

A Diachronic Study of Cultural Metaphors in Paralympic Theme Posters from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (1964-2024)

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Abstract

Originating from the rehabilitation needs of wounded soldiers after World War II, the Paralympic Games have evolved into a significant cultural event that transcends the realm of sports, promoting social inclusion and also challenging prejudices. However, public attention and awareness towards the Paralympics remain far lower than those of the Olympic Games. To address this issue, this study adopts "Multimodal Discourse Analysis" as its core theoretical framework, drawing on Zhang Delu's comprehensive analytical model which encompasses four dimensions: culture, context, content, and expression. Employing a diachronic research approach, this study analyzes how official Paralympic posters from successive editions construct and convey cultural values regarding the image of people with disabilities, the spirit of sports, and inclusive culture. By examining typical poster cases from different stages, the study reveals the cognitive transformation of disability perspectives—from the "medical correction" model to the "sports elite" model, further evolving into the "subject of rights" model and eventually the "diversified coexistence" model. It explores how Paralympic posters, as carriers of social discourse, reflect and promote the historical changes in the social status and cultural identity of people with disabilities, thereby providing a new perspective for the research on sports culture communication and disability-related issues.

Keywords

Paralympic Games; Diachronic Study; Multimodal Discourse Analysis; Disability Perspective.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Significance

As a top-tier global sports event for athletes with disabilities, the birth and development of the Paralympic Games are deeply rooted in the war trauma brought about in the mid-20th century after World War II. The emergence and evolution of this event have always been closely intertwined with the development of medical rehabilitation concepts and the global disability rights movement. Today, the significance of the Paralympic Games has long transcended the scope of competitive sports—it has become a global social and cultural practice that advocates social inclusion, challenges inherent prejudices, and demonstrates the extraordinary resilience of the human spirit. Nevertheless, compared with the Olympic Games, the Paralympics still suffer from a significant gap in public attention, and the general public's perception of athletes with disabilities remains narrow and one-sided. This cognitive deficiency hinders the consolidation and improvement of the social status of people with disabilities.

"The Paralympic Games can change people's attitudes towards people with disabilities, and we will strive to achieve a more inclusive world through this platform—that is the unique

significance of the Paralympics," stated Craig Spence, Spokesperson and Chief Brand & Communications Officer of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), in an exclusive interview with the Beijing News' *Global Connection*.

Official posters of successive Paralympic Games are designed and produced by various designers across different regions. The various symbols presented in these posters serve as a form of strategic visual discourse, and the cultural values they convey are not stated explicitly but implicitly expressed through rhetorical devices such as metaphor and symbolism, thus possessing strong persuasiveness and appeal. From the perspective of theme posters, this research not only holds analytical value in the field of social semiotics but also bears profound practical and global significance in promoting inclusive development, shaping global civic awareness, and reconstructing the discourse power on disability issues.

Furthermore, diachronic research plays a crucial role in this study. Firstly, diachronic research can reveal the evolutionary trajectory of ideologies and social concepts. A synchronic analysis of posters from a single session can only capture the representational characteristics at a specific point in time, similar to a static photo. In contrast, a diachronic analysis that juxtaposes posters spanning over 60 years is like watching a fast-forward documentary, allowing us to clearly observe how dominant metaphors have evolved. Secondly, it enables predicting future trends and providing in-depth guidance for practice. Only through diachronic combing can the evolutionary laws of Paralympic visual communication be summarized.

Diachronic research serves as a bridge between "textual analysis" and "social interpretation". It transforms the multimodal analysis of posters from an isolated and static aesthetic interpretation into a dynamic window through which we can observe how social concepts are shaped, challenged, and transformed.

Therefore, this study adopts a diachronic approach, regarding theme posters as a complex discourse system integrating multiple semiotic modes such as images, texts, colors, and layouts. It explores how these posters construct and convey cultural values related to people with disabilities, the spirit of sports, social inclusion, and national image through metaphorical mechanisms, with the aim of enhancing public attention and social status of athletes with disabilities.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Domestic Research Status

Although Chinese academic research on the multimodal study of Paralympic visual symbols started relatively late, it has already formed a relatively systematic theoretical framework and practical applications. Early domestic studies mainly focused on the application and expansion of Visual Grammar Theory, with particular attention to the metaphorical representation mechanism of local cultural elements. Since the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, with the concentrated hosting of international sports events in China, relevant research has shown a rapid growth trend.

