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In the late 1950s, Japanese leftists were battling plans to lengthen airport runways in Japan—runways the U.S. military wanted to handle its new jet aircraft. Faced with demonstrations and widespread neutralist sentiment, U.S. officials hit on a novel solution: produce a movie.

The result was *Jet Vapor Trails in the Dawn*, a *Top Gun*-like feature film released in December 1957 and starring a rising young actor named Ken Takakura. The anti-Communist movie, which glorified the Japanese air force, turned into a blockbuster, seen by 15 million people in some 2,200 theaters across Japan. Few in the audience could have known the film was secretly financed by the U.S. Information Service.

The film was but one part of a wide-ranging campaign of psychological warfare waged in Japan and other Asian nations during the 1950s, according to recently declassified U.S. government documents. The most extensive operations appear to have been in Japan, where U.S. officials secretly financed feature films, TV programs, thousands of hours of radio programming, hundreds of books, and numerous intellectuals.

U.S. officials made use of psychological warfare techniques that had been developed during World War II. In 1950 a Psychological Strategy Board was created, comprising top officials from the State Department, CIA, and Pentagon, under direct control of the President's National Security Council. The board described itself as "the nerve-center for strategic psychological operations . . . to influence the opinions, attitudes, emotions and behavior of foreign groups." Little was publicly known about it. "Almost everything about the PSB was classified: personnel, organization, even its telephone directories and scrap paper," wrote intelligence expert John Prados in his 1991 study of the National Security Council. By 1952 the PSB staff had grown to 130 and was by far the largest unit under the NSC.

PSB officials dubbed their Japan strategy the "Plan to Assure the Continued Orientation of Japan toward the West." In 1953, the PSB fell victim to political infighting and its functions were absorbed by other agencies. But the plans for Japan continued. A 1955 NSC report on Japanese intellectuals describes in some detail how these operations worked. Economics and political science professors, newspaper editorial and political writers, and physical scientists were targeted. Also singled out were labor leaders, but it was Japan's leftist intelligentsia that most concerned American strategists. While the CIA played a key role, much of the covert activity was in fact run by the U.S. Information Service. The USIS program in Japan is described at length in a 255-page evaluation from 1959, marked Confidential and quietly declassified last year.

Most intriguing, perhaps, was America's clandestine investment in the Japanese movie and TV industries. The USIS set up its own mini-Hollywood in Tokyo, financing, producing, translating and distributing films, and even training Japanese projectionists. The USIS claimed to have reached half the population of Japan—about 50 million people at that time—through its Motion Picture Branch.

By 1955, the agency had financed six feature films, produced by contract with Japanese production companies. "They are unattributed to USIS . . ." noted one report. "These films range from anti-communist to self-defense promotion themes." In addition to the box-office success of *Jet Vapor Trails in the Dawn*, other films included *The Yukawa Story*, based on the life of a U.S.-trained nuclear physicist, and another on communist infiltration into a student union.

U.S. funding also impacted Japan's fledgling TV industry. In March 1959, 205 USIS films were televised, reaching 18 million people, according to one report. Among the programs were *Living English* and *International Press Conference*. But the greatest impact may have been in radio, which remained the dominant electronic medium in Japan throughout much of the 1950s. USIS-sponsored shows comprised tens of thousands of hours of radio programming during this time. One declassified report reveals that the agency was behind 18,300 hours of radio programs in FY 1955—or 50 hours per day—and that "most of these programs are unattributed." The shows ranged from news and commentary to culture and music. Among them was a weekly 30-minute series entitled Background—"which is really the background of US foreign policy," noted one report, and a 15-minute weekly *Foreign Economic Commentary*. Another show, *Youth Wants to Know*, appeared on 30 commercial Japanese stations. The heavy US involvement was apparently an open secret within the industry. "It is known within the Japanese radio industry that USIS engages in the production of radio shows," noted a report, "yet the listening public is unaware of the source of these programs."

All this was designed to counter communist-inspired propaganda, which by most accounts was also big business in Japan. Stanislav Levchenko, a career KGB officer who spent four years in Japan before defecting to the U.S., shocked the Japanese in the 1980s by naming prominent journalists and politicians as agents he used for espionage and disinformation.

Like the Americans, the Soviets had their successes. "Bookstores are loaded with Communist books," warned the NSC report on Japanese intellectuals.

Alarmed by these sales, including a bestseller on Marxist economics, the Americans pushed into publishing as well. By 1955, the USIS was behind publication of more than 100 books per year in Japan--and could boast its own anti-communist bestsellers.

Payments or subsidies went to friendly authors and publishers. Among them was Jiji Publishers, which produced a series of translated books featured at bookstores across Japan. Another beneficiary was *Keizai Orai* (Economic Monthly), which produced a book, *The Sino-Soviet Economic Offensive in Less Developed Countries*, that was distributed free to all Diet members, governors, mayors, radio and TV stations, leading economists and business organizations.

