

International Journal of Japanese Sociology
Special Issue: The Olympic Games in Japan and East Asia: Images and Legacies
Edited by Mike Featherstone & Tomoko Tamari
March 2019

**The Olympic Games in Japan and East Asia: Images and Legacies:
An Introduction**

Mike Featherstone & Tomoko Tamari

In recent years global sporting events, such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA Football World Cup have attracted exhaustive media coverage which has helped dramatize the competition and encouraged a staged festive atmosphere. Such spectacular global mega-events can be increasingly understood as fitting well the logic of contemporary consumer capitalist societies, while at the same time stimulating nationalism and nation branding. More recently, this type of high-profile global event has increasingly become attractors for the social issues of the day, such as the concerns about environmentalism and the pursuit of elitism in sport and social life. The Olympic Games can in particular be seen as a site in which the complex processes of the interconnectedness between cultural values and contested political, national and economic interests are played out.

It is therefore, to be expected that the Olympic Games attracts a wide range of agendas. On the one hand, the games are often used as an opportunity to demonstrate the host nation/city's political, economic and cultural prestige to the world, not only by constructing new infrastructures, event-related facilities and iconic architecture, but also by recreating cultural heritage narratives and reinventing the imaginary of the host nation. On the other hand, this type of urban development has led to a range of negative consequences, including gentrification and the displacements and exclusions of the local population. In addition, the Games make visible a range of political issues around national legacies and environmental issues of sustainability in the Olympic sites. (The issue around the New National Stadium for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics in the redevelopment of Meiji Jingu district is a good example.) Hence, the Olympics Games provides a great opportunity to investigate these transformations and open-up a broader range of questions which could be addressed through multi-disciplinary research.

Some responses to these questions were provided by the symposium on London, Rio and Tokyo Olympics held at Goldsmiths, University of London, in June 2017. The symposium provided an intellectual platform to generate a dialogue between urban researchers, artists, activists, policy-makers and sociologists. Although the symposium made a significant contribution to the elucidation of various aspects of global mega events, the focus of this special issue is on the Olympics in Japan and the broader East Asia context. Earlier versions of the articles in this issue were presented at the symposium and have benefited greatly from the lively discussion. The authors in this issue were invited to rework their research

findings to share with the wider readership of the *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*.

The marathon at the first modern Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896 was won by a young Greek man, Spyridon Louis.ⁱ This was an extraordinary unexpected victory for Louis, given his inexperience as a runner.ⁱⁱ The victory delighted the 70,000 spectators in the stadium to the extent that the two Greek crown princes ran alongside Louis over the final metres and then carried him aloft before the king. The event was described by Peter Sloterdijk (20013:90) as providing prime evidence that ‘a new age of inverted hierarchies had begun;’ he adds ‘for a moment, an athletic shepherd became king over the king – for the first time, one could witness the majesty, indeed the power of the monarch being transferred to the runner.’ It has been suggested that Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, sought to establish a new ‘religion of the athlete.’ But the Olympics became more of a secular art-religious spectacle, the acme of an expanding exercise and disciplinary apparatus that provided opportunities for a range of new functionaries and honorary officials in the era of the masses and *nouveau riche*, a time in which the increasingly competitive global economy became supplemented by competitive sport as the new zeitgeist (Sloterdijk, 2013:93).

