Decentering Gagaku. Exploring the multiplicity of contemporary Japanese Court music

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NEW SKIN FOR THE OLD CEREMONY

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

Can 'what is' and 'what are' questions ever be answered? 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, in recent years anthropologists have also carved their way into selected areas of the finely trimmed and carefully fenced garden of Euro-American knowledge –and they are, more than ever before, happy to raise profound philosophical questions, mingling with ontology [1]. Mingling…or mangling[2]: the success of this "anthropology of ontology" (Scott 2013) is largely consonant with a parallel "revolt" in the social sciences, against the positivistic

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[1] For some recent texts, see (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).

[2] A not-so-covert reference to Andrew Pickering's *The Mangle of Practice* (1995).

intellectual inheritance of simplifying methodologies and in favor of an alternative, "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" and things that escape simplification 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' than 'music'[3], with its paradoxical relation to time and space and its tendency to crisscross the line between material and immaterial, to put such ontological and methodological innovations to the test? A preliminary question thus takes shape: could we understand music better by giving up simplicity, practicing more complex methods instead? And if that was the case, would we get any closer to answering that fetish-question, that leitmotif of music studies: *Was ist Musik* (What is music)[4]?

If these questions confound and confuse, it is simply the effect of a fully intended attempt to "keep the metaphors of reality-making open", to borrow again John Law's words (2004, 139 emphasis removed)[5], asking philosophical questions about music anthropologically. Such a stance calls for an explicit and immediate 'positioning': to say how a question is 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). Instead of the broader (and possibly unanswerable) *What is music?,* the fundamental question raised time and again throughout this dissertation is: *What is gagaku?* And asking this question anthropologically means also being interested in how *gagaku* is constructed (or,

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[3] 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.

[4] Such was the title of a book by Carl Dahlhaus and Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht (Dahlhaus and Eggebrecht 1985). See Bruno Nettl's commentary in his *Nettl's Elephant –On the History of Ethnomusicology* (2010, 215–27).

[5] It is perhaps ironic that a similar advice should come neither from a philosopher nor an anthropologist, nor even a musicologist, but a sociologist, and that the use of words like philosophy, music and anthropology seems itself to contradict the purpose of the advice. These are different aspects of the same problem: linguistic and disciplinary boundaries are conventional. But because the attempt here is to find ways of studying things that spill over boundaries, "things that slip and slide", a theoretical overstepping of sorts seems like a particularly fitting place to start.

to put it less bluntly, represented) as an object-of-knowledge[6]. This is not to say that anthropology is implicitly or necessarily constructivist, but simply to notice that anthropologists are always interested in what things are to the people they work with – or, in more recent terms, that they care about what constitutes a thing for the people they work with. So what are the main features of the anthropology of ontology, and how would it tackle the issue of *gagaku*? The approach 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 accounts was inspired by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's "Amerindian perspectivism"[7], 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" (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 –to each perspective, its own world, so to say.

Intellectual orientations routinely associated with the ontological turn (either in the sense that they influenced it or were influenced by it) include science and technology

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[6] On the notion of (social) constructionism, see (Haslanger 1995; Mallon 2007). Recently, LeRon James Harrison has put forth a philosophical approach to "begin to develop an ontology of *gagaku* that reflects the current state of the music" (2017, 6), drawing from the notions of "place" and "practice" as elaborated by such scholars as Jeff Malpas, Doreen Massey, Todd May and Noël Carroll (see Harrison 2017). His discussion is important in that it highlights "the absenting of *gagaku*", that is, the strategies through which *gagaku* is often approached as an unfamiliar "other", proposing instead to "not preconceive *gagaku* as other" as such (Harrison 2017, 6–7). His philosophical arguments are based on philosophical notions of space and practice and bring to mind my earlier explorations of similar theoretical notions (see e.g. Giolai 2016 and my forthcoming *Steps to and Ecology of Gagaku. Place, Nature and Sound in Japanese Court Music*). However, one of the main limits of his approach is that the ontology of *gagaku* is not sustained by empirical anthropological findings.

[7] 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).

studies (STS), actor-network theory (ANT) [8], and object-oriented ontology (OOO)[9]. 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 instead that "we are caught up (…) in a dense *material-semiotic network*" (Law 2004, 68 emphasis in the original), and a sensitivity to the notion of "multiplicity". Scott's choice of words captures both aspects well: speaking of the "relational non-dualism" of the anthropology of ontology (2013, 863), he echoes John Law's 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" (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* [10] 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"[11]. Thus redefined, the discipline is also bound to examine the conditions under

[8] A theoretical and methodological approach that owes much to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, but also to Michel Serres, Algidas 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).

[9] The pivotal figure for all three fronts 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 intellectual movement was rooted in the study of science and technology (*Laboratory Life*, a book written with Steven Woolgar and first published in 1979, was a pioneering work in that sense). 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).

[10] A term derived from Algidas 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).

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

which its own comparisons are performed[12]. Consequently, anthropologists must be constantly attentive to the specific practices in which relations are performed.

One author who, more than others associated with the ontological turn, has worked intensely on multiplicity, relating it to that of "practice", 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"[13]. The ethnographic account of her encounters with 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)[14]. 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 emphasis in the original; 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)[15].

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

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[12] "Comparison only works when it is sensitive to its own context of production: it must be reflexively reflexive" (Herzfeld 2001, 261).

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

[14] Confront Mol's approach with the "social praxeology" of Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994).

[15] 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).

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[16]. 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. 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)[17]. 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'[18];

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[16] 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).

[17] As noted by Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox, these philosophical views have recently turned into a sort of 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).

[18] 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

3. The primacy of the relation dictates that we pay attention to the practices or *performances* in which objects are enacted[19]. These three points emerge again and again, under various guises, throughout this dissertation. Their presence should provide a sort of counterbalancing effect, an underlying tendency to reconnect heterogeneous elements which otherwise would 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 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. Furthermore, throughout this dissertation I have tried to highlight precisely those features of *gagaku* that are especially suited to be studied under the theoretical paradigm sketched out above. Though the term ontology may be perceived as "sexy", it is probably true that it has 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[20]. 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

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float, transmuting mercurially into one thing and its opposite at the same time, depending on the criteria of difference employed to grasp it" (2013, 860). Mol had already noticed something similar in the early 1980s, focusing in particular on the ways different branches of science define or try to know "what a woman is" (see Mol 2015 originally published in Dutch in 1984).

