

The Paradox Concerning Disability Sports: Exploring Challenges Facing the Paralympics

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Introduction: Identification of the Issue

In recent years, public interest in the Paralympics and disability sports has been rising, and there are noticeably more opportunities for people to watch or participate in disability sports. These trends have a social significance, two of which are often cited. The first is that they can give courage to people with disabilities and act as an agent for motivating them to build their ability and for promoting their social participation. The second is that they can act as a catalyst for change in how people with disabilities are viewed in society and for creating a better physical and psychological environment for people with disabilities. To effectively bring about such outcomes and ripple effects, however, it is necessary that the Paralympics and disability sports are felt to be something more “familiar” not only among disability sports athletes and other parties involved in sports, but also among people with disabilities in general and among able-bodied people. This will require spreading disability sports competitions, increasing name recognition of athletes, and disseminating knowledge, but this process entails a number of latent and already emerging problems. The crux of the problem is that specific objectives and effects result not only in positive outcomes, but also in outcomes that contradict with the intended objectives and end results. This has been described by several researchers as the “Paralympic paradox”.¹

For example, a disabled athlete may attain success and increase their name recognition. This may result in increasing the interest of society at large in the Paralympics, disability sports events, and related activities and competitions. This process, however, implies the shift of a disabled athlete from the category of “a disabled person” to one of “an athlete” for whom “having a disability or not is

irrelevant". As a result, the athlete may be respected but oftentimes considered by many disabled people as unreachable for the very reason of his or her success. Therefore, it is not always clear whether the success of an athlete actually results in encouraging other people with disabilities to participate in sports and in expanding the base of participants in disability sports. To put it another way, the moment a disabled athlete "overcomes disability", the association the athlete has with "disability" becomes weaker. Furthermore, considered in relation to society at large, it also raises the question of whether it was from the perspective of able-bodied people that gave rise to the idea that disability sports help to give courage to people with disabilities and motivate them to become more independent and to develop their ability. In this regard, it poses the more essential questions of "Who is the Paralympics truly for?" and "What is the significance of disability sports?"

With the above approach, this article will analyze and discuss the current status of, and problems related to the paradox as well as gaps and disparities found in the Paralympics and disability sports from the perspective of: disparity between medalists and non-medalists; divergence between "athletes" and people with disabilities in general; disparity among different types of disabilities; the relationship between disability organizations and disability sports organizations; disparity between national and local governments; disparity between men and women; and disparity among countries. Furthermore, in some respects, disparity between disability sports and sports for able-bodied people, or between the Paralympic Games and Olympic Games, has an effect on the paradox in disability sports. This aspect, however, will not be included in this article.

1. Disparity between Medalists and Non-Medalists

As the Paralympic Games become better known and more people take interest in the Paralympic Games as sports or competition, it is natural for media coverage of Paralympians and particularly medalists to expand, and with it, medalists will have a greater number of fans. This tendency further heightens the public's interest in the Paralympic Games. However, if the disparity grows disproportionately between the medalists and non-medalists in the amount of public attention and in public estimation, then there is the risk that winning medals will become the purpose of

athletes participating in the Paralympic Games, that emphasis will be placed on developing athletes' competitive performance, and that the social significance of the Paralympics will be given little attention.

From this perspective, newspaper articles (the Asahi Shimbun (Figure 1), the Nikkei (Figure 2), and the Yomiuri Shimbun (Figure 3)) were used as a measure of public attention, and a comparison was made of the number of articles on medalists and non-medalists at each of the Paralympic Games. For this study, the keyword "Paralympic" was used to extract articles between 2009 and 2018 on each newspaper's database, a determination was made on whether the articles mentioned names of athletes, and if they did, the contents of each article were checked to select corresponding articles. As a result, it was confirmed that there was a wide gap between the number of articles on medalists and on non-medalists and that the media were making medalists into "stars", so to speak, creating a disparity between medalists and non-medalists.

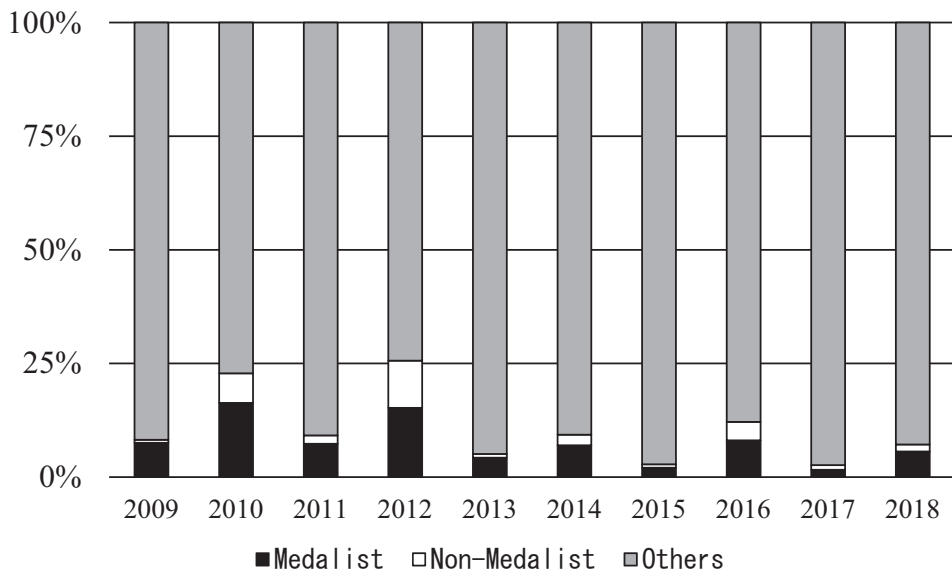


Figure 1. The Ratio of Articles about Medalists and Non-Medalists on the Asahi Shimbun Database