In terms of theoretical application, Tian Lu and Liu Zequan pioneered the application of Visual Grammar Theory to analyze the multimodal discourse characteristics of the Shanghai World Expo emblem, laying a methodological foundation for the analysis of visual symbols in sports events[1]. Among the studies on specific visual symbols of the Paralympics, Jin Wenjing and Zhang Hongxia conducted a detailed Visual Grammar analysis of "Feiyue" (Leap), the emblem of the 2022 Beijing Winter Paralympics[2]. They pointed out that the design ingeniously combines the Chinese character "Fei" (fly) with the image of an athlete with a disability, and constructs a strong visual modality through four high-saturation colors: red, blue, green, and yellow. The study found that these colors not only correspond to the official colors of the IPC logo but also integrate Chinese cultural symbols—red symbolizes the national flag and vitality of life, yellow represents the Chinese nation (descendants of Yan and Huang), blue implies

breadth and purity, and green embodies the concept of "Green Olympics", forming a multi-level cultural metaphor system.

From a comparative perspective of emblems of successive Winter Paralympics, Qin Xin systematically analyzed the collaborative mechanism of multimodal resources in constructing "representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning"[3]. The study pointed out that domestic Paralympic poster designs tend to utilize traditional cultural elements such as calligraphy and paper-cutting techniques, and demonstrate sports postures through "vectors" formed by diagonal compositions, integrating "athletes" and "sports equipment" into a vital whole. This design strategy not only conveys the sports spirit but also implies the traditional philosophical thought of "harmony between man and nature", reflecting the conscious construction of local cultural identity.

1.2.2. International Research Status

The international academic community not only focuses on the meaning construction of visual symbols but also attaches great importance to their role in reconstructing social cognition, identity politics, and disability discourse.

In terms of theoretical frameworks, the Visual Grammar Theory proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen remains the dominant analytical paradigm[4]. Meanwhile, the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis proposed by Machin and Mayr goes beyond merely describing how symbols convey meaning; instead, it raises critical questions such as "why meaning is conveyed in this way", "whose interests are served", and "what kind of social reality is constructed", thus demonstrating a stronger sense of social criticism[5].

In addition, an interview study conducted by Pearson and Misener on Canadian Paralympic athletes found that the media often portrays people with disabilities as either "superheroes" or "tragic figures"[6]. Although this narrative framework seems positive, it is actually a new form of "symbolic violence". It ignores the complexity and everydayness of the disability experience and essentially evades the issue of structural inequality.

Furthermore, although Carla Filomena Silva and David Howe's article *The (In)validity of Supercrip Representation of Paralympian Athletes* does not specifically focus on posters, it conducts an in-depth critique of the stereotype in the media that portrays Paralympic athletes as "superheroes"[7]. The authors argue that such a narrative, despite its seemingly positive nature, is actually harmful because it sets unrealistic expectations and ignores the reality of daily life. This provides a critical perspective that must be considered when analyzing poster metaphors.

2. Theoretical Foundation

The concept of Multimodal Discourse Analysis was first proposed by M.A.K. Halliday, the founder of Systemic Functional Linguistics. As a comprehensive research method, it aims to explore how meaning is jointly constructed through multiple semiotic systems, transcending the limitations of traditional linguistics. Zhang Zuocheng and Liu Jianxin noted that Multimodal Discourse Analysis is a method for studying how humans construct meaning through multiple semiotic systems such as language, images, sounds, and actions in the process of communication[8]. Based on this theory, Zhang Delu integrated cutting-edge achievements in multimodal discourse research and proposed a comprehensive analytical framework, which further summarizes the core analytical dimensions of multimodal discourse into four basic levels: culture, context, content, and expression[9].

This study will analyze the Paralympic posters of successive editions from these four dimensions. As a typical multimodal visual text, Paralympic theme posters rely on the collaborative interaction of various semiotic resources—such as images (athlete images,

assistive devices, landmark buildings), texts (event name, slogan, time), colors (application of warm and cool tones), and layouts (arrangement and combination of elements)—to jointly construct cultural metaphors specific to their era.

3. Diachronic Case Analysis

3.1. Medical Rehabilitation Narrative Stage (1964-1980): Metaphorical Construction of "Defect-Treatment"

3.1.1. Stage Background and Characteristics of Disability Perspective

The 1964 Tokyo Paralympics marked the first officially named Paralympic Games. During this stage, the Paralympics had not yet completely broken away from the rehabilitation and convalescence attribute of the "Stoke Mandeville Games". The socially dominant perspective on disability was the medical model, which regarded "disability as a personal physical defect requiring treatment". The core function of the Paralympics was positioned as a "platform for demonstrating rehabilitation achievements" rather than a purely competitive sports event. Against this backdrop, the core goal of Paralympic theme posters was to convey rehabilitation information and promote humanitarian care, forming a cultural metaphor system centered on "defect-treatment".