"In a way this was just a continuation of the Occupation, when Americans were approving radio scripts, shaping movies, and reviewing textbooks," says historian John Dower, a specialist on U.S.-Japan relations at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "The fact that Japan was under U.S. control until 1952 gave the Americans an entree into the media and a web of connections that was quite extraordinary."

Financial backing also went to various journalists and periodicals. The USIS provided "a limited amount of unattributed support" to *Kokusai News*, which it called "the largest weekly student newspaper in Japan." Another magazine that quietly received USIS support was *Futatsu no Sekai* (Two Worlds), a monthly magazine on communism mailed free to universities, libraries, and intellectuals. Anti-communist pamphlets were distributed "through friendly labor groups" such as the *Zenro* federation.

To gain favorable press coverage for the U.S. in newspapers and magazines, the USIS secretly supported the work of "a dozen or more critics, commentators, and analysts," according to one report. Among those receiving payments, the documents say, was Atsushi Oi, a military analyst and writer whose views on rearmament had become influential. By the late 1950s, the agency was also secretly giving \$5,000 a year to the respected Research Institute of Foreign Affairs of New Japan, headed by journalist Katsu Hara, to subsidize their publications. The Institute's twice-weekly newsletter, *New World Currents*, went to 1,000 influential educators, writers and critics.

The USIS also made use of the United Nations Association of Japan, through which it secretly sponsored at least three lengthy seminar series. Featuring lectures by conservative scholars, the public seminars focused on disarmament, democracy and Soviet imperialism, the last one running for four weeks in 19 prefectures. USIS "chose the subject, selected the lecturers, edited and published the pamphlets and set up the schedule," according to one report. Among the participants were such prominent scholars as Masamichi Inoki, a law professor at Kyoto University, and Masao Onoe, a law professor from Kobe University.

As in all propaganda, it is impossible to measure the effects precisely. But at least some Japanese are convinced the program left a lasting legacy. "We were shocked at how extensive the American program was," says Michio Matsui, a Tokyo journalist who researched the subject for the Kodansha monthly *Views*. "There is no doubt that important parts of our culture--our music, our politics, our journalism--were influenced by the U.S. psychological warfare program."

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Hypocrisy by Chalmers Johnson

Both the Japanese and English languages have precise and metaphorical terms for a person's or a nation's simulating virtue or pretending to feel what one does not feel, sometimes displayed as false modesty or feigned innocence. In English the precise word is *hypocrisy*, derived from the Greek *hupokrisis*, to act on stage; in Japanese the characters for *gizen* mean 'false goodness.' The metaphorical terms are more vivid--in English, to be a wolf in sheep's clothing but in Japanese, 'to play the cat.'

Recent news stories have set me to thinking about hypocrisy as it relates to the American role in East Asia. The elite American press typified by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* have expressed deep concern about the fate of the people of Tibet under Chinese occupation and praised the Walt Disney Company for standing up to Chinese bullying. During the 1950s, the American CIA covertly supported the Tibetans in their resistance to the Chinese invasion. Today the Americans have guilty consciences about abandoning the Tibetans to their fate, even though they know that there is nothing they can do.

Playing to this sense of unease, the Walt Disney Company funded the famous director Martin Scorsese in making a film about the life of the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader in exile. At the beginning of December, 1996, the director of the Film Bureau in Beijing's Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television threatened Disney with a ban against its films, merchandise, and proposed Disneyland in China if it continued with the film.

To the applause of American editorial writers, Disney said it would not knuckle under to Chinese threats. But two weeks later, under cover of personality differences, the chairman of Disney fired its president, Michael Ovitz. Mr. Ovitz was, however, the person who brought the Tibetan film to Disney, and he was also Disney's chief negotiator with China on many other projects. By throwing him to the wolves, Disney is almost surely sending a strong signal to China that it will be more careful of China's sensibilities in the future and trying to regain access to the world's largest market.

These developments led me to think of other cases in East Asia where one nation expressed deep concern about the victimization of people in another nation. During the 1930s Japan often claimed that its war against the U.S., Britain, France, and Holland was justified because it was liberating the colonies of these countries in East Asia. The reply to the Japanese has always been that if they were really concerned about ending colonialism, they might have started with Korea.

The Americans are close to putting themselves in the same position. If they are truly concerned about occupied and victimized peoples in Asia, they could start not with the Tibetans, for whom they know there is nothing they can do except to make movies, but with the Okinawans, with whom they have a relationship similar to that of the prewar Japanese with the Koreans.

For over fifty years the United States has occupied and governed Okinawa without the consent of the Okinawans. Today the American military bases occupy 20% of Okinawa's land area but supply no more than 5% of Okinawa's income. This 15% dead loss, regardless of other costs of the bases, explains why Okinawa is Japan's poorest prefecture. Perhaps it is time for the Americans to end their hypocrisy and do for the Okinawans what they urge the Chinese to do for the Tibetans.

A Japanese version of this essay appeared in the *Ryukyu Shimpo*, January 1997.

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