



**BA thesis**  
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**TokyoOlympics**

What Hosting the Olympics Has Meant for Japan in the  
20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Saga Unnsteinsdottir

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**UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND**  
**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**

**University of Iceland**

**School of Humanities**

**|Japanese**

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**Thesis for B.A. – Japanese Studies**

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**Saga Unnsteinsdottir**

**Ssn.: 031192-4049**

**Supervisor: Kristín Ingvarsdóttir**

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## Abstract

The 2020/21 Tokyo Olympics mark the second time Japan has hosted the Summer Olympic Games, and the third time that the city of Tokyo has won the bid to host the Olympics (1940, 1964, 2020/21). The Olympics coming back to Tokyo and being hosted in 2021 was a historic event for many reasons and serves as an invitation to re-examine Tokyo's history with the Olympics. Japan's history with the Summer Olympics and the historic quality of the Tokyo Games are examined in this paper, focusing on what meaning (or what symbolic value) the Games have carried for Japan and the city of Tokyo at different times in history. Looking at Tokyo's history as an Olympic host city, this essay will analyze how the Olympic Games and their effect on host cities, has changed in the 20th and 21st centuries. Answering the question; What has hosting the Olympic Games meant for Tokyo and Japan historically? And what did it mean now, in 2021, in light of that history?

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## Introduction

With Tokyo hosting the Olympics in 2021 the city has now, as of this writing, won the bid to host the Olympics three times, and made it all the way to actually staging the event twice. In 1940 Tokyo was set to host the Olympics, however, due to World War II, the Games were ultimately called off. Later, in 1964, Tokyo became the first city in Asia to host the Games. Then in 2021, the Olympic Games opened in Tokyo in July, after being postponed for the first time in Olympic history due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For Japan, hosting the Olympics has meant different things at different times, and each of the Games (planned or actualized) has left its impact on the city.

The aim of the following analysis will be to analyze the history of Tokyo and Japan's continued relationship with the Olympic Games. The Olympics coming back to Tokyo in 2021 is already an invitation for us to reflect on and re-examine Japan's Olympic history. The stark difference between each of Tokyo's interactions with the Olympics, especially the difference between the celebrated 1964 Games and the historically unpopular and controversial 2020/21 Games provide additional questions to guide that reflection, mainly: What have the Olympic Games meant for Tokyo before - and how, and why, is it so different in 2021?

The reason I have chosen to emphasize the *meaning* or symbolic value of hosting the Olympics for this analysis (in addition to the material- and/or economic effects) is that the Olympics themselves have been, and continue to be marketed to host cities and spectators on the promise of non-material, symbolic benefits. The stated values and goals of the Olympics include "building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced without discrimination" through understanding of the "spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play." (Olympic Values, 2021). As well as

the promotion of both peace and "political neutrality" (IOC Mission, 2021). In fact, the idea that the Olympics promoted or symbolized these virtues has been present ever since the Olympic Games were reintroduced in their modern incarnation in 1896, and as they have evolved and become grander so has their symbolic significance increased. Few if any international events come close to the Olympics in terms of prestige, scale, cost, or as a catalyst for urban redesign. At this stage in history the Olympics have become a way for governments to raise the profile of their city, and obtain respect from the international community (Chalkey & Essex, 1999).

Furthermore, the Olympics, as a resurrection of an ancient Greek festival, have always involved "the invocation of historical symbolism" (Tagsold, 2010, p.290). Like the very first modern Olympics were a resurrection of the Greek festival, the Tokyo Games have in no small part been inspired by history. Nostalgia for the 1964 Tokyo Games, and the narrative of the Olympic Games coming back to Japan, were a big selling point for the 2020 Games (Weber, 2020). The 1964 Games, similarly, were in part about fulfilling some of the promises of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics that were never staged. Looking at Tokyo's Olympic history this thesis aims to shed light on how the Olympics' impact on- and significance for host cities has changed in the 20th and 21st centuries. One thing that has not changed about the Olympics, however, is that the Olympics are about history, representing it and adding to it.

## 1. Before the First Tokyo Olympics: The „Phantom Olympics“

The 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games are frequently described as a significant milestone for Japan that marks the beginning of a new era in modern Japanese history, that symbolized Japan's political rehabilitation after World War II (Chalkey & Essex, 1999). The impressive Olympic structures and the vast improvements in infrastructure around the city that came with Tokyo 1964 could be seen as the final touches of the reconstruction following the Second World War. The live televised opening of the Games serving as Japan's re-introduction to the world. Some, like Ian Buruma (2003), have gone as far as referring to those Games as Japan's "*second opening*"; in reference to Japan's Meiji Restorations (1868) - which served as the country's first opening, or when the country opened up to foreigners following the isolationist Tokugawa period.

The 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games were certainly historic as the very first Olympic Games to be held in Asia, or anywhere outside of Europe or North America, as well as being the first broadcast live on television via satellite (Buruma, 2003). The Games were also made history by Tokyo taking on more urban renewal projects than any city before it in preparation for the Game, spending 72.1 billion yen on just the construction of new roads and highways – which was unprecedented at the time (Chalkey & Essex, 1999). Given all of this and more; it is hardly surprising that the memory of the 1964 Games remains alive and well. The 1964 Games were however not the first Olympics that were planned for the city of Tokyo, that honor belongs to Japan's forfeited "*Phantom Olympics*" of 1940.

The "Phantom Olympics" (Japanese: *Maboroshi no Orinpikku*) is largely absent in mainstream discourse, and discussions about the Olympics in Japan. Weber (2020) argues that the absence of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics in Japan's Olympic memory

reflects the broader trend in Japanese public discourse, where references to "the period between 1931 and 1945 are scarce and ambiguous" (Weber, 2020, p.67). This was reflected in the lead up to the 2020/21 Tokyo Olympics where much of the press following Japan's winning the Olympic bid in 2013 "quickly blended with nostalgia for the first Tokyo Games in 1964. "while the fact that Tokyo had actually won the bid „for a third (1940, 1964, 2020), not second, time was simply ignored."

(Weber, 2020, pp.66-67)

Buruma's (2003) book is no different in this regard. Although the 1964 Tokyo Olympics serve as the author's framing device for Japan's modern history, Japan's first successful bid to host the 1940 Games is omitted from the story. According to the book's index, every mention of the *Tokyo Olympics* is referring to the Tokyo 1964 Games, and never the 1940 Games. One might assume that since the 1940 Tokyo Games were called off in 1938, just over a year after Japan had won the bid, the absence of discussion about the 1940 Games could be due to there being very little to discuss. A closer look at the plans for the 1940 Games, however, reveals many aspects from the scheduled "Phantom Olympics" that are similar to, or even informed, Japan's later interactions with the Olympic Games.

