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Chapter 2

The political economy of mega-events as spectacles in the Global East

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Abstract: This chapter critically examines the recent experiences of hosting mega-events as spectacles in East Asia or the Global East, discussing the ways in which the Asian states have utilized the Olympic Games as spectacles to create a sense of unity and togetherness. In doing so, this chapter attempts to show how the analysis of mega-events needs to be extended beyond the city scale and how such an analysis involves the consideration of the life history of mega-events from their gestation to fruition on the one hand and the political economy of the host society on the other. The case studies of mega-events discussed herein include the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, the 2020 [2021] Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan, and the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing, China. The analysis of the political economy of these mega-events allows us to re-theorize mega-events as spectacles from the Global East.

Introduction: situating the mega-events in the Global East

Between 2018 and 2022, East Asia has seen a series of international mega-events as global spectacles hosted by South Korea (hereafter Korea), Japan, and China. The mega-event troika included, respectively, the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games, the 2020 [2021] Tokyo Summer Olympic Games and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games. For Japan, the 2020 [2021] Tokyo Games was the fourth Olympic Games to host, having previously hosted the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics, the 1972 Sapporo Winter Olympics, and the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics. For Korea and China, each event was the second Olympic Games,

having formerly hosted the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics and the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, respectively.

The concentration of these global spectacles in what I refer to as the Global East (see Shin 2021) provides an exciting avenue for theorizing mega-events as spectacles from Asia. While the literature on international mega-events has often focused on urban scales and therefore is prone to falling into *methodological cityism* that limits our gaze to host cities,ⁱ as this chapter shows, mega-events in the Global East can be said to be inherently entwined with the state- and national-level politics. Furthermore, the substantial time lag between the first Olympic Games and the most recent ones in these countries (e.g., 1988 Summer Olympic Games versus 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Korea) allows us to scrutinize the nature of such mega-events as spectacles against each country's political economy.

In this regard, this chapter critically examines the recent experiences of hosting mega-events as spectacles in the Global East, discussing the ways in which the Asian states have utilized the Olympic Games as spectacles to create a "pseudocommunity" (Debord 1967) in each host society. In doing so, this chapter attempts to show how the analysis of mega-events needs to be extended beyond the city scale and how such an analysis involves the consideration of the life history of mega-events from their gestation to fruition on the one hand and the political economy of the host society on the other. The case studies of mega-events discussed herein would allow us to re-theorize mega-events as spectacles from the Global East, emphasizing the role of the state and geopolitical economies in thinking about the drivers and legacies of mega-events.

The rest of this chapter begins with a review of the literature on mega-events as spectacles, which briefly introduces the perspective of Guy Debord (1967). This chapter adopts the viewpoint that mega-events as spectacles purport to transform each host society into a "pseudocommunity" that provides a "unified space" for facilitating socio-political stability and enabling capitalist accumulation (see also Shin 2012). This chapter then sums up the argument that in order to understand such role of mega-events, it is necessary to go beyond methodological cityism. Following this summary are the three sections, each

presenting a detailed discussion of each of the mega-event troika as case studies in this chapter. The final section provides a comparative reflection and concludes.

Mega-events as spectacles and the creation of “pseudocommunity”

The urban studies literature on mega-events often suggests that mega-events create a spectacle, which helps produce a false understanding of a unified community in host societies. Guy Debord’s perspective has been particularly influential in this regard (e.g., Gotham 2011; Shin 2012). According to Debord (1967), the rise of capitalism has accompanied the ascendancy of a market society that sees the mediation among people’s social relations by images as spectacles. Individuals are under the “delusion and false consciousness” created through the spectacles that act “as a *means of unification*” (Debord 1967, p. 24; original emphasis). The resulting “pseudocommunity” hides the separation and division in real life without resolving them. For instance, in China, the drive for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games was arguably aimed at creating national unity under the banner of a “harmonious society” and legitimizing the Party State (see Shin 2012), even though migrants who built the city of Beijing in a literal sense were marginalized and China’s ethnic integration was subject to questions (Shin and Li 2013).

Spectacles such as mega-events arguably operate in such a way as to achieve pseudo-unification among isolated individuals or their “controlled reintegration” into the governing system led by the capitalist hegemony (Debord 1967, p. 114). They do this through various means, including the creation of the “state of exception” (Agamben 2003; see also Vainer 2016) and the use of the “state of emergency” (Sánchez and Broudehoux 2013), which enable the implementation of exceptional measures that would have been otherwise impossible to be enforced under normal circumstances. The production of a “unified space” (Debord 1967) may help address both the needs of capital accumulation and the production of a “pseudocommunity,” which sustains the socio-political stability that is key to the advancement of capitalist interests.

