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Theoretical Concerns Surrounding Japanese Women in Sport

[S]port has become a firmly established and significant part of everyday life in modern society. In Western and Eastern European countries, in the USSR, Australia, Japan, and particularly in the United States, the indications are evident: the huge investments of time, energy, and wealth; the continuing and interrelated growth of participation and spectatorship; the spread of sport themes in high, middle, and mass culture; the rapid increase of sport as an international activity with its own techniques, jargon, and values which ignore national boundaries. Thus sport has emerged as a major social institution of worldwide scale, which directly or indirectly affects the lives of all of us.
Talamini and Page 1973

The importance of sport to society has long been recognized, as is made clear in the above quote by sport sociologist Charles H. Page. Since the time Page wrote that in 1973, sport has grown to take on an arguably greater role in all societies around the globe. Whether or not one is personally involved in sport, images of iconic athletes are ubiquitous; sport appears daily in all forms of media; sport metaphors have permeated our language and physical education and sport are entrenched in our children's education systems. Mega-events such as the Olympics and the World Cup have become global phenomena and can be seen among the few forums that regularly bring together people from around the world and garner mass media attention. Such events are far from static, however, and have seen major changes over the past century as a result of modernization, globalization and commercialization. In spite of the fact that sport embodies so many noteworthy components of contemporary global society, relatively few sports or athletes have received rigorous scholarly attention.

In particular, little attention been given to Japan's role in global sport, in spite of the fact that the nation has pioneered breakthroughs in race and gender in international competitions since the early twentieth century.¹ Japan was the first Asian nation to send athletes to the Olympics and to have a representative on the International Olympic Committee; they sent a woman to participate in the first ever women's Olympic track and field event and they hosted the first Olympic Games (both Summer and Winter) outside of the Western world. In this sense, sport can be read as one of several sites where Japan began to

truly integrate with the global community after so many years of isolation prior to the Meiji Restoration. In the currency of international sport – bronze, silver and gold medals – Japan began to show its wealth early on, bringing home medals from every Summer Olympics that they took part in from 1920 onwards. While sport in Japan, as in the rest of the world, has always had a dominant male presence, it is important to recognize that Japanese women were an integral part of Japan's sporting movement since the 1920s. At a time when the majority of nations were still strongly opposed to women's participation in competitive sport, Japan joined the few Western nations that allowed female representation in international competitions beginning in the 1920s.²

While Japan's progress towards increased female representation in international sport more or less mirrors that of other industrialized nations, Japan today continues to be regarded as a nation lagging behind in terms of gender equity. In exploring some of the major themes that have developed over the course of Japanese women's participation in sport, my hope for the conclusion of this book is to shed light on how and why images of powerlessness and frailty have persisted throughout the decades. While my objective is not to diminish the significance of the very real inequalities that still exist between the genders in contemporary Japan (as in many nations), I do hope to provide an alternative reading of these inequalities. The primary goal of this book as a whole has been to chronicle Japanese women's participation in sport, so I have relied thus far on written materials marshalled into a comprehensive historical account. With the understanding that there are multiple ways to interpret history, and that the takeaway message from learning about what these women have done will differ from person to person, I believe that a consideration of some recurring and overarching themes will be useful for better understanding the complexity and the significance of the historical account.

In order to do so, I will be looking in more depth at some of the 'master metaphors' touched on throughout the historical narrative of Japanese women's participation in sport.³ These metaphors include modernity, globalization, commercialization, spectacle/performance and femininity. Scholars have explored many of these themes in the context of sport, so several theoretical frameworks exist and will be drawn upon in my consideration of how these themes intersect with the history of female athletes in Japan. While these themes will be used to synthesize issues that have been raised over the past century, I have taken caution to try to avoid making blanket statements about how women in sport have affected Japanese society. I offer instead a holistic reading of the phenomenon – one that enables readers to recognize the depth of a seemingly simple subject, and to question pre-existing notions of sport, of Japanese women and of modern Japan.⁴ To this end, I have not endeavoured to investigate the very foundations of the theoretical frameworks with which I work. My objective is both to initiate a discussion of Japanese women and sport that starts to go beyond the superficial treatment they have received in the (particularly English language) literature thus

far and to consider the possibilities that these discussions can open up for future research.

Modernity

While all of the themes raised by women's sport are fundamentally interconnected, modernity is perhaps the most all-encompassing. To use Marilyn Ivy's definition,

[Modernity] indicates not only the urban energies, capitalist structures of life, and mechanical and electrical forms of reproduction that came into sharpest relief in the Japan of the 1920s. It indicates the problem of the nation-state and its correlation with a capitalist colonialism that ensured Japan would be pulled into a global geopolitical matrix from the mid-nineteenth century on. It indicates as well ... novel forms of image representation, mass media, scientific disciplines.⁵

From this definition alone, it is clear that capitalism and globalization are core components to be considered when looking at modernity within the context of the sport. New forms of image representation and media are also extremely important to sport, as it has long relied on some form of media in order to spread its popularity. Moreover, as Maurice Roche asserts in his book on mega-events and modernity, 'Mega-events ... were important and influential forces in the history of modern international culture in general.'⁶ So how can we see modernity being played out in the history of Japanese women in sport, and how can these women's participation help us better understand modernity in Japan?

