

The Political, Economic, Social, and Cultural Significance of the Paralympics

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As an international sports event for people with disabilities, the Paralympic Games can certainly be considered an important occasion for promoting disability sports. To be more specific, however, what is the significance of promoting disability sports? In what ways does their promotion have the same significance as the promotion of sports for people without disabilities, and in what ways is it different? The answers to these questions are not entirely clear.

For example, the promotion of sports for people without disabilities is generally believed to act as a catalyst in maintaining health, in promoting mental training and education, and even in contributing to social and economic development as well as to regional development. Moreover, the professionalization and commercialization of a considerable number of sports have made sports a substantial force as an industry.

The majority of disability sports, however, have not become professionalized or commercialized, and because many of the sports activities have historically played a role in enabling people to overcome their disabilities or in their rehabilitation, their social and economic significance has had a tendency to be centered on the idea of “inclusion,” in other words, encouraging the social participation of people with disabilities and deepening society’s understanding of people with disabilities.

This viewpoint seems to have been accepted as a matter of course in the early stages of the history of the Paralympics but as the number of Paralympic events increased and the competitive ability of the athletes improved, the more attention the Paralympics began to draw as an international sports event and the more the perception of the games was called into question. In other words, there was a growing view that irrespective of whether athletes are with or without disabilities, those who engage in a high level of competitive sports should all be treated equally

as athletes, and there should be no special treatment for having a disability.

It has been the case in contemporary society that the social and economic significance of sports activities of the general public and of competitive sports by people who have undergone a high degree of training have come to be viewed differently, and that same viewpoint should apply when considering the significance of the Paralympics.

Furthermore, the modality of “fusion” of the Paralympics and the Olympics has progressed in many areas and, in tandem with this integration, the Paralympics have been drawing attention as an international event in its own right. Therefore, from the perspective of its political, economic, social, and cultural importance, it can be said that the time has come for us to consider the influence and the impact of the Paralympics as a major international event, rather than simply a “sports event for people with disabilities.”

Based on the above views, this paper examines the significance of the Paralympics from political, economic, social and cultural perspectives, as well as from the perspective of sports promotion. The discussion of political significance is divided into political significance (implications) and the establishment of relevant legal and organizational frameworks. Sports promotion will be considered from three perspectives: impact on the promotion of disability sports, effects on athletes, and effects on spectators.

1. Political Significance

(1) Significance in domestic and international politics

The origin of the Paralympics can be traced back to a disability sports event held at Stoke Mandeville in the suburbs of London, England in July 1948. The majority of the participants were people who were being treated at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, a rehabilitation center for soldiers who sustained spinal cord injuries during the Second World War. Dr. Ludwig Guttmann, who was in charge of the hospital, was very passionate about introducing sports for the rehabilitation therapy of people with physical disabilities. He had emigrated to England to escape from the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany¹⁾, and his own life had been greatly affected by the war. In 1947, Dr. Guttmann began publishing a magazine called *The Cord* aimed at the

physical and mental rehabilitation of injured soldiers, and sports activities were one of the areas in which he was active²⁾.

In this way, the origin of the Paralympics was closely linked to the Second World War and postwar "recovery." In other words, it was closely linked to war as a "cause of disabilities" and the process of recovery from it.

This disability sports event that started in England became an international event and saw the official participation of athletes other than British nationals for the first time in 1952 with the participation of athletes from the Netherlands. The event was later re-named the International Stoke Mandeville Games, and this remained the official name until the games were held in Heidelberg, Germany in 1972 (the 1964 Tokyo Paralympics were officially the 13th International Stoke Mandeville Games).

Reflecting the background of its origin, the Stoke Mandeville Games initially welcomed only participants from British Commonwealth countries and allies of Great Britain during the Second World War. Germany participated for the first time in 1954, followed by Italy two years later. Even at the 8th International Games in 1959, all but India and Pakistan were Western countries³⁾.

The connection with war also applies to Japan to a certain extent. Among the athletes participating in the 1964 Tokyo Paralympics were Second World War veterans with disabilities⁴⁾. For Japan, a country that had to relinquish hosting the already scheduled 1941 Tokyo Olympics due to the war, the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games symbolized Japan's full return as a member of the international community and the end of the postwar era. Moreover, moves to host the Olympics started in the mid-1950s, the period in which Japan finally began to recover from the scars of the Second World War. In this sense, the 1964 games are linked to the Second World War in invisible ways.

Furthermore, during the 1970s, Alpine and cross country skiing drew attention as rehabilitation therapy for sick and wounded veterans of the war in Vietnam, and this therapy is said to have become an opportunity to train future athletes⁵⁾.

Even in recent times, British and American veterans who were wounded in wars in the Middle East were among the athletes who participated in the London Paralympic Games⁶⁾, and it is believed that among participants from developing countries, there were those who had sustained injuries in civil wars. The connection between war and the Paralympics has continued to this day.

Nevertheless, the fact that war and the Paralympics are connected by invisible links has received little mention in recent years. There has even been a tendency among some to keep this association from coming to the fore. For example, in the lead up to the London Paralympic Games, there were supposedly heated arguments between the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and a public relations firm in Great Britain over the pros and cons of including scenes of war in the promotional video for the Paralympics⁷⁾.

The recent tendency to avoid mentioning the connection between the Paralympics and war is based on the notion that the connection is an element that could damage the image of the Paralympics⁸⁾. However, making unnecessary efforts to conceal the objective fact that there is a connection between the two may conversely have an even more negative impact on the image of the Paralympics. In any event, it cannot be denied that the Paralympics have political implications as a symbol of recovery from the scars of war in various contexts and, for this reason alone, the Paralympics can be a potential catalyst for impressing upon people the importance of peace.

