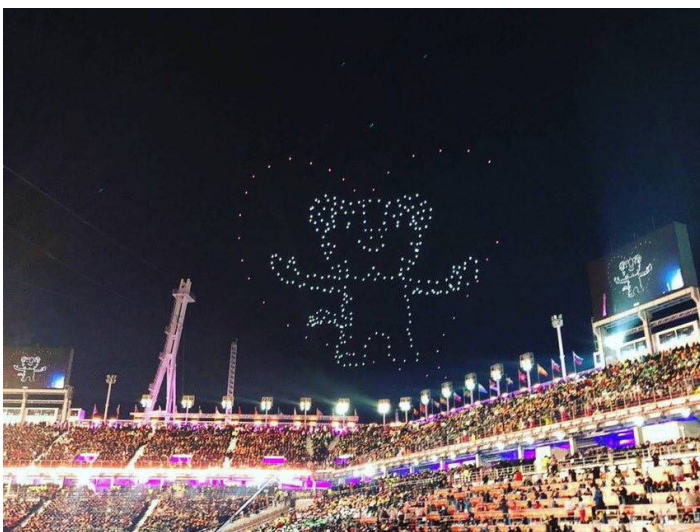


South Korea and the PyeongChang Olympic Games: Rising Power No More

2018 평창 동계 올림픽은 한국이 더이상 개발도상국이 아니며, 명실공히 발전한 국가임을 보여주는 계기가 되었고, 그에 따라 한국 정부는 평창 올림픽을 경제적, 문화적, 그리고 정치적 목적으로 이용하는 계기로 삼았다. 경제적으로는 한국을 그 어떤 나라보다도 현대적이며 기술적으로 발전된 나라임을 주지하고, 문화적으로는 케이팝을 비롯한 한국의 현대 문화를 널리 알리며, 정치적으로는 남북한 관계의 돌파구를 찾는 계기를 마련한 것이다. 이와 같은 세 가지 요인들은 평창 동계 올림픽을 한국이 비단 경제 개발 및 전통 문화를 알리는 데 주력하였던 1988년 서울 올림픽과 구분짓게 하였다. 또한 2018년 평창 올림픽을 기점으로 2020년 도쿄 하계 올림픽, 2022년 베이징 올림픽에 이어지는 세 차례의 동북아시아 권 내 올림픽 개최의 첫 발을 끊음으로써, 세계적 차원에서의 구심점 이동이 이루어짐을 천명하였다. 일본과 중국 또한 한국이 한 것과 마찬가지로, 올림픽을 단순한 국제 스포츠 행사를 넘어 경제력, 문화력, 정치력의 중심이 동북아로 집중되고 있음을 증명하는 계기로 만들 가능성이 농후하다.

The PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games served South Korea to show that it is not a rising power anymore - rather, it is a firmly established developed country. Thus, the South Korean government used the Games for economic, cultural and political purposes. In the area of economics, Seoul focused on showcasing South Korea as one of the most modern and technologically advanced countries in the world. Regarding the cultural dimension of the Games, the government promoted contemporary South Korean culture including K-Pop. As for politics, the Games were used to foster inter-Korean rapprochement. This made the PyeongChang Games different from the Seoul 1988 Games, which South Korea used as a coming out party to emphasise its economic development and traditional culture. With the PyeongChang Games opening a trio of Olympic Games to be held in Northeast Asia - Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 will follow - the Games also showed that there has been a shift in power at the global level. Japan and China are likely to use their Games as South Korea just did, offering proof that economic, cultural and political power has moved towards this part of the world.

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Mascot Soohorang paints the skies in the drone show at the PyeongChang Olympics closing ceremony
Source: The Blue House

Introduction

The PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games are now history. Years

of careful preparations resulted in over two weeks of ski, skating and other winter sports – including, of course, curling. Tens of thousands of sportspeople, fans, journalists and dignitaries from around the world descended on South Korea during the Games. They enjoyed athletic competition at the highest possible level, for winter sportspeople meticulously prepare to peak at this four-yearly event.

