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## **Decentering Gagaku. Exploring the multiplicity of contemporary Japanese Court music**

Giolai, A.

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## CONCLUSION

### I. CHANGING SCALE IN THE STUDY OF *GAGAKU*

*Gagaku* occupies an apparently paradoxical position in a world dominated by the ever-accelerating palpitations of commercial music. Too often reduced to a sort of ‘Shinto soundscape’ associated to the ‘emperor system’, this ancient performing art has recently expanded far beyond the confines of the court. Contrary to fifty or even thirty years ago, nowadays *gagaku* can be found in record shops and on the cover of the latest manga; its sounds are commonly heard in popular movies and anime, and some of its artists enjoy unprecedented popularity. Even though more thorough quantitative studies have been conducted, the number of *gagaku* practitioners throughout the country seems to be steadily on the rise (see e.g. Endō 2013, 1). Indeed, it is not rare for universities to offer *gagaku* classes, or to have a ‘*gagaku* club’ among their extracurricular activities. While members of these groups may still be maliciously tagged as “maniacs” (*maniakku*) by their peers, the normalization of these ancient sounds is well underway.

Educational settings are especially crucial when it comes to the parallel spreading of *gagaku* abroad: since the 1960s, institutions like the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Köln University in Germany, UCLA, and Columbia University in the United States have all been working with professional musicians to train students in the performance of *kangen* or, more rarely, *bugaku* (Terauchi 2010, 168–73; 2015). This internationalization of *gagaku*

is further reinforced by the popularity of some of its most renowned performers, like the *shō* player Miyata Mayumi, who in the past has collaborated with composers and popular music icons like Bjork. As these examples indicate, the increasingly cosmopolitan character of *gagaku* lends itself to future studies of its new transnational spaces, to further destabilize the naturalized association of *gagaku* with ‘Japaneseness’ and to assess what kind of mediators shape the experiences of an international audience – a promising area that will have to deal with issues of translatability, identity negotiation, and, more broadly, “cultural appropriation”.

Evidently, *gagaku* has come a long way from the secluded walls of the imperial palace. Between the 1980s and the 1990s in particular, in the experience of many Japanese “court music” went from the state of “music I’m not used to” to that of “music I’ve heard before” (Terauchi 2010, 242). But that quick and widespread popularization was not just a fad, the result of temporary momentum. Rather, *gagaku*’s commercial success was and still is above all a challenge to its own earlier representations. As the presence of *gagaku* in the vast panorama of music available in Japan becomes more and more established, certain scholars argue that it has become crucial for the public to be able to “situate, musically and sociologically, what one is listening to in the context of a complete map of *gagaku*, and to distinguish the value and uniqueness of the contents of a certain product” (Terauchi 2010, 255). It is arguably the duty of researchers to produce such a map. But for a scholar of *gagaku*, the challenge is also to decide whether drawing a coherent “complete map of *gagaku*” is at all possible, when its borders are constantly shifting and redefined<sup>1</sup>. When I started my research, in 2013, I had in mind an exploration of the relationship between music and ritual among a group of *gagaku* practitioners in Nara. On my very first day out in the field, I found myself timidly playing *ryūteki* with Mr. Suzuki Haruo leading on the *shō*, in a tunnel that was still closed to the public, somewhere along a stretch of the New Meishin Highway. It took me a few months to realize that in order to be able to show how those ancient sounds had come to resonate on the walls of a highway tunnel, I needed to operate on the *scale* of my project, not just on its contents. Gradually, I came to see that the two main issues encountered in my work, namely the complexity and multiplicity of 21<sup>st</sup>-century *gagaku*, were both related to this key concept of scale,

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<sup>1</sup> See (van Schendel 2002) for the source of this geographical analogy.

and to its relationship with the acts of mapping and mapmaking<sup>2</sup>. In order to convey a sense of that complexity, I needed to think about the *topology* of *gagaku*<sup>3</sup>.

In order to make a map, scale is indispensable. In its most basic understanding, in fact, “cartographic scale expresses the mathematical relationship between the map and the Earth, usually denoted as a representative fraction” (Marston, Woodward, and Johns 2009, 664). Simply put, the smaller the fraction, the bigger, and thus the less detailed, the portion of the space shown. But scale does not just refer to relations (mathematical or otherwise): it can also indicate size or levels (see Howitt 1998, 51–52). Shifting between scales of analysis or, to use Bird’s terminology, “modulating”, thus makes it possible to approach phenomena of different sizes, at different levels, and with disparate relations among them (quoted in Howitt 1998, 55). According to Howitt, who knowingly tries to “unsettle dominant metaphors” by playing with the homonymy between the musical and geographical “scales”, “changing scale does not change the notes but changes the relationship between the notes” (Howitt 1998, 55). Looping back this concept, I started to wonder whether it was possible to talk about *gagaku* shifting across different scales, modulating the analysis in different ways. In doing so, I was guided by Marilyn Strathern’s indication that “relations and connections between entities can appear in new configurations as one transfers from one domain of enquiry to another” (Strathern 2004, xiv).

