



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

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The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

The application format has been changed since this application was submitted. You must follow the guidelines in the currently posted Notice of Funding Opportunity (see above link).

Project Title: The Paralympic Movement, Sports, and Disability in Postwar Japan

Institution: Kalamazoo College

Project Director: Dennis Frost

Grant Program: Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan

The Paralympic Movement, Sports, and Disability in Postwar Japan

During the post-World War II era, Japan's encounters with the Paralympic Movement transformed societal understandings of and approaches to the disabled body. Offering the first comprehensive study of the history and significance of the Paralympic Movement outside a Euro-American context, my book project examines this transformation of Japanese views of disability by analyzing discourses and practices surrounding five different international sporting events held in Japan for disabled athletes. Focusing on how and why Japan has engaged with international movements as it developed domestic approaches to disability, I argue that the impact of these sporting events for the disabled has extended well beyond the playing field in terms of both policies and perceptions. From the 1964 Paralympics, when organizers promoted changes in rehabilitation techniques, to Tokyo's successful 2020 Olympic bid, which has been tied to "barrier free" environments for Japan's aging population, sporting events in the postwar era have repeatedly served as forums for addressing the concerns of individuals with disabilities. The five events I examine have also had a disproportionate impact on popular understandings of disability in Japan because of their international scope and media prominence. Providing new insights on the culturally and historically contingent nature of disability in Japan and beyond, my studies of these events demonstrate how they have challenged some stigma associated with disability, while reinforcing or even generating others. Through analyses of institutional materials, close readings of media sources, and interviews with contemporary Japanese athletes, my project highlights the profound, though often ambiguous and overlooked, ways in which sports have shaped how disability has been perceived and addressed in postwar Japan.

Organization and Contribution

As outlined below, this NEH fellowship will allow me to conduct the remaining research in Japan and complete a full draft of my book manuscript. The final monograph will consist of five main chapters that offer case studies of different sporting events and their participants. Together, these case studies explain how and why disability sports emerged in Japan, how they have changed, and how that process has affected both social perceptions of and approaches to individuals with disabilities.

The first chapter examines the origins of the 1964 Tokyo Paralympics in the context of the broader history of disability in Japan. When a group of Japanese advocates for the disabled first raised the possibility of holding the 1964 Paralympic Games in Tokyo, government support and institutions promoting disability sports were lacking, and only a handful of people in Japan were aware that such sports existed. Given this environment, the 1964 Games offer a unique vantage point for exploring how promoters and the mass media introduced a national population to the Paralympic Movement and how those efforts affected individuals with disability. The exposure to international athletes and ideas afforded by the Tokyo Paralympics sparked initiatives aimed at developing more holistic approaches to rehabilitation in Japan and provided the groundwork for Japan's domestic disability sports movement, as exemplified most clearly by the creation of the Japan Sports Association for the Disabled and the establishment of the annual National Sports Meets for the Disabled in 1965. The Tokyo Games and especially their front-page media coverage also challenged longstanding Japanese social perceptions of the disabled as weak and dependent. At the same time, the Games' repeated emphasis on the rehabilitative role of sports reinforced less progressive notions that disability was an individual, medical issue, helping to establish stereotypes and patterns of representation still apparent in coverage of disability sports today.

Chapter two explores the role of Japanese organizers in the Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled (FESPIC), first held in Ōita prefecture in 1975. Dr. Nakamura Yutaka, a rehabilitation specialist and early advocate for disability sports, launched these Games to promote greater awareness about and opportunities for athletes with disabilities in Asia and the South Pacific, a goal that dovetailed with Japan's efforts to reassume a postwar leadership role in the region. Hosted by different countries on nine occasions until they were replaced by the Asian Para Games in 2010, the FESPIC Games were initially envisioned as simple rehabilitation-oriented events that could be held in countries even if they lacked established programs in disability sports. However, like the Paralympic Games with which they

were affiliated, they became increasingly oriented toward elite competition, generating new challenges and tensions in the process. Despite their significant place in the history of disability sports, the FESPIC Games have garnered little attention, a fact that underscores both the importance of understanding why some events have a larger impact than others and the necessity of moving beyond popular assumptions that hosting such events automatically equates to improvements for individuals with disabilities.

Focusing on the annual Ōita International Wheelchair Marathon, chapter three considers how Ōita prefecture's history as a hot-spring rehabilitation site and the work of activists such as Dr. Nakamura have transformed this peripheral prefecture—located 600 miles from Tokyo—into a center of disability sports. The founding of Ōita's Wheelchair Marathon in 1981 as the world's first event of its kind demonstrates the role that strategic local actions can play at the national and international levels. Yet the Marathon's origins as a response to local officials' unwillingness to allow wheelchair athletes to participate in a preexisting marathon highlight the challenges that disabled individuals have faced, even in one of Japan's more disability-friendly prefectures. Examinations of more than three decades' worth of local archival and media materials show the impact of this increasingly competitive and prestigious Marathon on disability-related policies and popular perceptions in Ōita, drawing attention to both the benefits and limitations of sports in effecting change, particularly at the local level.

The fourth chapter turns to Japan's second experience hosting the Paralympics, the 1998 Winter Games in Nagano. Unlike the Tokyo Games where organizers were starting almost from scratch, those in Nagano benefitted from thirty plus years of engagement with the Paralympic Movement, as well as recent changes in government policies inspired in part by international approaches to disability linked with the United Nations. Such policy developments help account for the increased government support, institutional growth, and widespread media coverage that made the 1998 Paralympics a watershed moment in Japan's history of disability. As important as these changes were, closer examinations of the media and the experiences of participants reveal less positive outcomes. While Nagano's sporting venues were lauded for accessibility, areas outside the event sites and the local transportation networks remained far from barrier free, frustrating participants and supporters. The expanded official and popular attention, too, proved mixed, as older rehabilitation-focused approaches increasingly clashed with athletes' desires to be viewed as elite competitors rather than inspirational examples of overcoming disability.

