Politics And Prosthetics: 150 Years Of Disability In Japan

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Politics And Prosthetics: 150 Years Of Disability In Japan

Abstract
In this dissertation, I argue that attempts by activists and policy makers to improve access to Japan's built environment, education, employment, entertainment, and welfare systems for disabled populations over the last one hundred and fifty years have not always helped impaired individuals and frequently excluded as many demographics as they empowered. To identify which groups of people have been privileged with access and why, I analyze government records, news reports, and documents from advocacy organizations using approaches from history, anthropology, sociology, political science, and media studies. My evidence suggests that economic pressures tied to processes such as industrialization, democratization, and ageing have played a key role in shaping the politics of accessibility in modern Japan, as they have led architects, engineers, educators, and other stakeholders to focus on the needs of individuals with diverse impairments at different points in time. Equally influential have been international flows of information, materials, and people in the disability welfare sphere, which have pushed politicians to pursue domestic reforms. My project demonstrates why scholars of Japan must explore technologies created by and for disabled people to fully appreciate numerous aspects of the country's culture, ranging from military actions and modes of governance to marketplace and material innovations. It also explains why academics interested in social justice issues in places like the United States and Europe must strive to investigate the history and politics of disability in Japan. Why does Japan matter? Because Japan has the third largest economy and fastest ageing population in the world. Interested parties often export its assistive technologies overseas, and the nation's access-making activities have served, and likely will continue to serve, as successful models to emulate and cautionary tales of what to avoid for other countries. A descriptive project with prescriptive implications, this dissertation uses history to shape policy by asking policy makers to consider who has a seat at the table, how they come to be there, and what they fail to imagine when making access measures. By unpacking the politics of access in Japan's past and present, this project helps create an inclusive future.

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POLITICS AND PROSTHETICS: 150 YEARS OF DISABILITY IN JAPAN

Mark Ross Bookman

A DISSERTATION

in

East Asian Languages and Civilizations

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in

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If completing this project has taught me anything, it is how inextricably bound up the lives of disabled and non-disabled people are. Disabled perspectives have shaped, and continue to shape, built environments, education, employment, entertainment, and welfare systems for many communities. Disability activists have promoted policy changes aimed at the creation of inclusive societies by partnering with advocates for women, elderly people, and other minority populations. Just as their partnerships have enabled mutual empowerment and the attainment of shared goals, so too has my work been elevated by the kindness and generosity of individuals and institutions. Although spatial limitations prevent me from adequately acknowledging all the parties that have helped to structure this project, there are some whose contributions I would like to highlight here.

This project would not have been possible without financial support from the University of Pennsylvania, The Japan Foundation, and Fulbright Japan. During my time as a Fulbright Fellow in Tokyo between 2014 and 2015, I encountered physical and social barriers to access that prevented me from completing my proposed work on ninth century esoteric Buddhist philosophy. Driven by a desire to uncover the origins of those barriers, I started my doctoral education at the University of Pennsylvania in 2015, where I took courses in a wide array of fields until 2018. The training that I received helped me to synthesize theories and methods from history, anthropology, sociology, political science, media and area studies and craft the main approach for this project. Indeed, I used the skillset that I cultivated at the University of Pennsylvania to analyze archival materials and other records that I unearthed while a Japan Foundation Fellow at the University of Tokyo. By harnessing the financial and pedagogical resources that I acquired at each institution, I slowly pieced together disparate components and planted the seeds that bloomed into this project.
Of course, I could not have finished this project without guidance from many individuals. First, I would like to recognize the chair of my dissertation committee and longtime mentor, Jolyon Thomas, whose invaluable feedback allowed me to see this project through to completion despite physical, social, and financial barriers. Second, I would like to thank the other members of my dissertation committee, Ayako Kano, Eric Feldman, and Beth Linker, for their insightful comments, especially at my dissertation defense. I am indebted to colleagues at the University of Tokyo Research Center for Advanced Science and Technology, including Fukushima Satoshi, Kumagaya Shin’ichiro, Ishikawa Jun, and Hoshika Ryoji, for sharing their expertise on disability in Japan with me. I am equally grateful to friends in Japanese disability studies for speaking with me about their own projects: among them, Nagase Osamu, Jennifer McGuire, Steven Fedorowicz, Michael Gillan Peckitt, Carolyn Stevens, Karen Nakamura, Dennis Frost, and Yoshiko Okuyama.

I am fortunate to have benefitted from discussions and late-night commiseration sessions with current and former graduate students, as well as disability activists, policy makers, and other stakeholders invested in access-making on both sides of the Pacific while developing this project. During my early years at the University of Pennsylvania, conversations with the ‘Shinto Squad’ – John Grisafi, Tianran Hang, and Kaitlyn Ugoretz – informed my thinking about diversity issues. Also influential were exchanges with senior classmates like Daria Melnikova and Harry Schley, whose investigations of gender, performance, and material studies often resonated with my own. As I refined the scope of my project and began to conduct fieldwork in Japan, I came into contact with disability advocates like Onoue Koji, Nakanishi Shoji, Masako Okuhira, and Josh Grisdale, whose personal and professional advice allowed me to thrive in otherwise unhospitable settings. Their support is a large part of the reason that I was able to carry this project to fruition alongside assistance from Japan-based friends Patrick Galbraith, Alexandra Hambleton, and Laura Clark, as well as aid from my juniors at the University of Pennsylvania Patrick Carland and Caitlin Adkins.
Above all, I owe a great deal to my family for their fierce support over the last few years. I could not have written this dissertation without the nurturing love of my father and mother, Paul and Debby Bookman (now departed), as well as the affection of my little sister, Rachel Bookman. My stepmother, Wasna Dabbagh, offered me emotional stability and a shoulder to cry on, as did my caregivers and closest companions, Ryo Hatakeyama and Frank Mondelli. Perhaps the single greatest source of inspiration for this project is my partner, Fangdan Li, without whom I never could have made it to Japan. From helping me get out of bed and into my wheelchair each day to listening to my frustrated rants about article revisions, Fangdan was (and is) always there for me. I trust that she knows how significantly her actions have affected me and my work on this project.
ABSTRACT

POLITICS AND PROSTHETICS: 150 YEARS OF DISABILITY IN JAPAN

Mark Ross Bookman
Jolyon Thomas

In this dissertation, I argue that attempts by activists and policy makers to improve access to Japan’s built environment, education, employment, entertainment, and welfare systems for disabled populations over the last one hundred and fifty years have not always helped impaired individuals and frequently excluded as many demographics as they empowered. To identify which groups of people have been privileged with access and why, I analyze government records, news reports, and documents from advocacy organizations using approaches from history, anthropology, sociology, political science, and media studies. My evidence suggests that economic pressures tied to processes such as industrialization, democratization, and ageing have played a key role in shaping the politics of accessibility in modern Japan, as they have led architects, engineers, educators, and other stakeholders to focus on the needs of individuals with diverse impairments at different points in time. Equally influential have been international flows of information, materials, and people in the disability welfare sphere, which have pushed politicians to pursue domestic reforms. My project demonstrates why scholars of Japan must explore technologies created by and for disabled people to fully appreciate numerous aspects of the country’s culture, ranging from military actions and modes of governance to marketplace and material innovations. It also explains why academics interested in social justice issues in places like the United
States and Europe must strive to investigate the history and politics of disability in Japan. Why does Japan matter? Because Japan has the third largest economy and fastest ageing population in the world. Interested parties often export its assistive technologies overseas, and the nation’s access-making activities have served, and likely will continue to serve, as successful models to emulate and cautionary tales of what to avoid for other countries. A descriptive project with prescriptive implications, this dissertation uses history to shape policy by asking policy makers to consider who has a seat at the table, how they come to be there, and what they fail to imagine when making access measures. By unpacking the politics of access in Japan’s past and present, this project helps create an inclusive future.
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Introduction

“Let the elderly and disabled be carried by two-legged robots, don cybernetic exoskeletons, or ride carbon-fiber palanquins to reach the top of Nagoya Castle.” This was the message conveyed by Nagoya City officials at a press conference in July 2018, which sought to address the removal of the castle’s elevator “to restore its historical authenticity.”¹ A group of activists called the Committee for the Inclusion of an Elevator in the Wooden Keep of Nagoya Castle (Nagoyajō mokuzō tenshu ni erebētā setchi o jitsugen suru jikkō iinkai) responded by saying that replacing the elevator with such technologies, which had yet to be developed and tested, might endanger the safety of elderly and disabled individuals and prevent them from enjoying the castle. Speaking on behalf of more than 9.3 million people with documented disabilities (7.4% of Japan’s population) and 35 million people over the age of 65 (28.1%), they successfully postponed construction until a more suitable arrangement could be agreed upon.² The activists won, or at least suspended, the Nagoya Castle Battle. However, the war for accessibility was being carried out on multiple fronts.

Several months before the Nagoya Castle Battle in December 2017, a survey conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transportation, and Tourism

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² On June 19, 2018 more than six hundred activists submitted a petition to the mayor of Nagoya City that was signed by representatives of 118 organizations for elderly and disabled individuals from twenty-nine prefectures across Japan. Nagoyajō mokuzō tenshu ni erebētā setchī o jitsugen suru jikkō iinkai jimukyoku, Untitled Pamphlet (December 2018), Asahi Shinbun, “Shōgai aru hito wa 936-man nin jinkō no 7.4 pāsento Kōrōshō suikei” (April 9, 2018); Statistics Bureau of Japan, Statistical Handbook of Japan (2019), p. 10; and Asahi Shinbun, “Nagoya jō shin tenshu no EV mondai, shōgaishara ga jinken kyūsai mōshitate” (January 7, 2019).
in preparation for the 2020 Paralympics showed that only 368 of 102,766 hotel rooms in Japan were accessible (0.4%). In December 2019, another survey from the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare revealed that the national government had failed to achieve its legally mandated quota for hiring disabled people (2.5% of employees), as had more than half of large private companies operating in Japan (2.2%). And in September 2020, the Japan Student Services Organization released data demonstrating that disabled students made up only 1% of total enrollment at Japanese institutes of higher education.

Such statistics help to explain the scope of access issues in Japan but do not reflect the internal politics of the nation’s disabled communities: how physical, social, economic, and cultural differences between groups influence experiences of accessibility. Indeed, access means, and has meant, different things to different people in Japan: a reality that I have come to appreciate through my daily activities as a disabled scholar living in Tokyo.

Before I arrived in Japan in 2018, I went online to look for apartments. Out of the 240,000 apartments available in Tokyo, nine hundred were listed as ‘barrier-free.’ Each was accessible to someone, but none were accessible to me. The reasons varied: a raised entryway; a narrow bathroom door; an exorbitant renovation cost; and so forth. When I ventured outside to conduct my fieldwork, I had to rely on outdated maps and train station staff who were seldom able to help me due to lack of familiarity with my foreign

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3 Hoteru mata wa ryokan no bariafurī kyakushitsu kijun no minaoshi ni kansuru kenkōkai, Hoteru ryokan no bariafurika no genjō nado ni kansuru ankehō chōsa kekka bunseki (February 27, 2018).
5 Japan Student Services Association, Shōgai no aru gakusei no shūgaku shien ni kansuru jittai chōsa (2020).
wheelchair. While I would normally ask a caregiver to assist me in surmounting such obstacles in the United States, Japan’s labor shortage meant that I often had to find solutions by myself. Indeed, local authorities reduced my legally mandated disability service hours from twenty-four each day to five, explaining that my fiancée (a full-time student) must provide for most of my cooking, bathing, and other needs “because she is family” and they “could not find caregivers.” My daily experiences in Tokyo alerted me to the ways in which Japanese definitions of accessibility are informed by intersectional factors of identity like age, race, class, and gender. Before long, I started to ask a series of questions: Who defines accessibility in Japan? Why do people accept their definitions? How do their actions affect individuals with diverse bodies and minds? And if somebody wants to change a definition of accessibility, what tools can they use? To address these questions, I embarked on this project, which explores the politics of accessibility in Japan by analyzing government records, news reports, and documents from welfare associations using methods from history, anthropology, sociology, political science and media studies.

I argue that to truly understand the politics of accessibility in Japan today, we must examine the historical contingencies that have allowed some stakeholders to dictate how policy makers and members of the public have grasped notions of disability over the last one hundred and fifty years. I suggest that stakeholders have empowered some disabled populations and disenfranchised others by mobilizing economic pressures tied to

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7 My wheelchair is approximately twenty-six inches wide, forty-five inches long, and weighs roughly three-hundred-and-fifty pounds. By contrast, most Japanese wheelchairs are significantly more compact and weigh far less, so they can be hoisted and maneuvered with relative ease. I remember many instances of train attendants offering to lift me (and my wheelchair) up flights of stairs as there was no working elevator or alternative way to reach my destination. After I told such attendants that my wheelchair could not be lifted due to its weight, they had no idea how to help me.
processes such as industrialization, globalization, and ageing, which have (de)emphasized the needs of diverse impaired demographics at different points in time. I also show how stakeholders have localized international notions of disability to reshape domestic policy as well as Japan’s built environment, education, employment, and entertainment services. My project demonstrates why scholars of Japan must explore technologies created by and for disabled people to fully appreciate numerous aspects of the country’s culture, ranging from military actions and modes of governance to marketplace and material innovations. It also explains why academics interested in social justice issues in places like the United States and Europe must strive to investigate the history and politics of disability in Japan.

Why does Japan matter? Because Japan has the world’s third largest economy and is a major trading partner with a number of countries. Japan’s companies dominate many global markets, and interested parties routinely export its assistive technologies overseas. Japan also has the fastest ageing population on the planet, and its access-making activities have served, and likely will continue to serve, as models to emulate and cautionary tales of what to avoid for other industrialized nations. A descriptive project with prescriptive implications, this work uses history to inform policy by asking policy makers to consider who has a seat at the table, how they have come to be there, what definitions of disability they espouse, and whose perspectives they fail to imagine when drafting access measures. By unpacking the politics of accessibility in Japan’s past and present, it aims to create an inclusive future for disabled and nondisabled people living in different parts of the world.

Why Study Disability in Japan?
There are many ways to productively answer the question: “Why study disability in Japan?” Here, I break the question down into two interrelated lines of inquiry. First, I consider the value of researching disability. Then, I demonstrate the importance of the Japanese context. I suggest that investigating disability allows us to identify developments in law, policy, technology, healthcare, architecture, education, employment, entertainment, kinship, and community, among other things. To date, scholars have explored such developments at length in American and European settings. However, they remain relatively unexamined in the case of Japan. This reality is not surprising as humanities scholars have often taken for granted the Euro-American experience as a normative starting point. Indeed, their prescriptive treatises have heavily eschewed or entirely silenced the complex diversities that characterize alternative, non-Euro-American histories and epistemologies.

I contend that the case of disability in Japan is not special in the global history of disability. In fact, my research on the subject is more a product of my area studies training than anything else. Nevertheless, examining the domestic and international contingencies that have shaped notions of disability in Japan is important as they help us appreciate its construction in other times and places. As a scholar of Japan, I am particularly interested in ways that studying disability can deepen our comprehension of cultural artifacts such as language and literature and processes of regime change. Indeed,


9 I offer a brief overview of existing studies on disability in Japan in the following section of this introduction.
I argue that we must look at disability to truly understand many aspects of Japanese society, from the creation of fiction and film to the construction of political and architectural environments.

**Why Research Disability?**

To grasp why we must research disability, we first need to ask what exactly disability is. As Alison Kafer has suggested, “the meaning of disability, like the meaning of illness, is presumed to be self-evident; we all know it when we see it. But the meanings of illness and disability are not nearly so fixed or monolithic; multiple understandings of disability exist.”

Scholars of disability have organized those understandings into a complex array of overlapping models, three of which are particularly relevant for this project. The first is a medical model that locates the origins of disability inside the bodies and minds of individuals who authorities determine to be defective. The second is a social model, which suggests that disability stems not from the bodies and minds of impaired individuals, but rather their interactions with external environments and expectations. The third is a political/relational model that combines and critiques the medical and social models, arguing that disability depends on personal experiences, cultural settings, and historical moments. In the paragraphs that follow, I briefly unpack each model to explain how they help us appreciate the value of researching disability before outlining the importance of studying the Japanese context.

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11 There are other models of disability which might meaningfully be observed in relation to this project: for instance, the minority model, the human rights model, the identity model, the charity model, and various kinds of legal models.
The medical model of disability is among the oldest and most pervasive frameworks for understanding physical and cognitive diversities. Its origins are heavily bound up with the rise of industrial capitalism in late nineteenth century, which split society into two classes of individuals: 1) those who could sell their labor; and 2) those who could not due to physical and social barriers. The medical model defines disability as an impediment to productivity – a pathology to be cured. Under the model, a physician might give a paralyzed person a wheelchair to restore their mobility. Although the physician’s desire to rehabilitate the paralyzed person is on the surface admirable, it carries with it several problematic assumptions. For example, it assumes that eliminating mobility impairment in one context via the wheelchair will necessarily improve conditions in other contexts. Another assumption embedded in the physician’s treatment plan is that the paralyzed person will experience no additional physical or cognitive changes over time. If their muscles should weaken, for instance, the paralyzed person may no longer be able to use the wheelchair and achieve mobility. The medical model is plagued by such vexing assumptions, but nevertheless remains a dominant approach to disability in many places throughout the world including the United States and Japan. Historically, it has inspired legislators and welfare specialists to pursue innovations in law, policy, technology, and healthcare. The medical model has also permeated the realms of fiction, film, and popular culture, shaping the activities and perspectives of various publics. Consider, for instance, triumphalist narratives of overcoming adversity through technical innovation in advertisements for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic

12 Sarah F. Rose, No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s–1930s (2017).
Games in Tokyo, which have sported slogans such as “disability is no excuse. If you lose, you’re just weak” and promoted a particular kind of biopolitical agenda. To research disability via the lens of the medical model is to advance such innovations and agendas. But the medical model is not the only way that people have understood and responded to disability.

Since the early 1970s, disability advocates and scholars have challenged the medical model by arguing that disability is a social phenomenon rather than a personal pathology. Proponents of the social model have suggested that physical and cognitive impairments are not disabling in and of themselves. Instead, disability arises as impaired individuals encounter barriers erected by society. A paralyzed person may not be disabled in a society that requires no physical movement. Alternatively, a deaf person may not be disabled in a society where sign language is commonplace. By promoting a strict divide between impairment and disability, adherents of the social model have enabled the formation of numerous activist movements and lobbied for various kinds of reforms. Rather than pursuing individualized treatments, they have introduced infrastructural changes tied to architecture, education, employment, and entertainment, as well as other areas of everyday life. In Japan, such changes have assumed many forms including, but

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14 For more information, see Mainichi Shinbun, “‘Shōgai wa iiwake’ posutā, hihan de tekkyo” (October 16, 2018).
15 The philosophical underpinnings of the social model of disability can be traced back to the activism of groups like the UK’s Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS, established 1972). However, the model itself is often attributed to British sociologist Mike Oliver, who coined the phrase in 1981. Colin Barnes, “Understanding the Social Model of Disability: Past, Present and Future,” Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies (2012), p. 13.
not limited to, mandatory classes for elementary school children on the cultivation of a ‘barrier-free mindset’ (*Bariafurī kokoro*).\(^\text{16}\)

Although well-intentioned, the social model has recently become a target for criticism due to its depoliticization of the disabled condition. The social model overlooks, for instance, how removing architectural barriers for some impaired individuals might inadvertently disable others.\(^\text{17}\) Similarly, it ignores how in-class accommodations for impaired children might affect their peers.\(^\text{18}\) Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the social model is its emphasis on external accommodations, which can erase lived experiences of impairment and disabling effects internal to bodies and minds. Indeed, structural changes brought about by advocates of the social model often do little to alleviate symptoms of pain and illness that require treatments like those available via the medical model.\(^\text{19}\) Acting on this recognition, some activists and scholars have developed hybrid models of disability.

One hybrid model of disability relevant to this project is the political/relational model introduced by Alison Kafer in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013).\(^\text{20}\) Drawing on the work of academics like Robert McCruer, Simi Linton, and Jasbir Puar, Kafer proposed a model in which there is no sharp divide between internal impairment and external

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disability as posited by the social model. Instead, Kafer’s model asserts that impairment and disability are both constructed categories that allow for ‘collective reimagining’ of politics and the formation of new solidarities and kinships. The political/relational model of disability demonstrates how communities come together and drift apart in response to questions like “how far must one be able to walk to be considered able-bodied?” “how poor must one’s eyesight be to qualify as visually impaired?” and “when is pain an illness?” It suggests that such questions are always asked and answered in specific historical and geographic contexts, which are built on assumptions about age, class, gender and other intersectional identities. Today in the United States, an elderly man might be called energetic for walking fifty paces before resting, while a younger man who did the same might be diagnosed as sick and in need of treatment. The younger man might become hospitalized and dependent on his friends and family for physical, emotional, and financial support: his everyday experiences could structure their lives and his own. But in another time or place, the man may not be hospitalized, or his friends and family unavailable. The man’s isolation may lead him to contact other disenfranchised individuals and form a different kind of support network. Depending on his identification as disabled, he could forge new coalitions. To study disability via the political/relational model is to trace the rise and fall of such coalitions.


By coalitions, I mean groups of two or more people who for any amount of time unite around shared epistemologies and political orientations. For example, there may be coalitions of people who identify as
Taken together, the three models discussed above demonstrate how the study of disability can illuminate culturally specific developments in law, policy, technology, healthcare, architecture, education, employment, entertainment, kinship, and community. To date, scholars have explored such developments at length in American and European contexts. Authors such as Rosemarie Garland Thompson, David Mitchell, and Sharon Snyder have investigated the relationship between disability, media, and social hierarchy in the United States and United Kingdom. Academics like Ellen Samuels, Sami Schalk, and Liat Ben-Moshe have also studied disability, gender dynamics, and racial politics in similar settings. Such projects, while useful, have largely been siloed from the examination of disability in other parts of the world (and, more specifically, Japan). Therefore, they offer only a partial image of the structuring power of disability. Take an essay from historian Susan Schweik, which documented how American disability activists allied with members of the Black Panther Party to implement antidiscrimination policies in 1977. While the passage of those policies was a watershed movement for American disability rights activists, their influence did not end there. Some advocates traveled to Japan in the 1980s to share information about their policies. Japanese

‘disabled,’ ‘non-disabled,’ ‘able-bodied,’ and ‘impaired’ as well as their supporters and dissenters. Coalitions operate as networks for collecting and disseminating information. They offer a platform for developing activist movements, but the two are not identical: unlike activist movements, coalitions do not make explicit ethical or moral judgments about the state of social policy.


legislators drew inspiration from the American activists and reimaged their policies to accord with local norms. Because of their activities, new medical devices (i.e., electric wheelchairs, accessible toilets) and modes of governance (e.g., inclusive city planning, helper dispatch services) emerged. Those technologies were exported elsewhere, facilitating a process of global exchange. But Japan is not the only country involved in such exchanges. So why does it deserve our attention?

The Importance of the Japanese Context

It is not my intention to argue that Japan is more or less worthy of our attention than other countries when it comes to the study of disability. Indeed, my study of disability in Japan emerges more from my training in Japanese studies and familiarity with the Japanese language than a programmatic research decision to study Japan as a special site for disability activism and reform. Nevertheless, I argue that while Japan is not special in the global history of disability, its distinct trajectory explains historical trends elsewhere while also revealing the importance of contingency in the development of conceptions of disability and associated policies related to access. Therefore, I will now consider some of the factors that have defined the contours of modern Japanese history. Processes like industrialization, urbanization, militarization, democratization, internationalization, and ageing have created precarious conditions for diverse demographics of disabled individuals in Japan and facilitated the formation of

27 For additional information about such technologies, see Chapter Five.
social movements over the last one hundred and fifty years.\(^\text{28}\) By exploring the relationship between those movements and disability-related developments like those discussed above, I reveal how Japan’s trajectory has fueled local and global transformations. I conclude that the study of disability cannot be divorced from the study of Japan and vice versa.

During the Meiji Period (1868–1912), Japanese society underwent rapid changes as a new government regime tried to debase the political order of the previous age and justify its authority.\(^\text{29}\) To demonstrate their capacity to rule, Meiji officials adopted ‘modern’ biopolitical technologies from across the world such as vaccines that, in theory, would help preserve the national welfare.\(^\text{30}\) Their efforts at population control encouraged the development of new medical, architectural, and legal frameworks, which collectively triggered several waves of industrialization and urbanization. Historians like Andrew Gordon, Sheldon Garon, and Jordan Sand have examined the implications of Japan’s first wave of industrialization by tracing how the transformation of home and workplace settings allowed for the creation of new labor movements, civil society organizations, and class constructions.\(^\text{31}\) Scholars like Ken Kawashima and Louise Young have expanded on

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\(^{28}\) There is a longer history of disability in Japan that could be written, but I focus on the last one hundred and fifty years because of a series of social, political, and economic changes that occurred after the ‘opening’ of Japan in 1868.

\(^{29}\) For more information about politics during the Tokugawa Period (1603–1868), see Maren A. Ehlers, *Give and Take: Poverty and the Status Order in Early Modern Japan* (2018).


their work by identifying how a second wave of industrialization in the interwar period affected various cities and ethnic groups.32

To date, the relationship between Japan’s industrialization and the emergence of disability advocacy networks has yet to be thoroughly examined. However, as I argue in Chapter One, the two are inextricably linked. As Japanese authorities touted the efficacy of ‘modern’ inventions and devalued ‘traditional’ ideas between 1868 and 1937, they erected barriers for people whose bodies and minds did not fit in their visions of a ‘new Japan.’ Some disenfranchised individuals used mass media, public transit, and other industrial innovations to create regional and national organizations devoted to conditions such as deafness and blindness. By exchanging information with government officials and forging alliances with overseas activists, members of those organizations recruited followers and secured political power and prestige before the beginning of the Second World War.

If Japan’s industrialization and urbanization during the prewar period facilitated the rise of disability advocacy networks, its wartime activities helped consolidate and expand those networks. As Japanese officials attempted to extend the boundaries of their empire through imperial conquest, they became increasingly dependent on diverse strategies and sources of labor to fuel their military. Some authorities tried to rally public support by introducing ideas and artifacts that appealed to a utopian future to be won in

combat, which Aaron Moore has called a ‘technological imaginary.’ Others exploited human capital from vulnerable populations like Chinese migrant workers, Korean tenant farmers, and Japanese prostitutes to promote cooperation and conscription of servicemen. Disability advocacy networks offered yet another power source for the empire. Using their expert knowledge of impairments, they developed welfare services for wounded veterans alongside state officials including, but not limited to, rehabilitation plans, assistive devices, and accessible media.

As I explain in Chapter Two, partnerships between disability networks and government officials were mutually beneficial: the former received commission payments and opportunities to enhance their services, while the latter obtained an efficient welfare system to bolster conscription. Although such partnerships eventually dissolved at the end of the Second World War, disability advocacy networks found new allies in the occupying forces. Like other historically marginalized groups, they appealed to the Occupation’s rhetoric of democracy and egalitarianism to win rights and services. Using their privileged status and relationship with administrative officers, disability networks helped aid wounded veterans, who were ostracized and castigated after losing

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the war. Together, they successfully lobbied for the creation of Japan’s first disability welfare law in 1949.

The promulgation of Japan’s first disability law opened the floodgates for the development of additional policies, which were enacted against the backdrop of the nation’s ‘economic miracle’: a significant wave of industrialization and urbanization that stretched from the 1950s to the 1990s. As Frank Upham, Hiroki Kawamura, and other scholars have argued, Japan’s ‘economic miracle’ was a double-edged sword for many citizens. Factories pumped out new products, but also spread pollution and other sources of illness. Meanwhile, innovations in medicine extended the average life expectancy of the nation while helping to create a population of elderly people in need of care. Japan’s first disability law was not set up to accommodate individuals affected by such conditions. As their numbers increased in the 1950s and 1960s, however, policy makers were motivated to act.

As I discuss in Chapters Three and Four, some policy makers used the 1964 Paralympic Games as a catalyst to redesign Japan’s disability welfare system to support a range of impairments. By consulting experts in rehabilitation and related fields from the United States and Europe, they developed and implemented a system of large-scale residential institutions for disabled individuals. Those institutions were built in remote areas to cut costs, making administrative oversight difficult. They became overcrowded

and underfunded, allowing for incidents of neglect and abuse to occur. Such incidents sparked the formation of deinstitutionalization movements during the 1970s, which lobbied for community integration of disabled people by improving access to housing and transit. Such movements achieved some of their objectives by partnering with advocacy groups for other marginalized demographics who were similarly disenfranchised by Japan’s postwar reconstruction. However, they were stymied by coordination problems as standards of accessibility differed across various sectors of society, creating problems for disabled people who wanted to live independently.

Since the 1980s, Japanese disability activists have tried to achieve community integration by mobilizing trends in internationalization and ageing to pass compulsory accessibility legislation. Key to the activists’ efforts have been events connected to the UN International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) in 1981, the promulgation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, and the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006, which have facilitated cross-cultural exchanges and shaming of policy makers on the world stage.\(^39\) Equally important for Japanese disability activists have been anxieties about the nation’s growing population of elderly people, whose physical, emotional, and financial needs have

\(^39\) Disability activists are not alone in using international norms to pressure policy makers into solving domestic issues. Other groups of activists and politicians have adopted similar tactics to tackle issues like sexual exploitation of minors and terrorism. David Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local: Sex, Violence, and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan* (2006).
become a topic of increasing public concern since the collapse of the ‘bubble-economy’ during the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{40}

As I suggest in Chapters Five and Six, Japanese disability activists have used such events and anxieties to pressure policy makers into passing laws like the Barrier-Free Transportation Law in 2000 and the Law for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities in 2013, which have regulated access to education, employment, and other aspects of everyday life. To implement those laws, Japanese policy makers have relied on preparations for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which were originally scheduled to take place in Tokyo in the summer of 2020. Although the games have been postponed due to the ongoing COVID–19 crisis, the preparations for the games have already had major consequences for disabled people inside and outside of Japan. Indeed, the games have encouraged the development of new technologies like computer-generated sign language apps and caregiving robots, which are now being sent to countries across the planet.

If we are to learn anything from the brief sketch of modern Japanese history provided in the preceding paragraphs, it is that local processes of industrialization, urbanization, militarization, democratization, internationalization, and ageing have shaped notions of disability and vice-versa. To fail to examine the political interests of Meiji authorities or imperialist ambitions of wartime officials would be to lose sight of

\textsuperscript{40} The collapse of Japan’s bubble economy in the 1990s created financial hardships for many Japanese people. As a result, there was a decline in the national birthrate that restricted sources of physical and emotional care for the elderly. Sawako Shirahase, “Demography as Destiny: Falling Birthrates and the Allure of a Blended Society” in Frank Baldwin and Anne Allison eds., \textit{Japan: The Precarious Future} (2015), pp. 11–35.
the circumstances that facilitated the rise of disability movements. At the same time, to fail to look at disability would be to ignore how those regimes secured support. Indeed, it is imperative that we study disability in Japan in far greater detail than I have done here. Who exactly was involved in the development of Japan’s disability movements, laws, and policies? What historical contingencies and geopolitical circumstances allowed for their involvement? And how did their involvement affect different demographics of people with diverse bodies and minds? Without addressing these questions, we not only risk failing to understand the history and politics of disability in modern Japan but also constructions of disability in other cultures, times, and places. After all, Japanese notions of disability are routinely exported to global audiences for consumption in the form of access policies and associated technologies. Consider tactile pavement, a system of ground surface indicators developed by Japanese engineers to support blind and visually impaired individuals, which can now be found on footpaths, train platforms, and city streets across the planet. To grasp why our world looks the way it does in terms of access, we must study disability in Japan. By examining only one part of the equation – that is, disability or Japan – we miss the big picture.

**Approaches to the Study of Disability in Japan**

Now that we know why we must study disability in Japan, it is worth asking how we might do so. To date, scholars have examined disability in Japan in numerous ways. The vast majority of studies fall into the domain of four academic disciplines: 1) political science; 2) anthropological and sociological studies; 3) media studies; and 4) historical...
analyses. In the following paragraphs, I consider the contributions and constraints of works that have adopted each intellectual approach to reveal the rationale behind my research method, which synthesizes aspects from each discipline.

Scholars who have adopted political science-based approaches to the study of disability in Japan like Katharina Heyer, Celeste Arrington, Yong-Il Moon, Jun Nakagawa, and Peter Blanck have looked at the actors and tactics involved in creating and enforcing policies for disabled people. Heyer, for instance, has unpacked some of the issues faced by Japanese activists and policy makers as they struggled to localize international rights-based legal frameworks like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in the 1990s and 2000s, which were often incompatible with domestic social and political norms.\(^41\) Arrington and Moon have similarly traced how Japanese activists and cause lawyers advocated for the creation of antidiscrimination legislation for persons with disabilities in the 2010s by deploying multipronged strategies involving litigation, protest, and participation in policy reform councils.\(^42\) And Nakagawa and Blanck, for their part, have theorized “the future of disability law in Japan” by analyzing provisions of the CRPD about reasonable accommodation in employment alongside caselaw and statistics from the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.\(^43\) Such analyses have helped us understand how ‘idealized images’ of disability and accessibility

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are embedded in laws and policies, but have often failed to address how those ‘idealized images’ relate to ‘lived experiences’ and everyday activities of disabled people in the real world. To frame those experiences and activities, some scholars have used approaches from anthropology and sociology.

Anthropological and sociological studies of disability in Japan by academics like Karen Nakamura, Tateiwa Shinya, Carolyn Stevens, and Jennifer Robertson have emphasized the internal diversity of disabled communities by mobilizing ethnographic inquiry and aggregate data analysis. Nakamura’s multi-sited works have highlighted how disabled activists and allies have coalesced around common experiences of mental illness and disbanded due to differences in sign language.44 Tateiwa has also taken up tensions within disabled communities by exploring how individuals with chronic illnesses and neuromuscular diseases have variously embraced and rejected institutions.45 Stevens has explored how Japan’s urban landscapes have reciprocally shaped and been shaped by interactions between mobility-impaired and able-bodied individuals.46 And Robertson, for her part, has identified how some of Japan’s assistive technologies have reified a kind of ‘cyborg ableism’ by privileging the accommodation of people with specific bodies (four limbs) over those without.47 Such studies have textured our understanding of disability law and policy in Japan, revealing how ‘idealized images’ of accessibility

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affect individuals and communities in diverse ways depending on age, diagnosis, and other intersectional factors of identity. However, their target demographics are often quite small, and their conclusions do not always reflect understandings of disability held by broader publics. To grasp how general audiences produce and consume notions of disability, some academics have borrowed theories and methods from media studies and related disciplines.

Scholars who have deployed media studies approaches to analyze disability in Japan such as Yoshiko Okuyama, Steven R. Anderson, Arran Stibbe, and Andrea Wood have focused on the creation and circulation of tropes of impairment in anime, manga, fiction, film, and other mediums. Okuyama has used semiotic analysis of myths about impaired deities to show how perceptions of blindness, deafness, and chronic illness have changed in Japan from antiquity to the present.\(^{48}\) Anderson has similarly traced how anime like Nagahama Hiroshi’s *Mushishi* (2005) have inverted traditional hierarchies of impairment by debilitating characters with heightened physical and cognitive capacities and empowering characters who might otherwise be classified as disabled.\(^{49}\) Stibbe, for his part, has investigated how a boom in portrayals of disability in Japanese TV dramas during the 1990s and early 2000s often reinforced harmful stereotypes about disability rather than rejecting them, particularly for disabled women.\(^{50}\) And Andrea Wood has illuminated how Inoue Takehiko’s wheelchair basketball manga *REAL* (1999–) enables

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social education about disability by “realistically illustrating the lived experiences of its characters both on and off the court.” Such studies offer valuable insights into the ways in which stereotypes about disability and access are (un)consciously encoded and spread through products developed by and for Japanese citizens but seldom situate the media and presentations they examine within larger historical frameworks. To address lingering questions about complexity, contingency, causality, and context underlying presentations of disability in Japanese media, some academics have carried out historical analyses.

Historians of disability in Japan such as Lee Pennington, Honma Ritsuko, Sugimoto Akira, Okuhira Masako, and Hayashi Reiko have observed how shifting social, political, economic, and cultural currents have informed constructions of impairment over time. In his study of wounded veterans, for instance, Pennington has demonstrated how welfare policies created by specialists in response to international anxieties about conflict after World War I and high casualty rates during World War II influenced the development of ‘disability’ as a legal category in postwar Japan. In her examination of the life and contributions of blind activist Iwahashi Takeo, Honma similarly identified how visually impaired individuals capitalized on successive waves of industrialization, urbanization, militarization, and democratization to secure state support between 1868 and 1949. In How Did Disabled People Live? A History of Disability Movements Before and After World War II, Sugimoto illuminated the circumstances behind an array of

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53 Honma Ritsuko, Mōjin no shokugyōteki jiritsu e no ayumi iwahashi takeo o chūshin ni (2017).
demonstrations by deaf, blind, mobility impaired, and chronically ill activists in Japan over the last one hundred and fifty years. And in the “Disability Rights Movement in Japan: Past, Present, and Future,” Okuhira and Hayashi explored how shifting family structures and exchanges between Japanese and American activists shaped deinstitutionalization and independent living movements between the 1960s and 2000s. Such diachronic inquiries have deepened our understanding of the causes and effects of disability activism in both Japanese and global settings. However, in each case the periodization and scope of the investigation has revealed only a partial picture. My own periodization, while admittedly limited in its own way, attempts to synthesize and build upon the successes of these earlier works.

Aware of the strengths and limitations of each of the approaches to researching disability in Japan described above, I have decided to adopt an interdisciplinary method for this project. From political science, I borrow the exploration of ‘idealized images’ of disability and accessibility as enshrined in law and policy. To separate those ‘idealized images’ from ‘real-world experiences,’ I mobilize ethnographic accounts and aggregate data analyses from anthropology and sociology. To identify how ‘real-world experiences’ of disability endemic to local communities are variously (mis)understood by broader publics, I investigate presentations of disability using approaches from media studies. And to illustrate the complexities, contingencies, causalities, and contexts behind those (mis)understandings, I deploy theories and methods from history and adjacent disciplines.

By combining analytic frameworks from each of the four fields, I provide a partial corrective to the disciplinary restrictions that have hampered the study of disability in Japan up until this point.

Admittedly, my method is not without its shortcomings: by failing to fully embrace the toolkits available to scholars in any given discipline, I expose myself to myriad pitfalls and risks. There are parts of my research in which I must overlook descriptive details that another academic might emphasize. For example, an anthropologist or sociologist might examine the daily activities and intimate backgrounds of particular individuals or institutions, while I would instead focus on their social, political, economic, and cultural contributions for a diverse array of interested parties. Nevertheless, I contend that my interdisciplinary research method is useful because it allows us to recognize how disability activism in Japan emerges at the confluence of historical contingency, geopolitical circumstance, technical innovation, artistic representation, and shifts in law and policy.

Sources and Scope

When I began to explore the history of disability activism in Japan at the start of this project, I grappled with a series of conceptual and chronological questions about the nature of impairment. Should I focus on people with physical, intellectual, developmental, or other kinds of impairments? What would be an appropriate and useful timeframe for examining impairment-based activism? And how might I account for shifting taxonomies and ways of categorizing impairments over time? To obtain some
guidance in answering these questions, I carried out a preliminary investigation of materials available at several prominent archives in Japan. Starting with the collections of special-interest magazines and newsletters held by the National Diet Library (NDL) and Disabled Peoples’ International Japan (DPI Japan), I read through several hundred documents that helped me to piece together a rudimentary image of the history of disability in Japan. My initial findings revealed that although the Japanese word for ‘disability’ (shōgai) was not commonly used until it became a legal category in 1949, the story of disability in Japan could be traced back to the start of the Meiji era. To understand that story, I conducted a follow-up investigation, focusing on three kinds of sources: 1) government documents like council reports and occupation records; 2) public-facing media such as magazines and newspapers; and 3) organizational materials including manifestos and petitions. In the paragraphs that follow, I critically reflect on the sources that I surveyed for this project to explain how I constructed a periodization of disability activism in Japan and identify constraints.

One set of sources that I examined for this project was a series of government documents about disability and impairment. To locate those documents, I reverse engineered the development of relevant laws and policies and searched for official responses to them in the archives of several Japanese ministries and the United Nations. I started with a relatively short list of laws and policies that have already received attention in scholarship on disability in Japan, including, but not limited to, the Medical Code (1874), the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons (1949), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2014). Working backwards, I
traced the formulation of such laws and policies through Diet debates, occupation records, official histories, and transcripts from legal advisory councils to identify who participated in their drafting. I discovered that different laws and policies were informed by different groups of historical actors: for example, architects, engineers, educators, welfare experts, activists, and government officials. By researching the political affiliations of each group of actors, I started to recognize why certain laws and policies foregrounded the interests of some impaired individuals at the expense of others. Indeed, I was able to identify patterns of engagement and put together a preliminary periodization. During the prewar period (1868–1937), discussions of impairment usually emphasized the blind. In wartime and the immediate postwar, they tended to favor wounded veterans. After Japan entered its ‘economic miracle’ era in the late 1950s, conversations shifted to people affected by industrial accidents and workplace injuries. By the 1970s, they began to include people with severe mobility disorders and the elderly, who became a top priority after the asset bubble crash in the early 1990s. Isolating each period allowed me to conduct a follow-up search for lesser-known laws and policies and refine my understanding of the politics of disability activism in Japan at various points in time.

But why did the politics of disability activism in Japan look the way it did? What historical contingencies allowed specific groups to dominate legal discussions at particular moments in time? To find out, I scoured public-facing media sources for clues. Online newspaper archives managed by *The Asahi Shinbun, The Mainichi Shinbun, The Yomiuri Shinbun*, and *The Japan Times* proved to be an invaluable asset for my inquiry.
By searching those archives for period specific keywords like ‘invalids’ (haishitsusha), ‘cripples’ (katawa), and ‘the deformed’ (fugusha), I found articles about major events and technical innovations that helped explain the rise and fall of interest groups. For example, I uncovered articles about the introduction of braille to Japan and standardization of education for blind people in the 1890s, which set them apart from other demographics of impaired individuals and made them uniquely qualified to lobby for political changes during the early 1900s. I also unearthed public opinion polls that clarified how individuals injured in industrial accidents used events like the 1964 Olympic and Paralympic Games to lobby for significant welfare reforms. Newspaper articles aside, I gleaned a great deal of information about the circumstances behind the politics of disability activism in Japan by reading special interest magazines such as Servicemen’s Support (Gunjin engo, 1934–1944), Rehabilitation (Rihabiritēshon, 1953–), and Normalization: Welfare for Disabled People (Nōmaraiizēshon – shōgaisha no fukushi, 1981–), which illustrated how associations of impaired individuals won opportunities to shape notions of disability in Japan by appealing to contemporaneous anxieties such as financial extortion and international shame. My analysis of public-facing media helped me to appreciate how associations of impaired activists became eligible to participate in policy reform processes. But how did those associations function in the first place? To gain some perspective, I scrutinized a wide array of organizational materials.