The PyeongChang Games, however, were not only about sport. South Korea in general and President Moon Jae-in in particular used the Games for economic, political and even cultural purposes. Olympic Games have long been seen as a branding opportunity for the host country – the chance to present a particular image to the world, as tens if not hundreds of millions of spectators visit, watch, read and talk about a country that otherwise they might know little about. The South Korean government and South Koreans understood this well, and

they worked hard to make sure that the PyeongChang Games were a success in this regard.

Thus, an analysis of the recent Games from a South Korean perspective needs to examine not only the quality of athleticism, but also its economic, political and cultural dimensions. Furthermore, it is necessary to contextualize the PyeongChang Games in relation to two significant related events: the Seoul 1988 Summer Olympic Games and the upcoming Games of Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022. Only this way would we be able to properly judge the Games that concluded only a few weeks ago.

Seoul 1988: South Korea's Coming Out Party



The Emblem and Mascots of the 1988 Seoul Olympic and Paralympic Games, Hodori and Gomdoori
Source: The International Olympic Committee

The South Korea of 1988 was very different from the South Korea of 2018. Back in the 1980s, South Korea still was a rising power and an emerging economy. Most outsiders knew little of the country located on the Far East of the Eurasian landmass. The Korean War and its depiction in movies and TV series such as *M*A*S*H* was all that most foreigners could think of when asked about South Korea.¹ Even the economic success dubbed the Miracle on the Han River was not widely known. The World Bank, for example, would only publish its East Asian Miracle report in 1993.²

Thus, the Seoul 1988 Games were an opportunity for South Korea to make itself known to the wider world. And this is what the country did. South Korea surprised many with the performance of its sportspeople during the Games. The country sent its largest-ever delegation to the Games, with 401 athletes participating in them. They won a total of 33 medals, South Korea's best-ever and still-unmatched haul.³ South Korea ranked fourth in the medal table and has been in the top-ten ever since save for the 2000 Games. It can be said that South Korea became a first-class sporting nation thanks to the preparations toward the launch of the Seoul Games.

The economic dimension of the 1988 Games was clear. South Korea was on the verge of becoming a developed economy. Indeed, it would join the OECD club of developed economies less than ten years later – in 1996. South Korea sought to present itself as a modern economy which had left behind the destitution brought about by Japanese colonization and the Korean War. Instead, the country wanted to show that it had become an economic powerhouse rapidly becoming a world-leader in industries such as electronics, shipbuilding and automobiles. As only the second Asian country to ever host the Games, South Korea also wished to demonstrate that it was capable of making the necessary spending to host the biggest sports competition in the world.

Politically, the Seoul Games were part of the geopolitical competition between both Koreas in the Cold War. Thus, North Korea called for a boycott of the Games, albeit to no avail, as Cuba joined in. In fact, the 1988 Games had the largest number of participating countries during the Cold War.⁴ If anything, the 1988 Games made clear that South Korea was the undisputed 'winner' of the inter-Korean politico-diplomatic rivalry – as confirmed throughout the 1990s and 21st century. Indeed, the Games allowed South Korea to initiate a rapprochement with the Eastern bloc. The Games helped to lay the ground for Seoul to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in September 1990 and with China in August 1992.

At the domestic level, the Seoul Games provided a welcome boost to the nascent Korean democracy. Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan had sought to have South Korea host the Games to legitimize their military rule. Chun, in particular, implemented a '3S' policy of sex, sports and screen to try to use these three sources of entertainment to divert the public's attention to from politics. The domestic democratization movement that swept throughout South Korea in the 1980s, however, led to the December 1987 election that brought democracy to the country. As a result, the Seoul Games that started ten months later – in September 1988 – became a symbol of the dawn of a newly democratized country. This created an even starker contrast with authoritarian North Korea.