Compiled by Researcher Akira Nagamatsu based on the Asahi Shimbun Company database "Kikuzo II Visual" (morning and evening editions of the Asahi Shimbun)

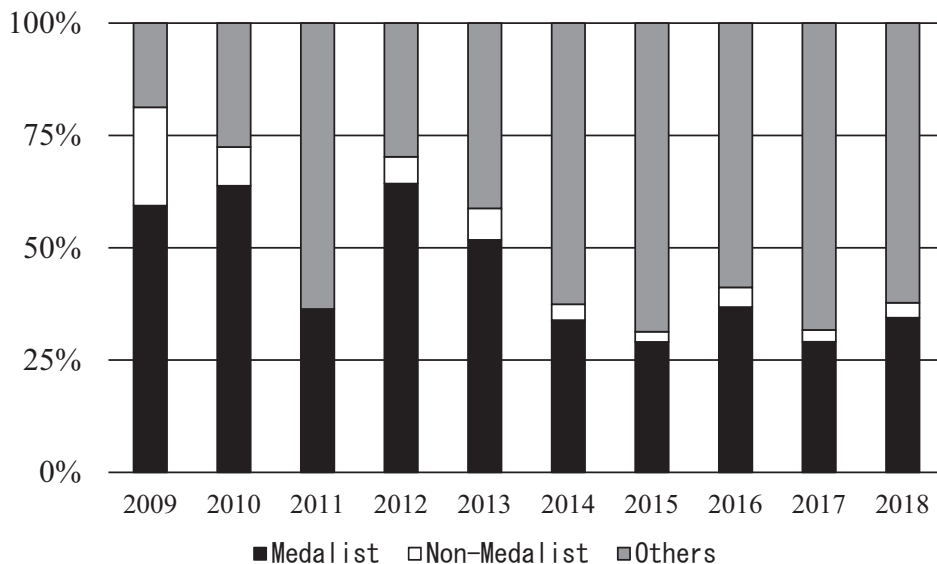


Figure 2. The Ratio of Articles about Medalists and Non-Medalists on the Nikkei Database

Compiled by Researcher Akira Nagamatsu based on the Nikkei, Inc. database “Nikkei Telecom 21” (morning and evening editions of the Nikkei)

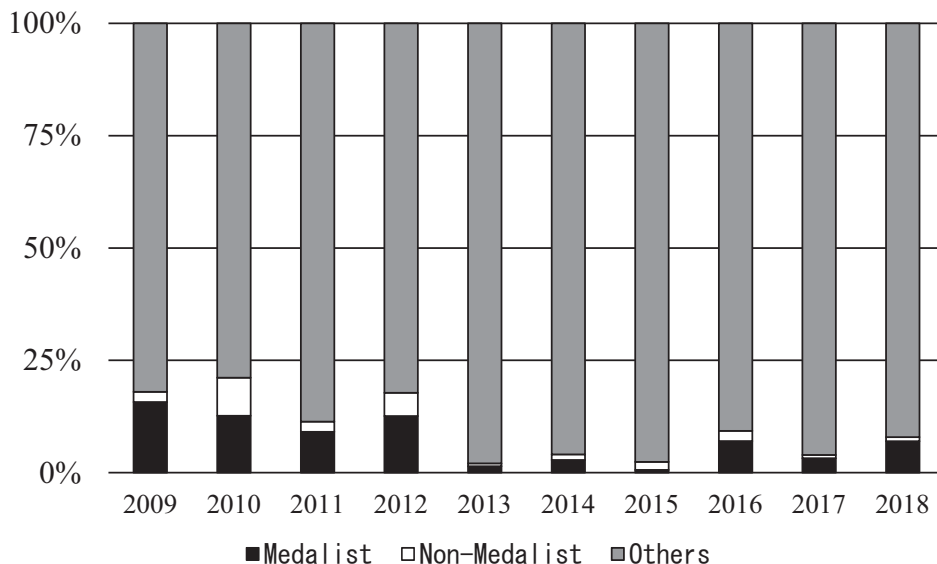


Figure 3. The Ratio of Articles about Medalists and Non-Medalists on the Yomiuri Shimbun Database

Compiled by Researcher Akira Nagamatsu based on the Yomiuri Shimbun database “Yomidasu Rekishikan”

Table 1. Medals Won by All Japanese Athletes Participating in the PyeongChang Paralympic Games and Total Number of Newspaper Articles*

Athlete	Medal	Total Number of Medals (including Paralympic Games other than PyeongChang)	Total Number of Newspaper Articles
NITTA Yoshihiro	○	5	373
YAMAMOTO Atsushi	○	3	268
MORII Taiki	○	5	262
KANO Akira	○	4	248
MURAOKA Momoka	○	5	237
SUZUKI Takeshi	○	3	193
NARITA Gurimu	○	2	148
MISAWA Hiraku		0	136
DEKIJIMA Momoko		0	124
SATO Keiichi		0	104
ABE Yurika		0	96
KOIKE Gakuta		0	77
SUDO Satoru		1	73
NATSUME Kenji		0	69
UEHARA Daisuke		1	64
NITTA Nonno		0	57
OGURI Daichi		0	50
HONDO Ammi		0	45
TAKAMURA Kazuto		0	44
HOSHIZAWA Masaru		0	43
KAWAYOKE Taiki		0	41
FUKUSHIMA Shinobu		1	38
IWAMOTO Keigo		0	36
TAKAHASHI Kazuhiro		1	35
MISAWA Eiji		1	32
YOSHIKAWA Mamoru		1	30
KUMAGAI Masaharu		0	29
TAKAHASHI Kohei		0	25
ANNAKA Mikio		1	18
SHIBA Taimei		0	15
KODAMA Nao		0	14
NAKAMURA Toshiyuki		1	11
HORIE Wataru		0	11
MOCHIZUKI Kazuya		0	11
NAGUMO Keisuke		0	10
SHIOYA Yoshihiro		0	9
HIROSE Susumu		0	9
ISHII Hideaki		0	6

