Sound of a Thousand Years
Art, Design & Architecture Museum
UC Santa Barbara
September 25, 2021 - May 1, 2022

Asian History of Gagaku

By Mariangela Carpinteri

The word Gagaku is the Japanese reading of the Chinese characters 雅楽 that read “Yayue.” “Yayue” means “refined” or “correct” art in terms of Confucian philosophy, a practice which included not only music, but also dances and songs. It was designated as the Confucian imperial music performed during ceremonies and state events. The original music theory of Chinese Yayue was formulated during the Zhou dynasty (1045 -256 BCE) and went through several modifications. In addition to Japan, Yayue was also transmitted to Korea (where it is called “Aak”) and Vietnam (“Nhã Nhạc”). Japanese Gagaku, however, is mostly based on the courtly entertainment music of the Chinese Tang dynasty (618 –907CE), rather than on purely Confucian ideals. The music of the Tang dynasty was the result of the richness of the Chinese imperial court and the influence of many different cultures from Persia, India, Tibet, and beyond, that met and comingled along the Silk Road.

Photo by Rory Lindsay

History of Gagaku

By Mason Johnson

Gagaku, an ancient type of classical music, was first imported into Japan from Tang China in the 7th century, though it differs from its Chinese predecessor (“Yayue”). It has been performed in Japan for over 1300 years for court ceremonies and some Buddhist and Shinto functions. In fact, the Gagaku orchestra at the Imperial Palace of Japan is the oldest continuously performing orchestra in the world. Gagaku consists of three repertoires: native Shinto religious music, vocal music based on Japanese folk poetry, and songs and dance based on ancient international music (mostly from China and Korea, but also from Central Asia, India, and Vietnam). Historically, these repertoires were primarily transmitted by families of professional, hereditary musicians who passed their secret musical knowledge on to their descendants.

Gagaku artistic repertoire peaked at court during the Heian period (794-1185 CE) but declined in the medieval Kamakura period (1185-1333 CE),when the power of the imperial court aristocracy was being overtaken by the rising samurai class.In the Edo period (1600-1868 CE), the Tokugawa government worked alongside the imperial court and musical families to revive and reorganize the traditional ensembles. During this period there were three official musical academies based in Kyoto (at the Imperial Palace), Osaka (at Shitennōji temple), and Nara (at Kōfukuji temple and Kasuga shrine), plus two newly formed ensembles at the castle of the Shogun in Edo (present-day Tokyo) and at Tōshōgūshrine in Nikkō. These are the progenitors of the present-day Gagaku ensembles and their repertories.

