The Formation of a 'New Japan' under the U.S. Occupation (1945–52): Popular Theater and the Cultural Restoration*

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the complex interplay of various cultural forces in Japan during the American occupation after World War II, using the theatrical arts as a microcosm. Three important elements are examined that dominated the cultural scene in post-World War II Japan in order to analyze how the Japanese identity was reshaped. First, it was the recently inimical Americans who helped guide Japan toward achieving a New Japan by encouraging the Americanization of Japanese administrative systems, social values, and popular culture. Second, by way of responding to total defeat and once again instilling national pride, the Japanese government strongly encouraged the arts. Third and finally, some unintended effects arose from state-sponsored programs because the wartime experience provided postwar models for Japanese leftist intellectuals and laborers, who presented their own vision of a new Japan as an ideal to help liberate the working class and encouraged the development of political and labor group activities. In the end, neither Communism nor Americanization won out, and a distinctively Japanese culture was reborn. Thus, contrary to what some have asserted, although American culture was popular, the Japanese did not suddenly embrace it after the war. Rather, depending on American support and building on their own arts organizations maintained during the war, they successfully fended off Communism and restored a strong and distinctively Japanese culture. Japanese cultural policy makers, the occupation forces, profit-seeking commercial groups, and leftist-led theaters sometimes collaborated and sometimes clashed during the process of nation-wide cultural renovation.

Keywords: 'New Japan', the U.S. Occupation, Takarazuka Revue, Theater Performance, National Identity, Cultural Restoration, Art Festival, Tōhō Strike

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I. Introduction

On August 17, 1945, the Higashikuni cabinet (August 17–October 5, 1945) announced that postwar Japan would begin work to refashion itself anew. This 'New Japan' (*Shin Nihon*) – as explained in the cabinet's statement – would concentrate all of its energies on rebuilding a peaceful and democratic country. The cabinet's idea was disseminated widely throughout Japan by radio broadcasts and newspapers, such as in an editorial in the *Asahi Shinbun*, a major Japanese newspaper, declaring that the new state would never again start a war. 'Culture' (*bunka*) instead of military power was recognized as the only motivational force for moving this reborn country forward (Iriye 1991, 50; *Asahi Shinbun* 45/09/05).

It might seem that culture would not be high on the agenda when the Japanese were facing massive difficulties, including the lack of basic necessities. Contrarily, from the earliest stages of the occupation, the Japanese government took the role of cultural initiatives in reforming the country very seriously. The Department of Arts within the Japanese Ministry of Education launched an Art Festival soon after the defeat, changing the state's goal from war mobilization to postwar reconstruction, in order to restore pride and confidence in the Japanese people.

This paper looks at three important elements that dominated the cultural scene in post-World War II Japan in order to analyze how the Japanese identity was reshaped. A first important element in the restoration of Japanese culture was, oddly enough, the overshadowing of America in Japanese culture. America, having recently been an enemy during the Pacific War, helped guide Japan toward the achievement of a

New Japan by encouraging the Americanization of Japanese administrative systems, social values, and popular culture. Second, it examines the government's efforts to revive the sagging spirits of the Japanese people with their cultural heritage and shows that the cultural reformation was not new in the postwar era but rather had been a central project during war mobilization. In many cases, cultural bureaus simply continued with their existing frameworks. Third and finally, that process eventually spawned some unintended effects from state-sponsored programs as the wartime experience provided postwar models for leftists who, in turn, thwarted state leaders in their attempt to achieve consensus on the primary goals of the state. Competing with conservatives, Japanese leftist intellectuals and laborers presented their own vision of a new Japan as an ideal to help liberate the working class and encouraged the development of political and labor group activities. In the end, as will be demonstrated, neither Communism nor Americanization won out, and a discourse for a distinctively Japanese culture was reborn.

In past decades, cultural historians and media studies have discussed the struggles that Japanese society encountered after the war. These fields have analyzed the modification of the Japanese identity vis-à-vis the transitioning gazes of the defeated masses toward their occupiers. Under the condition of the war defeat, in the understanding of these works, national identity was redefined and mostly channeled through an ambiguous notion of cultural discourse rather than by means of obvious political disputes. Previous works have analyzed the intention behind the U.S. occupation and the Japanese participants in policy by looking at the censorship in a wide range of popular products, such as novels, songs, films, advertisement, and nationwide EXPO events (Igarashi 2000; Tanikawa

2002; Tsuganesawa 2002; Yoshimi 2006).

This paper focuses on the Takarazuka Revue and Tōhō play groups that had led cultural trends ever since their establishment before the war. As a major showcase of Japanese popular arts, these theaters dedicated considerable energy to satiating the popular appetite, revising traditional themes as they recognized the particular forms that appealed to the urban masses. Theater studies have focused on the *kabuki* performance and its censorship (Brandon 2009; Okamoto 2001; Leiter 2009), but have seldom discussed how these popular theater enterprises, going beyond their nature as entertainment, display the very struggle for ideological consensus under the occupation. By uncovering the cultural agendas raised by the laborers involved in theater production, this paper even adds new research on the labor unions in postwar Japan. Social and economic historians have focused on male-centered discourse concerning the wages and labor norms, and have examined the Tōhō strikes and radical labor movements in an attempt to explain the abortive legal framework for gender equality during the occupation and the decline of active social movements in the subsequent eras (Gerteis 2010; Gordon 1998). All in all, the paper examines how Japanese cultural bureaucrats, theater managers, and leftist intellectuals aimed to achieve a national identity, even as they took the different approaches to that goal.

