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The Beijing Olympics as a Turning Point? China's First Olympics in East Asian Perspective

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It is commonly stated that the 1964 and 1988 Olympics were "turning points" for the integration of Japan and South Korea, respectively, into the global community. It was anticipated that the Beijing Olympics would be a "turning point" for China. Now that the Beijing Games are over, we can ask whether anything "turned," and if so, in which direction? This essay deals with a central paradox of the Olympic Games – they reinforce nationalism and internationalism at the same time. A one-sided focus on nationalism, such as characterized much of the media coverage of the Beijing Olympics, can lead to the erroneous conclusion that the Olympic Games exacerbate rather than moderate political conflicts. Wishful thinking that the Beijing Games would be a turning point for human rights and democracy led to the conclusion by China watchers in the West that the Beijing Games were not the turning point that was hoped for. However, reflection on what actually "turned" in Japan and South Korea helps us to see what we should actually be looking for in the case of China. This retrospective suggests that the interplay between nationalism and internationalism was similar in all three Olympic Games, and offers a more optimistic prospect for China's peaceful integration into the international community.

Most of the modern Olympic Games held between 1896 and 1988 took place in the shadow of wars, past, present, and future. The political animosity surrounding Beijing 2008 was especially highlighted by contrast with the comparatively tranquil background of the four preceding Olympics. The Albertville 1992 Winter Games had been the first Olympics in history considered to have "100% participation," with no boycotts or IOC-dictated exclusions (in addition to these reasons, before World War II nations often did not compete for lack of funding or indifference from the central government). South Africa's exclusion since 1964 had ended in 1988, but the tail end of the Cold War had extended into the Seoul Games with the boycott by North Korea, Cuba, and Ethiopia. The Barcelona 1992 Summer Olympics were marred only by the IOC's barring of Yugoslavia; both there and at the preceding Albertville Games, the former Soviet Union was represented by the Unified Team. From the Barcelona Olympics onward the Games were considered to forward integration and reconciliation, and the political issues that dominated public opinion were domestic or regional (Catalonian sovereignty in Barcelona 1992; the rise of the American South and racial integration in Atlanta 1996; Aboriginal rights in Sydney 2000; Greece taking its place as a respected EU member in 2004).

Although after the Tibetan uprisings in March 2008 some Chinese expressed the hope that the Beijing Olympics might promote ethnic reconciliation like that between Aborigines and Whites in Sydney 2000, a closer look would have revealed that in Australia the work of reconciliation through the Olympic Games had begun at least as early as 1996, when the use of aboriginal symbols in the Sydney segment of the Atlanta closing ceremony had provoked protest. In Beijing, however, the use of ethnic minority symbols, including Tibetan symbols, was notably absent in the opening ceremony, which was especially significant since the use of dancing and singing minorities to symbolize national unity is a common fixture in Chinese national celebrations. The restoration of dialogue with the Dalai Lama and a discussion about whether to invite him to the opening ceremony only emerged after the March uprisings, which suggests that previous to that time no serious attempt had been made to utilize the Games toward reconciliation between Tibetans and Han. Indeed, the National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities of the People's Republic of China, which had been one of the showpieces of the P.R.C.'s ethnic policy since their initiation in 1953, suffered from a lack of attention due to the focus on the Olympics when the 8th installment was held in Guangzhou in December 2007. Most of the opening ceremonies performers were Han students dressed as minorities and many of the athletes were Han students at sport institutes recently recruited to learn "traditional ethnic sports."

