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# **De-demonising Japan? Transitioning from War to Peace through Japan's Cinematic Post-war Cultural Diplomacy in UNESCO's *Orient* Project 1957-1959**

In 1959, UNESCO published a film catalogue titled *Orient. A Survey of Films Produced in Countries of Arab and Asian Culture* to familiarise Western audiences with Eastern cultures. Out of the 139 feature films included in the catalogue, 37 were Japanese. Through a discussion of the descriptions of the films provided in the catalogue, this article analyses Japan's post-war cultural diplomacy in the context of the Orient project. The analysis suggests the Japanese representatives aimed to position the nation in the international arena outside the Cold War political and ideological framework. Instead, they promoted national interests by utilising the catalogue project to renegotiate the country's position in the post-war world with the larger ideal of intercultural understanding guiding the selection process and the meaning created for Western audiences.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy; Japan; film; UNESCO; intercultural relations

## **1. Introduction**

After World War II, re-entering the international community constituted a big challenge for post-war Japan. Policymakers were faced with the tough task of renegotiating the Japanese national image of a fallen military power and one of the main players of a bitter war. During the war, the national image of Japan abroad had largely been constructed by wartime Allied propaganda. A vivid example of such negative image building is the film *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945), commissioned by the U.S. War Department, directed by Frank Capra and released three days after the bombing of Hiroshima. In the film, Japanese history and culture are portrayed as the cause of modern day Japan's warlike and expansionist behaviour instead of its political, military or economic aspirations. The primary sources of video footage are news clips and Japanese fiction films. In the film, the imagery has been taken out of context and

reframed to create a narrative serving a purpose of demonising Japan in Western eyes in order to build an image of the nation as something alien, unknown and hostile. Thus, sometimes the ways films are used and the contexts they are placed in become of more significance than the films themselves.

In 1959, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), in cooperation with the British Film Institute (BFI), published a film catalogue titled *Orient. A Survey of Films Produced in Countries of Arab and Asian Culture*. The aim of the catalogue was to promote the presentation of films which might give Western audiences a 'fuller and more informed idea of the ways of life of Eastern peoples' (Holmes 1959). Japan, as the world's most prolific film producer at the time, was featured prominently in the project. For the Japanese, it provided a means of introducing foreign audiences to Japanese culture – or at least to the aspects of it they wished to promote. The Orient catalogue is approached here as a significant cultural diplomatic initiative during a time when intercultural relations were largely determined by the bipolar Cold War geopolitics. The aim of this article is to discuss the question of what purpose the Japanese films chosen for the Orient catalogue served in terms of cultural diplomacy.

During the Cold War, film became one of the key instruments for constructing meaning and shaping the ideas of the nature of the conflict for the general public. The recent decade has witnessed an emergence of a growing amount of research on the cinematic Cold War in the form of both propaganda and diplomacy within and between the two blocs. Whether these accounts approach cinema as a Cold War ideological battlefield (see e.g. Shaw and Youngblood 2010; Roth-Ey 2011) or as a platform for cooperation (see e.g. Siefert 2012; Siefert 2014; Kozovoi 2016), the focus is placed on the states-level with the United States and Soviet Union and their allies as the main

actors, thus enhancing our understanding of the intercultural relations of the time as being positioned along this geopolitical East-West axis. With Japan's position in the post-war world as a starting point, the previously uncharted Orient project provides insight into the interplay between Cold War cinema and cultural diplomacy beyond the geopolitical East-West polarisation.

If we want to understand what exactly the Japanese representatives were hoping to accomplish by participating in the project, we need to look at how the catalogue attempts to shape the readers' understanding of the films in it. Even though the films were chosen to represent Japanese culture in the catalogue, they were not originally produced for the project. However, in the context of the catalogue, they became a means of both representing Japan and creating meaning for Western audiences. In the following sections of this article, I begin by taking a closer look at the question of defining Japan's cultural diplomacy and related film policies prior to the Orient project. Next, I move on to discuss the Orient project as an example of Japan's cultural diplomatic strategies by examining the selection process and criteria.

Finally, in order to provide an example of how exactly the descriptions in the catalogue shape and construct the films to further the agenda of image rehabilitation, I compare the plot summaries and the actual contents of two films included in the catalogue: *Four Chimneys* (a.k.a. *Where Chimneys Are Seen*, Entotsu no Mieru Basho, 煙突の見える場所, 1953, dir. Goshō Heinosuke) and *Gate of Hell* (Jigokumon, 地獄門, 1953, dir. Kinugasa Teinosuke). To borrow from Kenneth Burke's (1969, 59-62) terminology, the descriptions and the films they represent are looked at as a representative anecdote. Understood here in a broad sense, this term serves as a way of

unifying separate narratives under one coherent message, thus helping to crystallise the basic paradigm created through the collection of Japanese films in the catalogue.

## **2. Defining Japan's Cultural Diplomacy**

Cultural relations formed one of the central pillars of Japan's foreign policy in the post-war decades. Article nine of the post-war Constitution of Japan, which came into effect in 1947, declares that 'Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes'. This means that alternative courses of action were required in order to secure Japan's international position and thus, the key role of cultural diplomacy in Japan's foreign policy makes perfect sense. When the means of warfare are restricted, other options for doing politics need to be found – especially if we take war to be an instrument or an expression of politics (Clausewitz 1832, 70).

Cultural diplomacy in the strict sense can be defined as interest-driven governmental practices in comparison to ideals-driven cultural relations practiced by non-state actors (Ang, Isar and Mar 2015, 365). On a practical level the difference is often non-existent as the relationship between a nation state and its citizens is rather difficult to dismantle, but here this categorisation helps to make a distinction between the motives of the different actors involved. Of course, between the categories of citizen and state we need to add the category of enterprises, with motives likely differing from the other two. Enterprises are mainly of interest here to illustrate the multidimensionality of the concept, policy and practice of cultural diplomacy. However, it must be noted that in the field of cinema, this is exactly where some of the biggest actors are found, in the form of commercial film producers and distributors.

