Toward a Literature of Human Rights

Leprosy, Hansen’s Disease and Japanese Patient Writing

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Leprosy Literature/Hansen’s Disease Literature

• Kōseisha, *Complete Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature*, 10 vols, 2002-2010

• But the question of the title: can we call all patient writing Hansen’s Disease literature?
Sensitivity to medical advances and their effect on the functions of literature

• Leprosy Literature
  – Pre-Promin
  – Patients facing a lifetime of quarantine
  – Incurable illness
  – Writers are sufferers

• Hansen’s Disease Literature
  – Post-Promin (post-1946)
  – Campaign for changes in the social and legal status of cured hospital residents
  – Writers are survivors
Japanese Legislation

• 1907 Law Concerning the Prevention of Leprosy
  – Removal of itinerant sufferers from temples where they begged
  – Establishment of 5 public hospitals

• 1931 Leprosy Prevention Law
  – Institutionalization of everyone diagnosed with Hansen’s Disease

• 1953 Revised Leprosy Prevention Law
  – Essentially a continuation of the 1931 law
Japanese Poetry

Tanka, 短歌

– a Japanese poem composed of 31 Japanese phonetic units, broke into phrase patterns of 5-7-5-7-7

– Majority of hospitalized writers were poets

– Composed to reflect an image and evoke the feelings of a particular instant in everyday life
Leprosy Literature (Pre-Promin)

• Often focuses on the shock of diagnosis, the entrance into the hospital and the shock of quarantine, and the ways in which the hospital became a home.
Hospital Gates

My mother cried and my sister clung to me as we parted
I pass through the gates of this hospital
   Shimada Shakusō, 1939
   *Shimada Shakusō Collected Works*, 81

Thinking we will never meet again,
I sent my mother off near the gate
   Tsuji Ippo, 1930
   *The Veil of Daybreak*, 18

The gates to Tokyo’s Zensei Hospital, circa 1909
Crematorium and Prison

Now again the black smoke rising from the crematorium
Reminds me of the fragility of my own body
  Shibata Hoshū, 1925
  *The Shade of the Cypress*, August 1925, 4

Continuing to scream in the jail is painful
Even my voice has become hoarse
  Iizaki Toshiro
  *Complete Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature*, volume 8, 68

↑ The crematorium at Kyushu Hospital, circa 1915

The prison at Kyushu Hospital, circa 1915 →
Medical Care and the Care of Fellow Patients

With a heavy heart, coming to the annex behind the surgery
I was given my chaulmoogra oil shot

Ogawa Suisei, 1937
_The Maple’s Shadow_, 43

Carrying me on his back to treatment my friend is out of breath
In the dismal rain, on a narrow road

Shimada Shakusō, 1939
_Collected Works of Shimada Shakusō_, 112
Promin

My husband cut out and sent me an article on Promin
He waits for my complete recovery

Makino Miho, 1951

Collected Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature Volume 8, 122

Going to get their Promin shots, the hurrying forms
Of the new patients look cheerful

Matsuura Mifū, 1951

Collected Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature Volume 8, 130
From Leprosy to Hansen’s Disease

Despite our combined efforts to change the name to Hansen’s Disease
The broadcast still says leprosarium

Saito Masao, 1956

_Collected Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature_ Volume 8, 171

When the name we who are confined is called changes to Hansen’s Disease patient
A new life will erupt in spring

Takitato Kazuo, 1956

_Collected Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature_ Volume 8, 162
Activism in Hansen’s Disease Literature

The hunger strikers, as if dead, lying unable to move
I put them in bed, yet they said not word

Otai Toshio, 1956

Collected Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature Volume 8, 161

The first one whose leprosy has been completely cured is still living on this island
When is the day they can cross this ocean and return home?

Ninomiya Junko, 1952

Living on the Small Island, 242
Sterilization

My wife is looking at a pregnancy prevention device
We have no use for, as I have had eugenic surgery

Nanjō Tamaki, 1952

*Collected Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature* Volume 8, 177

You say to me, get sterilized and marry me
But at twenty-five, I am hesitant

Minamino Masashi, 1952

*Collected Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature* Volume 8, 182
Lingering Effects

Although the Leprosy Prevention Law was repealed
The wounds given to my siblings are not shallow

Moriyama Eizō, 2001

Collected Works of Hansen’s Disease Literature Volume 8, 538
Conclusion

• Both Leprosy Literature and Hansen’s Disease Literature depicts life in the hospital and illness experience
  – Hospital residents used literature to create communities and connect to the world outside the hospital
• But shifts in post-Promin Hansen’s Disease literature:
  – A genre for political activism and testimony
  – Writing becomes a platform in their fight for a recognition of their human rights
  – The shift from sufferer to survivor

☆ The name change reflects patients’ literary activism, as well as changes in the purpose of patient writing.