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**SCUOLA DOTTORALE DI ATENEIO  
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DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN  
LINGUE E CIVILTÀ DELL'ASIA E DELL'AFRICA MEDITERRANEA  
CICLO 28°  
ANNO DI DISCUSSIONE: 2017

**DECENTERING *GAGAKU*  
EXPLORING THE MULTIPLICITY OF CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE COURT MUSIC**

SETTORE SCIENTIFICO DISCIPLINARE DI AFFERENZA: L-OR/22  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To an extent, writing is never a solitary endeavor. So much more so in the case of academic writing, where one is not only writing with, but also for, against, and along others. Acknowledgements are hopelessly incomplete. But of course this is not a good reason not to express gratitude and affection. First of all, I wish to thank my Supervisors, Professor Bonaventura Ruperti and Professor Katarzyna Cwiertka, for allowing me to roam free. During my time in Japan, I received expert guidance from Professor Itō Kimio at Kyoto University and from Professor Alison Tokita at the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music of Kyoto City University of Arts. Thanks to them, and to the entire staff of the Research Centre, for their warm and welcoming support. In particular, I wish to thank Professor Takuwa Satoshi and Mr. Saitō Hisashi for their assistance and patience. My second year of fieldwork was made possible by the Japan Foundation, which I gratefully acknowledge. For precious introductions and for assistance at various stages, thanks to Dr. Marcella Mariotti, Professor Toshio Miyake (both at Ca' Foscari University) and Dr. Daniele Sestili (former Sapienza University of Rome). Thanks to Professor Fujita Takanori and to Dr. Diego Pellicchia for reading an earlier draft of this dissertation, and for offering insightful comments. Thanks are also due to Professor Steven G. Nelson (Hōsei University) and to Professor Terauchi Naoko (Kobe University). I owe an immense debt of gratitude to all the music-makers I was able to work with: in particular, many thanks to Professor Suzuki Haruo (Nihon gagakukai), to the members of the Uono Reed Bed Research Centre, to its Director Koyama Hiromichi, and to Professor Satō Kōji (Tenri University). Two years with the practitioners of Nanto gakuso in Nara have shaped my experience of *gagaku*. My warmest thanks go to Professor Kasagi Kan'ichi, the Head of the group, for allowing me to sit among the musicians, as well as to the other *sensei* and all the members. Special thanks go to one practitioner, who decided to remain anonymous. Finally, I thank all of my friends, my family, and Margherita: they are the ones I play with every day. This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfathers, who also loved to play.

## NOTE ON THE TEXT

All matters of style, including footnotes, in-text and bibliographic references follow the so-called author-date system of the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The only exception is represented by single quotation marks, which signal either alterations of a word's most common usage (when outside of someone else's quoted words) or a quotation enclosed within another quotation. Japanese personal names are given in their Japanese order, with the family name first. Transliterations follow the modified Hepburn system for Japanese, and the *pinyin* system for Chinese. Macrons indicate long vowels except in the common place names Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe, and Kyoto unless these appear in composite terms. Japanese and Chinese characters are only used when rendered necessary by the discussion.



## INTRODUCTION

### I. A NEW ONTOLOGICAL PARADIGM FOR THE STUDY OF 'JAPANESE COURT MUSIC'

Can 'what is' and 'what are' questions ever be answered? Should they? Undoubtedly (unfortunately?), a question for the ontologist, the metaphysician, the logician. At any rate, a question for the philosopher. But is that really so? After all, anthropologists too have recently carved their way into formerly restricted areas of the finely trimmed and carefully fenced garden of Euro-American knowledge –and they are, more than ever, happy to raise profound philosophical questions, mingling with ontology<sup>1</sup>. Mingling...or mangling<sup>2</sup>: regardless of the undeniable success and widespread resonances of this “anthropology of ontology” (Scott 2013), the case has been made before for a “revolt” against the reductive, positivistic intellectual inheritance of simplificatory methodologies,

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<sup>1</sup> For some of the most recent texts, see in particular (Viveiros de Castro 2004b; 2013; 2014; Mol 2014; Scott 2013; Skafish 2014; Kohn 2015). For a sharp criticism of the so-called “ontological turn” in anthropology, see (Bessire and Bond 2014). Further references can be found at <https://umaincertaantropologia.org/2014/10/28/a-readers-guide-to-the-ontological-turn-parts-1-to-4-somatosphere/> (accessed November 22, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> A not-so-covert reference to Andrew Pickering's *The Mangle of Practice* (1995).

favoring instead a “messier” methodology that could deal more appropriately with the complexity of reality (see Law 2004; Law and Mol 2002). After all, as noticed by John Law in *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*, “simple clear descriptions don’t work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent”; examples of things that are not easy to simplify include “pains and pleasures, hopes and horrors, intuitions and apprehensions...things that slip and slide, or appear and disappear, change shape or don’t have much form at all, unpredictabilities” (2004, 2). What better ‘object’<sup>3</sup> than music, with its paradoxical relation to time and space and its tendency to crisscross the line between material and immaterial, to put this view to the test? A first, underlying issue emerges: do we get to a better understanding of music by giving up methodological simplicity and trying to practice more complex methods instead?

In this apparently messy context, and in line with this line of reasoning, I want to try to “keep the metaphors of reality-making open” (Law 2004, 139 emphasis removed) by *asking philosophical questions about music anthropologically*<sup>4</sup>. Inevitably, such a stance entails the necessity to ‘position’ or ‘situate’ oneself: to say how a question will be asked is to say *from where* one is going to speak, to begin to make one’s “situatedness” appear (Vannini 2008; see also Haraway 1988; Strathern 1999). ‘What is *gagaku*?’ is the fundamental question raised time and again in the course of this dissertation. And to ask this question anthropologically means, I believe, to also ask how this particular object, *gagaku*, is constructed (or, to put it less bluntly, represented) as an object-of-knowledge<sup>5</sup>. This is not to say that anthropology is implicitly or necessarily constructivist, but, more practically, that as anthropologists are interested in what things are *to the people they work with* -or, in more recent terms, in *what constitutes a thing* for the people they work with.

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth reminding that bracketing words and phrases serves the purpose of signaling an epistemological violence –that of employing second-order notions that are largely non-isomorphic with the products of Japanese knowledge practices. As noticed by Marilyn Ivy with regard to ‘Japan’ and ‘the West’, quotation marks are used to indicate the “unstable identities” of what is marked (1995, 1). I use them in much the same way, to complicate the idea that conceptual constructs (like ‘music’) have unproblematic essences.

<sup>4</sup> The double irony is not lost on me: that the advice comes neither from a philosopher nor an anthropologist, nor even a musicologist, but from a sociologist; and that the use of words like philosophy, music and anthropology already seems to contradict the purpose of keeping one’s metaphors open. Different aspects of the same problem: linguistic and disciplinary boundaries are conventional. But the point is precisely that it is important to find ways of studying things that spill over boundaries: in this sense, a theoretical overstepping of sorts might be a good place to start.

<sup>5</sup> On the notion of (social) constructionism, see (Haslanger 1995; Mallon 2007).

If our starting point is a philosophical question asked anthropologically, what better path to follow than the one trailblazed by a breed of anthropologists who decided to tackle ontology full front? This anthropology of ontology consists, at least in part, of “ethnographic accounts of indigenous non-Western modes and models of being, presented in more or less explicit contrast with aspects of a Euro-American or modern ontology imputed to conventional anthropology” (Scott 2013, 859). Much of the tampering with Euro-American philosophical reasoning that characterizes these texts was inspired by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s “Amerindian perspectivism”<sup>6</sup>, and in particular by his noticing that “the resistance by Amerindian perspectivism to the terms of our epistemological debates casts suspicion on the robustness and transportability of the ontological partitions which they presuppose” (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 469). These “partitions” are none other than Cartesian dualisms, the likes of subject and object, material and immaterial, culture and nature: take the “ontological turn” (perhaps an excessively inclusive umbrella-term that indicates this vast coalescing front) and witness the walls of Euro-American customary ontology crumble down (see Stengers 1994; Scott 2013, 862). Herein lies the promise of different ontologies: to open up whole disciplinary fields to the study of not just ways of seeing the world, but the very possibility of there being more than one world.

Some of the approaches that are routinely associated with the ontological turn (either in the sense that they influenced it or were influenced by it) are science and technology studies (STS), actor-network theory (ANT)<sup>7</sup>, and object-oriented ontology (OOO)<sup>8</sup>. All of these share two important features: a “symmetrical” approach (see Latour 1993) that rejects any a priori distinction between material objects and knowing subjects, arguing

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<sup>6</sup> Synthetically defined as: “The conception, common to many peoples of the continent, according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view” (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 469).

<sup>7</sup> A theoretical and methodological approach that owes much to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, but also to Michel Serres, Algis Greimas and, in what could be termed its ‘Anglo-Saxon variant’, Alfred Whitehead, Donna Haraway, Roy Wagner and Marilyn Strathern. Seminal works include (Callon 1984) and (Latour and Woolgar 1986). For introductory texts see (Law 1992; Latour 2005; and Mol 2010).

<sup>8</sup> The pivotal figure is Bruno Latour: despite initially rejecting the acronym ANT (“I will start by saying that there are four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor, the word network, the word theory and the hyphen! Four nails in the coffin” (Latour 1999, 15)), the French philosopher eventually published an influential book that accepted the expression from its very title (Latour 2005). He always claimed that the roots of that movement laid in the study of science and technology (with special reference to *Laboratory Life*, a book written with Steven Woolgar first published in 1979). It is worth noting that Graham Harman, an important representative of OOO, devoted a book to Latour’s metaphysics (Harman 2009), and that his own approach was influenced by ANT (however, see Harman 2014 for the latest developments).

instead that “we are caught up (...) in a dense *material-semiotic network*” (Law 2004, 68 emphasis in the original), and a sensitivity towards multiplicity. Scott’s choice of words captures both aspects well: speaking of the “relational non-dualism” of the anthropology of ontology, he echoes John Law’s foundational assumptions that “interaction is all that there is” and that “society, organizations, agents and machines are all effects generated in patterned networks of diverse (not simply human) materials” (Law 1992, 380).

Incidentally, the primacy of the relation is arguably the most important metaphysical trait of Viveiros de Castro’s anthropological theory: for him, the “absolute relation that provides concrete *actants*<sup>9</sup> with their relative positions as subjects or objects” becomes “an a priori structure, (...) a condition of the field of perception” (2013, 478). In other words, the relation –not any notion of ‘the human’ or ‘the subject’– is the real metaphysical ground of all possible partitions, of all comparisons and binary oppositions. But if, indeed, relation is so central to this new anthropological conception of reality, and if, as proposed by Viveiros de Castro, the very notion of a subject is but “an effect of the relation” (2013, 479), it should follow that anthropology amounts to comparing relations –a necessarily recursive exercise, “since comparing is relating, and vice versa”<sup>10</sup>. Thus redefined, the discipline is also bound to examine the conditions under which its own comparisons are performed<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, anthropologists must be constantly attentive to the specific practices in which relations are performed.

One author who, moving from similar considerations, has worked intensely on practice and multiplicity, is Dutch anthropologist Annemarie Mol. Starting from another ‘what is’ question, namely “what is atherosclerosis of the lower limbs?”, Mol set out to investigate how this disease is *done in practice*: not how it is described, but how it is performed or, rather, “enacted”<sup>12</sup>. The ethnographic account of her encounters with

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<sup>9</sup> A term derived from Algirdas Greimas’s semiotics, indicating a semantic structure deeper and not limited to the idea of the individual actor: because the *actant* refers to the functions or roles “occupied by” certain actors, “the same actor may, at various moments of a narrative, personify various *actants* and, conversely, the same *actant* may be embodied by various actors” (Vanderdorpe 2000, 505; see also Greimas 1987). The fact that the concept of relation is posited in this way is perhaps the most unmistakable evidence of the structuralist roots of much of the ontological turn. For deep anthropological reflections on the notion of relation, see (Strathern 1995; 2004, 101–4).

<sup>10</sup> See <https://sites.google.com/a/abaetenet.net/nansi/abaetextos/anthropology-and-science-e-viveiros-de-castro> (accessed November 28, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> “Comparison only works when it is sensitive to its own context of production: it must be reflexively reflexive” (Herzfeld 2001, 261).

<sup>12</sup> The term ‘enactment’ is preferred to ‘performance’ because the latter bears unwieldy and “inappropriate” philosophical implications and “resonances” that extend Mol’s discussion beyond the scope

atherosclerosis across different sites within a university hospital in the Netherlands is conceived in terms of a “praxiography”, an “ethnographic study of practices” (Mol 2002, 31–32)<sup>13</sup>. This is because, in her words, “like (human) subjects, (natural) objects are framed as parts of events that occur and plays that are staged. If an object is real this is because it is part of a practice. It is a reality *enacted*” (Mol 2002, 42 emphasis in the original). Following various enactments of atherosclerosis, then, reveals that the disease is not at all a single entity, but rather “multiple entities that go by the same name” (Mol 2002, 151). “*Under the microscope* atherosclerosis of the leg arteries may be a thick intima of the vessel wall. *In the organization of the health care system*, however, it is pain. Pain that follows from walking and that nags patients suffering from it enough to make them decide to visit a doctor and ask what can be done about it” (Mol 2002, 48; see also Jensen and Winthereik 2005, 466). The answer to Mol’s initial question, then, is that the atherosclerosis of the lower limbs is “more than one –but less than many” (2002, 55)<sup>14</sup>.

Multiplicity does not amount to indefinite plurality, however: after all, patients, pathologists and general doctors (not to mention unaffected laymen such as philosophers and anthropologists) are perfectly able to speak of atherosclerosis in the singular, and smoothly carry across just what they mean by that. Therefore, what the ‘praxiographer’ does is a study of “the forms of *coordination* between different enactments of atherosclerosis” (Mol 2002, 71 emphasis in the original), an analysis of the work that is necessary for atherosclerosis to be conceived as a stable entity<sup>15</sup>. Praxiography, then, is also the study of *where* and *how*, in a fieldwork site, it is possible to speak of atherosclerosis in the singular. Thus, in Mol’s case, the ‘what is’ question must be deeply revisited: “somewhere along the way the meaning of the word ‘is’ has changed.

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she has set for herself (Mol 2002, 32,41). Nonetheless, the influence of John Austin’s concept of “the performative” is undeniable in Mol’s work (see Austin 2009, [1975]).

<sup>13</sup> Confront Mol’s approach with the “social praxeology” of Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Significantly, Mol’s oft-quoted expression “more than one –but less than many” is a rephrased version of an earlier sentence by Marilyn Strathern, in *Partial Connections* (originally published in 1998): “to be able to conceive of persons as more than atomistic individuals but less than subscribers to a holistic community of shared meanings would be of immediate interest for comparative analysis” (2004, 53).

<sup>15</sup> Recent developments in the study of materials and materiality are tackling remarkably similar issues: “the tracing of extensive relations between objects reveals objects as active participants in social networks. However, the limits to this approach concern the ways in which the objects themselves, although engaged as fully social, nonetheless tend to be understood as singular and stable. They move and engage but do not otherwise transform themselves. Other approaches (...) are more concerned with how it is that objects and materials can come to seem so stable. Starting from an interest in the intrinsic multiplicity of things, those who approach objects and materials in this way are more likely to ask how it is that objects and materials can achieve this sense of stability” (Harvey and Knox 2014, 7–8).

Dramatically. This is what the change implies: the new ‘is’ is one that is situated. It doesn’t say what it is in and of itself, for nothing ever ‘is’ alone. *To be is to be related.* (...) The praxiographic ‘is’ is not universal, it is local. It requires a spatial specification. In this ontological genre, a sentence that tells what atherosclerosis is, is to be supplemented by another one that reveals *where* this is the case” (Mol 2002, 54 emphasis in the original).

Though somewhat effaced by her attention to the ethnographic moments of practical enactment of reality, Mol’s “relational non-dualism” is clearly highlighted by the last quote. Taken more generally, her claim seems to be that “things not only can be, *but always already are*, other than themselves, and can thus transform from one thing into another” (Scott 2013, 864 emphasis in the original)<sup>16</sup>. Three points proceed from this strong philosophical stance: 1. There are various ways of *composing* an entity, and various strategies of coordination for different versions of ‘things’ that normally go under a single name; 2. Different ways of interrogating a certain reality do not simply yield different perspectives, but entirely different objects: in other words, there are *modes* of knowing whose application results in distinct and distinctive ‘knowledge-experiences’<sup>17</sup>; 3. The primacy of the relation dictates that we pay attention to the practices or *performances* in which objects are enacted (concrete as well as abstract, irrespective of their (im)materiality)<sup>18</sup>. These three points emerge again and again, under various guises, throughout this dissertation. Their presence should provide a sort of counterbalancing

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<sup>16</sup> As noted by Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox, these philosophical views have recently turned into a paradigm: “there is a general agreement across the humanities and social sciences that things are relational, that subject/object distinctions are produced through the work of differentiation, and that any specific material form or entity with edges, surfaces, or bounded integrity is not only provisional but also potentially transformative of other entities” (2014, 1).

<sup>17</sup> Compare Scott’s own observations on the ambiguous notion of “religion”: “for any given purpose, therefore, religion must be precipitated through ascriptions of affinity and incompatibility with various possible others: politics, art, law, science, culture, secularism, atheism, nihilism, humanism, animism, spirituality, and so on. But it is precisely these analytical manoeuvres that cause religion to splinter and float, transmuting mercurially into one thing and its opposite at the same time, depending on the criteria of difference employed to grasp it” (Scott 2013, 860). Mol had already noticed something similar in the early 1980s, focusing in particular on the ways different branches of various sciences define or try to know “what a woman is” (see Mol 2015 originally published in Dutch in 1984).

<sup>18</sup> There is a clumsy sleight of hand in the way I re-presented these three elements: choosing words that resonate with the vocabulary of music-making and music studies, I was forced to reintroduce the abused idea of the ‘performativity of performance’ (see e.g. Schechner and Brady 2013, 123–69). Despite this drawback, the (non-isomorphic) analogical relation between the material under investigation (i.e. *gagaku* as ‘music’ –a term purposely left undefined-) and the methods of such investigation is something worth pursuing precisely because it has the power to activate particularly rich intellectual resonances.

effect, an underlying tendency to reconnect heterogeneous elements which otherwise seem to break away centrifugally from the analytical itinerary.

This short excursus into the dense territory of the anthropology of ontology is far from comprehensive, and mine is not a declaration of unconditional support. Reference to the ontological turn is valuable only to the extent that it describes a limited set of conceptual tools useful to approach a topic in a fresh way. Still, I do subscribe to the idea that the twin notion of relation/comparison should precede traditional structuralist dualisms, and I do believe that multiplicity emerges from the study of practices, especially when what is in question is the making of music. More importantly, however, I want to suggest that it is worth thinking (of) *gagaku* with and within this new paradigm because it has not been done before, and because there are features of *gagaku* itself which render this mode of understanding especially suitable. The term ontology may be “sexy” but, as Annemarie Mol suggested, it has also most likely already run its course when it comes to anthropology: it may be time to go on and “play with other words” (see Mol 2014). But ontology still has some currency in music studies and in sound studies—two disciplines in which it has merely started to emerge as an analytical category<sup>19</sup>. Thus, I decided to play on, reconfiguring the study of *gagaku* under the aegis of the jaguar, who teaches us that “every thing is only itself-for-something-else”<sup>20</sup> (see Viveiros de Castro 2004a). And I still haven't said a word about *gagaku*!

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<sup>19</sup> In music studies, the most relevant names are those of Georgina Born (see the two edited volumes Born 2012; and 2013; and especially Born 2005), Tia DeNora (1999; 2000; 2014), Antoine Hennion (Hennion and Gomart 1999; Hennion 2012; 2015; and a review article: Looseley 2006). In sound studies, see especially Steven Goodman's theory of “vibrational ontology” (Goodman 2010), Julian Henriques's *Sonic Bodies* (Henriques 2011), and a recent criticism of these ontological approaches (Kane 2015).

<sup>20</sup> See <https://itself.wordpress.com/2015/09/07/worlds-without-end-response-from-mary-jane-rubenstein/> (accessed November 30, 2016).

## II. “STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE”: THE CONSTITUTIVE AMBIGUITIES OF 雅樂

Consider this peculiar object: a vast, ancient body of music, dances and sung poetry whose historical roots spread throughout East, Central and Southeast Asia via the Silk Roads through their networks of goods, people and ideas; an artistic repertoire that flourished in Tang China (618-907 CE), but stretches back to the first millennium BCE and reaches the present; a performing art that looks and sounds almost completely different wherever it survives, consisting as it does of mostly unrelated pieces, but that also presents strong commonalities; four historical realities that go under the ‘same name’, but a name that, despite indicating three different items inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, does not correspond to any currently performed musical reality where it was coined... One name, many things: 雅乐/雅樂 (pronounced *yǎyuè*) in China; 아악/雅樂 (pronounced *aak*) in Korea; 雅樂 (pronounced *gagaku*) in Japan; *nhã nhạc*/雅樂 in Vietnam<sup>21</sup>. What is this ‘thing’, this bizarre object: is it a textbook case of multiplicity, à la Deleuze, or are we simply dealing with disparate entities<sup>22</sup>? Multiple things, or ‘a multiple thing’? That is the question that *gagaku* stubbornly pushes us to answer.

To put it slightly differently, the issue is whether or not, in the case of *yǎyuè*, *aak*, *gagaku* and *nhã nhạc*, we can talk of local versions, different enactments, coexisting variations of a single ‘thing’. Though scholars invariably make the connection between, say, Vietnamese *nhã nhạc* and Chinese *yǎyuè*, or between Korean *aak* and Japanese *gagaku*, this is done predominantly in terms of “derivation” (Kishibe 1980, 250) or, worse, “influence” –a word that is often left semantically open. Similar weak connotations relieve from the burden of performing a full-fledged comparison: indeed, interrelated Asian repertoires are seldom treated in conjunction. Therefore, these repertoires resemble an uncertain archipelago, with neatly defined islands but only approximately sketched out

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<sup>21</sup> Variation across languages’ writing systems is responsible for slight alterations of the Chinese characters across these terms. The abandonment of the Chinese writing system on the part of Koreans and Vietnamese rendered the form 雅樂 obsolete. In its place, phonetic renditions are used, but the characters remain in academic discourse, and their use denotes a high degree of literacy.

<sup>22</sup> “Disparate” is a particularly suited adjective here: the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the word as “containing or made up of fundamentally different and often incongruous elements”.



lines of communication in between<sup>23</sup>. To be sure, the distance separating the repertoires of *yǎyuè*, *nhã nhạc*, *aak* and *gagaku* is formidable, both historically and in terms of the musical materials encompassed, and this certainly justifies a skeptical stance towards the possibility of instantiating a comparison. After all, this is a matter of finding the right “grounds of comparison” (Shih 2013, 69), the problem being that “comparison assumes a level playing field and the field is never level” (Spivak 2013, 253). Better, then, to speak of entirely different objects. Thus, the dissimilarities between *yǎyuè*, *nhã nhạc*, *aak* and *gagaku* are judged greater and more profound than their common traits, even though they all share the fact of being or having been court musics –that is, musics employed for, by and within institutions that, on the basis of yet another comparison, are judged similar enough to be grouped under a unitary rubric. Chinese court music, Vietnamese court music, Korean court music, Japanese court music: each one a different entity<sup>24</sup>. So what are these entities, and what is *gagaku* in comparison with them?

*Nhã nhạc*, we learn, “is known to have originated in China, as were the East Asian varieties [of court music]. (...) According to the description in *Dai Viet su ky* [*History of Great Vietnam*, 1272 CE], it was introduced from China during the Ming dynasty (around the fifteenth century [CE])” (Akagawa 2015, 167). *Nhã nhạc* then “developed during the

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<sup>23</sup> Thence a by-now customary ‘encyclopedic’ exposition. Reference texts like the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* or the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* tend to apply this isolationist approach. The few existing agile comprehensive surveys of East Asian musics (in Italian, see Sestili 2010; for a perspective based on the concept of “intangible cultural heritage”, see Howard 2012) are also affected by decisions on what constitutes a geographical and/or cultural area (a serious problem for area studies specialists: see van Schendel 2002). Thus, for example, East and Southeast Asia are often kept rigidly separated (however, see e.g. Miller and Williams 2008, 40–45). Among the few exceptions that investigated directly the relationship between these traditions, see (Maceda 2001) for a strictly structuralist musicological analysis, and (Howard 2014) for a historical perspective on the politics of (making) heritage. Laurence Picken’s somewhat unique monumental ongoing project *Music from the Tang Court* (Picken 1981), though initially concerned only with Tang-period Chinese Music as notated in the extant Japanese repertoire, irrespective of its Japanese realization, has also expanded in its 7<sup>th</sup> and most recent volume to include examinations of “some ancient connections” (see Picken et al. 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Here is how Endō Tōru, arguably the best *gagaku* historian presently active in Japan, handles the issue of providing a precise definition for the couple of characters now commonly read *gagaku* in Japanese: “Given that the meaning of *ga* [雅] in ‘雅樂’ is ‘correct’ ‘positive’, from an etymological point of view ‘雅樂’ means ‘orthodox or legitimate *gaku* [樂]’ (comprising both music [*ongaku* 音楽] and dance). (...) Moreover, this concept of ‘orthodox *gaku*’ [雅樂] spread in various kingdoms whose governments were modeled after China, such as in the Korean archipelago (*aak*), in Vietnam (*nhã nhạc*) and in Japan (*gagaku*). As for the contents of the musics and dances actually performed in each kingdom and as for the actualization of the concept of ‘orthodox *gaku*’, these things varied depending on the culture and history of each place” (Endō 2013, 12–13). At any rate, historical research has proved that the music introduced in Japan from the mainland was *not* the Chinese *yǎyuè*, but rather a mixture of imported songs, dances and traditional Chinese music performed at court banquets and known as *yànyuè* (*engaku* 燕樂 in Japanese) (see e.g. Endō 2013, 17; Ortolani 1995, 40; Garfias 1975, 13).

Le dynasty (1427-1788) and became highly institutionalized and codified under the Nguyễn monarchs (1802-1945)”<sup>25</sup>. Since the 1980s, *nhã nhạc* has been consistently revived within the framework of UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage program in connection with the preservation of the architectural heritage of the city of Huế. It is worth noting that Japanese scholars (particularly ethnomusicologists) were instrumental in this process, which also impinged on the creation of a national system of intangible heritage preservation: cultural diplomacy and soft power, it seems, continue to travel throughout the Asian continent together with court music (see Akagawa 2015, 167–81).

“*Aak*, unlike Chinese *yǎyuè* and Japanese *gagaku* (both written with the same Chinese characters), is not a collective term for a number of court genres, though some Koreans have loosely used the word in that sense in the present century. Rather, the term *aak* identifies a specific genre of Korean ritual music which is now performed in context only in the Sacrifice to Confucius, though in earlier centuries it was also played in a further five state sacrificial rites” (Provine 1992, 91). *Aak*, then, “is better considered a special type of court music used in particular sacrificial rites” (Provine 2002, 896). Note the indirect definition of Chinese *yǎyuè* and Japanese *gagaku*, as well as the cracks beginning to appear on the walls of the category “court music”.

As for *yǎyuè*, its functions were deeply linked to Confucian rituals, and its mythical origins go back to the Zhou (ca. 1046 BCE–256 BCE). Still, this was only one of many genres performed at the Chinese court, which also featured popular music, foreign music, banquet music, the music of military bands, theatrical arts and the music of the seven-string zither *qin* (Kishibe 1980, 250). But the primacy of *yǎyuè* remained a constant in Chinese history for 2000 years: “From the time Confucianism became the state religion or philosophy in the Han dynasty until the 1911 Revolution, the ritual music for Heaven, Earth and Ancestors was the state music” (Kishibe 1980, 250). Following the cultural revolution, however, this music was all but eliminated from the Chinese territory. Traces of the tradition may remain in certain Confucian shrine ceremonies in Taiwan, but historical uncertainties shroud *yǎyuè* like the clouds of an ink painting: what we see of its past is as uncertain as a vision in the mist.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/RL/nha-nhac-vietnamese-court-music-00074> (accessed November 29, 2016). See also (Văn Khê 1980).

Upon closer inspection, then, it seems clear that to recast in these terms the problem of what *gagaku* is simply means shifting the attention from the homogeneity of the components of each musical tradition to the appropriateness of a descriptive category. In the end, in fact, establishing what constitutes each of the abovementioned examples is less important than establishing whether or not they can all be described as ‘court music’. This is also an issue of *scale*: after all, it is not quite the same to talk about court music in Vietnam, where, “with the collapse of the Nguyễn dynasty in the mid-twentieth century, *nhã nhạc* lost its role as the royal ceremonies were no longer performed, and it was subsequently abandoned by the revolutionary Vietnamese” (Akagawa 2015, 168), and in Japan, where the ceremonial function persists today (*mutatis mutandis*). Conversely, it may be perfectly consistent to speak of “Asian court music” in both the Vietnamese and Japanese case, because the scale employed justifies the use of this term (see Tokumaru 2004). From this point of view, 雅楽 is either equated with “Asian court music(s)” or, paradoxically, not an entity at all. Ultimately, then, if the ground for comparison is deemed inadequate, 雅楽 as such, detached from its local enactments, from its local ‘readings’, so to say, is simply not a thing<sup>26</sup>.

The openness of this peculiar object, 雅楽, its hollowness of sorts, is unmistakably perceivable in the case of *gagaku*. Indeed, it is thanks to this openness that *gagaku* can function as “a ‘floating signifier’, a symbol emptied by a surfeit of possible and seemingly contradictory meanings” (Scott 2013, 860). But the same ambiguous identity of *gagaku* also leads to issues of “identity politics”: whenever new elements are related to *gagaku*, the question gets raised of to whom *gagaku* belongs. Nonetheless, we do not witness the birth of endless ‘new *gagakus*’: some sense of where the ‘borders of *gagaku*’ ought to be situated does remain, even if admittedly strange things happen at the margins of any tradition<sup>27</sup>. It is this sense of precarious coordination that pushes us to conceive of *gagaku* in terms of a multiple object, rather than conceding to its fragmentation, to its plurality. In this sense, this thesis is not intended as a “deconstruction of *gagaku*” – although, as long as laden words beginning in *de-* and denoting reversal are concerned, it

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<sup>26</sup> The indeterminacy of the reading of any Chinese character is especially helpful here: maintaining their graphic appearance without providing any specific sonic realization has the effect of keeping the meaning of the characters open.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, hybrids are produced: see (Giolai 2013).

may be read as an attempt to “deterritorialize” *gagaku*<sup>28</sup>. Rather, it is a genealogy of its present multiplicity and a praxiography of some of its enactments. In order to take the multiplicity of *gagaku* as a starting point, than, one must resist the temptation to simplify the matter coming up with an answer, any answer, no matter how arbitrary, to the crucial question of what it is. Ironically, this runs contrary to a recent convergence in the study of *gagaku*. To think of *gagaku* as a multiple object is thus, in a sense, a way of “staying with the trouble”, to use, alas in a more prosaic sense, an expression coined by Donna Haraway (see Haraway 2016). Before turning briefly to what *gagaku may also be*, below I offer a sketch of *what it is for gagaku specialists*.

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<sup>28</sup> An obvious reference to the by-now classical notions of territorialization and deterritorialization, employed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateau* (2005) (see also Holland 2013). For this and other usages of these terms in human geography, see (Agnew 2009).

### III. TELL IT LIKE IT CAN BE: *GAGAKU* DEFINED

Music and dances from the mainland were introduced in Japan together with Buddhist scriptures and ritual objects, the Chinese writing system, and, crucially, Buddhist chanting (*shōmyō*), between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Endō 2013, 12–36; K. Ono 2013, 42–45). The first historical record of a performance of “music from Tang China” (*tōgaku*) dates 702 (Gamō 1989, 407). ‘Japan’ as such did not exist at the time, of course, but solemn ritual occasions involving the performance of music and dance no doubt brought legitimacy and prestige to the new ruling class of Yamato (see e.g. Cranston 1993; Piggott 1997). By 701, with the Taihō reforms, a dedicated institution was founded with the task of performing and handing down both foreign and autochthonous repertoires (Endō 2013, 24). The name of this Office, which could have sounded “Gagakuryō”, “Utamai no tsukasa” or “Utaryō”, depending on the preferred reading of the characters, is also the first known occurrence of the term 雅楽 in Japan (Endō 2013, 14). To this day, scholars are divided on whether the two characters should be read *gagaku* or *utamai*, a crucial problem that impinges on the translatability of the concept of *gaku* and, consequently, on what counted as ‘music’ in ancient Japan (see Kikkawa 1984b, 15–48). Music and dances introduced from the continent quickly came to influence the ‘indigenous’ repertoire: during the Heian period (794-1185), the corpus performed at the Gagakuryō was gradually “Japanized”, and the court noblemen took an interest in playing certain instruments (especially zithers and flutes) privately, compiling music scores<sup>29</sup>, and composing entirely new pieces. According to Endō, “these music, songs and dances brought to completion within the courtly society of the Heian period constitute the essence of Japanese ‘雅楽’” (2013, 14). In fact, historians of Japanese music tend to agree that this corpus is the term *gagaku* should really indicate.

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<sup>29</sup> Including the famous lute scores *Sango yōroku* and the zither scores *Jinchi yōroku* by Fujiwara Moronaga (1138-1192) (Endō 2013, 42; Nelson 2012, 17–18). These scores attest the degree to which the aristocracy had mastered *gagaku*, and give us a sense of what were the main preoccupations in writing down the melodies; for these reasons, they should be regarded not only as practical tools, but as windows to understanding the transmission of this music in the Heian period.

A succession of changes over several centuries brought to multiple reorganizations of *gagaku*'s materials, as well as of the instruments employed<sup>30</sup> and of the social role of the performers. Gradually, families of musicians (called *gakke*) specialized in certain portions of the repertoire, while *gagaku* could still be heard in shrine/temple “multiplexes” (see Grapard 1992), often during solemn celebrations that included Buddhist chanting<sup>31</sup>. These local sites of *gagaku* performance and transmission were known as *gakuso* or *gakusho*<sup>32</sup> (Kōshitsu Our Imperial Family 2008, 23). As parallel ‘structures of transmission’<sup>33</sup>, the *gakusho* eventually evolved into modern ‘alternatives’ to the centralized group of musicians that, since 1870, has performed in close connection with the imperial family in Tokyo (see Chapter 2).

Yet, at least from the late Kamakura period (1185-1333), the overall organization of the *gagaku* repertoire remained remarkably stable over the centuries. For this reason,

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<sup>30</sup> Historical records confirm that many more instruments were employed in the performance of *gagaku* than the ones used today. Among the instruments no longer in use in *gagaku* (strictu sensu) were harps (*kugo*), bamboo pan flutes (*haishō*) and a bigger mouth organ with 17 pipes (*u*) (Endō et al. 2006, 44–46). Some of these were gradually abandoned due to the scarce number of foreign musicians who could teach them, as well as to matters of taste and practical considerations (such as the difficulty of performing them) (Nelson 2008a, 41). Several of these instruments are preserved in the Shōsōin (the treasure house of the Tōdaiji temple in Nara), and have been the subject of detailed study and restoration (Gamō 1989, 414; Hayashi 1964; 1969). Performances on new instruments manufactured on the basis of these restorations have also been frequent (for a fine example on record, see Reigakusha 2011).

<sup>31</sup> One rather extraordinary example of such ritual occasions was the ceremony “of the opening of the eyes of the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji” in 752 (Tōdaiji Daibutsu kaigen kuyōe). Its historical importance is such that commentators have described it as “a microcosm of the performing arts of eight-century Asia” (Nelson 2008a, 39; see also Endō et al. 2006, 40–42).

<sup>32</sup> The question of how to read correctly this particular combination of kanji is presently a matter of debate: when providing a specific reading at all, the majority of introductory texts refer to it as ‘*gakuso*’ (for instance, see Oshida 1975, 18; Kikkawa 1984a, 192; Tōgi 1988, 55); only a few are in favor of ‘*gakusho*’ (Endō 2013, 44, 46). Some acknowledge both readings (Ogi 1989). In one case, the same author refers to the compound as ‘*gakuso*’ in 1989 (in the *Encyclopedia of Japanese Music*) and as ‘*gakusho*’ in 1994 (in the *Historical Encyclopedia of the Heian Period*) (Ogi 1989; 1994). The issue is not as trivial as it may appear: for many contemporary local groups, pronouncing the two characters in a certain way may well reflect a specific decision as to what stance should be taken concerning the past (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed exposition of this problem). According to Steven G. Nelson (personal communication), choosing the most unusual reading for the kanji 所 might help to create a sense of antiquity to capitalize upon. In this way, a group’s name may perform a link to the past.

<sup>33</sup> Even though the exact meaning of the word *gakuso/gakusho* is the subject of an ongoing debate, there is some consensus on the fact that it originally indicated temporary structures within the Imperial Palace in which specialized musicians could reside when required to perform for rituals or banquets (Endō 2013, 44; Gamō 1989, 408). Gradually, the name of these (physical) structures came to indicate a more abstract setup in which low-ranking musicians (known as *jige gakunin* or ‘musician below the ground’, as opposed to the aristocratic families that passed on *gagaku*, known as *tōshō gakke* or ‘musician above the pavillion’) started to specialize in a subset of the repertoire, and/or in one or more musical instruments (Endō et al. 2006, 78). According to Gamō, the *gakusho* system slowly supplanted the duties of the Gagakuryō, and became “systematically structured” around the year 1110 CE (1989, 408; see also Nelson 2008a, 42–43). The official titles and names of those who were part of this system were recorded yearly from 1108 to 1262 in a text known as *Gakusho bunin* (Nelson 2008a, 43).

another valid answer to the question of what *gagaku* is consists in equating it with the body of music and dance performed by specialized musicians *within the court*: conceived in this way, “at present, *gagaku* signifies the whole body of classical music and dance performed by the musicians of the Kunaichō Shikibushoku Gakubu (Music Department of the Board of Ceremonies of the Imperial Household Agency, Tokyo)” (Nelson 2008a, 36). In this sense, *gagaku* can be legitimately translated as “Japanese court music”.

Following this view, and quoting Steven G. Nelson at length, the repertoire is thus composed:

- *kuniburi no utamai* [国風歌舞] –accompanied vocal music and dance of indigenous origin employed in imperial and Shinto ceremony;
- *kangen* [管弦] and *bugaku* [舞楽] –instrumental music and accompanied dance deriving from the ancient performing arts of the Asian mainland;
- *saibara* [催馬楽] and *rōei* [朗詠] –genres of accompanied vocal music originating at the Heian court of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>34</sup>.

“The second category is divided into two classes according to its geographical origin. *Tōgaku* [唐樂], largely Chinese, is performed with dance as *bugaku* (when it is known as *samai* or *sahō no mai* [左舞], ‘dance of the Left’). *Komagaku* [高麗樂], largely Korean, is now performed as a rule only as *bugaku* (*umai* or *uhō* [右舞], ‘dances of the Right’). The apparently symmetrical balance is in part illusory: although the number of dances currently performed in the two repertoires is approximately equal, at just under 30 each, most *komagaku* dances are smaller in scale. Once the *kangen* repertoire of *tōgaku* is figured into the equation, *tōgaku* outnumbers *komagaku* by a factor of more than five to one” (Nelson 2008b, 36).

It is worth noticing three features of these technical definitions of *gagaku* (a corpus of ‘Japanized’ foreign music that took shape during the Heian period, or the current

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<sup>34</sup> *Rōei* are “sung renditions of short excerpts from Chinese poems by Chinese and Japanese poets, recited as a rule in Japanese word order”, while *saibara* are songs composed by Japanese authors in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century which borrow their melodies from *gagaku*’s instrumental pieces (Nelson 2008a, 43, 41). However, *saibara* were probably not original continental creations, but rather Japanese folk songs “arranged in continental style to produce new *tōgaku* and *komagaku* pieces” that later served as bases for new texts (Nelson 2008a, 41). For early musicological studies of these forms in English, see Harich-Schneider (1952; 1965). On *rōei* as (bilingual) literary creations, see Smits (2000b; 2000a).

repertoire of the musicians active within the Japanese Imperial Household). First and foremost, the classification of the repertoire is essentially a combination of stylistic and geographical criteria: both *tōgaku* and *komagaku* comprise danced pieces (*bugaku*), but only in the case of *tōgaku* can the same piece be performed both in purely instrumental form (*kangen*) or in conjunction with dance<sup>35</sup>. One alternative and somewhat more consistent classification groups together all vocal music (including pieces in the *kuniburi no utamai* subset) under the rubric of *utaimono* (歌物) or ‘sung pieces’, as opposed to instrumental music (*kangen*) and music to accompany dance (*bugaku*). In this case, however, the danced items of the indigenous repertoire do not fit with the traditional definition of *bugaku*. In both cases, there is some sense that the organization of the repertoire is not straightforward. Secondly, both Endō’s and Nelson’s definitions are normative or prescriptive in character: the former focuses on the Heian period, the latter on the present, but both categorically exclude newer versions of *gagaku* –more recent enactments, so to say. For instance, 20<sup>th</sup>-century pieces written expressly for the Imperial Household ensemble by such composers as Takemitsu Tōru, John Cage or Karlheinz Stockhausen are automatically *not gagaku* (see Galliano 2002, *passim*).

Of course, this sort of exclusion can be interpreted as merely a matter of insufficient historical distance or, which is the same, of the always ongoing formation and reshaping of a canon; still, it signals precise choices on the part of the historians –choices that are not inconsequential when it comes to one’s general perception of where the line resides between what counts as *gagaku* and what does not. In this sense, Endō’s and Nelson’s choices are also political; perhaps, given that they state what can be taken as *gagaku* and what cannot, they may even be described as entailing “ontological politics” (see Mol 1999). Finally, and more importantly, it seems difficult to deny that even these restrictive definitions point toward an *internal heterogeneousness* of *gagaku*: the strongest evidence of *gagaku*’s constitutive multiplicity lies in its own components. Should any doubt remain, just consider the vocal repertoires of *rōei* and *saibara*, hybrid objects by definition: the former, Chinese texts by (sometimes) Japanese poets set to what may well have originally been Central Asian or even Indian melodies; the latter, popular songs that found their way up the social ladder and were transfigured into a genre for the elites.

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<sup>35</sup> In other words, though exceptions are possible, *komagaku* is generally performed as *bugaku* (Endō 2013, 15).



Heterogeneous aside, the definitions offered above roughly correspond to the mental image of a well-read Japanese listener of *gagaku*, and they do inform most understandings of the meaning of the word *gagaku*, even among those who have but a cursory understanding of its sonic reality. More specifically, I would argue that in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, even more, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, *gagaku* has been predominantly associated with *kangen*, instrumental music, and, more rarely, with the danced pieces of *bugaku*. What does this music sound like, what *is* it? Let us start with the instruments used. These consist of winds, strings, and percussions, variously arranged depending on the subset of the repertoire performed<sup>36</sup> (see **FIG. 1**).

A. <i>Kimbiri-no-utamai</i> (accompanied vocal music and dance of indigenous origin employed in imperial and Shinto ceremony)								
	winds			strings	percussion	song	dance	
	<i>kagurabue</i>	<i>ryūteki</i>	<i>komabue</i>	<i>hichiriki</i>	<i>suigen</i>	<i>shakubyōshi</i>		
<i>mikagura</i>	•			•	•	•	•	•
<i>azuma-asobi</i>			•	•	•	•	•	•
<i>yamato-mai</i>		•		•	•	•	•	•
<i>ōta</i>		•		•	•	•	•	•
<i>kame-mai</i>		•		•	•	•	•	•
<i>ruika</i>					•	•	•	

B. <i>Kangen</i> and <i>bugaku</i> (instrumental music and accompanied dance deriving from the ancient performing arts of the Asian mainland)												
	winds				strings		percussion				dance	
	<i>ryūteki</i>	<i>komabue</i>	<i>hichiriki</i>	<i>shō</i>	<i>bitau</i>	<i>koto</i>	<i>kakko</i>	<i>san-no-tsuzumi</i>	<i>shōko</i>	<i>ōshōko</i>	<i>taiko</i>	<i>dadaiko</i>
<i>tōgaku kangen</i>	•		•	•	•	•	•		•		•	
<i>bugaku bugaku</i>	•		•	•	◊	◊	•			•		•
<i>komagaku bugaku</i>		•	•					•		•		•

◊ The strings are used in exceptional performances of *bugaku* called *kangen-bugaku*, literally 'pipe-and-string dance'.

C. <i>Saibara</i> and <i>rōei</i> (accompanied vocal music originating at the early Heian court of the ninth and tenth centuries)							
	winds			strings		percussion	song
	<i>ryūteki</i>	<i>hichiriki</i>	<i>shō</i>	<i>bitau</i>	<i>koto</i>	<i>shakubyōshi</i>	
<i>saibara</i>	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
<i>rōei</i>	•	•	•				•

**FIGURE.1.** The instruments of *gagaku* and their sub-genres (From Nelson 2008c, 50).

The winds include three transverse flutes (*kagurabue*, *ryūteki*, and *komabue*) “of lacquered bamboo, with six, seven and six finger-holes respectively”; a short double-reed pipe of lacquered bamboo, called *hichiriki*, with seven (front) and two (back) finger-holes and a comparative large [cane] reed”; and a “free reed mouth organ with 17 bamboo pipes

<sup>36</sup> Using a more precise terminology, it is possible to differentiate between aerophones, cordophones, idiophones and membranophones (following the Sachs-Hornbostel system of classification, which focuses on the material that vibrates thus producing the sound). In emic terms, one could also distinguish between *fushimono* (‘blown things’), *hikimono* (‘plucked things’) and *uchimono* (‘struck things’), focusing instead on the method used to produce the sound (Nelson 2008c, 49).

(two reedless) inserted into a wind chamber”, called *shō* (Nelson 2008c, 49). The strings comprise two board zithers and a lute: the wagon is a six-string long zither “often said to be indigenous to Japan, but likely based on a Korean model”; the second zither, the *koto* or (*gaku*)*sō*, has 13 strings (originally made of silk) and “is played with plectra placed on the thumb and two fingers of the right hand”; the *biwa* is “a large four-string lute with four frets played with a large-hand plectrum” (Nelson 2008c, 49). As for the percussions, as many as three drums of various types and dimensions are employed: “the *kakko* is a small barrel drum struck with a separate stick on each of its heads. The *san no tsuzumi* is a small double-headed hourglass drum struck on only one head with a single stick. (...) The *taiko* is a large shallow barrel-drum with ox-hide heads, struck on one side with two sticks” (Nelson 2008c, 50). A larger version of the *taiko*, called *dadaiko*, is used to accompany the dances. The remaining instruments are “a small, suspended brass gong struck with two sticks”, called *shōko*, and “a pair of clappers comprising two flat pieces of wood”, called *shakubyōshi* (Nelson 2008c, 50)<sup>37</sup>.

Below are the main characteristics of a piece of Chinese origins (*tōgaku*) in purely instrumental style (*kangen*), as it might ‘sound like’ “to modern ears”, as summarized by David Hughes:

- “The melody is carried by the *ryūteki* transverse flute and *hichiriki* reed-pipe in slow-moving heterophonic relationship<sup>38</sup>.
- The *biwa* four-stringed lute, in the ensemble’s lowest register, provides a melodic accent on strong beats at regular intervals many seconds apart, through rapid arpeggios or, less frequently, a single note.
- The *koto* (also known as *gakusō*) 13-stringed zither primarily plays various standard arpeggio patterns beginning on a strong beat.
- The *shō* mouth organ plays chords of five or six notes, holding these on until the next strong beat.
- The *taiko* large stick-drum and *shōko* small gong mark the pulse, although very sparsely.

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<sup>37</sup> For further details in English, see (de Ferranti 2000; 2002; Adriaansz 2002; Marett 2002). For these instruments’ notation systems, see (Garfias 1975; Malm and Hughes 2002; Nelson 2008c).

<sup>38</sup> The simplest definition of heterophony is “the musical texture characterized by the simultaneous performance of variations of the same melody” (Koskoff 2008, 749).

- A smaller stick-drum, the *kakko*, plays various standard patterns; in particular, two types of non-metric rolls that extend from one strong beat to another” (2010, 233) (see **FIG.2**).

Regardless of the fascinating issue of the discrepancy between, on the one side, the roles we are led to attribute to each instrument on the basis of its perceived function in the ensemble and, on the other, the actual role fulfilled by the same instrument at a certain time in *gagaku*'s history –regardless, that is, of the historical changes that impacted on the listener's perception of 'who plays what'- these observations by Hughes can and should be supplemented by more general ones, concerning the music's overall 'sonic impression'. Limiting these necessarily subjective annotations to two which may well be the most widespread, it is certainly possible to say that *gagaku* is immediately perceived as orchestral music or, more precisely, as large-scale, non-chamber music, and that a host of its common connotations (nostalgic, solemn, dignified, severe, traditional, calming, natural and so forth) derive primarily from the sheer average length of most pieces, as well as from their slow performing tempi. The music to which *gagaku* specialists and most of its listeners generally refer is sonically imposing (characterized by a limited range of dynamics, roughly between forte and fortissimo, to use a scale derived from Euro-American classical music), and curiously elusive when it comes to immediate melodic contours. It is not music one can usually tap to with ease, let alone whistle or sing along, unless there is a prior familiarity with the piece in question.

These sonic features, in turn, are tightly bound both to *gagaku*'s visual characteristics and to its performance occasions. The music's 'loudness', for instance, is often associated with the fact that throughout its history it was often employed in processions and ceremonies held in the open air. Moreover, musicians and dancers are usually dressed in garments that replicate those worn by Heian period noblemen. Bright blues, greens and reds, props like spears and swords, and expressive masks that are bigger than those used in Nō theater are all fundamental elements that contribute to the overall impression this performing art is likely to make on anyone who decides to take the time to watch and listen with some care.



**FIGURE 2.** Two ‘standard images’ of *gagaku* as performed by the Imperial Household musicians: purely instrumental music (*kangen*) (top), dance with musical accompaniment (*bugaku*) (bottom).

(<http://iha-gagaku.com/index.html> and <http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/contents/learn/edc22/index.htm>. Accessed December 5, 2016).

Indeed, it is arguably the imagery conveyed by these gaudy visual elements that strike the deepest chords among the general public –which, unlike both Japanese and Euro-American commentators, is mostly unconcerned with the musical structures and complex notation systems of *gagaku* (see Takahashi 2004). Paradoxically, then, the equation of *gagaku* with ‘Japanese court music’, common since at least the beginning of

the Meiji period (1868-1912) (see Chapter 2) may rest more on the term ‘court’ than on the term ‘music’. This is also the source of a peculiar imbalance: the features of *gagaku* that found the broadest representation in popular culture in the past thirty years or so are also the least examined from an academic point of view: it is certainly so in the case of *gagaku*’s garments, too often relegated to the margins of ‘serious’ discussions of this performing art (e.g. Endō et al. 2006, 196–205)<sup>39</sup>, and similar observations also apply to *gagaku*’s ‘cosmology’ or ‘underlying worldview’, still marred by dreadful imprecision (however, see the careful exposition in Endō 2013, 134–65). If much has been said on the connection between the life of the Heian nobility (in particular its strictly calendric nature) and ‘court music’, just as much remains to be said on the ancient Daoist substratum running through *gagaku*’s symbolism, a substratum that includes but is not limited to the connection of certain modes with the five elements and the theory of yin and yang, as well as more overt allusions to ‘Daoist thought’ conveyed by the shapes and roles of the instruments (see Endō et al. 2006, 79–82; Abe 2008, 46–55).

In the end, it is by finally including in the academic discourse the frequently disregarded dimension of the actual practices in which performers *and* audiences mutually negotiate the current meaning of *gagaku* that one can begin to unpack the complexities of this music’s recent tendency to ‘overflow’ the boundaries imposed by its normative definitions. Through some of its least predictable “affordances”<sup>40</sup>, in fact, *gagaku* has managed to stretch the limits of what it may be, spilling over unexpected sectors of Japanese culture, ‘ending up’ in manga, movies, anime, but also in popular music, and even commercial merchandize (see **FIG.3**). Only by acknowledging the constitutive multiplicity of 雅楽, not-quite-just-Japanese-court-music, can we understand how the stiff images insistently offered by central actors like the Imperial Household and UNESCO have managed to turn into more fluid and playful depictions, how the unfamiliarity of a tradition performing art has turned into a much more

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<sup>39</sup> For two notable exceptions, see (Kōshitsu Our Imperial Family 2008) and the lavishly illustrated *The Design of Gagaku (Gagaku no dezain)* (Ōno and Hayashi 1990).

<sup>40</sup> According to ecological psychologist James Gibson, “the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment” (Gibson 2014, 119). For an anthropological application of the concept, see (Ingold 2000, 166–68).



#### IV. WHERE IS *GAGAKU*? THICK TOPOGRAPHIES, UNCHARTED TERRITORIES

We have seen how the complicated relationship between *gagaku* and 雅楽 opens up a vast theoretical space in which to investigate ‘Japanese court music’ on the basis of a new ontological paradigm. We have also seen that the heterogeneity of this performing art is constitutive even in the face of the many attempts to ‘tame’ its complexity providing definitions which ultimately fail to describe an object that continuously resists simplification. One further step in the attempt to understand *gagaku*’s most recent enactments is to figure out the historical trajectory that brought to its complex present, trying to follow the music along as it is produced and reproduced –in a word, as it is *made*. This is what this thesis attempts to do, with little consideration for ordinary disciplinary boundaries or affiliations.

Assuming the multiplicity of *gagaku* as a starting point, the thesis also takes for granted that any conclusion can only be localized and thus provisional. For this reason, its main concern is with views from below, rather than with bird’s-eye panoramas of *gagaku* conceived as a whole ‘genre’. The thesis goes ‘below the ground level’, both in the sense of searching for rhizomatic historical roots (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) and of paying attention to certain primary materials employed in the construction of one of *gagaku*’s instruments (Chapter 5)<sup>42</sup>. But the thesis also moves in other directions: it travels west of Tokyo, focusing broadly on the history of *gagaku* in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Kansai (Chapter 3) and zooms further in on one contemporary group of participants active in Nara (Chapter 4). It goes back and forth, constantly coming back to the present in an attempt to show that a recurrent theme in the history of *gagaku* is the reinterpretation of its past, often seen as the ultimate seat of legitimacy and authenticity (Chapter 3 and Chapter 5). Hardly anyone involved in *gagaku*, either as listener, performer or critic, is unaffected by this co-constitutive relationship of past and present: for *gagaku* lovers, yesterday really is today when it comes to this music. Ultimately, what can be done *with and of the past* determines what the future will sound like.

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<sup>42</sup> Incidentally, the roots of the cane considered in Chapter 5 also exhibit a rhizomatic structure. The appropriateness of the correspondence between theoretical and material rhizomes is serendipitous, if possibly cliché.

(Re)reading history may well be one near-constant tendency of *gagaku*'s existence in Japan, but it is also the most important element in *gagaku*'s representations by historians and musicologists. Thus, in order to situate my perspective, it seemed crucial to begin with a broad if necessarily incomplete overview of the ways in which *gagaku* has been critically approached thus far. One additional reason to start from a literature review (admittedly a very practical one), is that such an endeavor has not been attempted in recent years. Broad recapitulations of this sort may be advantageous not only to *gagaku* specialists (often so fully immersed in their limited portion of the territory to lose tracks of its width or, worse, running the risk of becoming a sort of intellectual border patrol) but also to ethnomusicologists and anthropologists interested in Japanese performing arts.

Of course, a literature review thus conceived should not be reduced to a list of who said what about *gagaku*. Rather, it is crucial that it offer additional critical insight. With this in mind, the first chapter draws an analogy between the musical concept of 'mode' and some of the ways in which *gagaku* has been approached. Interestingly, the analogy can be reinforced by reverse precedents in the field of geography. Some twenty years ago, Richard Howitt suggested to take more seriously the metaphorical significance of the homology between the musical and geographical concepts of "scale", noticing that "musical scales provide a useful metaphor for understanding the ways in which geographical scale involves *relations* between elements of complex and dynamic geographical totalities" (1998, 49 emphasis added). I think it is more than accidental that Howitt should pinpoint the relational aspect of the components of musical scales as something worth translating into the geographical discourse. In a similar vein, I want to suggest that the concept of mode can shed some light on the differences among parallel discourses regarding *gagaku*. Moreover, with its less Eurocentric pedigree modality is better suited than tonality to perform this task, most notably because relations between notes in a musical mode respond to a much less strictly defined hierarchy than relations within a tonal scale or "key"<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, Chapter 1 ties together four arbitrarily selected modes of research on *gagaku*, which I have termed 'historical', 'presentational', 'musicological' and 'decentering'. Needless to say, my own research is best characterized

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<sup>43</sup> On the concept of mode, see (Powers 1980). In particular, see pp.422-450 for an investigation of mode "as a musicological concept" and pp.442-447 for the concept of *chōshi* (often translated as "modes"), so central in *gagaku* musical language.



by the fourth of these approaches. Despite the fourfold classification, however, one the most important arguments presented in the chapter is that there is a persistent tendency exhibited by each mode to transgress its own bounds, effectively ‘invading’ the territory of one or more of the other three. This mutual overflowing or ‘obdurate intermingling’ shows both how different modes of knowledge-production constitute different objects for themselves, and how the single-person object *gagaku* cannot be pinned down and described in essentialistic terms, because its multiplicity exceeds the stability imposed by one or another approach.

To define one’s position as ‘decentering’ while almost simultaneously considering the developments of *gagaku* in late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Tokyo may seem entirely paradoxical. However, I believe that there are two important reasons to set out on the decentering path starting from the epicenter of Japanese modern political power. The first reason has everything to do with the term ‘modernity’: in fact, historians of *gagaku* largely agree in portraying the Meiji restoration of 1868 as “the birth of modern *gagaku*” –aware as they are of the many issues raised by the concept of “modernity” itself (Tsukahara 2009, 42; M. Ono 2016, 184; see also Terauchi 2010; Nelson 2008b). Indeed, most Japanese accounts of the consequences of the Meiji restoration on court music employ expressions that refer to a stoppage, such as *haishi* (“abolition”, “suppression”), *danzetsu* (“interruption”, “severance”), and *togire* (“intermission”, “suspension”) (among many more, see R. Ono and Tōgi 1989, 55; Abe 1998, 238; Kasagi 2008, 17).

This was due to the establishment, in 1870, of a centralized Office of Gagaku (Gagakukyoku), which was to become intimately connected with the renewed (and, to an extent, reshaped) figure of the emperor. Effectively, then, the Meiji period was the time in which the equation of *gagaku* and ‘Japanese court music’ came into being. Thus, it is altogether a natural decision to begin the decentering of *gagaku* with a portrayal of how a unified, centralized, normative interpretation of it came into being. Chapter 2 thus focuses on the decades following the Meiji restoration, and shows that by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new image of *gagaku* had been cast –one that emphasized its timeless solemnity, its static qualities, its purportedly unchanged nature since importation from China (see Ng 2011, 88), and, perhaps most importantly, its connection to Shinto, itself reconceived in terms of the ancient, national religion of the Japanese.

An additional reason for starting from Tokyo brings us back to multiplicity and heterogeneity. For all the ordering, systematizing and centralizing that characterized the Meiji period, in fact, the genealogy of contemporary ‘Japanese court music’ was all but simple and straightforward. Chapter 2 emphasizes this under-researched aspect of the history of *gagaku*, examining in some detailed various projects in which the musicians of the Gagakukyoku were implicated. In educational as well as research contexts, *gagaku* was at the forefront of ‘modernity’, yet it actively contributed to the creation of the very category of “Japanese traditional music” (see especially Terauchi 2010). Bringing to the fore lesser-known facets of Meiji-period *gagaku*, then, I wish to show that this music was seen as the sonorous embodiment of the forces driving social and political change. But I also want to maintain that the path leading to the formation of ‘Japanese court music’ consisted in a selective process that only emphasized specific resonances, silencing divergent sonic alternatives that were no less present at the time. *Gagaku* did not crystallize as a chemical solution would ‘precipitate’ into a solid state; rather, its heterogeneity was reduced in a process that substantially effaced a multiplicity that was already entirely there.

Chapter 3 marks the beginning of a change of focus from nationwide tendencies and processes toward more localized narratives<sup>44</sup>. Before 1870, the relative ‘weight’ of practicing *gagaku* was greatly unbalanced: in fact, all three of the most important centers of production of *gagaku* were located in the western area of Kansai. Here, a ‘*gagaku* triangle’ comprising the modern-day cities of Kyoto, Osaka and Nara was the veritable cradle of the ancient performing art. Because of the significance of ‘religious’ institutions such as Nara’s Kōfukuji-Kasuga Taisha ritual compound, Kyoto’s imperial palace, and Osaka’s Shitenōji temple on the performance of *gagaku* in Japan, the impact of the Meiji restoration on the lives of the musicians based in Kansai was immense: the creation of a unified Office of *Gagaku* in Tokyo essentially forced local performers to find creative ways of keeping their local traditions alive. The chapter thus sets out to examine how each ‘vertex’ of the imaginary ‘*gagaku* triangle’ established alliances that secured the survival of local versions of *gagaku*.

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<sup>44</sup> This progressive shifting of analytical scales is another important theoretical aspects of the whole thesis. Its significance is examined in some detail in the Conclusion.

The figure of the ‘modern *gagaku* amateur’, whose historical emergence is considered at the end of Chapter 3 in terms of a reaction to the centralization of ‘court music’, offers a direct entryway into the following chapter. This is different from the previous ones in that it is set entirely in the present, and based on two years of intensive fieldwork. In fact, Chapter 4 takes into consideration the practice of *gagaku* in present-day Nanto *gakuso*, a group of practitioners that inherited the long history of Nara *gagaku*. The appearance of a first-person perspective in the narrative is mitigated by a careful consideration of the organizational aspects of the group: starting from an ethnographic account of what it means to be an ‘amateur’, the chapter proposes a typology of Nanto *gakuso* practitioners that moves back and forth between etic and emic concepts. Subsequently, the chapter explores the significance of place and space on the practice of *gagaku*, insisting on the importance of interpreting the “emplaced” dimension of practice as co-constitutive to its embodiment (see Pink 2009; Ingold 2000; 2011). These points should reveal a consistent resemblance to –or, better still, they should resonate with– the praxiographic approach proposed by Annemarie Mol. For its markedly ethnographic character, then, Chapter 4 can be considered the fullest exposition of my investigation into the local enactments of present-day *gagaku*.

The latter half of the chapter demonstrates how conducting participant observation among the members of Nanto *gakuso* leads to a substantial reevaluation of the sonic materiality of *gagaku*. Drawing primarily on scholars active in the fields of sound studies and auditory culture or, to use a more encompassing expression, “sound culture studies” (Kane 2015, 3; see Novak and Sakakeeny 2015), I propose to rethink participant observation in terms of a tension between immersion and auscultation, reconnecting my own research with that of Tom Rice on the sonic dimensions of medical practice (see Rice 2010; 2012; 2015; 2016; but see also Cusick 2013) as well as with the phenomenologically-inflected concept of “acoustemology” proposed by Steven Feld (see e.g. Feld 2015). Such a perspective owes much to Steve Goodman’s “vibrational ontology” (see Goodman 2010), which, in turn, is in accordance with the ontological turn delineated above (see Kane 2015). Contrary to Goodman’s approach, however, my own perspective accords great importance to the body of the researcher, and tries to reconceive the kind of anthropological immersion prescribed by participant observation in terms of an enhanced sensitivity to the materiality of lived sound as it is enacted in the field.

But putting the accent on the tangibility of *gagaku* as ‘sound enacted’ also means signaling the limitations of those approaches that center excessively on the intangible. After all, instruments, hands, air and muscular tensions are among the elements that concretely *make* the music. These simple observations constitute the theoretical premise of the last chapter, which deals with what may seem the most unexpected enactment of contemporary *gagaku*. In fact, Chapter 5 presents the debate surrounding the construction of a highway section in Udono, a small town between Kyoto and Osaka where the materials used to produce the reeds of the oboe *hichiriki* are harvested. Here, a threat to the survival of the precious reeds, and, consequently, of the whole of *gagaku* was linked to the preservation discourses of advocates of the environment, creating complex “mutual affordances”.

Situating the debate within the larger context of the privatization of the Japanese highway system, and of the recent history of grassroots movements that try to protect water resources (see Waley 2005; Asano 2007), the chapter introduces the main actors in the ongoing dispute over Udono’s reed bed: the Udono Reed Bed Research Center, championed by Koyama Hiromichi, a local botanist and environmentalist, and a quasi-private corporation, NEXCO West. What emerges is a fierce controversy over the deceptively simple question “what’s in a reed?”. Answering this question entails taking a precise stance as to the necessity of preserving not only nature, but also (the sound of) *gagaku*. What at first seems like a local issue reveals itself as an intensely political matter that weaves together tangible and intangible, showing how much *gagaku* can be decentered, and what this decentering might entail.

Thus revisited, the issue of where *gagaku* can be found in contemporary Japanese society elicits answers that are profoundly different from those stemming from more conventional, centralized investigations. While the latter are likely to resonate with the modern notion of *gagaku* as ‘Japanese court music’, aligning also with images of crystallized unchangeability sanctioned at the international level by UNESCO<sup>45</sup>, the former force us to reconsider taken-for-granted oppositions between nature and culture, materiality and immateriality, subjective and objective. In this way, a ‘politics of the intangible’ that portrays court music as an ‘endangered species’ is contrasted with an

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<sup>45</sup> *Gagaku* was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, in 2009.

alternative perspective, in which the materiality of *gagaku* is not disentangled from its sonority. And this, in turn, may reinforce the embodied, emplaced, enacted view maintained in the context of a lived ‘comparticipation’ with those who *make gagaku resound*.

Finally, the Conclusion highlights how a reconsideration of *gagaku* conceived as a multiple object may result in alternative, fluid topologies of local sites that have thus far remained at the margins of official narratives and normative maps of ‘Japanese court music’. Indicating further areas of exploration, I suggest the creation of entirely unprecedented but mutually resonating sonic maps of *gagaku*. Shifting across different scales and different ways of composing *gagaku*, this thesis demonstrates that overflows, heterogeneities and ec-centricities are crucial elements of the interstitial force that keeps ‘Japanese court music’ in a state of becoming, defying definitions, escaping singularity and fostering its own change.

## CHAPTER 1

### FLOWS AND OVERFLOWS

#### *GAGAKU'S MODES OF REPRESENTATION*

The persistence of *gagaku* duplicates itself in the persistence of the variety of approaches mobilized to investigate it. In this case, the 'object' cannot be separated from the means of knowledge production<sup>1</sup>: as suggested in the Introduction, different ways of investigating *gagaku* generate different objects for themselves. For this reason, trying to embrace the totality of *gagaku* research is as bound to failure as trying to know all of its manifestations. Thus, the aim of reviewing some of the means through which *gagaku* has been approached should be to highlight how court music was repeatedly turned into a stable discursive field, available and amenable to specific paradigms of research, rather than to paint a necessarily impossible comprehensive picture of what it is, has been, or will become.

