

# Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Legacy, Disability and Japan — Muzukashi desu ne?

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## Introduction

In recent times, a key policy focus for cities hosting the Paralympic Games is to make the host city and country more accessible for disabled residents and, by extension, disabled tourists. Over the past half century, a spike in policy and public interest, and popularity of the Paralympic Games, which have grown to become the second largest multi-sport event on the planet after the Olympic Games (Brittain, 2016), has played a key role in recognising both the sports participation and other everyday challenges disabled people face within the wider society. When Tokyo finally got to hold the delayed 2020 Paralympic Games in August 2021 it became the first city to ever host them twice, having previously hosted them in 1964. However, the latest version of the Games came with higher and more explicit expectations to deliver social change beyond the Games for disabled people in Japan that although present in 1964, were on a much smaller and low-key scale, with far lower expectations (Brittain, 2016).

In the lead up to the Tokyo 2020 Games, Tokyo's Governor Yuriko Koike, stated Japan and the host city was prioritising the Paralympics to promote positive change:

“...putting weight on hosting a successful Paralympics is more important than a successful Olympics...In Tokyo and Japan we have an aging society, and it is clear there will be more and more people who will be requiring the use of wheelchairs or canes in coming years. Preparing for the Paralympics is preparing for Tokyo's aging population” (Kyodo News, 2017: [online]).

Japan's broader approach to accessibility, explicitly focused on the elderly, makes sense at first sight as 1) Japan has an aging population problem often positioned as *the* most critical social and economic problem the country faces to date; and 2) there is a close link between aging and acquired disabilities (United Nations, n.d.). However, Japan's specific emphasis and approach is potentially detrimental to the general aim of universal design, accessibility and improving the lives of disabled people across the host country and city. For clarity, universal design refers to:

'the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size or disability. This includes public places in the built environment such as buildings, streets or spaces that the public have access to; products and services provided in those places; and systems that are available including information and communications technology' (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2020: Online).

Over-emphasis on one type of disability may over-shadow others which may ignore challenges faced by those with non-age related disabilities. Cultural factors appear to compound this problem too. The challenges faced by people with non-age related disabilities may become deprioritised when juxtaposed against disabled people with age-related impairments, as Japan's elderly community are often viewed quite differently to the rest of society (Hashizume, 1998). This is something I will discuss in more detail shortly, but first I will take a brief look at the treatment of disabled people in Japan.

### *Disability and Japan*

Disabled people worldwide continue to face persecution and discrimination which isolates them from society. There are two primary mechanisms through which disabled people become deprioritised within and excluded from society (Brittain, Biscaia & Gerard, 2020). First, ableist attitudes subsequently promote negative attitudes toward disability, a system of thinking that may become internalised for some disabled people, and, to varying degrees is something everyone in society is socialised in to (OHRC, n.d.). Second, an inaccessible built environment that is generally designed only for those who most closely embody normative values

(Nourry, 2018) ultimately restricts accessibility and the mobility of disabled people within society. Both mechanisms, inextricably linked with ableism and capitalism, according to Oliver & Barnes (2012), underpin the structural barriers and the related psychological and emotional issues that may comprise everyday living for many disabled people.

Starting in the early 1940s and continuing up until 1996, the Japanese government forcibly sterilised disabled people because it deemed them “inferior” (Al Jazeera, 2018 [online]). The Eugenic Protection Law, modelled on a Nazi German eugenic sterilisation law of 1933, was passed in Japan in 1948 (Morita, 2001) and was not amended until 1996. Indeed, up to the 1980s it was not considered a violation of disabled people’s human rights to confine them in institutions. Although claiming that things have since improved, Hayashi and Okuhira (2001) cite the following example of how disabled people were treated at that time:

‘a standard practice in these institutions was to give hysterectomies to disabled women who menstruate, in order to make the staff’s work easier. Disabled women were simply not regarded as women’ (Hayashi and Okuhira, 2001; p.857).

