The Rise and Fall of Institutions for Persons with Disabilities in Postwar Japan

“Ten plus years after [the passage of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons], various measures for disabled people have gradually been implemented. However, those measures are extremely lacking when compared to measures for disabled people in advanced countries in Europe and the United States, even when accounting for the letter of the law alone. If we consider the legal system for disabled people in its entirety, I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say that we’ve only just begun.”[1]

Kasai Yoshisuke, Chairman of the Board of Directors for the 1964 Paralympic Games

In 1962, Kasai Yoshisuke lamented that Japan lagged behind its international counterparts when it came to creating policies for disabled people. Kasai’s critique was not to be taken lightly: he was a seasoned specialist who sat on the Council for the Creation of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons in 1949 and served as Chairman of the Board of Directors for the 1964 Paralympic Games in Tokyo. Why would Kasai, who devoted his life to developing policies for disabled people, express such disapproval of his own contributions and those of his countrymen? The answer, I submit, lies in Kasai’s hope that the 1964 Paralympics would help resolve fatal flaws in Japan’s welfare system that had come to light as the nation experienced an ‘economic miracle.’ When the 1949 law was first enacted, the targets of Japan’s welfare system were five-fold: people with 1) visual impairments; 2) hearing impairments; 3) mobility impairments; 4) missing limbs; and 5) central nervous disorders. The government laid out a small budget to support people affected by these conditions, but the majority of their care was covered by charities and private institutions.

---

[1] Kasai Yoshisuke. “Shinshōsha taisaku no omoide,” *Yonjūnen no ayumi* (1962): pp. 103–106.

If Japan’s population of disabled people had remained small, there may not have been a problem. However, rapid industrialization and urbanization during the mid-1950s led to a surge in disability. As the country began to bustle with cars and factories, incidents of accidents and injuries abounded. Medical advances meant not only longer lifespans but also increased rates of illness due to old age. By the time that Kasai was writing in 1962, it was evident that Japan needed a new approach to welfare. But what could be done to accommodate an ever-increasing population of disabled people?

In this chapter, I examine how Kasai and other interested parties used the 1964 Paralympics as a moment of rupture to break with a faltering disability welfare system characterized by lack of financial resources and replace it with a system of residential institutions by the end of the 1960s. I trace how those institutions became breeding grounds for abuse due to administrative oversights, leading some residents and their allies to stage dramatic demonstrations that caught the attention of the general public and fueled anxieties about the future of disability in Japan in the early 1970s. Such anxieties, I submit, inspired some individuals to engage in eugenic behaviors and commit so-called ‘mercy killings’ of disabled people, galvanizing activist groups like the Green Grass Society to carry out consciousness-raising campaigns aimed at deinstitutionalization throughout the decade. Such campaigns emphasized community inclusion and led to the formation of new solidarities and kinships between able-bodied and disabled individuals. They also encouraged architects, engineers, policymakers, and experts in other fields to try and integrate disabled people into their surrounding communities via technical and infrastructural innovations. As I point out, such efforts at integration were often hampered by compliance and coordination issues, and by the end of the 1970s it was still difficult for many disabled people to access education, employment, and recreational activities.

My exploration of the rise and fall of institutions for disabled people in this chapter builds upon previous scholarship on the relationship between disability law, policy, and activism in Japan.

By tracing the formation of discrete ‘disability publics’ in the 1950s, I provide a partial corrective to research by sociologists and welfare experts like Reiko Hayashi and Masako Okuhira, who have suggested that disabled people were passive victims of abuse who did not organize until the 1960s.[2] I also highlight several shortcomings in disability-related projects by anthropologists and political scientists like Carolyn Stevens and Katharina Heyer, who have emphasized the importance of philosophical concepts and international developments over the actions of particular individuals and organizations when considering the transformation of the postwar Japanese welfare system.[3] As I point out, philosophical concepts like normalization and neoliberalism (discussed by Stevens) and international developments like the UN International Year on Disability (discussed by Heyer) did help to reshape Japan’s disability welfare system, but only in so far as they informed the actions of interested parties. By identifying which individuals and institutions were able to capitalize on historical contingencies and geopolitical circumstances to change Japan’s postwar welfare system, I demonstrate how hierarchies of impairment affected the development of national disability policy.

Social Services and Solidarities

On April 5, 1950, the Japanese government enacted the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons.[4] Media outlets like *The Japan Times* celebrated the occasion as “highly praiseworthy” and “another major step in the development of a sound democratic society in Japan where the welfare and happiness of every member are the prime objectives.”[5] Supporters of the

---

[2] Reiko Hayashi and Masako Okuhira. “The Disability Rights Movement in Japan: Past, Present, and Future,” *Disability and Society,* Vol. 6(21) (2001): pp. 855–869.

[3] Carolyn Stevens. “Disability Policy and Law in Modern Japan,” *Disability in Japan* (2013): pp. 61–95, and Katharina Heyer. “From Welfare to Rights: Disability Law and Activism,” *Rights Enabled: The Disability Revolution, From the US, to Germany and Japan, to the United Nations* (2015): pp. 123–166.

[4] Ministry of Welfare. “Order for the Promulgation of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons,” (April 5, 1950).

[5] The Japan Times. “Even Until the Least” (April 2, 1950).

law generated awareness by organizing promotional events in cities across the country including, but not limited to, a "Week for Physically Handicapped Persons."[6] Such events called attention to the needs and desires of physically disabled people, but also highlighted the lack of government funds available for implementing the new law. Only ¥100,000,000 had been earmarked for the law under the 1950–51 national budget against a projected minimum expenditure of ¥1,500,000,000. Inadequate allocation of funds rendered the new law all but useless for many potential beneficiaries. As one op-ed author lamented at the time: "The government is granting a dole to the physically handicapped under a law providing for the welfare of disabled persons, but it is inadequate to say the least. Since the fund provided them is not even enough to feed the patients, the setting up of facilities to train them to become useful members of society is out of the question."[7]

Aware that significant administrative and financial reforms were necessary to deliver the products and services promised by the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons, the Japanese Ministry of Welfare requested that the Council on Social Security (*Shakai hoshō seido shingikai*) compile a list of "Recommendations for the Japanese Social Security System" (*Nihon shakai hoshō seido ni kansuru kankoku*), which the council turned in on October 16, 1950.[8] In their recommendations, the Council on Social Security called for the establishment of a welfare office in each region of Japan with a population exceeding 100,000 people as well as the training and retention of workers specialized in matters relating to social welfare. Furthermore, the council also developed a strategy for dividing the Japanese welfare system into discrete municipalities.[9] Arguably the most important recommendation offered by the council was that the government

---

[6] The Japan Times. "Week for Physically Handicapped Persons" (April 27, 1950).

[7] The Japan Times. "The Forgotten Men" (November 22, 1950). For another example of the way in which inadequate funding led to failed implementation, see The Japan Times. "Half Free Pass?" (January 10, 1952).

[8] For more information about the Council on Society Security in the immediate postwar period, see Iwamoto Yoshihiro. "Shintai shōgaisha no jiritsu to fukushi seisaku no hensen: Dainijisekaitaisen ikō no shintai shōgai fukushi kara," *Uekusagakuen tankidaigaku kiyō,* Vol. 14 (2013): pp. 27–34.

[9] Shakai Hoshō Seido Shingikai. *Nihon shakai hoshō seido ni kansuru kankoku* (October 16, 1950).

should assume control of all public welfare projects and regulate the conduct of private businesses. Under the system proposed by the council, private businesses would become part of a national welfare network and abide by official regulations in exchange for commissions and subsidies. Justified as a necessary measure for upholding Article 25 of the constitution, which guarantees that "all people shall have the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living," the council's system of state responsibility for public welfare projects had significant consequences for many physically disabled individuals. As I discuss later in this chapter, the idea that the government should pay for welfare projects allowed some members of the general public to identify disabled people as burdens who 'eat taxpayer money' and fail to contribute to society.

On March 24, 1951 the Diet promulgated the Council on Social Security's suggestions as law by passing the Social Welfare Industry Act (*Shakai fukushi jigyō hō*).[10] However, lack of government funding meant that few private institutions were willing to align themselves with the state's welfare project and those that were often provided inferior services to save money. Writing in the *Nippon Times*, journalist Tsugi Shiraishi explained that "the physically handicapped in Japan number over a million, but very little has been done for them. Because of lack of welfare and rehabilitation facilities they are leading a miserable life completely dependent on others."[11] To secure accommodations, many disabled persons had to turn to private charities like the Bethesda Home for Crippled Women for support. Effectively, not much had changed since the passage of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons and the Social Welfare Industry Act.

The Bethesda Home for Crippled Women in many respects embodied the problems and solutions of disability welfare in the 1950s. The home was a charitable organization established in

---

[10] National Diet of Japan (Tenth Session). "House of Councilors Welfare Committee, No. 17" (March 24, 1951), and Suzuki Tsutomu. "Shōgaisha fukushi seisaku no genkyokumen – sengo shōgaisha fukushi seisaku no tenkai o fumaete," *Bukkyō daigaku sōgōkenkyūsho kiyō bessatsu* (2010): pp. 1–24.

[11] The Japan Times. "Physically Handicapped See Donations as Crutch" (October 25, 1953).

1953 by Hasegawa Shigeyo (1920–84), a Christian activist and physically disabled woman.[12] To finance her organization, Hasegawa could not rely on government funding. Instead, she appealed to friends, local businesses, and national newspapers and asked them to run fundraising campaigns. At the time of her organization's founding, Hasegawa collected enough money to provide lodging and vocational guidance for fifteen disabled women. By 1955, her organization had taken in an additional seven women, but as Hasegawa explained, the Bethesda Home could not help everyone in need. "We do not accept those who need medical care," she said, "because we have no medical facilities here."[13] Hasegawa's Bethesda Home was not alone in dealing with issues of scarcity: many charitable organizations that tried to accommodate disabled people lacked the resources necessary to do so. Consider the Izumi-no-Ie, which supported fifty disabled men and women through donations from private institutions like the International Ladies Benevolent Society and the Rotary Club but failed to assist many others due to the absence of government funding.[14] While fundraising initiatives and private charities for disabled people continued to operate throughout the 1950s, they often failed to resolve the lacuna in coverage borne out of inadequate state support.

The uneven distribution of welfare resources during the 1950s and creation of disability as a legal category prompted many impaired individuals to forge new relationships with one another. People fortunate enough to receive services from the state and private organizations often became activists and championed charity initiatives like those discussed above. But more often it was the case that individuals who were denied accommodations found solidarity through their struggles. Inspired by the literary cultures of blind activists and patients' movements in the late 1940s, some

---

[12] The Japan Times. "Crippled Woman Running Home for Other Cripples" (November 28, 1955).

[13] Ibid.

[14] The Japan Times. "Crippled Social Worker Assisting Handicapped to Earn Their Living" (March 14, 1961). For another charitable organization that tried to help disabled people but struggled due to lack of government funding, see Asahi Shinbun. "Minotta san-shi no doryoku: shintai shōgaisha no ie `Kurume-en' tanjō" (January 13, 1961).

physically disabled people who could not leave their homes like Hanada Shunchō began to publish magazines aimed at exploring the newly developed category of 'disability' (*Shōgai*) in Japan.[15]

Piggybacking off of preexisting alumni networks tied to the Tokyo Metropolitan Kōmei School, Hanada and his allies circulated *Shinonome* (1947), a periodical that encouraged disabled people to examine their relationships with individuals and objects near them.[16] Many of the earliest issues of *Shinonome* are no longer extant, but we can learn about the topics discussed by Hanada and his fellows by reviewing a comprehensive bibliography compiled by Arai Yuki in 2008.[17] According to Arai's bibliography, contributors to *Shinonome* in the early 1950s took up issues like "The Voice of Physically Disabled People" (Vol. 5, May 1949), "The Educational Desires of People With Cerebral Palsy" (Vol. 9, July 1950), "How Society Views Us [Disabled People]" (Vol. 10, October 1950), "Our Families' Wishes" (Vol. 12, April 1951), "Men and Women" (Vol. 16, April 1952) and "How to Overcome the Shame Of Living with Disability" (Vol. 18, October 1952). As the authors and readers of *Shinonome* collectively unpacked their everyday experiences through literary exchange, they established a new 'disabled public.' And they were not alone in doing so: activists like Washitani Kyoko and Ariyasu Shigeru created their own 'disabled publics' by issuing

---

[15] Arai Yuki. *Shōgai to bungaku – `shinonome' kara `aoi shiba no kai' e* (2011): pp. 12–13, 31–33. It is worth noting that similar explorations of disability through magazines also took place in the United States during the postwar period. Bess Williamson. "Electric Moms and Quad Drivers: People with Disabilities Buying, Making, and Using Technology in Postwar America," *American Studies*, Vol. 52(1) (2012): pp. 5–30.

