

# **The 1940 Tokyo Games: The Missing Olympics**

Japan, the Asian Olympics and the  
Olympic Movement

**Sandra Collins**



Sport in the Global Society

# The 1940 Tokyo Games: The Missing Olympics

By representing their experience of modernity as different from the West in their respective Olympic Games, Asian nations reveal much about the ambitions and anxieties of being an Asian host in the continuing western Olympic hegemony. This original work explores the encounter between 'the East and the West' by analyzing the deliberate self-presentational cultural diplomacy historically required of Asian Olympic hosts.

Exploring the relationship between Modern Asia and the Olympic Games, it focuses on the forgotten history of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics to reveal the complex and fascinating encounter between Japan and the world in the 1930s. The book is the first full account of this encounter and draws substantially on Japanese sources hitherto unknown in the English-speaking world. It argues that this encounter sets the scene and the tone for later Asian involvement in the Olympic Movement. It includes chapters on:

- Imperial Commemoration and Diplomacy
- the Japanese Fascist Olympics
- the Event, Japanese Style
- the Spectre of 1940 in Later Asian Olympics.

This work fills a gap in the literature, and provides an original addition to the history of Japanese culture, Asian cultures and the Olympic Movement.

This book is a special issue of *The International Journal of the History of Sport*.

**Sandra Collins** is a lecturer of Japanese History and Culture at San Francisco State University. She was most recently a Visiting Scholar for the Center of Japanese Studies, University of California, Berkeley. She has published several works on the role of Japan in the Olympic Movement. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and she was an inaugural Post-Graduate Research Scholar for the International Olympic Committee and a Fullbright-Hays Scholar at the University of Tokyo Institute of Socio-Cultural Information Studies.

# Sport in the Global Society

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General Editors: J.A. Mangan and Boria Majumdar

## **The 1940 Tokyo Games: The Missing Olympics Japan, the Asian Olympics and the Olympic Movement**

## **Sport in the Global Society**

General Editors: J.A. Mangan and Boria Majumdar

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SANDRA COLLINS

The 1940 Tokyo Games: The MISSING OLYMPICS

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# Series Editors' Foreword

*SPORT IN THE GLOBAL SOCIETY* was launched in the late nineties. It now has over one hundred volumes. Until recently an odd myopia characterised academia with regard to sport. The global *groves of academe* remained essentially Cartesian in inclination. They favoured a mind/body dichotomy: thus the study of ideas was acceptable; the study of sport was not. All that has now changed. Sport is now incorporated, intelligently, within debate about *inter alia* ideologies, power, stratification, mobility and inequality. The reason is simple. In the modern world sport is everywhere: it is as ubiquitous as war. E.J. Hobsbawm, the Marxist historian, once called it the one of the most significant of the new manifestations of late nineteenth century Europe. Today it is one of the most significant manifestations of the twenty-first century world. Such is its power, politically, culturally, economically, spiritually and aesthetically, that sport beckons the academic more persuasively than ever - to borrow, and refocus, an expression of the radical historian Peter Gay - 'to explore its familiar terrain and to wrest new interpretations from its inexhaustible materials'. As a subject for inquiry, it is replete, as he remarked of history, with profound 'questions unanswered and for that matter questions unasked'.

Sport seduces the teeming 'global village'; it is the new opiate of the masses; it is one of the great modern experiences; its attraction astonishes only the recluse; its appeal spans the globe. Without exaggeration, sport is a mirror in which nations, communities, men and women now see themselves. That reflection is sometimes bright, sometimes dark, sometimes distorted, sometimes magnified. This metaphorical mirror is a source of mass exhilaration and depression, security and insecurity, pride and humiliation, bonding and alienation. Sport, for many, has replaced religion as a source of emotional catharsis and spiritual passion, and for many, since it is among the earliest of memorable childhood experiences, it infiltrates memory, shapes enthusiasms, serves fantasies. To co-opt Gay again: it blends memory and desire.

Sport, in addition, can be a lens through which to scrutinise major themes in the political and social sciences: democracy and despotism and the great associated movements of socialism, fascism, communism and capitalism as well as political cohesion and confrontation, social reform and social stability.

The story of modern sport is the story of the modern world—in microcosm; a modern global tapestry permanently being woven. Furthermore, nationalist and

imperialist, philosopher and politician, radical and conservative have all sought in sport a manifestation of national identity, status and superiority.

Finally, for countless millions sport is the personal pursuit of ambition, assertion, well-being and enjoyment.

For all the above reasons, sport demands the attention of the academic. *Sport in the Global Society* is a response.

