

Some Pages from the Manga Book ‘Tokyo and Olympics Guide’ with Commentary on Social and Environmental Significance, written by Sean Michael Wilson, illustrated by Makiko Kodama, published by Kodansha, bilingual edition, Dec 2019.

Sean Michael Wilson

Abstract: In these excerpts from our manga ‘guidebook’ to the Olympics for foreign visitors we include some critical commentary concerning both the 1964 and present Olympics. From breathless hyperbole to environmental destruction readers encounter graphic images of the games beyond the PR hype. Alas, changes thought necessary have damaged the physical and cultural ecology of Japan and there is a need for greater social responsibility.

Some readers may be wondering why there are comic book/manga pages included in this collection. It’s still an unfortunate fact that creators working in that medium have to struggle against the image that comic books are for children or teenagers. That has never been anything more than a silly image. Comic books and manga are, essentially, a combination of text and image. And so are, for example, most road signs. Would anyone suppose that road signs are only for children? No, just as with music we can have manga for children and manga for adults. Just as we have nursery rhymes for children and opera for adults, and the whole range of popular music between.

My own comic books, or graphic novels to give them the fancier title, are all aimed at adult readers, and cover issues of history, culture, biography, drama etc. The book that these

pages are taken from ‘Tokyo and Olympic Guide’, was published by the big Japanese publisher, Kodansha, in Dec 2019. It’s my 5th book with them and the 3rd to be published in a bilingual format, with English and Japanese on all pages. I am, at present, the only British comic book creator who has ever had 5 original books published with Kodansha. And let me say: though that makes my position unique, it’s a bad thing. There should be several such British authors, and several Americans and French etc. It’s symptomatic of the continued lack of interconnection between Japan and the rest of the world. The 2020 Olympics will hopefully increase connections, an issue examined in other essays in this collection.

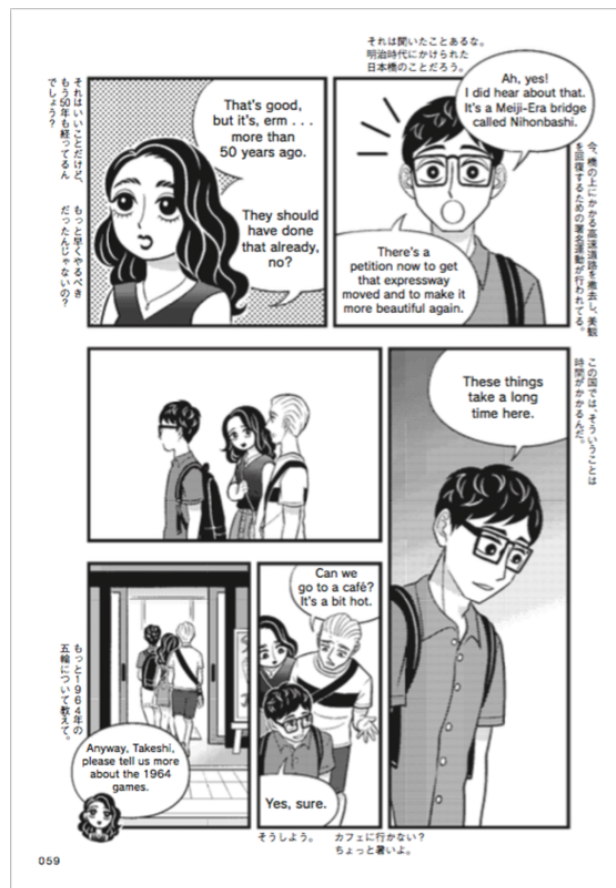
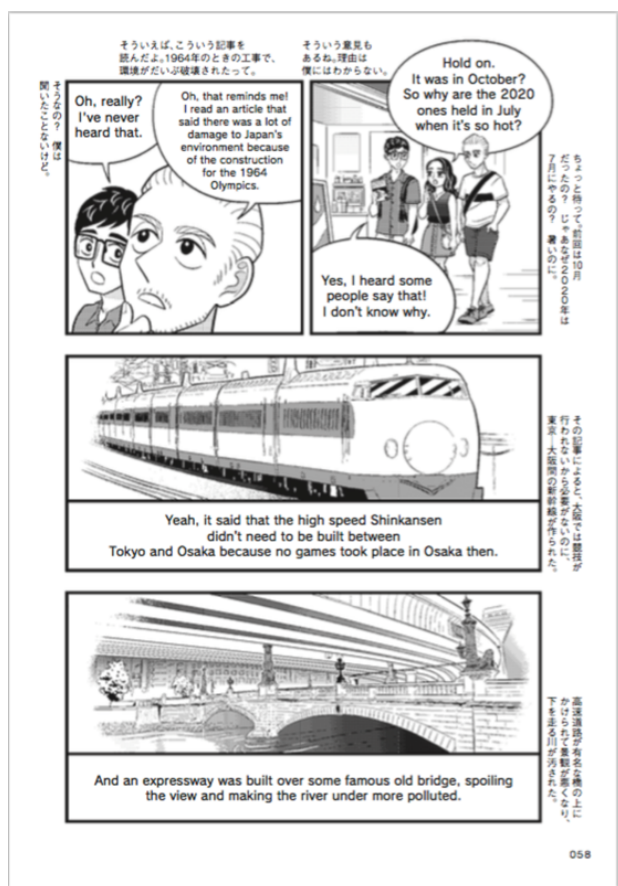
The story and aim of our Olympics book is simple: two foreigners visit Japan - a British man and his French girlfriend. Their Japanese friend guides them around Tokyo as they prepare for the Olympics to start, and we see pages from a fictitious guide book about the Olympics and the various places and games that are to take place in summer 2020. So not only is the manga a story it can also be used as a guidebook to the Olympics for foreign visitors to Tokyo. As part of that I felt that I should include some critical or difficult aspects, regarding both the present Olympics and the 1964 Olympics. Some of these are included here. For example, a panel on page 74 mocks the rather silly overblown language that the Olympics are couched in. “Infinite excitement”.

