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Mega-event scepticism in South Korea: Lessons from the 2014 Incheon Asian Games

Jung Woo Lee (University of Edinburgh)

Introduction

The Incheon Asian Games in 2014 is arguably the most controversial sporting event that South Korea has ever hosted. In terms of sporting performances, it was certainly an occasion through which the South Korean team was able to display its sporting prowess. Also, the President of the Olympic Council of Asia praised a safe and effective delivery of the Asian Games at the closing ceremony. When considering non-sporting issues related to this continental sporting festival, however, a different mood can be detected. Staging a sports mega-event is often closely connected to a social and economic policy of the host country or city (Horne, 2016). The Incheon Asian Games was no exception. Yet, unlike the organising committee's claim that the Games would boost the local economy before the event, Incheon is now suffering from a huge deficit (Kim, 2014). Also, a number of newly built sporting facilities, including the new Asian Games stadium, are now on the verge of turning into white elephants (Choi, 2014). It appears that the major legacy of the Asian Games is a heavy financial burden.

Over the last two decades, South Korea displayed a strong desire to bid for and host a diverse range of sports mega-events (Lee, 2015). For instance, this small peninsula country has staged the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup Finals, Formula 1 Grand Prix and the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Championships, and in 2018 will host the Winter Olympic Games. It appears that South Korea, especially the local governments in host cities firmly believes that large scale events will bring positive implications. Yet, the Incheon Asian Games makes policy makers and the public reconsider this belief. After observing the financial burden that this sporting mega-event engendered, a sceptical view of hosting a sports mega-event is gradually on the rise. In this respect, the Incheon Asian Games marks a significant turning point—although an overly optimistic view has not yet completely disappeared. What this chapter does is it provides a critical overview of the social, economic and cultural issues concerning the Incheon Asian Games. Particular attention will be paid to the construction project, the sporting legacy programme and the cultural relations activity associated with the 17th Summer Asiad. By examining a series of unfortunate incidents, this work aims to offer an exemplary case of a not-so-successful sports mega-event so that these negative practices will not be repeated. Before investigating them, however, this chapter will briefly discuss key agendas and claimed legacies of hosting a sports mega-event in South Korea.

Hosting sporting mega-events: Key agendas

There is no need to highlight that a sports mega-event is not simply a sporting contest but an occasion with socio-political and economic implications. In South Korea, at least three specific rationales for hosting such an event can be identified. These include (1) sport mega-event driven development and regeneration, (2) the improvement of its international reputation and (3) the demonstration of South Korean culture to the world. Referring to the rationales, firstly, hosting a sports mega-event offers a useful economic opportunity for the government of the host city to implement an urban regeneration programme (Yamawaki & Duarte, 2014). The host city can enhance the quality of urban environment since the preparation process entails the construction of amenities and physical infrastructures, such as upgraded or new transportation networks, communication systems, and other convenient facilities (Horne, In Press). More importantly, the large amount of public funds, which are not normally available to be spent on such major civil engineering projects if an international

sporting competition is not to be held in the city, are often given to the local authority to facilitate the redevelopment works associated with a sports mega-event (Preuss, 2015).

Because of the effect of sports mega-event driven development, a number of South Korean cities intend to host a major sporting event. In fact, various types of competitions from the international rowing championship to the Winter Olympic Games have been awarded to the South Korean cities. Regarding this, one commentator notes that when a local government wins the rights to host a sporting event, its major interest does not lie in sporting contests themselves but actually in an urban regeneration project that hosting initiates (Chung, 2014). In Korea, once its city is chosen to host a sports mega-event, the central government subsidises various construction works directly related to the event (Choi *et al.*, 2013). In addition, as staging a major international sporting event creates useful business opportunities, commercial corporations also invest in associated facility development projects. The financial supports and investments from public and private sectors enable the local government to implement and eventually materialise costly urban regeneration without entirely relying on the local budget. Therefore, in South Korea, hosting a sports mega-event is often viewed as one of the most effective strategies to upgrade an urban environment.

The second rationale, hosting a sports mega-event works as a diplomatic instrument to improve international reputation of the host country (see also, Henderson, Chapter 1, this collection). South Korea observed that by staging the Olympic Games and the Asian Games in the 1980s, it could display its remarkable industrial development—rapidly transitioning from one of the poorest to one of the fast developing economies in the world (see Koh, 2005; Bridges, 2008). In the twenty-first century, South Korea has strived for recognition as an influential power state in global politics. Concerning international relations today, it is important to secure both hard (i.e. economic prosperity and military power) and soft power (i.e. morally correct government policy and attractive cultural resources) to become a leading advanced nation (Nye, 2008). For South Korea, it is this soft power that needs to be developed in order to realise its aspiration. While hosting a sport mega-event does not automatically bring the soft power resources to the country, the implementation and management of socio-cultural programmes associated with sport mega-events can help accumulate this soft power capital.