J.A. Mangan  
Boria Majumdar

Series Editors  
*Sport in the Global Society*

# Introduction: 1940 Tokyo and Asian Olympics in the Olympic Movement

*Despite the importance of the 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games in defining Japanese cultural nationalism and contributing to the legitimacy of the IOC in the tumultuous 1930s, a thorough history of the event has not been addressed in the English language. This study situates the 1940 Tokyo Games as key not only to the diplomatic history of Japan and the West, but also to the ideological production of 1930s Japan and to the crisis of the IOC's legitimacy in the aftermath of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The history of modern sports in Japan and Japan in the Olympic Movement is also traced in order to showcase Japan's ability as a developed nation of Olympic sports and athletes.*

Remnants of the past that don't make sense in present terms – the useless, the odd, the peculiar, the incongruous – are the signs of history. They supply proof that the world was not made in its present form. When history perfects, it covers its own tracks. [1]

## **Prologue: Why a History of a Non-event?**

In the annals of the history of the modern Olympic movement, there are only three instances when the Olympic Games were not celebrated, namely 1916 (Berlin), 1940 (Tokyo/Helsinki) and 1944 (London). Due to the fact that these games were cancelled because of the First and Second World Wars, there is often confusion as to whether the IOC forced Tokyo to rescind the games (incorrect), the Second World War forced the cancellation of the games (incorrect) or Japan's military government voluntarily forfeited the right to host the games as it embarked on furthering its colonizing of Asia (correct). [2] Most historical narratives gloss over the unprecedented fact that the XIIth Olympiad of 1940 was awarded by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to the first non-Western host city: Tokyo, Japan. Much like the Panda's thumb in Gould's analysis, the 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games functioned as a misplaced and misunderstood event within the narrative of development in the history of the Olympic Games.

The 1940 Tokyo Olympics were pivotal to the histories of modern Japan and the Olympic Movement. First and foremost, the City of Tokyo and the Japanese government wanted to commemorate 1940 as the 2,600th anniversary of the foundation of Japan (*Kigen 2600nen*) by hosting the 1940 Olympic Games. [3]



The seeming contradiction of hosting an international event for national purposes was not publicly addressed in Japan at the time. Rather, the Olympics were part of the effort of the Japanese state to author its version of acceptable national culture as it veered towards war. [4] During the 1930s, the Japanese state increasingly censored and controlled the definition of national culture to centre around the idea of *kokutai* (national polity), which defined national identity as being racially homogeneous, since all Japanese shared the continuous blood line of a single imperial family as defined by Japan's ancient myths. [5] Through the Olympics, the Japanese state attempted to represent itself ideologically during the important historical juncture of 1930s Japan. Japanese culture became politicized in the production of the 1940 games to mobilize the Japanese masses ideologically and justify the expansion of the Japanese Empire in Asia. The Japanese state made alluring relationships between its definition of national culture and the Olympics that further justified the emerging rhetoric of Japan as the liberator of Asia in the 1930s. As the Japanese state came under increased scrutiny and isolation from the Western international community, Japan regarded the 1940 Games as a form of 'people's' diplomacy during the critical inter-war years.

The complex and fascinating encounter between Japan and the world in the 1930s set the scene and the tone for later Asian involvement in the Olympic movement. Tokyo's 1940 bid was the first campaign by a non-Western nation and it challenged many political and cultural assumptions that the IOC had of Japan and Asia. The Tokyo games set the terms of how both the IOC regarded Asian candidates and of how subsequent Asian nations defined their 'culture' in the Olympics. The history of the 1940 Tokyo games reveal not only the influence these specific games had on inter-war Olympism and the production of ideology in 1930s Japan, but also subsequent Asian Olympics. By representing their experience of modernity as different in their respective Olympic games, Asian nations reveal much about the ambitions and anxieties of being an Asian host in the continuing Western Olympic hegemony. The encounter between the 'East' and the 'West' is analysed within the context of the deliberate self-presentational diplomacy and calculated cultural representation historically required of Asian Olympic hosts. The dynamics of culture and ideology in subsequent Asian Olympics, such as the 1964 Tokyo, 1972 Sapporo, 1988 Seoul and 1998 Nagano Olympics are next addressed to reveal lingering political and cultural assumptions made of the East within the Olympic movement. The Beijing bid for the 2008 Olympics is briefly considered to assess how Chinese modernity is being politically showcased for the world as much as Japanese modernity was showcased in 1940.