In the Global East, the first Olympic Games hosted by Asian economies symbolized their economic achievements in a globalizing world. East Asian mega-events have arguably entailed the state's effort to create a "pseudocommunity" in each host society and endorse the legitimacy of the ruling political interests, albeit under different political-economic contexts. Indeed, when Japan, Korea, and China won the right to host their first Olympic Games, their economy was experiencing a take-off, heading for the realization of greater national affluence and a marked position in the global economy (see Figure 2.1). For Japan, the 1959 bid for the 1964 Olympic Games was a means to demonstrate the return of Japan to the international community supported by the reconstruction of a war-torn economy after having lost World War II.ⁱⁱ It was deemed an occasion for Japan to have "celebrated its entrance as a normalized member of the international community" (Collins 2011a, p. 17). Accordingly, the 1964 Summer Olympic Games became a national celebration. For Korea, its 1981 bid was signaling the growth of an export-oriented economy under the developmental state that needed its demonstration of legitimacy after a military coup that replaced the preceding dictatorship. For China, its 2001 bid coincided with its accession to the newly established World Trade Organization, which signaled its integration of global capitalism with China's positioning as a key manufacturing basis for world commodities. In this regard, the Olympic Games in Tokyo (1964), Seoul (1988), and Beijing (2008) could, respectively, be regarded as their "coming out party" (Whiting 2020, p. 1), "rites of passage" (Manheim 1990), and "coming of age" (Ren 2008, p. 178), all of which forged a degree of unity among the populations.

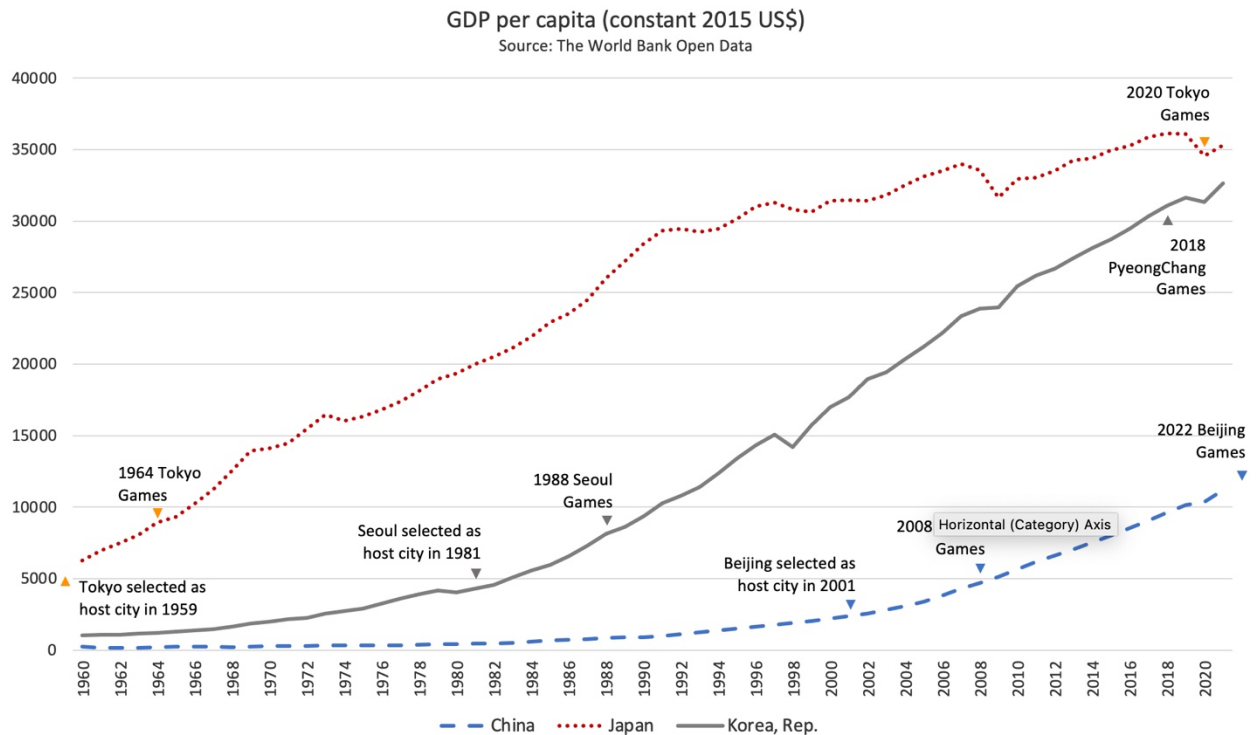


Figure 2.1 GDP per capita (constant 2015 US\$), 1960-2021

The first Olympic Games in Japan, Korea, and China were, therefore, bid for and hosted in each country at a particular juncture of economic modernization that saw the emergence and expansion of middle-class populations. As such, these Games were somewhat received by the national populace with a sense of pride and patriotism. Those who were negatively affected by the Games, such as migrant workers in Beijing, were also said to be susceptible to endorsing them, given the nationalist promotion of the Games (Shin and Li 2013).ⁱⁱⁱ All of these would have enabled the central state to pursue the creation of a pseudocommunity and false consciousness of togetherness with greater ease than their Western counterparts and reflect the understanding and the role of the state in Asian contexts, where the state came to nurture the growth of the middle-class populace of the nascent capitalism and use nationalist discourses for advancing their legitimacy (Koo 1991; Yang 2012).