In the Japanese context, the term cultural diplomacy (bunka gaikō, 文化外交) came about in the 1930s. Following Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933, the primary goal of Japan's cultural diplomacy was to stabilise its foreign relations with the great powers. The Japanese recognised that the promotion of national culture as a part of their foreign policy would help achieve the state's political goals, and thus it became a significant aspect of an aggressive foreign policy aimed at persuading the West to acknowledge Japan's role as a leader in Asia. The chosen counterpart for Japan's cultural diplomacy was the Western powers, which were seen to hold a level of culture and civilisation equal to that of Japan. (Park 2011, 18-19; 21-22.) Film, however, served a similar purpose in justifying Japan's imperial aspirations from the end of the 1800s all the way through to the end of the Pacific War in 1945 with a very different audience in mind. Japanese cinema became a key means to argue for the benefits of the Greater Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere as an alternative to Western colonialism and to inspire participation in the imperial project in the occupied territories. (Baskett 2008.)

In 1939, Japan legislated The Motion Picture Law. Films were subject to strict censorship and were examined by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the gendarmerie and the Education Ministry. After the termination of World War II in 1945, the Allied Occupation (1945-1952) began, and as a result, film censorship by the government was suspended and film production freed from government control. During the Occupation period, Japan's foreign policy was dictated by the United States, to which its cultural diplomacy was also tied to (Saeki 2015). The ex-imperial power was forced to adjust to the reorganisation of its society from the outside, and the film industry was no exception. The Occupation forces established a new set of rules for the film industry, aiming to popularise their political agenda of establishing democracy. While officially

the Occupation forces promoted freedom of speech, they nevertheless established an excessive bureaucratic machine under the General Headquarters to carry out their own media control in order to root out topics that could be interpreted as attempts to resurrect Japanese militarism (Hirano 1994). Following article 21 of the post-war Constitution, which forbid censorship altogether, the existence of censorship could not be publicly acknowledged. In practice, it was an open secret.

Towards the end of the 1940s, a U-turn in the Occupation forces' policies took place. Japan was to be transformed into a stronghold against the rise of communism in Asia, even at the cost of reversing some of the earlier reforms, and the focus of the officially non-existent censorship thus turned from right-wing targets to left-wing ones (Dower 1999, 426-429). In 1949, the Motion Picture Code of Ethics was introduced, leading to the gradual shift of the Occupation forces' control back to the hands of the Japanese. As an unarguably clever way of working around article 21, the new policy placed the film industry under a form of self-regulation carried out by the Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan. In 1950, the Red Purge enforced by the Occupation forces drove a number of accomplished directors out of the film studio system (Anderson and Richie 1982, 237).

One of the first steps taken by post-war Japan to restore its status in the international community was to join UNESCO in 1951. At the 6<sup>th</sup> UNESCO General Conference, which admitted Japan, Japan's representative Mr. Maeda Tamon gave a speech stating that '[t]he spirit of UNESCO is the guiding principle for Japan, which is on the path of rebuilding itself as a peace-loving and democratic state' (National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan 2016). Maeda's speech reveals a dualistic attitude towards Japan's cultural diplomacy. On one hand, he refers to it as a means of promoting national interests through image construction. According to

dominant understanding, during the 1950s the primary goal and challenge of Japanese cultural diplomacy was to transform its wartime national image into a new image of the country as a peace loving democracy (Aoki-Okabe, Kawamura, & Makita, 2010, pp. 216, 220; Ogura, 2008). This focuses on the nation state as the key player in cultural diplomacy, making the – perhaps only terminological – mistake of assuming the nation state to be the natural form of the world in both a social and a political sense, even granting it actor-like qualities (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002).

Taking a slightly different approach in line with the other track distinguishable in Maeda's speech, Sang Mi Park (2011) argues that in the post-war period, Japan's cultural diplomacy was characterised by an effort to place Japan in an intermediary position between the developed Western and developing Asian countries. Indeed, Maeda's speech places UNESCO's aims to promote intercultural understanding as the driving force behind Japan's cultural diplomacy. Defining intercultural understanding as the key aim of cultural diplomacy sounds rather idealistic, as it seems to eliminate the aspect of national interest altogether – at least if national interest conflicts with the idea of promoting mutual understanding.

During the transition from the Occupation to the post-Occupation era, a number of institutional mechanisms were established to support the United States' aspirations of incorporating Japan into its hegemonic Cold War sphere. Along with political, military and economic activities, this included cultural measures, like those of the United States Information Agency. Following the end of the Occupation in 1952 and 1953, significant sections of the Japanese film industry were accused by not only American but also British press of anti-Americanism for producing films dealing with the atomic bombings or the Pacific War. Allegedly these films were attempting to revive right-



wing Japanese militarism, thus posing a threat to the United States' Cold War interests in the Asia-Pacific region. (Howard 2016.)

In 1956, Mr. Haguiwara Toru, the head of the delegation of Japan, addressed the 9<sup>th</sup> UNESCO General Conference in a speech: 'Ten years ago, all the nations of the world were eager for peace. We were all entitled to think that the horrors of war were at last banished from the earth' (UNESCO, 9/C Proceedings. Records of the General Conference; Ninth session, New Delhi, 1956, p. 57). But still, 'bloody conflicts' had kept occurring all over the world. 'The experience of the last ten years surely proves that all the efforts made in the political field bring only a temporary and short-lived solution', he continued, emphasising the need for an alternative solution. His response was to turn to the promotion of intercultural understanding to build a sustainable basis for peace.

