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Reconsidering Sport Diplomacy: The 2020/1 Tokyo Olympics and ‘Soft-Power’

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ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to examine how sport mega-events can be utilized as a form of soft-power to further national unification, nation branding and international relations in the arena of sport diplomacy. Focusing on the 1964 and 2020/1 Tokyo Olympics, the paper critically analyses how the idea of soft power in the 2020/1 Games has become controversial. The paper explores how business oriented top-down Olympic diplomacy creates tensions, and value conflicts about the political, economic, and human life priorities between the organizers and Japanese citizens under the exigencies of the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper also compares the gender discourses employed in the Olympics, since women's performance in the Olympics can be seen as a vehicle of soft-power. The different gender politics are explored along with the impact of contemporary new media environments which created intensive public engagement about anti-gender inequality. These concerns indicate that the Olympics which are driven by the government and the IOC, no longer function as simple forms of soft-power designed to unify people, rather ‘soft-power’ is mobilized to unite multilateral profit-oriented business stakeholders and enhance the over-commercialized Olympics as well. Hence the question of what the general virtue of the Olympics should be, remains.

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Introduction: The 2020 + 1 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics

It is generally accepted that mega sport events can play a key diplomatic role in international relation. Mega sports events can also help consolidate sociality and unity in both domestic and international contexts. This article seeks to examine how sport mega events, like Olympics and Paralympics, can be considered as vehicles for ‘soft power’¹ and help to promote nation-branding in the context of Japanese sport diplomacy. It also critically examines how and to what extent this widely accepted idea of ‘sport diplomacy as soft-power’ in the context of 2020/1 Tokyo Olympics, has become controversial and raises fundamental questions about the mission of the Olympics.

In 2021 July, the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics were held amidst tremendous political, economic, and ethical problems in the middle of the 21st century's first-ever

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global health crisis. The Games were held in an extremely risky situation with Tokyo in a state of emergency, due to the more infectious Covid Delta variant, and the public were seriously concerned about a further surge in infection driven by the huge increase in mobility the Games would bring.² This suggests there was a major contrast in the way the health risks were assessed in 2020 and 2021.

The decision to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics were made just four months prior to the opening ceremony, due to the high-risk of the Covid-19 pandemic. Then the 2021 Olympics and Paralympics were rescheduled after the discussions between the IOC, the Japanese government, Tokyo City officials and the Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The priority was evidently a 'safe and secure' Games. This critical reason for postponement, however, wasn't applied again for the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. As result, increasing numbers of infections were recorded every single day after the opening ceremony on 23rd July 2021. An article published just two days after the closing ceremony, 10 August, reported 17,800 people were isolated at home with the virus.³ Another article published on 23 August explained that the number of daily infection cases recorded had reached the highest figure, 20,000, since the pandemic began, and had increased five times on the figure reached when the Olympics started in the last week of July.⁴

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics suffered from not only the pandemic, but also many unexpected changes, incidents, and scandals from the beginning. The first female architect Zaha Hadid, the Pritzker Architecture Prize holder, had her new plan for the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo heavily criticized by high-profile Japanese architects that generated a public controversy. It was scrapped in the end. There were also allegations of Olympic official logo's plagiarism, which created embarrassment for the Japanese people in the eyes of the world. In addition, there were also numerous resignations in some of the key posts of organizers of the Games. One of the most controversial cases was the head of the Tokyo Olympics organizing committee, Yoshiro Mori's resignation in February 2021, after growing criticism about his sexist comments about women – he'd stated that women talk too much and meetings with female board directors always took a lot longer time.⁵ After his resignation, Seiko Hashimoto become president. She was a former female Olympian and was previously the Olympic Minister in the cabinet of former prime minister Yoshihide Suga.⁶ This issue will be more fully discussed when gender politics and diplomacy are addressed later in this article.⁷

After the Great East Japan Earthquake (2011), the slogan 'Olympic Games for Reconstruction' was used by Yuriko Koike, the first female Tokyo governor. The slogan indicated a significant link between the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. This slogan was supposed to be a positive response to people who were in the affected areas. Using this slogan, she attempted to avoid criticism that a large budget must be used for the event and to control and suppress anti-Olympic movements, since the hosting of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games was the major responsibility of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Ichii, however, argued that although the IOC accepted Tokyo's bid, they were not convinced and did not emphasis the link between the Games and earthquake reconstruction.⁸ It was also becoming clear there was little benefit from the Games for people in the affected areas. In fact, the Fukushima nuclear power station was still not 'under control' and some people were still not able to return to their local areas to resume their 'normal' lives.⁹

Furthermore, given the Covid-19 pandemic, the slogan was shifted from ‘Reconstruction’ to ‘proof of human victory over the coronavirus’ which the former prime minister, Suga mentioned. Yet, the public vaccination only started in February 2021, much later than most other developed nations. With such incompetence on the part of the Japanese government with no clear sign of stopping the spread of the virus, some media polls showed that about 80 percent of the Japanese public thought the Olympics will not or should not happen.¹⁰ Anti-Olympics activities had become salient and the mass media outside Japan also spoke about the uncertainty of holding the Games.¹¹