As Takeshi Nakerji points out in his contribution to this collection, there is an extraordinary coincidence between the birth of the modern Olympic Games in April 1896 and the birth of the cinema in December 1895. Unfortunately, there is only very limited film footage of the Games (some 30 seconds), which show blurry images of the opening ceremony and the high jump. But this was soon made up in subsequent games, to justify his claim that the ‘Olympic Games originated as a visual spectacle media event produced as cinema.’ Certainly the concern to record the event in documentaries, movies, newsreels and eventually television broadcast in real time, gathered pace as the twentieth century unfolded. Leni Riefenstahl’s film of the 1936 Berlin Games used 30 cameramen, Kon Ichikawa’s *Tokyo Olympiad* 1960 used 103 cameras. Both supplemented the filming of athletes performing with extra material filmed after the event along with careful editing to reconstruct the reality to enhance a particular mythology of performance: the Olympics as the film studio that turned athletes into actors. A spectacular media event produced as cinema. Television broadcasting of the Olympics in real time followed in the late twentieth century with simultaneous broadcasting of a range of events along with regular highlights and news clips. It has been suggested that the film and television recording apparatus enable not only the rewriting of memory, but in the case of events which are primarily experienced as media events, it becomes a prosthetic memory. This is a supplanted memory of events never directly experience, but which function as if they were actually experienced. Screen memories summon up a past that has not been experienced, but because it has been recorded and shared (especially the case of stand-out events that occur as part of the heroic and tragic performances that are part of the unfolding Olympic drama), it works in powerful affective ways.

The coincident timing of the birth of the modern Olympics and the cinema not only meant that the new recording technologies captured sporting events; it also points to a further

aspect to the term 'record,' we need to consider: the recording of the results, the accumulation of the timing and logging of competitive events. The two senses of record come together in the use of cameras, not only to produce documentary footage of the events, or real time television broadcasting, but to accurately adjudicate and record the winning order of competitors and their respective times. This accurate measurement has become particularly important in competitive events such as athletics and swimming, where recording at 100 frames a second, using high speed digital cameras has become part of the official apparatus. If a film-maker today, would attempt to follow Kon Ichikawa's pattern of movie-making manifest in *Tokyo Olympiad 1960*, along with his intention to focus on the ensemble of people involved: not just the athletes, but also the executives, cleaners and spectator, then today considerable attention would have to be given to those who operate and maintain recording technologies. Not just the broadcast television cameramen, soundmen, commentators, editors etc., but also those officials of the International Olympic Committee and related experts and technicians, who produce the official recording of the winners and losers and placement in events. At the Athens 1896 Olympics officials used their own stopwatches. Even by the 1932 Los Angeles Games, Omega, who had become the Olympics official timekeeper, sent only one person, with 30 stopwatches. In the recent 2016 Rio De Janeiro games there were 480 professional timekeepers on site, along with 450 tonnes of equipment and 200 kilometres of cable.ⁱⁱⁱ It is in this sense we can better understand JM Brohm's (1978) depiction of 'sport as a prison of measured time.' Advanced timing technology can measure down to one millionth of a second; simple stopwatches have long been replaced by a timing apparatus involving high-speed digital cameras, electronic touch pads, infrared beams and radio transmitters.

At the same time, the digital technologies which are used in this measurement apparatus, can be seen as part of a wider tendency for the digitalization of data that facilitates its rapid retrieval in real time. Each event performance and training session can be recorded and measured with metrics assembled on the various inputs such as types of training regimes, diet, supplements and drugs evaluated, as competitors strive for improvement.^{iv} The latest training regimes, soon become endorsed by star athletes and celebrities for the home consumer market. In recent years there has been a notable rise in the use of wearable digital self-tracking devices (wristwatches bracelets, necklaces, training shoe inserts etc.), some of which can be worn day and night, for continual monitoring (Sanders, 2017). Exercise becomes vaunted as a prime form of self-improvement valid for all, which fits in well with the health fitness and beauty imagery of contemporary consumer culture (Featherstone, 1982, 2007, 2010). But this does not mean that the sole message is to follow these 'looking good and feeling great' imperatives and focus on bodily appearance. The Olympic Games has long been an arena for the production of heroic performances in the wake of Spyridon Louis's victory in the 1896 Athens marathon. Yet the willingness to endure pain, not only through the ascetic training regimes that will allegedly provide athletes with success in competitions, points to the way in which suffering and pain becomes a way of life. The Paralympics opens up an important further dimension in this process.^v It goes beyond heroic performances, to offer the commitment and dedication to a way of life, that in many ways exemplifies the heroic life (Featherstone, 1992). Paralympic competition becomes a school for the will and life a project to demonstrate ability and rise above disability. Peter Sloterdijk (2013) has argued that one of the most powerful messages central to modernity is 'you must change your life.' This injunction suggests we have

become self-training beings, and it is the training itself which is key. Exercise and fitness regimes are not primarily about consumer culture outcomes, the enhanced bodily form and appearance manifest in the 'looking good, feeling good' philosophy, rather it is the practice and the activity; the harnessing of the will. The Olympic Games provides one of the principal arenas, a global spectacle, for actualisation and recognition of this process: the rewarding through competition in prestige contests. Yet, the Paralympics also opens up a further aspect.

