HOLLYWOOD GOES TO TOKYO: AMERICAN CULTURAL EXPANSION AND IMPERIAL JAPAN, 1918–1941

DISSERTATION

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By
Yuji Tosaka, M.A.

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Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Michael J. Hogan, Adviser
Dr. Peter L. Hahn
Dr. Mansel G. Blackford

Approved by
Advisor
Department of History
ABSTRACT

After World War I, the American film industry achieved international dominance and became a principal promoter of American cultural expansion, projecting images of America to the rest of the world. Japan was one of the few countries in which Hollywood lost its market control to the local industry, but its cultural exports were subjected to intense domestic debates over the meaning of Americanization. This dissertation examines the interplay of economics, culture, and power in U.S.-Japanese film trade before the Pacific War.

Hollywood’s commercial expansion overseas was marked by internal disarray and weak industry-state relationships. Its vision of enlightened cooperation became doomed as American film companies hesitated to share information with one another and the U.S. government, while its trade association and local managers tended to see U.S. officials as potential rivals threatening their positions in foreign fields. The lack of cooperation also was a major trade problem in the Japanese film market. In general, American companies failed to defend or enhance their market position by joining forces with one another and cooperating with U.S. officials until they were forced to withdraw from Japan in December 1941. Culturally, Hollywood was signified as a major change agent for promoting a new world of capitalist modernization, interdependence, and
peace unified by the universal influence of democratic, non-political American values and ideals.

Domestic divisions characterized the Japanese film market and reception of American films. On the one hand, Japanese films came to control a large part of the domestic market, and Hollywood was increasingly criticized as a tool of cultural imperialism, a major source of ideological pollution corrupting Japanese traditions and national identities. Such critiques—underlying the growing campaign to impose official controls on American movies after the mid-1930s—were embedded within the nationalist discourses that helped to define the U.S.-Japanese conflict as a clash of civilizations. On the other hand, American films continued to enjoy strong, if limited, popularity, especially among the urban middle-class youth, and the official anti-Hollywood ideology coexisted with a subterranean counter-discourse that imagined American pictures as providing a positive, liberating force and alternative models for modern Japanese life.
Dedicated to my life partner and soul mate, Rumi
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VITA

31 May 1967 . . . . . . . . . . . . . Born – Osaka, Japan

1991 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A. American Studies, Osaka University of Foreign Studies

1994 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . M.A. International Relations, University of Tokyo

1996 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . M.A. History, The Ohio State University

1995 – present . . . . . . . . . Graduate Teaching and Research Associate, The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

HOLLYWOOD AND AMERICANIZATION IN INTERWAR JAPAN

By the 1920s, the modern mass media had begun to create what Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan would later call a “global village.” Major changes in communication and transportation technology, such as the telegraph and telephone, were conquering the traditional barriers of time and distance and linking the remotest villages. One of the most obvious effects of the growth of interconnectedness and mutual awareness—often described as globalization since the last decade of the twentieth century—was to make world history a palpable reality and to alter cultural frames of reference and the context in which human identities were constructed. The question of national identity, a moral sense of organic unity and readily identifiable distinctiveness, often took on added significance in such emerging cosmopolitan contexts shaped by the growing intersection and overlapping of societies and cultures. The process of globalization and increased cultural contact seemed to overrun the established lines of national demarcation and triggered a wide range of reaction over what often appeared to be overt and covert threats to the strengths and vitality of traditional culture.¹

The United States was the main vehicle driving this process of global integration, especially in the years after World War I, when it achieved a dominant position in
various forms of international communication. After the war, the United States emerged as the world’s leading economy and the largest creditor nation. American-controlled media flooded global markets with American popular culture, and America was increasingly recognized as the center of international mass culture, in effect launching a process of Americanization on a global scale. In light of American economic prosperity and influence in the postwar world, almost all aspects of American culture, from its business methods and social values to its lifestyles and fashions, were universally feared, envied, loathed, admired, and emulated all over the world. Of all cultural exports, the Hollywood cinema was perhaps the most visible and influential outpost of American culture in the interwar era, controlling most film markets and enacting the American way of life on the silver screen in crowded movie theaters in almost all corners of the world. It was in this context that Hollywood often became a focal point for localized debates about the question of cultural identity in a new, interconnected world.

One of the most powerful and effective means of modern communication, the movies—and the global influence of Hollywood cinema—certainly came to occupy a prominent place in Japanese public discourse during this period. This Japanese debate over the impact of American popular culture reached an ideological milestone in the symposium on kindai no chōkoku (overcoming the modern) during two hot summer days of 1942. The symposium, held under the auspices of a hastily organized Council on Intellectual Cooperation, brought together some of the nation’s leading writers, critics, and philosophers in the old imperial capital of Kyoto at the height of Japan’s initial military successes in Southeast Asia. To all intents, their talks represented a major in-
Intellectual effort to define the larger ideological meaning and justification in the service of what the Japanese imperial state called “Great East Asia War.”

Interestingly, perhaps the single most important theme that focused the interest of these pro-war intellectuals throughout the two-day roundtable was the clash of tradition and modernity. The discussion was marked by a nativist reaction to what all the participants saw as the invasion of Western civilization since the arrival of the U.S. “black ships” in 1853. In their view, Japan had been rapidly modernized solely as a consequence of the impact of the West and its technology, with the sorry result that traditional values had been called into serious question, if not totally obliterated. In other words, westernization had corrupted the purity of Japanese culture and spiritual life, especially a sense of organic unity under the timeless line of imperial authority, by spreading the curse of rampant materialism, individualism, and liberalism as a set of universalistic, modern ideologies. In this anti-modern, anti-Western vision, even science had become part of a dangerous foreign ideology, as scientific analysis was regarded as a source of skepticism, secular rationality, and materialism based on the Western tradition. Thus, Japan’s “world-historical” mission in the war—the conferees declared in a major reversal of the late nineteenth-century vision of “bunmei kaika” (civilization and enlightenment) and “datsua nyūō” (leaving Asia and joining the West)—was to liberate Japan and Asia from the malaise of modern civilization that had been forcibly imposed by Western imperialism. In this sense, World War II was merely the military part of a larger struggle between two opposing civilizations, between tradition and modernity.
In many ways, the wartime symposium on modernity was essentially a debate about America. According to its ultranationalist discourses, everything that was hateful about modern civilization was represented in what its participants called “Americanism.” Indeed, modernity was often simply another term for Americanization, which was feared as the epicenter of cultural homogenization and spiritual corruption (Americanism, Americanization, and American culture were almost always used interchangeably). America, it was argued, had replaced Europe as the center of modernizing forces, bringing secular and liberal democratic ideas into the Far East. For the conference participants, Americanism, ranging from jazz music to youth fashions, was hated as the purest expression of speed, moral decadence, eroticism, superficial optimism, consumerism, dehumanizing worship of machines and technology, mass politics, and constant sensation. Thus, their representations of America stressed a negative, monstrous culmination of Western civilization, the relentless regime of secular rationality and historical change that had uprooted the timelessness of cultural memory and undermined the ideals of Japan’s unique kokutai, or national polity, a polity that had been found on the racial ethos of self-sacrifice and submission to the emperor as the divine source of all national values and uniqueness.

One of the effects of drawing such essentialized boundaries between Japan and America was to reinforce the idealized image of Japanese national identity at the Kyoto symposium. Americanism, in other words, was the true “other” of Japanese modernity, that is, a binary category that defined who “we” were by identifying the qualities that supposedly were uniquely present only in “them.” In practical terms, moreover, the
problem of Americanism clearly had even broader implications in the ongoing global conflict. Film critic Tsumura Hideo defined its powerful influence as one of the most fundamental obstacles to Japan’s cultural mission to create the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. We should never let our guard down against the perils of Americanism, Tsumura warned in his symposium essay, because it had exhibited enormous, almost magical power to capture the heart of the masses throughout Asia by spreading the poison of modern material civilization as a superficial and decadent yet very appealing way of life.

In this ideological context, it is interesting to note that the Hollywood cinema was implicitly and explicitly drawn as the symbol of Americanization—the most visible and thus most dangerous force of cultural colonization during the interwar period. Tsumura pointed out that Hollywood’s cultural influence was all the more sinister and insidious because American movies had masqueraded as harmless entertainment, unlike Soviet films that were produced and billed as a propaganda tool for revolutionary ideology. Hollywood films claimed universal popularity throughout the world, Tsumura observed, because America did not have great historical and cultural traditions. Bearing a strong resemblance to the analysis about Americanism that had been made by the imprisoned Italian Communist theorist Antonio Gramsci in the early 1930s, he explained that as a new modern nation, America was free from the richness and complexity of past history, customs, manners, and morals. The result was that its movies, because they did not inform national traditions, were made less complicated and more comprehensible for people of all nationalities. Also, the absence of the solid residues of
traditional culture created a unique social order in the New World, one that was put on display for foreign viewers living in America’s shadow, and one that projected such powerful and dangerously seductive images as mass democracy, machine civilization, a new independent feminine personality, jazz music, racial diversity, and urban crimes.

During the symposium, Tsumura and others were persuaded that Hollywood’s vision of Americanism was a malignant contagion spreading the deadly nightmare of rootless, hybrid identities in Japanese culture after World War I. In their mind, the threat of American cultural influence was embodied in the figure of the modan bōi (modern boy) and modan gāru (modern girl), who they said “imported American culture,” “lived frivolous lives without any roots,” and slavishly imitated the latest fashions and mannerisms they saw in American movies. The culture offered by Hollywood cinema, literary critic Kawamura Tetsutarō suggested in his critique of mass culture and society, tapped the deepest fantasies of the masses, allowing ordinary people to dream of a magical transformation that would change their life happily ever after in a wider, more affluent world. Hayashi Fusao, an ex-proletarian writer, equated Americanism with the specter of mass society, which, according to Japanese historian Harry Harootunian, “had been a primary preoccupation of bourgeois writers and modernist criticism in Japan and elsewhere during the interwar period.” Hayashi declared that “American movies attracted the people around the world through democracy.” The motion pictures, he concluded, were nothing but a vulgar amusement that American democracy exported for mass consumption, a magic wand of cultural imperialism seducing ignorant masses around the world. In the wartime official discourse, in other words, the Hollywood
cinema was the central site of a global cultural war between Americanization and its opponents.\textsuperscript{5}

Thus, the \textit{kindai no chōkoku} symposium represented, in a highly abstract, theorized fashion, the type of racial language and imagery that characterized dominant wartime perceptions of the enemy on the Japanese side: Americans as the “demonic other” that threatened the unique “purity” of the Japanese nation as a race and culture. But interestingly, these negative images of Americanism—which are best captured in John W. Dower’s prize-winning book, \textit{War without Mercy\textsuperscript{(1986)}}—were not the only voice in the public sphere even after the outbreak of the Pacific War.\textsuperscript{6} That positive views of Hollywood movies and American culture survived even in wartime Japan is clearly illustrated in the recollection of Yasuoka Shōtarō, one of the leading Japanese novelists in postwar years. Yasuoka was an English major at a Tokyo university and a young film enthusiast when the import and exhibition of Hollywood movies were officially banned after the outbreak of the war. In his memoirs \textit{Katsudō goya no aru fūkei\textsuperscript{(1990)}} [The view with movie theaters], Yasuoka vividly remembers watching Frank Capra’s masterpiece \textit{Mr. Smith Goes to Washington\textsuperscript{(Columbia, 1939)}}—one of the last prewar Hollywood films released in Japan—in a crowded first-run Tokyo theater in October 1941. Yasuoka writes that he became totally absorbed about halfway through the movie and was almost brought to tears in the end, overwhelmed by emotions at its last scenes. Asking himself why it brought him such a thrilling sensation, Yasuoka concludes that it was simply because “the U.S. Capitol possesses such qualities that excite and electrify its observers.”
In the movie, one of Capra’s enormously successful populist films praising the common people and the fundamental goodness of the human spirit, Jefferson Smith, an innocent Boy Rangers leader played by James Stewart, is sent to Washington by a western state political machine to complete a dead senator’s term. He is only expected to be a yesman to rubber-stamp a corrupt, useless dam construction bill, one that would require the government to purchase the land around the projected site that had been secretly bought up by the political machine under bogus names. Taking his new responsibility all too seriously, Smith eventually begins to draft and introduce his own pet project, a bill that would realize his dream of creating a national boys’ camp. But his camp project happens to be located at the same site that had already been designated for the corrupt dam proposal. When Smith finally suspects political corruption in the competing dam project, the state’s senior senator Joseph Harrison Payne, at the behest of the machine boss, instead frames him with forged documents and alleges that Smith’s camp proposal has been introduced for his own unethical profit. He is investigated for possible expulsion in Senate committee hearings, where he is unable to prove his innocence. But after a late-night visit to the Lincoln Memorial, Smith decides to stand fast and fight back and uses one-man filibustering tactics the next morning to stall a vote on his ouster and expose the corrupt dam project. After twenty-three hours of filibustering, an exhausted Smith faints and collapses on the Senate floor, but Payne’s conscience finally breaks him down and makes him admit, after his failed suicide attempt, that every word Smith said was the truth. Thus, an unconscious Smith is
vindicated as a moral hero, symbolizing a miraculous triumph of American democracy and freedom over political evil and corruption.

Yasuoka remembers that he, of course, had never before heard of the filibuster process in the U.S. Congress. But once the filibustering scenes unrolled, even Japanese viewers were soon able to understand the legislative rules that allowed a senator to prevent a vote as long as he stays on his feet and continues to speak on the Senate floor. The movie’s appeal, writes Yasuoka, clearly reflected the popular fantasies about the possibility of such heroic, liberating actions in a single-party imperial state under military dictatorship. Also, when Nazi Germany controlled most of the European continent in World War II, Yasuoka and others were visibly impressed by the fact that Capra’s movie had the confidence to portray corrupt, unethical politicians and intrigues in the U.S. Congress even while giving full tribute to the blessings of liberty in American democracy. Mr. Smith Goes to Washington may appear to be just another Hollywood fairy tale decades later, but Yasuoka believes that it represents what he calls “America’s soul” [Amerika jin no tamashii] and that Smith’s simple faith and political idealism touch a universal chord in the hearts of American people as much as other peoples in places lacking liberal democracy. In 1942, when film study clubs in Tokyo universities gathered to select the best movies of 1941, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington was in fact their unanimous choice in foreign cinema. The transnational appeal of American mass culture, containing an alternative vision of democratic popular politics and social freedom, could not be suppressed so easily by the official ideology of
anti-Americanism even when the bloodshed and flames of the war closed off the bridges of cultural communication across the Pacific for several years.7

Historiographical Overview: The Cultural Turn, Hollywood, and U.S.-Japan Relations

The two competing perspectives, the one presented by the kindai no chōkoku symposium and the other by Yasuoka’s reception of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, dramatized Japanese images of American mass culture between the two world wars. Opposition to the international appeal of American movies helped provide the philosophical underpinnings of Japanese wartime propaganda, at the same time that they continued to attract admiration from many young Japanese. Indeed, globalization of American cultural influence, an ontological problem for “overcoming” in the wartime state ideology, may be viewed more broadly as one of the master international narratives in twentieth-century history. The United States has exported everything from mass-produced consumer goods, like soft drinks, Levi’s, and Nike shoes, to popular culture and entertainment, such as jazz and rock music, sports, television programs, Mickey Mouse, and Donald Duck. To a great extent, it has helped produce a deterritorialized and homogenized world that has been increasingly linked by the cultural wonders of the New World, while often arousing nationalist outcries about the perils of cultural imperialism and the erosion of local cultures by American cultural exports. And nowhere else has American cultural influence been as predominant as in the field of motion pictures. By the time World War I ended in 1918, the American film industry
was in a commanding position all over the world, and its foreign earnings would eventually exceed half of all its revenues by the mid-1990s.8

In order to understand the international context of American cultural influence, this dissertation examines the transmission and reception of Hollywood movies in Japan between the two world wars. It explores the intersection between culture and international relations on multiple, interrelated levels of analysis, from industry politics and discourses to commercial expansion and diplomacy. The narrative begins with an examination of the domestic underpinnings of Hollywood’s overseas expansion, such as Hollywood’s organizational approaches (or limits thereof) to the U.S. federal government in the foreign field and the American discourse on Hollywood’s cultural influence abroad. Further, a consideration of major importance to the dissertation is the question of Japanese reception, relating to such issues as the business expansion of the American film industry in the Japanese market, Japanese perceptions of Hollywood films, and U.S.-Japan film-trade diplomacy on the eve of World War II. In a broader sense, my work provides me with a unique way to address two of the most significant newer concerns and directions in the field: the interest in cultural history and the Americanization (globalization) debate.

The expansion of American cultural influence—the focal point of this dissertation—is crucial to our understanding of America’s relationships with the larger world during the twentieth century. The process has been aptly characterized as “Coca-colonization” by the Austrian historian Reinhold Wagnleitner. According to the diplomatic historian Emily S. Rosenberg, American cultural expansion has been an
important engine of the advance of American economic and political influence, while
the extension of American power and government assistance also has been the linchpin
of the remarkable global spread of American cultural influence during the twentieth
century. In his recent one-volume history of U.S. foreign relations in the Cold War era,
Warren I. Cohen has also suggested that when future historians look back at the Cold
War and its global impact, “they are less likely to be struck by the death and destruction
facilitated by the superpowers than by the influence of American culture,” such as “the
McDonald’s, Pizza Huts, and Kentucky Fried Chicken franchises found all over the
world, the blue jeans and rock and roll.” Reflecting recent discussions of globalization,
the growth of international integration and interdependence often viewed as “West-
ernization” or “Americanization” of the world, Akira Iriye also makes an interesting
and increasingly influential point that “the steady process of globalization, rather than
the rise and fall of bipolar superpower confrontation, emerges as the key phenomenon
of recent history.” Thus, the interest in non-diplomatic issues, which often operate in
relatively autonomous spheres from the high politics of nation-states, provides a very
important analytical framework for understanding the history of U.S. foreign relations
within the broader context of global influences and development.9

The question of culture is in the forefront of some of the new and most signifi-
cant directions that have helped to reinvigorate the historical study of American foreign
relations since the early 1990s. In part, this new cultural turn has been driven by external
forces outside the discipline, especially the end of the Cold War and the rise of “glob-
alization.” From the vantage point of the post-Cold War era, with the ultimate prospect
of nuclear doomsday no longer just around the corner, there is a growing awareness that many important issues had been obscured by the preoccupation with geopolitical and strategic issues that seemed to lie at the heart of international relations after World War II. Instead, “globalization” has increasingly become a keyword for describing what French *Annales* historian Fernand Braudel calls the “longue durée,” or the underlying structural components shaping the long-term evolution of economic, political, social, and cultural developments and institutions. The cross-border flow of people, capital, ideas, and information, rather than state-to-state relations and great-power rivalry, has been presented increasingly as the most important historical development in the modern world, changing even the nature of international relations itself and linking peoples and nations together in an ever-tighter web of global integration and interdependence. Thus, a growing awareness of globalization has helped to recast the field of diplomatic history and encourage a major shift away from the traditionally dominant approach that examines the questions of diplomacy, national security, and war through an exclusive focus on the official, governmental level and policy formation. Instead, international relations are increasingly seen in terms of the totality of different, complex forms and layers of transnational processes and interaction, and increasing attention is being paid to new subjects such as cultural transfer, as well as economic exchanges, the role of non-state actors and technology, human migrations, international movements, and environmental problems. Such international forces and trends are not necessarily confined within national borders and reinforce the need to decenter the nation-state as the primary principle of organization for historical analysis.¹⁰
At the same time, the recent effort to extend the frontiers of American diplomatic history is also driven by internal forces within the discipline. In many ways, it is a belated response to the numerous criticisms that have been aimed at traditional diplomatic history focusing on the classic questions of geopolitics, national security, and war. A number of leading scholars have lamented the crisis of diplomatic history since the 1970s. They have made numerous calls to explore conceptual and methodological innovations and to recast the field into the broader and more inclusive study of the totality of relationships between societies and cultures. Many diplomatic historians have increasingly responded to this sustained exercise of self-reflection and self-criticism by exploring the possibility of drawing new theories and approaches from other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, such as anthropology, literary criticism, cultural studies, and sociology. There is a growing, if not yet preponderant, voice within the field that such an approach—which Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman calls “the New Diplomatic History”—is the only way to open diplomatic history to topics of central concern to many historians today, namely social and cultural history, and to reintegrate the discipline to the mainstream of the historical profession.11

Indeed, it seems clear that the movement to redefine the field of U.S. diplomatic history has come at a right time—when there is a burgeoning effort aimed at internationalizing the study of American history. Recognizing the limitations of traditional nation-centered approaches in the age of globalization, many scholars—particularly cultural and social historians—have started to explore the importance of transnational forces and connections in shaping the American past. It was in this context that Lynn
Hunt, then president of the American Historical Association, recently wrote a similar state-of-the-art commentary about historical studies in the United States. A specialist in the history of the French Revolution and a major proponent of the turn toward cultural history since the late 1980s, Hunt stressed the decline of theoretical concerns in almost every field of history and observed that historians were now being forced to reevaluate the past in light of the current interest in issues of globalization. Her prediction, interestingly enough, was that “the next big thing” might be “some kind of revival or re-fashioning of diplomatic and/or military history.”

Spurred by both external and internal circumstances, the cultural approach thus has become one of the key interpretive frameworks that have helped to expand the conceptual horizons of American diplomatic history. The newer literature on culture and international relations has presented two main avenues of research. The first explores the intellectual or cultural underpinnings of U.S. foreign relations, seeking to illuminate the domestic values and discourses that helped to shape American policies toward other countries. Increasingly influenced by cultural studies and poststructuralist theories, these scholars see culture not as a simple reflection of political and economic interests but rather as a productive force in the formation of social identities and in the shaping of the external behavior of the United States. Yet, their efforts often seem to be far more successful in decoding meaning than in inferring causal explanation. Their analysis is often criticized for privileging certain ideas, such as concepts of gender and race, without demonstrating that American culture shaped policy formulation more than did economic or political interests and structures. The second strand of cultural analysis
has focused on issues of cultural transfer or cultural exchange, exploring the enormous influence of American goods, ideas, and popular culture, as well as the way that American history has been shaped by the nation’s relationships, real and imagined, with the rest of the world. This second, intercultural approach, doubtlessly spurred by the recent interest in globalization and its cultural ramifications, offers a rich, concrete perspective on how cultural exports and influences from the United States have been received and often altered beyond its borders, while also integrating the first strand of analysis and revealing the cultural motivations and activities of the U.S. government, as well as corporations, interest groups, and non-governmental organizations. Still, these studies have tended to focus on the second half of the twentieth century, a clear reflection of the unmistakable historical fact that the impact of the United States on the wider world reached a hitherto unknown, almost imperial scale and scope in the post-World War II era.\(^\text{13}\)

It was the interwar period, however, that truly laid the foundation of American cultural influence after World War II. By World War I, the communications revolution had made the mass media a significant force in making popular culture so much a part of everyday life, a key constitutive element of individual and national identities, in advanced capitalist societies. In this new international context, economic wealth and power had helped the United States refine and control new forms of communication and entertainment abroad, such as telegraph cables, news service, and popular music (especially jazz music), which in turn earned profits for U.S. corporations and helped to extend U.S. influence abroad. In other words, the years after the World War I were a
formative period in the international debates on Americanization. American mass culture became so ubiquitous that its international dominance came to have economic, political, and cultural consequences beyond U.S. borders and the problematic nature of Americanization increasingly became a controversial topic among foreign observers.

It was in this new context that Hollywood movies became perhaps the most significant outpost of American popular culture beyond U.S. borders. Richard Pells, a cultural historian writing on the impact of American culture on Europe after World War II, observes that “cinema became synonymous with Hollywood” in the 1920s and made Europeans “familiar with American products, lifestyles, patterns of behavior, and values.” “Before the outbreak of World War II,” he continues, “Hollywood had come to represent in the minds of many prominent European intellectuals everything they dreaded and despised about American mass culture.” In this sense, Hollywood may be seen as a quintessential part of the “borderlands,” as David Thelen puts it in his call for the internationalization of American history, where “people use[d] words, and ultimately create[d] lives, out of materials from two or more cultures.”

Nevertheless, the literature on Hollywood’s international influence, just like the larger scholarship on Americanization (with the notable exception of the literature on the American missionary experience in Asia), has focused on European nations. This is due in no small part to the lack of familiarity with non-European languages among American historians. Thus, the aim of this dissertation is to extend the scope of analysis to non-Western nations and explore the Japanese response to Hollywood movies in the interwar period. In his study of the Austrian reception of American mass culture after
World War II, Reinhold Wagnleitner also has suggested that the presence of common, transatlantic cultural heritage between Europe and the United States was “the decisive reason why the spreading of U.S. culture in Europe was not confronted with insurmountable hurdles with regard to either formal or material acculturation.” His argument offers an interesting counterpoint in reflecting on the broader cultural significance of Hollywood cinema in interwar Japan. What mechanism was involved in the process of cultural transmission when the two countries supposedly shared little common cultural heritage and tradition across the Pacific? Was it a classic case of cultural imperialism, as charged by kindai no chōkoku ideologues during World War II? Or, were they any other structures and forces at work when American films intersected with Japanese culture between the two world wars?15

The impact of American culture also has largely been overlooked in the historical scholarship on U.S.-Japanese relations during the interwar period. Nearly two decades ago, Akira Iriye, a leading historian of Japanese-American relations, suggested in his historiographical essay on American cultural influence in East Asia in the twentieth century that “changes in life styles and popular entertainment are far more durable than shifts in official policies.” Nevertheless, there are still few systematic studies exploring non-governmental, particularly cultural, relationships between the two countries during the 1920s and 1930s, with the noticeable exception of the immigration controversy and business and missionary activities. Because of the dominant position of the Pacific War in the historical narrative of Japan-U.S. relations, however, scholars
have focused on a detailed examination of diplomatic and security issues leading to the roots of the war on both sides of the Pacific.16

The question of Americanization, however, provides a very important window in evaluating the historical nature of the Japanese-American relationship in general. To date there are two larger interpretive frameworks in the study of U.S.-Japan relations. One master narrative, evident in Walter LaFeber’s *The Clash* (1997), sees conflict as the dominant theme in the relationship. In this view, the relationship has been marked by a set of sharp, deep-rooted cultural, economic, and diplomatic differences on both sides of the Pacific. The competing narrative is the convergence paradigm, which is expressed perhaps most systematically in the works of Akira Iriye. Despite war and racial misunderstandings in the past and economic frictions in the present, Iriye has argued, the United States and Japan always have shared more areas of agreement in terms of basic values and economic and political goals, such as the mutual desire for a Wilsonian “order of economic development and interdependence.” Thus, the complexity of Japanese attitudes toward Hollywood movies, with localized debates and cultural wars encompassing violent antagonism at one pole and wholehearted acceptance at the other, offers fertile ground for illuminating the entangled web of often uncertain, tumultuous relationships that found the two nations both enemies and allies, real and imagined, over different periods of their mutual history since the mid-nineteenth century.17
Theoretical and Definitional Problems

This dissertation explores the intersection of various conceptual and methodological approaches, examining the transmission and reception of American films across the boundaries of culture, race, and nation. In writing about Hollywood and Japan in the interwar period, the study has drawn upon a wide range of scholarly literature from the fields of American and Japanese history, from diplomatic history, film studies, and international communications research, and from new critical approaches in cultural and literary studies. Sources for this dissertation include both American and Japanese materials, such as the records and publications of the U.S. Commerce Department and State Department, the papers of Hollywood’s trade association and United Artists Corporation archives, Japanese trade journals and popular magazines, and the records of the Japanese Foreign Ministry and Home Ministry. My work combines both thematic and chronological approaches, seeking to weave historical narratives together across the multiplicity of social and political scales, ranging from national governments to non-state actors like industries and individual consumers.

To these ends, this dissertation highlights three major, intertwined themes. The first strand of analysis focuses on the domestic sides of Hollywood’s commercial and cultural expansion abroad and places the American control of world film markets within the broader context of domestic political economy and discourses about modernization and the communications revolution. The second concern includes a careful examination of the Japanese sides of intercultural relations and considers how Hollywood movies
were actually received and interpreted within the changing economic, social, and cultural contexts of interwar Japan. The last part of the study traces the increasing intersection of cultural with diplomatic issues after the mid-1930s. It explores how culture often affected state-to-state relations in particular contexts by analyzing how Japanese authorities proceeded to restrict Hollywood’s influence in Japan within the ideological paradigm of anti-Americanism and assessing how ideas about the worldwide influence of Hollywood films affected the mutual attitudes of American and Japanese negotiators and the policies they adopted prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War.

The dissertation often focuses on several concepts that have been widely used and just as widely debated by scholars in various disciplines. Before proceeding further, I shall start with some working definitions, however sketchy, of important concepts that run throughout the course of this study: “Americanization,” “culture,” “discourse,” and “ideology” (or their adjectival forms: “cultural,” “discursive,” and “ideological”), as well as “modernity.”

Though the term is often used rather liberally, “Americanization” has been a very debated, confusing, and spongy concept open to multiple definitions. In older accounts, Americanization has often been used to stand for the notion of “cultural imperialism.” In this view, America has sought to remake the world in its own image, as the wartime Japanese critics claimed, by controlling the mass media all over the world and imposing its foreign values on other cultures. American cultural exports always acted as a kind of magic potion to produce predictable Americanizing effects by spreading features of mass culture and consumerism and transforming other countries
into expanding markets for U.S. manufactured products. Thus, Hollywood may be considered to be the quintessential “culture industry,” to borrow from the classic Marxist theory of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, a key ideological apparatus with a global reach that disseminated formulaic, cheap, soothing amusements to control and manipulate the alienated masses as happy consumers under modern international capitalism.

But recently, some scholars, focusing on the reception issue, have called Americanization a “myth” and stressed instead the process of audience selectivity and hybridization in intercultural exchange. Americanization, the historian David W. Ellwood argues, was “a particularly distinctive form of modernization,” mediated by American political, economic, and cultural influence. Other societies, with their own variants of modernity, have adopted and reshaped aspects of American culture—especially advanced features of consumerism and mass culture—while resisting the rest as inappropriate to “their own needs, tastes, and traditions.” Meanwhile, other scholars have placed greater emphasis on the notion of cultural homogenization, characterizing Americanization as nothing more than a generic, universal process of modernization, westernization, or globalization. The roots of American cultural influence are traced to America’s position as the foremost economic power in global capitalism. As such, the United States developed and mediated features of mass society and consumer culture more fully than others in the twentieth century. Thus, American mass culture, including Hollywood movies, simply served as the principal promoter and exporter of “the latest capitalist culture of mass consumption,” one that would be a
universal development common to every modern, or capitalist, society all over the world.\textsuperscript{18}

My thinking about the question of “Americanization” in interwar Japan has been strongly influenced, among others, by a body of recent U.S. scholarship on modern Japanese intellectual history. These scholars have challenged the traditional historical narrative that focused on the origins of Japanese fascism, ultranationalism, and militarism as the intellectual roots of Japan’s road to the so-called fifteen-year war in Asia and the Pacific. Instead, they have asked new types of questions about prewar Japanese history by looking at the new field of mass culture in modern Japan. These scholars, sometimes described as the Chicago school (many have been affiliated with the University of Chicago, either as professors or graduate students), have drawn on neo-Marxist critical theory and postmodern literary criticism to study the Japanese experiences of modernity as local instances of a larger global process marked by capitalist modernization and an increasingly transnational commodity culture. Their subtle and sophisticated works provide a new perspective on Japan’s interwar history by stressing the universality of the modern Japanese historical experience, but the focus of their textual analysis has been elite intellectuals and their literary and philosophical reactions to the rise of modernity and mass society, rather than popular consumption and the impact of mass culture in prewar Japan. Still, the Chicago school and its new intellectual history offer very important conceptual implications for this dissertation, especially with regard to the question of Americanization.\textsuperscript{19}
What appears in the Chicago school’s scholarship makes clear that the “influence” model of intellectual history is not a sufficient narrative on Japanese modernity, contrary to the kindai no chōkoku critique of cultural imperialism. One of the main contributions made by these intellectual historians is to criticize the notion of Japanese exceptionalism in the traditional academic and popular discourses on Japan. Their “universalist” framework about the global synchronicity of modernity makes an important statement about the question of Americanization. It shows that interwar Japan, as always an integral part of transnational capitalism, should be considered an advanced capitalist nation along the lines of America, Britain, France, or Germany, facing certain common outlooks and engaging in shared global debates about the problems of modernity. Thus, it is impossible to label mass culture in interwar Japan as just an alien transplant that had been superimposed as a cultural invasion or colonization by the Hollywood cinema. Rather, mass culture had been a part of larger cross-national structures, so to speak, a part of worldwide historical developments even if they might originate in a domestic setting. The universality of Japanese historical experience is perhaps best captured in the field of economic history. This point is hardly surprising in that it draws generalized notions and models about modern capitalism and industrialization—rather than seeing Japan transformed only exogenously by the introduction of Western technology and institutions—even while dwelling on national differences and cultural and institutional divergences. Modern capitalism had, as Karl Marx observed, “through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country.” Thus, Chicago-school historians reveal that
both the United States and Japan had been incorporated into the global context of
capitalist modernization, developing a host of similar, and at times parallel, institutions,
interests, and ideas on both sides of the Pacific.²¹

Nevertheless, the validity of universalist assumptions still seems to leave the
problem of distinctiveness. In many ways, the Hollywood cinema might have been an
ideological superstructure of global capitalism, the dream-text of the utopian aspirations
for good life, material abundance, and a liberation of desire in an increasingly cosmo-
opolitan culture of capitalist consumption. But was “Americanization” simply a myth in
interwar Japan? It still may be necessary to determine what was commonly perceived as
uniquely “American” and identify the cultural meaning and appeal that American
movies often had for Japanese audiences. What were truly exceptional about the Hol-
lywood cinema, at least in the eyes of Japanese audiences, as opposed to the movies
from other capitalist nations, Europe or Japan? What was the nature of Hollywood’s
“Americanism” that would later leave the wartime ideologues so exasperated and
bewildered in the 1942 symposium on modernity? What was the special magnetism, if
any, that might have attracted so many Japanese viewers to the movie-made world of
Hollywood cinema? Also, Edward Said, in Orientalism (1978) and Culture and Impe-
rialism (1993), has shown that recurring images of the “other” help to define political
ideologies and concepts of identity through powerful cultural dichotomies. In what
ways, then, might Japanese perceptions of American life displayed on screen have
helped to shape how many Japanese thought about their own society and culture during
the interwar period? The aim of this dissertation is to look especially for clues to these
key questions about the problematic, dialogic nature of Americanization as a primary site of ideological contention in interwar Japan.22

“Culture” is another term that defies easy definition. Raymond Williams explains that “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.” It is thus all the more necessary to attain a clear understanding of this always elusive concept. In a traditional, still popular usage, culture is a concept that, as Matthew Arnold proclaimed in the mid-nineteenth century, describes refining and elevating elements, involving such characteristics as “beauty,” “intelligence,” “cultivation,” and “perfection,” that is, “the best that had been thought and known in the world.” Culture, he believed, is a separate, abstract sphere that cushions the pressure of everyday economic, social, and political concerns. In this sense, the term “culture” is commonly regarded as “high culture,” encompassing the highest achievements of men of intellect and art: the canon of literature, painting, music, and theater that can claim to be of universal, timeless value in the best humanistic tradition. This “highbrow” notion of literary and artistic achievements is usually contrasted to the notion of “mass culture” (or popular/low culture), which refers to consumerism and popular art and entertainment enjoyed by the majority population in a modern society, such as mass-produced consumer goods, the movies, radio and television programs, pulp fiction, and other popular forms peddled commercially by the mass media.23

In contrast, an oft-cited and influential definition of culture owes much to the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, whose writing has done much to broaden inquiry beyond the commonplace binary of high/low oppositions. Here, culture is defined
as “socially established structures of meaning” embodied in historically transmitted symbolic forms by which members of a given group interact and communicate the significances that they attach to their social actions as well as the world they inhabit. And yet, Geertz’s semiotic notion of culture as the “webs of significance,” while often useful in decoding various social practices, is often problematic, according to many critics, in reifying notions of the coherence and traditional continuity of particular cultures. The cultural historian James Clifford and others have challenged the idea of culture as a static, organic whole unified by shared meanings, values, and traditions. Instead, they have shown that culture is rooted in dynamic, contingent, negotiated processes, an unsettled site of contention over meaning and knowledge that is ultimately constructed as webs of symbolic mystification and justification of local power structures. Their critique also has raised questions about the essential boundaries of a culture itself, seeing it as an open entity constituted by a complex interplay of cross-cultural, transnational forces circulating in interconnected global contexts. Thus, I use the term “culture”—at least in a domestic sense—as analogous to Raymond Williams’s concept of the “dominant culture,” which describes a system of signifying practices and values that sustains distributions of power and influence in a given society.24

According to the definition outlined above, “culture” in the “dominant” phase is almost synonymous with the concept of “discourse” or “ideology.” Discourse, Michel Foucault argues, is a constitutive element that refers to the articulation of language on social relations and material conditions. To be sure, the social world exists outside language, but there is no transparent representation of material reality in language.
Rather, it is constantly mediated by and through the operation of arbitrary signs, concepts, and beliefs that acts as a form of power, the power to label and designate truth and thus to construct the conditions of existence for human subjectivity and knowledge. The genealogy of the term “ideology” is as difficult as that of culture. In Cold War America, for example, it usually was a term of anti-communist political abuse. Ideology, in this view, was a set of rigid, dogmatic, extremist, and fanatical principles, which was supposed to control the Soviet Union, while the United States supposedly saw things as they really were through more modest, rational, piecemeal, and pragmatic wisdom. As Geertz suggests, however, ideology is part of a cultural system universally inscribed as a legitimizing force in any modern society. “It refers more precisely,” Terry Eagleton explains, “to the processes whereby interests of a certain kind become masked, rationalized, naturalized, universalized, legitimated in the name of certain forms of political power.” In this definition, the terms “culture,” “discourse,” and “ideology” overlap one another as an organizing force that constitutes certain material effects in social life, although the concept of ideology or discourse is far more explicit in implying that certain ideas are actively concerned with the establishment and defense of the interests of ruling groups and thus represent elements of symbolic imposition, coercion, and consciousness, if possibly partial, in the reproduction of social order.25

“Modernity” is another concept that also seems to demand some working, if loose, definition. This introduction has, in fact, been discussing representations of modernity in the Hollywood cinema a good deal in its account of the kindai no chōkoku symposium. For those wartime Japanese intellectuals, the discourses of modernity
championed notions of progress, individual subjectivity, and scientific rationality as the foundation of universal truth and knowledge. The totalizing regime of expanding modernity, they warned, continued to disrupt and banish the inherited traditions and spiritual sensibilities of the Japanese people. The wartime anti-modernist ideology encapsulated important elements of what is commonly regarded as the experience of modernity. Modernity, as defined by the sociologist Anthony Giddens, refers to “modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence.” The dynamics of modernity has entered “our day-to-day existence” through such transformative forces as commodity production, industrialization, new transportation and communication technology, individualization, secularization, urbanization, and the growth of bureaucratic administrative power. Following Giddens’s theorization, modernization can be described as the processes by which the construction of modernity has swept away “all traditional types of social order” around the world—thus often fueling a sense of anxiety, uncertainty, and nostalgia over the perceived loss of a stable, historical culture capable of defining the authenticity of national identity.  

Chapter Organization

Hollywood between the two world wars was an integral part of the larger historical narrative about the general expansion of American economic and cultural influence abroad. Chapter 1 outlines the growth of the American film industry as a mul-
tional culture industry during the early twentieth century and describes its organizational approaches to foreign economic expansion. After World War I, the United States emerged as the principal exporter of motion pictures and controlled the majority of the screen time in most countries. The American movie business became highly dependent on foreign markets and earned 30–40 percent of its gross revenues overseas. But the rise of Hollywood as a multinational enterprise began to create a host of new problems in other parts of the world. In order to handle their international affairs and coordinate their export policies, among others, the moguls of the movie industry created a new trade association, Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1922. The formation of the MPPDA represented the interconnection between domestic and international imperatives. Hollywood studios sought to develop a structure of institutional cooperation with the federal government not only in domestic policies but also in foreign relations. Their organizational efforts illustrated the degree to which American leaders in the interwar era sought to extend what many scholars have described as corporatism or associationalism—a domestic system of political economy founded on public-private collaboration—to the international spheres as well. Yet, this chapter challenges the prevailing assumption about the close partnership between the American film industry and the U.S. government. It seeks to show instead that the two did not necessarily pursue the same policies or identical interests and that their relationships were often marred by a series of organizational tensions and underlying disagreements.
Chapter 2 recognizes Hollywood as a cultural institution and investigates the discursive formations that inscribed a web of conceptual structures and symbolic meanings on the impact of American movies abroad. The Hollywood cinema was associated with a range of cultural consequences both within and outside the United States. The most widely held belief about its overseas impact was probably Americanization, which also presupposed the interconnection between domestic and international orders. In this view, the spread of American movies was seen as a major engine reshaping national cultural boundaries and promoting the urban consumerist vision of modernity at home. At the same time, the international spread of Hollywood films was believed to project such a modern, homogenized culture of mass consumption all over the world. Also, Hollywood’s global vision stressed that the communications revolution unleashed the ineluctable process of global convergence toward a common set of cultural traits and practices as a basis for a newly emerging international system. The forces of homogenization, mediated by the all-powerful influence of American democracy displayed on screen, were expected to act as a transnational force that would change the basis of international relations itself and integrate the world into a peaceful liberal capitalist order based on American but universally recognized models and values. And yet, after World War I, local forms of cultural resistance abroad often set important limits on the universalist discourse of Americanization and thus on the American faith in the Hollywood cinema as a vehicle for spreading the American way of life and fostering international prosperity and peace.
How, then, did Hollywood’s global visions actually relate to the local economic and cultural contexts in receiving societies? There is a long-standing methodological division in the field, according to Robert J. McMahon, on whether American diplomatic history should be studied as a part of “national history” or “international history,” whether its students should focus on an “internalist” or “externalist” approach. On the one hand, many scholars have argued that the study of American foreign relations is a subfield of American history in that U.S. foreign policy is largely shaped by the internal configuration of forces—perceptions, values, and interests within American society and the American state. This critical question of policy formation, in their view, can best be answered by “a mastery of American archival sources.” In contrast, others have stressed that one cannot consider policy evaluation, or assess the impact of American actions and policies abroad, without analyzing the external forces and structures that influenced, constrained, or sometimes altered the projection of American power and influence in ways that Americans did not intend or even imagine. Thus, the internationalist critique urges a greater familiarity with area expertise and linguistic skills coupled with binational or multinational research as the ideal method to avoid a one-sided perspective of the world as seen by the Americans. It should be noted, however, that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive but rather must ideally be combined to present a more complete view of the meaning of the American encounter with the wider world.27

Toward this end, the second part of the dissertation seeks to juxtapose and place American and Japanese perspectives in mutual dialogue, as it were, and to explore the transmission and reception of Hollywood films in Japan and their political, economic,
and cultural consequences after World War I. Chapter 3 shifts the story to the Japanese side and examines the consumption patterns of American movies and the evolution of Hollywood’s business practices in Japan from the end of the war to the mid-1930s. Hollywood films were not merely a matter of cultural transfer but their reception was shaped by more profound forces and structures that were decades in duration and transforming Japan, such structural factors as changes in demography, economy, and communications technology. During the early twentieth century, the growth of modern capitalism created an expanding popular market for mass entertainment, and the movies became the most popular culture industry in interwar Japan. But Japan was one of the few countries in which Hollywood, despite its constant, substantial popularity, failed to sustain a dominant position in the local film markets. This study highlights the need to look beneath the nation as the essential unit of analysis and to place the question of Americanization within the historical specificity of local social and economic settings. In large part, the limits of Hollywood’s economic expansion in Japan were a product of the dualistic character of Japanese film culture between the two world wars. There was a pronounced preference for American movies among urban middle-class audiences as a symbol of their cultural sophistication and cosmopolitanism, while domestic films had a large following among rural and working classes, who tended to favor more familiar, native themes for an evening’s entertainment. Besides, the lack of official trade barriers against Hollywood movies served as a major disincentive for American film companies to enter into local film production and exhibition as a way to establish economic control in the Japanese market.
Chapter 4 examines the discursive field that constituted Japanese perceptions of the Hollywood cinema during the interwar period. In Japanese opinion, the end of World War I ushered in the forces of Americanization in society and culture and the movies were the most influential vehicle for such Americanization. The Hollywood cinema served as a semiotic site where Japanese audiences gained and reinforced their idealized versions of American life. On close examination, however, it becomes clear that Japanese responses to American films, with a mix of rejection and attraction, revealed less about their actual content itself than about the established universe of Japanese stereotypes of American society and culture. On the one hand, Japanese reactions were a projection of a widespread sense of social fragmentation and anxieties about the rapid modernization of Japan itself. For many Japanese, the Hollywood cinema represented threatening nightmares posed by the specter of Americanism, such as the coming of modernity and its uncertainties, the problems of capitalism and money-driven, conformist mass society, and the leveling of the traditional gender hierarchies. But at the same time, there were also positive reactions to American movies in interwar Japan. Many praised Hollywood movies as a symbol of liberating promises, such as a democratic vision of social mobility and an egalitarian, sexually liberated culture. Thus, both negative and positive views of American films were equally grounded in notions of binary oppositions that constructed the American “other” as an imagined counterpoint to Japan, ultimately repressing the burgeoning reality of modernity at home and labeling it as a foreign transplant originating in a world beyond Japan’s borders.
Chapter 5 traces the evolution of U.S.-Japan film relations after the mid-1930s. Dramatic changes in society and culture have often been experienced as an intense crisis that evoked a sense of discontinuity, chaos, and disorder in modernizing nations. Such fears about the dislocations of modernity, fueled by the Great Depression, led to a powerful revival of Japanese interest in the imagined past, some authentic moment of stability that captured the essence of Japanese culture. In the context of growing official nationalism, Hollywood films were increasingly seen as the linchpin of American cultural influence, and Japanese authorities in the mid-1930s began to tighten their regulation against imported films as a part of the ideological movement to police and control the “foreign” character of urban consumer culture in Japan. The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in the summer of 1937 moved the Japanese government to impose a total ban on foreign film imports for economic and cultural reasons. The American movie industry, which had dominated the Japanese market for foreign films, entered into yearlong negotiation to reopen the door on the Japanese film market. This chapter examines the often labyrinthian process of negotiations by which the MPPDA reached a new quota settlement with Japanese authorities, as well as the continuing limits of the “corporatist” relationship between Hollywood and Washington as a coordinating mechanism for solving foreign economic problems.

Chapter 6 examines the contradictory locations of American movies in Japanese politics and culture on the eve of the Pacific War. Despite the new trade agreement, Hollywood’s export was not restored even to the limited quota level because of Japanese bureaucratic foot-dragging measures. The market for American pictures was fur-
ther curtailed after the Japanese government enacted a new film law in late 1939. Its goal was to establish rigid state control over the movie industry as a major instrument of official propaganda, and the legislation authorized the government to impose tighter restrictions on the number of foreign films exhibited in Japan. Finally, American movies, which had been reduced to a trickle, were totally banned in Japan following the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941. Until that final day, however, many Japanese moviegoers had flocked to watch an ever-decreasing stock of new Hollywood films every week. This chapter seeks to disentangle the apparent contradictions between the official efforts to curb the cultural influence of Hollywood films and their continuing mass appeal at the popular level. Once the war was brought to an end in 1945, American movies would re-enter the Japanese market with far greater success. By the mid-1980s, Japan would become Hollywood’s largest market outside the United States. The meaning of Americanization is demonstrated, it seems, as much in the wartime myths of Japanese uniqueness as in the screen images that continued to capture the heart of many moviegoers even on the eve of the Japanese-American war.
CHAPTER 1
Hollywood, Foreign Markets, and the Limits of
The Associative Vision

Invented in the early 1890s, motion pictures found a domestic mass market in
the United States within a little more than a decade or so. Although European producers
dominated world film markets, including the American market, prior to 1914, the out-
break of World War I presented the U.S. film industry, which would soon be known
collectively as “Hollywood,” with a golden opportunity. The Great War had an imme-
diate and adverse impact on European film production, while it allowed American film
companies to defeat foreign competition in their home market and secure commercial
control in the international film trade. When the United States emerged as a creditor
nation after the war, American movies made up the vast majority of local theater pro-
grams in most European countries, with the network of distribution offices established
around the world and foreign incomes providing the major studios with more than
one-third of their entire earnings. Explaining the scale of Hollywood’s new imperium in
a 1925 Saturday Evening Post article, Edward G. Lowry—who would soon represent
the film industry’s trade association in Europe—boasted that “the sun, it now appears,
never sets on the British Empire and the American motion picture.”1
While Hollywood had emerged as a multinational culture industry by the late 1910s, its dramatic growth did not come without serious economic problems. On the one hand, the industry was plagued by “internal disorders” at home, which stemmed from the conflict between large distributors and independent small theaters. On the other hand, the major studios had to contend with a rising wave of foreign movements to counteract the dominance of American movies after the mid-1920s. After World War I, the proliferation of such domestic and foreign problems could not be solved individually and demanded a means of industry-wide coordination and internal self-regulation for U.S. motion picture companies. Thus, the major studios cooperated to establish a new trade association in early 1922: the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). Will H. Hays, postmaster general in the Harding administration, was recruited as president of the new organization, which also became known as the Hays Office (or Hays Organization) during his long tenure as the “czar” of the U.S. film industry until 1945.

This chapter examines the formation of the MPPDA and its efforts to solve Hollywood’s economic problems at home and abroad during the 1920s. The creation of the MPPDA reflected the new American system of political economy after World War I, a system that many historians have described as “associationalism,” “corporatism,” or the “associative state” and that envisioned private-public partnership in coordinating market activities and promoting economic growth and social harmony. Notably, many film scholars, using this concept to explain Hollywood’s global dominance, have argued that one of the key factors that enabled Hollywood to consolidate its dominance in
the global film market was the activities of the MPPDA, which was said to be a well-organized cartel that “co-ordinated many of the Hollywood majors’ export policies,” worked closely with the U.S. State Department, and negotiated directly with European governments to counteract their restrictive measures. In particular, without aggressive diplomatic support from the federal government, says one author, “Hollywood would have had a great deal more difficulty in achieving its overwhelming dominance of the world’s cinema screen.”

An important aspect of this chapter is to explore the extent to which Hollywood ever produced a coherent framework for representing its trade interests and expanding its overseas markets, as envisaged in the associative ideology of the 1920s. One basic problem with the existing literature is its tendency to assume an exact identity of interests in what one scholar calls the “government-industry alliance.” There is a tendency, in other words, to take the MPPDA’s public rhetoric at face value, to apply the associative ideology too literally, and to overlook a detailed examination of actual practices abroad. Thus, the focus of this chapter is how the Hays Office took shape and operated in the broader context of the associationalism that characterized the American political economy in the 1920s. It addresses the MPPDA’s relationship with the federal government, notes how U.S. officials endorsed its associational activities at home and abroad, and shows how the Hays Office gained a quasi-official standing in the eyes of government bureaucracies. But at the same time, because foreign sales were essential to the major studios, this chapter focuses on the practical limitations of the “government-industry alliance” in managing Hollywood’s “foreign affairs” during the interwar
period in order to throw new light on the underlying tensions within the U.S. film industry and between the Hays Office and government officials.

Hollywood’s Economic Problems and the Formation of the MPPDA

By the early 1920s, Hollywood had established a vast commercial empire throughout much of the world, but its emergence as a multinational media industry generated a series of major economic problems both at home and abroad. One major problem in the movie industry was its failure to resolve a wide array of disputes in the distributor-exhibitor relationship. After the mid-1910s, the industry had gone through a wave of vertical integration and had grown into an oligopoly of several producer-distributors who also controlled an increasing number of movie houses in their own theater chains. Still, the consolidation movement had left intact thousands of small independent exhibitors across the nation, with the result that the central line of economic conflict within the industry was not between the major companies, but between the vertically integrated major studios and the small, unaffiliated movie theaters.

One of the most controversial issues was blockbooking. The majors, as a precondition of renting popular, lavishly produced movies, required independent exhibitors to “blockbook” other pictures before they were released. These pictures naturally included many mediocre low-budget productions that were intended to secure a stable, profitable outlet for the Hollywood studios regardless of their quality. The majors also imposed a minimum admission price for each movie and withheld new films from
smaller, second- or third-run exhibitors for a certain period, because they feared losing patronage in their first-run theater chains. In addition, many exhibitors were notoriously late in paying film rentals and some unscrupulous ones failed to pay them for a period of time and then changed ownership of their theaters to avoid the uncompleted contracts. Furthermore, some exhibitors withheld parts of film rentals from distributors by underreporting their box-office grosses and “bicycling” film prints—using one print at several theaters they owned. As a result, the movie industry was overwhelmed by expensive litigation, which amounted to some four thousand cases in 1922 alone. Moreover, independent theater owners saw the expansion of distributors’ theater holdings as a major threat to their survival, as they found it exceedingly difficult to compete with such affiliated theaters receiving a supply of movies on preferential terms. They attacked the major companies for “completely trustify[ing] the industry,” as the president of the theater owner association put it, and the smaller unaffiliated exhibitors became a central force in demanding antitrust persecution of the major studios’ trade practices that allegedly gave unfair advantages to their vertically integrated theater chains.4

The other major economic problem facing the U.S. film industry was to maintain an open door in foreign markets. Before World War I, the industry had experienced few foreign problems because its presence was rather limited in the international film market. By the early 1920s, however, Hollywood’s overseas dominance began to generate a torrent of foreign agitation against American movies. Hollywood’s frontiers were now worldwide. Its empire, a trade journalist commented, “extend[ed] to the farthest corners of the globe, and carr[ied] American films to Japanese villages and
Polish hamlets.” Moreover, while the 1920s was a time of dramatic foreign expansion for the American economy, there were “few American industries,” commented one economist in 1930, that were “more dependent upon foreign markets than the motion-picture industry.” “There are still fewer industries,” he added, “in which American dominance of world markets has, in the past, been more dramatic and complete.” The major studios derived 30–40 percent of their total box-office incomes from international distribution. Thus, such foreign earnings were critical to the economic structure of the movie industry. Hollywood’s high-budget pictures, sold abroad through local branch offices that arranged booking and advertising terms for maximum profit, were usually intended to do little more than cover their production costs from the home market while the real profit more often than not came from the foreign market. On the other hand, their smaller home markets allowed foreign producers to make only low-budget, mediocre films, which sometimes lacked popular appeal even at home and thus perpetuated Hollywood’s control of international film markets after the war. Consequently, they would soon begin to agitate for the introduction of legislation to restrict American film imports by the mid-1920s, on the grounds that Hollywood’s domination destroyed local film industries and repatriated huge profits to the American companies.5

After World War I, the growth of domestic and international economic problems created increasing difficulties for Hollywood’s major studios. In the early 1920s, they eventually organized to establish some sort of basis for coordinated efforts to deal with such industry-wide problems. In January 1922, the moguls of the movie industry announced the establishment of a new trade association, the Motion Picture Producers and
Distributors of America (MPPDA). Will H. Hays, President Harding’s postmaster general, was recruited to serve as president for the new organization. The origins of the Hays Office have not yet received a clear, definitive explanation, despite all the attention it has received as the central coordinating mechanism in the American film industry. Standard interpretations have focused on the MPPDA’s most public aspect—its administration of self-censorship. A wide array of religious and reform groups demanded strict public censorship of motion pictures on the grounds that Hollywood, with its descriptions of social problems, violence, crime, or sexuality, had only corrupting influences on the moral character of movie audiences. The Hays Office, according to this view, was established in large part to co-opt the increasing pressure for official censorship and regulation through a measure of self-regulation. Secondly, some scholars also have called attention to the major studios’ concern about antitrust legislation and federal prosecution resulting from the discontent of unaffiliated exhibitors. In this sense, the MPPDA was designed to check potential government intervention by negotiating non-competitive distribution policies as a cartel in the name of “industrial self-government.”

Finally, the film scholar Ian Jarvie has advanced a third hypothesis as to the formation of the MPPDA. Drawing on Hays’s personal papers, he concludes that the new trade association was created “for reasons of corporate business, more than for immediate political worries about censorship or federal legislation.” The larger purpose of the MPPDA, in Jarvie’s analysis, was to address matters of industry finance, foreign competition, and cooperation with the federal government. Indeed, in his 1945 semi-
official history of the Hays Office, Raymond Moley pointed out that Hays was not “employed merely to ward off the impending danger of Federal and state censorship legislation.” The principal mission of the MPPDA, observed Moley, was to find acceptable solutions to the “abundance of problems which the perturbed film men were finally willing to recognize as common.”9 Contrary to Jarvie’s interpretation, however, a close examination of Hays’s personal files indicates some truth in all of the three accounts. The first two issues—self-censorship and distributor-exhibitor relationships—were not entirely ignored as important industrial concerns in their own right.