Despite Hayashi and Okuhira’s claims for improvement, the Shogaisha Research Institute (2017) found that 89% of disabled survey respondents felt that discrimination against disabled people had not improved despite the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Elimination Law in April 2016. In addition, 59% of respondents felt they had experienced direct discrimination in their daily lives, which appears to be in line with comments made by many of the disabled interviewees in my research. It would also clearly indicate that, from the perspective of disabled people at least, the law is not fulfilling its purpose. In addition, a national survey carried out by the Cabinet Office (2017) in Japan highlighted that 84% of participants felt that there is discrimination and prejudice towards disabled people in Japan based upon their disability. Indeed, Japan’s own recent history is replete with examples of the impact of negative attitudes towards disabled people and a lack of understanding of the negative consequences for disabled people in Japan of those attitudes. One recent example is the 2016 Sagami-hara massacre — Japan’s deadliest mass killing

since World War II, where nineteen residents at the Tsukui Yamahiro En (Lily Garden) care facility for people with intellectual disabilities were murdered by Satoshi Uematsu, a 26-year-old employee who sought to kill hundreds of disabled people “for the sake of Japan and world peace” (Hernon, 2017). Unfortunately, many of the underlying prejudices of the Eugenic Protection Law still linger within Japanese society as is highlighted by the fact that families of the 2016 Sagami-hara massacre chose not to release details of those who had died for fear of suffering discrimination themselves for having a family member with a disability (Adams, 2016). Further recent examples include three residents at an Aichi care home for the disabled who were sent to hospital with “holes in the intestines” and the subsequent arrest in December 2020 of a 45-year old care worker for abuse (Barrier Free Japan, 2020a); the Japanese couple sentenced to 13 years in prison for confining their eldest daughter, who had schizophrenia, for over 10 years and letting her freeze to death (Barrier Free Japan, 2020b) or the 20-year old university student who was arrested in August 2020 for threatening to release sarin gas at the Budokan (the Judo Arena built for the 1964 Olympic Games) in order to “kill a lot of people with disabilities” (Barrier Free Japan, 2020c). This kind of ‘direct violence’ against disabled people is becoming less common (or at least less visible) in most countries around the world and forms part of the ‘triangle of violence’ (Direct, Cultural and Structural) that many disabled people suffer on an almost daily basis around the world (Brittain, 2012), which can have a devastating impact on perceptions of what it means to be disabled.

#### *The focus on age-related disability and a barrier-free environment*

According to Palley and Usui (1995) attitudes towards the elderly are influenced by the Confucian tradition of respect for the elderly and familial responsibility for the care of aging parents. Hashizume (1998) claims that this stems from *filial piety*, which means “respect for elders and it charges family members to assume responsibility for caring for their elderly relatives. Filial piety is internalized as a cultural value in Japan through moral education beginning in elementary school” (p.125). In contrast, Japan’s reticence to attend to the needs of disabled people illustrates a deep-rooted and endemic social problem: perfection, particularly aesthetic perfection, which is a cultural value at the heart Japanese society. This is significant

as it leads to the stigmatisation and physical barriers to mobility across Japan, therefore leading to social exclusion of disabled people. Anything but perfect is a seen as not good enough — just one of numerous examples and explanations of Japan's high depression and suicide rates (Nakamura et al., 2012). This is reflected in many of the lived experiences of the interviewees. The interviewee quotes highlight attitudes towards disability in Japan appear, from the perspective of interviewees at least, to be highly negative and based in an ableist view of their perceived abilities. This helps to emphasise why tackling negative attitudes toward disabled people is significant, not just for Japan but for other countries who share similar prejudices. Japan appears obsessed with perfection, which may help explain some of the indifference for those who do have a disability and so deviate from the ableist narrative of physical perfection. It also emphasises the dangers of focussing purely on environmental barrier removal at the expense of increasing understanding of and attitudes towards disabled people — something that will be highlighted further in the findings.

