Photo by Hildegard Westerkamp

Insights Taken from Three Visited Soundscapes in Japan

By Keiko Torigoe

Abstract

Since the project of *100 Soundscapes of Japan*, which was carried out by the Japanese Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), was completed in 1997, I have been conducting my own follow-up field research, visiting the specific localities which were recommended by the local people for their soundscapes. This paper reports some of my findings on three specific soundscapes. Based on the result of this field work, this paper discusses the significance and problems of the project.1

Introduction

To understand the properties of certain soundscapes reported by other people, it is important for us to visit the localities and to meet and talk with the people who have experienced the soundscapes in their daily lives. From 1994 to 1997, the Japanese EPA carried out a project entitled 100 *Soundscapes of Japan: Preserving Our Heritage* in order to raise awareness of and preserve Japan's natural and cultural soundscape heritage. The project encouraged individuals or groups of people throughout the country to recommend soundscapes which could be appreciated in specific localities and which the dwellers would wish to preserve or to conserve for the next generation.

From these recommended soundscapes, 100 were selected as symbols of the richness and wide variety of Japanese nature and culture. Therefore, the project was not carried out as a "Top 10" kind of event. The whole mixture of 100 soundscapes was expected to be a kind of trigger for others to become aware of the many aspects of their own surrounding soundscapes. Applicants were asked to provide the answers in the following form:

1) name and address of the person or the group;
2) description of the specific sound components of the soundscape which could include visual illustrations;
3) season and time when the recommended soundscape is experienced;
4) location or site where the soundscape is experienced;
5) reason why the applicant wants to conserve the soundscape.

I participated in this project both as a planning adviser and a committee member. A total of 738 applications were received, of which 249 came from individuals. The themes of the soundscapes varied from the sounds of natural creatures and phenomena to those of festivals and industries, as well as the sounds of transportation such as steam locomotives. Through these applications, I became aware of the wide variety of soundscapes and specific sites which exist in Japan or are created by people throughout the country.

When the final 100 soundscapes were selected and publicly announced, the project itself was completed. However, since then, I have been conducting my own private follow-up field research on these 100 soundscapes as well as on those not selected (through my experience as a committee member I was aware of the fact that some selections were politically motivated, although most of the 100 were selected for their ecological and cultural value). I have already visited some of the sites in the process of my study.

Through visiting the actual soundscapes and interviewing the local people including the applicants, I have come to understand the profound meaning that the individual soundscapes hold for the inhabitants. It also enabled me to observe the various events which were brought about by the very fact that the sites were selected.

This paper aims to report what I have experienced and to discuss the significance and problems of the project by focussing on three specific soundscapes:

1) the soundscape of drift ice in the Sea of Okhotsk, the most northern soundscape of Japan,
2) the rumblings of the Sea of Enshu, the soundscape located in the centre of the country,
3) the sound of the subtropical forest and the creatures along Shiiragawa River of Iriomote Island, the southern-most soundscape of Japan.

All of these were included in the 100 selected soundscapes.

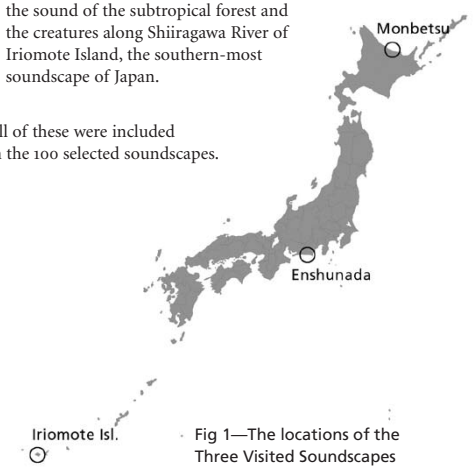

Fig 1—The locations of the Three Visited Soundscapes

1.The Soundscape of Drift Ice in the Sea of Okhotsk

The advent of drift ice is sudden. One day we notice that a white line shines along the horizon, and the next morning, or some days later, the whole surface of the sea changes into a white world of ice. Then the sea is hidden under layers of

whiteness and quietness, and the sound of the waves cannot be heard. But if I listen carefully, I start hearing the whining and wailing sounds of the moving ice fields instead. This is how the ice weeps. The surging ice pushes forward and piles up in pieces one above another, and in that process it makes creaking, squeaking and groaning sounds and forms itself into extraordinary shapes. As these shapes lose their balance, pieces of ice break away and with a hissing sound skid along the surface of the ice field. Indeed, the drift ice sounds like a living creature.