In such diverse organized efforts, Hays brought at least three key assets to the movie industry: political connections, public relations, and managerial and organizational skills. Born in Sullivan, Indiana in 1879, Hays practiced law and became involved in local Republic politics. He was eventually named as the state chairman of the Indiana Republican party in 1914 and helped to rebuild the state party organization after the Republican-Progressive split in the 1912 election. Then, once the United States entered World War I, Hays was appointed chairman of the Indiana State Council of Defense to promote mobilization efforts, and his organizational skills led to his appointment as national chairman of the Republican party in 1918. Regarded as one of the most effective national party chairmen, Hays organized Harding’s successful presidential campaign in 1920, which, according to the historian Michael E. McGerr, “carried political advertising to a new level.” In this first media-oriented national election, Hays “made heavy use of movies”—the tactics he had first used widely in the 1916 elections—and he created an “official moving picture staff,” while at the same time developing contacts
in the movie industry to ensure the maximum coverage of Harding’s campaign in the newsreels.10

After the 1920 election, Hays accepted appointment as postmaster general in the Harding administration. In that post, he reorganized and modernized the postal service, which was, as Hays later recalled, “the biggest distribution business in the world.” He helped to improve labor relations by establishing a welfare department and sought to increase business efficiency by expanding the civil service system and standardizing equipment and operations across the country. Then, Hays was propositioned by the movie men about the presidency of the film industry’s new trade association at the end of 1921. Neither are Hays’s personal papers or memoirs entirely clear on the reasons that he became Hollywood’s eventual choice for heading the new trade organization. In his personal letter to the old friend and humorist George Ade, written shortly after the formal establishment of the MPPDA in March 1922, Hays admitted as much, confessing that “I do not know how they happened to light on me.” But “for some reason,” he continued, “I was the only one they could all agree upon.” When Hays asked several industry leaders why he was selected, they replied that they were drawn to his track records as a hard-working harmonizer and his leadership in reorganizing the postal service across the nation. But there was a clear precedent to Hollywood’s interest in Hays’s potential service. Clearly, many industry leaders had come away so impressed with his campaign management and political connections that he had even been offered a high-paying executive position by the Fox Film Corporation a month after the 1920 election—“at more than seven times the salary of Postmaster General.” In light of his

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talents in public relations and contacts as a genuine insider in the world of politics and government, it was hardly surprising that Hays was selected to harmonize and guide the young movie industry through a sea of hostile criticism and political attack at home and abroad.11

At the same time, Hays’s papers do not give us a clear-cut explanation of the reasons that he accepted the job offer from the major studios, either. Yet, the same personal letter to Ade suggested that he saw the new position as an interesting challenge in the increasingly important culture industry after more than half a decade of national political activities as a Republican party operative. “It appealed to me very much,” Hays wrote to Ade, “because I wanted to get into private life and yet I would not have been satisfied at all unless what I went into had some element of public service in it.” His decision to accept the motion picture job was not a matter of money although his contract would certainly pay him a generous salary. “I had some offers when I went to Washington quite as consequential as this,” said Hays, and he still had other offers “worth more money.” The key element in his final decision was his recognition of the cultural “potentialities of the motion picture” as a form of modern mass communication. Clearly, Hays was intrigued by the unparalleled opportunity to shape the direction of the emerging movie industry, even though his letter suggested that, aside from the letters of the original by-laws, he had no clear ideas yet about what the new job would actually amount to.12

In its first few years, the MPPDA created a variety of new mechanisms to deal with Hollywood’s growing problems. Above all, Hays was publicly seen as an in-house
censor who was brought in to supervise the clean-up of Hollywood’s moral corruption. His midwestern, small-town, Protestant background—which was commonly regarded as the very antithesis of a Hollywood dominated by Jewish entrepreneurs and immoral stars—was apparently useful for bringing respectable and wholesome reputation to the movie industry. Despite its conventional image as a self-censorship body, however, the Hays Office was actually conspicuous for lacking such apparatus at least until the late 1920s. Indeed, Hays even said in his original letter to Ade that “the question of censorship has not yet been discussed” with the industry leaders, and he added that “I do not think it will be troublesome” because “the American public is against censorship—censorship of press, pulpit and picture.” Also, administration of self-censorship was not pursued seriously because Hays was given no jurisdiction or control over the internal affairs or products of film producers. The MPPDA’s original by-laws did establish a public relations committee made up of more than 50 national organizations, but the documents that are found in Hays’s papers show that its main goal was largely to assure the public about the improved morality of Hollywood movies by creating a publicity mechanism to obtain stamps of approval from the enlisted community and civic groups.13

The Hays Office and the Associative State

If censorship problems were not the main concern of the newly organized trade association, what, then, was the principal mission of the MPPDA as envisaged by the
movie industry? As the historian Ellis W. Hawley suggests, the formation of the MPPDA was an “expression of a large corporative impulse” in American capitalism during the 1920s. This impulse was a product of an “organizational revolution” that shifted power and status into the hands of organized social forces like large corporations and powerful investment banks. Hawley and others have also used the concept of “corporatism” or “associationalism” to stress the decline of nineteenth-century pluralist traditions in a new associative order where enlightened private elites were expected to cooperate in the national tasks of political and social management. More directly, the new order was built on a trade association movement that had sought to mitigate the costs of competition in the modern corporate economy by what were essentially price, market, and output agreements. Such associational networks had served as key instruments for mobilizing the U.S. economy in World War I, and in the postwar period, the growing network of peak associations was thought to be integrated into an organic, harmonious whole in the public interest. To facilitate such associational activities, federal bureaucracies delegated much of the public responsibility to private trade bureaucracies, which were envisioned to promote economic rationalization and facilitate the public goal of bringing order, stability, and progress in the modern organized society, and would do so without sacrificing such older American traditions as voluntarism and individualism.

At the heart of the associative state in the 1920s was a dynamic and expanding Commerce Department under the leadership of Herbert Hoover, secretary of commerce in the Harding and Coolidge administrations. Hoover was the most influential public
official who promoted the establishment of a new private government in what he called “the great era of self-governing industry and business.” As he spoke at the annual meeting of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 1924, Hoover continued to preach the gospel of voluntary cooperation and self-regulation organized through trade associations. The new system of political economy was advertised as the best antidote to control “destructive competition,” a “vicious cycle of waste and trouble,” and “a vast area of Governmental interference and regulation” while preserving the American principle of individual initiative and enterprise without the fetters of bureaucratic control in an interdependent, non-laissez faire economy. During 1921, Hoover’s name was also mentioned for the presidency of the new motion picture association. That position was filled by Hays, who was, of course, Hoover’s cabinet associate. But Hays shared his vision of private-public partnership and industrial self-government by cooperation. In many ways, Hays’s previous career itself also can be said to have personified the development of a new political economy that culminated in the rise of the associative state during the 1920s.

Hays’s education in political economy had started when he began to practice law in his father’s firm in Sullivan, Indiana in 1900. Before World War I, he had found himself at the forefront of the organizational revolution that was reshaping America into a modern corporate-bureaucratic society. Indeed, one of the most basic themes recurring in Hays’s memoirs was the need for organization and cooperation—whether political, economic, or social. In Indiana, he had served as a legal counsel, and sometimes as a board member and trustee for many state railroads, coal companies, and other large
corporations. And Hays’s experience as city attorney gave him an increasing awareness that the laissez-faire competition of a bygone day was often socially harmful and that government action and cooperation among different organized groups was needed to deal with the interrelatedness of new social problems in modern America. As he helped incorporate and consolidate his corporate clients in Indiana, Hays also continued to learn “a series of important lessons” about the need for socially conscious leadership and public “responsibility” in an increasingly interdependent, organizational era.18

Hays developed his belief in the business-oriented vision of organized cooperation more fully after the United States entered World War I. In May 1917, the Indiana governor appointed him chairman of the State Council of Defense. The non-partisan state agency was a local version of the Council of National Defense, which was designed to represent industry, transportation, finance, labor, and government in a common effort to coordinate the wartime mobilization of the U.S. economy. It was in this capacity that Hays first made contacts with Hoover in Washington, who was then overseeing the Food Administration’s national campaign to conserve and mobilize food resources for the war. In particular, what was typical of wartime public administrators like Hoover and Hays was their insistence on cooperation rather than coercion, which reflected their resolve to chart a middle way between the chaos of free competition and the danger of bureaucratic control in the war economy. As chairman of the state defense council, Hays emphasized that the wartime state should only serve as a facilitator. His official goal was to guide various functional groups and integrate their activities as
quasi-public partners through the force of “carefully considered opinion and advice,” rather than through “law,” government regulation, and legal prosecution.¹⁹

Once the MPPDA was established in 1922, the wartime vision of voluntary cooperation and self-regulation provided the main organizational blueprint as Hays worked to define his new associative responsibilities. Revisiting his decision to accept its presidency, Hays later recalled that “I have always felt that in a democratic commonwealth each business, each industry, and each art has as much right to, and as much duty toward, self-regulation as has the general citizenry to self-government.” Hays’s associational goal clearly represented Hoover’s vision of applying the wartime organizational experience to postwar economic conditions and preserving essential liberties on a private, voluntaristic basis through informal business-government cooperation. To the same end, one of the top priorities for the new Hays Office was to establish its position as a quasi-official regulatory mechanism for the entire movie industry and to counter all movements toward government antitrust interference in the motion picture business.²⁰

Indeed, while Hays was portrayed principally as Hollywood’s new in-house censor, the MPPDA’s very first topic at its initial board meeting in April 1922 was the issue of contract standardization, rather than the problem of censorship agitation. The distributor-exhibitor relationship, as discussed earlier, was the key to resolving what many industry insiders described as “internal disorders” and to establishing what Hays called “our ‘industrial civilization’” in the movie industry. In particular, exhibitor discontent and attacks on exhibition contracts had threatened to bring political pressure for
regulation from outside—a strict application of antitrust laws to regulate the major studios’ monopolistic distribution, pricing, and blockbooking practices. To contain this hostile movement, Hays immediately organized numerous trade conferences with the representatives of the theater owner association and managed to negotiate a new uniform contract on behalf of the major studios within just a year after his executive appointment, once again proving his reputation as a consummate political strategist and outstanding organizer.²¹

The most notable feature of the new standard contract was the establishment of arbitration machinery to settle disputes in the distributor-exhibitor relationship. Both majors and theater men now agreed to submit such trade controversies not to litigation but to a new industry organization called the Film Board of Trade. The new system was designed to establish a quasi-legal mechanism that took on the public responsibility of the judicial system and that sought to organize a private solution to an impending public-policy problem. According to the new plan, decisions in such arbitration would be made legally binding and enforceable because prolonged litigation would be costly to distributors and exhibitors alike. Movies were akin to perishable goods and any legal impasse would result in lost business for both interests being unable to show their films and collect box-office receipts while their products still had exhibition value and drawing power to the audience. Once established, Hays later boasted, the new mechanism settled “eighteen hundred disputes” in the first year without expensive litigation or new public controversy. By 1925, over 11,000 disputes were brought before Film Boards of Trade across the nation, with only 5 cases leading to litigation. The principle
of voluntary cooperation and self-regulation evident in this arbitration machinery eventually received quasi-official recognition from Hoover’s Commerce Department, which was interested in promoting such trade agreements as a means of business rationalization across U.S. industries. In 1924, the department’s official publication, Commerce Reports, featured Hollywood’s new arbitration mechanism and endorsed it as a successful associative model of industrial self-government in U.S. industries, one that could “eliminate the economic waste” of unregulated competition and integrate various interest groups into a state of harmonious interdependence.22

Yet, the MPPDA’s associational efforts to harmonize the industry and promote self-regulation met their organized resistance from independent exhibitors, despite their apparent success and the semi-formal recognition of the Commerce Department. The quasi-legal status of the Film Boards of Trade also gained official approval from the Justice Department in 1926, when the latter found most of the arbitration system legal after an extensive investigation. But it was evident that the arbitration mechanism, reflecting its institutional foundation, operated chiefly as an instrument for protecting the interests of Hollywood studios. The vast majority of arbitration decisions (e.g., 92.5 percent in 1927) favored the major studios over independent theater owners. Also, the continuing expansion of theater holdings by the major studios was a constant sore point among smaller unaffiliated exhibitors. As a result, pluralist pressure from exhibitor discontent and protest continued to overshadow Hays’s associational vision of private-public partnership and led to a renewed antitrust attack by a new exhibitor association formed in 1929. In late 1930, the U.S. Supreme Court eventually found com-
pulsory arbitration in violation of the Sherman antitrust act. The industry’s arbitration system across the nation ceased its operation as a result, but the Hays Office continued its negotiations looking toward the establishment of new standard contracts—with a provision for optional arbitration—while movie sales continued to be made through individual company contracts.  

In 1933, Hays’s corporatist efforts at industrial self-government and cooperation were given a new lease on life under the New Deal. The Roosevelt administration created the National Recovery Administration (NRA), a business-oriented measure aimed to restore economic order and stability through cooperative action and self-regulation in each industry. The NRA’s code of fair competition for the film industry, “by far the longest of the six hundred codes sired by NRA,” as Moley later noted, effectively legalized the oligopolistic structure of the movie industry. Most notably, the NRA practically took over the function of the local film boards of trade that the Hays Office had spent nearly a decade developing on behalf of the big studios. Thus, the majors succeeded again in receiving legal sanction for their non-competitive distribution and pricing policies under federal authority. But independent exhibitors still outside theater chains increasingly charged that the film code had been drawn in ways that favored the large producing and distributing companies and oppress small businesses, and it eventually became ineffective in mid-1935 when the whole NRA was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.  

Following the NRA debacle, there still remained strong interest in reviving some form of self-regulation for the movie industry. A distributor-exhibitor accord was
still deemed essential to containing the potential threat of antitrust challenge to the major studios’ vertical control of the exhibition business. But as Alan Brinkley writes in his analysis of New Deal liberalism after the mid-1930s, the old vision of associationalism was discredited further amidst the philosophical confusion of Washington policy circles after the 1937–38 recession. In this changing context, the renewed interest in anti-monopoly policies as an economic antidote for the Great Depression resulted in a 1938 antitrust proceeding filed by the Justice Department against the major film companies. This antitrust action eventually would lead to a 1948 Supreme Court decision ordering the “divorcement” of exhibition and production-distribution in the movie industry. By this time, Hays would be gone from the scene, and the MPPDA’s elusive quest for industrial self-government showed that his associational vision was in reality far less successful in integrating functional groups at home and promoting economic progress and efficiency in the movie industry.25

While the organizational mission of the MPPDA was grounded in the associative vision of cooperation and self-regulation, it is simply not correct to say, as Ian Jarvie argues, that its concern with censorship problems—stressed in conventional accounts of its organizational history—is a product of “mystification.” Even though the danger of censorship legislation was not the primary motive for the new trade association, it nevertheless remained “always a serious proposition” for industry leaders, as one internal report put it in the late 1920s, particularly in light of the additional costs of complying with different local and federal standards as an interstate business.26 Indeed, one of Hays’s major efforts in his first year was to defeat the Massachusetts state cen-
sorship referendum in the November election. It was a crucial test of his skills in public relations and organization. Hays laid out a careful campaign plan similar to the ones he had previously perfected in partisan politics. For example, he sent out the MPPDA’s executive secretary Courtland Smith, former president of the American Press Association from 1908 to 1921, in an effort to win over state newspaper editors and shape public opinion in the industry’s favor. Hays also sent political organizers to help organize the statewide campaign against censorship with the result that the referendum was soundly defeated by an almost 3–to-1 margin. In his analysis, the Massachusetts victory “turned the national tide,” and the Hays Office continued to maintain a national network of local theater owners, film salesmen, and political contacts that helped the MPPDA monitor and thwart censorship proposals in state legislatures and Congress. At the same time, the MPPDA was always careful to improve Hollywood’s public image and counteract any censorship agitation by cultivating its relationships with local and national opinion leaders, particularly newspaper and magazine editors and civic organization leaders. Also, in an effort to preempt public protest and official censorship, Hays resorted to the associative rhetoric of industrial self-government and continued to seek effective self-regulation over the studios as well, and his effort eventually led to the famous 1930 Production Code, the self-censorship rules that would control the content of Hollywood films until the mid-1960s. That no censorship law would be passed in America after 1922, despite occasional outcries for moral reform, was a sign of Hays’s effectiveness as a top industry lobbyist and strategist.28
In addition to the danger of official censorship, the problem of industry finance was also a major question for the Hays Office. Since the mid-1910s, the wave of mergers and consolidation had transformed the motion picture industry from an initial five-cent arcade into a vertically integrated modern big business. By the early 1920s, business expansion increased the need for outside sources of business credit and capital. Yet, the major studios lacked respectability as a new culture industry in conservative business circles. Wall Street bankers, as one former bank president later recalled, had been “exceedingly indifferent” to the motion picture business. Hays’s memoirs report that “only one banker,” Otto H. Kahn of Kuhn, Loeb & Co., “would do business with the industry at all” when he became the movie industry’s spokesman. That one exception was because Kahn, well-known patron of the fine arts, was personally interested in promoting “anything artistic or even potentially artistic.” The producers did have limited relationships with a number of other individual bankers as well, such as A. P. Giannini, a California banker whose Bank of Italy would be later renamed the Bank of America. But they were certainly not representative of the general attitudes of most bankers and financiers toward the film business, and the moguls of the movie industry were acutely aware of their overall image problem in the financial community. In Moley’s words, they were still generally looked down on “as something faintly unsavory, untoward, hooliganish”—little more than vaudeville owners or circus showmen. Their ethnic background also contributed to their poor standing in business circles. Many movie men were first-generation European Jews—immigrant entrepreneurs who had made their way up from the world of storefront nickelodeons. Moreover, with the
news of exorbitant star and executive salaries and skyrocketing production costs, the financial community had low confidence in the profitability of the movie industry." Once he took office in March 1922, therefore, one of Hays’s topmost concerns was to legitimize the movie industry in the world of high finance. As a major political figure, Hays’s political stature and contacts in business and government circles certainly aided his financial mission. Among “various powerful financial interests,” as one industry leader wrote to Hays, the news of his appointment itself was interpreted as an important assurance for increasing conditions of stability, predictability, and security for the movie industry. His new presidency was seen as a sign that a new political understanding had been reached between the movie industry and the federal government, meaning that no hostile action would be taken by the Harding administration, such as antitrust investigation by the Federal Trade Commission. In addition, Hays’s successful political campaign against censorship legislation also seemed to contribute to Hollywood’s improved standing as a secure, profitable investment opportunity.

Upon his arrival in New York as the new MPPDA president, Hays’s political connections opened many previously closed doors for the movie industry. He was an honored guest at a luncheon given by the governor of the New York Federal Reserve Bank and was invited to address a group of Wall Street investment bankers. Hays called their attention to the high profit potentiality of the major studios. His basic message was that Hollywood had developed into a stable, legitimate, and rational business after a period of chaos and confusion caused by its unprecedented growth from its nickel-and-dime origins. At the same time, the MPPDA created a special working group
to find ways to promote standard cost-efficiency measures and develop standard accounting procedures in order to improve Hollywood’s financial reputation in the banking community. Hays’s efforts paid off handsomely. “Within the three months after Hays took office,” Moley recorded in his semi-official history, “the film companies’ credit with the banks was established.” In light of the importance of the financial problem for Hollywood studios, one industry leader even argued, as the trade journal Variety reported in early 1923, that his success with the bankers alone had proven that Hays was the right choice for heading the new trade association. And over the first few years, the MPPDA continued what one of Hays’s top aide called “missionary work” and maintained regular contact with such organizations as the American Bankers’ Association and still cautious “old school” bankers and financiers in order to “convey to the business community at large the true picture of the commercial standing and financial soundness of the industry.” Hays’s successful legitimization campaign helped to promote the dramatic expansion of corporate financing for the movie industry after 1925, thereby allowing the major companies to expand their theater acquisition and construction programs.31

Finally, the MPPDA also provided a powerful lobbying organization that enabled the major studios to deal with their common legal problems both at local and federal levels. Its national network of local workers and political contacts continued to monitor legislative developments in state and federal legislature, seeking to counteract proposed bills inimical to the major studios’ interests, such as admission taxes and Sunday-closing laws as well as censorship proposals. Further, Hays managed to im-
prove the industry’s relationship with the federal government. For instance, his Washington office worked hard to press the industry’s cases before the Internal Revenue Service and other federal agencies and “secured special rulings” on such matters as taxation and customs regulations. Thus, the MPPDA’s reports boasted that its successes in the lobbying efforts were “saving many thousands of dollars” for the entire film industry.32

The Hays Office and Foreign Relations

The vision of the associative state proved central to the formation of the MPPDA in the early 1920s. Despite the difficulties that Hays had in managing the distributor-exhibitor relationship, the idea of industrial self-government helped to shape the MPPDA’s relationships with the federal government—particularly with Hoover’s Commerce Department—in dealing with Hollywood’s domestic issues. In this organizational context, foreign affairs also entered into the associative ideals of private-public partnership. International considerations touched almost every potential aspect of the movie industry because worldwide distribution was essential to Hollywood’s financial success as a multinational culture industry. Consequently, one of the most important tasks that defined the Hays Office was to develop an institutional mechanism for private-public cooperation in film-trade diplomacy, and associationalism also defined the way it approached international problems and sought to maintain an open door for Hollywood films.
The concept of associationalism, or corporatism, has been successfully employed as an analytical framework for illuminating important trends not only in the domestic aspects of American history but also in the history of U.S. foreign relations. A group of diplomatic historians taking the corporatist approach has sought to explore the interconnection between domestic and diplomatic history. These historians have shown how public officials and private elites cooperated to build a liberal capitalist world system conducive to U.S. economic interests and international peace and prosperity. Their corporatist global design has been revealed most clearly in the literature on U.S. foreign policy during the 1920s. In the late 1950s, William Appleman Williams first criticized what he called the “legend of isolationism” in the traditional interpretation of American diplomacy after World War I. And since the 1970s, the corporatist scholarship has built on Williams’s critique and has succeeded in redefining the 1920s as a decade of economic expansion and internationalism.33

Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover was also a central architect of the associative state in the international arena. One of his most important agendas in reorganizing the Commerce Department during the early 1920s was to establish a new bureaucratic structure that would assist the “expansion of foreign commerce” in the postwar world economy through “cooperation between the Department and the American exporting industries.”34 Among his key initiatives was the reorganization of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (BFDC). The main goal was to expand on the model of private-public collaboration that had shaped such wartime agencies as the War Industries Board and to make their planning and statistical functions into “a
permanent feature of the Department’s work,” according to one internal memorandum circulated in the spring of 1921. Under Hoover’s leadership, the BFDC budget was increased nearly six times in an effort to strengthen an executive agency for foreign trade promotion. In addition, the Commerce Department organized conferences with delegates of business groups and created special commodity divisions within the BFDC in order to serve their commercial interests with greater efficiency and expertise. Major trade organizations also established permanent committees to promote “close cooperation” with the department and consulted on the selection of expert staff members for the different divisions.35

In many ways, the MPPDA’s foreign activities showed that Hollywood was an important partner in the creation of the associational order taking shape both at home and abroad during the 1920s. Business-government cooperation in the international arena had not been entirely without a precedent in Hollywood’s brief history. During World War I, the major studios had supported the Wilson administration as a major promoting force in the Liberty Loan drives. They had also joined hands with the Committee on Public Information in its propaganda campaign to produce and distribute films explaining American war aims both on the home front and in the Allied and neutral countries. Following the war’s end, Hollywood’s ascendancy in the global market gave rise to a series of foreign attempts at import restriction on American movies. All the major companies were facing the same censorship regulations, tariff barriers, and quotas in foreign markets. As a result, one of the most important associational tasks for the Hays Office was to develop a common foreign policy among its
member companies and to establish a more permanent associative partnership with the federal government in the international arena as well.36

Indeed, the importance of foreign affairs became abundantly clear from the moment Hays first took office as MPPDA president in March 1922. Along with the issue of contract standardization, international problems also emerged as a top agenda item during the first MPPDA board meeting in April. In February, the Mexican government had decided to prohibit the importation of movies produced by Famous Players-Lasky and Metro Pictures as a formal protest against what it saw as racist representations of Anglo cowboys and Mexican villains in their western movies. Consequently, the Mexican problem engaged one of Hays’s first actions as MPPDA’s new president. Even though the United States lacked formal diplomatic relations with the new revolutionary government in Mexico, Hays asked the State Department to “take this matter up unofficially” with the Mexican foreign ministry. Facing the continuation of the film boycott, Hays then dispatched a private mission to Mexico City in October in order to negotiate an unofficial settlement with the Mexican government. By the end of the year, his personal emissary was successful in negotiating a reopening of the Mexican market in exchange for the MPPDA’s promise to improve Mexican images in American movies. Thus, the Mexican embargo served as “a dramatic warning,” as Hays later recalled in his memoirs, that the MPPDA needed to “maintain an active Foreign Department” in order to monitor the world film market and alert its member companies to any adverse development in other countries.37
Although preserving the open door for film export was recognized as one of the basic objectives in the Hays Office from its earliest days, its foreign-policy mechanism was underdeveloped at first because it was necessary initially to focus its limited resources on developing the machinery for dealing with the most pressing domestic problems like contract standardization and censorship legislation. Also, import restrictions against Hollywood films were not yet formally debated as a legislative measure in other countries. Although there was a foreign department on its organizational chart, the Hays Office thus had no special officer initially assigned for dealing with the international aspects of the industry’s problems, and such concerns as export promotion were handled mainly by its treasurer.  

Nearly a year and a half would pass before the MPPDA began to develop a special mechanism for handling Hollywood’s foreign affairs, an institution that came in response to growing overseas agitation to American film exports in the mid-1920s. This agitation was illustrated most clearly in July 1924, when the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations opened its debates on the influence of the motion picture and Hollywood’s dominance in the international film market. Germany also announced its official plan to establish a quota system in late 1924—the first major foreign commercial restriction on Hollywood’s exports since the MPPDA’s creation in 1922. Under the new system, one import license would be granted for every German film distributed in the United States during the previous year. These developments abroad were beginning to loom larger as part of the growing foreign efforts against the American control of international film trade.
Because of the critical importance of foreign film markets, the Hays Office was galvanized into action. Frederick L. Herron, Hays’s old friend and future brother-in-law (Hays would later remarry his sister), was designated to take charge of the MPPDA’s foreign relations in late 1924. Serving as foreign manager until 1941, Herron would have to navigate the increasingly treacherous foreign waters in order to keep the channels of export trade open to the major studios. He had served in the U.S. diplomatic service as vice consul in Panama and Cuba from 1914 to 1918. During World War I, Herron had joined the armed forces and served in Europe, while briefly remaining on the continent as a special service officer after the war. Thus, Herron was an ideal candidate for the MPPDA’s chief diplomatic post in light of his international experiences and familiarity with conditions in Hollywood’s two major foreign markets, Europe and Latin America.40

As it developed a new international apparatus for the movie industry, the Hays Office pursued two main associational strategies in its foreign affairs: industry-wide cooperation and business-government partnership. First, the major studios cooperated to establish the MPPDA’s branch offices overseas. In early 1925, the foreign managers of the MPPDA’s member companies decided to send a representative to Europe to monitor legislative developments and censorship regulations against American films. Several months later, Hays sent Herron and Oscar Solbert, a military advisor to President Coolidge, to survey various film markets and anti-Hollywood developments in Europe. In early 1926, the MPPDA established a separate foreign department and its first European office in London, which was headed by Edward G. Lowry, journalist and
former special diplomatic agent at the U.S. Embassy in London (1914–16). In early 1928, Hays also recruited Harold L. Smith, a vice-consul at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, to represent his organization on the European continent. (The London office would soon be closed and the Paris office would become the sole European representative for the MPPDA during the 1930s.)

At the same time, the Hays Office sought to create an informal system of business-government collaboration in the foreign field as well. After 1924, the MPPDA, capitalizing on Hays’s connections with Hoover, demanded greater representation of Hollywood’s interests in the associational system for trade promotion. Most notably, the Hays Office lobbied for the creation of a separate motion picture section in the BFDC, one that would serve as an official information service monitoring foreign trade conditions and supply reliable, comprehensive data on foreign censorship, quotas, and import restriction on behalf of the movie industry. The MPPDA found the Commerce Department highly receptive to its request. As early as 1921, Hoover and his top aides had begun to study the possibility of establishing a motion picture section in the BFDC in order to handle “export and import problems, foreign film productions, etc.” Yet, when the newly organized MPPDA asked the Commerce Department for an improved statistical service, the latter apparently had not yet acted on its own advise and the only data its officials could forward to the MPPDA came from a rudimentary survey of domestic film production. As a result, by early 1923, Julius Klein, BFDC director and Hoover’s top advisor, was writing to his correspondents, both in and outside the film industry, about the growing interest of the Commerce Department in “the trade pro-
moting possibilities of American films” and about the official plan to “mak[e] the pictures even more effective media in behalf of our trade in foreign countries.”43 By the end of 1923, the BFDC moved to establish “an Advisory Committee for the motion picture industry” that consisted of MPPDA officials, and in 1925, the department agreed to create a motion picture section in the BFDC’s Specialties Division—even before receiving formal budgetary approval from Congress. The next year, Congress formally appropriated budgets for the new unit, including the appointment of a special motion-picture trade commissioner in Europe. In 1929, the request of the Hays Office would eventually result in the expansion and promotion of the motion picture section to a division status within the BFDC.44

By the mid-1920s, therefore, the Hays Office had assumed a semi-official character and shared decision-making power with the U.S. government in foreign affairs as well as in domestic matters. The trade association was recognized as a quasi-diplomatic agency in that its enlightened private leaders were expected to cooperate and promote the national goal of maintaining open doors for American economic and cultural expansion. This structure of public-private cooperation was expected to serve as a powerful mechanism for managing Hollywood’s commercial dominance around the globe. Once established, the BFDC’s motion-picture agency institutionalized a bureaucratic system that would be dedicated to promoting the interests of MPPDA members abroad by preparing timely reports on motion picture developments overseas and monitoring anti-Hollywood agitation on behalf of the U.S. film industry.45 As a result, the outside world (and future scholars as well) usually perceived the co-
herence of purpose and close collaboration in the business-government relationship, a perception that often aroused fear of concerted national strategy to dominate the international screens.

**Hollywood and the Limits of Associationalism**

The foreign image of close collaboration between Hollywood and Washington seemed to come true in the spring of 1928, when France tried to impose new restrictions on American movie imports. The French quota plan was inspired by the passage a year ago of a British film act that was intended to revive the British film industry by establishing a quota of domestic films for exhibition. According to the French decree, which was issued in February 1928, four import licenses would be issued to American films for every French movie that was imported into the United States. The Hays Office feared the international repercussions of the proposed French quota and insisted that the proposal had to be fought “strongly and firmly” so that such trade restriction would not spread and “affect us later all over Europe.” To meet the French challenge, Hays made an unexpected decision to sail to Paris and conduct personal diplomacy with the French authorities in April. During his month-long negotiations, he acted with constant support from U.S. diplomatic and commercial officials and obtained a major concession from the French government after threatening a complete boycott of the French film market in a potential commercial war across the Atlantic. In the revised French plan, American companies would now receive seven import licenses for every French film that was
either distributed in the United States or produced by their subsidiaries in France. The resulting quota was so watered down that American film imports actually never exceeded their limits and continued to dominate the French market. In his memoirs, Hays would later boast about his personal triumph abroad by declaring that “it was a splendid example of the ability of [private-public] teamwork to win victories against heavy odds.”

On close examination, however, it becomes clear that the successful outcome in France exaggerated the actual level of collaboration between Hollywood and Washington in the expansion of U.S. motion picture trade. In reality, the relationship was much more limited, fragmented, and fragile than the associative ideology might have suggested. The French episode itself was overshadowed by incessant bickering and lack of genuine cooperation between Hollywood and Washington, and between their representatives in Europe. At the outset, the MPPDA had worked almost at cross-purposes with the BFDC’s motion picture section. Before the French policy was made public, C. J. North, BFDC’s motion picture section chief, had drawn on the economic intelligence coming from his field staff to issue a series of detailed reports that alerted the U.S. film industry to the imminent danger of the French situation. However, Lowry, the MPPDA’s European representative, had continued to ignore such official warnings, instead falsely reassuring his home office that no final action would be taken until he was given a further chance to present the American case and negotiate with the French government. When North’s warning came true, however, the MPPDA “immediately got busy,” according to the sarcastic comment made by H. C. MacLean, commercial attaché.
in Paris, and the Hollywood studios used Hays’s political connections to go over the head of the BFDC’s motion picture section and make a direct appeal for official assistance to Herbert Hoover and the State Department.\(^{47}\)

This action both embarrassed and infuriated North. In his private letter, he protested that it “hardly seem[ed] fair” for the MPPDA to bypass his section, particularly considering its previous efforts to keep the trade posted on the French film situation. North’s sense of indignation showed clearly when he wrote George R. Canty, special motion-picture trade commissioner in Europe, that “we were not advised by any one in the Hays organization of Mr. Hays [sic] intended trip.” North was also very annoyed that he first picked up the news “entirely from the press.” He believed, a bit condescendingly, that the MPPDA’s decision was “taken on the spur of the moment” and did not think that Hays’s trip could accomplish very much at this stage. Still, North hoped that the new trade problem could be a blessing in disguise for his bureaucratic interests, since it could prove to be a major opportunity to drive home the importance of his motion picture section to Hollywood. Thus, North swallowed his frustration at the MPPDA and instructed Canty and MacLean to “show him [Hays] how helpful we can be” and make sure that “by the time Mr. Hays leaves Paris he will fully realize the value of our services.”\(^{48}\)

North’s bureaucratic design seemed to be realized during Hays’s successful mission in Paris. C. C. Pettijohn, Hays’s old friend and his top aide who had happened to visit Europe in March, advised his “chief” that “the only results that will be obtained will come though regular Governmental channels,” and while in Paris, Hays was clearly
sold on the services of the BFDC’s foreign operations. Upon his return from France, Klein was invited to a private dinner in New York hosted by the film industry and “attended by a brilliant galaxy of financiers and journalistic magnates.” Both in private and public, Hays continued to shower “unstinted praise” on the Commerce Department’s field staff for their “thorough knowledge of the film situation in France” and for “the commendable spirit of cooperation and entire willingness to work at all hours in putting the job across.” Hays told Klein that their official assistance was the determining factor in the success of his negotiations in Paris. In response, Klein commended his staff on “having done such a splendid piece of work during the crisis which engaged the attention not only of the motion picture people but also of all the business leaders in this country.” North also felt that this incident had helped enhance the bureaucratic position of his motion picture section and the BFDC as a whole. After his experience in Paris, Hays was “especially keen on the section being made into a division,” and North expected that this move, “with proper support of the trade, would lead to increased personnel, additional trade commissioners and the like,” thereby satisfying his bureaucratic interest in the expansion of his own organization.49

However, North’s associational vision would turn out to be a brief pipe dream for the most part, except that his motion picture section would be upgraded into division status in 1929. In Hollywood’s Overseas Campaign (1992), for example, Ian Jarvie emphasizes how much the industry and government learned to work together to protect foreign markets for American movies.50 By the end of the summer, however, the motion picture section was actually complaining once again about “the lack of cooperation”
with the film companies and the Hays Office. Indeed, the state of continuing tension and mistrust between government and industry soon became evident when the quota controversy flared up once more between France and America in early 1929. In the new round of confrontation, because the seven-to-one quota had failed to stem the tide of American film imports, the French side sought to tighten its regulations in order to reduce imports by at least 20 percent. The Hays Office replied that the American industry would agree to a voluntary 10 percent cut if the French agreed to abolish the quota system altogether. In early March, the French government announced a new quota in which U.S. film distributors would receive only three import licenses in return for exporting a French film to the American market. This time, the MPPDA companies decided to carry out a boycott in protest and refused to sell American films in the French market after April 1. Hays promised officials in the State and Commerce Departments that he “would keep the trade in line 100 per cent.” But no sooner had the State Department agreed to send a note of formal protest to the French government than the American companies had a break in their ranks.

Within a month, Warner Brothers threatened to bolt from the united American front and attempted to resume selling its pictures in France. While Warner Brothers’ action was barely kept in line, the Hays Office itself also soon wavered. North apparently had a hard time suppressing his growing frustration at the trade organization. “One moment,” North said angrily, “he [Herron] says the companies here wont [sic] propose anything under any circumstances,” and the next minute he backed down and said that they would agree to end the boycott “if the American companies could be assured by
treatment for the next five years on the same basis as the present quota.” To make matters worse, the MPPDA ignored both the Commerce and State Departments “almost entirely” and instead tried to negotiate only through its own representative in Paris. The State Department was rightly furious at this situation; after all, it had agreed to become involved only on the basis of the MPPDA’s repeated pressure for government action and its firm promise of the industry’s full support and cooperation. “There is no disorganization [among its member companies] in the foreign field,” the Hays Office had argued, and “if our government gave us one-one hundredth of the support that these foreign governments are giving them [foreign companies] in the film business, we would have no trouble at all, and the department.”

In North’s view, the French situation was clearly a major test case for the American film trade in Europe. The outcome of the quota controversy might trigger a domino effect expanding to various European capitals that were contemplating their own quota measures against Hollywood films. For this reason, North was convinced that the MPPDA should have a clear showdown “to get real concessions from the French,” and that the American companies should even consider a permanent withdrawal if the negotiations failed. At the same time, North recognized that the French government would never abandon the quota principle, despite the American demand for returning to a free market basis. His fear, then, was that the industry would soon be divided against itself, with many companies itching to resume their distribution at any moment. North’s mistrust of the MPPDA’s coordinating capacity changed him from a frustrated supporter to a forceful leader, as it were, and he instructed U.S. consular of-
ficials in Paris that “whatever settlement is made will have to be between yourself and the French government officials.” Indeed, it was U.S. government officials who eventually guided the signing of a new trade agreement in September 1929. Under it, the French returned to the old seven-to-one quota for another year, and the quota would be renewed automatically if no agreement was reached by May 1930.54

The French episode was hardly an isolated case. Lack of cooperation between Hollywood and Washington would recur during the interwar period. Too often, the Hays Office took independent courses and ignored the BFDC’s motion picture bureaucracy, although it had been created on the industry’s behalf to promote the expansion of American film trade. As a result, U.S. officials repeatedly complained that the American companies always “adopt[ed] short sighted policies” and then “call[ed] on us later to pull their chestnuts out of the fire.”55 Clearly, the official vision of the associative state—often disregarded by the MPPDA and major studios—was that business and government should work together smoothly in foreign economic activities. Despite the foreign fear of the MPPDA as an export cartel backed by the U.S. government, however, there were a number of key conditions that seemed to inhibit the development of such corporatist arrangements in U.S. film trade policy.

First, shortsighted concern about competition kept the industry chronically disorganized and fragmented and prevented it from acting abroad as a truly effective cartel, notwithstanding the existence of the MPPDA as an officially recognized peak organization. U.S. officials usually advised that concerted action, such as a boycott, would be the best way for the U.S. film industry, in that it would “serve as a warning to
other countries” in its commercial battles against the wave of anti-Hollywood movements around the world. Even one small compromise, in their view, would set a bad precedent that might damage U.S. long-term interests in future trade negotiations, not only for Hollywood producers but also for all American exporters. As North noted again in 1932, however, the American film industry was usually plagued by a “wide difference in policies on the part of the various companies.” Lack of unity and cooperation created by different trade interests in each market continued to define the American film industry in foreign fields, even though it was probably wise for the majors to act together and promote the general welfare of the industry as a whole. Individual companies were in direct competition with one another and typically took “a policy of everyone for himself any way he could, and each one gouging [sic] the market in a temporary exploitation,” Solbert also had reported to Hays when he was sent to study the European film situation in 1925. They were unable to perceive or act upon their long-term common interests overseas, such as “the development of the future market,” because they were driven by the pursuit of short-term economic advantage such as market shares and profits and remained more concerned about the immediate costs of losing their own business in particular markets. North’s dismay only reiterated Solbert’s earlier observation, if unknowingly, about this central dilemma. Each company “acted just as though no other film company was in existence,” North often complained, “and they seemed to look at the situation entirely from the immediate future of their own particular company.”56
Similarly, it was difficult for U.S. officials to keep all American film companies behind the united front because they usually kept their foreign operations a jealously guarded trade secret, even though such enlightened cooperation obviously would be conducive to the interest of the industry as a whole. This basic problem revolved around the classic free-rider paradox of collective action, as described by rational choice theorists like Mancur Olson. Their studies have shown that rational actors, even when they have some interest in common, tend to avoid the costs of cooperation to achieve the group interest since any gain would go to all members regardless of their different sacrifices. Likewise, even if U.S. officials promised to keep such information “confidential,” the Hollywood studios were concerned that the pooled data might be used to improve the market position of other distributors at the expense of their own competitive interests. The Hays Office itself could not unite all such contradictory impulses under these circumstances. Indeed, in late 1928, Herron acknowledged as much when he discussed the problem of internal disarray in his conversation with N. D. Golden, assistant chief of the BFDC’s motion picture section. “It is a difficult job,” said Herron, “to get data from the member companies of his organization here in this country.” Thus, “it would be impossible,” he confessed, “to secure their cooperation in foreign countries.”

At the same time, there also existed a major problem in securing cooperation from the representatives of branch offices abroad. In planning their trade policies, U.S. officials, foreign managers of the Hollywood majors, and Hays Office officials were all naturally interested in receiving all the data available as to the state of foreign markets,
such as the number of pictures sold, their contracted prices, and their problems with censorship regulations and import restrictions. But foreign representatives were “each representing an individual company,” as North put it, and it was no surprise that they were usually “more interested in selling the films of that company” than in the common interests of the industry as a whole. As a result, it seems that there was usually no eagerness on the part of foreign local managers to devote their limited time and resources to providing such trade information to U.S. officials, the MPPDA, or sometimes even their home offices. Furthermore, foreign representatives often seemed to have more personal interests in withholding cooperation in their own markets. By 1930, his experience over several years had left North dismayed at the remote possibility of securing corporatist arrangements in foreign fields:

In so far as they do report on market and trade conditions, it is essentially with the future of their own jobs in mind. Obviously if American foreign versions are not going well in a given country the American distributors there are to minimize the fact as much as possible because if they reported the facts impartially it might mean the loss of their jobs through the withdrawal of the American companies from the particular markets.

Under such circumstances, foreign representatives would always tend to be on guard against U.S. officials or MPPDA representatives abroad, who might even be regarded as “a sort of government spy to check up on their offices” on behalf of their headquarters in New York.

Finally, a strong sense of organizational rivalry also tended to prevent the Hays Office from uniting for common action with U.S. officials, particularly among its foreign representatives. During the 1928 French quota controversy, for example, Canty decried the “absolute lack of co-operation” from Lowry, the MPPDA’s European rep-
resentative. Canty could not withhold his disgust at the ways in which Lowry unfairly sought to take credit for “our accomplishments” among the local American film managers in Paris. He complained that if he tried to correct Lowry’s assertions each time, “I would be in a constant state of turmoil with him, and my standing with his outfit would be still lower than it is now.” In his private letter to Hays, Pettijohn admitted as much, writing that “Lowry is not a teamworker” and that “there is no cooperation between our representatives abroad and the American Embassies, either in Paris or Berlin.” The lack of corporatist cooperation was repeated with an eerie sense of déjà vu during the 1929 French quota controversy, even though the new MPPDA’s new representative in Paris had been a former vice-consul in the U.S. Consulate at Paris.60

Lack of cooperative attitudes was hardly surprising on the part of the Hays Office officials. Generally, individual companies, as big businesses having their own networks of foreign branch offices, did not need outside assistance very much to market their pictures abroad. Thus, the primary raison d’être for the MPPDA’s foreign department was in its ability to deal with foreign government restrictions that affected the American industry as a whole, such as quotas and censorship regulations. This situation was likely to create a built-in mechanism for underlying tension in the dynamics of the government-MPPDA relationship. It is not totally surprising if the Hays Office people often saw U.S. officials as major thorns in their side, rather than their trusted allies in trade promotion. The more successful their official assistance was in resolving Hollywood’s foreign problems, the more difficult it would have been to justify the existence of the MPPDA’s own foreign organization to its member companies.61
Despite the limitations of Hollywood’s associationalism, the foreign restrictions were largely unsuccessful in curbing Hollywood’s overseas expansion during much of the interwar period. The strong opposition of local theater owners played an important role in weakening these protectionist measures abroad. Given the weakness of foreign film producers and distributors, local exhibitors maintained a very influential voice in most film industries overseas. They had a vested interest in ensuring the continued importation of popular American pictures and effectively served as countervailing pressure groups against anti-Hollywood measures in foreign markets. Also, U.S. film companies often evaded the quota regulations by buying into foreign studios and producing inexpensive local pictures to increase import licenses for Hollywood movies in return. The containment of Hollywood’s overseas invasion would become effective only when foreign governments decided to place domestic production and film import under state control, as would be the case in Germany, Italy, and Japan after the mid-1930s. But in the meantime, while all private and public agencies appeared to be united in promoting American film exports, they actually continued to find themselves often working at odds with one another. In the final analysis, the deep division of interest served to undermine the official ideology of the associative state in American film-trade diplomacy throughout the interwar period.
Conclusion

After 1922, the Hays Office moved to create new institutional mechanisms that sought to coordinate the American film industry in the face of increasing problems at home and abroad. The MPPDA’s evolution as a trade association took place in the broader context of associationalism or corporatism, which refers to a system of political economy that seeks to integrate private and public leaders in a common effort to ameliorate group differences, regulate competition, and guarantee stability and harmony in modern capitalist societies. The collaboration between Hollywood and Washington meant that the MPPDA was authorized to exercise extensive control over the implementation of public policy on such matters as antitrust enforcement and censorship in the film industry.

The MPPDA’s associative record in domestic policies was of limited success, often marred by pluralist forces such as independent theater owners. But the corporatist framework was even less an organizational reality than an ideological blueprint that went largely unfulfilled in the American film trade. Here, it is far more appropriate to emphasize the limits of business-government cooperation in the interwar years. There was not “a close and consistent harmony between government and industry” in overseas markets.63 As large multinational corporations, U.S. film distributors had production resources and managerial networks worldwide that made their products highly competitive in foreign markets even without active government assistance. Under normal conditions, therefore, the American companies, their foreign branch managers, and the
MPPDA usually did not find it necessary to call on U.S. officials in coordinating their strategies for overseas expansion.

As a result, the corporatist relationship was generally weak, piecemeal, and not mutually beneficial in terms of foreign economic policy. Certainly, there was a broad consensus on the fundamental desirability of expanding Hollywood’s overseas markets. More often than not, however, the industry asked for the government’s assistance only when it became needed to settle its immediate problems at hand, especially when it faced foreign legislation and regulations that were found inimical to its interests, such as local taxes, tariffs, and quotas. On the other hand, there was little interest on its part in reciprocating such formal assistance and offer enlightened cooperation to U.S. officials on a permanent basis. This dynamics contributed to the lack of corporatist coordination between the government and industry, while the American distributors themselves often could not forge restraints on their mutual competition overseas. The associational vision of enlightened cooperation fell far short of expectations, and political conflict and tension would remain an underlying theme in Hollywood’s commercial expansion during the interwar years.
In early 1927, the Harvard Business School offered a special lecture series inviting thirteen leaders of the U.S. film industry. The fifth lecturer was Paramount’s general manager Sidney R. Kent, who spoke on the problems of film distribution at home and abroad before an audience of more than three hundred graduate students in a large hall at the Baker Memorial Library. Addressing the group of future business executives, Kent explained the scope of Hollywood’s influence in the international arena. “There is [not] a sales situation in any line of industry,” he said, “that is quite as intricate and fascinating as the distribution of modern motion pictures in foreign countries.” To perform such a task, the Hollywood cinema “must be first a diplomat and secondly a salesman” because of all the legal, economic, and cultural obstacles that it encountered in the far corners of its world market.

“American motion pictures at the present time are meeting with a great deal of opposition in foreign countries because they carry something that no other merchandise in the world carries,” Kent continued. “Motion pictures are silent propaganda, even though not made with that thought in mind at all.” In his opinion, no other medium did a
better job of acquainting foreign people with the American way of life and American products displayed on the screen. But he also recognized that such visual images of different life options and styles could awake “restless thoughts and ambitions” in other parts of the world. Thus, it was rather understandable, conceded Kent, that many foreign governments were trying to police, censor, and expel such outside influences, worried that Hollywood movies were “a direct sales agency” for the expansion of American commercial and cultural influence all over the world.¹

The last chapter examined how major American film companies cooperated to create a new trade association, the MPPDA, headed by Will H. Hays, President Harding’s postmaster general. One of the MPPDA’s primary missions was to create a coherent framework for protecting Hollywood’s economic position in foreign territories. Hollywood’s dominance of the international film market after World War I was beginning to create a torrent of foreign agitation. But the industry remained poorly organized and continued to have a mediocre record at best in maintaining functional associative relationships with federal officials in film-export policies. Hollywood’s commercial struggles abroad were the subject of a fascinating story about economic diplomacy and the limits of associationalism between the two world wars.

At the same time, however, Hollywood’s export trade produced as much cultural history as economic and international relations, and one cannot understand the full implications of Hollywood’s global domination without making sense of a larger discourse on the international importance of American movies besides tangible calculation of profit and loss. As Clifford Geertz, Arjun Appadurai, and others have shown, human
action, including the circulation of commodities in social life, is culturally regulated and embodies symbolic meanings within “the structures of signification” across different times and places. In other words, there is no transparent representation of what is seemingly objective social reality outside certain established patterns of cultural signs and practices. Thus, one’s response to any new media is essentially a cultural construction—shaped by the cultural context into which they are introduced. Likewise, Michel Foucault offers a powerful analysis of discourse, a system of linguistic regularities and knowledge that establishes the conditions of possibility in terms of which material practices and referents, including new communication technology, can be described, explained, recorded, and elaborated into arbitrary but meaningful signifiers. In light of these theoretical perspectives, the discourses on Hollywood films become particularly important because the movies were both commercial commodities and cultural products, a means of modern communication that was reshaping the culture of everyday life and thus as culturally meaningful as any other unit of production or industry.2

Taking cues from these arguments, this chapter undertakes a cultural analysis of Hollywood’s export trade during the interwar years. It examines the relationship between U.S. overseas expansion and culture by charting how the international flow of Hollywood movies was seen from within the United States after World War I. The vision of associationalism, as discussed in the last chapter, defined large parts of the MPPDA’s efforts to protect the economic interests of the American film industry, both in domestic and foreign fields. A close examination reveals that the American global conceptions of Hollywood’s cultural influence, which has not been studied compre-
hensively, were characterized by similar interconnections between domestic and international considerations. The content of American movies, in other words, became standard signifiers of modernity both in domestic and international arenas. Hollywood came to mean a primary civilizing force spreading the emergent values of modernity, or selling what the historian Warren I. Susman calls a new “culture of abundance,” especially after the war. The homogenizing effects of mass consumerism, however, were seen not only as a constitutive aspect of new American identities but also as an integral part of the larger progressive narrative about the growth of a new global, Americanized culture. In addition, the technical form of Hollywood cinema was expected to play a major role, also nurtured by the values of American-style democracy, in creating a new, peaceful international community by shrinking a traditional sense of geography, furthering mutual interactions and understanding, and promoting American but universally shared values around the world.3

Hollywood and Projections of Modernity

The intersection between domestic culture and international relations, as discussed in the introduction, has recently received increasing attention in American diplomatic history, especially since the late 1980s. There is an expanding body of scholarly literature that raises new questions about how domestic cultural values, such as political ideologies, and religious beliefs, as well as gender and racial discourses, helped shape American foreign policy. But cultural analysis of U.S. foreign relations has not been
without important, if rather forgotten, precedents. In his classic book, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959), William Appleman Williams—one of the most influential American diplomatic historians after World War II—offered a very original and interesting argument about the fusion of economics, diplomacy, and ideology in the history of America’s relationships with the rest of the world. Williams usually has been remembered quite narrowly as a father of the New Left revisionist school, which has championed economic interpretations of U.S. diplomatic history since the early 1960s. A close examination reveals, however, that Williams’s influential critique of U.S. foreign policy was guided by his view of the expansionist ideology as a holistic, unifying cultural system that pervaded every aspect of American society and culture in the twentieth century.

Williams’s key argument was that overseas economic expansion, which he defined as open-door imperialism, ultimately created “a convergence of economic practice with intellectual analysis and emotional involvement.” American economic expansion blended narrow self-interest and a universalistic faith in America’s progressive role into a larger ideological whole. One of the central assumptions guiding U.S. foreign policy, argued Williams, was “one which insists that other people cannot really solve their problems and improve their lives unless they go about it in the same way as the United States.” American leaders, in other words, seldom compartmentalized their domestic and international visions, in effect seeking to build a world order in the American image and projecting the American ways—America’s ideals, experiences, and examples—as universal models to the rest of the world. To Williams, “the insistence that other people
ought to copy America” lay at the central core of the tragedy of American diplomacy. The act of forcing American-led progress on other societies contradicted the ideal of self-determination and created a very powerful and dangerous impulse to intervene in their internal affairs, while at the same time promoting anti-American resentment and reaction throughout the world.4

Williams’s classic thesis still provides an important point of departure in exploring cultural constructions of Hollywood movies after World War I. Motion pictures were a quintessential part of the new urban, industrial world of mass communications that was taking shape in the early twentieth century. Based on the mechanical reproduction of continuous motion for optical illusions, the movies were made possible by a series of technological inventions, such as electricity, that were closely related to the second industrial revolution. Although early audiences were located in vaudeville and storefront theaters in urban working-class neighborhoods, motion pictures soon became “the first true mass amusement in American life,” according to the historian Lary May.5 When one thinks of the growth of motion pictures as a newly emerging culture industry, the narrative is often framed within the domestic urban geography of American national history, without fitting or connecting it to transnational and global developments. But as Williams suggested, Americans usually did not think one way about their national society and a different way about the international society. Indeed, the new cultural technology changed the way people thought about their own society and international relations. Americans in the early twentieth century believed that they lived in a new era that was being reshaped by the new revolution in mass communications. One of the
dominant discourses was that the movies were not only instruments of amusement and entertainment but also forces of social change—a key cultural institution that promoted changing attitudes and habits associated with modernity, especially those core values associated with mass consumerism, both in domestic and foreign fields. Thus, Hollywood movies, as commonly conceptualized, were one of the most significant American export products whose content helped to homogenize the nation and the world, most notably, into a modern society of identical consumers all sharing the tastes, habits, and material aspirations displayed on the screen.6

The official discourse about Hollywood movies certainly reflected such an understanding of the power of mass communication in creating a new American culture. In his 1926 article, “What Are Motion Pictures Doing for Industry?” Julius Klein, BFDC director and Hoover’s top advisor, insisted that “motion pictures are the latest form of silent salesman.” But they should not be seen, he added, as a direct advertising medium “for the goods of some individual firm.” Rather, Klein saw the movies as central to the corporate capitalist order in that they constituted a key culture industry disseminating desired manners of modern life and leisure and creating across the nation a broad demand “for classes and kinds of goods as a whole.” “In spite of the fact that there is no conscious trade propaganda in the entertainment picture,” he added, “it is proving a considerable force in helping to arouse on the part of the buying public a desire for the many types of products most commonly shown on the screen.” An obvious example, in Klein’s opinion, was women’s fashion. He observed that “the latest styles” were a “source of never failing interest to the women in the audience and as such were recog-
nized as a definite ‘production value’”—those screen qualities, such as big sets, lavish costumes, big stars, breathtaking action sequences, and special-effect spectacles, that were designed to appeal to the viewers regardless of the plot structures. As a result, many popular pictures featured “a long and elaborate sequence showing the latest styles on living models,” which both sold movie tickets and spurred a popular fascination with such celebrity styles among women audiences, in effect helping set new trends in the fashion industry.7

Klein’s article suggested that the rise of motion pictures marked the domestic process of fundamental transformation from the “Puritan-republican, producer-capitalist culture” to a modern “culture of abundance” during the early twentieth century. In his influential book, Culture as History (1984), Warren I. Susman argues that the shift “represented a crucial change in the nature of the capitalist order and its culture.” The older producer-oriented society had emphasized such values as hard work, frugality, self-control, discipline, sacrifice, and character—those inner qualities that had been directed toward the pursuit of material gain and capital accumulation. On the other hand, the new consumer-oriented society promoted a different moral vision of life in the new urban-industrial order. Economic growth, creating a higher level of affluence, was geared increasingly to the growth of the mass market, with its emphasis on such values as pleasure, self-fulfillment, recreation, immediate gratification, appearance, and outward personality. In this context, motion pictures served as a key engine of a new lifestyle that was oriented around advertising, mass merchandising, and new patterns of buying, spending, and consuming. Any communication medium consists of at least two
basic dimensions: form (technological elements) and content (themes, problems, issues). Certainly, Hollywood movies did not cause the breakdown in the traditional cultural order, but as Klein clearly recognized, their content, delivered through the powerful form of visual images and star appeal, seemed to have special kinds of popular attraction by projecting new styles, manners, and models of the new personality that was being liked and admired in modern urban consumer culture. Susman’s characterization of modern advertising also offers a fitting statement on Hollywood’s importance as a cultural medium native to the new era. He tells us that “the products of the culture became advertisements of the culture itself.”

Hollywood’s special contribution to the emergence of a new cultural order was also a recurrent theme in the discourses of industry spokesmen and social observers alike. In his 1930 radio speech sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Will Hays even asserted that the motion picture was the greatest instrument in the “triumph of our civilization,” one that created a particular model of the self that was felt to be essential to the maintenance of the newly emerging order based on radical alterations under corporate capitalism. The modern American economy, he observed, demanded consumption as a “new factor” in achieving “permanent prosperity.” And in Hays’s opinion, the silver screen served as the nerve center of modern industrial society because it displayed “before our people in convincing fashion the comforts and conveniences which are available to those who will work and save.” A new sense of cultural identities as consumers was being shaped by the vision of good life that was on full display in Hollywood movies. “Nothing comes out of poverty but ignorance,” proposed Hays, and
“nothing comes out of ignorance but sloth and crime.” Instead, men were naturally moved by their ambition for “the good things of life” displayed on the screen, such as “attractive homes” and “good clothes.” In this situation, Hollywood played a fundamental role in encouraging people to work hard and earn more money in order to purchase the luxuries of life and improve their living conditions in a democracy of amusement and consumption. In Hays’s psychological model of modern society, such consumption ethics as mediated by Hollywood movies were a major source of “civic progress,” one that contributed to growth and advancement both in individual standards of living and national welfare.9

Perhaps the most careful contemporary examination of Hollywood’s roles in modern American culture was made by two sociologists in their important study, Middletown (1929). Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd, conducting in-depth fieldwork in Muncie, Indiana, examined how American people lived in an industrializing era—their work, family, leisure, religion, and community activities. Their sociological study recorded the whole range of tremendous transformation that took place in a typical American community during the early twentieth century, such as the growing independence of women in public and private spheres, increasing standardization and bureaucratization in economic and social life, the pervasiveness of advertising and new consumer goods, and increasing secularization in community activities.