In a similar vein, the association of the Paralympics with natural disasters cannot be ignored in terms of political significance. In the same way that the Paralympics have been used to encourage the rehabilitation of people suffering from war-inflicted injuries, the “power” of the Paralympics can also be effectively used in the psychological rehabilitation of victims of natural disasters. The Beijing Paralympic Games can be cited as a case in point. Held just a few months after the Great Sichuan Earthquake of May 12, 2008, four disaster victims were chosen as torchbearers of the games. One of them was a person who suffered the loss of a limb in the earthquake. The participation of these runners is said to have helped other victims in gaining the strength to recover⁹⁾.

The more the Paralympics begin to draw attention as an international event, however, the more apt they are to be exploited by certain countries as an opportunity to send out political and diplomatic messages to the international community. There are already a number of instances where this has been evident. For example, in the 2012 London Paralympic Games, North Korea sent an athlete (a swimmer) for the first time in the history of the Paralympics. The woman bearing the national flag and marching alongside the athlete as a so-called “leading athlete” during the opening ceremony was the secretary-general of the Chosun Disabled Persons Athletic

Association and a former member of the unified table tennis team of North Korea and South Korea, which had previously been formed during a World Table Tennis Championship. The presence of this woman at the Paralympics was aimed at advertising to the international community North Korea's commitment to the problems of people with disabilities, and indirectly impressing upon the international audience North Korea's conviction regarding the unification of the Korean Peninsula¹⁰⁾.

Moreover, international political issues common to both the Olympic and Paralympic Games are beginning to draw attention in the context of the Paralympics. The issue of women's participation is an example. In the future other issues, for example LGBT issues, may be discussed as a "political issue" in the Paralympics in the same way as in the Olympics.

There is also the possibility that the Paralympic Games can take on a "political color" in a different way from being exploited or abused as a venue for calling attention to specific political issues, when athletes protest against such political intervention itself.

Because the Paralympic Games attract a widespread, global participation of diverse people with disabilities, they can be considered an ideal venue for globally establishing the identity of "people with disabilities." On the other hand, in view of recent trends to consider disability sports not as activities for people with disabilities but purely as sports, it remains to be seen whether the Paralympics will play a beneficial role in establishing a global identity for people with disabilities. There are still some delicate issues to consider¹¹⁾.

(2) Establishment of a legal framework and organization

① Establishment of a legal framework

Among various aspects of the Paralympics to consider, such as effects, legacy, or social significance, one of the aspects that can be confirmed empirically more readily than others is the legal framework. This is because some host nations have used the Olympic Games as an opportunity to put in place legislation concerning people with disabilities.

One example is the Seoul Paralympic Games. In South Korea, the Disabled Persons Welfare Law was already established in 1980 but the 1988 Paralympic Games served

as an opportunity for making legal reforms to further improve the registration system for people with disabilities by expanding the scope of people with disabilities covered under the law in 1989. This is said to have been a reflection of heightened social awareness of the need for measures for people with disabilities following the Paralympic Games¹²⁾.

This legal reform can be said to reflect two phenomena. One is the increase in social interest in measures for people with disabilities. The other is that the Paralympic Games provided an opportunity to impart a new viewpoint to people with disabilities and their close relatives in a society where people with disabilities traditionally avoided going out in public as much as possible.

Furthermore, in October 2008, after successfully bidding for the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic Games, Russia tabled a law in its parliament to make the standards of the IPC applicable to people with disabilities in Russia. This is a good example of when bidding for the Olympics had an impact on laws concerning sports and measures for people with disabilities in the host country¹³⁾.

In Japan too, the 1964 Paralympic Games played a significant role in setting the stage for a shift in the orientation of the Act on Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons. A law that previously provided for people with disabilities from the viewpoint of providing care and protection, it established provisions for providing support for the independence of people with disabilities in 1967¹⁴⁾.

During preparations for the Nagano Paralympic Games, it was also understood that there was a need to focus on the establishment of legislation in regional areas. In 1995, for example, during preparations to host the games after Japan's successful bid, Nagano Prefecture enacted an ordinance concerning welfare town planning. This ordinance stipulated that builders of all architectural structures above a certain level, both new buildings and extensions, had to report on infrastructure considerations for people with disabilities¹⁵⁾.

Furthermore, participation in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities can also be considered part of the legal framework supporting people with disabilities. For example, China ratified the convention in 2008, and it can perhaps be said that the Beijing Paralympic Games set the stage for the ratification.

② Organizational framework

Alongside legal systems is the issue of establishing organizations for people with disabilities.

While there are, of course, international matters to consider including issues concerning the IPC itself and the organizational infrastructure of international sports associations, there is also the system infrastructure in the host country. The Netherlands can be cited as a case in point.

A decision was made to hold the 1980 Paralympic Games in Arnhem in the Netherlands since the Soviet Union, the host nation of the 1980 Olympic Games, claimed it had no people with disabilities¹⁶⁾ and refused to hold the Paralympics in Moscow. With the decision to hold the games in Arnhem, the Netherlands established the Foundation of the Olympic Games for the Disabled, and this later became a catalyst in the promotion of disability sports in the Netherlands¹⁷⁾.

