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Politics, policy and legacies of the Olympics in Asia Pacific: A panoramic view

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When it comes to the Olympic Movement, the four years from 2018 to 2022 are extraordinary. We can identify at least three reasons for this oddity. First, within these four years, three consecutive Olympic Games were scheduled to take place in East Asian cities, namely PyeongChang, Tokyo and Beijing. The staging of three successive Olympics outside the West is unprecedented. This development may indicate the decline of Olympic enthusiasm in the Western world (Horne, 2019). Equally, this geographical concentration of the events may reflect the rise of Asia in the global political economy at this chronological juncture (Khanna, 2019). Second, the 2020 and 2022 competitions are also named Covid Olympics. For the first time in its history, the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games were postponed until the following year due to the pandemic. Moreover, no international fans were permitted to travel to Japan for health and safety reasons when this event was finally commenced in July 2021. Likewise, only domestic spectators will be allowed to watch athletic contests on the Olympic sites in person during the 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Beijing. Surely, the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has been meaningfully reshaping the mode of event organization and sport consumption (Majumdar, in press). Third, the three Olympic Games in East Asia are entangled with volatile regional geopolitics. The reconciliation between North and South Korea was one

of the main themes at PyeongChang 2018, and the Japan-South Korea relations was all-time low during Tokyo 2020. With the opening of Beijing 2022 less than one hundred days away, the diplomatic tensions between the USA and China show no sign of being abated. The political climate surrounding Asia Pacific has been considerably affecting the delivery of the three Olympics in the region (Lee, in press). Clearly, this so-called East Asian Olympic era presents a series of incidents that deserve serious social scientific investigation.

While the three recent Olympic Games have received significant media and public attention over the last few years, historically major cities in the Asian Pacific countries have had an experience of hosting several Olympics since the 1960s. In terms of socio-political implications, these past events are by no means less important than the Games in 2018, 2020 and 2022. Tokyo earned a badge of the first non-Western Olympic host in 1964 and Sapporo delivered the first Olympic winter edition in Asia in 1972. In 2010, the inaugural Olympic Youth Games was held in Singapore. The South Korean province of Gangwon will stage the Youth Olympic Winter Games in 2024, and this marks the first Youth Winter Olympics awarded to the location outside the Western cultural zone. Seoul and Beijing also hosted the Summer Olympics in 1988 and 2008 respectively. Tokyo boasted its achievement to deliver multiple Summer Olympics in 2021, and Beijing will enjoy the privilege of being the first city that hosts both Olympic Summer and Winter Games in 2022.

Given that many of the Asia Pacific nations underwent an economic transition from developing to developed countries in the second half of the twentieth century, the government of newly industrialized nations in Asia exploited the Olympic Games as a diplomatic platform to demonstrate their compressed but outstanding modernization to the world (Collins, 2011). This development-state model of a sport mega-event is one of the distinctive features of the Olympic Games in Asia (Lee, 2017). Moreover, some Olympics in this region worked as a catalyst for social and political changes in the host countries. This is particularly so because a

despotic regime with strong leadership often led the rapid industrialization process in Asia Pacific nations (Im, 2014). As the economic development of these nations progressed, people's desire for freedom and democracy also grew. The Olympic Games, which attracts international media attention, often provides a podium on which the citizens of the Olympic host express their political voice to the global community (Black & Westhuizen, 2004). This situation puts additional pressure on the ruling elites to reform the political system albeit reluctantly.

As such, the Olympic Games in the Asia Pacific zone offers useful episodes where various tangible and intangible legacies of the sport mega-event can be examined sociologically, politically, and historically. In this opening essay, therefore, we will provide a brief social scientific review of three different variants of the Games in this region, namely Summer, Winter and Youth Olympics.

The Summer Olympics in Asia Pacific

Tokyo 1940, 1964 and 2020

Tokyo was chosen to be the host of the 1940 Olympic Games. This decision by the then Eurocentric IOC implied the enhancing international status of Japan as the only non-Western major power at that time (Collins, 2007). However, the outbreak of the Second World War shattered the Japanese ambition to deliver the first Olympics in Asia. When the international conflict ended in 1945, the industrial and military assets of Imperial Japan were completely dissipated. In the post-war period, Japan made strenuous efforts to reconstruct its industrial infrastructure and revitalise its economy from the ruins of World War II. This nationwide development campaign enabled Japan to stage the first Olympic Games outside the West in 1964. This East Asian Olympic host celebrated the recovery of its economic power and the restoration of its past glory through this event (Collins, 2011). In other words, the sporting event was the moment that declared the return of Japan to the world stage as an

influential player. In connection with this competition, Japan also introduced the Olympic education programme to its national school curriculum which emphasized the importance of international peace and harmony (Masumoto, 2012). The incorporation of such Olympic values into school textbooks was a valuable educational legacy of the Olympics that Japan initiated. At the same time, this Olympic education was a Japanese attempt to revamp its image from a former aggressor to a peace-loving nation.