## 1.1 Tokyo 1940: A Chance to Represent Modern Japan

When looking at the representation of history at the 1964 Olympics Christian Tagsold (2010) finds quite a few shared links between the iconic 1964 Games and the mostly forgotten 1940 "Phantom Olympics". To begin the 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games, had they been staged as planned, would have achieved many of the same aims that the 1964 Olympics eventually did. Most obviously, the 1940 Tokyo Olympics would have been

historic as the first Olympic Games to be hosted by an Asian country back then as well. Another thing the two Games share is the site, or the fact that the 1964 Games took place on the grounds originally chosen for the 1940 "Phantom Olympics".

The site selected for staging the 1940 Tokyo Olympics was mainly in the area overlapping two Tokyo districts: Shinjuku and Shibuya. An area where the Meiji Shrine is the main landmark. Next to the shrine, the 1940 Tokyo Olympics were to be hosted at a rebuilt Meiji Shrine Athletic Stadium, with additional planned buildings intended for sport surrounding it (Tagsold, 2010).

The Meiji shrine is a *Shinto*<sup>1</sup> Shrine dedicated to the emperor Meiji (1869–1912); Japan's first modern emperor who became head of state following the Meiji Restorations of 1868. The restoration saw the end of the *Bakufu* (Samurai tent-government) which ruled Japan during the isolationist Tokugawa period (794–1185). The shrine was built following the death of Emperor Meiji in 1915 and was completed in 1926. The choice of emphasizing emperor Meiji had much symbolic significance since his memory holds at least two important meanings: a return to imperial rule, and the opening up of Japan - followed by rapid modernization, and Westernization (Buruma, 2003).

The Meiji Restorations also saw the capital being moved from Kyoto to Tokyo (formerly named Edo). Making Meiji the first emperor to rule from Tokyo, and meaning that Tokyo became the city to most rapidly modernized, transitioning at great speed from a feudal capital to the nation's modern capital (Purkarthofer, 2020). It only makes sense that Japan would want to showcase Tokyo as Japan's still relatively new, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Shinto*: a native Japanese religion; a collection of local Japanese myths, and festivals.

highly modern capital, and highlight the first emperor who ruled from it by staging the Olympics.

The fact that Tokyo was Japan's most modern city is important since the Olympics, after being reintroduced by Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863–1937) in 1896, had evolved into a platform that countries could use to demonstrate modernity (Tagsold, 2010; Chalkey & Essex, 1999). Combine this with the spirit of the Olympics of bringing nations together, and it becomes easy to see how these grounds, and the proximity to the Meiji Shrine, would have been a very appealing location for the Tokyo Olympics.

Competitive sport themselves also carried a modern, and Western, connotation in Japan, and both sport and physical education were an integral part of Japan's nation-building and "enlightenment and civilization project of the early Meiji [era]." And by the 1930s, when Japan was seeking to host the Olympics, the emphasis on physical education and the "state control of sports and physical education [had] only intensified" (Collins, 2014, p.6). The fact that prior to 1940 the Olympics, despite supposedly being above politics and committed to internationalism, had never been hosted anywhere outside Europe or North America would have only reinforced the idea that competitive sports were linked to a nation's modernization status.

Being the first Asian nation staging the Olympic Games, with all their modern connotations, would have been fulfilling many of Japan's modern dreams that began with the Meiji Restoration. The 1940 Games would have shown that Japan was equal to other modern (Western) nations. Symbolically completing their race for modernity which began with the Meiji Restorations. The problem with this, however, was that the Meiji era was long over by the 1930s, and Japan's "race for modernity" had evolved into one

of empire - characterized by "a particularly modern kind of authoritarianism" (Buruma, 2003, p.19).

The plans to host the Olympics so near the Meiji shrine were actually met with some resistance by ultra-nationalists in government who worried about the sanctity of the Shrine should it receive so many foreign visitors. Others were skeptical about the value of bringing the Olympic Games to Japan all together (Tagsold, 2010). Then, by the time of the Second Sino-Japanese War (or World War II) in 1937, the government began placing serious constraints on the Olympic organizers since resources were needed for the war. With these limitations and the unpopularity of hosting the Olympics during a war, Japan formally withdrew from hosting in July of 1938. (Weber, 2020).

## 1.2 "Choosing War Over the Olympics."

According to Torsten Weber's essay: *Tokyo's "phantom Olympics" in public memory: when Japan chose war over the Olympics* (2020): "Just as revisionists ignore Japan's war responsibility, the year 1940 has largely been wiped from Japan's public memory." (Weber, 2020, p.67). Weber (2020) sites as an example how the *Tokyo Metropolitan Tokyo-Edo Museum* 'sexhibition on the Olympics. The exhibition, first of all, omits the 1940 Olympics from the title of the exhibit, and in the little space given to them, along with the war, it is only done using the passive voice. So that events are described as *happening* due to *circumstances* – downplaying Japan's role as an agent with an active (and aggressive) role in the war. In a similar fashion, the 1965 documentary *Tokyo Olympiad* does mention the 1940 Olympics in the film's opening sequence, but, only

using the passive voice. Explaining that the 1940 Olympics could not be staged because of the war.

The documentary and the exhibition are examples of how the "Phantom Olympics" are usually covered in the mainstream. If they are not omitted entirely, events are described in passive or even somber terms. Saying that the 1940 Games were called off *due to World War II*, and implying, like Weber's essay title, that war and hosting the Olympics were incompatible. That they could never have gone on simultaneously, and that Japan had to choose one or the other. Was this really the case, though?

Sandra Collins (2014) has a different point of view. Arguing that the 1940 Tokyo Olympics did not *need* to be canceled due to the war, nor that they were cancelled because the IOC *forced* Japan to withdraw, as the story is often told. Rather, it was due to Japan's military government voluntarily forfeiting their hosting rights. Collins goes on to argue that the desire of the Japanese authorities of the 1930s to host the Olympics could, in fact, be seen as being motivated by imperialism.

Within the timespan that Japan submitted its bid to host the Olympics, won the bid, and called off the 1940 Games the country had been carrying out an imperial mission around Asia. The 1940 "Phantom Olympics" are intimately linked to the history of Japanese imperialism, and the silence about the "Phantom Olympics" is linked to the bigger picture of silence, and revisionism, when it comes to the history of Japanese imperialism. Japanese imperialism played a role in bringing the 1940 Games to Tokyo, contributed to their cancellation as well as to their future erasure from Olympic memory (Weber, 2020).

In brief summary, the intersecting timeline of the Olympics and Japanese imperialism goes like this: In 1912, two years after Japan annexed Korea, Japan sent its first delegates to compete at the Stockholm Olympics. In 1932, following the Manchurian Incident of 1931, Japan founded the puppet state of Manchukuo, and began its Olympic bidding campaign for the 1940 Tokyo Olympics. A year later, in 1933, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations while the country "remained committed to its participation in international organizations, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC)." (Weber, 2020, p.67). Then in 1936, a day before Hitler opened the Berlin Olympics, it was announced that Tokyo had won the bid and would become the first Asian city to host the Olympics. A year later, in 1937, the Second Sino-Japanese War began, and as it became apparent that the war would not be over quickly, Japan forfeited its hosting rights in July of 1938 (Weber, 2020).