This is reminiscent of the circumstances in which the Japan Sports Association for the Disabled was established in the wake of the 1964 Tokyo Paralympics. Similarly, the Korea Welfare Promotion Association for the Disabled was established following the 1988 Seoul Paralympic Games¹⁸⁾. After the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, BlazeSports America was established as an organization for systematically promoting disability sports including in local areas. This can also be considered a legacy of the Atlanta Paralympic Games¹⁹⁾.

Here too, infrastructure improvement on a local level cannot be overlooked. At the time of the Nagano Paralympic Games, the town of Yamanouchi, which was chosen as the Alpine skiing venue, launched a council for promoting "human-friendly community development" as early as 1994, and proceeded with initiatives to promote a range of measures including the installation of automatic doors in the town hall building²⁰⁾.

2. Economic Significance

Dr. Guttmann, who was chairman of the International Stoke Mandeville Games Committee and is also referred to as the founder of the Paralympics, spoke of the following example at an international symposium²¹⁾ held after the Tokyo Paralympic Games.

The success, endurance, and standards of the athletes with disabilities [in the

Paralympics] here provided special inspiration to the government of Japan, civil organizations, and employers, which are making efforts to provide support to the return of persons with spinal injuries to society and the business world. Within a period of six months after the end of the Olympics, in an area about 70 miles west of Tokyo, where many factories manufacturing cameras and communication equipment are located, the Nagano plant, which hires 56 persons with disabilities, was built as the first facility in Japan dedicated to the hiring of persons with spinal injuries.

Unlike the Olympics, the Paralympics have been the subject of almost no detailed quantitative analyses regarding their economic effects. However, according to results²²⁾ of measurements undertaken by relevant stakeholders in Nagano Prefecture regarding the Nagano Paralympic Games, the monetary value due to an added value of 5.5 billion yen from operating expenses of the games was 2.9 billion yen, and the amount generated from an added value of 8.9 billion yen spent by athletes and spectators was believed to be 6.4 billion yen. As a coefficient, the former was 55%, and the latter about 72%. If we compare this with a coefficient for the added-value induction effects of the Nagano Olympic Games (163% in relation to the operating expenses, 76% in relation to consumption by the spectators and athletes), it is clear that induction effects of the operating costs are significantly low. This may be because the Paralympic Games were largely managed by public organizations and volunteers, and few commercial elements were involved.

Furthermore, the impact on employment is often cited in regard to economic effects. In the case of the Nagano Paralympic Games, however, in contrast to total consumption by spectators and operating costs (investment) of 14.4 billion yen, employment inducement effects were said to amount to 1,202 people²³⁾. Effects on the employment of people with disabilities can be seen for example in improvement in vocational training and employment services. In the wake of the Nagano Paralympic Games, vocational training facilities as well as an employment support center for people with disabilities were established in Matsumoto City in the spring of 1998²⁴⁾.

The employment of people with disabilities can also be considered not only in terms of the effects of the Paralympics but also in the promotion of employment in the Olympics business. For example, during the construction of the Olympic Park for

the London Olympic Games, a target was set to engage people with disabilities for 3% of the contract workers in the construction²⁵⁾.

As an economic aspect, the impact of the Paralympic Games on the development and dissemination of technology can be cited. This is seen first of all in the development and application of technology. For example, wheelchairs made with carbon fiber, a material lighter than aluminum and with less air resistance, made their debut in track events of the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games²⁶⁾.

Furthermore, developments in the area of transportation and their promotion cannot be overlooked. In the lead up to the 1998 Nagano Paralympic Games, the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association (JAMA) organized a working group to promote the widespread use of welfare vehicles, which resulted in more than a 50% year-on-year increase in sales of special welfare vehicles in 1997²⁷⁾.

In recent years the development and spread of information technology has been increasing in importance. For example, a system called the “time launcher” for accurately sharing information between athletes and coaches during matches was developed for use at the Vancouver Games²⁸⁾.

It is also necessary to focus on the development of technology for athletes and coaches not only for the games themselves but also for training. For example, one company whose employees were chosen to participate in cross country events in the 2014 Sochi Paralympic Games is said to have developed equipment in collaboration with a university that allowed athletes to train indoors using roller skis while viewing video images of the sports site at Sochi projected on a screen²⁹⁾.

The development of a communications system for the elderly and people with hearing impairments by Shinshu University in the lead up to the Nagano Paralympic Games can also be cited as an example of the development of information technology for a broader social use. This system presents visual representations of sounds (such as the sound of a telephone or bell, etc.) on a television screen³⁰⁾.

In tandem with the demand for more advanced specialization in Paralympic events, tailor-made technology to suit individual athletes, or individualized technology, has become important. Some say that promoting the application of technology in society becomes difficult as result³¹⁾, and future trends in this area are worthy of attention.

When the economic impact of the Paralympics is seen not from an overall perspective but considered specifically from the viewpoint of corporations, it

encompasses other areas such as (A) sales from the provision of products and services at sports venues of the Paralympics and in the athletes' village, advertising activities, and the use of logos and the Paralympics brand, (B) use of individual athletes who become widely known through the Paralympics for PR purposes, and (C) the support of disability sports as part of corporate social contribution activities.

In product development and sales, in addition to products using the Paralympic trademark and advertising activities, there is also the commercial use of so-called game mascots. For example, for the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games the mascot was Lizzie the frill-necked lizard and for the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games the mascot was Blaze, a caricature of a phoenix, which is said to have had significant commercial success³²⁾.

Regarding the issue of sponsorship, the effects are obviously determined by the rights a company gains in exchange for sponsorship fees, and how the rights are applied. However, unlike the Olympics brand, depending on the country and region, the value of the Paralympics brand is not particularly high (low level of recognition).