The Olympics were envisaged as involving constituted 339 events in 33 sports across 42 venues, and the Paralympics involved 539 events in 22 sports across 21 venues.¹² The Japanese government estimated that 90,000 people would come to Tokyo in summer 2021, including 15,000 Olympic and Paralympic athletes.¹³ This suggested that the risk to public health in Japan was great. Despite a surge of Covid cases in Japan, the Tokyo Olympic president Seiko Hashimoto mentioned that it was hundred percent certain that the Games could go ahead.¹⁴ The world was anxiously watching how the Japanese government could handle the 2021 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics and how far it would be possible for the Olympics to *unite* people around the world in the middle of the pandemic. Just three days before the opening ceremony on 20 July 2021, the IOC approved a change in the Olympic motto. The change adds the word ‘together’ to the original slogan in order to emphasize the significance of unity and solidarity. It becomes then ‘Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together’.¹⁵ One of the intentions in this paper, is to investigate in ways in which this type of slogan and the general orientation of the IOC had the potential to be employed by the Japanese government to further their national branding and soft-power agendas. In other words, we should critically examine how far the Olympics could create ‘unity’ not only between nations but also amongst the Japanese people. In doing so, the paper also analyses ‘public diplomacy’ in the contemporary media environment (e.g. the growth of social media), which has shifted from focusing on the relations between nations, to an attempt to reaching out to individuals (citizens) in public life. Given this changing environment, the paper attempts to scrutinize what was the virtue of organizing the Olympics in Tokyo and the meaning of the Olympics as a form of soft-power.

Mega-Event Olympics, Sport Diplomacy and ‘Soft-Power’

Although the term, mega-event has a variety of definitions and a clear consensus is yet to emerge, Roche’s definition has been widely supported by a number of scholars.¹⁶ According to Roche

[m]ega-events are ‘large-scale, cultural (including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance. They are typically organized by variable combinations of national governmental and international non-governmental organizations and thus can be said to be important elements in ‘official’ versions of public culture’¹⁷

It has, therefore, been generally accepted that the Olympics can be seen as a multiple stakeholders’ mega-event with various interests. The political and cultural

function of the Olympics as national projects which aim to promote positive national image to both domestic and international audience, has been extensively discussed. The role of the Olympics in the Japanese context, then, was not an exception.

Japan won the vote to be the host for the eighteenth Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo in 1964. This was an opportunity for Japan to emphasize its recovery from being a defeated country and become acknowledged as a modern nation to the world. Tokyo's city landscape had massively changed with the improvement of railway (the *shinkansen*), subways and the elevated motor highways and the monorail links to Haneda international airport. It was the first Olympics which started international broadcasting in colour television via a satellite transmission system. Computer recording systems and well-designed pictograms of sporting events (for foreigners) were applied, and the official Olympic posters were designed with visually and artistically sophisticated photographs. A number of memorial photo-magazines were also published after the Games. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics was also an important signpost for the Japanese people to become aware of beginning a new epoch, that of Japan's entering the period that became known as 'the economic miracle'.

Hence, we can argue that the 1964 Tokyo Olympics promoted public diplomacy which can be considered as a form of politics which engages with public attitudes and opinions on the formation and execution of both domestic and foreign policies. Nancy Snow conceives that 'public diplomacy is inevitably linked to power'¹⁸ and introduces Josef Nye's notion of soft power, which implies 'a nation's capacity to influence the preference of others'¹⁹ so that it involves attraction and persuasion, rather than the use of 'hard power' which relies on the force or military power in foreign policy. Soft power is the ability to attract and entice others by establishing preferences which are associated with 'intangible assets'. Intangible assets can include 'attractive personality, cultural and political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority'.²⁰

Cultural and political values and meanings can be produced by mega sporting event, such as the Olympics which have mass appeal and are not just for the elites who tend to prefer high culture, but also those who enjoy popular culture and mass entertainment. Hence the Olympics can be understood as a diplomatic device which involves the way in which governments and other stakeholders could influence global public in supporting stakeholders' political, economic and cultural objectives. These diplomatic functions of the Olympics can be understood as characteristics of soft power.²¹

There have been numerous discussions of the diplomatic capacity of sport as 'soft power'.²² There are two possible key factors when public diplomacy has been involved in mega sports events. Kramareva and Grix suggest that sport events can create and offer 'a universal apolitical human value'²³ which can prompt rapport between countries which have difficult political relationships to open up mutual dialogue. The second factor is that mega-sports events can provide a global stage for criticism of antagonistic political and ideological provocations through boycotts of the game, for example.²⁴ This can be seen as sport diplomacy, which sport playing as the facilitator for easing tensions between nations.

Diplomacy is politics. Therefore, when it comes to sport diplomacy, it leads to question of how the power of sport can be contextualized in both the international and domestic political environments. Murray and Pigman have made a distinction between

international sport for ‘dialogue between states’ and ‘international-sport-as-diplomacy.’²⁵ The first category includes cases in which the governments employ sportspeople to amplify their diplomatic message or states use sport events for international diplomatic opportunities to cool down a tension between countries or to investigate the situations for a possible policy change. For example, the People’s Republic of Korea and South Korea participated in the 2018 winter Olympics under one flag, which reignited (even temporarily) mutual diplomatic relations.²⁶ The second category can often be found in contemporary mega-sport events, such as the Olympics (with the IOC) or Football World Cup (with *Federation Internationale de Football Association*, FIFA). Sport diplomacy in mega-event can be involved by not only governments, but also by non-governmental organizations or individual competitors. ‘These organizations and individuals consistently engage in representation to and negotiation with governments, the regional and national organizing bodies of sport, large global firms that sponsor competition, global media firms and global civil society organizations (CSOs).’²⁷ Multi-stakeholders express and pursue their own interests and benefits, produce different messages, and expand their networks, all of which can characterize the modern diplomatic environment.