My study of organizational materials included an eclectic mix of sources that were arranged and disseminated by groups of impaired activists in Japan over the last one hundred and fifty years: financial records, meeting transcripts, private bulletins, petitions,
protest reports, and other filings. By reviewing those sources, I aimed to address three main questions: 1) what leadership structures, operational strategies, and business mechanics allowed activist groups to consolidate their efforts? 2) how did activist groups recruit new members and engage them in decision-making processes? and 3) what technologies did activist groups use to communicate their ideas to outside audiences? My inquiry revealed that media played a fundamental role in the routine activities of activist groups. Organizations like the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind (established 1929) and the Nippon Lighthouse Welfare Center for the Blind (established 1935) often used magazines and other kinds of print media to unite their constituents and lobby for protections in the prewar period. Associations like Shinonome (established 1947) and the Green Grass Society (established 1957) similarly used collections of poetry and cinema to rally support for community integration projects in the postwar. During the 1990s, groups like DPI Japan (established 1986) and the Japan Council on Independent Living Centers (established 1991) used fax messages and e-mails to coordinate campaigns for accessible transit. And today, activists press for change by leveraging social media platforms. By tracing how different activist groups mobilized different kinds of media to promote policy reforms at different historical moments, I revised the periodization of disability activism that I devised through my examination of government documents and public-facing media sources.

As I conducted my analysis of materials related to the history of disability activism in Japan, I became aware of several sets of constraints that restricted the outcomes of my project. One set of constraints was tied to the ordering of my
investigative efforts. By adopting a ‘top-down’ approach that began with reverse engineering the creation of law and policy, I inadvertently silenced groups of impaired activists whose activities did not reach the final stages of drafting and implementation. To highlight the contributions of those groups and their relationship with associations that directly informed disability law and policy, I supplemented my ‘top-down’ approach with a ‘bottom-up’ examination of activist organizations. However, a paucity of extant sources and spatial limitations made it difficult to address the actions and influence of all relevant parties within this project. If balancing coverage of ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ organizations of activists was problematic, so too was determining the extent to which I should describe the activities of particular associations. While groups like the Green Grass Society and DPI Japan certainly shaped the history of disability in Japan, their activism was only a fraction of the one-hundred-and-fifty-year story I wanted to tell. Therefore, I also had to make strategic decisions about which elements of their activism to include. A third set of constraints, alluded to above, was related to the availability of sources for this project. As is often the case with historical investigations, the further back in time I went, the fewer sources I had to work with. Indeed, it was often difficult to find sources from disabled activists themselves. Furthermore, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 severely limited my mobility and access to some archives while opening the doors to others via various modes of virtual engagement. Despite these constraints, I continued my study as it helped illustrate: 1) which organizations were involved in creating disability policy in Japan; 2) what historical contingencies and
geopolitical circumstances facilitated their involvement; and 3) how those organizations advocated for change.

**Organization and Chapter Outlines**

This project is divided into six chapters, which are organized into three principal sections: 1) Creating the Concept of ‘Disability’ in Japan (1868–1957); 2) The Rise and Fall of Institutions for Disabled Persons (1957–1981); and 3) Independent Living and Universal Design (1981–2014).

*Part I. Creating the Concept of ‘Disability’ in Japan (1868–1957)*

In Chapter One, “Investigating Impairment in Prewar Japan (1868–1937),” I consider how blind activists, especially elites with access to education, harnessed industrial innovations in transit and communications to build national advocacy networks and secure rights and privileges in Japan before the beginning of the Second World War in ways that other impaired individuals could not. Unlike deaf elites, whose efforts to organize were stymied by local differences in sign-language, blind elites could coordinate movements through an easily reproduced language: Japanese braille. Blind elites also had the ability to navigate Japan’s rapidly changing cityscapes with relative ease when compared to those with infectious diseases and mobility disorders, who were often confined in hospitals and impeded by architectural barriers. Such advantages, I argue, allowed blind elites to forge regional associations and lobby for welfare protections at the turn of the twentieth century. Although their efforts to petition the Diet in the early 1900s...
and 1910s were initially unsuccessful due to reliance on an outdated logic of status that did not sit well with an emerging political order premised on democratic ideals, blind elites began to gain some ground after the First World War. By mobilizing railways and mass media during the 1920s, they helped consolidate Japan’s regional associations for the blind into a countrywide consortium and pursued generalized welfare projects. By the 1930s, some blind elites had amassed enough resources to recruit support from charismatic, internationally renowned figures like Helen Keller, whose highly publicized lecture tour of Japan in 1937 bolstered their projects and brought them to the attention of local and national governments.

In Chapter Two, “Defining ‘Disability’ in Postwar Japan (1937–1957),” I pick up where Chapter One leaves off by tracing how blind elites leveraged their prestige from the prewar period to win consulting contracts with the wartime Ministry of Welfare and privileged access to policy makers in the immediate postwar, eventually becoming the only group of impaired individuals to help draft Japan’s first disability law: the 1949 Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons. By unpacking the personal and professional commitments that shaped their participation alongside the goals and objectives of other members of the drafting committee, I suggest some of the reasons why the law prioritized retroactive rehabilitation over proactive prevention of disabling conditions. I also explain why the law offered services to individuals with select conditions (i.e. visual, hearing, and mobility impairments) at the expense of others (e.g. internal injuries and infectious diseases). My analysis demonstrates how the 1949 law’s limited definition of disability welfare, paired with implementation issues born out of
Japan’s postwar economic depression, resulted in the exclusion of many impaired individuals otherwise in need of services and supports from government projects. I contend that such individuals often found solidarity through their struggles and began to establish ‘disability publics’ in the 1950s to identify and resolve problems connected to their new identities. By examining the activities and goals of such ‘disability publics,’ which ranged from philosophical explorations of the disabled condition to fighting for new modes of political participation, I reveal how they engaged emerging communities and paved the way for a new age of disability in Japan.

**Part II. The Rise and Fall of Institutions for Disabled Persons (1957–1981)**

In Chapter Three, “The Rise of Institutions for Disabled Persons (1957–1970),” I discuss the reasons why policy makers expanded welfare projects for disabled people in Japan’s ‘economic miracle’ era and explore how their well-intentioned efforts often resulted in undesirable outcomes including, but not limited to, institutional neglect of disabled persons and eugenic ‘mercy killings.’ To begin, I investigate how a wave of industrialization in the late 1950s and early 1960s generated new kinds of impairments and barriers in the built environment that politicians were not financially prepared to address, resulting in a sudden spike in rates of disability. To preempt the consolidation of new ‘disability publics’ and prevent mass protests, policy makers developed a series of pensions. However, they were ultimately unable to keep up with increasing demand for services and supports. I argue that the 1964 Paralympic Games in Tokyo were a critical turning point for disability welfare in Japan as they highlighted the failings of the nation’s
policy systems for an international audience, sparking criticism from local and global stakeholders and pressuring politicians to pursue reforms. In the wake of the games, welfare experts investigated how best to accommodate Japan’s growing population of disabled individuals and identified residential institutions as a cost-efficient solution. In theory, such institutions were to allow a small number of staff to care for many disabled people, but in practice they often failed to address specific needs and put extreme burdens on care providers, who were tasked with making up the differences between legal expectations and lived experiences. I contend that care providers’ overwork and underpay created the conditions for abuse of disabled people, and that similar issues outside institutions led some individuals to commit ‘mercy killings.’

In Chapter Four, “Deinstitutionalization and the Barrier-Free Boom (1970–1981),” I look at some of the ways that Japan’s ‘disability publics’ tried to fight against abuses and ‘mercy killings’ during the ‘economic miracle’ by promoting a series of reforms aimed at community integration. My analysis focuses on the Green Grass Society, a group of people with cerebral palsy whose anti-eugenic activism has often been described as the foundation of Japan’s disability rights movement. The society famously staged one of the first public protests against infanticide of disabled children after an incident in which a mother was found guilty of murder but given a lenient prison sentence. They also carried out mass demonstrations against abortion on the grounds of severe disability, as well as rallies for the integration of disabled and non-disabled children into Japanese schools, and spectacular takeovers of bus stations to reveal problems with the nation’s accessible transit systems. I argue that the Green Grass
Society’s protests were largely successful at generating policy reforms because of their shared interests and collective activism with advocates from other minority social movements who were also marginalized in the postwar period: for instance, women and the elderly. And even when the Green Grass Society’s attempts to promote policy change failed, their graphic performances caught the attention of media outlets, which amplified awareness of their activities and generated conversations about the value of inclusion among stakeholders in the private sector. Those conversations encouraged architects, engineers, and other practitioners to try and capitalize on an emerging ‘access market’ in Japan and facilitated what I call a ‘barrier-free boom’: a birthing of technical innovations that gradually helped to facilitate deinstitutionalization of disabled people.


In Chapter Five, “Independent Living and International Innovations (1981–2000),” I trace how Japanese disability activists leveraged global welfare trends and local responses to an ageing society to pass compulsory accessibility legislation and promote an agenda of universal design. First, I demonstrate how the UN International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 allowed Japanese activists to identify problems with deinstitutionalization and forge relationships with leaders of the American disability rights movement. I then reveal how those relationships led Japanese activists overseas, where they studied independent living centers (ILC) as a potential solution to such issues. ILCs offered a range of state-sponsored welfare services such as caregiving and home renovation. Aware that ILCs could not be imported to Japan without significant
modifications to the nation’s legal structures, Japanese activists debated how to establish a useful, culturally relevant equivalent. The first Japanese ILC was erected in 1986, enabling some disabled people to pursue lives at home by themselves. Having topped one barrier to community integration, they ventured out into society, only to encounter additional barriers in closed off buildings and transportation. To overcome such barriers, activists organized conferences and large-scale protests in the late 1980s, which gave rise to an access movement. Members of that movement harnessed winds of change tied to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 and anxieties about Japan’s ageing population to lobby for accessibility policies throughout the decade. By mobilizing newly available technologies like chatrooms and e-mail, they coordinated protest efforts and pressured government officials into passing Japan’s first compulsory access law in 2000 and promoting an agenda of universal design.

In Chapter Six, “Accessibility in an Ageing Society (2000–2014),” I explore how disability activists’ alliances with elderly advocates and promotion of universal design often backfired in the 2000s due to conflicting needs, leading to mass protests and the passage of antidiscrimination laws. To begin, I discuss the development of Japan’s Long-Term Care Insurance System (2000), which standardized welfare for elderly and disabled people at the national level. I demonstrate how the insurance system offered some underprivileged individuals increased access to welfare services but decreased the services available to others who benefitted from preexisting municipal programs. To remedy the situation, the Ministry of Welfare established a Support Payment System in 2003, but budget overruns meant that many disabled individuals were unable to obtain
access to services. To address those overruns, authorities combined the budgets for elderly and disabled care in 2005 and asked that all disabled users of their new welfare scheme pay a 10% deductible for services. Severely disabled people were disproportionately disadvantaged by the new payment system and began to protest as they were forced into poverty. Their efforts gained traction after the United Nations promulgated the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006. Unable to ignore the global stigma of failing to ratify the CRPD, Japanese policy makers began to explore necessary reforms to nation’s disability welfare system. The ascension of the disability-connected Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in 2009 aided reform efforts, as did their failure to adequately respond to the 3/11 ‘triple disaster’, which revealed the consequences of discrimination. By 2014, Japan had passed several antidiscrimination policies and become able to ratify the CRPD.

Toward an Inclusive Future

This is a descriptive project. However, there are many prescriptive takeaways for activists and policy makers. I explore some of those takeaways in greater detail in the conclusion. For now, I will simply state that this project demonstrates how access-making activities can have a variety of intended and unintended consequences for disabled and non-disabled individuals. It reveals how access-making activities always already involve a large cast of actors including, but not limited to, architects, engineers, educators, policy makers, disabled stakeholders, and members of the general public, whose daily efforts must be coordinated if their outcomes are to be desirable. Indeed, the case of Japan
illustrates that coordination of access-making activities must take place at multiple interlocking scales of analysis: local, regional, national, international, transnational, and otherwise. To facilitate such coordination, identification of barriers to communication is a necessary first step. My project helps accomplish this objective by inviting reflection on barriers to communication in Japan’s present and uncovering their origins in Japan’s past through rigorous descriptive analysis. Although this project is limited in many respects and subject to numerous constraints, it advances a conversation about how we might create more equitable policies at local and global levels. Using disability in Japan as a case study, it shows how may start down the path toward an inclusive future.
Chapter 1. Investigating Impairment in Prewar Japan (1868–1937)

‘Physical disability’ (Shintai shōgai) did not exist as a conceptual category in Japan before the end of World War II. This is not to say that impaired individuals did not live in the archipelago. On the contrary, there are records of difference and disease in some of the nation’s oldest histories: consider descriptions of the limbless Leech Child in the Records of Ancient Matters (Kojiki, 712).\(^{56}\) Nevertheless, policy makers did not use physical disability as a social, political, economic, or legal rubric for classifying individuals until the drafting of Japan’s first disability law in the late-1940s.\(^{57}\) Although some stakeholders occasionally used terms such as ‘cripples’ (Fugusha) and ‘invalids’ (Haishitsuisha) to refer to populations of individuals with particular impairments during the prewar period, those terms do not always map onto contemporary understandings of physical disability.\(^{58}\) Indeed, their meanings were often contested in their own time, as demonstrated by an anecdote from Ishizumi Harunosuke's A Comprehensive Dictionary of Japanese Law (Hōritsu mankai jiten, 1923) in which a lawyer and his client debate whether the client’s betrothed should be considered a ‘cripple’ because one of her arms is slightly shorter than the other and she has little pubic hair.\(^{59}\)

As officials from the Kanto Division of the Committee for Special Population Inquiry state in their 1923 census, the problem with classifying impairments in prewar

\(^{56}\) For a detailed account of the Leech Child, see Gustav Heldt trans., The Kojiki: An Account of Ancient Matters (2014).
\(^{57}\) I take up the drafting of Japan’s first Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons (Shintai shōgaisha fukushi hō, 1949) in Chapter Two.
\(^{59}\) Ishizumi Harunosuke, “Fugusha to no kon'in,” Hōritsu mankai jiten (1923), pp. 78–84.
Japan was one of scope. In their words: “impairments come in different shapes and sizes. Some people cannot control parts of their bodies, while others cannot control their entire bodies. As such, it is extremely difficult to develop a comprehensive survey of all kinds of impairments.” Despite the difficulty of classifying impairments, policy makers routinely instituted measures that influenced the lives of individuals with visual, hearing, and mobility disorders, as well as other conditions. Their actions reciprocally shaped and were shaped by historical contingencies and epistemological frameworks, including those bound up with industrialization and urbanization. By governing ‘unruly’ bodies, Japanese policy makers aimed to justify the power of a new political regime while shifting Japan’s public health practices to align with those of other ‘modern’ nations. Their activities had intended and unintended consequences for individuals with diverse bodies, shaping processes of community formation with legacies that extended into wartime and beyond.

To date, scholars of impairment and chronic illness in modern Japan have investigated how policy makers’ decision-making helped bring together and break apart different groups of people. Karen Nakamura has examined how regional variances in education and employment policies led deaf people to develop local sign languages that hampered the consolidation of national networks. Susan Burns, for her part, has similarly identified how quarantine protocols prevented individuals with infectious

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60 Kantōchō rinji kokōchōsabu ed., Taishō kyūnen rinji kokōchōsa (1923), p. 177.
61 I take up the relationship between prewar political pageantry and public health policy in greater detail below.
62 My analysis here focuses on physical impairments, but it is worth mentioning that there are also studies about the reasons why cognitively impaired individuals could not effectively organize. For instance, Yumi Kim, “Seeing Cages: Home Confinement in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 77(3) (2018), pp. 635–58.
diseases from forging countrywide collaboratives through isolation in hospitals.\textsuperscript{64} And Sugimoto Akira has highlighted how policies that promoted the rise of factories and facilities with architectural barriers stopped people with mobility disorders from setting up civil society organizations.\textsuperscript{65} Collectively, such scholars have helped illustrate how Japan’s modern transformation created and exacerbated hardships for different demographics of impaired individuals during the prewar period. And yet, those hardships did not impact all impaired individuals in the same way: some were uniquely situated to capitalize on Japan’s shifting landscape to secure rights and protections.

In this chapter, I consider how blind people, especially elites with access to education, used innovations in transit and communications in ways that other groups of impaired individuals could not to forge national advocacy networks and secure political protections between 1868 and 1937. In so doing, I help explain how blind activists became key allies for government officials as they developed welfare policies for wounded veterans during and after wartime, and eventually became the only group of impaired individuals to participate in drafting Japan’s first disability law in 1949.

To begin, I take up the circumstances that motivated blind activists to advocate for access to social services and supports such as education, employment, and healthcare in the prewar period. I suggest that many blind people were exposed to precarity as a result of Meiji Period (1868–1912) medical reforms, which regulated trades like acupuncture that were previously reserved for them. To combat such precarity, some blind elites started to coordinate regional resistance movements, which benefitted from

\textsuperscript{64} Susan L. Burns, \textit{Kingdom of the Sick: A History of Leprosy and Japan} (2019).
the creation of an easily reproducible language in Japanese braille in 1890. Using the standardized language, blind elites established school curricula and circulated magazines that helped broaden the memberships of their movements and pave the way for organized protests. And by the early 1900s, some associations of activists began to press the Imperial Diet for policies that would protect their livelihoods by preserving their rights to practice traditional medical trades. Such petitions were largely ineffective, owing to their reliance on an ‘outdated’ status-based logic that did not align with policy makers’ understanding of a democratic, ‘modern’ Japan. Still, they served to bring together Japan’s associations for the blind, which mobilized technologies like mail systems and mass media after World War I to recruit members and expand their projects. By the mid-1930s, some blind elites had amassed enough resources to solicit help from charismatic, internationally renowned activists like Helen Keller, whose nationwide tour in 1937 bolstered their prestige and brought their welfare expertise to the attention of state officials before World War II.

**Blind People and Precarity During the Meiji Period**

At the dawn of the Meiji Period in 1868, a new political regime replaced the longstanding Tokugawa shogunate: a military government which had asserted its authority in Japan since 1600. Lacking the name and prestige of its predecessor, the Meiji government faced significant pressure from powerful rivals to demonstrate its ability to marshal resources and protect Japan’s citizens. As Takashi Fujitani has explained, some officials tried to illustrate their capacity for leadership by carrying out elaborate
ceremonies in service of the state such as imperial weddings and funerals. Other officials attempted to justify their right to rule by mobilizing what many among the general public understood to be the most advanced technologies of the day to carry out numerous reforms. Scholars of modern Japanese history like Daniel Botsman, Jason Josephson, and Ann Janetta have documented the efforts of such officials in some detail, tracing how they drafted and implemented policies related to penal, religious, and medical practices that would serve to ‘modernize’ Japan. Such policies, which were frequently based on models developed in the United States and Europe, would in theory prevent colonization while elevating Japan into a leader on the international stage. In practice, however, they often had unintended consequences for domestic populations of diverse individuals like women, children, elderly, and poor people, some of which have been discussed by academics interested in social stratification problems such as Elise Tipton and James L. Huffman. Building on the work of such scholars in this section, I show how Meiji Period reforms influenced many blind communities in Japan, sparking processes of solidarity building and kinship formation.

To understand the effects of Meiji Period legal reforms on Japan’s blind communities, we must first consider how blind people lived and worked during the Tokugawa Period (1600–1868). As Wei-yu Wayne Tan, Gerald Groemer, Maren Ehlers, and other scholars of blindness in modern Japan have shown, blind people often worked

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as artists, musicians, and practitioners of specialized medical trades like acupuncture, moxibustion, bonesetting, and massage in the Tokugawa Period. Many blind people secured employment opportunities via guilds like the Tōdōza and the Gozeza, which regulated the availability of jobs in domains across Japan by forging strategic alliances with regional authorities and powerful aristocratic families. Such guilds allocated positions to their constituents based on internal hierarchies and ranking systems. The Tōdōza, for instance, allocated positions based on a system of four primary ranks (Kengyō, Bettō, Kōtō, and Zatō), which were divided into sixty-seven secondary ranks. To ascend the ranks, guild members paid set fees, which were usually redistributed as dividends. Members who paid more and climbed their way toward the top of the ranking system received greater dividends, while those who paid less received lesser dividends. As many guild members lacked the financial resources to buy their way into the upper echelons of the hierarchies, a select few individuals reaped the majority of the rewards. Indeed, as Gerald Groemer points out, those individuals were offered opportunities that their lower-ranking counterparts could not have imagined, including audiences with domainial lords and the Shogun.

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70 The Tōdōza was a male-only guild established in the fourteenth century by Akashi Kakuichi, a blind biwa player. The Gozeza was its female-only counterpart. In addition to providing employment services for blind people, the guilds performed several other critical functions for early modern Japanese society, including, but not limited to, money lending, entertainment, and medical services. It was these specialized services that made them attractive (or, in some cases, unattractive) to local authorities, allowing for the formation and dissolution of strategic alliances.

By the end of the Tokugawa Period, the disparity of wealth and privilege between the upper and lower ranks of Japan’s guilds for the blind had grown to such an extent that many blind people elected not to register with them.\textsuperscript{72} Instead, blind entrepreneurs opened private businesses and tried to secure contracts with local patrons. The final nail in the coffin for Japan’s guilds for the blind came with Commodore Perry’s ships at the start of the Meiji Period. Under duress to distance itself from the Tokugawa shogunate and abolish ‘backwards’ feudal hierarchies, the Meiji government’s Cabinet Office dissolved the Tōdōza and similar guilds on November 3, 1871 by promulgating Imperial Rescript No. 568.\textsuperscript{73} In addition to breaking down Japan’s guilds for the blind, the Cabinet Office’s rescript also attempted to promote what policy makers understood as a ‘modern’ value of democracy by declaring that all blind people were ‘ordinary subjects’ with the same rights to open businesses and practice trades as anyone else. By revoking the long-enjoyed special status of blind people and inviting sighted individuals to participate in trades that had traditionally been reserved for them, however, Meiji officials inadvertently created precarity and competition for employment. Indeed, sighted individuals – especially farmers, migrant laborers, women, and other minorities who were adversely affected by the legal reforms of the Meiji Period – seem to have jumped at the chance to assume positions that historically had been held by blind people, as evidenced by a series of petitions from blind elites demanding that such positions be reserved for them (discussed below). The clamoring of sighted people to practice acupuncture,

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 357.
moxibustion, bonesetting, massage, and other trades that had traditionally been the
domain of Japan’s blind communities is understandable, as they already had an
established market and required relatively little specialized training to enter. As Honma
Ritsuko has argued, they offered a convenient means of socioeconomic advancement.\textsuperscript{74}

If competition from sighted individuals was a source of precarity for blind people
in Meiji Japan, so too was the adoption of new medical codes that posed an existential
threat to their craft. In 1869, Meiji officials began to recruit high-profile doctors like
Iwasa Jun and Sagara Tomoyasu to construct a national medical system for Japan based
on American and European precedents.\textsuperscript{75} Two years later, authorities appointed Nagayo
Sensai to the Iwakura mission and charged him with collecting data about healthcare in
the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. After returning to Japan in
late 1873, Sensai shared his findings with the Ministry of Education (\textit{Monbusho}), paving
the way for the promulgation of the \textit{Medical Code (Isei)} on August 18, 1874. The
\textit{Medical Code} was a seventy-six article policy system set up to ‘modernize’ Japan’s
healthcare infrastructure via the achievement of four principle aims: 1) the establishment
of an administrative body that would oversee matters related to health and hygiene under
the Ministry of Education; 2) the creation of a medical curriculum based on Western
educational models; 3) the development of a licensing system for medical practitioners;
and 4) the erection of pharmaceutical dispensaries.\textsuperscript{76} The promulgation of the \textit{Medical
Code} can be read as an attempt by Meiji officials to demonstrate their authority and

\textsuperscript{74} Honma Ritsuko, \textit{Mōjin no shokugyōteki jiritsu e no ayumi iwahashi takeo o chūshin ni (2017)}.
\textsuperscript{75} Susan L. Burns, “Constructing the National Body: Public Health and the Nation in Meiji Japan” in
'modernity' in a way not unlike the introduction of Imperial Rescript No. 568. But just as
the latter edict inadvertently led to precarity for blind people, so too did the former code.
For evidence of this consider Article 53, which instituted regulations on two of the most
commonly practiced medical trades by blind people during the Meiji Period: acupuncture
and moxibustion. Such trades were suddenly recharacterized as unhygienic and unsafe
under the Medical Code, and practitioners (blind and sighted) were required to get
approval from licensed doctors for their work.

The Medical Code was only one of many legal frameworks introduced by Meiji
authorities to regulate traditional medical trades such as acupuncture, moxibustion,
bonesetting, and massage. In 1885, the Home Ministry (Naimushō) developed a list of
“Regulations for Bonesetting, Dental Implants, Extractions, and Fillings” (Ireba happatsu
kōchū ryōji sekkotsu eigyōsha torishimari hō) as well as a “Business Licensing System
for Acupuncture and Moxibustion” (Shin jutsu kyū jutsu eigyō sashiyuru hō), which set
further restrictions on trade practitioners (both blind and sighted). The former list of
regulations expanded on the Medical Code by requiring bonesetting practitioners to
consult with physicians before carrying out their craft, while the latter licensing system
asked practitioners of acupuncture and moxibustion to receive operating permission from
local officials. Such regulations continued to pose problems for practitioners of
traditional trades (both blind and sighted) throughout the Meiji Period, which were

77 Article 53 of the Medical Code reads as follows: “practitioners of acupuncture and moxibustion should
not perform procedures without permission or an order from a licensed doctor. If they do so independently
or prescribe medicines, they will be penalized in accordance with the severity of their offenses.”
78 Sakabe Masaaki, “Shinkyūshi to hari kyū ni kakaru hō seido no hensen – ise seiritsu kara genzai ni itaru
exacerbated by negative publicity in newspapers. Consider an *Asahi Shinbun* article from 1897 in which an unnamed journalist explains how a blind practitioner of acupuncture accidentally wounded his client’s head and face during treatment.\(^7^9\) Alternatively, look to an article from *The Japan Times* in 1899, which includes the following quote from a certain Dr. Yamane of the Central Police Commission in Tokyo about blind acupuncturists:

> The greater number of the blind professionals are subjects of contagious hereditary diseases of venereal character and it is very dangerous for people to receive treatment from these men. Especially in the case of acupuncture, for they are generally in the habit of wetting on their tongue the points of their needles before inserting them into the patient’s flesh.\(^8^0\)

Such negative publicity, which reinforced a stereotypical image of blind practitioners of traditional medical trades as being unhygienic and dangerous, did significant damage to their career prospects.

**Braille and the Birth of Blind Associations in Japan**

Disadvantaged by Meiji Period policy reforms and exposed to risk as a result of officials’ attempts to ‘modernize’ Japan, blind people had every reason to lobby for access to social services: education, employment, healthcare, and other protections that would make their lives much easier. However, a lack of standardized communicative technologies made coordinating protests difficult. While some enterprising elites among

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\(^7^9\) Asahi Shinbun, “Mōjin anma no kega” (February 26, 1897).

\(^8^0\) The Japan Times, “Protection of the Blind” (March 19, 1899).
Japan’s blind communities like Kuzuhara Kōtō had created customized systems for recording and disseminating information by the start of the Meiji Period, their methods often relied on expensive materials and techniques that were difficult to reproduce.\(^{81}\) Kuzuhara’s system, for instance, mobilized more than sixty wooden blocks, which could be used to print hiragana, numbers, grammatical markers, and basic kanji such as those for day and month. Kuzuhara etched each of his blocks with a series of horizontal lines, allowing him to quickly identify and differentiate one block from another. While his system predated the introduction of braille to Japan by around fifty years and had the added benefit of being legible to blind and sighted individuals due to its capacity to produce embossed characters, its complexity made it far more unwieldy than its French counterpart. Indeed, it was not until educator and linguist Ishikawa Kuraji introduced a modified version of braille to Japan in 1890 that blind associations began to emerge.\(^{82}\)

The development of Japanese braille afforded many blind people access to information and communities that they might not have encountered otherwise. As Suga Tatsuya has indicated, it inspired educators like Isawa Shūji and Konishi Nobuhachi to

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\(^{81}\) Kuzuhara Kōtō (1812–1882) was a blind poet and composer. He kept a diary from the time he was sixteen until his death at seventy-one. For the first ten years of his recordkeeping, Kuzuhara had someone else write entries on his behalf. Starting in 1837, Kuzuhara began to record his own diary entries using his custom print system. For additional information about Kuzuhara, see an article by his son, Kuzuhara Shigeru, “Kuzuhara Kōtō no koto – shingan no aite wiru mōjin,” *Meiji Bunka Kenkyū*, Vol. 11 (1928), pp. 35-41. It is worth mentioning that several of Kuzuhara’s blocks remain extant, as does a copy of his diary, the *Kuzuhara Kōtō Nikki*. Those materials, along with ten recordings of his shamisen practice, are now designated as Important Cultural Property in Hiroshima Prefecture.

\(^{82}\) As demonstrated by a series of articles from newspapers such as the *Yomiuri Shimbun* during the 1870s and 1880s, Japanese intellectuals and blind elites had taken an interest in braille long before Ishikawa developed his modified version. Initial discussions seem to have focused on the media applications of braille in France as well as the possibility of collecting braille materials in Japan via the construction of a library. Despite these early conversations, it does not appear as if any systematized effort was made to adapt braille for a Japanese audience until Ishikawa’s project in 1890. *Yomiuri Shinbun* (May 25, 1875); *Yomiuri Shinbun* (September 23, 1886); and Suzuki Riku, *Nihon Tenji no Chichi Ishikawa Kuraji Senseiden: Denki – Ishikawa Kuraji* (1987).
50 redesign schools for the blind and deaf in Japan, which began to spring up in major cities like Tokyo and Kyoto in the late 1870s. While five schools had already been established by the time that Ishikawa introduced his modified version of braille to Japan in 1890, another thirteen would be erected before the end of the decade. By the start of the Taisho Period (1912–1926), a total of sixty-nine schools for the blind and deaf had been built in Japan and multiple classes of alumni had matriculated through them. Some of those alumni formed organizations such as the Japan Association for the Blind (Nihon mōjin kyōkai, established 1902) and Japan Society for the Blind (Nihon mōjin kai, established 1906), which supported their alma maters by raising funds and publishing braille materials. The Japan Society for the Blind, for instance, authored a Blind Person’s Guide to Self-Studying Braille (Mōjin tenji dokushū-sho) in 1905 and a weekly braille newspaper called The Dawn (Akebono) in 1906. By 1910, the availability of braille materials in Japan had surged to such an extent that a library for the blind was set up in Nagoya City. Before long, additional repositories were built elsewhere.

Increased availability of braille materials created new possibilities of solidarity and kinship among Japan’s blind communities at the turn of the twentieth century. This

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83 Students with visual and hearing impairments were educated at the same institutions in Japan until the promulgation of the Order for Schools for the Blind and Schools for the Deaf (Mōgakkō oyobi rōagakkō rei) in 1923. By the mid-1890s, however, they were taught in separate rooms and exposed to different curricula depending on their impairments. For more, see Suga Tatsuya, Meiji Taishō-ki ni okeru mōagakkō no shien soshiki ni kansuru rekishiteki kenkyū (2017).


85 Japan Society for the Blind, Mōjin tenji dokushūsho (1905), and Yomiuri Shimbun, “Mōjin no shinbun ‘akebono’” (January 14, 1906).

86 Asahi Shimbun, “Mōjin toshokan (Nagoya)” (July 12, 1910).
reality was not lost on Japanese policy makers at the time. Consider the following quote from Count Itagaki Taisuke in a 1911 issue of *Social Policy* magazine celebrating the fiftieth issue of *Kunmō*, a braille periodical:

*Kunmō*, Japan’s one-and-only braille magazine, has united blind people from around the country. No matter how remote their villages or places of origin, those persons have gained access to new knowledge through the magazine and used that knowledge to pass licensing exams for massage and related trades in various regions. A great many have started to earn a living, and even after opening their businesses they have continued to crave knowledge. By subscribing to the magazine, they have excelled in their crafts and earned high marks.\(^{87}\)

Itagaki’s extolling of the virtues of *Kunmō* (and, by extension, other braille publications) only scratches the surface of their function as a community-building tool during the early 1900s. While braille publications did allow for the dissemination of information about traditional medical trades, they also connected practitioners of those trades with one another and galvanized movements that could collectively combat challenges born out of policy makers’ attempts to ‘modernize’ Japan.

United by braille, regional associations like the Tokyo Society for Blind Medicine (*Tōkyō mōjin igaku kyōkai*, established 1899), the Shiba Ward Association of Blind Medical Researchers (*Shiba-ku mōjin dantai igaku kenkyūkai*, established 1902), and the Association of Blind Research Organizations (*Mōjin dantai kenkyūkai*, established 1902)  

\(^{87}\) Itagaki Taisuke was the leader of the Freedom and People’s Right Movement (*Jiyū minken undō*), which eventually became one of Japan’s first political parties. Itagaki Taisuke, “Mōjin zasshi kunmō no hatten o shukusu,” *Shakai Seisaku* (June 1911).
began to emerge in rapid succession. By hosting lectures and recruiting support from licensed doctors sympathetic to their cause, such associations actively pushed back against Meiji Period policies that tried to regulate their trades. The Tokyo Society for Blind Medicine was particularly influential in this regard, having earned the favor of prominent medical experts and politicians like Miyake Hiizu and Takagi Masatoshi. In 1903, the society started to convene annual conferences on blind welfare in Tokyo, attracting hundreds of attendees with speeches from educators and policy makers like Okumura Sansaku and Takagi Masutaro. By 1905, the Tokyo Society had gathered enough resources to draft a “Petition for the Protection of Blind People” (Mōjin hogo ni kansuru kengi an), which was submitted to the Imperial Diet during its twenty-first session by Okuno Ichijiro and one other unnamed advocate.

Diet Debates and Revised Regulations

On February 18, 1905, the Imperial Diet convened a nine-person investigation committee to address the “Petition for the Protection of Blind People.” That committee held a hearing two days later on February 20 to discuss three questions that sat at the heart of the petition: 1) whether acupuncture, moxibustion, and similar trades should be reserved for blind people; 2) whether those trades were justifiable from a medical standpoint; and 3) whether blind people were more or less deserving of special privileges.

88 Asahi Shinbun, “Mōjin no shin dantai” (June 10th, 1902); Asahi Shinbun, “Mōjin dantai kenkyūkai” (July 1, 1902); Asahi Shinbun, “Tokyo mōjin igaku kyōkai” (June 6, 1903).
90 Asahi Shinbun, “Zenkoku mōjin taikai” (January 23, 1905).
91 Shūgiin ed., Mōjin hogo ni kansuru kengian iinkai kaigairoku (February 20, 1905).
and protections than other marginal demographics (i.e. the poor). To answer these questions, committee members Nemoto Shō and Tomishima Nobuo called on Onaka Morizō, a welfare expert from the Home Ministry who spoke to the status of acupuncture, moxibustion, and massage as well as protections for blind people in the United States and Europe. Onaka asserted that acupuncture, moxibustion, and massage were not valued in Western medicine and that no analogous system for protecting the rights of blind individuals had been set up abroad. His analysis answered the first two questions on the investigation committee’s agenda but failed to address the relative worthiness of blind people in relation to other marginalized demographics. As such, committee members turned to welfare expert Kubata Seitarō for information about the statistical relevance of blind practitioners of acupuncture, moxibustion, bonesetting, and massage.

Despite repeated questioning from Nemoto, Tomishima, and other committee members, Kubata was unable to provide any definitive data about the ratio of blind to sighted practitioners of acupuncture, moxibustion, bonesetting, and massage in Japan. He explained that while surveys were being carried out, the results of those surveys were complicated by regional differences in reporting structures. Indeed, it was difficult to compile comprehensive statistics about practitioners of traditional trades in any region of Japan, including Tokyo. Frustrated by Kubata’s inability to produce concrete data, Tomishima asked why regional regulations and reporting structures were necessary in the first place. His line of questioning led him to call the Home Ministry “irresponsible” in its handling of the matter and demand a more thorough census.92 Tomishima’s demands

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92 Shūgiin ed., Mōjin hogo ni kansuru kengian iinkai kaigiroku (February 20, 1905).
were echoed by Okuno in his closing statement, which similarly highlighted the need for a more detailed accounting of blind versus sighted practitioners of traditional trades like acupuncture and massage.

Approximately two months after the Imperial Diet’s hearing on April 17, 1905, the Tokyo Society for Blind Medicine convened its fourth National Conference for the Blind in Ginza. There, over one thousand individuals from across Japan gathered to listen to speeches by policy makers involved in the Diet’s hearing on blind welfare, including Okuno Ichijiro and Tomishima Nobuo. While it is difficult to determine the precise content of Okuno and Tomishima’s speeches due to the absence of an extant transcript, it is reasonable to assume that they told conference attendees about the Home Ministry’s intention to carry out additional surveys. Indeed, the results of those surveys, which were later released to the public on August 25, seem to indicate that conference attendees used that information to coordinate survey participation. The Home Ministry found that there were approximately 22,000 blind practitioners of traditional medical arts in Japan versus 13,000 sighted practitioners. Based on its findings, the ministry confirmed the need to create new policies that would differentially regulate blind versus sighted practitioners of traditional trades. The next question they had to deal with was determining what those new policies should look like.

93 The conference was covered by numerous press outlets. Representatives of associations for the blind were confirmed to have traveled from Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagasaki, Shizuoka, Kanagawa, Gifu, Fukui, Chiba, Saitama, Nagano, Fukushima, Yamagata, and Akita prefectures, among others. Asahi Shinbun, “Zenkoku mōjin taikai” (April 17, 1905).

94 Yomiuri Shinbun, “Mōjin hogo to naimushō” (August 25, 1905).
By September of 1905, the Home Ministry had already begun investigating several policy systems for differentially regulating blind and sighted practitioners of acupuncture, moxibustion, bonesetting, and massage.\(^{95}\) However, their efforts slowed down significantly after the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War.\(^{96}\) Angered by the ministry’s inaction, a group of around 3,000 blind activists formed the Japanese Coalition of the Blind (\textit{Nihon mōjin rengōdan}), which submitted a “Bill for the Protection of Blind People” (\textit{Mōjin hogo hō an}) to the Imperial Diet in 1909 requesting that traditional trades be exclusively reserved for blind people.\(^{97}\) The coalition’s proposal reignited government debates about the importance of protecting blind practitioners of traditional trades, leading to the promulgation of the “Regulations for Massage and Bonesetting Businesses” (\textit{Anma jutsu eigyō torishimari kisoku}) and the “Regulations for Acupuncture and Moxibustion Businesses” (\textit{Hari jutsu kyū jutsu eigyō torishimari kisoku}) in August 1911.\(^{98}\) Both sets of regulations required practitioners to pass a national exam administered by regional officials or attend a school selected by those officials. Exams were divided into two categories: one for sighted practitioners, and one for blind people. The contents of exams for blind people were modified to be easier and regional officials were authorized to give blind people licenses without an exam if conditions warranted.\(^{99}\)

\(^{95}\) Yomiuri Shinbun, “Mōjin hogo hō ni tsuite” (September 1, 1905).

\(^{96}\) As discussed in the next chapter, the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) did not generate enough casualties to encourage the Japanese government to develop specific welfare policies for wounded veterans. However, the wars (and veterans blinded by them) were likely on the minds of policy makers as they set out to develop new regulations and restrictions related to acupuncture, moxibustion, bonesetting, and massage.

\(^{97}\) Asahi Shinbun, “Mōjin shinan sengyōan” (March 9, 1909).


\(^{99}\) Asahi Shinbun, “Anma hari no shin kisoku” (August 15, 1911).
Despite concessions, many blind activists remained dissatisfied with the Home Ministry’s new regulations, arguing that anything less than complete reservation of traditional trades for blind practitioners was insufficient. During the fall of 1911, the Association of Blind Practitioners of Acupuncture and Massage (Mōjin shin an kyōkai) organized a large meeting of its constituents to coordinate protests against the new regulations. At the same time, the Japanese Coalition of the Blind began to submit petitions and manifestos to the Imperial Diet on a routine basis. In 1912, the coalition sent a “Manifesto on Massage as a Specialty Trade for Blind People” (Mōjin anma sengyō no shui) to the Diet. And in 1914, they proposed a revised version of the “Bill for the Protection of Blind People,” which failed to pass muster for a second time. The coalition would go on to resubmit their “Bill for the Protection of Blind People” three more times before 1935. They were unsuccessful each time, a reality which reflects general trends in policymaking with respect to the employment of blind people between World War I and World War II. Indeed, with the exception of a minor revision to the “Regulations for Massage and Bonesetting Businesses” in 1920 that prohibited practitioners from working on individuals with dislocated joints and fractures without first seeking approval from a physician, no additional policies were enacted at the

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100 Asahi Shinbun, “Mōjin anma no undō” (September 8, 1911).
102 Shūgin ed., Mōjin hogo hōan tinkai kaigiroku (March 12, 1914).
103 For additional examples of unsuccessful petitions, see Asahi Shinbun, “Mōjin niman kara seigan: anma o warera no sengyō ni” (February 27, 1921), and The Japan Times, “Blind Masseurs Rise Against Invasion” (February 12, 1937).
national level between 1911 and 1945 with respect to acupuncture, moxibustion, bonesetting, or massage.\textsuperscript{104}

So why were groups like the Japanese Coalition of the Blind unsuccessful in their attempts to convince the Imperial Diet to reserve traditional trades for their use? Part of the reason, I argue, was that their pleas were premised on a nineteenth-century logic of class and privilege that did not sit well with an emerging twentieth-century political order based on egalitarianism and democratic ideals. As David Howell explained in \textit{Geographies of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Japan} (2005), many status groups that had long enjoyed protections related to employment during the Tokugawa Period needed time to adjust to the shifting ideological landscape of Meiji and early Taisho Japan.\textsuperscript{105} Blind practitioners of traditional trades were among those groups: fighting with an outdated arsenal, they encountered barrier after barrier and eventually came to stand in as the antithesis of modernity. However, things began to change as blind advocates gained access to new technologies tied to Japan’s industrialization and urbanization in the wake of World War I.