As a result, there are many cases in advertising where using an athlete whose name has become widely known through the activities of the Paralympics is effective. One example of such an athlete is Grady Aldridge, a double-amputee American weightlifter³³⁾. Among Japanese athletes, there is Mami Sato, who uses a prosthesis for the long jump. After her engagement in PR activities related to bidding for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, she was in much demand for a wide range of PR activities.

Among internationally well-known examples of the Paralympics and social contribution activities is the accounting firm Deloitte UK that in recent years has focused on the Paralympics in its social contribution activities. Targeting the London Paralympic Games, it launched a project of over 1.7 million pounds for the training of athletes and for raising social awareness of disability sports³⁴⁾.

On the other hand, there are cases where a dispute between companies over sponsorship and methods of providing corporate donations developed into boycott-like activities towards specific companies. (For example, during the Atlanta Games, six companies that were sponsors of the Olympics did not become sponsors of the Paralympics and were accused of obstructing sponsorship activities of the Paralympics by other companies, which resulted in a boycott of the products of those

six companies³⁵.)

3. Social Significance

One aspect to consider in terms of the general or social significance of the Paralympics beyond the area of sports is the impact of the Paralympics on creating a society where people with disabilities can live comfortably.

This impact may first of all become evident in the infrastructure of the physical environment. Typical examples are improvement in areas such as barrier-free arrangements in public facilities, on roads and in means of transportation. In addition to improvements in facilities such as the installation of elevators for people with disabilities and audible traffic signal systems or guide marks for people with visual impairments, improvements may include functional and technological enhancements such as the adoption of innovative equipment and concepts. For example, during the 1964 Tokyo Paralympic Games, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and Air France, which were responsible for the transportation of athletes and officials from Europe to Japan, developed wheelchairs capable of going up and down the narrow aisles of aircraft for the convenience of passengers³⁶). It can be said that such initiatives contributed to promoting accessibility in a broad sense.

One example that can be cited as an improvement in the environment was a campaign to make shops accessible to people with disabilities during the Paralympic Games in Greece. This was an initiative achieved through close cooperation between the Athens Paralympic Games Organizing Committee and local companies. Through the concerted efforts of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Athens and the three surrounding cities, ERMIS (Accessible Choice Programme) was established as an organization for awarding certification marks to accessible shops and restaurants that satisfied certain standards. It also compiled a directory listing these shops and restaurants and distributed them to athletes and officials³⁷).

During the Atlanta Games, the campus of the Georgia Institute of Technology was used for the Paralympics, and the university is said to have taken advantage of this opportunity to transform the campus to a friendlier place for people with disabilities, and established an environment that was more conducive to the acceptance of students with disabilities. There are even some people who regarded the

transformation that took place as one of the “legacies” of the Atlanta Paralympic Games³⁸⁾.

In terms of expansion and improvement in accessibility, the Nagano Paralympic Games can be considered an example where these were comprehensively carried out. First, to improve access to the Paralympic sports venues for people with disabilities, people from the Nagano Association of Occupational Therapists (Nagano OT Kenshikai) conducted inspections of various sites and made proposals as a volunteer initiative. To improve the viewing environment, a magnetic loop was installed in part of the viewing stand for ice sledge hockey to improve access to information inside the stadium, and this innovation became a model for use at other sites. Furthermore, to improve accessibility at general public facilities, the town of Yamanouchi installed handrails and automatic doors in public facilities. As a means of promoting change in general social awareness, efforts were made to provide guidance and orientations in accepting guests with guide dogs in accommodation facilities³⁹⁾.

The change in social awareness resulting from the Paralympic Games can be divided into the change in people’s view of “disabilities” and the change in people’s view of “people with disabilities.” Regarding the former, it can be said that the viewpoint of “disabilities” in the traditional sense, that is, the notion that disabilities should not be revealed or should be hidden, changes with the participation of athletes with disabilities to the viewpoint that bringing disabilities out into the open leads to building self-confidence in people with disabilities and their acceptance in society⁴⁰⁾. This may also assist in establishing the viewpoint that a “disability” in the first place is not a medical or physical state but something created by society.

In relation to this change in awareness, there is the issue of registration of people with disabilities. As social awareness changes, so too will the traditional view that people with disabilities are people who should be protected and cared for by individuals or family at home. Instead, it will be understood that people with disabilities should be cared for by the welfare system of society as a whole. There are also indications that this recognition leads to an increase in the number of people who register their disabilities. For example, an increase in the registration of people with disabilities is said to be one of the effects of the Seoul Paralympic Games. According to one source, the number of people registered as having disabilities, which had been about 90,000 until then, rose to about 500,000 following the Paralympics⁴¹⁾.

There is also the change in the meaning of “disability” or the meaning of people with disabilities overcoming disabilities. In other words, as long as a disability is viewed as a personal or physical attribute, the capability and competence of people with disabilities will continue to be considered as “individual or internal commodity” of each individual¹²⁾. In this sense, in an environment where the “marketability” of disability sports as sports remains low, looking upon sports events for people with disabilities as the culmination of the endeavors of people with disabilities to overcome their disabilities, and emphasizing these activities themselves as acts of overcoming disabilities may be viewed as a catalyst that changes the context of disabilities from a personal to a social element. Put another way, the social nature of disabilities may also be considered an entry point for the introduction of commercial potential and marketability of disability sports as bona fide sports events.

