

# **On the Road towards Grand Inclusivity: The Development of Japan's Treatment towards Its Disability Community's Security**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Apart from their advanced technological innovation and development, Japan is also known for its support towards its disability community. However, Japan has a long and interesting history behind it as it initially, and to some degree in the present, did not appear that way. Filled with discrimination and even ostracization, Japan has gone a long distance to its present supportive treatment. By using the qualitative research method based on secondary data, the article aims to shed light to 4 issues. First, the article begins by laying out Japan's background regarding their treatment towards the disability community. Here, it can be seen how in the past they were subjected to confinement and discrimination. Moving on, a discussion over the changes of treatment towards them by the government is provided. The changes can be attributed to the government's rational move to uphold human security, strive towards a more inclusive society, and preparation towards huge events like the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics. The way the government made such changes is through the securitization or speech act. Eventually, the changes materialised into many forms, from the supportive bills/laws all the way to infrastructure adjustments that would ease access for people with disabilities on the field. Finally, for the implications brought about by the changes, it can be seen in how the environment are more accessible for people with disability and how it can work as a public diplomacy attempt as apparent in the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics.

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**Keywords:** *Human Security, Inclusive Society, Japan, Disability.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Being a growing regional power in the Indo-Pacific, Japan has its share of issues to handle in both the domestic and international landscape. Among the many policies that Japan has constructed, a common ground can be agreed on the idea that it was all in line with its national interest. Either in regard to its economic development or military issues, such policies have indeed been made rationally. Despite some difficulties it has faced, Japan has made good use of its advanced technologies and opt policy formulation in facing the many contemporary dynamics.

Security issues are one of the many contemporary, if not omnipresent, issues that the Japanese government has on their list. An important dimension of the important issue does not solely lie externally, it rather lies within Japan. There are a wide range of security issues arising domestically in Japan, from economic ones all the way to the issue of food security. In direct connection or the other, many of those security issues have in their heart the state as the referent or protected object. But in line with a growing view that is in contrast with the state centric belief, a focus towards human security has been garnering more attention.

Human security, which gained attraction in the post-Cold War period, gives a focus towards individuals or people as the referent object (United Nation Trust Fund for Human Security, 2023). The concept puts forward numerous aspects to human security which covers the many needs individuals need to live in security amidst growing global vulnerabilities

brought about by globalisation. In contrast to traditional understanding of security that revolves around the state, this new concept rejuvenates the need to support the people which at its core are the composing unit of a state. The provision or fulfilment of such an idea would push states to protect its people which in itself are diverse. Apart from the difference over the line of geographical positions, they also have other aspects to their identity which differentiate them with the other, from race, gender, all the way to their status as in disabled or not.

On this matter, an interesting issue to look at is the changing attitude Japan has made towards the disability community. Japan categorises people with disabilities to, according to its Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities, which are as follows: physical, intellectual and mental. While it is true that Japan has a history of social norms and poor treatment towards the disabled community, some notable changes have been pushed forward across many fields (Mogul, 2016). One of such ways is through the provision of government support and policies to accommodate their daily lives (Miller, 2019). The gesture, apart from being seen as a positive development on the government's part on the fulfilment of basic human rights, can be seen as a rational move, especially in regard to the creation of relevant policies. Putting the many considerations to it aside, a good point to view the shift is through seeing it as an attempt to push forward a more inclusive Japanese society.

In the past research over Japan and its disability community have been made. The first example is the research done by Reiko Hayashi and Masako Okuhira (2010) titled "The Disability Rights Movement in Japan: Past, Present and Future". The article sheds light on the history of the disability rights movement in Japan, which is responsible for notable changes in its social norms and even policies. The movement has pushed for more independence towards the disability community, which in the past had been left behind the doors of their homes. The many developments the movement has pushed for opens up many doors and challenges ahead. Another example is the research titled "Disability policies in Japan and Sweden: A comparative perspective" which was done by Rafael Lindqvist and Kamal Lamichhane (2019). This more recent research provides us with a disability policy comparison between Japan and Sweden. The disparity between the two can be seen in their characteristics. Japan's disability policy is characterised by the medical model, whereas Sweden is characterised by the social relational model. However, the two still converge over the goal to support the individuals' capacity to join the workforce.

