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Introduction: Why Women's Sport? Why Japan?

Between August 1999 and December 2000, the Japanese Postal Service issued a series of commemorative 'Twentieth Century Museum Series' postage stamps. Each month, a new set of stamps would be issued, chronologically and thematically working through the most important events of the twentieth century. The fifth set of stamps issued was titled 'The Start of the Shōwa Era (1926–1989)', and included a stamp showing a woman in full running stride, her well-defined muscles exposed below her small, close-fitting uniform. This image seems to go against not only the entrenched stereotype of weak and overtly feminine Japanese women but also how we today envision women of the 1920s. This was a time in which taking part in sport at all, let alone a sport that required exertion and a revealing uniform, was almost universally considered inappropriate and even dangerous for women. It is curious, then, that the accomplishments of this Japanese woman were singled out by the Japanese Postal Service as being among the most significant moments of the twentieth century in Japan.¹

Sport has indeed played a key role in the development of modern Japan, as it has been intricately linked to the dramatic political and social transformations that took place in quick succession following the 1868 Meiji Restoration. Baseball and sumo wrestling, Japan's two unofficial national sports, have received significant attention in both the academic and popular press for the various ways that they represent change and tradition in modern Japan. To look only at these two undeniably popular, almost exclusively male-only sports, however, would be to ignore a rich and important history of Japanese participation in a wide range of sports. Over the past century, Japanese men and women alike have competed in and excelled against international competition in virtually all sports.

The success and international prominence gained by Japan's female athletes in particular seems to stand in stark contrast to the 'traditional' image of Japanese women – an image of submissiveness and powerlessness created and supported by popular and academic discourse alike. Japan is often seen as being unprogressive in terms of gender compared to other advanced economies, as women still comprise only a small fraction of managerial and governmental positions.² These statistics, however, look quite different from those of Japanese women's participation in the international sporting arena. In the past century, Japanese women have received impressive financial and popular support for their endeavours in sport, and the results have been remarkable surges of

success at such international events as the Olympic Games. A Japanese woman took part in the first-ever women's track and field events of the Olympics in 1928. On more than one occasion, female Japanese delegates have brought home more Olympic medals than their male counterparts. In 2011, the Japanese women's football team won the FIFA World Cup, the first championship for both Japan and for Asia. These facts complicate the notion that Asian women have somehow been less progressive than their Western counterparts and that Japanese women have persistently lagged behind their male counterparts.³

In considering how and why sports have come to represent an arena in which Japanese women are encouraged to excel, we begin to challenge the hegemonic portrayal of Japan as a country filled with submissive women and to appreciate the diversity of options available to women in modern and contemporary Japan. A history of Japanese women's participation in sport is, in other words, a response to those works of history, sociology and anthropology that paint Japan as a restrictive and oppressive place for women.

To date, little has been written about Japanese women's involvement in competitive sport, and it may consequently come as a surprise to some readers that sportswomen have been flourishing in Japan for as long as they have been in Western nations. Japanese women have been taking part in international sporting events for about a century, which is longer than they have had a presence in the Japanese government or the white-collar workplace. Women did not have a place in Japan's government until 1946, when they were given the right to both vote and be elected to public office.⁴ While specific data about women in white-collar positions are a bit harder to quantify, women have traditionally held supportive, non-career track positions in Japan's private sector, and these positions (on average) constitute less than half the number of employees in the company. What can women's long-standing participation in sport thus tell us about the significance of sport in Japanese society? Not only has little been written about women's role in Japan's sport history, but in the literature on women's participation in sport, one would also be hard-pressed to find significant research on sportswomen in non-Western countries.

Beyond the social impact that sport can have on society and vice versa, sport in the twentieth century has historically been closely linked with politics. It has been argued that sport is more intricately tied up with politics in Asia than in other parts of the world. As Victor Cha posits in his book on the politics of sport in Asia, '[s]port matters more in Asia because of the turbulent histories that still afflict the nations there. Historical animosities translate readily into political disputes in Asia. There is no denying that historical memories linger among Europeans, but any resentments and anxieties arguably may not sit as close to the surface as they do in Asia'.⁵ This argument does not only apply to post-Second World War resentment towards Japan from its former colonies but encompasses the entire twentieth century – before, during and after Japan spread its empire westward.⁶ So how has the nationalist fervour that is tied up

with sport, particularly in Asia, had an impact on the construction of gender in twentieth-century Japan?

