The Revival of "Gentou" (magic lantern, filmstrips, slides) in Showa Period Japan: Focusing on Its Developments in the Media of Post-war Social Movements

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1. Introduction

Laterne Magica (Latin) or Magic Lantern (English), — the still image projection devices that use a light source and lenses to enlarge and project images printed on transparent plates onto a screen — was originally invented in the 1600s in Europe and was widely utilized for education and for entertainment. These devices were imported to Japan in the 18th century and were called "utsushi-e" or "nishiki-kage-e" (in the Kansai area). They gained popularity among urban residents in yose (vaudeville or variety theatre) or misemono (spectacle) shows.

In the early Meiji period (1868-1912), the Western "magic lantern" was re-imported to Japan and called "gentou". The gentou was considered to be a medium that would contribute to visual education in school, society, and the home, and was clearly distinct from the entertaining "utsushi-e" or "nishiki-kage-e". In Origins of Meiji Artifacts, Ishii Kendou acknowledges that the still image projection devices such as gentou had been popular among Japanese people before the Meiji period, but he adds that "the gentou for the purpose of practical education should be counted as one of the new products imported from the West" and observes that "gentou was a newly translated name ordered by the Ministry of Education."2

Gentou was first introduced to Japan by the Ministry of Education, and then it was widely produced and distributed by the private sector around the 1890s. Its popularity reached a peak in the period between the Sino-Japanese war (1894) and the Russo-Japanese war (1904), when gentou screening events called "gentou-kai" (gentou show) were held all over the

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ICONICS Volume 11 (2014). Published by the Japan Society of Image Arts and Sciences
country for the purposes of education, recreation, and war reporting. However, *gentou* started to decline as motion picture (*katsudou shashin*) rapidly grew in popularity around the time of the Russo-Japanese war. After the Taisho period (1912-1926), *gentou* gradually lost its popular appeal and came to be used only within limited contexts such as academic presentation or children’s toys.

Iwamoto Kenji’s informative *Centuries of Magic Lanterns in Japan* and other previous studies have already provided detailed descriptions of *gentou* history in the Meiji period. Iwamoto also briefly discusses *gentou* after the prevalence of cinema, “Western magic lantern (*Seiyou gentou*) survived in the schools or in social education. It was also utilized as a medium of national propaganda media during both WWI and WWII. After WWII, it was still used in audio-visual education and several kinds of promotion.”

Nevertheless, this “post-cinematic” or “post-Meiji” history of *gentou* has attracted much less academic attentions until today. With respect to the history of *gentou* (which came to be called “*suraido*” (slide) around the 1960s) after the start of the Showa period (1926-1989), there is no coherent study, and storage and preservation of the surviving materials hardly begun.

From 2011, we have been engaged in a cooperative research project on *gentou* during the Showa period under the aegis of the Collaborative Research Center for Theatre and Film Arts of Waseda University. In the course of conducting this research project, we discovered several hundreds of *gentou* films and scripts many of which had been used in post-war social movements, at the Kobe Planet Film Archive. Based on our study about the *gentou* collection of the Kobe Planet Film Archive, I will try to shed light on the unknown history of *gentou* in the Showa period, focusing on its use as a medium of education or propaganda in post-war social movements.

2. *Gentou* revival in the Showa period

As several authors have already pointed out, both the use of “*utsushi-e*” (aka “*nishiki-kage-e*” in Kansai) in performing arts and entertainment spectacles from the late Tokugawa period (1600-1868) and the use of “*gentou*” as an educational medium from the Meiji period started to decline around the beginning of the Taisho period. *Gentou* continued to be used after the Taisho period for limited purposes such as academic presentation, religious education in temples, shrines, and churches, or in children’s toys. However, it lost its broad popularity.

Nevertheless, around mid-1930s, several educators and bureaucrats came to the conclusion that *gentou* should be reintroduced into the schools and social education. For example, Aochi Chuzou, one of the pioneer creators of Japanese education and animation films, began to advocate the
revival of gentou education in his lectures and writings around 1930. Meanwhile, Nakata Shunzou, an official with a detailed knowledge of audio-visual media, who was in charge of the popular education sector in the Ministry of Education, also promoted the revival of gentou, after being impressed by visual education using a slide projector in contemporary Europe.4

Because of the above circumstances, gentou experienced a full revival in the early 1940s for the purpose of the national mobilization propaganda during the total war against the Allied Forces. In 1941, the Ministry of Education formally declared its policy to recommend gentou as an effective device for visual education. The Ministry explained that its main objectives were "to serve the national policy of improving defense and development of industries by spreading scientific knowledge through rural villages with poor transportations and limited cultural institutions, and to contribute to the development of education as well" in the document The History of Our Gentou Education Institute ("Honshou gentou kyouiku shisetsu no enkaku"). In order to achieve these objectives, they said they "will work on research investigation and guidance in order to promote production, improvement, distribution, and educational utilization of higher quality gentou".