International development through sport is one of such activities that can accrue the nation's soft power. Sport as a development tool is used to assist the development of emerging economies around the world (Levermore & Aaron, 2009; Maharaj, Chapter 3, this collection; Wise and Hall, Chapter 2, this collection). The United Nations (2009) recognises the usefulness of sport in improving social conditions in the poor developing nations, and international sport governing bodies such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA along with non-governmental organisations such as the right to play actively participate in international development through sport initiatives (Darnell, 2012). The host cities and the organising committees often set an international sport development programme as a key component of social legacy. Such assistance initiatives can be seen as ethical and responsible sport policy, as the successful implementation of international development programme can contribute to boosting the host nation's soft power. Because of this reason, as will be discussed later, mega-events awarded to South Korean cities also involve elements of sport and international development.

Finally, a host country and city intends to display cultural heritage to international audiences. This can be seen as the nation's cultural relations strategy which is also closely connected to a campaign for enhancing a nation's soft power (Grix & Lee, 2013). As indicated earlier, the domain of culture, including those related to sport, becomes increasingly important in securing international political hegemony (Johnson & Cester, 2015). Staging an event with the capacity to attract global attention deems to be regarded as an effective tool for

promoting cultural prowess of the host nation. Both the established core nation and an emerging state through international promotion therefore attempts to harness the tactic of hosting a major global sporting competition as a means to cultivate their own cultural relations (Grix & Lee, 2013; Grix & Houlihan, 2014). South Korea is a country which actively utilises this tactic (Lee, 2016). It should be noted that while its economy is one of the strongest in the world, South Korea is still located in a relatively marginalised position in the realm of cultural politics and diplomacy (Lee, 2009). In other words, there has been the unbalanced development between hard and soft power in the county. Because South Korea is eager to change this situation and thereby improve its international standing, it is important for the country to adapt the way they represent, communicate and deliver their cultural products effectively to the wider global community. To do this, it comes as no surprise that South Korea is aggressively aiming to bid for and host mega-events to display their cultural merit alongside their economic prowess.

Asian Games driven development in Incheon

In 2007, the South Korean port city of Incheon was selected to host the 2014 Summer Asian Games. A brief explanation of Incheon's geographical location in South Korea and in Asia will help understand this port city's intention to host the continental sporting spectacle. Incheon is located 30 km west of Seoul, but because most of the economic and cultural capital in the country tends to be heavily concentrated in Seoul, the port city had witnessed the problem of comparative underdevelopment despite (or because of) close proximity to the capitol (Kim & Jung, 2014). Due to this unbalanced development, the port city is merely regarded as Seoul's satellite that its economic and social environments were relatively neglected within the wider capital zone even though Incheon is the third largest city in the country in terms of population. Therefore, increasing the visibility of the city given its cultural and economic geography in South Korea has long been a major task of the local politicians.

In addition, Incheon is a port city where the major trade seaport and the main gateway airport into the country are positioned. The fact that the city has such international transportation infrastructures indicates that the city has a potential to develop into a regional and global hub. As Sino-South Korean economic ties continue to strengthen, Incheon is expected to play an important role in Northeast Asian trade in the coming years because of its logistically important geographical location. Nevertheless, the international transportation infrastructure in Incheon merely offers a highway to the capital city where most business meetings take place. It appears that Incheon's public facilities yet again mainly serve the interests of Seoul. In an attempt to attract more international capital and resources to Incheon to augment its capacity to become a Northeast Asian business hub, the Incheon metropolitan government have been recently investing in extensive urban regeneration. This includes the opening of a free trade zone and the installation of convenient facilities for foreign visitors in their wider municipal area. In spite of these efforts, the port city's potential has not yet materialised.

Incheon's willingness to host the Asian Games must be understood in relation to its relative underdevelopment and its desire to develop into a Northeast Asian economic exchange and trade hub. A few rationales can be identified in this respect. Firstly, the metropolitan government of Incheon expected that the central government would allocate more development funds to the port city so that it can improve the condition of its urban environment if Incheon won the rights for hosting the Asian Games. Secondly, by staging this continental sporting event, the city would be able to re-establish and promote its new geographical identity as a multicultural business hub in Northeast Asia. Moreover, hosting the Asian Games was perceived to not only help facilitate the city's urban development

endeavours to reclaim its underestimated potential domestically, but also disseminate its rebranded urban image across Asia and further afar. The project of staging the sports mega-event was, therefore, an attractive option for the metropolitan government in achieving a much delayed urban regeneration initiative.

