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The case of the 2020 Olympics branding: A true recovery?

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introduction

On the 10th of October 1964, the Tokyo Olympics kicked off with the traditional opening ceremony. Present at the ceremony was emperor Hirohito, the same emperor who was forced to capitulate roughly 19 years prior as a result of Japan's loss of World War II. This time he was there to welcome the athletes from around the globe who would be participating in the most prestigious sporting event in the world. For onlookers at the time, the symbolism was clear: Japan had been readmitted into international society (Whiting 2014).

The 1964 Olympics in Tokyo were, in many aspects, instrumental in aiding Japan's postwar recovery. Coming off the back of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics, which were cancelled by Japan to prepare for World War II (Collins 2007, 955), the 1964 Olympics provided Japan an opportunity to change the warlike image that the war had left them with, as well as an economic boost that put the country on par with the Western world. Now, 56 years later, Japan was set to host the Olympic games once again, and the theme of recovery was back on Japan's Olympic agenda as a result of the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake (Olympics 2020 March 24). However, due to an outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the games have been postponed until next year (Ingle & McCurry 2020). The start of the 2021 Olympics is quickly approaching, despite the fact that public support for the Olympics to continue as planned is telling a different story, with a majority of the Japanese people reportedly not wanting the games to go on as planned this year (Imaha Shi 2021). Despite this lack of public backing, the Japanese government, as well as the International Olympic committee, are poised to continue the games as planned. This begs the question what Japan's reasoning is for going ahead with the games despite this adversity.

The 1964 games have proven to have been very beneficial for Japan, something the organizers of the 2020 Olympics are keen to replicate as seen in the official Games Vision (Olympics Games Vision 2020). That being said, the circumstances of the 1964 games were very different from those of the 2020 Olympics, in no small part due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, which raises the question whether these comparisons are justified. In this thesis I want to analyze the branding that has been used for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, in particular with regards to the role of 1964 games in the games' marketing as well as the "recover games" branding used by the organizers, in order to answer the following question: in what ways have the 1964 Olympics and the "recovery games" rhetoric been used in the branding of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics by the organizers? The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic has had major ramifications for this branding, which will be covered wherever necessary. To analyze this I will be using a combination of media accounts, promotion materials, public statements by the organizers and public opinion polls among other things to find out whether the Tokyo 2020 Olympics' branding holds up in light of recent events.

Theoretical context

The story of sports in Japan and their role starts with the Meiji Restoration, the period that saw Japan transform from a feudalistic country into a modern nation state by adopting more Western influences. Ever since the beginning of Western influences reaching them, Japan had to choose whether to incorporate these influences or to deny them. The realm of sports is no exception to this rule. Ever since the beginning Japan's route towards modernization has been one that was imposed by the outside world, and as a result Japan has always been selective in which elements of modernization they have incorporated. This has resulted in Japan creating a modern identity which makes them part of Asia from a western point of view, while still being different from its Asia-Pacific neighbors (Horne 1998, 171).

This concept of Japan having to resist cultural influences ties back to the concept of globalization. Globalization became the de-facto term to explain the process of the world becoming

increasingly more interconnected. While globalization was initially understood as an economic phenomenon, later it became understood as a cultural phenomenon as well. Academic literature has been written on the topic of globalization within the context of the Olympic games. The Olympic games have undoubtedly become more globalized over the past decades, but some debate exists as to whether this increased globalization has truly allowed it to transcend borders in all aspects of globalization. Some would argue that only the economic aspect of the games are truly global, allowing companies to show their brand to a global audience only possible through these types of mega events (Short 2008). However globalization has many offshoot terms that are derived from it, among which is Americanization, where countries are subjugated to America's cultural hegemony (Manzenreiter 2003, 7-8). While Japan's culture was undoubtedly subject to Americanization during the postwar period, Japan has for the most part managed to adopt American sports on their own terms.

The concept of nation branding also ties into Japan's reasoning for hosting high profile sports events such as the Olympics. The concept of maintaining a brand identity is something that is traditionally linked mostly to private companies, however in recent decades countries have sought to improve their countries "brand", to the point where most countries now practice nation branding to some degree. Nation branding is defined as "the application of corporate marketing concepts and techniques to countries, in the interests of enhancing their reputation in international relations" (Pauline 2013 354). This improvement of reputation is usually done with the ultimate goal of some sort of economic gain. This usually results in nation branding being used towards ends such as export promotion, attracting foreign investments and promoting tourism, and Japan is no exception in this regard (Dinnie 2008, 6).

When talking about nation branding within the context of Japan, "Cool Japan" represents one of the more tangible examples of Japan actively trying to increase their so called "soft power". The idea of using soft power as a means of measuring a country's power was first used by Joseph Nye. He argued that soft power aims to coerce people into doing what you want out of their own free will, compared to hard power where brute force is used instead. He uses the metaphor of parents controlling their children, where forcing their children to do something they want is not as effective as trying to shape the preferences of their children and control them through that way. (Nye 1990, 166). Nowadays the concept of countries using means other than force through military to get what they want is hardly a novel concept, with China being a prime example of how effective this strategy can be. The case of Japan was also mentioned by Nye, stating that should the importance of soft power (here he still refers to it as technologic, educational and economic superiority) continues to rise, that there would be a chance for Japan to dominate global politics.

That being said he was swift to follow saying that Japan still heavily depended on military protection. This all but locked Japan out of using "smart power", which signifies the combination of soft power and hard power, and this constrained Japan in what they would be able to do on a global playing field (Nye 1990, 154-155). Public diplomacy is another offshoot of soft power, which refers to soft power not aimed at foreign governments, but rather foreign populations and non-governmental organizations. Nye identifies 3 dimensions that are important when it comes to fostering relationships through public diplomacy, which consist of daily communications to explain policy decisions to both domestic and foreign press, strategic communication which focuses on the themes and symbolism of the communication, and development of lasting relationships with key individuals within a country (the Japanese foreign language teaching exchange is used as an example of this last point). He also emphasizes that these efforts should go beyond being simple propaganda, as this will result in a lack of credibility and would prove to be counterproductive (Nye Jr. 2008, 101-102). This particular tendril of soft power seems to be of particular relevance within the context of the modern

Olympics, which is shown by the emphasis on attracting foreign investment and tourism rather than appealing to foreign governments.

While Nye's original definition of soft power has undoubtedly made a valuable contribution to the field of International Relations, there are also some criticisms that have been levied against it as well. For instance, there seems to be a great confusion as to what soft power actually is, as it can be used to describe many overlapping phenomena, with some going as far as to say that it is merely describing other similar terms like the aforementioned nation branding (Fan 2008). It is certainly true that soft power is difficult to properly measure, and this is helped by the fact that Nye's original work does not provide a description as to how soft power is actually acquired in the first place (Snow & Taylor 2009). This leaves us in a situation where soft power can certainly be studied and used in our analysis, but this will have to happen in a theoretical sense in lieu of a measurable framework that we can use.

