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The Dharma of Music

Gagaku and Buddhist Salvation in Medieval Japan

This article is a contribution to the rediscovery of the *gagaku* soundscape in medieval Japan with a special focus on instrumental music as part of the repertoire of *gagaku* and *bugaku*, a subject that is mostly absent from research on the history of Japanese religions. The article outlines some of the ways in which professional musicians and music virtuosos among the aristocracy conceptualized *gagaku* and *bugaku* instrumental music in Buddhist terms between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries. In addition to providing doctrinal justifications for artistic endeavors, they also contributed to the development of new ritual forms, such as *bugaku hōyō* and *kangen kōshiki*. This article explores influential Buddhist canonical ideas about music and shows how they were developed by musicians in medieval Japan.

keywords: Buddhist music—*gagaku*—Buddhist ritual—*bugaku*—performing arts and religion—poetry and music

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In premodern Japan, *gagaku* 雅楽 ("elegant, correct music") and *bugaku* 舞楽 ("dance and music"), traditionally associated with statecraft in Japan and other East Asian countries, were essential components of the main Buddhist ceremonies at important temple-shrine complexes. In addition, *gagaku* and *bugaku* continued to be performed at the imperial court and, from the mid-Edo period, at ceremonies related to the Tokugawa Bakufu and in many domains all over Japan.[1] Despite the historic importance of musical culture at religious and state-sponsored ceremonies in Japan, this aspect has been downplayed or ignored by scholarship on Japanese religions: if we only rely upon modern accounts, temples and their rituals are mostly silent. When music is mentioned, it is always in passing, and it mostly refers to vocal music (*shōmyō* 声明) or *kagura* 神楽 folk dances.[2] This is of course far from the reality on the ground. *Gagaku* and *bugaku* and their music were essential components of the ceremonial activities of emperors, shoguns, aristocrats, and, from the late Edo period, art-loving townspeople. Some of these ceremonial settings were more religious than others.

This article, as a contribution to the rediscovery of the *gagaku* soundscape in medieval Japan, will focus on the ways in which professional musicians (*gakunin* 楽人) and music virtuosos among the aristocracy conceptualized *gagaku* and *bugaku* in Buddhist terms between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries, thereby providing doctrinal justifications for artistic endeavors and contributing to the development of new ritual forms, such as *bugaku hōyō* 舞楽法要 (Buddhist rituals including *bugaku* dance) and *kangen kōshiki* 管弦講式 (chanted sermons with *gagaku* musical accompaniment). After a brief survey of a variety of Buddhist canonical positions about music, many of which informed medieval musicians' understanding of their art (especially the *Sūtra of Druma*, *King of the Kinnara*), we will examine how Japanese monastics, aristocrats, and professional musicians adopted and transformed Buddhist ideas about instrumental music into religious foundations about the art of *gagaku*, including the salvific power

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1. For an introduction to *gagaku*, see Endō (2013); Ono (2013); Ono (2019).

2. It is probably worth noting here that many music and dance performances found in medieval painted scrolls were not *kagura* but *bugaku*.

of music practice and music performances. Accordingly, this article will focus primarily on instrumental music (*kangen* 管弦) in the *gagaku* repertory, usually performed by professional musicians from hereditary lineages, court aristocrats, and, more rarely, Buddhist clergy.

A Short Introduction to Gagaku

There are many reasons that might explain the silencing of *gagaku* in scholarship about Japanese religions (some of which will be discussed at the end of this article), but one of them is certainly the elusive nature of *gagaku*, knowledge of which requires specialized competence that is not easy to acquire even in Japan.

Gagaku is the traditional music of the imperial court of Japan and other premodern East Asian polities (China, Korea, Vietnam, and Ryukyu). It was brought to Japan in different stages, beginning prior to the Nara period as part of the vast diffusion of continental culture that happened at that time. Interestingly, the Japanese never really adopted the music of Chinese state ceremonies, closely related to Confucianism; they preferred instead banquet music and dances (*engaku* 燕楽) and music performed at Buddhist temples during the Tang dynasty. These two genres have constituted the historical bases of an important part of the *gagaku* repertory called *tōgaku* 唐楽 (Tang music) until today. Tang dynasty music was highly eclectic and international, with melodies and instruments from many parts of Asia. Japanese *gagaku* also includes pieces that originated not only in China and Korea but also in India, Central Asia, and Vietnam; other pieces were composed in Japan based on them. Another important component of *gagaku* is music from the Korean Peninsula, including the Kingdom of Bohai 渤海, and later Japanese compositions in the same style collectively known as *komagaku* 高麗楽 (Korean music). It uses different instruments from *tōgaku* and employs different rhythm patterns. A third component is constituted by songs and dances originally from Japan, namely, *mikagura* 御神楽 (performed at imperial ceremonies for the kami), *rōei* 朗詠 (songs based on poems in Chinese), *saibara* 催馬楽 (songs in Japanese based on folk melodies from the early Heian period), and *azuma asobi* 東遊 (an ancient dance style from eastern Japan). *Bugaku* is the dance repertory accompanied by either *tōgaku* or *komagaku* music; it is, accordingly, divided into dances of the left (*sa no mai* 左の舞) of a broader Asian origin and dances of the right (*u no mai* 右の舞) of Korean origin. *Gagaku* musicians and *bugaku* dancers at the imperial court were part of the Gagakuryō 雅楽寮 (or Utamai no tsukasa 歌舞の司), a government department established by the *ritsuryō* 律令 code.

Since its inception in Japan, *gagaku* was performed not only at the imperial court but also at the main Buddhist temples in the Nara region; indeed, in the eighth and ninth centuries, most large temples had their own orchestras (*gakko*

楽戸).[3] Subsequently, from around the late Heian period, musicians and dancers came to be affiliated with three *gagaku* academies (*gakuso* 楽所): one at the imperial court, one at Shitennōji 四天王寺 in Osaka, and one at Kōfukuji-Kasuga 興福寺・春日 in Nara. These three academies were continuously in existence, and were reorganized in the Edo period, when they were called *sanpō gakuso* 三方楽所, under the direction of a court family, the Yotsutsuji 四辻 (formerly Saionji 西園寺, a branch of the Fujiwara 藤原 clan). In the early seventeenth century, the Tokugawa Bakufu created two new permanent *gagaku* ensembles, one at Edo Castle (Momijiyama 紅葉山 *gakuso*) and the other at Tōshōgū 東照宮 in Nikkō. Professional *gagaku* musicians and *bugaku* dancers (*mainin* 舞人) belonged to a limited and closed number of hereditary families with their subbranches, each in charge of specific instruments (the wind instruments and percussion instruments of *gagaku*) and/or dance genres.[4] The families associated with the imperial palace in Kyoto had minor court ranks; those affiliated with Kōfukuji-Kasuga and Shitennōji sometimes had religious titles. These families have lineages dating back at least to the eleventh century. Some claim a much older ancestry, prior to the Nara period; the Shitennōji musicians claimed to be descendants from Hata no Kawakatsu 秦 河勝, a sixth-century legendary figure, and, through him, to the Chinese Emperor Qing Shi 秦始 (259–210 BCE). They transmitted their arts hereditarily, in secret transmissions. It was relatively common, however, for them to teach emperors, court aristocrats, and, from the Muromachi period onwards, samurai as well. In addition, various subbranches of the Fujiwara house at court were traditionally associated with particular instruments; they had the hereditary monopoly on string instruments, which were not played by *gakunin*, and imperial *mikagura*.

