

Tokyo Olympiad: A Conflict Between Artistic Representation and Documentary Film

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I. Introduction

There are only two films considered as great artistic Olympic films worldwide: Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (1938) and Kon Ichikawa's *Tokyo Olympiad* (1965), even though official films of the Olympic Games have been recorded for the International Olympic Committee, according to the Olympic Charter, since 1936. These two films can be considered as artistic because both received high praise at Cannes and at the Venice International Film Festival. In this study, I have examined *Tokyo Olympiad* to determine why those appraisals still remain.

Although this film was criticized in Japan by the sport world and Ichiro Kono, a great Japanese politician, the special minister of the Tokyo Olympic Games of 1964, and the president of the Japanese Athletic Federation in those days (5,8) - the was enormously and internationally welcomed and praised at the Cannes Film Festival in 1965, receiving a special Award of the International Film Critics (1,2,3,9,10,11). This study was derived from the motivation to discover the reason for this criticism in Japan, and whether the problem may be solved or not by using text theory to consider the differences in reviews of the film between Japan and other countries.

The purpose of this study is to clarify the Olympism of the filmmakers by considering both artistic and documentary aspects of the film, with an interpretation of the contents of representation of *Tokyo Olympiad*. The interpretation proceeds as follows: (1) first, the details of the disputes were confirmed using Japanese newspapers and film journals, (2) the film was

interpreted using the VTR version, and (3) the interpretations were supplemented with the records of statements by the director Ichikawa.

II. The details of the film production and the disputes about "the art or the documentary film."

As shown in the appendix, the original director of this film was Akira Kurosawa who was replaced by Kon Ichikawa. Moreover, this replacement happened in January of 1964, just prior to the Tokyo Olympic Games. According to the request of the Olympic Organization Committee, the script of the film was begun at the beginning of May. The OOC accepted the script, and the director Ichikawa drew the pictorial continuities (note 1) of the main shots. This fact showed the director's intentions before shooting ever began. All footage of the films amounted to 322,933 feet, and these were edited to 18,000 feet in the first film rushes. After several modifications, the first special preview of the film was held March 8, 1965. The special Minister, Kono, attended the preview and reviewed the film, which he then decried, saying that it was not a documentary film, and was too artistic. His comments were printed in the main newspapers in Japan, and this ignited the dispute of "the art or documentary film."

According to the newspapers and the film journals the main criticisms and the director Ichikawa's refutations were arranged as follows.

(1) The main criticisms:

1. The film was too much artistic.
2. The film did not record all outcomes of the Games as required by the Olympic Charter.
3. The film recorded too few activities of the Japanese athletes.
4. The film mainly recorded the underdogs, like the last runner of the 10,000 metre race and the solitary runner from Chad in the men's 800 metre race.
5. The film distorted the real competition. The representations, especially in the shotput, the rifle shooting, and the walking race, caricatured the athletes too much.
6. The recommendation of the film to children by the Ministry of Education was reconsidered, because the artistic representations of the film did not seem to be understood by the young people.
7. The scene of the Emperor Hirohito replying with a smile and swinging his hat lacked dignity.
8. Among the miscellaneous shots inside the stadium, the shots of the Japanese

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baseball super stars, Shigeo Nagashima and Sadaharu Oh, were unnecessary because they had no relation to the recording of the events.

(2) Ichikawa's refutations:

1) This was a documentary film that tried to record the human being and the significance of Olympism. 2) Children had good sensibilities for artistic representations. 3) Although he argued against the newspapers from this standpoint, he did not deny both the artistic and the documentary aspects of the film. 4) As the dispute progressed, he argued in newspapers that the point of the dispute had turned to the political problems apart from the nature of the film work in itself. The director Ichikawa kept pushing his belief about the film, continuing to confront the criticisms from the sport world and the politicians.

