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What Japan Should Do for the Tokyo Olympics: Now is the Time for Japan's "Insight Diplomacy"

By WATANABE Hirotaka

The hosting of the Olympics is now in doubt. Regardless of how the Olympics will be held, or if the IOC unfortunately decides not to hold the games, Japan's efforts to host the games both at home and abroad will be highly appreciated, but how will Japan's international insight be evaluated amid the corona pandemic? A year or so ago, Prime Minister Abe announced the postponement of the Olympics at a time when international pressure to cancel last summer's Olympics seemed to be mounting.

It was a last-minute decision, but it seems the world accepted Japan's decision as a good one. At the time, I considered that there was no need to explicitly postpone the Olympics, nor should there be a one-year deadline, and that the world should make its own decision. I insisted through several media that Japan should simply say, "We will hold a peace festival with you after the Corona pandemic is over and when the world has settled down," but my voice was not heard.

That idea has not changed. The point of my proposal was to suggest "the possibility of substantial postponement," although Japan did not have to state it herself. What is more important is to send a message to the world that we would cooperate in bringing about a state of peace in the world and that we would wait for that to happen before holding the Olympics. That is the true meaning of the Olympics. At the root of my remarks is an awareness of seeking Japanese diplomacy from a broader perspective. This expression may be unfamiliar to many people, but it refers to a diplomatic stance of being a "global player," in other words, thinking about the countries of the world from a broader perspective, walking with them, and leading them.

The world still has high expectations for Japan as a leader in Asia. Although China is gaining momentum to surpass the U.S. in terms of physical and economic size, Japan is the foremost Asian country that gives the world a sense of security psychologically and spiritually. Thus, isn't it natural for Japan to express to the world its attitude toward foreign affairs from a broad perspective? Such thoughts on Japan's foreign policy lie behind my opinion.

Of course, as a matter of principle, there are probably few people who would disagree with this idea. On the other hand, there must be counterarguments as well. There

are many factors that may hinder my principled argument. There is the pessimistic view that Japan does not have the power to lead the world.

However, the real question for us is our will. It's about the "proactive diplomacy." Not the kind of "passive diplomacy" dictated by the international environment around us. The same is true of the debate over the Nuclear Weapons Convention, which came into force in January of this year. The opening ceremony of the Olympic Games should be headed by the Greek team. Isn't the presence of Japan, the only country to have experienced atomic bombings, even more important in the international movement to abolish nuclear weapons?

Then, what should Japan do now regarding the Olympics? There is a point to the idea that since we have come this far, we should implement the Olympics at all costs. If the Olympics can be held without any problems, Japan may be able to gain a reputation as an advanced country that excels in hygiene management and maintaining order. Rather, isn't it possible for Japan to explicitly show her stance of waiting for world peace aside from wanting to hold the event for her own sake? Japan has worked hard up to this point, however, in consideration of the situation in the world, she can resolutely leave it to the IOC to decide whether to hold the Games once again. Wouldn't that be better for Japan to raise her international reputation and convey the message as a leading country in the world? Personally, I don't think we can shake off the impression that it is too late, but still, in the end, we would be able to offer a certain amount of insight.

Even if the Olympics do not come to fruition this time, there will always be another opportunity for such a country. I call it "insight diplomacy," and I believe that the true meaning of cultural diplomacy is basically to convey a message of values. If the Olympics were to be cancelled due to an external pressure, that would be the worst-case scenario. Now that the IOC has announced that it will not accept foreign visitors, this is the last chance. It's not too late.

(This is the English translation of an article written by WATANABE Hirotaka, Distinguished Research Fellow, JFIR / Professor, Teikyo University, which originally appeared on the e-forum "Hyakka-Seiho (Hundred Flowers in Full Bloom)" of JFIR on March 31 & April 1, 2021.)

Reference

Hirotaka WATANABE, "Now is the time for Japan to adopt a true 'Insight Diplomacy'" *GFJ Commentary*, No. 90, April 28, 2020.

<http://www.gfj.jp/e/commentary/200428.html>