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Tokyo 2020 as Remedy for National Afflictions: Legacy, Foreign Policy, and Contradictions

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Tokyo 2020 as Remedy for National Afflictions Legacy, Foreign Policy, and Contradictions



Image from the author's personal archive. Cancelled Flights at an Empty Haneda Airport on September 9, 2020.

THESIS MASTER OF ARTS In POLITICS, SOCIETY AND ECONOMY OF ASIA

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Abbreviations and Conventions

JOC Japanese Olympic Committee

IOC International Olympic Committee

COO Country of origin effect

FDI Foreign Direct Investment

3.11 March 3, 2011 | Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown disaster

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Introduction

Hosting mega-events such as the Olympic Games is an exercise of sports diplomacy. It can lead to economic benefit, justify foreign policy and influence foreign relations. Because sport is presented as a form of harmless and universal fun and leisure, the consensus is that sport and politics do not mix, and therefore sport is apolitical.¹ Moreover, the Olympic charter outlines the values of Olympism as a blend of culture, sport, and education to create a lifestyle that upholds the Olympic values. These values include social responsibility, respect for universal fundamental ethical principles, harmonious development of humankind, peaceful society, and human dignity.² However, the reality is that sports diplomacy is used to shape a favourable image of a country because it can lead to a positive influence on its foreign policy goals.³ Politicians appeal to the honourable qualities and values that sport represents to conceal the political ends.

When promoting Tokyo 2020, politicians constantly refer to the fulfilment of dreams and inspiring the next generation, while portraying Tokyo as a city of innovation that inspires people from all over the world. It becomes clear that the goals of Tokyo 2020 are related to elevating the Japanese national brand and are delivered through sports diplomacy. Nation branding is a process of self (nation)-fashioning with the aim to reap the benefits generated by having a positive image internationally.⁴ In Japan nation branding is still not efficiently regulated but it is understood as a method of harnessing soft power.⁵ The connection between soft power and sports diplomacy is relevant because mega-events use recognizable symbols, stereotypes and emotional messages that are commercialized worldwide. The media is complicit in maintaining the illusion that sports are apolitical, as it tends to portray sporting events as “a “great leveller” that appeals to the best in humanity.”⁶ Sports diplomacy becomes a trojan horse for political ambitions because it encourages people consume content branded as politically neutral.

The use of soft power to influence the perception on the host country is just a piece of a bigger political jigsaw puzzle. Soft power is a tool that does not make use of coercion or military action.⁷ Since Japan used the 1964 Games to promote a break from its military past and a new pacifist approach, soft power is of great importance for the Japanese strategy of achieving desired outcomes in foreign and public policy. However, in the past 60 years dissent over the US influenced post-War Japanese constitution has been steadily growing. The key actor in attempts to change the constitution is former-prime minister Abe Shinzo. Abe is also the prime minister during whose administration Japan secured the bid for the 2020 Olympic Games.⁸ Abe aimed to preserve Japan’s tradition and culture while enhancing national pride and confidence during his administration.⁹ He had specific political ideals regarding Japan’s identity. Taking into consideration that the Olympic Games are the perfect

1. Burak Herguner, “The IOC as a transnational organization: Paradigm shift and its rising role in global governance,” *International Area Studies Review*, 15(2), (2012): 176.

2. International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Charter” July 17, 2020, 11.

3. Stuart Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 23:3, (2012): 581.

4. Fan Ying, “Branding the nation: What is being branded?,” *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 12, no 1 (March 2005): 5-14.

5. Koichi Iwabuchi, *Resilient Borders and Cultural Diversity: Internationalism, Brand Nationalism, and Multiculturalism in Japan* (Lexington Books, 2015), 25.

6. Jules Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism and The Olympic Games* (Routledge, 2014), 5.

7. Joseph S Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, N.Y Public Affairs, 2004), 5.

8. Hidetaka Yoshimatsu, “National Identity and Asian Diplomacy under Abe,” in *Identity, Culture and Memory in Japanese Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael Kolmaš and Yoichiro Sato (New York: Peter Lang, 2021), 19.

9. Ibid.

arena to showcase and promote these ideals of Japanese identity, analysing the Olympic Brand and Opening Ceremony can offer an insight into how sports diplomacy is used to shape the perception over Japan's foreign policy, without alienating its partners.

In 1964, Japan used the Olympic Games to present itself as a peaceful country that has renounced its militaristic past, managed to re-build Tokyo, introduced the fastest train in the world at the time (Shinkansen) and revolutionized the way the Olympic Games were watched by international spectators, just to name a few achievements. Since then, Japan has become the second largest economy by going through a so-called "miraculous" economic development under the protective wing of the developmental state. Japanese products, although timely, came to be appreciated worldwide, and since the 1990s the appeal of Japanese creative products in the form of manga, anime, music etc. also took off.¹⁰ Despite predictions that Japan would take over the United States in terms of GDP, in 2010 it lost its second place to China. Only a year later, the triple disaster in the form of The Great East Japan Earthquake, the subsequent tsunami, and the Daichi Nuclear plant meltdown cast doubt over the overall safety of the country. All the build-up affected the Japan's reputation abroad. The need for

Since the 1990s Japan has been struggling with many of the same issues as every other developed Western country. However, its status as leader in the region has been challenged by China's rapid growing economy and demands. In 1964 Japan's task to rise to the demands of the international community was a lot easier to fulfil since it had to start from scratch and had no competition from its neighbours. Since then, Japan had become a regional leader, a position which it must defend. However, this must be done while keeping on top of increasingly aggressive competitors. The COVID-19 pandemic cast an additional level of difficulty for Japan, raising the stakes for the Olympic Games from a celebratory event of prevailing in the face of the 2011 disaster to a potential super-spreader that would have threatened global safety. This thesis aims to show how Japan used the Olympic Games in order to signal a diplomatic change from a passive attitude to a proactive attitude. The Games are closely connected to the economic stagnation and the challenge posed by the China's economic rise, as well as South Korea's rising cultural popularity. By relying on orientalist narratives set in 1964, the Games served as a tool for self-actualisation meant to deliver an updated image of Japan as a world leader in innovation instead of a mere equal to the West. This thesis will explore the narrative behind the Games and the underlying issues. By relying on theories on sports diplomacy and national branding to frame the debate around the Japanese Games, this thesis will deliver three chapters. The first chapter will analyse the role of Abe Shinzo in building the narrative for Tokyo 2020. The second chapter will explore why Tokyo 2020 needed to frame the reconstruction of the 2011 disaster area as a goal in organizing the Games. Lastly, this thesis will use the Olympic proposal, the brand and the Opening Ceremony to show how the narrative was presented and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main research questions this thesis strives to answer is: What is the national brand identity promoted by Japan using sports diplomacy through the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games?

10. Iwabuchi, *Resilient Borders*; Ying, "Branding the nation."

Japanese Olympic Legacy

Historically, East Asian Countries (Japan, South Korea and China) organizing the Olympic Games strive for Western acceptance. The Games have been used as a tool for signalling economic development to the Western World. The 1988 Seoul and 2008 Beijing Olympic Games are often regarded as South Korea and China's "coming out" party to the international stage. China used the 2008 Beijing Olympics to showcase its recent economic development and garner international respect.¹¹ South Korea's 1988 Olympic Games, were not only a symbolic moment for the end of the Cold War, but also a catalyst for South Korea's democratization.¹² Furthermore, the 2018 PyeongChang Games were used as a device for reconciliation between North and South Korea, following a period of rising tensions.¹³

For Japan in 1964, the Games served as a rite of passage to the international community after the Second World War. When the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) argued for holding the Olympic Games in Tokyo, as far back as 1930, they stressed the importance of universality: they argued it could only be achieved once an Asian host was awarded the bid. The event offered Japan the opportunity to be the first Asian host and establish itself as a trail blazer. The 1964 the Games were of paramount importance as the event was intended to present Japan to the international community as a peace-loving country, removed from its imperial past, ready to reintegrate itself in the international community by promoting human and cultural exchange and mutual understanding.¹⁴ Moreover, it was meant to re-ignite a non-controversial feeling of nationalism in the Japanese people who suffered from the disillusion caused by losing the War. Tagsold describes it as a rite of passage from "post-war to Modern Japan"¹⁵.

In this context, modernity took many forms from technological advancement, civic education for Japanese people in order to be presentable to foreigners (Olympic education) as well as mediating the meaning of military architecture towards a new national narrative. The event was used as a steppingstone towards rebuilding a national consciousness and introducing national symbols using the national anthem (*kimi ga yo*), the national flag (*hi no maru*), and symbols of the royal family.¹⁶ Tagsold identifies the Games as being the catalyst for *nihonjinron*. Peter N Dale defines *nihonjinron* as "the commercialised expression of modern Japanese nationalism" that assumes under one genre any form of writing that attempts to define the unique characteristics of Japanese culture.¹⁷ This thesis will reveal in the next chapters how *nihonjinron* has not only persisted but became the norm when describing Japan.