Differently from other Japanese performing arts, such as Noh drama and Kabuki theater, which have well-known authors, most of the *gagaku* musical repertory and *bugaku* choreographies are virtually anonymous; even when traditional sources record authors, they are almost impossible to ascertain. Just to note a few examples, the piece *Karyōbin* 迦陵頻 (representing the sound and

3. The *Shoku Nihongi* (299) mentions the performance of "various kinds of music from the Gagakuryō and the temples" at the eye-opening ceremony for the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji (text available online from the National Diet Library at https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/991092?tocOpened=1). Some details about the types of music and the performers involved can be found in *Tōdaiji yōroku*, 42a–43a, 48b. *Tōdaiji yōroku* (57b) also lists the temples and the kinds of music associated with them: Tōdaiji 東大寺, Yamashinadera 山科寺, Gangōji 元興寺, Daianji 大安寺, Yakushiji 薬師寺, and Hōryūji 法隆寺 (Ono 2013, 4, 6–9, 45–46).

4. The leading families of *gakunin* associated with the imperial court since the late Heian period were Koma 狛 (based at Kōfukuji-Kasuga), Ō 多, Ōga 大神, Abe 安倍, and Toyohara 豊原 (now Bunno 豊). Later on at Kōfukuji, in addition to various subbranches of the Koma (Higashi 東, Ue 上, Oku 奥, Tsuji 辻, and Kubo 窪), there were the Shiba 芝 and the Ōga 大神; at Shitennōji, the Sono 園, Hayashi 林, Tōgi 東儀, and Oka 岡.

movements of the Indian heavenly bird *kalaviṇka*) is believed to have been first performed by the goddess Sarasvatī (Myōonten 妙音天 or Benzaiten 弁財天) at the Jetavana Grove in India. Several others are attributed to Chinese or Japanese emperors: *Manzairaku* 万歳楽 to either Emperor Yang 煬 (569–618) of Sui, or Emperor Yōmei 用明 (517–587) in Japan, and *Genjōraku* 還城楽 to Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685–762) of Tang. In some cases, the authorship is more established, such as the piece *Seigaiha* 青海波 apparently composed by Wanibe no Ōtamaro 和邇部大田麿 (798–865), Tsuneyo no Otouo 常世乙魚 (d. 840), and Ōbe no Kiyokami 大戸清上 (d. 839), with choreography by Yoshimine no Yasuyo 良峯安世 (785–830) and lyrics by Ono no Takamura 小野 篁 (802–853)—all artists from the early Heian period—or *Engiraku* 延喜楽 by either Fujiwara no Tadafusa 藤原忠房 (d. 929) or Wanibe no Sakamaro 和邇部逆麿. In this context, it may be interesting to note that many pieces in the *gagaku* and *bugaku* repertory have a narrative background variously related to the stories they represent, their origins, lore about their performances, and symbolic significance.

In terms of central texts of *gagaku* and *bugaku*, there are four particularly important encyclopedic works, namely, the *Kyōkunshō* by Koma no Chikazane 狛 近真 (1177–1242), *Zoku kyōkunshō* by Koma no Tomokazu 狛 朝葛 (1247–1333), *Taigenshō* by Toyohara Muneaki 豊原統秋 (1450–1524), and *Gakkaroku* by Abe Suehisa 安倍季尚 (1622–1708). As other premodern encyclopedic works, they are not organized systematically according to a central plan; rather, they are collections of materials, often in fragmentary form, from older documents. These materials are rarely studied today by intellectual historians, which is unfortunate because in addition to specifically musicological information they offer a unique view on the world of professional musicians and their milieu. In addition to information on music theory, organology, instrumental practice, repertory, and performances, they include lineages of musicians, scattered notes and private annotations, legends, rituals involving music, episodes, and anecdotes about famous instruments and musicians from the past, poems, notes on court artistic activities (poetry, incense, appreciation, *kemari* 蹴鞠 ball games, and so on), basic notions on Buddhism, and information on Japanese, Chinese, and Indian history.[5] These texts were copied and circulated among families of professional musicians and aristocratic amateurs. Significantly, they do not include the most secret aspects of their respective art, which were transmitted orally and sometimes recorded in separate documents, many of which are now lost.

5. In addition to these four encyclopedias, there is a large corpus of works dedicated to specific instruments, which include organology, lineages, performance information, music scores, and ritual instructions. Some of these works, such as *Ryūmeishō*, *Kaichikushō*, and *Bunkidan*, are referred to in this article.

From the Sutras to the Stage: India to Japan via China

In the sutras, music as a whole is rendered as *kabai* 歌唄, *ka* 歌, *gigaku* 伎楽, and *kaju* 歌頌, which are all translations of the Sanskrit *gīta* or *gīti* (songs, vocal music). In some cases, we find *genka* 弦歌 (songs accompanied by string instruments) for the Sanskrit *saṃgīta* (a vocal or instrumental ensemble) and *gigaku* for the Sanskrit *vādya* (instrumental music) (Kō 1973, 628).[6]

Many scriptures in the East Asian canon mention musical instruments (wind, string, and percussion instruments). First, we note the presence of a large variety of percussion instruments (drums, bells, and gongs) (Kō 1973, 626–628). Representative wind instruments are conch shells, animal horns, pan flutes, flutes, mouth organs (*shō* 笙 and *u* 竽), and double-reed instruments (*hichiriki* 篳篥). According to Kō Junshoku, the original Sanskrit versions only have generic appellations, such as *śaṇkha* (conch or shell), *śṛnga* (animal horn), and *vaṃsa* (bamboo, a general term referring to wind instruments). In some cases, we encounter *venu*, meaning "bamboo flute," translated as *shōteki* 蕭笛 or *shōkan* 蕭管 (pan flute), used in the texts as a metaphor for the subtlety and beauty of the Buddhist teachings (Kō 1973, 623–624). String instruments include a variety of zithers (*kin/koto* 琴, *sō* 箏), harps (*kugo* 箜篌), and lutes (*biwa* 琵琶). These seem to be translations of the Sanskrit *vīnā*, a plucked string instrument. In some cases, Indian sources mention the *tun tuna* (or *ektārā*, a vertical one-string instrument), rendered as *kugo*, and the *vallari*, a three-stringed guitar-like instrument translated as *kin* or *sō* (Kō 1973, 624–626; Ogi 1977, 121–125).

We can see that the Sanskrit originals mentioned a smaller set of musical instruments (mostly percussion, strings, and conch trumpets) than what we find in the East Asian canon, as is still the norm in most Buddhist traditions. The original musical terminology is also rather limited, with terms that often imply singing or chanting with some form of accompaniment; purely instrumental music is rarely mentioned. This is a clear indication of the low consideration for, and limited importance of, music in Indian Buddhist texts. It has been argued that Indian Buddhists wanted to differentiate themselves from the Brahmanical tradition, which gave importance to elaborate forms of music and

6. In medieval Japanese texts, the term *gaku* 楽 refers not to "music" in general but almost exclusively to *gagaku*. Musical sound is expressed by terms such as *oto* 音, which, however, also covers what we would now consider "noise" (both naturally and artificially produced), *koe* 声 (which also refers to human voice—not necessarily singing—and sounds produced by animals), and their combination *onjō* 音声. In other words, *gaku* (and especially *gagaku*) was considered for many centuries the only specific and explicit kind of music endowed of cultural and intellectual autonomy and specificity.

performing arts, in favor of a stronger focus on the messages of their scriptures (Kataoka 1981, 121–122).

