



Online Workshop

“Post-Olympics Japan: Renewal or Failure?”

7–8 October 2021

Abstracts

Session 1 – Political Economy of Olympics

Yasushi Aoyama, Meiji University

Test Positive Olympics

The planned venues for the 1940 Olympics, which were canceled due to the war, were Yoyogi, Komazawa and the Waterfront. The main venues for the 1964 Olympics were Yoyogi and Komazawa. For the 2020 Tokyo Olympics are Yoyogi and the Waterfront. Since the Great Earthquake of 1923, Tokyo has been aiming for an efficient design structure that combines ring roads and railways. This time, we have created many cultural and sports facilities along the Waterfront for the Olympics. There are many offices and houses in Tokyo, but there was a lack of cultural and sports facilities. It is a pity that many people from all over the world have lost the opportunity to visit Japan, but if the Covid-19 subsides, people can gather and interact with each other, so the investment will not be wasted. Due to the lack of spectators, the income from the Olympics will decrease and a large deficit will remain, but Tokyo's finances depend largely on corporate tax revenue. After the Covid-19 disaster, there is no choice but to revitalize and rebuild Tokyo's economy. To that end, the Waterfront becomes a great asset and Tokyo will test positive.

Ichii Yoshifusa, Ritsumeikan University

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics as a ‘Turning Point’ for the Olympic Movement: Creative Reconstruction, Bio-Politics and Capitalist Realism

There is uncertainty about what the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will look like after being postponed due to the spread of COVID-19. However, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has singled out Brisbane, Australia, as the “preferred” host city for the 2032 Summer Games. The IOC's political intention can be seen as an emphasis on ‘capitalist realism’ as a worldview to achieve a global ‘creative recovery’ after COVID-19 and to make the Olympic Movement sustainable. In addition, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which will take place while the spread of COVID-19 remains unresolved, is becoming something of a grand “social experiment”. In other words, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will be a biopolitical project to test the value of a “new way of life” to control infectious diseases, which has been thoroughly implemented in Japan during a period of about one year of postponement. In my report, I will attempt to examine the above issues through an analysis of the Olympic system that has been constructed and strengthened over the eight years from 2013, when the 2020 Summer Games were decided to be held in Tokyo, to 2021, when the Games were postponed.

Session 2 – Political Communication

Paul O'Shea, Lund University and Sebastian Maslow, Sendai Shirayuri Women's University

The 2020/2021 Tokyo Olympics: Does Japan Get the Gold Medal or the Wooden Spoon?

In the run-up to the 2020/2021 Tokyo Olympics there was widespread speculation that the Tokyo Olympics would be cancelled. Holding the summer games in the midst of a pandemic – and in a country with a relatively low vaccination rate – seemed to be a huge risk. In the end, Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide pushed ahead, betting his leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on their 'success'. At the time of writing, and against backdrop of public opposition, a city-wide state of emergency and increasing Covid19 infection rates, the games appear to be 'successful': increased infection rates have not (yet) translated into increased death rates, few athletes have tested positive, and Team Japan is winning gold. Given the vast amounts of money and political capital invested in the games, for the Japanese government, the LDP, and especially for Suga himself, simply pulling off the games without major incident is a 'success'. A good performance by Team Japan raises this further, creating a national feel-good factor, which may help change how the games are remembered. Internationally too, Japan saves face: that the Tokyo Olympics are sandwiched between the 2018 Pyeongchang and 2022 Beijing winter games heightened their importance in terms of regional competition and national prestige. However, other perspectives tell a different story. What does it mean for Japanese democracy that the Olympics went ahead despite overwhelming opposition? Or for public health, that a sports event took precedence over reducing infection rates? Does Japan really win gold, or does it get the wooden spoon?

Jonathan Lewis, Hitotsubashi University

Online Political Communication about the Tokyo Olympics

This paper provides an overview of social media communication about the Tokyo Olympics by Japanese politicians and their followers from before COVID-19 until the 2021 Lower House elections. It uses an original dataset of tweets sent by more than 6,350 politicians in national or local offices and by approximately 100,000 of their followers.