In 1958, the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO (JNCU) compiled a 1000-page encyclopaedia on Japan for foreigners titled *Japan: Its Land, People and Culture*, which attempted to 'give foreigners an authentic picture of Japan', indicating that the Japanese were on a mission to represent their country on their own terms and to challenge the wartime image constructed by others. They acknowledged that the atmosphere was finally favourable for the introduction of Japanese culture abroad, but regretted that neither the Japanese people nor the Japanese government were well prepared for 'effective cultural diplomacy' (Kurihara, Matsui and Tochiori 1958, 194). For the JNCU, cultural diplomacy held great promise as a way forward, but required a critical approach to the means at their disposal. The JNCU noted that cinema seemed to be the most effective means of promoting intercultural understanding, particularly among the general population.

In 1959, the Orient catalogue was published. The final catalogue consists of two parts: Part 1 deals with feature films suitable for screening at film festivals and part 2 focuses on documentaries and short films for television distribution. Part 1 includes 139 films<sup>1</sup>, out of which 37 are Japanese<sup>2</sup>. 36 of the Japanese films in the catalogue were produced in the 1950s, when Japan was the world's largest film maker. The 1950s, when Japanese cinema finally reached European audiences, is celebrated as the golden age of Japanese cinema. During the six and a half years of Occupation around a thousand feature films were produced (Dower 1999, 426), but by the mid-1950s the number had grown to around 500 films produced annually (Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan) while the estimated total of feature films produced world-wide in 1955 was 2800 (UNESCO 1981). This might partially explain the relatively large number of Japanese films included in the catalogue. However, at the time Hong Kong was the fourth largest film producer in the world, but was represented in the catalogue with only five films. India, on the other hand, ranked third on the list of the world's biggest film producing countries, was featured in the catalogue with 38 films.

### **3. Categorising the Orient**

The Orient project was carried out by the BFI at the request of UNESCO. The BFI was to prepare the catalogue, while UNESCO was in charge of distribution and also provided assistance with communicating with the National Commissions. The National Commissions for UNESCO are Member State coordinating bodies – part of their national governments. During the selection process of the films, draft versions were sent to the National Commissions for comments in order to avoid later criticism, reflecting UNESCO's role as an organisation of Member States (UNESCO, Extract from summary minutes of MC Departmental meeting held on Thursday, 31st October 1957). In some cases they suggested additions or asked for a film to be withdrawn as they

considered the film in question not to be representative of their country. Thus, the Japanese National Commission had the final say when it came to the collection of Japanese films chosen for the catalogue. It also provided the information on the individual films.

The catalogue's description of each of the films can be divided into three parts: production and distribution details, general introduction and a plot summary. While the production and distribution details might provide useful information concerning the collection of Japanese films included in the catalogue, the general introductions are where we find evidence on how the inclusion of each of the films was argued for. The information given can be categorised into five groups: 1) critical acclaim, 2) festival screenings and awards, 3) national importance, 4) audience, and 5) general characterisations.

In the beginning of the catalogue project the Member States were advised to submit films that were shown at an international film festival and had English subtitles or commentary. Out of the 37 Japanese films, 23 were available as a version with English, French or Spanish subtitles by the publication of the catalogue. 27 of the films came with a mention of festival screenings or awards. Most of these were major European film festivals, such as Cannes, Berlin or Venice. The significance of international recognition in the form of festival screenings and awards functions as the primary justification for a film's place in the catalogue. In fact, in the case of *Four Chimneys*, '1953 Shown at Berlin Film Festival. Won International Peace Prize' was pretty much all that was needed.

The second most important criterion seems to have been the approval of an undisputed authority: the film critic. 19 of the films come with a mention of foreign or domestic critical acclaim. The critical acclaim category contains two distinct sub-

categories: that of technical excellence, like 'the superb colour and ravishing sets' of *Men of the Rice Fields* (a.k.a. *The Rice People*); and that of artistic excellence, as exemplified by *The Boyhood of Dr. Noguchi* being '[w]ell received by Western critics as having a charming "mood" and sincerity of feeling when shown in London'. Even though some of the films are mentioned as having been screened in Asia and in the case of *The Roof of Japan* and *The Story of Pure Love* also in Latin America, the catalogue only mentions the comments of either Japanese or 'Western' critics, who, when specified, come from either Europe or the U.S.. This would make sense, as the intended audience of the catalogue seems to have been mainly European, even though it was also distributed in North America. Defining Western audiences primarily in terms of Europe is rather fascinating, as the decade leading up to the publication of the catalogue had witnessed a drastic restructuring of world politics. The European colonial great powers had crumbled, giving way to the rise of the United States with its allies - including Japan - as the new world hegemonic power.

The purpose of part 1 was to assist film festival organisers in finding suitable film content produced in the East in order to help the West both comprehend and appreciate the culture, life and ideals of Asian and Arab countries (UNESCO, Elements of the contract to be concluded with the British Film Institute 1957). The catalogue was pre-ordered in 400 copies but the number was soon increased to 1000. A decision was made to distribute the catalogue to organisations and people who were likely to make practical use of it. There is limited evidence to determine whether they ever did. These organisations included National Commissions for UNESCO, television stations, national federations of film clubs, film distributors and film critics – mainly based in Europe. In 1960, 2000 additional copies were printed and demand was noted to be so great that UNESCO needed to restrict its distribution. It was decided that copies should

be given to those most likely to continuously use it – others would be given information on where in their country the catalogue could be consulted.

