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Decentering Gagaku. Exploring the multiplicity of contemporary Japanese Court music

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CHAPTER 3

THE *GAGAKU* TRIANGLE

'COURT MUSIC' IN KANSAI SINCE 1870

At the end of the 19th century, *gagaku* was mobilized in institutional contexts such as public education, the reorganization of the rituals of the court, and the introduction of a number of foreign musical idioms. The transformations that ensued have radically reshaped court music, and are at the basis of contemporary understandings of what this performing art 'is' to most Japanese. Both the public image of *gagaku* and the often ideologically-charged rhetoric surrounding its history are products of the Meiji period. For this reason, examinations of the years immediately following 1870 shine a light on what I have called the complex genealogy of 20th century court music, and form the basis of any thorough analysis of present-day transformations.

Of course, the bulk of such examinations is bound to be concerned with processes that took place in the new capital of Japan. When it comes to 'modern *gagaku*', however, equal attention should be paid to the shifting conditions of the western part of the country, as this was arguably the area that had to face the harshest challenges to keep the transmission of the music alive. This chapter focuses on three centers of *gagaku* production located in the western cities of Kyoto, Osaka and Nara –a geographical area I

ironically refer to as ‘the *gagaku* triangle’¹ (see **FIG.3.1**). Contrary to its infamous kin, this particular strip of land has had the property of *not* making a special type of object (*gagaku*) disappear. By looking at each local reality separately and comparing similarities and differences among them, I will try to elucidate the kinds of strategies deployed in order to ‘keep *gagaku* on the map’.



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

The history and main features of *local* (variations of) Japanese traditional performing arts (often described as *minzoku geinō* or ‘folk performing arts’) is a topic made marginal by the persistent endurance of ideological distinctions between ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ (see Thornbury 1997; Lancashire 2013; Akagawa 2015). As a consequence, local enactments of genres like *gagaku* are often (and regrettably) the stuff of research conducted by members of *hozonkai*, preservation societies. Despite the impressive quality of this sort of research in Japan (a country where the line between amateurs and professional is often blurred), scholars interested in *gagaku* have rarely ventured into the history of the most important local groups in western Japan. This chapter presents the first comprehensive overview of secondary sources on the topic. It steers away from the tendency exhibited by Japanese scholars to confront the issue of the so-called “three offices of music” only from a historical point of view, debating on the

¹ I thank Kasia Cwiertka for suggesting this image for the first time.

basis of this expression with little or no preoccupation for the present state of the groups included within that definition (e.g. Yamada 2016). Although I do not wish to suggest a continuity between ancient Japan and today, I believe in the value of highlighting parallels between the modern histories of Kansai *gagaku*. Moreover, and more importantly, by focusing specifically on these groups of practitioners a decentering of orthodox and normative definitions of *gagaku* is made directly manifest. This decentering operation is of course thematic and concerns ideas and representations; but it is also geographic, concerned less with theoretical stances than with practical decisions taken to insure that it would indeed be possible to continue to talk about *gagaku* in Kansai more than 150 years later.

Different responses to the sudden changes that started in the 1870s are embodied in the sounds and gestures of today's local practitioners, resonating with one another.

Furthermore, the choices made at the turn of the 19th century are inscribed into the social fabric that surrounds and sustains contemporary court music, in the form of lasting institutional relations, surviving family lines and the social roles of court music's practitioners. These are the main reasons why it is important to look at some of the properties of this imaginary triangle.

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

From what we have seen in the previous chapter, it is no exaggeration to say that the *gagaku* of the Imperial Household of Japan, recognized by UNESCO in 2009 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Humanity, is a re-invented tradition. More boldly (perhaps too boldly, but when is this line crossed, and where exactly is it drawn?), one could go as far as to say that 'centralized' court music is relatively new to the eastern part of the Japanese archipelago. In fact, even considering the Tokugawa patronage of *gagaku* and its admission into the masculine walls of the Edo castle starting from 1642 (Takenouchi 2006, 193), the fact remains that from its arrival in Japan to well into the 17th century this performing art orbited around the circumscribed geographical area surrounding Heiankyō (present-day Kyoto), the ancient capital in the west. This veritable cradle of Japanese *gagaku* is known as Kansai or Kinki, and comprises today's so-called

Keihanshin metropolitan area, the region of approximately 15 million people where the cities of Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto are located. Also included in Kansai are the eastern (with respect to the more densely inhabited territories) prefectures of Wakayama, Mie, and Nara, essential to both the national, cultural self-images of the Japanese population². Thus, for both geographical and socio-cultural reasons, it is safe to say that Kansai is the most significant *other* to Tokyo's court music.

For centuries, the most distinctive feature of this territory has been the existence of a semi-institutionalized system through which *gagaku* was performed and passed down by specialized families belonging to something roughly identifiable as 'organizations'. In itself, this is an ancient phenomenon, with roots that go back to the reign of Emperor Murakami (r.946-967) (Endō 2013, 44; Kishibe 1974, 15-16; S. Tōgi 1988, 39). By then, the directives of the *Ritsuryō* legal codes of the early 8th century had led to a progressive shift from the unitary institution of the Gagakuryō to loose structures known as *gakuso* (or *gakusho*)³ (often translated as "offices of (court) music"). At such an initial stage, the *gakuso* were temporary physical structures set up within the court in order to house a limited number of musicians who were to perform at certain important celebrations: music was so often necessary in the calendrical rituals of the court that erecting lodgings in its precincts seemed a simple and practical way to have the performers always ready.

According to most historians of Japanese music, these structures gradually developed into more abstract systems of transmission, laying the foundations for what would become the so-called '*sanpō gakuso*' or "three offices of music" (Ogi 1989, 174). These consisted in three separate bundles of several families with preferential ties respectively

² Many if not most Japanese see in the plain of Yamato (in present-day Nara prefecture) the primary locus of what has been called "the emergence of Japanese kingship" between the 3rd and the 10th century CE (see Piggott 1997).

³ The reading of the second character of this word, the one commonly used to indicate a 'place' or a 'site' (*tokoro*), is debated. Both the *Dictionary of Heian History* and the fourth edition of the authoritative *Kōjien* (1993) have the main entry as *gakusho*, to which the *gakuso* entry refers (Shinmura 1993, 453; Ogi 1994, 460). Moreover, the Meiji-period *gagaku* dictionary *Gagakushōjiten*, largely based on the earlier *Kabuhinmoku* by Ōgawa Morinaka (1760-1823) also has a similar entry for *gakusho* (Gagaku to bugaku oyobi kanren geinō no ima to mukashi kyōdō kenkyūkai 2016, 35-36). However, throughout this dissertation the transliteration *gakuso* has been preferred in order to avoid unnecessary confusion: in fact, even though recently there has been a tendency to shift toward *gakusho* (e.g. Endō 2013, 44), the expression *sanpō gakuso* is still widely used, and remains the preferred choice for both introductory and reference books on court music (see, among many others, Endō 2007, 32; 2008, 82; Terauchi 2011, 29; Yamada 2016). *Gakuso* is also the transliteration used by a host of contemporary local groups, that generally attach the expression to a specific place-name (as in the case of the groups Tokyo *gakuso*, Osaka *gakuso*, Kyoto *gakuso*, Nanto *gakuso* Niigata *gakuso* and so on). Thus in this case philological precision has been sacrificed in the name of clarity.

to the court in Kyoto; to the Shitennōji temple in Osaka; and to the Kōfukuji-Kasuga Taisha religious multiplex in Nara. However, one must resist the hasty assumption that a fully-fledged ‘managerial’ system presiding over these three performing centers existed ever since antiquity. Indeed, recent research has demonstrated that the tripartite nature of the *sanpō gakuso* was not entirely established before the Tenshō period (1573-1592) (Yamada 2016, 29): while *gagaku* musicians in Nara were already occasionally taking part in the court’s rituals, the ones in Osaka only began serving there sometime between 1577 and 1579. As extant primary sources on court’s activities make this clear, we can safely assume that it was only around this time that a fully-fledged *sanpō gakuso* “system” was born (Minamitani 1994, 77). If that is the case, to talk of ‘three offices of music’ during the Heian or Kamakura period would mean erroneously projecting a historically constructed interpretation of this essentially early modern phenomenon back in time ⁴. Neither were the activities of these musicians limited to the court: as early as the Keichō era (1596-1615), for instance, performances at the Toyokuni shrine, dedicated to the shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi, became customary (Yamada 2016, 28). Thus, even though it is undeniable that from the late 10th century different groups of practitioners started specializing in the performance of court music, it must also be admitted that the *sanpō gakuso* articulation of *gagaku* practice is much more recent than many local musicians would claim. As a matter of fact, less than one hundred years separate the consolidation of the three offices of music from the creation of the *Momijiyama gakuso*, the group active at the Edo castle.

