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**Book Section:**

Haukamp, I., Hoene, C. and Smith, M.D. (2022) Introducing Asian Sound Cultures. In: Haukamp, I., Hoene, C. and Smith, M.D., (eds.) Asian sound cultures: voice, noise, sound, technology. Routledge, pp. 1-16. ISBN: 9780367698911.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003143772-1>

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# Introducing *Asian Sound Cultures*

*Iris Haukamp, Christin Hoene  
and Martyn David Smith*

## **Sound, modernity, and Asia**

In this book, we bring together studies on sound in Asia by scholars from various backgrounds, and at various stages of their academic careers, working on and—in many cases—from Asia. By examining the meanings, uses, and agency of voice, noise, sound, and sound technology from across a wide geographical region, the chapters challenge us to rethink and reassemble categories such as sound and power, technology and imperialism, voice and its interrelations with politics, noise and modernity, the relationship between the global and the local in modernity, as well as the dominant binaries of West/East or North/South, and colonial versus postcolonial. The work presented in this book acknowledges an important juncture in the study of sound brought about by the rapid increase of interest in and publications related to it. Whether we understand sound studies as an academic field or as a tool available to multiple disciplines (Hilmes 2005), research on sound covers numerous fields of research, differing historical and geographical contexts, and the challenging of familiar theoretical concepts (Smith 1994; Smith 2003). In particular, over the last decade or so, the geographical range of sound studies has rapidly broadened, and in this context, this book tackles the urgent question of how we account for the shared experience of the construction of modern sound whilst thinking it through and beyond the point of difference.

If sound is a substance of the world, it is also an essential element in how people frame their knowledge of that world (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015, 2). Yet, despite increasing in geographical scope, studies of sound have too often been restricted to comparisons between European countries or between the European experience and that of the United States. Although much work on the West highlights national differences and brings out developments that have taken different trajectories and followed differing chronologies, the conclusions often highlight common ways of hearing, controlling, reproducing, and ultimately thinking about sound that stem from ‘shared similarities’ in experiences of modernity (Morat 2014, 3). This is, of course, as Sheldon Garon has noted (2017), an affliction of the transnational historical project more broadly. Nevertheless, as sound studies become increasingly

consolidated into a field of study, scholars need to be aware that the process of establishing and defining key terms must avoid repeating the historical danger that by ‘imposing categories of meaning particular to Europe’, modern academic disciplines have often rendered ‘all other societies colonies of Europe’ (Conrad 2016, 4).

The ‘colonisation’ of the study of sound is evident in the numerous histories of technologies of sound as ‘modern western technology’, and in sonic ontologies and philosophies of sound that privilege an Enlightenment separation of the somatic from the psychological that has in turn relegated aural-ity behind the intense visuality of modern life and material culture. As Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes argue, research on non-western cultures throughout the twentieth century has been haunted by the positioning of non-western peoples ‘as closer to sound and hearing than their European counterparts’ (2019, 3). Jonathan Sterne’s recognition and problematisation of the ‘audiovisual litany’ (2012, 9) demonstrates the extent to which the relegation of sound and aural-ity behind the visual in accounts of modernity is imbued with colonial binaries that are cultural prejudices elevated to the level of theory. The identification of the visual as modern and western is maintained by the othering of auditory cultures. Linking modernity with visuality has helped to establish some of the most ingrained cultural oppositions between us and them (Sterne 2012, 9–10).

At the same time, the increasing volume of work on sound and auditory cultures means that keywords and approaches to sound in the humanities and social sciences are becoming increasingly standardised theoretical and conceptual tools. Unfortunately, as sound studies begin to take shape as a field, ways of thinking with and about sound articulated by experiences outside the West—including methods and examples that involve challenges to the mode of narrating what counts as a proper sound—are ‘conspicuously absent from the description of its disciplinary formation’ (Ochoa Gautier 2019, 263). And as Ana María Ochoa Gautier warns us, the problem is that the early promise for sound studies of challenging, disrupting, or even dismantling the problematic binaries of the ‘audiovisual litany’ is now at risk of depoliticising the very process of change by a homogenisation of its key theoretical terms. As a discipline, sound studies risks becoming colonised because of the contemporary imperial, neoliberal, institutional structure of academic production, recognition, and citation that articulate the global governance of the capacity to name the emergence of a field (Ochoa Gautier 2019, 262–264). The task facing those who work on or through sound is to shape a field that can remain as open to interpretation and as diffuse in nature and geography as the object of study itself.