A wealth of resources is available to help us answer these questions about the significance of women and sport to twentieth-century Japan. Global media outlets have, since the turn of the twentieth century, provided a running commentary on the emergence of Japanese women on the sporting scene and on their triumphs, failures, struggles and scandals. These outlets, namely newspaper articles, then radio and television broadcasts, can give us a clear picture of how dramatically attitudes towards women's sports have changed as well as how athletes and the sports they take part in have changed over the years. For example, take the following 3 August 1928 *New York Times* article about the women's 800-meter race at that year's Amsterdam Olympics:

The final of the women's 800-meter run, in which Frau Lina Radke of Germany set a world's record, plainly demonstrated that even this distance makes too great a call on feminine strength. At the finish six out of the nine runners were completely exhausted and fell headlong on the ground. Several had to be carried off the track. The little American girl, Miss Florence MacDonald, who made a gallant try but was outclassed, was in a half faint for several minutes, while even the sturdy Miss Hitomi of Japan, who finished second, needed attention before she was able to leave the field.⁷

This snippet plainly demonstrates the climate in which women of that era were competing. Because sport takes place in the public eye, there is an abundance of media coverage that can be used to look into the ways that attitudes toward Japanese women and sport have changed.

In addition to their media coverage, many female athletes as popular public figures write memoirs or autobiographies either during or after their sporting careers. Critical scholarly discourse on sport has also been written since the turn of the twentieth century, and like the media coverage this writing has changed strikingly. Over the years, opinions on what sports were or were not 'acceptable' for women has evolved considerably, and much can be said about concurrent changes in society by analysing the contemporary discourse. In short, all writing is a reflection of the time and place from which it was produced, and because of the large volume of discourse on sport, it is a valuable (and yet virtually untapped) source of information on gender in modern Japan.

Before delving into the rich resources that will help us construct an understanding of women's sport in twentieth-century Japan, it is important to understand the backdrop against which developments in sport were taking place. In other words, a basic appreciation of gender in a modern Japanese context is needed in order to see the points at which female athletes have alternately fit into and gone completely against the gender ideals of their time.

In the following sections, a brief overview of gender and sport studies in Japan is provided. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research methodology and an outline of the rest of the book.

Gender in the Japanese context

Serious academic inquiry into the issue of gender in Japan began appearing in English in the early 1980s. Prior to that time, very few academic articles and even fewer books had been written about Japan in terms of gender issues. The work that did exist generally focused on the subjugated position of women in Japanese society, and was rarely founded in any sort of unified theory, as the academic pursuit of women's and gender studies was itself in a fairly nascent state.⁸

Women's studies first began appearing in Western institutions of higher learning in the late 1960s, when feminist scholars began creating 'new courses that would facilitate more reflection on female experience and feminist aspiration'.⁹ By the 1980s, serious academic inquiry into gender in Japan had begun to appear in the West. Institutions of higher learning began to offer women's/gender studies courses and programmes by the 1980s, but gender had yet to become a topic worthy of much attention in studies of the history, anthropology, politics, economics or sociology of Japan.

In 1985, a report in *The Journal of Japanese Studies* discussed the ways that scholars of that time had begun to consider gender in Japanese studies.¹⁰ For example, the article asserts that gender ideologies were being looked at in a historical context in order to understand how certain domains have come to be defined as male or female and how unequal relations between the sexes have worsened or improved in light of specific historical circumstances. In looking at the history of women's sport in modern Japan, it is important to keep this paradigm in mind, as many changes and developments in the sporting world were closely linked to historical transformations such as industrialization and militarization.

Another way that Japan scholars in the 1980s had begun considering gender was in relation to other forms of structured inequality, namely class. Indeed, it is important to be sensitive to the fact that women in Japan can have vastly differing experiences depending on their class. In the scholarship of Japan, gender has been treated as one of many lines of stratification intersecting one another and thus impacting experiences of inequality.¹¹ Other forms of inequality have been looked at as well. For example, a growing literature on the experiences of minorities in Japan has considered ways that inequalities due to gender, class, race and sexuality have waxed and waned over time.¹² In addition to historical and anthropological works, many scholars who study Japan's economy and politics have dealt with the various ways that structured systems of inequality have affected gender relations over the past century.¹³ In the context of sportswomen in twentieth-century Japan, considering lines of inequality that go beyond gender will prove to be very important, as class played a major role in the development of leisure activities (generally available only for the upper classes) and competitive sports (at first only popular among the working class).

