

Wrestling with Gender

Coverage of the Olympic Games in Japanese Media

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Introduction

Current studies analysing gendered representations of athletes in the media focus primarily on Anglophone or European countries. This paper attempts to expand this scope by adding female athletes and media in Asia to the small body of work in English-language research. It does so by focusing on gendered depictions of athletes in Japanese media during the largest sporting event in the world: the Olympic Games.

Although media in Japan are still heavily influenced by hegemonic discourses of what is considered feminine and masculine, the consistent success of several Japanese athletes in sports ranging from track and field to volleyball has already challenged the ideal of the Japanese woman as a physically 'fragile' homemaker in the past. Coverage during the 2012 London Olympics and 2016 Rio Olympics, heavily influenced by the success of individual athletes, shows continuity in this regard. Gendered aspects are often superseded. This is evidenced by, for example, the significant amount of media attention that Japanese female wrestlers received during both of these Olympic editions, outperforming male wrestlers by a large margin. Also, in qualitative terms, female athletes are still distinctly differentiated from male athletes, with their success indirectly attributed to external factors, such as male guidance. The depiction of female athletes in Japanese media is congruent with the marginalisation that female athletes face in European and Anglophone media, as has been explored in existing literature. However, this article argues that it is incorrect to assume that women are considerably marginalized in 'masculine' sports in Japan, as they frequently are in cases outside of Japan. Significantly, the consistent success of Japanese female wrestlers in the Olympic Games has overshadowed the results of their male colleagues. This problematizes the notion that female athletes are mostly gaining ground in more 'attractive' sports¹ and

that they are marginalized when they deviate from what is perceived as appropriately feminine by participating in sports requiring 'masculine' physical capital such as muscularity, arguably viewed as 'distasteful and inhumane'.²

Starting with a short overview of media, gender and the Olympics in existing research, this article shows how sports coverage in European and Anglophone media mainly focuses on male athletes. Although women athletes are gaining ground in coverage in certain aspects, such as quantitatively in photographic coverage, these are still frequently limited to more 'attractive' sports, with sexualization as a recurring theme resulting in a consistent underrepresentation of women. The paper continues by describing how female athletes faced consistent marginalization when modern sports were introduced in Japan in the late nineteenth century and developed throughout the early twentieth century. This is followed by an exploration of how women and sport in Japan have developed, using examples of athletes who have defined and redefined female athleticism in Japan throughout the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. It becomes clear through these examples that female athletes have been able to push the boundaries of what is considered 'appropriate' for women in Japan through sports. The following section deals with gendered depictions in media in Japan during the London Olympic Games in 2012. Exploring an existing Japanese study on television coverage of the Games, this section shows how women athletes in Japan are also gaining ground in media from a quantitative perspective. This is similar to earlier studies of European and Anglophone media. However, the article also shows that women are still described as more emotional, showing a clear differentiation in descriptions of female and male athletes. Subsequently, this article continues with a study of gendered depictions of athletes in Japanese print media during the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, showing that female athletes are gaining ground in terms of increased photographic coverage, especially in the case of wrestling. This is interesting, as wrestling requires musculature, a physical attribute mostly framed as masculine. The article then concludes with its main findings, describing how certain aspects of gendered depictions of female athletes in Japanese media are congruent to existing cases covering European and Anglophone cases. However, as the article also concludes, it is problematic to assume that Japanese women athletes are side-lined in sports that are deemed masculine, as a more in-depth exploration of Olympic wrestling coverage in Japanese print media shows.

Media, gender, and the Olympics

It has been well established that people are influenced by the media they consume. This has significant effects on how gender is perceived, as these media construct, in the words of Eoin Trolan, 'narratives of what it means to be a woman or man, and more specifically, the gender imbalance between men and women', something that is especially apparent in the world of sport.³ For example, Dianne Jones' study about online coverage of several major news networks shows that 'the achievements of male

athletes were the focus of coverage [...] 16 out of 18 days' during the 2008 Olympic Games.⁴ Similarly, Andrew C. Billings concludes in a longitudinal study on the Olympic Games between 1996 and 2006 'that the gaps between coverage of men's Olympic sports and women's Olympic sports' have not improved towards the late 2000s, with a noticeable preference for male athletes.⁵ Even where the focus was shifting more towards female athletes this appeared to be centralized around 'attractive sports, such as beach volleyball [...]'.⁶ Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes aptly describe this phenomenon when they argue that in the media

[t]he marginalization of women's sport is perhaps the clearest manifestation of patriarchal ideologies in sport. The gendered values of sport are acutely realized when the physical capital ascribed to men and women's bodies differs so greatly. Female muscularity is viewed as distasteful and inhumane. Masculine strength and bravura are celebrated and viewed as heroic. Success and power in sport come to represent the iconic symbol of manhood. Women's boxing, for example, clearly disrupts and challenges such stereotypes, attempting to co-opt the quintessential male sport for its own celebration of women's power and physical ability.⁷