Arguably, the cultural dimension of the Seoul Games was less prominent than economics and politics, given the importance of these two. Nonetheless, the South Korean government used the Games

to promote Korea's traditional culture. To a large extent, this was a means to show the uniqueness of Korean culture, which international audiences often confused with Chinese or Japanese culture back then. Thus, the opening ceremony included a mass taekwondo demonstration. Taekwondo then featured as an exhibition sport in the Games, eventually becoming an official competition sport in the 2000 Games – making it the first Korean martial art to do so. Furthermore, 1936 Olympic marathon gold medalist Sohn Kee-chung – who had worn the Japanese flag under Japanese colonial rule of Korea at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin – was given the honour of carrying the Olympic torch into the stadium during the opening ceremony. This became a symbol of Korea's uniqueness even under Japanese colonization decades before.

The Seoul 1988 Games therefore served South Korea the same purpose that the Tokyo 1964 and Beijing 2008 games did for Japan and China, respectively. They showed changed countries that had left behind past poverty to firmly become modern economies. These three games also showed countries proud of their political and diplomatic achievements – with the obvious difference of Japan and South Korea being democracies – willing to make their unique cultures known to the rest of the world. In this respect, the three summer games held in Asia so far were very similar in their significance.

Comparative Statistics of the Seoul (1988) and Pyeongchang (2018) Olympic Games

	1988 Seoul Summer Olympics	2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics
Budget	747.7 billion KRW* (=1 billion USD, based on September 1988 Won-Dollar Exchange Rates)	2.4 billion USD* (= 2.6 Trillion KRW, based on February 2018 Won-Dollar Exchange Rates)
IOC Funds	0	880 million USD
Number of South Korean Athletes (Participants/Medalists)	467/33 Medalists (Gold:12 Silver:10 Bronze:11)	145/17 Medalists (Gold:5 Silver:8 Bronze:4)
Category of Games from which medals were awarded	Boxing, Handball, Wrestling, Shooting, Weight-lifting, Judo, Gymnastics, Table Tennis, Field Hockey	Bobsleigh (Mens), Short-Track, Snowboard, Skeleton, Speed- skating, Curling

Comparative Statistics of the Seoul (1988) and Pyeongchang (2018) Olympic Games
* Budget calculations are based on the approximate KRW-USD exchange rates during the months of September 1988 and February 2018, respectively. (Source: Bank of Korea Economic Statistics System)
@ DIVERSE+ASIA

PyeongChang 2018: A Playbook in How to Make Use of the Modern Games

The recently finished PyeongChang 2018 Games have shown a different South Korea from that of 30 years ago. The country is not a rising power or emerging economy anymore. South Korea is the 11th largest economy in the world, a top-ten trading nation, and a consolidated democracy. It also is a full-fledged member of the international community. This includes an important role in international diplomatic affairs, as most clearly exemplified by South Korean diplomat Ban Ki-moon having served as Secretary General of the United Nations until 2016. And South Korean culture from music to films to food is better-known and more influential than it has ever been since the division of the Korean Peninsula. The PyeongChang Games in 2018 have therefore served a different purpose compared to the Seoul ones three decades ago.

Starting with the economic dimension of the Games, the Moon Jae-in government sought to portray South Korea as one of the most modern and technologically advanced economies at the forefront of the so-called fourth industrial revolution. To be fair, President Moon took advantage of the work done by previous administrations and the evolution of the South Korean economy in recent decades more generally. For example, the high-speed rail line connecting Seoul with PyeongChang was an extension of the KTX network first launched in 2004. And robot guides deployed during the Games would have not been possible without the support that successive South Korean governments have provided to the robotics industry since the early 2000s at least.