For 19 of the films, justification for their inclusion in the catalogue is based on the audience category. This encompasses both box-office success in Japan and screening abroad, with the main venue being the National Film Theatre in London, operated by the BFI. Even though in most cases the reference is to either '[h]uge box-office success in country of origin' (*The Legend of Narayama*, a.k.a. *The Ballad of Narayama*), or to successful and widespread specialised showing in Europe and the U.S., a simple '[s]hown in America' (*Sansho Dayu*, a.k.a. *Sansho the Bailiff*) seems to have been considered adequate. This category comes across as being of less importance than festival screenings or critical acclaim, as it never appears on its own. The UNESCO report on film and cinema statistics 1955-1977 (1981) observes that the few Japanese films shown abroad are the ones that are made in such a way that they cater to the tastes of audiences everywhere, which means that they are 'not really good representatives' of the national culture of their country of origin. This places the national and the international in contradictory positions. However, as Homi K. Bhabha (1990), for example, notes, a national culture need not be placed as unitary or unified neither in relation to itself nor to what lies beyond it. In this light, it is rather interesting that the films in the catalogue were to show with 'sincerity and fidelity some aspect of life and culture in the country of their origin' (UNESCO, Letter from Winifred Holmes to the Director of the Indonesian Film Centre, 5th May, 1958). This was based on the BFI's understanding that 'the Survey was to be highly selective and only films of the best quality included in it' (UNESCO, Letter from James Quinn to Henry R. Cassirer, September 24th, 1958).

Later on the requirements were altered and thus in addition to festival films also box-office successes and films of special significance in the history of film in the country in question were included. Nine of the 37 descriptions contain a reference to the latter, such as the '[f]irst Japanese Eastman Colour Film' (*Gate of Hell*) or '[h]istorically important as the first Japanese feature length documentary film' (*The Roof of Japan*). However, the historical importance of the films is often framed not only in terms of Japan, but all of Asia. *The White Snake Enchantress* (a.k.a. *The Tale of the White Serpent* or *Panda and the Magic Serpent*), for example, is described as the '[f]irst full length cartoon drama produced in Asia', and *In the Woods* - better known to modern audiences as *Rashomon* - as '[h]istorically very important as first Asian film to win international showing and reclaim'. This would suggest that through these descriptions, Japan was positioned as representing not only itself but the whole of Asia.

The praising attributes associated with some of these films in the catalogue are, in fact, stretching the truth quite significantly. The first Asian full length cartoon drama, for example, was *Princess Iron Fan*, produced in 1941 in China. The false claim of the pioneering character of Japanese animation might imply an attempt to argue for Japan's role as the core part of Eastern civilisation, made notably easier by the fact that mainland China was not featured in the catalogue. However, to confuse things even further, *The White Snake Enchantress* does not even hold this position within Japan. It was preceded by over a decade by *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors*, a wartime propaganda film clearly not seen fit to represent Japan in the catalogue, let alone the whole of Asia. The task of the Japanese representatives was thus not merely to define what Japanese culture was as it was to be represented to the West, but perhaps more importantly to construct the East in the same sense. As we can see from the factual

slips, this was done zooming in on Japan as the core of Eastern civilisation, but in a form fitting for the purposes of the catalogue project.

The category of additional characterisations covers 26 of the films. The logic behind this category seems to be that additional descriptions have been given to the films which do not come with a mention of festival screenings or awards. Films without a description must have mentions of festival screenings, usually alongside the categories of critical acclaim, national importance and/or international audience. Charming, kindly, gentle, light-hearted, touching and sensitive are only a few examples of the adjectives used to describe these films. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto (2000, 10-11) argues that in the 1960s, the discourse on Japanese cinema in the West developed into one of humanist criticism, where the gap between the universal values portrayed in the films and the exoticism of Japanese cultural particularity was filled by 'humanity'. Judging by the characterisations of the films, it seems that the roots of this discourse might reach further back and that the Japanese representatives themselves were not against arguing for the recognition of their national cinema in such terms. *The Lighthouse*, distributed in the U.S. as *Times of Joy and Sorrow*, for example, is '[a] film of simple people who faithfully fulfill their duties in the face of solitude and hardship'. *Mother*, also, is '[a] charming film centering on the moving theme of a mother's love and suffering for her daughter'. *Love Never Fails* likewise places universal issues at the film's core: 'Leisurely, romantic film, about adolescent awakening, imbued with gentle fatalism'. The characterisations seem to simultaneously appeal to the emotions of the reader, and portray universal humanism and understanding as quintessential Japanese values.

The countries included in the Orient catalogue were categorically classified as part of the East, which was vaguely defined as countries of Asian and Arab culture – referred to in the singular. The sheer number of Japanese films included in the catalogue

would be enough to place Japan in a central position as a representative of Eastern culture, but the approach taken seems to have also been chosen as a strategy for building Japan's image in the eyes of the West. *The Tokyo Story*, for example, is advertised as '[a] slow, somewhat static film, but very Eastern in feeling'. *The Mask of Destiny*'s description takes more of an educational approach: It is a '[h]istorical film of interest to the West as it shows the art of the mask-maker'.

*The Story of Shunkin* also refers to Eastern and Western as oppositions, but adds the binaries of traditional and modern: It is set 'about fifty years after Japan emerged from her feudal past and was "groping in the full stream of Western culture"'. As the JNCU in a rather abstract manner explains it, despite the rapid importation of modern culture, Japanese culture had not lost its inherent characteristics, which would always be its underlying force and which for foreigners remained the most appealing and interesting aspect of Japanese culture (Inoue 1958, 1044). How exactly to draw a line between these characteristics and foreign influences absorbed throughout Japan's history, remains unclear. The cultural dualism the JNCU refers to is not in fact that of East and West but that of something traditional, inherent and pure versus a modern melting pot of Eastern and Western influences. The idea of Japanese culture as something pure and unique formed one of the bases of its wartime nationalistic ideology, and continued to be repeated in the post-war discourse on what it meant to be Japanese (Befu 1992, 43-44). However, the most appealing aspect of any film might in fact be a well told, captivating story and not its country of origin as is argued in the characterisations of several of the films.

*The Maid* (a.k.a. *The Maid's Kid*) is '[a] touching contemporary story of love and devotion of a poor servant girl for her boy charge', clearly sold to the audiences through attempting to evoke an emotional response and suggesting a very universal storyline,



but also pointing out that it is set in modern times. Similar argumentation is used with *The Baby Carriage*, which is '[a] story of modern life and family relationships, sincerely written and played, with understanding and sympathetic direction'. *The Story of Pure Love*, also, is '[a] moving film of modern city life and its social problems'. Finally, *Yellow Crow*, as the last description pointing out a film's modern setting, is '[a] tender and moving contemporary film about the relations of a father and his son.'