The precise start of the war remains a topic of debate, divided along ideological lines. Often 1937 is said to mark the start, or when fighting broke out in Beijing, some claim it started earlier with the Manchurian incident of 1931. Japanese conservatives, and far-right revisionists, tend to downplay Japan's role or/and blame the West for forcing Japan into their imperialist role starting as early as 1846. While more left-leaning Japanese historians and historians in the Peoples' Republic of China consider the period of imperialism to start in 1905 following Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (Mitter, 2003; Buruma, 2003).

Earlier some positive readings were given for the emphasis on Meiji in the "Phantom Olympics", however, the truth is that the historic figure was consistently invoked for the cause of imperialism in the 1930s and early 1940s Japan (Buruma, 2003). The Meiji nostalgia was not all total revisionism either. In fact the imperial quest

for control over the Northeast parts of China began in the Meiji period: "In the Meiji period, Japan turned towards imperialism as a means of achieving Fukoku Kyohei('rich country, strong army') [and] the idea that Northeast China, or Manchuria, was the 'lifeline' that would ensure Japanese security in the region began to emerge among imperialist politicians." (Mitter, 2003, p.147).

Unlike Germany in 1933, Japan never underwent an obvious break in continuity, as both the "constitution and emperor system of rule, which began with the Meiji Restoration, stayed in place." (Buruma, 2003, p.73). Meiji's role and relationship to Japanese militarism of the 1930s and 1940s are complicated by this. Meiji can not exactly be blamed for the trajectory Japan took towards imperialism, while there is also no real rupture in the timeline which allows us to completely separate Meiji from it. For example, the restoration of Emperor Meiji was followed by the erection of the *Yasukuni Shrine* in Tokyo. A shrine in honor of imperial soldiers, which remains controversial, especially among former victims of Japanese imperialism (Buruma, 2003).

During their early years, the Olympics were small in scale, usually poorly planned, and had minimal impact on their host cities' environment. It was not until the Berlin Olympics of 1936 that the emphasis shifted more towards architecture, and the new facilities built for the competition became a "Flagship feature" of the Games (Chalkey & Essex, 2003, p.374). This means that idea that the Olympics were a platform for nations to establish, or re-establish, themselves through national symbolism and displays of modernity was itself an invention of imperialism. It was a relatively new idea at the time, but it seems clear that the 1940 Games were meant to lend Japan legitimacy as an imperial power similarly to how the 1936 Games did for Nazi Germany (Tagsold, 2010; Collins, 2014).

In Japan, the Olympics, competitive sports in general, and imperialism shared a common link: the quest for modernity. Had imperial Japan hosted the Olympics in 1940 it would have been Japan's chance to demonstrate its modernizing capabilities to rival Western nations and their Asian neighbors. The emphasis on national symbols (the Meiji Shrine), and through showcasing the new high-quality sports facilities would have provided evidence to the international community of imperial Japan's competency, and with that earning them legitimacy. Like it had done for Germany (Chalkey & Essex, 1999). All during a time in which Japan was using modernity as justification for its imperialist activity in Korea, Manchuria, and beyond.

Both at home in Japan and in the colonies, subjects of the Japanese empire were told that Japan was bringing modernization to, and in doing so liberating, the rest of Asia. At the same time Japan's colonies, especially Manchuria, were needed for resources to further modernize Japan itself (Buruma, 2003). In the colonies, like Manchirna, the Japanese controlled, Chinese-language press constructed a narrative that justified, and set the stage for Japan's creation of Manchukuo in 1932. A narrative that cast the occupying Japanese as having a positive impact in the region as innovators and bringers of Modernity (Mitter, 2003).

The Japanese authorities also saw hosting the Olympics as an opportunity to promote and author its own idea of "acceptable national culture as it veered towards war." while further justifying "the emerging rhetoric of Japan as the liberators of Asia in the 1930s." (Collins, 2014, pp.1-2). The 11th of November of 1940 had been calculated to be the 2,600th anniversary of the enthronement of Japan's first emperor, Emperor Jimmu, and the mythical founding of Japan. This date had been decided upon back in the Meiji era based on the ad.720 text, the *Nihon Shoki*. Even though the Olympics are typically thought

of as an internationalist phenomenon, the 1940 Games had been planned to be combined with the nativist celebration. For the purpose of mobilizing the public "as imperial subjects bound together by myth and destiny" (Collins, 2014, p.4).

The fact that Japan had been involved in imperialist activity, including "incidents" like the one in Manchuria, even before winning the Olympic bid, complicates the theory that Japan had to choose between war and the Olympics. As does the fact that Japan's bidding campaign began the same year as the founding of the puppet state Manchukuo in 1932, the event which triggered Japan's move to leave the league of nations. The Tokyo Olympics were appealing to Japanese authorities of the 1930s because hosting the Olympics could have given Japan legitimacy as an imperial power. Additionally, participating in the IOC and hosting the Olympics was seen as an alternative way for Imperial Japan to participate in international diplomacy after leaving the League of Nations (Collins, 2014).

As the world witnessed with the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the Olympics and war and imperialism, are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the 1936 Berlin Olympics ushered in a new period in Olympic history where the Games emerged as a platform for nations to raise their profiles using architecture. In fact, all three axis powers were hoping to host the Olympics during World War II (Germany in 1936<sup>2</sup>, Japan in 1940, and Italy in 1944). The Berlin Olympics of 1936 are now remembered as if they were some kind of horrible mistake, or the exception. In truth the only exceptional thing about them was that Germany actually managed to host the Games. There was nothing unique about ultra-

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<sup>2</sup> The IOC did not technically award the 1936 Games to Nazi Germany but to the German Weimar Republic two years prior to the Nazi party's rise to power. \*However the IOC did not call for the 1936 Games to be cancelled, allowing them to be staged.

conservative governments being attracted to the Olympics, nor about the IOC awarding the Games to those nations (Tagsold, 2010; Chalkey & Essex, 2003).

Despite the lofty stated values of the Olympic charter there were contradictions present from the very conception of the Olympic Games when it came to the subject of war. The founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, did promote the belief that the Olympics could promote "international unity and social equality." (Chalkey and Essex, 2003, p.371), and that the Games promoted peace. However, Coubertin also praised the British empire, attributing its success to the British education system's inclusion of physical education. Coubertin had also said that he believed that sports and the Olympics "would toughen up the youth for war. " (Day, 2020).

On the other side of the Olympic partnership; the IOC was all too eager to work with Japan, even after the war with China began. One reason for this, and another contradiction, was the fact that the IOC had been criticized for their unspoken preference for Western host countries despite claiming to be in favor of internationalism. Those criticism were not unfounded either, and many critics of the Olympics have documented the different ways the Games were founded on, and continue to perpetuate racism (Day, 2020; Boykoff, 2020).

The IOC hoped that staging the 1940 Tokyo Games would grant them legitimacy as an international organization. Bringing the Games to Asia would have been a highly symbolic and a historic gesture, one that would have proved that the Olympics were unbiased, committed to internationalism, and above politics (Collins, 2014).