Having said that, the Moon government decisively pushed for the PyeongChang Games to showcase the latest South Korean technologies. Artificial Intelligence (AI), 5G technology and drones were used extensively and were embedded into the Olympic experience. The opening ceremony, for example, set a new world record for the number of drones working in concert. Up to 1,218 of them created light-up images including the Olympic rings.⁵ Certainly, South Korea has not been the first country to use the Games to showcase its latest technological innovations – nor will it be the last. Russia did the same during the Sochi 2014 Winter Games, and Japan seeks to follow suit in the upcoming 2020 Games in Tokyo. But the pride with which the South Korean government put indigenous technology at the centre of

the Games served to set an example for how a country would present and promote herself making use of a sports event.

Furthermore, the Games served the South Korean government to make the case for the country to become a destination for a new set of tourists: winter sport enthusiasts. In this respect, PyeongChang can be compared to Nagano and Salt Lake City, hosts of the 1998 and 2002 Winter Games respectively. The three of them are relatively small cities not necessarily well known before hosting the Games. But Nagano has now become a top winter destination for skiers coming from elsewhere in Asia seeking to try out the mountains where Olympic Alpine and Nordic skiing events were held. Meanwhile, Salt Lake City tourism receipts almost doubled in the decade following the Games held there. Seoul hopes that PyeongChang will receive a similar tourism boost.⁶ With South Korea already a leading destination for Asian tourists attracted by the country's pop culture, beauty treatments or shopping experience, PyeongChang could well become an important winter sport destination. Having said that, and in common with previous host countries, the South Korean government seems to have no long-term plan to increase to transform the PyeongChang Games into a long-term policy to foster the public's participation in Olympic sports. Thus, PyeongChang's success as a winter sports destination will hinge on organic growth rather than conscious government policy.

In one way, Gangwon Province has already benefited from the Games. The region – one of South Korea's poorest – has been revitalized through investment in infrastructure and a marketing push throughout South Korea. The region has already seen a spike in tourist arrivals from the rest of the country as access has become easier and it has become better known, a trend which will probably continue in years to come. In a sense, economic revitalization has become one of the rationales behind recent games – Spain has done so with Barcelona's port area, the UK with London's Eastern boroughs, and Russia with Sochi. South Korea has followed on this trend.

A key difference between the PyeongChang and Seoul games has been the role of culture in each of them. In contrast with from 1988, the South Korea of 2018 has become a cultural powerhouse which for years has been making use of cultural diplomacy to present its traditional and – very importantly – modern culture to the rest of the world. Thus, the

South Korean government did not need to use the PyeongChang Games to introduce its culture to the rest of the world. It is true that the opening and closing ceremonies did pay homage to traditional elements of Korean culture. Most notably, the opening ceremony started with five children following Soohorang, the Olympic mascot inspired by the white tiger traditionally considered to be a Korean guardian god. Some aspects of a country's traditional culture were blended into the opening and closing ceremonies. The PyeongChang Games were no exception.



*The Emblem and Mascots of the 2018 PyeongChang Olympic and Paralympic Games, Soohorang and Bandabi
Source: The International Olympic Committee*

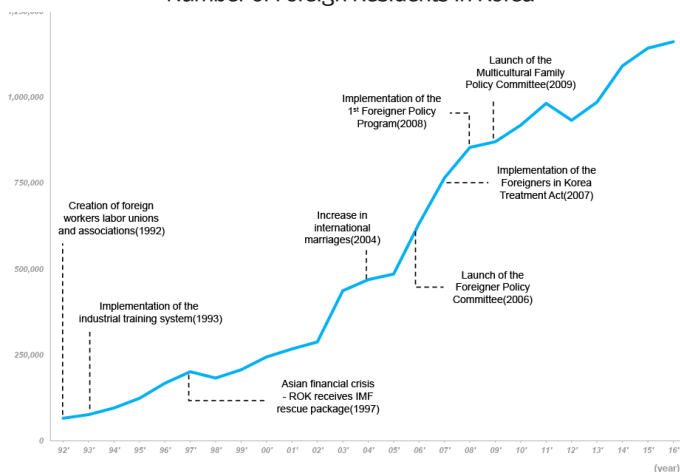
The most interesting aspect of the way South Korea portrayed its culture was its focus on its contemporary elements though. Above all, K-Pop was central to the Games. Hallyu or the Korean Wave had already made contemporary Korean music, dramas and films immensely popular across Asia. The Korean Wave has also reached the Middle East and parts of the West and Latin America. But the Games were an opportunity to further strengthen the position of K-Pop at the global level. Thus, K-Pop acts featured prominently in both ceremonies. This was especially the case in the closing ceremony, which tends to have a more party-feel than the opening one.