The ways that definitions of gender in Japan are affected by Japanese views of other societies (and vice versa) have also been considered in the scholarship. For example, during the Meiji period Victorian ideals of male and female roles were often emulated by elite Japanese in order to impress the West with the nation's modernity.¹⁴ In post-war society, American ideals have similarly affected definitions and conceptions of gender, sometimes resulting in significant change to policy and/or attitudes towards women's education and participation in politics and the workforce.¹⁵

This angle is important to keep in mind with respect to the history of Japanese women and sport. Competitive women's sport stemmed directly from Japan's interactions with the West and from subsequent changes in the education system that included the addition of physical education for girls and young women. The first international competitions at which Japanese women competed served as windows into the wider (primarily Western) world, as athletes competed against women from different nations and became more attuned to the differences between women's sports in Japan and in the Western world. As the twentieth century progressed, the trend of globalization became increasingly entwined with women's sports, with global trends seeping ever more easily into Japan. It thus remains important to consider this international dimension of gender when looking at the history of female athletes in Japan.

Moving beyond conventional categories

As evidenced by the sheer volume of references in the notes of the earlier section, the categories of proposed study laid out in the 1985 *Journal of Japanese Studies* article have been covered somewhat exhaustively in the work of scholars in subsequent years. This is not to say that these categories do not remain important and fundamental to considerations of gender in Japan, but it does suggest that in order for groundbreaking work to continue being generated, new and different paradigms for considering gender must be used. Indeed, more recent approaches to looking at gender in Japan have been arguably more dynamic than the pioneering works in the field. A brief consideration of some of these alternative ways to consider gender, in conjunction with their more conventional antecedents, can aide us in understanding how studies of gender in Japan may be applicable to the way gender is conceived on a more theoretical, universal level. This will ultimately aide us in using a study on women and sport in Japan to better conceptualize women and sport universally.

One example of a different paradigm for considering gender has involved looking at how a feminist consciousness and feminist action have taken root in Japanese society.¹⁶ These works have focused on the backdrop against which feminist thought emerged in Japan (i.e. the ways in which women in earlier eras

struggled against patriarchy, capitalism and the state) and the way feminisms manifest themselves in contemporary Japanese society. Works on feminisms make a particular impact on universal discussions of how modernity and gender have intersected. Scholars have explored certain seemingly unique aspects of Japanese modernity, along with related particularities in their women's rights or feminist movements when compared with their Western counterparts. For example, unique facets of Japan's modernity have included the following aspects: that the (Western) understanding of Japanese modernity was overlaid with theories of cultural difference, that the 'tradition' against which modernity opposed was one of a feudal economy, hierarchical relationships and military rule, and that Japanese modernity was imbued with characteristics of a colonial and imperial power.¹⁷

Several prominent Japanese feminists in the early twentieth century talked of the main dilemma for women being that they had to 'choose between dependence on an individual male or dependence on a patriarchal state'.¹⁸ Thus some of these women, in particular Yosano Akiko, advocated for women's individualism, since they believed that change at the national level could only come about through women changing on the individual level. The lasting effects of feminisms in Japan have been contested by various scholars, some highlighting primarily their progressive and positive outcomes but others focusing more on their shortcomings. For example, it has been argued that sexual differences between men and women cannot be considered the *only* differences that matter, but rather should be recognized as part of a complex interrelationship with various other differences such as race and class.¹⁹ The legacy of Meiji-era rights advocacy is indeed complex as a result of its socio-historical circumstances. That is, when rights are considered as part of a complex web of political and social power, economic interdependence and competing views of what should constitute women's dignity, no straightforward depiction of 'women's rights movements' or 'feminisms' can accurately describe what exactly women have fought for over the past century in Japan.²⁰

What looking at feminist movements *can* tell us definitively, however, is that many of the causes and rights that Japanese women have fought for have been different from those fought for in Western societies. Whether it is because of Japan's imperial past or simply because its citizens espouse different values, the trajectories of Japanese feminisms and women's rights movements require that we stretch the conceptual framework of Western feminisms to include the concerns of women in societies with histories very unlike our own. There are many overlaps between the discourse of feminisms and that of women on the playing field. In Western and Japanese scholarship alike, research on women in sport has focused largely on the ways and reasons that women have been marginalized over the years, in much the same way that feminist scholarship does.