11. Chen, Chwen Chwen, Cinzia Colapinto, and Qing Luo, "The 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Visual Insights into China's Soft Power," *Visual Studies* 27, no. 2 (June 2012): 188.

12. Jung Woo Lee and Tien-Chin Tan, "Politics, policy and legacies of the Olympics in Asia Pacific: a panoramic view," *Sport in Society*, 24:12: 2067-2076.

13. Jung Woo Lee, "Do the scale and scope of the event matter? The Asian Games and the relations between North and South Korea," *Sport in Society*, 20 (2017): 380.

14. Jessamyn R. Abel, *The International Minimum : Creativity and Contradiction in Japan's Global Engagement, 1933-1964*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015); Sandra Collins, "Mediated Modernities and Mythologies in The Opening Ceremonies of 1964 Tokyo, 1988 Seoul and 2008 Beijing Olympic Games," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 16 (2012): 2244-63; Sandra Wilson, "Exhibiting a New Japan: The Tokyo Olympics of 1964 and Expo '70 in Osaka*," *Historical Research* 85, no. 227 (2011): 159-78.

15. Christian Tagsold, "'The Tokyo Olympics as a Token of Renationalization'. In Olympic Japan." in *Ideals and Realities of (Inter)Nationalism*, ed. Andreas Niehaus and Max Seinsch, (Würzburg : Ergon, 2007), 113.

16. Tagsold, "The Tokyo Olympics as a Token of Renationalization."

17. Peter N Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (St. Martin's Press New York, 1990), 14.

Some of the main technological advancements scholars frequently identify are the *Shinkansen* (Bullet Train), the Tokyo-Narita monorail and the introduction of live broadcast television. While there was concern over the success of the event, 98% of Japanese people watched the Opening Ceremony on their television sets.¹⁸ These advancements were used to exemplify the prowess of Japanese innate capabilities although, as both Tagsold and Abel point out, Japan was the second biggest beneficiary of World Bank Loans during that time.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the message was absorbed in the collective imagination helping mould the image of Japanese uniqueness and subsequently the “economic miracle”.

Opening Ceremony as a Story-telling Device

While the 1964 Games represent the first time an Olympic event was organized by a non-Western host, Sandra Collins argues that the Olympic Games in East Asia have different political connotations, based on an East-West dichotomy; they are aimed at redeeming the Asian host as equal partners to Western nations.²⁰ Scholars have pointed out the importance of Opening and Closing Ceremonies as a tool for projecting national ideals; they become a method of reconciliation between international ambitions and nationalistic purposes via representations of songs, symbols, traditions, and technology. Moreover, Collins observes that the hosts from East Asian countries focus on the display of cultural uniqueness. The cultural capital is further enhanced by technological and economic advancements; the purpose is to exhibit a process of modernization that was achieved without compromising the mirage of an unchanging culture.²¹ Despite these efforts, Torsten Webber notes that despite the efforts to put the war behind and showcase an image of peace and newly acquired western-style modernity in 1964, there was no “clear-cut break between Japan’s wartime past and post-war Japan.”²² This avoidant approach towards a controversial past enabled Japan to constantly frame itself as a victim of the Second World War. In 2020, Japan used the same avoidant approach, not to conceal its past, but its current afflictions.

Chris Arning provides a valuable insight into how non-western countries project their values during the Opening Ceremonies by analysing the symbols and codes used. He explains how the Soviet Union used the Opening Ceremony to demonstrate its might and skill through the gymnastic prowess and grace, while the ballet represented the cultural heritage. Similarly, Beijing projected the same qualities through the “tightness of the choreography and the mass orchestration”²³. Lee Jung Woo also stresses the symbolic power of the Opening Ceremony for the Pyongyang 2018 Games, where North and South Korean athletes marching together represented an important moment for the diplomatic relationship between the two countries; it led to actual diplomatic development and de-escalation of tensions.²⁴ Arning does not only focus on eastern “others” but looks at western participants as well. The difference between East Asian hosts and Western hosts does not lay in the way they use the Opening Ceremonies to exhibit new technological advancements, military power or superiority of a political system, but rather in how the host frames itself as different but equal to the West.

18. Abel, *The International Minimum*, 156(?)

19. Tagsold, “The Tokyo Olympics as a Token of Rentationalization”, 124

20. Collins, “Mediated Modernities”, 2243.

21. Collins, “Mediated Modernities”, 2242, 2244.

22. Torsten Webber, “Success story: the 1964 Tokyo Olympics,” in *Through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics*, ed. Barbara Holthus et al, (Routledge, 2016), 71.

23. Chris Arning, “Soft power, ideology and symbolic manipulation in summer Olympic games opening ceremonies: A semiotic analysis,” *Social Semiotics* 23(4) (2013), 527.

24. Jung Woo Lee, “Olympic Ceremony and Diplomacy: South Korean, North Korean, and British Media Coverage of the 2018 Olympic Winter Games’ Opening and Closing Ceremonies,” *Communication and Sport* 9, no. 5 (2021): 761–84.

Symbolism

One of the highlights of the Opening Ceremony in 1964 was Yoshinori Sakai carrying the Olympic flame. Sakai, nicknamed “atomic boy”, was born in Hiroshima on the same day the atomic bomb was deployed. He was used a symbol for the Japanese post-war rejuvenation. The visual representation of Sakai, a person who never experienced the war, dressed in white with the *hi no maru* (rising sun) symbol on his chest “connected perfectly to the Olympic message of peace.”²⁵ Tagsold argues that this image helped the Japanese political purpose of re-framing Japan as a victim of World War Two. This type of incongruence is not an isolated case, and Tokyo 2020 is bound to suffer from the same historical blindness. Japan also used military symbols represented by the Reserve Forces in the Opening Ceremony. The jets were used to draw the five Olympic circles in the air, ignoring the contradiction between Japan’s involvement in the Second World War and the purported newly adopted pacifism. These symbols and much more were broadcasted to both domestic audiences and international ones, making use of the newly developed technology, and indirectly showing off Japanese capabilities that benefit the whole world: “for 1964 “not the televised content was important but the fact of televising itself.”²⁶ This type of discrepancy between projected identity and reality is the direction that this thesis intends to uncover for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

The main attractions at the 1964 Games were both material and value based. Japan highlighted its adoption of Western values such as modernisation, peace, or democracy. They were used as a trojan horse for Japan’s own political agenda: highlighting its culture as unique, veiled nationalism, and adopting the victim status. It also used material achievements in the form of cutting-edge technological advancements that the West had yet to achieve to demand respect.

Celebration Capitalism

Just like the Tokyo Games of 1964 represented a turning point for Japan, Barbara Holthus argues that “Tokyo 2020 is constructed as an important moment of redefinition for the nation vis- à-vis the global community, as well as to itself and its people.”²⁷ However, unlike 1964, Japan didn’t have to prove its economic prowess, nor invest massively in infrastructure. What Japan needed in 2020 was to solidify its global standing, prove it is a safe place for tourists and attract investment.²⁸

The body of work covering the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games is still in its infancy since the Games were held less than a year prior, at the moment of writing, June 2022. Before 2020, scholars have analyzed the Olympic Games as a neoliberal project that targets to address many of the worries within the Japanese politics and society in the past thirty years. The topics include neoliberal reforms, security, greenwashing, Olympic education, media coverage, as well as urban developments and labour and exploitation. The consensus is that while the Olympic Games represent a good opportunity for the hosting country to bolster its international standing and attract foreign investment and popular support, the anti-Olympic movement has become more and more prominent, albeit ignored by politicians.

Boykoff and Gaffney argue that the Games are already culturally obsolete because they have become a value extraction mechanism that abuses local communities and impacts

25. Tagsold, “The Tokyo Olympics as a Token of Rentationalization”, 114.

26. Tagsold, “The Tokyo Olympics as a Token of Rentationalization”, 122.

27. Barbara Holthus, Isaac Gagné, Wolfram Manzenreiter, and Franz Waldenberger, “Understanding Japan through the lens of Tokyo 2020 “in *Japan through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics*, ed. Barbara Holthus et al., (Routledge, 2020), 2.