This way, the PyeongChang Games blended culture and economics. South Korea presented its K-Pop industry to both enthusiasts and potential new customers who tuned in to watch the ceremonies. A parallel can be drawn with the London Games. The UK government also made use of the opening and, especially, closing ceremonies to make British pop even better known to the rest of the world. It takes a certain level of confidence in one's modern culture to do so. Most countries still stick to putting their more traditional music at the centre of Olympic ceremonies – especially during the opening one. This was the case for samba during Rio 2016 in Brazil, classical Russian music during Sochi 2014 or opera and traditional instrumental music during Beijing 2008.

Another important difference between the PyeongChang and Seoul

games touching on culture but also on domestic politics was the representation of multiculturalism. During the opening ceremony, Aegukga – the South Korean national anthem – was sung by the Rainbow Chorus. This is a multi-ethnic children’s choir sponsored by the South Korean government.⁷ This way, the Moon government presented a different face of the country’s society to both domestic and international audiences. At a time when South Korea is in the midst of a debate about the meaning of multiculturalism for what remains a very ethnically homogenous society, this sent a very powerful message of integration and acceptance. The South Korea of 1988 would not have needed to send such a message, given its small number of foreign residents and mixed-raced citizens. But even the South Korea of 2018 did not have an urgent need to showcase its multiculturalism. This was therefore a conscious choice by South Korean activities.

Number of Foreign Residents in Korea



Source: ROK Ministry of Justice data and immigration policies @ DIVERSE+ASIA

Delving into the strictly political dimension of the PyeongChang Games, inter-Korean relations proceeded very differently in comparison to the Seoul Games thirty years ago. Both Koreas marched together during the opening ceremony and filed a unified women’s ice hockey team. These were powerful symbolic gestures and a far cry from North Korea’s boycott of the Games in 1988. Even though it was not the first time that both Koreas have marched together, they had never done so in such a high-profile event taking place in Korean territory. Tens if not hundreds of millions of people watching the Games opening ceremony witnessed the moment when tens of thousands of spectators cheered on the Korean athletes parading under a common flag. The symbolic representation of potential peace – and even reunification – in the Korean Peninsula was both obvious and also moving.

The lack of public deliberation on such issues became the source of stirring controversies as a result of the Blue House’s decision to have a unified women’s ice hockey team during the Olympic games. As the Games host, South Korea was entitled to send its own team. In January 2018 a decision was made to include North Korean players in the 35-player roster. This was criticized by many South Koreans, who wanted their own team represented at the Games and who saw the inclusion of North Korean players as unfair on South Korean players who would be getting less playing time during matches.⁸ Ultimately, however, controversies were set aside and the team – incidentally, also including naturalized Korean citizens – became one of the highlights of the Games. President Moon and Kim Jong-un’s sister and Olympic envoy Kim Yo-jong even watched the first game together, a scene which was unthinkable even a few weeks before the Games.

