

# Multiculturalism and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics

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## ***Abstract***

Japan has taken steps to implement policies to address multiculturalism. These include the furthering of English education as well as plans to increase the number of inbound tourists, but these actions are not enough. More needs to be done to recognize the rights of foreign residents in Japan, and not just to provide hospitality to short-term visitors. Now Japan is preparing for the 2020 Olympic Games to take place in Tokyo. Along with the sports and tourism related projects that the Olympic preparation entails, Japan must take the opportunity to deal more fully with multicultural issues. With the eyes of the world on Japan, failure to do so could lead to negative outcomes.

***Keywords:*** Japan, Olympic games, multiculturalism

## ***Introduction***

In 2020 Tokyo will be the host for the Olympics and Paralympics games. Before the opening ceremony, there is still a long time. Leading up to 2020, the Tokyo government has embarked upon a number of large scale constructions projects for new stadia and an Olympic village. These projects constitute the so-called ‘hard-side’ of tourism, relating to the physical apparatus needed to deliver the games successfully. Along with this hard side, comes the ‘soft-side’ encompassing attitudes towards the visitors coming to Japan, the marketing of Japan and the hospitality provided by Japanese people. Japan enjoys a reputation as a tourist destination with good hospitality as seen through the idea of *omotenashi*, the spirit of Japanese hospitality, a notion that will fit well with a welcome expected of an Olympic venue. However, as the world’s media descend on Tokyo, journalists will be looking to find the real Japan. Of course, that includes the famous sites, but some of the more uncelebrated sides of Japan, namely discrimination towards foreigners, could be unearthed.

## ***Overview of Japan tourism***

Japan initiated a period *Sakoku* (closed-country) when the country was open to the outside world

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only in a limited capacity during the Edo Period of Japan (1603-1868). Moving into the twentieth century and the Meiji and Taisho periods, Japan became more concerned with military action. After World War Two, Japan enjoyed a period of peace and economic growth, which culminated in Tokyo becoming the host of the Olympics back in 1964. Later the government set up the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) with the goal of progressing international exchange through tourism. It was not until more recently, however, that Japan began to seriously pursue tourism as an economic policy. In 2003, the then Prime Minister of Japan, Junichiro Koizumi, proposed the Visit Japan campaign, and the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Law was enacted in 2007, stating that Japan would be a Tourism nation (Okano-Heumans, 2012). Since that time the Japanese Tourism Agency was also established in 2008, and the revised goal of 25 million foreign visitors coming to Japan by 2020 was solidified (JTA, 2015). On a practical level, the government has made access into Japan easier for visitors by improving airport access and introducing more flexible visa schemes for countries like China. At the regional level too, many prefectures and regions in Japan are marketing to specific groups of inbound foreigners and promoting their tourist resources on websites in a variety of different languages. Indeed, Carroll (2010) claims that the local authorities, rather than the central government, have pushed making their areas more user-friendly because those places are more in touch with the tourists' and communities' needs they serve. However, although Japan does make efforts to invite people to its shores, the government is also engaged in the idea of selling Japan overseas. Scholars like Qi (2011) see this as Japan's attempt to build a better reputation abroad, rather than to better understand cultures. By selling Japan around the world, it appears to be placing its culture as unique within the world.

### ***Attempts at multiculturalism in Japan***

Starting back in the 1980s in Japan, the idea of multiculturalism became popular with the government and educators through the use of buzzwords like *kokusaika*, or internationalization. This movement was defined through other popular expressions such as "international exchange," or "cultural exchange" (Qi, 2011). However, despite how frequently these words were used, the internationalization never really got off the ground. It took around 40 years for the numbers of foreigners registered in Japan to double from around 600,000 in 1950 to over 1,200,000 in 1991 (NIPSSR, 2008). Since then the rate has increased, but as of 2011, there were only around 1.9% of the population registered as foreigners. Compared to other developed nations this figure is relatively small. For example, 14.3% in the USA and 11.9% in Germany are registered as immigrants as of 2011 (United Nations, 2015). As a result, minority demands for recognition in Japan have not been able to develop sufficient momentum to influence policy because of the smaller number of immigrants.

Along with the push in internationalization has been the prominence of English. The Japanese government has formulated a number of plans which it has launched in order to promote English. One

such plan was the 2003 Action Plan to ‘Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities,’ which involved improvement of teaching methods of English in Japanese education as well as sending 800,000 Japanese students abroad to improve English and raise cultural awareness. Scholars do state that English is considered to be one of the most important tools for human resources in Japan’s future and some agree the government’s plans are substantial (Tanabe, 2004). Another government plan has been the globalization of higher education through a project called Global 30, which involves creating Japan as a hub for the global elite and also a country with the highest number of international students in the region (Kuwamura, 2009).