– One applicant's comment

In Japan it is only along the coast of the Okhotsk Sea—the southern most end of the drift ice, which begins in the Arctic Circle—where we can hear the sound of drift ice.

This coast is located between the two capes of Sohya and Shiretoko and there are cities and towns such as Esashi, Monbetsu and Abashiri. The applicant quoted above and who described the interesting variety of drift ice sounds, comes from Esashi City.

In order to experience some of these sounds, I decided to visit the city of Monbetsu in February 1999, which is located just around the middle section of the coast. It was late afternoon when I arrived in the city. First I visited city hall, where I had an appointment to interview some city officials. I found out that every year, since 1986, the city of Monbetsu has been holding an International Conference on the Regions of the Arctic Circle. Not only the scholars and specialists but also the citizens get together at these conferences to compare, for example, the different ways of preparing the same food, to share their customs and exchange ideas.

In a pamphlet handed out by city council, there was a phrase stating that *drift ice now has a new life*. I asked them what they meant by *new life*. They explained that in former times the advent of drift ice stopped the fishermen of this area from going fishing. As a result they had no income during this time. Therefore the drift ice was sometimes called "the white devil" by the local people, and was the symbol of poverty. However, in 1961, scallops began to be cultivated and it turned out to be quite successful precisely because of the conditions created by the drift ice.

A vast amount of vegetable and animal plankton flows from the Amur River into the Okhotsk Sea and enriches the seawater environment, which in turn is protected by the drift ice. As a result the combination of this food chain and the drift ice the Okhotsk Sea becomes an excellent place for the cultivation of seafood. Furthermore, the local people started to understand that drift ice functions as a kind of lid on the ocean, which stops the sea salt from being blown onto the land and destroying the forests.

Based on these new findings, the inhabitants' attitude towards drift ice has changed completely. Now drift ice is considered to be positively good in contrast to former times when it was considered to be positively bad. This change was reinforced by the development of an academic study on drift ice at the University of Hokkaido.

From this new awareness of the benefits of drift ice, the local people's attitude to other aspects of their environment has also been changed. For example, they used to be in favour of the excavation and development of an underground oil field in Sakhalin, Russia. But now, they are greatly concerned that it may pollute the seawater in the event of an accident. If this were to happen, the drift ice would contain oil which in turn would contaminate the sea of Monbetsu.

When I asked about the sounds made by the drift ice Mr. Funayama, one of the city officials whom I was interviewing, told me the following interesting fact. While it is true that the typical sounds of drift ice are creaking and squeaking sounds, these are, in fact, rarely noticed by the local people in their daily lives. Mr. Funayama's former house is located about 300 meters away from the coast and the house is surrounded by the constant sound of ocean waves. However, as he says himself, one morning when he woke up, suddenly the wave sounds were silenced. This signified to him the arrival of drift ice. Indeed, in the local people's daily lives it is this sudden silence of the waves which makes out the character of the drift ice soundscape

Listening to Mr.Funayama's words and recalling the applicant's description quoted at the beginning of this section, my understanding of this soundscape was deepened. The sea is silenced by drift ice. So its sound *is* quietness. Or as the applicant expresses it: *the sea is hidden in a world of whiteness and quietness, and the sound of the waves cannot be heard*. And the soft and delicate creaking and squeaking sounds that he mentions are audible precisely because of this quietness.2

As the next soundscape example shows, folktales often exist where we encouter a rich interaction between the local people and their natural sound environments. So, my last question to the people I interviewed was whether they had heard of any folktales or myths referring to the drift ice. However, none of them seemed to have heard of any such tales.