In this regard too, attention should perhaps be paid to the existence of the viewpoint that perceives signs of a change in the Paralympics from “an event for people with disabilities” to a pure “sports event” in the viewing attitude of spectators. In other words, when there is a prevailing view that a sports event is for people with disabilities, spectators are apt to refrain from booing or raising their voices in criticism of the athletes. If the perception of these events is more strongly colored by the sports aspect, however, as with mainstream sports events today, jeering and dissatisfaction are likely to be expressed more overtly. During a basketball event in the Barcelona Paralympic Games, scenes of spectators booing athletes during the game were reported¹³⁾. In one sense, however, the demonstration of such an attitude by spectators can be considered an indication that games at the Paralympics are being viewed on the same level as ordinary sports.

Here, one example of change in the way people view “people with disabilities” that occurred at the time of the Nagano Paralympic Games can be cited. A local newspaper reported that in the past when people with disabilities went to ski slopes for recreation, when they had lunch in the dining hall, it was not uncommon for families at nearby tables to quietly leave the room. After the Paralympics, however, rather than distancing themselves, there were even people who offered their seats instead¹⁴⁾. This can be considered a change in the general attitude of society toward “people with disabilities” as a result of the Paralympics.

Also worthy of mention is the potential impact from watching the agile movements

of athletes in the Paralympic Games, which may act as a catalyst in changing the way people without disabilities view themselves. In other words, as they witness the energetic participation in sports of athletes with disabilities who have overcome enormous difficulties, people without disabilities become aware of their own daily habits of grumbling and grieving over trifling matters, making them feel “ashamed⁴⁵⁾.” This can become a stimulus for self-reflection and self-improvement for spectators.

All of these changes, that is, changes in the viewpoint on disabilities, the viewpoint on people with disabilities, and people without disabilities’ views of themselves, are related in a sense to changes in the way people regard the human body. In other words, in most modern sports including the Olympics only healthy bodies endowed with physical and dynamic beauty are admired, and certain values concerning how the body should be have become universal. However, as athletes play an active part in the Paralympics, a broad, large-scale sports event for disability sports, athletes with disabilities are widely exposed to the eyes of the world. It can be said that this exposure may encourage reflection on the view of beauty and physical attributes of the human body⁴⁶⁾. People with disabilities may themselves experience such a change in values in the process of engaging in sports activities⁴⁷⁾, and the change may ultimately influence spectators and society in general through these sports.

Moreover, with the exception of people with hearing impairments, the Paralympics provide an opportunity to bring together many kinds of people with disabilities and, in this regard, the role of the games in the mutual acknowledgment and exchange among people with different disabilities should not be underestimated.

On a psychological level, the impact of the games on the improvement and deepening of the awareness and attitude regarding the nature of care for people with disabilities should be mentioned. The volunteers who took part in assisting the Paralympians during the 1964 Tokyo Paralympic Games are said to have gained an awareness of the importance of not only providing careful and helpful assistance but also of delivering care without imposing on the desire of people with disabilities to be independent⁴⁸⁾. This can be considered a psychological legacy.

The Paralympics can also be a golden opportunity for familiarizing and educating students from a young age about issues relating to people with disabilities⁴⁹⁾. At the times of the Sydney and Athens Games, educational programs are said to have been developed, and plans to invite children to games venues were implemented.

However, there are both negative⁵⁰⁾ and positive studies⁵¹⁾ in regard to whether Paralympics-related events and familiarization activities in school education resulted in changing the awareness of students towards people with disabilities. It can be said that the adoption of a timeframe for observation, and the conducting of quantitative verification remain as future issues to be addressed.

At the same time, beyond the impact on the people who participated or volunteered in the event, it should be mentioned that even people who did not directly participate saw the Paralympics as an event that was close to them, and the Paralympics provided an opportunity for having a sense of affinity with disability sports. For example, at the closing ceremony of the 1998 Nagano Paralympic Games, over seven million origami cranes handmade by 350,000 volunteers were displayed as a symbol of peace and friendship. The “participation” of their cranes in the Paralympics made people feel much closer to the Paralympics.

4. Significance in the Promotion of Sports

(1) Impact on the promotion of sports in general

The Paralympics naturally have “promotion” effects including the improvement of the competitive ability of athletes and the popularization of Paralympic sports. However, the most evident effects in terms of infrastructure development in the wake of the Paralympic Games are the establishment of special training centers for bringing up elite athletes. In China, for example, a large, 240,000m² disability sports training center was established⁵²⁾ in the lead up to the 2008 Beijing Paralympics.

Furthermore, the generation of so-called spin-off effects by linking the Paralympics to various competitive disability sports events may also be considered a unique outcome of the Paralympics. One disability sports event in Japan can be cited as an example. After the 1964 Tokyo Games, a national sports meet for people with physical disabilities including those with disabilities other than spinal cord disabilities was held for the first time in Japan. This was clearly an effect of the Paralympics.

In addition, the World Games for Disabled Youth can be cited as an example of a global movement. The first World Games for Disabled Youth took place in the United Kingdom in 1986. In 1984, due to complications in the United States, the Paralympic Games were held in Great Britain (at Stoke Mandeville) and this served as an

opportunity for holding this event⁵³⁾.

It cannot be said that there has been sufficient quantitative verification regarding whether international events including the Paralympics have contributed directly to the promotion of sports activities for people with disabilities in general. Even where sports events for people without disabilities such as the Olympics are concerned, there is empirical research that casts doubt on the “penetration effects⁵⁴⁾.” However, if, even in a country like the United Kingdom, which is generally perceived to have a significantly high participation rate in sports activities, the participation rate of people with disabilities remains extremely low (according to a research done prior to the London Games, 53% of children with disabilities received less than one hour of physical education lessons per week⁵⁵⁾), it can be expected that the impact of the Paralympics on the participation rate of sports for people with disabilities is relatively high. In fact, while the number of members of sports groups for people with disabilities under the umbrella of the Nagano Adapted Sports Association was a little over 200 in 1997, one year prior to holding the Paralympics, it increased to over 300 in 1998, and over 400 in 1999⁵⁶⁾.