[19] 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 an investigation is something worth pursuing precisely because it has the power to activate particularly rich intellectual resonances.

[20] 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 Steve 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).

itself-for-something-else"[21] (see Viveiros de Castro 2004a). Enters the jaguar: the new music-maker-of-multiplicity.

II. STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE: THE CONSTITUTIVE AMBIGUITIES OF 雅楽

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, travelling along networks of goods, people and ideas. An artistic repertoire that flourished in Tang China (618-907 CE), but actually dates back to the first millennium before the Christian era and reaches the present time. A collection of sounds and dances that sound and look almost completely different wherever they survived. A single name for four localized traditions: a name that indicates three items inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity but does not correspond to any currently performed musical reality where it was coined...

...*yǎyuè* 雅乐 / 雅樂 in China, *aak* in Korea 아악 / 雅樂, *gagaku* 雅楽 in Japan, *nhã nhạc* / 雅樂 in Vietnam[22]. What is this bizarre object? Are we simply dealing with disparate entities[23], or is this a case of Deleuzian multiplicity[24]? Multiple objects, or 'a multiple object'? That is the question that *gagaku* stubbornly pushes us to answer. Surprising as it may seem, questions regarding the relationship between Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese "雅樂" are rarely asked and only superficially dealt with by music historians and ethnomusicologists.

No doubt the connection between Vietnamese *nhã nhạc* and Chinese *yǎyuè*, or between Korean *aak* and Japanese *gagaku* is often commented upon in the context of specific

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[21] See https://itself.wordpress.com/2015/09/07/worlds-without-end-response-from-mary-jane-rubenstein/ (accessed November 30, 2016).

[22] Variations across languages' writing systems are 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.

[23] "Disparate" is a particularly suited adjective here: *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the word as referring to something "containing or made up of fundamentally different and often incongruous elements".

[24] For technical accounts of this notion, see (Bonta and Protevi 2004, 117; Holland 2013, 39).

discussions of one specific instance of "雅樂", but this is done predominantly in terms of "derivation" (e.g. Kishibe 1980, 250) or, worse, "influence" –a word that is often left semantically open. Weak connotations of this kind relieve the researcher from the burden of performing a full-fledged comparison, providing a handy escape from the issue of whether *yǎyuè*, *aak*, *gagaku* and *nhã nhạc* may be considered local versions, different enactments, coexisting variations of a single 'thing'. In fact, interrelated Asian repertoires are seldom treated in conjunction[25]. To be sure, the distance separating *yǎyuè*, *nhã nhạc*, *aak* and *gagaku* is formidable, both historically and in terms of the musical materials encompassed, and this certainly justifies a certain skepticism against placing them next to one another. And yet, "while the terms 'classical' and 'court' are somewhat problematic in mainland Southeast Asia there are certain instruments and ensembles –most notably in Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia- that do have association with a past aristocracy, with elite patronage, or with an aesthetic of refinement" (Douglas 2010, 68). More importantly, the hegemony of Chinese culture throughout the centuries is arguably the strongest common denominator of a number of musical traditions that, after all, were at the outskirts of the empire. On the other hand, and at the same time, "similarities do not prove relationships" (Miller and Williams 1998, 32).

In the end, it 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? In reaching this conclusion, the dissimilarities between *yǎyuè*, *nhã nhạc*, *aak* and *gagaku* are judged greater and more profound than their common traits. And yet, each of them has been a "court music" –each has been employed by and within institutions that, on the basis of

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[25] Thence a by-now customary encyclopedic, self-sufficient style of 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 2012b) 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; in Italian, see Sestili 2010). Thus, for example, East and Southeast Asia are often kept rigidly separated (for instance, see Douglas 2010; but see also Miller and Williams 2008, 40–45). Among the few exceptions that investigated the relationship between these traditions directly, see (Maceda 2001) for a strictly structuralist musicological analysis and (Howard 2012b; 2014) for a historical perspective on the politics of (the making of) heritage. Laurence Picken's somewhat unique monumental ongoing project *Music from the Tang Court*, 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 7th and most recent volume to include examinations of "some ancient connections" (see Picken et al. 2000).

yet another comparison, are deemed similar enough to pertain to a unitary rubric. Chinese court music, Vietnamese court music, Korean court music, Japanese court music: local variations, or distinct but comparable entities? A short profile of the three 'non-Japanese' items should provide the information necessary to draw some tentative conclusions on the difficulties inherent to a comparison of these diverse musical traditions[26].

The mythical origins of *yǎyuè* date back to the Zhou (ca. 1046 BCE–256 BCE), when its functions were deeply linked to Confucian rituals. In fact, the meaning of the characters, which could be translated as "elegant music", seems to have referred to a philosophical conception of "moral rectitude", "correctness" or "virtue" strictly rooted in Chinese ancient philosophy, as seen in the Chinese classic *Yueji* (*Record of Music*) (ca. 5th century BCE) (Cook 1995, 21)[27]. Thence the centrality of music to rituals partaking in the teachings of Confucius. The importance of these ceremonies is clearly attested by their scale: in the 12th century, as many as 400 performers were required in order to execute them (Provine 1992, 92).But the historical origins of *yǎyuè* remain somewhat elusive: "Confucian sacrificial rituals, it has been suggested, came into existence in the third century BCE, well after the death of the sage but as the influence of his doctrines spread. The rituals performed at Confucius's birthplace, Qufu, and elsewhere, incorporated music and dance. However, classical texts that include information on music or dance date from later, and offer little other than clues as to what was actually performed" (Howard 2012a, 94). By the end of the 5th century CE, ceremonial worshipping of Confucius had become "a national tradition controlled by court officials; its ritual and musical features were structured like those of state sacrificial ceremonies" (Lam 2002, 373). Less than two centuries later, Confucian temples were built also in prefecture and county capitals

A succinct description of some of the features of these performances, referring to texts detailing the style of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), suggests the peculiarity of Confucian ritual music within the broader context of Chinese musical culture:

> "Confucian ceremonial music occupied a unique position in the musical world of traditional China. It projected the Confucian ideology of music as a means of governance and self-cultivation, and it embodied a musical style that was supposed to have originated in ancient times. The continuous appeal

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[26] The next section is dedicated to an outline of the Japanese case.