Japanese women began participating in competitive and international sport at a time in which Japan was going through a concentrated period of modernization. Having developed from the physical education courses that were introduced into girls' classrooms at the end of the nineteenth century, competitive sport was representative of state efforts to bring Japan into the modern, global community.

While modern Japanese history scholars have long debated Japan's path to modernity (with some like Masao Miyoshi sidestepping the issue by simply contending that modernity is 'a regional term peculiar to the West'),⁷ few would argue the fact that Japan did experience a unique form of 'modernization' (as we in the West have conceptualized the term) following the Meiji Restoration. Their experience was unique because, while it took place at the same time many other nations were modernizing, it occurred on the heels of several centuries of near complete isolation from the rest of the world. In part because of this unique juxtaposition of isolationism and modernization, studies of Japan's path towards modernity have been varied and deep. However, work that seriously considers the role of gender has been relatively neglected from the canon of

modernization studies of Japan, as pointed out in the introduction to Molony and Uno's volume, *Gendering Modern Japanese History*.⁸ Moreover, given the nascent state of sport studies of Japan, few scholars have considered the role of sport in Japan's modernization or the role of modernization in Japan's sport history.

Sport historian Allen Guttmann has explored some of the reasons for the 'undeniable fact that the Japanese were more receptive to modern sports than other Asians were'.⁹ Guttmann posits several reasons for Japan's unique receptivity of Western/modern sport. For example, three of the key components of modern sport – rationalization, quantification and the goal of breaking records – can be found in some of Japan's earliest sport-like activities, like *kyūdō*, Japanese archery.¹⁰ While it would be too simple to suggest that modern sport spread so quickly in Japan *because of* these earlier traditions of rationalized, quantified activities in pre-modern Japan, it is fair to say that certain characteristics of modern sports *were* present in Japan before Western sport was introduced to the country and gained rapid popularity in the late nineteenth century. This is true not only for the more widely studied sports such as baseball but also for women's sport as well. For example, we have seen that women practiced certain forms of martial arts in the eighteenth century and were thus potentially more receptive to Western sport when it arrived.

Moreover, as Guttmann has also asserted, Japan's modernization (in general) can be somewhat more easily understood when one considers these precursors of modern sport that were present before Western influences took hold.¹¹ Scholars have pointed this out in the context of Japan's modernization in general – it is thought that certain precursors of modernity were present in pre-modern Japanese culture, enabling the country to modernize so rapidly after the Meiji Restoration.¹² With respect to gender, I would argue that the activities that Japanese women were engaged in prior to the modernization efforts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries similarly help us understand the rapid changes (i.e. the influx of modernity) that occurred for women from the 1920s onwards.

As we saw in the case of physical education pioneer Toyoda Fuyu, some young women from higher social strata were practising martial arts prior to the Meiji Restoration and the ensuing modernization of Japan. Toyoda was trained and skilled in the use of the *naginata*, or long pole sword, in the 1850s, and one can reasonably assume that other women were trained in this skill at that time as well.¹³ The formalization of physical education in girls' and young women's education after the Meiji Restoration occurred more or less simultaneously with that of their male counterparts, with certain restrictions in place with respect to which activities were considered both safe and appropriate for young women. Relative to boys and young men, females were expected to dress more demurely and to avoid those activities that might put undue strain on their bodies (which is why sports like tennis, golf, dancing, gymnastics and

swimming were popular for girls and women in the Meiji era). This practice does not suggest that Japan was in any way 'behind' with respect to modernization, as women in the West were practising these same sports at the same time. On the contrary, it suggests that from the moment Japan opened its ports to the West and began incorporating new educational and leisure activities into its society, 'progress' was being made at a similar rate as the West. This parallel progression is exemplified by Hitomi Kinue's appearance at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam – not only did she take part in the first women's track and field events but also her silver medal performance indicates that she was performing at a level the same as or above her Western counterparts.