The 1940 Tokyo games were also instrumental in legitimizing the IOC rhetoric that the Olympic movement was universal. From 1896 to 1932, when Japan began its bid campaign, the Olympic Games had only been in Europe and the United States. No Asian, African or Latin American nation had campaigned for the Olympics. During the inter-war years, the IOC's authority to govern and control the Olympic Games was often challenged. [6] By awarding the XIIth Olympiad to Tokyo, Japan, the IOC

wanted to indicate to the world that all nations could host the Olympic Games. In the early years of the Olympic movement, elite members of the diplomatic community, the sports world and the newly formed International Olympic Committee (IOC) all discussed how the modern Olympic Games were the consummate culmination of modernization – a voluntary international institution founded on the principles of Olympism that promoted fair play, peace and mutual understanding among nations through sport. As an institution dedicated to the advancement of international goodwill, the Olympic Games quickly became a powerful symbol in Europe and the United States of universal peace after the First World War. Advocates of the Olympics fought not only to popularize the games with their respective national citizens but also to promote the games internationally to other nations. Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, specifically conceived of the games as being ambulatory in nature in order ‘to win true international standing’. [7] Despite the fact that the Olympic Games were promoted by the IOC to be available for all nations of the world to participate in and host, the political ideology of the games had inherent contradictions that only became more evident in the 1930s.

Once the ‘Great Symbol’ of positive internationalism at the turn of the twentieth century, the Olympic Games deteriorated into the ‘great symptom’ of the breakdown in the world political system in the 1930s. The imminent conflicts among fascist, communist and capitalist nation states became more manifest in this uncertain era, and these political incongruities also plagued the IOC. Throughout this period, the IOC argued that ‘sports were above politics’ and that the IOC was a politically neutral organization. Despite these representations of political neutrality, the IOC was embroiled in constant conflict because the IOC was in fact making overt political decisions regarding the Olympic Games. Since their inception in 1896, the games had only been held in Europe and the United States, regardless of the petitions from other IOC member nations. The preference for predominantly European and American host cities revealed the unspoken requirement of development, both in terms of political and financial finesse. Controversies over what constituted an IOC member nation also mired the IOC, especially as imperialist nations erased previous national boundaries to create ‘new’ nations for the IOC to sanction, as with the case of the 1932 Japanese application of Manchukuo to be a recognized IOC nation. The contradiction between the IOC organization of power through nation states and the self-representations by the IOC of the Olympic Games as universal and politically neutral led to constant turmoil within the IOC during the 1930s. Despite various protests, the majority of IOC members not only permitted the sensational self-aggrandizement of Nazi Germany in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, but an overwhelming majority also favoured Tokyo’s bid for the 1940 games notwithstanding Japan’s war with China. By supporting the idea of a Tokyo Olympics, the IOC ultimately became an unwitting conspirator to the imperialist project of Japan.

The Tokyo Olympic Games were not only tied to the larger controversial politics of the international system but also to the production of ideology in 1930s Japan. After the intensive state-mandated initiatives to modernize the nation that

inaugurated Meiji Japan, many scholars characterize 1930s Japan as a tumultuous period in which Japan searched for its identity and place within a changing world order. [8] Although the 1940 games did not actually take place, the short-lived Tokyo Olympic bid was central to the ideological history of inter-war Japan. The Tokyo Olympics emerged as an alluring ideological banner that expressed the often contradictory international and domestic expectations of 1930s Japan. Many Japanists believed that the Tokyo games would force the international community to recognize Japan as a legitimate, expanding world power. Other politicians and bureaucrats imagined the Tokyo Olympics to be the tool that would orient many Western institutions to the experience, history and cultures of the East. In the aftermath of the Japanese failure to force the League of Nations to acknowledge the special role of Japan in Manchukuo, the Tokyo Olympics was imagined to be the opportunity for Japan to influence the world order that had been dominated by the West. In apparent contradiction to these international goals, the 1940 Tokyo games also functioned as a domestic symbol to mobilize Japanese subjects into the expanding empire of Japan. In planning for the Tokyo Olympics, Japanese government officials invented a national commemoration based on Japanese cultural traditions and oral legends to ideologically mobilize the domestic masses as imperial subjects who were bound together by myth and destiny as the Japanese empire expanded in Asia. [9]