Then the Ministry of Education set out to standardize the different types of gentou projectors (gentou-ki) and the media used in projection. As opposed to the standard gentou projector since Meiji period, which used glass slides placed one after the other onto the projector, the Ministry of Education employed a new type of gentou projector using a roll of 35mm film (film strip), the same gauge used in a standard movie film. The 35mm × 24mm film strip (called "Leica model" or "double frame type") standardized at that time, continued to be used widely as the standard film format for gentou projecting after the war. From 1942, the Ministry of Education urged the manufactures to produce twelve thousand of projectors a year in order to distribute to local governments throughout the Empire of Japan, and it promoted production of educational gentou films about increasing food production, fishery, engineering, resources, and national defense.7

The military authorities also made use of gentou actively. It was said that several gentou films were produced in order to teach soldiers and workers working in arsenals. Aochi Chuzou, who was engaged in production of these military gentou films through the war, recollected after the war that "the utilization of gentou, that had been stagnant in school and society regardless of our wishes over the previous decade, made rapid progress under the military due to the special demand of the war".8
It was after Japan’s unconditional surrender and the beginning of the Occupation (1945-1952) of Japan by the Allies that gentou made its unprecedented advancement. In 1948, CIE (Civil Information and Education Section), in charge of GHQ (General Headquarters) information, publicity and education sectors, began a nationwide campaign to distribute NATOKO (National Company) projectors made in the USA and educational movie films, as well as between 600 and 1,000 Besler projectors to project both slides and filmstrips. According to a feature article about gentou in the Movie Classroom (“Eiga kyoshitsu”), a bulletin from Zaidan Houjin Nihon Eiga Kyouiku Kyokai (Japan Visual Education Association; henceforth ‘Eikyo’), the ‘gentou boom’ had begun before CIE’s distribution of Besler projectors, because there were already 20,000 gentou projectors in Japan, and 33 domestic companies specializing in gentou slides and filmstrips were selling 6,000 gentou films per month.9

Aochi Chuzou described the circumstances surrounding gentou during the Occupation as “too great a development to call it simply a ‘revival’”10. There were several reasons for this rapid revival and development of gentou from the wartime through the Occupation. By hand-coloring films or slides directly, gentou could project colored images onto a big screen, a feat that was difficult to do in contemporary cinema. A second big advantage was that it cost much less to produce and screen a gentou than a movie film. Because of these technical and economical advantages, gentou has often been regarded as “a cheap substitute for cinema”11. For example, some gentou producers constantly produced gentou works that could be called “cinema-gentou”, re-editing the frames from film clips or the still pictures from the popular cinema works.12

Gentou has often been compared to another visual medium that was revived under the Occupation, kamishibai (picture story show), as well as cinema. Both kamishibai and gentou show the audience still images one by one with oral commentary or storytelling by the presenter. In contemporary discourse about audio-visual media, it was commonly held that many gentou works that appeared on market were “kamishibai-like fairly tale or cartoon things” for children13. Contemporary gentou works were also criticized because they were of poorer quality than kamishibai works. For example, Ochiai Kyouichi who was in charge of gentou reviewer in Movie Classroom commented, “These two years, I have evaluated educational movies, gentou, and kamishibai as a member of the Educational Film Committee in the Ministry of Education. Except for movies, our committee has agreed that most of kamishibai works are far superior to gentou. At least kamishibai has established its own methods of representation, while we cannot recognize that in most of gentou works.”14
Therefore, many of the producers, the distributors, and the presenters of gentou realized that it was important to properly grasp and utilize the unique characteristics of gentou, which were different from cinema or kamishibai. One gentou producer said that:

Gentou is neither a substitution for cinema, nor an arrangement of kamishibai. It has its own unique characteristics. And our mission as producers depends on two points, namely, how bring out these unique characteristics and how to make them effective. We feel ashamed when we hear recent criticisms that gentou is less interesting than kamishibai, even though it should really be more interesting from every point of view.

Gentou has a long history, but nothing could be newer than the revival of gentou as an expressive medium. So we are keenly aware of the needs to learn the artistic techniques of cinema and kamishibai furthermore, not to be complacent due to the recent economic boom brought by external forces.

And then when we master these artistic techniques, absorb and refine them to bring out the unique characteristics of gentou, a new gentou art form will be born.\(^\text{15}\)

3. Independent gentou production from the wartime through the post-war period

It was sometimes pointed out that the uniqueness of gentou lay in the potential it offered amateurs to produce them independently. When the movements for gentou revival started around the mid-1930s, it was said that some pioneering educators tried to make original gentou slides or films by themselves.\(^\text{16}\) However, because of the strict media control and supply shortages of the wartime, independent gentou production movements did not spread widely.

