Edited by Michael Raine and Johan Nordström

The Culture of the Sound Image in Prewar Japan

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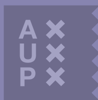

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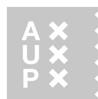

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for Arthur and Simon

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Introduction

Michael Raine and Johan Nordström

In his call for a new film history Thomas Elsaesser questions 'notions of origin and teleology' in existing accounts of cinema and asks, 'Have we been fixated too exclusively on "the image", and forgotten about sound; have we been concentrating on films as texts, and neglected the cinema as event and experience?'[1] This book takes up these caveats, and others raised by the recent turn to media archaeology, in order to refocus attention on cinema as a changing intermedial field during the conversion to synchronized sound in Japan around 1930.[2] Each chapter traces a specific, sometimes vanishing, mediation of sound in the cinema and related media, seeking to restore complexity to a new media transition in Japan that is often described simply as slow and reluctant, or as obstructed by traditional oral culture. In fact, technologically mediated sound was an object of fascination and excitement, part of a rapidly modernizing popular culture. As these essays tell us, audiences first heard film stars speak on the radio, sound films were tied to developments in popular music, and filmmakers developed new styles in response to the new sound cinema technology. In the histories laid out here, mediated sound is both live and recorded, voice or sound effect, and cinema is an institution, a mode of narration, and an architectural space. Taken together, they approach Japanese cinema as what Christian Metz, borrowing from Marcel Mauss, called a 'total social fact', embedded in technological and economic changes and framed by wider fears and aspirations.[3] The extended transition to sound in Japan, full of interstitial and unremembered elements, is more common than the relatively rapid conversion in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States.[4] In this larger view the complex mix of emerging, dominant, and residual technologies

1 Elsaesser, 'The New Film History as Media Archeology', p. 77.

2 See for example Huhtamo and Parikka (eds.), *Media Archaeology*.

3 Metz, *Language and Cinema*, p. 9.

4 The transition was rapid in India, too, which may perhaps be explained by the size and literacy rate of the local market.

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and practices, and the multiple forms of 'sound' and 'talking' cinema in Japan, are not so different from the cinemas of Latin America, Asia, and the European margins with their undercapitalized but cosmopolitan and intermedial mix of *films sonore* and *films parlant*.[5]

During the transition to sound Japanese cinema was subject to what Elsaesser has called '"media-interference" from radio as well as the co-presence or competition of the gramophone industry'.[6] In this introduction, we describe the technological, economic, industrial, and political contexts for the interrelated growth of the recording industry, radio, and sound cinema in Japan around 1930. Rather than claim a special cultural sense in which Japanese cinema is made up of 'commingled media' (the silent film image plus the live narrator, or *benshi*) we argue that all electronic media are 'commingled' in this period, sharing technology, personnel, and sounds.[7] Although this anthology focuses on the cinema, intermedial relations between the record industry, radio, and cinema constitute an extensive field of diverse sound practices that we are calling the 'culture of the sound image'. It is a *culture* because it concerns embodied practices that go beyond the text of film and the physical space of the theatre – an extended idea of cinema that incorporates radio broadcasts, theme songs, publicity materials, and the printed programmes provided at every screening. It is a *sound image* because in the age of computer data the deep etymology of 'image' as 'likeness' no longer refers only to vision. In this sense, the phrase 'visual image' is not redundant, and 'sound image' is its aural equivalent. The sound event's technical reproduction depends on its registration on a material substrate such as a shellac record or the celluloid soundtrack, or in its one-to-many mediation through an apparatus, as on the radio. As the chapters show us, these intermedial connections, forged in the midst of an economic crisis, furthered the trend toward a unified experience in the cinema that changed labour relations and even the architecture of the cinemas themselves. That extended and uneven transformation of the

5 See the discussion in O'Brien, *Cinema's Conversion to Sound*. For the transition to sound in the USSR, see Miller, 'Soviet Cinema 1929-41'. For China, see Bao, *Fiery Cinema*. For India, see the materials on sound cultures in Indian cinema at http://sounds.medialabju.org/ (Accessed 20 April 2020). O'Brien argues that *films parlant* were focused on reproducing the actor's sound performance on film, while *films sonore*, which relied less on the technology of synchronization pioneered in the USA, used sound expressively. Those films did not simply record a profilmic moment but employed counterpoint and incorporated music and sound effects into the film's narration.

6 Elsaesser, 'Discipline Through Diegesis', p. 209.

7 For the claims about 'commingled media', see Anderson, 'Spoken Silents in the Japanese Cinema'.

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cinema soundscape in Japan also brought to the foreground aesthetic issues in film, from the incorporation of popular song and other sound practices into sound films to the importance of the frame line and the changing semiotic relation between onscreen and offscreen.

The peculiarities of the transition to sound in Japan are sometimes explained as the result of different stages of economic or cultural development: as a non-western country, Japan is assumed to have lagged behind Europe and America. That sense of a 'geopolitical incline' between East and West was certainly part of many contemporary discussions about new sound media in Japan, but we should also recognize that Japan around 1930 was a rapidly developing country. In 1932, when Tokyo City expanded to accommodate its newly developed suburbs, it became the second largest city in the world, exceeding London proper and smaller only than New York. Japan was the dominant power in East Asia, the fifth largest country in the world by population, with a growing corps of scientists and strong connections across the Pacific with the most technologically advanced country, the USA. Cinema was part of that story of development: Japan was the world's largest producer of feature films in the 1930s, by number if not by capital investment. It had the world's fourth largest box office income in 1929, and in 1930, it had about 1,400 cinemas, among the top ten countries in the world.[8] Drawing on Marilyn Ivy and Harry Harootunian's theorizations of 'co-eval modernity', we argue that the transition to sound in Japan was also 'co-eval' with similar developments in the West: conditioned by the same forces, at almost the same time, but situated differently, and so following a somewhat different path.[9] Steve Wurtzler has shown how the large industrial combines headed by General Electric and AT&T in the USA created 'culture industries' out of the shared technology of telephone, records, radio, and film.[10] Cinema was just one part of an umbrella of technology research, like the European Tobis-Klangfilm partnership, in which the manufacturing arm was largely owned by Siemens and AEG. The Japanese film industry was not so vertically integrated but one consequence of the sound transition was the closer engagement of film studios with the industrial and capital structure of the modernizing nation.

8 The *Kinema shūhō* trade paper claimed that Japan had the fourth largest box office in the world in 'Nihon no eigakai wa sekai dai yon', p. 16. Data on the number of cinemas from the *Kokusai eiga nenkan* (1934), compiled in Kinoshita, 'The Benshi Track', p. 7. That yearbook also lists Japan in ninth place in a graph of countries with the largest number of cinemas printed in an unpaginated front section.