II. 'America' in Japanese Culture

It is astonishing to note how the anti-American sentiments promoted during wartime at least appeared to be rapidly transmuted among the Japanese populace into widespread acceptance of America as a model for emulation. Japanese radio broadcasts and newspapers introduced the modern lifestyle of the American people and their current affairs to the Japanese masses. American foods and products were sold in the areas around occupation bases, and American popular culture—such as baseball, Hollywood movies, TV dramas, theater shows, fashion, and jazz—spread to all regions of Japan after they had been banned during wartime. Learning English also greatly attracted the Japanese populace. The *Nichi-Bei Kaiwa Techō* (Japanese-American Conversation Booklet) became a bestseller with over three million copies in circulation only two months after it was published in October 1945. In early 1946, NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai) began broadcasting a radio program, *Eigo Kaiwa* (English Conversation), and the American popular magazine Readers' Digest sharply increased its circulation. The Japanese were eager also to educate themselves about American middle-class lifestyles by such means as the popular comic strip 'Blondie' that the Asahi Newspaper carried in 1949 (Iwamoto 2002, 84-90). As a former Army lieutenant and based on his own daily experience in occupied Tokyo, Grant Goodman (Goodman 2005) vividly addresses, the ordinary Japanese responses during the very early year of the occupation attracted the view of the Occupation. In short, the American ideals of democracy and Christianity, and the boom in learning English were powerful enough to intervene in the Japanese cultural sphere.

General Headquarters (GHQ) was deeply involved, from the start of occupation, in monitoring ideological content. It dissolved the Bureau of Information and abolished laws promulgated by the wartime Japanese office for controlling film, publications, and newspapers. As a replacement, on September 22, 1945, GHQ established the Press, Pictorial, and Broadcasting Division (PPB) of the Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) in the Civil Intelligence Section (CIS), and the Information Division in the Civil Information and Education Section (CIE) (Tanikawa 2002, 197; Tanikawa 2003, 35-36). The CIE took charge of so-called cultural issues, including arts, education, film, theater, entertainment, religion, information, and publications. It also prevented expressions of militarism and censored kabuki and shinpa that expressed feudalism and dealt with sentimental themes (Tōhō 1963, 175; Okamoto 2001).

Despite authoritarian portrayals of the occupation army, as Yoshimi Shunya (Yoshimi 2006, 67-68) has pointed out, its presence was more a 'seducing' than an enforcing presence in the Japanese everyday consciousness. It is clear that the occupation forces did not force the Japanese culture to Americanize. Japanese theater producers, for example, cherished aspirations of their own for satisfying these new audiences. After setting up military bases on several Japanese islands, GHQ requisitioned several Japanese theaters and entertainment facilities for recreation for American forces (Tōhō 1982, 190-191), one of these being the Tokyo Takarazuka Theater. Changing its name to the Ernie Pyle Theater, the U.S. army used it exclusively to amuse the occupation forces (*Asahi Shinbun* 46/02/25). Every day, two films and live shows were put on at Ernie Pyle Theater free of charge for the U.S. armed forces.

The Japanese, however, were not excluded from helping to create entertainment programs for Americans. Rather, prestigious figures in theater and entertainment played a leading role in the GHQ project. Itō Michio, who had studied Western plays and gained experience working at American theaters during the war, became director of the Ernie Pyle Theater. Itō oversaw the whole process of presenting American films and producing shows for the American forces. His brother, Itō Kisaku, who had led the Japan Federation of Mobile Theaters during the war, was also involved in the project as a stage director. The Itō brothers, using personal connections, invited many American theater performers to Japan. As new managers of a theater for Americans, they attempted to organize a group of Japanese dancers and train them in American dance and chorus. The group produced songs in English, dances, and skits, attracting large audiences of Americans in Japan (*Tokyo Shinbun* 46/04/09; *Tokyo Shinbun* 46/07/24).

Japanese managers and writers in the Takarazuka Revue also provided revised performance programs that were more amenable to American tastes after the war. They maintained a similar performance style, including shows that combined ancient Japanese works with modern music and dancing derived from the West (*Kageki* 46/06), but they also made revisions to their old programs. For instance, when they reproduced a colorful stage show called *Spring Dance* (*Haru no Odori*), which they had presented in the West during the war, they added simple English dialogue to the dances, which had previously contained no dialogue. This show also presented hit songs familiar to Americans and imitated the choreography and finale style of New York shows (*Takarazuka Kageki Kyakuhonshū* 47/05; Heim 1946, 8). These revisions made the show

'especially attractive to foreigners' (*Mainichi Shinbun* 47/04/20).

Moreover, program managers understood that representative festivals in the Western cultural sphere, such as Christmas Day, could be the peak of shows and entertainment activities, and took advantage of the holiday season as the best chance to promote their productions. More than two hundred entertainers from Azuma Tokuho Buyōdan and Hanayagi Dance Corps, traditional Japanese dance groups, visited the 8th U.S. Army in Yokosuka, Yokohama, and other regions of Kanagawa Prefecture to amuse American soldiers at Christmas in 1945 (*Tokyo Shinbun* 45/12/26). The Takarazuka Revue also produced a lavish show called Adieu 1947 to celebrate Yuletide and the New Year. This show was an 'operatic patch[work]-quilt of selections' from various productions of the Revue during that year, including *Sorrow on a Southern Island, Spring Dance*, and other hit shows. In the finale, the Revue featured such familiar Western Christmas carols as 'Jingle Bells' and 'White Christmas,' which were also performed in Japanese versions. The Revue reproduced this American winter festival in a Japanese way in order to impress the American audiences and to show that the Japanese could effectively emulate American culture and they shared a culture with the Americans (*Mainichi Shinbun* 47/12/16).