This chapter introduces four modes of *gagaku* representation: the historical, the presentational, the musicological and the decentering. Each of these modes subsumes a number of studies that can be grouped together on the basis of the relative weight assigned to a certain aspect of *gagaku*: namely, 1. The unfolding of a linear chronological

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<sup>1</sup> A lesson we have learnt from 20<sup>th</sup> century experimental physics and feminism (see Haraway 1988).

narrative throughout the many centuries of *gagaku*'s existence; 2. The (especially recent) attempt to present 'Japanese court music' to a public of non-specialists; 3. The importance of the methodologically accurate and meticulous study of ancient scores; and 4. The struggle to deconstruct or counterbalance overwhelmingly centralized, ideologically-charged representations of *gagaku* through various examinations of its lesser-known facets. Of course, these four modes are not mutually exclusive: especially in the case of recent edited volumes and monographs, all four approaches may coexist, or it may be difficult to establish which one is dominant. Thus the selection is arbitrary and undoubtedly partial: other modes are available to which equally broad academic bibliographies would correspond.

Research trends that will not be taken into consideration, because they do not fall within the confines of the four modes presented below, include the study of the relationship between *gagaku* and Japanese literature<sup>2</sup>; the neglected exploration of the historical connection between *gagaku* and *shōmyō* (Japanese liturgical chanting)<sup>3</sup>; and the numerous examples of so-called 'contemporary *gagaku*', that is, music written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by prominent composers (both Japanese and not) specifically for the *gagaku* ensemble<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, despite the fact that several publications and projects are intimately connected to accompanying CDs, DVDs and similar media, such materials are omitted here in light of the fact that a detailed review of their contents does not play a central role in the overall discussion that forms the theme of this dissertation. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that scholars and performers of *gagaku* increasingly rely on new media for their academic and artistic endeavors, to the point that *gagaku* has recently come to occupy a 'niche' in the discographic market for Japanese traditional music<sup>5</sup>.

Finally, the sources presented below are primarily in English and Japanese. Despite the fact that useful contributions on *gagaku* have appeared in such languages as Italian, French and German, these are rather sporadic, unconnected instances, more often than

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<sup>2</sup> One title that has become a standard reference, whose mention at least seems indispensable, is Yamada Yoshio's *Music and Genji monogatari* (1934). In Italian, see Daniele Sestili's *Musica e Danza del Principe Genji* (1996).

<sup>3</sup> For three exceptions, almost forty years apart, see (K. Ono 1970; Kataoka 1970; and Ogi 2009).

<sup>4</sup> The most famous example being the suite *Shūteiga ichigu* (*In and Autumn Garden*) by Takemitsu Tōru. On this and other pieces by central 20<sup>th</sup> centuries composers such as John Cage, Matsudaira Yoshitsune and Karlheinz Stockhausen inspired by or written for *gagaku* (ensemble), see (Galliano 2002; Wade 2014).

<sup>5</sup> For useful discographies, see (Endō et al. 2006, 230–37; Tokita and Hughes 2008b, 422).

not simply episodes of much larger attempts to introduce Japanese traditional music as a whole (e.g. Tamba 1995; Sestili 2010). In a sense, most of these texts could be said to share a presentational mode or approach to *gagaku*<sup>6</sup>. Japanese- and English-language research, on the other hand, are both more varied and more consistent: because of the sheer number of publications available, it is easier to identify specific trends, and a comparatively longer history of research on Japanese music guarantees more specialized research topics.

Boundary transgressions and leakages among each of the four modes of representation included below are not only frequent, but inevitable. In fact, this mutual overflowing of different types of knowledge production represents an important feature of a new way of thinking about *gagaku*. Thus, even though the approaches presented here do not encompass the dazzling variety of *gagaku*'s manifestations (its representations do not map onto its presentations, so to say), laying them out has the merit of bringing into view additional sites that remain open to explorations to come. Indeed, recognizing this 'exceeding' quality of *gagaku* is itself a powerful incentive to push research into hitherto unexplored territories that hold the promise of rich future reverberations.

### **1.1 FIRST STREAM. THE HISTORICAL MODE**

Given its antiquity, it comes as no surprise that *gagaku* was taken up as a topic for investigation very early on in Japanese history –so early in fact that when it comes to the first studies of court music the line between primary and secondary sources is at times blurred. Given that the authors of ancient texts on court music were often performers and descendants of specialized families of musicians, there is a certain ambiguity to the sheer diversity that characterizes ancient collections of miscellaneous sources: to what extent what we see today as a reflexive endeavor was in fact originally conceived in more practical terms as merely a supplementary means of transmitting practical musical traditions is difficult to say.

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<sup>6</sup> For a recent exception, see (Fujita 2012).



As noted by Steven Nelson, by the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century “theoretical and historical studies of music, genealogical tables of transmission of performance practice, records of the activities of musicians, collections of historical tales about music and musicians, and sources of importance in music iconography began to appear in abundance” (2002, 587)<sup>7</sup>. A great number of these sources deal with *gagaku* and Buddhist chanting, but the reasons behind their compilation often resulted in their rather fragmentary nature. The earliest comprehensive treatise specifically dedicated to *gagaku* is Koma no Chikazane’s (1177-1242) *Kyōkunshō* (1233), a work in ten volumes that focuses mostly on the danced repertory. This is also the oldest of the so-called “three great books on *gagaku*” (*sandai gagakusho*)<sup>8</sup> (Endō et al. 2006, 110–11), the other two being *Taigenshō* (1512) by Toyohara no Muneaki (1450-1524) and *Gakkaroku* (1690) by Abe no Suehiro (1622-1708). Because it is the oldest, *Kyōkunshō* served as the basis for the other two, which often quote it (S. Tōgi 1988, 282).

While *Kyōkunshō* shows a penchant toward danced pieces of Chinese origins (because its author was a dancer in the Tōgaku repertoire), *Taigenshō* frequently exceeds the boundaries of the musical and expands on religious and philosophical topics (Kikkawa 1984b; 1984e). With as many as 50 volumes, *Gakkaroku* is the largest treatise in scale, and the most complete. In fact, the *gagaku* scholar Hazuka Keimei fittingly likened the three books to a spring, a multitude of brooks, and an ocean (quoted in Kikkawa 1984a, 222). Today, these texts can be found as typographical reprints or as modern editions (based on early modern manuscripts) within broad collections such as the *Nihon koten zenshū* or the *Nihon shisō taikei* (S. Tōgi 1988, 282; Nelson 2008a, 45–47)<sup>9</sup>. A recent illustrated edition of *Gakkaroku* is also valuable in that it is based on the manuscripts in the possession of the Abe family, the oldest available primary sources for this work (Abe 2008).

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<sup>7</sup> A detailed English list of 40 important sources of Japanese music from the collection of the Research Archives for Japanese Music at Ueno Gakuen college, complete with a description of each item, can be found in (Nelson 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes the *Zoku Kyōkunshō* (1270) by Koma no Asakuzu (a relative of Chikazane) is added to the list (e.g. Nelson 2002, 587). Several passages of *Kyōkunshō* and *Zoku Kyōkunshō* coincide, but the latter also includes information on some pieces that are not mentioned in the former (S. Tōgi 1988, 285).

<sup>9</sup> A digitalized version of *Gakkaroku* is available online through the collection of the National Institute for Japanese Literature: [http://base1.nijl.ac.jp/iview/Frame.jsp?DB\\_ID=G0003917KTM&C\\_CODE=0281-045801&IMG\\_SIZE=&PROC\\_TYPE=null&SHOMEI=【樂家録】&REQUEST\\_MARK=null&OWNER=null&IMG\\_NO=1](http://base1.nijl.ac.jp/iview/Frame.jsp?DB_ID=G0003917KTM&C_CODE=0281-045801&IMG_SIZE=&PROC_TYPE=null&SHOMEI=【樂家録】&REQUEST_MARK=null&OWNER=null&IMG_NO=1) (accessed September 2, 2016).

All three “great books” contain a wealth of information on the (often legendary) origins of *bugaku* and *kangen* pieces, the details of the oral transmission of the repertoire, and the performing techniques of each of the instruments in the ensemble. Moreover, they display a proto-historical approach to the study of *gagaku*: the insistence on the mythical origins of the music, through frequent quotes of famous passages of the *Kojiki* in which ritual musical performances or musical instruments are portrayed, the inclusion of genealogies of hereditary families of *gagaku* musicians detailed calendars of the main performing occasions within and outside of the court, all point to the ongoing search for a historical development that would eventually serve as the backbone of modern overviews of the genre.

Later important collections by Ika Masana (1681-1759) (*Newly Edited Anthology on the Way of Music, Shinsen gakudō ruijū taizen*) and by Ogawa Morinaka (1769-1823) (*Items of Song and Dance, Kabu hinmoku*) included texts on *gagaku* (Nelson 2002, 588)<sup>10</sup>. Other notable examples of early modern miscellaneous compendia are the *Gunsho ruijū* and the *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, compiled by Hanawa Hokiichi (1746-1821) (Nelson 2002, 587). Many of the sources collected in these two multivolume endeavors deal with theoretical or practical aspects of court music’s transmission and performance, and remain largely unexplored. They also quote the “three great books” at length, adding few truly new elements to what over the centuries had become an established, cumulative body of knowledge on *gagaku*.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the relative political stability of the Tokugawa regime had positive effects on court music: broader sectors of the population acquired a loose awareness of what *gagaku* was, and a new wave of research was set in motion (Endō et al. 2006, 122–26). Recently, researchers have started to explore the connections between, on the one hand, the Tokugawa rulers and *gagaku* (e.g. Takenouchi 2006) and, on the other, the concomitant spreading of *gagaku* practice among commoners in what has been described as a “network” sustaining the circulation of instruments, ideas and people (see Minamitani 2005). These new research trends equally display a historical preoccupation with the ways in which *gagaku* interacted with the particular sociocultural characteristics of Tokugawa Japan.

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<sup>10</sup> A reprint of the anonymous *Gagaku shōjiten*, largely based on Ogawa’s work, was recently published (Gagaku to bugaku oyobi kanren geinō no ima to mukashi kyōdō kenkyūkai 2016).

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, publications devoted to *gagaku* were marked by both continuity and discontinuity with their premodern or early modern counterparts. While thoroughness and inclusivity, modeled on the three great books on *gagaku*, remained central, authors also became increasingly conscious of the ongoing formation of a wider public of non-specialists. This growing public would eventually constitute an audience less interested in the details of the performing practice and more concerned with those historical and aesthetic facets that could contribute to a fuller appreciation of *gagaku* as ‘art music’ (Endō et al. 2006, 139)<sup>11</sup>.

At the same time, heightened contacts with European and American disciplines brought about a transformation of the ways in which intellectual discourses on *gagaku* were conducted. In particular, the formation of disciplinary fields modeled on their ‘Western’ counterparts meant that this performing art could be approached through the lenses of specific theoretical premises and methodological tools: accordingly, while still in the making, (Japanese) ethnology, musicology and the history of music all began to tackle *gagaku* from their own exclusive standpoints.

At this time, hybrid texts began to appear that reflected these magmatic, intertwined currents. For instance, the documents prepared on such occasions as the Paris International Exposition of 1867 and the 1873 World Exposition in Wien are fascinating attempts to produce new and synthetic general overviews of court music. One of the earliest examples of such an endeavor was the *Outline of Japanese Court Music (Nihon gagaku gaiben)*, a text which went along the instruments and scores sent to Paris in 1878 for the third Paris World Fair (*Exposition Universelle*) (Tsukahara 2013, 230). Another of these precursors of 20<sup>th</sup>-century overviews of *gagaku* was the 1884 *Report on the Results of the Music Investigation Committee (Ongaku torishirabe gakari seiseki shinpōsho)*, a text especially interesting because of its portrayal of court music as an element in a larger cultural attempt to accommodate ‘modern’, ‘Western’ elements alongside Japan’s lasting traditions (see Terauchi 2005; 2010, 17). Though not conceived for broad circulation, the *Memorandum on the Principles for Transcribing Gagaku (Gagaku o kifuhō hikae)* produced

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the issue of the limits of the category of ‘music’ is itself crucial to understanding the shift to which *gagaku* was subjected: though it is not exactly clear when the compound *ongaku* started to be employed as a stable equivalent of the term ‘music’, it appears that it was not before the creation of the institution known as Music Investigation Committee (*Ongaku torishirabe gakari*) in 1879 (Kikkawa 1984d, 177). As late as 1926, Tanabe Hisao (in his *Essays on Japanese Music (Nihon ongaku kōwa)*) employed the word *ongaku* primarily as a synonym of the components of what today we commonly refer to as *gagaku* (1996 [1926]). On related terminological preoccupations, see also (S. Gamō 2000, 60–78).

by the musicians of the Research Institute on Traditional Music (*Hōgaku chōsa gakari*) shortly after its creation in 1907 is yet another notable representative of this period. The *Memorandum* served as a detailed explanation of the methods employed during the activities of transcription and transnotation of part of the *gagaku* repertoire (see Chapter 2), but it also included a succinct overview of court music's main musicological features (modes, scales, tunings and performing techniques) (Terauchi 2010, 45–51). Written at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all of these texts were crucial to the establishment of a narrative surrounding *gagaku* which placed it at the origin of Japanese music history<sup>12</sup>.

Recently, a growing number of studies by leading Japanese scholars of *gagaku* has directed a historical gaze at precisely the Meiji period (M. Gamō 1986; Hashimoto 1986; T. Tōgi 2006; M. Ono 2016). According to Terauchi Naoko and Tsukahara Yasuko, for example, the creation of the Office of *Gagaku* in 1870 and the subsequent production of the collections of scores known as the *Selected Scores of the Meiji* represent “the birth of modern *gagaku*”, a watershed moment that punctuates the overall ‘flow’ of *gagaku* history (Tsukahara 2009, 42; Terauchi 2010). The work of Tsukahara is especially important, in that it convincingly links the remodeling of the court's rituals to the formation of a new identity for *gagaku*, one in which the relationship with the imperial system was given a particularly prominent place, further emphasized by the superimposition of court music and a particular version of *shintō* (Tsukahara 1998; 2009; 2013). Indeed, Tsukahara's *The Meiji Nation and Gagaku (Meiji kokka to gagaku)* (2009) can be considered the most important recent contribution to the study of *gagaku* at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>13</sup>. Terauchi's aptly titled *Gagaku in Modern and Contemporary Japan (Gagaku no 'kindai' to 'gendai')* (2010). is broader in scope, and delineates a cultural history of *gagaku* spanning from 1870 to the present. Both books shed light on the genealogy of today's *gagaku*, focusing on the scrupulous analysis of the historical developments that led to the establishment of the Office of *Gagaku* and on the activities of its musicians in the years immediately following its creation.

One often ignored but rather important contribution to the historical assessment of the significance of the Meiji period to present-day *gagaku* is represented by two articles

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<sup>12</sup> For an early example of the evaluation of debates concerning “Japanese music” during the Meiji period, see (Kikkawa 1984c, 111–28).

<sup>13</sup> For the complementary perspective, that is, the study of the introduction of ‘Western music’ (*yōgaku*) in Japan and its relationship with ‘traditional Japanese music’ (*hōgaku*), see (Tsukahara 1993; Galliano 2002; Wade 2014).

published by non-Japanese scholars, Robert Garfias and Eta Harich-Schneider. While the former indirectly confirms the lasting effects of the association, established in the Meiji, between (court) rituals and (court) music, stating that “[i]t is improbable that *gagaku* will completely die out, as it still serves too important a function in the ritual and ceremonial life of Japan” (Garfias 1960, 18), the latter offers more immediately relevant observations. According to Harich-Schneider, “the theory of a strictly secluded court music, unchanged and immune to the ravages of time, is difficult to judge: it seems to be authentic in parts and a shrewdly and skillfully staged myth in other parts” (1953, 50). More than 50 years later, the judgement on the Meiji period has become more clear-cut: Steven Nelson has stated clearly that “as it is performed today, the music is largely the result of a systematization of the late nineteenth century” (2008a, 37), and that “the *gagaku* that we see and hear today has its roots in ‘Meiji *gagaku*’, or, even dating it back more, in ‘premodern *gagaku*’” (2009, 107). In all these cases, it is interesting to notice that the ‘historical mode’ has been consistently applied to the Meiji period by both Japanese and non-Japanese scholars, who productively turned to the study of the radical changes in *gagaku*’s conditions of possibilities, so characteristic of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the years leading to the Second World War and immediately following it, virtually all the founding figures of disciplines such as the history of Japanese music, musicology, folkloric studies and ethnomusicology tackled *gagaku*<sup>14</sup>. Among these, Tanabe Hisao, the pioneer of Japanese comparative musicology, deserves special consideration in light of the complex relationship between his work and the colonial project of Japanese nationalism in East Asia (see Hosokawa 1998; Atkins 2010, 127–30; Suzuki 2013). With the exception of a few isolated instances in which specific elements were studied in great detail (especially Hirade 1959a; 1959b; 1959c; 1959d), early works on *gagaku* by authors such as Tanabe (from the 1910s), Koizumi Fumio (in the 1940s) and Kikkawa Eishi can be read as attempts to establish both its centrality within the history of Japanese music and a mature disciplinary platform to conduct research on it (see especially Koizumi 1958; Tanabe, Kikkawa, and Hirade 1955). In other words, these research endeavors were instrumental in producing a fully-fledged ‘history of Japanese music’<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed, studies of these fundamental figures constitute a budding academic subfield in and of itself: see (M. Gamō 1983; Hosokawa 1998; Fukuoka 2003; Suzuki 2013).

<sup>15</sup> For a review of the disciplinary trends within “music scholarship” in Japan, see (Shimeda 2002).

After the war, two major developments that prompted a progressive boom of publications related *gagaku* were its designation as “Intangible Cultural Property” in 1955 following the promulgation of the *Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* (1950)<sup>16</sup>, and the inauguration of the new National Theater in Tokyo in 1966 (for the former, see Thornbury 1997; Akagawa 2016; for the latter, Terauchi 2008). These events provided the social stimulus necessary to establish the foundations of today’s unprecedented public appreciation of court music. The varying quality and sheer number of publications that resulted makes their encompassing review a challenging, even daunting task. However, because such a systematic endeavor has seldom been attempted<sup>17</sup>, it seems important to at least single out a few of the most representative works that can be subsumed under the admittedly arbitrary ‘historical mode’ label.

Between the 1950s and 1970s, two fundamental English-language books were published that surveyed court music in very different ways. While William Malm’s *Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments* (first published in 1959), included a chapter dedicated to court music, and opted for thematic sections on the instruments, the history of the genre and its performance practice (see Malm 2001, 97–118 for the new, revised edition), Eta Harich-Schneider’s *A History of Japanese Music* (1973) was consistently historical, with the topic of *gagaku* taken up repeatedly throughout. In a sense, then, the treatment of *gagaku* in English reflected the tendencies that characterized Japanese scholarship in the postwar-years: a more straightforwardly historical perspective existed alongside a broader, more encompassing approach. Kishibe’s *The Traditional Music of Japan* (published in English) (1984, 32–44), for example, briefly covers the main aspects of *gagaku*’s repertoire and presents its instruments, while Kikkawa’s *History of Japanese Music (Nihon ongaku no rekishi)* (1965, 22–92) breaks down the various components of court music and introduces them as

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<sup>16</sup> See the entry “*Gagaku*” in the digital database of Japanese cultural properties: <http://kunishitei.bunka.go.jp/bsys/maindetails.asp> (accessed September 5, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> The *Nihon ongaku daijiten (Dictionary of Japanese Music)* includes a section devoted to surveying research methods applied specifically to court music and their outcomes: its author distinguishes between musicological and historical approaches; the reconstruction of ancient pieces in the repertoire; the analysis and restoration of ancient instruments; and instances of transnotation and transcription (M. Gamō 1989, 412–14). However, this is not really a review of the available bibliography on these subjects, but rather a broad overview of themes and trends in *gagaku* research. Lists of sources at the end of general outlines of *gagaku* are also useful, but they are often restricted to the “most important” or “essential” texts (e.g. Endō et al. 2006; Terauchi 2011a; Endō 2013).

instances of a broader trend to assimilate mainland Asian culture<sup>18</sup>. Both are representative of the gradual process that led to the establishment of a standard way of presenting and representing *gagaku*: namely, its inclusion into a linear historical exposition of the chronological flow of Japanese (traditional) music<sup>19</sup>.

Important examples of this crystallization of the historical mode into the disciplinary bounds of the history of Japanese music conceived as a separate discipline include an edited volume published in collaboration with the National Theater, in which some of the best scholars of Japanese music (Kikkawa Eishi, Yokomichi Mario, Koizumi Fumio, Kishibe Shigeo and Hoshi Akira) presented all of the major forms of traditional performing arts synthetically (Kokuritsu gekijō jigyōbu sendenka 1974; see also the Italian translation Hoshi et al. 1996). As in the case of Kikkawa's 1965 text, here Kishibe treats *gagaku* as part of the "ancient music" of the archipelago. Albeit in the context of a similarly historical project (this time much larger in scale) Ogi Mitsuo's chapter on *gagaku* in the second volume of the collection *Japanese Music, Asian Music (Nihon no ongaku, Ajia no ongaku)* (1988, 19–42) takes a different approach, presenting the genre as a whole from the point of view of its relationships with the imperial court.

This 'historical development of the historical mode' applied to the study of *gagaku*, if conceptually aberrant has at least the merit of showing a number of shifts over the past 150 years: while until the Meiji period the cumulative body of knowledge on 'Japanese court music' relied heavily on the three "great books", after 1870 the musicians of the Office of *Gagaku* started to produce new comprehensive overviews under the influence of emerging disciplines modeled on Euro-American counterparts. On the basis of these developments, a fully-fledged historical paradigm became the dominant stance toward the study of *gagaku*, which was central both to Japanese projects of "East Asian colonial modernity" (see de Ferranti and Yamauchi 2012) and to the establishment of a history of Japanese music as told by Japanese researchers (see Shimeda 2002; Hirano 1988). After the war, history became increasingly marginal in overall representations of court music,

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<sup>18</sup> This kind of approach, less interested in answering the question of what *gagaku* is and more prone to show that the arts brought to Japan before the 7<sup>th</sup> century were numerous and diverse, is reflected in the sections dedicated to "ancient and early medieval performing arts" of the most important works in English on Japanese theater: Ortolani's *The Japanese Theater* (1995 especially Chapters 3, 4 and 5) and the recently published *A History of Japanese Theatre* edited by Jonah Salz (see Terauchi 2016).

<sup>19</sup> On why this type of narrative should not be taken for granted, but rather explored as a historical construction, see (Groemer 2012). For a broad problematization of the notion of "Japanese music", see also (Tokita and Hughes 2008a, 1–3).

which assigned more and more space to other aspects (from costumes and masks to local traditions) which could concur to a full aesthetic appreciation of *gagaku* 'as art'<sup>20</sup>.

This more inclusive tendency is reflected in what can be considered the utmost canonical sources for the study of Japanese traditional music: the entries related to Japan in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (see especially Hughes 2002; A. Marett 2002) and the articles of the 7<sup>th</sup> volume of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (Nelson 2002; Terauchi 2002). In Japanese, however, standard references like the *Encyclopedia of Japanese Traditional Music (Hōgaku hyakka jiten)* (especially M. Gamō 1984) and the *Dictionary of Japanese Music (Nihon ongaku daijiten)* (Hirano, Kamisangō, and Gamō 1989) attest to the persistence of the historical mode, as does Nelson's treatment of *gagaku* and liturgical Buddhist chant in the *Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, which separates the historical and musical facets of two repertoires that the author rightfully chooses to approach jointly (2008a; 2008b).

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<sup>20</sup> That is not to say that such elements were entirely absent from earlier sources: ancient treatises in particular were rich with illustrations of *gagaku* paraphernalia. However, as a consequence of the emergence of the historical approach to the study of *gagaku* and of the tendency to 'anthologize' it as an early chapter in the history of Japanese music, such aspects were temporarily put aside or given less importance in favor of a more diachronic recounting of *gagaku*'s past.



## 1.2 SECOND STREAM. THE PRESENTATIONAL MODE

With the advent of the Meiji restoration and the creation of a centralized Office of *Gagaku* in 1870, the process of popularization of court music initiated in the Edo period received a formidable acceleration, which resulted both in the multiplication of groups of amateur practitioners and in the spreading of publications primarily concerned with helping the general population familiarizing with a performing art until then far removed from the everyday life of the people (see Terauchi 2010, vi–viii). One of the results of this rapidly changing attitude toward court music was the development of a new way of introducing *gagaku* to a broader public.

This new mode, which can be described as ‘presentational’, is especially dominant today, and is characterized by the assumption, often expounded in prefaces or introductions, that in spite of the growing size of *gagaku*’s audiences there remains a fundamental lack of familiarity with it (e.g. Oshida 1984, 7). In order to improve on this paradoxical situation, publications in the presentational mode generally provide broad overviews and careful guidance, rather than engaging in complex academic discussions on specific aspects of *gagaku* research. At the same time, the authors of these introductory texts are often the same ones of more specialized, scholarly articles. One interesting aspect of the presentational mode, then, is that in spite of its stylistic peculiarities, it is not entirely separated from other coexisting approaches: to the contrary, it is arguably the most permeable and fluid approach to *gagaku* there is.

As noticed by Terauchi, during the Taishō (1912–26) period and in the years before the war “individual musicians were more conscious of their past traditions and the future development of *gagaku*, and became eager to popularize their music amongst ordinary Japanese people. Their activities ranged from the establishment of *gagaku* groups to organizing concerts, publishing a journal, undertaking and circulating academic research, transcribing *gagaku* pieces into Western staff notation, and arranging orchestral versions” (2008, 95). This diversification of the activities undertaken by the *gagaku* musicians is reflected in the multiplication of the means through which information was spread. In this sense, the appearance of journals dedicated to court music is particularly noteworthy (Terauchi 2013, 96). The most important of these journals was *Gagakukai* (*The World of Gagaku*), a publication connected to the semi-professional group *Ono gagakukai*, the

oldest amateur *gagaku* group in Tokyo. The group published several bulletins a year since at least 1891. The first one to bear the title *Gagakukai* was n.16, dating April 6, 1892. The journal grew steadily both in terms of number of pages and of the quality of its contents. It ran continuously until 1994, though with occasional gaps of a year or more in between issues. It also became increasingly specialized, and its overall scholarly value is still acknowledged today. At the same time, *Gagakukai* displayed significant efforts to reach out to a broader public, incorporating articles in English and providing a section that listed important upcoming concerts and publications.

In many ways, today's only newsletter entirely dedicated to court music, called *Gagakudayori* (*News from Gagaku*) inherited the main features of *Gagakukai* and carried on its legacy. Published four times a year by the association Gagaku kyōgikai since 1976, it is approximately 15 pages long and has a characteristically broad approach, including modern translations of excerpts from ancient texts on *gagaku*, interviews with famous performers such as Miyata Mayumi and Shiba Sukeyasu, sections with questions and answers concerning the practical facets of instrumental performance, short academic articles, and a list of upcoming performances. Although the overall tone of the newsletter is not as academically-oriented as its predecessor's, *Gagakudayori* remains an essential source of information on present-day court music, especially when it comes to the current spreading of *gagaku* throughout Japan. Its editor, Professor Suzuki Haruo, is a former member of the Imperial Household ensemble and a skilled *shō* maker.

At the beginning of the 1960s, when the historical mode of researching *gagaku* was turning into a paradigm, the first volumes solely dedicated to 'Japanese court music' started to appear. One antecedent was Ōno's *Gagaku* (1942), a highly personal recollection that included impressionistic vignettes of life in the new capital, descriptions of the routine of a *gagaku* professional's ordinary 'day at work' (such as the details of the physical space of the practice room) and a wealth of information relevant to the aforementioned investigation of the Meiji period<sup>21</sup>. Another interesting example of an early text dedicated to *gagaku* was Tōgi Masatarō's *Gagaku* (1968), which relied more on its photographic illustrations than on its actual contents (see M. Tōgi 1971 for the English edition). Oshida's *An Appreciation of Gagaku* (*Gagaku kanshō*) (1975 [1969]) was among

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<sup>21</sup> Ōno's book can be grouped together with a handful of other personal 'artists' talks on art' (*geidan*), including three volumes by Tōgi Toshiharu (1999b; 2002; 2012) and, though in a somewhat different sense, some of Tōgi Hideki's publications (e.g. 2015).

the few comprehensive overviews of *gagaku* to revisit the historical paradigm by stressing the essential “fusion of inside and outside musics” that characterized its past.

One of the first collections of essays entirely revolving around *gagaku* was the second volume in a series dedicated to Japanese ancient performing arts (Geinōshi kenkyūkai 1970). This was a truly comprehensive endeavor, which included texts on the continental origins of *gagaku* as well as studies of the history of its transmission, its musicological facets, its instruments, masks and costumes, its relations with Buddhist functions and liturgical Buddhist chant (*shōmyō*), and a survey of local festivals that included *bugaku* dances<sup>22</sup>. The volume was influential in its attempt to strike a balance between historical and more varied approaches, introducing *gagaku* from a multiplicity of points of view, cutting across chronological periodizations and disciplinary boundaries. A similar stance also characterizes Kikkawa’s overall presentation of *gagaku* in a collective project undertaken by the National Theater, which provides a detailed overview of Japanese traditional performing arts (1965, 22–92). The same year in which William Malm’s book was published, Robert Garfias authored a booklet on *gagaku* to accompany an American tour of the Imperial Household musicians (Garfias 1959; see Malm 1960 for a review).

In more recent years, the various tendencies outlined so far were recombined. The emergence of introductory books especially dedicated to *gagaku* and the growing recognition of the value of attending to court music’s present manifestations led to contributions in which the historical perspective is but one among many. For instance, the materials published in connection with the Japanese traditional music training course for performers organized by Japan’s national public broadcasting system (NHK) juxtaposed a first, overtly historical section by Kusano Taeko which presents the various components of *gagaku* in light of the (by then) typical paradigm of “importation and appropriation” (2000, 23–44), with a more detailed exposition by Shiba Sukeyasu, which presents examples of scores in both traditional and staff notation (2000, 137–204).

Since the 2000s, the publishing company Ongaku no tomosha has produced agile reference books that tackle “Japanese music” in its entirety, either understood as “traditional music” (including the musics of ethnic minorities in Okinawa and Hokkaidō), or as the music composed and performed within the borders of Japan (thus including

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<sup>22</sup> For a rare example of research dedicated to *bugaku*’s masks, see Nishikawa (1971), and its English translation, Nishikawa and Bethe (1978).

music composed through interactions with the so-called ‘Western classical repertoire’). In this context, Fukui (2006) relegates the historical side of *gagaku* to a few tables and charts, while Endō (2007, 17–35), in line with the overall approach of the volume *Dictionary of Japanese Music’s Basic Terms*, provides a glossary of *gagaku* terminology in which the various components of the repertoire and its transmission practices are given priority over historical transformations. In another recent contribution, the same author epitomizes the new presentational trend of *gagaku*’s general overviews including both a historical section that portrays *gagaku* as “music of foreign origins” (*torai-gaku*) and other sections that present its materials, its theory, and its systems of transmission (Endō 2008).

The growing interest in *gagaku* as a ‘stand-alone’ subject for academic monographs, combined with the increasing availability of this performing art to a public of non-specialists, has given rise to publications that can be described as ‘fully presentational’, in that their manifest intention is to paint a multifaceted view of *gagaku* without losing sight of scientific accuracy. Such a stance is reflected in the very titles of these works. Tōgi Toshiharu’s *An Invitation to Gagaku (Gagaku e no shōtai)* (1999a), for example, represents the most agile and accessible text on the subject available today. Skillfully combining interviews with performers and artisans, descriptions of the main performing subgenres, and a particularly effective use of pictures, the book never takes for granted what *gagaku* is, and manages to tackle its readers’ curiosity by incorporating unconventional themes such as the modern reconstruction of dance movements and costumes.

Another volume written by a member of an ancient *gagaku* family with the aim of helping readers getting acquainted with this performing art is Abe Suemasa’s *A Book to Understand Gagaku (Gagaku ga wakaru hon)* (1998). Despite its simple style and informal tone, however, this book is often unsystematic; rather than providing a solid platform to truly deepen one’s understanding of *gagaku*, Abe often confuses readers with a mixture of anecdotes, historical facts and technical descriptions of musicological components. Oshida’s *An Invitation to Gagaku* (1984) is much more thorough. His volume is particularly interesting because of its inclusion of Confucian ritual music among the “sources” of *gagaku* (Oshida 1984, 36–53). Although we now know that *gagaku* consisted since its inception not in Confucian ritual music, but in songs and dances to accompany

banquets (Endō 2004, 17), the presence of this little-explored aspect in Oshida's book is indicative of the author's encompassing approach.

The influence of a more markedly historical mode resonates in the *Illustrated Introductory Dictionary of Gagaku (Zusetsu gagaku nyūmon jiten)* (Endō et al. 2006), edited by Shiba Sukeyasu with contributions from Endō Tōru, Sasamoto Takeshi and Miyamaru Naoko. Despite its more traditional approach, this book was clearly conceived as a primer, a 'user-friendly' volume: the illustrations, for instance, are inspired by children's manga, and *furigana* reading guidance is provided for all the characters in the text (see **FIG.1.1**). Nonetheless, the more technical sections on *gagaku*'s modes, rhythmic patterns or performing techniques conform to the highest academic standards. Ultimately, the authors' intention can be summarized with the expression used by Shiba at the outset: "that through the book people may *enjoy gagaku*" (Endō et al. 2006, 5 emphasis added). And one is led to wonder whether the same could be said of the presentational mode as a whole.

The most recent and, in many respects, the best publication in the presentational mode is Endō's *A Dictionary to Understand Gagaku (Gagaku o shiru jiten)* (2013). Instead of presenting dictionary entries, the book comprises four chapters: *History; Subdivisions and Categories; Theory and Ideas; The Early Landscape of Gagaku*. Three useful appendixes provide, respectively, practical information on important individuals in *gagaku*'s history, the contents of some of the most important pieces of the repertory, and a list of relevant ceremonial occasions involving *gagaku*. Given the author's specialization in the ancient history and musicological facets of court music, it is not surprising that the origin and correct meaning of the word *gagaku* is thoroughly discussed in the context of the importation of the repertoire of banquet music from Tang China. Provocatively asking "is *gagaku* not *gagaku*?", Endō acknowledges that since at least the Edo period Japanese scholars were well-aware of the fact that the bulk of *tōgaku* (music imported from Tang China) was not ceremonial, but entertainment music, and stresses once and for all that "the original Chinese *gagaku* is very different from Japanese *gagaku*" (2013, 34–35).

Finally, it is important to notice that the progressive 'opening up' of the historical mode did not automatically lead to decentered views of *gagaku*: some of the projects in which the musicians of the Imperial Household in Tokyo were directly involved are, perhaps unsurprisingly, paramount examples of recent 'conservative' approaches to the topic.

Among such projects are the comprehensive VHS (now DVD) series *Gagaku. An 'Important Intangible Cultural Property' of Japan*, which includes two useful accompanying commentaries by Endō Tōru and Steven Nelson (“*Jūyō Mukei Bunkazai*” *Gagaku. Voll.1-7* 2000; Endō 1999; Endō and Nelson 2000); the lavishly illustrated *The Design of Gagaku* (T. Ōno and Hayashi 1990); and the tellingly titled *Gagaku Orthodoxy. The Music Department of the Imperial Household* (Kōshitsu Our Imperial Family 2008). The latter is particularly impressive for the strength with which, through marvelous pictures of the prized possessions of the Imperial Household musicians, it conveys the message of there being only *one* authoritative way of doing *gagaku*. In this sense, even though the historical mode may at first strike as especially appealing to those in search of an original, incorruptible version of *gagaku*, it is important to keep in mind that normative representations of this tradition can and do exploit a variety of other modes to fulfill their ideological ends.

えんそう じゅんび  
演奏の準備

演奏を始める前と終わったあとに、かならず楽器を温めます。昔は炭をおこした火鉢で温めていましたが、現在では電熱器が使われています。これは、呼気による水蒸気が楽器の中に溜まらないようにするためです。温めないで演奏しようとすると、リードが壊れてしまいます。

温めるときは、持ちやすいほうの手で頭の中心に中指を当てながら押さえ、もう一方の手で竹の部分を支えます。この下側の手は、温めすぎを防ぐ役割もします。竹を支えているほうの手の中で楽器をくるくる回すようにして、電熱器（火鉢）の上で全体が均一に温まるようにします。竹の切れ目の中に（小）指を入れてみて鏡を触ったときに、やんわりと温かく感じられるくらいが、温める目安です。

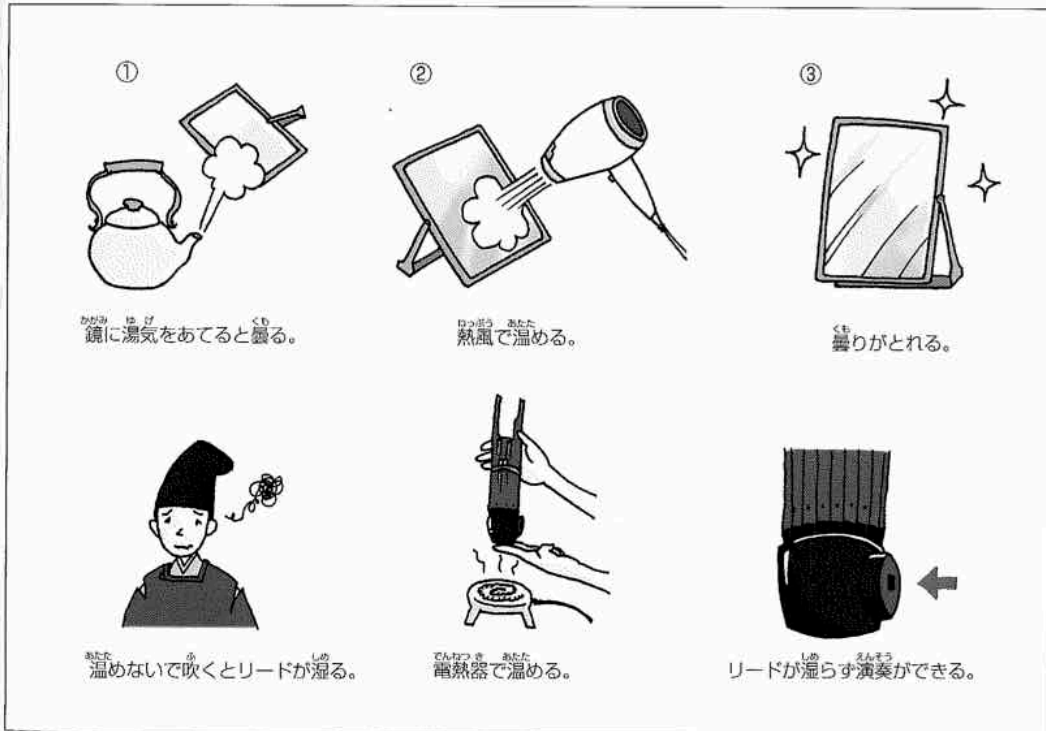
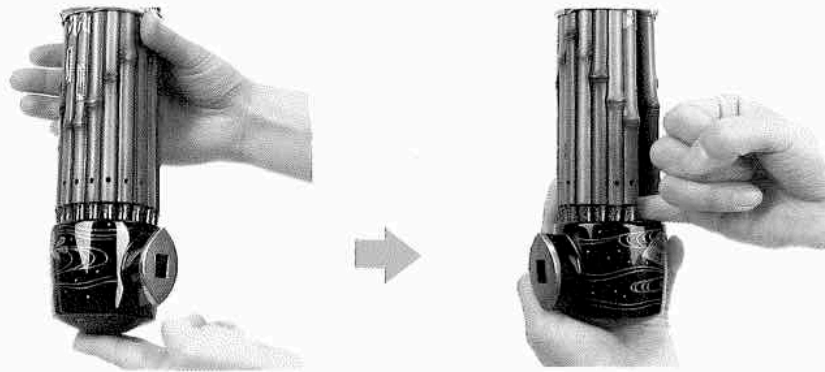


FIGURE.1.1. A detail from the *Illustrated Introductory Dictionary of Gagaku* (Endō et al. 2006, 151).

### 1.3 THIRD STREAM. THE MUSICOLOGICAL MODE

In Japan, during the past 35 years, the aura surrounding the figure of the Cambridge scholar Laurence E. Picken (1909-2007) has gradually undergone a radical transformation: skepticism, diffidence, and, in some extreme cases, plain aversion has given way to intellectual curiosity, admiration, even excitement. The reason for such a shift is the progressive acceptance of some of the core arguments advanced by the so-called “Picken school” (see Hughes 2010), an expression that has come to indicate the former pupils of Picken’s (and, to a lesser extent, the pupils of his pupils) who cooperated in the “Tang Music Project”, described as “perhaps the most extensive [project] yet undertaken in the historical musicology of Asia” (Durán and Widdess 2002, 719)<sup>23</sup>.

The aim of the Tang Music Project was to examine the earliest available surviving scores of the *tōgaku* repertoire of Japanese *gagaku*, to analyze and transcribe these scores into staff notation<sup>24</sup>, and to obtain in this way a sense of what the music sounded like at the time of its transmission to the Japanese archipelago. Although Picken’s interest in Chinese music and culture dated back to the late 1920s, “the Tang Music Project took formal shape from 1972, when Ford Foundation funding helped bring a determined and talented group of young scholars to Cambridge to work with [him]. Jonathan Condit, Allan Marett, Elizabeth Markham and Rembrandt Wolpert all pursued their doctoral research under Laurence’s guidance on aspects of Tang music. Several other scholars, notably Mitani Yōko and Noël Nickson, were also frequently involved in the Tang project” (Hughes 2010, 232). The method consistently followed by the whole team was made clear by Picken in the introduction to the first volume of a series edited by him and his associates and entitled *Music from the Tang Court* (see Picken et al. 1981; 1985; 1985; 1987; 1990; 1997; 2000): to read the earliest scores of the *tōgaku* tradition “with no more information than that given in the manuscripts themselves, deliberately ignoring the living tradition and performance-practice of today” (Picken et al. 1981, 1:11).

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<sup>23</sup>Picken was the first to acknowledge the significance of the project in his career as a musicologist. During an interview with Carole Pegg (1987), when asked to offer some remarks about his work with Tang music, he simply commented: “I regard this part of my work as the most important work of my life”.

<sup>24</sup> Or, more precisely, to transnotate them. See Chapter 2 for a fuller explanation of the difference between transcription and transnotation. See also (Bent et al. 2002).





FIGURE 1.2. The entire manuscript of the *Tenpyō biwafu* (from Nelson 2012, 6).

All of these manuscripts present melodies for one instrument at a time –in other words, they are part-scores, not full scores, and provide concrete instructions on how to execute specific notes on that particular instrument rather than giving notes’ names –which is to say that they are ‘tablatures’, to use a technical term<sup>25</sup>. The earliest among these tablatures is also the oldest extant document connected to *gagaku*: known as *Tenpyō biwafu* and dating from 747, it is “a fragment of notation for the *gagaku biwa* (lute), recorded on the reverse of a document detailing the receipt of paper for copying the sutras held in the collection of the Shōsōin”, the treasure hall of Nara’s Tōdaiji temple (Nelson 2002, 588) (see FIG.1.2). Other examples of notation worth mentioning are the *Biwa shochōshi bon* (*Collection of Tuning Pieces for Biwa*) by the Chinese master Lian Chengwu, handed to Fujiwara no Sadatoshi in Yangzhou during the last official mission to Tang China of 838 (Nelson 2002, 588; see also Picken et al. 1990, 5:124–25); the *Gogen*

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<sup>25</sup> Studies of these sources in Japanese abound, but occupy a somewhat peripheral position in the study of *gagaku*. For instance, Hayashi (1970) focuses on notations of the *tōgaku* repertoire classifying them according to the instrument they were written for, but only devotes 3 pages to the topic. The dedicated *Dictionary of Gagaku* (*Gagaku jiten*) also includes a brief section with details on the most important primary sources (S. Tōgi 1988, 282–86), as does one of Endō’s excellent overviews of *gagaku* (Endō 2004, 114–15). Nelson (1986, 4–7) is the best overview of these sources in English. The same author has recently offered an overview of the main musicological issues surrounding these sources in Japanese: see (Nelson 2014).

*biwafu* for five-string lute, dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century; the *Hakuga no fuefu* for transverse flute, by Minamoto no Hiromasa, edited in 966 (A. Marett 2002, 855–56). Two later collections of tablatures, respectively for the *biwa* (*Sango yōroku*) and for the zither *sō* (*Jinchi yōroku*) were compiled by Fujiwara no Moronaga (1138-1892): they record “the greater part of the *gagaku* repertoire as it existed at the end of the Heian period” (Nelson 2002, 589), and therefore often constituted the basis of Picken’s work. Scores for the mouth organ *shō* and the double-reed oboe *hichiriki* only survive in much later sources, often dating from the Edo period (see Ng 2011; Endō 2004, 114).

A close study of these early sources had been undertaken by Japanese scholars earlier or at the same time as the Tang Music Project was set in motion, notably by the scholar Hayashi Kenzō (1899-1976), whose main contributions were collected in the volume *Gagaku – Interpretation of Ancient Scores* (*Gagaku –Kogakufu no kaidoku*) (1969). However, Picken’s deliberate disregard of contemporary performance practice set him apart from such investigations, and caused a wave of criticism in Japan. In fact, “from the late nineteenth century, a conventional view of *tōgaku* emerged, which suggested that it was a static musical repertory, unchanged since its importation from China” (Ng 2011, 88). This was not simply a matter of cherishing the past: in fact, the implications of the analyses conducted by Picken and his former doctoral students Jonathan Condit (1979; 1981; 1984), Rembrandt Wolpert (1977; 1981), Elizabeth Markham (1983), and Allan Marett (1977; 1981; 1985; 1986; 2006) reshape the way we look and listen to *gagaku* in its entirety. Their revolutionary view, as synthesized by Steven Nelson, was that “the ancient melodies are carried in the modern *shō* and *biwa* parts like a type of *cantus firmus*” (2008b, 60), and that melodic lines have been rendered imperceptible and almost completely inaudible by a massive process of slowing down of the original performance tempi, by a factor variously estimated as of thirty-two (Picken et al. 1981, 1:14), sixteen (Hughes 2010, 234) or between four and eight (Nelson 2008b, 60) (see Howard 2014, 345). This thesis clashed with Japanese scholars’ understandings, which, in accordance with anyone’s experience of a piece of *tōgaku* in contemporary performance, elected the *hichiriki* and the *ryūteki* as the instruments that “carried the melodies” (e.g. Masumoto 1968, 20–23)<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, it was Picken’s opinion (or, rather, impression) that the Japanese

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<sup>26</sup> In Picken’s words: “It is furthermore evident that, in relation to the Tang-derived *canto fermo*, the variations provided by the versions for flute and *hichiriki* are *canti figurati*. They have arisen as elaborate variations on ancient tunes, originally minimally embellished. These variant versions have been generated

scholar Hayashi Kenzō “had no doubt as to the purity, not merely of the performing tradition, but also of the documentary tradition, presumably up to, and inclusive of, the Meiji revision” (Picken et al. 1981, 1:10).

The two claims, that the music had significantly slowed down, and that the string instruments (*biwa* and *sō*) also carried the melodies, are tightly interwoven: in fact, the latter can only be sustained if a melody is indeed perceivable upon listening to the individual instrumental parts of lute and zither. But the acoustical characteristics of these instruments result in such a short reverberation time or decay (that is, the time necessary for the sound to die away and become inaudible) that a melody-line can only be perceived if the score is performed above a certain speed<sup>27</sup>. In the case of the *shō*, however, Japanese musicologists have found that for several pieces the reconstruction of what would have been a melodic line is both problematic and unsatisfying: because of the difference between the pitch range of the string instruments and of the *shō*, in fact, the reconstructed melodies of the mouth organ are difficult to perform and feel somewhat “unnatural”<sup>28</sup>.

At any rate, the idea that Japanese scholars would not accept the main tenets of the Tang Music Project on the basis of their utmost trust in the fidelity of contemporary *gagaku* performance is both unconvincing and misplaced: not only is it very difficult to come across a statement to that end in the literature, but as early as 1968 Masumoto Kikuko had observed energetically that “*gagaku* derives from one single line of melody” (1968, 13). In other words, there is evidence to suggest that Japanese researchers were well-aware of the heterophonic nature of *gagaku* music before Picken and his students began their work on *tōgaku*. What truly distinguished the “Picken school” from scholars conducting research in Japan until the 1970s was rather its claim that the ancient scores could bring back to life the *sound* of Tang period music: contrary to this view, Japanese researchers were always skeptical about the actual fidelity to the original sound, and saw this reconstructive endeavor as necessarily incomplete, simply because a full set of part-scores (or a full score, for that matters) for all the instruments of the ensemble, dating from the same period, is simply not extant. Thus all a scholar can do is to patch together

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by the largely systematic and formulaic application to such melodies of all the standard, universally recognised types of melodic, decorative procedures: by the introduction of appoggiaturas, passing notes, anticipations, auxiliaries, and *échappés*” (Picken et al. 1990, 5:114 emphasis in the original).

<sup>27</sup> Picken and his students allude to precisely this connection between the perception of the melody and the indication of the tempo assigned to their rendition of the piece *Seigaiha* in a 1975 short article reprinted in the journal *Gagakukai* (Picken et al. 1975, 58).

<sup>28</sup> Takuwa Satoshi, personal communication (September 8, 2016).

different sources from different eras, hoping to reach at best an impressionistic, always partially reinvented version of how they music might have sounded like in the past.

In the fifth volume of *Music from the Tang Court*, Picken addresses this issue, making it clear that attaining a final, definitive text “even for a single manuscript, is ludicrous [because] the Tang-Music repertory, like the smaller *saibara*-repertory, is to be compared with a folk-song tradition” (Picken et al. 1990, 5:108). He observed that “the various items notated in tablature for particular, melodic instruments, are not *parts*, destined for performance in heterophonic ensemble; they are *versions*, appropriate to the mechanics and range of each of the five melodic instruments; they were never tailored, one version in respect to another, so as to yield a particular overall effect in ensemble-performance” (Picken et al. 1990, 5:107 emphasis in the original). And such a stance is much more extreme than merely affirming the melodic function of *biwa*, *sō* and *shō* in the ancient scores.

Ultimately, the ‘outrageous’ character of the scholarly input of the Tang Music Project should perhaps be reassessed on the basis not of its findings, but of its premises: in this sense, recent attempts “to situate Picken’s legacy against the ‘historical turn’ in ethnomusicology” (Howard 2014, 337) may be complemented by some reflections on the feasibility of associating Picken’s project to what has been termed “historical acoustemology” –that is, a historical-acoustic-epistemology (Bruce R. Smith, quoted in Smith 2015, 56). When the question becomes “whether or not we can (or ought to) try to re-experience the auditory and sensate past” (Smith 2015, 60), two opposite tendencies can be distinguished:

“On one side, there is a very tenuous claim that we can recapture and reexperience the sounds of the past. The most radical of these claims posits the recapturing of sounds –from any period of history –as undiluted and unmediated. According to this position, past sounds are directly exportable to the present through listening to recordings and the reenactment of sounds. (...) The alternative argument maintains that efforts along these lines are deeply misleading and insists that without sufficient appreciation of the context in which the sounds occurred, we warp our understanding of echoes to the point of intellectual desiccation” (Smith 2015, 56).

While it would probably be farfetched to claim that Picken disregarded context in favor of content, one could say that the musicological analysis of the scores was always the central component of his momentous endeavor. From this point of view, the Tang Music

Project's search for a sonic world hidden behind and beyond the existing sonic reality of Japanese *gagaku* was conducted with the sophisticated, "etic" instruments of a musicology that owes much to the field of philology<sup>29</sup>. In particular, this approach was preoccupied with establishing the exact time and circumstances surrounding the compilation of its sources, trying to reach a satisfactory understanding of the rhythmical and modal characteristics of what could be described as 'Tang music theory'. Hence, the musicological mode of research on *gagaku*, as inaugurated by Laurence Picken and his students, initially focused on bringing back to life the sounds of Tang-period Chinese music through an excessively optimistic, positivistic "unabashed use of *etic*, 'scientific and objective', analytical methods" (Picken et al. 1990, 5:111 emphasis in the original)<sup>30</sup>.

Despite the different perception of what exactly a (philologically-oriented) musicological analysis could attain, over the years Picken's approach received increasing validation from Japanese *gagaku* scholars, who absorbed it and reworked it into what has been called a "reconstruction ideology" (Terauchi 2010, 187). This gradual process started as early as the 1970s through personal interactions between Japanese researchers such as Hayashi Kenzō and Mabuchi Usaburō and members of the Picken school, most notably Allan Marett and his student Steven Nelson. This mutual rapprochement eventually led to strands of research that presently dominate the academic study of *gagaku* in Japan. In this sense, an interest in the sounds of *gagaku* not as perceived and performed but as composed and theorized sparked a host of research practices which, when grouped together, form the panorama of *gagaku*'s major mode of research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Diverse as they may appear at first, all of these approaches can clearly be subsumed under what I called the musicological mode. Terauchi has already studied in some detail the genealogy of this "reconstruction ideology", tracing it back to its Japanese forefathers Tōgi Tetteki (1869-1925), Yamanoi Motokiyo (1885-1970), Shiba Sukehiro (1898-1962) and Konoe Naomaro (1900-1932), finally reconnecting it to the main research trends since the 1970s (2010, 187-222). If this academic filiation is well

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<sup>29</sup> See Picken's strenuous defense of the use of etic concepts in association with emic ones: "we should make plain that, while accepting the need to determine the nature of emic conceptions of the process of musical composition, we reject the notion that analysis from outside is either impertinent or irrelevant. The understanding of a music from outside our own culture requires both approaches" (Picken et al. 1990, 5:111).

<sup>30</sup> In this sense, it is perhaps ironic that some critics would point out that the Cambridge school produced a fracture between "scientific accurateness" and "artistic creativity", and fundamentally lacked a "concrete sonic image" of the reconstructed pieces (see Terauchi 2010, 217-18).

documented, more recent years were characterized by the appearance of discernible differences among competing 'lines of academic transmission'.

One group of researchers maintains a strong historical and philological approach: gravitating around the Research Institute for Japanese Music Historiography at Ueno Gakuen University in Tokyo, scholars such as Fukushima Kazuo, Steven Nelson and Endō Tōru have relied on the Institute's reach collection of ancient manuscripts and instruments, publishing the outcomes of their investigations in a dedicated journal, *Studies in the Historiography of Japanese Music (Nihon ongakushi kenkyū)*. Fukushima systematically laid out the methodological coordinates of this approach by distinguishing it from other branches of musicology such as musical esthetics, the sociology of music and ethnomusicology, emphasizing instead the "objectivity of material documentation", all the while distancing the historiography of music from the study of practical performance, deemed "unnecessary" to the specific goal of using historical documents as research materials that mediate between past and present (Fukushima 1988, 28–31).

This interest in the material aspects of the documents used to investigate *gagaku's* history is in many ways a trait inherited from Hayashi Kenzō. As already mentioned, in *Gagaku – Interpretation of Ancient Scores* (1969) Hayashi had also worked toward the interpretation of ancient documents, meticulously classifying the musical symbols inscribed in the notations examined and conducting statistical analyses of their occurrences. Precisely because, as noted by Terauchi (2010, 213), his starting point was not contemporary *gagaku* practice, but rather a fascination with ancient Chinese culture (which in turn originated in his literary interests), Hayashi's approach was particularly akin to Picken's. Indeed, most of the manuscripts analyzed by the former were also taken up by the latter.

For this reason, Steven Nelson represents the 'missing link' between Hayashi's legacy and the work of the Cambridge school. As a student of Allan Marett, Nelson was able to appreciate the results of both Japanese and non-Japanese scholars, and to address their respective shortcomings. Accordingly, already in 1988 he regretted that Japanese researchers did not take on Hayashi's legacy, while at the same time lamenting the fact that Picken's work was not well known in Japan (1988, 27–28). Over the years, Nelson has consistently carried out this role of mediator, alternating publications that presented the many primary sources available for the study of Japanese *gagaku* (e.g. Nelson 1986;

2002) and excellent overviews of the genre in English (Nelson 1990; 2008a; 2008b). In parallel, he has contributed immensely to the debate concerning the interpretation of ancient tablature scores, especially the ones for *gagaku*'s string instruments (e.g. Nelson 1988; 2012). Two features of Nelson's research that are particularly worth pointing out here are his acknowledgment of the fact that Japanese court music and liturgical Buddhist chant "share not only a common origin on the Asian mainland and many aspects of their music theory, but also a common history and overlapping performance contexts" (2008a, 35)<sup>31</sup>, and his more recent attempts to reconstruct ancient *gagaku* in a way that is both faithful to the ancient notation (in other words, philologically accurate) and musically appealing to *gagaku* performers (see Nelson 2009; 2014). When it comes to these attempts, it is especially interesting to notice that his reconstructed pieces are either performed by himself on the zither *sō* (in case of solo pieces) or by members of the group Reigakusha<sup>32</sup>. In this way, Nelson's most recent work on *tōgaku* can be said to move toward a reconciliation of philological rigor and artistic enjoyment, in a way indirectly recognizing the significance of the audience as an actor, a "user of music" (see Hennion 2015), that should not be stripped away from serious, academic reconstruction projects.

In a sense, the scholarly output of Nelson's former student Endō Tōru is at once broader and more circumscribed. While on the one hand Endō authored a number of overviews of *gagaku* aimed toward a broader public of non-specialists (e.g. Endō 2004; 2007), on the other he has also conducted painstakingly precise research on the various modes of the *tōgaku* repertoire, convincingly demonstrating that "in the transmission of *tōgaku* in Japan during the Heian period, there are already visible signs of estrangement from the musical theory of the Tang period" (Endō 2005). If these words confirm the affinities between Endō's approach and the 'musicological mode', his recent contribution to an edited volume on the rituals involving *gagaku* performed at Amanosha shrine near mount Kōya should equally be linked to Hayashi's ground-breaking research on the importance of pictorial evidence to the historical study of Japanese *gagaku* (see Endō 2011).

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<sup>31</sup> Which brought him to double as one of the leading experts of Shingi Shingon-school *shōmyō*: see his fundamental *Buddhist chant of Shingi-Shingon: a guide for readers and listeners* (Nelson 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Among his most relevant conference-demonstrations, one of the most recent was significantly entitled *Towards a verifiable 'reproduction' of the music of ancient East Asia: From decipherment of old notations to music for performance* (4th Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Musics of East Asia, Nara, August 22, 2014).

Something akin to Endō's study of *tōgaku*'s modality was attempted by Terauchi Naoko for the rhythmical structure of the same repertoire, but with a focus on the end of the Edo period (see Terauchi 1996). Interestingly, a precursor of Terauchi's research was Harich-Schneider's *The rhythmical patterns in gagaku and bugaku* (1965), which, in turn, concentrated on the *present* performance of the repertoire (and was unfortunately marred by a number of imprecisions). Terauchi also recently completed a more comprehensive musicological overview of *tōgaku*, in which she carried out a broad analysis of what, following John Blacking, she calls "surface structure and deep structure", defined rather ambiguously as "the context of sonic form and process" (2011b, 20). The starting point here is the observation that "between the surface and deep structures in present-day *tōgaku* practice there is certainly a disjunction of musical idiom and mode. In other words, different principles govern each level of the music" (Terauchi 2011b, 20). This leads Terauchi to present the contemporary musical practice of *tōgaku* in terms of surface structure, and Chinese modal theory as deep structure. Simultaneously, Picken-inspired methods of deciphering ancient scores are taken up in order to demonstrate that "it is possible to reconstruct ancient *tōgaku* melodies by reading and interpreting current and historical sources of music notation with a full understanding of the relationship between the current surface realization and the deep basic melody" (Terauchi 2011b, 21).

Regardless of the fact that such a claim would require a much more detailed discussion than that offered in the context of an edited volume, the main shortcoming in Terauchi's project is the conflation of the ill-defined pair 'surface/deep structure' with the chronological opposition of present and past practice. Though her essay can be read as a useful introduction to the main issues surrounding the musicological mode of researching *gagaku*, it fails to show how exactly it differs from Picken's approach. What is one to make, for instance, of the analysis of melodic patterns and of the "shifting of focus" among the various instruments of the ensemble in contemporary practice (Terauchi 2011b, 34–35), if the reconstruction of the ancient melodies is accomplished through "disregard[ing] present-day embellishment practice and simply tak[ing] the pitches that the tablature signs indicate" (Terauchi 2011b, 39)? Despite the fact that her analysis is not as compelling as it could have been, Terauchi demonstrates that the



musicological paradigm initiated by Picken is still influencing a younger generation of (Japanese) researchers<sup>33</sup>.

Other scholars who have chosen to apply a similar musicological mode *to the current performance of gagaku*, rather than to its past, include Masumoto Kikuko, Robert Garfias and Mabuchi Usaburō. Masumoto's own presentation of *Gagaku. A New Approach to Traditional Music (Gagaku. Dentō ongaku e no atarashī apurōchi)* as “something right in the middle between a conversation and a scholarly dissertation”, a “useful book” for those “curious to find out more about the practical aspects of a specific traditional genre without having to commit to attending classes”, can only be interpreted in terms of an understatement (1968, 1). In fact, her 1968 book is vast and comprehensive, covering almost every aspect of *gagaku*, from the shape and use of plectrums and drumsticks to the analysis of the scores of each instrument, from the problematic concepts of mode (*chōshi*) and rhythm (*hyōshi*) to ‘emic’ expressions used by musicians, like *sureru*, “when two sounds performed simultaneously do not match” (Masumoto 1968, 357) and *zureru*, a “temporal discordance in the ‘stopping point’ of several elements performed simultaneously” (Masumoto 1968, 373)<sup>34</sup>. And it is precisely in cases like these that Masumoto's musicological attitude becomes especially evident: resorting to transcriptions into staff notation almost at every turn of the page, using Western music as the taken-for-granted referent of her observations, the author effectively provides an outstanding musicological analysis of *gagaku's* main features.

Robert Garfias's *Music of a Thousand Autumns* (1975b) is the result of extended contact with the Imperial Household musicians during the 1950s, and is somewhat in between the ethnographic and the musicologically-oriented. The author states clearly that “the main emphasis in this study is the analysis of the *tōgaku* literature from actual performance techniques” (Garfias 1975b, 57), and efforts are made to integrate descriptions of the musical practice with insight on the musicological features of *gagaku*. Overall, the balance between these two polarities is remarkable, but the book remains primarily interested in musical structures (melodic, rhythmical and compositional), even in the face of Garfias's own recognition that “there is little consciousness of form among

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<sup>33</sup> Recently, Chinese and Korean authors have also demonstrated an interest in Picken's methodology, while at the same time weighing the significance of Japanese pioneers like Kishibe Shigeo (see Zhao 2014).

<sup>34</sup> I must thank Mr. Saitō Nao from the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music in Kyoto for directing my attention toward these aspects of Masumoto's research.

court musicians of today” (1975b, 94). Thus even though his reliance on fieldwork and his recounting of such firsthand experiences are very significant in the context of a field of study that has been traditionally text-centered, *Music of a Thousand Autumns* remains fundamentally anchored to the same approach that characterized scholars like Endō, Nelson, and even Picken.

Finally, the unique and elaborate approach of Mabuchi Usaburō deserves special mention. In an article entitled *A Study of Texture in Tōgaku*, the Osaka Kyōiku University Professor observed that “[p]resently, I think two main methodologies are applied to the study of *gagaku* pieces: to take ancient scores as an object of analysis, or to embrace an ethnological approach towards contemporary performance. When this is done, the scores presently in use are unjustly ignored” (1980, 11–12). Deeming both philological and ethnological approaches limited in that the former is confined by the theoretical principles that produced the scores in the first place, and the latter by its specific objectives, Mabuchi sets out to analyze what can be grasped through the sole analysis of *contemporary* scores in staff notation, believing that “something of great importance” must be hidden among those notes. While openly musicological, Mabuchi’s acute awareness of the limits of the research trends of the time is remarkable, even though his stance is hardly embraceable.

A strand of research that maintains a particularly complicated relationship with both historical and musicological modes of inquiry, and in a sense is characterized by a continuous oscillation between the two, is that of the reconstruction of the instruments preserved in the Shōsōin treasury of Tōdaiji temple in Nara, and of musical pieces to be performed on these instruments. The fact that at the time of their introduction to Japan particular instruments that are now excluded from the repertoire were employed in *gagaku* performances is amply testified by pictorial evidences found both in Japanese temples (especially in the area surrounding Nara), and on the walls of the famous Dunhuang caves in China (see especially Kishibe 1982, 124–48). Serious research on the surviving instruments preserved but no longer in use was undertaken since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and interest on the subject grew steadily in the past 100 years. Indeed, both Tanabe Hisao and Hayashi Kenzō conducted investigations and catalogued the musical treasures of the Shōsōin, in the 1920s and 1940s, respectively (see Hayashi 1975, 16).

Hayashi's pioneering study *Research on the Shōsōin Instruments* (1964) advocated a conjoined use of different sources, including notably the analysis of artifacts and the iconography of music, to understand the details of the instruments' construction procedures. Just three years later, a dedicated book appeared that aimed at presenting the instruments with photographic reproductions and analyses not only of the methods of investigation but also of the cultural aspects surrounding the music for which the instruments were devised (see Shōsōin jimusho 1967). Meanwhile, in 1966, the new National Theatre had opened its doors in Tokyo. The existence since its inauguration of a series entitled *Gagaku Concerts* (*Gagaku kōen*) proves the importance that was assigned to this performing art among the many activities of the new institution (see Terauchi 2008). As shown by Terauchi, it was from the 19<sup>th</sup> of this concerts, held in 1975, that the emphasis was placed on the reconstruction of ancient works no longer performed (Terauchi 2008, 109). Still, at this stage the reconstructed pieces were performed using modern instruments

Under the influence of Kido Toshirō (b.1930), a producer active at the National Theatre from 1966 to 1996, a vast project by the name of *Reigaku* was set in motion in 1975, which aimed specifically at reconstructing some of the Shōsōin instruments (Kokuritsu gekijō geinōbu 1994, 2–3) (see FIG.1.3). As soon as the restoration of an instrument was complete, the object was concretely put to use on stage. The first time this happened was with the 29<sup>th</sup> concert of the *gagaku* series, in 1981 (Terauchi 2008, 103, 118). In 1985, the professional group of *gagaku* musicians Reigakusha was born, under the influence of Shiba Sukeyasu (b.1935), a court musician who in the 1970s taught courses on *gagaku* at Tokyo University of the Arts (Terauchi 2008, 98). The group became closely associated with the use of reconstructed instruments. At first, the concerts which included reconstructed scores were not taken very seriously by *gagaku* researchers, possibly because one of the Kido's strongest intentions was monetary: as the public of *gagaku* concerts dwindled, its producer tried to "challenge traditional music to adapt to contemporary times" (quoted in Terauchi 2011a, 173).

Kido's conception of what a modern reconstruction (of music and musical instruments) should or might entail is complex and deserves a separate treatment<sup>35</sup>, but

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<sup>35</sup> See his many publications that collect program notes, articles and other semi-academic materials (especially Kido 1990a; 1990b; 2006).

what is relevant here is the fact that the activities of the group Reigakusha and their leader Shiba Sukeyasu have become increasingly intertwined with the ‘reconstruction paradigm’ that constitutes the most important 21<sup>st</sup>-century result of the application of a musicological approach to the study of *gagaku*. What is more, the fact that both Shiba and Nelson have consistently relied on Reigakusha to perform their reconstructed pieces<sup>36</sup> (using instruments reconstructed on the basis of the specimens surviving in the Shōsōin), signals that what started out as a philological, cautious attitude towards a lost sound-world has gradually turned into a productive nexus of *experimenting with gagaku*. This progressive abandoning of a ‘textualist’ bias in favor of a proactive combination of scholarly outputs and creative production is especially interesting in that it pushes the boundaries of what we mean when we talk about ‘Japanese court music’ today. Indeed, in a sense, the results of such operations are neither Japanese, nor courtly, turning the music itself into something that is essentially different from mainstream definitions of *gagaku* –“a tradition with no history”, to quote Kido’s appealing words (Kido 1990b).