Even so, similarities among these three centers of (court) music production justify treating them jointly from at least the 16th century. Significantly, and apparently paradoxically, the first common characteristic to stand out in the past and present practice of the various *gakuso* is their interrelation. In fact, the groups in Osaka and Nara provided much needed aid when Kyoto was severely damaged by the turmoil of the Ōnin wars in the late 15th century, making it possible to perform rituals that would have been temporarily or perhaps even permanently suspended without this precious support. Even before these noticeable episodes, it had been customary to summon ‘local’

⁴ The genesis of *gagaku*’s *sanpō gakuso* around 1570 and its official incorporation in the Office of *Gagaku* in 1870 mark a chronological span that fits squarely in Totman’s periodization of “Japan’s early modern period”, i.e. the three centuries that divide Oda Nobunaga’s march into the imperial city of Kyoto in 1568 from the different seizure of the ancient capital by Satsuma and Chōshū armies in 1868 (1995, xxv).

musicians to the court on the occasion of important celebrations (Kōshitsu Our Imperial Family 2008, 23–24). Interestingly, historical documents show that such instances of collaboration were not just a matter of following orders, but rather a real example of mutual cooperation that extended to smaller local groups: for example, when in 1484 and 1496 the group in Nara experienced a shortage of members, several individuals from another *gagaku* group (simply referred to as “Sumiyoshi *reijin*”) provided the personnel necessary to conduct normal performances (Yamada 2016, 19–20). A similar collaboration exists today between the Kyoto group Heian gagakukai and the Nara-based Nanto *gakuso*: every year on December 17, on the occasion of the important *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri* festival, two or three members of the former association are dispatched to Nara, in what seems to be a mostly symbolical gesture, commemorating a time in which practical help was truly needed (Suzuki 2015, 2)⁵. As these examples indicate, then, a degree of interchange among all three *gakuso* has been the norm at least since the ‘medieval’ period, if not before.

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

As for the ways in which the music itself was transmitted, a common feature of the three *gakuso* was undoubtedly their hereditary nature. In all three cases, genealogical lines can be reconstructed, sometimes dating back to as far as the 10th century⁶: belonging to such lineages was and to a great extent still is a source of pride and self-identification⁷.

⁵ When I took part in the festival on December 2013, a number of ironic comments were made by Nanto *gakuso* practitioners concerning the real necessity of including members of the Kyoto group. In a sense, this antagonistic attitude strengthens the cohesion of each group, and should be interpreted along the lines of friendly skirmishes rather than as examples of substantial criticism.

⁶ This was done most famously by Hirade Hisao in 1967 (see the reprint in Hirade 1989).

⁷ Today, this holds especially true for those members of the Music Department of the Imperial Household who are the scions of ancient families. Occasionally, these musicians reveal their initial

In this way, the social fabric of a certain community and its relations to *gagaku* were determined by the interconnection of specific families. This aspect adds a sociological dimension to the study of local groups, since distinctive connections between *gagaku* and certain regional territories were (and still are) coextensive with processes of community-building. In this sense, anthropological research on kinship, at the intersection between the study of court music and of specific sites where it is transmitted, could provide invaluable data on the social significance of *gagaku* in the wider context of communitarian public spheres.

Another defining element of the three offices of music was the secretive character of the oral-aural methods of music transmission that all of them employed –something directly related to the hereditary nature of the transmission (T. Tōgi 1999, 73–79). Although in principle this aspect did not set the local musicians apart from the aristocratic family lines emerged in the late Heian period⁸, the more technical and encompassing nature of the transmission of *gagaku* as carried out by the *sanpō gakunin* (*‘gagaku* musicians from the three directions’) brought to a more striking diversification of local styles, clearly based on discordant interpretations of the repertoires. In other words, secrecy, the hereditary character of the transmission, and the specialization of each group of performers were tightly bound together in local practices. Hence, the very fact that contents and modalities of musical transmission were dissimilar constitutes a common feature of the *sanpō gakuso* system. Being different from one another was, in a way, a prerogative of these groups. Incidentally, this stands in stark contrast to the developments observed in the Meiji period, when the production of uniform scores marked a strong ‘textualization’ of the practice, to the detriment of the more secretive methods of oral transmission.

The extent to which observable differences between the musical and gestural characteristics of each repertoire reflect ancient idiosyncrasies pertaining to each group is difficult to assess. There is no doubt that these differences are matter-of-fact, and not

indifference (or even plain disinterest) towards undertaking the study of *gagaku*, a path perceived as a societal obligation toward the family. For some telling examples, see the interviews contained in a documentary produced by the Ministry of Education on the occasion of the participation of the musicians to the Edinburgh International Festival in 2012 (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tu2gLTO41IQ> (accessed August 8, 2016)). See also (T. Tōgi, Shiba, and Hayashi 2006) for rich historical details concerning each family.

⁸ After all, those families too developed a markedly secretive attitude towards *gagaku*, sometimes even composing secret pieces known as *hikyoku* (see Takuwa 2016).

simply elements of self-aggrandizing narratives. But the eyes and ears capable of detecting them must be expertly skilled: it is unlikely that the untrained listener might realize what it is that makes the performing styles of today's Osaka- or Nara-based *gagaku* groups unique. For one thing, these differences concern only a tiny portion of the repertoire: of the 56 *bugaku* (danced) pieces included in the repertoire of the Imperial Household musicians, for example, only a handful exhibit differences when performed in Kansai, and even when this happens it is only very rarely that the discrepancy concerns specific pitches in the melody. More often than not, the differences concern the fact that a certain piece can be performed either as “music of the left” (*sahō*) or as “music of the right” (*uhō*), so that the instruments employed may vary. In this cases, it may happen that the music itself is exactly the same, or the content of short pieces within an entire suite may change (especially those pieces that accompany the entrance and exit of the dancers, called *irute*, *zurute* or *derute*) (Endō and Nelson 2000, 84–85 provides a list of the entire repertoire and of the name of pieces performed with variations; Endō 2013, 305–53 provides further details for each item). Yet other differences concern the dancers' movements and the metric structures and rhythmic patterns employed.

One should keep in mind that practitioners themselves usually refer to their distinctive performing style not in terms of actual details (although they are fully aware of musical technicalities), but rather in terms of the overall impression generated by the performing style of this or that group. In this context, it is also worth noticing that today's Kyoto musicians are not the bearers of any recognizable distinctive performing feature. Rather, their style is aligned to that of the Tokyo musicians. Thus, nowadays, objective variances among such elements as special dance movements, distinctive melodic phrasings or melodic figurations, and peculiar choices of tempi (see Terauchi 2011, 125) characterize the claims to unicity made by the Kansai groups active in Nara (Nanto *gakuso*) and especially Osaka (*Garyōkai*) (see Terauchi 2013a). A case-by-case, cross-section, comparative and synchronic analysis of the discrepancies among today's groups remains to be undertaken. Researchers like Minamitani Miho and Takuwa Satoshi have reviewed some of the peculiarities of certain groups (not confined to Kansai), but their studies are not primarily concerned with the issue of comparing precise musical or gestural parameters. Such a comparative endeavor would be especially significant, notably because it would shed light on the actual extent to which the changes introduced in the Meiji have had an effect on concrete local performing practices.