Other characterisations focus on the historical or traditional setting. *The Legend of Narayama* is an '[i]nteresting treatment of traditional Shinto folk-customs and beliefs in force in Central Japan many years ago', and *The Temptress* (a.k.a. *The Temptress and the Monk*) a 'historical period film' with a 'fantastic and legendary story'. Many of the characterisations tie the films to Japanese cultural history through mentioning an original novel or a folk tale the films are based on. *Tales of Genji* is a '[h]istorical film based on the legendary stories called "The Tales of Genji"'. *The Throne of Blood*, being '[b]ased on Shakespeare's Macbeth', is an interesting exception. 'The action takes place in the middle ages of Japan - the period of strife between feudal Lords.' It is thus advertised as being both Western and historical, while the pairing usually is that of western and modern, and eastern and traditional.

Sometimes the characterisations function as a means of justifying the inclusion of a film with a more controversial topic. *The Story of Pure Love* addresses the problems of modern city life, 'including the new disease of "radiation"'. The problematic topic is softened by the fact that it is '[a] film made by an independent producer with one of the major film companies of Japan'. The 'independent producer' should perhaps be a reference to the film's director, Imai Tadashi, who had been somewhat a controversial figure in the Occupation and immediate post-Occupation era film industry. He was one of the directors forced out of the studio system in the purge of 1950 and

among the film-makers attacked as anti-American by the American and British press following the end of the Allied Occupation (Howard 2016). Even though *The Story of Pure Love* was produced after the storm had settled, it was perhaps still better to justify its selection for the catalogue through extenuating circumstances. The film was chosen as 'one of the ten best films' by Japanese film organisations in 1957 and thus its inclusion in the catalogue seems inevitable.

The general introduction section relies heavily on authority to explain why these films were chosen to represent Japan. It is as if the representatives were trying to focus our attention on the excellence of the Japanese film industry and argue for its recognition not only through the films' success domestically but also by justifying the quality of the films on a world-wide scale – mainly in relation to the West. Japan's current cultural diplomatic policies seeking to establish Japan as a cultural superpower much resemble Japan's aims in the Orient project. These policies, such as 'Cool Japan', remain a one-way projection of Japanese culture, despite their emphasis on the promotion of cultural exchange and dialogue (Iwabuchi 2015), mainly aiming to promote Japanese culture abroad through positioning cultural products, such as film, as a tool for economic and diplomatic aims (Kawashima 2016).

#### **4. Characterising Japan on the Screen**

Some general policies guided the Orient project: According to the introduction of the catalogue, films that might be a source of 'international misunderstanding' were left out (Holmes 1959). This might imply that there was more to the selection process than the officially acknowledged factors discussed above. In this section, I compare the plot summaries of two films with the actual film contents in order to provide insight into the process of creating meaning for the potential audiences reading the catalogue. The films have been chosen to represent two dominant streams in the collection of the Japanese

films in the catalogue. *Four Chimneys*, directed by Gosho Heinosuke, tells the story of common people's struggles in the post-war world with the catalogue's description emphasising intercultural understanding and universal humanism. Like many of the contemporary films in the catalogue, it is interpreted here as arguing for recognition of the similarities between post-war Japan and post-war Europe, directing our attention to the universal nature of the story. *Gate of Hell*, directed by Kinugasa Teinosuke, on the other hand, reminds us of Japan's rich cultural tradition. Representative of the historical dramas in the catalogue, I approach it as an argument that under the violent and socially rigid surface the ideals of peace and humanism form a central part of Japan's unique, nation specific cultural stance.

Both of the films were produced in 1953 and were available with English subtitles at the time the catalogue was published. The black and white *Four Chimneys* is an example of post-war *shomin-geki*, 庶民劇, a Japanese film genre depicting the lives of ordinary people. The Eastman colour *Gate of Hell*, on the other hand, is an example of *jidai-geki*, 時代劇, or historical drama, depicting traditional Japanese customs often as adaptations of folk tales and traditional stories. Even though not mentioned in the catalogue, *Gate of Hell*, too, is an adaptation of a play written by Kikuchi Kan, based on a story from the Heian period (794-1185), while *Four Chimneys* is based on Shiina Rinzo's novel *Mujakina Hitobito* (無邪気な人々 lit. innocent people).

'The film concerns a cross-section of life in a poor quarter of Tokyo', the plot summary of *Four Chimneys* begins, setting the stage. What it leaves unmentioned, is the fact that it is a contemporary film, taking place in the post-war years. Reminding potential European audiences of the war and the role Japan had played in it was perhaps not seen to be the best strategy for portraying the universal values of humanism and

peace. Focusing instead on the human aspect of the societal and political conflicts that followed was better suited for their purposes. The struggle to deal with the poverty following the war and the reconstruction of their societies was something Japan and Europe had in common, which might partially explain Europe being the chosen counterpart for Japan's cinematic cultural diplomacy.

'The main characters are a struggling worker, Ryukichi, and the woman he believes to be his legal wife, Hiroko'. Even though it is implied that their difficulties might be of a financial nature, we find out that this is merely the surface of the hardships they encounter as the summary unravels. 'A baby is left with them one day' setting the events in motion. The abandoned baby is 'the child of Hiroko's worthless first husband, whom she has presumed dead, and his sluttish companion who eke out a wretched existence on some wasteground by the river's edge.' The description of Tsukahara and Katsuko, left unnamed in the summary, creates tension between the characters: There are the good ones whose hardships we are meant to feel sympathy towards and, as their counterforce, the 'worthless' and 'sluttish' ones. So, in the summary, the new hardships are brought about by other people, and not the social, let alone political, conditions of the time. In the film, however, we find out that Tsukahara and Katsuko are also struggling with difficulties of their own, not differing much from those of the main couple.

