

Give and Take: Poverty and the Status Order in Early Modern Japan. By MAREN A. EHLERS. Harvard East Asian Monographs, vol. 413. Cambridge, MA: HARVARD UNIVERSITY ASIA CENTER, 2018. Pp. xvi + 351. \$49.95.

When I first started studying early modern Japan, a.k.a. the Tokugawa or Edo period, historians in Japan and the West tended to see the decline of the Tokugawa military regime (1603–1867) beginning as early as the failure to replace the keep of the shogun's castle following the Meireki fire of 1657, and certainly no later than the decreases in its tax revenues after 1745. With ears cocked to the distant rumble of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, they heralded internal disorder in the early nineteenth century as signs of an increasingly sclerotic and oppressive system of rule plus a rigid status system that stifled innovation. Nowadays the early modern period looks quite different. Historians in Japan emphasize complexity in the social structure and regional variation as indicators that governmental rule was not as monolithic as it once appeared, and some even laud the underlying strength of the Tokugawa system. In the West, *Performing the Great Peace: Political Space and Open Secrets in Tokugawa Japan* by Luke Roberts (Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2012) demonstrated how the regime adapted to changing circumstances by permitting a gap to open between the rituals and practice of rule. Now Maren Ehlers characterizes the status system as a flexible mechanism of governance, shows how relationships were negotiated with rulers who saw reason to aspire to benevolence, and points out that thanks to a successful administrative reform in the region she studies, the period between 1842 and 1868 is still seen as a golden age.

Give and Take is an urban history, but not the sort that Westerners have pursued in Japan up to now. In contrast to studies on the three metropolises of Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto plus Kanazawa, headquarters for Japan's largest domain, Ehlers focuses on Ono, a castle town of no significance, that grew to approximately 30,000 residents. Previous local histories that dealt with specific domains took as their subject those that were contiguous and played major roles in history such as Chōshū, Satsuma, and Tosa. In contrast Ono was the administrative center for a small domain fragmented into five parcels, including an enclave on the Japan Sea. The region, in what is now Fukui Prefecture, hosted seventeen administrative jurisdictions. Each area was different, and Ehlers does a fine job of teasing out Ono's particularities of place while situating it in the context of other cities and regions.

A third challenge to existing scholarship comes from Ehlers' decision to analyze Ono's society from the bottom up and to put public relief at the center. She has little to say about Ono's admittedly small samurai population; instead she devotes entire chapters to the professional beggars and the blind. Other segments of society, the purveyors to the lord, for example, are situated in relation to their involvement with poor relief. Even the lord's decision to set up a company to market Ono's products is seen as a response to fears that an inability or refusal to aid the destitute might lead to unrest or riots. And it is the poor who provide Ehlers with the lens through which to examine the transformations wrought by the new Meiji government up to the end of the nineteenth century.

Beggars, even professional ones organized into guilds, do not leave writings of their own except for petitions for help at times of food insufficiency. Evidence for their existence, their social organization, and their activities has to come from other sources whose main purpose is not to keep track of beggars. Ehlers has combed through voluminous unpublished records kept by town officials that provide a rough if incomplete chronology of interactions between beggars and other members of society and supplemented them with published materials in local histories. For comparative purposes she generously cites the groundbreaking work of Yoshida Nobuyuki on the lower strata in Edo society and Tsukada Takashi's work on the outcastes of Osaka, among many other scholars. Her bibliography is intimidatingly impressive. I admire her for not simply following Yoshida into Edo's byways but for instead striking out on her own to study a town considerably less blessed by Japanese scholarship. At the same time, by putting her conclusions regarding Ono's social structure and practice into dialogue with his work on Edo, she provides the best introduction to this important scholar's work that I have seen in English.

Although scholars once followed the lead of Japan's Confucian scholars in assuming that Tokugawa society was made up of four main hereditary statuses—warrior, farmer, artisan, merchant—with

a few marginal groups on the side, Ehlers argues that the status system was much more complex, with different status groupings within these four categories and more besides. For her the key term is professional, as in professional beggars in contrast to seasonal beggars, who came down from the mountains during the winter when they ran out of food. Being professional meant integration into an organization defined more by occupation than by residence, and each profession had its own relationship to the rulers stipulated by privileges and duties. At the bottom of society, in addition to the two main categories of outcastes, were actors and other entertainers, itinerant religious practitioners, lepers, and the blind.

The relationships between categories of outcastes varied according to region. In Edo, the leather-workers' boss, Danzaemon, dominated the beggars and other outcaste groups, but in Ono, the reverse was true. There the hereditary beggar bosses had their own name, Koshirō, and their own set of responsibilities to the domain. They managed poverty by negotiating the terms under which they would collect alms, how much these would be, and who would receive them. In return they ran a hospice for beggars, they buried dead vagrants, and over time they became more involved in police work, standing guard duty, torturing and driving away criminals, even serving as executioners, a task in other regions more often assigned to men considered deeply polluted (*kawata/eta*), and one they therefore tried to avoid. Status did not equal class; at least one Koshirō became a property owner and moneylender.