\textit{From Regional Resistance to National Networks}

In the immediate aftermath of World War I, Japan experienced an economic boom resulting in rapid industrialization and urbanization. Local and national government agencies began to invest in infrastructure like electric streetlamps, paved roads, and railway lines, which linked major cities with smaller towns (often for the first


\textsuperscript{105} David Howell, \textit{Geographies of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Japan} (2005).
time). Factories and powerplants started to spring up across the country, fueling fundamental shifts in education, employment, communications, and welfare. Historians of the interwar period such as Andrew Gordon, Jordan Sand, and Ken Kawashima have illustrated how such transformations encouraged the rise of an urban middle-class economy while disenfranchising workers, women, and ethnic minorities, who campaigned for equal opportunity. As Sheldon Garon has argued, such disenfranchised individuals negotiated with state officials via a network of “social-managers” – civil society organizations, religious institutions, and similar labor unions. In this section, I build upon the work of Gordan, Sand, Kawashima, and Garon by demonstrating how blind advocates, who had been active for decades before the conclusion of World War I, took advantage of Japan’s burgeoning postwar landscape to consolidate and expand their associations. In so doing, I explain how those advocates could solicit support from charismatic, internationally renowned activists like Helen Keller, who authoritatively championed their cause to state officials.

One way that blind advocates attempted to expand their associations in the interwar period was to take advantage of industrial innovations that significantly reduced the costs of print media. During the early 1920s, some blind advocates began to partner with local and national newspaper companies to produce newspapers like the *Braille Mainichi* (*Tenji mainichi,* established 1922) and *Oriental Braille Newspaper* (*Tōyō tenji*

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106 As Louise Young argues, such developments assumed many forms, as policy makers used technical innovations to address local crises. Louise Young, *Beyond the Metropolis: Second Cities and Modern Life in Interwar Japan* (2013).


shinbun, established 1925), which carried articles about regional issues as well as advice columns and other information relevant for a blind readership.\textsuperscript{109} As Ōsawa Hideo has suggested, such newspapers, alongside other braille publications, could be circulated with relative ease thanks to a 1917 ordinance that subsidized the cost of braille postage.\textsuperscript{110} Indeed, blind advocates and their allies used such newspapers to organize spectacular events like athletic competitions and speech contests that showcased their talents and contributions to society. The success of such events did not go unnoticed by stakeholders within the publishing industry, who understood them to be a proof of concept for a national braille network. And by the late 1920s, institutions including the Mainichi Newspaper Company began to invest in that network by issuing braille textbooks, poetry collections, and a range of materials edited by the Ministry of Education.\textsuperscript{111}

As blind people gained increased access to braille publications in Japan during the 1920s, some advocates began to coordinate a countrywide movement for political representation and the legalization of braille ballots. Although regional associations of blind advocates had occasionally petitioned authorities for recognition of braille ballots in years prior to the conclusion of World War I, their constituencies were often small and lacking in political power. One petition submitted to the Nagoya prefectural government

\textsuperscript{109} Asahi Shinbun, “Mōjin no sekai ni shin komyō umaru nikkan ‘tōyō tenji shinbun’ rokugatsu tsuitachi kara iyoioyo hakkō” (June 2, 1925); and Mainichi Shinbun, “Tenji mainichi” \url{https://www.mainichi.co.jp/co-act/tenji.html} (Accessed December 19, 2018).
\textsuperscript{111} For example, the Mainichi Newspaper Company published a textbook issued by the Ministry of Education in 1929 entitled “A Primer on Japanese for Beginners” (\textit{Shotō bu yō kokugo dokuhon}). Mainichi Shinbun, “Tenji mainichi no shuyō nenpyō” \url{https://www.mainichi.co.jp/co-act/tenji-history.html} (Accessed December 19, 2018).
in October 1913, for instance, bears only thirty signatures.\textsuperscript{112} By contrast, petitions
submitted after the war by organizations such as the Imperial Federation of the Blind
\textit{(Teikoku mōjin rengōdan, established 1920)}, the Gifu Association of the Blind \textit{(Gifu
mōjinkai, established 1921)}, and the Federation for the Regulation of Braille Ballots
\textit{(Tenji tōhyō kisei renmei, established 1923)} seem to have fared much better with
signatures in the thousands.\textsuperscript{113} Bolstered by increased media attention and support from
politicians such as Takagi Masatoshi, the first blind member of the Japanese House of
Representatives who publicly declared that “we [blind people] will not allow our children
to enter the military if the government does not acknowledge our right to vote,” those
petitions eventually convinced legislators to legalize braille ballots at the national level
through the General Election Law \textit{(Futsū senkyo hō)}, which passed muster in 1925.\textsuperscript{114}

The promulgation of the General Election Law and legal recognition of blind
people’s right to vote inspired some elite activists like Hara Taiichi, Takano Rokuro,
Tomita Aijiro, Akiba Umaji, and Kawamoto Unosuke to reimage the relationship
between regional associations for the blind. Aware that regional associations lacked the
political power necessary to persuade the Imperial Diet to accept their petitions for
employment protections in isolation from one another, such activists began to plan for the
creation of a national umbrella organization in 1927. Two years later in 1929, they

\textsuperscript{112} Asahi Shinbun, “Senkyo-ken to tenji” (October 25, 1913).

\textsuperscript{113} Asahi Shinbun, “Tsui ni mukō ka: gifu shigi senkyo ni mōjin no kyūpyō mondai to naru zenkoku ni
higekisu” (July 7, 1921), and Asahi Shinbun, “Tenji tōhyō undō: gifu no mōjin taikai” (March 10, 1924).

\textsuperscript{114} Asa Hiroshi, “Tenji tōhyō no jitsugen o mezashite,” \textit{Nōmaruizēshon shōgaisha no fukushi}, Vol. 32
(2002), Stable URL: \url{http://www.dinf.ne.jp/doc/japanese/prdl/jsrd/norma/n367/n367001.html} (Accessed
April 26, 2019); Asahi Shinbun, “Tenji tōhyō o mitomeyo” mōjin taikai de kaketsu: Takagi Seinen-shi o
hittō ni ashita wa kōkai enzetsu” (February 19, 1922); and Asahi Shinbun, “Tenji o sagutte mōjin no chi no
sakebi: chōju mo mune o utarete, kinchō shita zenkoku mōjin taikai” (November 24, 1924).
established the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind (Chūō mōjin fukushi kyōkai), which united its constituent associations by identifying common causes for their struggles as well as mutually beneficial solutions.\textsuperscript{115} Given the diverse histories and experiences that characterized regional associations for the blind, this was no easy task. However, the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind did its best under the circumstances, arguing that Meiji Period reforms sat at the heart of problems faced by those associations. It laid out its views in a foundational prospectus:

The path toward securing education and protections for blind people is the same regardless as to where one is in the world and should be followed quickly. In Japan, special measures have been in place for the protection of blind people since long ago. Those measures peaked during the Tokugawa Period, including the reservation of specialty trades like acupuncture and massage for blind people. Education around such trades flourished, and blind people lived in a bright world despite their visual impairments. However, at the dawn of the Meiji Restoration, as various political systems were reformed, social protections for blind people met with an unfortunate fate and were eventually discarded. The long history of reserving trades such as music, acupuncture, bonesetting, and massage exclusively for blind people was abandoned, and as a result those with weakened bodies were subjected to a fierce battle for survival in which they struggled to escape from a swirling whirlpool of hardship.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} The Japan Times, “Officers for Blind Society Elected: Viscount Shibusawa Accepts Presidency; Declaration Drafted” (June 15, 1929).

Given its explanation of the issues faced by blind people, the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind needed to develop a solution that dealt with the negative consequences of Meiji Period political reforms while remaining flexible enough to accommodate local differences in approach. Therefore, they proposed to organize and implement general welfare projects with broad appeal. More specifically, the Central Association vowed to: “1) facilitate conversations between regional associations for the welfare of the blind; 2) carry out surveys regarding the status of social welfare for blind people as well as efforts to preserve sight and prevent loss of vision; 3) publish bulletins and other essential materials; and 4) perform various other tasks necessary to achieve its goals.”

During the early 1930s, the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind began to work toward its objectives in numerous ways. To facilitate conversations between regional associations for the welfare for the blind, the Central Association organized a series of national conferences, including a Conference on the Protection of the Blind and Prevention of Blindness in 1931, a Conference on the Prevention of Blindness in 1933, a Conference on Blind Workers in 1934, and a Conference on Social Protections for the Blind in 1935. The Central Association also convened a standing committee of policy advisors in 1931, who were charged with consolidating the efforts of regional associations to petition the Imperial Diet for education and employment protections. To ensure that the standing committee was successful in its mission, the

117 Ibid.
118 The Japan Times, “National Association for Welfare of Blind Not Only Aids the Blind But is Back of Movement to Prevent Blindness” (July 8, 1937).
Central Association partnered with the Home Ministry to carry out countrywide censuses of blind and visually impaired individuals in 1931 and 1936. The results of those censuses were fairly consistent: in both cases, more than half of the people surveyed were unemployed, and those who were employed were almost always affiliated with trades like acupuncture, moxibustion, bonesetting, and massage. Dissatisfied with these results, the Central Association began to conduct research on vocational possibilities for blind people during the mid-1930s and explore avenues for rehabilitation. Between 1934 and 1935, they campaigned for the establishment of clinics and treatment centers for blind and visually impaired people in more than twenty prefectures and set up a large infirmary in Tokyo.

While the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind ultimately failed to convince the Imperial Diet to reserve traditional trades for blind people, they achieved an arguably greater feat: by uniting regional associations for the blind from across Japan, they created new solidarities and possibilities for kinship. As constituent associations from major cities and smaller towns came into contact with one another, blind individuals gained opportunities to share their experiences and discuss common barriers related to education, employment, and other social services and supports. Through their conversations, new extralegal strategies emerged for toppling such barriers, leading to the expansion of social welfare networks in terms of both size and scope. In the next section, I discuss how elite advocates like Iwahashi Takeo used those networks in the 1930s to

solicit support from activists such as Helen Keller, who authoritatively championed their cause to state officials.

Iwahashi Takeo and Helen Keller’s Visit to Japan

Iwahashi Takeo was a blind educator and welfare expert. He lost his sight while a student at Waseda University in 1916, and after a brief setback graduated from Kwansai Gakuin University in 1923. Shortly thereafter, Iwahashi became an instructor at the Osaka City School for the Blind (Ōsaka shiritsu mōgakko), where he taught courses on English Literature. On August 15, 1934, Iwahashi left Japan for the United States, where he was scheduled to give a series of lectures and conduct research into American welfare policies and protections for blind people. After traveling around the country, Iwahashi reached the suburbs of New York in December and arranged to meet Helen Keller. Iwahashi quickly befriended Keller and asked if she would consider visiting Japan, arguing that Keller’s presence would help to consolidate the nation’s burgeoning blind associations. Keller initially refused Iwahashi’s invitation (twice) citing the poor health of her companion and interpreter Anne Sullivan, but eventually agreed to come to Japan in 1937 for a five-month tour.

In preparation for Keller’s tour, Iwahashi erected the Osaka Lighthouse (Ōsaka raitohausu, established 1935), a regional association for the blind that carried out welfare

120 During his academic career, Iwahashi assumed numerous other positions, including a job as a Visiting Researcher at the University of Edinburgh in 1927 and a lectureship in English Literature at Kwansai Gakuin University in 1928.
122 The Japan Times, “Helen Keller Cancels Trip to This Country” (December 04, 1936).
projects in Kansai. Perhaps most importantly, the Osaka Lighthouse helped coordinate the itinerary for Helen Keller’s tour as a member of the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind alongside government officials, who had learned of Keller’s intentions from Iwahashi shortly after his return to Japan. As Chizuru Saeki has argued, the Japanese government had a vested interest in promoting Keller’s tour of the nation as it offered an opportunity to strengthen diplomatic ties with the United States. Indeed, the government was not alone in trying to capitalize on Keller’s spectacular trip to Japan: local shops, business owners, and many other stakeholders also attempted to leverage her charisma for profit, including newspaper companies like The Japan Times and Asahi Shinbun, which began to chronicle each step of her journey months before she reached Yokohama Bay on April 15, 1937.

Upon setting foot in Japan, Keller was greeted by Iwahashi, who served as her translator and cultural liaison for the duration of her tour. The two blind advocates attended a cherry blossom viewing party at the Shinjuku Imperial Gardens on April 16, where they were officially welcomed by the emperor and empress. Later that evening, Keller and Iwahashi enjoyed a dinner organized by the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind, which doubled as a planning meeting. The following day, Keller and Iwahashi attended a reception hosted by the national government and met with the

123 Among its many functions, the Lighthouse operated as a lending library for braille books, arranged recreational events for blind residents of Kansai, and provided consultations to families of blind and visually impaired individuals.
124 Nippon raitohausu nijūichi seiki kenkyūkai ed., Waga kuni no shōgaisha fukushi to Heren Kerā – jiritsu to shakai sanka o mezashita ayumi to tenbō (2002).
Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Home Minister, and numerous Diet members. Keller then gave a public address at an inaugural event sponsored by the Asahi Shimbun Company and the Tokyo Women’s Association, which kicked off an impressive nationwide tour. From the middle of April until her departure for Korea and Manchukuo in July, Keller visited over thirty-nine cities and gave more than ninety-seven lectures. Thanks to Iwahashi’s connections with the Osaka Lighthouse, the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind, and government officials, Keller managed to reach an audience of more than 250,000 Japanese subjects throughout her tour.

Helen Keller’s message for Japan was abundantly clear: she wished to promote awareness and understanding of issues faced by blind people and create opportunities for their education and employment. Toward that end, Keller implored her listeners to construct schools and vocational centers for the blind throughout the imperium. During her first lecture in Tokyo, she pleaded with her audience to build a Lighthouse for the Blind like Iwahashi’s Osaka Lighthouse in the nation’s capital. Keller echoed this call during her trip to the colonies, stating “I hope that we can establish here institutions for people like me. I hope especially that we can open vocational training centers to train adults to be able to live independently.” Perhaps Keller’s most explicit call to action came as part of her farewell address, which she delivered at the Hotel New Osaka on August 09, 1937:

127 The Japan Times, “Helen Keller Registers Name in Imperial Book, Visits State Ministers” (April 18, 1937).
129 Manshu Nichinichi Shimbun (July 20, 1937).
Going from one end of the empire to the other, I have seen for myself how far their [blind people’s] educational and social status is from what it should be. Many large, vigorous projects must be pushed forward before they even approach a life worthy of human beings. For example, free compulsory education is required for all teachable blind children, since most of them come from very poor homes and no such law has been passed in Japan. There should also be in every province and city special groups or associations formed to study the needs of the blind in each locality, to find occupations which they may follow successfully, to give the public a chance to see and buy their products, not out of pity for the makers but because the articles are saleable or beautiful. Very few groups of this kind exist in the Empire, and they are hampered by the people’s ignorance and lack of funds. [...] For all of these reasons it is urgent to place the Osaka Lighthouse on a sound financial basis. Only then can it render a creative service to the blind – making them feel that they are useful human beings able to work for others as well as for themselves. I plead with you, dear friends of Japan, do unto my sightless fellows as you would have others do unto you. Help them so that they may take their place in the work and the heart of society, converting their handicaps into stepping stones to achievement.130

Keller’s charismatic call to action resonated with Japanese activists and policy makers alike. It reinforced the community building efforts of organizations like the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind, leading American Ambassador Joseph

130 The Japan Times, “Miss Helen Keller Honored at Farewell Party Held at Hotel New Osaka” (August 14, 1937).
Grew to claim that “never before has an American created so great an atmosphere of friendship in Japan. She is a second Admiral Perry, but whereas he opened the door with fear and suspicion she has done it with love and affection.”\textsuperscript{131} Indeed, Keller’s activism encouraged media exposés about the state of education and employment for blind people in Japan. In the wake of her visit, radio broadcasters and journalists for newspapers like the \textit{Asahi Shinbun} and \textit{The Japan Times} began to conduct statistical analyses of government, public, and private institutions and produce detailed descriptions of their curricula and practices.\textsuperscript{132} Iwahashi, for his part, achieved a kind of celebrity status due to his role in facilitating Keller’s tour. By the winter of 1937, Iwahashi’s reputation and prestige had blossomed to such an extent that officials from the Ministry of Welfare sought him out as a consultant for government projects: among them, the creation and implementation of a welfare policy system for wounded veterans, whose numbers had started to increase due to Japan’s military adventurism on the Asian continent.

\textit{Concluding Remarks}

Although ‘physical disability’ did not exist as a conceptual category in Japan between 1868 and 1937, government officials still enacted measures that shaped the lives of impaired individuals. Driven by a desire to justify the legitimacy of a new political regime, legislators introduced laws and policies to ‘modernize’ Japan, often with unintended consequences for vulnerable populations. Scholars such as Karen Nakamura,

\textsuperscript{131} The Japan Times, “Famous Blind Scholar and Lecturer is Called ‘Second Admiral Perry’ by Grew: Appearance in Japan Provides Wonderful Impetus and Stimulus to Government Movement to Comfort Deaf, Mute, Sightless” (July 08, 1937).
\textsuperscript{132} The Japan Times, “Authorities Confident Visit of Keller to Bring Happy Result” (July 08, 1937).
Susan Burns, and Sugimoto Akira have considered some of the implications of those laws and policies for diverse demographics including, but not limited to, deaf people, those with infectious diseases, and individuals with mobility issues and related disorders. Their studies have shown how historically contingent macrosocial processes like industrialization and urbanization occasionally brought together (but often broke apart) communities of impaired individuals who might otherwise find solidarity and advocate for change during the prewar period. In this chapter, I have expanded on their work by demonstrating how blind people, especially elites with access to education, were uniquely positioned to capitalize on developments in transportation and communications to forge national associations and obtain political clout before World War II.

My analysis has revealed how the creation of Japanese braille in 1890 afforded some blind advocates access to a standardized and easily reproducible language, which they used to structure curricula that helped consolidate otherwise disparate populations of blind people at the local level. By the early 1900s, local associations of blind advocates began to petition the national government for protections related to employment, arguing that Meiji reforms had threatened their livelihood. Although such petitions were largely ineffective due to their reliance on an outdated status-based logic that did not sit well with an emerging twentieth century political order built on egalitarianism and democratic ideals, local associations for the blind continued to lobby for change in the 1910s. After World War I, they mobilized industrial innovations connected to Japan’s booming economy like railroads, mailing systems, and mass media to recruit new members and expand their projects.
Japan’s associations for the blind broadened their activities in the 1920s as regional organizations with different social and political interests collided with each other. Shifting focus away from special employment protections and toward generalized welfare enabled activists to successfully legalize braille ballots and lobby for blind people’s political participation. By the 1930s, umbrella organizations such as the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind started to coordinate the activities of Japan’s regional associations for the blind at the national level. Elite advocates tapped into such national networks to arrange conferences, carry out surveys, and convince government officials of the need to create social services and supports for blind people. Iwahashi Takeo is perhaps the clearest example of such an advocate: by mobilizing his connections with regional associations for the blind from across Japan, he was able to travel to the United States, recruit Helen Keller, and promote the interests of blind individuals in front of prominent politicians. Indeed, Iwahashi acquired significant social and political capital through his activities and became uniquely situated to assist the Japanese government in developing welfare policies during wartime.

In Chapter Two, I discuss how Iwahashi and other blind elites leveraged their connections from the prewar period to win consulting contracts with the Japanese government during wartime and acquire resources that afforded them privileged access to policy makers in the postwar period. My analysis reveals how blind elites became uniquely situated to help draft Japan’s first disability law in 1949 alongside American welfare specialists and Japanese officials, who sought to address a population of wounded veterans that had been stripped of their welfare to prevent remilitarization.
tracing how the interests of Iwahashi and other blind elites came to be reflected in the drafting and implementation of the 1949 law at the expense of other impaired individuals, I frame the rise of ‘disability publics’ whose members found solidarity through their exclusion from state projects, and eventually became the harbingers of a disability advocacy movement that remains active today.

In a resource book compiled by the Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons in 1997, welfare expert Hideharu Uemura asserted that the 1949 Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons (Shintai shōgaisha fukushi hō) “took welfare for persons with disabilities beyond an existing framework of poor relief measures and rehabilitation services for disabled veterans and set in place rehabilitation services that have continued to benefit all physically disabled persons.”

Uemura’s statement is for the most part correct, although it is arguably misleading on several fronts. The 1949 law did create a broad category of ‘physical disability’ (Shintai shōgai) welfare in Japan, but its definition of ‘physical disability’ was still rather narrow when judged by today’s standards. Indeed, the law acknowledged only visual, hearing, and mobility impairments, missing limbs, and central nerve disorders as ‘disabilities’ and excluded internal injuries and other kinds of ailments. Furthermore, the allocation of services and supports under the 1949 law was not entirely equitable: in fact, only a small fraction of individuals theoretically entitled to accommodations received them.

Why were some people able to receive welfare services under the 1949 law but not others? While existing scholarship has yet to directly answer this question, it does offer some helpful clues. Lee Pennington and Takeda Mikio have demonstrated how policy makers’ decisions about welfare in Japan during the postwar period were shaped by a large population of wounded veterans in need of financial support and limitations in

the availability and functionality of diagnostic technologies. Building on their work, I reveal how a handful of blind elites became the only impaired individuals to aid in drafting the 1949 law and identify how their interests were reflected in its implementation. By tracing the origins and outcomes of blind elites’ decision-making, I help explain the emergence of ‘disability publics’ in postwar Japan, whose members found solidarity through their exclusion from state projects and became the harbingers of an advocacy movement that remains active today.

My analysis is divided into several sections. To begin, I pick up where Chapter One leaves off by exploring how blind elites like Iwahashi Takeo leveraged their assets from the prewar period to secure consulting contracts with the wartime Ministry of Welfare, which sought their expertise when developing projects for wounded veterans. I suggest that Iwahashi and his companions used their positions to promote welfare projects that appealed to both military and civilian populations of blind people, and thereby acquired significant financial capital before the end of World War II. By investigating how blind elites leveraged their capital from wartime to gain privileged access to policy makers in the postwar, I reveal how they became eligible to help draft the 1949 law, which was intended to aid veterans whose welfare services had been revoked to prevent remilitarization.

As I demonstrate in the latter half of this chapter, it mattered that blind elites were the only group of impaired individuals directly involved in drafting the 1949 law.

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Expanding on research by Carolyn Stevens and other scholars who have scrutinized the development of welfare policies in the postwar period, I illustrate how blind elites leveraged their authority to guide the legislation process for the 1949 law and guarantee that their interests were protected at the expense of others’. My analysis reveals how the 1949 law came to prioritize rehabilitation over prevention of disability. It also suggests how such prioritization influenced the distribution of services and supports under the law and led to the disqualification of some groups of individuals who otherwise needed them. Such disqualification, I argue, triggered the formation of many of Japan’s first ‘disability publics,’ whose activities paved the way for the emergence of the contemporary disability rights movement.

The Wounded Soldiers Protection Agency and the Blind Bubble

During the 1930s, Japanese authorities attempted to extend the boundaries of their empire into continental Asia by deploying diverse strategies and sources of labor as fuel for their military. Some government officials rallied public interest by introducing ideas and artifacts that appealed to a utopian future to be won in battle, which Aaron Moore has called a ‘technological imaginary.’ Others exploited human capital from vulnerable populations like Chinese migrant workers, Korean tenant farmers, and Japanese prostitutes to incentivize conscription, as Mark Driscoll has shown. Lee Pennington has identified a third tactic that Japanese leaders used to recruit and retain soldiers:

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namely, the development of specialized welfare policies for wounded veterans and their families.\textsuperscript{137} Such policies encouraged enlistment by providing potential combatants with peace of mind in the form of guaranteed income, medical care, and vocational rehabilitation should they become injured. As Pennington has indicated, they were mainly administered by the Wounded Soldiers Protection Agency (Shōhei hogoin) during World War II. Building on Pennington’s analysis in this section, I demonstrate how the agency, lacking expert knowledge of different kinds of impairments, sought out a small group of blind elites as consultants and service providers when creating welfare policies. By unpacking the historical contingencies and geopolitical circumstances that led agency officials to solicit advice from blind individuals instead of those with other physical and mental conditions, I illustrate how those individuals (and the institutions they worked for) became uniquely positioned to earn profits in wartime and participate in policymaking activities throughout the postwar period.

As Terawaki Takao has pointed out, welfare policies for wounded veterans existed in Japan before the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945): for instance, the Soldiers’ Families Assistance Order (Kashi heisotsu kazoku kyūjo rei, 1904); the Military Relief Act (Gunji kyūgo hō, 1918); and the Military Conscript Vocational Security Act (Nyūeisha shokugyō hoshō hō, 1931).\textsuperscript{138} Such policies aimed to provide relief to a relatively small group of soldiers injured in conflicts like the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), World War I (1914–1918), and the Mukden Incident (1931)

who could not easily earn an income or depend on their friends and family for financial assistance. However, they were not designed to support a large population of wounded veterans like that which emerged in the wake of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 7–9, 1937. Following the incident, officials from the Army Ministry deployed several hundred thousand troops to the Asian continent and casualty rates rose accordingly.\textsuperscript{139} Newspapers like \textit{The Japan Times} began to report about the activities of organizations like the Japan Industrial Club and the Osaka Youth Association, which donated blood and money to support the war effort but could not keep up with rising demand.\textsuperscript{140} Journalists also highlighted imperial benevolences like gifts of artificial limbs and hospital visits, which became sites of media spectacle but did little to stem the literal and metaphorical bleeding.\textsuperscript{141} To preserve conscription rates and rally support for state projects, officials from the Home Ministry and Ministry of Welfare began to investigate the feasibility of developing new welfare projects for wounded veterans. After several months of exploration during the winter of 1937, they eventually sent a list of recommendations to the Imperial Diet for review.\textsuperscript{142} On April 18, 1938, the Diet issued Imperial Rescript No. 258, which formally established the Wounded Soldiers Protection Agency.

The Wounded Soldiers Protection Agency was charged with the creation and maintenance of schools, hospitals, vocational rehabilitation offices, and related institutions for injured veterans. As evidenced by a series of celebratory newspaper

\textsuperscript{139} Nihonshōigunjinkai ed., \textit{Nichūsensō Taiheiyōsensō no senshōbyōsha sū to jittai ni kansuru chōsa hōkokusho} (2004).
\textsuperscript{140} The Japan Times, “Industrial Club Planning Relief for the Wounded: To Raise ¥10,000,000 by Year-end” (December 7, 1937), and The Japan Times, “Youths Offer Blood” (February 17, 1938).
\textsuperscript{141} The Japan Times, “Artificial Legs and Eyes are Donated to Wounded by Empress” (August 7, 1937).
\textsuperscript{142} Asahi Shinbun, “Shōigunjin no hogo ni shinkikan sechi kettei – hōan iyōyo gikai ni teishutsu” (January 28, 1938).
reports released shortly after its opening, which attempted to generate awareness of the agency’s activities among members of the general public, it wasted no time carrying out its official mandate. On May 8, 1938, the agency announced that it would erect eighteen new sanatoriums for military use in prefectures across Japan. By November, it had recruited a labor force of architects and engineers to construct another thirty eight infirmaries and one hundred employment consultation centers. However, it was not enough for the agency to simply build spaces for care: it also had to ensure that the facilities under its purview provided appropriate and meaningful services to individuals affected by a diverse range of health conditions. Indeed, the Wounded Soldiers Protection Agency recognized that many injured veterans required specialized measures and treatment that exceeded the boundaries of standardized medical coverage. In a Ministry of Welfare bulletin from October of 1938, agency officials singled out blind veterans as being among those populations in need of expert advice and extraordinary care. In their words: “because of the great psychological barriers and sudden shifts in lifestyle that blind veterans face, we must devise protective measures for them beyond those afforded to other wounded soldiers.”

Why did agency officials emphasize the needs of blind veterans over those with other conditions? Part of the reason, I argue, was that blind activists were relatively organized at the national level, thanks to a series of recent industrial innovations in transportation and communications, as well as Helen Keller and Iwahashi Takeo’s countrywide tour of Japan in 1937 (discussed in Chapter One).

144 The Japan Times, “38 New Military Hospitals” (November 21, 1938), and Asahi Shinbun, “Shōigunjin sōdansho zenkoku ni 100-kasho shinsetsu” (November 29, 1938).
With Helen Keller’s tour fresh in mind, authorities from the Wounded Soldiers Protection Agency turned to Iwahashi for advice when trying to solve issues for visually impaired soldiers in 1938. One of the first projects Iwahashi consulted on was a barracks and school for blind veterans, which opened on the campus of Tokyo Bunri University in November.\textsuperscript{146} We can learn a great deal about that facility from Kishi Takeo’s *Diary of a Visit to the Newly-Built Dorm for Blind Veterans* (*Shinsetsu no shitomei shōgunjin ryō hōmonki*, 1940), which features a detailed walkthrough and interviews with its occupants and administrators.\textsuperscript{147} In his diary, Kishi says that the facility had an infirmary, workshop, living quarters, as well as classrooms for acupuncture, music, massage, braille, typing, and other marketable skills. Kishi explains that the facility enabled blind veterans to reintegrate into mainstream society through a series of physical and mental exercises. Learning braille allowed blind veterans to write letters and freely communicate with their friends and family. Meanwhile, making hats, clothes, and other materials helped blind veterans “focus their attention on specific tasks and overcome distractions [related to their impairments], healing their spirits.”\textsuperscript{148} For Kishi, the facility was a resounding success: its rewards revealed by the everyday activities of residents like a man who could fold his own laundry and navigate his surroundings without support. And Kishi was not alone in praising the facility. Newspapers like the *Asahi Shinbun* also applauded the ‘paradise for blind veterans’ and published hagiographic narratives about its graduates, as


\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
did period magazines like *Patriotic Women* (*Aikoku fujin*) and *Servicemen’s Support* (*Gunjin engo*).\(^{149}\)

The Wounded Soldiers Protection Agency was largely satisfied with the results of its dorm for blind veterans and started to set up additional facilities across Japan during the spring of 1939. To staff those facilities, the agency needed to recruit braille instructors and experts in blind welfare. Towards that end, agency officials once again asked Iwahashi for advice. Iwahashi connected those officials with organizations that he was affiliated with including the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind and the Osaka Lighthouse for the Blind, which solicited blind specialists and dispatched them to military installations throughout the country.\(^{150}\) All parties involved seemed to benefit from the arrangement: the Wounded Soldiers Protection Agency developed an appealing welfare scheme that incentivized conscription and retention of soldiers, injured veterans reaped rewards from services rendered, and organizations for the blind received commission payments.\(^{151}\) Using their newfound wealth, organizations like the Osaka Lighthouse created broadly applicable welfare programs that appealed to both military and civilian populations of blind people, which simultaneously attracted government benefactors and expanded their consumer bases. For example, the Lighthouse arranged

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accommodations so that blind people could participate in sports events, poetry readings, tea ceremonies, and kabuki performances. It also supported the activities of elite blind entrepreneurs like Yamamoto Ukichi and Honma Kazuo, who circulated braille publications and collected them in archives like the Japan Library for the Blind (Nihon mōjin toshokan, 1940). Before long, the Lighthouse built a Blind Cultural Research Center (Mōjin bunka kenkyūjo, 1943) and began to compile an International Dictionary of Blind Culture (Sekai mōjin bunka daijiten).

The Osaka Lighthouse never completed its dictionary. While records of a manuscript exist, it is presumed to have burned in the final days of the war. Indeed, the lost manuscript is but a single example of how the shifting tides of battle affected Japan’s burgeoning blind culture. As munitions and other material resources grew scarce in late 1944 and early 1945, so too did government funds for recreation and rehabilitation. The so-called ‘braille boom’ slowed dramatically, as did efforts to integrate blind individuals into their surrounding communities. By July of 1945, many blind veterans abandoned medical treatment and remobilized for war. Forming volunteer groups, they helped unload freight trains and cart ammunition to their able-bodied counterparts. Japan’s ‘blind bubble’ had effectively collapsed. But as I discuss in the next section, that collapse was temporary: the bubble quickly reinflated as blind elites appealed to the occupying forces.

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155 The Japan Times, “Blind Soldiers Active in War Effort” (July 13, 1945).
forces’ egalitarian rhetoric and leveraged their wartime assets to gain privileged access to policy makers in the postwar period. In fact, some blind elites used their authority to directly shape Japan’s first disability law in 1949.

Unequal Egalitarianism and the Japan Federation for the Blind

As John Dower explained in *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (2000), the Occupation of Japan (1945–1952) was a time of great economic hardship and political change. Widespread poverty and illness led many lower-class individuals to lobby for legislative reforms. Their efforts echoed and informed the activities of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), who also promoted policies aimed at the democratization and demilitarization of Japan.156 As David Law has argued, the confluence of domestic and international pressures in the immediate postwar period drove Japanese politicians to negotiate new legal frameworks.157 Perhaps the most emblematic framework of the Occupation era was the Constitution of Japan (1946), which, among other things, guaranteed all Japanese citizens rights to: 1) life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; 2) education; 3) employment; 4) equality under the law; and 5) a minimum standard of living.158 The adoption of the Constitution allowed Japanese activists and government officials to justify the creation of a national welfare system between 1947 and 1964, as Carolyn Stevens has indicated.159

Constitution, advocates for vulnerable populations of women, children, elderly, and poor people, as well as those with physical and cognitive impairments, successfully convinced legislators to pass laws that afforded such groups access to social services and financial support. However, the egalitarian rhetoric embedded in the Constitution did not empower all groups equally. On the contrary, only select individuals and organizations had the resources necessary to capitalize on it. Who those individuals and organizations were mattered, as their personal and professional commitments shaped the way that policy makers conceptualized and responded to regional crises.

Consider Kawamoto Unosuke, a charter member of the Central Association for the Welfare of the Blind who became principal of the Tokyo School for the Deaf (Tōkyō rōa gakkō) in 1942. Using his connections with Japan’s blind and deaf communities as well as government authorities like Education Minister Abe Yoshishige, Kawamoto secured a position as an advisor to the United States Education Mission to Japan (hereafter USEMJ) on matters pertaining to special education. Thanks in part to his guidance, the USEMJ, whose mission was to assess Japan’s schooling system and suggest how it could be more closely aligned with SCAP’s agenda, concluded in a March 1946 summary report that “separate classes or schools should be provided for the blind and deaf and for other seriously handicapped children whose needs cannot be met

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160 Today, such laws are collectively referred to as the Six Welfare Laws (Fukushi roppō). They include: 1) the Child Welfare Law (Jidō fukushi hō, 1947); 2) the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons (Shintai shōgaisha fukushi hō, 1949); 3) the Public Assistance Law (Seikatsu hogo hō, 1950); 4) the Law for the Welfare of Intellectually Disabled Persons (Chiteki shōgaisha fukushi hō, 1960); 5) the Law for the Welfare of Elderly Persons (Rōjin fukushi hō, 1963); and 6) the Law for the Welfare of Mothers and Widows (Boshi oyobi fushi narabi ni kafu fukushi hō, 1964).

adequately in regular schools.” Working alongside USEMJ officials and their Japanese counterparts, Kawamoto helped draft the School Education Act (Gakkō kyōiku hō) in 1947, which required each prefecture “set up schools for blind and deaf children as well as those with other kinds of serious impairments.” As officials built those institutions, Kawamoto and numerous organizations for the blind and deaf partnered with labor unions such as the National Federation of Employees at Schools for the Deaf (Zenkoku rōa gakkō shokuin renmei, 1946) and the National Society of Educators at Schools for the Blind (Zenkoku mōgakkō kyōin kumiai, 1947) to lobby Japanese legislators for mandatory attendance. Their activism helped pass the Order for Compulsory Education at Schools for the Blind and the Deaf (Mōgakkō oyobi tsunbo gakkō no shūgaku gimu oyobi setchi gimu ni kansuru seirei) in 1948, around three decades before similar policies were developed for children with other impairments.

Kawamoto’s involvement in education policy during the immediate postwar period is but a single example of the ways in which elite members of blind organizations used their connections to ensure that their interests were adequately addressed. Another

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163 For additional information, see Article 6 of the School Education Law (1947). Also see Hori Tomohisa, Shōgaigaku no aidentitii: Nihon ni okeru shōgaisha undō no rekishi kara (2014), pp. 73–81.
case study discussed by historian Shimada Nobuo focuses on a group of wealthy blind acupuncturists who defeated a government campaign to ban their trade as ‘unhygienic’ by calling on prewar and wartime advocacy networks to convince local officials that the ban would violate their constitutional rights to employment.  

Perhaps the clearest illustration of a blind elite mobilizing their accumulated resources to secure rights and privileges for visually impaired people in the wake of World War II is Iwahashi Takeo. After Japan’s defeat, Iwahashi called on his contacts throughout the country to help him coordinate a campaign for political office. On April 10, 1946, Iwahashi formally declared his intention to run for the House of Representatives. Although his bid was ultimately unsuccessful, Iwahashi’s effort helped (re)unite Japan’s blind communities at both regional and national levels, allowing various individuals and organizations to consolidate their advocacy during an otherwise chaotic moment.  

Thanks to their concerted activities, Iwahashi was able to carry out numerous welfare projects and arrange a second visit to Japan for Helen Keller, which lasted from August 29–October 31, 1948. During the months leading up to Keller’s arrival, Iwahashi used her prestige to pressure the Diet into promulgating laws and policies that benefited blind and visually impaired people such as the Act for the Establishment of the National Dormitory of Light (Kokuritsu kōmyō sechī hō, 1948). Iwahashi also capitalized on Keller’s charisma to  

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organize fundraising campaigns and convene the Japan Federation for the Blind (*Nihon mōjinkai rengō*, 1948), a large national advocacy network that brought together more than seventy organizations for the blind from twenty prefectures.  

The Japan Federation for the Blind earned significant media attention and political clout as Iwahashi and Keller traveled across Japan together in the fall of 1948. Its mission “to improve the cultural and economic conditions of blind people as well as elevate their social position” and to “aid in the construction of a peaceful Japan through humanitarian and public contributions” was shared with an estimated two million people: among them, General MacArthur (SCAP), members of the imperial family, and representatives from the ministries of education, labor, and welfare.  

The Federation’s board of directors was not ignorant of its reputation and status. On the contrary, the Federation used its fame and prestige to promote a Blind Welfare Bill (*Mōjin fukushi hōan*), which called for the establishment of scholarships for blind people as well as housing subsidies, transportation discounts, tax exemptions, and the creation of braille libraries. The Federation’s bill was advertised in a newspaper article in the *Asahi Shinbun* on August 31, which caught the attention of several government officials. On October 10, Kobayashi Katsuma, a member of the House of Representatives, met with leaders of the Federation to discuss an alternative to their bill. Kobayashi asked the Federation to lend its support to a Rehabilitation Bill (*Rihabiritēshon hōan*) being

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developed by the Ministry of Welfare rather than a policy specifically for blind people.\textsuperscript{173} His proposal was discussed by the Federation’s board of directors in late October but eventually rejected. Instead, the Federation doubled down on its Blind Welfare Bill, asking Iwahashi to try to negotiate with SCAP officials and authorities from the ministries of education, labor, and welfare.

Iwahashi failed to win support for the Federation’s Blind Welfare Bill, but his activities could not be ignored by policy makers in Japan. Indeed, government officials were keenly aware of the political weight of the Federation’s endorsement for their new Rehabilitation Bill in light of Helen Keller’s recent visit. On November 30th, Nelson Neff (Head of SCAP’s Public Health and Welfare Section), Kasai Yoshisuke (Vice-Secretary of the Ministry of Welfare), Kimura Chujiro (Director of the Ministry of Labor’s Social Bureau), and Ferdinand Micklautz (Head of SCAP’s Public Health and Welfare Section Rehabilitation Division) met with Iwahashi to ask his opinion about their bill.\textsuperscript{174} Three weeks later, Micklautz called on Iwahashi a second time at his Lighthouse in Osaka and for three days tried to convince him to shift the Federation’s position in favor of the Ministry of Welfare’s Rehabilitation Bill.\textsuperscript{175} Iwahashi eventually agreed to Micklautz’s proposal after using the Federation’s reputation as leverage to secure five seats on the twenty-person Advisory Council for the Establishment of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons (\textit{Shintai shōgaisha fukushi hō seitei suishin

\textsuperscript{175} Nippon raitohausu nijūichi seiki kenkyūkai ed., \textit{Waga kuni no shōgaisha fukushi to Heren Kerā} (2002), p. 49.


Thus, it was largely thanks to Iwahashi Takeo’s personal and professional connections that the Japan Federation for the Blind became the only group of impaired individuals to help draft the 1949 Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons. But several important questions remain: why were SCAP officials and authorities from the Japanese ministries of education, labor, and welfare so adamant about the passage of their Rehabilitation Bill? So much so, in fact, that they gave elites from the Japan Federation for the Blind five seats on its advisory council as collateral? To answer these questions, we must shift our gaze back to wounded veterans in the postwar period.

**Demilitarization and the Dilemma of Welfare for Wounded Veterans**

If SCAP’s rhetoric regarding democracy and egalitarianism enabled blind elites to bolster the welfare status of visually impaired individuals during the Occupation, it often did the opposite for wounded veterans. Fearing rearmament, SCAP officials frequently characterized wounded veterans and other military personnel as ‘undesirable elements’ who impeded public participation in politics and needed to be purged. Toward that end, they promulgated a series of policies aimed at eradicating military bias in healthcare and other areas of everyday life. In November of 1945, SCAP called on the Japanese government to: 1) demolish state-sponsored relief organizations for veterans; 2) eliminate military pensions and other monetary benefits for veterans; and 3) convert more than 150

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medical facilities previously reserved for veterans’ use into a public hospital system (kokuritsu byōin). Such policies earned the ire of conservative factions within the Japanese government, but as John Dower reminds us, they were not simply top-down impositions of an authoritarian regime. On the contrary, SCAP’s policies were welcomed by many members of Japanese society who suffered the ills of war like famine, disease, poverty, malnutrition, and shame.