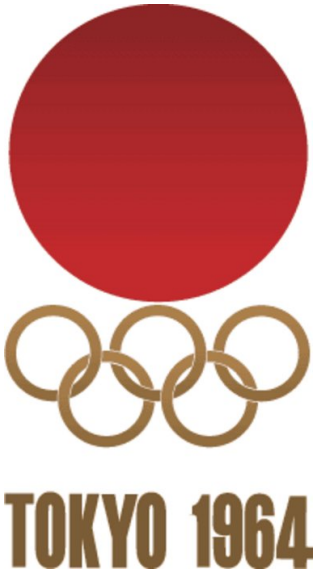
Another reconciliation that did not take place at a symbolic level was that between the people and the Communist Party as represented in the figure of Chairman Mao. As Geremie Barmé and Jeffrey Wasserstrom have observed, Chairman Mao was absent in Zhang Yimou's opening ceremony, which skipped from the Ming dynasty to the late 1970s and gave the spotlight to Confucius, whom Wasserstrom has called "the comeback kid" of the Beijing Games. [1] The Communist Revolution was also generally absent from Olympic symbolism. This was due to a decision that traced its roots back to the 1990 Asian Games, China's first hosting of a major international sport festival. The cultural performance in the Asian Games ceremony had been choreographed by the same national team of choreographers that had designed the cultural performances for the previous three Chinese National Games – starting in 1979 with the first post-Cultural Revolution performance, which had the theme "The New Long March." The themes and symbols utilized by this team of choreographers had gradually evolved away from the political symbols that dominated ceremonies after 1949 and toward "cultural symbols." The 1990 Asian Games had taken place one year after the Tiananmen Incident, which had been a disaster for China's international relations and a severe setback for its plans to reach out to the world through the Asian Games. (The Asian Games were, nevertheless, the occasion for the first official cross-straits exchanges, and Taiwan sent a large official delegation.)[2] In 1990 it was recognized that "ethnic cultural" (民族文化) symbols were more attractive to the outside world in general and also constituted a shared cultural repertoire with East Asians and overseas Chinese.[3]

By the time the planning for the Beijing ceremonies had begun, this strategy for drawing in international audiences was known as the "cultural China" (文化中国) strategy. It traced its roots to multiple international developments, including the 1980s and 1990s works of Harvard historian and philosopher Tu Weiming and other "New Confucianists," as well as government policies for promoting the "cultural industry" in Japan and South Korea in the mid to late 1990s; the international orientation of the Korean cultural policies had gained impetus from the 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul.[4] "Cultural China" was also expressed in the Chinese government's support for "Confucius Institutes" around the world, and it was linked to Hu Jintao's concept of "soft power." For the Beijing 2008 Olympics, a key policy recommendation from the People's University concluded, "On this basis, we cautiously propose that in the construction of China's national image, we should hold the line on 'cultural China,' and the concept of 'cultural China' should not only be the core theme in the dialogue between China and the international community in Olympic discourse, but also it should be added into the long-term strategic plan for the national image afterwards"[5]. Although the vast majority of educational and cultural programs surrounding the Beijing Olympics targeted the domestic population (see the discussion of Olympic education below), a debate about the target audience for the opening and closing ceremonies was resolved in favor of the international audience. Film director Zhang Yimou, the choreographer of the ceremonies, is not well-regarded inside China, where his work is seen as pandering to Western tastes with a superficial and exoticized picture of traditional Chinese culture. His "Eight Minute Segment" in the closing ceremony of the Athens Olympics was so disliked that the bid competition for the choreography of the 2008 ceremonies was re-opened. That Zhang was finally re-confirmed in 2005 indicates that the final decision was to prioritize international tastes over domestic.

Tang Dynasty Symbolism in the Opening Ceremony. From BOCOG official website

In the end, the only significant violence did not pit sovereign states against one another but took place in China's Tibetan areas. However, this should not mislead us into thinking that the Beijing Games did not take place in the shadow of war – a point that, I believe, was very present in the minds of the East Asian audience but was missed by Westerners with shorter and more spatially distant memories. And it is important to remember that the Beijing Olympics were the first Olympics to take place in an East Asian country that is not host to U.S. military bases. This was the "present absence" in 2008 in comparison to Tokyo 1964 and Seoul 1988.

Shimizu Satoshi, Christian Tagsold, and Jilly Traganou remind us that many of the symbols of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics established continuity with pre-war Japanese national symbols.[6] Japan did not have an official national flag or anthem in 1964: the hi no maru flag and the kimi gayo anthem had been proscribed by the occupation authorities after World War II and were not officially reinstated as the national flag and anthem of Japan until 1999, and indeed, they have been plagued by controversy ever since. However, the logo of the Tokyo Olympics consisted of the rising sun over the five Olympic rings, which was also used in the first of the four official posters. While designer Kamekura Yūsaku denied that his design was the hi no maru, stating that it was meant simply to be a red sun, he had played an active role in nationalist representations of Japan in wartime propaganda.



