

# Asian Sound Cultures

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Voice, Noise, Sound, Technology

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## Chapter 7

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### Listening to the talkies

*Atarashiki tsuchi's* (1937) acoustic construction  
of Japan for western consumption

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## 7 Listening to the talkies

### *Atarashiki tsuchi*'s (1937) acoustic construction of Japan for western consumption

*Iris Haukamp*

#### Introduction

On 3 February 1937, prominent musician Miyagi Michio<sup>1</sup> attended the premiere of the much-discussed film *Atarashiki tsuchi* (New Earth aka The Samurai's Daughter, Fanck and Itami) in Tokyo's Imperial Theatre:

I don't go to listen to the talkies very often, and therefore don't know much about them, but when 'New Earth' was shown at the Teikoku Gekijō [theatre], I had also been invited. There were many prominent people there that night, and I could feel the presence of gentlemen and ladies in the atmosphere.<sup>2</sup>

(Miyagi 1972)

The location's splendour mirrored the anticipations layered onto the film to be screened that evening: Lauded as 'Japan first export film' and international co-production, it was supposed to open Western markets to the products of Japan's extremely prolific but internationally under-appreciated film industry.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, it was to project the correct image of the country that had become an exotic trope of foreign cultural representation.<sup>4</sup> Set in 1936 Japan, *Atarashiki tsuchi* (1937) tells the story of Teruo (Isamu Kosugi), a young Japanese man who returns home from his agricultural studies in Germany.<sup>5</sup> His costly education was only possible through the Japanese custom of 'adopting a son-in-law' (*mukō yōshi*), and he is thus expected to marry his wealthy adopted father's daughter, Mitsuko (Hara Setsuko). Having learned the value of the pursuit of individual aspiration while abroad, he asks his adopted father to release him from the arrangement. This rejection of his native culture and the marriage worries his families (including his birth parents and sisters) and his German friend, the journalist Gerda Storm (Ruth Eweler), who accompanied him to Japan for an article about the country. The remainder of the film is dedicated to Teruo's 'reconversion' to his Japanese-ness, pushed and pulled by Gerda's admonishments, his birth sister showing him around 'traditional' Japan, a priest's teachings, and finally through Mitsuko's attempted suicide on a volcano. After the lengthy rescue scene, during which Teruo proves his worth, the young couple relocates to Manchuria, the 'new

earth' of the film's Japanese title, to participate in Japan's 'enormous task of developing the country', as Teruo explains it to Gerda.<sup>6</sup>

Eventually, there was little satisfaction with the representation of contemporary Japan on the screen, but the outstanding cinematography and beautiful shots of the national landscape were unanimously praised. Some even argued that the beauty of the shots disguised the ideologically problematic content as well as the film's mediocracy, statements that account for a shared understanding of the power of the image. Yet, when Miyagi encountered *Atarashiki tsuchi*, it was not Fanck's impressive visuals that he was concerned with. A pioneer in the modern development of the *koto* (Japan's 13-stringed zither), Miyagi had turned to music after losing his eyesight due to an illness at the age of eight.<sup>7</sup> His sensitivity towards sound and his previous experience as a film composer made him well aware of film sound as constructed: 'Two years ago, J.O. Talkie [Studio] asked me to compose for *Kaguya hime* [Princess Kaguya, 1935, Tanaka and Aoyagi].<sup>8</sup> Here, I understood for the first time that they record the music and dialogue first, and only then make the images to match' (Miyagi 1972). Miyagi's thoughts on what he heard that evening opens up a space to think about *Atarashiki tsuchi*'s acoustic representation of Japan in the context of a purpose-driven and ideologically charged process of cultural translation. His account is one of only a few concerned with sound;<sup>9</sup> a gap that illustrates the often-commented-on oversight of film's acoustic component. Yet, I find this omission curious: *Atarashiki tsuchi* occurred at the watershed of the relatively late, full transition to sound in Japan,<sup>10</sup> and it was supposed to showcase and promote Japanese filmmaking skills in an international context. Thus, sound was crucial, and the film was produced by the J.O. Studios with strong ties to P.C.L. (Photo Chemical Laboratory), a small high-tech studio that had established itself particularly for its sound technology. Yamada Kōsaku, one of Japan's most prominent composers at the time, also participated in the project. Hence, sound should have played a more prominent role in the lively discourse surrounding the production, but all emphasis was placed on the invited foreign director's photographic imagery.

In this chapter, I take my cue from Miyagi and consider the acoustic construction of Japan in *Atarashiki tsuchi* and the purposes behind it, keeping in mind that sound evokes strong emotional responses in the audience and shapes their interpretations. I will focus on the sound choices in the 'German-Japanese' version, scripted and directed by Fanck for an anticipated German audience. His Japanese co-director, Itami Mansaku, had contested Fanck's image of Japan in the script and in order not to endanger the costly, high-prestige project, the producers decided to have them each make their own version, from the same script, at the same locations, and with the same actors (Haukamp 2020, 53–84). While both were released in Japan, Fanck's used Japanese and German for the dialogue, whereas Itami had his actors speak English and Japanese; his version was later presented, unsuccessfully, for distribution in the US. Fanck's, however, is closest to the original blueprint as well as the most consciously shaped towards a specific, foreign audience.

The chapter then takes a three-part approach to the acoustic construction of Japan, beginning with the musical score. Daibō has examined Yamada Kōsaku's compositions for the film (2010), but as Miyagi's article shows, other scores found their way into the project as well, and I will consider the music regarding the objective of constructing a specific image of Japan for a Western audience. However, Miyagi also comments on the other two components of film sound: voice and noise (sound effects).<sup>11</sup> These, like the music, were carefully chosen, created, recorded, and added to the soundtrack, and the latter parts of this chapter examine their functions. The specificities of the acoustic construction of 'Japan' in a film written, directed, and edited by a white man, specifically invited to represent Japan to the West, support the argument that sound is crucial to proliferate and challenge the Empire (cf. regarding music: Radano and Olaniyan 2016). *Atarashiki tsuchi*, however, was also a co-production between two countries articulated as 'friends' and 'equals' within a discourse aimed at political and military collaboration. The resulting sound film was impacted by various ambitions and agendas but, despite the financial and artistic input from the Japanese side, it was eventually skewed towards the meanings intended for a German audience, revealing the underlying imbalance regarding cultural power and authority in this encounter.