In order to interpret these messages, it is important to notice the film's context and metatext. First, as a social context, the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games had a strong role to play in enhancing Japan's national prestige. The Games were exploited as a tool to arrange certain infrastructures in Japan, such as the Tokyo capital highway, Tokaido Shinkansen Express, and so on. So, it was natural that the politicians, the officials of JOC, and the sport world in Japan asserted that the IOC's official film of the Tokyo Olympic Games should be recorded mainly as the outcomes of the performances of Japanese athletes. Moreover, the praise for both the smooth management of the Games and the architecture, called "the formative Olympic" caused many to insist that Japanese leadership and technology should be mainly recorded in the film. Nevertheless, the director Ichikawa insisted upon his belief that the spirit of the Olympic Games must be a peaceful festival, so he tried to create an artistic documentary film in the manner of Leni Riefenstahl's "Olympia." Here the conflict between the documentary and the artistic representation of the film arose. That is to say, the nationalism trying to uplift Japanese power and the universalism trying to record Olympism artistically collided with each other.

The filmmakers, first, decided that a script of the film by four writers who were not athletes must be prepared, and they drew the picture continuities of the main shots of the Games. This fact testified that the producers privileged the artistic representation of the film, rather than a documentary recording, before shooting ever

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began. It can be said that the idea was to film and project on screen the inner feelings of not only the winners but also officials, referees, spectators, and all persons involved in the Games of Tokyo in 1964. For example, the sequence of the solitary fight of the nameless runner, Armed Isa from Chad, continued about eight minutes. The scene was a typical part of the criticisms that the film recorded mainly the underdogs, although at the script writings this solitary scene was already planned. The script, though, was requested by the OOC, and the director Ichikawa said, in retrospect, that it brought merit to penetrate the intentions of the work (into the whole film) (4). In order to avoid the criticism that the film was too artistic, another film was edited to record mainly the activities of Japanese athletes (7). According to the director Ichikawa, five edited versions of the film were printed; for previews in Japan, for the Cannes Film Festival (135 min.), for the English version (93 min.), for Japanese standard version (170 min.), and for the Emperor Hirohito and Imperial family (4).

Second, it can be considered that the gap between the artistic representation and documentary record are clarified by considering the metatext of the film. The frame of reference of viewers, which is comprehension of the film itself, is as follows: "This is an official film of the Olympic Games, " and "this is a documentary film." So, people regard this film with the understanding that "all that is represented in this film must be true." Then, the frame of understanding to the film associated with its recording as a documentary should be reinforced. Here, this led some to ask that the film record the activities of the Japanese athletes and the uplifting of nationalism. On the other hand, there is also a premise of the filmmakers that "this film is not just a documentary film but an artistic one." This latter frame of reference led to the message that "some important theme must be represented in the film." In this case, the attitude of the filmmakers trying to record Olympism and the universality of human beings should be reinforced.

With these metatexts, it must be recognized that the peculiarity of the film, that is, the possibility and the unrestrictedness of its representation, exists. In film making, it is possible for the filmmakers to articulate the real world by shooting under the contention of creation, and to insert scenes with editing. Even in a

documentary film, a director can devise the representation in the editing room. This invention could be said to be a creative recording of a documentary film. This type of construction of attitudes to film viewing could be confirmed carefully by film audiences. For example, like the sequence of the female gymnast, Vera Caslavská's, long horse vault and balance beam performances, there were some sequences where the film viewers noticed something artificial. It is no exaggeration to say that those who only asked to record the outcomes in the documentary film, did so not only because they had no concerns with the artistic nature of the film, but also because they could not compose the recognizable order of the artistic representation.

III. A creative documentary film: for the records of impressiveness

According to the director Ichikawa, the 'after shots' or retakes of the competitive scenes were as follows:

1. Caslavská's gymnastic performances:
The scenes of Caslavská performing the long horse vault and on the balance beam were filmed with a high speed camera with black background, and overprinted by a multiple exposure of two frames. This technique of film editing enabled Ichikawa to represent vividly the inner condition of the athlete beside the superficial beauties. Arguably these sequences were not the real events. It is possible, though, to represent the excellence and the solemnity of the athlete who was earnestly attaining a level of superb skilfulness, in showing these impressive representations of her mature performances.
2. The Olympic Torch bearer running at the foot of Mt. Fuji:
The Torch Relay with the beautiful 'back' of Mt. Fuji was not the real shot of the relay but a reverse side printing. Because it was cloudy when the real Torch Relay passed

Mt. Fuji, Ichikawa decided to shoot the scene from the other side of Tokaido, in order to depict the great symbol of Japan. Incidentally, this scene was cited in the Canadian film, *Running Brave (1983)*, in which Billy Mills, the winner of the 10,000-metre race at the Tokyo Olympic Games, was a protagonist. This scene was acknowledged as a great symbol of Japan in any time.