28. Yoshifusa Ichii, ‘Creative Reconstruction’ and the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games: How Does the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games Influence Japan's Neoliberal Social Reform?’ *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 28, no. 1 (2019), 104.

the climate negatively.²⁹ They mention numerous issues in the Tokyo 2020 bidding process such as: alleged bribery scandals involving the bidding process, legislation promoting heightened surveillance, lack of mass-media coverage of anti-Olympic movements, deaths of people involved in building the new Olympic stadium, or the dislocation of people and neighbourhoods. They argue that “Unlike the illegal corruption that Japanese Olympic powerbrokers allegedly carried out through vote-buying, these dynamics, in combination, amount to a potent brand of legalized corruption that defines the Olympic business model.”³⁰ The issue of heightened surveillance is also covered more in-depth by other scholars who argue that the Olympic Games are used as an excuse to exert more control over the population.³¹

Jules Boykoff introduces in 2014 the concept of “celebration capitalism” which tries to explain how the Olympic Games are a spectacle that uses symbols, hopes, and dreams in order to justify public spending for mega-events. Boykoff explains that just like Naomi Klein’s “disaster capitalism”, “celebration capitalism” happens in a state of exception during which politicians and corporate cohorts take advantage to push for policies that otherwise would be unthinkable. The population is pushed towards economics rooted public-private partnerships that rarely benefit the public in the long term.³² Boykoff observes that even for the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games the capacity for tourism was overestimated and the expected demand unmet. He points out that due to an erroneous assumption that in the absence of a mega-event the economic activity in the area would be zero, economic gains resulted from events like the Olympics are overstated and that “when people spend money at the Olympics, they’re not spending it in their local communities”.³³

The celebration aspect of “Celebration capitalism” refers to the spectacle that the Olympic committees rely on to divert the public’s attention from the price tag using promises of great economic gain and social benefits. Boykoff explains that “with celebration capitalism, the spectacle scintillates our senses while tapping into rich symbolism and marking a line between actors and spectators”.³⁴ The spectacle connects with the affective side of the audience and rather than representing a means to an end it uses symbols, hopes, and dreams in order to deliver meaning.³⁵

29. Jules Boykoff and Christopher Gaffney. “The Tokyo 2020 Games and the End of Olympic History,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 31, no. 2 (2020).

30. Boykoff and Gaffney, “The Tokyo 2020 Olympic”, 10.

31. Sebastian Polak-Rottmann, “Security for the Tokyo Olympics,” in *Japan Through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics*, ed. Barbara Holthus et. al, (Routledge 2020), 131.

32. Jules Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism*, 3.

33. Jules Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism*, 14-16.

34. Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism*, 18-19.

35. Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism*, 20.

Methodology

The previous chapter explores how Japan built the Olympic Legacy by relying on “cultural uniqueness” and historical amnesia. The 1964 success also informed the approach for Tokyo 2020. The goal of this thesis is to examine how sports diplomacy was used in relation to national branding to update Japan’s status in the context of increased competition, a stagnating economy and an ageing population. Japan built on existing narratives of nationhood, cultural uniqueness, and miraculous economic development in order to on one hand re-enforce the status quo while on the other hand to communicate a new assertive diplomatic approach. By pursuing a qualitative research approach, this thesis will seek to answer the main research question by using the commercial materials, official statements and declarations by politicians and public figures, as well as official documents released by the JOC, the Japanese Government, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and the IOC.

As it can be observed from the existing literature, inconsistency, and contradiction whether in brand or policy, is one of the main issues that can already be identified for Tokyo 2020. The gaps in research are easy to identify considering the timing. Moreover, since nobody has yet attempted to analyse the Olympic Games in Japan from the perspective of sports diplomacy, this thesis will add a new dimension to the existing scholarly discussion by providing the main characteristics of Japanese nation branding in the context of the Olympic Games. Sports diplomacy, and the political dimensions of mega-events have garnered attention only in the past decade. Many studies now focus on soft power and sports diplomacy when discussing the Olympic Games, however, few mention both in a Japanese context. On top of this, it would have been impossible to talk about branding in the year 1964, considering the heavy commercialization of the Olympic Games had not gained steam yet. This thesis will bring the three concepts together by framing Tokyo 2020 as an exercise of national branding that relies on soft power and is delivered through sports diplomacy.

Based on the theories of sports diplomacy and nation branding, this thesis will next attempt to answer the following sub-questions related to the main research question:

- 1) How does organizing the Summer Olympic Games relate to the economic and foreign policy issues Japan is facing in the 21st century?
- 2) How does Japan frame the reconstruction of Tohoku in relation to the Olympic Games?
- 3) What symbols does Japan use to build its international reputation through the Olympic Games?
- 4) How did the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent one-year delay affect the narrative around the legacy of the Olympic Games?

The first question seeks to contextualize the political and economic environment in Japan since 1964. By providing a background regarding the changes that occurred in the past sixty years, this thesis proposes Abe Shinzo as the main driving force behind the need for the Olympic Games. After two decades of failed attempts of revitalizing the economy, Japan needed the Olympics to remedy and consolidate its status.

The second question will be explored mainly through the lens of reputation management and nation branding, because the declared purpose of the Japanese government is to inspire people to support the reconstruction of the Tohoku region through consumerism (buying local products and produce) and tourism. Like this, I will be able to explore how Japan seeks to exploit its reputation abroad and why the Olympic Games are the perfect device for delivering the best results.

In order to uncover the symbols Japan relies on for building its national brand, the “Official bid file of Tokyo for the Olympic Summer Games in 2020” will serve as a starting point for identifying the values that Japan deems important for its international image. The document will be supplemented with the findings from the previous chapter that ties the reconstruction of the Tohoku area with the Olympic efforts. To answer the last question, which deals with symbolism during the Opening Ceremony the official recording of the event will be used. This question will make use again of the third theory of nation branding to exemplify how Japan seeks to represent its image, constructed through familiar symbols during the Opening Ceremony.

Lastly, this thesis will try to contextualize the changes the COVID-19 pandemic forced upon the organizers. The presence of the virus raised the stakes for Japan, because just a projection of national identity and ideals was suddenly not enough to preserve its international credibility. The argument will focus on how goals initially presented for the Olympic Games were affected and the declared intention and how the initial purpose of promoting the Tohoku area loses the spotlight in favour of first line responders.

Sport Diplomacy, Soft Power, and Nation Branding

Sports Diplomacy

The reasons national governments get involved in sports diplomacy vary by country, but they include: the increase in national prestige, the creation of a sense of national identity and unity or economy.³⁶ It must be mentioned that treating sports diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy is a recent scholarly approach. Murray explains that the purpose of diplomacy is to engage in a dialogue in order to avoid war. During the Cold War, obtaining great results in the Olympic Games was treated as a sign of superiority between two political systems. The US-USSR Olympic boycotts were used as a political tool to send a message to a nation, proving the symbolic importance of participating in the Olympic Games. Moreover, friendly games like the US-Chinese ping-pong tournament (also called “ping-pong diplomacy”) have proved the reconciliatory potential of sport.³⁷ That is not to say that sporting events are a panacea because they can also create conflict between two states. The unintended negative impact of sport diplomacy can be observed in the aftermath of the soccer match between Honduras and El Salvador where a riot among the players spread to the spectators and devolved into war between the two countries in 1969.³⁸ However, the importance of Olympic performance as a proxy for political superiority has decreased and, in its place, human rights and democracy have become the main values nation states have to abide by in order to be awarded the Olympic bid by the IOC.³⁹ Furthermore, the concept of Olympic Legacy has increased in importance and the Olympic Games became synonymous with an investment for the future.⁴⁰

Soft Power

Because it is used as an agent that exercises influence rather than force or coercion, sports diplomacy becomes another expression of soft power.⁴¹ Grix identifies culture, tourism, branding, diplomacy, and trade as the main actors that states can employ in order to foster soft power and sports diplomacy is part of each of their respective strategies.⁴² Defined by Nye as “the ability to shape other’s preferences”, the exploitation of soft power is not a recent phenomenon in Japan.⁴³ Nye points out that previously, Japan was able to derive a large amount of its soft power from its manufacturing prowess. Despite the economic stagnation, the soft power potential of Japan was not affected.⁴⁴ Instead popular culture and cultural exports replaced manufactured goods as the main resources of soft power. The Japanese Government understood this as early as early as 2006, when former foreign minister Aso Taro was highlighting the need for an organized approach around nation branding with the

36. Herguner, “The IOC as a transnational organization”, 178-179.

37. Herguner, “The IOC as a transnational organization”, 177.

38. Ibid.

39. Herguner, “The IOC as a transnational organization”, 182-183.

40. Jonathan Grix, “Sport Politics and the Olympics,” *POLITICAL STUDIES REVIEW* 11 (2013):19.

41. Murray, “The Two Halves”, 581.

42. Jonathan Grix and Paul Michael Brannagan, “Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualising States’ “Soft Power” Strategies through Sports Mega-Events,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 27:2 (2016): 260;

Jackson J Steve, “The contested terrain of sport diplomacy in a globalizing world,” *International Area Studies Review*, 16(3) (2013): 277.