[16] The Tokyo Metropolitan Kōmei School was built in 1932 as Japan's first public school for children with mobility impairments. Unlike schools for the blind, the Kōmei School lacked a standard curriculum and instead favored custom lessons that accorded with the physical capacities of its students. As such, enrollment was kept relatively low: the first graduating class consisted of thirty-four students. Early graduates who wanted to continue their education formed alumni associations and circulated magazines like *Unabara* and *Kurarute*, which analyzed works of classical Japanese literature like the Man'yōshū and Hōjōki. Over time, as the number of alumni of the Kōmei School grew, so too did the number and content of those magazines. It was this literary base that Hanada Shunchō targeted when developing his magazine (and eventual disability organization), *Shinonome.* Ibid. See also Mainichi Shinbun. "'Shinonome' wa watashitachi no kibō – kurushimi norikoeta shintai shōgaisha dōjinshi o jūnen mo tsuzukeru" (December 31, 1957).

[17] Arai Yuki. *Shinonome sō mokuji 1-gō (1947) kara 70-gō (1970)* (2008).

newsletters like *Sincerity* (*Magokoro*, 1949) and *Fellows Correspondence (Yūai tsūshin,* 1954*).*[18] The goals of those newsletters occasionally resonated with the objectives of *Shinonome* and other peer groups, but often differed. *Sincerity,* for instance, featured a medical advice column from a surgeon that did not align with the philosophical *Shinonome* or political *Fellows Correspondence*, which emphasized legal issues like Japan's lack of an in-home ballot system for disabled voters.

Over time, as different 'disability publics' came into being, special interest groups began to emerge including, but not limited to, the Green Grass Society (*Aoi Shiba no Kai*). Founded in Tokyo in November of 1957, the Green Grass Society was (and still is) an organization for individuals with cerebral palsy. Its membership grew quickly after its founding, exceeding one hundred people by April of 1958. Early activities of the Green Grass Society included group outings, bus tours, art exhibitions, and lectures by welfare experts.[19] Through public exposure and broad-scale advertising campaigns, the organization expanded its base and established branches around the country throughout the 1960s and 1970s.[20] In fact, the Green Grass Society went on to become one of the leaders of Japan's 'Disability Liberation Movement' (*Shōgaisha kaihō undō*).[21] To understand *what* members of the Green Grass Society were seeking liberation from and *why* they became movement leaders, however, we must first examine a series of environmental changes that occurred in conjunction with Japan's rapid economic expansion during the postwar period.

---

[18] Zenkoku shitai shōgaisha dantai renraku kyōgikai eds. *Shōgaisha undō no sakigake – Ariyasu Shigeru to yūaikai no ayumi* (2012), and Kenji Arai. "Disabled Woman Puts Out Unique Monthly Magazine," *The Japan Times* (September 13, 1959).

[19] Asahi Shinbun. "Basu o tsutsumu akarui utagoe `aoi shiba no kai' ga hatsu ensoku" (April 24, 1958), and Asahi Shinbun. "Geijutsuka nijū yonin de `aoi shiba no kai' no tame ni" (December 7, 1958).

[20] Mainichi Shinbun. "'Karada wa fujiyū demo akaruku…'" Aoi Shiba no Kai Kanasugi ni mo shibu hossoku" (October 13, 1958); Asahi Shinbun. "Kaiin, zenkoku ni hirogaru 'me o fuita 'Aoi Shiba no Kai' kyō san shūnen kinen taikai'" (November 3, 1960); and Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha ga renrakukyō o kessei" (November 25, 1963).

[21] Nagase Osamu. "Development of Disability Studies in Japan: A Brief Outline," *Disability Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 28(3) (2008): p. 14.

Economic Expansion and International Exposure

After the conclusion of the Second World War, Japan experienced an 'economic miracle.' Between 1945 and 1958, the country's average growth rate in terms of GDP was around 7.1 percent. From 1959 to 1970, the average GDP growth rate grew to 9.5 percent. By 1970, Japan boasted the third largest economy on the planet and ranked among the most developed nations in the world. As Michael Beckley, Yusaku Horiuchi, and Jennifer M. Miller have pointed out, Japan's economic growth was largely contingent upon alliances with American policymakers, political scientists, economists, and journalists on both sides of the Pacific.[22] It was also a product of domestic policy like Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato's "Income Doubling Plan" (*Shotoku baizō keikaku,* 1960), which reaffirmed the government's responsibility for education, vocational training, and social welfare.[23] The material consequences of Japan's economic growth were profound. Rapid industrialization, urbanization, and transition to a petroleum-based economy facilitated the rise of a new kind of infrastructure replete with cars, factories, and state-of-the-art medical centers.

The development of Japan's postwar infrastructure fueled promises of recovery and reward, but also created new risks for Japanese citizens in their daily lives. With cars came car accidents. Factories pumped out products for both domestic and international consumption, but also pollution and other hazardous substances. As medical science improved and life spans increased, so too did possibilities of accident, injury, and illness due to old age. By the mid 1950s, movements of parents, patients, and other affected parties began to appear across Japan and lobby for welfare reform.[24] Physically disabled people were often at the center of such movements, as they were exposed to

---

[22] Michael Beckley, Yusaku Horiuchi, and Jennifer M. Miller. "American's Role in the Making of Japan's Economic Miracle," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 18 (2018): pp. 1–21.

[23] Suzuki Hironao. *Ikeda seiken to kōdo seichōki no nihon gaikō* (Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2013).

[24] Hiroki Kawamura. "The Relation Between Law and Technology in Japan: Liability for Technology-Related Mass Damage in the Cases of Minamata Disease, Asbestos, and the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster," *Contemporary Japan,* Vol. 30(1) (2018): pp. 3–27, and Curtis Milhaupt, J. Mark Ramseyer, and Mark D. West eds. *The Japanese Legal System: Cases, Codes, and Commentary* (2012): pp. 166–200.

unique precarities tied to Japan's ever-expanding urban landscape. For example, the creation of highways and skyscrapers necessitated the development of footbridges and stairs that prevented physically disabled people from pursuing education, employment, and recreational opportunities. In response to the protests of disabled people, the Ministry of Welfare introduced a series of laws in rapid succession including the National Health Insurance Act (*Kokumin kenkōhoken hō*, 1958), the National Pension Law (*Kokumin nenkin hō*, 1959), and the Welfare Pension System (*Fukushi nenkin*, 1960). The Ministry of Labor also pursued policies aimed at promoting the employment of persons with physical disabilities including, but not limited to, the Employment of Persons with Physical Disabilities Promotion Act (*Shintai shōgaisha koyō sokushin hō*, 1960).[25]

While sound in theory, the Japanese government's responses to the growing problem of disability welfare were seldom effective in practice. As evidenced by a series of scathing critiques in the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *Japan Times*, the disability pension system set up by the Ministry of Welfare provided only modest annuities to select populations of physically disabled individuals.[26] Incensed, one columnist argued that a more comprehensive system must be established that could offer financial assistance to anyone who lived with a debilitating condition. In their words, "the physically handicapped person who has lost a hand or leg is granted a welfare annuity, but a person who suffers from serious tuberculosis or a mental disease is not. It is thus unfair that despite being the same as crippled, one cannot get an annuity. Such criticism has been frequently heard since the

---

[25] Kōsei Mondai Kenkyūkai ed., *Kōseishō Gojūnenshi* (1988): 1200–1206. See also The Japan Times. "Disabled Persons Demand Annuity" (November 6, 1957); The Japan Times. "Annuities for the Disabled" (November 9, 1957); The Japan Times. "National Pension System Bared by Welfare Ministry" (January 17, 1959); The Japan Times. "Welfare Recipients Crowd Post Offices" (March 4, 1960); The Japan Times. "Plan Formed to Get Jobs for Disabled" (September 22, 1956); The Japan Times. "More Handicapped May Be Employed" (March 21, 1959); and The Japan Times. "Law for Physically Handicapped" (April 24, 1960).

[26] Asahi Shinbun. "Fukushi hōki ipponka o – shinshōsharen zenkoku taikai de yōkyū" (May 26, 1951); The Japan Times. "Handicapped Persons" (April 24, 1962); and the Japan Times. "Hike Urged in Welfare Annuities" (July 27, 1962).

creation of the national annuity system."[27] Welfare experts like Kunii Kuninaga expressed similar concerns with respect to employment, suggesting that the government had failed to implement its policies for vocational rehabilitation and lagged behind its American and European counterparts.[28]

The criticism that Japan was doing less for its disabled citizens than other countries became an increasingly common refrain among activists and politicians during the preparation, execution, and aftermath of the 1964 Paralympic Games in Tokyo.[29] Before the games, fundraising initiatives were largely carried out by grassroots organizations instead of the Japanese government.[30] In fact, the government provided only ¥70,000,000 for the games against an estimated ¥90,000,000 budget, leaving the remaining ¥20,000,000 to be collected by volunteer associations. Despite campaigns from groups like the Japan Bartenders Association and the Japan Automobile Industry Association, the organizing committee was still around ¥5,000,000 short of their goal on November 2, two days before the opening ceremony.[31] Lack of funding significantly hampered possibilities of using the Paralympic games as a springboard to showcase Japan's disabled athletes (and, by extension, other disabled individuals) in a positive light.[32] By the time the games officially began on November 4, differences between Japan's athletes and their international counterparts were readily apparent. Embarrassingly, this highly publicized event brought global attention to Japan's laggardness in comparison with the disability politics and policies of other industrially advanced countries.

---

[27] The Japan Times. "Aid to Handicapped" (June 23, 1962).

[28] Kuninaga Kunii. "More Jobs for Crippled: New Law Needs Gov't Implementation," *The Japan Times* (September 7, 1960); Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha o yatoou seinen kaigisho de undō okosu" (September 3, 1961); The Japan Times. "Handicapped Persons" (October 4, 1964); and The Japan Times. "Work for Handicapped" (September 14, 1965).

[29] Kubo Masafumi. "Shinshōsha taisaku no jūjitsu o – pararinpikku no hankyō kara –," Kōsei Mondai Kenkyūkai ed., *Kōsei* (1965): p. 44.

[30] Dennis Frost. "The Paralympic Movement: Disability and Sports in Postwar Japan," *Peace and Culture,* Vol. 8(1) (2016): 41–48, and The Japan Times. "Lack of Funds Threatens to 'Paralyze' Paralympics" (October 20, 1964).

[31] The Japan Times. "Paralympics" (November 2, 1964).

[32] In addition to funding shortages, administrative blunders also tarnished the global image of Japan's commitment to disability welfare. For instance, there were not enough medals to give out to the winners at the award ceremony. The Japan Times. "Prize Shortage" (November 11, 1964).

During the games, reporters from local and global media outlets like NHK commented on the fact that many Japanese athletes used mass-produced wheelchairs and prosthetics that were unfit for their bodies, whereas foreign athletes used custom-made technologies of higher-quality.[33] Journalists also noted that Japanese athletes often lived at home or in hospitals and were excluded from their local communities, while the same could not always be said about their competition.[34] Even Crown Prince Akihito, who used his charisma to promote the Paralympics, offered an implicit criticism of Japan's performance. In his words: "Watching the recent Paralympics, I noticed that the foreign athletes were much brighter and had better bodies. I know that unlike the Japanese athletes, who tended to come from hospitals or health care facilities, the majority of the foreign athletes had already returned to society. I think that foreign rehabilitation is going well."[35] As Dennis Frost suggests, such indictments of Japan's approach to welfare, however veiled, were exactly what activists and organizers of the games like Kasai Yoshisuke, mentioned at the opening to this chapter, were hoping to draw out. By demonstrating how Japan's welfare system was broken, they could lobby for reform including, but not limited to, increased access to rehabilitation services.