Oh, really? Wouldn't that give the average person a heart attack within about 24 hours? Surely such a significant global event is made to look shallow by such hyperbolic language. Do we really want a better world or are we just pretending? If we want it, let's use words that mean something.

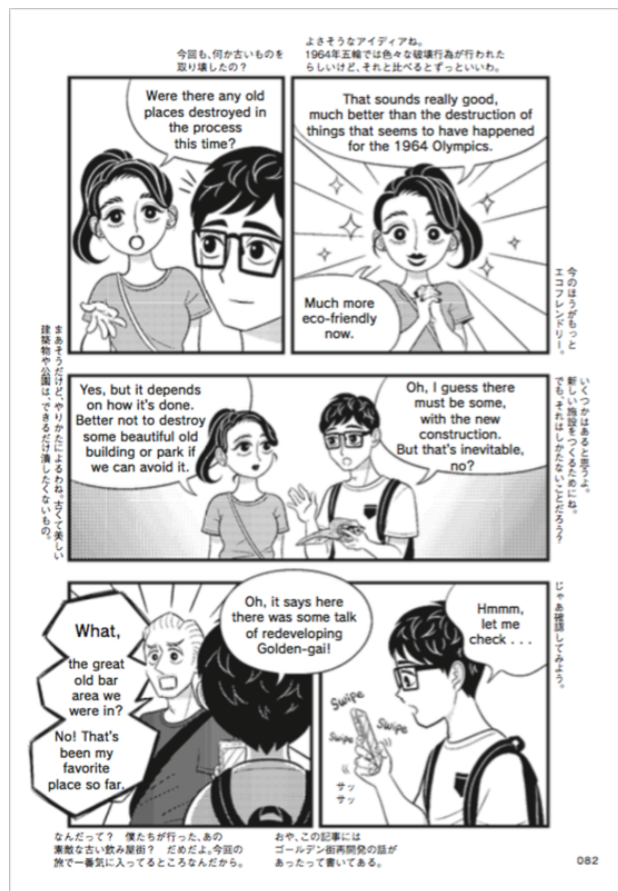


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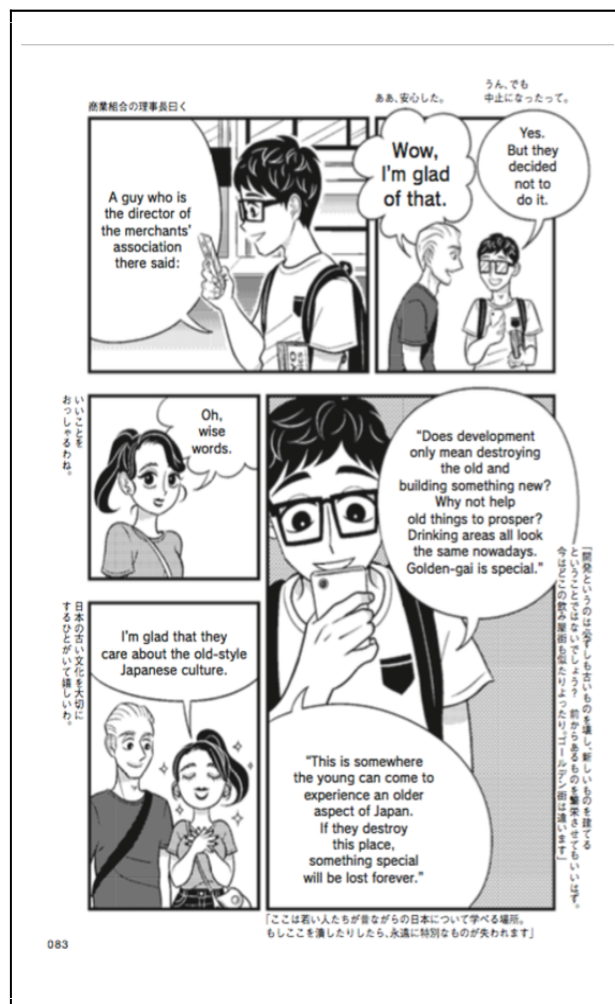
during the 1964 games, which as other essays here attest was extensive and unnecessary. The 1964 games seem to be where a lot of the modern image of Japan originates. Two interesting things spring from that: firstly, the