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Unease about Tokyo 2020

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Abstract: Hosting the 2020 games was a mistake right from the beginning. The Olympics sucked construction workers from Tohoku and delayed reconstruction work in the 3.11 tsunami- devastated Tohoku region.It is essential to concentrate our mental, spiritual and financial resources to create a future vision of Japan, and to move holistically toward the implementation of that vision. Instead, the energy, money and vision which the Japanese people mobilized over the last seven years has been misdirected.

In my memory, the 1964 Tokyo Olympics are associated with anything but negative! Foremost it was an event which symbolized post-war Japan's acceptance by international society. Regarding state-to-state relations, the San Francisco Peace Treaty signed in September 1951 was the landmark development, but in terms of a national event, it was the Tokyo Olympics. Second it marked Japan's economic recovery from the devastation of World-War II, exemplified by the double-digit GDP growth and doubling income policy of the 1960's lead by prime-minister Ikeda Hayato. Third it was a symbol of political stabilization and reconciliation between the conservative-right and progressive-left. The split was exacerbated by the conclusion of a new security treaty with the U.S. led by Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke in 1960.

Widely disseminated photos of a sleek bullet-train zooming across shimmering greenery, against the backdrop of a snow-capped Mt. Fuji, became an iconic image of Japan in the 1960s. The Olympics was a manifestation of the new Japan, capturing the imagination and hopes of Japanese across the archipelago. On a personal note, I happened to be a first-year student at the University of Tokyo when everything seemed to be filled with hope, choice and possibilities.

"Something is wrong" with the 2020 Olympics!

Things do not look the same for the 2020 Olympics. When on September 7, 2013 it was decided that the 2020 Olympics is going to be held in Tokyo, I did not have a strong feeling. I just thought that an event that would attract world attention would be brought back after 56 years. I had a vague feeling that it could divert people's attention from the reconstruction of the tsunami and earth-quake shattered Tohoku, but that was not initially a particularly strong feeling.

But when the preparatory process started, soon there emerged an impression that "something is wrong." The first shocking news concerned the design of the main stadium replacing the main coliseum for the 1964 Olympics. The design offered by the celebrity architect Zaha Hadid was a massive stadium with a soaring roof, looking like a spaceship from some other planetary system. For those familiar with the surroundings of the adjacent Meiji-Shrine Park, this was a ghastly prospect. Professor Maki Fumihiko commented, "whether you like that design or not, the new stadium is exceedingly gigantic" (Maki, 2019, p.14).

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Learning about that design sometime in 2014 I immediately began contacting architects, NPOs, journalists and other influential people who might be willing to take initiative to renovate and preserve the existing stadium. Nonetheless, at the beginning of 2015, the old stadium was brutally torn down. But public rage was becoming clearer, partly because the Zaha stadium seemed to be unduly expensive, and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo took a final decision "to start from zero" on July 17, 2015. Then a new competition was made through an open and fair procedure, and Kengo Kuma, one of the most esteemed architects of contemporary Japan, was selected to design a new stadium. The stadium is already built and ready for the Olympics.

The second issue which caused serious confusion was the selection of the emblems of the Olympic game. At the time Abe was cancelling Zaha Hadid's design in July 2015, Olympics-Paralympics emblems made by a designer Sano Kenjiro were approved by the preparatory committee. But soon objections were raised that his design was taken from an emblem of a Belgium theatre's logo, and in September Sano's design was withdrawn. After this stumble, in April 2016 new Olympics-Paralympics emblems were adopted, but the reputational damage was significant.

When this logo issue was under media-scrutiny, another scandal emerged that the Japanese Olympics Committee (JOC) had transmitted 1.3 million Euro to an account belonging to the son of Mr. Lamine Diack, the disgraced former president of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), to help Tokyo win support for its' 2020 Olympics bid. Following media reports that French authorities were preparing to arrest Mr. Takeda Tsunekazu, president of the JOC, he announced his resignation on March 19, 2019 effective at the end of June 2019. On June 27, 2019, Yamashita Yasuhiro, a well-known judoist of international reputation, was named the new president of the JOC. Even after this damage control, the bribery revelations cast a cloud over Japan's reputation and the 2020 games.

