

Blind in Early Modern Japan

Disability, Medicine, and Identity

A volume in the Corporealities: Discourses of Disability series

While the loss of sight—whether in early modern Japan or now—may be understood as a disability, blind people in the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) could thrive because of disability. The blind of the era were prominent across a wide range of professions, and through a strong guild structure were able to exert contractual monopolies over certain trades. *Blind in Early Modern Japan* illustrates the breadth and depth of those occupations, the power and respect that accrued to the guild members, and the lasting legacy of the Tokugawa guilds into the current moment.

The book illustrates why disability must be assessed within a particular society's social, political, and medical context, and also the importance of bringing medical history into conversation with cultural history. A Euro-American-centric disability studies perspective that focuses on disability and oppression, the author contends, risks overlooking the unique situation in a non-Western society like Japan in which disability was constructed to enhance blind people's power. He explores what it meant to be blind in Japan at that time, and what it says about current frameworks for understanding disability.

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