Nygaard and Gates have also explored sport politics as soft power in a complex modern diplomatic environment, and they pointed out that there can be four mechanisms at work: *image-building*, *platform for dialogue*, *trust-building*, as well as *reconciliation and integration*.²⁸ These mechanisms can be seen as ‘a process of persuasion’²⁹ which is ‘a power in ideals, propaganda, in the granting of good will.’³⁰ Hence, soft-power is a complex set of intangibles which are comprehensively unmeasurable, but are empirically observable.³¹

Acquiring the right to become the host for mega sporting events brings a huge opportunity to promote positive national image, since the host country gains full attention from the world. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics exemplifies this *image-building* mechanism. As discussed, in the post-war Japanese context, like the post-war situation of other countries, sport was used as a diplomatic tool for ‘soft power’: the 1964 Tokyo Olympics exemplifies this *image-building* mechanism.

2002 FIFA World Cup which was co-hosted by South Korea and Japan provides a good case to demonstrate that a mega-sport event can help to create a *platform for dialogue*. There have been long political tensions between Japan and Korea since Japan invaded the peninsula in 1910. Japan’s rule of Korea ended in 1945 when Japan was defeated in the war, but there were several controversial political issues which made tensions worse. For example, just one year before the World Cup, in 2001, the former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine, where Class-A war criminals are enshrined, and Japanese high-school textbooks which did not mention Japan’s wartime aggression in Korea were approved for use. Given such negative political conditions, there were, however, some positive responses that were generated by Japan-Korea co-hosting the event. President Kim Young Sam of South Korea wrote just before the event, ‘the cohosting of the 2002 World Cup will serve as an occasion to further solidify the friendly relations of Korea and Japan’ and the Japanese Football Association Vice President Kunishige Kamamoto also remarked ‘it’s important to make the World Cup a success, so we have better relationship (with South Korea) now.’³² The newspaper reported that ‘[I]n a survey jointly conducted by

leading newspapers in both nations, 79 percent of respondents said they believed co-hosting the tournament had helped heal[sic] the rift between Japanese and Koreans.³³ Although there were many controversial political issues which have been caused to create conflicts between Japan and Korea, the 2002 World Cup paved the way to have mutual dialogue between two countries.³⁴

Sport event could also help to *build trust* between Japan and the United States after World War II. In 1949, the San Francisco Seals toured Japan and played a total of 111 games against Japanese professional teams and American military teams stationed in Japan. This was the first tour of a US professional baseball team since 1934 and was initiated from the American side.³⁵ Furthermore, with supporting from the Japanese Imperial Household, American organizer planned and executed the tour as a vehicle for sport diplomacy. The emperor Hirohito was fully aware of soft-power of the sport. He made 'public appearances at high-profile sporting event as part of seemingly coordinated campaigns to reinvent himself as a 'People's Emperor.'³⁶ Prince Akihito also participated in sport events and appeared frequently in mass media, such as baseball magazines.³⁷ The imperial family's public activities with sport, particularly their passion for baseball, helped not only to create a new image of the imperial household, but also supported 'the US-Japanese Friendship Baseball Tour'. In this rendering, the soft-power of baseball served to rebuilt 'trust' between the Emperor and the Japanese people in the domestic context, as well as reconstruct a new 'trusted' political relationship with their former enemies.

Reconciliation, integration, and anti-racism are the fourth mechanism. Anti-racism, particularly the Black Lives Matter protesting racial injustice has been become a global movement since the murder of George Floyd in June 2020. 'The taking a knee' action is often seen in the sport world as indicating athletes' support for the 'Black Lives Matter' movement. The athletes of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic, however, would not be allowed to take a knee to show their solidarity with anti-racism. The IOC has been under pressure to loosen Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter, which 'stops athletes from demonstrating on the podium, the field of play or at opening and closing ceremonies'³⁸ in the expanding anti-racism protests in the world last year. The ban was initially kept for the 2020 Olympic, since the IOC's survey suggested that '3,547 athletes from 185 countries found 70% believed the field of play and official ceremonies were not an appropriate place for protest: 67% supported a ban on podium protests.'³⁹ This is the idea that the modern Olympics must be strictly separated from politics, given that the memory of the Nazi Olympics still remains part of the dark history of the Olympics.⁴⁰ A contradiction has been pointed out, that 48% of survey respondents thought it is important to increase opportunities for athlete's expression during the Games, which includes having a 'moment of solidarity against discrimination' at the opening ceremony.⁴¹

Given such circumstances, the athletes were reminded that (their) freedom of speech 'is not absolute' and may be 'limited' under certain restrictions from the IOC.⁴² Eventually, the IOC reviewed Rule 50 and allowed athletes to demonstrate with gestures, such as taking a knee, in the fields of play with some limitations in July 2021.⁴³ The current anti-racism movement cannot be seen as an extreme political propaganda such as Nazi's fascism or anti-Semitism,³ rather it seeks to embrace and protect a universal human right. In history, the role of the Olympics has never been

separated from politics. This, in turn, suggests that the Olympics can play key role of 'diplomacy' which can be understood as the potential power of *reconciliation and integration*. Hence, sport is clearly part of politics and can be used as a form of soft power via sport diplomacy, and mega sports events, especially the Olympics. In order to further understanding of soft power in sport diplomacy, it is vital for us to address the 'tangible assets' of soft power which can not only be found in sport diplomacy, but also in gender politics in the context of the Olympics.

Gender Politics in Sport Diplomacy

In political science, gender politics have been discussed the intersection of biological sex, socially constructed gender and social agents. Feminists analyze how female ideology has been situated and constructed in social life. A critical debate on gendered institutions is one of central topics which reveal how 'normative' patriarchal political power subvert women's ability to be an active political agent. Institutions are often gendered. Sport institutions are not exception. The paper discusses gender politics by examining how women as social agents are used for public diplomacy and they are not considered as active subjects, but they perform as political tools in the context of sport diplomacy.