The inclusion of masculinity into the discussion of gender in Japan in recent years has also helped further gender studies on a more universal level. While 'gender studies' theoretically ought to focus on issues of sexuality and human experience across both genders, the field has historically been conflated with women's studies in both institutions of higher learning and in the scholarship produced. Certainly women's issues and feminisms are important aspects of gender studies, and their previous exclusion from many scholarly canons compels some scholars to focus solely on these issues. However, this focus on women can sometimes be to the detriment of studies of men and masculinity within the 'gender studies' rubric. Several books and articles focusing on Japan have worked to change this imbalance, however, and in doing so have opened up new possibilities for doing gender studies in other societies.²¹

The consideration of masculinity is important for historical studies of women in sport, as athletic endeavours have long been associated not only with masculinity but also with the masculinization of women. Several of the athletes we will be introduced to shortly faced serious scepticism and critique precisely because they were venturing into a realm that was considered to be too masculine for ladies. Theoretical considerations of femininity and masculinity in women's sport will also factor into Chapter 8 of this book, as we look at the ways sportswomen in Japan have been portrayed and received over the past century.

Another contribution that scholars of Japan have made to the broader understanding of gender can be seen in several works focused on performance. For example, the ways that women have taken on different gendered roles on stage have been looked at critically.²² Women entered a previously all-male world of acting in late Meiji-era Japan, which happened to be right around the same time that women were beginning to enter the male world of competitive sport. By the early twentieth century, women began to grace the pages of newspapers as both actresses and athletes, thus dramatically changing the fields (of acting and of sports) and contributing to a new image of womanhood and femininity in modern Japan. Interestingly, if this parallel between actresses and sportswomen were to be drawn out to the twenty-first century, it could be argued that women have not only become integral parts of their fields but that in many cases they have taken over these previously all-male domains and now actually epitomize theatre and sports. For example, actresses like Kikuchi Rinko, Kuriyama Chiaki and Miyazawa Rie are just as famous as their male actor counterparts, and sportswomen like Arakawa Shizuka, Takahashi Naoko and Tani Ryōko are equally famous as any male athlete in contemporary Japan. These women represent a new kind of ideal in the worlds of acting and sports.²³ Keeping this parallel in mind will be helpful in conceptualizing the various ways that women's 'performance' on the playing field throughout the twentieth century was interacting with what it meant to be a woman in modern Japan.

Related to the idea of 'performing' is the notion that certain sports are more or less acceptable for women. Certain 'performance' sports such as figure skating

and synchronized swimming have long been considered the most appropriate for women, while those sports associated with such 'masculine' traits as heavy physical contact or bulky muscles (e.g. wrestling, weightlifting) have been deemed less appropriate for women. Just as the above-mentioned, less-conventional ways of considering gender in Japan have contributed significantly to literatures on both gender (in a universal context) and Japan, studies of sport and gender can serve a similar end.

Sport in Japan, as elsewhere, has historically been male dominated, as has the scholarship and commentary about it. The entrance of women into the sporting arena is a subject that has warranted attention from scholars who focus on other parts of the world, particularly in the West, but to date very little exists on women in sport in Japan.²⁴ Such a paucity of English work leads Western audiences to have a skewed view of women's contribution to sport in Japan (i.e. say 'sport' and 'Japan' and most people will think baseball, sumo and perhaps martial arts – all traditionally male domains). I hope through this book to make clear that sport has been integral to the history of modern Japan, and this *includes* women's sport. A brief consideration of some of the work on women's sport in the West can give us insight into the use of such a study in the Japanese context.