The book concludes with investigations of Japan's most recent efforts to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games, including the unsuccessful 2008 and 2016 bids from Osaka and Tokyo and the winning bid for the 2020 Games in Tokyo. These bids were all developed in accordance with new guidelines reflecting agreements between the International Olympic Committee and the International Paralympic Committee that have required potential hosts to outline their plans for both sets of Games. Tokyo, in particular, has taken its potential role as the first two-time Paralympic host quite seriously, actively integrating athletes with disabilities into the bid process and proposing significant improvements in accessibility both within and beyond the sporting venues. Plans for "universal design" in Tokyo clearly intersect with concerns about Japan's current demographic trends. At present, it remains to be seen whether the desire to make the city a model of accessibility for the Paralympics in 2020 can produce the financing and action to make those plans a reality and how such efforts will affect social perceptions of disability within and beyond Tokyo. The final chapter also explores the Paralympic Movement's growing use of web streaming, athletes' blogs, and other forms of new media, suggesting that these trends promise greater visibility and access, but they also have the potential to foster increased marginalization for disability sports and their participants in Japan.

As this brief overview suggests, this study addresses issues of interest to humanities scholars, social scientists, and general readers. It draws insights from and contributes to three fields in particular: Japanese studies, disability studies, and sports studies. In the Japan field, this book will offer the first scholarly account of its kind in either Japanese or English. It complements recent works on disability in English by Karen Nakamura (2006; 2013), Carolyn Stevens (2013), Misa Kayama and Wendy Haight (2014), and Lee Pennington (2015) by examining the previously overlooked role of sports in shaping Japanese approaches to disability at both the official and popular levels. I also build on the research of Japanese scholars exploring the relationships between sports and disability. Most Japanese works offer

accounts of particular sports, like Watari Tadashi's book on wheelchair basketball (2012), or introductory descriptions of the Paralympics and disability sports (Takahashi Akira 2004; Ito Kazuko 2012).

Indeed, one benefit of this project is its potential for raising awareness in disability studies and sports studies about research on Japan, since both fields have tended to concentrate on Euro-American issues and contexts. By focusing on disability sports in Japan, this study offers a critical reminder that such "universals" as the body, disability, and sports are interpreted and addressed in culturally and historically specific ways. My work, however, does more than introduce a non-Western perspective. Because sports have played a central role in shaping how societies understand the human body, this study's consideration of the ways in which disability sports have challenged—and at times reinforced—normative perceptions of the body contributes to ongoing efforts in disability studies to interrogate the social construction of disability. My emphasis on sports and the evolving representations of disability associated with them helps explain the roots and resilience of stereotypes that continue to influence understandings of disability today. My research also brings renewed attention to the impact of "mega events" on their host sites. While scholars in sports studies have generally focused on the economic, political, or environmental impacts of large-scale sporting events, I demonstrate that such events have proven a mixed blessing for Japan's disabled population; they have generated significant debate aimed at improving policies and changing popular understandings, but for a variety of reasons examined in my study, changes in policies and perception have not always been fully realized. Finally, my work makes the case for viewing disability sports in a broader historical context. Aside from a handful of works (Steve Bailey 2008; Ian Brittain 2010), much of the scholarship on the Paralympics and disability sports addresses contemporary events and athletes. At a time when scholars, activists, and such organizations as the United Nations are actively promoting "Sports for Development" in countries around the world, it is critical to understand the benefits, challenges, and unforeseen consequences of earlier and ongoing efforts to use sports to promote change. In many ways, the introduction and diffusion of disability sports in Japan can be seen as a success story, but it is a complex success that merits careful examination.

Competencies, Work Plan, and Dissemination

My study of the history and impact of disability sports in Japan builds on my previous research. My dissertation and first book, *Seeing Stars: Sports Celebrity, Identity, and Body Culture in Modern Japan*, traced the emergence and evolution of sports celebrity in Japan, focusing on the ways in which sports stars have shaped Japanese perceptions of their bodies and their relationships to the nation-state. Using materials gathered during a short-term research trip to Japan, I have published two essays on the Tokyo Paralympics, including a prize-winning article, and I will be presenting a portion of chapter four on the Nagano Games at an Asian studies conference in June 2015. I was recently awarded an NEH Summer Stipend for 2015 to conduct focused archival work in Tokyo and Ōita, Japan and write drafts of chapters two and three. A twelve-month Fellowship for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan will allow me to conduct the remaining research and complete my manuscript during my 2016-17 sabbatical.

During the fellowship term, I will spend six months in Japan, with the remaining time in Michigan. Because most of the archival research will be completed during summer 2015, my time in Japan will focus on interviewing contemporary Japanese athletes and gathering materials on the upcoming 2020 Paralympics. My previous and ongoing interactions with the Japanese Sports Association for the Disabled and my fluency with written and spoken Japanese will facilitate this phase of the research. While in Japan, I will also revise my existing articles and talks to complete chapters one and four, taking advantage of resources at Waseda University in Tokyo where I completed my dissertation research and plan to affiliate during this visit. After returning home, my current, renewable affiliation with the Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan will aid me as I polish earlier drafts of chapters two and three and complete the final chapter, the introduction, and the conclusion.

Completing the manuscript during my sabbatical year will leave me ideally positioned to shepherd the book through the peer-review and publication process in advance of the 2020 Tokyo Games. Prior to the book's publication, I intend to share my findings with general audiences via new and traditional media and at academic conferences associated with the three fields my project addresses.

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