Tokyo Olympic Poster. From IOC official website

The 1964 torch relay was the longest held to that date; indeed, a sense of rivalry with Japan's coming-out party may well have been a principal reason that China insisted on holding the largest-ever international torch relay. The Tokyo 1964 torch passed from its origin in Olympia, Greece, across the Middle East and Asia, into countries that Japan had once invaded, finishing with Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Taiwan (but not Korea) - and then on to Okinawa, which at that time remained a U.S. military colony. The Mainichi Shimbun wrote, "In Okinawa, it gave power, hope and encouragement to the islanders who are longing for the day when America returns Okinawa to Japan."[7] Indeed, an Okinawan movement for reversion to Japan was gaining strength as the Olympics neared. During the relay in Okinawa, hi no maru flags were waved by spectators on the roadside and the kimi gayo anthem was played, which, as Tagsold points out, lent cultural weight to Japan's claim to Okinawa.

In Tagsold's accompanying essay, the role of the genbakuko (atom boy), and the Self-Defense forces in the opening ceremony offer points of comparison with the Beijing Olympics, as does his argument that the Tokyo Olympics enabled the "re-nationalization" of Japan by associating the classical national symbols (flag, anthem, emperor, military) with the Olympic symbols of internationalism and peace. This subtle symbolic shift was largely unremarked in the West, and the concomitant absence of international contestation contributes to today's recollection of the Tokyo Olympics as a peaceful turning point in Japan's integration into the international community. Tagsold also argues that Sakai's igniting of the torch enabled Japan to assume the role of victim in World War II as the first nation to bear the brunt of atomic attack.[4] While detailed scholarship on U.S. and Asian reactions to the use of symbols associated with emperor, nation and the Asia Pacific War in Tokyo 1964 is lacking, it appears that neither the U.S. nor the Asian victims of Japanese colonialism and war publicly opposed the use of symbols representing Japan's "re-nationalization" or its claim on Okinawa.

Before the Beijing 2008 Games, the major regional tension - between China and Taiwan - flared up in April 2007 over the route of the torch relay, when Taiwan insisted that the torch must enter Taiwan and exit through a third country so that it would not be portrayed as a territory of mainland China with a dependent status similar to that of Hong Kong and Macao. Given the huge IOC effort to mediate between China and Taiwan in the decades of China's exclusion from the IOC (1958-1979), it was significant that

no high-profile negotiations were held and five months later it was simply announced that Taiwan would be bypassed – but this can be understood if one realizes that this was actually a peripheral affair by Olympic standards, since no boycott of the Olympic Games was being proposed and that is the central concern of the IOC. The IOC organizes the Olympic Games, but the local organizing committee organizes the torch relay. The basic problem of the participation of both parties in the Olympic Games had been resolved decades beforehand by the IOC's 1979 Nagoya Resolution stipulating that Taiwan cannot use any of the national symbols of the Republic of China in Olympic venues, but must compete under the name, flag and anthem of the Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee. This "Olympic formula" is today the agreement that enables the participation of both Taiwan and China in many other international organizations. The China-Taiwan tension was eased by the March 2008 election of the KMT's Ma Ying-jeou as Taiwan's President, opening a new page in China-Taiwan diplomacy.

Like all host countries, China attempted to use the Olympic Games to promote its own agendas. The torch relay was intended to symbolize national unity when it announced that the international relay would advance from Vietnam to Taiwan and on to Hong Kong. Taiwan, however, refused to take part in a route that represented Taiwan as a domestic stop (although it was agreed that the neutral word 海外, "overseas," would be used to describe the relay before the torch landed on the mainland, rather than the problematic 国□, "international"). In stark contrast to the U.S.'s laissez-faire approach to Okinawa in 1964, the P.R.C. government maintained an uncompromising position against any symbols of Taiwanese (or Tibetan) independence and sovereignty. The Parade of Athletes in the opening ceremony provoked minor issues that were mostly missed by the non-Chinese-speaking world. When the first cross-straits sports exchange was to take place at the 1990 Asian Games in Beijing, the Chinese translation of the English "Chinese Taipei" became a point of contention. The mainland had typically translated it as Zhongguo Taibei（中国台北）, but Taiwan translated it as Zhonghua Taibei（中□台北）, a distinction of one character that makes little difference even to Chinese speakers except that, if one were to split hairs, one might understand Zhongguo as implying "Chinese national territory" and Zhonghua as implying "Chinese people." The 1989 agreement between the two sides had stated that China would allow Taiwan to use Zhonghua Taibei in official Olympic venues, but China would retain its customary usage in non-official settings, including media coverage and sports announcing in Mainland events. Leading up to the opening ceremony, there had been rumblings in the Taiwanese media that if Taiwan were to be announced as Zhongguo Taibei when it entered the stadium, then Taiwan should boycott the Games; this was based on an erroneous understanding of the agreement and actually was never in question. When Taiwan entered the stadium, it was announced in English, then in French, and finally in Mandarin as Zhonghua Taibei. When Chinese Hong Kong entered, it was announced according to Mainland custom as Zhongguo Xianggang. Another problem had been created by the Chinese decision to use Chinese character stroke order in determining the order of the entering nations, because this put Chinese Taipei and Chinese Hong Kong next to each other - China as the host country marched in last, and so it was not a factor. As with the torch relay, Taiwan refuses to march adjacent to China in the Parade because it would symbolize it as a province of China; this is a problem in English, as well, which has been solved by having Taiwan march with the "T's." The problem was solved by inserting the Central African Republic between Taiwan and Hong Kong – since "China" literally means "central country," the Central African Republic shares the character zhong with them. Ironically, the stroke order placed Japan before Chinese Taipei, but with Taiwan's former colonial status no longer problematic for Taiwanese identity, this was not an issue.