9 See Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing* and Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity.*

10 Wurtlzer, *Electric Sounds.*

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Phonograph Records

Mechanical sound recording was introduced to Japan in the nineteenth century. Until around 1910 most records, even of Japanese artists recorded in Japan, were pressed abroad and imported. A domestic industry manufacturing 78-rpm 'SP' records with 3-5 minutes of recording per side was sustained by genres such as classical music and military marches, local vocal arts such as *gidayū* chanted narration, comic *manzai* spoken-word performances, and *benshi* narration of famous scenes from the cinema, often performed with actors from the film. Popular songs consisted mostly of Japanese folk songs and other popular songs in '*yonanuki*' (omitting the fourth and seventh notes) pentatonic scales, played on both western and Japanese instruments, as well as western folk tunes with Japanese lyrics that used similar scales and were included in the grade school curriculum.[11] The incorporation of western-style marching bands into the Japanese military (and, as we will see, the cinemas), as well as the growth of steamship lines between Japan and the west coast of North American increased Japanese familiarity with western popular music. The increased popularity of social dancing in the 1910s motivated the import of records and live musicians playing the ragtime, foxtrot, and occasional improvisation that came to be known as 'jazz' in Japan.[12] Records were luxury goods but recorded popular music was already a staple of cafes and upper-middle-class households by the 1920s. Luxury taxes on imports raised to pay for reconstruction from the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake led to large foreign investments in Japanese record companies and a boom in the local production of records in the late 1920s.[13] As Sasagawa Keiko and Hosokawa Shuhei discuss in Chapters 1 and 2, those records included comic and romantic songs backed by orchestral jazz bands, sometimes sung in English as well as Japanese.

The newly established Nihon Victor and Nihon Columbia record companies were among the top ten Japanese companies by foreign capital investment and brought to Japan the new technology of electronic sound recording (*denki fukikomi* or *denki rokuon*) that developed out of telephone research in the USA, and that underpinned the development of sound recording in the cinema. Production of record players increased, and record sales tripled as prices fell drastically. New recordings with greater dynamic

11 See Kitahara, 'Kayokyoku'.

12 For an overview of this music see Atkins, *Blue Nippon.*

13 See Mitsui Tōru, '"Sing Me a Song of Araby" and "My Blue Heaven"' for an incisive overview of this period.

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range and frequency response sustained the culture of college jazz groups and dance halls, which played records during the day and featured live bands in the evening. The boom in manufacturing commodified the new popular music, shifting the labels' commercial strategy from exploiting songs popularized by stage shows or sung in the pleasure quarters by more or less anonymous geisha and street entertainers to the planned promotion and release of popular songs with celebrity singers, supported by promotional campaigns in magazines, bars, and cafes. The style of the music also changed, shifting toward up-tempo and romantic melodies, although minor key 'blues' and 'new folk songs' were also popular.

Miriam Silverberg has written extensively on modern Japanese urban culture, which she calls by its Japanese pronunciation, *modan*, to indicate both its global filiations as well as the local specificity of the relations between technological and economic modernization, modernism as a more or less oppositional cultural phenomenon, and modernity as a philosophical category that attempts to name those new conditions.[14] In particular, Silverberg indicates the double-edged nature of the Japanese *modan*: both partaking of the exhilarating loosening of social roles amidst a surge of new material goods and cultural practices and at the same time enabling the new demands a state could make on citizen-subjects by virtue of the extended range and finer grain of bureaucratic systems of control, including new communications technologies. The new media of records, radio, and sound cinema were all enlisted from their inception as part of a capitalist economy but also as part of an imperial and militarist political project. The flipside of the flourishing culture of cafes and dance halls, mediated even more widely by jazz records, were the bestselling record collections, often offered by newspapers on a subscription model, of military marches and *nagauta* (a form of narrative singing associated with kabuki) celebrating Japan's colonial adventures in China.[15]

Radio

In December 1926, news of the illness and death of the Taishō Emperor was broadcast through the new medium of radio by the three stations of the nationalized NHK radio network. The broadcasts drew on the

14 See Silverberg, 'Constructing the Japanese Ethnography of Modernity', and 'Remembering Pearl Harbor, Forgetting Charlie Chaplin', summarized in her book *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*.
15 Kurata, *Nihon rekōdo bunkashi*, p. 179.

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development of a series of technologies over the previous fifty years: microphones that could register the human voice and other sounds as an electronic signal; the telephone system through which the radio stations were directly connected to the Imperial Household Agency; amplifiers and broadcast equipment to transmit that signal; and radios, whether crystal sets with headphones or vacuum tube receivers with loudspeakers that could produce recognizable sounds. Although the subscriber base was still small, Takeyama Akiko argues that the regular broadcasts of the Emperor's condition, and the announcement of the Emperor's death by station chiefs that doubled as a ceremonial commemoration, were the first media events in Japan that depended on the electronically mediated voice.[16] Hori Hikari shows that the state encouraged the spread of radio and staged the Shōwa Emperor's enthronement ceremonies in November 1928 so that they could be experienced through a newly established radio network linking major cities throughout the length of Japan. These scripted 'live' broadcasts complete with sound effects were then released as records that were sometimes played alongside silent newsreels of the ceremonies.[17] In sum, there was already a dense culture of the sound image in Japan by the time that mediated sound in Japanese cinema became technologically and economically possible.

Modelled on the BBC and started only three or four years after broadcasting in Britain, NHK radio soon embedded itself in the media environment of Japan. In 1925 Japan was the largest purchaser of radio receivers from the USA, increasing the number of licensed sets in Japan from 5,455 to 338,204.[18] Domestic production by Sharp and other companies also took off and the number of receivers doubled every three years, reaching 50% of Tokyo homes by 1934. What did Japanese audiences want from the radio? Early opinion polls give a sense of the range of preferences. In 1926, the major newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* reported a poll on radio conducted at a girls' school in Osaka. One of the respondents said it was no longer the age of *gidayū* (chanted puppet theatre narration) and other Japanese vocal arts and asked for more western music programmes, suitable to a 'modern girl'. That was the first time the newspaper had used the phrase, which would come to characterize the dangerous and exciting image of a new generation of women in Japan.[19] As radio spread further into the Japanese middle class,

16 Takeyama, *Rajio no jidai*, pp. 80-83.

17 Hori, *Promiscuous Media,* pp. 51-52.

18 Mitsui, 'Interactions of Imported and Indigenous Musics in Japan', p. 158.

19 'Chihōga', p. 6

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the preferred programming also shifted toward more conventional tastes. Later, broader-based polls revealed the popularity of older vocal and musical forms such as *rakugo* (comic storytelling), *naniwabushi* (melodious narrative recitation accompanied by a shamisen), and *manzai* (comic repartee). Between the old vocal arts and the new jazz culture, alternative genres of vocal entertainment emerged, from sports broadcasting to drama on the radio, which relied on the creative construction of soundscapes. Even more popular than radio drama were two other forms of drama that drew on audience familiarity with the conventional soundscape of the cinema. Both forms presented the stories of silent cinema, accompanied by live music and a live *benshi*. As Niita Chie explains in Chapter 3, in the *eiga monogatari* (film story) the *benshi* explained the plot of a film and did character voices to a backing of music and sound effects. The *eigageki* (film drama) went one step further in using actors, typically from the cast of the film, to perform alongside the *benshi* even before those actors' voices could be heard in the cinema.

The one-to-many format of radio broadcasting encouraged the incorporation of individual Japanese into a larger community. For example, to commemorate the Shōwa Emperor's enthronement in 1928, the insurance arm of the Japanese Post Office introduced radio calisthenics on the model of radio broadcasts sponsored by the Metropolitan Life insurance company in the USA, which were in turn based on the revanchist mass calisthenics of the Czech Sokol movement.[20] Kurata Yoshihiro reports that after the Manchurian Incident of 1931 the radio calisthenics broadcasts were accompanied by military songs.[21] In the same decade, radio was the first medium to report Japanese successes in the Olympic games of 1932 and 1936. Also in the 1930s and early 1940s the radio networks were used for short wave 'exchange broadcasts' (*kōkan hōsō*) that tied Japan to the Asian colonies and Axis allies. In less than twenty years, radio spanned an enormous range of uses, bridging high and low culture, entertaining audiences with sports and drama, and uniting all Japanese as citizens of an expanding Empire. All mass media, by virtue of their ubiquity, become absorbed and naturalized as infrastructure but before radio sank into the background, a mere channel for coordinated exercise, information, or propaganda, Japanese listeners

20 See the Japan Post company history at http://www.jp-life.japanpost.jp/aboutus/csr/radio/abt_csr_rdo_history.html (Accessed 20 April 2020).