The Revue's demonstration that the Japanese populaces as a whole had become more American aware a couple of years after the war did not stop there. Various expositions and theaters promoted America as the symbol of modern life and the model for postwar Japanese culture. On March 17, 1950, the Japanese government collaborated with private organizations to hold the energetic *American EXPO* in the City of Nishinomiya in Hyōgo prefecture. The Asahi Newspaper sponsored the

exposition, and major Japanese agencies, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Education - as well as the City of Nishinomiya and GHQ - supported the event. This exposition ostensibly sought to educate the Japanese comprehensively on what America was. It publicly advertised that America would be the best model for the Japanese to follow in establishing a cultural state; thus, the EXPO introduced Japanese people to the technology, schooling, and lifestyle of the United States. This presentation of American modern life garnered much attention from the Japanese masses, and about 2,000,000 people came to see the *American EXPO* (Tsuganesawa 2002, 163-166). The Japanese desire for American culture was also presented onstage at the *EXPO*, with, for example, a newly choreographed *Spring Dance*, which presented a song called 'The Statue of Liberty' that sang the praises of New York and the USA in general in extravagant terms (Takagi 1950, 17-23).

The presence of the American occupiers was so influential that Japanese desire for American culture seemed for a time to have entirely eclipsed wartime preoccupations with Japanism and Pan-Asianism. The Japanese government was cooperative in disavowing military power and, at first, even seemed eager to adopt these American-style renovations. However, widespread Americanization does not mean that the Japanese pursued an imitation of America only as a symbol of modern culture and values. They also explored other representations of culture, some of which competed with Americanism.

III. An Art Festival for Japan's Spiritual Recovery

Even though American culture had seduced many, especially urban Japanese, it was at the same time viewed by others as a threatening force that destroyed Japanese culture. The 'black market' and unlicensed prostitutes, known as 'pan-pan girls,' were pervasive, and youth who had lost jobs flowed into the pleasure quarters. Inflation rose sharply, and life was unstable. The defeated masses lost their pride and confidence as Japanese, often instigated social disorder, and suffered from mental despondency. In a report sent from Ogura Masahiro, the chief of police of Tottori Prefecture, to the chief of the National Police Bureau in the Home Ministry on September 5, 1945, the government and police officials were concerned with how to manage these social problems (*shakai mondai*), and they regarded cultural policy as a practical means for overcoming national difficulties (*kokunan*) and recovering from defeat (Awaya 1980, 170).

In December 1945, the Ministry of Education set up the Department of Arts (*Geijutsu Ka*) within the Bureau of Social Education (*Shakai Kyōiku Kyoku*). This department, as a leading office for cultural policy, decided to hold the first Art Festival (*geijutsusai*) in the fall of 1946 (Bunkachō 1978, 11). The festival comprised competitions within the traditional and modern performing arts including *bugaku* (court dances), *Noh* dance, *jōruri* (puppet show), *kabuki* play, theater, revue, ballet, and music (Bunkachō 1976, 8). In addition to the festival, the government held art exhibition tours; sponsored lectures and seminars on the arts; provided events for theater, music, and chorus groups to compete; and distributed information on arts and entertainment (Bunkachō 1978, 14). Even before the

establishment of the Department of Arts, there had been amateur entertainment contests (*shirōto engeikai*) wherein people competed with dances, skits, and singing (*nodo jiman*). Japanese local governments, newspapers, and the government-sponsored NHK had supported these events (Takaoka 1996, 172-176). The central government was simply attempting to further organize these cultural events. Kon Hidemi (Kon 1946, 19-21), the first chief of the Department of Art, argued that the cultural bureaus should expand arts and entertainment nationwide so that ordinary Japanese people, not merely a minority of elite specialists, could share (*kyōyū*) in state-initiated cultural activities.

The Japanese government legislated a 'Culture Day' (*bunka no hi*), beginning with November 3, 1948, and regarded cultural programs as 'social education' (*bunkyō*) to guide the people toward the state's goal of inspiring renewed confidence (Neki 2001, 28). Although translating the term *bunkyō* into English is difficult, 'social education' seems the most suitable for conveying the scope and goal of the cultural policy. Japanese defeat was a serious threat to national development, in the cultural bureau's view, and the Japanese populace needed to be fully integrated into efforts for national restoration. These officials mandated projects for expanding arts and entertainment, which they believed would help the Japanese recover from fatigue and mental despondency in everyday life (*Asahi Shinbun* 46/01/28).