Reflecting on current gender equality movements, unlike the IOC, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has manifested their support for anti-racism. Their proposal announced, 'Making Football Truly Global: The Vision 2020–2023' which includes two key messages: 'Fight against racism and all other forms of discrimination and protect human rights'.⁴⁴ 'The taking a knee' action was supported by FIFA president Gianni Infantino. He 'has publicly spoken out to back anti-racism movement and has reiterated that football (and FIFA as the game's governing body) must continue to lead the way in fighting racism' on the FIFA official website. Interestingly, FIFA's position to strengthen diversity and anti-discrimination includes discrimination of gender and sexual orientation.

Here we find that gender politics can also become an important issue for maintaining the socially and politically acceptable image of an international institution.

In terms of anti-sexism, the issue has also been intensively debated by both the current Tokyo Olympic organization and the general public, as mentioned earlier. This suggests that gender politics in the context of the Olympics is a significant factor for public diplomacy. In this section, the article examines how gender politics can be seen to justify the legitimate dominant gender identity in the context of the historical transition of the Olympics' media environment. To do so, it could be useful to introduce the discussion by Nousiainen et al. (2013) on gender equality from the perspectives of power and legitimacy. They argue that gender equality can be understood by analyzing what is legitimate in power dynamics. It is impossible to establish legitimation without the influence of political power. Yet power is not just promoted by the authorities, it must also be supported by public acceptability and consent. In this light, it is important to consider how different legitimate discourses are used to justify the power relations between the public and the authorities (which includes not only institutions, but also influential individuals). In other words, understanding relationship between legitimate discourses and the dynamics of political power is a vital factor for a successful diplomacy.

Hence, the paper investigates two different gender discourses in the context of the 1964 and 2021 Tokyo Olympics, and examines gender politics in terms of how gender discourse is applied as part of an apparatus for sport diplomacy. This is a form of diplomacy what we can call 'gender diplomacy'. By doing so, the paper considers how gender diplomacy was legitimated in the context of the two Tokyo Olympics. The dominant gender discourses could be influenced by different social and political environments. This kind of shift can be found in Japanese gender politics in 1964 and 2021 Tokyo Olympics.

This paper considers then current Japanese landscape of gender politics and controversial gender issues in the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, following by discussing different discourses of the gender politics in the context of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

According to the 2022 World Economic Forum's (WEF), Japan ranks 116st out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report,⁴⁵ which indicates it has the largest gender gap among advanced economies.⁴⁶ Mori's tasteless remark on women can be seen as evidence of gender inequality in Japanese society. His injudicious remark thrust the long-standing gender inequality issue into the public debate. Within 20 days of Mori's unappropriated comment, approximately 1000 volunteers for the Games had withdrawn to criticize and protest gender inequality.⁴⁷ Given this situation, the former female Olympian and the former Olympic minister, Seiko Hashimoto was named the president of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee. The IOC president Thomas Bach supported her, saying she was 'the perfect choice' for the role and 'With the appointment of a woman as president, the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee is also sending a very important signal with regard to gender equality.'⁴⁸ The appointment of a woman to a high-profile post can also be understood as a similar initiative for gender politics of the former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's 'Womenomics'. This policy embraces women's empowerment and seeks gender equality. In his speech (2014), he explained that '[w]e cannot say that today's Japan is a 'straight-A' model student in appointing women to executive positions. The proportion of women among members of the National Diet remains low, at 11%. That is why we must act now.'⁴⁹ The Japanese Cabinet Office also announced that 'Japan will (also) engage proactively in diplomatic issues on women, cooperating with the international community to implement measures to empower women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and promote their social advancement.'⁵⁰ The 2023 Global Gender Gap Report showed that Japan ranked 125 out of 146 countries.⁵¹ This indicates that Japan's gender gap has not yet improved and still remains a perennial low ranking in the index even nine years after seemingly implemented 'womenomics'. The imperative of womenomics was to respond to increasing international criticism of Japan's low ranking gender equality, such as the high-profile comments from Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the IMF.⁵² Hence, womenomics was not just well-incorporated into 'Abenomics', but was also almost a political rhetoric for gender diplomacy.

In this context, the female president, Seiko Hashimoto can be seen as a vehicle of gender diplomacy to the outside world and has been expected to perform for soft-power. Hashimoto said '[A]fter being appointed Tokyo 2020 President, right away I launched a team dedicated to gender equality and increased the number of women on the EB (the Tokyo 2020 Executive Board) to 42 per cent. *The world is watching* and the Organising Committee itself has to move fast on gender equality, diversity,

and inclusion so it will lead to government and societal reform. I see this as an opportunity to change unconscious bias to change the mindset of the entire nation⁵³ (emphasis added). Hashimoto seemed to be concerned about the international reputation of Japan and was fully aware of the need to 'showing' that tackling gender inequality was the key item of the diplomatic agenda. Rena Suzuki Wagner, who is one of co-founders of 'Lean In Tokyo' which is an organization to support women in the gender unequal society, remarked that the positive change resulting from the Olympics (female president replacing a male one) happened largely because of international pressure. She believes that after the Olympics, Japan will go back to a gender unequal society without international exposure and pressure.⁵⁴ This suggests that the female president Hashimoto was a vehicle for soft power and her gender equal policy was applied not only to ease the negative view of gender inequality for domestic public opinion, but also to rebuff criticism from outside Japan. The female president Hashimoto and her policy promised to legitimate Japan's positive attitude towards gender equality and help to gain acceptance from the international community.