In this context, one major change that captured the Lynds’ attention was the growing importance of leisure activities in American culture. One of the new “inventions re-making leisure” in Middletown was motion pictures. Local movie theaters at-
tracted packed audiences from all social classes “seven days a week.” Indeed, the new, more affluent society was also one of mass communication in which newer forms of national media helped shape popular minds. With the increased recognition of communication, the Lynds paid close attention to Hollywood’s growing importance in the 1920s culture. In their analysis, new moviegoing habits were a powerful factor in introducing modernizing influences to local communities in the new era. In general, the movies as a modern communication media had the effect of loosening traditional social constraints and group mores by greatly expanding the range of information available about alternative life experiences in powerful visual forms. The Lynds found that ordinary people talked about this cultural effect most often in terms of the “early sophistication” of youth in modern society. In a darkened theater, the youngsters were habitually exposed to “the ways of the world,” as one working-class mother put it, and learned about Hollywood’s glamorous version of adult relationships—such as love, courtship, and marriage—outside the traditional socializing institutions of family, school, and local community.10

It is interesting to note that the same discourses were also applied to foreign fields. Hollywood’s projection of modernity was said to have cultural consequences within a larger world system. In 1927, for example, a Commerce Department trade bulletin reported that a popular Chinese movie in Shanghai “usually presents a curious interweaving of the customs and civilizations of East and West,” or a combination of what it defined as traditional and modern values. The body of its actors was obviously Chinese and so was their physical movement, like clasping their hands and bowing
rather than shaking each other’s hands. But its plot and scenes were distinctly “foreign” or “modern.” The play usually featured the novel idea of love affairs and courtship between young, independent characters, which was apparently at variance with the Chinese custom of arranged marriage but probably in accord with the cosmopolitan tastes of urban audiences. The men and women on the screen were often dressed in Western clothes and danced to jazz music, while every scene was filled with “some ultra modern foreign device,” such as typewriters, telephones, and phonographs. Clearly, motion pictures seemed to serve as symbolic carriers of modern industrial civilization and its social values in China. The official report concluded that from the “American point of view” Hollywood’s projection of modernity and mass culture would exercise a powerful influence. It would have “immense advertising value” for American products exhibited on the screen and would create cultural conditions, or demands, abroad for exporting such products in increasing volume.11

This type of advertising language, summarized by the popular slogan, “trade follows the film,” constituted one of the most important themes used to describe the impact of Hollywood films in foreign fields. Hollywood’s international dominance, in other words, had a much larger meaning far in excess of the significant box-office returns for the American film industry. Rather, the movies were commonly regarded as the most visible showcase for projecting the values of modernity and mass consumerism and promoting changes in social attitudes not only at home but also abroad. Their most tangible effect, of course, was typically discussed in terms of expanding export markets for American industries as a whole. Hollywood, by delivering mediated images and
information about the newly emerging culture of abundance all over the world, had “become a factor in international trade,” wrote Edward Lowry in his 1925 *Saturday Evening Post* article. The movies were “making the United States the best-known and most widely advertised country to the very remotest habitations of man on the globe,” in effect “coloring the minds and changing the desires of foreign peoples.” Hollywood pictures, in other words, were placed in the service of the creation of new, independent individuals, that is, the cosmopolitan, homogeneous consumer for modern American products, such as automobiles, radios, office and household equipment, cosmetics, and clothing. In his 1926 article, Klein also endorsed Lowry’s argument and suggested that “the best evidence of the unconscious rôle which the entertainment movie plays in selling goods comes from abroad,” although these commercial discourses were in large part just an article of faith, usually backed up with little more than anecdotal, circumstantial examples about the influence of Hollywood movies in popularizing American merchandise throughout the world.12

Later, the famous University of Chicago sociologist Robert Park formulated these ideas into a more refined, academic discourse. Park was a leading figure in the development of American sociology between the two world wars. He is best known for his study of urban life, race/ethnic relations, and the relation of communication to social change in America, but he also produced a series of important essays extending his theories to international fields. Park’s analysis focused on the implications of growing economic and cultural interdependence driven by international commerce and modern communication technology. He observed that modern society was formed by its means
of communication and that changes in communication were related to the nature and rapidity of social change by promoting social contacts and movement. Communication, according to Park, assisted in advancing modernization around the world in a number of ways. The broader diffusion of new information and knowledge tended to break up “the routine of tradition” and stimulate individuals to “undertake new enterprises.” Thus, Hollywood movies, with their content advertising and selling American goods abroad, were a major instrument of promoting social development and molding a modern social order. This international process paralleled the perceived domestic effects of motion pictures, which were thought to provide images of new practices and behaviors, undermine the inherited social order, and bring even rural communities within the orbit of modern consumer-oriented culture in the 1920s America. In Park’s analysis, Hollywood was clearly the chief device of communication that was at work disrupting the traditional prejudices and superstitions fostered by ignorance. It played a major role in drawing other countries like China within the circle of participation in modern civilization, one that was defined by the cosmopolitan, homogeneous culture of abundance within the cross-border networks of trade, investment, and information in an increasingly borderless world.¹³

The Limits of Hollywood’s Modernity Discourse

These discourses on Hollywood’s cultural importance as a key projector of modernity and a new global, Americanized culture immediately created their organized
opposition both at home and abroad. Its domestic manifestation was the anti-movie/pro-censorship campaign coming from many religious and civic organizations. Susman has argued that modern American culture, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, was shaped by the underlying conflict between two moral orders. In other words, as America became an urban society by the 1920s, its cultural fault line was defined by the considerable tensions between the traditional and modern, the country and city. Thus, the growth of urban consumer-oriented culture that had begun in the late nineteenth century—or what the historian William E. Leuchtenburg described as the "revolution in morals"—often inspired an uneasy, even hostile, response from the defenders of traditional moral values, and Hollywood movies as the symbol of new mass culture easily attracted more than a fair share of such cultural criticism.14

Anti-Hollywood critics believed that the movies were the harbinger of social dislocation that corrupted the moral character of American people—particularly the impressionable minds of youth. To sell its products every week, the movie industry undermined the traditional moral authority of parents, teachers, and churches and tried to titillate the curiosity of moviegoers by showing such indecent material as excessive violence, urban crime, and sexually suggestive scenes on the screen. As a result, motion pictures had to be censored, a pro-censorship group argued during the 1922 Massachusetts referendum campaign, in order to keep their immoral, "foreign" influences from destroying "the standards of the family, upon which all civilization is based." Clearly, the anti-Hollywood position reflected widespread concern about the cultural influence of movies as a new communication media. Daniel Lord—a Catholic priest
who helped write the famous 1930 Production Code, the self-censorship rules that would control the content of Hollywood films under the Hays Office and its successor until the mid-1960s—explained the characteristic moral response from a nearly psychological perspective. In his 1931 memorandum addressed to the Hays Office, Lord reiterated his position that “motion pictures are a distinctly new form of entertainment” and “have appealed to the mass beyond any other art” because they were “vivid beyond anything presented on the printed page or the spoken drama.” “While the printed page describes,” he continued, “the motion picture presents in actual form.” That was why motion pictures were especially dangerous, Lord maintained, because “youthful and untrained audiences are not able to distinguish right from wrong in many cases.” Instead, they embraced and imitated immoral values enacted by beautiful movie stars, such as adultery, divorce, prostitution, and other criminal activities.15

Academic discourses also helped to establish such perceived relationships between the content of Hollywood movies and the larger society. During much of the interwar era, American social scientists were interested in the Hollywood dream factory, if at all, mostly in terms of its psychological effects on the youth. In 1926, for example, a University of Tennessee scholar reported that the movies contributed to a significant increase in juvenile crimes by “rousing dormant emotions of youth.” Recent research showed, he said, that they came closer to “reproducing real life situations” than any other medium could have before. Such an environment tended to cause moral confusion in the minds of minors and make them imitate Hollywood’s criminal and obscene scenes as their moral models. There was even a great fear that the power of
movies, easily affecting even those who could not read or lacked intellectual sophistication, would be a major source of cultural “difficulties” in modern mass society. A University of Pennsylvania sociologist observed that Hollywood created a make-believe world of dreams and fantasies by “present[ing] impossible standards most frequently to the most people with the most personal and enticing appeal.” Thus, his deeper concern was whether such false, inflated desires, cutting across all social, economic, and educational boundaries, might not have highly disruptive, unexpected consequences in American culture and cause social problems among the masses—the “mechanic,” “sales girl,” and farmer”—who actually could not afford such material comforts as they saw glamorized on the screen.16 In the early 1930s, the famous “Payne Fund studies” also attracted broad public attention as a team of psychologists, sociologists, and educators published their similar findings about the “positive relationship”—though hedged with scholarly caution—between movie attendance and juvenile delinquency. The opinion was based on their analysis that “children of all ages tend to accept as authentic what they see in the movies.”17

At the same time, it is striking that similar concern about Hollywood’s effects on modern society and on the attitudes of individual viewers was part of common discourse in other countries as well. Hollywood’s international domination, as discussed in the previous chapter, certainly evoked strenuous foreign reaction for commercial reasons. Foreign governments and industries often feared Hollywood movies as a major agent for U.S. economic expansion, one that created and stimulated a demand for American products that were displayed on the screen. As early as 1923, a speech by the British
Prince of Wales on the importance of the film industry in imperial trade drew a memorable comment from a London newspaper:

> If the United States abolished its diplomatic and consular services, kept its ships in harbor and its tourists at home, and retired from the world’s markets, its problems, its towns and countryside, its roads, motor cars, counting houses and saloons would still be familiar in the uttermost corners of the world. . . . The film is to America what the flag was once to Britain. By its means Uncle Sam may hope some day, if he be not checked in time, to Americanize the world.\textsuperscript{18}

However, such foreign reaction was further exacerbated by the fact that motion pictures were both commercial products and cultural goods. Many observers recognized, as C. J. North put it in 1928, that “the cultural argument is one which can be honestly advanced in good faith” as a motive for foreign film restrictions, rather than simply a rhetorical smoke screen used by foreign governments and industries to camouflage their commercial interests.\textsuperscript{19} In addition to their economic impact, American movies provoked powerful ideological reaction abroad because Hollywood’s international successes seemed to signal a new cultural development after World War I, that is, the perceived erosion of national cultures by the transnational forces of Americanization. The discourse of American media imperialism even reached the higher circles of the League of Nations. In 1924, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, recommending the organization of an international cinema conference, discussed a major report on the motion picture question. The report noted that “the development of the cinematograph is one of the most important developments in the history of intellectual life during the last twenty years,” one that transformed “the conditions which stimulate and nourish the imagination, feeling and thought of the masses in every
country.” “It is a striking fact,” the report warned in reference to the popularity of American movies, “that only the Bible and the Koran have an indisputably larger circulation than that of the latest film from Los Angeles.” Two years later, the recommended conference was held in Paris, but the Hays Office, fearing that it would only turn into an international forum for anti-Hollywood movements, refused to participate officially. Instead, it worked privately through a major French film company Pathé—whose main object was to have its pictures distributed in the United States through Hollywood studios—in order to ensure that “nothing was said or done against our interests.”

However, the forces of such anti-Hollywood discourses themselves could not be contained abroad and remained a powerful factor in shaping rhetorical structures relating to Hollywood’s global influence after the mid-1920s. In early 1928, for example, the German Reichstag held an interesting debate on the cultural implications of American movies. German politicians believed that the Hollywood cinema, despite the quota-based import restriction, was exercising too great an influence on the character of German films. They complained that German producers and movie stars tried to copy the Hollywood style all too often, especially the figure of the American flapper as the heroine of the modern times. The ideological structure of German reaction was clearly illustrated in the New York Times article that picked up on this German parliamentary debate: “just what evil influence American stage and screen stars are working on the German public was not defined by the Committee, which, however, was unanimous that the girls wielded a mystic and wicked power.”
Thus, the status of American movies as the symbol of modernity and mass culture—which constituted the discourse of domestic moral criticism at the time—triggered expressions of cultural ambivalence and tension in other countries as well. Many scholars have found that such anti-Hollywood sentiments were rooted particularly in political, economic, and cultural elite discourses overseas. The main fear was that Hollywood, as Paramount’s manager Sidney Kent explained in his 1927 Harvard lecture, posed one of the greatest threats to local cultures and public morality. American ideas of individual freedom and social mobility, freedom of speech and freedom of politics, foreign critics feared, had the effect of overturning established distinctions and social authority by encouraging people to disregard the existing values and take all law and order into their own hands, as American cowboys were so often portrayed to do in the westerns. Also, the American culture of abundance, as its vision of glamour, excesses, and conspicuous consumption captured the popular imagination on the world’s silver screens, might lead to an upsurge of mass unrest and revolt against all sorts of class differences. The typical ideological response to the perceived menace of Americanization was to define modern mass culture as the “other” and see it as a cultural invasion that was spearheaded most conspicuously by Hollywood movies, as the German case suggested, rather than seek domestic sources of such social and cultural change. Just as Hollywood’s urban consumerist vision of modernity shared domestic and international concerns, so did it raise conservative voices of cultural self-defense both at home and abroad.22
Such ideological constructions, combined with the economic fears of Hollywood’s influence on international trade, produced increasing movements for import restriction and tighter censorship against American movies in foreign markets, particularly after the mid-1920s. For that reason, the Hays Office often made it a point to minimize the publicity about the dominance of the American film industry on the international screens, fearing its adverse reception in foreign capitals. Hollywood’s clear doubletalk—celebrating its global economic control and cultural impact at home while also trying to hide them from foreign attention—annoyed some U.S. government officials. In the spring of 1926, for instance, the MPPDA expressed its objection to a Commerce Department publication that listed motion picture royalties earned abroad “on the ground that this publicity may have a harmful effect” in other countries considering anti-Hollywood measures. The MPPDA’s complaint irked one BFDC official, who told Hoover that the data was not much different from the trade figures that had been issued for domestic consumption by none other than the Hays Office itself, which “emphasized not only the money returns from pictures sent abroad but also the economic penetration effected by the pictures.” Thus, Hollywood’s effort to eradicate the trace of its international influence was caught up in a web of ideological contradictions, creating its active opposition in a shared discursive field that established the significance of movies in the new urban, industrial world of mass communications.23
In addition to the discourse of motion pictures as cultural arbiters of modernity, Hollywood’s global position was often described as having further cultural consequences in the modern world. If the content of Hollywood movies helped to promote the modern culture of mass consumerism around the globe, changes in medium—the new form of film—also seemed to play a different, significant role in creating a new type of national and international community that had been inconceivable previously. In this context, McLuhan’s dictum that “medium is the message” has much to offer toward explaining the structure of thought that characterized the cultural meaning of American movies after World War I. To many Americans, in other words, the communication revolution, the radical change in the nature of communication technology, created a totally new human environment, transformed the traditional notions of time and space, and developed a new universal consciousness and experience as the solid foundation of world peace.²⁴

Certainly, Will Hays was a major proponent of the idea that sweeping changes in communication technology, with motion pictures as the key signifier, were creating a special community of all Americans at home through the effects of a new media environment. In his 1926 speech at the Advertising Club of New York, Hays told the nation’s advertisers that “we are advertising America itself” and “bettering living conditions everywhere, especially in the small towns.” His cultural vision celebrated the form of modern communication and its unique capacity to break down the traditional barriers

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of time and space and promote social cohesion, order, and consensus in a rapidly urbanizing nation. Cities as the centers of social and cultural change in modern life attracted an increasing flow of migrants from rural areas and produced new products, customs, and styles of life. In the urbanizing society, Hays explained, Hollywood movies created a technology of uniformity. The flow of ideas and information played a great role in wiping out the cultural distance between New York and Main Street. No one had to move to the big city any more, he said, to find out about the latest goods, services, and ideas that had once been so hard to reach rural communities and small towns formerly isolated by geography and lack of communication. In Hays’s opinion, the new consciousness that caused American life to become integrated and homogenized was, most importantly, a modern culture of consumption. He explained that people in his hometown, Sullivan, Indiana—while far removed from the metropolitan hubs of modern industrial civilization—were no longer a bunch of country bumpkins. Today, the movies made it possible for them to travel visually to new distant places beyond their local communities. They were now easily able to keep abreast of current fashions and thoughts, a cultural activity that had once before been possible only for the rich leisure class. Clearly, Hays saw the growth of motion pictures as an essential part of the communications revolution that brought the outside world even into the rural home, extended human senses beyond traditional horizons, and created a new sense of proximity and national community in a way that no other previous medium had ever been able to do.²⁵
Hays’s domestic reflection on the psychological impact of motion pictures was rooted in the longstanding conceptual framework that had governed the way new electronic media were discussed and comprehended in American culture. In his book, *Media and the American Mind* (1982), Daniel J. Czitrom argues that a powerful tradition of media essentialism constituted the utopian vision of modern communication technology, such as the telegraph and radio. According to this discourse of technological determinism, the modern mass media increasingly created new structures of perception and experience by conquering “those vast social and cultural distances that had traditionally kept the large majority of people isolated.” New technology, Hays also predicted in his speech, promoted integration—the removal of cultural barriers and the development of a growing sense of community and unity—by accelerating the exchange of ideas and information in larger society. In other words, the reduction of effective distances brought the outside world into individual communities and into the privacy of individual families.

Notably, Czitrom also suggests that this fetishism of electronic communication revealed domestic as much as international implications and created a new way of thinking about the world. The compression of geographical space signified a unifying force for international cooperation and peace. There was a strong, utopian faith that the accelerated pace of communication would lead to the creation of a “global village”—to borrow from McLuhan’s more recent formulation—by promoting a web of mutual understanding and interdependence and ending social, cultural, and political parochialism among nations. Indeed, this type of media discourse also penetrated the con-
temporary field of academic knowledge as well. In a 1929 article on the social effects of modern communication, the University of Chicago sociologist E. W. Burgess declared that the movies had “accomplished as much for world solidarity as the League of Nations” by “becoming indispensable instruments for the functioning of a world-society.” “The motion picture,” he continued, “accused of Americanizing the world, is, without doubt, making the peoples of the earth acquainted with one another.” Writing on the history of U.S. communication studies, Everett M. Rogers, whose work has been central in the field since the 1960s, concludes that such an idealistic view of the world being bettered through the free flow of information and mass communication across national borders became enshrined as a dominant academic discourse in post-World War II America.27

This discourse of cultural internationalism clearly shaped Hollywood’s vision of the enormous technological possibilities of motion pictures in international relations after World War I. Indeed, such views also were a striking part of Hays’s 1927 lecture at the Harvard Business School. He spoke with enthusiasm to the future corporate elite about Hollywood’s unique capacity for the realization of enhanced communication and integration on a global scale, the capacity for breaking down the barriers that divided nations and cultures and “bringing about better understandings between man and man, between group and group, and between nation and nation.” Hays redefined peace and war as the basic problem of communication in building ties that would create an ever larger community of peoples:
When we know one another, we do not hate one another. When we do not hate, we do not make war. Wars and lesser conflicts are caused because groups and peoples do not understand each other’s ideas and beliefs, each other’s backgrounds and ambitions.

His theory was that the barriers of geography were a main source of human conflicts; it is human nature to regard distant groups and nations as the “other”—something different and therefore suspicious and inimical to their own ideas and ambitions. All international controversies were brought about by lack of understanding, jealousy, fear, and hatred born of traditional insularity and ignorance. Based on this general proposition, Hays proclaimed that the movies were destined to be the greatest instrument ever for overcoming such ignorance, bringing people closer together, and creating a community of nations formerly isolated by distance and lack of communication. The universal acceptance of film entertainment helped various countries to learn, know, and understand one another in a manner that was never before possible. Hollywood movies showed visual images of the places and cultures that most people had known only remotely in newspapers or on maps. As a result, people around the globe increasingly had the opportunity to watch how others looked, dressed, and acted from day to day, while also recognizing that all mankind—no longer strangers—might be different but still basically shared a common planet and common humanity, those emotions of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. Since knowing others was essentially the best route to understanding them, to promoting increased toleration and fellowship, said Hays, our children would forget what nationalism was, a prospect that opened “the ultimate and eternal road to peace.” The movies, in this view, were an “international ambassador of
good will,” and formal treaties and agreements between governments became less relevant in improving international relations given the power of motion pictures, a vicarious form of travel and contact allowing communication and mutual understanding to take place across national borders.29

This vision of technological utopianism about the collapse of traditional spati-ality was also shared to a great extent by U.S. government officials. In 1925, Julius Klein told a group of peace activists that “it is no exaggeration to describe the international trade in motion pictures as one of the truly great contributions toward mutual understanding, acquaintance, and therefore peace.” He explained that commerce was the main engine of international peace that strengthened the “bonds of interdependence” through “mutual exchanges of advantages.” In Klein’s view, one vital factor that contributed to such peaceful economic interchanges was “the vastly improved network of transportation and communication throughout the world,” especially motion pictures. He observed that Hollywood movies, by linking various nations with visual, easily available, information about all parts of the world, were “accomplishing a profoundly helpful service in clearing away misconceptions and distorted ideas as to the manners and customs of other peoples.” Klein’s hopes for the American film industry were located at the intersection of domestic and international considerations:

The first assurance of domestic order and compact national unity and accord is the establishment of effective means of communication. And the surest way to stimulate a comparable growth internationally is to stimulate the ebb and flow of international trade by improving these channels of communication and transportation through which it flows.30

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Klein’s faith in the technological promise of motion pictures was also expressed by Herbert Hoover. The secretary of commerce expressed such ideas most clearly when he was invited as a main speaker to the April 1927 dinner hosted by the Hays Office in honor of Latin American diplomats. His long speech was dedicated to a broad examination of the way that motion pictures were increasingly becoming an important factor in the establishment of international peace and order. Hoover spoke of his great hopes for increasing friendship and cooperation within the Western Hemisphere and defined Hollywood movies as a “distinctive” force for promoting such regional unity. He told the audience that “the motion picture is not solely a commercial venture; it is not solely an agency of amusement and recreation.” “Beyond all this,” said Hoover, “it is a skilled and potent purveyor between nations of intellectual ideas and national ideals.” The exchange of literature, science, art, and drama had been traditional “methods of world communication.” But he observed that such cultural exchanges had been “a slow and tedious process,” while at the same time “reach[ing] but a selected few” in other countries. In contrast, the movies created a new environment for “this national interchange” by making it possible for “the great mass of people of every nation” to see the details of life and its styles in different places and to share new common experiences. Thus, Hoover presented the vision of global integration progressing irreversibly and making all peoples virtual neighbors through the forces of modern communication. The increased bonds of mutual goodwill and understanding mediated by the movies were the reason that he placed “the hopes of the future” in motion pictures, together with inter-
national trade, as the foundation of “our mutual civilization” and “mutual interests” in the Western Hemisphere.\textsuperscript{31}

At the same time, however, it is important to note that the dominant discourse of cultural internationalism was not derived solely from the idea of technological determinism. The possibilities inherent in the new form of mass communication, unlike McLuhan’s media theory, seemed to be strengthened by the content of the messages that Hollywood movies conveyed as “American” cultural exports. According to this discourse, they were welcomed worldwide as a democratic, nonpolitical, universal art embodying key features of American political culture. Because of its enormous popular influence worldwide, Hollywood helped to guide the thought of nations toward common ideals and values that were American in nature but universally accepted, such as democracy and capitalist abundance. And even more significantly, these cultural perceptions of Hollywood’s international popularity as a medium of Americanization were firmly rooted in the traditional ideology of American exceptionalism.

The special importance of American culture was preached most clearly in the industry’s explanation for the international acceptance of Hollywood movies. Motion pictures occupied a central place in modern life, said Hays, because they satisfied a universal human need for affordable leisure and recreation among the millions of common people who needed a temporary escape from the routine of modern industrial work. Drawing on the metaphor of two worlds that informed American exceptionalism, he argued that in contrast to European films, Hollywood movies appealed internationally because they recognized and sought above all to meet the entertainment require-
members of the millions rather than the privileged leisure class. While European directors, influenced by the anti-democratic, class-oriented conception of high culture, often tried to make pictures acceptable solely to their artistic pretensions, Hays suggested that Hollywood epitomized the very essence of mass culture and created a democratic institution—a truly global popular culture—that could reach out and touch audiences anywhere by finding the largest common denominator of entertainment appeal that fulfilled the desires of its mass consumers around the world. And it had attained a commanding position in the world on its own merit—by “depicting the life of a free people under democratic government,” as Hays late put it in his memoirs, in a way that revealed America, its promise of equal, unlimited opportunity, and the chance for common men and women to play a central role and find adventure, romance, and happiness in their dream world. The supposed contrast between the democratic values of American society and the class-ridden structure of Europe, in this view, was epitomized in Hollywood’s happy endings, a narrative structure that embodied its easy confidence that all problems were ultimately reducible to individual happiness. In his 1925 Saturday Evening Post article, Lowry also told his readers that this cheerful outlook on life, as opposed to gloomy and unhappy ending, was maybe “the true reason” for the international popularity of American movies:

There is no laughter in the European films. They lack gayety, light-heartedness, sprightliness. They do not portray happiness. There is not in them anywhere any sense of irresponsible children at play. These lacking qualities are supplied in almost every American film. Our pictures show people having fun. They reflect freedom, prosperity, happiness, a higher standard of living . . . .
The European intelligentsia criticize the happy endings of our stories as bad art. But . . . these happy pictures are beacon lights of hope. They seem to show the way to peace, prosperity, and happiness. They make the spectators forget their cares and worries and anxieties. They bring relaxation and give entertainment. . . . They open a fresh new world of play where there are no class restrictions or the inertia that comes of despair. That is why American pictures are popular abroad.33

Besides, America’s democratic tradition was related to the commercial character of its movies in a way that enhanced Hollywood’s ability to unify the mind of peoples across national borders and create a new kind of international community. Hollywood’s universal mass appeal in foreign lands, Hays argued, was also a product of the high value placed on the liberal ideals of freedom of speech and freedom of markets in America. Born in a New World that had escaped the extremes of class distinction and ideological conflict afflicting the Old World, Hollywood movies commanded universal acceptance all over the world as a refreshing, liberating cultural alternative, one that embodied the right of the democratic public to make decisions in the marketplace of ideas based on a free flow of information. The larger public enjoyed American films as purely commercial entertainment without censorship or politically motivated propaganda by government authorities. In addition to the democratic absence of government controls, the universality of Hollywood movies also seemed to be overdetermined by the liberal tradition of free enterprise and market competition. Hays observed that Hollywood films existed solely as commercial commodities that were produced for the masses, not only for an intellectual elite, “from a world viewpoint for an international market.” The market demands of the box office always pressed American producers to provide the best, universal entertainment films with high production value that satisfied
the taste and interests of their audience not only in America but also around the world. In addition, such market forces compelled them to take every possible care to portray all nations and cultures in a positive, sympathetic light so that no foreign scenes or characters would be offensive to their audiences overseas, with the result that Hollywood played an important role in removing causes of misunderstanding through realistic depictions of conditions in the United States and overseas.  

Further, the pluralist nature of American nationhood was thought to be an important factor in shaping what Hays called “the cosmopolitan nature of American motion pictures.” Contemporary studies of Hollywood’s short history, such as Terry Ramsaye’s *A Million and One Nights* (1926), found the secret of its international popularity in the high proportion of immigrant viewers in America. “Since the American producer has always served a polyglot and extremely diverse population,” he wrote, “his products have automatically evolved with a certain innate internationalism, and a catholicity which tends to make them world market merchandise” across the barriers of language and nationality. In addition to this demand-side account, the discourse of America’s melting pot added to Hays’s statement that Hollywood, while it happened to be in America, was “decidedly an international institution” as a supplier of popular entertainment in the world market. American movies were not just “the missionaries of American culture and thought” Rather, Hollywood had attracted the best actors, directors, and technicians of all nations during its short history. In short, “all countries are participating” in making American movies and portraying what was common to all mankind, to men and women of every race and every language. In that sense, Holly-
wood was making international pictures for the whole world, while other countries made movies largely for their national audiences. Thus, the relative openness of American society was another important reason, suggested Hays, that America had been able to create a popular art form that could reach out and touch audiences anywhere regardless of status, culture, or national origins.36

Clearly, Hollywood’s vision of a truly global popular culture after World War I was a consummate expression of the ideology of liberal internationalism in modern U.S. foreign policy. In Spreading the American Dream (1982), Emily S. Rosenberg has presented a widely read and influential interpretation of American economic and cultural expansion during the early twentieth century. Adding a more systematic cultural dimension to Williams’s theory of open-door imperialism, Rosenberg explains that the liberal internationalist ideology, which she defines as “liberal-developmentalism,” “elevat[ed] the beliefs and experiences of America’s unique historical time and circumstance into developmental laws thought to be applicable everywhere.” This expansionist ideology was rooted in such central tenets as belief in liberal capitalism (private free enterprise) and support for the free flow of goods, capital, services, and information in the global marketplace. When she looks at U.S. foreign relations after the war, Rosenberg further stresses that “the internationalism of the 1920s implicitly assumed the superiority and inevitable spread of American techniques and values.” This faith in American-led progress merged “expansionism, national interest, and international betterment” into a powerful ideological whole, and the broad consensus was that Americanization, mediated by mass communications, was the only route to universal harmony, peace, and
progress in the modern world. Hollywood movies were embedded in such broader ideological contexts of American economic and cultural expansion during the interwar era. It also seemed that there were no fundamental contradictions between American exceptionalism and universalistic assumptions. Both in their form and content, the movies were thought to be a major instrument of international amity, knowing no geographical limitations and creating a growing sense of community among nations under the influence of American but universally acceptable models and values.37

The Limits of Hollywood’s Cultural Internationalism

The Hays Office maintained an unquestioning confidence in the powerful force of Hollywood movies as an instrument of international communication. In this view, Americana movies—which were said to be produced for worldwide consumption—served as goodwill ambassadors for promoting mutual understanding among nations. To that end, the American producers proclaimed their aspiration to ensure that every picture “shall correctly portray American life, opportunities and aspirations to the world,” while also “correctly portray[ing] to America the life of other people.”38 In reality, however, just like its discourses on modernity and mass culture, Hollywood’s vision of creating universal products that crossed the boundaries of culture and nation was often besieged with a constant stream of critical examination by domestic and foreign observers alike.
In this respect, one major problem that caught the attention of domestic critics had to do with Hollywood’s depictions of American life on the international screens. Domestic concerns about the broader cultural implications of American movies had been raised loudly as soon as they established dominance in the world film market during World War I. As George Creel wrote in his postwar memoirs, *How We Advertised America* (1920), his Committee on Public Information (CPI) had used motion pictures as one of the major instruments of wartime propaganda to carry “the story of America” around the world. But Creel also recalled that one of the CPI’s important missions was “the work of keeping certain motion pictures out of those countries”:

Much of the misconception about American before the war was due to American motion pictures portraying the lives and exploits of New York’s gun-men, Western bandits, and wild days of the old frontier, all of which were accepted in many parts of the world as representative of American life. That was the reason, said Creel, that the CPI wanted to show only “pictures that presented the wholesome life of America,” while keeping out of world circulation those movies “that gave entirely false impressions of American life and morals.” It seems clear, however, that the CPI’s export censorship was actually quite limited in its official scope; one study shows that contrary to the public discourse on the potentially harmful impact of many American movies, the proportion of pictures that were ever denied export licenses was only about one percent during the war.39

The problem of Hollywood’s cultural miscommunication was a recurrent theme running through the reports filed by U.S. officials during the interwar era. In early 1922, a commercial attaché at Beijing wrote home about the inquiry that he had received from
an American female missionary in China. According to his report (written coinciden-
tally within the first days of the MPPDA’s existence), she had asked him if American
movies were officially censored in any way before they were exported to the rest of the
world, because she was concerned that “the Chinese are being given a very distorted and
unfavorable impression of our American life and customs through the character of the
motion picture films which are being displayed in this country.” The commercial atta-
ché offered an example of an affluent Chinese mother who had refused to send her
daughter to an American university on a scholarship because she seemed to think that
the social problems and corruption displayed on the screen, such as frontier lawlessness
and violence vividly portrayed in the westerns, were a regular part of life in the United
States. While more sanguine about the positive impact of Hollywood films on China
trade, he did feel that they offset much of the longstanding cultural efforts made by
American missionaries in East Asia. In his view, while American movies were con-
sumed at home as popular entertainment, they acquired, once they crossed national
boundaries, different cultural constructions, gave distorted, unfavorable images of
American life, and created a major source of cultural miscommunication and misper-
ceptions around the world.40 Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, this sort of concern
about Hollywood’s domestic (mis)representations led U.S. officials and the Hays Office
repeatedly to propose more careful selection procedures to avoid possibly inappropriate
materials for foreign export. The Roosevelt administration, citing “the bad effect they
are supposed to have by misrepresenting America in foreign lands,” once even con-
sidered setting up an official clearing house to censor Hollywood’s exports as part of the
Good Neighbor Policy in Latin America, although the idea was never carried out in the face of the MPPDA’s strong objection.41

Similar concern about the susceptibilities of foreign audiences to the Hollywood universe was also heard from foreign quarters, particularly with regard to the cultural impact of motion pictures on European colonial subjects. In a 1926 letter to Lowry, for example, Hays noted that “one of the chief British complaints” about Hollywood’s international dominance was concerned with its possible effects on Britain’s position and prestige in its colonial empire. He was particularly interested in the notion that “British colonialists see nothing but the American flag on battleships” in Hollywood movies. “They have been told,” said Hays, “that Britain is ‘mistress of the seas,’” while the influence of British sea power, not surprisingly, had not been represented prominently in most American pictures entering Britain’s colonial possessions. Hays confessed that he did not know how to solve this problem and told Lowry that “there are so many ramifications of this situation that it challenges imaginations, as well as the best of the ability of all of us to work it out.”42 The British authorities also remained highly sensitive to the harmful influence of those movies showing white characters in any comic, criminal, or immoral situations. Such scenes, it was feared, would be a menace to the prestige of white civilization as a whole, as they might destroy the myth of white supremacy and incite anti-imperialist sentiment among “the awakening minds of the natives” around the world.43

In addition to such concern about the effects of American representations of the “self,” American movies were also criticized abroad for their representations of the
“other.” This international problem owed a great deal to the fact that Hollywood was always in search of a workable villain who could be paired against its heroes and heroines as part of its cliché happy endings—good and justice overcoming evil, wrongdoing, and adversity at the end of its entertainment pictures. American producers naturally felt, wrote Hays, that the frequent choice of enemies from outside “added contrast and color to stories filled with Americans.” Hollywood’s appetite for stereotypes of foreign evil was also fueled by the fact that domestic censors tended to be more tolerant when the movies projected unfavorable attributes to foreign characters or were removed from contemporary American settings. But it was no surprise that Hollywood’s exoticism had difficulties in avoiding accusations of national bias and giving offense to audience sensibilities in other countries. The Mexican film embargo of 1922—which was discussed in the previous chapter—was hardly an isolated episode of international protest, as Hays said to studio executives during his first year, against “the accuracy with which the people and the scenes of their countries are portrayed.” Indeed, the Hollywood universe was often disturbed by the obvious contradictions between its universalistic discourses and ethnocentric productions during the interwar era.44

These contradictions never seemed to go away even while the MPPDA’s negotiations with the Mexican government were winding down in November 1922. One of the new controversies involved The Pride of Palomar (Paramount, 1922). Its producer was William Randolph Hearst, famous newspaper publisher and owner of the Cosmopolitan Pictures, a production company that had been established originally to promote the career of his mistress, actress Marion Davis. True to Hearst’s widely
known anti-Japanese attitudes, this melodrama was a variation on the menace of Japanese immigration to the West Coast. The veteran Mike Ferrell returns to his southern California home after his army service in World War I. He discovers his father’s death and learns that John Parker, a speculator who holds a mortgage on his old ranch, Palomar, is trying to sell the land to Okada, a wealthy Japanese who plans to turn it into a Japanese colonization project. While he works to raise the needed money to regain the ranch, the hero is attacked and seriously wounded by Japanese secret agents who have been summoned by Okada. Mike is nursed back to health by Kay Parker, the speculator’s daughter with whom he has fallen in love. Then, the hero miraculously wins a Kentucky derby classic with his horse, collects a large award, and prevents a foreclosure on the ranch at the last minute. Okada, with his scheme defeated, declares that he will some day come back with a Japanese army and take over the land. When Okada strikes a match across the face of a marble bust of George Washington to light his cigarette, the patriotic hero knocks him out of the window to an untimely and rather grisly end. The movie also was filled with many scenes stressing the Japanese menace in California, such as a classroom scene in a local school where a few remaining white pupils were surrounded by a horde of Japanese children.45

The Japanese consulate general in New York protested against the film’s “wholesale condemnation of their [Japanese] race” and requested the deletion of what he saw as anti-Japanese materials in The Pride of Palomar.46 Hays wrote a confidential letter to Hearst about this problem, in which he unsuccessfully asked for “some slight changes that could be made which would not involve serious expense or trouble and not
injure the picture in any way, but would be a definite service to use in the other things we are trying to do.” But the remaining evidence, though limited, shows that Hays succeeded at least in having the picture altered in New England by working with the local secretary of the Japan Society of Boston. She arranged the support of local civic and religious organizations and lobbied to have the film’s anti-Japanese scenes censored and deleted prior to exhibition in Massachusetts and in other northeastern states. Yet, this success was only a small consolation—an omen of the continuing troubles that would shape an important part of Hollywood’s international affairs during the interwar era.

The difficulties involved in creating universal entertainment pleasing all in its global audience gradually led the Hays Office to create a centralized process of overseeing the themes and contents of Hollywood films and even seeking diplomatic advice and counsel from foreign embassies on pictures that featured foreign subjects and backgrounds. By 1928, it also began to seek a corporatist solution to this international problem and formally asked the BFDC’s motion picture section for the first time to collect and provide detailed reports on the general foreign reception and censorship on American movies. The industry’s rationale, according to North, was that American producers were now “pretty well up on what is wanted in the United States” and “can generally figure out pretty closely what they should put into pictures and what they should leave out,” while no coordinated efforts had previously been made to filter similar information back to the Hays Office or individual companies with an eye to developing effective mechanisms for industry-wide self-censorship. In particular, the
Hays Office was interested in receiving official guidance on how American films with foreign settings were received abroad so that their depictions of foreign scenes and characters would be as correct in every detail as possible. Later that year, North also observed that the MPPDA member companies were “making a sincere effort” to improve their foreign relations and sought not only to leave out what might not pass foreign censor boards but to avoid “anything which might arouse antagonism among the people themselves.”

Yet, it seems that the need to accommodate the sensibilities of foreign nations never went far enough to overcome the nationalistic limitations of Hollywood’s cultural internationalism. On close examination, Hollywood’s discourse itself was shot through with inherent contradictions about the cultural and political significance of its products in the global village. On the one hand, the American film industry proposed itself as a universal, fundamentally benign institution that claimed no nationality and achieved its worldwide success by providing ever popular, harmless entertainment to its global audiences across the geopolitical boundaries. The major studios, North observed in the late 1920s, were “generally obsessed with the notion that the rest of the world cannot get along without American pictures.” This confidence produced an industry viewpoint that foreign restrictions, if ever attempted, would eventually fail in large part because such a clamor of protest would go up from the foreign public demanding the wholesome, universally accepted American products. Consequently, Hollywood simply tended to take its foreign position for granted, failed to realize the danger of foreign antagonism and agitation until it was usually too late to thwart such moves, and often proposed sales
boycotts as the best route to countering the proposed measures to restrict American films.\textsuperscript{50}

On the other hand, Hollywood was also acutely aware of the nationality of American pictures as a powerful tool of shaping international images. Recognizing such media influence helped to reinforce the industry’s insistence that its products were meant for pure entertainment and free from any political considerations, so that it could counter cultural arguments for foreign restriction. Thus, the Hays Office was usually “most anxious” to keep politics out of American pictures as much as possible and steer the newsreels to “an absolutely impartial course as regards political news.” But at the same time, the American film industry was not entirely averse to calling attention to the ideological power of motion pictures in other countries. When anti-Hollywood measures were proposed by other governments, the Hays Office, as well as U.S. officials, tended to suggest that excluding the American film industry in hopes of promoting local industries would be a distinct disadvantage to them. While American newsreels, using many pictures taken in such countries, had served as a free, “wonderful advertising medium” for their countries, it would be practically impossible for smaller foreign film companies to have similar, satisfactory results in world markets because they lacked “the wide distributing facilities throughout the world of the American firms.”\textsuperscript{51} To this end, the Hays Office at times even made a point of arranging special, favorable coverage for certain foreign events and government leaders as “evidence of the desire of the American film industry to show its cordial attitudes” and the value of projecting positive images worldwide through American pictures. On the contrary, American film
companies could also threaten to unleash the power of Hollywood cinema as a way to gain the upper hand in film trade disputes, as will be discussed later in the Japanese case. Hollywood, it was suggested, was always in need of bad guys in its crowd-pleasing stories and would not hesitate to create evil villains from where its pictures were excluded, as a result demonizing and damaging the images of such countries throughout the world.52

Considering these obvious contradictions in Hollywood’s discourse of cultural internationalism, it was not surprising that the Hays Office, despite its general supervision of studio production, continued to receive specific expressions of diplomatic protest about the negative, stereotyped representations of nations and racial groups in Hollywood movies. Like the failure of associationalism to solve foreign economic problems, as discussed in chapter 1, one important reason for Hollywood’s failure to speak the universal language around the world was the short-term priorities or parochial outlooks of Hollywood studios. In late 1928, before traveling to Hollywood to meet with studio executives and producers, North wrote to George Canty, U.S. trade commissioner in Paris, that “all the people in New York give me to understand that the Hollywood outlook does not go even so far as New York, let alone across the Atlantic.” Indeed, one Hollywood scenario writer had once articulated the strong, nationalistic resistance to Hays’s idea of spreading Americanism and cultural understanding through motion pictures. He told an MPPDA official in a clear, unmistakable tone that he was “still not convinced that Internationalism is a good thing” and insisted that Hollywood “always must be Pro-American,” rather than trying hard to make its pictures acceptable
to foreign tastes and influences, such as refraining even from the use of the Star Spangled Banner as a musical accompaniment.53

Hollywood’s parochialism, combined with its shortsighted concern with packaging picturesque, exotic interests—if rendered deliberately less explicit and offensive—for box-office appeal, often proved to be at odds with its long-term interest in accommodating the demands of the global market. Its representations of the foreign “other” remained tied to the national mood and movie trends in the largest market, the United States, rather than conforming to the stated desire to show international sensitivity to issues of racism and national stereotypes and create universally acceptable films for worldwide distribution. This situation was clearly illustrated in late 1932 when Shanghai Express (Paramount, 1932) became the subject of diplomatic protest by the Chinese embassy. In this story of adventures and romance, a British medical corps officer is reunited with his long-lost love and fallen woman (played by Marlene Dietrich) on a train speeding from Beijing to Shanghai. The train is overtaken by Chinese rebels and they are taken hostage by a Eurasian warlord rebel leader, who is eventually stabbed to death by an American-born Chinese prostitute in revenge for her earlier rape. One of Dietrich’s best remembered films, Shanghai Express was among the many films on China that were produced in Hollywood during the early 1930s, with their popularity apparently reflecting the box-office appeal of the war-torn nation as an exotic fantasy of intrigue, illusion, and mystery. But the Chinese government originally demanded that Paramount withdraw prints of Shanghai Express from worldwide circulation because of what its censor board saw as derogatory descriptions of the Chinese national character.
In December 1932, the BFDC’s motion picture division and the State Department invited Chinese diplomats to a special showing of the movie in question—the first official showing ever arranged for foreign diplomatic missions. The event indeed proved useful in allaying the Chinese concern. In particular, U.S. officials emphasized the extra care with which American producers depicted Chinese scenes to be faithful in every possible detail and avoid offending Chinese sensibilities. “Among other things,” North wrote to Herron after the meeting, “we were able to point out the fact that the bandit leader is not even a Chinese but a half-caste and also that it is mentioned on numerous occasions that the Chinese government has put a price on his head and is trying in every way possible to catch him.” U.S. officials also told the Chinese that motion pictures were merely fictions made for popular entertainment and that no Americans would ever accept as authentic what they saw on the screen. But in private, North was clearly annoyed at the “epidemic of films on China right now.” In his letter to the commercial attaché at Shanghai, he wrote that while Shanghai Express did not cause diplomatic trouble, some of these movies, if designed to be only thriller films, showed the Chinese “as mysterious orientals moving in an atmosphere of utter artificiality and unreality, depicting strange and hideous tortures and in short filling to the letter almost all of the most ignorant conceptions of the Chinese.” Ironically, the fictional character of their products often seemed to lead American producers to exaggerate cultural stereotypes and prejudices by giving them a dramatic license for colorful representations. Thus, it is clear that Hollywood’s pursuit of domestic box-office hits often com-
plicated its professed mission of promoting international understanding and unifying its
audiences around the world through the forces of its universal entertainment.\textsuperscript{54}

Moreover, Hollywood’s representations of the “other” also caused further dip-
lomatic trouble in its dealings with the multifaceted global market. The need for easily
identifiable heroes and villains in crowd-pleasing entertainment films sometimes had
the effect of pitting American producers against the competing requirements of dif-
ferent foreign audiences. For example, the MPPDA’s foreign department noted in 1928
that India was a multi-religious country and that “the subject of religion is highly con-
troversial and colored by politics and racialism,” liable to cause hostile reaction from
various groups.\textsuperscript{55} On an international scale, the problem of multiple audiences was
perhaps never revealed more clearly than in the case of the classic action adventure
\textit{Gunga Din} (RKO, 1939). Inspired in part by Rudyard Kipling’s poem, it was one of
many celebrations of the British empire that were made in Hollywood during the 1930s.
The movie, an obvious concession to the imperial sensibilities of the largest and most
profitable export market, traces the exploits of three British sergeants in colonial India,
along with native water carrier Gunga Din, whose only dream is to join his colonizers
and become a soldier in the British army. Together, they discover and fight a fanatic
religious order that has sworn to annihilate the British colonial presence in India. Gunga
Din eventually sacrifices his life to save the British soldiers and defeat the native reli-
gious uprising, and his sense of duty and sacrifice is honored with a military burial and a
posthumous appointment as a corporal in the British army.
This paean to British colonialism, however, became a potential source of trouble in other foreign markets. *Gunga Din* was banned in India and Singapore, and while the movie passed the official censors in Japan without any problems in December 1939, the Japanese foreign ministry immediately received a telegram of protest from Indian residents in Tokyo, who requested that the movie be banned since its celebration of the subjugation of the Indian rebellion under colonial rule was a disgrace to all colored peoples. By the end of the month, the Japanese home ministry finally ordered to prohibit its domestic exhibition on the ground that its content was a real offense to other nations. The American embassy in Japan had made “repeated informal representations” to the foreign ministry on behalf of local RKO representatives, who had incurred substantial advance expenses to prepare the movie for the Japanese market during the profitable holiday season. But in the end, U.S. officials decided to take no further action in the *Gunga Din* case because the Japanese censorship regulations, as in most countries, contained diplomatic clauses that legally provided for the censorship and prohibition of movies that were offensive to the national dignity or sensibilities of other countries.56

The *Gunga Din* incident reveals that Hollywood’s efforts to paint a favorable picture of foreign nations could not completely spare American movies from hostile reaction abroad. The interests of the foreign market made it impossible for Hollywood to ignore foreign tastes and sensibilities during the interwar period. But it was not always an easy task, even with the self-regulatory mechanisms developed over the years, to create products that could be equally acceptable to Hollywood’s vastly different audiences around the world. If incorporating British influences helped American pro-
ducers provide films suitable for large British audiences, its imperialist representation of hostile Indians as villains triggered the wrath of Indian nationalism and even led to its diplomatic exclusion in other markets like Japan. All too often, Hollywood’s global vision of providing universal entertainment with common appeal everywhere was affected by contradictory requirements of its multiple foreign territories, and its movies were hardly perfect models as a progressive force that could unite the entire world in the universal brotherhood of mankind.

Conclusion

After World War I, American discourses on motion pictures were based on the premise that they were a leading agent of cultural changes rapidly molding a new and different civilization both at home and abroad. Hollywood was commonly regarded as one of the most powerful instruments of modernization and international peace. American movies were discussed in terms of the rise of modern and cosmopolitan influences. They helped to promote the Americanization of the world by creating an international mass culture and advancing the consumerist reorientation of social identities all over the world under capitalist modernization. There also was a strong belief that Hollywood opened a new era of cultural interdependence and world solidarity. Hopefulness about imminent world peace had flourished at every advance in the history of modern communication, and the motion picture was also expected to break down the barriers of class, geography, and nationality and promote a greater sense
of community both in domestic and international arenas. Moreover, Hollywood movies, with mass appeal and superior quality based on its democratic, nonpolitical content, were viewed as an irresistible force for creating a peaceful world under the influence of American but universally accepted models and ideals.

Yet, Hollywood’s universalistic discourses were often contested not only at home but also all over the world. There were powerful strains of domestic concern about the disorganizing, harmful rather than beneficial consequences of motion pictures, and foreign elites and governments were concerned about the increasing importance of Hollywood movies as an ideological spearhead of Americanization, a subversive force that they feared would lead to cultural convergence, destroy national traditions, and colonize their countries through the decadent, homogenizing influence of modern consumerism and mass culture. In addition, Americanization through Hollywood movies was often contested as the ultimate route to universal peace. Many Americans feared, on the one hand, that Hollywood was peddling a distorted view of American life and sowing the seeds of cultural miscommunication and anti-American reaction around the world. On the other hand, Hollywood’s representations of the “other” also raised the vital question of international communication. American producers were often accused of spreading a distorted, stereotyped image of foreign tastes and manners, rather than finding a universal formula that had common appeal to their worldwide audiences.

These nationalist discourses, especially at official and elite levels, were clearly at odds with Hollywood’s global vision of promoting American beliefs and values as a universal force throughout the world. In her influential conceptual framework,
Rosenberg has defined this universalistic ideology of Americanization as “liberal-developmentalism”—the concept that focuses on the imposition of hegemonic economic and cultural structures by American officials and private groups. But her critique of U.S. foreign relations—a curious echo of anti-American official discourses abroad—does not give much insight into the effects of Americanization on others, or the potentially complex ways in which American movies were received and interpreted in the local context of other cultures. That Hollywood claimed a significant, often overwhelming, market share all over the world may not be simply a question of economic control or cultural imperialism. Rather, it may only underscore the need for a better understanding of how Hollywood movies were adopted and even demanded as popular entertainment around the world. With this consideration in mind, the next chapters shift focus to examine how their reception was actually negotiated, both commercially and culturally, in Japan—Hollywood’s biggest market in Asia between the two world wars.
CHAPTER 3

THE LIMITS OF INTERNATIONAL DOMINANCE: HOLLYWOOD’S COMMERCIAL STRUGGLES IN INTERWAR JAPAN

In January 1912, the U.S. Consul General in Yokohama sent home a consular report on motion picture business in Japan that would not have pleased the U.S. film industry. Japanese film distributors, he wrote, “do a large film-exchange business, mostly with European manufacturers.” In contrast, he observed, “an American film is seldom seen” in the local market.¹ Yet, the European domination came to a sudden end in Japan after the start of World War I. The war stifled film production in European countries, while American movies embarked on their path to international dominance. By the time Hollywood faced a local boycott movement triggered by the 1924 Immigration Act, one that excluded most Japanese immigrants from the United States, Kinema junpō, the leading trade journal in Japan, editorialized that American films had already “conquered” the market in Japan. The editor of Katsudō kurabu, a major fan magazine, also noted that American pictures exercised unmatched influence on Japanese film culture, with domestic movies existing only in their shadow as Japanese producers had learned the dominant techniques and styles of narrative filmmaking from Hollywood.² American actors were prominently featured on the cover of many popular
magazines, and their popularity was also evident in the mob of Japanese fans who greeted such visiting stars as Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and Charlie Chaplin.3

Still, Hollywood’s popularity did not translate into its total domination in interwar Japan, while American movies claimed a predominant share in most European countries during the same period. Looking for causes of Hollywood’s international dominance, many scholars have maintained that it was primarily due to its monopolistic trade practices, such as blockbooking policies, and the tight alliance between industry and government in foreign markets. Jens Ulff-Møller argues, for example, that “Hollywood did not rely on the popularity of its movies to secure its worldwide dominance, but on monopolistic trade practices and the power of the United States government.” American market control, in other words, was imposed through aggressive marketing and diplomatic efforts to defeat local competition and break foreign import restrictions on Hollywood movies. “The dominance of American films,” he concludes, “has little to do with aesthetics and consumer preference and a great deal to do with politics and greed.”4 Yet, such a conspiracy theory, as it were, clearly does not explain Hollywood’s position at least inasmuch as interwar Japan was concerned. In fact, American producers failed to establish an uncontested position in the Japanese market, where Japanese companies controlled the majority of the local screen time after the late 1920s. “In no other territory,” a local United Artists representative reported in 1940, “does Hollywood have such competition, as Japan still produces some 500 pictures a year.”5

This chapter examines why Hollywood’s commercial expansion proved to be less complete and successful in interwar Japan. First, it establishes a receiving context
for Hollywood’s expansion by providing a brief overview of the growth of motion pictures in an increasingly urban-industrial Japanese society. Then, the chapter analyzes the scope of Hollywood’s economic penetration in the context of Japanese film culture. In many ways, the limits of American market control resulted from the fractured nature of Japanese movie audiences. American movies were treated as a marker of cultural refinement among urban middle-class viewers, while their reception was far more circumscribed among the other social classes. The chapter further examines the commercial struggles of American film companies to expand their share in the Japanese market until the mid-1930s by looking at the impact (or lack thereof) of such factors as the rivalry between American and Japanese film companies, the 1924 boycott of American movies, and the conversion to talkies. Throughout this period, the bifurcation of Japanese film culture and Hollywood’s conservative, rather than aggressive, business strategies were formidable barriers to the expansion of American economic control in the Japanese film market.

Modernity, Urban Capitalism, and the Growth of Motion Pictures in Japan

Since the late 1880s, Japan had been changing steadily from a traditional rural-agrarian society to a modern urban-industrial society. The turn of the twentieth century is usually defined as “the takeoff period in the development of Japan’s modern industrial capitalism.” Between 1888 and 1920, the industrial sectors of the Japanese economy leaped forward from 12.2 percent to 32.1 percent of gross national product,
while the proportion of non-agricultural labor climbed from 30.1 percent to 46.6 percent of the total labor force. In particular, the sharp rise in industrial production received a major boost from World War I, which brought an unprecedented economic boom to Japan as well as the United States. The war removed much of European competition from both domestic and regional markets and provided a huge opportunity for domestic industrial growth. Japan’s light industries enjoyed a booming export trade in Asia, and there also was a sharp wartime expansion in heavy industries, with 400 percent growth recorded in several sectors, although heavy industrialization did not grow rapidly until the early 1930s. Like the United States, Japan was also transformed almost overnight from a debtor to a creditor nation, although its payment balance would return to the prewar position soon after the war.7

The growth of modern industrial capitalism had reshaped the face of Japanese society by the end of World War I. Among the most prominent results of capitalist modernization were the rapid growth of cities and the opening of new urban opportunities for employment and education. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the expansion of urban industries had converged with high population density and a limited amount of arable land to create the classic rural-to-urban migration of surplus agricultural labor. When urban areas are defined as places with 10,000 people or more, the urban population ratio climbed from 18.4 percent in 1903 to 32.4 percent in 1925. The population of Tokyo, the nation’s largest city, doubled to more than two million people from the 1890s to 1920. Thus, the major features of modern urban-industrial society existed by the 1920s, both in Japan and other advanced capitalist countries. As in the
case of America, moreover, the city became the focus of national experience, serving as the incubator of new lifestyles and values by the late 1910s.8

The rise of motion pictures as a major culture industry also highlighted the universalistic, cosmopolitan aspects of Japanese historical experience that crossed national boundaries in the modern world. Japanese cinema had originated in 1896, when Thomas Edison’s Kinetoscope, a box-like peep-show machine, was imported as a new curiosity. Later, films, mostly imported from Europe, were exhibited by a group of traveling circuits around the nation. Their foreign origins would provide perfect material for the standard discourse of East-West division—conceptions of Western media technology imported from abroad and transplanted on Japan’s cultural traditions. However, this stereotype needs to be deconstructed because motion pictures, as Japanese historian Miriam Silverberg suggests in a related context, were “part of a worldwide reorientation of mass production, mass consumption, and mass politics” in the industrial centers of global capitalism. In his classic theory of international communication, which has been refined by such modern scholars as Everett M. Rogers, Robert Park also points out that the adoption of new ideas and technological innovations occurs most frequently in similar societies, depending largely on the cultural values, beliefs, and socioeconomic structures at the receiving end of communication channels. Indeed, movies might have remained only an imported curiosity had they not found fertile, receptive ground in Japanese society, that is, a mass audience with a readiness to accept a new form of commercial entertainment. In that sense, it is appropriate to say that motion pictures
gained popularity in Japan only because they were readily incorporated into the changing structure of Japanese society in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{9}

To the extent that the spread of motion pictures is seen as a domestic social process, rather than as a foreign transplant, therefore, it is necessary to focus on the constitution of Japanese culture that produced the conditions for the popular success of the new media technology. In fact, the new urban cultural landscape was being forged in the crucible of Japan’s modern capitalism. The emergence of new social relationships under capitalist modernization led to the rise of a mass society, creating, among other things, a new cultural constituency—an expanding population of factory workers and a new middle class of white-collar workers who were consumers of urban commodity culture. As the general level of wages had moved upward, even for the mass of industrial workers by the late 1910s,\textsuperscript{10} there were increasing numbers of consumers who sought new activities and commodities to occupy their leisure time away from the factories and offices that regulated their time at work. As was the case in American culture, therefore, the growth of disposable personal incomes in the new urban-industrial capitalist order generated a collective demand for a new vision of life, identity, pleasure, and self-fulfillment, and this demand found cultural expressions in the emerging universe of consumption and entertainment.\textsuperscript{11}

Indeed, if modern mass culture was invented in any one place, it was, as in the American case, at the turn of the twentieth century in the growing metropolitan centers of Japan. And after the late 1900s, the urban field of such commercial amusements was increasingly dominated by motion pictures. The film industry entered a take-off period
at the same time and became the largest culture industry in Japan. Not only did the import of foreign films increase steadily but Japanese distributors and exhibitors also began to set up small studios in response to the increasing domestic demand for motion pictures. By the early 1910s, the Japanese film industry paralleled the American model of oligopoly by vertically integrated companies that controlled the processes of production, distribution, and exhibition. Japan’s earliest fan magazines—whose pages were packed with plot synopses, portraits of foreign stars, popularity contests, and letters to the editors—were also founded in 1913, only two years later than their American counterparts. The place of motion pictures in urban mass culture was also evident in their increasing attendance record. Movie halls overshadowed all other forms of commercial amusements after 1912, outdrawing traditional theaters and yose (small vaudeville halls featuring traditional comedians, historical folktale storytellers, singers, magicians, and dancers) during the silent era. By 1921, furthermore, nearly two-thirds of these movie halls were concentrated in urban areas, with their number increasing more than five times in Tokyo and its vicinity between 1912 and 1925.12

What factors, then, accounted for the development of motion pictures as a key institution in the new urban consumer-oriented culture? This question also interested many contemporary observers in Japan, such as Gonda Yasunosuke, who became the leading intellectual figure in popular-culture studies before World War II. In fact, Gonda’s urban studies started in 1917, when he was commissioned by the state-sponsored Imperial Education Association to study the impact of motion pictures on school children in Tokyo. After the late 1910s, he continued to work for several
government ministries—particularly for the Education Ministry—as a consultant, researcher, or committee member on motion pictures and popular entertainment until the end of World War II. Thus, Gonda’s work, among others, provides a rare, informed contemporary perspective on interwar Japanese film culture.13

These observers of urban mass culture usually traced the growing popularity of cinema to its inherent qualities as modern media technology—the principles of movement and mechanical reproduction. The popular imagination was captured, in their opinion, by the unique capacity of motion pictures to project an uninterrupted, moving simulacrum of living reality unrolling on the theaters’ screens. The principle of mechanical reproduction also played a major role in promoting motion pictures as a popular art form in the new urban environment. Traditionally, theaters in Japan tended to proceed at a leisurely, pre-modern pace—usually starting at noon or in the early afternoon and continuing until late in the evening. This practice changed under modern industrial capitalism, when the mass of urban employees worked long regular hours and had little time or energy to spend an entire day for their amusement. Instead, the modern technology of mechanical reproduction was better suited to the imperatives of mass culture and consumption in an urban-industrial society. Each program lasted only a few hours and could be repeated a number of times every day, effectively mass-producing and organizing short amusements at a relatively low, affordable price for urban audiences. In fact, contemporary surveys showed that average admission prices were lower at movie halls, often less than half the ticket prices charged at traditional theaters.14
Because of these and other advantages, the mass production and commodification of culture as symbolized by the modern medium of motion pictures soon expanded from urban to rural areas. Indeed, motion pictures soon began to overwhelm all the other amusements even in rural towns and villages. From 1921 to 1929, for instance, movie halls increased more than three times in such non-urban locations, while the number only doubled in the cities. In many respects, it seems that the growing rural demand for commercial entertainment reflected the increasing movement of people, goods, services, and ideas through an ever-expanding network of national and international commerce and exchange. Clearly, the spread of motion pictures was a signifier for the incorporation of the countryside into the new order of commodified mass culture that had been born and raised in the urban cradle of Japan’s modern industrial capitalism.15

Hollywood and the “Two Worlds” of Japanese Film Culture

If the rise of motion pictures in the early twentieth century represented the creation of a new cultural order, what types of films were made available to Japanese audiences in the dark interior of movie halls? Typical motion-picture programs in this period were at least a double feature mixing different types of pictures running several hours, such as documentaries, period films, and modern dramas, including action pictures, comedies, and melodramas. During the early silent era, most of the films shown in Japan were foreign imports. According to the police censorship figures, 72.8 percent of
movies shown in Tokyo was imported products in 1920. It was not until the mid-1920s that domestic films equaled imported films in volume, if not in quality.\textsuperscript{16}

Although foreign pictures occupied a predominant place in Japan’s growing film industry, a momentous shift occurred in the sources of imported movies during the mid-1910s. Until the beginning of World War I, France and Italy had been the leading suppliers of motion pictures in Japan. This reflected the fact that these countries had traditionally been the most important producers in the world film market. In late 1916, however, the U.S. Vice Consul in Yokohama reported that “the past two years have seen American motion-picture films rise rapidly in popularity and practically supersede all other imported films in Japan.” “Well-known American film actors,” he added, “are becoming great favorites” among Japanese moviegoers. Indeed, when a fan magazine polled “movie-crazy” readers on their favorite foreign stars in the same year, the top five actors were Americans, with the list headed by Grace Cunard, contemporary heroine of serial action films that were top box-office attractions in Japan. American pictures were shown in almost all genres, and their box-office appeal was clear to all contemporary observers.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to reach a definitive judgment as to which genres were the most preferred among Japanese audiences. No reliable box-office figures were kept in the interwar era, and this makes it almost impossible to gauge with certainty the popularity of individual pictures. After the mid-1920s, \textit{Kokusai eiga shinbun}, a leading trade paper, started to provide regular columns on the perceived box-office performance of feature films released, both Japanese and foreign, in Tokyo.
until the end of the 1930s. On close examination, however, its listings typically gave no clear indication of dominant genres, for this period at least. In part, this might have reflected the fact that Japanese theaters continued to change their programs every week. The act of moviegoing itself had become a popular weekly ritual, and most films were simply changed at the end of one-week run to show something else in their place before their box-office performance (or lack thereof) could create even greater interest for exhibitors. The listings did suggest, as American observers often reported in foreign markets, that comedies and action films with simple plots, sexual titillation, and/or high-budget spectacles—thus requiring little cultural knowledge—tended to be quite popular in interwar Japan, although other genres, such as those pictures portraying urban society, melodrama, and tragedies, also often seemed to do very well at the box office. Given such local market conditions, it seems likely that the genre of individual films had less influence on their popularity than the reputation and immediate appeal of certain stars and directors. Indeed, there was even a common saying in the late 1910s that the child who did not know the name of the prime minister would have no trouble naming Chaplin.17

As noted previously, the American ascendancy in the Japanese film market was a local manifestation of the broader shift in international film trade caused by World War I. The war provided golden opportunities for many U.S. industries by creating a booming demand for all types of American products and removing European competition from world markets. Hollywood was also caught up in the general expansion of American business worldwide and secured hegemony in the world film market after the
mid-1910s. In this global context, the United States replaced European nations as the largest supplier of imported pictures in Japan, grabbing 39 percent of the foreign film market in 1916. Then, American movies came to constitute nearly 90 percent of the foreign movies shown in Japan by the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{18}

In this process, Hollywood moved to establish a direct marketing network in Japan, which was a key multinational strategy in the American control of world film markets after World War I. Prior to the war, Japanese distributors had purchased American movies through their offices in London, the established center of international film trade, because the American trade practice had been to distribute their films through London agents and sell out their international distribution rights at relatively low prices. Then, Universal Film Corporation opened a Tokyo branch office in 1916 for the first time in the American film industry. By the end of the silent era, all major U.S. film companies, like many U.S. multinational corporations at the time, had established branch offices or contracted Japanese distributors to handle sales in Japan. The relative importance of the Japanese film market was noted by a Commerce Reports article in 1926, in which Japan was ranked among Hollywood’s “secondary film markets,” along with Mexico and Germany, following such primary markets as Great Britain, Canada, and France.\textsuperscript{19}

Thus, Hollywood maintained economic control over the Japanese market for foreign films after World War I. Still, it is important to note that the American dominance was not simply a case of media imperialism. The notion of “domination,” which should be essential to any critical understanding of imperialism, was not quite enough to
explain the preeminent position that American pictures initially enjoyed on the Japanese screen. In many ways, the initial answer was not so much in the supply side as in the demand side—a result of the local market strategy adopted by Japanese film companies. Lacking financial resources, these companies competed to import glossier Hollywood products for their greater production values, rather than produce low-budget domestic films of poorer quality and questionable drawing power. So, American movies, rather than being forcefully imposed on a reluctant nation, were strongly demanded by Japanese firms, which made the distribution and exhibition of imported pictures a key component of their domestic business enterprise.20

In that sense, Hollywood’s initial position in Japan was a case study of the empire by invitation. Yet, it is one thing to know that the foreign film market in Japan was defined by the influx of American pictures after World War I. It is another to assess the scope of Hollywood’s economic control in the entire Japanese market. For example, Everett Rogers and other social scientists have long shown, as a major principle of cross-border communication, that there is constant variation in the adoption of foreign ideas, practices, and objects, depending on such attributes as cultural beliefs, educational background, and status of various groups in a social system. In fact, while the last chapter discussed Hollywood’s discourse of the uniform, homogenizing impact of American mass culture abroad, its commercial penetration in Japan was complicated by the fractured, dual structure of Japanese film culture itself, defined by the influence of local particulars such as social status and geography.21
That national universals and generalizations could not explain Hollywood’s reception in interwar Japan may be seen in the composition of regular theater programs in the local industry. In terms of overall statistics, the number of American pictures released in Japan initially exceeded and later compared favorably to that of domestic productions. But their actual circulation was much more limited than the numbers might have suggested, because different audiences tended to watch different types of films, depending on the character of the movie halls they patronized. A 1917 study shows, for example, that the overwhelming majority, nearly 90 percent, of movie theaters in Tokyo exhibited a regular program that billed domestic films as main features and supplemented them with imported pictures.22 As domestic films rose both in quality and popularity, all-Japanese theater programs appeared in the early 1920s, and in 1927, the proportion of Japanese theaters exclusively showing foreign films eventually declined to only 3.4 percent throughout Japan. American movies increasingly became box-office hits only in the large cities, while even the best ones often did not play well with small-town and rural audiences, which were converted into a captured market for domestic films.23

Yet, it is necessary to emphasize that these foreign-film houses constituted a distinct, important universe in themselves. They were located almost exclusively in the largest cities, such as Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama, Kyoto, Kobe, and Nagoya. They were among the largest, most important first-run theaters, usually classified as “high-quality” or “first-class” theaters. Their admission prices were typically more than 30 percent and sometimes 100 percent higher than those charged at other theaters, in effect placing
them in the highest-grossing, most profitable segment of the Japanese film industry. More importantly, these theaters represented a distinct taste-culture among their urban audiences. The best collective description of social constituencies attending such foreign-film theaters may be that they were largely younger people with education and status—students and white-collar workers, including technicians, engineers, and clerks. After World War I, moreover, kyōyō shugi—meaning culturalism or philosophical cosmopolitanism—was a predominant middle-class disposition, one that extended the identification of the West with the virtues of “civilization” and progress and that ex- tolled the values of self-cultivation and spiritual enlightenment through the mastery of Western philosophy and arts. In this intellectual context, the urban middle-class moviegoers, claiming the monopoly of artistic legitimacy, also approached the realm of commercial entertainment through the prism of their self-claimed cosmopolitan values. They were more affluent, even called themselves “first-class” or “high-quality” audiences, and often took a peculiar, elitist sense of pride in not watching domestic movies, which were usually dismissed as inferior both in technique and artistry—thus as beneath their high standards of cultural sophistication. In this sense, foreign movies were therefore an essential part of the “cultural capital,” as defined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, an explicit aesthetic stance, or good taste, that was made to legitimate the position of the educated urban middle class and assert its status distinction in Japan’s interwar social space.