Widening the Welfare Net and Risk Management

Many individuals and institutions tried to capitalize on Japan's fascination with disability in the wake of the 1964 Paralympics to transform the nation's welfare scheme. Among them, two sets of actors are worthy of note: 1) the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, and 2) the Network of Associations of Physically Disabled Persons (*Shintai shōgaisha dantai*

---

[33] Yabuki Fumitoshi. "'Undō' no izen – shōgaisha no ikizama o furi kaeru," in Onoue Kōji, Kumagaya Shin'ichirō, Ōno Sarasa, Koizumi Hiroko, Yabuki Fumitoshi, and Watanabe Taku ed., *Shōgaisha undō no baton o tsunagu* (2016): p. 73.

[34] Kyodo News. "Long Forgotten Films Shed Light on 1964 Tokyo Paralympics" (July 30, 2019).

[35] Kokusai Shintai Shōgaisha Supōtsu Taikai Un'ei Iinkai ed., *Pararinpikku Tōkyō Taikai hōkokusho* (1964): p. 79. I borrow this translation from Dennis Frost. "Tokyo's Other Games: The Origins and Impact of the 1964 Paralympics," in *Unpublished Manuscript* (2020): pp. x–y.

renraku kyōkai, established 1953). The former society used the Paralympics as an opportunity to highlight how Japan might benefit from global approaches to disability welfare and rehabilitation. The latter network capitalized on heightened media coverage of disability issues after the games to amplify the impact of local demonstrations at the National Rehabilitation and Guidance Center for Physically Disabled Persons and Ministry of Welfare. Together, the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled and the Network of Associations of Physically Disabled Persons put pressure on government agencies and motivated them to survey the status of disability in Japan. By examining their contributions in this section, I reveal some of the reasons why the government expanded the welfare net in the 1960s, leading to a proliferation of institutions for disabled people.

First, I examine the activities of the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled. After witnessing the stark contrast between domestic and foreign athletes at the 1964 Paralympic games, some Japanese welfare specialists like Motome Ikezumi concluded that the country could learn a great deal from international approaches to disability and rehabilitation. Ikezumi, then head of the Japanese branch of the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, used his position to organize a five-day pan-Pacific conference on disability welfare in Tokyo. The conference, which began on April 13, 1965, was attended by more than nine-hundred welfare experts from twenty-four countries as well as members of the Japanese government and imperial family, including Minister of Welfare Hiroshi Kanda, Crown Prince Akihito, and Princess Michiko.[36] After the opening ceremony, which featured lectures on rehabilitation programs for disabled people in developing countries, attendees participated in panel sessions on topics like cerebral paralysis, spinal paralysis, vocational training, prosthetics and artificial limb replacement,

---

[36] The Japan Times. "Rehabilitation Meet Beginning Here Today" (April 13, 1965).

and social rehabilitation.[37] While it is difficult to determine the extent to which the conference directly influenced the formation of disability policy in Japan, it is reasonable to assume that officials from the Ministry of Welfare in attendance sought advice from their foreign counterparts.

As ministry officials attempted to glean knowledge about rehabilitation from global experts, they were troubled by local developments including a series of public protests by the Network of Associations of Physically Disabled Persons. To contextualize those protests, a brief discussion of life at the National Rehabilitation and Guidance Center for Physically Disabled Persons is in order. As described in Chapter One, the National Rehabilitation Center was first built in Sagamihara in 1949 to provide vocational training and medical support to disabled people at an affordable cost. When the center initially opened its doors, the vast majority of its patients were wounded veterans with missing limbs. Although the center had a medical division, it did not have surgical facilities and instead sent patients in need of relatively minor procedures such as limb shaping to external hospitals. After the center moved to Toyama City in 1953, it was inundated by patients with diverse disabilities and expanded the scope of its surgical offerings accordingly. The medical division began to perform bone grafts and related procedures on patients affected by conditions like polio and rheumatoid arthritis which caused limb deformities that prevented them from walking. Such large-scale surgeries restored patients' limb function to a certain extent and allowed them to walk. As Futsukaichi Yasushi explained in his *Personal History of the Disability Movement* (*Shiteki shōgaisha undōshi*, 1979), they represented a beacon of hope for patients with little resources who had otherwise resigned themselves to lives of misery.[38] To illustrate just how important those

---

[37] Many other topics were also explored at the conference, including, but not limited to, spinal paralysis and prosthetics. The Japan Times. "Pan-Pacific Meet Opens to Study Rehabilitation" (April 14, 1965).
[38] Futsukaichi Yasushi. *Shiteki shōgaisha undōshi* (1979): p. 51.

surgeries were, consider the following quote from a certain Ms. Watanabe Echi, which originally appeared in a collection of essays written by patients from the center called *Journeys* (*Dōtei*, 1970):

> "For fifteen years after contracting my illness, my life consisted of nothing besides staring out the window. During my two-year stint at the center I received surgery on six parts of my body and gained the ability to walk without a cane. The pain that I felt when stretching my arms and right elbow was nothing but a memory after a three-hour large-scale surgery. The surgery's success also greatly impacted my psychological condition. Half a year after entering the center, the expression on my face had clearly changed, and it was as if I was a different person: the joy of laughter sprang up from deep inside me."[39]

While surgeries carried out by doctors from the National Rehabilitation Center on patients like Ms. Watanabe were life-changing, they were not sustainable from an economic standpoint. Indeed, institutional priorities changed as Japan experienced its economic miracle in the late 1950s. Growing demand for able-bodied laborers by emerging corporations led employees from the center to emphasize the care of patients who could easily return to the workforce. In 1957, the center modified its operations policy so that "surgeries would only be conducted after approval from an evaluation committee whose judgment would be based on a patient's ability to rejoin the workforce and complete vocational training within three months of their procedure."[40] The new policy, which effectively barred people with severe disabilities from accessing surgical procedures, was enacted in full force after a new director took over the center in 1959. By 1963, organizations of current and former patients like the Association of Rehabilitated Friends (*Kōyūkai*, established 1963) and the Confederate Rose Association (*Fuyōkai*, established 1963) began to appear and lobby center administrators for a change in policy. After several failed attempts at negotiation, seven of those

---

[39] Kokuritsu Shintai Shōgai Sentā Kōyūkai Seikatsu Taiken Bunshū Henshū Iinkai ed., *Dōtei* (1970). Book at NDL.

[40] Sugimoto Akira. *Shōgaisha wa dō ikite kita ka – senzen sengo shōgaisha undōshi* (2008): pp. 69–71.

organizations banded together with local groups like Shinonome and the Green Grass Society to form a collective bargaining unit in the Network of Associations of Physically Disabled Persons.[41] While the Network submitted several written petitions to facility administrators before the 1964 Paralympics, press coverage of disability issues at the games led the organization to change tactics.

On March 1, 1965, the Network helped coordinate a twenty-four-hour sit-in protest by more than one hundred disabled people and their allies in front of the National Rehabilitation Center.[42] The event received significant coverage from local and national media, with quotes and photos of protesters plastered across the *Asahi Shinbun*, *Mainichi Shinbun*, and *Japan Times*.[43] According to contemporaneous news sources, activists chanted slogans like "Give Us Surgeries!" (*Hayaku shujutsu o!)* and held signs that read "so many beds are empty when the place is full of staff personnel!" Their cries seem to have reached the ears of facility administrators, who on March 2 agreed to accept additional patients with the understanding that they lacked sufficient resources to treat an unlimited number of applicants.[44] Despite the temporary settlement, many protestors remained dissatisfied with the lack of options available at the National Rehabilitation Center and went on to stage additional demonstrations at the Ministry of Welfare.[45] Their rallies continued for more than a year after the initial incident and put pressure on the ministry to address the situation.[46]

---

[41] Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha ga renrakukyō o kessei" (November 25, 1963).

[42] The number of protestors is estimated differently by period sources, ranging from ninety to one-hundred and twenty. Likewise, the duration of the protest is described as having lasted anywhere between two and twenty-four hours. For a first-hand account of the protest, see Futsukaichi Yasushi. *Shiteki shōgaisha undōshi* (1979): pp. 47–57.

[43] Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha ga suwarikomi – kokuritsu sentā mae de 'jūshō-sha ni mo monko ake'" (March 1, 1965); Mainichi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu de suwarimoki – kokuritsu shinshō sentā 'shujutsu o' to hyaku ni jū nin" (March 1, 1965); and the Japan Times "Disabled People Stage Two Hour Demonstration" (March 2, 1965).

[44] Mainchi Shinbun. "Kokuritsu shinshō sentā de yōkyū doori kaiketsu" (March 2, 1965).

[45] Asahi Shinbun. "Kōseishō ni shinshōsha suwarikomi" (June 3, 1965).

[46] Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshin shōgaisha sentā kensetsu de shimon to shakai fukushi shin hiraku" (May 20, 1966); Yomiuri Shinbun. "Kurumaisu de suwarikomi shinshō ni hyakunin" (July 19, 1966); and Asahi Shinbun. "Ichiō hanashiai tsuku kokuritsu shinshō sentā" (August 6, 1966).

It was in this environment of compounding local and global pressures that the Ministry of Welfare instructed forty-six prefectural governments to conduct a census of all physically disabled people under their purview on August 1, 1965.[47] The results of the ministry's census were startling. According to their findings, the number of physically disabled adults over the age of eighteen in Japan was 1,160,000 people: an increase of 214,600, or more than 18%, between 1960 and 1965. The figure meant that 11.9% of every 1,000 persons in Japan had some kind of physical disability. The ministry associated the increase with industrial and traffic accidents, concluding that 89.65% of all disabled individuals had acquired their impairments after birth due to accidents or illnesses. Furthermore, the ministry explained that only 39.3% of physically disabled adults were employed, indicating a significant disadvantage compared with 66.9% of otherwise healthy Japanese adults.[48] While the validity of the methods by which the ministry gathered and presented its data for the census are open to debate, the responses to it are nevertheless significant. Disability advocacy groups like the National Social Welfare Council seized the opportunity to lobby for additional government funding.[49] At the same time, journalists like Gotō Teiji used the census to criticize Japan's lack of facilities and services for disabled people. In Gotō's words, "According to the 1965 census conducted by the Ministry of Welfare, there are around 950,000 disabled people in Japan, including 200,000 disabled children. There are also 140,000 severely disabled adults who are unable to work. […] Of course, local and national government agencies have made significant efforts to try and improve the welfare status of disabled adults and children. […] However, there

---

[47] The Ministry of Welfare was already due to conduct a survey on disability in 1965 as required by the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons. However, their approach to that survey and method for gathering data was likely affected by the activities of the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled and the Network of Associations of Physically Disabled Persons. The Japan Times. "Survey Ordered on Handicapped" (July 3, 1965).
[48] The Japan Times. "Survey Shows 18% Rise in Handicapped Adults" (December 29, 1965).
[49] The Japan Times. "Social Welfare Group Ask Gov't for Larger Funds" (January 8, 1966), and the Japan Times. "Handicapped Persons" (April 15, 1966).

are still an insufficient number of facilities for them, and countermeasures are slow coming."[50] As pressure mounted from different parts of society, the Ministry of Welfare was compelled to act.

On January 21, 1966 the Ministry of Welfare convened a committee for the revision of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons.[51] After several months of investigation, during which time ministry officials called for an increase in the nation's public welfare allowances to match those of advanced countries in Western Europe, the committee released a report entitled the "Comprehensive Plan for Revising the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons and Promoting Other Measures for the Welfare of Physically Disabled People" on November 24.[52] In their report, the committee argued for a revision of the 1949 law to expand its purpose and scope, as well as the services available to its beneficiaries. More specifically, the committee suggested that the law's purpose should be expanded to include not only the rehabilitation of disabled persons, but also the creation of a stable lifestyle for them. The committee also pressed for the establishment of services for adults with hitherto unrecognized conditions including those with internal injuries.[53] The Diet approved almost all of the committee's recommendations and accordingly revised the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons in March of 1967.[54] In the interim, the

---

[50] Gotō Teiji. "Shinshin shōgai taisaku o isoge," Tetsudō shinshōsha fukushi kyōkai ed., *Rihabiritēshon* (1965): pp. 8–9. See also the Japan Times. "Perils of a Long Life" (January 10, 1966).