After Japan’s defeat, people like Aochi or Sato Toshio\(^\text{17}\), who had already been engaged in the movement to revive gentou for educational purpose before the war, started to be active in educational campaigns to promote and support independent production of gentou. Since around 1948, a large number of articles on independent production of gentou have appeared in the magazine Movie Classroom, from which we can infer many school teachers (and sometimes students as well) have tried to make their own gentou filmstrips or slides to be used as teaching materials for their classes, and that workshops or competitions for the amateur gentou creators
were held all over Japan. These activities quickly culminated in such achievements as the *gentou* filmstrip *The Science of Mountain* (*Yama-no Kagaku*) won first prize in the competition of the Ministry of Education for educational films, *kamishibai*, and *gentou* in 1949, defeating works by professionals. This educational *gentou* was originally conceived by a high school science teacher and independently made by local educators. And then, Aochi Chuzou and others established the Nippon Amateur Cine Slide Association (NACSA), the organization for amateur film and *gentou* creators in 1951 and started to hold annual competitions of independent films and *gentou* filmstrips from 1953.

Since the early phase of the Occupation, *gentou* were utilized not only within schools, but also for a wide range of the social education, including labor education. In 1947, the newly established Ministry of Labor held “An Exhibition on Labor Education” which included a corner dedicated to “the *gentou* filmstrips for labor education” in which 18 titles of educational filmstrips on the new Constitution of Japan, democratic enlightenment, and industrial education were displayed. In addition, the Ministry of Labor published a booklet titled *How to Make Gentou Images* (“Gentou-ga no tsukuri-kata,” 1951) in order to “answer technical questions from educators of labor unions or labor officials who are trying to utilize independently produced *gentou* to promote labor educations”18. Besides these government-led campaigns to promote the use of *gentou* in labor education, newly legalized labor union activists started to produce their own *gentou* and screen them during labor disputes. For example, the “*gentou* cartoon” (*gentou manga*) titled *White Socks Family: Episode of Raid* (“*Shiro-tabi ikka: Naguri-komi no maki,*”) was produced by a labor union during the Toshiba Dispute of 1949.

The independent production and screening of *gentou* by labor unions were temporarily blocked in the later stage of the Occupation because of the Red Purge and the “Reverse Course” (*Gyaku Koosu*). However, when the San Francisco Peace Treaty came into effect on 28 April 1952 and the Occupation by GHQ/SCAP was ended, social movements raise again and independent *gentou* production started to flourish. Sakazaki Tsunerou reported that the first *gentou* filmstrip related to the post Occupation social activity was *Forward to the People’s Square!*: *A Document on Blood May Day* (“*Ike! jinmin-hiroba e: Chi-no mei-dei kiroku,*”) about the incident called “Blood May Day” on 1 May 1952, the first May Day held after the end of the Occupation. On this “Blood May Day”, May Day protestors collided violently with the police squad around the Imperial Palace Square. In the end, two protesters were shot to death, and many members of both sides suffered injuries. According to Sakazaki, *Forward to the People’s
Square! was produced two weeks after Blood May Day, using photographs taken by May Day protesters at the scene, and adding texts based on "poems and reportages by the cultural circles and the groups of poets around the country." Since around the end of the Occupation, labor unions, cultural circles, youth organizations, women's organizations, and other civil society organizations came to recognize that gentou was a useful mean to share knowledge about social problems, to document and publish their activities, and to appeal for wider support. Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha (The Japan Gentou Culture Corporation) which produced and distributed Forward to the People's Square!: A Document on Blood May Day also published a booklet titled The Gentou Activities by Labor Unions ("Roudou kumiai no gentou katsudou," ) around 1960, in which it summarized independent gentou production and screening activities within 1950s social movements as below.

It is over ten years since labor unions started to be involved with gentou. In the midst of the devastation caused by defeat in the war, union activists introduced gentou to company housings and to local communities, in order to bring "a bright and healthy culture to children!". Through gentou screenings, they strengthened their bonds with families of union members or neighborhood housewives.

Gentou movements extended more and more after the Japan Coal Miners Union (Tan-rou) and the Japanese National Railway (Kokutetsu) Union began to seriously organize worker's families and to establish the labor-farmer coalition. In this period, gentou based on Japanese folklore or children's stories from China, the Soviet Union, and other countries, or the gentou version of independent produced films were often screened.

"63 Days of Struggle" independently produced by Tan-rou marked a watershed in the expansion of union's application of gentou and a shift from cultural activities to labor union propaganda.

More than one thousand prints were made of this gentou filmstrip on the large labor dispute led by Tan-rou in 1952. They were screened over the country, and played an important role in publicizing the dispute.

After this successful experience, many of unions came to think about producing gentou by themselves, as a means of
publicity and development for their struggles.

