

The Rise of the Global Public Sphere: From the World Economic Forum to the Jeju Forum

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On January 22, 2014 at the 44th World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, President Park Geun-hye emphasized how Korean unification would be a “bonanza” not only for Korea but for all Northeast Asia. President Park made the remarks during a Q&A session following her opening address at the plenary session hosted by Claus Schwab, the forum's founder and executive chairman.

The Davos Forum, as it is otherwise known, is held in a ski resort in the canton of Graubunden in southeastern Switzerland. It is a remote Alpine village with a population a little over 10,000. Thomas Mann, a Nobel laureate in literature, set his masterpiece *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain) there. The village was once famous for its tuberculosis sanitarium and the novel depicts the protagonist's intense intellectual journey over seven years battling to recover from the illness.

Last January, about 2,500 of the global elite from more than 100 countries, including over 40 world leaders, gathered at Davos in spite of the inconvenient weather, transportation, and lodgings all caused by an altitude of 1,500 meters. This tells of the global strength of the forum.

The plenary session is the forum's flower and essence. That President Park spoke at the session, propagating Korea's creative economy - in connection with the forum's theme of “The Reshaping of the World” - perhaps shows Korea's rising international status.

International forums attended by world leaders and dignitaries, such as the Davos Forum and the Boao Forum for Asia, modeled after Davos and based in Hainan, China, play an increasingly important

role in international politics. Traditional multilateral diplomacy, facilitated by international organizations such as the UN, struggles to reach practical solutions and thus such civil international forums are increasingly filling the gap.

The Davos Forum is a unique, not-for-profit, independent foundation, but at the same time it promotes world peace and the public interest just like other international organizations. The motto of the Davos Forum is “committed to improving the state of the world” and it has earned its reputation by its strategic use of “soft power” to build peace and hold open-minded discussions tackling global problems.

For instance, in 1988, when Greece and Turkey rushed to war across the Aegean Sea, the forum invited the Greek and Turkish prime ministers, Andreas Papandreou and Turgut Ozal, respectively, leading the way to the “Davos Declaration” and reconciliation between the two countries. Also noteworthy are the first ministerial talks between the two Koreas in 1989 and the Davos meeting of South African president Frederik de Klerk and black leader Nelson Mandela to end apartheid in 1992.

Nowadays, in Korea, there exists the “Jeju Forum for Peace and Prosperity,” known as the Jeju Forum, a comprehensive international event reflective of Davos or Boao. Since the South-North Korean summit in June of 2000, icy relations between the two began to thaw. In this light, in 2001 the Jeju Forum was founded as a platform of discussion to achieve peace on the Korean peninsula and build a peaceful community in Northeast Asia.

Initially, the Jeju Forum operated biennially under the name “Jeju Peace Forum” and focused on peace. 10 years later, in 2011, it was renamed “Jeju Forum for Peace and Prosperity” and became an annual event. With this momentum, the Jeju Forum expanded its agenda range from peace and security to business, the environment, culture, and women. It also expanded geographically from Northeast Asia to East Asia.

Whereas about 300 people from nine countries participated in the first Jeju Peace Forum of nine sessions in 2001, the 8th Jeju Forum in 2013 held 54 sessions under the theme “New Waves in Asia” and welcomed about 3,600 people from 49 countries including political leaders, current and former ministers, academics, business people, diplomats, and journalists. This shows the great strides the forum has made.

The Jeju Peace Institute organizes the Jeju Forum every May. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Jeju Special Self-Governing Province established the Jeju Peace Institute as a research and international exchange hub in March 2006, aiming to promote peace and cooperation in East Asia and to realize the “Island of World Peace” . The 9th Jeju Forum, which consists of 64 sessions, is going to be held on May 28-30 of this year, under the theme “Designing New Asia.”

Despite its great strides forward, the Jeju Forum still requires active governmental support and strategic diplomatic moves based on soft power, such as routinizing the South Korean president's attendance. It also needs a master plan for greater growth and development into a world-class forum such as the Davos Forum.

If this can be done, both in name and reality, then the Jeju Forum can play a crucial role in representing Korea as a "middle power."



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