[51] Kōsei Mondai Kenkyūkai ed., *Kōseishō Gojūnenshi* (1988), pp. 1200–1206.

[52] Shintai Shōgaisha Fukushi Shingikai ed., "*Shintai shōgaisha fukushi hō no kaisei sono hoka shintai shōgaisha fukushi gyōsei suishin no tame no sōgōteki hōsaku" ni tsuite (tōshin)* (1966), and The Japan Times. "Ministry Calls for Hike in Welfare Allowances" (July 30, 1966).

[53] While the committee's initial report singled out internal injuries as hitherto unrecognized disabilities that should be covered under the law, later reports pressed for the accommodation of other conditions including heart and lung defects. Expanding the legal framework for physical disability to include such conditions necessitated the development of new kinds of targeted measures and policies, which were eventually consolidated under the Basic Act for Countermeasures Concerning Mentally and Physically Handicapped Persons (*Shinshin shōgaisha taisaku kihon hō*, 1970). Mainichi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha fukushi hō o bappon kaisei - naibu shōgai mo tekiyō" (March 12, 1967); Asahi Shinbun. "Kekkaku, shinzōbyō mo taishō ni – shinshōsha hō kaiseian no yōkō: hōrei, hōan" (March 12, 1967); Asahi Shinbun. "Jūshō kekkaku kanja mo shinshōsha atsukai – shingikai hōkaisei de tōshin" (March 14, 1967); Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha ni kihon hō renkyū ake kokkai teishutsu" (April 23, 1969); and Asahi Shinbun. "'Shinshōsha kihon hō' seiritsu e" (May 8, 1970).

[54] Some recommendations from the committee, including the establishment of a 'handicapped consultant system' in which some 2,000 physically disabled people would oversee the implementation of Japan's disability welfare policy,

Ministry of Welfare worked to determine what sorts of accommodations were necessary to create a stable lifestyle for people with different kinds of disabilities and how best to implement them.

The Rise of Colonies and Institutions

In fact, the Ministry of Welfare had begun to investigate practical solutions to the 'problem' of disability shortly after the 1965 census. Drawing inspiration from international precedents and domestic dormitories for disabled children, ministry officials identified colonies and large-scale residential institutions as avenues worth exploring.[55] On October 5, 1965, Welfare Minister Zenko Suzuki convened a committee to research the possibility of creating facilities for severely disabled people in Japan.[56] That committee consisted of seventeen people, including, but not limited to, government officials from various ministries, welfare experts from national hospitals and sanatoria, and representatives from private corporations like Sony. After several meetings, committee chair Kasai Yoshisuke submitted a list of recommendations to Minister Suzuki on December 22, 1965.[57] Among Kasai's recommendations was the development of colonies, or 'independent communities,' for severely disabled people at national and prefectural levels that would serve as a model for the creation of similar institutions in the future.[58] After reviewing Kasai's plan, Suzuki presented it to

---

were scrapped by the Diet. National Diet of Japan (Fifty-Fifth Session) "House of Councilors Budget Committee, No. 2" (March 20, 1967), and The Japan Times. "Handicapped Consultant System Seen" (March 12, 1967).

[55] The Ministry of Welfare's decision to build colonies for severely disabled people was partially inspired by reports about the 'Bethel House,' a facility for impaired individuals in Bielefeld, Germany. Regarding dormitories for disabled children, they began to appear in Japan after the passage of the Child Welfare Act in 1947 and proliferated rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s. Tateiwa Shinya. *Byōsha shōgaisha no sengo —sei seijishi tenbyō* (2018); Hori Tomohisa. *Shōgaigaku no aidentitī – nihon ni okeru shōgaisha undō no rekishi kara* (2014); and Murao Seiichi. "Shinshin shōgaisha no tengoku," *Rihabiritēshon* (1968): pp. 8–9.

[56] Mainichi Shinbun. "Nen'nai ni kōsō matomeru 'shinshōsha koronī kondankai' dai ikkai kaigō hiraku," (October 6, 1965).

[57] Mainichi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha koronī no kensetsu kōsō matomaru" (December 23, 1965), and Asahi Shinbun. "Jūshō shinshōsha koronī kondankai kōshō ni kensetsu ikensho kaku chihō ni ikkasho setchi" (December 23, 1965).

[58] As evidenced by publications from welfare experts like Itoga Kazuo and Yano Takao, the stigma associated with creating 'independent communities' for people with severe disabilities was not lost on politicians during the mid 1960s. Itoga Kazuo. "Shinshin shōgaisha no tame no 'koronīron' konjaku," *Kōsei* (1966): pp. 22–24, and Yano Takao. *Shinshin shōgaisha no tame no koronīron* (1967).

the House of Representatives Budget Committee in March of 1966. The Diet quickly approved Suzuki's request, and by the end of the month it was decided that the first national colony for severely disabled people would be set up in a rural suburb of Takasaki City in Gunma Prefecture.[59]

By October of 1967, construction of Japan's "Paradise for the Disabled" was underway.[60] With an initial budget of ¥780,000,000, architects planned to build a small village of twenty-eight buildings that could accommodate 1,500 disabled people, complete with dormitories, a school, sports facilities, rehabilitation centers, and maternity wards.[61] However, construction was delayed due to a series of financial and administrative complications.[62] By 1969, the budget for the colony had ballooned to ¥7,000,000,000, of which the government expected public donations to cover ¥2,500,000,000.[63] Officials from the Ministry of Welfare also had to develop a screening system for applicants that would not cause resentment among those not selected and transform them into aggressive elements who might organize and carry out public demonstrations in a way not unlike the Network of Associations of Physically Disabled Persons at the National Rehabilitation Center. It took the ministry another two years of grappling with these difficulties to open the colony to even a small pool of disabled people: less than one out of every hundred who applied to live there.[64]

---

[59] National Diet of Japan (Fifty-First Session). "House of Councilors Budget Committee: Fourth Branch Meeting, No. 1," (March 29, 1966). In addition to Japan's first national colony in Takasaki, prefectural colonies would later be set up in places like Aichi and Osaka. The Japan Times. "Suzuki Explains Handicap Colonies" (March 2, 1966); Mainichi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha no koronī kensetsu – 'Takasaki' ni kimaru" (March 27, 1966); Asahi Shinbun. "Koko ni nengan no koronī – yonnen keikaku de Takasaki ni shinshōsha sengohyaku hito o shūyō e" (March 27, 1966); and Asahi Shinbun. "Shōsha koronī kaisho – Aichi shinshōsha taisaku" (June 26, 1968).

[60] The national colony in Gunma prefecture was described as a "Paradise for Disabled People" by various press outlets. Asahi Shinbun. "'Shōgaisha no rakuen' kansei e kokuritsu koronī ukeire junbi mo hajimeru" (October 11, 1970).

[61] The Japan Times. "Colony Building to Start in October" (February 28, 1967).

[62] Prefectural colonies faced similar problems regarding the selection and admission of applicants. Asahi Shinbun. "Koronī – kyō no mondai" (December 5, 1970).

[63] When the first budget for the colony was released in 1966, the Japanese government expected public organizations to pay for half of its development. Over time, the government assumed more financial responsibility to earn support. Mainichi Shinbun. "Akasaki no shinshin shōgaisha koronī kensetsu – kantei de kyōgi" (May 7, 1966), and The Japan Times. "In Suburbs of Takasaki City: Center for Disabled Being Built" (January 4, 1969).

[64] Mainichi Shinbun. "Takasaki no kokuritsu shinshin shōgaisha koronī, yokka kara ichibu nyūsho no hakobi ni" (January 6, 1971), and Mainichi Shinbun. "Kokuritsu shinshin shōgaisha koronī e daiichijin no nyūen" (April 20, 1971).

Among those rejected by colony administrators were some of the most vulnerable people whose disabilities prevented them from leaving their homes. Writing about an anonymous applicant with cerebral palsy who was unable to sit up by himself, 'Mr. A,' the director of the colony explained that "we truly understand that severely disabled people like Mr. A who must live at home are the most troubled of applicants, but at this point in time there is simply nothing we can do for them."[65]

So what other options were available for individuals like Mr. A? Aware that independent colonies were not an all-encompassing solution to the 'problem' of disability in Japan, the Ministry of Welfare also developed large-scale residential institutions for people with severe impairments. Such institutions have their origins around the time of the 1964 Paralympics, when a prototype facility was set up in Ibaraki Prefecture.[66] Japan's first institution for people with severe physical disabilities featured medical and nursing care but lacked the recreational and vocational elements that characterized colonies. Nevertheless, it was an appealing option for many severely disabled people and their families who could not afford to care for them at home, leading some to sign petitions and lobby for the creation of similar institutions across Japan.[67] While the national government erected eleven institutions in various prefectures after the 1965 census, those facilities lacked the resources necessary to house even a fraction of the nation's severely disabled people.[68] Furthermore, the government's institutions for severely disabled people were plagued by financial

---

[65] Asahi Shinbun "Kokuritsu koronī o owareta A-san jūshō sugite 'shikaku nashi' shokuintachi mo taien ni hantai" (June 30, 1971).

[66] Asahi Shinbun. "Otona no jūshō shinshin shōgaisha shisetsu zenkoku hatsu Ibaraki ni," (May 31, 1964).

[67] Institutions became increasingly popular options for families with disabled kin during the late 1960s as urbanization led to a significant decrease in viable housing. Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha taisaku o chinjō e Fukuoka ken no seinen shomei atsumete jōkyō," (June 8, 1964); The Japan Times. "Housing Problem" (August 5, 1968); and The Japan Times. "New Gov't Housing Projects Boast of Ample Noise, Odor" (August 31, 1968).

[68] Asahi Shinbun. "Kokuritsu shinshōsha shisetsu" (January 19, 1966); Asahi Shinbun. "'Otona' muke ni shinshō shisetsu raigetsu, Machida-shi ni kaien tonai de hajimete" (April 20, 1966); Asahi Shinbun. "Jūshō no shinshōsha ni shisetsu Machida-shi de kansei hatsuka ni nyūsho daiichijin" (May 12, 1966); and Asahi Shinbun. "Otona no shinshin shōgaisha shisetsu Akitsu ryōikuen de kensetsu keikaku" (June 24, 1966).

and administrative problems that affected residents' quality of life and allowed for abuses to occur. Such abuses eventually motivated stakeholders like the Green Grass Society to lobby for change.

During the late 1960s, many institutions for severely disabled people in Japan were built in remote locations outside of major cities as land was cheap. One consequence of isolation was that residents' families and friends (as well as government officials) could not easily visit the facilities. Lack of oversight often led to poor living conditions and various kinds of violations. Reiko Hayashi and Masako Okuhira have collected many examples of abuse inside of institutions: from unwanted hysterectomies and forced sterilization to instances of molestation and assault.[69] Other scholars like Yabuki Fumitoshi have also commented on the inhumane living conditions inside of institutions.[70] According to Yabuki, it was often the case that eight people were crammed into rooms designed for one person. Time for eating was kept extremely short and individuals living in facilities were only able to take a shower twice a week (if that). Furthermore, people living in facilities were not allowed to leave without applying for a short-term leave permit two to three weeks ahead of time, and even then, their requests were often denied by facility administrators. Rooms for residents did not have clocks or mirrors and residents had to ask permission to use the facilities' phones. If a resident went against facility policy, they were denied assistance transferring to and from their wheelchairs. Caregivers, who had no choice but to make up the difference between facility accommodations and residents' needs, often came to resent the individuals they cared for. It was not uncommon for caregivers to utter phrases like "the rice you're eating was paid for by our taxes! Don't talk back! Quit complaining and obey our orders, or else!"[71]

---

[69] Reiko Hayashi and Masako Okuhira. "The Disability Rights Movement in Japan: Past, Present, and Future," *Disability and Society,* Vol. 16(6) (2001): pp. 855–869.