In a more concrete sense, Hitomi and her successors can also be seen as embodying the 'novel forms of image representation, mass media' laid out in Ivy's definition of modernity. International sport has long represented one of the few venues where Japanese citizens were able to see where they stood in relation to men and women from other parts of the world. While the actual number of Japanese people travelling abroad for events like the Olympics started off small, the media coverage of the event enabled many Japanese citizens to experience the event with their own ears and eyes. In the early years of Japanese women's participation, printed media was the most popular means of disseminating information, and it just so happened that the heavily publicized female athlete Hitomi was a newspaper journalist and avid writer. As early as 1925, Hitomi's athletic achievements were gaining her sizeable newspaper coverage. For example, an article in the *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* from March 1925 shows a photograph of an eighteen-year-old Hitomi about to release a javelin, with the headline 'A Transition Time in the World of Women's Competitions'.¹⁴ Many articles both by and about her would follow in the coming years, slowly changing the public's idea of who should appear in the 'Sports' section of the newspaper.

As technology progressed, the public could not only see but also hear the sports in their own living rooms. As exemplified by NHK announcer Kasai Sansei's live broadcast from Maehata's gold medal race in Berlin in 1936, these broadcasts proved to be extremely memorable and would make lasting impressions on the Japanese public. By the 1950s, the television had been introduced to Japan, with the ability to watch sporting events serving as a major selling point for the luxury commodity.¹⁵ By 1960, more than nine million Japanese households had television sets, meaning more than nine million families were able to see live-action Olympic events from Rome that year, all in the comfort of their own homes.¹⁶

The rapid Japanese progress in technology, in other words modernizing forms of image representation, had a significant impact on Japanese women's participation and success in sport. When Hitomi returned from her competitions abroad, she was able to tell the public what she had seen – for example, that competitive sport was not just an activity for school-aged children in Europe

and that even married women and mothers were able to safely take part. When Maehata won her gold medal in Berlin, people in Japan were able to palpably feel the excitement of a women's sporting event as never before, as is made clear by the photographs of people sitting by their radios, arms raised in the air, shouting *banzai!* as they heard the live broadcast.¹⁷ As more and more people came to be able to watch the events on television, the notion that women were becoming an integral part of the sporting world was cemented in people's minds.

In this sense, the impact of modernization on Japanese women's participation and success in sport becomes quite evident. The image of a rapidly modernization Japan is often placed in contrast to a stagnant image of the Japanese woman whose rights remain limited and whose way of life remains more or less unchanged over the years (i.e. still the good wife, wise mother). However, the historical narrative of Japanese women in sport provides proof that this has not always been the case. Rather than always representing the 'traditional' to which the 'modern' can be compared, a handful of influential Japanese women were not only *part* of the changes that were occurring from the 1920s onwards but indeed *propelled* these changes by their very actions.

Globalization and commercialization

Of all the changes fuelled by modernization in the twentieth century, perhaps two of the most pervasive have been globalization and commercialization. While these two themes have their own complex histories and tendencies, I believe that in the context of sport they can logically be considered in tandem. We have seen in the historical narrative the ways that sport has come to be increasingly commercialized (e.g. the case of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles). While the rather sudden change towards corporate sponsorship in the Olympics can be traced back to 1984, this change was fostered by much larger transformations in the global community that were being brought on by a combination of political, cultural and technological factors.

The end of the Cold War marked a period of increased openness, as people, ideas and products flowed much more freely across national borders. Simultaneously, technology such as satellite broadcasting enabled images and ideologies to instantly reach more and farther-reaching locales. Before focusing on the ways in which Japanese female athletes have both embodied and made an impact on our conceptions of globalization and commercialization, I will briefly look at the way these two processes have interacted with the sporting industry in contemporary Japan.

According to Takayuki Yamashita, who researches how Japanese sport has changed with the tides of globalization, the sharp rise in the value of the Japanese yen in the mid-1980s corresponded with a sudden shift of Japanese

production from domestic to overseas, which ultimately led to significant changes within the Japanese sporting industry.¹⁸ One such important change was the move towards privatization, which, as anyone who follows the political economy of Japan knows, is a trend that has happened or is in the process of happening across many different industries in the country, from the railways to primary education to the enormous postal savings system, all currently or recently having undergone privatization.

Leisure activities and sport in Japan were heavily influenced by the privatization efforts from the mid-1980s onwards, as government support for such activities began to wane and business enterprises began to take over. For example, sport sociologist Shimizu Satoshi has observed the influx of privately owned sports clubs in both rural and urban areas over the past several decades. These clubs, which generally have steep membership fees, are pushing out publicly funded gymnasiums that can no longer afford to operate as their clientele dwindles. Similarly, some primary and secondary schools' sport clubs are suffering from the growing popularity of privately owned sport 'camps' or training centres that attract talented student athletes who have the funds to pay for the higher level coaching that these centres afford.¹⁹ Unfortunately, this means that corporate interests in the sporting industry have contributed to the disintegration of communities and the growth of the gap between rich and poor. These are examples of the ways that globalization and commercialization have manifested themselves in Japan's sporting world and have had a resounding effect on a society that has long recognized itself as being populated predominantly by middle-class citizens.