Chinese Taipei enters the stadium in the opening ceremony. Source

As in the lighting of the torch by Sakai in 1964, the incident in the Paris leg of the torch relay, when a Tibetan protester tried to wrench the torch away from a young Chinese female Paralympic athlete in a wheelchair, produced an image of China as a victim that received a great deal of attention in the Chinese media. The victimization function was further carried out by the nine year-old survivor from the Sichuan earthquake disaster area who entered the stadium beside the flagbearer, basketball icon Yao Ming, in the opening ceremony. The small flag carried by the boy was upside down, an international nautical symbol for distress. However, it appeared that the boy had unintentionally flipped the flag, because no official explanation was issued, and Xinhua news agency requested clients not to use a photo of it shortly after sending it out. While not as forceful as the image of Japan victimized by the atom bombs, within China these symbols did preserve the Chinese narrative of victimization in the midst of the most grandiose Olympics ever.

Yao Ming, flagbearer for China, enters the stadium with Lin Hao, earthquake survivor. Source

Looking back on the 1964 torch relay and Olympics from the perspective of 2008, one wonders why the Tokyo Games did not incite a furor as the Beijing Games did. Given the extensive Japanese atrocities associated with colonialism and war and Japan's failure to make effective apologies and reparations to victims at that time, the key symbols and torch relay seem even more inflammatory than those surrounding the Beijing Games. Tagsold's accompanying essay argues that the symbolic work was sufficiently subtle to bypass domestic legal and moral arguments, and few Western observers were aware of the ongoing conflicts between Japan and the nations it had occupied and colonized a generation earlier. But, he argues, more important was the general historical context; in the Cold War era, the effort to delimit the Olympic Games as "apolitical" was stronger than it is now because the international political stakes were higher. I would argue that in 1964 this produced a stronger "will not to know" than was present in 2008. One big difference is that the 2008 Olympics were a media mega-event far exceeding what the Tokyo Olympics were, and this provided a platform for human rights and Tibetan NGOs with a higher level of media savvy and organization than had heretofore been seen in the Olympic context. It was easy to be misled by the heat of the media coverage into believing that profound "political" conflicts were occurring. However, closer examination reveals that there was no serious momentum toward national boycotts of the Games, and more national Olympic committees (204) and national representatives (over 100 "national dignitaries," of which about 80 were "heads of state") took part in the opening ceremony than in any previous Games. It was the first opening ceremony attended by an American president outside of the U.S. From my position as a Fulbright Researcher in Beijing with regular contact with the U.S. embassy, I felt that the Bush administration strongly wanted these Games to take place and to be successful. Well-informed observers such as He Zhenliang, China's senior IOC member and sports diplomat, felt that Sino-U.S. relations had been strengthened through the Games and perhaps had become closer than they had ever been since 1949.

As in Tokyo, soldiers had a large presence in the Beijing Olympics, including the participation of 9,000 People's Liberation Army soldiers in the cultural performance of the opening ceremony. The Chinese "riot police" (防暴警 , literally "violence-prevention police"), had high visibility during the Olympic Games. This is a category of security personnel whose domestic numbers and functions had been expanded in 2005, at the same time that China also started sending riot police on U.N. peacekeeping missions. Clad in black, physically bigger (many are former wushu and judo athletes), and more highly trained and educated than the regular and armed police, they were brought out in large numbers to protect sensitive locations in Beijing. Their training drills were shown on CCTV in dramatic ways that promoted a positive image of them as anti-terrorist police ready to help evacuate a stadium in case of a bomb or to secure the release of innocent spectators taken hostage. The riot police are more frequently deployed to control the local populace than to deal with terrorists – indeed, on the night of the opening ceremony I watched them clear out the crowd that had gathered in the square at the central train station to watch the opening ceremony on the big-screen TV, when the security personnel decided the crowd was too big and the situation was dangerous. However, the effect of the Olympic coverage may have been similar to that described by Tagsold for the Japanese Self-Defense Forces – their image was improved by linking them with keeping the peace at the Olympics.