In the realm of 16mm film, the working class has now started to produce and screen films from their own standpoints, instead of just screening existing films. However, a similar movement started earlier in the realm of gentou, which were much easier to make than movie. Nowadays, this has become the main activity involving gentou.20

The gentou filmstrip referred to above as “63 Days of Struggle” is How We fight: The 63 Day’s Struggle (“Warera kaku tatakau: Gekitou 63 nichī”), produced by Tan-rou and distributed by Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha in 1953. It documents the general strike of coal miners led by Tan-rou in 1952, focusing on Jouban coal mine in Fukushima Prefecture and Kaho coal mine in Fukuoka Prefecture. In the script that accompanies the gentou filmstrip, the distributor Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha included a section titled “Anyone can make gentou filmstrips” in which it says:

If you turn your struggle, document, or story into a gentou and screen it for your workplace or family, it will please everyone and contribute a lot to publicity.

Anyone can make a gentou filmstrip since it does not cost as much as making a movie.

We guarantee that you can create wonderful gentou if you cooperate with circles devoted to photograph, painting, literature, cinema, or drama in your workplace or community under the direction of the union.

The Kureha Spinning Corp Union in Oomachi, Nagano Pref, or the Aviation Administration Union have already produced stunning color filmstrips and used them to support union activities.

Let's produce your gentou filmstrip and think of it as small gauge movie (kogata-eiga). We'll do all we can to help you.21

Although parts of its history remain to be explored, this Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha certainly played an important role as the support organization for independent gentou producing and screening in 1950s social movements. When the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Nihon Roudou Kumiai Souhyougikai / Souhyou) held a seminar on cultural activities for unions, a anonymous member of Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha gave a lecture on gentou. The following year, when Souhyou published the lectures in book form The Lectures on Modern Culture (“Gendai bunka kouza”), Nihon Gentou
Bunka-sha is introduced as “a gentou-slide service center that was founded after the end of the war. Then it started to support independent gentou production by unions and cultural circles, and it has already produced and distributed 140 titles. In addition, it produces gentou for children and families”.

The role of Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha in the planning and production process of individual work is attested to by several sources. According to a report published in The Lectures on Modern Culture, the gentou filmstrip Portraits of Young People (“Wakai gunzou,” 1955) produced by Tokyo Branch of Japan Telecommunication Worker’s Union (Zen-den-tsuu) was planned and produced by several cultural circles including a literature circle, a cinema circle, and a camera circle in the workplace. Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha is said to have offered advice about on the budget at an early stage of production, and to have helped in post-production tasks such as processing the film. And Kako Satoshi, who was engaged in independent gentou production as a part of activities in Tokyo University Settlement Kawasaki Children Club, wrote in his biography The Way to Picture Books (Ehon-e-no Michi), “a small company called Nihon Gentou Bunka in Yoyogi turned our original picture into a gentou filmstrip, using part-time workers to color films” Therefore, we can consider that many works of gentou used in social movements of the 1950s were actually produced by amateur groups, and that Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha offered limited services such as advice on budget or other matters in early stage of planning, assistance with machinery and materials, supports for post-production works, and consignment sales and rental of finished products.

4. Sharing Experience

Many participants in the 1950s social or cultural movements tried to create gentou works independently, including labor unions, the anti-base movement, the anti-nuclear movement, utagoe (singing songs) movement, or the life document movement. One of the main purposes of these gentou production was propaganda “to publicize significance of our struggle inside and outside of the organization, and to make many people know about it” and another was the economic one of utilizing gentou screenings during fund-raising campaign or to raise money from consignment sales and rental through Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha. In addition, the independent production and screening gentou also served to create “the space in which different social movements could share their experience.” In the round-table discussion titled “On the Gentou Activities” published in The Lectures on Modern Culture mentioned above, a member of Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha stressed the importance of cooperation among “screening”, “viewing”, and
"production" of gentou to connect people within and without the different social movements. He or she said, "if we hope in the future to significantly increase our gentou activity, we need to create these spaces to share experience even within our local communities."

For people concerned with education who had been engaged in promoting gentou as visual teaching material since the 1930s, "the value of gentou lies in its potential to show individual figures exactly, quietly, and calmly" (Aochi Chuzou), in other words, it was recognized that gentou had unique educational value for showing "exact figure" of things objectively. Because, unlike the cinema, it did not foster the illusion of dynamic movement. In contrast, in the 1950s social movements, some gentou works tried to create the dynamic illusion of "movement" by succession of still images and narration, and to involve audiences in such "movement" and give them the sense of "sharing experiences" with the people they saw on the screen.