As sport in Japan began taking more market-oriented approaches, the symbolic meaning of sport came to be linked more and more with aesthetics over discipline. Interestingly, the advertising campaigns that emerged from this new trend in commercializing sports tended to target women over men. Yamashita writes that the sport industry has 'emphasized feminine traits, rather than traditional masculinity in their advertisements in order to attract women to sport'.²⁰ The reasons for this shift in gender focus are multifaceted, but they ultimately tie into certain neoliberal ideologies that were stemming from globalization, namely the trend towards individual success and perceived equal opportunity regardless of gender, class or other such markers that had previously inhibited certain participants from certain sports.²¹ A milieu of endless possibility for women's participation in sport arose from the socio-economic changes of the mid-1980s and remains to this day.

The ease with which images and information can cross borders and subsequently be marketed has certainly made Japanese women increasingly aware of the myriad opportunities available to them. However, the current neoliberal climate as it relates to athletes also has the tendency to create some skewed perceptions with respect to gender equity. Over the past several years, an Adidas advertising slogan that reads 'Impossible Is Nothing' has appeared

in many popular Japanese magazines and been plastered across Japanese billboards and buildings.²² Advertisements and endorsements may give the impression that the opportunities for women to excel in sport are boundless, but the reality is that both gender and class *are* still limiting factors when it comes to participation and acceptance in sport. Sociologist T.R. Young has criticized sport for this reason, among others, stating that commercialized sport promotes false solidarity, when it really exists primarily for profit.

The intense feelings of solidarity generated by an entire nation cheering and rejoicing for the same player or team is a limited kind of togetherness, Young argues, and because it is confined to the world of make believe (sport), it masks real disharmonies that exist in a society. He posits that ‘class antagonisms and ... gender ... hostilities with real conflicting interests can be assimilated to the harmless competition of sports. The structures of privilege, inequality, and oppression are left intact by such use of solidarity moments in sports’.²³ Indeed, winning athletes will return home to fanfare no matter if they are rich or poor, male or female. Nationality trumps everything when it comes to international competitions, and it is too simplistic to suggest that cheering for a female athlete connotes or translates to actual support for women getting ahead in Japanese society. However, because of the commercialization of the industry, there undoubtedly exists this new kind of fictitious solidarity that can alternately be read as negative (for the inequalities it masks) or positive (for the support it garners female athletes).

Looking at Olympic gold medal figure skater Arakawa Shizuka, we can see examples of both these positive and negative outcomes. While the togetherness of celebration and the outpouring of national and commercial support that occurred immediately following her victory might be viewed as Young’s fictitious solidarity, Arakawa definitely made an impact on a generation of young girls who now see figure skating (and perhaps other sports) as a means of success. Because of the current highly commercialized state of sport in Japan, Arakawa’s win lasted far beyond the moment she got her medal in Torino – she continues to endorse numerous products, and her face can be seen on advertisements in some of Tokyo’s busiest train stations. She shares the spotlight with numerous other female athletes whose success on the playing field (or ice rink or golf course) is being used to a commercial end.

There are two sides to this coin as well. The profit-driven sporting industry tends to benefit greatly from these athletes’ feminine allure and marketability, as advertisements frequently show athletes donning make-up and attractive, revealing clothing. However, as evidenced by the popularity and commercialization of athletes who do *not* necessarily embody traditional feminine traits, such as Tani Ryōko, wrestler Hamaguchi Kyōko or the national softball team, the commercialized sporting industry does more than just mask inequalities and promote idealized notions of femininity.²⁴ The following two sections on spectacle and femininity will explore this issue in more depth.

As is highlighted by these examples of women across diverse sports receiving a seemingly similar share of the spotlight, the question of whether athletes in different sports play different roles in the national imagination bears consideration. Because they may be used to an equal degree to endorse products or raise public awareness, does this mean that they are equally representative of femininity and national progress? It could be argued that the popularity of female athletes (particularly at the most visible, elite level) is dependent on their apparent determination and devotion to the Japanese nation. This is perhaps highlighted most clearly by the first female superstar, Hitomi Kinue, whose devotion to the nation at the 1928 Olympics led her to sign up for the 800-metre run after failing to win a medal for Japan in the 100-metre dash. As a reporter for the *Ōsaka Mainichi* newspaper noted, 'If this isn't a manifestation of the Japanese Spirit [*yamatodamashii*], then I don't know what is'.²⁵ Nationalism is inextricably tied to sport at international events and arguably at the popular level as well. Whether striving to be the best in one's school, prefecture or nation, the rhetoric of the Japanese spirit is ubiquitous across different levels of sport and across different sports themselves. Because the most visible and popular athletes (those being used to endorse products, for example) have all exhibited an unusual degree of *yamatodamashii*, and thus a complete devotion to the nation, it would appear that the sport they partake in is of secondary importance to their success itself.