3.1.2. Metaphorical Interpretation of Multimodal Symbols

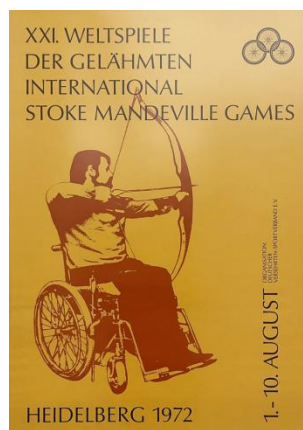
At the cultural level, the dominant cultural metaphor of the posters revolved around "medical rehabilitation". The official poster of the 1964 Tokyo Paralympics (Figure 1) is a typical representative of this stage. With a light blue background, the poster displays the Olympic event, venue, and time in English at the top, and the Japanese translation of the event name "International Sports Games for the Physically Disabled" along with the holding time and venue at the bottom. In the center, a wheelchair and a disabled athlete sitting in it serve as the main image, reflecting the cognition that "disability equals a physical defect requiring assistive devices". This equates people with disabilities with users of medical equipment, reinforcing the metaphorical connotation of "defect".



(Figure 1) Official Poster of the 1964 Tokyo Paralympics

At the contextual level, the scope of discourse focused on "reporting rehabilitation achievements" and "humanitarian care", while the discourse tone presented an "unequal helping relationship". The poster of the 1972 Heidelberg Paralympics (Figure 2) adopted a layout of "text-dominated + simple graphics". At the top, bold fonts prominently display "XXI International Stoke Mandeville Games", and at the bottom, there is a silhouette of an athlete sitting in a wheelchair with a gentle posture and no obvious competitive dynamics, more like a symbol of a "rehabilitated person". The poster uses yellow as its main color, with a plain tone similar to the visual style of medical brochures, conveying a tone of "care and protection" rather than the passion and vitality of a competitive event. This design style constructs an

interpersonal metaphor of "able-bodied organizers and helped disabled people", highlighting the inequality between the two parties.



(Figure 2) Official Poster of the 1972 Heidelberg Paralympics

At the content level, the construction of conceptual meaning relies on the direct presentation of medical-related symbols. The poster of the 1980 Arnhem Paralympics (Figure 3) takes "Olympics for the Disabled" as its core textual information and uses red, white, and blue as its main colors—these colors not only echo the symbolic colors of the Dutch national flag but also convey the solemnity and inclusiveness of the event through a bright and powerful color combination. The three white wheels at the visual center of the poster are not a simple reproduction of the functional components of a wheelchair; instead, they transform the assistive tool in the medical rehabilitation context into a core visual symbol: the circular shape of the wheels implies the metaphor of "circulation and continuous progress", which not only refers to the unrelenting perseverance of athletes with disabilities on their journey of rehabilitation and competition but also symbolizes their continuous pursuit of sports rights. The interlocking structure of the three wheels further elevates the individual "physical assistive" symbol to a collective "spiritual connection" symbol, highlighting the mutual assistance and unity among people with disabilities in the face of common difficulties, and also implying the core value of the event as a link to unite disabled athletes worldwide.



"Arnhem 1980"

(Figure 3) Official Poster of the 1980 Arnhem Paralympics

At the expression level, the posters mostly adopted documentary photography or simple graphics, with single colors and regular layouts. The poster of the 1968 Tel Aviv Paralympics (Figure 4) only uses "IS.M.G. 1968 Tel Aviv 1968" as its core text, without any athlete images or dynamic elements, conveying information in a direct and concise manner, similar to an official notice. The metaphorical connotation of this design style is that "accurate transmission of rehabilitation information takes priority over emotional expression", which further strengthens the medical publicity attribute of the poster.



(Figure 4) Official Poster of the 1968 Tel Aviv Paralympics

3.1.3. Stage Summary: Limitations and Historical Value of Metaphors

During this stage, Paralympic posters constructed a cultural metaphor system of "defect-treatment" through multimodal symbols such as wheelchairs, plain tones, and passive athlete images, accurately reflecting the core connotation of the medical model of disability perspective. Although the visual expression of the posters was relatively simplistic and reinforced the "disadvantaged status" of people with disabilities, in the specific historical context, the humanitarian care and rehabilitation concepts they conveyed laid the foundation for the development of the Paralympics and opened the initial window for society's understanding of people with disabilities.

