Japanese film stardom came into being and was transformed between two historical moments marked by the emergence of two popular actresses: Nakamura Kasen (1889–1942) and Ri Kōran or Li Xinglang (1920–). These actresses gained popularity, respectively, in 1909 and 1939, but images of them were shaped and circulated in very different ways.

It is unclear whether Nakamura should be called a “film star.” Her professional career began in 1900 as a performer in an all-girl theater troupe (onna-shibai or shōjo shibai), one of the forms of kabuki labeled ko-shibai or the small theater, which is distinguishable from the ō-shibai or the legitimate grand kabuki theater of the Meiji period (1868–1911). Her performance reportedly became the talk of Asakusa, Tokyo’s busiest amusement district in the early twentieth century. Her film début happened in 1908, when the M-Pathé Company filmed The Soga Brothers and Dawn at the Hunting Ground (Soga kyōdai kariba no akebono), a typical kabuki play. A critic of the time, Yoshiyama Kyokkō, later wrote that when the film was shown at the Taishō Playhouse in Asakusa later that year, Nakamura and her fellow performers added their voices to their projected images from behind the screen. This kind of voice performance was called kage-zerifu or dialogue from an unobserved position. The film is no longer available, but it framed the entire space of the theatrical stage using a fixed, lengthy long shot from the central position of the supposed theatrical audience, in the same way as one of the rare extant early Japanese films, A Morning Glory Dairy (Asagao nikki, 1909), in which, according to one view, Nakamura also appeared. This description of the framing points to several significant traits characterizing the early performers who appeared onscreen. Nakamura’s popularity was mostly limited to the Asakusa district and had already been established prior to her screen début. She was affiliated with a theatrical troupe rather than a film
production company, and so she was less likely to have acted for the camera and probably maintained the same performance style as in the theater.

A Morning Glory Dairy also evinces her kabuki-like dance performance, which highlights a conventional style of physical movement far more than an individual performer’s physical traits per se. Indeed, this was a typical dance routine performed by onnagata (aka, oyama, a male actor playing female roles). Onnagata dominated the screen until 1919, and only a handful of actresses appeared in films during this period. These dance routines were typically shot from a distant camera position to make it difficult to identify whether the performer is a man or a woman. Moreover, the publicity for and advertising of Nakamura was very limited. From this era, the only mention of her name that can be found is a small piece from a local newspaper advertisement for a 1909 motion picture program. Meanwhile, one of the earliest movie magazines, Katsudō shashin kai, chose the benshi, rather than Nakamura or any other actor, as the cover stars of its first several issues in 1909 and 1910. Although she might have been one of the first actors who appeared on screen and enjoyed limited but proven popularity, I hesitate to call her a film star. This is partly because images of Nakamura, as well as film and other media discourse relating to her, did not enjoy broad currency, and partly because the production, distribution, and representation of her movies did not constitute any form of what can be called a film-star system.

Emerging thirty years later, however, Ri clearly qualifies to be called a film star. Her professional career commenced with a 1933 radio broadcast of her singing prior to her movie début in The Honeymoon Train at Exhilarating Speed (Mitsugetsu kaisha, 1938). But, it was her sixth movie, Song of the White Orchid (Byakuran no uta, 1939), that brought her remarkable popularity. It was produced by the Manchurian Film Company, which was founded in July 1937 in Manchukuo—the administrative region in Northern China that had been declared an independent state by Japan—and was virtually owned and ruled by Japanese personnel. Through her subsequent thirteen movies made until the end of World War II, her fame extended beyond Manchukuo and Japan throughout the expanding Japanese empire, which included Korea, Taiwan, and Shanghai. What is crucial here is that Ri’s image was generated and circulated by and through a complex nexus involving the production, representation, distribution, and reception of films and other media. She was principally affiliated with the Manchurian Film Company, yet she often acted in co-productions with other companies or for those companies alone. In either case, however, her films were produced within a system characterized by a hierarchical division of labor, from the producer to the directors, actors, and other staff. These films were also distributed through a network of Japanese-affiliated theaters in Japan and its colonies and in semi-colonized
areas. Advertisements, publicity, reviews, and visual images of and articles about Ri carried in newspapers and magazines and on posters further served to build up her persona and to disseminate it throughout the Japanese empire. It is my contention that this system of multiple factors that created and circulated Ri as both a renowned personality and a visual figure can be called a form of film stardom.

The comparison between Nakamura and Ri thus reveals crucial conditions for the development of film stardom. The star is not simply an actor, but a peculiar historical phenomenon that comes about because of an actor’s attractiveness, the circulation of his or her identity (in the form of a name and images) in media, and the support of the consumers of that media. Throughout this book, I call this overarching process of star formation stardom. Yet, the film star is more grounded in the mechanical reproduction and circulation of visual images than is the theatrical star, although the latter’s image may also be reproduced and disseminated through photography, film, and other media. Although Nakamura’s popularity was based mostly on her local theatrical productions and through word of mouth, Ri’s was sustained by a large-scale industrial network of (re-)production and distribution of her images. This difference was inextricably linked with the technological, economic, political, and social background of their stardom. The limited currency of Nakamura’s images in 1909 was partly due to the underdevelopment of printing technology, the fact that offset and rubber plates had yet to be fully implemented. The film industry also was not yet well-established at that time. Although a series of wars, from the Sino-Japanese War (1894) and Russo-Japanese War (1904) to World War I (1914–1918), boosted Japanese industrial capitalism, the first full-fledged film company, Nippon Katsudō Shashin (aka, Nikkatsu), was founded only in 1912; another major company of the teens, Tennenshoku Katsudō Shashin (aka, Tenkatsu), only followed in 1914. In addition, whereas a film actor such as Onoe Matsunosuke, popular from the early 1910s, became so influential that bureaucrats, intellectuals, and the media targeted him as a social and educational problem, Nakamura never drew as much attention. Moreover, with male actors dominating both film and theater and only a small number of actresses working, Nakamura, seen as a popular yet socially less respectable performer, occupied an interesting public position in the entertainment world in terms of gender and class. By contrast, Ri’s stardom was supported and promoted not only by a well-established industry, but also by the infrastructure of the Japanese empire that strove to explore and secure natural resources, workers, employment, and markets in Asia for the nation-state. Although Ri was exploited both as a commercial product and a figure of propaganda under the national film policy, the question of whether her films were actually effective for ingratiating
the Japanese empire with audiences in colonized and semi-colonized areas became a controversial issue among critics, bureaucrats, and entrepreneurs. I will discuss Ri’s stardom in more detail in the conclusion, but the point here is that stardom cannot be understood separately from its historical conditions.

In this book I will narrate the formation and transformation of film stardom in modern Japanese history, mainly focusing on the period from the early 1910s to the early 1930s, or from after Nakamura to before Ri. In so doing, I will pursue two overarching goals that are two sides of the same coin. One is to show how film stardom and the film-star system emerged and changed, touching on a variety of its facets, including the production, representation, circulation, and reception of performers’ images in films and other media. For this purpose, I will examine not only stardom as it related to several individual performers—particularly the *benshi*, Onoe Matsunosuke, Tachibana Teijirō, Kurishima Sumiko, Clara Bow, and Natsukawa Shizue—but also certain aspects of different star systems that bolstered individual stardom. It should be noted here that because the circulation and reception of images of actors are crucial for understanding film stardom, I will avoid the hitherto predominant production-centered national film history dealing exclusively with Japanese films and actors. Instead, I will bring into the discussion images of stars originally produced in and then imported from other countries, especially the United States, if these images gained distinctive meanings and social roles through their circulation and reception in Japan.