When the metropolitan government prepared for its Asian Game bid in 2007 they encountered an unexpected problem. As part of a bidding campaign, it is important for the candidate city to show the Olympic Council of Asia a message that the central government is fully supportive of the bid. Then South Korean President, Roh Moo-hyun, was lukewarm about Incheon's Asian Games bid. This was because of Pyeongchang simultaneous efforts in trying to host the Winter Olympic Games. Considering this winter sporting competition as a more significant national project, the central government was in favour of supporting Pyeongchang's bid—worrying that undertaking two separate bidding campaigns might negatively affect Pyeongchang's effort to win the Winter Olympics (Kim, 2012). In addition, Incheon was financially in deficit from overspending the city's budget on urban redevelopment projects. Hosting a mega sporting event would require more public funding and the central government rightfully expected that staging the Asian Games would worsen Incheon's economic circumstances.

Despite a lack of support from the central government, Incheon carried out its aggressive bidding campaign and was successfully selected to host the 17th Asian Games. The Incheon city justified the rationale for hosting this sporting event with reference to its own financial survey which anticipates that the Asian Games would bring economic benefits to the port city by promoting tourism in the destination during the sports events and attracting more foreign direct investment after the Games (see KIEP, 2007). Based on this survey, the metropolitan government believed that it could resolve the current financial deficit by marketing the city through the sporting event. During the preparation period, tensions aroused again between the municipal and central governments over the provision of public funds. No issue exemplifies this conflict better than building sporting facilities, particularly the construction of the main Asian Games Stadium.

Initially, in 2008, Incheon proposed to build 21 new sporting facilities (including the main Asian Games Stadium) out of 39 sporting fields necessitated to stage the Asian Games. Yet, given the huge amount of money needed to construct these venues, the central government did not approve this Asian Games development plan. The metropolitan government resubmitted its Asian Games development proposal and this time only 12 of 40 essential sporting facilities would be new constructions. This proposal still included the construction of the main stadium—the most expensive venue. The central government recommended using the underused, but still functional, World Cup stadium built for the FIFA World Finals in 2002 instead because it is a more sustainable option particularly considering the amount of taxpayers' money used simply to maintain it. Nevertheless, in response to this, Incheon promised that no public funds would be spent on building this most expensive facility and it would seek a funder from the private sector to complete the main stadium construction project. This would reduce almost 40% of financial supply from the central government. On this condition, the South Korean government approved Incheon's Asian Games development plan in 2009.

In 2010, amidst Incheon's serious financial deficit, Song Young-gil (the newly elected mayor) proclaimed that improving the city's economic condition was his most urgent monetary policy. Incheon's new mayor notified that the municipal government should renovate the World Cup stadium for the purpose of the Asian Games because it was simply unable to secure sufficient private funds to construct the new main stadium. This plan seemed fair and acceptable given the city's financial difficulties. Yet, citizens and local developers from the west Incheon area (where the proposed construction site was to be located) protested

against the new mayor's idea. West Incheon was a comparatively underdeveloped part of the city and people here considered the venue construction a valuable opportunity to upgrade their living conditions. Local politicians representing west Incheon also joined this protest. In the end, the new mayor, unable to persuade its citizens, dropped his idea and returned to the original plan.

Given that no organisations from the private sector were willing to invest in the main stadium construction project, the metropolitan government again sought financial support from the central government—who initially refused this requested outright. In response, millions of Incheon citizens signed a petition for the publicly funded Asian Games Stadium while politicians representing Incheon city put further pressure on the government. Subsequently, the central government agreed that it would subsidise one-quarter of the total cost needed, and the rest of money would be deducted from the budget to be allocated to the municipal government in the years following.

After these incidents, the municipal government managed to deliver the Asian Games as planned in 2014. Given the sheer cost to build the new sporting facilities, Incheon's debts increased following the Asian Games. Measuring the long-term economic impact of hosting the Asian Games at this stage is a difficult task, but it is clear that Incheon city is suffering from a heavy economic burden—a significant portion of which is accumulated from the construction and maintenance of the sporting facilities. It seems that a large amount of taxpayers' monies was wasted, given that the Asian Games main stadium (the most costly facility to build) is currently of very little use and on the verge of becoming a white elephant. It seems that claimed economic benefits and development opportunities associated with hosting the Asian Games are unlikely to materialise in the feasible future.