21 Kurata, *Nihon rekōdo bunkashi, p.* 178. For a history of a similar illiberal modernist use of radio technology, see Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes*. For the Japanese case, see Robbins, *Tokyo Calling*.

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were presented with a range of possibilities for how radio might contribute to the human sensorium as it was constructed in Japan.

As a state-controlled enterprise, radio tended toward education more than entertainment, and music tended toward the classical rather than the popular. Nagahara Hiromu argues that Japanese elites tried, and failed, to preserve a space for high culture within Japan's emerging mass culture by limiting the rotation of popular songs on the radio, but that even radio was swept up in the media event that was 'Tokyo March' in 1929.[22] Popular novelist Kikuchi Kan serialized a story of that name, starting the previous year, in the top-selling monthly magazine *Kingu*. In the middle of the serialization, Victor Records released a song 'Tokyo March' with lyrics by Saijō Yaso and music by Nakayama Shinpei, perhaps the top lyricist and composer of popular tunes at that time. The record was a phenomenal hit, selling at least 150,000 copies on the back of its jaunty lyrics about a potential affair between a male bohemian and one of the 'modern girls' mentioned above.[23] The song was banned from the radio but an adaptation of Kikuchi's story was broadcast by NHK's Osaka station in May 1929, quickly followed by a film from the Nikkatsu studio, directed by Mizoguchi Kenji.[24] The multimedia promotion had been planned as a tie-up between Victor and Nikkatsu, the first such joint planning between film and record companies, and was intended to commemorate Nikkatsu's first talkie using the Mina Talkie (*Mina tōkī*) sound-on-film system. In fact, the system, a licensed version of Lee de Forest's Phonofilm, failed and the film was released silent with the song played on a record player in the cinema. Nevertheless, the project indicates the increasingly close relation between cinema, radio, and the recording industry during the transition to synchronized sound.

Sound in Japanese cinemas

The American and European films that dominated early Japanese film exhibition were accompanied by local instruments and musical genres, as well as by brass bands playing western marching tunes. Hosokawa Shuhei has reconstructed the musical accompaniment in Japanese cinemas of

22 Nagahara, *Tokyo Boogie-Woogie*.

23 Hosokawa Shuhei, in this volume, cites what he regards as a dubious estimate of 300,000 in sales. Kurata Yoshihiro claims that the record was not an immediate success but was promoted by Nikkatsu actresses who toured cafes and bars, encouraging the owners to play the record. See Kurata, *Nihon rekōdo bunkashi*, p. 156.

24 Kinoshita, 'The Edge of Montage', pp. 124-146. See also Hosokawa Shuhei's article in this volume.

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the 1920s, the decade in which audiences for local films for the first time exceeded that for imported films. The film programme for both Japanese and western films included a live orchestra playing light classical music with a combination of western and Japanese instruments, interludes of classical standards between the films, and occasional appearances by live, usually female, singers that were replaced by records when the singers were banned for immodesty.[25] Kurata Yoshihiro argues that the cue sheets for foreign films familiarized Japanese musicians, and Japanese audiences, with western light classical music. One sociologist even claimed that you could hear kids in the slums playing classical melodies on their harmonicas, thinking it was 'movie music'.[26]

The live narrator or *benshi* was a crucial element of the cinema soundscape during the silent period.[27] As already mentioned, *benshi* made highlight records and performed film stories on the radio so that audiences could relive the sonic experience of the cinema. However, Fujiki Hideaki has shown that with the rise of the star system and the development of a more Hollywood-style *découpage*, audience attention shifted from the *benshi* to the actors. Rather than a free interpreter, the *benshi* was constrained by the proliferating intertitles of early 1920s films and by an approved censorship script after 1925.[28] In effect, like the musicians with their cue sheets, the *benshi* was part of a sonic *dispositif*, an apparatus increasingly focused on narrative and emotional effects centred on the screen.[29]

Even before electronic amplification, Japanese film exhibitors attempted to replace the *benshi* and live musicians with recorded sound. The Kinetophone and other mechanical playback systems had a brief success in the early 1910s, but the main use of recorded sound was to play popular songs in the cinema. One brief exception was Lee de Forest's Phonofilm system that was shown in Japan by Minagawa Yoshizō in 1925. Minagawa's Shōwa Kinema Co., Ltd. licensed Phonofilm as the 'Mina Talkie' system, and used it to produce several short sound subjects as well as the first Japanese talkie feature film, *Reimei/Dawn*, directed by Osanai Kaoru in 1927. Although the

25 Hosokawa, 'Sketches of Silent Film Sound in Japan'.

26 Kurata, *Nihon rekōdo bunkashi,* p. 140

27 See Dym, *Benshi* for a rich account of the 'forgotten narrative art of *setsumei*'.

28 Fujiki, '*Benshi* as Stars'.

29 See Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 194 for a discussion of the *dispositif* as an apparatus that links discursive and non-discursive structures in ways that discipline human behaviour. Foucault was interested in more powerful institutions than the cinema but the pattern of norm and exclusion, of technical and architectural materiality affecting consciousness, and of effects produced without definite subjective intention, is similar.

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films received some press attention, the screenings failed to turn a profit or make any impact on Japanese filmmakers. As we will see in the next section, the introduction of Hollywood talkies in 1929 revived Japanese efforts to make synchronized sound films.

In the 1920s, cinemas played the radio and records in their lobbies to attract audiences and sometimes played the theme song of silent films before and during the film, with the lyrics and often the catalogue number for the record printed on souvenir postcards distributed with the ubiquitous film programmes. Film studios and record companies, along with cinemas, collaborated to advertise their products: posters advertised the records as well as the films, and the poster design was re-used for record advertisement handouts, with record stores sometimes offering discounted tickets or free passes to the movies with the purchase of a record. The record companies created advertising records containing the theme song and dialogue from the film, which played at the cinemas during the intermission, and when the actual film was screened its theme song was often played so that it could be heard in the street in front of the cinema.[30]

In one of the most widely discussed instances, Paramount and Victor promoted the 1931 release of Josef von Sternberg's talkie *Nageki no tenshi/ The Blue Angel* (1930), by inserting an advertisement for the record into the weekly programme handed out in cinemas and attaching an advertisement for the film to the record in all Victor record stores in Tokyo.[31] The All-Kanto Film Study Circle, sponsored by the Asahi newspaper, showed the silent version of the film in the company's cinema, narrated by famous *benshi* Tokugawa Musei.[32] The English talkie version was given a wider release, praised for its sparse dialogue and cinematic values, despite the fact that almost 400 metres was cut by the censors. The Kobe Shōchikuza staged a live revue of the film, though it is not clear whether this was to familiarize audiences with the plot or just to allow them to enjoy the popular songs from the film.[33] Later in the year, those songs were the main feature of an *eiga monogatari* (see Niita Chie's discussion in Chapter 3) broadcast on the radio, in which several *benshi* narrated the story of *The Blue Angel* and three other films, and a singer gave a recital of the songs.[34]

30 Ōnishi, 'Eiga shudaika "Gion kouta" kō', p. 158.