Nye's original concept of soft power has received a lot of academic attention in the form of applying it to various real world cases, and Cool Japan marks the most prominent Japanese case when it comes to analyzing this concept. Douglas McGray was one of the first scholars to make this connection. In his article, in which he first coined the term "Japan's Gross National Cool", he describes how the Japanese had managed to open up cultural exchange between them and the rest of the world. He talks about how, after the Japan's economic growth had depreciated, Japan needed to transition towards promoting themselves culturally rather than economically. He cites relevant examples such as Pokémon and Hello Kitty, to show how Japanese pop culture has made itself relevant in the rest of the world. One of the things he mainly admires is the balance that Japan strikes in giving and taking its culture, knowing where to open its culture up to the outside world in order to expand its cultural influence, but also knows when to block off certain parts of its culture to the outside world in order to maintain cultural integrity.

However, in line with Joseph Nye, Douglas McGray also had some concerns as to the effectiveness of Japan's soft power. For one, although Japan may possess a lot of this soft power, it has very limited ways of tapping into this power. According to McGray, although people might like and appreciate Japanese culture and "Coolness" this does not translate into any sort of tangible control over these people (when referring to people outside of Japan). He also argues that, although Japan has been opening up more in recent years, this has come at the cost of national uncertainty and the waning of fundamental Japanese values (Mcgray 2002, 44-54). Cool Japan has also faced more criticism, with some questioning whether this cultural exchange that Japan has attempted to set up is truly an exchange, or a one-way street merely interested in projecting its culture upon the recipient (Iwabuchi 2015, 419).

Cool Japan can be seen within the context of nation branding as an attempt to spread Japanese culture with the intent to gain more economic leverage. That being said, Cool Japan seems to differ from other forms of nation branding in the sense that the government did not really interfere with it until it was already in progress. The world in the age of globalization is one big market, and countries will therefore have to compete with the entire world. Nation branding is a way of gaining a competitive advantage in the global market. They do this by framing their country in a way that makes their country appealing to foreign investment. Some would argue that Japan's motives with promoting Cool Japan do not seem to be solely economical in nature, and that this is part of the reason their promoting efforts have been more effective than those of other countries. This is because whereas other countries may see nation branding as something lucrative that can net them some easy investments, in the case of Japan there seems to be way more at stake. For Japan, nation-branding is a way of improving their standing within the Asia-Pacific region, it is a way to eclipse the imperialist past of Japan and it is a way to shape the Japanese identity. In this sense, nation branding is only part of what Japan is doing (Valaskivi 2013, 489-490).

Others would argue that modern day promotion of Cool Japan is entirely top-down, done entirely with the goal promoting exports and tourism. In this context Japan is trying to position themselves as unique, being neither Western nor Asian, which would be in line with how Japan identified itself during the pre-war era (Tamaki 2019). As we will analyze later on, this theme of Japan measuring themselves against the West would also be a defining feature of how Japan used the Olympics in their first iterations, wanting to be respected by the West whilst still maintaining their Japanese identity.

Historical context of the 1964 Olympics

When analyzing Japan's history of the Olympics, it might seem difficult to determine which of the Olympic games warrants the most attention. This becomes even more apparent when one considers that Japan has made a bid to host the Olympics twelve times, with five of those being successful (assuming the cancelled 1940 Olympics are counted), meaning Japan has been essentially been constantly trying to host the games ever since the 1930's (Kietlinski 2016, 35). Despite this lengthy history with the Olympics, the 1964 games and 2021 games stand out from the rest in terms of their importance for Japan as a nation, for reasons that will become clear over the course of this thesis. The other Japanese Olympic endeavors will also be covered, however this will only be done in the interest of providing context to the 1964 and 2021 games, as the analysis of these 2 games would not be complete without putting them in the wider context of Japan's Olympic history.

In this sense, the 1964 Olympics cannot be properly analyzed without placing it in the context of the 1940 Olympics. Ever since the start of the Meiji restoration in 1868, Japan had made rapid advancements toward becoming a modern state. Japan had also made great strides in achieving economic growth, with them successfully industrializing and seeing them catch up to the rest of the "modern" world. It was within this context that the Japanese decided to make a bid to host the Olympics. At the time, there were several motivations for hosting. For one, the Olympics were to be used as a tool in the greater effort of the Japanese state to control the discourse surrounding Japanese culture, as the Japanese cultural identity was to be shaped in a way that emphasized cultural homogeneity. Additionally, this rhetoric was used to emphasize Japanese cultural superiority, which would serve as justification for Japan's imperialistic efforts to bring other Asian countries under its sphere of influence in the years to come (Collins 2007, 956-957). The 1936 Olympics in Berlin gave the Japanese an example as to how sports could be used for the purpose of promoting nationalism, and these games would be used as inspiration for forming the patriotic rhetoric around the 1940 games (Collins 2007, 967). As well as having domestic implications, the reasoning for hosting the Olympics also had implications for Japan's international relations: Japan had seen the shortcomings of their soft power, such as when the League of Nations did not acknowledge Japan's imperialist efforts as legitimate. In hosting the Olympics, the international community would be forced to see Japan as a modernized equal, and would serve as a good opportunity for Japan to engage in public diplomacy. Collins mentions that there is an implied contradiction in Japan seeking recognition from the West and to be seen as an equal on one end, while also driving a rhetoric of Japanese cultural superiority and uniqueness on the other (Collins 2007 958). Whatever the case may be, this contradiction did not prevent Japan from at least achieving the former as Japanese government achieved their goal in mobilizing Japanese society into their war efforts, and were able to successfully frame the IOC's awarding of the 1940 Olympics to Japan as the IOC recognizing Japan as a legitimate world power in Asia equal to the West. The IOC had their own reasons for choosing Japan as the host country: they had been struggling with the fact that they positioned themselves as an organization separated from politics. However, some of their actions such as their unwillingness to host the games in non-western cities seemed to contradict this,

with being a “modern” nation seemingly being a prerequisite for being allowed to host the games. With Japan doing a bid for the games, they saw an opportunity to prove that the games were indeed as universal as they claimed them to be (Collins 2007, 956-957). In this sense, Japan was able to achieve the benefits of hosting the Olympic games without having to actually host them at all, gaining all the societal mobilization in preparation of the war that they desired before ultimately cancelling the games once enough support for imperialist expansion had been reached. 5 years later, this would ultimately result in Japan losing World War II to the Allied forces. In the aftermath of World War II, Japan was left to rebuild itself both economically as a result of the damage that the country had endured as a result of the war, as well as socially due to the reforms imposed by the US. Japan had to reinvent their national identity, balancing tradition versus modernity which often meant measuring themselves against the West (Kelly 2019). Despite the economic hardships early on, Japan managed to overcome these obstacles by investing heavily into manufacturing, which proved successful as the Korean war and Vietnam war provided plenty of opportunity for Japan to manufacture the supplies necessary for these wars. Additionally, many necessary reforms were made to stimulate growth, such as the dismantling of the Zaibatsu, as well as heavy investments into improving infrastructure and education (Yuan 2013, 2-4). Influential in achieving this growth was the so-called “Yoshida Doctrine”, spearheaded by the post-war prime minister Yoshida Shigeru, which emphasized economic growth as the highest priority, while at the same time avoiding contention abroad and instead relying on the US for protection (Pyle 1988 452). These policies saw Japan’s economy skyrocket to their pre-war levels, to the point where the government felt comfortable declaring that Japan was “no longer in the postwar period” in 1956 (Richard & Layard 1993). Through these changes Japan was able to recover over the course of the postwar era, with them quelling internal strife and getting the economy running again.