The Olympics are a salient issue for many Japanese politicians. They have sent more than seventy thousand Olympic-related tweets since the start of 2020. 161 politicians have tweeted about the Olympics more than 100 times: 20 National Diet members, 72 in various offices in Tokyo, and 69 based elsewhere. For more than one hundred politicians, at least 10% of their tweets have been about the Olympics.

I will use structural topic modelling and sentiment analysis to explore the relationship between party affiliation, location and attention to/position on the Olympics. I will also investigate to what extent politicians have tweeted about the Olympics in response to their followers' interest or concerns, and to what extent in response to party strategy or media coverage. This study will contribute to our understanding of democratic communication about mega sporting events, and also of how issues intersect with party loyalties in Japanese politics.

Session 3 – Historic Perspectives

Christian Tagsold, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf

Akira between 1964, (1988) and 2020/21

In 1982 the Young Magazine published the first instalment of Akira. The manga unfolded a dark story about future Olympics in 2020 after Tokyo had been destroyed by nuclear bombing in 1982. Back in the early 1980s, the manga was one of the early popular texts to question the legacy of the 1964 games and their promise of a bright future for Japan.

It was certainly not by chance, that Akira posed these questions in 1982. One year earlier, the bid of Nagoya for the 1988 Olympics had been confronted with the first major citizen's protests against staging Olympics in Asia. It became clear, that enthusiasm for the games had cooled down in Japan to a considerable degree. The creative anti-Olympic movement even wanted turn sport upside down and invented tropes (sport read backwards) as an inclusive and non-profit-oriented alternative. In the end, Nagoya lost out to Seoul. By reading the Olympic history of Japan through Akira, I will connect these Olympic moments of 1964, 1981/88 and 2020/21 to ask questions about legacy, sport as symbol for progress and peace and Japan's entanglement into the history of (post-)modern sports mega-events.

Steffi Richter, Leipzig University

Post-Olympics Japan: Renewal AND Failure „Once again that Dream?“

Three times the Summer Olympics have been awarded to Tokyo, in three historically different phases of modernity, which have been characterized by Japanese sociologists as the “time of ideals”, “time of dreams” and “time of fictions/ impossibility”. Taking up this classification as well as Japan's (post-) colonial position between “East”/Asia and “West” and based on recent publications in sports history and sports sociology, this paper gives an insight into the history of the Olympics in this country, which already for a long time has been counted among the “great sports nations”. At the same time, this retrospective takes into consideration the ways in which the mega-event “Tokyo 2020”, currently postponed to 2021, is dealt with. For the very reason that its supporters propagate it as “reconstruction games”, critics regard “Tokyo 2020” as a prime example of the interweaving of the Olympics, celebration capitalism and disaster capitalism.

Session 4 – Diversity

Sakura Yamamura, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Tokyo 2020 Unity in Diversity – from a Mega-event Motto to Social Change to (Super-)Diversity?

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics has taken “Unity and Diversity” as one of its main mottos - this, in times of global migration-led diversification of societies, also called superdiversity by Vertovec. Recent migration policy changes and rising social movements in diversity issues seem to showcase Japan as an open and cosmopolitan country for diversity. Indeed, while the intentions for hosting such mega-events have often given priority to the economic effects, expectations have recently risen to also leave social and cultural legacies behind. However, besides the motto of “Unity in Diversity” as a rather ubiquitous feature of the Olympics, not much appears to have changed - at least politically - beyond marketing and urban re-development. Based on recent developments of policy and public debates regarding diversity issues in Japan, this paper examines the measures (not) taken by governmental actors, but also explores how the LGBT* community and activists seized the opportunity provided by the Olympics and the global media attention to initiate a momentum for a social change in the local society. Reflecting on the different dimensions of diversity from a transnationalism and superdiversity perspective, I argue how the Olympics might have contributed sustainably to the new awareness for the factual societal diversification in Japan.