*Asian Sound Cultures* adds to a growing body of work, then, that challenges western universalism in the humanities through sound and contributes to the expansion of the cartography of global modernity in sound studies. The contributors to Steingo’s and Sykes’s recent edited collection, *Remapping Sound Studies* (2019), clearly highlight ongoing issues surrounding regimes of knowledge and the inherent unevenness brought about by a process of

modernity with its origins in the West that continues to be reinforced by the neo-liberal academic institutions of the more developed regions of the globe. In the effort to invoke discourses of sound as ‘artefacts of rich and diverse histories of thought’, as well as to attend to the ‘existential and even mundane presence of sound in everyday life’ (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015, 2), our book takes up the challenges presented by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny’s *Keywords in Sound* (2015), Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan’s *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique* (2016), as well as Steingo and Sykes, because the laying out of the terms of debate and the mapping of the ‘shared ground’ of sound studies over the last decade has clearly revealed the exciting prospects inherent in the destabilising and denaturalising nature of sound as an object of study. Yet the presumption of universality has been hard to shake in a field that appears wedded to western intellectual lineages and traditions (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015, 3–7). Much recent work, even if openly challenging the dominance of the West, has only served to highlight those experiences as the point of difference—frequently as the ‘other’ of colonial regimes of knowledge—and further reinforced notions of common ways of hearing, controlling, reproducing, and ultimately thinking about sound that foreground an emphasis on the visual in modernity as not just an accentuated tendency in western conceptions of knowledge, but as a critical element in the constitution of the colonial modern itself (Ochoa Gautier 2015, 13). It is impossible to deny the extent of—or at the very least the desire for—imperial projection through the networks of knowledge and aesthetic influence surrounding music, language, and technologies for example. Ultimately though, the imperial project itself has become the circuit around or against which aurality is seen to be structured, and it has become the hub around which or against which studies of sound in the non-West have too often found their common ground.

Attempts to study sound in Asia have often focused on the problem of how to separate local auditory signals from the global circuits within which they resonate. Separating the signal from the circuit has certainly helped to expose the dominance of imperial—and predominantly western—ways of thinking about sound and sound technology, but all too often in favour of a quest for a pure, unadulterated, ‘traditional’ sound that can speak against the western process of modernity. This creates two channels, the indigenous sonic experience or signal that is boosted, attenuated, or interfered with by the process of modernity and the wider, global historical processes and regimes of knowledge within which sound—and specifically modern sound—came to be understood. In everyday life of course, once combined, separating the local from the global requires a great deal of work. Ultimately, like modern life, the sonic takes on meaning not thanks to the triumph or amplification of the global circuitry over the local signal; rather, it is at the point where both come together that sound takes on meaning. The use of US weapons of war to create a new musical instrument and music style in Thailand; the hobby of sound hunting and amateur recording competitions in Japan; the changing sounds of the Kyoto Kimono making industry; radio in late colonial India;

city soundscapes in film; poetry as dissonance under Thai military rule; voicing bad guys in Korean cinema; and the politics of the phonograph in colonial Korea and Taiwan: the chapters in this volume seek to recover sound as central to the experience of modernity and everyday life in Asia and as essential to our understanding of the historical processes of cultural, social, political, and economic transformation throughout the long twentieth century.

Throughout *Asian Sound Cultures*, we push beyond the binaries of North/South or East/West by bringing together geographical areas that unsettle unambiguous notions of western colonialism and post colonialism. The countries covered here include China, South Korea, Hong Kong, India, and Thailand, as well as Japan—a highly developed capitalist economy and itself an imperial centre that complicates easy equations between West=Modern, West=Empire, and functions as an important site for the questioning of issues of both modernity and (post)colonialism. The chapters in *Asian Sound Cultures* tackle the issues of sound as music, modernity as development, or Empire as ‘western/northern regimes’ of knowledge, by mixing much-needed historical perspectives with ethnography, literary studies, film studies, technology, language, and music. Bringing these disciplines to work on and through the study of sound helps to show that interdisciplinarity must be at the heart of sound studies, whether it is seen as an approach or a discipline in its own right. Also, the wide range of case studies in this volume, spanning different geographical spaces and historical periods, amplifies the importance of openness and diffusion as well as convergence and amplification in the study of sound.