The promotion of culture was also a message to the gaze of the Other—that is, the occupiers. Japanese officials endeavored to show the Americans that a defeated Japan had not declined spiritually and still had the potential to resurrect itself as a nation of culture (Bunkachō 1995, 110-112). In later years Kon, recalled his feelings on initiating the art festival

at the time: 'Even though Japan was beaten in the war, it does not mean that [Japan] was also defeated in culture by America. I want everyone to be aware of the fact that Japan has a great traditional culture that foreign countries cannot match' (Geijutsuka 1961, 2-4). In sum, Japanese cultural leaders understood that Japan could be proud of its own cultural heritage and artistic traditions. The state's promotion of the art festival reveals that postwar Japan embraced both Americanization and nationalism in the process of national renovation, despite the fact that these two ideologies are often seen as mutually exclusive projects.

It is noteworthy that in practicing this cultural policy, which was seemingly new, the Japanese government was actually continuing its wartime patterns. In terms of financing, the state was still stingy, with Japanese officials deciding that government budgets were not interested in providing funds for activities in non-economic fields. The art festival committee planned to make the festival exempt from taxation so that ordinary people could have more chance to enjoy it at a reasonable price. However, when they discussed the tax-exemption issue with Ikeda Hayato, the chief of the Tax Bureau (*Shuzei Kyoku*) in the Ministry of Finance (*Ōkurashō*), Ikeda refused. Although they tried negotiating tax-exemption in return for any profits donated to the Red Cross of Japan, Ikeda cited insufficient government funds (Geijutsuka 1961, 4-7).

It was paradoxical that Japanese authorities wanted to save money while at the same time insisting on state supervision of art and entertainment. Thus, Japanese officials' attitude toward the role of the state in cultural policy was conflicted. They recognized that many were critical of the wartime government's exertion of strong control over arts and entertainment. The idea of 'war repentance' thus became an excuse

for their lack of financial support. Leading cultural bureaucrats even insisted that the state should not intervene in cultural affairs because intervention had been one of the regrettable mistakes of the wartime. Instead, they emphasized that the private sector should actively participate in cultural affairs (*Tokyo Shinbun* 46b/08/22; Neki 2001, 12).

Nonetheless, the seemingly passive role of the state did not mean that the state planned to stop intervening in cultural affairs. Japanese officials borrowed methods of mobilizing commercial theaters and entertainers from their wartime experience. Officials in the Ministry of Education held meetings with intellectuals and top managers of commercial theaters, and organized an executive committee to plan the festival. Tōhō and Shōchiku, two of the leading film and theater entertainment companies, participated as the main members, and they volunteered their own theaters, such as the Imperial Theater and the Tokyo Theater as the main venues for this nation-wide event (*Asahi Shinbun* 46/07/30; Geijutsuka 1961, 4-7). They also provided financial support, facilities, and personnel, being motivated by the opportunity to deepen relations with the government. Tōhō, in particular, was more cooperative than other theaters, and expressed a strong desire to participate in the state-initiated event. This was a good chance for Tōhō to publicize its leading role in contributing to Japan's reconstruction by disavowing commercial profits. Indeed, Tōhō was publicly praised as a 'social educator' for providing quality entertainment that would encourage the Japanese populace (Furuya 1946, 58-61). The scheduling notes for 1946 in *Kageki* (*The Revue*), the monthly house journal of the Takarazuka Revue, show that the Tōhō and Takarazuka groups focused their activities to a large degree on entertaining Japanese in areas that had suffered aerial bombardment. In

actuality, however, it was not so burdensome for big theaters to host the festival. Since they already had experience holding competitions at their own theaters in Tokyo and provincial cities, the big theater companies were familiar with how to arrange programs and organize schedules and performances. Managers of the regional theaters were similarly well prepared for the expansion of their own events into a national festival (*Tokyo Shinbun* 46b/08/22; *Tokyo Shinbun* 46a/08/22).

The government's art festivals and the avid participation of commercial theaters illustrate how the Japanese themselves practiced an active cultural policy that was not directly controlled by GHQ. In realistic terms, the Americans, because they lacked linguistic or cultural understanding of the Japanese society, had little choice but to rely on Japanese cooperation. The U.S. occupation force attempted to involve the Japanese and governed them 'indirectly' through existing personnel and organs during the occupation period—indeed, the American forces' control of cultural affairs was usually indirect without allowing Japanese ministries complete autonomy in managing mass media and information.

The complexity of U.S. cultural rule was often viewed simplistically. Etō Jun (Etō 1989), for example, a leading conservative journalist in Japan, complained that the Japanese mass media had become 'captive' (*toraware*) to GHQ, and that this condition deprived Japanese of the freedom to speak freely by creating a 'closed linguistic space' (*tozasareta gengo kūkan*). However, such an interpretation exaggerates American control and ignores Japanese participation in media affairs. Etō overlooked the role of the CIE by focusing solely on the authoritarian aspects of GHQ's approach, such as the direct censorship from the CCD. In fact, the CCD and the CIE had different functions. Whereas the CCD

primarily aimed to censor the content of the media and gather secret information on ideas and activities among the Japanese, the CIE focused on offering more indirect guidance (Yamamoto 2003, 7-10) by working through the Japanese officials in the Ministry of Education. Thus, the occupiers gained easier access to the Japanese populace and the ability to feed them with information that coincided with GHQ's purposes and to educate them on the American ideals of democracy and respect for individuality (Tanikawa 2002, 236-237; 456-457; GHQ 1950, 273-274). For instance, the CIE provided educational films and some Hollywood movies in Japanese through the Union of Japanese Movies (*Nihon Eiga Ren'gōkai*) as informative exemplars for Japan in its efforts to construct a newly democratic society (*Jiji Tsūshin: Eiga Geinōban* 48/05/18; Tanikawa 2002, 456-457).