This “high culture” discourse, to take an early example, occupied a prominent position when the influential opinion journal Chūō kōron featured a special roundtable
on modernity in 1918. The roundtable essays—collectively titled “Impressions of ‘the Automobile,’ ‘Motion Pictures,’ and ‘Café’ as the Symbols of Latest Trends in the New Era”—were specially solicited from a younger generation of Japanese writers and artists, who joined in expressing their fascination with the cultural possibilities of motion pictures. Šatō Haruo, a young writer, was drawn to the international scope and simultaneity that the modern technology of communication signified. Šatō emphasized the way that the “revolution in time and space” was being made by motion pictures. The movies, in his view, continued the cultural mission of the railroads and steamships in making the globe into a smaller place. Thus, the new visual media promoted the leveling of traditional temporal and spatial hierarchies by staging actual, continuous movement and displaying multiple distant events in a way that was accessible and understandable to mass audiences. Painter Masamune Tokusaburō also suggested that foreign films had broader cultural impact because they were a far more powerful medium than any painting or printed words in expanding human consciousness across the sharp divide of space. The virtual sense of proximity influenced by motion pictures, a new sensibility that made it possible for the first time to be figuratively at different places at once, produced a general predilection for foreign films in the Chūō kōron roundtable.

This type of cultural internationalism was best articulated in the roundtable by Yanagisawa Ken and Kikuchi Kan. Yanagisawa, a young poet, observed that motion pictures had far greater cultural influence on popular opinion than Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech or any other official statement. Foreign films taught the real “West” to the people, he said, through the prism of “love,” “hatred,” and “fear” that
were represented on the silver screens. In his analogy, the cultural mission of cinema was similar to Commodore. Perry’s naval mission to Japan in 1853–54 in that “motion pictures are nothing but a cinematic ‘opening of the nation’ (kaikoku) in Japanese cultural history.” Kikuchi, a rising star in popular fiction and perhaps the most astute interwar recorder of Japanese intellectual scenes, made a similar point on motion pictures and modern culture. He emphasized aspects of wonder and amazement at foreign movies. Kikuchi argued that while he would never sit through a Japanese film, he would gladly watch any foreign film because it never failed to display certain elements that fascinated his inquisitive mind, such as dazzling visual effects or the beauty of its actors and actresses, and exposed him to exotic, unique settings.  

The discourse of cosmopolitan film culture often defined itself against the aesthetics of theaters showing a mixed Japanese-foreign and increasingly Japanese only program. This large segment of Japanese film culture almost appeared to be a world apart—often described as “second-class” or even “third-class” establishments. A survey of film attendance conducted on Tokyo movie theaters in 1917 reveals that children accounted for 80 percent of regular moviegoers on Sunday afternoons. On average, their audience was estimated to be nearly 37 percent children. Another major feature of such theaters, especially in the cities, was their predominantly working-class character. Not only were admission prices much lower in such theaters—accommodating their main clientele—but their equipment, seats, and music accompaniments also were generally inferior and substandard. Overall, these theaters existed outside the boundaries of the urban middle-class world, patronized by low cultural capital consumers in urban
working-class neighborhoods as well as non-metropolitan regions. Their audiences were clearly more parochial or provincial, and cultural familiarity was apparently the most important fact that dictated their preference for domestic films. Japanese movies offered them the familiar narratives and iconography grounded in domestic cultural traditions, while foreign films, if technically superior and far more lavish, were increasingly regarded as too alien and distant from their limited sphere of everyday experience. The social geography of film exhibition in Japan was already noted in a 1916 report by the U.S. Vice Consul in Kobe: “The theaters which cater to the laboring class make a specialty of native films, while those patronized by the better class of Japanese and by foreigners exhibit either a combination of foreign and Japanese films or only foreign films.”

Also, another significant factor illustrating the bifurcation of Japanese film culture, during the silent era, was the institution of benshi (onstage explainers). This system was an enormously important fixture in Japanese movie theaters. In most accounts, benshi is generally assumed to have been a unique local institution in Japan, although similar practices, if quite marginal, did exist in many countries during the early days of cinema. For instance, the film historian Richard Koszarski writes that some theaters in New York immigrant neighborhoods had onstage explainers who read English titles and provided dramatic interpretation and narratives throughout the show. But what was really unique about the Japanese case was that the benshi tradition continued to survive, even flourish, well into the very end of the silent era. Benshi emerged at the turn of the century when the first exhibitors offered a dramatic introduction to explain
the simple moving images of foreign life and curiosities that were shown in the early
to movies imported from the West. As longer narrative films began to be imported from
the West, benshi played an increasing role in shaping the theatrical experience of
Japanese moviegoers. They were now translating foreign intertitles and providing de-
tailed narration for mass audiences who were curious but unfamiliar with Western
manners, customs, history, and culture projected on the screen. The institution of benshi
also was influenced by the traditional style of theatrical presentation that combined
various visual and oral performances, as in kabuki, no, and bunraku theater, where an
individual chanter (or a group of chanters) provided all or part of vocal narration. Later,
the early Japanese films produced in short reels during the late 1900s and 1910s were
basically intended to be exact copies of theater productions, which were re-enacted
vicariously in movie halls by having several benshi provide voices for different screen
characters.29

Benshi was a central institution in Japanese film culture during the silent era.
“An intermediaries between a film and an audience,” observes the historian Jeffrey A.
Dym, “benshi had a strong influence on how spectators viewed a movie.”30 Benshi’s
performance often became almost a form of art in itself. They used all the resource-
fulness and oratorical skills of the traditional storyteller, many becoming major celeb-
rities in their own right. That benshi was often a popular attraction—sometimes more
than movies themselves—is evident from the pages of early fan magazines. Hundreds
of readers’ letters were printed rating different benshi and the magazines organized
frequent popularity polls on benshi as important circulation-building devices, just as
U.S. fan magazines polled their readers on their favorite movie stars for the same purpose. Also, the readers’ letters showed that preference for particular benshi was often among the most significant factors in determining where audiences would go to the movies, particularly in early days. Benshi’s role began to be somewhat diminished after the early 1920s, when domestic filmmakers also began to develop a more sophisticated, uniquely cinematic form by incorporating such practices of classical narration as intercutting between and within scenes and using intertitles. Still, there were 6,818 benshi (6.5 benshi per theater) in a 1927 survey, including 130 women. Movie theaters needed the staff of several benshi at all times. Because benshi could provide the entire narration for short reels, they usually shared the duties and changed midway through longer features. The appearance of a lead benshi was eagerly awaited, notes Dym, as a “time of great anticipation for the audience.”

For our purpose, however, one of the most interesting facts about benshi was that foreign films were often narrated and shown in a different manner than Japanese films, and their presentation styles appeared to vary with the sociocultural composition of particular audiences. This split was somewhat reminiscent of the differences between the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century American theaters as described by historian Lawrence W. Levine in Highbrow/Lowbrow (1988). On the one hand, the style used to narrate Japanese films tended toward “poeticism.” Jeffrey Dym explains that this style, originally popular in the working-class section of Tokyo and widely used in the countryside, was “less concerned with the exact text” and focused instead on the “rhythmic tones and poetry” that sounded great and stirred emotion, even if they
sometimes “had nothing to do with the film and thus made little sense.” Also, smaller, neighborhood theaters showing mostly Japanese films were often characterized by a raucous, participatory audience that delighted in such oral performances, an audience that expressed its approval and enthusiasm by applauding, cheering screen heroes and booing villains, and sometimes even calling out the names of their favorite benshi. On the other hand, the ideal style in urban foreign-film theaters was to present a subdued, less intrusive narration, which was a clear reflection of the taste-culture of their middle-class audience. This style focused on “realism,” in which benshi avoided becoming an overpowering presence and sought instead to narrate foreign films in a more objective, less emotional manner. The ideal was that benshi’s narration would not destroy the original feeling of foreign films and that the educated, cultured audience thus would be allowed to appreciate them as an individual experience in a genteel, quiet atmosphere—as if benshi were not present.33

Thus, the position of Hollywood movies was not interpretable within a solely national framework. In the Japanese market, there were clearly two separate worlds in film culture that served to limit Hollywood’s influence, with urban centers being major sites of consumption for American movies. American observers themselves also seemed to have a clear understanding of the bifurcation of Japanese film culture between the two world wars. In its 1929 report on Far Eastern film markets, the Motion Picture Division of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce announced that “utmost diversity” was one of the “most interesting and important” aspects of the Japanese market:
Audiences of Japan differ widely according to locality as a result of the transition taking place at varying speech in different sections of the country. Residents in the large cities are subject to continuous direct foreign influence and have advanced to quasi-western standards; but in the provincial towns, old Japanese customs still retain a strong hold on the native mind, while the peasants of the interior conservatively retain many of their old distinctive customs and have little direct knowledge of things foreign. Modern western methods and ideals are penetrating through the empire at an increasing tempo, but at present the majority of Japanese have an outlook and knowledge tinged more by their own civilization than by occidental melioration.34

But at the same time, it is important to note that this segmentation and limitation of the Japanese film market must be interpreted in greater detail. For one thing, while there were only a select number of metropolitan theaters specializing in foreign films, many theaters showing mostly domestic films continued to offer imported pictures as popular features of their regular programs. In 1927, 47.4 percent of theaters still offered a mixed program of Japanese and foreign films. Although the arrival of sound pictures helped to reduce this percentage, one-fourth of Japanese theaters continued to show such mixed programs during much of the 1930s. It is therefore evident that Hollywood movies, which came to account for some 90 percent of foreign films, were widely available and watched by a large number of Japanese moviegoers, particularly in the cities. In addition, despite the sectored taste-cultures of Japanese film culture, Hollywood’s influence could not be contained solely to an urban middle-class world. American films found the greatest cultural resonance among the audiences that were more cosmopolitan and exposed to all forms of new information and that had somewhat higher social status and led in the promotion of innovative ideas within an increasingly urban, industrial, consumer-oriented society. To borrow from Everett Rogers’s framework about social communication, this group may be seen as having more opinion
leadership characteristics in the nation’s communication network about new entertainment ideas. Consequently, it was no surprise that their cultural position helped to give American movies an influential, often central position in Japan’s public discourses during the interwar era, which will be explored fully in chapter 4.35

Hollywood and Domestic Competition in the Silent Era

It is clear that American control of the Japanese film market was far less complete than in most other countries after World War I. The war left European film industries in a severely weakened position, while Japanese companies, like Hollywood studios, remained unscathed by the European conflict. Indeed, despite Hollywood’s influence in its urbanizing culture, the fact was that Japan was among the few major markets, along with Germany, in which it ultimately failed to maintain a clear majority of local film offerings in the interwar period.36 Although the history of the Japanese film industry and its commercial practices has yet to be studied comprehensively, one interesting thesis offered by some scholars is that the most critical barrier to Hollywood’s commercial dominance in Japan was the vertically integrated structure of the Japanese film industry.37

According to this argument, U.S. film companies were relegated to a subordinate supplier status in the Japanese market because their Japanese counterparts also developed along Hollywood’s organizational model, in which domestic distributors controlled all stages of the growing local industry from film production to distribution
and exhibition. Just like Hollywood’s major studios, they owned many first-run theaters directly and controlled smaller neighborhood theaters across the nation through long-term exclusive contracts. In fact, the unique market conditions in Japan, unlike most other markets, came to the attention of a U.S. consular official as early as 1916. “American exporters will not be likely to succeed in any attempts they may make to sell films directly to the theaters,” he reported. “The motion-picture houses are usually controlled by the film exchanges, and they must take the films that are given them.” In this view, the terms of Hollywood’s entry into Japan were effectively controlled by the vertically integrated Japanese film companies, which regulated when, where, and how the imported films were to be exhibited in their theater chains. In their hands, Hollywood films were thus segregated and used as high-grossing prestige items in their select first-run theaters, but were denied access to the rest of Japanese screens controlled by domestic products.38

However, this theory cannot withstand close examination. When we leaf through the dusty, yellowed pages of contemporary trade papers, it soon becomes evident that the Japanese studios owned but a small percentage (less than 10 percent) of the nation’s screens (chokuei kan—“directly owned theaters”), while most theaters remained on a contractual basis in relation to the domestic producer-distributors. These theaters were only obligated to accept and exhibit films of a particular studio during a certain contractual period. Some rented their pictures either at pre-determined monthly or weekly prices (tokuyaku kan—“special contract theaters”), while others arranged to pay a certain percentage of box-office receipts (buai kan—“percentage theaters”). Thus,
once the contracts expired, the exhibitors were not technically prohibited from switching to a different company as their supplier, including American film companies.\textsuperscript{39} Given this theoretically flexible market structure, we must ask in greater detail why Hollywood failed to expand its access to Japanese screens during the interwar period.

At the end of World War I, Japan appeared to be one of the most promising film markets that appeared to demand increasing attention from Hollywood’s dream factory. The wartime economic prosperity, as noted previously, had spurred the growing popularity of motion pictures by producing large urban audiences eager for an evening’s entertainment. The war also had changed the United States into the largest source of foreign films in Japan. By 1920, Japanese film companies, responding to the major shift in international film trade, opened offices in New York, where they competed fiercely for new American movies to be exhibited as box-office attractions in their theater programs. At the same time, they sent some of their filmmakers and technicians to study the Hollywood style of narrative filmmaking. Their business competition became so intense that they were even willing to use pirated American films bought in the black market. Thus, the problem of Japanese piracy and copyright violation became one of the most important issues that the Hays Office raised with U.S. Commerce Department in the early 1920s. Indeed, it seems that American film companies moved to establish branch offices and hire local agents as a way of preventing piracy and securing the commercial value of their products in the Japanese market.\textsuperscript{40}
At the same time, direct control of distribution networks in Japan was clearly an essential part of Hollywood’s business strategies abroad, which involved intense local salesmanship and planning to negotiate the best exhibition conditions and highest rental prices possible in each local market. This was certainly a superior arrangement to selling Hollywood movies outright to foreign distributors either on a flat rate or percentage basis, because American producers could not be certain that their own films would be handled in the most lucrative terms by such local sales and rental organizations. There are no accurate, systematic records remaining about the marketing practices of American film companies in Japan, but it seems that Hollywood movies were increasingly rented to local exhibitors on a percentage basis in the largest cities, with film rentals varying (from 15 to 50 percent, in one estimate) according to the popularity of particular pictures. This arrangement, designed to maximize the royalties from highest-grossing urban theaters, was of course made possible only by having foreign branch offices, with a corps of local employees to check theater receipts and admission. On the other hand, in the smaller towns, film rights were rented for a certain period, usually a week, at a flat, stipulated sum, because such a monitoring system was not very cost-effective and practicable in the marginal, non-metropolitan territories.41

Further, the early twenties provided Hollywood with what appeared to be a major opportunity to improve its favorable business prospects in the Japanese film market. In September 1923, the Tokyo area was hit hard by one of the biggest earthquakes in Japanese history, which was followed by a raging fire that reduced much of the city to ashes. The sudden disaster halted film production and destroyed much of the
existing film stocks in Tokyo-area studios. At the same time, the earthquake created a
booming demand for popular entertainment in Tokyo, as if the urban masses sought a
temporary escape from their collective trauma in a world of fantasy. In response, the
number of movie theaters in Tokyo skyrocketed some 40 percent in little more than a
year after the devastating earthquake. American companies tried to take advantage of
the resulting film shortage by mounting aggressive sales efforts in Japan, while also
raising the rental prices of their products for local theaters. For example, United Artists
and Fox each contracted to screen their movies as part of mixed Japanese-American
programs in the theater chains of smaller Japanese studios—which one film magazine
reported with a tone of economic nationalism as the start of Hollywood’s campaign to
conquer the small Japanese film market. Film imports from the United States (measured
by censored feet) also increased some 45 percent from 1923 to 1924.42

Yet, American film companies were soon faced with a new crisis in the early
summer of 1924. In June of that year, Japanese film companies planned a boycott of
American movies, to begin the next month, in protest of the Immigration Act passed by
the U.S. Congress earlier that year.43 This movement, publicly shrouded in national
indignation, was actually rooted in economic self-interests among Japanese companies.
Protesting the U.S. prohibition of most Japanese immigration, nationalist groups around
the country often called for a boycott of American products, including the highly visible
atmosphere by opening a boycott that would break the domination of American films,
which then enjoyed a local market position (ca. 53 percent) that was more than 10

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percent larger than the share enjoyed by domestic films. Traditionally, the Japanese companies had charged higher rental and admission prices for foreign films, deriving a third to a half of their incomes from exhibiting such premium pictures in their theater chains. But American companies had increasingly switched to importing and marketing their pictures directly in Japan, rather than selling their distribution rights in New York at lower wholesale prices. Thus, Hollywood’s increasing direct participation in the Japanese market threatened to reduce the profit margins of the domestic companies. This economic fear was amplified especially after the 1923 earthquake, when American companies raised their rental prices in response to the growing demand for Hollywood movies. In this situation, the Japanese plan was to use the pretext of anti-American nationalism in order to channel movie audiences away from American films toward cheaper Japanese and European products.44

American film companies in Japan feared that the planned boycott might close the door on the growing export market for their pictures. However, such economic anxieties were made increasingly groundless as the Japanese authorities began to intercede with domestic film companies against the planned boycott in late June. Government officials decided that the already tense Japanese-American relations should not be complicated further by some ill-timed private actions, such as attacks on American residents or missionaries in Japan and a mass economic boycott against American goods. In addition, Japanese diplomats were clearly concerned that the boycott would be used as a political weapon to justify anti-Japanese economic boycotts by Chinese nationalists.45
There also was strong popular opposition to the planned boycott. Many argued that it could lead to economic warfare between the two countries by triggering American boycotts against Japanese goods. Such a confrontation would be a disaster for Japan, they said, because the entire value of Japanese exports to the United States far exceeded that of the Japanese importation of American movies. In addition, they argued, the significance of the new immigration act should be put into proper perspective because it would directly affect only a limited number of Japanese migrants who would no longer be permitted entry into the United States. Further, fan magazines warned that the boycott would be akin to suicide for the entire domestic film industry, since both Japanese and European films were still inferior and less popular and could never be box-office substitutes for American “superproductions” with international stars.

In fact, the planned boycott proved to be an abysmal failure even before it started. Outside the Tokyo area, many exhibitors had simply decided to ignore the boycott proposal of the Japanese distributors in view of the popularity of Hollywood movies and the fears of broader negative impact on U.S.-Japan relations. Especially in the large cities, moreover, theaters showing American pictures also showed little decline in attendance even as the planned boycott and its professed anti-American goals were widely reported in the Japanese press. Despite these signs of popular opposition, the Japanese distributors still went forward with the planned boycott in the Tokyo market on July 1, but it was clear that moviegoers voted with their feet on this issue. For example, in Tokyo’s Asakusa district, the nation’s premier entertainment area, the only theater that continued to show American movies—which was owned by Univer-
sal—was packed to full capacity every day, while theaters boycotting them recorded less than one-third of normal attendance. The empty seats and the popularity of Hollywood films led to the collapse of the boycott by July 11. Later, letters to the editors of fan magazines were filled with readers’ fury at the Japanese distributors, who were denounced for placing pure greed before the desire of their customers who demanded the fantasy of Hollywood films and stars on the silver screens.  

Nevertheless, the post-earthquake success of American companies was apparently short-lived, although it continued to generate an occasional nationalist outcry about the American invasion of the Japanese film market. By early 1926, the share of Japanese films (55 percent) exceeded that of American movies for the first time (37 percent), which then declined rapidly to 28 percent the next year. Hollywood’s heyday was no more, although it would continue to be a major presence in Japan and controlled about a quarter of the entire film market during the 1930s, at least in terms of the number of newly released films. In many ways, this development reflected the fact that Japanese cinema had finally come of age. The quality of domestic cinema was gradually improved by Japanese directors who had studied the American style of classical filmmaking. While the box-office appeal of Japanese films was increased, Japanese companies continued to increase production capacity at their studios. Japan had the second largest film industry in the world, rivaling Hollywood in the volume of film production (ca. 700 in 1929) if not in its international influence.  

But why did American film companies fail to sustain the commercial dominance that they achieved so easily in other parts of the world after World War I? Was it that
Japanese moviegoers simply turned their backs against American imports in favor of improved domestic products after the mid-1920s? A close examination suggests instead that another major factor leading to a decline in the American share of the Japanese market was the rapid geographical growth of the film industry in interwar Japan. After the war, as noted earlier, movies grew beyond their initial urban origins and became a ubiquitous presence as a popular amusement across the nation, and the number of movie theaters increased at a much faster speed in the countryside than in the cities. This geographical expansion also helped to extend the “two worlds” of domestic film culture, and Japanese-only programs increasingly became a standard form of film exhibition outside the metropolitan center of mass culture and consumption. This analysis finds clear support in the statistical data on the number and type of movie theaters between 1927 and 1937. When six prefectures containing the largest cities (Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Kyoto, Kobe, and Yokohama) are coded as “urban,” it becomes evident that the increase rate of theaters showing mostly Japanese movies was 169 percent in these “urban” prefectures, while such theaters increased 276 percent in the other, “non-urban” prefectures during the same period.50

Thus, American companies did not benefit as much from the expansion of the Japanese film market, although the increasing acceptance of domestic films did not necessarily mean that American products were becoming less popular all across the nation. The number of foreign-movie theaters, centered in the largest cities, recorded a 25 percent increase between 1927 and 1932, and then stabilized from 1932 to 1937. The increase was concentrated in the Tokyo area, where foreign theaters nearly doubled in
the five-year period, and these metropolitan theaters were among the largest, highest-grossing first-run locations in the Japanese film industry. In addition, the number of theaters showing both foreign and Japanese films stayed on the same level in the “urban” prefectures between 1927 and 1937, and decreased only slightly (ca. 20 percent) in the “non-urban” prefectures. The above data clearly suggests that Hollywood movies continued to enjoy a stable urban fan base in interwar Japan, even while domestic films were exhibited more and more extensively in the countryside. Despite the declining American share of the Japanese market, it is clear that the demand for Hollywood movies itself was far from shrinking after the mid-1920s.51

In this local situation, perhaps the ideal solution to Hollywood’s declining share in Japan would have been to adapt to the changing local market structure by creating a new “demand” among the growing number of theaters showing mostly Japanese films. After the mid-1920s, the conventional “block-booking” practice typically had a Japanese producer-distributor guaranteeing prospective exhibitors a weekly program of domestic movies, usually a double feature including both period and modern films. But such block-booking contracts never made it impossible to have American films shown in Japanese movie theaters. Theater owners were supposed to have the right to select a foreign title if they preferred to include one in their programs. This practice meant that the existing demand for American movies were at most limited outside the large cities, rather than artificially restricted by the blockbooking system. Under these terms, the best way to increase American access to Japanese screens would have been to enter into domestic production by financing and controlling independent local studios, rather than
trying to have American pictures rented individually as a supplement to the theater programs supplied by Japanese major companies. Although foreign films alone might have lacked enough drawing power to satisfy local exhibitors and moviegoers, this direct investment strategy would definitely have helped American companies to challenge the position of Japanese producers by servicing domestic exhibitors with a decent selection of “Japanese” movies as the main attraction of their theater programs. Then, the Americans could have created their exclusive circuits covering many theaters showing both foreign and Japanese films. Even theaters currently showing only domestic films also could have been converted anew into regular customers of Hollywood movies as part of such “mixed” Japanese-American offerings, especially if they could recruit and feature some of the best local stars for their Japanese films.52

This ideal solution was not adopted by American film companies in the late 1920s, except for the short-lived experiment by Universal between 1926 and 1927.53 Such efforts were conspicuously absent in Japan, even though the American film industry, according to C. J. North, was then interested in “the future development of our [U.S.] film trade with the Far East” as a substitute for markets in Britain, France, and Germany, which were establishing quotas on American movies in 1927 and 1928.54 It was ironic, in fact, that the lack of American interest in local production was apparently in no small part due to the lack of protectionist barriers to Hollywood’s entry to the Japanese market during much of the interwar period. In Britain and Germany, Hollywood had powerful motivations to invest in local studio production because financing domestic releases was often required to secure the larger number of import licenses for
American movies. In contrast, since Japan remained an unrestricted, open film market until the late 1930s, it was no surprise that American companies, largely content with their control over the highest-grossing segment of urban first-run theaters, had few economic incentives to change their existing business practices in Japan. The inevitable result of this status-quo policy, however, was that their commercial opportunities in the Japanese market became relatively limited by the inability to supply a complete Japanese-American program to local movie theaters across the nation.55

Contrary to their conventional image as a tightly organized cartel, American companies showed no bold plans or coordinated efforts for expanding their market base in Japan. Instead, their natural instinct was to cannibalize one another and fight over the same foreign and “mixed” sectors of the Japanese film industry. After 1926, for instance, Paramount, which had become the largest American presence in Japan, sought to move forward from distribution into exhibition by acquiring a number of first-run foreign-film theaters in major cities. Then, Paramount sought to increase its control of foreign film exhibition by organizing a cartel arrangement with Japanese distributors that controlled other first-run theaters showing foreign pictures. Paramount’s effort to create its own circuit caused resentment and fear among other American companies, which felt that it was trying to monopolize the Japanese market and exclude their products from its theater chain. At different times, some tried joining hands with Paramount while others struggled to organize a rival alliance by contracting with independent foreign-film theaters for the screening of their products. Yet, dividing the existing, or only slightly growing, economic pie, as it were, failed to change the fun-
damental structure of the Japanese film industry whereby foreign movies were increasingly closed off from the majority of local screens outside the urban middle-class world. As a result, while Hollywood continued to enjoy a secure urban fan base in interwar Japan, its products, in terms of their market share, remained an important, but segregated segment at the exhibition level in the “two worlds” of Japanese film culture.  

**Sound Revolution and Hollywood’s Frustration in Japan**

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, American film companies faced both a new crisis and a new opportunity for their business prospects in Japan: the commercial introduction of sound films. In the United States, the talkie revolution started in late 1927, and it was introduced by American film companies into the Japanese market in the spring of 1929. In the U.S. market, the advent of new sound technology led to packed houses filled with the public clamoring for the latest novelty, while it created a major “language” problem overseas for Hollywood producers. During the silent era, Hollywood movies often had depended on a strategy of calculated textual ambiguity in order to circumvent official censorship at home and abroad. In other words, they had invited sophisticated viewers to read hidden or suppressed meanings through innuendo and symbolization, while avoiding titillating elements on a formal, explicit level. The talkies complicated this formula of double entendre because sound imposed a much greater degree of transparency on a movie’s text and thus increased the pressure to censor
suggestive elements. As a result, the Hays Office worked hard to revamp and tighten its domestic self-censorship mechanism during the early 1930s in order to bring the subversive overtones of Hollywood’s products under greater control.57

At the same time, the talkie revolution created a separate language problem for the American film industry in other parts of the world. In part, Hollywood’s international dominance had been rooted in the fact that it had spoken the “universal language,” as its promoters often had put it. Its silent products could be made comprehensible as the mass entertainment form throughout the world by the simple process of translating the intertitles, or in the Japanese case, by having benshi narrators in each theater. However, the introduction of sound threatened to remove American movies “from the international category” and diminish Hollywood’s accessibility to non-English speaking audiences. As initial popular demand for sound films began to wear off, the language barriers soon produced a new climate of confusion and pessimism among American companies about the future of foreign markets. There was a powerful fear that every foreign audience preferred “anything in its own language,” even if such local productions had many technical shortcomings and lacked production values found in Hollywood movies. United Artists even decided to close its branch office in Germany in 1929, on the ground that its talkies “did not have a market in Germany because of the English language being used and not the German.” Given their critical importance in Hollywood’s financial survival, however, withdrawing from world markets was never a viable long-term option, and various means of translating the soundtracks and making its products less language-specific and more compatible with
foreign exhibition were tested overseas in an initial period of uncertainty and sometimes contradictory experiments after 1930.58

One localization method that was tried by most American companies was the production of foreign-language versions—making the same movies with two or more casts: English-speaking and non-English speaking. Clearly, they were the most ambitious effort to restore Hollywood’s status as supplier of popular entertainment worldwide. But this practice soon fell out of favor, in large part because it was too costly to produce multiple movies for separate linguistic markets and because foreign audiences were not attracted to low-budget multilingual versions without their favorite Hollywood stars (hence lacking much of American production values). At the other extreme, American companies sometimes tried to solve the language problem by producing narrative styles with little dialogue (e.g., musicals) and even by cutting out dialogue parts altogether and re-editing sound films, with added intertitles, into silent films or partially silent films with background music and sound effects. In general, however, subtitles and dubbing eventually offered standard solutions (the latter—the more costly method—was used mostly for large French- and German-speaking territories, along with Italy, where non-native dialogues were banned by the fascist regime). As techniques for dubbing and subtitling were improved, the initial fears about the possible decline of Hollywood’s dominance receded and American pictures continued to hold their own in most foreign markets during the 1930s.59

The response of the American film industry to the language problem in Japan was in large part a manifestation of its worldwide struggles for viable sound solutions.
However, it also seems that Hollywood had to find ways to deal with unique local conditions and demands in the Japanese film market. In her overview of Hollywood’s efforts to survive the language problem overseas, film scholar Kristin Thompson argues that dubbing was used especially for the French and German territories because Hollywood faced serious competition from the local film industries. Nationalistic feelings were aroused in these markets, and the subtitled versions of American talkies could not have competed successfully with the native-language productions demanded by local audiences, who were weary of reading subtitles, wanted to hear their own languages, and saw American talkies as a threat to their cultural identity. “In other markets,” she writes, “where less common languages were in use and where native production was less a threat, American films were shown with subtitles.” But in Japan, despite the strength of local film production, dubbing was clearly rejected in favor of subtitled versions. So, why did subtitles become the standard solution to the language problem in Japan? And how did Japanese audiences react to the coming of American sound films after the spring of 1929?

Initially, the Japanese response to the talkie revolution was a rather ambivalent and mixed one at best. By 1930, sound films came to account for nearly half of Hollywood movies shown in Japan, and the new innovation became a key site of heated controversies among Japanese critics and moviegoers. Obviously, many complained that the new language barriers created a serious problem in comprehending Hollywood movies in any meaningful way. Some even said that they did not want their favorite stars to speak at all because they might be disappointed when their actual voices
somehow did not match their screen images of what they should be. But at the same
time, many others insisted that they were thrilled at the prospect of hearing the real
voices of their screen idols. Clearly, the novelty of sound itself also became a major
drawing point for some moviegoers. One reader wrote to the editors of a fan magazine
that she could hardly wait for the first showing of talkies in her city, adding that the idea
of listening to the soundtracks alone would be the most exciting even if the new talkie
technology might have some initial problems in poor sound quality.61

In this context, film critics were naturally more concerned with the theoretical
and aesthetic debate over American sound pictures. Many voiced their opposition to the
introduction of American talkies on the ground that sound technology changed the
visual construction of Hollywood films. As film scholar David Bordwell points out in
The Classical Hollywood Cinema (1985), the earliest talkies lost the fluid, flexible style
of late silent films. With the absence of sound, silent films had developed “a more ab-
stract quality” and the power to create dramatic space through the formula of fluid
image shifts ranging from crosscutting and close-up shots to smooth camera movement.
But early sound films were ironically much closer to the “filmed plays” of the early
silent cinema. The initial recording technology did not easily allow for changing camera
positions so that camera noise and vibrations would not be picked up by microphones.
This technical problem made the composition of narrative space less mobile in early
sound films, in effect subordinating their visual movement to the demands of spoken
dialogues. In addition, the performance of actors was more static, because the limited
range of the early microphones forced them to speak directly into them. To make mat-
ters worse, Hollywood producers initially believed that the best way to exploit the novelty of sound was to reproduce successful Broadway plays and musicals with their original casts, thus further narrowing the range of visual, as well as dramatic, expressions.62

Viewing this trend in early Hollywood talkies, Japanese critics were often appalled that the new novelty marked a major step backward for cinema as an art form. The movies, they lamented, virtually regressed to their primitive state, which had been governed by the impulse to copy and record stage performances on film. Yet others saw such concern as a Luddite objection at best. From the very beginning, they argued, motion pictures had been a new art based on modern technological innovations, and it made little sense to resist a new technology of mechanical reproduction on any aesthetic ground while accepting the modern concept of film art itself. Also, even if the technical problems caused sound films to resemble the early silent cinema and cease fluid movement, they were confident that the aesthetic problems were the product of the transitional era and that a sophisticated artistic use of new sound technology would soon develop and solve the visual blandness of the earliest talkies. Clearly, even these pro-sound critics recognized that the language problem was a great threat to the universality of motion pictures as an international medium. But the current emphasis on dialogue and sound effects, they said, was merely a passing fancy exploited for the purposes of novelty and commerce. Thus, they usually expected that once audiences became tired of the visual monotony of talking pictures, Hollywood would soon recover the possibilities of images and movement, thereby ameliorating the alienating effect of
foreign-language dialogue and solving the problem of the international comprehensibility of its sound films.63

As Hollywood’s imports were increasingly converted to talkies, the Japanese debate over the introduction of sound centered increasingly on a single practical question: how to solve the language problem, a problem made even worse by the presence of benshi in Japanese theaters. When American film companies began importing sound films into Japan, they were transplanted on an established local theatrical environment, which included the human intervention of benshi’s narration. At first, many benshi did not know what to do with the new talking pictures and simply reacted by providing no more than a brief advance explanation of their plots while staying silent during their screening. But their sudden silence simply left average Japanese moviegoers both confused and at a loss with unintelligible English dialogue. The confusion was hardly lessened when benshi often tried to narrate faithfully because they used no sound equipment, which was dismissed as expensive and uneconomical, and were forced to shout as loud as they could—and even then their voice was still largely drowned out in a shouting match with the original dialogue and sound effects reverberating through the theaters.

Faced with the new difficulties, many benshi experimented with a number of new formulas for domesticating and explaining Hollywood sound films on more conventional grounds. One early solution was to turn off the soundtracks and insert Japanese narration at crucial dialogue scenes, but this clearly seemed to be a compromised and inadequate response to the intended effects of the technological revolution that had
taken place with the advent of sound itself. Then, Japanese exhibitors moved to mix the soundtracks and benshi’s narration, lowering the volume of English-language originals all the time or at various key points while benshi tried narrating over the muted sound. Still, the combination of soundtracks and benshi’s explanation led to a disorienting cacophony in Japanese movie theaters, particularly because early American sound films, as noted previously, featured revues and operettas that stressed singing and other novel sound effects. Within a year after the start of the talkie revolution in Japan, many moviegoers were getting tired of unintelligible dialogue as a crude novelty, while both attendance and receipts were falling at theaters screening American pictures, many of which then began to include Japanese films in their theater programs by 1931. Under these circumstances, the American film companies naturally viewed the new language barriers as the biggest problem affecting the future of their Japanese market.64

At first, the American response to the language problem in Japan was based on a cautious, conservative approach. Many American companies somehow tried to find a workable solution by importing a diminishing number of silent films as well as silent versions of sound pictures and “part-talkies” with background musical scores and sound effects while avoiding all-dialogue “100 percent all-talkies.” In the most extreme case, United Artists even decided to retreat and close its Japanese branch office in late 1929 on the ground that most of its studios did not “intend to make any silent pictures to supply the non-English-speaking countries.” However, as Hollywood’s exports were increasingly converted to sound films after 1930, silencing the spoken dialogue apparently proved to be an unsatisfactory solution. Such adaptations only became awk-

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ward and clumsily paced even as silent films, if patched up with synchronized musical accompaniment. Also, American companies feared that once Japanese studios began producing native-language talkies, Hollywood’s sound imports would lose their commercial value as a new curiosity and its market in Japan would be limited further to a small circle of educated elites capable of understanding English dialogue. But retreating from any overseas market was always the very last option for Hollywood, due to its financial dependence on foreign revenues.65

These concerns made it increasingly urgent for American companies to restore the international character of Hollywood movies by improving methods to localize them for Japanese audiences. In early 1931, Paramount finally provided a promising, long-term solution to the language problem by introducing a subtitled version in the Japanese market. At first, some critics argued that subtitles were a major barrier to enjoying foreign sound films because it was distracting to read superimposed titles at the same time that viewers were trying to follow the nuances and details of pictures displayed on the screen. By the end of the year, however, subtitling became the standard localization method that was eventually adopted by American companies in Japan, although various alternatives were still tried without success into the mid-1930s. But what were the factors leading to this technical choice in Japan? When this crucial question is scrutinized, it becomes evident that this was not a result that Hollywood simply imposed on the smaller Japanese market. Rather, it was in large part a technical response to the local demands from Japanese audiences, many of whom apparently did
not want to hear their own language and instead embraced subtitled versions over other localization methods such as dubbing.66

In fact, before subtitling was conceived as a sound solution, changes in localization policy were fairly common and frequent. Such experiments reflected Hollywood’s confusion about its language problem and depended on the success or failure of individual films in Japan. For example, some exhibitors tested the use of sidetitles, that is, set up a smaller screen next to the main one for projecting Japanese explanation with a separate projector. But this translation method clearly did not catch on because it was difficult to follow two screens at the same time. Several American companies also experimented with what was called “X versions” in Japan, in which a sound picture cuts in to an added intertitle explaining each sequence in Japanese, a practice that only disrupted the flow of the actual footage to a more or less disconcerting and annoying effect. Still others tried importing benshi into their Hollywood studios in order to produce a specially made “Japanese version,” where they were propped in before each major sequence to introduce and explain following actions, instead of providing on-stage narration before the actual audience in movie theaters. Clearly, this method was effective at best only in movies which had only limited dialogue and required no more than occasional translation footage, such as musical-revue pictures.67

Even after subtitled versions became fairly common, several attempts were still made until the mid-1930s to exhibit dubbed versions of Hollywood movies in Japan. Although dubbing was far more costly than adding subtitles, the American action was based on the fear that, as in the larger European markets, subtitled versions eventually
would be rejected in favor of native-language talkies. After 1931, first dubbed pictures were produced in the United States using Japanese immigrants on the West Coast, but these early efforts were technically unsatisfactory in part because their language had become somewhat old-fashioned to Japanese ears. In that same year, Paramount even flirted with a venture into local production by financing a smaller independent Japanese producer so that it could arrange to distribute Japanese-language talkies in its theater circuit. But the company soon moved to end its brief experiment after exhibiting only one original Japanese talkie. Such local production was still deemed to be unprofitable with limited outlets as most theaters were not yet wired in Japan, except those showing mostly foreign films. Later, in 1934 and 1935, American companies turned again to dubbing, this time having a number of their films dubbed in Japan with Japanese actors to ensure the authenticity of contemporary accent. They expected that such dubbed versions would provide an ideal alternative to the growing threat of Japanese sound films and attract mass audiences even in non-urban theaters—which were slowly but increasingly wired for talkies—where there would be little understanding of English dialogue in Hollywood’s movies.68

But dubbed versions were never successfully embraced in the Japanese market. Many critics articulated the widespread opposition by insisting that dubbing corrupted the whole aesthetic experience of watching foreign movies. Above all, they pointed out the absurdity of having American stars speak Japanese, which destroyed the unity of their voice and body and imposed the effect of cultural dissonance and dislocation in dubbed pictures. One film critic even opined that voice was a most critical element in
defining individual characters and that hearing a Japanese voice uttered by a totally
different American actor would destroy at least “two-thirds” of their value for Japanese
viewers due to radical modifications and dislocations in Hollywood’s originals. These
attitudes, it seems, clearly reflected the established position of foreign movies in
Japanese film culture. As noted previously, they had not been so much functional al-
ternatives for Japanese films as prestige items for urban middle-class audiences, cultural
products that could be enjoyed in original, unmediated forms, save benshi’s narration,
only by those who had acquired necessary intellectual sophistication and distinctive
tastes. To be sure, dubbing would have made Hollywood talkies less foreign and more
accessible to Japanese moviegoers as a whole. But the technical ability to hear Japanese
language was hardly a desirable choice for their main constituency because it would
make foreign films socially less scarce objects and diminish the cultural capital re-
quirements necessary to understand and appreciate foreign films in a manner inacces-
sible to those with less cultural capital. Thus, it was clearly the local demand of Japa-
nese audiences, rather than Hollywood’s international commercial policies, that dic-
tated the adoption of subtitling over dubbing in Japan, although American companies,
as in the large European markets, showed similar concern about the potential competi-
tion from locally made talkies.69

Once subtitling became the accepted solution to the language problem in Japan,
the talkie revolution then seemed to provide a major opportunity to enhance the position
of American film companies in the local market. Because of the higher costs, Japanese
studios had not undertaken the process of converting to sound production until 1932–33
and sound pictures still made up only 30 percent of Japanese cinema even in 1935. Also, the general consensus was that domestic film production declined both in quantity and quality during this transitional period, a development that forced Japanese companies to contract imported films for supplementing the regular programs that they offered to their theater chains.\(^{70}\) In addition, the commercial advantage for American companies was seemingly enhanced by the establishment of a new Japanese film company—Tōhō—in 1934–35, which temporarily had the effect of creating more exhibition outlets for Hollywood movies in Japan.

In fact, Tōhō’s new studios also were not yet equipped to supply a double feature required for its newly contracted theaters every week. Its management tried to overcome this problem by purchasing blocks of American movies to service their growing circuit. Further, the rise of Tōhō introduced new dynamics of business competition in the Japanese film market and created a better marketing environment for American companies as the rival theater chains often competed to outbid each other for the rental right to contract new Hollywood movies.\(^{71}\) By 1936, Hollywood’s improved position was increasingly recognized, often with a strong note of alarm, in the Japanese trade press. Despite the language barrier, it was often reported, American pictures appeared to enjoy a major renaissance, regaining their silent-era popularity, penetrating far beyond the largest metropolitan centers like Tokyo, and performing much better at the box office than mediocre, hastily made domestic films.\(^{72}\)

The growing acceptance of American sound pictures, however, did not mean that Hollywood was able to consolidate its temporary gains in the Japanese market. By
1937, Japanese talkie production was increasingly brought up to an acceptable level, and Japanese companies turned again to supplying weekly double features of domestic movies for their theater circuits, excepting those theaters traditionally specializing in foreign films or showing mixed Japanese-foreign programs. As in the late 1920s, American companies failed to show any cartel-like behavior in dealing with the changing Japanese market. Rather, they tended to engage in a constant cycle of turf battles, so to speak, and fight over the segregated market segment instead of acting together to expand the overall local demand for Hollywood movies. Having long enjoyed an open market in Japan, they had little interest in adopting such aggressive business tactics as individual or joint ventures into local production, although it would have been a promising, if highly costly, way to break into the unexplored mass market outside the large urban centers. Some companies did show interest in buying or even building new theaters to secure independent local outlets for their exports. Clearly, this move would have provided a perfectly rational solution to increase the market share of individual firms, since the integrated structure of the Japanese film industry had largely allowed the few domestic companies to create a virtual monopoly and dictate the terms for buying and distributing American pictures in their contracted theaters. Yet, such isolated inroads on local exhibition in foreign and semi-foreign theaters would not have offered a long-term, collective solution to Hollywood’s major limitation in Japan—the “two worlds” of Japanese film culture. Lacking locally made movies, Hollywood failed to seize its opportunity for business expansion in Japan and continued to find itself relegated to the limited, if important, urban middle-class market for foreign films, while
the rest of Japanese screens increasingly reverted to the exclusive territory for domestic products after the mid-1930s.73

**Conclusion**

To summarize, Hollywood’s vision of international dominance was undercut by the dual structure of the local film market in interwar Japan. The popularity of motion pictures grew in early-twentieth century Japan as an essential part of the global reorientation of urban leisure activities under modern capitalism. One method of market control for the Hollywood studios would have been through block booking, selling blocks of American movies to Japanese theaters through long-term contracts. Yet, cultural capital structured consumption patterns for American movies. The Hollywood cinema commanded a popular and influential position in a smaller urban middle-class audience, signifying a set of socially distinctive tastes, skills, refinement, and knowledge required to consume such cultural commodities successfully. Thus, Hollywood’s commercial penetration was circumscribed by the segregation of foreign films at the exhibition level. After the mid-1920s, the majority of Japanese screens fell under the control of domestic movies, and cultural and social differences in the other audiences, preferring less technically sophisticated but more familiar native products, served as effective barriers to the widespread distribution of most foreign pictures outside the large cities.
Furthermore, Hollywood’s economic expansion in interwar Japan was frustrated by the conservative, rather than aggressive, trade practices of American film companies. Another method of market control would have been through theater building and theater acquisition, which they often did in European countries to counter possible government restrictions against the showing of U.S. films. The other method would have been to accommodate the Japanese film market structure and buy into the local production sector using Japanese stars. Such an ambitious plan would have provided a huge opportunity to open new outlets for American movies by enabling the American distributors to supply combined Japanese-American programs under their own theatrical control. Unlike the major European markets, however, the absence of local import restrictions had an ironic effect of discouraging them from incurring the risks of moving upward to the production level or buying into Japanese theater circuits. In effect, this policy only helped to perpetuate the segregated position of Hollywood movies in the Japanese market, and the Americans, rather than act as a cartel, kept fighting for the control of the limited, if vital, segment of Japanese theaters showing mostly foreign films in the largest cities.

The incomplete degree of American market control reflected the strength of local film companies in interwar Japan. Like Hollywood’s major studios, they engaged in film production and distribution while also controlling movie theaters either directly or indirectly though long-term exhibition contracts. Yet, vertical integration did not lead to a total exclusion of American movies from Japanese theaters, and they continued to enjoy nearly 30 percent of the share in the Japanese market even after the late 1920s. In
the early 1930s, their audiences even chose subtitling over dubbing of American sound films, preferring to hear the original voice of foreign actors rather than their own language. Thus, it is not appropriate to say that Hollywood’s position in Japan was imposed forcibly through its “monopolistic trade practices” and “massive diplomatic support.” Rather, its constant popularity, if “unbelievable” to some future scholars and limited mostly to urban middle-class audiences, was a clear reflection of the market demand involving the aesthetic quality and successful formula of American films and viewer preference in the dual film culture of prewar Japan.74 What qualities, then, did such audiences find attractive, or perhaps sometimes repulsive, in the make-believe world of Hollywood cinema? An examination of this key question will be a main concern of the next chapter on the cultural significance of American movies in interwar Japan.
CHAPTER 4
HOLLYWOOD AND DISCOURSES OF AMERICANIZATION
IN INTERWAR JAPAN

Robert Park, a leading scholar in American sociology between the two world wars, was also one of the classic theorists and keen observers in the field of international communication studies that was established in the United States after World War II. The increasing exchange of commodities and ideas, Park wrote in one of his articles on the impact of modern communication, inevitably reduced the traditional distances separating nations, became the basis for a new international order, and gave rise to a new “cultural frontier,” such as “the Singer sewing-machine frontier, or the automobile, cinema, and radio frontiers.” In his opinion, however, the creation of an increasingly mobile, cosmopolitan world was not necessarily a positive development, at least for the short term. In the modern world, the chief process of communication took place through symbolic transmission connecting technological devices and a mass audience. Park recognized that the movies, which were dominated by the American industry, had far greater influence than the traditional print media as a channel of cross-border exchange thanks to their unprecedented ability to reproduce “realistic and thrilling pictures of American life” that were comprehensible even to an illiterate mass population. Writing
after the 1924 Japanese boycott of American films, Park offered a penetrating analysis about the significance of motion pictures in international relations:

A few years ago the average man in China and in Japan got his most lively conceptions of America from two sources: the returned immigrant and the missionary. . . . [But the Japanese image of America today is] little more than confirmatory of hypotheses which they derive from another source so much more widely known in the islands, so vivid, and so copious that every other channel of knowledge has become petty in comparison. This source is the American motion-picture. . . . The cinema may be regarded as the symbol of a new dimension of our international and racial relations which is neither economic nor political, but cultural.

Yet, Park warned that such intimate cross-border encounters could, at least temporarily, become a major source of cultural tension and conflict, rather than mutual understanding and friendship among different nations. Consciousness about the “alien” other, he observed, would be felt more deeply and strongly and could lead to a powerful wave of nationalist reaction at the popular level.²

It is interesting to place Park’s concern alongside, if not in actual dialogue with, the way that many Japanese reacted to the 1924 boycott on American movies. Nationalist groups argued that Japan had become a complete vassal state of America and was controlled by the influx of American goods and ideas. But while they targeted Hollywood movies as the hated symbol of America, the boycott, as examined in the last chapter, was practically doomed by the popular opposition of urban audiences. Following the swift collapse of the 1924 boycott, one fan magazine concluded that no other medium had exercised greater influence in promoting pro-American sentiment than Hollywood films. The two contrasting perspectives, represented by Park and many Japanese moviegoers, provide a good point of departure for exploring Japanese per-
ceptions of American movies during the interwar period. Interestingly, while their difference expressed the ambiguities of Hollywood’s cultural reception abroad, it is easy to note that they shared a common viewpoint that American movies were, as Park identified, the embodiment of American national character.³

In many ways, the Japanese view of American films, paralleling Park’s sociological concern, was almost a direct reflection of Hollywood’s discourses on the impact of American mass culture abroad. Hollywood, as noted previously, defined American films as a major driving force for creating a new global, Americanized order, one that transmitted a homogeneous culture of modernity and abundance and linked different nations together in an ever tighter, denser web of democratic understanding and peace. Also, “Americanization” or “Americanism” (often used interchangeably) was a ubiquitous buzzword in Japanese culture after World War I. In Japanese opinion, Hollywood had become the nerve center of Western civilization. Its pictures exported the whole vision of American life, superimposed the forces of modernity on Japanese culture, and made Japan the most Americanized nation in Asia during the interwar era.⁴ Yet, as Miriam Silverberg suggests in her work on interwar Japan, it must be remembered that this “‘East meets West’ paradigm” only privileged the external agency of American culture as a modernizing force and reinforced “notions of otherness that cannot do justice to questions of agency, history, or the Japanese history of the consciousness of agency.” This view is fundamentally too simplistic in portraying audiences of American mass culture as passive victims of manipulation by the powerful global media industry.
It fails to interrogate how the international flow of cultural products beyond U.S. borders was actually experienced and interpreted in the receiving context of local cultures.\(^5\)

This chapter calls into question such essentialist and nation-centered interpretations of Americanization by examining how the Hollywood cinema represented American life to Japanese viewers during the 1920s. As the last chapter showed, American movies were not imposed on reluctant customers through commercial hegemony and political assistance of the U.S. government. Rather, Hollywood’s presence in Japan relied on the popularity of its products, which claimed significant cultural resonance in an increasingly urban, industrial Japan. American and Japanese audiences were often watching and enjoying the same movies thousands of miles apart, with their experiences thus representing the permeability of cultural boundaries in the modern world. Further, while domestic pictures controlled the majority of Japanese screens after the mid-1920s, Hollywood’s cultural influence remained highly salient after World War I. American movies circulated as a signifier of cultural capital among the urban middle-class audiences, which in effect constituted the cosmopolitan segment of Japanese film culture having more public influence in shaping and promoting new ideas in fields of popular culture.

How, then, did this community of Japanese audiences understand and respond to Hollywood movies? A close examination suggests that their reception of American films was framed through the prism of “otherness” caught in a web of popular images and visions about America that were widely available in interwar Japan. It was rooted in the cultural construction of America as an imaginary exotic “other,” which was defined
with respect to what it was not rather than what it was. Hollywood was regarded as the repository of cultural values that were somehow “foreign” to Japanese soil, a perspective that externalized and displaced many threatening social and cultural changes in interwar Japan as products of Americanization. In other words, Japanese discourses on American movies were shot through with a web of cultural ambiguities that involved the constitution and negotiation of individual and group identities after World War I. To a large extent, American movies aroused familiar deep-seated anxieties about the problems of capitalist modernity, but Hollywood’s America also figured as the land of freedom and promise and its pictures were embraced as exotic carriers transporting the original, liberating vision of modern life across the Pacific.

