

Tokyo 2020 Olympics: Nation Branding Creates an Opportunity for a New Cultural Narrative for Japan

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Abstract

What is the role of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics in shaping the narrative for Japan's cultural and national identity? This paper highlights changes in Japan's nation brand, and examines how Japan's branding for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics is an opportunity for creating a future legacy for Japan, particularly in human resource development. A cultural approach to nation branding targets a range of identities for a country, shaping a country's narrative. Nation branding is presented as the theoretical lens for analyzing Japan's efforts to date. Building on the concept of nation branding, mega event planning can reinforce a positive cultural image and change negative cultural images. This paper reviews the impact of past Olympics on a host nation's brand, including the Tokyo 1964 Olympics. Japan's branding to date, Cool Japan, has evolved, and an analysis of the incorporation of this work in the current plan for the development of Japan's nation brand via the Tokyo 2020 Olympics will be presented. In the discussion section, recommendations for the branding of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games will include opportunities for deepening Japan's legacy. Government-led reform initiatives could provide a springboard for creating an Olympic legacy that is a cultural narrative inclusive of cultural issues such as women's societal roles and increased foreign representation in educational institutions.

Keywords: Nation Branding, Olympics, Cultural Identity

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Introduction

Mega events, such as the Olympic Games, have been utilized to shape the identity of a nation through nation branding (Florek, 2008; Nauright, 2013; Zhang & Zhao, 2009; Zhou, Shen, Zhang, & Zhong, 2013). Nations can utilize mega sports events to present themselves to the world. In this sense mega events are a vehicle for nation branding that serves as global diplomacy (Nauright, 2013), meaning these mega events can strengthen a nation's global position and serve to build its cultural diplomacy or soft-power (Zhou, et al., 2013). From this perspective, what role might the Tokyo 2020 Olympics serve in shaping the narrative for Japan's cultural and national identity? This study highlights Japan's nation brand, its evolution over the past two decades, and opportunities for the Olympic Games to contribute towards Japan's legacy, particularly in human resource development.

In 2013 Japan won the bid to host the 2020 Olympics and the planning work began. Planning for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics has included a wide swath of activities, from establishing leadership and committee structures, to designing the logo and venues. Included in the planning was the strategy for building on Japan's nation brand.

Past Olympics have contributed both positively and negatively to a nation's brand (Nauright, 2013). Examples from three past Olympic Games are reviewed, Tokyo (1964), Beijing (2008), and London (2012), to highlight the impact of branding. Tokyo, 1964, was selected to provide a comparison to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, from over fifty years ago; while Beijing, 2008, and London, 2012, were selected as the two most recent Olympic Games held. Nation branding is presented as the theoretical lens for analyzing Japan's efforts to date, and as a perspective for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics to shape Japan's cultural and national identity. This paper presents a review of Japan's nation branding goals, Olympic planning documents, and a discussion of human resource branding for Japan. If nation branding can build a nation's legacy, what will Japan's legacy be as a result of hosting the Tokyo 2020 Olympics?

Lessons from past Olympics

The Tokyo 1964 Olympics was the first ever Olympic Games held in Asia. They were considered an enormous success, seen as a mega event that transformed Japan and allowed it to gain legitimacy in the world (Hargreaves, 1992). The Tokyo 1964 Olympics was an opportunity for Japan to present itself to the world, post WWII. For Japan, "The 1964 Tokyo Olympics symbolized the full (re)admission of Japan into the US-dominated post-war imperial order..." (Wood & Abe, 2011, p. 3245). In preparation for the 1964 Olympic Games, Tokyo experienced dramatic development from its post-war infrastructure, including the construction of the Metropolitan Expressway and the Tokaido Shinkansen railway (a.k.a. "the bullet train"). This development served as a gateway to rapid economic growth in Japan, an incredible development that was viewed as "miraculous restoration" (Tokyo 2020, 2016). While the concept of nation branding had not yet been named in 1964, the result of the efforts to prepare for and successfully host the Tokyo 1964 Olympics could be viewed as a successful example of nation branding, as the next section on nation branding describes. In addition to the reconstruction of basic infrastructures, the Tokyo 1964

Olympics showcased a nation that was anxious to be seen as a member of a global community (Hargreaves, 1992; Wood & Abe, 2011).