## Methods

### *Data Collection*

This research used a flexible, qualitative design to capture the social reality for a group of disabled Japanese individuals, using their own thoughts, experiences, and opinions, in their own words. The research was conducted in partnership with two Tokyo-based gatekeeper organisations (Disabled Person's International — Japan and the Co-Innovation Laboratory) who enabled access to my interviewees through their client base and contacts. At each interview the interviewer was accompanied by a native Japanese speaker who also spoke English to act as an interpreter. Two interviews were held in English as the participant was fluent. All participants were given a Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form that had been translated into Japanese and so were able to provide written and verbal informed consent for participation. Interviews all took place in a location convenient and comfortable to the interviewee and a semi-structured interview guide was used during the interviews with extra questions asked for either clarification purposes or to delve deeper into anything interesting that arose. All interviews were audio

recorded and the English language sections professionally transcribed. The average length of interview was 35.00 minutes (14.15 – 68.58).

### *Participants*

In total, twenty-six Japanese disabled people who lived in the Tokyo Metropolitan area were interviewed. Details of the participants can be found in table 1 along with the pseudonym used for each in the findings section and an overview of the participants by gender, age and impairment group can be found in table 2. The inclusion criteria for interviewees were a) aged 18 years or older, b) self-identified as disabled or as having a disability, and c) able to provide freely given informed consent. The twenty-six Japanese disabled people that formed the sample for this study, included fourteen men and twelve women ranging in age from 19 to 73-years-old.

### *Secondary Data*

Secondary data (reports, surveys news items, etc.) were also collected prior to and after the interview period in order to determine themes to be discussed at the interviews, and then to either back up claims made by interview participants or, in some cases, to highlight differing perspectives.

**Table 1. Interview Participant Details and Pseudonyms**

Interview	Gender	Impairment	Onset	Age	Pseudonym
1	M	Physical	2012	52	Phys1M52
2	M	Physical	2010	52	Phys2M52
3	M	Physical	2016	51	Phys3M53
4	M	Physical	2004	50	Phys4M50
5	M	Physical	2005	61	Phys5M61
6	F	Physical	1998	73	Phys6F73
7	F	Physical	2006	73	Phys7F73
8	M	Physical (Electric wheelchair user)	2003	55	Phys8M55
9	F	Physical	1996	52	Phys9F52
10	F	Physical	2013	49	Phys10F49
11	M	Physical	1968	72	Phys11M72

12	M	Physical	2010	69	Phys12M69
13	F	Physical	2011	58	Phys13F58
14	F	Physical	1996	23	Phys14F23
15	M	Physical (Manual wheelchair user)	Birth	19	Phys15M19
16	M	Physical	Birth	26	Phys16M26
17	F	Physical (Electric wheelchair user)	1968	69	Phys17F69
18	F	Deaf	Birth	27	D/HI1F27
19	F	Hearing Impaired	2001	28	D/HI2F28
20	M	Physical (Electric wheelchair user)	1976	52	Phys18M52
21	M	Physical	Birth	35	Phys19M35
22	F	Physical (Electric wheelchair user)	Birth	40	Phys20F40
23	F	Physical (Invisible disability)	2014	27	Phys21F27
24	M	Blind	1967	67	B/VI1M67
25	F	Physical (Manual wheelchair user)	1994	45	Phys22F45
26	M	Physical (Electric wheelchair user)	Birth	38	Phys23M38

**Table 2. Overview of Interview Participants by Gender, Age and Impairment Group.**

	Number	Age Range	Average Age	Physical Impairment	Deaf/Hearing Impaired	Blind/Visually Impaired
Male	14	19 – 72	50.64 yrs	13	0	1
Female	12	23 – 73	47.00 yrs	10	2	0
Total	26	19 – 73	48.96 yrs	23	2	1

### *Data Analysis*

The recorded interviews were professionally transcribed after which a thematic analysis was performed, identifying themes, and capturing patterns of data. Throughout the analytic process, following the methods suggested by Braun and Clarke (2014), data was grouped together into themes using content analysis in order to provide a robust picture of what it was like to be disabled and living in Japan and the possible impacts the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games might have on their lived reality moving forward.