3.2. Sports Competition Transition Stage (1984-2000): Metaphorical Reconstruction of "Competition-Glory"

3.2.1. Stage Background and Characteristics of Disability Perspective

The 1984 New York Paralympics marked a crucial turning point in the development of the Paralympic Games. For the first time, the Summer and Winter Paralympics were held separately, and the number of participating countries and athletes increased significantly, officially highlighting the "sports competition attribute" of the Paralympics. During this stage, the perspective on disability began to shift from the medical model to the sports model, and society gradually recognized the identity of disabled athletes as "sports elites". The core function of the Paralympics transformed from "rehabilitation demonstration" to "competitive strength competition". Consequently, the cultural metaphors of the posters were reconstructed, forming a core metaphor system of "competition-glory".

3.2.2. Metaphorical Interpretation of Multimodal Symbols

At the cultural level, "sports elite" became the core cultural metaphor of the posters. The poster of the 1984 New York Paralympics (Figure 5) completely broke away from the previous plain style and adopted a strong contrasting color scheme of red and blue. The torch in the center of the poster, an image inherited from the ancient Greek Olympic tradition, was endowed with symbolic meaning beyond competition itself: the "burning" form of the flame uses passionate and dynamic visual language to metaphorize the spiritual core of disabled athletes "breaking physical limitations and releasing life energy", shifting the physical narrative of "needing correction" in the medical context to a life narrative of "possessing unlimited potential". This is culturally isomorphic with the emerging "social model of disability" in Western society at that time—which no longer regards disability as an individual defect but emphasizes the shaping of the disability experience by the social environment. The "lighting" process of the torch is precisely a cultural declaration for people with disabilities to "break social exclusion and gain equal participation rights".



"New York 1984"

(Figure 5) Official Poster of the 1984 New York Paralympics

At the contextual level, the scope of discourse focused on "elite sports competitions", and the discourse tone shifted to "admiration and inspiration". The poster of the 1992 Barcelona Paralympics (Figure 6) is a typical representative of this stage. With an orange background, the poster displays the event name "IX Paralympic Games" in four languages at the top, and at the bottom is a dynamic image of a visually impaired athlete running accompanied by a guide. The athlete's body is stretched out, and the posture is full of strength. The cooperation between the guide and the athlete metaphorizes "collaboration and support in competition" rather than "helping and being helped". The bright and vibrant colors of the poster completely broke away from the rigid impression of medical brochures, constructing an equal interpersonal metaphor of "sports stars and audiences".



(Figure 6) Official Poster of the 1992 Barcelona Paralympics

At the content level, the construction of conceptual meaning relies on the presentation of competitive scenes and sports symbols. The poster of the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics (Figure 7) takes "1996 ATLANTA PARALYMPIC GAMES" as its core text and uses blue as its main background. The visual subject of the poster consists of 19 silhouettes of athletes in motion. These silhouettes are not simple reproductions of individual sports events but accurately capture the core dynamics of athletes in different competitive scenarios—such as striding to start, swinging a racket to hit the ball, and leaping forward—through highly concise line language. The stretched posture and sense of strength of the body are amplified, completely breaking the rigid cognition that "disability equals limited mobility". This not only directly affirms the competitive ability of disabled athletes but also pays tribute to their sports spirit of "surpassing oneself and pursuing excellence".



(Figure 7) Official Poster of the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics

At the expression level, the design style of the posters began to align with that of mainstream sports events. The poster of the 1998 Nagano Winter Paralympics (Figure 8) adopted dynamic photography technology to capture the sprint moment of a skier. The snow-capped mountains in the background and the athlete's red clothing form a strong contrast, enhancing the visual impact. The textual symbol "Power of Inspiration directly" conveys the emotional metaphor that "the competitive spirit of athletes is inspiring", further strengthening the core cognition of "sports elite".



(Figure 8) Official Poster of the 1998 Nagano Winter Paralympics

3.2.3. Stage Summary: Transformational Significance of Metaphors

During this stage, through multimodal symbols such as dynamic athlete images, bright colors, and low-angle perspectives, Paralympic posters completed the metaphorical transition from "defect-treatment" to "competition-glory". This transition not only reflected the functional transformation of the Paralympics from a "rehabilitation platform" to a "sports event" but also promoted the progress of social perspectives on disability—people with disabilities were no longer merely "patients in need of treatment" but "sports elites pursuing glory", laying a cognitive foundation for the subsequent stage of social rights advocacy.