Mega-events and changing political economies

One of the frequent areas of discussion in the mega-events literature is the spatiotemporality of mega-events. Mega-events as spectacles are known to facilitate the compression of space and time due to their very nature that prioritizes certain projects and resources to meet the uncompromising event deadline and enhance connectivity across geographies to deliver shared experiences of spectacle consumption. The rise of global media industries further facilitates space–time compression. Global media industries render the spectacles as transnational commodities for the global spectators to consume and synchronize their senses with what the event organizers purport to generate (see Alekseyeva 2014 for the case of Sochi 2014). As the preparation for mega-events takes place, especially toward the last phase of the event preparation, infrastructural projects and the construction of event-related facilities (e.g., stadia, athletes' compound, media center) are sped up to meet event opening deadlines (Müller 2017; H. B. Shin 2014).

While the compression of space and time is one of the critical features of contemporary mega-events, a significant shortfall in the mega-events literature is how the changing political economy of host cities *over time* influences the shifting characteristics of mega-events and their meanings to host societies. Often, critics analyze mega-events as if such events are situated within the never-changing political economies of host cities and countries. However, even if one takes the period between a bid for an event and its actual opening ceremony, there are usually ten years of life for mega-events, which is sufficiently long enough for the host city and country to experience some changes to their political and economic fortunes. For instance, it is well known that when the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games released its budget and business plan three years before the opening ceremony, its 196-page document included the expression “recession” only once in the context of there would be “no recession” given the solid Canadian economy (Mackin 2010). However, the ensuing global financial crisis rocked Canada.

In East Asia that has experienced condensed urbanization and industrial development during the last few decades (Shin et al. 2020; see also Chien and Woodward 2018), the

political economy of the host society at the time of their successful event bid is more likely to differ from that at the time of event opening. For instance, Seoul's bid for the 1988 Summer Olympic Games took place when the country was seeing the consolidation of a dictatorship led by the leader of the 1979 military coup, which extended the lifeline of the authoritarian regime under the previous president, Park Chung-hee. However, by the time the preparation for the Games was in full swing, the country saw the culmination of democratization and militant labor movements, which challenged the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime and resulted in the regime's concession to people's demands (Koo 2001). In economic terms, Korea overcame the global economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s. It successfully developed an export-oriented economy based on low labor costs and gradual technological upgrading, which led to the workers' demands for a fairer share of the economic surplus and more democratic corporate governance (ibid.). Against this backdrop, although the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games were initially aimed to be a showcase of the economic success of Korea under the authoritarian regime, it eventually called into question the legitimacy of the regime itself, with the people's call for democracy and social redistribution receiving global spotlight and scrutiny.

Mega-events as spectacles and methodological cityism

While producing a "unified space" can be regarded as a multiscalar process that extends beyond urban boundaries, the study of mega-events as urban spectacles has often focused on host cities as bounded entities. For instance, studies consider mega-events' impact on urban development and infrastructural provision in host cities (e.g., Kang 2004; Tzanelli 2017), discussing how mega-events create impetus for developing certain urban districts deemed strategically important for host cities' development. Scholars also examine mega-events' impact on urban governance (Cochrane et al. 1996; Lauermann 2016), considering the longer-term implications of repeated bids, including contingency planning. Such studies on mega-events as spectacles can be characterized by their tendency to exhibit *methodological cityism*, considering the host city as the primary unit of analysis.

Such approaches accompany efforts to unveil what mega-events do to the host city's spatial configuration and identify the economic and social legacies. Attention to how such events are entwined with broader regional, national, and transnational scales of accumulation and political struggles is often in shortage. Even if the governance of host cities exhibits elements of urban entrepreneurialism, it would be essential to understand how their politics are part and parcel of multiscalar politics at the urban, regional, national, and transnational scales.

In the case of urban spectacles in the Global East, methodological cityism becomes even more problematic, as host cities are rarely dissociated from national politics and geopolitics. In the Global East, mega-events, especially the likes of the Olympic Games, are prone to such national and transnational influence, partly because of the ways in which the event bidding process is embedded in national politics and global capitalism and partly because mega-events are strongly associated with the aspirational politics aimed at creating a certain national identity (Collins 2011b; Shimizu 2014). The Olympic Games also entail a symbolic significance for Asian nations that aspire to make use of such events for the advancement of their global reputation in a way that would correspond to their economic standing. For instance, China's bid for the 2000 Summer Olympic Games was subject to an international spotlight generated partly by China's violent crackdown on democratization movements in 1989 and partly by the triumphant sentiment of the West vis-à-vis the end of the Cold War. In contrast, the country's bid for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games benefited from the greater economic integration of China into global capitalism under the auspice of the United States (Close et al. 2007).

