

Policy Suggestions for the Incorporation of Sports in Improving Inter-Korean Relations

Heung-Tae Kim (Daejin University)

The history of division on the Korean Peninsula, manifest through political, territorial, and cultural division and deeper heterogeneity in the economy, society, and culture, has been reinforced to reach its current state. For the last 80 years, North and South Korea have intermittently undergone a repetition of hostile confrontations and friendly cooperation only to arrive where the two countries currently are. In the process of division, such a cyclical process can be interpreted as the two Koreas transitioning from a relationship based on hostile confrontation towards hostile exchange and cooperation, and further onto to advanced exchange and cooperation. Inter-Korean relations, manifest through conflict, antagonism, confrontation, exchange, cooperation, and reconciliation is reflective of the two Koreas' status as the only divided nation in the world.

Since its inauguration in 2017, the Moon administration's policies pertaining to the Korean peninsula can be interpreted as a self-led long-term and comprehensive policies that reflect the strive for peace and prosperity across the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia together with North Korea, Northeast Asia, and the international community. However, amidst heightening military tensions, peace on the Korean Peninsula has been unstable. Despite the international community's strong sanctions on North Korea, the desire for peace and stability has been persistent during a situation in which there are concerns on North Korea's nuclear issue and missile provocations.

The third Inter-Korean Summit successfully took place in Pyongyang on September 18–20, 2018. It has been evaluated that the meeting offered a hopeful outlook towards improved inter-Korean relations and peace on the Korean peninsula. The two Koreas announced the outcomes of the summit through the Pyongyang Joint Declaration in September 2018 and declared that the two Koreas would improve their new relationship, now envisioned as a partnership. As shown in Article 4, Paragraph 2 of the Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018, "North and South Korea agreed to actively participate together in international competitions such as the 2020 Summer Olympics and to cooperate in bidding for 2032 Summer Olympic Games." It is assessed that sports would serve as a new milestone and turning point to improve inter-Korean relations and promote the coexistence and prosperity of the

Korean people.

Throughout the last 80 years of divide on the Korean peninsula, exchange and cooperation have been made between the two Koreas across various fields. In particular, although inconsistent, meaningful exchanges and cooperation have occurred in the field of sports for the purpose of “reconciliation and cooperation, restoration of homogeneity, and furthermore, peaceful coexistence on the Korean peninsula.” It is expected that sports will continue to play a leading role in inter-Korean exchange and cooperation in the future. Such inter-Korean sports diplomacy should play an important role as a catalyst for the improvement of inter-Korean relations for national reunification and unity, and subsequently, peaceful coexistence and settlement. This is an important mission and duty for the sports sector during our time. If we make steadfast efforts to increase national homogeneity, this area is expected to yield great value. Furthermore, to create a broader vision for peace on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia in the future, it is necessary to declare and observe the grand principle of “making peace through exchange and cooperation.”

Similar to the achievements of inter-Korean cooperation through sports made during the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, cooperation at the 2018 Jakarta–Palembang Summer Asian Games also left a meaningful legacy of contributing to the improvement of inter-Korean relations and the promotion of peace on the Korean peninsula. It is assessed that this occasion served as momentum to spread public consensus that sports is a major area that could lead to meaningful change in inter-Korean relations in the future. Korea has transformed into a country advanced in sports, as it hosted four major international sports events: the Summer Olympics, Winter Olympics, World Championships in Athletics, and the World Cup. Korea, with its rising status as an advanced country in sports, has been the sixth country to achieve a Grand Slam. If the inter-Korean joint Olympics were to be held in the future, it would be recorded as a historic and meaningful milestone for various areas.