In contrast, the Chinese translations display a wealth of different musical instruments and describe scenes in which instrumental music is distinct from vocal music and sometimes accompanies dances. All instruments in Chinese translation of the sutras existed in early medieval China until the Tang period; several of them are still in use today, and many are preserved at the Shōsōin 正倉院 imperial repository in Nara.[7] It is interesting to note that the translators, including the earlier ones, decided to include the names of Chinese instruments, as if their goal was not that of passing on information on contemporary Indian music but rather that of conveying some sense of the celestial music described in the sutras. Translators did that by mobilizing celestial orchestras full of instruments that were popular in China at the time. Now, while the relation between Buddhist festival music played at temples in medieval China and the entertainment music played at banquets and parties at the Chinese imperial court at the time is not clear, it is very likely that there were significant overlaps, certainly in their instruments but also in repertory. A crucial consequence of that translation decision was that a specific type of music popular in early medieval China, known in Japan as *gigaku*, which was associated with Buddhist festivals and was most likely of foreign origin, came to signify the celestial music of the pure lands.

Musical performances that took place at important events in the Buddhist liturgical calendar are reported in Chinese sources dating back at least to the sixth or seventh centuries (Ono 2013, 41–42). These events seem to be the basis of *gigaku* as it was transmitted to Japan in the seventh century.[8] The history of *gigaku* is outside the scope of this article, but suffice to say that some elements of it converged into Japanese court music and dance (*gagaku* and *bugaku*) since the Nara period, while others contributed to the development of popular performing arts (*sangaku* 散楽, perhaps also *sarugaku* 猿楽, and so on) already in the Heian period. In fact, one could argue that the presence of elements from ancient Buddhist performing traditions is one of the features that still distinguishes Japanese *gagaku* from analogous forms of court music (also written with the same characters) in China (*yayue*), Korea (*aak*), and Vietnam (*nhã nhạc*). From a number of scattered sources, we know that the diffusion of Buddhism in many countries was accompanied by the activities not only of itinerant preachers

7. For information on the musical instruments preserved there, see the Shōsōin official website at https://shosoin.kunaicho.go.jp/en-US/search-result?p=1&per=30&type=treasures&operator=AND&usage=musical.

8. It is not clear if the term *gigaku* as it appears in the Buddhist canon in Chinese refers to music in general or to a specific genre of music associated with Buddhist temples. In Japan, however, it was considered a musical genre.

and storytellers but also musicians and singers.[9] In any case, by the late Heian period, *gagaku* came to be envisioned as the music of the heavens and the pure lands. In other words, Chinese translations of the sutras provided a scriptural background for the development of a richer form of Buddhist music in East Asia. By connecting vague Indian accounts of generic Buddhist music—both its human and heavenly forms—to the specific genre of *gigaku* existing in medieval China, these translations opened the way for the adoption of *gigaku* and its successors (various types of ceremonial music in China, Korea, and Vietnam and, above all, *gagaku* in Japan) as proper forms of Buddhist music.

Music for Buddhist Ceremonies (bugaku hōyō and kangen kōshiki)

In premodern Japan, *gagaku* and *bugaku* were essential components of the main Buddhist ceremonies at important temple-shrine complexes. The common name for these ceremonies involving court music and dance is *bugaku hōyō* or *bugaku hōe* 舞楽法会 (Buddhist ceremonies with *bugaku*) in which *bugaku* dances were added to the standard four-part Buddhist ritual (*shika hōyō* 四箇法要): melismatic singing (*bai* 唄), flower scattering (*sange* 散華), Sanskrit chanting (*bonnon* 梵音), and staff wielding (*shakujō* 錫杖). *Bugaku* rituals were performed at large ceremonies, such as the consecration of halls and major icons at temples supported by the emperors or the aristocracy.[10]

While it was not uncommon for large Buddhist ceremonies to involve music and dance in ancient Japan—the typical example being the inauguration of the Great Buddha at Tōdaiji 東大寺 in 752—the general model for *bugaku* ritual was perhaps the lavish ceremony held in 1083 for the consecration of the pagoda at Hosshōji 法勝寺, the magnificent temple built by Retired Emperor Shirakawa 白河 (1053–1129) (Ono 2013, 51–52, 68–69). *Bugaku* was incorporated into the ceremony in two different ways, namely, as an integral component of the ritual in the first part of the ceremony and as gratification for the audience (the so-called "pleasure of the Dharma," *hōraku* 法楽) in the second part.

This is also the basic structure of the *Shōryōe* 聖霊会 (Assembly for the Sacred Spirit of the Sage, full title *Shōryōe bugaku daihōyō* 聖霊会舞楽大法要), held annually from the late Heian period if not earlier at Shitennōji in Osaka on the day of the death (*meinichi* 命日) of Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574–622). This ceremony praises Shōtoku Taishi's virtues and prays for the pacification of his spirit. Today, the *Shōryōe* is the only representative of these large ceremonies dating

9. For a general overview, see Mair (1988), which unfortunately focuses mostly on visual and performing aspects, rather than on music per se.

10. For a study of early medieval Buddhist ceremonies, including their aesthetic components, although not the role of music in them, see Bushelle (2015). For an overview of the roles of *gagaku* and *bugaku* in Japanese Buddhist ceremonies, see Endō (2013, 222–242).

back centuries ago; other ceremonies have been revived in recent years based on it (Ono 2013; Rambelli 2020).

At around the same time, in the late eleventh century, we have the development of a new liturgical genre, the so-called *kangen kōshiki*, in which the chanting of doctrinal texts (*kōshiki* 講式) is interspersed with *gagaku* orchestral music, in programs that were very similar to the *bugaku* ritual (Ambros, Ford, and Mross 2016). The one with the richest musical elements is *Junji ōjō kōshiki*, composed in 1114 by Shingen 真源 (d. 1136) (Guelberg 1997–2016). Its program includes twenty-one musical pieces: twelve instrumental (*kangen* 管弦) pieces and nine *saibara* songs. If all were performed, this would be a very long liturgy. Interestingly, almost all musical pieces were in the *hyōjō* 平調 mode, which, in *gagaku* musical theory, stands for the western direction—a clear reference to the location of Amida's Pure Land.[11] This musical choice is in line with the text of the *kōshiki*, extolling music and songs as representations of the soundscape of the Pure Land and as offerings to Amida (Yasumoto 1990; Ogi 1977, 147–151; Ono 2019, 124–128). It is interesting to note that Shingen uses images of music in the Pure Land from the sutras but adds explicit *gagaku* terminology that is absent in canonical sources (Ono 2019, 128), a clear indication of the fact that *gagaku* was explicitly envisioned as the soundscape of Amida's realm.

An earlier case of a musical performance as part of a ritual for rebirth in the Pure Land is the *ōjōkō* 往生講 discussed by Jacqueline Stone. She writes,

> The monk Raisen (d. ca. 1069–1074), for example, of Anrakuji at Dazaifu in Kyushu, had an Ōjōkō performed on the fifteenth of each month, inviting five or six musicians to provide accompaniment. Raisen himself had been a musician in lay life, and he composed music for this gathering together with lyrics that read, "I revere and prostrate myself before Lord Amida, who will surely draw me to the Pure Land." (Stone 2016, 74)

It is not clear from extant sources how often these rituals involved the composition of new instrumental music, as appears to be the case here; in most cases, musicians performed pieces from the standard *gagaku* repertory.