3. The close-up shot of the bronze medalist of the marathon race, Koichi Tsuburaya:
The close-up shot of Tsuburaya was a testimony to the persistence of the director Ichikawa who tried to capture the inner situation of the loser. The scene was filmed after the Games because his face on the podium could not be taken with cameras at the medal ceremony, as he was behind the other athletes.
4. The close-up shot of Robert Hays, winner of the men's 100-metre race, just before the start of the final:
The scene was borrowed from a shot of the trial heat, because Hays was hidden behind the other runners. The strained expression of the winner at the starting line was necessary to express the seriousness and the anxiety of the athlete before the race. The substitution happened because of a limitation by the International Amateur Athletic Federation that restricted the number of cameras on the field to three.
5. The performance of the horizontal bar:
The sequence of the Japanese male gymnast, Takashi Ono, was a typical shot filmed under the bar in order to represent skilfulness in a beautiful composition.

With these retakes and 'after shots', the director Ichikawa tried to represent not only the peaceful situation in the Olympic Games but also the earnestness and the superb performance of the athletes. Although this was a documentary film, the film was penetrated with the director's stance that *mise en scene* was important to express the impressions of the Games.

VI. The interpretation of the film: the main messages

To begin the interpretation of the film, I examine first its main messages. One of the main messages of this film is 'peace', as shown straightforwardly in the superimposition of text. In the opening title, the director Ichikawa inserted the message that "Olympic Games are a manifestation of human dreams," and in the end sequence, "In the night, the sacred flame returned to the sun. Every four years, human beings have a dream. Is it right to finish this realized peaceful situation as only a dream?" What kind of image of the film can transmit these messages?

1. Peace as a dream:

The fundamental principles of the Olympic Games are specified in the Olympic Charter. That is, "The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced . . ." (6) Ichikawa's message that "the Olympic Games are a manifestation of human dreams," showed the direction of our endeavour to actualize the dream, though it would be just a dream. The message appealed to all people who viewed the film world-wide to see the necessity of trying to attain a peaceful world even if a renouncement of war was a momentary situation, following the example of the *ekecheiria* (*truce*) of the Ancient Greek system. These messages were also presented both with the delegations of the developing countries dressed in folk costumes during the entrance parade of the opening ceremony, and the long takes of the nameless athletes, like Armed Isa and the Ceylonese runner who ran last with a finishing kick long after Mill's finish.

2. Equality under the sun:

Another message that must be noticed are the close-up shots of the sun in the opening sequence. The scene of the sun seems to be a symbolic representation of the subject of Ichikawa's film. Although the shots of the

sun were transformed to the flames, as in the Torch Relay and the ignition of the Olympic Cauldron, these shots as the background of the Olympic events played a role as symbolic representations. Not only could these shots symbolize Japan as the country where the sun rises ('the land of the rising sun'), but that everything is inevitably lighted up nakedly under the sun and, consequently, these shots represented that all the people in the world are equal. The representations of human equality may be seen in the attempt to film all people who attended the Tokyo Olympic Games. The film shows not only the athletes, but also officials, referees, spectators, tourists, and the Emperor. Despite the ages and sexes, all the people participated as equal human beings. Although the athletes took the central position in the film, they were not just the winners. That is, even though the skilful performances were depicted from the technical stand point, these sequences were presented as shots of the universal and earnest attempt of the human.