It was within this context that Japan decided to put in a bid to host the Olympics once again, with them winning this bid in 1959. Initially there was little enthusiasm about Japan winning the bid for a couple of reasons, namely the fact that many believed that Japan was not yet ready to host such a major event. Indeed, many of the required facilities for hosting the Olympics were not yet present in Tokyo (or anywhere else in the country for that matter), and funding for the games were a constant issue throughout the preparation process, with many wondering whether that money would not be better spent elsewhere (Wilson 2010, 176-177). Considering the fact that the government’s Olympic budget consisted of 1.08 trillion yen (Kodanska 1983, 68), money that could have been spent on the improvement of a Japan that was in many ways very much still recovering from the war, it is not hard to see why these criticisms were present. That being said, criticisms about the Olympics seemed to disappear as the event drew closer, and although a sizeable number of people maintained that the expenditures of the games were better spent elsewhere, the majority of people across the nation agreed that the Olympics would be a plus for Japan and chose to watch the spectacle that was about to unfold in their country (Wilson 2010, 177).

1964 Olympics objectives and legacy

When talking about the objectives of the 1964 Olympics, public diplomacy was a major part of the rationale for hosting the Olympics. As previously mentioned, Japan had done well in the post-war period to rebuild their economy for the devastation of World War II. However, as renowned geographer Edward A. Ackerman remarked, Japan could only hope to get back to their standard of living before the war by opening up the country and acquiring foreign assistance, rather than remaining self-contained (Ackerman 2007, 50). Although it would not take long for Japan to return to this pre-war standard of living, with them achieving this level only a few years after this statement was made, the sentiment of this message was clearly picked up on by the Japanese, as they

understood that international trade and influence was vital in keeping up with the rest of the modern world. Japan was heavily restricted in this regard, being that their diplomatic standing with the rest of the world was in a bad state due to the reputational damage suffered from world war II. This meant that Japan was unable to join important multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, and their security alliance with the US would not change this. As a result of being limited in their hard power possibilities due to US restrictions, Japan understood that engaging in soft power and public diplomacy was the only way to improve their diplomatic reputation with the rest of the world, and the 1964 Olympics provided a key opportunity in facilitating this (Abel 2012, 204).

The usage of using such sports mega-events (henceforth referred to as SME's) for political purposes was nothing new even at the time, and although the IOC maintains that their event is apolitical in nature, a long history of countries using the Olympics to that end seemingly contradicts this. Some would argue that the insistence of the Olympics being apolitical is exactly what makes them so effective to this end, allowing political motives to be inserted without significant backlash (Abel 2012, 205). Whatever the case may be, Japan was able to successfully use the Olympics for the political goals that they had set out for themselves.

One key aspect of acquiring this soft power through public diplomacy was that Japan had to get rid of the image of a warlike nation that it had obtained as a result of World War II. In this sense, the Olympics provided the perfect opportunity for Japan to build on its national identity. Sports are in many ways similar to warfare, in that they allow people to cheer for the victories of "their" athletes when competing against other countries. At the same time, the official rhetoric of the Olympics states that the competition is between competitors rather than countries, allowing for a narrative of peace and friendship to be formed (Droubie 2011, 2310). This allowed Japan to bolster the nationalistic expressions of a Japanese society that was looking for a new identity since World War II, while at the same time avoiding associations to the conflict by the rest of the world. However, this event by itself would not be enough to change Japan's image for the outside world.

To achieve this, the narrative of Japan as the aggressor would have to be changed. They achieved this by putting the blame of the suffering caused by the war on the Japanese military and government, shifting the responsibility away from the Japanese nation as a whole and painting them as another victim of the Japanese warlike government (Dower 1986) (Orr 2001). They also shifted the narrative with regards to their involvement in Manchuria and in colonizing Korea, by instead referring to the Second World War and emphasizing their conflict with the US instead. The true victimization did not take place until the two atomic bombs were incorporated into this narrative, providing the Japanese with a suffering unique to them only (Droubie 2011, 2311). It should come as no surprise then that references to the atomic bombs were used prominently in the promotion of the games, such as when Sakai Yoshinori, a man who was born a few miles from Hiroshima on the day that the bomb was dropped, was selected to be the Olympic torch bearer. This was done on purpose, and the Japanese press at the time even referred to him as "the atomic bomb boy", something that was reportedly also picked up by foreign media with mixed reactions (Shukan Shincho 1964).

Sporting events such as the Olympics have a long history of being used in the context of nation branding for the purposes of altering a country's reputation for the better. The hosting of sporting events has become an important tool for the purposes of nation branding especially for developing countries, which see it as a way to show the world that they are capable of hosting major events. One high profile example of this is the hosting of the 2010 FIFA world cup in South Africa. At the time, South Africa was the most developed nation on the African continent. Despite this, they were being held back by the so-called "Brand Africa", which states that all African countries are viewed as a collective (Knott & Fyall 2017, 902). South Africa sought to separate themselves from this stigma through hosting a major sporting event. South Africa is not alone: all other BRIC countries

(Brazil, Russia, India and China) have used the hosting of sporting events in an attempt to improve their image to the outside world.

With so many countries choosing to use sporting events in this manner, the question remains how effective of a tool it is, and there are certainly some doubts whether the benefits of these events outweigh the costs. What makes this even more complicated is the fact that the effects of nation branding are often to a larger degree intangible, making it hard to measure exactly what benefits these events have for the host country. Among the benefits listed for host countries are things like increased media attention, an increase in nationalistic pride and identity by its citizens, a chance to improve the image of the host country toward the outside world, and the aforementioned soft power that a country can obtain through these events (Knott & Fyall 2017, 904). That being said, there are also criticisms that are levied against the potency of these events, claiming that the attention that the host country receives is short lived, and that the organizers have little control over exactly what type of brand is being created. It seems clear that merely hosting a high profile sporting event is no trump card to solve a country's image problems, and that a lot more work has to be put into fostering the opportunity that it creates instead (Knott & Fyall 2017, 905).