The ideological entrenchment of dominant masculinity is seen throughout media outlets. In non-sport magazines in the United States, for example, there is a visible contrast between female athletes who are 'encouraged to achieve a synthesis of beauty and physical fitness' and men who 'are encouraged to achieve a competitive record in power and performance sports', despite any actual progress of female sport.⁸ Even during the 2012 London Summer Olympics, which were described as the 'Women's Games' because for the first time all participating countries sent female athletes, photographic evidence from print media shows a persistent preference for depicting male athletes.⁹ This is also the case with televised news in the United States, which has seen a measurable decline in the coverage of women's sport over the past 20 years.¹⁰ However, there are differences between media outlets. Christopher King, for example, points out that women received more photographic coverage in British newspapers during the 2004 Athens Olympics compared to their male counterparts when considering the overall participation rate. Nevertheless, also here 'female coverage was sexualized, and images of women were placed in the latter pages of the sport section or below pictures of male athletes', resulting in an overall underrepresentation of female athletes.¹¹

Amy Godoy-Pressland and Gerald Griggs state that portrayal of female athletes is affected by a cascading variety of influences. In their study on the 2012 London Olympics they argue that nationalism, patriotism and the scale of specific sporting events can heavily affect the gender bias in different media.¹² This article follows Allen McKee's approach by analysing the 'evidence left of the practice' by examining the media produced and the context in which this takes place to investigate the 'normativeness of [a] narrative'.¹³ Several scholars have even argued that the success of media relies on how existing sources of knowledge are utilized in the production process.¹⁴ Consequently,

a more inclusive understanding of the underlying dynamics of gender balance in the media needs to expand the scope of research cases.

Sport in Japan

Modern sports in Japan developed alongside the country's growing educational infrastructure in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Although sports were already practiced in Japan, it was only in the latter half of the nineteenth century that 'sport' in its more contemporary form started proliferating in the country. Due to their popularity among students, especially baseball and tennis developed.¹⁵ Following the introduction of baseball in 1872 at Kaisei-Gakkō (university), different sports were gradually introduced into schools in Japan, mostly at the university level. These included boating (a general term for boat sports such as rowing) (1873), football and softball (1874), and hockey (1875). This trend continued into the twentieth century with track and field, basketball and rugby (1913), handball, volleyball and sumo (1926). Furthermore, the development of capitalism in Japan resulted in an increase in educational institutions, in turn producing a larger number of students engaged in these sports. Inevitably, throughout this process, it became clear to several key actors in Japan that sports needed to be codified alongside the regular curriculum in order to facilitate the increased participation and competition between students and athletes.¹⁶ One of these key actors was Jigōrō Kanō, the founder of contemporary judo and one of the most influential figures in the promulgation of mass-sport in Japan. He was the first member of the International Olympic Committee from Japan, and in 1911 became the first president of the Japan Sports Association, leading Japanese participation in international sports competitions.¹⁷ Kanō used judo to introduce a new approach to sports in Japan towards more Western-style rationalized methods of practice.¹⁸ In addition, newly imported sports started proliferating in this period, with a growing number of sporting associations (*undō-bu*, mostly affiliated to schools) organizing competitions.¹⁹ However, although experiencing an uplift in the 1920s the development of sport for women remained of peripheral importance throughout a large part of its early development in Japan. Although the actual participation rates for female athletes from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century remain largely unknown, the lack in growth of women's sports is visible in the marginalized position they occupied in local, regional, national and even international competitions.²⁰

Women and sport in Japan

From the late nineteenth century onwards, women's role within Japanese society was justified pedagogically and educationally formulated with the concept of 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryōsai kempo*). Appropriating this dual role to women was not unique to

Japan,²¹ but did have a significant effect on the conceptualization of women in relation to sports in the country, as three examples show.

Judo presents a first example. Kanō, the founder of modern judo, was worried about what he considered the 'fragile' bodies of women and adjusted exercise routines to better fit his ideas, and going as far as to separate judo practice between men and women in his own school (Kadokan).²² In this sense, judo serves as a good example of how female sports participation developed in Japan. While male participation rates were skyrocketing in the 1920s and '30s, examples of female practitioners (both female and male practitioners of judo are called *judoka*) are rare to come by and are mostly limited to Kanō's own special section for women (*joshi bu*). Even in this section female *judoka* faced consistent challenges. They were largely excluded from competition throughout the growth of the sport, both in Japan and internationally. Remarkably, not Japanese women but female *judoka* from the West eventually forced their way through a ban from competitions, with the International Judo Federation lifting it as late as 1974. This suggests that the position of female *judoka* in Japan, judo's country of origin, did not progress at the same pace as that of their foreign counterparts. In fact, Japan first had to sign the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and change the law before *judoka* were gradually allowed to participate in competitions. A few decades later, the success of *judoka* such as Ryōko Tamura (Tani), a seven-time world champion and two-time gold medallist at the Olympics between 1992 and 2008, would suggest that the position of female *judoka* within the sport in Japan had improved. However, to this day female *judoka* in Japan still face sexism in a variety of ways. The eventual expectations of marriage and motherhood remain primary focus points; this is exemplified by the fact that Tamura's marriage and the birth of her child were heavily publicized events and showcased a return to the conservative 'good wife, wise mother' values in Japanese media.²³