*The databases “Yomidasu Rekishikan”, “Kikuzo II Visual”, and “Nikkei Telecom 21” were used to obtain the total number of articles. The search covered the longest period available on each database, except for the Yomiuri Shimbun database, which restricted the search to the Heisei Period (1989-2019). The name of each athlete and the word “Para” were used as search keywords to exclude articles on same-name persons who are not the athletes.

Compiled by Researcher Akira Nagamatsu based on “Yomidasu Rekishikan”, “Kikuzo II Visual,” and “Nikkei Telecom 21”

**Table 2. The Amount of Reward Money Awarded
by the Japanese Paralympic Committee**

Year	Paralympic Games	Reward Money in Yen		
2008	Beijing (Summer)	Gold:1 Million	Silver:0.7 Million	Bronze:0.5 Million
2010	Vancouver (Winter)	Gold:1 Million	Silver:0.7 Million	Bronze:0.5 Million
2012	London (Summer)	Gold:1 Million	Silver:0.7 Million	Bronze:0.5 Million
2014	Sochi (Winter)	Gold:1.5 Million	Silver:1 Million	Bronze:0.7 Million
2016	Rio de Janeiro (Summer)	Gold:1.5 Million	Silver:1 Million	Bronze:0.7 Million
2018	PyeongChang (Winter)	Gold:3 Million	Silver:2 Million	Bronze:1 Million

Compiled by Researcher Akira Nagamatsu based on the Yomiuri Shimbun (evening edition, September 4, 2008), the Asahi Shimbun (morning edition, May 21, 2014), and the Nikkei (morning edition, March 27, 2018)

The Figure 1.-3. are a comparison of the number of articles on all athletes. A comparative analysis was also made of the number of articles on medalists and non-medalists among Japanese athletes who participated in the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Winter Games (hereafter shortened to “PyeongChang Paralympic Games”). The results, shown in Table 1, confirm the wide disparity between medalists and non-medalists.

There is the risk that these trends may widen the disparity between medalists and non-medalists not only in terms of the athletes’ name recognition, but also in terms of securing sponsors, practice environments and income. In particular, the reward money for winning a medal, the amount of which has been rising in recent years as shown in Table 2, symbolizes the growing disparity in how the athletes are treated.

One of the causes of the wider disparity between medalists and non-medalists is the significant expectations and interest that people have about athletes winning medals. It is also possible that setting a goal on the number of gold medals may be playing a part in widening the disparity. For example, the Japanese Paralympic Committee (JPC) had originally set a goal of winning 22 gold medals² and ranking 7th in the gold medal ranking (although more recently, the JPC has released only the goal related to ranking)³ at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games (hereafter the “Tokyo Paralympic Games”). For the PyeongChang Paralympic Games, Canada set the goal of more than 16 gold medals to improve the number they won at the previous winter Paralympic Games in Sochi.⁴ The UK set the goal of winning at least 121 medals at

the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games (hereafter the “Rio Paralympic Games”).⁵ On the other hand, although it is said unofficially that the U.S. has a goal, it has not been disclosed. Australia deliberately withheld from setting a goal at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games to “minimize pressure on athletes”.⁶ Given the situation in each country, we will need to consider a number of factors, including whether the goal is officially disclosed or not, and whether the goal is for gold medals or a total number of medals, when examining to what degree setting such goals on the number of medals widens disparity between medalists and non-medalists in terms of public attention and in other aspects.

There is on the other hand a view that is worth noting: even though media coverage on medalists at the Paralympic Games may have temporarily intensified, the recognition that Paralympic athletes have in society, unlike Olympic athletes, is still limited and that at this stage, it would be more important to increase and deepen media coverage of Paralympic athletes regardless of whether they have won a medal or not, than to make an issue of disparity between medalists and non-medalists. In fact, Momoka Muraoka was featured in many articles after winning five medals at the PyeongChang Paralympic Games, but when she won the Women’s Super-Combined Sitting event at the World Para Alpine Skiing World Cup on January 31, 2019, after the PyeongChang Paralympic Games, newspaper coverage among the three newspapers (the Asahi Shimbun, the Nikkei, and the Yomiuri Shimbun) was limited to a few lines each in the morning edition of the Asahi Shimbun and the Yomiuri Shimbun.⁷ This suggests that Paralympic medalists have not necessarily achieved a “star” status.