At the same time, the holding of the Paralympic Games and various other international events in tandem provided opportunities for improving competitive conditions each sport (for example, the introduction of functional class divisions) and the clarification and dissemination of information regarding rules. For example, up until the Barcelona Games in 1992, universal rule books existed for only two of the Paralympic sports internationally. It was at this time that universal rule books were compiled for all sports⁵⁷⁾.

It can also be said that the Paralympics provided opportunities for engaging in sports that had not previously enjoyed widespread popularity. At the Seoul Paralympic Games, the number of sports rose from 5 to 18⁵⁸⁾.

Moreover, there are people with disabilities who became involved in competitive sports after watching the Nagano Paralympic Games as spectators. Among these are Keiichi Sato who competed in biathlon events and Shinji Inoue who competed in Alpine skiing, both in the Vancouver Games. Their involvement in sports demonstrates that the Paralympic Games can provide motivation to people with disabilities to become athletes.

(2) Impact on athletes

Factors such as improvement in competitive ability and the deepening of a global perspective can be cited as general impacts of global sports events on athletes. These effects and impacts have also been important in the Paralympics to date. In terms of impacts unique to the Paralympics, which differ from mainstream world championships (differences for example in the events athletes participate in and their nationalities), the bringing together of athletes who have different types of disabilities can be cited. Being together with people who have different disabilities from one's own, watching how they participate in sports competitions at the same location, and engaging in mutual exchanges can be considered meaningful in promoting deeper understanding among people with disabilities regarding other people with different disabilities⁵⁹⁾.

From this viewpoint, the opening and closing ceremonies of the Paralympics have more meaning than the ceremonies of the Olympics. Because of this, there was strong criticism about the schedule for the closing ceremony of the Sydney Games. Due to demonstration events, the closing ceremony took place after the majority of the Paralympians had left Sydney⁶⁰⁾.

(3) Impact on spectators

Due to its unique atmosphere and tradition, unlike regular sports events, a certain sense of unity often develops between spectators and athletes at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. While the welcoming mood of the host nation may also play an integral part, the development of a sense of unity can have a greater significance in an event of disability sports.

The fact that the report on the 1964 Tokyo Games cited the development of a sense of unity between athletes and spectators as one of the characteristics of the Tokyo Paralympics is of particular note. This sense of unity could develop further in tandem with growing social awareness of the need for an environment where people with and without disabilities can enjoy the same sports. In fact, one member of the prefectural assembly in Nagano who watched the Nagano Paralympic Games publicly made a statement to that effect⁶¹⁾.

5. Cultural Significance

The cultural significance of the Paralympics can be considered from the following perspectives: (1) the Paralympic Games as a significant international event and its use as an opportunity to introduce and promote various forms of art and performing arts, (2) the Paralympics as an inspiration for creating works of art, (3) the promotion of the social participation of people with disabilities through cultural activities and works of art by people with disabilities, as well as promoting the marketing and commercialization of their works of art, (4) changing the viewers' perspective in the way they view art through the works and performances of people with disabilities.

(1) Significance as a place for introducing and promoting various forms of art and performing arts

The Paralympic Games as an international event, including the production of the opening and closing ceremonies, can play a role in introducing performing arts of the host country or host region to spectators and visitors as well as in preserving and promoting local performing arts in the process. The Nagano Paralympic Games is a good case in point. The Fire Festival of the Travelers' Guardian Deity, *Dososhin Himatsuri*, in Nozawa Onsen Village was chosen as the theme for the entry of the Olympic torch and the lighting ceremony. This traditional festival is designated as an important intangible cultural asset by the national government, and presenting this cultural asset as well as introducing local folk art are said to have contributed to their subsequent preservation and promotion⁶²⁾.

Furthermore, the ritual music and dancing of *oodengaku*, which formed the basis for the closing ceremony feature a performance with a modern arrangement of *dengaku* (ritual music and dancing) and Shinto rituals preserved in various regions. This also served to promote traditional folk performing arts⁶³⁾.

(2) Inspiration for works of art

The Paralympic Games itself can be considered a source of artistic inspiration (or an indirect catalyst) for media such as posters, photographs, movies, and literary

works. "Song for a Wheelchair (*Kurumaisu no Uta*)", a novel by Tsutomu Minakami, written after viewing competitive events at the 1964 Tokyo Paralympic Games, may be cited as an example of such inspiration⁶⁴. The novel relates the feelings of the parents of a girl who is confined to life in a wheelchair due to a disability, and describes their state of mind up until they resolve to help her become independent and capable of walking without a wheelchair. The novel was watching the athletes take an active part in the Paralympics that inspired the parents. The content of the story can be considered a product of the Paralympics.

Furthermore, in the town of Yamanouchi, which was one of the venues for events during the Nagano Paralympic Games, a wooden sculpture of the Paralympic symbol was created as a means of helping people with visual impairments understand the symbol⁶⁵. This may be also described as a work of art inspired by the Paralympics.