In fact, after 1870, the local practitioners left in Kansai after the Office of *Gagaku* was created and the most important *gakke* families were summoned to Tokyo had to find ways to keep their own specific traditions of transmission alive. These included physical skills, material objects and notation systems, but also a host of social relations with local institutions. Together with more specific musical features, all of these elements concurred to making Osaka's *gagaku* different from Nara's or Kyoto's. Analyzing the recent history of each of the three *gakuso* brings to light the connection between 19th-century 'survival strategies' brought about in order to maintain *gagaku*'s multiplicity and the present conditions of the three most important *gagaku* groups in Kansai.

3.2 KYOTO: LOST CENTRALITY, FRAGMENTED MODERNITY

Since *gagaku* is, beyond any doubt, 'also' Japanese court music, Kyoto must be, almost by definition, at the very center of its history. And yet the longtime capital of Japan is a curiously unexplored site when it comes to the modern history of *gagaku*¹⁰. Such a state of affairs is perhaps not entirely surprising, considering that the relocation of the capital to Tokyo was bound to have more intense consequences on the longtime seat of the emperor's power. Precisely because of this association with the imperial institutions, over the course of its long history Kyoto's *gagaku* suffered repeated moments of crises. The first and most brutal of these were the disorders of the Ōnin wars (1467-1477). During the decades that followed the violent outbursts of 1467, "Kyoto was ravaged and mostly destroyed, with devastating effect on the court and its *gagaku* tradition. Many musicians were able to flee to the somewhat safer provinces, but a large number were killed, bringing to an end several hereditary musician houses" (Shumway 2001, 120). In fact, in 1559 the Kyoto *gakunin* were only 7, and at the outset of the Edo period they

¹⁰ The chapter dedicated to Kyoto in Terauchi's *Gagaku o kiku* (a book that presents the most important sites where one can listen to *gagaku* in 21st-century Japan) devotes most of the space to a description of *gagaku* in the Imperial palace in classical times and most notably in the context of calendrical events within the court (Terauchi 2011, 34–59). However, there is no mention of the modern and contemporary condition, nor even a brief reference to the constitution of the modern *gagaku* groups described below. Similarly *Gakke ruijū*, a book specifically concerned with the most ancient *gagaku* families and how their tradition is carried on by court musicians, completely avoids the topic, focusing on the years between the establishment of the main family lines no later than the early 12th century and the end of the 16th century (Ogi 2006, 26–43).

amounted to just 17 individuals, aided by an equal number of members hailing from each of the other *sanpō gakuso* (Yamada 2016, 204). To actually fulfill their duties, these performers needed the financial support of powerful families such as the Yotsuji clan¹¹ (Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984a, 164). As these examples indicate, there were several premodern instances of Kyoto's precarious conditions in the world of court music.

Still, that of the 19th century was perhaps the most harmful of these drawbacks. Shortly after the Meiji restoration, the musicians who had to move to Tokyo were given some time to relocate: those who eventually went to the eastern capital did so between 1869 and 1878, while a 'Kyoto branch' of the Office of *Gagaku* was established in 1871, mostly to accommodate elderly musicians who preferred to stay behind (Abe 1998, 239). Here, these performers started training shrine priests so that music could still be heard at the many institutions that had suddenly found themselves deprived of the collaboration of the court musicians (Suzuki 2015, 1). But the branch office was definitively closed in 1877, leaving the musicians with no other choice but to organize themselves autonomously (Tsukahara 1998, 217; Endō et al. 2006, 135). From this moment on, information on Kyoto's *gagaku* becomes scattered, certainly due to the sudden disappearance of an officially recognized institutional setting.

Fortunately, the unique story of two Kyotoites comes to the rescue. In fact, the first *reijin* (the musicians-functionaries in Tokyo) that were not heirs of an ancient *gagaku* family were Horikawa Hisatami (1833-?), a man from the old capital, and his son Morokatsu (1860-1938). Hailing from a family that had close ties to Buddhist institutions, both father and son entered the Office of *Gagaku* in 1873, the very year in which court music transmission was open to 'commoners'. Though one can easily imagine their enthusiasm and trepidation in undertaking an entirely new path, their experience in Tokyo was actually extremely brief (and perhaps not entirely gratifying): when the Kyoto branch was shut down in 1877, the two decided to resign and go back (Fukushima 1999, 150). The reasons behind such a hasty return are not clear, but an important part must have been their concern for the future of *gagaku* in the old capital (Fukushima 1999, 150). Unfortunately, the only available source on the topic seems to be the diary of Hisatami (entitled *Gakujiki* or *Musical Chronicles*), which covers the years from 1880 to 1900. The

¹¹ An aristocratic family with ties to the Fujiwara that since ancient times was in charge of certain ceremonies and ritual services involving music (Okunaka 2008, 177)

document provides invaluable information on the conditions of court music in Kyoto, and is fundamental “to get a necessary grasp of the new perception of *gagaku* in the musical history of the Meiji period from a different point of view from the one of the Office of *Gagaku*” (Mishima 1999, 162). Once they were back in Kyoto, the Horikawas made great efforts to establish a solid basis for future *gagaku* practice in the city, creating a network that included *shintō* priests, Buddhist monks and former lower members of the aristocracy (Mishima 2012, 162). At first, they entered the association Kyoto gagakukai, created in 1888 by two former aristocrats, Nyakuōji Enbun and Reizei Tamenori (Endō et al. 2006, 138). In the following years, they became especially active as instructors for a newly created group called Heian gagakukai –a duty that Morokatsu would retain until his death in 1938 (Endō et al. 2006, 138; Fukushima 1999, 150) (see **FIG.3.2**).



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

From (Hira Nakagawa and Yamato 1986, 19).

Heian gagakukai was established in 1916 on the basis of the pre-existing Heian Foundation, itself an organization sponsored by the Imperial family with the primary goal of providing education to the children of former employees of Kyoto’s Imperial Palace (Suzuki 2015, 1). When a certain number of its students expressed their desire to start a *gagaku* training, a new group was established, formally separated from the foundation. Official activities started only in 1917, under the supervision of a member of the Office of

Gagaku in Tokyo. In a few years, the involvement of Heian gagakukai in the cultural life of Kyoto grew exponentially: the group was especially active in keeping alive two important rituals, the Aoi matsuri of Kamogamo jinja (held on May 15) and the Iwashimizu-sai of Iwashimizu Hachimangū (held on September 15) (Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984b, 812). After the Second World War, Heian gagakukai also recorded some tracks for the soundtracks of the famous movies *Rashōmon* (1950) by Kurosawa Akira and *Ugetsu monogatari* (1953) by Mizoguchi Kenji (Suzuki 2015, 2). At around this time, the number of commoners interested in *gagaku* gradually started to increase, in Kyoto as elsewhere, and Heian gagakukai expanded the scope of its activities: in 1973, a tour of Europe lasted about a month; in 1980, they participated in *Kyoto Fair*, an event held in Boston (Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984b, 812). In the 1980s, Heian gagakukai had around 60 members, most of whom were Buddhist monks or shrine ‘priests’ (*kannushi*) (Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984b, 812). Today, the group is open to everyone, and has its headquarters in the Nishiki Tenmangū temple on Teramachidōri, at the heart of Kyoto’s business life. In 2015, it counted around 70 members, of ages spanning from 20 to 80, and its activities amounted to almost 100 performances per year (Suzuki 2015, 3).