[27] On music in ancient China, see also (Major and So 2000)

of Confucian ceremonial music is nevertheless not unrelated to its aural and artistic appeal. Realized through the distinctive sounds of stone chimes, bell chimes, and other musical instruments that accompany stylized choreography performed by thirty-six dancers arranged in six rows, Confucian ceremonial music generates a soundscape that is different from other Chinese genres. Within rigidly defined stylistic constraints, the music displays structural features that are clearly a result of creativity and sophistication" (Lam 2002, 373).

From Chinese sources such as Chen Yang's *Yueshu* (*Collection of Music*) (ca. 1104 CE), we also know that

"sacrificial rituals used two forms of dance, *wenwu* civil dance and *wuwu* military dance, each with specific paraphernalia (…). These were line dances, the dancers standing in equally spaced lines, eight lines of eight dancers for rituals offered for kings or emperors, six lines of six or eight dancers for male nobility (or for the kings of vassal states, such as was appropriate in respect to Korea until it declared itself an empire in the 1890s), four lines of four dancers for female nobility, and two lines of two for scholars. The dance was simple: it served ancestral figures hence the author of *Yueshu* argues that a stable government required orderly and regularly paced slow movements (…). Philosophical concerns within the dance also balanced yin and yang, so that, for example, the yin quality of civil dance required movements that started from a low posture while the yang of military dance dictated movements starting with the head high" (Howard 2012a, 95).

According to the most conservative musicologists, the primacy of Confucian ritual music 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). However, as Joseph Lam similarly noticed, "current practices of Confucian ceremonial music in mainland China and Taiwan are modern manifestations of a long tradition of Chinese state sacrificial music that was practiced from ancient times until 1911, the year imperial China formally ended. In other words, the current practices not only continue a hallowed Chinese musical tradition but also reflect ways the Chinese preserve their musical heritage and adjust it to changing times" (2002, 372).

But accounts of Chinese musical history also make clear that already in the early 12th century a number of changes were made to the music, probably under the influence of the dominant Daoist élite (see Howard 2012a, 96). For this reason, informed approaches to this music must always descend from an awareness of the transformations brought on by centuries of social, political and cultural modifications within Chinese culture. Furthermore, even in ancient times *yǎyuè* 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).

After the glorious period of the Tang dynasty (618-907), references to Confucian ritual music become increasingly scant until, following the cultural revolution, *yǎyuè* was all but eliminated from the Chinese territory. Traces of the tradition may remain in certain Confucian shrine ceremonies in Taiwan, and to some extent Confucian ritual music has experienced revivals and attempts at reconstruction (see Lam 1995). But these attempts are fundamentally detached from "a mute music history which we can read but not hear" (Lam 1995, 47). Indeed, 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.

"Unlike Chinese *yǎyuè* and Japanese *gagaku* (both written with the same Chinese characters), [***aak***] 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 [Rite] 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). As noticed by Keith Howard, in fact, "the music for the Rite to Confucius is known as *aak* (J: *gagaku*; Ch: *yayue*), but in Korean musicology the term *aak* is often extended to cover music at the Rite to Royal Ancestors" (Howard 2012a, 94). In truth, at the turn of the 21st century the musics and dances corresponding to the two rites have been designated Intangible Properties under the more specific names Munmyo cheryak (for the Rite to Confucius) and Chongmyo cheryak (for the Rite to Royal Ancestors).

A closer look at its history and preservation dispels any doubt as to the distance separating *aak* from Chinese (and other Asian) 'court musics'[28]. Brought to Korea through a gift of Chinese musical instruments in 1114 and 1116, the genre already suffered "breaks of continuity and performing style by the end of Koryô in 1392" (Provine 1992, 92, 97). Among the most noticeable, "the instrumental forces were altered[, a]dditional

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28 The following account is a succinct retelling of Robert Provine's article *The Korean Courtyard Ensemble for Ritual Music (Aak)* (1992).

rites were added by 1134, and by 1188 Korean melodies had been incorporated" (Howard 2012a, 96). A subsequent attempt to "restore" musical practice initiated by King Sejong (r. 1418-1450 CE) and based on Chen Yang's *Yueshu* (T*reatise on Music*) of 1103, resulted in a significant rescaling, as well as in the abandonment of other musical practices unorthodox to Chinese traditional musical use before and after the short period marked by the Dasheng Institute (*Dashengfu*) (Provine 1992, 97). Thus, even though it seems likely that the music of the Confucian rituals introduced to Korea was itself essentially different from its own predecessors due to the eccentric historical revisions made by the Dasheng Institute, it would appear that such eccentricities were largely revised in the course of the 15th century, and with lasting effects. In fact, the historical source *Akhak kwebôm* (*Guide to the Study of Music*) to which court musicians have referred ever since dates 1493, so that all modern attempt to reconstruct *aak* could not have been based on any "original" or "authentic" version of the music. However, because the only example of notation available at the time was in turn a collection of Dasheng music, "the 15th-century Korean reconstruction of ritual music was a peculiar marriage of Chen Yang's conservative ensemble and Dasheng melodies" (Provine 1992, 106). In sum, because it was based on books rather than on practice, the reconstruction was "a new beginning" (Provine 1992, 106).

The Japanese and Manchu invasions of the late 16th and early 17th centuries had a strong negative impact on the Confucian rituals, once again scaling down the number of performers and reducing it to the bare essentials; meanwhile, singing was reintroduced (Provine 1992, 107). In the 20th century, the Japanese occupation had an even more severe effect: "Even before the final demise of royal and imperial Korea in 1910, most state sacrificial rites had been abolished under the influence of the Japanese, who were to colonize Korea for the first half of the century. Only the Sacrifices to Royal Ancestors (Chongmyo) and to Confucius were permitted to continue. The Sacrifice to Royal Ancestors, in fact, had not used *aak* (...) since the 15th century" (Provine 1992, 107). As recently as the 1980s, the performers of the Courtyard Ensemble of *aak* were just 17, compared to the 190 elements of 1116 (Provine 1992, 110). Nonetheless, it is worth noticing that the passionate interest of the Japanese ethnomusicologist Tanabe Hisao (1883-1984) contributed to the survival of *aak*, as he "used his influence to improve the

conditions of Korean musicians and elevate the prestige of their traditional music" (Provine 1992, 109).

