13 Success story

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics

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There is little doubt that the 1964 Olympics were a huge success for Japan and Tokyo. To make travel easy for visitors, spectators, and athletes and to display Japan's cutting-edge technology, billions of yen were spent to construct city highways, the Shinkansen, and the Monorail. The latter linked Tokyo's international airport Haneda to the city, and after completion in September 1964 many Tokyoites are said to have taken the Monorail just for the experience (see Figure 13.1). New sports facilities were built, among them the Yoyogi National Gymnasium designed by Kenzo Tange and the Olympic Park in Komazawa, originally planned for the abandoned 1940 Olympics. Tokyoites still use them today as popular sports and recreation facilities. The landmark-building Nippon Budokan was especially built to host the Olympic newcomer sport of judo. Needless to say, Japanese athletes won three out of four gold medals in that sport.

In total, Japanese athletes won 16 gold medals, earning the Japanese team a record third rank in the medal table. Famously, Japan's legendary women's volleyball team – nicknamed *Tōyō no majo* (Oriental witches) – beat the Soviet Union in the final match of the tournament to clinch the title of Olympic champions. The opening day of the Games, October 10, became a public holiday (Health and Sports Day) in 1966, together with the reinstallation of National Foundation Day, which had been abolished by the Occupation Forces after World War II. The Olympics also created a boom in consumerism: sales numbers of televisions peaked, hyped by the first live Olympic broadcast via satellite and the introduction of color TVs.

Historian Christian Tagsold writes that the 1964 Tokyo Olympics reaffirmed Japanese citizens' pride in the country's postwar achievements and reinforced its identity as a modern and successful nation that had stepped out of the dark shadows of the past and regained respect from the international community. And Tokyo, in the words of journalist Robert Whiting, was "transformed from a struggling third-world capital into a shiny international metropolis." This success story is undisputed and has been told many times. Yet, native Tokyoites will also remind you of the annoyances of toxic pollution, deafening noise, and horrendous smell in their city caused by the increase in traffic and the poor sewage system as well as of environmental destruction and forced relocations that enabled the frantic pre-Games construction rush.

Figure 13.1 Linking the past with the future, at Haneda airport, 2017.

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