Another example of the ambiguous position of female athletes in Japan is track and field and particularly the case of Hitomi Kinue, the first Japanese woman to win an Olympic medal at the 800 meter sprint during the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics.²⁴ Her success became a media sensation in Japan. She contributed to this by 'delivering speeches about her achievement throughout Japan', resulting in contemporary nationalists turning her Olympic achievement into a testament to the 'Japanese spirit'.²⁵ It is possible to interpret Kinue's success as a form of resistance to a perceived Western dominance in both (international) sports and global politics at the time, as some scholars do.²⁶ However, she also deviated from the roles she was expected to fulfil as a Japanese woman. This became obvious in the public debates about the value of sports for women in Japan sparked by her early death at the age of 24 in 1931. These included opposing and supporting arguments about the health values of sport for women. Although such debates had existed earlier, Kinue's death served to further gender the sports discourse. Female athletes were now labelled 'victims' whenever they encountered injuries.²⁷ This consolidated the idea that women's bodies were fragile and needed extra attention if they were to participate in sports. Kinue's passing also fuelled discussions regarding her biological gender when it was speculated that an assumed 'masculine' behaviour dur-

ing her childhood showed her being either a man or at least '40 or 50 percent male'. In line with this discourse there were also public deliberations on her sexual preferences, comparisons of her body to men's bodies (especially her 'unusual' height), and the fact that she had not been married, all suggesting that both she and her biographers 'had been feminiz[ing] her athletic image' to make up for a perceived lack.²⁸

The dual role of *ryōsai kembo* that formed the basis for these debates was effectively promulgated through educational institutions, evidenced by the opposition from educational circles and parents of female students to women participating in sports at the time. Despite the popular association of sports with unfeminine behaviour, however, and similar to countries in Europe, growing nationalism in Japan leading up to World War II resulted in an increasingly strong conviction among nationalists that women actually needed sports to become stronger and healthier than their Western counterparts, encumbering women with the obligation to bear a strong new generation of Japanese children.²⁹ Simultaneously, male dominated sport was asserted continuously, reinforcing already existing ambivalences towards the role of female athletes.³⁰

Male hegemony in sports was not only expressed in this ambivalent stance. A third and later example in this regard is that of the 'Oriental Witches' (*tōyō no majo*), a celebrated team of Japanese female volleyball players who won 22 consecutive games in Europe in 1961 and went on to win a gold medal during the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Similar to Kinue, these athletes were hailed as 'national heroes' and they are still 'praised for their skill and athletic performance'. However, as Iwona Merklejn shows, by incorporating the social and cultural context into our understanding of the phenomenon, it becomes clear that the presentation of these 'national heroes' was constructed parallel to a reliance on conservative gender values.³¹ In the volleyball final the Oriental Witches faced the Soviet Russian team that consisted of players taller than themselves. This physicality became a focal point in the mediatized attempt to preserve the femininity of the Japanese players. Domestic media dichotomized the tall 'masculine' players from Russia who were framed as representing 'the West' and the 'little Japanese players' as petite and implicitly more feminine.³² In addition, the expectations of marriage and motherhood were recurring themes in the reports on the players' lives. In an attempt to subdue the external reification of the conservative role that Japanese women were expected to fulfil, some even had to justify their continued participation as a 'sacrifice to the state'.³³ Tellingly, one player's decision to postpone marriage until after the Olympic Games became a topic of national debate.³⁴ Merklejn also shows how the team was 'portrayed as a harmonious family, obedient to the father [the team coach, Hirobumi Daimatsu]', thus upholding male hegemony in Japan. Imposing a strict regime, Daimatsu was presented in public discourse as an ideal 'father-like, charismatic coach'. Despite his strictness, the players remembered him as a 'loving father'.³⁵ This framing reflects the persistent ideology of the male head of the family.³⁶ Daimatsu's training methods and the team's eventual success did pose a challenge to contemporary discourses of the 'fragile and weak' female body. However, by implying the psychological weakness of women in need of strict male-imbued discipline, it also reinforced the already prevalent gendered hierarchy.³⁷

Ambivalent portrayals

All three historical examples signify what Margaret Carlisle Duncan and Cynthia A. Hasbrook call the ambivalence of 'positive portrayals stressing women's strength, skill, or expertise along with negative suggestions that [trivialise] the women's efforts or [imply] that they [are] unsuited to sport'.³⁸ By doing so, the media do not only maintain the gender bias but also actively construct barriers for female sports participation,³⁹ also called 'symbolic annihilation'.⁴⁰ Toni Bruce aptly formulates this position when she explains that this process results in the idea that 'Sportswomen don't matter'.⁴¹

Research focusing on Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States has shown how female athletes were perpetually ignored and their successes marginalized. Such concrete as well as symbolic annihilation resulted in persisting barriers for women in sport. Simultaneously, as the cases of Kinue, Tamura and the Oriental Witches show, female athletes were pushing the boundaries of hegemonic gender discourses. In Japan they frequently did so under the aegis of a strongly nationalistic discourse. In fact, as Robin Orlansky argues, Japanese female athletes oftentimes 'receive significant media attention', and utilizing this attention they have already broadened 'the ways "success" can be defined for Japanese women', making that 'not all women in Japan are invariably entrapped in the position of the submissive homemaker, a stereotypical image that still persists today'.⁴² The success of Kinue serves as an example, as she opened up a national debate on the value of women in sports. The choice of several Oriental Witches to postpone marriage, again sparking national debates, is another case in point. However, Orlansky also explains that the amount of media attention might increase during times of success but that post-feat framing still frequently reverts to 'a more conservative gender discourse by privileging their achievements in traditionally feminine roles of wife and mother over their individual sporting success'.⁴³ Despite this post-feat reversal, Michelle H.S. Ho concludes in her study on femininity and athleticism on morning television that there is an 'increasing tolerance for alternative roles for women in Japanese society'. Ho argues that Japanese women are more than ever able to move away from roles considered more 'appropriate' while audience perceptions of the presentation of female athletes are influenced by interventions of 'nationalistic discourse, athletic prowess, and appropriate femininity'.⁴⁴ Depictions are also influenced by the popularity of individual athletes and different sports, and even the improbability of success in sports where other countries' athletes might be dominant.⁴⁵ Although dominant gender discourses still strongly influence the representation of female athletes in the media, success can significantly affect what is deemed 'appropriate' for women, allowing female athletes to slowly detach themselves from the conservative idea of the Japanese woman as a fragile homemaker, mother and wife.