In fact, the PyeongChang Games were also the scene of high politics. President Moon used them to boost inter-Korean relations and a thaw in Korean Peninsula tensions. Since his election he sought rapprochement with North Korea through repeated public and private invitations to send a delegation to the Games. Even as Pyongyang’s sixth nuclear test in September 2017 and repeated missile launches made some think that US President Donald Trump would order a strike on North Korea, President Moon maintained his invitation. Once Kim Jong-un accepted in his New Year’s message, the South Korean government worked very hard to make sure that the Games served to turn the tide in inter-Korean relations. Kim Yo-jong’s unanticipated visit turned out to be very successful, as proven by preparations from both Koreas for a host of summits involving different players in Korean Peninsula affairs in the coming months. Inter-Korean rapprochement would have most probably happened without the Games, since the Moon government has repeatedly emphasized its engagement policy. However, the Games helped to accelerate the process and provided a useful cover for Kim Jong-un’s sister and trusted envoy to travel to South Korea.

Arguably, the biggest similarity between the PyeongChang and Seoul games relates to the performance by South Korean sportspeople. South Korea sent its largest-ever delegation to the winter Games, with 122 athletes. The delegation obtained South Korea’s largest-ever winter Games medal haul, with 17 medals in total.⁹ This put South Korea

seventh in the medal table and therefore in the top-ten again following its disappointing results at the Sochi 2014 Games. More importantly, South Korea won its first ever medals in skeleton, snowboarding, bobsleigh and, most famously, curling. A country famed for its speed skaters thus enjoyed success in a wide range of winter sports.

The PyeongChang 2018 Games represented for South Korea a similar opportunity to what the Sapporo 1972 and, especially, Nagano 1998 Games were for Japan in terms of their economic dimension. Before the PyeongChang Games, these had been the two only winter games to be held in Asia. The Japanese government took the opportunity of the Winter Olympic Games to showcase the country's technological achievements and tourist attractiveness. They also served Japan to present itself as a cultural powerhouse, even if its focus remained on traditional rather than contemporary culture.

A clear difference between the PyeongChang Games and its two Japanese predecessors was in the area of politics. The recent Games in South Korea have served a clear purpose in the area of high politics. This was not the case with the Sapporo and Nagano games. In fact, the former took place only eight years after the Tokyo Games and to an extent were also utilized by Japan to project the image of a developed economy with a more important role to play in international affairs. This was not the case with the Nagano Games, which did not have an obvious political dimension attached to them. The PyeongChang Games were thus different in this respect. The upcoming Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games might be closer to the recent Games in South Korea in this regard.

The Games Shift to Asia

One other important aspect of the PyeongChang Games is the fact that they inaugurate a sequence of three consecutive games being held in Asia. The Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 games will follow from the PyeongChang Games by hosting the next summer and winter games, respectively. This is the first time that any region outside of Europe and North America will have hosted consecutive games. It will also mark a period of twelve years between the London 2012 and Paris 2024 games in which the Olympic Games will not have visited North America or Western Europe.¹⁰ The fact that it is East Asia the region hosting the most games during this period sends a strong message.

To begin with, hosting the Olympic Games shows a country's economic strength. The Games usually cost tens of billions of US dollars to organize. Construction costs and preparations tend to run over budget. And the Games tend to produce short-term losses. Montreal 1976 and Rio 2016 are two games that provide a cautionary tale. The former spent decades repaying the costs of hosting the Games. The latter won the bid to host the Games in a period of economic boom but ended up hosting them during an economic and political crisis. Cost cutting led to one of the most underwhelming Games in recent memory, tarnishing the image of the city and Brazil in general.

South Korea, Japan and China, however, are economic powerhouses. Japan and China, for example, are the third and second largest economies in the world. Thus, they can afford to make short-term losses from the Games as South Korea just did. These should be offset by long-term benefits in terms of branding, a larger influx of tourists and, potentially, a boost to domestic sportspeople. In other words, these three countries can afford to take a direct economic hit from the Games in return for the many benefits that might come from them.

Still, within the remit of the economic significance of having three consecutive Games in East Asia, it is clear that the International Olympic Committee has the audiences and customers of the region in mind. China, Japan and South Korea boast three of the largest numbers of middle class citizens in the world. East Asia as a whole is poised to continue adding hundreds of millions to their ranks in the coming years – led by China and followed by Southeast Asian countries, especially Indonesia. Getting as many of them as possible to practice Olympic sports would ensure growing TV audiences and revenues – especially if Olympic champions from the region as popular as the South Korean figure skating champion Kim Yu-na continue to emerge.

