

"Be Better, Together"

Japanese Studies Curriculum Development across CUNY



Demographic Crisis and Institutional Reform: How the Olympic and Paralympic Games Helped Reshape Disability Welfare in Japan

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Date: Friday, November 13, 2020

Time: 11:00am-12:00pm

Location: Online (Zoom)

RSVP at <http://bit.ly/lagccEventReg>



Abstract

The preparation, execution, and aftermath of mega events like the Paralympics can create dramatic shifts in disability politics on both local and global scales. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of Japan, where the games have driven 'accessibility booms' on two separate occasions. Physical and social differences between Japanese para-athletes and their foreign counterparts during the 1964 games triggered a series of events that eventually led activists and policymakers to reshape the nation's infrastructure by installing elements of barrier-free architecture in the 1970s. Now, a second wave of accessible development is underway in connection with the 2020 games, in which domestic pressures like an aging population, declining birthrate, and shrinking workforce are guiding the production of technologies that will transform international ideas about inclusion. Despite these developments, or perhaps because of them, many persons with disabilities remain unable to access education, employment, and other services needed for social participation in Japan.

In this presentation, I use the 1964 and 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo as case studies to consider why activist and legislative interventions do not always help persons with disabilities (and often necessitate further interventions). Drawing on a wide range of sources, including, but not limited to, magazines, government records, and documents from social welfare organizations, I demonstrate how lack of coordination between specialists operating in various fields can create precarious conditions in which persons with disabilities are put at risk. To mitigate such risks and facilitate access, I argue, we must imagine new modes of collaboration.

About "Be Better, Together" Project

Be Better, Together seeks to bring together CUNY faculty in an effort to systematically discuss the current and future state of Japanese Studies in the CUNY system. This project is funded by the Japan Foundation.



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