Another representative liturgy in this genre is the *Myōonten kōshiki*, of which a few versions remain. It includes twenty-one instrumental pieces in three different modes; the producer had to choose the mode in accordance with the lunar phase

11. In fact, two pieces are in different modes: *Taiheiraku* 太平楽 is in *taishikichō* 太食調, which is very similar to *hyōjō*, and *Sokō* 蘇合香 at the end is in *banshikichō* 盤渉調 but the author required it to be transposed to *hyōjō*. *Hyōjō* is equivalent to the Dorian mode in Western musical theory (close to an E minor scale with the minor seventh), and so is *banshikichō* (a B minor scale with the minor seventh). In contrast, *taishikichō* is equivalent to E mixolydian (E major with the minor seventh), but its scale is identical to that of *hyōjō*, with the sole difference of the third note (minor in *hyōjō*, major in *taishikichō*).

at the time of performance, thus leaving seven pieces that were actually played at the ceremony. This *kōshiki* also included a reference to King Druma and his music, which eliminates defilements and sins. As a whole, music is presented as a merit-making activity leading to salvation. Particularly interesting is also the *ongaku kōshiki* 音楽講式, a Buddhist celebration of *gagaku* and its instruments, in which each of which their virtues are presented as part of a salvific process (Inose 2018, 264–286).[12] Finally, Yasumoto Masahiko has identified a number of *kōshiki* that were accompanied by *kangen* instrumental music performed from 1178 until 1517 (Yasumoto 1990, 57–58).

The period between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries also saw the development of rituals for the initiation-consecration of musicians to the art and the performance techniques of specific instruments. These rituals were modeled explicitly upon Esoteric Buddhist (*mikkyō* 密教) consecration rituals called *kanjō* 灌頂 (*abhiṣeka*). The first and most influential among them was the *biwa kanjō* for the transmission of the art of *gaku biwa* (the kind of *biwa* unique to *gagaku*) to emperors and aristocrats (Inose 2018; forthcoming). Next, in the Muromachi period, we find the *shō* 笙 *kanjō*, for the transmission of the music for *shō* to the emperor (Rambelli forthcoming b). Analogous rituals for the *gagaku* academies are also recorded. While it can be argued that these rituals mostly employed structural elements and visual components from Esoteric Buddhist *kanjō* ceremonies but without a deep (or even, in some cases, explicit) doctrinal content, they still bear witness to the important connections between Buddhism and *gagaku*.

The importance of music and dance in the medieval ceremonies of Japanese Buddhism requires some explanation. First, Buddhist canonical sources are lukewarm, to say the least, about music and performing arts, and no Buddhist tradition in premodern Asia employed instrumental music to the extent seen in Japan. Second, the connections between *gagaku* and the celestial music of the Pure Land are never made explicit in the scriptures of the East Asian canon—obviously, it was not in their Indian originals. In the remaining part of this article, we will try to solve this puzzle by investigating the role of music and musical instruments in representative Buddhist canonical sources and by exploring the ways in which they were adapted in Japan by professional musicians, aristocrats, and priests.

Buddhist Attitudes Toward Music

The importance of *gagaku* in Japanese Buddhism is all the more remarkable when one considers the well-known fact that early Buddhist sources present negative views of music performed for entertainment purposes, to the point of

12. I am grateful to Inose Chihiro for information on *Myōonten kōshiki* and *kangen kōshiki*.

prohibiting it for monks, nuns, and lay practitioners. Music for Buddhist rituals is, however, accepted (especially as an accompaniment to scripture chanting), and heavenly music is lavishly praised. Let us take a closer look at representative canonical sources that deal with music.

In the *Zeng yi ahan jing* (T 2, 1.756c) the Buddha enunciates the eight abstinences that lay followers must adopt in the days of fasting (*fusatsu* 布薩). One of these precepts enjoins Buddhists to "avoid making music and smearing one's body with perfumes." The same sutra prohibits monks and nuns from discussing music (*gigaku*), singing, and dance (*kabu* 歌舞), because these subjects, along with drinking alcohol and performing comedy, are not appropriate for them (T 2, 1.781bc). The *Zhang ahan jing* lists, among the causes of financial ruin, "losing oneself in music" (*gigaku ni mayou* 迷於伎樂) (T 1, 1.70b). The Vinaya codes also prohibit monks, nuns, and laypeople not only from performing music and dance but also watching or listening to performances (*Mohe sengqi lu* T 1425, 22.540b; *Youposai wujie weiyi jing* T 1503, 24.1119c; *Shi song lu* T 1435, 23.269bc). In other words, music is forbidden because it is related to sensual pleasure, and, as such, it leads to inordinate behavior and is therefore a major obstacle to Buddhist practice.

However, sutra chanting in melodic ways has already been attested since an earlier period, and early scriptures praise chanting the scriptures with a beautiful singing voice. For instance, the same *Zeng yi ahan jing* praises "a clear and penetrating voice that reaches Brahma's Heaven" (T 2, 1.558a23–24), as long as it is deployed in praise of the Buddha and his teachings. The same sutra even describes a fight among two disciples of the Buddha, Maugdalyāyana and Ānanda, as to which of the two has the most beautiful (*myō* 妙) voice (T 2, 1.673b). As we can see, the orthodox practice of sutra chanting opens up the possibility of an aesthetic experience in connection to such a devotional act.

In fact, early scriptures also show a positive attitude towards music, singing, and dancing, as long as they are performed as offerings to the Buddha. The *Mohe sengqi lu* allows the members of the sangha to attend musical performances of various kinds offered by lay patrons at important ceremonies such as those commemorating the birth of the Buddha, his enlightenment, or his first sermon (T 1425, 22.494a). In the *Zhang ahan jing*, the Buddha praises the Gandharva Pañcasikha, a virtuoso musician, for the "pure sound" (*shōjōon* 清浄音) of his beryl *koto* (*ruri kin* 瑠璃琴; the Sanskrit original is *vīnā*, a plucked string instrument):

> The sound of your *koto* and your own voice are neither too long nor too short; they express melancholy and sadness and move the human mind. The music you play on your *koto* has many meanings: it talks about desire and attachment, it talks about Buddhist practice; it talks about the *śramanera*, it talks about nirvana. (T 1, 1.63a18–20)

The *Buddhacārita* (T 192 4.54a) describes music performed to celebrate the building of stupas to enshrine the relics of Śākyamuni after his cremation. A more explicit praise of music offerings is present in *Fa yuan zhu lin*, when the Buddha attended a music performance in the city of Śravastī:

> All these people played music as an offering to the Buddha and the sangha. Because of this merit, in the future for a hundred *kalpa*s they will not fall into an evil destination (*akudō* 悪道), for a hundred *kalpa*s they will receive the highest pleasure for gods and humans after which they will become *pratyeka-buddha*s. (T 2122, 53.576c11–13)

In general, Mahāyāna scriptures tend to show a more positive attitude towards music. For instance, in the Āgama collection monks, nuns, and lay followers are clearly prohibited from playing and listening to music (T 1, 1.89b19–21). In the *Fan wang jing*, music is addressed in one of the minor precepts, which includes it among the activities that generate bad karma such as war, gambling, helping thieves (T 1484, 24.1007b15–16). Other Mahāyāna sutras, however, make it explicit that playing music can lead to becoming a buddha. The *Lotus Sūtra* says that, in a distant past, the bodhisattva Myōon 妙音 played music of all kinds (*hyaku-sen gigaku* 百千伎楽) for twelve thousand years to the buddha Unraion'ō 雲雷音王, and because of that he was reborn in the buddha land of Jōgeshukuōchi 浄華宿王智 (T 262, 9.56). Music is therefore allowed as an offering to the buddhas, which as such generates merit. A different case is the *Jin guangming zui sheng wang jing*, which describes the virtues of the voice of Benzaiten 弁財天 that leads beings to salvation (T 665, 16.437c–444a). Here, Benzaiten's voice is not an offering, but a tool to induce beings to accept Buddhism.

