific Bechtel and General Electric symbolized modernity and affluence, and therefore became the icon of the universal ideology the U.S. was trying to disseminate globally. The state-sponsored media such as USIS films also played important roles in the construction of hegemonic ideas, for example, by conveying the message that industry and technology would lead to affluence.
There are some serious limitations in the present paper. First, it has not explored an alternative modernity which competed with the U.S. model. To do this, cultural programs carried out by the Socialist bloc and non-Western countries must be examined. Due to language barriers and unfamiliarity with archival sources, however, it is extremely difficult for any one researcher to carry out such a task. More international collaborative work by multi-national scholars is desired in this regard. Second, an alternative modernity is not necessarily introduced from overseas, but it can be proposed domestically. It is necessary to examine more domestic sources to discuss resistance to, or appropriation of what the U.S. government and industry tried to export. Third, the two cases introduced in the present study have chronological limitations. They both deal with the period from 1954 to 1956. It is not appropriate to generalize the findings in explaining later stages of the Cold War, especially when détente became more conspicuous. With all these shortcomings, the present paper hopefully forms a small step toward a more complete picture of the cultural aspect of the Cold War.

Notes

1. For example, Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., Local Consequences of the Global Cold War (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2007).
2. For example, Odd Arne Westad, The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
3. For example, Kiron K. Skinner, ed., Turning Points in Ending the Cold War (Hoover Institution Press, 2008).

10. Osgood, op. cit.
11. Alvh, op. cit.
13. Because the United States Information Service (USIS) stationed in each country was in charge of storing and showing the USIA-sponsored films, they were called “USIS films.” More detailed information on USIS films will be given in later sections. USIA, The Overseas Film Program, June 1959, RG306, Entry A1 1066, box 153, the National Archives at College Park (Hereafter abbreviated as NACP).
15. Von Eschen, op. cit.
17. NSC156.
20. NSC156.
22. McCartney, 101-112. Also see the Bechtel Corporation homepage (http://www.bechtel.com).
23. Yates to Wood, February 3, 1954; Yates to Wood, February 12, 1954, RG469, UD1276, box 26, NACP.
24. S. D. Bechtel to President Syngman Rhee, April 30, 1954; S. D. Bechtel to Wood, April 30, 1954; S. D. Bechtel to President Syngman Rhee, June 8, 1954, RG469, UD1276, box 26, NACP.
25. Wood to Jerry Komes, December 6, 1954, RG469, UD1276, box 26, NACP.
26. Memorandum, May 12, 1954, RG469, UD1276, box 26, NACP.
27. J. Komes to Minister of Commerce and Industry, ROK, September 30, 1954, RG469, UD1276, box 26, NACP.
28. NSC167 “U.S. Courses of Action in Korea in the Absence of an Acceptable Political Settlement” October 22, 1953, FRUS, 1546-1547; “Memorandum of Discussion at the 175th Meeting of the National Security Council” December 15, 1953, FRUS, 1658-1659.
29. “Memorandum of Discussion at the 175th Meeting of the National Security Council”

30. C. Tyler Wood to Kang Sung-Tae, November 2, 1954; Kang Sung-Tae to C. E. Pehl, November 1, 1954, RG469, UD1276, box 26, NACP.

31. Mercer C. Walter to Kang Sung-Tae, July 7, 1955, RG469, UD1276, box 26, NACP.


33. Movie scripts, RG306, Entry 1098, NACP. Information on USIS films given in this paragraph is based on the author’s examination of the fifty-nine boxes of film scripts at NACP. Although there are 1670 titles according to the NACP’s finding aid, the actual number may be a little larger because the author has noticed some titles not listed in the finding aid.

34. “Forecast of Activities for Next Two Months,” July 18, 1956, RG306, Entry A1 56, box 11, NACP.


36. For example, the first four pages of *Achievement in Steel* produced by the National Steel Corporation were deleted by the USIA. Those four pages introduced National Steel’s branch offices and affiliated companies, so it is assumed that the USIA judged it to be overtly advertising for a government film.

37. The author made an inquiry to Bechtel Corporation, but the company replied that no film or script was available.


40. Airgram from ICA/W to CINCREP SEOUL ICATC / CINCUNC TOKYO ICATO, December 17, 1956, RG469, UD1276, box 26, NACP.


International Relations in Asia [NichiBei domei kankei to Ajia no kokusai kankyo] (Minerva Shobo, forthcoming in 2011).


47. From Walter Robertson to John Allison, October 22, 1954, RG59, Japan Subject Files, 1947-1956, box 9, NACP.


49. U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, USIS Films Digest (December 1955), 2; (January 1956), 7, the Papers of Sato Kaichi, Niigata Prefecture Archives.


51. John Sutherland Production, A is for Atom (1954), The Big Cartoon Database (http://www.bcd.arts/2005/10/18.php); A is for Atom, movie script, foreign version, April 23, 1954, RG306, Entry 1098, NACP.

52. USIA, The Overseas Film Program, June 1959, RG306, Entry A1 1066, box 153, NACP.

53. The Film Program of the United States Information Agency, no date (1956?), RG306, Entry A1 1066, box 155, NACP.


55. For example, see Kato Tetsuro, “Netizen College Diary” August 1, 2011, http://www.ff.iij4u.or.jp/~katote/Living.html.


57. The occupations of those surveyed were coal miners (196), steel industry workers (91), and porcelain industry workers (112). Their age and education level varied.

58. “General Film Survey” (February 1958), RG306, Entry P78, box 22, NACP.


60. “Political Notes from Visit to Japan,” April 20, 1956, RG59, General Records Relating to Atomic Energy Matters, box 503, NACP.

61. “Progress Report on Japan (NSC 5516/1),” February 25, 1957; March 6, 1957, White House Office, NSC Staff Papers, Special Staff File Service, box 4, DDE.