The author posing with a soldier guarding the VIP lane at the closing ceremony, following the example of Chinese spectators.

One more point in Tagsold's analysis is also relevant to Beijing. He observes that the planning of the symbolism of the Tokyo

Olympics and the opening ceremonies was led by the Ministry of Education, which controlled most of the interpretation of national symbols from 1959 onward.[9] Masumoto Naofumi has recently brought to the attention of Anglophone scholars the fact that formal educational initiatives related to the Olympic Games were organized outside of the organizing committee for the first time in the context of the 1964 Tokyo Summer Games.[10] Building on his work, I have argued that since that time there has been an "East Asian stream" in the "Olympic Education" initiatives that have surrounded the Games, which has been ignored by Eurocentric scholars.[11] From 1961 to 1964 the Ministry of Education distributed four Olympic readers and guidebooks to primary and secondary schools and colleges nationwide. Two books were produced by the organizing committee for distribution to schoolteachers from 1960-61: 1,000 copies of The Glorious Tokyo Olympics (130 pages) were distributed in Kanto area schools and 1,000 copies of Olympic Facts & Figures for Teachers' Use (36 pages) were distributed to school teachers. In addition to school textbooks and school activities, the Ministry of Education promulgated the "Citizens' Olympic Games Movement" aimed at educating the people in the streets about the Olympics, increasing national pride, and improving understanding of foreign countries.[12]

The important role played by the Japanese Ministry of Education is particularly illuminating for a comparison with the Beijing Olympics. With the support of the Chinese Ministry of Education, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission in collaboration with the Beijing Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) organized the largest Olympic Education program ever implemented by a host city. When this effort began, the director of the educational programs for the 1998 Nagano Winter Games was invited twice to Beijing for consultation. Nagano's "One School, One Country" sister school program was adopted (this program has been utilized in every summer and winter Olympics since 1998, excepting the 2004 Athens Olympics). Beijing quickly far exceeded what Nagano had done - a source of pride due to the rivalry with Japan. A total of 200 primary and secondary schools in Beijing City and another 356 schools nationwide were designated as "Olympic Education Demonstration Schools," which were responsible for devoting at least two hours per month to Olympics-related activities, and for conducting "hand-in-hand sharing" activities with other schools and the surrounding community. The third theme of the Beijing Olympics – the 人文奥运 (translated as "People's Olympics" or "Humanistic Olympics") also drew on the concept of the 1964 "Citizen's Olympic Games Movement" but unfolded it on a much larger scale. China's effort involved the mobilization of 70,000 college students through the Communist Youth League system as "Games-time volunteers" to help at all official Olympic venues. Approximately 400,000 "city volunteers" were enlisted to staff 550 volunteer stations and maintain social order throughout the city. A multitude of cultural and educational activities for the community were organized through the central Party Office of Spiritual Civilization Development and Guidance and its Beijing branch.

In a recent article in China Quarterly, I develop an argument about Beijing's Olympic education that builds on Tagsold's argument about the Tokyo Olympics.[13] As in Japan, the educational project was oriented toward imagining China taking its place in the international community. The content of the school programs largely imparted knowledge about the world outside China, and in this respect it differed markedly from the inward-looking focus of previous national educational/propaganda campaigns. Western observers tended to dismiss Beijing's Olympic education as just another nationalist propaganda campaign, but I believe they were missing the important point: true, one major goal was patriotic education – but as in Tokyo, the old nationalist symbols were re-shaped by association with symbols of internationalism, the global community, and world peace. This is the paradox of the Olympic Games – they reinforce nationalism and internationalism at the same time. Perhaps the national identity itself is not greatly changed, but it is an important shift in orientation if the holders of that identity start to see their nation as an equal partner among friendly nations instead of a victimized nation among hostile nations.

International song and dress at the Olympic Education Exhibition, May 2008. Photo by the author.