**Hollywood and the Question of Audience Reception in Japan**

Motion pictures, as noted earlier, were obviously the most important form of popular entertainment in the years between the two world wars. Thus, their cultural significance became a subject of major interest in Japan after World War I. Indeed, Japanese writers and intellectuals invested a great deal of energy in decoding and exploring the meaning of motion pictures as the new media of mechanical reproduction. Japanese literary historian Maeda Ai has written that the 1920s was the time when “the phenomenon of a mutual intersection between literature and film became especially pronounced.” In fact, one scholar has even suggested that this relationship, though not peculiar to Japan, was most explicitly debated in its interwar milieu. These interwar
debates, as a result, left important fragments and traces of contemporary evidence for historical investigation, such as editorials, feature articles, and roundtable discussions, not to mention numerous letters from dedicated fans printed in movie magazines. These contemporary sources provide significant access, if limited, to the popular views expressed by popular audiences in interwar Japan.

The growing public interest in motion pictures represented the growth of symbolic transmission through modern media technology. Before the mid-nineteenth century, information could travel no faster than the human messenger and most Japanese could hardly have imagined the essential reality of a Western world existing beyond their seashores. Following the end of traditional isolation, the development of mass communication had expanded the bounds of information and knowledge—both real and imagined—and had widened the process of self-formation and consciousness beyond the spheres of everyday, face-to-face experience. Accordingly, one of the central ideas that shaped Japanese views of motion pictures in the interwar period was naturally an almost exact duplication of Hollywood’s technological discourses about modern communication and the creation of a global village. The movies, in this view, succeeded and went far beyond traditional print media in terms of their technical capacity to expand human consciousness and spread increasingly coherent, if mediated, knowledge or images about the distant outside world. Indeed, the contributors to the 1918 Chūō kōron symposium, as examined in the previous chapter, identified the distinct attraction of foreign films in their unique transnational qualities that claimed direct, almost magical appeal to a mass audience. The body of new cultural knowledge they represented about
foreign societies and people, past and present, brought a pervasive sense of wonder and excitement that transcended the barriers of physical space and time. That was the reason motion pictures were often regarded as cultural ambassadors whose contemporary influence was far more powerful than any official diplomacy.\(^7\)

Given the American prominence in the Japanese film market, it was not surprising that the Hollywood cinema provided a predominant metaphor shaping the Japanese discussion about foreign movies. In fact, when motion pictures were discussed in terms of binary dichotomies drawn between “Japanese” and “foreign” films, American pictures more often than not figured as a powerful signifier of the latter category. Hollywood films and movie stars were an everyday presence in Japanese popular culture, finding their ways, for example, into the covers of many mass-circulation magazines. Because motion pictures were commonly regarded as the latest, and most influential, medium that represented and transmitted cultural values and influences from abroad, Japanese discussions of American movies were intimately associated with the discourse of “Americanization.” Hollywood movies were thought to be the most conspicuous symbol of American cultural influence as the Japanese public reflected on the meaning of America after World War I. What, then, were the consequences of these cultural flows for Japanese audiences? What were Japanese experiences of watching American movies? What specific values and ideas were perceived or altered, if at all, when the Hollywood cinema came into contact with Japanese audiences in the interwar period?
The popularity of American films made it a commonplace argument, as the Marxist writer Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke wrote in 1929, that Hollywood was the most powerful “agent of Americanization” in interwar Japan. American movies controlled the entire globe as a new invisible empire, he observed, one that uprooted Japanese culture from its fixed values and traditions and transforming Japanese life with a set of American products, lifestyles, and values depicted on the screen. Like many Japanese critics, Hirabayashi made a typical argument that Americanization was taking place in both Europe and Japan after World War I. The United States increasingly replaced Europe as the leader of Western civilization and exported its economic, social, and cultural models around the globe. Thus, Japanese life was progressively Americanized as Japanese shaved their faces with American razors, rode in American cars, and slept in futons made of American cotton. Hollywood movies, observed Hirabayashi, were the magic wand of Americanization. While Americanization had failed when peddled by Christian missionaries and churches, it enjoyed unparalleled success and met little resistance when Hollywood films peddled it for pleasure and profit to the remotest corners of the world.⁸

In this context, it is important to note that Hollywood’s America was usually viewed as more or less realistic depictions of American life. Statements on Hollywood films usually doubled as cultural commentary on American society and culture. And given their cultural influence in the interwar period, it may not be an exaggeration to say that Japanese audiences interpreted American life through the prism of popular American movies. Edward Said describes a similar discursive operation in his classical
work, *Orientalism* (1978). He shows how Western images of the Orient (the Middle East) were constructed not so much by “Oriental sources”—the “real” Orient—as by “Orientalist works”—an institutionalized system of Western attitudes and preexisting conceptions about the Orient. These images neglected a detailed context of historical specificity and constructed the imagined Orient as it fit the symbolic order that shaped Western discourses and allowed for the constitution of cultural identities in the West.

Then, Said develops a broader perspective on the representation of foreign culture and the relational character of the self and the Other in general:

> One ought again to remember that all cultures impose corrections upon raw reality, changing it from free-floating objects into units of knowledge. . . . Cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be.⁹

In the Japanese case, the power of the dominant discourse on Hollywood movies was similarly reflected in the way that a few critics with firsthand experiences in the United States questioned (or, to be exact, failed to question) the predominant identification between Hollywood’s America and the real America. It is difficult, as Emily S. Rosenberg suggests, to distinguish what was perceived as “domestic” and what passed for “foreign” in the study of “Americanization.” The Japanese-American binarism, in other words, was obviously an ideological invention. Its boundaries were culturally constructed and far less absolute than they appeared. Questions of national and cultural identity became considerably complicated because the constitution of the self through its contrasting image made it all the more imperative to police such discursive constructs and contain any ideological transgression across national borders. Some argued,
for example, that the screen vision of America in Hollywood films was fundamentally
distorted and represented only features of urban mass society and consumer culture
while passing over the vast expanse of the traditional culture in the middle part of the
country. Others even wondered if Hollywood might be no more than a symbolic place
for public fantasies, one that exaggerated certain aspects of American life—repressed
ideas and actions like sexual titillation—in order to lure mass audiences into movie
theaters. Such critical analysis led to the observation that American people themselves
were often as disturbed by Hollywood’s commercial sensationalism as foreign critics.10

Yet, as Said has suggested in his study of the Orientalist knowledge, Japanese
discourses of Americanism seemed immune even to such conflicting information and
experiences. This point may be illustrated by the example of Tsurumi Yūsuke, a liberal
politician and member of the Institute of Pacific Relations, a transnational
non-governmental organization aiming to promote international understanding and
peace in the Far East. Following the passage of the 1924 U.S. immigration act that re-
stricted most Japanese immigration, he had toured the United States for a year and half
seeking to promote Japanese-American friendship. Several years later, as a participant
in a 1929 roundtable discussion on “America and Americanism” published by the major
literary journal Shinchō, Tsurumi sought to question the constructed nature of American
images circulating in the Japanese mass media. During his numerous conversations,
said Tsurumi, he had found that the American people themselves regarded their country
as a very conservative society. The Americans would be outraged, therefore, if their
country should be defined overseas by the image of Hollywood actors, just as the
Japanese always resented the foreign stereotype of *geisha* and Yoshiwara (Tokyo’s premier red-light district) as the representative images of Japan. But no sooner had he suggested that Hollywood movies in fact were more cultural constructs than reflections of American reality than Tsurumi returned full circle to the oversimplified master narrative of “Americanism” and turned blind eyes to the actual conditions and diversity of American society. His argument soon regressed to the rhetorical strategy of displacement, one that overlooked the crucial question of domestic agency and social change and focused instead on how modern Japan had become a product of Americanization by continuing to adopt American lifestyles, clothing, architecture, and media products. Thus, the totalizing notion of Americanization served as a sort of gravitational field that continued to pull down and imprison even the most perceptive observers in interwar Japan and apparently prevented understandings of America in itself, in its own social and cultural specificity.11

A nation imagines itself in the stories it tells and the images it creates, molding an evolving cultural narrative about the self and its world. When one looks at Japanese views of the Hollywood cinema after World War I, it soon becomes evident that they hardly constituted unique, new, or independent visions and impressions. Rather, they were typically a recycled product drawing themes, agendas, and treatments from the structure of conventional formulas and established images about American culture that had long before circulated in the traditional print media, ranging from travel guides to literature. Clearly, Japanese constructions of Hollywood’s America were self-referential and patterned by an often contradictory but regularized deployment of
stereotypes about American life, although motion pictures certainly helped to make such cultural images more vivid and popularly circulated in the new culture of mechanical reproduction. Japanese images of the Hollywood cinema usually referred to its overall design and as such remained highly stable and constant fixtures that could never be nailed down to individual films and viewers, not to mention contemporary events. Further, such perceptions were generally shared by both intellectual elites and popular audiences and were expressed both in elite magazines and fan magazines, although the former was undoubtedly far more articulate in voicing their opinions and judgments. Thus, the Japanese practice of film viewing was shaped not as a closed entity—appreciating individual American pictures for their own sake—but rather as an “intertextual” product that could be meaningful only within networks of relations to textual references and broader historical and intellectual sources.\textsuperscript{12}

In conceptualizing the field of discourse revealed by Japanese images of Hollywood films and “Americanization,” it may be particularly useful to draw on the analytical insights derived from standpoint theories in sociology and reception theory in literary criticism and cultural studies. In contrast to a traditional preoccupation with macrostructures or the text, many scholars have explored new ways of studying their cultural signification from a specific subjective (or phenomenological) point. Stuart Hall, a leading figure in the British cultural studies tradition, has proposed an important theoretical framework about the potential disjunction between the encoded message and how it is decoded in the process of audience reception. In this view, the meaning of a text varies, depending on the perspective of “interpretive communities,” to use Stanley
Fish’s expression, rather than on the singular intension of its producer. Neither the social world or the text stands as a closed, self-sufficient object. Instead, their meanings are created in terms of which set of discourses are embedded among different groups in any particular set of time-and-place cultural contexts. Japanese audiences, in this view, were by no means passive consumers of American movies. Rather, they were active agents who interpreted and negotiated the meanings of Hollywood’s media images in their own terms—through the prism of their own social experiences and cultural expectations.13

At the same time, however, it is still important to note that Japanese views of American films, while they had their own conditions of existence, were almost never purely selective or random. The way that Japanese audiences interpreted the Hollywood cinema was also structured by a formal pattern of “encoding,” to use Stuart Hall’s term, on the part of American producers. An important clue to understanding the relationship between American movies and Japanese reception may be found in The Classical Hollywood Cinema (1985), co-written by film scholars David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. This highly influential work in film studies has shown that Hollywood films were bound by a “distinctive and homogeneous” group style “whose principles remain quite constant across genres, studios, and personnel.” The fairly coherent, unified system of film practice, such as narrative linearity, character-centered story construction, and transparent or unobtrusive scene composition, established the unity of stylistic norms and conventions as a sort of paradigm that bounded and sustained individual creation in the American movie industry.14
This formalist analysis suggests that Japanese perceptions of American movies constituted a set of inferences that were involved in the process of cross-cultural audience reception in Japan. The aesthetic style of Hollywood cinema certainly helped to encode particular narratives and visions of American life and construct some of the limits and parameters within which Japanese audiences viewed American movies in monolithic terms, mostly as a national group rather than as individual films. Yet, the effects of such border-crossing media influence were neither direct nor linear. The meaning of American movies became fixed only in the acts of reading or “misreading” across cultures. The Japanese reception, in other words, was a product of systematically distorted communication, one that exaggerated parts of the cultural norms and intentions encoded in Hollywood cinema in a way that reflected and reinforced the preexisting cultural frames of reference about the Japanese self and the American other. Hollywood, in short, served as a discursive field for projecting a wide range of social ideologies and cultural anxieties swirling in interwar Japan.

Thus, it may not be too much to say that the Japanese reception or “misreception” of Hollywood cinema typically had little to do with an “accurate” understanding of the original American films and culture. Rather, it said much more about the self-image and identities of Japanese viewers themselves. In that sense, Hollywood’s America was perhaps an object of the Japanese imagination, set off against the juxtaposition of two opposed, essentialist entities—the Japanese self and the American other—and constituted by the needs and issues that concerned the everyday lives of Japanese audiences. They were implicated, in other words, in the cultural construction
of America as the homogeneous, monolithic, and alien other, one that blocked out any contradictory information and simply updated archetypal cultural narratives in a new historical context.

**Hollywood’s America and the Discourse of Modernity**

Japanese discourses of Hollywood movies were caught up in a web of different, but closely interconnected, themes during the interwar period. When this tangled web is dissected, one of their most powerful images may be found in the vision of America as the land of modernity. Hollywood’s America, it appears, was a symbolic invention, a discursive construct that had been devised long before “Americanization” became a major keyword in Japanese culture after World War I. As an object of knowledge, America had long figured as a powerful counterpoint to Japanese culture ever since the end of its traditional seclusion in the 1850s. Above all, Japanese perceptions of the Hollywood cinema were rooted in a long-standing interest in America as the model of a possible future representing everything that Japan was not and should be.¹⁵

In Japan, the 1920s was often referred to as a “new era”—as also was the case in the United States—or a decade of modanizumu (modernism). After World War I, as the last chapter showed, the forces of modernization were overtaking Japanese society at the levels of everyday life. The experiences of modernity were symbolized by the expansion of its capital industries, the decline of traditional patriarchy and cohesive community structures, and the expansion of individual lifestyle choices in a rapidly
The cities became the focal point of a new consumer culture, re-decorated as they were with such new icons as automobiles, cafés, dance halls, movie theaters, streetcars, and tall buildings. But in this material context, the standard perception of Hollywood movies took the form of psychological denial or projection. The trope of cultural imperialism was typically deployed as a rhetorical strategy to forgo sociological or empirical explanations of such often unwelcome domestic changes that came with modernity. Instead, the source of modern raifu (modern life) was displaced to a securely alien region—the West, particularly the United States. In light of America’s inordinate economic and cultural influence after the war, Japan’s modern urban culture was invariably linked to Americanism or Americanization, which was disseminated, in Japanese opinion, through mechanized media technologies underlying the Hollywood cinema.16

Thus, Hollywood’s America constituted a major imaginary space in the Japanese vision of modernity between the two world wars. Hollywood films signified a key cultural engine that transmitted and diffused “modern” American influences across the Pacific. The narrative framework referring to American movies was perhaps most evident in one of the key cultural debates of the period, that is, the controversy over the rise of distinct youth culture, symbolized by the figure of moga (modern girls) and mobo (modern boys). In an urbanizing Japan, the old structure was quickly crumbling by the 1920s, if the shape of the new one was not yet clear to anyone. As the new urban environment exposed people to new influences away from the traditional attachments that had anchored small isolated communities, the urban youth, especially among the
middle class but also among the working class, started to seek a greater measure of self-expression and freedom in their social and cultural life. Their quest for liberation from the bounds of tradition was often symbolized by such outward marks as departures in dress and hairstyles, as well as smoking, drinking, the Charleston dance, and new, more open attitudes toward sex, even among women. Confronting these and other sociocultural changes identified with modernity and the concomitant expansion of life choices, most critics refused to interrogate their possible domestic sources. Instead, the ominous implications of modernity were projected to American mass culture, and Hollywood films were usually held responsible for making their most distinctive, seductive impact on Japanese youth culture. Hollywood’s cultural threat, these critics argued, was symbolized by the sensual images of the playboy Rudolph Valentino or the flapper Clara Bow, with American pictures serving as the Bible for moga and mobo. Their representations of conspicuous consumption were supposed to follow Japanese youth into the streets and introduce them to the decadence of modan raifu, a lifestyle of self-centered individualistic pleasure and instant gratification in modern urban culture.17

Even in this ideological context, there were a number of liberal and leftist intellectuals who tried to dismantle the dominant constructions of Hollywood’s America. Yet, even these perceptive observers always remained imprisoned in the discourse of binarism between Japan and America. Their critique pointed out that the rise of moga and mobo was but a historical manifestation of universalistic aspects of modernity. In this view, the sources of Japan’s modernization were identified in such general socio-
economic forces as the development of media technology, the increasing participation of women in the labor market, and the rise of modern capitalism and mass production that allowed, among other things, the mass marketing of cheaper, more casual, gaily colored clothes. The Marxist writer Hirabayashi, for example, affirmed that the Japanese experiences of modernity were driven by new forces of production under modern capitalism. His argument implied, therefore, that both U.S. and Japanese history represented the parallel and general forces of social and cultural transformation, if at different speed. But the particularistic rhetoric of cultural colonization continued to serve as a powerful field of discourse replacing progressive theories of history with essentialized tropes of geographic space in his analysis of Japanese-American relations. Hirabayashi’s analysis, if alert to domestic roots of modernity, soon reverted to the standard binary dichotomy between America and Japan. He argued that the growth of new habits and values among Japan’s urban youth should not be feared as a national crisis or decline because Westernization, and later Americanization, had been a long, ongoing process ever since the opening of Japan to the West. Much of what was labeled as Western had long been deeply entrenched in Japanese life, and to reject Americanization, he said, would mean that the Japanese would be forced to abandon not only motion pictures but also such modern institutions as representative politics, the legal system, public schools, newspapers, and the telegraph and railroad. Thus, despite his earlier claims, Hirabayashi was ultimately unable to deconstruct the discourse of otherness about the Hollywood cinema. The sources of Japanese modernity were traced,
in the last instance, to generations of cultural contact and influence from the West, rather than the universalistic forces of capitalist production within Japan.\textsuperscript{19}

In relation to the discursive projection of modernity, the concept of the New World was also a predominant influence on Japanese perceptions of Hollywood’s aesthetic style as well. The notion of national cinemas was prevalent in the Japanese conception of foreign films. Initially, American movies often had been grouped with European films under the overarching framework of “Western” cinema, especially because the former had made up only a minor part of imported pictures before World War I. Later, Hollywood’s products themselves became almost synonymous with “foreign” movies, a development that reflected their increasing predominance in the Japanese market after the war. Yet, despite the changing place of American movies in Japanese film culture, it was still a common view that each national cinema, like other traditional works of art, revealed a fundamental stylistic unity and coherence, an essential character that represented the national spirit and cultural identity in its producing nation. This central, essentialist assumption about nationally shared cultural codes and principles persisted even when some critics and moviegoers claimed that they studied foreign films based solely on their individual merits rather than on their nationalities. The common stereotype was that Hollywood movies were artistically inferior to European films, such as the avant-garde, experimental works of German expressionists or the revolutionary Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein.\textsuperscript{20}

In interwar Japan, it was a dominant discursive practice to trace what many saw as Hollywood’s artistic inferiority to the culture of a new, modern nation. According to
their cultural narratives, America was a land without a sense of the past—young, immature, and childish—a land that lacked the sort of history, cultivated tastes, and respect for tradition that was characteristic of older, established cultures like Europe and Japan. This stereotype of two opposing civilizations (which some also compared to a contrast between jazz and classical music) meant that the European cinema was usually described as highbrow and high-quality elite art—more cultured, refined, and enriched by Europe’s aesthetic tradition and the depth of tragic resolution (although it was often admitted that the number of good European films was usually limited, accounting, for example, for the failure of the 1924 boycott on American movies). In contrast, the Americans were supposed to be anti-intellectual and culturally incapable of producing serious works of art. American movies, led by slapstick comedies and melodrama, were typically characterized as no more than good entertainment—products of lowbrow mass culture beset by bad taste—vulgar, shallow, philistine, formulaic, and lacking in moral seriousness, if cheerful, light-hearted, amusing, and pleasurable at the same time.

In Japanese opinion, the superficiality of Hollywood’s aesthetic style was best signified by one of its key narrative conventions: the emphasis on happy endings—the hero and heroine overcoming a series of obstacles to achieve their desires, goals, or romance. This common story construction, it was argued, was the inevitable product of American culture as a new modern nation. The young American nation was so innocent and optimistic about the future that it lacked a tragic sensibility directly linked to the sense of the past. Instead, the American people contented themselves with describing
only an ideal, perfectible world—superficial, lacking any depth, and denying the inadequacies and evils of the real world in human history.\textsuperscript{21}

On the one hand, these arguments show that the Japanese reaction remained a clear signifier of American movies at some important levels. In particular, it was in part a real reflection of one of the basic principles governing the Hollywood cinema: goal-oriented, character-centered narration. Many film scholars have explained that happy endings had developed as a dramatic form that was fairly specific to American movies. In their analysis, the foundations of such classical narrative strategies can be found in the ideological and economic imperatives for Hollywood movies to affirm the social and cultural order and maximize audiences’ pleasures and satisfactions as commercial commodities, along with the formal stylistic conventions that had initially influenced the formulation of Hollywood’s group style, such as short fiction, the popular novel, and the theater. Accordingly, American movies were in fact “an excessively obvious cinema,” in David Bordwell’s phrase, one that was typically driven by the formula of sympathetic, individualized characters solving personal problems and acting toward an uncomplicated, predictably utopian resolution through linear, straightforward, and transparent chains of psychological cause and effect.\textsuperscript{22}

Still, the Japanese discourse of Hollywood’s infantilism was always more than a simple signifier of its classical narration. Rather, it was inevitably magnified as an effect of the Japanese sense of cultural apprehension and dislocation about modernization and mass culture. The metaphor of (im)maturity has often been an essential part of the arbitrary, hierarchical binaries aiding in the discursive construction of the modern world
as a mass society. It was part of the universal tropes of anti-modernist reaction worldwide that modern culture appealed increasingly to the infantile and the emotional in mass psychology, as opposed to traditional, or authentic culture that had belonged to the class of intellectual elites as quintessential products of individual creativity, refinement, learning, and strivings for perfection. Clearly, this binary framework was derived from the fact that stereotypes of such powerless and often devalued groups as children are always linked to the language and imagery of power in highly intimate manners. Children and their youthfulness are often objectified as a fixed sign of imperfection, weakness, irresponsibility, and inferiority, signifying a chiefly negative value that defined the “true Other” in many ideological contexts. Thus, it was little wonder that Japanese views were overdetermined by the conception of American pictures as a cultural symbol of the New World. Concerns about the forces of modernity defined a discursive space that configured and delineated the Hollywood cinema as an abstract, external sign of shallow, childish mass culture, and the topographical opposition between the Old World and the New helped to promote an ideological closure on the modernization process that actually might have originated in the specific historical experience of an increasingly industrial and urban capitalist Japan.23

Hollywood’s America as the Land of Mammon and Women

In addition to the discourse of modernity, another powerful theme in Japanese perceptions of Hollywood films was the image of materialism—the idea of America as
the land of money and machines. Since the turn of the twentieth century, an earlier image of America as “the land of liberty” had begun to be superseded by the notion of American greed and crass commercialism. During the 1860s, the high-minded ideals of the American Revolution had been admired by future leaders of modern Japan as they prepared to overthrow the Tokugawa feudal regime. During the 1870s, although leaders of modern Japan increasingly came to stress the political incommensurability between American democracy and their new imperial government, the spirit of independence of the American people had yet remained an object of official sanction as they tried to “civilize and enlighten” the people in an effort to create a rich, powerful nation through the adoption of the utilitarian, rational, and scientific aspects of Western civilization. And during the 1880s, which is generally known as the age of the “popular rights movement,” opponents of the authoritarian Meiji government again found a stirring inspiration in the model of the American Revolution and its struggles for liberty, justice, and political rights.24

Yet, the earlier tone of adoration had begun to be muted down by the turn of the twentieth century, even though it continued to influence the Japanese view of America as late as the mid-1920s. A growing sense of nationalist pride in Japan’s modern progress helped increasingly to transform America into a competitor rather than a model. Its rapid industrial growth and excesses of uncontrolled capitalism in the Gilded Age were watched with a mixture of envy and fear. After the 1890s, Japanese images of America became further complicated by the increasing U.S.-Japanese competition in East Asia and the Pacific. In addition, the treatment of Japanese immigrants in Cali-
fornia, along with America’s rejection of the racial equality clause in the League of Nations Covenant, were received as a terrible slap in the face, offending the modern Japanese national aspiration to attain an international position equal to Western great powers.

In this changing ideological environment, the notion of American materialism and money worship increasingly came to the forefront in twentieth-century Japan. In describing European views of Americanization, Rob Kroes has suggested that the “deep structure of cultural defense” typically privileges the authenticity of native culture and constructs rival cultures “as overbearing yet alien,” “as lacking depth and soul,” and “as being an exterior veneer without historical rootedness and legitimacy.” It is a fairly common discourse that “others” do not share the same deep feelings. They are always viewed with suspicion as somehow cold, soulless, and calculating.25 Similar cultural narratives juxtaposing a superficial, surface world and a domestic realm of authentic life were clearly reflected in Japanese images of Americanism. The New World increasingly stood as a modern Babylon, a ruthlessly technical civilization lacking a sense of history. On the one hand, America was a land of greed, decadence, and corruption that lacked any spiritual qualities and was exclusively preoccupied with a crude, frantic pursuit of material riches. On the other hand, it was a land where the assembly line and machines replaced quality with quantity and marked all aspects of American life with the single-minded pursuit of productivity, efficiency, technology, and profits. According to these stereotyped images, it was impossible to find arts, good taste, and spiritual richness in America—a barren, vulgar cultural wasteland that was the mirror image of
Europe and Japan, which were rich with established cultural traditions of refinement and cultivation.²⁶

It was in this discursive context that rising critiques of rampant materialism in America became magnified in Japanese perceptions of Hollywood films after World War I. The urban consumerist vision of lavish lifestyles and mass culture depicted on the screen appeared to provide a vivid, graphic showcase of the decadent, hedonistic “Yankee spirit” engulfing American society and culture in the midst of unprecedented capitalist abundance. It was a widely held view that the Hollywood cinema was the true reflection of America’s machine civilization and its principles of standardization, mass production, rationalization, and the assembly line. Paralleling the profound indictment of conformity in American social criticism of the 1950s, the conventional stereotype in interwar Japan was that American movies demonstrated that every aspect of American society reflected the culture of superficial, mediocre, and monotonous mass uniformity. Everyone was reduced to leading standardized, stupefied, and shallow lives as mass man—all wearing identical clothes, eating similar foods, holding uniform opinions, pursing the almighty dollar, and dancing to the decadent rhythm of jazz music. This national character, it was argued, was also reflected transparently in the story construction of American pictures. The Hollywood cinema was tailored to a mass audience at its receiving end—mediocre, standardized, mass-produced, and interchangeable. Thus, its typical melodramas always lacked quality, taste, depth, and creativity, only peddling the proven formula of simplistic, generic themes and predictable happy endings that appealed simply to the lowest common denominator in society.²⁷
In relation to the evils of materialistic mass culture and its numbing conformity, Japanese participants in both high culture and popular culture typically approached the question of Hollywood’s global dominance through its perceived commercialism. One of the prevailing assumptions about American films was that the key to their international success was in their very existence as commercial commodities. In this view, the Americans reduced everything to dollars, and culture in America was only a commodity, rather than a creation of individual genius and inspiration, which was sold to as broad a market as possible and designed to amuse the exploited American masses who needed their leisure time as an escape from their oppressed everyday lives. Thus, American pictures succeeded at the box office worldwide, many argued, because Hollywood, ever a prisoner of the profit system, was preoccupied with the glossy production values of its movies as popular amusements. The American movie studios did not spare huge budgets to produce the screen qualities that were calculated to provide the maximum amount of entertainment independent of their implausible plots, such as expensive sets, lavish costumes, dazzling action sequences and spectacles, and star performances. For that reason, the Hollywood cinema was not taken seriously as art. American movies were, to be sure, fun and refreshing to watch, commercially successful, and maybe superior in its cinematic talent and skills but featured only shallow and banal cultural content manufactured to satisfy mass market demands for an evening’s entertainment. In contrast, the European cinema was stereotyped as displaying a much closer connection with the virtues of traditional arts, particularly in terms of moral
seriousness, ambiguous symbolism, and psychologically dense characterization that had been central to the narrative authenticity and integrity of classical literature.\textsuperscript{28}

In particular, this art-versus-business dichotomy had powerful influence on the way Japanese intellectuals viewed Hollywood films after World War I. During the 1920s, many critics, especially younger writers and artists, argued that motion pictures could be made to gain a place alongside the more traditional forms of high culture, as they showed powerful possibilities for new cultural expressions. In their eyes, what was particularly interesting was the unique ability of the new visual media, unlike traditional print media, to render the movement of an object in time and project an uninterrupted simulacrum of living reality on the screen. In addition to discovering a means of artistic expression for the new age, this interest was clearly a manifestation of Japan’s cultural position as a latecomer to the Western world of modern capitalism. Its national ambition to catch up with the West, intertwined with its fascination with the “modern,” had sharpened the tendency of Japanese cultural elites to look to the West as a source of new concepts, practices, and models, as symbolized most recently by the intellectual strain of kyōyō shugi (culturalism or philosophical cosmopolitanism) of the 1920s. This historical framework of cultural borrowing and internationalism apparently strengthened the engagement of Japanese intellectuals with cinema as art, and foreign films in general—which carried a high cultural capital as the latest product of Western civilization—were commonly regarded as far superior and establishing norms of style and quality for domestic filmmakers. Thus, many intellectuals openly declared their enthusiasm about the possibilities of artistic innovation revealed through the foreign cinema,
fascinated by such novel principles as movement and the relativity and multidimensionality of time and space. In fact, there were writers like the future Nobel laureate Kawabata Yasunari who participated in the production of domestic movies during the 1920s.29

Yet, the new interest in foreign pictures often did not quite extend to Hollywood films. This negative response among many intellectuals was apparently grounded in the classical notion of art as a personal site for expressing the creativity, imagination, and sensibility of individual artists and authors. In this view, art was defined as a unique, separate sphere that was expected to be outside and unaffected by the surrounding society, especially by the demands of the marketplace and the question of money. Following such traditional aesthetic standards, Japanese critics would have totally agreed with the future criticism of mass culture by such Western intellectuals as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Critiques toward mass culture and consumption circulated worldwide throughout the twentieth century—in circumstances as diverse as the United States and Japan. George F. Kennan is perhaps the most notable example in the history of U.S. foreign relations. While widely celebrated as a key architect of U.S. Cold War foreign policy, Kennan continued to voice his uneasiness, since the 1930s, about what he feared to be the ills of urban industrial civilization and the subordination of American mass culture to vulgar materialism and mass-produced standardization.30

Taking a similar critical position, many intellectuals in interwar Japan argued that Hollywood movies were difficult to take seriously in aesthetic terms. Instead, they were all invariably dictated by the industrial logic of commodified escapism—market
commodities that were commercially produced and controlled by the big studios, packing brief moments of senseless amusement as an escape from the travails of routinized daily life in modern society. Thus, the artistic purity and authorial integrity of American filmmakers were usually compromised by Hollywood’s economic motivation, a director’s vision always collided with pressures to make a commercial hit, and the final products inherently remained stereotyped, formulaic, anonymous, and deficient in genuine human impulses, rather than allowing directors and scenario writers to translate their personal visions into authentic art forms. This elitist cultural conservatism, as it were, acted as a major foundation for critical constructions of the Hollywood cinema in interwar Japan. Even when an individual picture was praised as an exception to the more recognizable norms of Hollywood films, it was hardly enough to deconstruct the familiar discourse about art and the uneasiness with the growth of capitalist mass culture and its feared mediocrity. Such contradictory viewing experiences, if any, were readily excluded in the whole system of binary opposition between Hollywood and other national films, and American movies were mostly disqualified in wholly monolithic terms from the category of art forms worthy of serious consideration.31

Finally, the last striking theme in Japanese perceptions of Hollywood films was based on tropes of gender—the idea of America as the land of women. “Images about women’s roles,” Emily S. Rosenberg argues, “have played a central role in the semiotics of Americanization.” Indeed, discussions of sexuality—especially female one—also were a part of the most consistently repeated cultural narratives in the Japanese vision of America as an essentialized Other since the first encounter in the mid-nineteenth cen-
tury. The higher position of women in American society had been seen as a dire threat to Japan’s traditional system of feudal patriarchy. In Japan’s first diplomatic mission to America in 1860, for example, Japanese samurai visitors had regarded America as a feminized/emasculated social order. They believed that American women were held in high regard, while they were scandalized by the presence of women in public functions, particularly formal dance parties. Their Confucian values of sexual restraint were dramatically incompatible with what they saw as immoral promiscuity, the almost religious worship of women, and their public visibility and influence in American culture.32

By the 1920s, this gendered ideology intertwined with critiques of modernity to weave a web of anti-Hollywood discourses in interwar Japan. Such sexual anxieties were clearly grounded in the function of Hollywood films as the symbol of modern mass culture. As the literary critic Andreas Huyssen has noted in his analysis of modernist literature and arts, mass culture and the masses have consistently been gendered and subordinated as feminine and inferior in political, psychological, and aesthetic discourses since the turn of the twentieth century, whereas high culture was defined almost exclusively as male, real, and authentic. This binary opposition represented the importance of sexuality for the representation of power and knowledge, reflecting the fact that in male-dominated society, culture is inscribed by the image of patriarchal structures that equate the masculine with the privileged self and the feminine with the excluded, absent “other,” the antithesis to what man is. That was why basic institutional changes like the spread of modernity and mass culture were identified with the fem-
inization and emasculation of culture in many countries. Thus, the prominence of sexual ideology ensured that Hollywood as the symbolic carrier of modern American culture was also interpreted in heavily gendered terms.\textsuperscript{33}

In this ideological milieu, the Hollywood cinema was constructed, most symbolically, as the origin of the moga phenomenon after World War I. Hollywood’s cultural impact on youth culture, as noted earlier, created enormous anxieties in the public sphere, but such public critiques pointed especially toward young women rather than men.\textsuperscript{34} The “new women” figured as the vanguard of modernity in Japan, as they did in the United States. Since the turn of the twentieth century, rapid industrialization and urbanization had generated domestic debates on the dissolution of the traditional agrarian household and its ideological support. By the 1920s, such social anxieties were often articulated most clearly in gendered terms. Above all, it was the figure of “consuming women,” as Rosenberg has suggested in an American context, that symbolized the forces of modernity, with the central shift to a newly emerging culture of mass consumption. In Japan, this feminization of consumption was discursively projected especially onto a new group of flappers who were said to transgress old gender and cultural boundaries and assume new images and identities in the expanding metropolitan centers by adopting American styles of clothing, short hair, cosmetics, leisure, and life as displayed on the screen. In debating the new moga phenomenon as a major social question, the most perceptive critics were occasionally compelled to recognize that uneasy, changing definitions of femininity were in large part a product of domestic social and cultural history. For example, there was a growing presence of young
working women pouring into the service and industrial sectors with some money and
time for independence from the confines of patriarchal family. This change overlapped
with the rise of new social groups whose life experiences became far removed from the
bounds of labor and production in the consumer revolution, like students and the new
middle class. Yet, rather than documenting these internal considerations, the discourse
on the moga was essentialized and subordinated all too easily, almost inevitably, to
free-floating imaginations on Hollywood’s eroticism and influence on the new genera-
tion of Japanese women.35

In this sense, the screen image of liberated American women came to symbolize
all the problems and contradictions of Americanization. In Japanese views, the Hol-
lywood cinema was a powerful force that exported the dominant “women’s civiliza-
tion” in America, and the values it embodied were profoundly threatening to the traditional moral order of sexuality in interwar Japan. In particular, the liberated image of
flappers in Hollywood films appeared to demonstrate that America was a feminized
nation of strong-willed and independent women, almost unruly and disorderly, who flaunted tradition and flirted with the opposite sex in the modern metropolitan sites. In
hindsight, there was clearly nothing unusual or uniquely Japanese about projecting
sexual concerns and repressed desires to foreign territories. The same distancing dis-
course also circulated within American culture, and Hollywood films of the 1920s
themselves often projected subversive sexual impulses to stereotyped European char-
acters, as symbolized by Rudolf Valentino, who were portrayed as more libidinous,
exotic, willful, and daring than innocent Americans never dreamed of being. Likewise,
Japanese audiences thought that what they saw on the screen were living signs, or direct, transparent reflections of feminized American culture, and their perceptions about American eroticism were largely unaffected by the presumed nationalities—European or American—of Hollywood’s characters or settings.

From this perspective, the movie star who best defined the screen archetype of Hollywood’s flapper in Japan after World War I was probably Clara Bow. It was a commonplace view that American movies created and exported a new personality type in their female characters, encouraged new identities and modes of behavior among young women, and seduced young men through Hollywood’s formula of sexual titillation, such as screen kisses and barely clad bodies. It was in this context that the “It” girl conquered the imagination of Japanese viewers and became literally a household name during the late 1920s. With an aura of radiant, self-assured sexuality (one film critic aptly stressed the overpowering magnetism of her “fully grown, glamorous thighs clad in short skirts”), Bow was often portrayed as the most controversial, threatening figure in Hollywood’s America. For many viewers, she was quintessentially the vulgar, obscene icon of the new American women corrupting the mind of young men and enticing young women to imitate the appearance of Hollywood stars in ways that challenged and destabilized traditional models of femininity and sexuality in Japanese society. Thus, the gendered image of American life in Hollywood films further served to amplify the conception of America as an ontological threat to the cultural boundaries and identities of Japan as a true moral community.36
Hollywood and the Allure of Americanism

The Japanese visions of the Hollywood cinema were commonly defined by what they excluded. The entire hierarchy of meanings was constructed upon a binary system of symbolic representation that drew rigid boundaries between the Japanese self and the American other, a system that constructed the specter of a monolithic America colonizing a homogeneous Japan. Yet, while the whole edifice of these binaries was hardly questioned, Hollywood’s America was not just a negative reference point in Japan, some kind of contagion that had to be avoided at all costs. On the contrary, many Japanese viewers were much more ambivalent in their acts of cultural reception, and negative discourses ran, often even in the same person, alongside a profound sense of magnetic attraction found in the world of movie-made America. It is interesting to note, furthermore, that as people assembled meanings and identity from everywhere in an increasingly borderless world, the same binary oppositions used to denounce Hollywood and its perceived Americanism were usually evoked and reworked to advance just the opposite claim, as a result shaping a discourse of acceptance—and often even reverence—in interwar Japan.

For many Japanese, Hollywood represented opposite, positive values as the dream image of a foreign landscape that embodied a series of attributes and ideals that seemed unavailable in their own culture. Unlike Hollywood movies, observed Kido Shirō, executive producer of Shōchiku, Japan’s largest film company, European films lacked certain universality and tended to perform poorly at the box office. European
filmmakers were too elitist, he said, and their serious themes and artistic experiments were poorly understood and welcomed only by a limited number of the Japanese intelligentsia. Indeed, as Kido’s business experience showed, the Hollywood cinema was clearly a central reference point in Japanese film culture. Hollywood’s top stars attracted Japanese moviegoers like “brand names” and American films became the dominant model of narrative filmmaking in the Japanese industry after World War I. In addition, there existed an unmistakable air of ambiguity even among many intellectuals who typically showed critical stances on the Hollywood cinema. Praising European films might have carried a greater degree of cultural capital as a sign of intellectual refinement in the Japanese intellectual discourse, but the fact was that American pictures usually dominated the rankings of the best foreign films selected by film critics each year. For example, nine American films were included in a 1927 list of top-ten foreign pictures created by a group of film critics, while ten American films appeared on the same annual ranking the next year. Indeed, many conceded their strong, if grudging, sense of admiration for Hollywood films, especially for their perceived technical superiority and more polished look than the European counterparts.37

The novelist Tanizaki Jun’ichirō—recipient of Japan’s most prestigious national Order of Culture after World War II—was one of the Japanese intellectuals who embraced Hollywood movies for the apparent otherness and exoticism that they offered to Japanese audiences after World War I. Later, he would become a major literary voice in valorizing the purity of traditional culture in the 1930s. In his early career, however, Tanizaki might well be described as a cosmopolitan author, influenced by such Western
writers as Edgar Alan Poe, Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde. (In his 1924 novel *Chijin no ai* [A fool’s love], the heroine Naomi—which was then definitely a non-traditional, Western-sounding name—was a Western-looking “Yankee girl,” a flapper who was made to resemble such movie stars as Mary Pickford and Gloria Swanson.) In 1920, Tanizaki even joined a new, short-lived film production company as a main scenario writer. At that time, he saw American movies as establishing norms of style and quality for a new generation of Japanese filmmakers. Later that year, Tanizaki elaborated on his views in a short fan-magazine article, wherein he detailed his first filmmaking experience and explained what he saw as the special attraction of the Hollywood cinema.

Tanizaki’s argument was also framed within the conventional binary structure of Japanese-American opposition. In his article, Tanizaki, envisioning a new approach to Japanese filmmaking, suggested that domestic pictures (the majority of which were period films and modern tragedies) had been overwhelmingly dull and drab, based on material that was too detached from changing social and cultural life in modern Japan. Instead, his ambition was to produce a cheerful, modern comedy, one that was grounded in what he saw as the lively, joyful culture of the contemporary Japanese youth. Tanizaki further claimed that his most important goal in producing a comedy film was to generate a series of symphonic sequences linking every element in a way that would capture and keep its audience in a dream-like state of psychological trance. That was why Tanizaki claimed that he idolized American films as setting the definitive standard of narrative filmmaking that should be adopted aggressively by Japanese producers. He insisted that Hollywood’s plots, though usually dumb, banal, and not socially critical or
morally serious, were always exciting and refreshing as expressions of American culture, as they embodied such liberating values as innocence, youthful exuberance, gaiety, playfulness, and boundless energy. Thus, Hollywood movies apparently allowed him to make a romantic journey to America in search of a new model for modern arts and society, while Japan tended to represent debilitating barriers—old, staid restriction and stagnation—against major cultural innovations.38

Tanizaki’s positive views were shared widely among Japanese admirers of Hollywood films after World War I. Many scholars also have found similar imagery and enthusiasm in the European reception of American mass culture. But they suggest that such sentiment usually corresponded to class positions and that cultural anti-Americanism was articulated by Europe’s intellectual and political elites expressing misgivings about modern mass society and culture. On the contrary, Japanese intellectual historian Harry Harootunian concludes that “the Japanese, when contrasted to Europeans, seemed more enthusiastic” about the cultural promise of modernization. Clearly, this powerful sense of cultural hopefulness was derived largely from Japan’s historical position in the modern world, not to mention its accelerated effort to attain a level of modernity close to an idealized West. In contrast, European intellectuals arguably saw Europe as the birthplace of Western civilization and thus maintained a much higher sense of cultural rivalry and superiority toward America, which they dismissed as a land of Yankee vulgarity and barbarism. It was in this intellectual context that the promise of Hollywood cinema attracted far greater interest in interwar Japan as a new cultural configuration.39
In such positive views, American movies were typically praised for the very reasons that they were often compared unfavorably to the European cinema. Their popularity, it seems, reflected changes in modern Japanese society, as they offered a vision of global cultural reorientation in the new era. Hollywood films were embraced as symbolic carriers of American mass culture and modernity, standing for such imagined qualities as freedom, progress, and sophistication. The experience of modernity was represented, among other things, by a sensation of accelerating speed of movement. In Japanese eyes, the key symbol of the new era was in the rhythm of modern life, which was no doubt greatly accelerated by a broad technological revolution and modern instruments of transportation and communication. Reflecting this modern perspective, the adjective “speedy” was deployed frequently as a term of positive commentary for the Hollywood cinema. Many argued that American movies captured the Japanese imagination because Hollywood’s world, enhanced by the elaborate effects of breathtaking action sequences, chase scenes, and the swing of Charleston, was always refreshing and riveting as it represented the mind and life of modern men. It brought out into the open a new sense of time and space in modern machine civilization by illustrating in always fascinating manners how fast people moved and interacted freely and how they danced and sped through the cityscape energetically in the modern era.40

In addition to its expression of modernity, many Japanese thought, as did Shōchiku producer Kido, that the strength of the Hollywood cinema owed a great deal to its character of capitalist commercialism. They did not mean to refute the common accu-
sation about the shallow escapism that was peddled by American films as commercial commodities in the global marketplace. In their view, however, the attraction of Hollywood cinema rested, rather ironically, on the outcome of such commercialism. It managed to instill optimism and infinite hopefulness, invented a positive space for escape as products of mass culture, and offered a few hours of simple entertainment to their audiences. In contrast, the European cinema, with its cultural pretension to the status of elitist art, was said to be mired in negative pessimism, as it described a dreary, depressing world that might be profound, abstract, and intense in moral seriousness and aesthetic aspirations but mostly too grim and unappealing to its viewers. This positive view of motion pictures as commercial amusements was a clear contrast to the competing discourse on the superiority of the European cinema, which rested, as noted earlier, on the traditional definition of art as a vehicle of social criticism or negation, as a high-minded place of refuge from the routine demands of everyday reality. The pro-Hollywood argument was that the people bought tickets and went to the movies not to search for deep, philosophical meanings about life’s agonies and tragedies but to relax, forget everyday reality, and have a good time—to see characters laugh, cry, and meet happy endings and to reclaim childhood daydreams and fantasies inside the safe, self-contained space of movie theaters. In this view, Hollywood dominated the world’s screen time by excelling in what Marshall McLuhan defined as a chief cultural function of movies, that is, in “offer[ing] as product the most magical of consumer commodities, namely dreams.” American movies served as an imagined utopia, a utopian site for wish fulfillment where dreams came true, impossible ideas and actions were magically at-
tained, villains were safely defeated, all problems were easily resolved by a doze of romantic love and personal success.\textsuperscript{41}

This acceptance of Hollywood’s escapism and utopian possibilities was related more broadly to a different vision of Americanism. Why America was able to produce such a global dream factory was a question that continued to engage the attention of Hollywood admirers. Here, it is interesting to note that the Japanese discourse on Hollywood films was somewhat reminiscent of the notion of American exceptionalism that would later be argued in Louis Hartz’s classic study, \textit{The Liberal Tradition in America} (1955). America was born free as a modern nation, said Hartz, a land of abundance and opportunity escaping the encrusted political and religious constraints and hierarchical tradition of the Old World and conquering the virgin land of boundless possibilities in the New World. Thus, the dominant ideology of Americanism was the original, unadulterated version of modernity, or hypermodernity representing universal principles of modernity in its purest form. Even if the same general forces of modernization were at work on both sides of the Atlantic, Europe—chained to the over-bearing weight of the past—could never match the American dream of a “perennial rebirth,” as Frederick Jackson Turner put it in articulating the American national mythology, a dream that accentuated the liberal idea of living in an endless, open democratic world marked by freedom from tradition and the promise of social mobility and abundance. Likewise, the cultural allure of Hollywood cinema in interwar Japan was often traced to the special character of American modernity.\textsuperscript{42} While the West in general was seen as the epicenter of modernity, many Japanese suggested that Americanism
embodied more than just the generic values of modernity or the fulfillment of the West, that there was something uniquely American about the culture of modernity and abundance, and that there was some cultural essence equipping the Hollywood cinema with its unique cultural and ideological messages in ways that resonated around the world.

Thus, Hollywood’s America became the key signifier of a set of value systems that were used to create a special, imagined vision of a better future. Explaining the popularity of American movies, for example, one Marxist film critic noted that people sought a popular utopia, a world in which all could dream themselves at their best and fulfill their desires and ideals instantly, a world of happiness, physical and material well-being, and personal freedom and autonomy. That was why Hollywood’s America proved to be so fascinating and engaging, he said, because the ideals of Americanism were represented in its affirmative cultural function that celebrated the utopian possibilities of equal abundance and offered redemption, if temporary, from the routines and limitations of their own daily lives and humdrum existence.

This positive discourse on American movies was clearly a significant variation on what Xiaomei Chen calls “anti-official Occidentalism” in her book, Occidentalism (1995), an interesting literary study of the cultural construction of the West in post-Mao China. Chen’s analysis shows that the idealized image of the Western Other often has been appropriated as a powerful, alternative discourse of liberation against indigenous forms of political oppression in dominant, official culture. Indeed, it seems that American movies appealed strongly to Japanese audiences even when their topics often
did not resonate directly with the historical memory of domestic culture (e.g., the conquest of the American West). Thus, Hollywood’s underlying narratives themselves appeared to represent the promise of American life and the dream of its free air found elsewhere—open space, new ways of life, hopes of personal fulfillment and happiness, and a democratic ideal of independence and social mobility without the burden of social inhibitions and class restrictions. The Hollywood cinema seemed to accentuate the positive, liberating side of modernity and present the dream of fresh innocence, unlimited optimism, eternal youth, adventure, and restless energy in the new modern age. In particular, its happy endings—regarded as the quintessential expression of Americanism—exercised a powerful grip on popular imagination by celebrating the possibilities of individual achievement and giving common people a chance of magical transformation and never-ending renewal in its perfectible world. Hollywood’s America was obviously a utopian place, a fabled land of freedom and opportunity, where all problems could find miraculous resolutions and anyone had the chance to play roles of riches, fame, and power beyond their wildest dreams at the end of movies’ plots.43

As Hollywood’s Americanism was embraced strongly for its the liberating cultural possibilities, the stereotyped discourses of American commercialism and modernity were also appropriated as a means to explain what many saw as the artistic merits of Hollywood movies as well. It was difficult for Shōchiku’s executive producer Kido, to take an example, to suppress his profound jealousy toward the business scale of Hollywood’s studio system. The Hollywood cinema was so commercial, highly capitalized, and targeted at international markets, he said, that American filmmakers were
prepared to spend enormous budgets and went to almost any lengths to maximize their box-office appeal as popular entertainment all over the globe. Such economic imperatives led everything in Hollywood movies to be the very best, the most authentic, and the most realistic as motion pictures. Hollywood’s commercial motivation was the key reason, in Kido’s opinion, that its films enjoyed worldwide success, because Hollywood’s superproductions, driven by expensive action scenes and stunning visual effects, were able to entertain their diverse international audiences with the easily intelligible formula of grand scale, glamorous splendors, and polished cinematography.44

Also, American movies were often praised as far more realistic in character performance and settings than European films. Here again, their perceived realism was believed to be a manifestation of Americanism itself. On the one hand, there was in fact a trend toward naturalism in American acting after the turn of the twentieth century. The traditional valorization of an actor’s versatility and acting technique yielded to a new system of typecasting players into the roles that only suited their looks and personal characteristics. This was a clear reflection of the cult of personality that, as Warren Susman suggests, stressed details of personal appearance and manners in an increasingly impersonal and mobile urban capitalist culture. At the same time, such naturalism was technically derived from the growth of longer narrative films. The traditional acting style, distinguished by typed gestures and studied pose, was increasingly considered to be stilted and artificial in the screen space. Instead, character development formed the basis of narrative construction as the movies had become longer and more complex, with multiple lines of intertwined action sequences. Thus, the new emphasis on psy-
chological characterization encouraged the shift from the earlier pantomime style to a more naturalistic approach emphasizing facial expressions and restrained gestures that helped to convey one’s thoughts and feelings more clearly and forcefully in closer shots. However, Japanese viewers tended to interpret the new acting style as a reflective mirror of American culture itself. Hollywood stars did not act or acted only naturally because they were not bound by the old style of classical traditions in European (or Japanese) theater. Americans—unencumbered with the heavy crusts of history and tradition—were allegedly much simpler in their feelings and thus free to act and express their emotion naturally and effortlessly even in the make-believe world of motion pictures.

Finally, the essentialized image of America as a land of women also served as a positive discursive field for individual liberation in interwar Japan. Perhaps this point was articulated most clearly by the feminist poet Fukao Sumako. Writing about the movies and women in the mid-1930s, Fukao celebrated the increasing emancipation of Japanese women from the straitjacket of oppressive social traditions and customs that had long enslaved them to the dictates of patriarchal authority. In particular, she observed that women previously had been treated as personal properties without any voice, supposed to wear certain types of clothes and hair styles according to their respective age and social status. On the contrary, modern women were making dramatic gains in their freedom to express personal identities, and their new-found independence was expressed outwardly through their individual fashion tastes. In this regard, her sharp attack was directed at the “anachronistic” eyes of male social critics, including
liberals, who spoke alarmingly of the impact of foreign movies on Japanese women but showed relatively little concern about similar social trends among young men and who did so apparently without understanding the source of new social relationships and changes that promoted new types of social behavior among modern women. Protesting such masculine discourses, Fukao wrote approvingly of her recent experience of watching a young woman imitate Hollywood star Joan Crawford and stroll down the street with great poise and self-confidence. In her feminist appropriation, the Hollywood cinema clearly offered a positive cultural space that taught young Japanese women how to use their new social freedom and express themselves in the modern era.47

In addition, another interesting case that suggested the liberating potential and appeal of Hollywood cinema in sexual politics, as well as in cultural politics, may be found in the ambiguous duality of Clara Bow during the late 1920s. It has been shown earlier that she was one of the most visible and controversial figures among Japanese critics and audiences at that time—often denounced as a scandalous, threatening cultural symbol—a sort of vulgar, excessively erotic flapper flouting a blatant sexuality and violating the codes of conventional manners and morals. Yet, what was thought of as vulgarity was also often interpreted in positive terms, and Bow claimed tremendous drawing power as a special icon of modernity in Hollywood’s Americanism—embraced even by many—both men and women—who usually took more critical stances on American movies in general. In this view, Bow exuded childlike, unpretentious charm
and overwhelming vitality and came across as a friendly, accessible character blending sensuality, innocence, and humor in a radiant, sympathetic manner.

Many viewers were fascinated by the larger-than-life stories in which Bow’s characters, often with the working-class background as in the shopgirl heroine Betty Lou of *It* (Paramount, 1927), were involved in silly sexual escapades with perpetual energy and worldly-wise, vivacious assurance. An eager public apparently found inspiration and wish-fulfillment in Bow’s cheerful, uninhibited, even mischievous—if vulgar—manners and her sparkling, “wholesome beauty,” as one fan put it. Another fan compared the actress to a “wild cat” whose wild red hair, red lips, and winks simply electrified the hearts of modern individuals, while one film critic analyzed Bow’s vulgarity as striking a sympathetic chord with the modern desire for personal liberation from the old, stifling conventions and superficial constraints in their daily life. The keywords used in her praise included joy, cheerfulness, happiness, health, briskness, and freshness—a series of themes encoded as key metaphors for Americanism and modernism in interwar Japan. One fan indeed praised her film as a gift for young, Americanized movie fans who had embraced the cheerful vision of Americanism. Also, it is interesting to note that Bow was highly popular even among children, as a film critic observed in 1928, especially among young girls from upper-class families. In fact, his interviews showed that she was often the only actress whose name they knew by heart, and he felt that Bow’s aura of free-spirited attitudes and cheerful self-confidence, giving uninhibited expression to her feelings, claimed wide innocent appeal to those small girls who chafed unconsciously at the traditional moral order of strict patriarchal
discipline by their conservative parents. For her Japanese admirers, everything about Clara Bow was thus the quintessential screen vision of Americanism, a liberated heroine flouting convention and symbolizing the seductive attraction of a new era marked by the universal aspiration for the American dream of unlimited opportunity and freedom from a binding past and artificial hierarchies.48

Conclusion

After World War I, Hollywood defined and presented images of America to the rest of the world. The modern mass media became a major constitutive element in the formation of both individual and collective identities by creating a sense of the wider world through the expanded processes of symbolic transmission. In Japan, motion pictures emerged as a key institution in urban mass culture, and Hollywood films became an imaginative filter through which most Japanese gained a mediated vision of American life after the war. To be sure, the actual conditions of American society and culture varied widely across the lines of race, class, region, and other factors. Yet, the most readily available images of America probably involved the Manhattan skyline and organized crime scenes in Chicago that were actually shot somewhere in Hollywood studios.

In many ways, the perceived “America” was a construction of Japanese audiences that had been structured in their historical and discursive contexts, rather than simply a one-way imposition of American ideas and values by the Hollywood studios.
Hollywood’s America was a cultural receptacle, an in-between zone of negotiation, that was made to contain whatever best suited the hidden or repressed anxieties, desires, and dreams among Japanese viewers. They interpreted and re-encoded American movies for their own purposes—in terms of the local discourses of Americanization after World War I. Americanization or Americanism generally referred to the coming of modernity, especially the perceived importation and adoption of mass culture and consumerism that were oriented around such values as buying, spending, and materialism. On the one hand, the Hollywood cinema was perceived as the outpost of cultural imperialism superimposing a new cultural wasteland of decadence and homogenization, valueless philistinism, and endless desire on Japan’s national traditions and identity. Yet, the cultural imperialism thesis oversimplified questions of national and cultural identity and overlooked the fact that many viewers freely and even avidly chose to watch American movies, based on their already existing expectations about the presumably desirable consequences of Americanization. In this view, Hollywood’s Americanism was celebrated for embodying its modern, democratic culture, for presenting a positive, liberating model or source of inspiration that allowed Japanese viewers to imagine and remake themselves and helped to set Japanese culture free from the bounds of confining tradition and conventions.

Yet, the binary discourse opposing Americanism and Japaneseness was always threatened by ideological inconsistencies and tensions. Sometimes, there was a subtle, if fleeting, recognition that the boundaries between the foreign and the domestic might be highly plastic and arbitrary and that modernity was more than something that was
forcibly imposed on interwar Japan. Rather, it seemed that Americanization, mediated by the Hollywood cinema and defined as the coming of consumer society and mass culture, was a part of the universal process of capitalist modernization that was grounded in such parallel and relatively autonomous forces as industrialization, urbanization, and women’s increasing participation in public life. In this sense, Hollywood’s vision of urban consumerist lifestyles left no room for modification, accommodation, or resistance for Japan, because it was inherently native to the Japanese historical experience—an indigenous, cosmopolitan development that was not imported or adopted in a selective manner. Clearly, it is futile and almost impossible to separate unique national traditions and the categories of nation-states were much less fixed and absolute in the modern capitalist world of mass culture and commodification.