The second goal of this book is to demonstrate how a diverse array of technological, economical, political, social, and cultural factors came to comprise Japanese modernity. I will reach this goal through discussing the concrete case of film stardom in its historical context. Film stardom is an excellent case for investigating issues of modernity precisely because it has been a product, agent, and icon of modernity, as I will explain. I assume that modernity is not simply a linear trajectory, as so-called modernization theory poses, but rather that it comprises the multifaceted relations of various historical conditions and processes, which include contradictions, fissures, and paradoxes. Rather than imposing existing theoretical conceptions on modernity in a deductive manner, I will approach it through analyzing specific images, discourses, and institutions regarding film stardom.

Because *Making Personas* is an unprecedented illustration of the history of Japanese film stardom, this introduction begins with a concise sketch of the configuration and reconfiguration of stardom during the 1910s and 1920s. I will then suggest certain ways in which the history of film stardom was necessarily connected with larger historical aspects of modernity. I believe that these overviews will help both those familiar and unfamiliar with Japanese
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film history to follow my discussion in the subsequent chapters. Finally, although this book takes advantage of scholarly research and debates on a variety of topics in the humanities, including nationalism, colonialism, capitalism, consumerism, fandom, gender, and sexuality, I will elucidate my approach to particularly the two overarching themes of this book: film stardom and modernity.

A History of Film Stardom

As in many other countries, in Japan the history of film stardom cannot be dissociated from its relationship to the theater. The theater developed an earlier and equivalent form of stardom before film stardom emerged. Some theatrical actors gained significant social prominence through their portrayal of major roles. This became particularly obvious in the rise of kabuki during the late sixteenth century. During the Edo era (1603–1868), kabuki was the most popular entertainment and continually produced star actors known as “hana-gata.” Kabuki’s tradition of stardom has continued even up to the present. While it has become legitimized as a form of national classical theater since the Meiji era (1868–1912), it should be noted that the majority of kabuki actors, such as Nakamura Kasen, could not appear in legitimate theaters, but only performed in ko-shibai, or small theater kabuki, in local towns. Usually these actors were either affiliated with a specific playhouse or toured the provinces.

Meanwhile, in the late nineteenth century, shinpa, or new school theater, emerged. Its advocates called it “straight theater” (shōgeki), attempting to differentiate it from kabuki, which they considered “outmoded.” Kawakami Otojirō envisioned shinpa as political theater and also promoted a shinpa star. This new shining light of shinpa was Sadayakko, who formerly had been a geisha and became Kawakami’s wife. Although shinpa has survived until today, this mode of theater was no longer fashionable by the 1910s. At this time, shingeki, or New Theater, which was based on the translation and adaptation of European and Russian drama, became salient. Shinpa, to some extent, kept elements reminiscent of kabuki, including the convention of male actors called onnagata playing female roles. Shingeki wanted to distinguish itself from traditional Japanese theater and instead emulated Western theater. Hence, shingeki started casting actresses instead of onnagata. In general, this intellectual’s theater did not achieve much popularity, mostly because its themes and narrative forms were unfamiliar to lower-class Japanese people. Yet, during the early 1910s, Shimamura Hōgetsu’s group, Bungei kyōkai, managed to attract audiences from different classes by featuring the actress Matsui Sumako.
Early Japanese cinema unfolded in close relation to all three of these theatrical forms. Until the late 1910s, most film actors came from shinpa and kabuki (mostly from small theater kabuki), with the former appearing in shinpa films and the latter in kyūha or kyūgeki (old drama), although some actors performed in both genres. From the late 1910s, when shingeki had managed to establish a sufficient stock of actors, it became no less an important source of film personnel than kabuki and shinpa. In addition, other types of theater, including oral performance (such as gidayū and naniwabushi), Asakusa opera, and the Takarazuka revue, were closely linked both to film acting and to the art of the benshi (voice performers who narrate silent films and act out the voices of the characters while standing or sitting beside the movie screen). Throughout this book, I will show how film stardom differed from and related to these theatrical forms of stardom. Suffice it to say here that film stardom was not a pure form dictated by the nature of the medium but was inevitably influenced by and associated with the stardom traditions of existing arts and entertainments on both the institutional and practical levels.

Japan’s film stardom developed at a moment when a variety of new theatrical forms began to burgeon in addition to and in competition with kabuki and shinpa. Specifically, the history of early film stardom in Japan can be understood as comprising three main strands: early Japanese film stars (from the 1910s until the mid-1920s), American film stars (from the mid-1910s onward), and a new type of Japanese film star (after the early 1920s). Each of these strands was endowed with unique characteristics in terms of the representation of actors, the institutional practices of production and distribution, and their social relations. At the same time, while the evolution of Japanese stardom can be roughly summed up as the story of early Japanese stars being overwhelmed by the influx of American stars and the subsequent development of new Japanese stars, this history was not a linear one of rise and fall. Rather, it would be better characterized as the complex interrelation resulting from their coexistence and competition.

Stars representative of the first strand—early Japanese film stars—were the benshi, some of whom became famous from the 1900s, and represented by such actors as Onoe Matsunosuke and Tachibana Teijirō, who gained wide popularity in the 1910s. While the benshi (live performers) and actors (screen performers) should be distinguished in terms of their fundamentally different sites of performance, both were strongly influenced by existing theatrical forms such as yose (vaudeville), kabuki, and shinpa. These early actors and the benshi were more interdependent of each other than they were in competition, and their popularity peaked in the 1910s. Although most benshi kept working until the mid-1930s, when the talkie became fully institutionalized, and the early Japanese actors remained active until the mid-1920s, when
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Onoe died, American film stars and the newer generation of Japanese film stars surpassed them in popularity by the early 1920s.

The second strand of stardom was the American film stars, images of whom became pervasive in the Japanese public space (particularly in urban areas) after the outbreak of World War I. Whereas only a limited number of early Japanese actors were famous enough to be worth calling stars, American actors (including those who immigrated from Europe) whose names were actively publicized in Japanese periodicals were legion. Some early Japanese performers, like Onoe, Tachibana, Sawamura Shirōgorō, Inoue Masao, and Kinoshita Yaoko, probably qualified as celebrities, but the majority of Japanese actors were not widely known. However, Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Mabel Normand, Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish, Margarita Fischer, Norma Talmadge, and Francis Ford, as well as the “serial queens” (such as Pearl White, Grace Cunard, Helen Homes, and Ruth Roland) and Universal’s Bluebird film actresses (such as, Pricilla Dean, Ella Hall, Dorothy Phillips, and Myrtle Gonzales), are just some of the American stars who became famous in Japan. Moreover, these American film stars were distinct from the early Japanese stars particularly because their stardom was produced apart from existing Japanese theatrical conventions. As I will argue, it is vital to note that images of American stars did not necessarily circulate, become popular, and gain meaning and value in Japan in the same way as they did in the United States. For instance, Japanese critics used American stars—who were almost all white—as a standard by which to judge the performance and physicality of Japanese actors.