In what follows, I will discuss each of the Asian mega-event troika, analyzing them against the changing political economy of each host society. In doing so, each case study aims to show how these mega-events may have their meanings and significance redefined and what this means for our understanding of mega-events as spectacles.

2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games

Gangwon Province, home to Pyeongchang, had previously been concerned about its weak economy, which used to be heavily dependent on outdated mining industries in the 1970s. More recently, its economy has been relying mainly on tourism and the leisure industry (e.g., winter sports), trying to overcome the threat of its shrinking population (D.-C. Shin 2014). The province is also a border region that faces North Korea to its north and has experienced historically lagging investment in its infrastructure. The provincial governor, elected in 1998 for the first time and served three consecutive terms until 2010, was keen to use the Winter Olympic Games as a means to attract the central government subsidy for its infrastructural investments and pursue place marketing to attract people and capital (Burbank et al. 2001).

As such, the bid for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games was initially propelled by the persistent efforts of the local growth coalition headed by the provincial government and its governor, who was keen to produce his legacy (Lee 2003).^{iv} However, it took three bids for Pyeongchang to secure the right to host the Winter Olympic Games. The first time it entered the bid was in 2002, going for the 2010 Winter Olympics, but after a round of voting, it lost to Vancouver in July 2003. The Korean Olympic Committee selected Pyeongchang in December 2004 as the candidate city to repeat its bid, this time for the 2014 Winter Olympics. Having failed again, losing to Sochi in Russia, the provincial governor Kim announced his intent to bid for the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in September 2007.

The two decades of the bid history and Games preparation have accompanied changing local-central state dynamics as well as the changing nature of the state at both national and local levels. Korea in the early 2000s was the time of the post-crisis recovery, as the country struggled to return to the developmental path after having endured the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis. Partly supported by the devolution of decision-making processes enabled by the introduction of local elections to elect mayors and provincial governors directly from 1995 and partly by the pressure to liberalize the economy, local states in Korea began to seek their growth strategies to pursue place-based marketing and development. For Gangwon Province and its governor, event-led development (H. B. Shin 2014) that could make use of its natural environment and its existing reputation as a winter sports destination

was adopted as a key strategy for improving the province's economic fortune, while anticipating associated infrastructural development facilitated by mega-events. Indeed, as early as 2002, the provincial governor was reportedly commenting in front of the provincial supporters for hosting the Olympic Games that "the Winter Olympic Games would fasten the regional economic development by expanding the province's road networks and infrastructure" (Gangwon Provincial Government 2003, p. 967). The Winter Olympics as a significant opportunity was so attractive that the province kept bidding for it despite two consecutive fails. The level of public support remained very high, with the reported approval rate reaching "91.4% nationwide and 93.0% in areas adjacent to Pyeongchang" as of December 2009 (PyeongChang 2018 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Bid Committee 2010, p. 61).

The 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic Games were held in the middle of the Cold War, whose sudden demise was unpredicted. Korea was still under the control of the right-wing political faction that inherited the military regime. The developmental state that guided the rise of the Korean economy still had its substantial presence, working in close alliance with the large conglomerates known as *chaebols* while striving to suppress the militant student and labor movements that challenged the ruling hegemony. In contrast, when Pyeongchang's first bid took place in 2002, it was the time of the dwindling power of the developmental state that was increasingly subject to neoliberalization, further propelled by the Asian financial crisis that bankrupted the country (Choi 2011). Decentralization and devolution were the two keywords of the time, even though the central state was still able to retain a degree of power (Bae and Sellers 2007).

The 1988 Seoul Olympic Games under the development state was to "provide legitimacy at home and protection from a hostile sister state [North Korea]" and "serve notice to the world of Korea's arrival as an economic power" (Manheim 1990, p. 283). On the other hand, the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games were differentiated from the 1988 Seoul Olympics in that what started as a political and economic project of a local growth coalition transformed into a high-profile (geo-)political event. Halfway into the preparation for the 2018 Winter Olympic Games, Korea witnessed a major political overturn that saw the

impeachment of the then right-wing president Park Geun-hye. This fall was followed by the election of a more liberal president Moon Jae-In from the opposition party in 2017, whose mandates included a more peaceful co-existence with North Korea. Here, the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in a border province that was split into two halves after the Korean War (1950–1953) came to be perceived as a grand opportunity to stage a spectacle that disseminated a signal of reconciliation with North Korea to the national and global audience. Such an act of reconciliation was deemed a precondition to transforming the armistice agreement into a peace agreement on the Korean peninsula, where the two Koreas were still technically at war since 1953. While the theme of peace on the Korean peninsula penetrated Pyeongchang's bid for the Olympic Games,^v it was under the Moon Jae-In government that realized the full potential of such an aspiration. Eventually, North Korean delegates led by the sister of its top leader were invited to take a seat close to the Korean president. Such a sight itself was an added spectacle that signaled a potentially profound change to the geopolitical tension on the peninsula in the Global East. Indeed, a series of high-level talks followed after the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympic Games, including the summit meetings between the top leaders of the two Koreas and the US president.