The Beijing 2008 Olympics presented mixed results, positive and negative, of nation branding. Beijing's strengths were promoted through the Olympics however its identity and core values were not in alignment with the perceptions held by the general public (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). While the Olympic logo was designed to represent: *One World, One Dream, A harmonious city of the international community*, there was a gap between city government portrayals of China and the residents' reality. Beijing was perceived to be biased in its storytelling, altering negative images regarding human rights, social issues, and social justice (Panagiotopoulou, 2012; Zhang & Zhao, 2009). Researchers (Zhang and Zhao, 2009) reported that the Olympics did not seem to change or alter people's experience of Beijing due to the mismatch between the vision for the city and reality. Beijing was working to reposition itself as a new superpower, seeking acceptance as a modern city however its efforts at public diplomacy fell short (Panagiotopoulou, 2012). While its rich cultural heritage was a strength, its environment and social well-being were weaknesses. As a result of the Olympic Games, Beijing's international status as a famous cultural city was achieved, however its past history of isolationism and human rights violations blemished its nation brand (Vitiello, 2008). Due to the gap between vision and reality, Beijing was seen as great place to visit but not a place where you would want to live (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). In reviewing nation brand rankings (Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index, 2016), China's ranking dropped from number 28 (out of 50 countries) in 2008, the year of the Olympics, to number 22 in 2009 (Panagiotopoulou, 2012). While a causal relationship cannot be determined, the drop in rank bears noting. More information on the ranking method is provided below.

In contrast, the London 2012 Olympics were thought to be hosted with overall positive results, and the media described this mega event as successful in defining the British culture, successfully promoting Great Britain's global reputation (Zhou, et al., 2013). Research showed that the London 2012 Olympics succeeded in rebranding Great Britain in the areas of heritage, creativity, sports and music (Zhou, et al., 2013). While promoting a country's identity is challenging, efforts made throughout the Olympic Games are opportunities for presenting a nation's brand. From the opening ceremony to the finale, a nation is on the world stage. While review of the media coverage of the London 2012 Olympics had highs and lows, overall the goals of the British government to present an image of Britain that was creative, heritage-rich, humorous, green, presenting an overall favorable image of Britain was accomplished (Zhou, et al., 2013). In reviewing nation brand rankings (Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index, 2016), the United Kingdom ranking increased from fourth place on the nation brands index in 2010, two years before the Olympics, to third place in 2014 (Nation Branding, 2016). In summary, the Tokyo 1964 Olympics, Beijing 2008 Olympics, and London 2012 Olympics are three distinct examples of how a country's identity or nation brand was linked to the Olympics with varying results. As seen in the examples of the most recent Olympic Games, Beijing and London, the Olympics can impact a nation's identity to varying degrees. The Tokyo 2020 Olympics come 52 years after the first Olympic Games held in Tokyo in 1964. In just over half a century, Tokyo has emerged from a war-torn nation to a global power. How will the 2020 Olympic Games be utilized to present Japan to the world?

Nation Branding

The term nation branding was introduced by Simon Anholt in 1996 (Anholt, 2008; Kaneva, 2011). Emerging from the field of marketing, where products are presented for sale by their brands, nation branding is a new field where a nation's identity is being marketed. Nation branding has emerged as a field of nation identity, related to diplomacy, image, and reputation (Dinnie, 2008).

Kaneva (2011) offers the following definition of nation branding, it is "... a compendium of discourses and practices aimed at reconstituting nationhood through marketing and branding paradigms" (p. 118). She states that different lens can be used to view a nation's brand, and these include economic, political and cultural approaches. According to Kaneva, the cultural approach is related to politics, diplomacy, and identity. For the purposes of this paper, the cultural approach will be utilized for examination of Japan's brand, focusing on the identity of Japan as opposed to the economic approach of increasing exports, investment and tourism.

Central to understanding a nation's brand is a nation's identity (Dinnie, 2009; Kaneva, 2011; Panagiotopoulou, 2012). National identity is formed from a broad definition of culture, including language, traditions, food, beliefs and values. People become familiar with a country not only through its products and services; but also through conversations, images and behaviors. A nation brand, based on a nation's identity, can be thought of as a country's narrative or story. Dinnie (2009) shares, "...a nation's culture may be regarded as constituting the true essence of the nation-brand" (p. 118). A nation's brand, including its image and reputation, can be shaped and managed. Fan (nd) defined nation branding as "a process by which a nation's images can be created, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to improve or enhance the country's reputation among a target international audience" (p. 6).