In certain respects, prompted by the influx of American film star images, the third strand of stars started gaining prominence in the early 1920s. For the sake of convenience, I shall call them the new type of Japanese film stars, in comparison with the earlier generation of Japanese stars. “Newness” is, of course, doomed to expiration, but the advantage of this labeling is that it implies the sense of freshness that people of the time would have associated with these stars. In 1919 and 1920, new companies such as Kokusai Katsuei (aka, Kokkatsu), Shōchiku Kinema, and Taishō Katsudō Shashin (aka, Taikatsu) were founded one after another. A few years later, an older company, Nikkatsu, also remodeled itself to a considerable degree. One of the most obvious departures from the days of the early stardom period was that, as each of these companies began to promote a larger number of actors as stars, the number of stars dramatically increased in Japanese cinema as a whole. Among these stars were Kurishima Sumiko, Hanabusa Yuriko, Satsuki Nobuko, Okada Yoshiko, Natsukawa Shizue, Suzuki Denmei, Yamamoto Kaichi, Sakai Yoneko, Tsukuba Yukiko, Bandō Tsumasaburō, and Ōkōchi Denjirō. Another significant change was that the use of onnagata, which had been a
mainstream practice in Japanese cinema until the 1910s, largely vanished, and the use of actresses became common.

Needless to say, these three strands do not make an exhaustive account of the early history of Japanese film stardom. We should not forget, for instance, that European stars like Sarah Bernhardt also enjoyed a certain level of prominence that can’t clearly be classified into any of the three main strands of stardom I have delineated. Moreover, within each strand, many stars’ individual traits and tendencies had a complicating effect on their stardom. Stars of the first strand were generally divided into representatives of two genres—kyūgeki and shinpa. Within the second strand, comedians whose attraction lay in their pantomime or comedic action could not be equated with stars who appeared mostly in serious dramas. One should also note that in the third strand, gendaigeki (contemporary drama) stars and jidaigeki (period drama) stars were usually distinct types. In addition, stars are also not necessarily perfectly classifiable into one of these currents in the sense that they each have unique characteristics. Onoe and Sawamura, both of whom we can classify as early stars, had their own peculiarities, as had Kurishima and Satsuki despite their clear membership of the third current. Onoe came from a low-ranking kabuki, whereas Sawamura came from a legitimate kabuki; and Kurishima was mostly known as an innocent while Satsuki was known as a vamp. It is thus clear that we should not downplay deviation from these categories and diversity within categories. Nevertheless, I would like to give priority to delineating a history of film stardom on the basis of these three currents over describing actors individually. This classification enables us to shed light on structural changes in the representation of stars, as well as on the institutional practices of image production, circulation, and reception.

A Modern History through Film Stardom

Film stardom is fascinating not only as a part of cinema history, but also as a part of modern history. It came into being only in the modern age. It could not have come about without the mediation of the modern technology, institutions, and practices that encompassed industry, mechanical reproduction (film, photography, and print), media, and consumption. As sociologist P. David Marshall points out, in relation to the West, the star is also a typically democratic and capitalistic product, insofar as he or she epitomizes the potential for anyone to become famous. This is contrasted with feudal systems that bound the individual to his or her lineage and original position in society. Although the film stars I discuss in this book share this fluidity in social status to a considerable degree, they were necessarily tied to the specific contexts of modern Japanese politics, economics, and culture. These realms
also interacted with those in other countries, especially Europe, America, and East Asia. It is in tandem with this complex nexus of historical conditions and their dynamic mobilization that film stardom formed and changed.

The three different types of film stardom I have delineated above respectively constituted characteristic parts of Japanese modernity. Each involved a distinctive pattern of association among such modern phenomena as nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, consumerism, and mechanical reproduction, while the nature of these factors themselves varied in their historical contexts. While newly emerging practices often clashed with existing conventions, what was characterized as tradition in many cases did not simply act as an impediment or opposition to modernity. Rather, it was something re-created as part of modernity, in a similar way to what Raymond Williams called “a selective tradition” and Eric Hobsbawm described as the “invention of tradition.”

The early film star Onoe Matsunosuke became popular against the background of the growth of heavy industry and the sharp increase in urban laborers in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War, Russo-Japanese War, and World War I. It follows that his company, Nikkatsu, and, by extension, the Japanese film industry as a whole, was established on the basis of providing workers with inexpensive amusement. Nikkatsu achieved huge profits by massively distributing Onoe’s pictures. Onoe’s social rise from a low-ranking traveling kabuki actor to a motion picture star was only possible under this expanding capitalism, which enticed working-class people to invest their money in pleasure by providing it cheaply. Onoe’s popularity, however, did not guarantee his social authority. In fact, intellectuals frequently condemned him as a low-class entertainer. Onoe and his associates strove to bolster their social authority by appropriating such national values as “shūyō” (self-cultivation) and “chūkun aikoku” (loyalty and patriotism), which echoed state regulations like the Civil Code (1898) and the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890).

Although American film stars obviously emerged under capitalism, their personas were produced with no consideration of Japanese social values because they were primarily targeted at consumers in the United States. Images of American stars flooded Japan in the mid-teens, not least because of World War I. This made it difficult for European companies to produce and distribute films, and allowed the American studios to sweep into the world motion picture markets. Behind the rising prominence of American stars in Japan lay the complicated social legacy of Euro-American imperialism, which dominated the world at that time.

In this context, the young critics who advanced what was later called the Pure Film Drama Movement (jun’eiga-geki undō) canonized European and American films and actors while characterizing Japanese films and actors as inferior. While this valuation was usually
critical of Japan, it can’t be described as anti-Japanese. In fact, it was highly
nationalistic and aspired to improve Japan. Unlike Onoe’s fans, supporters of
American film stars advocated the reformation and re-establishment of the
national—Japanese cinema and actors—by drawing not on a traditional Japa-
nese sensibility and on state regulations, but on a Western-centered global
paradigm. It is in this vein that they demanded the abolition or marginaliza-
tion of the *benshi*, the replacement of the *onnagata* with actresses, and the
adoption of “natural” acting styles.

At the same time, though, American actors’ stardom in Japan had the po-
tential to unsettle the national equilibrium. Stars’ images came to Japan from
beyond the national border, and Japanese fans had multifaceted and intimate
illusory relationships with stars from overseas. For Japanese audiences, the
American film stars were personas who acted as communication partners,
models for everyday life, and objects of fetishist desire and criticism. This il-
illusion was sustained by a mechanism of consumption peculiar to capitalism.
As Adorno and Horkheimer would point out, from an objective point of view
the star was nothing but product differentiation. One could argue that like a
model of car, a star’s individual attractiveness is only generated by his or her
difference from other stars. Nevertheless, a fan experiences his or her rela-
tionship with a star as highly personal. The star system can be considered a
mechanism of consumption that draws on the tension between objective and
subjective structures. In addition, as the diffusion of photographic and print
technologies led to the proliferation of photographs of stars in magazines and
newspapers, the development of media technology enabled a global image
currency and ultimately a system of transnational stardom. In this process,
Japanese fans of American stars gradually came to embarrass Japanese intel-
lectuals even though the latter were also on occasion attracted to those very
stars. Kaeriyama Norimasa and many other reformist critics who argued for
a film aesthetic modeled after European and American films criticized fans
for being *hentai* (“perverts”), saying they were obsessed only with actors’
odies and ignored cinematic technique. Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, on the other
hand, uniquely incorporated the star phenomenon into his novels, with nar-
ratives of American stars enthralling fans beyond the boundary between
on- and off-screen.