SCAP’s demilitarization policies put many veterans in a precarious situation. Individuals who had long enjoyed protections from the government were stripped of their welfare and recast as backwards and indigent losers who embodied everything wrong with the postwar Japanese state. While wounded veterans could in theory access the same facilities and services as everyone else in the postwar period, their ruined pensions and meager salaries made it quite difficult in practice. Veterans admitted to national hospitals were required to pay around 1,000 yen a month for personal supplies such as tissues and soap. This charge represented approximately one-third of the monthly salary of a middle-aged public servant and many veterans were unable to pay. For nearly a year, veterans struggled to survive in crowded hospitals with limited supplies and financial assistance. Still, many elected to remain in the crumbling institutions and endure harsh

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180 Many national hospitals lacked sufficient stores of food, coal, medicine, and other supplies in the immediate postwar period. Their plight only worsened as more injured and ill expatriates returned to Japan in the months after the war. For more information, see autobiographical accounts from Maeda Katsutoshi,
conditions, aware that the little care they received was better than the alternative waiting for them in the outside world.\textsuperscript{181}

As Tateiwa Shinya has shown, some wounded veterans clashed with facility administrators who opposed their desires to remain in the nation’s hospitals during the early months of 1946.\textsuperscript{182} Faced with issues of crowding and scarcity tied to the spread of infectious diseases by expatriates returning from overseas (many of whom also had other ailments), hospital directors did all they could to encourage turnover.\textsuperscript{183} Some found subtle ways to discourage patients from lingering too long: for instance, merging or closing parts of their institutions. Others pursued more direct means of pushing wounded veterans out of their facilities by restricting the amenities available to them. As tensions rose between wounded veterans and care providers, the Ministry of Welfare was driven to act. Due to SCAP’s position on demilitarization, however, the ministry could not create a policy directly for wounded veterans. Instead, the Ministry of Welfare presented the Diet with a Public Assistance Act Bill (\textit{Seikatsu hogo hōan}) on July 18, 1946, which aimed to “guarantee a minimum standard of living as well as to promote self-support for all citizens who are in living in poverty by providing necessary public assistance in accordance with their level of poverty.”\textsuperscript{184}

\textsuperscript{181} For difficulties faced by wounded veterans, we can look to media reports. The Japan Times, “Disabled Ex-Soldiers Leading Gloomy Life: Japanese Veterans Swallowing Bitter Pill of Defeat in Miserable Hospitals,” (August 9, 1946).

\textsuperscript{182} Tateiwa Shinya, \textit{Byōsha shōgaisha no sengo – seiseijishi tenbyō} (2018), pp. 77–89.

\textsuperscript{183} For repatriation issues, see Lori Watt, \textit{When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan} (2002).

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Public Assistance Act} (1946).
Promulgated as law on September 9 and enacted on October 1, the Public Assistance Act (Seikatsu hogo hō) theoretically afforded a bare minimum of food, clothing, shelter, and medicine to all impoverished citizens on an equal basis, including wounded veterans. In practice, its benefits were rarely enough to offset the economic challenges faced by veterans during the postwar period. By December of 1946, movements against the involuntary discharge of wounded veterans from Japanese hospitals began to appear in numerous prefectures.\textsuperscript{185} Many of those movements came together under the banner of two national organizations: the Japan Alliance for Patient Advocacy (Zennihon kanja seikatsu yōgo dōmei, 1947) and the Alliance of Patients in Japanese National Sanatoriums (Kokuritsu ryōyōjo zenkoku kanja dōmei, 1947). Those organizations later merged into the National Hospital Patients Alliance of Japan (Zenkoku kokuritsu byōin kanja dōmei, 1948), which connected wounded veterans from across the country by publishing a Sanatoria Newspaper (Ryōyō shinbun) and lobbying for legal changes that would bring about systemic welfare reform.\textsuperscript{186}

The National Hospital Patients Alliance and its subsidiary groups put significant pressure on officials from the Japanese government to resolve the welfare crisis faced by wounded veterans. However, the government still needed to find a way to circumvent SCAP’s policies regarding the preferential treatment of ex-servicemen (or rather, prohibition thereof). After some consideration, officials from the Ministry of Welfare identified general disability policies as a potential solution to their problem. Between July

\textsuperscript{185} For example, see Asahi Shinbun, “Shōhei ga kyōsei taiin ni hantai gunjin ikagazoku engo” (December 21, 1946).

of 1947 and March of 1948, the ministry convened several expert committees to develop policy recommendations for blind and deaf people, as well as individuals with mobility issues, head wounds, internal injuries, and several other conditions. The committees tested their policies by carrying out small-scale welfare initiatives including the construction of twenty one vocational centers, twelve sanatoria, and a school for physically impaired individuals. Their efforts helped lay the groundwork for the creation of the Ministry of Welfare Social Bureau’s Rehabilitation Division on August 11, 1948, which among other things oversaw the drafting of the Rehabilitation Bill that became the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons in 1949.

As Konishi Ritsuko has pointed out, the activities of the Rehabilitation Division and its predecessors were heavily monitored by SCAP, who prohibited them from pursuing any major reforms that might result in Japan’s remilitarization. Indeed, government officials knew that any sweeping legislation aimed at physically impaired individuals would be rejected by SCAP as welfare for veterans by other means unless they identified a separate target for their endeavors: ideally, a target with a national organization and unified voice that could not easily be associated with military activity. Return to the stage blind people and more specifically the Japan Federation for the Blind, which had recently convened ahead of Helen Keller’s crowd-pleasing visit in 1948. The Federation checked all of the governments’ boxes and promised a future for wounded

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187 The disability committees’ projects were documented by reporters for The Japan Times. The Japan Times, “Training Center Set for Crippled” (April 27, 1948), and The Japan Times, “School Trains Lame Persons” (June 25, 1948).

veterans. As such, officials from the ministries of education, labor, and welfare actively recruited Federation members to participate in the drafting of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons.\textsuperscript{189}

*Creating the Concept of Physical Disability*

Representatives from the Federation had access to direct feedback channels with impaired individuals and decades of institutional memory that other advisory council members did not. Therefore, they were uniquely positioned to help guide the council through tough decision-making processes regarding the purpose, scope, and method of implementing its new law. As Matsumoto Seiji recounted in his *Explaination of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons (Shintai shōgaisha fukushi hō kaisetsu, 1951)*, early conversations centered on whether the law should prioritize preventative or rehabilitative welfare as well as the limits of state responsibility.\textsuperscript{190} Mobilizing American precedents in the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 and the Wagner-O’Day Act of 1938, which aimed to give blind people access to medical supplies and employment services, Federation council members convinced their peers that the law should emphasize rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{191} Council members then went on to decide the targets of the law by creating a list and taking a vote. Among the groups they considered were people with

\textsuperscript{190} Matsumoto Seiji, *Shintai shōgaisha fukushi hō kaisetsu* (1951).
visual, hearing, and mobility impairments, missing limbs, infectious diseases, internal injuries, mental illnesses, and central nerve disorders. Before voting, some council members explained their rationale. Many, including representatives from the Federation, asserted that mental illnesses, internal injuries, and infectious diseases were too difficult to diagnose and should not be covered under the law. Their concerns were reflected in the final tally, which afforded accommodations to only five categories of individuals: namely, those with visual, hearing, and mobility impairments, missing limbs, and central nerve disorders. The advisory council defined these categories of impairment as physical disability (Shintai shōgai).

The advisory council further narrowed the scope of its disability welfare law by considering interactions with existing policy and working to eliminate redundancies. For example, the council denied coverage to children under the age of eighteen and poor people who were already eligible to receive benefits under the Child Welfare Act and the Public Assistance Act. The council also tabled costly provisions including an affirmative action clause that afforded impaired individuals services “according to the extent of their disabilities.” By April of 1949, the council had finished a draft of its

192 Shintai shōgaisha fukushi hō seitei suishin iinkai ed., Shōisha no hogo kōsei ni kansuru hōritsuan ni tsuite suishin iinkai kakuiin yori teian atta jikō (January 10, 1949).
193 As Takeda Mikio has discussed, diagnostic technologies were often costly and hard to obtain in the postwar period. Accordingly, so-called ‘invisible disabilities’ (i.e. internal injuries, heart defects, and developmental disorders) were difficult to identify and treat. With expense in mind, those conditions were excluded from Japan’s first disability law. Takeda Mikio, “Shōgaisha no han’i ni kansuru rekishi teki kōsatsu to minaoshi e no kadai – shintai shōgaisha no han’i no hensen ni kansuru kōsatsu o tōshite,” Shakai fukushi kenkyū, Vol. 113 (2012), pp. 84–90.
194 The Child Welfare Act gave children with physical and cognitive impairments institutional care until the age of 18.
195 For additional information about the ways in which the advisory council conceptualized interactions between their proposed bill and existing policy, see Yajima Rie, “Shintai shōgaisha fukushi hō no seitei katei” (1997), pp. 52–63.
law, which aimed to rehabilitate people “whose vocational capacities were damaged owing to physical disability” by banning “unfavorable and discriminative treatment” and enacting measures that would let them “participate in social and economic activities as fast as possible.” The council’s law promised rehabilitation via the creation of new facilities and services, which often betrayed the specialist knowledges and interests of the council members who called for them. Although the law mandated the construction of workshops and vocational centers for all physically disabled individuals, it offered specific affordances to blind people including, but not limited to, safety canes, seeing-eye dogs, braille libraries, record repositories, and information centers. To supervise the development and distribution of such facilities and services under the law, the council suggested that a National Committee for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons be established alongside corresponding regional committees in each Japanese prefecture. Their proposition was an expensive one, which required a significant amount of administrative planning and oversight. Thus, it took officials from the Japanese ministries of welfare, education, labor, and transportation, as well as SCAP’s legal, education, and public health sections most of the summer to deliberate.

This is not to say that efforts to develop a new system of supports for persons with physical disabilities suddenly disappeared during the summer of 1949. On the contrary, broadly advertised fundraising initiatives and awareness campaigns organized by the

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197 The law also offered specific affordances to deaf people like hearing aids and sign-language interpretation services. This was in part a product of sustained advocacy from the Japan Federation for the Deaf as discussed in footnote 164.
198 The Japan Times, “Give Livelihood to the Disabled” (October 24, 1949).
Ministry of Welfare established an environment in which activists and policy makers could call those efforts to the fore of public consciousness.\(^{199}\) On May 13, Suzuki Senpachi, a disabled member of the House of Representatives, issued a “Resolution to the House of Representatives Concerning Policies for Physically Disabled People” (\textit{Shintai shōgaisha taisaku ni kansuru ketsugian}), which argued for the implementation of interim policies for disabled individuals until a comprehensive law could be formally established.\(^{200}\) Suzuki was not alone in appealing to the zeitgeist to press for protections for persons with physical disabilities. Other state officials also seized the moment to pass the Act for the Establishment of the National Rehabilitation and Guidance Center for Physically Disabled Persons (\textit{Kokuritsu shintai shōgaisha kōseishidōsho sechi hō}) on May 31, which led to the opening of the first national rehabilitation center for physically disabled people in Japan several months later on October 1.\(^{201}\) That facility was equipped to offer educational, vocational, and medical services to disabled people.

Thanks in part to these initiatives, the advisory council collected enough funds and support to submit their bill for Japan’s first disability law to SCAP for consideration by October 31, 1949. After receiving approval from SCAP, Nakahira Jōtarō of the House of Councilors introduced the council’s bill to the Diet at a meeting of the Committee on


\(^{200}\) Suzuki Senpachi was a member of the House of Representatives who had some kind of physical impairment. In April of 1948, he established the Alliance of Persons with Physical Disabilities (\textit{Shintai shōgaisha kōsei dōmei}), which aimed to "support the autonomy of all physically disable persons and their ability to lend their strength to the public while paving the way for their health and welfare and contributing to the establishment of the Japanese public and world peace." Suzuki Senpachi, \textit{Shintai shōgaisha taisaku ni kansuru ketsugian} (May 13, 1949).

\(^{201}\) The Japan Times, “School for Disabled: First Training Center to Open at Newly Built Hospital” (October 12, 1949).
Health and Welfare on November 25.\textsuperscript{202} For the better part of two weeks, members of the Diet examined the bill. Oka Ryoichi asked about its somewhat arbitrary division of public and private expenditures. How much funding should the state give to persons with disabilities? Should the state subsidize public transportation? If so, by how much, and why? Oka’s line of questioning was followed up by Watari Shirō, who scrutinized the bill’s synergy with existing laws and policies. Watari indicated that while the advisory council had thought ahead to deny coverage to children who received benefits from the Child Welfare Act, they had neglected to specify how services would be administered during the transitional phase between adolescence and adulthood.\textsuperscript{203} Yamashita Gishin expressed similar concerns regarding the blurry line between poverty and affluence and called for clarification of the bill’s interaction with the Public Assistance Act.\textsuperscript{204} Indeed, many aspects of the bill remained hazy and unclear, including whether persons with disabilities would even use the facilities and services it provided. Citing the case of prosthetic limbs, Okamoto Yoshito explained that many persons with disabilities actively rejected facilities and assistive technologies as uncomfortable and stigmatizing, and those who did embrace them did so in different ways.\textsuperscript{205} If the government was to invest in such an elaborate and expensive welfare plan as that proposed by the advisory council, it would have to prepared itself for significant losses and adjustments. And yet, that is exactly what the National Diet opted to do.

\textsuperscript{202} National Diet of Japan (Sixth Session), \textit{Committee on Health and Welfare, No. 6} (December 25, 1949).
\textsuperscript{203} National Diet of Japan (Sixth Session), \textit{Joint Meeting of Committees on Health and Welfare Review Councils, No. 1} (December 25, 1949).
\textsuperscript{204} National Diet of Japan (Sixth Session), \textit{Joint Meeting of Committees on Health and Welfare Review Councils, No. 2} (December 26, 1949).
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
Issues with Implementation and the Rise of Disability Publics

Under significant pressure from an angry public, the Diet approved the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons on December 3, 1949 and began to enforce it on April 5, 1950. 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.” Supporters of the law generated awareness by organizing promotional campaigns in cities across the country including a ‘Week for Physically Disabled Persons.’ Such events not only called attention to the needs and desires of people with physical disabilities, but also highlighted the lack of funds available for implementing the new law. Japanese legislators only earmarked ¥100,000,000 for enacting the law under the 1950–51 national budget against a projected minimum expenditure of ¥1,500,000,000. Indeed, inadequate allocation of financial resources rendered the new law all but meaningless for many potential beneficiaries. As one anonymous author lamented in an issue of The Japan Times from November 22, 1950:

The government, to be sure, 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

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207 The Japan Times, “Even Until the Least” (April 2, 1950).
patients, the setting up of facilities to train them to become useful members of society is simply out of the question.\textsuperscript{209}

Aware that significant administrative and financial reforms were necessary to deliver the facilities and services promised by the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons, the Japanese Ministry of Welfare requested that the Council on Social Security (\textit{Shakai hoshō seido shingikai}) compile a list of “Recommendations for the Japanese Social Security System” (\textit{Nihon shakai hoshō seido ni kansuru kankoku}), which was submitted for review on October 16, 1950.\textsuperscript{210} 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.\textsuperscript{211} Arguably the most important recommendation offered by the council was that the government should assume control of all public welfare projects and regulate the conduct of private businesses. Under the system proposed by the council, private businesses were to become part of a nationwide welfare network and abide by government regulations in exchange for commissions and subsidies. Justified as a necessary measure for upholding Article 25 of the Constitution, which guaranteed 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

\textsuperscript{209} The Japan Times, “The Forgotten Men” (November 22, 1950).
\textsuperscript{211} Shakai hoshō seido shingikai, \textit{Nihon shakai hoshō seido ni kansuru kankoku} (October 16, 1950).
had significant consequences for many physically disabled people and their families. Indeed, the idea that the state should pay for disability welfare projects led some members of the general public to view disabled people as burdens who ‘eat taxpayer money’ and fail to contribute to society in meaningful ways.\textsuperscript{212}

On March 24, 1951 the Diet implemented the Council on Social Security’s suggestions as law by promulgating the Social Welfare Industry Act (\textit{Shakai fukushi jigyō hō}).\textsuperscript{213} 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 willing often provided inferior services to cut costs. To secure adequate welfare services, many disabled people had to turn to private charities like the Bethesda Home for Crippled Women for support. The Bethesda Home in many respects embodied the problems and solutions of disability welfare in early 1950s Japan. It was a charity organization established in 1953 by Hasegawa Shigeyo, a Christian activist and physically disabled woman. To finance her organization, Hasegawa could not rely on funding from the state. Instead, she appealed to friends, family, local businesses, and national newspapers to help arrange fundraising campaigns. At the time of her organization’s founding, Hasegawa had collected enough money to provide food, lodging, and vocational assistance to fifteen disabled women. By 1955, her Home had expanded to include another seven women, but

\textsuperscript{212} This kind of eugenic logic intersected with a wide array of bioethical concerns and economic practices in the postwar period such as infanticide, abortion, euthanasia, and forced sterilization. The legacies of those concerns and practices continue to play out in the present in the form of ongoing debates about reparations for past discriminatory treatment. I take up some of those debates and their repercussions for disabled communities in the latter chapters of this project.

\textsuperscript{213} National Diet of Japan (Tenth Session), \textit{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,” \textit{Bukkyō daigaku sōgōkenkyūsho kiyō bessatsu} (2010), pp. 1–24.
as Hasegawa explained, it could not accommodate everyone. “We do not accept those who need medical care,” she said in an interview with *The Japan Times*, “because we have no medical facilities here.”

Hasegawa’s Home was not alone in dealing with issues of scarcity: many other charitable organizations that tried to help disabled people also lacked the resources necessary to do so. Consider the Izumi-no-Ie, which supported fifty disabled people through donations from civil society organizations such as the International Ladies Benevolent Society and the Rotary Club but was ultimately unable to assist a waiting list of applicants due to lack of funds.

The uneven distribution of welfare services under the newly developed rubric of ‘disability’ in the early 1950s prompted many impaired individuals to forge new relationships with one another. People fortunate enough to receive services from the state and private organizations occasionally became activists and championed charity initiatives like those discussed above. But more often it was the case that people 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 disabled individuals published periodicals to share their experiences and explore their identities. For example, a man with cerebral palsy named Hanada Shuncho repurposed a poetry journal called *Daybreak (Shinonome, 1947)* into a magazine for disabled people so that they could vocalize their frustrations, troubleshoot problems, and reflect on their experiences.

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connections with their friends and family. As the authors and readers of Daybreak collectively examined their everyday lives through written exchanges, they established a distinct ‘disability public’ with its own projects and objectives. And they were not alone in that regard: other groups of disabled individuals (and their kin) also started to form ‘disability publics’ by circulating newsletters like Sincerity (Magokoro, 1949) and Fellows Correspondence (Yūai tsūshin, 1954). The aims of such publics sometimes overlapped with peer organizations, but often differed. Sincerity, for instance, featured a medical advice column from a physician that did not align with the philosophical Daybreak or political Fellows Correspondence, which sought to address legal issues like the absence of a mail-in voting system for disabled people. Operating independently, Japan’s earliest ‘disability publics’ often failed to accomplish their goals. But change was just around the corner as the nation entered into its ‘economic miracle’ in the late-1950s and a wave of industrialization facilitated the proliferation and consolidation of such publics.

Concluding Remarks

Hideharu Uemura was right to assert that the establishment of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons in 1949 “took welfare for persons with disabilities [in Japan] beyond an existing framework of poor relief measures and

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217 For more about Hanada Shuncho, see Arai Yuki, Shōgai to bungaku – ‘Shinonome’ kara ‘Aoi shiba no kai’ e (2011).
rehabilitation services for disabled veterans.” However, his claim that the law “set in place rehabilitation services that have continued to benefit all physically disabled persons” in the present day is misleading at best and almost certainly untrue. Japanese policy makers adopted a relatively narrow definition of ‘physical disability’ when drafting the 1949 law, including only limited services for individuals with select visual, hearing, and mobility impairments, missing limbs, and central nerve disorders. Guided by economic considerations, technical constraints, and advice from the nation’s blind elites, who used resources gained through wartime partnerships to obtain political privileges after the war, policy makers set up a system for the creation and distribution of welfare services that excluded diverse demographics of disabled individuals who were otherwise in need of government support. Such systematic exclusions were compounded by budgetary issues and administrative oversights as regional authorities, welfare experts, and other relevant stakeholders tried to implement Japan’s first disability law during the early 1950s, resulting in further exemption of many disabled people. And while some individuals who were ineligible to receive welfare services from state agencies acquired the finances necessary to pursue an education and achieve employment through private charities and corporate donors, the vast majority were unable to rely on such institutions for support. Such disenfranchised individuals started to find solidarity in their struggles, and by the mid-1950s began to set up ‘disability publics’ with diverse projects and goals.

In Chapter Three, I discuss how the number of ‘disability publics’ in Japan grew rapidly as the nation entered into its ‘economic miracle’ era in the late 1950s and waves of industrialization washed over the country. The sudden emergence of new sources of impairment and barriers in the built environment led to a spike in disability that policy makers were not prepared for, and despite their best efforts they were unable to accommodate Japan’s growing population of disabled people. The 1964 Paralympics became a watershed moment that revealed the failings of Japan’s disability welfare system for local and global audiences, allowing interested parties to pursue diverse reforms. However, those reforms were frequently subject to restrictions, and often did more harm than good.

It has been ten plus years since the law [for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons] was promulgated and policies for impaired individuals have gradually been implemented. However, those policies are extremely lacking when weighed against policies for impaired individuals in advanced countries in Europe and the United States, even when accounting for the letter of the law alone. If we consider the entire legal system for impaired individuals in Japan, I do not think that it is an exaggeration to state that our work has only just begun.220

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

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 Committee for the Creation of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons in 1949. Why did Kasai, who devoted his life to making 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 disability welfare system that had come to light as a result of postwar rebuilding efforts. Kasai believed that by capitalizing on local and global pressures connected to the 1964 games, he could enact reforms to expand Japan’s welfare net to encompass...
disenfranchised ‘disability publics’ like those described in Chapter Two, which began to proliferate across the country in the late 1950s. And Kasai was not alone in his way of thinking: many other stakeholders also tried to use the Paralympics to secure protections for disabled people. Such stakeholders organized protests, coordinated media campaigns, and arranged research meetings during the preparation, execution, and aftermath of the games with the best of intentions. However, their actions often did more harm than good: for instance, they helped facilitate the rise of relatively unregulated residential institutions, where disabled people were neglected and abused. They also helped shape a society in which the families of disabled people were occasionally driven to commit so-called ‘mercy killings’ of their kin to ‘save’ them from a cruel and inaccessible world.

Why did stakeholders’ benevolent attempts to develop welfare policies for disabled people during Japan’s ‘economic miracle’ era in the late 1950s and 1960s ultimately culminate in violence? In this chapter, I take up this question by investigating the historical contingencies and geopolitical circumstances that shaped stakeholders’ efforts to expand and improve the nation’s welfare system. By reading newspapers, magazines, and government documents alongside archival materials from activist and welfare organizations, I demonstrate how macrosocial processes like industrialization and urbanization led to an increase in disability that stakeholders were not financially prepared for. I suggest that some stakeholders tried to fix the growing ‘problem’ of disability with cost-efficient ‘solutions’ such as pension plans and assisted living facilities, which in theory could be generalized to cover the care of many disabled individuals but in practice often failed to address specific needs. Indeed, the inadequacies
of such cost-efficient ‘solutions’ put extreme burdens on care providers, who were tasked with making up the difference between imagined services and lived experiences. I contend that such care providers were driven to neglect, abuse, and even commit ‘mercy killings’ of disabled people due to the stresses of a social system that was not set up to support either party. I conclude that we must try to understand the mechanisms which undergirded that system because they helped shape an environment in which many of Japan’s otherwise disparate ‘disability publics’ could come together and collectively lobby for major welfare reforms (discussed in Chapter Four).

My analysis is split into several sections. To begin, I explain why Japan’s industrialization and urbanization during the late 1950s and early 1960s resulted in a sharp spike in disability rates. Building on the work of scholars such as Mary Brinton and Ann Waswo, who have examined how the reconstruction of Japan’s cities encouraged the rise of new modes of labor and gender norms, I illustrate how infrastructural reforms created new sources of impairment and barriers in the built environment that facilitated the consolidation and proliferation of numerous ‘disability publics.’ As I discuss, the sudden growth of Japan’s ‘disability publics’ caught policy makers off guard, and despite their attempts to create pensions and promote employment in the late 1950s and early 1960s, they largely failed to satisfy the needs and desires of those publics, leading some activists to protest. Such protests were initially ineffective due to lack of support, but eventually gained traction as the 1964 Paralympic Games helped highlight the cracks in

Japan’s faltering disability welfare system for a global audience and spark conversations about how to extend services to excluded individuals.

As historians of the 1964 Paralympics like Dennis Frost and Kazuo Ogoura have indicated, early conversations born out of the games between welfare specialists and state officials did not produce significant changes in Japan’s built environment in the short term. However, those conversations did help facilitate the development of residential institutions in the long term. In theory, residential institutions represented a cost-efficient solution to the ‘problem’ of disability, in so far as a small number of administrators could oversee the care of many impaired individuals. In practice, however, such institutions were often built in remote areas and overpopulated to further reduce expenses, creating environments in which visiting was difficult and staff were overworked.

Scholars of disability rights in Japan like Reiko Hayashi and Masako Okuhira have shown how Japan’s residential institutions quickly devolved into breeding grounds for neglect and abuse. Their analyses have offered important insight into the physical, verbal, psychological, and sexual violence that disabled residents of institutions had to endure on a daily basis during the late 1960s. However, they have only given a partial explanation for such violence, focusing on discrimination against disabled individuals while overlooking its social, political, economic, and cultural origins. Expanding on their scholarship, I suggest that abuse in institutions became a common practice not only

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because of discrimination against disabled people (although it may also have been a factor), but also financial constraints and considerations tied to Japan’s continued industrial development. Indeed, such constraints and considerations similarly informed the conduct of impaired individuals and their families outside of institutions as they grappled with the realities of cities not designed to accommodate them. Faced with the options of watching their disabled family members become increasingly isolated at home or sending them to institutions where they might be abused, some people decided to pursue a third and final alternative: eugenic murder in the name of ‘mercy.’

As I discuss in the penultimate section of this chapter, many Japanese citizens understood ‘mercy killings’ of disabled people as a product of desperation: a last resort for friends and families who could not care for their loved ones nor bear to see them subjected to an inaccessible society. For such citizens, disabled people had no future (or no desirable future), and accordingly those who killed them were spared punishment and afforded lenient or commuted prison sentences. It was against the backdrop of such an existential threat that some of Japan’s ‘disability publics’ began to join hands and organize mass protests for a major overhaul of the nation’s welfare system.

_Economic Miracles and Risk Management_

After the conclusion of the Second World War, Japan experienced an ‘economic miracle.’ Between 1945 and 1958, the nation’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. And 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 heavily contingent on strategic alliances between government officials, policy makers, academics, economists, journalists, and other stakeholders operating on both sides of the Pacific.\textsuperscript{224} It was also a product of local policy reforms like Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda’s “Income Doubling Plan” (\textit{Shotoku baizō keikaku}, 1960), which helped transition Japan to a petroleum-based economy and incentivized industrial development through a series of tax breaks and targeted investments.\textsuperscript{225} Regardless of its roots, the sociopolitical implications of Japan’s economic growth were profound.

Historians of postwar Japan like Mary Brinton, Ann Waswo, and Frank Upham have shown how waves of industrialization starting in the late 1950s facilitated a fundamental restructuring of the nation’s social hierarchies, encouraging the emergence of new kinds of labor and gender roles.\textsuperscript{226} Building on their work in this section, I highlight how the reimagination of Japan’s infrastructure not only fueled postwar promises of recovery, but also created health risks for the nation’s citizens. By explaining how the rebuilding of Japan led to a sharp spike in impairment and the consolidation of new ‘disability publics’ whose demands policy makers were not prepared to meet, I help identify how the 1964 Paralympic Games became a moment of transformative rupture for welfare reform.

\textsuperscript{225} Suzuki Hironao, \textit{Ikeda seiken to kōdo seichōki no nihon gaikō} (2013).
To date, scholars like Hiroki Kawamura and Robert Stolz have explored the social, political, economic, and legal implications of illnesses born from industrial pollution during Japan’s postwar reconstruction: for instance, Itai-itai disease (*Itai-itai byō*) and Minamata disease (*Minamata byō*). Their analyses have revealed how the rapid rise of relatively unregulated factories resulted in the dissemination of products laced with mercury and other dangerous chemicals to consumer markets, as well as the contamination of public water supplies and other facilities used by large populations. Indeed, the scandalous nature of such incidents has also attracted audiences from outside academia as of late, inspiring auteurs such as Andrew Levitas to make documentaries like *Minamata* (2021).

It is worth remembering, however, that industrial pollution and the illnesses associated with it only represent a small fraction of the health risks that grew out of Japan’s so-called ‘economic miracle.’

As the streets of cities in Japan began to bustle with cars, accidents and injuries abounded. New developments in medical technology meant not only increased longevity for Japan’s citizens, but also ailments connected to old age. And just as sources of impairment blossomed across Japan during the postwar period, so did the amount of physical and social barriers in local communities. The construction of skyscrapers and subway stations replete with stairs and other obstacles created hardships for impaired

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228 Andrew Levitas, *Minamata* (2021). It is worth mentioning that activists and filmmakers have made documentaries and produced other kinds of media about industrial accidents and diseases in postwar Japan for decades. For example, see Tsuchimoto Noriaki, *Minamata: The Victims and Their World (Minamata: kanja-san to sono sekai, 1971).*
individuals, as did the widespread adoption of fast-paced business practices. Accordingly, many impaired individuals lost access to education, employment, and medical care. It was against this backdrop that ‘disability publics’ such as those discussed in Chapter Two, whose members were excluded from various sectors of society and denied government assistance, started to proliferate in prefectures throughout the country and carry out a diverse array of welfare projects.

To preempt the consolidation of Japan’s blossoming ‘disability publics’ and prevent mass demonstrations, the Ministry of Welfare introduced a series of policies to expand access to welfare during the late 1950s like the National Health Insurance Act (Kokumin kenkōhoken hō, 1958), the National Pension Act (Kokumin nenkin hō, 1959), and the Welfare Pension (Fukushi nenkin, 1960). The Ministry of Labor also developed a quota system for hiring disabled people in the Employment Promotion Act for Physically Disabled Persons (Shintai shōgaisha koyō sokushin hō, 1960). While sound in theory, such responses to the growing problem of disability welfare were seldom effective in practice. As evidenced by a series of critiques in The Japan Times, the pension system set up by the government only offered modest annuities to select populations of disabled people. Incensed, one columnist argued that the Ministry of Welfare must establish a more comprehensive system that could provide financial assistance to anyone with a disabling 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 creation of the national annuity system.\textsuperscript{231}

Such criticisms about the failures of Japan’s disability welfare system were not limited to annuities. Welfare specialists like Kunii Kuninaga expressed similar concerns about the Ministry of Labor’s efforts to promote employment of disabled persons, arguing that regional authorities had failed to implement national policies and that Japan lagged behind its American and European counterparts when it came to creating opportunities for disabled people to contribute to numerous economies.\textsuperscript{232}

By the early 1960s, many of Japan’s ‘disability publics’ began to petition local government officials and other relevant parties for policy reform. Perhaps the most emblematic petitions of the era are those concerning preferential medical treatment and surgeries at the National Rehabilitation and Guidance Center for Physically Disabled Persons (\textit{Kokuritsu shintai shōgaisha kōseishidōsho}). To highlight the historical significance of those petitions, a bit of background discussion is in order. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the National Rehabilitation Center was first built in Sagamihara in 1949 to provide vocational training and medical support to disabled people at an affordable

\textsuperscript{231} The Japan Times, “Aid to Handicapped” (June 23, 1962).
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 minor procedures such as limb shaping to external hospitals. After the center moved to Toyama City in 1953, however, it was inundated by patients with diverse disorders and started to expand the scope of its surgical offerings to accommodate patients’ needs. The medical division began to perform bone grafts and related procedures on patients affected by conditions like polio and rheumatoid arthritis, which caused limb deformity and difficulty walking. Such surgeries restored patients’ limb function to a certain extent and even allowed them to walk.

As Futsukaichi Yasushi noted in his *A Personal History of the Disability Movement* (*Shiteki shōgaisha undōshi*, 1979), the National Rehabilitation Center’s surgeries represented a beacon of hope for patients with little resources who had otherwise resigned themselves to lives of misery. To illustrate just how important those surgeries were to the patients who received them, we might consider the following quote from a certain Ms. Watanabe Echi, which originally appeared in an anthology of essays composed by former patients from the center entitled *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 National Rehabilitation

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233 As discussed in Chapter Two, the National Rehabilitation Center was established during the months leading up to the passage of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons. It was set up in such a fashion as to provide services and supports to the primary targets of that law: namely, wounded veterans with a small range of impairments.

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 long 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 had become a different person: the joy of laughter arose from deep inside me.\textsuperscript{235}

While surgeries carried out by doctors from the National Rehabilitation Center on patients such as Ms. Watanabe were life-changing in many respects, they were not a financially sustainable practice. And when Japan entered its ‘economic miracle’ in the late 1950s, institutional priorities changed. Growing demand for able-bodied laborers by emerging corporations led employees from the center to emphasize the care of patients with minor impairments 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.”\textsuperscript{236} The new policy, which effectively barred people with severe impairments from accessing surgical procedures, was enacted in full force after a new director took over the center in 1959. And by the early 1960s, groups of patients like the Association of Rehabilitated Friends (\textit{Kōyūkai}, established 1963) and Cotton Rose Association (\textit{Fuyōkai}, established 1963) started to lobby for policy change.

After several failed attempts at negotiation, seven patients’ groups came together to create a political pressure group, which composed and submitted petitions on their behalf: The Network of Associations of Physically Disabled Persons (Shintai shōgaisha dantai renraku kyōkai, 1963). The Network sent several petitions to administrators at the National Rehabilitation Center in 1963, but their efforts to secure policy reforms lacked sufficient support and were largely unsuccessful. However, things started to change after the 1964 Paralympic Games helped highlight the Network’s struggles and encourage public dialogues about disability in Japan.

**International Exposure at the 1964 Paralympic Games**

As researchers of the 1964 Paralympics like Kazuo Ogoura have suggested, the games were widely hailed as a success by domestic and international audiences because of their social, political, and economic contributions, and generally credited with raising awareness of disability in Japan. However, as historians like Dennis Frost have shown, the consequences of the games for disabled people living and working in the archipelago were not always what otherwise might be expected. Frost notes, for instance, how the 1964 games advanced a medicalized understanding of disability as something to be cured and did not produce significant changes in the nation’s built environment. Expanding on his analysis in this section, I demonstrate how the 1964 Paralympic Games provided a

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platform for diverse stakeholders – activists, medical experts, policy makers, regional officials, and others – to collectively redefine the scope, meaning, and praxis of disability welfare in Japan. I argue that while the 1964 Paralympics may not have resulted in immediate changes for impaired individuals, they invoked a series of long-term investigations that eventually led to the broadening of ‘disability’ as a legal category and facilitated the rise of residential institutions in the late 1960s.

During the preparation period for the 1964 Paralympic Games, the Japanese government was hesitant to get involved in planning promotional events or organizing fundraising campaigns. The government’s hesitance is understandable: to arrange activities that might showcase Japan’s floundering welfare system, which by their own admission ‘lagged behind other advanced nations,’ was to risk potential embarrassment and shame on the international stage during the Paralympics. Instead, preparatory tasks were usually delegated to grassroots associations and corporate entities, which assumed risks on behalf of the state in return for rewards if the games proved to be a success. 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 and managed by private organizations.

The government’s reliance on private organizations proved to be problematic for the games. Despite prolonged campaigns from organizations like the Japan Bartenders Association and Japan Automobile Industry Association, the Paralympic committee was

\[241\] The Japan Times, “Lack of Funds Threatens to ‘Paralyze’ Paralympics” (October 20, 1964).
still around ¥5,000,000 short of their budget on November 2, two days before the opening ceremony.\textsuperscript{242} Diffuse distribution of labor also resulted in administrative blunders: for instance, not enough medals were made to give out to the winners of numerous events.\textsuperscript{243} Such shortcomings, which were frequently reported as scandals by newspapers like The Japan Times, significantly hampered possibilities of using the Paralympic games as a springboard to showcase Japan’s disabled athletes (and, by extension, other impaired individuals) in a positive light. And by the time that the games officially began on November 4, differences between domestic and international athletes were readily apparent to a viewing public.

During the games, reporters from local and global media outlets such as 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. 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.\textsuperscript{244} Even Crown Prince Akihito, who used his charisma and prestige to promote the Paralympic games, offered an implicit criticism of Japan’s overall 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

\textsuperscript{242} The Japan Times, “Paralympics” (November 2, 1964).
\textsuperscript{243} The Japan Times, “Prize Shortage” (November 11, 1964).
\textsuperscript{244} Kyodo News, “Long Forgotten Films Shed Light on 1964 Tokyo Paralympics” (July 30, 2019).
athletes had already returned to society. I think that foreign rehabilitation is going well.\textsuperscript{245}

Such indictments of Japan’s approach to disability welfare, however veiled, were precisely what activists and organizers of the Paralympics like Kasai Yoshisuke (mentioned at the opening to this chapter) were hoping to draw out. By illustrating how Japan’s disability welfare system was broken, they could push for reforms including, but not limited to, increased access to rehabilitation services.

Following the conclusion of the games, many individuals and institutions tried to capitalize on their spectacle to call attention to diverse issues and reshape Japan’s disability welfare scheme, including the Network of Associations of Physically Disabled Persons (see the previous section). Shortly after the closing ceremony for the games, the Network decided to swap tactics from written petitions to sit-in protests for improved medical access, which were more visible to media outlets. On March 1, 1965, the Network carried out a twenty-four-hour sit-in protest in front of the National Rehabilitation Center, in which more than one hundred disabled advocates and allies participated. The event received significant coverage in local and national newspapers, with quotes and photos of disabled activists plastered across the \textit{Asahi Shinbun, Mainichi Shinbun}, and \textit{The Japan Times}.\textsuperscript{246} According to contemporaneous news sources, advocates chanted slogans like “Give Us Surgeries!” (\textit{Hayaku shujutsu o!}) and held signs


\textsuperscript{246} \textit{Asahi Shinbun}, “Shinshōsha ga suwarikomi – kokuritsu sentā mae de ‘jūshō-sha ni mo monko ake’” (March 1, 1965); \textit{Mainichi Shinbun}, “Kurumaisu de suwarimoki – kokuritsu shinshō sentā ‘shujutsu o’ to hyaku ni jū nin” (March 1, 1965); and \textit{The Japan Times}, “Disabled People Stage Two Hour Demonstration” (March 2, 1965).
that read “so many beds are empty when the place is full of staff personnel!” Their cries at last seem to have reached the ears of center 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.\textsuperscript{247} Despite such concessions, 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.\textsuperscript{248} Their rallies continued for more than a year after the initial incident and put pressure on the Ministry to address the situation.\textsuperscript{249} 

As the Network of Associations of Physically Disabled Persons and many other ‘disability publics’ began to openly protest Japan’s welfare system in the aftermath of the 1964 Paralympics, rehabilitation experts like Motome Ikezumi suggested that state officials look abroad for solutions. Ikezumi, then head of the Japanese branch of the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, leveraged his position to convene a five-day pan-Pacific conference on disability welfare. 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 Welfare Minister Hiroshi Kanda, Crown Prince Akihito, and Princess Michiko.\textsuperscript{250} After the opening ceremony, which featured several keynote lectures on rehabilitation programs for disabled people in developing countries, attendees participated in panel sessions on topics like cerebral paralysis, spinal paralysis, vocational

\textsuperscript{247} Mainchi Shinbun, “Kokuritsu shinshō sentā de yōkyū doori kaiketsu” (March 2, 1965).
\textsuperscript{248} Asahi Shinbun, “Kōseishō ni shinshōsha suwarikomi” (June 3, 1965).
\textsuperscript{249} Asahi Shinbun, “Ichiō hanashiai tsuku kokuritsu shinshō sentā” (August 6, 1966).
\textsuperscript{250} The Japan Times, “Rehabilitation Meet Beginning Here Today” (April 13, 1965).
training, prosthetics and artificial limb replacement, and social rehabilitation. While it is difficult to determine the extent to which the conference directly influenced the development 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. It was in this environment of compounding local and global pressures that Japan celebrated the fifteen-year anniversary of enacting the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons. On August 1, 1965 in accordance with the law’s review system, the Ministry of Welfare instructed forty-six prefectural governments to census all physically disabled people under their purview. The results of the Ministry of Welfare’s census were startling. According to their data, the number of physically disabled adults over the age of eighteen in Japan was 1,160,000 people: an increase of 214,600 individuals, or more than 18%, between 1960 and 1965. The Ministry associated the increase with industrial and traffic accidents, concluding that 89.65% of all physically disabled individuals had acquired their impairments after birth due to injuries or illnesses. Furthermore, the Ministry explained that only 39.3% of physically disabled adults in Japan were gainfully employed, indicating a significant disadvantage compared with 66.9% of otherwise healthy Japanese adults.

While the validity of the methods by which the Ministry gathered and presented its census data are open to debate, the responses to it are nevertheless significant. Disability advocacy groups like the National Social Welfare Council seized the

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251 The Japan Times, “Pan-Pacific Meet Opens to Study Rehabilitation” (April 14, 1965).
253 The Japan Times, “Survey Shows 18% Rise in Handicapped Adults” (December 29, 1965).
opportunity to lobby for government funding. At the same time, journalists like Gotō Teiji used the Ministry of Welfare’s census as a vehicle to criticize Japan’s lack of services and supports for physically disabled individuals. In Gotō’s words:

According to the 1965 census, there are around 950,000 disabled people in Japan, including 200,000 children. There are also 140,000 severely disabled adults who cannot work. [...] Of course, local and national government agencies have made significant efforts to try and improve the welfare status of disabled adults and children alike. [...] However, there are still an insufficient number of facilities for them, and countermeasures are slow coming.