These English goals are ambitious to be sure, but there appears to be a certain one-sidedness to these projects. Although foreign students may come to Japan to study subjects in English, there is little in the way of Japanese study. It may be asked what the value of English medium education is if Japanese study does not go hand in hand. This kind of interaction, it is argued, can only bring about superficial interactions and limited engagement with Japan. This is despite promoting the uniqueness of Japanese culture in its messages overseas (Hashimoto, 2007).

As well as the advancement of English, the government has forwarded ‘multicultural coexistence’ plans and policies. These plans have tried to offer information and go some way to include foreigners in Japan through providing multilingual information (on daily life, disaster training, and so on), advisory services, opportunities to learn Japanese locally, and opportunities for cultural exchange. As part of the plans for internationalization, the 1988 Guidelines for the Creation of Localities for International Exchange, for example, started to increase the use of foreign languages (predominantly English) for public facilities, adapting to living in Japanese local communities and formulation of events to bring together local citizens and foreign residents.

However there can sometimes be a problem with the disseminated information. In Tokyo, for example, two of the 23 wards of Tokyo called Adachi and Taito now have significant numbers of Filipino, Thai and Brazilian residents, but information in their languages is not provided on the local government websites. Currently information is only available in Chinese, Korean or English (Adachi City, 2015, Taito City, 2015). There is some help with minority groups in Japan, but with the English sites in particular, the translations are very poor; often apparently run through translation software from Japanese into English, making very little sense.

The issue of multiculturalism is further exacerbated because the Japanese race is often referred to as racially homogenous. There do, however, exist a number of distinct ethnic groups within Japan. Those are the Ainu people, who are native to the Hokkaido area of Japan. They have their own language and culture uniquely distinct from Japan, but only until recently have received recognition within Japan (Qi, 2011). Other ethnic groups are the Koreans and Chinese, who were former slaves and their descendants who have stayed in Japan. A group of around 600,000 Korean residents stayed in Japan at the end of the Second World War, but were deprived of Japanese citizenship, being regarded as aliens (Hester 2008). Even though their descendants were born in Japan and they have been mostly assimilated into

the Japanese culture, their status is still described as alien. These groups of immigrants have been subjected to discrimination according to a Rapporteur for the Commission on Human Rights, which released the findings from his mission to Japan, concluding that racism and xenophobia are indeed prevalent in Japan (Diéne, 2006).

Despite the some of the efforts made towards multiculturalism, Chung (2011) maintains multiculturalism in recent years has become assimilatory in nature, based on 'superficial toleration of foreign cultures and avoidance of social conflict'. It certainly is not close to the Oxford dictionary's definition of multiculturalism that covers "the policy or process whereby the distinctive identities of the cultural groups within such a society are maintained or supported". Qi reports that a collective body of research was spawned through the *kokusika* movement and was known as *ibunkaron*, literally translated as "the study of other cultures." Qi argues that this body of work placed the Japanese culture as superior to other cultures it encountered. Qi further contends the fact that when Japanese learn how to speak their own national language it is referred to as *kokugo*, but when foreigners learn to speak the Japanese language that study is referred to as *Nihongo*, a term Qi asserts, was made to distinguish foreigners from native Japanese people.

Scholars have described Japan's internationalization policies as only recognizing exchanges between Japanese citizens and foreigners who are either short-term visitors or temporary residents (Ishiwata, 2011). This is also asserted by Qi, who summarizes her article by stating that the foreigner in Japan, so long as he / she is not thought to be a permanent immigrant, is treated with politeness, but always as an outsider. It seems the concept of a permanent foreign resident is a lot more difficult subject to tackle because Japan's scope of internationalization does not extend basic civil and social rights to such permanent resident aliens. Qi maintains that this type of multiculturalism is not for the cultural minorities but for the social and cultural majorities (p. 112). These policies work to solidify Japan's own cultural identity through English language education policies by developing a framework of 'Japanese internationalization' and the essential necessary qualities of Japanese culture, whilst, at the same time promoting the learning of English (Hashimoto, 2007)

The strong ethno-national identity of the Japanese then is one of the reasons why multiculturalism has not gained a strong foothold in Japan. Many Japanese believe in the idea of ethnic homogeneity in Japan and as a result are often reluctant to go along with the idea of multiculturalism, which accepts cultural diversity within it. Other researchers have pointed out that the Japanese do endorse the idea of multiculturalism, but that they do so only in order to separate ethnic minorities from pure 'Japanese' by emphasizing their cultural differences, which tend to marginalize those minorities (Okubo 2008). A survey of 1,102 Japanese people aged over 16 years old by Nagayoshi (2011) found that 54.2% of people agreed with the idea that those who do not share Japanese customs and traditions cannot be truly Japanese. For most Japanese people, being 'Japanese' is defined by their 'blood' lineage and culture. This idea implies that the nation is likely to be defined in ethnic terms in Japanese society.