A distinct thread in Buddhist ideas about music concerns the presence of music in the heavenly realms and the pure lands. In the *Guan fo sanmei hai jing* it is written:

> Countless songs with musical accompaniment (*onka* 音歌) sing the infinite virtues of the Tathāgata. At that moment, King Brahmā and countless members of his retinue, holding incense burners, played many types of music as an offering, standing by the left stairs. Indra and countless heavenly beings in his retinue played music (*kogaku genka* 鼓楽絃歌) and stood by the left stairs. Countless *śrāvaka*s, bodhisattvas, and the crowds stood by the right stairs. (T 643, 15.677b26–c2)

Regarding Amida's Pure Land, the *Fo shuo muliang qingjing pingdeng jue jing* (T 361, 12.258ab) describes in detail a beautiful heavenly music. The *Wuliang shou jing* (T 360, 12.266a) describes Amida's Pure Land, with the unsurpassable beauty of the sound produced by the trees of the seven jewels, and the myriad kinds of music produced spontaneously in which each sound is the sound of

the Dharma (*hōon* 法音). Moreover, heavenly beings come to play music for the Buddha, bodhisattvas, and *śrāvaka*s. According to this scripture, such heavenly music is not only an adornment of the Pure Land, but a veritable manifestation of Amida endowed with the power to lead beings to the Land of Bliss. It is worth noting that the rich array of musical instruments listed in Pure Land scriptures will later appear in visual representations of the Pure Land across East Asia. Esoteric Buddhist scriptures also present a favorable idea of music, again as an offering to buddhas and bodhisattvas (Kataoka 1981, 150). A novelty is the fact that a musical instrument, the *biwa*, is described as the *sanmaya gyō* 三昧耶形 (the symbolic, substitute body) of Benzaiten, thus opening up the possibility for a sacralization of musical instruments as well (Inose 2018).

We should point out, however, that the scriptures make a clear distinction between human music and heavenly music on the one hand, and, within human music, between secular music and music as Buddhist offering on the other hand. Heavenly music is described as greatly surpassing human music in beauty, variety, and scale. The *Fo shuo muliang qingjing pingdeng jue jing* says that all the music of an earthly kind is but one sound of the music of a Buddhist ideal ruler (*cakravartin*) (T 361, 12.258ab). Moreover, the music Śākyamuni was exposed to before leaving his father's palace was human music, but after his awakening, he only listened to heavenly music.

The Sūtra of Druma, King of the Kinnaras

One scripture stands out, however, for its original view on music and its uncompromising praise of music as a full-fledged Buddhist endeavor. The *Sūtra of Druma, King of the Kinnaras* is one of the oldest scriptures in the East Asian canon. It exists in two versions, very similar in content: the first, *Fo shuo Dun zhenduoluo suowen rulai sanmei jing*, is attributed to Lokakṣema (second century), who probably translated it between 170 and 190. The second, *Dashu jinnaluo wang suowen jing*, was translated by Kumārajīva (344–413) and dates to the early fifth century (Kataoka 1981, 125–133, 154–167; Kō 1973; Miyasaki 2007; Ono 2007; Rambelli forthcoming a; Harrison 1992).[13] Their content is almost the same; for our purposes we will follow the latter. This scripture appears to not have been the subject of monastic commentaries and was not used by any sectarian tradition. However, as we will see below, it was read and utilized in medieval Japan by learned musicians typically engaged in performances both at court and religious ceremonies at temples.

The sutra describes an extended interaction between the Buddha Śākyamuni and the king of the Kinnaras, Druma. Druma (meaning "tree" in Sanskrit) is

13. For a full English translation based on the Tibetan version, which is very close to the Chinese translations, see Dharmachakra Translation Committee (2020).

a virtuoso musician: he plays a precious *koto* made of beryl, a light blue-green semi-transparent stone.[14] His people, the Kiṃnaras (Kinnara 緊那羅), are one of the life forms of gods and semi-gods called *tenryū hachibushū* 天龍八部衆, categories of beings that are endowed with both superhuman powers and animal features.[15] In the sutra, the Buddha teaches aspects of the bodhisattva practice and characteristics of *prajñāpāramitā* but also extolls the virtue of King Druma and his people and, importantly, the salvific power of music. Several times over, Druma is invited by the Buddha to share his knowledge with their audience. Throughout the sutra, numerous performances of heavenly music and singing take place, mostly by King Druma himself and his retinue of musicians and singers but also by other divine beings, by elements of the environment (trees and mountains), and even by the Buddha himself, who, toward the end, preaches through songs in a remarkable—if not unique—performance. Overall, this scripture conveys an unusual sense of sheer joy that is "secular" in tone, as resulting from the music and dance of the Kiṃnaras, rather than from more standard and rarefied "pleasure of the Dharma." Above all, the most durable impression of this sutra is the pervasive role that music plays in it.

Two scenes of this sutra are especially relevant for our discussion: one in which King Druma's performance at the *koto* has most members of the Buddha's retinue dance and sing, and the other when Druma expounds his philosophy of music in relation to the doctrine of emptiness. In the first scene, King Druma plays his *koto* accompanied by the Kiṃnaras who play countless instruments; their sound can be heard all over the universe and they overpower the celestial music played by the gods in the realm of desire (*yokukai* 欲界). At the sound of Druma's music, everything in the surrounding environment, from the cosmic mountain Mt. Sumeru down to all plants and trees, begins to sway like someone who is extremely inebriated. At the sound of this music, all the members of Buddha's retinue, with the sole exception of the bodhisattvas at the stage of non-return, rose from their seats and, unable to control themselves, began to dance. The bodhisattva Tengan 天冠 (Divyamauli or Devamauli), one of the protagonists of the scripture, addresses the elder disciple of the Buddha Mahākāśyapa, saying: "You are venerated by men and *asura*s like a stupa [because of your practices and achievements]. Why can't you hold yourself together and instead dance like a child?" And Mahākāśyapa answered:

14. Similar to the instrument played by the previously mentioned Gandharva Pañcasikha, King Druma's original instrument was a *vīnā*.

15. *Tenryū hachibushū* include Indian gods (*ten* 天), serpents/dragons (*ryū* 龍), demonic beings (*yasha* 夜叉), heavenly musicians (*kendatsuba* 乾闥婆), anti-gods (*ashura* 阿修羅), supernatural birds (*karura* 迦楼羅), heavenly musicians and singers (Kinnara), and a special category of great snakes (*magoraga* 摩睺羅伽).