One illustration of this point is a conversation I had with a Tsinghua University student who, as an Olympic volunteer, was standing beneath the flagpole when the Chinese flag was raised in the Olympic opening ceremony. He asked me what I thought of Beijing's Olympic education programs – didn't I find that much of it was just a "show" by the government? I told him that while many of the activities might be considered to be "appearance-ism," I thought that teaching students that their country was taking its place among other nations as an equal, and that China would no longer be "bullied" by other nations, would have an important effect on the students for the future. He was silent for a moment, and then confessed that when he saw the Chinese flag being raised in the stadium and heard the wild cheering of the crowd, he had gotten tears in his eyes, and this had been the first time in his life that this had ever happened to him. From this perspective, he agreed with my conclusion. Our conversation took place during a dinner to which I had been invited so that I could advise him on whether to accept admission to the Master's Degree programs at the University of Pennsylvania or the University of Southern California, with an eye to which city would offer better future employment opportunities.

The raising of the Chinese flag in the opening ceremony. From BOCOG official website

In sum, if the 1964 Games were a turning point in Japan's peaceful reconciliation with the international community, we can probably point to a similar outcome of the 2008 Beijing Games. On the other hand, the Tokyo Games, far from eliminating past symbols of militarism and war, only re-oriented them. The same will likely be true of the effect of the Beijing Games on the elements of revolution, socialism, Communist ideology, and anti-Western sentiment that figure so large in Chinese national identity. Even as I write this, the former director of Beijing city's Olympic Education Office is working on a draft of a long-term plan being developed by the Ministry of Education – he has been assigned to the section that deals with Marxist-Leninist thought and socialist morality. In both Japan and China, the idea of national victimization at the hands of the West remains, although in China it appeared that a change was finally starting. In the official rhetoric, the Beijing Games were supposed to "erase the label of the Sick Man of East Asia" that had loomed in the Chinese imagination for over a century as an insult applied to China by the West and Japan. Young Chinese told me that they recognized that the Sick Man of East Asia was political rhetoric used to stir up patriotism and that they did not think much about it themselves – although, as one college student put it, they would "never forget the history" that it represented.

If the political background of the Tokyo Olympics was emotionally-charged, the lead-up to the 1988 Seoul Olympics involved outbreaks of actual violence related to the games. On October 8, 1979, President Park Chung-hee officially announced the intention to bid for the Olympic Games; on October 26, he was assassinated at a dinner party by the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and in 1980 General Chun Doo-hwan seized power in a military coup. In September 1981, Seoul was selected as the host city by the IOC. In October 1983, a North Korean assassination attempt on President Chun at the Aung San National Cemetery in Rangoon killed 14 South Korean officials. And then in 1987, less than a year before the Olympic Games, two North Korean operatives left a bomb on Korean Air #858, killing 115 people, including 93 South Koreans. The confession of the operative who survived despite eating a cyanide capsule stated that the order was intended to disrupt the Seoul Olympic Games, and was personally penned by Kim Jong-Il, now President of North Korea.[13] It was primarily because of this act that North Korea was listed as a "State Sponsor of Terrorism" by the U.S. State Department in 1988. It was not removed from the list until October 11, 2008.

This history has since been overshadowed by the positive recollection that the Olympics "brought democracy" to South Korea when Roh Tae-woo assumed the presidency in 1987 through a constitutional election and a promise of democratic reforms. This rosy view of Olympic history often neglects the subsequent events in which Chun and Roh were convicted of mutiny, treason, and bribery and blamed for the 1980 Kwangju massacre of several hundred pro-democracy protesters.

There were many people, including IOC members and Chinese journalists, who wondered if the Beijing Olympics could stimulate a democratic transition in China like that attributed to the Seoul Olympics. If they were looking for a dramatic change, they were disappointed. But there were key differences in China. One difference was the lack of a real external military threat. Jarol Manheim argues, based on interviews with South Korean government and Olympic officials, that one hope of the ROK government was that, by focusing world attention on South Korea, the Olympics would increase world awareness about the North Korean threat and purchase a form of insurance against northern aggression.[14] It would appear that the Games succeeded on both counts. In the analysis of IOC member Dick Pound, it was because of this "insurance" that the conservative military stood back and allowed a democratic transition to begin before the Games had even started; the military gained a sense of security from the expressions of support for the Games issuing from both the U.S. and the Soviet Union, as well as other members of the socialist bloc.[15]