The geopolitical spectacle that staged both Koreas in Pyeongchang can be said to have brought the Korean society together, reaffirming the function of a spectacle to produce a sense of togetherness or “pseudocommunity” that North and South Korea were indeed one nation, despite the widening inequalities in Korea. Such creation of a “pseudocommunity” would have also addressed the accumulation needs of the Korean capital that has been seeing North Korea as an untapped reservoir of the cheap but well-disciplined labor force and an attractive destination of spatial fix for the Korean capital (Gray 2016). However, the subsequent failure to see the materialization of such reunification and, indeed, the failure of the former Sunshine Policy emerged under Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun indicates the limitations of economic determinism in understanding the capitalist economies and the importance of geopolitical economic perspectives (see Glassman 2018).

2020 [2021] Tokyo Summer Olympic Games

Tokyo was identified as one of the three global nodal cities (the other two being London and New York) that acted as command centers of the global economy in Saskia Sassen's (1991) *The Global City*, epitomizing the resurgence of the Post-War Japanese economy. Ironically, shortly after such praise, Japan saw its bubble burst, leading to a decades-long recession that was often dubbed Japan's "lost decades." While the 1964 Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo can be seen as the reflection of Japan's aspiration to be recognized as a normal country after its defeat in World War II and an opportunity to exhibit its nationalist pride of having achieved post-War economic recovery (Wilson 2011), the initiation of Tokyo's bid for the Olympic Games in the twenty-first century can be regarded as the city's attempt to protect its reputation as a global city. It was also to enable a series of urban redevelopment aimed at upgrading the city's appearance and lagging districts, such as the waterfront and Tokyo Bay areas, where substantial developmental potential was present (Lützel 2020; Saito 2003). The previous failure of Osaka's bid for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games (and to some extent, Nagoya's failed bid for the 1988 Olympics) ascertained the strategic importance of Tokyo to be the Japanese city to put its name forward as a stronger contender for Japan's bid for the Olympics (Kelly 2010), even if this would have come at the expense of enlarged economic gaps between Tokyo and other local cities (Tamaki 2019).

Tokyo's bid for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games was led by the nationalist Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintaro, despite modest public support.^{vi} Having lost to Rio de Janeiro in 2009, Tokyo, under the same governor, re-submitted its bid in July 2011 to contend for the 2020 Summer Olympics. This re-submission occurred only a few months after the Tohoku earthquake, tsunami, and the nuclear disaster, which ripped the country apart and caused major disruption and anxiety to Japanese society. The triadic disasters changed the tone of the Olympic Games bid and its meaning to Tokyo. When Tokyo was bidding for the 2016 Olympic Games, its main slogan was "uniting our worlds," with its eyes on "combining vitality and sustainability, heritage and innovation in line with Tokyo's ten years (2007–2016) urban planning strategy" (International Olympic Committee 2009, p. 28). As Kelly (2010, pp. 2429–2430) states, "the 2016 bid had much less to do with domestic prominence

and much more about international prestige, as an effort to preserve Tokyo's status as a global city." However, Tokyo's bid for the 2020 Olympic Games was all about its post-disaster reconstruction: Governor Ishihara reportedly stated that "the Olympic Games would help Japan recover from the deadly March 11 earthquake and tsunami and make it a better country" (CNN 2011).

Tokyo's bid for the 2020 Summer Olympic Games succeeded in September 2013, 3 years after the triadic disasters, defeating Istanbul in the final vote held in Buenos Aires. The use of the Olympic Games as a spectacle to facilitate Japan's recovery from the disasters, rejuvenate its economy, and unite people was evident in the bid document submitted to the IOC in 2013: Inose Naoki, as the acting governor of Tokyo, stated in his letter to the IOC President that:

The earthquake and tsunami of March 2011 deeply affected the Japanese people, and we are in need of a dream we can share that will strengthen our *solidarity*. A dream can give us strength, and with strength we can build a future.

(Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Bid Committee 2013; emphasis added)

Indeed, the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo had been dubbed the "Reconstruction Games" for Japan and perceived as a means to overcome the impact of the 2011 disasters (Manzenreiter 2021) and boost the stagnant national economy that has been under a long spell of deflation. It was also expected to bring about growth in construction and tourism for the country, building upon the legacy of the Japanese construction state and the boosterish increase in consumption to help sustain economic growth (McCormack 1995). It was to create solidarity and a sense of community and unity (c.f., Debord 1967) through the use of the Olympic Games as a national spectacle: as a matter of fact, the Olympic torch relay had Fukushima, the site of the 2011 nuclear disaster, as the starting point (McCurry 2021).