As for the performing style of 20th- and 21st-century *aak*, this is

"strikingly distinct from other types of Korean music. There are only two melodies, each thirty-two notes in length, though one is performed in a number of transpositions. A starting signal and a finishing signal, played on drums and other percussion, is provided for each performance of a melody. After the melody begins each melodic note is of the same duration, and every instrument follows a strictly consistent and orderly procedure: the bells and chimes are struck once for each note, the wind instruments each play each note once and rise in pitch near the end of it. A clay bowl is struck in an accelerating pattern after each note has begun in the melodic instruments, and the drums play a punctuating pattern after every four melodic notes" (Provine 1992, 110).

Provine's own conclusions about the feasibility of applying adjectives like "traditional", "authentic", and "ancient" to the music described above are "that the tradition of this music is thriving; that the instruments are authentic, descending directly from Chinese originals (and in some cases the instruments themselves are hundreds of years old); and that the modern performing style is virtually all Korean, rather than Chinese. Recent changes to the ensemble demonstrate that the musical performing practice is not moribund –it is vital rather than being a mere museum relic (Provine 1992, 111). Indeed, as noticed by Howard, "reconsiderations continue[:] in 2009, a new set of stone chimes, *p'yn'gyng*, was created", based on a 15th-century version; ironically, "other instruments must now be restored – notably the bronze clapperless bell set, *p'ynjong* – if the new stone chimes are to be incorporated into the Rite [to Confucius]" (Howard 2012a, 97). Recent changes to the Rites are matched by a heated debate surrounding the historical veracity of the current performing style of the dances and of the music. However, neither side in the debate "attempts to go back to the time of Confucius or anywhere near his time, or to the later establishment of sacrificial rites in his honour. Neither side, then, looks for the most ancient archetype; both see more recent manifestations as their prime concern. The efforts of both are, thus, limited: they challenge the impact of Japanese colonialism, and seek to restore sacrificial rites, and ritual music and dance, to forms recorded at some point from the 15th to the 19th century" (Howard 2012a, 103). If anything, similar debates demonstrate that the question of what counts as *aak* has yet to find a definitive answer, and that "the arts live through creation and recreation" (Howard 2012a, 103).

Nhã nhạc "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*], it was introduced from China during the Ming dynasty (around the fifteenth century [CE])" (Akagawa 2015, 167). *Nhã nhạc* then developed during the Lê dynasty (1427-1788), when the political shift resulted in a greater Chinese influence at the royal court. A split between popular forms and courtly genres then began to emerge, exacerbated by the influential opinion of Confucian scholars who mandated "that the elegant music (*nhã nhạc*) of the court be clearly distinguished from the vulgar music (*tục nhạc*) of commoners" (Nguyễn 1998, 470). Over time, the separation of the repertoires was complicated by the progressive 'spillage' of musical forms from the royal palace to remote villages. At the same time, "the court embraced new kinds of music: by decree, the court orchestra adopted the instrumentations of the Ming court of China" (Nguyễn 1998, 470). A ban imposed by the later Lê Dynasty from 1680 to 1740, "forbade any full-scale musical performances like those characteristic of the previous dynasty"; nonetheless,

"the Commission on Music permitted the string-and-wind ensemble (*ty bã lệnh*) and the ritual ensemble (*nhạc huyền*), which later came to be known as the small ensemble (*tiểu nhạc*) and the large ensemble (*đại nhạc*), respectively. Like court orchestras in other East Asian countries, these ensembles featured many instruments of Chinese lineage and were classified as civil or military. They also had conductors. The string-and-wind ensemble had two three-stringed lutes, two two-stringed fiddles, two two-stringed coconut-shell fiddles, two moon-shaped lutes, two pear-shaped lutes, two oboes, two small drums, two one-headed drums, one hourglass-shaped drum, one three-gong set, and one coin clapper. The ritual ensemble had one large drum, one small drum, one large stone chime, twelve small stone chimes, one large bell, twelve small bells, one wooden idiophone (*chúc*), one wooden tiger-shaped idiophone (*ngũ*), two *cầm* zithers, two *sắt* zithers, two small vertical bamboo flutes, two transverse bamboo flutes, two long transverse bamboo flutes, two mouth organs, and two ocarinas. The large ensemble included twenty large drums, eight trumpets, four large gongs, four small gongs, four conch trumpets, and four water-buffalo horns" (Nguyễn 1998, 470–71).

Music and the arts more generally were taken up again by the Nguyễn monarchs (1802-1945), and "Vietnamese court music" became highly institutionalized and codified[29]. Even so, according to some scholars "the music of Vietnam's imperial court […] was never widely known or played" (Douglas 2010, 64).

Since the 1980s, *nhã nhạc* has been consistently revived within the framework of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage program and in connection with the preservation of the architectonical heritage of the city of Huế. Therefore, "[it] tends to represent that ancient capital more than the nation as a whole. For these reasons Vietnamese music is often referred to as 'traditional' rather than classical or court" (Douglas 2010, 64). Indeed, the very relationship of *nhã nhạc* vis-à-vis other South Asian musical traditions is problematic: "while scholars generally agree, with some debate, what styles and genres fit the 'classical' category in Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia the court music of Vietnam has not found the same status. Indeed, the label 'Vietnamese classical music' has no clear meaning" (Douglas 2010, 64). It is worth noting that Japanese scholars (particularly ethnomusicologists) were and still are instrumental in the process of recreating a courtly musical tradition, insisting on the connection between the two countries in a way that unmistakably signals a new wave of cultural nationalism in the shadow of Japan's already uneasy colonial past (see Akagawa 2015, 167–81)[30].