The Olympics charter is based on the idea of open competition, anyone can take part provided they are a national of one of the countries which enters the competition (Olympic Charter, 2015:80). Apart from nationality the other main division, is gender. Women were not allowed to compete at the first Athens Olympics in 1896 but were admitted to the 1900 Paris Games. The 2015 Olympic Charter constantly refers to 'each gender,' a two-gender approach which has attracted criticism from a number of quarters, including LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer) movements and advocates. Indeed, more recently there have been some calls to dispense with the male/female binary in sport (Anderson et al, 2018). Yet, there are also calls for 'fairness' and there have been discussions about high-profile women participants, who crossed the gender line, or were suspected of using male hormone treatments as performance enhancers. Nevertheless, the IOC in the aftermath of the 2014 Sochi Olympics announced a new anti-discrimination clause for host cities to the effect that any form of discrimination with regard to race religion, politics or gender was deemed incompatible with the Olympic Movement. In 2016, over 50 LGBTQ athletes participated in the Rio Olympics. The guidelines will allow more transgender athletes to compete in the future. Indeed the IOC have recently (January 2017) revised its Host City Contract to take into account recommendations from a coalition of leading rights, transparency and athletes' organizations (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The Olympics, then, can be seen as a vehicle for the extension of human rights to protect a variety of social categories and statuses to ensure equal participation and fair treatment. The Paralympic Games, which are growing in prominence is a case to point, involving an elaborate classification system listing various categories of physical, visual and intellectual impairment (World Para Athletics, 2018).

The other category which is attracting some attention is the aged. We are used to graded competition for children and young people in a variety of sporting events, with the assumption being that it is unfair not to recognise the different levels of physical development and maturation that occur up to around the age 20. Why not recognise the decline and produce age banded competitions after say the age 40? While some events such as equestrian sport, have had competitors such as Hiroshi Hoketsu in their 70s, (Jones, 2012), other sports (track athletics and swimming), rarely feature people over 30. The World Senior Games, sometimes dubbed 'Senior Olympics' began in 1987, yet it is a relatively small-scale event and does not have affiliation to the International Olympic Movement. As we move into an 'ageing society,' with an increasing proportion of people worldwide who are living over 65,^{vi} there could well be arguments to age-stratify certain events and bring them into the Olympic Games; to celebrate those people who not only fight disability as with the Paralympics, but acknowledge those who struggle with the

additional impairments of the ageing process. Indeed, the process is already underway with the IOC, who already support the Youth Olympic Games, unfolding a strategic roadmap to extol the benefits of being physically active and participation in sport by working with the international Masters Games Association to encourage Olympic host cities to plan Mature and Masters Games. Currently the World Masters Games are becoming major events with the Auckland Games which took place in April 2017, attracting over 20,000 participants.

While access to compete in the Olympics is being extended in many directions to acknowledge human rights principles to advocate fairer treatment of a wider range of categories of persons that should be allowed to compete in sports and games, there is the related question of the right to watch, the access of spectators. On one level the Olympic Games seem a model of public participation. The London 2012 Games, for example, according to the Tokyo 2020 Guidebook,^{vii} had 20 million spectators attending events with 8.8 million tickets sold, with over 4.8 billion people watching on television. Yet while there are going to be 33 different sports scheduled for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and 22 for the Paralympics at some 40 stadia and venues, the ticket prices vary a great deal with a ticket for the Opening Ceremony to cost \$2,760.^{viii} The prices are similar to those at London 2012, where a good deal of attention was given to the attendance of the super-rich and celebrities along with the various exclusions of disaffected parties from being allowed to demonstrate in the vicinity of stadia.^{ix}