However, such an emphasis on recovery was not without skepticism, as can be read in an interview with the ex-Fukushima mayor, who was critical of the government efforts that

made no meaningful gesture toward disaster-hit areas (Kaneko 2020).^{vii} The Tokyo bids for the Olympic Games were also subject to the speculation that the construction of Japanese national identity through the bid process had largely been multi-layered, part of which involved Tokyo's Othering from the rest of the country (Tamaki 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic led to a virus-hit state of emergency for many local authorities, ultimately resulting in the cancelation of the public display of the torch relay and rendering the event downsized and canceled (BBC News 2021). The government emphasis on the meaning of the 2020 [2021] Olympic Games seems to have also experienced a subtle change, with the Games now presented as the "Recovery Games" that was meant to celebrate, rather ambitiously, the conquest of the COVID-19 virus (Manzenreiter 2021, pp. 437–438).

While Tokyo's bid for the 2016 Olympic Games faced a mixed signal from Japan's newly elected Democratic Party of Japan government (Tashiro 2009), the 2020 Tokyo Games was a national spectacle with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government fully behind its bidding and preparation. After having suffered a historic defeat in the 2009 election, the LDP, which dominated as the ruling party for much of post-War Japan, bounced back to win a landslide victory in December 2012, regaining its power to govern the country under the leadership of Abe Shinzo. Although Tokyo's win to host the 2020 Olympics was made under the acting governor Inose Naoki who filled the shoes of Ishihara Shintaro after the latter's resignation to lead a new political party, it was Prime Minister Abe Shinzo from LDP, who seemed to have taken the spotlight and made a passionate appeal to the voting members of the IOC in September 2013 (Shine 2013).

However, the preparation for the 2020 Olympic Games was overshadowed by several scandals associated with the preparation of the sporting facilities and the government's seeming inability to bring the nuclear crisis under control, despite the prime minister's explicit and controversial assurance at the time of the final vote in Buenos Aires that "the situation is under control" (Shine 2013). The questioning ability of the Japanese state was under further scrutiny during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, which eventually pushed back the Games opening by a year, and the epidemic cast further doubts on people's minds about the necessity of hosting a mega-event when the state of emergency prolonged and

public safety was under question. Even when bidding for the Games, public support in Japan was not as strong as typically expected in East Asia, and this further dwindled during the pandemic. According to the poll conducted in October 2012 by the Tokyo 2020 Bid Committee (2013, p. 32), only about two-thirds (64% of Japanese nationals and 65% of Tokyo citizens) were known to have supported Tokyo's bid for the 2020 Olympic Games. The Olympic Games' use to unite the nation faced a major hurdle due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic. This has affected the national sentiment toward the Games, leading to some opinion polls indicating a large majority of respondents (e.g., 83% in a survey conducted by a major newspaper in May 2021) opting for either cancelation of the Games or further postponement (Inoue 2021).

Such changes to the level of public support and the ineffective government responses to the pandemic-generated state of emergency raise questions about the extent to which the Olympic Games as a spectacle could successfully act as an impetus to national unity and sustain socio-political stability through the production of a "unified space" (Debord 1967). Instead, similar to what Gotham (2011) reveals in his analysis of the Louisiana Expo, the mega-event spectacle has helped unveil the contradictions in the Japanese capitalist system and the societal rifts. The intended creation of a sense of community and the aim to produce "solidarity" among Japanese people turned out to be not more than a "pseudocommunity," which was fragile and divided.

2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games

Beijing's decision to bid for the Olympic Games dates back to the early 1990s when it bid for the right to host the 2000 Olympic Games and lost to Sydney. This was at the time of Beijing coming out of the political and economic setback resulting from the political turmoil of 1989. The bid for the 2000 Olympic Games coincided with the pledge of the Chinese Party State to resume its economic reform, highlighted by the Southern Tour of the then Premier Deng Xiaoping. This implies that the bid for the Games could be considered part of the state project rather than Beijing's pursuit. Having failed the bid for the 2000 Olympic Games, Beijing re-entered the bid almost ten years later, this time successfully bidding for the 2008 Olympic

Games in 2001. This was the year of China's accession to the newly established World Trade Organization, signaling China's integration with global capitalism.

As exhibited throughout the preparation for the Olympic Games, Beijing made use of the mega-event as a justification for advancing a number of urban projects to enhance its infrastructural provision (e.g., subways, airport) and urban beautification in order to face-lift its appearance to the world. Here, local state entrepreneurialism might have played a role, enabling the local state of Beijing to engage with market instruments to fulfill its (extra-)economic and political objectives (Shin 2009; Wu 2018). Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to confine the Olympic Games to Beijing only. China's working of local state entrepreneurialism works under the rubric of the central state, that is, urban developmental aspirations are shaped and materialized through the consideration of "national political mandates" (Wu et al. 2022). Indeed, for China, the 2001 bid for the 2008 Summer Olympics could have endorsed its integration into the global economy and the recognition of the Party State, whose legitimacy was brought to many questions after 1989.