Throughout the thesis, this ‘controlled interference’<sup>4</sup> between different scales or magnitudes is represented by a progressive scaling down of or zooming in on *gagaku*. However, this is not a way to ‘get closer’ to any ‘thing itself’, to any ‘essence’, not even to the ‘music itself’ (see Hennion 2015). Rather, it is an attempt to highlight how, at every scale, the allegedly stable ‘object-*gagaku*’ is differently reconstituted. Scaling down therefore does not in any sense entail a process of simplification. In her ethnography of the atherosclerosis of the lower limbs, Annemarie Mol made this point very clearly: “if I slightly altered the lenses of my ethnographic microscope, or shifted my view sideways a bit, I would tell different stories. The specificities would differ. However, what wouldn’t

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<sup>2</sup> As will become apparent, my main source of inspiration in this sense is the work of Marilyn Strathern in *Partial Connections* (2004). On the difference between “mapping” and “mapmaking”, see (Wood 1993).

<sup>3</sup> For similar predicaments, see (Mol and Law 1994; de Laet and Mol 2000; Ingold 2011, 76–88).

<sup>4</sup> See (Viveiros de Castro 2004) on the notions of “controlled equivocation” and “transduction” (adopted from Gilbert Sinondon) at the core of his anthropological project. On transduction in sound studies, see also (Helmreich 2015).

differ is the coexistence of different ways to enact any one disease—the coexistence of different diseases enacted. *The fact that there is multiplicity stays the same, in every site, on every scale*” (2002, 50 emphasis added). From the many ways in which different ‘modes’ of knowledge-production elicit different analytical objects (Chapter 1) to the macroscopic transformations and alternative experimentations of ‘court music’ during the Meiji period (Chapter 2); from the allegiances forged by *gagaku* practitioners in Kansai to ensure the survival of their local traditions (Chapter 3) to the physicality and complex relationality of becoming *gagaku* practitioners within Nara’s Nanto gakuso (Chapter 4); down to the riverbanks of Udonō, through its grass and inside its canes, down to the very DNA of a reed’s materiality (Chapter 5), the thesis offers no stable definition of *gagaku*, let alone a sense of coming to terms with its complexity.

But complexity itself calls into question the very scope of any cartographic endeavor, in that it might “[come] to be perceived as an artifact of questions asked, and by the same token of boundaries drawn” (Strathern 2004, xiii). The issue of the appropriateness of using a certain scale, then, is relevant not only because “each type of social and environmental diversity has its own ‘best resolution’ in terms of cartographic representation” (Marston, Woodward, and Johns 2009, 664), but also because there is a “politics of scale” at work in the construction of any map (Howitt 1998, 56). In this sense, the representation of space is never neutral<sup>5</sup>: “the construction of spaces in which human activity is thought to take place is always contested, and so is the production of knowledge about these spaces, their ‘geographies of knowing’ (Gregory 1994)” (van Schendel 2002, 651). In the case of *gagaku*, the many geographies of knowing encompassed throughout this thesis show that power and authenticity are tightly entwined, and that, at each scale, the past is a colonized land. Be it in the (re)appropriation of courtly rituals after the Meiji restoration; in the claim to a special historical bond between Udonō and *gagaku*; or even in the choice of a group’s name, the music-makers are the first ones preoccupied with securing boundaries and creating a safe space for the enactment of their particular versions of ‘Japanese court music’. In this sense, those who enact local versions of *gagaku* also scale it down, and, even more importantly, decide which scale is contained within: the local scale of the city of Nara, for instance, can encompass the international, intercontinental scale of the Silk Road,

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<sup>5</sup> For two radical approaches to the issue, see (Harley 1989; Wood 1993).

because, according to Nara's musicians, their city was the end point of its trajectory. Thus sound, like food, can "fold" various places, which then exist both through their presence and absence (see Abrahamsson and Mol 2014).

Of course, the cartography of contemporary *gagaku* presented in this thesis is highly personal and arbitrary. Could it not be the case, then, that the complexity of *gagaku* is just an effect of my own way of interpreting it? After all, "the ability to perceive more than one scale at the same time" might well be "[what] makes the relationship between phenomena appear 'complex'" (Strathern 2004, 15). But the criticism that complexity is only produced by the gaze of the observer, and that simplification provides a firmer hold on reality, does not account for the effects of shifting across different scales: "although one's grip on a tool is no less secure because on an infinitesimal scale skin and wood do not touch, the knowledge creates the sensation of there being something else to explain. Certainty itself appears partial, information intermittent. An answer is another question, a connection a gap, a similarity a difference, and vice versa. Wherever we look we are left with the *further knowledge* that surface understanding conceals gaps and bumps" (Strathern 2004, xxiv emphasis added). Comparing and contrasting historical, relational, material, and ontological ways of composing *gagaku* creates this further-knowledge, despite the fact that the comparison is instantiated by a specific subject. Which is not to deny the importance of reflexivity: on the contrary, my efforts to situate myself from the start, and to "engage in practice" with my informants "making participation central to the task" (Pink 2009, 34) was paired to a theoretical attempt, at every turn, to make my presence perceivable, in line with Donna Haraway's famous claim that "only partial perspective promises objective vision" (1988, 581). In this sense, and with all the phenomenological overtones that this implies, my map constitutes "the view of a body rather than the view from above" (Strathern 2004, 32).

Partiality, then, is another of the features of the map provided by this thesis. Resonances between different enactments of *gagaku*, always necessarily partial, constitute a path to follow. In this alternative topology, a map is more akin to a 'sonic wayfaring device' than to a locational tool<sup>6</sup>. This is why the images that result from my explorations of *gagaku* are ec-centric: they do not provide a way to travel from stable place to stable place, they de-stabilize *gagaku* and its study.