Despite the divergent goals of both international recognition and domestic mobilization desired of the 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games, the juxtaposition was successfully maintained from 1932 to 1938. Through the 1940 Tokyo games, Japanese officials fashioned a symbol for both international and domestic consumption by defining the 1940 games as a commemorative ceremony to celebrate the 2,600th anniversary of Japan (*kigen 2,600nen*) that evoked various Japanese and Olympic ideological tenets. The date of 11 November 1940 was calculated by Meiji bureaucrats as the 2,600th anniversary of the ascension of first emperor of Japan, Emperor Jimmu, to the throne based on obscure references in oral tales that were compiled in the AD 720 text, the *Nihon shōki*. [10] The ancient date itself was central to a Japanese national ideology that was defined by a mythic origin and divine state foundation. [11] As the national anniversary date encroached, Japanese ideologues forged many discursive links between the Olympics and the *kigen* anniversary. The 1940 Tokyo Olympics spectacularly encapsulated the discordant attempts to ideologically mobilize the Japanese masses as Japan embarked on its imperialist project. By employing the IOC representations of the Olympics as universal and politically neutral, Japanists reinforced the emerging 1930s discourse on Japanese national ideology by evoking the sacred founding narrative of the nation to ideologically transform the masses into imperial subjects. The IOC's awarding of the 1940 Olympic Games to Tokyo provided the international dimension of recognizing Japan status as a legitimate world power expanding in Asia.

The alluring linkages that were forged between the Olympic Games and the *kigen* commemoration reveal the neglected importance of the failed Tokyo Olympics: this

non-event was central to the ideological history of 1930s Japan as it compelled its often contradictory domestic and international expectations. Domestically, the Tokyo Olympics helped to foment a sacred national consciousness from the Japanese masses as Japan embarked on creating a new order in Asia. And internationally, the IOC's representations of the Olympics as politically neutral forced the IOC to comply with Japan's symbolic use of the 1940 games not only to reinforce Japanese society, but also to force the world to acknowledge Japan as a legitimate empire as it expanded into Asia in the 1930s. The Tokyo Olympics succeeded in supplementing the national narrative of divine destiny with notions of the larger world system by coalescing powerful narratives of the national identity and purpose of Japan as it expanded in Asia. The majority vote of support for Tokyo by the IOC catapulted Japan into the limelight of the international community. The IOC support also publicly confirmed the opinions of Japanese ideologues who considered Japan to be the only Asian nation capable of participating and contributing equally to the world order that had been predominantly dominated by the West. The Tokyo Olympics refracted the emerging 1930s discourse held by many Japanese on the envisioned role of Japan in creating a new order in Asia. In the last analysis, however, the broad agenda desired of the Tokyo Olympics to promote international diplomacy, intensify military patriotism and solemnize Japanese national culture could only result in 'a tangled web of ideas, fictions and mis-recognitions' within Japan and between Japan and the world. Through the prism of the failed 1940 Tokyo Olympics, the varied and often painstaking diplomatic negotiations expose the ideological stakes of defining Japanese national culture, identity and purpose vis-à-vis the IOC and the changing 1930s world system.

The campaign to bring the international Olympic Games to Tokyo began in 1932 and ended in 1936 when Tokyo stunned the world by winning the right to host the 1940 Olympic Games. These games promised to be historically significant as the first to be held outside the West. In 1932, Tokyo had entered an extensive and expensive competition with such great European cities as Barcelona, Rome and Helsinki for the right to host the games. The city of Tokyo began its campaign for the 1940 games and the 1940 World Exposition to promote international tourism to Tokyo as a means of helping the recently reconstructed city after the devastating earthquake of 1923. [12] City officials marketed the idea of the 1940 Tokyo Olympiad to Japanese Olympic officials as a forum of international diplomacy after Japan's 1933 withdrawal from the League of Nations over its controversial establishment of Manchukuo in 1932. The majority of IOC members supported the Tokyo proposal, in spite of the ongoing Japanese campaigns in China. The IOC continued to support Japan by awarding the Winter Olympic Games to Sapporo as late as March 1938. [13] Tokyo's triumph, however, quickly faded. In July 1938, Japan forfeited the right to host the games, claiming that the protracted war with China demanded both 'the spiritual and material mobilization of Japan'. Although Helsinki was then accorded the right to host the 1940 games, the Second World War ultimately led to the cancellation of the 1940 and 1944 Olympic Games and the absence of the games until 1948 in London.