[70] Yabuki Fumitoshi. "'Undō' no izen – shōgaisha no ikizama o furi kaeru" (2016): p. 68.

[71] Ibid.

While the Ministry of Welfare lacked sufficient resources to overcome the problems inside Japan's institutions for severely disabled people during the late 1960s, it was not unaware of them. By June of 1967, the ministry had begun to build an evaluation center for people with disabilities in Shinjuku that would help disabled people and their families develop custom care plans to ease the burdens associated with living outside of institutions.[72] The evaluation center, which opened on April 16, 1968, featured state-of-the-art scientific and medical equipment such as simulation spaces where specialists could examine and train people with disabilities to overcome obstacles found in daily life. While a breakthrough in many respects, Japan's first evaluation center was ultimately unable to accommodate many people with severe disabilities, leading the architects to construct a second center in Fuchu. Both facilities suffered from staffing shortages. Although the Shinjuku center was able to recruit approximately 85% of its target 146 occupational therapists, vocational evaluators, speech pathologists, and trainers by the time it opened, the director said that the prospect of filling the remaining vacancies was "extremely dim." The Fuchu center, which was created specifically for severely disabled people, had an even harder time finding qualified staff.[73]

Faced with a lack of trained specialists and insufficient material resources, the Ministry of Welfare needed to develop a new strategy for solving the 'problem' of disability at the end of the decade. In December of 1968, Ryokichi Minobe, the governor of Tokyo, released a three-year plan involving the expansion of facilities for disabled people and installation of more than 1,000 beds at hospitals for the aged.[74] Minobe's plan was only the tip of the iceberg from the perspective of the national government. On November 18, 1969, the Ministry of Welfare convened a committee of consultants to develop a list of comprehensive measures for the improvement of social welfare

---

[72] Asahi Shinbun. "Nipponhatsu no shinshōsha sentā – raiharu Toyama kōseikan ato ni kansei" (June 15, 1967).
[73] The Japan Times. "Center for Disabled to Open Today" (April 16, 1968).
[74] The Japan Times. "Gov. Minobe Unveils 3-Year Plan" (December 3, 1968).

in Japan. That committee established a subcommittee dedicated to institutions for disabled people, which released a report entitled "On the Emergency Maintenance of Social Welfare Facilities" (*Shakai fukushi shisetsu no kinkyū seibi ni tsuite*) on November 25, 1970. The subcommittee's report eventually became the basis for the Ministry of Welfare's "Emergency Five-Year Plan for the Maintenance of Social Welfare Facilities" (*Shakai fukushi shisetsu kinkyū seibi gokanen keikaku,* 1970), which tried to resolve the overcrowding of institutions by creating additional facilities during the first half of the 1970s.[75] Those facilities suffered from the same funding and space issues as their predecessors, leading to more incidents of violence against disabled people.[76]

The Fuchu Rehabilitation Center Battle and Disabled Futures

Persons with disabilities were not passive objects of systemic violence and state aggression in the late 1960s and early 1970s. On the contrary, many actively protested what they saw as unfair and life-threatening treatment by government officials, facility administrators, caregivers, and staff. Perhaps the clearest example of opposition by disabled people is an incident which contemporary scholars often refer to as the 'Fuchu Rehabilitation Center Battle' (*Fuchū ryōiku sentā tōsō*).[77] By taking up that incident and the media coverage it generated in this section, I reveal how members of the general public became increasingly aware of the poor conditions inside otherwise isolated institutions for severely disabled people. I suggest that such awareness created anxieties about the future of disability in Japan that inspired some people to engage in eugenic behaviors like murder, suicide, and abortion. Such behaviors led to the formation of new solidarities and kinships among

---

[75] Chūō Shakai Fukushi Shingikai. *Shakai fukushi shisetsu no kinkyū seibi ni tsuite* (November 25, 1969).

[76] Kumagaya Shin'ichiro and Onoue Koji, "Keishō subeki keifu: undō," *Rinshō shinrigaku*, Vol. 10 (2018): pp. 28–38.

[77] Nishikaku Junji. "Sengo shōgaisha undō to tsukui yamayurien – shisetsu to chiiki no 'kyōsei' no shosō," *Senshū jinbun ronshū,* Vol. 103 (2018): pp. 265–287, and Suzuki Masako. "1960 nendai no jūdo shintai shōgaisha undō – kokuritsu shintai shōgai sentā iryōmondai tōsō o jirei ni," *Rekishigaku kenkyū,* Vol. 889 (2012): pp. 18–34.

otherwise disconnected populations of disabled people who found a common cause to rally against as well as able-bodied individuals who feared what eugenic culling meant for an aging society. Together, able-bodied and disabled individuals lobbied government agencies for infrastructural revolution, leading policymakers and other specialists to initiate a 'barrier free boom' in the 1970s.

The Fuchu Rehabilitation Center Battle began on November 28, 1970 when four residents of the center for severely disabled people discussed in the previous section staged a hunger strike to protest the relocation of a facility worker who was routinely kind to them.[78] One of the residents, Nitta Isao, was interviewed by a reporter from the *Asahi Shinbun*, who later published Nitta's remarks in an article called "Severely Disabled People are Human, Too!" In a block in the middle of that article, Nitta is quoted as having said that "Some of the staff deprive us of our human rights and freedom instead of protecting our lives. They treat [the facility] as if they are going to the zoo. Is this a place where seriously disabled people can live? We want to live as humans." Next to Nitta's comments in the same block is a quote from the Fuchu center's annual business report, which reads: "it is more practical from a socioeconomic standpoint to treat these people as a group rather than individual members of various households."[79] The two quotes sit in stark contrast to one another and clearly illustrate differences between the two sides of rehabilitation center policy. They amplify the impact of many other quotes strewn throughout the article: from Nitta, "even in an inhumane facility, there were still a few people who treated us as human. All we want to do is preserve that;" and from facility administrators, "the only people who are upset are the protestors."

Niita's first hunger strike at the Fuchu Rehabilitation Center broke after five days, but protests against inhumane treatment at the center continued sporadically for the next two years.[80]

---

[78] Such relocations were relatively common due to the staffing shortages described in the previous section.
[79] Asahi Shinbun. "Jūdo shōgaisha mo ningen desu" (December 14, 1970).
[80] For a walkthrough of protests related to the Fuchu Rehabilitation Center between 1970–1972, see Sugimoto Akira (2008): pp. 88–90.

Those protests reached new heights in the fall of 1972 when the Tokyo Metropolitan Government began to relocate residents of the Fuchu Rehabilitation Center to a remote facility in Hachioji due to insufficient space. On September 18th, three disabled residents from the center and thirty allies staged an all-night sit-in demonstration in front of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building to oppose the forced relocation. Hanako Nuita, director of the Tokyo Bureau of Social Welfare, and other officials pleaded with protestors to stop the sit-in, but the protestors ignored their pleas.[81] Instead, protestors accused the Tokyo government of failing to listen to their concerns and turned to reporters from media outlets like the *Asahi Shinbun*. "The facility that the government intends to send us to," the protesters proclaimed, "is surrounded by cliffs, trees, and hills. It is completely shut off from the rest of society and will be overlooked by the general public." One protestor gave a particularly strong condemnation of the government's conduct, declaring that "it is not our fault that there are not enough facilities for severely disabled people. If that's the case, the government should build more of them. It is unthinkable that the Bureau of Social Welfare is telling a group of residents who have already entered the center that plans have changed and they need to leave."[82]

Throughout the demonstration, disabled residents of the Fuchu Rehabilitation Center and their allies demanded to meet with Tokyo Governor Minobe Ryokichi to discuss their grievances. Government officials repeatedly denied protestor's requests, leading some to escalate their efforts. On September 29, 1972 two disabled residents of the center began a ten-day hunger strike in front of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building.[83] The strike was closely documented by local media outlets, which shared protestors' frustrations with the public via a series of interviews.[84] By

---

[81] The Japan Times. "Plan to Relocate Rehabilitation Center Protested" (September 20, 1972).
[82] Asahi Shinbun. "Minkan e no iten wa oidashi – Fuchū ryōiku sentā no shōgaisha kōgi no suwarikomi" (September 19, 1972).
[83] Asahi Shinbun. "Futari ga hansuto – to ni kōgi no shinshōsha" (September 29, 1972).
[84] Asahi Shinbun. "Tochō mae no hansuto tsuzuku shōgaisha 'kakuri' hantai no futari" (September 30, 1972), and Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha shien de suwarikomi Tōkyō-to Fuchū ryōiku sentā no kango joshu Matsumoto Takahiro-san" (October 9, 1972).

October 9, awareness of the ongoing protests had grown to such an extent that the government could no longer afford to ignore demonstrators' demands.[85] In a major victory for demonstrators, Governor Minobe agreed to meet with residents of the Fuchu Rehabilitation Center and negotiate. Much to the dismay of those residents, however, negotiations with the governor amounted to very little in practice. With little recourse, residents organized additional sit-ins, hunger strikes, and other demonstrations throughout the winter of 1972. Each step of the way, reporters from media outlets like the *Asahi Shinbun* were there to share the sufferings of protestors with the public.[86]

By January 31, 1973 it was clear that the disabled demonstrators and their allies were losing the battle. Almost all of the residents selected for relocation had been sent to facilities in Hachioji, Tama, and Higashimurayama. While Governor Minobe eventually announced an end to the forced relocation of center residents in September of 1973, by then the damage had already been done.[87] Victims of the battle included not only disabled protestors and their allies but also members of the general public. Media coverage of the drawn-out series of demonstrations revealed to otherwise uninvolved Japanese citizens the sufferings of disabled people who for most of the nation's history had been literally and metaphorically silenced. Allowed to speak to a broad audience in their own voices (often for the first time) via quotations in magazines and newspapers, disabled people made plain the difficulties of eating, sleeping, urinating, and other aspects of life often taken for granted. The dismal image conveyed by disabled protestors generated significant anxieties about the future

---

[85] Asahi Shinbun. "Tochō mae no hansuto tooka buri ni hodoku – kōgi no shinshōsha" (October 9, 1972).

[86] Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu de 40-nichi suwarikomi naze… 'sabetsu iten' ni hantai jirenma ni kurushimu togawa" (October 30, 1972); Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha kyozetsu suru kono daitokai Fuchū ryōiku sentā zaishosha Sōdaiseira to taiwa shūkai" (November 4, 1972); and Asahi Shinbun. "To no setsumeikai o 'kyohi' Fuchū ryōiku sentā suwarikomi gurūpu" (December 13, 1972).

[87] Protests continued for more than a year and a half after the first sit-in near the Metropolitan Government Building. Asahi Shinbun. "Shinshōsha no minkan iten shogū wa toritsu shisetsu nami ni to ga setsumei, hantaisha wa nattoku sezu" (January 16, 1973), and Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu de no tochō suwarikomi ichinenhanburi kaiketsu e assen an jūdo shinshōsha tō rainen, minseikyoku e ikan – Fuchū ryōiku sentā funsō kaiketsu" (June 3, 1974).

(or lack thereof) of individuals living with disability in Japan among the general public. Meanwhile, some people began to engage in eugenic behaviors like infanticide, suicide, murder, and abortion.[88]

Reports of parents killing their disabled offspring (or plotting to do so) out of concern for their future wellbeing started to appear in magazines and newspapers like *Case Reports* (*Hanri jihō*) and the *Japan Times* during the late 1960s.[89] For example, one article published in December of 1968 tells the story of a certain Mrs. Hashimoto Ikuno of Kobe who "really thought of killing herself and two handicapped children when two operations on [her daughter] Yoko and one operation on the son failed to enable the children to move their limbs."[90] During the early 1970s, such reports became increasingly common as journalists honed in on the topic of 'mercy killings.' In May of 1970, a thirty-one-year-old housewife, Mrs. Hakamada Mihoko, strangled her two-year-old daughter with an apron string in Yokohama.[91] According to news reports, "she committed the murder on the spur of the moment when her daughter, suffering from a serious case of cerebral palsy, started crying. She thought that it would be better for her daughter to die then be kept alive." The following year, a Mrs. Yakushiyama Michi of Tokyo jumped in front of a train and killed herself after being arrested for murdering her disabled child.[92] Of course, it was not just women who committed such acts, nor were the victims always underage. In 1972, a 77-year old Tokyo man, Mr. Tokichi Takane, was arrested for strangling his 37-year old son, Ryuzo, who had cerebral palsy and had been confined to a bed since childhood.[93] In 1973, a disabled couple committed

---

[88] Eugenic practices like murder and infanticide had a long history in Japan before the 'mercy killings' of the early 1970s and it is not my intention to suggest a causal relationship between increased media coverage and frequency of occurrence. For more about the history and politics of such practices in Japan, see Fabian Drixler. *Mabiki: Infanticide and Population Growth in Eastern Japan: 1660–1950* (2012).