After the Tokyo premiere, the question of how contemporary Japan was represented by this foreign director was at the forefront of the discourse (Haukamp 2020, 107–156). In an unexpected turn of events, however, it was Itami's version that was shown that evening—and that Miyagi listened to. It was only replaced by Fanck's one week later. Fanck returned to Germany to prepare for his version's premiere in Berlin, where it was titled *Die Tochter des Samurai* (The Samurai's Daughter), mobilising preconceived notions about Japan—exotic femininity and mighty warriors—that the Japanese side had intended to challenge.<sup>12</sup> This tension between lived reality, auteurial perception, and purpose-driven interpretation also impacted the soundtrack.

## Music

There was a scene where tea was being prepared and I heard a *koto* accompanying it. This appeared to have been taken from one of my records. Perhaps because of how the sound was magnified, it trembled, and it felt as if all the rough parts came out [clearly]. I broke out in a cold sweat. Had they consulted me, I would have played that piece differently in that situation.

(Miyagi 1972)

When watching *Atarashiki tsuchi* with students, they often remark on the over-presence of music. One of the project's stated objectives was to evoke affectionate understanding and to represent Japan and its culture, and music is able to fulfil both by guiding our affective response towards the events on

the screen and by marking cultural difference. Furthermore, Fanck was not a great scriptwriter: ‘Fanck is the only person in the world able to make nature’s great feelings and sensations come alive [but] is neither a master of narrative films nor famous for depicting a national character’ (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 1935). Hence, perhaps, the idea to mobilise the power of music to supplement the landscape shots and help represent Japan’s ‘national character’. When it comes to international encounters, music has been said to provide a common language and thus overcome cultural barriers. However, it is also a major stage for processes of othering. In the case of Japanese music encountering the West, ‘[t]he cultural conservatism of sound is far stronger than that of seeing’ (Naitō 2005, cited in Yasar 2018, 70). Western music entered the country from the Meiji Period (1868–1912) onwards,<sup>13</sup> but the reverse was not true. As a German reviewer of *Atarashiki tsuchi* notes: ‘If anything can bring the people of the world together it is music, as its language facilitates easy communication. When it comes to Japanese music, however, this communication is quite impossible ... it would have presented the European ear with an impossible task’ (Martin 1937).<sup>14</sup> His judgement—while more courteous—is in line with accounts by Westerners describing the music of the Japanese Noh theatre, for instance, as “‘cacophonous” and “discordant”” (Naitō 2005, cited in Yasar 2018, 70). Establishing a clear line between ‘order/culture’ and ‘chaos/nature’, the Orientalist notions at work here are obvious. Martin then continues to praise composer Yamada’s skilful circumvention of the problem by making ‘traditional’ music more digestible via dilution (‘presenting it carefully’) and by having mastered the ‘modern music’—Western music, the proliferation of which, in Japan, is also due to ‘many German musicians’ (Martin 1937). While the adoption of ‘modern’ music can be attributed partly to Western musicians, even if one was inclined to overlook the Orientalist ascription of ‘progress’ to the self, Yamada was crucial for bringing European music to a Japanese audience. Following his studies in Germany, he pioneered in composing symphonies and orchestral pieces, and soon began merging European and Japanese classical conventions (Gōto 2014; Katayama 2007).<sup>15</sup> His 1921 fusion of Japanese traditional music and Western orchestration, ‘Sinfonia Inno Meiji’ (Kōkyōkyoku ‘Meiji shōka’) opens Fanck’s *Atarashiki tsuchi* with its haunting sounds of the *hichiriki* reed wind instrument, and it also combines the traditional court music (*gagaku*) with a big orchestra. This blend denotes ‘contemporary Japan’ well, but the opening uses only about one minute of the 18-minute piece, with the distinctive *hichiriki* taking the lead. Hence, the first impression of Japan here consolidates imaginations of the never-changing Other.

What I would like to focus on from here, however, is the music not composed by Yamada—such as the *koto* piece Miyagi mentioned. These undiscussed replacements reflect the multiplicity of agendas at work in the production, which often led to conflict and inconsistencies, and also emphasise the film’s message regarding the ‘true nature’ of Japan for Fanck’s intended German audience. *Atarashiki tsuchi* uses music to express culture, but also cultural clashes. In his review, Martin writes that the score’s

contrasting of ‘modern’ and ‘traditionally Japanese’ serves to ‘deepen the [representation of the] young Japanese man’s struggle and make it clearly understandable’ (1937). Teruo’s struggle of feeling torn between two worlds finds its musical climax at the end of the first act, in a bar. The two worlds, West and East, modern and traditional, are here expressed through music (and women and alcohol). The first shot shows a dance bar, and the camera tracks through the foxtrotting couples, to finally reveal Teruo sitting at a small table; a Japanese hostess is pouring sake for him. The lively jazz music fits the upbeat atmosphere and the camera pans with Teruo gazing to the right and to a small jazz band.<sup>16</sup> He looks very much at ease in this environment, corroborating the image of the suit-clad, bilingual cosmopolite. This feeling of borderlessness is visualised by the international dancing couples on the floor, overwhelmingly Japanese taxi dancers with mainly Western partners, and acoustically established by the choice of music, namely jazz—a choice as fitting as it is political:

By the time Japanese began wrestling with jazz (part of the second wave of musical Westernization) in the 1920s, they relied on musical skills instilled during the first such wave ... Jazz thus represented a challenge to a music culture whose values had been thoroughly refashioned, in quite recent memory, to reflect the technical and aesthetic standards of European composed music.