2. The Rumbling of the Sea of Enshu

The waves of the Enshu Sea rumble without any rest, like high and low drums. The sound is like a symphony played by the sea and the winds.

In the spring, the ebbing and flowing of the small waves beat small drums softly together with the sound of the gravel. The voices of children on an excursion are captured on the five lines of the musical notation formed on the sandhill by the winds.

In the summer, the big surges of the waves beat big drums, washing the feet of the children on the shore. Their shouts resound like the sound of brass instruments among the waves.

The fall is the season of typhoons. The drum sounds made by the waves reach us from the East announcing a break in the weather. The wave sounds are audible within a distance of 30 or 40 km, which reveals the meaning of the proverb: thunder travels 2 Ri, Waves travel 7 Ri. (1 Ri equals 3.9 km in the traditional Japanese way of measuring distance.)

The winter is the season of strong winds. The sand on the beach travels from one sandhill to another as it dances to the accompaniment of the waves.

– One applicant's comment

There were several applicants for this sound, *the rumbling of the Sea of Enshu*, including the one who wrote the above sentences, a local dweller who was born and is still living near the Sea of Enshu. All of them referred to an old folktale of *Wave Boy*. which is one of seven well known mysteries in the Enshu district. The story goes as follows:

> Once upon a time, there was a small monster called *Wave Boy* living in the Sea of Enshu. *Wave Boy* was very mischievous and did many naughty things such as breaking the fishing net. One day, a fisherman found *Wave Boy* caught in his net. He said, "At last, I caught you. You should get ready to be killed." *Wave Boy* implored saying "Please save my life. If you save me, I will give you something in return. I will let you know the change of the weather by beating the drum. The fisherman released him, and since then *Wave Boy* has been announcing weather changes by beating his wave drum.

In March of 1998, I visited Nagaoka sandhill located on the coast of the Enshu Sea. Observing the site and talking with local people, I found out that the beach itself is endangered through erosion. The amount of sand on the beach is decreasing steadily, caused by several factors including the construction of dams upstream of the Tenryu River—a big river which flows into the Sea of Enshu—and the unhealthy pine woods which were planted as windbreakers.

Some of the local dwellers, including the applicants, are very concerned about this situation. During that same visit, I noticed a new stone statue on the beach together with a sandholding fence. According to the local people, this is a statue of *Wave Boy*, which was built by the local government immediately after the site was selected as one of the 100 Soundscapes of Japan.

Fig 2—Nagaoka Sandhill with Traditional Windproof Fences

On the front side of the stone base, the title of the statue, *Namikozo*, which means *Wave Boy* in Japanese, is curved in three Chinese characters, and under the title, the brief story of the *Wave Boy* legend is also curved. I felt that something is wrong with this statue. It is a good idea to let visitors know the legend by engraving the story into a stone monument. However, a mythical figure such as *Wave Boy* has been imagined in many ways, therefore it seems problematical to me to visually represent and freeze his image into one sculptured form.

3. The Sounds of Subtropical Forests and Creatures along the Shiira River

Iriomote Island, which is located within the southern most subtropical area of Japan, is the habitat of a variety of rare species, such as crown eagles and round back turtles, both of which are Protected Species. Because of its rich nature, the island is called the Galapagos of the Oriental world. It is the biggest island in the Yaeyama Islands, which have their own unique culture, distinct from the Okinawa culture.

Four applicants recommended this particular soundscape to the project and it was selected to be among the final 100 under the title of *TheVoices of Birds and Animals Living in the Mangrove Forest / The Soundscape of the Shiira River Created by the Local Living Creatures*. This is the most Southern of all the recommended sites.

It was March of 2001 when I landed on Iriomote Island and I was concerned that it would be too early to hear the subtropical sounds recommended in the applications. However, I was able to hear some of them as summer comes very early on this island.

The most impressive sounds I heard during my stay were the voices of some local creatures, that sounded like *kon-kon kon-kon*. They entered my room in the inn from the surrounding environment when I was resting on my futon. Another voice was a continual *kata kata kata kata* which filled the paddy field by a path. As I had never heard these sounds in my life before, it was impossible for me to connect them to any specific creatures. They remained pure sound to me, as I could not put them into any semantic context. This made them particularly mysterious to me. Listening to these unfamiliar sounds, I felt that I was not in Japan.