[89] Mizuki Hatushiko. "Sai kakarubeki mono – shinshin shōgaisha no musuko koroshi jiken kara –," *Hanri jihō* (1968): p. 22.

[90] The Japan Times. "Disabled Children Give Mother Heavy Burden" (December 3, 1968).

[91] The Japan Times. "Suspended Term Given to Mother Over Killing" (October 9, 1971).

[92] The Japan Times. "Housewife Leaps in Front of Train" (January 22, 1972).

[93] The Japan Times. "Elderly Man Gets 3-Year Sentence for Killing Son" (July 22, 1973).

suicide in Sapporo because their parents opposed their marriage.[94] Such incidents (or, at least, reports about them) occurred often enough that it would be hard to create a comprehensive account.

One common theme that united the eugenic incidents involving persons with disabilities in the late 1960s and early 1970s was lenient sentencing of culprits. Judges and juries often expressed sympathy for the individuals who carried out eugenic acts, understanding that their decisions were derived from positions of desperation. Consider, for instance, the case of Mrs. Hakamada Mihoko (mentioned above). For strangling her two-year-old daughter, Mrs. Hakamada was sentenced to a total of two years imprisonment, suspended for three years. Mrs. Yakushiyama, for her part, was judged as being insane at the time of killing her child and prosecutors opted not to press charges. As for Mr. Tokichi, he was afforded a three-year sentence, suspended in consideration of his age. Others were afforded similarly lax punishments: a thirty-one-year-old Mr. Kato Kinji of Sapporo, for example, was sentenced to three years in prison for killing his paralyzed two-year-old son.[95] Disabled individuals were not desensitized to the relative lack of repercussions for killing their kin. On the contrary, the shared threat of eugenics led many disabled people to find solidarity with one another and form opposition groups collectively known as the Disability Liberation Movement.[96] At the head of that movement was a group introduced in the first section: The Green Grass Society.

The Green Grass Society and Anti-Eugenics Activism

Leaders of the Green Grass Society like Yokotsuka Koichi and Yokota Hiroshi took issue with the relatively light sentencing of so-called ‘mercy killers’ of disabled people during the 1970s. They were particularly enraged by the aforementioned incident involving Mrs. Hakamada Mihoko,

---

[94] The Japan Times. “Man Dies, Woman Critical in Double Suicide Attempt” (September 14, 1974).
[95] The Japan Times. “Sentence Cut in Mercy Killing” (October 12, 1972).
[96] Ōsawa Hiroshi. “Shinshōsha dantai no katsudō ni kitai suru,” *Rihabiritēshon* (1969): 18–21.

whose child was affected by the same condition they were: cerebral palsy.[97] In a written response to the incident, members of the society expressed their anger and fear: “if you think that it is natural to kill persons with disabilities,” they reasoned, “then you might someday decide to kill us, too.”[98] Inspired by the infanticide, Yokota Hiroshi drafted a manifesto for the Green Grass Society, which was originally featured in the eleventh issue of the organization’s internal bulletin, *Ayumi*, in 1970. The manifesto has since been translated into English by Nagase Osamu.[99] I include its text below:

1. We Identify Ourselves as People with Cerebral Palsy (CP).

> We recognize our position as "an existence which should not exist" in the modern society. We believe that this recognition should be the starting point of our whole movement, and we act on this belief.

2. We Assert Ourselves Aggressively.

> When we identify ourselves as people with CP, we have a will to protect ourselves. We believe that a strong self-assertion is the only way to achieve self-protection, and we act on this belief.

3. We Deny Love and Justice.

> We condemn egoism held by love and justice. We believe that mutual understanding, accompanying the human observation that arises from the denial of love and justice, means true well-being, and we act on this belief.

4. We Do Not Choose the Way of Problem Solving.

---

[97] The prominence of people with cerebral palsy (CP) in Japan’s early disability movements is not incidental. Individuals affected by the neurological condition often had speech and mobility impairments that prevented them from pursuing activities deemed ‘productive’ by relatively privileged members of Japan’s postwar capitalist society.

[98] Sugimoto Akira (2008): pp. 78–79. Yokotsuka Koichi later expanded the Green Grass Society’s statement into a full-length monograph called *Mother! Don’t Kill Me!* (*Haha yo! Korosu na!*) in 1975. Yokotsuka’s monograph has since been republished numerous times, most recently in 2007 by Seikatsu Shoin with a foreword by Tateiwa Shinya.

[99] Aoi Shiba no Kai. *Ayumi,* No. 11 (1970): p. 1. Nagase’s translation is available on the Ritsumeikan University Research Center for Ars Vivendi’s Website: http://www.arsvi.com/o/a01-e.htm (Accessed October 16, 2019). As Nagase points out, the fifth clause of the manifesto was added at a later date.

> We have learned from our personal experiences that easy solutions to problems lead to dangerous compromises. We believe that an endless confrontation is the only course of action possible for us, and we act on this belief.
>
> 5. We Deny Able-Bodied Civilization*
>
> We deny able-bodied civilization. We recognize that modern civilization has managed to sustain itself only by excluding us, people with CP. We believe that creation of our own culture through our movement and daily life leads to the condemnation of modern civilization, and we act on this belief.

Yokota's manifesto became the foundation upon which the Green Grass Society based its activist efforts throughout the 1970s. As such, it is worth taking a minute to unpack its somewhat counterintuitive prose. The first clause of the manifesto posits that there is a fundamental problem with Japanese society in so far as it does not appreciate the value of people with cerebral palsy [and other disabilities].[100] The second clause suggests that the only way for the Green Grass Society to resolve the problem of devaluation of disabled lives is through deliberate action. The third clause is heavily bound up with the 'mercy killing' that led Yokota to write the manifesto. It contends that members of the Green Grass Society must consciously reject the ethics of Japanese society, which stipulated that a two-year prison sentence for killing a disabled child was 'justice' and defended that justice by declaring that murder of a disabled individual was an act of 'love.'

---

[100] According to Yokota's autobiographical writings, he reached this realization in the late 1960s during his time at the 'Maha Raba Village' (*Maha raba mura*), a private colony for disabled people set up by Buddhist monk Osaragi Akira. Drawing on Jōdo Shinshū teachings derived from the *Tannishō*, Osaragi told Yokota that society should not condemn him for being disabled. On the contrary, society should strive to save Yokota precisely because he is disabled. Osaragi's teachings allowed Yokota to imagine a society that conformed to his needs rather than the other way around and develop a 'social model of disability' around ten years before Michael Oliver formally coined the term in 1981. Yokota Hiroshi, Tateiwa Shinya, and Usui Masaki, *Warera wa ai to seigi wo hiteisuru – nōseimahisha yokota hiroshi to "Aoi Shiba"* (Tokyo: Seikatsu Shoten, 2016); Yamazaki Ryo. "Shōgaisha jiritsu shisō no ichi genryū – 'Aoi Shiba no Kai' no shūkyō shisō o megutte," *Shakai bunka ronshū*, Vol. 13 (2017): pp. 19–38; and Tsunenobe Yoritaka. *Shinshūgaku to shōgaigaku – shōgai to jiritsu o toraeru aratana shiza no kōchiku no tame ni* (2015).

The fourth clause of the manifesto insists that members of the Green Grass Society must push back against one-size-fits-all solutions to the ‘problem’ of disability like those proposed by the Japanese government during the late 1960s and 1970s including, but not limited to, colonies and institutions. And the fifth and final clause of the manifesto argues that members of the Green Grass Society must actively combat the biases of an ableist society and endeavor to create their own community.

During the 1970s, members of the Green Grass Society implemented Yokota’s manifesto by carrying out a series of consciousness-raising campaigns. Drawing inspiration from protests at the National Rehabilitation Center and Fuchu Rehabilitation Center, many adopted a media-centric approach to activism.[101] In 1972, several members of the society teamed up with filmmaker Hara Kazuo to produce “Goodbye CP” (*Sayonara CP*), a documentary that shows the trials, tribulations, stigma and shame faced by people with cerebral palsy in their daily lives. The documentary follows Yokota and other members of the Green Grass Society as they drag their bodies across busy streets, beg for donations at crowded bus stops, and discuss social taboos like drinking, smoking, and sex. It reveals how able-bodied individuals routinely objectified people with cerebral palsy as “pathetic,” “incapable,” and “pitiful” during the 1970s and offers Yokota and his friends a chance to respond. In one scene from early in the film, Yokota crawls across a train station and hands out flyers for the Green Grass Society. He says, “I walk slow and look pathetic. What’s wrong with that? […] We’re outsiders. We really are. We can never be insiders. But those who think they are insiders may end up being outsiders. Why don’t they realize that? That’s the point we’re trying to make.”[102]

---

[101] The Green Grass Society’s media-centric approach to disability activism later became a model for other associations during the late 1970s. Consider several groups of people with muscular dystrophy who produced documentaries about their own conditions toward the end of the decade. See the Japan Times. “‘Hopeless’ Victims Create Their Own Quiet Sensation” (April 10, 1977), and the Japan Times. “Dystrophy Sufferers Produce Film” (November 25, 1979).

[102] Hara Kazuo. *Sayonara CP* (1972): 23:10–24:20.

Yokota's critique that able-bodied individuals may one day become disabled played off of growing anxieties about old age in the 1970s and implied that eugenic behaviors like mercy killings were not sustainable solutions to the problem of disability. It allowed members of the Green Grass Society to explore alternative solutions throughout "Goodbye CP" including various strategies for community integration. For Yokota, the first step was to challenge a pervasive paternalism that led his friends and family to try and prevent him from pursuing activities he wanted to do. In his words:

> "For me, thinking about sex was taboo. Something I shouldn't think about. So, I didn't dare. I was told I was not capable, and I can't get married. I can be in love with someone, but no marriages. People think my body is not capable to have sex. That's what they think. My uncle is the same. When I fall in love, he tells me that I can't. When I tell him that I want to get married, he tells me that I can be in love, but no marriages. When I tell him I want kids, he says that I can get married, but I can't have kids. What is he thinking? I suppose he'll tell me I can have one kid, and not two. That's what healthy ones think. We have to show them that we can get married and have kids. Even then, they will deny us the next step. My uncle is not a bad person. He treated me very well. I'm grateful. But his behavior typifies the way healthy ones look at us."[103]

"Goodbye CP" was initially limited to a small number of theaters in Kanagawa Prefecture, but it soon spread across the country as Yokota and other activists arranged screenings for potential sympathizers.[104] As more people were exposed to the film, new advocacy groups began to emerge like "Group Ribbon" (*Gurūpu ribbon*) and "Group Gorilla" (*Gurūpu gorira*), which partnered with

---

[103] Hara Kazuo. *Sayonara CP* (1972): 37:20–40:17.

