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Decentering Gagaku. Exploring the multiplicity of contemporary Japanese Court music

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THE WORD *GAGAKU* INDICATES A VAST REPERTOIRE OF MUSIC AND DANCES BROUGHT TO JAPAN THROUGH THE SILK ROADS FROM THE 6TH CENTURY CE. JAPANESE CONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUALS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS LIKE UNESCO OFTEN PORTRAY *GAGAKU* AS TIMELESS AND IMMUTABLE, EQUATING IT WITH THE MUSIC PERFORMED BY THE JAPANESE IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD. BUT *GAGAKU* IS MUCH MORE THAN "JAPANESE COURT MUSIC".

THIS THESIS OFFERS AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON *GAGAKU*, PRESENTING IT AS A "MULTIPLE OBJECT", A DYNAMIC GENRE WITH POROUS BOUNDARIES. THE EXAMINATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS IN TOKYO AND OF AMATEUR PRACTITIONERS IN KANSAI AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY FORMS THE BASIS FOR TWO ETHNOGRAPHIC SKETCHES OF *GAGAKU* IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN: A PORTRAIT OF NANTO GAKUSO, AN AMATEUR GROUP BASED IN NARA; AND A DISCUSSION OF THE DISPUTE CONCERNING THE THREAT TO THE MATERIALS USED IN THE MAKING OF A *GAGAKU* INSTRUMENT BY THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HIGHWAY BETWEEN KYOTO AND OSAKA.

THEORETICALLY AMBITIOUS AND BASED ON OVER TWO YEARS OF APPRENTICESHIP, THIS THESIS SKILLFULLY COMBINES HISTORICAL, MUSICOLOGICAL, AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO MUSIC. ADVOCATING A NEW ONTOLOGICAL PARADIGM FOR THE STUDY OF *GAGAKU*, IT PROPOSES TO SHIFT THE QUESTION FROM WHAT MUSIC IS TO WHAT MUSIC CAN DO.



ANDREA GIOLAI

DECENTERING GAGAKU

DECENTERING *GAGAKU*

EXPLORING THE MULTIPLICITY OF CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE COURT MUSIC

ANDREA GIOLAI