On my second day on the island, I visited Mr. Sakaguchi, one of the four applicants who works at the *Iriomote Wildlife Conservation Centre*, and I interviewed him about the sounds of the forest on the island as well as about the life of the islanders themselves.

Although there are many rivers on the island, the Shiira River, according to Mr. Sakaguchi, is the optimum place to observe nature, because its size is ideal for canoeing. I asked him what the *kon-kon* sounds were, heard the night before. But he said it was difficult to tell without hearing the real sound. He speculated that it may have been the voices of either the spotted belly yaeyama frogs or of the branded crakes.

He also explained that traditionally the islanders who were involved with agriculture and forestry, relied on the sounds from the forest to regulate their daily activities. For example, the call of the Ruddy Kingfisher announces the beginning of the farming season and the chirping of the Dusky Thrush tells the arrival of seeding time. Sometimes the islanders considered these sounds to be the voices of the gods. At the same time, so he told me, the whole island is also developing the idea of *eco-tourism*.

The following day, I canoed along the Shiira River with Mr. Yamamoto, a local canoeing instructor. I followed him in my own canoe, as we paddled upstream.

The further we went, the less we heard the mechanical sounds of the port. Finally we were surrounded just by the sounds from the forest and river (as shown in fig. 3). I heard clearly the rustling sounds in the trees and the voices of various birds and other living creatures—sounds that I had not heard during a motor boat tour on my first day here along a bigger river. When I heard a sharp and strong chirp, Mr. Yamamoto told me that it was the courtship cry of a Crested Serpent Eagle.

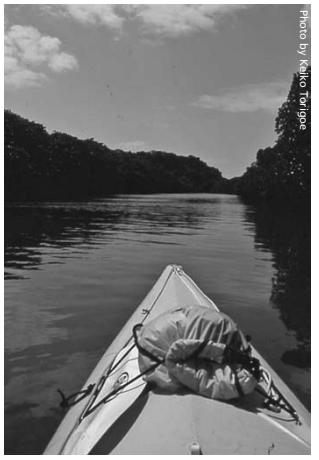

Fig 3—A View from My Canoe

After about two hours of paddling, we were able to float back down stream, so we could concentrate on listening & observing our surroundings. Occasionally, we dipped our oars in the water in order to steer our canoes in the right direction. The sound of the water dripping from our oars onto the surface of the river, resounded with crystal clarity. In the midst of this rich acoustic environment, I felt a profound quietness.

In the course of the tour, Mr. Yamamoto explained many things to me. The most impressive one was that, the number of visitors coming to listen to the sounds of the river surroundings had increased since this particular soundscape was selected. Due to this fact, the motor boat travel company of the island had withdrawn its motor boats from the Shiira River.

Conclusion

These three cases gave me a variety of insights into the nature of our soundscape activities and showed me the significance (and disadvantages) of the *100 Soundscapes* project.

For example, the last case highlighted the need for noise abatement, not only for our health and aural well being, but also to reveal to our ears what all too often is covered by noise: the indigenous soundscapes of our local environments.

One of these cases also showed that folktales record the traditional interaction or relationship between the local people and the sounds of their environment.

In another case, when the local people became aware of the extra aural dimensions of their environment, it empowered them to pursue further ecological activities. At the same time, it is also important that the project—on a purely personal level—enabled these applicants and the local people they represented, to extend their understanding and deepen their appreciation of their local environments. Their comments and illustrations in their application forms demonstrated this clearly.