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<sup>6</sup> On wayfaring, and for a critique of the notion of "space", see (Ingold 2011, 141–64)

The problem, then, is whether this lack of centrality is bound to induce an instability, a centrifugal force that leads to incoherence. This thesis argues that, on the contrary, *gagaku*'s ec-centricity does not make it any weaker. But if this is the case, a different topology is all the more necessary to be able to understand and explain how something that seems to always be other than itself can not only survive, but thrive. The map traced in this thesis thus knowingly anticipates new distributions of partially connected resonances, always already pointing out of themselves. Ultimately, in fact, the challenge of the alternative further-knowledge produced by shifting across different scales is "to imagine the possibilities of 'more-than' *gagaku* [*fukusū no' gagaku*]" (Terauchi 2010, 255).

Embracing the multiplicity of *gagaku*, then, makes room for the peculiarly elusive objects that proliferate in contemporary Japanese society. Despite being outside the borders of most maps, these objects are not beyond the scope of my own approach. Gesturing toward them in the next few pages, I hope to give a sense of the open-ended character of the present work, which traced a genealogy, but also renounced the violence of intellectual closures. All of the themes that follow, moreover, are possible points (or better nodes) of other *gagaku* maps.

## II. THE EC-CENTRICITY OF CONTEMPORARY 'JAPANESE COURT MUSIC'

In Japan as elsewhere, the academic world has been mostly unable to keep up with the recent commercial success of *gagaku*<sup>7</sup>. Though the signs had been there for decades, when the first scholars finally acknowledged that something was happening to "Japanese court music" they did so with unstudied surprise. In the early 2000s, the tone was still one of astonishment:

"*Gagaku* has been gaining strength for quite some time now thanks to a *silent boom* [*shizukana būmu*]. The tone of the *hichiriki* can be heard on TV commercials, and the number of people committed to *gagaku* practice has suddenly risen in the midst of the success of the manga *Onmyōji*. They say that the number of application forms to attend the *bugaku* concerts of the Imperial Household ensemble are

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<sup>7</sup> In some cases, the specialists' silence has even been interpreted as an implicit negative judgement (see Terauchi 2010, 243).



more numerous every year, and that the lucky ones who manage to get in have to stand in line for several hours before the doors are even open –still, the public is cooperative and everyone seats orderly. Even at the Shōryōe festival of the Shitennōji temple [in Osaka] or at the Kasuga wakamiya on matsuri festival [of Nara’s Kasuga taisha]<sup>8</sup>, packs of fans can watch the hours-long rituals intently until the very end, mindless of the stormy weather, so that one can really feel how numerous they have become” (Takahashi 2004, 14 emphasis added).

Takahashi’s observations are enthusiastic, even incredulous. Indeed, *gagaku* has gained a significant following and is now out of the court, on TV, and in hugely successful manga and movies like those adapted from Okano Reiko’s *Onmyōji* (see **FIG.1**). Nonetheless, this trend is not an entirely contemporary phenomenon: it has deep historical roots that go back to at least the Meiji<sup>9</sup>. In this sense, the popularity of *gagaku* is not just a starting point, it is also a process that can and should be approached critically, analytically.

Three interconnected stories effectively illustrate how far *gagaku* has spread out in contemporary Japan, as well as the extent to which it now forces us to reconsider all preconceived definitions and understandings of its ‘essence’. Although the ‘narrative strategy’ has been skillfully used before<sup>10</sup>, I will adopt it because it efficiently shows the partial connections and fierce uncontrollability of *gagaku*’s multiplications. Furthermore, these examples do not just resonate with each other theoretically: similar sounds can actually be heard across the three stories. The resonance itself is indeed real, analogies aside. The first story is about *gagaku* and entrepreneurship<sup>11</sup>.

First story. In 1975, Kido Toshirō (b.1930), a producer at the newly established National Theatre in Tokyo, comes up with an ingenious solution to a typical producer’s problem: not being able to fill enough seats of the concert hall. Since the theater’s foundation in 1966, there had been a *Gagaku* Series which featured yearly performances by the Imperial Household musicians and other prominent groups. However, the public was not as responsive as Kido had hoped. The programs were long and unfamiliar. The

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<sup>8</sup> Two of the most important festivals in Kansai: the Shōryōe is held on April 4 every year at the Shitennōji temple, while the Kasuga wakamiya on matsuri takes place between December 16 and December 18 within Nara park, in the famous forests of Kasuga shrine (see Chapter 3).

<sup>9</sup> Terauchi Naoko and Tsukahara Yasuko have been among the most prominent authors to retrace the path to *gagaku*’s progressive popularization. Indeed, one could read the latter’s *The Meiji State and Gagaku* (2009) and the former’s *Gagaku’s ‘Modern’ and ‘Contemporary’ Ages* (2010) in succession, and gain a thorough understanding of the paths that led from the foundation of the Office of *Gagaku* to today’s complex scenario.

<sup>10</sup> See (Mol 2014) for a succinct and successful example.

<sup>11</sup> The main sources for this story are (Terauchi 2010, 174–86; and 2008; Kido 1990; 2006).

music was too slow, loud, strange and dangerously boring. So Kido had to devise a plan. He took a chance, and decided to provide the old music with a new face: the series began featuring pieces that had long been forgotten, most of which were actually part of the repertoire, but had not been performed in decades if not centuries. Cautiously, Kido also started to promote performances that tried to veer away from the prescriptions of the current modal theory of *tōgaku*, drawing nearer to the ancient Chinese system, reinterpreted with more or less philological means by some of the most skilled *gagaku* performers.