The very fact that not only rising film critics but also intellectuals in other
fields, including Tanizaki, Satō Haruo, Kume Masao, Osanai Kaoru, and
Gonda Yasunosuke, displayed their interest in cinema and its stars indicates
the extent to which film culture achieved its remarkable social expansion in
the late 1910s and early 1920s. Commentators also increasingly referred to
cinema and stars in relation to Marxism and consumer culture. Marxism
became influential mainly through newly published leftist magazines, such
as Warera (debuting in February 1919), Kaizō (April 1919), and Kaihō (June 1919). These mushroomed under the influence of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the economic recession following World War I. By the mid-1920s, film critics who focused on capitalism and class also emerged. For these critics, the star system was deceptive because it was the epitome of capitalism. On the other hand, Gonda, while influenced by Marxism, did not reject capitalism as a whole. He originally specialized in German aesthetics at Tokyo Imperial University but became well known as a leading social researcher after graduating, and published several books and articles on “popular recreation” (or minshū goraku) during the “Taishō democracy” period (1905–1931). He maintained that cinema was not a form of culture that should dictate to its audience in a top-down manner as “culturalists” advocated, but one that the people (minshū) themselves created by appropriating cultural commodities the industry provided. However, Gonda’s view contained certain serious contradictions. In one article, he stated: “There are no original books on popular recreation. They are to be found in Asakusa,” while in another he wrote: “This new type of people constitutes a new class created by capitalism.” Despite the positivist gesture, Gonda defined “people” as an abstract category. He also had no hesitation to accuse the moga and mobo of being perverts because of their devotion to flapper stars (which I will discuss in detail in chapter 8). This is despite his insistence on the need to respect the people’s free will. After all, the people or minshū Gonda referred to—which he later replaced with another term, kokumin (literally, “the national people”), in the 1930s—were nothing but a category that he himself idealized. For him, the moga and mobo deviated from the category because they were a “leisure class” standing separate from work.

Gonda’s writing further suggests that the fan culture that had taken root around the film stars was a microcosm of the wider consumer culture on the rise during this period. Department stores, expositions, advertisements, magazines, and so on provided consumers with a new vision of life and led them to adopt habits of consumption, purchasing goods not simply out of necessity but for novelty and pleasure. Film stars and other commodities triggered audiences’ self-definition through consumption (for example, choosing to imitate stars’ fashion and styling). This led to new levels of diversity and fluidity in the self-definition of Japanese people of the time that extended beyond the categories set up by bureaucrats and intellectuals.

It is in this newly emerging social context that the new type of Japanese film star, as well as the American stars, whose images continued to flow into Japan, gained public prominence. Yet, while these stars shared certain attributes—such as the production of their images by a star system based on a fairly, if not fully, systematized film industry; the proliferation
and dissemination of their images though different kinds of media; and the promotion of illusory relationships with their fans—they also each presented a unique persona involving distinctive social meanings. In this book, I will particularly focus on Kurishima Sumiko, Clara Bow, and Natsukawa Shizue, who were all distinguished stars in Japan during the 1920s. Kurishima became a popular star at Shōchiku in the early 1920s and was often referred to as a traditional woman endowed with typically Japanese elegance. However, at that time she was also imbued with a sense of novelty. This was partly because her career was the product of a newly formulated business strategy to sell her as a “typically Japanese actress,” differentiating her from Western film stars. Moreover, she was a “new woman,” who worked outside the home (ie) and departed from the prevailing slogan of “good wife, wise mother” (ryōsai kenbo). In contrast, Bow was seen as the origin of the moga phenomenon and created such a controversy that she both unsettled the Japanese national identity and triggered a reactionary backlash. Natsukawa, while also regarded as a “modern girl,” did not create such a sensation as Bow. Rather, she maintained a persona of respectability, combining modern sophistication with a sense of seishinshugi or “spiritism” (the notion that a person’s acts should be led by his/her will or spirit, an ideology pervasive in the rise of militarism). Film stardom, both as a collective system and as the process of individual star formation, can thus be seen to constitute, in a concrete form, the historical junctures at which multifarious parameters of modernity were interconnected in complex and varied ways.

**Transnational Film Stardom**

Although auteurist approaches have largely dominated Japanese film history, stars or actors have gained growing attention as a subject of academic discussion. Examples include studies about such actors as Ri Kōran, Hara Setsuko, Wakao Ayako, Ishihara Yūjirō, Suzuki Denmei, Okada Yoshiko, and Irie Takako. These studies are not simply biographies but attempts to identify stars’ social and political meanings by analyzing how their personas were constructed through cinematic representation and noncinematic discourse.23 This is the case in studies of theatrical stars, including Ayako Kano’s revealing book-length study on Kawakami Sadayakko and Matsui Sumako.24 *Making Personas* shares this type of approach and interest, but I depart from these earlier works at two main points. First, as already noted, my goal is to examine the history of stardom or a star system as a unified entity that was shared by a significant number of stars, while also acknowledging the negotiation between different forms of stardom. Second, because this book puts great importance on the circulation of images and discourses, and on the visual
and discursive environment created through this circulation, it doesn’t only deal with stars produced in Japan but also stars who were originally produced in other countries, especially in America.

These two points have been discussed already to some extent. For instance, Satō Tadao, a prominent film historian, argued that casting in Japanese cinema took over kabuki conventions like tachiyaku (the leading role) and nimai-me (the male lover’s part). He also explored the relationship between actors’ educational backgrounds and their stardom. These accounts unquestionably pioneered the scholarly study of Japanese film stardom, but Satō tended to characterize his observations (especially in the former case) as markers of Japanese-ness. As I have already suggested in the overview above, I will discuss the links between the theater, film stars, and their social rise as a complex historical process, rather than as an example of the uniqueness of Japanese culture. Iwasaki Akira’s 1951 book, A Short History of Film Stars (Eiga sūta shōshi), on the other hand, is the first extensive account of the history of the star system in Japanese. However, while criticizing the star system from a Marxist standpoint as an incarnation of capitalism, Iwasaki exclusively dealt with the Hollywood star system (with the exception of a few pages), thereby setting up a predominant, implicit ideological strain according to which “‘stars’ mean ‘Hollywood stars.’” By contrast, in his 1991 essay “What Made the Inferior Complex regarding the Caucasian?” (Naniga hakujin konpurekkusu o umidashitaka?), Deguchi Takehito contextualized the Japanese reception of images of white, Western actresses from the 1890s through the 1920s by analyzing their representation in literature by authors such as Mori Ōgai, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, and Nagai Kafū, as well as in essays by Kaeriyama and the psychologist Habuto Eiji. Deguchi then contended that as cinematic images of white actresses prevailed in Japanese society, a certain Japanese inferiority complex vis-à-vis white people became salient in the discourse of these intellectuals. While groundbreaking, this essay nonetheless postulated that an essential difference between Western and Japanese physiques, and the superiority of the former over the latter, was a given, and overlooked the fact that the psychological complex was conditioned by the geopolitical power relations of the period.