In the world of women's sport, globalization and commercialization have indeed overlapped with long-standing sentiments of nationalism to create a large body of highly successful and visible sportswomen. Negative by-products of these processes have included a growth in the gap between rich and poor, and a masking of the social inequalities that may well inhibit young women from getting involved in sport (in spite of what certain neoliberal slogans might suggest).²⁶ In considering the historical narrative of female athletes in this context, it should be clear of the ways in which Japan's sporting industry has been deeply affected by current trends in the global marketplace.

While Olympic founder and proponent of amateurism Pierre de Coubertin would have cringed to see the current state of the professionalization of athletes, the outcome for Japanese women has been far from negative. Rather than showing that the shift from amateurism to professionalism is indicative of a degeneration of the purity of sports (as Coubertin might have predicted), I believe that the narrative of Japanese women's increased participation over the past few decades has shown that it indicates growth and progress. After all, no female athletes at all took part in the first Olympic Games in Athens, and now women make up a sizable percentage of both athletes and administrators of the event. The world has changed greatly since the late nineteenth century when women's sport began to emerge, with the processes of globalization and commercialization serving as both a major cause and effect of this change.

Spectacle/performance

Sporting events are often referred to as a spectacle, both in an academic and in a colloquial sense. French neo-Marxist Guy Debord uses the term 'spectacle' to mean 'not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images'.²⁷ As Olympic scholar John MacAloon has further elaborated, the term must 'be treated carefully as a performative genre in its own right, engaged in complex dialectical and functional dynamics ... and not just as a loose, imperial trope for everything dubious about the contemporary world'.²⁸ In the academic context, then, it is clear that the term 'spectacle' embodies more than its colloquial counterpart would suggest. It is used as a metaphor to describe a specific dynamic of power in today's world, much in the same way that modernity, globalization and commercialization suggest power configurations that have been ever changing over the past century.

Sport is a useful site to consider spectacle, as it combines ritual, festival, performance and aesthetics, while simultaneously bringing together cultures from around the world. With Debord's definition in mind, this means that one could use the images generated through sport in order to analyse social relationships. Looking at how female athletes in Japan have been represented, we can gain better insight into Japanese society and our conceptions of spectacle and performance.

The public image of female athletes in Japan (as in the West) has revolved primarily around three main factors: the sport they play, their physical appearance and the success of the athlete. Sometimes one of these factors outweighs the others, making an athlete either very popular or very unpopular, but more often than not the three work together to sway popularity in one direction or the other. That is to say, an athlete who may not embody traditional ideals of beauty may gain sudden popularity from a winning performance at a major sporting event.²⁹ A popular and/or attractive athlete is similarly likely to lose her recognition and product endorsements after a weak performance. Appearance can also factor into male athletes' popularity, but it goes without saying that female athletes have long been judged on their physical appearance to a more critical degree than their male counterparts.

Gender conventions confined women to a small number of 'lady-like' sports at the turn of the twentieth century, and though these conventions have significantly loosened and shifted, there are still sports that are considered more or less appropriate for women. Swimming, gymnastics and figure skating have long been considered 'appropriate' sports for women, while those sports involving muscles, physical contact and aggressiveness (such as track and field, football and wrestling) have generally been considered less acceptable.

This is exemplified by the different treatment in the press of two of Japan's earliest female Olympians – track and field athlete Hitomi Kinue and figure

skater Inada Etsuko. Hitomi was frequently portrayed *in action*, with the most common image of her being one where she is running the 100-metre race in Amsterdam, leg muscles bulging with a pained expression on her face.³⁰ In contrast, the most widely published image of Inada shows the young athlete standing in a white dress and fitted jacket, with a cheerful smile across her face. The aggressive and competitive nature of Hitomi's sport (along with her unusually large stature) contributed to her portrayal as burly and masculine. Inada's highly aestheticized sport of figure skating, however, allowed the public to be more immediately accepting of the athlete. However, following her silver medal-winning performance at the Olympic Games, Hitomi became and remained extremely popular, while Inada more or less faded into obscurity.³¹ I believe that this speaks to the power of athletic success in changing the public's view towards women. Preconceived notions about the appropriateness or acceptability of a certain sport or athlete seem to melt away – at least for a while – when that athlete represents Japan well against international competition. Over time, I believe that this phenomenon has helped to slowly chip away at firmly entrenched notions of what is or is not acceptable for Japanese women – in both the sporting world as well as in a more general context as exemplified by the case of jūdō star Tani Ryōko.