### ***Olympics as a force for change***

The byword of the Olympics is diversity. For example, in the London (2012) Olympics, the hosts claimed that the Olympics committee would ensure that people of diverse cultural ethnic, religious and sexual backgrounds would be welcome (Evans, 2007). The idea of tolerance is so important to the Olympics that to ignore it would be a real mistake for the Olympics. Looking back at other Olympics, in the Beijing (2008), China came under pressure before the games because of its human rights issues. China had tried to remove all sign of poverty from the city and even jailed dissenters for the period surrounding the games. In the winter games of Sochi (2014), Russia came under intense fire because of its treatment of homosexuality, where, in Russia, it is a crime. Although not the Olympics, even the world cup to be planned in Qatar in 2022 has drawn criticism to that country. Currently, some news reports state that Qatar has used much in the way of slave labor to drive its economy. All these host nations planned the execution of their games carefully, but these unresolved issues in their countries came to light as a result of the media spotlight that was shone on the host before the games starts.

Due to the size and assumed benefits that go along with hosting a mega-event like the Olympics, it can also be a catalyst to change parts of the society (Bondonio & Guala, 2011). Again, looking back over previous Olympics, the Barcelona games (1992) were orchestrated to eliminate tourists' stereotypes (siesta and bullfights), while London focused on its heritage and culture and worked hard to change its tourist image. Furthermore, in the Sydney games of 2000 the focus was on reconciliation among the cultures present in Australia, including the aboriginal culture, who had long been discriminated against. Olympics are not only to improve the economy and culture, but can be the start of other social movements within the host country.

### ***Conclusion***

Tourism appears to be a result of and cause for the games, and Japan is certainly positive in setting high goals for the number of inbound tourists. However, as seen above tourism is not always the primary goal for hosting the games. In Japan's case, however, it appears that other goals are also important such as showing the world it is safe after the nuclear meltdown, precipitated by the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 as well as trying to kick-start the economy that has been stagnant for a number of years now. The goal of multiculturalism should be added to that list to be more in line with the ethics of equality that is implied in the Olympic message in today's modern society.

Although Japan has taken positive steps towards increasing its economy through increasing the number of inbound tourists, there are a number of mixed messages involving multiculturalism that are evident in Japanese society. First, integration of foreigners in Japan is more a process of assimilation where the dominant Japanese culture consumes the perceived minority culture, leaving little left of that ethnic culture. Multiculturalism requires fostering understanding and appreciation of ethnic diversity

by acknowledging and respecting minority group identities and culture (Verkuyten, 2006). In other words, multiculturalism is based on cultural diversity within the nation.

In the past, Japan was able to change certain parts of its country for a major event. Many efforts were made when Japan cohosted the 2002 World Cup, which involved accommodating visiting soccer fans, but these sadly did not help Japan's immigrant residents in any way. Multiculturalism is not just about increasing inbound visitor numbers. Japanese society needs to effect a large shock in the face of changing parts of society that other hosts of the Olympics have employed (Weed, Stephens & Bull, 2011). The legacies that Olympic games venues leave behind are not inherent in hosting a games (Smith & Fox, 2007), but if Japan fails to capitalize on the opportunity to address multiculturalism in its country, it may leave behind a negative legacy it had not planned for.

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## 多文化主義と 2020 年東京オリンピック

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### 要約

日本は多文化主義に取り組むための政策の実行に着手した。この政策には更なる英語教育と海外からの旅行者を増やす計画が含まれるが、それでもこれだけでは十分な行動計画とは言えない。日本に滞在する外国人居住者の権利を認識するために、さらなる行動が必要である。それは単に、短期滞在者を親切にもてなす、というだけのことだけではない。いま日本は、2020年の東京オリンピックにむけて準備をしている。オリンピックの準備に伴うスポーツや観光関連のプロジェクトとともに日本は多文化主義に関する問題をより全面的に取り扱う機会を持たなければならない。世界は日本に注目しており、これに失敗すれば否定的な帰結となろう。

キーワード：日本、オリンピック、多文化主義