But at the same time, the Japanese reaction to Hollywood films suggested that Americanization was more than just generic modernization and hardly a myth in interwar Japan. The unique influence of American culture was clearly a perceived, if not ontological, reality, and the dominant view was that Americanism, or American culture as represented by the Hollywood cinema, was far more appealing and exportable than the cultures of European nations. In this view, Hollywood’s America was understood as a liberating utopia that could be created by Americans alone. It was a world marked by the popular aspiration for freedom, progress, unlimited opportunity, and self-fulfillment, a world in which everything could be made new again and all individual dreams and desires came true, time after time, without the dead weight of the often oppressive past and traditions. The dominant ideology of cultural uniqueness in
interwar Japan was ultimately framed against Hollywood’s America rather than the real America, and its vision of modernity was imagined as an exotic other that offered a fresh promise of redemption and liberation in Japanese life during the 1920s.
CHAPTER 5
NATIONALIST DISCOURSES AND HOLLYWOOD’S STRUGGLES AGAINST IMPORT CONTROLS IN THE 1930S

The novelist Tanizaki Jun’ichirō had once found intellectual refuge in the cultural appeal of Americanism in the 1920s, viewing himself as an imagined sojourner to a vibrant, liberating America that stood in stark contrast to a dull and drab Japan. He had even spent some time writing movie scenarios, as seen in the previous chapter, looking to Hollywood cinema for inspiration and a model of narrative filmmaking. By the 1930s, however, Tanizaki seems to have performed an intellectual volte-face. In his often brilliant essay on aesthetics, In’ei raisan (In praise of shadows, 1933), Tanizaki expressed a novel sense of nostalgia for the traditional culture of Japan, a world that appeared to be vanishing irrevocably before his eyes. As he had done a decade earlier, Tanizaki continued to divide the world into the West and Japan, a world of progress and modernity and a land full of the past. But his return to Japan now transfigured what he saw as native traditions into a positive space for cultural memory and imagination, and the contrapuntal notions of “light” and “shadows” were used as key foundational categories propping his new discourse on the East-West opposition.
In Tanizaki’s opinion, pure Japanese styles, ranging from architecture to cuisine and arts, were distinguished by the Japanese “propensity to seek beauty in darkness.” In contrast, the Western way was rooted in the endless “quest for a brighter light.” He explained that “such differences in taste” were derived in part from the Oriental tendency to “content ourselves with things as they are.” This temperament had taught the Japanese to immerse themselves “in the darkness and there discover its particular beauty” in the traditional silence of shadowy, empty spaces. In contrast, Tanizaki wrote, “the progressive Westerner” was “determined to better his lot” at all times by using modern scientific civilization—symbolized by electric lights in his essay—to spread brightness, or progress, and “eradicate even the minutest shadow” from every parcel of the land. At the same time, Tanizaki traced the source of East-West differences to the question of racial essence, or what he called “the color of our skin.” In his view, it was natural that the Japanese had chosen “cloudy colors” and “shadows” to express their aesthetic style as a “yellow” race, whereas the “whiteness” of Westerners had led them to reject the shadow and delight in a world of glittering brilliance. Tanizaki suggested that age had only increased his admiration for the old ways of traditional national beauty, but his nostalgic gaze obviously was obviously reinforced by the sense of cultural dislocation and loss about what he saw as the irresistible process of modernization in Japanese life. “Old people give up the cities and retire to the country,” Tanizaki lamented, “and yet there is not much cause for hope there either, for country towns are year by year going the way of Kyoto, their streets strung with bright lights.”
In’ei raisan also revealed that Tanizaki’s changing views on Japan-West binarism contributed to souring his attitudes toward the Hollywood cinema. Having been forced to open itself to the “superior civilization” of the West, he now asserted, modern Japan had essentially been led to “surrender to it” and to “leave a road we have followed for thousands of years.” As a result, the Japanese had been obliged to adopt “borrowed gadgets,” such as “the trolley, the radio, the airplane,” without being allowed to discover those novel technologies as “the tools of our own culture, suited to us.” Motion pictures, in Tanizaki’s new opinion, were part of such modern foreign technologies that had been foisted upon the native soil of Japanese culture. While Tanizaki had once seen American movies as a symbol of the modern promise of domestic cultural renewal and innovation, his new critical stance in the 1930s was clearly constituted by his nativist, essentialist rejection of their cultural “otherness”:

One need only compare American, French, and German films to see how greatly nuances of shading and coloration can vary in motion pictures. In the photographic image itself, to say nothing of the acting and the script, there somehow emerge differences in national character. If this is true even when identical equipment, chemicals, and film are used, how much better our own photographic technology might have suited our complexion, our facial features, our climate, our land.

At the same time, it must be noted that Tanizaki’s fantasy about inventing a native technological space suited to Japanese culture and arts was instantly tempered by his fatalistic resignation about what he perceived as the iron cage of modernization uprooting the claims of fixed categories and stable meanings in contemporary Japan. Nevertheless, while expressing his remorse that “the loss we have suffered cannot be remedied,” Tanizaki wondered if “there might still be somewhere, possibly in literature
or the arts, where something could be saved,” a place where he could “call back at least for literature this world of shadows we are losing.” This passion to recall and preserve the old and native produced what are often hailed as Tanizaki’s most accomplished stories, including *Sasameyuki* (The Makioka sisters, 1943–48), a novel portraying the decaying world of an old Osaka mercantile family with exquisite details, centered upon its four daughters and their attempt to arrange a suitable marriage for the beautiful but exceedingly reticent second sister.¹

The claims to the imagined national past may have created some of the classic works in modern Japanese literature, but Tanizaki’s interiorizing mediation obviously was not the only reaction to the perceived threat to native traditions and cultural identities in the 1930s. The appeal to Japaneseness, reflected in his literary call to indigenous memory, also induced an overall anti-Western backlash in prewar Japan, which involved a broader ideological movement to assert, police, and regulate the boundaries of Japanese culture against the free flows of foreign and modern influences. Indeed, this chapter shows that the growth of such nationalistic discourses loomed ever larger as an ominous ideological trend in shaping the future of Hollywood cinema in Japan.

First, the chapter surveys the crucial effects of increasing cultural particularism on the Japanese film industry and traces the semi-official efforts to promote powerful renditions of nationalism in domestic films as a popular mass-cultural alternative to American movies. Then, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937 introduced new dynamics into Japanese film policy, and the accelerated formation of restrictive film policy eventuated in an official decision to place a complete ban on foreign, pre-
dominantly American, movies by September of that year. On the surface, it might seem somewhat strange that the importation of Hollywood films was targeted in any way because Japan was fighting a war with China, not the United States. But this policy decision was a logical outgrowth of the discursive construction of a monolithic West, particularly America, as the mirror image that defined the imagined essence of the indigenous culture in imperial Japan.

The chapter, then, examines largely neglected aspects of interwar U.S.-Japan relations by analyzing the ensuing, complicated process of international negotiations through which American film companies sought to lift the Japanese ban on their imports. The study seeks to show how U.S. and Japanese discourses on the global influence of Hollywood cinema often helped to legitimate or delegitimate foreign policy options in the ensuing film-trade talks. By the autumn of 1938, the American film industry and Japanese officials finally settled on a new trade agreement to reopen the Japanese market to Hollywood movies on a greatly reduced basis. Hollywood’s success, however, proved to be a Pyrrhic victory when American applications for import licenses were actually met with a series of delaying tactics by the Japanese authorities.

The Discourse of Japanese Uniqueness and the Quest for “National” Films

“The screen has become a new factor in international diplomacy,” wrote Nathan D. Golden, chief of the BFDC’s Motion Picture Division, in his annual report of 1937. The new circumstances, in his view, constituted a major challenge to the American film
industry in its dealings with the global market. A growing number of foreign governments, observed Golden, showed considerable concern about the perceived influence of Hollywood movies in shaping popular tastes and opinions worldwide. As a result, he reported that the rising tide of nationalism led many foreign governments to make increasing threats to prohibit the exhibition of American pictures so that local audiences would not be exposed to what they often saw as the “offending” cultural contents of Hollywood’s products. The desire for “national expression at home and before the rest of the world” also had driven many of these governments to create and promote “their own film industries” as a way to counteract the influence of American companies. In the same report, Golden noted that Japan had yet to establish “quota or contingent laws . . . inimical to the interests of American films,” but he was quick to caution that there was a current “drive for compulsory showing of educational films” that were intended to promote ideas about national culture and traditional values in local theaters. Thus, the gathering clouds of cultural nationalism, according to Golden’s forecast, also threatened American movies with the potential danger of future restrictive legislation in Japan.2

Golden’s summary was a very fitting description of the new direction in which the Japanese film market had been moving gradually since the early 1930s. Indeed, while Japan had traditionally been among the most open foreign markets for the Hollywood studios, the decade saw the burgeoning of ideological campaigns, if tentative at first, to promote domestic films at the expense of American pictures. Close examination suggests that such overtly ideological measures should be understood properly in the
broader historical context of Japan’s nationalism and its encounter and struggle with the West and modernity.

During the 1930s, the flames of radical nationalism in Japan were ignited further by the economic and social dislocations brought on by the Great Depression, by the magnitude of seemingly unprecedented hardships that beset the nation, particularly in rural, agrarian communities. The ultranationalist ideology that held increasing sway in Japanese political culture was often known as nihon shugi, or “Japanism.” One of the main features of such a rising nationalism, besides the obvious currents of economic protectionism, was a cultural reaction to externalize the perceived ills of Japan as the general crisis of modernity. In particular, Maruyama Masao and others have shown that such nationalist revolts contained a deep agrarian hatred of modern urban culture and its emerging cosmopolitan contexts. The countryside was represented as a timeless, idyllic space embodying the authentic values and character that the modern city was said to be losing in a changing world.³

This anti-urban reaction to the consequences of modernity had revealed itself on the other side of the Pacific as well. In his comparative study of modernizing societies, the historical sociologist Barrington Moore found that modernization tended to produce a sense of cultural reaffirmation, a renewed commitment to indigenous cultural values. The space for nostalgia was opened up only after the past seemed irrevocably lost in a modern world of ceaseless change. Perhaps the most striking example was what many historians call a “clash of cultures” during the 1920s, as symbolized, among others, by the prohibition movement, the anti-immigration sentiment, and the rise of the Ku Klux

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Klan and Protestant fundamentalism. These cultural forces illustrated a marked increase in nativism, the hostility of largely rural, more provincial, and less affluent native-born Protestants, who claimed to be “old-stock” Americans, toward the modern, secular culture of postwar America. Such nativism was often directed against the modern city and recent “foreign” immigrants, representing the effort of an older America to defend its traditional values and faith from the perceived threat of a new urban culture corrupted by wild consumption, sexual promiscuity, and modern science. Moore demonstrates, however, that “patriotic exaltation of peasant virtues” in prewar Japan was “more important than elsewhere.” Moreover, the anti-urban, anti-modern discourses in Japan, as Tetsuo Najita, Harry Harootunian, and others have suggested, took an extremely virulent, anti-Western, nationalistic form and reached a climax after the mid-1930s, precisely because the West had long replaced China as a metaphor for the “other” that represented forms and structures of meaning in contrast to the imagined essence of indigenous culture in modern Japan. Thus, it was not surprising to find that Japan’s social problems were seen not as domestic developments but rather as results of figurative foreign conquests by the powerful pull of urban modernity in Western civilization.4

The anti-urban, anti-Western discourse in Japanese nationalism found its expression, among others, in strong opposition to liberal, individualistic values, which were believed to be artificial ideas imported from the West since the mid-nineteenth century. While Japan sought the goals of Westernized modernity, it was often argued, these foreign transplants had penetrated the grain of Japanese life and left the Japanese
spirit in a state of total ideological chaos. They had spread urban consumerist lifestyles, which, like a deadly contagion, had corrupted the true qualities, values, and character of the Japanese people. The basic document of contemporary ultranationalism, Kokutai no hongi (cardinal principles of the national entity of Japan, 1937), claimed that “the various ideological and social evils of present-day Japan” were “due to the fact that since the days of Meiji so many aspects of European and American culture, systems, and learning, [had] been imported” and fostered a private selfishness and commodified culture that threatened social stability and national unity. According to this nationalistic narrative, the forces of modernity and the West clearly served as an ideological foil, a negative reference point that was constituted as unnatural and inauthentic, without any indigenous roots in Japanese soil. The prescribed antidote to the modern illness was to recover, or indeed invent, the mystical, spiritual roots of culture and anchor the entire nation in the imagined tradition of family-state ideology, with its totalitarian emphasis on the absolute sanctity of the imperial institution as the divine core of timeless authenticity, the source of all truth, values, and national identities in Japan.5

This discursive project to construct national identities in contrast to a perceived otherness of the essentialized West had serious repercussions in the formulation of Japanese film control policies during the 1930s. Official attitudes toward American movies were also profoundly affected by the growing concern for protecting Japanese culture from “outside” elements. In the twentieth century and especially after World War I, America had gradually become a key signifier of the modern West thanks to the perceived Americanization of Japanese life. As America occupied the central place of
the “other” in Japanese views of Western modernity, it was not too long before the anti-Hollywood rhetoric was deployed all too easily as part of the ideological drive to promote the notion of Japanese uniqueness in the context of increasing nationalism and international tension.

Since the introduction of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century, the shadow of bureaucratic regulation, led by film censorship, had been inseparable from almost all phases of the Japanese film industry. The growth of the film industry had led to the consolidation and standardization of film controls at the national level. In 1925, the Home Ministry had issued a new decree establishing national regulations for film censorship, which provided a basic legal framework for guiding the Japanese film industry over the next fifteen years. Yet, it seems that Japanese and American films initially were not treated any differently, both regarded as potentially injurious to public morals and having corrupting influences on the larger society, particularly on impressionable children and youth. Indeed, official statistics showed that a slightly larger proportion of scenes were deleted from domestic movies in the first year of national censorship, particularly scenes dealing with such subversive topics as crime, public disturbances, and revolution, or with such immoral subjects as sex and violence. Thus, Japanese studio executives themselves criticized the official hands-off policy, blamed the lack of positive efforts to protect and promote domestic film production, and criticized the government’s indifference to the cultural and economic importance of motion pictures. Their call for protective policy was often related to the alleged concern that the influence of Americanism was uniquely harmful to Japan’s national traditions and
customs because American movies spread American values and lifestyles, such as unbridled materialism and money worship, while at the same time pretending to offer only interesting, harmless entertainment for mass audiences.\textsuperscript{6}

The official tradition of benign neglect toward the cultural influence of American films started to change slowly as the development of new media policy gained initial impetus following the outbreak of the Manchurian crisis in September 1931. In March 1933, Japan’s military aggression in North China eventually led the Japanese government to withdraw from the League of Nations in response to its almost unanimous resolution urging Japan’s withdrawal from the newly created puppet state Manchukuo. In light of Japan’s growing international isolation, many government officials began to take an increasing interest in the potential use of mass media as tools of eliminating the Westernized ills of urban materialistic ideology, mobilizing domestic mass support, and improving the nation’s image abroad. In this context, the evolution of new film controls was spurred by a Diet resolution in February 1933. This resolution called on the government to establish a new “national film policy” that would go beyond traditional passive censorship in view of the increasing importance of motion pictures both as a popular amusement and a potential instrument of official propaganda. The motion stated that movies were as influential as the press or schools in shaping popular opinion and culture and thus recommended the creation of an official organ that would “guide” and “control” the film industry. The parliamentary proposal was based on the growing concern that international opinion on Japan would become more negative if “true and noble films introducing Japan” were not made and exported because foreign
films often presented eccentric, biased depictions of the country. The most glaring example of such films, the resolution’s chief sponsor Representative Iwase Akira explained in a movie magazine, was anti-Japanese movies and newsreels about the Manchurian incident, which reportedly helped to tilt the balance of international opinion in China’s favor at the League of Nations.  

This initiative eventually led to the creation of the Film Control Committee a year later. By September 1933, following passage of the parliamentary resolution, Home Ministry bureaucrats led a government study of film policies in other countries and prepared an official blueprint for a new film control organization. This blueprint was approved in meetings with Education and Finance Ministry officials by the end of the year. In March 1934, the cabinet then agreed to create the Film Control Committee, to be directed by the Home Minister himself, by adopting the original Home Ministry plan with only a few minor changes. The beginnings of the new cabinet-level organization seemed quite unostentatious, however, as it had no budget and was intended only as an interministerial coordinating committee whose bureaucratic authority was limited to “research and discussion” on future film control policies. A long list of subjects for discussion, covering almost all aspects of the film industry, included proposals for government awards and subsidies to “superior” domestic filmmakers, official guidance and supervision of domestic studios, export promotion of domestic films introducing Japanese culture, domestic production of negative films, promotion and compulsory showing of educational films, and new censorship standards. In the context of the mid-1930s, however, what was particularly interesting about the direction of the new
committee was that the very first topic on its agenda was restriction of foreign films and establishment of an import quota system to promote the national film industry.8

Despite the limits of its bureaucratic powers, it was clear that the formation of the Film Control Committee—whose announced goal was to promote “the Japanese spirit unique to our nation”—represented a rising ideological tide of official nationalism against foreign movies, which had long become almost synonymous with the Hollywood cinema. Yet, while one government advisor emphasized that regulating motion pictures was the “most serious” question in Japanese public life, the committee itself met only a few times and left few important imprints in policy development. For one thing, the Home Ministry itself still lacked a broad consensus on promoting drastic policy innovations in film regulation. Bureaucratic inertia dictated an initial disinclination to move from negative control (or censorship) to positive control (or mobilization), a policy change that would require unprecedented, active intervention to control all segments of the film industry as a central vehicle for spreading the imperial state ideology. Also, a major financial scandal brought in a new cabinet three months after the committee’s first meeting and led to bureaucratic shuffles in the original roster of officials who had been appointed to serve as its members. As a result, the Film Control Committee became largely buried as a powerless organ in the sea of bureaucratic confusion and inertia. But even in this situation, it did leave one concrete, if small, achievement that had been high on the agenda in its few meetings. By December 1935, the committee helped to launch the Greater Japan Film Association (Dai Nihon eiga kyōkai), a semi-official organization sanctioned by the Home and Education Ministries.
Its executive council was composed of top officials from these ministries as well as film studio executives and intellectuals, thus linking the two worlds of state and industry in a formal, corporatist manner. The purpose of the association was to “eliminate the ill effects of motion pictures on the general public” and to “contribute to the preservation and betterment of the nation’s culture and morals” by encouraging the production of superior domestic pictures for Japanese viewers.9

Clearly, the Greater Japan Film Association sought to play a strategic role in promoting screen visions of the Japanese spirit as a mass-cultural alternative to the Hollywood cinema. When the association was in the final stage of preparation in November 1935, Education Minister Matsuda Genji gave a rare interview in a movie magazine, in which he left no doubt about his virulent disdain for American movies. They were condemned as too frivolous and disgusting. What had distressed the education minister all the more was that Hollywood movies were apparently a preferred choice for Japanese youth, or moga and mobo. Matsuda’s anger grew as he observed that Tokyo’s streets were crowded with examples of modern consumer culture lacking purity, authenticity, and depth under Western, particularly American, influence, with young women wearing what he saw as weird clothes and makeup like American actresses and with young men clad in flashy fashions copied directly from the Hollywood cinema. Alarmed at such displays of cosmopolitan rootlessness and decadent self-indulgence, Matsuda argued that motion pictures possessed formidable power to capture the impressionable mind of young people as well as the general public and to change the nation’s manners and customs in covert, almost imperceptible manners. This
cultural power, according to Matsuda, was the reason that the government must make a greater commitment to regulate the film industry, encourage good national films, and prohibit foreign movies from destroying Japan’s traditional morals and identities. One of the key instruments that the new association immediately created toward this nationalist end was Nihon eiga (Japanese cinema), a new mass-circulation magazine launched in the spring of 1936. Its announced purpose was to promote popular tastes for “refined, sound, and wholesome movies”—euphemisms for idealized renditions of Japanese national essence.  

It is interesting to note, however, that Nihon eiga and its campaign for cinematic nationalism were fraught with major contradictions from its inception. Its editorial committee included the popular novelist Kikuchi Kan, among others, who once had taken great intellectual pride, as discussed in an earlier chapter, in watching only foreign films. Thus, it was a clear mark of the new ideological climate that the magazine was launched with an editorial statement that committed the editors to the “improvement and development of Japanese films” for the mass audiences. Yet, its official nationalist rhetoric, reinforced by anti-American constructions, was often belied by its actual contents eluding the closure of national boundaries, a condition that illustrated the near impossibility of overcoming the prominent place of Western, especially Hollywood, movies in Japanese film culture. The magazine turned out a steady stream of official rhetoric for replacing Americanism and its egoistic, decadent ideology with the pure spirit of Japaneseness, such as the imperial notion of self-sacrifice and loyalty. Still, many of its writers, while embracing the magazine’s call for promotion of national
films, confessed openly that educated audiences like themselves rarely, if at all, watched Japanese movies even when they lacked good command of foreign languages. In their opinion, domestic films usually were not quite satisfying because they lacked the appeal of high-budget spectacles and exoticism that transported their spectators to a movie-made world of foreign fantasies.

It is evident, therefore, that the proposed use of motion pictures as an instrument for spreading the imperial state ideology revealed profound cultural ambiguities in prewar Japan. In many ways, official nationalism was a collective form of psychological denial, or an escape from history into culture, in the face of the feared waywardness of modernization. Because modernity involved uprooting social and cultural transformations, such as individualization, secularization, increasing materialism, the decline of traditional authority, and the sexual revolution, it became in the eyes of official ideologues a negative, alien image of evil and corruption that must be rejected at all costs to protect traditional Japanese culture. The official construction of Hollywood movies as a principal promoter of such cultural pollution, it seems, served the same ideological function of “official Occidentalism,” as described in Xiaomei Chen’s insightful book, Occidentalism. Contrary to the cosmopolitan discourse of “anti-official Occidentalism,” Chen argues, its main feature was the essentialization of the Western “other” as a means of promoting nationalist ideology in non-Western societies.¹²

But the strident anti-Hollywood ideology in Nihon eiga actually suggested that Hollywood’s America provided a popular—thus all the more disturbing—projection of the personal desires and aspirations that might pull Japanese viewers away from the
straitjacket of “official Occidentalism.” The frontier between Japanese and American culture had been far more permeable than ever allowed in the official discourse of self-contained nationality. Clearly, the ideological claim of territoriality had been transgressed already by the strong popular appeal and acceptance of American films. They had never been forcibly imposed on passive, unwilling audiences in interwar Japan. Rather, their continuing popularity served as a symbol of the urban cosmopolitan currents still flowing deeply through Japanese mass culture in the 1930s. Thus, it was no surprise that the porous reality of cultural borderland called for particular vigilance from those who sought to defend official ideals of Japanese uniqueness against the perils of cultural homogenization mediated by Hollywood cinema.13

The official blueprint for promoting the nationalist sentiment in Japanese cinema was carried out at a methodical, if incrementally slow, pace following the establishment of Nihon eiga, with a series of bureaucratic measures aimed at establishing tougher controls against foreign films. By the end of 1936, Home Ministry officials suddenly moved to tighten up on censorship standards, particularly with an eye to closing off Western cultural influences. The new standards were much tougher on materials that portrayed “foreign” values and customs that were regarded as injurious to national morals, such as pacifistic, anti-military themes, anti-royal views, and kissing scenes—the quintessential symbol of an excessive individualism and decadence that promoted personal desires and pleasure at the expense of self-sacrifice and obedience to the imperial state at the core of the larger ethnic community.14
By the spring of 1937, Japanese authorities took further steps to co-opt motion pictures for nationalistic propaganda efforts. In April, the Home Ministry revised its regulations to increase censorship fees for foreign films by 50 percent, while at the same time introducing a special clause exempting domestic “educational” films and “exceptional” entertainment movies. The official rationale was that the higher rates were made necessary by the greater amount of work required to censor foreign films, largely due to language and cultural differences, although American distributors had provided the official censors with complete transcripts both in English and in translation at their own expenses. Thus, the revised system obviously was part of the new direction in film policy, in that its larger purpose was to encourage the production of domestic movies that would promote public loyalty to kokutai, or the imperial state, and mobilize popular support for government policies at home and abroad.

Other ministries joined in the ideological fray as well. In May, the Education Ministry established Eiga kyōiku chūōkai (central association for film education), a new national organization that sought to facilitate the use of motion pictures as an instrument of cultivating officially sanctioned “cultural” values. At the same time, the army also sent a senior information officer on a six-month trip to survey state controls of the mass media in Europe, particularly with an eye to studying European film policies—which often featured anti-Hollywood provisions—as a prototype of future film controls in Japan. In this context, the trade press was understandably abuzz with rumors about an official plan to formulate a new film law, one that could contain provisions restricting foreign movies, as well as with speculations about possible American responses to such
new regulations. These underlying ideological crosscurrents would suddenly crystallize into a major crisis for American film companies following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937.\(^{15}\)

**The Sino-Japanese War and Film Import Controls in Japan**

On the night of July 7, 1937, a minor incident occurred between Japanese troops and Chinese forces just outside the city of Beijing, which soon escalated into a general war between the two countries that would last until the summer of 1945. The sudden escalation of Japanese military aggression led to the expansion and centralization of propaganda agencies in Japan. Within a few months, the Japanese government expanded existing propaganda functions and reorganized them into the Cabinet Information Division. This cabinet agency was established as a central bureau that would coordinate often overlapping public information operations that had been conducted separately by various government ministries and agencies, while at the same time consolidating policy-planning functions regarding the dissemination of imperial state ideology under the new wartime conditions.\(^{16}\)

The Sino-Japanese War also became a major opportunity to accelerate the official movement to establish tougher film controls and use motion pictures as a key apparatus of ideological mobilization. Newsreels about the fighting and the much vaunted valor of Japanese soldiers were extremely popular at home and were played before packed audiences across the nation. In response, Home Ministry censors soon estab-
lished new official guidelines for wartime movies, “requesting” domestic filmmakers to eliminate scenes that ridiculed the military, exaggerated horrifying cruelties occurring in war zones, or took up frivolous and decadent subjects contrary to the current war efforts. By July 1938, the Home Ministry formalized its existing guidelines and pressed the major studios to produce motion pictures more in line with the spirit of national emergencies. The list of such official demands highlighted the need to eliminate the influence of foreign movies and their individualism, to promote a spirit of self-sacrifice to the larger goals of the nation-state, to glorify the Japanese spirit, particularly the beauty of the “unique” family system based on deep respect toward one’s elders, and to re-educate Japanese people, especially in view of the “Westernization” of Japanese women and the loss of traditional values. At the same time, Home and Education Ministry officials began to lay out official plans to formulate a new legislation for extending film controls far beyond the narrowly restrictive censorship policy. The government’s turn to more formal film policies demonstrated clearly that the Sino-Japanese War culminated the growing politicization of culture since the early 1930s, as a result adding a new intensity to the ideological revolts against the perceived menace of the modern West during the years of Japanese militarism.17

These political contexts provided an essential backdrop to the growth of bureaucratic measures to curtail the importation of Hollywood movies. Faced with the new wartime conditions in China, “practically all American distributors [in Japan] predicted more official control over the motion picture business,” Golden later reported in his annual report on foreign film markets, but “none expected developments to take
so drastic a turn as they did” in the previously “profitable and not too severely regulated” Japanese market. In his historical study of American multinational corporations in Japan, Mark Mason has argued that local business interests in Japan played a significant role in the formulation of government controls over foreign companies during the 1930s, as they had learned to produce manufactured goods without foreign technical assistance and pressed the government to increase anti-foreign restrictions in their industries. But in the case of film control policy, it was clearly government officials who had been dictating new limits on the American film companies in Japan, as seen in the formation of the Film Control Committee and the Greater Japan Film Association. In contrast, the Japanese studios, in addition to film production, also controlled theater chains that showed only foreign films in their urban, highest-grossing locations and were thus reluctant to have the supply of popular American pictures cut off by official restrictions.

In January 1937, the Finance Ministry had revised a foreign exchange control law and required an official permit to send more than 30,000 yen ($9,000) to foreign countries, thus making import payments subject to official approval. The new policy was designed to bring foreign exchange transactions under tighter control in view of the balance-of-payments pressures that had been exacerbated by large military expansion plans at home. Mason also has shown that foreign-exchange laws became “perhaps the single most important method of controlling FDI [foreign direct investment]” after the late 1930s. Indeed, just a few days after the Sino-Japanese War began, Finance Ministry officials suddenly halted most foreign-exchange transactions and advised American
film companies and others that no amount over 1,000 yen ($300) could be remitted to
their home offices without a permit. They also “requested” the local American
representatives to submit complete details of their business records, although it
obviously was not considered a voluntary measure and they actually sent several
inspectors to examine the books of one company that refused to comply with the
government policy. Even in this new situation, a rather optimistic view initially
prevailed and the United Artists office in Japan reported that “the control law is being
enforced more for the purpose of accumulating information about foreign business than
anything else.” Thus, it predicted that there would be “no difficulty whatever in
remitting money” with new official permits once the submitted information was
completely examined by the Finance Ministry.20

But such early optimism quickly faded. Within a month or so, the local
American film company representatives began to write home that there were all kinds of
rumors about the fate of foreign films under the new wartime conditions. The word was
often that motion pictures would be re-defined officially as luxury goods, along with
such products as cosmetics and automobiles, with their importation and remittances
limited. Initially, Finance Ministry officials denied such rumors and continued to assure
the Americans that all remittance permits would be granted after their examination of
past business records were completed. By the middle of August, however, the Japanese
officials unveiled their true intention and announced unequivocally that foreign films
would “definitely be controlled by the government in the future” and that “in no case
will the full amount requested [for remittances] be granted.” They also issued a new
regulation to require import permits for all foreign pictures after August 15, in part with
an eye to prohibiting the importation of expensive pictures. Then, on September 20, the
Finance Ministry imposed a total ban on the importation of foreign films, except for a
few newsreels, and advised local American companies that only those pictures shipped
on or before September 4 could be imported into Japan. In this situation, many doubted
further that any import permits would be granted even after that date if bal-
ance-of-payments situations were not greatly improved.21

Although official pronouncements suggested that Finance Ministry officials
were moved primarily by concern for the balance of payments, the new measures ap-
parently were also the product of more subtle and increasingly powerful cultural sub-
texts that classified American and Japanese movies, respectively, as corrupt, decadent
sources of modern, foreign values and as propagandistic objects of ultranationalistic
imperial discourse. Such discursive formations constituted the binary rules of ordering
and exclusion that helped to define foreign pictures as non-essential “luxuries,” whereas
only domestic films were supposed to be capable of providing “wholesome” enter-
tainment for the Japanese masses. It is interesting to find, however, that the official
discourse was not without easily noticeable contradictions. Even in the semi-official
organ Nihon eiga, some critics claimed that motion pictures formed an important cul-
tural institution as the most popular form of entertainment in the wartime nation, and
they protested that foreign films were not “luxury goods” for that very reason and could
never be substituted by inferior domestic pictures. They also took up the declining ideal
of cultural cosmopolitanism and argued that the free movement of foreign information
and ideas, as mediated by foreign films, had made valuable contributions to Japanese culture. At the same time, even government officials revealed that there was a complex relationship between the imperial state ideology and American mass culture. Their position was an interesting mix of rejection and openness. Rather than shutting out American movies completely, they recognized the need to import them, if selectively, and learn from their superior, attractive qualities. In other words, Hollywood was still seen as providing the international standard of narrative filmmaking, one that must be appropriated and reworked in the articulation of alternative mass-cultural models that would help to improve domestic films as a popular ideological apparatus for promoting official visions of ideal Japanese life and behavior.22

The Japanese ban on foreign film imports dealt a severe blow to American film interests in Japan. Before the new official policy was announced by the Finance Ministry, foreign films in general were improving their market position over the previous year, exhibited as always in the highest-grossing urban locations and, by one estimate, earning more than half of the entire domestic gross ticket receipts. Ironically, the American film companies did perhaps even better business in Japan after the import ban was imposed in September 1937. Even B-class foreign pictures, not to mention A-class movies like Charlie Chaplin’s Modern Times (United Artists, 1936), tended to draw larger audiences. They apparently feared that they would not be able to see their favorite screen stars for a while should they miss such available films, preferring Hollywood’s harmless entertainment to the dreary drumbeat of official propaganda. Catching rumors of the impending import ban several days earlier, local American representatives had
wired their home offices to ship all possible pictures before September 4. Still, American companies in Japan held only about one hundred new pictures in stock, which were expected to last only “for the better part of a year.” By the end of 1937, the Finance Ministry eventually indicated that the importation of foreign films probably would not be permitted “during the entire year of 1938,” which did nothing to improve the business prospects for American companies in Japan. 

There are no accurate figures available about the amount of economic damage that was incurred by the American companies due to the Japanese ban on film importation and foreign remittances. But the U.S. assistant trade commissioner in Japan later estimated that they received at least 12 percent of theater receipts as film rentals, which amounted to 5 million yen ($1,500,000) in 1937. Under normal circumstances, at least half of the total film rentals ($750,000) were sent abroad as royalties to the home offices. But only some 30 percent had been actually remitted before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, while the remainder of over 50 million dollars had been frozen by the Finance Ministry regulations and film rentals kept accumulating in the local bank accounts of American distributors in Japan. To make things worse, the Home Ministry, citing the need for war economy, issued a decree to limit theater programs to three hours after February 1938. This measure helped to narrow the Japanese market for Hollywood movies by leading rural theaters to concentrate on domestic features and drop the use of foreign films as fill-ins. While the local representatives of American companies were mostly “very optimistic” about the possibility of having the import ban lifted the next March, it was evident that staying in Japan would soon become totally unprofitable and
that the foreign film business in Japan would be killed by slow attrition unless the import ban was lifted fairly soon.24

To thwart such a slow and agonizing death, the American film industry had to find ways to restore the open door in the small but lucrative Japanese market. Some local representatives believed that the American distributors should unite to stop selling Hollywood movies in Japan immediately and force the issue with the Japanese authorities, rather than “sit tight and allow these regulations and laws to be imposed upon us.” This boycott proposal was clearly rooted in Hollywood’s traditional discourse, which held that American movies were popular because they were democratic, universal, nonpolitical art forms enjoyed by people around the world. It was usually claimed, echoing the Japanese argument, that domestic films could never be perfect substitutes for American pictures, always poorly received in the largest first-run theaters in major cities. Also, Hollywood movies provided dominant models for most of the modern films and theaters produced in Japan, which were commonly seen as “direct copies of American pictures both as regards story and scenes.” Thus, the hardliners predicted, in the language oft-repeated in other national contexts, that once Hollywood threatened to boycott the Japanese market, Japanese audiences and film companies would presumably demand an early end to the import ban and let Japanese officials “realize their mistake in a few months and begin begging for the importation of American pictures.” Yet, only one or two companies showed interest in taking such drastic action immediately, while the others were apparently still drawn to their habitual, short-term temptation to obtain whatever money they could get by selling pictures even
under the new, restricted conditions, rather than consider potential long-term benefits of industry-wide collective action.25

Also, no immediate action was taken in the Japanese film market because the more pressing problem at hand for the local American companies was Manchuria, rather than Japan proper. In August 1937, the Japanese puppet regime Manchukuo had established a semi-official company, Manshū eiga kyōkai (Manchurian film association), for the purpose of controlling the production, distribution, exhibition, and importation of motion pictures and promoting pro-Japanese ideals in that territory. Thus, the late summer and autumn months were spent exploring possible ways to deal with the new state-sanctioned monopoly. The Hays Office and the foreign managers of its member companies agreed that they should adopt their normal position on such government monopolies and sell no pictures in Manchuria. They worried that accepting a state film monopoly in one territory might have domino effects worldwide and influence other countries, particularly in Europe, to adopt similar systems and impose arbitrary conditions on the American film industry. Still, such an enlightened international outlook did not necessarily alter the normal state of internal disarray and some local representatives flirted with the idea of selling to this monopoly and “possibly get[ting] a fair price” before being forced to withdraw their offices and prints from the growing Manchurian market.

Yet, a unanimous agreement on Manchuria was somehow effectively maintained, this time, by the strong faith in the power of American mass culture. The consensus was that the monopoly would not be successful without superior, popular
American films, so that “we will be able to return to Manchukuo later and can at that
time dictate the terms under we will return.” Also, it was felt locally, as Golden noted
later in his annual film market report, that the American film boycott of Manchuria
would “cause the Japanese Government to proceed cautiously before attempting to
institute a similar organization in Japan proper.” Indeed, the Japanese response actually
seemed to offer a significant basis for supporting the American position. The Manchu-
rian film monopoly sought to reach some sort of compromise with the American
companies, later approaching their local representatives in Tokyo to procure American
pictures for Manchukuo. By the spring of 1938, however, Hollywood eventually re-
signed itself to pulling out of Manchuria for good, because it turned out that the pro-
posed terms were not substantially modified to their liking.26

Meanwhile, negotiations about the import ban in Japan proper did not get un-
derway until the end of 1937. By this time, the Hays Office had increasingly shifted
toward the State Department, rather than the Commerce Department, in its corporatist
effort to join hands with the U.S. government in foreign fields. The BFDC had reduced
its bureaucratic services for the movie industry under the Roosevelt administration,
eliminat-
expected to serve as main bureaucratic channels in the MPPDA’s efforts to re-open the Japanese market for Hollywood movies.27

In his December 23, 1937 letter, Frederick Herron briefed Maxwell M. Hamilton, chief of the State Department’s Division of Far Eastern Affairs, about his impending meeting with what he called “the representatives of the Imperial Japanese Government.” He explained that the Hays Office and the majors’ foreign managers would finally sit down with them in its New York office the next month to discuss the terms under which the Japanese market could be reopened to Hollywood’s exports. Herron wrote that the Japanese side reportedly wished to “set up credit arrangements,” which featured a deferred payment plan in which the remittances of local American film companies, effectively prohibited since last July, would be kept three years as promissory notes with six percent annual interest by Japanese banks with U.S. branch offices. According to the reported Japanese plan, actual film imports would be monopolized and handled by a newly organized Japanese syndicate with directions to buy from an American syndicate, that is, the American Motion Picture Association of Japan (AMPA), a local association of American film companies established in 1936 to deal with their common trade problems with local theaters, such as “bicycling.” The proposed credit plan was to continue “for a minimum of three years,” after which it would automatically be returned to a normal cash business. Herron observed that this was a similar plan that had been more or less expected since the Manchurian film monopoly went into effect. His letter suggested that such a settlement would be largely unacceptable to the Hollywood majors, which, wrote Herron, would likely “turn it down
absolutely” and “be forced out of that territory also.” When the talks were finally started, they would test the effectiveness of the MPPDA’s corporatist diplomacy in an uncertain sea of Hollywood’s growing international difficulties during the late 1930s.28

The Hays Office, the AMPA, and Trade Negotiations in Tokyo

The man who reportedly had been appointed for the trade negotiation by the Finance Minister of Japan was Kubo Hisaji. There are few precise biographical records about this shadowy figure. Kubo was a lawyer and amateur economist then in his late 40s, who apparently had important connections in higher political circle and who later became counselor to the cabinet’s wartime central planning agency (sōgō keikaku kyoku). Contrary to Herron’s earlier information, however, Kubo actually was not a Japanese government representative and even Japanese diplomats knew little about the precise details of his private mission, although his activities did seem to have the personal approval of Finance Minister Kaya Okinori. Kubo was later described as “nothing more nor less than a political racketeer.” In his subsequent letter to Joseph W. Ballatine, acting chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, Herron complained that Kubo did not “measure up to the standard of other Japanese individuals that I have dealt with in the past,” adopted a take-it-or-leave-it approach, and tried to “dictate terms to us as to what we would have to do or else get out of his country.” Apparently, Kubo sought to take advantage of the troubled American film business by using his personal connections
with the finance minister and by working out an economic plan to resume film imports into Japan, which would earn hefty commissions for him and his associates.29

Kubo’s general plan was practically identical to the one that had been reported to Herron previously, except in a few slight details. Both the money currently frozen in Japan and the future remittances still would be deposited at a Japanese bank as a three-year note bearing 6 percent annual interest. But unlike the earlier report, the American companies would not be forced to work through a newly organized monopoly, as each company instead would be allowed to contract with local exhibitors and distribute its pictures as it had done in the past. Another important difference was that the Japanese association, which was to be organized by Kubo serving as an intermediary between the government and the American distributors, would collect its operating “expenses” by making exhibitors “pay a small fee.” The Hays Office made a number of objections after Kubo’s party left the conference with the majors’ foreign managers in New York. One counterproposal was that frozen funds already accumulated in Japan should be paid in one-year notes at the rate of 6 percent. Another would permit American companies to remit the money for all their operating expenses, such as print costs and shipping charges, while future remittances from box-office profits would be paid in two-year bank notes bearing 6 percent interest each year.30

One day before Kubo left New York for Japan on January 10, Herron received his memorandum outlining his answer to the American counterproposal, which clarified a number of originally vague details but made the original proposal a bit more severe in other aspects. Kubo categorically rejected the MPPDA’s proposal that the frozen funds
and future earnings should be treated differently. His new proposal stipulated that Japanese banks still would issue only three-year promissory notes to the American film companies, while halving the projected interest to 3 percent per year suddenly without offering any explanation. But Kubo seemed to acknowledge the concern of American film companies about financing their current operations in Japan and made clear that he would try to negotiate with the finance minister “on the question of obtaining cash remittances not to exceed a total of $15,000 per year”—amounting to about 100 new feature films—for their operating expenses. Feeling that the talks had reached a dead end in New York, Herron only replied that “the general plan is one that perhaps could be used as the basis for future negotiations” and told him that this matter had to be taken up with the local representatives of American companies in Japan, who were “better qualified to know the necessary details of such an agreement” than the Hays Office or foreign managers in the home offices. But he believed that Kubo’s credit scheme must be revised in a number of details before the American film industry could possibly carry on its business there and asked the foreign managers to sound out the ideas of their own representatives in Tokyo, “especially as to whether this is the only way we can bring about the resumption of our importation of films into Japan.”

Following the initial conferences in New York, the negotiations were resumed when Kubo sailed back to Japan in February 1938. But adding difficulties to the cross-ocean talks was that the Hays Office had a poor working relationship with the AMPA negotiators in Tokyo. Its lack of control in Japan was once again a clear contrast with its conventional image as a corporatist organization coordinating Hollywood’s
export policies and negotiating with foreign governments in close partnership with the
U.S. government. Herron later complained that he had been able to hear only from
Paramount’s local representatives in Tokyo (though they did represent the largest
American concern in the Japanese film market):

Messers. Piper and Perkins [of Paramount] are the only individuals who took the
trouble to communicate with me . . . . At no time did that Board [AMPA] let me
know who its President was, or its Secretary, or if it had any cable name, nor did
I get any minutes of its meetings, in spite of the fact that I had written to different
individual members of the Board asking for this information. At different times I
found absolutely contrary reports coming in from different members of that
Board to different New York offices, which made my problem anything but easy.

Lacking its own representative in Tokyo, the Hays Office faced a far more difficult task
than in Europe because it had only to rely on the local representatives of American
companies in Japan, who had direct responsibility for answering only to their home
offices in New York. Also, the situation was often made even worse by the typical lack
of cooperation among the major studios. The foreign managers and local representatives
both threatened to act in different directions based on their corporate self-interests, in-
stead of maintaining the united front against the Japanese government.32

By the time the negotiations got underway in Tokyo, the situation had become
even severer for the American film business in Japan. The embargo on the importation
of foreign films was officially extended to April 1, with no assurance that it would ever
be lifted at that time. Further, not only was there any change whatsoever in the official
ban on remittances but Finance Ministry officials also intimated privately that they
planned to introduce a quota system for foreign films based on the German model after
lifting the import ban, with an eye to drastically reducing the number of Hollywood
movies permitted into Japan from more than 200 to 70 or less. In this situation, the need to conserve the remaining stock of imported films led many first-run theaters to use various stage attractions, such as revues and vaudeville shows, to make up their weekly programs. Here, the Japanese policy was not without certain advantages for the American companies in Japan because it reportedly created artificially heightened demands and allowed them to sell their limited stock, including B-class pictures, at higher rental prices. But it was clear that their still thriving business would be suffocated by a continuation of the foreign-exchange restrictions on film imports. In his talks with the AMPA members, Kubo apparently tried to make the most of the American weakness, with his attitudes sometimes bordering on acts of plain extortion. Kubo “presented an entirely different idea to us,” a United Artists local representative complained later as the AMPA opened its trade talks in Tokyo, “than what he had presented to you [the Hays Office and foreign managers]” in New York.33

At one point, Kubo demanded 8 percent fees on all funds transferred out of Japan under his proposed credit plan, which Herron protested as “a bit high.” According to one industry report from Tokyo, Kubo also said at first that “he would need a commission of eight or ten men, all influential politicians,” which would act as a middleman between the Japanese government and the AMPA. The American film men in Tokyo charged that Kubo’s main aim was simply to make a fortune as the AMPA’s official agent. Later, the AMPA negotiated to reduce Kubo’s proposed fees to 5 percent on future remittances and 3 percent on the present frozen funds, while at the same time making a continued effort to bring down the amount further.
Also, Kubo changed his positions time and again, in the process making his terms “far less favorable” to the desperate industry. From the beginning, the AMPA negotiators had asked Kubo to have at least some of the frozen funds released immediately, for which they expressed their willingness to pay him some commission. Yet, not only did Kubo continue to reject such an offer but he also hardened the terms of proposed credit arrangements. By the middle of March, he came to claim that the “maximum” plan to which the government would now agree was one in which the Yokohama Specie Bank, Japan’s special foreign-exchange bank, would issue only “a letter”—rather than legally binding promissory notes, as originally proposed—that instructed its New York branch to pay out the transferred funds with no interest in three-year maturity. Further, while it was estimated that the unremitted royalties accumulated by American film companies would easily exceed 3 million yen, Kubo made a new proposal to limit the maximum amount that could be transferred out of Japan to 2 million yen ($600,000) per year, including both the funds impounded in September 1937 and the earnings that had accumulated since then, although he added that he would lobby to have this amount raised by the Finance Ministry.³⁴

Kubo’s new proposals caused “great consternation” among the AMPA negotiators in Tokyo. It was no wonder that some of them immediately felt like “cutting him off completely,” but their contacts with government officials had made it clear that their only option was to deal through Kubo. Shortly after Kubo returned to Japan, Foreign Ministry officials had at one point seemed “quite willing to discuss plans” and to “co-operate with us [the AMPA companies] as much as possible” as they apparently real-
ized the power of American mass culture and feared “the possibilities Hollywood had of putting unfavorable propaganda into pictures against Japan.” But the Foreign Ministry had no formal authority in foreign-exchange regulations and soon distanced itself from film trade negotiations by stating that any deal would have to be made first through Kubo—who had the personal support of the finance minister—before the Finance Ministry came out and accepted credit arrangements for the American film industry. Also, it seemed clear that such credit arrangement itself had a strong economic attraction for the Finance Ministry, which hoped to “establish a precedent to be held up to other industries” in its wartime efforts to expand state control over foreign trade. Thus, the AMPA members recognized that there was little hope for more advantageous alternatives, and since Finance Ministry officials suggested that Kubo’s commission “should be within reasonable limits that would be acceptable,” their main concern now moved to the question of obtaining adequate official recognition and guarantee for the proper fulfillment of any plan that might be adopted.35

Kubo’s proposals, which took the American film men in Tokyo off guard, also set off a sudden alarm in the State Department. Certainly, U.S. officials were not opposed to a renewal of the American film trade in Japan itself. Indeed, the U.S. Consul General in Tokyo later repeated the “trade follows films” discourse in his “strictly confidential” report (which was printed in a BFDC bulletin, Motion Pictures Abroad, by bureaucratic error and later withdrawn from distribution). His report concluded that “should the export of American films be seriously restricted by the tightening of trade regulations, there is no doubt not only that export sales of other American merchandise
would be adversely affected, but that American influence throughout the world would lose some of its impetus.” Yet, State Department officials reacted to the proposed arrangement to export American films on credit with obvious disapproval.36

On April 13, Maxwell Hamilton wrote a memorandum to Stanley Hornbeck, a former Far Eastern Affairs Division chief and now political advisor in the State Department, alerting him to the possible ramifications of film trade negotiations in Japan. Hamilton warned Hornbeck that the proposed credit agreement could have very serious larger implications for America’s commercial position in East Asia and other parts of the world. He noted that the deal could encourage other countries to “follow the Japanese example” and increase similar currency controls over American trade interests, while at the same time leading the Japanese government to “attempt to make arrangements of a similar character in other commercial and economic fields.” Thus, Hamilton asked for and received Hornbeck’s authorization to call Herron at the Hays Office and “discourage as far as practicable credit arrangements of the type now being considered.”

In addition to citing the above factors, Hamilton’s plan was to point out that the wartime loss of currency reserves and the extension of similar credit schemes to other foreign interests could greatly diminish the ability of the Japanese government to fulfill whatever economic promise it might make to the American film industry three years hence.37

Later on the same day, before a long-distance call was placed to the Hays Office in New York, Herron happened to be in the State Department, where he had a brief meeting with Hamilton on the Japanese situation. Hamilton called his attention to the
points that he had made earlier in the day to Hornbeck. Although Hamilton told him that the State Department had “no authority to express approval or disapproval,” he none-theless expressed his strong reservation about the credit arrangements that had been proposed for the resumption of American film imports into Japan. Hamilton tried gently to dissuade the Hays Office from the Japanese plan that, in his view, would have the effect of compromising the American principle of free trade and investment abroad. Herron agreed that he would certainly “give consideration” to the State Department’s official position, but his answer clearly revealed that Hollywood, as usual, was quite prepared to strike a deal with the Japanese side and place its short-term profit motives above the larger national interests.

During the meeting, Herron told Hamilton that he had telegraphed the American film men in Tokyo about the industry’s position some ten days earlier. The gist of the telegraph, according to him, was that the MPPDA member companies unanimously rejected Kubo’s plan and that they instead would accept a deferred payment plan of preferably two years—along with a foreign-exchange allowance for operating expenses—only if it was guaranteed by the Japanese government. (Actually, the telegraph was sent on April 5 and also reiterated Hollywood’s request for 6 percent yearly interest and a credit allowance to import some 200 pictures—about one-year supply of new pictures in Japan. It further stated, to be more exact, that the industry would accept either U.S.-dollar bonds guaranteed by the government or promissory notes endorsed by the Yokohama Specie Bank.) To reassure Hamilton, Herron observed that “he doubted very much whether any arrangement could be worked out with Japan,” whereupon the
two parted with Herron promising that the industry would continue to keep the State
Department informed of any future development in the Japanese film negotiations.38

The Limits of Corporatism and the Resumption of Film Imports in Japan

As it turned out, the promise of private-public cooperation over Hollywood’s
trade negotiations in Japan failed to materialize, despite the reassuring departing words
that had been exchanged between Herron and Hamilton. The State Department essen-
tially would be kept in the dark about their progress for more than two months until
Joseph C. Grew, U.S. Ambassador to Japan, suddenly reported on June 20, 1938 that an
agreement on the lifting of the Japanese film embargo had become “simply a matter of
time and certain formalities.” To Grew’s dismay, the U.S. Embassy had learned about
the new trade agreement just two weeks earlier through a local English-language
newspaper article, which was later confirmed as “approximately correct” by one
American film company representative in Tokyo. According to this local insider, the
proposed agreement between the American film companies and the Japanese govern-
ment was similar in its basic outlines to Kubo’s earlier credit plan, with their remit-
tances transferred to the Yokohama Specie Bank in the United States and held in its
dollar account without interest for three years. “The American companies apparently
believe,” observed Grew, “that the American control of foreign bank branches located
within the United States is adequate safeguard for this credit transaction.” Also, he
reported that the quantity of American films that could be imported under this ar-

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rangement would be about 60 percent of what it used to be in normal times. Understandably, Grew lamented the limits of corporatist coordination in foreign economic fields, noting that the proposal showed “the readiness of American business to arrive at credit arrangements, in return for business,” at the expense of larger national interests.39

One day after Herron and Hamilton had discussed the Japanese situation in the State Department, one American film manager in Tokyo actually had sent a pessimistic report to his home office that “the situation looks entirely hopeless” and that “the government has no intention of taking any action on this question until after the end of this year.” By the end of May, however, the AMPA’s negotiations in Tokyo had been almost concluded, with the finance ministry accepting a final letter of proposed arrangements submitted through Kubo’s offices.40 Then, what made it possible for the American film industry to move toward a final settlement with Japanese officials by early June? The answer seems to be that the Japanese authorities had, in the AMPA’s opinion, “a great deal of respect for the opportunities and possibilities for anti-Japanese propaganda in the production of American pictures in Hollywood,” while the American film companies, having been offered no other alternatives, simply had exhausted all avenues for bargaining and decided to accept most of the Japanese terms rather than live hopelessly with a continuation of complete import restrictions.41

On the one hand, it seems that Hollywood’s discourse on the influence of American mass culture abroad played a significant part in guiding the negotiating stance of American film men in Japan. In his “strictly confidential” report, the U.S. Consul General in Tokyo later summarized the veiled threat, as it were, that the American
negotiators made about the potential consequences of the Japanese failure to restore
Hollywood’s access to the domestic film market:

In these interviews between the Japanese authorities and representatives of the American Motion Picture Association, the former were permitted to sense a certain danger which might accompany the exclusion of American films. Almost every plot must have a villain, and the American producers find it difficult to discover a suitable nationality for such villains, encountering violent opposition from any country of which the villain happens to be a national—an opposition which sometimes results in the exclusion or boycott of films with consequent financial losses—so that for the present a disproportionately large percentage of movie villains and characters arousing feelings of resentment are American. . . . Should the producing companies decide that some one country is determined to rule them out entirely so that resentment as to villains from that particular country would not diminish the financial returns of their films, they might consider it an opportunity.

Japanese officials were not unmindful of Hollywood’s global influence in their negotiations, and a senior Finance Ministry official revealed in a local newspaper interview that their concern about antagonizing Hollywood and provoking the majors to producing films that would show Japan and the Japanese in an unfavorable light was a key factor in softening their policy toward American film companies in Japan. Clearly, these officials reasoned that as long as Japan remained an important customer for the majors, it would be able to restrict movies offensive to Japanese images abroad by applying pressure through their local offices in Japan.42

Still, the softened terms for the renewed importation of Hollywood films were only a marginal improvement for the American film industry. During April negotiations, the Finance Ministry agreed to increase the release of funds that had been frozen in Japan due to exchange-control regulations. The American companies now would be allowed to send out 3 million yen ($900,000), rather than 2 million yen, which would be
transferred and held in the San Francisco branch of the Yokohama Specie Bank without interest for a period of three years. Two-thirds of the released funds were intended to cover the royalties frozen between September 1937 to May 1938, with the balance allocated for new remittances until the end of 1938. Since the credit plan was not sufficient to remit the entire amount that the major studios had accumulated in Japanese banks (covering barely half the frozen funds in the case of one company), the Hays Office had tried to negotiate a further increase in the credit allowance and also explored the possibility of having American banks “act as depositories or agents for the industry in making these transfers so that the industry has a better control of the situation.” These attempts were both flatly rejected by Japanese officials, and the AMPA negotiators in Tokyo had only to report that a carefully worded agreement drafted by their American banker and lawyer was expected to “giv[e] maximum protection under circumstances.”

The other main feature of the negotiated agreement was that the AMPA negotiators in Tokyo also managed to secure official licenses to remit $30,000 immediately to cover the cost of importing some 200 pictures—about one-year supply of film stocks—before the end of 1938. The foreign managers in New York had given orders to have this amount more than doubled to provide for the importation of more pictures, though this demand was summarily dismissed in Tokyo by Finance Ministry officials. Further, upon the delivery of the formal agreement with the Finance Ministry, the AMPA was authorized to pay 30,000 yen ($9,000) to Kubo as a one-time gratuity—amounting to 1 percent commission—for his efforts in brokering the deal with the Japanese government, while it clearly had rejected Kubo’s earlier move to collect larger
fees as its official license agent. The biggest problem for the major studios was that the proposed settlement would be a limited one-time deal, without any provision about the possibility of obtaining new import and foreign-exchange licenses after its expiration. By early June, however, the American film men in Japan were finally informed that official permits for film imports and remittances might be granted any day, thereby seemingly ending the tortuous negotiations with the Japanese authorities.43

Interestingly, the American film companies encountered a number of frustrating misunderstandings and disputes during the final process of complex negotiations that had to be conducted through a series of ocean-crossing cables and letters. When the Japanese acceptance of the final plan became imminent in early June, as reported in local newspapers and trade journals, the foreign managers in New York had been led to believe that they could export as many pictures as they liked as far as the industry limited its remittances to $30,000. Yet, a cable was then received on June 3 from Tokyo explaining that the industry was not entitled to free importation and that film imports would definitely be limited to that amount. Then, the situation became far more chaotic and confusing when Herron cabled that the latest information would necessitate the Hays Office and the foreign managers to open a new discussion in New York since their understanding had been that importation would be unlimited. On June 8, the AMPA office in Tokyo replied that $30,000 would translate into more than 200 feature films as per Herron’s earlier cable instruction on April 5 and that this number was all the Japanese market could absorb in the limited period. The telegram also suggested that “Herron cable as soon as possible New York managers’ agreement” because the Japa-
inese government would likely sign the final agreement at any moment while “several local representatives [were] seriously disrupting matters” by arguing that Herron’s latest cable effectively changed the previous instructions and making reckless suggestions about re-opening the talks and negotiating much better terms with the Japanese side.44

These cables from Tokyo also caused heated arguments in New York. In the June 13 meeting held at the Hays Office, the United Artists representative stated that his company wanted to have further information before sending out a cable authorizing the “immediate conclusion [of] negotiations permitting [film] shipments [to] start imme-
diately.” While there is no direct evidence explaining its cautious position, United Artists—with the smallest stake in Japan (about 8 percent of the entire American film imports)—had largely soured on this territory and reduced its local staff to the minimum. Thus, it seems likely that this company was in no hurry to export its pictures under still uncertain circumstances. Yet, the others all insisted that the cable should be sent im-
mEDIATELY, and Paramount’s foreign manager (the company was the largest American concern in the Japanese market) went almost berserk, declaring that “all agreements were off” as far as his company was concerned and that he would have to work out a private solution to this problem if his colleagues could not get together immediately on the proposed agreement for returning to the Japanese market. Herron was fully aware that the Hays Office could not do very much, both in this case and others, unless it had the broad consensus and backing of its member companies. Thus, he sent an urgent letter to coax the United Artists foreign manager back to the united front on the Japanese
question, pleading that the proposed agreement, “if only for a year,” would at least “open the doors and give us a chance to plan on what could be done next year.” There is no remaining document showing that the Hays Office ever sent a cable instructing the acceptance of the final agreement in Tokyo. But the fact that Herron’s persuasion seemed to be effective in the end is reflected in the internal memorandum that United Artists itself circulated later about the conclusion of a trade agreement between the American film industry and the Japanese government.45

However, there was a further strange, unexpected twist to the trade negotiations with Japan at the end of June. On June 22, the AMPA office in Tokyo cabled that its committee was suddenly advised by the Finance Ministry that the deal might be delayed for a while because it was besieged with vocal protests from various groups, such as importers of other restricted goods as well as independent Japanese importers of foreign films who would be excluded from the proposed agreement with the Hollywood majors. Similar protests were made by the embassies of other film-exporting nations like France, Italy, and Germany. The Finance Ministry also stated that it had received “thousands of letters from the public protesting against the importation of foreign pictures” while the soldiers were fighting selflessly in China and the country was facing balance-of-payments problems. Although no documents are left in Japanese archives describing how the new decision was actually reached by government officials, the American film men in Tokyo were told by Japanese politicians and other sources that final approval had been held up since a new finance minister was chosen in one of the cabinet shuffles at the end of May, which replaced the original supporter of Kubo’s
credit plan with the American film industry. At the same time, the American negotiators feared that their agreement with the Finance Ministry might be voided for good by the powerful ideological objections of nationalist, militaristic forces to the “liberalism unconsciously radiated from American films,” whose glamorous representations of urban consumer culture, the U.S. Consul General in Tokyo later reported, “at times acquire[d] such a universal popularity and inspire[d] such world-wide imitation.” The military and police officials told the Americans frankly, according to his report, that their enemy was the internationalizing dimensions of culture, the perceived ideological menace of cross-cultural homogeneity and interpenetration mediated by the Americanizing influence of Hollywood cinema:

Foreign, and especially American, films were opposed because of the danger that they would create discontent among the masses by reason of the high standards of living, equality of men and women and emancipation of the later, criticism and free thinking in regard to all subjects, and general freedom from restrictions of the American populace which are depicted in the films.46

In spite of these protests, the Finance Ministry tried to assure the local representatives of American companies that it still intended to issue official permits for film imports and remittances in accordance with the negotiated agreement. But they suspected that Japanese officials were clearly getting cold feet about their credit arrangement with the American film industry. Indeed, the Finance Ministry suggested, one of them wrote to his New York home office, that American companies might be “requested to withhold action of both remittances and imports even though they were granted until such time as these protests were forgotten,” probably sometime in August. In this situation, the local consensus was that the expected permits would be de-
layed—unless “some miracle” occurred—later than September. Some doubted if the American companies would be permitted to import pictures at all until the end of the year, and they feared that the current agreement would then be “subject to considerable revision,” so that part of official permits might be re-allocated from the American companies to the local Japanese importers. Guided by the discourse of Hollywood’s global influence, the AMPA negotiators believed that “the only hope for success in closing this deal” lay in the perceived Japanese fear that “Hollywood will very soon start to insert anti-Japanese dialogue and scenes in every picture possible if some arrangement is not made with us.” Some wondered if Japanese officials had “no intention of going thru [sic] with the deal at all, but are simply stalling to head off any adverse propaganda on our part.” Thus, impatience with these indefinite conditions helped to bring forth an extreme proposal at times. The local United Artists representative even urged an immediate sales boycott as “the only way we will ever get any action,” by either being forced to “get out entirely” or “com[ing] to an immediate agreement with them.”47

To the surprise of many, however, the AMPA was officially notified on August 12—fifty days after the June postponement—that the Japanese government had approved the plan at last, signed two days earlier, to import Hollywood films and remit money with only certain minor changes. In that sense, Finance Ministry officials appeared to keep their earlier promise of accepting the negotiated agreement in August, but within a few days after the initial notice, they soon announced more specific provisions that “added enough difficulties to make it very easy for them to stop at any point
they like.” As American film companies tried to import pictures into Japan, they were
now required to file a complicated financial statement for each film, and each applica-
tion had to receive official approval from both the Bank of Japan and the Finance
Ministry. Also, it was expected that censorship standards would be made even stricter,
as the negotiated agreement prohibited the importation of pictures that were not suitable
for Japan’s current wartime conditions. Thus, if Japanese officials did not wish to bring
in the full quota of American films, observed the United Artists representative in Tokyo,
“it would be an easy matter for them to declare that they are not suitable for Japan and
tell us . . . that we will not be permitted to bring in any more without losing face.”
Further, the Finance Ministry decided to split up the remittance of 3 million yen in four
monthly installments from September to December, although issuing four separate
permits for the interest-free remittance could have no real advantage to the Japanese
government. When the AMPA negotiators inquired about the grounds for this strange
decision, the Japanese reply was that “the officials simply lack the courage to permit the
amount to be sent out in one shipment” in the face of the powerful nationalist opposition
to the renewed importation of films made in Hollywood.48

Clearly, the external pressures of domestic protests had only encouraged internal
tendencies within the Finance Ministry to drag its bureaucratic feet over full imple-
mentation of its credit agreement with the American film industry. On the one hand, the
AMPA negotiators had no major problems in obtaining permits for sending out four
monthly remittances of 3 million yen after September, although the last remittance was
delayed one month until the end of January 1939. On the other hand, the American
companies were forced to clear many hurdles before importing new pictures into Japan. On September 19, the Finance Ministry announced that they would have to “wait about 10 days more” before receiving import permits, citing new protests by Japanese film importers, who had not yet negotiated their separate arrangements for film imports, as well as by a number of parliament members. Then, on September 30, the AMPA members received a further notice that official permits for the importation of American movies would be held up indefinitely due to the protest brought by independent Japanese importers, until such time as some arrangement was made to allow them to import pictures from abroad as well.49

The Japanese delaying tactics provoked an agitated response from American film distributors in Tokyo. The next day, they decided to send a strongly worded letter—which many described as an “ultimatum”—and protested the “unfair and unjust” decision to regard them in the same light as small Japanese importers. The Japanese companies, they said, had imported “only a negligible quantity of very inferior product produced by insignificant American and European producers.” In contrast, the AMPA members represented the “biggest motion picture companies in the United States” that had been “acclaimed as the leading factors of Motion Picture Industry throughout the world.” The letter invoked the discourse of American cultural power once again, with an ill-concealed threat that continued procrastination would result in grave consequences that could threaten the “friendly relations between Japan and the United States.” Hollywood studios, the letter stated, represented “a very powerful force of public opinion in the United States as well as throughout the world, having at their
command tremendous resources,” and failure to honor the negotiated agreement would likely interfere with the Japanese effort to stop “the very unfavorable propaganda which is being disseminated through the activities of newsreels in the United States.”