(Atkins 2001, 49)

The music in this scene contrasts with Yamada’s compositions, but is still concerned with nationalised hierarchies. Jazz as the liberating overcoming of barriers was a common discourse in many countries from the 1920s onwards. ‘Cigarettes and jazz ... spun to the fast beats of global capitalism and imperialism’ as Enstad demonstrates with regard to interwar Shanghai (2016, 46). Her account of how members of the expatriate community both produced and consumed these commodities that also attracted elite Chinese consumers evokes the culturally and racially liberated (although still always unequal) atmosphere of that time and of that city. An echo of these ‘vibes’ can also be felt in the bar in Tokyo: As Teruo listens to the jazz, he is even smoking the all-important cigarette. This topic is strengthened by a Western hostess—perhaps one of the Russian taxi dancers often working in Japanese dance halls (Atkins 2001, 56)—coming to his table. By pushing away the sake and offering him a martini, a distinctly Western drink, she sets up a relationship of opposition and competition between East and West instead of the smooth syncretism evoked at the beginning. The soundtrack takes up and corroborates this new discourse: A pretty, young shamisen player wearing a kimono enters the bar and comes to Teruo’s table, her instrument’s sound clashing vigorously with the jazz. A brief moment of silence then sets up the acoustic climax of the scene and of the protagonist’s dilemma. As she starts singing and playing her shamisen, the jazz band gets going, too, with neither common ground nor harmony between the two styles. The soundtrack’s

jarringness is empathetic to the visuals, and vice versa: The rapid editing between close-up shots on the band, Teruo, the shamisen player, and multi-layered superimpositions of a disco ball and spinning dancers echoes and amplifies the sense of confusion created by the music. The final medium close-up on Teruo's pained face amid the cacophony in the room and his mind clearly indicates that it is either/or: the West, individualism, cosmopolitanism, jazz, and martinis, or the pure face and innocent sound of Japanese traditions. We can feel his dilemma and the clash of cultures not only through empathy but also due to the audiovisual signals directly and painfully affecting us.

The use of music taps into a shared discourse, which made the motif of cultural incompatibilities relatable to both Japanese and German audiences. In both countries, jazz had become a symbol of modernism, and with the tides changing towards a nationalist and protectionist discourse that drew on shared pasts and imagined traditions, it became a topic within conservative circles. While jazz was never fully banned in either country (Atkins 2001, 127–32; Fackler 1994), it did undergo some transformations—such as adding more domestic elements or evolving towards swing—to make it more palatable for the powers that be, leading to a second jazz wave in the mid-1930s (Fackler 1994, 439).<sup>17</sup> Yet, the musical style also carried other undesirable connotations apart from 'foreignness' and 'Americanisation'. The urban decadence associated with 1920s Berlin or Tokyo provided an ideal target for nationalists and militarists. As Atkins points out, as the economic crisis impacted rural farming communities severely, urbanites spending money in dance halls, and dance halls themselves, 'became potent symbols of the widening cultural gap between urban and rural Japanese, a gulf that ultranationalist leaders exploited skilfully in their rise to political prominence' (2001, 73). Jazz's 'subversion of the German national character's moral strength' also played an increasing role after 1933 (Fackler 1994, 438). A return to tradition discursively provided the appropriate counterforce, as heard with the shamisen sounds in the bar scene, and thus *Atarashiki tsuchi* clearly fits the trend—in German discourse, too—that the '1930s saw the movie screen take on the didactic function of awakening cosmopolitan Japanese to the glories of their own culture' (Davis 1996, 45). The loudspeakers took on this function as well.

In this sense, it is unsurprising that the ideologically appropriate solution to Teruo's dilemma is announced by, firstly, the absence of all sound, clearing the overstimulated ears and mind, and then by the slow, rhythmic drums and bells accompanying *sutra* chanting, as Teruo's father prays for his son in front of a Buddha statue. From now on, Teruo will return to his roots, and the soundtrack focusses on traditionally Japanese music, such as the *koto* in the tea ceremony described by Miyagi, Yamada's syncretic orchestra compositions or, finally, his song about 'our land' to be discovered in the West, across the ocean ('Aoi sora mirya'). The music in Fanck's *Atarashiki tsuchi* constructs Japan as, first, inherently foreign and other, then as torn between superficial and unfitting Western and deeply buried indigenous ideas, and finally as returning to its authentic, traditional self. This development is in

line with nationalist ideas circulating both in Germany and Japan, while at the same time safely confining Japan within age-old traditions, regardless of its outward modernity. The final song's lyrics extend Japan westwards to the puppet state Manchukuo<sup>18</sup> only for its Japanese audiences. But, still, the German viewers would have linked the up-beat melody with the visual cues and thus read the expansionist discourse that linked both countries.

## Noise

Someone told me that Mt. Fuji and cherry blossoms were shown, but I couldn't grasp it. But then the sound of the waves began. It came through well, but it seemed to be the sound of a very large wave, and I wished I could hear the sound of smaller waves, too.

(Miyagi 1972)

The proliferation of music to the detriment of (background) noise in *Atarashiki tsuchi* places the film firmly within an interesting movement. In the very early stages of sound film, a reactive move against the musical accompaniment during silent film screenings 'banished' music for a while: '[T]hey called on music only if the action justified it as diegetic. The sparsity of music made room for noises on what was a very narrow strip for optical sound' (Chion 1994, 161). But music came back in the mid-1930s, pushing noise out, reducing it to 'stylised, coded sound effects', rather than providing an acoustic verisimilitude of life (ibid.). Tasaka observes a similar development in early Japanese sound films (2020, 269). By now, the composers were well-versed in expressing the sonic environment through music:

composers considered it the mission of the musical score to reconstruct the aural universe, and to tell in its own way the story of the raging storm, the meandering stream, or the hubbub of city life by resorting to an entire arsenal of familiar orchestral devices developed over the past century and a half.

(Chion 1994, 146)

This 'sense of mission' was one more factor for composer Yamada's indignation regarding the 'mistreatment' of his compositions: 'the musical accompaniment throughout the scenes on the mountain has been deliberately drowned out with the reverberations of the rumbling volcano in a most regrettable fashion' (1937, 39). He saw the main reasons in 'the imperfections in the function of motion picture production in Japan and the lack of musical perception on the part of the film editor' (1937, 38), but really it was director Fanck. It is fair to say that Fanck, with his photographic eye, was not very interested in sound,<sup>19</sup> as one of his comments about his first impressions of Japan illustrates:

When one travels through a Japanese town for the first time, one doubtlessly is disappointed. I too felt there is nothing uglier than a big city in Japan ... I saw telephone pole after telephone pole, electric line after electric line [and for] any Westerner who is invited and comes to Japan, this completely destroys the fairy-tale image.