Many of gentou works concerned with labor disputes after the 1950s shared a common style of representation in which dozens of pieces of photorecordings of events were arranged in chronological and causal order. During the screening, one or more narrators read the script aloud, sometimes commenting each image, sometimes speaking lines like a radio actor, singing workers songs (roudou-ka). In this manner, they used a narrative process to tell the audience the cause of the labor dispute, the order of events, and the end result. In the opening sequence of many of these works, the faces and bodies of workers or their families were sometimes shown in close up without offering any explanation about person or situation, and poetry monologue-like narration overlapped with those images. For example, in How We fight: 63 Days of Struggle mentioned above, following the title picture, we first see a bust shot of a woman nursing a baby with an absentminded expression. As this image is screened, the script instructs the narrator to read the following lines "as though reading a poem". "Oh mom, why are you staring at my face like that?/Wrinkled face, dreary eyes / You always seem to want to say something, but say nothing / What a quiet woman you have become, mom!" [Figure 1]

Following the first picture of the mother and the baby, the audience is shown 11 frames of photographs showing slagheaps and other scenery from the coal mine town, the naked bodies of the coal miners working in narrow tunnels. The script
accompanies these images with subjective and poetic narration which appeals to the pain of oppressed bodies like "The crushed bones of my dead dad / Is still in that slagheap. / The torn flesh of my dead brother / Is still in that slagheap.", "We are forced to work without time to piss. / Even lunchtime comes at last, / It is such a bother to remove the fishbones." The 13th frame shows a one-legged coal miner walking with a pair of crutches shot from behind, and the narration reads, "Mom, please wait for / Revenge to guys robbed us sun, / And deprived of your smile. / The time for revenge will come." [figure 2]

In the 14th frame that shows workers who are about to go on strike, finally the script offers an objective and concrete explanation of situation: "On October 17, 1952, 270 thousands workers organized under the Japan Coal Miner's Union went on strike for a wage increase", with instructions to read that passage "in a normal tone of voice."

Susan Buck-Morss classifies emotional reactions caused by images into "sympathy" and "empathy", and describes the difference between them as follows.

When images are not confined by cultural context, including the propagandistic context that governments want to convey, viewers react to the pure physicality of what they see. They respond not with sympathy to the contextualized meaning of the image, but with empathy to the vulnerable human body, all the more visible because of the paucity of interpretive glosses. Sympathy requires a shared cultural horizon, but empathy is a mimetic, physical response to a sensory perception.

With the opening 12 frames and accompanying narration, How We fight: 63 Days of Struggle tries to arouse "empathy", a mimetic and physical bodily response from seeing images of suffering human body, among the audience. Before knowing who these people are, where they live, what situation they face, the members of the audience start to gaze upon their oppressed bodies shown on the screen before them, and they hear a live narration describing their pain in a natural voice, then they are involved in the sense of "sharing experience" with people on the screen.
This sense of “sharing experience” based on physical resonance or empathy would be reinforced by the “utagoe” (singing voice). The Utagoe Undō (The Singing Voice Campaign) started as a part of the cultural campaigns led by the Japan Communist Party in 1948, and then became one of the most successful left cultural movements in the 1950s. At its peak, tens of thousands of people attended the annual event “Utagoe in Japan” (Nihon no Utagoe), which started in 1952, and the official song book Youth Song Book (“Seinen kashū”) became a best seller in 1950s.9 Several gentou works were directly related to the Utagoe campaign, such as Songs of Homeland, Songs of Japan in 1954 (“Furusato-no uta, nihon-no uta 1954- nen”), produced and distributed by Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha) which documents the convention of Utagoe in Japan in 1954. And many other gentou works have scripts that instruct narrators or chorus members to sing along workers songs or anti-war songs popularized by the Utagoe campaign during the screenings. The audience could also join in by singing.

As an example of these “singing gentou”, I would mention Give Me Back My Eyes: Footsteps of 1954 (“Me-wo kaese: 1954- nen no Ayumi”, co-produced by Kansai Gentou Center and Osaka Literature School, 1955). This gentou work looks back upon the Kansai social movements in 1954, including the Oumi silk factory strike, the Osaka Securities Exchange strike, the Sōgen-sha strike, the anti-nuclear movement around Kansai, and May Day protest. In the different scenes of the gentou, background chorus and humming are inserted in the script according to the scene, including several workers songs, revolutionary songs, and anti-war songs popular in the contemporary utagoe campaign such as Song of Red Flag (“Akahata no uta”), Song of National Independence Action Committee (“Minzoku dokuritsu koudou-tai no uta”), No More Atomic Bombs (“Genbaku Yurusumaji”). In addition, International is sung in chorus for the final May Day scene. It may be supposed that the audience in screening place was expected to actively participate in these “singing voice”, especially in the final chorus of International.