31 Minami, 'Rekōdo kaisha to no tai appu senden', pp. 21-22. See also 'Eiga to shohin no teikei senden', p. 10-12.

32 See 'Dai 35-kai kenkyūkai *Nageki no tenshi* no yoru', *Asahi Shimbun*, 6 May 1931, p. 7 and '*Nageki no tenshi* no yoru', *Asahi Shimbun*, 9 May 1931, p. 11.

33 See the programme for the Kobe Shōchikuza, 29 May 1931.

34 'Eiga fuan oatari no kon'ya', p. 5.

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As Michael Raine argues in Chapter 5, western talkies, linked technologically and commercially to the modern media of radio and recorded music, threatened to make Japanese cinema seem backward in comparison. However, the exhibition of western films posed many problems, from the practical (how to help audiences understand dialogue in a foreign language?) to the theoretical (what is the proper relation of image and sound?).[35] *Benshi* shouted over the English dialogue or turned down the recorded sound, and some cinemas took to advertising *benshi*-free 'after dinner cinema' – screenings in which one could hear living English unencumbered by interpretation. In other attempts to assist audiences unfamiliar with subtitles, or struggling without them, Paramount even translated the story and key phrases for *Thunderbolt* and *Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* and published them as books. However unlikely, local editorials claimed the books sold well as examples of 'real "man" talk' in English.[36] Business suffered from the collision of foreign dialogue and *benshi* explanation, and many cinemas that specialized in western films went back to showing silent classics, cut out dialogue scenes from musical films and showed compilations of the musical numbers, or incorporated live stage shows into the programme.[37]

Critics at the time debated whether the talkies offered an improvement over *benshi* cinema, criticizing talking pictures for losing the aesthetic stylization of the silent film and for destroying cinema's international appeal. Although it was an extreme minority opinion, some even drew on Soviet film theory to criticize Hollywood films' slavish interest in synchronization and looked to the divided channels of *kabuki* narration for inspiration.[38] When translating Hollywood films, they debated the merits of the *benshi* over practices such as side titles (slides projected alongside the screen), X-titles (intertitles cut into a sound film), subtitles, and dubbing.[39] Most of those attempts failed – according to one article, the dubbing of *The Man Who Came Back* was so bad that audiences thought Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell had dubbed themselves in Japanese – but the successful screening

35 See the discussions in Mori Iwao's regular column 'Kabin to hanataba' in *Kinema shūhō* from early 1931, and the many round-table discussions in *Kinema shūhō*, *Kinema junpō*, and other important film journals.

36 Cited in 'The Talkies, a Medium of English Study', p. 17.

37 See 'Kaku eiga kaisha ga neru seika o mukaete no kisaku' for examples.

38 See the survey of Japanese sound theory in Mori, et. al, 'Nihon tōkī taikan'. The Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov proposal on sound was introduced to Japan in *Kinema junpō* in 1930. Ogino, 'Film Criticism in Japan' also cites a T. Shigeno as proposing that the sound film should be modelled on the divided channels of kabuki in *Kinema junpō* in 1931.

39 These alternatives were widely discussed in January and February of 1931. For example, in Mori Iwao, 'Kabin to hanataba 8', p. 18.

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of subtitled prints of *Morocco* in February 1931 settled the practical if not the aesthetic argument.[40] For the rest of the year, audiences could choose whether to watch films such as René Clair's *Sous les toits de Paris/Under the Roofs of Paris* with subtitles or with a *benshi* speaking over and between the French dialogue, but after a series of strikes in 1932 *benshi* were seldom listed in the programmes for cinemas showing western films. Apart from a few experiments with dubbing, films were shown with subtitles (usually scratched onto the right side of the frame) that gave the gist of the scene if not all the dialogue.

Japanese sound films and talkies

The introduction of Hollywood talkies, both sound-on-film and sound-on-disc, in May 1929 galvanized attempts to emulate the new sound film medium in Japan. That was no easy feat for cash-strapped Japanese studios. Talkies increased the cost of production, and that cost could not be amortized across multiple prints and global distribution as it could for Hollywood films. Japanese studios struck less than ten prints of most films and had essentially no export market outside the colonies of Taiwan and Korea and some expatriate communities in Brazil, Hawai'i and the west coast of the USA. The Japanese economy in the late 1920s was already shaky due to a financial crisis in 1927, made worse by fiscal tightening in 1929 and a return to the gold standard in 1930 just as the global depression hit. Agricultural prices fell by almost half, as did wages in the cities and the prices of many other goods.[41] With a fixed exchange rate, Japanese exports were decimated as the whole world was caught in a recessionary vicious circle. The crisis was only relieved by the fiscal expansion caused by Japan's military adventures on the continent and the decision to leave the gold standard at the end of 1931, after which the yen collapsed by 60% against the US dollar.

That reduction in purchasing power slowed the transition to sound even further as the studios could not afford to pay import taxes and the increased cost of foreign technology, reinforcing existing strategies of reverse engineering and import substitution. Stopgaps abounded: for example, cinemas would use turntable systems for silent film exhibition that channelled the

40 See Mimura, 'Western Electric Records "Namiko"', p. 7 for the *Man Who Came Back* anecdote, and Nornes, *Cinema Babel*, especially Chapter 4, for a rich historical and theoretical account of *Morocco* and the introduction of subtitling to Japan.

41 For a lucid survey of this period see Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan* Chapter 11.

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sound through the projectors to the cinema speakers, as if the film itself had sound.[42] Minagawa Yoshizō restructured the Mina Talkie company and secured a distribution deal with Nikkatsu, supplying Nikkatsu cinemas with six machines for playback and releasing films starting in late 1929. Minagawa's former employees developed the Vitaphone-like sound-on-disc Eastphone system and the Phonofilm-like sound-on-film Eion system, but both were regarded as low quality and struggled to find commercial acceptance.

Hundreds of different sound playback systems were sold all over the world, including dozens in Japan, but when the patent wars were settled there were few exceptions to the sound recording tripoly of Western Electric, RCA, and Tobis-Klangfilm. The essential technologies for the incorporation of sound and image onto a single filmstrip – ribbon light valves and responsive photoelectric cells, triode (and more) vacuum tube amplification, separate but synchronized film- and sound-recording motors, flywheels to reduce sound flutter, frequency profiles and psychoacoustic research, and so on – were the product of major industrial research programmes that could not be emulated where patents applied. Japanese studios, however, developed two successful sound recording systems: the sound-on-film Tsuchihashi system at Shōchiku in 1931, followed by the sound-on-film system at Photo Chemical Laboratory (P.C.L.) in 1932. Nikkatsu signed a contract to use the P.C.L. system but soon reneged in favour of a Western Electric recording system that the studio used for dubbing films shot silent until it completed the sound stages at the new Nikkatsu Tamagawa studio in 1934.