In 2021, the Japanese capital hosted the Olympic Summer Games again. To some extent, the Japanese government envisioned this event to be the revival of Tokyo 1964 which would signal the revitalization of the stagnated Japanese economy (Tamaki, 2021). Yet, unlike the expectation of the political elites, the 2020 Olympics received comparatively little public support because of the huge fiscal resources required to host the event (Kobayashi, 2021). Particularly, the demolition of the National Stadium in order to build a new Olympic arena caused public controversy over the economic sustainability of the Games (Boykoff, 2020). The postponement of Tokyo 2020 made the financial situation of the host city worse. As this event was being held amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, there was less festivity but more solemnity during the competition because more than four million people including health workers died of this viral disease worldwide. Despite these difficulties, the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021 demonstrated the ability of humanity to deliver the sport mega-event during the pandemic.

Seoul 1988

Seoul hosted the second Summer Olympic Games in Asia Pacific in 1988. Until the 1960s, South Korea was one of the least developed countries in the world. During the next three decades, its manufacturing industry and the export-driven economy grew so rapidly that the development of this East Asian nation is named the miracle on Han River. The 1988 Olympic Games was the occasion that South Korea advertised its economic achievement to

international audiences (Bridges, 2008). Politically, Seoul 1988 marked the last Cold War games in which both Eastern and Western bloc countries including the USA and the Soviet Union participated (Hill, 1996). It should be noted that the previous two Olympics in Moscow and Los Angeles was held at the height of the ideological conflicts, and the boycott from each side undermined the value of the Olympics in 1980 and 1984 (Senn, 1999). In Seoul, the entire world met again in the stadium. The appearance of Eastern bloc nations in the South Korean capital also provided the host country with an opportunity for diversifying its foreign policy channels, and this political environment enabled capitalist Korea to formalize its diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union and its satellite states (Lee, 2017). This international harmony and connectivity at the last stage of the Cold War was the most notable legacy of the Seoul Olympiad. However, the absence of North Korea from this Olympics signified that the Korean Peninsula would be the last remaining outpost of the ideological tensions.

Domestically, the 1988 Olympics facilitated the democratization of South Korea (Lee, 2017). Until 1987, a series of juntas ruled the country. As people's demand for democracy was increasing, the protest against the military regime was also becoming fiercer and more violent. With Seoul Olympics fast approaching, international media frequently reported this unstable political situation in South Korea to the people in the West, and even the IOC raised concern over the unrest in the Olympic host (Pound, 1994). This global media attention and the worrying view from the Olympic institution rendered the despotic government difficult to ignore the demand for democracy in the nation, and the ruling elites eventually accepted the people's request for a presidential election in 1987. At the opening ceremony, the first democratically elected South Korean president, Roh Tae-woo, raised the curtain of Seoul 1988. This political shift was yet another important impact of hosting the Olympic Games in South Korea.

Beijing 2008

For China, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games was an important turning point that proclaimed the rise of the nation. After Beijing was elected the host city of the 2008 Summer Olympics, the narrative of this sport mega-event became the focal point within the realm of sport in China (Zheng, Shushu, Tan, & Lau, 2018). The Chinese government implemented a series of ‘Olympic Glory’ projects which set guidelines for the provision of generous resources strategically so as to achieve sporting success at the international competition on its home soil (Bairner, Lee, & Tan, 2016). In the run-up to the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, the host city not only actively campaigned for the sport development in the country, but it also vigorously strived to uplift its urban landscapes such as the installation of transportation and communication networks and the implementation of environmental preservation policy. Simply put, Beijing 2008 was a watershed in the renovation and modernization of the Chinese capital. With regard to the sporting contest, Team China reached first place in the Olympic medal table for the first time. This Olympic success signified that China obtained the status of a leading sport powerhouse, completely revamping its derogatory reputation as the sick man of East Asia. It also signalled that China has the potential to grow into a major political and economic power in the global political economy that can confidently compete with advanced economies such as the United States and European countries (Tan, Bairner, & Chen, 2020).