The Asian Games and international sport development

Sport has been increasingly used as a tool for international development and for sporting mega-events today (Levermore & Aaron, 2009), and the South Korean government also takes this sport for international development initiative seriously. The government set Official Development Assistance (ODA) to be one of the nation's major foreign policy agendas, with a number of sport governing bodies in South Korea actively engaged in various international sport development activities (Na & Dallaire, 2015). The Incheon Asian Games was no exception. When Incheon was elected to be a host of the 17th Summer Asiad, the metropolitan government of Incheon claimed that this sporting occasion would make a valuable contribution to the development of sport in Asia. In order to achieve this goal, Incheon city introduced the Vision 2014 programme.

The Vision 2014 programme refers to an international sport development campaign associated with the Incheon Asian Games. The Incheon metropolitan government in collaboration with the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) initiated this sport assistance programme with the aim of supporting the development of sport in less well-off nations in Asia. The Vision 2014 consists of three major activities: (1) inviting young athletes from developing countries to training camps in Incheon, (2) dispatching qualified sports coaches to marginalised regions in Asia and (3) providing sport equipment for athletes in underdeveloped nations in the continent (Incheon Metropolitan Government, 2015). Given South Korea has recently emerged as an international sporting power, this sport development opportunity has potential to identify and foster sporting talents in peripheral countries in the continent. Through this, the Incheon Asian Games also potentially contributes to reducing the development gap between Northeast and Southeast Asia.

The metropolitan government of Incheon undertook this international sport development initiative for eight years from 2007 to 2014, costing around \$20 million (all monetary figures in US dollars). By implementing the Vision 2014, Incheon city could

establish close international partnerships with those 30 Asian nations. 696 athletes over from 30 Asian countries benefited from this Vision 2014 campaign which included 155 sport development programmes. As part of the Vision 2014, Incheon also assisted sport development in North Korea. Given the escalating political tension between the two Koreas, the South Korean port city's attempt to help its northern neighbour signalling messages of peace—showing how sport can transcend ideological conflicts and political differences. More importantly, this initiative enabled 97 participants from developing Asian nations to take part in the 2014 Asian Games. This can be seen as a visible impact of this international sport development programme.

This international development programme can be understood as the South Korean port city's cultural relations strategy which potentially fosters Incheon's and South Korea's soft power in the relations between Asian states. Nye (2008) notes the nation-state whose foreign policy is concerned primarily with universal humanitarian values is more likely to shape a favourable international circumstance to the state so that it can fulfil its diplomatic aims more smoothly. In effect, a country's effort to keep global social justice constitutes one of the key factors that increase a destinations attractiveness—which eventually contributes to enhancing its soft power. International sport development, particularly those activities designed to improve sporting skills and opportunities in the less developed world by providing material and technical supports is of paramount importance in this respect. Such efforts are certainly seen as a diplomatic, or related to sport diplomacy, to increase an influence of a specific country within the system of international sport governance. The Vision 2014 programme appears to be one such tactic to enhance Incheon's merit.

Without underestimating the valuable contribution that Incheon made by implementing this Vision 2014, it should also be pointed out whether this international assistance campaign is genuinely related to the principle of universal humanitarianism. A close examination of the context in which this international sport development programme took place reveals a slightly different picture. As noted earlier, the central government did not wholeheartedly advocate for Incheon's intention to host the Asian Games. Given the competitive nature of the event bidding campaigns between New Delhi and Incheon, strong government support turned out to be crucial in order to win the Games. The lack of governmental endorsement was a severe disadvantage to Incheon. In an attempt to outweigh this shortcoming, the metropolitan government pledged the implementation of Vision 2014 which would offer technical and material resources for sport development to developing Asian countries if the Asian Games was awarded to Incheon. It is difficult to claim that Incheon won the continental sporting event because of this pledged assistance programme. Nevertheless, given many member states of the Olympic Council of Asia would benefit from the Incheon's promise, it is no exaggeration to argue that the potential beneficiaries voted for the South Korean port city. Therefore, Incheon's international sport development programme seems to be merely a tactic to win the bid. Hence, it appears that the ethos of humanitarian development was simply a façade and that the self-interest of Incheon came first when the city offers the Vision 2014 programme. The fact that this sporting aid ceased soon after the mega-event finished also suggests this was merely a short-term and goal-oriented plan that focused only on winning the Asian Games bid.