Closer examination of the representation of female athletes in Japan will deepen our understanding of the underlying dynamics in gendered ideologies. The Olympic Games offer a valuable opportunity to study how these media utilize gendered framing, it being the largest media event in the world and widely covered in Japanese

domestic media. The following section therefore delves deeper into the gendered representation of female athletes in Japanese media during the 2012 London and 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

Gendered representations in Japanese media: the London 2012 Olympic Games

The Olympic Games are an immense media event and Japanese media contribute to this predominance. To examine how competing athletes were gendered in domestic media coverage Naomi Kobayashi explored gendered aspects in media portrayals focusing on televised news programmes aired during the London Olympic Games in 2012. One of the main conclusions of her study is that the majority of Japanese news coverage of the 2012 Games concerned itself with Japanese athletes (92.1 percent).⁴⁶ Success was a strong determining factor in gaining more coverage, with 81.6 percent dedicated to medal winners. Kobayashi also shows that female athletes received more coverage than their male colleagues when considering overall success. Japanese female athletes won 17 medals, receiving 55.2 percent of airtime, while male athletes won 21 medals, receiving 43.5 percent. This was related to the success of the individual athletes. For example, in wrestling both female and male athletes won three medals but female wrestlers got 7 percent of total television news coverage and male wrestlers only 1.4 percent.⁴⁷ An overview of the medal rankings indicates that female wrestlers were more successful than their male counterparts, winning three gold medals, while the men won only one gold and two bronze medals. In addition, two female wrestlers from Japan successfully defended their previous Olympic titles: Saori Yoshida (2004 and 2008 gold medallist in the 55 kg women's freestyle event) and Kaori Ichō (2004 and 2008 gold medallist in the 63 kg women's freestyle event), showing that female wrestlers were consistently successful at the Olympics.

Although the total coverage of female athletes exceeds that of male athletes, further analysis of the coverage shows this does not reflect the whole picture. For example, in televised news coverage of the 2012 Games female athletes were more likely to be described as 'happy' (*yorokobi*, 74 percent); 'sad' (*kanashimi*, 83.3 percent); 'spirited' (*kihaku*, 100 percent); and 'nervous/tense' (*kinchō*, 100 percent), while male athletes were more often described as 'angry' (*ikari*, 85.7 percent). Similarly, topics such as marriage, children, family, love interest, or personality were more frequently used to describe female than male athletes.⁴⁸ So, while in the total coverage it seems that female athletes were gaining ground in comparison to their male counterparts, a deeper reading uncovers an inherent ambivalence towards female wrestlers as well. There are, however, a few limitations to Kobayashi's study. First, it does not include an analysis of visual representation. Second, it excludes how athletes are comparatively assigned specific markers of femininity or masculinity associated to specific sports. The 'appropriateness' of certain sports would suggest a deviation from the argument that women (especially in more 'masculine' sports) are consistently marginalized. However, female wrestlers appear to receive dedicated coverage, even though it is clear that

wrestling – a martial arts that requires developed musculature – does not fit into the framework of the conservative feminine woman with a ‘petite’ and ‘fragile’ body. It is therefore also necessary to also establish *how* these wrestlers are depicted. This will be done by examining coverage of the 2016 Rio Olympics to expand on how wrestlers were depicted in print media before, during and after the event.

Covering female athletes during the Rio 2016 Olympics

The study below consists of an analysis of photographic material from articles published in the *Asahi Shimbun*, one of Japan’s national daily newspapers.⁴⁹ Despite a decline in newspaper readership,⁵⁰ Japan still maintains a high degree of mass circulation and readership, with newspapers remaining a reflection of the ‘social mainstream’.⁵¹ The initial timeframe is between 5 and 21 August 2016. Examining how Japanese wrestlers are framed, the timeframe is then expanded to include the week prior to and the week after the Games (29 July to 28 August 2016) in order to include insight into the expectations and evaluations of the Olympics. The analysis then proceeds with a limited textual analysis to investigate *how* the athletes were described.

The analysis focuses on photographs because, as Margaret Carlisle Duncan writes, while they seem to be realistic and objective, they are ‘never neutral renderings’. This is especially true for the gendered depictions.⁵² In order to examine how this is done in Japan, the photographic evidence from the 2016 Rio Olympics was first categorized according to frequency (total number), date and sport, and then categorized as the following: female, male or unspecified (the focus of the image did not focus on an athlete).⁵³ In addition, the photographs were categorized by the following factors taken from King: athletic pose, meaning ‘a performing athlete who is wearing their team clothing whilst participating in his or her event’, and non-athletic pose, meaning ‘a picture of an athlete in a non-sport setting or not wearing their team clothing’.⁵⁴

Because a long-term discourse analysis is outside the scope of this analysis, the research offered here is limited to an eclectic methodological approach that obviates certain qualitative aspects. In addition to these limitations, the analysis relies on only one newspaper, limiting generalizability. The purpose of this analysis is to add a perspective to a broader understanding of gender framing.