(Fanck 1937b)

As Hall and Smith also point out in their chapters in this volume, unlike its serene reputation, the urban Japan that Fanck encountered was noisy; still, Fanck had his visual, not his acoustic stereotype shattered.

Clearly, the noise that did make it onto *Atarashiki tsuchi*'s soundtrack, was chosen very consciously. It is quite significant in this regard that the film opens with a bird's eye view of Japan, approaching a miniature Mount Fuji and then cutting to smoking volcanoes. Yamada's orchestral piece here introduces percussions that evoke the characteristic rumbling of an eruption—demonstrating the composer's sensitivity to the merging of image and sound as well as locating him within the trend discerned by Chion. The following scene mixes music and natural noise, as waves break on rocky shores and the wind blows across snowfields. After this exposition, we are presented with the bucolic farmhouse of the protagonist's birth family, their dialogue replacing the noise on the soundtrack.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the film resists the trope of introducing an exotic country by emphasising its 'noisiness' in order to denote the associated unruliness and chaos (Weidmann 2016, 314–319). By the same token of relative serenity, however, for a film intended to break stereotypes, its exposition scene (re-)locates the modern country that Fanck had encountered firmly within an idyllic image of nature and traditional, rural life. This tension is based in Japan and Germany's particular positioning *vis-à-vis* each other as well as within a larger Orientalist discourse, and in Fanck's agenda for making *Atarashiki tsuchi*.

It is only later that the soundtrack introduces 'modern' noise.

There was a scene with a sleeping car in *Atarashiki tsuchi*, and, to me, the train's sound came through very well. It appeared to be the sound of the train that runs between Nagoya and Kōbe, but of course that is unlikely. The train's sound was good, but the sound of the car [later in the film] was probably a bit too loud.

(Miyagi 1972)

On further examination, in many instances the film distinguishes very clearly and politically between 'natural' and 'man-made' noise; the former, such as waves, the wind, and the volcano's rumbling denoting 'traditional'; the latter, such as the train, car, and a brief instance of 'Tokyo ambient sound', including trams, cars, and the murmur of the urban crowd, denoting 'modern'. A complication arises from the fact that sounds such as the temple bell in the film's second act of Teruo's reconversion to his essential Japaneseness seem to fall under the category of 'natural' in terms of it

being associated with Japan's traditional (in a nationalist discourse: natural) environment. On the other hand, the horn of the ocean liner that brings Teruo and his Western ideas to Japan is associated with modernity, international mobility, technological advancement, but also, ultimately, the influx of disruptive foreign ideas.

The first act takes up the discourse of Japan as an industrialised nation as if to counterpoint the image of traditional Japan: We hear the rattling sound of the ship's engine together with Teruo and Gerda as they visit the machine room. The sound is so loud that both have to raise their voices:

*Gerda:* Wonderful, such a machine, right? ... Won-der-ful, such a ma-chi-ne!!!

*Teruo:* WE built this! And woe to our old Nippon, if we hadn't learned this from YOU at the very last moment! Otherwise, there wouldn't be a free Japan today!

The film then cuts to impressive shots from inside a steelwork that produces steel bars 'Made in Japan', with the soundtrack consisting entirely of the hammering, clanking, and hissing of industrial work. The next scene is of a large-scale silk mill, and the young female workers' song is underscored by the sound of wafts and pressing machines. At first glance, this advancement from natural to industrial sound seems to reflect a discourse on Japan's successful modernisation, which is then carried over to the film's very last act, as Teruo ploughs the wide, fertile plains of colonial Manchukuo with his Komatsu tractor, the noise of which mingles with his song. The film's soundtrack thus appears to resonate the four stages of cinematic Orientalism that Yomota delineates: The initial stage in typical films made by Westerners about Japan, such as Fritz Lang's *Harakiri* (1919; based on *Madam Butterfly*), presents a Western male rescuing a Japanese female from her country's pre-modern traditions. The second, often overlapping stage is characterised by the 'beautiful Japanese woman' as a discursive topic and marketing device, activating the Western male gaze in innumerable geisha-themed films. The 'reverse stage' (*sakadachi dankai*) is based in a psychological perversion occurring in Japan as the target of Orientalism: Striving to achieve modernity and catch up with the West, Japan perceives modernisation as being grounded in masculinity. In its quest to internalise this masculine power and take control over its own image, Japan takes on representing itself, but as feminine; the masculine task of Orientalist representation is still incomplete. This 'lack' is remedied in the fourth and final 'transference' stage: Japan perceives itself as having arrived at the stage of modernity, equated with Western masculinity. For continuous (self-) confirmation, Japan now applies 'stage one' to its neighbouring Asian countries, controlling their and its own image via the metaphor of gendered domination (Yomota 2000, 303–306). With *Atarashiki tsuchi* having been commissioned and largely financed by the Japanese side, this taking control of one's own image relates to the more active stage three, and the tractor's penetration of the colonised soil

completes stage four. Yet, the project's international nature complicates this interpretation:

The aforementioned dialogue about the ship's engine introduces another Orientalist gaze, that of the invited foreigner. If the industrial sounds are due to German knowledge and tutelage, this puts Germany firmly in the place of the 'bringer of civilisation'. Germany and Japan, however, were not in a colonial relationship. As Teruo says, Japan 'escaped' colonialisation through last-minute modernisation. Germany and Japan were new political and military allies, and both were late industrialisers. Hence, presenting Japan as a strong, capable nation was important. On the other hand, nativist discourses in both countries promised salvation and, paradoxically, progress through a return to one's imagined roots. This is expressed in Teruo rediscovering his true self in purely Japanese surroundings and soundscapes, such as geisha performances and his father's paddy field. However, Germany as embodied by Gerda acts as a friendly, all-knowing mentor. The machine sounds are due to 'you' (Gerda/Germany/the anticipated German audience), and she comments on the sounds of soldiers marching in step through the streets of Tokyo as indicative of Teruo needing to let go of his individualist delusion.