Heian gagakukai is recognized as the oldest and most important *gagaku* group active in Kyoto (Suzuki 2015, 1; Sawa, Naramoto, and Yoshida 1984b, 812), and is perhaps the association of amateur practitioners that more than any other can lay claim to continuity with the ancient *gakuso* of the court. Other, more recent associations include Kyōto bugakukai (f.1957), Kyōto kogaku hozonkai (f.1974), and Kyōto gakuso (f.1963)¹², but

¹² This last group is of special interest in that it is led by Nakagawa Hisatada, the 37th head priest (*gūji*) of Ebisu shrine in Kyoto. Mr. Nakagawa is an author and a lecturer at several universities in Kyoto, including Kyoto City University of Arts, where he teaches undergraduate courses on *gagaku* that focus on his elective instrument, the oboe *hichiriki*. He is a former disciple of court musician Abe Suemasa (himself an active promoter of *gagaku*: see Abe 1998). I had the opportunity to attend a few of his classes during the winter of 2015. What stands out in his method is the fact that Mr. Nakagawa uses his own scores, revised and simplified under the guidance of Abe Suemasa, and that he employs extensively his own book, *A shinto priest recounts the charms of Kyoto: looking for the origins of the Japanese spirit* as teaching material (Hisatada Nakagawa 2010). Both the contents of the book and his general approach as a lecturer are marked by a strong Nihonjinron discourse, interspersed with attempts to make traditional culture ‘look cool’ in the eyes of often only mildly interested teenagers. Asked about it, Mr. Nakagawa confirmed that it would be “too heavy” for students to only learn about *gagaku*, and adds that because the *hichiriki* is a physically demanding instrument for beginners, in his fifteen years of teaching he gradually became persuaded that it is more appropriate to “listen to interesting and little-known facts about traditional Japanese customs and culture” than “to talk slavishly about the history and theory of court music” (interview, December 3, 2015). All in all, his attempt to reconcile the practice of *gagaku* with things of the past in a presentation that successfully catches the attention of young students makes Mr. Nakagawa’s teaching method fascinating. Positive character traits and a certain ‘performer’s attitude’ also play a part. However, in the classroom the line between learning about the past and being indoctrinated on a presumed ‘spirit/heart of the Japanese people’ is dangerously blurred, and questions must be raised as to the dangers

many more groups exist, more or less uncharted, often connected to small shrines and neighborhood temples (S. Tōgi 1988, 288, 291).

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

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

3.3 OSAKA: THE LIVELINESS OF AN ALTERNATIVE TRADITION

The history of *gagaku* in Osaka is an example of the extraordinary degree to which local practitioners have interwoven past and present both into their public representations and in their shared identity as performers. *Gagaku* performance in the area is well attested by a variety of historical documents that span from the Kamakura period to modern times¹³. Most of these sources insist on the axiomatic connection between court music and the Shitennōji temple (often simply referred to as Tennōji), the first Buddhist temple in Japan, erected following an order by Shōtoku Taishi in 593 (Shiode 2002, 391). given the significance of the temple, the group of musicians

of channeling such essentialist predispositions through the medium of *gagaku*, -especially considering the fact that the issue is by no means limited to this case alone, but could be read as one of the many threads in contemporary discourses on court music, as evidenced by more publicly prominent figures such as Tōgi Hideki (see Lancashire 2003).

¹³ The most important historical sources on *gagaku* at the Shitennōji temple have been collected and reprinted in the volume *Tennōji gakuso shiryō* (*Historical Documents on Tennōji gakuso*) (Minamitani 1995).

performing there came to be known as Shitennōji (or Tennōji) *gakuso*. The main yearly celebration in which the musicians took and still take part is known as *Shōryōe*, a Buddhist memorial service dedicated to the founder of the temple¹⁴. Already in the 12th century, diaries of Heian aristocrats attest to the presence of rituals with court music at this important Buddhist center (Minamitani 2008, 125). The quality of the musicians was also noticed by the author of the classic medieval text *Tsurezuregusa* (ca.1330), Yoshida Kenkō, who in the 220th *dan* praised the group and specified that the *Shōryōe* was “an important tradition characteristic of the Tennōji”, confirming its antiquity (quoted in Terauchi 2011, 121–22). Thus, it would appear that the earliest records of Shitennōji *gakuso*’s existence date back to between the 12th and the 14th century. Necessarily, speculations concerning earlier times must rely on secondary sources (Minamitani 2008, 121).

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

Introduced in Japan during the 6th and 7th century CE and soon disappeared, *gigaku* was a masked pantomime transmitted from the Korean kingdoms (Minamitani 2008, 28, 121; Kishibe 1970, 8–9). Despite the fact that “little can now be said about *gigaku* music or the manner in which its dances were performed” (Cranston 1993, 497), Minamitani Miho has suggested that the pantomime could be the forerunner of the music and dances performed by the musicians of Tennōji *gakuso* (2008, 121–22). It is well-known that early historical sources attribute the transmission of *gigaku* to an artist from Kudara known as Mimashi. This man is said to have taught the son of a certain Hata no Kawakatsu, who in

¹⁴ The precise origin of the ritual is unknown, but the earliest sources mentioning it are from the Edo period (Minamitani 2008, 6).

turn is revered as the ancestor of Osaka's *gagaku* families (Minamitani 2008, 122). In fact, "until the end of the Edo period, a large hereditary family –the Hata (or Uzumasa), with its several branches, the Sono, Oka, Hayashi and Tōgi–[dedicated] itself for centuries to performing *gagaku* for temples and shrines (...) in Osaka" (Terauchi 2013b, 174). Minamitani suggests that two of the pieces performed during the Shōryōe festival, entitled *Bosatsu* and *Shishi*, are surviving examples of *gigaku*¹⁵ (2006, 28) and that the characteristic traits of Garyōkai's performances may be "the result of the fact that the *bugaku* of Shitennōji, compared to *bugaku* as performed in other places, retained the atmosphere of *gigaku*" (2008, 127). The decision that *gigaku* should be transmitted is credited to none other than Shōtoku Taishi himself, in a famous edict of 612 that sought to spread the Buddhist faith (*Shōtoku Taishi denryaku*) (Cranston 1993, 497). Furthermore, the centrality of Prince Shōtoku is purportedly further evidenced by the gradual development of a full-fledged cult of his figure –a cult directly connected to the practice of court music in Osaka¹⁶ (Minamitani 2008, 123). The memorial ritual dedicated to him (*Shōryōe*) takes place every year on April 22¹⁷. *Gagaku* is an important part of this grandiose celebration, with as many as 18 danced pieces performed in parallel to Buddhist chanting (*shōmyō*)¹⁸. This section of the ceremony, called *Bugaku shika hōyō*, is particularly evocative, and draws a great number of spectators from well beyond Osaka prefecture.

The fact that Minamitani ascribes great importance to these early elements of *gagaku*'s history contributes to a process of legitimation of Garyōkai's claim to antiquity, and therefore to authenticity. For this reason, it is important to handle her analyses with care, knowing that attempts to 'bring back the clock' of a group's history runs the risk of obfuscating its more modern construction: while practitioners may gain prestige and

¹⁵ *Shishi* functions as a purification of the stage, depicting in a stylized form two creatures similar to lions circling the surface on which the dancers will perform. The piece is considered the prototype of the many lion dances encountered in folk rituals throughout Japan. Little can be said about *Bosatsu*, a piece in which two masked dancers wearing a long, orange robe move in a circle on the stage, slowly and solemnly. In its most obvious interpretation, the piece would be a portrayal of two bodhisattva (the Japanese word for it being *bosatsu*) (Minamitani 2008, 28).

