Japan’s “Act on Employment Promotion of Persons with Disabilities” has been revised in 2013 and 2019. The 2013 amendment prohibited discrimination on the grounds of disability and obliged employers to provide reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities, and was supposed to be a paradigm shift in Japan’s disability employment policy, which until then had relied on the disability employment quota system. As the law originally intended to improve employment opportunities in the general labor market, the quota and related systems contributed to quantitative improvements. However, it also established the “special but separate” treatment for persons with disabilities (PWD).

In order to answer the puzzle why different or separate treatments remained in place in the employment of PWD even after the 2013 amendment, I have analyzed statistical data, administrative guidelines, and the debate preceding the recent 2019 amendment. Furthermore, I conducted interviews with the management of “Special Subsidiary Companies” about their methods to hire and maintain PWD as employees. My findings suggest that the prohibition of discrimination and the reasonable accommodation clause were both poorly interpreted in subsequent administrative guidelines. A further research objective is to reflect on a more suitable operation of the quota system and non-disability approach. In my conclusion, I would like to stress the necessity for a reform of the quota system.

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