Concerted efforts and dialogue are required to improve inter-Korean relations and to create historic milestones to build prosperity on the Korean peninsula by promoting the co-hosting of the inter-Korean joint Olympics as a common agenda and making this a top priority among the two Koreas. Furthermore, it is necessary to resume cooperation and exchange in sports and to bolster public consensus for consistent and sustainable inter-Korean relations in the future. To this end, it is important to focus on restoring momentum for cooperation in sports and other accessible areas. The promotion of co-hosting inter-Korean Olympics would serve as a meaningful turning-point for better inter-Korean relations and present a blueprint for a new era of prosperity on the Korean peninsula. This could be understood as a policy initiated and implemented by the Moon administration. To this end, I would like to propose the following symbolic and practical agenda as part of a process to promote inter-Korean joint Olympics:

The first proposal is to organize the “New Gyeong-Pyong Soccer Match (tentative name)” to continue the history of the “Gyeong-sung (old name of Seoul)–Pyongyang friendly soccer match”. Second, South and North Korea could organize the “Seoul–Gaeseong International Peace Cup Marathon (tentative name)”. Third, the “Korea Peace Cup International Men’s and Women’s Doubles and Mixed Doubles Table Tennis Championships (tentative name)” could be organized to promote exchange and cooperation through table tennis. Fourth, it is recommended that South and North Korea host the “Korea Sports Science Forum (tentative name)” or the “Korea Sports Scientists Conference (tentative name)” centered on inter-Korean sports policy and sports science research institutes. Fifth, regarding co-hosting the inter-Korean joint Olympics in the future, it is suggested that the two co-hosted Olympics can select around 16–17 types of sports, considering North Korea’s external competitiveness, record, and performance at international competitions, geopolitical environment, and recently built sports-related

infrastructure.

Sixth, I would like to propose the establishment of the “Inter-Korean Society and Cultural Exchange and Cooperation Committee (tentative name)” or the “Special Committee for the Promotion of Inter-Korean Sports Exchange and Cooperation (tentative name)” under the President or the Prime Minister's Office. These committees would consist of experts from the academia and public and private sectors who will collectively play the role of a practical and effective think tank on inter-Korean sports exchange and cooperation. The seventh part of this proposal is to draft and implement the “Five-Year Plan for the Promotion of Inter-Korean Sports Exchange and Cooperation (tentative name)” or the “Five-Year Plan for the Promotion of Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation (tentative name)” with the inauguration of a new administration. The eighth part is to carry out a pilot project, such as the “Registration of North Korean Soccer Players to South Korean K-1 Leagues,” develop and implement more effective and substantive exchange and cooperation programs that would bring a ripple effect, beyond fielding a unified Korean team via political considerations.

Ninth, as a prerequisite for inter-Korean sports exchange and cooperation, South and North Korea need to take a strategic approach for proactively finding and suggesting fields and areas in which collaboration is feasible and easily possible through the “Principle of Preemptive Proposal.” To this end, the grand principle of “First connecting the fields of politics and sports, then separating the two” should be adopted. Tenth, as a part of efforts to build an institutional basis for revitalizing inter-Korean sports exchange and cooperation, the organization of a pool of experts on North Korean sports and cooperation is recommended. As a part of such efforts, South and North Korea may make an archive of information and materials related to North Korea's sports and exchange/cooperation and hold academic meetings such as regular colloquiums to facilitate cooperation in academic activities, information and materials. Lastly, the legislation and institutionalization for sustainable inter-Korean sports exchange and cooperation are recommended. As part of these efforts, I would like to suggest the implementation of the “Inter-Korean Sports Exchange Agreement (tentative name)” and the enactment of “(Inter-Korean Sports Exchange and Cooperation Support Act (tentative name))” as an internal policy of South Korea in order to continue and stabilize sports exchange and cooperation between the two Koreas. ■

- **Heung-Tae Kim** is a professor at the Department of Sports Science of Daejin University. He graduated from the Graduate School of Korea University with a major in sports administration and policy. His research areas include North Korean sports and inter-Korean sports exchange and cooperation. Currently, he is the president of the Korea Entertainment Industry Association and the vice-president and editor-in-chief of the Korean Society of Sports Policy.

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Typeset by: Seung Yeon Lee

For inquiries:

Seung Yeon Lee, Research Assistant

Tel. 82 2 2277 1683 (ext. 205)

slee@eai.or.kr

The East Asia Institute
#909 Sampoong B/D, Eulji-ro 158, Jung-gu,
Seoul 04548, South Korea
Phone 82 2 2277 1683 Fax 82 2 2277 1697
Email eai@eai.or.kr Website www.eai.or.kr