Against that backdrop, the research article seeks to bring forward yet another new look into the issue. The article does so later down the road through the focus on the security dimension of Japan's treatment towards its disabled population. Specifically, the focus towards the fulfilment of human security as well as its means of execution are also deliberated upon. The former is being put to use as not only it is a rather nascent idea in the field, but it also fits the focus on the research, the disabled population, as well. Following the two, a proper understanding of Japan's background or history on the matter as well as the positive implication brought around by the move are also present in the research article.

## **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

The article employs the qualitative research method that utilises secondary data. The qualitative research method can be understood as a research method that begins with the formulation of the research questions that would be answered through qualitative interpretation of the then gathered data which would later be concluded in the end. The data used to buttress the findings of the article are gathered from numerous sources like past research, media coverage and government publications. The method is chosen to accommodate the researchers in interpreting the findings as it would later be reinforced with

relevant concepts or theories. The concepts that are incorporated in the research are the ones related to security analysis like the securitization theory along with human security. Through the aforementioned sources, the article dives into four areas of discussions as follows: Japan's background in regard to the disability community, the securitization towards their treatment, the present government support as well as its positive implication.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Another glance back at the past

When we talk about the history of physically disabled people in Japan, it all started a long time ago. The history of disabled persons in Japan can be found in *Kojiki*, the oldest history book that was written around 712 A.D. There was a certain social status for them that obviously made them get a lot of discrimination or prejudice based on their disability. That social status kept around until 1945 when The Empire of Japan surrendered in World War II. At that time, allied forces abolished all of the laws and regulations based on discrimination and prejudices. Later in 1949, laws for the welfare of physically disabled people were enacted in Japan (Kodama, 1997).

Then there is also a law that benefits physically and mentally disabled persons. The law pushes companies and organisations within the government to employ people with that kind of disability. There is also a law that passed in 2016 that bans discrimination against people with disabilities. The law made organisations and companies to provide anything to support people with disabilities such as braille documents (Miller, 2019).

Other than laws, there are also facilities that support people with disabilities in Japan. In pedestrians there is always a tactile paving that is installed to help impaired vision persons walk. Then, there is also a support button in the pedestrian traffic light for disabled persons. There are even slopes and elevators installed in public places to support people who use wheelchairs. Other than that, there is braille installed to support impaired vision persons in public places and buildings.

Even though the laws for welfare of physically disabled persons were enacted or there are many facilities that support physically disabled persons, there is still stigma or even worse discrimination towards disabled persons. For example, there is a story from Mizuki Hsu who often got a gaze at public and there is even a time when people tell her how pitiful she is. Another example is an incident that occurred in Sagamihara. In 2016, 19 residents at a care home for disabled people were stabbed to death by Satoshi Uematsu. It seems like there is still a stigma for disabled people in Japan (Rose, 2021).

Then there was the mass sterilisation to around 25.000 people with disabilities. The disabilities include intellectual disabilities and mental disabilities. Among that number around 16.000 people were operated without their consent. The action was authorised by using the eugenics protection law between 1948 and 1996. Even though it took a long time, from this action Japan's parliament paid compensation to each person who endured forced sterilisation in 2019 (Kyodo News, 2022).

There are many ups and downs about the problem of people with disabilities in Japan. From a time when they still had prejudice and discrimination, until nowadays that disabled persons were supported by the government. That sums up that Japan keeps improving on making the life of disabled persons more comfortable and indirectly tries to eradicate discrimination towards disabled persons.

**B. Onward! The securitization of the issue**

The securitization towards the disability community, as apparent in the policies, are a product of rational choice formulation. To better understand the driving force behind Japan's move, we may refer to the rational choice model (Ramadani and Trisni, 2019). The model can be used to understand why an actor resorts to certain means as apparent in its moves. The model is composed of 4 stages which are the problem recognition, goals selection, option identification and the forthcoming choice.