### **The politics of voice**

The first three chapters address the topic of ‘voice’ from a multiplicity of geographical, disciplinary, and material vantage points. Deciding and defining who can speak and who is being silenced is always a political act, just as much as breaking silences and giving voice to the silenced. As a metaphor, voice is particularly resonant in the context of uneven hierarchies of power, including imperialism and colonialism. In his chapter on ‘The phonographic politics of “corporeal voice”’, Fumitaka Yamauchi focuses on speech recordings for imperial subjectification and wartime mobilisation in colonial Taiwan and Korea. He introduces the concept of *nikusei* (a term he translates as ‘corporeal voice’) to sound studies and adds an important case study focused on Japanese imperialism. *Nikusei* was widely used in print across the territories of the Japanese empire during the early twentieth century to advertise recordings of Japanese military leaders, often posthumously. Treated as ‘sacred sounds’, these ‘corporeal voices’ invited, and in effect constituted, devotional listening subjects and called the living to deadly battlefields in the service of Japanese imperialism. The discussion of ‘corporeal voice’ is a meditation on the disembodiment of the voice caused by recording it—more urgently so in cases where, such as this, the recorded voice outlives the corporal body. It thus also becomes a meditation on presence and absence, and the

ephemeral nature of the speaking voice versus the material reality of the recorded voice in the physical presence of the recording. Yamauchi also considers what happens when the colonised resist auditory indoctrination by turning a deaf ear to the phonographic voices of Japanese military leaders.

In Chapter 2, 'In dark times: Poetic dissonance in the Thai-Malay borderlands', Noah Keone Viernes sounds out the political dimensions of the poetic voice outside the Euro-Western world. Focusing on the work of the Thai-language poetry of Malay writer Zakariya 'Che' Amataya, Viernes analyses how Che's voice resists the dialogic harmony of the state and explores how his voice has thus been able to disrupt, disagree with, and resist the declaration of martial law in the Southern Thai borderlands since 2004. In the dissonant landscape of the Thai-Malay borderland, political division threatens to silence what are perceived to be discordant voices, but the sound of Che's contentious poetic voice, Viernes argues, marks a space of resistance against the territorial and disciplinary imposition of martial law. As Viernes puts it: 'There is power in resonance, but also power over others in the reproduction of silence'. In opposition to institutional silencing, Viernes positions Che's as an alternative and dissonant voice that echoes a long tradition of sound as a form of power politics in the region: from the cymbal that rang in the transition from the fourteenth-century Hindu polity to the fifteenth-century Islamic one, to the gift of 'royal drums' (*nobat*) from one sultanate to another to signify solidarity, to the silencing regime of contemporary martial law. Viernes's chapter examines the politics of voice—poetic versus military—in a highly politicised and politically fractured region. He explores how the dissenting voice of the poet—and, at times, the crowd—has the potential to challenge not only the authoritarian speak of government and military, but also to unsettle the dominating frame of martial law.

The associations and metaphorical richness of the term 'voice' in languages other than English and in geographical contexts outside the Euro-Western world explored by Viernes in the Thai-Malay context are also closely listened to by Jina E. Kim in her concluding chapter to this section. In 'Sonic aesthetics and social disparity: The voice of villains in Ryoo Seung-wan's *Veteran* (2015) and *The Unjust* (2010)', Kim examines the voice of villains in two South-Korean films. Using an interdisciplinary lens of sociocultural linguistics, sound studies, and the cultural history of Korea, Kim develops the categories of contemptuous sarcasm and indignant sarcasm, which, she argues, are vocal qualities that amplify and earmark the vast social inequalities in contemporary Korean society. Kim thus expands canonical scholarship—such as Edward Sapir's 1927 pioneering study of 'Speech as a Personality Trait'—that focus on vocal cues for English language contexts by teasing out the cultural registers and historical experiences that are necessary to contextualise sarcasm in Korean. In doing so, she reveals an unfinished process of decolonisation and highlights the way voice is entwined in crucial networks of power and social relations. In the case of her villains, their sarcastic vocal features become sonic signifiers mediating national anxieties of social inequality that amplify an incomplete process of decolonisation and hint at a

continuing process of internal colonisation through economic disparity. Through the associations and imaginations of poetic form, the technological platforms and infrastructure of colonial power, and the sound of the bad guys, voice is not just a sonic and material phenomenon but a powerful metaphor that, as the chapters in this section show, is diffuse, ambiguous, and extremely useful in different cultural and historical contexts.

### **Modern noise**

Noise is usually defined in negation, as that which is not intelligible, organised, or meaningful sound. As David Novak puts it:

a discrete subject in itself, noise resists interpretation. It is the static on the radio; the mass of unbeautiful sounds that surrounds the island of musical aesthetics; the clatter of the modern world that indexes the lost sounds of nature; the chaos that resists social order; the unintegrated entities that exist beyond culture.