**FIGURE 1.** The cover of two volumes of the complete edition of the manga *Onmyōji* (JET Comics, 2014) are reinterpretations of the attire worn by *bugaku* dancers in the pieces *Bairo* (left) and *Soriko* (right).

The public is intrigued, and Kido becomes increasingly bold. In 1981, ‘reconstructed’ pieces are performed using ‘reconstructed’ instruments modeled after the ones preserved in the ancient Shōsōin treasure hall in Nara. “This concert marked Kido’s introduction of the concept ‘*reigaku*’, a term derived from the legendary Chinese musician

Reirin and originally used to denote *gagaku* in general. Kido used this term, however, to indicate a reconstructed repertoire played with reconstructed instruments. He argued that the National Theatre's *reigaku* project would challenge tradition in the contemporary context" (Terauchi 2008, 109–10). Over the years, Kido's vision takes shape, turning into something fascinating. A group of professional players is born in 1985: with the exception of their leader, Shiba Sukeyasu (b.1935), all of them are unconnected to *gagaku* families. Their name is Reigakusha, and they specialize in this new provocative repertoire in the making (see Chapter 1).

They don black, ordinary clothes to differentiate themselves from 'normal' *gagaku* performers, as underlined by Kido himself: "in order to make it perfectly clear that the *reigaku* project is a project of the modern day and not a romantic imitation of antiquity, the performers have always performed in modern dress in concerts using these instruments" (Kokuritsu gekijō geinōbu 1994, 5).



**FIGURE 2.** A recent performance on reconstructed instruments. Notice that none of them is currently used in *gagaku*. (<http://style.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO76385330Q4A830C1000000> accessed December 5, 2016).

These instruments have unusual shapes and unusual sounds. Nobody truly knows exactly how they are supposed to be played. Japanese composers take an interest in them, and gradually new pieces of contemporary music are written. Shiba himself starts writing for his group, drawing inspiration from Chinese theory, from his years as musician in the Imperial Household ensemble, as well as from Japanese contemporary composers like Takemitsu Tōru (whose piece *In an Autumn Garden (Shuteiga)* he premiered as a member of the Imperial Household ensemble). Something new has seen the light. It may be imperfect, or immature, but it is taking its first steps in the world of Japanese performing arts (see **FIG.2**). Is it (still) *gagaku*, or is it something else? Who gets to decide?

Second story<sup>12</sup>. *Hideki Togi out to gagaku your world*, titles the online edition of an article appeared in *The Japan Times* on December 29, 2012. The story of a maverick of Japanese court music goes something like this: adopted into an ancient *gagaku* hereditary family, Tōgi grows up playing many instruments and listening to all sorts of music, from rock to ‘ethnic’. He loves *gagaku*, and plays *hichiriki* and *shō*, but he is also proficient in all the other instruments of the ensemble. He becomes a member of the Imperial Household’s Music Department in Tokyo, but he soon realizes that he has an increasingly hard time coming to terms with the rigidity and closed-mindedness of that environment. He wants to write his own music, and, crucially, he wants to play it openly in public. But this is not allowed by the Imperial Household. In 1996, he leaves the ensemble and publishes his first album, *Togi Hideki*.

“Thrust into the commercial world, the distinction between artistic creativity and commercial enterprise has become blurred for, in addition to the production of CDs, he contributes to, or is the subject of magazines ranging from *Ongakukyōiku (Music education)*, *BoguNippon (Vogue Japan)* and *Mens Ex to Pureiboi (Playboy Japan)*. Likewise, frequent television appearances cover a wide range of programme types. *Seishun Poppusu (Youth Pop)* with the explanation (...) ‘I play pop on the *hichiriki*’, 8 May 2000, NHK); ‘*I Met Dolphins*’, explanation – ‘Togi Hideki communicates with dolphins in Hawaii’, 30 March 2000, TBS); and a documentary in search of the sound of the ancient flute, (...) (*A Journey of the Heart*’, 2 July 2000, NHK) are just some of the programmes in which he has appeared or presented” (Lancashire 2003, 26).

For a time, Tōgi continues to “*gagaku* our world” with his blend of synthesizers, traditional tunes made mellow by the tone of the *hichiriki*, and ‘adjusted’ harmonies that

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<sup>12</sup> This story has received some timid academic attention in the past 15 years: see especially (Lancashire 2003; and Terauchi 2010, 242–51).

turn the unfamiliarity of *gagaku* into a reassuring succession of major and minor chords<sup>14</sup>. At some point along the way, he starts playing *Hey Jude* on the *hichiriki*. His success is extraordinary: somehow, he has managed to become “the unrepresentative representative of the *gagaku* tradition” (Lancashire 2003, 36). In the process, he has also become a sort of sex symbol, and authored several books that celebrate the “Japanese spirit” in pure essentialist, *Nihonjinron* style<sup>15</sup>. Thanks to him, at the beginning of the 2000s it seems like *gagaku* has never been so normal, so popular. In fact, Terauchi Naoko even speaks of an entirely new brand of Japanese court music: “pop *gagaku*” (Terauchi 2010, 254; 2011, iii). Then, inevitably, comes a gradual decline.