Even before Nikkatsu and Shōchiku, whose Ōfuna sound studio was completed in 1936, could produce a full slate of talking pictures, they found ways to incorporate sound in their films. Although they made some talkies, Shōchiku also used the Tsuchihashi system to create 'sound versions' (*saundo-ban*) from 1932 – films shot silent and released with music and sound effects but without synchronized dialogue on the soundtrack. Unlike western sound versions, which also combined images with a musical soundtrack and intertitles, Japanese sound versions were almost always accompanied by a *benshi*, either live or recorded on the soundtrack. Even though that combination of music, voice, and occasional sound effects matched the sonic environment of Japanese silent films, the power relation between the music and the *benshi*, and the nature of their mutual performance, shifted with the creation of the sound version. Like the *benshi*, the conductor or bandleader of a live musical performance could respond to the audience, and maintain

42 For descriptions of these systems see the Chapter 5 in this volume.

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communication with the *benshi* at the front of the auditorium. Yet the introduction of recorded soundtracks fixed the synchronization of sound and image, and control of the volume generally shifted to the projection booth. Adjusting the soundtrack volume according to the *benshi*'s performance now depended on buttons or telephones linked to the auditorium. *Benshi* did not use microphones so they would have to speak over the music or wait for the pauses that sound versions incorporated into the soundtrack before they could summarize the film's narrative.

From 1932, Shōchiku increased the number of synchronized sound films it produced and Nikkatsu switched from Mina Talkie to P.C.L. and then Western Electric equipment to dub some films that were shot silent. The resulting talkies played in the increasing number of contract cinemas that the studios had wired for sound. Also, the P.C.L. studio, after being spurned by Nikkatsu, produced its own films, the first of which were shown in Shōchiku chain cinemas while later films were released in cinemas run by the Tōhō exhibition company. In 1937, Tōhō would absorb P.C.L. and the smaller J.O. studio to create the vertically integrated Tōhō studio that is still a major presence in Japanese cinema. Johan Nordström traces the development of the sound-on-film P.C.L. system in Chapter 6, arguing that the company's inability to provide Nikkatsu with matching playback systems caused the established studio to renege on their contract, and so forced P.C.L. to enter film production. The history of Japanese sound systems and their relation to western precursors demonstrates the complexity of a technological transition constrained by cultural and economic forces that produced the extended and uneven transition to sound in Japan.

Unevenness in Japanese film culture

Technological catch-up is only one reason for the complexity of this period of Japanese film history, a complexity sometimes obscured by the tendency of national cinema studies to hypostatize Japanese culture as both distinct and unitary. Neither of those assumptions holds in this period: the technology, techniques, personnel, and arguments involved in the transition to sound all crossed national borders, while the exhibition environment of Japanese cinemas was radically uneven. If we track the cultural geography of the sound transition, we can identify multiple forms of unevenness in Japanese cinema – for example, between Japan and the West, city and country, and between audiences for films made by different studios and shown in different cinemas.

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For all the cultural permeability of silent cinema there was still a gulf in capital investment between Japanese and western film industries, and the cinema was subject to different cultural pressures in different locations. The *Japanese Cinema Labour Yearbook* in 1933 estimated the capital formation of the Japanese film industry as only 3% of the capitalization of Hollywood studios. Only in 1927 did Japanese audiences watch more Japanese than Western films, by a 7:3 ratio (lower in the more cosmopolitan cities and higher outside), a ratio that did not change despite the troubled introduction of talkies from Europe and America. As part of contemporary capitalist culture, Japanese films had much in common with Hollywood cinema. Even period films (*jidaigeki*) were often modelled on outlaw westerns and experimented with European film styles. Yet as the 1930s wore on there was official pressure to 'nationalize' Japanese popular culture. Records of traditional *nagauta* and military marches sold in large numbers and 'decadent' songs were gradually restricted. Cinemas specializing in Japanese films increasingly showed topical features and documentaries based on Japanese military adventures. Some aspects of the cinema experience converged in the 1930s, reducing the differences between Japan and the West. However, in other ways the experience of the cinema in those different contexts diverged as film programmes, like records and radio programmes, became major vehicles for cultural nationalism in Japan.

In many ways, the unevenness between city and country was more pronounced than the difference between Tokyo and other global cities. Cinemas in the provinces were concentrated in regional cities; smaller locations were serviced by traveling projectionists. Quality was always a problem: if the talkie made silent film seem backward then any sound would do. To save money provincial cinemas used Japanese systems such as Nitta and Rola that, coupled with the lower fidelity of the Japanese recording systems and the much greater wear on each print, often rendered the dialog for Japanese films incomprehensible.[43] After a great deal of industrial unrest, starting with cinemas for western films and shifting from city to country, musicians disappeared from all but the largest cinemas, which used live music and stage shows as an attraction. The *benshi* were relegated from being fixtures at particular cinemas to itinerant and

43 See *Kinema junpō*, 1 January 1935, p. 17 for the claim that Japanese films were incomprehensible on rural projectors. In Mori, et. al., '*Madamu to nyōbō* o meguru', the chief Western Electric engineer in Japan, Kobayashi Kichijirō, claimed that prints sound best after a protective layer has worn off the film, when they have been projected between 22 and 36 times. According to Kobayashi, the prints are designed to be shown 150 times but prints for Japanese films are screened 500 times!

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sometimes freelance workers who would follow the dwindling number of silent and sound version films from cinema to cinema. This situation speaks not so much of a reluctant transition to sound as the co-presence of emergent, dominant, and residual aspects to Japanese film exhibition dictated by the specific material conditions of technological change during the depression.[44] If we include non-synchronized recorded sound films along with talkies, and count the number of cinema seats and the size of audiences, not just the number of cinemas and films, by the early 1930s Japanese cinema was already deeply embedded in a culture of the sound image.

Cinemas in the 1930s were organized into chains, with only a small number in the largest cities specializing in western films. The remaining 1,300 or so, rising to about 1,600 by 1936, were evenly split between showing mixed programmes and showing only Japanese films. The larger cinemas were typically directly owned by or affiliated with specific studios. Cinemas that showed western films or first-run Shōchiku and Nikkatsu films typically installed sound projectors made by Western Electric or RCA, sometimes Tobis-Klangfilm, that were connected to sophisticated record playback devices in the projection booth. These cinemas featured the most powerful and highest fidelity sound systems in the country, though these most prestigious and expensive cinemas often also included live stage shows in the programme. Admission prices ranged from 2 yen for the best seats at the prestigious Teikoku Gekijō (Ozu Yasujirō's regular cinema, which showed almost exclusively western films) to less than a tenth of that price in the cheapest cinemas.

In Tokyo in the early 1930s, there was also a dramatic difference in the level of sound integration among cinemas that catered to audiences for western films and films from the four main studios: Shōchiku, Nikkatsu, Shinkō, and Kawai (which became Daito in 1933). Shōchiku, the most economically successful studio, gradually bought up or otherwise controlled those rivals during the 1930s, seeking to create a monopoly until thwarted by Tōhō in 1937. The various studios maintained product differentiation through highly variable production budgets and uneven sonic conditions at their affiliated cinemas. Shinkō and Daito specialized in sword fighting period films (*chanbara*) that were popular with children and working-class audiences. There, the *benshi* still reigned supreme. Even in the late 1930s, audiences in those cinemas could hear '*benshi*

44 Raymond Williams explores the concepts of dominant, emergent, and residual "structures of feeling" in *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 121-135.