43. Nye, *Soft Power*, 5.

44. Nye, *Soft Power*, 86.

goal of harnessing and expanding the influence Japanese culture has around the world.⁴⁵ Successfully attaining the full potential of soft power requires an equal engagement with foreign audiences, making the Olympic Games the perfect platform for such a dialogue.⁴⁶

Despite being a former leader in the region, Japan was facing increased competition. The reason why popular culture not manufacturing became Japan's main source of soft power also stems from the increased competition from China.⁴⁷ While Japan slowed down, its neighbours did not, creating an identity crisis and a struggle for maintaining its influence. The Japanese Government's soft power regulatory project titled "Cool Japan" has been directly linked with the Olympic movement:

The decision to hold the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo has been made, and there is momentum that supports the Cool Japan strategy.⁴⁸

The projects and proposals under Cool Japan are meant to promote understanding of Japanese culture and language abroad, to promote tourism to Japan, to encourage the consumption of Japanese commodities, foods, and beverages, to enhance the status of products "Designed in Japan", as well as to highlight the uniqueness of an "ancient" culture.⁴⁹ However, Iwabuchi Koichi explains that Cool Japan has become an umbrella term for a set of cultural policies that encompass both political and economic objectives by exploring the "collaborative relationship among the state media and cultural industries and between culture and national interest."⁵⁰ Iwabuchi argues that Cool Japan functions as a form of "brand nationalism" meant to heighten the image of Japan abroad without engaging with the socio-political and bilateral issues that Japan faces.⁵¹

Nation Branding

Nation branding represents the messages and stories a country conveys about itself to both its own population and to an international audience. A nation tries to present itself as attractive to an external audience by appealing to the beliefs and sentiments of the audience which in turns should prompt purchasing decisions.⁵² The nation brands itself by relying on easily recognizable stereotypes. However, nation branding does not involve promoting a certain product but rather all aspects of a nation.⁵³ Just like with marketing a product, the strategy relies on creating loyalty from customers which can be generated by quasi-historical myths, special languages, and environments.⁵⁴

45. Taro Aso, "A New Look at Cultural Diplomacy: A Call to Japan's Cultural Practitioners

Speech by Minister for Foreign Affairs Taro Aso at Digital Hollywood University," MOFA, Accessed 2 June 2022..

46. Grix, "Of Mechanisms and Myths", 256.

47. Shinji Oyama, "Japanese Creative Industries in Globalization," in *Routledge Handbook of New Media in Asia*, ed. Larissa Hjorth and Olivia Khoo (Routledge, 2016), 322.

48. "Declaration of Cool Japan's Mission," Cabinet Office, August 26, 2014.

49. "Cool Japan Proposal," Cabinet Office, August 26, 2014.

50. Iwabuchi, *Resilient Borders*, 25.

51. Iwabuchi, *Resilient Borders*, 25.

52. Fan Ying, "Branding the nation," 9; Nicolas Papadopoulos and Louise Heslop, "Country Equity and Country Branding: Problems and Protests", *Brand Management* 9, no 4-5 (April 2002): 298; Philip Kotler and David Gertner, "Country as brand, product and beyond: a place marketing and brand management perspective", in *Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition*, ed. Nigel Morgan, Annette Pritchard and Roger Pride (Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2004), 41; Peeter W.J. Verlegh, Jean-Benedict E.M. Steenkamp, "A review and meta-analysis of country-of-origin research", *Journal of Economic Psychology* 20 (June 1999): 523.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Olins, "Branding the nation: the historical context", 24.

The success of products that originate in said countries, is also influenced by a country's reputation. This is called "country-of-origin effect" (COO). The perception helps the nation not only further its political agendas as customers will view it in a positive light which helps the country avoid purchase boycotts, but it will also incentivise them to pay more for what they perceive as high-quality, especially if buying a certain brand is synonymous with higher status as well.⁵⁵

There is, however, a difference between the image of a nation which exists with or without branding and the purposeful marketing of the national image.⁵⁶ For example, Cool Japan is a project meant to exploit the positive image Japan enjoyed. The Olympic Games are a tool for exploiting the image through nation branding. The national image is not static, and its positive or negative valence depends on the audience.⁵⁷ Scholars agree on the fact that the image of a country, once established lingers for a long period of time and is hard to change in the absence of major events.⁵⁸ However, things like natural disasters, coups, massacres and so on can swiftly change the image. For example, the organization of mega events such as the Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988 "found corresponding and major and immediate, positive" effects on the host country.⁵⁹

55. Anholt, "Nation-Brands and the value of provenance", 35.

56. Ying, "Branding the nation", 5.

57. Ying, "Branding the nation", 8; Anholt, "Nation-Brands and the value of provenance", 34.

58. Ying, Papadopoulos, Kotler and Gertner

59. Papadopoulos, "Country Equity and Country Branding," 300.

CHAPTER I-THE NEED FOR OLYMPIC GAMES

The bid for the Olympic Games was secured during the Abe administration in 2013. During the same period Abe sought to achieve economic revival and improve the Japanese image abroad. When he assumed office for the second time in 2012, Japan had been struggling with a slow economy for two decades and its reputation started to decline.⁶⁰ Although a national image is not easy to change, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake was an event strong enough to shift the opinion of the public, casting doubts on Japan's safety. In order to remedy the situation Abe launched the "Abenomics" economic reform, composed of "three arrows": combating the deflation and the effect of an ageing population, aggressive monetary policies, and fiscal consolidation and growth strategy. In 2013, the media called the Olympic Games the "fourth arrow" of Abenomics expecting that the win would bring the long-term benefit the economy needed, as well as a method to redress the declining reputation.⁶¹ Hayashi Yuka called the Olympics a "redemption of national pride." From the beginning Abe stressed the importance of ideals as a catalyst for the success of the national goals: "For 15 years, Japan has stagnated because of deflation and a recessionary trend. I am convinced we can accelerate growth in the economy if we all work toward the dream and goals we were just granted."⁶²

As a tool for achieving political goals, Abe used sports diplomacy to promote, build, and deliver a comprehensive message that would signal not only Japan's new assertive approach but also hope for the population. This chapter will first explore the evolution of the economic and political environment in Japan since 1964. Next, it will discuss how the rise of China as a political and military actor provides Japan with an opportunity to claim a new role in the region. Lastly, this chapter will introduce the effect of the 2011 triple disaster (3.11) on the already deteriorating Japanese reputation.

In 1964, the identity promoted during the Olympic Games was based on the post-war constitution and the "Yoshida doctrine" to the extent that any attempt at investing in a Japanese military with offensive capabilities relates to changes in the Japanese identity itself.⁶³ The discourse around Japan as an ancient and unique culture capable of modernization persisted even after the Games although meaning evolved over time. The success was followed by fast economic growth under the protective wing of the developmental state that propelled Japan to become the second largest economy by 1970.⁶⁴ Although the reason for the success was related to the state involvement in picking

60. Masazumi Wakatabe, *Japan's Great Stagnation and Abenomics: Lessons for the World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 118.

61. Nyree Stewart, "Japan's New Olympic Hopes Bring Promise," *Investment Adviser*, 2013; (available through Leiden University catalogue archives); Anthony Fensom, "2020 Olympics: A Fourth Arrow for Abenomics?," *The Diplomat*, September 10, 2013; Nick Ferguson, "Olympics Could Be Fourth Arrow for Abenomics", *FinanceAsia*, July 28, 2013,

62. Yuka Hayashi, "For Some in Japan, Olympics Is a Redemption of National Pride," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 2013.

63. Michal Kolmaš, "Introduction: National Identity and the Study of Japan", in *Identity culture and Memory in Japanese Foreign Policy*, ed. Michal Kolmaš and Yoichiro Sato (New York: Peter Lang, 2021), 2.; The "Yoshida Doctrine" refers to the post World War II prioritization of economic development over military power, while maintaining the right for self-defence.

64. Walden Bello, "States and Markets, States Versus Markets: The Developmental State Debate as the Distinctive East Asian Contribution to International Political Economy," in *Routledge Handbook of International Political Economy (IPE)*, 190–210. Routledge, 2009; Mark Beeson, "Developmental States in East Asia: A Comparison of the Japanese and Chinese Experiences," *Asian Perspective* 33(2): 5-39; Dwight H. Perkins, *East Asian Development: Foundations and Strategies*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).

industry winners and losers, and discouraging foreign direct investment in favour of exports, the myth of the “economic miracle persisted”⁶⁵.

The 1985 Plaza Accord was the beginning of Japan’s economic trouble. It led to an appreciation of the yen against the dollar, which had previously helped the economy because it provided Japan with a trade surplus. The Japanese government was thus forced to accept neo-liberalism and pursue reforms towards deregulation and privatisation. The accord was not the only reason behind the change, as Japan was faced with the subsequent burst of the speculative estate bubble, as well as the emergence of globalization.⁶⁶ Neo-liberalism was imminent. Since then, many prime ministers attempted many reforms and counter-reforms that were not able to solve deflation.