Using gender as an apparatus of soft-power in sport diplomacy is, however, not a 'new' political tactic, as it can also be found in the Olympics history of Japan. The gender diplomacy of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics can prove further evidence. The 'Oriental Witches' (Toyo no Majo),⁵⁵ Japanese women's volleyball team won a gold medal at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. It was the first Olympics, which included women's volleyball. Female players and their male coach, Hirobumi Daimatsu were frequently exposed in TV programmes, newspapers and magazine articles. Daimatsu became infamous for his philosophy of sport: his strict disciplined and extremely hard training programme for his female volleyball team were highly admired, at the same time, helped create his nickname, 'Demon Daimatsu' (*Oni no Daimatsu*) in the mass media. He had a strong sense of responsibility for his female players in order to win the gold medal for the nation. Daimatsu's training regime were often described as 'spartan practice' which was criticized and created controversial debates. Under his authoritarian regime, female players were expected to follow the coach. They, however, had very strong ties. One of the players, Masae Kasai, the team leader said '[c]oach Daimatsu was everything to us: father, an elder brother and boyfriend'.⁵⁶ His paternalistic relationship with the players fitted the dominant model of masculinity of the time. The team was, therefore, structurally based on patriarchal family ideology which was generally accepted by the Japanese public. His gender ideology was, however, rather contradictory. When it came to the victory in the Olympics, he did not pay attention to player's femininity. He told his players that they should forget about being a woman when playing volleyball. At the same time, his female ideology was based on the traditional female doctrine which implied the most important thing in a women's life was becoming 'a good wife and a wise mother'.

Hence, players had to switch their *performance* to accommodate with two different contexts: in playing volleyball on the court as a player (not a woman) and in everyday life in Japanese society as a woman.⁵⁷ His traditional female ideology was well embodied in his players and well received by Japanese public. It can be understood that his discourse of femininity turned his female players into cultural and political devices (for soft-power) to be used in order to reinforce patriarchal values in Japanese society.

Women (Daimatsu's female players) were represented as dependent beings who follow man (the coach, Daimatsu). After the victory at the Olympics, Kasai became a national sport celebrity. After her retirement, her marriage was widely featured by mass media and she was celebrated by the public. She was expected to become a good wife and a wise mother. In this context, the narratives of fatherhood which overpowered woman in the patriarchal system and the ideal of womanhood as being a wife and wise mother, were accepted and embraced by the Japanese public. The narrative around the 'Oriental Witches' created not only an image of Japan as a tough and magical Far East country to the world, but also produced a new image of Japanese women as strong without losing the 'conventional value' of being a woman, which was promoted, valued, and accepted in Japan.

Media and Narratives

Daimatsu was the key figure to create the narratives of the Oriental Witches through the mass media. Before the victory in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, he was already acknowledged as a public figure who was the coach of the female volleyball team which beat the Soviet World Champions in 1962. In total, he published nine books. His first book, *Ore ni tsuite koi: watashi no shoubu konjou* (Follow me: my fighting spirit in victory and defeat) was published in 1963. The book became a bestseller which was reprinted 47 times by summer 1964.⁵⁸ Daimatsu and his players also appeared in *Mainichi Gurafu* in January 1965 with the title of the edition: '12 Witches: Chronicle of the Victory – A Story of Persistency'.⁵⁹ Consequently, 'Daimatsu was not only a coach and a hero of the national Olympic myth, but also the mastermind behind the media hype surrounding the team'.⁶⁰ The popularity of Daimatsu and the Witches could not be separated from the increasingly expanding media environment of the 1960s. NHK (*Nippon Hoso Kyokai*: Japan Broadcasting corporation) started television broadcasting in 1953 and the total number of TV sets in public reached 2,000,000 just before the Royal Wedding in 1959. Colour television broadcasting started in 1960. NHK prepared for the 1964 Tokyo Olympic as a major enterprise: 2,548 staff, including 42 announcers, 195 directors and producers, 146 reporters and cameramen, and 598 broadcasts: 74 black-and-white TV cameras, 6 colour TV cameras, 46 videotape recorders, 600 audiotape recorders, 18 black-and-white TV broadcast cars, 2 colour TV broadcast cars, 17 generator cars, and 8 video-tape recording cars.⁶¹ Of Japanese households with TV sets, 95% watched the women's volleyball final between Japan and the Soviet Union which was the highest ever in the NHK's audience rating records.⁶² Eventually, the 1964 Tokyo Olympic was called the 'Television Olympics'.⁶³

Since this time, the contemporary media environment has radically changed as the digital revolution has brought about a huge network, multiple channels and social media platforms. The 2020 Tokyo Olympic can be called the 'Internet Olympics'. Unlike the 1964 'Television Olympics', contemporary social media environment can make it much difficult to create or maintain a strong hegemonic discourse. One of the most obvious pieces of evidence can be Mori's resignation, as mentioned earlier. Tokyo Reuters reported that a 22-year-old Japanese college student launched an online campaign against the president of Tokyo Olympics Organization to criticize his sexist remarks.⁶⁴

Momoko Nojo with other activists started the campaign and gathered more than 150,000 signatures in less than two weeks through X (the former Twitter) and other social media platform with #DontBeSilent tag. According to *The Japan Times*, Sat 6th February 2021,⁶⁵ their activity has reached not only the Japanese public, but also some European embassies in Japan. They tweeted pictures of staff 'raising their hands' under the hashtags #DontBeSilent and #Genderequality to show their support to activities against sexism and gender inequality. The German Embassy used the hashtags first, their tweet being retweeted more than 10,000 times, then other European Diplomatic missions in Tokyo, including those Finland, Sweden, and the European Union followed suit. The embassies of Ireland and Portugal, and the United Nations Information Centre Tokyo also joined the movement. A number of retweets were posted to act against gender discrimination, using hashtags in Japanese with meanings such as 'women who won't behave' and 'Please retire, Yoshiro Mori'. The collected signatories through an online petition called for the central and Tokyo metropolitan governments, the JOC and the Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee, to 'properly address' Mori's sexist remarks.