My approach to film stardom is fundamentally historical. Rather than describe its universal essence, I will analyze how film stars, their modes of stardom, and star systems were constructed and reconstructed within their specific historical contexts. At the same time, however, in order to conduct this analysis, it is necessary to explore certain theoretical frameworks that enable us to consider diverse aspects of and possibilities for what can be seen as film stardom. There are three key frameworks in my discussion of film stardom: the institutional, the social, and the transnational. Film stardom is
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institutional because it can be understood as being constituted by a complex network enabling the production, circulation, and reception of an actor’s images. I assume that different film industries may develop different iterations of a star system and that all of these are open to change and mutual interaction. Indeed, I will discuss an iteration of the Japanese film-star system unique to the 1910s, as well as another that is both similar and dissimilar to the Hollywood star system of the 1920s, which itself was undergoing transformation at the time. But the institution of film stardom is not only made up of a film industry but also draws on other industries, especially publishing and advertising. As Richard Dyer puts it, “The star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars. A film star’s image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio hand-outs and so on, as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star’s doings and ‘private’ life.”

To this list can be added many other discursive and nondiscursive practices, including reviews, criticism, tie-ins, advertisements, and word of mouth. This suggests that the institution of film stardom operates on the foundation of the precarious contact between the systematic exploitation of the star by certain industries and the less systematic appropriation by other participants. It is equally vital to keep in mind that the different components of these institutions and the combinations thereof are not uniform, but rather vary historically and geographically.

I will also analyze stars as social phenomena, assuming that a star cannot emerge without, albeit indirect, contact with consumers, including critics and fans. Mediated by film and other media, a star appears not only as “the image,” that is, “a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs,” but also as a persona to which consumers can attach meanings and emotions. Because a star’s persona consists of multiple images and discourses, it always opens to possible transformation; it is never finished with this process—it continues even after the actor dies. In this endless process, multiple contradictory social meanings coexist while at first glance appearing harmonious.

In a 1960s article, the sociologist Alberto Francesco describes the star as a member of “The Powerless Elite.” Analyzing Rudolph Valentino and his relationship with his female fans, Miriam Hansen points out that his persona was endowed with both sadistic and masochistic drives. Rey Chow discusses Ruan Lingyu, who played a prostitute in Goddess (1933), and asks how we can understand the paradoxical phenomenon of an actress who embodied such a socially marginalized figure as a prostitute also occupying the socially central position of film star. In his Sessue Hayakawa, Daisuke Miyao argues that Hayakawa’s popularity in the United States during the 1910s was at once sustained and destabilized by both the middle class’s sophisticated “Japanese taste” and its anxiety regarding the so-called Yellow Peril or the Asian
immigrant’s perceived threat to Victorian morality. Despite their distinctiveness, all of these arguments suggest that different meanings and values are intricately woven into the formation of a star persona. This multivalent quality of stardom, in turn, can induce divergence and conflict in the ways consumers make sense of and desire stars. I will explore such complex social relationships in their specific historical contexts by examining the cinematic and noncinematic visual representation of stars, as well as critical and fan discourse about them, the public articulation of which is necessarily not contiguous because of differences in stars’ social status and position.

In addition, I will highlight the transnational operation of film stardom in Japan during the 1910s and 1920s. By *transnational* I mean something not necessarily in opposition to the national but that may function to enhance the national or be complicit with it. The transnational operation of the examples of early film stardom I will investigate comprised multiple dimensions that were intricately interrelated. One dimension was the circulation of American (and, to a lesser extent, European) actors’ visual images, which became salient in Japanese theaters, periodicals, and other public spaces during the 1910s. Another dimension is the reception of these star images, where critics, fans, filmmakers, and bureaucrats expressed their judgments about and desires for the stars, as well as engage in various activities like collecting and exchanging stars’ photographs, importing overseas periodicals, and emulating stars’ clothing and fashion. In this sense, not only actors’ cinematic and noncinematic images but also other related materials and ideas crowded into the Japanese social space from across the border.

Yet another transnational dimension I will illuminate is how the Japanese film industry and, by extension, its star system were restructured in the early 1920s, with considerable reference to the Hollywood film industry and its star system. The Japanese film industry continuously distributed and promoted American films, from as early as the mid-1910s to the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, when their importation was suspended. This is not to say, however, that the Japanese film industry emulated Hollywood in all respects, but I will argue that the former was not a purely self-contained system independent from the latter. All of these multiple transnational dimensions—the circulation and reception of star images from overseas, and the way the industry was restructured—did not necessarily undermine the national; rather, they at times served to reconstitute it. For example, Kurishima’s persona was characterized as “the traditional Japanese woman,” while it implicitly echoed dominant ways American actresses were represented in the 1910s and early 1920s. The fusion and tension between the national and the transnational also fluctuated historically, as critical discourses around the canonization of American stars gradually changed between the 1910s and 1920s.
These theoretical perspectives—which enable us to analyze the institutional, social, and transnational complexities of Japanese film stardom in history—further place *Making Personas* into the worldwide historical context of film stardom. One integral yet challenging issue concerns how film stardom involved global modernity, within which negotiation took place between local and national institutions and practices in a newly emerging sociocultural environment conditioned by the uneven international power relations of the period. I will return to my strategy regarding this issue shortly. It is also fruitful to position this book in the recently flourishing field of star studies, dealing with a variety of actors and other celebrities, images of whom have been produced and circulated in different countries. Even in the Anglophone literature alone, star studies have covered a broad range of topics and approaches, from actors as professionals or laborers, the nature of acting and performance, the nature of the star system, cinematic and noncinematic representation and the construction of stars and the circulation and reception of star images, to gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, ideology, commodity, and fan culture. On the other hand, these studies have largely concentrated on Hollywood stars solely in their American context. This is true of Dyer’s seminal books *Stars* (1979) and *Heavenly Bodies: Stars and Society* (1986), which examine as variants of the icons of American culture and society Marlon Brando, Bette Davis, Marlene Dietrich, Jane Fonda, Greta Garbo, Marilyn Monroe, Robert Redford, John Wayne, Paul Robeson, and Judy Garland (some of whom were not American but created bases in Hollywood).37 This tendency seems to reflect that of Anglophone film studies as a whole, which, as many scholars have pointed out, tends towards a hierarchical division between Hollywood as the universal standard and national cinemas as the alternative to this standard.38 Although one can’t deny that the Hollywood star system has in many ways been historically and internationally the most influential, in both economic and cultural terms, such an approach lacks the scope to reflect global multiplicities and interactions. Moreover, only a few in-depth studies—most notably Richard deCordova’s *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System* (1990)—focus on the historical formation of film stardom as a whole.39 DeCordova and several other historians of film stardom have provided significant insights into critical approaches to film stardom and indeed inspired my research. Nevertheless, these studies have tended not only to follow the Hollywood-versus-national-cinemas paradigm, but also to isolate the history of stardom or the star system from a larger sociocultural context while concentrating on analyzing noncinematic discourses on actors and the representational and industrial practices of their movies. This book thus partly aims to broaden the horizon of worldwide star studies by exploring Japan’s early history of transnational film stardom as a
case study. But, in order to do so, we must further reconsider what viewpoint enables us to place the history of Japanese film stardom in a global historical context while eschewing the Hollywood-versus-national-cinemas paradigm. At this point, modernity is worth particular attention.