(2015, 126)

But to tell noise apart from these other sounds is a normative position that depends on the listener and their sociocultural context as well as numerous other circumstances. Ultimately, noise does not exist outside an interpretative framework that is itself implicated within hierarchies of power. As the papers in this section demonstrate, the nature of art, the modern versus the natural, chaos versus social order, and nature versus culture are highly normative binaries that are deeply imbricated with the geopolitics of the modern world. R. Murray Schafer's landmark 1977 publication *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* presents a fixed and natural binary with the technological clamour of modernity drowning out the peaceful keynotes of nature. Although Schafer pressed the need to rescue the sounds of nature from the background cacophony of modern life, as Ari Kelman has noted, it is the background noise that has become the 'headline act' for most scholars of sound (2010, 229). And, if noise can take on or shed meaning so readily, it is precisely the soundscape as background noise that makes the concept such a rich metaphor for exploring the multiplicities and intricacies of modernity in Asia.

Japan, perhaps more than any other country in Asia, inhabits these complexities. All chapters in this section focus on Japan, which allows the chapters to speak to each other in ways that allow for specificity and depth of meaning. As a colonial power itself, one that, by the 1920s, defined its own modernity, and with a relationship to the West that has historically been defined by extremes, Japan complicates all the binaries of western modernity and imperialism. Listening to the background noise of modernity in Japan brings out the ambiguity, complexity, and inevitability of a global process deeply imbricated in the local. The chapters in this section listen in on the noises of Japan over the span of the last 150 years, a period in which both the

country and its noises moved from the pre-modern (Flavin, Chapter 4) to the modern (Smith, Chapter 5) to the postmodern (Corral, Chapter 6).

Philip Flavin's chapter on 'Aesthetic ruptures and sociabilities: Tateyama Noboru (1876–1926), quotidian noise, and *sōkyoku-jiuta*' explores the impact of urban and western noise on pre-modern Japanese musical aesthetics through the works of Tateyama Noboru. Composing at the height of the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), which saw Japan's transformation into a modern imperial power that was strongly influenced by the West, Tateyama was the first composer to incorporate western music into Japanese music for the *koto*, a 13-stringed zither. The music Tateyama turned to in his attempts to modernise Japanese music was the western military march, then part of the western urban sound environment, that embodied a highly politicised referencing of the contemporary West. Flavin discusses this innovation in terms of a violent aesthetic rupture to the original lyrical sentiment pursued in the Edo period. In referencing the 'popular' music of the western military brass band, Tateyama also introduced the real world, replete with political reality and new notions of the disciplined body placed within the larger framework of the nation-state, into what can only be seen as a new nationalist musical genre. Rather than 'sound', Flavin thinks of this violence as 'noise'—a politically charged referencing of the contemporary world that did not exist in pre-modern *sōkyoku-jiuta* aesthetics. The irruptive impact of these incongruous ideologically laden noises fundamentally changed the sentimental lyric aesthetic of *sōkyoku-jiuta* through the introduction of 'urban noise', and forever changed indigenous Japanese music. As Flavin concludes, the juggernaut of modernity crushed everything in its path, its noise obliterating the 'sounds' of pre-modern aesthetics and understandings, but in its tracks, new understandings, new modes of aesthetic engagement, and new understandings of public space sprang to life.

In the middle chapter of the trio, 'The "hell of modern sound": A history of urban noise in modern Japan', Martyn David Smith echoes Flavin's concern with urban noise, and takes us from pre-modern Japan squarely into the modern period. Highlighting particular accents in the discourse about urban noise that reverberate throughout the twentieth century, Smith traces the history of urban noise in Japan and concludes that the noise of the modern Japanese cityscape and discussions about it are not new; and neither is the link between a noisy cityscape and a conception of modernity as urban and loud. Like Flavin, Smith suggests that Japanese modernity is negotiated vis-a-vis the West, but with several caveats. Noise, Smith argues, was understood not as a symbol of modernity or consequence of it, but as a hindrance in achieving it made worse by the Japanese peoples' supposed lack of civilisation. The issue of urban noise and rapid economic growth allowed for comparisons between Japan and a West that was allegedly more civilised because it was quieter and quieter because it was more civilised. Here, again, the actuality of noise breaks the binary of modernity by being both/and: ringing in modernity (noise of cities, factories, etc.), the clamour of which at the same time marks it as supposedly less civilised than the West. By the 1930s, the 'hell

of modern noise' that had triumphed marked a sonic condition of modernity as an inescapable component of the technology that came with it—and it amplified the problems with the response of the Japanese people to that modernity.