Hence, the noise in *Atarashiki tsuchi* addresses shared discourses on the benefits and dangers of modernisation and globalisation, recognisable by both German and Japanese audiences. Yet, due to the unacknowledged power position of the invited Westerner, subtle racial hierarchies bolstering German feelings of superiority are maintained. And there was resistance to this discourse on the level of sound editing in Itami's version: Reminiscent of the volcano's noise drowning out the music, here the ship engine obliterates the dialogue about the origin of Japan's progress. While it is impossible to discern directorial intention from technological issues, the tempering of the Orientalist trope is remarkable, demonstrating the relative power of the oftentimes neglected noise on the soundtrack.

## Voice

Also, and this is not limited to the impression I got from listening to *Atarashiki tsuchi*: If one person is talking and facing me, while another person is talking and facing the opposite direction, it still sounds to me as if both are facing me. Other sounds that should be far away are too close and sounds that should be weak are too loud. When someone's voice is replaced by someone else, it feels incongruous.

(Miyagi 1972)

Speech posed an interesting and timely challenge for *Atarashiki tsuchi* as an international co-production that aimed at presenting an authentic image of Japan and fostering understanding. When the heard voice took the silver screen by storm, it engendered both enthusiasm and criticism. Apart from concerns about an aesthetic regression of the purely visual art towards

theatrical conventions, sound also complicated the idea of cinema as a universally understood medium due to its reliance on the seemingly transparent image. Hirabayashi articulates this in the Japanese context by means of comparison to the novel and argues that film presents the image directly to the audience, instead of the audience constructing the image out of the word (2018 [1932], 260–261). Hence, ‘film’s language is, as it were, the world’s language’ (2018 [1932], 261). It was the speech that turned ‘cinema’ into a national cinema: ‘A talking picture ... became the prisoner of its own language’ (Dibbets 1996, 213). One tactic for setting the prisoner free—dubbing—was regarded with suspicion, as it laid open dissonances between form and content. The visible split between language and nationality due to the unavoidable asynchronicity between the lip movements and the sounds heard by the audience prevents immersion and emphatic understanding. If, as also pointed out in Kim’s chapter in this volume, film is a ‘voccocentric or, more precisely, a verbocentric phenomenon’ (Chion 1994, 148), voice is crucial for the impact on the audience. For a deceptively simple film—often judged merely by its plotline—*Atarashiki tsuchi*’s use of voice, I argue, is complex and ambitious: We can observe synchronous and post-recording, dubbed voice-over narration, subtitling, and (perfectly and imperfectly) spoken Japanese, German, and English.

In its heterolingualism, the film follows three conventions: When we are introduced to the story, Teruo’s birth family discusses his return in Japanese. This dialogue—presumably unintelligible for the majority of the intended foreign audience—is translated via German subtitles,<sup>21</sup> a strategy kept throughout the film. In the next scene, Teruo explains the ‘character’ of the Japanese people to Gerda in accented German. The use of German in the presence of one of the two German characters is established here as another convention and made believable by Teruo having studied in Germany, his fiancée Mitsuko taking German lessons, and Teruo’s adoptive father Yamato Iwao (played by former Hollywood star Hayakawa Sessue) being educated upper-class. Before moving on towards the third strategy, German voice-over, I shall examine the concept of using these two languages for a film that was to be screened in Japan as well as Germany, where at least one language was unintelligible for most of the audience and thus required subtitling.

As mentioned before, dubbing’s split between form and content figured prominently in the discourse on film export. Fanck tapped into this discourse when he wrote on the challenges of Japanese export film, based on his experience with *Atarashiki tsuchi*:

There is no chance at all in a picture which is spoken entirely in Japanese. What is more, one which is dubbed in foreign language afterward or super-imposed picture is no good. We cannot think of dubbing Japanese into European language. There is, of course, a technical difficulty such as the disagreement of the movement of the lips. But, what do you think if a Japanese peasant spoke suddenly French.<sup>22</sup>

(Fanck 1937a, 27)

Keeping in mind that initially all dissonance between form and content as signified by the off-sync lip movements was criticised, the greater schism being attributed to the ‘gap’ between Japan and France, rather than, say, Spain and France, clearly introduces a racial bias. But the matter at hand was also one of authenticity regarding both audiences’ experiences, the unity of the actor/character seen, and the voice heard. Since the film gives plausible motivation for the character’s respective language abilities, I would argue that its linguistic flexibility allows for an authentic ‘spoken landscape’. Initially, Fanck had been opposed to using any language other than Japanese in order to ensure authenticity: Because of the ‘one hundred per-cent Japanese’ topic, it would be ‘absurd to make “versions” in which the Japanese suddenly speak German or English. What is spoken must be comprehensible without the actual words, but through the simple plot, the unambiguous situation and the clear mimic expression’ (Fanck 1935). While this statement on the one hand reflects a certain provinciality, the question remains about the reason for this change in plans.

Firstly, this strategy was not as unusual as it seems. Early on in the discourse on sound, film critic Balázs linked the notions of the sound of voice, authenticity, and the impact on the audience: ‘In film, what attracts our interest is less what a person says than the sound of his voice. In dialogue, too, what is decisive is not the content, but the acoustic, sensuous impression’ (2010 [1930], 195). He cites *Melodie des Herzens* (Melody of the Heart, 1929, Schwarz), in which the protagonists speak German while the ‘people’ speak Hungarian, establishing ‘the image of an original landscape, an acoustic location shot, a linguistic landscape’ (Balázs 2010 [1930], 195). Thus, one of the first feature-length German sound films<sup>23</sup> was heterolingual, albeit denying the Hungarian ‘people’ intelligibility; they are part of the landscape. In contrast, in P.C.L.’s first international co-production, the Burmese-Japanese *Japan Yin Thwe/Nippon Musume* (Japanese Darling, 1935, Nyi Pu), all dialogue is accessible, using Burmese subtitles for scenes with English or Japanese dialogue and Japanese subtitles for Burmese and English lines (Ferguson 2018, 278), thus ‘failing’ to set up nationalised hierarchies qua the intelligibility/unintelligibility binary. *Atarashiki tsuchi* follows this strategy, and, like *Japan Yin Thwe*, introduces a foreign character.