Weber (2020) explains that Japan pulled out from hosting the Olympics after Japan's Foreign Ministry got a call from the president of the IOC saying that: "if Japan were not to stop its war in China, many countries were expected to boycott the Tokyo Games."

And that "In order to spare Japan this embarrassment, he advised them to withdraw from hosting the Games." (Weber, 2020, p.69). These events could be interpreted as Japan following the IOCs suggestion, however the fact that the IOC members had overwhelmingly supported Tokyo - so much so that the Winter Olympics were awarded to Japan's Sapporo as late as March of 1938(Collins, 2014), makes that theory seem a little less convincing.

Whichever way we choose to interpret these events. In order to avoid the high cost of hosting, negative press and potential boycotts, Japan did withdraw from hosting the Olympics in July of 1938, and the 1940 Games became a phantom.

## 2 Tokyo 1964: Representations of "tradition and modernity"

After Japan pulled out from hosting the Olympics in 1938, the hosting rights were transferred to Helsinki, Finland. However, like Tokyo, Helsinki did eventually pull out from hosting - and the 1940 Olympics were canceled altogether. The same story was repeated for the 1944 Olympics which were never staged as well. Even though one could argue that the IOC had been consistently supportive of Japan leading up to 1938, Japan was still banned from competing at the next Olympics, in 1948 in London "on account of its role in WW II"(Tagsold, 2010, p.289). Japan was next involved in the Olympics at the Helsinki Games of 1952, twelve years after the nation's last Olympic appearance. Then, another twelve years later, in 1964 Tokyo would host the Olympics, successfully becoming the first Asian city to host the Olympic Games this time.

As the first Asian Olympics, Tokyo 1964 completed the abandoned ambitions of both the original organizers and the IOC from the 1940 "Phantom Olympics". While the Games also set the bar for how other East Asian cities (Seoul 1988, Beijing 2008) would navigate the challenge of representing their nations and cultures through hosting the Olympics in the future (Collins, 2011).

Since the 1940 Tokyo Olympics never actually took place it could be said that the 1964 Games *took* their place as Tokyo's and Asia's first Olympics and in Olympic memory. The 1964 Games were additionally about Japan's reintroduction to the international community, and recovery following World War II. As Tagsold (2010) explains: "Post-War Japan was less a newborn nation than a reborn[one], but was nonetheless in the position of having to prove its modernity." (Tagsold, 2010, p.289).

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics came to symbolize Japan turning a new leaf and moving forward from its recent, troubled past of imperialism, defeat, and occupation

(Buruma, 2003; Chalkey & Essex, 1999; Weber, 2020(2)). So it would seem that the organizers of the 1964 Games succeeded in their mission of representing Japan positively despite the nation's recent history. Ultimately moving forward from history into a new and brighter era. This chapter will examine how the 1964 Games succeeded in representing the country, its history, and how the Games themselves became history. Leaving behind their own legacy and changing the urban landscape of Tokyo.

## 2.1 Tokyo 1964 as Representation of History

The majority of events at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics took place around Shibuya and Shinjuku, the area originally selected for the 1940 "Phantom Olympics". The three main Olympic sites of the 1964 Games were all in this area too. Those were the main Olympic Stadium, the Olympic village (what is Yoyogi park today), and the Yoyogi National Gymnasium. The two main sports venues were a recent one, and a completely new one, while the Olympic village used existing structures - former U.S army barracks. The first example of the layers of history were not only present but highlighted by the organizers of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics (Tagsold, 2010).

Staging the 1964 Tokyo Games in this location had the effect of both replacing history while simultaneously placing the Games in a historic context. The organizers of the Tokyo 1964 Games had to stage the event with an awareness of the city's "symbolic politics and the burdens of history" which "called for image management not simply in order to enhance marketing opportunities but to reconstruct" Japan's national identity (Tagsold, 2010, p.291).

The location was already symbolically loaded due to the Meiji connection, however, by the time Tokyo 1964 was being planned, the area had even more history

that the organizers needed to grapple with. The location was now also the site of, and a reminder of, the canceled "Phantom Olympics" for one thing. As well as a space that both the Japanese Imperial Army and the U.S Air Force had used during the war and during the years of American occupation after the war (Tagsold, 2010).

The celebration of Japan's first emperor and the mythical founding of Japan 2,600 years earlier was held there in November of 1940 as planned. Instead of the celebration being combined with celebrating the Olympics, the East Asian Sports Meeting was staged. A stadium was erected by the Meiji Shrine, and was used for that occasion, and then torn down and rebuilt for the Asian Games of 1958, and served as the main stadium of the 1964 Games (Tagsold, 2010).

The location had also been used for the Japanese Imperial army Barracks, and served as the site where emperor Showa (1926-1989) would visit, and inspect troops before they were sent off to battle around Asia<sup>3</sup> during the war. Following Japan's defeat in 1945 the area became known as Washington Heights and served as a base for the American Air Force. It was only in 1958, in preparation for the Olympics, that the land was returned (Tagsold, 2010).

According to the IOC, the US agreed to hand back the piece of land to Japan for the purposes of the Tokyo 1964 Olympics. So that the former military barracks could be used as: "accommodation for athletes and coaches from 98 countries during the Olympic Games was seen as a symbolic illustration of Japan's transformation from an occupied nation to a country of internationalism and peace." (Yoyogi Olympic Village, 2020). The IOC's version of the story, revealingly, forgoes any reference to Japanese

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<sup>3</sup> Even prior to the war, and the site being selected for the 1940 Olympics, the area had been used for various purposes by the army. The first airplane to take flight from Japanese soil took off from there in 1910, as an example. (Tagsold, 2010)

imperialism or activity during the war. Instead, the IOC highlights that Japan was an *occupied nation* moving towards independence. A clear-cut example of the narrative the organizers of the 1964 Olympics were hoping to promote.

The victimization and devastation which Japan and its' people had faced during the war, the success of the nation's reconstruction after the war, and the US handing Japan its land back were themes of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. As the choice of using the former army barracks to house the athletes illustrates. The 1964 Olympic organizers did not attempt to sweep history under the rug but were actually very conscious of-, and purposefully made references to history. Allowing them to take charge of the narrative, and mend Japan's image.

Since the main Olympic stadium was built for hosting the Asian Games of 1958, that venue had little meaning specific to the Olympics, and was a fairly standard venue by design. Receiving minimal special coverage by the media covering the 1964 Games as a result. The Yoyogi National Gymnasium, on the other hand, was created specially for the 1964 Games, and was by design a new Tokyo landmark, or "hallmark of modernity [to be] recognized around the world." (Tagsold, 2010, p.295). The Gymnasium, like the Olympic village, contained deliberate references to Japan's recent history.

Designed by architect Kenzo Tange, and famous for the suspended, curved design of the roof, the Yoyogi National Gymnasium was built even closer to the Meiji Shrine than the main stadium. It was also positioned/built in such a way that the Gymnasium corresponded, or linked to the center of the Meiji shrine - so that one could imagine a direct line connecting the two. The line "broken only by the trees surrounding the Meiji Shrine, firmly connected the two and gave a sense that the post-war modernity

represented by the National Gymnasium was a continuation of the pre-war modernist tradition" which Meiji, and his Shrine, represented (Tagsold, 2010, p.295).