Vision 2014 initiative exasperated Incheon's financial crisis after the Asian Games. As mentioned earlier, the city suffered from huge debts preparing for the sporting event. This was, in fact, one of the main reasons for the lack of political support from the central government. Yet, Incheon was persistent with its desire to host the Games at any costs without carefully considering the economic implications. The port city even pledged the delivery of this expensive aid project to outbid its competitors. Without entirely dismissing the ethos of Vision 2014, Incheon's agreement to deliver the international sport development

project cost the port city almost \$20 million, is an insensible offer considering its economic situation.

The Asian Games and the ‘Korean Wave’

The representation of contemporary South Korean popular culture was one of the main cultural events associated with the 2014 Asian Games. South Korea’s popular cultural industry (such as music, films and television shows) has attracted much attention in Asia recently (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008), and in the past 10 years this industry has become one stimulators of the country’s economy (KOTRA, 2015). This growing popularity of Korean pop culture abroad is called the ‘Korean Wave.’ Currently, Korean cultural commodities are extensively circulated and consumed in a number of different Asian countries, and many South Korean film stars and pop musicians have become household names in those nations. Reflecting their popularity a large number of tourists from Asia, notably from China and Japan, regularly visit South Korea to pay homage to their pop idols. This Korean Wave focused tourism has significantly contributed to boosting the nation’s image and economy (Koh, 2012). In effect, the Korean Wave is a branding technique that symbolises the Korean pop culture industry today.

The extensive circulation and consumption of South Korean cultural products in East Asian region is, to some extent, the outcome of the government’s effort to foster its culture industry as part of the nation’s soft power strategy (Kwon & Kim, 2014). As indicated earlier, having an attractive cultural heritage that includes contemporary mass culture constitutes an important component of cultural relations in global politics today (Nye, 2008). In this respect, the South Korean government invests in the development of culture because they considers this industry a dominant domain of creativity that helps further improve the nation’s reputation (Kwon & Kim, 2014). Moreover, it is especially expected that the dissemination of Korean cultural commodities to neighbouring Asian states can cultivate a social environment in those countries wherein positive attitudes towards Korea emerge—thus regenerating the nation’s image as an appealing popular destination. With these in mind, the South Korean government regards nurturing the popular culture industry a core policy agenda, and this political choice further enables the demanding market for the Korean Wave to expand continually both in the country and abroad.

Given the increasing influence of the Korean Wave in Asia, it is no surprise that the South Korean pop culture accounts for one of the major themes at the Asian Games related cultural events. In fact, the exploitation of Korean cultural commodities during the continental sporting competition seems to be Incheon’s strategic choice to effectively attract the attention of people across the region to the Games, and subsequently to the host city. It was also expected that more Asian tourists would visit the port city not only for sport, but also to meet the Korean Wave stars during cultural programmes and at mini-concerts. In addition, famous South Korean film directors, Jang Jin and Im Kwon-taek, arranged the opening and closing ceremonies wherein the performances of Korean celebrities played a significant role. Also, a South Korean actress, Lee Young-Ae, was chosen to be the final torchbearer who lit the Asian Games cauldron. The finale of the opening ceremony was performed by a South Korean pop star PSY. After all, it seems that the Asian Games functioned as a theatre to display the country’s sought-after cultural icons.

The use of Korean popular culture itself is not necessarily problematic. However, it appears that the opening and closing ceremonies relied too much on the cultural commodities in making the shows more spectacular. So much so that, the representation of sporting tradition and historical legacies of the host city were comparatively neglected. Given that the Korean entertainment industry displayed throughout the events ceremonies has no meaningfully historical and cultural connection with Korean sports and local tradition, the

abundance of the Korean pop culture failed to explain the values of the sporting competition, namely ‘Diversity Shine Here,’ and the narrative of Incheon’s long history sufficiently. For instance, while many South Korean celebrities were invited to the ceremonies, many of key sport personalities, particularly a former Manchester United midfielder Ji-sung Park and an Olympic champion Yuna Kim, arguably the most famous international sport stars who the country has ever produced, were not asked to attend the events. The selection of the final Asian Games torchbearer triggered some controversy. Conventionally, an individual who lit the cauldron was chosen from athletes whose characters and achievements suitably symbolises the values of the sporting competition. At the Incheon Asian Games, as mentioned earlier, a popular film star undertook this role simply because the actress was a well-known figure. This indicates that the central message disseminated through the ceremonies concerns the promotion of South Korean cultural commodities. The fundamental value of the Asian Games was overshadowed by a superficial entertainment. Reflecting this, one commentator aptly points out that the opening ceremony of this continental sporting event turned out to be an occasion to simply promote products associated with the Korean Wave (Han, 2014).