## Findings and Discussion

Overall, it has to be said that the interviewees painted quite a negative picture of what it was like to live in Japan as a disabled person. This was particularly clear in terms of their perceptions and lived experience of how attitudes towards disability held by non-disabled people in Japan impacted their lives. This forms the first issue to be discussed below. The second major issue was the link between non-disabled attitudes towards disabled people and their understanding of the issues they faced, and explicit focus upon the barrier-free programme by the Japanese and Tokyo Metropolitan governments. The results, discussed in terms of transport within the Tokyo Metropolitan area, clearly highlight how a focus on the physical environment without also attempting to educate and change the attitudes of non-disabled people may actually mean that physical barriers can remain barriers even when they have apparently been removed. The related issue of language use and how this may maintain negative attitudes is also introduced. The fourth and final issue is that of segregation within Japanese society in terms of areas such as education, sport and other areas of social life that may also aid in the maintenance of negative attitudes towards disability.

### *The Importance of Social Attitudes and Understanding of Disability*

The impact of negative social attitudes towards disabled people can be potentially devastating, as was highlighted by several of my Japanese residents who acquired disabilities later in life. Many freely admitted that they either wanted to die or seriously considered committing suicide rather than continuing to live in Japan with a disability, such was their perception of what life would be like. Phys3M51, Phys6F73 and Phys8M55 all admitted that at the onset of their impairments they all could see no other option than to die, such was the perception of life with a disability that they had been socialised into. Phys9F52 even went as far as looking at a suicide website in order to find a way to end her depression at the thought of the life ahead of her with a disability, such is the power of the ableist narrative and the negative attitudes towards disability that it portrays. Indeed Phys8M55 highlighted the complicity of the non-disabled population, and negative attitudes towards disability, in driving these



feelings of worthlessness when he stated:

“Directly after my spinal cord injury... the doctor said to me ‘your body will not work again’. So I thought, I felt, as though I should die, I should die, the only choice I have, it’s to die” (Phys8M55).

This clearly helps to emphasise why tackling negative attitudes toward disabled people is significant, not just for Japan but for other countries who share similar prejudices.

These negative attitudes towards and lack of understanding of the needs of disabled people can also have unintended tragic consequences, such as the cases of two visually impaired people who fell on to rail tracks from the station platform at Tokyo stations and were killed. In the first case at Asagaya station in June 2020 there was no barrier to prevent the fall (Barrier Free Japan, 2020d), but in the second case at Toyochō station in November 2020 platform doors had been fitted earlier that month as part of the barrier free programme, but work was not complete and they had been left open (Nammo, 2020). According to Nammo:

“At Toyochō Station, one attendant is stationed at the ticket gates at all times, and is supposed to approach visually impaired individuals who pass by. However, the train attendant apparently did not notice that Koike was holding a white cane when he entered. Following the accident, the station has increased the number of attendants at ticket gates to two people, and is working to prevent a recurrence” (Nammo, 2020; Online).

However, this need for assistance for certain disabled people by station staff highlights another important link in the whole process of improving accessibility for disabled people — that of economics. In December 2020 three disabled passengers brought a lawsuit against Kyushu railway citing inconvenience and safety concerns over the increasing number of un-manned stations. Kyodo News (2020a, Online) claim this is the result of “budget cuts and Japan’s widespread labor shortage issues” that have “led rail operators to no longer staff many less frequented train stations, causing major accessibility problems for the nation’s disabled”. It is often the case that when budgets need cutting, the people who suffer most from such cuts are those

that society deems less worthy, such as disabled people. In what follows I will highlight the important links between attitudes towards and understanding of the needs of disabled people and their connection to removing environmental barriers. Put bluntly, one without the other is fairly pointless as an environmental barrier, even if apparently removed in the physical sense, may still remain a barrier if attitudes towards and understanding of the needs of disabled people are not improved at the same time. I will highlight these issues with reference mainly to the transport system in Tokyo.

*The Important Links between Social Attitudes/Understanding of Disability and a Barrier-free Environment*

A major component of the Tokyo 2020 'barrier-free' policy programme was that all Tokyo rail and metro stations that were used by more than three thousand users per day should be made more accessible by the introduction of step free access from the street to the platform and all the way onto the train itself. Although at the time of interview this process had nearly been completed, the responses of the interviewees clearly highlighted that there was a disconnect between barrier removal and understanding the issues faced by disabled people, and how the two are closely connected. The interviewees highlighted three key areas in which this disconnect can cause issues — i. access to the station and platform; ii. on the train; and iii. finding reliable and accurate accessibility information regarding stations and their accessibility, particularly for wheelchair users. All three of these issues clearly highlight this disconnect that stretches well beyond the transport network to all areas of society.