[104] Hara Kazuo did not initially release "Goodbye CP" on a national scale due to institutional obstacles. Sean O'Reilly. "'Disarmed': Disability, Trauma, and Emasculation in Contemporary Japanese Cinema," *Arts*, Vol. 7(1) (2018): p. 9.

the Green Grass Society and extended its reach such that it encompassed almost all of Japan.[105] Before long, the Green Grass Society started to coordinate demonstrations across the country to challenge what leaders like Yokota understood as 'the egoism of healthy people.' One famous demonstration occurred as the Diet debated a proposed amendment to the Eugenic Protection Law (*Yūsei hogo hō*, 1948) during the Winter of 1972 and Spring of 1973.[106] Up until that point in time, the Eugenic Protection Law had afforded women the right to abort fetuses for economic and health-related reasons. The proposed amendment, introduced by the Ministry of Welfare in the Fall of 1972, included a clause that would have allowed women to abort their fetuses if prenatal testing revealed that their child may have a severe disability. The Green Grass Society opposed the amendment for three reasons: 1) the amendment implied that disabled people should be eliminated from society; 2) the amendment psychologically disempowered disabled people by inviting stigmatization in the form of questions like "Why were you born in an age of prenatal screening?"; and 3) the amendment suggested that disabled people were incapable of contributing to society.[107] On May 14, 1973 fifty members of the Green Grass Society acted on their opposition by storming the Ministry of Welfare in their wheelchairs. Protestors chanted slogans like "don't steal our right to life!" and "it's the country's duty to make a society where people born with disabilities needn't

---

[105] Sadato Kuniko. "Shōgai tōjisha undō ni okeru kaijosha no yakuwari – Ōsaka Aoi Shiba no Kai no undō ni okeru gurūpu gorira o jirei to shite," *Core Ethics*, Vol. 4 (2008): pp. 119–130, and Yokotsuka Koichi. *Haha yo! Korosu na!* (2007): pp. 153–241.

[106] For more about the Eugenic Protection Law, see Ayako Kano. "Beyond Choice and Fate: Debates on Reproduction," *Japanese Feminist Debates: A Century of Contention on Sex, Love, and Labor* (2016): pp. 64–103, and Matsubara Yōko. "The Enactment of Japan's Sterilization Laws in the 1940s: A Prelude to Postwar Eugenic Policy," *Historia Scientarium: International Journal of the History of Science Society of Japan*, Vol. 8(2) (1998): pp. 187–201.

[107] Aoi Shiba no Kai ed. *Ayumi*, Vol. 19 (1973): p. 14.

be unhappy!"[108] The demonstration spurred significant debate among ministry officials and other related parties, eventually leading policymakers to remove the clause about disability in 1974.[109]

Perhaps the most famous example of the Green Grass Society's activism during the 1970s is a series of protests called the "Kawasaki Bus Battles" (*Kawasaki basu tōsō*). Between 1976 and 1977, leaders of the Green Grass Society received many reports of wheelchair users being refused access to buses in prefectures across Japan. According to the Ministry of Transportation (*Unyushō*), such refusals were due to safety concerns as wheelchair users often traveled alone and were not able to secure their devices without assistance from caregivers.[110] While many people accepted the ministry's explanation as plausible, Hiroshi Yokota and other members of the Green Grass Society argued that it was a rationale designed to keep people with disabilities out of mainstream society.[111] On January 7, 1977 the Green Grass Society sent a signed petition to transportation authorities in Kawasaki demanding that disabled people be allowed to ride buses without caregiver assistance. After several weeks of stonewalling, the society called on constituents from across the country to coordinate a massive demonstration. On April 13, more than fifty wheelchair users swarmed the bus terminal in front of Kawasaki City Station and simultaneously tried to board the buses there.[112] Their protest lasted for around ten hours and led authorities to stop service to thirty-eight bus routes, affecting an estimated 150,000 passengers.[113] The incident was evidence of the growing power of

---

[108] Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu, Kōseishō e kōgi 'shinshōsha no seizonken ubau na'" (May 14, 1973).

[109] For more about the debates, see Masahiro Morioka. "Feminism, Disability, and Brain Death: Alternative Voices from Japanese Bioethics," *Journal of Philosophy of Life,* Vol. 5(1) (2015): pp. 15–41, and Kuwahara Makiko. "Sengo nihon ni okeru yūseigaku no tenkai to kyōiku," *Kyōiku shakaigaku kenkyū,* Vol. 76 (2005): pp. 265–285.

[110] Yomiuri Shinbun. "'Enman hassha no michi' nai ka" (December 14, 1976).

[111] No official caregiving system existed in Japan during the 1970s and disabled people often had to rely on volunteers for support. When volunteers were not available, disabled people would occasionally venture out on their own, but the Ministry of Transportation's policy hampered their ability to travel and participate in recreational activities. Asahi Shinbun. "'Kurumaisu jōsha zehi mitomete' Kawasaki no nōseimahisha kyōkai ichi to hatsu kaidan" (January 8, 1977).

[112] It is ironic that the bus battles took place in Kawasaki as the Ministry of Welfare announced its plan to transform the city into a "Welfare Town" filled with elevators and employment programs based on European precedent in 1972. Mainichi Shinbun. "Kawasaki nado itsushi ni shinshōsha no tengoku o - Kōseishō keikaku" (August 26, 1972).

[113] Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu jōsha mata ōmome – basu 35-dai ga unkyū Kawasaki eki mae" (April 13, 1977).

disabled people in Japan and sparked negotiations between the Green Grass Society, the Ministry of Transportation, and several labor unions.[114] Eventually, the Ministry of Transportation and labor unions agreed to implement buses with tie-downs for wheelchairs in Kawasaki in the fall of 1978. Those buses were later introduced to Tokyo and other areas of Japan during the following spring.[115]

The Green Grass Society did not always win its battles.[116] Consider the fight for inclusive education, which began in 1973 when the Ministry of Education (*Monbushō*) announced its plan to create special schools for disabled children in response to demands from parents and teachers. The Green Grass Society heavily criticized the Ministry of Education's plan as "isolationist" and insisted that it would perpetuate stigma against disabled people due to lack of public exposure.[117] Despite the society's opposition, the ministry sided with parents and teachers, who saw segregation of schools as a way of cutting costs and providing additional accommodations to disabled children. In response to the ministry's decision, members of the Green Grass Society arranged a conference in consultation with the Disability Liberation Committee (*Shōgaisha kaihō iinkai*) and Saitama-based activist Koichi Yagishita in August of 1976.[118] That conference, which took place in Osaka, was attended by more than 1,200 physically disabled people representing groups from across Japan and led to the establishment of the National Liaison Council for the Liberation of Disabled People (*Zenkoku shōgaisha kaihō undō renraku kaigi*). The National Liaison Council went on to organize major protests of able-bodied and disabled people at the Ministry of Education in April of 1977.[119]

---

[114] The Japan Times. "Handicapped Fight for Their Rights" (December 10, 1977).

[115] Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu de basu jōsha ni – unyushō, maemuki tōben" (May 20, 1977); Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu demo noremasu – Kanagawa no basu shichigatsu kara" (June 21, 1978); and Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu jōsha, Tōkyō mo OK – basu kyōkai kimeru" (July 1, 1978).

[116] For more about the Green Grass Society's failures, see Koide Kyōichi. "Datsushisetsuka e no itonami – `Aoi Shiba no Kai' no undō o chūshin ni shite –," *Momoyama gakuin daigaku shakaigaku ronshū*, Vol. 39(1) (2005): pp. 93–123.

[117] Asahi Shinbun. "Nōseimahisha koritsu no tatakai – yōgo gakkō no gimuka o megutte 'kakurisaku' to tsuyoku hantai da ga rikai shimesanu oya kyōshi" (October 3, 1977).

[118] Zenkoku Shōgaisha Kaihō Undō Renraku Kaigi ed., *Shōgaisha kaihō undō no genzai* (1982): pp. 96–118, and Sugimoto Akira (2008): pp. 97–99.

[119] The Japan Times. "Assimilating the Handicapped" (April 30, 1977).

Their efforts to pressure the ministry into changing its policy were ultimately unsuccessful and the ministry made education of disabled children at special schools compulsory in April of 1979.[120] The Green Grass Society and its allies had lost the battle but were on their way to winning the war: their consciousness-raising campaign had created new connections among individuals who could identify and implement extra-legal solutions to the problem of social integration on many fronts.[121]

The Barrier-Free Boom: Compliance, Competition, and Coordination

As the Green Grass Society and related organizations lobbied for deinstitutionalization and community integration during the 1970s, they motivated specialists in multiple fields to try and eradicate barriers to education, employment, and recreational activities for persons with disabilities. By tracing how architects, engineers, policymakers, and other specialists tried to break barriers for disabled people in this final section, I demonstrate how their well-intentioned attempts to improve Japan's environment helped some people with disabilities while making life difficult for others. My argument hinges on the concepts of compliance and coordination as related to access-making. Focusing on changes to Japan's infrastructure and transportation systems, I reveal how the 'barrier-free boom' of the 1970s was driven by social and market expectations rather than legal mandates. I suggest that access-making consisted of a diverse and discordant set of practices in different areas that seldom resulted in a holistic system that supported the social integration of disabled people. While some people were able to successfully navigate the differing accessibilities of newly built roads, shops, trains, planes, and office buildings, many others were unable to leave their homes.

---

[120] The ministry's decision was also informed by international precedent, as special education systems began to appear in the United States and Europe at roughly the same time. Asahi Shinbun. "Yōgo gakkō no gimuka" (April 2, 1979).

[121] The idea that legal battles – even when lost – can provide an impetus for the consolidation of movements and social change has been explored in relation to other marginalized groups in Japan. See Karen Nakamura. "No Voice in the Courtroom: Deaf Legal Cases in Japan During the 1960s" in Patricia Steinhoff ed., *Going to Court to Change Japan: Social Movements and the Law in Contemporary Japan* (2014): pp. 147–164.

Over time, the divide between the theory and practice of access-making grew, and by the end of the decade a growing population of disabled people were all but shut out from Japanese society.

As an increasingly large number of disabled people left institutions and integrated into their surrounding communities during the 1970s, one thing became abundantly clear: it was difficult to navigate Japan's cityscapes in a wheelchair. Some welfare organizations and volunteer groups like the "Association of Disabled Friends" (*Shōgaisha tomo no kai*) tried to call attention to the problem by arranging public simulation exercises alongside media companies such as the *Asahi Shinbun*.[122] Typical exercises involved both discussion and experiential components: able-bodied individuals walked around urban landscapes with wheelchair users who pointed out how lack of architectural accommodations like ramps and elevators impeded their access to various facilities and services.[123] To attract participants, event organizers highlighted the fact that even able-bodied citizens might one day need to use wheelchairs due to injury, accident, or old age. As public awareness of the absence of accommodations grew, so too did calls for disability-focused city planning projects.[124] Under pressure, prefectural authorities in Tokyo released a five-year plan for the removal of stairs and construction of wheelchair-accessible walkways in 18,300 locations in December of 1972.[125] By May of 1973, the Ministry of Construction (*Kensetsushō*) introduced a similar plan calling for innovations on a national scale: the "Physical Disability Welfare Model City Planning Initiative" (*Shintai shōgaisha fukushi moderu toshi setchi jigyō*). Under that initiative, cities with populations

---

[122] Asahi Shinbun. "Machi ni deta kurumaisu no taikendan o kataru 'shinshōsha ni rikai o' no tsudoi" (September 11, 1972), and Asahi Shinbun. "Karada de kanjita 'kurumaisu' sabetsu hodō no dansa semai kaisatsu kuchi 1-nichi kaijoin dōkōki" (November 6, 1972).

[123] Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu ni muku machidzukuri o shinshō tomo no kai 'kurumaisu o yoroshiku' no tsudoi (September 1, 1972).

[124] Asahi Shinbun. "Motto kurumaisu OK no setsubi o kyōgikai shōgaisha taisaku suishin de hōkoku" (December 13, 1972).