Starting off, we may refer to the first one. In this stage, the threat or issue the Japanese government faces in relation to the disability community can be pointed to the treatment they receive. That particular issue can be broken into some like employment and presence of support or accommodation. The two issues, apart from their different nature, still fall under the umbrella of human security.

Following the identification, the Japanese government could then decide what it wishes to do in response to it. In the goals selection stage, upon in-depth consideration of the problem, the government would then decide what it seeks to gain in its responses. For the case of the disability community, the government seeks to empower them so as they could eventually have a level playing field within the society. In pursuing that particular goal, it is no surprise that the government would need a lot of resources. Against such need, we can then refer to the third stage of the model that is the options identification. In this stage, the government would choose whether or not it would pursue its goals as well as the suitable channels to materialise them. Japan has made notable changes in its stance towards disability. Something that not only resonates within the government, but also in the society (Rose, 2021). For the government to pursue such ideals, it must take into account the related developments of the disability community. Japan has witnessed a lot of changes, from both the community itself and the society as a whole, in regard to the disability community. Diving into the bigger picture of the society, there has been growing attention given to a more human/individual-centric understanding of security (human security) and inclusivity. Civil society, aside from spearheading the focus, also brought into attention marginalised groups within Japanese society that should also receive the support and accessibility to be more active. In the past, Japan has already passed laws and bills to provide more support for the disability community, albeit to a different degree compared to the contemporary dynamics (Bateman, 2021). Therefore, it is not surprising that the government would take into consideration the importance of such ideals.

Ideals alone may attract doubt over its capacity to influence the state or the government's forthcoming move. To support its influence, we may refer to other external factors that are also in line with it. Another important thing to consider is Japan's responsibility to host the 2020 Paralympics (Brown, 2021). To support this big event, it is urgent for the government to highlight the support towards the disability community. In this matter, the government would not only have to take into account its share of the population, but also the international ones that would be attending the event. Given the huge international spotlight as apparent in the many media spotlight and foreign participation, it is undeniably an opportunity for the government to engage in public diplomacy. Despite being somewhat isolated in the context of the 2020 Paralympics, it is still related to the bigger picture of the treatment towards the disability community (Kyodo, 2017).

In the end, the government made the choice to push forward the necessary means to attain its aforementioned goals. Measures like passing of supportive bills and all the way to its on-field execution are all the product of securitization which obtained it greenlight following the stages in the rational choice model. The securitization of issues, in this case the

treatment and support for both the disability community and events like the 2020 Paralympics, were done in order to procure the necessary resources. Such action needs to be done considering that the public, which the government is responsible for, has a big say in the policies or moves the government is pursuing. Should any of the initiatives that the government is pursuing is not supported by the masses, it would certainly invite huge backlash. To have its policies supported and granted the necessary resources, securitization would be something the government does. This speech act would be done to highlight the importance of certain issues or policy and convince the people that it is important to pass.

The securitization of supportive measures towards the disabled population can be explained in the concept's scheme. Securitization consists of some aspects that are the securitizing actor (the actor who is doing the securitization which in this case is the government), the referent object (the object that will be protected), the threat (the issue that would be responded by the securitizing actor). In practice, the flow of the event can be understood in the government's effort, as the securitizing actor, to securitize the threat or issue it perceives, that being the need to provide support or empowerment measures to the disability community, to the public. The ground on which the government may highlight the issue can either be in the name of the fulfilment of human security or any other name it sees fit. The referent object that the public would take note of is a segment of itself, that being the disability community.

Once the initiatives pass, the government would then bring into fruition its many goals. They could do so from means like the attempts to increase the accessibility of public facilities all the way to the provision of legal instruments to support the referent object. Eventually, the government was able to pass the many relevant measures to attain its ends. And from here on, the Japanese government would find itself working with all sorts of actors, from its prefectural counterparts to civil society institutions.