When Abe Shinzo took office for the second time in 2012, he was facing more than a stagnating economy. The March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tripe disaster (3.11) had added a shadow of doubt over Japan as a safe destination. Abe sought to articulate Japan’s importance through a “value-based diplomacy” which emphasizes democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law.⁶⁷ These values also overlap with the values promoted by the IOC and sports diplomacy. The purpose was to convey two distinctive messages: first to stress the Japanese identity as a great nation, and second to signal a departure from previous diplomatic strategy based on passivity towards a more assertive and confident position. Abe was proactively pursuing ideals tied to Japan’s identity and past experiences of nation building. Yoshimatsu notes that “Abe’s perception of value-oriented diplomacy, which was linked to Japan’s national identity, was so strong that he located it as a key diplomatic pillar even in the second administration.”⁶⁸ Moreover, since 2010, Japan’s relative decline combined with the growth of its Chinese neighbour, also raised security concerns that challenge the core of post-war Japanese identity: pacifism. This geo-political situation created the perfect opportunity for Japan define itself against the backdrop of a threatening “other”. Boykoff points out that the Olympic Games present themselves as a promoter of democratic values.⁶⁹ Japan could present itself as a leader of democracy and peace in contrast with the undemocratic and authoritarian China.⁷⁰ Abe presents his stance on revising the constitution through the need for strengthened national security, rather than a departure from pacifism. Ichii Yoshifusa argues that the Olympic Games were used as leverage to pass different policies regarding national security, anti-terrorism and surveillance that inflict on human rights. The Japanese Government appealed to the domestic audience the importance of hosting safe Olympic Games to justify its actions.⁷¹

Hidetaka Yoshimatsu explains that national identity is reliant not only on the state’s self-perception but also on the understanding and acceptance of this identity by other states as well.⁷² Japan’s desire to create a long-lasting impression of an assertive, confident and autonomous democracy juxtaposed with autocratic and increasingly aggressive China, needed a stage where such values could be exhibited without inhibition. In a Presentation at the 125th Session of the International Olympic Committee, Abe skilfully constructed the Japanese Olympic legacy placing himself at the core of the story. Abe offers himself as an example of

65. Perkins, “Success and Failures,” 68; and Beeson, “Developmental States in East Asia,” 9.

66. Michal Kolmaš, “Introduction: National Identity and the Study of Japan.”

67. Hidetaka Yoshimatsu, “National Identity and Asian Diplomacy under Abe”, in *Identity culture and Memory in Japanese Foreign Policy*, ed. Michal Kolmaš and Yoichiro Sato (New York: Peter Lang, 2021), 21-2.

68. Yoshimatsu, “National Identity and Asian Diplomacy under Abe”, 22.

69. Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism*, 16.

70. Kolmaš, “Introduction: National Identity and the Study of Japan,” 11; Yves Tiberghien, *The Great Transformation of Japanese Capitalism* (Routledge, 2014), 27.

71. Ichii, “Creative Reconstruction”, 105-6.

72. Yoshimatsu, “National Identity and Asian Diplomacy under Abe,” 18.

the vitality of the Olympic Movement in Japan by bringing up his athletic pursuits in college, as well as his memories as a child of the 1964 Olympic Games:

When I close my eyes vivid scenes from the Opening Ceremony in Tokyo in 1964 come back to me...All amazing to me, only 10 years old. We in Japan learned that sports connect the world.⁷³

Abe invokes keywords such as “the power of sport”, “Olympic spirit”, or “global vision”, and “sport for tomorrow” in order to tailor an optimistic vision of hope for the Japanese brand. The suspension of disbelief provided by the spectacle offered in part by the Opening and Closing Ceremonies as well as the athletes competing is needed in disseminating feel-good stories and symbols that will help bolster the national brand, improve the national status, and add new value and allure to Japanese products. Therefore, the strategic marketing of Japanese national identity could have direct benefits to the economy, because it builds the narrative of a country with good reputation where investors should come invest, tourists should come visit and whose products everyone wants to buy. As for foreign policies, the Games were a tool for creating a well curated context where a more militarized Japan would be just an assertive actor and supporter of democracy, rather than signalling a shift from the post-war ideology of pacifism.

Guthrie-Shimizu observes that before 3.11, the JOC focused on the revitalization of the national spirit as a justification for the Olympic investment: “Japan needed to overcome the widespread malaise and sense of hopelessness spawned by the prolonged recession and the resulting decline in its international status.”⁷⁴ In his presentation for the IOC, Abe Shinzo starts his speech by reassuring the audience that Fukushima is safe and poses no threat to Tokyo present or future.⁷⁵ However, just a month prior to winning the Olympic bid in August 2013, news outlets were reporting a new storage tank breach of approximately 300 metric tons of contaminated water, after previous leaks into the Pacific Ocean.⁷⁶ The next chapter will present how the nuclear meltdown and the reconstruction of the Tohoku region were used as a symbol for the revitalization of Japan by winning global sympathy and building new symbols of hope.

73. “Presentation by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the 125th Session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC),” Speeches and Statements by Prime Minister, Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, September 7, 2013, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201309/07ioc_presentation_e.html.

74. Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, “Tokyo 2020: Opportunity for Regional Reconciliation or Protracted Antagonism?” in *Japanese Imperialism: Politics and Sport in East Asia: Rejection, Resentment, Revanchism*, ed. by J. A. Mangan (Springer Singapore 2017), 374.

75. “Presentation by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe”.

76. Yuko Kubota and Yuka Obayashi, “Wrecked Fukushima storage tank leaking highly radioactive water,” *Reuters*, August 20, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-fukushima-leak-idUSBRE97J02920130820>.

CHAPTER II –Reconstruction Olympics as Pretext

While arguing why Tokyo deserves to win the next Olympic bid, both the former governor of Tokyo, Inose Naoki, and the former president of the JOC, Takeda Tsunetzaku, used the disaster as an example of resilience and hard work by the Japanese people.⁷⁷ The Great East Japan Earthquake occurred at a time when Japan was already struggling with a declining reputation. Framing it as a source of hope, Japan used sports diplomacy to re-brand the tarnished image of the area and prove Tokyo and Japan are safe places to visit and invest in.

On March 3, 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake shook the Tohoku region, causing a tsunami and a nuclear meltdown. The disaster resulted in 470,000 displaced people, out of which 37,000 people remain displaced as of March 2022.⁷⁸ Information related to the reconstruction of the area can be found on the official Olympic Games Website, the Recovery Agency website, as well as the Bureau of Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 Preparation website. All offer similar information: the Olympic Games will help the economy of the disaster affected areas and implicitly the reconstruction effort. They invoke attractive concepts, staples of sports diplomacy, such as “hope”, “support”, “future”, “recovery”. For the “Reconstruction Olympics”, the mega-event served as a platform for informing people of the situation in Tohoku, promoting products from the area, and encouraging tourism. The Recovery Olympics Portal declares that one of the core ideas of the Olympic bid for 2020 is that by bringing the Olympics closer to the residents of the affected areas they will feel inspired and consequently support the reconstruction process.⁷⁹ While it is clear what role the Olympic Games would play in the reconstruction of Tohoku, it remains unclear what role the Tohoku disaster played in organizing the Olympic Games themselves. This chapter will attempt to uncover the way sports diplomacy was employed to re-frame the Tohoku disaster and how rebranding the area would have positive effects for the Japanese brand as a whole. It will first explore why place branding is focused on Tohoku and why it was instrumental in holding the Games in Tokyo. Next, it will explore the branding of Tohoku and the issues that arise with it. Lastly, it will explore how branding Tohoku is related to the Olympic Legacy.

The Brand

National branding does not focus on a certain product but rather on things such as places, people, local products.⁸⁰ However, in order to sell a compelling story, Japan had the difficult task of highlighting the things that would differentiate Tokyo from other cosmopolitan cities. In the proposal named “Discover Tomorrow”, the JOC focused on the reputation achieved in 1964 of a modern nation with a rich tradition: “Tokyo is the city where the world comes to discover the future.... Its unique combination of hypermodern living and respected historic values has made it a place of intrigue and inspiration....”⁸¹ The bid focuses on hope for the future centred on children and the youth. While a nation brand is hard to sell due the wide range of areas that it covers, branding “the future”, an immaterial concept that

77. “Tokyo 2020: Discover Tomorrow.”

78. “Great East Japan Earthquake,” Reconstruction Agency, Accessed June 14, 2022, <https://www.reconstruction.go.jp/english/topics/GEJE/index.html>.

79. “What are the Recovery Olympics?” About the Recovery Olympics, Recovery Olympics Portal Website, Accessed June 14, 2022.