Upon closer inspection, it seems clear that to recast the problem of what *gagaku* is in comparative terms by problematizing the notion of '(Asian) court music' simply means shifting the attention from the homogeneity of the internal components of each tradition to the appropriateness of a descriptive category. In the end, in fact, establishing what constitutes each repertoire is less important than deciding whether or not they can all be labeled 'court music' in the first place. The problem addressed here is therefore not so much how to draw precise paths of derivation for each of the local enactment of a common 'thing' subsumed by the use of the phrase 'court music', but rather if a similar line of reasoning is in itself tenable. That scholars of *gagaku* are painfully aware of such a conundrum is evident from the following attempt by Endō Tōru (arguably the best *gagaku* historian presently active in Japan) to provide a definition of the couple of characters now commonly read *gagaku* in Japanese:

"Given that the meaning of *ga* [雅] in '雅楽' is 'correct' 'positive', from an etymological point of view '雅楽' means 'orthodox or legitimate *gaku* [楽]' (comprising both music [*ongaku* 音楽] and dance). (…) Moreover, this concept of 'orthodox *gaku*' [雅楽] spread in various kingdoms whose governments were

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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).

And similar considerations must be complemented with an awareness of the fact that historical research has convincingly demonstrated that the music introduced in Japan from the mainland was *not* 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).

This, however, is not merely a historical issue: it is also a matter of *scale*. After all, it is not the same thing to talk about court music in contemporary 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" both in the Vietnamese and in the Japanese case if scale implied by the comparison is transnational (see Tokumaru 2004). From this point of view, in order to speak of a stable supranational category consistent with all the items sketched out above, 雅楽 has to be equated with a wholesale conception of "Asian court music(s)".

And, conversely, when the ground for comparison is deemed inadequate, 雅楽 as such (as an entity detached from its local enactments but still theoretically valid and complete with explanatory power) ceases to be an epistemologically valid notion. 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. And 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 what could be called 'identity politics': whenever new elements are related to *gagaku*, the question gets raised of to whom *gagaku* belongs.

And yet, we do not witness the birth of endless 'new *gagakus*' every day: some sense of where the 'borders of *gagaku*' ought to be situated does remain, even when admittedly eccentric things take place at the margins of tradition[31]. It is this sense of precarious coordination that pushes us to conceive *gagaku* in terms of a multiple object, rather than conceding to its fragmentation, to its plurality. In this sense, this dissertation is not a 'deconstruction of *gagaku*' –although, as long as laden words beginning in de- and denoting reversal are concerned, it may be read as an attempt to "deterritorialize" *gagaku*[32]. 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, then, one must resist the temptation to ascribe it to the umbrella-term 'court music', because, as I have tried to demonstrate, such a notion loses its currency when the scale of the comparison between its purported enactments is reduced from transnational to localized. To think of *gagaku* as a multiple object is thus, in a sense, a way of "staying with the trouble", to use, in a more prosaic sense, an expression coined by Donna Haraway (see Haraway 2016). In light of these considerations, a sketch of what the word *gagaku* refers to in ordinary academic parlance will help to appreciate the distance between the 'common knowledge' about 'Japanese court music' and the approach put forth in this dissertation.

III.   COMMON KNOWLEDGE: *GAGAKU* DEFINED

Music and dances from the mainland were introduced in Japan between the 6th and the 8th century together with the Chinese writing system, Buddhist scriptures and ritual objects, and, crucially, Buddhist chanting (*shōmyō*) (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, but solemn ritual occasions involving the performance of music and dance no doubt brought legitimacy and

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[31] See (Giolai 2013).

[32] An obvious reference to the twin 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).

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 charged with the task of performing and handing down primarily the foreign musical repertoire (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[33], 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 were read *gagaku* or *utamai* at the time –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, and to be influenced by it: during the Heian period (794-1185), the corpus performed at the Gagakuryō was gradually "Japanized", and court noblemen took an interest in playing specific instruments privately (especially zithers and flutes), compiling music scores[34], and composing entirely new pieces. According to Endō, "these musics, songs and dances brought to completion within the courtly society of the Heian period constitute the essence of Japanese *gagaku*" (2013, 14). In fact, historians of Japanese music now tend to agree that this corpus is what the term *gagaku* should indicate, in the strictest sense of the word.

A succession of changes over several centuries brought to multiple reorganizations of *gagaku*'s materials, as well as of the instruments employed[35] 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

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[33] The character 寮 contemplates the readings *ryō* or *tsukasa*, and indicates one of various administrative structures in the framework of the Ritsuryō legal system.

[34] 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 also as windows on the transmission of music in the Heian period.

[35] 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 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 examples 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).

Grapard 1992), often during solemn celebrations that included Buddhist chanting[36].
These local sites of *gagaku* performance and transmission were known as *gakuso* or
gakusho [37] (Kōshitsu Our Imperial Family 2008, 23). As parallel 'structures of
transmission'[38], the *gakusho* eventually evolved into the 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).

Despite the numerous changes in its physical and societal means of transmission, the
overall organization of the *gagaku* repertoire remained remarkably stable over the
centuries comprised between the Kamakura period (1185-1333) and the present. For
this reason, another valid answer to the question of what *gagaku* is consists in equating
it with the body of musics and dances 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".

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[36] 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 8th-century Asia"
(Nelson 2008a, 39; see also Endō et al. 2006, 40–42).

[37] 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 character 所 might help to create a sense of antiquity to capitalize upon. In this way,
a group's very name may perform a link to the past.

[38] 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 'musicians below the ground', as opposed
to the aristocratic families that passed on *gagaku*, known as *tōshō gakke* or 'musicians above the pavilion')
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).

Following this view, and quoting Steven G. Nelson at length, the repertoire of *gagaku* 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 9th and 10th centuries[39].

"The second category is divided into two classes according to its geographical origin. *Tōgaku* [唐楽], 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* [高麗楽], largely Korean, is now performed as a rule only as *bugaku* (*umai* or *uhō* [*no mai*] [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 repertoire of the musicians active within the Japanese Imperial Household'). First and foremost, the classification 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[40]. One alternative and somewhat more consistent

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[39] *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 9th 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 (2000a; 2000b).

[40] In other words, though exceptions are possible, *komagaku* is generally performed as *bugaku* (Endō 2013, 15).