2. Divergence between “Athletes” and People with Disabilities in General

If we define “athletes” as those who take part in the Paralympic Games and those who enter domestic or international events in the hope of competing in the Paralympic Games, the more a disabled person becomes an “elite athlete” who wins medals and performs at the highest levels of competition, the more we hear them say that they want to be seen not as “a person with a disability” but as “an athlete” for whom “having a disability or not is irrelevant”. This tendency is the very symbol of the divide, or potential divide, between such athletes and people with disabilities in

general. In other words, the more a Paralympic athlete and others involved try to increase the athlete's competitive ability, win medals and seek to be recognized not as "a person with a disability" but as "an athlete", the more the athlete becomes a person who exists in a different dimension for people with disabilities in general. This creates a paradox with the original aim of the Paralympics, which is to give courage to people with disabilities in general through sports and to promote their participation in society. This tendency is also substantiated by the findings of the Study of the Paralympics and Broadcasting conducted jointly by the Nippon Foundation Paralympic Support Center and NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute.

As shown in Table 3, the percentage of people with disabilities (18 and over) who showed interest in the Paralympic Games (those responding either "very much interested" or "interested" to the question "Are you interested in the Paralympic Games?") was only 36.2% on average. The level of interest in the Paralympic Games is higher than that of able-bodied people (28.3% on average), but is substantially lower than the level of interest the same respondents with disabilities had in the Olympic Games (57.9% on average). It can be said here again that we can glimpse the divide between the "athletes" and people with disabilities in general.

This divide between the "athletes" and people with disabilities in general, at the level of each person's consciousness, can be understood as an essential divide between identification of the self as "athletes" and identification of the self as a "disabled person". In other words, for people with disabilities in general, "being disabled" makes up a large part of their identity, whereas for many disability sports athletes, "being an athlete" makes up a large part of their identity. The more the Paralympics are reported in the sports section of newspapers, rather than in articles that highlight success stories of people with disabilities in the general news page, the more the divide between the "athletes" and people with disabilities in general will widen.

It can also be said that the more exceptional the performance of disability sports athletes, the more it will induce in people with disabilities the feeling that they could never do the same as those athletes if they were expected to do so. This also widens the divide between the two. On this point, Overboe (2009) has written as follows:⁸

Paradoxically, the image of the disabled hero validates the lived experience of a few disabled people and invalidates the lived experience of the majority of

Table 3. Interest in the PyeongChang Olympic Games and the PyeongChang Paralympic Games

		Interest in the Olympics Base=All the People in the Survey						Interest in the Paralympics Base=All the People in the Survey									
		%						%									
	Age	Number of Samples	Very Much Interested	Interested	Not Sure	Not Much Interested	Not at All Interested	Subtotal of "Interested"	Subtotal of "Not Sure" + "Not Interested"	Very Much Interested	Interested	Not Sure	Not Much Interested	Not at All Interested	Subtotal of "Interested"	Subtotal of "Not Sure" + "Not Interested"	
People with impairments	Answered in Person	SUBTOTAL	1275	26.3	31.5	15.1	8.9	18.1	57.9	42.1	11.0	25.2	25.0	16.8	21.9	36.2	63.8
		SUBTOTAL of the Following 4 Impairments	1000	29.9	37.8	14.3	8.5	9.5	67.7	32.3	11.6	32.9	22.4	19.9	13.3	44.5	55.5
		Visual Impairment	250	29.7	38.1	9.6	11.2	11.4	67.8	32.2	15.3	31.3	19.3	18.4	15.7	46.6	53.4
		Hearing Impairment	150	32.3	42.8	12.9	5.0	7.0	75.1	24.9	19.6	44.2	17.7	9.4	9.1	63.8	36.2
	18 or Above	Physical Impairment	500	25.8	36.0	15.3	11.8	11.2	61.7	38.3	11.0	31.5	23.3	18.5	15.7	42.5	57.5
		Internal Impairment	100	36.8	39.4	14.3	2.9	6.6	76.3	23.7	9.4	32.7	22.9	25.7	9.3	42.1	57.9
		Intellectual Impairment	75	30.7	21.3	21.3	4.0	22.7	52.0	48.0	18.7	25.3	25.3	6.7	24.0	44.0	56.0
		Mental Disorder	100	25.0	29.0	18.0	10.0	18.0	54.0	46.0	7.0	21.0	28.0	21.0	23.0	28.0	72.0
		Developmental Disorder	100	23.0	29.0	12.0	9.0	27.0	52.0	48.0	13.0	21.0	25.0	11.0	30.0	34.0	66.0
		SUBTOTAL	400	8.4	25.4	16.9	15.4	33.9	33.8	66.2	4.1	14.0	20.5	21.6	39.9	18.0	82.0
Answered by Proxy	Under 18	55	3.6	32.7	14.5	18.2	30.9	36.4	63.6	3.6	20.0	12.7	25.5	38.2	23.6	76.4	
	Mental Disorder	262	8.4	24.0	16.8	18.7	32.1	32.4	67.6	3.1	14.1	19.8	23.3	39.7	17.2	82.8	
	Intellectual Impairment	83	10.8	24.1	18.1	8.4	38.6	34.9	65.1	6.0	10.8	25.3	16.9	41.0	16.9	83.1	
	Intellectual Impairment	100	11.0	23.0	17.0	10.0	39.0	34.0	66.0	6.0	15.0	22.0	18.0	39.0	21.0	79.0	
Non-Disabled People		500	21.6	35.3	12.3	11.1	19.7	56.9	43.1	6.2	22.1	26.2	19.0	26.4	28.3	71.7	

Source: The Nippon Foundation Paralympic Support Center and NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, 2018, "Study of the Paralympics and Broadcasting."

disabled people because they cannot meet such expectation.

It is also possible to find a social meaning behind this feeling of discomfort or disparity at the personal level on the part of people with disabilities in general. This is because praising athletes for their high performance levels may inadvertently embed in society the idea that “overcoming disabilities” is dependent on individual efforts and will, and it may be that the unconscious rejection of this very idea on the part of people with disabilities is settling into the form of “discomfort”.