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sound versions' of films shot silent with a soundtrack of *benshi* backed by recorded music.[45] Some scholars claim that a cultural preference for the *benshi* was an obstacle to synchronized sound cinema in Japan. While it is undeniable that there was an audience for the distinct vocal art of the *benshi*, based on a history of oral storytelling forms, it is also clear that Shōchiku and Nikkatsu, joined by the new studios P.C.L and J.O., which were amalgamated into the Tōhō studio in 1937, were determined to make talking pictures. They also found a receptive audience. By 1932, commentary in trade magazines such as *Kinema shūhō* recognized that even western talkies drew larger audiences than silent films and the studios would have to shift to sound and talkie production if they were not to lose their audience.[46]

Even the date of the 'end' of silent cinema is uneven: for much of the supposedly 'delayed' transition, sound in Japanese cinema was both 'already' and 'not yet'. Some studios made and circulated silent films in Japan even after Ozu Yasujirō, the last major holdout, made his first talkie in 1936. 1936 was also the year that the number of talkies finally exceeded the number of silent films, but if we add the intermediary category of the sound version to the totals then films with recorded soundtracks already constituted a majority of productions by 1935. If we consider not just the number of films but also the size of the audience then 1934 is the first year that sound films exceed silent films from Shōchiku, the best-capitalized studio with the largest chain of contract cinemas and the most popular films. We could even argue that the transitional point is 1933, the last year that a silent film took top spot in the *Kinema junpō* Best Ten poll, and the year that talkies and sound versions produced by the studios were some of the top draws, even though they were still in the minority.[47] The essays in this volume are further evidence for the media historical argument that there is no single dimension by which to measure the 'transition to sound' in Japan. Rather than a miraculous 'advent' the transition to sound was a long-anticipated and seldom-resisted achievement in difficult economic circumstances, a development that was realized at different moments, depending on whether we consider the number of films, the number of people who heard them, or their cultural significance to critics and regular filmgoers.

45 Kitada, 'Tōkī jidai no benshi'.

46 'Kōkyūteki kanosei jūbun naru ka: Nikkatsu no gaiga tōkī joei mondai', p. 5.

47 Chika Kinoshita argues that 1934 was the last year a silent film was ranked top by *Kinema junpō* but that film, Ozu Yasujirō's *Story of Floating Weeds/Ukikusa monogatari*, was released as a sound version that played with a recorded soundtrack that competed with the live voice of the *benshi*. See Kinoshita, 'The *Benshi* Track', p. 6.

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The historiography of the transition to sound

There is a history to the historiography of Japanese cinema's transition to sound. Japanese writers published an abundance of richly textured material on the technology and aesthetics of talking pictures during the late 1920s and the 1930s.[48] Just as the arrival of electronically recorded sound brought about questions of medium specificity in Western classical film theory, Japanese critics were preoccupied with delineating the difference between the talkie and silent cinema through extended theoretical and critical reflections on film language and *mise-en-scène*. Chika Kinoshita has convincingly argued that the prolonged coexistence of the silent and the talkie in both production and exhibition in Japan, as well as the close personal connections between critics and filmmakers, fostered a 'media-conscious' film culture in the early 1930s:

> First, the media-conscious critics tried to identify the essence of the talkie medium in contrast to the silent medium, as European filmmakers/theorists did. Secondly, however, the media-conscious did not seek to purify each medium, but to create silent films that reflected talkie aesthetics. Most critics and filmmakers were concerned with the talkie's influence on the use of intertitles in relation to the flow of images. Third, the problem of intertitles was reflected back to the question of how to deal with the tangible duration of filmic discourse brought by synchronized sound. In other words, the question of interval and duration (*ma*) occupied a central place.[49]

A network of specialist publications sustained that film culture, which was perhaps the most extensive in the world. Throughout this period, *Kinema junpō* (1919-) was one of the main venues for sustained discourse on the theoretical implications and practical applications of sound film for film as art and industry. *Eiga hyōron* (1926-1975) also printed critical reflections on sound film style, often from an auteurist point of view, whereas industry-oriented trade publications such as *Kokusai eiga shinbun* (1927-1937) and *Kinema shūhō* (1930-1939) frequently featured articles penned by filmmakers, studio representatives, and film technicians. Short-lived journals such as *Eiga kagaku kenkyū* (1928-1932) and *Eiga geijutsu kenkyū* (1933-1935) explored issues relating to film production and film aesthetics, respectively. Film journals

48 See for example the articles collected in Gerow, Iwamoto, and Nornes, *Nihon senzen eiga ronshū*, chapter 6.
49 Kinoshita, *Mise-en-scène of Desire*, p. 243.

specifically dedicated to issues of sound and music, such as *Tōkī ongaku* (1934-1937) and *Eiga to ongaku* (1937-1940), also carried highly theoretical articles on the nature of talkie aesthetics and talkie film production, with close analysis of sound films' constituent parts in relation to film music.

As Johan Nordström has shown, the debates were led by film scholars, critics and theorists such as Iijima Tadashi and Iwasaki Akira; pioneering film-maker, theoretician and prolific writer Kaeriyama Norimasa; scholar and musician Nakane Hiroshi, one of the foremost contemporary writers on the theoretical aspects of sound cinema; and Kakeshita Keikichi, prolific writer on sound cinema and talkie music who spearheaded the journal *Tōkī ongaku* and later became head of the music division at P.C.L.[50] Both Nakane and Kakeshita frequently advanced technologically determinist readings of talkie music's development from the classical accompaniment of silent cinema to the jazz-infused soundtrack of the talkie, remaining sensitive in their analysis of origin and aesthetic application to the specificities of technology and musical development. Many producers and studio representatives also took an active part in these discourses, perhaps none more so than Mori Iwao, arguably one of the most important and influential figures in the history of the Japanese talkie, especially in his role as head producer at P.C.L., later Tōhō. Mori's voluminous writings touch on almost all aspects of the sound transition, from early theoretical considerations on the viability of sound cinema as artistic form, to later discussions on sound cinema's industry-wide implications for film production.

That many Japanese filmmakers, such as Mizoguchi Kenji, Gosho Heinosuke, and Kimura Sotoji, often doubled as critics and theoreticians during the transition to sound indicates that from the time of the Pure Film Movement onwards representatives of the Japanese film industry systematically investigated their medium. Similarly, the regularly-updated corporate histories of production companies such as Shōchiku, Nikkatsu, and Tōhō attest to how the Japanese film industry has continuously documented itself in ways that, for example, Hollywood studios did not. In the context of the sound transition, those studio histories, especially the editions published during the Pre-War era, offer detailed accounts of how each respective studio dealt with the logistic, economic and technological challenges of sound film. These corporate narratives also serve, by omission, to illustrate the studio's frequent self-censorship, or selective memory, when faced with politically sensitive issues such as workers' rights, left-leaning political

50 For a detailed discussion on contemporary discourses concerning Japan's transition to sound, see Norström, 'Chapter 10: Technology', pp. 151-163.

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affiliations, and the effects of state censorship. Pertinent historical incongruities surface when comparing these 'official' narratives with postwar interviews and memoirs by producers, directors, actors, scriptwriters and technicians. These first-hand accounts of the industries transition to sound often prove invaluable for a deeper, albeit highly subjective, understanding of the technological and aesthetic transitions within the industry. In the context of the sound transition Mori Iwao's *Watakushi no geikai henreki* and Shōchiku producer Kido Shirō's *Nihon eigaden: Eiga seisakusha no kiroku* are particularly important accounts of the sound transition from the viewpoint of two of the industry's most important producers. Gosho Heinosuke's *Waga seishun: Denki Gosho Heinosuke* and Yamamoto Kajirō's *Katsudōya jitaden: Denki Yamamoto Kajirō* also offer important insights from the point of view of two directors who were instrumental in shaping the Japanese talkie cinema of the 1930s. Likewise, Iwamoto Kenji and Saeki Tomonori's collection of long-form interviews *Kikigaki kinema no seishun* serves as an important resource.