Gerda Storm is a later addition to the script with two interrelated functions. Firstly, her interactions with the Japanese characters represent the topical notion of German-Japanese (military) friendship as indicated by Iwao’s lines spoken in German: ‘Go and tell your country that here, in the Far East, a nation on its rocky island is keeping watch. This storm will break on its walls’; the storm refers to the communist threat the military agreement was directed against. Secondly, she is a concession to German viewers, and not only regarding language: The introduction of a German character facilitates their emphatic involvement, even more so because Gerda learns with the audience about the strange country. However, she did not prepare for her journey by learning the language. While she does attempt to speak Japanese once, after a few stumbled words, her host Yamato Iwao graciously invites

her to just speak German—in German. Having the other learn the language of the ‘coloniser’, albeit imperfectly so as not to pose a threat, is indeed a familiar notion. It also ensures German viewers that the effort of communication will be borne by the Japanese allies.<sup>24</sup> Following Sonnenschein’s categorisation of accent—along with nonsense sounds and technical jargon—as ‘pure acoustical characteristics’ that can be used in sound design to ‘release the analytic mind-set into a more feeling mode’ (2011, 137–138), accent is here used to evoke the affective response abroad.

However, the ‘feeling mode’ was rejected for other scenes as it could have been detrimental to a different objective. Returning to the primacy of voice in early films, Chion observes that ‘one element that remains constrained to perpetual clarity and stability ... is dialogue. We seem to have to understand each and every word, from beginning to end, and not one word had better be skipped’ (1994, 170). This points towards speech’s other meaning, namely the verbal one, describing the speaker’s experience, often associated with the brain’s more logical, left hemisphere (Sonnenschein 2011, 138). In the crucial scene in which Teruo explains Japan’s mission in Manchukuo in German—‘This land could feed many more people, if it was just properly cultivated’—only his voice is present on the soundtrack. It seems curious to dispense with the subliminal potential of music or noise to further the audience’s emotional response; for example, by denoting the region’s ‘noisy’ backwardness or the benefits of Japan’s technology, such as the sounds of the trains, planes, and tractors shown on the screen. However, this key message had to be absolutely clear. Not only did the exclusivity of ‘voice’ here prevent acoustic clashes during sound editing, it also addressed the audience’s rational consciousness, logically explaining the need for military expansion, corroborated by the corresponding images.

The same strategy, taken even further, occurs in two other key moments in which the film rejects any potentially undermining accent altogether and mobilises the clarity and authority of voice-over narration. Both moments are lines of dialogue by Japanese characters—a priest and Teruo’s birth father—and both could also be described as merely dubbed by a male, German voice. In this sense, they are, strictly speaking, ‘dialogue issuing from characters in the action’ (Chion 1994, 171) and thus, like Teruo’s lines described above, ‘theatrical speech’ (*ibid.*). However, for the release in Germany, Fanck chose to have the initial Japanese dialogue change into German. The lines were likely recorded in Germany, but with different equipment resulting in a much clearer sound quality than the Japanese speech. The acoustic contrast between diegetic and seemingly extradiegetic speech resembles the ‘textual speech’ (Chion 1994, 171) of the classical voice-over commentaries: ‘Textual speech has the power to make visible the images that it evokes through sound—that is, to change the setting, to call up a thing, moment, place, or characters at will’ (172).

As mentioned before, a temple bell signals the narrative turn from Teruo’s infatuation with Western ideas and towards his re-becoming Japanese. We hear the bell again as he visits the priest who taught him in his youth.

After greeting each other in Japanese, they walk silently through the temple grounds, the only sound heard is that of *mokugyō* ('wooden fish'), a rounded, wooden gong with fish carvings, used at Buddhist temples. Its very distinct, rhythmic percussion sets the stage, creates tension, and underscores the priest's speech to Teruo, now suddenly in German. The sound of his voice has changed dramatically, and there is no establishing shot. The lines flow, bodiless and visually unanchored, through the soundtrack, as the camera does through the temple. It is perhaps the sound occupying a strange middle ground between the two types of acousmatic film sound (Chion 1994, 171–173) that accounts for the slightly disorientating but powerful effect: the sound's cause is not a secret (it is the priest), but neither has this specific sound been visualised first, allowing the image to be associated with the offscreen sound. The speech is about the necessity of adopting things of use from the technologically advanced but restless West, so that 'our aged Nippon will be able to contend in the nations' struggle over the world's [living] space'. However, he cautions that each individual, however insignificant in the stream of ancestors and history, 'is responsible for what came before him and what will come after him'. This eternal entity 'is Japan', and this understanding, he stresses, is the principle of Japanese cultural identity and to be summarised as 'Shintō'. Fanck claims that he was introduced to Shintō in Germany and used it in his film due to similarities to the German situation (Fanck 1935). Despite some resemblance, such as the subjugation of individual desires for the service to the state, the priest's speech not only is *in* German, it *is* German. The rhetoric of one being just 'one small link in the long chain of ancestors and descendants' (verbatim used by the priest) was a mainstay in National-Socialist ideology (Haukamp 2020, 110–113). The German voice relates it to, and thus corroborates, the German audience's context, not merely by means of comparison but by a process of identification that is forced through the use of 'pure' German language.

Similarly, in the last scene set in Japan, Teruo's birth father, a farmer, speaks to the newlywed couple as they are overlooking small paddy fields. His lines begin in Japanese, but suddenly the German voice-over sets in, floating over the shots of manual labour. His voice commandeers the images of people working in the fields, and the lack of any technology establishes the idea of timelessness, hard labour for the sake of Nippon, since eternity. Then, however, he insists that 'now, we are too many. We are too many, Teruo my son'. Immediately after this, the soundtrack cuts to a surprisingly upbeat song and the sound of a tractor, over a panning shot of the modern vehicle, tiling fertile, black soil. The superimposed text informs the audience that this is 'Manchuria'. In other words, the voice-over speech motivates the film's final act and legitimises Japan's contested westwards expansion; militarist expansionism, of course, being a common goal of both countries—with Germany aiming eastwards.