Results

In 393 articles containing 613 photographs, 36.7 percent depict female athletes, 50.41 percent depict male athletes with 2.94 percent depicting both and 9.95 are unspecified. In contrast, the Japanese team at the Olympics consisted of 164 female (48.52) and 174 male athletes (51.48 percent).⁵⁵ A comparison of the participation rate and coverage indicates a significant imbalance favouring male athletes. Female athletes won seven gold medals, while male athletes won five. Despite being more successful in the

gold medal standings, female athletes received less visual exposure than male athletes. Comparing gender category and pose also shows that photographs of athletic poses contained less female (38.9 percent) than male (60.27 percent) athletes, suggesting a bias favouring males.

There are conspicuous differences in the balance in individual sports. While visual coverage of badminton and wrestling are dominated by female athletes, photographs of football, gymnastics, judo, rugby, swimming, tennis and track are dominated by men. Especially coverage of football, tennis, and track are male dominated, with 93.75, 100, and 84.85 percent, respectively. Overall, male athletes receive a clear advantage in total photographic coverage. Nevertheless, there are sports that deviate from this rule, most notably wrestling, a sport easily associated with masculinity but clearly dominated by female athletes in terms of coverage. For this reason, the following section further explores how wrestlers were depicted during the Rio Olympics.

Wrestling

Wrestling has been an official Olympic event since 1904. However, the women's event was only added a century later, during the 2004 Olympic Games.⁵⁶ Succinctly, wrestling is a sport in which two athletes face each other off in a circular ring, and the goal is to pin down one's opponent, or win by points for specific moves. Necessarily, the sport requires musculature to ensure strong physical fitness. When looking at the existing research explored earlier focusing on European and Anglophone media, the conclusion that 'musculature on a female is considered [...] socially unacceptable'⁵⁷ strongly suggests that female athletes face marginalization within the sport and in the media.⁵⁸ This is consistent with the idea of "natural" differences between the sexes', in this case musculature, which is perceived as naturally masculine.⁵⁹ If this conclusion can be generalized across media and sport internationally, including Japan, the visual rendering of female athletes such as wrestlers, who have significant muscle definition, would clearly be a break from hegemonic discourses of femininity.

It is an interesting development, therefore, that the Japanese photographs of Olympic wrestling are quantitatively dominated by female athletes and depicting athletic poses. Around 69.77 percent of this coverage is dedicated to female wrestlers, and 27.91 percent to male wrestlers, with 2.33 percent unspecified. In addition, the majority of images were either the main image in the article, or above-text images (not placed below images of male athletes), in non-sexual positions. A closer look into this development reveals why this is the case. Japan sent six female and four male wrestlers to Rio, and five out of six female wrestlers won a medal, of which four were gold medals. In contrast, male wrestlers won two medals, both silver. There is a significant difference in the success ratio between female and male Olympic wrestlers.

Analysing coverage in the week prior to the Olympics shows that female wrestlers were covered in four articles, and male wrestlers in one article: a list of the complete selection of Japanese athletes also mentioning the female wrestlers. The three

remaining articles contained two extensive descriptions of female wrestlers (Rio Watari and Eri Tōsaka),⁶⁰ and one reference to the consistent success of another female wrestler (Saori Yoshida).⁶¹ Similarly, the coverage of wrestling *during* the Olympics was heavily skewed towards female wrestlers (63.29 percent), increasing to 75.86 percent in the week after the Olympics. In comparison, male athletes received 36.71 percent during, and 32.74 percent of wrestling coverage following the Olympics. This indicates not only a clear expectation that female wrestlers were more likely to win medals than male wrestlers at the 2016 Olympics, but also shows that national success as such greatly affected the amount of attention athletes received during and after the Games.

Despite wrestling being a sport easily associated with masculinity, Japanese female wrestlers received more coverage than male wrestlers. Interestingly, this is also the case in terms of visual coverage depicting athletic poses. Musculature, a physical attribute considered 'masculine' and necessary for wrestling, did not prevent female wrestlers from being depicted more, especially in athletic poses, than male wrestlers, despite contradicting the historically constructed conservative female body as petite and fragile. Moreover, there is a strong qualitative gap in the textual coverage between the female and male athletes.

A comparison between two silver medal winners, Saori Yoshida and Rei Higuchi, female and male wrestlers respectively, clearly highlights this gap. Higuchi was mentioned in three articles that described his past, his match(es), a quote by him or concerning him, or a personal aspect, with the remainder of his mentions being limited to his achievement in single sentences or in a chart showcasing the overall Japanese standings. In contrast, Yoshida was covered in 25 articles, ranging from an overview of her achievements, descriptions of her matches, to investigations into her private life. The same applied to the other wrestlers, with a majority of coverage dedicated to female wrestlers. The reason for this is the consistent international success of female wrestlers:

Japan's female wrestling has become the strongest. 'Having become targeted by the world, it [wrestling] will likely become even fiercer during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics' according to Miyazawa. However, she believes that the Japanese women, with their high pride and tough mental fortitude, will be able to strike back at this pressure.⁶²

Nevertheless, it is common for coverage to relapse into a more ambivalent position, as a piece written by Mitsuru Satō, a former Olympic male wrestler and gold medallist, shows:

However, even though Japanese women occupy the top layer, the population of competitors is small. Supporting them are the people from the All Japan Boys and Girls Wrestling. There are only a few examples of countries where, like in Japan, girls can stand on the mat together with boys.⁶³