¹⁶ In the Edo period, during the ceremony celebrating the 'coming of age' of young students of *gagaku* it was customary to celebrate Prince Shōtoku by visiting the temple; moreover, the transmission of secret teachings happened in front of a hanging scroll with his image, in a way that reminds of meditation techniques in front of mandalas (Minamitani 2008, 127–28).

¹⁷ For a detailed outline of the ritual which includes a description of the danced pieces that are not performed anymore, see (Minamitani 2008, 24–90; K. Ono 2013, 25–39).

¹⁸ See the synthetic descriptions in (Endō 2013, 235; Terauchi 2011, 103, 110–15).

authority from similar operations, scholars may end up losing analytical sharpness. In point of fact, the only features ascribable to the connection between *gigaku* and (Osaka) *gagaku* are “a marked realism in the representation of the characters” and the “portrayal of people” on the stage (Minamitani 2008, 126). All in all, similar traits seem hardly sufficient to justify an unbound centennial link to a performing art otherwise virtually lost¹⁹.

A parallel theme in the modern history of *gagaku* in Osaka is that of *popular participation*. Historical records indicate that even during the turbulent final decades of the 15th century the *Tennōji gakunin* were performing actively at temples and shrines in the Kansai area (Yamada 2016, 20). The cult that developed around the figure of Shōtoku Taishi further indicates that participatory practices that included but were not limited to *gagaku* existed since premodern times. In a similar way, during the second half of the Edo period an increasing number of Buddhist monks belonging to the Jōdo shinshū (the so-called Shin Buddhism) school started to approach *gagaku* and to incorporate it into various rituals (Minamitani 2008, 131). Building on these antecedents, the *Shōryōe* festival was revived in the Meiji period, after a short interruption from 1870 to 1879²⁰, (Terauchi 2011, 124; S. Ono 2008, 62, 112). At the time, in fact, *reijin* with family ties to the region came back from Tokyo and joined forces with younger musicians who had not had to move to the capital.

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

¹⁹ For another example of a commentator glorifying Garyōkai’s past, see Yamaguchi (2008). Over the past 35 years, *gigaku* has also been the object of re-appropriations by the *gagaku* group of Tenri University (see the Conclusion).

²⁰ Earlier research tended to consider 1860-1861 as the time of the interruption of the ritual (K. Ono 2008, 17), but more recent efforts demonstrated that in fact it was performed until 1870 (K. Ono 2008, 62 note 1).

in turn, cemented a relationship with an increasingly broader sector of the population of Osaka.

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



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

In the case of Garyōkai, opening up the group beyond the confines of specialized families of musicians was a strategy that ultimately paid off: “by 1900 the Garyōkai membership had stabilized and increased to between 30 and 40, (...) half of the members were Buddhist or Shinto priests, while the others were mostly rich merchants from Osaka and Kyoto” (Terauchi 2013b, 175). Today, the group is the largest of the former *sanpō*

gakuso. A similar expansion already characterized the activities of the group at the turn of the 19th century: as already noted by Terauchi, “in the Meiji period, in addition to *Shōryōe*, the Garyōkai began to be associated with many other Buddhist and Shinto rituals in the Kansai area” (2013b, 175; see also S. Ono 2008, 115).

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

As already mentioned, it is certainly possible to compile a list of precise stylistic elements that differentiate Osaka’s musical style of *gagaku* from the one of Tokyo or Nara. Such a list would include details of danced pieces performed at a different speed or characterized by more rapid and slightly different movements, as well as the titles of specific pieces presented as *komagaku* instead of *tōgaku*, or vice versa. The absence of such a detailed examination of the musical and gestural particularities of today’s ‘Osakan’

gagaku is due in part to a lack of space, and in part to the decision to prioritize socio-cultural dynamics over performing ones. There is no doubt that a more precise exploration of Garyōkai's style would be precious –but I would argue that the technicalities indispensable to a full understanding of such a topic render their inclusion scarcely advantageous.

All in all, it is possible to argue that the most prominent characteristic of Osaka's musicians' response to the challenges of the Meiji period was their reliance on the support of a broad pool of potential amateurs and sponsors. Still, the group did not entirely reject the claim to a transmission of tradition that for centuries had had a number of peculiarities. To the contrary, the unique story of Shitennōji gakuso was turned into a source of strength by envisioning a future for the new group Garyōkai that negotiated (and still negotiates) between the allure and “cultural capital” (Bourdieu) of *gagaku*'s past and the promises of a more down-to-earth ‘enjoyment’ or ‘playful disposition’ (*asobigokoro*) (Terauchi 2013b, 187)²¹.

3.4 NARA: A GLORIOUS PAST ALWAYS PRESENT

Among practitioners, lovers and, to a much lesser extent, specialists of *gagaku*, the mouth organ *shō* is associated with the Chinese phoenix (*hōō*), a legendary animal with ties to theories of yin and yang, but also to fire and thus to death and rebirth (Gamō 1989, 340). Given that the present leader (*gakutō*) of Nara-based group Nanto gakuso, Kasagi Kan'ichi (1927-), is a master of this instrument, it may be more than a coincidence that his many accounts of the history of the group invariably emphasize the centrality of 1870, the year when *gagaku*'s transmission was radically altered by imperial decree (e.g. Kasagi 2014, 21–23). In fact, those more prone to find hidden meanings in such intersections of ‘macro-’ and ‘micro-’ histories may even say that there is a degree of (perhaps unconscious) identification between the *sensei*, his elective instrument, and the fate of his group. Psychological interpretations aside, there does seem to be a resonance of themes

²¹ For an entertaining description of how this playful spirit manifested itself in the early years of Garyōkai (including dancing *bugaku* while drunk!) see the conversations in (M. Ono and Fujiwara 2008, 149–58).

at play: 1870, a phoenix, death and rebirth –the rhetoric could not be clearer. Unfortunately, unlike its Osaka-based counterpart, Nanto gakuso has attracted little academic research²², and the reconstruction of its past has been primarily taken up by Professor Kasagi himself. His body of research is the most complete and recent overview of Nanto gakuso’s endeavors, and constitutes the basis of the account that follows²³. For this reason, when it comes to the modern history of Nanto gakuso, it is sometimes difficult to disentangle elements that were purposely recast with utilitarian or even self-aggrandizing ends from historically-based claims.

A first, crucial assumption in Kasagi’s accounts is that the history of his group is tantamount to that of Nara’s *gagaku* at large. Never tackled directly, the question of how the historical continuity between past and present practitioners of court music was assured at various critical historical junctures is resolved resorting to genealogical lines and sparse quotes from musicians’ diaries dating back to the Edo period (see e.g. Kasagi 2006). However, these documents only account for the years leading to the Meiji restoration, and thus do not truly clarify whether or not the group known today as Nanto gakuso can be taken altogether as the heir to the practice of court music in Nara. According to Kasagi, the history of Nanto gakuso can be divided into three main periods: a “foundational period” coincides with the importation of court music from the continent to Nara, sometime in the 6th century CE. This was a time in which *gagaku* was essentially a kind of “*religious music* connected to the introduction of Buddhism” (Kasagi 1993, 20 emphasis added). The second and longest period spans from the transfer of the capital to Heiankyō (Kyoto) in 794 to the Meiji revolution, thus coming to a close in 1870. The final phase encompasses the 20th and early 21st centuries, running all the way until the present. Below, I will briefly sketch out the first two periods and focus more closely on the years between 1868 and 1968. This fundamental century in the history of Nara’s *gagaku* was marked by two defining moments: the Meiji restoration and the official foundation of the association known today as Nanto gakuso (see **TABLE 3.1**). To understand these modern transformations, it is imperative to consider Nara musicians’ claims to the rich historical heritage of *gagaku*.

²² Most commentators, Japanese or otherwise, have focused on the connection between the group and the ritual life of Kasuga Taisha, while the history of the group itself has remained a relatively unexplored research topic (e.g. Grapard 1992, 157–67; for an exception, see Kitahori 2009).