The film's three strongest ideological messages are expressed through 'voice', and in a manner setting it apart from its regular, theatrical mode.<sup>25</sup> If propaganda is intended to impact on people's thoughts and actions, power is

clearly implicated in this endeavour. Chion has likened textual speech to the archaic power of the word: ‘the pure and original pleasure of transforming the world through language, and of ruling over one’s creation by naming it’ (1994, 173). This power is granted very selectively, and hence only in the scenes that the creators deemed most crucial. As Weidmann points out, the Western cultural imagination associates the signifying (as opposed to the bodily, material) voice with ‘individuality, authorship, agency, authority, and power’ (2015, 232–234). The signifying/bodily binary here gives preference to the former, masculine part, hence the use of the authoritative, male voice in *Atarashiki tsuchi* is within this tradition. Looping back to the international project’s hierarchically structured nature, however, it is also the white male voice that manifests its authority through the voice-overs and their seemingly ‘rational’ appeal to the German audience, thus replacing the Japanese voice in the film and the image of Japan it creates.

## Conclusion

I go to the theatre sometimes. The stage is large, and there is space between the actors. Just by listening, one can understand their movements very well. With the talkies, however, everybody comes together in a small box ... so it’s easy to feel like you’re listening to a gramophone after all. But if you also use your eyes, you wouldn’t think so.

(Miyagi 1972)

Listening to a talkie creates a very different impression than seeing one. Of course, at a time when sound film was still in its infancy, film’s inherent two-dimensionality extended to the soundtrack, preventing the spatial immersion and real-to-life sonic environment Miyagi mentions regarding the theatre. However, his observation also points towards the ‘added value’ of the combination of sound and image (Chion 1994, 3–24). The effect of both combined transcends that of the individual types of sensory input in terms of power, affect, and consequently the interpretation of the film. Previous foci on *Atarashiki tsuchi*’s cinematography confirm Weidmann’s statement about the prioritising of the visual over the aural in specific spatial and temporal contexts (2016, 315–316), a tendency apparent also in the contemporaneous discourse on the film project. However, as this chapter has shown, the major messages about Japan and its relation to Germany are encoded on the soundtrack, coming into effect in interplay with the beautiful but over-promoted images; sound, like the image, is selected, constructed, recorded, and reordered. The emphasis on the visual and narrative levels in fact veils mechanisms occurring on the soundtrack that, in fact, might be more crucial for understanding the film’s function in its particular contexts.

When it comes to international encounters, sound can play a crucial role in representing cultures—to indicate cultural difference or cultural affinity. Yet, the reception of these sounds also lays open cultural biases as well as issues

regarding the acoustic representation of others for context-dependent purposes. As Weidmann argues with regard to British colonial novels, '[r]epresentations of sound... are fundamentally about class and race hierarchies and about the clash of whole systems of value, as characters—and authors—make their passage between India and the West' (2016, 315–316). *Atarashiki tsuchi*'s characters and authors, as well as the film itself, made their passage between Japan and Germany, encountering similar issues. Music appears to be a prime battlefield for these clashes, despite its reputation as universal. When Martin writes that 'the Japanese heart must have felt deeply because of the music' and 'we all experienced how the Japanese music stirred us, despite its careful presentation' (1937), he not only speaks to the emotional power of music, but also to the association in Western thought of 'aurality' to the East (Weidmann 2016, 317). Martin's statement echoes the trope of the Other being prone to arousal by sound as well as that of the need to discipline native sound—as Yamada did by virtue of his foreign education. The binary opposition between visuality ascribed to the West and aurality to the rest (Weidmann 2016, 315–317) determined the readings of the film. Because most actors were Japanese, the music was composed and performed by Japanese composers and musicians, and the noise was recorded or created in the country, sound can be attributed the Japanese side; while the visuals, including Fanck's high-tech Askania camera and lenses, were seen to originate in the West. The image dominated the discourse in Japan, silencing the notion of sound, despite its important role in the film and the project (e.g. Haukamp 2020, 137). The German reception, too, focused mostly on the images and narrative (ibid., 122). In reviews, but also in the film project and the image of Japan it created, a careful path emerged between Orientalist traditions and notions of Aryan supremacy and the reality of a Japan that no longer could be fitted quite as neatly into these categories as a military and political ally. Hence, the film also creates ideological ties between Germany and Japan through similar concerns about the disorderliness caused by jazz, and dispenses with the trope of 'chaotic noisiness' in favour of 'progressive mechanical' sound.

We also observed long seated, albeit non-colonial hierarchies, comprising racial, political, economic, geographic, and cultural aspects play out in the representation of Japan in *Atarashiki tsuchi*. Messages of value to the topical discourse are transmitted to the German audience via noise-free dialogue, in an inwardly directed Orientalist tradition; at the same time, the film also addresses shared discourses in Japan, such as Teruo finding his home in his native soil and his destination in the song about the fertile land beyond the Eastern Sea. Japan, after all, was an empire, with its own imperial aspirations and associated images and sounds. In this way, the film provides different layers of meaning for different audiences. These meanings, as shown above, are mostly encoded on the acoustic level, making 'good use' of the new technology. In sound film, the visual and the aural enter a powerful relationship, but for composer Yamada, *Atarashiki tsuchi* was not yet an instance of success—hardly surprising, given the treatment of his contributions. Still, he

recognised the potential: ‘The “talkie” is as yet in its early stages of progress. Consequently, I have not lost faith in it’ (Yamada 1937, 39). Miyagi was equally dissatisfied with listening to *Atarashiki tsuchi*, partly due to technical issues, but also the purpose and potential of sound:

I was often disappointed when I listened to a talkie, even when it used my *koto* playing. This might be because of the recording or the playback, but both sound and voice were trembling. Now I felt the same thing. I have come to think that in some cases a film with only natural noise and a skillful theater orchestra would be more pleasant to listen to. What I’d like to listen to would be a foreign talkie with unfamiliar nature sounds.  
(Miyagi 1972)

Sound in cultural translation here perpetuates preconceived images, but in the best case, it can open new worlds. In *Atarashiki tsuchi*, due to a lack of understanding and, indeed, cooperation, the added value of sound and image was appropriated to careerist and ideological aims, such as Fanck’s ambitions regarding his career and his visual focus. However, before these interventions, as they embarked on this remarkable film project, the producers and participants in *Atarashiki tsuchi* had been well aware of the tremendous potential of this synergy for making the unfamiliar familiar. And as I have shown throughout this chapter, sound was used specifically with the ideological agenda to create an acoustic representation of Japan for foreign consumption within a very complex and particular historical context regarding the use of culture for political purposes.