3.3. Social Rights Advocacy Stage (2004-2016): Metaphorical Deepening of "Barrier-Breaking"

3.3.1. Stage Background and Characteristics of Disability Perspective

The 2004 Athens Paralympics marked the entry of the Paralympic Games into a new stage of "social rights advocacy". By this time, the socially dominant perspective on disability had shifted to the social model, which holds that "disability is the result of social barriers rather than individual defects". The IPC put forward the concept that "Paralympic sports are a force

for promoting social change". The core goal of Paralympic posters shifted from "demonstrating competitive strength" to "advocating social equality", forming a cultural metaphor system of "barrier-breaking" and becoming a visual declaration for promoting social rights transformation.

3.3.2. Metaphorical Interpretation of Multimodal Symbols

At the cultural level, the core metaphor of the posters centered on "breaking social barriers". The 2008 Beijing Paralympics poster *One World, One Dream* (Figure 9) is a classic case of this stage. With Chinese red as the background, the center of the poster features the outline of the "Bird's Nest" stadium composed of multiple colored lines, which are intertwined and arranged in a disorderly yet orderly manner, metaphorizing the "integrated coexistence of different groups". The slogan "One World, One Dream" directly conveys the value concept that "people with disabilities and able-bodied people enjoy equal rights", breaking the metaphorical cognition that "people with disabilities are a marginalized group".



(Figure 9) 2008 Beijing Paralympics Poster "One World, One Dream"

At the contextual level, the scope of discourse extended to "social movements and rights advocacy", and the discourse tone presented "criticality and appeal". The 2012 London Paralympics poster (Figure 10), created by artist Sarah Morris, takes London's landmark Big Ben as the background and uses abstract geometric figures to reconstruct the building. The colors are mainly black, white, and red, creating a strong contrast. This abstract treatment metaphorizes the "deconstruction of traditional concepts of disability", while the fragmentation and reorganization of geometric figures symbolize the "breaking of social barriers and the establishment of a new order". The textual part of the poster only marks "London 2012 Paralympic Games", which is concise and powerful, conveying an appealing tone that "the rights of people with disabilities should be taken seriously without excessive explanation".



(Figure 10) 2012 London Paralympics Poster by Sarah Morris

At the content level, the construction of conceptual meaning relies on the use of symbolic symbols. The 2016 Rio Paralympics poster (Figure 11) takes an abstract image of intertwined red and yellow colors at the center of the picture as its core visual symbol. This image is not a random color combination but a visual integration of multiple core concepts: red adopts the warm tone of Rio de Janeiro's tropical climate, echoing the cultural genes of Brazil's Carnival, and conveys vitality and passion through intense color tension; yellow corresponds to the "golden color" in the Brazilian national flag, symbolizing both the sunshine of the Amazon rainforest and the value connotation of "hope, inclusion, and preciousness". The two colors do not form distinct boundaries but appear in a flowing, intertwined, and integrated form. The twisting and overlapping of lines break the regular geometric composition, forming a dynamic visual rhythm, which is not only like the body trajectory of athletes stretching in competition but also resembles the link connecting different individuals. This visual expression materializes the concepts of "difference" and "symbiosis". The combination of colors and forms no longer deliberately emphasizes the particularity of people with disabilities but highlights the commonality of human beings through abstract expression—namely, the love for sports, the dedication to life, and the human nature of seeking resonance amid differences.



(Figure 11) 2016 Rio Paralympics Poster

At the expression level, the design style of the posters became more artistic and conceptual. The poster of the 2006 Turin Winter Paralympics (Figure 12) adopted a surreal composition. In the center of the picture is a silhouette of a skier, with abstract snow-capped mountains and sky in the background. This athlete has limitations, but still needs to explore them) directly challenges the traditional concept that "disability equals incompetence, metaphorizing that social barriers rather than individual defects are the core cause of disability. The poster uses strong color contrasts—the black athlete silhouette stands out sharply against the white background, enhancing the emotional tension of "breaking barriers".