²³ The most important sources to which I will refer are (Kasagi 1993; 2006; 2008; 2014).

Just like Garyōkai projects back its history to the founding figure of Prince Shōtoku, so does Nanto gakuso with Koma no Chikazane (1177-1242), the author of a fundamental treatise on *gagaku* called *Kyōkunshō*²⁴. The prestige attributed to the Koma name is twofold: on the one hand, it binds Nara's *gagaku* to an *intellectual* tradition; on the other, it reconnects the group to a specific line of *transmission*, given that the Koma family is one of the oldest *gakke* hereditary lines. Self-representations of Nanto gakuso thus suggest from the start that *gagaku* is not only something to perform, but also something to approach as an object of study. As for the claim to an unbroken line of transmission, the most important families credited as ancestors are either related to the Koma (*Komasei*) or to the Fujiwara clans (*Fujiwarasei*): ancient documents mention the family-names Ue, Nishi, Tsuji, Shiba, Oku, Higashi, and Kubo²⁵. Others joined the genealogy over the years, making Nanto's *gakke* the most numerous in Japan. According to this narrative, during the general reorganization of *gagaku* transmission of the late 10th century the Koma family was specifically entrusted with the transmission of music “of the left” (i.e. *tōgaku*, mostly hailing from the Chinese empire), while the music “of the right” (i.e. *komagaku*, mostly hailing from the three Kingdoms of Korea) was assigned to the Ōno family (Kasagi 1993, 23). Throughout the centuries, Nara's *gagaku* musicians (*Nanto gakunin*) continued passing down the tradition, performing at major temple-shrine complexes and, occasionally, at the imperial palace, gradually also incorporating the study of *komagaku*.

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

²⁴ In fact, Kasagi goes so far as to quote an even earlier member of the Koma clan, Koma no Mitsutaka (959-1048), as a direct ancestor of the group (2014, 128).

²⁵ See Shiba Sukehiro's (1898-1982) *Genealogy of the Gagaku Families of the Three Offices of Music* (1967; reprint in T. Tōgi, Shiba, and Hayashi 2006, 238–63).

However, the practical supervision of the activities of the *gagaku* musicians was carried out by the powerful Yotsuji family, and their headquarters were located at Himuro jinja, a small shrine just outside today's Nara park (Kasagi 2014, 20–21). Its modest size can easily deceive, but the shrine has been fundamental for the history of court music in the region. Often overlooked by foreigners and Japanese alike (the only time of the year in which it attracts a considerable amount of people is when the flowers of its beautiful wisteria tree, visible from the nearby street, are in bloom), Himuro is also overshadowed by its prestigious neighbors (above all the Tōdaiji temple, just a few meters away). It welcomes visitors quietly, even anonymously, with an ordinary orange gate on the roadside, past which very little is detectable. Unassuming as it may be today, the shrine enjoys a certain popularity among *gagaku* practitioners, primarily in connection with Koma no Chikazane. In fact, in 1217, following an oracle response, the famous *gagaku* scholar and performer started serving as a priest in this very temple (Kasagi 2014, 126). Over the centuries, a cult developed among lovers of court music and today, a small stone shrine (*hokora*) called Mukōsha bears testimony to the devotion accorded to him (see **FIG.3.4**). Located to the back of the main pavilion (*honden*), hidden from view on the right side, the unpretentious Mukōsha allegedly contained the mask used in a memorable performance of the piece *Ranryō*, revered as the receptacle of the body of the deity (*shintai*)²⁶.

Even though Himuro shrine has been an important site for Nara's *gagaku* since the 13th century CE, it was especially during the Edo period that the local population became involved in sustaining local musicians, gathering around its stage (Kasagi 2014, 131). Today, the link with this institution remains strong: in May 2014, at the beginning of my fieldwork with Nanto gakuso, Professor Kasagi suggested I take a 'personalized tour' of Nara's most relevant '*gagaku* spots', guided by a young member of the group. The first stop was Himuro. Listening to a detailed, diligent exposition of the main facts and legends concerning the ancestral Koma family, I was struck by the efforts put into conveying the intensely personal significance the place holds for the group: the scene of a young *gagaku* practitioner bowing in front of the Mukōsha shrine, eyes closed, evidently absorbed, somehow contrasted with the humble, empty grounds surrounding us. It was a strong reminder of the power certain places have to cement people's passions, to reinforce

²⁶ The original mask is considered an Important Cultural Property and is presently stored at Nara National Museum (Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan 2009, 31).

attachments, to nurture commitments. Interestingly, today Himuro jinja is not the headquarter of Nanto gakuso, but of a smaller association of *gagaku* practitioners, called Nanto kōyōkai²⁷, founded just after the war (Kasagi 2014, 133). In a sense, the site appears to have multiplied its relations with the practice of ‘Japanese court music’, leading a centennial tradition of mutual affordances with the community into the 21st century.

The close relationship between Himuro jinja and the population of Nara was literally carved in stone in 1834, when the citizens donated a lantern to the shrine: adjacent to the main building of the compound, it is decorated with images of drums and *gagaku* instruments, and one can easily discern a man dancing in a *gagaku* costume on one side (Kasagi 2014, 132) (see **FIG.3.4**). The fact that the donation of the stone lantern took place less than 50 years before the dismantling of local *gagaku* groups is indicative of the persistence of that early modern bond with the community.

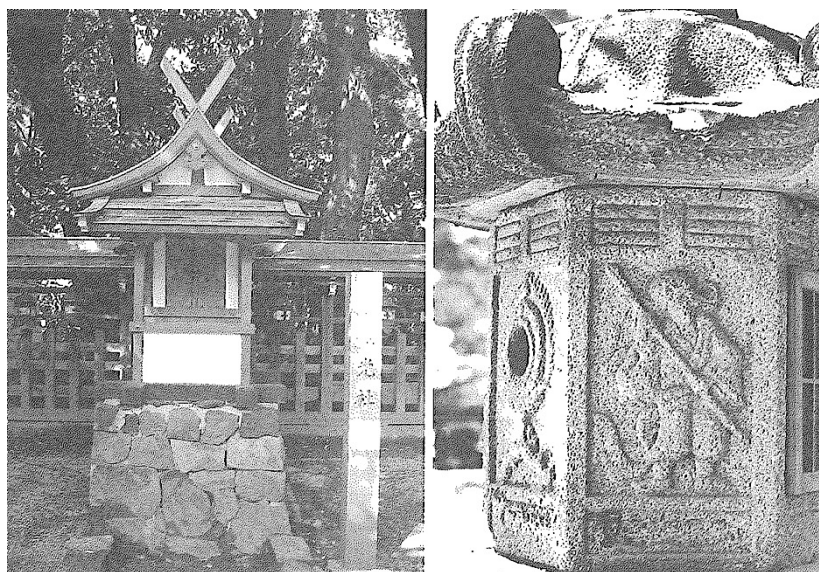


FIGURE 3.4 The small Mukōsha shrine at Himuro jinja (left) and the lantern donated by the citizens of Nara in 1873 (right). From (Kasagi 2008, 17).