80. Ying, “Branding the Nation”, 7.

81. “Tokyo 2020 : Discover Tomorrow / Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Bid Committee,” Olympic World Library - Tokyo 2020: discover tomorrow / Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Bid Committee, Accessed June 29, 2022.

can never be experienced, is even harder. Moreover, Tokyo is not the only forward-looking global city in the world. When looking at the other contender's bid for 2020, Istanbul focuses in its introduction on the same points: "From day one, the city has been the star: 8000 years of history at the point where the continents meet a physical and philosophical bridge connecting east and West, tradition and innovation, ambition and capacity."⁸² Istanbul used the same strategy as Tokyo did in 1964 and in 2020: East-West dichotomy, innovation, rich culture and history. Moreover, unlike Tokyo that struggles with a declining birth rate, Istanbul shows off its young generation: highly educated and "the youngest population in Europe."⁸³ Both cities also bring up their vast experience with hosting mega-events. However a success story of overcoming disaster, was the perfect ingredient to set Tokyo apart. By using the reconstruction as a reason for the Olympics, Japan could reproduce the 1964 success, claiming a spectacular comeback, re-confirming the uniqueness and resilience of the Japanese people, and regaining international trust. In fact, the proposal submitted as early as December 21st 2012 by Inose proposes as follows: "If Tokyo is granted the honour of hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games, we can demonstrate to the world how far we have come in rebuilding our country."⁸⁴ Duignan explains that "by offering a protracted period of time before, during and after winning the rights to stage the event, hosts, whether at a country, city or community level, typically leverage the opportunity to overcome a blemished brand or pejorative imagery of place."⁸⁵ The achievement could be flaunted in the Olympic Branding, the Opening Ceremony, as well as sporting events scheduled to be held in the Fukushima, Miyagi, and Iwate prefectures (part of the Tohoku region).

The brand created for the reconstruction of Tohoku is straight forward. The area is safe, and people should come visit and support the locals in their reconstruction effort. Ichii and Manzenreiter observe that the branding employed for reconstruction equated the recovery of the area with Japan itself.⁸⁶ Inose's statement further confirms this approach. By equating the reconstruction of the area with the reconstruction of the whole country, any investment made in Tokyo would implicitly be also made for Tohoku. This would justify the investment in the capital and shift responsibility from directly engaging with the affected areas in Tohoku. The Olympics became a beacon that cast "the power of dream" over every issue at hand. The Reconstruction Agency explains that in order to better the reputation of the area a number of strategies were put in place including local products and tourism.⁸⁷ The Bureau of Olympic and Paralympic Games portrays the approaches the reconstruction efforts from a mode idealised perspective:

The origins of the Tokyo 2020 Games are Olympic and Paralympic Games aimed at recovery and reconstruction. The power of sport will raise the spirits of the residents of these affected areas and provide them with hope and inspiration. ⁸⁸

Hashimoto Seiko, the current president of JOC (2022) also declared that:

82. Hasan Arat, "Why Istanbul Now? Turkey's Bid for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games" (Turkish Policy Quarterly, September 5, 2013): 66.

83. Arat, "Why Istanbul Now?" 66.

84. "Tokyo 2020: Discover Tomorrow."

85. Dr Michael B Duignan, "Leveraging Tokyo 2020 to Re-Image Japan and the Olympic City, Post-Fukushima," *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 19 (March 2021): 12.

86. Ichii, "Creative Reconstruction," 195; Wolfram Manzenreiter, "Olympics and the media." in *Japan Through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics*, ed. Barbara Holthus et al (Routledge, 2020), 10.

87. "Initiatives for Recovery Olympics by the Reconstruction Agency," Recovery Olympics Portal Website, Reconstruction Agency, Accessed June 14, 2022.

88. "The Recovery and Reconstruction Games," Games Related Information (Torch Relay, Etc.), Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 Portal Site, Accessed June 12, 2022.

Since the Games bid, we have been consistently engaging in support activities to help energise and give hope to the people who are still making great efforts in the reconstruction of the Tohoku region.⁸⁹

It is unclear how dreams, hope, the power of sport, and inspiration will materialize in reconstruction efforts or how the remaining 37,000 people displaced will be able to return to their former homes. The focus on morale boosting however laudable is reduced to nothing more than feel-good stories about the unifying power of sport with the sole goal of reputation rehabilitation. The Recovery Olympics Portal Site explains that through the Games, they aim to “raise awareness both domestically and internationally on the current state and attractions in the affected areas as they undergo reconstruction.”⁹⁰ The narrative constructed about the affected areas cynically treats the reconstruction process like a sporting event where the people become the athletes and rebuilding their livelihoods becomes the sport. The “Discover Tomorrow” proposal praises the “qualities of dignity, discipline and fair play” exhibited by Japanese people during the disaster.⁹¹

The celebration aspect of the sports diplomacy conceals the areas that still need improvement. Moreover, Boykoff makes the point that during regular times, the Games do not generate economic benefits for the whole population of the host city and that hosting does not provide the long-term benefits that governments expect to gain.⁹² Because the hosts generally assume zero economic activity in the city, they ignore the fact that the money spent during the Olympic time is simply substituted from other areas or cities. Therefore, for the investment in Tohoku through FDI or tourism to be substantial it would have needed to be the main attraction of the Games. Even then this would have only offered a temporary and small boost to the local economy, without long-term gains.

Building the Legacy

The “Recovery Olympics” also offered an opportunity for creating emotionally charged symbolism and an Olympic legacy based on a success story. In order to create strong ties between the reconstruction effort and the Games, prior to 2020, many cultural events centred around children from the Tohoku area were held or scheduled. Boykoff identifies this as festive commercialism meant to maximise the “affective effect” of the marketing campaigns. He criticises the art and culture events happening in the years prior to the Games, as a means to expand the festive spirit.⁹³ Before the pandemic forced major changes on the concept of the event, students from schools in the affected areas were invited to attend the sporting events during the Games, with the aim to create “A Legacy of Heart”.⁹⁴ Boykoff criticises the spectacle induced by the Olympic Games because they are not a means to achieving an end, but gestures that “carry meaning and significance through their connection to symbols, hopes and fears.”⁹⁵

Children were also directly involved in the creation of Olympic legacy which took the form of the “Monument of Tokyo 2020 Reconstruction”, a three-piece monument, each piece

89. “Tokyo 2020 “Recovery Olympics” Give Hope to Regions Affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake,” International Olympic Committee, July 28, 2021.

90. “What are the Recovery Olympics?”

91. 11

92. Boykoff, “Celebration Capitalism”, 16.

93. Boykoff, “Celebration Capitalism,” 5.

94. “Tokyo 2020 “Recovery Olympics.”

95. Boykoff, “Celebration Capitalism,” 20.

two meters tall.⁹⁶ The monuments are made from recycled alumina, taken from the window frames of temporary housing units. The monuments serve as symbols not just for resilience which enhance the Japanese nation brand. The provenance of the material is intended to inspire and create a strong emotional bond between the viewer and the victims of the disaster and suggest that they overcame the situation.

The J-Village which was previously used as the centre of operations for the nuclear meltdown in Fukushima, was used as the starting point for the torch relay. Under the concept “Hope Lights our Way”, the torch relay was named “The Flame of Recovery.”⁹⁷ Abe invoked the image of smiling children and hope for a better future in order to paint a mental image rid of any controversy, pain or suffering. Abe built another bridge between Tokyo 2020 and the 1964 Games by remembering Yoshinori Sakai and implicitly connecting the revival of the Japanese nation after the Second World War to the Reconstruction of the affected areas. His aim was to inspire the Japanese people to believe that the 2020 Games will lead to another era of rapid growth: “This will bring all the people of Japan together to walk forward together into a new age.”⁹⁸

By 2020, Tokyo had already become a global city. Just the construction of a new Olympic stadium, promises of sustainable real estate projects, and security only cover the basic requirements for the bid. Moreover, the 3.11 disaster had stained Japan’s reputation abroad and casted doubt over the safety of Tokyo. The JOC focused on rebranding the very thing that affected its international image, while the actual reconstruction process took a step back from the spotlight. How the pandemic further took the spotlight in the Tokyo 2020 Games will be explored in the next chapter.

96. “Tokyo 2020 “Recovery Olympics.”

97. Ibid.

98. Leika Kihara, “Japan’s Abe Says Cannot Hold Olympics Unless Pandemic Contained,” *Reuters*, April 29, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-japan-olympics-idUSKCN22B0QR>.

CHAPTER III- Sports diplomacy for National Branding: Before and after Covid

This chapter is structured in two parts. The first part engages with the original concept of the Olympic Games based on the descriptions from the Candidature files and the Olympic Brand both present on the Olympic World Library and the Olympic Games Official Website respectively. This chapter will attempt to uncover the symbols used to reinforce Japan's international reputation through sports diplomacy. The second part will try to gauge the effect of the pandemic on the brand by analysing the images and symbolism during the Opening Ceremony. It will attempt to answer how the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent one-year delay affect the narrative around the legacy of the Olympic Games. In short, this chapter will conduct a comparative analysis of the pre and post pandemic Olympic brand.