Here could be found two aspects to compare to indicate noteworthy differences between the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics in the context of gender politics and diplomacy of mega-sport events. Although the both mega events used gender for soft-power, there two different gender politics can be found in both games respectively. First, the gender ideology and politics which were well-constructed by Daimatsu's gender discourses in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, largely reinforced conventional gender ideology which was based on patriarchal values. Women were seen as strong and tough, but they eventually become dependent beings. The volleyball female players were utilized as vehicles for soft-power which reinforced the conventional value of femininity in Japanese society. Contrary to this, gender politics of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics sought for women's independence and was strictly against gender inequality. (This is why Mori's remarks were severely criticized by not only the domestic audience, but also the international one). What is suggestive is that the anti-sexism gender discourses in the context of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics was used diplomatically for avoiding international criticism and attempting to demonstrate Japan's seeming endeavor to achieve a gender equal society. Secondly, the message construction processes and the information flows have been radically changed, due to the new media environment. The popularity of Daimatsu and his philosophy of sportsmanship combined with the female volleyball players' gender discourse largely relied on 'traditional' mass media, such as books, magazine articles and television programmes. The Olympics themselves were undoubtedly a huge platform which 'mediated' his message not only to the domestic audience, but also to the global counterparts. It was a mixed media platform, but his charismatic figure and the image of 'Oriental Witches' were easily 'edited' and controlled in order to legitimate, justify and create a uniform coherent message, or regularly dramatized by magazine editors, television producers, and Daimatsu himself.

The contemporary media environment can be symbolized by the emergence of the Internet and advanced digital communication technologies. Social media can be a particularly significant factor in terms of considering changes in the flow of information and the construction process of the Olympic narratives. Mori's resignation under enormous pressures both from the domestic and international audiences was a great

example of how a public voice via social media created a huge impact on a leading senior politician. Mori's resignation on the highly visible political stage of the Olympics was consequently used as an attempt to amend the image of gender inequality in Japanese society, and to create a positive image of Japan. All the critical comments on Mori's sexist remark from the governor of Tokyo, Yuriko Koike, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, the IOC and one of the top sponsors of the Games, the president of Toyota Motor Corporation, Akio Toyota, can be seen as driven by the dynamics of gender diplomacy. It would be impossible to imagine Mori's resignation without the collective activities on social media, which had the impact of subverting conventional narratives, values, and customs.

The Conflicts of the Olympics Narratives

The Olympics has been seen as a media event, since most people experience the Olympics through various media platforms. The 2012 London Olympics were watched by 3.6 billion via television.⁶⁶ The 2016 Rio Olympics has been called as 'most social Games', since its radical expansion of social media coverage.⁶⁷ The social media coverage comprised of live statistics, behind-the-scenes, streaming videos, Facebook's live interviews with athletes and commentators, and slow-motion videos of inspiring moment of Instagram and so on.⁶⁸ Furthermore, social media content become an important part of the news cycle information flow during the Rio Games.⁶⁹ The expansion of media channels, various devices and platform enable individuals to share their observations, experiences and opinions with the global audience. The social media content is therefore different from traditional media, such as television broadcasting which is usually politically and commercially authorized by professional media editors and stakeholders in order to 'spotlight some central value, idealized version of society, or some aspect of collective memory'.⁷⁰ Given the expansion of social media use in the Olympics, media narratives are produced not only by television producers and editors, but also the audience.⁷¹ This new media environment which generates multiple channels to exchange information and debates, results in creating both a specific view which is shared by similar-minded audiences (echo chamber), as well as different opinions and discourses by a variety of audiences. Either case won't be helpful for sustaining the uniform and coherent message and narrative of the Olympics. Girginova, writes⁷²

There is no single 'Olympic Games' and increasingly the Olympic narrative is becoming tangled between at least two conflicting images: one is top-down and elitist and the other is bottom-up, more egalitarian but often trouble ridden.

As mentioned earlier, the slogans of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics have initially been 'Olympic Games for Reconstruction' after the Great East Japan Earthquake (2011), then 'proof of the human victory against coronavirus' in the on-going pandemic situation. Such top-down narratives about the Olympics clearly did not resonate with Japanese public opinion and these slogans sounded unrealistic and merely political rhetoric. The Fukushima district has not yet fully recovered. The pandemic situation was not fully controlled by the national scale of vaccination, which was rather delayed, due to 'the regulatory requirement for a domestic clinical trial involving Japanese

citizens and its own review process⁷³ and ‘Only 4% of the population was vaccinated as of 21 May, 2021.’⁷⁴ Just one month before the Game, the government was suffering from a shortage of vaccination supply. The concern for public health in the middle of the pandemic was increasing not only in Japan, but also outside Japan. For instances, the US’ track and field team cancelled its pre-Olympics training in Japan.⁷⁵ In this context, a petition against the Tokyo Olympics was collected with a record 451,867 signatures.⁷⁶ There was an apparent discrepancy between the government Olympic narratives and public opinion. Furthermore, there was also conflicting narratives between the IOC and the professionals. The Japanese doctor’s union said in a statement to the government that it was ‘impossible’ to hold the Games, given the development of the pandemic.⁷⁷ The Olympic charter stipulates that the IOC should ensure ‘the health of the athletes’ and promote ‘safe sport’ which seemed to be a rather difficult and unrealistic case in the middle of the pandemic in Tokyo. This can be understood not just as a conflict between the top-down narrative and the bottom-up realities, but also as a critical issue of biopolitics in the initiative of the IOC and the Japanese government, since the decision could involve potential risks to people’s lives. This suggests that the coherent narrative of the Olympics no longer can be sustained and share amongst multiple-stakeholders (e.g. the IOC, nations, sponsors, and people), which means that the soft-power potential of the Olympics becomes weakened. Rather, the Olympics can be no longer seen as a vehicle for soft-power, but rather as hard-power, defined ‘the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies’⁷⁸ and even involved potential physical destruction of human life.⁷⁹