Despite the fact that the men are less successful at this stage and that there is no evidence of the validity of the above argument, Satō still attributes the success of female wrestlers to the unique system in Japan that allows them to compete with male wrestlers. Similarly, the strict male coach as the guiding father figure, reminiscent of the Oriental Witches, still persists. Gold medallist Sara Doshō's training serves as an example:

Her [Sara Doshō] supervisor was Saori Yoshida's (33) father, Mr. Eikatsu. The supervision was strict. He would correct the position of toes and hands by the millimetre. Her mother Ms. Yūko (47) says 'When she could not do it, he would always get angry'⁶⁴

The title of the article also strongly reinforces the idea that Doshō's success is not her own, but the result of people supporting her: 'Doshō, it is because of the support. [...]'⁶⁵ Female wrestlers are also presented as more emotional, with coverage focusing less on their technique or their training, but rather contributing their success to other factors:

That day three Japanese female wrestlers all performed great last-moment reversals and they all won a gold medal. A champion can become one even under such circumstances. [...] it really is about heart and not technique. These were two days in which I experienced the female athletes' attitude of never giving up. I was again taught the splendour of fighting until the very end.⁶⁶

The success of the three female wrestlers is not attributed to their years of training and effort, but to their willpower, their 'heart' and their attitude of 'never giving up'. The following excerpt highlights the contrast between how female and male athletes are described:

In Rio, even with the former champion as a powerful opponent, he [Higuchi] brought out techniques taught by Mr. Yumoto, such as a single foot tackle, and bending one's arm around your opponent to bring down his position. According to Mr. Yumoto, who watched the game as a television commentator: 'He remained in a state of high concentration and constant movement'.⁶⁷

Two points of interest arise in this comparison: the description of how the athletes were trained and the role of the coach. Building on the idea that women simply need 'more attention' when training, Doshō's trainer is described as strict (male) guiding figure that needed to correct her techniques by the millimetre. In an amazing contrast, Higuchi is simply described as having learnt techniques taught to him, with little reference to correction or disciplinary action from his trainer, Mr. Yumoto.

It is evident that, despite the progress in quantitative terms, gender equity in qualitative terms is still lagging. However, there are indications that progress is continuing, with themes such as marriage and child rearing being rare among both female

and male athletes. In addition, women are neither subservient to male athletes with regard to photograph location, nor overtly sexualized in their visual depictions, even surpassing male athletes in athletic depictions. This shows that female wrestlers in Japan are pushing hard against the boundaries of what is 'appropriate' in terms of being successful as an athlete in a sport that strongly contradicts the idea that Japanese women are fragile and weak.

Conclusion

The majority of studies concerning gendered depictions in sport in the media have focused on Anglophone and European cases. This inherent bias prevents a deeper understanding of how gendered ideologies are expressed in media outside of this region. This article wants to expand that scope. In doing so, it shows that certain aspects of gendered depictions already found in existing studies are also prevalent in Japanese media. Nevertheless, the study of wrestling in Japanese print media also questions certain aspects concerning the dichotomisation of 'appropriate' femininity and masculinity. The case of wrestling in Japan is exceptionally enlightening, especially when considering the historical development of female athleticism in the country. It shows that success can supersede gender and greatly affect the media attention an athlete receives in Japan. This is interesting when considering that wrestling does not fall into the category of 'attractive' sports explored in earlier research. It requires musculature, an attribute associated with masculinity. Yet, visual representations of female wrestlers in athletic poses are not consistently placed in subservient positions to visual renderings of male athletes, nor are the images overly sexualized. Moreover, female wrestlers have received a great deal more textual coverage than male wrestlers, with expectations of success, and actual success, considerably affecting the amount of attention these athletes have received, as is clear in both television coverage of the 2012 London, and print media coverage of the 2016 Rio Olympics. Success has allowed Japanese female wrestlers to shift their representation in the media, pushing the boundaries of 'appropriateness' for women in sport in Japan. Although this seems like a logical conclusion, it is notable that media attention in Japan can balloon even in a sport that strongly contradicts hegemonic discourses of femininity. Nevertheless, it is evident that dominant gender ideologies are still strongly embedded in the qualitative descriptions of female athletes, reminiscent of the 'symbolic annihilation' that female athletes outside of Japan also face. In this aspect Japan does not necessarily deviate from the studies concerning European and Anglophone media. This is apparent in Kobayashi's analysis of the 2012 London Olympics, with female athletes being described in more emotional terms, manifesting itself in coverage during the 2016 Rio Olympics as well. Furthermore, the male coach is still persistently portrayed as a guiding figure. Following this trajectory, the success of female athletes is removed from their individual efforts, and rather framed as a supposed effect of their environment. This is opposed as to how, for example, Japanese male wrestlers are portrayed as owing more to their individual

abilities. It can be concluded, therefore, that despite female wrestlers' push against the boundaries of the Japanese woman as simply a 'fragile' homemaker and shifting what is considered 'appropriate' for women through individual success, news coverage of female athletes still has a long way to go. Nevertheless, from the analysis of Japanese media coverage of Olympic wrestling it is also clear that successful female athletes are receiving widespread attention in a sport contradicting the dominant ideals of femininity, problematizing the generalizability of the argument that female athletes are only gaining ground in media coverage of what are considered 'feminine appropriate' and 'attractive' sports.