BEFORE

The Candidature document is comprised of three files: one concerning the concept and legacy, one concerning the Olympic venues and one concerning technicalities regarding safety, media, accommodation, etc. This chapter will focus on the first file, regarding the vision for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Japan engages in sports diplomacy by delivering political messages regarding its international status (regarding both public and foreign policy) through the benign image of sport, sports education, Olympic values, and physical activity. The proposal alleges that the purpose is to inspire the youth to engage in sporting activities and lead a healthy lifestyle. Under the pretext of sport for a healthy life aided by the introduction of symbols of purity and peace such as children, dreams, and harmony, the proposal tries to whitewash any issues faced by Japan and establish its political role on the international stage. When fashioning Tokyo for the 2020 Olympic Games the text introduces some of the best known "uniquely" Japanese traits combined with the claim of technological innovation on the backdrop of East-West dichotomy.⁹⁹ Moreover, it places Japan as part of the Western world, by assigning itself as the successor of the London 2012 Games.¹⁰⁰

The proposal juggles with two concepts: the already established reputation born during its "economic miracle" and manufacturing era, and the Western perspective of the "other". By catering to a western gaze, the proposal explains Japanese characteristics as being either "unique" and therefore something the West lacks, or by pointing out the contributions that the West has admired throughout history. Unlike 1964 the tone is assertive. No longer is Japan trying to prove it is on par with its Western counterparts but is already ahead of them. Although it stresses the contributions Japan had brought to the international community, it still judges its value relative to its usefulness to the West. The first part of this chapter will try to identify the main themes proposed by the candidature files and compare them with the Olympic Brand.

99. "Tokyo 2020: Discover Tomorrow," 12.

100. *Ibid*, 10.

Discover Tomorrow or Unity in Diversity?

The proposal includes many vague statements about hope and dreams for a better future, as well as misleading statements regarding internal issues. For example, the file boasts about the economic prowess of Japan in 2012, despite entering its third decade of stagnation.¹⁰¹ It also claims no opposition from the Japanese people regarding the Olympic Games, relying on stereotypical concepts of social harmony. The file repeats on numerous occasions the timeless, unique and *omotenashi* (hospitality) culture of Japan which will make foreigners feel welcome at the Games. The Japanese people are presented as enthusiastic about sports but respectful with an emphasis on social unity and harmony along with political stability. The population is rendered voiceless despite being instrumental in achievement a political goal, for which it will pay in taxes for many years to come. For a Western democracy, the claim that there is no opposition on a given subject would raise eyebrows. Japan fashions itself in such a way that it can claim a position of equality with the West, while avoiding any uncomfortable questions. The usefulness of self-orientalism can be observed as Japan upholds its status as an Asian other, whose culture is unique and should be respected, not questioned.

The bid, under the slogan “Discover tomorrow”, portrays Tokyo as the place where the future happens, but also a place with a well conserved heritage. It describes in-depth security measures, financial measures and environmental measures taken in order to comply with the Olympic Movement and provide a “world-class” experience. The bid places Japan at the top of the hierarchy, envisioning itself as a leader in innovation and a trend setter.¹⁰² The proposal implicitly relies on the influence of Japanese soft power resulted from the reputation of Japanese exports. Despite these claims, by 2020 Japan had fallen behind its neighbours in terms of digitization. One example is the launch of the Digital Agency, meant to digitise the public system. This was accomplished only after the Olympic Games were postponed and concluded in 2021. Despite touting Tokyo as a world leader in innovation, it was South Korea launched its digital agency in 2020. If one takes into consideration non-democratic states as well, China had accomplished this even earlier.

The slogan, “Discover tomorrow,” aims to convey the image Japan wanted to promote about itself through sports diplomacy: a country of the future. The concept focuses on vision, dreams, hope, and children. Images of children are frequently used as a symbol, not just within the proposal (title pages designed as collages of pictures of children learning sports and athletes performing in the Games), but also during the Opening Ceremony. Despite struggling with a declining population, the bid declares that “The power of sport has been recognised as essential to achieving “Tokyo Vision 2020” with one of its 8 goals being to “Create a society where everyone can enjoy sports and children are given dreams”.¹⁰³ The bid is weaving a fairy tale where the Olympic Games represent a coming of age story where Japanese children, symbolising the hope for a better future, will overcome current issues through physical activity. Although the bid is optimistic and hopeful, it focuses on a legacy that was yet to be built, signalling the importance of appearances over the actual process. The “power of dreams” rings superficial in the face of natural disasters, wars, or recession because it is presented as the main solution to the problem.

Although not mentioned, the official brand of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games falls under the “Discover Tomorrow” mission. The mascot and the logo design convey the goals expressed in the candidature files in 2012 by combining the ideas of future and harmony with

101. Ibid, 12.

102. Ibid, 1.

103. Ibid, 1,18.

Japanese culture. By glancing over the brand description, the Tokyo 2020 winning design logo is supposed to incorporate the message “Unity in Diversity”. While the description admits the popularity of the chequered pattern all over the world, the logo is tied to Japanese traditional motifs from the Edo Period named *ichimatsu moyo*.¹⁰⁴ The description tries to use the theme of cultural uniqueness while placing Japan as part of the international dialogue by admitting the existence of the pattern in other areas of the world as well. The contradiction is but one of many. The mascot makes use of the popular anime-style imagery through its expressive big eyes, tapping into the popularity of popular culture which has generated a new generation of Japanese soft power. The concept alludes to the slogan and forward thinking through its name: Miraitowa (*mirai* meaning future). The website explains that it promotes eternal hope for the future. The mascot also falls in line with the old-new concept meant to also embody the idea of “innovation from harmony”.

The concept packages many keywords and values to the point where it becomes hard to follow. The logo and the mascot embody unity, diversity, future, hopes, Japanese cultural uniqueness and innovation. The main message is unclear.

Sustainability

For the “Tokyo 2020” vision, the JOC included sustainable legacies as one of the goals proposed in the 2006 bid as a ten-year plan for changing Tokyo. The proposal suggests the importance on utilizing venues from the 1964 Games while at the same time preparing the legacy for after 2020. It claims that out of the thirty-five venues that will be used, fifteen will come from the 1964 legacy. The original plan was to decrease the carbon footprint that would be generated by the event by delivering a “compact” Games, where most of the venues and accommodations are within 8km from the It also presents a real estate development plan designed specifically for the event. This was done by creating the Heritage Zone where the Olympic stadium is situated and the Tokyo Bay zone, where the discovery of tomorrow was supposed to happen. The JOC presents the Games as a major real estate development that pays close attention to its environmental legacy. The project is described to pay respect to the biodiversity, green living, and water through the development of 433 ha of urban parkland, the completion of 88ha of Sea Forest creating a 30 km diameter “Green Road Network”.¹⁰⁵ However, Boykoff points out that the sustainability projects undertaken by the IOC is merely nothing more than a greenwashing initiative that does nothing more than creating positive feelings.¹⁰⁶ This can be seen in the case of Tokyo as the goals were not achieved but recycled with the latest sustainability buzzwords in the “Tokyo Bay eSG project”.

The project, published by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government website as part of the “Tokyo Sustainability Action”, is a plan that overlooks all aspects of the lives of Tokyo residents, from sustainability to feminism in a post-COVID society. It presents the same strategies described in 2012 for 2020, with updated goals that incorporate the latest buzzwords such as “zero emissions,” “digitalization” or “climate crisis”. In a step further from the Olympic proposal, the project acknowledges that

Japan lags far behind in the digital shift occurring in the rest of the world. It has also fallen behind in the area of economic growth.¹⁰⁷

104. IOC, “Tokyo 2020 Olympic Logo, Poster Design & Look of the Games,” Olympics.com, October 6, 2021.

105. *Ibid.*, 17,18.

106. Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism*, 39,40.

107. “Tokyo Bay eSG project,” Tokyo Metropolitan Government, accessed June 24, 2022, 1.

However, the realism of the project ends there, as it proceeds to lay out the same optimistic plans set, but not met, in 2012. The “Tokyo Bay eSG project” signals the ever-growing ambition to bring Japan back to its past glory, by envisioning a setting future where by 2050, people will be able to reside both on ground as well as under sea, in the air or “anywhere”.¹⁰⁸ Just like the “Tokyo Bay eESG project”, the Olympic proposal suffers from grand ideals poorly executed if at all. Although Japan sold the bid as a sustainable project, the goals were not met by 2020. Goals regarding economic growth, world leadership, and innovation are attractively packaged but lack substantiation and follow through.