(Figure 12) 2006 Turin Winter Paralympics Poster

3.3.3. Stage Summary: Social Value of Metaphors

During this stage, Paralympic posters constructed a cultural metaphor system of "barrier-breaking" through multimodal symbols such as puzzles, geometric figures, and abstract compositions, elevating the significance of the Paralympics from sports competition to the level of social movement. Posters were no longer merely tools for event promotion but became visual carriers for advocating equal rights and promoting social change. The concept of "breaking barriers and integrated coexistence" they conveyed promoted the transformation of social perspectives on disability from the "sports model" to the "social model", providing strong cultural support for people with disabilities to strive for equal rights.

3.4. Diversified Integration and Coexistence Stage (2017-2024): Metaphorical Sublimation of "Diversity-Coexistence"

3.4.1. Stage Background and Characteristics of Disability Perspective

Since 2017, the Paralympic Games have entered a new stage of "diversified integration and coexistence". The socially dominant perspective on disability has shifted to the diversified model, which "integrates individual needs and social improvement, and advocates diversity and inclusion". The IPC put forward the concept that "Paralympic sports promote the common development of humanity", and the Paralympics have become a platform for "showcasing the diverse values of humanity". Against this backdrop, Paralympic theme posters take "diversified cultural integration and collective coexistence and prosperity" as their core goals, forming a cultural metaphor system of diversity-coexistence and realizing the sublimation of metaphorical connotations.

3.4.2. Metaphorical Interpretation of Multimodal Symbols

At the cultural level, the 2022 Beijing Winter Paralympics poster (Figure 13) takes the Great Wall in snow as its core background image, achieving the triple integration of "local cultural genes", "core Olympic spirit", and "contemporary disability perspective" at the cultural level. Its image construction is deeply rooted in the spiritual soil of traditional Chinese culture while accurately echoing the contemporary context of global inclusive development, serving as a visual carrier of Chinese attitudes and common human values in cross-cultural communication. As a core totem of Chinese civilization, the snow-covered Great Wall in the poster is not a mere reproduction of a geographical landscape but a creative transformation of traditional cultural connotations. The "endless stretch" of the Great Wall symbolizes the continuity and inclusiveness of Chinese civilization, while the white snow covering it endows this ancient symbol with contemporary implications of "purity, peace, and new life". The "covering nature" of snow dissolves the rigid boundaries of the Great Wall's bricks and stones, using gentle visual language to metaphorize society's acceptance and inclusion of diverse groups, echoing the traditional Chinese values of "harmony in diversity" and "one world". Meanwhile, the Great Wall, as a traditional symbol of "defense and protection", is endowed with new cultural connotations in the context of the Winter Paralympics: it is no longer a boundary between regions or ethnic groups but a spiritual symbol of "protecting every life's dream", reflecting China's care and respect for people with disabilities and also conforming to the core appeal of the Winter Paralympics of "protecting equal participation rights". In addition, the combination of snow scenery and the Great Wall accurately aligns with the "winter" attribute of the Beijing Winter Paralympics and the "hosted by China" local identity, deeply integrating natural landscape, cultural symbols, and event context, enabling the poster to possess both "recognizability" and "sense of belonging" in cultural expression, and allowing global audiences to perceive China's emphasis on the Paralympics and humanistic care for people with disabilities through a familiar cultural totem.



(Figure 13) 2022 Beijing Winter Paralympics Poster

At the contextual level, the scope of discourse expanded to "the common development of humanity", and the discourse tone presented "warmth and hope". The poster of the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Paralympics (Figure 14) takes "Passion. Connected." as its core slogan. With a white background, the poster uses two interconnected colorful lines as its visual core. Its image construction is not an isolated aesthetic design but is deeply embedded in the dual framework of South Korea's local social transformation context and the global development context of the disability movement. The "connected" form and "colorful" characteristics of the lines respectively respond to the local appeal for "community" and the global consensus on "diversified rights", forming a contextual meaning network where "local narrative" and "international discourse" support each other. For South Korean local audiences, the image of the poster evokes their cognition of traditional culture and social reality, triggering emotional resonance of "local unity"; for global audiences, the "connection and diversity" form of the lines transcends cultural boundaries, conveying the universal significance of "common human values", expanding the context of the PyeongChang Winter Paralympics from a "single event" to a platform for "global dialogue on disability rights".