While the Olympics is a global event with widespread appeal made available to people around the world through a range of media, the prime attraction is its very eventfulness, the affective charge of novel happenings where 'being there' is valued in our 'experiential society' (Gillmore and Pine, 1999). Every Olympics sport offers a field of potentially unexpected dramas, but the city itself also becomes a theatre through the festive and carnivalesque atmosphere amongst the crowds entering and spilling out of stadia. Certain events, such as the marathon, attract playful crowds of ordinary people who line the streets, not only enjoy the sight of the runners as they briefly pass by, but also make the most of the occasion by playing the part of spectators for the television cameras eager to transmit the 'special atmosphere' around the world. Spectators, in the stadia and the city also busy themselves capturing the events through photographing on mobile devices and sending 'selfies' and other images and texts to friends, families and social networks around the world. The ease with which mobile phones and devices can produce photographs and movie clips, to edit and rapidly transmit, point to the democratization potential of recording technologies, along with the competence to engage in a new form of multi-tasking participation and distracted viewing. As Yoshitaka Mori points out in his contribution to this issue, if the shift from Berlin 1936 to Tokyo 1964 Games can be understood as the transformation of media from radio to television, then Tokyo 2020 will be noted for the continued expansion of social media. Yet, the spread of the internet and social media cannot be seen as just facilitating 'interactivity;' they also favour 'interpassivity,' along with the development of 'affective communities' and a 'lukewarm nationalism.'

At the same time, the power of social media has been recognised by the IOC, who in the middle of the London 2012 Games tried to control competitors' use of social media. Controlling the wider internet social media is a different matter, as the cases of the plagiarism of the official Tokyo 2020 Olympic emblem and the controversy surrounding Zaha Hadid's design for the athletics' stadium indicate. Tomoko Tamari, in her contribution to this issue examines the process whereby Zaha Hadid, a leading architect who became a global brand, won the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Stadium Competition; yet eventually her design was rejected. A significant factor in the mobilization of the criticism against her design, was the use of social media internet blogs and discussion platforms. Important in this process was the struggle to reconcile two conflicting objectives: to hire a prestigious world renown 'star architect' to reinforce Tokyo's position as a forward-looking leading global city and also produce a stadium that was not just an 'iconic architecture' statement, but one which had the necessary Japanese inflections that fitted in with the local cityscape and its evocative national memories. Hadid's design was referred to in a series of derogatory statements in the press and social media - one of the politest being 'cycle helmet,' and points to the tension between adopting signature global brands and entrenched local interests with their sense of appropriate/appropriated tradition.

One of the main problems being that the new stadium had to be built in close proximity to the Meiji shrine and park. As Tsutomu Tomotsune indicates in his contribution to the special issue, each Olympic Games in Japan has been linked to national ceremonial commemoration and the honouring of the emperor. He argues that while it may well be the case that the contemporary Olympics can be regarded as sites for the selling of global cities, there is also the local dimension with struggles over urban development, gentrification and the removal of the underclass. The relationship of the urban redevelopment through the building of stadia and other facilities to national political agendas clearly looms large in the Japanese context. In his paper in this collection, Shunya Yoshimi discusses the ways in which priorities have shifted in the intervening time between the 1964 and 2020 Tokyo Olympics. In 1964 the concern was development and modernization, to undertake large scale urban infrastructure and building projects to modernize Tokyo. The agenda for 2020 would seem to have shifted to diversity, conservation and sustainability, but how these goals are to be realised is still an open question. Conservation and sustainability as against modernization and progress, came onto the agenda at the time Tokyo made its successful bid to the IOC in September 2013. This was in the wake of the Great East Japan (Tohoku) 2011 earthquake and tsunami. As Yoshifusa Ichii argues in his contribution to the issue, the Japanese government sought to align its aim of developing neoliberal 'creative reconstruction' projects for the disaster region, with more general sustainability and the benefits for the city of Tokyo. Ishii indicates that the IOC although accepting Tokyo's bid, were not convinced by this conjunction. This also relates to the question raised in the broader East Asian context by Myungkoo Kang and He Yeum Kim in their contribution to the issue: how can the Olympics endeavour to provide a true transnational global space that can further values such as human rights, equality, sustainability, cultural diversity and gender equality and avoid the narrower national agendas and pragmatic politics of the hosts?