Additionally, the ceremonies paid only scarce attention to the social and cultural history of Incheon. The opening and closing ceremonies conventionally include a section which is devoted to displaying the legacy and heritage of local traditions. Incheon was the first international seaport in the country and as the main gateway port, Incheon observed the influx of the large volume of modern cultural products and foreign goods from Europe to the country for the first time in its history. This implies that Incheon played an important role in the modernisation of Korea. The direct inter-cultural encounter that Incheon experienced in the late nineteenth century also built the circumstance that the port city easily embraces multiculturalism later. These historical narratives potentially offer useful concepts that fit the main theme of the Asian Games, yet these elements were not sufficiently utilised in the opening and closing ceremonies.

Overall, the Incheon Asian Games, particularly the opening and closing ceremonies, simply offered an extravaganza of South Korean pop culture. This may have entertained the athletes, guests, and tourists from neighbouring Asian countries, yet the essence of the Asian Games, which includes the ethos of the continental sporting festival which celebrates cultural diversity through sports and the heritage of the South Korean port city, was largely omitted from the ceremonies and other cultural events associated with this sporting competition. Given Incheon attempted to establish its new urban identity as a hub of Northeast Asian economy and transportation, the lack of demonstration acknowledging the city’s local history as a traditional port city that embraced multiculturalism was arguably a major shortcoming of the event. The spectacle of Korean pop culture alone simply does not fulfil Incheon’s desire to construct its new identity.

Conclusion

Incheon’s metropolitan government has been undertaking a massive urban regeneration project in order to develop the port city into a node of Northeast Asian transportation and economic networks. The delivery of the Summer Asian Games, which is the largest continental sporting competition, must be understood as part of this redevelopment plan. The metropolitan government anticipated that the Asian Games would have positive implications for this new urban policy—and therefore attempted to use this sporting occasion as a vehicle to facilitate a redevelopment process aimed at rebranding Incheon as a centre of Northeast Asian industry. Boosting the local economy was also an important consideration.

This optimism disappeared once the event finished. As long as cultural, economic and political implications are concerned, the Incheon Asian Games is arguably the least

successful event South Korea has ever hosted. The preparation for and delivery of the two weeks of sporting competition left a huge economic deficit, and the newly built Asian Games stadium is hardly used in the post-event period. Rather than stimulating the local economy, Incheon has become the most indebted city in the country after the event (Kim, 2014). Of course, the citizens of Incheon are mainly responsible for the repayment of this debt that hosting the Asian Games caused (Green Korea, 2015). Moreover, Incheon's international sport development programme created an additional financial burden. Surely this campaign had merit in terms of helping less well-off neighbouring nations. Nevertheless, Vision 2014 was certainly an irresponsible project, especially in consideration of the worsening economic situation that Incheon faced. Furthermore, cultural contents displayed through the opening and closing ceremonies were rather frustrating. These occasions mainly showed a series of Korean pop culture performances they did not sufficiently represent Incheon's historical legacy alongside its new urban identity that the city attempted to establish. Hence, in contrast to the optimism before the event, the 17th Asian Games appeared in some ways to influence the development of Incheon negatively.

Ironically, the Incheon Asian Games was also an important incident because of the negative impact. After witnessing the Incheon metropolitan government's financial mismanagement approach along with the inadequate orchestration of the Asian Games ceremonies, a number of civic organisations, academics and the media keep requesting that an independent and transparent post-event investigation into the preparation and delivery of the Asian Games be conducted (Choi, 2014). Incheon's fiasco also triggers mega-event scepticism within South Korea's civic society. It may be an exaggeration to state that this critical view on hosting a mega sporting event is extensively accepted by the establishment. However, it is also difficult to deny that a number of people who join this anti-mega sporting event campaign is continually increasing, especially after the Incheon Asian Games. Incheon's huge financial deficits and the city's now almost neglected sporting facilities influence Korean people and policy makers alike are challenged to objectively re-evaluate the hosting of a mega-event in their municipalities. This may be indicative of the belief of economic development and urban regeneration through hosting a mega sporting event being dismantled. If this is the case, emerging sporting mega-event scepticism and debunking myths of sporting mega-event driven development are unintended but unignorable legacies of the Incheon Asian Games—which render this sporting occasion rather significant.

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