Gagaku: Some more technical information

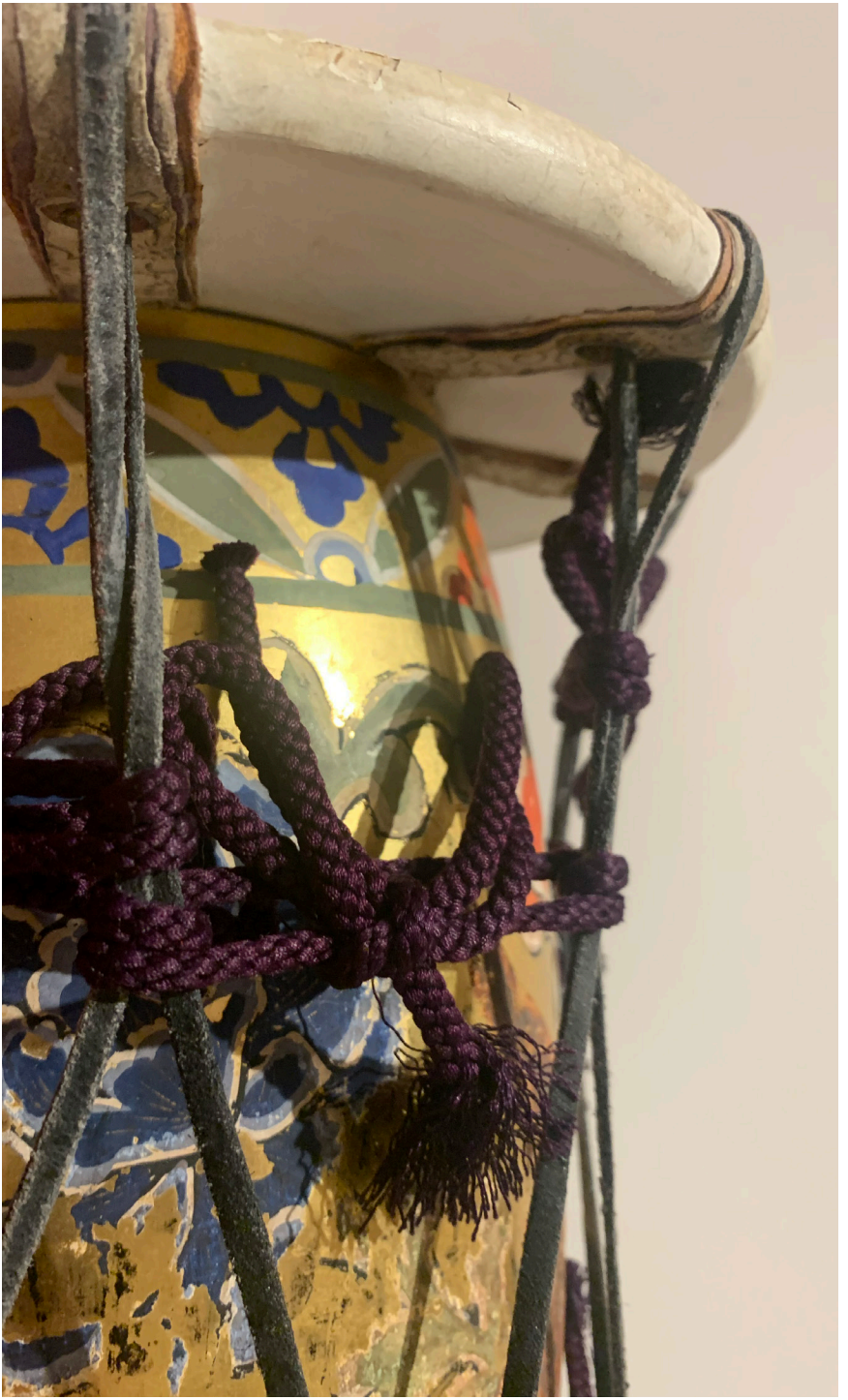
By Fabio Rambelli

The Gagaku repertoire can be divided into three types: 1) International music, comprising both instrumental music and dance, imported from the Asian mainland to Japan along with Buddhism between the 6th and 8th centuries CE; 2) Ancient native songs and dance (mikagura imperial ceremonies for the godskuniburi no utamairitual songs and dances) performed at the Imperial Palace of Japan since antiquity; and 3) Various compositions created in Japan between the 10th and 13th centuries. Gagaku includes two different styles of musical performance: Kangen (instrumental music) and Bugaku (music for dance programs). Kangen is performed in a relatively loose tempo unique to Gagaku, whereas ugaku conveys a sense of energy by emphasizing a strong sense of rhythm.Gagaku compositions have various rhythms: nobe (8 beats), haya (4 beats), tada (2+4 beats), and yatara (2+3 beats). In addition, some compositions are performed in free rhythm. The rhythm for each piece is written in the notation score. In general, the tempo gets faster towards the end. Originally, Gagaku music had a large number of modes but today only the following remain: In the Tōgaku repertory (mainly pieces imported from medieval China and Japanese compositions in that style), there are six modes: Ichikotsuchō (D as tonic), Hyōjō (E), Sōjō (G), Ōshikichō (A), Banshikichō (B), Taishikichō (E). Each mode is associated with a season, a direction, a color, and other aspects of reality. In Komagaku (mostly pieces from the ancient Korean Peninsula and Japanese compositions in that style), there are three modes: Koma Ichikotsuchō (E), Koma Hyōjō (F#), and Koma Sōjō (A). Gagaku is commonly employed in Buddhist and Shinto ceremonies, but its cultural background from the Asian mainland includes Daoist elements as well.

Gagaku in Modern Japan

By Daigengna Duoer

Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Gagaku was presented to the world as the oldest genre of traditional music in Japan and became the only traditional performance genre to be selected for state ceremonies. The Meiji period (1868-1912 CE) saw significant changes in Gagaku, which was reworked to become a performing art suitable for a modern nation state, unlike similar forms in China ("Yayue"), Korea ("Aak"), and Vietnam ("Nhã nhạc"). The authority to perform Gagaku, including all instrumental, dance, and vocal repertories, was taken away from highly ranked nobility and members of the imperial house and instead entrusted to full-time Gagaku musicians affiliated with the imperial court in Tokyo. In 1876 and 1888, these musicians compiled the *Meiji sentei-fu*, standardized scores for the complete repertoire of Gagaku. Since the Meiji era, Gagaku court musicians also began to train in Western classical music, thus enabling an aspect of bi-musicality that opened many new cultural opportunities outside the court. In 1877, for example, they composed children's songs for schools; in 1878, pieces for military use, as well as ceremonial songs for modern schools; in 1880 they authored the melody of the Japanese national anthem, Kimi ga yo, which was originally conceived for Gagaku ensemble. In 1955, the Japanese government designated Gagaku as an Important Intangible Cultural Property, and the music and its instruments began to attract interest from contemporary composers both in Japan and abroad. Numerous works have been composed combining western classical and Gagaku elements and instruments. In 2009, Gagaku performed by the Music Department of the Imperial Household was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