3. Universal human nature:

All the sequences of the film, as a whole, transmitted the performances of the earnest human endeavours. Nevertheless, the events did not always progress as the original script planned. There were dramatic scenes that happened without the aid of theatrical drama. Capturing these happenings with cameras, the film was able to represent more than the excellent performances. The hero of the 10,000 metres race in the film was not the winner, Billy Mills, but the last runner from Ceylon running to the finish with a final spurt of energy. The gold medalist of the women's 800-metre race, Ann Packer of Great Britain, rushed directly into her fiancé's arms, and they hugged each other happily after she won the race. The camera captured her eyes and shy smile just after the finish line, and the film showed the scene with one cutting of the long takes. Moreover, the highlights of the film and the Tokyo Games itself were the chaotic entrance parade of the athletes at the closing ceremony. This happening was not expected in the film script. Although the scene of the Emperor Hirohito was criticized, he was responding to the athletes by smiling and swinging his hat unconsciously. It could be said that these shots succeeded in representing universal human nature.

In sum, it can be said that this great and excellent film tried to represent not only the peaceful world but also

universal equality as human beings. The images of the film have no connection with race and class because of the representations of the universal solemnity of athletes, and human possibilities of excellent performance by winners and losers. This is the really authentic representation of the Olympism of the filmmakers, and this is the reason the film was appraised (and praised) as a great film worldwide.

On the other hand, most Japanese persons concerned with the Tokyo Olympic Games could not understand this Olympism from the film representations. As evidence supporting this concluding remark, the next year (1966) another film, "*Impressive Century*" was reedited and released in Japan. This film was aimed at mainly recording the Japanese athletes' activities and was edited in the order of the Games. Although it was released with the promotion of the union of the sport member of the Diet, it did not receive a good evaluation from film critics in Japan.

V. Conclusion: Nationalism, Trans-nationalism, and Olympism.

In this study, by reconfirming the disputes using newspapers and film journals, and with film analysis, the conflict between artistic and documentary representation was confirmed. As shown above, the persistence of those other than Ichikawa to the goal of recording the activities shows the aims to uplift national power and to display Japan. This stand point tried to record the nationalism, even though the Olympic ideal promotes trans-nationalism in some sense (6). Nevertheless, it is true that the Olympic Games seem to be a favourable opportunity to reconfirm and to reinforce national identity in any time. In contrast, the director Ichikawa tried to record not the nationalism of Japan but the trans-nationalism of the Olympics. In this sense, the film was a documentary record. The symbolic images captured in the film represented exactly the peace and the solitude of the world and recorded the universal human equality. Ichikawa said that the sport was a manifestation of the pureness (7). Is this sport philosophy just a dream not to come true any more, or not? It seems to be necessary for us to rethink critically the modern Olympic Games according to reinterpretations of the records of Olympism.

Note 1

A continuity of the filming according to the script takes the director's frame images into account. In the images of the frames of each shots, the subjects filmed, the lens, the location and movement of cameras, the size of frames, the camera angles, the sequence of the scene, sound and music, etc. are carefully written into the script.

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Appendix

The chronological order of the making and the dispute over *Tokyo Olympiad*

1960: The director, Akira Kurosawa, inspected the Rome Olympiad.

1962: Kurosawa resigned. The Ministry of Finance approved the production costs, 250,000,000 yen.

1963, spring: Seven News Film companies established the Association Tokyo Olympiad Film.

.10: Trial shooting at Tokyo International Sport Games in National Stadium.

1964.01.20: Kon Ichikawa inaugurated as the head director.

.05.18: Kon Ichikawa, Natsuto Wada, Yoshio Shirasaka, and Syuntaro Tanikawa begin to write the script.

.05.26: The establishment of the Committee of the Official Film of the Tokyo Olympiad.

.08-09: filming of the lighting of the sacred fire at Greece, and the filming of the torch relay in south Asia.

.10-: filming of the torch relay in Japan according to the script.

.10.10: opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympiad. From this night, every night checking of the film, rushes and meetings.

.10-24: filming the Games. Total footage of reached 322,933 feet, and sound recordings about 240 hours.

1965.01.11: the first cut of the film (about 18,000 feet).