Being a strong athlete casts a favourable light on a female athlete, no matter what she looks like or what sport she participates in. If the athlete also happens to be marketable in some way (generally by being considered 'cute' or attractive), her popularity will surge all the more, as was seen in the case of gold medal figure skater Arakawa Shizuka. Her combination of perceived feminine grace, athletic strength and Olympic success in Torino made her one of the most publicized athletes, male or female, that Japan had ever seen. The success of female athletes relative to their male counterparts over the past several decades has made this phenomenon all the more visible, with athletes like Arimori, Takahashi and Tani gracing just as many if not more advertisement posters than popular male baseball or football stars. The growing use of visual phenomena that has helped spread positive – if not sometimes hyper-sexualized – images of female athletes throughout Japan has contributed to this gradual shift in focus from male to female athletes over the past century.

Returning to Debord's definition of spectacle as 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images', we can thus see some of the ways that images of female athletes have affected social relationships in modern and contemporary Japan. While the Japanese public was initially opposed to women's participation in competitive sport, the strength of the athletes and their ability to represent Japan well abroad led to a gradual acceptance of a growing number of athletes and a wider variety of sports. Perhaps one of the main critiques of the quickly growing 'spectacle' of women's sport is the *way* that these athletes have been portrayed. The following section will explore this issue in more detail.

Femininity

Any 'spectacle' must be considered in conjunction with a 'gaze'. Those watching the images of women competing, winning and endorsing are the ones who greatly outnumber the athletes themselves and who ultimately have the greatest power to alter the views of society. Feminist sport scholars have long grappled with issues of *how* female athletes are represented, and it appears that over the years – particularly in the West – a fine line has been toed between a hyper-sexualized feminine and an over-masculine, lesbian image.³²

These feminist scholars have focused almost exclusively on Western subjects, however, with many discussions revolving around pre/post–Title IX changes in attitudes towards female athletes in the United States. For this reason, I believe it is important to consider a discussion of femininity and sport in the Japanese context, where no such legislation was ever implemented, yet extreme changes in attitude towards athletic women have been evident over the past century.³³ In considering the issue of femininity among Japanese sportswomen, we can both broaden notions of femininity within Japan and differently consider femininity in a more universal sense. While looking at the issues of femininity and sport in Japan can be a useful tool for broadening our understanding, it is also important to be careful not to essentialize Japanese women and/or athletes in the process. That is to say, in discussing portrayals of female athletes, caution must be taken to avoid assumptions that there exists any kind of 'essential femaleness' that is naturally expressed by women through their bodies.³⁴

The issue of femininity has been at the core of discussions over Japanese women participating in sport from the time physical education was introduced into schools in the late nineteenth century. The pioneers of women's physical education and sport in Japan, particularly Inokuchi Akuri, Fujimura Toyo and Nikaidō Tokuyo, were conscious of the fact that physical education for girls and women was to be carried out to a different end than was the same sort of training for boys and men. That is to say, while the goals of physical education for boys were largely military based, the goals for women centred primarily around the development of 'good wives and wise mothers'. During the Meiji period, limitations were placed on the activities girls could engage in both because of an assumed fragility and a lack of understanding of the effect of sport on the female body (particularly the reproductive system).³⁵ This presumed fragility lasted well into the post-War period, as evidenced by the fact that the women's 800-metre race was scratched from the Olympic programme until 1960 after Hitomi and the other women running that race in 1928 had fallen exhausted to the ground at the finish line.

The year 1960 marked not only the reinstitution of the women's 800-metre race at the Olympics but also broader change towards inclusion and acceptance of women in a larger variety of sports. More and more Japanese women continued to be on the front lines of new sports, representing their nation

abroad in virtually every new sport that opened up to women.³⁶ The broad and varied representation of Japanese women in sport speaks not only to the quick response on the part of the athletes to global changes in the sporting world but also to the Japanese public's openness in supporting women in a broad range of events. For example, when women's wrestling was introduced to the Olympic programme in 2004, Japanese women came away with four medals in the event – more than any other nation.³⁷ This isolated example provides clear evidence against several deeply-seated notions of Japanese women: that they are weak, that they feel compelled to conform to traditional notions of femininity and that they have continuously been 'behind' their male counterparts (Japanese men came away with two bronze medals in wrestling from those Olympics). Moreover, it is one of many examples highlighting that Japanese women are not lagging behind their Western counterparts in the world of competitive sport.

Of course, this is only one example (though many similar examples exist), and one could argue at length whether the highly publicized image of a triumphant female wrestler actually has an impact on the public's way of thinking. As Susan Cahn has elucidated, 'By looking at how athletes ... 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 of their time.'³⁸ The actions of and reactions to individual athletes indeed tell us volumes about Japanese society throughout the twentieth century, especially with regard to gender dynamics and the ideals of femininity.

In looking at the historical narrative outlined in the preceding chapters, it should be clear that these ideals have shifted markedly over the past century – a female marathon runner endorsing sports drink on a poster would have been inconceivable to the Japanese public of the 1920s, but today it is considered completely mainstream. Posters of athletes from an endless variety of sports can be seen in subway stations and on billboards across Japan – female table tennis stars, wrestlers, figure skaters, golfers, snowboarders and swimmers are just as common in these advertisements as are their male counterparts. While Japanese women are competing in a wider variety of sports that require an ever-increasing amount of speed, strength and stamina, however, certain ideals of femininity and prejudices are still very present in Japanese society.