Gagaku in California

By Fabio Rambelli

Gagaku became a part of liturgical music at Jōdo shinshū Buddhist temples in Japan in the early seventeenth century. After Jōdo Shinshūbegan proselytizing in the United States, Gagaku was brought to Japanese Buddhist temples in California in the early twentieth century. However, Gagaku in the United States came to a sudden end during World-War II, as many Japanese Americans were forcibly moved into internment camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Gagaku ensembles were disbanded, and instruments were destroyed or lost. In 1968, however, the Gagaku tradition was revived at Senshin Temple in Los Angeles and later in the Bay Area. The instruments on display here were brought to California by ethnomusicologist Robert Garfias in the late 1950s (professor emeritus at UC Irvine). Garfias directed a Gagaku ensemble at UCLA, which attracted the interest of, among others, Igor Stravinsky, who went to see his performances. Architect Frank Gehry also played in that ensemble.

Gagaku and Contemporary Music

By Rory Lindsay

Western composers have been captivated by Gagaku as the oldest surviving orchestral music in the world since the 1920s. The American composer Henry Eichheim (1870–1942), who called Santa Barbara home for the latter part of his life, famously adapted a Gagaku piece for modern European instruments. Eichheim described Gagaku as centuries ahead of its time and “ultra-modern” in its style and composition. Other important Western composers who drew inspiration from Gagaku include Henry Cowell (1897-1965), Olivier Messiaen (1908–92), Pierre Boulez (1925–2016), Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007), and John Cage (1912–92), who famously composed a series of works for the mouth organ or shō. Contemporary Japanese composers have also reimagined Gagaku. In 1970, Mayuzumi Toshirō (1929–97) broke new ground with his innovative composition Shōwa Tenpyōraku for Gagaku ensemble. Takemitsu Tōru (1930–96), a highly influential composer, pushed Gagaku into avant-garde territory with his compositions including “In an Autumn Garden.” His music further popularized the genre among Japanese and non-Japanese audiences alike.

Gagaku in Popular Culture

By Kaitlyn Ugoretz

While Gagaku performances are most often seen in ritual and ceremonial settings, various sights and sounds of the genre appear in Japanese popular culture. In literature, Gagaku has famously featured in Tsukiyama Kei's historical detective novels set in Edo-period Osaka, *Ogata Koan Naniwa Case Files*. The author Tsukiyama herself studied the shō in Osaka. A television series based on Tsukiyama's series was adapted by Japanese public TV NHK. In recent years, television and film have become a major source of exposure for Gagaku music. Contemporary Gagaku musician and composer Tōgi Hideki often appears and performs for TV programs and has written music for several video games. Hokkaido Television Broadcasting produced a super-hero drama, *Gagaku Squadron White Stones*, in which three Gagaku musicians from the Heian period appear in present-day Japan and wield their powerful instruments to protect their neighborhood. Gagaku elements also appear in anime. Bugaku dancers wearing paper masks are among the many spirits in animator Miyazaki Hayao's popular film, *Spirited Away*. Anime with Shinto themes often feature young women who perform kagura, a sacred dance for the gods, accompanied by either Gagaku or contemporary music. The shō and hichiriki are prominent in the soundtrack of Capcom's popular video game *Ōkami*.

Bugaku Costumes

By Mariangela Carpinteri

Originally, before the arrival of Buddhism, ceremonial robes in Japan were made of white fabric. The bright colors of the Gagaku attire reflect the influence of the colorful Buddhist ceremonies coming from the Asian mainland from around the sixth century CE. Today performers wear numerous costumes, each with their own history and meaning. A layered silk robe called “kasane shōzokuis” worn by dancers only for quieter pieces. This robe was not originally considered a costume but was based on the court outfit of the Heian period (794-1192 CE).The dancers’ costumes are usually complex and refined, and differ according to the genre of dances. The costumes used in the “Dances of the Left” (sa no mai, related to Tōgaku music) are mostly orange or brown. These colors represent the Yang, the bright aspect of reality. In the “Dances of the Right” (u no mai, related to Komagaku music), green and blue are predominant. They express the idea of Yin, the dark side of reality. Costumes generally include an inner robe (shita-gasane) and an outer garment (hō). The outer garment is decorated by two layers of motifs: the background decoration (jimon) and the main motifs on the surface. Decorations often include animals such as cranes, koi fish, lions and dragons, flowers, waves, and geometrical shapes. The patterns are repeated in an orderly fashion following horizontal and vertical columns.