The strategy of working through the Japanese institutions proved successful for achieving the occupation's goals. Top managers of such big entertainment companies as Shōchiku, Tōhō, and Yoshimoto began voluntarily to select scripts they deemed most appropriate to the occupiers' purposes. For example, Shōchiku decided not to present works showing the abuse of women because it did not accord with ideals of democracy and human rights, nor anything suggesting feudalistic loyalty and vengeance, such as its steady seller Chūshingura (Sugai 1975a, 35-44). Because of the theater's conscientious collaboration with the American forces, direct censorship by the PPB ended relatively quickly, in October 1949 (Tanikawa 2000, 76-78).

These collaborative efforts by some Japanese officials and private companies, however, did not satisfy other Japanese, especially those on the left. In addition, problems emerged with the idea of the governmental

festival for the arts. The high tax on the entrance fee burdened the people already suffering under inflation and kept them from accessing art and entertainment (Hyōdō 1948; *Jiji Tsūshin: Eiga Geinōban* 48/09/13). Because few Japanese people could attend events, most of the audience was made up of artists and critics. Lacking a solution to the taxation problem, the festival found it difficult to create an event for the masses (*kokuminteki gyōji*), and it rather became a contest for commercial theaters and entertainers to compete with each other. Endō Shingo, the leading figure in the leftist theater movement, criticized the art festival in his recollections as having proved that Japanese people are afflicted by a 'bureaucracy-worship complex' (*kanson compurekusu*). In other words, commercial theaters willingly participated in the state-initiated project or public events, even under unfavorable conditions, because they were too obsequious before the power of the state (Geijutsuka 1961, 105-107).

Thus, in reality, the government looked to generate more revenue through taxation while providing little funding. It was not until 1950 that the Japanese government provided a budget of 6,000,000 yen for the festival. It is not clear what percentage of the total budget for arts and culture this figure represents. However, this was the first time that the government had provided funds since it initiated the art festival. Moreover, this amount turned out to be insignificant. Local governments shared part of this budget for their own events in local areas. Taxes on the tickets were also so high that in 1949, the total sum of taxes collected amounted to 16,030,000,000 yen. The tax became a source of revenue for local governments, and they were not willing to decrease it (*Jiji Tsūshin: Eiga Geinōban* 48/12/11; *Shakai Kyōiku* 1951b; Shakai Kyōiku 1951a).

The contradiction between the state officials' efforts to help the people

regain spiritual confidence and the lack of financial support illustrates the dilemmas that postwar Japan faced in its efforts toward national reconstruction. One of the managers of Tōhō stated,

> What I want to say is this: the issue of reduction of taxation on entrance fees, despite the great uproar it has generated and the support of nearly all the Japanese people for its necessity, demonstrates the inadequacy of a policy that only pays lip service to the slogan of building a 'cultural' state, while Japanese culture itself is in danger of sliding down to a 6th grade level (Kudō 1949).

IV. The Rise and Fall of the Left's Vision of a New Japan in 'Self-reliance Theater'

The persistence of officials' ambiguous attitude toward the role of the state in cultural affairs was merely one side of Japan's cultural policy. Within the theaters themselves, conflicts between labor and management further complicated the story of postwar Japan's cultural policy. Because leftists expressed their own vision of a new national identity through theater activities, the state's attempt to restore confidence among the Japanese populace through the art festival did not always proceed in the direction that either the Occupation or Japanese officials, along with the management of private organizations, wanted. Even the first Art Festival did not go well. Tōhō, the biggest sponsor of the festival, stopped performing at the Imperial Theater after October 16, 1946, because of a general strike led by labor unions within Tōhō (Geijutsuka 1962, 279;

Geijutsuka 1961, 7-9).

Japanese leftists attempted to define their own vision of a new national purpose through collective activities. Labor strikes, which were a part of their efforts, thus should also be understood in terms of the leftist cultural movement, rather than merely as a dimension of the labor movement. At a very early stage of the occupation, GHQ revised the labor law, allowing the freedom to organize labor unions. The Tōhō strike, thus, was a demonstration of the growing voice of laborers. Labor unions in Tōhō instigated several strikes from March 1946 through 1950. The so-called 'Tōhō Strike' peaked between March 10 and October 19, 1948, after the Tōhō Studio dismissed large numbers of employees who were involved with the Communist Party. This large strike drew a great deal of attention from Japanese society (Rōdō Undōshi Kenkyūkai 1972, 71), and because the crisis at Tōhō appeared a grave threat to other laborers and industries in Japan (Takemoto 1948), labor unions in the railway and textiles industries organized a nationwide Association to Protect Japan's Culture (Nihon Bunka wo Mamoru Kai) to coordinate sympathy strikes (Hōjō 1949, 254-259).