3. Disparity among Types of Disability

The public’s knowledge of, and interest in, disability sports varies depending on the type of competition or event. In addition, there is a disparity in involvement in the Paralympic Games depending on the type of disability.

As a matter of convenience, we categorize disabilities into physical disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment, and intellectual disability. Those with a hearing impairment do not participate in the Paralympics but have their own international event, the Deaflympics. A comparison between the Deaflympics and Paralympics in terms of the number of participating countries and athletes and the number of events is shown in Table 4. There is a considerable difference in size.

Table 4. Number of Participating Countries, Athletes, and Events at the Paralympics and Deaflympics

Games	Summer Games		Winter Games	
	The Rio 2016 Paralympic Games	2017 Samsun XXIII. Summer Deaflympics	The Sochi 2014 Paralympic Games	18 th 2015 Winter Deaflympics Khanty-Mansiysk
Countries	159 + IPA	86	45	27
Athletes	4,328	2,873	541	336
Sports	22	19	5	5

Compiled by the author based on the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf’s official website of the Deaflympics (“Games,” <https://www.deaflympics.com/>, (May 27, 2019)); 23rd Summer Deaflympics official website (“Sports,” www.deaflympics2017.org, (May 27, 2019)) and IPC database (“Paralympic Games,” <https://www.paralympic.org/paralympic-games>, (May 27, 2019)).

In terms of newspaper coverage, a comparison for instance of the number of articles on the Rio Paralympic Games and those on the Deaflympics in Samsun, Turkey, in 2017, points to a significant disparity as shown in Table 5. In particular, few photographs were used in newspaper articles covering the Deaflympics, and there was no television broadcasting of the Deaflympics.

Table 5. Comparison of the Number of Articles on the Paralympics and Deaflympics in Three Newspapers

Games	The Asahi Shimbun	The Yomiuri Shimbun	The Mainichi	Total
The Rio 2016 Paralympic Games	301	373	335	1,009
2017 Samsun XXIII. Summer Deaflympics	21	23	9	53

The search words used were “Paralympics” for the Rio Games and “Deaflympics” for the Samsun Games. The search period was from the opening ceremony until the closing ceremony (Rio Games - September 7 to 18, 2016; Samsun Games - July 18 to 30, 2017). Each of the newspapers includes the morning, evening, and local editions.

Compiled by Researcher Masahiro Nakamura based on “Kikuzo II Visual,” “Yomidasu Rekishikan,” and the Mainichi Newspapers’ database “Maisaku”

These differences in media coverage are also reflected in the public’s knowledge of the Paralympics, Deaflympics, and Special Olympics. A comparison of the public’s knowledge of each event, shown in Table 6, indicates that there is considerable disparity among the three.

Table 6. Degree of the Public’s Knowledge of the Paralympics, Deaflympics, and Special Olympics

The Paralympics	The Deaflympics	The Special Olympics
97.6%	10.1%	17.9%

Compiled by Researcher Kenjiro Nakayama based on the Nippon Foundation Paralympic Support Center 2017 survey on “The General Public’s Awareness and Interest in the Paralympics in Japan and in Some Selected Countries after the Rio 2016 Games”

At present, the events that people with intellectual disabilities can officially participate in at the Paralympic Games are limited to three (athletics, swimming, and table tennis) out of the 22 planned to be held at the Tokyo Paralympic Games. For the winter Paralympic Games, there continues to be no events in which intellectually

disabled people can participate. However, people with intellectual disabilities also have their own international games called the “Special Olympics”. A comparison of the number of participating countries and athletes, and the number of events, in Table 7, shows that the Special Olympics are in par with the Paralympics. Therefore, the disparity between intellectual disability and other types of disability is not in the number of participating athletes and events at international games, but a difference in the significance of participating in each of the sporting events, or in other words, the difference in the underlying principles of the Paralympics and the Special Olympics.

Table 7. Number of Participating Countries, Athletes, and Events at the Paralympics and Special Olympics World Games

Games	Summer Games		Winter Games	
	The Rio 2016 Paralympic Games	The 2015 Special Olympics World Summer Games, Los Angeles	The Sochi 2014 Paralympic Games	The 2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games, PyeongChang
Countries	159 + IPA	165	45	100
Athletes	4,328	approx. 6,200	547	approx. 2,300
Sports	22	25	5	8

Compiled by the author based on Special Olympics International, “Sports and Games,” <https://www.specialolympics.org/about/history>, (May 27, 2019); [Special Olympics World Games History](https://media.specialolympics.org/soi/files/resources/World_Games/2013-World-Winter-Games/Docs_PressReleaseFactSheet/SOWorldGamesHistory_UpdatedMarch2012.pdf),

https://media.specialolympics.org/soi/files/resources/World_Games/2013-World-Winter-Games/Docs_PressReleaseFactSheet/SOWorldGamesHistory_UpdatedMarch2012.pdf, (May 27, 2019) and IPC database (May 27, 2019)

4. Gap between Disability Organizations and Disability Sports Organizations

There is also a gap in the relationship between welfare-related disability organizations and disability sports organizations. Even though there are a few cases of representatives from disability organizations sitting as board members of disability sports organizations (the president of the Japan Federation of the Blind, for example, serves as president of the Japan Blind Judo Federation, and the general manager of

the union of national parents' associations for persons with intellectual disabilities (Inclusion Japan) serves as a director of the All Nippon ID Sport Association (as of May 2019)), it can hardly be said that there is a sufficient level of collaboration between disability organizations and disability sports organizations. To begin with, there are hardly any disability organizations that have identified promotion of disability sports as one of the main pillars of their activities (by officially setting up a department in charge of sports within their organizations), with the exception of the Japanese Federation of the Deaf, as of March 2018. This state of affairs shows that there is a gap or divergence between welfare-related disability organizations and disability sports organizations.

