

Olympics and International Peace

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Introduction

Whether the Tokyo Olympic Games that were postponed due to the global spread of the coronavirus will actually begin officially on July 23, 2021 is drawing much attention from all around the world. The Japanese government and the International Olympic Committee(IOC) are determined to hold the Games, allowing domestic spectators only. However, as the number of people infected with COVID-19 has recently increased and the fourth wave takes shape, over 80 percent of Japanese have opposed Olympics this summer. Nevertheless, the IOC and the Japanese government insist on holding the Games as rescheduled. As for Japan, it would not be so easy to give up its ambitious national project to overcome the economic stagnation, referred to as the "lost decades", and the nuclear disaster of Fukushima. The IOC would also be in a tight spot to have the Olympics canceled after having it postponed for the first time in its history.

The Olympics is of cultural significance to mankind, but for the Olympics to be held in real life, the intricate webs of interests of the stakeholders must be coordinated and come to a satisfactory settlement amid a constant state of flux. After the end of the Cold War, the Olympics caught the wave of globalization and used its monopoly status to unite with huge capital. Major cities around the world were eager to host the Olympics, and the bidding competition became so heated that the decisions were often surrounded by controversies and scandals. Nevertheless, the Olympics enjoyed a golden age. However, as the artistic presentations have grown in scale, the costs of hosting the Olympics have skyrocketed, placing much financial burden on the host cities and this led to fewer states interested in playing host. The IOC, in return, announced the Olympic Agenda 2020 in 2014. Top agenda of the Olympics

2020 was to minimize the cost of hosting the Olympics, thereby lightening the burdens of staging the big event for the host city.

Although the IOC has bought some time through the Olympic Agenda 2020, it is hard to deny that the modern Olympics are facing a challenge to fundamentally break through the crisis in light of the rapidly changing times and seek a long-term vision for the future. Besides the fact that the Tokyo Olympics will be held in the midst of a global health crisis, it also holds significance in the fact that it coincides with the beginning of a full-fledged hegemonic competition between the United States and China. This article studies the Olympics, one of the most important mega sporting events, based on peace aspects.

Ancient Olympic Games and Peace

The ancient Olympic Games which inspired the creation of the modern Olympics held two primary significance - religious/cultural and political. The ancient Olympics began as part of a religious ritual that symbolized to offer physically supreme human beings in honor of Zeus. Originally, there were four major games and sanctuaries in ancient Greece: Olympia, Delphi, Nemea and Isthmia. Among these Panhellenic Games, the Olympic Games held in honor of Zeus in Olympia, Elis, located in the northwest of the Peloponnese peninsula in Greece, became the origin of the ancient Olympic Games. Official records reckon the date of the first Olympic Games to be 776 BCE, but various archaeological sources suggest that the Olympics existed before that. The ancient Olympic Games lasted over a thousand years, with a total of 293 times held in the same place every four years until the emperor Theodosius I banned the Olympics in CE 394.

Only freeborn Greek men were allowed to participate in the ancient Olympic Games and women were forbidden to watch the Games. With hardly any support from their city-states of origin, the participants had to finance most of the expenses for training, transportation and participation by themselves. Thus, physically fit Greek men with a certain level of financial stability participated. Victors received no rewards other than laurel wreaths, but so great was the honor that they were able to amass a fortune and expand businesses in their hometowns or through different events. During the Olympics, the city was rife with finest food and wine from all over Greece and poets and women flocked to perform music and theater. The selected Olympic competitors were said to have been popular within Greek society as they were recognized as the

alter ego of Heracles and treated as idols of the time. In short, the ancient Olympic Games are the epitome of Hellenistic culture, a combination of religion, arts and sports.

In the meantime, big and small wars between the city-states never stopped in ancient Greece. However, a pan-Hellenic truce prohibited conflicts between city-states three months before and during the Olympic Games. All disputes came to a halt and the executions were suspended during this period. The safety of all competitors, officials and spectators was also guaranteed. Although the ancient Olympics did not bring permanent peace among city-states, they played a role in temporarily easing tensions by mandating a truce, at least for during the Games.

Olympism, Olympic Movement and Olympics

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a Frenchman who launched his plan to revive the Olympic Games in 1894, was interested in education and archaeology. He became deeply interested in the ancient Olympic Games out of all the ancient Greek civilizations excavated through archaeology. Coubertin's advocacy for the Games sprang from not only the mere intellectual curiosity but also his educational motivation to improve the weak mind and body of the French youth at the time. However, soon after he realized that the ideals for athletic competition held significance not just for the youth but for humanity as a whole, Coubertin invested time in the development of Olympism, Olympic Movement and the modern Olympics.

Olympism, which refers to the philosophy of the Olympic Games, captures the universal values that mankind have realized in the course of modernization. In other words, Olympism aims for a whole-person with healthy body and mind and promotes a peaceful society where such better humans coexist. The Olympic Movement is a series of activities that propagate the values of Olympism through sports, and the Olympics are the best means of implementing the Olympic Movement.

According to the Olympic Charter, Olympism, as a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body and mind, seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. The goal of Olympism is to contribute to preserving human dignity and building a peaceful and better society by ensuring every youth's possibility of practicing sport without discrimination of any kind.