The two structures are both like shrines; to pre-and post-war Japan's modernizing achievements. The two are then easily connected by being positioned in such a way that a direct, unbroken line stretching between them. With nothing separating them aside from the trees in the park. The two structures tell a version of the history of modern Japan which links the pre-and post-war traditions – without any references to the war and Japanese militarism, and its role in Japan's modern history, that in reality did exist between the two periods.

References to the war itself were not absent, however. Tange's first major project as an architect was the *Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum*, and *Peace Memorial Park* in Hiroshima. The Memorial Cenotaph "the spiritual center of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park" (Tagsold, 2010, p. 295), dedicated to the victims who perished in the attack, had the same curved structure for its roof as the National Gymnasium. The choice of Tange for the project and the link the architect created between the museum in Hiroshima, and the victims of the atomic bomb, by using the same features for the Gymnasium are yet another example of how the 1964 Olympic organizers used the Olympic Games to reconstruct Japan's image and represent its history (Tagsold, 2010).

Another prominent reference to the atrocities committed against the Japanese during the war - the atomic bomb dropped by the Americans - at the 1964 Olympics was the choice of the final Olympic torch relay runner Sakai Yorishiro. Yorishiro was born on August 6th in 1945, the day the Atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, only 70 kilometers from the center of the blast. A symbolically loaded gesture, that would have inspired anyone. Yorishiro, like Japan, was a survivor of the atomic blast, representing

the strength of the Japanese people, and how far they had come. Japan, represented by Yorishino, had survived the atomic attack, rebuilt their country, and on top of that was now taking the lead among Asian nations by becoming the first to host the Olympic Games. Even outdoing European cities, like Rome at the previous 1960 Games, in terms of developments undertaken in preparation for the Games, and the overall extravagance of the event (Tagsold, 2010, Chalkey, & Essex, 1999).

With all of this said, it is no wonder that so many like to emphasize the symbolic significance of the 1964 Games for Japan (Buruma, 2003; Chalkey, and Essex, 1999; Weber, 2020(2)). Yorishino lighting the Olympic torch marked the beginning of the Olympics – and with that the end of what had come before it: the preparation for the Olympics, and the reconstruction that followed Japan's defeat. Coupled with that, the Olympic village it also symbolized the return of Japanese land from the Americans.

Another aim the organizers of Tokyo 1964 had was "to cast the emperor, the Showa tenno, in a peaceful aura as Japan's head of state". A tough challenge for the organizers considering that Emperor Showa had played a role in Japanese politics since 1926. Including having been Japan's head of state during the period of imperialism, and the war (Tagsold, 2010, p.290).

One way this was done was by the prominent display of chrysanthemums used to decorate the city for the games. Using "the symbolic flower of the imperial family and not the state itself" is incredibly telling, and deepened a false "impression that the imperial family played a central role in staging the Games." This was also accomplished by locating the Meiji Memorial Picture Gallery next to the main Olympic Stadium, encouraging visitors to the Games to learn about "the remarkably sympathetic" version of emperor Meiji, and the imperial family. Paired with the decision to keep the original

location by the Meiji shrine, it all "served to white-wash the imperial family, the Meiji tenno and most of all his grandson the Showa tenno, rather than take historical responsibility." (Tagsold, 2010, p.298).

Italy and Germany, the other two axis powers, took on similar tasks when hosting the Olympics in the post-war era. Tagsold (2010) finds that, based on the representation of space and history, that Germany was most successful in taking responsibility for, and ultimately moving forward from, recent history "while Japan was still struggling" and "Rome simply ignored it" (Tagsold, 2010, p. 298). However, the 1972 Munich Olympics likely succeeded due to the fact that, unlike Tokyo and Rome which were *finally* hosting the Olympics they had campaigned for in the 1930s and 1940s, Germany actually had hosted the 1936 Berlin Olympics. With the 1936 Games in the rearview mirror of history, Germany could use the experience to guide their decisions in staging the Games in the post-war era and better avoid mistakes (Tagsold, 2010).

This does not mean that Tokyo's approach to framing recent history was not a success. Despite Tagsold (2010) being able to notice how the Tokyo organizers struggled with coming to terms with history, the fact was that the Western press by and large completely missed the historic, and political meaning when covering the Tokyo Olympics back in 1964. Western journalists who covered the 1964 Olympics struggled to grasp the layered meaning and mostly "relied on describing the city as a mixture of tradition and modernity." (Tagsold, 2010, p.294).

That is not to say that the narrative or theme of "tradition and modernity" at the 1964 Olympics was not being employed deliberately to some degree. Japan may have been seeking to prove itself as a modern nation equal to the West, however, the Tokyo 1964 Games were importantly the first non-Western Olympic Games. Using traditional

Japanese culture and symbols highlighted Japan's, and the East's, difference from the West. Both Seoul and Beijing ended up doing something similar (leaning into, and showcasing their East Asian traditional cultures), leading one to believe the theme of „tradition and modernity“ that many Westerners took away from the 1964 Olympics may not have been purely based on ignorance (Sandra Collins, 2011).

This does not excuse the Western media which did fail to apply the same rigorous analysis to Tokyo as they perhaps would have with a North American- or European city. Even if Collins (2011) is correct about the organizer's emphasis on Japan's Asian difference being deliberate, the fact that the next non-Western cities that hosted the Olympics after Tokyo (Mexico City in 1968, and Seoul in 1988) got covered in a similar skin-deep is revealing. It was not until the 2008 Beijing Olympics that the trend changed, and the Western press began to read more deeply (and critically) into non-Western countries staging the event, and began seeing them as "highly political" (Tagdold, 2010, p.294).

## 2.2 The Impact of Tokyo 1964

The Olympics serve as an opportunity for cities to represent their nation through the use of national and historical symbolism – as we have seen. As well as through displays of modernity, or since 1936 when new stadiums and other new buildings used for the event became a main feature of the Olympics. By the time of the 1964 Olympics the modernity on display had come to include large-scale development-, and infrastructure projects surrounding - or unrelated to - the Games (Chalkey, & Essex, 1999).

Hosting the Olympics is in itself a statement about a nation's self-esteem, as well as a nation's political and economic strength. For governments of any host cities, the

Olympics have come to serve as a chance to form a new "political narrative founded on "reconstruction" and a "bright future"." (Purkarthofer, 2020, p.48). Since post-war Japan was already seeing high-speed development, the 1964 Games could both be seen as belonging to the phenomenon of destruction and disasters creating opportunities to rebuild from scratch, which in turn raises the nation's self-esteem and a desire to host the Olympics as Purkarthofer (2020) says. While the large-scale urban design projects undertaken can also be interpreted, as Chalkey and Essex(1999) have argued, as the Olympics themselves being the catalyst for redevelopment projects. Likely a bit of both.