In conclusion, Terauchi is certainly right when asserting that reconstruction projects are based on historical interpretations which are in themselves “accumulations of interpretations” (2010, 188) –each operational decision already a combination of decisions as to the nature of the instruments, the scores, and even the images in which sound has been inscribed over the centuries. The same scholar also wisely suggests to look beyond simplistic oppositions between theoretical approaches that produce musically uninteresting outcomes and imprecise artistic operations that leave behind the principles upon which the music was itself originally produced (Terauchi 2010, 189–90). Recent trends suggest that such a gap may indeed be closing –but they also show that in order to assess the various reconstruction projects both in terms of their creative import and of their fidelity to pre-established methodological standards one needs to be willing to radically revisit the very definition of *gagaku*.

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<sup>36</sup> Some notable CDs which contain Shiba’s reconstructions or original compositions include (Reigakusha 1995; 2011a; 2011b).

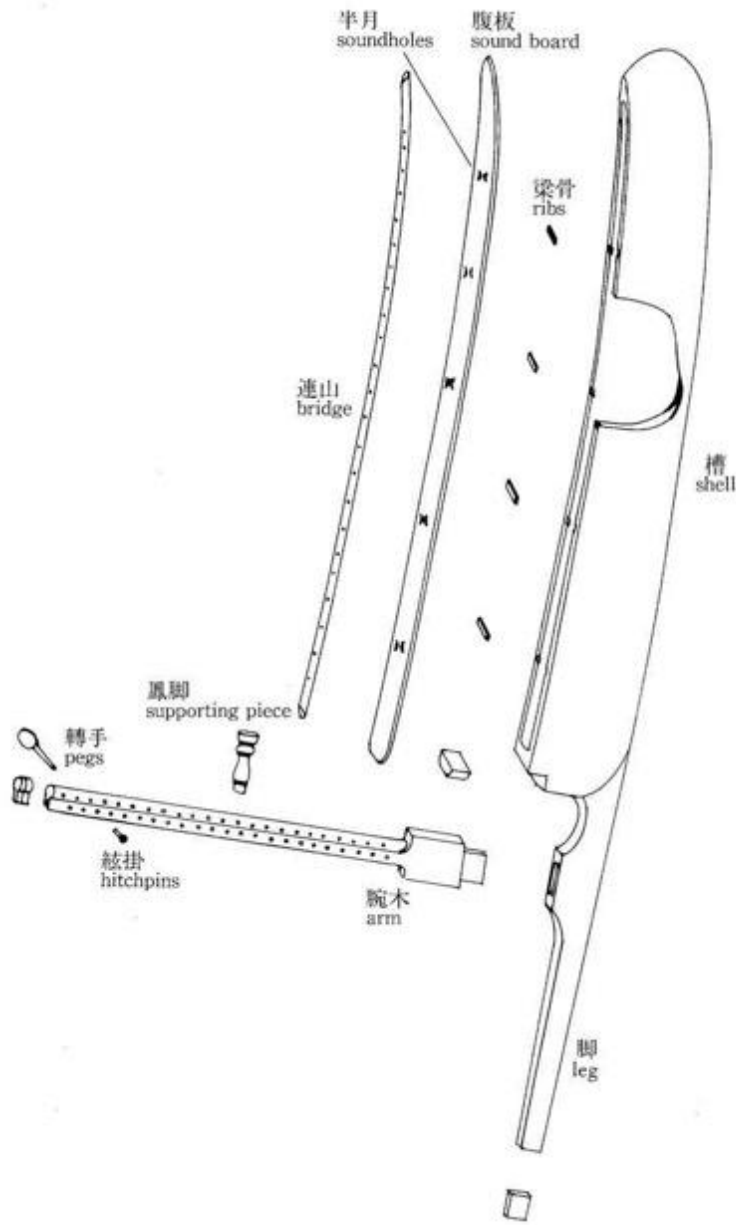


FIGURE 1.3. Some images of the *kugo*, a harp reconstructed by the National Theater. (From Kokuritsu gekijō geinōbu 1994, 15).

#### 1.4 FOURTH STREAM. THE DECENTERING MODE

No matter how historically informed and critical of predefined assumptions, the vast majority of studies presented so far retain and in some cases reinforce the centrality of the Japanese court in the description and investigation of *gagaku*. In doing so, various approaches also indirectly confirm an imagery surrounding *gagaku* that ties it to spiritual and political power, to the highest strata of society, and to a constellation of values produced and circulated by those occupying dominant positions within society. While it is certainly grounded in the historical reality of the proximity of *gagaku* to the court, this is not the only narrative available. A sparser, more intermittent, and internally diverse approach to *gagaku* complicates its normal/normative interpretations by focusing specifically on themes that generally neglected or altogether disregarded by the approaches presented thus far. This mode, best described as ‘decentering’, does not wish to deny the significance of dominant institutions throughout the history of *gagaku*, nor its astonishing continuity. It does, however, indicate several ways to counterbalance established orthodox views on ‘*gagaku* as Japanese court music’.

The most prominent author in the exploration of *gagaku*’s diversity is Terauchi Naoko. In her study of the modern history of Osaka’s most important group of local practitioners, for instance, Terauchi concluded that “the Garyōkai’s *gagaku* prompts us to reconsider what regeneration and diffusion can yield in the performing arts and what the potential inherent in each *gagaku* tradition can bring forth” (2013, 188). Implicit in these words is the recognition that *gagaku* already comprises different traditions, and that this multiplicity ought to be valued. In what is perhaps the best example of a study that decenters common views about court music, significantly titled *Beyond the Court: A Challenge to the Gagaku Tradition in the ‘Reconstruction Project’ of the National Theatre*, Terauchi stressed that the experiments conducted with the reconstructed instruments in the abovementioned *gagaku* concert series were crucial in “undermining the generally accepted image of *gagaku* as ‘eternally classic’ or ‘noble unchanged music’” (2008, 94). While carefully assessing the “immaturity” of some facets of the projects, such as the excessively imaginative instrumental playing techniques and musical expression assigned to the reconstructed instruments, Terauchi also speaks of a “diversified context” for *gagaku* since the 1990s (2008, 120–21), and in so doing makes it clear that the real

significance of the whole endeavor on the part of the Nation Theatre is its attempt to convey the manifold qualities (and thus the multiple quality) of *gagaku*.

Yet another project that tackles the diversity of *gagaku*, this time from the point of view of the actual performing sites where this music can be encountered in contemporary Japan, is Terauchi's *Listening to Gagaku (Gagaku o kiku)* (2011a). Presenting the concrete features of the spaces and performance occasions for *gagaku* in Kyoto, Osaka, Nara and Tokyo, the book is especially interesting not only because it embraces a participatory way of conducting research, notably absent from much of the literature on the topic, but also because it reflects on the mutual constitution of place and sound. Observing that "the actual performance of *gagaku* envelops the entire body of the listener" (Terauchi 2011a, v), the author explores the relationship between aural and visual appreciation of live performances, evoking in particular the impact of different "sonic environments" on the audience –from the stimulating indeterminacy of rituals that take place in the open air (characterized by the presence of ambient "noise") to the somewhat "shut off" and purified atmosphere of modern theaters (especially Terauchi 2011a, 96–95, 165–66). In so doing, Terauchi introduces the crucial theme of the body of the researcher in its immersion in the surrounding as he or she pays attention to *gagaku* not only aurally, but with all of the five senses. Despite the fact that her approach is not, strictly speaking, ethnographic, Terauchi thus comes one step closer to a socio-anthropology of *gagaku*. In a way, then, it is only natural that such an approach should proceed from conceiving its object differently: when *gagaku* is not merely taken to be the reified object of a focused, educated listening mode, but is rather interpreted as intrinsically diverse and unstable, the methods of investigation are bound to change. Indeed, in similar cases, it is often hard to tell whether one's methodological stance proceeds from the object explored, or vice versa.

The significance of *Listening to Gagaku* lies precisely in its delicate balance between a style that is easily accessible and engaging, a historically-aware approach that presents *gagaku* through broad overviews, and a less practiced, ethnographic, at times even reflexive mode of conducting research. For this reason, the book resembles more straightforwardly anthropological accounts of Japanese performing arts. A foundational reference in this sense is the work of Honda Yasuji (1906-2001), who surveyed the dazzling variety of what came to be known as *minzoku geinō* or Japanese performing arts –a term that was itself 'invented' as late as 1952 (Lancashire 2013, 13). Despite the

fluctuating position of *gagaku* within his famous taxonomy of local artistic expressions, the relevance of Honda's work is twofold: on the one hand, its classification system is intimately related to the institutional framework that brought to the nomination of musical items as "folk intangible cultural heritage" (see Thornbury 1997). Given the number of local festivals variously influenced by *gagaku* that have been nominated since the promulgation of the *Law for the Protection of Cultural Property* in 1950, one way to define the boundaries of 'Japanese court music' may be to look at Honda's influential classificatory logic. What counts as "folk", and what is its centralized opposite? How does the answer to this question map onto the dichotomy of "center" and "periphery"? If these are questions raised in part by a profound criticism of Honda's rationale, it is undeniable that the scholar has provided generations of researchers with a new exciting methodology that could be employed in ethnographic approaches to local manifestations of court music. Today, this type of research constitutes an especially promising, if undervalued, subfield within the confines of *gagaku* studies.

Though he would probably reject this association with Honda's work, Takuwa Satoshi, associate professor at Kyoto's Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music, is one of the few scholars who have conducted research on the performance of *bugaku* at local shrines and temples "in the provinces"<sup>37</sup>. A student of Mabuchi, Takuwa has conducted extensive research on the historical changes in *bugaku*'s dance movements, drawing from historical evidences within Koma no Chikazane's *Kyōkunshō* (Takuwa 2003; 2016). Through a historical problematization of the distinction between "central *bugaku*" and "local *bugaku*" (Takuwa 2007, 40–41), and employing the so-called Labanotation method of transcription of human movements<sup>38</sup>, Takuwa showed a relation between central and peripheral versions of *gagaku*, advancing the thesis of a centrifugal progressive spreading of particular movements. In what can be considered a productive 'mixed methodology', Takuwa has recently turned to a comparison of the contents of ancient scores and treatises such as Fujiwara no Moronaga's *Jinchi yōroku* and *Sangō yōroku*<sup>39</sup> and Koma no Chikazane's *Kyōkunshō* with the living tradition of Jūnidan *bugaku* in Morimachi (Shizuoka prefecture), a ceremonial performance that includes local dances

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<sup>37</sup> For a few exceptions, see (Takahashi 1978; 2005; Shumway 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Developed by Rudolf Laban in 1928 (see Guest 2005).

<sup>39</sup> On the issues raised by the transnotation of these scores, see the early articles by Garfias (1975a) and Condit (1976).



influenced by *bugaku* pieces (Takuwa 2012). In this case, the starting point is Picken's theory of the "basic melody" of *shō, biwa* and *sō*, "ascertained through a folkloric approach" (Takuwa 2012, 71). The result of this bold comparison between premodern sources and contemporary performance practice are fully illustrated in a recent DVD, accompanied by a short written presentation of the whole endeavor (Takuwa 2015). Takuwa's work stands out as an example of how mixing methods can be a fruitful strategy to update and refine both musicological and ethnographic approaches to *gagaku*. Moreover, by juxtaposing center and periphery, his experiment with Morimachi's Jūnidan *bugaku* shows that the decentering mode is not necessarily deconstructive, and that, on the contrary, it might shed light on apparently marginal elements which eventually feed back into our common understanding of *gagaku*.

Other examples of research conducted on the 'fringes' of *gagaku* include Terence Lancashire's pioneering article on the activities of court music's maverick Tōgi Hideki (b.1959) (see Lancashire 2003). Caught up between a self-orientalizing stance towards a music believed to be "in the DNA" of the Japanese (Lancashire 2003, 35)<sup>40</sup> and a biographical proximity to 'Western popular music', from The Beatles to Pink Floyd, Tōgi has become "the unrepresentative representative of the *gagaku* tradition" (Lancashire 2003, 36). Undoubtedly, performing *Hey Jude* on his *hichiriki* he has both challenged the stereotype of an unchanged, unchangeable music and attracted a vast number of new listeners. At the same time, however, with his books as well as his musical creations Tōgi promotes a specific understanding of the relationship between *gagaku* and its public. Scholars ought to take him seriously, if not for his worrying tendency to amplify and give currency to theories of Japanese uniqueness (*Nihonjinron*), at least in light of his unprecedented appeal to the masses. While Terauchi has only mentioned Tōgi on different occasions (e.g. 2010, 242–51), few researchers have tried to assess his activities (in German, see Bürkner 2003). And yet, the case can be made for the urgency of pursuing a decentering approach to *gagaku* via further explorations of groups and individual musicians who, probably under the influence of Tōgi, have started to mingle with core

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<sup>40</sup> See also Tōgi's 2002 interview to The Japan Times: <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2002/12/29/culture/hideki-togi-out-to-gagaku-your-world/#.V-qN6txH04A> (last accessed September 16, 2016).

assumptions of what constitutes the ‘sound-world’ of Japanese court music<sup>41</sup>. Not only could this line of research provide a better understanding of the endurance of one of Japanese most ancient traditional musics, it could also rejuvenate the ways we look at this as well as other performing arts.

Though they may appear as minor in the vast panorama of *gagaku* studies, investigations in the decentering mode will no doubt constitute the core of future research. It is perhaps normal for the study of any truly vital musical tradition to move slowly towards its borders; but the case of *gagaku* is especially interesting in that such groundbreaking research puts into question the stability of the very core of the tradition. For this reason, shaking up our modes of apprehending *gagaku* is not only healthy, but necessary to cope with the sheer speed of its transformations –a velocity too often obscured by the sometimes cumbersome historical value of this music.

One of the lavish pictures illustrating a recent book on the reconstruction of ancient instruments preserved in the Shōsōin treasure hall is a depiction of *gagaku* musician and scholar Shiba Sukeyasu performing on a flute that he has himself helped reconstructing (see Kokuritsu gekijō geinōbu 1994, 109) (see **FIG.1.4**). The book reaffirms the significance of pictorial evidence and musical archaeology to the study of those ancient sounds that partially survive in contemporary ‘Japanese court music’ –thus echoing an opinion voiced by Hayashi Kenzō and other researchers in the ‘musicological mode’ more than 50 years ago. But the presence of Shiba’s picture is also a reminder (to informed readers, at least) that the performer-qua-instrument-maker is also a composer who has written contemporary pieces tailored on the expressive possibilities of those same Shōsōin instruments. And the pieces he wrote, in turn, are routinely performed by the professional group Reigakusha –the same group of musicians who recently made it possible to turn Steven Nelson’s philologically reconstructed scores into resounding musical materials. All the while, important Japanese composers such as Ishii Maki and Ichiyanagi Toshi are also photographed in the same book, and they too have contributed new compositions for this new *gagaku* ensemble. At the same time as the sounds of Tang music come back to life, and as new sounds are born for new but reconstructed

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<sup>41</sup> Other artists that treat *gagaku* as musical material to be mingled with include but are certainly not limited to the group Tenchi garaku (<http://www.tenchigaraku.com/>) and the Osaka-based *hichirki* player Fukami Ryōsuke (<http://profile.ameba.jp/ryosukefukami/>).

instruments in an incessantly creative loop of past and present, Japanese researchers like Takuwa and Mabuchi look for the connection between the past and its contemporary manifestations, bringing ethnographic methodologies into the equation.

As these examples demonstrate, historical, presentational, musicological and decentering modes are not clearly separable tracks along which run immediately distinguishable lines of research. Their isolation is arbitrary at best, certainly partial, in many ways almost unnatural. Much like human perception, *gagaku* is not something that can be easily “sliced up”: if differentiating among sensory modalities makes little sense in the face of the fact that “the world we perceive is the same world, whatever path we take, and in perceiving it, each of us acts as an undivided centre of movement and awareness” (Ingold 2011, 136), the same should perhaps be said of the world of *gagaku*. A simple exploration of the main contributions in each of the four modes or approaches thus makes it perfectly clear that for centuries now research on *gagaku* has been characterized by mutual influences, disciplinary breaches and continuous overflows. Nonetheless, by showing the relative weight assigned to specific aspects of *gagaku*, its constructedness as a particular object of research becomes evident. In this sense, the chronological flow of sounds and movements perceived as foundational to a particular field of knowledge identifiable as the history of Japanese music is a drastically different object from the “basic musical materials” inscribed in the tablatures of *tōgaku* (see Picken et al. 1990, 5:108). And the latter, in turn, is hardly the same as the ‘enjoyable’ art music of the presentational mode. Tōgi’s performance of *Hey Jude* on the *hichiriki* gets as far from the preconceived sound of *gagaku* as it is possible to imagine, decentering it to the extreme.

In the end, the reason why these four modes were favored is practical as well as theoretical: in fact, each of them resonates with the contents of the following chapters. Just like the historical mode is deeply concerned with retracing a unitary narrative that can be followed throughout the chronological unfolding of *gagaku*, so too local groups of practitioners active in the Kansai area have tried to overcome their 19<sup>th</sup> century predicaments on the basis of an alleged continuity with a glorious and linear past (see Chapter 3). Similarly, the generative tension between recovering and reinventing the past so characteristic of the musicological approach evokes the ways in which ‘court music’ was re-semanticized (as such) after the Meiji restoration in 1868: in that process, too, a dynamic interplay of creativity and preservation was crucial (see Chapter 2). The presentational mode, with its broad, encompassing treatment of *gagaku*, is also reflected

in the diverse dispositions of today's amateurs, who are not simply motivated by musical passion, but also bring a host of new associations and representations to their attachment to *gagaku* (see Chapter 4). Finally, the decentering mode, which pays special attention to the diversity of 21<sup>st</sup>-century *gagaku* and in many ways defies other, more clearly delineated approaches, resonates with the overflowing of court music into the realms of environmental and political discourses that characterize Chapter 5.

Renegotiations of tradition circulate throughout different modes of *gagaku* research. Today, the stunningly different objects produced by each of them are still loosely subsumed under the feeble label of 'Japanese court music', and, as such, they are offered to a public that is vaster, more varied, and more familiar with *gagaku* than ever before. The question remains of how that unitary label will be kept in place today, and of what that expression, Japanese court music, actually entails. The next chapter looks closely at these issues, showing the extent to which modern associations between *gagaku*, the Japanese court and *shintō* cannot be taken for granted, and highlighting the existence of some powerful but eventually discarded alternative associations. Even when it was turning into 'Japanese court music', *gagaku* was so much more than that.



**FIGURE 1.4.** Shiba Sukeyasu performing a reconstructed transverse flute.

(From Kokuritsu gekijō geinōbu 1994, 109).

## CHAPTER 2

### IN THE LABORATORY OF MODERNITY

#### THE COMPLEX GENEALOGY OF 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY 'JAPANESE COURT MUSIC'

In an early article on “the present condition” of *gagaku*, Eta Harich-Schneider, a pioneer in the study of the history of Japanese music<sup>1</sup>, observed: “it is impossible to decide how far and according to what points of view the court music was remolded when, after the Meiji restoration [of 1868], the remains of the old cult and the deteriorated feudal arts were refurbished for reasons of Imperial prestige” (1953, 50). Although the German scholar did not specify what she meant by “the remains of the old cult”, more than fifty years of research have convincingly demonstrated that the proportion of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century remolding of *gagaku* was monumental, and its consequences extensive. For this reason, any serious consideration of the state of “court music” in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early

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<sup>1</sup> Hers *A history of Japanese music* (Harich-Schneider 1973) is “the first comprehensive study of [Japanese] traditional music in a Western language by a Western scholar and based on primary sources” (Mehl 2007, 394). A fascinating figure, Harich-Schneider was a professional harpsichordist turned historical ethnomusicologist, so to say: after a few years spent teaching at the State Academy College for Music in Berlin, in 1941 she embarked on a tour to Japan that unexpectedly turned into an eight-year stay (Jansohn 2012, 66). In Tokyo, she took on the job of training the court musicians in European classical music, while at the same time pursuing both bibliographic research and practical studies of *gagaku*, benefitting from the help and resources of the court musicians. The product of her research is documented in a series of journal articles that paved the way for more detailed analyses of many aspects of court music, from its vocal repertoire to the complex rhythmic structure of the danced pieces (Harich-Schneider 1952; 1954; 1965). Her interests were broad: in 1944 she published a German translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets (see Jansohn 2012).

21<sup>st</sup> century must necessarily take as its point of departure the years immediately following the Meiji restoration.

In fact, the historical bond linking *gagaku* to the life of courtly aristocrats and of the Emperors themselves was fully exploited by late-19<sup>th</sup> century reformers, who envisioned a new order symbolically founded upon the renewed figure of a divine ruler<sup>2</sup>. The reorganization of the court was thus also a reorganization of the music (perhaps even a reinvention of it), which manifested itself first and foremost in terms of *gagaku*'s ritual applications. At the same time, though, in the Meiji period *gagaku* was characterized by a host of experimentations and novel endeavors, which ought to be examined as proofs of its musicians' creativity. More importantly still, these experiments show that the epistemological categories applied to domestic and foreign music were themselves being renegotiated, and that there is much more to Japan's musical 'modernization' than a straightforward process of 'Westernization'.

For all of these reasons, the Meiji period was a watershed moment in the history of *gagaku*: without a thorough investigation of its features, any understanding of court music's new "present condition" is bound to remain both incomplete and unaware of its complex genealogy.

## **2.1 THE OFFICE OF *GAGAKU* AND THE *SCORES OF THE MEIJI***

On November 3, 1870, one of the first decrees issued by the new government of Japan formally established an Office of *Gagaku* (*Gagakukyoku*) in the new capital of Tokyo<sup>3</sup>. At first, its 35 members were allowed to reside either in the new capital or in Kyoto, where a detached branch was also temporarily created, but in 1877 the Kyoto branch was closed

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<sup>2</sup> For a general discussion of these issues, see (Kim 2011; Zhong 2011)

<sup>3</sup> The office changed denomination several times: in 1874 it was renamed Court Music Section of the Office of Ceremonies (*Shikiburyō gagakuka*), in 1881 Court Music Section, Board of Ceremonies, Imperial Household Department (*Kunaishō shikibushoku gagakubu*), in 1907 Music Department of the Board of Ceremonies of the Imperial Household Office (*Kunaishō shikibushoku gakubu*). Finally in 1949 the present name started being used: Music Department of the Board of Ceremonies of the Imperial Household Agency (*Kunaichō shikibushoku gakubu*) (Gamō 1986, 207; Tsukahara 1998, 220). Hereafter, I will use the expression Office of *Gagaku* referring to the years immediately following the Meiji revolution of 1868, to avoid confusion with the present appellation.

and all the musicians were ordered to move to Tokyo, thus cementing the new institution (Ono 2016, 183).

Reminiscent of a glorious past when music had an important role in the life of the court, the new Office had a centralizing function: given *gagaku*'s numerous historical changes, it had become necessary to bring together musicians with diverse provenances and partially discordant traditions of music transmission into a unified professional body at the service of the state (Endō 2013, 48–49). The reinstatement of the centrality of the Emperor was therefore accompanied by a parallel 'modern update' of the structures that had regulated the production of court music in the Heian period: what used to be the *Gagakuryō* was now the *Gagakukyoku*, while the musicians who were once known as *gakujin* became state functionaries by the name of *reijin* (Endō 2013, 37–50).

Though at first such parallels might seem to suggest a degree of continuity with the past (or at least a revival thereof), in reality the reshuffling of *gagaku* responded to pressing contemporary issues. In fact, in the eyes of the bureaucrats, the most crucial task of the musicians was the production of a uniform body of songs and dances to accompany new or renewed rituals and ceremonies in the court (Tsukahara 2009, 136). In this sense, the relevance of music to the newly established administration is reflected by the fact that since its very inception the Office of *Gagaku* was part of the Daijōkan, the highest structure of the state, which had existed, in one form or another, since as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Gamō 1986, 206).

Even so, a number of obstacles had to be overcome for the political project behind the creation of the Office of *gagaku* to succeed. The way in which court music was transmitted before the Meiji period, in particular, stood in stark contrast to any model of bureaucratic efficiency predicated on systematization and unity. For centuries, the main centers of musical performance had been unequally spread out across the archipelago, mostly revolving around the ancient capital of Kyoto. As a matter of fact, *gagaku* was not only performed at the old imperial court, but also at major local shrines and temples<sup>4</sup>, often in

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<sup>4</sup> The terms 'shrine' and 'temple' are used to indicate two types of cultic centers that are marked differently in contemporary Japan: respectively the *jinja* associated with the cult of the *kami* deities and the *(o)tera*, associated with the cult of Buddhist deities.



conjunction with Buddhist liturgical chant (*shōmyō*), as accompaniment to large-scale ritual celebrations<sup>5</sup>.

What is more, the transmission of *gagaku*'s music and dances was firmly grounded in a hereditary system made up of family lines that passed down their specialized knowledge through an oral-aural method called *kuden* or *kōtō denshō* (literally, "oral tradition" (Tanabe 1975, 50; Kikkawa 1984b, 327). Since it was characteristically imitative and practice-based, such a system relied only in part on musical notation, which by its very nature functions as an aid to memorization. Each *gagaku* family (*gakke*) specialized in one of the wind instruments of the ensemble: the firstborn male heir was assigned to the performance of either the double reed oboe *hichiriki*, the transverse flute *ryūteki* or the mouth organ *shō*. For centuries, the social status of these performers had been rather low: in the Heian period, for example, strict adherence to the protocols of the court required that they perform at a physically lower level than the noblemen. Hence, musicians had limited access to the court's pavilions (which were raised above the ground) and for this reason were known as *jige gakunin* or 'musicians below the ground' (Gamō 1989, 408)<sup>6</sup>.

In contrast to these 'local craftsmen', aristocrats during the late Heian period had started to perform on *gagaku*'s string instruments, such as the pear-neck lute (*gaku*)*biwa* and the zither (*gaku*)*sō*<sup>7</sup>. These performances, known as *gyoyu* or *miasobi* (described at length in such famous sources as the *Genji monogatari* (1008) or the *Makura no sōshi* (1002)) represented a refined pastime and an important vehicle for the circulation of aesthetic principles within the courtly society. The habit of performing *gagaku* spread fast, and soon even the Emperor and his family became involved in events that featured court music. Together with the production of a great number of new pieces by high-ranking officials, this new practice also resulted in the compilation of the first notable collections of scores (Endō et al. 2006, 114). With all likelihood, these were initially

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<sup>5</sup> The most important Buddhist celebrations including the performance of court music were called *bugaku hōyō*, "Buddhist ceremonies with court dance" (see Endō 2013, 226–29).

<sup>6</sup> In this sense, it is perhaps best to think of local transmission of *gagaku* in terms of a 'craft' handed down from generation to generation within families of dedicated artisans – a role quite different from the one attributed to the 'artist' as conceived by European Romanticism.

<sup>7</sup> Since the construction of the instruments employed in court music differs slightly from that of their counterparts employed in other genres of Japanese traditional music, the prefix *gaku*- is attached to their names. Thus, specialists talk about *gakubiwa* and *gaksō* to make it clear that they refer specifically to the instruments used to perform *gagaku* (see de Ferranti 2000, 79–80, 91–93; 2002, 821; Adriaansz 2002, 825).

intended to help the aristocrats getting acquainted with an unfamiliar repertoire. Far from being the hastily scrambled up ‘mnemonic crutches’ so common to folk musicians the world over, these scores consisted in refined manuscripts whose quality befitted the sophistication of the Heian court. Their authors speculated on abstract topics such as the modal theory inherited from China and the relationship between court music’s sounds and the Daoist doctrines of yin and yang –in so doing, contributing to the progressive assimilation of what once was a foreign repertoire, and to the establishment of a more markedly autochthonous theory of *gagaku* (Endō 2013, 134–63).

Over time, both the specialized *gagaku* families and their aristocratic counterparts developed peculiar performance techniques and idiosyncratic styles. While technical specialization characterized local lines of transmission, several noble families also produced so-called “secret pieces” (*hikyoku*), often consisting in solo performances of *gagaku* melodies on the *biwa*. These were often associated to Buddhist ideas concerning salvation and the entrance into the Pure Land of Amida Buddha (Takuwa 2016, 36). The scores of such secret pieces were kept in especially high esteem, and with the progressive ‘esoterization’ of the religious episteme of premodern Japan (Raveri 2014, 176–219) this music (and its texts) came to be included in a broader “culture of secrecy” (see Scheid and Teeuwen 2006). Eventually, centuries of gradual modifications and the weakening of the imperial court further contributed to the inexorable differentiation of many lines of *gagaku* transmission.

In 1870, *gagaku*’s multiple histories had to be rectified. The pre-existing, largely oral system of transmission needed to be modified if the musicians-functionaries were to perform exactly the same melodies in a homogeneous style. The most important means to accomplish such a goal was the production of a stable, authoritative set of scores for all the court musicians to rely on.

Accordingly, the *orthodox and complete repertoire* of today’s *gagaku* was assembled just a few years after the Office of *Gagaku* came into being: compiled in 1876 and 1888, the *Selected Scores of the Meiji (Meiji senteifu)*<sup>8</sup> consist of two sets of instrumental, vocal and dance notations, for a total of 196 small fascicles<sup>9</sup> (see **FIG.2.1**). Writing them down

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to notice that the title with which these scores are commonly referred to is not the one written on their covers. Rather, the expression *Meiji senteifu* was used for the first time by ethnomusicologist Hirano Kenji in the *Gagaku* entry of the 1959 dictionary *Ongaku jiten* (Gamō 1986, 207).

<sup>9</sup> See (Gamō 1986, 209–11; and Hashimoto 1986) for a detailed list of all the fascicles and their contents.

was a formidable challenge: clear-cut decisions had to be made on performing practice and on the relationship between the fleeting sonic nature of the music and its material manifestations on paper. In a sense, therefore, unifying *gagaku* also meant *textualizing* it, transforming it into a more stable artefact that required, more than ever before, skills related to literacy and faithfulness to the written sign.



FIGURE 2.1. The Selected Scores of the Meiji.

From the collection of the Imperial Household Agency of Japan (Endō 2004, 52–53).

The first collection focused extensively on the music and dances that accompany ritual celebrations at shrines, while large orchestral suites were included within the second (Terauchi 2010, 14). Besides the pieces connected with the cults directed to the *kami*, such as the cycles of songs and dances *Kagurauta* and *Azuma asobi*, the first selection included also the vocal pieces belonging to the genres *saibara*, *imayō* and *rōei*, 49 orchestral and danced pieces of *tōgaku* style and 15 pieces of *komagaku* style. The second selection added respectively 34 and 10 items to these latter categories (Ono 2016, 184)<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> These were not all the pieces contained (in full or partial form) within the ancient scores preserved by the various *gagaku* families: those that were not selected, often because they had not been performed for many years, are known as *engaku* (Ono 2016, 184).

While it is rather easy to detect a political plan behind their creation, a deeper analysis of the circumstances that led to the compilation of the *Selected Scores* shows that these were the result of a number of different factors. First of all, the existence of three parallel versions of the scores<sup>11</sup> and of small discrepancies among different versions of the same piece proves that their practical usage was always a central preoccupation of the compilers (Gamō 1986, 218–212). Secondly, the discovery of another collection of notations that dates from 1870 or 1873 (*Meiji san'nen gagaku zenfu*) reveals both that it is possible to distinguish between the moment in which the project was requested and its actual completion, and that already in 1870 the compilation was at an advanced stage (Gamō 1986, 220). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Gamō has demonstrated that the basis for the two major compilations of 1876 and 1888 was a third source, comprising pieces to be performed during *shintō* rituals: because the families in charge of transmitting this part of the repertoire had developed conflicting interpretations over the centuries, they were requested to present their 'private' scores to the Office. This they did as early as 1871 and 1872, and the resulting documentation formed the basis for the subsequent, official collections (Gamō 1986, 225–27).

Even though the identity of the compilers is not included in the two finished sets of 1876 and 1888, some of their names can be deduced from the *Meiji san'nen gagaku zenfu* (Terauchi 2010, 15). These indicate that members of former aristocratic families played a decisive role at this early stage of the operation, and that the overall choices made reflected less an attempt to homogenize or mediate between various pre-existing traditions, and more the direct influence of those families that were well-versed in a particular string instrument (Terauchi 2010, 16).

To an extent, to choose to begin from a family's specific performing style over those of others was only natural, as it reduced considerably the efforts required to come to a univocal decision. At the same time, however, this conservative approach to the problem of creating a 'unified' performance also reveals the existence of a power play among those in charge of leading court music into the modern world. In line with its political task, the Office of *gagaku* thus manufactured two collections of scores that "represent a sanitized and sanctified tradition, portrayed as unchanged and unchanging since ancient times"

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<sup>11</sup> Preserved respectively by the Head of the Music Department of the Imperial Household Agency (*gakuchōhon*), by the administrative office of the same Department (*kyōmuhon*) and by the musical instruments' repository (*gakkihon*).

(Nelson 2008a, 48), but it did so at the cost of taking a resolute stance toward the project: differences were leveled out rather than harmonized.

On February 2, 1882, just twelve years after the birth of the *Gagakukyoku*, a thief smuggled into the storehouse of the Office's practice room, located in Tokyo's Kōjimachi (today's Chiyoda district). Even though Yaguchi Shin'ichi (this was the name of the culprit) was able to run away with 167 items comprising both precious instruments and scores, after a mere three months the police apprehended him and returned the booty on May 2 (Gamō 1986, 205). But the plot thickens, for not all the items taken from the site were returned. After almost 150 years, the extant *Scores of the Meiji* preserved at the Music Department of the Imperial Household Agency appear to be copies (Gamō 1986, 206). Perhaps those famous, mostly authoritative scores of the *gagaku* repertoire are but an ironic example of a somewhat differently 'lost' tradition.

## 2.2 THE REORGANIZATION OF COURT RITUALS AND *GAGAKU* AS 'SHINTO SOUNDSCAPE'

In addition to the production of physical supports for the inscription of the otherwise dangerously fleeting sounds of *gagaku*, the Meiji period was crucial for the formation of what could be called '*gagaku*'s modern imagery': a much more intangible, albeit possibly more durable, inheritance, consisting of all those associations between musical, socio-cultural and historical elements that eventually became *gagaku*'s stable (but not immutable) referents in Japanese culture. In other words, it was at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that a set of mutually reinforcing signifiers were selected and assigned to court music. These included the figure of the Emperor, the terse atmosphere of a court that was little known but widely fantasized about, and above all the association with *shintō*.

The lasting effects of such a bond can be seen in Japan even today: with famous pieces such as *Etenraku* or *Bairo* played at weddings, funerals and similar ceremonial occasions (often in the form of recorded CDs), shrines have become the most unanimously recognized sites for hearing *gagaku*. In this sense, *gagaku* is also employed by *shintō* structures as a sort of unobtrusive, softly flowing 'soundtrack' to the experience of visiting their compounds. In everyday conversations with Japanese men and women of all ages, the answer to the question "Do you know *gagaku*?" is likely to be something akin to "Oh, wait...you mean the music you hear at *jinja* [Shinto shrines]?"

This connection is not something the scholar of court music can take for granted, for it was recast entirely in the Meiji period. Undeniably, a precedent existed in the earliest days of *gagaku*, when the music was first introduced to the Japanese archipelago. At that time, a Music Office (*Ōtadokoro*) was set up especially for the performance and transmission of autochthonous songs and dances, and these were opposed to the 'foreign' ones, entrusted to the *Gagakuryō* or *Utamai no tsukasa* (Nelson 2008b, 41). However, centuries of modifications of both the repertory and its performing occasions reshuffled the very contents of *gagaku* as a distinguishable performing art, while at the same time the multifarious practices, beliefs and institutions that we now subsume under the rubric of *shintō* were being transformed by way of extended interconnections with other more or less loose 'religious' systems, such as Daoism, Confucianism and esoteric Buddhism (see Breen and Teeuwen 2000). For this reason, it was only in the Meiji period that a specific link was established between a well-defined repertory of songs and dances

termed *gagaku* and a new conceptualization of the practices surrounding the worship of the *kami* in terms of a unitary “state religion” (see Hardacre 1989)<sup>12</sup>.

Creating this bond was not something that could be accomplished overnight, but rather a comprehensive process that necessitated the overall reorganization of shrines’ ceremonial contents as well as of their musical constituents. The extensive remodeling of the rituals of the imperial court that took place in the years immediately following the Meiji restoration had a fundamental role in this long process (Hardacre 1989, 31–33). In fact, in order to apply a unitary procedural outline of ritual practice to the whole nation, it was important to come up with a paradigmatic model, which had necessarily to stem from the imperial palace in Tokyo, since this was conceived as the new spiritual center of the nation. The meticulous work of Tsukahara Yasuko has demonstrated that such a remodeling of court rituals took place concurrently with the one of *gagaku*’s music and dances (2009, 11–12; 2013).

At the same time, however, this process of renewal was not completely independent from what had happened in the decades leading to the creation of the Office of *Gagaku*. In fact, the rituals in which *gagaku* was employed in relation to the calendrical events of the court in the so-called Bakumatsu period<sup>13</sup> are the ones that served as the basis upon which the systematization of the Meiji era was built (Tsukahara 2009, 29–30). Another element that formed the bedrock of future modifications was the tendency, started during the late Edo period, to recreate *gagaku* pieces that had fallen out of use in previous centuries. Supported financially by the Tokugawa, these ‘restorations’ became especially significant between 1779 and 1846, and reached the highest point during the reign of Emperor Kōmei (r. 1846–1866) (Tsukahara 2009, 32).

Indeed, the entire 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> were a favorable time for *gagaku*, which was especially appreciated by the ruling class on the basis of its value as

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, the notion of *shintō* must itself be problematized, given the fact that nothing like a systematic organization of shrines with a shared belief or practice system and a specifically trained group of individuals recognized as specialists existed in Japan before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this sense, Kuroda Toshio was a pioneer in questioning the authenticity of the notion of *shintō* as “the primeval religion of Japan” (Kuroda 1981; see also Teeuwen and Scheid 2002; Dobbins 1996). Similarly, we must resist the oversimplification of interpreting the formation of State Shinto as the development of a ‘religion’: given the role that this concept accords to specialists and ritualists and the fact that it “refers to a cultural system containing a distinct outline of doctrine and religious social organizations”, we must admit that as an epistemological tool the term ‘religion’ is ill-suited for describing and understanding the practices nonchalantly referred to as Shinto or *shintō* (Shimazono 2009, 98; see also Isomae 2012).

<sup>13</sup> The expression refers loosely to the last years of the Tokugawa shogunate, sometimes defined as the fifteen years between the arrival of Commodore Perry’s black ships in 1853 and the Meiji reforms of 1868.

ritual music with Confucian overtones (*reigaku*), understood as “proper music” for self-cultivation (Shumway 2001, 123). Thus, “Buddhist rites [with *gagaku*] commemorating the ancestors of the Tokugawa shogun family were held in Nikkō (north of Tokyo) and Edo Castle (Tokyo), while the Confucian rite Sekiten was celebrated with *gagaku* (*tōgaku*) at the shogunate school Kōheikō. Many *daimyō*, including Tayasu Munetake (1715–1771) and Tokugawa Harutomi (1771–1853), cultivated *gagaku*, collecting instruments and music notation, and performing themselves.” (Tsukahara 2013, 226).

Table 1, adapted from the pioneering studies published in 1959 by Hirade Hisao (1959a; 1959b; 1959c; 1959d) as reworked by Tsukahara Yasuko (2009, 33; 74), shows the pieces of the repertoire that were revived during the latter part of the Edo period, also indicating for how long they were abolished or suspended.



PIECES RESTORED	ABOLITION/SUSPENSION	RESTORATION(S)	DETAILS
<i>Yamatomai</i>	1308-1311	<b>1748</b> 1848 extension and expansion	
<i>Tamai</i>	1466 Then again after 1818	1783 1787 (revision)	Employed in the <i>Daijōe</i> ceremonies
<i>Kishimai</i>	1466 Then again after 1687	<b>1687</b> 1818	
<i>Saibara</i>	Until the late Muromachi period (1336-1573)	<b>1626</b> (Piece <i>Ise no umi</i> ) 1683 (Piece <i>Anatō</i> ) <b>1787</b> (Piece <i>Mushiroda; Anatō</i> ) <b>1813</b> (Piece <i>Yamashiro</i> ) <b>1818</b> (Piece <i>Minoyama</i> ) 1828 (Piece <i>Koromogae</i> )	<i>Ise no umi</i> was restored on the occasion of Emperor Go-Mizunō (r.1611-1629)'s visit to Nijō castle  <i>Yamashiro</i> was restored on the occasion of the restoration of the <i>Kamo rinjisai</i> festival in 1814
<i>Azuma asobi</i>		1694 1702 (additions) <b>1813</b> (partial revision, complete restoration)	From 1706, performed also at the Tokugawa castle in Nikkō
<i>Kumemai</i>	1466	<b>1818</b>	Employed in the ceremonies of Imperial succession

**TABLE 2.1** Restoration of *gagaku* pieces during the second half of the Edo period.

(Adapted from Tsukahara 2009, 33).

YEAR	RITUAL
1588	<i>Bugaku</i> and <i>kangen</i> performed when Empero Go-Yōzei (r.1586-1611) visited the new Jurakudai palace
1615	<i>Tōka no sechie</i>
<b>1626</b>	Emperor Go-Mizunō (r.1611-1629)'s visit to Nijō castle
1650 CA	Composition of the <i>Tōji nenjū gyōji</i> ( <i>Annual Events of the Time</i> ) by Emperor Go-Mizunō
<b>1687</b>	Restoration of the <i>Daijōsai</i> rituals for Emperor Higashiyama (r.1687-1709)
1738	Restoration of the <i>Daijōsai</i> rituals for Emperor Sakuramachi (r.1735-1747)
1740	<i>Niinamesai</i> and <i>Toyo no akari no sechie</i> (discontinued again since 1778)
<b>1748</b>	Restoration of the <i>Daijōsai</i> rituals for Emperor Momozono (r.1747-1762)
<b>1786</b>	<i>Niinamesai</i>
<b>1787</b>	Restoration of the <i>Daijōsai</i> rituals for Emperor Kōkaku (r.1780-1817)
1790	Reconstruction of the Imperial palace in accordance with the ancient style
1791	<i>Niinamesai</i>
1813	<i>Iwashimizu rinjisai</i>
<b>1814</b>	<i>Kamo rinjisai</i>
<b>1818</b>	Restoration of the <i>Daijōsai</i> rituals for Emperor Ninkō (r.1817-1846)
1848	Restoration of the <i>Daijōsai</i> rituals for Emperor Kōmei (r.1846-1867)
1863	Empero Kōmei's visit to Kamo shrine to pray for the "exclusion of the barbarians" ( <i>jōi</i> ) from Japan
1864	<i>Kitano rinjisai</i> and <i>Bugaku bairan</i>
1865	<i>Yoshidasai</i> , <i>Gion rinjisai</i> , <i>Ōharano matsuri</i>
1866	<i>Matsunō matsuri</i>

**TABLE 2.2** Restorations of court rituals since the early modern period. (Adapted from Tsukahara 2009, 74).

A comparison with Table 2, which displays the main ritual occasions restored from the early modern period to 1868, effectively brings to light the following important characteristics of *gagaku*'s repertoire and performance occasions in the centuries leading to the Meiji: first of all, as should be expected, the restoration of specific items corresponds closely to the dates in which specific court rituals were themselves revived<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Relevant dates are marked with bold typing in both tables.

Secondly, a great number of pieces was restored in conjunction with the revival of the Daijōsai, arguably the most important ritual celebrated on the occasion of the enthronement of a new sovereign. Finally, the years just before the Meiji restoration are marked by an increment of the revival of ceremonies that took place at shrines. In a sense, therefore, these may be seen as the ones paving the way for the subsequent tendency to associate court music with State Shinto.

With the transfer of the capital from Kyoto to Tokyo and the creation of the Office of *Gagaku* in 1870, the policy of revitalization of portions of the repertoire was abruptly abandoned and several ceremonial occasions were discontinued (Tsukahara 2009, 34–36)<sup>15</sup>. Shortly afterwards, “the abolished court ceremonies were replaced with a broad range of new imperial rites celebrated in Shinto style” (Tsukahara 2013, 226). What is most striking in the case of the rituals created anew after 1868 is the fact that the overwhelming majority of them is dedicated to the figure of the emperor: from those memorializing the four sovereigns preceding Emperor Meiji, to those that revolved around the foundational figure of Emperor Jinmu (believed to be the first Emperor of Japan), to those, somewhat more abstract, that celebrated all emperors and empresses or even the beginning of the imperial system itself, to those dedicated to the goddess Amaterasu, the list clearly reveals a pressing need to reinforce the symbolic role of the emperor by positioning him at the very center of the calendrical activities of the court. Importantly, as pointed out by Tsukahara, “all of these rites were created by the Jingikan (Department of Shinto Affairs, a branch of the bureaucracy reinstated in 1868) with a view to unifying court ritual and political affairs, and were celebrated in a newly created Shinto style at the Imperial Palace from 1872. Imperial rites had been celebrated in Buddhist style in the Edo period, and many of the new Meiji rites, especially those associated with Shinto ancestor worship, had no antecedents among the various court ceremonies of the Edo period” (2013, 226).

Such considerations indicate that any real understanding of *gagaku*'s modifications in the early Meiji period must also consider the concurrent development of so-called State Shinto (*kokka shintō*) (see Shimazono 2010). This has been defined as “the government

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<sup>15</sup> In the remaining years of the Meiji period, such a tendency would resurface only sporadically: in 1911 *Soshimari*, a piece of Korean origins, was revived on the occasion of the commemoration of the annexation of Korea to Japan (which had taken place one year earlier); in 1912 a new sung piece, called *Ruika*, was composed for the funeral of Emperor Meiji (Tsukahara 2009, 36).

enforcement of Shinto-style rituals in public places designed to promote the ideal of emperor worship, a concept that the Meiji government felt central to its ideological program intended to promote national unity” (Picken 2011, 164; see also Hardacre 1989).

Shimazono Susumu has devised a tripartite structure of the dynamics of Shinto during the Meiji period, artificially distinguishing between Shrine Shinto, a diffuse web of cultic centers; Court Shinto, the centralized, official site of ceremonies embodied by the imperial palace; and State Shinto, the chronologically-bound institutionalization of practices and beliefs and its encroachment on the structure of the state<sup>16</sup> (2009, 95). From this point of view, the remodeling of the rituals of the court can be understood as the pivotal force through which Court Shinto led the way to State Shinto, providing a model to be implemented locally by Shrine Shinto. Moreover, Shimazono’s distinction between a “formative period” (1868 to 1890), followed by a moment of “establishment” (1890-1910), a “penetration period” (1910-1930) and a “fascist period” (1931-1945) can be fruitfully superimposed to the years during which the rituals were being reworked (2009, 101). In fact, the fifty years between 1868 and the death of Emperor Meiji in 1912 squarely correspond to the two periods of “establishment” and “penetration” of State Shinto, once again demonstrating the role of court music in the political processes of the time. Within this temporal framework, *gagaku* was consistently deployed in the highly symbolical funerary ceremonies for members of the imperial family. An analysis of the musical component of the funerals of Emperor Kōmei in 1867, Prince Wakamitsu Teruhiko no Mikoto (first male son of Emperor Meiji) in 1873, of the Empress Dowager Eishō (1897) and of Emperor Meiji (1912) demonstrates that by the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century “the sonic environment” of these occasions had completely changed (Tsukahara 2009, 96–106), de facto producing a (State) ‘Shinto soundscape’.

Finally, it is important to remember that the various rearrangements of the court rituals happened at the cost of expunging from the calendrical life of the central institutions those Buddhist elements that had characterized them for centuries. In fact, the process through which State Shinto came into being was both intellectually and physically violent: with the forcible “dissociation of Shinto and Buddhist divinities”

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<sup>16</sup> Even though the separation of these three aspects of Shinto practice misleadingly suggests that each can be dissected and treated independently from the other two, its value resides in providing a schematic representation of the complex dynamics at work during the Meiji and Taishō periods. Shimazono relies on the work of Murakami Shigeyoshi, but the latter offers a more nuanced typology of Shinto, spread out against the flow of Japanese history (see Murakami 1970, 17).

known as *shinbutsu bunri* (Grapard 1984, 240), the Meiji government tried to put an end to a long history of “fusion of *kami* and buddhas” (*shinbutsu shūgō*)<sup>17</sup>, enforcing a policy of clear-cut separation between the two systems of belief that resulted in “frightening outbursts of violence against Buddhist institutions” and the condoned destruction of hundreds of temples throughout Japan (a phenomenon referred to as *haibutsu kishaku*) (Antoni 1995, 143).

Information regarding the ways in which the actual musical content of the rituals was altered is extremely scarce, but the efforts undertaken to manufacture a ‘Shinto soundscape’ are evident from the preference accorded to autochthonous music in a number of official occasions. In 1868, for example, the piece *Ōuta* was performed at the ascension ceremony of Emperor Meiji –an entirely different context from the ones it had before. Moreover, during the festival Iwashimizu Hōjōe pieces that had a relationship with Buddhism were expunged. In general, newly created rituals were all assigned the performance of ‘Shinto music’ (Ono 2016, 182). Similarly, on the first official encounter with a French diplomat in 1868, at the entrance of the Emperor the modal prelude *Hyōjo chōshi* and the danced piece *Manzairaku* were performed. In sum, “the existence of a religious tradition attached to *gagaku* was used abundantly as a mediator that could serve as a solemn ‘decoration’ of the Imperial family” (Ono 2016, 182).

And yet, the same reorganization of *gagaku* that portrayed it as a herald of the imperial system and of the quintessentially Japanese religious tradition of State Shinto was parallel to much more diverse experimentations, in which court music was assigned less predetermined roles. This internal dynamism of *gagaku*’s modern modifications is especially evident when one considers the interactions between this ancient performing art and the nascent field of music education in the first decades of the Meiji period.

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<sup>17</sup> “Shinto and Buddhism were thoroughly intertwined until the forcible separation that occurred after the Meiji Restoration” (Reader 2005, 435). On this topic, see the important volume *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: Honji Suijaku as a Combinatory Paradigm* (Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003).

### 2.3 CAN THE CHILDREN SING (*GAGAKU*) ALONG?

The story of how music became one of the core subjects in the organized, modern Japanese school curriculum can be read as a typical case of acculturation: following the abruptly increased political interactions with the United States and Europe in the 1850s and 60s, the influence of foreign models started to be felt in the Japanese artistic field at large, gradually overtaking and ‘supplanting’ earlier forms of expression. Accordingly, compositional techniques and performing styles hailing from ‘the West’ were heavily adopted and applied to music-making “with a healthy dose of governmental intervention and guidance” (Herd 2008, 364).

In the context of the traditional performing arts, receiving a musical education until the Meiji period was tantamount to being affiliated to a specific ‘school’ or, rather, to a specific line of transmission in the wider context of that familistic passing-down of the art known as “the *iemoto* system” (see Ortolani 1969; Smith 1998). For this reason, laying the foundations for a fully-fledged national music education implied carrying out structural reforms and the establishment of entirely new centers of transmission, in line with equally new directorial practices. Accordingly, the government proceeded to implement a system of mandatory music education for both primary and secondary schools, and came up with the outline of a specific institutional framework for the professional training of musicians (especially composers) (Wade 2014, 203–11). Both were characterized by the ample appropriation of models, styles and techniques hailing from a Euro-American context (Okunaka 2008, 203–11). The decision to privilege such models and techniques over pre-existing ones was far from accidental: if Alison Tokita is right in asserting that “the spread of Western classical music can be compared with the ubiquity of the modern novel which Benedict Anderson posits as an indicator of nationalism” (2010, 224–25), it might be possible to state that the intention of Meiji bureaucrats and politicians was from the start to channel nationalistic ideas and values through the medium of music, thus actively seeking to ‘modernize’ and ‘Westernize’ the education sector and, consequently, future generations of citizens.

In this “massive educational process of Japanese modernization” (Herd 2008, 364), the understandable lack of preparation on the part of the teachers-to-be was only half of the issue: as a fitting institutional setting for their training was being set up, the very contents

and forms of school music education had to be envisioned and produced. In fact, as early as 1872 a governmental decree listed “school songs” (*shōka*) and “musical performance” (*sōgaku*) as curriculum subjects in primary and middle school, but noticed that they were still “lacking” (Baba 1968, 293–94). To correct this situation, a Music Investigation Committee (*Ongaku torishirabe gakari*) was created in 1879, with famous educator Isawa Shūji (1851-1917) as director. Isawa had spent three years in the United States, where he had been trained by Luther Whiting Mason (1818-1896), then director of the Boston Music School and author of the *National Music Course*, “a graded series of songbooks in extensive use in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century” (Manabe 2014, 97; see also Okunaka 2008, 139–40). According to Eppstein, Isawa argued that “traditional Japanese music was unsuitable in education, as music such as *gagaku* was ‘too refined’, while popular music, such as shamisen-based music for geisha, was ‘too vulgar’; he deemed a newly created ‘national’ music for all classes to be more suitable” (1994, 30-36, as quoted in Manabe 2014, 97). In line with a similar stance, the ambition of the Music Investigation Committee was to forge “a common music that could transcend local origins and social extraction, (...) a national music [*kokugaku*]” that could contribute to the formation of modern, educated citizens (Tsukahara 2009, 5–7).

In order to turn Isawa’s vision into reality, Mason himself was invited to Japan in 1880 as a leading member of the newly established *Ongaku torishirabe gakari* (see **FIG. 2.2**). The activities of the Committee resulted in the publication of the first collection of *Songs for Elementary School* (*Shōgaku shōkashū*) in 1881 (**FIG. 2.3**): in line with the ‘acculturation hypothesis’, more than 90% of the songs consisted of European or American melodies with an adapted Japanese text (Galliano 2002, 30). Even though in the following years the number of melodies of Japanese origin was slightly increased, the overall influence of Christian devotional music remained predominant<sup>18</sup>. The effects of this are aptly summarized by Galliano: “children learned to read Western notation, to sing in a choir, to enjoy harmonized tunes, and to perceive modulation” (2002, 30). In 1887, the Music Investigation Committee became the Tokyo Music School (*Tōkyō ongaku gakkō*, predecessor of today’s Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music), with Isawa as its director (Howe, Lai, and Liou 2015, 95); two years later, music education was introduced

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<sup>18</sup> Modern recordings of the earliest school songs can be heard on the seventh volume of the series *Collection of Modern School Songs Based on the Original Texts* (*Genten ni yoru kindai shōka shūsei*) (*Nihon Saisho No Shōka Ongakukai ~ Shōgaku Shōkashū* 2000).

into the curriculum of secondary schools. Within the span of ten years, tangible results had been achieved (Galliano 2002, 91).

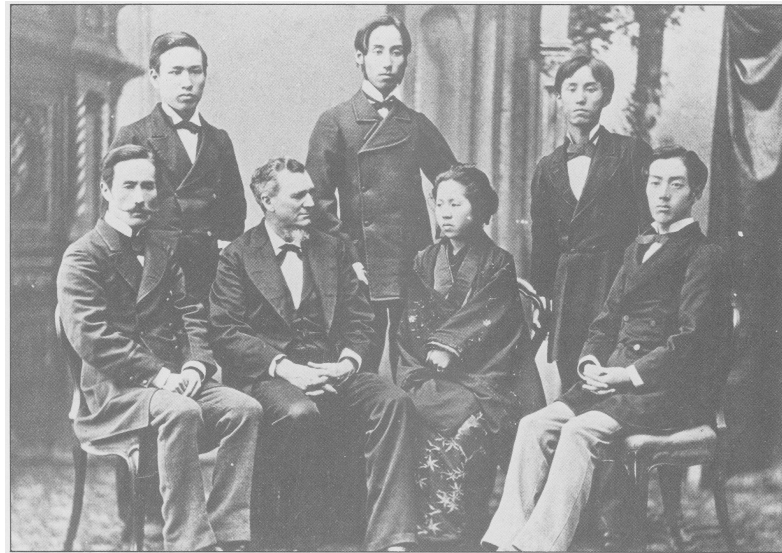


FIGURE 2.2. Luther Whiting Mason with Japanese students during his sojourn in Japan (March 1880 – July 1882) (Berger 1987, 32).

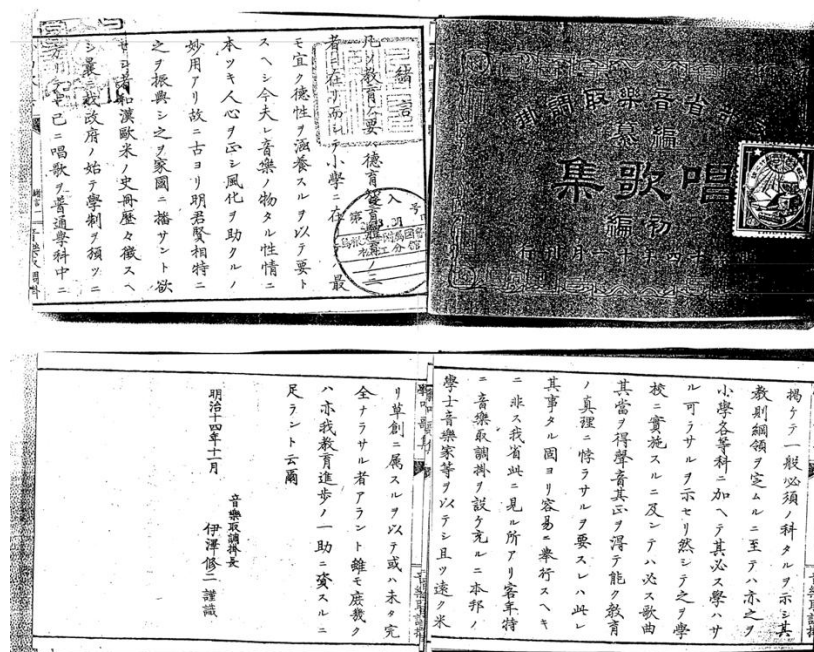


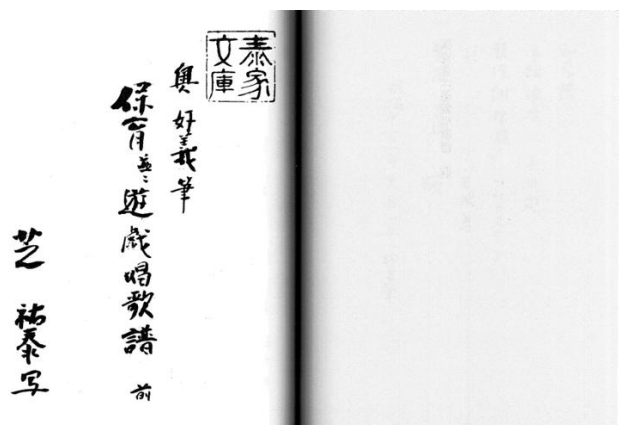
FIGURE 2.3. The frontispiece of the first edition of the *Songs for Elementary School* (1881).

(From a photographical reprint preserved at the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music, Kyoto).



While it is certainly true that the story of the creation of a national music for education and indoctrination is characterized by the import of Euro-American musical traits, this does not mean that in the process there was no space for discussion and even exploration of possible alternatives. For one thing, some of the first members of the *Ongaku torishirabe gakari* were musicians hailing from several Japanese traditional performing arts, including a few *gagaku* musicians from the Office of *Gagaku* (Galliano 2002, 51).

More importantly, in those same years *gagaku* provided an interesting example of a failed attempt to compose a music for the nation building on different, non-Western materials. In fact, Isawa and Mason’s plan for the implementation of school songs was not the only option available: between 1877 and 1884, the musicians of the Office of *Gagaku* worked on two collections of ‘educational songs’ (*hoiku shōka*) at the request of institutions seeking to include music in their curricula. The first was commissioned for the opening ceremony of the kindergarten of Tokyo Women’s Normal School (*Tōkyō joshi shihan gakkō*), and comprised about 100 songs (FIG. 2.4), while the second only included 24 songs and was compiled for the Institute for Research on the Imperial Classics (*Kōten kōkyūsho*), a school founded to educate Shinto clergymen (Gottschewski 2013, 245–47)<sup>19</sup>.



**FIGURE 2.4.** Frontispiece of the *hoiku shōka* written for the kindergarten of Tokyo Women’s Normal School. Hand copied in 1971 by Shiba Sukehiro on the basis of a manuscript by Oku Yoshihisa (1858-1933) (Shiba 1991, 203, 208–9).

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the foundation and role of this institution in the development of a nationalistic version of *shintō*, see (Shimazono 2009).

The results were significantly different from those of the *Ongaku torishirabe gakari*: “while the songs of the *Shōgaku shōkashū* mainly use Western melodies and are notated in Western staff system, the *hoiku shōka* are based on the music theory of *gagaku* and written in *hakase*” (Gottschewski 2003, 1), the neumatic notation used for Buddhist chant (*shōmyō*) and court music’s vocal pieces (see FIG. 2.5). Moreover, as noted by Ibukiyama, the latter’s songs were to be accompanied by the wooden clappers *shakubyōshi* and by the six-stringed zither *wagon*, both instruments used in the *shintō*-associated subgenre of *gagaku* known as *kuniburi no utamai* (1979, 2)<sup>20</sup>.

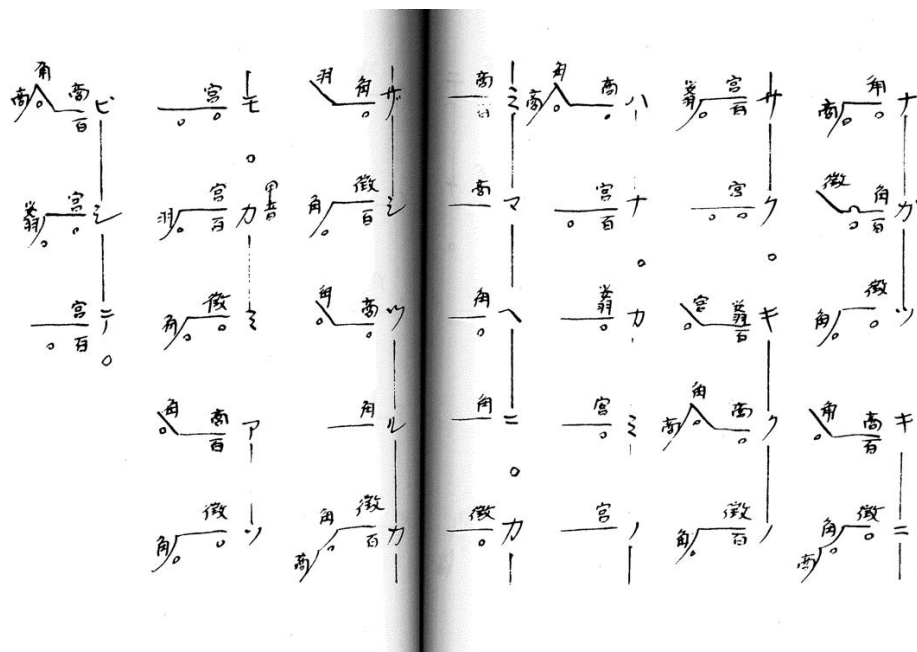


FIGURE 2.5. Notation of the vocal part of the song *Kiku no kazashi* (*The Chrysanthemum Fastened in the Hair*) (starting on the left side of the first picture). Note the striking similarity with the notation of Buddhist chanting (Shiba 1991, 249–51).

Considering that the *hoiku shōka* also differed from the children school songs of Isawa and Mason in terms of pitch and modulation, it is certainly appropriate to consider them as something musically distinct from the creations of the Music Investigation Committee (see Ibukiyama 1979, 20). Gottschewski is therefore right in pointing out that the

<sup>20</sup> Compare the recordings contained in the sixth volumes of the series *Collection of Modern School Songs Based on the Original* with those in the abovementioned seventh volume (*Reijintachi No Shōka ~ Hoiku Shōka* 2000).

“nursery school songs” produced by the musicians of the court represented an example of musical creativity in the context of ‘traditional music’, and that their study must be wary of the binary opposition between ‘Western’ modernity and ‘Asian’ tradition – a stance that would “neglect modernization in traditional culture” (2013, 263). Confirming the artistic and historical value of these compositions, Ibukiyama also notes that these pieces were not merely used in schools as classroom material, but also performed at *gagaku* recitals: in other words, these were full-fledged compositions and artistic experimentations (1979, 24). Paraphrasing Gottschewski, we could then say that the *hoiku shōka* show that change is possible in musical contexts perceived as unalterable or even immutable<sup>21</sup>. Perhaps similar considerations should be expanded to Meiji-period school songs as a whole, as Tsukahara seems to suggest: “Although these modern songs are closer in style to Western than traditional music (because they were modelled on similar Western songs), they reflect more than just the introduction and assimilation of Western music: they represent a new eclectic song style based on the idea of the Japanese people ‘singing together in Japanese’” (2013, 224).

Even though they clearly manifested elements of novelty and deep artistic significance, the stylistic choices made by the court musicians were eventually deemed inadequate in consideration of the many complications caused by having young students sing melodies in the little-known modes of *gagaku*, accompanied by instruments whose acoustic qualities are far from ideal in creating a sense of homogeneous unity of voices<sup>22</sup>. Eventually, the choice fell on Isawa’s model, and the *hoiku shōka* were quietly put aside. Nonetheless, a few songs made their way into successive collections of school songs, published in 1883 and 1884 (Tsukahara 2009, 117; Ibukiyama 1979, 24).

These institutional dynamics, and the artistic experimentations they helped shaping, suggest that a balanced reading of the role of music in Meiji-period education should consider the importance of *gagaku*, especially in light of the fact that musicians active in this field were experimenting with foreign categories while at the same time retaining stylistic and aesthetic features pertaining to their own established repertoire. The *hoiku*

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<sup>21</sup> The artistic significance of these creations in the history of Japanese music is also evidenced by the fact that one of them, the song *Kimi ga yo*, was selected as national anthem in 1880 (Gottschewski 2003, 12–13).

<sup>22</sup> Both *shakubyōshi* and *wagon* have a dry sound, with a very short decay time. These characteristics are especially opposed to those of the organ, the instrument Mason felt was most appropriate to accompany the school songs.

*shōka* thus show that the narrative according to which Japanese music's 'modernization' can be equated to the unquestioned acceptance of 'Western' elements and the converse denigration of 'traditional' ones is both simplistic and historically imprecise.

## 2.4 THE BIRTH OF 'JAPANESE TRADITIONAL MUSIC'

From what we have seen so far, a somewhat antithetical dynamic seems to characterize the artistic endeavors surrounding *gagaku* at the outset of the Meiji period. On the one hand stands a tendency to incorporate Euro-American models, most notably taking extant melodies in their entirety and supplementing them with newly composed or preexisting Japanese texts to create a repertory of school songs. This practical solution to the problem of, quite literally, 'harmonizing Japanese modernity' is evident in the three collections of school songs produced under Mason's influence between 1881 and 1883. On the other hand, however, *gagaku* musicians exhibited a significant amount of creativity in their multiple endeavors in and out of the court. How are we to judge these apparently contradictory currents, running parallel from the 1860s on?