As pressure for welfare reform mounted from different sectors of society, the Ministry of Welfare was compelled to act. On January 21, 1966, the Ministry convened a special committee for revision of the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons. After several months of investigation, during which time Ministry officials called for an increase in the nation’s public welfare annuities to match those of advanced countries in Europe like France and Germany, the committee released a “Comprehensive Plan for Revising the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons and Promoting Other Measures for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Individuals” on November 24. 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.\footnote{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 Disabled Persons (Shinshin shōgaisha taisaku kihon hō, 1970).}

After several months of review, the Diet approved almost all of the Ministry of Welfare’s recommendations and accordingly revised the Law for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons in March of 1967.\footnote{National Diet of Japan (Fifty-Fifth Session), \textit{House of Councilors Budget Committee, No. 2} (March 20, 1967).} As policy makers considered their advice, Ministry officials began an arduous task: determining what services were necessary to ‘create a stable lifestyle’ for disabled individuals. In the next section, I discuss how the Ministry decided to build a network of residential institutions to resolve outstanding welfare problems and explore how their efforts were hampered by economic constraints, resulting in precarious environments in which disabled people were exposed to abuse.

\textit{The Rise of Colonies and Institutions}

In fact, the Ministry of Welfare had started 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.\footnote{Murao Seiichi, “Shinshin shōgaisha no tengoku,” \textit{Rihabiritēshon} (1968), pp. 8–9.}

On October 5, 1965, Welfare Minister Suzuki Zenko convened a committee to research the possibility of constructing such facilities in Japan. 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 sent a list of suggestions to Minister Suzuki on December 22, 1965.\footnote{Mainichi Shinbun, “Shinshōsha koronī no kensetsu kōsō matomaru” (December 23, 1965).} Among Kasai’s suggestions was the development of colonies, or ‘independent communities,’ for people with severe disabilities at national and prefectural levels that would serve as a model for additional institutions in the future.\footnote{As evidenced by publications from welfare experts like Itoga Kazuo and Yano Takao, the stigma associated with creating ‘independent communities’ for severely disabled individuals was not lost on politicians during the mid-1960s. Itoga Kazuo, “Shinshin shōgaisha no tame no ‘koronīron’ konjaku,” \textit{Kōsei} (1966), pp. 22–24, and Yano Takao, \textit{Shinshin shōgaisha no tame no koronīron} (1967).}

After reviewing Kasai’s plan, Minister Suzuki submitted it to the Diet in March of 1966. The Diet quickly approved Suzuki’s proposal, and by the end of the month it was decided that the Japan’s first national colony for disabled people would be erected in a suburb of Takasaki City.\footnote{National Diet of Japan (Fifty-First Session), \textit{House of Councilors Budget Committee, No. 1} (March 29, 1966).} By October of 1967, construction of Japan’s so-called “Paradise for the Disabled” was underway.\footnote{Asahi Shinbun, “‘Shōgaisha no rakuen’ kansei e kokuritsu koronī ukeire junbi mo hajimeru” (October 11, 1970).} 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 individuals, complete with dormitories, a school, sports...
facilities, rehabilitation centers, and maternity wards. However, construction was delayed due to a series of financial and administrative complications. 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. 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 its colony to even a small pool of individuals: less than one out of every hundred who applied to live there. Among those refused by colony administrators were some of the most vulnerable applicants 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.”

So, what alternatives for care were available for people with severe disabilities like Mr. A? Aware that colonies were not an all-encompassing solution to the ‘problem’ of disability welfare in Japan, the Ministry of Welfare also developed large-scale

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265 The Japan Times, “Colony Building to Start in October” (February 28, 1967).
266 The Japan Times, “In Suburbs of Takasaki City: Center for Disabled Being Built” (January 4, 1969).
267 Mainichi Shinbun, “Kokuritsu shinshin shōgaisha koronī e daichijin no nyūen” (April 20, 1971).
268 Asahi Shinbun, “Kokuritsu koronī o owareta A-san jūshō sugite ‘shikaku nashi’ shokuintachi mo tainen ni hantai” (June 30, 1971).
residential institutions for people with severe disabilities. Such institutions started to appear around the time of the 1964 Paralympics, when a prototype facility was set up in Ibaraki Prefecture.\(^{269}\) Japan’s first institution for people with severe disabilities provided medical and nursing care to residents 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 advocates to sign petitions and lobby for the creation of similar institutions across Japan.\(^{270}\) While the national government erected eleven residential institutions for severely disabled people in various prefectures after the 1965 census, those facilities lacked the resources necessary to house even a fraction of the nation’s impaired individuals.\(^{271}\) Furthermore, the facilities were plagued by financial and administrative problems that affected residents’ quality of life and allowed for abuse.

During the late 1960s, many residential institutions for severely disabled people in Japan were built in remote locations outside of major towns and cities as land was relatively affordable. One consequence of such isolation was that residents’ families and friends (as well as government officials) could not easily visit the facilities. Lack of oversight, paired with overpopulation issues, often resulted in poor living conditions and various kinds of violations. Reiko Hayashi and Masako Okuhira have documented many examples of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse inside institutions: from unwanted

\(^{269}\) Asahi Shinbun, “Otona no jūshō shinshin shōgaisha shisetsu zenkoku hatsu Ibaraki ni” (May 31, 1964).

\(^{270}\) Institutions became increasingly popular options for families with disabled kin during the late 1960s as urbanization led to a significant decrease in viable housing. I take up issues related to home care in greater detail in the next chapter.

\(^{271}\) Local officials advertised the construction of such facilities in media outlets to demonstrate their good will and win public support for state projects. For example, see Asahi Shinbun. “Kokuritsu shinshōsha shisetsu” (January 19, 1966).
hysterectomies and forced sterilization to instances of molestation and assault.\textsuperscript{272} Yabuki Fumitoshi has also commented on the inhumane conditions inside residential institutions.\textsuperscript{273} According to Yabuki, disabled residents were only allowed to take a shower twice a week (if that). Furthermore, they were not allowed to leave their facilities without applying for a permit several weeks ahead of time, and even then, their requests were often rejected 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 were tasked with making up the difference between facility accommodations and residents’ needs, often came to resent the individuals they cared for. As Yabuki has indicated, 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!”\textsuperscript{274}

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. In June of 1967, the Ministry began to build an evaluation center for physically disabled people in Shinjuku that would help such individuals and their families develop custom care plans to ease the burdens associated with living


\textsuperscript{274} Ibid.
outside of institutions.\textsuperscript{275} The evaluation center, which opened on April 16, 1968, featured state-of-the-art scientific and medical equipment, including 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.\textsuperscript{276}

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, Minobe Ryokichi, 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.\textsuperscript{277} 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 in Japan. That committee established a subcommittee dedicated to institutions for disabled people,

\textsuperscript{275} Asahi Shinbun, “Nippon hatsu no shinshōsha sentā – raiharu Toyama köseikan ato ni kansei” (June 15, 1967).
\textsuperscript{276} The Japan Times, “Center for Disabled to Open Today” (April 16, 1968).
\textsuperscript{277} The Japan Times, “Gov. Minobe Unveils 3-Year Plan” (December 3, 1968).
which released a report entitled “On the Emergency Maintenance of Social Welfare Institutions” (*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 Institutions” (*Shakai fukushi shisetsu kinkyū seibi gokanen keikaku*, 1970), which attempted to resolve the overcrowding of institutions by creating additional facilities during the first half of the 1970s.\(^{278}\) Those facilities suffered from the same funding and space issues as their predecessors, leading to more incidents of violence against disabled people.\(^{279}\)

*The Fuchu Rehabilitation Center Battle*

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 have referred to as the ‘Fuchu Rehabilitation Center Battle’ (*Fuchū ryōiku sentā tōsō*).\(^{280}\) By discussing how disabled residents of the Fuchu Rehabilitation Center pushed back against what they understood to be cruel behavior by partnering with public-facing press outlets in this section, I explain how otherwise uninvolved citizens became aware of realities of


institutional abuse. I also suggest how the friends and families of disabled people, faced with the difficult decision of subjecting their kin to either inaccessible community life or sequestration in residential institutions, came to engage in a range of eugenic practices, including infanticide and so-called ‘mercy killings.’

The Fuchu Rehabilitation Center Battle began on November 28, 1970, when four disabled residents staged a hunger strike to protest the reassignment of a caregiver who was kind to them.281 One of the residents, Nitta Isao, was interviewed by a reporter from the Asahi Shinbun, who later published Nitta’s remarks in an op-ed 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.”282 The two quotes sit in stark contrast to one another on the page and clearly show the differences between the two sides of center policy. They amplify the impact of many other quotes in 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.”

281 Such relocations were relatively common due to the staffing shortages described in the previous section.
282 Asahi Shinbun, “Jūdo shōgaisha mo ningen desu” (December 14, 1970).
While Niita’s initial hunger strike at the Fuchu Rehabilitation Center broke after five days, protests against inhumane treatment at the center continued sporadically for the next two years. 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 18, 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. Nuita Hanako, 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. 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.”

Throughout the demonstration, disabled residents of the Fuchu Rehabilitation Center and their allies demanded to meet with Tokyo Governor Minōbe Ryokichi to

283 The Japan Times, “Plan to Relocate Rehabilitation Center Protested” (September 20, 1972).
284 Asahi Shinbun, “Minkan e no iten wa oidashi – Fuchū ryōiku sentā no shōgaisha kōgi no suwarikomi” (September 19, 1972).
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.\textsuperscript{285} The strike was closely documented by local media outlets, which shared protestors’ frustrations with the public through a series of interviews.\textsuperscript{286} By October 9, awareness of the ongoing protests had grown to such an extent that the government could no longer afford to ignore demonstrators’ demands.\textsuperscript{287} 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 options remaining, residents of the center continued to organize sit-ins and hunger strikes throughout the winter of 1972. Every step of the way, journalists from media outlets like the \textit{Asahi Shinbun} were there to broadcast the sufferings of protestors to the public.\textsuperscript{288}

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

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\textsuperscript{285} Asahi Shinbun, “Futari ga hansuto – to ni kōgi no shinshōsha” (September 29, 1972).
\textsuperscript{286} 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).
\textsuperscript{287} Asahi Shinbun, “Tochō mae no hansuto tooka buri ni hodoku – kōgi no shinshōsha” (October 9, 1972).
\textsuperscript{288} Asahi Shinbun, “Kurumaisu de 40-nichi suwarikomi naze… ‘sabetsu iten’ ni hantai jiremma ni kushishimu togawa” (October 30, 1972); Asahi Shinbun, “Shinshōsha kyozetsu suru kono daitokai Fuchū ryōiku sentā zaishōsha Sōdaisetra to taiwa shūkai” (November 4, 1972); and Asahi Shinbun, “To no setsumeikai o ‘kyohi’ Fuchū ryōiku sentā suwarikomi gurūpu” (December 13, 1972).
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then the damage had already been done.\textsuperscript{289} 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 (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.\textsuperscript{290}

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 such as \textit{Case Reports (Hanri jihō)} and \textit{The Japan Times} during the late 1960s.\textsuperscript{291} 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 her two handicapped children when two operations on [her daughter] Yoko and one operation on her son failed to

\textsuperscript{289} 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 jūdō shinshōsha tō rainen, minseikyoku e ikan – Fuchū ryōiku sentā funsō kaiketsu” (June 3, 1974).

\textsuperscript{290} 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. \textit{Mabiki: Infanticide and Population Growth in Eastern Japan: 1660–1950} (2012).

enable the children to move their limbs.” 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. 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. 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. In 1973, a disabled couple committed suicide in Sapporo because their parents opposed their marriage. 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 Japan during 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 desperation. Consider

293 The Japan Times, “Suspended Term Given to Mother Over Killing” (October 9, 1971).
296 The Japan Times, “Man Dies, Woman Critical in Double Suicide Attempt” (September 14, 1974).
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, which was
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 only three years in prison for killing his disabled
two-year-old son.297 Such lenient sentences reified anxieties among members of the
general public that Japanese society was not willing or able to support disabled people,
and eventually led many activists to speak out.298

Concluding Remarks

When Kasai Yoshisuke and other stakeholders attempted to leverage the 1964
Paralympics to develop welfare policies for disabled individuals in Japan, they did so
with the best of intentions. Indeed, they almost certainly did not want to create a society
in which disabled people could be exposed to neglect and abuse in residential institutions
or be subjected to so-called ‘mercy killings.’ However, the actions of Kasai and his
contemporaries were informed by various historical contingencies and geopolitical
circumstances, resulting in outcomes not only undesirable, but arguably antithetical to
their core objective of facilitating social inclusion. We must examine those contingencies
and circumstances if we are to truly understand why many disabled people were denied

298 I take up the activities of such activists in Chapter Four.
access to medical care and other social services in the age of Japan’s ‘economic miracle’ and eventually came together to combat a common threat in eugenic violence.

Perhaps the single-most influential factor that shaped the production of disability welfare policies in Japan during the late 1950s and 1960s was a wave of industrialization, which created new kinds of impairments and environmental barriers that led to a spike in disability. Policy makers were largely unprepared to support Japan’s growing population of disabled people, as evidenced by early pension systems which offered only minor assistance to select demographics. The inadequacies of Japan’s disability welfare system fully came to light at the 1964 Paralympics, which afforded various stakeholders a platform for naming and blaming on the international stage. Using that platform, disability advocates and welfare specialists pressured government officials to carry out numerous reforms, leading the Ministry of Welfare to investigate what a more effective welfare system for disabled people might look like. After considering local and global precedents, authorities from the Ministry decided that residential institutions were an option worth exploring.

In theory, residential institutions were a cost-efficient solution to the ‘problem’ of disability, as a relatively small number of administrators could oversee the care of many impaired individuals. In practice, however, such institutions were often set up outside of major cities and overpopulated to further reduce expenses, creating settings in which visiting was hard and staff were overworked. Disabled residents started to be abused in institutions as care providers struggled to negotiate differences between the imagined expectations of state policy and individuals’ needs. Indeed, care providers outside of
institutions grappled with similar problems as they tried to help disabled people in their care navigate industrializing cities from which they were all but shut out. Faced with the alternatives of watching their disabled friends and family members remain inside their houses with little access to education, employment, and other social services or sending them to institutions where they might be abused, some individuals carried out eugenic ‘mercy killings.’ Judges and juries understood the actions of such individuals to be born of desperation and offered them commuted prison sentences as a way of tacitly acknowledging the difficulty of their position.

As I discuss in Chapter Four, 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 people to find solidarity with one another and form opposition groups collectively known as the Disability Liberation Movement. At the head of that movement was a group of people with cerebral palsy who have become a topic of much scholarly discourse: the Green Grass Society (Aoi shiba no kai). The Green Grass Society coordinated many spectacular demonstrations during the 1970s to protest eugenic violence against disabled people, including anti-abortion rallies and bus-station takeovers. By joining hands with radical feminists and advocates for the elderly who aimed to make Japan an easier place to live, they helped create an accessibility market and bring about a ‘barrier-free boom.’

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In “Development of Disability Studies in Japan: A Brief Outline” (2008), Nagase Osamu attributed the “birth of the modern disability rights movement in Japan” to the Green Grass Society (*Aoi shiba no kai*, 1957), a group of people with cerebral palsy “who had a lasting impact on the disability scene.” Nagase’s characterization of the society is arguably correct. As he has suggested, the society famously staged one of the first public protests against infanticide of disabled children in Japan after an incident in 1970 in which a mother was found guilty but given lenient sentencing. In fact, the Green Grass Society’s advocacy, including dissemination of graphic documentary films such as *Goodbye CP* in 1972, demonstrations against abortion on the grounds of disability in 1973, and spectacular takeovers of bus stations to reveal problems with accessible transportation in 1977 has inspired generations of activists and academics in and of Japan to investigate disability issues. Consider, for instance, studies by Kuramoto Tomoaki, Morioka Jirō, and Hirono Shinsuke, which unpack the philosophical frameworks that undergirded the society’s awareness-raising activities. Alternatively, look to works by Elizabeth Guffey, Yuriko Iino, and others who have explored the social and material

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implications of the society’s efforts to highlight community integration issues.\footnote{Elizabeth Guffey, “Designing the Japanese Walking Bag,” in Bess Williamson and Elizabeth Guffey eds., \textit{Making Disability Modern: Design Histories} (2020), pp. 159–76, and Yuriko Iino, “On Disabled Access to the Sexual Realm: How Does a Feminist Perspective Contribute,” \textit{Feminism & Psychology}, Vol. 21(4) (2011), pp. 536–41.} Such scholars have enriched our understanding of the causes and effects of the society’s activism. However, they have largely overlooked the historical and political circumstances that enabled the society’s successes, leaving us with an incomplete image of its legacy that I intend to help fill out.

I contend that we cannot truly understand the Green Grass Society’s legacy in Japan if we do not examine the interests and activism of other minority social movements in the postwar period. Using ‘radical’ feminists, advocates for the elderly, and different ‘disability publics’ as case studies, I demonstrate how the society’s efforts to secure access to education, employment, and other social services in the 1970s were aided by parallel protests from populations of people who were similarly disenfranchised by Japan’s rapid industrialization and urbanization during the ‘economic miracle.’ When society members’ activities aligned with the advocacy of politically powerful organizations that had resources to pressure politicians into pursuing reforms, they tended to win policy battles. By contrast, society members frequently lost battles in which they lacked support from such allies. When victory proved to be impractical (or impossible) for the Green Grass Society, some members partnered with representatives from other relatively powerless associations to solicit attention from media outlets and spark discussions about the value of inclusion among private-sector stakeholders. Thanks in part to their activities, architects, engineers, and other interested parties started to engage
in ‘experiments in integration’ and contribute to what I call Japan’s ‘barrier-free boom’: a birthing of technical innovations that gradually helped to facilitate deinstitutionalization of disabled people.

My analysis in this chapter is divided into three sections, which collectively contextualize the Green Grass Society’s advocacy and highlight its relationship with Japan’s ‘barrier-free boom.’ In the first section, I introduce the society and investigate its origins, identifying how a small group of activists from Kanagawa helped expand the society from a local movement to a national network. Building on research by Tateiwa Shinya, Koide Kyōichi, Yamazaki Ryo, and other academics who have partially unearthed the society’s roots, I trace how factors such as lack of accessible housing, encounters with Buddhist theology, and media reports about ‘mercy killings’ of disabled children encouraged some members of the society’s Kanagawa chapter to engage in anti-eugenic activism. Delving into the chapters’ development and dissemination of the documentary *Goodbye CP* (1972), I demonstrate how members came to adopt a spectacular, media-centric approach to their advocacy, which they used to frame accessibility issues for viewing audiences and recruit potential supporters from across the country to join their movement and participate in protests throughout the decade.

In the second section, I explore some of the reasons why the Green Grass Society’s protests for community integration and disability welfare reforms occasionally succeeded but often failed. Focusing on their fights against regulation of abortion and campaigns for accessible transportation, I highlight how the society’s policy victories were often contingent on shared goals and collective activism with advocates for other
minority demographics: for instance, women and elderly people. By investigating the society’s demonstrations for integration of disabled and non-disabled children in schools at the Ministry of Education alongside other ‘disability publics,’ I show how competing interests and lack of support from such politically powerful allies often translated into policy losses. I argue that regardless of the outcomes of their policy battles, members of the Green Grass Society benefitted from media coverage of their activities, which helped spark discussions about the value of including disabled individuals in Japanese society among interested parties in the private sector.

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss how diverse stakeholders tried to capitalize on Japan’s growing ‘access market,’ which was revealed in part by the Green Grass Society’s activism. Analyzing the activities of architects, engineers, and various other ‘access-makers,’ I suggest how attempts to integrate disabled people into local communities were thwarted by coordination issues. Participants in Japan’s ‘barrier-free boom’ developed a plethora of assistive devices such as ramps and elevators but differing standards of accommodation made their new devices unusable by many. By the early 1980s, such actors had radically redesigned Japan’s built environments, entertainment, and employment venues, but the work of truly integrating disabled individuals had only just begun.

The Origins of the Green Grass Society

The origins of the Green Grass Society have been meticulously documented by scholars of disability in Japan. Perhaps the most prolific author on the subject is Tateiwa
Shinya, a sociologist and historian of welfare who has worked closely with members of the society for several decades. According to Tateiwa, the Green Grass Society was founded by a small group of activists in Tokyo during the winter of 1957 as a ‘disability public’ for people with cerebral palsy (see Chapter Two). Using local newspapers, society members arranged art exhibitions, bus tours, and lectures on social welfare for individuals affected by the condition, whose significant mobility, speech, and learning impairments made it hard for them to access education, employment, entertainment, and healthcare. The society helped to facilitate exchanges between such individuals and highlight shared concerns, encouraging some to set up local chapters in prefectures across the Kantō region during the 1960s. Among those chapters, the Kanagawa chapter is particularly noteworthy, as its members’ actions heavily informed the philosophy behind the Green Grass Society’s later efforts at the national level. By tracing the development of the Kanagawa chapter in this section, I suggest how the society was transformed from a small collective of activists to a countrywide community in the early 1970s. Members of that community often used their resources to coordinate large-scale demonstrations that called attention to accessibility issues through graphic and spectacular displays. Their efforts, bolstered by the activism of other marginalized demographics in the postwar period whose goals aligned with their own such as women and elderly people,

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encouraged private sector stakeholders to engage in ‘experiments in integration’ and bring about Japan’s ‘barrier-free boom.’

Many leaders of the Green Grass Society’s demonstrations in the 1970s began as members of its Kanagawa chapter: for instance, Yokota Hiroshi and Yokotsuka Koichi. As Koide Kyōichi and other academics interested in the Green Grass Society’s advocacy have argued, the chapter’s activist trajectory was largely contingent on decisions made by such actors with respect to housing and healthcare, as well as their interactions with diverse civil society organizations and religious associations.305 During the mid-1960s, members of the chapter started to search for living arrangements outside of their families’ homes and residential institutions that would allow them to avoid social exclusion. One option they investigated was staying at temples and shrines, which historically had supported individuals with diverse impairments and illnesses by providing nursing care and related services.306 After receiving an invitation from Buddhist monk Osaragi Akira to stay at his ‘Maha Raba Village’ (Maha raba mura) – a private colony for disabled people established at Kankyosan Ganjoji Temple in Ibaraki prefecture shortly after the conclusion of the 1964 Paralympic Games – some members of the Kanagawa chapter decided to relocate and see if their overall quality of life would improve.

As Yamazaki Ryo has illustrated through his analysis of Yokota Koichi’s autobiographical writings from the late 1960s, the time that members of the Kanagawa

306 For the history of religious groups as providers of disability welfare in Japan, see Tsunenobu Yoritaka, Shinshūgaku to shōgaigaku – shōgai to jiritsu o toraeru aratana shiza no kōchiku no tame ni (2015). Also see James Robson’s forthcoming scholarship on the topic of temples as spaces for the care of persons with diverse cognitive impairments.
chapter spent at the Maha Raba Village was transformative in multiple respects. Not only were members afforded increased access to housing and healthcare, but also training in religion and the political ideology of Osaragi. Drawing on Buddhist teachings from the Tannishō, Osaragi told Yokota and other members of the chapter that Japanese society should not condemn them for being disabled, but rather should strive to save them because of their disabilities. Osaragi’s insight allowed Yokota and his contemporaries to imagine a version of society that conformed to their needs as opposed to the other way around. And by the late 1960s, they began to develop a framework for social inclusion not unlike the ‘social model of disability,’ which was being fleshed out at roughly the same time by disability activists from the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the United Kingdom.

As members of the Kanagawa chapter started to investigate the philosophical possibilities of a society built to proactively include rather than retroactively accommodate disabled individuals, reports of abuse and eugenic ‘mercy killings’ of disabled people began to appear in media outlets. As I discussed in Chapter Three, those reports highlighted the apathetic and resigned attitudes of many members of Japanese society, who quickly forgave such crimes as acts of desperation and devalued the lives of

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308 The Tannishō is a late thirteenth century Buddhist text generally thought to have been written by Yuien, a discipline of the founder of Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism, Shinran. The text deals with various doctrinal issues, including matters pertaining to eradicating evil. It asserts that all human beings are in some way impure but could enter the pure land by following specific ritual protocols. For Osaragi, the Tannishō seemed to imply that ‘disability’ was one of many kinds of impurity that could be overcome if appropriately accommodated.
disabled individuals by giving culprits lenient or largely commuted sentences. Leaders of the Kanagawa chapter took issue with the light sentencing of ‘mercy killers’ of disabled people and were particularly enraged by an incident that occurred in Yokohama in 1970 involving a certain Mrs. Hakamada Mihoko, whose two-year-old child was affected by the same condition they were: cerebral palsy. 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 disabled people,” they reasoned, “then you might someday decide to kill us, too.”

Incensed 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. The manifesto was eventually expanded into a book-length monograph by Yokotsuka Koichi in 1975 called Mother! Don’t Kill Me! (Haha yo! Korosu na!) and has since been translated into English by Nagase Osamu. I include its complete 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.

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310 The Japan Times, “Suspended Term Given to Mother Over Killing” (October 9, 1971).
312 Yokotsuka’s Mother! Don’t Kill Me has been republished numerous times, most recently in 2007 by Seikatsu Shoin with a critical analysis from Tateiwa Shinya. Yokotsuka Koichi and Tateiwa Shinya, Haha yo! Korosu na! (2007).
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.

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. 313

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

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313 Aoi Shiba no Kai ed. *Ayumi*, No. 11 (1970), p. 1. I borrow this translation from Nagase Osamu. As Nagase points out, the fifth clause of the manifesto was added at a later date. For additional information, see the Ritsumeikan University Research Center for Ars Vivendi’s Website: [http://www.arsvi.com/o/a01-e.htm](http://www.arsvi.com/o/a01-e.htm) (Accessed June 16, 2019).
there is a fundamental problem with Japanese society in so far as it does not appreciate the value of individuals with cerebral palsy [and other disabilities]. 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 inspired 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 commuted prison sentence for killing a disabled child was ‘justice’ and defended that justice by declaring that the murder of an impaired individual was an act of ‘love.’ 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 early 1970s, members of the Green Grass Society’s Kanagawa chapter began to enact Yokota’s manifesto by coordinating consciousness-raising campaigns and demonstrations. Drawing on lessons learned from participating in protests at the National Rehabilitation Center for Physically Disabled Persons and the Fuchu Rehabilitation Center (discussed in Chapter Three), many adopted a media-based approach to anti-eugenic activism centered around shock-and-awe.314 In 1972, several members teamed up

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314 The Green Grass Society was not the only ‘disability public’ to adopt a media-based approach to advocacy in 1970s Japan. Consider several ‘disability publics’ devoted to people with muscular dystrophy that produced documentaries about their own problems toward the end of the decade. See The Japan Times,
with filmmaker Hara Kazuo to produce a documentary called *Goodbye CP* (*Sayonara CP*), which follows Yokota and his friends as they dragged their bodies across busy streets, begged for donations at crowded bus stops, and discussed social taboos such as drinking, smoking, and sex. The film also illustrates how non-disabled individuals routinely objectified people with cerebral palsy in Japan during the early 1970s as “pitiful” and “pathetic.” By affording members of the Green Grass Society opportunities to contextualize their experiences of social exclusion for viewing audiences and identify potential avenues for community integration, *Goodbye CP* advanced the society’s agenda of sparking dialogues about disability welfare reform.

Consider one scene from early in *Goodbye CP* in which Yokota crawls across a train station and hands out flyers for the Green Grass Society. He says, “I walk slow and look pathetic. What is wrong with that? […] We are outsiders. We can never be insiders. But those who think they are insiders may become outsiders. Why do they not realize that? That is the point we are making.” Yokota’s critique that non-disabled people might one day become disabled implied that eugenic behaviors such as ‘mercy killings’ were not sustainable solutions to the ‘problem’ of disability and allowed him to explore alternative resolution methods. He argued that a first step to welfare reform was to dismantle a pervasive paternalism that encouraged the families of disabled people to

“‘Hopeless’ Victims Create Their Own Quiet Sensation” (April 10, 1977), and The Japan Times, “Dystrophy Sufferers Produce Film” (November 25, 1979).

prevent those individuals from pursuing activities that they otherwise wanted to pursue.

In Yokota’s words:

For me, sex was taboo. Something I should not think about. So, I did not dare. I was told I was not capable, and I cannot get married. I can be in love with someone, but no marriages. People think that my body is not capable of having sex. That is what they think. My uncle is the same. When I fall in love, he tells me that I cannot. 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 that I want kids, he says that I can get married, but I cannot have kids. What is he thinking? I suppose he will tell me that I can have one kid, and not two. This is how people who are healthy think.

We must show them that we are able to have sex, fall in love, get married, and have kids.\(^{317}\)

By recounting his interactions with his uncle in *Goodbye CP*, Yokota demonstrated how disabled people could help identify and resolve barriers to social inclusion in Japan during the early 1970s. Using the film, he and his companions from the Green Grass Society invited viewing audiences to engage in conversation about challenges faced by disabled individuals and join their organization.

As Sean O’Reilly has noted, members of the Green Grass Society and Hara Kazuo initially released *Goodbye CP* to only a small number of theaters in Kanagawa due to budget constraints.\(^{318}\) However, the film soon gained traction as members of other


local chapters picked it up and started to host screenings at residential institutions and
related venues to recruit potential sympathizers. Sadato Kuniko has traced the
community-building impact of such ‘roadshows’ and revealed how they not only
increased the Green Grass Society’s membership roster, but also led to the formation of
additional advocacy organizations like “Group Ribbon” (*Gurūpu ribbon*, established
1972) and “Group Gorilla” (*Gurūpu gorira*, established 1972).319 Those organizations
helped to disseminate *Goodbye CP* across Japan while carrying out their own welfare
projects. Because of their efforts, Yokota and the Kanagawa chapter of the Green Grass
Society extended their reach into previously untouched parts of the country and became
able to mobilize many people for mass demonstrations. Such demonstrations, I submit,
were successful not only because of the society’s political power, but also parallel
protests from advocates for other minority demographics who shared similar goals.

**Collective Activism and Policy Battles**

As scholars of minority social movements in postwar Japan such as Kiyoteru
Tsutsui have demonstrated, members of the Green Grass Society and other ‘disability
publics’ were not the only demographics of disenfranchised individuals to face
difficulties and speak out in the early 1970s.320 On the contrary, many groups of people
who were marginalized from mainstream society due to reconstruction efforts during the
nation’s ‘economic miracle’ pressed policy makers for reforms. Vera Mackie and Ayako

Kano have identified how some women, especially mothers with children who had been burdened with caregiving labor since Japan started to recover from its wartime losses, began to lobby government officials for abortion rights and protections tied to sexual autonomy.\textsuperscript{321} Shinozaki Tsuguo and Shibuya Terumi have similarly examined how advocates for elderly people, who had been confined in hospitals due to medical restrictions and lack of appropriate care at home, petitioned authorities to redesign Japan’s welfare system and improve their overall quality of life.\textsuperscript{322} Here, I build on the work of such scholars by investigating how the Green Grass Society benefitted from the activities of different minority social movements while lending its strength to their causes. My analysis suggests that we cannot truly understand the society’s successes and failures without examining the history and politics of other marginalized groups such as women and elderly people. I contend that shared interests and collective activism with such politically powerful constituencies allowed the society to win policy victories, while alliances with relatively weak ‘disability publics’ often resulted in losses. Even then, members of the society capitalized on its reputation and prestige to push private-sector stakeholders to pursue extra-legal solutions and spark a ‘barrier-free boom.’

Perhaps the most studied point of intersecting activism involving the Green Grass Society and other minority movements is a series of protests alongside ‘radical feminists’ in response to a proposed amendment to the Eugenics Protection Act (\textit{Yūsei hogo hō},


1948, hereafter EPA) in 1973. Initially introduced to help Japan recover from its postwar economic depression, the EPA afforded women the right to abortion (an otherwise illegal practice) for economic and health-related reasons. As Ayako Kano has pointed out, the EPA was enough to placate several sectors of society at first, but by the time that Japan entered its ‘economic miracle’ came to be seen by many as insufficient. During the late 1960s, some feminists started to argue that the right to abortion should not be tied to matters of prosperity or health, but rather a personal decision premised on individual autonomy. To preempt mass protests, the Ministry of Welfare began to investigate ways to expand restrictions on abortion under the EPA and in the fall of 1972 suggested a series of revisions as a compromise. Among those revisions was a clause that would have allowed for abortion on the grounds of any abnormalities in pregnancy that could lead the child to have a severe physical or mental disability. For many so-called ‘radical’ feminists, the proposed amendment, including its clause on disability, was inadequate: anything less than complete acceptance of their right to choose was unacceptable. Their rejection of the proposed amendment was amplified by the Green Grass Society’s criticisms.

As Matsubara Yōko has indicated, the proposed amendment, which characterized disabled individuals as ‘unfortunate offspring’ who were ‘unable to live happy lives,’ was not the first legal measure created by the Japanese government to control the nation’s population of disabled people. In fact, authorities had introduced many other policies to

prevent disabled people from reproducing as a way of promoting economic productivity in the Second World War via forced sterilization.\textsuperscript{324} Still, the timing of the amendment was significant, as it coincided with the Green Grass Society’s rapid expansion across Japan after \textit{Goodbye CP}’s release and offered members a chance to fight for their rights on the national stage. For many members, the opportunity was too good to pass up. In the nineteenth issue of \textit{Ayumi}, leaders of the Green Grass Society explained their opposition to the proposed amendment, citing three reasons why it would harm disabled individuals in Japan.\textsuperscript{325} First, the amendment tacitly implied that disabled individuals should be eliminated from society. Second, the amendment promised to disempower disabled individuals and incite eugenic violence by inviting stigmatizing questions such as “Why were you born in an age of prenatal screening?” And third, the amendment assumed that disabled people were not capable of contributing to society.

On May 14, 1973, after several months of preparation, fifty members of the Green Grass Society decided to act on their opposition by storming the Ministry of Welfare in their wheelchairs. For several hours, protestors chanted slogans such as “do not steal our right to life!” and “it is the country’s duty to make a society in which people born with disabilities need not be unhappy!”\textsuperscript{326} Their protest, alongside parallel efforts from members of Japan’s Women’s Liberation Movement, sparked significant debate among government officials, welfare experts, and other relevant parties, who were forced to


\textsuperscript{326} Asahi Shinbun, “Kurumaisu, Kōseishō e kōgi ‘shinshōsha no seizonken ubau na’” (May 14, 1973).
grapple with issues of economic independence, social responsibility, personal autonomy, and equality under the law from the perspective of multiple marginalized populations.\textsuperscript{327} Such debates have been chronicled in detail by historians and philosophers like Masahiro Morioka and Kuwahara Makiko, and while I do not have adequate space to take them up here, their outcome is nevertheless significant: in 1974, the Ministry of Welfare abandoned its proposed amendment.\textsuperscript{328} For all intents and purposes, the Green Grass Society had won its first major policy battle in Japan, largely owing to its collective activism with another marginalized demographic: ‘radical’ feminists. And the society would go on to win additional policy victories through similar sets of conditions.

Among the least investigated, but arguably most interesting, points of intersecting activism for the Green Grass Society is their fight for environmental shift alongside advocates for the elderly. To appreciate the context of that fight, some background discussion of elderly welfare is in order. Japanese policy makers began to recognize the nation’s elderly population as a problem sometime around the year 1960 when 5.7% of the public was over the age of 65. Initial legislative efforts such as the Elderly Welfare Law (\textit{Rōjin fukushi hō}, 1963) attempted to address the needs of elderly people by erecting nursing homes and dispatching home helpers.\textsuperscript{329} However, Japan’s population of elderly individuals continued to climb in the early 1970s and could not be contained. In response to growing complaints about the cost of healthcare, the Ministry of Welfare created a

\textsuperscript{327} For the Women’s Liberation Movement, see Setsu Shigematsu, \textit{Scream from the Shadows: The Women’s Liberation Movement in Japan} (2012).


\textsuperscript{329} I take up home helpers and other caregiving services in greater detail in Chapter Six.
zero-payment system for the nation’s elderly in 1973, but that system had serious problems.\textsuperscript{330} By prioritizing the health of elderly people over their quality of life, the zero-payment system accidentally engineered a population of ‘bedridden elders’ (\textit{netakiri rōjin}) in need of physical and psychological care.\textsuperscript{331} Local authorities usually entrusted the care of such ‘bedridden elders’ to their families, who were seldom equipped to deal with the physical and financial burdens associated with their new role. Instead, families often remanded their relatives to hospitals and medical centers for supervision. Some facilities known as ‘inhospitable hospitals’ (\textit{Akutoku byōin}) took advantage of elderly people in their care by administering costly treatments, which were ultimately paid for by the government. A small number went so far as to try and keep their residents sick to protect their profit margins.\textsuperscript{332}

To combat such profiteering, government officials began to explore alternative systems for elderly care during the early 1970s. Their investigations were influenced by an emerging discourse on ‘barrier-free’ design espoused by advocates for the aged, welfare experts, and disability activists, which emphasized the removal of stairs and other architectural obstacles from built environments. Barrier-free projects had precedent in Japan even before the passage of the zero-payment system: for instance, in December of 1972, prefectural authorities in Tokyo released a five-year plan for renovating footbridges and constructing wheelchair-accessible paths in roughly 18,500 locations.\textsuperscript{333} Drawing on

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\item \textsuperscript{330} Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare Bureau for the Elderly, \textit{Nihon no kaigo hōken seido ni tsuite} (2016).
\item \textsuperscript{331} Okamoto Yūzō, \textit{Kōreika iryō to fukushi} (1986), pp. 72–73.
\item \textsuperscript{332} Ōkuma Kazuo, \textit{Anata no ‘oi’ o dare ga miru} (1986), pp. 28–33.
\item \textsuperscript{333} Asahi Shinbun, “Kurumaisu demo raku ni ōdan ho shadō no dansa kaishō 5-nen keikaku” (December 15, 1972).
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those precedents, the Ministry of Construction introduced a strategy for development on a national scale in May of 1973: the “Physical Disability Welfare Model City Planning Initiative” (Shintai shōgaisha fukushi moderu toshi setchi jigyō). Under that initiative, cities with populations over 200,000 people were recommended, but not required, to: 1) install traffic light control buttons; 2) carve out curb cuts; and 3) build ramps into government offices and welfare-related institutions. As Nomura Akira has pointed out, politicians often carried out such projects in an attempt to please their constituents, but did so at a fairly slow pace to reduce financial and administrative burdens.\(^{334}\)

Implementation slightly accelerated after Japan participated in the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Barrier-Free Design in 1974, which simultaneously provided international pressure for environmental reform projects and a platform for specialists to examine cost-effective solutions.\(^{335}\) But even then, many elderly and disabled people remained unable to leave their homes and secure access to various sectors of society such as hospitals, medical facilities, and public transportation.\(^{336}\)

It was against this backdrop that the Green Grass Society carried out one of its most famous demonstrations: the “Kawasaki Bus Battle” (Kawasaki basu tōsō). During the mid-1970s, leaders of the society started to receive reports of wheelchair using members being denied access to buses. According to officials from the Ministry of

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\(^{335}\) Susan Hammerman and Barbara Duncan eds., Barrier Free Design: Report of a United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Barrier-Free Design, held June 3-8, 1974, at the United Nations Secretariat, New York (1975), p. 6. Japan’s barrier-free development was documented in detail and spurred on by media outlets such as The Japan Times. For example, see articles such as The Japan Times, “Gov’t Adopts Budget with Welfare Slant” (January 11, 1975), and The Japan Times, “Standards Set to Aid Handicapped” (May 29, 1976).

\(^{336}\) I discuss some of the reasons why Japan’s early barrier-free projects failed in the following section of this chapter.
Transportation, such denials were due to safety issues as wheelchair users often traveled alone and could not secure their assistive devices without help.\textsuperscript{337} The Green Grass Society pushed back against the ministry’s explanation, arguing that it was based on a discriminatory logic that accepted the exclusion of disabled people from local communities.\textsuperscript{338} On January 7, 1977, the society’s leadership sent a petition to authorities in Kawasaki demanding that wheelchair users be allowed to ride buses without support. After several weeks of stonewalling, they called on the society’s constituents from across the country to participate in a massive protest. On April 13, more than fifty wheelchair users swarmed the bus terminal in front of Kawasaki City Station and attempted to simultaneously board the buses there. Their protest lasted for more than ten hours and led authorities to halt thirty-eight bus routes, affecting roughly 150,000 passengers.\textsuperscript{339} The incident received significant coverage in media outlets, which highlighted how the ministry’s ‘no-ride’ policy affected not only disabled people, but also the elderly and other wheelchair users.\textsuperscript{340} Before long, members of the Green Grass Society entered into negotiations with the ministry, and using a similar logic convinced authorities to reverse their policy and install tie-downs in buses.\textsuperscript{341} The Green Grass Society had once again

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\textsuperscript{337} Yomiuri Shinbun, “‘Enman hassha no michi’ nai ka” (December 14, 1976).
\textsuperscript{338} The Green Grass Society promoted its position on public transportation in regional and national newspapers. Asahi Shinbun, “‘Kurumaisu jōsha zehi mitomete’ Kawasaki no nōseimahisha kyōkai ichi to hatsu kaidan” (January 8, 1977).
\textsuperscript{340} The Japan Times, “Mobility for the Handicapped” (October 30, 1977).
\textsuperscript{341} As reported in the Asahi Shinbun, buses with wheelchair tie-downs began to operate in Kanagawa Prefecture in July of 1978. They spread to Tokyo a few months later, and then began to appear in other metropolitan areas across Japan. For additional information, see 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).
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won a major policy battle in Japan, at least in part because of its collective activism with advocates for another marginalized demographic: elderly individuals.

Importantly, the Green Grass Society did not always win its policy battles, especially when its goals did not align with those of politically powerful organizations like those discussed above. Consider the battle for inclusive education, which began in 1973 when the Ministry of Education released its plan to create special schools for disabled children in response to demands from parents and teachers.\(^\text{342}\) The society criticized the ministry’s plan as “isolationist” and insisted that it would perpetuate stigma against disabled people by reducing opportunities for interpersonal interaction.\(^\text{343}\) Despite the society’s objections, the ministry declared that it would go ahead with its plan, arguing that it was a cost-effective solution that would help provide additional support 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 Yagishita Koichi in August of 1976.\(^\text{344}\) 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 council helped coordinate several

\(^{342}\) For additional information about parents’ associations and their demands for special education of disabled children, see Hori Tomohisa, *Shōgaigaku no aidentiti – Nihon ni okeru shōgaisha undō no rekishi kara* (2014).

\(^{343}\) Asahi Shimbun, “Nōseimahisha koritsu no tatakai – yōgo gakkō no gimuka o megutte ‘kakurisaku’ to tsuyoku hantai da ga rikai shimesanu oya kyōshi” (October 3, 1977).