In the case of the 1964 Olympics, the benefits of the event exceeded beyond merely wiping away a harmful warlike image for Japan, and its effects would last far beyond the conclusion of the event. Through selective memory about its warlike past and emphasizing its own suffering, Japan was able to depict the nation as yet another victim of the war rather than an aggressor. However, this in and of itself would not be enough for Japan to earn the respect of the rest of the world, let alone to be seen as equal to the West. In order to achieve this, Japan would have to show that they had recovered from the war, and that the nation as a whole had modernized.

One of the ways in which this was achieved was a major makeover for the city of Tokyo, one that according to some estimates may have cost as much as the entire national budget of Japan at the time (Martin 2013). Most of this budget was spent on building the facilities necessary for hosting the games, as well as a major overhaul of Tokyo's infrastructure system. Many modern facilities were built for the purposes of the Olympics, of which Yoyogi National Gymnasium was one of the most notable examples: the roof of this building provided it with a particular mix of modern and Japanese aesthetic that evidently stood the test of time, owing to the fact that it is set to be used for the upcoming 2021 Olympics. The new Nippon Budokan provided another good example of this, a new modern venue being used for judo, a traditional Japanese discipline (Abel 2012, 212). The new Shinkansen, or bullet train that connected Tokyo and Osaka was another example of Japan showing off its modernity to the world, with special efforts being made to ensure that it would be ready before the start of the games. What is interesting about these rebuilding efforts is that, in addition to showing off Japan's modernity to the rest of the world, many of these projects also achieved other purposes. For example, the Yoyogi National Gymnasium was built in close proximity to the Meiji Shrine (Meiji Jingū), drawing an unmistakable parallel between the goal of the original Meiji Restoration (to modernize Japan and show its superiority) and the 1964 Olympics (Tagsold 2010, 292). Additionally, the construction of the Shinkansen line, in addition to showing off Japan's feat of modernization, also improved the national coherence of the country by improving the connection between 2 of its major cities (Wilson 2012, 174).

Speaking of national coherence, there are some who would argue that, rather than being of benefit to Japan's image for the outside world, the games were mostly watched by Japanese themselves and therefore held more significance for the nation on a domestic level (Wilson 2012, 161). Wilson cites numbers stating that only 50,000 foreigners came to watch the games in person, whereas 65 million Japanese, or roughly 70% of the population at the time watched the games on television (Kobayashi 1991, 651) (Masaru 2004, 7). Measuring television views versus in-person attendance does not give us a complete image of domestic versus foreign interest in the games. The

official website of the Olympics states that the number of viewers is believed to be between 600 and 800 million (Kano 2020), although it is unclear if this number also includes the Japanese viewership. Whatever the case may be, with such a large percentage of the domestic population tuning in to watch games, it is undeniable that they played a role in uniting the country. Part of this was due to the fact that Japan's economy was growing and quickly industrializing, and this process already has shown to contribute to nation-building and the forming of national identity as has been shown in other countries (O'Bryan 2009, 178-179).

The emergence of television also contributed to this, allowing a large amount of people to consume the same media which contributes to this national identity. Nowadays the Olympics are mostly a television-event for most people, however the 1964 Tokyo Olympics were the first to use it on such a grand scale, to the point of earning it the nickname of the "TV-Olympics" (Kortemeier 2019). Japan had historically not performed well in the Olympics, and the organizers realized that, in the absence of war, sports would be an important driver of Japanese nationalism. This drove them to invest heavily to improve the state of their athletic program. When the Japanese audience tuned in to watch the games, they saw their Olympic delegation exceed all expectations, to the score of 16 gold medals, which was enough for a third place on the medal table for that year (Droubie 2008). This combined with seeing their country transform into a modernized country that could rival the West helped Japanese society regain the civic pride that they had lost since losing World War II.

The Tokyo Olympics of 1964 were in many ways the crowning achievement of Japan's postwar recovery, and left a lasting legacy for its organizers. It allowed Japan to, at least in part, rid themselves of their image as a World War 2 aggressor, laying the groundwork for acquiring the soft-power required for becoming a major political player in world politics. The games provided a stimulus that saw Tokyo rebuilt from the ashes of World War 2 into a modern city the likes of which earned them global respect. Additionally, it improved social cohesion by allowing a Japanese population that had been traumatized by the war to be proud of their country once again. The games also cemented the role of sports as a whole in Japan, as Japan would go on to host more SME's at a rate seen by few other countries after seeing what they could accomplish for the nation, something that likely would not have occurred were it not for the success of the 1964 games. This also extends to role of sports on a societal level, with sports participation in Japan skyrocketing as a result of the 1964 Olympics, with it even being credited for the high amount of elderly sports participation that the country enjoys today (Aizawa et al. 2018). In short, the 1964 games were instrumental for Japan's postwar recovery, and have remained in the collective memory of many Japanese citizens who were there to witness the moment where Japan was at the center of the world's attention, something that might explain Japan's enthusiasm for their future Olympic endeavors.

2020 Olympics bidding process

With the success of the 1964 Olympics, Japan had been shown what an SME like the Olympics could achieve for the country. Perhaps it was for this reason that Japan would go on to continue their Olympic endeavors, with a total of twelve bids being made by Japan to host the games over its history (Kietlinki 2016, 35). This would result in them being awarded the 1972 winter games of Sapporo as well as the 1998 winter games of Nagano, however neither of these games came close to achieving the monumental effects for Japan that the previously covered 1964 games had managed to achieve. There are a few reasons that could explain this, but the most simple explanation is that the 1964 had a historic purpose due to the circumstances of being hosted at the zenith of Japan's rebuild, something the 1972 and 1998 games simply did not possess, with the 1972 games in particular getting overshadowed by the 1972 summer games in Berlin, which in many aspects represented to Germany what the 1964 games represented to Japan in terms of moving on from

World War 2 (Schiller & Young 2010). This brings us to the Tokyo Olympics of 2020, which come after two decades of relative economic stagnation for Japan, quite the departure from the economic boom that Japan found themselves in during the 1960's (Holthus et al. 2020, 3-4). The fact that the Japanese government is willing to host an SME like the 2020 Olympics, shows their belief in events like these and their power to boost the economy. This was before the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic disrupted the entire organizational process of the 2020 Olympics: not only did it force the games to be postponed to 2021, but it also had ramifications for seemingly all facets of the games, which will all be covered in this chapter wherever it is relevant. Throughout this thesis I will be referring to the Tokyo Olympics using both 2020 and 2021 depending on the context, however it should be noted that the organizers have stuck with using the year 2020 for virtually all of the promotional material used for the games.