It was the 1960 Olympics in Rome that moved the development of the Olympics into its next stage, where the Olympic Games began to come attached with large-scale infrastructure-, and urban redevelopment projects as the standard. The Tokyo 1964 Games only went further in that direction, and Tokyo ended up being even more costly and extravagant than the 1960 Games in Rome. Most of the money Tokyo spent was not used for stadiums or venues but on large-scale projects unrelated to sports (Chalkey & Essex, 1999).

Unlike the historically meaningful imperial flowers used to decorate the city or the old army barracks used for the Olympic village, the new highways and the modern landmarks constructed, and other large-scale infrastructure projects Tokyo took on for the Games were there to stay. The former Olympic village was transformed into Yoyogi Park following the Games – becoming one of Tokyo's most prominent public parks. While a few remnants of the old Olympic Village were kept in the park's southeast corner as a monument to the 1964 Games. (Yoyogi Olympic Village, 2020).

There were also improvements to hygiene and revitalization of Tokyo's Sumida river in preparation for the Games. Improving the city's environment, and the lives of

Tokyoites, while symbolizing a kind of "self-purification" for the city (Tagsold, 2010). Or so the story usually goes – there remain some residents who claim that leading up to, and during the 1964 Games Tokyo actually saw more "toxic pollution, deafening noise, and horrendous smell in their city caused by the increase in traffic and the poor sewage system as well as of environmental destruction and forced relocations" (Weber, 2020(2)).

Other large-scale infrastructure projects included improvements to water and sewage systems, the construction of highways, and the completion of the Tokaido Shinkansen bullet train from Tokyo to Osaka, and the Monorail which connected Tokyo's Haneda airport to the city(Weber, 2020(2)). All were necessary anyway, but their development was sped up and designed so that they could meet both the short- and long-term demands of the Games and the City's growing population, and increases in traffic (Chalkey & Essex, 1999).

The construction of Highways was the largest of all the projects that the Tokyo Government took on in preparation for the Games, and outdoor events like cycling and the long-distance marathon served as golden opportunities to showcase them to global TV audiences (Chalkey and Essex, 1999; Tagsold, 2010).

The 1964 Olympics also contributed to shaping Tokyo's famous fashion and subculture district Harajuku. In preparation for the Olympics, Japan's National Television Network, the NHK, set up their Olympic Media Center in Harajuku, or on the southeast side of the Olympic Village. Triggering a chain of events where other media outlets set up their offices in the area as well. As a result of the concentration of media outlets in Harajuku, the area began to attract young people; aspiring musicians,

and trendsetters hoping to be discovered – and Harajuku transformed into a hot spot of fashion and youth subcultures as a result (Tagsold, 2010).

The story of Harajuku is one example of how in preparation for the Olympics, the changes made to Tokyo ended up changing not just spaces but how the public interacted with spaces, in often unpredictable ways. There were however other ways the 1964 Tokyo Olympics impacted the lives of Tokyo residents that were less positive, even if the damages were relatively low compared to later Games. Kohei Jinno is one example of such a case; Jinno was one of the people who lost his home and had to relocate for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics to make room for the new stadium, his home was "paved over, the greenery that blanketed the area cut down, and a nearby river buried in concrete." as upsetting as that must have been on its own Jinno was evicted once again in 2013 "at age 80, so the government could rebuild the stadium for the 2020 Games" (Lies, 2021).

Typically, the citizens who suffer most due to the Olympics in any host city are average, often lower-income or otherwise marginalized, citizens whose stories and lives are deemed less important, and are easily ignored (Day, 2021). After all, how could Jinno's and others with stories like his compete with the legacy of the 1964 Tokyo Games and all the glowing, inspiring stories from the Games which captured the world's attention? Japan's athletes won a total of 16 gold medals, including winning three out of four Gold medals in the national sport, Judo. Japan's women's volleyball team, surprising everyone, beat the Soviet Union, earning them the nickname *Tōyō no Majo* (English: Oriental witches) in one of the most memorable and iconic moments of the 1964 Games (Weber, 2020(2)).

The 1964 Games were so celebrated that "The opening day of the Games, October 10, became a public holiday (Health and Sports Day) in 1966, together with the reinstatement of National Foundation Day, which had been abolished by the Occupation Forces after World War II." With all of these stories combined, the 1964 Games earned itself reputation as the event which: "re-affirmed Japanese citizens' pride in the country's postwar achievements and reinforced its identity as a modern and successful nation [...] and regained respect from the international community." (Weber, 2020(2)).

Staging the 1964 Games on former military lands meant that Games did not cut as deeply into the urban fabric of Tokyo, and disturb the lives of the people, as much as would become the norm in later Olympic Games (Purkarthofer, 2020). The comparatively minimal material downsides coupled with such historic significance makes it unsurprising that the memory of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics remained so glowingly positive for as long as it did – focusing heavily on their symbolic quality. It is only recently, in the lead-up to the 2020/21 Tokyo Olympics, that the legacy of the 1964 Games is being called into question a little. Evidenced by the fact that Jinnō's story actually, successfully captured the media attention this time around in the lead-up to the 2020/21 Games. A sign of how the Olympics, their effect on their host cities, and the IOC's image management are changing in the 21st century. And why the 2021 Tokyo Games became considerably less popular, and a lot more controversial, than the 1964 Games.

### 3 Why Tokyo Hosted the 2020 Olympics (in 2021)?

In response to the question of why it had taken the IOC so long to come to the decision of postponing the 2020 Games, the IOC stated: "The postponement was based on the dynamic spreading of COVID-19 pandemic." and that the organization had been "monitoring the situation day-by-day, 24 hours a day, and that it would adapt to any changes, and follow the advice of the World Health Organization." (Frequently Asked Questions, 2020). When addressing why the Tokyo 2020 Olympics could not be moved back even further than 2021, given the lack of any guarantee that the pandemic would be under control by then, the IOC said that: "Our Japanese partners and the Prime Minister made it very clear that Japan could not manage a postponement beyond next summer at the latest." and that: "All the partners, sponsors, and regional and local governments need to pull together. The postponement will involve restrictions and compromises on the part of everyone involved. There is no blueprint for postponement, but the IOC is very confident that all the complex parts will come together and give us a marvelous Games." (Frequently Asked Questions, 2020).

Going by these statements by the IOC, the 2020 Tokyo Games, seemingly, *had to be postponed* and then *had to be staged later in 2021*, because the "Japanese partners" and Japan's government and Prime Minister could not manage to host the Games at a later date. The idea of canceling the Games altogether is not addressed, even though historically the Olympics had been canceled three times (1916, 1940, 1944) already, but never postponed.

The coronavirus and the COVID-19 pandemic were, like the war had been for the 1940 "Phantom Olympics" - the stated reason for the 2020 Olympics being postponed. Yet, a year later, in 2021 the pandemic and public health were apparently not strong

enough reasons for the Olympics to be postponed again - or canceled entirely. Why was this the case? Did the 2020 Tokyo Olympics really need to take place (in 2021)? Did they even need to take place for a second time, in Tokyo, at all, in the first place?