However, there is criticism that China's victory at Beijing 2008 was the result of sacrificing the development of the community sports sector (Tan, 2015; Zheng, Shushu, Tan, & Lau, 2018). The Chinese government heeded such a view and subsequently introduced a nationwide sport-for-all programme after the Olympics. The fact that the active lifestyle of its population can reduce the cost of public health and medical expenses also affected the government's decision to promote sport and physical activities in the country (Tan, 2015). Additionally, this Olympics engendered a series of controversies and disputes over heavy

construction costs, unsafe working conditions for the facility builders, poor human rights records, forced eviction, environmental pollution, and the lack of freedom of press and of right to protest (Kidd, 2010). Also, the suspicion of systematic doping of Olympic athletes was also a major issue at this competition (Prakash & Mulvenney, 2017). These incidents are in stark contrast to the image of harmony and progress that Beijing was trying to convey to the world.

The Winter Olympics in Asia Pacific

Sapporo 1972 and Nagano 1998

The northern Japanese city of Sapporo was supposed to host the Olympic Winter Games in 1940. Back then, the Summer and Winter Olympics were held in the same year and in the same country where possible. As mentioned earlier, the 1940 Olympiad was cancelled due to World War II. When Japanese society, polity and economy regained their vitality in the post-war period, Sapporo was chosen to be the host of the 1972 Winter Olympics. This means that Japan became the first Asian nation that delivers the winter sport mega-event. More importantly, the snowy city in Hokkaido was able to improve its urban infrastructures such as subway networks and underground shopping malls by organising this winter sporting event (Kim E. H., 2018). The regeneration of urban settings is seen as one of the major impacts of hosting a premier sporting contest, and this Winter Olympics in Sapporo presents a prototype example of the interlink between inner-city redevelopment and a global sport mega-event (Smith, 2012). The fact that Sapporo submitted its bid for the right to host the 1984 Winter Olympics was not unrelated to the developmental opportunity that the delivery of the sport mega-event can engender.

The second Winter Olympics in Japan was awarded to Nagano. In preparation for this event, the regional capital could renovate its transportation infrastructures such as new highway networks within the region and high-speed railways from Nagano to Tokyo. Despite this

betterment of living conditions, this Winter Olympics triggered a public debate on sustainability due to the high economic and ecological cost of the event delivery. Environmentalism is enshrined in the Olympic Charter from the mid-1990s, and the Nagano Winter Olympics was the first event after the implementation of the sustainable Olympic policy by the IOC (Kietlinski, in press). Its official poster, which shows a bird sitting on the grips of ski poles, represented the importance of ecologism at this competition in Japan. Nevertheless, the installation of the Olympic facilities in the mountain seriously defiled the natural environment in the region. Not only that, but some of the event venues also turned into white elephants most notably the sliding tracks when the Olympics ended (Kyodo, 2017). The expensive maintenance fees consequently bore a heavy economic burden on the local government (Kim K. , 2020). After all, the 1998 Olympic Games in Nagano rang the wake-up call for event stakeholders to reconsider the environmental cost of hosting the Winter Olympics.

PyeongChang 2018

The political significance of the Winter Olympics in PyeongChang lies in a diplomatic breakthrough between North and South Korea. Until the end of 2017, geopolitical tensions in the region were continuously escalating. Because of the conflict-laden atmosphere surrounding the Korean Peninsula, some countries even considered not dispatching their delegations to PyeongChang (Lough & Jin, 2017). A few weeks before the Olympics, North Korea unexpectedly announced its intention to improve its relationship with its southern neighbour and its willingness to support the Olympic Games in the South Korean town. As the south welcomed this message from the north, the two sides immediately re-opened their communication line and soon agreed to collaborate on the delivery of the Winter Olympics. Subsequently, peace and reconciliation emerged as a major theme of this event (Lee, 2021). The sporting union of North and South Korea such as a joint march during the opening

ceremony and a unified Korean ice-hockey team symbolized the spirit of inter-Korean connection at this Olympics (Rowe, 2019). This political momentum eventually gave rise to a series of summit meetings between the two Koreas after the competition.