In 2016, an informant once illustrated the role of Tōgi Hideki in the recent resurgence of *gagaku*: “Before Tōgi, the success of *gagaku* was about *here*” –he gestures, keeping the right hand below the waist. “With Tōgi, all of a sudden it jumped to *here*” –the hand moves quickly upward, right in front of the chest. “Then, for about fifteen years, it stayed pretty much stable, actually slightly declining” –the hand moves gently down. “Now we’re *here*” –higher than the initial gesture, but much lower than its highest point. “I don’t think the popularity of *gagaku* should necessarily go back to the bottom”, he concludes, “but it’s definitely not as high as when Tōgi was super-famous...nowadays, I’m afraid his fans are mostly fifty-something housewives”<sup>16</sup>. Sadly, the diagnosis seems about right: an acquaintance, indeed a Japanese lady in her sixties, takes me to a concert by Tōgi in 2016. When he comes onstage, she cannot help but notice: “He truly *is* good-looking!”. The music is a strange mixture of nostalgic pieces out of the vast repertoire of Japanese folk songs, arranged for *hichiriki*, *ryūteki* and synthesizer; and unthreatening new compositions. Surely there is more to say about this music, but among my fieldnotes I find the following peremptory judgement: “Elevator music?”.

Still, the mere fact that Tōgi’s trajectory seems to be hopelessly descending does not necessarily mean that his story is over. On the contrary, the fact that Tōgi’s threat to tradition has been so quickly reabsorbed within the bounds of the discographic market, as well as its innocuous current labeling in record shops as *hōgaku* or “Japanese traditional music” is a revealing element of *gagaku*’s most recent history. Indeed, it is time

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<sup>14</sup> For two musicological analyses, see (Lancashire 2003; Terauchi 2010, 244–45).

<sup>15</sup> On the ideology of *Nihonjinron*, see (Yoshino 1992; Ivy 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Interview, February 2016. For a similar reference to *gagaku*’s appeal to the middleclass, see (Terauchi 2010, 245–46)

to start asking whether *gagaku*'s borders have quickly expanded, or whether they have quickly shrunk, succumbing to the hegemony of Euro-American harmony. More importantly, what is the relationship between these two stories? Could Tōgi's success have been possible, without Kido's earlier challenge to tradition?

In late 2016, to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his debut, Universal Music Japan released Tōgi's last album, *Hichiriki Christmas* (FIG.3). On the cover, drawn by the artist himself, we see Santa Claus playing the *shō*, while a snowman takes its performance on the *ryūteki* very seriously. Towards the back of the picture, a reindeer marches on, blowing his *hichiriki*. Among the eleven tracks contained are covers of famous Christmas songs (including *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, *Last Christmas* and *White Christmas*), but also arrangements of classical pieces (Bach's *Air* "on the G string", Schubert's and Caccini's *Ave Maria*...), contemporary Japanese classics like *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* by Sakamoto Ryūichi (with mouth organ and synthesizers providing a rich sonic floor that blends 'natural' and 'technological' sounds), and an original tune, *I Want to Protect your Dream*. Having completed his initial mission, Tōgi is now out to *gagaku* our Christmas.



**FIGURE 3.** The cover of Tōgi's latest album, *Hichiriki Christmas* (2016). (<http://www.universal-music.co.jp/hideki-togi/products/uccy-1072/> accessed December 5, 2016).

Third story<sup>17</sup>. On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016, in an unexpectedly torrid day, I found myself sitting in a mixed crowd of well-prepared middle age Japanese men and women armed with visors, tiny umbrellas and long black gloves. We are all trying our best not to get sunburnt, sitting in the ample courtyard between the main pavilions of Nara's Yakushiji temple. Onstage, Tōgi Hideki impersonates a Chinese Buddhist monk, Xuánzàng or Genjō Sanzō (602-664 CE), as he is known in Japan (**FIG.4**). The performance is a narrative reenactment of the monk's voyage along the Silk Road, tirelessly explored in order to collect precious sutras, and has both a celebratory and an edifying character, for Genjō is considered the founder of the Buddhist Hossō school to which the Yakushiji belongs.



**FIGURE 4.** Tōgi Hideki as Genjō Sanzō. (Picture by the author).

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<sup>17</sup> The main sources used are (Nomura 2002; Fukushima 2005; and Satō 2012). See also (Ortolani 1995, 29–38; Terauchi 2016). A short fieldwork was conducted in Tenri and Nara on May 4 and 5, 2016. What follows draws from unstructured interviews with Professor Satō Kōji and members of the *gagaku* ensemble of Tenri University. I am grateful to Professor Satō for his kindness and for a welcoming support, and to Professor Alison Tokita for introducing me. Many thanks also to Terauchi Naoko for providing the draft of her presentation *Gigaku in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* at the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Study Group for Musics of East Asia (MEA) of the International Council for Traditional Music (Nara, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014).



One of the priests from the temple recounts the story in a bright declamatory voice, skillfully amplified. Needless to say, Genjō undergoes a series of trials and misadventures: he meets with local kings and mysterious sages, he fights off a giant lion-like creature, he even gets to perform for a noble crowd (at this point, the whole event suddenly comes to a halt, and Tōgi, now knowingly out of character, plays three of his own compositions to a heavy base of synthesizers, blowing the *hichiriki* over a prerecorded track). The costumes and masks of the numerous characters onstage are lavishly colored and richly textured, and the musical accompaniment is performed by a small group sitting on the back. Though the instruments are those of *gagaku*, the music is somewhat different –freer, with a Chinese flavor to it, and much faster. It’s an undeniably entertaining spectacle, and the response of the audience is enthusiastic. “If it weren’t for the heat, it would be a perfect show!”, grumbles a man sitting next to me.