Photo by Daigengna Duoer

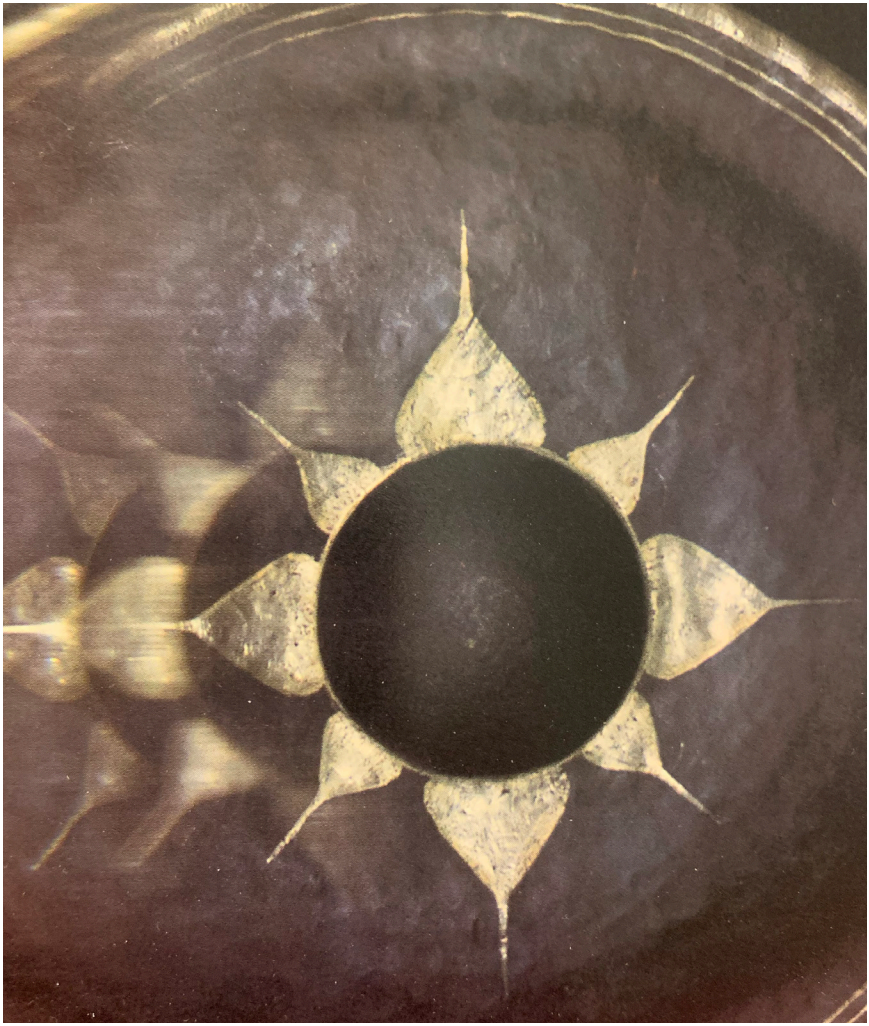
SOUND OF A THOUSAND YEARS

Gagaku, which translates to “elegant music,” is the classical music and dance of the Imperial Court of Japan and an important component of Buddhist and Shinto liturgies. It originated in ancient China and the Korean peninsula, and i ncorporated influences from India, Persia, and Southeast Asia. In Japan, these influences blended with ancient indigenous songs and dance taking on original characteristics.

The beginning of Gagaku is officially linked to the establishment of the Bureau of Song and Dance (Utamai no tsukasa) as part of the state administration, in 701 CE (a special department in charge of Gagaku still exists today at the Imperial Household Agency of Japan). The Heian period (794-1192 CE) is considered Gagaku´s golden era. During this time, the music was rearranged according to Japanese sensibilities, and many new pieces were added to the existing repertory. Abandoning progressively the original Chinese models, Gagaku´s form, as we know it today, with instrumental and vocal music and dance, was established around the 10th-13th centuries. Ever since, Gagaku´s orchestra has employed instruments (string, woodwinds, and percussions) that are not used in any other Japanese musical genre. A sample of these unique instruments is on display in this exhibition.

Gagaku’s cultural importance goes well beyond music and performing traditions: it includes the visual arts, educational methods, traditional artisanal crafts, rituals and ceremonies, as well as an elaborate and complex philosophy of music. Today, more than 1300 years after its establishment, Gagaku is considered the oldest living orchestral music in the world and has been recognized by UNESCO as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Gagaku is exceptional in its combination of archaic sounds with contemporary features such as free rhythms, complex sound clusters and controlled dissonance.

Sound of a Thousand Years has been organized by the AD&A Museum in collaboration with Fabio Rambelli, International Shinto Foundation Chair in Shinto Studies and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at UC Santa Barbara.



AD&A
MUSEUM
UC SANTA BARBARA