The post-war era saw the publication of several multi-volume Japanese film histories that gave detailed accounts of the Japanese film's development. Tanaka Jun'ichirō's multi-volume *Nihon eiga hattatsushi*, begun before the war as serialized instalments in *Kinema junpō*, was one of the first histories based on documents that the author had collected since his early days as a journalist, supplemented by interviews with contemporary filmmakers and producers. The second volume provides an industry-focused, densely detailed history that firmly establishes the industrial, economic, and personnel-based reasons for the corporate restructurings entailed by the transition to sound. Satō Tadao's more narratively-oriented four volume *Nihon eigashi* shifts the focus to the tone and content of the films that were produced and the people who created them, building on his previous account of the transition to sound era published as the chapter 'Tōkī jidai: Nihon eigashi 3' in the third volume of the important anthology series *Kōza Nihon eiga*. That series is rich with interviews and eyewitness accounts from the rise of the talkies.

Another short but succinct historical account of the transition to sound can be found in *Nihon eigashi: Jissha kara seichō konmei no jidai made*, published by *Kinema junpō* as volume 31 of the *Sekai no eiga sakka* series.[51] As Aaron Gerow and Markus Nornes point out, this volume was groundbreaking in that it was the first Japanese film history compiled by university trained film scholars such as Iwamoto Kenji and Chiba Nobuo.[52] The authors

51 Chiba, *Nihon eigashi*.

52 Abé Mark Nornes and Aaron Gerow, *Research Guide to Japanese Film Studies*, p. 136.

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set out to not merely give a descriptive history, but to continuously problematize that history in their analysis of the transition to sound not only within the specificities of the Japanese film industry, but also in relation to issues of colonialism, imperialism and the politics of inter-war Japan.[53]

There is a wealth of historical information drawn from first hand sources and documents in these and other postwar accounts of the sound transition in Japan but, when compared to the richness of the theoretical discussions in the prewar, there is a striking lack of theoretical consideration given to the sound transition. Although many Japanese film historians have given detailed versions of the technological, industrial and artistic shift that occurred during the transition, until recently few have focused on the wider implications of what these changes might entail for the nature of the cinematic apparatus, its social and political implications, and artistic potential. Iwamoto Kenji's work stands out as one of the few exceptions in this context. His sustained interest into the field of sound and the switch from silent to sound has repeatedly gone beyond mere historicism to the intersections between technology, art and industry.

Iwamoto is also editor for the anthology series *Nihon eigashi sōsho*, which across its volumes has included several articles that help inform our understanding of the sound transition. For example, Daibō Masaki's analysis of early Japanese attempts at sound-film synchronization, up until those by Minagawa Yoshizō with the Lee de Forest's sound-on-film technology during the 1920s, calls into question teleological narratives while illuminating the divergent audio-visual experience that these attempts embodied.[54] More recently, Sasagawa Keiko's foray into the intertextual field of musical films and the intersection between popular song and film has boldly staked out new territory for consideration when it comes to re-assessing the historical context of various transmedial forms of cinema. Sasagawa shows how the introduction of radio and the proliferation of phonographic records, together with the further development of the record companies' business model, changed previously established patterns of song consumption. The cinema and sound media industries collaborated more closely, with the *kouta eiga* eventually giving way to the artistic inflections of 'theme song films' (*shudaika eiga*) and 'popular song films' (*kayō eiga*).[55]

In English-language film criticism, occasional articles in contemporary newspapers or film magazines alerted western readers to the importance

53 Chiba, p. 348.

54 Daibō, 'Musei eiga to chikuonki no oto'.

55 Sasagawa, 'Kouta eiga ni kan suru kiso chōsa'.

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of the *benshi* to Japanese silent films, but those articles tended to play up the exoticism of the practice and give very little sense of the stakes of the sound transition in Japan.[56] Major critic Iwasaki Akira provided the most reliable account in *Sight and Sound* in 1937, emphasizing the enthusiastic reception of sound films in Japan, which forced Japanese studios to invest in sound production.[57] Japanese cinema was not 'discovered' by western critics until after world war two, and the first silent and sound-transition films shown were early works by auteurs such as Ozu Yasujirō and Mizoguchi Kenji. Those films were almost invariably shown silent or with a simple musical accompaniment. That some of those films were originally released as 'sound versions' with a complicated relation to the *benshi* was not part of the discussion.

Later scholarship in English paid less attention to the technological, architectural, and social aspects of the sound transition, than to the cultural background and aesthetic consequences of the relatively slow transition, and in particular to the fate of the *benshi*. For example, Noel Burch, supported by a renewed attention to the cultural difference of Japanese cinema by Japanese interlocutors such as Iwamoto Kenji, insisted that Japanese culture had never supported the 'ideology of transparent representation' typified by the 'bourgeois' sound cinema. Sound for Burch was an instance of western cinema's original sin of attempting to create seamless 'codes of illusionism'.[58] In his 'hypothetical explanation', directors such as Ozu and Naruse resisted the introduction of sound, taking advantage of the long transition and accepting the interference of the *benshi* as part of a 'unified cultural practice' in which 'the aesthetic values of Japan's past came to be fully reincarnated in cinema'.[59] Although less extreme, Joseph Anderson also focuses on the traditional nature or avant-garde potential of the splitting of sound and image in silent Japanese cinema narrated by the *benshi*.[60]

Film historians have long recognized the inadequacy of Burch's deconstructive account of Japanese cinema. He misunderstands the role of the *benshi* in the 'ideology of transparent representation' of silent Japanese cinema, does not recognize the prevalence of intertitles and visual narration in films of the period, and makes ahistorical claims about the connection

56 See for example Venebles, 'The Cinema in Japan' and Byas, 'From Oriental Screens'. Though see Byas, 'News of Japan's Films' for a more sympathetic account of the tensions raised by the arrival of sound films in Japan.

57 Iwasaki, 'Honourable Movie-Makers'.

58 Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, p. 66.

59 Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, p. 145-150.

60 Anderson, 'Spoken Silents in the Japanese Cinema'.

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between contemporary cinema and ancient Japanese aesthetics.[61] Reacting against this version of Japanese film as 'our dream cinema' David Bordwell insisted on the importance of primary research into Japanese film style, industry, and social institutions that gains in explanatory power what it loses in exoticism.[62] Bordwell's auteur monograph on Ozu Yasujirō incorporates one of the best English-language overviews of the transition to sound. More recently, scholars based both inside and outside Japan have contributed to the increasingly dense historiography of the sound transition in English.[63]

The chapters in this volume continue that work, contributing to what Bordwell called for forty years ago: a view of 'film style, the film industry, and the social matrix in one complex whole'.[64] They take a broad view of sound in the cinema, attentive to its limits and unexpected effects. For example, in Chapters 1 and 2 Sasagawa Keiko and Hosokawa Shuhei trace the aesthetic as well as industrial connections between cinema and popular song. In Chapter 3, Niita Chie shows how the ways in which film stories were told on the radio developed audience familiarity with talkies. In Chapter 4, Ueda Manabu explores the spread of a new architecture for the cinema auditorium in reciprocal relation to the development of sound technology. In Chapter 5 Michael Raine traces how the growth of electronically mediated sound in the middle of an economic crisis disrupted the soundscape of the cinema and its labour relations. In Chapter 6 Johan Nordström demonstrates that the new P.C.L. studio drew on the performers and the style of the Asakusa revue for the audio-visual style of its films. Finally, in Chapters 7 and 8 Nagato Yohei and Itakura Fumiaki analyse the effects of sound technology and technique on the visual style of filmmakers sensitive to those changes in the medium. We are honoured to be able to present the work of these established and emerging scholars of Japanese cinema in English, often for the first time.