Next, the summary adds more characters to the mix: 'This event not only affects the lives of the husband and wife, but also those of a young couple to whom they have let their two upstairs rooms'. They are 'Kenzo, a tax collector, and Senko, a young girl embittered by her experiences during the war'. In the film itself, both Senko and Hiroko still carry emotional scars of the war. The two women thus become symbols of post-war Japan, attempting to push forward in life with the memories of the war still weighing

heavily on their shoulders. The summary aims for evoking sympathy towards the characters' hardships: 'The baby never stops crying and causes friction between Ryukichi and Hiroko, both of whom are at their wit's end to know what to do'. In the film, the baby is not the sole reason for their disagreements. Ryukichi feels deceived learning that in order to earn extra money, Hiroko sells gambling tickets at a bicycle race track behind her husband's back. On top of this, the surfacing of Hiroko's first husband is enough to push him over the edge, for this is the reason they are stuck with the baby in the first place: They are afraid to go to the police as they might be accused of bigamy. In the summary the couple themselves carry none of the blame, perhaps to do with the sympathy we are meant to feel for them. 'Finally Hiroko, driven to despair, tries to commit suicide', but '[t]ragedy is narrowly averted'. We can correctly assume that Hiroko is rescued, but we are still left with the situation that led us here in the first place.

'[T]he experience charges all the characters with a new optimism, a clear vision', the summary continues. To fully grasp what is being said here, we need to return to the film. One key character is completely left out of the summary. This is the newly rich, materialist and modern Yukiko, Senko's colleague. One day Katsuko appears to claim back her baby, but is confronted about her suggested inability to look after the child. She storms out breaking her shoe and it is Yukiko who runs after her. Katsuko, dressed in a kimono, and Yukiko, in a Western-style dress with high heels, confront each other on the street and Yukiko hands Katsuko one of her shoes to replace her broken geta.

In the end, duty and common good are placed first as Hiroko decides to return the baby to her mother, and Katsuko and Yukiko take on the responsibility of looking after the baby together. This not only implies an equal relationship between the two women but also between social classes. However, we can also look at this as a reflection

of a post-war nation rebuilding itself, communicating that even after defeat the Japanese nation still stands united and strong. This level of social commentary does not get a mention in the plot summary. From here, the catalogue jumps to its concluding remarks, finally revealing the idea behind the film's title: 'The husband looks up at the chimneys which always seem to be a different number depending on the position from which he looks'. The chimneys are one of the visually most dominant aspects of the film but their main purpose is to emphasise one of the central messages: Our approach to life alters through our changing perspective.

Both the film and the catalogue's summary of it provide a powerful example of the similarities between post-war Japan and post-war Europe, as they clearly communicate not only the practicalities but also the emotional aspects of rebuilding society after the war. The film *Four Chimneys* tells the story of common people's struggles in the changing post-war society where modern influences clash with traditional values. With sympathy and understanding, it shows that all the characters are only doing what they feel is necessary to adapt to society changing around them. Even though this would have been a good universal message to send through the catalogue, the focus of the summary is elsewhere. "Life is whatever you think it is", he says, "it can be sweet or it can be bitter, whichever you are yourself", the summary concludes, quoting Ryukichi. The key message the catalogue's summary sends is of a rather noble nature. There is a way of overcoming the hardships of life, be they societal or personal in nature – it merely requires an adjustment of attitude. Very fittingly, this is also the point the UNESCO Constitution (1945) tries to get across: It is in the minds of men, where the foundations of a new world must be constructed. Understanding is the road to peace, while ignorance is what lurks behind the causes of war, allowing us to reject the 'principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men'.

In opposition to the contemporary setting of *Four Chimneys*, *Gate of Hell* is '[s]et in the Japan of the 12th Century'. It is 'a story of intrigue and violence in times of civil war', the summary begins. The film portrays 'the character of the girl, Kesa, who substituted herself to save the fleeing Emperor's daughter, as the focus of romance, passion and sacrifice'. With its introduction of the main character, the summary sets the stage through a promise of a great adventure in a historical setting, starring the intriguing noble class. The Emperor's daughter is fleeing from rebels attacking the palace and Kesa, the emperor's sister's lady-in-waiting, volunteers to draw the attackers away from the palace. She is escorted by samurai Morito. 'Kesa is depicted as the ideal heroine of old Japan, beautiful, remote and calm but full of latent humour and capable of deep love, which she is bound by her upbringing to put after her honour.' Again, we are reminded that we are dealing with historical times, when the heroines had a true sense of mystery to them – we must not forget that we are being showcased the conflict and drama of old Japan. We are told that Kesa will have to choose between personal interests and duty, but the details of what actually happens are not revealed.

The film is loosely based on the events of the Heiji Rebellion of 1160<sup>3</sup> and portrays a nation in the midst of a series of civil wars, dominated by samurai clans fighting for political power. Samurai lord Taira no Kiyomori has left Kyoto, leaving opportunity for rival samurai clans to attack the royal palace. Taira no Kiyomori is an actual historical character and known in Japanese epics as a ruthless, proud and arrogant man. Instead of even mentioning a real-life war-lord, the summary keeps us focused on the seemingly distant but sympathetic character of Kesa. The rebels are defeated and to set the events of the film in motion, Taira no Kiyomori rewards his warriors by granting each of them a wish. Morito asks for a marriage to be organised between himself and Kesa. 'This forces her to sacrifice herself on behalf of her husband and his companions',

the summary continues. As is revealed here, Kesa is already married to another samurai lord, Wataru, and thus Morito's wish cannot be granted. But Morito is obsessed and determined to acquire what he wants, even if it means committing murder. Morito sneaks into Wataru's room, slaying him in his bed. As we are told with '[t]he sword which kills her is that of her lover', the light of the full moon reveals he has made a horrifying mistake: It is Kesa, sleeping in her husband's bed.