\(^{344}\) For additional information about the Disability Liberation Committee, see Tateiwa Shinya, “Kyōjo tai shōgaisha – zenseikimatsu kara no yaku jūgo nen,” in Asaka Junko, Tateiwa Shinya, Okahara Masayuki, and Onaka Fumiya, *Sei no gihō – ie to shisetsu o dete kurasu shōgaisha no shakaigaku* (2017).
high-profile protests at the Ministry of Education in the spring of 1977, but their efforts to pressure the ministry to change its policy contradicted those of parent-teacher unions and were ultimately unsuccessful. In April of 1979, the ministry made education of disabled children at special schools compulsory.\footnote{Zenkoku Shōgaisha Kaihō Undō Renraku Kaigi ed., \textit{Shōgaisha kaihō undō no genzai} (1982), pp. 96–118.} The Green Grass Society and its allies had lost their policy battle, but their efforts were not in vain. By generating media discourse and public discussions, they were on their way to winning the war.

As Karen Nakamura pointed out in her study of court cases involving deaf activists in Japan during the 1960s, legal victory was not the only avenue by which disability advocacy organizations advanced their campaigns for community inclusion and social welfare in the ‘economic miracle’.\footnote{Karen Nakamura, “No Voice in the Courtroom: Deaf Legal Cases in Japan During the 1960s” in Patricia Steinhoff ed., \textit{Going to Court to Change Japan: Social Movements and the Law in Contemporary Japan} (2014), pp. 147–64.} Many organizations capitalized on media coverage of their activities to initiate conversations about extra-legal solutions to the barriers that they faced among interested parties in the private sector.\footnote{Consider the Association of Disabled Friends (Shōgaisha tomo no kai), an advocacy group that hosted wheelchair simulation exercises in collaboration with the \textit{Asahi Shinbun} to highlight numerous accessibility issues. \textit{Asahi Shinbun}, “Kurumaisu ni muku machidzukuri o shinshō tomo no kai ‘kurumaisu o yoroshiku’ no tsudoi” (September 1, 1972).} This was certainly the case for the Green Grass Society regarding its fight for inclusive education. Consider an article published in \textit{The Japan Times} in 1977 called “Assimilating the Handicapped” in which an unnamed author reflects on the society’s demonstrations at the Ministry of Education. The author indicates that the activists’ point that “normal children who grow up with handicapped children gain precious knowledge” is “enlightened” and demands “experiments in integration.” Listing a series of “successful” attempts to
integrate disabled children into mainstream classrooms through various techniques and strategies, the author suggests that ‘integration’ has market value. Such commentaries about Japan’s emerging ‘accessibility market’ were not restricted to the realm of education: in fact, contributors to newspapers like the Asahi Shinbun often made similar remarks about the nation’s built environment, shopping centers, office buildings, and other shared spaces. Their invitations for private-sector based community integration initiatives flourished after many of the Green Grass Society’s protests, especially those that received significant press coverage due to their intersection with demonstrations by other minority groups like women and elderly people. Paired with pressure from other ‘disability publics,’ they paved the way for the ‘barrier-free boom.’

Extra-Legal Experiments and the ‘Barrier-Free Boom’

In this final section, I investigate how diverse stakeholders capitalized on Japan’s emerging ‘access market’ in the 1970s, which was revealed in part by the Green Grass Society’s activism. Focusing on the creation and implementation of assistive technologies for impaired individuals by architects, engineers, and other ‘access-makers,’ I demonstrate how ‘experiments in integration’ helped to bring about a plethora of new devices that initially did little to empower disabled people. My argument hinges on the concepts of competition and coordination as related to access-making. I suggest that access-makers were driven to develop generalized products to maximize their profits,

349 For example, see Asahi Shinbun, “Shinshōsha sūpā ga kaiten – kurumaisu no reji kakari mo” (December 12, 1977).
which in theory could help multiple demographics but in practice failed to address specific needs. The limited usability of such generalized products was further compounded by divergent standards of design, inappropriate installation, and inadequate availability across different sectors of society. While some disabled individuals were able to successfully navigate the discordant accessibilities of newly constructed schools, shops, trains, planes, and built environments, many others could not. Over time, as the number of accessibility features and assistive devices available in Japan increased, some members of society problematically assumed that the issue of integration had been resolved. Their misunderstanding of the status of social integration, paired with a paucity of useable assistive technologies, significantly slowed down the process of deinstitutionalizing many disabled people.

To illustrate the relationship between disability advocacy, technical innovation, and issues with implementation in Japan during the 1970s, we might consider any number of case studies: for instance, motorized wheelchairs, accessible toilets, showering systems, or even robot caregivers. Here, I investigate Japan National Railroad’s (JNR) development of new trains and train stations. JNR’s decision to modify their trains to accommodate disabled people was influenced by negative press tied to an incident involving twenty-three-year-old wheelchair user Okabe Fumiake in 1972. Okabe was

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350 Such generalized solutions to the ‘problem’ of disability were one of the main issues that the Green Grass Society aimed to resolve through their activism (per their manifesto). It is ironic, then, that the society’s consciousness-raising activities regarding community integration helped to inspire private sector actors to pursue such generalized solutions.

351 Newly developed assistive technologies frequently became the subjects of media spectacle, with their creation and implementation being monitored by newspapers such as the Asahi Shinbun, Mainichi Shinbun, and The Japan Times. For example, see The Japan Times, “Handicapped Gear Show Scheduled” (November 1, 1978).
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.\textsuperscript{352} Media outlets such as \textit{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 were widened wicket gates, handrails, tactile pavement, and wheelchair-accessible bathrooms.\textsuperscript{353} 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 \textit{Asahi Shinbun}.\textsuperscript{354} 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

\textsuperscript{352} The Japan Times, “Youth in Wheelchair Tests Society, JNR” (June 14, 1972).
\textsuperscript{353} The Japan Times, “At Five Stations in Tokyo Area: JNR Plans Aids for Handicapped” (March 28, 1973).
\textsuperscript{354} Asahi Shinbun, “Kurumaisu de kigaru na tabi o senyō no toire kaisatsuguchi Ueno eki dekibae mazu” (June 1, 1973).
people drove JNR to pursue additional integration projects over the next few years including, but not limited to, the invention of wheelchair-accessible bullet trains.\textsuperscript{355}

As JNR engaged in ‘experiments in integration,’ other companies started to follow suit.\textsuperscript{356} Automobile manufacturers threw their hats into the ring by engineering accessible microbuses and cars for specialty transport services such as “Welfare and Tourist Taxicab Inc” and “Handicab.”\textsuperscript{357} Airline carriers also got involved by providing 25\% discounts to physically disabled passengers.\textsuperscript{358} 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. And yet, the explosion of new assistive devices onto the scene rarely helped disabled individuals. Consider a report from the National Recreation Association of Japan released in 1979 in an article from \textit{The Japan Times}: “Majority of Wheelchair Users Stay at Home.”\textsuperscript{359} According to that report, only 14\% of 122 disabled people surveyed from 24 prefectures rode trains, and 5.8\% rode buses. Furthermore, 32.2\% of respondents said they only go outside between “one to three times a month.” How can we make sense of such statistics regarding the lack of use of Japan’s new assistive devices? One place we might look for clues is a 1973 essay by Ikemoto Yutaka in \textit{Rehabilitation Magazine}.

\textsuperscript{355} The Japan Times, “Traveling on Wheelchairs: Super-express Trains to Carry Crippled” (October 4, 1973).


\textsuperscript{357} The Japan Times, “‘Handicab’ Campaign is Launched” (June 14, 1977), and The Japan Times, “Taxis for Handicapped Make Debut Near Tokyo” (November 17, 1977).

\textsuperscript{358} The Japan Times, “Airlines Bare 25\% Fare Cut for Handicapped” (November 22, 1974).

\textsuperscript{359} The Japan Times, “Majority of Wheelchair Users Stay at Home” (September 16, 1979).
According to Ikemoto, one of the most significant problems with Japan’s rapidly changing built environments and transportation systems was lack of coordination and incomplete renovation. While disabled people might have been able to take trains or taxis to access buildings, they could not always use the facilities and services inside due to a lack of ramps and other accommodations. Indeed, two-thirds of respondents to the survey by the National Recreation Association mentioned above said that they “find it terribly difficult to negotiate stairs or toilets outside of their homes.” In other words, the advent of accessible transportation did not necessarily result in the removal of barriers to education, employment, entertainment, and other spaces of daily life for disabled people. And even when barriers were removed from such spaces, social integration was not a guarantee. ‘Accessible toilets,’ for instance, were meaningless if the buildings around them were inaccessible. Private sector stakeholders seem to have responded to this reality of inaccessibility in diverse ways. Some acknowledged the difficulty of regulating standards of accessibility across different parts of society while asserting that the installation of any kind of supports was better than the alternative. Others overlooked issues of usability entirely in favor of economic incentives, hoping to capitalize on positive publicity tied to the ‘image’ of inclusivity for disabled people versus its lived ‘reality.’ To a certain extent, the approach taken by individual stakeholders did not matter in the short term. As competition inspired the production of new assistive technologies,

361 The Japan Times, “Majority of Wheelchair Users Stay at Home” (September 16, 1979).
coordination issues emerged, and by the late 1970s many disabled people were systematically shut out from Japanese society.\textsuperscript{362}

To be clear, changes to Japan’s built environments and transportation systems in 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 Yashiro Eita 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.\textsuperscript{363} 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.”\textsuperscript{364}

\textsuperscript{362} The Japan Times, “Hearing from the Handicapped” (September 30, 1979).
\textsuperscript{363} 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).
\textsuperscript{364} The Japan Times, “Remodeling the Diet” (September 24, 1977).
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.\(^{365}\) In October of 1978, the Ministry of Labor announced that nearly half of the nation’s corporations had yet to attain the government-set target for hiring disabled people: 1.5% of total employees.\(^{366}\) 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.\(^{367}\) 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.\(^{368}\) 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.”\(^{369}\)

**Concluding Remarks**

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\(^{365}\) The Japan Times, “500 Demonstrate for Handicapped” (November 7, 1977).

\(^{366}\) The Japan Times, “Gov’t-Set Employment Target for Handicapped Persons Yet to Be Met” (October 29, 1978).


\(^{368}\) The Ministry of Welfare explained that the increase was associated with rising rates of accidents and injuries as well as dissipation of stigma about 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).

\(^{369}\) The Japan Times, “The Increasing Handicapped” (August 10, 1980).
Japan’s ‘barrier-free boom’ was not born out of a vacuum: it was in many ways the product of graphic performances and media discourses spurred on by groups like the Green Grass Society. Indeed, as Nagase Osamu has suggested, the Green Grass Society helped ‘give birth’ to the modern disability rights movement in Japan through its high-profile anti-eugenic activism in the 1970s. The society’s rallies against the regulation of abortion on the grounds of disability, demonstrations for integration of disabled and non-disabled children into Japanese schools, and bus stop takeovers to reveal issues with inclusive transportation inspired numerous policy reforms and extralegal innovations. Collectively, their efforts helped to highlight an emerging ‘access market’ for various stakeholders. To date, scholars like Kuramoto Tomoaki, Morioka Jirō, Hirono Shinsuke, and Elizabeth Guffey have explored the society’s connection to Japan’s ‘access market’ by taking up its philosophy. However, as I have argued, we must also examine the history and politics of advocates from other minority social movements in the postwar period, whose shared interests and activism helped to facilitate the society’s community integration projects, to understand its legacies and contributions to deinstitutionalization.

The Green Grass Society’s policy victories were often contingent on parallel protests from advocates for women, elderly people, and ‘disability publics’ who were similarly disenfranchised by developments tied to Japan’s rapid industrialization and

urbanization in the ‘economic miracle.’ Support from such politically powerful partners was a key component of the society’s successes, allowing them to generate media coverage and pressure policy makers for various kinds of reforms. Society members also capitalized on the prestige they gained from battling alongside such partners to recruit new allies and solicit attention from reporters, who helped spread their message to broad audiences and spark conversations about the value of inclusion among private sector stakeholders. Those conversations highlighted the profitability of Japan’s growing ‘access market’ for architects, engineers, and other interested parties, who started to engage in diverse ‘experiments in integration’ and develop novel assistive technologies that would contribute to the nation’s ‘barrier-free boom.’ Although the implementation of such technologies was often hampered by coordination problems, they slowly helped to facilitate the deinstitutionalization of disabled people during the late 1970s.

As I discuss in Chapter Five, implementation of community integration projects in Japan significantly accelerated after the United Nations’ International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981. During that year, Japanese disability activists, welfare specialists, and other relevant stakeholders participated in a series of events that allowed them to identify problems with deinstitutionalization and forge relationships with leaders of overseas accessibility and independent living movements. Those relationships eventually led Japanese advocates to places like the United States, where they studied global welfare systems with the hope of resolving local problems faced by disabled people. Among the potential solutions they explored were independent living centers: government-funded institutions that provided community-based services like caregiver dispatch and home
renovation. After years of negotiations regarding how to effectively import independent living centers to Japan, the first facility was set up in 1986. From that point on, disabled activists gained increasing access to community spaces for education, employment, and entertainment only to encounter new barriers. By appealing to international pressures connected to the Americans with Disability Act (1990) and domestic anxieties about an aging society, they passed Japan’s first compulsory access law in 2000.

In *Disability in Japan* (2013), Carolyn Stevens drew on data collected during seven trips to Tokyo with her disabled daughter between 2000 and 2006 to reveal how “the growing number of accessibility features in Japanese public spaces has not necessarily resulted in a ‘barrier-free’ society.” Stevens identified how many accessibility issues in Japan are rooted in overpopulation. Exploring ramps, curb-cuts, and elevators as examples, Stevens suggested that disabled individuals in Japan are usually required to share barrier-free accommodations with other users: wheelchair accessible paths are frequently overtaken by bicyclists, and lifts are often used by elderly people. Even when use of barrier-free accommodations is restricted to disabled individuals, they are rarely able to access them without expending extra time and energy, especially in areas with heavy traffic. At train stations, for instance, wheelchair users must wait for extended periods of time for staff to prepare ramps and offer assistance with tasks like boarding and disembarking. Stevens argued that displacing barrier-free accommodations to areas of lesser traffic might fix the problem of multiple users but would marginalize disabled individuals by making them go out of their way for access. Stevens was not alone in suggesting that Japan’s built environment disempowers disabled people in the present. Other scholars like Yatogo Takeshi have made similar claims,

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focusing on the way that Japan’s cities fail to accommodate individuals with intellectual and psychiatric impairments.\textsuperscript{373}

Stevens and Yatogo have provided valuable synchronic analyses of accessibility in Japan. To further explain why Japan’s built environment looks the way it does and who it privileges with access, I perform a diachronic analysis that considers the classical historiographical questions of complexity, contingency, causality, context and change over time in this chapter. More specifically, I examine how disability activists, welfare experts, and policy makers helped construct notions of accessibility in Japan between 1981 and 2000 by localizing ideas born from international advocacy, reinterpreting them in light of domestic circumstances, and redeploying them to create legislation. My analysis, which focuses on Japan’s independent living and accessibility movements, suggests that the study of disability in Japan cannot be divorced from the study of disability in other contexts.

To begin, I illustrate how the UN International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 allowed Japanese disability activists to forge relationships with leaders of American disability movements. I then trace how those relationships led Japanese activists overseas and American activists to Japan, facilitating exchanges about independent living centers (ILCs) as a solution to accessibility issues. While Masako Okuhira and Reiko Hayashi attribute the founding of Japan’s first ILC in 1986 to disabled activists who were “motivated by the stories of US advocates […] to go to the United States and study at

\textsuperscript{373} Yatogo Takeshi, “Kenri toshite no ‘inkurūshibu na machidzukuri’ e no hatten katei to gijutsu – otagai o sonchō suru kyōsei no tame no dezain e,” Toshi keikaku (2014), p. 12.
centers for independent living,” I suggest that its creation was not that simple.\(^{374}\) Japanese activists did learn from their American counterparts, but they also recognized that ILCs could not be imported to Japan without significant modifications to the nation’s welfare structures. Overlooking how activists merged domestic policies with international insights when establishing ILCs in Japan, Okuhira and Hayashi present an incomplete image of Japanese ILCs that does not explain why ILCs expanded across the country and eventually consolidated into a national network. I partially fill out the picture by identifying a ‘cascade effect’ in which the emergence of ILCs in Japan paradoxically created not only accessibility but also new barriers for disabled individuals, triggering an ongoing cycle of movement consolidation and the construction of additional ILCs.

Drawing on newspapers, magazines, and documents from welfare organizations, I reveal how ILCs allowed disabled people in Japan to leave their families and institutions and pursue lives by themselves during the late 1980s. Having toppled one barrier to community integration, some disabled individuals ventured out into society, only to encounter additional barriers in the form of closed off buildings and transportation. To overcome those barriers, a handful of disability activists organized research conferences and large-scale protests, which facilitated the development of an accessibility movement. Members of that movement harnessed global pressures tied to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and local anxieties about Japan’s aging population to lobby for regional barrier-free ordinances in the early 1990s, which were eventually nationalized under the Heart Building Law of 1994. By tracing the trajectory

of their activism, I expand on the work of Katharina Heyer, who has described the 1994 law as “the official response to the UN mandate for social integration and barrier-free access.” 375 I submit that the passage of the Heart Building Law, like the development of ILCs in the late 1980s, permitted disabled people to leave their homes and gradually penetrate their communities by regulating access to supermarkets, department stores, and other large-scale facilities. As disabled people explored those facilities they ran into additional barriers, leading to a second wave of ILC expansion during the mid-1990s. Powered by newly developed communications technologies such as internet chatrooms and e-mail, those ILCs helped to coordinate the efforts of Japan’s access movement and pressure government officials into promulgating the Barrier-Free Transportation Law of 2000, which made accessibility a legal requirement for the first time in Japan’s history and inspired debates about the exclusionary aspects of universal design. By contextualizing those debates and examining their consequences, I help frame the rise of a disability-centric antidiscrimination movement in Japan (see Chapter Six).

The United Nations and the International Year of Disabled Persons

On December 9, 1975, the UN issued the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons. 376 As a resolution from the UN General Assembly, the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons was not binding on member nations. However, it did establish a framework that legislators could draw on to develop disability-related policies at

regional, national, and international levels. Among the Declaration’s thirteen proclamations for disabled individuals were rights to: 1) respect for their dignity as human beings; 2) protection against discrimination, exploitation, and abuse; 3) measures designed to enable self-reliance; 4) access to medical, psychological, and functional treatment; and 5) economic and social security, including opportunities to secure and retain employment. Aware that many nations could only devote limited resources to the realization of the Declaration’s ideals at the time of its resolution, the General Assembly called for the creation of a global plan of action in 1976. As a first step, the General Assembly announced that 1981 would be the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) and laid out a series of goals such as increasing awareness of disability issues, equalizing opportunities, promoting rehabilitation, and preventing impairment. The announcement of the IYDP put significant international pressure on the UN’s member nations, creating opportunities for activists and government officials to implement domestic policy changes.

In Japan, the IYDP was first taken up by the Central Council on Policies for Physically and Mentally Disabled Persons (Chūō shinshin shōgaisha taisaku kyōgikai), a government agency charged with coordinating conversations about disability across administrative organs. The council started to facilitate exchanges about the IYDP shortly after its announcement but did not formally adopt the event as part of its agenda until an assembly meeting on December 17, 1978. At its next assembly meeting on March 17, 1980, the council declared itself the most suitable agency within the government to serve

as the regional commission for organizing activities related to the IYDP. As the UN requested that regional commissions include not only government officials but also volunteers from the public and private sector, disabled people, and groups operating on their behalf, the council created a Special Committee on the IYDP (Kokusai shōgaisha nen tokubetsu iinkai) under its purview. The Special Committee’s makeup did not reflect the IYDP’s theme of “full participation and equality,” with only fifteen out of sixty members having a disability. As activist Ōsuga Ikuo explained in a March 1981 issue of Rehabilitation magazine, the exclusion of disabled people from the committee allowed majority members to promote paternalistic policies and turn the “International Year of Disabled Persons” into the “International Year for Disabled Persons.”

Between March and August of 1980, the Special Committee on the IYDP investigated the feasibility of enacting new projects related to disability during the following year. It reported its findings to a Headquarters for the Promotion of the IYDP (Kokusai shōgaisha nen suishin honbu), which was set up by the Cabinet Office in April with Prime Minister Suzuki Zenkō as its head. On August 12, the Special Committee announced its plans to the public. The committee proposed that Japan host a series of commemorative events throughout the year like international disability sports meetings, vocational competitions, lectures, rehabilitation seminars, and craft exhibitions. The committee also suggested that December 9 be designated as “Physically Handicapped Day” (Shōgaisha no hi) in Japan and that comprehensive welfare centers be built in

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379 Asahi Shinbun, “Kokusai shōgaisha nen no suishin honbu o mōkeru raigetsu seifu ni” (March 18, 1980).
various prefectures. After receiving the committee’s recommendations, the national government set aside a sum of 1.34 trillion yen, approximately 3% of the national budget for 1980, for projects related to the IYDP. Local governments also devoted significant resources to the IYDP, with officials estimating that total government expenditure for the year would exceed three trillion yen (around 1.2% of Japan’s GNP). By contrast, Japan’s national defense budget for the same year was only 0.9% of its GNP. Despite promises of lavish spending, many organizations of disabled people were dissatisfied with the event-based plans for the IYDP laid out by Japanese government as they did not address issues of accessibility that undergirded the institutionalization of disabled individuals during the 1970s.

As the government finalized its plans for the IYDP in early August, organizations like the Council for the Promotion of the IYDP in Japan (Kokusai shōgaisha nen nihon suishin kyōgikai), a national network consisting of sixty-seven associations concerned with disability welfare issues, demanded that they increase the budget and pursue practical legal reforms for disabled people. The council’s demands were later echoed by other activist groups such as the Green Grass Society (Aoi shiba no kai, see Chapter Four), whose members insisted that the projects proposed by the government failed to live up to the spirit of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons. On October 20, dozens of members of the Green Grass Society met with representatives from the

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382 For a history of institutions in Japan, see Chapter Three.
Headquarters for the Promotion of the IYDP, the Ministry of Welfare, and other official agencies to vocalize their concerns. They argued that the government must develop new laws and policies to: 1) establish economic security for disabled people; 2) eliminate discrimination in education and employment; and 3) eradicate eugenic thought that sought to remove disabled people from society. Failure to do so, the society members asserted, was to jeopardize the long-term impact of the IYDP. Despite their protests, the government ultimately decided to favor large events over legal reform.

Angered by the government’s event-based approach to the IYDP, many disability activists continued to carry out demonstrations throughout the following year. Some criticized the efficacy of large-scale events by citing public opinion polls carried out by the Prime Minister’s office, which demonstrated that more than 80% of Japanese people were unfamiliar with the IYDP. Others argued that large-scale events generated some awareness about disability issues but did little to resolve them. As activist Hanada Shunchō explained in a 1983 retrospective on the IYDP:

The IYDP had events and flashy coverage of problems, but how have the actual lives of disabled people at the individual level changed by comparison? There’s been no change at all. The disability welfare pension remains lower than the national pension and cannot be used to support daily activities as a kind of social security. Likewise, the built environment has not changed. Transportation is particularly problematic, as almost all of the national and private railways, as well

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384 Asahi Shinbun, “Aoi shiba no kai ga uttae” (October 21, 1980).
as other modes of urban transportation, are off-limits to disabled people. […] One can’t help but view the IYDP in Japan as a simple celebration.³⁸⁶

Many members of the general public seem to have agreed with Hanada’s assessment, as evidenced by a survey conducted by the Prime Minister’s office at the end of the IYDP in December of 1981. According to that survey, 84% of respondents felt that “public services [for disabled people] are insufficient and there is a need to improve them.”³⁸⁷ Press outlets also condemned the IYDP as a failure with headlines such as “Int’l Year of Disabled Persons Ends with Few Tangible Results.”³⁸⁸ And yet, the IYDP was not a complete loss for Japan. Precisely because of its problems, Japanese activists and welfare experts found reasons to reconsider the purpose of domestic disability policy.

Localizing Independent Living in Japan

Drawing inspiration from technologies and concepts circulated by foreign advocates during the IYDP, Japanese activists and welfare experts started to develop systemic solutions to the problem of disability in the early 1980s. Perhaps the most important tool at their disposal was the philosophy and practice of “independent living” (Jiritsu seikatsu). Originally an outgrowth of the American disability rights movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, independent living had already caught the attention of some Japanese experts before the IYDP. In 1979, Ed Roberts, a quadriplegic respirator user

³⁸⁷ The Japan Times, “Services for Disabled Called Poor” (December 15, 1982).
from the United States whose activism later earned him the nickname “father of the independent living movement,” traveled to Japan to give a lecture about disability empowerment. At around the same time, magazines like Rehabilitation Gazette, which spoke to issues faced by disabled Americans in their daily lives, began to be translated into Japanese. Such lectures and publications cultivated a specialist audience, but their sphere of influence was relatively small. During the IYDP, interest in independent living grew as new venues for conversation and exchange emerged in rapid succession. Throughout the year, American activists traveled to Japan to take part in commemorative events and vice versa. Each trip allowed the activists to share materials from their respective countries. At the same time, heightened media coverage of disability issues helped facilitate the formation of advocacy networks like Disabled Peoples’ International (DPI). Through such networks and exchanges, many Japanese activists became aware of the concept of independent living. By studying how they localized and redeployed that concept, I frame the rise of Japanese independent living centers and transnational communities that enabled policy reform.

In a special issue of Rehabilitation Magazine (Rihabiritēshon) published in March of 1981, Okuno Eiko of the National Rehabilitation Center for Physically Disabled Persons asked “what is necessary for people to live meaningful lives as human beings if they cannot perform daily tasks like eating, toileting, dressing, and bathing by themselves?” and answered that “severely disabled people must have opportunities to

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govern their own lives, to make decisions by themselves, and to recognize that they are in charge of their daily activities.”

For Okuno, the key to a meaningful life was self-determination, which was only possible when an individual was not physically or psychologically dependent on others for survival. Okuno acknowledged that it was difficult to eliminate all dependencies for both able-bodied and disabled individuals but suggested that the latter were particularly prone to dependency due to inadequate and inappropriate access to housing, medicine, education, rehabilitation, transportation, and assistive technologies, among other things. To facilitate access for disabled people and create opportunities for them to live meaningful lives, Okuno argued that it was necessary to develop independent living services and an administrative vehicle for their implementation. Toward that end, she recommended that Japanese policy makers investigate precedents from the United States in Independent Living Centers (ILC). Okuno was not alone in proposing that Japanese policy makers look to American ILCs for inspiration: other activists and experts like Ōtsuki Kenichi and Takahashi Takafumi also made similar suggestions.

Although more than one hundred ILCs had been set up across the United States by the start of the IYDP in 1981, the majority of Japanese specialists seem to have focused their attention on the first, and arguably most radical, ILC: the Berkeley Center for Independent Living (CIL, founded 1972).

The CIL offered a range of for-profit services to its clients such as caregiving, counseling, transportation, vocational training, home renovation, and technical repair. As

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Kodama Keiko of the Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatrics Research Institute explained in an issue of *Everybody’s Wishes* magazine (*Minna no negai*) from October 1981, the CIL’s services differed from contemporaneous services in Japan in several important ways. First, the services provided by the CIL were available to anyone with a serious disability regardless of their residential status, whereas Japanese services applied only to individuals in institutions. Second, the CIL’s services could be used by seriously disabled people at any age, while services in Japan were divided among children, adults, and the elderly. Third, the CIL’s services attempted to help clients achieve multiple kinds of independence simultaneously – physical, social, educational, vocational, and otherwise – whereas Japanese services tended to emphasize individual sectors of independence. Fourth, the CIL’s services aimed at community integration, while Japanese services promoted separate accommodation. And fifth, the CIL’s services were managed by disabled individuals themselves, unlike Japanese services. For Kodama, the CIL was an important example of what independent living in Japan could be like. However, the services provided by the CIL were not to be adopted wholesale: additional research was necessary to determine if the American model of independent living could be useful in Japan.

One important area of research for activists and welfare experts interested in setting up a system of independent living services in Japan was cost. In the United States, ILCs were financed by both state and federal grants authorized via a 1978 amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (hereafter, Title VII). Why did the United States Congress

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agree to adopt Title VII? And could Japanese legislators be convinced to promulgate independent living legislation for similar reasons? Kojima Reiko of Japan Women’s University took up these questions by tracing the development of Title VII in a March 1981 issue of Rehabilitation Research magazine (Rihabiritēshon kenkyū). According to Kojima, three factors played a role in convincing Congress that Title VII was worthy of pursuit. The first was a series of surveys carried out by the Social Security Administration and the Institute on Urban Rehabilitation in the mid-1970s, which suggested that it was often more cost-effective to develop independent living services for disabled people who were ineligible for government rehabilitation programs than to support them directly via unemployment payments. The second factor cited by Kojima was evidence from the state of New Jersey’s financial records, which demonstrated that the total cost of independent living services for severely disabled people including home remodeling, caregiving, transportation, and medical care was usually less than one quarter of the cost of institutionalization during the mid-1970s. The third and final factor taken up by Kojima was the rise of a deinstitutionalization movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which argued that independent living services were necessary to fully integrate disabled individuals into society. For Kojima, then, legislation like Title VII promised both economic and social rewards for Japan.

And yet, as Nakajima Kazu pointed out via his translation of Owen Dailey, Denise G. Tate, and William D. Frey’s “Issues with Independent Living,” Title VII was

not without its problems.\textsuperscript{395} Although the stated purpose of Title VII was “to authorize grants […] to assist states in providing comprehensive services for independent living,” it did not define the scope of independent living.\textsuperscript{396} During the late 1970s, the ambiguity of independent living under Title VII inspired fierce debates among American activists and policy makers as they often approached the idea in different ways. To understand the impact of those debates on the lives of disabled people, many Japanese activists and welfare experts traveled to the United States to investigate American ILCs during the IYDP. Some received scholarships to participate in the “Mister Donut U.S. Disability Leadership Study Abroad and Training Program” (Misutā dōnatsu shōgaisha rīdā beikoku ryūgaku kenshū haken).\textsuperscript{397} Others gained support from groups like the International Christian Youth Exchange Federation.\textsuperscript{398} While conducting research in the United States, Japanese activists and experts learned from leaders of the American disability rights movement like Judith Heumann and Michael Winter. From their reports, it is clear that first-hand exposure to American ILCs alerted them to problems that they had not previously considered. Activist Kunii Sumie, for instance, describes how she came to appreciate the value of involving disabled people in financial decisions during her time at the CIL because they had knowledge of costly challenges that able-bodied

\textsuperscript{398} The Japan Times, “ Strikes Out on Own After 15 Years in Hospital: Muscular Dystrophy Patient Tours U.S.” (December 15, 1982).
individuals might overlook.\textsuperscript{399} Such revelations highlighted that Japanese specialists still had much to learn about American ILCs.

As Japanese experts continued their research at American ILCs during the Spring of 1982, policy makers rushed to draft proposals for new disability legislation and deflect a growing wave of criticism tied to the IYDP. Borrowing from the burgeoning discourse on independent living, the Headquarters for the Promotion of the IYDP introduced a “Long-Term Plan Regarding Policies for Disabled People” (\textit{Shōgaisha taisaku ni kansuru chōki keikaku}) on March 23, which called for a restructuring of Japan’s educational, employment, and rehabilitation systems as well as its built environment so that disabled people could “achieve independence to the greatest extent possible and actively participate in social activities.”\textsuperscript{400} The following week, the Council for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons (\textit{Shintai shōgaisha fukushi shingikai}) released a “Comprehensive Strategy for Promoting the Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons in the Future” (\textit{Kongo ni okeru shintai shōgaisha fukushi o susumeru tame no sōgōteki hōsaku}), which argued that the purpose of physical disability welfare in Japan should be “to reduce or eliminate physical disability to the greatest extent possible; to provide necessary accommodations for the independent living of physically disabled persons; to stabilize the daily lives of seriously disabled people; and to improve social conditions as necessary for the full participation of physically disabled people.”\textsuperscript{401} As hastily written proposals, it is not surprising that the “Long-Term Plan” and “Comprehensive Strategy”

\textsuperscript{400} Kokusai shōgaisha nen suishin honbu, \textit{Shōgaisha taisaku ni kansuru chōki keikaku} (1982).
\textsuperscript{401} Shintai shōgaisha fukushi shingikai, \textit{Kongo ni okeru shintai shōgaisha fukushi o susumeru tame no sōgōteki hōsaku} (1982).
exhibited many of the same problems as Title VII regarding an ambiguous definition of independent living. Indeed, their theorization of the concept and its practical applications was so vague that it took legislators another several years of debate to settle upon any kind of legal reform.

For most of 1982, Japanese welfare experts and policy makers remained trapped in a cycle of research and debate regarding the concept of independent living. The gridlock finally began to break on December 3 when the UN announced the “United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons” (1983–1992). Activists and experts returning from American ILCs seized the chance to invite their overseas counterparts to Japan. After reaching out to colleagues in the Ministry of Welfare, who themselves were anxious to learn from the American leaders and settle ongoing debates about disability policy, they secured financial support to organize a series of Japan-U.S. Seminars on Independent Living for Disabled Persons (Nichibei shōgaisha jiritsu seikatsu seminā) during the Spring of 1983. Those seminars, which featured Ed Roberts, Judith Heumann, Michael Winter, and other leaders from the CIL and American ILCs were set up in cities across Japan like Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto. They were divided into three parts: 1) opening remarks and regional conditions of disabled people; 2) a keynote presentation from the American leaders, which examined the history of the disability rights movement in the United States and concept of independent living; and 3) breakout sessions in which seminar attendees discussed topics like independence, urban planning, and employment for disabled people. Each seminar brought in hundreds of attendees from different sectors.

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of society: not only disability activists, welfare experts, and policy makers, but also ordinary citizens who hoped to meet the American leaders celebrated during the IYDP.\textsuperscript{403}

Audience reactions to the Japan–U.S. Seminars were mixed but skeptical, as evidenced by a roundtable arranged by the seminar’s organizing committee in July of 1983. There, activist Saito Akiko explained how the American leaders’ devotion to protecting disabled people’s right to self-determination was so strong that it was as if they adhered to a “gospel of independent living” (\textit{Jiritsu seikatsu kyō}), which they “aimed to spread throughout Japan like missionaries in Africa.”\textsuperscript{404} While Saito stopped short of condemning her American colleagues at the roundtable, others did not pull their punches. Green Grass Society member Ōta Shuhei suggested that “the Americans’ ‘faith’ in independence was only possible because of their cultural background and that Japan must develop its own framework of independent living.” Ōta’s comments were echoed by another Green Grass Society member, Shiraishi Kiyoharu, who argued that “although the American and Japanese disability movements shared a common interest in deinstitutionalization, they had unique histories and motives that made it difficult to reproduce the American model of independent living in Japan.” Nakamura Yūichi, moderator for the roundtable, said it best: “if we do everything the way that the American activists say it would be like they decided for us and we did not make our own judgment.

That is, if we just take the American idea of independence, then we would not be independent.”

But why did Japanese disability activists think it would be so hard to replicate the American model of independent living in their country? What did they see as setting the two cultures apart? Among the differences discussed by the activists at the roundtable, two are particularly worthy of note: namely, 1) training of disability advocates; and 2) attitudes toward compensation for services. As Saito Akiko argued, American advocates often graduated from high school, learned that they needed expert knowledge to argue with authorities, and then pursued college degrees later in life. Such progression from practical experience to professional development was not possible in Japan, where taking time off after high school all but closed off the possibility of enrolling at university. Indeed, as Ōta Shuhei suggested, there was a gap between disability activists and students in Japan. The former often accused students of lacking ‘real world’ experience and failing to mobilize their education for community projects, while the latter treated activists as ‘misguided troublemakers.’ Such conflicts presented a barrier to recreating the American model of independent living in Japan. However, there were also other barriers like differing cultural expectations regarding renumeration for human resources, which affected the quantity and quality of services available in both countries. As activist Kubo Közō explained, the United States functioned on a for-profit (albeit subsidized) service model which saw disabled people as consumers, while Japan operated on a volunteer basis. Accordingly, disabled people in Japan rarely received the same kinds of services as

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Ibid.
their American counterparts and frequently faced unique environmental challenges at home, work, and school. For example, disabled people in Japan often had difficulty recruiting volunteers to provide support during business hours, and as a result were unable to obtain assistance with work-related activities.

If Japan could not simply import the American model of independent living, then what should a Japanese model of independent living look like? This is the question that disability activists and welfare experts like Taniguchi Akihiro and Nakanishi Shōji attempted to address by creating institutions like the ILC Research Group (*IL sentā kenkyūkai*) and the Research Center on Problems Related to the Independent Living of Disabled Persons (*Shōgaisha jiritsu seikatsu mondai kenkyūjo*) in 1984. By analyzing the activities of Japanese welfare organizations like the Kobe Lifecare Network (*Kōbe raifu kea kyōkai*) and augmenting them with lessons learned from American ILCs, those institutions laid the groundwork for the development of ILCs in Japan. Despite their best efforts, it was another two years before the opening of Japan’s first ILC, largely owing to technical and financial difficulties. During those two years, several events helped shape the form and function of the gestating ILC. Perhaps the most important of those events was Nakanishi Shōji’s nationwide tour of American ILCs in early January of 1986, which began at the CIL and extended along the eastern coast to ILCs in places like Boston, Virginia, and New York. Nakanishi’s tour allowed him to research methods for managing ILCs in different cultural contexts. After returning to Japan and sharing his findings with

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406 Ibid, 18–22.
his colleagues, Nakanishi established the country’s first ILC, the Human Care Network (Hyūman kea kyōkai), in Hachioji on June 1, 1986.\textsuperscript{408}

Staffed primarily by disabled individuals who had studied abroad in the United States, the Human Care Network provided a range of for-profit services not unlike those offered by the CIL. For instance, it featured a caregiver dispatch program and an independent living training program, which aimed to equip participants with basic accounting and social skills that they might not have received at segregated schools for the disabled (Yōgo gakkō). Although the Human Care Network initially served a relatively small clientele of only fifty disabled people, it expanded at a rapid pace. By 1988, the network had more than doubled in size to serve one hundred clients, who benefitted from peer counseling programs developed on the basis of local need and international precedent. As the network grew in size, it partnered with local government agencies to subsidize its services. Before long, staff and clients began to share their experiences with friends, family, and community members, allowing for the development of additional ILCs in prefectures throughout the country.\textsuperscript{409} In the next section, I explore how those ILCs helped Japanese activists bring together transnational coalitions of elderly and disabled people and encourage policy reform in the late 1980s and 1990s.

\textit{Community Integration and the Cascade Effect}

\textsuperscript{408} Asahi Shinbun, “Shōgaisha jiritsu jibun-ra de Hachiōji Amerika ni manabi hatsu no soshiki” (June 4, 1986).
\textsuperscript{409} Higuchi Keiko, \textit{Enjoi jiritsu seikatsu — shōgai o saikō no megumi to shite} (1998).
The development of ILCs in Japan during the mid-1980s afforded many disabled people increased access to their communities by allowing them to live in homes by themselves rather than in their family’s houses or institutions. However, the further those individuals traveled from their homes, the more barriers they encountered. Consider the case of Misawa Satoru, a wheelchair user who established the Japan Association of Quadriplegics (*Keizuisonshōsha renrakukai*) in 1973. Each day, Misawa traveled from his home in Shinjuku to his office in Ochanomizu using public transportation. Many train stations did not have elevators, so Misawa had to call ahead of time and let the attendants know that he was coming. Upon arriving at each station, Misawa was greeted by five attendants, who lifted his wheelchair up onto the train. On any given day, Misawa relied on thirty or forty attendants to help him reach his destination. And Misawa was not alone in that regard, as evidenced by a series of editorials from disabled people and their allies in newspapers like *The Japan Times*.410 One editorial describes how twenty-five-year-old wheelchair user Kadota Shunji ran into difficulties at every train station along JNR’s Tokaido Line between Osaka and Tokyo during the course of a publicity stunt (called a ‘marathon’ by the press) in August of 1986.411 The following year, Kadota repeated his ‘marathon’ with a team of wheelchair users and expanded it into a forty-day trek, “Try ’87,” which caught the attention of press outlets and Diet members.412 Perhaps the most telling account of access issues in the mid-1980s was a nationwide poll conducted by the Prime Minister’s office in July of 1987, which revealed that 46.6% of 5,000 respondents

had personal experience helping disabled people navigate train stations and other public settings.\textsuperscript{413}

As access issues became increasingly apparent in Japan during the latter half of the 1980s, disability activists and welfare experts started to convene global conferences on rehabilitation and assistive technologies to try and find solutions. In April of 1988, Kinoshita Yukiko, chairwoman of the World Association for Promoting Independence of the Elderly, Disabled, and Women, organized a two day research conference in Osaka that featured a Ray Charles concert and was attended by representatives from the United States, West Germany, Thailand, China, and the United Nations.\textsuperscript{414} Two months later in June, the Tokyo Branch of the Asahi Shinbun Social Welfare Organization arranged another conference to showcase communication devices for severely disabled people.\textsuperscript{415} By far the largest of the conferences held in 1988 was the 16\textsuperscript{th} World Congress of Rehabilitation International (RI), which took place at the Keio Plaza Hotel in Tokyo between September 5–9.\textsuperscript{416} The RI conference was the first of its kind in Asia and drew in more than 2800 participants from 93 countries, including, but not limited to, disability activists, welfare specialists, and policy makers. After keynote speeches from James Grant, executive director of UNICEF, and Ōe Kenzaburō, an author whose 1964 book \textit{A Personal Matter} about his disabled son later earned him a Nobel prize, participants split up to attend panel sessions on topics such as design and appropriate use of technology.

\textsuperscript{413} The Japan Times, “50% show concern about the handicapped: gov’t poll” (December 9, 1987).
\textsuperscript{415} Asahi Shinbun, “Shōgaisha no ishi o haiteku de tsutaeru komyunikēshon kikiten” (June 24, 1988).
\textsuperscript{416} Disability Information Resources (DINF), “The 16\textsuperscript{th} World Congress of Rehabilitation International,” (Accessed June 2, 2020).
barrier-free architecture and transportation, legislation, and the development of national policies. For many conference attendees, the panel sessions were of lesser importance than the networking opportunities they provided, which were supplemented by receptions and social events like a film festival and sightseeing tour. Such events allowed for the formation of new solidarities and reunion of domestic and international activists and allies. Some of those individuals used the RI conference as a chance to host an impromptu demonstration.