Okubo Ryo points out that gentou screenings of the Sino-Japanese War in the Meiji period were accompanied by active physical participation such as shouts of banzai, applause and singing by the audience. In addition that, audible stimulation as narration by benshi, music, chorus constituted a sense of festival-like unity, drawing collective emotional exaltation from the audience.31 We can find similar situations in the screenings of “singing gentou” more than 70 years after the Meiji gentou screenings. This leads us to the paradox that gentou image, which lacks movements and sounds, was able to stimulate the audience to offer their singing voice to imbue the still screen with spirit of movement.
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I have discussed about gentou works with photographic images above, but hereafter I would like to refer other works with picture drawn or painted by hand, focusing on My Mom ("Boku-no kaa-chan", produced by Tokyo University Settlement Kawasaki Children’s Club, distributed by Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha, 1953), as a unique practice that makes the most of the characteristics of gentou medium.

My Mom is one of the five gentou works produced by Tokyo University Settlement Kawasaki Children’s Club, where Kako Satoshi, later a picture book artist, played the central role in creative activities making kamishibai and gentou with children as mentioned above. “Settlement” (Setsurumento) is defined as a social welfare activity in which students or intellectuals establish a base within a poor district of a large city to “settle in” and provide social service such as legal advice, medical and health support, and children’s care to the people living in the community. The Japanese settlement movement started with the relief activities by teachers and students of Tokyo Imperial University in the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. From the 1920s to the early 1930s, settlement movements centered on the Tokyo Imperial University Settlement (Toukyou Teidai Seturumento) established in 1924 had been actively deployed in other Japanese cities, but they were destroyed during the crackdown on leftists in the 1930s. In 1950, Tokyo University Settlement (Toudai Seturumento) restarted from the relief activities for the Kitty Typhoon.32 Kako Satoshi joined the Kawasaki Settlement established in Furuichiba, Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture in 1951, and started making original gentou works with children and other adult supporters of Children’s Club around 1952.33

Kako recollects about the production process of My Mom as follows.

My Mom (1953) was a documentary work based on the life of a child in Settlement, which assumes the form of the child’s composition. After it was published in a magazine, Nihon Gentou Bunka-sha made it into gentou. One to two hundred prints were produced. Some of the money from sales and rental were used to fund for our Children’s Club.

In those days, there was an educational publication known as The School of Echoes from the Mountains (“Yamabiko gakkou,” 1951) about children’s composition. I believe that this movement aimed to stimulate children to reflect their own lives by writing compositions and it became a very popular movement. Some people tried to accomplish the same thing with kamishibai. Taking advantage of this movement, I arranged compositions and pictures written or drawn by
children into the story of *My Mom*, I made no attempt to adapt them for dramatic effect, but simply added children’s pictures to the composition based on their life experiences when I made *My Mom*.34

Thus, we can consider that *My Mom* was created through the collaborative process involving children and adults, rather than a work created by an adult for children.35 Not only did the producer use “compositions based on life experience” of children for the script, but he also employed children’s painting with characteristics such as figures with extremely big heads, eyes as drawn as blacked out circles without white parts, limbs and bodies drawn simply with straight. In all these respects, they are very different from Kako Satoshi’s signature drawing style in *kamishibai* and picture books. However, figures in some scenes that require more complicated depiction of actions and psychology such as the quarrel of “Mr. and Mrs. Yamada” are drawn in a different style that is reminiscent of Kako’s later works.

Even though it based on “a composition based on fact”, a story of *My Mom* cannot to be said as “unique”, it seems rather “stereotypical” at first sight. “My mom”, a war widow, works as temporary worker in the factory from early morning to late at night. Her two sons, “I” and “Yasuji, my younger brother” spend most of the day alone by themselves. “Mom” who comes home exhausted every night, smiles only when she sees her kids eat late dinner saying “Yummy, yummy”. In the last scene, “mom” and the two kids are smiling side by side against the background of factories of Kawasaki industrial zone, and narration tells us that “I” hopes that in the future “to grow up soon to take care of my mom./ I want make mom smile without saying ‘yummy’”.

As shown in the opening scene of *How We fight: 63 Days of Struggle* mentioned above, the image of “mother”, who was separated from her husband by the war, and lost her smile in the hardship after the defeat was among the stereotypical icons in the 1950s social movement. *My Mom* is consists of stereotypical images of the hardships of works, life of poverty, and an unsmiling mother’s face, but it deviates from stereotypes by not fitting these images within a narrative frame in which current difficulties are overcome by support and instruction from outside and the lead to a bright future. Although it was created by group work within a Settlement, *My Mom* never represents the Settlement through a leader figure who saves oppressed people and leads them to bright future, as would be typical in stories of social improvement. In *My Mom*, it is “waiting” practiced by the children themselves that links the past to the present, and the present to a
bright future, rather than outside adult saviors such as teachers in school or tutors in the Settlement.

After seeing their “mom” off early in the morning, the two children go to school “slowly, loiter around” the town which is cloaked in darkness. And they are the first to arrive at school, before anyone else. [Figure 3]

Yet, when we arrive at school, we are always earliest. So we and Yasuji exercise on the bar until everybody comes.

Yasuji, who is a second grader, actually should not do this exercise because he might get hurt, but he does it anyway.