What the unions meant by 'Japan's culture' was an ideological conception of 'culture', which was produced through labor's collaboration with intellectuals on the Left. The actions of labor unions were more than merely a struggle of the working class for higher wages and better treatment in the workplace; they were an appeal from leftists for a greater role and status in a new society. Laborers, they believed, should not be mere objects of exploitation and suppliers of food; rather, they should cultivate themselves as leaders in constructing a new democratic state for Japan. Intellectuals on the left and laborers took critical stances toward both the 'capitalist' notions of Americanism and

the 'feudalistic' aspects of Japanese culture. For instance, when the Tokai Regional Association (*Tōkai Chihō Kyōgikai*) within the National Film Circle (*Zenkoku Eiga Saakuru*) selected a list of the best movies of the year 1950, the members of the association did not give top rankings to Hollywood movies on the grounds that those films did not properly (*ryōshinteki*) express the realities of daily life for the workers and lacked class-consciousness. A member of another movie circle criticized American movies, saying that 'the humanism that [they] express is shallow (*usuppera*) and absurd (*bakarashiku*), and is combined with hypocrisy (*gizen*)', because American cinema proclaimed an interest in human rights, but did not tell of real laborers' conditions as Italian and Soviet cinema did (Narita 2005, 249-250). Thus, the Left approached the ideal of a democratic state in terms of liberating the working class. This was perceived as the best way to increase their voices in the workplace and to bring about a drastic improvement in their social status. In this sense, the Left attempted to show Japanese culture as something different from Americanism, to reject democracy and accept communism, from which they would construct a cultural state.

Leftist intellectuals attempted to inculcate this ideology among laborers through diverse group activities. Indeed, both private and public companies in Japan witnessed a boom of leftist-inclined 'cultural circles' (*bunka saakuru*) at factories, workplaces, and schools, as leftists organized groups for producing theater, music, poems, and films. In the field of theater, they organized 'self-reliance theater', which was also known as 'workplace theater' (*shokuba engeki*) or 'circle theater' (*saakuru engeki*) (Tōhō 1963, 177). They were not simply watchers of theater, music, and films but became active participants performing, writing, and singing, as well as

producing, raising funds from among the members of each circle, reviewing scripts, advertising programs, and mobilizing audiences (Narita 2005, 251-254).

Through these cultural activities, the Left developed a strong sense of political consciousness that encouraged the working class to become leaders in producing 'real' Japanese culture (*hontō no Nihon bunka*) (Murayama 1947, 8-12; 16-21; *Nihon Engeki* 46/08). On November 23, 1946, laborers in Tokyo organized the Association of Tokyo Self-reliance Theaters (Tōkyō Jiritsu Gekidan Kyōgikai; Tōjikyō). In the first amateur theater contest in September 1947, Tōjikyō announced a slogan declaring that the laborers ought to be at the core of a cultural state (*'bunka kokka' no chūkaku wa kinrōsha bunka da!*). Along with the establishment of Tōjikyō, laborers expanded their own cultural movements through various circle activities within their unions (Kan 2003, 93-94).

Ironically, it was the wartime amateur theater movement, initiated by the state, which influenced the rise of workers' voices through the self-reliance theater movement after the war. Contradictory to assumptions by some scholars regarding leftist movements, the 'circle movement' (*saakuru undō*) was not suddenly established after the war (Shisō no Kagaku Kenkyūkai 1976). Japanese workers and leftists had organized small groups for saakuru activities in the early 1930s, at which time laborers were able to learn the importance of their social roles by discussing and interacting with progressive intellectuals. They spread political ideas among the populace through their theater, poetry, literature, and paintings, and the role of laborers was also much emphasized during wartime mobilization. Though officials and cultural leaders expected to raise productivity by encouraging laborers to participate in circle-based leisure activities, they

did not intend to inspire class-consciousness (Gordon 1998, 97).

Thus, the cultural activists who had led wartime amateur theater movements guided the self-reliance theater movements among laborers after the war. It is not surprising that wartime intellectuals resumed their work soon after the defeat, just as other Japanese politicians and economic leaders also quickly returned from the purge to guide postwar Japan's national reconstruction. Kishida Kunio, for example, retired from serving as chief of the Division of Culture in the IRAA after the war but advised youth groups and women's groups in local areas on leisure activities in the postwar era (Kitagawa 2000, 46). Matsubara Eiji, the leader of the Tōhō Mobile Culture Corps during the war, guided workers at textile factories in Aichi prefecture in the production of amateur theater from late 1945 (Aichiken Shokuba Engeki Kyōkai 1994, 1-2).

Thus, these wartime cultural activists played a central role in promoting amateur entertainment after the war, expecting that theater activity would help enhance the living standards of workers and increase productivity as it had during the war (Hatta 1948). This cultural movement expanded upon organizations and structures created during the war, most of which persisted after defeat. Specialists in film, theater, music, and literature were invited to give lectures and continued to hold seminars, concerts, theater performances, and art exhibitions (Kaneko 1946a; Kaneko 1946b). Japan's wartime Federation of Mobile Theaters, for example, simply changed its name into the Federation of Mobile Entertainment (*Idō Geinō Renmei*) and revived the old organization. Itō Kisaku became a member of the board of directors of this new Federation. Setting the new goal of the organization as the reconstruction of postwar Japan, leading figures in entertainment initiated movements to increase coal production

and to decrease inflation, as well as to comfort war victims and laborers. Trucks on which actors performed light music and *manzai* (comic dialogues) continued traveling the streets of postwar Japan, just as they had in wartime (*Nihon Engeki* 46/01).