Unlike South Korea, in the past three decades China has experienced peaceful transitions of power in the midst of sweeping social and economic change, and there is currently widespread popular support for gradual instead of dramatic political change. The Tibet uprisings and the violent acts, or foiled intended acts, of groups classified as "terrorist" had an internal function similar to the external threat to South Korea; they strengthened the conservative position of the Chinese security system. It was not clear to me how well the political history surrounding the Seoul Olympics was known by intellectuals and policy-makers in China – but if it were fully understood, I can imagine that South Korea's move toward democracy would serve as a counter-model because of the massive popular demonstrations that accompanied it, while in China there is currently a strong aversion toward mass protests. This does not, however, mean that the same forces that pushed South Korea toward political reform were not at work in China. Manheim's interviewees believed that the presence of the international media, the negative image of South Korea it conveyed to the world, and the legitimacy it conferred on demonstrators and opposition politicians forced the ruling party to make significant political concessions.[16] Global scrutiny of China in 2008 was much greater and it does appear that this pressure had effects. The domestic pressure for greater media freedom and government transparency has increased over the last year, not just because of the Olympics, but also because of the Wenchuan earthquake and the tainted milk scandal. Vibrant debates about China's inability to effectively communicate a national image to the outside world are now going on, and large government investment is being made in foreign communications and public diplomacy. The temporary Olympic law that guaranteed more freedom to foreign journalists was extended indefinitely just as it expired on October 15. A higher level of organized dissidence in comparison with recent years was revealed when Charter 08, a document calling for political reform signed by 303 Chinese intellectuals and activists, was initiated in late spring 2008 and publicly issued in December 2008. The Information Office of the State Council published its first Human Rights Action Plan in April. China is changing but only greater distance will allow us to look back and assess it.

Tagsold's essay describes the rise of the anti-Olympic movement in Japan called "trops" ("sport" spelled backwards). The opposition to Nagoya's bid for the 1988 Summer Games was a wake-up call for the IOC, which has given increasing attention to environmental issues in the ensuing years. In China in 2008, sports scholars frequently stated that the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games gave rise to an "anti-Olympic movement" in Japan (apparently not understanding that the movement did not really emerge until 1988), and they felt that this might also occur in China. A 2002 article in 体育学刊 [Journal of Physical Education] introduced the trops concept to China, but described it as advocacy for popular sport as opposed to the Olympics, and did not mention its environmental

connection.[17] While popular protests against rapacious development and environmental destruction have been cropping up all over China, and were occasionally linked to the Beijing Games, it did not appear that an organized anti-Olympic movement ever congealed. Censorship regulations promulgated by the Central Propaganda Department before and during the Games restricted the publication and broadcasting of criticism of the Olympic Games, which might cause one to suspect that any incipient anti-Olympic movement was squelched, and that the shape of public opinion in China might be similar to that in Japan in 1988 if people were allowed to openly criticize the Olympics. However, closer analysis reveals that the underlying issues were different in China compared to Japan. Japan's trops movement has thrived in a context in which there has been a strong political will to host Olympic Games, which has aroused the opposition of citizen's groups. Altogether, Japanese cities have put forward five unsuccessful and four successful bids for Olympic Games, including Tokyo's successful bid for the 1940 Summer Olympics, later rescinded; Tokyo's unsuccessful bid for the 1960 Summer Olympics and successful bid for the 1964 Olympics; Sapporo's unsuccessful bids for the 1968 and 1984 Winter Games; Nagoya's bid against Seoul for the 1988 Summer Olympics; Osaka's bid against Beijing for the 2008 Games (revealing a lack of solidarity in the East Asian bloc within the IOC); Sapporo's successful bid for the 1976 Winter Games; and Nagano's successful bid for the 1998 Winter Games. As discussed in Bill Kelly's accompanying essay, Tokyo is currently bidding for the 2016 Summer Olympics. Japan's repeated bids, and the massive urban development projects proposed in the Tokyo 2016 bid, seem to indicate that the momentum toward organizing Olympic Games in association with large-scale development is more powerful than the anti-Olympic and pro-environment movements. Japan has also violated customs of bloc voting within the IOC and sacrificed East Asian solidarity for its Olympic bids. Similarly, a forthcoming chapter by James Thomas based on his fieldwork among urban squatters in Seoul in 1988 concludes that the Seoul Olympics enticed Korean citizens to support the state's grandiose development program by linking it with a "new empowered nationalism;" he observes that even after ex-presidents Chun and Roh were imprisoned and discredited, the Olympics-inspired development program continued.[18]