This brings to the forefront the question of the legacy from the Olympic Games. We are used to the inflation of legacy claims and creative audits in the bids and build-up to Games, as the analysis of the London 2012 claims and actuality of the legacy demonstrates (Cohen,

2013). The practicalities of how the Tohoku creative reconstruction can be linked to the future of the city of Tokyo remains to be seen; at this point the documentation from the Tokyo Organizing Committee is relatively bland (Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, 2016). These questions become more demanding in the wake of the IOC's recent introduction of a new legacy reporting framework to start with Tokyo 2020. The problem remains how to reconcile sustainability with a festive event which necessarily involves conspicuous consumption and wastage. There is an aspect of the Olympic Games which connects to excess, potlatch and festive expenditure. It is an event that is meant to embody elements of sacrifice, communality, the sacred, the gift and generosity: orientations which resonate with Bataille's notion of the general economy (see McGoey, 2018). How to square this with neoliberal accounting procedures, audits and the metrification of outcomes, is a challenge that host cities will have to grapple with in future Games.

Endnotes

ⁱ De Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, had endorsed the ideas of Michel Bréal to include the marathon in the series of athletic events (Müller, 2015).

ⁱⁱ He has been variously described as a shepherd boy, soldier in the Greek army, or mineral water seller. Sloterdijk (2013:90) uses the more exotic shepherd descriptor.

ⁱⁱⁱ See comments by Hans Gubler, the managing director of Omega, the official Olympics timekeeper in 'The history of Timekeeping at the Olympic Games,' <https://nationalpost.com/sports/olympics/the-evolution-of-time-how-the-olympics-went-from-30-stopwatches-to-480-professional-timekeepers> Accessed 11.9.18.

^{iv} The more intense the competition, participants strive for knowledge of the latest training techniques and diet, but also the latest drug performance enhancers (illegal and undetectable). This can lead to an escalation process whereby official sporting bodies such as the International Olympics Committee seek to monitor training regimes, muscle building techniques, drug use, modes of concealment, cheating etc, to formulate more appropriate rules and tests.

^v The first move towards the Paralympics took place at the time of the London 1948 Olympics with competition for wheelchair athletics at the Stoke Mandeville Games, which involve a small number of injured servicemen and women who took part in archery. It was extended beyond servicemen at the 1960 Rome Olympics to include 400 wheelchair athletes. At the Seoul Olympics in 1980 the Paralympic Games become more truly parallel and staged on the same lines and scale as the Olympics (Anderson, 2008). One participant who caught attention at the Rio Games 2016 was Silver medal winner Marieke Vervoort. She endure constant pain and a condition which make it difficult to eat or sleep, and has been apparently, considering euthanasia for when her condition worsens (see 'Paralympic Athlete Marieke Vervoort Will Eventually Die By Euthanasia, But Not Anytime Soon,' *The Huffington Post Canada* By Chloe Tejada, Posted: 09/13/2016).

^{vi} Japan currently has 25% of the population over 65; this will rise to 33% by 2030. It is predicted that there will be 13 'super-aged societies' – ones with over 20% population over 65 – by 2020, rising to 34 by 2030. This is a very different scenario from when the Olympic idea was formed in the 1880s, when in the United States those over 65 made up only 3.4% of the population, with the average life expectancy 40. There has been a doubling of life expectancy in 130 years.

^{vii} <https://tokyo2020.org/jp/games/plan/data/tokyo2020-guidebook-en.pdf> Accessed 12.9.18.