.01.20: sound and music rushes.

.02.28: preview of the film; the completion of *Tokyo Olympiad*.

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The dispute over the film in 1965-1966.

* : dispute = reproducing of the film, centralizing the records.

: refutation of Ichikawa and the film world.

@: praised internationally.

1965.03.08: the special preview of the film.
* Ichiro Kono, Special Minister of the Tokyo Olympiad and the President of The Japanese Athletic Association, proposed that "This film is not a documentary, and too much artistic." This opinion ignited the dispute about whether the production was "a documentary film or artistic one."

03.10: special preview for Emperor Hirohito and the Imperial family.
* Toho Film Company, the distributor of the film, requested Ichikawa to reedit.
* Mr. Kono and the President of the OOC, Yosano, proposed that another documentary film, which would be centred on the records, must be produced.
The director Ichikawa argued that this film was a record of human being and the significance of Olympic Games.

03.11: film reviews and criticisms were printed in newspapers according to both Ichikawa's and Kono's comments.
*# The film reediting was decided.
Ichikawa asserted that this reediting was a link in a chain of accomplishment by the film.
* The union of the sport members of the Diet made a proposition to make a film centred on competition records.

03.15: completion of the Japanese version of the film (170 min. 15,226 feet).

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- 03.16: * The Minister of Education, Aichi, decided not to recommend this film for children, because this film was too much artistic, and did not seem to be understood by children.
The director, Ichikawa, argued that children had some good sensibilities to art.
- 03.17: * The Japan Amateur Sports Association stated that a film had to be recorded of all finals of the Games and the activities of Japanese athletes.
Ichikawa declared he would not reedit another documentary film.
- 03.18: * The Olympic Organization Committee decided that another film centred on the records of the Games would be produced, although Ichikawa's edition would be released in Japan, and that the foreign version would be reedited to about 120 minutes in English.
- 03.20: Ichikawa's Japanese version was released in 260 movie theatres in Japan.
@ Most Japanese newspapers wrote positive reviews.
- 03.21: @ The USSR's official newspaper, PRAVDA, praised the film highly.
- 03.23: * The Minister, Kono, said that the film was unsuitable for a documentary, and he disagreed that the film be recommended to children. He was also in favour of the OOC's reedition of the film.
- 03.24: @ *Tokyo Olympiad* invited officially to the 18th Cannes International Film Festival.
- 03.25: # The Japan Association of Film Directors protested to the OOC and Japanese Government.

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- *Mr. Kono still asserted that the film was unsuitable for a documentary film apart from its artistic nature.
- 03.27: The union of the sport members of the Diet began to arrange the situation.
*# Director Ichikawa had a conversation with the Minister Kono.
*# Ichikawa's edited film was decided to be the foreign version because he agreed to reedit making much of the records of the Games.
- 03.29: The Minister Kono and the members of OOC allowed Ichikawa's foreign version after viewing the rushes of the film.
- 04.05: The foreign version was completed in time for the first preview in Malaysia.
- 04.08: @The first preview in a foreign country, Malaysia. Foreign news services sent good evaluations.
- 04.09: @The director, Ichikawa, was invited to the Moscow Film Festival.
- 05.20-25: @The film was highly praised, and received the special awards of the International Film Critics.
- 06.03: @An English version of 93 minutes was praised enormously at the first preview in America at the New York Modern Museum, and a contract was made for its release in America. Critics said that they did not understand why the film was decried in Japan.
- 10.07: @The film was released in London and won popularity.
- Another documentary film, *Impressive Century*
- 1965.03.31: the OOC decided to reedit another

- documentary film in
addition to Ichikawa's film.
- .10.07: Another film, *Impressive Century*,
was completed.
- .10.08: The first preview of the film. The
union of the sport members of the
Diet decided to promote the film
release.
- 1966.04.01: The decision to release the film to
the Japanese audiences was made.
- .05.18-27: The film was released in Japan.
- .05.18: The main Tokyo newspaper wrote a
negative film review that the
reediton of the documentary had no
significance.