### **C. The instrument of empowerment**

It is clear that the Japanese government has plenty of tasks to do in providing both tangible and intangible support for the disability community. There are numerous areas in which the government provides its support, from the issue of employment to access support in public facilities.

According to Japan's Disabled Persons' Fundamental Law Ch.1 Art.3, the dignity of all disabled persons shall be respected and they shall have the right to be treated in such an equal manner. Hence, The Japanese government has taken strides to increase its disabled populations' welfare, such as through employment policies. In short, employment policy plays a crucial role because it allows them to have common jobs enabling them to participate in society.

Labour policies to support disabilities have been implemented in Japan since 1960, in the form of the Act on Employment Promotion etc. of Persons with Disabilities. Since then, hiring individuals with disabilities with a certain quota is mandatory for companies (Japan Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2012). Fines and severe sanctions will be given to employers who do not meet the quota for disabled workers and other conditions. These fines are then used to provide rewards for employers who meet the requirements. This policy has been amended several times until become Law for Employment Promotion of Persons with Disabilities in 2019 which includes workers with intellectual and mental disabilities and requires employers to accommodate all disability needs. In this amendment, direct discrimination has been prohibited, although indirect discrimination is still not directly prohibited in this policy.

As impressive as it is, the quota-centred approach also has its share of flaws. This can be pointed to how the policy, despite giving more options to the community, actually limits the job options. In most of the recruiting schemes, the company (both private and public enterprise) would ask the disabled candidate to give them their disability ID (shogaisha techo). This means of identification is compulsory to give in the interviews and later on, this would lead the company to identify the candidate not based on their skills or other capacities, but rather on their identity as a person with disability. The identification leads them to obtain jobs, but it's one that is designated for people with disabilities that does not require a high degree of expertise. While it is true that such traits can be helpful in giving opportunities to many in the community, it roughly does so with the price of others. What is meant by that is how there are also many people with disabilities that are trying to compete in jobs that people without disabilities have access to. The intangible result of it is how this policy traps the community with another stigma, as in now they can only work on certain fields as apparent in many enterprises. Moreover, companies would at times not follow the policy. They would refrain from recruiting people with disabilities due to them not being able to make the adjustments to support them (HRM Asia, 2018).

This phenomenon, despite being plenty on the field, is also changing as a result of changing views towards disability. Numerous companies have made it their norm to not highlight a candidate's disability over their skills. Shifting our attention back to the government, they have also made the adjustments so as the policy would receive better results. One of the ways the government does so is through going with the carrot and stick approach. Through their policy, the government could hand out levies/fees to companies that don't comply with the policy and as for those who do, they would be given bonuses instead. Due to the vast social landscape of the issue, it is important to enforce the normalisation for people with disabilities' public participation, including in the professional/workplace area.

In the field of education, Japan has also established many special schools for blind, deaf, and other disabled students. This started with the renewal of the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law in 1947. This policy was later revised in 2007 which merged schools for blind, deaf and disabled students into special needs schools. This school aims to provide education that is in line with kindergarten, elementary, middle school and to develop the abilities and skills of students with disabilities to be independent and intelligent.

Apart from the areas of education and employment, the general issue of accessibility is also highlighted and taken into account. People with disabilities are no stranger to issues regarding access to either public or private facilities. It is one of the contributing factors to their confinement in the past. Many supports were made in the forms of numerous adjustments or addition of facilities in public areas. Two examples of that are the Barrier-Free Buildings Act and the Barrier-Free Transportation Act back in 2006 (Jica Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development, 2019). However, as time goes by, the Japanese government renews the idea by instead pursuing universal design to their public facilities as opposed to barrier-free. The former aims to increase the ease of access and design for people of all groups in contrast to the latter which does so only towards people with disability. Through waves of adjustments, Japan seeks to push for universal design to improve the accessibility of the facilities (Accesible Travel Japan, 2015). Such measures would greatly support the country, especially in big events like the 2020 Paralympics where many public facilities (either buildings or public transportation) are accessible for all people, including those with disabilities.