Because we exercise every morning, we are good at everything, somersaults, handstands, etc.

After showing this long time spent “waiting” in the empty school, before the arrival of “everyone”, we move next to another scene also involving a long “waiting.”

After the war ended, we received a message that my dad was killed in the war, and mom cried as she was holding the baby Yasuji. Because she cried for a long long time, it gradually got dark, and I started crying, too. I had the hiccups as I cried. [Figure 4]

After recalling the day “dad’ left for the front and hardships “mom” suffered after the war, the scene returns to the present “waiting” again. After school, the two children return home, pick up the key from the “Yamada family next door”, and wait for their “mom” to return. They spend their time “playing menko (a card game) or rock, paper, scissors”, and “when we get hungry, we eat kelp or small fish used in soup stock, and gulp down hot
water... Sometimes, we make little rice balls to eat.” [Figure 5]

The representation of “waiting” in My Mom enables us to recognize one of the essential elements of gentou. The filmstrip images loaded on the gentou projector are first screened to the audience as still images, but as they slide horizontally, one image changes into another. This screening practice that is proper to gentou is analogous to the different scenes of “waiting” of My Mom. “Waiting” early in the morning is transformed into “waiting” in the past night, and then back into the present “waiting” again. Through this modulation from one type of waiting to another, the dark past of war finally changes into the bright future with a smiling mother.

Although one cannot describe the “waiting” of the children in My Mom as cheerful and happy, it is not represented to be only painful and empty either. These periods of “waiting” filled with lively small activities like exercise on the horizontal bar, making small rice balls, and saying “Yummy!” to make “mom” smile. This sense of “lively waiting”, dynamism within stillness in which one waits for an absent person to arrive or a new event to happen epitomizes the fascination of the image proper to gentou medium.

An audience that stares at the screen and waits for one still image to slide into the next still image also share the experience of “lively waiting” with children depicted on the screen. In this way, the gentou creates a space that enables an “sharing experience” based on physically resonance and empathy.

5. Conclusion

I have examined the history of gentou from the wartime period to the 1950s, focusing on several practices within educational and social movements of the 1950s.

As I mentioned above, even in the stage of its rapid development after the Occupation, gentou had been sometimes regarded as lacking unique characteristic compared with cinema or kamishibai. One of the dominant opinions on gentou in those days was the “gentou as vessel” theory.

I’m afraid that gentou is just a device to enlarge photographs or paintings and project them onto a screen, and that it cannot advance to the stage of creating original world which cinema has managed to achieve. Gentou is a kind of “vessel”, and its educational value lies in the photographs or paintings that make up its “contents” after all.36

Even if gentou were merely a “vessel”, it was an extremely adaptable
and capacious vessel that could encompass a wide variety of contents starting with photographs and paintings as mentioned above, but also including pell-mell, cinema, *kamishibai*, cartoon, shadow play, puppet play, drama, poem, and composition. Because of this vessel-like property, *gentou* lacks the history of independent genres like cinema, photograph, or fine art, and always crosses the boundary of genres. Therefore, *gentou* has been an elusive medium until today.

People who sought to grasp the particular characteristic of *gentou* discovered that it offered great potential for non-professional users to engage in independent production and screening. As I have shown above, independent *gentou* production and screening activities in social movements of the 1950s helped to create an alternative public space in which individual movements could "share experience". For that purpose, images, narrations, screening practices proper to *gentou* were exploited in various ways.

Whether we regard *gentou* as "vessel" for other media, or as an independent medium that has its particular characteristic and domain, we cannot ignore that it has own history and its unique practices that cannot to be dismissed as "pre-history" or "substitute" of cinema and other media. An important future task will be to discover and scrutinize unknown materials and testimony, and to carry on a more concrete and comprehensive clarification on the diversity and scope of *gentou* in the Showa period.

*The author would like to thank to the Kobe Planet Film Archive, the International Institute for Children’s Literature, Osaka, Kako Satoshi, the research team members of the Collaborative Research Center for Theatre and Film Arts of Waseda University 2013 research project “Revival and redevelopment of gentou (slides) in Showa Period Japan” for their kind support on research, and to anonymous reviewers from ICONICS for their thoughtful comments. And my heartful appreciation goes to Robert Tierney for proofreading. This article was supported by the Mitsubishi Foundation’s research grants in the humanities.*

**Notes**

1. In Japanese, still image projecting devices and slides or filmstrips projected on screen through them have been called by several names such as "gentou", "gentou-ga", "suraido"(slide), or "suraido-eiga"(slide film). In this article, I will refer to the projecting device as "gentou projector", to the filmstrip for projecting as "gentou filmstrip", and to the medium including projector, film or slide, narration scripts as "gentou".


