

Legacy of 2020



Professor Hiroko Ota of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and chairperson of the Economy and Technology Commission of the Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games

JAPAN is addressing a variety of challenges ahead of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to be held in Tokyo in 2020, including energizing the economy and developing cutting-edge scientific technology. We spoke with Professor Hiroko Ota of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and chairperson of the Economy and Technology Commission of the Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games regarding how Japan will change ahead of the Tokyo Games.

What is Japan aiming to achieve in the spheres of economics and technology for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games?

Following the 1964 Olympic Games, the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be the second time Japan has hosted the summer Games. The 1964 Olympic Games were held during Japan's period of rapid economic growth as the nation bounced back from the devastation of the Second World War. In that year, the Shinkansen Bullet Train entered service between Tokyo and Osaka, road networks such as the Tokyo Metropolitan Expressway in central Tokyo grew and the urban functions of Tokyo developed. The Olympics became a major opportunity for Japan to make even further strides in the fields of economics and technology.

Japan now faces a variety of challenges, including the shrinking birthrate and the aging of the population. Our aim is to ensure that the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games become a milestone in encouraging the kind of advanced economic and technological development that could potentially resolve such issues. I believe that such advances in economics and technology

Photo: Yuichi Itabashi

will help both Japan and the rest of the world take a major step forward.

Professor Ota, you chair the Economy and Technology Commission of the Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. What sort of discussions have the Commission engaged in?

We're lucky to have a variety of experts taking part as members of the Commission, including university professors, attorneys and company executives who are discussing what we need to build in the fields of economics and technology as the legacy of the Games that will continue to prevail after 2020 and what we need to do by 2020 to achieve that. The theme taken up by the Economic and Technology Commission is "Restoration of the Japan Brand." This theme focuses on the creation of highly reliable, high value-added products and services through the incorporation of a variety of ideas. These include, for instance, making it possible for anyone to move and communicate without hindrance, to share feelings with large numbers of others, and to enjoy security that is high in reliability and quality.

What sort of specific technological achievements are being targeted?

We anticipate that very many guests from overseas will be visiting Japan. Technologies for multilingual communication are therefore being developed so that these people do not experience any language difficulties. These include translation applications that can be downloaded to a smart phone and the placement of robots capable of multilingual communication at locations such as airports and meeting venues.

One type of environmental technology under development is hydrogen technology. We're considering the adoption of hydrogen-powered buses as a means of transportation for athletes and guests and the use of hydrogen energy to

provide electric power to the Olympic Village.

Visual technology is also being developed. Technologies that make possible high-resolution video which far exceeds current 4k or 8k television quality, or technologies using virtual reality techniques which can create the visual experience of being right on the scene are examples of such technologies.

In addition, terrorism has become a serious problem worldwide in recent years. Security technology to prevent terrorism, including cyber-terrorism, will continue to evolve in the future.

What is the status of preparations being made for 2020?

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has praised the preparations which Japan has made for 2020. You could say that preparations are proceeding smoothly according to schedule. From this point forward, an important factor will be how to stimulate interest in the Olympic and Paralympic Games throughout Japan. We need to ensure that the Games draw participation not just by the athletes but by many citizens, particularly young people.

Right now Japan is undergoing big changes, and present circumstances make it hard to predict the future. For this reason, some people have a vague sense of unease. Given this situation, my hope is that the Olympics will provide an opportunity to open up new vistas for Japan. The Tokyo Olympics held in 1964 were exactly that sort of Olympics. I want to ensure that the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will provide significant self-confidence for the young generations in the same way that the Olympics of 1964 did. I also hope that many people across the world will come to see the new Japan and share the thrill of the competition while enjoying the warm hospitality of the Japanese people. 

Inverview by OSAMU SAWAJI