61 Contrary to Burch's argument in *To the Distant Observer*, p. 80, the number of *benshi* were reduced in later silent films, not increased, and the goal of *benshi* performance was often precisely the kind of illusionism that Burch deprecates. See Fukuchi Gorō. 'Musei no deshi to shite' for an account of elite *benshi* Tokugawa Musei's illusionist ambitions. See also Raine, 'A New Form of Silent Cinema' for an account of Ozu's relation to transitional sound film. Burch's argument for the traditional mode of *benshi* narration as avant-garde was anticipated in English by Koch, 'Japanese Cinema', p. 296.

62 Bordwell, 'Our Dream Cinema'.

63 Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema.* For an excellent overview of the current state of research see Gerow, 'Japanese film and television'. Specialized monographs in English that deal in whole or in part with the sound transition in Japan include Dym, *Benshi*; Fujiki, *Making Personas*; Kinoshita, *Mise-en-scène of Desire*; and Nornes, *Cinema Babel.*

64 Bordwell, 'Our Dream Cinema', p. 58.

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In Chapter 1 Sasagawa Keiko reviews the sonic conditions of early cinema screenings, in particular the changing relation between cinema and popular ballads (*kouta*) before the production of Japanese sound films. Film followed the song when the *kouta* first appeared, around the time of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. The songs were released as sheet music and phonograph records, played in cafes and advertised in magazines. Film studios would then release silent romantic melodramas titled after the most popular songs, in which the *benshi* was partially displaced by records that played over scenes superimposed with the song lyrics. With the boom in production and the fall in prices of records at the end of the 1920s, *kouta* films that showcased songs with more western rhythms and scales became even more prominent. Sasagawa interprets this as a response by the film industry to the threat of western musical talkies, showing how the bonds between the film and record industries grew closer as the exploitation cycle for popular music tightened. She argues that those tie-ups prepared the way for the more reciprocal relation between cinema and popular music in the creation of theme songs (*shudaika*) that became ubiquitous in Japanese cinema, along with the new sound genre of the popular song film (*kayō eiga*).

In Chapter 2 Hosokawa Shuhei outlines a history of Japanese popular song and its 'one-way' relationship with cinema to show how the former geisha Katsutarō was produced as a new musical celebrity and then incorporated into *Shima no musume/The Island Girl* and *Tokyo ondo*, two Shōchiku sound films made in 1933, and *Sakura ondo*, made at P.C.L. in 1934. Hosokawa demonstrates the multivalent relationships between sound and image in early Japanese sound films by identifying three different modes to the integration into the diegesis of Katsutarō's title song for each film. In the first film, it serves as a kind of commentary on the feelings of the characters, more aligned with the narrative than the typical *kouta* film. In the second film, Katsutarō's hugely popular song colours and thereby links scenes with a similar emotional valence. In the third film, Katsutarō appears only at the beginning, inoculating Kimura Sotoji's dark melodrama against censorship with an upbeat and pro-military title song.

Turning from records to the radio, in Chapter 3 Niita Chie shows how *eiga monogatari* (film stories), narrated by *benshi* on the radio, advertised films and produced intermedia entertainment for their listeners. In the early 1930s, *eiga monogatari* were displaced by *eigageki* (film dramas) that featured the voices of actors who could not yet be heard in the cinema. Niita's exploration of different radio genres shows how the medium was linked to cinema as part of the culture of the sound image. She argues that

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eigageki prepared the audience for synchronized Japanese talkies, even as the genre dissolved into radio dramas featuring film actors after the transition to sound.

In Chapter 4 Ueda Manabu shows how cinema architecture responded to the demands and affordances of the film medium during the silent period and the transition to sound. It traces a series of developments in the orientation, size, and distribution of cinemas in Japan and argues that they contributed to the tendency toward a unified and synchronized presentation of films in the 1920s and 1930s. Purpose-built cinemas changed their layout from the wide and shallow theatre format to box-like spaces oriented around a long axis that focused audience attention on the screen. With the introduction of amplification and recorded sound, cinemas also increased in size and spread around the country, enabling a standardized cinema experience through the creation of uniform seating and the production of sound films.

In Chapter 5 Michael Raine traces the growth of electronically mediated sound in the middle of an economic crisis that disrupted the soundscape of the cinema and its labour relations. Even before Japanese studios were equipped for talkie production, cinemas showing Japanese films displaced the musicians with recorded sound and 'sound versions'. The introduction of talkies also displaced the musicians and then the *benshi* from cinemas showing western films. That development also threatened the *benshi*, who had been the main attraction of Japanese film exhibition. They became the central figures in the industrial actions that were billed as a struggle against machine civilization, a struggle that played out in the cinemas and in journalism against a wider background of economic and political instability in 1930s Japan.

In Chapter 6 Johan Nordström traces the development of P.C.L. as a new sound studio that employed progressive filmmakers, some with experience in Hollywood, and a more rationalized set of production practices than the established studios. The studio specialized in light musical comedies that combined influences from Hollywood musical films and local live entertainments, in particular the revue form known as Asakusa opera. Nordström shows that the early P.C.L. films featuring the performer Enomoto Ken'ichi emulated the comic interactivity of the stage shows for which the star was famous, distancing the films from their Hollywood intertexts and testing the illusionism of standard forms of film narration.

In Chapter 7 Nagato Yohei questions the historical judgment that *Madamu to nyōbō/The Neighbour's Wife and Mine*, made with the Tsuchihashi

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Shōchikuphone system and released in 1931, was the first commercially and aesthetically successful sound film in Japan. He shows that *Furusato/Hometown*, a part-talkie made with the Mina Talkie system and directed by Mizoguchi Kenji for Nikkatsu, played for weeks in major cinemas in 1930 and was widely praised by film critics. Nagato explores the subtle sound design of the film and discovers a concept of 'counterpoint' and a technique of 'cutaway within the shot' that anticipates Mizoguchi's intense 'one scene, one shot' long take style in his later films, in which the moving camera articulates an undivided *mise-en-scène*.

Finally, in Chapter 8 Itakura Fumiaki approaches the transition to sound from the perspective of its material substrate. He shows that many Japanese films in the transitional period used the 'early talkie frame', in which the soundtrack was added to 35mm silent film without modifying the top and bottom of the frame. Drawing on the importance of a concept of 'authenticity' in archival studies and on his experience at the National Film Archive of Japan, Itakura argues that many well-known films, including Japanese films, cannot now be seen in the correct aspect ratio without access to archival sources. The narrowed horizontal dimension changed the aspect ratio of the image, which prompted some filmmakers to reflect on their film style. Through a close analysis of the original negatives Itakura shows that Ozu Yasujirō's use of the early sound aspect ratio coincided with his increased interest in visual composition, in particular with arranging objects along the bottom frame line, a development that has gone unrecognized because of the faulty reprinting of the original films.

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Note on names and transliteration: Japanese names in this volume are given in Japanese name order (family name first), unless the author publishes regularly in English in western name order. Macrons are used to indicate long vowels in all Japanese words, including personal, company, era, and place names, except for words commonly used in English, such as Tokyo,

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Osaka, Kyoto, and Hyogo. Film titles in each chapter are introduced with the Japanese title followed by the common English title, and are thereafter mentioned by the English title. Japanese words used in the text, such as *benshi* and *eigagaku*, are italicized unless they are commonly used in English. Japanese book titles and names of institutions are not translated, unless relevant to the argument of the essay.

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