hi-tech image of Japan is now largely inaccurate. As I noted in an article I wrote for the Japan Times a few years ago, Japan is nowhere near as hi-tech as most people think. Banks, the post office, the tax system, the train ticket machines, etc. are all rather old fashioned. Certainly behind most places in Europe and often behind many big cities in other parts of Asia. Secondly, the changes thought necessary then were not without damage to the physical and cultural ecology of Japan and this habit of 'knock down the old' continues to do damage.



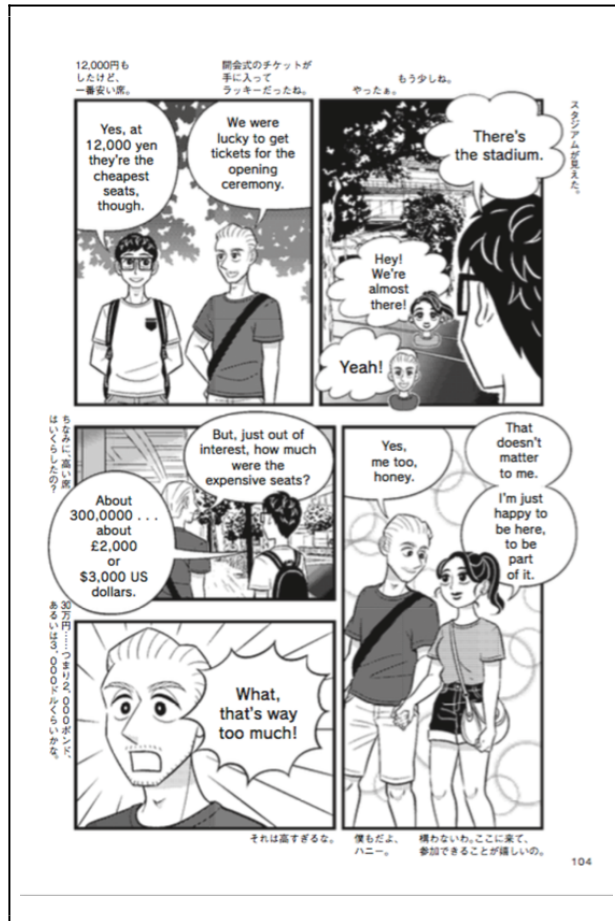
Page 58 looks at the damage that was done