As current vice-chairman of DPI Japan Onoue Kōji recalls, the demonstration began after relatively little planning as a result of casual conversations between Japanese disability activists and international allies like Judith Heumann, Kalle Konkkola, Justin Dart, and Michael Winter. On the last day of the RI conference, several wheelchair users left the venue and made their way towards Shinjuku Station, which at the time lacked an elevator. The wheelchair users intended to show how difficult it was for them to get around Tokyo before entering into negotiations with the Ministry of Transportation in Shinbashi. By the time they reached Shinjuku Station, more than one hundred activists had joined their ranks. The station staff was completely overwhelmed and unable to assist the vast majority of disabled protestors (at first). The protestors started to chant “Access Now!” and continued to do so while the staff scrambled to accommodate them. Eventually, after significant delays, the staff managed to help the wheelchair users board trains to Shinbashi. Upon arriving at their destination, they demanded that Ministry
officials develop new access policies. Misawa Satoru tells us that the protestors met with a cold response from government officials, who said that they “had a bad attitude and needed to change it.” While the protestors’ demands went unanswered, their demonstration had a significant impact on Japan’s disabled communities. For more than ten years after the initial incident, similar protests were carried out in thirty-plus cities. Wheelchair users from across the country flocked to each city, and before long there were more than 3,000 participants in the annual demonstrations. Organizations like DPI Japan supported the protestors by offering food and lodging, and over time a national network gradually took shape.

As access advocates formed alliances in the late 1980s, so did the ILCs that supported them. During the fall of 1989, ILC directors and staff from across the country started to coordinate with one another at a series of National Assembly Meetings on Problems Related to Independent Living (Jiritsu seikatsu mondai kenkyū zenkoku shūkai) hosted by welfare experts like Mitsugi Tadakazu of the Tokyo Disability Welfare Center and Sato Hisao of Nihonshakaijigyo University. By 1990, members of ILCs in the Tokyo area like the Human Care Network, the Shinjuku Lifecare Center (Shinjuku raifu kea sentō), the Machida Human Network (Machida hyūman nettowāku), and Hands Setagaya (Hanzu Setagaya) began to work with representatives from ILCs in Shizuoka and Kyoto to create a countrywide consortium. On November 22, 1991, the night before

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419 Higuchi Keiko, “Nihon no jiritsu seikatsu undōshi” (2001), p. 16.
the third annual National Assembly Meeting on Problems Related to Independent Living, ten of those ILCs came together to establish the Japan Council on Independent Living Centers (Zenkoku jiritsu seikatsu sentā kyōgikai, JIL). Borrowing from the [American] National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), JIL adopted a constitution which required that the director, secretary-general, and majority of the steering committee of all member ILCs be disabled, and that all member ILCs offer at least two of the following services to individuals with different kinds of disabilities: 1) caregiver dispatch; 2) in-home consultations; 3) peer counseling; and/or 4) independent living programs. To become a member of JIL, applicants had to submit a petition to a selection committee composed of existing members and demonstrate their ability and willingness to comply with the constitution. As Higuchi Keiko suggests, the prerequisites for joining JIL were steep, but many ILCs still tried to do so as JIL gave leadership positions in welfare to disabled people who were often excluded.

Although Japan’s access and independent living movements grew out of domestic concerns regarding community integration of disabled people in the late 1980s, they also benefitted from international developments like the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. Starting in March, Japanese newspapers like The Japan Times, the Asahi Shinbun, and the Yomiuri Shinbun began to cover the introduction of accessibility legislation by the United States Congress. Journalists emphasized how the ADA would lead to changes in transportation, communication, and business cultures and

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stressed that “a bill of rights for Japan’s disabled is overdue as well.” By October, the transnational implications of the ADA became clear as Japanese entities operating in the United States like NEC, Fujitsu America, Sony, Toyota, and Japan Airlines began to change their policies to include disabled people in the workforce and target them as potential consumers. For disability activists, such changes not only promised increased access to select sectors of society, but also served as a source of solidarity and pride: they were winning the fight on the global stage. Some activists such as wheelchair user Kawauchi Yoshihiko used the promulgation of the ADA to encourage cross-cultural collaboration and the creation of similar accessibility policies in Japan. Kawauchi, who studied abroad at the CIL as the ADA was drafted, seized the opportunity to invite American activists Michael Winter and Margaret Jakobson to participate in a nationwide tour of Japan in the Spring of 1991 that helped consolidate the nation’s emerging disability movements.

As Japan’s disability movements grew closer together and lobbied for accessibility policies in the early 1990s, they allied with other groups of people who stood to benefit from those policies. Perhaps the most notable of those groups were elderly individuals over the age of 65. As discussed in Chapter Four, government officials began to devise barrier-free construction projects for Japan’s aging population after the failures of its Zero Payment Medical System came to light in the mid-1970s.

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During the early 1980s, many officials recognized that such projects were not sufficient to dissuade citizens from remanding their relatives to hospitals for state-subsidized medical coverage. In 1982, the National Diet passed the Elderly Insurance Law (*Rōjin hoken hō*), which required all Japanese citizens over the age of 65 to pay a 20% deductible for their healthcare. With cost of care once again an issue, government officials redoubled their efforts to create a barrier-free society.\(^{426}\) In 1986, the Ministry of Welfare convened a committee to explore “sweeping changes to Japan’s welfare systems and adapt them to the new social environment, especially the aging population.”\(^{427}\) Then, in 1989, the Ministry issued a “Ten-Year Strategy for Promoting the Welfare and Insurance of Elderly Individuals” (*Kōreisha hoken fukushi suishin jukkanen senryaku*), which called for “Projects for the Creation of Easily Livable Welfare Cities.”\(^{428}\) Despite its best efforts, the Ministry was not able to quickly implement its strategy, as evidenced by a survey from November of 1991, which revealed that 2.8 million elderly and disabled people in Japan lived at home and had trouble going on trips (an increase of 300,000, or 8%, from 1986).\(^{429}\) Seizing the chance to advance their cause, some disability activists partnered with advocates from Japan’s aging population to argue that the nation’s built environment must be radically redesigned to accommodate both groups.\(^{430}\)

As pressure mounted from local organizations of elderly and disabled people as well as global initiatives tied to the passage of the ADA, prefectural governments in

\(^{427}\) The Japan Times, “Ministry Asks Advisory Panels to Study Welfare Changes” (January 15, 1986).
\(^{429}\) The Japan Times, “Number of Seniors Rising, More Disabled at Home: Poll” (December 29, 1993).
\(^{430}\) Dare mo ga tsukaeru kōtsū kikan o motomeru zenkoku kōdō jikkō inkai, *Shōgaisha no kōtsū jōken no kaizen ni kansuru yōbōsho* (1991).
places like Hyogo and Osaka began to promulgate barrier-free ordinances in 1992. Those ordinances recommended, but did not require, public buildings like hospitals, hotels, and department stores to include access features like ramps, handrails, and elevators.\textsuperscript{431} Regarding the optional nature of such ordinances, Higuchi Seisho, director of Hyogo Prefectures’ Public Welfare Department, explained that “we simply can’t order an owner to build expensive new facilities overnight.” Such explanations failed to convince disability activists such as Sato Satoshi of the Mainstream Society, who argued that “owners won’t go to the considerable expense of building ramps and so on unless forced to.”\textsuperscript{432} In addition to compliance issues, the barrier-free ordinances of the early 1990s also created problems for disabled people due to regional variances. Such variances were identified via a series of surveys carried out by the Ministry of Transportation in 1992 and resolved (in theory) by the promulgation of the Heart Building Law (Hāto biru hō) in June of 1994, which established a national standard for accessible architecture.\textsuperscript{433} Under the Heart Building Law, the creation of barrier-free facilities remained optional for owners but was encouraged through low-interest loans and tax exemptions. In November of 1994, the supermarket chain JUSCO became the first Japanese business to qualify for financial compensation under the Heart Building Law and others followed shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{434}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{431} The Japan Times, “Cities Establish New Identities” (June 1, 1992).
\textsuperscript{432} Cameron Hay, “Hyogo planning codes to help disabled, but ordinances to improve building access may not be binding,” \textit{The Japan Times} (January 28, 1992).
\textsuperscript{433} The Japan Times, “Elderly, handicapped access up for review” (February 11, 1992).
\textsuperscript{434} Asahi Shinbun, “Kōreisha ni yasashī mise, jojo ni shōgai ni hairyo bariafurī” (November 13, 1996).
\end{footnotesize}
The gradual transformation of Japan’s built environment through the Heart Building Law triggered a cascade effect for disabled people in a way not unlike the development of ILCs in the mid-1980s. Increased access to community spaces instilled some disabled people with the capacity to travel further away from their homes. For evidence of their journeys, one might look to a weekly column in *The Japan Times* by Anne Pepper called “Going Places,” which ran throughout the fall of 1995 and included titles such as “Persons with Mixed Abilities on the Move,” “Wheelchair Travelers Going Places, Doing Things,” and “Airline Travel Opening Up for Disabled.” As Pepper explained to her readers in an article called “Travel Options for the Differently Abled”:

A new world is opening up for travel-minded people who happen to be disabled. Options for disabled travelers are increasing so rapidly that it’s almost impossible to keep up with them. Both in Japan and abroad, extraordinary changes have taken place during the 1990s. Spurred by the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and aided by advances in telecommunications, grassroots organizations all over the globe are working with the public and private sectors to make more places accessible to more people.435

And yet, the “new world” of which Pepper spoke was still out of reach for many disabled people in Japan. In July of 1995, wheelchair user Kumeta Naotaka expressed his frustrations in a letter, “Where are Japan’s Handicapped?” which detailed how physical

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barriers and social stigma kept many disabled people in their homes. Kumeta was not alone in grappling with such frustrations, as made clear by a flurry of editorials from other disabled people who also voiced their concerns.

To help disabled people assimilate into Japan’s emerging landscape of accessibility in the mid-1990s, activists and welfare experts began to open new ILCs in prefectures across the country and expand ILC networks at both regional and national levels. JIL in particular saw significant growth during the mid-1990s and by May of 1996 its membership exceeded fifty-five ILCs spanning from Hokkaido to Okinawa. As JIL increased in size, it also broadened the scope of its activities to include research related to transportation and the promotion of barrier-free design. Some members of JIL such as the Human Network in Kumamoto (Hyūman nettowāku Kumamoto) sent staff overseas to the United States and Europe to gather information about non-step buses and other accessible technologies, which they shared with activists and government officials via reports and colloquia. Other members like the Funabashi Independent Living Center for Disabled People (Funabashi shōgaisha jiritsu seikatsu sentā) attempted to reach broader audiences by extolling the virtues of accessibility in public-facing publications like Your Neighbors in Books: The Creation of the Independent Living Movement And Us (1995). Such initiatives complemented and fueled the efforts of

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436 Kumeta Naotaka, “Where are Japan’s Handicapped?” The Japan Times (July 9, 1995).
437 Asahi Shinbun, “Kurumaitsu yō erebētā o shōgaisha dantai ga JR ni yōbō” (June 16, 1995).
438 Asahi Shinbun, “Shōgaisha no jiritsu o shien suru nettowāku ga hossoku” (August 1, 1994).
439 Asahi Shinbun, “Ōkiku sodate jiritsu e no yume shōgaisha, zenkoku kara tsudou” (May 26, 1996).
leaders of Japan’s access movement like Kawauchi Yoshihiko and Sato Koichi, who also used publications like *Barrier Full Japan: Urban Planning from the Perspective of a Disabled Expert* (1996) and “Anticipating Urban Planning: The Opinions of Disabled People Are Essential” (1996) to campaign for the inclusion of disabled people in state-sponsored accessibility projects.\(^{442}\)

As demand for accessibility grew among disability activists and members of the general public, the Cabinet Office’s Headquarters for the Promotion of Disability Policy (*Shōgaisha taisaku suishin honbu*) released a “Seven-Year Strategy for Normalization [of Disabled People]” (*Nōmaraiōshon 7-kanen senryaku*) on December 18, 1995. The Seven-Year Strategy aimed to “use various policies and measures to positively work toward the removal of physical barriers in everyday environments such as roads, train stations, and buildings and thereby expand the activity spaces of disabled people and create a society in which their free social participation is possible.”\(^{443}\) More specifically, the Strategy proposed to: 1) widen 130,000 sidewalks across Japan by the start of the 21\(^{st}\) century; 2) instruct the operators of new and recently renovated train stations with stairs over 5M tall and daily traffic over 5,000 people to install elevators; 3) build wheelchair-accessible bathrooms and parking spaces at all roadside stations along major highways; and 4) ensure that all newly constructed government facilities have an accessible reception desk, among other things.\(^{444}\) Immediate reactions from Japan’s disabled


\(^{444}\) *Shōgaisha taisaku suishin honbu, Nōmaraiōshon 7-kanen senryaku* (1995).
communities to the Seven-Year Strategy were mixed. Some activists argued that “regardless [as to whether or not it was effectively implemented], the fact that the Strategy was created was itself significant.” Others suggested that the “Strategy’s aims were too narrow and unlikely to improve conditions for disabled people in difficult situations.” Such evaluations were speculative at best, as the responsibility of planning and implementing the Strategy ultimately fell on municipal authorities, who interpreted its objectives in numerous ways.

Differences in interpretation of the Seven-Year Strategy and other accessibility policies at the local level disconcerted many disability activists in Japan, some of whom organized seminars and forums to address the issue. At a roundtable event in the summer of 1997, representatives from groups such as the National Federation of Organizations for Physically Disabled Persons, the Japan Council on Disability, and the Japanese Federation of the Deaf discussed how the creation of a multi-tiered network of local, regional, and national disability associations might facilitate greater solidarity among Japan’s disabled communities, allowing for horizontal and vertical sharing of information and coordinated efforts toward the implementation of accessibility policy. At the same time, activists like Sawamura Seishi of the Hyogo Prefecture Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center argued that Japan’s disabled communities must continue to form solidarities with politically powerful allies like domestic organizations of elderly

individuals and international associations of activists if their efforts toward the implementation of accessibility policies were to be successful.\textsuperscript{447}

Perhaps the most significant event aimed at the formation of solidarities in the interest of enforcing accessibility policies in the late 1990s was an International Forum on Independent Living held by JIL in Tokyo between November 2–4, 1998. The forum used internet chatrooms to bring together around 1,300 activists from the United States, England, South Korea, the Philippines, and Japan to discuss issues faced by independent living movements across Asia and international solidarity among ILCs.\textsuperscript{448} At the forum, representatives from JIL argued that the formation of an international ILC network would allow disability activists from around the world to exchange ideas and collectively brainstorm solutions to local and global problems related to accessibility and disability policies. As English activist Nick Danagher pointed out, such a network was not without precedent: the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) had been set up several years earlier in 1989. Although the World Independent Living Network (WIN) was not established for another two decades, early efforts towards its creation helped unite and empower Japan’s access movement. In May of 1999, American activist Lex Frieden followed up on JIL’s forum by sending out an e-mail to attendees entitled “Global Perspectives on Independent Living for the New Millennium,” which called on leaders of ILCs from around the planet to join a committee for the WIN.\textsuperscript{449} As Higuchi Keiko

explained in an issue of *Rehabilitation* magazine from the year 2000, members of the WIN development committee from countries like Germany and the United States advised Japanese activists about methods of identifying and resolving barriers to transportation.\(^{450}\)

Under increasing pressure from Japan’s disabled communities and aging population, the Ministry of Transportation started to investigate a compulsory accessibility law in the fall of 1999. At a press conference on January 25, 2000, Minister of Transportation Nikai Toshihiro introduced a “Barrier-Free Transportation Bill” (*Kōtsū bariafurī hōan*), which mandated operators of public transportation systems, including buses, trains, and airplanes, to make both their vehicles and the surrounding facilities user-friendly for elderly and disabled passengers.\(^{451}\) A complement to the Heart Building Law of 1994, the Barrier-Free Transportation Bill attempted to ‘close the circuit’ of accessibility in Japan by smoothing out transitions between buildings, roads, and vehicles. While the bill differed from the Heart Building Law in so far as compliance was not optional, it was incentivized by a similar system of subsidies from the national government (75% of cost). The bill was favorably received by many government agencies including the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the National Police Agency, which grappled with the costly fallout of problems related to inadequate accessibility on a daily basis.\(^{452}\) On March 8, the bill was


\(^{452}\) Asahi Shinbun, “Kōtsū bariafurī hōan ni 4 shōchō ga ainori ‘uke nera’ tsugitsugi gōryū” (February 15, 2000).
sent to the Diet by a representative from the Democratic Party of Japan. It passed on May 10 as the Barrier-Free Transportation Law and was enacted on November 15.  

Although the promulgation of the Barrier-Free Transportation Law was a ‘win’ for many policy makers and members of Japan’s disabled communities, it was also subject to heavy criticism. On May 20, ten days after the law passed the Diet, an anonymous op-ed article in the Asahi Shinbun called “Barrier-Free, But for Whom?” detailed some of the problems with its implementation. Focusing on existing facilities in Kyoto and Osaka, the op-ed identified how wheelchair accessible entrances at parks and train stations were often narrowed or closed off entirely to prevent bicyclists from illegally parking and how, as a result, only particular models of wheelchairs could enter the so-called ‘accessible’ entrances. The article also gave other examples of inaccessible accessibility, including payphones that were out of reach for wheelchair users and elevators that were too small to accommodate even the smallest of chairs. As disability activists like Yoshiura Miwa pointed out in follow-up articles, such examples were not uncommon, and even when accommodations were properly situated they often resulted in social segregation by singling out disabled people for special treatment. In The Japan Times, Misawa Satoru explained that “many elevators (for those with disabilities) have been installed at the farthest corners of buildings and are usually locked shut. Users have to ask facility maintenance personnel to unlock them each time.” To resolve such

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453 Asahi Shinbun, “Kōtsū bariafurī hō seiritsu” (May 10, 2000).
454 Asahi Shinbun, “Bariafurī, dare no tame” (May 20, 2000).
456 Uranaka Taiga, “Societal barriers facing disabled may prove the most formidable,” The Japan Times (December 18, 2000).
issues and effectively implement the new law, access advocates like Onoue Kōji insisted that “it is important that designers consider the users’ perspective from the earliest stages of planning. After all, it is incredibly difficult to rebuild something after it has been completed. Now that we’re in a good position to implement barrier-free accommodations, we must not do so in form alone.”

Onoue’s use of the word “user” as opposed to “disabled person” in his plea for inclusive design is worthy of note. It represents the culmination of decades of activism by Japan’s disability, independent living, and access movements, which tried to achieve one of their main objectives by forging strategic alliances with powerful organizations of elderly and international individuals. The word “user” also reflected a growing global discourse on universal design at the turn of the twenty-first century, which caught the attention of Japanese politicians and public press outlets. Often associated with American architect and disability advocate Ronald Mace, universal design is the “concept of designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life.”

For a country like Japan in the year 2000, when around 17.4% of the population was over the age of 65 and access activists staged constant protests, universal design appeared to be a valuable solution.

457 Asahi Shinbun, “Kurumaisu deiriguchi, semasugite tōrenai” (May 27, 2000).
In 2002, the Cabinet Office officially incorporated the concept of universal design into its “Basic Plan for Disabled People” (*Shōgaisha kihon keikaku*). Two years later, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport established a Universal Design Policy Promotion Headquarters under its purview to oversee the implementation of principles of universal design across Japan.⁴⁶¹ Initially, it seemed as if the efforts of Onoue and other access advocates were finally paying off. Indeed, by the time that the Barrier-Free Transportation law was up for its five-year review in 2005, the number of accessible train stations in Japan had increased from 1381 to 2000 and the number of non-step buses had soared from 1289 to 5432.⁴⁶² And yet, the widespread adoption of universal design in Japan did not always produce positive results for disabled people. By attempting to create facilities and services for everyone, Japanese policy makers inadvertently excluded populations of individuals with conflicting needs. Interventions for the elderly and people with relatively light impairments did not always help those with more significant impairments and often made other interventions necessary. Nowhere was this clearer than in the implementation of a 2005 revision to the Long-Term Care Insurance System (*Kaigo hoken seido*, established 2000), which merged Japan’s welfare systems for elderly and disabled individuals at the national level. By taking up that revision in Chapter Six, I illustrate how debates about Japan’s implementation of universal design in the 2000s helped pave the way for disability-focused antidiscrimination legislation in the 2010s.

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Concluding Remarks

When Carolyn Stevens conducted fieldwork in Tokyo with her disabled daughter between 2000 and 2006, she concluded that Japan’s accessibility was shaped by crowding and user diversity. Stevens was correct: competition between multiple users had influenced Japan’s built environment. But why did that competition look the way it did? Who was involved in creating access in Japan? As I have argued, Japan’s landscape of accessibility was a product of decades of activism by transnational disability communities as well as domestic and international pressures. It was directly informed by the extralegal efforts of disability advocates, welfare experts, and allies, who capitalized on local and global events such as the rise of ILCs, the promulgation of the ADA, and the spectacle of Japan’s rapidly aging society to form coalitions and pressure policy makers into drafting legislation like the Barrier-Free Transportation Law of 2000. The activists’ strategy of building solidarity and promoting access for everyone advanced an agenda of universal design that helped many disabled individuals but did not come without a cost.

In Chapter Six, I discuss how advocates of universal design in Japan accidentally put some individuals with diverse bodies and minds at risk by conflating the needs of elderly and disabled people in the 2000s and helped facilitate the passage of antidiscrimination laws in the early 2010s. Focusing on the development and implementation of Japan’s Long-Term Care Insurance System, I demonstrate how projects devised to help ‘everyone’ were manipulated by policy makers during the early 2000s to serve their own purposes and support some populations at the expense of others. My analysis reveals how such maneuvers, which were often carried out with benevolent
intentions, inadvertently disenfranchised some demographics of disabled people and forced them into poverty. By tracing how marginalized individuals overcame challenges to their legal rights by appealing to domestic and international pressures connected to the United Nations’ adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 and the March 2011 ‘triple disaster’ in Tohoku, I reveal how they sparked policy reform and conversations about access that persist into the present.

In “Cause Lawyering and Movement Tactics: Disability Rights Movements in South Korea and Japan” (2020), Celeste L. Arrington and Yong-Il Moon investigated how disability activists successfully lobbied for antidiscrimination legislation in Japan during the early 2010s by forging strategic alliances with welfare specialists and adopting a decentralized approach to advocacy involving litigation, protest, and participation in various councils for policy reform. While such alliances and approaches were (and remain) a major part of disability advocacy in Japan, they provide an incomplete image of the nation’s shift towards antidiscrimination policy. For instance, they do not explain why a legal framework based on antidiscrimination appealed to Japanese activists in the first place as opposed to one modeled on an alternative value system. Arrington and Moon are not alone in overlooking the historical contingencies and geopolitical circumstances that inspired disability activists to pursue antidiscrimination legislation in Japan. Scholars such as Nagase Osamu and Kawashima Satoshi have similarly deemphasized the story behind Japan’s recent antidiscrimination policies in favor of analyzing their practical effects.

In this chapter, I expand on the works of Arrington, Moon, Nagase, and Kawashima by unpacking the reasons why disability activists pursued antidiscrimination policies in the 2000s. My analysis demonstrates how the widespread adoption of

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universal design (see Chapter Five) and conflation of welfare policies for elderly and disabled individuals resulted in human rights violations for which antidiscrimination legislation provided an expedient resolution method. By tracing how disability activists convinced Japanese policy makers to localize international antidiscrimination legislation to promote domestic policy reforms and prevent such violations, I help explain why Japan’s accessibility landscape has recently undergone rapid transformation.

To begin, I briefly investigate the origins of Japan’s Long-Term Care Insurance System (kaigo hoken seido), which standardized welfare coverage for elderly and disabled individuals at the national level in 2000. By unpacking the historical underpinnings of that system, I reveal how it afforded some individuals increased access to welfare services but decreased the amount of coverage available to others who already benefitted from highly tailored regional programs. I suggest that the national government tried to make up for such discrepancies in care by setting up a Support Payment System (shienpi seido) in 2003, but budget constraints meant that many disabled people could not get access to services that would allow them to live in local communities. Faced with a troubling set of circumstances, government officials debated combining the Long-Term Care Insurance System and the Support Payment System to address such concerns in the mid-2000s. However, their proposed course of action was not without major controversy.

Many disability activists and advocacy organizations opposed the merger, which called for consolidation of the service allocation budgets for elderly and disabled people. Despite their arguments that the needs of elderly and disabled people were essentially different, and that the merger would likely emphasize the former’s interests and the
expense of the latter, government officials decided to pursue the merger and introduced the Independence Support Act for Persons with Disabilities in 2006. The Independence Support Act required all disabled users of the newly combined welfare system to pay a 10% deductible for their services. Severely disabled people, who were often predisposed to extraordinarily high medical expenses but seldom equipped to pay for them due to lack of job opportunities, were disproportionately disadvantaged by the Independence Support Act and forced into poverty. Their marginalization inspired a wave of protests during the mid-2000s, which were largely unsuccessful. However, the tides began to change in after the UN promulgated the Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Japanese policy makers were unable to ignore the global stigma of failing to ratify what journalists at the time called “the first human rights treaty of the 21st century.” Many vowed to prepare Japan for the CRPD by replacing the Independence Support Act with more equitable legislation and promoting antidiscrimination policies for disabled individuals. After a brief period of investigation, officials began to develop new policies during the Spring of 2009. However, their efforts were abandoned when the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had served as the ruling coalition in Japan almost continuously from 1955 until 2009 (with a one-year exception from 1993–1994), was temporarily replaced by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) during the summer elections. The DPJ had its own agenda for policy reform, which was directly informed by their connection with disability NGOs like DPI Japan. In December, they erected a headquarters to spearhead investigation of necessary changes to Japan’s disability welfare system, which created a tripartite model for reform centered around: 1) revision of the
Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities; 2) promulgation of a Comprehensive Welfare Law for Persons with Disabilities; and 3) passage of a Law for Elimination of Discrimination Against Disabled Persons. As DPJ officials and other interested parties worked to flesh out their model for reform and prepare for its implementation, however, disaster struck.

In March of 2011, Japan was ravaged by an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown, which demanded response from DPJ authorities. The DPJ’s relief efforts for disabled and non-disabled populations alike were heavily criticized by media outlets and members of the public, allowing for the LDP’s return to power in December of 2012. By then, more than two-thirds of the DPJ’s tripartite model for disability policy reform had already been accomplished, and LDP officials saw an opportunity to demonstrate their political authority through its completion. After finishing the reform process, leaders of the LDP helped Japan ratify the CRPD in 2014 and began the arduous process of enforcing antidiscrimination legislation for disabled people.

*The Lengthy Road to the Long-Term Care Insurance System*

The origins of official caregiving programs in Japan can be traced back to the late 1950s when regional governments in Nagano and Osaka developed home helper services to alleviate anxieties about elderly and disability welfare during the economic miracle (see Chapter Three). In 1962, the Ministry of Welfare decided to consolidate several of those services into a national program to be funded through state subsidies, which was
enacted in 1963 via the promulgation of the Elderly Welfare Law (Rōjin fukushi hō). The Home Helper Program was available to both elderly and disabled people, although it favored the former in terms of specific offerings. Eligible users could ask local government officials to dispatch home helpers twice a week for two-hour intervals (four hours total) to assist with household chores like cooking and cleaning. The program was sufficient to help some elderly individuals and people with minor disabilities integrate into their communities. However, it failed to address the needs of severely disabled people who required additional hours of care and assistance with tasks outside the home like shopping and transportation. To thrive in their communities, such individuals usually had to pay out of pocket for caregiving services or recruit unpaid volunteers for daily living support. Even then, coordination and compensation issues meant that most caregivers were unwilling or unable to work outside of business hours.

As Yasuda Tomohiro explained in a pamphlet on the history of caregiving in 1985, “if volunteer caregivers encountered difficulties or became sick and had to go to the hospital, they had no safety net. None of their expenses were covered: living, medical, or otherwise.” Accordingly, many disabled people had to compete for services.

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467 The Home Helper Program was revised in 1982 in accordance with the passage of the Elderly Insurance Law (Rōjin fukushi hō) to afford users up to eighteen hours of service each week. Köseishō shakaikyoku rōjin fukushi ka, Rōjin katei hōshin haken jigyō un’ei no kaisetsu oyobi jisshi tetsuzuki nado no ryai jikō ni tsuite (1982).
468 Zaitaku shōgaisha no hoshō o kangaeru kai, Jūdo shōgaisha no jiritsu to kaigo hoshō – sono keika to genjō soshite kore kara no mondai (1985), p. 3.
During the early 1970s, a handful of severely disabled people in Tokyo achieved greater access to caregiving services due to a series of protests coordinated by the Green Grass Society (see Chapter Four). Thanks in part to their efforts, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government created a Caregiver Dispatch Service for People with Severe Cerebral Palsy (Jūdo nōseimahisha nado kaigo hito haken jigyō) in the summer of 1974. The Caregiver Dispatch Service allowed adults over the age of twenty who were diagnosed with severe cases of cerebral palsy and lived by themselves to identify and register caregiver(s) with local government offices and have those caregiver(s) receive compensation of 7,040 yen per month (split into four weekly payments). While helpful, the 7,040 yen subsidy was hardly enough to cover the cost of even one day of care for severely disabled people who required twenty four hour assistance, let alone one month. Dissatisfied with the Caregiver Dispatch Service, some members of the Green Grass Society lobbied for a Supplemental Caregiving Allowance (Tanin kaigo kasan) in the winter of 1974. After calculating the total cost of that allowance at 520,000 yen per month/person based on the hourly wages of workers at state-sponsored institutions, they sent a petition to local authorities. In February of 1975, the society received a reply from the Tokyo Bureau of Civilian Affairs:

In light of currently accepted social standards, we cannot give you the extremely high amount of money that you have requested ‘because you are disabled.’ However, because you have gone so far as to leave your institutions and live among society we have considered your request, and in accordance with currently

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469 Unlike home helpers, caregivers were able to travel outside with their clients. Tokyo Metropolitan Government Bureau of Civilian Affairs, Tōkyō-to shintai shōgaisha jūdo nōseimahisha kaigo hito haken igyō un’ei yōkō (1974).
accepted social standards decided to give you funds for four hours of care each
day at a rate of four hundred yen per hour for a total of 48,000 yen per month. If
you cannot live in society even with that amount, then you will have no choice but
to enter institutions. If you do, we will pay the wages of workers at those
institutions, and you will be treated well.\(^\text{471}\)

Although the 48,000-yen subsidy provided by the Supplemental Caregiving Allowance
was in and of itself not enough for members of the Green Grass Society to obtain twenty-
four hours of coverage each day, it went a long way towards facilitating their community
integration. By combining the supplemental allowance with other benefits like the Home
Helper Program and Caregiver Dispatch Service, society members minimized their
dependency on volunteer labor. Indeed, by compensating their caregivers, they
eliminated precarities that prevented them from pursuing activities inside and outside of
their homes. Over time, as the Green Grass Society spread across Japan, the organization
put increasing pressure on policy makers to expand the Supplemental Caregiving
Allowance and the Caregiver Dispatch Service. Their efforts appear to have been
effective as the budget for each program grew significantly over the next decade.\(^\text{472}\)

The fruits of the Green Grass Society’s activism inspired individuals with other
kinds of impairments such as spinal cord injuries and neuromuscular diseases to demand

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\(^{472}\) The budget for the “Supplemental Caregiving Allowance” and the “Caregiver Dispatch Service”
increased each year after their inception. By 1980, the former had reached 78,000 yen/month and the latter
24,720 yen/month. By 1985, the former was valued at 97,000 yen/month and the latter 41,910 yen/month.
For a complete breakdown of budget increases, see Ritsumeikan University Research Center for Ars
Vivendi, *Nōseimahisha nado kaigo hito haken jigyō kingō nado no suii* (2019), Stable URL:
http://www.arsvi.com/0c/130k742.htm (Accessed January 5, 2020), and Ritsumeikan University Research
Center for Ars Vivendi, *Seikatsu hogō kaigo kasan* (2019), Stable URL:
similar allowances and subsidies from government officials in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, those individuals often lacked the solidarity and support of powerful organizations, and their petitions were frequently rejected. Nakanishi Shōji, who became paralyzed due to a spinal cord injury during his time as a college student, recalls a conversation he had with the director of the Hachioji City Department of Welfare’s Aging Division during the early 1980s in which he was told that “there are no other disabled people in this city making requests like yours. The government cannot change its system of services just because you personally want them to.”

Frustrated by his experience, Nakanishi decided to create a disability community and fight back. Nakanishi began by inviting similarly disenfranchised people with severe disabilities and their allies to live with him in Hachioji. At first, he was only able to attract a small cohort of severely disabled people and a few volunteers. However, Nakanishi’s project grew over time, and by the mid-1980s he was coordinating interactions between more than thirty caregivers and clients. In June of 1986, Nakanishi formalized his operation as the Human Care Network, paving the way for the proliferation of independent living centers across Japan (ILCs, see Chapter Four).

The rise of ILCs in Japan during the late 1980s helped many severely disabled people achieve greater access to caregiving by creating an administrative vehicle for dispatch services. In April of 1987, as ILCs spread across the country, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government expanded its Caregiver Dispatch Service to include all

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individuals with systemic disabilities, defined as those affecting all four limbs. Local authorities actively cooperated with ILCs to implement the dispatch service by offering commission payments to ILCs that recruited and registered caregivers for disabled people. The dispatch service blossomed throughout the late 1980s and before long ILCs such as the Machida Human Network and the Shinjuku Lifecare Center had contracted more than one-hundred caregivers each for a rapidly growing clientele. As the Caregiver Dispatch Service took off in Tokyo, government officials in other parts of Japan (Osaka, for instance) created similar ILC-based dispatch services at the regional level. The birth of the Japan Council on Independent Living (JIL) in 1991 and networking of ILCs during the early 1990s accelerated the development of dispatch services and by the mid-1990s it became possible to secure at least a few hours of care each day in most parts of the country. And yet, for all the support that ILC-based dispatch services provided severely disabled people in Japan, many seemed to have benefitted more from programs created for the aging population.

By the late 1980s, approximately 12% of Japanese people were over the age of 65, and policy makers felt a need to find a way to care for them. In 1988, the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Labor sent a joint list of recommendations to the Diet, which included recruiting 50,000 home helpers to assist elderly (and, although not the

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475 Asahi Shinbun, “Shōgaisha kaijo ’motomu otoko te’ nayami fukashi jiritsu seikatsu undo” (June 22, 1992).
477 For additional information about JIL and the networking of ILCs, see Chapter Five.
primary target of their policy, disabled) people with daily activities.\footnote{Ministry of Welfare and Ministry of Labour, Chōju fukushi shakai o jitsugen suru tame no shisaku no kihonteki kangaekata to mokuhyō ni tsuite (1988).} The following year, the Ministry of Welfare built upon its previous recommendations by introducing the Gold Plan, which called for the employment of 100,000 home helpers by the year 2000.\footnote{The Gold Plan was revised into the New Gold Plan in 1994, which expanded the target number of home helpers to 170,000 by the year 2000. Ministry of Welfare, Kōreisha hoken fukushi suishin jukkanen senryaku (1989), and Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Welfare, and Ministry of Home Affairs, Kōreisha hoken fukushi suishin 10-kanen senryaku no minaoshi ni tsuite (shin gōrudo puran) (1994).} To incentivize workers to pursue caregiving as a profession, the Ministry revised its Home Helper Program in 1990 by abolishing the hourly service limit. Officials hoped that by allowing users to request services in accordance with their needs and letting home helpers work longer hours they could at once satisfy users’ demands and develop a new labor market.\footnote{Ministry of Welfare, Rōjin fukushi hō nado no ichibu o kaisei suru hōritsu no ichibu shikō oyobi sore ni tomonau sei shōrei no kaisei ni tsuite (December 28, 1990).} As evidenced by a handbook published by the Ministry’s Elderly Welfare Planning Division in 1992, however, all did not proceed according to plan. Many municipalities continued to enact hourly service limits long after their formal removal, leading the director of the Elderly Welfare Planning Division to issue a sharp critique:

According to welfare maps and other sources of data regarding the activities of home helpers, the current national average of use is around 2–3 hours, once a week, per person. This is not always sufficient to fully meet users’ needs. […] One of the main reasons for this is because municipalities have provided fixed services that overlook the conditions of users and their kin. In other words, they have set restrictions despite the existence of need. It is not appropriate to make
unilateral decisions. Municipalities that do so must revise their conduct immediately.\textsuperscript{482}

As Watanabe Taku has suggested, some elderly and disabled people used the Ministry’s handbook and the director’s critique to negotiate additional hours of service in the early 1990s. A select few severely disabled individuals even managed to secure twenty four hours of fully subsidized care for the first time in Japan’s history.\textsuperscript{483} However, those individuals were usually exceptions rather than the rule who benefitted from extenuating circumstances like their place of residence, political affiliations, and medical diagnosis. For example, a Mr. Ishida Yoshiaki of Higashikurume was able to obtain twenty four hours of coverage because he simultaneously qualified for the Home Helper Service (12 hours/day), Supplementary Caregiving Allowance (4 hours/day), and Caregiver Dispatch Service (8 hours/day) as a man with cerebral palsy who lived in Tokyo.\textsuperscript{484} To ensure that other disabled people could enjoy the same care as Mr. Ishida, organizations like the National Association of People Who Demand Guaranteed Public Care (\textit{Zenkoku kōteki kaigo hoshō yōkyūsha kumiai}) mobilized communications technologies such as toll-free telephone lines and the internet to share information, coordinate negotiations, and pressure government officials into acknowledging the needs of individuals across the nation.\textsuperscript{485} Their activism helped to ‘level the playing field’ and

\textsuperscript{482} Zenkoku rōjin hoken fukushi shukan ka, \textit{Hōmu herupu jigyō un’eitō no tebiki} (1992).
\textsuperscript{483} Watanabe Taku, \textit{Kaijoshatachi wa, dō ikite iku no ka – shōgaisha no chiiki jiritsu seikatsu to kaijo to iu itonami} (2011), pp. 284–86.
\textsuperscript{484} Ibid. See also Zenkoku kōteki kaigo hoshō yōkyūsha kumiai, “Tōkyō to B ichi zaijū no hitorigurashi (zenshinkseki shōgaisha) C-san no kaigo seido no jitsurei,” \textit{Zenkoku shōgaisha kaigo seido jōhō} (August 1995), Stable URL: \url{http://www.arsvi.com/0j/0095m.htm}.
\textsuperscript{485} Zenkoku kōteki kaigo hoshō yōkyūsha kumiai, “Denwa uketsuke jikan ni tsuite,” \textit{Zenkoku shōgaisha kaigo seido jōhō} (December 1995), Stable URL: \url{http://www.arsvi.com/0j/9512102.htm}, and Zenkoku...
ensure that many severely disabled people around the country could obtain twenty four hour care (or close to it) by the end of the decade.486

As organizations like the National Association fought to equalize access to care during the mid-1990s, the Japanese government became increasingly aware of disparities in coverage. Such disparities disconcerted officials, especially in light of projections about the aging society. In March of 1994, the Ministry of Welfare convened a roundtable of specialists to discuss a “Welfare Vision for the 21st Century” that addressed the aging population, declining birthrate, and community integration of disabled people.487 One outcome of the roundtable was that Japan should set up a long-term care insurance system to standardize at the national level some of the regional programs available. In December, the Ministry of Welfare set up a research group to start drafting Japan’s insurance system: a process that took almost three years to complete.488

As policy makers hammered out the details of the insurance system, disability advocates did not sit idle. For example, in April of 1995, the National Liaison Council Demanding Social Security for the Disabled (Zenkoku shōgaisha no seikatsu hoshō o yōkyū suru renraku kaigi) sent a petition to the Minister of Welfare, arguing that “even if the insurance system is for the elderly, it must be created in such a way as to leave no gaps
between the elderly and disabled.” In May of 1996, the Ministry of Welfare unveiled a draft of its system to the public, which proposed to make local authorities responsible for administering the program since, in theory, they would have a better understanding of the needs of their elderly and disabled constituents. The Ministry’s proposal was criticized by some regional officials, who argued that revenues from premiums might be insufficient and they would be asked to make up the difference. A round of revisions ensued, eventually resulting in a Long-Term Care Insurance System Bill (kaigo hoken hōan) that passed the Diet in November of 1997 and was enacted in April of 2000.

**Setting Up the Independence Support Act for Persons with Disabilities**

The Long-Term Care Insurance System initially met with mixed reviews from Japan’s disabled communities. On the one hand, its budget was around ten times larger than the budget for disability services at the time it was enacted, and users could secure a maximum benefit of 350,000 yen per month for a premium of only 5,000 yen. For many users, especially those from municipalities that historically lacked access to caregiving programs, such a scheme was highly appealing. Indeed, the system was celebrated in the media as a success for disabled persons. However, the insurance system’s maximum benefit of 350,000 yen was not enough to cover the cost of care for many severely disabled people, who were often better off before its creation. As disability activist Misawa Satoru explained in a May 2000 issue of *Normalization* magazine:

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490 The Japan Times, “The Crisis Facing Japan’s Elderly” (May 19, 1996).
The Long-Term Care Insurance System enacted in April of this year has started to affect the lives of disabled people in numerous ways. Disabled people who are not the direct targets of the system have become unable to use caregiving services and other benefits that they have enjoyed up until this point due to the abolition of municipal departments that had previously handled dispatch programs and reconfiguration of the relationship between government authorities and welfare service providers in local communities.\textsuperscript{492}

Such losses of coverage unsettled welfare experts like Takizawa Hirohito of Waseda University, who argued that “the more the government works to enforce a long-term care insurance system that cannot guarantee the care of disabled persons, the more problems it will create for them.”\textsuperscript{493} Responding to criticism, the Ministry of Welfare started to develop a Support Payment System (shienpi seido) for disabled persons during the summer of 2000 to be enacted in April of 2003.\textsuperscript{494}

In March of 2001, the Ministry (recently reconstituted as the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) held a Q&A session about its Support Payment System with disability activists. Ministry officials explained that users of the system would be asked to secure contracts with service providers of their choosing, who in turn would receive


\textsuperscript{494} Although the Ministry of Welfare did not formally adopt the Support Payment System as part of its agenda until a June 2000 revision to the Social Welfare Industry Act, its origins can be traced back to a series of negotiations that took place between 1998 and 1999 as the rollout of the Long-Term Insurance Care System was being planned.
payment from the government.\textsuperscript{495} The “contract” (keiyaku) system was to be modeled on municipal ILC-based dispatch services like those described in the previous section that relied on users to locate and register caregivers. It would replace the “measures” (sochi) system associated with the Home Helper Program, in which local authorities arranged and approved all caregiving services for disabled individuals. Ministry officials argued that a contract-based system was better equipped to “respect disabled users’ right to self-determination […] by allowing them to select their own service providers.”\textsuperscript{496}

Some activists praised the Ministry’s endorsement of contracts. Others were skeptical, instead viewing it as an attempt to shift responsibility for welfare away from the government and toward private citizens. In March of 2002, a group of activists in Tokyo asserted that “contrary to its intent, the Support Payment System will destroy the lives of disabled people in local communities […] by forcing them to find providers when it is already difficult to do so.”\textsuperscript{497} In October, another group of activists in Kawasaki made a similar accusation. In their words: “we believe that the Support Payment System […] will rescind welfare for disabled individuals and violate the state’s obligations to the public as outlined in Article 25 of the Constitution.”\textsuperscript{498} Such objections to contract-based services were not shared by many disability organizations in Japan and ultimately ignored by Ministry officials as they drafted the Support Payment System.