This shaping of an audience's perception of a country is seen as cultural and public diplomacy. A diplomacy that is directed at reaching and communicating with foreign publics, not diplomat to diplomat but rather, diplomat to public (Dinnie, 2008, Panagiotopoulou, 2012). Anholt also noted that countries, in working to manage their identity abroad, linked national identity to the politics and economics of competitiveness, a concept he terms competitive identity (Anholt, 2008). Competitive identity is seen as the outcome of intellectual capital rather than economic capital, and has a better return on investment. Thus cultural or public diplomacy is a strategy nations can work on to manage and enhance their image, both internally and externally, with a focus on national identity. A cultural approach to nation branding has implications for a country's social power or political standing on the global stage (Kaneva, 2011).

This paper focused on a review of documents about nation branding in Japan from 2002 – 2016 and the link of nation branding to the official government planning process for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Government documents were reviewed from 2013 – 2016 specific to Olympic planning, including formation of the Olympic Planning Committees and development of the Olympic planning infrastructure. Themes were identified as a result of document review to then formulate the discussion on recommendations. The three questions addressed include:

- What impact can the 2020 Tokyo Olympics have on Japan's cultural and national identity?
- What new opportunities exist for Japan in shaping its nation brand as a result of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics?
- What recommendation can be offered towards building Japan's legacy, post-2020 Olympics?

Japan's Nation Brand and Cultural Narrative

According to Dinnie (2008), Japan has been effective in developing its nation brand, even though Japan has a history of isolationism and insularity. Overall Japan's nation brand has ranked sixth in the world, in 2014 and 2015, on the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, a measuring tool for nation brands (Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index, 2016). To calculate rankings, consumers in 50 countries are polled regarding items such as culture and heritage, people, governance, exports, tourism, and investment and immigration.

Researchers have noted that an effective nation branding campaign includes a strategic action plan with well-defined goals; priorities based on values; long-lasting duration; and developing cooperation between national and international stakeholders (Dinnie, 2008). Japan's brand has evolved over the past two decades and to a certain extent followed these strategic action steps. From a review of documents, including government reports, research articles and media coverage, the following key points related to Japan's nation brand have been identified.

Launch

In 2002 Prime Minister Koizumi seated a working group to focus on the strategic utilization of intellectual property, which is seen as the launch of nation branding in Japan (Akutsu, 2008; Cannon, 2012). This working group noted that the goal of nation-branding effort is to improve the image and reputation of Japan. The aim was to become competitive through the creation and development of Japan's intellectual property; ideally, to have Japan respected worldwide (Cannon, 2012). The focus expanded in 2003 to the management of media, including music, movies, game software and animation. Then in 2004 the working group's focus examined policy issues for strengthening Japan's brand, discussing food culture, local brands and fashion. Cannon shares that the vision was to develop a strong Japan brand linked to cultural diplomacy versus military or economic power.

Cool Japan

While the branding concept of Cool Japan had emerged in 2002, it was in 2005 Japan's government promoted Cool Japan as its nation branding project in an effort to advance cultural diplomacy (Valaskivi, 2013). The historical evolution of Japan's nation brand has been described in detail elsewhere (Akutsu, 2008; Daliot-Bul, 2009), outlining the efforts of government committees to harness and manage Japan's brand. The Cool Japan Advisory Council, the main driver of Cool Japan, is composed of representatives from Japanese government ministry offices and the Cabinet Office, with a focus on emphasizing national cultural policies.

In 2006 there were concerted government efforts to promote culture to the media abroad, including Japanese pop culture, Japanese anime, and Cool Japan (Akutsu, 2008). These were promoted as reactive efforts by the government, not proactive, as Japanese pop culture and anime had spread worldwide and offered a positive connection to Japan (Cannon, 2012). In order to harness this success, there was an attempt to harness pop culture, which was viewed as the vehicle for cultural diplomacy.