Concluding this section, Jeremy Corral's chapter, 'Feel the power of my exoticism: Japanese Noise music and claims of a distinct Japanese sound', takes us from the modern to the postmodern and from noise to Noise music, a musical genre from the turn of this century that is characterised primarily by its blatant lack of traditional musical architecture. Corral's chapter resonates with Flavin's discussion (Chapter 4) about the relationship between noise and music but transposes it by a century from the turn of the twentieth to the turn of the twenty-first century and from Japanese musical culture at the brink of modernity to musical late postmodernism. Where the introduction of quotidian noises from the west into Edo-period Japanese music marked the transition from the pre-modern to the modern, Noise music as a term is a postmodern oxymoron that signals its aesthetic core: in its very disregard of traditional musical architecture—melody, rhythm, and harmony—Noise becomes music. Corral echoes the earlier discussion of noise as a signifier of alterity. While the sound of Japanese Noise comes to signal 'Japaneseness', this identity is primarily defined by its fundamental alterity and exoticism. In reference to Anaïs Fléchet's concept of double exoticism, which goes beyond the power structures of archetypal colonialist relations, Corral argues that Noise engages in a co-production of alterity in which cultures engage themselves in a process of construction of the other, leading to the constitution of an exoticism reflecting the expectations of both sides. Rather than assuming that there is only one 'Japaneseness' dreamed up by the 'Occident', Corral turns our ears and our attention to how Noise music projects various iterations that articulate specific ideas of what is—or what should be—the nature of Japan.

### **Sound and power**

Across Asia, as elsewhere, sound is implicated with power. It is important therefore to identify the power structures that impact the meaning of sounds and, vice versa, to accent the ways in which sounds uphold or subvert these power structures. The (de-)construction of power in and through sound is one of the leitmotifs for the three chapters in this section. In her chapter 'Listening to the talkies: *Atarashiki tsuchi*'s (1937) acoustic construction of Japan for western consumption', Iris Haukamp uses sound as an umbrella term to discuss film sounds, including music, noise, and voice. Ka Lee Wong, in her chapter on 'Recovering the lost Cantonese sounds in pre-handover Hong Kong: Sinophone politics in Dung Kai-cheung's "The Rise and Fall of Wing Shing Street" (1995)', discusses the sounds of Cantonese as a silenced language. And in the concluding chapter of this section, 'When the looms stop, the baby cries: The changing sounds of the Kyoto kimono-making industry', Jenny Hall listens in on the sonic environment of the kimono-making

industry in contemporary Kyoto. The polyphony explored in this section emphasises a central conundrum at the heart of this book: sound, like Asia, defies definition in isolation. Instead, sound gains meaning only in context, both conceptual and geographical. As Porath points out, one group's meaningful sound might be another group's meaningless noise, 'unrecognizable and semiotically incomprehensible' (2019, 6). In order to make sense of sound, then, the chapters in this section listen carefully to the particular cultural, historical, political, and geographical strata of power and hierarchy in which these sounds are produced and in which they become meaningful. It is precisely this polyphony of meaning—or rather: sound's ability to mean differently according to different contexts—that renders sound so useful in exploring power relations and modernity in particular.

More specifically, Haukamp's careful analysis of sound in the co-produced film *Atarashiki tsuchi* (*New Earth* aka *Die Tochter des Samurai*, 1937) reveals how Japan is sonically constructed for western audiences, which in turn emphasises the underlying imbalance regarding cultural power and authority at work in the project. Haukamp's analysis of selected music, noise, and voice throughout the film accentuates that the major messages are actually encoded on the film's soundtrack. When it comes to international encounters, Haukamp argues, 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. The context, in this case, was mainly western—German, to be specific—and the other created by this context was Japan. Albeit Germany and Japan were at that point in history both colonial powers, the colonial trope and binary opposition between visuality ascribed to the West and aurality to the rest determined the readings of the film. Sound in the film is thus implicated in racial, political, economic, geographic, and cultural hierarchies of representation between Japan and the West. Messages of value to the topical discourse are transmitted to the German audience via noise-free dialogue, in an Orientalist tradition; at the same time, the film's music underscores Japanese nationalism. Japan, after all, was an empire, with its own imperial aspirations and sounds that functioned to uphold imperial power. Haukamp thus emphasises how sound in the film provides different layers of meaning for different audiences.