\textsuperscript{495} Kōsei rōdōshō shakai engo kyoku shōgai hoken fukushibu shōgai fukushika, Shōgaisha shisaku ni kakaru shienpi seido ni tsuite – Shienpi seido Q&A shū (March 6, 2001).
\textsuperscript{496} Kōsei rōdōshō shakai engo kyoku shōgai hoken fukushibu, Shienpi seido no jimu taiyō (August 23, 2001).
\textsuperscript{497} Mainichi Shinbun, “Jishin ga sābisu sentaku ‘shienpi seido’ dōnyū made 1 nen… Kikikan tsunorasu shōgaisha dantai” (March 13, 2002).
\textsuperscript{498} Article 25 of the Constitution gives Japanese citizens the right to minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living. Okotteiru zo! shienpi seido shōgaisha nettowāku, Kōrōshō kōgi kōdō ni kesshū o! (October 1, 2002).
In January of 2003, three months before the Support Payment System was scheduled to take effect, Ministry officials started to investigate the possibility of instituting an upper limit on services of four to five hours per day behind closed doors. The Ministry’s investigation represented a reversal of its need-based approach to care from the early 1990s and was quickly leaked to the press through informal channels. On January 9, an official justified their inquiry by explaining that “demand for services is expected to increase with the launch of the Support Payment System and it is impossible to offer unlimited support without ruining the budget.”499 While some disabled people were sympathetic toward budget concerns, many, especially those who received twenty-four hours of care each day, felt betrayed by the move to limit services.

On January 14, around four hundred disability activists gathered in front of the Ministry to demand that officials abandon their investigation of service limits. Officials responded by saying that they “were not setting an upper limit on the budget for services at the individual level but rather creating a standard for the fair distribution of subsidies [at the municipal level].” Dissatisfied, activists retorted that the Ministry’s plan “was in effect no different from setting an upper limit on services [at the individual level] and would result in severely disabled people […] having no choice but to return to facilities or their families.”500 Protests continued for days after the initial incident and by January 16 more than one thousand activists had entered the fray under the banner of four

499 Mainichi Shinbun, “Shigatsu dōnyū, herupā riyō shienpi seido Kōrōshō itten, jōgen mo – shōgaisha dantai wa tsuyoku hanpatsu” (January 10, 2003).
organizations. On January 27, after two weeks of negotiations, leaders of those organizations reached an agreement with the Ministry: there would be no upper limits on services and measures would be put in place to preserve the care of disabled people already living in their communities. Protests temporarily ceased, but problems still remained.

Immediately after the January 27 agreement, activists began to express concerns about a lack of opportunities waiting for their ‘juniors’ (kohai) under the Support Payment System. Their fears were realized over the course of the next year as many disabled people who wished to use the system to leave their families and institutions could not do so due to budget overruns. Indeed, the Support Payment System was underfunded by around three billion yen in 2003. Thanks in part to the January protests, policy makers anticipated such budget issues and began to investigate solutions. On January 30, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare announced that it was exploring the possibility of combining the Support Payment System with the Long-Term Care Insurance System in 2005. To finance the combined welfare system, the Ministry intended to ask all citizens over the age of twenty to pay into its insurance scheme: a

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501 The four organizations were: 1) DPI Japan; 2) the Japan Council on Disability; 3) the National Federation of Organizations for Physically Disabled Persons; and 4) the Japan Parent’s Association for Intellectual Disabilities.
departure from its contemporaneous payment system, which only levied taxes on citizens over forty.\textsuperscript{505}

Disability activists opposed the idea of merging the two welfare systems, arguing that “compared to elderly individuals, disabled people have many opportunities to go outside, work, and participate in society, and their care needs are different.”\textsuperscript{506} Some went so far as to suggest that “by making disabled people targets of the Long-Term Care Insurance System, the Ministry was trying to decrease the amount of care available to disabled individuals and use them as a scapegoat to collect premiums from taxpayers in their twenties and thirties [for the elderly].”\textsuperscript{507} Despite such criticisms, the Ministry continued to explore the integration of welfare for elderly and disabled people, eventually formalizing its activities beneath a Headquarters for Reform of the Long-Term Care Insurance System (\textit{Kaigo seido kaikaku honbu}) on January 8, 2004.\textsuperscript{508}

Shortly after the creation of the Headquarters for Reform on January 16, Shioda Yukio, the director of the Ministry’s Department of Disability Health and Welfare, announced that the Ministry would set up a taskforce in charge of investigating issues related to disability services under the combined welfare system. That taskforce was to determine the direction of disability policy sometime around June, informing a proposal for revising the Long-Term Care Insurance System that would eventually be sent to the Diet in early 2005 after several rounds of revisions. According to Shioda, the success of

\textsuperscript{505} Nihon Keizai Shinbun, “Kaigo hokenryō no chōshū, ‘20-sai ijō ni kakudai’ shōten – seido minaoshi Kōrōshō chakushu” (January 30, 2003).
\textsuperscript{506} Yomiuri Shinbun, “2004-nen shakai hoshō seido no kadaï” (December 24, 2003).
\textsuperscript{507} Sutoppu za shienpi seido shūkai jikkō iinkai, \textit{Fukushi kirisute hantai}! (October 20, 2003).
\textsuperscript{508} Kaigo seido kaikaku honbu, \textit{Kaigo hōken seido kaikaku honbu no setchi ni tsuite} (January 8, 2004).
the taskforce was dependent on collaboration and mutual exchange between government officials and organizations of disability activists. In his words:

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is not rejecting the Support Payment System, but rather thinking about how to realize its ideals and expand its scope of coverage going forward. We would like to have a constructive conversation with [organizations of disability activists] on equal footing about how to change the Long-Term Care Insurance System so that disabled individuals are not thrust into a system meant for the elderly. If we cannot reach a satisfactory conclusion through conversation, we will give up discussing modifications to the Long-Term Care Insurance System.

While Shioda’s goal of ‘reaching a satisfactory conclusion’ through ‘constructive conversation’ with disability activists was an appealing prospect for many, it was never truly accomplished.

Between January and April of 2004, the taskforce held nine meetings with eight groups of disability activists to discuss the development of the combined welfare system. However, at those meetings, the taskforce failed to address many of the problems raised by the activists. For example, when activists expressed concerns about the government’s proposal to institute a 10% blanket deductible on care services for

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509 Zenkoku shōgaisha kaigo hoshō kyōgikai, Shōgaisha 7 dantai to Kōrōshō shōgai hoken fukushibu to no hanashiai no hōkoku ni tsuite (January 16, 2004).

510 The eight organizations of activists were: 1) DPI Japan; 2) the Japan Council on Disability; 3) the National Federation of Organizations for Physically Disabled Persons; 4) the Japan Parent’s Association for Intellectual Disabilities; 5) the Japan Federation of the Blind; 6) the Japan Federation of the Deaf; 7) the Japan Association of Individuals with Spinal Cord Injuries; and 8) the National Federation of Families of the Mentally Ill in Japan.
disabled people, their inquires went unanswered. On May 31, representatives from several organizations in dialogue with the taskforce accused the government of working behind their back and failing to honor its promise of co-designing a Long-Term Care Insurance System that would benefit both elderly and disabled individuals. On June 9, they coordinated a mass demonstration with more than 1,200 activists in attendance from 475 associations of disabled people. The demonstration was unique in so far as it brought together people with physical, mental, and psychiatric disabilities as well as intractable diseases who were all put at risk by the potential combination of disability and elderly welfare services. In solidarity, the activists declared that “they were against the merger of the Long-Term Care Insurance System and the Support Payment System as well as the consolidation of premiums” and demanded that “the nation take responsibility for all disabled people in local communities!” Despite their opposition, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare ultimately concluded that the merger of the two welfare systems was a “realistic possibility” on June 25 while conceding that additional conversation with stakeholders was necessary to resolve remaining concerns.

For several months, the Ministry continued to evaluate the pros and cons of combining the Long-Term Care Insurance System and Support Payment System. During that time, public opinion was split down the middle as evidenced by a survey conducted by the Asahi Shinbun, which showed that 48% of municipal authorities opposed merging

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511 DPI nihon kaigi, Shōgaisha shisaku no kaigo hoken tōgō ni hantai suru kinkyū apīru (June 26, 2004).
512 6.9 Zenkoku dai kōdō jikkō iinkai, 6.9 Zenkoku dai kōdō no sandō dantai o boshū! (May 31, 2004).
513 Sankei Shinbun, “Shōgaisha fukushi to kaigo hoken no tōgō yōnin katameru shahōshinbukai chūkan matome an” (June 25, 2004).
the two welfare systems.\footnote{Asahi Shinbun, “Shuchō no 48-pāsento ga kaigo hoken tōgō hantai Asahi shinbunsha ankēto tōgōan no sanpi to riyū” (July 25, 2004).} On October 12, with little warning, the Ministry took a concrete step toward combining the two welfare systems by releasing a policy proposal: “On the Future of Disability Health and Welfare Policies – A Grand Design For Reform” (\textit{Kongo no shōgai hoken fukushi shisaku ni tsuite [kaikaku no gurando dezainan]}).\footnote{Kōsei Rōdōshō shōgai hoken fukushi bu, \textit{Kongo no shōgai hoken fukushi shisaku ni tsuite (kaikaku no gurando dezainan)} (October 12, 2004).} As Tateiwa Shinya points out, the sudden rollout of the Grand Design came as a shock to many disability activists in Japan who were not consulted during its drafting. Indeed, the Grand Design retained many clauses that had been called into question during the taskforce meetings earlier in the year such as the 10\% blanket deductible.\footnote{Tateiwa Shinya, “Kyōjo tai shōgaisha – zenseikimatsu kara no yakū jūgo nen,” (2017), p. 587–88.} Perhaps the most controversial element of the Grand Design was its call for the promulgation of a Disability Service Law (\textit{Shōgai fukushi sābisu hō}) that would consolidate supports for people with physical, mental, and psychiatric disabilities who up until that point had benefitted from separate programs. Just as the combination of welfare for elderly and disabled individuals threatened to reallocate resources away from the latter, so too did the Disability Service Law threaten to redistribute benefits by inciting competition among Japan’s disabled communities.\footnote{Shirubā shinpō, “Shintai, chiteki, seishin shōgai shisaku o ipponka – shōgai fukushi sābisu hō kōrōshō ga sōsetsu teiji” (October 15, 2004).}

Angered by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s neglect of their needs and desires, leaders of the June 9 protest began to coordinate another mass demonstration to take place on October 20. On that day, in the middle of a typhoon with pouring rain and fierce winds, more than 2,000 activists gathered at the base of Tokyo Tower to
demand that “the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare listen to the voices of disabled people!” and “make it so that all disabled people can live in local communities!” After the demonstration, the activists hosted a symposium about the status of the Long-Term Care Insurance System and disability policy, which was attended by several Diet members. The activists also organized a protest inside the House of Representatives, arranged a rally in front of the Diet building, and submitted a petition to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare asking officials to reconsider the Grand Design. Despite their efforts, the Ministry continued to pursue the Grand Design and Disability Services Law. During the final months of 2004, many activists carried out additional demonstrations, but by the middle of December it became clear that their opposition would not stop the Ministry from submitting a Benefits and Supports Bill for the Independence of Persons with Disabilities (Shōgaisha jiritsu shien kyūfu hōan) to the Diet. On February 10, 2005, the Ministry sent its bill to the House of Representatives, and deliberations began several months later on May 11. Within days, an estimated 10,000 activists from across Japan descended on the Diet Building and the Ministry to participate in a final round of demonstrations. Their protests postponed, but did not prevent, the passage of the Independence Support Act for Persons with Disabilities (Shōgaisha jiritsu shien hō) on October 31 and its eventual implementation on April 1, 2006.

518 Shōgaisha no chiiki seikatsu kakuritsu no jitsugen o motomeru zenkoku dai kōdō' jikkkō iinkai, 10. 20 Shōgaisha no chiiki seikatsu kakuritsu no jitsugen o motomeru zenkoku dai kōdō hōkoku! (October 20, 2004).
519 Yomiuri Shinbun, “Shōgaisha taisaku, shūrō shiritsu shien ni jūten… shin hōan kokkaku” (December 18, 2004).
520 Hirashita Kōzō, 5.12 Zenkoku dai kōdō hōkoku bun (May 14, 2005).
521 Only certain provisions of the Independence Support Act for Persons with Disabilities were enacted in April. The Act went into full effect several months later on October 1, 2006.
Within six months of its implementation, the Independence Support Act started to cause major problems for many members of Japan’s disabled communities. The 10% deductible for services led some activists to declare that “the law, which claims to support the independence of disabled individuals, actually prevents those individuals from achieving independence.” Indeed, the 10% deductible made life particularly hard for persons with severe disabilities who were predisposed to disproportionately high medical expenses but seldom equipped to pay for them due to a lack of employment opportunities. Some disabled individuals like a certain Mr. Kamei Hiroki of Nagasaki Prefecture were forced to finance their services by selling what little possessions they had and purchasing expired foodstuffs to save money. Faced with troubling circumstances, many organizations of activists in places like Kumamoto, Shizuoka, and Gunma began to rally for a revision of the Independence Support Act to remove the 10% deductible. Such rallies were initially small and relatively ineffective. By the end of the decade, however, they expanded into a series of high-profile lawsuits in which plaintiffs successfully accused the government of violating their rights to life as guaranteed by Article 25 of the Constitution. What allowed for the shift in scale and efficacy of

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522 Asahi Shinbun, “Futan zō yahari, fuan tsunoru shōgaisha jiritsu shien hō, riyōsha wa…” (September 16, 2006).
523 Asahi Shinbun, “‘Genjitsu wa shōgaisha kirisute’ jiritsu shien hō shikō kara hantoshi” (October 13, 2006).
524 Asahi Shinbun, “1-Wari futan no keigen, gaitō kara uttaeru shōgaisha jiritsu shien hō, raigetsu kara honkaku shikō” (September 28, 2006), and Yomiuri Shinbun, “Shōgaisha jiritsu shien hō ni kōgi futan-gen motome sengen saitaku Kumamoto de shūkai” (August 18, 2006).
525 There were more than seventy lawsuits by disabled activists. Kōsei rōdōshō shakai engo kyoku shōgai hoken fukushibu shōgai fukushika, Shōgaisha jiritsu shien hō iken soshō ni kakaru kihon gō ni tsuite (January 7, 2010).
protests? One contributing factor, I argue, was the promulgation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

_Antidiscrimination Legislation: An Answer to the Problem?_

While the origins of the CRPD can be traced to a proposal made by Mexico in the 2001 meeting of the UN General Assembly, many Japanese activists first learned of the convention at the Sixth DPI World Congress, which was held in Sapporo in October of 2002. The congress, which coincided with the conclusion of the UN Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993–2002), was attended by more than 3,000 activists from one hundred and ten countries.⁵²⁶ Among them were leaders of the American disability rights movement like Judith Heumann, who delivered a keynote speech in support of the CRPD.⁵²⁷ At the end of the congress, participants co-authored a “Sapporo Declaration,” which argued that the UN must promulgate the CRPD and countries must develop antidiscrimination policies as “disabled people are the single most discriminated minority group in the world and their human rights are systematically under attack.”⁵²⁸ At around the same time, leaders of Japanese NGOs like Nakanishi Shōji and Higashi Toshihiro became involved in drafting the CPRD as members of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). In 2003, Nakanishi traveled to the United States to present ESCAP’s draft of the CRPD to the UN General Assembly. At that meeting, it was decided that ESCAP’s draft would serve as the basis for the final

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⁵²⁷ The Japan Times, “Group for Disabled to Seek Support for International Treaty” (October 11, 2002).
⁵²⁸ Mainichi Shinbun, “Bariafurī shinseki kenri o mamoru” (November 7, 2002).
CRPD, which would take shape via negotiations over the next three years.\textsuperscript{529} To ensure that their voices were heard during negotiations, Japanese activists set up a political pressure group in the Japan Disability Forum (\textit{Nihon shōgai fōramu}), which consisted of members from the nation’s thirteen largest NGOs.\textsuperscript{530} As the Japan Disability Forum became increasing involved in drafting the CRPD, Japanese policy makers were pressured into assisting them and promoting reform.\textsuperscript{531}

On December 13, 2006, the UN adopted the CRPD. Journalists in Japan described the CRPD as “the first human-rights treaty of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century,” which was created “to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.” The CRPD declared that “state parties shall prohibit all discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantee to persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection against discrimination on all grounds.”\textsuperscript{532} In practical terms, the fifty-article CRPD required member states to enact laws to improve the rights of disabled people, such as access to healthcare, transit, education, and employment, as well as freedom from violence and abuse. At the time the CRPD was adopted in 2006, the Japanese delegation to the UN General Assembly was not prepared to ratify the

\textsuperscript{529} Nakanishi Shōji, \textit{Jiritsu seikatsu undōshi – shakai henkaku no senryaku to senjutsu} (2014), pp. 100–102.
\textsuperscript{530} \textit{Nihon shōgai fōramu}, “JDF to wa,” Stable URL: https://www.normanet.ne.jp/~jdf/about.html.
\textsuperscript{531} More than two hundred members of the Japan Disability Forum participated in a series of negotiations in New York between the organizations’ founding in 2004 and the UN’s adoption of the CRPD in 2006. \textit{Nihon shōgai fōramu}, \textit{Shōgaisha kenri jōyaku no hijun shōnin ni atatte no seimei} (December 3, 2013). For information about government support of the Japan Disability Forum’s efforts, see \textit{Nihon shōgai fōramu}, \textit{Shōgaisha kenri jōyaku kokuren sagyō bukai sōan ni kansuru ikensho} (April 28, 2004).
\textsuperscript{532} The Japan Times, “Dignity for the Disabled” (February 14, 2007), and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, \textit{Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)} (December 13, 2006).
convention, although they pledged to do so as soon as possible. The irony of the delegation’s position was not lost on disability activists and media pundits, who pointed out that the Japanese government simultaneously sought to commit itself to disability rights while endangering the lives of its disabled citizens via the Independence Support Act. Indeed, with more than 80% of respondents to a Cabinet Office survey from February of 2007 suggesting that “there is discrimination against physically and mentally impaired people in Japan,” it was clear that the government had much work to do before it could ratify the CRPD and avoid being shamed on the international stage for failing to protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

On September 28, 2007, the Japanese government signed the CRPD to demonstrate its commitment to developing antidiscrimination policies that would eventually allow the nation to ratify the convention. However, as activists and academics like Takamine Yutaka and Ikeda Naoki explained in a special issue of Normalization magazine published in January of 2008, many questions remained to be answered before Japan could effectively ratify the CRPD. One set of questions examined by Takamine was related to matters of definition and scope. What kinds of activities and behaviors counted as ‘discrimination’ or ‘reasonable accommodations’? Who should be in charge of making such determinations: domestic and/or international bodies? And what of the gulf of responsibility between governments, NGOs, and disabled individuals? As

533 The Japan Times, “Dignity for the Disabled” (February 14, 2007).
Takamine urged the Japanese government to consider such questions when drafting policies aimed at the ratification of the CRPD. Ikeda Naoki raised additional concerns about monitoring. Stressing the importance of compliance in realizing the objectives of the CRPD, Ikeda asserted that a monitoring system must be created with local officials and disabled persons at the helm. In fact, the CRPD required all state parties to submit progress reports regarding implementation within two years of ratification and, thereafter, at least once every four years. However, the composition of the committee(s) tasked with compiling those reports was left up to individual member states to decide. Ikeda’s suggestion was that “Japan must adopt a stance of allowing ‘disabled individuals to assess the growth of the CRPD by themselves’ rather than entrusting everything to the government.”

Only then, he argued, could Japan truly implement the CRPD.

In April of 2008, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare convened a committee of specialists to investigate policies and problems related to the ratification of the CRPD like those discussed by Takamine and Ikeda. One item of particular concern to committee members was the Optional Protocol, which went into effect alongside the CRPD on May 3. The Optional Protocol provided a mechanism for the United Nations to hear grievances from and offer help to individuals and groups of individuals who experienced discrimination because of disability. If those parties exhausted all recourse in their respective countries, they could submit a petition to a council of experts, who would

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instruct governments to take remedial measures if needed.\textsuperscript{537} With growing complaints about the cost of disability welfare in Japan tied to the Independence Support Act, the Japanese government was reluctant to ratify the Optional Protocol. However, as one journalist for \textit{The Japan Times} pointed out, “the government […] will not receive respect in the international community if it opposes an international mechanism designed to help individuals and groups of individuals who suffer from discrimination because of disability.”\textsuperscript{538} In the end, the Japanese government did not ratify the Optional Protocol, but instead pursued domestic policy reforms in an attempt to show their commitment to defeating discrimination while preserving state autonomy and sovereignty.\textsuperscript{539} On March 31, 2009, the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare submitted a bill to the House of Representatives that would have revised the Independence Support Act such that users could make flexible payments based on personal financial circumstances rather than fixed payments of 10%.\textsuperscript{540} Before that bill could be passed, however, a swing election changed the course of the nation’s efforts toward ratifying the CRPD.

On August 30, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) defeated the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in a sweeping victory during the general election. The LDP had long dominated the Japanese political system, preserving its position as the ruling

\textsuperscript{538} The Japan Times, “Uphold Disabled People’s Rights” (June 22, 2008).
\textsuperscript{539} Some activists, including members of the Japan Disability Forum, supported the government’s decision to pursue domestic policy reform before ratifying the CRPD. Onoue Kōji, for instance, argued that ratification in form alone was meaningless, and the only way for Japan to truly enact the CRPD was to develop a corresponding set of domestic laws and policies. Nihon shogai forumu, \textit{Shōgaisha kenri jōyaku hijun made no michinori to JDF no 10-nen} (2014), Stable URL: \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPjK7on8p54&feature=youtu.be}.
\textsuperscript{540} Kösei rōdōshō shakai engo kyoku shōgai hoken fukushibu kikakuka, \textit{Shōgaisha jiritsu shien hō nado no ichibu o kaisei suru hōritsuan} (March 31, 2009).
coalition almost continuously from 1955 until 2009 (with a one-year exception from 1993–1994). The shift in power had major consequences for Japan’s disabled communities and efforts toward ratifying the CRPD as the DPJ was directly affiliated with associations of activists and NGOs such as DPI Japan.\footnote{In fact, DPI used its connection with the DPJ to ensure that lines about repealing and replacing the Independence Support Act made it into the party’s election manifesto. Fukushima Satoshi, “‘Jiritsu shien hō ichibu kaisei’ wa seiji sekinin no hōki da,” Nōmaraiizē shōgaisha no fukushi, Vol. 32 (369) (April 2012). Stable URL: https://www.dinf.ne.jp/doc/japanese/prdl/jsrd/norma/n369/n369003.html.} Within one month of the DPJ’s victory, Nagatsuma Akira, the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, announced that the Independence Support Act would be abolished and replaced by new legislation to be developed in consultation with the coalition government. That legislation would, at least in theory, allow for flexible payments based on personal financial circumstances in a way not unlike the March 31 bill and help Japan ratify the CRPD.\footnote{Asahi Shinbun, “Shōgaisha jiritsu shien hō ‘haishi suru’ nagatsuma kōrōsō ga meigen” (September 19, 2009).} On December 8, the DPJ set up a Headquarters for Promoting Reforms to the Disability System (Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin honbu) under the jurisdiction of Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio to oversee the production of new policies.\footnote{Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin honbu, Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin honbu no sechi ni tsuite (December 8, 2009).} Shortly thereafter, the Headquarters established a committee of government officials and members of disability organizations such as the Japan Disability Forum, the Japan Federation of the Blind, and the Japan Federation of the Deaf to help achieve its objectives.\footnote{Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin kaigi, Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin kaigi kōseiin meibo (January 15, 2010).} At the committee’s first meeting on January 15, 2010, it became clear that each organization had their own perspectives about the future of disability policy in Japan and additional meetings would be necessary to resolve
disagreements. On June 7, after fourteen meetings, the committee reached consensus and released a tripartite model for policy reform.\textsuperscript{545}

The first part of the Headquarters’ model for reform called for revisions to the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities.\textsuperscript{546} Although the Basic Act was amended several years earlier in 2004 to include a clause banning public entities from discriminating on the basis of disability, its scope was less comprehensive than the CRPD and it lacked an enforcement mechanism.\textsuperscript{547} To remedy the situation, the Headquarters began to investigate ways of harmonizing the Basic Act with the CRPD, eventually submitting a list of recommendations to the Cabinet Office on December 10, 2010. The Headquarters recommended expanding the Basic Act’s definition of disability to encapsulate individuals with developmental disorders and intractable diseases as well as the introduction of measures for vulnerable populations of disabled women and children. The Headquarters also suggested changing the goal of the act to “creating a society that respects the individuality and dignity of all citizens regardless as to whether or not they are disabled.”\textsuperscript{548} To address the issue of enforcement, the Headquarters proposed that monitoring committees be established at regional and national levels with at least half of their members being disabled. And the Headquarters also sought other revisions related to education, employment, and access. After several months of consideration, during which time Cabinet Office officials tweaked the language of the Headquarters’

\textsuperscript{545} Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin kaigi, Shōgaisha seido kaikaku no suishin no tame no kihonteki na hōkō (dai ichi ji iken) (June 7, 2010).
\textsuperscript{546} For additional information about the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities, see Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{547} Naikakufu jimujikan, Shōgaisha kihon hō no kaisei ni tsuite (June 4, 2004).
\textsuperscript{548} Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin kaigi, Shōgaisha seido kaikaku no suishin no tame no dai ni ji iken (December 27, 2010).
recommendations to indicate that reforms would be carried out “to the greatest extent possible,” the ruling coalition sent a bill to the Diet on April 22, 2011. That bill passed both houses on July 29 and was eventually promulgated as law on August 5.\footnote{Naikakufu seisaku tōkatsukan, Shōgaisha kihon hō no ichibu o kaisei suru hōritsu no kōfu shikō ni tsuite (August 2, 2011).}

The second part of the Headquarters’ model for reform was to develop a system of laws and policies to replace the Independence Support Act. On April 12, 2010, the Headquarters set up a Comprehensive Welfare Subcommittee to investigate: 1) the philosophy and purpose of disability welfare services; 2) definitions of disability; 3) consultations and accommodations; 4) community living supports; 5) caregiver dispatch programs; and 6) life and activity spaces.\footnote{Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin kaigi, Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin kaigi sōgō fukushi bukai no kaisai ni tsuite (April 12, 2010).} The subcommittee’s early deliberations informed a bill to revise the Independence Support Act, which proposed to swap out the act’s 10% deductible for an income-adjusted payment system. That bill was a stopgap measure designed to placate disability activists who had started to sue the government until a permanent solution could be created. It was sent to the Diet in November, promulgated as law on December 10, and scheduled for implementation on April 1, 2012. In the meantime, the subcommittee continued its deliberations, eventually producing a skeletal framework for the Comprehensive Welfare Law for Persons with Disabilities (\textit{Shōgaisha sōgō fukushi hō}) on August 30, 2011.\footnote{Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin kaigi sōgō fukushi bukai, Shōgaisha sōgō fukushi hō no kokkaku ni kansuru sōgō fukushi bukai no teigen (an) – shinpō no seittei o mezashite – (August 30, 2011).} The subcommittee submitted its sixty item framework to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare for review only to have it
cut down into a three article bill on February 8, 2012. The Ministry’s bill was criticized by activists, who saw it as a minor change to the Independence Support Act rather than the new law that they had been promised. Despite their objections, the Cabinet Office approved the bill on March 13, arguing that it was an adequate replacement because it had “a new name and philosophy.” The bill was sent to the Diet, where it passed muster on June 20, and was enacted in stages during 2013 and 2014.

The third and final part of the Headquarters’ model for reform focused explicitly on the creation of antidiscrimination legislation. Toward that end, the Headquarters established an Antidiscrimination Subcommittee on November 1, 2010. The subcommittee drew inspiration from regional antidiscrimination ordinances developed by activists and policy makers in places like Chiba (2006) and Hokkaido (2009) in response to the CRPD. Those ordinances prohibited acts of discrimination against disabled persons based on examples collected via the internet, public forums, and private consultations. They also borrowed language and concepts from countries that had implemented similar policies such as France, Germany, and the United States to ensure a broad range of coverage. Between January of 2011 and July of 2012, the subcommittee conducted additional research into issues of discrimination related to education, employment,

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552 The Japan Times, “DPJ’s broken promise to the disabled” (February 29, 2012).
554 Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin kaigi, Shōgaisha seido kaikaku suishin kaigi sabetsu kinshi bukai no kaisai ni tsuite (November 1, 2010).
healthcare, and public facilities, as well as products necessary for everyday life. On July 13, the subcommittee completed its deliberations, and after analyzing its findings sent a report to the Cabinet Office on September 14. As that report was being reviewed by various administrative organs in December, a general election was held, and leadership of the Japanese government switched from the DPJ back to the LDP. Some activists and policy makers were concerned that the LDP would reject the subcommittee’s report, but their fears were allayed when the Cabinet Office sent a bill to the Diet on April 26, 2013. That bill passed both houses on June 19 and was promulgated on June 26. It was later enacted on April 1, 2016 as the Law for Elimination of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Shōgai sabetsu kaishō hō).

Why did the LDP continue to pursue the DPJ’s agenda for disability policy reform after returning to power in December of 2012? Part of the reason has to do with the events underlying their reelection campaign: namely, the DPJ’s botched relief efforts after the 3/11 triple disaster. DPJ officials were heavily criticized by activists, media pundits, and politicians from opposing parties for failing to provide support to victims of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident. Their delay in instituting protections for vulnerable populations of disabled people in particular set off a firestorm of damning critiques. Immediately after the triple disaster in April, disability NGOs like JIL and DPI Japan set up a temporary Headquarters for Providing Relief to Disabled Victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake (Higashi nihon daishinsai shōgaisha kyūen honbu) to coordinate relief campaigns. The Headquarters reported to the Mainichi Shinbun that

556 Shōgaisha seisaku iinkai sabetsu kinshi bukai, ‘Shōgai o riyū to suru sabetsu no kinshi ni kansuru hōsei’ ni tsute no sabetsu kinshi bukai no iken (September 14, 2012).
many disabled people who needed care were left in their homes during the evacuation process. They also indicated that shelters often had stairs and other barriers that put disabled people at risk. Although the Headquarters asserted that “it was necessary for the government to enact long term measures for disabled evacuees,” official response time was delayed.\textsuperscript{557} One year after the disaster, many disabled people remained unable to return to their homes. Although guidelines were created to allow those people to seek compensation from the Tokyo Electric Power Co, they had to follow a complicated redress procedure which did not have a simplified version for people with mental disabilities or a braille version for blind people. In the end, mortality rates for disabled individuals were around twice as high as those for their able-bodied counterparts.\textsuperscript{558} Such stats made for bad press and helped trigger the transition of power from the DPJ to LDP alongside a larger set of accusations about mismanagement and missed opportunities for relief.

Some LDP officials saw the DPJ’s failings regarding protections for disabled people as an opportunity to promote new policies that would distance themselves from the former regime and boost their credentials. With two thirds of the DPJ’s disability reform plan already achieved by the time that the LDP took power in December of 2012, the policymaking path was all but laid out for them. First, the LDP would promulgate the Law for Elimination of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities, which was

\textsuperscript{557} Mainichi Shinbun, “Higashinihon daishinsai borantia shōgaisha kyūen honbu setsuritsu chōki shien taisei hitsuyō” (April 20, 2011).
already in the final stages of development. Then, the LDP would allow Japan to ratify the CRPD, bolstering its status on the international stage. As mentioned above, the LDP successfully passed the Law for Elimination of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities in June of 2013 with a three year delay on implementation to allow various sectors of society to prepare for the new law. Six months later in January of 2014, Japan successfully ratified the CRPD under LDP leadership after seven years of investigation.

Concluding Remarks

Celeste Arrington and Yong-II Moon were right to assert that Japan’s ratification of the CRPD was made possible in part by strategic alliances between disability activists and lawyers, as well as a decentralized approach to advocacy involving litigation, protest, and participation in various councils for policy reform. However, as I have argued, we cannot truly understand Japan’s decision to embrace the CRPD without also examining the historical contingencies that inspired disability activists to pursue antidiscrimination legislation as a desirable outcome in the first place. In this chapter, I have highlighted some of those contingencies through my analysis of the creation and implementation of the Long-Term Care Insurance System and related policies in the 2000s and 2010s, and in so doing contextualized many recent innovations in Japan’s landscape of accessibility.

My analysis has demonstrated how the development of the Long-Term Care Insurance System in 2000 at once helped and harmed diverse populations of disabled individuals, leading government officials to introduce a Support Payment System in 2003. That system, while well intentioned, was financially unsustainable, inspiring policy
makers to explore the possibility of combining the two welfare schemes in the mid-2000s. Although many disability organizations opposed the merger of the two systems, arguing that the needs of elderly and disabled people were different, their objections were often ignored by legislators, who passed the Independence Support Act in 2006. That legislation, which created difficulties for many disabled people by demanding they pay a 10% deductible for their services, became a lightning rod for criticism after the United Nations promulgated the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the same year. From 2007 until 2014, policy makers collaborated with activists and NGOs to revise Japan’s disability welfare system. Their efforts produced a series of laws that allowed Japan to eventually ratify the CRPD and enact antidiscrimination policies for disabled people.
Conclusion

Efforts toward full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) have only just begun in Japan and many problems remain to be resolved. For example, the Comprehensive Welfare Law for Persons with Disabilities must be monitored, and the Law for Elimination of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities must be enacted. Furthermore, as a member state of the CRPD, Japan is required to submit a progress report two years after ratification and will soon be judged on the international stage. Japan also needs to appoint representatives to sit on the CRPD Executive Committee and work to promote awareness among its citizens.\(^5\)

Arashidani Yasuo, Representative for the Japan Disability Forum

In a January 2014 issue of *Normalization* magazine, activist Arashidani Yasuo asserted that Japan’s ratification of the CRPD was a starting point for the creation of a truly accessible society for disabled people and not an end goal because of issues of awareness and enforcement. Arashidani was not alone in making such claims. In an online article for *Nippon.com* published in October of the same year entitled “The Long Road to Disability Rights in Japan,” Shirasawa Mayumi of Tsukuba University similarly argued that “media coverage has been sparse, and the general public remains largely ignorant of the meaning of ‘prohibition of discrimination’ under the CRPD and unaware

of the kind of hurdles to participation the disabled face even today.”^560 Indeed, when the Law for Elimination of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities was finally put into effect in 2016, media outlets such as The Japan Times were flooded with articles decrying the ambiguity of terms such as “reasonable accommodation.”^561 And a Cabinet Office poll from 2017 illustrated that one year after the law’s implementation, 77% of the public were unaware of its existence and 83% said that discrimination against disabled persons persisted.^562 In the face of such statistics and issues with awareness and enforcement of the CRPD in Japan, it is not surprising that many disabled people still grapple with barriers in the built environment, as well as access to education, employment, entertainment, and other areas of everyday activity.

As mentioned at the outset of this project, we can obtain some insight into the scope of access issues that affect disabled people in Japan by analyzing collections of surveys compiled by public agencies, private entities, social welfare organizations, and other diverse stakeholders. For example, consider a survey from December 2020 carried out by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, which demonstrated that only 65% of approximately 28,000 public elementary and middle schools in Japan had wheelchair accessible bathrooms.^563 Alternatively, look to another survey by the Mainichi Shimbun Company, which showed that only 24,367 of 208,152

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^561 For examples of media discourse surrounding the ambiguity of ‘reasonable accommodation,’ see Phillip Brasor, “Accommodating disabilities, but only within reason,” The Japan Times (April 17, 2016), and Tomoko Otake, “New law tackles disability bias: discriminatory acts outlawed, but experts see shortcomings,” The Japan Times (May 3, 2016).
traffic lights in Japan had audible signals for blind individuals (8.5%), and of those with signals 20,445 were set not to make sounds for at least part of the day (84%).\textsuperscript{564} Such surveys and the macro-level data they provide can help us conceptualize the barriers that many disabled people face in Japan as they try to lead independent and self-determined lives. However, they offer only an incomplete picture as they do not account for the internal politics of the nation’s disabled communities: that is, the ways that intersectional identities such as race, class, gender, physical and cognitive capacity affect individual experiences of barriers to access.

As a disabled scholar from the United States living and working in Japan in early 2021, I still encounter barriers to accessibility each day in connection with my intersectional identity. Public bathrooms are not designed to accommodate my relatively large foreign wheelchair, and local medical standards mean that I am often subjected to unwanted and invasive procedures.\textsuperscript{565} Academic administrators scratch their heads when I ask about the possibility of securing short-term barrier-free housing, and bureaucrats at city hall are perplexed by my long-term care needs. If researching this project has taught me anything, it is that I am not alone in dealing with such problems: many disabled people in Japan have struggled, and continue to struggle, with similar issues depending upon their designation as targets of services and supports by interested parties. To make sense of their marginalization from mainstream society as well as my own experiences, I

\textsuperscript{564} The Mainichi, “80% of audible traffic signals for blind in Japan silenced to appease residents” (December 30, 2020).

\textsuperscript{565} For example, I am required to have biannual cardiac biopsies in Japan because I had a heart transplant at age ten. Such procedures are deemed unnecessary and potentially dangerous in the United States after a certain point post-transplantation due to risk of infection and other complicating factors that come with any kind of invasive surgery.
have asked questions like: Who defines accessibility in Japan? Why do people accept or reject their definitions? How do their actions affect individuals with diverse bodies and minds? And if someone wants to change a definition of accessibility, what tools and strategies can they use? This project has been my first major attempt to unpack these questions, exploring the historical contingencies that have permitted some stakeholders to dictate how policy makers and publics have grasped notions of disability and access in Japan over the last one hundred and fifty years.

Mobilizing methods from history, anthropology, sociology, political science, and media studies, I have analyzed state records, news reports, and documents from welfare organizations to identify how various stakeholders have helped structure the politics of accessibility in Japan. I have suggested that stakeholders empowered some disabled populations and disenfranchised others by grappling with macrosocial processes like industrialization, globalization, and ageing, which (de)emphasized the needs of diverse impaired demographics at different points in time. I have also argued that stakeholders localized global notions of disability to reimagine domestic policy and rebuild Japan’s environments, education, employment, and entertainment programs. My work has demonstrated that scholars of Japan must investigate technologies developed by and for disabled people to truly understand the country’s social, political, and material legacies, ranging from its popular culture products to modes of governance and marketplace innovations. It has also illustrated that academics invested in issues of diversity and inclusion in places such as the United States and Europe must examine the history of disability in Japan, as the country’s assistive technologies are often exported overseas to
help global populations of disabled people. Indeed, as Japan has the world’s third largest economy and fastest ageing population, its access-making activities have served, and almost certainly will continue to serve, as successful models to emulate and cautionary tales of what (not) to do for other industrialized nations in the future.

Although my project has primarily been descriptive, it has prescriptive implications for advocates, policy makers, and practitioners in numerous fields, as well as disabled stakeholders. My research has shown how activist and legislative interventions intended to create access for disabled people often have unintended consequences and make further interventions necessary. I contend that such unintended consequences must be investigated and theorized by specialists in various fields and at multiple scales of analysis: local, national, international, and otherwise. If architects, engineers, educators, and other experts throughout the world do not work together to anticipate the unintended consequences of access-making, the results could be catastrophic. Consider, for instance, current attempts to resolve barriers connected the COVID–19 pandemic. I have seen firsthand how some activists in Japan are now championing technologies developed to stop the spread of contagion including remote education and telework as tools for facilitating participation of disabled individuals in social spaces that might otherwise be off limits to them. I have also seen advocates arguing that such technologies may call attention away from barriers in Japan’s built environment and create hardships for other disabled individuals. Both positions are valid and highlight the need for nuanced conversation about the costs and benefits of access-making. Without extending those
conversations to include as many people and perspectives as possible, their outcomes may be undesirable: they may erect barriers instead of resolving them.

How can we make sure that as many people as possible are able to take part in dialogues about access-making? A first step is to illuminate barriers that may impede participation in the present by investigating experiences of marginalization in the past, as I have done in this project. With that said, I would reiterate that this project is not a truly comprehensive study of disability in Japan. On the contrary, it is limited by several sets of constraints, including a focus on policy that silences the voices of individuals who did not participate in legislative processes, a paucity of extant archival materials, and limited space to address what little resources do exist. It is my most sincere hope that scholars will expand on this project by examining materials that I have not covered and extending its theoretical insights to encompass populations of disabled people that I have not addressed: for instance, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. For my part, I intend to build on this project in at least three ways. First, I will add additional international context for the diverse disability-related developments that I have discussed by investigating contemporaneous innovations in accessibility overseas. Second, I will bring this project into the present by adding a seventh chapter about stakeholders’ attempts to implement the UN CRPD prior to the presently postponed 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo. And third, I will start a companion project that reveals how global stakeholders have localized assistive devices born out of Japan’s domestic history to reimagine international access systems. Through such initiatives, I will enhance the legibility and relevance of this project for otherwise unengaged audiences and advance
my ultimate goal of increasing awareness of the importance of researching global histories of disability for academics and practitioners in numerous fields. By inviting discussions about the ways that making access for some demographics of disabled people can exclude others, I will bring us one step closer to the creation of an inclusive society.
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