

Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction 3/e

Sample Essay for Chapter 4

Many court cultures throughout the world had strikingly similar intellectual traditions that linked music and poetry. Compare and contrast the kouta song of the Japanese tradition with the European Renaissance madrigal in terms of linkages between text, music, and performer roles.

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The court cultures of the Japanese geisha and the European madrigal singer seem worlds apart, but there are musical and textual traditions that are intriguingly similar. Both the kouta and the madrigal contained **secular text, and text was carefully considered in the musical setting**. The **kouta**, for example, typically used **five to seven syllables per line**, and this rhythmic flow had to be taken into consideration when the geisha improvised music to fit the text. The **madrigal** singer, on the other hand, typically performed pre-composed music that was not improvised; during the Renaissance, the genre was performed by a group of singers, not a soloist. Still, like the kouta, the Renaissance madrigal featured a set number of lines and syllables, and the form of the text impacted the musical form of the piece.

Interestingly, both **madrigal and kouta texts topically focused on love**, and both frequently contained metaphor that alluded to sensuality or sexuality. In **performance** practice, however, there are some significant differences. In the geisha tradition, women performed one-on-one for male patrons who

provided the text, and created musical accompaniments to fit their patron's poetry. The sexual innuendo contributed to the sense of secrecy of the geisha art. Contrastingly, many early madrigal groups likely consisted of all male singers. Later, the emergence of the *concerto delle donne* (professional female court singers) marked a change of perception in terms of associating court performers with an over-sexualized "courtesan" connotation.