In the second chapter of this section, Ka Lee Wong discusses how Hong Kong Chinese writer Dung Kai-cheung historicises a fictive Cantonese soundscape with the aural memory of a neighbourhood in 'The Rise and Fall of Wing Shing Street' (1995). Wong reads Dung's Cantonese soundscape as a literary form of sonic resistance against the existing hegemony which maintains who is audible and who is not in pre-handover Hong Kong. She explains that in Hong Kong literature in Chinese, writing in Cantonese is rare, because convention demands that regional expressions, like the ones in Cantonese, are to be 'translated' into the so-called 'literary language' *shumianyu* (書面語). Cantonese, while being the spoken vernacular in Hong Kong, has thus been largely muted. As Wong argues, using Cantonese to emphasise Cantonese

identity in Hong Kong can therefore be read as the unwillingness to being absorbed and assimilated into either the British colonial or the mainland Chinese culture. At the heart of Wong's chapter—and of Dong's short story—is therefore the intersection between language and political power: the political power to silence language, and the power of language to resist that silencing. Making use of the Sinophone theories put forward by Shih Shumei (2007) and combining them with recent discussions on sound studies, Wong discusses how Dung evokes an alternative way to recover the aural history of Hong Kong in Cantonese in the short story: through textually simulating a sonic restoration of the lost orality of a Hong Kong Cantonese singing tradition, *nanyin* (南音), Dung gives voice to the Hong Kong Sinophones to tell their own stories in Cantonese, which, for most local people, is their mother tongue. Wong's chapter exemplifies that to write sound into literature is to create a paradox: after all, the written word cannot sound out sound. Sound is thus contained within the text and transcends it at the same time. This creates a tension of representation, whereby the written presence of sound in text signals its absence *as sound*. This tension between presence and absence opens up creative spaces within the text for the representation of marginalised identities that are traditionally defined through their absence from—and their silencing by—written history (Hoene 2015, 3). In the case of Dung's short story, his Cantonese soundscapes echo the historical silencing of local people's actual lived experiences in Cantonese.

In her chapter on the changing sounds of the Kyoto kimono-making industry, Jenny Hall listens to the locals' accounts of their lived experiences and effectively deconstructs western-centric assumptions about sound *vis-à-vis* noise, the passivity of participants, and the private as a place to retreat from the public. Hall's chapter focuses on the ways in which technological change, in particular mechanisation and digitisation, has altered the sonic environment of the Kyoto kimono-making industry in order to highlight and address debates in sound studies concerning 'presumptions of universality' (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015, 7); the romanticisation of sounds of nature over urban 'noise' (Plourde 2014); and the representation of the state as 'having the power to produce, authorise, or condone loudness and to coerce silence' (Quintero 2019). Listening to the sounds of the kimono-making industry in contemporary Kyoto allows Hall to understand this sonic environment and the people who make it on their own terms and 'prior to and different from their engagements with Western notions' (Steingo and Sykes 2019, 21). As Hall emphasises in reference to Gould, Chenhall, Kohn and Stevens (2019), the 'Japanese interdisciplinary field of acoustic ecology (*oto no kankyō*) or soundscape studies (*saundosukēpugaku*) predates much of the sensory turn in Western academia' (246). Therefore, there is a wide body of existing local knowledge and scholarship, which provides an alternative understanding of urban sonic environments that in turn challenges entrenched western dichotomies such as nature/urban and public/private. Moreover, Hall's interviews with weavers and dyers in Kyoto emphasise that individuals continually sound out their sonic environments and compose their sense of

identity and community accordingly, which contradicts the common perception of the Japanese public as ‘passive and unable to resist or “assume control” over such urban noise’ (Plourde 2014, 71). Ideas about which sounds are appropriate, both in time and space, are changing with technology, and Hall’s careful ethnographic research shows how the weavers and dyers continually negotiate and contest their sonic environments.

### Technology and imperialism

Much of the early work in sound studies was carried out by academics interested in technology, media theory, and communication. Numerous studies of sound technologies like the telephone, radio, phonograph, loudspeaker, and even the Walkman have centred on a technological determinism that has too often structured an understanding of the technology around certain generalised observations about modern sound whose cultural specificity is rarely recognised; the increasing privatisation of the neoliberal listener (Hagood 2019); the privatisation of the listening experience; or the increasing mobility of sound and music (Steingo 2019, 41–44). Many accounts of the interplay between sound and technology outside the West focus on the ways in which new technology, largely developed in the West, has been adopted, adapted, and refined within different—because ‘other’—social and cultural contexts of the non-West.