For one, when it comes to product endorsements, it is often unclear whether women are being used because of their marketability as an athlete or because of their marketability as a woman. A large part of Arakawa Shizuka's success in the public eye (as well as with product endorsements) has undoubtedly revolved around the fact that she is attractive in a very traditional, 'feminine' sense. The photos that are most widely circulated and advertised show Arakawa during her gold medal performance in Torino, for which she wore jewellery, make-up and a purple and blue dress with a transparent opening from the diamond

choker at her neck all the way down to her navel.³⁹ Figure skating, along with such sports as gymnastics, synchronized swimming and diving, is considered to be an 'aesthetic sport', for beauty and/or feminine grace tend to factor largely into whether an athlete is successful.

There are inherent problems with the way the aesthetic nature of these so-called 'feminine' sports is capitalized upon in contemporary society. Cahn writes that '[t]he belief that femininity is an aesthetic disguises the fact that not just beauty but passivity, submissiveness, frailty, and service – signal features of women's subordination – have also characterized femininity'.⁴⁰ That is to say, the idea that women should excel most at these aesthetic sports reinforces the notion that muscles, competitiveness and aggression are neither feminine nor desirable in a woman. The historic exclusion of women from such strength-based contact sports as sumo wrestling, boxing and American football highlights a certain expectation of female frailty and submissiveness.

However, in Japan as in many Western nations, these notions of athletic femininity are rapidly becoming antiquated as women excel in sports that were not considered acceptable just a few decades ago.⁴¹ For example, a May 2002 article in the magazine *Asahi Shimbun Weekly* highlighted Japan's national women's rugby team, which had at that time competed twice in the Women's Rugby World Cup since the event's inception in 1991.⁴² The article contains a brief history of the sport in Japan, and it focuses on the goal of the team to someday compete at the Olympic Games, if and when women's rugby becomes an Olympic event (which it thus far has not).⁴³ The large photo in the middle of the article shows the Japanese team in competition in New Zealand, and the uniforms, headgear, mouth guards and muscular physiques of the players suggest anything but a traditional 'feminine' image. The Japanese media is not hesitant to run stories about all different women's sports, whether they may be aesthetically appealing or not. As previously mentioned, the attention garnered and endorsements earned by jūdō wrestler Tani Ryōko, the women's national softball team and wrestler Hamaguchi Kyōko are proof that sport has provided an outlet for Japanese women where traditional notions of femininity are not considered to be paramount.

However, the media does not always portray female athletes in a positive light, nor does the media necessarily serve as an engine for change in society. Often times, women's sport still receives significantly less media coverage than men's, and when covered it is sometimes done so in a subtly demeaning manner. Journalist Yamanaka Toshiko wrote an article for the weekly magazine *Shūkan Kinyōbi* in October 2000 (immediately following the Sydney Olympics) in which she criticized the diminutive tone so often taken by media writers and commentators when it comes to reporting in Japan about women's efforts in sport.⁴⁴ She mentions the cute nicknames so often given to female athletes (like 'Q-chan', 'Yawara-chan' and 'Ai-chan') as well as the unnecessarily flowery language used by newspaper reporters when writing about these athletes.⁴⁵

Yamanaka carefully surveyed Japan's three major newspapers (*Asahi*, *Mainichi* and *Yomiuri Shimbun*) during the course of Olympic coverage, between 15 September and 1 October 2000. From this, she determined that the personal lives of female athletes were discussed far more often than the personal lives of males, with marital status or motherhood considered fair game for the media.⁴⁶

A 2003 academic article in the journal *Supōtsu to jendā kenkyū* (*Sport and Gender Studies*) looks at similar issues in a more detailed manner, comparing the language used in the media to describe the achievements of two specific female jūdō wrestlers, Sugawara Noriko and Narazaki Noriko.⁴⁷ The author concludes that Narazaki is regularly portrayed as having been encouraged by a man – her father when she was younger and her husband after her marriage. Headlines also often attach the word 'housewife' (*shufu*) to her name, suggesting that she has responsibility for both her athletic career and her domestic work. Male reporters write the majority of articles using language that downplays or trivializes women's athletic achievements, while female reporters tend to describe female athletes as self-reliant and independent women.⁴⁸ These two critical articles about Japan's media portrayal of female athletes show that there is still a long way to go before equality is reached between men's and women's sport. However, they also show that there is public dissent and discussion over hyper-feminized representations of women, which is an important step towards a more inclusive acceptance of sportswomen (and arguably broader categories of women who do not fit certain ideals) by Japanese society.