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*. And in both cases, there is some sense that the organizing principle does not emanate 'naturally' from the musical material, but is rather imposed upon it for analytical purposes. 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, 20th-century pieces written expressly for the Imperial Household ensemble by such composers as Takemitsu Tōru, John Cage or Karlheinz Stockhausen are notably difficult to classify as *gagaku* in a straightforward way (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 constant reshaping of a canon. Still, it signals precise choices on the part of historians or musicologists –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: given that they state what can be taken as *gagaku* and what cannot, they may even be described as entailing certain "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*: in this sense, the strongest evidence of *gagaku*'s constitutive multiplicity lies in its own components. Should any doubt remain on this point, just consider the vocal repertories of *rōei* and *saibara*, hybrid objects by definition: the former, Chinese texts by (sometimes) Japanese poets set to what may 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.

Heterogeneousness 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 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 20th century and, even more, at the beginning of the 21st, *gagaku* has been

predominantly associated with *kangen*, purely instrumental music, and only 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 aerophones, cordophones, idiophones and membranophones, variously arranged depending on the subset of the repertoire performed[41] (see **FIG. 1**).

Table 3.1   Instruments, song and dance in the sub-genres of *gagaku*

A. *Kuniburi-no-utamai* (accompanied vocal music and dance of indigenous origin employed in imperial and Shinto ceremony)

| | winds | | | | strings | percussion | song | dance |
	kagurabue	ryūteki	komabue	hichiriki	wagon	shakubyōshi		
mikagura	●			●	●	●	●	●
azuma-asobi		●		●	●	●	●	●
yamato-mai		●		●		●	●	●
ōuta		●		●	●	●	●	●
kume-mai		●		●	●	●	●	●
ruika					●	●	●	

B. *Kangen* and *bugaku* (instrumental music and accompanied dance deriving from the ancient performing arts of the Asian mainland)

| | | winds | | | | strings | | percussion | | | | | | dance |
		ryūteki	komabue	hichiriki	shō	biwa	koto	kakko	san-no-tsuzumi	shōko	ōshōko	taiko	dadaiko	
tōgaku	kangen	●		●	●	●	●	●		●		●		
	bugaku	●		●	●	◊	◊	●			●		●	●
komagaku	bugaku		●	●					●		●		●	●

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

C. *Saibara* and *rōei* (accompanied vocal music originating at the early Heian court of the ninth and tenth centuries)

| | winds | | | strings | | percussion | song |
	ryūteki	hichiriki	shō	biwa	koto	shakubyōshi	
saibara	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
rōei	●	●	●				●

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 comparatively large [cane] reed"; and a "free reed mouth organ with 17 bamboo pipes (two reedless) inserted into a wind chamber", called *shō* (Nelson 2008b, 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 *(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 *(gaku)biwa* is "a large four-string lute with

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[41] 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).

four frets played with a large-hand plectrum" (Nelson 2008b, 49). As for the percussions, 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 2008b, 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 2008b, 50)[42].

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[43].
- 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.
- 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

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[42] 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 2008b).

[43] The simplest definition of heterophony is "the musical texture characterized by the simultaneous performance of variations of the same melody" (Koskoff 2008, 749).

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.

Indeed, it is arguably the imagery conveyed by these gaudy visual elements to 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 have 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)[44], 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"[45], 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 popular music, and even commercial merchandizing (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 traditional performing art has turned into a much more reassuring, possibly even "cute" object[46]. "Staying with the trouble", to use Donna Haraway's famous expression, entails an openness to the constant challenges of a semiotic-material, more-than-sonic reality.

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[44] For two notable exceptions, see (Kōshitsu Our Imperial Family 2008) and the lavishly illustrated *The Desing of Gagaku* (*Gagaku no dezain*) (Ōno and Hayashi 1990).

[45] 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).

[46] On the peculiarities of Japanese conception of "cuteness", see (Kinsella 1995; Yano 2009).
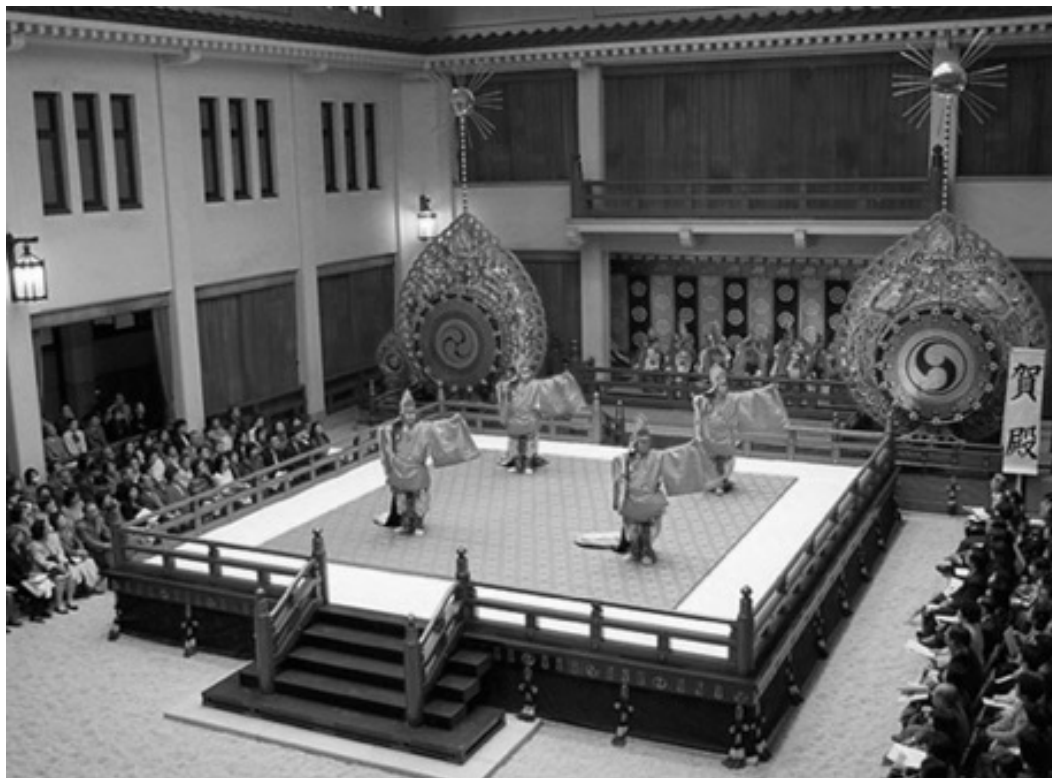
FIGURE 2. Two 'standard images' of *gagaku* as performed by the Imperial Household musicians: purely instrumental music (*kangen*) (top), dance with musical accompaniment (*bugaku*) (bottom).