Concluding Remarks: The Olympics as a Vehicle for Soft-Power

The contemporary transnational, multilateral, democratic public audience participatory, multiple-stockholder based Olympics has become increasingly difficult to sustain alongside the written mission of the Olympics manifest in the three missions that derive from the philosophy of Pierre de Coubertin: striving for excellence, demonstrating *respect and celebrating friendship* (emphasis added).⁸⁰ The expansion of digital information technologies further complicates and fragments not only the sport spectator experience,⁸¹ but also the process of constructing the Olympic message and narrative. Citizens can access social media, Facebook and X (the former Twitter) which provide a political platform both inside and outside their countries. Hence, their communications and messages usually bypass the government (state) and the editorial processes of the mass media. These diversifications can make the impact of governmental diplomatic messages more feeble and non-governmental citizen-led messages more salient. Following this line of argument, ‘[A]s state sovereignty is relaxed, diplomacy is less attributed to the state, and centers more on transnational issues and relations.’⁸² The ‘relations’ in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics could include multiple-political relationships amongst the IOC, the Japanese government, the Tokyo metropolitan government, various Olympics related sport organizations, athletes, broadcasting global TV/radio/internet media networks and commercial/business related sponsors, medical organizations, and people in Japan. Especially what is vital to realize an effective soft-power for public diplomacy is how far politically

constructed narratives could be accepted and shared with individuals in the public. This can be found in evidence in gender diplomacy for soft power in the context of 1964 and 2021 Tokyo Olympics.

After the Games, Bach announced, 'We did it like athletes and for the athletes. We did it – together.'⁸³ In his 'Letter by IOC President Thomas Bach to the Olympic Movement', after the Games, Bach also wrote that we were inspired by the world best athletes and their achievements, and the world come together through the power of sport.⁸⁴ It is fair to say that there are often athletes' human dramas which emotionally catch people's mind and are truly inspirational. The Olympics are festivals which temporarily generate a range of extraordinary experience and sentiments in relative harmony. This is the innermost characteristics of the Olympics, which take people to immersive remarkable stories of the Olympians' performance and sportsmanship, simultaneously it manages to stay away from numerous controversial issues.

Bach also stated, 'the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 give the world much-needed hope in these difficult (pandemic) times.'⁸⁵ His rhetoric implies that the power of sport can unite people and heal any in social problems. But how did they do it? They did it by giving less attention to recovering from the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, along with creating an ambiguous national consensus,⁸⁶ the absence of spectators, strict social distancing, scandals and resignations of senior organizing members, political and business corruptions and dramatically increased infection numbers during and after the Games. In addition, the final price tag for the Games was \$13 billion (1.4 trillion Japanese yen) which was twice what was estimated when Tokyo won the right to be the host. It was the most expensive game in Olympic history. The Japanese government, primarily the Tokyo Metropolitan Government covered about 55% of the total expenses, about \$7.1 billions, from Japanese taxpayers' money.⁸⁷

We also keep in mind that the power of sport acts as a marketing and promotional tool which turn Olympics into 'the world best known global brand'⁸⁸ to generate various game-associated business opportunities. The report shows a huge rise in the quantity of sponsorship deals associated with the Tokyo Olympics.⁸⁹ The Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS) for the Tokyo Olympic planned to increase content by 30 percent was the case of Rio 2016 through providing more channels than ever before.⁹⁰ Broadcasting and sponsorship account for 91% of IOC income⁹¹ and both have continued to grow. Olympic businesses have grasped the new marketing strategies to develop new media channels, such as social media, and to expand into new territories of participation for both local and global sponsorship.⁹² Given this contemporary Olympics environment, the Olympics can be seen as a vehicle for soft-power entanglement between international political diplomacy and global business strategies. It doesn't seem to function as a mode of soft power to unify nations, communities, and people anymore. With multiple stakeholders with different interests and the increasingly complex and expanding media environment with new communication platforms, it can lead us to speculate about the potential challenges to the Olympics movement to sustain its 'unique nature' (unity and solidarity – 'together') which has often been believed to be the virtue of the Olympics and the power of sport diplomacy. The question raises here is how to understand the Olympics as a vehicle for soft-power along with the government's interest in nation-branding and the emergence of more participatory audiences in the era of advanced information

technologies. If we can no longer create ‘grand narratives’ to unify people, communities and societies, then we need to *reconsider* how to articulate the virtue of the contemporary Olympics. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics highlighted the ambiguous entangled relationship between sport and diplomacy, and the complex power balance between human life and economy, democracy and elites, sport and business, gender and soft-power, the pandemic and politics, as well as humanity and technology. This might suggest it is a time to reconsider a fundamental question which repeatedly arises from the public – for what, for whom, and by whom the Olympics should be executed and sustained.