In many instances, only a few disability sports organizations have people with disabilities on the board and among their employees. Of the 23 Paralympic sports organizations surveyed by the Nippon Foundation Paralympic Support Center in October 2018, the organizations that had people with disabilities on the board (in positions of chairperson, president, or board member) were limited to the Japan Para Shooting Sport Federation, Japan Para Table Tennis Association, Japanese Para-Swimming Federation, and Japan Boccia Association. The organizations that have people with disabilities among their employees were limited to the Japan Wheelchair Tennis Association, Japan Wheelchair Basketball Federation, Japan Para-Volleyball Association, Japan Para Table Tennis Association, Japan Para Ice Hockey Association, Japan Swimming Federation for Persons with an Intellectual Disability, and Japan Para Archery Federation.

5. Disparity between the National and Local Governments

At the level of the national government, administration of disability sports was transferred from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2014, integrating the planning and implementation of sports promotion policies for both able-bodied sports and disability sports. At the level of prefectural governments, administration of disability sports has been integrated into departments that have responsibility over sports for the able-bodied in the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and 10 prefectures (Iwate, Fukushima, Kanagawa, Shiga, Tottori, Hiroshima, Ehime, Kochi, Fukuoka, and Saga

Prefectures), as of October 2018. Among the prefectures, Iwate and Ehime, which hosted the National Sports Festival of Japan (hereafter the “NSF”) and the National Sports Festival for People with Disabilities (hereafter the “NSFPD”) in 2016 and 2017, respectively, each set up a department overseeing both the NSF and the NSFPD in the preparatory phase of the events. After the events, both prefectures carried out restructuring to integrate the offices responsible for sports for the able-bodied and the disabled, establishing the Department of Culture and Sports in Iwate Prefectural Government and the Sports and Culture Promotion Department in Ehime Prefectural Government. This is a case where the departments responsible for sports for the disabled and the able-bodied were integrated because the NSF and NSFPD were held in the same prefecture.

At the level of the national government, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which has the Japan Sports Agency as its subordinate organization, administers education in schools on the Olympics and the Paralympics, which makes coordination easy. At the level of prefectures, however, the Board of Education in each prefecture generally has responsibility over Paralympics education. As there is no department responsible for Paralympics education within the prefectural government itself, there tends to be little coordination between promotion of disability sports in society at large and Paralympics education in schools.

Among the 28 disability sports organizations that have their offices in the Nippon Foundation Paralympic Support Center, moreover, only seven have local branches (either at the prefectural or other regional levels), according to data published on their websites (as of February 2018), suggesting that the foundation for promoting and conducting PR activities for disability sports competitions has not been sufficiently established at the local level.

6. Disparity between Men and Women

It is evident, also from comparison with the Olympic Games, that women athletes competing in the Paralympic Games are less frequently discussed than their male counterparts, and this has also drawn international attention. One of the main reasons for this is the difference in the number of men and women athletes participating in the Paralympic Games. As shown in Table 8, women athletes’ participation rate in the

Paralympic Games, and particularly in the winter Paralympic Games, is lower compared with that in the Olympic Games. Disparity between men and women is not only limited to athletes. From the perspective of the ratio of women board members, only four out of 13 members (29%) on the IPC Governing Board are women,⁹ and only three out of 15 members (20%) of the Executive Board of the Asian Paralympic Committee are women.¹⁰

Table 8. Women Athletes Participating in the Olympic and Paralympic Games (%)

% of Female Athletes (Summer Games)			% of Female Athletes (Winter Games)		
Year	The Paralympics (%)	The Olympics (%)	Year	The Paralympics (%)	The Olympics (%)
1960	21.5	11.4	1976	23.0	20.6
1964	26.7	13.2	1980	30.6	21.7
1968	25.4	14.2	1984	28.9	21.5
1972	29.1	14.6	1988	25.7	21.2
1976	21.3	20.7	1992	26.7	27.1
1980	25.6	21.5	1994	23.7	30.0
1984	25.5	23.0	1998	27.7	36.2
1988	22.1	26.1	2002	26.5	36.9
1992	23.3	28.8	2006	26.4	38.2
1996	24.3	34.0	2010	31.8	40.7
2000	25.5	38.2	2014	31.3	40.3
2004	30.6	40.7	2018	30.9	41.3
2008	34.5	42.4			
2012	35.4	44.2			
2016	38.6	45.0			

Compiled by Researcher Kei Hiraga based on IOC, 2016, Factsheet Women in the Olympic Movement; 2018, Factsheet the Olympic Winter Games and IPC database (May 27, 2019)

7. Disparity among Countries

It is easily conceivable that each country's economic and social conditions are more readily reflected in the performance of athletes at the Paralympic Games than at the Olympic Games, because of differences in the degree to which social welfare policies

and assistive technology are implemented and used in each country.