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

FIGURE 3. In the summer of 2016, the cellphone application LINE launched this series of *bugaku*-inspired stickers (From LINE).

IV.   WHERE IS *GAGAKU*? MAPPING AN UNCHARTED TERRITORY

The complicated relationship between *gagaku* and 雅楽 opens up a theoretical space in which to investigate 'Japanese court music' on the basis of a new ontological paradigm and perfectly illustrates the constitutive heterogeneity at the heart of these ancient repertoires. Taking the ambiguity of *gagaku* as a starting point, this dissertation proposes to consider it a "multiple object" (Mol 2002) from the outset, thus highlighting its resistance to being grasped and defined as a 'thing'. In this new framework, conclusions can only be localized and provisional, and intellectual stances are multiplied: favoring a view from above to a bird's-eye panorama, this work suggests that situatedness and reflexivity are better conceptual tools than any pretended objectivity or detached evaluation. A new ontological paradigm for the study of *gagaku* thus leads to alternative, decentering narratives. The intellectual itinerary described in the dissertation is therefore far from straightforward.

The arguments unfold taking various directions, multiplying the lines of flight, as it were (see Deleuze and Guattari, 2005). The dissertation goes 'below the ground level', both in the sense of searching for the rhizomatic historical roots of *gagaku*'s contemporary multiplicity (**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**). But the thesis moves in other directions too: it travels west of Tokyo, focusing broadly on the history of *gagaku* in 20th-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 returning to the present moment 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 as listener, performer or critic is unaffected by this co-constitutive relationship of past and present: for its lovers, yesterday really is today when it comes to *gagaku*. Ultimately, what can be done *with and of the past* determines what the future will sound like.

Chapter 1 draws an analogy between the musical concept of *mode* and some of the ways in which *gagaku* has been approached in the past. Four arbitrarily selected modes

of research on *gagaku* are presented in turn. They have been termed 'historical', 'presentational', 'musicological' and '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 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.

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. Despite the fourfold classification, however, one of 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 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 essentialist terms, because its multiplicity exceeds the stability imposed by one predetermined approach.

Any decentering operation rests logically on a center, evoked and contested in the same breath. A decentered approach to *gagaku*, too, assumes a centralized structure, and in a way positions itself at the peripheral end of a system. However, the presupposition of a center does not imply an equally predetermined set of features proper to this conjured entity. Academic discourses on *gagaku* overwhelmingly concur in considering Tokyo the veritable epicenter of modern and contemporary "Japanese court music", thus often excluding alternative traditions and conflictual interpretations of the history and ontology of *gagaku*[47]. An especially significant role is attributed to the Office of *Gagaku*, a

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[47] LeRon James Harrison notices the Japanese government's Agency of Cultural Affairs offers a representation of *gagaku* marked by an "exclusionary focus", evident in the texts of the website Cultural Heritage Online (*Bunka isan onrain*) (2017, 17). This is due to the fact that *gagaku* groups perceived as peripheral "represent challenges to the claims of the agency" (Harrison 2017, 17). Harrison's claim that his

centralized structure created in 1870 Thus, it is altogether a natural decision to begin my decentering of *gagaku* with a portrayal of how a unified, centralized, normative interpretation of it came into being. Indeed, many specialists now agree in recognizing 1870 as a watershed moment, the "birth of modern *gagaku*" (Tsukahara 2009; M. Ono 2016; see also Terauchi 2010; Nelson 2008b). Oftentimes, 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"), demonstrating the watershed significance of this historical phase (among many more, see R. Ono and Tōgi 1989, 55; Abe 1998, 238; Kasagi 2008, 17). In this narrative, then, it seems clear enough when and how a center of power came into being. Interestingly, however, a closer examination of the activities of the Office of *Gagaku* at the turn of the 20th century reveals that the situation was much more complex. For this reason, **Chapter 2** explores the connection between the making of a sociopolitical discourse revolving around the figure of the emperor, the invention of State Shinto as a religion tightly bound to the 'essence' of Japan and the Japanese population (itself a modern concept), and *gagaku*. In fact, it was in the decades following the Meiji restoration that a new image of *gagaku* was cast –one that emphasized its timeless solemnity, its static qualities, its purportedly unchanged nature since importation from the mainland (see Ng 2011). In so doing, *gagaku* was to become the 'soundscape of Shinto' and, by extension, the soundscape of an imperial system now crucial to the success of a precise political turn.

But for all the ordering, systematizing and centralizing that characterized the Meiji period, the genealogy of contemporary 'Japanese court music' is far simple and straightforward. Examining the participation of *gagaku* musicians in the creation of a repertoire of nursery school songs, for instance, reveals a creative aspect of their lives too often obscured by their primary role as bearers of the tradition. Similarly, the fact that the same performers were the first to receive a proper training in European classical music is significant: in a turbulent context shaped by, on the one hand, the invention of the novel category of "Japanese traditional music" (see especially Terauchi 2010), and, on

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article "marks the opening of new spaces and places for *gagaku*" (2017, 25) is largely consonant with my own perspective, even though his critique of Terence Lancashire's treatment of *gagaku* is fundamentally unconvincing and his arguments would have benefited from a comparison with recent academic research by Japanese *gagaku* scholars such as Terauchi Naoko and Takuwa Satoshi, which the author seems to ignore.

the other, the pressing "westernization" of the musical scene, these interpreters faced "the challenge of bi-musicality" (Hood 1960) reaching a remarkable level of literacy in more than one artistic idiom. The chapter thus highlights the many ways in which *gagaku* came to be perceived as the sonorous embodiment of the forces driving social and political change, while at the same time exposing the fact that the selective process leading to the creation of the modern category of "Japanese court music" was highly selective. *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 multiplicity and complexity.