> It is like trees in a forest shaken by a powerful storm, they just cannot stand still. It is something independent of my mind's desire, I just cannot resist this rhythm. The music of the king of the Kiṃnaras with his *koto*, the songs, and the sounds of wind instruments (*shōteki* 蕭笛), shakes my mind like trees in a storm and it cannot stand still. (T 624, 15.371a19–24)

The image of the vast crowd gathered around the Buddha dancing wildly at the music of King Druma's celestial orchestra as if it was a rave party could well be one of the most remarkable scenes in the entire Buddhist canon.

In the second scene, King Druma, prompted by Tengan, explains his own philosophy of music:

> All sounds (*onjō* 音声) emerge from empty space (*kyokū* 虚空). Sound has the nature of emptiness (*kyokūshō* 虚空性): when you finish hearing it, it disappears; after it disappears, it abides in emptiness. Therefore, all dharmas, whether they are taught or not, are emptiness.… All dharmas are like sound.… Sound is originally non-abiding anywhere… has no origin (*muuki* 無有起) and thus is not subject to extinction. Therefore, it is pure (*shōjō* 清浄)… and incorruptible (*muku* 無垢), like light (*kōmyō* 光明) and the mind (*shinjō* 心性).… [Sound is thus] the condition of enlightenment (*shōi* 正位).
> (T 625, 15.372a3–24)

In short, King Druma adopts the standard doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and transcendent wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*), according to which discourses are simply voiced sounds (that is, signifiers); their signifieds are not inherent in those sounds and have no substantial reality. Druma then applies this doctrine to music and emphasizes that music is exactly the same as language. Because of its intrinsic evanescence and constitutive impermanence, music is a concrete example of emptiness in our experiential field.

At a time in which most Buddhist scriptures saw music just as entertainment—either a way to engage with possible patrons or as an offering to the buddhas—or as a sort of ambient music creating the soundscape of the Pure Land, the *Sūtra of King Druma* provided the first cogent and systematic Buddhist philosophy of music as closely related to the concept of emptiness, its practices (*samādhi*), and its effects (*prajñāpāramitā*). However, the importance of this sutra goes well beyond its intellectual content, as it was central for a number of developments that affected Japanese Buddhism and its attitudes towards the performing arts, especially *gagaku* and *bugaku*. In particular, the sutra offers a justification for the activities of musicians and performing artists, by presenting their art as both a joyful offering to the buddhas and a form of self-cultivation. The sutra also provides the first known model for Buddhist ceremonies involving instrumental music and dance. As Buddhist musicologist Kataoka Gidō notes, the musical accompaniment to the dialogues between Druma, the Buddha, and

others can be seen as a precedent to Tendai *rongi* 論議 (doctrinal debate) ceremonies as they are still performed today (Kataoka 1981, 131–133). We can expand this insight further and see in the *Sūtra of King Druma* a model for large Buddhist ceremonies involving *bugaku* dance and chanted lectures accompanied by *gagaku* instrumental music, both of which developed in the late Heian period. Indeed, the sutra emphasizes the richness of existing musical styles with many musical instruments and the presence of music, song, and dances, which are the basic structure of the *gagaku* repertory. However, it mentions no specific instrument aside from Druma's own *koto* and the pan's flute. In order to get a better sense of the instruments associated with celestial music in Buddhism, the Japanese had to turn to other scriptures (and, when available, their visual representations), where they found, as we have seen, a large number of Chinese musical instruments all related to the history of *gagaku*. It was thus natural for the Japanese, when they imagined heavenly music, to envision a *gagaku* orchestra and its instruments. In other words, *gagaku* in Japan was superimposed on images found in Buddhist sutras referring to vague, general, and nondescript kinds of music.

Music as a Salvific Activity

Japan seems to be a notable exception in the Buddhist world, both for the richness of music and dances used at Buddhist rituals (*gagaku* and *bugaku*) and for the fact that it was not unusual for Buddhist priests to also engage in this genre of music and dance in religious and secular contexts. Some of the reasons for the importance of music and dance in premodern Japanese Buddhism may be found in its distinctive court culture of artistic cultivation shared by lay and tonsured aristocrats alike. One product of this cultural environment was the large and lavish ceremonies of medieval Buddhism from the late Heian to the mid-Muromachi periods. Musicians and dancers from the imperial court were joined by musicians from Kōfukuji-Kasuga in Nara and Shitennōji in Osaka. Often, the emperor (and the shogun as well in the Muromachi period) and other elite aristocrats also performed in public. At times, musicians and dancers also included Buddhist priests.

The involvement of devout Buddhists in artistic production and enjoyment caused doctrinal debates regarding the status of the arts in the Buddhist cultural system. The Chinese poet Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846) established a precedent for shifting literary creation from "mad words and ornate discourses" (*kyōgen kigo* 狂言綺語) to ways to enhance the human sensibility and promote the Buddhist teachings (LaFleur 1983, 1–25; Bushelle 2015). The expression *kyōgen* ("crazy words") is originally found in the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* 莊子 with the meaning of non-serious speech or nonsense; *kigo* ("ornate speech" or beautiful but empty words) is one of the prohibitions in the Buddhist precepts referring to

unwholesome, immoderate uses of language.[16] Later on, from around the eleventh century, we also encounter similar discussions applied to music. Music as a secular art was seen as something close to poetry and literature, something that evokes strong feelings and diverts people from seeking the Dharma and attaining detachment from worldly passions.

Japanese musicians faced the issue of the lowly status of human music when compared with heavenly music described in favorable terms in the sutras. As we have seen, different Buddhist traditions dealt with this issue in different ways. Some, as in Vinaya texts, thought that human music was completely different from heavenly music and therefore should not be encouraged. Other traditions, in contrast, allowed for some similarities, especially with regards to music and dances praising Buddhism. The *Sūtra of King Druma*, in particular, artfully gives voice to both positions, while encouraging the latter, or rather, expanding the meaning of music beyond mere devotional entertainment and pointing to its metaphysical and salvific nature as such. Japanese Esoteric Buddhism developed this idea further by emphasizing the ontological and cosmological aspects of music. In a way, then, philosophical discussions about music followed similar debates concerning the status and role of secular poetry (and human languages in general) in relation to the sacred language of the Buddha and his utterances. While some traditions stressed the arbitrary and delusory nature of human language as incapable of guiding one towards enlightenment and even its danger as conducive to four major sins, Esoteric Buddhism argued that every language is a modification of the primordial language of the cosmic buddha Dainichi 大日 (that is, Sanskrit as it is used in mantras and *dhāraṇī*s) and thus shares with it a salvific potential. Language was considered just one aspect of a much broader system of sounds in which each single entity in nature produces sounds that are meaningful and salvific.

The increased importance of music at court during the Heian period—performed at lavish Buddhist rituals, at state ceremonies, and in private performances—combined with the pervasive role of Buddhism at the time resulted in the development of an association between *gagaku* and *bugaku* and the celestial music described in the sutras, something from the realm of the buddhas and the gods. Expressions of this association are ubiquitous in literary texts and other documents from the Heian and Kamakura periods.

An early example is the *Eiga monogatari*, a narrative account of the life of Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 (966–1028) and his world written by various authors from 1028 to 1107. It contains a section on music ("Omugaku" おむがく) describing a ceremony at Hōjōji 法成寺 in 1022 in which it argues that *gagaku* is the "sound of the Dharma" (*nori no koe* 法の声). It points out that celestial beings

16. These prohibitions included deluded speech, that is, saying wrong things (*mōgo* 妄語), lying (*ryōzetsu* 両舌), and badmouthing (*akku* 悪口), in addition to ornate speech (*kigo*).

play music and sing, and explicitly mentions King Druma, who, with his beryl *koto*, performs music, songs, and dances expressing the essence of the Dharma (*hosshō* 法性) and reality (*shinnyo* 真如) (*Eiga monogatari* 76: 72; McCullough and McCullough 1980, 2: 577).