NOTES

- 1 Andrew C. Billings, 'Clocking Gender Differences: Televised Olympic Clock Time in the 1996-2006 Summer and Winter Olympics', *Television & New Media* 9 (2008) 5, 439.
- 2 Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes, *Power Play: Sport, Media and Popular Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 143.
- 3 Eoin J. Trolan, 'The impact of the media on gender inequality within sport', *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 91 (2013), 215.
- 4 Dianne Jones, 'Online coverage of the 2008 Olympic Games on the ABC, BBC, CBC and TVNZ', *Pacific Journalism Review* 19 (2013) 1, 257.
- 5 Andrew C. Billings, *Olympic Media: Inside the biggest show on television* (London: Routledge, 2008), 122; and Billings, 'Clocking Gender Differences', 439.
- 6 Billings, 'Clocking Gender Differences', 439.
- 7 Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*, 143.
- 8 Timothy J. Curry, Paula A. Arriagada and Benjamin Cornwell, 'Images of Sport in Popular Nonsport Magazines: Power and Performance versus Pleasure and Participation', *Sociological Perspectives* 45 (2002) 4, 409.
- 9 Amy Godoy-Pressland and Gerald Griggs, 'The Photographic Representation of Female Athletes in the British Print Media During the London 2012 Olympic Games', *Sport in Society* 17 (2014) 6, 819.
- 10 Cheryl Cooky, Michael A. Messner and Robin H. Hextrum, 'Women Play Sport. But Not on TV: A Longitudinal Study of Televised News Media', *Communication & Sport* 1 (2013) 3, 225.
- 11 Christopher King, 'Media Portrayals of Male and Female Athletes: A Text and Picture Analysis of British National Newspaper Coverage of the Olympic Games since 1948', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 42 (2007) 2, 198.
- 12 Amy Godoy-Pressland and Gerald Griggs, 'London 2012: The Women's Games? Examining the Photographic Evidence', in: Kevin Dixon and Tom Gibbons (eds.), *The Impact of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games: Diminishing Contrasts, Increasing Varieties* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 67.
- 13 Alan McKee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 13 and 16.
- 14 Fabrice Desmarais and Toni Bruce, 'Blurring the boundaries of sports public relations: National stereotypes as sport announcers' public relations tools', *Public Relations Review* 34 (2008), 190.
- 15 Interestingly, Wolfram Manzenreiter describes how this is also the case in Austria. He explains how the word 'sport' developed in Austria and Japan, juxtaposing this development with the already

- available activities in Japan that would be considered sports in the contemporary sense. See *Sport and Body Politics in Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 29-30.
- 16 Yuko Kusaka, 'The emergence and development of Japanese school sport', in: *Japan, Sport and Society: Tradition and Change in a Globalizing World*, edited by Joseph Maguire and Masayoshi Nakayama (London: Routledge, 2006), 18 and 27.
 - 17 Shohei Sato, 'The sportification of Judo: global convergence and evolution', *Journal of Global History* 8 (2013), 305-306.
 - 18 Yoshinobu Hamaguchi, 'Innovation in martial arts', in: Joseph Maguire and Masayoshi Nakayama (eds.), *Japan, Sport and Society: Tradition and Change in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge, 2006), 13.
 - 19 Kusaka, 'The emergence and development of Japanese school sport', 19.
 - 20 Kyoko Raita, 'The movement for the promotion of competitive women's sport in Japan, 1924-35', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 16 (1999) 3, 132 and 130 calls this situation 'a state of paralysis', and refers to women's role in competitive sport as a 'subordinate appendage to men's games'.
 - 21 Keiko Ikeda, for example, gives an overview of the literature covering similarities between Japan and England in the promulgation of the underlying values underlying the role women had to play for the benefit of the home, and the nation. See: 'Ryōsai-kembo, Liberal Education and Maternal Feminism under Fascism: Women and Sport in Modern Japan', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27 (2010) 3, 540.
 - 22 Blanca Miarka, Juliana Bastos Marques and Emerson Franchini, 'Reinterpreting the History of Women's Judo in Japan', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28 (2011) 7, 1020.
 - 23 *Ibidem*, 1024-1025.
 - 24 'Kinue Hitomi', *Olympic*, on: <https://www.olympic.org/kinue-hitomi>, accessed 1 August 2018.
 - 25 Dennis J. Frost, *Seeing Stars: Sports Celebrity, Identity and Body Culture in Modern Japan* (Boston: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), 124 and 128.
 - 26 *Ibidem*, 114.
 - 27 *Ibidem*, 114, 131-135. In his exploration on public debates following Kinue's death, Frost shows how medical experts and physicians suddenly had/found?/came up with? a very conspicuous example for their arguments.
 - 28 Murobuse Kōshin, as quoted in Frost, *Seeing Stars*, 143, and 144-145.
 - 29 Raita, 'The movement', 131.
 - 30 Frost, *Seeing Stars*, 117, describes how Hitomi Kinue's success was interpreted as tomboyish, ascribing her with 'masculine' attributes, and criticizing her 'for a lack of femininity [...]'.
 31 Iwona Merklejn, 'Remembering the Oriental Witches: Sports, Gender and Shōwa Nostalgia in the NHK Narratives of the Tokyo Olympics', *Social Science Japan Journal* 16 (2013) 2, 247-248.
 - 32 Merklejn, 'Remembering the Oriental Witches', 242.
 - 33 Iwona Merklejn, 'The taming of the witch: Daimatsu Hirobumi and coaching discourses of women's volleyball in Japan', *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* (2014), 13.
 - 34 Merklejn, 'Remembering the Oriental Witches', 242-243.
 - 35 *Ibidem*, 248, 245-246.
 - 36 This is also called the *daikokubashira*, which roughly translates to 'the main pillar in the home'. Despite women increasingly participating in the work force and moving away from conservative