In this section, the chapter by Duggal and Hoene takes up the ambiguity of radio. By focusing on the early years of the radio in late colonial India, Duggal and Hoene move the debate away from the examination of documents created by state and radio officials to examine the debates around radio in the *The Times of India* and *The Indian Listener*, one of the earliest broadcasting trade publications in India. They show how the decade before the official establishment of All India Radio in 1936 was central to the development of the radio and its audiences. In doing so, Duggal and Hoene expose the ways in which radio, as a then-new sound technology, was received and explored by the urban elite and rural audiences alike. By focusing on this period, Duggal and Hoene amplify early practices of radio listening in India and accentuate the various ways in which the technology impacted perceptions of space and place beyond the geopolitics of empire and across the rural/urban divide. This, in turn, enables Duggal and Hoene to tune in to the specificity of the experience of Indian sonic modernity via the radio. The sonic modernity broadcast via the radio was not only marked by the technological dimension of the object itself, but by the effect it had on audiences and on broadening people’s imagination of space and place. The chapter allows us to understand early radio in colonial India as a sound event: the radio became a small-scale everyday media object and technology through the way in which it structured knowledge through sound. Duggal and Hoene build on David Arnold’s (2013) emphasis on ‘small everyday technologies’ such as sewing machines and bicycles as critical tools in Indian technological modernity.

In her chapter '(Re)Diffusion of Beautiful Sound: Chinese broadcast in postwar Bangkok', Kornphanat Tungkeunkunt shows how the radio encompassed the ambiguity of modernity in Thailand, a country which did not experience colonisation by western powers as it began its process of modernisation, but became gradually drawn into Cold War binaries. Tungkeunkunt emphasises that the development of the radio went along with urban development and played a crucial role in shaping sonic experiences. In the context of a Cold War battle for hearts and minds, the radio was considered more trustworthy and able to reach a larger audience than any other mass medium, and Rediffusion became a tool to effectively counter communist propaganda. The service was known in Thai as '*song siang thang sai*' ('transmitting sound by wire'), a name that referred to the technology used, and in Chinese as '*Li de hu sheng*' ('beautiful sound'), which referred to the impression it aspired to convey. Although the Thai state used Rediffusion to communicate with the Chinese communities, the emergence and influence of the service went beyond partisanship and propaganda. In a certain sense, it did achieve the aims of the state as it became a crucial part of Chinese life, especially in Bangkok. Nevertheless, as the chapter shows, Chinese women could learn basic notions and Chinese traditions while listening to *Gua Ceh* and Chaozhou opera programmes from home. Radio dramas offered insights into Chinese classics and modern literature for a minority community that often lacked literacy in Thai and Chinese. Even for Mandarin pop music, its mission was not only to entertain but also to promote Chinese songs worldwide, connecting the Chinese community in Thailand to a global diaspora through 'circuits of listening' that, as Andrew F. Jones has shown, help to trace the contours of the 'fractured topography' of the global 1960s (2020, 6). Tungkeunkunt makes clear that Rediffusion's origins in colonial Britain at the start of the twentieth century and its role in assimilating Thai Chinese communities in Bangkok from the mid-1950s on, demonstrate how sound technologies move across, within, and in competition or complicity with existing social topographies.

Tomotaro Kaneko's contribution moves on to the 1970s to examine the rise in popularity of sound recording competitions in Japan. Audio manufacturers, audio magazines, and broadcasting stations began to sponsor amateur sound-recording (*namaroku*) contests. Through a survey of these contests, the chapter explores the significance of a new sound culture that emerged prompting people to record their own musical performances, conversations, and environmental sounds, including the sound of steam locomotives, festivals, or the natural environment. By the end of the 1960s, audio equipment was the most desired consumer durable among young Japanese, FM radio began regular broadcasting, and ownership of cassette recorders became widespread bringing alternatives to the pursuit of high-fidelity sound reproduction to Japanese audio culture. By focusing on a representative amateur recording contest that had no genre restrictions and produced LPs of its winning works, Kaneko encourages us to listen in to the everyday of 1970s Japan as it became an important source of inspiration for amateur creativity.

The availability of the technology, the time and effort required to make the recordings, and the desire to search out, capture, or create sound all point to important social and economic changes in Japan. The chapter makes clear the importance of questioning constructionist views of technology and listening to and through the tape-recorder. But it also amplifies the need for a refusal to subscribe to any predetermined distribution of the senses—including any static idea of what counts as ‘sound’ or ‘listening’, because the entries varied widely and the act of questioning such terms was in itself central to Namaroku culture.