Finally, Mr. Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympics Committee (IOC), announced on October 17 at the General Assembly of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) that, "We put the interests of the athletes first. I think we have just demonstrated yesterday, where the IOC Executive Board, together with the Tokyo Organizing Committee decided to move the Olympic marathon races and the race walking events to the city of Sapporo." There ensued a lot of contentious debate between the JOC, the IOC, Tokyo Governor Koike Yuriko and so on, but finally it was announced on December 19, 2019 that the Tokyo Organizing Committee endorsed the shifting of the marathon to Sapporo, to take place on August 8 for women and August 9 for men. The IOC suddenly realized that Tokyo is extremely hot and muggy at that time of year and made the decision to protect athletes' health.

The relocation of the marathon raised the issue as to why the games were not planned for the autumn as in 1964. Summer in July and August is becoming increasingly unbearable in Tokyo. If scheduling is driven by American television companies, could we not have resisted it at all costs, and if the games became unviable without their support, is there a necessity to hold them anyway? Just as a footnote, the issue of the Paralympics marathon has never been debated, and it is going to take place on September 6 in Tokyo as scheduled.

What is really wrong with the 2020 Olympics?

Considering the four examples analyzed in the previous section, I realize that one could think that they demonstrate Japan's ability to correct mistakes. It is not a bad thing that the Japanese

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can correct mistakes, even if we are forced to do so. It means that through correcting mistakes we are able to adjust to international standards.

Yet this does not eradicate my feeling that "something is wrong with the 2020 Olympics." Why? Perhaps this indicates that the mistakes are not just technical matters which can be corrected, but something more fundamental and essential: hosting the games was a mistake from the vert beginning.

The most penetrating analysis showing that it was essentially wrong to hold the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo was written by a journalist Murashima Takehito (Murashima, 2016, 54-59). He argues that those who have taken the initiative of holding the Olympics were driven by their desire to gain profits through large scale construction projects. The first initiative came from those who saw a huge opportunity of *saikaihatsu* (redevelopment*)* of the Yoyogi Area, Japan's sacred sporting grounds. Sports-related businessmen, construction firms, and LDP politicians constituted a powerful grouping seeking *riken (*concessions*)* in Yoyogi. But as this plan was proceeding, high-level bureaucrats in the Tokyo Metropolitan Office saw another huge opportunity for gaining *riken* in the Tokyo Bay *Rinkaichiku (*seaside area*)*. Current support and planning for the 2020 Olympics has been guided by these two groups.

This maneuvering suggests that the energy, money and vision which the Japanese people had to mobilize over the last seven years was misdirected. We really needed to concentrate our mental, spiritual and financial resources to create a future vision of Japan, what kind of Japan we really want to create, and to move holistically toward the implementation of that vision. If asked what kind of Japan I want to see, my answer would be a Japan where nature and culture harmonize best with human life. This vision applies both to cities and countryside. In the age of diminishing population and aging society, how to achieve it is a gigantic task that requires nationwide concentration of efforts. The Abe government had a policy to meet this task partially, such as *chihou sousei* (revitalization of local regions), but that was just a starting point. The Olympic games had the unfortunate effect of distracting the nation's attention from this real issue and redirecting national resources to Tokyo for successful implementation of a single event.

Yet to what purpose? If one seeks a vison for this city, it is a Tokyo where green, water and wind create a harmony together with the development of traditional and modern culture. The highest architectural achievement is welcome, but more coordinated city-planning should bring all divergent factors into harmony. Some of the superfluous construction originating from the 1964 Olympics era should be torn down. Space is needed to recreate parks and woods, to transform Tokyo into a livable place for July and August. But what we have observed in the last seven years in Tokyo is a relentless construction boom that is eliminating small open spaces and greenery as the juggernaut of profit seeking trumps all other concerns.