(3) Catalyst for social participation and empowerment of people with disabilities

For creators and performers with disabilities to have their works of art or performing arts introduced at an event such as the Paralympic Games, which attracts worldwide attention, provides encouragement and in a manner promotes the participation of people with disabilities in social activities. In this regard, the Paralympic Games may also be regarded as serving in the capacity of a celebration of disability sports. From the perspective of people with disabilities, artistic pursuits, as with sports, afford opportunities to demonstrate the abilities they have or their potential abilities. Therefore, it perhaps can be said that a venue like this is even more important for people with disabilities as a place for self-expression than for people without disabilities. Providing such a venue was in fact one of the main objectives of the Art Paralympics Nagano 1998, a festival featuring art created by people with disabilities, which was held during the Nagano Paralympic Games⁶⁶.

At the same time, there is a possibility that the presentation of works of art or artistic performances at the Paralympics will provide opportunities for commercialization and marketing. To some extent, this aspect may not be unlike opportunities that lead to athletes becoming professional.

Furthermore, promoting artistic activities for people with disabilities through the Paralympics provides an opportunity to change the social environment of artistic works by people with disabilities. To again cite the Nagano Paralympic Games as an

example, it provided an opportunity to broaden the scope of the display of works of art by people with disabilities from welfare facilities to museums and store windows⁶⁷⁾. Moreover, the Art Paralympics Nagano 1998 not only became the catalyst⁶⁸⁾ for encouraging cultural institutions like the Nagano Prefectural Shinano Art Museum to become barrier-free venues but also provided an opportunity for more people including curators to cultivate an interest and understanding of art works by people with disabilities⁶⁹⁾.

(4) Changing the viewers' perspectives

Unlike an isolated performance or exhibition, the artistic events and exhibitions held before and after the Paralympic Games can accommodate an extremely large number of viewers and audience. Such an opportunity is extremely rare, particularly for art by people with disabilities. Therefore, the impact its significant scale will have on viewers cannot be ignored. It is particularly important that the art of people with disabilities is having impacts on challenging the existing concept of arts.

For example, one of the works that received a bronze medal in the exhibition of works open to the general public at the Art Paralympics Nagano 1998 was a piece of pottery with a ceramic ball inside, which, when touched, made a sound. Created by a person with a visual impairment, the work demonstrated that the appreciation of pottery, which ordinarily relies on vision, can also be appreciated through the senses of touch and hearing. It can be said that works of art like this can be expected to change the way viewers perceive and appreciate works of art, and even to challenge their views of existing artistic concepts⁷⁰⁾.

The notion of challenging existing concepts applies not only to changing the viewpoint of appreciation. Whether it is sports or artistic activities, praising the suffering and difficulties generally associated with the social activities of people with disabilities itself (as embodied in the spirit of *ganbare*, which essentially means "Overcome all odds by doing your best!") can be questioned.

The Art Paralympics Nagano 1998 challenged the view that the Paralympics are a condensation of this spirit of *ganbare* even more than the Olympics, as well as the tendency for the Paralympics be praised in that light. It is interesting to note that a work of calligraphy containing the one word, "*Ganbaranai*" ("I will not do my best to overcome all odds") drew widespread attention in the media. This statement may in

fact have been challenging the very ideals of the Paralympics as a sports event.

Footnotes

- 1) Brittain, Ian. 2010. *The Paralympic Games Explained.*, Routledge, p.7 and elsewhere.
- 2) Howe, David. 2008. *The cultural politics of the Paralympic movement: Through an anthropological lens.* Routledge, p.18.
- 3) Brittain, Ian. 2011 *From Stoke Mandeville to Sochi.* Common Ground, pp.43-44.
- 4) Ogoura, Kazuo. "The Legacy of the 1964 Tokyo Paralympics." *Journal of the Nippon Foundation Paralympic Research Group* Vol. 01, 2015, pp.5-23.
- 5) Legg, David and Gilbert, Keith eds. 2011 *Paralympic Legacies.* Common Ground, p.167.
- 6) According to the BBC News Magazine, July 4, 2012 issue, as of that time, there were at least five veterans who had been injured in the Iraq or Afghan Wars among those who were selected for the UK team. In addition, there were two who were injured while defusing a bomb during their military service. Athletes like these veterans are said to account for about 2% of all UK team members. Furthermore, according to the same source, the number of British soldiers who sustained injuries to all four limbs or part of the body in the Iraq or Afghan Wars during the period from October 17, 2001 to March 31, 2012 is said to be as many as 262.
- 7) Based on interviews conducted by the author with relevant people who are knowledgeable about PR issues concerning the Paralympics.
- 8) For an example discussing this point from the perspective of a journalist, there is an article by Moore, a reporter of the *Daily Telegraph* (Great Britain) dated October 9, 2009.
- 9) Legg and Gilbert. *op. cit.*, p.114.
- 10) Mainichi Shimbun, August 30, 2012, Evening Edition.
- 11) See Legg and Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p.169, and Brittain, *op. cit.*, p.92.
- 12) Chun, Hea-Ja. 2015. "The Positive Impact and Legacy of the 1988 Seoul Paralympics on Sports for People with Disabilities." *Journal of the Nippon Foundation Paralympic Research Group*, Vol. 02, pp.41-58.
- 13) IPC website as of 2009.
- 14) Ogoura. *op. cit.*, pp.5-23.
- 15) Ogoura, Kazuo. "The legacy of the 1998 Winter Paralympics in Nagano." *Journal of the Nippon Foundation Paralympic Research Group*, Vol. 03, 2015, pp.1-32.
- 16) Legg, David et al. 2004. "Historical Overview of the Paralympics, Special Olympics and Deaflympics." *Paraestra* 20 (1), pp.30-36.
- 17) Howe. *op. cit.*, p.25.
- 18) Chun. *op. cit.*, pp.41-58
- 19) Legg and Gilbert. *op. cit.*, pp.70-71.
- 20) Ogoura. *op. cit.*, pp.1-32.
- 21) Conference for Sports for All 1973.
- 22) For details of statistics published by Nagano Prefecture, see the author's article "The legacy of the 1998 Winter Paralympics in Nagano." *Journal of the Nippon Foundation Paralympic Research Group*, Vol. 03, pp.1-32. Note that the "coefficient" discussed here was calculated by

the author based on statistics published by Nagano Prefecture.