The Japanese government has made the needed policies to normalise the disability community's participation in all fields. To top it all off, the government has also taken a holistic approach at the society level to eliminate societal hindrances to people with disabilities. A good example of it is the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Japanese Law Translation, 2013). Now, all there's left to fight is the remaining unsupportive view towards them within the society. To deal with such a grassroots issue, no one fit all solution is present. However, as time flies and the normalisation is kicked into motion, one can remain optimistic for the forthcoming developments.

#### **D. The merits of all efforts**

Employment rate for disabled persons in Japan was 40.3% in 2006 (Kudo, 2010). It's significantly higher than the US rates in 2019 which is only 19.3% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Other than that, the legal employment rate in Japan is 2.2%, while the actual rate is 2.11% in 2019. It can be concluded that the gap between the actual employment rate is nearly approaching the legal rate. It also means that Japan quota employment and discrimination prohibition for disabled people is effective in increasing the disabled person employment rate. Meanwhile in US 2019, the employment rate of disabled persons is 19.3% while non-disabled person's employment rate is 66.3%. It shows that the employment rate of people with disabilities was extremely lower than the non-disabled one. Japan's significant contribution of disabled person to labour sector surely will increase productivity, hence GDP (Gross Domestic Product) will increase as well (Seino, 2022)

On the other hand, the existence of special schools for disabled students also has increased the number of graduated disabled students from year to year, from 11,223 persons in March 2000 to 14,284 persons in March 2007. This increase implies that more disabled students can obtain education, as time goes by. Hence, more disabled people will have higher competencies and skills to be able to compete with non-disabled people in the labour market.

There's the biggest event that involves a disabled person in Japan, namely the Summer Paralympic Games. This is an international sports event held every four years devoted to athletes with physical disabilities to show their skills (International Paralympics Committee, n.d.). These physical disabilities include mobility disabilities, amputations, blindness, and cerebral palsy. In 2020, Japan had the opportunity to host the 2020 Summer Paralympic Games.

At this event, Japan is extremely focused on implementing sustainable facilities in order to achieve the SDGs (paralympics.org, 2020).. Japan used the existing venues rather than constructing the new one to minimise the expenses, resources, and energy used. The existing venues are also equipped with energy-friendly technologies, such as the use of solar panels to generate electricity. In addition, the properties used are also designed with recycled materials, such as jerseys worn by skateboard athletes made from 100 percent recycled polyester, sleeping mattresses for athletes designed with recycled cardboard, and even award medals made from electronic waste. The committee even prefers to rent properties, such as computers, tables and tablets, rather than buying them.

The event shows that besides providing competitions for disabled athletes, Japan also practises a unique way to realise sustainable development (International Olympic Committee, 2021). What Japan has done will certainly save costs that must be spent on realising this event, so that the budget can be allocated to infrastructure, programs or other government projects that will support development.



## CONCLUSION

All things considered, it can be perceived how Japan has made the stride towards empowerment for the disability community. Such a change is a welcoming one in an international system where the human-centric understanding of security has been taking the spotlight. Not only that, the move also shows how far Japan has moved from its rather dark past of poor treatment against the community. As for the underlying reason behind the change, it can be attributed to the Japanese government's rationality to attain the benefits of an inclusive society where people of all backgrounds can contribute to the state. The many channels it did so can be seen in the securitization scheme along with its later materialisation. For the latter, the Japanese government's empowerment instruments are present in the forms of supporting bills/laws, infrastructure adjustments, as well as relevant social support in the forms of institutions and such. As for the fruits that the government reaps, they are present in the good changes made following the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics as well as empowering the disability community. But apart from the aforementioned impacts, the Japanese government also got a good opportunity for public diplomacy where they can show the world how not only they have started moving away from their past and onto better treatments toward their disability community. All in all, there remains a lot to be seen as to whether Japan would maintain its momentum and remain committed to the cause.

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