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Blind in Early Modern Japan: Disability, Medicine, and Identity by Wei Yu Wayne Tan is a recent addition to the Corporealities series edited by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder. Tan's slender but ambitious monograph tackles the subject of blindness in premodern Japan, and more specifically, the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), which roughly coincides with the early modern period in European history. It asks "what did it mean to be blind in Tokugawa society?" and the response will be of interest to early modernists, scholars of disability history, and experts on Tokugawa Japan.

Tan supports his research through use of woodcuts, maps of Tokugawa Japan, and images of medical texts from Kyoto University Rare Materials Digital Archive and the Wellcome Collection, amongst other sources. The same illustrations also feature on the book's associated website. Tan takes care to describe and transcribe the images in the captions below them, a necessary and very welcome accessibility feature. Each chapter also boasts a short conclusion and summary of its arguments and of its connections to the overall narrative of the book, a useful tool for a work that is dense and ambitious. I can imagine *Blind in Early Modern Japan* being a helpful resource for scholars of Japan, but also scholars of disability history. Both undergraduate and graduate students can find material of interest to them, and the bibliography at the end of the book has a thorough breakdown of digital, hardcopy, and database sources. The

focus on electronic resources especially adds to the accessibility of Tan's research and its utility to anyone who wants a deeper look at Tokugawa medical and social practices around blindness.

As a Euro-American researcher of early modern European disability and literature, I hoped to find an examination of blindness that might work as a springboard to disability history in newer contexts (for me), and I was not disappointed. However, seasoned scholars of Japanese medical history and Japanese disability studies will no doubt draw even more benefit from Tan's examination of blindness and how "being blind was about being disabled but also about being enabled in particular ways" in the Tokugawa period (p. 2). To do so, Tan relies on the social model of disability; in his summary, which is rather brief, the social model posits the chasm between "biological and physiological impairments in a biomedical sense" and disability, "constructed purely around social and political agendas that find fault with impairment and so as to justify the exclusion of impaired people from mainstream society" (p. 20). Tan cites and draws inspiration from premodern European theorists of disability history, such as Irina Metzler, and Ottoman studies, such as Sara Scalenghe, to employ a methodology which focuses on a specific impairment, blindness (instead of the contemporary and broader category of "disability") and by considering the Tokugawa period's particular lexicon around the impairment in question. Tan follows this methodology throughout the work, carefully delineating the terms used for blindness in medical contexts, in the context of the guild and its members, and in contexts of almsgiving.

Tan considers in the opening chapter Tokugawa medical practice around curing and treating eye disease. Tokugawa medicine boasted practitioners whose remedies focused on blindness, and who either came from or established their own lineages of treatment. Whether it was via products for sale for consumers, treatments via needling, or other forms of surgery or

medication, patients seeking care could have recourse to a wide array of options. The rise of print culture, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, a theme which recurs throughout the work, was a particularly important factor in the expansion of treatment choices.

One of the clearest takeaways from the first two chapters is the relationship between traditional Japanese medical practices, which were themselves heavily influenced by Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), and "Dutch learning," the name given to European medical and scientific ideas which began arriving in the period. Tan wisely avoids a teleological and colonial consideration of medicine which would regard Japanese medical models to be improved or replaced entirely by Western "progress." He notes that "Dutch-method medicine stimulated the birth of new inquiry in Japanese ophthalmology and more important, initiated perspectives and practices that enriched and coexisted with the Sino-Japanese medical worldview" (p. 46). Dutch medicine focused largely on medical substances and their uses in ophthalmology; one example would be the introduction of pupil-dilation drugs, which enabled surgeons to operate more confidently. Sino-Japanese medicine, on the other hand, understood blindness as being caused by blurred vision, wind, poison (produced by disease). The different models of illness and its treatment represented a context in which Japanese people seeking medical advice and hopefully cures for eye ailments had access to an increasing variety of healers, drugs for sale, printed miscellanies with home remedies, travel literature and medical lineages. Traveling to another city to purchase a remedy, consult a local lineage of healers, or visit a temple's experts were options open to people of the period.