The state of *gagaku* in Nara rapidly deteriorated after 1870, when most musicians were forced to move to Tokyo (Kasagi 1993, 24–25). What saved Nara’s *gagaku* from such a state of crisis was the intervention of a group of private individuals determined to keep

²⁷ See <http://www1.kcn.ne.jp/~hagi30/Contents/introNara/Himuro/Himuro.html> (accessed August 7, 2016).

alive specific ritual occasions in which court music played a major role. Almost as soon as the new dispositions concerning the practice of *gagaku* came into effect, an important local shrine, the Kasuga Taisha, manifested the intention to train its religious functionaries (*kannushi*) in the ancient performing art. This was done with an eye on keeping alive the most important *matsuri* of the region, called *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri*. Originated in 1135 CE, the ritual is centered on the performance of a number of ancient performing arts dedicated to a young goddess enshrined in the Wakamiya jinja, itself located just a few meters from the main building of Kasuga Taisha (see Ishii 1987; Nakashima et al. 1991, 11–40). The goddess, Ame no oshikumone no mikoto, is transported to a temporary shrine (*otabisho*), in front of which the main ceremony takes place every year on December 17²⁸. Among the arts performed, *gagaku* has the most prominent role²⁹, and to this day the ritual is the most important moment of the year for Nanto gakuso. Musicians assign it great significance, and so do scholars: the great ethnologist Orikuchi Shinobu (1877-1953), for instance, has written on the subject (Orikuchi 1967)³⁰.

Given the antiquity of the ritual, and its socio-political role in bringing together the population of the whole province of Yamato (Grapard 1992, 157), it is not surprising that a powerful institution such as Kasuga Taisha had an interest in keeping the *Onmatsuri* alive. However, the real challenge was recruiting and training the necessary number of performers³¹. Luckily, in 1873 the study of a number of traditional arts (including *gagaku*) became officially open to the general population (Kasagi 2014, 23). Just two years later, thanks to the efforts of Kasuga Taisha's head priest (*gūji*) Miyagawa Tadaoki (1848-1923) (**FIG.3.5**), a small group started practicing at his shrine (Kasagi 1993, 25). In 1876, 10 of the 17 people who performed at the *Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri* were priests at Kasuga Taisha, while the remaining 7 were members of *gagaku* families (Kasagi 2014, 23). In 1877, two priests from the shrine were sent to the (soon to be abolished)

²⁸ Useful overviews of the ritual can be found in (Ishii 1987; Amino 1991; Terauchi 2011, 61–95; Nakashima et al. 1991, 160–94; in Italian, see Giolai 2016).

²⁹ For a description of the whole ritual with a special focus on the *bugaku* danced pieces, see (Kasagi 2014, 153–83).

³⁰ The full text of Orikuchi's article is available at: http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000933/files/47688_42280.html (accessed 07/08/2016). On the significance of this festival, and especially on its “layers” grounded in folk beliefs, see also (Hashimoto 1986).

³¹ For the performance of a piece with four dancers, for instance, a minimum of 16 members is necessary. Considering that a change of costumes can take up to one hour, a total of at least 20 members is generally considered appropriate for full-fledged *gagaku* performances.

branch office of *gagaku* in Kyoto, in this way making a further step toward the transition of the bulk of *gagaku*'s transmission from members of specialized families to the personnel of a shrine³².

In the same years in which several religious specialists were approaching *gagaku*, the citizens of Nara too were getting to know 'Japanese court music'. In 1873, the city organized its first *Nara Exposition* (*Nara hakuran*), with the purpose of attracting tourists to the ancient capital and in so doing reviving the city's poor economic condition (Kasagi 1993, 22). Given its success, it was decided that the event would be held yearly; to that end, a dedicated Society for the Nara Exposition was founded in 1874 (Kasagi 2014, 24). Within this framework, paintings and precious objects that belonged to aristocratic families or religious institutions started to become available to a much wider public. Among the objects on display were the treasures of the Shōsōin storehouse, which included ancient musical instruments and precious costumes used in performances of *bugaku*³³. No doubt this contributed greatly to the popularization of court music, essentially conveying the idea that it was a 'reifiable' art form, consumable if not (yet) commodifiable³⁴. As noted by Kasagi, contemporary public performances of court music promoted as a form of entertainment for the general population started in 1876, and similarly contributed to a "visual appreciation of *gagaku*" (2014, 24): for the first time, common people had the opportunity to see and hear directly something that had been reserved to the aristocracy. The excitement, and perhaps the surprise, must have been great.

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

³² Kasagi even uses the expression "passing the baton" (*batontacchi*) to describe this delicate institutional shift (2014, 24). To this day, prominent members of Nanto *gakuso* are employed at Kasuga Taisha (see Chapter 4).

³³ This famous treasure house belongs to the Tōdaiji temple, and contains a number of items of great value brought to Japan through the Silk Road in the 7th and 8th centuries. Only a selection of the objects, preserved in stunningly good conditions, is displayed once a year at Nara national museum. For an early study of the musical instruments of the Shōsōin, see (Hayashi 1964).

³⁴ On this crucial passage from an 'aerial' ritual music performed in the "palace on the clouds" (i.e. the imperial palace) to a more "terrestrial" (*chijō*) or, quite literally, down to earth aesthetic form to be appreciated like other entertainment genres, see (Terauchi 2010, viii).

first indication of the Kasagi family's direct involvement with *gagaku*: in fact, Kasagi Kamekichi, the father of the present head of Nanto gakuso, joined Nara gakukai from its very inception (Kasagi 2014, 25).



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

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

As a result of the new popularity of and familiarity with *gagaku*, in 1915 a new association was born, Nara gagakukai, with Miyagawa as its president. In the span of only

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



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

Both this summer course and the group Kogaku hozonkai still exist today: joining the Kogaku Hozonkai is mandatory in order to enter Nanto gakuso, even though it is unclear to what extent the activities of the latter differ from those of the former. Moreover, the summer course is still held every August, over the span of 6 days, and marks a moment

of in-depth learning and enthusiastic sharing. The course is an especially meaningful occasion for new members of Nanto gakuso to get to know each other better in a notably relaxed environment, punctuated by moments of conviviality. Sharing meals and tea breaks in the heat; chatting while walking together through the forest of Nara park; smoking a cigarette with the teachers in the designated areas at the back of Kasuga Taisha's buildings; dealing with curious visitors attracted by the unfamiliar sounds piercing through thin, rice paper walls...all this creates a sense of comradeship and strengthens the feeling of belonging to a group of like-minded peers³⁵. In this and other ways, the modern history of Nara's *gagaku* continues to resonate with today's practices.

Furthermore, as the name itself indicates, the constitution of the Society for the Preservation of the Ancient Arts of Kasuga Shrine signaled a turn toward a more inclusive approach to sustaining *gagaku*, directly addressing and embracing a commitment toward the preservation of local material and immaterial cultural features increasingly perceived in terms of 'cultural properties' (*bunkazai*)³⁶. Such tendencies must be linked to specific legal and administrative developments: in 1897, the *Old Shrine and Temple Preservation Law* (*Koshaji hozon hō*) was passed (Hughes 2008, 213), and since 1900 the municipality of Nara decided to provide economic aid to the Kasuga kogaku hozonkai (Kasagi 2014, 30). But the true birth of a 'preservation discourse' can be identified with the promulgation of the *Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* (*Bunkazai hogohō*) in 1950. As is well known, this formed the basis for the recognition of the category of "intangible cultural heritage" (*mukeni bunkazai*) not only in Japan, but on an international level (Akagawa 2015, 47–78; 2016). Two years later, in 1952, "the *bugaku* of the Southern Capital preserved at Kasuga shrine" was nominated as intangible cultural heritage of Japan, marking a new phase for the history of Nanto gakuso.

The twenty years that separated the creation of the Kasuga kogaku hozonkai from the nomination were an especially difficult time for court music in Nara. The long, dark shadow of the war was cast upon the ancient temples and shrines of the ancient prefecture, and *gagaku* was heard less and less each year. In August 1938, in what was to be a metaphor of the dark days to come, Kasuga Taisha's *mantōrō* festival, in which all of

³⁵ I attended the course from August 5th to August 10th 2014, as part of my fieldwork research (see Chapter 4).