The decision to host the 2020 Olympics can be viewed as part of Shinzo Abe's economic policies, more commonly known as Abenomics. Three main tenets, commonly referred to as the "three arrows", make up this economic policy, which are aimed at improving the position of companies and profits, putting a stop to tax increases to help business owners, and to reduce the growing inequality in Japanese society (Rookwood & Adeosun 2021, 3-4). Within the context of Abenomics, the Olympics are of great importance due to their ability to stimulate economic activity, to the point where they are referred to by some as the "fourth arrow", a bold move in the face of Japan's problems with an aging population (Hayashi 2013). Whilst Shinzo Abe may no longer be the prime minister of Japan, as this role was taken over by Yoshihide Suga as of 16 September 2020, however it seems unlikely that Suga will make many radical changes in this economic policy on such short notice, as he has declared his intend to follow in Abe's footsteps and continue his economic policy of Abenomics (Lies & Sieg 2020). It was within this context, as well as the relative stagnation of the Japanese economy in the decades prior, that a decision was made to make a hosting bid for SME's such as the Olympic games in order to stimulate the Japanese economy (Rookwood & Adeosun 2021, 4-5).

The official bidding process for the 2020 Olympics started out in 2011, many years in advance as is customary with the Olympics, and came off the back of a failed earlier bid in 2016. In the case of the 2020 Olympics, the process started with the so-called applicant city phase, whereby a host city has to be chosen by the country in question, which in turn has to be approved by the national government. Tokyo's bid for the 2020 Olympics was approved later in the year by the Japanese government, with the Tohoku Earthquake that occurred months prior being cited as a reason for the importance of the games being hosted (Mackay 2011). The city was then selected by the IOC as a candidate city, along with Istanbul and Madrid. In the end the Japanese delegation were able to win the bid due to the safety and financial stability that Japan could provide compared to the other host cities, with then IOC president Jacques Rogge referring to Tokyo as a "safe pair of hands" to entrust the hosting of the Olympics (Japan Times September 8 2013). Tokyo's securing of the Olympic bid can be in part credited to prime minister Shinzo Abe himself, who flew out to Buenos Aires on the day of the vote to deliver a speech in support of the bid. In this speech, he assured the IOC members that the situation regarding the Fukushima power plant was under control and that it would not pose a threat towards hosting the games, something that has been disputed by experts regarding the situation (Victoria 2015), as well as charming the IOC members by making reference toward the 1964 Olympics in the form of his personal memories regarding the event (Gibson 2013). This would not be the last time that Abe would help the Games' promotion in such a high-profile manner, as shown by his appearance at the closing ceremony of the Rio Olympics in 2016 accompanied by a cast of Japanese animated characters, which has been described by some as an attempt to link the 2020 Olympics and the Cool Japan branding together (Ronalds 2019, 27).

It should be noted that the Japanese public opinion regarding the games was rather positive at the time: A public poll taken in November 2012 showed that 67 percent of Tokyo's population supported the current Olympic bid, a number that was up 20 percent compared to similar survey taken earlier in the year (Mackay 2012). This increase was in part due to the good performance of the Japanese Olympic delegation at the London Olympics that same year which, along with several marketing campaigns by the Tokyo 2020 organization, saw Japanese citizens getting excited for the games once again. This number would continue to climb as shown by a public poll conducted by newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun, which showed that 83 percent of the Japanese polled wanted Tokyo to host the games, much to the delight of the organizers as low public approval had been one of the reasons for Japan not winning the bid in 2016 (Mackay 2013). The bid has not been without controversy, something that is far from uncommon in the modern Olympics bidding process: following investigation by French prosecutors, then-president of the JOC Tsunekazu Takeda was charged with bribery to secure votes after monetary transactions were discovered between him and IOC-members. Although he has denied wrongdoing, the accusations compelled him to step down as president of the Japanese Olympic Committee in 2019 (Takenaka & Tarrant 2019). In another piece of controversy, former Tokyo Olympics chief Yoshido Mori was forced to resign from his position after first refusing to do so in a manner similar to Takeda, as a result of making sexist remarks during a meeting of the Tokyo 2020 executive board, during which he reportedly complained that women make the meetings "drag on too long". As a result of the incident, a female replacement was picked in the form of Olympic medalist Seiko Hashimoto, although some believe that this appointment was symbolic in nature (Rich 2021).

Japan has been no stranger to the use of SME's for the purpose of public diplomacy and economic benefit, and this interest in hosting SME's has extended itself beyond the scope of the Olympics. The 2002 FIFA world cup provides an interesting case study as an early example of Japan using SME's to this purpose in the modern era. While Japan had obviously hosted sporting events prior to this point, the 2002 FIFA world cup was special in that it was co-hosted with South Korea, a former colonial subject of Japan. This event therefore shows the potential of hosting SME's, able to unite 2 countries despite their historic animosity (Rookwood & Adeosun 2021, 2).

However, as previously already explained, we should not get too carried away with overvaluing the effect that these types of events have in situations like this. For example, while Japan and South Korea ended up hosting the world cup together, this only happened after both countries put in bids to host it individually, which drove FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) to make this compromise (Moran 2002). Additionally, these types of events only seem to be effective when they are capitalized upon with genuine attempts to improve the relations between 2 or more countries, as the co-hosting of 1 SME cannot make up for the decades of historical tension that has existed between Japan and South Korea (Koga 2016). In the case of the 2002 FIFA world cup, it does not appear as if that is the case, as there is no substantial evidence that the Japanese government has attempted to capitalize on this opportunity in this way or, yet more importantly, that the relationships and public perceptions between the 2 countries improved in any measurable way. That being said, reconciliation with its former colonial subject is not the only thing that Japan was interested in with the hosting of this SME. Indeed, the event has provided a good opportunity for stimulating economic growth as well as making for a good opportunity to improve Japan's image for the rest of the world in a bid to promote tourism, with some even going as far as to say that it helped to get rid of Japan's reputation linked to their 'Sakoku' period, during which the country was closed from the rest of the world (Rookwood & Adeosun 2021, 3). Whatever the truth may be, it is undeniable that Japan's tourism industry has been on the rise over the past few decades, and GME's such as the 2002 FIFA world cup have in all likelihood contributed to this upswing.

2020 Olympics economic analysis

In the case of the 2020 Olympics, one of the main objectives was the stimulation of economic growth. Hosting SME's such as the Olympics is an expensive endeavor, and as a result the costs of hosting such an event have to be justified in the form of economic gains, lest people start openly wondering if the money spent of the event is not better spent on more tangible investments. It should come as no surprise, then, that official research was conducted by the Bank of Japan to analyze the economic benefits of the games. The conclusions of this research state that the two main areas in which Tokyo Olympics stood to benefit the Japanese economy were in the areas of tourism and an increase in construction investment (Osada et al. 2016, 1). The part about tourism is not surprising: Japan has been investing heavily to promote tourism as a way to boost economic growth, and the 2020 Olympics play a part in continuing this policy (Robson 2016). The research continues to state that the games will in all likelihood have a positive effect on the Japanese economy, but that this depends a lot of uncertain factors. Additionally, by their own admittance most of the data regarding the Olympics comes from the experience of developing countries hosting them, and this does not help predictions for Japan seeing as it is not a developing country (Osada et al. 2016, 5-6). Couple this with the fact that there is still a lot of contention as to how exactly the economic benefits that the Olympics provide should be measured (Owen 2005; Giesecke & Madden 2011; Rose & Spiegel 2011; Brückner & Pappa 2015), and it becomes understandable why the writers of this research are hesitant to make a definitive conclusion about the financial benefits of the games.