Cinema and Modernity

Although *Making Personas* does not intend to offer a comprehensive account of modernity, I see it as a useful framework to go beyond the Hollywood-versus-national-cinemas paradigm or, more broadly, the Euro-American-centricism that the scholarship of non-Western subjects or cinemas has confronted. By Euro-American-centricism I mean the epistemological presumption that the knowledge of non-Western scholarly objects is constructed and accessed according to that of Western scholarly objects—where the latter functions as the universal standard. This center-periphery presumption often triggers orientalism and self-orientalism that see the non-West, say Japan, as an inferior, exotic, or alternative entity that is characterized in terms of its degree of distance from the West. Modernity enables us to cope with this problem insofar as it provides a perspective on the ways political, economic, social, and cultural formations have historically constituted and reconstituted uneven relations between different regions in a shared global time-space, where people, materials, resources, and knowledge have increasingly flowed across national or regional borders. Thus, as Stuart Hall suggests, modernity carries a certain analytical value. But, of course, modernity has been a longstanding source of controversy in the humanities and social sciences. Below I will clarify in what sense I find modernity useful as an analytical framework for investigating the history of transnational film stardom in Japan without reducing it to a binary conception of the West versus the East or the West versus Japan.

To a large degree, my interest in modernity runs parallel to what has been explored in recent studies of Japanese film history, especially Catherine Russell’s *The Cinema of Naruse Mikio: Women and Japanese Modernity*, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano’s *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s*, and Aaron Gerow’s *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895–1925*. As these titles suggest, the authors attempt to analyze Japanese cinema and its related practices in terms of modernity. Moreover, these works all resist the Hollywood-versus-national-cinemas paradigm as well as Euro-American-centricism. It is clear that this trend has become manifest in the intersection between the critical examination of area studies, more specifically of Japanese studies, and that of film studies. Notably, in critical studies of the field of Japanese studies, Harry Harootunian,
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Masao Miyoshi, Naoki Sakai, and many other scholars have contended that modernization theory and the search for Japanese uniqueness (or Nihonjinron), which became salient and often merged in academic and journalistic discourse on Japan after World War II, have served to set up a simplistic hierarchical relationship between America as the universal standard and Japan as a particular case, and tended to define Japan and the Japanese as a homogeneous entity separate from the West.42 Rey Chow, Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, and other scholars have also accused Anglophone film studies of enacting a hierarchical division of labor through which to deal with Western film as universal objects and non-Western films as locally specific cases.43 Chow, for instance, notes:

Non-Western cultures can be acknowledged as producers of film . . . only insofar as their national or ethnic labels remain in the picture. Such labels are reminders of the mass or non-individuated socioeconomic realities to which the study of non-Western films, much like the study of non-Western cultures in general, is consigned as a rule, so that understanding non-Western films—nowadays often grouped under the rubric of “world cinemas”—becomes a matter of returning the films to the so-called local specifics, known summarily as contexts.44

Russell, Wada-Marciano, and Gerow are all sensitive to these discussions about the contemporary discursive configurations of Euro-American-centrism in area studies and film studies.

At the same time, they are also concerned with issues of modernity that have been discussed in film studies and critical studies. In film studies, Giuliana Bruno, Anne Friedberg, Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, Lauren Rabino-vitz, Ben Singer, and many other scholars have focused on the sensory experience of early cinema as a characteristic part of modernity in the urban centers of Europe and America.45 Singer, while noting the risk of oversimplifying a vast body of texts, calls this type of project “a dynamic model of the cinema-modernity nexus,” saying,

By this I mean a basic conception of both modernity and of early cinema attending to determinative forces and phenomena characterized in terms of novelty, velocity, mobility, instability, flux, contingency, transformation, attraction, shock, distraction, disconcertion, hyperstimulus, and so on.46

David Bordwell named this trend “the history-of-vision” or “the modernity thesis” and challenged it by asking, “In what sense can we talk about short-term changes in perception, that intricate mesh of hard-wired anatomical, physiological, optical, and psychological mechanisms produced by millions of years of biological selection?”47 The debate seems to have yielded no clear conclusion,48 but two particularly noteworthy directions have emerged. One
is the modernity or “ambimodernity” that Singer has recently attempted to explore beyond the dynamic model of sensory experience as “an arena of modern and counter-modern [for example, Hofmannsthal’s] impulses, yielding cultural expressions that reflected both ends of the spectrum, along with, and perhaps more frequently, ambivalent or ambiguous positions in between.”\(^{49}\) This provides a similar or even broader perspective on modernity than Marshall Berman’s oft-cited chart, which encompasses modernization as “the state of perpetual becoming” and modernism as both a celebration and critique of this state.\(^{50}\) The other direction is “vernacular modernism,” an explanatory model that Miriam Hansen has formulated to account for Hollywood cinema’s historical prevalence in international markets (she cites China and Japan as examples,) with its quality of industrially mass-produced products that could generate both wide-ranging sensory experiences and the experience of modernity. Yet, Hansen differentiates this model from that of classical Hollywood cinema, which Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger laid out in their 1985 book \textit{Classical Hollywood Cinema}.\(^{51}\) Hansen contended that Hollywood cinema gained worldwide popularity not because its causally unified form held universal appeal for people all over the world, but because it contained various competing traditions, discourses, and interests rendering it flexible enough for audiences anywhere to receive, translate, reuse, or reconfigure within their specific historical contexts.\(^{52}\)

The issues raised around modernity in critical studies, especially in Japanese studies, certainly echo these discussions in film studies to a considerable degree, but they have been pursued in a different context, a context in which both ideas of modernization theory and of multiple or alternative modernities have been resisted. This is evident in one of the field’s most influential books, Harry Harootunian’s \textit{Overcome by Modernity} (2000). Harootunian proposes, “Instead of examining the material transformation of Japanese society as an instance of some hypostatized conception of the social . . .  , we need to read this episode not for the familiar story lines authorized by such historical narratives but rather as the production of experience that tried to catch hold of the moving present (‘fleeting and fragmentary,’ as Baudelaire described the modern present) and thus give it meaning and direction.”\(^{53}\) Harootunian then analyzes the intellectual discourse of the interwar period as falling into two starkly different types, “a social discourse of everyday modern life” (which pointed to ceaseless changes accelerated by consumer products, the succession of events, and the progressive fragmentation and destabilization of cultural forms) and “a secondary discourse on the social” (which “aimed at representing the essence of society and performing a virtual poeticizing or aestheticizing of everydayness in order to negate the divisions, fragmentation, and conflict that had instituted society in Japan”).\(^{54}\) Here,
Harootunian’s interest is in everyday experience, but it goes beyond sensory experience to the broader social and political imagination inscribed in the discourse of intellectuals. Equally important, he declares his intention to demonstrate that Japan’s modernity was “an inflection of a larger global process that constituted what might be called co-existing or coeval modernity” while distinguishing it from “alternative modernities.” For Harootunian, whereas the latter necessarily sets up an alternative as something exceptional or unique vis-à-vis the standard, a coeval modernity suggests at once different experiences from and the same temporality as in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere. This wariness of the idea of alternative modernities is further clarified in a 2004 essay by Thomas LaMarre, which includes his critique of Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar’s introduction to his 2001 anthology Alternative Modernities. According to Gaonkar, Western modernity has comprised the dilemma between two opposite theories—“societal modernization” pursuing “bourgeois orders and orderliness,” and “cultural modernity” exploring self-exploration and self-realization. For Gaonkar, non-Western modernities complicate the relationship between these two strands of Western modernity by pursuing a “particular angle of interrogation” of the present by creatively adapting Western modernity in a specific cultural site. For LaMarre, however, the problem with Gaonkar’s argument of alternative modernities is that it still locates the origin of modernity in the West, and hence implies a hierarchical relationship between the West and non-West. LaMarre thus illuminates the recent discussions of modernity that “have thoroughly challenged the simple diffusion model of a modernity that originated in the West and extends to the world.”