The promotion of peace, along with the cultivation of a whole-person, is the fundamental principle of Olympism, the ultimate purpose of the Olympic Movement, and the fundamental reason for hosting the Olympics. These are clearly stated at the beginning of the Olympic Charter.

Modern Olympics and Peace

For the 100 years since the establishment of the modern Olympics, however, the Olympics have shown little effect in promoting peace for humanity. The 1916 Olympics were scheduled to be held in Berlin, but were eventually canceled due to the outbreak of World War I. The 1940 Olympics that were originally scheduled to be held in Tokyo were rescheduled for Helsinki due to the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War, and were ultimately canceled due to the outbreak of World War II. The 1944 London Olympics were also canceled due to World War II. The Olympics were of no use in the face of two World Wars. Meanwhile, the Olympics have been targets of interstate wars and terrorist attacks. In the 1972 Olympics, the Munich massacre, in which the Palestinian terrorist group Black September kidnapped and killed 11 Israeli athletes and coaches, shocked the world.

The Olympics during the Cold War had no effect on global peace, but rather diminished the efforts for global peace. In the 1980 Moscow Olympics, the United States and the Western Bloc governments boycotted the Olympics in protest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, making it a half-Olympics in which a smallest number of nations was represented since 1956. In return, the Soviet Union and its allies later boycotted the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. In the end, until the end of the two World Wars and the end of the Cold War, the Olympics did not bring about a truce, let alone peace, but rather took on a nature of a proxy war. While the ancient Greek city-states shared religious and cultural similarities, the dynamics of international relations in the 20th century were so much more complex and culturally heterogeneous that the Olympics was simply not enough to deliver peace.

In the meantime, the 1988 Seoul Olympics, which coincided with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, hosted the largest number of participating nations during the Cold War era and was marked as a symbolic Olympic event that laid the foundation for the end of the Cold War. The Seoul Olympics provided impetus to the development of South Korea's relations with communist states in Eastern Europe. The 1993 U.N. General Assembly

unanimously adopted a resolution on the Olympic Truce, and since then, the Olympic Games have had the effect of ceasing local warfare and civil war during the period of the Truce. In 1994, the civil war between the central Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army was suspended, and the ethnic conflicts in Georgia and Bosnia also reached a temporary ceasefire. In addition, the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, served as an opportunity for the Korean Peninsula to overcome the crisis of armed conflict over North Korean missile and nuclear crisis.

PyeongChang 2018, Tokyo 2020, Beijing 2022 and the East Asian Peace

East Asia is hosting three consecutive Olympics: the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, the 2021 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, Japan, and the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, China. Never in the history of the Olympics have there been such consecutive events in the neighboring countries. This is a fortuitous result from combined factors such as hosting cycle by continent, each nation's bid to host the Games and interstate power relations, rather than the result of the IOC's deliberate plan. The fact that three consecutive Olympics are hosted in East Asia, where the tension of the international relations are very high, implies that the Olympics have provided a good opportunity to ease tensions and seek peace in the region.

East Asia is a geopolitical black hole of the 21st century, where interstate conflicts and the resulting international relations are intricately intertwined. The ongoing interstate conflicts include the hegemonic competition between the United States and China, the territorial disputes in the South China Sea between China and surrounding states, the Senkaku Islands disputes between China and Japan, the nuclear crisis between the United States and North Korea, the Liancourt Rocks dispute between South Korea and Japan, the Goguryeo controversies between China and Korea, the Korean conflict between North Korea and South Korea, and the Kuril Islands dispute between Japan and Russia. As the conflicts within the region and the U.S.-China strategic competition for hegemony overlap, tensions are mounting over time.

As can be seen from the history of the Olympics, the Olympics cannot be a leading factor in bringing about a fundamental and lasting peace. Yet, it can provide justification and

opportunity to postpone military conflicts or seek a peaceful solution through a tentative ceasefire. South Korea, China, Japan and the IOC should take advantage of the golden opportunity of holding the consecutive Olympics to find ways to ease tensions and promote peace in the region.

Conclusion

It is not at all easy to politically and diplomatically resolve the relationship between South Korea, China and Japan, which have been intertwined with historical grievances. Instead, it may be more natural and effective to begin in a non-political area, such as sports, in which universal rules are applied. The Olympic Games, the centerpiece of the sporting events, regard peace through sports competitions as the ultimate value. Peace is the best legacy that can be achieved through hosting the Olympics. There is a need to make a legacy to implement a venue for continuous sports exchanges in which the youths of the three countries can break free from historical traumas and develop strong bonds.

Certainly, it is an increasingly hostile environment for the Olympics to actualize its principle of promoting world peace for humanity. This is due to numerous factors that threaten humanity's peaceful lives, such as infectious diseases, climate change, and polarization, as well as the collapse of international order and the U.S.-China hegemonic competitions. However, hope and peace paradoxically add value when they seem so distant. The Olympic Games, a common cultural symbol of mankind, is a valuable asset like a small beacon in the dark. Although it cannot bring peace, the Olympics can function as an alarm that constantly informs mankind of the value of peace.

Currently, mankind must consider living in a symbiotic relationship with not only other individuals, but also nature and technology. There is a keen interest on whether the Tokyo Olympics will be held and if so, whether it will be able to offer a possibility of new progress of mankind to overcome the symbiotic crisis with humans, nature and technology.