Susan Cahn, who has done a detailed study of gender and sports in the twentieth-century United States, asserts that '[b]y looking at how athletes, educators, sporting officials, promoters, and journalists have clashed and compromised over gender issues in sport, we can learn something about how ordinary and influential people create society's gender and sexual arrangements, and how their actions are conditioned by the circumstances and beliefs of their time'.²⁵ Through first considering the 'feminine' sports such as archery and bicycling that women participated in during the first part of the century and progressing to discuss the reaction against women's entry into more aggressive and competitive sports, Cahn describes how US society and female sport stars alike have struggled to define their roles as both women and athletes. One of the points she stresses in her account is the importance of the public's acceptance of female athletes and how this acceptance has changed and been influenced over time depending on the race, class and perceived sexual orientation of the athletes. The media has played an important role in the ways female athletes have been constructed, as they tend to focus either on the 'presence or absence of femininity among female athletes, and the comparative capabilities of men and women in sport'.²⁶ Looking at the ways the media and sport commentators have fashioned the female athlete in Japanese history, just as Cahn has done in the United States, can tell us much about the prevailing views and biases that have existed over time in Japanese society at large.

Feminist scholars of sport have criticized the way that women have historically been excluded from the sporting arena, either through explicit economic

constraints and a lack of opportunity for women or through certain activities that reinforce gender inequality and a certain structure of power relations in society.²⁷ Just as women have been marginalized in other arenas of society (e.g. politics, workplace), they have historically experienced similar discrimination in sport. Sport tends to prescribe 'appropriate' gendered behaviour and appearance, as certain sports that emphasize physical attractiveness and aesthetics (e.g. figure-skating, synchronized swimming, gymnastics) have been deemed more acceptable for women than those that do not (e.g. bodybuilding, wrestling, track and field). While globalization has resulted in somewhat more universal norms regarding sport, the way that female athletes have been viewed in the West, which is where virtually all the theoretical feminist studies of sport originate, differs from the way they are viewed in Japan. Thus a study of women's sport in Japan can highlight the historical construction of gender norms in a new way.

One of the ways in which women have been marginalized in the sporting arena has been the relative absence of their presence in the historical development of sport.²⁸ One book and two doctoral dissertations (including my own, from which the present book emerged) have been written expressly about women's sport in Japan. Laura Spielvogel's *Working Out in Japan: Shaping the Female Body in Tokyo Fitness Clubs* details the ways that fitness clubs can serve as a unique window into many facets of contemporary Japanese society, including cultural conceptions of work, play, aging, beauty, power and gender.²⁹ Similarly, Elise Edwards' dissertation, 'The "Ladies League": Gender Politics, National Identity, and Professional Sports in Japan', looks at the way professional women's football has embodied social forces such as nationalism and gender ideology in contemporary Japan. The primary mode of data collection for both Spielvogel and Edwards was participant observation, the former working as an aerobics instructor in a popular Tokyo fitness club and the latter serving as both player and coach on a women's professional football team in Japan.

While these detailed accounts provide much insight into two specific facets of women's physical activity in contemporary Japan, as anthropologists the focus of their work is not on the history of women in sport. In looking at the subject matter from a historical and theoretical perspective, I have endeavoured in this book to provide this historical background so as to contextualize women's sport both in Japan and universally.

A major strength of the ethnographic approach used by Spielvogel and Edwards, of course, is their ability to use first-hand accounts of Japanese women involved in sport. Their inclusion of quotes and anecdotes gained through their extensive fieldwork enables the reader to get a nuanced perspective on what it means to be a female athlete in contemporary Japan. While the methodology of my project was designed to focus more on the history than on the contemporary position of sportswomen, I believe that future work on my subject would benefit from further ethnographic inquiry. While my work relies heavily on autobiographical works by female athletes and corresponding media coverage,

the incorporation of athletes' voices obtained through ethnographic fieldwork could help to fill in more of the gaps in this still nascent line of inquiry.

Sport studies in Japan

A common reaction when I tell people I am researching female athletes in modern Japan is one of surprise and confusion. I believe that there are several reasons for this, one being that sport studies constitute a relatively new and uncommon field, particularly within the US academy. English-language works that do fall under the rubric of 'sport studies' tend to be spread out across several disciplines, thus resulting in a somewhat ethereal 'field'. Scholarly studies of sport written in English can be found in works of history,³⁰ sociology,³¹ anthropology³² and gender studies,³³ not to mention area studies, which are themselves already interdisciplinary.³⁴ Along these same lines, sport scholars in the West tend not to be housed within one department, but rather in their respective departments or professional schools, as is the case with specialists in sports medicine, business or law.