For one thing, the fact that the musicians of the Office of *Gagaku* were experimenting with previously unfamiliar categories should not come as a complete surprise, given that from 1874 they were trained in 'Western' music as well as in *gagaku* (Tsukahara 2009, 114). In fact, it was felt that ceremonial occasions derived from the United Kingdom, Prussian Germany or the United States, such as the visits of foreign authorities or the celebration of the Emperor's birthday should require a different, perhaps less religiously connoted repertoire. At first, the task of performing on these occasions was assigned to the military band of the navy, as it was virtually the only group specialized in Western music at the time<sup>23</sup>. But the sheer frequency of such ceremonial occasions made it seem inappropriate to repeatedly borrow the services of a branch of the military, and, eventually, it was considered more fitting to have the court musicians take over the task (Tsukahara 1998, 217)<sup>24</sup>. This they did actively, even zealously, considering that already in 1879 an Association for Western Music (*Yōgaku kyōkai*) was founded, with voluntary participation and (since the following year) the guidance of Luther Whiting Mason (by then Professor at the Music Investigation Committee) and later Franz Eckert (1852-

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<sup>23</sup> On the importance of marching bands for the introduction of European and American music in Japan, see (Galliano 2002). On military music in Meiji Japan, and its relationship to court music, see (Tsukahara 2009, 120–23; Tsukahara 2013, 230–35).

<sup>24</sup> Tsukahara also suggests that the main reasons for such a shift were primarily "budgetary" (2013, 228).

1916)<sup>25</sup>. While at first only members aged 15 to 40 were required to undertake Western music training, eventually this was extended to everyone, and to this day court musicians reach a high level of proficiency in one or more instruments of the European orchestra (Tsukahara 1998, 217–19).

Without a doubt, the members of the Office of *Gagaku* represented a unique case in Japan: as a body of state functionaries professionally trained in two widely different musical styles, by the end of the 1870s they were perhaps the most qualified and up-to-date group of professional musicians in the country. Through their training, they came in possession of a set of technical skills that made them particularly apt to confront a musical world in turmoil. Especially crucial was their ability to grapple with the complexities of staff notation (Tsukahara 2009, 115): it was this “bi-musicality”<sup>26</sup> that rendered the *reijin* perfect candidates for a new project set up by the Tokyo Music School in 1907 and called Research Institute on Traditional Music (*Hōgaku chōsa gakari*). The purpose of the Institute was the investigation and preservation of “Japanese traditional music” (*hōgaku*) mainly through historical and musicological analyses (Ōkubo 2012, 5; Terauchi 2010, 36–51). The practical means to reach this goal were primarily two: the extensive use of staff notation (*gosenfuka*, literally ‘pentagrammation’) as a tool to record performed music and music notated with traditional methods, and the recording of music on wax cylinders. Within these broad coordinates, the activities of the Research Institute were numerous and diverse, encompassing a variety of different genres, including the music of *Nō* theatre, music connected with the recitation of the *Heike monogatari*, *Kabuki* music, music for the puppet theatre, *shamisen* popular music, and many others (see Ōnuki 1989).

*Gagaku* was especially prominent, with sessions dedicated to its analysis and transcription taking place even two or three times per week between 1916 and 1928<sup>27</sup> (Terauchi 2010, 38–42). Four musicians from the Office of *Gagaku* took part in the project, with the original ambitious task of transcribing the whole corpus of court music as

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<sup>25</sup> The German composer credited with harmonizing the national anthem *Kimi ga yo* (see Gottschewski 2003).

<sup>26</sup> A notion introduced by Mantle Hood to describe “the training of ears, eyes, hands and voice” in more than one musical tradition (1960, 55). For Hodd’s students, this was to become a prerequisite for competent ethnomusicologists. Hood himself indicated the musicians of the Imperial Household in Tokyo as being “truly bi-musical” (upon a suggestion that came from the *gagaku* specialist Robert Garfias) (1960, 55).

<sup>27</sup> With a significant interruption caused by the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923.

transmitted by its ‘certified’ specialists<sup>28</sup>. Together, they produced a brief text entitled *Memorandum on the Principles for Transcribing Gagaku* (*Gagaku o kifuhō hikae*), which provides a simple comprehensive understanding of *gagaku* and at the same time sheds light on the unique, sophisticated methods employed by these musicians in their groundbreaking attempt to deal with one further ‘textualization’ of court music<sup>29</sup>. Since it sheds light on the broader activities of the *Hōgaku chōsa gakari*, it is worth taking a closer look at this ‘pentagrammization’ of court music.

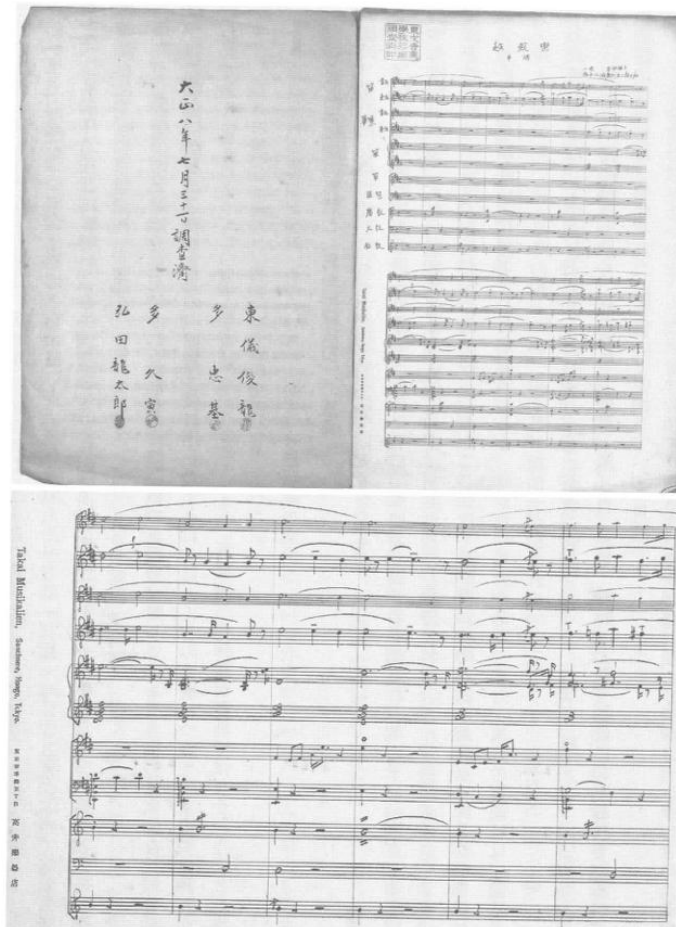
In practice, individual instrumental parts were treated in two different but parallel ways: on one side, the notes produced by each instrument (as derived from their individual tablature parts) were notated exactly as they appeared in the official *Meiji senteifu* and termed *shohō* (“the way [the music is] written”); on the other, the same melodic line was notated *as it was actually heard* in performance, under the name *sōhō* (“the way [the music is] performed”). This represented an innovative and original analytical exercise, fascinating for its pioneering character: in fact, the juxtaposition of a transnotation (*yakufu*) and a transcription (*saifu*)<sup>30</sup> made it possible to appreciate the subtleties of court music performance, while at the same time providing an accurate version of it in staff notation, thus remaining ‘faithful’ to the score (Terauchi 2010, 49) (see **FIG. 2.6**).

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<sup>28</sup> A monumental endeavor later accomplished by Shiba Sukehiro (1898-1982) in his four volumes *The Full Scores of Gagaku in Staff Notation* (*Gosenfu ni yoru gagaku sōfu*) (Shiba 1968-1972).

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed exposition, see (Terauchi 2000). For a reprint, see (Tōkyō geijutsu Daigaku hyaku nen shi henshū iinkai and Geijutsu kenkyū shinkō zaidan 2003, 2:686–91).

<sup>30</sup> Both subcategories of notation (Ellingson 2002, 692) broadly defined as “a visual analogue of musical sound, either as a record of sound heard or imagined, or as a set of visual instructions for performers” (Bent et al. 2002, 73), ‘transnotation’ and ‘transcription’ are technical terms in musicology that acquire further specific meanings when used in ethnomusicological research. In particular, “in ethnomusicological transcription, music is written down from a live or recorded performance, or is transferred from sound to a written form by electronic or mechanical means” (Ellingson 2002, 692–93); transnotation, on the other hand, is the transferring of music from a (written) notation system to another. In the present case, the preexisting notation (from the *Meiji senteifu*) was transnotated (into staff notation), and in parallel the music actually performed was transcribed (also into staff notation). The operation is both highly sophisticated and technically demanding, but its positive effects are immense: in fact, the hiatus between the scores and their actual performance is rendered maximally clear.



**FIGURE 2.6.** Transnotation and transcription of *Etenraku* by the musicians of the Chōsa ongaku gakari: the discrepancies are apparent in the upper two lines, dedicated to the *ryūteki* flute (Terauchi 2010, 46).

The inventiveness and the meticulousness with which the *gagaku* musicians faced the issue of representing differences between sonic and textual sides of court music are especially interesting considering that the overall project of the *Hōgaku chōsa gakari* had a tremendous impact on the ways Japanese scholars and performers of future generations would conceive of the music produced and preserved in the archipelago before (and in part even after) the Meiji period. In fact, it was precisely with the activities of this institution that the category of *hōgaku*, often translated as ‘Japanese traditional music’, was born<sup>31</sup>.

Even though expressions such as *wagaku* (‘music of Wa’, an ancient name for the archipelago) had appeared in the second half of the Meiji period, the term *hōgaku* was

<sup>31</sup> For an excellent review of the social and intellectual processes that led to the establishment of the category of *hōgaku*, see (Groemer 2012).



created in 1907 on the occasion of the foundation of the Institute (Tsukahara 2007, 11). This and similar expressions were partly meant to signal an arising paradigmatic contrast with the equally broad category of *yōgaku* (Western music), perceived as overwhelmingly dominant at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Tokita and Hughes 2008, 2–3)<sup>32</sup>. By contrast, the (first of all institutional) recourse to a new term should have the effect of “awaken[ing] the understanding and perception of Japanese traditional music” (Terauchi 2010, 37), encouraging the Japanese audience to get acquainted with its own musical heritage.

However, as noticed by Terauchi, “here, the concept of *hōgaku* is not the new Japanese music or ‘national music’ praised by Isawa Shūji (...): analyzing the items selected by the Research Institute on Traditional Music, it becomes clear that *hōgaku* was a generic term to indicate *the traditional music that was present in Japan at that time*” (Terauchi 2010, 36 emphasis added). For this reason, much like *gagaku*, the term *hōgaku* soon became an ambiguous signifier, at times indicating the whole of Japanese music (including compositions in ‘Western’ style by Japanese individuals), at times only the music transmitted up to the Meiji by specialized guilds of musicians (Tsukahara 2007, 11–12). Accordingly, genres such as *gagaku* and the music of Nō were sometimes perceived as difficult to reconcile with other, more “folkloric” performing arts (Kikkawa 1984a, 904), so that a host of different expressions such as *junhōgaku* (pure *hōgaku*, referring specifically to the earliest examples of Japanese music) *kinsei hōgaku* (early-modern *hōgaku*), *gendai hōgaku* (contemporary *hōgaku*) started to be used to achieve greater descriptive accuracy (Hirano 1989, 86).

As a matter of fact, Isawa’s personal dismissal of Japanese ‘traditional’ music in the 1870s was not so much based on an opposition between Western and Japanese repertoires, but rather on an earlier set of epistemological categories, that between *ga(gaku)* (understood as ‘elegant, refined music’) and *zoku(gaku)* (‘popular, folkloric, vulgar music’) (Tsukahara 2009, 6). Within this paradigm, *zokugaku* indicated entertainment music, with special reference to geisha music of the Edo period; *gagaku*, on the other hand, was ‘serious’ music, as epitomized by court music, but also by Nō. That ‘Japanese traditional music’ was not at first directly opposed to ‘Western music’ is also

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<sup>32</sup> The most notable source of ambiguity was represented by the activities of Japanese composers who wrote in ‘Western’ style: should those examples be considered *yōgaku* or *hōgaku*? (On these topics, see especially Kikkawa 1984a; Herd 2008, 365–71; Galliano 2002, 65–73).

evidenced by the contents of a text written by Isawa in 1884, on the occasion of the inclusion of items of Japanese music in the International Health Exhibition in London<sup>33</sup>. The text, entitled *Ongaku torishirabe gakari seiseki shinpōsho*, summed up the main results obtained within the Institute’s first five years of existence (see Hirata 2012). Isawa clearly states that “The traditional music of our country can be divided roughly into two groups, *gagaku* and *zokugaku*” (Kawaguchi 1991, 1:67), before arguing that the scale used in Japanese music is not different from the one used in Western music (Hirata 2012, 36). Interestingly, Isawa writes these words at the outset of a chapter entitled *On the Scale of this Country* (*Honpō onritsu no koto*) using the same character for ‘country’ that will be later employed in the expression, *hōgaku*, whose literal meaning thus appears to be close to ‘the music of this country’ rather than ‘Japanese traditional music’ (FIG. 2.7).

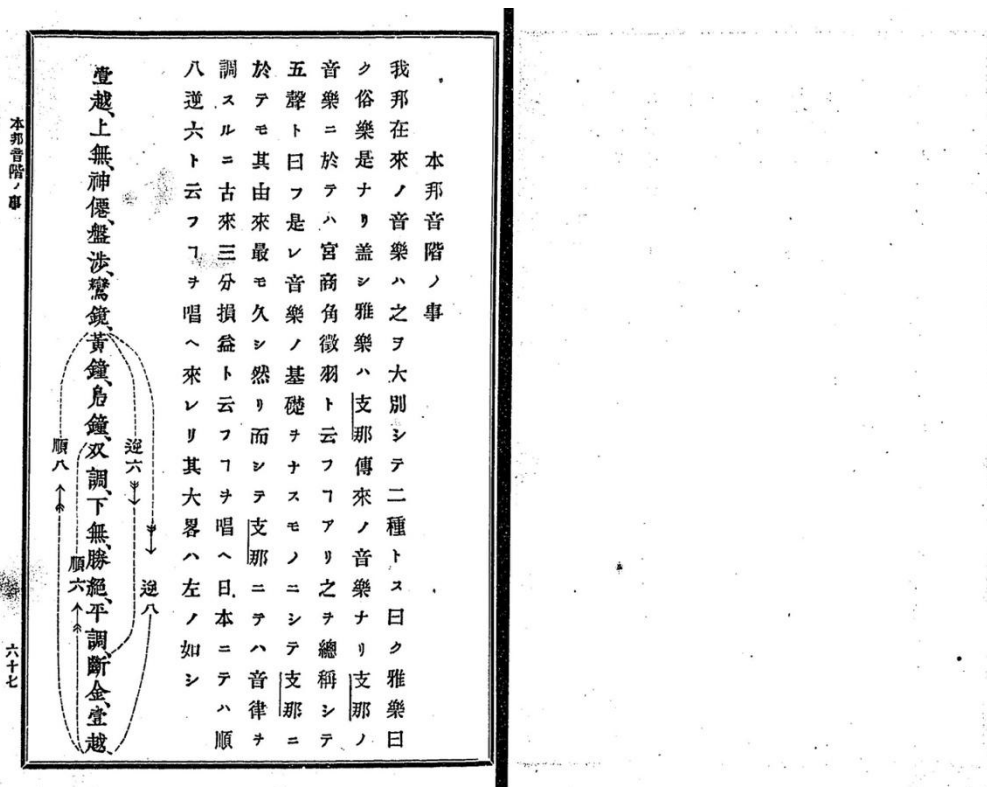


FIGURE 2.7. First lines of the chapter *On the Scale of this Country* from Isawa’s *Ongaku torishirabe gakari seiseki shinpōsho*. (From the digitalized version available at <http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/854780/44>).

*Gagaku*’s role in this overall renegotiation of the epistemological categories applied to the music already present or recently introduced in Japan was especially ambiguous, as was its presentation to ‘the West’. In fact, “*gagaku* was the first of Japan’s traditional

<sup>33</sup> For a complete list of the items displayed, see (Terauchi 2005).

music genres to be introduced overseas in a systematic way”: instruments were featured in the second International Exposition held in Paris in 1867, in the 1873 World Exposition in Wien, and then again in the third Paris World Fair (*Exposition Universelle*) of 1878, this time with the inclusion of “a set of instruments, nine scrolls of music notation and thirteen drawings of *bugaku* dances, a booklet of commentary on *gagaku* entitled *Nihon gagaku gaiben* (*Outline of Japanese court music*)”, complete with an English translation (Tsukahara 2013, 230). This *Nihon gagaku gaiben* offers a synthetic explanation of *gagaku*’s major subgenres *tōgaku* and *komagaku* that unashamedly asserts: “almost all of the pieces were either reworked or composed anew after transmission, and the instruments are made in Japan. Nothing remains exactly the same as it was when it was transmitted. Although of foreign origin, this music is completely Japanese now, and is only referred to as ‘Chinese’ or ‘Korean’ in accordance with ancient custom” (Tsukahara 2013, 230). Tsukahara rightly notices that these words indicate that *gagaku* was considered “‘Japanese music’, in recognition of the fact that it had been transmitted within the country for an extremely long time” (Tsukahara 2013, 230). But, more importantly, they also demonstrate that there was no claim that *gagaku* had remain unaltered throughout the centuries. So while on the one hand autochthonous music could be presented as a component of a “modern nation” that “to a great extent has absorbed Western culture” (Terauchi 2010, 17), especially in the context of music education, on the other it was increasingly being conceptualized in opposition with ‘Western music’ under the new rubric of *hōgaku*.

Within this larger panorama, the *Hōgaku chōsa gakari* put forth the apparently paradoxical or even ‘schizophrenic’ idea that ‘traditional music’ needed to be recorded, preserved and protected through extensive use of specific musicological means derived from ‘Western’ music, such as sound recording and transcription into staff notation. In this sense, the category of *hōgaku* was a potential indicator of identitarian feelings in an initial stage of crystallization –a concept still partly allowing mediation, as evidenced by both the heterogeneous nature of the genres it encompassed and by the intellectual that underscored it, so heavily imbricated with conceptions of ‘scientific endeavors’ based on a type of knowledge-production associated with ‘the West’ (i.e. getting to know an object by systematically applying a technical method perceived as ‘neutral’ and endowed with ‘explanatory force’). With the passage from the *ga/zoku* opposition to the *hōgaku/yōgaku* opposition, thanks in great part to the activities of the *Hōgaku chōsa gakari*, what is at

stake is the shift of an entire episteme, as well as the development of a retrospective (that is, historical) understanding of how music could be perceived as familiar or unfamiliar, domestic or extraneous. As indicated by the techniques employed in the transcription of *gagaku* pieces, the contribution of court music to the formation of this idea of 'Japanese traditional music' was fundamental. However, it is probably best not to think of the recording and 'pentagrammation' of *gagaku* in terms of a sudden turn to an entirely new paradigm. Far from being ideological, the stance taken by the transcribers was probably pragmatic: in an essentially fluid, magmatic context, in which categories were taking a new shape, their task was to find the best way to preserve faithfully the musical contents of *gagaku*. And that is just what they managed to accomplish.

Finally, both the inclusion of *gagaku* items in the context of international exhibitions abroad and the 'textualization' of the repertoire into fully-fledged scores at the beginning of the Meiji period are symptoms of a growing awareness of *gagaku*'s value "as art music" (Terauchi 2010, xi). In fact, these examples can also be read as instances of a process of reification of *gagaku* within a system of values that assigns more and more importance to its aesthetic features. In this sense, the magmatic emergence of the category of *hōgaku* at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can and should be linked to the stable place occupied by court music in present-day "Japanese traditional music" sectors of record shops across the archipelago.

## 2.5 (COURT) MUSIC AND THE NATION

In all its manifestations, from court rituals to school songs, from international exhibitions to sophisticated transcription onto a pentagram, *gagaku* in the Meiji period partakes of the tangled up relationship between music, nationalism and modernity. For this reason, it is important to explore how such a critical node reverberates not only throughout the history of court music, but also along the theoretical lines that guide its analysis.

Although both evidently problematic in terms of their applicability to the Japanese context, the concepts of nationalism and modernity have been tackled by virtually all scholars concerned with the intellectual and political history of Japan at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>34</sup>. In fact, the Meiji restoration is perceived as a foundational moment for what we came to consider constitutive features of Japan as a nation-state. According to these interpretations, perhaps the very ideas of 'Japan' and 'the Japanese' could be read as products of modernity, understood as a new historical phase inaugurated in 1868. Building on Naoki Sakai's related argument on the Japanese language, Marilyn Ivy asserts that "it is arguable that there was no discursively unified notion of the 'Japanese' before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and that the articulation of a unified Japanese ethnos with the 'nation' to produce 'Japanese culture' is entirely *modern*" (1995, 4 emphasis in the original)<sup>35</sup>.

In the case of court music, too, the creation of the Office of *Gagaku* and the production of the *Scores of the Meiji* marked a watershed moment, recently described as "the birth of modern *gagaku*" (Tsukahara 2009, 42; Ono 2016, 184). With this expression, scholars such as Tsukahara Yasuko and Terauchi Naoko stress the fact that it is possible to think in terms of 'before and after 1870', at the same time highlighting that it is of paramount importance to confront the node of modernity, asking both what it meant for *gagaku* and how we should interpret that very term, modernity. In fact, if the Meiji restoration can be thought of as a moment of creation and organization, the same must be said about court music in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: as noticed by Terauchi, "*gagaku* was an essential element in the reorganization of the rituals of a new Japan, reborn as a nation-state, and in the

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<sup>34</sup> For instance, see (Vlastos 1998; Ivy 1995a).

<sup>35</sup> For some coordinates on modernity in and out of Japan, see (Appadurai 1996; but also Latour 1993). At the outset of their introductory chapter, the editors of the *Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music* similarly problematize the concepts of 'Japan' and of 'Japanese music' (Tokita and Hughes 2008, 1).

creation of the imperial system; as such, it was itself reconstructed and reorganized” (2010, 11). In a similar vein, Steven G. Nelson has observed that “as it is performed today, the music is largely the result of a systematization of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century” (Nelson 2008b, 37). The driving forces behind such a systematization are linked to the development of a new, smoldering nationalistic ideology resulting from the political and bureaucratic application of the concepts of ‘modernity’ and of ‘nation-state’ to key bureaucratic apparatuses, most notably the institution of the Imperial family and the field of mandatory school education. Necessarily, this situates *gagaku* in the context of an overarching discussion of the relationship between music and nationalism in Meiji Japan.

Several studies have dealt with the issue, convincingly demonstrating that music did in fact play an important role in shaping a new collective identitarian discourse informed by the principles that were to guide the ‘renewal’ of the nation<sup>36</sup>. Indeed, building on the experience of adopting military music (most notably marching bands) from foreign countries, the government came to the conclusion that music could be considered “valuable for character formation and discipline, and also for the spiritual and physical health of its practitioners” (Wade 2014, 17). Accordingly, music education quickly became “a cornerstone of producing modern citizens” (Yano and Hosokawa 2008b, 346)<sup>37</sup>. In this sense, music was a medium with some unique characteristics, carrying out the task of indoctrination in *multisensory, multimodal ways*: “singing school songs became a way to teach the lesson of the nation, intellectually through the content of the lyrics, aurally through the sounds of the music, as well as bodily through the very act of unison singing” (Yano and Hosokawa 2008b, 346). For this reason, *gagaku*’s school songs are interesting testimonies of the attempts to give material and sonic substance to specific ideological principles. That these early attempts were hybrid in nature, defying the boundaries of tradition and modernity by borrowing from both and identifying with neither, is perhaps not so surprising, considering that even the school songs that were later accepted as textbook material reveal “the cultural ambivalence typical of early Meiji” (Herd 2008, 365) –an ambivalence immediately evident in the stark juxtaposition of the

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<sup>36</sup> For example, see (Johnson 2004; Yano and Hosokawa 2008a; Tsukahara 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, “the influence of *gagaku* permeated into both military and school pieces” through their use of *gagaku* scales, “producing a *distinctive sound world* in the ceremonial spaces of both” (Tsukahara 2013, 237 emphasis added).

calligraphic style of the songs' lyrics and the staff notation to which melodies were set (FIG. 2.8).

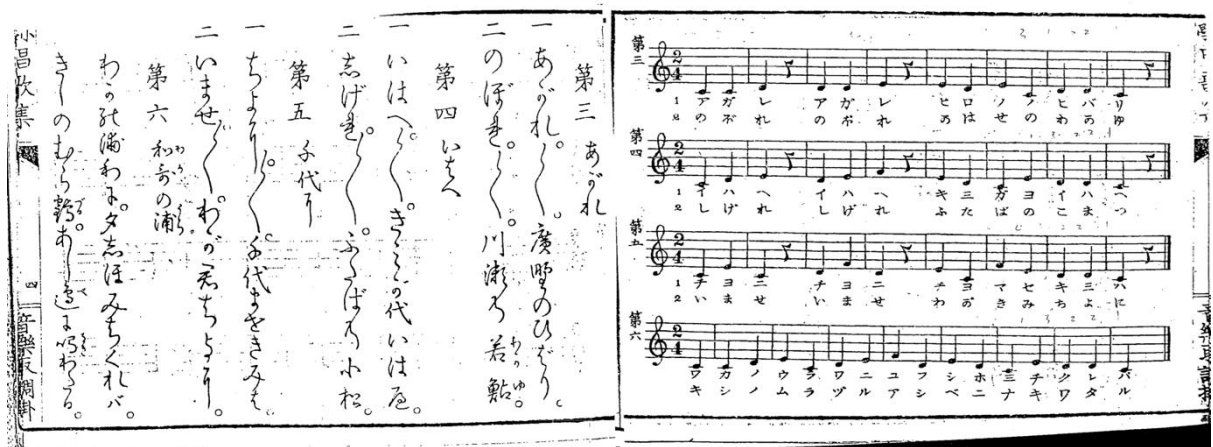


FIGURE 2.8. An extract from the first song contained in the first edition of the *Songs for Elementary School* (1881). (From a copy preserved at the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music, Kyoto).

These elements of hybridity and ambiguity remind us that we should always be wary of simplistic binary interpretations: as noticed by Tsukahara Yasuko, the tendency to construe the musical dynamics of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Japan in terms of an opposition between ‘Western’ and ‘traditional’ music “reveals glimpses of a conceptual framework that views the modernization of music in non-Western cultures largely as a process of westernization” (2013, 224). But cases like the skillful transnotations made by the musicians of the *Hōgaku chōsa gakari* demonstrate that, far from being mere examples of westernization, the Japanese attempts to employ technical skills derived from fairly unfamiliar musical and cultural backgrounds were characterized by a high degree of sophistication and creativity. In turn, this puts into question the validity of interpretations of *gagaku* as an unchanged and unchanging performing art: in fact, the examples above demonstrate that during the early Meiji period, “the ‘tradition’ of *gagaku* was reworked to make it suitable for a modern state, reappearing in what we may see as a strengthened form” (Tsukahara 2013, 227).

If this is the case, the question becomes to what degree the reworking of court music was in fact a *reinvention*. In other words, one may ask whether “modern *gagaku*” was nothing more than an instance of invented tradition and, given the strict relationship

between the two, whether the same can be said of State Shinto<sup>38</sup>. However, it is equally important to keep in mind, as Terauchi does, that the concept of “invented tradition” may itself be of little use, given that “perhaps traditions are always invented” (2010, vi)<sup>39</sup>.

In conclusion, we have seen that in the years immediately following the Meiji revolution of 1868 *gagaku* found itself caught up in a densely interrelated network: modernization and reinvention were tightly bound in the fields of education, music making, religion, and the reorganization of the institutional apparatuses of the state.

In many ways, the encounter (or better encounters) with modernity described so far show that *gagaku* was an important mediator at the center of a complex web of mutual affordances<sup>40</sup>. Reshaped alongside the social structures it was involved in reshaping, court music started anew while remaining the ancient performing art it had been for centuries. Fulfilling the need of both nationalistic and modernizing drives to be symbolically represented required that court music be ‘resemanticized’ in terms of a performing art with strong religious connotations and an exclusive relation to the imperial family<sup>41</sup>. In this sense, the ritual contexts in which *gagaku* was employed were not marginal elements in the political endeavors of the time; to the contrary, they were at the core of a new nationalism in the making. “Just as Japan’s ‘Emperor system’

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<sup>38</sup> As suggested also by Itō (1998, 31). For the “invention of tradition”, see (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

<sup>39</sup> However, this stance would not be condoned by Marilyn Ivy: according to the American scholar, “it is not possible to rest easy with the by now common critique of the invention of tradition: that is, that *all* tradition is invented. To say that all tradition is invented is still to rely on a *choice* between invention and authenticity, between fiction and reality, between discourse and history” (1995b, 21 emphasis in the original).

<sup>40</sup> The concept of affordance is borrowed from psychologist James Gibson, (2014, 119). Tia De Nora offered another image to think about music and its flexible potentials, talking about “musical framing”, a phenomenon that “occurs when music’s properties are somehow projected or mapped on to something else, when music’s properties are applied to and come to organize something outside themselves. Using the notion of framing as a starting point, it is possible to investigate how actors of all kinds forge links between musical materials and non-musical matters” (DeNora 2000, 27). Both the idea of *gagaku* as part of a series of mutual affordances, and of it being the subject of musical framing can go a long way in explaining in a non-deterministic fashion the relationship between ideology and court music in Meiji Japan. The first concept is favored here because it is essentially relational and disrespectful of material-semiotic discriminations between the entities brought into the relation.

<sup>41</sup> However, it is important to remember that, contrary to an “old image, which still exercises strong iconic-ideological power over the ‘Western’ imaginary”, the figure of Emperor Meiji “signified neither a return to ancient, ‘traditional’ Japanese culture nor a capitulation to the hastily put-together ‘state Shinto’ program, but a complex amalgamation of the traditional and the modern” and that, for most Japanese of the time, he was “no less important a symbol of Japanese modernity than, say, the steam locomotive” (Kim 2011, 55).



(*tennōsei*) ideology functioned as the central pillar that supported the political system and unified the nation and its people in the pre-war period, so the *gagaku* of imperial rites played a special role in the state ceremonies that were concrete expressions of that ideology” (Tsukahara 2013, 237–38). But *gagaku* appealed to Meiji period reformers more broadly because of its ability to provide a *sonorous embodiment* for the ideological forces driving the changes that Japan was undergoing at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Deconstructing the presupposition that court music is the timeless soundtrack of Japanese traditional religiosity, the ‘Shinto soundscape’, is the necessary first step in a thorough exploration of its genealogy.

At the same time, it is important to always keep in mind that steering away from the past was not painless, nor without consequences. In fact, moving the capital to Tokyo produced not only a re-location, but also a dis-location of court music. While all of the processes presented so far took place in the context of new institutions specifically created in the new ‘capital of the east’, local bearers of *gagaku* transmission in the western part of the country had to deal with a very different situation. Precipitous changes and increasingly unstable conditions characterized the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for performers of court music operating in the Kansai area. Many musicians were confronted with the real possibility of seeing *gagaku* disappear from its historical cradle, and needed to find skillful ways to cope with such a threat. This partial fracture with the past is the subject of the next chapter, which presents the historical evolution of *gagaku*’s main groups in the area comprising Kyoto, Osaka and Nara at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## CHAPTER 3

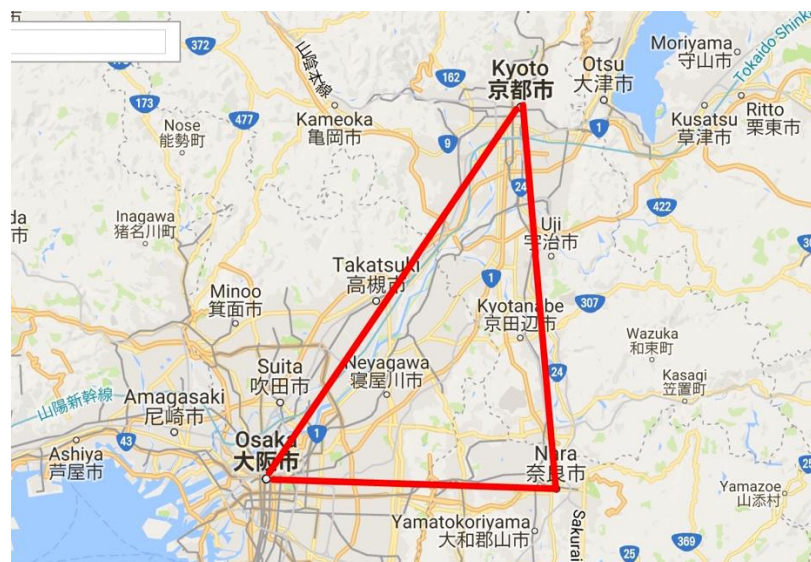
### THE *GAGAKU* TRIANGLE

#### 'COURT MUSIC' IN KANSAI SINCE 1870

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *gagaku* was mobilized in institutional contexts such as public education, the reorganization of the rituals of the court, and the introduction of a number of foreign musical idioms. The transformations that ensued have radically reshaped court music, and are at the basis of contemporary understandings of what this performing art 'is' to most Japanese. Both the public image of *gagaku* and the often ideologically charged rhetoric surrounding its history are products of the Meiji period. For this reason, examinations of the years immediately following 1870 shine a light on what I have called the complex genealogy of present-day court music. Of course, the bulk of such examinations is bound to be concerned with processes that took place in the new capital of Japan.

When it comes to 'modern *gagaku*', however, equal attention should be paid to the shifting conditions of the western part of the country, as this was arguably the area that had to face the harshest challenges to keep the transmission of court music alive. This chapter focuses on three centers of *gagaku* production located in the western cities of Kyoto, Osaka and Nara –a geographical area I ironically refer to as 'the *gagaku* triangle' (see **FIG.3.1**). Contrary to its infamous counterpart, this particular strip of land has had

the property of *not* making a special type of object (i.e. court music) disappear. Looking at each local reality separately and, subsequently, comparing similarities and differences among them, I will try to elucidate the kinds of strategies deployed in order to ‘keep *gagaku* on the map’. Resonances among different responses to the sudden changes that started in the 1870s are embodied in the sounds and gestures of today’s local practitioners. And, on a more concrete level, the choices made at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are inscribed into the social fabric that surrounds and sustains contemporary court music, in the form of lasting institutional relations, surviving family lines and the social roles of court music’s practitioners. These are the main reasons why it is important to look at some of the properties of this imaginary triangle.



**FIGURE 3.1.** The ‘*gagaku* triangle’. (Google maps).

### 3.1 CONTINUITY? THE THREE EARLY-MODERN AND MODERN OFFICES OF MUSIC

From what we have seen in the previous chapter, it is no exaggeration to say that the *gagaku* of the Imperial Household of Japan, recognized by UNESCO in 2009 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Humanity, is a re-invented tradition. More boldly (perhaps too boldly, but when is this line crossed, and where exactly is it drawn?), one

could go as far as to say that ‘centralized’ court music is relatively new to the eastern part of the Japanese archipelago. In fact, even considering the Tokugawa patronage of *gagaku* and its admission into the masculine walls of the Edo castle starting from 1642 (Takenouchi 2006, 193), the fact remains that from its arrival in Japan to well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century this performing art orbited around the circumscribed geographical area surrounding Heiankyō (present-day Kyoto), the ancient capital in the west. This veritable cradle of Japanese *gagaku* is known as Kansai or Kinki, and comprises today’s so-called Keihanshin metropolitan area, the region of approximately 15 million people where the cities of Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto are located. Also included in Kansai are the eastern (with respect to the more densely inhabited territories) prefectures of Wakayama, Mie, and Nara, essential elements in both national and cultural self-images of the Japanese population<sup>1</sup>. Thus, for both geographical and socio-cultural reasons, the Kansai area is the most significant *other* to Tokyo’s court music.

For centuries, the most distinctive feature of this territory has been the existence of a semi-institutionalized system through which *gagaku* was performed and passed down by specialized families belonging to something roughly identifiable as ‘organizations’. In itself, this is an ancient phenomenon, the making of which was already discernible during the reign of Emperor Murakami (r.946-967) (Endō 2013, 44; Kishibe 1974, 15–16; S. Tōgi 1988, 39). By then, the directives of the *Ritsuryō* legal codes of the early 8<sup>th</sup> century had led to a progressive shift from the unitary institution of the Gagakuryō to loose structures known as *gakuso* (or *gakusho*)<sup>2</sup> (often translated as “offices of (court) music”). At such an initial stage, the *gakuso* were temporary physical structures set up within the court in

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<sup>1</sup> Many if not most Japanese see in the plain of Yamato (in present-day Nara prefecture) the primary locus of what has been called “the emergence of Japanese kingship” between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE (see Piggott 1997).

<sup>2</sup> The reading of the second character of this word, the one commonly used to indicate a ‘place’ or a ‘site’ (*tokoro*), is debated. Both the *Dictionary of Heian History* and the fourth edition of the authoritative *Kōjien* (1993) have the main entry as *gakusho*, to which the *gakuso* entry refers (Shinmura 1993, 453; Ogi 1994, 460). Moreover, the Meiji-period *gagaku* dictionary *Gagakushōjiten*, largely based on the earlier *Kabuhinmoku* by Ōgawa Morinaka (1760-1823) also has a similar entry for *gakusho* (Gagaku to bugaku oyobi kanren geinō no ima to mukashi kyōdō kenkyūkai 2016, 35–36). However, throughout this dissertation the transliteration *gakuso* has been preferred in order to avoid unnecessary confusion: in fact, even though recently there has been a tendency to shift toward *gakusho* (e.g. Endō 2013, 44), the expression *sanpō gakuso* is still widely used, and remains the preferred choice for both introductory and reference books on court music (see, among many others, Endō 2007, 32; 2008, 82; Terauchi 2011, 29; Yamada 2016). *Gakuso* is also the transliteration used by a host of contemporary local groups, that generally attach the expression to a specific place-name (as in the case of the groups Tokyo *gakuso*, Osaka *gakuso*, Kyoto *gakuso*, Nanto *gakuso* Niigata *gakuso* and so on). Thus in this case philological precision has been sacrificed in the name of clarity.

order to house a limited number of musicians who were to perform at certain important celebrations: court music was so often necessary in the calendrical rituals of the court that erecting lodgings in its precincts seemed a simple and practical way to have the performers always ready.

According to most historians of Japanese music, these structures gradually developed into more abstract systems of transmission, laying the foundations for what would become the so-called '*sanpō gakuso*' or "three offices of music" (Ogi 1989, 174). These consisted in three separate groups of families with ties to the court in Kyoto, to the Shitennōji temple in Osaka, and to the Kōfukuji-Kasuga Taisha religious multiplex in Nara. However, one must resist the hasty assumption that a fully-fledged 'managerial' system presiding over these three performing centers existed ever since antiquity. In fact, recent research has demonstrated that the tripartite nature of the *sanpō gakuso* was not entirely established before the Tenshō period (1573-1592) (Yamada 2016, 29). Whereas *gagaku* musicians in Nara were already occasionally taking part in the court's rituals, the ones in Osaka only began serving there between 1577 and 1579: since this becomes clear upon examining the oldest surviving records of the court's activities, we can safely say that it was only around this time that a fully-fledged *sanpō gakuso* system was born (Minamitani 1994, 77). Therefore, to talk of 'three offices of music' during the Heian or Kamakura period would be to erroneously project back in time a historically constructed interpretation of this essentially early modern phenomenon<sup>3</sup>. Neither were the activities of these musicians limited to the court: as early as the Keichō era (1596-1615), for instance, performances at the Toyokuni shrine, dedicated to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, became customary (Yamada 2016, 28). Thus, even though it is undeniable that from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century different groups of practitioners started specializing in the performance of court music, it must also be admitted that the *sanpō gakuso* articulation of *gagaku* practice is much more recent than many local musicians would claim. As a matter of fact, less than one hundred years separate the consolidation of the three offices of music from the creation of the *Momijiyama gakuso*, the group active at the Edo castle.

Even so, similarities among these three centers of (court) music production justify treating them jointly from at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The first common characteristic to

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<sup>3</sup> The genesis of *gagaku*'s *sanpō gakuso* around 1570 and its official incorporation in the Office of *Gagaku* in 1870 mark a chronological span that fits squarely in Totman's periodization of "Japan's early modern period" (1995, xxv).

stand out in the past and present practice of the various *gakuso* is their interrelation. In fact, the groups in Osaka and Nara provided much needed aid when Kyoto was severely damaged by the turmoil of the Ōnin wars in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, making it possible to perform rituals that would have been temporarily or perhaps even permanently suspended without this precious support. And even before these noticeable episodes, it had been customary to summon ‘local’ musicians to the court on the occasion of important celebrations (Kōshitsu Our Imperial Family 2008, 23–24). Interestingly, historical documents show that such instances of collaboration were not just a matter of following orders, but rather a real example of mutual cooperation that extended to smaller local groups: for example, when in 1484 and 1496 the group in Nara experienced a shortage of members, several individuals from another *gagaku* group (simply referred to as “Sumiyoshi *reijin*”) provided the personnel necessary to conduct normal performances (Yamada 2016, 19–20). A similar collaboration exists today between the Kyoto group Heian *gagakukai* and the Nara-based Nanto *gakuso*: every year on December 17, on the occasion of the important *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri* festival, two or three members of the former association are dispatched to Nara, in what seems to be a mostly symbolical gesture, commemorating a time in which practical help was truly needed (Suzuki 2015, 2)<sup>4</sup>. As these examples indicate, a degree of interchange among all three *gakuso* has been the norm at least since the ‘medieval’ period, if not before.

At the same time, unique performance occasions conferred distinctive features to each *gakuso*: while musicians in Kyoto were mostly active in the context of calendrical ceremonies in the court, in Nara and Osaka music and dance were provided as an essential element of ritual services and festivals (*hōe*, *hōyō* and *matsuri*) at local shrines and temples. The ritual occasions in which *gagaku* was inscribed were the most important source of identification for the local groups. In fact, privileged associations with certain institutional frameworks made each group recognizable in its constitutive opposition to the others. This trait of the *sanpō gakuso* system emerges clearly from a comparison of the history of two contemporary groups based in Osaka and Nara: their past and present are interwoven with the history of specific ceremonial events.

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<sup>4</sup> When I took part in the festival on December 2013, a number of ironic comments were made by Nanto *gakuso* practitioners concerning the real necessity of including members of the Kyoto group. In a sense, this antagonistic attitude strengthens the cohesion of each group, and should be interpreted along the lines of friendly skirmishes rather than as examples of substantial criticism.

As for the ways in which the music itself was transmitted, a common feature of the three *gakuso* was undoubtedly their hereditary nature. In all three cases, genealogical lines can be reconstructed, sometimes dating back to as far as the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>: belonging to such lineages was and to a great extent still is a source of pride and self-identification<sup>6</sup>. In this way, the social fabric of a certain community and its relations to court music were determined by the interconnection of specific families. This aspect adds a sociological dimension to the study of local groups, since distinctive connections between *gagaku* and certain regional territories were (and still are) coextensive with processes of community-building. In this sense, anthropological research on kinship, at the intersection between the study of court music and that of specific sites where it is transmitted, could provide invaluable data on the social significance of *gagaku* in the wider context of communitarian, public spheres.

Another defining element of the three offices of music was the secretive character of the oral-aural methods of music transmission that all of them employed –something directly related to the hereditary nature of the transmission (T. Tōgi 1999, 73–79). Although in principle this aspect did not set the local musicians apart from the aristocratic family lines emerged in the late Heian period<sup>7</sup>, the more technical and encompassing nature of the transmission of *gagaku* as carried out by the *sanpō gakunin* (*gagaku* musicians from the three directions’) brought to a more striking diversification of local styles, clearly based on different interpretations of the repertoires. In other words, secrecy, the hereditary character of the transmission, and the specialization of each group of performers were tightly bound together in local practices. Hence, the very fact that contents and modalities of musical transmission were dissimilar constitutes itself a feature of the *sanpō gakuso* system. Being different from one another was, in a way, a prerogative of these groups. Incidentally, this stands in stark contrast to the developments observed in the Meiji period, when the production of uniform scores

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<sup>5</sup> This was done most famously by Hirade Hisao in 1967 (see the reprint in Hirade 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Today, this holds especially true for those members of the Music Department of the Imperial Household who are the scions of ancient families. Occasionally, these musicians reveal their initial indifference (or even plain disinterest) towards undertaking the study of *gagaku*, a path perceived as a societal obligation toward the family. For some telling examples, see the interviews contained in a documentary produced by the Ministry of Education on the occasion of the participation of the musicians to the Edinburgh International Festival in 2012 (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tu2gLTO41IQ> (accessed August 8, 2016)). See also (T. Tōgi, Shiba, and Hayashi 2006) for rich historical details concerning each family.

<sup>7</sup> After all, those families too developed a markedly secretive attitude towards *gagaku*, sometimes even composing secret pieces known as *hikyoku* (see Takuwa 2016).

marked a strong ‘textualization’ of the practice, to the detriment of the more secretive methods of oral transmission.

After 1870, all local practitioners had to find ways to keep alive their own specific traditions of transmission. These included physical skills, material objects and notation systems, but also special dance movements, distinctive melodic phrasings or melodic figurations and peculiar choices of tempi (see Terauchi 2011, 125). All of these elements concurred to making Osaka’s *gagaku* different from Nara’s or Kyoto’s<sup>8</sup>. Analyzing the recent history of each of the three *gakuso* brings to light the relationship between those necessary ‘survival strategies’ and the present conditions of the three most important *gagaku* groups in Kansai.

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<sup>8</sup> A comparative, synchronic and diachronic analysis of such musicological traits would greatly enhance our understanding of *gagaku*’s practice, both in its center and peripheries.



### 3.2 KYOTO: LOST CENTRALITY, FRAGMENTED MODERNITY

Since *gagaku* is, beyond any doubt, ‘also Japanese court music’, Kyoto must be, almost by definition, at the very center of its history. And yet the longtime capital of Japan is a curiously unexplored site when it comes to the modern history of *gagaku*<sup>9</sup>. Such a state of affairs is perhaps not entirely surprising, considering that the relocation of the capital to Tokyo was bound to have more intense consequences on the longtime seat of the emperor’s power. Precisely because of this association with the imperial institutions, over the course of its long history Kyoto’s *gagaku* suffered repeated moments of crises. The first and most brutal of these is represented by the disorders of the Ōnin wars (1467-1477). During the decades that followed the violent outbursts of 1467, “Kyoto was ravaged and mostly destroyed, with devastating effect on the court and its *gagaku* tradition. Many musicians were able to flee to the somewhat safer provinces, but a large number were killed, bringing to an end several hereditary musician houses” (Shumway 2001, 120). In fact, in 1559 the Kyoto *gakunin* were only 7, and at the outset of the Edo period they amounted to just 17 individuals, aided by an equal number of members hailing from each of the other *sanpō gakuso* (Yamada 2016, 204). Moreover, in order to actually fulfill their duties, these performers needed the financial support of powerful families such as the Yotsuji clan<sup>10</sup> (Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984a, 164). As these examples indicate, there were several premodern instances of Kyoto’s precarious conditions in the world of court music.

Still, that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was perhaps the most harmful of the numerous drawbacks. Shortly after the Meiji restoration, the musicians who had to move to Tokyo were given some time to relocate: those who eventually went to the eastern capital did so between 1869 and 1878, while a ‘Kyoto branch’ of the Office of *Gagaku* was established in 1871, mostly to accommodate elderly musicians who preferred to stay behind (Abe

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<sup>9</sup> The chapter dedicated to Kyoto in Terauchi’s *Gagaku o kiku* (a book that presents the most important sites where one can listen to court music in the 21st century) devotes most of the space to a description of *gagaku* in the Imperial palace in classical times and most notably in the context of calendrical events of the court (Terauchi 2011, 34–59). However, there is no mention of the modern and contemporary situation, nor even a brief reference to the constitution of modern *gagaku* groups. Similarly *Gakke ruijū*, a book specifically concerned with the most ancient *gagaku* families and how their tradition is carried on by court musicians, completely avoids the topic, focusing on the years between the establishment of the main family lines no later than the early 12<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Ogi 2006, 26–43).

<sup>10</sup> An aristocratic family with ties to the Fujiwara that since ancient times had been in charge of certain ceremonies and ritual services involving music (Okunaka 2008, 177)

1998, 239). Here, they started training shrine priests in the performance of *gagaku*, so that music could still be heard at the many institutions that had suddenly found themselves deprived of the collaboration of the court musicians (Suzuki 2015, 1). However, the branch office was definitively closed in 1877, leaving the musicians with no other choice but to organize autonomously (Tsukahara 1998, 217; Endō et al. 2006, 135). From this moment on, information on Kyoto's *gagaku* becomes scattered, certainly due to the sudden disappearance of an officially recognized institutional setting.

Fortunately, the unique story of two Kyotoites comes to the rescue. In fact, the first *reijin* (the musicians-functionaries in Tokyo) that were not heirs of an ancient *gagaku* family were Horikawa Hisatami (1833-?), a man from the old capital, and his son Morokatsu (1860-1938). Hailing from a family that had close ties to Buddhist institutions, both father and son entered the Office of *Gagaku* in 1873, the very year in which court music transmission was open to 'commoners'. Though one can easily imagine their enthusiasm and trepidation in undertaking an entirely new path, their experience in Tokyo was extremely brief (and perhaps not entirely gratifying): when the Kyoto branch was shut down in 1877, the two decided to resign and go back to Kyoto (Fukushima 1999, 150). The reasons of such a hasty return are not clear, but an important part must have been their concern for the future of *gagaku* in the old capital (Fukushima 1999, 150). Unfortunately, the only available source on the topic seems to be the diary of Hisatami (entitled *Gakujiki* or *Musical Chronicles*), which covers the years from 1880 to 1900. The document provides invaluable information on the conditions of court music in Kyoto, and is fundamental "to get a necessary grasp of the new perception of *gagaku* in the musical history of the Meiji period from a different point of view from the one of the Office of *Gagaku*" (Mishima 1999, 162). Once they were back in Kyoto, the Horikawas made great efforts to establish a solid basis for future *gagaku* practice in the city, creating a network that included *shintō* priests, Buddhist monks and former lower members of the aristocracy (Mishima 2012, 162). At first, they entered the association Kyoto gagakukai, created in 1888 by two former aristocrats, Nyakuōji Enbun and Reizei Tamenori (Endō et al. 2006, 138). In the following years, they became especially active as instructors for a newly created group called Heian gagakukai –a duty that Morokatsu would retain until his death in 1938 (Endō et al. 2006, 138; Fukushima 1999, 150) (see **FIG.3.2**).



FIGURE 3.2. Members of Heian gagakukai in 1931. The third man from the right is likely to be Horikawa Morokatsu.

From (Hira Nakagawa and Yamato 1986, 19).

Heian gagakukai was established in 1916 on the basis of the pre-existing Heian Foundation, itself an organization sponsored by the Imperial family with the primary goal of providing education to the children of former employees of Kyoto's Imperial Palace (Suzuki 2015, 1). When a certain number of its students expressed their desire to start a *gagaku* training, a new group was established, formally separated from the foundation. Official activities started only in 1917, under the supervision of a member of the Office of *Gagaku* in Tokyo. In a few years, the involvement of Heian gagakukai in the cultural life of Kyoto grew exponentially: the group was especially active in keeping alive two important rituals, the Aoi matsuri of Kamogamo jinja (held on May 15) and the Iwashimizusai of Iwashimizu Hachimangū (held on September 15) (Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984b, 812). After the Second World War, Heian gagakukai also recorded some tracks for the soundtracks of the famous movies *Rashōmon* (1950) by Kurosawa Akira and *Ugetsu monogatari* (1953) by Mizoguchi Kenji (Suzuki 2015, 2). At around this time, the number of commoners interested in court music gradually increased, in Kyoto as elsewhere, and Heian gagakukai started to expand the scope of its activities: in 1973, a tour of Europe lasted about a month; in 1980, they participated in *Kyoto Fair*, an event held in Boston (Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984b, 812). In the 1980s, Heian gagakukai had around 60 members, most of whom were Buddhist monks or shrine 'priests'

(*kannushi*) (Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984b, 812). Today, the group is open to everyone, and has its headquarters in the Nishiki Tenmangū temple on Teramachidōri, at the heart of Kyoto's business life. In 2015, it counted around 70 members, of ages spanning from 20 to 80, and its activities amounted to almost 100 performances per year (Suzuki 2015, 3).

Heian gagakukai is recognized as the oldest and most important *gagaku* group active in Kyoto (Suzuki 2015, 1; Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984b, 812), and is perhaps the association of amateur practitioners that more than any other can lay claim to continuity with the ancient *gakuso* of the court. Other, more recent associations include Kyōto bugakukai (f.1957), Kyōto kogaku hozonkai (f.1974), and Kyōto gakuso (f.1963)<sup>11</sup>, but many more groups exist, more or less uncharted, often connected to small shrines and neighborhood temples (S. Tōgi 1988, 288, 291).

Even though present-day *gagaku* in Kyoto appears to be in good shape, it is worth noticing that the groups currently active do not seem to rank among the most important ones in the Kansai area, let alone in the whole country. Both in terms of number of participants and of public visibility through concerts, workshops and similar efforts to popularize court music, Kyoto groups lag behind the more active 'contemporary *gakuso*'

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<sup>11</sup> This last group is of special interest in that it is led by Nakagawa Hisatada, the 37<sup>th</sup> head priest (*gūji*) of Ebisu shrine in Kyoto. Mr. Nakagawa is an author and a lecturer at several universities in Kyoto, including Kyoto City University of Arts, where he teaches undergraduate courses on *gagaku* that focus on his elective instrument, the oboe *hichiriki*. He is a former disciple of court musician Abe Suemasa (himself an active promoter of *gagaku*: see Abe 1998). I had the opportunity to attend a few of his classes during the winter of 2015. What stands out in his method is the fact that Mr. Nakagawa uses his own scores, revised and simplified under the guidance of Abe Suemasa, and that he employs extensively his own book, *A shinto priest recounts the charms of Kyoto: looking for the origins of the Japanese spirit* as teaching material (Hisatada Nakagawa 2010). Both the contents of the book and his general approach as a lecturer are marked by a strong Nihonjinron discourse, interspersed with attempts to make traditional culture 'look cool' in the eyes of often only mildly interested teenagers. Asked about it, Mr. Nakagawa confirmed that it would be "too heavy" for students to only learn about *gagaku*, and adds that because the *hichiriki* is a physically demanding instrument for beginners during fifteen years of teaching he was gradually persuaded that it would be more appropriate to "listen to interesting and little-known facts about traditional Japanese customs and culture" than "to talk slavishly about the history and theory of court music" (interview, December 3, 2015). All in all, his attempt to reconcile the practice of *gagaku* with things of the past in a presentation that successfully catches the attention of young students makes Mr. Nakagawa's teaching method fascinating. Positive character traits and a certain 'performer's attitude' also play a part. However, in the classroom the line between learning about the past and being indoctrinated on a presumed 'spirit/heart of the Japanese people; is dangerously blurred, and questions must be raised as to the dangers of channeling such essentialist predispositions through the medium of *gagaku*, especially considering the fact that the issue is by no means limited to this case alone, but could be read as one of the many threads in contemporary discourses on court music, as evidenced by more publicly prominent figures such as Tōgi Hideki (see Lancashire 2003).

in Nara and Osaka. The overall level of their performances is also not especially outstanding.

From the scarce and scattered information available, it seems clear that Kyoto suffered greatly from the dislocation of many of its court musicians to the new capital: what little activity survived after the 1870s served as the basis for a new, more modest beginning, but in a sense *gagaku* never fully recovered. Today's fragmentation is surely a resource in that it forces practitioners to find innovative ways to attract a public and a stable membership. However, it is undeniable that Kyoto occupies a somewhat paradoxically marginal position in the panorama of contemporary *gagaku* practice in Western Japan.

### 3.3 OSAKA: THE LIVELINESS OF AN ALTERNATIVE TRADITION

The history of *gagaku* in Osaka is an example of the extraordinary degree to which local practitioners have interwoven past and present both into their public representations and their shared identity as performers. *Gagaku* performance in the area is well attested by a variety of historical documents that span from the Kamakura period to modern times<sup>12</sup>. Most of these sources insist on the axiomatic connection between court music and the Shitennōji temple (often simply referred to as Tennōji), the first Buddhist temple in Japan, erected following an order by Shōtoku Taishi in 593 (Shiode 2002, 391). Accordingly, the group of musicians performing there came to be known as Shitennōji (or Tennōji) *gakuso*. The main yearly celebration in which the musicians took and still take part is known as Shōryōe, a Buddhist memorial service dedicated to the founder of the temple<sup>13</sup>. Already in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, diaries of Heian aristocrats attest to the presence of rituals with court music at this important Buddhist center (Minamitani 2008, 125). The quality of the musicians was also noticed by the author of the classic medieval text *Tsurezuregusa* (1667), Yoshida Kenkō, who praised the group and specified that the *Shōryōe* was “an important tradition characteristic of the Tennōji”, confirming its antiquity (Terauchi 2011, 121–22). Even if the merits of the Osaka *gakuso* were well-known by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it should be noticed that the earliest records of its existence only date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, speculations concerning earlier times can only rely on secondary sources (Minamitani 2008, 121).

In 1884, almost fifteen years after the creation of the Office of *Gagaku* in Tokyo and the consequent disbandment of the Shitennōji *gakuso*, a group of private individuals decided to give birth to a new association of *gagaku* practitioners, called Garyōkai (Terauchi 2013a, 173). From the outset, its main purpose was to carry on the long history of court music performance in Osaka, thus inheriting the tradition of Tennōji *gakuso*. The central importance attributed to the past is evident in the insistence with which scholars directly affiliated to the group or to the Shitennōji itself emphasize the role of ancient performing arts and of Prince Shōtoku in the foundation of Osakan court music (e.g. K. Ono 2008).

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<sup>12</sup> The most important historical sources on *gagaku* at the Shitennōji temple have been collected and reprinted in the volume *Tennōji gakuso shiryō (Historical Documents on Tennōji gakuso)* (Minamitani 1995).

<sup>13</sup> The precise origin of the ritual is unknown, but the earliest sources mentioning it are from the Edo period (Minamitani 2008, 6).

The most striking example of this rhetorical narrative is the treatment of what is purported as one of its foundational elements: the lost performing art known as *gigaku*.

Introduced in Japan during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century CE and soon disappeared, *gigaku* was a masked pantomime transmitted from the Korean kingdoms (Minamitani 2008, 28, 121; Kishibe 1970, 8–9). Despite the fact that “little can now be said about *gigaku* music or the manner in which its dances were performed” (Cranston 1993, 497), Minamitani Miho has suggested that the pantomime could be the forerunner of the music and dances performed by the musicians of Tennōji *gakuso* (2008, 121–22). It is well known that early historical sources attribute the transmission of *gigaku* to an artist from Kudara known as Mimashi. This man is said to have taught the son of a certain Hata no Kawakatsu, who in turn is revered as the ancestor of Osaka’s *gagaku* families (Minamitani 2008, 122). In fact, “until the end of the Edo period, a large hereditary family –the Hata (or Uzumasa), with its several branches, the Sono, Oka, Hayashi and Tōgi–[dedicated] itself for centuries to performing *gagaku* for temples and shrines (...) in Osaka” (Terauchi 2013b, 174). Minamitani suggests that two of the pieces performed during the *Shōryōe* festival, entitled *Bosatsu* and *Shishi*, are surviving examples of *gigaku*<sup>14</sup> (2006, 28) and that the characteristic traits of Garyōkai’s performances may be “the result of the fact that the *bugaku* of Shitennōji, compared to *bugaku* as performed in other places, retained the atmosphere of *gigaku*” (2008, 127). The decision that *gigaku* should be transmitted is credited to none other than Shōtoku Taishi himself, in a famous edict of 612 that sought to spread the Buddhist faith (*Shōtoku Taishi denryaku*) (Cranston 1993, 497). The centrality of Prince Shōtoku is further evidenced by the gradual development of a fully-fledged cult of his figure –a cult directly connected to the practice of court music in Osaka<sup>15</sup> (Minamitani 2008, 123). The memorial ritual dedicated to him (*Shōryōe*) takes place every year on April 22<sup>16</sup>. *Gagaku* is an important part of this grand celebration, with

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<sup>14</sup> *Shishi* functions as a purification of the stage, depicting in a stylized form two creatures similar to lions circling the surface on which the dancers will perform. The piece is considered the prototype of the many lion dances encountered in folk rituals throughout Japan. Little can be said about *Bosatsu*, a piece in which two masked dancers wearing a long, orange robe move in a circle on the stage, slowly and solemnly. In its most obvious interpretation, the piece would be a portrayal of two bodhisattva (the Japanese word for it being *bosatsu*) (Minamitani 2008, 28).

<sup>15</sup> In the Edo period, during the ceremony celebrating the ‘coming of age’ of young students of *gagaku* it was customary to celebrate Prince Shōtoku by visiting the temple; moreover, the transmission of secret teachings happened in front of a hanging scroll with his image, in a way that reminds of meditation techniques in front of mandalas (Minamitani 2008, 127–28).

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed outline of the ritual which includes a description of the danced pieces that are not performed anymore, see (Minamitani 2008, 24–90; K. Ono 2013, 25–39).

as many as eighteen danced pieces performed in parallel to Buddhist chanting (*shōmyō*)<sup>17</sup>. This section of the ceremony, called *Bugaku shika hōyō*, is particularly evocative, and draws a great number of spectators from well beyond Osaka.

The fact that Minamitani ascribes great importance to these early elements of *gagaku*'s history contributes to a process of legitimation of Garyōkai's claim to antiquity, and therefore to authenticity. For this reason, it is important to handle her analyses with care, knowing that attempts to 'bring back the clock' of a group's history runs the risk of obfuscating its more modern construction: while practitioners may gain prestige and authority from similar operations, scholars may end up losing analytical sharpness. In point of fact, the only features ascribable to the connection between *gigaku* and (Osaka) *gagaku* are "a marked realism in the representation of the characters" and the "portrayal of people" on the stage (Minamitani 2008, 126). All in all, similar traits seem hardly sufficient to justify an unbound centennial link to a performing art otherwise virtually lost<sup>18</sup>.

A parallel theme in the modern history of *gagaku* in Osaka is that of *popular participation*. Historical records indicate that even during the turbulent final decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the *Tennōji gakunin* were performing actively at temples and shrines in the Kansai area (Yamada 2016, 20). The cult that developed around the figure of Shōtoku Taishi further indicates that participatory practices that included but were not limited to *gagaku* existed since premodern times. In a similar way, during the second half of the Edo period an increasing number of Buddhist monks belonging to the Jōdo shinshū (the so-called Shin Buddhism) school started to approach *gagaku* and to incorporate it into various rituals (Minamitani 2008, 131). Building on these antecedents, the Shōryōe festival was revived in the Meiji period, after a short interruption from 1870 to 1879<sup>19</sup>, (Terauchi 2011, 124; S. Ono 2008, 62, 112). At the time, in fact, *reijin* with family ties to the region came back from Tokyo and joined forces with younger musicians who hadn't had to move to the capital.

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<sup>17</sup> See the descriptions in (Endō 2013, 235; Terauchi 2011, 103, 110–15).

<sup>18</sup> For another example of a commentator glorifying Garyōkai's past, see Yamaguchi (2008). Over the past 35 years, *gigaku* has been the object of re-appropriations by the *gagaku* group of Tenri University (see the Conclusion).

<sup>19</sup> Earlier research tended to consider 1860-1861 as the time of the interruption of the ritual (K. Ono 2008, 17), but more recent efforts demonstrated that in fact it was performed until 1870 (K. Ono 2008, 62 note 1).



Gradually but steadily, the number of people involved in performing *gagaku* with what would soon become Garyōkai increased: already in 1883, a certain number of “commoners” participated in the Shōryōe, and the next year shrine priests and Buddhist monks from the area were also included (Terauchi 2011, 124). Buddhist monks were especially instrumental in assisting the group in its initial stages of development: “at first Garyōkai was based in the Yūkōji temple headed by Reverend Mori Sōju, then in 1890 it moved to the Gansenji temple of Reverend Ono Shōin, which has been its office and rehearsal space ever since” (Terauchi 2013b, 175). Thus the revival of the Shōryōe was only possible thanks to the collaboration of a number of citizens, and the collaboration, in turn, cemented a relationship with an increasingly broader sector of the population of Osaka.

Within this context, reverend Ono Shōin (1871-1943) was a pivotal figure for modern-day *gagaku* in Osaka in general, and for Garyōkai in particular (FIG.3.3). Though still very young at the time of the group’s constitution in 1884, he is credited with being the driving force behind its rapid ascent, actively recruiting other monks and hosting the rehearsals in the temple where he was serving as priest (S. Ono 2008, 113). The name Garyōkai (literally, Association of Elegance and Refinement) was itself suggested by the reverend, taking inspiration from a devotional hymn composed by Shinran, the founder of Jōdō Shinshū. Nowadays, Ono Shōin is remembered yearly with a dedicated Buddhist memorial service called *Shōinki* (S. Ono 2008, 113). More importantly, his legacy was carried on by his descendants: both his son Ono Setsuryū (1907-1986) and his grandson Ono Kōryū (1936-2014) have become ‘head’ (*gakutō*) of Garyōkai after him. Presently, Ono Makoto represents the fourth generation of individuals from the same family to occupy a prominent position within the group.

In the case of Garyōkai, opening up the group beyond the confines of specialized families of musicians was a strategy that ultimately paid off: “by 1900 the Garyōkai membership had stabilized and increased to between 30 and 40, (...) half of the members were Buddhist or Shinto priests, while the others were mostly rich merchants from Osaka and Kyoto” (Terauchi 2013b, 175). Today, the group is the largest of the former *sanpō gagaku*. A similar expansion already characterized the activities of the group at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: as noted by Terauchi, “in the Meiji period, in addition to Shōryōe, the Garyōkai began to be associated with many other Buddhist and Shinto rituals in the Kansai area” (2013b, 175; see also S. Ono 2008, 115).



**FIGURE 3.3** Ono Shōin. Date unknown. From (M. Ono and Fujiwara 2008, 21).

Finally, over the last 100 years Garyōkai's openness has resulted in the construction of a true "alternative tradition" (Terauchi 2013b; 2010, 117–35). The group embraced more daring experimental solutions that appealed to the population of an especially lively urban reality such as Osaka, and gradually deviated from the 'orthodox' interpretation of court music put forth by the Office of *Gagaku* in Tokyo. For example, Terauchi described the experience of attending a Garyōkai concert in 2008 noting that while the first half of the program was familiar, "the second part was directed in a very contemporary, extravagant and even gaudy style, with the use of stage elevator, smoke, decorative lighting, confetti and crackers blowing out gold and silver ribbons. The audience got so excited that some of them stood up and started waving their hands toward the stage" (2013b, 187). While on the one hand some may claim that these elements of creativity and originality are simply the continuation of those peculiarities of the Tennōji *gakuso* known since premodern times, critics and historians of court music could maintain that they pose a threat to Garyōkai's claims to authenticity. Beyond such disagreements, it is important to remember that similar choices secured a stable place for *gagaku* in the texture of Osaka's cultural life, infusing the feeling that court music could be something close to people's lives, if not even a collective creation. In fact, "it is the amateur members' enthusiasm and enterprising spirit that has enabled the broad range of activities of the Garyōkai, but the support and interest of rich Osaka merchants has also been crucial" (Terauchi 2011, 127). In other words, as of today, gaining the financial support and

popular appreciation that makes it possible to keep the activities of the group alive may well be deemed more important than attempting to be faithful to the prescribed repertoire.