At the Stockholm *Hey Listen!* conference (June '98), I first presented the *100 Soundscapes* project from Japan as an example of how an awareness of soundscape and acoustic ecology issues can be converted into action. At that time I tried to highlight one of the most important aspects of this project: the fact that the project *itself* was an action brought about by the awareness of soundscape and acoustic ecology concepts. However, at the same time, I could predict from previous work in this area, that future actions needed to take more of a grass roots approach, *designing from the bottom up or from inside*, which is very different from the conventional way of *designing from the top down or from outside*. (Torigoe 1998: 104). After the Stockholm conference, Gregg Wagstaff succinctly honed in on this aspect of the project as follows:

> The *100 Soundscapes* project successfully raised public awareness of, and responsibility towards, the environment by means of its soundscape. This was achieved not by promoting a 'Self-realisation' but rather the identification of sounds as having a greater value or worth within a community by that community. (Wagstaff 1999: 7)

The fact that the motor boat travel company stopped running their motor boats on the Shiira River so that the visitors could enjoy the sounds of the subtropical forest and the living creatures in that area, demonstrates what Wagstaff and myself said above. The local people, including the owner and workers of the company, became aware not only of the value of the river's sound environment but also of their responsibility towards these sounds. As a result their priorities and understanding of their daily activities within their environment changed.

The *Wave Boy* statue is another, but in a way more ambiguous, example of action taken as a result of the *100 Soundscapes* project. As mentioned earlier I had an uneasy feeling when I saw the statue on the beach of Enshu. I felt that it fixed an image of *Wave Boy* in people's minds. Whereas the marvelous aural tradition of the legend allows people to use their inner imagination and conjure up images in their own mind's eye of this *Wave Boy*, a visual aid like this statue highlights only one person's notion of what he might have looked like.

These examples indicate that there can be a wide variety of actions as a result of soundscape projects, some of which may be more beneficial in the context of acoustic ecology, and some may even contradict its ideals. However, this does not mean that we should be discouraged from carrying out actions as a result of the project, as long as we consider them carefully and continue to exchange our opinions in an open atmosphere. (In this context we should not forget the fact that the eco-tourism in Iriomote Island is based on economic and commercial considerations.)

As we have seen from *Wave Boy*, legends of folk tales referring to environmental sounds are an important part of the local soundscapes. That was the reason I asked people in Monbetsu if they knew of any legends or folk tales based on the drift ice. When they replied that they had not heard of any, I suggested to them that they might consider inventing a new story which would include the sound of drift ice. If I were from the area, I would love to create such a story myself. This could also be a future action of the *100 Soundscapes* project.

At the same time, we should not assume that there are no legends about drift ice in Japan. It could very well be that there are some among the Ainu people who used to be the main people living in the drift ice area. But unfortunately, the dominant Japanese indigenous people, who started to take control of Hokkaido about 1800, did not culturally interact with the Ainu people.

It is highly likely that other peoples living around the Arctic Circle have stories and legends about drift ice. Indeed, it would be another action to initiate exchange of such stories among the people who share the common experience and environment of drift ice.

On the last day of my visit to Monbetsu, I traveled through the frozen sea on an ice-breaker. From the deck of the ship, I noticed the footprints of the Northern Fox. Watching these footprints as they faded away into the white surface of the sea, I thought of the so-called "Okhotsk People", who, the local people say, used to travel just as freely on the frozen sea.

For the Okhotsk people as well as for the Northern Fox, it is not a national anthem that is important, but the environmental sounds which form the soundscape of their daily lives. It is a matter of survival for them to listen to the subtle differences in the drift ice sounds.

If people were bound more by the local soundscapes rather than by national anthems, there would be wider and deeper understanding among the people of this new millennium.

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Endnotes

1 This paper was presented at the WFAE conference in Melbourne in 2003. Several sentences and figures were added for this version.

2 Recently, in March 2006, I visited the Shiretoko Peninsula and I heard a type of murmuring sound in the drift ice in Okhotsuk, which indicated that the power of the drift ice in the Okhotsk Sea has decreased since the year 1999. The murmuring sound was caused by the air captured inside the ice. As the ice melted, the air was released out into the sea water and made the murmuring sounds. When the power of drift ice is strong, however, the drift ice squeaks and grinds.