In all of the above discussions on the 'master metaphors' that can be explored through Japanese women in sport, it is important to keep in mind that the field of women's sport studies in Japan is still young and that the depth of critical research carried out within it remains relatively shallow. That said, I have endeavoured to make use of a variety of theoretical frameworks in an effort to broaden our understanding not only of the history itself but also of the possibilities of using this kind of research for future critical work.

For future consideration

In this work, a comprehensive view of the changes that occurred both for and by female athletes in modern and contemporary Japan has been undertaken. Primary and secondary sources have been drawn upon in an effort to provide a well-rounded historical narrative of events as well as an analysis of how looking at these events can shed new light on various aspects of modern Japan. Because so little has previously been written in English about Japanese women in sport (especially when compared to the body of work on male-dominated sport in Japan such as baseball and sumo wrestling), a broad and sweeping approach was taken to the subject matter. While this was the most encompassing means

of conveying the long and complex narrative, the volume of material included meant that certain areas were not delved into as deeply as they might have been. My hope is that future projects might focus in more depth on some of the individuals and issues raised by this book.

For example, though a substantial amount of information was provided on Japan's first female international sensation, Hitomi Kinue, much more could be written on this influential woman. It would be revealing to trace the ways she was received over time – from the time she was a young woman competing to the time of her death, to the time her name was resurrected in the public's eye by Arimori Yūko in the early 1990s, the image of Hitomi has been used to very different ends over the past eighty years. Other athletes such as Maehata Hideko or the 'witches of the Orient' could also have similar in-depth studies conducted about them, with the breadth of material available in Japanese on these subjects making such a project entirely feasible.

A direct ethnographic approach to the topic of female athletes in contemporary Japanese society could also shed great light on the issues of how these women currently influence and have been influenced by Japanese society. While first-hand accounts have been relied upon as much as possible throughout this narrative (namely autobiographies and articles written by female athletes), the ability to ask pointed questions directly *to* athletes would provide a nuanced perspective on the issues. Spending an extended period of time with athletes might also allow a researcher to delve into the 'darker' side of sport that is rarely highlighted in autobiographical materials, looking at issues such as doping, chauvinism, sexual harassment or attitudes towards (real or perceived) homosexuality.

Comparative projects between Japan and other nations might reveal interesting similarities or peculiarities about Japan as well. Such a comparison would provide an added layer of analysis with respect to the rate at which Japanese women have progressed over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. How does the change in reception towards female athletes in Japan compare to that of other Asian nations? How does it compare to Western nations? Has the commercialization of female athletes in Japan been greater or lesser than in other parts of the world? How does the manifestation of prejudices against so-called 'masculine' sports such as wrestling or weightlifting compare to the prejudices faced by women in these sports elsewhere? Finding answers to such questions would provide further insight and perspective on how 'progressive' Japan really is when it comes to its treatment and support of sportswomen.

Finally, a quantitative sociological approach to the topic of female Olympians in Japan might provide a different kind of framework for tracking the success of these women over the past century. There are no doubt countless statistical breakdowns for such a measurement – one could look at Olympic gold medal winners, at all medal winners, at all contestants finishing in the top five or top

ten of their international events or at all athletes who compete regardless of their success. One might also do a comparison of these categories between male and female competitors from Japan in order to get a more clear idea of how women are progressing with respect to their male counterparts.

One Japanese scholar, Kawahara Takatsu of the National Institute of Sports Sciences (*kokuritsu supōtsu kagaku sentā*), conducted one such small-scale study focusing on female Olympic athletes, which was published in the November 2006 edition of *Sports Godzilla* magazine.⁴⁹ In it, he includes several different charts that break down the number of athletes, the number of events they participated in and the number of medals garnered by both male and female delegates from Japan from 1964 to the present.⁵⁰ He calculates the percentage of medals won by female athletes in comparison to those won by men. For example, he shows that in Barcelona in 1992, men won thirteen medals while women won nine, meaning women took home forty-one per cent of the total Japanese medals. In 1996, male and female competitors each took home seven medals, meaning the women's medals were fifty per cent of the total.⁵¹ In Sydney in 2000, men won five medals while women won thirteen, meaning women won seventy-two per cent of the Japanese medals. In the last line of Kawahara's final chart (which shows the gendered breakdown of medals for the Winter Games), he lists the results of the most recent Winter Games at the time, in which figure skater Arakawa Shizuka brought home Japan's only medal. According to his analysis, when you try to calculate the percentage of female medals at these Olympics, the result is a telling symbol: ∞ .⁵² Although perhaps not statistically significant, I believe that this result is more symbolically important than any other figure on Kawahara's charts. It suggests the infinite possibility for Japan's female athletes to continue to excel and the boundless opportunities that have opened to women in contemporary Japan.

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