These Japanese theater specialists' role in postwar cultural policy overlapped with the agendas of both conservatives and laborers. While, on the one hand, they served the state's goal of encouraging the people to work for postwar restoration, theater specialists, on the other hand, also commented on and advised workers about leftist ideology. What made post-war self-reliance theater different from that in wartime was the fact that theater specialists were strongly leftist after the war. Hijikata Yoshi and Murayama Tomoyoshi, who had played leading roles in developing the wartime amateur theater movement, taught at schools that the Communist Party established after the war (Hatta 1975, 9-11) and continued activities in the Mobile Entertainment Federation (Kan 2003, 51). On April 26, 1946, Murayama also organized the left-leaning New Thespian Association (*Shin Engekijin Kyōkai*) with Senda Koreya, one of the Itō brothers, and Hatta Motoo. The Association collaborated with labor unions and advised self-reliance theaters (Teatoro 1946). On April 21, 1947, the Association organized the Conference for Mobile Performance (*Idō Kōen Kyōgikai*) for entertaining laborers (Teatoro 1947). These leftists, whether consciously or unconsciously, covered up what they had done during the war and took a critical stance against the state's cultural policies (Murayama 1947, 2-3). Leftist writers pointed out that the wartime entertainment programs led by the IRAA (*yokusan geinō*) failed to liberate laborers because they did not allow laborers to cultivate their own ideology for independence and self-reliance, and thus functioned simply

as a means for the bourgeoisie to control laborers within the structure of industrial patriotic units (*sanpō*) (Jinnouchi 1949, 263-268). They also criticized the postwar government for still failing to provide entertainment for working people.

Leftists' critical attitudes toward the state's cultural policy became more aggressive as they developed cultural activities in parallel with the labor movement. Intellectuals on the Left regarded strikes for better treatment of workers in the workplace as merely the first step in securing laborers' leading role in the establishment of a new cultural state. Advised by leftist intellectuals, workers in the entertainment industry organized the Japan Motion Picture and Theatrical Worker's Union (*Nihon Eiga Engeki Rōdō Kumiai*; Nichieien) on April 28, 1946, and launched the Tōhō Strike (Sugai 1975b, 30-38). This union demanded improved working conditions—better working hours, wages, and recruitment—as well as increased participation by workers in management decision making. Union leaders argued this was the way to achieve democratization of the company (The Institute of Social Science of the University of Tokyo 1986, 14).

The union members' concept of cultural identity caused conflict with the management of the companies. Kobayashi Ichizō, the conservative leader of the Tōhō and Takarazuka groups, dismissed labor unions as merely communist (Kobayashi 1948, 53). Mabuchi Takeo, the vice president of Tōhō, criticized Nichieien as an extremely leftist union that was disrupting postwar Japan's economic recovery by focusing on all-consuming ideological struggles. Top managers agreed that the companies could guarantee employees' rights only when they negotiated with the companies in a peaceful and 'realistic' (*genjitsuteki*) way (*Tōhō* 48/11).

Management adopted a policy of 'divide and conquer' by acknowledging only anti-communist unions as legitimate (kenzen). Their selective negotiation with approved labor unions on the issue of reopening the studio brought about conflicts among the laborers themselves. Nichieien refused to recognize company-collaborator unions (*goyō kumiai*), such as the Association of Tōhō Laborers (*Tōhō Rōren*), because it recognized that management was maneuvering to split Nichieien (Itō [the chairperson of Nichieien] 1948). Nevertheless, the radical strikes led by Nichieien did not appeal to the whole body of workers, diminishing the cooperative power of laborers to resist the company. Tōhō Rōren, which promoted anti-communist slogans, soon surpassed Nichieien in total membership (Mabuchi 1948). Some laborers even sought to differentiate union-based circle activities from union-backed political strikes. When leftist journals expressed political perspectives against the government's anti-communist attitudes, some readers criticized the journals for becoming 'too red' (*akasugiru*) (Narita 2005, 255). Rather than involving themselves in radical political activities and taking a leading role in fomenting social revolution, some laborers merely wished to enjoy apolitical amusement activities.

Even though in the occupation period, GHQ allowed theater activities involving primarily leftist intellectuals (Tōhō 1963, 175), American occupiers were not willing to allow communism to spread freely throughout Japanese society. Perceived militaristic and ideological threats from mainland China after its communist revolution of 1949 and the growing power of the Soviet Union precipitated a shift in the focus of the United States from democratizing and demilitarizing Japan to establishing Japan as its leading bulwark in Asia against communist

influence over the region. The Yoshida cabinet (October 15, 1948~December 10, 1954) skillfully engaged the Japanese mainstream by focusing on economic recovery and the security provided to Japan by the American forces in Okinawa and other capitalist Asian countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan. The U.S. occupation collaborated with Japan's top bureaucrats in conducting the 'Red Purge' of 1950, and pulled Japan into the Western camp of American-led democracy and anti-communism. Under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, Japan focused its energies on national reconstruction rather than such issues as war responsibility (Dower 1999).

Eventually, the government resolved the strike with force. The GHQ focused on suppressing radical and communist-inspired labor unions as well as leftist theater activities (Ōhashi 1975, 17-19). In the wake of GHQ's suppression of a planned general strike on February 1, 1947, the Tōhō Strike deepened the clash between authorities and labor unions. The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department (*Keishichō*) even asked the 8th U.S. Army to dispatch troops. The suppression of the strike was so notoriously harsh that some recollections lamented hyperbolically that GHQ dispatched 'everything except its warships' (*konakatta no wa gunkan dake*) (Tōhō 1963, 188; Rōdō Undōshi Kenkyūkai 1972, 71). The Tōhō crisis finally came to a close in 1950.