Passion. Connected.
하나된 열정



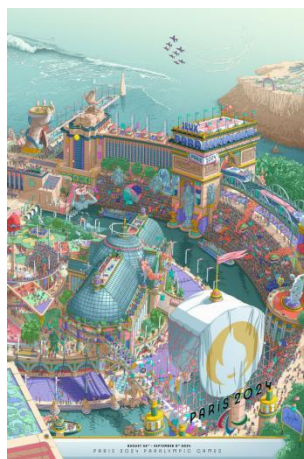
2018 평창
동계패럴림픽대회
ORGANIZED BY KOGA
2018. 3. 9 - 2018. 3. 18
www.pyeongchang2018.com

Paralympic Winter Games
PyeongChang 2018
3.9-3.18
www.pyeongchang2018.com

(Figure 14) 2018 PyeongChang Winter Paralympics Poster

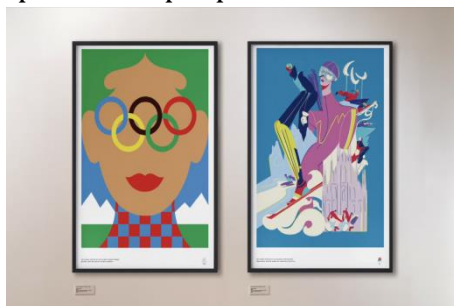
At the content level, the construction of conceptual meaning relies on the presentation of symbols of "collective strength" and "historical inheritance". The poster of the 2024 Paris Paralympics (Figure 15), created by an illustrator, takes "Fantasy Paris" as its theme. It rearranges Paris' landmark buildings such as the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe with Paralympic venues, constructing an "urban space where sports are everywhere". The athlete images in the poster demonstrate diverse characteristics, including both wheelchair athletes and visually impaired athletes, who collaborate and exercise together, metaphorizing "collective strength driving development". Meanwhile, by connecting the Paris Olympic history

of 1900, 1924, and 2024, the poster reflects the "historical inheritance of the Paralympic movement and the continuous progress of humanity", deepening the metaphorical connotation of "diversified coexistence".



(Figure 15) 2024 Paris Paralympics Poster

At the expression level, the design style of the posters became more innovative and inclusive. The poster *Untitled* for the 2026 Milan Winter Paralympics (Figure 16), created by illustrator Carolina Altavilla, adopts digital illustration technology to depict a group of athletes supporting each other, with their bodies intertwined to form a tight-knit collective. The picture features rich yet harmonious colors and smooth yet powerful lines, metaphorizing "the unity and support of the group". The text "We participate as a community" directly conveys the concept that "people with disabilities are an important part of the social community", completely subverting the traditional metaphor that "people with disabilities are a marginalized group".



(Figure 16) 2026 Milan Winter Paralympics Poster "Untitled"

3.4.3. Stage Summary: Sublimation Significance of Metaphors

During this stage, Paralympic posters constructed a cultural metaphor system of "diversity-coexistence" through multimodal symbols such as diversified cultural symbols, collective athlete images, and innovative artistic techniques. This metaphorical sublimation not only reflects the functional transformation of the Paralympics from "rights advocacy" to "common development" but also promotes the maturity of social perspectives on disability—people with disabilities are no longer "a group requiring special attention" but "an important part of the diverse values of humanity", providing strong cultural impetus for building an inclusive and equal society.

4. Analysis of Driving Factors for the Evolution of Cultural Metaphors in Paralympic Posters

4.1. Social Civilization Progress: The Fundamental Driving Force for the Transformation of Disability Perspectives

The progress of social civilization is the fundamental driving force behind the evolution of cultural metaphors in Paralympic posters, with its core embodied in the transformation of disability perspectives. From 1964 to 2024, society's perception of people with disabilities has shifted from "individual defects" to "social barriers", and further to "diversified values". This transformation directly determines the core connotation of poster metaphors. During the medical rehabilitation narrative stage, the development of industrial civilization led to the improvement of medical technology, and social attention to people with disabilities focused on the "treatment of physical defects", so poster metaphors naturally centered on "medical rehabilitation". With the development of post-industrial civilization, human rights awareness awakened, and society began to pay attention to the "equal rights" of people with disabilities, leading poster metaphors to shift to "rights advocacy". Entering the information age, the integration of diverse cultures has become a trend, and society has recognized the "diversified values" of people with disabilities, eventually elevating poster metaphors to "diversified coexistence". The transformation of disability perspectives provides the core cultural logic for the evolution of poster metaphors.