National Identity

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, through his influence as head of state, shifted how nation branding was described, introducing the term country identity as opposed to nation brand (Cannon, 2012). In his speech of January 29, 2006 (Abe, 2006) he shared that Japan's identity should focus on "...Japan's ideals, the direction in which we should aspire, and the way in which we convey our Japan-ness to the world" (para. 53). This definition is considered to have reinforced the concept of nationalism, a position that Abe supports (Morris-Suzuki, 2013). Nauright (2013) explains that "mega events also must be understood from political and social viewpoints, because mega events involve the political leadership of a host country and often shape legacies that governments and leaders envision for themselves" (p. 25). Prime Minister Abe's legacy will in part be impacted by the success or mishaps of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games (Lewis, 2016).

Japan's nation branding initiatives and strategies continued to evolve, from a 2010 focus on an expansion of Japan's brand to Japan's national strengths, to a 2011 focus on the Great East Japan Earthquake which featured Japan's ability to manage difficult issues such as natural disasters. Japan's nation brand emphasized building something better – new solutions (Valaskivi, 2013). The branding strategy included a safe and secure Japan; and excellence in science and technology.

Cultural Narrative

Valaskivi (2013) notes that the Cool Japan Advisory Council asked the questions, what kind of country does Japan want to be? And, what should Japan's vision of the future be? In the related areas of nation branding, national identity and cultural identity, who does Japan want to be? These questions are brought back into focus as the planning for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics advanced. As Anholt, who is quoted in a personal interview with Valaskivi (2013), shares, "Branding a nation is not a marketing effort...Changing your national image is virtually impossible, what you can do is to do right things for the right reasons and be useful for the world and then – just as a collateral effect – your reputation gets better" (p. 499). In designing the cultural narrative for Japan's nation brand, the upcoming 2020 Olympic Games are taking center stage. As the work for branding Japan via the Olympic Games emerges, various agencies and committees are focused on strengthening Japan's nation brand, including the development of a cultural narrative that will advance Japan's legacy.

Tokyo 2020 Olympic Planning

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics are seen as an opportunity to feature Japan as a nation, in part, based on culture and education. This is to be accomplished through continued building of the Cool Japan strategy, via the Olympic Games, whose mission is to position Japan as a nation providing solutions to the problems of the world (Cool Japan Strategy, 2015). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is also central to this goal of promoting culture and education. Overall, these goals are aligned with Prime Minister Abe's vision which he shared in his policy speech to the Diet in January, 2016, articulating a desire for Japan to promote its world-class art and culture, thus proactively engaging in cultural diplomacy (Abe, 2016).

The Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee (TOC) is responsible for the planning of the Olympic Games and the committee has developed the Tokyo 2020 Games Foundation Plan which includes elements such as the Games' vision, clients, venues and infrastructure, support functions, support structure, action and legacy, and engagement (The Tokyo Organizing Committee, 2015). The Games' vision includes building three core concepts: achieving personal best, unity in diversity, and connecting to tomorrow. Achieving personal best refers to both athletes and spectators realizing their best personal performance, in competition or in everyday life. Unity in diversity has a focus on accepting and respecting differences. Creating a legacy is included in the concept of connecting to tomorrow. Five pillars or focus areas have been identified in the Tokyo 2020 Games Foundation Plan, including culture and education. The goal of this pillar is for Japan to become a country grounded in culture and the arts, that is, to create a foundation of strong cultural power (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2016a).

The Intermediary Plan towards creating a nation based on the Olympic pillar of culture and the arts was developed in 2014 by MEXT ((Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2016a). The goals of the plan include developing human resources or a competent workforce that has global perspectives, revitalizing communities through cultural assets, and promoting international cultural exchange. Of these three goals, the goal aimed at nurturing human resources is the goal that is most pivotal to impacting the future position of Japan on the world stage. Cultural assets and cultural exchange, to a certain degree, involve the presentation and outreach of static assets. Human resources are a dynamic asset that have the potential of positioning Japan's legacy as a legacy that is people-based, engaging Japan globally, emerging from a nationalistic past to a global, cosmopolitan future (Chappel, 2013).

Discussion

Government-led reform initiatives could provide a springboard for creating an Olympic legacy, recognizing that nation branding takes time and intention (Panagiotopoulou, 2012). A cultural narrative stemming from human resource development could include women's roles and increased foreign representation in educational institutions. Nauright (2013) shared, "Governments that have been most successful have carefully thought out long-term strategies that focus on the creation of legacies rather than immediate economic results" (p. 26). While the Foundation Plan

and Intermediary Plan for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics are building on past branding history and experience, many of the goals, activities, and strategies seem to be focused on strengthening the cultural assets of Japan and positioning Japan in a favorable light to the world, and less on creating a springboard for transformation, such as resulted from the Tokyo 1964 Olympics.