Within Japan, the field of sport studies is somewhat more cohesive and well established, with departments of 'physical education' (*taiiku gaku*) or 'sports sciences' (*taiiku kagaku*, *supōtsu kagaku*) often uniting scholars with specialties that vary from sports ethics to history to exercise physiology to sports management. As Maguire and Nakayama point out in the introduction to their volume, *Japan, Sport and Society*, Japan also has 'arguably the largest national sociology of sport membership',³⁵ resulting in a constant renewal and growth of the field. During the course of my fieldwork in Tokyo I attended numerous sports-related study groups, ranging in topic from the history of martial arts to the discourse of body culture, and every time the room was filled to capacity with faculty and students alike. Also, several academic journals such as the *Japan Journal of Sport Sociology* (*Supōtsu shakaigaku kenkyū*) and *Contemporary Sports Critique* (*Gendai supōtsu hyōron*) contribute regularly to the analytical literature on sport and Japanese society.

Sport studies in Japan began with practical, pedagogical and policy-related work and have evolved to include much more critical and cultural approaches, including symbolic analyses.³⁶ The first Department of Physical Education was set up at Tokyo University of Education (now Tsukuba University) in 1949 as a response to government reforms expanding the requirements for physical education in all levels of Japanese education. In the early 1960s as universities and graduate programmes grew in number, so too did the number of sports studies departments and scholars. Following the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, government and corporate spending on sport and physical education increased, and the national interest in sport reached a new peak.

Against this backdrop of high spending and attention to sport, critical sport studies began to emerge in Japan in the 1970s. In considering the cultural and sociological implications of Japanese involvement in sport and physical activity, several quantitative analyses of sports participation were published in this decade.³⁷ Throughout the 1980s more sports-related work in the social sciences and humanities began to appear, and scholars' approaches to sport shifted from being only pedagogical or quantitative to including more cultural studies approaches that combined anthropology, history, philosophy, gender and media studies. In 1991, the Japan Sport Sociology Society (*Nihon supōtsu shakaigakkai*) was founded and has since remained the eminent organization for sports scholars in Japan, including cultural anthropologists, sociologists, historians and philosophers.³⁸ In 2002, the Japan Society for Sport and Gender Studies (*Nihon supōtsu to jendā gakkai*) was founded, an organization that runs regular workshops and lectures, publishes the *Journal of Sport and Gender Studies* and maintains an online forum on issues of gender and sport in contemporary Japan.³⁹

The academic community in sport studies in Japan is undoubtedly thriving, although within this community, as in virtually all groups of sport scholars, the majority of work is still being done by men and about men's sport. In more recent years, several prominent female scholars have been adding to the diversity of the scholarship, and the amount of material on women's sport produced in Japan continues to grow at a rapid pace. I have relied on the work of many of these female scholars, whose work can be found quoted throughout this book and listed in the 'Japanese Sources' section of the Bibliography. As perhaps the most well-known contemporary Japanese scholar of women's sport history, Raita Kyoko, stated in the late 1990s, 'a great deal of research has been carried out in Japan on the subject of the history of physical education for women, [but] not much progress has been made in elucidating the history of women's sport'.⁴⁰ She explains that in addition to a disproportionate focus on physical education over sport, those works to date that have looked at sport have focused on individual athletes rather than comprehensive accounts of Japanese women's involvement in competitive sport. While I hope that this book helps to bridge this gap, it should also be noted that some progress has been made by other female sport sociologists and historians in Japan since the time Raita made this observation.⁴¹

While contemporary scholarship has indeed progressed to include many insightful and increasingly diverse academic critiques, still the bulk of work in the Japanese language is instructive rather than analytical. Bookstores tend to catalogue their 'sport' books next to other books about leisure or hobbies, such as crafts, cooking and travel. While one can usually find a handful of works in the 'sport' section that are critical academic works of sport sociology or history, the vast majority include such pedagogical content as how to improve your golf swing or what the best foods are to eat after running a marathon.

Another major constituent of Japan's literature on sport can be found in its booming sport comics (*supokon manga*) industry.⁴² These comics, like the instructive manuals, are intended for popular rather than critical consumption and are read by both males and females of all ages in Japan. And, of course, the most widespread literature on sport can be found in the media that covers it in daily newspapers, weekly tabloids, television and radio broadcasts and in various online formats.