The preparation for the 2008 Olympic Games between 2001 and 2008 was, therefore, indicative of the Party State's attempt to showcase the success of China's economic reform and its leadership in guiding the country toward becoming one of the top economic powerhouses. In this regard, the Olympic Games could be seen as an event that marks China's coming of age in the global economy and an occasion to overcome the century-old sentiment of "national humiliation" (Ren 2008). Post-2008 Beijing declared its ambition to become a world city, and its urban development strategies reflected such an ambition, including its crucial role in developing the Jing-Jin-Ji (Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei) city region that can be seen as "a new state space to manage inter-city competition" (Wu 2020, p. 468) and a spatial manifestation of "a rescaled and territorialised governance of the nation state" (ibid., p. 469). As noted earlier, however, it would be misleading to dissociate Beijing's global aspiration from that of the Party State.^{viii} Beijing's bid for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games demonstrates this as well.

The bid for the Beijing Winter Olympics was announced in October 2012. It took about 33 months for Beijing to outbid Almaty of Kazakhstan and, in July 2015, win the right

to host the Games. Public support for the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing was reportedly high, reaching 88% in Beijing and 92% nationwide, according to the IOC-commissioned independent poll (International Olympic Committee 2015, p. 74), although the level of support in Beijing turned out to be lower than what was reported (96%) at the time of Beijing's bid for the 2008 Olympic Games (International Olympic Committee 2001, p. 60). The bid preparation by China coincided with the rise of Xi Jinping, who assumed his office as the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2012 and the 7th president of the People's Republic of China in March 2013. The bidding period (2012–2015) was also a time of culminating optimism about China's economic development and growing influence on world politics: China was expected to take over the US economy in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms by 2014 (see Bloomberg report on April 30, 2014),^{ix} while the Belt and Road Initiative was adopted as the central development policy of China in 2013 to create a global network of infrastructure and strengthen China's influence on the Global South (Jones and Zeng 2019). In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, China was also regarded as the savior of global capitalism, welcomed with open arms by, for example, the European Union member states seeking Chinese investment into their weak economies (Flanders 2011).

While the 2008 Summer Olympic Games could be considered a signal of China's emergence as the manufacturing hub of the global production network of commodities and subsidizing the consumption of advanced economies, the 2022 Winter Olympic Games were expected to announce the economy's maturation and the effectiveness of the CCP leadership. As Bradsher (2022) aptly reports, "Perhaps most important of all to China's leader, Xi Jinping, the Olympics are a chance to demonstrate to the world his country's unity and confidence under his leadership," a salient point as the country, and the world, have seen the endorsement of his third-time presidency in October 2022.

However, Beijing's entering bid for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games took place at the end of 2013 when the geopolitical tensions between China and the West were not as frosty as in recent years. The rise of China and the expectation for its economy to be positioned at the apex of the global economic output were challenged by geopolitical friction,

with the Western economies led by the United States increasingly distancing itself from close collaboration with China (Schindler and DiCarlo 2022). Furthermore, similar to the 2020 [2021] Tokyo Olympic Games, while mega-events such as the Olympic Games were regarded as creating a state of exception, such exceptional status was overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic as the state of emergency, the government response to which was challenging the legitimacy of the Party State. What was meant to be a spectacle on both a national and global scale, the 2022 Beijing Olympic Games turned out to be a spectacle that struggled to exhibit the Party State's ability to prove the supposedly unyielding governance capacity while retaining social stability. Such goals were also very much at the heart of epidemic control during the COVID-19 pandemic. It could even be said that the pandemic-generated state of emergency took over the spectacle-induced state of exception.

Conclusion

The three mega-events discussed herein were all in the Global East: Korea, Japan, and China. While targeting domestic and global audiences, these events as spectacles were meant to bring the nation together in each host city by creating a pseudocommunity that would help sustain the economic growth momentum in host countries. For Korea, the transformation of what was initially pursued by a local growth coalition into a national spectacle of two Koreas was acting as a means to unite the people in Korea together under the leadership of a new liberal president who inherited the Sunshine policy that aimed at reconciling and cooperating with North Korea. Such reconciliation and cooperation would have given an advantage to Korean capital constantly seeking profitable production bases. For Japan, the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo was framed as a "Reconstruction Games" and, subsequently, a "Recovery Games," which was to help with the economic boosterism and the formation of national unity under the leadership of the LDP government that practically ruled post-War Japan. Having been overtaken by China as the second-largest economy after the United States, the Japanese capital needed momentum to overcome the economic challenges generated by its prolonged recession and triadic disasters. For China, while the bid for the 2022 Winter Games would have entailed China's global ambition (e.g., Belt and Road

Initiative and overtaking the US economy) to recognize its economic and political influence, the actual Winter Games turned out to be an important occasion for the legitimacy of the Party State during the times of pandemic as China anticipated the election of Xi Jinping as the party's general secretary to serve his third term.