In contrast to the twenty to forty Koshirō, in Ono the guilds of the blind numbered only ten or less, and their status was not hereditary. Ehlers sees them as important, however, because they provide another example of the diverse occupation-based groups organized into guilds that made up the urban underclass. Blind men, called *zatō*, belonged to a countrywide hierarchically structured organization that licensed them to practice healing arts such as acupuncture or massage and conferred great wealth on the leadership in Kyoto. (Ehlers does not mention *Zatōichi*, the blind masseur and master sword-fighter famous in postwar Japanese movies and television.) The *zatō* in Ono never rose beyond the lowest rank. Unlike the beggars, they were allowed to live within the town, albeit in the poorest section. At the same time, they depended on the Koshirō to provide them with a portion of the alms collected for poor relief. Blind women called *goze* worked as professional entertainers and sometimes as midwives. Although they lived in female-only households, they were subject to the *zatō*'s authority. Other guilds also functioned as mutual aid associations, but when a blind person could no longer support himself and his portion of the guild's collective alms income proved insufficient for his needs, his relatives were expected to help take care of him, a responsibility they sometimes shirked. These kinship ties provided the blind with a stronger safety net than the hereditary outcaste groups enjoyed.

Ehlers devotes the last third of her book to tracing a history of poor relief in Ono that provides insight into castle town society and the reciprocal relations between warrior government and self-governing units of commoners. During the famine of 1783–84 following the eruption of Mt. Asama, the domain first sponsored its usual seasonal rice gruel kitchens for beggars (commoners were expected to cook the gruel, and beggars helped distribute it). When these proved insufficient, it encouraged (coerced) commoners to collect donations from across the town to feed the starving as part of their duty to the domain. The wealthiest merchants contributed as individuals, both in hopes of rewards in the form of privileges from the lord and out of fear of violence if they did not. Finally the lord stepped in with interest-free loans of food. Nevertheless, many people died of starvation. In the nineteenth century the lord promoted public health through measures such as smallpox vaccination programs as a way to promote popular loyalty and create productive subjects. He also developed mercantilist enterprises to strengthen domain finances and help the poor, some of which foreshadowed future developments in the Meiji period even though the status categories that had supported the groupings of the professional poor were abolished.

The Harvard University Asia Center is to be congratulated on publishing this solid piece of scholarship that will, alas, never become a best seller. Although it has excellent maps and eye-catching illustrations, plus being exceptionally well organized and clearly written with occasional flashes of humor, it is far too dense to assign to undergraduates. Specialists in the field will find it informative and challenging; for graduate students it will provide a model for how to construct an argument out of fragmentary primary sources and situate it in the context of Japanese, English, French, and German

secondary literature. It will long retain its place as an innovative contribution to our understanding of early modern Japanese society.

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Roaming into the Beyond: Representations of Xian Immortality in Early Medieval Chinese Verse. By ZORNICA KIRKOVA. *Sinica Leidensia*, vol. 129. Leiden: BRILL, 2016. Pp. x + 420. €150, \$125.

This long-awaited monograph on early medieval Daoist poetry brings visibility to a relatively new field in which numerous aspects have so far remained almost virgin territory. These aspects include genres, prosody, themes, thoughts, rituals, and art history, which always yield freshness when studied from interdisciplinary perspectives. Focusing on the important topic of *xian*, “immortality” or “immortal,” as the author translates, the monograph succeeds in identifying works that fit into this “genre” and in exploring new research avenues. Undaunted by the challenging task to be proficient in both literature and religious studies, the author shows her mettle through a broad consultation of sources and a thorough panorama of the two disciplines, despite the limited use of religious texts mainly from the Shangqing tradition that she considers most pertinent to her reading of the poems selected for analysis.

This first book on early medieval Chinese verse on “*xian* immortality” outlines a comprehensive picture of the genre’s development through the careful design of its chapters. Since the rendering of the term *xian* as “immortal” or “immortality” throughout the book is problematic, as the author herself admits and addresses (pp. 11–12, 148), one should be cautious when encountering these translations and use one’s own judgment of what the Chinese term actually connotes in various contexts. The book, comprised of six substantial chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion, aims to present a complete history of poetry on “roaming into immortality” (*youxian shi*, p. 12). The main chapters are entitled: “Religious and Literary Background,” “The Dramatis Personae,” “A Phenomenology of Immortals,” “The World of the Immortals,” “The Way to Immortality,” and “Immortality in the Context of the Human World.” An appendix lists “Extant Classical and Early Medieval Verse Treating the Theme of Immortality,” followed by a bibliography and an index.

While the structure of the book may at first sight appear to be reasonable, the thematic division indicated by the chapter titles does not achieve the clarity they announce. The first two chapters do indeed do justice to their titles, but upon reaching chapters three to six, the reader frequently finds repeated and overlapping materials and ideas; as the chapter titles suggest, it is inevitable that the same or similar issues will be touched upon when the same materials are covered according to organizing principles that do not differ much from one another. There certainly is room for structural improvement. A more efficient presentation of ideas and arguments would enhance the persuasiveness and readability of the author’s findings. For example, comments on the works of Guo Pu, Sun Chuo, Xiao Yan, Shen Yue, and Yu Xin are scattered in a number of places such that the arguments are then inevitably presented in a fragmentary manner, despite the frequent cross-references. In addition, the ambitious attempt to outline the whole eight hundred years of *youxian* poetic history results in a survey of works from vastly different periods, which inevitably overshadows what historical issues are at stake and deserve focused investigation.

The two goals in the book of writing a poetic history of the *youxian* tradition and compiling an “anthology” of *youxian* poetry have been duly achieved: the reader is introduced to a new perspective on the early medieval Chinese poetic tradition and the “anthology” is quite handy, especially together with the appendix. These goals, on the other hand, diminish the depth of most discussions of the selected works and instead lead to superficiality. Perhaps due to the many examples, the reader sees very little discussion of the literary achievements in the selected poems. For example, chapter two is a comprehensive survey on *xian*, and chapter three mostly presents the juxtaposition of poetic works under different categories, with rather scant discussion. This treatment is found throughout (e.g., pp.