The deeper work of human resource development is building on what MEXT has been promoting in terms of globalization of universities, focused on training a future workforce. While it is central to the Intermediary Plan developed by MEXT, the goals of human resource development do not seem to be central to the nation brand emerging from the greater Olympic planning and vision. The multitude of goals set by the various committees and government agencies, all tasked with supporting the planning of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, cut across Kaneva's (2011) different lens that include economic, political and cultural approaches. The cultural approach, related to politics, diplomacy, and identity, could be the approach to decisively engage women and foreigners (Chappel, 2013; Narita, 2014). This effort could prove to be transformational for Japan. In order for this to be accomplished, Japan's Olympic planning efforts need to align goals towards advancing cultural diplomacy through an inclusive lens that is aspirational, guided by a long-term vision as opposed to piecemeal and fragmented efforts.

For example, Japan's current narrative related to women in higher education casts Japan not as a global power but rather as a provincial nation. On the Gender Gap Index which ranks national gender gaps on economic, political, education, and health-based criteria, Japan ranks 101 out of 145 countries, indicating that Japan is in the bottom third of countries with the greatest gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2016). Robert Dujarric's view is that

Despite its economic weight, Japan lacks strength in what is known as soft power...(and) Japanese universities wield minimal influence...If Japan wishes to develop international human networks, it will need elite undergraduate programs, as well as some high schools where most courses are taught in English. This will allow the country's future leaders to establish global connections from the time they enter college while familiarizing themselves with foreign cultures thanks to overseas professors and students. (Dinnie, 2008 p. 9)

MEXT has been committing resources to the development of English language competencies in junior high and high schools, while also advancing globalization at the high school and university levels (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2016a). This effort towards globalization has not emerged without criticism (Chapple, 2013). While the vision is to deepen efforts towards human resource development prepared for a global stage, MEXT's efforts convey an approach that develops English-language learning, international experiences, as well as welcoming foreigners, as long as the Japanese cultural way of life and values are not disturbed (Chapple, 2013).

The Olympic pillar of culture and education provides an opportunity for Japan to showcase a commitment to the transformation of the country's workforce, to one that is inclusive of women, foreigners, and supportive of leadership development and integration into the Japanese society. As long as the majority of women and foreigners

in Japan are excluded, intentionally or unintentionally from high level decision-making, advancement in human resources will remain limited.

For human resource development to be transformational it will need to be positioned as the gateway to global citizenship (Chappel, 2013). MEXT's goal of increasing the number of students going to study abroad and increasing the number of incoming international students is a step in the right direction, however a shift in worldview and perspective comes from the inclusion of professionals from abroad into the fabric of Japan, in leadership positions, as a voice at the table – that is critical for advancement of the human resource development goals. MEXT seeks to create an Olympic legacy that is driven by a human legacy that builds the future of Japan, post-2020 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2016b). MEXT's goal is to develop high school students capable of developing solutions to problems, not a transformation of broader and more meaningful inclusion and diversity within Japan. The legacy for Japan post-2020 will require a monumental shift in perspective towards those individuals currently perceived as outsiders in the realm of governance and leadership. This includes both women and foreigners.

Conclusion

A shift from Cool Japan to an Olympic Global Japan could set the stage for a transformation based on people's ability to authentically serve as a bridge between countries, linking nations, global perspectives, and global goals. Japan is challenged by an aging population and a decline in population. To boldly advance in meeting these challenges, engagement of women and foreigners in Japan's workforce could increase the country's GDP (Matsui, 2014) and build bridges across the global stage. The continued transitioning and shifting of Japan's nation brand goals have not allowed Japan to gain full traction. Japan has moved from promoting pop culture, food and fashion to much more complex goals, striving to be seen as a country with solutions to complex problems.

What is the role of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics in shaping the narrative for Japan's cultural and national identity? Building on the concept of nation branding, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games could advance and deepen government-led reform initiatives in human resource development, providing a springboard for creating an Olympic legacy that is a cultural narrative inclusive of women and foreigners, along with an increased representation of both in higher education institutions.

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