Acoustic Ecology Considered as a Connotation: Semiotic, Post-Colonial and Educational Views of Soundscape

By Dr. Tadahiko Imada

Keywords: *Semiotics, Post-colonial, and Soundscape*

I. Phono-Centrism and Metaphysics

Jacque Derrida criticized the Cartesian metaphysical view of philosophy as being logo-centric. Derrida thinks that logos is merely a monologue criticized as phono-centrism. Phono-centrism suggests that when one speaks something, one's speech should express exactly the same contents which one intends to say, in other words, there is no difference between speech and writing. Derrida writes (1978, pp.279-278):

> The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix—if you will pardon me for demonstrating so little and for being so elliptical in order to come more quickly to my principal theme—is the determination of being as presence in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated the constant of a presence—*eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia*, (essence, existence, substance, subject) altetheia, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.

European philosophy always listens to its own voice. This monologue pursues a desire for unification, explained by the terms "A=A." This is a concept which seeks identity among differentiation. For example, the concept of "a human = a human" may express that a human being is always a human being even if one looks like a hoodlum, and this concept of "A=A" comes from a particular value named "cogito." Therefore, the concept of "A=A" secretly introduces the concept of humanity. Derrida (1980) also argues that all language, because of a surplus over any exact reference, leaves the reader and listener free to interpret due to a certain vagueness of the relationship between signifier and signified. European metaphysics strives for a solid foundation of language, that is to say, an original meaning which is spoken and can be precisely written. Therefore this writing (*ecriture*) actually says exactly the same thing as the original meaning of the speech. In Saussurian linguistics, attention is paid to speech events (*parole*). Derrida criticizes this as phono-centrism and removes the center of Saussurian linguistics from speech events to writing (*ecriture*). Derrida explains (1976, p.78):

> The privilege of the phone does not depend upon a choice that might have been avoided. It corresponds to the moment of the system (let us say, of the "life" of "history or of "being-as-self-relationship"). The system of "hearing / understanding-oneself-speak" through the phonic substance—which presents itself as a non-exterior, non-empirical or non-contingent signifier—has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world-origin, arising from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, the outside and the inside, ideality and non-ideality, universal and non-universal, transcendental and empirical, etc.

Naess (1998), for example, proposed the concept of deep ecology, which has no objective/subjective distinctions, and all human beings can instinctively and spontaneously experience it. His concept is quite similar to Noam Chomsky's linguistic theory. Chomsky (1966) proposed the concept of deep structure, in which all human beings innately and universally have as one, the same internal organs. However, both "deep ecology" and "deep structure" have never yet been found. If anything, we might merely listen to Naess' monologue and should not expect to find any fundamental ecological truth. Needless to say, any cultural symbol or heritage is not genetically inherited, (e.g., Levi-Strauss, 1968). Thus, we cannot share the same acoustic environment where everybody universally feels comfortable. We may be able to find some commonalities in terms of acoustic environments and people's perceptions. However, we should also examine their socio-cultural settings very carefully. We need to learn what deconstruction, cultural history, narratology, and feminist theory have to offer even for acoustic ecology as well as soundscape studies (Said, 1991, xvi).

Umberto Eco says (1972, p.383):

> If the ultimate structure exists, it cannot be defined; no metalanguage can ever capture it—because if it can be discovered, it is no longer ultimate.

How can we understand or even compare soundscapes which have totally different histories and contexts? In non-Western cultures, there is presumably no concept of Western acoustic ecology or soundscape at all. Can we simply abstract a "sound structure" of which Western people may make sense from non-Western sound cultures? And can we accept such a structure as a universal one for acoustic ecology or soundscape, ignoring all the evidence of differences? We can possibly have some universal sense of acoustic ecology or soundscape from a European or North American perspective. However, if it does not apply to non-Western sophistication (if people in the non-Western culture do not need to seek the universal nature of acoustic ecology or soundscape at all), a universal structure of acoustic ecology itself would be a European and North American cultural product in a specific period.

People in Japan, for example, used the word "music" as soon as Western musical influence came to Japan in the early twentieth century (Tanaka, et al, 1986). In ancient times, "music" meant the foreign instrumental sounds which were mostly from Korea and China. Simultaneously, people in ancient Japan called their own