This disparity among countries is evident, first of all, in that many countries are restricted in the events they have the capacity to take part in. The Rio Paralympic Games had a total of 22 events, but the number of countries that could partake in more than ten of those events was limited to 27 out of the 159 countries participating in the Games. The breakdown of these 27 countries by region shows that of the 27 countries, 16 were composed of European countries and North American countries, five were from the Asia and Pacific region, four from the Middle East and Africa, and two from South America, with European countries and North American countries making up the majority. Among the six team sports events (football 5-a-side, football 7-a-side, goalball, sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball, and wheelchair rugby), only 5 countries could participate in four or more events.¹¹

Secondly, in terms of the number of medals won at the Rio Paralympic Games, the top ten countries were, with the exception of China and Australia, all European countries plus the U.S. The percentage of medals won by the top three countries was 31.5% (the top three countries of medal share (gold, silver, and bronze) were China, the UK, and Ukraine). At the PyeongChang Paralympic Games, the percentage of medals won by the top three countries (the U.S., Canada, and Ukraine) was 39.6%. For the share of medals and share of medal points in Tables 9 to 14 below, any number less than one unit for each case, has been rounded to the nearest unit.

Table 9. Share of Medals Won at Summer Paralympic Games

Games	Top 3 Countries	Top 5 Countries	Top 10 Countries
The London 2012 Paralympic Games	29.8%	41.8%	60.2%
The Rio 2016 Paralympic Games	31.5%	43.8%	60.6%

Compiled by Researcher Hanae Endo based on IPC database (May 27, 2019)

Table 10. Share of Medals Won at Winter Paralympic Games

	Top 3 Countries	Top 5 Countries	Top 10 Countries
Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Winter Games	42.2%	58.9%	84.4%
Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games **	56.9%	71.3%	90.7%
PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Winter Games	39.6%	57.6%	79.7%

**Considering that the host country Russia won an exceptional number of medals at the Sochi Paralympic Games, the data on the Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Winter Games are also listed for comparison.

Compiled by Researcher Hanae Endo based on IPC database (May 27, 2019)

Table 11. Share of Top Ten Countries Winning Medals at the London 2012 Paralympic Games

	NPC	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	Medal Point	Region	Share of Medals***	Share of Points****
1	China	95	71	65	231	492	Asia	15.2%	16.2%
2	Great Britain	34	43	43	120	231	Europe	7.9%	7.6%
3	Russia	36	38	28	102	212	Europe	6.7%	7.0%
4	United States	31	29	38	98	189	America	6.4%	6.2%
5	Australia	32	23	30	85	172	Oceania	5.6%	5.7%
6	Ukraine	32	24	28	84	172	Europe	5.5%	5.7%
7	Germany	18	26	22	66	128	Europe	4.3%	4.2%
8	France	8	19	18	45	80	Europe	3.0%	2.6%
9	Brazil	21	14	8	43	99	America	2.8%	3.3%
10	Spain	8	18	16	42	76	Europe	2.8%	2.5%

***The share of medals is the total number of medals won by a country shown as a percentage of all medals.

****The share of medal points is the total medal points of each country, calculated, for matter of convenience, by adding three points for each gold medal, two points for each silver medal, and one point for each bronze medal, shown as a percentage of all medal points.

Compiled by Researcher Hanae Endo based on IPC database (May 27, 2019)

Table 12. Share of Top Ten Countries Winning Medals at the Rio Paralympic Games

	NPC	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	Medal Point	Region	Share of Medals***	Share of Points****
1	China	107	81	51	239	534	Asia	15.0%	16.8%
2	Great Britain	64	39	44	147	314	Europe	9.2%	9.9%
3	Ukraine	41	37	39	117	236	Europe	7.3%	7.4%
4	United States	40	44	31	115	239	America	7.2%	7.5%
5	Australia	22	30	29	81	155	Oceania	5.1%	4.9%
6	Brazil	14	29	29	72	129	America	4.5%	4.1%
7	Netherlands	17	19	26	62	115	Europe	3.9%	3.6%
8	Germany	18	25	14	57	118	Europe	3.6%	3.7%
9	Poland	9	18	12	39	75	Europe	2.4%	2.4%
10	Italy	10	14	15	39	73	Europe	2.4%	2.3%

Compiled by Researcher Hanae Endo based on IPC database (May 27, 2019)

Table 13. Share of Top Ten Countries Winning Medals at the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games

	NPC	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	Medal Point	Region	Share of Medals***	Share of Points****
1	Russia	30	28	22	80	168	Europe	37.0%	38.9%
2	Ukraine	5	9	11	25	44	Europe	11.6%	10.2%
3	United States	2	7	9	18	29	America	8.3%	6.7%
4	Canada	7	2	7	16	32	America	7.4%	7.4%
5	Germany	9	5	1	15	38	Europe	6.9%	8.8%
6	France	5	3	4	12	25	Europe	5.6%	5.8%
7	Austria	2	5	4	11	20	Europe	5.1%	4.6%
8	Slovakia	3	2	2	7	15	Europe	3.2%	3.5%
9	Japan	3	1	2	6	13	Asia	2.8%	3.0%
10	Great Britain	1	3	2	6	11	Europe	2.8%	2.5%

Compiled by Researcher Hanae Endo based on IPC database (May 27, 2019)

Table 14. Share of Top Ten Countries Winning Medals at the PyeongChang Paralympic Games

	NPC	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	Medal Point	Region	Share of Medals***	Share of Points****
1	United States	13	15	8	36	77	America	16.6%	17.9%
2	Canada	8	4	16	28	48	America	12.9%	11.1%
3	Ukraine	7	7	8	22	43	Europe	10.1%	10.0%
4	France	7	8	5	20	42	Europe	9.2%	9.7%
5	Germany	7	8	4	19	41	Europe	8.8%	9.5%
6	Belarus	4	4	4	12	24	Europe	5.5%	5.6%
7	Slovakia	6	4	1	11	27	Europe	5.1%	6.3%
8	Japan	3	4	3	10	20	Asia	4.6%	4.6%
9	Norway	1	3	4	8	13	Europe	3.7%	3.0%
10	Netherlands	3	3	1	7	16	Europe	3.2%	3.7%