4.2. Development of the Paralympic Movement: The Direct Driving Force for the Expansion of Event Functions

The development of the Paralympic movement itself and the expansion of its functions are the direct driving factors for the evolution of poster metaphors. The 1964 Tokyo Paralympics had only 21 participating countries and regions, with a small scale and its function focused on "rehabilitation demonstration". The 1984 New York Paralympics saw the number of participating countries and regions increase to 45, and the event achieved a professional transformation with its function shifting to "sports competition". The 2004 Athens Paralympics had 136 participating countries and regions, and the event became a "platform for social movement". The 2024 Paris Paralympics is expected to have more than 160 participating countries and regions, and the event has become a "platform for showcasing the diverse values of humanity". The expansion of the event scale, the improvement of professional level, and the expansion of functions have transformed the communication goals of posters from "conveying rehabilitation information" to "advocating social equality", and further to "promoting diversified values", directly driving the continuous deepening of metaphorical connotations.

4.3. Reform of Visual Communication: The Technical Support from the Development of Multimodal Technology

The development of visual communication technology provides technical support for the evolution of poster metaphors. During the medical rehabilitation narrative stage, printing technology was relatively backward, so poster design adhered to the principle of "simplicity and clarity", mostly using simple graphics and single colors, with direct metaphorical expressions. With the development of photography and digital technology, poster design was able to adopt complex techniques such as dynamic photography and surreal composition—for example, the dynamic athlete image in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympics poster and the abstract composition in the 2006 Turin Paralympics poster, both of which were realized relying on technological progress. Entering the information age, the application of technologies such as digital illustration and 3D modeling has enabled posters to integrate diversified cultural symbols. For instance, the "Fantasy Paris" scene in the 2024 Paris Paralympics poster

integrates history and reality, sports and the city through digital technology, providing technical possibilities for the construction of the "diversified coexistence" metaphor.

4.4. Demand for Cultural Communication: The External Driving Force for Global Discourse Construction

The demand for global cultural communication is the external driving force for the evolution of poster metaphors. With the deepening of globalization, the Paralympic Games have become an important carrier of cross-cultural communication. As the core text of visual communication, posters need to adapt to the cognitive needs of audiences from different cultural backgrounds. During the medical rehabilitation narrative stage, posters focused on "humanitarian care", and this universal value facilitated cross-cultural communication. During the sports competition transition stage, "sports glory" became the core metaphor, and the universality of the competitive spirit enabled posters to break through cultural barriers. During the social rights advocacy stage, "equal rights" is a global consensus, and the appealing discourse of posters has gained widespread recognition. During the diversified integration and coexistence stage, the grand metaphor of "a community with a shared future for humanity" directly conforms to the needs of global cultural communication, making posters an important bridge for cross-cultural exchanges.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

Taking Paralympic theme posters from 1964 to 2024 as the research object, this study analyzes the evolutionary characteristics and driving factors of cultural metaphors in the posters from a diachronic perspective based on Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The main conclusions are as follows:

Firstly, the cultural metaphors of Paralympic posters present distinct diachronic characteristics, which are highly consistent with the transformation process of disability perspectives. During the medical rehabilitation narrative stage (1964-1980), a metaphor system of "defect-treatment" was constructed, reflecting the medical model of disability perspective. During the sports competition transition stage (1984-2000), a metaphor system of "competition-glory" was formed, embodying the sports model of disability perspective. During the social rights advocacy stage (2004-2016), the metaphor system was deepened into "barrier-breaking", corresponding to the social model of disability perspective. During the diversified integration and coexistence stage (2017-2024), the metaphor system was sublimated into "diversity-coexistence", reflecting the diversified model of disability perspective.

Secondly, the collaborative interaction of multimodal symbols is the core mechanism for the construction of cultural metaphors in posters. Image symbols (such as wheelchairs, dynamic athletes, and puzzles) serve as the core carriers of metaphors; textual symbols (such as slogans and event names) clarify the connotations of metaphors; colors and layouts strengthen the emotional expression of metaphors. Different combinations of symbols in different stages have formed distinct metaphor systems, such as the "wheelchair + plain tone" combination in the medical rehabilitation stage and the "diversified cultural symbols + warm tone" combination in the diversified coexistence stage.

Thirdly, the evolution of cultural metaphors in Paralympic posters is the result of the joint action of social civilization progress, the development of the Paralympic movement, the reform of visual communication, and the demand for cultural communication. Among these, the transformation of disability perspectives triggered by social civilization progress is the fundamental driving force; the expansion of the functions of the Paralympic movement is the direct driving factor; the development of visual communication technology provides technical

support; and the demand for global cultural communication forms the external driving force. These four factors together constitute a complete driving system for metaphor evolution.

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