[125] Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu demo raku ni ōdan ho shadō no dansa kaishō to ga 5-nen keikaku zentodō no 18300-kasho" (December 15, 1972).

over 200,000 were recommended, but not required, to: 1) install traffic light control buttons; 2) create curb cuts; and 3) build ramps into government offices and welfare-related institutions.[126]

The Ministry of Construction's decision to delegate implementation of the Model City Planning Initiative to local authorities was a carefully calculated choice. By introducing concrete policies to promote accessibility, the Ministry helped placate an increasingly concerned public and allay anxieties about the future of disability in Japan. At the same time, the Ministry satisfied another demographic of people by downplaying the social and economic costs of implementation. To a certain extent, it did not matter if the initiative actually created access for disabled people: the image of access-making was sufficient for the ministry's purposes. Indeed, implementation of the initiative was not at all uniform and made as many problems for disabled people as it solved. As welfare specialist Ikemoto Yutaka pointed out in a 1973 issue of *Rehabilitation Magazine*, partial implementation of urban planning projects was a major problem for many disabled people. While a disabled person might be able to follow a road and scale a ramp to access a building, they could not always use the facilities and services inside of that building. Ikemoto's investigation focused on restrooms, post offices, and libraries, but his logic extended to other places as well.[127] Indeed, partial implementation of city-planning projects rendered many disabled people immobile by the end of the decade. Consider the results of a survey by the National Recreation Association of Japan as reported in a *Japan Times* article with the telling title, "Majority of Wheelchair Users Stay at Home, Study Reveals: Handicapped Find Life Outside Hard." Out of 122 disabled people

---

[126] The initiative was later expanded to include cities with populations greater than 100,000 people in 1979 and 50,000 people in 1985. Nomura Akira. "Fukushi no machidzukuri gairon," *Rihabiritēshon kenkyū*, Vol. 80 (1994): pp. 2–10.
[127] Ikemoto Yutaka. "Shinshōsha to machidzukuri," *Rihabiritēshon*, Vol. 152 (1973): pp. 3–4.

surveyed in 24 prefectures, two-thirds said that they "find it terribly difficult to negotiate stairs or toilets outside of their homes" and 32.2% said they "only go outside one to three times a month."[128]

Incommensurate implementation of city-planning projects was only part of the reason why disabled people had difficulties integrating into their surrounding communities during the 1970s. Equally troubling were market pressures that drove the production of new kinds of technologies. Consider the case of Japan National Railroad's (JNR) development of new trains and train stations, which led to horizontal innovations in adjacent fields during the latter half of the decade. JNR's decision to modify their trains to accommodate disabled people was heavily influenced by negative press tied to an incident involving twenty-three-year-old wheelchair user Okabe Fumiake in 1972. Okabe was determined to test JNR by taking a train from his hometown in Fukuoka to Hiroshima. His trip was documented in detail by local media outlets, which identified how he had difficulty buying a ticket and had to ride freight elevators as passenger elevators had yet to be installed. Okabe also had no way of getting off and on the train by himself, and while he was able to ask an attendant to hoist his chair onto the train, he could not ask for help disembarking at his transfer. Okabe was stranded onboard and later prohibited from taking a train to his final destination by station attendants who told him that they had received many complaints from other passengers.[129] Media outlets like the *Japan Times* criticized JNR for their treatment of Okabe and wheelchair users in general. By the following year, JNR began to investigate new ways to improve their access.

In March of 1973, JNR announced plans to install accommodations for physically disabled people at five stations in the Tokyo area as well as Sendai Station. Among those accommodations

---

[128] The Japan Times. "Majority of Wheelchair Users Stay at Home, Study Reveals: Handicapped Find Life Outside Hard" (September 16, 1979). See also The Japan Times. "Hearing from the Handicapped" (September 30, 1979).

[129] The Japan Times. "Youth in Wheelchair Tests Society, JNR" (June 14, 1972), and the Japan Times. "Mobility for the Handicapped" (October 30, 1977).

were widened wicket gates, handrails, tactile pavement, and wheelchair-accessible bathrooms.[130] By June 1, JNR completed its renovations at Ueno Station and used the opportunity to showcase the company's 'forward-looking approach' to disability in press outlets like the *Asahi Shinbun*.[131] The renovations and positive publicity seem to have generated significant revenue for JNR. Indeed, the profitability of access-making (or the appearance thereof) paired with constant pressure from demonstrations by disabled people drove JNR to pursue additional projects over the next couple of years including, but not limited to, the development of wheelchair-accessible bullet trains.[132] As JNR made new technologies, other companies also tried to buy into the barrier-free boom.[133] Automobile manufacturers threw their hats into the ring by engineering microbuses and cars for specialty taxi services such as "Welfare and Tourist Taxicab Inc" and "Handicab."[134] Even airline companies got involved by offering up to 25% discounts to passengers with physical disabilities.[135] By the end of the decade, accessible transportation was transformed from a luxury service into a viable business model with competition guiding the production of new technologies instead of law. However, as was the case with city planning projects, differing standards and lack of coordination between businesses created critical disconnects between disabled people and their communities. According to the same survey by the National Recreation Association of Japan mentioned above, only 14% of wheelchair users rode trains to get around, while an even smaller 5.8% rode buses.[136]

---

[130] The Japan Times. "At Five Stations in Tokyo Area: JNR Plans Aids for Handicapped" (March 28, 1973).

[131] Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu de kigaru na tabi o senyō no toire kaisatsuguchi Ueno eki dekibae mazu mazu" (June 1, 1973).

[132] Asahi Shinbun. "Kurumaisu demo densha ni nose yo! Odakyū e shinshō kenshūsei ga demo" (August 10, 1973), and The Japan Times. "Traveling on Wheelchairs: Superexpress Trains to Carry Crippled" (October 4, 1973).

[133] For an in-depth look at the development of barrier-free transportation services in the 1970s, see Katsuya Mitsunobu. "Rekishi kara mita bariafurī," *Journal of Transportation Problems and Human Rights*, Vol. 19 (2002): pp. 19–26.

[134] The Japan Times. "'Handicab' Campaign is Launched" (June 14, 1977), and the Japan Times. "Taxis for Handicapped Make Debut Near Tokyo" (November 17, 1977).

[135] The Japan Times. "Airlines Bare 25% Fare Cut for Handicapped" (November 22, 1974).

[136] The Japan Times. "Majority of Wheelchair Users Stay at Home" (September 16, 1979).

To be clear, changes to Japan's infrastructure and transportation systems during the 1970s did not always inconvenience disabled people. Some particularly privileged individuals capitalized on the rising rhetoric of inclusivity and upswing in technical innovations to improve their personal and professional standing. For example, television personality and wheelchair user Eita Yashiro seized the opportunity to secure a seat in the House of Councilors in July of 1977. Yashiro was the first wheelchair user ever to be elected to the Diet. According to contemporaneous sources, his appointment caused headaches for other government officials as it necessitated major renovations to the Diet building that were costly and difficult to carry out. The building was made of marble and featured mazelike stairs in many places, which Yashiro pledged to crawl over if necessary.[137] It also lacked an accessible bathroom and had other problems: there was no space for Yashiro to park his chair in the main chamber and the rostrum could not be remodeled to accommodate him. Rather than endure the bad press and public relationships nightmare that would come from refusing Yashiro access, Diet members agreed to renovate select parts of the building to make it usable. Their decision was celebrated in the media as a practical and symbolic gesture that was not done for Yashiro alone, but for all disabled people: a welcomed sign of "long-overdue social reform."[138]

While success stories like Yashiro's are readily available in the historical record, it is worth remembering that so many others lacked the resources that allowed Yashiro to achieve his position. Not two months after newspapers applauded the Diet for its decision to renovate the building did reports emerge about a rally of 500 demonstrators demanding jobs and better welfare benefits.[139] In October of 1978, the Ministry of Labor announced that nearly half of the nation's corporations

---

[137] The Japan Times. "Lawmaker in Wheelchair Poses Problems for the Diet" (July 13, 1977), and The Japan Times. "New Upper House Member in Wheelchair Tours Diet" (July 19, 1977).

[138] The Japan Times. "Remodeling the Diet" (September 24, 1977).

[139] The Japan Times. "500 Demonstrate for Handicapped" (November 7, 1977).

had yet to attain the government-set target for hiring disabled people: 1.5% of total employees.[140] One year later in October of 1979, the situation remained relatively unchanged, with corporations reporting an average employment rate of 0.86% for disabled people.[141] It did not help matters that Japan's population of disabled individuals continued to grow at an alarming rate as made clear by a Ministry of Welfare census from 1980 that indicated a 33% increase since 1970.[142] As a reporter from *The Japan Times* so eloquently put it: "How much more is there left to be done? Everything, for the accomplishments to date represent but the barest beginning. And the possibilities for admitting the handicapped people into the social mainstreams remain largely to be explored."[143]

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have chronicled how activists, policymakers, and members of the general public justified the rise and fall of institutions for disabled people in Japan between 1950 and 1980. My analysis has highlighted the role of the 1964 Paralympics as a key moment of rupture in which local and global actors conspired to fundamentally transform the nation's approach to disability. Before the games, government officials rarely allocated the financial and administrative resources necessary to afford disabled people access to education, employment, and recreational activities. During the games, the consequences of such omissions became readily apparent as media outlets showcased differences between domestic athletes and their international counterparts. And after the games, disability activists and welfare specialists used those differences to advocate for new ways of accommodating people with diverse bodies and minds.

---

[140] The Japan Times. "Gov't-Set Employment Target for Handicapped Persons Yet to Be Met (October 29, 1978).

[141] The Japan Times. "Labor Ministry Reports: Handicapped Employment Remains Low" (October 5, 1979).

[142] The Ministry of Welfare explained that the increase was not only linked to accidents and injuries, but also a dissipation of stigma surrounding disability that let people identify as disabled who might have been reluctant before. The Japan Times. "Number of Handicapped Up 33% Since 1970" (August 2, 1980).

[143] The Japan Times. "The Increasing Handicapped" (August 10, 1980).

With growing rates of disability tied to Japan's rapid economic development during the postwar period, it was essential that architects of the new welfare system develop countermeasures capable of covering large groups of people. Toward that end, they constructed colonies and institutions that could in theory solve the problem. In practice, colonies and institutions were set up on cheap parcels of land outside of major towns and cities and suffered from lack of oversight, allowing for neglect and abuse of disabled residents. As otherwise uninvolved citizens learned of such abuses via a series of public demonstrations and media exposés during the 1960s and 1970s, they became anxious about the future of disability in Japan. Some individuals engaged in eugenic behaviors like 'mercy killings' of disabled people, which mobilized groups like the Green Grass Society to carry out consciousness-raising campaigns. Those campaigns, in turn, inspired experts in various fields to try and integrate disabled people into their surrounding communities via innovations in transportation and infrastructure. Such efforts were stymied by compliance and coordination issues, and by 1980 it was still hard for many disabled people to access education, employment, and recreational activities. For those people, Japan's 'barrier-free boom' was a bust.

As I explain in the next chapter, 1981 was a watershed moment for accessibility in Japan thanks to the United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons. Throughout the year, public and private organizations hosted events including, but not limited to, disability art exhibitions, adaptive sports meetings, and technical skill competitions that encouraged collaboration between activists and experts from across the world. Disabled people who traveled to Japan from the United States and Europe shared ideas about community integration from their respective countries and it wasn't long before an Independent Living Movement (*Jiritsu seikatsu undō*) began to bud in Japan. During the early 1980s, members of that movement started to study abroad at bastions for disability rights like the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, California with support from benefactors like the Japan Society for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, the Duskin Ainowa Foundation, and the College Women's Association of Japan. After several months of cross-cultural exchange, those activists returned to Japan with new strategies for community integration of disabled people. Working alongside Japanese welfare experts, who organized international conferences on topics like assistive technology and rehabilitation throughout the decade, they established independent living centers that significantly enhanced the services available to Japan's disabled communities. During the 1990s, the number of independent living centers in Japan grew rapidly as domestic anxieties about an aging population mixed with international pressures tied to the Americans with Disabilities Act. By the new millennium, Japan's independent living centers had combined into a national network with enough resources to lobby the government for a compulsory access law.

In 2000, the Diet promulgated the Barrier-Free Transportation Law (*Bariafurī kōtsū hō*), which made access to public transit a legal requirement for the first time in Japan's history. Many disabled people became able to ride trains and taxis with greater ease, only to encounter barriers upon reaching their destinations. To bridge the gap between Japan's inadequate infrastructure and the capacities of its disabled citizens, the government introduced several new policies to increase access to caregivers and assistive technologies. However, their efforts were hampered by a lack of resources: human, financial, and otherwise. As tensions grew between disabled people and service providers, activists organized protests around the country. Drawing energy from the drafting of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), they called for the creation of antidiscrimination legislation, which policymakers eventually enacted at local and national levels. Despite the implementation of that legislation, rates of violence against disabled people continued to climb into the 2010s. The Japanese government hoped that their ultimately successful bid for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo would help facilitate a total transformation of the nation's infrastructure and resolve the issue of discrimination against persons with disabilities. But has it? In the next chapter, I take up this question by tracing the history of Japan's Independent Living Movement from the United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons until the present.