One of the most fascinating and complex topics which Tan tackles in the middle chapters is that of the Kyoto-based guild of blind men, which had originated in the late medieval period as

an academy teaching musical performances of Heike epic. To call it a "guild" in English does disservice to the complex and multifaceted ways this social organization disciplined, trained, promoted, and profited from its members. Its reach extended beyond its members, and the guild attempted (and was often expected to) dictate the behavior of blind non-members, including women. The guild became a key Tokugawa institution because the ruling shogunate's introduction of status rule meant that the guild gained "special political authority to govern Japan's blind population categorically as the blind status group" (p.79). The interplay between status, profession, livelihood, and guild membership/lack thereof is what enabled some blind men to profit both socially and financially.

The guild's role in the lives of Tokugawa's blind subjects cannot be overstated: it recruited and trained young blind men of the appropriate classes in music, rituals, or acupuncture/massage; it dictated where and how its impoverished members could ask for alms (and what services members could perform in return) and required exorbitant fees to advance in rank. For men without capital, guild membership would guarantee an access to charity but also impose heavy obligations on adepts. For this reason, as Tan discusses, blind men increasingly found ways to live successfully outside its direct protection; as he notes, "no matter how blind people organized their disabled identities they were implicated in the guild's rule" (p. 108). Less fortunate members of the guild often turned to money-lending, which, while legal, caused authorities concern; more fortunate members could use the mentorship and training available through the guild to develop their abilities in music or later, in acupuncture and massage.

A parallel with the medical lineages famed for treating blindness were the literary lineages of the period that featured blind men as the best choice of musicians for Heike music.

Tan delineates the ways in which the guild established and promoted Heike music as the music best suited for blind performers through the narrative that the genre had been advanced in the pre-Tokugawa period by legendary blind musicians. The genres and instruments open to blind performers expanded, but Heike remained a reliable source of income for the guild's members.

By the close of the 17th century, the guild expanded its members' possible professions by offering training in acupuncture (and slightly later, massage). As Tan notes, "the logic of abdominal palpitation suggests that a good physician with a discerning sense of touch could uncover the secrets of diseases by palpating sites around the abdomen" (p. 165). This would play into narratives of disabled compensation, in which impairment in one sense creates or forces improvements in others. In any case, the guild's promotion of TCM and massage created a strange irony, one which privileged disabled healers in the treatment and even possibly the cure for others' illnesses and non-lasting impairments. I realized that in some cases, it is possible that the guild's blind healers enabled the movement of their patients between the categories of "disabled"/"not disabled," and thus served as arbitrators of this identity category !

In this disability history, as in many others, the narratives that survive are more likely to focus on wealthier, well-known, and privileged individuals. Tan does discuss in some detail the complex arrangements around almsgiving, which were established between the guild's regional offices, local government, and shogunate decrees, which brings equilibrium to his work. His case studies focus largely on well-known male musicians, amongst others, and evokes a few groups of women musicians. I would have liked to read more of their stories, but it is understandable that the written records would not always allow for this.

An overall well-imagined and executed work, *Blind in Early Modern Japan* left very few modifications to be desired. There were a couple of improvements I would have appreciated. The social model of disability appears in the first chapter of the work, and a citation from Mitchell and Snyder in its epilogue, but the rest of Tan's analysis might benefit from more reliance on critical disability theory, such as citations from other theorists, and integration of these ideas. The lack of reliance on extended and explicit references to the social model contrasts with Tan's otherwise productive reading of his sources. It is something to be said that *Blind in Early Modern Japan* manages to enact a productive social model reading of blindness in early modern Japan while avoiding the use of more extensive criticism.

I came away from reading Tan's work with the conviction that Japan was a particularly suitable choice for a disability history, especially for histories of blindness. The guild system in the Tokugawa period was especially helpful in illustrating the kinds of self-fashioning, strategies, and choices disabled people must often rely on to a claim a place in any wider society that imposes varying barriers to access. Moreover, the Tokugawa status system, in which blindness through the guild (and larger cultural narratives), became linked to musical creation, narrative, and healing parallels myths about disabled compensation which appear in other cultures and times. Tan's disability history of blindness in Tokugawa Japan also disrupts straightforward narratives of progress; with the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912) and the closing of the guild, blind men and women found themselves in a newly precarious position in which their traditional livelihoods were foreclosed to them.