### 3.1 CoronOlympics: Why Was Tokyo 2020 Not Canceled?

In March of 2020 Dave Zirini and Jules Boykoff (2020) wrote in *The Nation* that hosting the Games in 2020 was "an irresponsible borderline sociopathic response to the global pandemic." In the article the authors argue that the Olympics in 2020 should be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and condemn the IOC for lagging behind other sports organizations in their response to the outbreak.

The IOC's president, Thomas Bach, had justified the organization's slow response "by admitting that he was relying on Donald Trump's baseless public assurances that the pandemic would blow over by mid-April." (Zirini & Boykoff, 2020(2)). Due to criticism such as this, from across the board, the IOC did ultimately reach its decision, however late, to postpone the Olympics for the first time in Olympic history. On a visit to Tokyo in November of 2020 the president of the IOC made a statement where he claimed that celebrating the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 could "be a celebration of humankind after having overcome the unprecedented challenge of the coronavirus." and that "These Olympic Games and the Olympic flame can be a light at the end of this very dark tunnel that humankind is going through at the moment, and which we do not know how long it will be." (IOC President, 2020)

One can't help but look at these statements of the IOC and the IOC's president with at least some amount of cynicism considering what did end up happening. Less than a year later from these statements, in July of 2021, the Olympics opened in Tokyo -

despite absolutely nothing to the effect of "humanity overcoming" the coronavirus having happened.

In 2021 none of the issues which made the 2020 Games too unsafe and "sociopathic" to host had been fixed. Neither had the thing the Games were meant to be celebrating and representing symbolically been accomplished. Tokyo was still implementing severe restrictions for citizens and businesses, no foreign spectators were expected, and naturally, the Games had only grown more controversial and unpopular among the public as a result. With one survey from May of 2021 finding that up to 83% of responders were against the Games being hosted in 2021 (The Asahi Shimbun, 2021).

Unlike the IOC, Japan's anti-Olympic activist groups such as *Okotowari* (English: No thank you, Olympics) and *Hangorin No Kai* (English: the Anti-Olympic Group) correctly predicted this would be the case. Organizing protests in the street to meet Bach during his visit to Japan in 2020, with the support of average Japanese people who were more and more turning against the Olympics (Zirini & Boykoff, 2020(2)).

Getting back to the Bach's and the IOC's statements. According to Zirini and Boykoff (2020) the IOC's contract with Tokyo (and other host cities) gives the IOC ultimate deciding power for withdrawing the Olympics. They write: "it is not Prime Minister Abe, nor anyone in the host country for that matter, who has the final word on whether the show in fact goes on.". In addition to this the IOC's contract makes it so that all cost overruns are dumped on the host city – or the taxpayers. Something people in future host cities should keep in mind considering the Olympics have the biggest cost overruns of any mega-event (Flyvbjerg et al., 2016). With the 2020/21 Tokyo Olympics cost spiraling

out of control to an extreme degree. Originally expected to cost \$7.3 billion, the 2021 Games had cost nearly four times that amount by 2020, roughly \$5 billion of that being public money (Zirini & Boykoff, 2020(2)).

The truth of how the IOC's contract actually works contradicts to the IOC's own statements from 2020 regarding their decision to postpone the Games. Where the IOC's makes reference to multiple parties (the World Health Organization(WHO), Japan's prime minister(Shinzo Abe at the time) and the Japanese- and the local Tokyo government) with the clear implication that those other parties were essential for making, or even guiding, the IOC's decision.

In a separate interview, Boykoff provides some insight into the Olympics that help explain why the Olympics are being hosted despite the failure to overcome the coronavirus and the Games' unpopularity among the Japanese public. Saying that the Olympics are above all else an occasion used by the IOC along with other "political power players, and megacorporations[...] as a pretext to funnel massive amounts of money to local and international elites" at the expense of athletes and working-class people living in the host city (Day, 2021). Aside from the Tokyo 2020/21 Games costing ordinary working-class people \$5 billion in taxpayer money, an estimated 300 households were displaced for the 2020 Olympics. A fairly low number in comparison to other recent Olympic Games (Day, 2021), but none the less representing real people who's lives were uprooted for an event that only lasted a handful of weeks.

Another way the Olympic Games hurt the working class and marginalized people is by bringing increased policing and surveillance - including the implementation of facial recognition technology at all of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic venues. This often includes removing those who are unhoused. The 1996 Games in Atlanta, and the Vancouver 2010

Olympics saw mass removal of homeless people in the "clean up" effort before the Games. The mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, has similarly, already promised that in preparation for the LA 2028 Games the city will "eliminate the problem of homelessness". Words that might sound like advocacy for homeless people if it weren't for the history the Olympics have with knocking down public housing, and placing poor and marginalized people in prisons – and not with providing people homes (Day, 2021).

Tokyo had its own clean-up campaigns in preparation for the 2020 Olympics, a part of this was a considerable effort to change the district of San'ya, or one of Tokyo's day laborer quarters (Japanese: *Doya-gai*). Famous for being a place where men who have fallen through the cracks of society can live in cheap hotels, San'ya had already been changing gradually over decades due to Japan's changing economy. This did not prevent the Tokyo city government and business owners from seeing an opportunity in the 2020 Olympics to speed up the transformation of San'ya. Changing the district into a place that could host thousands of international visitors, and offering cheap accommodation and easy access to the Olympic Games (Jentzch, 2020).

Transforming San'ya from a place that mainly catered to the needs of elderly day laborers and welfare recipients into a place welcoming international tourists for the 2020 Olympics was not a smooth process (Jentzch, 2020). Knowing now that the 2021 Games brought no additional tourism - one can't help but feel for those whose lives were disturbed or even uprooted for seemingly no good reason. This is, however, what has become the standard for host cities of the Olympics.

As explained by Chalkey and Essex (1999) the Olympics started out as low-impact events, only to change with the 1936 Berlin Olympics into a platform where countries could showcase modern landmarks, like new stadiums. Later, the 1960 Rome Olympics

had the Games emerge as a catalyst for urban renewal, expanding the cost and scale of the Games significantly. It was however the 1972 Montreal Games and the 1984 Los Angeles Games that set the Olympics on its course to becoming what they are today.

First, the Montreal Games' budget spiraled completely out of control, with "a 720 percent cost overrun" (Boykoff, 2020, p.19), that, as a result, cities and citizens around the world began to turn on the Olympics, and interest in hosting the Games severely dropped. This laid the foundation for what happened at the 1984 LA Games, or LA84 as it was called. With the Games being so unpopular, LA was one of only two cities to even submit a bid for the 1984 Games - and won due to the competition dropping out. Since the Games were also unpopular among LA's citizens the organizers of LA84 innovated by promising pay for the Games using private sponsors instead of on relying on public money. With that privatization, however, accountability to the people of the host city was lost (Boykoff, 2020; Day, 2021).