V. Toward a Recovery of Confidence in Japanese Culture

Ultimately, the state's version of cultural identity won out. Under the conditions of defeat, Japanese conservatives wanted to shape a new national culture in ways that would help Japan's political stability and economic recovery, and they regarded communism as a dangerous impediment to these goals, as not fitting into either national integration or Americanism. An unfettered communist movement, they believed, would hinder economic recovery, cooperation between Japanese company managers and workers, and a strong alliance with the United States. The Japanese state even allowed U.S. military police to intervene when the communist view of cultural activity was seen as interfering with the state's aims. Communist labor unions were naïve in regarding the new cultural Japan as a state that would embrace communism generously. After the strikes died down, the entertainment industry began to focus on commercial promotion rather than ideological disputes (*Jiji Tsūshin: Eiga Geinōban* 49/04/02).

The occupation period, which ended in 1952, was successful in the sense that afterward, Japanese began to see economic recovery, slowly recovered from ideological turmoil, and looked toward a new leadership role in Asia. During the Korean War, communism was rolled back, to the point that there was no possibility it could become a mainstream part of Japanese culture. Cultural leaders in Japan subsequently prepared to show off Japan's rising confidence on the stage. Itō Michio, the leading Japanese theater activist in both wartime and the postwar period, clearly emphasized Japanese cultural ability in his talk with Shirai Tetsuzō, the major writer of the Takarazuka Revue: 'Only Japan in Asia can enhance

the stage [to the level of] a comprehensive art. It is possible for [Japan] to take a representative position in Asia. It is possible because [we] are Japanese'. Matching the attempts of the Japanese empire during the war, Itō advocated in the early 1950s that Japan 'modernize the old Oriental culture inherited by Japan', including traditions from Korea, China, India, and Indo-China. This argument was nothing less than the resurrection of the wartime idea that only the Japanese could 'represent the Orient', and that this was 'the role of the Japanese' (*Kageki* 52/12).

The discourse on Japanese culture, as suggested in Itō's statement, coincided with evolving changes in popular interest. Japanese confidence in its cultural power heightened around the mid-1950s, when the society witnessed high-level production and mass consumption. In 1956, the Japanese government proclaimed in its white papers that the post-war era ended (*mohaya sengo dewanai*). After the failure of the radical demonstration against the intensified alliance with the U.S., Japanese intellectuals turned away from the Communist Party. The rising boom of consumption in society, initiated by the Ikeda cabinet's Income Doubling Plan of 1960, brought about a decline in the leftists' ideology. The mass (*taishū*) replaced the proletariat, leading to debates over the potential of producing a dominating popular interest through the form of mass culture (Ivy 1993, 247–251).

Similar to Itō, the Takarazuka Revue also conveyed the idea that Japan was no longer a defeated country. In the finale of *Hana no Fudoki* (*Spring Dance*), the Revue presented a beautiful image of postwar Japan as being in its springtime, with '[n]o more Hiroshima or charred ruins' and in which '[f]lowers of peace proudly bloom' (*Takarazuka Kageki Kyakuhonshū* 51/11). In April 1955, the Tokyo Takarazuka Theater changed its name

back from the Ernie Pyle Theater (Takarazuka Kagekidan 1964, 179), and in spring 1956, Takarazuka held an ambitious exhibition, the Beautiful National Geography and Tour Japan Exposition in its own amusement park. Whereas the Japanese had felt the allure of America at the American EXPO several years before, they now enjoyed a miniature presentation of Japanese lifestyle, nature, and history (*Kageki* 56/03).

Japan seemed to have recovered in diplomatic terms as well. The Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, which was the main organization of wartime Japan's cultural diplomacy, resumed its overseas cultural affairs in the early 1950s, and its members began to express their rising confidence in Japanese culture (KBS 1946). Japan's current economic recovery was attributed to Japan's capacity to inherit cultural diversity from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity, and the KBS expressed the idea that only a country with a great cultural tradition could attain high development in business. They tried to persuade leading businessmen to invest funds in the KBS to further develop Japanese culture (*KBS Kaihō* 51/05/20). Future discussion is needed on the way Japan's cultural nationalism has sharpened in tandem with its growing economic affluence, and the growth of its influence on international society and the region.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has used the theatrical arts as a microcosm for looking at the complex interplay of Japan's own existing wartime cultural structure, combined with the support of the American occupiers after the war. It has been demonstrated that postwar Japan's cultural efforts were a continuation of wartime efforts to promote and restore Japanese culture. With the American occupation, the Japanese enthusiastically promoted American culture, with the government also attempting to re-energize Japan by promoting the arts. Japanese cultural policy makers, the occupation forces, profit-seeking commercial groups, and leftist-led theaters collaborated with each other at times, at other times working at cross purposes in the process of nation-wide cultural renovation. The various activities, maneuverings, and negotiations among the participants reveal a complex picture underlying the formation of a new Japanese state identity; but Japanese culture was eventually reborn. The Japanese maintained a relatively autonomous voice in redefining their national identity soon after the war, which was incompatible with both Communization and Americanization. Japan further nourished its culture as it formed a capitalistic society and became a greater economic power in the world. The discussion here contributes to the literature on the Japanese national identity and popular cultural contestation under the occupation.

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