Celeste L. Arrington, George Washington University and Mark R. Bookman, University of Tokyo

Policy Change in the Shadow of the Olympics: Disability Activism and Accessibility Reforms in Japan

The preparation, execution, and aftermath of the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo have offered domestic stakeholders opportunities to leverage international scrutiny and deadlines to pressure policymakers to pass reforms, including measures to improve accessibility. However, the games alone are not sufficient to explain the scope and consequences of recent accessibility measures. We argue that researchers must also consider the impact of historical contingencies such as decades of activism by affected parties (tōjisha), the 3/11 triple disaster, and Japan’s 2014 ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in order to understand how the games catalyzed accessibility reforms and empowered some (but not all) populations of disabled people. By unpacking the causal mechanisms that linked activism to policy outcomes, we contribute to studies of minority social movements and policy processes in Japan. Drawing on government records, news reports, and documents from disability organizations, our analysis also illustrates how activists contributed to a recent “legalistic turn” in Japanese governance, characterized by detailed rules and enforcement mechanisms, through accessibility projects. These projects improved accessibility for some individuals but created difficulties for others with conflicting needs, reinforcing inequalities across impairment type, age, and gender inside Japan.

Session 5 – Social Movements & Voluntarism

Sonja Ganseforth, German Institute for Japanese Studies

From ‘No Olympics 2020’ to ‘NOlympics Anywhere’: Reflecting on the Anti-Olympic Movements in Japan before and after Tokyo 2020/1

This presentation reflects on the evolution of anti-Olympic opposition in Japan in recent years, in particular with respect to the shift in public opinion since 2020 and to the formation of a transnational movement. For a long time, public opposition against the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics & Paralympics was voiced primarily by a few dozen protestors, most of them activist ‘veterans’ who had banded together on the occasion of the Games, which in their eyes bring to the fore many current problems in society and politics in contemporary Japan. Bystanders at protests, but also national media and broader society used to turn a cold shoulder to these activists, but the tides have shifted with the prolonged coronavirus pandemic. As at times over 80% of Japanese survey respondents answered that they were opposed to holding the Games in 2021, the bystanders’ eyes have recently, in the words of one activist, “become warmer,” and media outlets have taken up covering protests. As the Olympic Games were officially opened under exceptional circumstances and in the midst of a wave of record-breaking infection numbers in Tokyo in July 2021, the IOC’s relentless pursuit of financial profit and its disregard for the plight of host cities and local opinions have become proverbial not only in Japan but in numerous international commentaries as well. It remains questionable, however, whether this shift also signifies any longer-term change in the widespread skepticism and suspicion of political activism and social movements in Japan. But the Olympic Games in their current form seem to be more unpopular than ever, and they are confronted by a growing transnational opposition movement. Japanese activists play an active and integral role in this movement, which is why anti-Olympic activism will likely not end after the Games are over this fall, but will continue to campaign for “NOlympics Anywhere.”

Barbara Holthus, German Institute for Japanese Studies

Tainted Love: Volunteering for the Pandemic Olympics

Olympic organizers always rely heavily on the support of volunteers for the smooth operation of the Games. Just like the Games have grown in recent decades, so has the number of volunteers. Japan hired an unprecedented number of 110.000 helpers, from a whooping 204.000 applications. Volunteering was supposed to get a huge boost in popularity in society, after having volunteers experience a fun-filled time at the Olympics. “Volunteering as the best time of one’s life” became the new mantra. Fast forward to the Pandemic Games, thousands of volunteers either were let go due to the ban on spectators, or they quit their jobs – for fear of the virus, for having had very different life circumstances when the Olympics were held with one year delay. This paper is based on fieldwork of the volunteer journey, from the application process to volunteering in a very different world than originally envisioned. It is a road from pride to shame for some, of open to subdued enjoyment for others.

Session 6 – Technology & Innovation

Alexandre Faure, Fondation France-Japon de l'EHESS

Tokyo 2020: The Implementation of an Event-oriented Urban Function in the Bay Area