Methodology

In considering the ways that female athletes have helped shape and been shaped by twentieth-century Japanese society, it is crucial to consider these popular media in addition to the insightful academic work by both Japanese and foreign sport scholars. For this reason, a cultural studies approach is used to deal with the multiple facets of women's sport in modern Japan. This approach combines textual interpretation, historical background and observation.⁴³

The bulk of the research for this book was conducted in the periodical and newspaper reading rooms of the National Diet Library in Tokyo. In addition to newspapers and popular and scholarly journals, I relied heavily on autobiographies and biographies of women athletes. I drew on work by Japanese scholars ranging in topic from body culture to gender and the media in sports. It was essential that most of my research be carried out in Japan, since so little work in English has been written on the topic of Japanese women in sport. While in Japan, I benefited greatly from my affiliation with the Institute of Health and Sport Sciences at the University of Tsukuba. My advisor there, Dr Shimizu Satoshi, informed me about pertinent study groups and presentations that were helpful in informing the direction of my fieldwork.

Because the bulk of my research was text based (as opposed to being primarily participant observation), my narrative naturally began to gravitate towards those figures who appeared most commonly in the media and scholarly material, namely high-profile athletes. I have carefully considered how focusing on the achievements of a number of individual, well-known athletes lends itself to the construction of a history of Japanese women in sport. As will become clear in the following chapters, the individual athletes that I focus on did not merely enter the scene, impress the nation, then fade into obscurity. Rather, the intense media scrutiny they received (from the very beginning) led to the reach of these women going far and wide, extending well beyond the short time that they actually competed.

In the early twentieth century, high-profile female athletes appearing in a heavily male-dominated sporting world sent the message that competitive sport for women was even possible, and the concurrent growth of physical

education and school sport programmes for girls suggests that this message was being embraced by the public. Throughout the twentieth century and up to the present day, female celebrity athletes have been held up as role models and had an arguably profound impact on the way Japanese women think about and take part in sport.⁴⁴ Sociological research about popular participation of girls and women in sport supports this argument, which is to say that across all segments of society the participation of females has grown through the past century, with particularly inspiring events (e.g. the women's volleyball win at the 1964 Olympics) provoking surges in popular participation.⁴⁵

While textual research on high-profile female athletes was the primary source of information for the history contained within these pages, I also felt it important to observe sport on a non-elite level in order to gain a better understanding of the role of sport for women in contemporary Japan. During one of my extended research trips to Japan, I joined a co-ed track club with regular practices in Tokyo and took part in several road races and relay races (*ekiden*). Beyond the camaraderie I enjoyed from the team and the necessary physical activity that helped to balance out months of sitting at a desk reading and writing, this experience gave me a glimpse into the world of women's sport, both competitive and recreational. While a small number of women in the track club would regularly compete in both national and international running races (particularly marathons), the vast majority joined for reasons of fitness and/or social interaction. Many had taken part in track clubs during secondary school; some had come to running later in life. The nature of my project was such that my participation in the track club constituted only a small fraction of my overall research, and yet it ultimately gave the work a different flavour from one based on textual examination alone.

While recognizing all the limitations of participant observation, it is important to acknowledge that such activities can provide access into certain facets unattainable through solely text-based research. Anthropologists have long debated the problems of insider and outsider status and have made it clear that pure objectivity is impossible to attain. Nonetheless, even in this age of postmodernist critique and extreme self-reflexive caution, participation remains a critical component to most works of anthropology and sociology. My experiences in competitive racing (both before and during my fieldwork) helped to shape my perspective on women's sport in contemporary Japan and have resulted in a more textured account. As I ran against a strong wind during a race, heard a crowd cheering as I took the *ekiden tasuki* (sash) from my teammate or simply made the trip to the track for practice on a cold January night, I certainly felt throughout the course of my fieldwork that I was, at the least, gaining a great appreciation of the subject matter that I was studying. In short, the cultural history of women in sport that I have produced was informed and created primarily through textual research but was coloured by my own experience in the field – or on the track, as it were.