Arguably the most prominent characteristic of Osaka's musicians' response to the challenges of the Meiji period was their reliance on the support of a broad pool of potential amateurs and sponsors. Still, the group did not entirely reject the claim to a transmission of tradition that for centuries had had a number of peculiarities. To the contrary, the unique story of Shitennōji *gakuso* was turned into a source of strength by envisioning a future for the new group *Garyōkai* that negotiated (and still negotiates) between the allure and "cultural capital" (Bourdieu) of *gagaku*'s past and the promises of a more down-to-earth 'enjoyment' or 'playful disposition' (*asobigokoro*) (Terauchi 2013b, 187)<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> For an entertaining description of how this playful spirit manifested itself in the early years of *Garyōkai* (including dancing *bugaku* while drunk!) see the conversations in (M. Ono and Fujiwara 2008, 149–58).

### 3.4 NARA: A GLORIOUS PAST THAT'S ALWAYS PRESENT

Among practitioners, lovers and, to a much lesser extent, specialists of *gagaku*, the mouth organ *shō* is associated to the Chinese phoenix (*hōō*), a legendary animal with ties to yin-yang theories, but also to fire and thus to death and rebirth (Gamō 1989, 340). Given that the present leader (*gakutō*) of Nara-based group Nanto gakuso, Kasagi Kan'ichi (1927- ), is a master of this instrument, it may be more than a coincidence that his many accounts of the history of the group invariably emphasize the centrality of 1870, the year when *gagaku's* transmission was radically altered by imperial decree (e.g. Kasagi 2014, 21–23). In fact, those more prone to find hidden meanings in such intersections of 'macro-' and 'micro-' histories may even say that there is a degree of (perhaps unconscious) identification between the *sensei*, his elective instrument, and the fate of his group. Psychological interpretations aside, there does seem to be a resonance of themes at play: 1870, a phoenix, death and rebirth –the rhetoric could not be clearer. Unfortunately, unlike its Osaka-based counterpart, Nanto gakuso has attracted little academic research<sup>21</sup>, and the reconstruction of its past has been primarily taken up by Professor Kasagi himself. His body of research is the most complete and recent overview of Nanto gakuso's endeavors, and constitutes the basis of the account that follows<sup>22</sup>. For this reason, it is sometimes difficult to disentangle elements that were purposely recast with utilitarian or even self-aggrandizing ends from historically-based claims.

A first, crucial assumption in Kasagi's account is that the history of his group is tantamount to that of Nara's *gagaku* at large. Never tackled directly, the question of how the historical continuity between past and present practitioners of court music was assured at various critical historical junctures is resolved resorting to genealogical lines and sparse quotes from musicians' diaries dating back the Edo period (see Kasagi 2006). However, these documents only account for the years leading to the Meiji restoration, and thus do not truly clarify whether or not the group known today as Nanto gakuso can be taken altogether as the heir to the practice of court music in Nara.

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<sup>21</sup> Most commentators, Japanese or otherwise, have focused on the connection between the group and the ritual life of Kasuga Taisha, while the history of the group itself has remained a relatively unexplored research topic (e.g. Grapard 1992, 157–67; for an exception, see Kitahori 2009).

<sup>22</sup> The most important sources to which I will refer are (Kasagi 1993; 2006; 2014; Kasagi 2008).

According to Kasagi, the history of Nanto gakuso can be divided into three main periods: a “foundational period” coincides with the introduction of court music from the continent to Nara, sometime in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. This was a time in which *gagaku* was essentially a kind of “religious music connected to the introduction of Buddhism” (1993, 20). The second and longest period spans from the transfer of the capital to Heiankyō in 794 to the Meiji revolution, thus coming to a close in 1870. The final phase encompasses the 20<sup>th</sup> century, running all the way until the present. Below, I will briefly sketch out the first two periods and focus more closely on the years between 1868 and 1968. This fundamental century in the history of Nara’s *gagaku* was marked by two defining moments, the Meiji restoration and the official foundation of the association known today as Nanto gakuso (see Table 1). To understand those modern transformations, it is imperative to consider Nara musicians’ claims to the rich heritage of Japanese court music.

Just like Garyōkai projects back its history to the founding figure of Prince Shōtoku, so does Nanto gakuso with Koma no Chikazane (1177-1242), the author of a fundamental treatise on *gagaku* called *Kyōkunshō*<sup>23</sup>. The prestige attributed to the Koma name is twofold: on the one hand, it binds Nara’s *gagaku* to an *intellectual* tradition; on the other, it reconnects the group to a specific line of *transmission*, given that the Koma is one of the oldest families of court music specialists. Self-representations of Nanto gakuso thus suggest from the start that *gagaku* is not only something to perform, but also something to approach as an object of study. As for the claim to an unbroken line of transmission, the most important families credited as ancestors are either related to the Koma (*Komasei*) or to the Fujiwara clans (*Fujiwarasei*): ancient documents mention the family-names Ue, Nishi, Tsuji, Shiba, Oku, Higashi, and Kubo<sup>24</sup>. Others joined the genealogy over the years, making Nanto’s *gakke* the most numerous in Japan. According to this narrative, during the general reorganization of *gagaku* transmission of the late 10<sup>th</sup> century the Koma family was specifically entrusted with the transmission of music “of the left” (i.e. *tōgaku*, mostly hailing from the Chinese empire), while the Ōno family was assigned the music “of the right” (i.e. *komagaku*, mostly hailing from the three

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, Kasagi goes so far as to quote an even earlier member of the Koma clan, Koma no Mitsutaka (959-1048) as a direct ancestor of the group (2014, 128).

<sup>24</sup> See Shiba Sukehiro’s (1898-1982) *Genealogy of the Gagaku Families of the Three Offices of Music* (1967; reprint in T. Tōgi, Shiba, and Hayashi 2006, 238–63).

Kingdoms of Korea) (Kasagi 1993, 23). Throughout the centuries, Nara's *gagaku* musicians (*Nanto gakunin*) continued passing down the tradition, performing at major temple-shrine complexes and, occasionally, at the imperial palace, gradually incorporating the study of *komagaku*.

During the Ōnin wars, only three families remained in Nara to provide music for the many celebrations of major temples and shrines, while the others joined the *gakuso* in the court (Kasagi 1993, 24; 2008, 16). At the outset of the Edo period, during the years leading to the consolidation of the *sanpō gakuso* system, the group of musicians active in Nara officially passed under the jurisdiction of the Kōfukuji temple, the powerful and ancient headquarter of the Hossō school of Buddhism (Skr. Jogacara), built as a tutelary temple for the Fujiwara family and moved to its current location in the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Bowring 2005, 77–78). At the time, the Kōfukuji was at the apex of its power, ruling over most of the territory around the city of Nara (Grapard 1992, 100–114).

However, the practical supervision of the activities of the *gagaku* musicians was carried out by the powerful Yotsuji family, and their headquarters were located at Himuro jinja, a small shrine just outside today's Nara park (Kasagi 2014, 20–21). Its modest size can easily deceive, but the shrine has been fundamental for the history of court music in the region. Often overlooked by foreigners and Japanese alike (the only time of the year in which it attracts a considerable amount of people is when the flowers of its beautiful wisteria tree, visible from the nearby street, are in bloom), Himuro is also overshadowed by its prestigious neighbors (above all the Tōdaiji temple, just a few meters away). It welcomes visitors quietly, even anonymously, with an ordinary orange gate on the roadside, past which very little is detectable. Unassuming as it may be today, the shrine enjoys a certain popularity among *gagaku* practitioners, primarily in connection with Koma Chikazane. In fact, in 1217, following an oracle response, the famous *gagaku* scholar and performer was employed as a priest here (Kasagi 2014, 126). Over the centuries, a cult of his figure developed among lovers of court music and today, a small stone shrine (*hokora*) called Mukōsha bears testimony to the devotion accorded to him (see Fig.4). Located to the back of the main pavilion (*honden*), hidden from view on the right side, the unpretentious Mukōsha contained the mask used in a memorable

performance of the piece *Ranryō*, revered as the receptacle of the body of the deity (*shintai*)<sup>25</sup>.

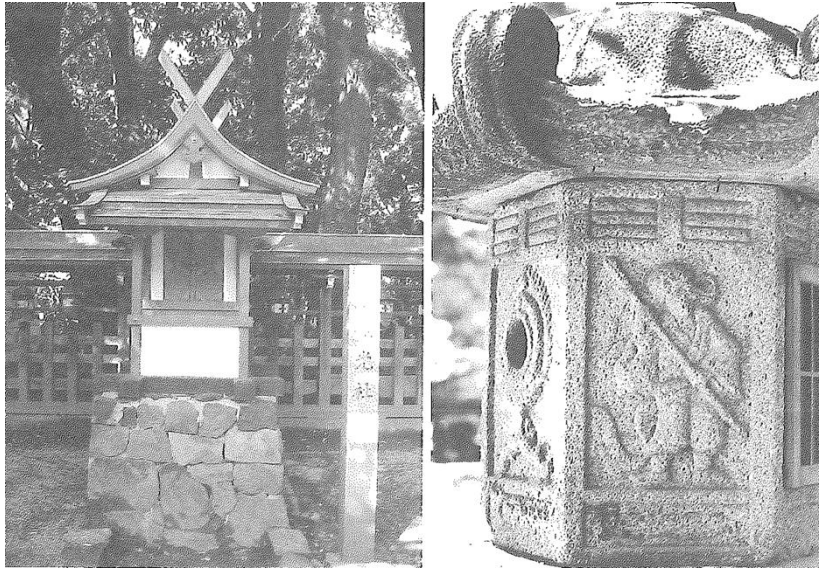
Even though Himuro shrine has been an important site for Nara's *gagaku* since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was especially during the Edo period that the local population became involved in sustaining local musicians, gathering around its stage (Kasagi 2014, 131). Today, the link with this institution remains strong: in May 2014, at the beginning of my fieldwork with Nanto *gakuso*, Professor Kasagi suggested I take a 'personalized tour' of Nara's most relevant 'gagaku spots', guided by a young member of the group. The first stop was Himuro. Listening to a detailed, diligent exposition of the main facts and legends concerning the ancestral Koma family, I was struck by the efforts put into conveying the intensely personal significance the place holds for the group: the scene of a young *gagaku* practitioner bowing in front of the Mukōsha shrine, eyes closed, evidently absorbed, somehow contrasted with the humble, empty grounds surrounding us. It was a strong reminder of the power certain places have to cement people's passions, to reinforce attachments, to nurture commitments. Interestingly, today Himuro jinja is not the headquarter of Nanto *gakuso*, but of a smaller, more recent association called Nanto *kōyōkai*<sup>26</sup>, founded just after the war (Kasagi 2014, 133). In a sense, the site appears to have multiplied its relations with the practice of court music, leading the centennial tradition of mutual affordances with the community into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The close relationship between Himuro jinja and the population of Nara was literally carved in stone in 1834, when the citizens donated a lantern to the shrine: adjacent to the main building of the compound, it is decorated with images of drums and *gagaku* instruments, and one can easily discern a man dancing in a *gagaku* costume on one side (Kasagi 2014, 132) (see **FIG.3.4**). The fact that the donation of the stone lantern took place less than fifty years before the dismantling of local *gagaku* groups is indicative of the persistence of that premodern bond with the community.

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<sup>25</sup> The original mask is considered an Important Cultural Property and is presently stored at Nara National Museum (Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan 2009, 31).

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www1.kcn.ne.jp/~hagi30/Contents/introNara/Himuro/Himuro.html> (accessed 07/08/2016).



**FIGURE 3.4** The small Mukōsha shrine at Himuro jinja (left) and the lantern donated by the citizens of Nara in 1873 (right). From (Kasagi 2008, 17).

However, the situation rapidly deteriorated after 1870, when most *gagaku* musicians in Nara had to move to Tokyo (Kasagi 1993, 24–25). What saved Nara’s *gagaku* from such a state of crisis was the intervention of a group of private individuals that were determined to keep alive specific ritual occasions in which court music played a major role. Almost as soon as the new dispositions concerning the practice of *gagaku* came into effect, an important local shrine, the Kasuga Taisha, manifested the intention to train its religious functionaries (*kannushi*) in the ancient performing art. This was done with an eye on keeping alive the most important *matsuri* of the region, called *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri*. Originated in 1135 CE, the ritual is centered on the performance of a number of ancient performing arts dedicated to a young goddess enshrined in the Wakamiya jinja, itself located just a few meters from the main building of Kasuga Taisha (see Ishii 1987; Nakashima et al. 1991, 11–40). The goddess, Ame no oshikumone no mikoto, is transported to a temporary shrine (*otabisho*), in front of which the main ceremony takes place every year on December 17<sup>27</sup>. Among the arts performed, *gagaku* has the most prominent role<sup>28</sup>, and to this day the ritual is the most important moment of the year for Nanto gaguso. Musicians assign it great significance, and so do scholars: the great

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<sup>27</sup> Useful overviews of the ritual can be found in (Ishii 1987; Amino 1991; Terauchi 2011, 61–95; Nakashima et al. 1991, 160–94).

<sup>28</sup> For a description of the whole ritual with a special focus on the *bugaku* danced pieces, see (Kasagi 2014, 153–83).



ethnologist Orikuchi Shinobu (1877-1953), for instance, has written on the subject (Orikuchi 1967)<sup>29</sup>.

Given the antiquity of the ritual, and its socio-political role in bringing together the population of the whole province of Yamato (Grapard 1992, 157), it is not surprising that a powerful institution such as Kasuga Taisha had an interest in keeping the *Onmatsuri* alive. However, the real challenge was recruiting and training the necessary number of performers<sup>30</sup>. Luckily, in 1873 the study of a number of traditional arts (including *gagaku*) accessible to the general public (Kasagi 2014, 23). Just two years later, thanks to the efforts of Kasuga Taisha's head priest (*gūji*) Miyagawa Tadaoki (1848-1923) (FIG.3.5), a small group started practicing at his shrine (Kasagi 1993, 25). In 1876, 10 of the 17 people who performed at the *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri* were priests at Kasuga Taisha, while the remaining 7 were members of *gagaku* families (Kasagi 2014, 23). In 1877, two priests from the shrine were sent to the (soon to be abolished) branch office of *gagaku* in Kyoto, in this way making a further step toward the transition of the bulk of *gagaku*'s transmission from members of specialized families to a the personnel of a shrine<sup>31</sup>.

During the same years in which several religious specialists were approaching *gagaku*, the citizens of Nara were gradually getting to know court music too. In 1873, the city organized its first *Nara Exposition (Nara hakuran)*, with the purpose of attracting tourists to the ancient capital and in so doing reviving the city's poor economic condition (Kasagi 1993, 22). Given its success, it was decided that the event would be held yearly; to that end, a dedicated Society for the Nara Exposition was founded in 1874 (Kasagi 2014, 24). Within this framework, paintings and precious objects that belonged to aristocratic families or religious institutions started to become available to a much wider public. Among the objects on display were the treasures of the Shōsōin storehouse, which included ancient musical instruments and precious costumes used in performances of

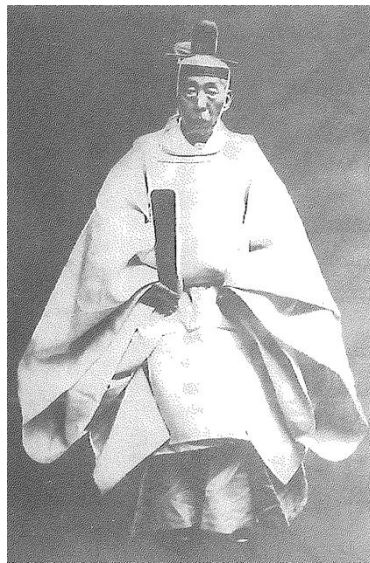
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<sup>29</sup> The full text of Orikuchi's article is available at: [http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000933/files/47688\\_42280.html](http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000933/files/47688_42280.html) (accessed 07/08/2016). On the significance of this festival, and especially on its "layers" grounded in folk beliefs, see also (Hashimoto 1986).

<sup>30</sup> For the performance of a piece with four dancers, for instance, a minimum of sixteen members is necessary. Considering that a change of costumes can take up to one hour, a total of at least twenty members is generally considered appropriate for full-fledged *gagaku* exhibitions.

<sup>31</sup> Kasagi even uses the expression "passing the baton" (*batontacchi*) to describe this delicate institutional shift (2014, 24). Today, prominent members of the group are employed at Kasuga Taisha (see Chapter 4).

*bugaku*<sup>32</sup>. No doubt this contributed greatly to the popularization of court music, essentially conveying the idea that it was a ‘reifiable’ art form, consumable if not (yet) commodifiable<sup>33</sup>. As noted by Kasagi, contemporary public performances of court music promoted as a form of entertainment for the general population also started in 1876, and similarly contributed to such a “visual appreciation of *gagaku*” (Kasagi 2014, 24): for the first time, common people had the opportunity to see and hear directly something that had been reserved to the aristocracy. The excitement, and perhaps the surprise, must have been great.



**FIGURE 3.5** Kasuga Taisha Head Priest Miyagawa Tadaoki. Date unknown. From (Kasagi 2008, 26).

A further step in this progressive ‘opening up’ of *gagaku* in Nara was the creation in 1880 of a group specifically interested in the preservation of *bugaku* dances, following the wish of Kasuga’s head priest Miyagawa. This growing interest eventually led to the creation, in 1903, of an association called Nara *gakukai*; its 9 members included both heirs of *gakke* families and commoners (Kasagi 2014, 25). Importantly, we find here the first indication of the Kasagi family’s direct involvement with *gagaku*: in fact, Kasagi

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<sup>32</sup> This famous treasure house belongs to the Tōdaiji temple, and houses a number of items of great value brought to Japan through the Silk Road in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Only a selection of the objects, preserved in stunningly good conditions, is displayed once a year at Nara national museum. For a study of the musical instruments of the Shōsōin, see (Hayashi 1964).

<sup>33</sup> On this crucial passage from an ‘aerial’ ritual music performed in the “palace on the clouds” (i.e. the imperial palace) to a more “terrestrial” (*chijō*) or, quite literally, down to earth aesthetic form to be appreciated like other entertainment genres, see (Terauchi 2010, viii).

Kamekichi, the father of the present head of Nanto gakuso, joined Nara gakukai from its very inception (Kasagi 2014, 25). The group gradually took over the duties that thus far had fallen upon the priests at Kasuga Taisha, quickly setting in motion a transformation from “a gathering of interested people” to a group of semi-professionals (Kasagi 2014, 25–26). However, this did not mean that religious specialists stopped caring about court music: once again thanks to the intervention of Miyagawa Tadaoki, three priests at Kasuga were appointed the exclusive duty of performing music, thus securing the continuity of *gagaku* transmission inside the shrine too. The first 15 years of the new century were bustling with activities, including performances of Nara gakukai in all major temples in Nara. The general population was thus gradually exposed to the presence of court music in specific, historically relevant sites: in a way, the creation of a widespread awareness of the value of Nara’s ancient temples and shrines in terms of national cultural heritage sites was accompanied by a soundtrack or, better, a soundscape, largely centered on *gagaku* – a phenomenon that must be understood in parallel to the contemporaneous conceptualization of court music as the ‘soundscape’ of *shintō* (see Chapter 2).

As a result of the new popularity of and familiarity with *gagaku*, in 1915 a new association was born, Nara gagakukai, with Miyagawa as its president. In the span of only two years, Nara gagakukai had already reached 210 members, including individuals from the prefectural offices, the city’s administration, various schools and newspapers, and even foreigners: an entire population of ‘modern *gagaku* lovers’ was in the making (Kasagi 2008, 25). Unfortunately, such enthusiasm was short-lived, since it clashed with the political and economic hardships of the 1920s and 30s: after the death of Miyagawa in 1922, several older members of the group passed away, and the securing of a stable system of internal succession became a real issue. Nara gagakukai was renamed Society for the Preservation of the Ancient Arts of Kasuga Shrine in 1932 (Kasuga jinja kogaku hozonkai, see **FIG.3.6**), “in an attempt to modernize it” (Kasagi 2014, 29) that essentially consisted in making it mandatory for a handful of shrine priests across Nara prefecture to take part in an intensive summer course organized within the grounds of Kasuga Taisha and led by instructors dispatched from the imperial household in Tokyo. Though the scale of these dispositions was quite modest, their effects were quite significant: for instance, *gagaku*’s purely instrumental music (*kangen*) started to be employed by local shrines.



**FIGURE 3.6** The members of Kasuga jinja kogaku hozonkai in 1939. From (Kasagi 2008, 29).

Both this summer course and the group Kogaku hozonkai from which it spanned still exist today: joining the Kogaku Hozonkai is mandatory in order to enter Nanto gakuso, even though it is unclear to what extent the activities of the latter differ from those of the former. Moreover, the summer course is still held every August, over the span of six days, and marks a moment of in-depth learning and enthusiastic sharing. The course is an especially meaningful occasion for the new members of Nanto gakuso to get to know each other better in a notably relaxed environment, punctuated by moments of conviviality. Sharing meals and tea breaks in the heat, chatting while walking together through the forest of Nara park, or while smoking a cigarette with the teachers in the designated areas at the back of Kasuga Taisha's buildings, dealing with curious visitors attracted by the unfamiliar sounds piercing through thin, rice paper walls, all this creates a sense of comradeship and strengthens the feeling of belonging to a group of like-minded peers<sup>34</sup>. In this and other ways, today's practice of *gagaku* continues to resonate with the modern history of Nara's court music.

Moreover, as the name itself indicates, the constitution of the Society for the Preservation of the Ancient Arts of Kasuga Shrine signaled a turn toward a more inclusive approach to sustaining *gagaku*, directly addressing and embracing a commitment toward

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<sup>34</sup> I attended the course from August 5<sup>th</sup> to August 10<sup>th</sup> 2014, as part of my fieldwork research (see Chapter 4).

the preservation of local material and immaterial cultural features increasingly perceived in terms of ‘cultural properties’ (*bunkazai*)<sup>35</sup>. Such tendencies must be linked to specific legal and administrative developments: in 1897, the *Old Shrine and Temple Preservation Law* (*Koshaji hozon hō*) was passed (Hughes 2008, 213), and since 1900 the municipality of Nara decided to provide economic aid to the Kasuga kogaku hozonkai (Kasagi 2014, 30). But the true birth of a ‘preservation discourse’ can be identified with the promulgation of the *Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* (*Bunkazai hogohō*) in 1950. As is well known, this formed the basis for the recognition of the category of ‘intangible cultural heritage’ (*mukeni bunkazai*) not only in Japan, but on an international level (Akagawa 2015, 47–78; 2016). Two years later, in 1952, “the *bugaku* of the Southern Capital preserved at Kasuga shrine” was nominated as intangible cultural heritage of Japan, marking a new phase for the history of Nanto gakuso.

The twenty years that separated the creation of the Kasuga kogaku hozonkai from the nomination were an especially difficult time for court music in Nara. The long, dark shadow of the war was cast upon the ancient temples and shrines, and *gagaku* was heard less and less each year. In 1938, in what to be a metaphor of the dark days to come, the so-called *mantōrō* festival held at Kasuga Taisha in August, in which all of its famous stone lanterns are lit up at night, had to be conducted in obscurity, to abide with the new governmental regulations (Kasagi 2008, 32). During the war, numerous members of the Kogaku hozonkai were sent off to fight, and some did not make it back home. Of those who did return, not all rejoined the group (2014, 32). The new phase inaugurated in 1952 with the nomination of the arts of Kasuga to intangible cultural heritage of Japan had the positive effect of reinvigorating the overall status of court music among local musicians: the number of members enrolled in the Kogaku hozonkai gradually increased, celebrations at major temples were resumed, and stability seemed to be an achievable goal. The improved situation formed the backdrop for the revival of the group of performers connected to Kasuga Taisha. In 1968, the Incorporated Association Nanto gakuso detached itself from the preservation group (which nonetheless remained the overarching structure providing an institutional framework) and quickly established itself as the natural heir to Nara’s glorious past (Kasagi 2008, 40). The following decades belong to the contemporary history of the group, and were characterized by the

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<sup>35</sup> For a general discussion of this crucial theme in a Japanese context, see (Thornbury 1997; Lancashire 2013). On the birth of Japanese preservation societies, see (Hughes 2008, 212–14).

expansion of Nanto gakuso’s activities beyond the confines of Nara prefecture, of Kansai and of Japan as a whole. Within the span of a few years, the heirs to the *gakunin* of the southern capital had become ambassadors of Japanese court music on a truly international stage.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENT</b>
<b>1868</b>	Meiji restoration
<b>1870</b>	Foundation of the Office of <i>Gagaku</i> (Tokyo)
<b>1873</b>	Nara Exhibition
<b>1875</b>	Court music training at Kasuga Taisha
<b>1876</b>	Foundation of Nara Gakukai
<b>1914</b>	Nara gagakukai
<b>1932</b>	Kasuga jinja kogaku hozonkai
<b>1950</b>	Promulgation of the <i>Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties</i>
<b>1952</b>	“Ancient arts of Kasuga jinja” nominated Japanese Important Intangible Cultural Heritage
<b>1968</b>	Foundation of Nanto gakuso incorporated association

**TABLE 3.1** One hundred years of *gagaku* in Nara: main relevant events and institutional changes.

### 3.5 THE APPEARANCE OF THE MODERN *GAGAKU* AMATEUR

A thorough examination of the recent histories of local groups in Kansai's 'gagaku triangle' makes it possible to detect a number of common threads in the ways local practitioners have managed to sustain and maintain the transmission of court music during an especially troubled time. Some of these are dynamics that encompass broader portions of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese society, while others are directly related to the specificities of court music's history. First and foremost, all three centers of *gagaku* transmission relied heavily on religious institutions with which they had previously established quasi-exclusive collaborative relationships. Although especially evident in the cases of Osaka's tight connection with Shitennōji and of Nara's historical bond with Kasuga Taisha, this was also true in the case of Kyoto, as evidenced by Heian gagakukai's participation in the most important *matsuri* of the city since at least the late 1930s. Furthermore, given the effects of the new political deliberations concerning religious practices, the nature of those connections with religious institutions had to be somewhat reshaped: while for the Osaka musicians this meant renewing their attachment to Pure Land Buddhism, Nara's *gagaku* came to be strictly identified with *shintō* sites. A similar dynamic seems to apply to Kyoto musicians, considering the frequency with which they performed and continue to perform at shrines such as Kitano Tenmangū and Nishiki Tenmangū (Hira Nakagawa and Yamato 1986).

One of the most important consequences of this heightened role of shrines and temples in the practice of *gagaku* was the shift in the composition of the members of each group. After the relocation of many hereditary families to Tokyo and the decision to make the study of court music accessible to everyone in 1873, the number of monks and priests that became involved in learning and passing on *gagaku* increased considerably. Both in Osaka and in Nara, important figures like reverend Ono Shōin and head priest Miyagawa Tadaoki became veritable champions of court music, almost singlehandedly shaping modern *gagaku* practice in their respective contexts. In fact, it is probably no exaggeration to say that were it not for them court music would have run a much greater risk of losing relevance and followers, potentially disappearing from the map in important cities like Osaka and Nara. In this sense, despite the efforts of the Hosokawa family to restore the place of *gagaku* in Kyoto's cultural life, the lack of a figure

comparable to those of Ono and Miyagawa may have been an important factor preventing Kyoto's court music to regain a central position in Kansai.

Another important feature in the responses of Nara, Osaka and Kyoto groups to the developments of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was the renewal of their connection with what was portrayed as the glorious past of court music. Traumatic as the creation of the Office of *Gagaku* may have been, the event should not be seen as a surgical cut with what came before: even if the disbanding of local groups had an undeniable 'watershed effect', practitioners in all three performing centers exploited the "symbolic capital" (in Pierre Bourdieu's terms) of *gagaku* and of ancient Japanese history. Thus, while Osaka's Garyōkai reinforced the image of an 'alternative tradition' dating back to the time of prince Shōtoku, Nara's various groups resorted to the connection between the Kasuga shrine and the Fujiwara family, as well as to the fact that Nara had been the ancient capital of Japan and, perhaps even more importantly, the endpoint of the Silk Road –the one place on earth in which the tradition of court music survived<sup>36</sup>. As for Kyoto, what more prestigious tradition could ever be summoned than the imperial court itself, unchallenged center of *gagaku*'s history from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century? In all these cases, what seems especially important is not so much the fact that the past was reinvented, but rather that it was channeled into the present features of modern groups, in so doing hoping that an echo of bygone glories would still resonate in the eyes and ears of new audiences.

The reassertion of each group's roots stands out as a paradigmatic trait reverberating throughout the '*gagaku* triangle' since the first years of the Meiji and all the way to the present. However, this can also be interpreted as an astute strategy to conceive what was perhaps the greatest change of all in the passage from before to after 1870 –namely the changed status of the court music practitioner. In fact, what for centuries had been a role reserved exclusively to specialized families and court aristocrats suddenly became a pursuable path for anyone willing to invest the necessary amount of time and effort. More research needs to be conducted on this crucial topic, but the fundamental features in the appearance of the modern *gagaku* practitioner seem to be two: the fact that he (and later she) was an amateur and not a professional remunerated in exchange for his performances, and the gradual crystallization of new hereditary lines of transmission.

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<sup>36</sup> A claim in no small part supported by the existence of the Shōsoin treasure house.



Even though the second characteristic is a more recent phenomenon, it is worth looking at both in the context of their establishment.

Research on the often underestimated popularity of court music during the Edo period has convincingly demonstrated that there existed an extended “network of *gagaku* amateurs” (Minamitani 2005), linking major towns and remote villages through the circulation of court music masters and apprentices. In fact, wealthy merchants in urbanized areas took up the study of *gagaku*, while masters were ordinarily travelling to the countryside to impart private classes (Minamitani 2005, 22–23). The existence of such a diffuse web of interchanges involving court music must also be considered in light of the complexity of 17<sup>th</sup>-century attitudes toward music. These were in no small part informed by Confucian ideas, so that *gagaku* came to be perceived as the paramount example of proper, elegant, refined (*ga*) music (Groemer 2012, 31). Even though this high status of court music determined a hiatus between this performing art and the population, “the rapid commercialization and commodification of much Edo-period culture meant that class distinctions in the realm of the musical world were difficult to maintain. For an appropriate fee nearly anyone could learn [anything]”, including *gagaku* (Groemer 2012, 32). For all these reasons, the emergence of the *gagaku* amateur at the end of the Meiji period was not an entirely new phenomenon. However, what truly distinguished this new historical phase was the fact that for the first time amateur practitioners could join groups with centennial histories of *gagaku* transmission. Of course, this was especially true in the case of Nara, Kyoto and Osaka, where claims to authenticity could be fully substantiated by historical documents.

The entrance of this new figure in the world of court music was at first little more than a matter of finding a way to ensure that local traditions would not die out. And yet, the situation became increasingly complex with the passage of time, as the three ‘modern offices of music’ gradually became well-established social realities. Especially in the case of Garyōkai and Nanto gakuso, certain families became more prominent than others, and new hereditary lines began to form. The Ono family in Osaka and the Kasagi family in Nara, in particular, have been steadily at the top of each group’s hierarchy for nearly a century, passing down the title of *gakutō* or ‘Head of the Art’ to each successive male son in the line. Though the phenomenon is relatively recent and confined to just three generations, it is perhaps possible to start posing the question of whether ‘new *gakke*’ or ‘new *gagaku* families’ have formed since the Meiji. If this is the case, we would be

witnessing a fascinating case of ‘tradition in the making’ in which members of families who do not belong to ancient genealogical lines nonetheless tend to replicate the social patterns with *gagaku* has been passed down until the Meiji period. Moreover, the ‘heads’ of the most important local groups in Kansai occupy a somewhat ambiguous position vis-à-vis the ‘social status pyramid’ of the world of court music –a pyramid with the Imperial Household musicians firmly sitting at the top. As recognized authorities, local leaders are influential actors in the power dynamics and complex negotiations between center and periphery. Moreover, they have great influence over the future of amateur groups, since they both retain a symbolic status as representatives of large groups and manage the (variously mediated) power to take operational, executive decisions within the groups themselves. Thus, even though the establishment of these ‘new *gakke*’ is a markedly modern phenomenon resulting from the reshuffling of post-1870 western *gagaku* practice, its analysis and significance must be based on the present.

Analyzing the three vertexes of what I have called the ‘*gagaku* triangle’ in the Kansai region highlights similarities and differences in the ways each group of performers has reacted to the complex construct of ‘modernity’. Certainly there appears to be a significant degree of consistency between Kyoto’s, Osaka’s and Nara’s specific histories of *gagaku* transmission and their 19<sup>th</sup>-century counterparts. On the other hand, different social contexts have brought about original solutions and specific organizational choices. Moreover, in all three cases contemporary groups are the direct result of evolutions that have originated in the Meiji period. The clearest resonant note within the *gagaku* triangle appears to be the emergence of a new social figure, the modern *gagaku* amateur. While its establishment is sufficiently clear, to understand the practice of court music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is essential to figure out who is the contemporary counterpart of this modern figure. In other words, understanding what it means to be a *gagaku* amateur today could shed a light on the reasons why so many men and women have joined nonprofessional groups in the past 20 to 25 years. The next chapter addresses these issues on the basis of extensive fieldwork conducted with the Nanto *gakuso*; analyzing the group’s activities in the context of contemporary Japanese society it hopes to catch a glimpse of the passion that moves and motivates lovers of Japanese court music.

## CHAPTER 4

### “THE *GAGAKU* OF THE SOUTHERN CAPITAL”

#### PRACTICING *GAGAKU* LOCALLY IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN<sup>1</sup>

Entering the field was easy. In May 2013, on a meteorologically impeccable spring day, I sat down with Professor Kasagi Kan'ichi, leader of Nanto *gakuso*, and with Professor Suzuki Haruo, from the Tokyo-based group Nippon *gagakukai*. The coffee shop, just outside Nara's Kintetsu train station, was busy but quiet –not at all an oxymoron in this country. Kasagi *sensei* was extraordinary in his composure: soft and polite voice, quiet eyes suggesting genuine curiosity, a smile that made me think of a child. The meeting was organized long before my arrival in Japan. Suzuki *sensei*, who was an acquaintance of a former supervisor, had agreed to intercede for me, in the hope that I would be taken in as a “special student” by Nanto *gakuso*. Given the prearranged nature of the encounter, there was hardly anything for me to say or do. Suzuki *sensei* compressed my life into two short sentences: my initial Ph.D. project was exposed in all its vagueness; my former

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on two fieldwork experiences among the members of Nanto *gakuso*, conducted between April 2013 and March 2014 and again between October 2015 and September 2016. Some of its contents have been previously touched upon in (Giolai 2016).

“training in Western flute” was brought up<sup>2</sup>. Finally, the conversation landed on the fact that I was hoping to train in court music, perhaps in the *ryūteki* flute. Whether this was for pleasure or for research purposes, or a mixture of the two, was something left unsaid. In fact, *the* request was never stated out loud. Kasagi seemed attentive, if somewhat detached. Within the span of three or four sips of coffee, the conversation could move on to different topics: upcoming concerts, this year’s shrine celebrations, the usual pleasantries. On my end of the table, I did my best to silently fade from view.

Before sending us off at the train station, Kasagi *sensei* told me he would take the matter to the Rijikai, the administrative board of Nanto gakuso, and that I could probably join the weekly rehearsals from the second week of June, if not earlier. Would I also be interested in witnessing a ritual, called *Hōgakusai*, the attendance of which was normally restricted to the members of the group and their families? Needless to say, I was more than interested: I was excited. So, on June 8, I went to Kasuga Taisha. At around 5 pm; when the last visitors stepped outside the main pavilion, escorted by *miko* priestesses wearing colorful hair decorations of wisteria flowers, preparations for the ritual began – and I had that feeling for the first time. The forest’s mysterious atmosphere, the silent gravel, the sense that you could hear the trees breathe in<sup>3</sup>. The shrine was empty. Ours. Mine, too. I felt the thrill of exclusivity, the privilege of being there. And somewhere in there, I felt a sense of familiarity, a quietness of sorts. Then came the music, the costumes, the fire in the braziers as the light of day went out (FIG.4.1 AND 4.2). Then, when the ritual was over, a different soundscape set in: the forest in the dark; steps on the gravel; cheerful goodbyes. In just a few minutes, the shrine was behind me and I was back on a train, among sleepy high school students and salarymen staring vacuously at their phones. But the sounds of *gagaku* wouldn’t let go: I could still hear them resonate, enfolding me like an invisible substance muffling the normal sonic impact of reality. The ritual left me floating and suspended. Entering the field was wonderful. It was a thrill, a confirmation, a surfeit of emotions I was eager to explore.

Just one week later, in a building not far from the same Kintetsu Nara station, fifty-odd members of Nanto gakuso were getting ready to start the weekly practice. Thin, wooden

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<sup>2</sup> I studied transverse flute professionally for over ten years and graduated from music school in 2009.

<sup>3</sup> In 1998, the “Kasugayama Primeval Forest” that surrounds Kasuga Taisha was inscribed in the World Heritage List as part of the “Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara” (see <http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/870.pdf> accessed August 13, 2016).

sliding doors (*fusuma*) separated the rooms, but this provided very little actual acoustic isolation. I could hear the conversations overlap in the next room, as practitioners flocked in. Suzuki *sensei* had lent me a plastic replica of a *ryūteki* flute, and I had bought the scores online, together with an introductory book on how to play the three wind instruments of *gagaku* (see Sasamoto 2004). At that point, I was still struggling with notes' names and fingers' positions, all the while trying to decipher the score's indications on meter and mode. Sitting at the back of the room, I suddenly felt overwhelmed: the piercing sounds of *ryūteki* and *hichiriki*, mixed to the practitioners' voices, created a thick wall of incomprehensible noise. I looked around, and everyone was busy doing something: chatting, taking out their scores and recorders and pencils...only I was sitting still, not knowing exactly what to do. I felt suddenly uncomfortable, markedly out of place. Japanese, English and Italian musical terms amassed in my head as I kept looking down at my tiny notebook, as if an answer could magically surface from the blank page. Now the sonic contours of my unraveling ethnographic experience were very different: confusing, almost aggressive, unwelcoming. The teacher sat behind a low desk, everyone bowed and the class began. Struggling to find the right page, I browsed the scores frantically. A woman sitting next to me silently offered to help. I handed her the small book, and in the blink of an eye she returned it to me, the title of the piece staring back at me: three characters I was not sure how to pronounce. I smiled and thanked, but deep inside I asked myself: "How can I even begin to understand what it means to be one of you?".





**FIGURES 4.1 AND 4.2.** Two moments of the *Hōgakusai*. June 8, 2013 (Pictures by the author).

#### **4.1 “YOU DON’T JUST DO WHAT YOU LOVE”: BEING AN ‘AMATEUR’ IN NANTO GAKUSO**

Academic research on amateurism generally belongs to the broader framework of sociological studies of art and sport. These tend to emphasize the processes of socialization at play within amateur groups, as well as the complex role of class, gender and ethnicity in the pursuit of specific amateur activities (e.g. Meyer 2008; Hanquinet and Savage 2016; Coakley 2014). Despite this shared sociological background, however, the figure of the amateur has been left largely untheorized: most descriptions resort to the naïve distinction between “professionals” and “non-professionals”, and definitions are often equivocal or inconsistent (see Stebbins 1977, 583–84; Gray 2013, 19–20). In fact, a widespread negative characterization of amateurs reduces them to individuals lacking some of the features and requirements of professionals. The absence of a significant monetary intake for the amateurs’ activities and the limited amount of time at his or her disposal are but the most cited examples of such a purported deficiency (Stebbins 1977, 585). Similarly, amateurs are sometimes contrasted with “hobbyists” on the basis of the existence, for the former, of a pursuable professional career which the latter cannot have access to: as pointed out by Stebbins, “one cannot be an amateur butterfly-catcher or

matchbook collector; no opportunity for full-time employment exists here” (1977, 588). Moreover, comparisons with work also characterize sociological definitions of the broader category of “leisure”, generally understood as bringing together the activities of amateurs, hobbyists, volunteers, devotees and dabblers under a single rubric (Stebbins 1992; 2014; Scraton 2011). Leisure is seen as an activity which typically “provides individuals with the opportunity for relaxation, the broadening of knowledge, and social participation” beyond other obligations (such as work and family) (Scraton 2011, 351). In brief, despite its relevance to the sociological field, amateurism is often simplistically portrayed in opposition to work, with little or no effort put into producing a subtler understanding of the phenomenon.

Even though Stebbins has every right to claim that such “unidimensional definitions fail to communicate the essence of amateur and professionals”<sup>4</sup> (1977, 585), the fact remains that binary judgments are common among amateurs themselves. In the case of Nanto gakuso, for instance, Kasagi has stressed that “all the members have their own professional activity, and none of them makes a living from performing court music alone. In other words, they are *not professionals*” (Kasagi 2008, 68 emphasis added). Similarly, a male practitioner in his forties<sup>5</sup> once told me that “Only the court musicians can eat from playing *gagaku*. We are *gagaku* enthusiasts (*aikōka*), but we don’t really think about becoming professionals (*puro*)”<sup>6</sup>. These examples are important reminders that the line between emic and etic concepts can be blurred<sup>7</sup>, and that it is sometimes necessary to “de-socialize the amateurs” (Hennion 2015, 271), given that they often knowingly or unknowingly appropriate the vocabulary they expect scholars or ‘experts’ to employ when referring to them. Thus, any discussion of the role of court music’s practitioners must be wary of the dangers intrinsic to superficial sociological approaches, while at the same time resisting taking for granted the categorizations of the actors themselves.

In this sense, recent research in the sociology of music represents a more reliable and increasingly coherent platform for the study of amateurs. Drawing inspiration from such diverse influences as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, anthropology and,

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<sup>4</sup> Though of course it is doubtful that anyone could find such an “essence”. Indeed, positing it may itself be quite pointless.

<sup>5</sup> All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, February 2014.

<sup>7</sup> On the classic anthropologic pair emic/etic, see (Fetterman 2008; Geertz 1974).

above all, science and technology studies (STS), scholars such as Tia DeNora and Antoine Hennion have worked extensively on the uses of music in everyday life, coming to a radical reconsideration of the role of the amateur in the dynamic “co-construction” of music and society (Shepherd and Devine 2015, 10; see in particular DeNora 2000; 2014; Hennion 2005; 2015 [1993]). In *Music and Everyday Life* (2000), DeNora claims that “musical materials provide parameters that are used to frame dimensions of experience” (2000, 27), ultimately suggesting that the careful examination of those dimensions of experience<sup>8</sup> leads to a reconsideration of music as “an ally for a variety of world-making activities” (2000, 40). Appropriating James Gibson’s influential concept of “affordance” (2014, 119), she also shows how music is often perceived as “analogous or homologous” to individuals’ “modes of being” (DeNora 2000, 122) and how, for this reason, it can be conceptualized as “a technology of the self” (DeNora 1999; see also 2000, 45–74). Hennion, on the other hand, starts from a severe critique of Bourdieu’s sociology of taste<sup>9</sup>, and proposes instead to work toward a “pragmatics of taste” resting on an inclusive “theory of passion” that accounts for the ways amateurs create specific attachments to the world (see Hennion 2005). Accordingly, he defines amateurs in the broadest possible way as “‘users of music’, that is, active practitioners of a love for music, whether it involves playing, being part of a group, attending concerts or listening to records or the radio” (Hennion 2001, 1)<sup>10</sup>. In this view, “taste is a ‘performance’: it acts, it engages, it transforms and *makes one sensitised*. In this event, or this becoming, if music counts, it will end up indefinitely transformed through the contact with its public, because it depends of, and is *ultimately undistinguishable from, the chain of its modes of execution and appreciation, and of our training to attend to it as such*” (Hennion 2008, 43 emphasis added).

Especially important for Hennion (and for the following analysis of court music’s practitioners) is the fact that the amateur is not simply subject to an invisible and impalpable “power of the music”: to the contrary, he or she actively resorts to a potentially infinite series of material and immaterial means to construct and mediate a

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<sup>8</sup> What she significantly refers to as “ethnomethodological ethnomusicology” (DeNora 2000, 155).

<sup>9</sup> Such approaches are summarized with the lapidary sentence “taste is culture’s way of masking domination” (Hennion 2005, 132). For a review of the debates surrounding Bourdieu’s influential contributions to the sociology of art and music, see (Prior 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Stebbins too noted that, etymologically, the amateur is “one who loves”, but specified that the activity the amateur is engaged in is “rarely an unalloyed joy”, and that therefore this definition should be carefully qualified (1977, 590).



relationship with the object of his or her passion (Hennion 2012, 251). The process of *sensitization* that results from this mediated relationship is a central characteristic of amateurism as a whole: indeed, practitioners of an art learn to perceive it in certain ways through bodily techniques that are inseparable from specific, negotiated emotional responses. In this way, sensing exceeds Cartesian binary distinctions between body and mind, subject and object, abstract and concrete (see Lock and Farquhar 2007). Thus, embracing Hennion's theoretical view necessarily means recognizing the significance of to the so-called Actor-Network Theory<sup>11</sup>, in particular when it comes to the idea that both amateurs and researchers are caught up "in a dense *material-semiotic network*" (Law 2004, 68 emphasis in the original). The contributions of DeNora and Hennion are particularly significant in that they both acknowledged the reflexivity of actors that had long been silenced by sociologists, urging us to take seriously the apparently mundane dimension of everyday practices.

Even accepting Hennion's loose definition of amateurs as "users of music", however, the necessity to provide a typology of Nanto gakuso's members clashes with difficulty of translating the very term 'amateur' in Japanese. The issue is not one of mere linguistic incommensurability: as already mentioned, members of the group show a penchant toward presenting themselves as 'nonprofessionals', in this way internalizing sociological analytical. However, while doing so they also resort to a set of words that exceeds the mere professional/nonprofessional binarism. In general, the term *puro*, borrowed from the English "professional", is opposed to either *shirōto* or *amachua*, itself a borrowing from "amateur". Because it generally refers to "someone who has no experience with something" (Shinmura 1993, 1315), *shirōto* is perceived by members of the group as having derogatory connotations. For this reason, *amachua* is more widely used. Here is how one of my key informants, a man in his mid-thirties who has been playing in the group for nearly twenty years, reacted to my simple exposition of Hennion's use of the term:

INTERVIEWER: So you know, "amateur" comes from this French verb, *aimer*, which means "to love". I guess that's an important part of being a member of a group.

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<sup>11</sup> For concise but insightful overviews of this perspective, see (Latour 1999; Mol 2010).

RESPONDER: Well, certainly most people would agree that we love *gagaku*, though of course it sounds a bit strange to put it like this...[smiles] I mean, we do love it, but we don't really say things like "I love gagaku", you know? You don't just do what you love<sup>12</sup>.

While on the one hand he seems to approve of my use of the term amateur, this young man also highlights the fact that making reference to the category of 'love' might in itself be problematic. This is hardly surprising, considering how much the concept of love is subject to diverging cultural interpretations. More importantly, his words also suggest that linking 'passion' to 'practice' may not be enough to account for the ways in which court music practitioners think about themselves.

That passion or emotional engagement is an important shared dimension of Nara's court music performers is reflected by their use of another term, *aikōka*, which incorporates two characters that express love or deep care about things or persons and is often used in the sense of 'aficionado', 'devotee', 'enthusiast'. When a man in his forties noticed that "Only the court musicians can eat from playing *gagaku*", and that, in contrast, Nanto gakuso was an association of *aikōka*, what he was hinting at was the fact that despite the disparity in economic gain between 'professionals' and 'nonprofessionals', the latter can be just as much invested in performing court music as the former. Similarly, one of the group's 'veterans' once told me that "Imperial Household musicians are good and fine, but it's all a bit routine-like. This way is more interesting, and it's good to see so many people playing because they like it"<sup>13</sup>.

Yet another possible rendition of the word amateur is the term *jissensha*, or 'practitioner', also sporadically used by members of Nanto gakuso. Even though I initially tended to favor this word, I soon realized that *jissen* (practice) and *jissensha* are technical terms rarely employed by research participants<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, after a presentation I gave in front of the group at the end of my first year of fieldwork in 2014, a woman in her forties, who also played the *ryūteki*, approached me and told me that while she liked the title I chose for my presentation, *The Practice of Gagaku in Contemporary Japanese Society*, she was wondering what I meant with 'practice'. When I replied that I simply meant the

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, December 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Interview, February 2014.

<sup>14</sup> In Japan, studies of "practice", including the lively debate on the so-called "theory of practice" famously outlined by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), invariably use this term (e.g. Tanabe 2003; Tanabe and Matsuda 2002).

manifold activities of the members of the group, she thought for a second and dismissively mumbled: “Yes, yes, I guess you can call those ‘practice’...”<sup>15</sup>. The skepticism in her tone spoke volumes to the gap between *their* conceptualizations and *mine*: a gap I was trying to fill, not widen. Indeed, the episode reveals a certain split between emic and etic understandings reverberating in the use of the words ‘amateur’ and ‘practitioner’. Below, I will employ both as virtually interchangeable, even though I acknowledge that ‘practitioners’ rarely refer to themselves as such<sup>16</sup>. Of course, Hennion’s definition is so broad that many types of practitioners, including professionals, could be termed ‘amateurs’, fitting in their characterization as “users of music”. Still, the defining trait of Hennion’s practitioners is their passion. *Gagaku* practitioners complicate this line of reasoning, while at the same time being fully describable as amateurs. Indeed, the correct way to express the interrelation of these two dimensions would be to call them ‘amateur practitioners’.

When they refer to themselves, members of Nanto gakuso resort to a ‘differential rationale’: in effect, their choice of a word actively ‘blocks out’ the overtones implied by the others at their disposal. By doing this, they manage to convey more precisely a specific kind of self-identification vis-à-vis larger realities, such as the world of *gagaku* as a whole (when they call themselves *aikōka* in opposition to the Tokyo musicians), the distinction between professionalism and amateurism (when they contrast *amachua* with *puro*), or the involvement in a specific, regulated activity (when they opt for *jissensha*). In other words, by selecting a particular word, practitioners can emphasize what they are not (“We are amateurs, not professionals”) or make clear what they value in the broader world of court music (“We are music lovers, we are not in the music business”). Ultimately, members of Nanto gakuso do not seem to subscribe to any simple definition of what it means to be a *gagaku* practitioner: in this sense, ‘amateur’ is not a marker of identity, it is merely one of several available forms of self-description. Indeed, if anything can be said about the complex topic of the practitioners’ identity, it is that this would be better described as multiple rather than as stable or monolithic<sup>17</sup>. Perhaps, then, being a

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<sup>15</sup> Personal communication, March 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps there is nothing particularly surprising about this: the fact that most high school teachers do not refer to themselves as ‘educators’ does not lessen the explanatory force of the concept as used by different actors.

<sup>17</sup> On moving “beyond identity”, see (Brubareck and Cooper 2000). For a brief overview of the most recent debates concerning the relationship between music and identity, see (Roy and Dowd 2010, 189–91).

practitioner in Japanese court music would be better described as a process through which one 'becomes many', rather than a path leading to the crystallization of a fixed identity.

## 4.2 BECOMING AN AMATEUR: TYPOLOGIES OF NANTO GAKUSO'S PRACTITIONERS

As of today, both men and women can become members of Nanto gakuso<sup>18</sup>, and even though the charter of Nanto gakuso officially sets an age limit of 45 years for new practitioners, exceptions are possible. Indeed, an interest in court music is in principle all it takes to qualify. However, a shared endeavor is no guarantee of a group's uniformity and cohesion. In fact, different personalities and backgrounds normally contribute to internal diversity, sometimes giving rise to contrasts and complex power dynamics. Nonetheless, providing a typology of *gagaku*'s practitioners is useful in that it can shed light on the ways men and women approach court music in contemporary Japan.

Group members are required to choose among the three wind instruments of the ensemble as soon as they join Nanto gakuso. *Ryūteki*, *hichiriki* and *shō* practitioners are subsequently grouped together, and weekly rehearsals are conducted on the basis of these smaller subgroups<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, during these lessons there is very little interaction among members practicing different instruments: the primary socialization of Nanto gakuso's members takes place within one's instrument's subgroup. On a superficial level, therefore, the easiest typology of *gagaku* amateurs coincides with the initial choice of one of the three wind instruments. Even though I sporadically observed *hichiriki* and *shō* rehearsals in the course of my first year of fieldwork, what follows is largely based on the *ryūteki* lessons. I chose to focus on one instrument mostly because this would give me the possibility to achieve a higher proficiency, which indeed proved fundamental in order to be able to fully appreciate the subtleties of more advanced stages of court music's training. The *ryūteki* subgroup is also the most numerous, with as many as ??? practitioners.

From the examination of a complete list of members referring to the year 2012, I was able to ascertain that the total number of practitioners (including new ones enrolled that very year) amounted to 123 individuals. This was the official number of members when I started my fieldwork in 2013. In reality, however, I soon realized that that figure had to

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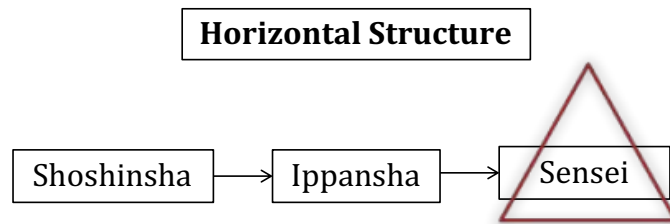
<sup>18</sup> Gendered aspects of *gagaku* practice are a neglected topic. This is regrettable, since there are clear differences in what men and women can or should, do both in the practice room and on stage. Unfortunately, space limitations prevent a fuller exploration.

<sup>19</sup> As for the dances, a number of years and an official decision on the part of the administrative board are necessary before the practitioner can choose between the *tōgaku* and *komagaku* repertoire. Once the choice is made, he or she will always and only be able to dance the pieces belonging to that particular repertoire (Kasagi 2008, 69).

be reduced to approximately 70 individuals, 40 of whom may be rightfully considered 'regulars'. In fact, the remaining 30-odd members attended the weekly rehearsals quite loosely, on average about once or twice a month. By contrast, regulars came in at least twice a month, and a few were almost always present. This distinction also matches the semi-official, internal subdivision of the group among 'beginners' (*shoshinsha*) and 'regulars' (*ippansha*) (Kasagi 2008, 68).

The weekly practice also follows this model, with a 'beginners' class' from 7 to 8 pm, and a more 'advanced class' from 8 to 10 pm every Saturday night. Nonetheless, most of the 'regulars' also attend the first class, regardless of their 'higher' status. The age range among practitioners is rather wide, and is not necessarily aligned with the aforementioned distinction between *shoshinsha* and *ippansha*: though children from 3 years of age only attend the first class, regular members aged 20 to 80 can attend both. In other words, age in itself is not a determining factor to decide whether a practitioner is a beginner or a regular. It is also common for different members of the same family to be part of the group: at times, representatives from three generations may sit next to one another. This may be the single most important factor contributing to the overall atmosphere of 'familiarity' invariably pointed out as an important feature of the group.

These simple characteristics indicate that the structure of the group presents itself at first as remarkably horizontal: indeed, proximity is both a physical and an abstract trait of Nanto gakuso's practice. Beginners' classes seamlessly flow into regulars' with little changes in the setting (if any), and no major distinction in format. On such a horizontal plain, members can be divided into beginners (*shoshinsha*), regulars (*ippansha*) and teachers/instructors (*sensei*) (see **TAB. 4.1**). This is also the most accurate representation of the overall, phenomenological impression encountered at the outset of my fieldwork, reinforced by frequent allusions to the metaphor of the group as a family. Needless to say, such an imagery simultaneously conveys both a sense of mutual support or diffuse affection and the acute awareness of an existing, precise distribution of power.



**TABLE 4.1.** The horizontal structure of Nanto gakuso.

Interestingly, upon closer inspection it became clear that identifiable subsets within Nanto gakuso correspond to a specific age distribution, and that each of these subsets is characterized by the particular circumstances that prompted its members to join the group. In other words, age itself is less a marker of the achievement of mastery, and more an indication of how a certain individual might have come to be involved in *gagaku*. In this sense, younger members, between 5 and 20 years of age, constitute a subset that is best described by the expression ‘family-obligation’. These are elementary, middle school or high school students who are often strongly encouraged by their families to join Nanto gakuso as a sort of ‘educational hobby’. This subgroup of practitioners is also characterized by the underlying tension between the necessity to make sure that a new generation will take on the performance of *gagaku* in Nara and an objective high dropout rate, which endangers the transmission of tradition. During an interview with a regular member in his fifties, this conundrum emerged with great clarity:

INTERVIEWER: I noticed that there are many children coming to the weekly rehearsal...

RESPONDER: Yes, it’s very sweet to see them playing with their flutes for the first time, their little fingers can’t even cover the holes! [laughs] But you know, many of them are sent by their mothers...it’s normal actually, to have the mother who says: “Go to study *gagaku*!” and there’s nothing the kids can do...they just have to come. I guess the mothers think it’s good for the children, that they’re going to learn something. But unfortunately most of these kids drop out of the group quite soon. It’s difficult, when you think about the future. It all depends on how many of them will stay in the group<sup>20</sup>.

As this practitioner points out, the youngest subset of the group is in a certain sense also the weakest: the fact that at a beginners’ lesson an average of 5 to 10 practitioners are

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<sup>20</sup> Interview, October 2013.

below 20 years of age may stand out at first, but it does not automatically guarantee the generational turnover necessary for a steady transmission of the tradition.

A second identifiable subgroup comprises members between 20 and 50 years of age. These constitute the majority of the ‘regulars’, and have generally spent at least a decade practicing court music. In general, these practitioners are mostly hailing from the middle-class, they are educated and generally enthusiastic about performing *gagaku*<sup>21</sup>. Their geographical provenance is uniform: the overwhelming majority of them was born and raised in Nara prefecture, where they also work and reside. However, a small number of practitioners commutes by train from Kyoto or nearby smaller cities<sup>22</sup>. The fact that they choose to enroll into Nanto gakuso and not one of the groups active in Kyoto is noteworthy. Some say that the main reason is monetary: in fact, the annual fee of Nara’s *gagaku* group is a mere 60 dollars. Others quote the relaxed atmosphere of the rehearsals and the possibility to relax and get to know people with similar interests. The overwhelming majority of these members either witnessed a performance of Nanto gakuso that induced an interest in court music or came into direct contact with the group’s leader, Kasagi Kan’ichi. Accounts of both situations abounded during my fieldwork. This is how a female practitioner in her late thirties, mother of two children also enrolled in the group, recalls her initial decision to try practicing *gagaku*:

I went to see the Wakamiya Onmatsuri festival one winter, about two years ago, and I remember I was so impressed by the *bugaku* pieces! Maybe it was the atmosphere in general, but I really remember it vividly. Then for a while I kept thinking about *gagaku* from time to time but didn’t do anything about it. And then I went to see Nanto gakuso again on a fixed performance, on Children’s Day [a national holiday celebrated on May 5], and again I was impressed –I thought the costumes were so elegant, and I loved the sound of the mouth organ. It’s so relaxing! So I finally went to *okeiko* one night and I met Professor Kasagi. He was very nice, and I was instantly convinced. Since then I kept coming, also with my children, and they also like it very much!<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> One informant once told me in passing that there are many teachers in Nanto gakuso, referring to the fact that several adult members are employed as teachers in primary or secondary schools in or around Nara.

<sup>22</sup> This minority of about 6 members was especially important in the course of my fieldwork, since on the way back to Kyoto we often engaged in relaxed, carefree conversations which provided a good opportunity for authentic “ethnographic hanging out” and, occasionally, for fully-fledged, 45-minute long unstructured interviews (see Bernard 2006, 368–69).

<sup>23</sup> Interview, February 2014.



A younger member, a girl in her twenties, heard a talk by Professor Kasagi at Nara University<sup>24</sup>, got interested in *gagaku* as a part of the historical heritage of the area, and decided to try to play<sup>25</sup>. Those who joined the group later in life have similar stories to tell, and some of these members are highly motivated precisely because their passion for court music developed at an advanced age. Confirming the educational or moral value often attributed to *gagaku*, one lady likens her practice of court music to another dignified ‘pastime’: tea ceremony (*chanoyū* or *sadō*): “I have been involved in tea ceremony for many years, and lately I decided to start studying *ryūteki*. I find many similarities between court music and tea ceremony, especially the element of elegance. I think both are very refined. The gestures are also very beautiful”<sup>26</sup>. Thus, the ways in which these adult practitioners entered the group are similar. In general, the initial interest in *gagaku* served as the basis for a personal contact with the leader of the group. Moreover, the fact that ‘adult members’ toward the younger side of the spectrum often entered the group not because of family obligations but spontaneously seems to indicate that younger practitioners were born in a period characterized by a certain degree of familiarity with court music, approximately coinciding with the beginning of Tōgi Hideki’s discographic debut in 1996 (see Lancashire 2003, 26).

Finally, a small subgroup comprises members who have been enrolled for more than 20 years. Seven of these practitioners have spent over 40 years within Nanto gakuso and are *always* referred to as *sensei* or “masters”. In a way, they could perhaps be called the ‘founders’ of contemporary Nanto gakuso. Having joined the group as early as 1945, these “grand amateurs”, to employ Hennion’s term in a slightly altered sense (2005, 131), would well deserve a more in-depth, dedicated treatment<sup>27</sup>. Below I will only summarize these findings. First and foremost, all *sensei* agree on the fact that the status of court music has steadily improved from their childhood to the present. Immediately after the war, the group consisted in less than 10 members. Rehearsals were themselves very different from today: classes were individual rather than collective, and a much greater

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<sup>24</sup> Professor Kasagi is Professor Emeritus at that institution.

<sup>25</sup> Interview, November 2015. As a matter of fact, the connection between Nanto gakuso and Nara University’s students’ association Nara gagakukai is an important resource for the group: several of its members first experience *gagaku* in the context of their student life.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, February 2014.

<sup>27</sup> In fact, individual interviews conducted with all seven of them between February 15 and February 18 2014 revealed a wealth of information concerning the most significant changes in the practice of *gagaku* in Nara throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

importance was placed on learning how to sing the melodies in the so-called *shōga* solfege technique<sup>28</sup>. In fact, the same melody was sometimes sung up to a hundred times before finally taking up the instruments. In general, the training seems to have been stricter and more physically demanding (though this particular aspect may be overemphasized). Moreover, because the father of Kasagi *sensei* was already a member of Kasuga kogaku hozonkai before the war, his family became a veritable catalyst in the training of a new generation of performers –something that is still true today. Entrance into the world of *gagaku* was often less a consequence of a clear-cut choice and more a matter of serendipitous circumstances. Being classmates or simply acquaintances was more than enough to trigger an initial curiosity that could lead to decades of engagement. Despite the fact that for a very long time the group only counted a few individuals, the *sensei* invariably recall those early decades of struggles as happy, marked as they were by the novelty of performing at prestigious institutions like the Tōdaiji temple and other religious centers in or around Nara.

The bond tying these performers together appears to be especially strong: having toured abroad and performed hundreds, perhaps thousands of times all over Japan has forged permanent, indelible personal relationships. As is to be expected, many of these grand amateurs have passed down the art to their heirs. In this sense, it is no exaggeration to say that the group is for them as an extended family, and their status of harbingers and patriarchs is undisputed. In fact, one important aspect of this subgroup that requires further study is the fact that they initiated ‘new *gakke*’ or new hereditary, genealogical lines of music transmission. Their families have reached the third or even fourth successive generation of practitioners enrolled in Nanto gakuso, effectively linking the present group to its Meiji-period forerunners. While the methods of transmission may be relatively stable, what is truly striking is the consolidation of a sort of ‘monopoly’ on the higher ranks or key roles of Nanto gakuso’s hierarchy. For example, the son of one of these masters is employed at Kasuga Taisha, and is in charge of the more practical, organizational relations between the group and the shrine. Similarly, there are rumors that the son of Kasagi *sensei*, now in his late forties, will one day inherit his father’s position as head of the group. How the transmission will be handled by the next

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<sup>28</sup> On this particular aspect of the practice of Japanese traditional music, and on its value, see (Gamō 2000, 208–45; Hughes 2000; 2002).

generations will determine whether or not the tradition of Nara's *gagaku* will come to be identified with specific families that had no direct relations with court music before 1870.

This tentative typology of Nanto gakuso's members is certainly arbitrary. Others would be equally significant: in particular, the performers' gender is just as defining a trait in one's experience of court music, and so is the balance between the practice and the primary activity of each member (be it an office job, a part time employment, the role of housewife or mother, or simply attending school). Nonetheless, the distinction between a younger group driven by 'family obligations', a group of 'adult practitioners' internally diverse, and a stable, core group of 'founders' is meant to highlight the various paths that led and still lead individuals to join Nanto gakuso. Even though a certain horizontal, 'democratic' structure seems to stand out as the main internal categorization of Nanto gakuso's practitioners, other possibilities exist that offer alternative, equally feasible configurations of the lifelong processes through which members *become* amateurs.

### 4.3 IN THE PRACTICE-ROOM

The activities of Nara's court music amateurs can be roughly divided into three main categories: regular, occasional, and educational. The first are sometimes referred to as *nenjū gyōji* or “calendrical events”: they take place on the same day every year, and coincide with ritual celebrations at Kasuga Taisha and/or with national holidays. These yearly celebrations constitute the bulk of Nanto gakuso's public commitments, and can be thought of as the primary vehicle for the promotion of the group's fabricated narrative of continuity with the past. The official website of the group lists 26 of these occasions, the most important being by far the *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri* in December<sup>29</sup> (FIG. 4.3). Together they epitomize the long tradition of performing court music at Kasuga Taisha<sup>30</sup>. As such, they are also the best known activities of Nanto gakuso, its ‘public face’, the most obvious referents of famous expressions like “the *gagaku* of Nara” or “the *gagaku* of the southern capital”, often used by the group as markers of a strong local-territorial identity (e.g. Kasagi 2008; Kasagi 2014). Strictly speaking, however, none of these ‘calendrical events’ should be considered ‘concerts’, since they are offered to the *kami* deities rather than to the general population.

The symbiotic relationship between Kasuga Taisha and Nanto gakuso conveys a set of powerful assumptions regarding court music as a whole: the fact that performances take place during or on the day of shrine celebrations suggest that *gagaku* is indeed the soundscape of *shintō*, ‘the right music’ for that specific environment. Moreover, connecting the ritual or religious atmosphere to the music suggests that *gagaku* has cosmological or spiritual connotations. Finally, both parties capitalize on the implied link between court music and nature, mobilizing complex cultural associations regarding a supposed “Japanese sensitivity” to the environment (see Berque 1997; Asquith and Kalland 1997). The prominence of this association between “the shrine” and Nanto gakuso is evidenced by the practice of visiting Kasuga Taisha before and after important

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<sup>29</sup> “Main Annual Celebrations in Nara (In Relation to Performing Arts)” <http://www.nantogakuso.jp/index-i.htm> (accessed August 19, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> As we saw in Chapter 3, such a tradition can be interpreted as both ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’. Indeed, it is precisely upon the continuity of tradition that the present-day group Nanto gakuso founded its public representation.

performances, to receive the purification from a priest and to “report” on the successful conclusion of the performance itself (see Kasagi 2008, 52–68).



FIGURE 4.3. The *bugaku* dance *Kitoku* performed during the *Otabishosai* on December 17, 2013.

(Picture by the author).

A different class of events includes stage performances in theaters, culture centers and similar venues, both in Japan and overseas. Two early examples of particular significance are the participation of the group at the Hue festival in Vietnam in 2014, in which Japanese and Vietnamese court music were performed on the same occasion<sup>31</sup> and the recent ‘stage adaptation’ of the whole *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri* at the National Theater in Tokyo, on July 30, 2016. None withstanding the excitement connected to touring, these particular performances are considered somewhat less solemn and perhaps even less important. For instance, a *sensei* dismissively told me once that “Performing in a theater is not like playing at the shrine. Our *gagaku* is not for the stage per se, it is as an offering to the gods [*hōnō*]. The public in a theater is composed by normal people, but our most important public is the gods”<sup>32</sup>. Undoubtedly, the opinion of this experienced practitioner is widespread: in fact, it is no exaggeration to say that

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<sup>31</sup> On Vietnamese court music as an example of Japanese cultural nationalism in the context of the critical discourse on intangible cultural heritage, see (Akagawa 2015, 150–81).