- family values, a majority of men still cling to this ideology despite the impossibility of maintaining these gender relations in the long term. See Tomoko Hidaka, 'Masculinity and the family system: The ideology of the "Salaryman" across three generations', In: Richard Ronald and Allison Alexy (eds.), *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2011), 122.
- 37 Merklejn, 'The taming of the witch', 6.
- 38 Margaret Carlisle Duncan and Cynthia A. Hasbrook, 'Denial of Power in Women's Sport', *Sociology of Sport Journals* 5 (1988), 18.
- 39 Paul Mark Pedersen, 'Examining Equity in Newspaper Photographs: A Content Analysis of the Print Media Photographic Coverage of Interscholastic Athletics', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 37 (2002) 3/4, 316.
- 40 Gaye Tuchman, 'Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media', In: *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 8, 10.
- 41 Toni Bruce, 'Sportswomen in the Media – An Analysis of International Trends in Olympic and Everyday Coverage', *Sportswomen in the Media* 15 (2017), 27.
- 42 Robln Orlansky, 'Moving Forward: Sports and Gender In Modern Japan', *Graduate Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* 5 (2007) 1, 72, 80-81.
- 43 Ibidem, 80.
- 44 Michelle H.S. Ho, 'Is Nadeshiko Japan "Feminine"? Manufacturing Sport Celebrity and National Identity on Japanese Morning Television', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 38 (2014) 2, 179.
- 45 Chia-Chen Yu, 'A Content Analysis of News Coverage of Asian Female Athletes', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 44 (2009) 2/3, 298-299.
- 46 Naomi Kobayashi, 'Rondon orinpikku ni okeru senshu no jendā hyōshō ~ terebi nyūsu naiyō hunseki [Gender differences in Television News Coverage of Olympic Athletes featured on Japanese Television during the London Olympic Games]', *Yamagata Daigaku Kiyō (Shakaigakka)* 48 (2017) 1, 31.
- 47 Ibidem, 32-33.
- 48 Ibidem, 35-36.
- 49 *Asahi Shimbun* is a national daily, with morning, evening, and weekend editions, ranking among the highest in the world in terms of circulation. See 'Newspaper Circulation in Japan: Still High but Steadily Falling', *Nippon*, 5 December 2014.
- 50 'Shimbun no hakkō busū to fukyū-do [Number of newspaper publications and distribution rates]', *Nihon Shimbun Kyōkai*, on: <http://www.pressnet.or.jp/data/circulation/circulation05.php>, last accessed 15 May 2018.
- 51 Gerlinde Mautner, 'Analyzing Newspapers, Magazines and other Print Media', in: Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyzanowski (eds.), *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 32.
- 52 Margaret Carlisle Duncan, 'Sports Photographs and Sexual Difference: Images of Women and Men in the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 7 (1990), 23.
- 53 Godoy-Pressland and Griggs, 'London 2012: The Women's Games?', 59.
- 54 King, 'Media Portrayals of Male and Female Athletes', 189.
- 55 MEXT, 'Kantō shashin Rio de Janelro no kiseki [Foreword pictures, the path of Rio de Janelro]', *Heisei 28-nendo Monbukagakusho hakusho* (2016), on: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/hpab201701/detail/1398110.htm, accessed 16 May 2018.
- 56 'Wrestling Freestyle', *Olympics*, on: <https://www.olympic.org/wrestling-freestyle>, accessed 1 August 2018.

- 57 Vikki Krane, 'We Can Be Athletic and Feminine, But Do We Want To? Challenging Hegemonic Femininity in Women's Sport', *Quest* 53 (2001) 1, 118.
- 58 Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*, 143.
- 59 Marie Hardin, Jean Chance, Julie E. Dodd and Brent Hardin, 'Olympic Photo Coverage Fair to Female Athletes', *Newspaper Research Journal* 23 (2002) 2/3, 64-78, here 65.
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- 62 Yuka Nishimoto, 'Rio gorin senshu-dan, shushō to menkai [The Rio Olympic Team, Meeting with the Prime Minister]', *Asahi Shimbun*, 25 August 2016.
- 63 Mitsuru Satō, 'Kedakaki Joō Nihon toripuru-kin resuringu joshi Rio gorin [The Noble Queen, Triple Gold for Japan in Women's Wrestling, Rio Olympics]', *Asahi Shimbun*, 19 August 2016.
- 64 Kentarō Hirobe and Ryōsuke Yamamoto, 'Doshō, sasae no okage da-ya, resuringu, Rio gorin [Doshō: 'It was because of the support' Wrestling, Rio Olympics]', *Asahi Shimbun*, 19 August 2016.
- 65 Ibidem.
- 66 Tadahiro Nomura, '(Nomura Tadahiro ga mita Rio) Takaramono wa mienai, monogatari wa suzuku, Rio gorin [(Rio as seen by Nomura Tadahiro) I cannot see a treasure, the story continues, Rio Olympics]', *Asahi Shimbun*, 23 August 2016.
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