Morito confesses his crime to Wataru, offering his head as reconciliation. His offer turned down, Morito dramatically grabs his knife and cuts off his hair tied into a traditional samurai top knot. With this gesture, he renounces his social status, declaring to dedicate the rest of his life to suffer the tortures of hell for what he has done. With 'Moritoh, the great warrior, who thereafter becomes a monk to expiate the crime', the summary concludes the story and its underlying lesson. Morito of the film, left to live with the consequences of his actions, tells us that the use of force is futile, at least for selfish purposes. Having tried to acquire what he wanted by force only resulted in him destroying it. The catalogue's message, on the other hand, is one of remorse and redemption. Under the violent and dramatic surface, it is a story of appreciation, understanding and peace. In this sense, the story is very much in line with the aims of UNESCO as it clearly portrays the pacifistic ideals of the 1950s. Or, as Mr. Haguiwara Toru in his speech at the UNESCO General Conference in 1956 phrased it: 'The Japanese people have learnt by experience the ills that result from national selfishness and the blessings of international collaboration' (UNESCO, 9/C Proceedings. Records of the General Conference; Ninth session, New Delhi 1956, 58).

Both of the plot summaries seem to guide our attention back to the roots of the humanist discourse on evaluating Japanese cinema, pointing out Japan's capability to integrate the world's cultures into its own, in order to present its unique contribution to



promoting a peaceful coexistence of cultures. We can also detect the Japanese representatives trying to make a break with the war-filled past and drawing our attention to the difficulties of adjusting to the post-war societal conditions. *Gate of Hell* uses the historical wars as a background against which to showcase the splendour of old Japan, whereas the approach *Four Chimneys* takes on modern wars is as a source of human suffering. Thus, the descriptions of the films come across as a means of reconstructing Japan's national image through their contribution to mediating a new, peace loving image of the nation. One way of defining cultural diplomacy is as the construction of a national culture by projecting it outward (Aoki-Okabe, Kawamura and Makita 2010, 212). Traditionally a national culture may seek to unify its members into one cultural identity, but here lies a significant challenge: This notion compresses cultures into externally distinguishable, internally homogenous systems shared by the members of their corresponding societies.

Thus, Japan's cultural diplomacy in the context of the Orient project can be defined as the promotion of national interests through illustrating the positive aspects of its national culture abroad, and its cultural diplomatic strategy as being tied to the process of image construction. However, the aim of promoting intercultural understanding is also strongly present – perhaps dictated by the framework provided by UNESCO. As we can see from a 1958 speech by Maeda Tamon, the head of the delegation of Japan and the chairman of the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO at the time, in the UNESCO context, national interest is by default tied to the promotion of mutual understanding: 'All nations should be glad of the opportunity Unesco affords them [...] to bring the world nearer to universal harmony and peace, so that we may face the future with greater confidence than we have done in the past'

(UNESCO, 10/C Proceedings. Records of the General Conference; Tenth session, Paris 1958, 124).

The intertwining references to national interest and mutual understanding illuminate what is a central problem of the concept, policy and practice of cultural diplomacy. Its primary aim is seen to be to cater to the strategic interests of national governments while simultaneously hinting towards a possibility of moving beyond the national interest in order to support a common good through mutual cultural exchanges and understanding (Ang, Isar and Mar 2015). However, while it might be tempting to view this relationship as a dichotomy, it is not necessarily so black and white. We can question the existence of such contradiction through Richard Rosecrance's (1986) distinction between two major tendencies in how international relations are organised in any given time: the military-political and the trading world. The latter involves a peaceful balance of trade and production in a world where, despite power differences, nations are dependent on each other and therefore equal in status. Thus, creating an international society based on the peaceful coexistence of nation states does without a question belong in the realm of national interest. For Japan, taking this approach could, of course, also be interpreted as a necessary consequence of its post-war position, defined by the peace treaties and the new Constitution, essentially eliminating the military-political option.

## **5. Conclusions**

In the Orient project, we have seen evidence of two approaches to Japan's cultural diplomatic strategy. On one hand it can be defined as the promotion of national interests through projecting Japan's pacifist and peace-oriented image, and constructing Japan's image in relation to the West. With the Orient project, the Japanese representatives had the opportunity to project their nation on their own terms and to challenge the wartime

image constructed by the Allied forces. The challenge would then be erasing the old demonic image and replacing it with a picture of Japan as a modern, democratic nation while also recognising its long historical and cultural background – in a sense, redefining Japanese nationalism through image transformation. The heavy emphasis placed on justifying the inclusion of the films in the catalogue through critical acclaim and festival awards argues for Japan's role in the post-war world as a cultural force that should not be ignored.

On the other hand, the larger ideal of intercultural understanding seems to guide the related policies. The coexistence of these aims, which can be at odds with each other, may partially be the result of the context provided by UNESCO. It could also be argued that the Japanese representatives were aiming to position the nation in the international arena not through political or ideological factors but as a cultural mediator between the East and the West. The fact that Japan's cultural diplomacy of the time was not tied to promoting a specific political ideology is especially interesting considering that the catalogue project was carried out in the early and heated ideological stages of the Cold War. Even though the Cold War set-up may have been a contributing factor in the selection process of the films, despite Japan's alliance with the U.S., in the context of the Orient project the Japanese seem to have followed a policy of separating intercultural relations from politics: The East-West polarisation in the context of the catalogue is not that of the Soviet Union and the U.S., but that of Asia and Europe. However, we need also to consider the option that participating in the Orient project was merely an attempt to boost the export of Japanese cinema, which despite 'an active demand for Japanese films on overseas markets', was not making as much money as imported films were making in Japan (Ikeda 1958, 465).