Of course, the citizens of LA still ended up paying for the Games. Figuratively, since they had to put up with- and live with the changes made to their city in preparation for the Games, and literally in the form of "public services like taxpayer funded communication network and busing service." which were increased before the Games (Boykoff, 2020, p.58). Thus LA84 became the model for what the Olympics are today: removed from the democratic process, privately funded (on paper, and excluding cost overruns), and serving as a catalyst for increased policing, surveillance, and changes to the urban landscape. To the effect of gentrifying neighborhoods and displacing the poor. All done in the name of the sporting event that lasts a couple of weeks, but with the benefit of making private contractors and sponsors large sums of money.

These drastic changes made to Tokyo only appear so excessive and wasteful in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, because in 2021 the Olympics did not deliver any of the expected tourism, and the economic benefits promised to locals. Although, as activists for the organization NOlympics LA (an activist group aimed on stopping the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics from being staged) have pointed out: a world-class city like Tokyo did no need more tourism, nor stadiums, in the first place (Lee, 2021, 8:00).

### 3.2 Tokyo 2020: Disaster and Recovery Narratives

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Games had always been positioned as a kind of recovery Games. Japan's winning Olympic bid from 2013 claimed that the Games could stand for the country's recovery from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear meltdown and tsunami (Boykoff, 2020, Day, 2021; Hiroaki, 2019; NOlympics, 2020). There was one issue with the idea; the fact that Fukushima had not actually recovered.

On March 11. of 2011, the Fukushima was hit by a massive earthquake, then tsunami – causing the *Tokyo Electric Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Powerplant* to go into meltdown as a result (Hiroaki, 2020). Although concerns regarding the risk of potential exposure to radiation were raised among IOC members, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe assured the IOC that the situation regarding Fukushima was "under control". Others, including members of the public, a nuclear engineer, environmental sociology professors, and elected officials from the Fukushima prefecture (to name a few): did not agree with his statements (Boykoff, 2020; Day 2021).

By 2019 the areas surrounding Fukushima (or areas that were accessible) still had high levels of radiation (Hiroaki, 2020; Boykoff, 2020). The Fukushima disaster was also

a mass displacement event, with Fukushima residents losing their homes and livelihoods, and still tens of thousands remaining displaced (Belden & Franczak, 2021, 30:00).

Areas with radiation levels lower than 20 mSv were deemed safe enough to allow certain residents to return. Although, that level of radiation is usually what is permitted for *radiation workers*, making it an unacceptable level of exposure for people (including children) who have not chosen to work with these materials, and who are not reaping any monetary benefits from their exposure to radiation (Hiroaki, 2020).

Boykoff (2020) argues that the Olympic Organizers likely went with calling the 2020 Olympics a "Recovery Olympics" in order to tamp down fears surrounding the issue and to champion the clean-up effort. Others are more cynical, believing that the Tokyo Olympics, and the media's focus on the event, would serve as a distraction from the real issues regarding Fukushima. It seems to be, at the very least, in poor taste that the 2020 Games were being sold as Japan symbolically moving forward from the Fukushima disaster, while the area remained contaminated to such a degree that it should have been declared a "state of emergency" (Hiroaki, 2020). While, at the same time the 2020/21 Games were costing the Japanese people millions of dollar, the relief funds for the victims of the Fukushima disaster were set to expire in 2020 - under the cover of the "Recovery Olympics" (Belden & Franczak, 2021, 30:00).

Deciding in 2020 that in 2021 the Tokyo Olympics could represent a COVID-19 recovery seems unbelievably short-sighted. However, knowing about the earlier idea that the Olympics in 2020 were meant to represent Japan's recovery from the 2011 Fukushima disaster - despite the failure of the "recovery"- it seems almost expected that the same would happen in regards to the coronavirus. Since Japan's bidding campaign, and winning the bid in 2013, the Tokyo 2020 Games were built on false promises of a

recovery that the government and organizers had, at best, no way of knowing that they could solve, and, at worst, were uninterested in actually achieving. The narrative or statement, and the symbolic value of the Games came first, before any ability - or commitments to solving actual problems. In both 2020 and 2021 public safety issues, the health of attendees and athletes came second, and the 2020 Games were hosted (in 2021) as they always would have during (what should have been called) a state of emergency.

## Conclusion.

The Olympics themselves, and the effect they have on their host cities, have changed a great deal from being reintroduced in the 19th century – and Tokyo's Olympic history reflects these changes. Examining Tokyo's interaction with the Games can help explain the effects the Olympics can have on their host cities. As well as shedding some harsh light on how the Olympics, despite their stated aims and values, have been used throughout history for less than savory purposes – often while creating and promoting hopeful "recovery" narratives.

All of Japan's winning Olympic bids included the recovery angle: The 1964 Games were about the country's recovery from the devastation of World War II, and even the 1940 Tokyo bid included mentions of the city's recovery following the *Great Kanto Earthquake* of 1923 (Collins, 2014). This makes sense since, after all, disasters create opportunities for developers and governments to rebuild, which in turn boosts a nation's confidence. Leading them to seek out challenges like hosting the Olympics to raise their profiles and create new political narratives (Purkarthofer, 2020). The fact that the 2020 Olympics were meant to symbolize Fukushima's recovery, and later, in 2021, a COVID-19 recovery, additionally reveals that these political narratives can be an end

in and of themselves. The Olympics can promote the illusion that a country has overcome disaster and is heading towards a "bright future" - without there being an actual recovery.

Even the 1964 Tokyo Games were only for show when it came to the theme of Japan receiving its land back from the Americans – as that was not entirely true. Washington Heights were returned and used for the Olympic village, however, the US military presence lingers on in Japan. In 2019 the US was still expanding its base of operations in Okinawa - despite environmental concerns, protests, and the local people voting against it (Ono & Kelly, 2019). Like how the US military can overrule the democratic process, so can the Olympics. Since the LA Games of 1984 the Olympics have increasingly become a tool of big businesses (mainly property developers and contractors) – changing cities, creating and destroying new structures "leading to a colossally wasteful society from which they derive stupendous profits." (Hiroaki, 2020, p.1).

In the 21st century the Olympics are no longer needed as they perhaps were in the 20th century, especially in world-class cities like Tokyo, as a catalyst for new stadiums being built or to signal a nation's modernity status to the world. The Games do however continue to be an incredibly profitable, and symbolic event. With the symbolic value, or the stories that cities tell by hosting the Olympics, increasingly becoming like commercials without a product. In the case of the 2020 Games and its Fukushima recovery narrative, or the 2021 COVID-19 recovery – these stories were made up to sell Tokyo to the IOC - or to win the Olympic bid as it is usually called. False, hopeful stories, that have nothing to do with the reality of what the Games do to cities, or even what the cities or countries have actually accomplished.

That is why the 2020 Olympics were staged in 2021 despite being a health and safety hazard, despite the lack of any economic benefits for the locals, despite the Fukushima issue remaining unsolved, and despite the Japanese people protesting against them in the streets. The Olympics went on because they are built on a too big to fail philosophy (Day, 2021), and because the Olympics are beholden to no one but the IOC and private capital. Because as long as the Olympics make those that matter money: the show must go on.

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