As seen in the previous sections on the mega-events troika in the Global East, it is essential not to fall into methodological cityism when examining the meanings and operation of mega-events as spectacles. These international events are closely entwined with the workings of the central and local states, which are, in turn, under the influence of geopolitical economies. Nevertheless, while mega-events aim to create a sense of unity and togetherness among people in host cities, this ambition is not always fulfilled. As Gotham (2011) discusses with reference to the World Expo in Louisiana, mega-events deliver spectacles that do not conform to realities, thus having the potential to expose the hidden contradictions that spectacles were meant to conceal through the creation of a pseudocommunity. Delayed spectacles work similarly – as the material conditions and the political configurations change over time, the images produced by mega-events exhibit a huge rift.

Finally, it will be important to understand the transnational scale of mega-events. The 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Games engaged with the delicate (geo-)political tension that exists in this part of Asia, where military and political confrontations among neighboring countries (North and South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia) and the United States have persisted (Schreer 2019). The efforts to reconcile the two Koreas and promote greater cooperation face not only opposing voices domestically but also hesitations from the neighboring countries that are reluctant to endorse a reunified Korea. China and Japan have also been engaging in a long-term territorial dispute in East China Sea, and Japan's close cooperation with the United States to promote the Indo-Pacific Strategy makes China raise its eyebrows, especially given its implication on cross-Strait relations with Taiwan (Wirth 2015). The souring relationship between China and the United States makes regional conflicts challenging to be reconciled. Korea is also in both territorial and historical disputes with Japan.

The presence of such (geo-)political tensions suggests that all three countries have failed to scale up to produce an Asian sense of community through their mega-events, even

though the concentration of mega-events in recent years in the Global East can be interpreted as the reflection of a significant shift of global capitalism that has seen the rise of East Asian economies.^x As Collins (2011b) points out, it may be the case that the Asian economies see more tensions among themselves rather than seeing themselves as a regional power that confronts Western capitalism in the context of dissipating the hegemony of the West. In other words, the efforts to create a sense of pseudocommunity or a united space through mega-events as spectacles are limited to the national scale rather than the transnational scale. The need to avoid methodological cityism, which this chapter has advocated, compels us not to treat the nation-state as a unit of analysis either. It is, therefore, important to understand mega-events as multiscalar processes.

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ⁱ A similar perspective can be seen in the urban political ecology literature, where methodological cityism is exhibited among the researchers whose work entails “an overwhelming analytical and empirical focus on the traditional city to the exclusion of other aspects of contemporary urbanization processes” (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015, p. 16).

ⁱⁱ It is worth noting that Japan’s engagement with the Olympic Games dates back to the 1930s when it successfully bid for the 1940 Olympic Games, becoming the first non-Western country to host the Games. Having forfeited the hosting right during the war against its Asian neighbors, Tokyo managed to bring the Olympic Games to Asia for the first time in 1964.

ⁱⁱⁱ However, a more militant struggle against eviction carried out in the name of the Olympic Games in Seoul has shown their disapproval of the Olympic Games and the authoritarian government’s use of the Games for its legitimacy gains (see Kim 1991).

^{iv} According to an interview with the then governor Kim Jin-Sun, Gangwon Provincial Government began the consideration of the bidding in 1996, and the actual preparation commenced in 1999 (Lee 2003).

^v For instance, PyeongChang’s bid document for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games included a letter of support from the president of North Korean Olympic Committee, adding weight to the intended use of the Games as a bridge to build peace between the two Koreas (The Hankyoreh 2007).

^{vi} According to a report, only 55% of the surveyed in Japan were in support of the Olympic Games returning to Tokyo. This was the lowest among the four finalists eyeing the 2016 Olympic Games (Tashiro 2009).

^{vii} For more discussions on anti-Olympic movements at the time of the Tokyo 2020 [2021] Olympic Games, see Boykoff and Gaffney (2020).

^{viii} A similar practice can be witnessed in Guangzhou’s use of the 2010 Asian Games for advancing its global aspiration but in a way that involved negotiated scale jump so as not to disregard the role of the central state. See Shin (2014), for further discussions.

^{ix} For the Bloomberg report, see www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-04-30/china-set-to-overtake-u-s-as-biggest-economy-using-ppp-measure. The World Bank data show that it was 2016 when this takeover has actually occurred.

^x As of 2021, China's GDP in current US dollars exceeds the GDP of the entire European Union, while the combined GDP of China, Korea, and Japan surpasses that of the United States. In PPP terms, China's GDP has been reported to have exceeded that of the United States in 2016 (or 2017, depending on which measure one takes) (see World Bank Data Bank website).