This is where analyzing the effect of the Olympics can turn into something of a guessing game: In analyzing the 1964 Olympics, we have the luxury of being able to measure the lasting effects of the games decades after the fact. With the 2020 games, we do not have this luxury, and as a result there is no way to know how some of the economic stimulants touted for the games will play out. SME's have a lot of unmeasurable elements associated with them, and it is for this reason that not all of them end up having a net positive benefit for the host country, with the research using the example of the 1994 games of Lillehammer as an example of what happens when the economic impulse of the Olympics are not properly capitalized on (Teigland 1999).

Whatever tangible conclusions could have been drawn about the net benefits of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics were thrown out the window with the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, which added yet another layer of uncertainty to the equation. To understand the financial consequences that the COVID-19 epidemic has had on the 2021 Olympics, one only has to look at the "game of chicken" that went on between the IOC and the Tokyo 2020 organizers, as whoever backed out of games first would potentially be on the hook for the cancellation costs of the event, causing both parties to delay postponement of the games while public calls to do so kept increasing (Scott et al. 2020), until a joint decision to postpone the games was finally reached on March 24 2020 (McCurry & Ingle 2020). Dan Roan, editor for BBC Sports explains the financial nightmare accompanied with postponing the games:

The ramifications will be significant. It's a huge blow to Japan, and the country will now have to spend yet more money. Commercial contracts will have to be unpicked and the availability of venues revisited. A crowded sporting calendar will have to be flexible. And the IOC, sports federations, broadcasters, sponsors and a myriad of other related businesses will have to wait an additional year for the financial bonanza that the event generates. (Roan 2020)

This falls on top of what was already shaping up to be the most expensive iteration of the Olympics in the events' history. The original budget of the Olympics was set at an estimated \$7.3 billion at the time that the bid was won in 2013 (Benjamin 2018), however this figure has grown tremendously throughout the hosting process. A report from the organizers in 2020 showed that the games would

cost \$15.4 billion to host, up \$12.6 billion from the year before which was due to the delay caused by COVID, however audits by the Japanese government show that these costs should be at least \$25 billion (Wade 2020). One particular example of the financing process that has caught a lot of attention is the construction of the new National Stadium, which was set to be a centerpiece of the 2020 Olympics being that it would host the opening ceremony. The construction of the venue incurred numerous delays, such that it was unable to be used to host games for the 2019 Rugby World Cup as originally planned, but was eventually finished with a staggering final cost of more than \$1.25 billion (Reuters 2019).

These exorbitant costs have been a characterizing feature of the modern Olympics, which has driven some to question the sustainability of the event in its current form entirely: where countries seemingly lined up for the chance to host the greatest SME on the planet, interest has waned in the modern era. Whereas sponsors tv broadcasters are still more than happy to associate themselves with the Olympic brand, host cities have increasingly been on the wrong end of the deal. This has already led to situations where the IOC has seen itself being strapped for choices when it comes to choosing a host city, such as in the case of the 1984 Olympics when the city of Los Angeles presented itself as the sole available host city as a result of waning interest in the Olympics. (The Economist 2017). Indeed, criticism of the Olympics seems to have ramped up again over recent years, with many case studies done on editions of the Olympics that did not yield the desired effects for their respective countries. One such example comes from the 2004 Olympics of Athens. The hosting process for the 2004 Athens Olympics seemed to follow a pattern that seems all too familiar at this point: the domestic public was initially excited to see the games to their country, but were also weary of the high costs associated with the event. The organizers in turn played their part, promising that the legacy of the event would outlast its duration, with promises of major urban improvements, infrastructure reform and sports venues that the city would be able to enjoy for many years (Kissoudi 2008, 1972-1972). It would not take long for the reality to become apparent, as in the immediate aftermath of the games it turned out that the costs for maintaining the Olympic venues used in the event was considerably higher than what had initially been reported, and that no long term contingency plan had been made for the purpose of reusing the Olympics sports venues. Criticism about these costs mounted from both political opposition and domestic media. As a result of this criticism, contingency plans were drawn up for some of the venues by the Greek government, but these efforts seem to little too late in the context of the exorbitant costs of these investments, something the Greek population will likely be financing for years to come (Kissoudi 2008, 1987). The case of the 2004 Athens Olympics shows just how high the stakes are when it comes to hosting an event of this size, as well as the consequences of what happens when the organizers fail to take the aftermath of the event into account. Whatever the case may be, with great costs comes a greater pressure on the event to put out economically, something that now seems doubtful in the case of the Tokyo Olympics given the current circumstances.

But perhaps one of the hardest pills to swallow for the Olympic organizers is what the COVID-19 pandemic means for tourism which, as previously discussed, is one of the big motivators for organizing the games. The COVID-19 pandemic almost entirely halted global traveling, and with no end in sight for Japan the organizers have had to make the difficult decision to bar foreign spectators from the event (Rich & Dooley 2021). While this does not strictly prevent Japanese tourism from growing as a result of the Olympics, as the increase of tourism will most likely result from the image Japan creates by successfully hosting the event, the symbolism of foreign tourists not being able to attend the event in person will certainly not contribute to the image that the organizers are trying to create around the games.

The Tokyo 2020 games form an important tool in Japan's attempt to end the economic stagnation that the country has found itself in for the past decades. Despite Japan's apparent

frivolousness in trying to host SME's of this variety, planning these types of events is not something that can be done on a reactionary basis, and instead requires years of planning ahead. In the case of the 2020 Olympics, it becomes apparent just how much can change in that timeframe: in the advent of the COVID-19 epidemic, the 2020 games now find themselves on shaky grounds, and where its profitability was already being questioned prior to this crisis, it now seems all the more unlikely that the games will turn out beneficial from a purely financial standpoint. However, as we have seen with the case of the 1964 Olympics, the benefits of these types of SME's go beyond mere monetary value, as these events have the power to create narratives and unite nations given the proper branding.

Parallels between the 1964 and 2020 Olympics

Within the context of the branding of the 2020 Olympics, connections have already been made with the 1964 Olympics, including by the organizers themselves. The official website of the Olympics provides the vision of the games, which was also part of the material presented for when the bid for hosting the games was made. Among other things, it lists the three core concepts that define the organizers' vision for the games, and one of these concepts, titled Connecting to Tomorrow: "Passing on Legacy for the Future", reads as follows:

The Tokyo 1964 Games completely transformed Japan, enhanced Japanese people's awareness of the outside world and sparked the rapid growth of Japan's economy.