The American protest finally seemed to have a desired effect immediately. Just two days later, the Japanese government officially lifted the ban on the importation of American pictures. The first films—which had long been held up in the port warehouse—were inspected and cleared by the Yokohama customs authorities on October 15. At the same time, however, the Finance Ministry reportedly cautioned that the American film companies should minimize publicity about the renewal of film imports so that its concession would not open up a whole new can of worms similar to the earlier controversy. To a similar end, implementation of the import agreement was made only on a partial basis. The Finance Ministry initially granted just three import licenses to each company—except five permits each for Paramount and MGM—amounting to no more than one-seventh of the negotiated film allotments.

Certainly, the AMPA companies continued to protest against the Japanese license practice as a violation of the negotiated agreement. But the Finance Ministry remained very stingy in granting import permits. By the middle of December, only about 75 features, with a combined value of $10,000, had been imported from the United States, while official permits were still held up for the remaining 20,000 dollars. The American distributors became highly alarmed by the Finance Ministry’s license policy because the agreement stated categorically that the importation of new films must be completed before the end of 1938. On this issue, they were assured by the Fi-
nance Ministry that the agreement would certainly be extended after that date so that all films could be imported into Japan. Yet, the AMPA received import permits only for another 5,000 dollars by March 1939, which made the total number of licenses granted exactly half of all the allotments as provided for in the original agreement. “The whole idea of the government,” reported the United Artists representative, seemed to be a “prolongation of the permits as long as possible.” Some of the frustrated AMPA members argued once again that they should “present a strong front and ask for a showdown.” But cooler heads prevailed when it was generally agreed that “such an attitude on our part might put us in a very unfavourable position and jeopardize all future negotiations.” Thus, the AMPA eventually decided to “pursue the matter as at present and take whatever we could get in the way of import permits before making any bigger requests of the Government.”

In the AMPA’s opinion, however, Japanese procrastination in regard to import permits had both “good and bad results.” On the negative side, it left the future of the Japanese film market full of financial uncertainties. Since the remittances of 3 million yen had been concluded at the end of January 1939, the next main question for the American film industry was to ascertain the Japanese intentions about their unremitted surplus funds and future film rentals, whose remittance was definitely not covered in the 1938 credit arrangement. But the Americans understandably felt quite frustrated when the Finance Ministry refused even to discuss an arrangement for new remittances until all import permits had been granted from the 1938 deal, while at the same time continuing to hold them up against the AMPA’s repeated protests. Also, the other impor-
tant, disturbing problem was that the end of economic restrictions by the Finance Ministry was accompanied by the threat of increasing film controls from a different direction, that is, ideological regulation led by Home Ministry officials. The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, as already noted, had provided the major impetus for their campaign to establish comprehensive film legislation providing for rigid government control over all phases of the important mass medium. According to press sources, the resulting eiga hô (film law) was expected to be submitted to the Diet in the spring of 1939, with an eye to providing the government with practically unlimited powers to restrict foreign films when deemed “necessary.” In this uncertain policy context, the Finance Ministry were made even more disinclined to grant additional permits for the importation of Hollywood movies while specific bureaucratic decrees for enforcing the film law were being worked out by Home Ministry officials.53

On the other hand, Japanese failure to issue all import permits at once interestingly helped to improve the commercial position of the American film industry in Japan. In effect, each company was given the opportunity to select and bring in its best productions, rather than rush in mediocre pictures as well to meet the original deadline of the end of 1938. As the Japanese government was now permitting new pictures from the United States, the United Artists representative predicted in March 1939, “we anticipate our best year for 1939” in Japan even if the war in China continued on the present scale because motion pictures—popular American movies in particular—were a favorite escape of most people under tense but generally prosperous wartime conditions.54
The U.S. assistant trade commissioner in Tokyo also had expressed a similar view about the continued popularity of American films among Japanese audiences, while at the same time showing concern over the ideological trend toward greater film controls. “It seems safe to say,” his report observed, “that the days of unrestricted competition in this market are over.” But despite the forces of ultranationalistic ideological opposition, “the average Japanese is a curious individual, keenly interested in foreign customs, manners, and countries.” Such cultural internationalism at the popular level seemed to promise the constant appeal of Hollywood cinema even with increasing official restrictions. Thus, it was not surprising that the lifting of the Japanese ban on foreign film imports came as a welcome respite for the American companies after a stressful period of year-long business interruption and tangled negotiations. Perhaps nothing captured Hollywood’s sanguine outlook on the Japanese market more clearly than Nathan Golden’s annual BFDC review published in March 1939: “Although the year opened on a highly pessimistic note [in Japan], it closed with a considerable amount of optimism as regards the immediate future.”

Conclusion

The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War opened a new era in the history of Hollywood’s relations with Japan. Balance-of-payment pressures became the immediate cause of the Japanese ban on the importation of foreign films in September 1937. But the Japanese decision was firmly embedded within the fields of increasingly viru-
lent official discourses that featured militant, highly politicized resistance to the West, particularly America, as a place of Japan’s contrasting image, idea, and experience. This ideological context led to the construction of Hollywood movies as nonessential luxury goods that were devoid of any cultural significance at best and that only corrupted the national purity and authenticity of traditional Japanese culture. Such views of Hollywood’s America, given its powerful cultural influence, increasingly served as a negative reference point for reinforcing the official frame of national identities and character during the 1930s.

The American film industry, as usual, did not accept any foreign restrictions without strong, sustained resistance. The Hays Office and the American Motion Picture Association of Japan (AMPA)—organized by local representatives of the American film companies—responded to the new Japanese policy by opening private channels of communication with the Finance Ministry in order to find ways to regain access to the Japanese film market. Also, the Hays Office sought official support for its trade position from the State Department, but corporatism once again proved to be a highly fragile form of political coordination in the Japanese situation. When the State Department disapproved the proposed credit deal as a violation of the American principle of free trade and investment, Hollywood simply disregarded the ideal of private-public cooperation and promoted its short-term profit motives by concluding an unofficial agreement that provided for restricted remittances and import permits in the Japanese market.

The other important lesson of Hollywood’s trade diplomacy in Japan was that the basic framework of its negotiations was constituted by the established discursive
formations about the influence and power of American mass culture worldwide. American negotiators often believed that they could force the hand of Japanese officials through the weight of public pressure because Hollywood films, with their dazzling representations of liberal democracy and consumer abundance, enjoyed constant popularity among Japanese audiences—if they were feared by proponents of official nationalism—and provided dominant, classical models of narrative filmmaking for Japanese studios. Also, the AMPA members assumed that Hollywood’s international dominance gave them an important weapon in negotiating American access to the Japanese film market because the Japanese government was concerned about the international impact of anti-Japanese reactions and characterizations in Hollywood cinema. In this sense, the final trade agreement with the Finance Ministry, despite its limitations and ensuing problems, appeared to be a major confirmation of Hollywood’s discourses about the democratic, liberalizing force of American movies, but Hollywood’s global visions would soon be put to the further test as Japan and the United States took steps toward military confrontation in Asia and the Pacific.
CHAPTER 6
HOLLYWOOD AND A NEW CULTURAL ORDER IN WARTIME JAPAN

The March 1939 issue of Nihon eiga, the monthly organ of the semi-official Greater Japan Film Association, featured an interesting essay by the former Marxist social critic Ōya Sōichi on his “reappraisal of Americanism.” Before the onset of the Sino-Japanese War, he recalled, Japanese film culture had been dominated by “Americanism.” America had spread its way of life and values worldwide through its powerful film industry, which in Ōya’s view was the quintessential embodiment of Americanism itself. The global influence of American mass culture, he explained, was even more visible in Chinese cities than in the Philippines, the U.S. colonial outpost in the Far East. When he took several tours as a war correspondent following the “China Incident,” Ōya came away feeling that the younger generation in Hong Kong and Shanghai looked and seemed to behave exactly like characters straight out of American movies. While their nation was practically on its deathbed, he thought that urban Chinese youth, under the influence of Hollywood’s Americanism, nonetheless revealed an active, healthy, robust attitude toward life. Ōya was particularly struck by what he saw as a stark contrast among young women in rural and urban China. When he entered small towns and villages that had fallen under control of the Japanese imperial army,
Ōya’s imperialist gaze became fixated on the figure of fatigued women, many in their twenties and thirties, dragging their bound feet to beg for the leftovers of Japanese soldiers. In contrast to this symbol of ancient China, the modern cities were full of active and energetic young women—Ōya compared them to “young sweetfish” (yaka ayu)—often playing a leading role over men both in public and private life.

Ōya’s guarded admiration for urban China, which rested on the trope of women, was a prologue to his plea for rethinking the positive side of Hollywood cinema and “Americanism.” Many critics, including himself, had long criticized the influence of American movies as a principal source of moral decay and frivolous behavior among Japanese youth. In his opinion, however, the pendulum had swung too much against American mass culture since the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War. Hollywood’s cultural influence had receded amidst the official ban on foreign film imports and the wave of nationalist sentiments on the home front. There were now fewer people strolling on Tokyo’s promenade who looked, acted, and talked like cheap copies of Hollywood stars, a development that should be extremely pleasing to many people. Yet, Ōya believed that Americanism still had so much to offer to Japanese culture, inasmuch as it had a profoundly healthy influence, such as youthful vitality and a robust, practical outlook. Such cultural qualities, he added, should be of particular importance to Japanese women, who would now have to play more active public roles and fill jobs historically performed by men as millions of them left their positions in factories and offices to take up arms in a long war with China.
In Ōya’s view, the conflict required an active, individual commitment to the imperial ideology of the Japanese state. Such spiritual dynamism had much in common with the essence of Americanism, which had helped to inject some much-needed vitality into Chinese youth even when their country seemed to be an old, sick man without any chance of survival. In that sense, Americanism also could be a dear friend to Japan as a source of national youth, voluntarism, and cultural vitality, a quality that would be instrumental in navigating through any kind of national and international problems. Thus, Ōya warned his readers that exaggerated fear, hostility, and disdain for Americanism were thoroughly misguided and unwarranted, a serious mistake that merely copied the cultural prejudices of the old, decaying European civilization.1

Ōya’s reflection on the positive, liberating force of Americanism—printed incongruously as it was in the semi-official journal—is truly important for comprehending the complex cultural landscape that shaped the issue of American films in imperial Japan on the eve of World War II. An important concern of this chapter is to highlight competing definitions of Japanese film culture, national identity, and Americanism before the Pacific War. First, the chapter discusses the formulation of the 1939 film law, a legislative landmark that initiated Japan’s first comprehensive policy combining both positive measures to promote national films and restrictive measures to limit the influence of foreign film imports in the wartime nation. Then, the chapter traces the desperate and increasingly futile efforts of American film companies to find ways to survive increasing official restrictions in the Japanese market, an important business consideration as box-office revenues from the European continent plummeted with the
onset of war in 1939. The U.S.-Japan film negotiations continued to show how the diplomatic or bureaucratic texts were often shaped—despite the changing geopolitical context—by the mutual discourses about the global influence of Hollywood movies.

Finally, this chapter shows that there was a constant, almost subterranean tension between the rising tidal wave of official proscription and the continuing popularity of the few still available pictures imported from Hollywood studios. Exhibition of Hollywood cinema in Japan finally came to a complete halt when war with the United States started in December 1941, a development that no doubt disappointed many Japanese fans who had crowded into theaters showing the last few American movies. The chapter seeks to illuminate this tension between culture and power, thereby showing that the appeal of American culture was often impervious to the efforts of political authorities to inscribe fixed national identities and boundaries between the Japanese “self” and the American “other.”

**Film Law of 1939 and the Ideology of Official Media Control**

In early 1939, a feeling of general optimism was still widespread among American film companies in Japan about the prospects of returning to familiar, profitable normalcy after the official ban on foreign film imports finally had been lifted in October 1938. The American hopes about the Japanese market also were in part a projection of Hollywood’s increasing desperation about the state of its world markets in the late 1930s. In the world according to Hollywood, “the film market [was] shrinking
every day,” overtaken by such measures as import restrictions, quotas, state film monopoly, and the Nazi overruns of European markets. In this situation, the attitude of the New York head offices was, quite understandably, that “the longer business can be carried on the better, even though returns are less and the progress slow and uncertain.” Reflecting Hollywood’s conservative mindset, it was the general opinion of American film representatives in Tokyo that they should try to make the most of re-opened sales opportunities in Japan, while “accept[ing] any partial payments” they could get and “proceed[ing] cautiously without stirring any antagonisms.”

However, Hollywood’s mix of optimism and hopes was soon dashed by one dark cloud that had hung over the American film business since the onset of the Sino-Japanese War—the passage of eiga hō (film law) in the spring of 1939. The new proposal, a fruit of official deliberations since the end of 1937, was suddenly brought to the parliament in early March and approved without any changes three weeks later. The new film law was described as Japan’s “first cultural legislation.” Its ultimate goal was to promote “national culture.” In other words, the Japanese government sought to mobilize motion pictures in order to foster militarism, patriotism, and mass loyalty to kokutai, or the imperial polity. The new legislation mirrored the official assumption that the Sino-Japanese War, according to Home Ministry official and the bill’s main author Tatebayashi Mikio, was essentially part of an epic struggle between different ideologies, Japan’s “kōdō” (imperial way) ideology versus Western liberal and communist ideologies. Thus, it was absolutely imperative, as Tatebayashi explained the film law in Nihon eiga, that the government should develop a more “powerful cultural policy” as a
key to promoting an authentic Japanese spirit and extending Japan’s imperial mission in Asia. Clearly, the new film policy was grounded in rising Japanese nationalism and militarism since the start of the Sino-Japanese War, which intensified the official ideological impulse to construct the West, particularly America, as the essentialized other and impose severe controls and restrictions on all forms of “foreign” influence—economic, political, or cultural—that seemed inimical to the growth and consolidation of what would soon be called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.³

The new film law was a major culmination of successive official movements to establish new media policy since the early 1930s. What its planners had in mind was to create a potent state mechanism for overcoming the limitations of “negative,” narrowly restrictive censorship and enforcing “positive,” comprehensive controls over the entire film industry in Japan. The law, supplemented by the administrative order when it went into effect in October, was intended to do so through the combination of a series of restrictive and supportive measures. For example, it established the institution of a government license system that required production and distribution companies, as well as directors, actors, and cameramen, to register with the imperial state and obtain official permits, with a particular eye to excluding possible left-wing dissenters through the threat of government blacklisting and forced unemployment. (Exhibitors were not on this list because they traditionally had been required to carry official theater licenses issued by local police authorities.) The government also gained absolute authority to regulate the types and quantities of films produced and their distribution in Japan.
At the same time, the film law extended state censorship from finished products to the pre-production stage and required the studios to submit all scripts to the Home Ministry before shooting even one single scene. While this rule was meant to screen material that was incompatible with the censor’s standards more effectively, the law also established a supportive policy to promote and direct official awards and “recommendation” to feature films contributing to the “advancement of national culture,” a euphemism for upholding the imperial state ideology. Further, so-called “cultural films”—officially sanctioned nonfiction films promoting the “national spirit” and “education”—were now shown to a wide paying audience through a compulsory showing policy. In general, the new law was welcomed by the Japanese studios, whose executives hoped that the new government standards would somehow help to regulate cutthroat competition in the industry and provide order and predictability by protecting them from the risk of what they saw as arbitrary post-production censorship.4

One of the major goals in the new film law was to restrict the importation and exhibition of foreign films. Home Ministry planners argued that import control was needed because foreign pictures—particularly when imported and distributed without any limitation—damaged the domestic film industry, sent money overseas, and had “enormous influence” on the sentiment, habits, and thought of Japanese people. They corrupted the hallowed Japanese tradition and family system and promoted “blind worship and imitation of foreign countries,” superficial, decadent behavior, and dangerous, frivolous thought, such as individualism, liberalism, and democracy, especially among Japanese youth. In particular, as they drafted the new legislation, government
officials expressed alarm over the distinctive position of foreign films in metropolitan centers of prewar Japan. Theaters devoted exclusively to imported movies were statistically rather negligible (under 3 percent nationally), but they were among the biggest, most prestigious picture palaces in the largest cities attracting a large, steady audience of educated middle-class moviegoers and young people at their formative mental stage. Thus, the magnitude of Hollywood’s cultural influence culture clearly appeared to subvert imperial state control over mass culture.

This ideological concern led Japanese officials to formulate a new quota system for imported pictures under the film law. In addition, exhibitors were now prohibited from showing more than 50 foreign films per year. Foreign-film theaters, like other Japanese theaters, traditionally had shown weekly programs presenting double features, which, of course, had been filled by imported movies. Under the new policy, however, they would practically be forced to show one domestic picture each week. Clearly, these control measures were intended to abolish theaters showing only imported pictures, eliminate the “evil influence of foreign films,” and steer their fans toward Japanese pictures instead.5

American film companies in Japan had kept a watchful eye on the development of new film legislation since mid-1938, when they were still struggling to solve all sorts of unexpected last-minute problems in finalizing their trade arrangements with the Finance Ministry. During the final negotiations, the American representatives had continued to question its officials about the rumors of new film legislation, but they had denied that there was ever such a law discussed and said that they knew “nothing
whatever about the future operations or plans of the government in respect to motion pictures”—which was not surprising at all considering that the Home Ministry had been the main engine behind extending ideological control over the film industry. The drafting process had been kept mostly from public knowledge until the outline of the new law was released to the Japanese press at the end of the year, but the published outline itself still had remained incomplete and continued to keep the Americans in the dark about the future direction of Japanese policy toward foreign films. Thus, they were able to make only an educated guess at best about the actual contents of the proposed legislation. There was some concern that the Japanese government might force American film companies into joint U.S.-Japanese control, while also making the censor’s standards even stricter, increasing import duties, and restricting royalties on rental receipts. In particular, there was a strong fear that the government would follow the Manchurian model and establish a state film monopoly taking over the distribution of Hollywood films in Japan. If the last plan was put into effect, the American companies were determined not to turn over their distribution but to threaten a withdrawal as they had done in Manchukuo, worried as usual that such measures would spread all over the world.6

It is important to note, however, that Japanese authorities actually did not intend to call for a total ban on foreign pictures under the new film law. Nor did they show any immediate interest in creating a state film monopoly in Japan. On paper, local productions were able to fully satisfy home demand and fill the domestic screens. Japan had the world’s largest film industry—measured in the number of movies produced if not in
their quality. Nonetheless, the establishment of a state film monopoly was unlikely, observed one American official, following their failure in the Japanese-controlled territory of Manchuria. American film companies having branch offices in that area had withdrawn from the market, and the Manchurian Film Association, the local state monopoly, was still trying to open negotiations to import popular pictures from the Hollywood majors. Thus, the Japanese government seemed to have every reason to avoid a policy that had “proved unsatisfactory and reportedly unpopular in Manchuria.”

Also, evidence shows that a total ban was rejected in large part due to the undeniable, grudging respect Japanese officials had for the technical superiority of Hollywood cinema. Despite their ideological reservations, the officials recognized that a total ban was not a realistic policy for many theaters that had shown foreign films exclusively because it would likely reduce their attendance and drive them to a financial ruin. Also, it was their belief that Japanese filmmakers needed some access to foreign pictures in order to learn from their superior film style and techniques and to improve the quality of domestic films as an alternative mass culture for Japanese people. Thus, this view complicated the ideology of Japan’s official nationalism and instead reflected a subtle, lingering appreciation of foreign pictures as a cosmopolitan medium for importing “foreign cultures and modern civilization” and for raising the “cultural level of Japanese people.”

In addition to the importance of continued cross-cultural contacts, there also was official concern about Hollywood’s cultural influence worldwide and the continued fear
that a total ban would provoke American film companies “unnecessarily” and create serious diplomatic repercussions. Home Ministry officials were worried that if they adopted a discriminatory policy against Hollywood films or set up a state film monopoly taking over their local distribution, the Hays Office would try to retaliate by using American films to show Japan in an unfavorable light all over the world. The guarantee of foreign access to the Japanese market, however, would help to curb production and world circulation of pictures with anti-Japanese themes and offensive characterizations. Indeed, Japanese officials sent a clear signal that they were interested in curbing anti-Japanese sentiments in Hollywood. At one time, for example, they even made a specific request for a copy of the AMPA’s letter that had been sent to Variety and other trade journals to give an “accurate,” favorable account of the 1938 import agreement when AMPA negotiators called attention to Hollywood’s efforts to take “positive steps to create good will” between Japan and the United States. These various calculations had prompted the Japanese government to take a cautious approach to the issue of foreign film control, avoid a total import ban, and adopt a combination of import and exhibition quotas under the new film law.9

Nevertheless, the sudden passage of new legislation created a climate of tension and uncertainty among American companies in Japan. The film law, as mentioned previously, was not due to go into effect until October 1939 and its administrative rules would not be promulgated until September. But from the beginning, it contained specific clauses that authorized the Japanese government to restrict the distribution and exhibition of foreign pictures. Japanese industry leaders tried to reassure AMPA com-

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panies that the law was “elastic and general” and probably would not be “carried out to the full extent of its powers.” Nevertheless, most American film men in Tokyo felt much more pessimistic about the effects of new legislation. They now had to face the unenviable prospects of fighting two-front battles with the Japanese government, negotiating with the Home Ministry as well as the Finance Ministry, and there was legitimate concern that Japanese officials would not hesitate to use their new powers to do whatever they wished in regard to foreign films. Indeed, when AMPA members had their first conference on this subject with a Home Ministry official in mid-April, he simply refused to “reveal the true intentions . . . with regard to the application of the New Law,” which he said would be determined only after consulting the ideas and desires of various groups in the film industry. Still, while “there is no desire on the part of the Japanese Government to put too strict a ban on importation or distribution of foreign films,” the same official admitted unquestionably that “the reason for the enactment of the New Law is to help the Home Industry even at the sacrifice of foreign interests.”

In a rare display of industry-wide unity, AMPA companies responded by calling for direct protest action against the new film legislation. In a meeting called one day after the Home Ministry conference, MGM’s representative, for example, made a typical boycott proposal. He claimed that American companies should take a united front and send an ultimatum to the Japanese authorities, “requesting that they clarify their intentions toward us, giving us a positive reply within 14 days,” or else threatening to stop selling Hollywood films to Japanese theaters immediately. His view was that “now, before the law [is] in concrete form, is the only time we can do anything” to shape
the new course of Japanese film policy. Warner Bros., taking a more cautious approach, opposed issuing such an ultimatum and suggested instead a “petition outlining the [AMPA’s] position and possible reactions.” Columbia’s representative proposed a middle-of-the-road compromise and reminded others that their action, be it a strong objection or petition, must have the “direct backing” of their home offices in New York. Columbia’s idea was to cable New York explaining the local situation and, with their approval and without any ultimatum, “simply to stop selling films” until the Hollywood majors were granted “independent treatment from other distributors and importers.”

Hollywood’s representatives in Japan also adopted an equally combative stance on the Finance Ministry’s refusal to issue import permits since the last winter. At the end of May, the AMPA addressed a petition to a few government officials and politicians, in which it called attention to its previous efforts toward “checking any anti-Japanese tendencies in American motion picture circles.” At the same time, the petition included a barely veiled warning that Hollywood commanded “tremendous” cultural influence worldwide and that the continued Japanese refusal to issue import licenses might “result in creating a bad impression on the American motion picture producers and the American public as a whole, which will naturally affect the bonds of friendship existing between the two countries.” The AMPA adopted an even more hard-line attitude in its special meeting a few days later. There, its members agreed to stop servicing first-run theaters until the ministry quit “stalling off the [AMPA’s] Committee.” Their boycott proposal was based on the idea that they would “have the assistance of the influential owners of the first run theatres”—who apparently needed
popular American pictures in their weekly programs—in pressing the Japanese government to offer a compromise by living up to the previous summer’s credit agreement.12

In the end, however, the AMPA companies failed to put such stern measures into action. Unfortunately, there is no direct correspondence left to indicate how the Hays Office or the majors’ foreign managers actually responded to the local proposals from the AMPA, but circumstantial evidence shows that the New York people remained strongly opposed to any local action that might provoke a confrontation with the Japanese authorities. “We are here to do business,” to quote a United Artists representative in Tokyo reassuring his home office, not to become embroiled in political controversies with local governments. Also, faced with the shrinking foreign markets for the American film industry, they were apparently preoccupied with taking advantage of “any small or remote opening” in order to earn the greatest possible returns from the pictures they had on hold in Japan. “The revenue derived from the distribution of motion pictures in the United States is not sufficient to return the cost of production,” Jack Warner wrote to President Roosevelt a few months later when war started in Europe, “we depend upon a world market to support our production costs.” In this situation, it was not surprising that the Hollywood majors were very reluctant to withdraw from the Japanese market, especially when film stock shortages enabled them to raise rental prices for popular American pictures—although they had no immediate hopes of sending home their local revenues to the United States. After all, despite all the anti-Jewish restrictions on the majors, many companies had kept their German offices
open and avoided criticizing the Nazis through 1939 for fear of jeopardizing their diminishing but still profitable film business in German-dominated markets.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, when the Finance Ministry moved to issue a few new import permits in early June, it is easy to imagine why the AMPA representatives were never allowed to take any drastic action that might place their organization on a collision course with the Japanese authorities. It seems that they were instructed instead to petition for further permits and carry on their releases of available films in local theaters. In early August, the AMPA sent out a petition once again protesting the continued delay in fulfilling the terms of the 1938 film import agreement. The petition emphasized that the Japanese government had issued less than 60 percent of negotiated import permits even though a year had passed since the original agreement had been signed. But, interestingly, the latest protest adopted a far less threatening tone, backpedaling on the AMPA’s previous efforts to highlight Hollywood’s cultural power around the globe. Instead, the AMPA members clearly had decided to underscore the desirability of minimizing U.S.-Japanese diplomatic tensions in more measured language. The petition reminded Japanese authorities that the AMPA had refrained from appealing to the U.S. Embassy in Japan, despite many suggestions it had received otherwise, and had taken the position that “this is a purely business transaction between the Finance Ministry and ourselves.” Instead of its previous confrontational tone, the letter adopted a soft approach by requesting “most earnestly” that “as the remaining balance of $12,500 is not a sum of any great magnitude,” these import permits be issued “in the interests of goodwill and with sincerity of purpose.”\textsuperscript{14}
The Approach of War and Hollywood’s Withdrawal from Japan

Hollywood’s decision to avoid a showdown with the Japanese government brought little comfort to AMPA officials in Tokyo as they faced two-front struggles with the Home and Finance Ministries. On the one hand, as mentioned previously, the Home Ministry announced in September 1939 that no theater would be allowed to show more than 50 foreign pictures per year, thus imposing a drastic restriction on foreign access to Japanese screens. Also, although the Japanese government imposed neither a state monopoly nor majority control of American distributors, both of which had been Hollywood’s worst nightmares, it did announce its intention to impose a quota system for restricting the distribution and exhibition of foreign films. As required by Japanese officials, American companies proceeded to file their applications for importing 320 pictures at the end of October, but they expected that they would be permitted to import not more than 100 films for the year 1940, about the same number they had released locally in 1938 and 1939. At the same time, the Foreign Ministry finally issued new import licenses in September, but one-third of the 1938 credit import plan ($10,000 worth of new films) still remained unfulfilled nine months after the original expiration date of that agreement. Moreover, while it had allowed American companies to remit the entire amount of 3 million yen under the same agreement, the revenue earned by new and old American prints continued to accumulate with the frozen money already amounting to 4 million yen by November 1939. The possibility of obtaining further
remittance permits appeared to be remote after the 1938 agreement was entirely completed, even as new pictures worth $10,000 were still awaiting clearance in the customs house at Yokohama.\textsuperscript{15}

Confronted with the increasing difficulties with Japanese officials, American film companies finally decided to turn to U.S. diplomats in Tokyo, although the latter had deliberately been kept out of their private dealings in Japan. On November 13, eight AMPA officers, each representing his own company, called upon U.S. Ambassador Joseph Grew and requested urgent official assistance to “have the [Japanese] Government comply with our present deal.” During the conversation, Grew was informed for the first time that what the AMPA had referred to as a credit “agreement” or “arrangement” with the Finance Ministry was merely a “statement” of intent handed by its chief of the exchange control bureau. As such, it was not a strictly legal agreement and could not be used as a basis of formal protest to the Japanese government, even as Japan failed to issue further import permits to American film companies. The ambassador also learned that the supposed agreement had been arranged through a shady deal in which Kubo, AMPA’s agent, used Hollywood’s secret money to cross the palm of his “personal friend,” then finance minister Kaya Okinori. Despite the questionable, corrupt character of its previous negotiations, however, the AMPA representatives had no qualms about asking Grew to make an informal diplomatic approach to Japanese officials as to the fulfillment of the 1938 “agreement” and the possibility of future remittances. In its letter written three days later summarizing Hollywood’s trade problems in Japan, the AMPA also called attention to the introduction of an import quota system
under the new film law, noting that the Home Ministry had not yet decided the quota allocation for each company but had hinted at its intention to give special consideration to German and Italian films. Thus, the AMPA made an additional request for a “timely” diplomatic representation in order to maintain the dominant share of American pictures and obtain a favorable import quota in the Japanese market.\textsuperscript{16}

Grew did agree to make an informal inquiry at the Japanese Foreign Ministry and sent home an official dispatch one week after the meeting requesting further instructions from the State Department. His correspondence did not arrive in the mail in Washington until December 11. Four days later, Cabot Coville, a State Department official in the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, wrote an internal memo summarizing Grew’s letter but recommending no immediate decision on Hollywood’s problems in Japan. Grew’s conversation in Tokyo, noted Coville, indicated that the AMPA representatives were also preparing a letter explaining the Japanese situation to the Hays Office. Thus, he saw no immediate need for any official action for the present, commenting that “the Department will perhaps hear [from the Hays Office] in the course of time.” As expected, the State Department actually received an urgent letter from Herron on the very same day. Calling official attention to the impending enforcement of new Japanese legislation against American films, he exclaimed that “the time has arrived to request the kind offices of your Department to file an official protest” against the Japanese government.\textsuperscript{17}

Meanwhile, things had gotten worse for the Hollywood majors. Just before Christmas, the Hays Office had been informed by cable from Tokyo that the Japanese
government had finally issued its 1940 quota allocation for foreign films. The actual quota proved to be extremely small, as had been expected by the AMPA members. The number of foreign films allowed to enter was limited to 120 annually, with 81 of them being Hollywood movies, a number that equaled roughly one-third of the pre-1937 figures. Although American companies were still allowed to maintain their dominant position in the Japanese market for foreign films, Japan’s new quota decision added to the growing sense of frustration and pessimism among AMPA members in Tokyo. They argued that, with such a small number of official permits to import and release new pictures, it was scarcely feasible to maintain their offices and continue to cover their overhead expenses in Japan. To make things worse, the granted quota itself was “no guarantee for the future” since actual imports still required special authorization from the Finance Ministry, a policy that suggested that their number would likely be smaller than the quota itself. Indeed, only 35 American pictures—less than half the announced quota—actually would be released in Japan during 1940. Also, the AMPA’s cable noted with extreme alarm that the new quota dealt a “severe blow [to the] American industry.”

It granted small import licenses to the largest Japanese studios, Shōchiku and Tōho and thus seemed to open an “initial wedge” to the eventual Japanese takeover of foreign-film distribution in Japan. Faced with these increasing problems, the AMPA stressed that “strong action [was] imperative at this stage” and again recommended retaliation through a boycott of the Japanese film market. The “future holds no guarantees for American industry,” the AMPA claimed in its cable from Tokyo, “unless
Hays Organization takes our entire problems in Japan for discussion with State Department as local protest [had been] futile to date.18

At the same time that Herron decided to travel to Washington to take up the matter of diplomatic assistance in the Japanese situation, the Division of Far Eastern Affairs finally sent off an official reply to his original request. But the letter, dated January 3, 1940, was clearly worded in noncommittal language, reflecting the unsteady state-industry relationship and Grew’s reservation about the problematic nature of Hollywood’s secret dealings in Japan. It pointed out that while Grew intended to make an informal inquiry about the 1938 import arrangement at the Japanese Foreign Ministry, the State Department could not accept the MPPDA’s request to make an official protest against Japan’s new film quota policy and its ban on profit repatriation. Obviously, American distributors received “a very large proportion” of the entire quota for imported films, and it was not the policy of the U.S. government to protest non-discriminatory quotas against American trade. Likewise, the State Department also could find little ground for diplomatic protest against the right of a foreign government to impose non-discriminatory currency restrictions on American companies, while it would certainly object to the growth of discriminatory commercial practices in Japan. Trying to limit the government’s role in film-trade diplomacy, Washington simply reiterated the official position that by simply reiterating that the U.S. Embassy would definitely be instructed to make informal representations so that Hollywood’s remittance problem would be brought to the attention of appropriate authorities in Japan.19
Just as the official reply was mailed to New York and the instruction was dispatched to Tokyo by diplomatic pouch, Herron—apparently having lost his patience—called in person at the State Department the very same day to discuss the new quota and other trade problems in Japan. During the meeting, Herron emphasized that American film companies could not continue in profitable operation on a small quota imposed by the Japanese government. Using the discourse of Hollywood’s global cultural influence, he then reiterated that “Japan need[ed] American pictures” while complaining that its ultimate goal was, as it had tried to do unsuccessfully in Manchuria, to drive out the American distributors and place the distribution under exclusive Japanese control. Although repeating the constant refrain that they would “probably withdraw from Japan rather than turn their films over to Japanese distributors,” Herron continued to demand that the State Department take necessary steps to assist the Hollywood majors in coping with the Japanese situation, particularly in asking the Japanese government that the 1938 credit import “agreement” be not only carried out fully but also extended.\textsuperscript{20}

As he tried desperately to make Hollywood’s case for government assistance, Herron put an interesting spin on the 1938 agreement between the AMPA and the Japanese government. In a blatant appeal for official sympathy from the State Department, he sought to portray the industry as a poor victim caught in the web of treacherous deception in Tokyo. “He and his associates have discovered,” said Herron, “that Mr. Hisaji Kubo, the Japanese who ‘negotiated’ the ‘agreement’ between the association and the Japanese Ministry of Finance, is a ‘crook’ and the association has
ceased dealing with him.” Grew would later criticize Herron for being “something less than entirely frank with the Department.” American film representatives in Tokyo, he wrote, had been “quite aware from the beginning that they were dealing with a most unsavory character” who carried out corrupt transactions on behalf of the Hollywood majors. Thus, their “hands” were “none too clean” and it was apparent that the Hays Office had remained fully informed of the “extended dealings” between AMPA managers and Kubo. This would prompt Grew to observe coldly that Herron’s cry of innocence about the alleged Japanese fraud “consort[ed] poorly with the facts” about the conduct of Hollywood’s private negotiations in Tokyo.21

Herron’s less than candid attitude was clear evidence that the American film industry, even with its myriad of problems with the local authorities, had little intention to withdraw from the Japanese market. Overriding the AMPA’s local recommendation, the majors were obviously unwilling to stage a complete walkout as long as there was still money to be made in Japan. When he was told that a higher quota for American films might be difficult in view of the financial situation in Japan, Herron merely replied that the majors had no intention of challenging the status quo and insisting that accruing money be exported outside the country. As Grew had suggested, State Department officials expressed their doubts about persuading the Japanese government to live up to the questionable “agreement” with the AMPA companies. Upon hearing such reservations about the character of the agreement, Herron then shifted gears and declared eagerly that he would send along a statement that would detail the industry’s trade prob-
lems in Japan and help the State Department to protest the small quota allotment for American pictures without referring to the previous “agreement.”

A week later, Herron finally sent the statement that he had promised while in Washington. The letter only reiterated his earlier argument that the new Japanese quota constituted a severe blow to American film companies, the first official move to force them to close down their Japanese offices and sell their product to Japanese distributors. The failure of Hollywood’s private diplomacy led Herron to ask U.S. officials to pull Hollywood’s chestnut out of the fire in foreign markets. “The only way to get anywhere near a fair deal from the present government in Japan,” he wrote, “is to constantly bear down on them by the efforts of our Embassy.” A day later, Grew also cabled home that the U.S. Embassy had made informal inquiries at the Japanese Foreign Ministry with no definite results. “As we are under continual pressure from the American motion picture interests here,” Grew continued, “we would welcome early instructions, preferably by cable.” On January 15, Herron also chimed in and phoned the State Department from New York demanding immediate action, “saying that he had heard from Tokyo that Ambassador Grew was awaiting instructions” from Washington. After much lobbying by the American film industry, the State Department finally sent a naval radio cable the next day instructing the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo to approach Japanese Foreign Ministry officials about enlarging the quota for American films and do so by citing the severe impact of the new quota limitation on American film business in Japan without reference to the questionable 1938 import “agreement.”
American overtures, whether private or official, did little to change Japan’s commitment to minimize the influence of Hollywood movies in the nation. In mid-March, after repeated requests from AMPA members in Tokyo, the Finance Ministry finally issued new permits for importing $1,411.94 worth of films—amounting to no more than 10 new pictures—with no further import licenses thought likely. Meanwhile, the AMPA companies remained a constant headache for the U.S. Embassy in Japan. At the end of May, Grew reported that he had been “in close and frequent touch” with them over half a year. But he complained, in a clearly annoyed tone, that it had been virtually impossible to make any useful diplomatic intervention on their behalf because they obstinately refused to give up the untenable position that they had concluded an import “agreement” with the Japanese government in the summer of 1938. Clearly, the Embassy’s position was that it could not be expected to take formal action with Japanese officials on the basis of a document that was nothing more than a unilateral declaration of future intentions with regard to American film imports. On the other hand, U.S. officials in Tokyo had suggested that it might be possible to approach the local authorities on the ground that Japan’s failure to provide some indication as to additional import permits had made it difficult for the American distributors to shape plans for their future operations in Japan. It was only “after considerable hesitation and delay,” Grew reported, that the AMPA companies were persuaded to see the merit of the Embassy’s counsel and agreed to have the proposed official note finally delivered to the Japanese Foreign Ministry on May 25.24
The Hollywood majors, as Grew’s critical report suggested, were apparently united in their desire, if nothing much else, to sell as many pictures as still could be absorbed in the Japanese market. But their cooperation, as always, did not go much beyond such narrow common interests, easily susceptible to their competitive impulse as it became clear that they somehow would have to find ways to cope with the new market conditions in Japan. For example, they became embroiled in a bitter internal fight over the allocation of import quotas, as they sought to “increase their imports at the expense of other companies,” according to one of the few AMPA memos sent directly to the Hays Office. Also, while they once had even threatened a complete boycott as a last resort, it now actually became the “unanimous consensus” of the AMPA companies that they carry on and release further pictures in the Japanese market even when their local revenues remained frozen by the Japanese government. “No matter how hard pressed we are in regard to Dollar remittances,” wrote Joe C. Goltz, United Artists manager in Tokyo, “it is absolutely necessary to continue our operations in Japan.” His recommendation for clinging to the Japanese market was driven in large part by competitive concern about what he called the “retention of the market,” a factor that had been exacerbated by the loss of many European markets after the outbreak of World War II. Goltz’s fear was that United Artists would lose out on new business opportunities for American pictures in Japan should the political situation improve in China as well as between Japan and the United States. He also expressed the local concern that the American companies would not be able to reopen once they closed their Japanese offices entirely. “As long as the other film companies are going to bring new product to
this market,” Goltz explained, “we feel that it is only fair that we carry on.” “It is our opinion,” he concluded with an exaggerated sense of optimism, “that if we can release [four A-class pictures] for 1941, we shall continue to enjoy the biggest business we have ever done in this market.”

Despite the faint ray of hope that Hollywood tried to see in Japan, the Japanese government continued the process of virtually closing the domestic market to American films. In January 1940, the 1911 U.S.-Japan trade treaty had expired six months after the Roosevelt administration had given the required formal notice to Tokyo, thereby ending the benefit of international legal protections for American subsidiaries and investments in Japan. While the United States had intended to send the message about Japan’s economic vulnerability and deter its expansion in East Asia, the abrogation of the commercial treaty seemed to have just the opposite effect in the summer of that year as much of the European continent fell to the German conquest in World War II. In July, the former premier Konoe Fumimaro was appointed to organize a new government and announced his ambition to establish a new order in domestic and foreign policy. The new regime eventually moved to establish Taisei Yokusankai (Imperial Rule Assistance Association), an all-embracing totalitarian organization that sought to bring together diverse political elements and foster the Japanese spirit among the masses.

The ideological trend of the times was reflected in a new film-policy directive, issued by the Japanese censors in early August. It advised the AMPA companies that old foreign pictures would be re-censored for exhibition only when they had “educational or documentary value” and were “compatible with Japan’s culture and social
welfare.” Apparently, Japanese officials had remained unhappy with the cultural content of Hollywood movies being imported into Japan. After the film law was enacted in October 1939, for example, the Education Ministry’s seal of official “recommendation” would be given to only five American films before the end of 1941, including a classic historical drama, The Adventures of Robin Hood (Warner Bros., 1938), and two biographical pictures on Thomas Edison, Young Tom Edison (MGM, 1940) and Edison, the Man (MGM, 1940). Thus, it was no surprise that American film companies were criticized for importing only the kind of crowd-pleasing entertainment that should garner large box-office profits and for disregarding the official vision of using motion pictures as an instrument of inculcating the state imperial ideology.27

The new censorship regulation, reflecting an official sense of the cultural clash in Japanese-American relations, was another critical blow to American film distributors in Japan. In effect, it represented a drastic reduction in their usable film stock at the time when the American companies had been allowed to import only a small number of new pictures. To make things worse, although the Finance Ministry issued new permits at the end of September for importing American pictures for the first time in about six months, the granted amount did not exceed $2,656.72 in print cost—which equaled only 16 new feature films. In addition, the Home Ministry soon announced a further reduction in the quota for Hollywood films for 1941, halving the number of annual permits and granting permission for importing only 40 new pictures. At the same time, the entire annual quota for foreign pictures was cut down from 120 to 71, meaning that non-U.S.
films were granted only a slightly lower quota over the previous year, with Hollywood movies accounting for most of the quota reduction in imported films.28

By the autumn of 1940, these increasingly gloomy conditions finally began to have a cumulative impact on the majors’ policies toward the Japanese film market. The combination of currency restrictions and scarce import licenses finally led the home offices in New York to consider closing their offices in Japan. “With the way things are,” Arthur W. Kelly, United Artists foreign manager, wrote to his Tokyo manager in October, “it looks as though the importation of motion pictures into Japan will be very few and far between and we might as well release what we have in the Customs House and then gradually do what the Japanese expect us to do, and that is to liquidate.” “There is no use building up ‘frozen’ foreign funds anyway, all of which means nothing,” he continued in the same resigned tone, “and we don’t care whether we ever get into the market again if it is to only build up a credit balance in Yen.” At the same time, the majors’ foreign managers in New York began to pursue the possibility of negotiating “outright sales” of American films and turning over their distribution to Japanese companies, a proposition they had once rejected as a precursor to state monopoly similar to the one in Manchuria. But even this unsatisfactory option was admittedly an improbable solution because Hollywood proposed the condition that American films be paid for in U.S. dollars, an unlikely scenario when there had been little hope of having the frozen money released by the Japanese government in the first place.29

The very same issue became the focal point in the last major episode of crisis facing American film companies in the Japanese market. On December 24, 1940,
AMPAnes made an urgent call at the U.S. Embassy concerning the disposition of their frozen funds in Japan. According to them, the National City Bank had requested them to withdraw 8 million yen (approximately $1.9 million) in their accounts, proposing that their deposits be transferred to the Bank of Japan. The Japanese freeze on the majors’ revenues since 1937 had forced them to pile up local currency to the extent that the bank became reluctant to assume further responsibility for their ever-increasing deposits under unpredictable political and economic conditions. The alternative proposal suggested was for the American companies to invest in Japanese national bonds, an arrangement for which Japanese officials promised to provide a written guarantee of future redemption at face value and permission to send home the annual interest of 3.5 percent to the United States. U.S. Embassy officials were understandably upset about this sudden development and worried that it would create added pressure on all American commercial interests having frozen currency in Japan. Thus, they advised the AMPA officials to have their home offices in New York contact the State Department with an eye to bringing pressure on the National City Bank to retain the majors’ accounts in Japan.30

Upon receiving the new message through the U.S. Embassy in Japan, however, the Hollywood majors showed their typical tendency to disregard the importance of presenting a united front or cooperating with government officials in their foreign affairs. On January 2, 1941, Herron wrote back to the State Department that he had called a foreign managers’ meeting at the Hays Office to address the frozen fund problem at length. Their decision once again reflected the usual mutual distrust and lack of coor-
dination in the industry. The foreign managers adopted no unanimous position and left the investment question for individual companies to handle, in effect dismissing the calculated diplomatic advice of the U.S. Embassy in Japan without much discussion. “It was decided,” Herron explained, “that it was a matter that each company would have to take care of individually, that it was not a group proposition.” “Some companies did not have their money in the National City Bank,” he continued, “and others felt that they could straighten this matter out to their own satisfaction in their own way and don’t care to expose their hands to the other companies.”

A few weeks later, it became clear that Paramount, which had the largest stake in the Japanese market, had long acted behind the scenes to ignore the official recommendation of the State Department. After receiving the noncommittal reply from the Hays Office, the State Department instructed the U.S. Embassy in Japan to keep a close watch on local American film companies and remind them on every possible occasion that it would not look with favor on any U.S. concerns investing their frozen money in Japanese bonds. On January 31, however, Paramount’s local manager, calling at the U.S. Embassy with other AMPA representatives, revealed that his office had acted against its diplomatic advice. He said that he had received definite instructions to invest in Japanese national bonds, had already worked out such an agreement with the Japanese government in the middle of the month, and was waiting only for a power of attorney to arrive from New York. The Embassy again stressed the opposition of the State Department to the purchase of Japanese bonds (which was later discovered to total 1.4
million yen), while at the same time requesting Washington to reemphasize the official position to Paramount’s home office in New York.32

On February 13, the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, following some internal discussion, rushed out a letter to the Hays Office, its normal channel of “contact” in the film industry. The letter was intended once again to drive home the official position of the State Department with respect to the investment of frozen funds in Japan and asked Herron to bring the matter to the attention of Paramount and other companies.33 The next day, Herron sent back a terse reply that most companies had followed the advice of the State Department, while he did not “imagine” that Paramount decided to invest large sums in the purchase of these Japanese bonds and thought that it probably made some bond investment, if at all, under pressure from the Japanese government “they felt they could not resist.” Then, Herron added, almost as an afterthought, that he was passing on to all the companies a copy of the letter received from Washington.34

The counsel of the State Department fell on deaf ears, however, or so it seemed. On March 7, the U.S. Embassy in Japan cabled that it was informed by Paramount’s local representative that he had placed a purchase order the day before for an “undisclosed amount of Japanese Government bonds.” Ten days later, the State Department sent a letter to the Hays Office once again protesting Paramount’s decision in the strongest terms and expressing “regret” for its neglect of the “Department’s general attitude in this matter.” On March 26, the Hays Office in turn forwarded a copy of Paramount’s reply, which apparently had been written rather hastily the day after the State Department’s letter was received in its executive office. In the letter, Paramount
explained that its bond purchase in Japan was an attractive financial arrangement in that it earned 3.5 percent interest, payable in U.S. dollars, while the Japanese government had provided an assurance that it would ease exchange control and grant exchange permits to transfer further sums to the United States (later revealed to be equal to 10 percent of the value of purchased bonds). Then, it claimed that “we [had] immediately cabled to Japan to cancel any further bond purchases” and tried to shift blame to Washington by arguing falsely that it had been unaware of the official position until it received a copy of the State Department’s letter to Herron on February 14 and that “a good deal of this difficulty could have been avoided by the State Department’s contacting this office directly.” Paramount professed that it “naturally” intended to comply with the official position of the State Department, but emphasized that “there are large sums of money involved.” It went on to question strongly “why this type of investment is not approved,” especially because the Japanese bond purchase enabled Paramount to receive the interest and parts of frozen money in U.S. dollars, while at the same time “deplet[ing] the gold reserve of the Government that at the moment, appears unfriendly to our own.”35

To the State Department, this fiasco was the latest evidence for Hollywood’s problem of collective action, one that seemed to confirm how the pursuit of economic self-interest could raise obstacles to corporatist solutions and larger national interest in film-trade diplomacy. In effect, Paramount’s action constituted a direct extension of American credit to the Japanese war economy, the State Department replied, while further encouraging “continued and future refusals” to permit the withdrawal of the
blocked funds in hopes of imposing similar arrangements on American companies and individuals in Japan. Later, Paramount officials called at the State Department to reiterate the company’s position that it had agreed to the purchase of Japanese bonds “before the attitude of the Department was made known.” Their effort to explain the ill-advised investment added yet another different twist to the entire bond question. Paramount’s office in Japan, they claimed, had not been “informed of the position of the Department . . . by any member of the Embassy” until the middle of February, while in reality U.S. diplomats in Tokyo had continued to stress their official opposition since the end of December 1940. Paramount’s representatives made a renewed pledge to make no further bond purchases in excess of the January commitment of 1.4 million yen. But Paramount’s underhanded behavior in Japan provided another powerful evidence of the tenuous connection of the major studios to the U.S. government, as well as the internal lack of coordinating capacity within the American film industry. The Japanese bond question clearly illustrated yet again that Hollywood’s corporatism had been so often a broken ship in the interwar period.36

“Mr. Smith Goes to Washington”: Hollywood and Americanism in Prewar Japan

While the State Department had opposed Paramount’s investment in Japanese national bonds, it decided to raise no objection to the proposal of the other AMPA companies to deposit their frozen accounts, approximately 8 million yen, with the Mitsui Trust Company for a period of five years. Mitsui’s proposal, made known to the
U.S. Embassy in Japan in the middle of March, would allow withdrawal at any moment should the Finance Ministry grant exchange permits for exporting any part of these funds. Mitsui also offered to pay an interest rate of 3.8 to 3.9 percent if the deposits exceeded 1 million yen, at the same time guaranteeing the semi-annual transfer of this interest to the United States. While Mitsui benefited as banker by having the blocked funds available as liquid cash for its own use, U.S. officials recognized that this would be the best possible arrangement for the Hollywood majors in Japan since National City Bank had moved to withdraw from Japan and no longer wished to retain their blocked funds. “The Mitsui proposal,” a State Department memo concluded in early May, “seems about as favorable a solution as could be made,” one that did not conflict with the “policy of discouraging American loan to Japan” by allowing the companies to “endeavor to obtain the withdrawal of the funds from Japan” while at the same time earning exportable return on their deposits.37

Yet, the approval of the State Department became a moot question two months later. On July 28, the Japanese Finance Ministry moved to freeze the local assets of American film companies in Japan when the Roosevelt administration froze Japanese assets in the United States in response to the Japanese move into southern Indochina. The Hollywood majors were not prohibited from releasing their pictures in Japanese theaters, but the Japanese authorities, in accordance with the freezing order, refused to permit the release of blocked funds and deposits still held in National City Bank. Also, official permits became required for every step of business operation, thereby placing Hollywood’s commercial activities in Japan under total government control. It became
necessary to submit individual exhibition contracts for government approval, with the final approval resting with the local police, and rental prices also became subject to reduction at the discretion of Japanese censors. Further, by the end of August, Japanese officials moved to enforce a monopoly system on domestic pictures in order to increase wartime state control over the film industry—consolidating film production into two central companies (later increased to three) while establishing one central company for distribution. “The next move,” according to the U.S. commercial attaché in Japan, “will be to establish a similar monopoly over American pictures,” thereby forcing the AMPA companies to withdraw from Japan.  

Hollywood’s long presence in Japan entered the final twilight zone for the rest of 1941. In the middle of October, the Japanese government finally announced its decision to establish a single organization controlling the importation and distribution of foreign pictures, although Hollywood films were initially not included in the proposed system. There is no available document explaining the Japanese motive for excluding them, but the policy was still clearly in line with the deep-rooted fears of antagonizing American companies doing business in the Japanese market. Nevertheless, the writing was clearly on the wall for their ultimate fate as Japan and the United States were coming perilously closer to the end of diplomacy. Indeed, RKO moved to transfer its film business in Japan to Paramount by the end of that month. The end came suddenly on December 8. With the surprise attack of the Japanese military on Hawaii, Japanese theaters made a joint, voluntary agreement to stop showing Hollywood pictures immediately, while the Finance Ministry announced a formal decision to halt the operation.
of American distributors in Japan. Thus were U.S. movies made inaccessible to Japanese audiences twenty-five years after Universal first opened its local office in 1916.39

The growing economic restrictions that the Hollywood majors endured during their last year in Japan had been matched by the efforts of Japanese censors to impose increasing ideological regulations on American pictures. Despite or because of the rising wind of diplomatic tension across the Pacific, Japanese diplomats had continued to express concern about Hollywood’s cultural influence and its power to disseminate anti-Japanese images around the world. Yet, ideological concerns grew more powerful in shaping the overall direction of Japanese film policy after the late 1930s. In 1941, an increasing number of Hollywood films were not even allowed to be imported on the grounds that they had nothing to contribute toward the “development of Japanese culture,” although the customs house censors, according to a United Artists manager in Japan, previously had “passed practically any kind of picture provided it did not deal with royalty.” Official censorship was made even stricter after the Japanese move into southern Indochina at the end of July. When the American companies complied with the new policy of submitting individual bookings for official approval, more than half of the pictures, including old films, were disapproved for exhibition. When the war finally came in December, only 17 new American films had been exhibited in Japan during 1941, a far cry from the pre-1937 era when more than 250 pictures had been released each year.40

American film companies in Japan, as discussed previously, had long seemed confident about the popularity and Americanizing influence of Hollywood movies in
Japanese mass culture. As late as March 1939, Nathan Golden, head of the Motion Picture Division at the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, had made an eloquent remark on how American pictures were loved by Japanese audiences, observing that “the average Japanese is an individual distinguished for his keen curiosity, his vivid interest in foreign customs, manners, and countries.” Ironically, Golden’s optimism had coincided with the growing official efforts in Japan to promote the use of motion pictures as a key instrument of instilling the right attitudes and beliefs in the people under the film law of 1939. Then, how did Japanese filmgoers react under the weight of increasing official anti-American proscriptions against Hollywood cinema? Did they suddenly lose their traditional “interest” in the movie-made world according to Hollywood? Had Golden, like most American film men in Japan, been so completely misinformed about the popularity of Hollywood movies and their influence as an important force in blurring the cultural boundaries and shaping Japanese identities during the interwar era?41

Accounting for the experience of Japanese audiences and their reception is always challenging. All texts are irreducibly polysemic and diffuse. Their meaning and reception could vary with the context of different perspectives and references that must be realized within the actual specificity of interpretation. Also, there are few written traces of the private voices of individual viewers. With the increasing regulation of mass-media outlets, such voices were drowned all too easily by the strident, overpowering tone of anti-Hollywood ideology propagated by Japanese officials. Nevertheless, what little evidence there is suggests that the official resistance to Hollywood cinema
was not the only voice in the public sphere. Field reports from the majors’ local offices and Japanese trade papers indicated that many Japanese continued to vote with their feet, so to speak, by flocking to Hollywood films as the number of new American pictures continued to dwindle after 1938. As a result, the few Hollywood films that were released on screen often became huge box-office successes even on the eve of the Pacific War. One such movie that served to illustrate the complex relationship between Japanese culture and Americanization—returning to the introduction—was Frank Capra’s masterpiece, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, which was released in Japanese theaters in October 1941.