AFTER

The Opening Ceremony is the main device for delivering a performance that encompasses all the elements of the national brand including symbols, music, speeches and political statements. The most obvious impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the Games is the unprecedented one-year postponement. The initial aim of this thesis was to analyse in-depth how the pandemic has changed the original plans for the Olympic Games and the Opening ceremony, starting from the assumption that it had a major impact. The pandemic did have a major impact, but only behind the scenes regarding rigorous testing, increased surveillance on movement, and the impossibility to fulfil the economic ambitions tied to tourism. Although the absence of foreign tourists or any type of audience did affect the presentation, the Japanese government was able to use the crisis to its advantage without having to compromise or change its goals in terms of branding. The messages of resilience and unity that were promoted through the “Recovery Olympics” were replaced by the need for unity during the pandemic. The concept of the logo and mascot, “Unity in Diversity” were also effectively employed as symbols of global unity during a health crisis. The Games shifted from the “Recovery Olympics” to “the pure essentials: a celebration of athletes and sport.”¹⁰⁹

The Opening Ceremony is four hours in length and includes both video montage and live performance.¹¹⁰ The lack of audience makes this Opening Ceremony unique from other Ceremonies as the organizers had complete control over the narrative. This made a streamlined presentation involving a combination of video montage and live performance possible. The video montage presented athletes training at home, while the dancers dressed in white on an empty gigantic stage performed different physical activities. This type of imagery symbolises the apolitical nature of sport and places athletes as the deliverers of hope during the pandemic. The performances that follow range from dance to music to theatrical performance. The East-West dichotomy is underlined with every performance through the combination of Western and Japanese elements (costume, music, dance etc). Children, usually also dressed in white, are present as central symbols in most of the performances from the dances to the Torch Relay.

The torch relay is a symbolic gesture of passing down the Olympic torch until it reaches the cauldron. For Tokyo 2020 it involved athletes from the previous generations pass down the torch until it reaches a group of three children, in a performance suggesting the transition from the old Japan to future Japan, as the flame is meant to “symbolise the sunrise of a new era spreading the hope that will light our way.”¹¹¹ The brand description also mentions that, prior to the event itself the flame was exhibited in various locations in Tohoku.

108. “Tokyo Discover Tomorrow,” 11.

109. IOC, “Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics - Athletes, Medals & Results,” Olympics.com, June 7, 2022.

110. “Opening Ceremony - Ceremony: Tokyo 2020 Replays,” Olympics.com, International Olympic Committee. Accessed June 30, 2022.

111. IOC, “Tokyo 2020.”

However, during the ceremony itself no visual symbol reminding of Tohoku or Fukushima were introduced. Instead, representatives of the healthcare system were introduced in line with the new theme of the “pandemic Olympics”. The torch was handed down to a nurse and a doctor, symbolizing their importance for the Games during the pandemic. Finally, the Olympic Flame was passed down to tennis player Osaka Naomi. Just like Sakai who embodied the rebirth and purity of the nation after the War, Osaka embodies the new goals of a unified but diverse Japan in sync with the global trends. Using her image and reputation as a tennis world champion is exploitative. The brand presents Japanese culture as unchanging. However, Osaka, as the daughter of a Japanese citizen and a Haitian citizen, is meant to represent diversity. What results is an unchanging tradition that relies on cultural purity, being represented by a person who did not grow up in Japan and represents a group of people who are generally discriminated against.¹¹²

Despite being touted as an apolitical display of sportsmanship and peace, the Opening Ceremony introduces the national flag carried first by different Olympic champions and a first responder. This could be the only mention of the 3.11 disaster, although brief and not obvious. Finally, members of the self-defence forces hoist the flag to the pole. A close-up shot of the Japanese flag waving on a background of empty seats for a considerable amount of time covers the screen. The metaphor should have been resilience, however considering the indiscriminate border measures enforced by Japan even after the Olympic Games it should be read as the symbol of a solitary country. In the light of attempts at changing the constitution the presence of the self-defence forces in the Opening Ceremony is politically laden.

The Ceremony also contains an attempt at showcasing some of the contributions Japan made since 1964. This is done through a brief performance meant to introduce the fact that pictograms were for the first time introduced and used for the 1964 Olympics. However, the technological innovation or contribution is not necessarily obvious or during the Opening Ceremony. The Ceremony also does not deliver the promise hinted by Abe’s Mario cosplay from Rio 2016 Closing Ceremony of a Cool Olympics. The soft power symbolism is only briefly embodied during the Parade of Nations segment, where representatives from each country are greeted by a corridor of volunteers whose garments are painted in manga-style textures. The signs used to announce each country are also designed as manga speech bubbles. However, besides this, not much of the soft power that attracts foreigners to Japan is present. It can be argued that the traditional music, garments, and dances are part of the Cool Japan project meant to better control soft power, but not much else.

The speeches by both IOC president Thomas Bach and JOC president Hashimoto Seiko praise the resilience of the Japanese people against the pandemic. The speeches briefly mention the Tohoku disaster but move on to praising the Japanese people regarding their behaviour during the pandemic, rather than their reaction in 2011. Since the start of the Olympic bid in 2012, the image of a unified Japanese people has played a central role in the Olympic Games. However, it was the JOC or the state that talked for them. Even when quotes are mentioned, they are not substantiated by sources. Their indirect involvement in the organisation through things such as the donation of old mobile phones that helped create the Olympic medals is framed as a pure act of good will, rather than exploitation on the part of the organisers. The proposal mentions full support from the people and political stability, glossing over the anti-Olympic movement and the parties who oppose it. The Games are used to define who is Japanese by ousting whoever is not in favour. In fact, Abe Shinzo

112. “About,” Naomi Osaka, Accessed June 29, 2022.

commented in 2021 that some people who are labelled as anti-Japanese also oppose the Games.¹¹³

113. Ryuko Tadokoro, "Ex-PM Abe says 'anti-Japan' people are strongly opposing Tokyo Olympics," *The Mainichi*, July 3, 2021.

CONCLUSION

In order to answer the main research question this thesis took a step-by-step approach. First, it established the socio-political context during which the bid was awarded to Japan. The Olympic Games were born from the need to prove that Japan, despite all afflictions is still a culturally unique world leader, a trend setter, as well as a partner of Western democracies. Since sports diplomacy can be a tool for investment, the Tokyo 2020 Games worked in two ways: first to rectify Japan's declining reputation caused by economic stagnation and most recently by the 3.11 disaster, and second to plant the seeds for the future of the Japanese image (both in terms of brand and foreign policy). This thesis has shown how Abe used the 1964 Games by borrowing what was convenient, like images of cultural uniqueness, victimhood, and national rebirth, and casting aside the pacifism. The event also offered Japan the opportunity to signal a departure from a previously passive diplomatic attitude to an assertive and proactive attitude. Hiding under claims of technological advancement and as a democratic stronghold against China, Japan found the perfect opportunity to heighten surveillance on its population and attempt more defence independence from the US.

Next, the thesis has explored how the 3.11 disaster was used to re-create the same spectacular debut from 1964 by relying on ideas of Japanese uniqueness, re-birth, victimhood, and resilience. Because it did not suffer any major issues, the story could not be delivered through Tokyo. Instead, Japan framed the reconstruction of Tohoku as one of the goals for the Olympic Games because the story of resilience and succeeding against all odds was appealing for the band, easy to sell, and was in line with the narrative established in 1964. The story of the reconstruction of Tohoku was used to create emotional ties and deliver an inspirational success story, therefore confirming the claims of unique culture and monolithic nature of the Japanese people. The values promoted through sports diplomacy tend to be general or vague, leaving space for last minute changes, caused by things like pandemics. The branding made through sports diplomacy, due to its tendency to spread positive images also covers up any issues and exploitation behind the scenes.

Lastly, this thesis has sought to present the main points of the Japanese branding exercise by analysing the Candidature files and the Opening Ceremony. Japanese nation-branding promotes orientalist images that Western audiences are familiar with and enjoy consuming, packaged as apolitical values, hopes and dreams. Through this strategy, the branding remains unchanged, while the political goals behind the scenes can constantly evolve. This thesis has also showed how sports diplomacy also relies on celebration capitalism. The so-called apolitical nature of sports, combined with the spectacle of the Opening Ceremony induces a suspension of disbelief in the viewer who focuses on the feel-good messages they are presented. The Spectacle of the Opening Ceremony synthesizes all the values Japan wanted to endow itself with, and delivers ideology through solemn representations, colours, and sound. The audience takes the performance at face value, while questioning the authenticity of the representation is cast aside.

Japan used sports diplomacy as a universal remedy for all its issues, from foreign policy, to economy, to the reconstruction of Tohoku, to reputation. It sought to preserve its positive and uncontroversial image, keeping the international audience at arm's length, while claiming to be welcoming and friendly. In reality, Japan follows its own interests, and needs support in order to do so. The successful delivery of the Games during one of the deadliest Covid waves, further consolidated the idea of Japanese brand as being exceptional and unique. The Games served as an investment in its soft power, for future favour. Whether the investment will pay off is still an open question. This thesis has covered the main goals Japanese politicians sought to achieve through Tokyo 2020. There are many avenues that can be further explored starting from each of the above chapters from an in-depth analysis of

legislative changes made under the pretext of safety at the Games, to covert LGBT representation or Olympic boycotts within the Opening Ceremony itself. Although of interest, this thesis could not afford to explore these ideas in depth, despite being of great importance for the study of Japanese national branding.

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