The Tokyo 2020 Games were an opportunity for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) to establish and strengthen the event function of the bay. This area, which stretches across the wards of Chuo and Koto, is home to many tertiary activities related to the development of high-rise buildings (Scoccimaro, 2017) as part of the deregulation of urban planning at work since the 2000s (Aveline-Dubach, 2019). However, the tertiary sector is not the only one under development. Leisure parks, large shopping malls, and halls for cultural and sporting events are being built all along the bay, a dynamic that is reinforced during the preparation of the Games. This contribution aims to question the formation of an urban event function in Tokyo Bay and to discuss the influence of the Olympic and Paralympic Games on the reinvestment of this former port and industrial sector by private actors and under the stimulus of public policies at the local and national levels. Through maps, we will see the transformation of the bay area under the influence of the Games and in the continuity of urban development and requalification policies. In this framework, the Olympic legacy already perceptible is constituted by the investments in the Olympic village on the Harumi land-reclamation, the Sea Forest, and the Dream Island. The success of this legacy can be measured by the success of these developments in attracting not only international tourists, but also and especially Tokyoites in an area that remains difficult to access and still under construction.

Iris Wieczorek, German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA)

Tokyo 2020 as the most Innovative Olympic Games in History?

The vision for the Tokyo 2020 Games was to be the most innovative in history and as part of this to “Discover Tomorrow”. Expectations of what the 2020 Games could mean for Japan were high. It was hoped that the 2020 Games will – in a similar way as the Games in 1964 – accelerate groundbreaking innovations and technological advancements for Tokyo and Japan. Japan has pledged that the Games will showcase the latest in technology, sustainability and accessibility to the world. With a variety of innovations on display – from self-driving vehicles to facial recognition systems to robots and cloud-based solutions – and already dubbed as “Hydrogen Olympics”, Tokyo 2020 was meant to offer insights to how the future can look like. Within the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic the expectations for showcasing innovations and technological achievements during the Olympic Games 2020 had to change. But the question remains if Tokyo 2020 were the most innovative Olympic Games in history. This paper aims at answering this question by providing a first reality check: What kind of innovations and technological achievements were in place when the Olympic and Paralympic Games Kicked-Off? What was the vision for Tokyo’s technological transformation and what has been achieved by now? To answer these questions, the paper will take the Tokyo’s 2020 bid file, the Tokyo 2020 Games foundation plan, related governmental planning documents, (social) media reports, and reports on technology innovation examples from previous Olympic Games into account.

Session 7 – Mass Media and Public Discourse

Igor Prusa, Metropolitan University Prague & Ambis College Prague

The Olympic Logo Scandal and the Case of Sano Kenjiro

On July 24, 2015, the new Olympic logo, designed by Japanese graphic artist Sano Kenjiro, was officially revealed. However, only five days later, a relatively unknown Belgian designer claimed striking similarities between his logo. On August 5, Sano stressed that the allegations of plagiarism were baseless. Nonetheless, Japanese users on social media, acting as self-appointed detectives, discovered that Sano had also plagiarized eight images in a separate advertising. Consequently, Sano's logo for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Games was officially scrapped on September 1, while the controversy became a major international embarrassment for Japan.

I look at why and how did Sano discredit himself in the eyes of the public, and what was the role of the media – both traditional and social – during his fall from grace. I analyze Sano's public performances and follow the dialectic of Sano's perception as a hero, then villain, and finally the scapegoat. Finally, I put the scandal into a wider context, where I point to the institutionalized closedness within the collusive system of bid rigging (*kansei dango*) that spreads the largesse among a top tier of major contractors with little transparency or accountability. I argue that rather than exploring the "real" structural causes of corruption, Japanese scandals serve merely as a form of ritual and spectacle that seek to scapegoat the transgressor while generating greater profits for the media.

Andreas Niehaus, Ghent University

'Recovery flame': The Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Torch Relay as Media Event

The Olympic flame (*seika*) as well as the torch relay have a distinct symbolic value for the International Olympic Movement, but at the same time both serve host nations to instill flame and torch with their own political rhetoric and political agendas. In my lecture, I will analyze the Japanese Olympic torch relay as a choreographed top-down performance that mirrors and magnifies the framing of the Tokyo 2020 Games within the context of the reconstruction and recovery (*fukko*) narrative after the triple disaster of 2011 as well as – increasingly – the coronavirus pandemic. By focusing on printed news as well as internet-based media coverage, I will show that while the broadcasting of the torch relay is heavily controlled by the IOC – resulting in a sanitized official image of the Olympics –, alternative visions of the Olympics and also Japanese society are still transported in media.