Chapter 3 marks the beginning of a shift in focus, from nationwide tendencies and processes to more localized narratives. Before 1870, the geographical distribution of the most important groups of *gagaku* practitioners was significantly different: in fact, all three of the most important centers of *gagaku* production were located in the western region of Kansai. Here, a '*gagaku* triangle' comprising the modern-day cities of Kyoto, Osaka and Nara was the veritable cradle of this ancient performing art. Because of the sociopolitical weight of 'religious' institutions such as Nara's Kōfukuji-Kasuga Taisha ritual compound, Kyoto's imperial palace, and Osaka's Shitennōji temple in early modern 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 this imaginary 'triangle' established alliances that secured the survival of local versions of *gagaku*. In doing so, the chapter simultaneously attempts to provide an alternative to the centripetal, hegemonic narrative surrounding modern and contemporary *gagaku*. At the same time, a nearly forgotten history of musical practices in western Japan is presented jointly for the first time. The modern and contemporary history of three groups of performers is recounted: from Kyoto's Heian gagakukai, to Osaka's Garyōkai, to Nara's Nanto gakuso, each group is described from its inception to well into the 20th century. Perhaps the most important conclusion drawn is that the survival of this ancient performing art largely depended on the cooperation of leaders of 'religious' institutions and members of families that had no former hereditary relation to the transmission of specific performing traditions.

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' sketched out (but also contextualized and problematized) in Chapter 2, offers a direct entryway into the following chapter. This is different from the previous ones in that it is entirely set in the present, and based on two years of apprenticeship-based participant observation. In fact, **Chapter 4** takes into consideration the practice of *gagaku* as carried out by Nanto gakuso, a group of practitioners that inherited the long history of "Nara *gagaku*" (see Kasagi 2008). The appearance of a first-person perspective in the narrative is mitigated by a careful consideration of the group's organizational aspects: 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 (for the former, see especially Hennion 2001; 2015). The second half of the chapter explores the significance of place and space in the practice of *gagaku*. In fact, the complex process of becoming a practitioner is inseparable from a distinctive way of inhabiting the space where the practice unfolds. As in many other genres of traditional performing art, a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991) reinforces its internal bonds through its uses of the practice room (*keikoba*) (Hahn 2007; Keister 2008). Importantly, these considerations resonate with the praxiographic approach proposed by Annemarie Mol, revealing a fundamental consistency among the various intellectual standpoints mobilized in this multifaceted exploration of *gagaku*.

The chapter ends with some theoretical reflections of an anthropological nature. Two years spent on the field with Nanto gakuso led me to consider more closely the sonic materiality of *gagaku*, as well as its implications on the broader framework of 'doing fieldwork in sound'. Drawing from scholars active in the field of sound studies, auditory culture or, to use a more encompassing expression, "sound culture studies" (Kane 2015, 3; see Novak and Sakakeeny 2015), I propose to think of participant observation in terms of a tension between "immersion" and "auscultation" (see Feld 2015; Rice 2010; 2015; but also Cusick 2013). Within a framework that in many ways resembles Steve Goodman's notion of "vibrational ontology" (see Goodman 2010), I stress the importance of gaining a greater awareness of the (Deleuzian) affective potential represented by the researcher's body. At the same time, these reflections raise the question of whether it would be possible to reconceive the 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. In sum, I maintain that the experience of ethnographic fieldwork *within gagaku* highlights the power of sound to affect the researcher first and foremost through his or her body. For its markedly anthropological character, then, Chapter 4 can be considered the fullest exposition of my investigation into the local enactments of present-day *gagaku*.

But putting the accent on the tangibility of *gagaku* as 'sound enacted' also means signaling the limitations of approaches more emphatically centered on the intangible aspect of music. After all, music is *made* thanks to instruments, hands, air and muscular tensions (and similar considerations also apply to dance). These simple observations constitute the premise of the final chapter, which deals with what may seem the most bewildering 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 to the sound of *gagaku* itself) was linked to a complex 'preservation discourse' surrounding the safeguarding of the natural environment, eventually creating complex 'mutual affordances' between music and nature. Situating the debate within the larger context of the privatization of the Japanese highway system (see Waley 2005; Asano 2007), the chapter introduces the main actors in the ongoing dispute over the fate of Udono's reed bed –the area where the canes used in the production of the *hichiriki* reeds (*rozetsu*) are harvested. These primary actors and stakeholders are the Udono Reed Bed Research Center, championed by Koyama Hiromichi, a local botanist and environmentalist, and a quasi-private corporation, NEXCO West. Based on numerous interviews with the members of the Udono Reed Bed Research Center, complemented by participant observation as well as by a close reading of the official documentation provided by NEXCO, the chapter shows the extent to which *gagaku* has exceeded the confines of music studies. In Udono, what at first seems like an eminently local issue reveals itself as an intensely political matter that weaves together tangible and intangible, revealing just how much *gagaku* can be decentered, and what this decentering might entail.

Overall, the dissertation marks a substantial departure from the conventional ways in which *gagaku* has been investigated so far. While earlier accounts largely took for

granted the equation between *gagaku* and 'Japanese court music', aligning themselves with an image of immutability consecrated by international organizations such as UNESCO[48], my own approach assumes from the start the multiplicity of this performing art, showing that its ability to remain vital is based in the renegotiation of its own boundaries. Returning to the theoretical plane, the **Conclusion** highlights how an application of this new ontological paradigm may result in the production of alternative, fluid topologies of local sites that have remained at the margins of official academic narratives and normative maps of *gagaku*. Shifting across different scales and different ways of composing *gagaku*, this dissertation demonstrates that overflows, heterogeneities and eccentricities are crucial elements of its present state of becoming. These topological images are especially suited to describe the case studies presented throughout the thesis, notably because they resonate with the unorthodox character of many of the topics introduced.

A brief discussion of some additional "untraditional" representations of *gagaku* in contemporary Japan opens the discussion to future developments. In fact, broader explorations of the "contemporary *gagaku* scene" are dearly needed, and could significantly complement and complicate the academic debate. Ultimately, then, this dissertation could be seen as a first step toward a new theoretical and methodological framework for the exploration of Japanese traditional performing arts at large. A similar perspective would be creatively deconstructive, decentering established narratives and bringing into view the generative power of border-crossings and heterogeneity.

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[48] *Gagaku* was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009.