Getting into the station and down to the platform.

Despite the fact that at the time interviews took place the programme to improve accessibility at rail and metro stations from street level to the platform was almost complete, many of the interviewees highlighted that issues with the placement, sign-posting and availability of the elevators often made it hard to find them, or they were not actually accessible at all times or in some cases even switched on. This issue was clearly highlighted by one of the interviewees when she stated:

“The trains start working five, five-ish in the morning but the elevator from

the ground level to get up to the station's entrance they don't open until 20 after six. So at the beginning I didn't know that so I just checked the time of the train. I get there, the elevator's not working. And the elevator not being open, nobody's around so like I had no choice just taking cab to go to the airport" (Phys22F45).

It would appear then that there is an underlying assumption that disabled people don't require access to the transportation system in the same way and at the same times that everyone else does. This idea was reinforced by Phys22M38 who stated "in general the attitude is that people with disabilities don't travel is the cultural impression I think...that leads to an idea that people with disabilities don't have the expendable income or ability to travel".

A further problem raised by the interviewees, particularly those that use wheelchairs, is the actual size/ weight restrictions of the elevators and other accessibility aids in the stations, including the stairlifts that are installed in some of the stations. One interviewee stated "It may be okay for the Japanese small user, but (if the) wheelchair is very heavy...the 180kg is already not accessible" (Phys8M55). This clearly highlights the fact that accessibility aids should not only be designed to make life easier for disabled Tokyo residents, but also disabled tourists and Tokyo 2020 spectators who may visit Tokyo. Although the equipment installed may be culturally appropriate given the smaller size and weight of the average Japanese citizen compared to some other nations, it would appear that planners have failed to take into account disabled foreigners visiting Tokyo when implementing the 'barrier-free' programme. Given the Japanese government's focus upon a future tourist legacy this would appear strange, unless the focus is actually only upon non-disabled tourists.

According to the interviewees, the small size of the elevators leads to a further problem. It was felt by many that non-disabled passengers often chose to also use the elevators rather than the stairs or escalators, and despite the fact that they were primarily installed to make access easier for disabled people, this fact is not understood or is simply ignored by the non-disabled citizens who make them wait:

"we have only small elevator and we have the person with disability and

without disability and they have sometimes the cart for the baby or a big suitcase then the wheelchair user should wait for a long time to use the elevator” (Phys6F73).

In this sense, despite the fact that a lift has been installed primarily to increase accessibility for disabled people, the lack of understanding or perhaps indifference towards disabled people by non-disabled passengers means that accessing the platform remains a barrier despite the removal of the physical barrier, which has been replaced by an attitudinal barrier that is equally as problematic.

On the train.

According to Schulz-Richard (2019) the metro system in Tokyo has 142 stations (although some stations serve more than one line) and has approximately 8.7million daily users, which make it the busiest subway system in the world. At peak times this makes for an extremely congested system with at peak times some stations even having guards to push passengers onto overcrowded trains like sardines. Therefore, even if disabled people safely navigate their way from the street to the platform and get aboard their train, the issues caused by negative attitudes towards disability do not stop there. As one of the interviewees who is an electric wheelchair user pointed out:

“in the morning the train in Japan is full. And when I get in the train the staff of the station must prepare the slope and this takes time and the passengers in the train doing the bad faces and I had some bad feeling because I take the time for them. I feel maybe the passengers think we are very busy and we are non-disabled person and why should we use the time for the person like this” (Phys8M55).

He is clearly made to feel an inconvenience to the non-disabled passengers on the train because he moves round using a wheelchair rather than on two legs which is in line with the failure to adhere to the normative values for bodily function that underline the ableist narrative.

Accessing Reliable and Accurate Information regarding the Transportation

Network.