The 2020 Games will enable Japan, now a mature economy, to promote future changes throughout the world, and leave a positive legacy for future generations.(Olympics Games Vision 2020)

Obviously this vision is of part of the games' promotion material, with some going as far as to call it propaganda (Kietlinski 2016), and as such its content has to be taken with a grain of salt. However, the fact that the 1964 games are mentioned so prominently in the organizers' vision for the games, to the point of making it one of their 3 core concepts, speaks volumes about how they view the 1964 games in the context of the 2020 games: They are making a connection between the 2 games to support the narrative that the 2020 Olympics will help Japan in the same way that it has helped Japan back in 1964.

This brings us to the branding of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, and in particular how the organizers of the event plan to use the event to improve Japan's image for the outside world for the purposes of public diplomacy. One way in which the Tokyo Olympics have been branded by the organizers is by labeling them as the "recovery games". We have already discussed that the games are being organized in the context of 2 decades or relative economic stagnation for Japan, however the 2011 Tohoku earthquake has also proven to fit into this narrative. As a result of this, the Japanese organizers have incorporated this disaster into their rhetoric, touting the 2021 Olympics as an opportunity for the region to recover from the disaster (Boykoff & Gafney 2020, 1). The use of the word recovery is interesting, as this same terminology is used when discussing how the 1964 games were used by Japan to recover from World War II, a similarity that others have also pointed out (Holtus et al. 2020, 2). This in and of itself implies an effort to create a link between the two games, and the organizers have used other actions to strengthen this comparison. One example in which this becomes apparent is with the usage of the Olympic torch ceremony, with the torchbearer being born near Hiroshima in the case of the 1964 games and the torch run starting in Fukushima in the case of the 2020 games. In another example, the Olympic cauldron used in the 1964 Olympics was

temporarily put on display in tsunami-hit Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture, in an unmistakable effort to link the recovery themes of the 1964 games and the 2020 games together (Osumi 2019).

That being said, the comparisons between the 1964 games and the 2020 games go beyond branding them as the recovery games, and seem to be present throughout many aspects of the game's organization, such as during the many speeches given in support of the games by those involved with the games. In a policy speech addressed to the Japanese diet on January 20th 2020, one that is usually reserved for a candid laydown of national policy, Shinzo Abe instead made a passionate speech in favor of the Olympics, describing how the 1964 Olympics helped Japan step out "into a new era of rapid growth", and stating that this year's Olympics will help Japan break through the "*akirame no kabe*", roughly translated as "wall of resignation", most likely referring to the economic stagnation that Japan has faced in the past decades (Shinzo 2020). In another example, IOC President Thomas Bach stated the following at the Olympic Flame lighting ceremony in march 2020:

Back in 1964, the first Olympic Games in Asia marked a new beginning for a peaceful and dynamic Japan among the family of nations. The Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 will again be a symbol of hope and confidence for all Japanese people (Olympics October 9 2020).

Five venues that were used in the 1964 games are also set to be reused for the 2020 games, including the iconic Yoyogi National Gymnasium (Olympics 2019), something that might make sense from a practical point of view, but also unmistakably links the two games together in yet another way, with the organizers even referring to this group of venues as the so-called "heritage zone" (2020games 2020). Additionally, the Health and Sports Day (*Taiiku no Hi*), an annual holiday that was started in commemoration of the 1964 Olympics, has been moved to coincide with the opening ceremony of the 2020 Games (Health-Sports Day 2021). Some parallels between the two games have also been observed in the promotional material used for the games, with one observer noticing that some of the street banners used in Tokyo for the promotion of the games seem to bear a striking resemblance to the banners used for the 1964 games, with their use of dark red and white coloring along with gold lettering drawing a parallel with the design by Yusaku Kanemaru used for the 1964 games (Tomizawa 2020). The 1964 games were the first to make use of pictograms to indicate the different sports, and the design of the 2020 pictograms also pays homage to the original 1964 pictograms according to Masaaki Hiromura, designer of the Tokyo 2020 pictograms (Hiromura 2020). Some more tangible links between the two games include a 1964 Olympics clothing line created by Lacoste in collaboration with the International Olympic Committee, which pays homage to the 1964 games and serves as yet another link between the two games (Olympics May 3 2020).

2020 Olympics and the problematic "recovery games" branding

From these examples we can see that numerous parallels have been drawn between the 1964 games and the 2020 games, seeing them in things ranging from public statements to promotional materials. With that being said, there are some factors which make this comparison between the two games questionable. First, the decision to label the games as the "recovery games" loses some credibility when looking at the different circumstances of the two games. We have already discussed the ways in which the 1964 games helped Japan facilitate a transformation from an impoverished country recovering from the war towards becoming a modernized state. In the case of the 2020 games, it is easy to see what makes the circumstances different, as Japan is already a developed state, rendering the games redundant to this end. Additionally, it is not hard to see why the effects of World War II, which affected the entire country on a large scale, does not compare to the effects of the Tohoku earthquake which only affected a part of the country. Even outside of the context of the "recovery

games”, there are doubts whether the comparisons between the two games are justified. Roy Tomizawa, author of a book regarding the legacy of the 1964 games is also skeptical on this matter, stating the following:

Nothing can really compare to the legacy or the memories of 1964 because there's no comparison. A nation that comes from an environment that's bombed out literally and in desperation, a country that is impoverished, an economy that is devastated. Nineteen years later, they pull off arguably one of the most logistically challenging global events you can do. (Hueston 2020).

Additionally, there are doubts whether the games are truly there to help the Tohoku region recover both economically and image-wise. The organizers claim that the Olympics will help the Tohoku region recover from the 2011 disaster, and indeed some measures have been taken to incorporate the Tohoku region in the games, such as with the aforementioned torch-relay as well as the decision to host some of the sporting events in the region (Olympics Recovery and Reconstruction 2020). That being said, most of these actions seem to be symbolic in nature, with the tangible Olympic experience being centered in Tokyo (Holtus et al 2020, 118). This has led some to label the “recovery games” rhetoric as a form of disaster capitalism, aimed at profiting off of disaster with only symbolic contempt for the affected (Boykoff & Gaffney 2020 3). This would not be an isolated event, as a similar case occurred within the context of the 2019 Rugby World Cup hosted in Japan: the town of Kamaishi was also hit hard by the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, and in the aftermath of the disaster the Kamaishi Recovery Memorial Stadium was built to be used as a venue for the Rugby World Cup, however In a cruel twist of fate one of the two games that was schedule to be played at the stadium was cancelled at the hands of yet another natural disaster in the form of typhoon Hagibis (Rugby World Cup 2019). Although the stadium was touted to be symbol of the region’s recovery from the earthquake, some also questioned whether the 3.9 billion yen cost of the project could not have been better spent towards helping the local residents, some of which still live in temporary housing (McCurry 2018). Critics of the 2020 Olympics’ ability to be beneficial for the Tohoku region also includes the inhabitants of the region itself who, among other things, question whether the games can truly proclaim that the region has recovered while they see a different image in their daily life, with some believing that the recovery games were conceived purely to garner sympathy for the 2020 bid (Holtus et al. 2020, 120) (Ronalds 2019).