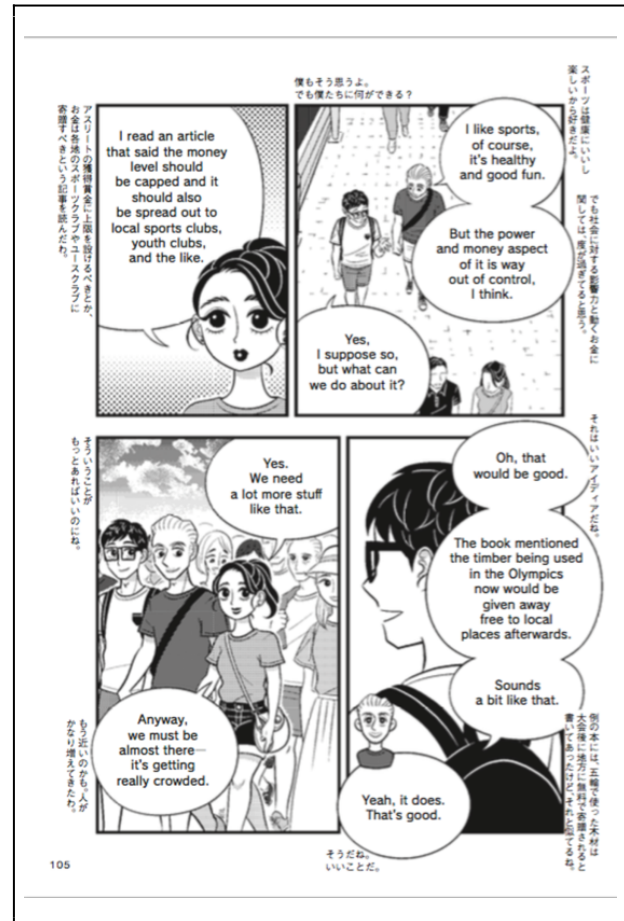
Page 82 and 83 is an example where people stood up to the outdated habit of 'modernising via heedless destruction'. It shows that an official connected to the Golden Gai area of Tokyo voiced an intelligent and sensible respect for this historic area, and helped save it from what I now term in probably an odd use of Greek: 'Katastrofi Olympia'. As page 58 notes, it is only now, more than 50 years later, that an effort is being made to try to restore the former beauty of the areas around Nihonbashi that was spoilt by the ugly expressway built during the Katastrofi Olympia of the 1964 games.



Page 104 and 105 address the outrageous cost of some of the tickets in the 2020 games. Doesn't that cost directly contradict some of the supposed aims of the games? The official site notes: "The goal of the **Olympic** Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced without discrimination of any kind..." It would seem that financial discrimination does not count.



It is rightly considered outrageous to create barriers based on gender or race. But barriers based on money seem to be just fine. As page 105 notes there are very forward thinking and realistic plans to change the dominance of money in sport.



Why not instigate a policy that 50% of tennis players prize money should be distributed to sports clubs in their home town? Why not a similar policy saying that motorcar racing companies have to give 50% of their huge profits to technical colleges in Syria? Why shouldn't Manchester United have to give 50% of its soaring earnings to help rebuild rundown areas of the city? Wouldn't that "contribute to building a peaceful and better world"? What is holding us back from making sport a genuine force for good, rather than a huge cash cow for elites and corporations? To invent another odd Greek phrase, we could make it a 'Anagennisi Olympia' - a games that actually helps grassroots regeneration. Is that what we have now?

A related concern of mine is the very bad habit in Japan of destroying all the greenery on a plot of land when knocking down the old house and

clearing it for a new building. This would be acceptable if new trees and bushes were put in their place. But my research found that most new buildings normally have less than 5% of the amount of trees that the garden of the old building had. That amounts to hundreds of thousands of trees lost to the urban ecology each year, and yet, no one in Japan seems to notice or care. Ironically, it is often companies that tout their 'eco' credentials that carry out this destruction. Japan has a long way to go to

improve ecological policies and habits on such things though we can see some improvements. Another page in our book focuses on using recycled timber in the 2020 games, and of making the medals out of recycled material. We need far more in this direction. My own suggestion is that a mandatory minimum of replacing at least 25% of the previous greenery in urban plots should be imposed on all construction companies. 25% is not a lot, but much better than the current 5%.

This article is a part of the Special Issue: Japan's Olympic Summer Games -- Past and Present, Part II. See the Table of Contents [here](#).

Sean Michael Wilson is a writer from Scotland. He has had more than 30 books published with a variety of publishers. He has written a unique line of illustrated history books, adaptations of classics and several of his own original stories. In 2017, his book *Secrets of the Ninja* won an International Manga Award from the Japanese government - he is the first British person to receive this award.

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