Though none of the organizers ever tried to conceal the fact that the *Great Buddhist Festival of Genjō Sanzō* is a recent creation, devised in 1992 and replicated every year on May the 5<sup>th</sup>, there is also no doubt as to the connection between the ceremony and the little-known ancient performing art of *gigaku* (see Chapter 3). Besides being advertised as such (“The Gigaku of Yakushiji”), the characters displayed are exactly the same as those recorded by Koma no Chikazane in the ancient treatise *Kyōkunshō* (1233) as appearing in *gigaku* (see Terauchi 2014, 1–2)<sup>18</sup>. A masked pantomime, *gigaku* “is one of Japan’s earliest foreign performing arts” (Terauchi 2016, 5). Ancient sources state that it was introduced in 612 CE by a Korean immigrant, Mimashi, and that it contained “satiric, erotic or comic flavors seemingly contradictory to Buddhist morality. However, these simple, easily understood *gigaku* were employed as a practical device for attracting people to temples, where they assimilated Buddhist ideology” (Terauchi 2016, 5).

As a matter of fact, this Yakushiji performance was not the first attempt at reconstructing *gigaku*. In 1980, for example, the Nara musician Shiba Sukeyasu created a reinterpretation of it for a ceremony at the Tōdaiji temple, “with masks reconstructed at Tenri University” (Terauchi 2016, 5). Earlier on, in 1965, the scholar Hayashi Kenzō (1899-1976) had recorded his own versions of three pieces<sup>19</sup>. More than 35 years later,

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<sup>18</sup> For a list of characters: <http://www.nara-yakushiji.com/contents/genjyosanzoetaisai/giraku.html> (accessed December 2, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> See the LP *The Music of the Tenpyō and Heian Periods*, particularly the detailed commentary by Hayashi (Kogaku dōkōkai 1965).



in 2001, the *kyōgen* actor Nomura Mannojo (1959-2004) also did extensive research on the *gigaku* masks and revived the genre, renaming it *shingigaku* or “true *gigaku*” (see Nomura 2002; Fukushima 2005; Terauchi 2016, 6). Thus, as concluded by Terauchi, in the past 50 years, “*gigaku* has not been merely revived as an ancient art but reinterpreted and recreated into contemporary music, dance, and theatrical form. *Gigaku*, as a vessel conveying ancient spirit and modern imagination, is still developing” (2014, 4).

One of the things that makes the Yakushiji performance unique, however, is the fact that its musicians are also members of the *gagaku* club at Tenri University. The relationship between the new religion of Tenrikyō and *gagaku* is a topic that goes beyond the scope of this dissertation<sup>20</sup>. However, one is inevitably led to wonder what the relationship between a group that belongs to an institution directly affiliated to a ‘new religion’ and a major Buddhist temple can tell us about the new paths of *gagaku* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not to mention the involvement of both *gagaku*’s “unrepresentative representative” and of one of the godfathers of Kido’s *reigaku* experiment, Shiba Sukeyasu. And what about the scene, within the *gigaku*-esque pantomime, in which the exotic king Gokō joins in on the flute to a danced performance of what appears to be an example of ‘court music’ strikingly similar to contemporary Japanese *bugaku*, complete with four dancers whose movements bear an uncanny resemblance to those of the piece *Manzairaku*? What does this Matryoshka-like situation entail? *What is a performance of gagaku nested inside a performance of gigaku which is itself a recreation of a long-lost performing art?* In a similar situation, where are the ‘conceptual borders’ of *gagaku* as a performing art? Does it even make sense to still resort to this term? But if it does not, why is that? *When does gagaku stop being gagaku?*

The three stories briefly sketched above are certainly indicators of *gagaku*’s recent tendency to overstep the boundaries imposed by its rigid categorization as ‘Japanese

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that many influential figures in the *gagaku* world are affiliated to Tenrikyō. In turn, the international visibility of *gagaku* is heavily promoted by the Japanese new religion, which organizes tours and conferences around the world. Even more noticeable is the role of Tenrikyō in promoting the performance of *gagaku* by non-Japanese, especially supporting university ensembles (among which are the ensembles of the University of Köln in Germany; of Columbia University in the USA; and of the University of Hawai’i at Manoa). Tenri’s significance is evident even when it comes to the materials used in *gagaku* practice: one of the few shops specializing in *gagaku* instruments is located at the heart of Tenri city, and it is likely that the vast majority of *gagaku* amateurs throughout Japan today make use of the scores edited by Tenrikyō’s publishing company, Dōyūsha (not least because, at under 20 dollars, they are affordable and easily available on the internet).

court music'. Yet, this should not be seen as a phenomenon confined to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, one may even argue that *gagaku* was a vital, self-renovating performing art for much of its history: it was certainly so during the Edo period, for example, when the Tokugawa ruling class appropriated it and resemanticized it in terms of a 'new ceremonial music'. And it was even more so in the Meiji period, when many of *gagaku*'s 'commonsense associations' were established (see Chapter 2). But it is in the (not yet precisely estimated) number of new practitioners; in the unprecedented eruption into wildly separate fields; in the bizarre, unexpected juxtaposition of *bugaku*-inspired coffee mugs and 8<sup>th</sup>-century scraps of notations for lute, that the peculiarity of *gagaku*'s contemporary "silent boom" is more clearly manifested. Traditional music in Japan is often dismissed by unconcerned youngsters as *furukusai* or "stinking of old"; why, then, is the oldest of these old performing arts so hip? To rephrase Terauchi's provocative expression, how was the "deodorization" of the old past possible (2010, 244)?