But perhaps the biggest threat to the “recovery games” branding (and the 2020 games as a whole for that matter) is the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic. I have already discussed some of the ways in which the COVID-19 outbreak has impeded the organizational process of the 2020 games, and will now explain why it threatens the rationale behind the games’ branding as the recovery games. As previously mentioned, in 2020 the decision was made by both the IOC and the tournament organizers to postpone the games to 2021. Even the proponents of the games seemed to agree that, for Tokyo to successfully host the games, the COVID-19 epidemic would have to be under control, such as when Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike said that she wanted to host the games as “symbol of the world coming together to overcome this tough situation and of strengthened bonds among humankind” following the decision to postpone the games. (Sieg & Miyazaki 2020). In an interview on the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, IOC president Thomas Bach underscored the importance in aiding recovery, labeling the 2020 Olympics as a “Light at the end of the dark tunnel that we are currently in” (Olympics 2021 April 6). These types of statements show that the rhetoric of the “recovery games” has, whether the organizers intend for it or not, been expanded to include recovery from the COVID-19 outbreak.

However, roughly a year later, and the organizers find themselves in a situation similar to the year before. The city of Tokyo found itself in a state of emergency as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, and although this state of emergency was eventually lifted before the games (Takahashi 2021), there are currently no signs that indicate that the COVID situation will be completely under control in time for the start of the games, with IOC senior official John Coates even stating that the games would go on as planned regardless of whether or not the state of emergency would be lifted in time (Kim & Sieg 2021). This is where the labeling of the 2020 Olympics as the “recovery games” becomes problematic, being that Japan will not have recovered from the COVID-19 epidemic in time for the games to start.

This dissonance has not been lost on the Japanese population either, with numerous public polls showing a decline in approval ratings as the start of the Olympics draws closer: looking at public polls conducted by the Asahi Shimbun shows that 86% of the respondents in January wanted the games to be either cancelled or postponed as Japan was in the middle of their third Covid infection-wave. This number then slowly shrank to 69% in April, before jumping up to 83% in May after the state of emergency was declared in Tokyo once again (Asahi Shimbun 2021). Similar polls held by other Japanese news agencies such as Kyodo News and Yomiuri Shimbun seem to confirm this pattern of approval rates changing according to the country’s COVID-cases (Kyodo News 2021) (King 2021). From these numbers we can conclude that the approval ratings for the games are, at least to some extent, linked to the perceived COVID-19 situation in Japan. As uncertainty regarding the games rises, some Japanese towns that were set to host Olympic athletes have opted out of doing so citing safety concerns (Yamamitsu & Park 2021).

Disapproval of the games by a country’s residents is certainly not an uncommon phenomenon, especially in the modern age, as it is quite common for a games’ popularity to dip shortly before they start (Dunbar 2021). That being said, these doubts are usually overshadowed by successful hosting of the event, something that looks like a difficult proposition in the case of the 2020 Olympics. Criticism for the decision not to cancel or postpone the games has not been limited to ordinary citizens either: In an editorial piece the Asahi Shimbun, who are also one of the official sponsors of the games, declares that “it is simply beyond reason to hold the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics this summer”, and calls on Yoshihide Suga to “evaluate the situation calmly and objectively” (Asahi Shimbun 2021). While some would question their motives for doing this without withdrawing their sponsorship (Miyake 2021), it seems pretty telling that such a key player in the organizational process would publicly speak out like this. In a similar incident, the Tokyo Medical Practitioners Association has also publicly spoken out against hosting the games, citing that the medical personnel in the host city “have their hands full and have almost no spare capacity” (Slodowski 2021).

All this criticism has made the event’s role as a nation-building tool questionable, however its benefits as a nation-branding event could also be at risk as concerns have also been coming from abroad. Most of the foreign media coverage regarding the Olympics seems to focus on criticism from within Japan, with comparatively little attention devoted to criticism from abroad. The coverage that does exist seems to be in agreement that the games cannot be held in the current situation, although some pin most of the blame on the IOC rather than the Japanese organizers, as they hold ultimate jurisdiction whether get cancelled or not (Illmer 2021; Guardian 2021; nakano 2021). With all that being said, with this mounting concern for the population’s safety, the pressure to successfully host the games is rising for Japan. With the current state that the country finds itself in, however, it seems doubtful that the “recovery games”, will feel like a true recovery.

Conclusion

The 1964 Olympics in many aspects represented the culmination of Japan's postwar recovery. The games granted Japan the opportunity to show the world how far they had come since their World War II defeat, with the transformation of the city of Tokyo from a destroyed husk to a modern metropolis serving as testament to Japan's economic growth. The 1964 games allowed the Japanese people to show pride for their nation once again, and the positive legacy of the event still lives among many Japanese people old enough to have witnessed the event. Now, 57 years later, the organizers of the 2021 Olympics seem keen to evoke this nostalgia, creating the image that the 2021 games will help the country in the same way that they helped the country in 1964. As we have seen from the "recovery games" branding to the various channels via which the games have been marketed, many parallels have been drawn between the two games. Contrary to this image however, the Olympic games have very much changed since 1964: the costs to host the biggest SME on earth has risen tremendously throughout the decades, and the notion that the benefits of the games have matched this rise seems questionable.

We have covered why the branding of the 2020 Olympics as the "recovery games" is problematic, being that Tohoku region has in many aspects yet to completely recover from the effects of the 2011 earthquake. Despite this, the recovery games rhetoric has been used prominently, both during the Olympic bidding process to secure the bid, as well as in the promotion of the games. The attempts of the organizers to involve the Tohoku region in the Olympics have so far been perceived as symbolic, something that has caused the organizers to be questioned about their intentions by some, and accused of trying to profit off of the disaster by others. It remains to be seen how the Tohoku region will be represented over the course of the event, however it seems doubtful that the recovery rhetoric will come close to the legacy of recovery that the 1964 games enjoy.

On the other hand, the COVID-19 epidemic has proven to be a threat to the 2020 Olympics beyond the realm of branding. Besides further damaging the rationale of the recovery being held, the epidemic is now forcing the event to take place during questionable circumstances after already causing them to be postponed. As a result of the of the pandemic, a Japanese population that was initially receptive about hosting the games has now been turned against them, and concerns about the safety of the event have been mounting as the games draw closer. The margin for error will be small for a host city that has yet to recover from the pandemic, as the whole world will be watching their tightrope act where one mistake could spell disaster for the recovery games branding. Watching the games unfold will undoubtedly provide good material for future research, as we will be able to follow the aftermath of the 2020 Olympics in areas such as economic benefit and how the event changes the world's perception of Japan from a nation branding point of view. While it remains unlikely that the event will live up to the positive legacy of the 1964 Olympics, only time will show us what type of legacy the 2021 Olympics will leave behind.

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