Book outline

Chapter 2 will locate the discussion of Japanese women in sport within the larger context of women in sport in East Asia. This will include a consideration of the role that sport has played in the sociopolitical history of modern Japan. A brief discussion of the history of women's sport in surrounding East Asian nations will be included in order to highlight the relative progressiveness of Japanese women on the international sporting scene. The objective of this chapter is to further acquaint the reader with modern Japanese society before looking at the history of their female sportswomen in greater detail.

Chapters 3 through 7 discuss the history of Japanese women's participation in competitive sport, including their participation in the Olympic Games from 1928 onwards. After looking briefly at Japanese women's role in pre-modern Japanese 'sport' (namely martial arts), the focus is turned to modern sport and its evolving relationship with women in Japan. The introduction and growing significance of Western sport for both men and women following the late nineteenth-century Meiji Restoration is examined in Chapter 3. As Japan sought to rapidly modernize and Westernize during this time period, sport became an increasingly important component of Japanese society and of the education system. Several female sport pioneers (both athletes and educators) are looked at, including Nikaidō Tokuyo, who established the first women's school of physical education in the 1920s. This school would serve as the training grounds for Japan's first female Olympian, Hitomi Kinue, who is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Having laid out the foundations of women's competitive sport in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 focuses on the entry of Japanese women to the international sporting scene. The first female Olympian was a track and field star named Hitomi Kinue, who had already gained fame in national and international competitions by the time she took part in the 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam. These Olympics were the first in which women's track and field events were included, and Hitomi's success at these Games is evidence that Japanese women have quite literally been on the front lines in the development of women's sport in the twentieth century. Hitomi paved the road for a rapidly growing number of Japanese women to compete in both Summer and Winter Olympics from 1928 onwards. Chapter 4 will consider not only Hitomi and her contemporary female sport pioneers (from the 1920s and early 1930s) but also the larger social issues of how these women were viewed by a relatively conservative Japanese society.

Chapter 5 looks at several more pioneering Japanese sportswomen, with its starting point being the 1936 Berlin Olympics. It was at these Games where Japanese excitement over the Olympics reached a new pinnacle, as the nation was gearing up to play host to its own (ultimately cancelled) mega-event in 1940. The year 1936 also saw the first Olympic gold medal brought home by

a Japanese woman, and with this a new standard was set to which Japanese sportswomen would aspire throughout the rest of the twentieth century. This chapter looks particularly at how Japanese attitudes towards female athletes changed as women began to represent Japan so favourably at international sporting events. This was a time, after all, when Japan was aggressively trying to assert itself politically and militarily, and sport came to take on a growing nationalistic significance as Japan's empire spread across Asia. The years covered in this chapter will be the late 1930s to the early 1960s; thus the relatively brief lull in Japan's sporting culture that occurred during and after the Second World War will be looked at. By the late 1950s, the nation's post-war social and economic rebound was in full effect, and in 1959 Tokyo was (again) selected as the first non-Western nation to host the Olympic Games. As Japan prepared to welcome the world to its shores for this event in 1964, the national fervour over several highly successful female athletes and teams would escalate even further.

Chapter 6 begins with a look at the pivotal 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. One of the most significant turning points in the history of women's sport in Japan came with the gold medal success of the women's volleyball team at these Olympics. The women of this team, who were dubbed the 'witches of the Orient', are discussed in this chapter, as is their controversial coach who applied his military training to his coaching techniques. As Japan's economy flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, so too did women's sport, and the rest of Chapter 6 examines ways that Japan's post-war economy manifested itself in women's sport.

Chapter 7 looks at Japanese sportswomen in a contemporary context, from 1980 to the present day. The way that global controversies like the 1980 Olympic boycott of the Moscow Games affected women athletes in Japan will be considered. The chapter looks at a number of contemporary sportswomen and the role they play in Japanese society, including the ways they have been commercialized and sometimes (though often times not) sexualized.

The final chapter of the book is primarily analytical and synthesizes various theoretical issues raised by the historical account of Japanese women's involvement in sport. These issues include modernity, globalization, commercialization, spectacle and femininity. These topics have been considered in other general studies of sport and the Olympic Games, but examining them in the context of Japanese women provides a fresh perspective. Not only do these theoretical concepts become more concrete and comprehensible through individual case studies, but also our understanding of the concepts themselves can be altered and broadened by looking at examples of non-Western, non-male athletes. After examining these theoretical concepts, the book concludes with a consideration of potential future projects.

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