The three consecutive East Asian games also point out to a shift in political power at the global level. To put it bluntly, the West matters less while the East is rising. The voices of South Korea, Japan and – especially – China matter more today than they did before. When China announced that it was bidding to host the 2022 Winter Games, no Western country dared to present their own bid. South Korea and Japan, meanwhile, beat an impressive list of Western and other countries during their respective bidding process. In the case of the PyeongChang

Games, it beat opposition from France and Germany. Even though it can be argued that this is merely symbolic, it adds to the inevitable dynamic that the ongoing shift in power from West to East is here to stay.

Having said that, South Korea, China and Japan are not rising powers anymore. The last two can use the upcoming Games to present themselves as confident members of the international community with strong economies and diplomatic clout, as South Korea just did with the PyeongChang Games. High politics might even be in the agenda if inter-Korean rapprochement continues, North Korea comes out of its shell, and Japan and China seek to extend an olive branch to Pyongyang in their respective games.

In all likelihood, the Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 games will be as successful as the PyeongChang Games in terms of organization and the performance of domestic sportspeople. Therefore, we may be about to witness five years of almost continuous success for the region. With the Olympic Games having become a political, economic and cultural venue, this bodes well for the three biggest East Asian powers.

PyeongChang in Retrospect and the Way Forward

With the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games now over, now is the time to reflect on their significance for South Korea. It is undeniable that the athletic performance of South Korean sportspeople and the perfectly organized and entertaining opening and closing ceremonies set the tone for a very successful Games. PyeongChang and South Korea will be remembered for having hosted one of the best Games in recent history. The government and South Koreans at large should take pride in this.

More importantly in the long-run, however, would be the opportunity that the Games gave South Korea in the areas of economics, culture and politics. Starting with the economic dimension, the Games allowed South Korea to portray itself as a modern country at the frontier of technological development and great host for winter sports enthusiasts. Regarding culture, the Games helped to put South Korea's modern culture in front of the eyes of tens of millions of people – particularly K-Pop. They were also used to show a multicultural South Korea. As for high politics, inter-Korean rapprochement and an easing of tensions in

the Korean Peninsula were greatly helped by the Games.

Ultimately, the PyeongChang Games demonstrated how far South Korea has moved since the Seoul Games thirty years before. South Korea is no longer rising power and emerging economy anymore. It is an important member of the international community and a fully developed economy. The Games might not have propelled this change, but they have served to showcase South Korea's evolution over the past thirty years.

About the Author

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- 1 M*A*S*H is a TV show that depicting the lives of a team of doctors stationed in South Korea during the Korean War. It ran from 1972 to 1983 in the US, remains one of the highest-rated ever shows in US history, and won multiple awards.
- 2 Nancy M. Birdsall et al., The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1993).
- 3 International Olympic Committee, 'Republic of Korea', available at (<https://www.olympic.org/republic-of-korea>) (accessed 9 May 2018).
- 4 International Olympic Committee, 'Olympic Games', available at (<https://www.olympic.org/olympic-games>) (accessed 9 May 2018).
- 5 Andrew Keh, Victor Mather and Haeyoun Park, 'Winter Olympics 2018 Opening Ceremony: Highlights and Analysis', New York Times, 9 February 2018.
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- 7 Keh, Mather and Park, op. cit.
- 8 Motoko Rich and Seth Berkman, 'Forth South Korea's Hockey Women, Unity With North Is a Bitter Burden', New York Times, 22 January 2018.
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- 10 International Olympic Committee, 'Olympic Games'.

*본 기고문은 전문가 개인의 의견으로, 서울대 아시아연구소와 의견이 다를 수 있음을 밝힙니다.