The project brought Japan into contact with the West not only as a nation but

also as a significant representative of Eastern civilisation. Similar narratives were utilised to argue for West Germany's position in the post-war world as belonging to the equally vague Western civilisation (Jackson 2006). Although somewhat similar, Japan's case might be even more multifaceted. In the project, Japan was placed in the East through naming and representing it as a central pillar of Eastern culture while simultaneously constructing its international stance through emphasising the similarities between Japan and the West. The seemingly apolitical humanism portrayed through the choices of films was an unarguably skillful way of renegotiating the position of a former enemy as a part of both of the two major civilisations recognised in the catalogue project: the East and the West. Like in the case of West Germany, the process of international image reconstruction was primarily built on cultural argumentation, showcasing in a very concrete manner how the image of a nation can, in fact, simply be born as a result of cultural policy strategies (ibid.) The descriptions of the films in the Orient catalogue remind us that culture is a social construction: It can be not only utilised, but also shaped for political purposes.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The other countries included in the feature film part of the catalogue are Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Korea, Malaya, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Tunisia, the United Arab Republic and the U.S.S.R..

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1 for a list of all the Japanese films included in the catalogue.

<sup>3</sup> The Japanese name of the events, 平治の乱, refers to violent political disorder or disturbance but it is most commonly translated into English as 'rebellion'.

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## Appendix 1

A list of the Japanese films included in the catalogue. The English titles and Romanisation are given as they appear in the catalogue.

*The Baby Carriage* (Ubaguruma, 乳母車), 1956, dir. Tasaka Tomotaka

*The Boyhood of Dr. Noguchi* (Noguchi Hideyo no Shōnen Jidai, 野口英世の少年時代), 1956, dir. Sekigawa Hideo

*A Boy Named Jiro-san* (Jirō Monogatari, 次郎物語), 1955, dir. Shimizu Hiroshi

*A Cat and Two Women* (Neko to Shozo to Futari no Onna, 猫と庄造と二人のをんな), 1956, dir. Toyoda Shirō

*Five Sisters* (Onna no Koyomi, 女の暦), 1954, dir. Hisamatsu Seiji

*Four Chimneys or Chimney Scene* (Entotsu no Mieru Basho, 煙突の見える場所), 1953, dir. Gosho Heinosuke

*Gate of Hell* (Jigokumon, 地獄門), 1953, dir. Kinugasa Teinosuke

*In the Woods* (Rashomon, 羅生門), 1950, dir. Kurosawa Akira

*The Legend of Narayama* (Narayama Bushi-kō, 檜山節考), 1958, dir. Kinoshita Keisuke

*The Life of O Haru* (Saikaku Ichidai Onna, 西鶴一代女), 1951, dir. Mizoguchi Kenji

*The Lighthouse* (Yorokobi mo Kanashimi mo Ikutoshitsuki, 喜びも悲しみも幾歳月),  
1957, dir. Kinoshita Keinosuke

*Living* (Ikiru, 生きる), 1952, dir. Kurosawa Akira

*The Lord Takes a Bride* (ōtori-Jo Hanayome, 鳳城の花嫁), 1957, dir. Matsuda  
Sadatsugu

*Love Never Fails* (Mugibue, 麦笛), 1955, dir. Toyoda Shirō

*The Maid* (Jochūko, 女中ツ子), 1955, dir. Tasaka Tomotaka

*The Mask of Destiny* (Shuzenji Monogatari, 修禅寺物語), 1955, dir. Nakamura Noboru

*Men of the Rice Fields* (Kome, 米), 1957, dir. Imai Tadashi

*Mother* (Okaasan, おかあさん), 1952, dir. Naruse Mikio

*Muhomatsu the Rickshaw Man* (Muhōmatsu no Isshō, 無法松の一生), 1958, dir.  
Inagaki Hiroshi

*The Refugee* (Bōmeiki, 亡命記), 1955, dir. Nomura Yoshitaro

*The Roof of Japan* (Shiroi Sanmyaku, 白い山脈), 1957, dir. Imamura Sadao

*Samurai – The Legend of Musashi* (Miyamoto Musashi, 宮本武蔵), 1954, dir. Inagaki  
Hiroshi

*Sansho Dayu* (Sansho Dayu, 山椒大夫), 1953, dir. Mizoguchi Kenji

*Seven Samurai* (Shichinin no Samurai, 七人の侍), 1954, dir. Kurosawa Akira

*Snow Country* (Yukiguni, 雪国), 1957, dir. Toyoda Shirō

*The Story of Pure Love* (Jun-Ai Monogatari, 純愛物語), 1957, dir. Imai Tadashi

*The Story of Shunkin* (Shunkin Monogatari, 春琴物語), 1954, dir. Itō Daisuke

*The Story of Ugetsu or Tales of the Pale Moon after the Rain* (Ugetsu Monogatari,  
雨月物語), 1953, dir. Mizoguchi Kenji

*Street of Shame* (Akasen Chitai, 赤線地帯), 1956, dir. Mizoguchi Kenji

*Tales of Genji* (Genji Monogatari, 源氏物語), 1951, dir. Yoshimura Kōsaburō

*The Temptress* (Byakuya no Yojo, 白夜の妖女), 1957, dir. Takizawa Eisuke

*The Throne of Blood* (Kumonosu-Jō, 蜘蛛巣城), 1957, dir. Kurosawa Akira

*The Tokyo Story* (Tōkyō Monogatari, 東京物語), 1953, dir. Ozu Yasujiro

*Untamed Woman* (Arakure, あらくれ), 1957, dir. Naruse Mikio

*Walker's on Tigers' Tails* (Tora no O o Fumu Otokotachi, 虎の尾を踏む男達), 1945,

dir. Kurosawa Akira

*The White Snake Enchantress* (Hakujaden, 白蛇伝), 1958, dir. Yabushita Taiji & Okabe

Kazuhiko

*Yellow Crow* (Kiiroi Karasu, 黄色いからす), 1957, dir. Gosho Heinosuke