Various Japanese ideologues, politicians, bureaucrats and sports officials contributed to the 1930s effort of defining how the 1940 Olympiad could become the crowning commemorative event for the expanding Japanese empire. In the 1930s, ideas that celebrated the national culture of Japan contributed to an ideological 'revolt against the West' and the Tokyo Olympics were also deployed in the effort to solemnize Japanese national culture. [14] By adopting the IOC representation that the Olympics were universal, Japanese ideologues argued that in order for the games to be truly universal, they would need to be held in Asia. Soon after winning the Olympic Games in 1936, however, Japanese ideologues began to morally capitalize on the economic unevenness that characterized the perceived differences between Japan and the West. The initial search for parity with the West that was displaced by the Japanese preoccupation with emphasizing the difference between Japan and the West is addressed in two articles in this issue: 'The 1940 Olympics' and 'East and West'. The former specifically analyses the first two years of the Tokyo City campaign and argues that the idea of a Tokyo Olympics gained support when it was reconceptualized as a means of 'people's diplomacy' (*kokumin gaikô*) to improve Japanese international relations. The worldwide media coverage of the sensational performance of Japanese Olympic athletes at the 1932 Los Angeles games served as a concrete symbol by which the Olympics could influence international diplomacy. The unprecedented state-to-state diplomatic negotiations and the conflicts that emerged from the IOC ideological representations of the Olympic Games as being universal and politically neutral are chronicled in 'East and West'. The very conditions of globalization that made Tokyo's being a host city possible also threatened the probability that any Tokyo games would ever take place. The increasing international awareness that the Olympics could no longer be a Western monopoly in order to be truly universal were counterbalanced by the heightened politics resulting from increased globalization as well as from what the post-First World War 'Great Powers' viewed as rapacious competition from the new imperial nations of Japan, Italy and Germany. The two subsequent articles clarify the representational strategies used to evoke the sacred symbols of Japanese national culture that were gaining currency in the 1930s, such as the warrior ethic (*bushidô*), the national polity (*kokutai*) and the Japanese spirit (*Nihon seishin*), in the context of the international Olympic Games. Earlier strategies of harmonizing Eastern and Western cultures were subsumed under later strategies to exoticize Japanese national and spiritual culture as symbols to be consumed by the West as the Japanese Empire continued to expand in China. As the planning of exotic 'Olympic Tokyo' continued in the late 1930s, Japanese ideologues argued against the appropriateness of hosting an international event that required precious material and spiritual resources. The next article, 'The Rise of Japanese Militarism', chronicles how the 1940 Tokyo Olympiad ultimately lost the support of the Japanese national government in 1938 as the government failed to resist the encroaching powers of the military. The spectre of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics is traced through the 1964 Tokyo Olympics to other Asian Olympiads in the final article. The dynamics of culture and ideology in subsequent

Asian Olympics, such as the 1964 Tokyo, 1972 Sapporo, 1988 Seoul and the 1998 Nagano Olympics are next addressed to reveal lingering political and cultural assumptions made of the East within the Olympic movement. The Beijing bid for the 2008 Olympics is briefly considered to assess how Chinese modernity is being politically showcased for the world in much the same way that Japanese modernity was showcased in 1940. In the final analysis, the extent to which Asian Olympic host cities represent their national culture and modernity according to a different cultural logic to the Western cities of other continents is explored.

### **Building ‘Modern’ Japan through Western Sports and the Olympic Games**

In order to understand what hosting the Olympic Games may have meant for 1930s Japan, we must first turn to the development of Western sports and athleticism required of any nation state that would participate in, let alone host, the Olympic Games. The introduction of sports and athletic competitions were part of the enlightenment and civilization project of early Meiji. Indeed, sports (*supōtsu*) always signalled modern/Western forms of sports, and the word for ‘competition’ (*kyōgi*) had to be invented for Meiji Japan. [15] While some forms of modern and Western sports had been imported and informally practised by foreign teachers in early Meiji, sports were increasingly centralized and organized into official institutions after Japan began to participate in the Olympic movement in 1912. As the nation state recognized the international symbolic currency gained by participating in the Olympic movement, it also promulgated modern sports through the school system and used sports to develop the morally and physically fit national subjects required of a modern nation state. Concern for the individual body was a synecdoche for the larger national concern for the collective body of modern Japan in the early decades of the twentieth century. As an integral part of nation-building, state control of sports and physical education only intensified during the war mobilization project of the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Physical education was a key component to the modernization of the Japanese school system. In 1878, the Ministry of Education invited George Adams Leland to come to Japan to introduce educational gymnastics in the newly established Japanese Physical Education Normal School of Gymnastics (*Nihon taiikukai taisho-gakkō*). [16] In 1893, the Japanese Physical Education Association (*Nihon taiikukai*) was established to disseminate and domesticate Western gymnastics and sports into the everyday life of national subjects. [17] By 1902, several publications on Swedish gymnastics were published by Kawase Motokuro, a teacher at the Japanese Physical Education Normal School, to promote physical education in the school system. [18] A 1903 Japanese Physical Education Association (*Nihon taiiku kai*) circular states:

Now we the Japanese people who have the immense responsibility of reconciling oriental and occidental civilizations and who have a great destiny to fulfil in the future as the leader of the oriental countries and the most advanced among them,