Capra’s enormously successful populist film was met with overwhelmingly positive reviews even in the pages of Nihon eiga, the monthly journal of the semi-official Greater Japan Film Association. The critics praised Mr. Smith Goes to Washington as a great work of film art that put Japanese filmmakers to shame in its story construction, technical elements, and direction. Their reception was characterized by admiring commentaries about its fast-paced, well-orchestrated plot that created a coherent fictional world building up to a spellbinding climax in which an idealistic Smith fights a lone battle delivering a long filibustering speech on the point of being falsely expelled from the Senate and finally prompting Senator Payne’s confession about his innocence and their state’s political corruption. It seems from contemporary reports that superimposed subtitles often had been tailored to block out key expressions such as the “nation of liberty” or “symbol of liberty” as Smith quotes democratic principles extensively from the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. But it
was clear nonetheless that the film’s main theme was unmistakably conveyed to many viewers in prewar Japan. Capra’s picture, many reviewers suggested, created a place for public fantasy, the public articulation of ideas, desires, and action that were often repressed in their everyday reality. To be sure, anti-American remarks about the corrupt reality of democratic politics were usually included as almost obligatory elements in line with the ideological climate of the times. Nonetheless, many film reviews called special attention to the way that the film’s dramatic power, despite its unrealistic, superficial plot, was rooted in its liberating, wish-fulfilling aspect, one that affirmed the populist dream that anything was possible, that human nature was fundamentally good, and that an innocent individual could magically overcome almost insurmountable obstacles to defeat organized, corrupt forces in a happy ending.42

Admittedly, it is far more difficult to obtain information on the audiences who actually went to the movies and what particular messages they took home from the American pictures they paid to watch in the dark. Still, because the introduction to this dissertation opened with a vignette describing the positive reaction that Mr. Smith Goes to Washington evoked from Yasuoka Shōtarō and other college students in Tokyo, it seems fitting to close this final chapter with another recollection of such a movie-going experience on the eve of the Pacific War. Undeniably, such personal narratives are often more powerful than a thousand words of scholarly analysis. In a rare oral history published nearly fifty years after the end of the war, Hirosawa Ei (1924–96), well-known screenwriter and assistant director of Kurosawa Akira’s Seven Samurai (1954), recalled
vividly his reaction to Mr. Smith Goes to Washington and other American movies as the Hollywood majors were preparing to leave the Japanese market at the end of 1941:

In 1941, we heard that Universal, Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox, Columbia, and MGM were all going to close down their offices in Japan after completing the projected runs of the films already imported. Mr. Smith Goes to Washington and The Life of Edison [Edison, the Man (MGM, 1940)] were among those. Excellent movies. I felt desolate, thinking that I wouldn’t be able to see American movies anymore. . . .

I went to see Mr. Smith Goes to Washington on October 26, 1941, at a time when America and Japan were on the verge of war. It sticks in my mind as a result. It truly captures a feeling of humanity. People are willing to let even a stripling like Smith work his will. We lived in the same world, but in America, a young person’s will was valued so much that if James Stewart began to speak in the Senate, nobody could prevent him from finishing. This was “democracy” and something called “social justice.” I hadn’t known these terms, but they must be good things, nonetheless.

It is clear that Hollywood cinema demonstrably had been a major factor in Americanization, in representing America as an imagined geography and creating an international mass culture in which Hirosawa formed his moral character. A week later, worried that “I might be getting my last chance to see American movies,” Hirosawa decided to spend the entire Sunday paying almost religious homage to the disappearing world of Hollywood. That the foreign territory of American mass culture had become so much a part of his cultural identity in even distant Japan can be gleaned easily from the apparent sense of loss and sadness with which he bid farewell to Hollywood movies:

[On November 2,] I asked my mother for two meals of rice balls and caught the first train on the Odakyū Line for Shinjuku [the premier theater district in Tokyo, close to a two-hour distance from his hometown]. There, I ran from theater to theater, seeing Stanley and Livingston [(Twentieth-Century Fox, 1939)], The Ghost Goes West [(United Artists, 1936)], The Condor [Only Angels Have Wings (Columbia, 1939)], and Stagecoach [(United Artists, 1939)]. Sitting in the darkness, I ate my rice balls and sipped water from my canteen. The last film was Stagecoach. I’d seen it twice already; still, I watched until the last possible moment to rush for the final train back on the Odakyū line. I rose from my seat,
checking my wristwatch. At the door, I looked back and saw the stagecoach dashing away into the distance, then I bolted for the station.

A month later, Hirosawa felt disoriented to discover that the familiar cultural world in which he had grown up was about to end with the coming of war between Japan and the United States:

I remember the day the war started . . . . I was still a middle-school student, commuting from Odawara to Yokohama by train. It was a cold winter morning. [One of my friends] told me that according to today’s news, our military’s entered into a “situation of war” in a place called “the Western Pacific.” It was December 8, 1941. I knew relations had worsened, but I didn’t think war with America and Britain would ever come. They were great nations for which I was filled with respect. “Is it all right to fight a war against such countries? Can we possibly win? What would victory mean? Raising the Hinomaru [Japanese national flag] in Los Angeles? But even then, what would happen next?” I couldn’t imagine. That was the way I felt as a boy of seventeen.43

Only time would tell what would happen to the transnational influence of Hollywood cinema that was suddenly cut off by the new balance of political and military power across the Pacific.

Conclusion

The sense of optimism that the Hollywood majors felt about the end of Japanese film import ban in late 1938 was soon frustrated by the threat of increasing film controls from a different direction, that is, ideological regulation led by Home Ministry officials. The onset of the Sino-Japanese War also had provided the major impetus for the official campaign to move beyond the narrowly restrictive censorship and enforce ideological controls over the entire film industry. The stated goal of the resulting eiga hō (film law)

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was to promote “national culture,” that is, for the Japanese government to use motion pictures and promote a more militaristic and nationalistic outlook among the Japanese people.

One of the major agendas in the new film law was to restrict the importation and exhibition of foreign films. Japanese officials feared that Hollywood’s cultural influence, especially on urban youth, interfered with their efforts to promote an authentic Japanese essence and tradition that eschewed Western technology and ideology. This ideological concern led the Japanese government to formulate a new quota system for imported pictures and abolish picture palaces devoted exclusively to foreign films. The majors, often resorting to the discourse of Hollywood’s global influence, struggled to press Japanese authorities to maintain their profitable business in the Japanese market. But in the context of escalating diplomatic tension, the release of new American movies was cut down to almost a trickle by the time war came between Japan and the United States on December 8, 1941. Hollywood cinema would disappear from the Japanese screens until the war ended with an official surrender in September 1945.

Although the anti-Hollywood discourse constituted Japanese film controls after the late 1930s, questions of national and cultural identity were considerably more complex if the parameters of Japanese film culture were drawn at the site of popular consumption rather than the site of state ideology. Despite, or because of, the official resistance to the perceived influence of Americanism radiated from Hollywood movies, the last few remaining stock continued to play to packed theaters over the final months leading up to the Pacific War. Even in the face of an ever-increasing web of official
regulation and censorship, many viewers were still able to read into American pictures the moral or political meanings that were presumably suppressed in wartime Japan, at times transgressing the boundaries of national culture and constructing a range of interpretations that validated such anti-official values as an alternative, American vision of democratic popular politics and social freedom. The official campaign to invoke the mystique of an unadulterated Japanese identity and ethos inadvertently betrayed the sheer ideological challenge of containing the influence of an international mass culture disseminated by Hollywood movies in a world irreversibly interconnected by new communications technology.
CONCLUSION

My thoughts were severed like a broken film on August 15. The war ended. It was like a daydream. Had it really lasted fifteen years? No it wasn’t a dream. It was all because of the voice of Chin, the Emperor, which I heard for the first time that day. His voice spoke difficult words but it conveyed the end of war. I felt faint, filled with pleasure and relief at no longer being one of His Majesty’s limbs. I realized I would be able to see American movies again. I would now be able to live.

The screenwriter Hirosawa Ei used these words to explain his emotional reaction when he, like most people of Japan, heard the voice of the Emperor for the first time when he went on national radio, using the rarefied personal pronoun of Chin, to address the nation and announce his decision to accept Japan’s military defeat on the hot summer day of 1945. Hirosawa had been called up for active military duty about a year earlier, assigned to a field-artillery unit, digging “foxholes in the sand,” training to “run out and set charges on the sides of enemy tanks,” and destined to die as cannon fodder in the Japanese imperial army. Virtually all the major cities lay devastated by the Allied bombing campaigns, leaving millions of injured people and destroying much of the economic infrastructure as the shattered nation awaited the triumphant arrival of occupation troops headed by General Douglas MacArthur. The ravages of Japanese imperialism finally came to an end in Asia and brought down the curtain on Japan’s long road to war, conquest, and destruction since the start of the Manchurian Incident in
1931. For Hirosawa, however, the larger meaning of war and defeat was lost, at least for
the moment, in two very personal concerns—the sheer human will to life and the desire
to watch Hollywood movies again.

In this sense, Hirosawa had been in a much more fortunate position than most
Japanese moviegoers during the war. As shown earlier in the kindai no chôkoku sym-
posium, “culture,” or civilization, had become one of the central issues during the Pa-
cific War, as Japan sought to claim a new international status as the champion of Asia
leading the revolt against the forces of Western modernity and imperialism. Many
wartime ideologues had contended that the rise of modern industrial capitalism, driven
by foreign technology, had led to the spread of corrupt urban civilization, which ex-
hibited such ills as shallow materialism, liberalism, individualism, rationalism, city
pleasures, decadence, and moral laxity. Hollywood films had been viewed as harbingers
of the mental confusion and spiritual corruption that had subverted the rural Japanese
traditions that had once assured discipline, self-sacrifice, and simple austerity. Even
under these ideological conditions, however, Hirosawa had been able to see a number of
American pictures during the war, as he had been hired by the Tôhô studio as an as-
sistant director in May 1944.

The picture that had left the most profound impression on Hirosawa during the
company’s private screenings was Charlie Chaplin’s The Great Dictator (United Artists,
1941), his first talkie that had been confiscated in the Philippines and brought home to
Japan. It was shown in a room packed with people on a hot summer afternoon. No
subtitles were provided, but one man in the room who understood the English dialogue
gave them a translation as the little Jewish barber who is mistaken for the Hitler-like dictator (both played by Chaplin) delivers a final, rousing speech denouncing fascism and making an impassioned plea for liberty, humanity, and brotherly love. “As I, too, listened,” Hirosawa remembered in his oral-history interview, “I thought, ‘What marvelous things he’s saying, accusing fascism and Hitler. What am I doing here, when he’s really doing something, conveying frankly his true inner mind?’” “He spoke directly to each of us: ‘Hanna, the dawn is near,’” Hirosawa added, citing one of Chaplin’s last famous statements in the movie. “That really hit me.”

In many ways, Hirosawa’s reaction seemed to represent the way that many Japanese would be reintroduced to Hollywood cinema after World War II. The first postwar American picture, Call of the Yukon (Republic, 1938), was released in Tokyo as early as December 1945. This adventure-melodrama between a visiting female author and a trapper in the rough Alaskan wilderness was among the few pictures that already had been imported and then remained frozen during the war. Many theaters lay in ruins and often showed films inside the charred remains, but Call of the Yukon was played to a packed audience, for the brief moment entertaining and making many people forget their everyday worry about where their next meal would come from. When the Hollywood majors formally returned to Japan and began to release new pictures in February 1946, they achieved long-run successes and the theaters were jam-packed for weeks with eager spectators who sought to be reunited with the world of Hollywood cinema that had been denied during the war—even though their admission prices were set a couple of times higher than for Japanese pictures.
Hirosawa himself returned to his old film company on August 20, 1945. The abrupt transition from the nationalistic war themes to postwar directions was nothing less than remarkable. One of the executives voluntarily put up an English sign, “New Face, New Plot, New Treatment,” and the entire studio was already working on new movies along such new ideological lines—even before the U.S. occupation forces landed in Japan and issued the first directives to the film industry. When U.S. censors began to supervise Japanese film companies in October, Hirosawa was surprised at the stark contrast between their actual overbearing behavior and the idealized image of a free, democratic America that Hollywood movies had given him before the war:

I couldn’t understand why the American military men who now supervised the movies acted so pompously. They, too, stuck their noses into every detail: “No swords, no ‘feudalism,’” We had handed our hearts over to the bureaucrats during the war, and now I felt we were doing it again. What a difference from the image I’d gotten in Mr. Smith Goes to Washington! Why were these Americans so arrogant?

Still, Hirosawa believed that occupied Japan was clearly a much better place than the one in which he had been ordered to help produce movies in the service of wartime state ideology. Many theaters had been physically burned down during the war, and the U.S. film policy did impose desirable subjects and directions for the postwar Japanese film industry. Still, Japan’s defeat had spiritually liberated both filmmakers and audiences from the bounds of long ideological suppression. “We could now express our feelings freely,” Hirosawa looked back fondly on the new sense of intellectual liberation after the end of the war. “I feel very strongly about this. For me, that war [and its experiences] was the starting point of everything.”

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Hollywood and the Meaning of Americanization in the “American Century”

“Once we cease to distract ourselves with lifeless arguments about isolationism, we shall be amazed to discover that there is already an immense American internationalism,” wrote Henry R. Luce in his famous 1941 essay, “The American Century.” “American jazz, Hollywood movies, American slang, American machines and patented products, are in fact the only things that every community in the world, from Zanzibar to Hamburg, recognizes in common.” “Blindly, unintentionally, accidentally and really in spite of ourselves,” Luce continued, “we are already a world power in all the trivial ways—in very human ways.” In other words, there was now an imaginary America all over the world as “America” had become present as a dominant structure of cultural symbols and metaphors in many other countries.4

After World War I, the United States became a foremost world power as Hollywood represented the visible face of American influence beyond its borders, with its cultural exports achieving international domination and defining America to the rest of the world. In 1922, the Hollywood majors established the Hays Office as a new trade association for coordinating their industrial practices and collaborating with the U.S. government in resolving their trade problems. In fact, Hollywood’s corporatist design proved incomplete and elusive in interwar film-trade diplomacy. The U.S. film industry so often could not overcome its competitive disorganization and worried constantly about sharing trade information with other companies and the U.S. government, while the Hays Office and local company representatives both tended to see government of-
ficials not as friendly partners but as potential rivals threatening to eclipse their organizational positions in foreign fields. As a result, the associative vision of enlightened cooperation in the service of the industry’s common interests was not always successful in promoting the commercial dominance of American movies in world markets. Hollywood’s failure was even more striking in interwar Japan, one of the few markets that eventually became dominated by native products. Despite their outward image of a tightly organized cartel, the majors never agreed to take such aggressive business strategies as joining forces to control local film production and exhibition. Instead, they continued to treat Japan mostly as an arena of competition, a general trend that encouraged shortsighted self-interest in gaining larger shares in the limited, if profitable, market for foreign films until the very end.

Despite the actual limitations placed on Hollywood’s commercial ambitions, however, Luce’s observation about the global influence of American mass culture still provides a good starting point in reflecting upon the broader meaning of Hollywood movies in prewar Japan. As he recognized before the war, culture itself was a form of power, encoded in language, texts, and images and constituting the conditions of knowledge, identity, and social action. American discourses on the social and cultural roles of motion pictures constituted Hollywood as a major agent for change in promoting capitalist modernization-cum-Americanization. Its products helped to shape a modern, international mass culture characterized by the urban vision of mass consumption and abundance. At the same time, Hollywood movies were signified as a preeminent spearhead of the broader ideological enterprise that led the world to a new
era of international interdependence and peace unified by the universal cultural influence of democratic, non-political American values and ideals.

What, then, does the case study about the reception of Hollywood cinema in interwar Japan reveal about the consequences of introducing American culture in a non-Western context? To what extent might Hollywood’s global vision of Americanization be considered a “success” at the site of actual consumption overseas, as opposed to the intentions of American producers? What conclusions might be drawn about the nature and meaning of America and its influence abroad? In what ways can Americanization be distinguished, if at all, from similar developments, such as modernization and globalization?

During the interwar era, the Japanese reception of American pictures was embedded within larger cultural debates over the consequences of modernity and the meaning of American influence. As the flames of radical nationalism were fueled by economic and political frustrations in Japan during the 1930s, Hollywood movies became a magnet for increasingly strident criticism and regulation. They were attacked as a tool of cultural imperialism and feared as an epicenter of ideological pollution and homogenization that threatened to erase the distinctive essence of traditional national culture. The intertext of such critiques—the binary opposition of modernity and tradition—intertwined with the contemporary context of geopolitical situations to shape and crystallize discursive formations and images related to Japanese-American relations. As Japan took the road to World War II, the official ideology came to define the conflict as a clash of civilizations, between the East and the West, with Japan now locked in a
spiritual crusade to defend the purity of the Japanese or “Asian” spirit and to overcome the corrupting influence of modern civilization that had made its visual presence felt through Hollywood movies. But this East-West opposition always threatened to embarrass and dismantle its own ambiguous foundation, for example, as Japanese officials also showed an increasing commitment to mobilize motion pictures, a modern Western technology, in the service of a national culture that overcame Western technique and ideology.

In many ways, this critique of American cultural imperialism may be considered a classic case of “official Occidentialism,” as described by Xiaomei Chen. It was part of a nationalistic discourse that evoked the essentialized image of the West as an ideological foil, as a means for constructing it as a negative reference point and promoting nationalism in non-Western societies. Indeed, the official construction of Hollywood movies served such an ideological function. Decades of Japan’s successful if incomplete modernization had visibly reinforced a nostalgic sense of loss and discontinuity with the distant, national past, an ironic reaction when the cosmopolitan nature of Japanese culture had become transparent and well-defined by the 1920s. There was an occasional, fleeting admission that the modern was already an integral, undeniable part of Japaneseness; it was not an “other” that had been imposed by foreign powers and thus could be disavowed and overcome at will but rather a development that had been derived from universalistic forces deeply entrenched within the structures of Japanese everyday life, such as capitalist development, industrialization, urbanization, and new communication and transportation technology. In this sense, it is rather clear that the
official discourse of anti-Americanism cannot be explained as simply a response to Americanization, specific instances of cultural transfer, the American presence, or specific U.S. policies. But in the context of “official Occidentalism,” the perceived dislocations of modernity were displaced and re-imagined as effects of American mass culture. The United States supposedly used its cultural exports to impose foreign values and dominate other national cultures in the service of an American-centered world capitalist system, while Hollywood cinema was represented as one of the most subversive forces wrenching Japan away from its native place and seducing its people to a modern culture based on fantasy and desire.

Yet, Hollywood’s drawing power in Japanese film culture clearly contradicted the image of cultural imperialism. The discourse of “official Occidentalism” coexisted with what Chen has defined as “anti-official Occidentalism,” a counter-discourse that imagined the West as a positive, liberating force and model for non-Western nations. Contrary to the official discourse of national distinctiveness and authenticity, Japanese culture was not solely grounded in such fixed identities within a homogeneous national community. Rather, its boundaries and self-definitions were both contingent and contested in a modernizing nation experiencing several decades of economic and cultural intercourse with the West. In Japanese film culture, there existed two distinct worlds in the years after World War I—divided by such factors as class, education, and social geography—one that became controlled by native products and the other, smaller but nonetheless significant, that remained under the influence of foreign, especially American, movies. In particular, urban middle-class youth like Yasuoka and Hirosawa
embraced Hollywood movies and their Americanism as a still monolithic but idealized “other,” one that presented visualized alternatives to the authoritarian politics, social backwardness, and suffocating conditions that seemed to pervade contemporary Japanese life.

In this sense, it also seems evident that Americanization was not a “myth” limited to aspects of mass consumer culture in interwar Japan. It may be true, as reception theory would suggest, that the process of cultural transmission often altered the meaning of American films in Japan—which is not actually surprising at all because all texts are irreducibly plural, diffuse, and open to multiple interpretive strategies. More importantly, however, Hollywood’s discourse of Americanization—a free, democratic, consumer culture unifying the entire globe through American yet universalistic values and ideals—clearly found wide acceptance in imperial Japan. The Japanese reception of Hollywood movies may have been filtered through the discursive prism of otherness, but they were nonetheless commonly perceived, even in critical accounts, as icons of modernity. Above all, Hollywood’s vision of Americanism was supported by a substantial, active audience with a passion for watching and living out American hopes and dreams, at least in the safe, imagined space of movie theaters. Ironically, what was forcibly imposed in prewar Japan was actually the imperial state ideology, rather than Americanism, as indicted in the kindai no chōkoku symposium.

Finally, the continuing popularity of American movies in Japanese film culture suggests that Americanization was not merely a part of larger social developments, historical dynamics, or global forces of capitalism, that is to say, the broader, universal
process of modernization or globalization driving the international progression toward
economic, political, and social convergence and integration. On the one hand, the place
of American mass culture and consumerism as a focus of Japanese “Occidentalist”
discourses on Hollywood cinema may appear to lend support to the argument that there
was nothing distinctive about the phenomenon commonly perceived as Americaniza-
tion in interwar Japan. If Americanization was to be simply equated with modernization
or globalization, Hollywood might be seen as the principal promoter and exporter of the
cultural logic of late capitalism as the United States was the foremost economic power
that developed and mediated features of mass society and consumer culture more fully
than others in the twentieth century. This argument would suggest, echoing the Marxist
theory of historical materialism, that as the United States lost the preponderance of
economic power it had enjoyed in the immediate post-World War II era, its cultural
supremacy increasingly gave way to the rise of Europe and Japan as new competing
centers of cultural activity and influence.

But it seems evident that economic power and control did not translate so easily
into cultural influence. In other words, Americanization represented more than a par-
ticular historical era when the spread of general trends and developments like con-
sumerism and mass culture was mediated and promoted by American power as the most
advanced capitalist country in the middle part of the twentieth century. Indeed, Hol-
lywood became a very attractive target for foreign investors toward the end of the
twentieth century because its studios continued to produce the most popular, recog-
nizable content in international film and television markets. Japanese electronics giants
Sony and Matsushita moved to buy Columbia Pictures and Universal Pictures, respectively, at the end of the 1980s, although Matsushita later sold off its holdings after losing millions of dollars over several years. (Universal Pictures would be bought by a French telecommunication giant in 2000.) However, the new international economics of the movie business certainly has not led to Japanization (or Europeanization) of Hollywood cinema as their acquisition strategies were driven by a need to secure high-quality software—popular American movies—to complement and promote their electronic hardware products around the world.  

Thus, it seems fair to conclude that there was something more distinctive and intoxicating about American cultural influence, at least in the imaginative space of many people around the world, including the movie audience in interwar Japan. In many ways, it may be appropriate to note that Hollywood’s America was a discursive construct rather than a material reality. Being an object of discourse, the symbolic construction of “America” could be more than a time-bound phenomenon. Thus, it is plausible that its cultural influence has not been totally confined by the narrow limitation of a particular historical context that corresponded to the era of American global hegemony in the mid-twentieth century. Rather, Hollywood movies have continued to enjoy continued popularity worldwide even when the nearly unquestioned supremacy of American power became challenged by other economic players.

The central appeal of “America” as cultural fiction, it seems, was to shape free-floating signs and rhetorical structures related to the formation of capitalist modernity and mass consumer culture. The United States and Japan were set on a parallel
course of social and cultural transformation under global capitalism, with the former being further advanced along that road. As American mass culture became ubiquitous worldwide in the years after World War I, “America,” with its dominant liberal ideology, became a cultural model associated with the concept of freedom and the positive, liberating aspects of modernity as opposed to the perceived historical backwardness and restriction of contemporary Japan. In reality, American culture itself was hardly a uniform, coherent entity—always contested not only across but also within the national boundaries along such fault lines as class, race, ethnicity, and gender. But Americanism was clearly embodied as a coherent notion, as a dreamscape, in the imagination of those viewers watching American films in interwar Japan, just as American culture usually has been defined at home in exceptionalist, unifying terms featuring such supposedly unique aspects as the frontier, liberal democracy, a virgin land, and a City on the Hill that is free from the corrupt traditions and debilitating divisions of the Old World.6

For many, Hollywood’s America was the land of hope, opportunity, and progress promising a better future. It was imagined predominantly as white middle America, a land of expanding urban modernity where life, enacted by white actors and actresses (many of whom were actually non-American), could be made freer, happier, and more prosperous than it ever had been. As cultural exports of a new nation blissfully free from the burden of history, American movies represented the promise of a new world and a new era, a land of wish-fulfillment, liberty, and immediate gratification where there was an almost childlike, innocent confidence in human ability and individual possibility. Such utopian hopefulness, often displayed in American movies, was
considered perhaps the most prominent, defining, and desirable characteristic that distinguished Japan from Hollywood’s America. Japanese perceptions of American films, in other words, were essentially a complex web of cross-national conversations fashioned by the abstract, magnifying cultural prism that filtered and reconstituted aspects of American culture according to the forces of pre-existing, essentialist logic and narrative about Japan-America binarism. If globalization refers culturally to what Roland Robertson calls “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole,” Americanization may be seen as an integral part of this historical process, where America provides a common framework for interpreting the very existence of nation-states and individuals as parts of a larger whole in the modernizing, globalizing world.7

In Power and Culture, Akira Iriye argues that “there was continuity between the 1920s and the postwar years” in U.S.-Japanese relations as many Japanese officials during the Pacific War shared visions of postwar peace based on Wilsonian internationalism, the American principles of international economic development, cooperation, and interdependence. In his view, these shared assumptions about the nature of postwar world order accounted for the restoration and stability of U.S.-Japanese peace and cooperation after 1945. However, it is clear that much more than postwar visions were shared in common across the Pacific. “That the postwar Japan eventually became one of the most ‘middle-class’ of industrial capitalist societies,” Carol Gluck points out, “was due in part to changes in social value that were proceeding as the official ideology in the 1930s glorified the farmer and the soldier.” The anti-Western state ideology, she
continues, “ran against the grain of the Japanese experience, from the Meiji adoption of
civilization through the cosmopolitan pursuit of the modern in the years between the
two world wars.” Indeed, a U.S. diplomat in China observed during the conflict that
Japanese prisoners of war as a whole seemed to “lack feelings of hatred or even ani-
mosity” toward the United States, a country that was “more familiar to [them] than any
other foreign country” through movies and other modern products.8

In other words, American and Japanese audiences had been watching many of
the same movies across the Pacific before the war, thereby coming into frequent
cross-cultural contact with each other, even if indirectly and uni-directionally at most
times. In an effort to make sense of this cultural dimension of international history, Iriye
also has suggested recently that “it would be useful to postulate the simultaneous ex-
stistence of two worlds, one consisting of sovereign states as they have actually devel-
oped over time, and the other a putative global community, a product of forces of
globalization,” a process that have helped to create new transnational identities through
the deepening border-crossing networks of human migrations, economic exchanges,
technological transfers, and cultural transmission. In this sense, it may be said that these
two worlds in imperial Japan—geopolitical and transnational—came into acute tension
and conflict during the late 1930s and early 1940s. But the prewar strain of “anti-official
Occidentalism” in Japanese film culture provides a powerful reminder that there was a
different side to the official historical narrative of increasing conflict across the Pacific
and that culture was a cross-national force that could prove potentially impervious to
power, to the official authority, supervision, and control of the imperial state trying to
assert its national sovereignty in a modern, globalizing world. Thus, it may be even tempting to suggest that Hollywood’s global discourse on the peaceful effects of its cultural export ultimately contributed just as much, if not more, to the creation of a new postwar world order as the common official faith in Wilsonian internationalism, as American films helped to construct the broader popular ties of shared cultural images, values, and feelings of transnational interconnectedness between two advanced capitalist societies.9

Meanwhile, the global influence of Hollywood cinema definitely has not been in decline even after the end of American hegemony in global capitalism. According to United Nations reports, international trade in culture more than quadrupled in the 1980–98 period alone, and this increasing trade has been more and more of a one-way street leading from the United States to the rest of the world even while the country has continued to run large trade deficits overall since the 1980s. Indeed, the single largest U.S. export industry was not aircraft, automobiles, or computers at the century’s end. It was entertainment, in film, television, and music programs. One of the most powerful indicators of this growing dominance of American cultural products has been supplied by the film industry. Hollywood today earns more than half of its revenues from outside the United States, and it has increased its market shares all over the world, claiming seventy percent of the European film market in 1996, for example, up from fifty-six percent in 1987.10

In Japan, domestic studios have increasingly lost their once dominant market share to foreign, predominantly Hollywood, fare since the mid-1980s, allowing
American movies to regain the dominance they had lost in the mid-1920s. Indeed, Japanese pictures now controlled only twenty-seven percent of the domestic film market in 2002. Since the mid-1980s, Japan also has been the largest export market for the Hollywood studios. And not a week goes by nowadays without seeing Hollywood stars and directors fly across the Pacific as roving salesmen to pitch their new movies in this most important film market outside the United States.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, it certainly may not be too far-fetched to argue that the world is still in the American Century, at least in the global movie business. To borrow Edward Lowry’s words in his 1925 \textit{Saturday Evening Post} article, the sun still never sets on American pictures, it seems, as Hollywood continues to export images of America and shape an international mass culture that is exciting and liberating for some but often confusing and disquieting for those who still feel threatened by the perceived menace of Americanization in a rapidly changing modern world.
NOTES

Introduction


4. In this dissertation, Japanese names are usually given in a traditional, non-Westernized order, that is, a family name preceding a given name, except for scholars with substantial publication records in English (e.g., Akira Iriye).


York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 190–212. E. Taylor Atkins’s study on the
Japanese reception of jazz music is one of the rare monographs on the influence of
American mass culture in Japan. See E. Taylor Atkins, Blue Nippon: Authenticating
is not much different in the Japanese-language literature. For broad overviews examin-
ing Americanization of Japanese literature, popular culture, and lifestyles, see, for
example, Honma Nagayo, “Nihon bunka no Amerika ka: raifu sutairu to taishū bunka
[The Americanization of Japanese culture: life-styles and popular culture],” in
Washington taisei to Nichibei kankei [The Washington system and Japanese-American
relations], eds. Hosoya Chihiro and Saitō Makoto (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppan kai,
1978), 603–30; Kamei Shunsuke, Meriken kara Amerika e: Nichibei bunka kōshō shi
no oboegaki [From “Meriken” to America: essays on Japanese-American cultural rela-

(New York: Norton, 1997); For Iriye’s view, see his Pacific Estrangement: Japanese
and American Expansion, 1879–1911 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,
1972); After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East, 1921–1931
(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965); Power and Culture: The Japa-
The last quote is from Iriye, Power and Culture, 268.

18. For a historiographical review, see Gienow-Hecht, “Shame on US?”
465–94. For a critical analysis of the concept of cultural imperialism, see also John
word “myth” is from Pells, Not Like Us, xiv. Ellwood’s quotation is from “The
Workings of American Power in Contemporary France,” DH 18 (Fall 1994): 580. The
phrase, “the latest capitalist culture of mass consumption,” is taken from Wagnleitner,
Coca-Colonization and the Cold War, 295. The terms “hybridization” and “homogen-
ization” are drawn from Robert Holton, “Globalization’s Cultural Consequences,”
Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (hereafter Annals)
570 (July 2000): 140–52. See also Mauro F. Guillén, “Is Globalization Civilizing, De-
structive or Feeble? A Critique of Five Key Debates in the Social Science Literature,”

19. See, for example, Doak, Dreams of Difference; Leslie Pincus, Authenticat-
ing Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shūzō and the Rise of National Aesthetics (Berke-
ley: University of California Press, 1996); Miriam Silverberg, Changing Song: The
Marxist Manifestos of Nakano Shigeharu (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press,
1990); Stefan Tanaka, Japan’s Orient: Rendering Pasts into History (Berkeley: Univer-
sity of California Press, 1993); Harootunian, Overcome by Modernity. A good intro-
duction to critical theory is presented in Douglas Kellner, Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

20. The idea of universal economic models and local conditions/variants is drawn from such works as Thomas C. Smith, Native Sources of Japanese Industrialization, 1750–1920 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).


24. Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 12, 89; James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), esp. 7–17, 255–76; Emily S. Rosenberg, “Crossing Borders,” in Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations, revised ed., eds. Hogan and Paterson; Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121–27. For a critique of Geertz’s semiotic concept of culture, see Aletta Biersack, “Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond,” in The New Cultural History, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 78–84. Williams contrasts the dominant culture to the “residual” and “emergent” cultures—an old system that is still “an effective element of the present” and a new system that is “continually being created”—although it is always necessary to distinguish those elements which may be largely incorporated into the dominant culture and those which may have an alternative or oppositional relation to it.


Chapter 1

1. Edward G. Lowry, “Trade Follows the Film,” Saturday Evening Post, 7 November 1925, 12. By “Hollywood,” I mean the major production-distribution companies, which tended to become vertically integrated units by expanding into exhibition and acquiring domestic theater chains from the late 1910s to the mid-1940s.


16. Address of Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover at the Annual Meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce, Cleveland, Ohio, 7 May 1924, “Commerce Department, Achievements, 1924 May-June,” Commerce Papers, Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.


21. Ibid., 330; Agenda of Board Meeting, 7 April 1922, Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft to Hays, 28 September 1922, Hays memo, October 1922, Hays Papers. See also Lewis, The Motion Picture Industry, 264–65.


25. Moley, Hays Office, 204–12. The ideological struggle among different visions of political economy in the late 1930s is analyzed in Alan Brinkley, The End of


38. C. J. North to Platten, 21 October 1924, 281 Motion Pictures—General, 1924, RG 151.


40. Moley, Hays Office, 171; Thompson, Exporting Entertainment, 111.


45. Warren L. Hoagland to All Commercial Attaches and Trade Commissioners, 24 November 1924, 281 Motion Pictures—General, 1924, North to Klein, 2 August 1926, North to George R. Canty, 15 October 1926, 281 Motion Pictures—General, 1926, RG 151.


47. Hoover to Klein, 26 March 1928, North to R. C. McLean, 29 March 1928, 281 Motion Pictures—France, 1928—January-June, RG 151; Pettijohn to Hays, ca. 28 March 1928, Hays Papers.


49. Pettijohn to Hays, ca. 28 March 1928, Hays Papers; Canty to the Motion Picture Section, 2 April 1928, “Hays, Will H., 1927–1928,” Commerce Papers, Hoover Papers; North to Canty, 28 April 1928, 12 June 1928, Klein to MacLean, 15 May 1928,
North to MacLean, 22 May 1928, 12 June 1928, 281 Motion Pictures—France, 1928—January-June, RG 151.


51. Golden to Canty, 21 September 1928, 12, October 1928, North to Canty, 18 October 1928, 281 Motion Pictures—General, 1928, July-December, RG 151.

52. Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, 121; North to Herron, 1 March 1929, North to MacLean, 9 May 1929, 281 Motion Pictures—France, 1929, RG 151.


60. Canty to North, 14 March 1928, 281 Motion Pictures—France, 1928—January-June, RG 151; Pettijohn to Hays, ca. 28 March 1928, Hays Papers.


63. The quote is from Putnam, The Undeclared War, 351.

Chapter 2


5. For a detailed analysis of the increasing appeal of the motion picture for middle-class segments during the 1910s, see Lary May, Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 60–166, 205–20. The quote comes from page xii.

6. For a stimulating, theory-oriented attempt to view the larger relationship between motion pictures and modernity, see Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), esp. 1–11.


8. Susman, Culture as History, xix-xxvii, 112. See also note 5 above.

9. Hays radio address, 29 March 1930, Hays Papers. For his similar, if less clearly articulated, argument, see, for example, Hays speech at the Advertising Club of New York, 31 March 1926, Hays Papers.


17. See, for example, W. W. Charters, Motion Pictures and Youth: A Summary (New York: Macmillan, 1933). The quote is from page 9.

18. Lowry, “Trade Follows the Film,” 12.


25. Hays speech at the Advertising Club of New York, 31 March 1926, Hays Papers. See also Hays speech at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 26 May 1922, Hays Papers; Will H. Hays, “Supervision from Within,” in The Story of the Films, ed. Kennedy, 38. In his book, The Culture of Time and Space, Stephen Kern focuses on the same cultural changes during an earlier period, from 1880 to 1918, because he looks largely at more conscious avant-garde writers, artists, intellectuals, and philosophers. The importance of communication in modern American culture also is a major theme in Susman’s Culture as History, but he shows that it became a source of popular concern only during the 1920s.

26. The persistence of the popular discourses on the impact of communication technology is suggested in Daniel J. Czitrom, Media and the American Mind: From


29. Hays address before the National Foreign Trade Council, 22 May 1930, Hays Papers.

30. Klein address before the conference on the cause and cure of war, 22 January 1925, Hays Papers.


38. Hays to J. F. Keeley, 23 August 1924, 281 Motion Pictures—General, 1924, RG 151.


42. Hays to Lowry, 25 July 1926, Hays Papers.


45. K. Kumasaki to Melville E. Stone, 6 November 1922, Hays Papers.

46. Kumasaki to Stone, 6 November 1922, Hays, resume for board meeting, 10 January 1923, Hays Papers.

47. Hays to William Hearst, 18 November 1922, Hays Papers.


51. North to Charles F. Baldwin, 17 May 1928, 281 Motion Pictures—Australia, 1927–1929, RG 151; George S. Messersmith to the Secretary of State, 11 December 1936, Wright Legal File, box 8, folder 8, UA.

52. Charles A. Livingood, memo for the Ambassador, 18 February 1927, 281 Motion Pictures—Italy, 11932–1945, RG 151; BFDC, Motion Pictures Abroad, 1 December 1938, 22.

53. North to Canty, 10 September 1928, 281 Motion Pictures—General, 1928, July-December, RG 151; Zach Sanderson to McKenzie, 23 August 1925, Hays Papers.


56. Toyota (Consul General, Singapore) to Nomura (Foreign Minister), 14 December 1939, Fukui (Consul, Bombay) to Nomura, 14 December 1939, Wakamatsu (Consul General, New Delhi) to Nomura, 15 December 1939, I.1.12.0.1, Gaimushō kiroku [Records of the Japanese ministry of foreign affairs], Gaikō shiryō kan [Diplomatic record office], Tokyo, Japan; Joseph C. Grew to the Secretary of State, 23 December 1939, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/33, RG 59; Richard D. Spierman to Grew, 29 December 1939, Donald W. Smith, memo to Grew, 29 December 1939, 840.6 Gunga Din, Japan, Embassy, General Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84 (hereafter RG 84), National Archives. For the censorship of movies for diplomatic reasons, see Harley, World-Wide Influence of the Cinema, 37–40; Vasey, The World According to Hollywood, 152–56.
Chapter 3


2. Kinema junpō, 1 January 1924, 12; Katsudō kurabu, July 1924, 35–36.

3. For a graphic reconstruction of Japanese fans besieging Fairbanks and Pickford at the Tokyo station during their 1930 visit, see *Eiga sekai*, March 1930, 99.

4. The quotes are from Ulff-Møller, *Hollywood’s Film Wars with France*, xiii, xvi.


8. Hashimoto Tetsuya, “Toshika to minshū undō [Urbanization and mass movements],” in *Iwanami kōza Nihon shi*, vol. 4, 305–14. See also Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 7–9. To compare the Japanese and American cases, the 1920 U.S. census announced that more than half the nation’s population lived in the city for the first time in U.S. history. However, it defined the city as a town with more than 2,500 people, as opposed to the minimum of more than 10,000 people cited in the Japanese case. Thus, the two capitalist countries apparently shared similar levels of urbanization across the Pacific.
9. Silverberg, Changing Song, 3–10; Park, Race and Culture, 3–14; Everett M. Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1995), esp. chap. 1. For the early history of motion pictures in Japan, see Tanaka Jun’ichirō, Nihon eiga hattatsu shi [The history of the development of Japanese cinema], vol. 1, Katsudō shashin jidai [The age of moving pictures] (Tokyo: Chūō kōron sha, 1980), 23–66. This work, the classic of Japanese film-history research originally published in 1965, is essentially a collection of brief synopses of major films shown in Japan and their basic exhibition data, interspersed with editorial commentary and anecdotes by Tanaka, who had been an observer of the Japanese film industry since the early 1920s.


11. For contemporary perspectives, see, for example, Osaka shi shakaibu chōsaka [Research division, social bureau, Osaka city], Yoka seikatsu no kenkyū [A study of leisure] (Kyoto: Kobundō, 1923), 5–10; Ōbayashi Munetsugu, Minshū goraku no jissai kenkyū [Case study of popular entertainment] (Tokyo: Ōhara shakai mondai kenkyūsho, 1922), 1–33. For historical studies of mass culture in Japan, see, for example, Minami Hiroshi, ed., Taishō bunka [Taishō culture] (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1965), 14–26, 118–49.


13. For the increasing public interest in the question of urban mass culture and popular entertainment, see Hashimoto, “Toshika to minshū undō,” 314–16. For an insightful analysis of Gonda’s work, see Miriam Silverberg, “Constructing the Japanese Ethnography of Modernity,” Journal of Asian Studies 51 (February 1992), 30–54. For the contemporary transformation of traditional spatialities and temporalities in Western intellectual history, see Kern, The Culture of Time and Space.


15. Gonda, Minshū goraku ron, 275–91; Gonda, Minshū goraku no kichō, 359–64.


21. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 16–30. A similar division in European film culture after World War I is suggested in Higson and Maltby, “‘Film Europe’ and ‘Film America,’” 20–22.

22. Gonda, *Minshū goraku no kichō*, 296–97; Gonda, *Minshū goraku mondai*, 74–75. The number of theaters showing mainly domestic films includes thirteen ren-sageki picture houses, which were popular in the mid-1910s. Rensageki combined stage acts and films, usually depicting outside scenes with the same cast, into a single plot.


31. The popularity of benshi is illustrated in Gonda’s 1917 survey of school children in Tokyo. In this survey, he asked what features of the movie-going experience appealed most to them other than motion pictures themselves:
music ........................................ 31.8%
other attractions (e.g., stage acts) ........ 23.7%
benshi ......................................... 11.2%
eating .......................................... 5.8%
jeering benshi ................................... 4.0%


37. For this argument, see Donald Kirihara, Patterns of Time: Mizoguchi and the 1930s (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 39–42. A major weakness of this work, which includes a rare study of interwar Japanese cinema as an industrial institution, is in its failure to consult contemporary Japanese-language sources.


43. Hoagland to Platten, 12, June 1924, 281 Motion Pictures—Japan, 1919–1925, RG 151.

44. Governor, Osaka prefecture to the home minister et al., 16 June 1924, 3.8.2.339–14, Governor, Aomori prefecture to the home minister et al., 26 June 1924, Governor, Osaka prefecture to the home minister et al., 21 August, 1924, 3.8.2.339–6–3, Gaimushō kiroku; *Katsudō kurabu*, July 1924, 36–39, 40–41, December 1924, 37; *Katsudō zasshi*, July 1924, 43, June 1925, 33; *Kokusai eiga shinbun*, 20 July 1937, 692.

45. Governor, Kanagawa prefecture to the home minister et al., 16 June 1924, 3.8.2.339–14, Governor, Saitama prefecture to the home minister et al., 16 June 1924, Governor, Hyogo prefecture to the home minister et al., 26 June 1924, Governor, Saitama prefecture to the ministry of agriculture and commerce, commercial division, and the ministry of foreign affairs, foreign commerce division, 9 July 1924,
3.8.2.339–6–3–1, Governor, Fukuoka prefecture to the home minister et al., 16 July 1924, 3.8.2.339–6–3–1–1, Gaimushō kiroku.


47. Governor, Kyoto prefecture to the home minister et al., 17 June 1924, 3.8.2.339–14, Governor, Hyogo prefecture to the home minister et al., 26 June 1924, Governor, Nagasaki prefecture to the home minister et al., 4 July 1924, 3.8.2.339–6–3–1, Governor, Hyogo prefecture to the home minister et al., 5 July 1924, 3.8.2.339–6–3, Gaimushō kiroku.


The official records on the national percentage of newly released films are as follows:

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50. See note 29 for the data on Japanese movie theaters.

51. Ibid.


54. North to J. H. Seidelman, 28 November 1927, 281 Motion Pictures—General, 1927, North to Karl C. Squire, 12 December 1927, 281 Motion Pic-

55. For Hollywood’s efforts to deal with quota legislation in Europe, see Thompson, Exporting Entertainment, 104–11, 118–21.

56. For Hollywood’s rivalry over foreign theaters in Japan during the late 1920s, see Eiga orai, October 1927, 55; Kokusai eiga shinbun, July 1928, 28–29, September 1928, 4, 5, 7–9, January 1929, 3, 18–20, 55–56, February 1929, 2, September 1929, 5, October 1929, 4, June 30, 38, September 1930, 38.


58. Thompson, Exporting Entertainment, 158–59. The phrase, “from the international category,” comes from G. F. Morgan to Kelly, 21 July 1933, William P. Philips Files, box 2, folder 3, UA. The words, “anything in its own language,” are from “Argentine Motion Picture Developments,” ca. May 1936, Wright Legal File, box 8, folder 7, UA. For United Artists’ pessimism, see minutes of a special meeting of the board of directors, 15 January 1930, annual meeting of directors, 9 April 1930, United Artists Corporation Minutes, UA.


60. The quote is taken from Thompson, Exporting Entertainment, 163.


67. See, for example, *Kaizō*, October 1931, 95.


69. *Bungei shunjū*, February 1933, 282; *Eiga to engei*, July 1934, 30–32; *Kaizō*, December 1935, 156–57; *Eiga to engei*, September 1936, 63–64.


71. *Kokusai eiga shinbun*, 20 January 1934, 3 (Tokyo section), 5 March 1934, 2 (Tokyo section), 5 April 1934, 4 (Tokyo section), 5 June 1934, 1 (Tokyo section), 20 March 1935, 3 (Tokyo section), 20 October 1935, 903. See also Tanaka, *Nihon eiga*, vol. 2, 224–49, 339. For a description of the pre-Tōhō market conditions, see A. Krisel to Kelly, 23 October 1934, Philips Files, box 2, folder 5, UA.


73. *Eiga to engei*, May 1937, 58. For the continued American interest in obtaining or building local theaters, see Krisel to Kelly, 23 October 1934, Philips Files, box 2, folder 5, Walter Gould, circular letter #74 to all producers, Walter Gould Papers, box 2, folder 7, UA; *Kokusai eiga shinbun*, 5 August 1934, 3 (Tokyo section); *Kaizō*, December 1935, 156; *Kinema*, January 1936, 46–48.

74. The quotes are from Ulff-Møller, *Hollywood’s Film Wars with France*, xvi, xvii, 157.
Chapter 4

1. Park’s essays on intercultural relations in the modern world are gathered in his *Race and Culture*. The quote is taken from page 119.


3. Governor, Osaka prefecture to the home minister et al., 21 August 1924, 3.8.2.339–6–3, Governor, Shizuoka prefecture to the home minister et al., 9 September 1924, Gaimushō; Katsudō kurabu, September 1924, 66–67.


7. For contemporary popular interest in motion pictures as cultural containers of foreign information, see also, for example, Katsudō no sekai, July 1916, 138; Katsudō kurabu, August 1922, 42–43, September 1924, 66–67; Eiga sekai, April 1928, 82. For the importance of the mass media in the modern construction of personal and cultural identities, see Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, 114–18, 179–99, 207–12.


19. Ibid., 143–45; *Kaizō*, February 1929, 69–71. For a major study of Japanese intellectual and philosophical response to the question of modernity in the interwar era, see Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*. For Hirabayashi’s affirmation of Japanese modernity, see ibid., 106–18.


23. For the conception of modernity and mass culture as an expression of the infantile and the emotionally unstable in human nature, see Giner, Mass Society, esp. 72–75, 173.


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34. For a clear feminist indictment of such gendered discourses in interwar Japan, see *Nihon eiga*, August 1937, 12–17.


37. Kaizô, February 1928, 120; Shinchô, June 1929, 126, 131–32; Chûô kôron, June 1929, 62–64. For annual lists of top-ten foreign films, see Eiga sekai, February 1928, 38–42, February 1929, 44–45. For the influence of American movies on the Japanese style of filmmaking, see Satô, Nihon eiga shi, 68–79.  


42. For Hartz’s classic argument on Americanism, see Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955).  


47. Nihon eiga, August 1937, 12–19.


Chapter 5


3. See, for example, Masao Maruyama, Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 34–51. Other insightful analyses include Gluck, Japan’s Modern Myths, esp. chaps 8–9; Harootunian, Overcome by Modernity, esp. chap. 2.


10. Eiga to engei, November 1935, 47–49; Keihokyoku [Police bureau], document #13, 3 February 1936, Keihokyokuchō kessai shorui [Papers of police bureau chiefs], Kokuritsu kö bunsho kan.

11. Nihon eiga, April 1936, 18–19.


19. Mason, *American Multinationals and Japan*, chap. 2. For a local analysis of the reluctance of Japanese studios, made by a Kodak salesman in Japan, see Boehringer to Motion Picture Division, 28 February 1939, 281 Motion Pictures—Japan, 1939–1945, RG 151.


25. Lowe to Kelly, 20 August 1937, Black Books, box 5, folder 5, UA. For similar contemporary discourses on Hollywood’s cultural power with regard to other countries, see, for example, Smith to Herron, 13 February 1935, Philips Files, box 1, folder 7, Messersmith to the Secretary of State, 11 December 1936, Wright Legal File, box 8, folder 8, UA.


28. Herron to Maxwell M. Hamilton, 23 December 1937, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/15, RG 59. For the organization and motives of the AMPA, see BFDC, Review of Foreign Film Markets during 1936, 99; Boehringer to Motion Picture Section, 8 May 1937, 281 Motion Pictures—Japan, 1926–1938, RG 151.

29. Herron to Joseph W. Ballantine, 12 January 1938, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/16, RG 59. The quotation about “a political racketeer” is from Herron to Hamilton, 29 March 1938, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/18, RG 59. For Japanese diplomats’ ignorance about the details of Kubo’s mission, see Saitō (Ambassador, United States) to Hirota (Foreign Minister), 21 December 1937, E3.7.0.J1, Yakasugi (Consul General, New York) to Hirota, 20 January 1938, Yakasugi to Ugaki (Foreign Minister), 30 August 1938, E4.5.0.48, Gaimushō kiroku.

30. Kelly to Dr. Giannini, 5 January 1938, Dr. A. H. Giannini File, box 2, folder 7, UA.

31. Herron to Ballantine, 12 January 1938, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/16, RG 59; Kelly, circular letter #103 to all stockholders & producers, 11 January 1938, Wright Legal File, box 4, folder 10, UA.


33. Herron to Wallace Murray, 16 February 1938, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/17, RG 59; Lowe to Kelly, 14 April 1938, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA; Kokusai eiga shinbun, 5 March 1938, 226, 5 November 1938, 813. The last quote is from Lowe to Kelly, 14 April 1938.

34. Herron to Kelly, 10 March 1938, Muller Legal File, box 8, folder 6, Kelly to Giannini, stockholders, directors, producers, Herron, 28 March 1938, Wright Legal File, box 4, folder 11, Lowe to Kelly, 14 April 1938, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA; Herron to Hamilton, 29 March 1938, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/18, RG 59. For an estimate of the frozen funds held by American film companies in Japan, see Boehringer, “Motion Picture Developments in Japan Proper during 1938,” 19 December 1938, 281 Motion Pictures—Japan, 1926–1938, RG 151.

35. Herron to Hamilton, 29 March 1938, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/18, RG 59. The quotations in the third sentence are from Lowe to Kelly, 14 April 1938, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA.

36. BFDC, Motion Pictures Abroad, 1 December 1938, 27. The original report, with the “strictly confidential” part missing, is Cameron, “Motion Pictures in Japan,” 6
October 1938, 840.6, Tokyo, Consulate General, RG 84. For its subsequent withdrawal from distribution, see Thomas L. Hughes to Messersmith, 1 February 1939, Golden to Foreign Commerce Service, 10 February 1939, 281 Motion Pictures—Japan, 1939–1945, RG 151.

37. Hamilton to Stanley Hornbeck, 13 April 1938, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/18, RG 59.

38. Memorandum by Hamilton, 13 April 1938, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/18, RG 59. For Herron’s telegraph to Tokyo, see Lowe to Kelly, 14 April 1938, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA.

39. Grew to the Secretary of State, 20 June 1938, 894.5151/85, RG 59. For a similar lack of corporatist cooperation between Hollywood and the U.S. government in other countries during this period, see, for example, Malcolm P. Hooper, confidential memo for the Counselor, 22 September 1938, 281 Motion Pictures—Italy, 1932–1945, RG 151.


41. The quotation is from Lowe to Kelly, 23 June 1939, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA.

42. BFDC, Motion Pictures Abroad, 1 December 1938, 22; Asahi shinbun, 8 June 1938, 2. See also Kaizō, July 1938, 258.

43. Kelly to Giannini, 25 April 1938, Giannini File, box 2, folder 7, Herron to the foreign managers, u.d. (ca. 11 May 1938), Wright Legal File, box 9, folder 5, Herron to Kelly, 9 June 1938, Lowe to Kelly, 29 June 1938, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” Lowe to Kelly, 13 August 1938, Muller Legal File, box 8, folder 6, UA; Grew to the Secretary of State, 20 November 1939, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/31, RG 59.


49. American Motion Picture Association of Japan (hereafter AMPA), minutes of meeting, 19 September 1938, Joe C. Goltz to Kelly, 2 March 1939, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA; Chairman, AMPA, to S. Ikeda, 1 October 1938, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/32, RG 59.


Chapter 6


2. AMPA, minutes of meeting, 5 April 1939, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA.

3. Nihon eiga, July 1939, 10–15. For the general trend in Japan’s increasing controls on foreign business interests, see Mason, American Multinationals and Japan, chap. 2.


7. See note 5 above. See also Boehringer, “Motion Picture Developments in Japan Proper during 1938,” 19 December 1938, 281 Motion Pictures—Japan, 1928–1938, RG 151. For new Japanese approaches regarding Manchuria, see also Herron to Kelly, 24 March 1939, AMPA, minutes of meeting, 14 April, 23 May 1939, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA.
8. See note 5 above.

9. See note 5 above. For the continuing official concern about anti-Japanese sentiments in Hollywood, see also AMPA, minutes of meeting, 10 March, 5 April 1939, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA; Cameron, “Japanese Motion Picture Law,” 894.4061 Motion Pictures/29, 30 June 1939, RG 59. The AMPA’s letter to Variety was printed in ibid., 1 March 1939, 53.

10. Goltz to Kelly, 4 April 1939, AMPA, minutes of meeting, 14 April 1939, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA.

11. AMPA, minutes of meeting, 14 April 1939, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA.


14. Chairman, AMPA, to Ikeda, 10 August 1939, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/32, RG 59.


16. Grew to the Secretary of State, 20 November 1939, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/31, RG 59. For the AMPA’s consent with Kubo’s use of bribery, see also Grew to the Secretary of State, 31 May 1940, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/43, RG 59.
17. Cabot Coville memo, 15 December 1939, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/31, Herron to the Secretary of State, 14 December 1939, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/32, RG 59.


19. Messersmith to Herron, Messersmith to Grew, 5 January 1940 [sic], 894.4061 Motion Pictures/32, RG 59.


21. Ibid.; Grew to the Secretary of State, 31 May 1940, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/43, RG 59.

22. Memorandum of Conversation, 3 January 1940, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/38, RG 59.

23. Herron to Raymond C. Mackay, 10 January 1940, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/39, Grew to the Secretary of State, 11 January 1940, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/35, Jones to Hornbeck, 15 January 1940, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/34, Cordell Hull to Grew, 16 January 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/35, RG 59.

24. Grew to the Secretary of State, 31 May 1940, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/43, RG 59.


27. Goltz to Kelly, 2 August 1940, Gould Papers, box 2, folder 7, UA. The list of motion pictures receiving official “recommendation” from the Education Ministry
between October 1939 and December 1941 can be found in *Eiga nenkan*, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Nihon eiga zasshi kyōkai, 1942; reprint, Tokyo: Nihon tosho sentā, 1994), chap. 3: 1–9.

28. Goltz to Kelly, 2 August 1940, Gould Papers, box 2, folder 7, UA; Grew to the Secretary of State, 1 November 1940, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/46, RG 59; *Eiga nenkan*, vol. 9, chap. 2: 4–5, 7–8.

29. Kelly to Goltz, 10 October 1940, AMPA, minutes of meeting, 8 October, 15 October 1940, Kelly to Herron, 11 October 1940, Liebler File, “Japanese Situation, 1938–1945,” UA.

30. Grew to the Secretary of State, 24 December 1940, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/49, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/50, RG 59. Actually, it would be revealed later that the bond purchase plan had been discussed without official knowledge as far back as November 1940. For the origins of the bond purchase plan, see Grew to the Secretary of State, 24 March 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/58, RG 59.

31. Herron to Hamilton, 2 January 1941, 8894.4061 Motion Pictures/51, RG 59.

32. Hull to Grew, 15 January 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/5L, Grew to the Secretary of State, 31 January 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/52, 24 March 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/58, James E. Perkins to Hull, 23 May 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/67, RG 59.

33. Jones memo, 6 February 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/52, Hamilton to Herron, 13 February 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/54, RG 59.

34. It was revealed later that Paramount’s local office had been instructed to purchase the bonds up to about eighty percent of its blocked funds in Japan. Herron to Hamilton, 14 February 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/54, Carl R. Milliken to Hamilton, 26 March 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/57, RG 59.

35. Grew to the Secretary of State, 7 March 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/56, Hamilton to Herron, 17 March 1941, 894.4061/Motion Pictures 56, RG 59.

36. Hamilton to Milliken, 2 April 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/57, Grew to the Secretary of State, 24 March 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/58, Coville, memorandum of conversation, 21 May 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/69, Perkins to Hull, 23 May 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/67, RG 59.
37. Grew to the Secretary of State 24 March 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/58, Max Schmidt, memorandum of conversation, 6 May 1941, Frederick Livesey memo, 6 May 1941, Hornbeck memo, 8 May 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/61, RG 59.

38. Grew to the Secretary of State, 8 August, 2 September 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/63, 72, RG 59; Eiga nenkan, vol. 9, chap.2: 15, 17. For the official efforts to increase ideological control over domestic film companies, see Katō Atsuko, “Eigahō shikō ikō ni okeru eiga tōsei: eiga shintaisei o chūshin ni [Film control and the new film order after the enactment of the film law],” Media shi kenkyū [Media history] 10 (October 2000): 37–50.


40. Grew to the Secretary of State, 13 June 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/62, RG 59; Alfred Katz to H. W. Schroeder, 7 January, 4 February, 5 February 1941, Gould Papers, box 2, folder 7, UA; Grew to the Secretary of State, 20 August, 22 August 1941, 894.4061 Motion Pictures/65, 66, RG 59; Eiga nenkan, vol. 9, chap. 2: 4–5, 7–8.

41. BFDC, Review of Foreign Film Markets during 1938, 305.

42. Nihon eiga, September 1941, 52–67, November 1941, 28–32. See also Kaizō, September 1941, 148–54.


Conclusion

1. Cook and Cook, Japan at War, 246–47. The original line in Chaplin’s final speech is “Look up, Hannah! The clouds are lifting! The sun is breaking out! We are coming out of the darkness into the light!”


5. For a discussion of the “Europeanization of American culture,” see, for example, Pells, Not Like Us, chap.11.


8. Iriye’s quotation is from his Power and Culture, 268. Gluck’s quotations are from her Japan’s Modern Myth, 261, 284. The U.S. diplomat’s observation is taken from Iriye, Power and Culture, 211–12.


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