One issue many of the interviewees highlighted was the need to plan very carefully and check the accessibility of the stations they would need to use to complete their journeys. Many found that the information available on official websites was either inaccurate or was based upon a very poor understanding of what accessibility really means. Indeed, one respondent stated “I don’t really trust if they say ‘fully accessible’. If I hear from disabled friends that it is accessible then I can totally rely on it. But if not like I really, really question it” (Phys22F45). It is clear therefore, that lack or only partial understanding of what accessibility and universal design really means can have a huge impact upon the ability of disabled people to move around freely within the city.

Transport Issues for Foreign Disabled Visitors.

The interviewees also highlighted that for disabled foreign spectators visiting the Games and possibly future disabled tourists there was a further problem. Accurate information might be hard to come by for them in Japanese, but in English it is almost non-existent as pointed out by (Phys23M38):

“finding general information is hard to come by...Speaking in Japanese I have to look at Japanese websites, and I like to compare back and forth, and there are way too many times where the Japanese site of information on accessibility exists and the English version nothing really exists fully at all” (Phys23M38).

This would appear to indicate a lack of expectation that disabled foreigners would visit Japan and so why bother going to the trouble and expense of providing the information. Indeed, the same respondent (Phys23M38) felt that as there was very little expectation of Japanese disabled residents of Tokyo travelling, then the same thought process probably applies to disabled people travelling to Japan from abroad, which may help explain the comments about accessibility equipment sizes mentioned earlier. It is clear, however, that from the viewpoint of the interviewees at least, very little has gone into the barrier-free programme beyond simply removing the problem of the perceived physical barrier, i.e. the stairs to the platform, rather than the whole process of a disabled person needing to get from one place to another and all that

entails.

## The Impact of Attitudes towards Disability in other related Areas

Even industry stakeholders like hotels have a major issue. According to Ingle (2019), Yokohama hotels wanted to charge ParalympicsGB to make hotel rooms for athletes accessible and then charge them extra to convert them back into inaccessible rooms after the Games! One interviewee (Phys22M38) claimed this was because they were afraid that they would remind people of hospital rooms and would put non-disabled people off using the hotel, highlighting a lack of knowledge of universal design, as well as (dis) ableism. However, Ingle goes on to cite the President of the International Paralympic Committee, Andrew Parsons as claiming that the problem

“is not a Games specific issue. There is an issue with the legislation in Japan when it comes to the number of accessible rooms. In hotels with more than 50 rooms you have to have one accessible room but it doesn’t matter if that hotel has 500 rooms, it can still just be one accessible room” (Ingle, 2019 Online).

This clearly highlights the importance of strong legally binding and legally enforced policies that are developed in collaboration with disabled people and the organisations that support them. Without this, most organisations will simply do the bare minimum in order to meet their legal responsibilities.

## Some Signs of Progress

It would be remiss of me to claim that there are no signs of positive developments within Japanese society with regard to disabled people and greater inclusion within society. In June 2020, Starbucks opened its first sign language store in Japan staffed mainly by hearing impaired employees (Kyodo News, 2020b) and in November 2020, Liberal Democrat Party member Eriko Imai asked questions in sign language at Japan’s upper house plenary session for the first time in its history (Barrier Free Japan, 2020e). In July 2020, a supermarket in Fukuoka opened a slow checkout counter, which is “reserved for older and disabled customers to allow them to pay for

their groceries slowly and without feeling pressured' (Matsumoto, 2020). In terms of attitudinal change, for the last two years Bengt Yamada, a Swedish-Japanese citizen, has been touring Tokyo's 150 foreign embassies, as well as local government offices in Tokyo, together with a group of disabled adults and children, to help tell their stories. He began this quest after attending a hospital with his own child and seeing numerous disabled children who, in his opinion, were almost invisible to Japanese society. His long term aim is to bring their stories "back to a wider domestic audience with documentaries he is making based on his visits with disabled people as well as his prior interactions with them" (Tominaga, 2020 Online). In November 2021, two months after the Games took place, a survey conducted by Kyodo news in 45 of the 47 prefectures indicated that 70% of disabled respondents stated that the hosting of the Paralympic Games had led to a better understanding of their own disability or disabilities, in general (Kyodo News, 2021). These may appear isolated and small examples in the overall scheme of things, but they do appear to indicate some positive signs that things may be changing for the better across Japan, which if continued and spread, could positively impact the lives of disabled people in Japan and the attitudes towards them amongst the wider non-disabled society. However, whether this is a short-term Games related effect or whether it will have any lasting long-term impact remains to be seen.