The projects of Catherine Russell, Wada-Marciano Mitsuyo, Aaron Gerow, and other researchers focusing on Japanese cinema and modernity should be read against this complex background. At the same time, significant dissonances exist between the ways these scholars apply modernity as a conceptual framework. There is especially a gap between Russell and Wada-Marciano on the one hand and Gerow on the other. This dissonance is no less vital for me in elucidating my own approach than the resonance I also find in their work. When they trace the historiography of Japanese cinema, for example in Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie’s The Japanese Film (1959), Noël Burch’s To the Distant Observer (1979), and/or David Bordwell’s Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema (1988), they all start from their respective critical vantage points in order to judge whether these earlier studies had been designed to be production-centered accounts or linear accounts of history, and whether they were directed by the Hollywood-versus-national-cinemas paradigm, modernization theory, and/or the ideology of Japanese-ness or orientalism. The concept of modernity is introduced as a counter-methodology against these notions. At the same time, these scholars foreground their own approach as
enabling them to show how Japanese cinema and its related practices, ranging from production to spectatorship, were enmeshed in larger sociocultural historical processes of the time.

However, they depart from one another in their attitude towards Hansen’s “vernacular modernism” and in their understanding of the relationship between Japanese and American cinema. Russell and Wada-Marciano both adopt vernacular modernism as a conceptual framework for their respective analyses, but they tend to emphasize the particularity of Japanese cinema rather than examine the Japanese reception of Hollywood cinema. Wada-Marciano invents the term “classical Japanese cinema” as an alternative to “classical Hollywood cinema,” and focuses on film genre because, she notes, it was not only a core of studio practice through which to establish “classical Japanese cinema” but also a “critical methodology” that allows us to de-center the predominance of classical Hollywood cinema as the comparative norm and shift focus from canonical film as artistic expression to film as social practice—that is, the continuity of subject identity, community expectations, or the ways that cinema particularized a vernacular form of modernity.59

Russell, on the other hand, sets up “vernacular modernism” as a counter-concept both to Brechtian or avant-garde concepts of high modernism and to the “paradigms of orientalism that have tended to emphasize the Japanese-ness of Japanese cinema at the expense of its modernity.”60 Like Wada-Marciano, Russell also introduces the term “classical Japanese cinema” or “Japanese classical cinema” in contraposition to “classical Hollywood cinema.” But unlike Wada-Marciano, Russell emphasizes the dynamic interaction of Japanese cinema with American cinema not simply in their cinematic styles but in the “public sphere.” As Russell puts it:

Despite Naruse’s ongoing formal idiosyncrasies in the 1930s, he also demonstrates a continued preoccupation with gender, subjectivity, melodrama, and architectural space that were in many ways closely aligned with the American cinema, and which are, in the Japanese context, closely aligned with the modern.61

Nevertheless, throughout the book, Russell tends to highlight the particularity of certain Japanese cultural traditions as they show up in Naruse’s films rather than focus on how they were influenced by or refer to Hollywood cinema. For example, she challenges Bordwell’s argument that silent Japanese films elaborated on their own stylistic idiosyncrasies—“piecemeal,” “calligraphic,” and “flamboyant” styles—as a form of surface decoration grafted on to their essential assimilation into the style of classical Hollywood cinema.62 One of her counter-arguments follows:
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The flamboyant effects were perceived at the time as add-ons to shinpa-style narrative, rather than to Hollywood style. Whereas Bordwell suggests that “the norms of the West provided a framework within which more distinctively ‘Japanese’ elements could be situated,” in fact the reverse is more to the point—that the techniques of Western modernity were added to a framework derived from traditional Japanese theater, to construct a mode of “vernacular modernism.”

This claim, however, poses two vexing questions: 1) why then didn’t Naruse cast onnagata in any of his films—surely a vital convention in shinpa theater, though theatrical shinpa also occasionally used actresses; and 2) why didn’t he have the renowned shinpa onnagata, Hanayagi Shōtarō, act as an onnagata in his 1943 film, Uta-andon?

Here I don’t mean to say that Russell fails to recognize the intricate tripartite relationships between Naruse’s films, the Japanese theater, and Hollywood cinema. It should be added that the peculiar characteristics of Japanese cinema that Russell and Wada-Marciano foreground shouldn’t be confused with essentialist conceptions of Japaneseness insofar as they attempt to contextualize these characteristics within their specific historical sphere. What is at issue is that the historical relationship between Japanese cinema and Hollywood cinema cannot be fully understood only through the textual analysis of film, the approach that Russell and Wada-Marciano mostly count on, despite their broader industrial and social perspective. Both scholars have undoubtedly made significant contributions to our understanding of Japanese film history, especially in their compelling analyses of gender, nationalism, genre, and other social categories represented in Japanese films. But their accounts of the relationship between Japanese and Hollywood cinema rely on textual comparison or on the simple application of such a pre-existing model as “vernacular modernism,” with emphasis on the specificity of Japanese cinema as differentiated from Hollywood cinema. It is at this point that Gerow’s approach is crucial.

Gerow emphasizes the analysis of nonfilmic discourse while refusing to use “vernacular modernism” as an analytical framework. He is wary of applying “vernacular modernism” to his study of Japanese film history precisely because it is still cited as an explanatory model for the domination of Hollywood cinema in the international market, though it is conceptually differentiated from classical Hollywood cinema as the “universal standard.” Gerow remarks that Hansen “may be unwittingly reinforcing the idea that Hollywood occupies the center, and that it is the one to be translated.” For Gerow, neither Hollywood domination nor “the active process of appropriating” Hollywood cinema in various locales that Hansen mentions in her conception of “vernacular modernism” should be taken as a given. Instead, “articulations of modes of cinema such as the classical style,” Gerow suggests, “are
shaped...by struggles over the power to determine meaning and draw boundaries, from both inside and outside. In other words, the relationship between Japanese cinema and Hollywood cinema shouldn't be taken as the direct influence of one on the other or vice versa, but seen as something always mediated by discourses that interpret, translate, or reject film texts within the ongoing struggle over the power to articulate. If I draw this view into my discussion, actresses superseded onnagata around 1920 not because Hollywood cinema directly influenced Japanese cinema, and certainly not because the former was essentially superior, but rather because Hollywood cinema was valued by the critical and commercial discourse of the late teens, discourse that had the power to articulate and circulate in the media and the public sphere. What distinguishes Gerow from Russell and Wada-Marciano is his consideration of the discursive formations and contestations that define and redefine meanings and valuations regarding the relationship between Japanese cinema and Hollywood cinema—although Gerow deliberately does not examine the transnational issue. From this methodological perspective, Gerow’s approach is more useful for understanding Japanese film history than is “vernacular modernism.”