³⁶ For a general discussion of this crucial theme in a Japanese context, see (Thornbury 1997; Lancashire 2013). On the birth of Japanese preservation societies, see (Hughes 2008, 212–14).

its famous stone lanterns are lit up at night, had to be conducted in obscurity, to abide with the new governmental regulations (Kasagi 2008, 32). During the war, numerous members of the Kogaku hozonkai were sent off to fight, and some did not make it back home. Of those who did return, not all rejoined the group (Kasagi 2014, 32).

The new phase inaugurated in 1952 with the nomination of the arts of Kasuga as intangible cultural heritage of Japan had the positive effect of reinvigorating the overall status of court music among local musicians: the number of members enrolled in the Kogaku hozonkai gradually increased, celebrations at major temples were resumed, and stability seemed to be an achievable goal. The improved situation formed the backdrop for the revival of the group of performers connected to Kasuga Taisha. In 1968, the Incorporated Association Nanto gakuso detached itself from the preservation group (which nonetheless remained the overarching structure providing an institutional framework) and quickly established itself as the natural heir to Nara's glorious past (Kasagi 2008, 40). The following decades belong to the contemporary history of the group, and were characterized by the expansion of Nanto gakuso's activities beyond the confines of Nara prefecture, of Kansai and of Japan as a whole. Within the span of a few years, the heirs to the *gakunin* of the southern capital had become ambassadors of Japanese court music on a truly international stage.

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

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

3.5 THE APPEARANCE OF THE MODERN *GAGAKU* AMATEUR

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

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

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

Another important feature in the responses of Nara, Osaka and Kyoto groups to the developments of the late 19th century was the renewal of their connection with what was portrayed as the glorious past of court music. Traumatic as the creation of the Office of *Gagaku* may have been, the event should not be seen as a surgical cut with what came before: even if the disbanding of local groups had an undeniable 'watershed effect', practitioners in all three performing centers exploited the "symbolic capital" (in Pierre Bourdieu's terms) of *gagaku* and of ancient Japanese history. Thus, while Osaka's Garyōkai reinforced the image of an 'alternative tradition' dating back to the time of prince Shōtoku, Nara's various groups resorted to the connection between the Kasuga shrine and the Fujiwara family, as well as to the fact that Nara had been the ancient capital of Japan and, perhaps even more importantly, the endpoint of the Silk Road –the one place on earth in which the tradition of court music survived³⁷. As for Kyoto, what more prestigious tradition could ever be summoned than the imperial court itself, unchallenged center of *gagaku*'s history from the 8th to the 19th century? In all these cases, what seems especially important is not so much the fact that the past was reinvented, but rather that it was channeled into modern features of *gagaku* groups, in the hope that an echo of bygone glories would still resonate in the eyes and ears of new audiences. Indeed, the reassertion of each group's roots stands out as a paradigmatic trait reverberating throughout the '*gagaku* triangle' since the first years of the Meiji and all the way to the present.

However, this can also be interpreted as an astute strategy to conceive what was perhaps the greatest change of all in the passage from before to after 1870 –namely the changed status of the *gagaku* practitioner. In fact, what for centuries had been a role reserved to specialized families and courtly aristocrats suddenly became a pursuable path for anyone willing to invest the necessary amount of time and effort. More research needs to be conducted on this crucial topic, but the fundamental features in the appearance of the modern *gagaku* practitioner seem to be the fact that he (and later she) was an 'amateur' and not a professional remunerated in exchange for his performances; and the gradual crystallization of new hereditary lines of transmission. Even though the

³⁷ A claim in no small part supported by the existence of the Shōsoin treasure house.

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

Research on the often underestimated popularity of court music during the Edo period has convincingly demonstrated that there existed an extended “network of *gagaku* amateurs” (Minamitani 2005), linking major towns and remote villages through the circulation of *gagaku* experts and apprentices. In fact, wealthy merchants in urbanized areas took up the study of *gagaku*, while skilled performers were ordinarily travelling to the countryside to impart private classes (Minamitani 2005, 22–23). The existence of such a diffuse web of social and artistic interchanges must also be considered in light of the complexity of 17th-century attitudes toward music. These were in no small part informed by Confucian ideas, so that *gagaku* came to be perceived as the paramount example of proper, elegant, refined (*ga*) music (Groemer 2012, 31)³⁸. Even though the high status of *gagaku* determined a hiatus between this performing art and the population, “the rapid commercialization and commodification of much of Edo-period culture meant that class distinctions in the realm of the musical world were difficult to maintain. For an appropriate fee nearly anyone could learn [anything]”, including *gagaku* (Groemer 2012, 32). For all these reasons, the emergence of the *gagaku* amateur at the end of the Meiji period was not an entirely new phenomenon. What truly distinguished this new historical phase was the fact that for the first time these new practitioners could join groups that laid claim to centennial histories of *gagaku* transmission. Of course, this was especially true in the case of Nara, Kyoto and Osaka, where claims to authenticity could be at least partly substantiated by historical documents.

The entrance of this new figure in the world of court music was at first little more than a matter of finding a way to ensure that local traditions would not die out. And yet, the situation became increasingly complex with the passage of time, as the three ‘modern offices of music’ gradually became well-established social realities. Especially in the case of Garyōkai and Nanto gakuso, certain families became more prominent than others, and new hereditary lines began to form. The Ono family in Osaka and the Kasagi family in Nara, in particular, have been steadily at the top of each group’s hierarchy for nearly a century, passing down the title of *gakutō* or ‘Head of the group’ to each successive male

³⁸ See the discussion on the paradigmatic shift from *gagaku/zokugaku* to *hōgaku/yōgaku* presented in Chapter 2.

scion in line. Though the phenomenon is relatively recent and confined to just three generations, it is perhaps possible to start posing the question of whether ‘new *gakke*’ or ‘new *gagaku* families’ have formed since the Meiji. If this was the case, we would be witnessing a fascinating case of ‘tradition in the making’ in which members of families who do not belong to ancient genealogical lines nonetheless tend to replicate the social patterns with which *gagaku* has been passed down until the Meiji period. Furthermore, the ‘heads’ of the most important local groups in Kansai occupy a somewhat ambiguous position vis-à-vis the ‘social status pyramid’ of the world of court music – a pyramid with the Imperial Household musicians firmly at the top. As recognized authorities, local leaders are influential actors in the power dynamics and complex negotiations between center and periphery. They have great influence over the future of amateur groups, since they both retain a symbolic status as representatives of large groups, and manage the (variously mediated) right to take operational, executive decisions within the groups themselves. Thus, even though the establishment of these ‘new *gakke*’ is a markedly modern phenomenon resulting from the reshuffling of post-1870 western *gagaku* practice, its analysis and significance must be conducted with an eye on the present conditions of local *gagaku* groups.

Analyzing the three vertexes of what I have called the ‘*gagaku* triangle’ in the Kansai region highlights similarities and differences in the ways each group of performers has reacted to the complex construct of ‘modernity’. Certainly there appears to be a significant degree of consistency between Kyoto’s, Osaka’s and Nara’s specific histories of *gagaku* transmission and their late-19th- and early-20th-century counterparts. On the other hand, different social contexts have brought about original solutions and specific organizational choices. In all three cases, contemporary groups are the direct product of evolutions that have originated in the Meiji period.

But the most resonant note within the *gagaku* triangle appears to be the emergence of a new social figure: the modern *gagaku* amateur. While its historical formation is sufficiently clear, in order to understand the practice of court music in the 21st century it is essential to figure out who is the *contemporary* counterpart of this modern figure. In other words, understanding what it means to be a *gagaku* amateur today could shed a light on the reasons why so many men and women have joined nonprofessional groups in the past 20 to 25 years. The next chapter addresses these issues on the basis of extensive fieldwork conducted with the Nanto *gakuso*. Analyzing the group’s activities in

the context of contemporary Japanese society, the chapter hopes to catch a glimpse of the passion that has moved and motivated lovers of *gagaku* for centuries, and that will no doubt continue to do so in the years to come.