### *The role of language in the understanding of disability in Japan*

According to Brittain (2016) language is at its most simple just a series of words or characters. It is the meanings attached by humans to these words or characters that makes language important. One function of language is communication, but in communicating humans also, more often than not, convey the underlying meaning behind the words or characters used. It is also claimed that language plays a key role in politics, domination and control. The meanings attached to the words or characters used are socially constructed within the social or cultural group within which an individual grows up and develops. Therefore, there can be major differences in the perceived meanings of words such as disability, disabled and even what constitutes sport, dependent upon the social and cultural group within which an individual learns their proscribed meanings. However, as some social groups and cultures within a given society are more powerful or have more influence than others, one set of

meanings for these words may gain dominance, even over those meanings proscribed by the group they refer to. In Japan the word for non-disabled is 'Kenjōsha' which translates as 'fully healthy person'. This may appear a reasonable description until you realise that the implication of this is that anyone who doesn't fit the definition of 'Kenjōsha' must then be considered 'not fully healthy', which in the case of many disabled people is a complete nonsense. A single arm amputee, a visually impaired person and even a paraplegic can still be fully healthy even with their impairments. Following an interview with the author of this article, Akiko Okazaki, deputy director of the department of science and medicine for the Asahi Shimbun, wrote an article entitled *The fear of lurking in the word "healthy person" to eliminate "yan-no-shi"* that highlights some of the negative impacts that the meanings associated with words can have upon people who do not fit the prescribed meaning, and how this continues to enhance divisions between the two groups to the advantage of the group that best fits the prescribed meaning (Okazaki, 2021).

### *Segregation*

Shek-Noble (2020) claims that the continuing segregation of disabled people within Japan from wider society is the result of architectural, social and institutional barriers. Stevens (2007) claims that of all the segregatory mechanisms used in Japan, the most important is educational segregation, as this is closely associated with financial success in Japan. Stevens goes on to claim that

“even though the Japanese government encourages people with disabilities to work, the educational sector's unwillingness to integrate children with disabilities in mainstream schools even where appropriate represents one of the main mechanisms of their long-term disempowerment.” (Stevens, 2007; p. 273-274).

One of the interviewees linked this issue to the lack of understanding of disability issues in the wider society when he stated “In Japan, disabled students are separated from other students. So, ordinary kids rarely meet students with disabilities in school” (Phys18M52). His hope was that the hosting of the Paralympic Games in Tokyo might gain a better understanding and awareness of the issues faced by disabled people through watching the Games.



Another issue with segregation raised during the interviews was the existence of sports facilities built specifically for disabled people. Christiaens and Brittain (2021) have argued that disability specific sporting opportunities may form an important part of freedom of choice, allowing disabled people to participate in segregated settings if that is where they feel most comfortable. However, one of the interviewees highlighted how these segregated facilities were sometimes used by non-disabled facility staff to refuse access to disabled people.

***Int: I've heard there are segregated facilities and that a lot of the non-disabled facilities won't allow people with disabilities to use them.***

Phys22F45: Yeah I've experienced that too.

***Int: And what kind of excuses do they use for?***

Phys22F45: Our facility is non-accessible. We don't have knowledgeable trainers or personnel. And it's not safe for the people.

***Int: For the people with disabilities or the non-disabled?***

Phys22F45: Non-disabled people.

***Int: Not safe in what way?***

Phys22F45: Just go and maybe I run over their toes like. What the heck is that right? But like those stupid excuses they come up with. And then like oh you'd better, you have a better experience if you go to the sports facility for the disabled. So like I highly recommend for you to go there.

***Int: Even though it might be 20 miles away.***

Phys22F45: Exactly.

***Int: The other excuse I've heard is that they won't let wheelchairs in because they're afraid it will damage the floor.***

Phys22F45: Yes……And then the thing is I was told that exact thing. But the day I visited the facility they had the unicycle. What the hell? Like a unicycle is okay and a wheelchair is not. Just because they have one wheel it's okay, four wheels is not? I did have a good argument but they didn't have any.