Later on, *Genpei seisuiki*, an early fourteenth-century extended narrative of the struggle between the Taira 平 and the Minamoto 源 clans, described a *kangen kōshiki* at Fukuhara, the center of the Taira clan, to commemorate the patriarch Taira no Kiyomori 平 清盛 (1118–1181), and the text refers to a famous passage in the *Sūtra of King Druma* when his powerful music makes Mahākāśyapa dance. Druma's music is described as "pure, beautiful, and unobstructed" (*jōmyō muge* 浄妙無礙), as appropriate for an offering to the Tathāgata and his retinue (*Genpei seisuiki* 6: 57).[17]

Numerous literary texts such as *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, diaries, and rebirth texts (*ōjōden* 往生伝) describe *gagaku* and *bugaku* performances as otherworldly, evocative of the celestial music of the heavens and the Pure Land (*Nihon ōjō gokuraku ki*, 23; *Shūi ōjōden*, 298–299; Ogi 1977, 137–147, 180–189). At the same time, the importance of music in the Buddhist pure lands cannot be underestimated. In Japanese paintings from the late Heian period on, the Buddha Amida comes to this world to welcome dying people accompanied by a retinue of musicians (notably playing *gagaku* instruments). The pure lands are suffused with music, which medieval Japanese explicitly identified with the melodies of *gagaku* and *bugaku*. In addition to the *ōjōkō* already discussed, another type of deathbed ritual called *mukaekō* 迎講 ("welcoming assembly") was developed as a preparation to welcome Amida to descend and carry away the dying person;[18] Sarah Horton presents sources reporting that music was performed at these rituals, typically by musicians from the capital (Horton 2008, 47, 50–51, 53). In other words, not only was music associated with the Pure Land and its visual representations (such as in *raigō* 来迎 paintings), but it was also performed in liminal situations aimed at facilitating the passage to the Pure Land.

Texts and authors began to develop the idea, also included in the *Sūtra of King Druma*, that playing music produces merit not only as an offering to the buddhas, but also and especially as a particular form of Buddhist practice in which sounds, songs, and dances convey the essence and depth of the Buddhist teachings. This led to the idea that instrumental music is also a karmic activity leading to rebirth in the Pure Land, thus overturning the classic Buddhist precepts on the subject (Minamitani 2003; Sakaki 1980, 26–47; Inose 2018).

17. I would like to thank Michaela Mross for this information.

18. As Sarah Horton explains, *mukaekō* were performances, "enjoyable rehearsals for the deathbed" (Horton 2008, 27).

Professional musicians at court adopted this view, which was explained by their art's function as an offering to the Buddha and as a way to promote Buddhism. Ōga no Koresue 大神惟季 (1026–1094), flutist in the *gagaku* ensemble at Kōfukuji-Kasuga temple-shrine complex, wrote in *Kaichikushō*, a treatise on flute music, that "even though they are mad and senseless things, these are melodies that perfect the Dharma and allow the audience to see the Buddha and listen to the Dharma" (*Kaichikushō*, 70a). *Ryūmeishō*, another treatise on flute music written by court musician Ōga no Motomasa 大神基政 (1079–1138), states that *gagaku* and *bugaku*, as offerings to the buddhas, are activities suitable for rebirth in the Pure Land, or, at least, for not falling into hell (*Ryūmeishō*, 58b–60b).

The renowned musician from Kōfukuji-Kasuga, Koma no Chikazane 狛 近真 (1177–1242), further elaborates on these ideas in his *gagaku* encyclopedia entitled *Kyōkunshō*. Chikazane says that *bugaku* and its music pervades the entire universe, from the heavenly realms down to this world, where it is performed in India, China, and Japan (*Kyōkunshō*, 130a, 128b–129b). He refers to precedents in the Buddhist scriptures: music and songs performed as offerings to the Buddha produce merit, which results in avoiding the three bad destinations and in the rebirth into Tuṣita Heaven followed by becoming a buddha in the future, much as described in the *Sūtra of King Druma*. Chikazane also explicitly refers to the *Sūtra of King Druma* as an example of *bugaku* in India (Tenjiku 天竺), writing that the music of his *koto* speaks that all dharmas are illusory entities (*genke* 幻化) and the pleasures in the three conditioned realms (*sangai* 三界) are empty (*kyokū* 虚空) (*Kyōkunshō*, 129a). He further states that awareness of this cosmic dimension, together with deep faith in Buddhism, are at the basis of this art (*Kyōkunshō*, 128b). With regards to *kyōgen kigo*, music and dance are offerings to the buddhas, the kami, and the three jewels; their power to pacify demons (*kijin* 鬼神) is superior to any other way (or art). The play of *kyōgen* is the basis for the desire for enlightenment and for embarking on the quest for the Dharma. The excitement produced by *kigo* makes one forget worldly relations and profane thoughts and thus clears up the clouds of karmic obstacles (*Kyōkunshō*, 130). In other words, *kyōgen kigo* are seeds for praising the buddhas (*Kyōkunshō*, 134a); more than that, *gagaku* and *bugaku* also reproduce the sounds of the Pure Land and are a source of joy (*Kyōkunshō*, 160b).

Chikazane also includes a discussion on *suki* 数寄 (art amateurs), aristocrats deeply engaged in artistic creation and performance, including music. For them, Chikazane says, *gagaku* is a way to practice *mono no aware* 物の哀れ (the awareness of the impermanence of all things) and thus the realization of their desire to escape from this world and become a buddha. For them, playing the flute is an offering to the Buddha and a way to praise the Dharma (*Kyōkunshō*, 161). A couple of generations later, Chikazane's grandson Koma no Tomokazu describes *gagaku* in his *Zoku kyōkunshō* (2: 643–644) as a kind of heavenly music, something

that continued with *shō* 笙 master musician at the imperial court, Toyohara Muneaki, and his *Taigenshō*.

As we can see, medieval musicians saw their art as a tool to aid governance and promote harmony in the realm, as in the classical Confucian vision of *gagaku*, but also as an offering to the buddhas, an instrument to pacify the deities, and as a means of salvation. This is a clear indication of the importance of Buddhism for the understanding of ideas about music and musical practice of the period. However, as Kasahara Kiyoshi points out, the renewed increase in trade with China from the Kamakura period brought to Japan many books, including texts about music, which promoted a return to Confucian ideas in Japanese discourses about *gagaku* (Kasahara 2001, 132–137).