The final chapter takes us back to Thailand to examine the popular musical co-optation of a tool of US anti-communist warfare. The twin horns that are the focus of Pierre Prouteau’s chapter were originally used to broadcast ideological propaganda in the context of the global struggle against communism. After the US military officially departed Thai soil, the central government continued to battle communist insurgents. Prouteau draws out the journey of the twin horn from imperialist tool of propaganda to its current popularity as the centrepiece of bands performing the musical genre of *phin prayuk*. The chapter reveals the technology as an instrument of double-folded imperialistic dynamics: weaponised by the United States in Thailand and used in the service of internal colonialism by the Thai state. At the same time, because Thai/US propaganda made use of regional music and made equipment available to musicians, local music genres such as *molam* gained amplification through the technology and evolved alongside it. Once the battle between the Thai state and the insurgents in Phetchabun province was over, the twin horn technology used to spread propaganda in the context of the Cold War was adopted by the local musical genre of *phin prayuk*, peculiar to the districts of Lomsak, Lomkao, and Muang. Tracing the circulation of this model of loudspeaker and the discourses it triggered, the chapter makes abundantly clear the malleability of sound technology. The horn played a central role in the Thai adoption of electrical sound amplification and aided the emergence of a new sound-system culture-specific to Thailand, one in which regions outside the Thai capital played an important role. Local internationalism becomes evident here because the sound technology was made available through US anti-communist warfare and then locally adapted, transforming the work of, and transformed by, the local musicians who add them to their bands.

### **Asia as method, or: Why listen to Asia?**

As scholars with an interest in sound working in various disciplines, we have tried, in this book, to listen for the inflections driven by the sonic regimes imposed by a global process of change and transformation across Asia. Yet if, to take the twin horns as a sonic metaphor, one channel blasts the deep link to a process of imperial domination that we cannot escape, the other channel tells us that it is impossible to ignore the local context. We must listen to both together in order to appreciate the importance of sound for

understanding modernity not just in Asia, but to better understand how the shared experience of the construction of modern sound can take us through and beyond the point of difference and help to maintain a field that is as open to interpretation and as diffuse in nature and geography as the object of study itself.

As noted above, part of the task facing sound studies is to resist structuration around western ways of perceiving and understanding sound whilst being aware of the contemporary regimes of knowledge production that remain centred on a neo-liberal, western dominated academic industry. Shifting the axis of sound studies from West-East to North-South (Steingo and Sykes 2019) is a start, but, as with projects that pursue decolonisation by provincialising Europe, the danger is in leaving the frame intact (Sakai and Morris 1997) or throwing it out altogether. Key concepts and ways of thinking and speaking about Asia canonised in western academic institutions have begun to be decolonised or destabilised over the last several decades. The process of deconstructing the West has been central to the move to decolonise Asian studies. Yet, attempts to provincialise Europe have recently been brought into question as a convoluted process that may loosen but not necessarily change ‘the structure of the dialogue’ (Chen 2010, 219), and the challenges faced by Asian studies in recent years resonate with the debates that now animate sound studies.

As Naoki Sakai has argued in relation to the East/West dichotomy, if the West lacks unity through provincialisation, it cannot then be the ‘other’ of Asia. If the assumed unity never existed and Europe is provincialised, then the frame for both universalism and particularism is no longer legitimate (Sakai and Morris 1997; Chen 2010, 218). Rather than continuing to fear reproducing the West as the ‘other’ of Asian studies *and* sound studies, it might therefore be more productive to posit the West as bits and fragments that intervene in local social formations in a systematic, but never totalising, way (Yoshimi and Calichman 2005). The local formation of modernity carries important elements of the West, but it is not fully enveloped by it. As Carol Gluck has argued, just as Europe once served as the explanandum that generated theories of modernity, the worldful of modern experiences can do the same today: ‘[i]nstead of applying the pile-up of past theories to explain such experiences, we have the opportunity to use such experiences to explain modernity. We can, in short, generate new theories from these histories’ (2011, 679). After all, the ‘*sound* of modernity has always been integral to modernity itself’ (Cullen Rath 2008, 431) and across Asia modernity sounds different. In this book, we examine how thinking about sound and Asia together brings out an international localism (Chen 2010) that better recognises the ambiguity of modern sonic categories in order to better grasp sound’s ‘specific cultural formations’ (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015, 6). We hope the book foregrounds the need to be open to a multiplicity of voices, respects the local, but does not mobilise the resources of ‘tradition’ simply for the sake of opposing the western domination of sound studies. Ultimately, *Asian Sound Cultures* shows that the diverse historical experiences and rich

social practices of Asia can be mobilised to provide alternative horizons and voices for the exciting and vibrant field of sound studies.

Tokyo–Maastricht–Sheffield, 2021

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