Demolition along Wangfujing Street, Beijing, May 2008

It may be that the Beijing Games will initiate a period of regular bids for Olympic Games. I was in Shanghai in November 2008, where preparations for the 2010 World Expo are ramping up now that the Olympics are over, and the mood in the municipal government is currently positive toward a future Olympic bid. However, when Chinese scholars refer to an anti-Olympics movement, they refer to opposition to the state-supported sport system and the government's neglect of popular and school sport. In 1964 Japan placed third in the gold medal count and in 1988 South Korea placed fourth, their highest placements of all time. Chinese sportspeople believed that their first place in their own Olympics might also be the peak of China's state-supported sport system, and that the pursuit of gold medals might be downgraded after the Games and more attention given to school and recreational sport. The Director of the State Sport General Administration, Liu Peng, took a preemptive stance immediately after the Olympic Games in an interview in the People's Daily on September 6, stating, "Our position on the state-supported sport system is clear: One, we will maintain it; two, we will perfect it."[19] But the debates about the future of the state-supported system are still going on.

Motivated by rivalry with China and South Korea, the Japanese government established a National Training Center in 2000 and a system of subsidies for top athletes in 2003, leading to a fifth-place finish in the gold medal count at the 2004 Athens Olympics, the first time that it had defeated Korea (ninth) in the gold medal count since the 1988 Seoul Olympics – and also the first time that China, Japan, and South Korea had all finished in the top ten (excepting the socialist bloc-boycotted 1984 Olympics). When Germany found its sixth-place finish behind Japan unacceptable, it initiated the revival of several of the former East German sports schools.[20] In addition to Germany and Japan, a number of other sport superpowers were shamed by their performance in Athens, and their governments increased funding for sport, including Russia, Australia, and Great Britain; the British Olympic Association is currently pressing for greater funding on the premise that it, like China, should make a good showing at its own Olympic Games in 2012. In Beijing, Great Britain redeemed its national honor with an unexpected fourth (up from ninth), Germany climbed back into fifth place, Australia dropped to sixth (from fourth), South Korea surprised in seventh, and Japan slipped to eighth – due in part to South Korea's gold medal in baseball, which added salt to Japan's wound. Among the sport superpowers of the world, the U.S. is an anomaly in its lack of direct government investment in sport, since most American Olympians are cultivated in the collegiate sport system, a structure that is unique to the U.S. The U.S. Olympic Committee's (USOC) investment in sport is only a miniscule part of the American sport infrastructure. About half of the USOC's 600 million-dollar operating budget in the last Olympiad came from a long-term contract with the IOC that grants about 13% of U.S. Olympic television rights fees and 20% of Olympic Top Programme marketing revenue to the USOC, which is greater than the percentage allotted to the other 204 national Olympic committees combined. In 2008 resentment began to boil over in the IOC and among the other national Olympic committees, who felt that the U.S. government was avoiding its moral obligation to fund national sport by essentially skimming profit off the Olympics that should be shared more equitably with other countries. The USOC and IOC are currently at a standoff, and the re-negotiation of the contract has been postponed until economic conditions are more favorable. Government investment in Olympic sport seems to be on the increase worldwide, stimulated in part by China's rise as a sport superpower. This Chinese model is itself stimulated by East Asian Olympic rivalries fueled by Japan and its memories of the 1964 Olympics as a turning point in Japan's status among nations.

In sum, when we carefully reexamine the 1964 and 1988 Olympics, it is surprising that we remember them today as turning points in

the peaceful integration of Japan and South Korea into the global community. Why would "peace" be associated with these events so clearly connected with political upheaval and war? In the popular memory at home and abroad, probably the outstanding organization of the ceremonial pageantry and the sports events themselves worked their magic to leave lasting memories segregated from the surrounding politics. In the academic analysis, symbols of national pride that had been born in war and emphasized collective sacrifice in the struggle for survival among hostile nations were resituated within the pursuit of individual excellence and health, in peaceful interaction with a friendly outside world. Perhaps as the heated emotions surrounding the Beijing Olympics fade into the distance, these Games will look similar to their East Asian predecessors in hindsight.

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Christian Tagsold, The 1964 Tokyo Olympics as Political Games

William W. Kelly, Asia Pride, China Fear, Tokyo Anxiety: Japan Looks Back at 2008 Beijing and Forward to 2012 London and 2016 Tokyo

Notes

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