One possible answer may lie in a sort of auto-Orientalism: in the case of Tōgi Hideki's success, for instance, Lancashire has suggested that "*gagaku* remains an unknown entity to many people in Japan. As music initially intended for the court, temple and shrine, this remoteness is perhaps natural. But it is a remoteness that has placed the music of *gagaku* in the realm of the musical other" (2003, 25). Perhaps *gagaku* has come 'full circle', then: perhaps, in being so quintessentially traditional, it has become "exotic and thus interesting again", as suggested by Alison Tokita and David Hughes about traditional music in general (2008, 30). Still, this can only be a valid interpretation of *gagaku*'s boom if we remain wary of simplistic dichotomies, such as 'Japanese' and 'Western', or 'tradition' and 'modernity'. In fact, such distinctions efface the transformative power of hybrid objects like Tōgi's songs or *gigaku*'s reenactments –objects that travel across many scales and boundaries with ease, complicating the picture, constantly muddying the waters of 'tradition'.

### III. WAVES ACROSS FLUID STATES: *GAGAKU* IN THE INTERSTICES

When the ontological question with which this thesis started, 'what is *gagaku*?', is posed anthropologically, the 'what' of the question must be complemented by a 'where':

an account of the whereabouts of being become suddenly important, even necessary. This is why my attempt to follow *gagaku* along the many scales of its contemporary enactments has turned into a topological investigation –and, consequently, into a cartographic effort. Geographical decentering, away from the capital and to the western part of Japan, is just one of the ways in which this cartographic effect is rendered visible throughout the thesis. Others include a sensitivity to place and emplacement, to the ways in which spaces like the *keikoba* (practice-room) of Nara’s Nanto gakuso become music-makers in their own right, or to the territorial bonds that *gagaku* helps reinforcing (Chapter 4). Or, along similar lines, the awareness of the need to rethink the special sewing together of music and the environment in places like Udonō (Chapter 5), where the land contains the material conditions of possibility of *gagaku*’s sound, and where the *furusato* –that powerful conceptual shaping of nostalgia-, is utterly political. In this sense, place is crucial to the whole discussion: for centuries, in Kansai, ‘court music’ has resounded in an imaginary triangle made of long histories and strong bonds that mattered to the point of guaranteeing the very survival of local traditions (Chapter 3). In all these ways, this thesis is less about sound, and more about sites<sup>21</sup>.

Ultimately, however, the map I offered of *gagaku* is characteristically *fluid*. Like the Zimbabwe bush pump studied by Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol (2000; see also Law 2004, 80–82), in fact, *gagaku* is “a fluid object”: it gradually changes shape from one place to the other, from one emplacement to the next (Mol and Law 1994, 613–15). It is not the same in the practice room, where attendance is crucial (Giolai 2016), and in Udonō, where it is tangled up with the roots of a plant and with the claims of a ‘preservation discourse’. On the other side of the barricade, where a reed is only a material reality, measurable, quantifiable, really-real, *gagaku* is yet another thing: intangible, traditional, already protected by national and international regulations. Sound and water, in this sense, are obviously connected by the image of the wave they both evoke –and this is why *resonances* among various enactments of *gagaku* are so important. Perhaps it is not yet the method that John Law has wished for, but *resonance* has been used consistently throughout the thesis as a conceptual tool for “detecting and creating periodicities in the world” (see Law 2004, 144).

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<sup>21</sup> For another example of how the “circulation” of sound can affect the practice of ethnomusicology, see (Novak 2013).

This, however, is hardly original. Indeed, resonance has recently captivated the imagination of many theorists: it has become “part of a rich metaphorology that seeks to replace the binaries of structuralist thought with a notion of discourse that is diametrically opposed to a distancing and objectifying form of knowledge” (Erlmann 2015, 175). What is more, because it “denotes the materiality of auditory perception, resonance is eminently suited to dissolve the binary of the materiality of things and the immateriality of signs that has been at the center of Western thought for much of the modern era. At the very least, resonance compels us to call into question the notion that the nature of things resides in their essence and that this essence can be exhausted by a sign, a discourse, or a logos” (Erlmann 2015, 183). With its theoretical implication of a physical and acoustical isomorphism between sound and waves, resonance is the perfect metaphor to deploy in a fluid cartography of *gagaku*.

Fieldwork itself can be reflexively redefined in these terms. As I have tried to show in Chapter 4, for instance, a vibrational ontology can support the idea that participant observation is a tension between immersion (another fluid image) and auscultation. Needless to say, such a stance brings to the fore the “carnal dimension of existence” that Loïc Wacquant envisioned as the basis for “a sociology not only *of* the body, in the sense of object, but also *from* the body” (Wacquant 2004, viii emphasis added). Similarly, there would be much to say about the parallel between the ethnographer’s and the informant’s co-occurring immersions, and about their resonating passions. After all, the idea that “at a molecular or quantum level, everything is in motion, is vibrating” (Goodman 2010, 83) is central to an approach that rejects a priori distinctions between human and non-human entities. Why not recast the ontological commitment of ethnographers *and* informants in terms of a “musical being” that is inscribed in fluid space, then? In a somewhat different vein, ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon has observed: “I would like to ground musical *knowing* –that is, knowledge of or about music- in musical *being*. I look, in other words, for an epistemology of music that is grounded not in a detached or objectivizing way of ‘being-in-the-world’, nor in a reflexive, self-conscious way of being in the world, nor either in what phenomenologists call the ‘natural attitude’ or everyday way of being-in-the-world. Rather, I think that musical being is a special ontology and that knowing music requires that we start from musical being” (2008, 32 emphasis in the original). What kind of object would *gagaku* be, under these terms?