Notes

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 20. Joseph Nye, Jr., ‘Public Diplomacy and Soft Power’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 95.
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71. This media condition has also been promoted by the IOC Charter which secure 'the fullest coverage by the different media and the widest possible audience in the world' (cited in Girginova, 'New Media, Creativity, and the Olympics', 245).
72. Girginova, 'New Media, Creativity, and the Olympics', 246.
73. Makoto Kosaka, Takano Hashimoto, Akihiko Ozaki, Tetsuya Tanimoto, and Masahiro Kami, 'Delayed Covid-19 Vaccine Roll-Out in Japan', *The Lancet* 397 (2021): 10292, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01220-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01220-4/fulltext) (accessed March 10, 2023).
74. Ibid.
75. Andreas Illmer, 'Tokyo Olympics: Why Doesn't Japan Cancel the Games?', *BBC News*, May 15, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-57097853> (accessed March 10, 2023).
76. Kenji Utsunomiya collected signature through internet (homepage 'Stop Tokyo Olympics to Save Our Lives' <https://utsunomiyakenji.jp/stoptokyoolympic/> (accessed March 10, 2023) and submitted to the IOC and Tokyo metropolitan government on July 15, 2021 (see 'Gorin, Para chuushimotome 45 manninnbunn no shomeiteishtu', *Tokyo Newspaper*, July 15, 2021, <https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/116991>, accessed March 10, 2023).
77. Illmer, 'Tokyo Olympics'.
78. Joseph Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2011): 11.

79. The Olympics have never been immune to unintended negative consequences, such as terrorist attacks, given its prominence global stage. 171 sport-related terrorist attacks were logged between 1972 and 2005, Steven Jackson and Stephen Haigh 'Between and Beyond Politics: Sport and Foreign Policy in a Globalizing World', *Sport in Society* 11, no. 4 (2008): 351 cited in Kambiz Abdi, Mahdi Talebpour, Jami Fullerton Mohammad Jaad Ranjesh, and Hadi Jabbari Nooghabi, 'Converting Sports Diplomacy to Diplomatic Outcomes: Introducing a Sports Diplomacy Model', *International Aera Studies Review* 21, no. 4 (2018): 367. The most tragic incident in our memory could be the Munich massacre which eleven Israeli athletes were killed by members of the Palestinian Black September group, Cursino Malu, 'Munich Olympics Massacre Compensation Deal Struck', *BBC News*, August 31, 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-62742124> (accessed March 10, 2023). Hence the Olympics and sport do not necessarily lead to successful diplomatic outcomes, but also lead to diplomatic violence. In this case, the Olympics stage as soft power turned into the field of 'hard-power'.
80. The IOC official website, <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic-values> (accessed March 10, 2023).
81. The statics shows Rio Olympics prime-time television rating dropped 17% compared to the 2012 London Olympics (Tang Tang and Roger Cooper 2018: 309). Although this was often considered as the expansion of social media use, the case of Rio Olympics illustrated that audience may use multiple media platform simultaneously (Tang Tang and Roger Cooper 2018: 315). Tang Tang and Roger Cooper therefore consider that it is important to explore how social media acted as a different platform (compare to TV) that transformed ways in which the audience can experience sport-mega-event and re-defined the role of traditional TV in Olympic content distribution and consumption' (Tang Tang and Roger Cooper 2018: 323).
82. Karin Aggestam and Ann Towns, 'The Gender Turns in Diplomacy: A New Research Agenda', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21, no. 1 (2019): 11.
83. See Scott Reid, 'We Did It' IOC's Bach Declares as Olympic Games Close', August 9, 2021, *The Orange County Register*, <https://www.ocregister.com/2021/08/08/we-did-it-ioc-s-bach-declares-as-olympic-games-close/> (accessed March 10, 2023).
84. Thomas Bach, 'Letter by IOC President Thomas Bach to the Olympic Movement International Olympic Committee Official Website', <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/letter-by-ioc-president-thomas-bach-to-the-olympic-movement-2021-09-17> (accessed March 10, 2023).
85. Ibid.
86. Priyanka Borpujari wrote 'Almost 450,000 people had signed petitions for the Games to be cancelled; most sponsors were distancing themselves from the Games. Asahi Shimbun—whose parent company is one of the sponsors of the Games—ran an editorial critiquing the decision to continue with the Games. The CEO of Japan's top e-commerce company Rakuten called the Games "a suicide mission." Nevertheless, the Games were held,' in 'Japan Looks Back at the Tokyo Olympics', *The Diplomat*, August 23, 2021 (accessed March 10, 2023).
87. Stephen Wade, 'Tokyo Closes Books on Delayed Games; \$13 Billion Price Tag', *AP News*, June 21, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-politics-sports-japanese-yen-d4c65d8e702c455ed54fa1e9a667891b> (accessed March 10, 2023).
88. Michael Payne, *Olympic Turnaround, How the Olympic Games Stepped Back from the Brink of Extinction to Become the World's Best-Known Brand – and a Multi-Billion Dollar Global Franchise* (Oxford: Infinite Ideas Limited, 2012).
89. 'Business of Olympic Games – Tokyo Olympic Games Overview, Impact of Covid-19, Sponsorship and Medial Landscape' cited in 'Business of Olympic Games Report 2021', *GlobeNewswire*, June 30, 2021, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/business-olympic-games-report-2021-124800760.html> (accessed March 10, 2023).
90. 'Tokyo 2020 Broadcast Operation Explained', *OBS Official Website*, June 24, 2021, <https://www.obs.tv/news/797> (accessed March 10, 2023).

91. 'Olympics, Pandemic and Politics: There's Not Separating Them', *3WTKR*, July 22, 2021 <https://www.wtkr.com/sports/olympics-pandemic-and-politics-theres-no-separating-them> (accessed March 10, 2023).
92. Payne, 'Olympic Turnaround'.

Disclosure Statement

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