3. Iwamoto Kenji, *Gentou no seiki: Eiga zenya no shikaku bunka-shi*

4. For a summary of the gentou revival movement since the late 1930s, see “Jijo” [Foreword] of Aochi Chuzou, Gentou kyouiku no shishin [Guide to Gentou Education], (Zaidan houjin Nihon Eiga Kyouiku Kyoukai, 1949).


6. Gonda, ibid, 317.
7. Gonda, ibid, 351.
8. Aochi, ibid, no page number.

10. Aochi, ibid.

11. Aochi Chuzou criticized the tendency to regard gentou as a substitute for cinema, saying, “I doubt that most of our film education circles think that we are forced to use gentou because of the lack of movie films, or that we use gentou because we have no other choice. Under the recent economic conditions, it is the reasonable course that the utilization of gentou has been promoted by such pressure of the shortage of material, but I think it would be regrettable if gentou’s revival or newborn is limited within this purpose from first to last.” Aochi Chuzou, “Gentou ni taisuru kangae kata” [A Way of Thinking about Gentou], Eiga Kyouiku 1, no.3 (May 1947): 2.

12. For example, during the roundtable discussion in the journal Shikaku Kyouiku Shiryou [Visual Educational Resources], Sakugawa Keiichi, a staff member of a gentou production company says, “We are striving hard to improve the slides in circulation on the market. However, our gentou doesn't have a long history as cinema. Compared to cinema that has already established its own style and technology to some extent, our study about original style and nature of gentou is still developing. This is the current state of affairs. Sometimes gentou producers try to make gentou similar to cinema, to imitate cinema, or in extreme cases, they make slides from the frames of film clip. Although such products aren’t necessarily bad depending on the situation, I think gentou should be able to show its special feature in other ways.” “Zadankai: ‘Gentou’ wo megutte” [Round Table Discussion on Gentou], Shikaku Kyouiku Shiryou 10 (May 1953): 6.

13. See following criticism. “Many people regard the pictures in kamishibai and gentou as similar, and never consider the difference between them. I think this is a major factor hindering the development of gentou picture. Among gentou films and slides of the fairy tale genre which are abundant today, we can find terrible kamishibai-like pictures, garish colors, simple copies of existing picture books. It is deplorable that the suppliers of these products never give a second thought to them because the educators show them children with no clear conscience.” Kawakami Haruo, “Shikaku kyougu to shiten no gentou, gentou no tokushitsu ni tsuite no ichi kousatsu” [Utilizing Gentou as Visual Educational Tool: A Thought on Characteristics of Gentou], Eiga Kyoushitsu 2, no.10 (Dec 1948): 7.


16. Aochi, ibid, 3


20. Nihon Gentou Bunkasha, Kansai Gentou Center, Roudou kumiai no gentou katsudou [The Gentou Activities of Labor Unions], n.d.

21. From the narration script of How We Fight: 63 Days of Struggle,


27. ibid, 167.


32. About the settlement work, see Shibata Kenji, Hinkon to chii ki fukushi
WASHITANI Hana


33. Among five gentou works independently produced by Tokyo University Settlement Kawasaki Children’s Club, Kobe Planet Film Archives owns three titles: *My Mom, Kurihiko and Urihime* (1954), and *Wasshoi, Wasshoi, Bun, Bun, Bun* (1953). And Mr. Kako Satoshi kindly offered me a copy of script of *Watashi tachi no Machi to Tsurutsurumento* [Our Town and “Tsurutsurumento”] (1954).

34. Kako, ibid, 34

35. According to Mr. Kako Satoshi’s letter in response to this author’s question, children, especially those in the upper grades “actively organized the events or set up the venue as if they were the sponsors” at the screening events of these gentou works.

The Revival of "Gentou" (magic lantern, filmstrips, slides) in Showa Period Japan:
Focusing on Its Developments in the Media of Post-war Social Movements

WASHITANI Hana

In Japanese, "gentou" (magic lantern, slide, filmstrip) means visual media projecting still images onto screen. In Japan, gentou had first thrived during the Meiji period and revived in the Showa period from war-time to post war 1950s. In both case, gentou had been introduced as "educational media" for school, social and home education, with the recommendation of the Ministry of Education and some authorities of education for the first time. However, since the entering into force of the Treaty of Peace with Japan in 1952, gentou also flourished as grass-roots media within several social movements like labor disputes, anti-basement movements, anti-nuclear movements, and utagoe movement.

In this article, I try to explore the possibility of the independent history of gentou, without subordinating it to the history of other media like cinema, photography, or fine arts. Especially, I would like to focus on the 1950s independent gentou production and screening within social movements. During 1950s, social activists often produced original gentou films for the purpose of documenting and propagating their activities, and tried to establish the public sphere for "the exchange of experiences" through gentou screenings. Analyzing newly found materials like films and scripts of these 1950s grass-roots gentou movements I would like to clarify how these gentou films, with their peculiar characteristics, created sense of "the exchange of experiences" among their audience.