To advance a tentative answer to such questions, it helps to think about what water itself can be: “here is an object that is endlessly transmutable, moving readily from one shape to another: from ice to stream, from vapour to rain, from fluid to steam. [Water] has an equally broad range of scales of existence: from droplet to ocean, trickle to flood, cup to lake” (Strang 2005, 98). Water, as noticed by Ivan Illich more than thirty years ago, “has a nearly unlimited ability to carry metaphors” (1986, 24. Quoted in Strang 2005, 105). This is why, as an open-end mechanism of reasoning, a fluid topology of *gagaku* can accommodate its past, present, and even future enactments. Which is not to say that such a topology can tolerate *any* form that *gagaku* might take: after all, the fact that sound can freely float, irrespective of the ways in which we carve pitches and scales out of its continuum, does not exclude ultimately music-makers are the ones who get to decide what counts as undesirable interference, as noise, as non-musical (see Novak 2015). Similarly, the decision over what is *not gagaku* will always rest with its making, not with its description.

What this approach affords, however, is a conceptual platform that is more sensitive to objects’ changes of state. Thus conceived, the opposition between, on one side, normative definitions of what *gagaku* is, and, on the other, flexible approaches that take its multiplicity as a point of departure can be reconfigured in terms of one between *gagaku*’s ‘solid state’ and ‘fluid states’. Both terms of this new opposition are, in a sense, merely indicative: one will never find a completely crystallized version of *gagaku*, no matter how rigidly its confines may be drawn by a centralized power. Similarly, the very physicality of sound will prevent *gagaku* from being utterly liquidized. Nonetheless, one can see in the strict organizational setups that characterized the Meiji period described in Chapter 2 a level of crystallization far greater than that of the reshufflings made necessary in Kansai by the very birth of a centralized Office of *Gagaku* (Chapter 3). And, conversely, the fluid state of *gagaku* in Udono (see Chapter 5) often makes it fade in the background, almost becoming undetectable among the endless debates surrounding the protection of the environment. Conversely, the commitment and dedication of Nara’s amateurs is such that the object of their passion may appear granitic, immovable (see Chapter 4).

But if various scales may correspond to different states of *gagaku*, does it even make sense to insist on thinking about *gagaku* as an object? Is it not wrong, perhaps even hypocritical, to keep referring to ‘it’ in this terms, while simultaneously criticizing its

reifications? Would it even be possible to think *gagaku* out of or away from this metaphor of the object? These doubts indirectly cast suspicions on the ontological status of the sonic (objectified as ‘sound’) and of the musical (objectified as ‘music’). Lurking behind the question of what *gagaku* is lies another unsettling hesitation: is sound itself an object<sup>24</sup>? As far as *gagaku* is concerned (but this may well extend to sound itself), two alternative images come to mind: on the one hand, the notion of an “assemblage” as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari and further refined by Manuel De Landa (on which see De Landa 2016). On the other, the more modest image of the sheaf, the humble bundle of wheat. As noticed by Jacques Derrida, in fact, “the word sheaf seems to mark more appropriately that the assemblage to be proposed has the complex structure of a weaving, an interlacing which permits the different threads and different lines of meaning –or of force– to go off again in different directions, just as it is always ready to tie itself up with others” (1982, 3. Quoted in Law 2004, 42).

This sheaf or bundle, with its potential for “endless extension” so reminiscent of the “apprehension of surfeit” described by Marilyn Strathern (1996, 522)<sup>25</sup>, seems to me like a particularly apt metaphor for the kind of complexity presented in this thesis –not least because it reminds us of Udonō’s tall canes in the winter, when they are cut and tied together with a rope before burning. The transformative force of *gagaku*, in this sense, is perhaps akin to the invisible space in between each spike of grain (or, in this case, each cane). When the bundle is complete, this space is less perceivable, but no less present. Its role in making up a figure is indisputable, but the fleeting nature of the figure composed is also tangible.

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, an interstice is “a gap or break in something generally continuous”, “a short space of time between events” or, more evocatively, “a space that intervenes between things”<sup>26</sup>. Reconsidering *gagaku* through this new ontological paradigm, one may think of paradoxical images, such the interstices

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<sup>24</sup> For some answers and more questions, see (Pinch and Bijsterveld 2012; Novak and Sakakeeny 2015).

<sup>25</sup> The expression designates the perception “that there are always potentially ‘more’ things to take into account” (Strathern 2004, xiv), the “endless extensions and intermeshing of phenomena” (Strathern 1996, 522).

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interstice> (accessed December 4, 2016). I am aware of the potential dangers of gesturing toward something akin to the concept of *ma* or *aida* (間), an important element in Japanese aesthetics in general and in traditional music in particular (see e.g. Galliano 2004). However, my reference here is rather to the phenomenological psychology of Kimura Bin (see especially Kimura 2000) as well as to Alfred North Whitehead’s intuitions on life in the interstices of things (Debaise 2013). Many thanks to Fabian Schaefer for directing me towards Kimura’s works.

of a fluid space. The slippery feeling that such a notion induces may scare us away. But it may also direct our flow of thoughts towards the working of *gagaku*'s force of incessant becoming. This is an ample enough vista for the many streams sketched out in this work to merge. New routes await, new paths for exploration . I hope that more and more lovers of music will lead the way, and that I will continue to play with them.



**FIGURE 5** The fluidity of movement and fire. (Hōgakusai, June 2014. Picture by the author).