<sup>32</sup> Interview, February 2014.

Analogously ‘minor’, but with different connotations, are workshops, conferences or public lectures aimed at popularizing *gagaku* among the broadest possible audience. Practical workshops organized with a ‘hands-on’ approach are considered especially precious occasions to reach out to younger generations, who often have but a superficial understanding of what court music sounds or looks like. At the same time, there is also a sense in which these activities serve the purpose of fulfilling the unwritten duty to popularize ‘traditional Japanese culture’ as a whole.

All these events require a great deal of preparation: hardly a month goes by without an important performance taking place, either in Nara or in other regions of Japan. Like any other orchestra, Nanto gakuso selects the pieces to rehearse on the basis of what will go onstage on the next performance. Therefore, rehearsing can and should be considered itself the main activity of Nanto gakuso. ‘Lessons’, ‘classes’ or, more broadly, ‘the practice’, are called *okeiko* (see Keister 2004; 2008). They are held every Saturday evening from early September to late June, once a month on Sunday at Kasuga Taisha to rehearse orchestral pieces with or without dance (*gassō*), less than once a month on weekdays, during the evening, to practice the *bugaku* and Kuniburi no utamai repertoires or string instruments. Additionally, the intensive summer course held every year at the beginning of August can also be considered part of the *okeiko*. The ‘basic type’ of lesson is the Saturday weekly rehearsal. These *okeiko* lessons offer endless opportunities to study interactions among various members of the group, and represent the primary context for a kind of participant observation that is best described as “apprenticeship-based” (see Downey, Dalidowicz, and Mason 2015). What follows refers mostly to these lessons.

Saturday *okeiko* take place in a building called Ōshukusho, located at the end of a busy covered shopping street (*shōtengai*) that leads from Nara Kintetsu train station to the older merchant district known as Naramachi. Slightly removed from view, the location is signaled by a tall, unadorned wooden gate (*torii*). Past the gate, a wide courtyard is revealed. On the left side of the main building, a small wooden shrine sits quietly in the shadow, invisible from the shopping street. Members of the group bow in front of it before and after *okeiko*, but almost all of them curiously ignore which deity the shrine is dedicated to: “The god of *gagaku*?!” answered laughing a female practitioner in her late twenties when posed the question<sup>33</sup>. The Ōshukusho is owned and managed by Kasuga

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<sup>33</sup> Personal communication, February 2014.

Taisha, and hosts a dedicated ritual (*Ōshukushosai*) on December 15, as part of the preparations leading to the *Kasuwa Wakamiya Onmatsuri*<sup>34</sup>. It is a one-story, rectangular building much longer than wide, with only a few rooms inside: entering from the extreme right, one encounters a restroom, a small kitchen, and, to the left, a narrow wooden corridor that runs parallel to the façade (see **FIG.4.4**). The main rooms are all arranged to the right of the corridor. The first is immediately after the entrance, and it is used by *hichiriki* practitioners from September to May, when they briefly hand it over to the mouth organ practitioners so that they can profit from the centralized air-conditioning system. At the center of the building, a large open space is used by the dancers. Toward the end, one finds two additional rooms of approximately the same size as the first one: they host *ryūteki* and *shō* players, respectively.



**FIGURE 4.4.** The Ōshukusho building. (Picture by the author).

Entering the practice room, called *okeikoba* or simply *keikoba* (*o-* is an honorific prefix), the first impression is of dignified simplicity. The space is set to Japanese style: tatami floors, *fusuma* sliding doors, thick *zabuton* cushions to sit on. The cushions are arranged to form six or seven rows of five or six people. The room ends with a window, below which a low table is prepared for the teacher who leads the class. A kettle and a few

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<sup>34</sup> The ritual is noteworthy because it includes a ceremony known as *yudate*, in which a *miko* priestess of Kasuga Taisha sprinkles boiling water from a large cauldron on the onlookers, with the purpose of purifying them (see Lancashire 2013, 40).

teacups sit on the right side of the entrance. Before and after the class, when the cushions are piled up next to the teacher's desk and nothing else punctuates the space, the appearance of the practice room is minimal, almost frugal (see **FIG.4.5**).

But in fact, the simple setup of the Ōshukusho is highly functional: when the entire group needs to practice a danced piece, the flute and mouth organ rooms are 'fused together' by moving the sliding doors. *Hichiriki* practitioners then join the *ryūteki* room, and dancers can use the central space as a miniature stage, facing the orchestra (see Fig.5). During normal lessons, practitioners can see the teacher with little to no physical impediment, and the absence of furniture reduces potential sources of distraction.



**FIGURE 4.5.** The *keikoba* or practice room. (Picture by the author).

From this point of view, the space of *gagaku* practice is very different from the typical European solfege classroom studied ethnographically by Hennion (2015: 221-244). In that case, rows of desks are prearranged in front of a vertical piano, to make up a 'classroom', a term that "names the underlying function of this space" (Hennion 2015: 222). The grid of seats and desks in the solfege classroom "gives material reality to the hypothesis that there is a homogeneous plane, which allows us to use the same units to evaluate different elements which have been defined a priori according to the same parameters" (Hennion 2015: 223). By contrast, the educational topology of *gagaku* maintains different, more ambiguous relations and mediations. The lack of furniture does



not necessarily imply a greater freedom of movement, nor does it simply enable practitioners to change seating positions at will. On the contrary, in the *keikoba* patterns and regularities are detectable that are no less pervasive than in a Euro-American school environment. For instance, beginners who need to learn the most invariably sit in the front rows, on the cushions that are closer to the teacher (as can be seen in **FIG.4.6**). This may or may not coincide with an age distribution: normally, during the beginners' lesson from 7 to 8 pm, the younger subset of Nanto gakuso (the 'family obligation' subgroup) does sit in the front, and the age increases progressively towards the back of the room.



**FIGURE 4.6.** Getting ready for an 'ensemble rehearsal'. (Picture by the author).

For 'regular members' lessons, however, the situation is more complex: in general, 'adult practitioners' tend to sit in the center, but there are members who occupy the same seating position consistently, possibly to mark specific power dynamics or even personal attitudes toward other practitioners (revealed in part by the very fact that according to one's position in the room certain persons are 'pushed out of view'). 'Founders' invariably occupy the row(s) to the back of the room. Their demeanor is telling: one of them never uses a cushion; another answers his phone and sometimes smokes cigarettes (something that would be unthinkable for a 'normal' member). In general, *sensei* move around more often and more nonchalantly than other practitioners, and spark conversations among one another rather freely. In this way, the typologies of practitioners introduced above are mapped onto the practice room: a certain structure of the group is projected on the

ground, so to say, complicating the initial conflation of horizontality and democracy. This aspect also demonstrates how crucial it is to consider *gagaku* practice as a fundamentally “emplaced” activity –that is, as an endeavor that cannot be separated from the specific site in which it occurs (Pink 2009, 63–81; see also Ingold 2000).

When it comes to the researcher, ‘outsider’ par excellence, yet other dynamics come into play. No doubt under the influence of Euro-American commonplace uses of the classroom environment, I initially tended to occupy the back of the room, sitting in front of the older masters, as close as possible to the wall. In other words, I actively tried to find a place that would provide me with the highest degree of ‘invisibility’ in order to regulate as needed the observation end of the ‘participant observation’ scale<sup>35</sup>. One day during my second year of fieldwork, I felt a brusque tapping on the back, and the firm voice of one of the masters saying: “Go sit in the front!”. Moving to the rows closer to the low table, I started thinking that assigning me a different seating spot was not so much a reprimand (my conscious decision to sit at the back was not necessarily considered ‘wrong’ per se), but rather a renegotiation of what Jeanne Lave and Etienne Wenger have called “legitimate peripheral participation” (1991, 34–42). The fact that I was being asked to physically join the other practitioners signaled that my role within the group was being acknowledged; perhaps, my presence was becoming less unfamiliar. The episode was also an important reminder that the body is always an important research tool, and that a reflexive understanding on how the space of research is inhabited can help understanding the interrelation of space, bodies, and social interactions in learning environments.

For beginners and regulars alike, the structure of the practice is very much the same: first, the melody of a certain piece is sung once or twice in its entirety, as notated in the scores; later, the same piece is performed on the flute. The practice of singing together, called *kuchi shōga* and sometimes translated as “oral mnemonics” or “solmization”<sup>36</sup> likely became fully developed only in the Edo period<sup>37</sup>, just like the method currently used to notate the melodies (Hughes 1989; 2000; 2002). In this system, the melodies of

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<sup>35</sup> For a typical example of such a ‘graded’ interpretation of participant observation, see (Bernard 2006, 347–49).

<sup>36</sup> Conceived by David Hughes as an “acoustic-iconic mnemonic system” (2000, 96). For sound examples of this practice spanning across many genres of Japanese traditional music, see (*Kuchi Shōga Taikei* 1978).

<sup>37</sup> However, early examples of notated solmization for *biwa* and *ryūteki* do survive. (Takuwa Satoshi, personal communication).

the flute (and of the *hichiriki*) are arranged on parallel vertical columns on the score. At the center of each column, specific syllables (such as *ta, chi, ra, ro, fo*, and so on) are sung. These convey systematic indications as to the fingers' movements throughout the melody. Practitioners are generally unaware of the 'meaningfulness' of the syllables: to them, they are mostly arbitrary if not even nonsensical sounds. In reality, however, "each choice of consonant and vowel is likely to reflect some feature(s) of the musical sound in a relatively direct and intrinsic way" (Hughes 2000, 96). The right side of the main column indicates the main drum beats with bigger or smaller black dots. The left side is for all effects and purposes a tablature, indicating the name of a certain position of the fingers which in turn corresponds to a certain pitch. By singing the syllables in a way that is close to the actual performance of the melody, practitioners supposedly interiorize not only the melodic contour of a piece, but also a number of subtler characteristics pertaining to rhythm, phrase length, musical ornamentation and so on.

However, the real value of the *shōga* is a staple of practitioners' casual conversations on *gagaku*. A short repertoire of comments includes but is not limited to: "The *shōga* is useless and boring –why can't we just do without it?"; "When X-sensei sings the *shōga*, I can imagine the melody in my head, and then it's useful to sing it along. But with Y-sensei it's impossible to understand...and it changes slightly every time!"; "Well, there's nothing anyone can do about it, it's part of the practice and we just have to accept it". Older members of the group, and especially the most experienced *sensei*, tend to stress the importance of these oral mnemonics, often claiming that "If you can't sing the *shōga*, you can't play the melody properly"<sup>38</sup>.

One thing on which all members seem to concur is that the sitting position in which melodies are sung, known as *seiza* or "correct sitting", is painful. Onstage, court music is performed in a crossed-legs position called *gakuza*, with the left leg in front of the right one and the body facing the front. During *okeiko*, however, practitioners alternate between singing the oral mnemonics in *seiza* and performing the piece with the instruments in *gakuza*. Both sitting styles have correct and incorrect postures, thought to have a significant impact on, respectively, vocal emission and tone production. The *seiza* position requires the back to be straight, the weight of the body distributed on both legs equally. It is maintained for the time necessary to sing the melody once or twice, that is

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<sup>38</sup> Interview, February 2014.

for 10 to 25 minutes on average. Though probably this sitting style can strike as more demanding, the *gakuza* is perhaps the most important of the two: most practitioners find it easy and natural, but for some it is challenging to maintain the back straight and the torso facing the front. In particular, members trained in the transverse flute (such as myself) are naturally inclined to tilt the upper body slightly, imitating the standing position of a flute soloist. This mistake is often corrected by more experienced practitioners, who insist that the air column has to flow freely, sustained by the abdominal region.

Thorough explanations of the fingers' positions are sporadic and surprisingly scant. The most effective means to demonstrate how certain notes should be produced is a visual demonstration by the teacher leading the lesson, who takes up the flute with both hands and holds it above his head, showing the right fingering(s) to the onlookers. Certain passages, known to be more technically demanding, are emphasized and underlined with special care. Occasionally, these short phrases are also performed as isolated fragments, in unison, up to two or three times. But the overall outcome is given greater importance than each individual's precision.

Surprisingly, older members often hold a negative stance toward individual practice at home: in fact, they believe that playing without fellow practitioners can lead to incorrect habits in one's posture or fingering, that later prove hard to correct. Indeed, for most practitioners performing at home is not an option anyway: living in apartment buildings and working office jobs do not match a daily musical practice. Still, some of them would practice, if circumstances permitted it. A male practitioner in his thirties once told me: "The thing I envy most about the fact that you're doing research on *gagaku* is that you have a room at the University and you can play whenever you want"<sup>39</sup>. These objective limitations have the fundamental consequence of making the *keikoba* the most crucial important site of *gagaku* practice. Indeed, the practice room must be considered not merely in terms of its physical space, but also as a node of material and immaterial negotiations: in this sense, as noted by Keister, "a lesson place is socially constructed by the individuals inhabiting the space and their interrelationships" (2008, 241). This "social construction of the space" (Keister 2008: 256) is inseparable from the bodily presence of the practitioners (see Vergunst and Ingold 2006, 77), as made clear by the connection

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<sup>39</sup> Personal communication, November 2015.

between the architectural features of the *keikoba* and the educational features of the lesson itself.

Before and after each class, members bow and respectfully thank the teachers. During the lesson itself, their gestures and verbal utterances are restrained. The practice as a whole takes place largely 'on the ground level': practitioners rarely abandon the sitting position. When they do stand, they tend to keep their bodies low, with their backs bent down, and take fast, small steps. They also move close to the walls of the room rather than in the center. All these characteristics are common to the demeanor of practitioners of other Japanese traditional performing arts, from *Nihon buyō* to *nagauta* (e.g. Keister 2004, 41–44; Hahn 2007, 71–77). Factors that are often underlined in analyses of the spaces of transmission of such arts are the “centrality of discrete, detailed units of predetermined patterns of action” known as *kata* (Keister 2004, 39; see also Fujita 2013) and the “ritualized” nature of the space, that can even be perceived in terms of “sanctity” (Hahn 2007, 77). These elements seem to be especially relevant to highly formalized systems of familial, hereditary transmission known as *iemoto* (see Ortolani 1969).

In the case of *gagaku*, however, what counts the most is perhaps the peculiar “sense of place” (Feld and Basso 1996) instilled through inhabiting the practice room together. For this reason, the most fitting anthropological model to make sense of the dynamics unfolding in the *keikoba* from the point of view of an apprenticeship-based research is that of an “*emplaced ethnography* (...) that attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment” (Pink 2009, 25 emphasis added). The entwinement of values, structures, experiences and materialities is especially evident in the ways “making (court) music together” in the practice room means weaving passion, skill acquisition and a mutual negotiation of the roles fulfilled by members of the same group.

#### 4.4 COMMUNITIES OF *KEIKO*

It is perhaps smart to resist the impulse to equate belonging to a group to being part of a community. Certainly most, if not all, members of Nanto gakuso are voluntarily engaged in a common pursuit (the practice of *gagaku*), and the overwhelming majority of them resides in Nara prefecture. But is this really enough to think of them as a “community”? The definition is itself controversial: “‘Community’ is concerned with people having something in common, although there is much debate about precisely what that thing is”; indeed, some scholars have highlighted “the importance of people being brought together by common interests or by common identities, neither of which requires co-presence” (Crow 2011, 74). So even if members of Nanto gakuso are indeed characterized by both geographical proximity and a common interest, neither seems to be a necessary and sufficient condition for the sociological definition of community. Of course, the constructed nature of the concept applies both to local realities and large-scale ones: “in fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (Anderson 2006, 6). Nations, as Benedict Anderson famously showed, are a case in point.

One theoretical framework that capitalized on the openness and ambiguity of the term community is the study of so-called “communities of practice” (see especially Wenger 1998; Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002; Fox 2000). Far reaching in scope and compelling in its general assumptions, the notion of community of practice was first introduced by Etienne Wenger and Jeanne Lave in the context of a broader “social theory of learning” (1991, 4) that redefined it “as a situated activity” (1991, 29). A more complete theory of communities of practice was later developed by Wenger, who argued that its essential components are “competence” and “participation”, tightly woven together in the practices of social communities (Wenger 1998, 4–5).

These concepts are certainly crucial to any ethnographic analysis of shared human enterprise, especially when, as in the case of apprenticeship, the methodological weight of participation is emphasized. However, the characteristic circularity with which Wenger defines the building blocks of his theory appears problematic. Knowledge, arguably the center of any theory of learning, is believed to consist in competence and

participation<sup>40</sup>, the latter of which refers to “being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to those communities” (Wenger 1998, 4 emphasis in the original). Communities are “the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognized as competence”, while practices are “the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action” (Wenger 1998, 5). Finally, participation is also defined as “the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises” (Wenger 1998, 55). Things get especially complicated when Wenger manages to provide the exact same definition of the concepts of “practice” and of “negotiation of meaning”: both are “the process by which we experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful” (1998, 51, 53). So, meaning is defined tautologically, practice is conflated (or confused) with meaning, participation amounts to being a participant in a social community, the description of which refers back to participation and to competence, left entirely undefined.

With such theoretical inconsistencies at its core, what can be the value of taking the concept of community of practice seriously? First of all, since both of its components can accommodate a multitude of interpretations, the notion befits John Law’s suggestion to “keep the metaphors of reality-making open” (2004, 129). In other words, “community of practice” is a ‘stretchable’ concept, whose adaptability pays off in the face of its sheer imprecision. Secondly, as suggested by Wenger himself, there is much value in considering some of the “dimensions” of associating community and practice: for instance, the idea that even though “mutual engagement” defines a community, engagement itself is inherently partial and not necessarily related to the homogeneity of a group can aptly be applied to the case of Nanto gakuso (1998, 73–76). Indeed, different members of the group exhibit a varying and ever-changing degree of commitment: their mutual engagement pulls the practitioners together, but it is not a unified field or force. It has also been remarked that “a community of practice may dissolve in the intervals between training sessions or performances” (Downey, Dalidowicz, and Mason 2015, 189). This is true of Nanto gakuso: although some members do occasionally meet for

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<sup>40</sup> “Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises”; “Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world” (Wenger 1998, 4).

spontaneous social gatherings, there is no real sense in which they constitute a “community” beyond the activities of the group.

Even more important than the ‘stretchability’ of the expression coined by Lave and Wenger is the ‘ontological spin’ produced by reinterpreting the concept of practice on the basis of the work of Dutch philosopher Annemarie Mol (see especially Mol 2003). In her book *The Body Multiple*, Mol claims that “if an object is real this is because it is part of a practice. It is a reality *enacted*” (2003, 44 emphasis in the original). Studying a specific medical object (the atherosclerosis of the lower limbs) through a detailed ethnographic investigation of a Dutch hospital, Mol found that the disease is not a stable entity that presents itself evenly across different sites, such as the radiology department, the surgeons’ operating table or the consultation room. Rather, there are several “versions” of atherosclerosis: as pointed out by Tom Rice, “these distinct versions of the disease (and of the patient body) are able to coexist simultaneously. In a hospital, [Mol] argues, there is not just a single patient body, but rather many versions of the same body: the body is multiple and disease is composite – an entity produced through different versions of the disease and of the body” (Rice 2013, 181). In fact, “objects come into being—and disappear—with the practices in which they are manipulated. And since the object of manipulation tends to differ from one practice to another, reality multiplies. The body, the patient, the disease, the doctor, the technician, the technology: all of these are more than one. More than singular” –hence the title of the book (Mol 2003, 5).

If realities are “enacted in practice” (Mol 2003, 152), the anthropological endeavor should itself be reconfigured in terms of a “praxiography”, an ethnographic study of practice (Mol 2003, 31–33; see also Law 2004, 59). Thus conceived, the concept of community of practice is fundamentally transformed, reinvigorated by a healthy infusion of new speculative blood. And, given the significance of training as the main dimension of the *enactment of gagaku in practice*, it becomes possible to speak of Nanto gakuso as a ‘community of *keiko*’: a praxiography of court music in Nara should therefore follow the particular ways in which amateur practitioners embody corporeal and conceptual dispositions that turn them into sensitized music-makers. In fact, as pointed out by Ingold, ‘understanding in practice’ “is a process of *enskilment*, in which learning is inseparable from doing, and in which both are embedded in the context of a practical engagement in the world”, which he refers to as “dwelling” (2000, 416 emphasis in the original). If there is any sense in calling Nanto gakuso a community of practice, it is precisely the



recognition that members of the group are above all engaged in the continuous process of *becoming* practitioners.

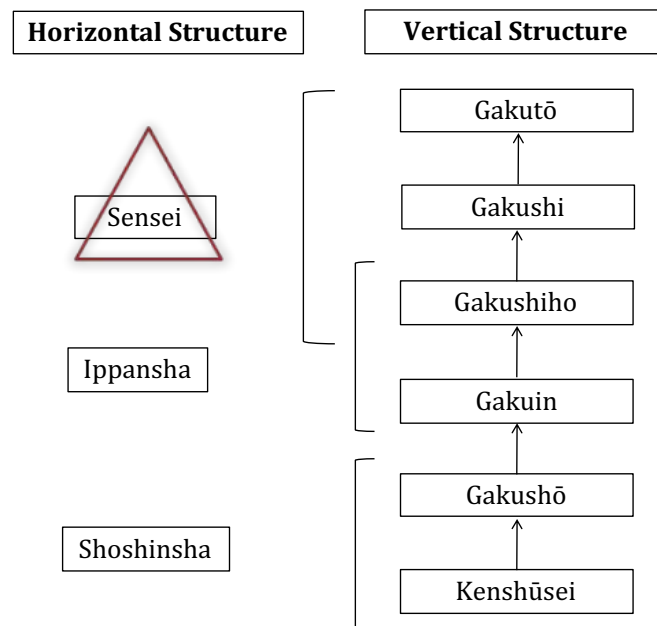
Within this radically reinterpreted framework, the ways in which the group organizes itself can be revisited. The issue is not what rigid structure is chosen by Nanto gakuso in order to regulate itself as a community, but rather what is the preferred way to coordinate various parallel “trajectories of becoming” (Ingold 2011, 14, 84). Recall the phenomenologically apparent horizontal structure of the group. Upon further inspection, a second, more hidden structure of relationships emerges. In fact, the administrative board or Rijikai has the authority to bestow a series of ‘titles’ or appellations on the basis of each member’s competence. These official ‘titles’ are: *kenshūsei*, *gakushō*, *gakuin*, *gakushiho*, *gakushi*, and *gakutō*. In general, beginners are *kenshūsei* or *gakushō*, while more experienced practitioners called *gakuin* and *gakushiho* are mostly but not exclusively regular members. Old-timers are called *gakushi*. This appellation is reserved to a small subgroup that in 2013 amounted to 17 individuals. Finally, the head of Nanto gakuso is called *gakutō* (presently, Professor Kasagi Kan’ichi), and acts as a spokesperson for the whole group. Interestingly, the distinction among these appellations is materially represented in the official garments worn by the group when performing in public: a small, simple knot to the back of the costume, at the base of the neck, can be yellow, for beginners; orange, for experienced practitioner; or purple, for the highest ranks.

The bestowal of each ‘title’ is neither automatic nor dependent on any special examination: it rests solely on the judgment of the administrative board, which is composed of the *gakushi* members, the *gakutō*, and honorary members such as the head priest of Kasuga Taisha. The crucial feature of the juxtaposition of the two structures of the group, the ‘horizontal’ and the ‘vertical’ one (summarized in **TAB. 4.2**), is that they are both based on what could be called an ‘identity of competence’<sup>41</sup>: even though the final decision is taken by the administrative board of the group, *in practice* competence is assessed as the practice itself unfolds, and is continuously renegotiated. Thus, just like in other Japanese performing arts the “very concrete and particular way of *doing* tradition” (Keister 2008, 240 emphasis added) is valued over any abstract conception of the past,

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<sup>41</sup> Wenger notes that “because a community of practice is not necessarily reified as such, our membership may not carry a label or other reified marker. (...) In this context, our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails” (1998, 152).

so too the *making* of a *gagaku* amateur is much more crucial than the appointment of the title in and of itself. Indeed, practitioners very rarely talk about the vertical structure of the group, which is sometimes referred to as “just a tool older members like to have so they can exercise some power” or “a necessary structure that no one really cares about too much”<sup>42</sup>.



**TABLE 4.2.** A comparison of the horizontal and vertical structures of the group.

The best example to demonstrate how this double structure is articulated through the mutual negotiation of the amateurs’ identity of competence is represented by the peculiar ambiguities of the term *sensei*. This word *sensei* has entered common usage in English as an honorific epithet referring especially to a teacher or instructor in Japanese martial arts. The OED defines it as “a teacher or instructor; a professor; a respectful title, occasionally with ironic connotations, for one skilled in an art”<sup>43</sup>. Indeed, in Japanese too this term implies the recognition of a particular degree of proficiency or specialization. Every week,

<sup>42</sup> Interviews: male practitioner in his thirties and female practitioner in her forties, respectively. Both January 2014.

<sup>43</sup> "Sensei, n.". OED Online. June 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/175959?redirectedFrom=sensei> (accessed August 30, 2016).

Nanto gakuso's flute players receive instructions from a *sensei* who leads the class sitting behind a desk and giving indications on how to play certain passages. His version of the *shōga* melodies is the one to follow, and whenever a doubt emerges over a certain aspect of the practice, questions are directed to him. He is a regular member, invariably a middle age male *not* part of the administrative board. This distinction is critical: in fact, even though old-timers *gakushi* are *always* referred to as *sensei*, they *never* lead the class. In other words, the figure of the weekly 'teacher' does not correspond uniformly to the vertical structure of the group: he is kept separate from the 'masters', even though the same word identifies both types of amateurs. This 'temporary *sensei*' is appointed on the basis of a pre-established rotation, so that every week a different regular member leads the class, effectively learning how to teach.

On a superficial level, this situation seems to be nothing more than an illustration of the polysemy of the Japanese word *sensei*. But upon closer inspection, a similar explanation does not exhaust the significance of the phenomenon. Two examples from the practice room illustrate the point more clearly. In a light conversation with a beginner in her forties, I stated noticing that she referred to one of the younger 'regulars' using the term *sensei*, even though he never led the weekly classes<sup>44</sup>. As is customary in Japan, different members of the group commonly resort to a range of suffixes to be added to other persons' surnames, in so doing signaling varying degrees of respect, proximity or intimacy. For example, older members call younger ones *-kun* (as in Yamamoto-*kun*), while for people of roughly the same age it is customary to use *-san*. When it comes to the term *sensei*, however, the same members do not conform uniformly to a shared, if unwritten, rule: rather, by resorting to it practitioners actively make an assessment of other amateurs' perceived mastery. In other words, members of Nanto gakuso employ the term *sensei* as a means to express a mutually assigned and constantly renegotiated identity of competence.

Similarly, the fact that members belonging to different 'steps' of the vertical ladder of titles/appellations can be equally addressed as *sensei* can sometimes give rise to interesting examples of mildly conflictual 'micro-interactions' among practitioners<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Personal communication, March 2016.

<sup>45</sup> I am grateful to Fujita Takanori for suggesting the use of this term in the context of my research, and for highlighting the points of contact between my approach and that of Ethnomethodology (on the basic tenets of which, see Chang 2011). Personal communication, May 2016.

From the back of the *keikoba*, the voice of a senior member of the group may arise, offering remarks on certain aspects of the piece being performed or on *shōga*: the comments are usually offered to all practitioners, but sometimes they point directly at the weekly teacher (“Before, while you were singing the *shōga*, you made a mistake at the beginning of the fourth column. I think the melody should go like this...”). There might be a short exchange, or even a mild confrontation, between the two *sensei*, but in the end the older one invariably wins the argument. Seniority prevails, but this does not prevent the propagation of alternative interpretations, circulating in the form of muffled, critical comments.

On these occasions, when there is a micro-conflict between *sensei* and *sensei*, amateurs learn that the status of all participants is negotiable, and that having a certain role is no direct guarantee of authority. Fleeting and similarly insignificant as these moments may appear (after all, at most these exchanges last but a handful of minutes), they nevertheless open up spaces of negotiation in which the practitioners’ identity of competence is renegotiated. Such incidents also prove that communities of practice can be less harmonious than the expression itself may suggest. As noticed by Fox, newcomers within a community of practice are torn between the need to “[p]ractices evolve partly through the agency of the members of a community as ways of working are changed. (...) Different masters may compete with each other in leading the way to the future. Alliances between masters and young masters can be crucial to the outcome of such struggles” (2000, 856).

Commenting on the master-disciple relation, Keister notes that in the case of Japanese traditional performing arts the learning process “concretizes the tradition and ensures that the tradition resides in the house (*ie*) and physically resides in the *iemoto* –the head of the house who is *the living embodiment of the tradition*” (2008, 242 emphasis added). According to this view, “the art” is essentially “a practical knowledge that is carried in the mind and body of the *sensei* as a performer and teacher” (Keister 2008, 243). This centrality of the master has led several researchers to emphasize the vertical, hierarchical structure of learning, thus placing much of the agency and capacity to modify tradition predominantly in the hands of its official bearers. Countering similar tendencies, Lave and Wenger chose to “take a decentered view of master-apprentice relations”, showing that “mastery resides not in the master but in the organization of the community of practice of which the master is part” (1991, 94). My experience with Nanto gakuso

reinforces this diffused view of the learning process, further indicating that the role of master is itself not as static as many analyses of Japanese performing arts seem to suggest.

#### 4.5 DOING FIELDWORK IN SOUND: *GAGAKUS*'S MATERIALITY

Waiting for the regular members' class to begin. The usual chatting. The pace is slow; people don't seem too eager to start again. Just hope we'll do a *gassō* rehearsal tonight. I just want to listen.

Field notes. March 2016, 8.05 pm

There is an image of myself that keeps coming back every time I think about my fieldwork with Nanto gakuso. It is an image I conceive in terms of the "ethnographic moment" so masterfully described by Marilyn Strathern: "We could say that the ethnographic moment works as an example of a relation which joins the understood (what is analysed at the moment of observation) to the need to understand (what is observed at the moment of analysis). The relationship between what is already apprehended and what seems to demand apprehension is of course infinitely regressive, that is, slips across any manner of scale (minimally, observation and analysis each contains within itself the relation between them both). Any ethnographic moment, which is a moment of knowledge or insight, denotes a relation between immersement and movement" (1999, 6). And she adds: "Either observation or analysis, either immersement or movement, may seem to occupy the entire field of attention. What makes the ethnographic moment is the way in which these activities are apprehended as occupying the same (conceptual) space" (Strathern 1999, 262).

In my case, this moment was recurrent, as it coincided with Saturday evenings' *gassō*, occasional regular members' rehearsals that gravitated around the performance of danced pieces. I could never know when these special rehearsals would take place, though naturally they were more likely at times when an important public performance was drawing near. So every week there was a speck of trepidation in attending *okeiko*. The swiftness with which the entire atmosphere in the practice room would change was also part of that distinctive feeling-to-come: in a sense, the trepidation with which it began never left the overall sensation. It went something like this: seemingly out of the blue, the sliding screens that delicately separated the flute's room from the mouth organ's (on the left) and from the open space where the dancers practiced (on the right) were slid and moved to the side, opening up what until a few seconds before had been a wall.

This new space brought a new relationality with it: the practice room became rapidly noisier, with *hichiriki* practitioners flocking in and sitting down among the flutists. The percussions were arranged on the narrow corridor in front of the dancers' area. In a matter of minutes, the orchestra was ready, facing the dancers coming onto the mockup stage in their everyday clothes. Tilting their heads and moving the cushions slightly, practitioners searched for the right spot to check on the dancers during the performance. It was a positively bustling scene, to be sure, but it also always felt like ordinary business. After all, this was an experienced group: ensemble practice was their daily bread. Sitting somewhere among the *ryūteki* practitioners, doing my best not to get in anyone's way, I kept both the score and the notebook open, a pencil to record at once the musical features of the flute's melody and a few impressions (FIG.4.7).



FIGURE 4.7. The practice from within. (Picture by the author).

Certainly this was practice at its utmost manifestation: this was *gagaku* in the making. After a short instrumental prelude performed by soloists from each of the wind instruments, the piece begins. When *hichiriki* and *shō* jump in on the *ryūteki* melody, it feels like an explosion, a sonic attack to the ears. What strikes one first (quite literally) is the sheer volume of the music: *gagaku* is loud and powerful. The rhythmic section is categorical: the smaller, double-headed drum *kakko* accelerates in sparse strokes, while the suspended drum *taiko* provides simple beats that work like semicolons in the musical

syntax. The hands of its player, holding two thick mallets, alternatively come to a rest on the hips with a beautiful but determined movement. The suspended gong *shōko* comes in a fraction of a second after the *taiko* beats, and the long sticks falling on the metal linger on the surface of the instrument. When you hear its sound, you can almost feel the density of the bronze. Meanwhile, the mouth organ envelops the space seamlessly with alternating crescendos and diminuendos. One moment the melodies of the *hichiriki* and *ryūteki* are conjoined, the next they are slightly apart. Often when they depart there is an interval of a major second between them –something considered sharply dissonant in Euro-American classical music up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I can follow the melodies; appreciate the characteristically progressive change in the overall tempo. Or I can watch the movements of the dancers and the faces of the other participants. I can even join in and play: I've been told it's ok. In fact, sometimes I do. But more often than not I sit still, overcome by information, sensations, thoughts. There is a surfeit –a surfeit of everything that counts in fieldwork research. Sometimes I choose to close my eyes and plunge into sound. Is it a reaction to the hopelessness of trying to register it all, to take it all in on so many different levels? In part, certainly, it must be. Is it the passion I personally feel towards this music? Or is it the embodied disposition I carry with me wherever I go, my “habitus of listening”? After all, according to Judith Becker, “we listen in a particular way without thinking about it, and without realizing that it even is a particular way of listening. Most of our styles of listening have been learned through unconscious imitation of those who surround us and with whom we continually interact. A habitus of listening suggests not a necessity nor a rule, but an inclination, a disposition to listen with a particular kind of focus, to expect to experience particular kinds of emotion, to move with certain stylized gestures, and to interpret the meaning of the sounds and one's emotional responses to the musical event in somewhat (never totally) predictable ways” (2011, 130). Is it really so? Do I listen to Japanese court music the way I listen to a piano concerto? Do I *make myself feel*, like Hennion's music amateurs and drug addicts, who skillfully move between activity and passivity (see Hennion and Gomart 1999)? Do I give myself away to a culturally predetermined (or to a culturally ubiquitous, for that matters) “sonic rapture through listening” (Kapchan 2015, 37)?

There must be more to this. This act of listening, which is also a specific moment in the history of my fieldwork with Nanto gaku, is also, perhaps primarily, a search for “sound knowledge –a nondiscursive form of affective transmission”, “both a method and a state



of being” (Kapchan 2015, 34, 42). In this sense, it is inscribed within a precise theoretical paradigm, informed by phenomenology and pioneered by Steven Feld (see especially Feld 1990; 1996; 2015). The program of his “acoustemology”, the conjoining of acoustics and epistemology, is “to investigate sounding and listening as knowing-in-action: a knowing-with and knowing-through the audible” (Feld 2015, 12). Mobilizing a “relational ontology”, a form of “knowing through relations” (Feld 2015, 12–13), this approach fosters “consciousness of modes of acoustic *attending*, of ways of listening for and resounding to presence” (Feld 2015, 15 emphasis added). Note the progressive intensification of mutual resonances among theoretical concepts already encountered: according to Kapchan, for instance, certain ways of listening are “listening acts”: “Like J. L. Austin's [(2009)] ‘locutionary acts’, listening acts *enact* –that is, they are ‘performative’, they do not simply represent sound, as waves reach the ears and are relayed to the brain, but they *transduce* these sound waves, changing the waves, the body and the environment in the process” (Kapchan 2015, 36 emphasis in the original). Tom Rice further points out that “listening to” a sound “implies that a person, having moved beyond the detection and/or location of the auditory stimulus, is *attending to it* with a degree of focus” (2015, 99 emphasis added).

Enactment and attendance are but two of the conceptual nodes that feed back into the ethnography of *gagaku* practice. Equally important in the particular listening act sketched out above is its distinctive *immersive* quality. Far from being simply a moment of emotional rapture in the field, immersement or “the experience of the flow” (*bōnyū* in Japanese) is also a fundamental aspect in the acquisition of practical skills by craftsmen, artists and sport practitioners (see Kitamura 2011). It is precisely by *thinking through* immersement (see Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007) that it becomes possible to bind together the materiality of court music and the metaphoric or rather the analogical conceptualization suggested by the ethnographic moment of the listening act<sup>46</sup>. As recently noted by Novak and Sakakeeny, “to engage sound as the interrelation of materiality and metaphor is to show how deeply the apparently separate fields of perception and discourse are entwined in everyday experiences and understandings of

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the imagery suggested by the verb ‘to bind’ is misleading, in that it suggests a tying together of discreet entities –whereas the relational ontology underlying both a phenomenological approach to sound and a praxiography of *gagaku* denies precisely this kind of splitting of the real into material and immaterial components. The paradigm is that of the material-semiotic network introduced by Donna Haraway (1988, 595) and developed by ANT-inspired research (Law 1992; Strathern 1996).

sound, and how far they extend across physical, philosophical, and cultural contexts” (2015, 1).

Thus the materiality of court music is first and foremost present in the form of “vibrational force”, to use Steve Goodman’s expression (2010, 81–84): it manifests itself in terms of the “physicality of sound (...) so instantly and forcefully present to experience and experiencers, to interpreters and interpretations” (Feld 2015, 12). The vibrations of court music’s sonorous enactment reach my body as I sit in the practice room with my eyes closed –as it reaches the other music-makers, intent in performance. Enskilment, enactment, and emplacement are co-constitutive: I am caught up in this loop.

This vibrational and experiential account of doing participant observation *within gagaku* practice is an “acoustemology of embodied place resounding”, to quote Steven Feld again (see Feld 1996). However, if it is to be more than “a literary activity mainly concerned with explorations of selves”, “self-indulgent and narcissistic” (Davies 1999, 178, 179) (a danger of so-called autoethnography at large), such a stance needs to be turned into something akin to what Law refers to as “resonance as method” (2004, 144). How can the immersive quality of doing fieldwork in the sound of *gagaku* be conducive of not only the researcher’s, but also the amateur’s experience of enacting court music in practice?

One way may be to *not* disentangle the act of listening from the materiality of *gagaku* –to try to revert *gagaku*’s aura of intangibility back to its tangible, even tactile, sensory production. In a way, this amounts to “gesturing to listening as a mode of consciousness that reaches beyond the merely auditory” (Rice 2015, 101). On the one hand, in fact, it has been suggested that “listening is at least as significant as observation to ethnographers” and that “ethnography is arguably more aural than ocular, the ethnographer more participant listener than observer” (Forsey 2010, 561). On the other, and taking one step further, a relational ontology of sound knowledge rests on the premise that “all human beings, whether hearing or not, are immersed in a vibrating world” (Cusick 2013, 278). Thus, “we are never quite as separate from other vibrating entities” and “we exist in something like a continuous loop of vibrations, an environment dense with what philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy calls the ‘re-soundings’ *by* all the vibrating entities in a space *of* all the vibrating entities in that space” (Cusick 2013, 278 emphasis in the original). Suzanne Cusick phrased the anthropological dilemma of how to deal with

this conception of reality wonderfully: “How might we imagine that this notion of our immersion in an always already mutually vibrating world could interact with an anthropocentric notion of subjectivity to produce a second, vibration-centred framework?” (2013, 278).

An interesting answer comes, again, from the anthropology of medicine. In Tom Rice’s ethnographic research on the various listening practices in two British hospitals, auscultation on the part of doctors plays a crucial role, and so does the acquisition of the skills necessary to use the stethoscope on the part of medical students (see Rice 2010; 2012; 2013). Apart from being a competence indispensable for the formation of medical practitioners, stethoscopic listening was found to have a powerful symbolic significance: indeed, the instrument became an important symbol of medical identity among young doctors (Rice 2015, 106). The attitude of court music practitioners toward *their* instruments similarly suggests that those tangible musical mediators are given a central place in the practice, and that they carry a formidable amount of agency in the making of *gagaku*. *Ryūteki*’s and *hichiriki*’s cases are often lavishly decorated with tailor-made, mother-of-pearl inlays, depicting scenes from famous Buddhist paintings or ancient Japanese illustrated scrolls. Most amateurs own more than one of the instruments of the ensemble, and sometimes have a spare instrument in addition to their primary one. Though they seldom brag about such topics as prices and particularly expensive materials, it is well known that these costs can be astronomical, and the quality and even the antiquity of some of the teachers’ instruments are fabled. In a sense, then, listening and performing practices are shaped by the relationship amateurs hold to the tangible embodiments of *gagaku*, in a way that resembles young doctors’ attachment to their stethoscopes. Curiously, while the latter are listening devices, the former produce sound. But could there be a deeper connection between the two?

Auscultation in medical settings opens up a window into relational dynamics that are ethnographically rich. For instance, “the fact that auscultation required close tactile and visual contact between doctor and patient (listener and listened-to) also meant that it created what some doctors saw as a valuable point of human contact between themselves and their patients. There was some consensus that auscultation produced an intimate, personal, and humane type of medical interaction” (Rice 2015, 106). On this basis, Rice draws an analogy between stethoscopic listening and ethnographic fieldwork: in particular, “the balance of subjectivity (in the experience of sounds) and objectivity (in

constituting those sounds as perceptual objects about which rational judgments may be made) that occurs in stethoscopic listening resonates with the balance of subjectivity and objectivity that defines the conduct of successful ethnography” (2015, 107–8). As farfetched as the parallel may seem at first, what I want to suggest here is that a ‘soundful praxiography’ of *gagaku* oscillates between the two poles of immersement and auscultation. Far from indicating a simple distinction between hearing and listening (since doing fieldwork in sound requires attending to the significance of both), this oscillation is a challenging exercise in turning the researcher’s body into a stethoscopic device, able to detect resonances among embodied auditory and experiential modalities.

Practicing *gagaku* can be overwhelming, both in terms of the sheer unfamiliarity with its context and contents and of the vibrational force of its sonic manifestations. Sound should not be idealized. Indeed, sound has recently been investigated as a powerful means to disrupt the social tissue of a community (Cox 2013), to dismantle the stability of ordinary self and personhood (Cusick 2013), and to contribute to “an immersive atmosphere or ambience of fear and dread” (Goodman 2010, xiv). But these unsettling characteristics are only partially resonant in my fieldwork with Nanto *gakuso*. Other detectable recurring threads include the continuous mutual renegotiation of the practitioners’ identity of competence, itself a sort of productive resonance among and across members of the group, and the complex structuring of a community of *keiko* based on attendance and on the embodiment of specific bodily techniques, a process that in turn resonates with the spatial qualities of the practice room. In all these cases, the materiality of the practitioners’ body, of their surroundings, and of their instruments is inseparable from the production of impalpable attitudes and long-lasting associations between *gagaku*’s sonic manifestations and a host of moral and even spiritual values. For this reason, a closer exploration of the fate of court music’s primary materials, the ones used to produce its instruments, provides not only a window on the manifold manifestations of the multiple reality called court music in contemporary Japan, but also a better understanding of its place within wider discourses embracing history, the environment, and the very survival of these ancient, unruly sounds.

## CHAPTER 5

### HIGH-SPEEDING GAGAKU

#### SOUND, NATURE, SURVIVAL<sup>1</sup>

“The landscape is never neutral.

It always bears the marks of the forces that have shaped it,  
and these forces are fundamentally political” (Waley 2011, 91).

*Imagine being immersed in a familiar piece of orchestral classical music: perhaps Bach’s fifth Brandenburg concerto, or Mozart’s “Jupiter” symphony. Perhaps you like this music better when it’s performed on period instruments –but for the sake of this example, let’s assume you don’t. In fact, let’s say you’re listening a modern orchestra, with its bright, shiny sound. You close your eyes and lay back, relaxed. Now you’re waiting for a certain passage, anticipating the entrance of an instrumental solo you’ve gradually learned to love. You wouldn’t say that it’s your favorite moment in the piece, but there’s something beautiful*

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted between April 2013 and March 2014 and again between October 2015 and September 2016. I visited a tract of the Shin Meishin Highway on April 15, 2013 with Suzuki Haruo (Nippon gagakukai and Gagaku kyōgikai) and representatives of West Nippon Expressways (Nishi Nihon kōsoku dōro, ‘NEXCO West’ below). Additionally, I had the opportunity to audit the third Investigative Commission Meeting on the Environmental Preservation of the Udono Reed Bed on December 12, 2013. I went to Udono for the first time on July 27, 2013, and again on December 13, 2015. On both occasions, I conducted participant observation in the context of activities organized by the Udono Reed Bed Research Center (Udono yoshi hara kenkyūjo). Follow-up interviews were also conducted with Suzuki Haruo (February 22, 2014) and Koyama Hiromichi (Director of the Udono Reed Bed Research Center) (September 11, 2016). The names of all other research participants are withheld by mutual agreement. My warmest thanks to the members of the Udono yoshi hara kenkyūjo and to the farmers who instructed us about their work with the canes. Special thanks are also due to Ms. Tanioka Suwako from Udono Reed Bed Research Center and to Suzuki Haruo, who introduced me to this case study and kindly shared with me his extensive documentation on the subject. Thank you to Daniele Sestili for introducing me to Suzuki *sensei* at the onset of my doctoral research.

*about it that you can't really pin down. It's one of the pleasures of listening, this sonic anticipation, this way of playing in your head the sound that will materialize in just a few seconds, getting a taste of its effects in advance<sup>2</sup>. But when the moment comes, something odd and unexpected happens: the sound you had in mind does not come out as it should. Something is wrong...it's just different from the way you knew it to be. Not that the performers are doing anything wrong; their skill is undisputed –that's why you bought the CD in the first place! But there is something odd with that instrument you love (is it the bassoon, is it the oboe perhaps?). It's the tone color. Something happened there. There used to be that depth, that warmth...now, it's flat, shallow, plain. The sound of the whole orchestra has changed, and not in a good way. An unnerving feeling, to be sure, having to listen to something that doesn't sound quite right. But it's not just you, it's the music that has lost something in the process.*

Noticing that music consists of sound may well amount to a platitude, just like saying that the sound of an instrument depends on the materials with which it is constructed. Yet, in studying music we rarely pay enough attention to the materiality of the sonic –to the apparently simple fact that sound ‘touches’ us first and foremost physically (see Novak and Sakakeeny 2015). After all, isn't this the hallmark of many if not most musical experiences? With such considerations in mind, the trivial thought experiment presented above can be considered as an attempt to convey a feeling or, rather, a distinctive sensation that might spread out across the small enclave of those who care about *gagaku*.

This chapter tells the complex story behind that sensation. It involves an unremarkable material known as *yoshi* or *ashi*, a common cane that grows along Japanese rivers and lakes. It also involves the sound of *gagaku*, or, rather, the likely consequences of environmental changes that may affect the production of these canes in an unremarkable patch of land in Osaka prefecture, called Udono. This innocuous plant found itself under attack years ago, and has learned to live with the unexpected, unlikely

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<sup>2</sup> “Someone waiting for a sound to appear will “pre-hear” – that is, he or she will actually hear – the expected signal, even if no sound has been emitted. This effect can be observed either in the expectation of an unknown sound, every rustling then becoming a potential sign, or in familiar situations where the listener anticipates in her or his mind, a foreseeable (or *fore-hearable*) sonic context. (...) The anticipation effect is often caused by a specific expectation concerning the sound to appear. It happens as if the desire of the event was creating its own sound envelope” (Augoyard and Torgue 2006, 25–26 emphasis in the original).

paring with the most dignified of all Japanese traditional performing arts. The menace has come in the form of a highway, or rather a 10 km highway tract, while the potentially affected entity, (the sound of) *gagaku*, was recently described as nothing less than “an important cultural tool in confirming Japanese identity and a crystallization of the history of Japanese society” (UNESCO 2009, 61). If the highway is indeed realized, Japanese court music will never be the same. Imagine the disquietude of listening to music that has changed forever, when there is no going back. Music’s touch is not a given after all. It, too, can and does change. How appropriate for a discussion of *traditional* music in *contemporary* society, one may think. Here is a textbook case of tradition against modernity, a threat to a country’s heritage, the loss of an invaluable legacy. Here comes the usual indignation. Except there is so much more to say about the issue of Udono’s soil and streets, about its thin but sturdy canes, about the expansion plans of politicians and engineers and the struggles of volunteers, environmentalists, passionate music-lovers. Here is a more complex state of affairs: here in Udono, there is more than meets the eye –and the ear too.

### 5.1 UNDERSTANDING UDONO: THE CONTESTED SPACE OF JAPANESE HIGHWAYS

Udono is a tiny strip of land located on the right bank of the Yodo river, which originates at lake Biwa, just a few kilometers north of Kyoto, and flows southward through Osaka and into the Osaka bay (**FIG.5.1**). From an administrative point of view, Udono is part of Kanmaki, itself a neighborhood of Takatsuki, a city of about 350,000 people in Osaka prefecture<sup>3</sup>. From a naturalistic point of view, Udono is a neatly defined green belt of approximately 75 hectares, 2.5 km in length and about 400 meters wide, home to a number of birds (such as peregrine falcons, who come here to nest) and to over 400 types of plants (Koyama 2009, 9; Suzuki 2011, 1). In a word, it is a rich if somewhat unimpressive ecosystem (see **FIG.5.2**). Getting off the train from Kyoto at Kanmaki station on the Hankyū line, it takes about 20 minutes to reach the river on foot,

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See [http://www.city.takatsuki.osaka.jp/shisei/profilekeikaku/tokeijoho/jinko/jinkou\\_28/1467964626690.html](http://www.city.takatsuki.osaka.jp/shisei/profilekeikaku/tokeijoho/jinko/jinkou_28/1467964626690.html) (accessed September 21, 2016).

passing through grayish, anonymous streets dotted by standard curry restaurants and discomfiting *kaiten zushi* (cheap automatic conveyor-belt sushi restaurants). Everything in the surroundings is suburban. And yet, Udono's geographical location is the most fitting starting point to tell a story that is all the more surprising because it originates in such a distinctively ordinary place.

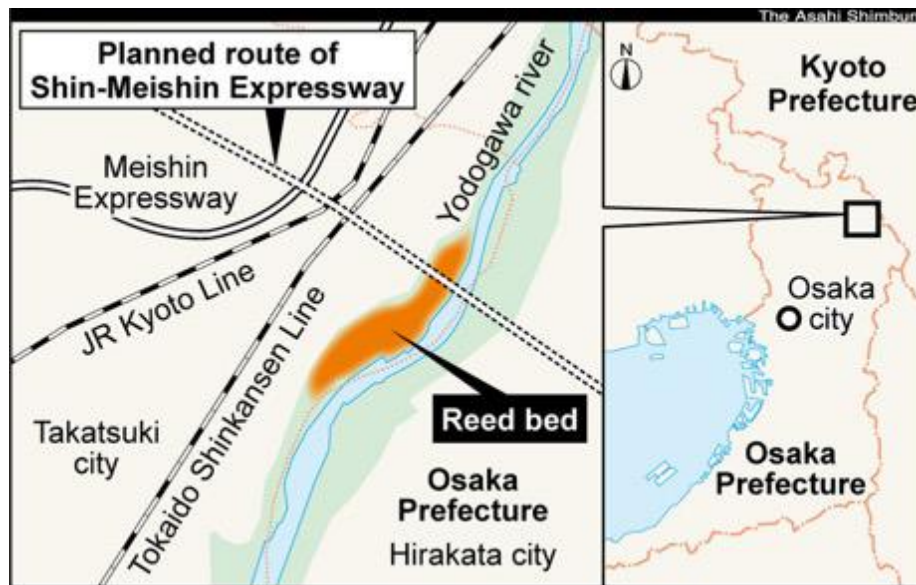


FIGURE 5.1. Map of the Udono reed bed area and planned route of New Meishin Highway (Asahi Shinbun, online edition. December 06, 2012).



FIGURE 5.2. Udono reed bed, facing South. December 2015. (Picture by the author).



The site is characterized by a “perfect geographical relation” with the three former Offices of Music, being at approximately the same distance from Osaka, Kyoto and Nara (Koyama 2009, 8). Perhaps it was this fortunate geographical contiguity to the main centers of *gagaku* that determined the choice of Udono as the best harvesting site of the common canes used to produce the reeds of the *hichiriki*, the small, conical oboe used in *gagaku*. Thus the expression ‘Udono reed bed’ (*Udono yoshi hara*), by which this portion of the riverbed is commonly referred to. Historical records dating back to at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century testify to the excellent quality of Udono’s reeds: in Abe Suehisa’s treatise *Gakkaroku* (1690), for instance, it is recorded that “as for the reeds of the *hichiriki*, since antiquity the canes that are used are those that grow in the place called Udono in the province of Settsu” (quoted in Koyama 2009, 5). Even though little else can be found in the literature about the subject, the claim that Kansai’s *gagaku* performers have been employing Udono’s materials consistently for several centuries seems entirely plausible. Another indication of this may be the historical importance of the Yodo river as an ancient fluvial route of transportation for goods of every sort. Indeed, some even claim that the use of Udono’s canes might date back “as far as the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when the music was introduced and musicians had to find primary materials in Japan, since it was too complicated to import them from the mainland”<sup>4</sup>.

To be sure, this was not the sole territory with the right natural characteristics: after all, the plant in question, called *Phragmites Australis*, is extremely common in wetlands the world over, and it has been harvested for the same purpose on the banks of lake Biwa, as well as in several northern portions of the archipelago (Kawasaki et al. 2016, 46). Nonetheless, there is ample evidence to suggest that Udono’s reeds have been considered the highest in quality by professional *gagaku* performers in more modern times too. As noticed by Tōgi Kanehiko (d.2008), for example, a document preserved in the Imperial Household’s library details a request made by the Office of *Gagaku* at the beginning of the Meiji period to acquire some canes from Udono (2008, 3). Today, professional performers and amateurs unanimously recognize the superiority of these reeds, despite a progressive deterioration of their overall quality and number. For these reasons, the Udono reed bed is well known among *gagaku* practitioners throughout Japan, and it is

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<sup>4</sup> Koyama Hiromichi, interview, September 11, 2016.

perhaps not farfetched to say that most experienced *hichiriki* players would associate the distinctive tone color of their instrument with this specific place, even without ever feeling the need to visit it in person.

Thus the understandable turmoil at the news that the plan to build a highway tract between the cities of Takatsuki and Jōyō was resumed in April 2012<sup>5</sup> (see **FIG.5.3**). According to the plan, a massive bridge sustaining the 4-lane pavement was to be constructed right above the Udono reed bed. Needless to say, such a massive construction work would threaten the very survival of this delicate strip of land: what would be of its falcons and of its rich vegetation? What would happen to the *Phragmites Australis*, and, consequently, to the reeds of the *hichiriki* and to its sound? Certainly, or so must have thought numerous *gagaku* amateurs, this must be stopped, not only for the environment, but in the name of the most ancient of all Japanese traditional performing arts.



**FIGURE 5.3.** A drawing of the Takatsuki-Yawata highway tract as it should look like once completed. The Udono reed bed is clearly identifiable on the right.

(Modified from NEXCO West, *Shin Meishin Ōsaka higashi dayori Vol.5*. See <http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/activity/branch/kansai/shinmeishin/topics/topics03/>. Accessed November 14, 2016).

When the news came out, on April 2, 2012, the reaction was one of shock, but not of surprise. In fact, the relationship between the highway plan and Udono’s riverbank dated back almost 30 years, and must be understood in the historical context of a series of

<sup>5</sup> In the following pages, the expressions ‘highway tract’ and ‘highway section’ are used interchangeably. ‘Highway’ and ‘expressway’ are also considered synonyms.

infrastructural projects that have gradually modified the entire Japanese landscape (see Waley 2011). Indeed, it is difficult to decide what came first, the works on the river or on the land. Arbitrarily starting from the latter means venturing into the highly contested territory of Japan's road management: a very short historical detour will prove well worth in order to understand more fully how deeply Udonō's issue is inscribed within a larger narrative encompassing some of the most heatedly debated environmental changes in the archipelago.

The "backbone" of today's fully-developed Japanese highway system is represented by six ancient routes, established during the 7<sup>th</sup> century as part of the centralistic Taika Reforms (Road Bureau (MLIT) 2015, 48). These were later developed and transformed into an enduring early modern network of five primary roads, known as Gokaidō (see Vaporis 2012). However, for complex reasons, it was not before 1963 that the first "modern expressway", was inaugurated (NEXCO Nishi Nihon 2012, 9)<sup>6</sup>. The route later became a section of the larger Meishin Highway (*Meishin kōsoku dōro*), itself linking Nagoya (whose first character can also be read *mei*) to Kobe (whose first character is commonly pronounced *shin*). The most significant reason for such a late (from a Euro-American perspective) appearance of 'modern infrastructure' was that "horse-drawn carriages were not common prior to the Meiji Era" and thus roads did not need to be heavily paved: in fact, "damage caused by traffic was not severe and maintenance was relatively easy to complete" (Road Bureau (MLIT) 2015, 49)<sup>7</sup>. Precisely because of the previous lack of heavy carriages on the pavement, the conditions of Japanese roads decreased dramatically when transportation technologies began to be modeled on or imported from Europe and the United States. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "the beautifully maintained pre-modern roads of the Edo Era began to deteriorate under the burden of modern horse-drawn carriages and human-powered vehicles (or rickshaws)" (Road Bureau (MLIT) 2015, 50). Such a state of "backwardness" persisted for several decades.

But the situation changed dramatically when, "after the end of World War II, the Japanese government initiated the reconstruction of the transportation system including

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<sup>6</sup> Significantly, this 'first highway' connected Rittō, in Shiga prefecture (just a few kilometers to the East of Kyoto), to Amagasaki, a city between Osaka and Kobe (David 2014, 39).

<sup>7</sup> According to Vaporis, restrictions on the use of carts "seem to have been the result of the shogunate's desire to prevent any interference with the flow of traffic (heavy carts are prone to spills) and the opposition of pack-horse operators, who felt their livelihoods were threatened" (2012, 101).

a massive road construction program. Automobiles gathered a steadily growing popularity as the economy recovered and the standard of living improved<sup>8</sup>. (...) Thus, road construction and improvements were a high priority in the government's infrastructure development plans" (Feldhoff 2007, 102) (see **FIG.5.4**). In fact, "to address the need perceived by the government for a national road network, in 1952 the government revised the Road Law (*Dōrohō*), which was the main regulation for road policy, and set up a system for constructing a highway network. Furthermore, the national government enacted new laws (...) in order to borrow money from postal savings because the national government's general account was insufficient to finance construction of a road network" (Mizutani and Uranishi 2008, 474). In 1956, Japan Highway Public Corporation (*Nihon dōro kōdan*, commonly known as JH) was founded, as a "non-profit government corporate" that enjoyed a number of privileges, from governmental loans to tax exemptions and the possibility to acquire the land speedily thanks to the Land Acquisition Law (David 2014, 21). Over the next twenty years, the amount of resources poured into road construction reached the incredible value of nearly one-quarter of the total public infrastructure investment (Feldhoff 2007, 104).

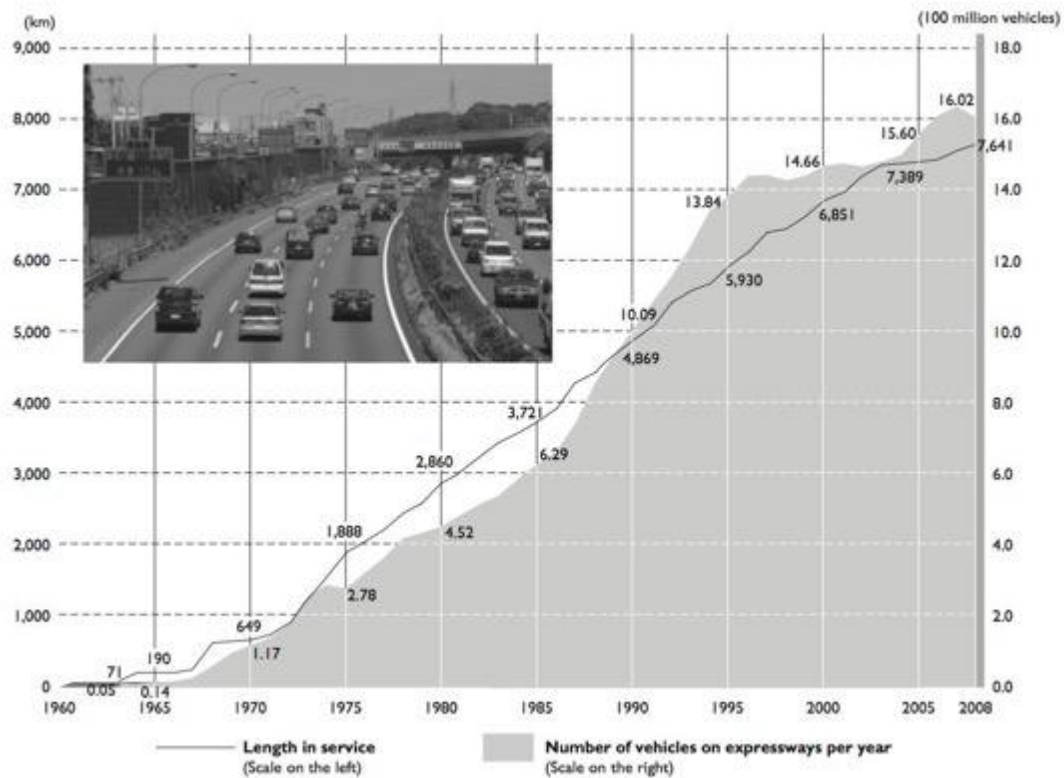
Such an exponential increase of governmental interest in the highway sector led to the realization of little less than 10.000 kilometers of expressways in a span of merely 50 years (Road Bureau (MLIT) 2015, 52). "From the latter half of the 1950s to the 1960s, investment was concentrated on the main trunk lines. The five longitudinal lines were constructed in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the transversal limb lines were laid starting in the late 1980s" (David 2014, 21). By the 1990s, most of the structurally indispensable roads were completed. Nonetheless, the 1987 Fourth Comprehensive National Development Plan (*Dai yonji zenkoku sōgō kaihatsu keikaku*)<sup>9</sup>, a programmatic document which reassessed the balance between "urban centers" (namely Tokyo, Nagoya and the Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto area) and "outer areas", expressed the need for a highway network totaling 9064 km –a significant increase from the 3721 km already completed in 1985 (Mizutani and Uranishi 2008, 479). This new plan also included the

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<sup>8</sup> "Only 130,000 vehicles were registered at the end of World War II, but the number increased rapidly, reaching 500,000 vehicles by 1951, then doubling to one million in 1953, and doubling again to two million in 1957" (Road Bureau (MLIT) 2015, 51).

<sup>9</sup> "The CNDPs are long-term comprehensive physical and spatial plans which identify the ideal state of the Japanese territory including land use, natural and water resources, social infrastructures, industrial locations, culture and tourism, and human resources" (Ono 2008, 507).

realization of a New Meishin Highway, considered necessary to guarantee a smoother and faster connection on the East-West axis of the network, and devised as a way of relieving the older Meishin highway from its increasingly frequent congestions (NEXCO Nishi Nihon 2012, 9).



**FIGURE 5.4.** Relationship between number of vehicles and length of Japanese expressways, 1960-2008. (David 2014, 28).

In this context of ever-accelerating investments in road construction, the project of the New Meishin proceeded with changing fortunes, essentially shifting back and forth between permissions to initiate construction and stoppages based on heated political discussions. In fact, a bitter debate started mounting in the latter half of the 1990s over the real necessity of such a strongly subsidized construction policy. Doubts and resentment towards the astronomical debt accumulated by JH over the years resulted in a strong popular demand for the privatization of the highway sector. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) acknowledges that at the time “there were various critiques and opinions about road development, including the belief that roads were developed wastefully and sometimes redundantly, spending a large amount of both

borrowed money and the national budget. At the same time, the repayment and management costs were not being sufficiently preserved due to the high-cost structure of JH's toll road system" (Road Bureau (MLIT) 2015, 52).

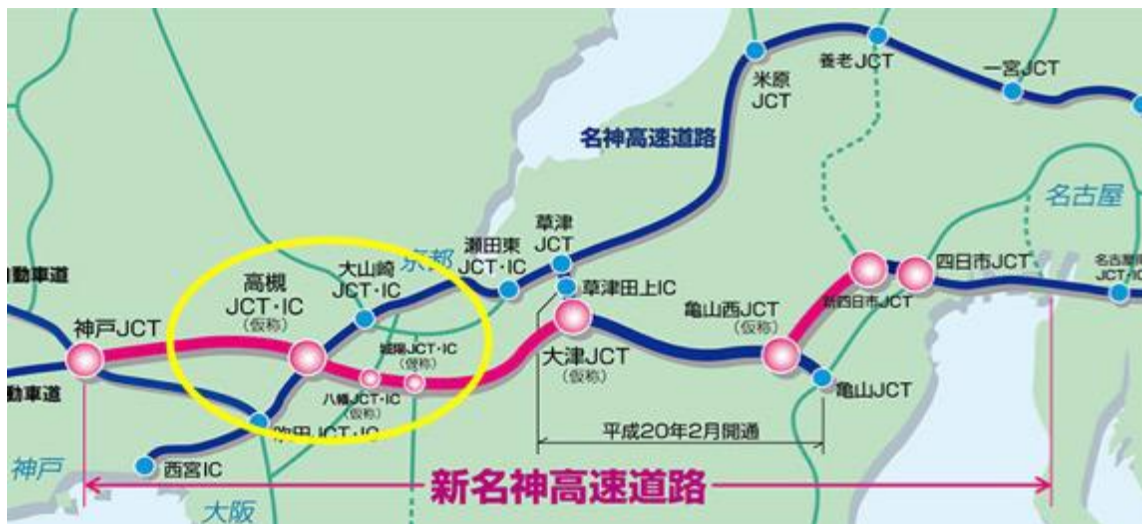
On December 19, 2001, a Cabinet meeting of the LDP government presided by Koizumi Jun'ichirō started discussing the issue of the privatization of JH. Shortly afterwards, the same government set up a Committee for the Promotion of the Privatization of the Four Public Roads Corporations (*Dōro kankei yon kōdan min'eika iinkai*). The report of the Committee was offered to the Cabinet on December 6, 2002. The suggestion to finally privatize JH and three other public companies was emphatically supported by the government, which devised a basic plan made public on December 22, 2003. In June 2004, the necessary legal modifications were enacted. The government decided that JH should be split into three 'semi-private' companies: Higashi Nihon kōsoku dōro kabushikigaisha, shortened to NEXCO Higashi Nihon or NEXCO East; Naka Nihon kōsoku dōro kabushikigaisha, shortened to NEXCO Naka Nihon or NEXCO Central, and Nishi Nihon kōsoku dōro kabushikigaisha, shortened to NEXCO Nishi Nihon or NEXCO West. Parallel to this "horizontal separation", a "vertical separation" was also put into place: most noticeably, the responsibility of repaying the accumulated debt was handed over to the newly instituted Japan Expressway Holding and Debt Repayment Agency (JEHDRA) (see Mizutani and Uranishi 2008, 487; Road Bureau (MLIT) 2015, 7) (see **FIG.5.5**).