There is one additional important factor to consider. Japan in 2013 was still experiencing the serious aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011. A huge budgetary transfer of 20 trillion yen was underway. There was a dire need to continue directing mental, financial and even spiritual attention to the kind of Tohoku we wanted to recreate. The worst thing was that Olympics-related construction, including Tokyo's transformation into a melting pot of construction profit making, sucked construction workers from Tohoku because payment was more lucrative in Tokyo than in Tohoku. Inevitably there has been a delay of reconstruction in Tohoku. Japan has not forgotten Tohoku, but Tokyo and all of Japan became shallowly distracted by this one-time event while paying less and less attention

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and devoting fewer resources to recreating Tohoku as a model area of development in 21st century Japan.

What should we do now?

What is done is done. Nobody in Japan can escape the Olympics. The small choice left to us as individuals, is whether to go to tremendous effort at great expense to get a ticket to see some of the games amidst Tokyo's unbearable heat or watch the events from the comfort of home with air-conditioning.

What should Japan do, once this event is over? In television commentary in the New Year 2020 programs some analysts called for a kind of moratorium on critical views suggesting people should be allowed to dream the dream, without asking why we had to give in to the gala euphoria, perhaps because it's going to happen anyway.

Even if one agrees with this, possibly controversial, moratorium perspective, from September 2020 Japan will need to face the reality of the post-Olympics syndrome and grapple with urgent challenges. The fundamental task of revitalizing Japan involves mitigating the consequences of a diminishing population and an aging society. It is important not just to go back to square one where we were before winning the bid and generate some positive legacies.

First the Tokyo Olympics could become an example showing that, when the Japanese cooperate with each other and overcome fundamental differences in values and deep rivalries among various interest groups, it is possible to achieve something that we can be proud of. Admittedly it is no more than a gigantic sports spectacle. But ironically, because it is no more than a sporting extravaganza, and because we needed to produce very quickly an acceptable selection of stadiums, fields, and roads for running and biking, compromise to mediate conflicting interests could became much easier to achieve. But whatever the real reason for cooperation, the fact that we achieved some big events successfully through our organizational ability is something that we can be proud of, and something from which we might be able to draw lessons for future coordination and cooperation.

Second there is the anticipated massive influx of tourists into Japan in the summer of 2020 when many may go off the beaten path and discover some of Japan's hidden treasures. Greatly helped by Google and its instantaneous information about where to go, see, eat and buy, tourists of diverse nationalities in varying forms (individuals, family and friends, or diverse groups) will roam around Japan. If these tourists return home with a sense of satisfaction, their collective experiences and adventures are likely to become an important legacy of the Olympics and sustain momentum in the tourism sector.

Above all, I hope for a hospitality legacy as Japanese learn how to make foreigners feel welcome and want to return. Governor Koike, in a discussion with the celebrated writer Alex Kerr, says that one of the important legacies she would like to leave is the burying of electric wires, which have become a symbol of Japan's ugliness. (Koike, *Chuo koron*, 82-87). Japan has a long way to go in transforming its tourism infrastructure and making it easier for tourists to enjoy the nation's considerable charms, but incrementally it is doing so with an extra push from the Olympics.

It is also important to pay attention to the role of the Paralympics. One of the biggest differences between 1964 and 2020 is the new attention to these events. I hardly remember the 1964 Paralympics although we know that after the Tokyo Olympics (October 10~24 1964), the Paralympics was held between

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November 8~12 in Tokyo as well. Now media energetically disseminates information that after the Olympics are held from July 24 till August 9, the Paralympics will be held from August 25 until September 6. An impression that the traditional Olympics and the Paralympics are unified tandem events is emerging.

I think through this experience of highlighting the Paralympics there might be a legacy of understanding and inclusion towards those with disabilities. Governor Koike states that the: "2020 Olympics will surely be a success. But I consider that a successful Paralympics to follow is the key to real success." (Koike, *Bungei shunju,* 271). Likewise, I have been observing some of the social movements to encourage transforming Japan into a barrier free society including announcements in many stations to help sight impaired commuters who are walking with white sticks. Greater sensitivity towards those with various impairments could become a worthy legacy. Perhaps the legacy of the Paralympics will be greater sensitivity to the more vulnerable and eradication of discrimination against them.

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