In terms of sustainability, the outcome of the Winter Olympics was not so optimistic. The local government built a number of world-class Olympic facilities for the event (Kim K. , 2020). Civic activists protested against these construction projects and presented more sustainable options during the preparation stage of the Olympics (Kim & Chung, 2018). Their concern was that not only would the massive Olympic infrastructures be unnecessary for PyeongChang as a small rural town, but these facilities would also be difficult to keep due to the high operation cost in the post-event setting (Lee, 2019). Despite this warning, the event organizers carried on the development project as originally planned. After the Games, most of the Olympic venues are being underused, and some of them have been closed permanently. The remaining amenities such as hotels and resorts only incurred large debts let alone generating incomes (Lee, 2019). As to local ecology, the destruction of ancient forests to build Olympic ski slopes caused major controversy (Yoon, 2020). This development was particularly problematic because an alternative venue existed in a different part of the country. While the local government promised the restoration of the natural heritage site after the Olympics, it is evident that the installation of the international ski centre permanently damaged the ecosystem in the environment. At the time of this writing, no recovery process has started yet.

Beijing 2022

In 2022, Beijing will become the first city in the world to host both the Summer and Winter Olympic Games. During the bid for the Winter Olympics, President Xi Jinping proposed a major winter sport development in China. With this strong government initiative for winter sport promotion, the economic value of this sport industrial sector in China has now

exceeded RMB 500 billion. Additionally, it is expected that the scale of the snow and ice sport business will increase to RMB one trillion by 2025 with at least 300 million Chinese people taking part in winter sport across the nation (Gaujacq, 2021). As to sustainability, the picture is not so bright, unfortunately. Recently, many ski resorts have been under construction all over China. However, the building of ski slopes inevitably involves deforestation which may lead to the destruction of the natural ecosystem in the regions. Also, many ski resorts in China including the Olympic venues rely heavily on artificial snow (Oxley, 2021). Thus, the development of winter sport in the country is prone to leave a huge carbon footprint because the process of snowmaking requires a large supply of water and electricity. Additionally, it is questionable whether the popularity of winter sport continues to grow after the 2022 Winter Olympics as the government subsidy and policy incentive may be cut during the post-event period.

An international voice against Beijing 2022 poses another taxing problem. A few days before the 128th IOC session, Free Tibet activists sent the IOC letters which claimed the illegality of the Chinese occupation of Tibet (Watt, 2015). It was part of the protesters' attempt to dissuade the IOC members from choosing Beijing as the host of the 2022 Winter Olympics. In 2018, a few American lawmakers called on the IOC to strip Beijing's rights to host the 2022 Winter Olympiad based on the allegation that China had been holding more than one million Uighur Muslims in a re-education camp (Diamond, 2018). As this contention intensifies, a few Western countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK and the US are considering not dispatching their government representatives to Beijing during the Olympics (Huang, 2021). While China denies its poor human rights records and the operation of a re-education camp in Xinjiang, the spread of an anti-Olympic campaign in the West can damage the international reputation of the nation. Given that Beijing 2022 is part of the Chinese government's cultural

diplomacy to demonstrate its merit and influence, the Olympic host needs to manoeuvre this diplomatic circumstance strategically lest Beijing 2022 turn into a new Cold War game.

The Youth Olympics in Asia Pacific

Singapore 2010

The launch of the Youth Olympic Games was part of the IOC's new millennium strategy to reignite international interests in the Olympic Movement (Judge, Petersen, & Lydum, 2009). Eleven cities across the world expressed a note of interest in hosting this inaugural Youth Olympics, and Singapore was selected to be the host city of this new competition for young athletes (Skadian, 2008). As a small nation with a complicated history of colonialism and regional rivalries, the demonstration of its national identity to the international community has been a significant political project for this city-state. Sport has been an important tool not only for fostering a Singaporean subject but also for displaying the national identity of Singapore (Peh, 2012). Thus, it is no surprise to observe that many young Singaporeans consider that the hosting of this global sporting event has strengthened patriotic sentiment in their home country (Leng, Kuo, Baysa-Pee, & Tay, 2014). Additionally, the Singaporean government tends to adopt an entrepreneurial approach to the delivery of a major sporting event with the key goal being the promotion of international tourism in Singapore (Henderson, Foo, Lim, & Yip, 2010). Not unrelated to this business mindset, the host nation embraced effective sustainability throughout the competition to minimise the cost. For instance, most Olympic venues were either renovated existing facilities or temporary structures. As the Youth Olympics is arguably a non-major sporting event but receives meaningful global attention, the staging of this edition of the Olympics was an optimal choice for Singapore to publicise the city-state worldwide without excessive investment.

