



Scuola Italiana di Studi  
sull'Asia Orientale  
ISEAS



École Française  
d'Extrême-Orient  
EFO

CO-HOSTED BY



# KYOTO LECTURES

Tuesday, November 6th, 18:00h

Andrea Giolai

## Monkey Business

Differing Approaches to  
the "Reconstruction"  
of the *Bugaku*  
Piece *Somakusha*

### SPEAKER

Japanese medieval musical treatises often provide engaging legends concerning the origins of *bugaku* suites, the graceful dances at the core of the repertory of Japanese "elegant music" (*gagaku*). One of these "origin stories" concerns a piece called *Somakusha*: according to Koma no Chikazane's *Kyōkunshō* (1233), legend had it that Prince Shōtoku Taishi was once playing the flute while riding on a horse when, suddenly, a mountain god charmed by the melody appeared before him in the shape of a monkey and improvised a dance. The monkey-face mask still used by the dancer could thus be taken as evidence that the *bugaku* piece is a depiction of this scene. This talk will focus on several contemporary attempts to reconstruct both the "original" melody of *Somakusha* and the very instrument mentioned in Chikazane's treatise. Drawing on interviews with *gagaku* performers, instrument makers and scholars, but also on an analysis of the earliest notations available, the talk will argue that the reconstructions of *Somakusha* are creative re-inventions of tradition, and that, to quote Richard Taruskin, they reveal a great deal about "the presence of the past and the pastness of the present".

Andrea Giolai is JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) in Kyoto. In 2017 he received a double PhD degree in Area Studies at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Leiden University, where he also taught Introduction to Japanese Performing Arts. He has carried out research on *gagaku* at Kyoto University and at the Research Centre for Japanese Traditional Music of Kyoto City University of Arts. His research interests also include the use of the body in ethnomusicological research; the "reconstruction" of ancient notations and instruments used in Japanese "elegant music"; Japanese Buddhist chanting (*shōmyō*); the *shakuhachi* flute and its music. Since 2013 he is a member of the *gagaku* group Nanto gakuso.

Please note that this lecture will be held at the Kyoto centre of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient

École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFO)  
29 Betto-cho Kitashirakawa, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, 606-8276 Japan

Italian School of East Asian Studies (ISEAS)  
4th Floor, 4 Yoshida Ushinomiya-cho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, 606-8302 Japan

EFO | Tel. 075-701-0882 E-mail [efeo.kyoto@gmail.com](mailto:efeo.kyoto@gmail.com)

ISEAS | Tel. 075-751-8132 E-mail [iseas@iseas-kyoto.org](mailto:iseas@iseas-kyoto.org)