- 23) Nagano Research Institute for Local Government, *White Paper on the Nagano Winter Olympics*, 2000, p.123.
- 24) *Nagano Prefectural Assembly Plenary Session Minutes* March 18, 1998, Vol. 03.
- 25) Legg and Gilbert. *op. cit.*, p.224.
- 26) *Asahi Shimbun*, September 18, 2008.
- 27) *Asahi Shimbun*, March 10, 1998.
- 28) Japan Paralympic Committee, official *report on the Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Games*, p.46, p.49.
- 29) Japan Paralympic Committee, official *report on the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games*, pp.22-23.
- 30) *Asahi Shimbun*, March 5, 1998.
- 31) For details regarding this point, see, for example, Howe, *op. cit.*, pp.125-26, and details regarding the development of technology in various fields, see Gilbert, Keith and Schantz, Otto. 2008 *The Paralympic Games*, Meyer & Meyer, pp.119-120.
- 32) Darcy, Simon and Cashman, Richard, eds. 2008. *Benchmark Games: The Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games*. Petersham. Chapter 12, "Legacies," p.69.
- 33) Gilbert and Schantz. *op. cit.*, p.80.
- 34) Legg and Gilbert. *op. cit.*, p.223.
- 35) *Ibid.*, p.67.
- 36) Bailey, Steve. 2008 *Athlete First: A history of the Paralympic movement*, John Wiley & Sons, p.28.
- 37) Gold, J. & Gold eds. M. *Olympic Cities*, p.12. *IPC Annual Report 2004*, p.6.
- 38) Hughes, Anthony. 1999. "The Paralympics." Cashman, Richard, and Anthony Hughes, eds. *Staging the Olympics: the event and its impact*. University of New South Wales, pp.170-182.
- 39) Ogoura. *op. cit.*, pp.1-32.
- 40) Howe. *op. cit.*, p.130.
- 41) Chun, *op. cit.*, p.43. Note that numerical figures are based on Legg and Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p.50, but the author believes these figures are based on hearsay and are lacking in supporting documentation.
- 42) The terms "internal" and "external" are also used in Howe, *op. cit.*, p.80.
- 43) Legg and Gilbert. *op. cit.*, p.59.
- 44) *Shinano Mainichi Shimbun*, March 13, 2008.
- 45) Gilbert and Schantz. *op. cit.*, p.148.
- 46) For example, an article by Clare Balding in the *Observer* (British newspaper), October 15, 2004, discusses experience and views in regard to changes in values in this context.
- 47) Howe discusses this point in detail in *The cultural politics of the Paralympic movement: Through an anthropological lens*, 2008, p.130
- 48) Kasai, Y. *Hosts to the Games to Tokyo.*, The International Stoke Mandeville Games for the Paralysed in Tokyo.
- 49) Gilbert and Schantz. *op. cit.*, p.60.
- 50) Wilhite, B., Mushett, C. A., Goldenberg, L., & Trader, B. R. 1997. Promoting inclusive sport and leisure participation: Evaluation of the Paralympic day in the schools model. *Adapted physical activity quarterly*, 14 (2), pp.131-146.
- 51) Darcy, S. "Paralympic planning." Cashman, R. and Darcy, S. *The Sydney 2000 Paralympic*

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- Games, Sydney*: Walla Walla Press /Australian Centre for Olympic Studies, University of Technology, pp.74-98.
- 52) For details on scale and budget, see "China's Paralympics get a good head start," *China Daily*, May 23, 2008.
- 53) Bailey. *op. cit.*, p.77.
- 54) Hogan, K. &Norton, K. 2000. "The Price of Olympic Gold" *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* 3, pp.203-218.
- 55) Legg and Gilbert. *op. cit.*, p.193.
- 56) *Active Japan*, Vol.12, p.46.
- 57) Legg and Gilbert. *op. cit.*, p.60.
- 58) *Ibid.*, p.48.
- 59) *Ibid.*, p.58.
- 60) *Ibid.*, p.66.
- 61) *Nagano Prefectural Assembly Plenary Session Minutes* March 17, 1998, Vol. 02
- 62) Nagano 1998 Paralympic Games Organizing Committee, ed. *Official Report on the Nagano 1998 Paralympic Games*, p.139.
- 63) *Ibid.*, p.142.
- 64) Minakami, Tsutomu. *Kurumaisu no Uta (Song for a Wheelchair)*, Chuokoron-Sha, Inc. 1973.
- 65) Yamanouchi Town, Shimotakai-gun, Nagano Prefecture. *Record Notes of Yamanouchi Town Regarding the Nagano Olympics and Paralympics*, pp.213-214.
- 66) Executive Committee for Nagano Art Paralympics. *Collection of Selected Works of Art of the 98 Art Paralympics Nagano*, p.2.
- 67) *Ibid.*, p.27.
- 68) *Ibid.*
- 69) *Shinano Mainichi Shimbun*, December 11, 1998.
- 70) Executive Committee for Nagano Art Paralympics. *op. cit.*, p.26.