**FIGURE 5.5.** Scheme of the privatization of Japanese public highway corporations

(Road Bureau (MLIT) 2015, 7).

Meanwhile, in 2003, the first Conference on the Construction of Automobiles, Great Railway Lines and Territorial Development (*Kokudo kaihatsu kansen jidōshadō kensetsu kaigi*)<sup>10</sup>, moved to reconsider any major infrastructural project in order to cut back excessive costs. Accordingly, the second Conference, held in 2006, explicitly recommended to “freeze” (*tōketsu*) two tracts of the New Meishin highway: between Ōtsu (Shiga pref.) and Jōyō (Kyoto pref.) and between Yawata (Kyoto pref.) and Takatsuki (Osaka pref.) (See **FIG.5.6**). At the time, this was seen as a near-definitive drawback for the project: the political climate had radically changed, in part due to the hardships of the first ‘post-bubble’ years, and the construction of a New Meishin seemed all but archived.



**FIGURE 5.6.** A map of the entire New Meishin Highway project as of 2016, spanning from Kobe and Osaka (bottom left), through Kyoto (center left) and to Nagoya (center right). The area within the yellow oval is approximately the Takatsuki-Yawata tract (Modified from NEXCO West, brochure).

And yet, the following ten years were enough to overturn the decision, bringing back menacing prospects for *gagaku* lovers. Just considering the geographical location of the Udono reed bay, which rests squarely in the middle of the mere 10 kilometers separating Takatsuki from Yawata, it seems clear that the story of its reeds must be situated within the framework and chronological arch described above. If this is the case, the original starting point for the present chapter, the 2012 green light to start the construction of the highway tracts, comes at a much later sage in the narrative of the construction of the New

<sup>10</sup> These conferences were simply a new format assigned to an advisory body that had existed since 1956.

Meishin Highway, which in turn is an element in the vicissitudes of infrastructural policies and reforms in modern and contemporary Japan.

In addition to the realization that in Udono these different orders of magnitude come together and coexist, appreciating the complexity of this case study requires a parallel consideration of the complementary history of hydrological works in the area. Over the years, these riverine projects have had a tremendous impact on the delicate ecosystem in which the *hichiriki* canes once thrived. Upset by the consequences of these massive construction works, a small but combative group of local citizens joined forces and started to take measures to protect Udono's environment. Years later, the same concerned citizens would come to incorporate the issue of the *hichiriki* materials into a broader 'counter-discourse' on the preservation of local environmental resources.



## 5.2 HIGH AND DRY: RIVER MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND UDONO

In the early 1970s, while Japanese cars were multiplying and running faster and faster along longer and newer highways, Udono was a less contested, and no doubt muddier, construction site. Japan was not only tracing new lines on the map, using asphalt and bulldozers as drawing tools –it was also retracing old ones, most noticeably with projects aimed at reshaping the most important water streams in the country. In this sense, the Yodo river was no exception: with the 1971 revision of the Basic Plan for Hydrological Works (*Yodogawa suikei kōji jisshi kihon keikaku*), a series of construction works was initiated that would forever alter the role of the river vis-à-vis the surrounding landscape. The various measures ended up lowering the riverbed by more than 3 meters, at the same time widening its channel from 120 to almost 300 meters<sup>11</sup>. As a result, the gap between the Udono reed bed and the surface of the river doubled, eventually reaching 7 meters (Koyama 2009, 11–12). Though there had been earlier substantial construction works on the Yodo river, most notably in 1875 and 1939 (see Takatsuki kōgai mondai kenkyūkai 1981, 36), these were arguably the ones with the greatest impact on the Udono area.

As was the case in much of Japan’s territory, such massive operations were devised in order to limit the damages caused by frequent floods, something known to happen in Udono since ancient times<sup>12</sup>. Japan is obviously not new to the problem of rivers’ seasonal flooding, caused by specific topographical and climatic characteristics of the landscape: “rivers in Japan are generally short, steep in gradient and flow rapidly down the mountains and across the plains into the Pacific Ocean, the Sea of Japan and some of them to the Seto Inland Sea (...) [Moreover,] the ratio between the maximum and minimum discharge in each river is generally very high resulting in seasonal floods. Flood control became thus an early priority for both the Government of Japan and the people living in the alluvial river valleys” (Takahasi and Uitto 2004, 63). Indeed, in the decades following the enactment of the first River Law, in 1896, “flood control projects became, next to railroads, the most important infrastructure development in Japan” (Stalenberg and

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<sup>11</sup> For more technical details, see [http://www.mlit.go.jp/river/shinngikai\\_blog/shaseishin/kasenbunkakai/shouiinkai/kihonhoushin/070514/pdf/ref4.pdf](http://www.mlit.go.jp/river/shinngikai_blog/shaseishin/kasenbunkakai/shouiinkai/kihonhoushin/070514/pdf/ref4.pdf) (accessed October 20, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Koyama Hiromichi, interview (September 2016).

Kikumori 2008, 97)<sup>13</sup>. Though it would surely be too simplistic, it could perhaps be said that flood control was one localized aspect of the larger process that goes under the contested label of ‘modernization’.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, with the rapid urbanization of flood plains the land gradually lost its absorptive capacity, turning what was a periodic, largely expected occurrence into something more unpredictable and destructive: “flash flooding” (see Waley 2005). The government thus found itself caught up in a dilemma: while taking resolute measures to limit the effects of such calamitous events was certainly indispensable, it was equally clear that this should be done without limiting the expansion of cities into areas with high chances of flooding. Crucially, “the advancements in concrete technology starting in the latter half of the 1950s facilitated the process of pounding concrete into rivers and significantly brought down the cost of using concrete for levee revetments and dams” (Takahasi and Uitto 2004, 65). Thus, most of the preferred engineering solutions to the problem of flash flooding started to involve those newer technologies, which, in addition to being cheaply and readily available, also held a promise of durability. “Rivers and their banks, as well as over half the country's coast, has [sic] been cast in concrete, with consequences that are only now being acknowledged. Dams were built across nearly all of Japan's rivers to provide power for industry, as well as water for the cities and irrigation for farmers” (Waley 2005, 195). In some cases, fluvial works even resulted in what has described by scholar Asano Toshihisa as “environmental destruction” (2007, 190). Part of the issue clearly derived from the managerial approach adopted by central institutions: in fact, “rivers were governed primarily by the Ministry of Construction’s River Bureau<sup>14</sup>, which saw rivers primarily in engineering terms of industrial, urban, and irrigation water supply, flood control, and hydro-electric power generation” (Asano 2007, 190).

Even though these riverine construction works were generally successful at protecting the adjoining areas from flooding, the fact that their construction often disregarded the role of rivers both in the social tissue and in the landscape of rural Japan eventually generated a wave of protest that rapidly coalesced into a number of citizen movements.

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the Yodo river was the first site of such projects, also initiated in 1896 (Stalenberg and Kikumori 2008, 97).

<sup>14</sup> Tellingly, it was only in 2001 that the Ministry of Construction was merged with the Ministry of Transport and renamed Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (often shortened to MLIT).

In fact, the 1970s and 1980s were characterized by a clash between environmental activism, on the one hand, and a state-sponsored policy that has been described as “development through construction in concrete” (Waley 2005, 195). It would be impossible to understand social protest in postwar Japan without considering the complex interplay of the state’s investment in colossal infrastructural works, these works’ impact on the environment, the changing role of (and disposition toward) the landscape itself within a broader trend of urbanization, and a growing concern with the negative effects of industrialization. In this context, pollution and its crippling effects, dramatically exemplified by the cases of mercury poisoning that went under the name of Minamata disease (first reported in 1953), were decisive factors in the emergence of organized movements articulating their widespread disquiet and mounting dissatisfaction toward postwar environmental politics (McKean 1981, 20–22, 50–59).

Thus, the twenty-odd years following the end of the Second World War saw the consolidation of two “narratives of dysfunctionality” with regards to the environment in general, and the management of rivers in particular (Waley 2000, 213). One, exemplified by the environmentalists, warned against “threats to a certain type of rural Japanese landscape”, depicted by its own champions through what was (and still is) essentially “a nativist approach to nature”; the other, probably best represented by the figure of the ministry official, put forth “a policy of economic growth that continues to prioritize construction interests” (Waley 2000, 213–14)<sup>15</sup>. Despite its undeniably conflictual character, the relationship between these two “narratives” is best understood as mutually transformative, rather than symmetrically divergent. This was especially true in the years following the radical amendment of the River Law, in 1964 (Stalenberg and Kikumori 2008, 99; Suzuki 2011, 3). After this landmark event, both fronts had to review and modify their earlier positions: the government’s shameless program of ‘cementification’ of the landscape was gradually rearticulated so as to give more weight to consultation (see Waley 2000, 204), while citizens became increasingly aware of the limitations of a merely oppositional mobilization, and started to devise more holistic alternative visions for the future of local ecosystems. The successive amendments to the

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<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, it would be pointless to try to identify these two “narratives” with specific individuals, if anything, because it would always be possible to find someone who would fit both ‘profiles’. Rather, the two options could be conceived as “actants” in the sense of Greimas’s semiotics and Actor-Network Theory: that is, entire narrative fields encompassing both human and nonhuman actors, more akin to ‘currents’ variously shaping specific courses of actions (see Latour 2005, 54–55).

River Law (most notably the ones enacted in 1997) reflected this trend: “the result of these reforms was a dramatic turn-around of Japanese policies concerning river management over a short period of time. Now, environmental and esthetic considerations are featured alongside those pertaining to flood control and water resources development” (Takahasi and Uitto 2004, 69–70; see also Waley 2000, 215).

In this context, rivers became especially charged with symbolic meaning, by virtue of their capacity to index the affective “landscape of nostalgia”, maximally represented by the many discourses revolving around the concept of *furusato* (literally, “old-village”, often translated as “hometown”) (Robertson 1988, 112; see also Waley 2000, 199). Thus the political valorization of local fluvial ecosystems was often tinged with that powerful feeling described by Jennifer Robertson as “a nostalgia for nostalgia” (1988, 495), which attributes “nativist and national-political meaning and value” to the seeming ubiquity of *furusato* (1988, 494). Indeed, this peculiar “aesthetic of landscape nostalgia” (Waley 2000, 200) is predicated on the alleged centrality of water to a supposedly ‘traditional, Japanese perception of nature’. These, then, are the elements necessary to examine Udo’s issue: aggressive infrastructural works in the postwar period, undertaken in order to fight frequent flooding; the gradual impoverishment of the land that resulted from these works; the intensification of organized public dissent; a gradual shift in policy on the part of the government, and a parallel shift in tactics on the part of citizens’ movements; the ‘resemantization’ of the riverine environment as an emblem of *furusato*, depicted as the embodiment of a value-laden discourse encompassing nature and a number of political values (see **FIG.5.7**)<sup>16</sup>.

Each and every one of these elements reverberates today; each and every one can be consistently detected in the field: all of them, in a way, are re-presented in the canes, the mud, the conversations, the pictures and the projects drafted. But this analytical fact says little of the men and women who take care of the canes, work with their boots deep into the mud, collect data and talk passionately about their social engagement. Undoubtedly, we are confronted with an issue of scale. The impression is reinforced by the analysis of

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<sup>16</sup> As noted by Waley, “rivers impose themselves on public planning and environmental action as a result in particular of their propensity to flood. It is precisely the continuing incidence of flooding and the growing damage that flooding causes that have been a major catalyst for renewed attention to rivers and to the various elements that affect the flow of water from mountain to sea. Rivers are implicated in so many issues that have an impact on people’s lives, issues that invite a co-ordinated response but often give rise to dissension and dispute” (2000, 202).

a monograph issued in 1981 by the Takatsuki Research Group on the Issue of Environmental Pollution (Takatsuki kōgai mondai kenkyūkai). After taking over the administration of the Organization for Nature's Observation (Shizen kansatsu kai) in 1974, the group decided to devote a separate volume to Udono's reed bed: the articles included combined historical information, scientific data, and appeals to the general population, striking a balance between a detached, technical tone and a more openly nostalgic mode that appealed to the sensibility of Takatsuki's citizens (see Takatsuki kōgai mondai kenkyūkai 1981). With its articles on the history of Udono, its hand drawn pictures of the water levels in the area before and after the most important state-sponsored works, its detailed data on the flora and fauna of the area, and, to the back, its clippings from local newspapers, the book is a perfect representation of the ways in which national discourses and dynamics were being translated at a much more confined, 'punctual' scale. But where were the canes in this complex scenario, and what of *gagaku*?



**FIGURE 5.7.** "Udono reed bed, the landscape of *furusato*". Final slide of a power point presentation by Koyama Hiromichi (October 2013).

At this stage, it would appear, the reeds were only given value because of their metonymic (or synecdochic) relationship to the whole fluvial environment along the

Yodo river: lamenting the fact that the number of *Phragmites Australis* had significantly dropped as a direct consequence of the lowering of the riverbed was a way of signaling a more generalized deterioration of the environment. The reed was the part signifying the whole, the indicator of something greater than itself. But, at this stage, *gagaku* was simply not in the picture. Rather, for the local population and at this stage, the more dangerous consequences were on traditional commercial activities. In fact, the abovementioned lowering of the riverbank by more than 3 meters resulted in a heavy shift in the proportion of water in the proximity of the reeds, which in turn brought to a sudden change in the composition of the plant life in the reed bed: because the *Phragmites* now received less nourishment, their number rapidly dropped, while other species such as the Japanese hop (*Humulus japonicus*, known as *kanamugura*) were left free to grow well beyond their former ratio (see Koyama 1981). According to Koyama, the *hichiriki* canes (*yoshi*) represented 60% of the plant life in the Udono reed bed in 1966, 20% in 1974, and merely 5% in 1982 (2009, 12). These changing figures had a significant impact on the ways locals made a living: the canes were traditionally cut and harvested in the dry season, and served as a modest but widespread material for fuel and for the making of *sudare*, typical blinds still used to shield the houses from the intense heat of July and August. Other plants present in the area, like the common cane *ogi*<sup>17</sup>, were similarly employed in the manufacture of thatched roofs (Koyama 2009, 10).

Of course, these materials were already falling into disuse well the 1970s. Interestingly, this led to the creation of an event perceived today as a tradition of sorts. When the reeds fell out of use, they were simply left to grow on the riverbanks, where they dried out and died. Once dead, the plants turned into an obstacle for the new stems below, so that the overall population of reeds rapidly decreased. At the same time, the number of insects in the reed bed rose significantly. To solve these problems, it was decided that the area should be burned periodically: this would eliminate at once the problem of the dead plants and of the insects, all the while helping the soil to regenerate. Such regulated fires,

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<sup>17</sup> As duly noted by Kindaichi in his *The Japanese Language* (1978), “Japanese is rich in its vocabulary for vegetation. (...). Names of grasses—especially those with long leaves—are also numerous and include *take* (bamboo), *sasa* (bamboo grass), *shino* (small bamboo), *ashi* (reed), *ogi* (common reed), *kaya* (miscanthus), *susuki* (Japanese pampas grass), *komo* (water oat), *chi* (a species of reed), *suge* (sedge), *i* (rush), and *gama* (bulrush)” (Kindaichi 1978, 165). From a botanical point of view, *ogi* and *yoshi* or *ashi* belong to the same category of perennial plants (known as warm-season or C4), but the former is technically known as *Miscanthus sacchariflorus*, while the latter, as already mentioned, is known as *Phragmites Australis*. In English, both are usually referred to as “reeds”, “common reeds” or “canes”.

called *yoshiyaki*, began in 1952 or 1953 (Takatsuki kōgai mondai kenkyūkai 1981, 10) (see FIG.5.8). Since then, they were suspended several times because of complaints from the residents of the village on the opposite side of the river, Kuzuha (Koyama 2009, 12). Thick, black columns of smoke rose up and were transported by the wind, sometimes even making it dangerous for drivers to circulate.



**FIGURE 5.8.** Some of the phases of volunteering and commercial activities in the reed bed: harvesting and amassing the reeds, burning the reed bed, manufacturing the *yoshizu* screens. (Second Investigative Commission Meeting on the Environmental Preservation of the Udono Reed Bed (June 23, 2013). History of the Udono Reed Bed. Available at <http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/newly/h25/0624/pdfs/11.pdf>. Accessed November 15, 2016. Pictures by Taguchi Keisuke).

Nonetheless, the *yoshiyaki* are still held today, usually over two days at the beginning of February. Beyond their practical purposes, they have gradually become important appointments occasions for the recruitment of new volunteers interested in the protection of Udono’s environment. *Kansatsukai* or ‘observation meetings’ are held every year; newcomers meet old-timers and farmers, everyone gets to learn the well-rehearsed story of “Udono reed bed’s problem” (including a significant section on *gagaku*), after which everyone eats a frugal meal sitting in the middle of the huge piles of reeds that

were cut just a few weeks before. Ironically, the depletion of the area, set in motion by the rapidly changing lifestyle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which traditional materials were no longer commercially valuable, and worsened by the infrastructural works on the riverbed, led to the organization of an event whose survival is predicated on the continuing existence of an environmental threat.

Walking around Udono in July 2013, when the reeds were still green and towering sometimes more than 3 meters above the ground level, an old farmer offered an interesting commentary on the whole vicissitudes of cutting and burning the reeds: “Sure, I remember how the place looked before the burnings began: it was a mess. Full of mosquitoes and other bugs. You could merely see the reeds, and finding the good ones was almost impossible. We used to get requests for *hichiriki* reeds, but there wasn’t much we could do about it. So, if you ask me, the situation improved with the fires, and the place looks better now than fifty years ago”. The farmer’s frank and pragmatic remark is a reminder of something all too easily forgotten: that *gagaku* came later, that it was preceded by more mundane problems, having to do with blinders and a changing economy, neighborhood squabbles over that nasty black column of smoke, insects, messy vegetation. Today, all of this comes back as an opportunity for revival: chopsticks and Japanese paper are produced using the *hichiriki* canes, as well as sliding panels (*fusuma*) for traditional houses and even business cards<sup>18</sup>. But in general it is the appeal to *gagaku* that has acquired the most prominent position in the economy of grassroots campaigns to “save the Udono reed bed” (see **FIG.5.9**). A brief history of the main associations active in the preservation of Udono’s natural resources shows how this shift has come about, bringing us closer to the present condition of this decennial dispute.

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<sup>18</sup> Some links are available at <http://www.udono-yoshihara.com/ヨシ紙-ヨシおはし/> (accessed November 04, 2016).





FIGURE 5.9. Brochure produced by the Udono Reed Bed Research Center to accompany the SAVE THE Udono Reed Bed petition. March 2013.

### 5.3 “SAVE THE UDONO REED BED!”. UDONO’S GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS AND GAGAKU<sup>19</sup>

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, the Udono reed bed was left “high and dry”: with the last occurrence of a flood recorded in 1984<sup>20</sup>, the process of depletion of the riverine environment was characterized by the dryness of the canes, due to the distance interposed between its roots and the river’s current. Simultaneously, the unproductivity of the traditional economic activities connected to the canes resulted in even more reasons for citizens to feel frustrated about the state of affairs in the riverbed. Gradually, it became clear that the construction of new roads would benefit politicians and construction companies more than the general population. Just a few years later, towards the end of the 1990s, this lack of confidence would lead to what was promoted as a major revision of the highway sector. Under similar circumstances, it was only a matter of time before one or another form of civic protest took place.

For their part, however, the local institutions involved were not as insensitive to environmental issues as one would expect –yet another demonstration of the downfalls of interpreting the relations between citizens and the state in purely antagonistic terms. As early as 1975, for instance, the municipality of Takatsuki requested Mr. Koyama Hiromichi to conduct a series of comprehensive analyses of the city’s environment. Then a researcher at the botanical garden of Osaka City University, the young scientist emphasized from the start the necessity to consider a number of different ecological factors jointly. In part, this was in line with the so-called “multi-nature-style river planning” (*tashizengata kawazukuri*), an approach opposed to the “modernist river planning” that was common until the 1980s (Waley 2000, 200; Koyama 2009, 13–14). More importantly, however, it meant that Koyama did not stop at the level of the chemical analysis of the soil, or of the vegetation, but rather attempted to reach a holistic understanding of the relationship between water, plants and the animal life along the river.

This encompassing approach, in conjunction with Koyama’s love for the rich and varied fluvial ecosystem of the Yodo river, was a central factor in his long-lasting

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<sup>19</sup> The following section draws from Koyama Hiromichi’s *In Order to Protect Udono’s Reeds (Udono no yoshi o mamoru tame ni)* (2009).

<sup>20</sup> Koyama, interview, September 2016.

commitment to the cause of Udono's *yoshi*. Slowly but surely, Koyama became the gravitational center and pivotal point of all the successive battles fought in the name of the canes (**FIG.5.10**). Up until the 1990s, he and a small group of citizens struggled to insure the continuous execution of the traditional *yoshiyaki* fires established by earlier local associations like the Organization for Nature's Observation (Shizen kansatsu kai) and the Takatsuki Research Group on the Issue of Environmental Pollution (Takatsuki kōgai mondai kenkyūkai). But for all of their efforts, it was the lack of water that was causing the most damage, and the number of canes kept decreasing through the years.



**FIGURE 5.10.** Koyama Hironichi talking to the press in the Udono reed bed. From his presentation *Enjoying Udono: Creating Watersides and Dreams. Records from 40 Years* (October 2015).

It was only in 1996 that the situation finally started to change. Having realized that those drawn to the cause of the environment were not just the citizens of Kanmaki and Takatsuki, but a wider audience of young, well-educated men and women, Koyama decided to rely even more on volunteers for simple but essential tasks such as cutting and burning the reeds. Subsequently, he was able to obtain all the permits necessary to set up a pump that would extract water from the river and bring it to at least some portions of

the reed bed. In fact, it was his opinion that only a radical solution such as this could salvage the reeds. Starting in 1996, 400 meters of pipelines were laid down. When fully functioning, two years later, the pump was able to extract as much as one ton of water every two seconds. It was soon clear that the solution was extremely effective: the percentage of *Phragmites Australis* rose from a meager 5% in 1988 to an encouraging 15% in 1998 (Koyama 2009, 14–15). All the while, little changed on the surface, given that the pump and pipelines left almost no marks on the ground. Unfortunately, however, the revival of the reeds came at a high price: garbage and debris quickly accumulated around the pump's entrance point, impeding the normal flow of water. Thus, volunteers had to start cleaning up the obstructed areas.

Two years after the water pump started to function, Koyama and his volunteers founded the Udono Club (*Udono kurabu*), a membership-based organization devoted to four interconnected activities: monthly “observation meetings” (*kansatsukai*) conducted in situ; occasional scientific, quantitative investigations consisting mostly in measurements taken in order to monitor the state of Udono's vegetation and wildlife in general and of the reeds in particular; the publication of monthly bulletins, entitled Udono Reports (*Udono tsūshin*); and the promotion of occasional “field trips” (*kengaku*) open to a vast public<sup>21</sup>. The relevance of the Udono Club is best understood when considered against the specific historical trajectory in which the group was inscribed, and which it actively helped (re)shaping. In fact, the establishment of the Club represented one of several shifts in the local community's focus on the environment: after an initial overarching preoccupation with nature as a whole before the 1970s, the stress was put on the then pressing theme of pollution. With the Udono Club, the scale was further restricted, and the members' concern was more finely clarified. “There was a need for money, that's for sure”, tells me a middle-age woman who has been in the Udono Club for many years. “Still, it wasn't just about that. It was important to have one clear purpose and one clear area we were all interested in. Come to think of it now, it felt quite natural at the time to join a group with the name Udono in it!”<sup>22</sup>.

Seen from the point of view of this historical arch, and paying attention to the dates in which each shift took place, it is clear that the faith of the Udono Club was to with yet

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<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.udono-yoshihara.com/鶺殿クラブ-鶺殿通信/> (accessed November 01, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Interview, December 2015.

another grassroots group, the Udono Reed Bed Research Center (Udono yoshi hara kenkyūjo). Established in 2001 (Koyama 2009, 16), this continues to be the most actively outspoken organization opposing the construction of the New Meishin Highway. Koyama is his Director, and as such he can be considered its main spokesperson. Even though many (if not most) of the activities and members of the group overlap with those of the Udono Club, there is no significant conflict between the two (FIG.5.11).



**FIGURE 5.11.** Some members of the Udono Reed Bed Research Center. December 2015. (Picture by the author).

If anything, the fact that there exist not one but two different groups devoted to Udono should be seen as an indicator of the greater importance accorded to the issue since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And indeed, the years in which the Club and the Research Center were born were also the years of the heated debate on the privatization of the highway system, a time in which roads were especially contested sites holding the deceitful promise of connectivity with megacities<sup>23</sup>. But roads were also dangerous, potentially harmful machineries causing pollution and environmental destruction: opinions regarding their construction were thus situated along a spectrum with expectations and distrust at its opposite ends. According to Koyama, “for a city such as Takatsuki, which

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<sup>23</sup> For a comparison with South American case studies, see (Harvey and Knox 2015).

originated as a sort of satellite of Osaka, populated by workers who already commuted daily by train, the economic stimulus deriving from the construction of the New Meishin Highway was not as significant as politicians claimed”<sup>24</sup>. If this was the case, there is little wonder that the local communities would tend to side with the environmentalists rather than with the construction companies. There was cause for concern, too. In 1996, a plan was devised to realize the 10 kilometers of highway between Yawata and Takatsuki as a two-lane section. Two years later, the section was revised so as to accommodate four lanes (Koyama 2009, 24). Even though it was repeatedly argued that the construction of this tract ran contrary to the privatizing agenda of Prime Minister Koizumi, JH and its successor NEXCO West consistently claimed that the state of the old Meishin Highway was so compromised that the road could even be dangerous, especially in the event of a natural disaster such as an earthquake. Moreover, heavy traffic had become a cause of concern: not only were travelling times excessively long, but the lack of alternative routes represented a problem in case of an accident or other emergency.

Here, then, is where the river and the highway met –where the site of environmental threat materialized. Even though the environmental impact assessment had been conducted in 1994, JH officially took charge of the construction only in 1998. Thus, it is easy to interpret the constitution of the Uono Club and of the Uono Reed Bed Research Center as a reaction to the plan’s advancements. As already mentioned, the following steps of the plan went contradictory. At first, the Yawata-Takatsuki tract was temporarily “frozen” as part of the broader privatization of the highway system: in 2003, the government and the ruling party decided that the tract was to be “radically reconsidered”, and the decision was ratified by the second Conference on the Construction of Automobiles, Great Railway Lines and Territorial Development. However, in 2009 the newly elected governor of Osaka prefecture, Hashimoto Tōru, stated incontrovertibly that “even if there was no demand for it, the construction of the New Meishin Highway would be a governmental and administrative duty” and that the administration was “working toward a rapid inauguration of the construction works on the no-go tracts (*michakkō kūkan*)” (Koyama 2009, 26). Just a few days later, the fourth Conference on the Construction of Automobiles, Great Railway Lines and Territorial Development confirmed its decision not to build, even though the necessity of the highway was brought

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<sup>24</sup> Interview, September 11, 2016.

up and discussed. And yet, the decision was reversed in April 2012 by the Minister of Transportation, Maeda Takeshi, who then entrusted NEXCO West with the project. Today, works have not yet begun. If everything goes according to NEXCO's plan, they should start in 2018, while the completion is expected by the year 2023.

It was in the span of 20 years, between the birth of the Udono Club in 1998 and the order to reopen the Yawata-Takatsuki construction site in 2012, that *gagaku* made its appearance. Once again, Koyama's role was crucial: in 1999, an encounter with reed maker Okuda Teiji opened his eyes to the painstaking work of producing these delicate objects. Okuda also introduced members of Osaka-based *gagaku* group Garyōkai to Koyama. Later on, in 2003, Koyama made the acquaintance of Tōgi Toshiharu (1929-2011), then Chief Court Musician of the Imperial Household ensemble. Since then, court musicians' visits to Udono became frequent, as well as concerts by *gagaku* groups (Koyama 2009, 20–21). Tōgi Hideki's homonymous first album was released in 1996. Five years later, he was at the height of his popularity: *gagaku* had made an unexpected comeback in the mainstream panorama of Japanese arts. Thanks in part to Tōgi's interest in the fate of the *hichiriki* reeds, Udono started to receive media coverage, reaching national visibility. In 2005, Crown Prince Naruhito attended an event on riverine environments that featured a small stand with descriptions of Udono's reeds. In conjunction with *gagaku*, the canes were no longer metonymic, merely indicating a wider environmental problem: they were center stage.

The two worlds started to draw nearer, as both environmentalists and *gagaku* lovers began to understand the value of speaking out in unison. The newsletter *Gagakudayori* took it upon itself to spread the news concerning Udono among its members<sup>25</sup>. For its part, the Udono Reed Bed Research Center acknowledged to a much greater degree the cultural relevance of *gagaku* and the historical connection between 'Japanese court music' and Udono. The most important and representative of the many initiatives organized jointly was the drafting and circulation of a petition opposing the construction of the Yawata-Takatsuki highway tract, to be presented to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. Between 2012 and November 11, 2013, when it was presented to the Director of the Road Bureau of the Ministry, 79,000 signatures were collected.

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<sup>25</sup> As a renowned *shō* maker, its editor Suzuki Haruo was and still is especially concerned with the fate of materials used to produce musical instruments.

Despite the sympathetic (and most likely circumstantial) words proffered by the ministry official, however, little changed in the following years. While the petitioners advocated a radical “reconsideration” (*minaoshi*) of the highway project, both NEXCO West and representatives of the government have always declared that their hope was to be able to assure “the compatibility of the preservation of the environment in which high quality reeds grow and the construction works on the New Meishin Highway”<sup>26</sup>.

The petition was distributed among *gagaku* practitioners everywhere in Japan, and constitutes the core of today’s official strategy against the New Meishin project. Such a strategy has been reduced to a fittingly provocative slogan, that is a mixture of English and Japanese: “SAVE THE Udono reed bed!” (*SAVE THE Udono yoshi hara!*) (FIG.5.9). One effect of this recent exacerbation of the Research Center’s communication strategy has been the mobilization of the already polarized world of *gagaku*. Spokespersons from the most important groups, both amateur and professional, signed it. Both the Osaka-based group Garyōkai and the Nara-based Nanto gakuso joined the cause, as well as the internationally renowned musicians of the ensemble Reigakusha. Although the Imperial Household musicians took a more subdued stance, its former Directors Tōgi Toshiharu and Tōgi Kanehiko voiced passionate appeals. Similarly, Tōgi Hideki, arguably the best known public figure associated with *gagaku*, repeatedly stood up for the Udono case: “I would be greatly disappointed if a piece of our culture that we present to the world with such pride is lost for the sake of an expressway”, he reportedly said in November 2012 (*Asahi shinbun*, digital version, December 06, 2012). The following year, Tōgi went so far as to call the construction of the New Meishin Highway “a world-scale blasphemy against culture”, referring to the whole dispute as “ruining Japanese culture for a highway” (H. Tōgi 2013, 9). Finally, when NEXCO decided to set up an Investigative Committee on the Environmental Preservation of the Udono Reed Bed, Tōgi asked to act officially as an observer, and even sent a passionate letter to the Committee on its second meeting in 2013 (see H. Tōgi 2013)<sup>27</sup>. Even so, activists have repeatedly expressed their disappointment toward the passing nature of his engagement. One man in his forties once

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<sup>26</sup> First Investigative Commission Meeting on the Environmental Preservation of the Udono Reed Bed (January 10, 2013). New Meishin Highway. Investigative Commission on the Environmental Preservation of the Udono Reed Bed: Rules and Regulations (Draft). Available at <http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/newly/h25/0121/pdfs/05.pdf>. Accessed November 15, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> The letter can be found at: <http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/newly/h25/0624/pdfs/10.pdf> (accessed November 15, 2016).



told me, rather sharply: “Go look at the list of those who attended the meetings: he was only there the first time, then he didn’t bother to show up anymore. Sure he was there when Uono made the news in 2012, but perhaps he has lost interest ever since”<sup>28</sup>.

Another noticeable aspect of the petition was the international support it immediately received. Perhaps unsurprisingly, ethnomusicologists dealing with Japanese performing arts responded, sending messages from the University of Hawaii (Shamoto Masatoshi), Columbia University (Barbara Ruch), Cologne University (Robert Günther), Sapienza University in Rome (Daniele Sestili), and Seoul University (Hwang Jun-Yeon) (see Suzuki 2013). Interestingly, the International Double Reed Society<sup>29</sup> issued a message of support in which its executive board drew an appropriate parallel between ‘Eastern and Western reed cultures’, so to say: “In western culture, all reed wind instruments (including the ancient bagpipe) use reeds made from cane (*Arundo Donax*). The best reed cane grows only in a few areas of the Var region of France, and virtually all professional reed players in the world use reeds made from Var. If the resource for this reed were to be destroyed, its obliteration would have a catastrophic impact on western music making and culture” (see Suzuki 2013, 3).

Despite such widespread solidarity, stopping the construction altogether seems to be an unattainable goal. Between January 2013 and February 2016, the Investigative Committee set up by NEXCO West to gather scientific evidence and take into consideration various experts’ opinions organized seven meetings. The Committee is composed of six members<sup>30</sup> (three university professors in scientific departments, two museum directors, and Koyama Hiromichi from Uono Research Center), eight observers (among whom two stand out: Tōgi Hideki and Ikebe Gorō, Chief Court Musician of the Imperial Household ensemble) and five representatives from NEXCO West. From the numerous documents available online and as confirmed by several activists, it seems clear that despite NEXCO’s accommodating attitude, the intention was never to radically reconsider the project, but rather to find a way of bringing it forth that would be deemed

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<sup>28</sup> Interview, December 2015.

<sup>29</sup> “The world-wide organization of double reed (oboe and bassoon family) players, instrument manufacturers and enthusiasts” (see <https://www.idrs.org/>. Accessed November 4, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Until the fourth meeting, the members were Kamada Toshirō, Koyama Hiromichi, Nakase Hisao, Nishigaki Makoto and Nunotani Tomō. In 2014, Hattori Tamotsu joined the Committee (Fourth Investigative Commission Meeting on the Environmental Preservation of the Uono Reed Bed (May 24, 2014). Participants’ List. Available at <http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/newly/h26/0526/pdfs/02.pdf>. Accessed November 15, 2016).

acceptable by all parties involved. Thus, the battle between those who sustain and those who oppose the project, as seen through the materials submitted to the Committee by experts handpicked by NEXCO West and by the members of the Udono Research Center, can be understood as a 'negotiation within bounds'<sup>31</sup>. Needless to say, this caused some discontent among activists: "Let's just say that if you call your own experts, maybe you're not exactly as neutral as you want everybody else to think..." a woman told me while pensively sipping a beer. Koyama instantly echoed her: "We have to make our own measurements, you see. Call *really* independent experts and have them redo the analyses all over again. Except we don't always have the means to do that, and so sometimes we just have to accept some data for what they are, at face value. Although, to be perfectly honest, the main point is what you do with those data"<sup>32</sup>. The laughter that followed was sincere and seemingly light-hearted. Still, I sensed a hint of bitterness in it: perhaps it was not resentment, but something that closely reminded me of it.

In the end, however, the future of Udono does not depend on how many signatures are collected, or on how many people gather on the riverbank. Ultimately, that high-profile individuals should join the cause has little consequence. The crucial question resides instead in the reeds themselves, and its answer dictates radically different courses of action. The question is simple: are Udono's reeds truly special? And if so, what is the scientific explanation for it? To answer this question is to find out whether the existence of the Udono reed bed is essential to the world of *gagaku*, or whether its destruction should, from a strictly scientific point of view, make no real difference. Posing the question is itself a provocation, because the message delivered to those who for many years upheld Udono's reeds as *materially consequential* to the sound of Japanese court music can be summarized quite bluntly as: "You've been hearing it all wrong!". But if that was the case, would it not mean that *gagaku* performers and listeners have been tricking themselves into *hearing things*? Is there really such a wide gap between a sound as perceived and the material constituents that concur to its production? These are the radical questions that all parties interested in the dispute over the survival of the *hichiriki* reeds must face: what's in a reed? Who is hearing things right?

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<sup>31</sup> See the numerous documents available at <http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/> (accessed November 11, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Interview, December 2015.

#### 5.4 WHAT'S IN A CANE? THE COMPOSITE PULP OF THE *HICHIRIKI* REED

There is a notion among *gagaku* connoisseurs that the canes used to produce the *hichiriki* reeds are inherently different from those that belong to the same botanical species but can be said to be, for all intents and purposes, musically useless. Evidence of this conviction can be found in the language they use: take, for example, the character that denotes the plant *Phragmites Australis*: 葦. Generally, it has two perfectly interchangeable readings: *yoshi* and *ashi*; but if you ask someone knowledgeable about *gagaku*, they will say that the two terms are far from identical. Given the immediately recognizable homophony between *yoshi*, the ancient form of the word for “good” and the first reading, and, on the other hand, the equally distinctive assonance between *ashi* and the word *aku*, denoting something negative or evil, *hichiriki* players and *gagaku* amateurs at large are used to refer to canes that can be turned into reeds using only the reading *yoshi*, relegating all other ‘useless’ canes to the overtly generic *ashi* (see T. Tōgi 2009, 2).

One of the pamphlets produced by the Udono Reed Bed Research Center accurately specifies that it was only from the Kamakura period, and starting from the region of present-day Ōmi, that the reading *yoshi* gained popularity, and adds that in the Meiji it gained a more prestigious status, being taken up by botanists, and thence spreading among the Japanese population. Nowadays in Udono, *yoshi* is the preferred reading, simply because the area was for centuries a district of production of *yoshizu*, a type of traditional horizontal screen similar to the *sudare* (Yagi 1982, 30–31)<sup>33</sup>. While this may go a long way in explaining how and when the alternative reading spread, it says nothing of the assumptions carried across by these alternative readings. Those assumptions, however, are much more important than any historical detail when it comes to an ‘anthropology of the canes’ –a project that, if ever seriously undertaken, must be grounded in the value given to these modest plants by those who use, harvest and turn them into sound-producing tools. For all its ‘earthliness’, for all its political repercussions, the issue of Udono’s reeds may be best conceived as a problem of translation: after all, the *yoshi/ashi* distinction is clearly operative and eminently *emic*, in the sense that it finds no immediate counterpart in the terminological toolkit of the (social) scientist; the

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<sup>33</sup> The pamphlet is available for download at <http://www.udono-yoshihara.com/鶺鴒うどの/鶺鴒パンフレット/> (accessed November 11, 2016).

problem, then, is to verify whether or not this distinction can be rendered in *etic* terms, to return to the abused Geertzian categories (on which, see Geertz 1974; Fetterman 2008). That this emic dimension is indeed important appears to be amply demonstrated by the peculiar relationship between a performer and his or her reeds.



**FIGURE 5.12.** A *hichiriki* and its reed. From Koyama's presentation *Enjoying Udono: Creating Watersides and Dreams. Records from 40 Years* (October 2015).

When I conducted participant observation with the group Nanto gakuso, I saw N. as the prototype of all *hichiriki* players. A short-haired, slender and tough-looking girl in her thirties, she had an interesting smile: even though her mouth would open more than most people's, showing her upper teeth, her eyes stayed almost always the same –serious, focused, determined. I was unconsciously led to associate these physical traits with the details of her relationship to the *hichiriki*. The way she sat with a straight back, for example, the careful gestures with which she adjusted the reed into the instrument's bore, always slightly more precisely than the persons sitting next to her, the strength of a sound that seemed to come directly from her confidence, her bodily presence...all of this corresponded so squarely to the 'personality' I had assigned to the *hichiriki*, that I ended up equating the features I associated with the *hichiriki* with those I could observe in N.. In other words, I projected the attitudes and personality traits that I saw reflected in N. onto her instrument, to the extent that those and this seemed once and the same. So when, during an interview, she began to talk about the relationship between the reeds and the sound of the *hichiriki*, I inevitably felt that there was something beyond the mundane in

her carefully chosen words. “You can use the same reeds for several weeks, months if they are good. Since you use green tea, they remain quite soft<sup>34</sup>. At first, when you’re inexperienced, they crack easily. But gradually you learn to adjust them with the knife, so they are just the right size for you. All in all, you can understand if the reeds are good in three ways: touching them, putting them in your mouth to play, and listening to the sound that results. Also, good reeds make it easier for you to play, much easier. In this sense, Udono’s reeds are really the best”<sup>35</sup>.

In many respects, professional musicians are under the same impression. The essential book on the *hichiriki* is without doubt Abe Suemasa’s *The Hichiriki of Gagaku. A Secret of a Thousand Years (Gagaku hichiriki. Sen’nen no hiden)* (2008). The author, who takes special pride in being the descendant of an ancient *gagaku* family, notices that “the tone quality of the *hichiriki* varies greatly depending on the quality and condition of the reeds” and that “since ancient times the best quality reeds are harvested in a place called Udono” (Abe 2008, 65). The fact that the book contains a paragraph entitled “The Canes of Udono” (*Udono no ashi*) attests to this sort of publicly acknowledged primacy of Udono. But the ultimate judgement rests with the professional reed maker, a figure that has almost disappeared in contemporary Japan. Now well over seventy, Mr. Okuda Teiji is considered by many as Japan’s most talented *rozetsu*<sup>36</sup> maker, and one of the few remaining artisans of this kind. Based in Mie prefecture, he has learned the craft from an Imperial Household musician, Tōgi Kanehiko, and has been active for over 35 years (Suzuki 2012, 4). He too is unequivocal: “The canes that I use are those from Udono on the Yodo river. I have tried using canes from different regions, but there are no other reeds that produce the peculiar tone quality [*neiro*] of the *hichiriki* used in *gagaku*. And even in Udono, if the canes are not firm and sturdy you can’t really get true high-quality reeds”. As soon as it is established that the best material to produce *rozetsu* comes from Udono, the focus of attention shifts to what it takes to physically make a reed: this is a

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<sup>34</sup> *Hichiriki* players generally dip their reeds in a cup of warm green tea for a few minutes before starting playing, so that the two ends automatically ‘open up’, allowing the air to pass through and allowing for the reeds’ vibration.

<sup>35</sup> Interview, February 2014.

<sup>36</sup> The technical term to indicate *hichiriki* reeds. It is often substituted by the English-based *rīdo*.

difficult and time-consuming endeavor, whose step-by-step description constitutes yet another possible answer to the question of what exactly a reed might be<sup>37</sup>.

This is how Okuda recounts the first steps of his delicate work: “First of all, you must select the best canes available, cut them and let them dry naturally for about three years. Only then can you start working on them. Then you need to put the canes to dry three more years indoors, on an *irori* [traditional sunken hearth] inside a thatched roof house, so that the soot from the fire can settle on them. By doing that, not only will the canes get sturdier, but once the reed is complete they’ll last longer and have a brighter tone” (Suzuki 2012, 4–5). After drying the cane in the way described above, a section of the appropriate length (58 mm according to Abe (2008, 68)) is cut. The skin is removed from two thirds of the total length of the piece of cane, and Japanese paper (*washi*) is applied. The same portion is then squeezed with a special pair of pincers: the resulting walls will become the two “blades” of the reed (FIG.5.13 and 5.14). The cane is then ‘treated’ with charcoal fire, which provides greater strength and durability. Subsequently, the extremities are carefully shaped by carving out the material in excess. The upper end of the cane’s portion is rounded, while the lower one is inserted in a separately crafted, small cone of *hinoki* wood. Finally, the buttonhole-shaped movable *seme*, used to adjust the length of the part of the reed inserted in the performer’s mouth (i.e. the mouthpiece proper), is created from scratch. Several adjustments are usually necessary after these operations are completed. In any case, it will always be possible for the skilled performer to intervene on the finer details, using a special stocky knife, usually carried around together with substitute reeds and a number of smaller tools (similarly to what is customary for oboists and bassoon players in classical Euro-American music).

The procedure is obviously complex, though it requires little technological intervention. Besides its material aspects, however, the making of a reed tells us something about certain less directly perceivable characteristics that the final product conveys. First and foremost, a reed is a manufactured object that ‘contains’ tradition and expertise. The reed is highly deceptive: it looks and feels utterly ‘natural’ and unspoiled, but its appearance is the product of a finely refined process of manipulation. Indeed, the ‘untouched feel’ that characterizes the reed is not unlike that of a fully ‘technological’

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<sup>37</sup> A short video clearly illustrates the main passages: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wMaFVH6aNE> (Accessed November 04, 2016). A more complete description can be found in (Abe 2008, 67–85).

object, and, in that sense, might be compared to the publicized qualities of a disposable razor: in both cases, the ‘naturalness’ conveyed is strategic and functional to the way the object is represented. But the reed also conceals the process of its making. In fact, beginners are more likely to buy it online, or through shops that specialize in traditional instruments. Thus, the reed may also symbolize status: it does not take long to realize that in the practice room, only amateurs with many years of experience are able to work on their own reeds. Nonetheless, these are only some of the aspects instilled in a *rozetsu*.

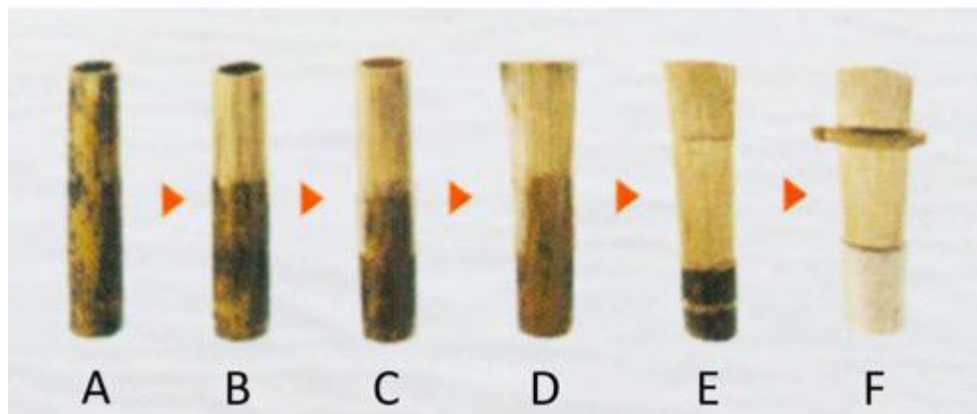


FIGURE 5.13. Various stages in the creation of the *hichiriki* reed. (Udono Reed Bed Research Center).

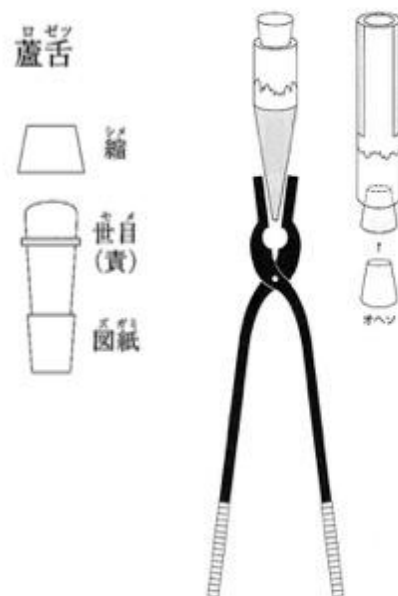


FIGURE 5.14. Pinching the reed's blades (right) and a finished *rozetsu* (right) (From Abe 2008, 45, 69).

If the craftsman's expertise can be thought of in terms of the immaterial component of the reed, its material but equally invisible counterpart is something that needs to be *extracted* from the cane: not all primary materials make for good reeds. When Okuda offered some precious 50-year-old canes received from his late teacher to Koyama Hiromichi, so that he could analyze them scientifically, the much yearned scientific evidence behind the unrefined, dried plants presented itself in the form of two images obtained with a microscope. Koyama explained this data in a booklet published by the Udono Reed Bed Research Center: "Why is it that only Udono's canes are appropriate [as reeds]? Of course there is the matter of their different size, much longer and thicker than usual. But another important element is the special combination of thickness and flexibility that makes the canes difficult to break. If we look at a picture of a high-quality stem magnified about 80 times, we can see that there are very few cavities in the phloem<sup>38</sup>, and that the cellular structure is highly uniform. Not any cane growing in Udono qualifies for a *hichiriki* reed. To the contrary, in a very limited area only one stem in several hundreds or even thousands will do" (see Suzuki 2012, 5). And so, jumping back from materials to values, Koyama seamlessly concluded: "The protection of these precious *hichiriki*-reed canes is a big element in keeping alive the intangible cultural heritage [that is *gagaku*]".

Unlike Koyama, NEXCO West was not inclined to make the same jump, as should be expected from its vested interest in building a highway that might destroy or severely damage the reeds' habitat. Thus it comes as no surprise that the company should appoint an internal working group (nicknamed Shokubutsu WG or Vegetation Working Group) with the aim of providing scientific analyses of the vegetation in the Udono reed bed. Since the third meeting of NEXCO's Investigative Committee (*kentōkai*), held in December 2013, the working group has been reporting on these analyses, subcontracted (so to say) to a subdivision of NEXCO itself, called Greening Technology Center (Ryōka gijutsu sentā). The investigations initially focused on the botanical characteristics not only of the *yoshi* reeds, but also of similar canes and of the vegetation at large, and later moved to the botanical and chemical properties of both the plants and the soil in the area (FIG. 5.15). Once more, the underlying and unasked question was, quite simply: what's in a reed?

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<sup>38</sup> Vascular tissue distributing sugars and minerals throughout a plant (Mauseth 1998, 125).





FIGURE 5.15. Collecting specimens from Udono reed bed. July 2013. (Picture by the author).

Comparing the findings of the Shokubutsu WG with those of the Udono Reed Bed Research Center, what strikes as odd is the discrepancy between substantially similar results and diametrically opposite conclusions. For instance, both groups established that the composition of the soil in Udono is threefold, with a superficial layer of silt (i.e. clay) on top, followed by a “psammic” or sandy area, and by a more viscous, deeper layer close to the water. On this basis, it was determined that the types of routes conveying the water to the plants have a quantifiable effect on the reeds. But while the ‘company men’ declared that the water supply in the harvesting surface is independent from rainfalls, and in so doing tended to disjoin the quality the canes from that of the soil, the Udono Research Center insisted that the process by which the surface of the reed bed was distanced from the riverbed had the severe consequence of impoverishing the soil. This in turn, caused a marked decrease in the percentage of high-quality reeds. As explained by Koyama, in fact, “the best canes for the *hichiriki* reeds went through a specific lifecycle during the year: at certain times, the river would flood and the plants would be partially

submerged. During these limited periods, the stems would absorb a number of chemical elements. After the water had retreated, the reeds would undergo several months with only their roots reaching the water. At such times, the nourishment previously stored was put to use by the plant"<sup>39</sup>. With the embankment of the riverbed beginning in the 1970s, flooding became a much rarer phenomenon. Thus, today, the plants are rarely if ever covered by water, and, according to the environmentalists, do not receive the necessary nourishment.

In this as in many other instances, the two approaches appear to differ radically in the way they look at the canes: while the activists include them in a complex dynamic regulating the entire ecosystem, the engineers-qua-scientists tend to isolate the object of their analysis. The point is crucial, for what is at stake is the entire interpretation of the concept of 'protecting the reeds', which, according to each group's statements, should be a paramount priority for all parties involved. According to those opposed to the highway, the canes' lifecycle is the primary factor responsible for their quality, because the absorption of essential nourishment is believed to strengthen the plant, causing its outer walls to thicken. By thickening its walls, the canes are able to sustain the dryness of the warm season. At the same time, the substances stored help the reed enduring the colder months of the year. In addition, the roots of the Udo no canes are rhizomes, which means that they may grow horizontally towards the surface of the land as well as vertically towards the water. After many years of research, Koyama concluded that the particular location of the high-quality canes provides the ideal balance between wetness and dryness: in fact, their roots grow much more horizontally, throughout the upper silt layer, than vertically, across the deeper strata of the soil. Thus what sets apart Udo no's reeds is their thickness and flexibility, produced by their special distance from the water and by their ability to store certain nutrients thanks to their uniquely shaped roots (see Koyama 2009, 6).

Given Koyama's conclusions, it is easy to see why his preoccupation is the safeguard of the whole reed bed, as opposed to the canes in isolation. If this is the case, however, stopping the New Meishin projects depends on convincing the NEXCO experts of the validity of this view. However, the chances of such succeeding in this are so slim, and the scientific evidence so contested, that Koyama and his volunteers have considered

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<sup>39</sup> Interview, September 2016.

alternative solutions. In fact, whatever the material elements responsible for the different quality of the reeds may be, whatever its 'causal factor', safeguard is merely the best case scenario for the environmentalists: *preservation* is their final goal. Preservation at all costs, even in the face of losing the reed bed. After all, it is crucial to be realists; after all, the decision made on the highway in 2012 does not seem reversible. And so Koyama started asking a simple but radical question: what if we could clone the reeds?

The hypothesis seems tempting, if slightly futuristic. At any rate, it is not discarded by NEXCO as gibberish. On the contrary, the company decides to include DNA analysis among the tasks of the Shokubutsu WG, starting from the third Investigative Committee Meeting. Specimens are collected from different locations across the Udono reed bed, and two years later, in 2015, the results are presented: apparently, even when the items collected by locals and supposed to be of good quality were cloned, it was not possible to find scientific evidence that the cloned canes were better suited to become *hichiriki* reeds. Indeed, there seemed to be no substantial difference in the DNA of canes harvested in widely different regions of Japan (Fifth Investigative Commission Meeting on the Environmental Preservation of the Udono Reed Bed (December 05, 2015). Results of the DNA Analyses of Udono's Canes. Available at <http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/newly/h26/1205/pdfs/2-03.pdf>. Accessed November 15, 2016). Similar conclusions were not only a disappointment for Koyama and the other members of the Udono Research Center, but also a strong confirmation of NEXCO's hopes and desires: after all, science was telling everyone, there is nothing special about the reeds of *gagaku*, nothing 'essential'. Claims to their superiority are just flawed, or unsupported by evidence.

Tōgi Hideki once stated: "In 'we Japanese', it seems there is a Japanese DNA. If, as DNA, music and the arts of ancient times, or the way of feeling nature, have been passed on down to modern man, this DNA yearns [to be released]. I believe that, in our modern heads, this has just been forgotten and that this sense/feeling in our cells has not been lost" (quoted in Lancashire 2003, 35). And in an interview, he added: "*gagaku* appeals to our primal instincts –we not only listen to *gagaku*, but feel it with the whole of our being. It's in our DNA"<sup>40</sup>. (Here, too "we" means "we Japanese", in an unabashed, self-

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<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2002/12/29/culture/hideki-togi-out-to-gagaku-your-world/> (accessed November 8, 2016).

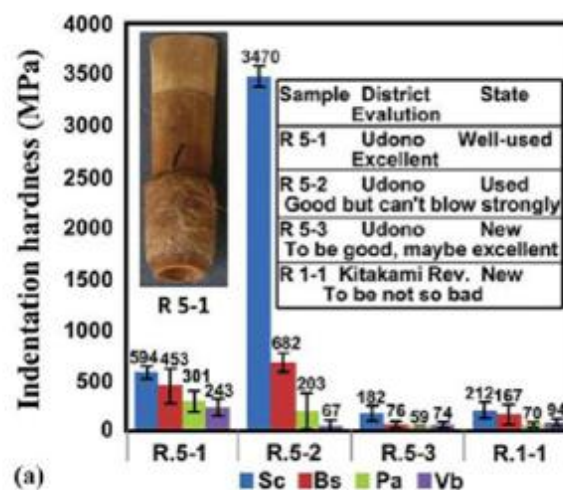
aggrandizing Nihonjinron spirit). But looking at the results of NEXCO's working group, it seems clear that even if *gagaku* was actually inscribed in Japanese DNA, it would still be nowhere near the reeds of one of its instruments. Perhaps, in the end, *gagaku* is more something we infuse things with, than a 'really real' substance that can be found instilled or diluted in one or another ration.

In 2016, a group of Japanese scientists published an article that, in many ways, set the record straight. Even the title holds promises of clarification for the reader worried about the fate of Udono: *Why are Phragmites Australis Canes Grown in an Udono Reed Bed the Best for Reeds of the Japanese Wind Instrument Hichiriki?: A Structural and Biomechanical Study* (Kawasaki et al. 2016). A reassuring read, to be sure. Unfortunately, despite the authors' best intentions to address the question full-front, their results were not as conclusive as one would have hoped. They get off to a good start. In fact, the physical characteristics of a quality reed seem to be undisputed: "A good cane for *rozetsu* should have an outer diameter of about 11 mm to fit in the *hichiriki* tube, a wall thickness of about 1 mm to make its double blades<sup>41</sup>, and a homogeneous structure to transmit good vibration" (Kawasaki et al. 2016, 49). And yet, finding a cane with these features is not enough to get a great reed, since "the quality is very different even among canes grown in the same place" or, how frustrating, among "parts of the same cane" (Kawasaki et al. 2016, 49). Just like Mr. Okuda, the old reed maker, remarked. The crux of the matter seems to reside in the thickness of the cane's cellular walls –this is where things get technical. Specimens collected in Udono compared with ones that grew in different geographical areas exhibit "thicker cell walls", providing "more uniform hardness in the whole blade" (Kawasaki et al. 2016, 49). After all, there might be hope for the advocates of Udono's cause. And, the authors admit, "the homogeneous structure over the hard and soft tissues would be an important condition for an excellent *rozetsu*" (Kawasaki et al. 2016, 49). The higher "the homogeneity of the structure over the harder and softer materials", the better the results for the *hichiriki* player (Kawasaki et al. 2016, 50). The strictly biomechanical and chemical analysis of the canes did seem to point to the existence of certain 'objective' characteristics that would set Udono's canes apart from all the others.

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<sup>41</sup> A term that indicates the sides of the reed.

Nonetheless, the authors of this pioneering article draw much more subdued, and, to an extent, much more problematic conclusions: “It may be noted that we cannot say what hardness and rigidity are best for *rozetsu* because they depend on the player, the type of music, and other factors” (Kawasaki et al. 2016, 50). And, shortly afterwards, they add: “It is not easy to describe quantitatively or objectively the relation between the structure of musical instruments and the musical tones or sounds because the latter is [sic] evaluated subjectively by the feeling and sensitivity of the players” (Kawasaki et al. 2016, 50) (see **FIG.5.16**). In the end, a purely technological approach to the issue of what makes for a good *rezetsu* does not seem to yield a more convincing answer than a different paradigm (such as the environmentalist perspective embraced by Koyama and the Usono Research Center). So, how can the question be answered? What makes a cane a reed?



**FIGURE 5.16.** Analysis of the indentation hardness of four specimens of reeds. Note the performer’s comments (not directly identified as such) below the name of each specimen.

(From Kawasaki et al. 2016, 50).

For one thing, it seems clear that the answer varies greatly depending on who is asking the question, and that, consequently, the issue is instrumental to specific, oftentimes opposing ideologies. The image of a rich pulp, at once flexible and sturdy, unique to the vegetation that can be found in Usono, fits particularly well with the political agenda of those who claim to be working to salvage a delicate ecosystem under threat. Conversely, the mere and cold data produced inside impersonal (but not necessarily independent) laboratories can become powerful mediators in the service of corporate schemes and strategies. But NEXCO’s analyses tell us something more. Besides being compromised by

an a priori lack of impartiality, these results are fascinating as powerful mediators, effectively turning something as tangible as harvesting, cutting and carving the reeds into steady numbers and impassive diagrams (see **FIG.5.17**). These stable, fully reified objects are more manageable, because their connection with the embodied practice of producing, performing and caring for *gagaku* has been stripped off. To find what lies inside a reed, or, rather, a cane, some elements must be eradicated first<sup>42</sup>. A third alternative, embraced by Kawasaki and his colleagues, is to suggest a less divisive solution, in which hard scientific data are available, but simply inconclusive. Noticeably, though, this option reinstates the subjective, attributing its shortcomings to “the feelings and sensitivity of the players”. What the engineers/scientists have taken out of the equation surreptitiously finds its way back in.



**FIGURE 5.17.** A slide depicting the various stages of the DNA analysis commissioned by NEXCO West on canes collected in different regions (including Udono). Progressively, all links to the practices connected with the *canes as hichiriki reeds* are stripped off. (Third Investigative Commission Meeting on the Environmental Preservation of the Udono Reed Bed (December 12, 2013). Report of the Executive Office Shokubutsu WG. Available at <http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/newly/h25/1212/pdfs/05.pdf>. Accessed November 15, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> As noted by Harvey and Knox, “the knowledges that these engineers produce do have a particular quality, namely the capacity of the specific abstraction to manifest as generic (i.e., nonspecific) and thus float free of the complex relationality of the social” (2015, 203).

What is there left to say about these contentious findings? What do they say to a researcher interested in the sociocultural dynamics looming large just below the surface of the merely technical debate, be it botanic, biochemical or broadly ecological? First of all, it seems perfectly clear that different groups look inside the hollow canes that grow in Udono and see different things. Artisans see craft and tradition: to them, history is science, and the only data that truly count are the experiences accumulated by those who worked before them. Tradition is the name they give to the evidence that left a sediment in time. Engineers, on the other hand, see the hollow space between the walls of a cane, but fail to see the value in its preservation. Perhaps they see an obstacle to brighter possibilities, to much more impressive accomplishments, a green and gently swinging obstruction against what could be a real mark on the land and a sign of progress. Environmentalist look into the canes and see an entire panorama of diverse ecological richness, a vista they care about deeply: where others see a patch of muddy land and a uniform mass of uninteresting vegetation, they feel the interconnection of vegetation and animal life, the past and the present, ways of life and ways of inhabiting the world.

All these different gazes rest upon different ways of scaling: the infrastructural gaze embraces entire portions of the territory that can be repurposed or reorganized; the scientific gaze dissects objects into smaller components, essentially 'looking for' specific units of analysis; the environmental gaze moves 'at ground level', patching together what is normally constructed as natural or as relating to mankind. But all these ways of seeing can be found inside the cane, which is essentially a complex, *multi-scale object*: in Udono its substance, its pulp, is a composite of water, cement (in absentia), chemicals, measurements, tradition, hopes...and sound. The lines of a network of conflicts converge into a tiny fragment, transformed into a symbol and invested with opposing interests. Along the Yodo river, as anywhere else, the natural is turned political.

## 5.5 TANGIBLE, INTANGIBLE, POLITICAL. *GAGAKU* AS AN 'ENDANGERED SPECIES'

Infrastructures are dangerously seductive. Embedded in the daily life of those who inhabit them, roads, bridges, pipelines and communication cables shape people's fruition of their surroundings and dictate pathways for physical, intellectual and even spiritual movement (just think of pilgrimages as infrastructures of (e)motions, for instance). Often monumental, they are nevertheless curiously absorbed by the fabric of experience, attaining a kind of invisible presence in full view. This paradoxical character of manmade material arrangements rests on two features: the first is a dynamic of opposites conjoined, as seen in the synchronicity of absence and presence, naturalness and artificiality exhibited by rail tracks or telephone lines, technologies so seamlessly integrated in the urban environment that they often 'disappear' or become 'natural'. The second is what might be called a 'foldedness' of sorts<sup>43</sup>. By this I mean to suggest that infrastructures are always presented to us as already 'networked', enclosing a number of smaller constituents but also pointing to larger realities. After all, as Dalakoglou and Harvey have noticed, "the realisation of such works involves financial, regulatory and technical relations that often *fold* international, national and local regimes into a single and specific location" (2012, 460 emphasis added). The 'folded state' of infrastructures thus points to a third characteristic: their ability to subsume or, rather, efface the very processes that brought them into being<sup>44</sup>.

Though they might be 'networked', infrastructures are not easily explained by the concept of network itself –quite simply, because the connection between networks and infrastructures is constitutive, and thus has little explanatory force in and of itself<sup>45</sup>. In fact, "given the ever-proliferating networks that can be mobilized to understand infrastructures, we are reminded that discussing an infrastructure is a categorical act. It is a moment of tearing into those heterogeneous networks to define which aspect of

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<sup>43</sup> On networks' and objects' ways of folding, holding together or falling apart, see (Mol and Law 1994; Abrahamsson and Mol 2014).

<sup>44</sup> In the vocabulary of Actor-Network Theory, this is known as "punctualization" (see Latour 1999, 184).

<sup>45</sup> It is perhaps useful to remember that the Oxford English Dictionary defines infrastructure as "A collective term for the subordinate parts of an undertaking", clearly gesturing towards the networked quality introduced above (see "infrastructure, n.". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/95624?redirectedFrom=infrastructure> (accessed November 18, 2016)).



which network is to be discussed and which parts will be ignored” (Larkin 2013, 330). In recent years, anthropologists’ choice has often fallen on the political dimension of devising, constructing, and living with infrastructures<sup>46</sup>. Today, despite significant disagreements in terms of underlying theories, the premises for a full-fledged disciplinary subfield seem to be entirely laid out: as two prominent authors have noticed, “the ethnography of infrastructures offers a space through which to investigate how the political takes form” (Harvey and Knox 2016). In a similar vein, in their monograph *Roads. An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise* (2015) the same authors conclude that a focus on roads has allowed them “to rethink the political from the more grounded, experiential, and immediate space of infrastructural formation” (Harvey and Knox 2015, 187). The specificity of the anthropological gaze as applied to infrastructures lies, then, in its power to bring to light both the political in the material and the materiality of the political.

More broadly speaking, when it comes to infrastructures anthropology has also felt the need to understand what lies behind the surface of the tangible: road building, for example, “involves a great deal more than simply the execution of a planned process of material transformation. As well as technical expertise, their appearance also requires a force of social and political will which is able to generate and foster the belief that these technologies have a capacity to transform the spaces through which they will pass. Roads are thus not just material forms, but are promises towards a future which is uncertain and unclear” (Harvey and Knox 2012, 523). In fact, anthropologists have consistently demonstrated that the political dimension of infrastructures plays out largely on the level of affects: “roads and railways are not just technical objects then but also operate on the level of fantasy and desire. They encode the dreams of individuals and societies and are the vehicles whereby those fantasies are transmitted and made emotionally real” (Larkin 2013, 333).

But the emotional purview of road building or river management is not confined to how certain people live with (the consequences of) roads or bridges –and so the study of

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<sup>46</sup> See the seminal article by Susan Leigh Star (1999), those collected in (Lockrem and Lugo 2012) and the special number of the journal *Mobilities* (Vol.7 Issue 4) (2012) on roads and anthropology. For useful overviews, see also (Snead, Erickson, and Darling 2010; Salazar 2014). For a provocative piece on fresh ways to think about infrastructures, complete with an excellent list of recent anthropological sources, see (Larkin 2013). See also the post series available at <https://aesengagement.wordpress.com/thematic-series/the-nature-of-infrastructure/> and <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/725-the-infrastructure-toolbox> (Appel, Anand, and Gupta 2015) (accessed November 16, 2016).

infrastructures too should not be limited to such aspects. Road building and river management have an ‘affective dimension’ because they have an effect on the world: affecting a state of affairs –that is what affective means, in this and other cases<sup>47</sup>. Thus, in this sense, “the processes by which rational projects of technological development are able to enact their promises start to become more comprehensible when we begin to pay attention to the affective engagements which accompany developmental processes” (Harvey and Knox 2012, 534). Needless to say, such a shift also clears the way for a rich cross-pollination between research on mobility, “human-technological assemblages”, experience, expertise, and even performance<sup>48</sup>.