Compiled by Researcher Hanae Endo based on IPC database (May 27, 2019)

In terms of host cities of the 15 summer Paralympic Games held between 1960 and 2016, only six were hosted outside of Europe and the U.S., namely, Tokyo in 1964, Tel Aviv in 1968, Seoul in 1988, Sydney in 2000, Beijing in 2008, and Rio de Janeiro in 2016. For the 12 winter Paralympic Games held since 1976, only two were hosted outside of Europe and North American countries, namely, Nagano in 1998 and PyeongChang in 2018.

When the ratio of countries winning medals to countries not winning any medals is observed chronologically from the beginning of the history of the Paralympic Games, we can see that as shown in Figure 4, since the Seoul Paralympic Games in 1988, the increase in the number of participating countries and the increase in the number of countries not winning any medals are practically in parallel, suggesting that progress has not necessarily been made in closing the disparity. A similar trend can also be observed for the winter Paralympic Games, starting from the time of the Nagano Games.

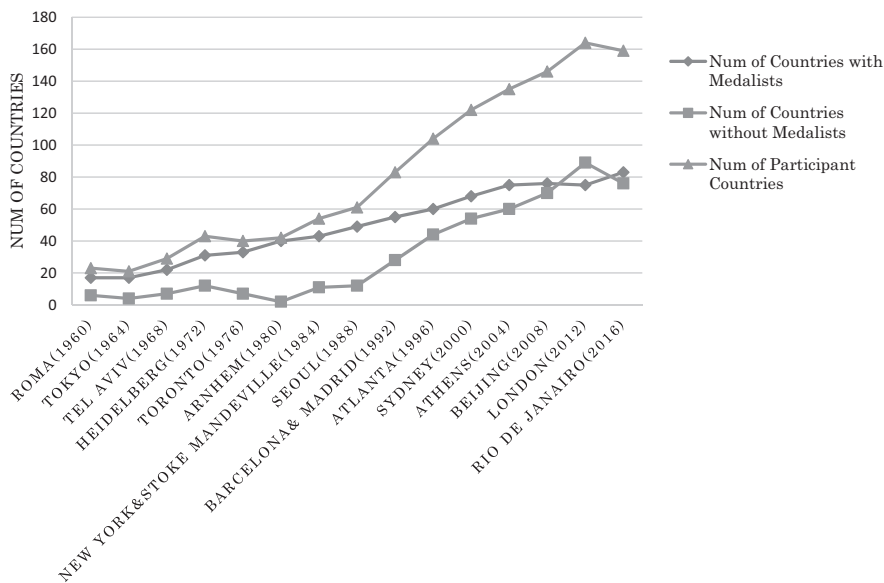


Figure 4. The Number of Countries Winning Medals and Countries Not Winning Any Medals (Summer Games)
 Compiled by Researcher Hanae Endo based on IPC database (May 27, 2019)

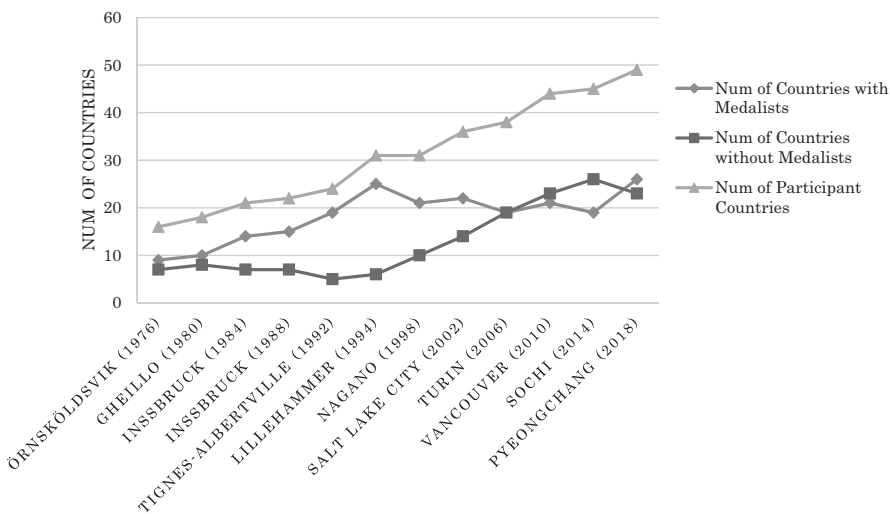


Figure 5. The Number of Countries Winning Medals and Countries Not Winning Any Medals (Winter Games)
 Compiled by Researcher Hanae Endo based on IPC database (May 27, 2019)

Towards the Future

As the public's knowledge of the Paralympics grows and their interest in Paralympic events is deepened, the issues and challenges facing the Paralympics are increasingly coming to the fore and becoming more apparent. In particular, because there are expectations that the Paralympics may have a positive ripple effect on changing the awareness and behavior of disabled and able-bodied people in relation to promoting social participation of people with disabilities, one of the central themes of future Paralympic research should be to study how the significance of the Paralympics may change or evolve with its development. In that respect, it would be fortunate if this article were to contribute in any small way to discussions on the future success of the Paralympics.

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