However, one should not ignore the fact that musicians were aware of the karmic risks involved in their artistic profession, centered on the pursuit of beauty but also of patronage, and in the bitter rivalries and envy that such pursuits generated. Thus, they also stressed the need for explicit (and non-musical) Buddhist practices. The *Kyōkunshō* invites musicians to copy the *Lotus Sūtra* to atone for their desire for fame and wealth that comes with their profession (*Kyōkunshō*, 11). More explicitly, Chikazane, after saying that *gagaku* evokes the sound of the Pure Land and is endowed with salvific power, writes that it is also a source of affliction: slandering older generations and being envious of young musicians makes *gagaku* academies like the realm of the *asura* (*shuradō* 修羅道) characterized by constant struggles (*Kyōkunshō*, 161a). The *Zoku kyōkunshō* (2: 549) is also aware of the dangers intrinsic to the art of music: even though past masters said that this art causes no sins, it definitely goes against the Buddhist precepts, and thus musicians need to produce merit for their future lives. Even more explicit and somber is the picture presented in the previously mentioned *Taigenshō*, where Toyohara Muneaki wrote:

> It would be a great mistake to think that, just because this music exists in the Pure Land, one simply has to play it in order to automatically become a buddha. One should be well discriminating and give up a path that cannot be remedied and engage in ways that lead to salvation in the next life.
>
> (*Taigenshō* 4: 1444)

A more extreme case of sensitivity to the karmic dangers of musical activity is that of the second daughter of *biwa* virtuoso Fujiwara no Takamichi 藤原孝道 (1166–1237), as reported in the book on *biwa* music *Bunkidan* by Ryūen 隆円 (thirteenth century). When she became a nun, she destroyed all her *biwa* notation sheets and recycled them into paper to copy the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Bunkidan*, 123). By doing so, she was destroying all material traces of her former music-making

and turning them, literally, into a meritorious action (sutra-copying).[19] This account is a clear parallel to similar practices related to *Genji monogatari*, which was also recycled to make paper for sutras.[20] The idea of *kyōgen kigo* and the karmic dangers associated with artistic activities also extended to the very materiality of art, both literary and musical. It appears that the understanding of professional musicians about the salvific nature of their art became gradually more pessimistic between the late Heian and the late Muromachi periods, perhaps in relation to growing competition among lineages and the struggle to survive caused by changing social conditions.

That said, it is clear that the *Sūtra of King Druma* provided a model to understand music as a Buddhist way to generate merit. It is not clear how this sutra, which was not adopted by any sect in particular and produced no commentarial activity, made its way into literary and musical texts of the Heian and Kamakura periods and beyond. It is likely that aristocrats, on the one hand, and professional *gagaku* musicians affiliated with the imperial court and major temples on the other, searched the Buddhist canon for texts supporting and justifying their artistic endeavors, in parallel with similar discussions about literary arts. The close proximity between scholar-monks and aristocrats may have facilitated this pursuit of textual sources. It is possible that the *Sūtra of King Druma* was initially discovered through its references in the *Dazhi du lun*, a well-studied text in Japan (for instance, T 1509, 25.135c15, 139b21–23, 188b9–11).[21] However, most citations from this sutra in music-related documents do not seem to come directly from the *Dazhi du lun*, but either from the sutra itself or from excerpts in yet unidentified texts. Importantly, this sutra was influential not only for its doctrinal justifications of music, but also in terms of actual performance, as it provided a template for Buddhist ceremonies involving music and dance.

19. Professional *gagaku* musicians were all males. This practice still continues today at the *gagaku* orchestra of the Imperial Household Agency (Kunaichō 宮内庁). Some women in the hereditary families of professional musicians are recorded to have mastered the instruments, but the sources are still few and scattered. It was not uncommon for court ladies to practice string instruments (*gaku biwa* and *gakusō*), and, more rarely, the flute. However, systematic research on the role of women in the practice and transmission of *gagaku* in premodern Japan has yet to be undertaken.

20. These practices, known as *Genji kuyō* 源氏供養, developed around the second half of the twelfth century (RAMBELLI 2007, 248–250).

21. As a side note, it may be interesting to point out that medieval professional musicians and, to a certain extent, amateurs at court referred very rarely, if ever, to Esoteric Buddhist ideas of music as part of the combinatory system of five-element series that constitute the mandalic cosmos of medieval Japan (for a description of the system, see RAMBELLI 2013). It is likely that those esoteric constructs were created in monastic contexts and subjected to regimes of secrecy to which professional musicians had little or no access.

Final Remarks

The silencing of *gagaku* from the history of Japanese religions may have a number of possible reasons: (1) the modern idea circulating in religious studies that elaborate and complex ceremonies were manifestations of "inauthentic" religiosity, and are therefore not worth discussing; (2) the lack of disciplinary communication in modern academia between musicology and religious history; (3) the remoteness of *gagaku* and *bugaku* from the ordinary experience of most people, including scholars; and (4) a series of modern reconceptualizations of *gagaku*. These reconceptualizations manifested first as an "imperial" tradition (which resulted in occluding its non-imperial, and more broadly religious, aspects), then its reappropriation by Shinto shrines (as Shinto ceremonial music) and its more recent reconfiguration as a cultural heritage "art form" (music to be listened to at a theater or on CD), thus gradually separating *gagaku* from its premodern religious contexts.

However, the Buddhist significance of *gagaku* and *bugaku* never disappeared, especially among musicians affiliated with religious institutions such as Kōfukuji-Kasuga and Shitennōji. *Gagaku* and *bugaku* were extensively performed at temples and shrines all over Japan (and in many places, they still are). By the mid-Edo period, the powerful Jōdo Shinshū establishment also added *gagaku* to its liturgies, similarly to what was already happening at the leading temples in the country (Ono 2013, 330–337). In addition, a new awareness of *gagaku* emerged in the Edo period, which was significantly different from its medieval role as described in this article. This new awareness constructed *gagaku* (its music, songs, and dances) as an important part of the tradition of the imperial court, something that had value in itself for its ceremonial and aesthetic function. It is in this context that we can interpret the efforts at the reconstruction of lost songs and music from the ancient and medieval repertory that took place at the imperial court in the Edo period (Yamada 2016). This newly defined close connection with the imperial court and its values made *gagaku* attractive for a number of people in Japan: shrine priests above all, but also wealthy and cultured townspeople, who began to learn *gagaku* instruments and perform its music at private events from around the end of the eighteenth century (Minamitani 2005). The spread of *gagaku* was part of the cultural outreach of the imperial court and the growing influence it exerted among many people in different social strata of Japan, something that is not very well known.

On the other hand, intellectuals and politicians from the samurai class also focused their attention on *gagaku*, but for different reasons. From a Confucian worldview, they were aware that Chinese Confucian classics considered *gagaku* one of the key components of the system of rites that lay at the basis of political

legitimacy and social order and tried to mobilize *gagaku* as central to the Tokugawa Bakufu political regime and its legitimacy. These intellectuals and politicians, including Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 (1619–1691), Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 (1657–1725), Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728), Tominaga Nakamoto 冨永基仲 (1715–1746), Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 (1759–1829), and many others, studied ancient Chinese texts about musical theory and the metaphysics of music and learned *gagaku* instruments; some even tried to reconstruct lost music from ancient manuscripts (Yamada 2018). From the mid-seventeenth century, the Tokugawa Shoguns established *gagaku* academies, first at the Tōshōgū in Nikkō and then at Edo Castle, for the performance of ceremonies. Subsequently, many samurai in various domains, from Hirosaki to Kumamoto, also began to practice *gagaku* at their local ceremonies, which resulted in a vast and extensive Confucian ritual apparatus that all but disappeared with the Meiji Restoration. After that, *gagaku* was reconfigured again, this time as a performing art of the imperial court. After World War II, it became part of the national cultural heritage, and *gagaku* added a new layer of non-religious, non-ceremonial performances to its standard practice. These two aspects—the performing art of the imperial court and a type of ancient and arcane music as part of the cultural heritage of Japan—are most highlighted today, which has resulted in the loss of an awareness of knowledge concerning pre-World War II, premodern *gagaku* and its religious significance.

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