## Notes

- 1 Throughout this chapter, I follow the Japanese convention of giving the family name first, followed by the given name.
- 2 I am grateful to Roger Macy for kindly sharing Miyagi’s article with me. Translations are my own, if not indicated otherwise.
- 3 Eventually, the product of this project was also released in Shanghai and Manchukuo (see Haukamp 2020, 91–92), but my focus here is on the originally anticipated Western markets and audiences with their associated preferences and sensibilities.
- 4 For book-length treatments of the film project see Hansen (1997; in German), Segawa (2017; in Japanese), and Haukamp (2020; in English).
- 5 This summary pertains to Fanck’s version, mainly directed at German-speaking markets.
- 6 Within the politically charged historical context, various agendas operated in the background, ranging from the wish for artistic prestige to leading covert negotiations regarding the Anti-Comintern Pact, Japan and German’s fist military agreement signed on 25 November 1936 and leading to the formation of the ‘Axis’. Needless to say, the film’s narrative solution in the wide, fertile fields of Japan’s ‘puppet state’ Manchukuo, the establishment of which in 1932 had caused much international consternation, evoked similar responses in some international reviews and was also later likened to similar German aspirations (Haukamp 2020, 83–100).

- 7 See Chiba (1992) and, for a brief account in English, see *Miyagikai* (2016).
- 8 The cameraman in this puppet animation adaptation of the traditional ‘Legend of the Bamboo Cutter’ (*Taketori monogatari*) was Tsuburaya Eiji. Tsuburaya was also responsible for the screen projection and miniature scenes in *New Earth* and, of course, later rose to fame as the ‘father’ of Godzilla.
- 9 Such accounts are concerned with Yamada Kōsaku, mentioning *Atarashiki tsuchi* in passing. Daibō provides the most thorough examination of Yamada’s compositions for the film (2010). Irie briefly remarks on the sound-design, and my book treats sound to a certain extent (Haukamp 2020).
- 10 On the transition to and early use of sound in Japan see Freiberg (1987) and Kinoshita (2011), and more recently Yasar (2018), Nordström (2020), Tasaka (2020, 192–224), as well as the chapters in Raine and Nordström’s edited book *The Culture of the Sound Image in Prewar Japan* (2020).
- 11 The distinction between ‘voice’, ‘music’, and ‘noise’ for the acoustic elements on and heard from a film soundtrack is one possibility of many. While ‘voice’ and ‘music’ are quite self-explanatory, ‘noise’ here means anything that does not fall under the previous two categories, i.e., footsteps, a car door closing, the wind rustling leaves on a tree, etc. In this sense, I am using the term ‘noise’ slightly differently than many of my co-authors in this volume.
- 12 It must be pointed out that many of the participants, including Fanck and Kawakita, were not opposed to using the film project to further their careers by appealing to the powers that be, in both countries.
- 13 See Yasar for an outline of the earlier rejection and later adoption in a context of modernisation and international competition (2018, 70–71).
- 14 For his article, the writer drew heavily on Chamberlain’s *Things Japanese* (1905, 340–344), albeit omitting Chamberlain’s most unfavourable descriptions of Japanese music—likely in the spirit of binational friendship.
- 15 Yamada also had experience with writing film music, such as for Osanai Kaoru’s early, experimental talkie *Reimei* (Dawn 1927), Mizoguchi Kenji’s propaganda film *Mannō kenkoku no reimei* (The Dawn of Manchuria and Mongolia, 1932), and the Japanese-Soviet documentary *Big Tokyo* (1933, Shneiderov) (Fedorova 2014; Katayama 2012).
- 16 Yamada’s former pupils, Aoki So and Itō Noboru adapted some of Yamada’s older pieces for Itami’s version. According to Katayama, Itō is the trombone player in the bar scene (2012, 36).
- 17 Fackler and Atkins examine the eventual inability of the Japanese and German authorities to erase jazz completely, describing instances of resistance, compliance, or collaboration by artists, listeners, and authorities (Atkins 2001, 93–163; Fackler 1994).
- 18 Following involvement in the area since the Russo-Japanese war (1904–1905), Japan seized control in 1931 and established Manchukuo as an independent state in name only in 1932 (Young 1998). This move was observed with deep suspicion by the international community, resulting in Japan announcing to leave the League of Nations in 1933. Germany, with similar expansionist aspirations, followed in the same year.
- 19 He very rarely mentions sound in his numerous publications, perhaps also because his career was at its height in the pre-sound Weimar cinema.
- 20 Irie has pointed out Itami’s more interesting approach to sound: In his version, the sound of waves bridges the change of scenes to be eventually ‘revealed’ as the sound of a mortar (1996, 12).
- 21 Fanck sold his version to Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Baltic States, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Holland, and Austria, most of these markets obviously required new subtitles for both Japanese and German dialogue.

- 22 The idiosyncrasies in expression in this article in the English-language publication *Cinema Yearbook of Japan* are either due to Fanck's limited English, or the result of a translation by somebody from German to English.
- 23 *Melodie des Herzens* was released on 16 December 1929, shortly after the first feature-length sound film *Das Land ohne Frauen* (Land Without Women, Gallone), released on 20 September 1929.
- 24 My students gave another interpretation: For them, Iwao put Gerda (and Germany) in her place, demonstrating his (and Japan's) superiority via his language ability and proficiency in international 'manners'.
- 25 In the Japanese release version, the voice is all theatrical, thus achieving less powerful effects. And, indeed, the Japanese post-premiere discourse questioned several of the film's messages about Japan (Haukamp 2020, 107–142). This discursive space was, of course, also due to the mismatch between lived experience and representation, but the use of sound also had a part in it.

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