And, incidentally, the aesthetic dimension of infrastructures is shaped by the centrality of the body in the fruition of such complex systems: “Aesthetics in this sense is not a representation but an embodied experience governed by the ways infrastructures produce the ambient conditions of everyday life: our sense of temperature, speed, florescence, and the ideas we have associated with these conditions” (Larkin 2013, 336–37)<sup>49</sup>. This is because infrastructures “operate at the level of surface, what Buck-Morss (1992) refers to as the *terminae* of the outside of the body—skin, nose, eye, ear—rather than the mind inside. Softness, hardness, the noise of a city, its brightness, the feeling of being hot or cold are all sensorial experiences regulated by infrastructures” (Larkin 2013, 337). Aesthetic, affective and embodied: such are the surprising features of roads, pipes, and cables.

But the aesthetics of infrastructure is only a short step away from the “aesthetic of landscape nostalgia” (Waley 2000, 200) actively deployed by the supporters of the SAVE THE Udono Reed Bed campaign. Resorting to old and new images of *furusato*, Koyama and the other members of the Udono Reed Bed Research Center appealed to a complex imagery that more or less unknowingly draws from what anthropologist Jennifer Robertson has called “a literary genre of *affective environmentalism*, beginning in the eighth century with the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, including poetry anthologies and Edo-period (1603-1868) farm manuals, and persisting today in the form of domestic policy

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<sup>47</sup> Of course, such a view is based on Spinoza’s notion of *affectio* as interpreted and redefined by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateau* (2005 [1980]) (see Brian Massumi’s succinct definition in Deleuze and Guattari 2005, xvi; and, for a clearer exposition, Massumi 2015, 3–4).

<sup>48</sup> For a wonderful example of such theoretical hybridizations, see (Adey et al. 2012).

<sup>49</sup> Here, Larkin is drawing from the classical Aristotelian concept of *aesthesis*: “*Aisthesis* refers not to the mental appreciation of works of art, but to a bodily reaction to lived reality: “It is a form of cognition, achieved through taste, touch, hearing, seeing, smell,” Buck-Morss (1992, p. 6) argues” (Larkin 2013, 336).

platforms, city charters, and sake advertisements among others” (1988, 498 emphasis added). Just like infrastructures participate in our sensory experiences, so too the *furusato* discourse elicits an affective response mobilizing images and cultural references that resonate with people’s perception of the environment.

This complex affective appeal of *furusato* is often condensed, hidden, and, in a Latourian sense, punctualized, by resorting to the word “culture”. Noticeably, this was the case with Tōgi Hideki’s appeals against the construction of the New Meishin Highway. Here is how he chose to begin his peroration: “Certainly it must be possible to harvest the canes somewhere else, you may think. But the reeds from a different location cannot harbor a sound that has been preserved without changes since the Heian period! It would be a change to our culture”. And he goes on: “Culture is intricately entangled and linked to a number of things. The canes from Udonō’s reed bed too are entangled with not just the culture of *hichiriki* reeds, but also the unique culture of Udonō. It is finely linked to the methods of burning the canes and harvesting them, and to the impact on the ecosystem there” (H. Tōgi 2013, 9). What the artist who can be most broadly identified as the “spokesperson” for Japanese court music<sup>50</sup> is doing here is trying to project onto Udonō “a sentimentally evoked topography” (Robertson 1988, 497) that reverberates with that entire undercurrent of Japanese classical literature mentioned earlier under the rubric of “affective environmentalism”. Indeed, one could even say that Tōgi is truly carrying out a sort of *topos-graphia* (from the Greek *topos*, or “place” and *graphein*, or “to write”): inscribing “culture” upon Udonō; imbuing space with meaning; semanticizing a no-where by turning it into a some-where that will be relevant to the whole nation on the basis of an appeal to something akin to a specific ‘Japanese sense of place’.

While this may sound too farfetched, it is worth remembering that Tōgi’s intellectual move is not isolated: Koyama, for example, similarly opens his pamphlet recalling the episode, recorded in the *Tosa nikki* (935), of poet Ki no Tsurayuki travelling along the Yodo river and spending the night in an inn that he calls Udonō (2009, 10). Thus the use of Udonō as an emblem of *furusato* is not at all ahistorical; on the contrary, it is filled with intertextual cues to the past. Moreover, some of the features of the reed bed, such as its proximity to the water and its role in the production of traditional artifacts, seal the analogy with a touch of authenticity: “as a landscape, the quintessential features of

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<sup>50</sup> But see (Lancashire 2003).

*furusato* include forested mountains, fields cut by a meandering river, and a cluster of thatch-roof farmhouses” (Robertson 1988, 494). According to these coordinates, Udono truly seems like the paragon of nativist hometown-ness.

But given the insistence on such well-worn tropes, how are we to judge the fact that those environmentalists are the same who once heavily intervened on the reed bed by placing there a water pump (see **FIG.5.18**)? And how can the values articulated by the discourse of *furusato* be harmonized with the suggestion advanced by Koyama to simply “clone the canes”? In short, how and why did the advocates of Udono’s cause manage to intervene on the reed bed at the infrastructural level while at the same time praising the timeless beauty of the area?



**FIGURE 5.18.** Working on the water pump in Udono, around 1996. From Koyama’s presentation *The Udono Reed Bed Sustains the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Humanity* (October 2013). Used with permission.

In order to answer these questions satisfactorily, it is important to acknowledge the impossibility of reducing the environmentalists’ interpretation of what Udono is to any idealized vision of *unspoiled* naturalness. The most convincing evidence of this lies in the words of a prominent member of the Udono Reed Bed Research Center Tanioka Suwako. On one occasion, Tanioka noted that “like *satoyama*<sup>51</sup>, the reed plain is a ‘secondary

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<sup>51</sup> “*Satoyama* is a word composed of *sato* (village) and *yama* (mountain). Its dictionary definition reads: “mountain near a village, connected to the life of the inhabitants”. By extension, the term indicates the Japanese rural territory linearly organized as a valley floor or piedmont, downhill from forest slopes. Surrounded by woodland, *satoyama* consists of fields and rice paddies, streams and furrows, dugouts and reed beds, with gardens and houses all around. This territory is used for food-producing mixed farming, and it is maintained according to local know-hows. [...] In such a temporal and spatial mosaic of intertwined milieus and habits, each component is strictly connected to the others from an ecological as well as from a

nature' [*nijiteki shizen*] that can only be preserved through human use" (Tanioka 2012, 9). Here "secondary nature" is not to be confused with Shirane's homonymous concept, which indicates a "re-created or represented nature", codified by literary authors starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and "not regarded as being opposed to the human world so much as an extension of it, (...) a substitute for a more primary nature that was often remote from or rarely seen by the aristocrats" (Shirane 2012, 4). Conversely, Tanioka refers here to a type of nature which, "like the natural environment of rural communities, is preserved through the participation of human beings"<sup>52</sup>. In this way, it is clear that human intervention is not rejected a priori as destructive by Koyama and other environmentalists, but rather ingrained in the very definition of nature that underlies a certain 'politics of preservation'.

A similar attitude is reflected in Tōgi's inclusion of the techniques of reed-burning within what he calls "the culture of Udono": in this expression, nature is subsumed by culture, rather than opposed to it. From this point of view, the reeds are no less natural even if they have gone through a complex process of manufacturing: "before we can hold them in our hands as *hichiriki* reeds, these [canes] have to pass through many hands, from those of the people who harvest them, to those of the people who sell them, to those of the people who manufacture them, to those of the people who buy them and finally play them" (Tanioka 2012, 3). Protecting the environment thus means not only insuring the existence of Udono's flora and fauna, but also supporting a variety of human activities that were once flourishing. In this sense, the battle for preservation is not necessarily aimed at keeping things as they are, but rather at averting the consequences of unwanted change. The distinction is vital to understand why those who oppose the construction of the highway section between Yawata and Takatsuki have already manipulated the same environment that they actively try to safeguard.

Even though the concept of nature that emerges from the words and activities of the Udono Reed Bed Research Center is more comprehensive than one would initially expect (and similar considerations could be extended to such keywords as 'landscape' or 'environment'), their choices when it comes to the preservation of the area were always

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utilitarian point of view. Here, there have been constant interactions between people and environment. [...] Here, culture and nature have overlapped and enriched one another" (Brosseau 2014, 402–3)

<sup>52</sup> A definition provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF): see <http://www.maff.go.jp/j/nousin/jikei/keikaku/panf/02/pdf/2.pdf> (accessed November 15, 2016).

markedly in line with broad political tendencies at the national level. This chapter has attempted to elucidate some of these broader connections with the political life of postwar Japan. Indeed, the effects of the aggressive ‘cementification’ that characterized Japanese politics between the 1950s and the 1980s were particularly severe in places like Udono, close to a stream of water but undoubtedly suburban: “river ecosystems were destroyed, their wildlife and fauna disappeared, and many riparian landscapes lost their natural beauty. This transformation was particularly evident in rivers that ran through urban areas” (Takahasi and Uitto 2004, 65). Since the 1980s, “recovering the river environment [became] an important issue in river administration and engineering in Japan, because it was realized that the ecology of virtually all rivers in the country had deteriorated severely” (Takahasi and Uitto 2004, 68).

The explosion of a national debate over the privatization of Japan Highway and the other public companies involved in the construction of the road system, around 1998, gave the inhabitants of those areas that had already been subjected to large-scale works yet another reason to dissent. After all, as noted by Waley, “the postwar history of Japan can be seen in terms of the inexorable arch of development through construction (generally in concrete). Much of the resulting conflict has focussed on struggles over water” (2005, 195–96). In short, “rivers have become a central preoccupation, a rallying point, and a locational device for organizing activities” (Waley 2005, 196). Once again, the case of Udono is paradigmatic: the appearance of the Udono Club and Udono Reed Bed Research Center is almost concurrent with the debate on the privatization of the highway sector.

The chronology of “river-focussed environmental movements” is laid out precisely by Waley:

“It begins, so to speak, with a prologue, with initial recommendations in the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s on new thinking about floods and flood control. During the next period, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, fresh ground was broken mainly through consciousness-raising efforts. Books were written, seminars held and visits undertaken to sites in Europe and North America. This led in the 1990s to a period of pilot projects, several of them in locations surrounding Tokyo. Largely overlapping with this, from the mid-1990s on, comes a period of diffusion of good practice throughout the country under the guidance of umbrella groups. And finally the last few years have seen two trends: river-focussed groups adopting NPO status and the increasing involvement of schools and students. This development through time reflects at least three factors. The first, from the 1970s into the 1980s, was the product of a period of rapid economic growth and the resulting despoliation of the environment, leading to

dramatic instances of flash flooding. The second, from the 1980s into the 1990s, was characterized by the gradual rise to positions of influence of a generation of officials who had been educated during the period of university ferment of the late 1960s and early 1970s. And the third, in the 1990s, grew out of the blossoming of lay activism that stemmed from disenchantment with the perceived corruption of politicians and bureaucrats” (2005, 205).

This marked dissatisfaction with politics constitutes a third element of social critique taken up by the champions of Udono’s ‘reed bed culture’, along with fear for an increasingly polluted environment and skepticism towards policies of construction through cement. Over the years, the overtones of civic protest that local groups had acquired were gradually reinforced by the realization that the privatization of the highway companies was merely a façade: as pointed out by Mizutani and Uranishi, in fact, the use of the term privatization “is far from accurate in this case, as the newly established expressway law rules that one-third of the shares should continue to be held by the government” (2008, 471). Despite the mounting aversion toward the expansion of the highway system (promoted by the Fifth Comprehensive National Development Plan in 1998<sup>53</sup>), “in most cases, government policy has been characterized by an apparent rigidity, an unwillingness to change a previously decided course, however unreasonable or inexpedient it is shown to be” (Waley 2005, 213). In other words, the reaction of central institutions seemed to confirm the thesis of Japan as a “construction state” (*doken kokka*) (McCormack 1996), described by Feldhoff as “a government which puts much more public investments into the construction of public works than can be realistically justified by public need” (Feldhoff 2007, 91).

Such a failure to address citizens’ concerns was worsened by the fact that “public works have not scored any real success at lessening the regional disparities” (Feldhoff 2007, 95). Once more, the issue was first and foremost political: “politicians and bureaucrats at both local and central levels have gravitated around specific construction project” (Waley 2011, 91), giving rise to a “clientelist state” in which “politicians channel distributive policy expenditures in the form of public works into their electoral districts and thereby enhance their prospects for re-election” (Feldhoff 2007, 98). According to

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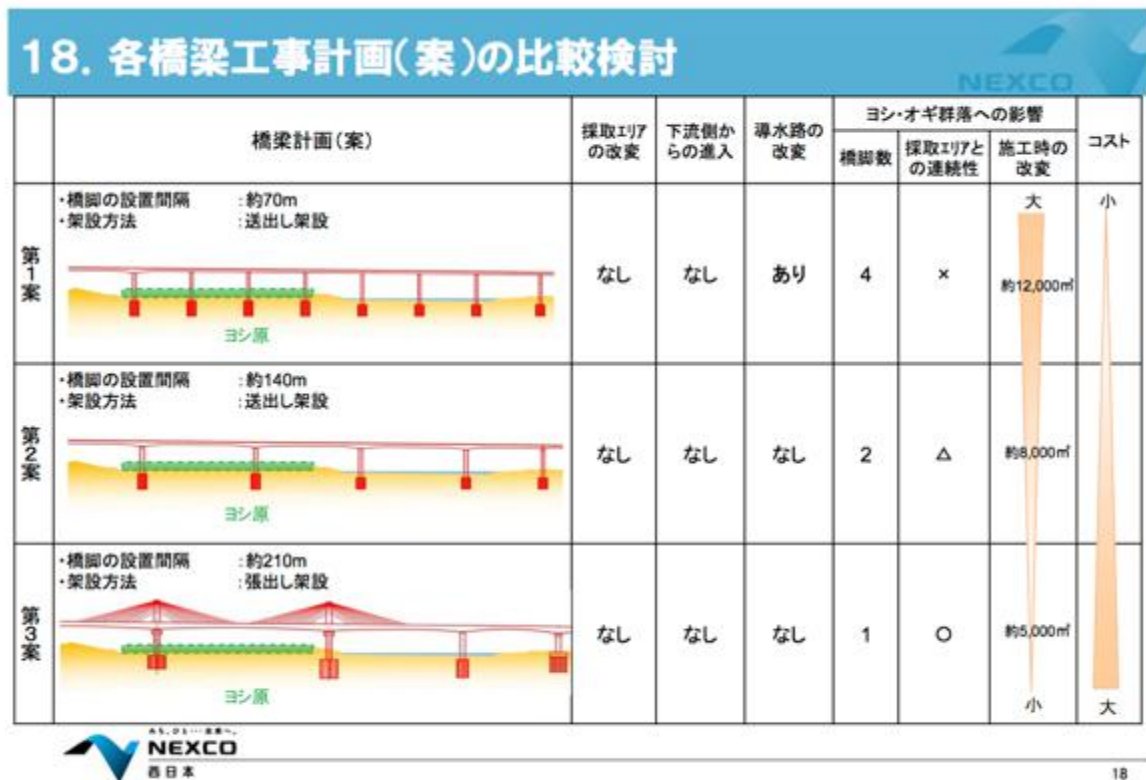
<sup>53</sup> See Part 2 Chapter 5 Section 1 Paragraph 3.1.(1): “The automobile networks will comprise a 14,000-kilometer Arterial high standard highway network that will traverse the land both horizontally and vertically and supplementary local high standard highways that will promote interregional exchange”. See <http://www.mlit.go.jp/kokudokeikaku/zs5-e/cndp5.txt> (accessed November 16, 2016).

many activists, Udono was caught up in this toxic loop: despite the fact that the construction of a secondary highway in the area was often perceived as unnecessary, its realization was required by an essentially corrupt political system. Naturally, this delicate aspect was particularly difficult to explore during interviews. But what leaves no traces on a recorder can be no less present or telling. Broad smiles of complicity were the preferred reaction to the most sensitive questions, followed by vague, matter-of-fact remarks on the “difficulty” of the present situation. In this sense, the struggle to express the political reasons behind their predicament mirrored the fact that the environmentalists were overwhelmed by specific local repercussions of the abovementioned nationwide issues. Torn between the tangible menace of promised infrastructures, the political discomfort toward enduring national inequalities, and the ineffable appeal of a nostalgic nationalistic frame of reference, Koyama and his fellow volunteers had to navigate the troubled waters of an imbalanced negotiation with NEXCO West.

This brings us to the final matter of what these movements to protect Udono have achieved, and of what future lies ahead of them. The first question is rapidly dispensed with. During the most recent Investigative Commission Meeting on the Environmental Preservation of the Udono Reed Bed, held on February 24, 2016, the image below was featured in a presentation entitled *Project for a Bridge Considering the Environmental Protection of the Udono Reed Bed* (see **FIG.5.19**). It represents a comparison of three options for the construction of the massive bridge that would cross the Yodo river, each considered from the point of view of its impact on the reed bed. According to NEXCO West, the third alternative has the highest degree of “continuity with the [canes’] harvesting area”, shown in green. This solution would also reduce the number of pillars necessary to the project from the original four to just one, supposedly minimizing the impact of the bridge on the surroundings. Noticeably, the last column on the right represents the cost of each option. It easy to see how the least invasive is also the most expensive. The very fact that a plan characterized by a lower environmental impact has been devised would seem to indicate that Koyama and his volunteers have somehow managed to get their message across. After all, what better sign of a successful negotiation than a modification of the original engineering project. Nonetheless, NEXCO’s proposals is seen by members of the Udono Reed Bed Research Center as a far cry from any real improvement. And in the end, given that construction works on site are expected to begin by 2018, it is hard to



tell whether two years will be enough time to ensure that “option 3” becomes anything more than merely a display of good intentions.



**FIGURE 5.19.** NEXCO’s three options for the project of the bridge above the reed bed and across the Yodo river. Seventh Investigative Commission Meeting on the Environmental Preservation of the Udono Reed Bed (February 24, 2016). Project for a Bridge Considering the Environmental Protection of the Udono Reed Bed. Available at <http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/newly/h28/0224/pdfs/05.pdf>. Accessed November 15, 2016.

Unfortunately, the prospects of Udono’s activism are rather grim. Sure, there will be other meetings of experts, other measurements and debates, as well as countless events. Sure, more people will join the ranks of the skeptical, dissatisfied, or simply concerned volunteers. But a close look at the documents made available by NEXCO West after each meeting of the Investigative Commission, and especially at the latest version of the recapitulatory brochure *Udono Reed Bed and the New Meishin Highway: The Effort of*

*Environmental Protection* (Ver.7, 2016)<sup>54</sup>, indicates that the most crucial disputes have been essentially resolved. Analyses of the soil and of the canes did not reveal any substantial characteristics setting apart Udono from other areas of Japan; the bridge will have no negative impact on the canes harvested below; the spring fires in the reed bed will still be possible after the construction of the highway. The language is matter-of-fact, supported by numbers and diagrams. Even though Udono exhibits no sign of concrete changes, and one can still walk freely among its canes, there is a strong sense of inevitability surrounding the remaining phases of the project, which should be completed by 2023.

Asked to comment on what will happen in the future, Koyama stresses the importance of continuing organizing the observation meetings (*kansatsukai*), “because more and more people should experience the beauty of Udono’s nature on the ground”. After our interview on September 11, 2016, he asked me to wait a few more minutes before heading back: there was something he wanted to show me. Hurriedly, he took me to an underpass just below Takatsuki’s train station. Here, illuminated by aseptic neon lights, stood three big information panels behind thick glass. Each contained images of Udono, its reeds, its animals and vegetation. There were also pictures of *gagaku*: the usual ensemble playing *kangen* (*Etenraku*, one would imagine...), accompanied by a routinely informative description of the main characteristics of “Japanese court music”. The next day, Koyama was to meet with some city administrators, who suggested to have a friendly conversation in front of those same panels. “I said: ‘No, let’s go to the reed bed instead. Let’s meet there and have a walk’. Because you see, they should come there in person...it’s too easy to meet here, too comfortable for them not to dirty their nice shoes”. Perhaps it was the flickering light, or the fact that we were the only people in the underpass, but the enthusiasm of this senior campaigner seemed somewhat misplaced, perhaps even slightly grotesque. What fight was left to fight? His was a failure, a victory, or a baffling mixture of the two? The cacophonous echo of those concrete walls left little room for optimism.

An hour earlier, Koyama had told me that while his friend and former Chief Musician Tōgi Kanehiko was alive, the battle for Udono could count on an eminent face and name.

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<sup>54</sup> Available at [http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/activity/open\\_info/progress/individual/31/pdfs/udono-yoshihara.pdf](http://corp.w-nexco.co.jp/activity/open_info/progress/individual/31/pdfs/udono-yoshihara.pdf) (accessed November 16, 2016).

Here was a musician who was ready to put himself on the frontline and speak up against the huge loss his instrument and his profession would suffer from the realization of a new highway in Udono. “Now that he’s gone, there is no real spokesperson. More and more members of the Imperial Household ensemble do not belong to hereditary families. They are not from Kansai, their roots are not here. So naturally they don’t care as much about the faith of Udono. The problem with *gagaku* musicians’ involvement with the issue of Udono’s reed bed, if you ask me, is all there: it’s not personal to them anymore. It’s not about their family, their home, their tradition”.

Koyama might be right; perhaps musicians have lost interest in what is perceived as a matter of material resources, rather than of ethical values. But I would like to suggest that the decisive factor in the more or less acknowledged failure of the environmentalists lies in their incapacity to team up effectively with the world of *gagaku*. Despite the undeniable fact that many *gagaku* amateurs have in fact signed the SAVE THE Udono petition, firsthand experience with one of the most prominent groups in Kansai (Nanto gakuso in Nara) suggests that the vast majority of practitioners have but a vague understanding of the issue, even when the *hichiriki* is their primary instrument. More importantly, active participation in the events organized by the Udono Reed Bed Research Center is not a priority for those who perform *gagaku*. Indeed, it is something that does not concern them directly as music lovers, because it lies outside the realm of the musical, pertaining instead to the realm of (political) decisions.

This disconnection between musicians and environmentalists is all the more surprising considering that both groups have a vested interest in safeguarding Udono. Borrowing psychologist James Gibson’s famous term (2014, 119), one could say that there are rich mutual “affordances” between the discourse of nature’s preservation and that of *gagaku*’s. The reed, this complex and durable object, is itself full of “conceptual affordances” that stem from but extend far beyond the realm of the material (Holbraad 2014, 231): the timelessness of the music in which it is used coincides with the long history claimed for Udono; its ‘rustic naturalness’ is easily associated to a rural landscape that resists the pressures of modernity; its role in the production of a harmonious tone color may even parallel the canes’ centripetal function within the communitarian life that once characterized the riverbanks. Exploiting these affordances –these mutual resonances–, the environmentalists conflate sound and nature: they not only portray *gagaku* as an unchanging tradition, but project the values ascribed to the environmental

onto it. Thus the sounds and materials of the *hichiriki* largely overlap in this ‘preservation discourse’: in Udonō, what may happen (and, to an extent, has already happened) to nature may also happen to music.

However powerful these associations may be, their proponents were clearly unable to articulate them into a network strong enough to overpower the one set up by NEXCO West. The components of the ‘preservation discourse’ remain divided: “At one end of the spectrum, then, is a narrative bemoaning the destruction of a nostalgia-suffused aesthetic of landscape, bathed by flowing water and reflected in neat paddy fields; at the other, one of focused struggle and targeted campaigns, occasionally reminiscent of the anti-pollution citizen movements of the 1960s and early 1970s” (Waley 2000, 200). Despite Waley’s suggestion that there is “no hard boundary between these narratives and their adherents” (2000, 200), in Udonō fragmentation is the price that those who care about the *hichiriki* reeds have to pay for their shortsighted decision to continuing playing the part of the country folks “entrusted with the custody of an irreplaceable (if invented) heritage”, the “curators of the landscape of nostalgia” (Robertson 1988, 509).

In the end, the concept of ‘safeguard’ may be the crux of the matter here. So long as *gagaku* is portrayed as an ‘endangered species’, so long as the discourse of those who seek to protect its materials keeps veering away from the tangible and the sonic and towards the ineffable, the timeless –that is, towards the essentialist-nationalist modern discourse surrounding “Japanese court music” - the differently heterogeneous network of numbers, engineering, chemical analyses and seductive promises of economic expansion will continue to prevail. Udonō’s case urges us to incorporate in the study of *gagaku* both the persistence of stereotyped images of Japanese sensitivity towards the environment<sup>55</sup> and a critique of ‘salvational’ approaches to traditional music. The consequences far exceed the local scale of Udonō’s quarrels: perhaps the most self-aggrandizing of all such salvational approaches is UNESCO’s “safeguarding paradigm”, which, by valuing the intangible, often loses track of the political significance of sustaining the tangible behind it (see Akagawa 2016). With its stark opposition of green (fields) and grey (roads), Udonō reminds us of the importance of a *politics of the tangible*: in fact, *gagaku* can only move the listener if its materials are under the right conditions to vibrate. What’s in a reed, if not the conditions of possibility that make music resonate with those who care to listen?

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<sup>55</sup> On which, see (see Asquith and Kalland 1997; Berque 1997a; 1997b).

High-speeding *gagaku* or enrooting it in water and soil? Roots and routes: the sonic mobility of this music will have to find a way of harmonizing the two –and this can only be a political process.



**FIGURE 5.20.** Uono's reed bed from within. July 2013. (Picture by the author).

## CONCLUSION

### I. CHANGING SCALE IN THE STUDY OF *GAGAKU*

*Gagaku* occupies an apparently paradoxical position in a world dominated by the ever-accelerating palpitations of commercial music. Too often reduced to a sort of ‘Shinto soundscape’ strongly associated to the emperor system, this ancient performing art has recently spread out far beyond the confines of the court. Contrary to fifty or even thirty years ago, nowadays *gagaku* can be found in record shops and on the cover of the latest manga, its sounds are commonly heard in popular movies and anime, and some of its artists have enjoyed unprecedented popularity. Even though a thorough quantitative study remains to be conducted, the number of practitioners throughout the country seems to be steadily on the rise (see e.g. Endō 2013, 1). It is not rare for universities to offer curricular *gagaku* classes, or to have a ‘*gagaku* club’ among their extracurricular activities. While members of these groups may still be maliciously tagged as “maniacs” (*maniakku*) by their peers, the normalization of these ancient sounds is well underway.

Educational settings are especially crucial when it comes to the parallel spreading of *gagaku* abroad: since the 1960s, institutions like the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Köln University in Germany, UCLA and Columbia University in the United States have all been working with professional musicians to train students in the performance of *kangen* or, more rarely, *bugaku* (Terauchi 2010, 168–73; 2015). This internationalization of *gagaku*

is also reinforced by the popularity of some of its most renowned performers, like the *shō* player Miyata Mayumi, who in the past has collaborated with both composers and popular music's icons like Bjork. Like these examples indicate, the increasingly cosmopolitan character of *gagaku* lends itself to future studies of its new transnational spaces – a promising area that will have to deal with issues of translatability, identity negotiation, and, more broadly, 'cultural appropriation'.

Evidently, *gagaku* has come a long way from the secretive aura of the imperial palace's thick, silent walls. Between the 1980s and the 1990s in particular, in the experience of many Japanese "court music" went from the state of "music I'm not used to" to that of "music I've heard before" (Terauchi 2010, 242). But that quick and widespread popularization was not just a matter of something temporarily gaining momentum. It could not be reduced to a process of intensification. *Gagaku's* commercial success was and still is, above all, a challenge to the image most people used to have of it. As the presence of *gagaku* in the vast panorama of music available in Japan becomes more and more established, for the general public it has become crucial to be able to "situate, musically and sociologically, what one is listening to in the context of a complete map of *gagaku*, and to distinguish the value and uniqueness of the contents of a certain product" (Terauchi 2010, 255). For a scholar, however, the same situation poses a challenge to the very possibility of drawing a coherent "complete map of *gagaku* – the challenge of having to confront a constant relocation of borders, a constant redefinition of what constitutes a matter of concern<sup>1</sup>. When I started my research, in 2013, I had in mind an exploration of the relationship between music and ritual among a group of *gagaku* practitioners in Nara. On my very first day out in the field, I found myself timidly playing *ryūteki* with Professor Suzuki Haruo accompanying on the *shō*, in a tunnel that was still closed to the public, somewhere along a stretch of the New Meishin Highway. It took me a few months to realize that in order to be able to show how those ancient sounds had come to resonate on the walls of a highway tunnel I needed to operate on the *scale* of my project, not just on its contents. Gradually, I came to see that the main issues encountered in my work, the complexity and multiplicity of 21<sup>st</sup>-century *gagaku*, were both related to this key concept of scale, and to its relationship to the acts of mapping and mapmaking<sup>2</sup>. If I

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<sup>1</sup> See (van Schendel 2002) for the source of this geographical analogy.

<sup>2</sup> As will become apparent, my main source of inspiration in this sense is the work of Marilyn Strathern in *Partial Connections* (2004). On the difference between "mapping" and "mapmaking", see (Wood 1993).

wanted to convey a sense of that complexity, I needed to think about the *topology* of *gagaku*<sup>3</sup>.

In order to make a map, scale is indispensable. In its most basic understanding, in fact, “cartographic scale expresses the mathematical relationship between the map and the Earth, usually denoted as a representative fraction” (Marston, Woodward, and Johns 2009, 664). Simply put, the smaller the fraction, the bigger, and thus the less detailed, the portion of space shown. But scale does not just refer to relations (mathematical or otherwise): it can also indicate size, or levels (see Howitt 1998, 51–52). Shifting between scales of analysis or, to use Bird’s terminology, “modulating”, thus makes it possible to approach phenomena of different sizes, at different levels, and with disparate relations among them (quoted in Howitt 1998, 55). According to Howitt, who knowingly tries to “unsettle dominant metaphors” by playing with the homonymy between the musical and geographical “scales”, “changing scale does not change the notes but changes the relationship between the notes” (Howitt 1998, 55). Looping back this concept, I started to wonder whether it was possible to talk about *gagaku* shifting across different scales, modulating the analysis in different ways and thus in a sense ‘messing with’ *gagaku*’s materials. In doing so, I was guided by Marilyn Strathern’s indication that “relations and connections between entities can appear in new configurations as one transfers from one domain of enquiry to another” (Strathern 2004, xiv).

Throughout the thesis, this ‘controlled interference’<sup>4</sup> of different scales is first and foremost apparent in the form of a progressive scaling down of or zooming in on *gagaku*. However, this is not a way to get ‘closer to the real thing’, closer to an ‘essence’, but rather an attempt to highlight how, at every scale, the allegedly stable ‘object-*gagaku*’ is differently reconstituted. Scaling down therefore does not in any sense entail a process of simplification. In her ethnography of the atherosclerosis of the lower limbs, Annemarie Mol made this point very clearly: “If I slightly altered the lenses of my ethnographic microscope, or shifted my view sideways a bit, I would tell different stories. The specificities would differ. However, what wouldn’t differ is the coexistence of different ways to enact any one disease—the coexistence of different diseases enacted. *The fact that there is multiplicity stays the same, in every site, on every scale*” (2002, 50 emphasis

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<sup>3</sup> For similar predicaments, see (Mol and Law 1994; de Laet and Mol 2000; Ingold 2011, 76–88).

<sup>4</sup> See (Viveiros de Castro 2004) on the notions of “controlled equivocation” and “transduction” (adopted from Gilbert Sinondon) at the core of his anthropological project.



added). From the many ways in which different ‘modes’ of knowledge-production elicit different analytical objects (Chapter 1), to the macroscopic transformations and alternative experimentations of ‘court music’ during the Meiji period (Chapter 2); from the allegiances forged by *gagaku* practitioners in Kansai to ensure the survival of their local traditions (Chapter 3) to the physicality and complex relationality of becoming *gagaku* practitioners in Nara’s Nanto *gakuso* (Chapter 4), all the way down to the riverbanks of Udono, through its grass and inside its canes, down to the very DNA of a reed’s material(ity) (Chapter 5), the thesis offers no stable definition of *gagaku*, let alone a sense of coming to terms with its complexity.

But complexity itself calls into question both the scope and the promoter of a cartographic endeavor, in that it might “[come] to be perceived as an artifact of questions asked, and by the same token of boundaries drawn” (Strathern 2004, xiii). The issue of the appropriateness of using a certain scale, then, is relevant not only because “each type of social and environmental diversity has its own ‘best resolution’ in terms of cartographic representation” (Marston, Woodward, and Johns 2009, 664), but also because there is a “politics of scale” at work in the construction of any map (Howitt 1998, 56). In this sense, the representation of space is never neutral<sup>5</sup>: “the construction of spaces in which human activity is thought to take place is always contested, and so is the production of knowledge about these social spaces, their ‘geographies of knowing’ (Gregory 1994)” (van Schendel 2002, 651). In the case of *gagaku*, the many geographies of knowing encompassed throughout this thesis show that power and authenticity are tightly entwined, and that, at each scale, the past is a colonized land. Be it in the (re)appropriation of courtly rituals after the Meiji restoration, in the claim to a special historical bond between Udono and *gagaku*, or in the choice of a group’s name, the music-makers are the first ones preoccupied with securing boundaries and creating a safe space for the enactment of their particular versions of ‘Japanese court music’. In this sense, those who enact local versions of *gagaku* also scale it down, and, even more importantly, get to decide on which scale is contained within which: the local scale of the city of Nara, for instance, can contain the international, intercontinental scale expressed by the Silk Road, because, according to Nara’s *gagaku* musicians, their city was the end point of the

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<sup>5</sup> For two radical approaches to the issue, see (Harley 1989; Wood 1993).

long route. Thus sound, just like food, can “fold” various places, which then exist both through their presence and absence (see Abrahamsson and Mol 2014).

Of course, the cartography of contemporary *gagaku* presented in this thesis is highly personal and arbitrary. Is it not possible, then, that the complexity of *gagaku* is just an effect of my own way of interpreting it? After all, “the ability to perceive more than one scale at the same time” might well be “[what] makes the relationship between phenomena appear ‘complex’” (Strathern 2004, 15). But the criticism that complexity is only produced by the gaze of the observer, and that simplification provides a firmer hold on reality does not nullify the effects of shifting across different scales: in fact, “although one’s grip on a tool is no less secure because on an infinitesimal scale skin and wood do not touch, the knowledge creates the sensation of there being something else to explain. Certainty itself appears partial, information intermittent. An answer is another question, a connection a gap, a similarity a difference, and vice versa. Wherever we look we are left with the *further knowledge* that surface understanding conceals gaps and bumps” (Strathern 2004, xxiv emphasis added). Comparing and contrasting historical, relational, material, and ontological ways of composing *gagaku* creates further knowledge, despite the fact that the comparison is instantiated by a specific subject. Which is not to deny the importance of reflexivity: on the contrary, my efforts to situate myself from the start, and to “engage in practice” with my informants “making participation central to the task” (Pink 2009, 34) was paired to a theoretical attempt, at every turn, to make my presence perceivable, in line with Donna Haraway’s famous claim that “only partial perspective promises objective vision” (1988, 581). In this sense, and with all the phenomenological overtones that this implies, my map constitutes “the view of a body rather than the view from above” (Strathern 2004, 32).

Partiality, then, is another of the main features of the inconstant map provided by this thesis. Resonances between different enactments of *gagaku*, always necessarily partial, constitute a path to follow, and an image to think with multiplicity. In this alternative topology, a map is more akin to a ‘sonic wayfaring device’ than to a locational tool<sup>6</sup>. This is why the images that result from my exploration of *gagaku* are ec-centric: how else could it be, when the topology employed follows resonances across various scales, rather

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<sup>6</sup> On wayfaring, and for a critique of the notion of “space”, see (Ingold 2011, 141–64)

than dictating how to travel from stable place to stable place keeping a disembodied center perfectly still?

The problem, then, is whether this lack of centrality is bound to induce an instability, a centrifugal force that leads to incoherence. This thesis argues that, on the contrary, *gagaku's* ec-centricity does not make it any weaker. Instability does not necessarily amount to a failure to count: after all, changes of state are more likely to guarantee the rhizomatic growth of an (abstract) entity than to prevent it. But if this is the case, a different topology is all the more necessary to be able to understand and explain how something that seems to always be other than itself can not only survive, but thrive. The map traced in this thesis thus knowingly anticipates new distributions of partially connected resonances, always already pointing out of itself. Ultimately, in fact, the challenge of the alternative 'further knowledge' produced by shifting across different scales is "to imagine the possibilities of 'more-than' *gagaku* (*fukusū no' gagaku*)" (Terauchi 2010, 255).

Embracing the multiplicity of *gagaku*, then, makes room for the peculiarly elusive objects that proliferate in contemporary Japanese society. Despite being outside the borders of most maps, these objects are not beyond the scope of my own approach. Gesturing toward them in the next few pages, I hope to give a sense of the open-ended character of the present work, which traced a genealogy, but also renounced the violence of intellectual closures. All of the themes that follow, moreover, are possible segments of other *gagaku* constellations. *Gagaku's* present "boom" might be silent, but it is also, at the same time, intensely resounding.

## II. THE EC-CENTRICITY OF CONTEMPORARY 'JAPANESE COURT MUSIC'

In Japan as elsewhere, the academic world has been mostly unable to keep up with the recent commercial success of *gagaku*<sup>7</sup>. Though the signs had been there for decades, when the first scholars finally acknowledged that something was happening to “Japanese court music” they did so with unstudied surprise. In the early 2000s, the tone was still one of astonishment:

“*Gagaku* has been gaining strength for quite some time now thanks to a *silent boom* [*shizukana būmu*]. The tone of the *hichiriki* can be heard on TV commercials, and the number of people committed to *gagaku* practice has suddenly risen in the midst of the success of the manga *Onmyōji*. They say that the number of application forms to attend the *bugaku* concerts of the Imperial Household ensemble are more numerous every year, and that the lucky ones who manage to get in have to stand in line for several hours before the doors are even open –still, they cooperate and take their seats orderly. Even at the Shōryōe festival of the Shitennōji temple [in Osaka] or at the Kasuga wakamiya on matsuri festival [of Nara’s Kasuga taisha]<sup>8</sup>, packs of fans can watch the hours-long rituals intently until the very end, mindless of the stormy weather, so that one can really feel how numerous they have become” (Takahashi 2004, 14 emphasis added).

Takahashi’s observations are genuinely enthusiastic, perhaps even incredulous. Her words indicate that scholars were finally able to acknowledge the ongoing process of *gagaku*’s renaissance, a “boom” that should perhaps be conceived rather as a ‘bloom’, a blossoming of sorts. *Gagaku* has gained a sizeable following and it’s now out of the court; on TV, in hugely successful manga like Okano Reiko’s *Onmyōji* (see **FIG.1**). “It’s among us”, commentators began to say. But the trend is not entirely new: there are roots to it, deep and entwined<sup>9</sup>. In this sense, the popularity of *gagaku* is not just a starting point, it is also a process that can and should be read critically, analytically. It is, in a word, something to take seriously.

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<sup>7</sup> In some cases, the specialists’ silence has even been interpreted as an implicit negative judgement (see Terauchi 2010, 243).

<sup>8</sup> Two of the most important festivals in Kansai: the Shōryōe is held on April 4 every year at the Shitennōji temple, while the Kasuga wakamiya on matsuri takes place between December 16 and December 18 within Nara park, in the famous forests of Kasuga shrine.

<sup>9</sup> Terauchi Naoko and Tsukahara Yasuko have been among the most prominent authors to retrace the path to *gagaku*’s progressive popularization. Indeed, one could read the latter’s *The Meiji State and Gagaku* (2009) and the former’s *Gagaku’s ‘Modern’ and ‘Contemporary’ Ages* (2010) in succession, and gain a thorough understanding of the paths that led from the foundation of the Office of *Gagaku* to today’s complex scenario.

With this in mind, three brief, interconnected stories may effectively illustrate just how far *gagaku* has spread out in contemporary Japan, as well as the extent to which it now forces us to reconsider all preconceived definitions and understandings of its ‘essence’. Though this sort of ‘narrative trick’ has been used more skillfully before<sup>10</sup>, I will try to perform it anyway, because it shows the (Strathernian) partial connections and fierce uncontrollabilities of *gagaku*’s multiplications. Moreover, these examples do not just resonate with each other theoretically: similar sounds can be heard across the three stories. The resonance itself is indeed real, sonic analogies aside. The first story is about *gagaku* and entrepreneurship<sup>11</sup>.



**FIGURE 1.** The cover of two volumes of the complete edition of the manga *Onmyōji* (JET Comics, 2014) are reinterpretations of the attire worn by *bugaku* dancers in the pieces *Bairo* (left) and *Soriko* (right).

In 1975, Kido Toshirō (b.1930), a producer at the newly established National Theatre in Tokyo, came up with an ingenious solution to a typical producer’s problem: not being

<sup>10</sup> See (Mol 2014) for a succinct and successful example.

<sup>11</sup> The main sources for this story are (Terauchi 2010, 174–86; and 2008; Kido 1990; 2006).

able to fill enough seats of the concert hall. Since the theater was founded, in 1966, there had been a *Gagaku* Series which featured yearly performances by the Imperial Household musicians and other prominent groups. However, the public was not as responsive as Kidō had hoped. The programs were long and unfamiliar. The music, needless to say, was slow, loud, strange and dangerously boring. What could be done about it? It was just the way *gagaku* was. So Kido had to devise a plan. He took a chance, and decided to present a new face of the old music: the series began featuring pieces that had long been forgotten, most of which were actually part of the repertoire, but hadn't been performed in decades if not centuries. But the producer didn't stop there. Cautiously, Kido started to promote performances that tried to veer away from the prescriptions of the current modal theory of *tōgaku*, drawing nearer the ancient Chinese musical system, reinterpreted with more or less philological means by some of the most skilled *gagaku* performers.

The public is intrigued, and Kido becomes increasingly bold. In 1981, "reconstructed" pieces are performed using "reconstructed" instruments modeled after the ones preserved in the ancient Shōsōin treasure hall in Nara. "This concert marked Kido's introduction of the concept '*reigaku*', a term derived from the legendary Chinese musician Reirin and originally used to denote *gagaku* in general. Kido used this term, however, to indicate a reconstructed repertoire played with reconstructed instruments. He argued that the National Theatre's *reigaku* project would challenge tradition in the contemporary context" (Terauchi 2008, 109–10). Over the years, Kido's vision takes shape, turning into something fascinating. A group of professional players is born in 1985: with the exception of their leader, Shiba Sukeyasu (b.1930), all of them are unconnected to *gagaku* families. Their name is Reigakusha, and they specialize in this new provocative repertoire in the making (see Chapter 1). They don black, ordinary clothes to differentiate themselves from 'normal' *gagaku* performers, as underlined by Kido himself: "in order to make it perfectly clear that the *reigaku* project is a project of the modern day and not a romantic imitation of antiquity, the performers have always performed in modern dress in concerts using these instruments" (Kokuritsu gekijō geinōbu 1994, 5). These instruments have unusual shapes and unusual sounds. Nobody truly knows exactly how they are supposed to be played. Japanese composers take an interest in them, and gradually new pieces of contemporary music are written. Shiba himself starts writing for his group, drawing inspiration from Chinese theory, from his many years as musicians in the Imperial Household ensemble, even from Japanese

contemporary composers like Takemitsu Tōru. Something new has seen the light. It may be imperfect, or immature, but it is taking its first steps in the world of Japanese performing arts (see **FIG.2**). Is it (still) *gagaku*, or is it something else? Who gets to decide?



**FIGURE 2.** A recent performance on reconstructed instruments. Notice that none of them is currently used in *gagaku*. (<http://style.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO76385330Q4A830C1000000> accessed December 5, 2016).

The second story is short, because it has been told already<sup>12</sup>. *Hideki Togi out to gagaku your world*, titles, surprisingly without an exclamation mark, the online edition of an article appeared in *The Japan Times* on December 29, 2012. The story of this maverick of Japanese court music goes like this: adopted into an ancient *gagaku* hereditary family, Tōgi grows up playing many instruments and listening to all sorts of music, from rock to ‘ethnic’. Of course, he loves *gagaku*. He plays *hichiriki* and *shō*, but is proficient in all the other instruments too. He becomes a member of the Imperial Household ensemble in Tokyo. However, he has an increasingly hard time coming to terms with the rigidity of that environment. He wants to write his own music, and, crucially, he wants to play it openly in public, maybe even make some money from it. In 1996, he leaves the ensemble and publishes his first album, *Togi Hideki*.

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<sup>12</sup> See especially (Lancashire 2003; and Terauchi 2010, 242–51).

“Thrust into the commercial world, the distinction between artistic creativity and commercial enterprise has become blurred for, in addition to the production of CDs, he contributes to, or is the subject of magazines ranging from *Ongakukyōiku* (*Music education*), *BoguNippon* (*Vogue Japan*) and *Mens Ex* to *Pureiboi* (*Playboy Japan*). Likewise, frequent television appearances cover a wide range of programme types. *Seishun Poppusu* (*Youth Pop*) with the explanation (...) ‘I play pop on the *hichiriki*’, 8 May 2000, NHK); ‘*I Met Dolphins*’, explanation – ‘Togi Hideki communicates with dolphins in Hawaii’, 30 March 2000, TBS); and a documentary in search of the sound of the ancient flute, (...) (*A Journey of the Heart*’, 2 July 2000, NHK) are just some of the programmes in which he has appeared or presented” (Lancashire 2003, 26).

For a time, Tōgi continues to “*gagaku* our world” with his blend of synthesizers, traditional melodies made warm by the gentle tone of the *hichiriki*, and ‘adjusted’ harmonies that turn the unfamiliarity of *gagaku* into a reassuring succession of major and minor chords<sup>13</sup>. At some point along the way, he starts playing *Hey Jude* on the *hichiriki*. His success is extraordinary: somehow, he has managed to become “the unrepresentative representative of the *gagaku* tradition” (Lancashire 2003, 36). He also becomes a sort of sex symbol and author of books that celebrate the “Japanese spirit” in real *Nihonjinron* style<sup>14</sup>. Thanks to him, at the beginning of the 2000s it seems like *gagaku* has never been so normal, so popular. In fact, Terauchi Naoko even speaks of an entirely new brand of Japanese court music: “pop *gagaku*” (Terauchi 2010, 254; 2011, iii). Then, inevitably, comes a gradual decline.

In 2016, an informant once illustrated to me the role of Tōgi Hideki in the recent resurgence of *gagaku*: “Before Tōgi, the success of *gagaku* was about *here*” –he gestures, keeping the right hand below the waist. “With Tōgi, all of a sudden it jumped to *here*” – the hand moves quickly upward, right in front of the chest. “Then, for about fifteen years, it stayed pretty much stable, actually slightly declining” –the hand moves gently down. “Now we’re *here*” –higher than the initial gesture, but much lower than its highest point. “I don’t think the popularity of *gagaku* should necessarily go back to the bottom”, he concludes, “but it’s definitely not as high as when Tōgi was super-famous...nowadays, I’m afraid his fans are mostly fifty-something housewives”<sup>15</sup>. Sadly, the diagnosis seems about right: an acquaintance, indeed a Japanese lady in her sixties, takes me to a concert

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<sup>13</sup> For two musicological analyses, see (Lancashire 2003; Terauchi 2010, 244–45).

<sup>14</sup> On the ideology of *Nihonjinron*, see (Yoshino 1992; Ivy 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Interview, February 2016. For a similar reference to *gagaku*’s appeal to the middleclass, see (Terauchi 2010, 245–46)



by Tōgi in 2016. When he comes onstage, she cannot help but notice: “He truly *is* good-looking!”. The music is a strange mixture of nostalgic pieces out of the vast repertoire of Japanese folk songs, arranged for *hichiriki*, *ryūteki* and synthesizers, and unthreatening new compositions. Surely there is more to say about this music, but in my notebook I find the following peremptory judgement: “Elevator music”.

But the mere fact that Tōgi’s trajectory seems to be hopelessly descending does not necessarily mean that his story is over. On the contrary, the fact that Tōgi’s threat to tradition has been so quickly reabsorbed within the bounds of the discographic market, as well as its innocuous label in record shops (*hōgaku* or “Japanese traditional music”) is also telling us something of *gagaku*’s most recent history. What happened there? Have *gagaku*’s borders quickly expanded, or have they begun to shrink, succumbing to the hegemony of Euro-American harmonies? And, more importantly, what is the relationship between these two stories? Could Tōgi’s success have been possible, without Kido’s earlier challenge to tradition?

Post Scriptum: in late 2016, to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his debut, Universal Music Japan released Tōgi’s last album, *Hichiriki Christmas* (**FIG.3**). On the cover, drawn by the artist himself, we see Santa Claus playing the *shō*, while an iceman takes its performance on the *ryūteki* very seriously. Towards the back of the picture, a reindeer marches on, blowing his *hichiriki*. Among the eleven tracks contained are covers of famous Christmas songs (including *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, *Last Christmas* and *White Christmas*), but also arrangements of classical pieces (Bach’s *Air* “on the G string”, Schubert’s and Caccini’s *Ave Maria*...), contemporary Japanese classics like *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* by Sakamoto Ryūichi (with mouth organ chords used in addition to synthesizers), and even an original tune, *I Want to Protect your Dream*. Having completed his initial mission, Tōgi is now out to *gagaku* our Christmas.



**FIGURE 3.** The cover of Tōgi's latest album, *Hichiriki Christmas* (2016). (<http://www.universal-music.co.jp/hideki-togi/products/uccy-1072/> accessed December 5, 2016).

The third and last story is not only complex, but truly complicated<sup>16</sup>. On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016, in an unexpectedly torrid day, I find myself sitting in a mixed crowd of well-prepared middle age Japanese armed with visors, tiny umbrellas and long black gloves, trying not to get sunburnt as I sit in the ample courtyard in between the main pavilions of the Yakushiji temple in Nara. Onstage, Tōgi Hideki impersonates a Chinese Buddhist monk, Xuánzàng or Genjō Sanzō (602-664), as he is known in Japan (**FIG.4**). The play is a narrative reenactment of the monk's voyage along the Silk Road, tirelessly explored in order to collect precious sutras, and has both a celebratory and edifying character, for Genjō is considered the founder of the Buddhist Hossō school to which the Yakushiji belongs.

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<sup>16</sup> The main sources used are (Nomura 2002; Fukushima 2005; and Satō 2012). See also (Ortolani 1995, 29–38; Terauchi 2016). A short fieldwork was conducted in Tenri and Nara on May 4 and 5, 2016. What follows draws from unstructured interviews with Professor Satō Kōji and members of the *gagaku* ensemble of Tenri University. I am grateful to Professor Satō for his kindness and for a welcoming support, and to Professor Alison Tokita for introducing me. Many thanks also to Terauchi Naoko for providing the draft of her presentation *Gigaku in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* at the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Study Group for Musics of East Asia (MEA) of the International Council for Traditional Music (Nara, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014).

One of the priests from the temple describes his story in a bright declamatory voice, skillfully amplified. Needless to say, Genjō undergoes a series of trials and misadventures: he meets with local kings and mysterious sages, he fights a terrible lion, he even gets to perform for a noble crowd (at this point, the whole event suddenly comes to a halt, and Tōgi, now knowingly out of character, plays three of his own compositions to a heavy base of synthesizers, blowing the *hichiriki* over a prerecorded track. The audience is enthralled). The costumes and masks of the many characters on stage are lavishly colored and richly textured, and the musical accompaniment is performed by a small group sitting on the back. Though the instruments are those of *gagaku*, the music is somewhat different –freer, with a Chinese flavor to it, and much faster. It’s an undeniably entertaining spectacle, and the public’s response is enthusiastic. “If it weren’t for the heat, it would be a perfect show!”, grumbles a man sitting next to me.



**FIGURE 4.** Tōgi Hideki as Genjō Sanzō. (Picture by the author).

Though none of the organizers ever tried to conceal the fact that the *Great Buddhist Festival of Genjō Sanzō* is a recent creation, devised in 1992 and replicated every year on May the 5<sup>th</sup>, there is also no doubt as to the connection between the ceremony and the little-known ancient performing art of *gigaku* (see Chapter 3). Besides being advertised as such (*The Gigaku of Yakushiji*), the characters displayed are exactly the same as those

recorded by Koma no Chikazane in the ancient treatise *Kyōkunshō* (1233) (see Terauchi 2014, 1–2)<sup>17</sup>. A masked pantomime, *gigaku* “is one of Japan’s earliest foreign performing arts” (Terauchi 2016, 5). Ancient sources state that it was introduced in 612 BCE by a Korean immigrant, Mimashi, and that it contained “satiric, erotic or comic flavors seemingly contradictory to Buddhist morality. However, these simple, easily understood *gigaku* were employed as a practical device for attracting people to temples, where they assimilated Buddhist ideology” (Terauchi 2016, 5). As a matter of fact, this Yakushiji performance was not the first attempt at reconstructing *gigaku*. In 1980, the Nara musician Shiba Sukeyasu created a reinterpretation of it for a ceremony at the Tōdaiji temple, “with masks reconstructed at Tenri University” (Terauchi 2016, 5). Earlier on, in 1965, the scholar Hayashi Kenzō (1899-1976) had recorded his own version of three pieces<sup>18</sup>. More than 35 years later, in 2001, the *kyōgen* actor Nomura Mannojo (1959-2004) also did extensive research on the *gigaku* masks and revived the genre, renaming it *shingigaku* or “true *gigaku*” (see Nomura 2002; Fukushima 2005; Terauchi 2016, 6). Thus, in the past 50 years, “*gigaku* has not been merely revived as an ancient art but reinterpreted and recreated into contemporary music, dance, and theatrical form. *Gigaku*, as a vessel conveying ancient spirit and modern imagination, is still developing” (Terauchi 2014, 4).

One of the things that makes the Yakushiji performance unique, however, is the fact that its musicians are also members of the *gagaku* club at Tenri University. The relationship between the new religion of Tenrikyō and *gagaku* is a topic that goes beyond the scope of this dissertation<sup>19</sup>. However, one is inevitably led to wonder what the peculiar relationship between a group that belongs to an institution directly affiliated to a ‘new religion’ and a major Buddhist temple can tell us about the paths taken by *gagaku*

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<sup>17</sup> For a list of characters: <http://www.nara-yakushiji.com/contents/genjyosanzoetaisai/giraku.html> (accessed December 2, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> See the LP *The Music of the Tenpyō and Heian Periods*, particularly the detailed commentary by Hayashi (Kogaku dōkōkai 1965).

<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that many influential figures in the *gagaku* world are affiliated to Tenrikyō. In turn, the international visibility of *gagaku* is heavily promoted by the Japanese new religion, which organizes tours and conference around the world. Even more noticeable is the role of Tenrikyō in promoting the performance of *gagaku* by non-Japanese, especially supporting university ensembles (among which are the ensembles of the University of Köln in Germany, of Columbia University in the USA, and of the University of Hawai’i at Manoa). Tenri’s significance is evident even when it comes to the materials used in *gagaku* practice: one of the few shops specializing in *gagaku* instruments is located at the heart of Tenri city, and it is likely that the vast majority of *gagaku* amateurs throughout Japan today make use of the scores edited by Tenrikyō’s publishing company, Dōyūsha (not least because, at under 20 dollars, they are affordable and easily available on the internet).

in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not to mention the involvement of both *gagaku*'s "unrepresentative representative" and of one of the godfathers of Kido's *reigaku* experiment. And what about the scene, within the *gigaku*-esque pantomime, in which the exotic king Gokō joins in on the flute to a danced performance of what appears to be an example of 'court music' strikingly similar to contemporary Japanese *bugaku*, complete with four dancers whose movements bear an uncanny resemblance to those of the piece *Manzairaku*? What does this Matryoshka-like situation entail? *What is a performance of gagaku nested inside a performance of gigaku which is itself a recreation of a long-lost performing art?* In a similar situation, where are the confines of *gagaku*? Does it even make sense to still evoke this term? But if it does not, why is that? *When does gagaku stop being gagaku?*

The three stories briefly sketched above are certainly indicators of *gagaku*'s recent tendency to overstep the boundaries imposed by its rigid categorization as 'Japanese court music'. Yet, this should not be seen as a phenomenon confined to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Come to think of it, it is even possible to argue that *gagaku* was a vital, self-renovating performing art for much of its history: it was certainly so during the Edo period, for example, when the Tokugawa ruling class appropriated it and resemanticized it in terms of 'new ceremonial music' (see Chapter 2). And it was even more so in the Meiji period, when many of *gagaku*'s 'commonsense associations' were established. But it is in the (not yet precisely estimated) number of new practitioners, in the unprecedented eruption into wildly separate fields, in the bizarre, unexpected juxtaposition of *bugaku*-inspired coffee mugs and 8<sup>th</sup>-century scraps of notations for lute, that the peculiarity of the contemporary "silent boom" of *gagaku* is more clearly manifested. Traditional music in Japan is often dismissed by unconcerned youngsters as *furukusai* or "stinking of old"; why, then, is the oldest of these old performing arts so hip? To rephrase Terauchi's provocative expression, how was the "deodorization" of the old past possible (2010, 244)?

One possible answer may lie in a sort of "auto-Orientalism": in the case of Tōgi Hideki's success, for instance, Lancashire has suggested that "*gagaku* remains an unknown entity to many people in Japan. As music initially intended for the court, temple and shrine, this remoteness is perhaps natural. But it is a remoteness that has placed the music of *gagaku* in the realm of the musical other" (Lancashire 2003, 25). Perhaps *gagaku* has come 'full circle', then: perhaps, in being so quintessentially traditional, it has become "exotic and

thus interesting again”, as suggested by Alison Tokita and David Hughes about traditional genres in general (2008, 30). Still, this can only be a valid interpretation of *gagaku*’s boom if we remain wary of simplistic dichotomies, such as ‘Japanese’ and ‘Western’, or ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. Such distinctions efface the transformative power of hybrid objects like Tōgi’s songs or *gigaku*’s reenactments –objects that travel across many scales and boundaries with ease, complicating the picture, constantly mudding the waters of ‘tradition’.

### III. WAVES ACROSS FLUID STATES: *GAGAKU* IN THE INTERSTICES

When the ontological question with which this thesis started, ‘what is *gagaku*?’, is posed *anthropologically*, the ‘what’ of the question must be complemented by a ‘where’: the whereabouts of being become suddenly important, even necessary. This is how the attempt to follow *gagaku* along the scales of its many contemporary enactments has turned into a topological investigation –and, consequently, into a cartographic effort. Geographical movements, away from the capital and to the western part of Japan, in a purposeful de-centering of *gagaku* and of its study, are just one of the ways in which this cartographic effect is rendered visible throughout the thesis. Others include a sensitivity to place and emplacement, to the ways in which spaces like the *keikoba* (practice-room) of Nara’s Nanto *gagaku* becomes a music-maker in its own right, to the territorial bonds that *gagaku* helps reinforcing (Chapter 4). Or, along similar lines, the awareness of the need to rethink the special sewing together of music and the environment in places like Udono (Chapter 5), where the land contains the material conditions of possibility of *gagaku*’s sound, and where the *furusato* –that powerful conceptual shaping of nostalgia-, is utterly political. In this sense, places are crucial throughout the whole discussion: for centuries, in Kansai, ‘court music’ has resounded in an imaginary triangle composed of long histories and strong bonds that mattered to the point of guaranteeing the very survival of local traditions (Chapter 3). In all these ways, this thesis is less about sound, and more about sites<sup>20</sup>.

Ultimately, however, the map I offered of *gagaku* is characteristically *fluid*. Like the Zimbabwe bush pump studied by Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol (2000; see also Law 2004, 80–82), in fact, *gagaku* is “a fluid object”: it gradually changes shape from one place to the other, from one emplacement to the next (Mol and Law 1994, 613–15). It is not the same in the practice room, where attendance is crucial (Giolai 2016), and in Udono, where it is tangled up with the roots of a plant and with the claims of a ‘preservation discourse’. On the other side of the barricade, where a reed is only a material reality, measurable, quantifiable, really-real, *gagaku* is yet another thing: intangible, traditional, already protected by national and international regulations. Sound

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<sup>20</sup> For another example of how the “circulation” of sound can affect the practice of ethnomusicology, see (Novak 2013).

and water, in this sense, are obviously connected by the image of the wave they both evoke –and this is why *resonances* among various enactments of *gagaku* are so important. Perhaps it is not yet the method that John Law has wished for, but resonance is used consistently throughout the thesis as a conceptual tool for “detecting and creating periodicities in the world” (see Law 2004, 144).

This, however, is hardly original. Indeed, resonance has recently captivated the imagination of many theorists: it has become “part of a rich metaphorology that seeks to replace the binaries of structuralist thought with a notion of discourse that is diametrically opposed to a distancing and objectifying form of knowledge” (Erlmann 2015, 175). What is more, because it “denotes the materiality of auditory perception, resonance is eminently suited to dissolve the binary of the materiality of things and the immateriality of signs that has been at the center of Western thought for much of the modern era. At the very least, resonance compels us to call into question the notion that the nature of things resides in their essence and that this essence can be exhausted by a sign, a discourse, or a logos” (Erlmann 2015, 183). With its implication of a physical and acoustical isomorphism between sound and waves, resonance is the perfect metaphor to deploy in a fluid cartography of *gagaku*.

Fieldwork itself can be reflexively redefined in these terms. As I have tried to show in Chapter 4, for instance, a vibrational ontology can support the idea that participant observation is a tension between immersion (another fluid image), and auscultation<sup>21</sup>. Needless to say, such a stance brings to the fore the “carnal dimension of existence” that Loïc Wacquant envisioned as the basis for “a sociology not only *of* the both, in the sense of object, but also *from* the body” (Wacquant 2004, viii emphasis added). Similarly, there would be much to say about the parallel between the ethnographer’s and the informant’s co-occurring immersions, and about their resonating passions. After all, the idea that “at a molecular or quantum level, everything is in motion, is vibrating” is central to an approach that rejects a priori distinctions between human and non-human entities (Goodman 2010, 83). Why not recast the ontological commitment of ethnographers *and*

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<sup>21</sup> On yet another use of the term “immersion”, partially connected to the one professed here, see (Strathern 1999, 1–29).



informants in terms of a “musical being”<sup>22</sup> that is inscribed in fluid space, then? What kind of object would *gagaku* be, under these terms?

To advance a tentative answer to such questions, it helps to think about what water itself can be: “here is an object that is endlessly transmutable, moving readily from one shape to another: from ice to stream, from vapour to rain, from fluid to steam. [Water] has an equally broad range of scales of existence: from droplet to ocean, trickle to flood, cup to lake” (Strang 2005, 98). Water, as noticed by Ivan Illich thirty years ago, “has a nearly unlimited ability to carry metaphors” (1986, 24. Quoted in Strang 2005, 105). This is why, as an open-end machine for reasoning, a fluid topology of *gagaku* can accommodate its past, present, and even future enactments. Which is not to say that such a topology can tolerate *any* form *gagaku* might take: after all, the fact that sound can freely float, irrespective of the ways in which we carve pitches and scales out of its continuum, does not disprove that it is ultimately the music-makers who get to decide what counts as undesirable interference, as noise, as non-musical (see Novak 2015). Similarly, the decision over what is *not gagaku* will always rest with its making, not with its description.

What this approach does afford is a conceptualization that is more sensitive to objects’ changes of state. Thus conceived, the opposition between, on one side, normative definitions of what *gagaku* is, and, on the other, flexible approaches that take its multiplicity as a point of departure can be reconfigured in terms of one between *gagaku*’s ‘solid states’ and ‘fluid states’. Both terms of this new opposition are, in a sense, merely tendential: one will never find a completely crystallized version of *gagaku*, no matter how rigidly its confines may be drawn by a centralized power. Similarly, the very physicality of sound will prevent *gagaku* from being utterly liquidized. Nonetheless, one can see in the strict organizational setups that characterized the Meiji period described in Chapter 2 a level of crystallization far superior than that of the reshufflings made necessary in Kansai by the very birth of a centralized Office of *Gagaku* (Chapter 3). And, conversely, the fluid state of *gagaku* in Udon (see Chapter 5) often makes it fade in the background,

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<sup>22</sup> In a somewhat different vein, Jeff Todd Titon once observed “I would like to ground musical *knowing* –that is, knowledge of or about music- in musical *being*. I look, in other words, for an epistemology of music that is grounded not in a detached or objectivizing way of ‘being-in-the-world’, nor in a reflexive, self-conscious way of being in the world, nor either in what phenomenologists call the ‘natural attitude’ or everyday way of being-in-the-world. Rather, I think that musical being is a special ontology and that knowing music requires that we start from musical being” (2008, 32).

whereas the commitment and dedication of Nara's amateurs is such that the object of their passion appears granitic, immovable (see Chapter 4).

But if various scales may correspond to different states of *gagaku*, does it even make sense to insist in thinking about *gagaku* as an object? Is it not wrong, perhaps even hypocritical, to keep referring to 'it' in this terms, while simultaneously criticizing its reifications? Would it even be possible to think *gagaku* out of or away from this metaphor of the object? These doubts indirectly cast some suspicions on the ontological status of the sonic (objectified as 'sound') and of the musical (objectified as 'music'). Lurking behind the question of what *gagaku* is lies another unsettling hesitation: is sound itself an object<sup>23</sup>? As far as *gagaku* is concerned (but this may well extend to sound itself), two alternative images come to mind: on the one hand, the notion of "assemblage" as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari and further refined by Manuel De Landa's "assemblage theory" (on which see De Landa 2016). On the other, the more modest image of the sheaf, the humble bundle of wheat. As noticed by Jacques Derrida, in fact, "the word sheaf seems to mark more appropriately that the assemblage to be proposed has the complex structure of a weaving, an interlacing which permits the different threads and different lines of meaning –or of force– to go off again in different directions, just as it is always ready to tie itself up with others" (1982, 3. Quoted in Law 2004, 42).

This sheaf or bundle, with its potential for "endless extension" so reminiscent of the "apprehension of surfeit" described by Marilyn Strathern (1996, 522)<sup>24</sup>, seems to me like a particularly apt metaphor for the kind of complexity presented in this thesis –not least because it reminds us of Udonō's tall canes in the winter, when they are cut and tied together with a rope before burning. The transformative force of *gagaku*, in this sense, is perhaps akin to the invisible space in between each spike of grain (or, in this case, each cane). When the bundle is complete, this space is less perceivable, but no less present. Its role in making up a figure is indisputable, but the fleeting nature of the figure composed is also tangible.

According to the online *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, an interstice is "a gap or break in something generally continuous", "a short space of time between events" or, more

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<sup>23</sup> For some answers and more questions, see (Pinch and Bijsterveld 2012; Novak and Sakakeeny 2015).

<sup>24</sup> The expression designates the perception "that there are always potentially 'more' things to take into account" (Strathern 2004, xiv), the "endless extensions and intermeshing of phenomena" (Strathern 1996, 522).

evocatively, “a space that intervenes between things”<sup>25</sup>. Juxtaposing *gagaku* to this poetical use of the concept of interstice, a paradoxical image is immediately produced: the interstices of a fluid space. The slippery feeling that such a notion induces may scare us away. But it may also direct the flow of our thoughts toward the working of *gagaku*'s force of incessant becoming. This is an ample enough delta for the many streams sketched out in this work to merge. Other crossings await, other vistas. I hope more and more lovers of music will lead the way, and to always be eager to play with them.



**FIGURE 5** The fluidity of movement and fire. (Hōgakusai, June 2014. Picture by the author).

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interstice> (accessed December 4, 2016). I am aware of the potential dangers of gesturing toward something akin to the concept of *ma* or *aida* (間), an important element in Japanese aesthetics in general and in traditional music in particular (see e.g. Galliano 2004). However, my reference here is rather to the phenomenological psychology of Kimura Bin (see especially Kimura 2000) as well as to Alfred North Whitehead's intuitions on life in the interstices of things (Debaise 2013). Many thanks to Fabian Schaefer for directing me towards Kimura's works.

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