***Int: What did they say?***

Phys22F45: Like well that's the rules.

This exchange highlights multiple issues around attitudes towards and understanding of the issues disabled people face within society. The facility staff would rather the disabled person used a disability specific sports centre, thus reinforcing their segregation and isolation within the wider society, and uses numerous dubious reasons as to why they should not use the non-disabled facility. The facility staff focus on what they don't have (e.g. knowledgeable trainers or personnel) or assumed issues such as potential damage to the floor rather than what they could do to change the situation to allow access for disabled people in their facility. This highlights an issue known as opportunity hoarding, which according to Brar (2016), 'is a deliberate process by which social closure enables the dominant group to disproportionately amass the available rewards in a particular field, thereby strengthening and entrenching their dominant position within that field' (p.66). Put simply, in this case it is a way for the non-disabled majority to keep the use of this particular facility for their sole use, but denying access to anyone who does not fit their normative values for physical appearance and ability.

Finally, something that took me a little by surprise in the interviews was the fact that at the end of the interview six interviewees (all women) actually thanked me for taking an interest in them and their lives. Phys13F58 stated "I think your research is very important and amazing research" and Phys9F52 said "I am very

happy because person in professional area from abroad has interest in this field, what is disability in Japan, I am so very happy.” I actually asked one of my final interviewees about this and she stated that she thought it was because disabled people in Japan don’t have a voice. She also felt that although the government and policy makers might (pretend to) listen to disabled people, the ideas put forward by disabled people are rarely actioned:

Even the government, you know, like my perception, they host the meeting and invite many advocate from the disabled group. They take the minutes. Okay we heard all of their advice but the decision makers don’t have any people with disability. So those ideas are not really implemented (Phys22F45).

This highlights a key issue when trying to plan for Paralympic legacies for disabled people living in the host city — that of non-disabled people assuming they know what is best for disabled people or implementing changes that are the easiest and most cost effective, so that they can appear to have made an effort towards change without actually changing too much.

## Conclusion

The findings clearly indicate that, for these interviewees at least, there is still a long way to go to achieve any kind of real understanding of the issues faced by disabled people within the wider non-disabled Japanese society. That is not to say that the situation is any worse or any better than in other nations around the world, but if the highlighted issues of i. increasing understanding of how non-disabled actions and attitudes can negatively impact the lives of disabled people; ii. how the language they use to describe issues around disability can reinforce this negative impact; iii. how segregation can reinforce both the isolation of disabled people and decrease opportunities for increasing understanding amongst non-disabled people regarding disabled people; and iv. government and policy makers only paying lip service to what disabled people have to say rather than really listening to their needs and acting fully upon them, then the chances of any lasting positive changes and genuine Paralympic legacy within Tokyo and the rest of Japan will be, as the Japanese often say, muzukashi desu ne!!

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## 東京2020パラリンピック競技大会のレガシー， 障がいと日本——ムズカシイデスネ？

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2021年8月，東京は史上初めてパラリンピック競技大会を2度開催した都市となった。同パラリンピック競技大会の開催に向けて，小池百合子東京都知事は，東京そして日本全国に暮らす障がい者の生活の向上のためには，パラリンピックの成功がオリンピックの成功以上に重要であると述べた。本稿では，2019年5月に行った首都圏に暮らす日本人障がい者26人とのインタビューならびにその他二次データに基づき，日本政府および東京オリンピック・パラリンピック競技大会組織委員会によるパラリンピック・レガシーに関する主張のいくつかについて，インタビュー対象者のコメント，またメガ・イベント・レガシーおよび障がいに関する批判的研究における筆者自身の経験を踏まえて，批判的に分析する。障がいに対する考え方が及ぼす影響力について本当の意味で理解を深めることなしに，人口の高齢化による障がいや，さらにはバリアフリー環境に焦点を当てるのが，日本の障がい者の真の生活の向上につながるのかについて問う。さらにまた，日本国内に広く認められる言葉遣いや隔離政策など，真に有益なパラリンピック・レガシーの実現を困難な課題にしかねない重要な問題のいくつかを明らかにする。

### キーワード

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