^{viii} Ticket prices for Tokyo 2020 were announced in July 2018 and range from \$18 upwards. More than half of all the tickets will be sold for \$71 (Tokyo 2020 Olympics ticket prices unveiled, *Reuters*, July 20, 2018. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-olympics-2020-tickets/tokyo-2020-olympics-ticket-prices-unveiled-idUKKBN1KA1CQ> Accessed 12.8.18.

^{ix} Over 100 super-yachts were moored on the Thames and the British Prime Minister David Cameron used the Games to encourage super-rich sociability to promote 'brand Britain' via 'champagne networking.' For a discussion of the super-rich see Featherstone (2013a, 2013b).

References

- Anderson, Julie. 2008. Athlete Frist: a History of the Paralympic Movement,' *Reviews in History*, August.
- Anderson, Lynley, Taryn Knox and Alison Heather. 2018. 'Time to dispense with the male/female binary in sport? Analysis of the cases of Laurel Hubbard and Mack Beggs,' *British Journal of Sports Medicine Blog*, Posted on April 11, 2018.
- Brohm, Jean-Marie. 1978. *Sport, A Prison of Measured Time*. London: Ink Links Ltd.
- Cohen, Phil. 2013. *On the Wrong Side of the Track? East London and the Post-Olympics*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Featherstone, Mike. 1982. 'The Body in Consumer Culture,' *Theory, Culture & Society* 1(2) reprinted in M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth and B.S. Turner (eds) *The Body*. London: Sage, 1991.
- Featherstone, Mike. 1992. 'The Heroic Life and Everyday Life' *Theory, Culture and Society* 9(1) Reprinted in Featherstone, M. (1995) *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity*. London: Sage.
- Featherstone, Mike. 2007. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. 2nd edition. London: Sage.
- Featherstone, Mike. 2010. 'Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture,' *Body & Society* 17(1).
- Featherstone, Mike 2013a. 'Super-Rich Lifestyles,' in Birtchnell, T. and Caletrío, J. (eds.) *Elite Mobilities*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Featherstone, Mike. 2013b. 'The Rich and the Super-Rich: Mobility, Consumption and Luxury Lifestyles' in Nita Mathur (ed) *Consumer Culture, Modernity and Identity*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Gilmore, James H. and Pine, B. Joseph. 1999. *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Human Rights Watch. 2017. 'Olympics: Host City Contract Requires Human Rights' <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/28/olympics-host-city-contract-requires-human-rights>, accessed 11.9.18.
- International Olympic Committee. 2015. *Olympic Charter*. Lausanne: International Olympic Committee.

International Olympic Committee. 2016. IOC Steps up its Support for Mature Athletes and Signs MOU with IMGA,'*IOC News*, 29 November 2016, <https://www.olympic.org/news/ioc-steps-up-its-support-for-mature-athletes-and-signs-mou-with-imga> Accessed 11.9.18.

Jones, Sam. 2012. 'London 2012's Oldest Competitor, Hiroshi Hoketsu, Takes the Reigns,' *Guardian* 2 August 2012.

McGoey, Linsey. 2018. Bataille and the Sociology of Abundance: Reassessing Gifts, Debt and Economic Excess, *Theory, Culture & Society* 35-(5-6).

Müller, Norbert. 2015. 'Michel Bréal (1832-1915) – The Man Behind the Idea of the Marathon,' *Sport Journal*, November 5.

Sanders, Rachel. 2017. Self-Tracking in the Digital Era: Biopower, Patriarchy, and the New Biometric Body Projects, *Body & Society* 23(1).

Sloterdijk, Peter. 2013. *You Must Change Your Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. 2016. *Tokyo 2020 Action & Legacy Plan 2016: Participating in the Tokyo 2020 Games, Connecting with Tomorrow*. Tokyo, July 2016.

World Para Athletics. 2018. *Rules and Regulations 2018-2019*. Bonn: World Para Athletics, February. https://www.paralympic.org/sites/default/files/document/180305150449200_World+Para+Athletic+s+Rules+and+Regulations+2018-2019_February.pdf Accessed 11.9.18.