Nanjing 2014

Nanjing, the former capital of China, was awarded the right to host the second Summer Youth Olympic Games in 2014. The reduction of the non-essential cost was one of the major concerns in organizing this Olympics. The demonstration of this frugality at this event was closely related to the recent Chinese government's anti-graft and corruption policy. This initiative also stressed the prohibition of expensive meals and showy receptions at public occasions (Moody, 2017). In line with this new government policy, Nanjing needed to prepare a Chinese version of an austerity Olympics. For instance, they reused various pieces of machinery and equipment originally made for the 2010 Youth Olympics in Singapore (Himmer, 2012). Moreover, the event organizer and the local government also implemented strict measures to control air pollution before and during the Games. Air pollution is so severe in Nanjing that, for the people in the city, living with clean and fresh air is considered a luxury. However, the air quality control during the Olympics was only a short-term measure, and grey and yellow smog returned to the city as soon as the event finished (Zhao, Zheng, & Ting, 2017). In terms of sport development, the most distinctive feature was the introduction of mixed team events to the competition for the first time. Young Olympians formed a team for the contest regardless of their nationalities and genders in order to promote international fraternity and to enhance the harmony between male and female athletes (Business Wire, 2014). The international link and gender equity in the Olympic stadium are probably the most important legacies of the 2014 Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing.

Gangwon 2024

The province of Gangwon will host the Youth Winter Olympics in 2024. One of the key rationales for delivering this winter sporting event is to prolong the legacies of the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang (IOC, 2020). As noted earlier, inter-Korean reconciliation

was the most distinctive political impact of the previous winter sport mega-event in the province. However, North Korea disconnected its hotline with South Korea in 2020 and turned hostile to its southern sibling again largely due to the resumption of the US-South Korea joint military exercise (Shin & Smith, 2020). Despite this challenging political circumstance, the South Korean government constantly endeavours to re-establish the inter-Korean connection. At this juncture, the Organizing Committee of Gangwon 2024 proposed the co-hosting of this Youth Olympics with North Korea in the hope that this joint project would revive the momentum of the inter-Korean communication and collaboration (Burke, 2021). Until yet, North Korea has expressed no response to this proposal. While there is criticism that the local government politically exploits the Winter Youth Olympics in Gangwon, this winter sporting occasion can make a valuable contribution to peace promotion in the Korean Peninsula if the two Koreas materialize another sporting union at this competition.

2021 Special Section on the Olympic Movement

This year's Asia Pacific Sport and Social Science (APSS) special issue includes a special section on the Olympic Movement in Asia Pacific. As briefly reviewed earlier, from an international peace promotion, via domestic social transformation, to the marketing of a specific location, the Olympic Games held in Asia Pacific countries had significant social, political and economic impacts on these nations. The Olympic hosts in this region have also made a valuable contribution to the development of the Olympic Movement. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Asia Pacific is the area that is comprised of both developing and developed economies, and the Olympic venues in this part of the world largely concentrate on a few well-off nations in Asia Pacific: Japan, South Korea, and China. Understandably, the problem of this regional divide requires critical attention and systematic investigation in order to make a more equitable and sustainable Olympic Movement in Asia Pacific and beyond.

The Olympic Movement special section contains five articles that examine various issues related to the 2014, 2018 and 2020 Olympic Games. In the first article, Yan Wang, Inge Derom and Marc Theeboom examine the influence of socio-cultural value upon the collective memory of event volunteers who supported the delivery of the 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympics. The next three essays concern the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang. Kyu-ha Choi, Becca Leopkey and Dana Ellis look into the impact of hosting this competition on the development of ice hockey in South Korea. Then, JeongAe You and her colleagues explore lived experience of sport administrators who were involved in the management of the Winter Olympics. After this, Jinsu Byun and Becca Leopkey survey legacies of hosting the winter sport mega-event paying attention to the four different categories: physical, reputational, intellectual, and individual dimensions. The last paper in this Olympic section is concerned with Taiwanese national identity politics at Tokyo 2020. Hung-Ju Chiu, Ping-Chao Lee and Ren-Shiang Jiang investigate the political implications of a campaign for changing the official name of the Taiwanese Olympic team from “Chinese Taipei” to “Taiwan”. This special issue also includes four original research articles dealing with various sociological and political problems in Asia Pacific sport. We hope that the collection of papers in this special issue stimulates social scientific dialogues about sport in this region.

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