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## **Sport, Politics, and the New Nation: Sport Policy in the Republic of Korea, 1961-1992**

The dramatic development of Korean sport from the post-colonial era leading up to the 1988 Seoul Olympics was in large part politically motivated. Politics and sport were connected to the government's aspirations to boost confidence in the nation, both at home and abroad. Although politics and sport reciprocally influenced each other, politics had a powerful influence on sport by establishing a policy that defined national sporting goals and by allocating resources to develop human talent. The political intentions imposed on sport were manifested in two critical ways. First, politicians used sport for its symbolic propaganda effect of enhancing Korea's image nationally and internationally. Second, sport was employed as means to bind people under the cause of national unity. The Republic of Korea was a military government lacking in democratic institutions so propaganda was important to seal the public's loyalty to the totalitarian regime.

This study examines the sport-politics-government linkage in Korea during three different time periods: from the military coup of General Jung-Hee Park in 1961 to President Park Chung Hee's administration (1961 – 1979); the administration of President Chun Doo Hwan and the 1988 Seoul Olympic games (1980 – 1988); and Seoul's post-Olympic era (1989 – 1992). The study concludes in 1993 because Korea's state-society relations were substantially altered with the emergence of the civilian government.

I draw on a wide variety of primary and secondary sources used in historical research to construct my narrative and analysis. These include historical works on Korea; historical, political and sociological works on sport in Korea, western countries and Japan; Korean newspapers; a wide variety of Korean magazines on sport and popular culture; government documents on sport and physical education; documents of sporting organizations, such as KASA;

and interviews with individuals involved in making sporting policy during the period under investigation.

At the forefront was the emphasis on symbolic propaganda and national unity that facilitated the development of sport programs (e.g. participatory sports). However, these programs resulted in creating a mirage of national progress at the expense of the people. It was an elite sport system that few common people could access, but placated their desire for mass entertainment, resulting in a sort of Orwellian turn of events. The masses were satisfied with these sporting achievements, while politicians delighted in the development of a national following. However, the people failed to recognize that they were victims of political mass manipulation, and these sport programs diverted their attention from more important matters of national development.