This is not to say, however, that a model such as vernacular modernism or the appropriation of Hollywood cinema on discursive and nondiscursive levels did not exist in the history of Japanese modernity and film. What can be understood as vernacular modernism and modernization theory emerged as part of modernity in certain kinds of discourses while contesting other kinds of discourses and nondiscursive practices in the 1910s and 1920s. One should also be cautious not to privilege nonfilmic discourse too radically. For instance, a producer at Shōchiku, Kido Shirō, called in his book and articles for a new type of cinema depicting a new type of woman, but in fact the films he produced incorporated “traditional values”—for example, an ideology in which a woman must subordinate herself to a man—into their narratives. This requires us to always look at—or at least imaginatively consider, in case the film is no longer extant—possible tensions and contradictions between films and noncinematic discourse. In this book, I will refer to a variety of discourses ranging from those produced by intellectuals and bureaucrats to the discourse of actors, fans, and other social subjects. I will also highlight newly emerging nondiscursive milieus of the time, including industrial formations, technological developments, and the visual environments (that is, theaters, print media, and other public spaces), within which images of both American and Japanese actors increasingly circulated. I assume that discursive practices that produce meaning do not operate in isolation from nondiscursive conditions and processes, and hence we need to consider both these dimensions. In addition, I will conduct comparative analyses between visual images...
of American and Japanese stars in order to explore their historical points of contact, but this is only insofar as they were embedded within the complex, uneven relations among discourses and between discursive and nondiscursive practices in a shared modern social time-space. Again, this book does not aim to provide a comprehensive account of Japanese modernity, much less to theorize it. However, modernity, as we have seen, offers a useful analytical framework that enables us to eschew modernization theory, essentialist notions of Japoneseness or orientalism, and the Hollywood-versus-national-cinemas paradigm, and instead observe how film stardom involved a complex combination of political, economic, social, and cultural formations in its specific global historical context.

In the subsequent chapters, I will outline the formation and transformation of Japanese film stardom while undertaking close examinations of certain, but not all, representative stars of the 1910s and 1920s. In part I, I will discuss the early Japanese film stars, mainly dealing with the benshi and Onoe Matsunosuke. Chapter 1 aims to illuminate the history of the benshi as stars. The benshi could be seen as Japan’s first film stars, preceding the emergence of film actors as stars, and their popularity culminated in 1917, when they were institutionalized under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and the Home Ministry. However, while some benshi subsequently gained both popularity and social respectability, they generally were regarded as vulgar, especially because they could not fulfill the educational role that bureaucrats and intellectuals expected them to play. Moreover, they could no longer foreground their virtuoso voice performances and instead were compelled to serve as nothing but supplemental narrators explaining the images on the screen. Voice performers became marginalized in the industry and ultimately declined, replaced by the talkies by the mid-1930s. The history of the benshi serves as a good prologue (or maesetsu) for understanding the stardom of film actors because both groups were necessarily interrelated. Chapter 2 will discuss the early stardom of Japanese film actors, focusing on Onoe Matsunosuke. The central issues raised here are the foregrounding of these actors’ performative virtuosity, troupe-based corporate business as a dominant production mode at the time, Onoe’s social prominence as sustained by capitalist principles contrasted with the iemoto system, and his aspiration towards state-sponsored values.

In part II, I will analyze the stardom of American film actors, images of whom gained remarkable currency from the mid-1910s. In chapter 3, I will elucidate the formation of the strategic star system in the United States, the circulation of visual images of and discourses regarding these stars in Japan, and the representational underscoring of these stars’ physically manifested sexuality and personality rather than their virtuosic choreography and
technique. Their multifaceted, illusory relationships with fans, as well as the reformist discourse that judged American actors’ physique and expressions as “natural,” are also requisite issues here. In addition, as Japanese audiences embraced American stars, the stars simultaneously countered existing cultural values and promoted certain modern ideologies regarding aesthetics, gender, and class. Such broader cultural implications of U.S. stars in Japan will be investigated in chapter 4. In this chapter, I will also shed light on Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s literary works as an alternative to the majority of the reformist critics’ discourse.

Part III will center on the remarkable transformation of Japanese film stardom in the early 1920s. In chapter 5, I will analyze the restructuring of the Japanese star system, which was achieved by both assimilating aspects of and differentiating itself from the American star system. These changes took place on the institutional level as well as in the representation of stars and the distribution of their images. With particular focus on the celebrated film director Murata Minoru’s attempt to theorize film acting, I will argue that, despite his critical stance vis-à-vis the star system, his theorization nevertheless served to support it in the industry on a practical level. Continuing with the historical overview I have provided so far, the following two chapters will reexamine the transformation of stardom by concentrating on the replacement of the onnagata with actresses, a development that occurred in the early 1920s. In chapter 6, I will show how the canonization of American star images prompted the rise of Japanese actresses. Critics’ comparisons of American and Japanese films—wherein they articulated differences between the onnagata and actresses in terms of the specific quality of the medium, the relationship between performance and image, and the reorganization of gender and sex—were a key force behind this shift. Yet, of course, the replacement did not mean that Japanese cinema adopted Hollywood practice tout court. As I will discuss in chapter 7, while Kurishima Sumiko tended to emulate American stars insofar as she was represented as a sexual image and a personality that remained stable on-screen and off, her stardom was also closely related to that of the popular onnagata of the teens (Tachibana Teijirō especially) in terms of their embodiment of the conventional beauty in a kimono and their portrayal of subtle sentiment. Kurishima’s persona thus epitomized the fusion of newness and tradition, thereby marking the invention of a new traditional Japanese womanliness.

Although the main purpose of the earlier chapters is to illustrate the larger historical transformation of film stardom, part IV will focus on two individual stars: Clara Bow and Natsukawa Shizue. In so doing, I will discuss how stardom involved the phenomenon of modan (“the modern”). I selected these stars not only because both became popular, but also because both were
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frequently referred to in association with *modan*, and hence are useful for us to understand the relationship between cinema stardom and modernity. While both Bow’s and Natsukawa’s personas were those of “modern girls,” each had distinct social and cultural meanings.

These arguments constitute a far-from-exhaustive account of the history of Japanese film stardom in the early twentieth century. Comedy stars, male stars of the twenties, and *jidaigeki* stars are equally important and have yet to be researched. Primary sources for this area of study are also extremely limited. For instance, though Onoe played in more than a thousand movies, only about seven remain, and even these are not completely in the same condition as the original works. Fortunately, however, synopses, so-called film stories (*eiga monogatari*), and reviews, along with books, magazines, newspapers, and other printed materials, survive, albeit incompletely. Needless to say, these print materials do not precisely reflect filmic forms, but they help present some of the cardinal aspects of the formation of film stars. In what follows, with these limitations and possibilities in mind, I will investigate the history of film stardom and its entanglement with modern Japan.