SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION OF THE MEIJI ERA

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From the middle of the nineteenth century onward the school physical education of Japan was rapidly modernized, until by the beginning of the twentieth century it had caught up with the standard in the West. This important period covering half a century is called the Meiji Era (1868~1912). Hence we may say that this period played a very great part in the establishment of the modern physical education in our country.

The dawn of modern physical education

The modern physical education of Japan started with the establishment of the new law on the school system in the fifth year of Meiji (1872). But the shifting from the old education system to the new had already begun before the Restoration of the Imperial Government (1868). We generally refer to this short period as "Bakumatsu", the last days of the Tokugawa Government. It was a preparatory period for the modernization of the physical education of Japan. Japan's modernization was expedited by the pressure of the Western powers backed by their strong military force. The international situation of those days must be taken into consideration if we wish to understand why the Tokugawa Government invited and employed foreign military advisers and gave foreign-style field drills to the "samurai" and the farmers, and why every feudal clan also made a similar attempt.

From such a background arose the need for order, exercise and physical training not only for the "samurai" but also for the militiamen. Interest in books on physical exercises and their methods was also aroused as a part of the measures for building up a powerful military force. Thus Japan's traditional military arts gradually increased the character of aiming at fostering the "samurai" spirit. At least after 1860 in Japan, gymnastics and military arts, from a very practical necessity and chiefly for the purpose of spiritual training respectively, began to be esteemed highly, which served to achieve an adjustment between the imported art and the traditional one. This tendency was clearly revealed in the education of clan schools.

Japanese clan schools, which might be called Ritterakademie, were old educational institutions chiefly for the sons of the "samurai". But the clan schools after the middle of the nineteenth century added Western learning into its literary course. On the introduction of Western style drill into the military course, correct manner as a Japanese was required for traditional military arts.

The Japanese people of those days generally thought of the Western civilization as a materialistic one, but at the same time they also began to notice the rationalistic and scientific ideas underlying it. Consequently, they realized that, in order to attain the Western level of culture, new learning must also be taught. It is noteworthy that the patriotism of those days revealed itself in such ways. The wonder at and the resistance against Western
civilization did not end in mere psychological repulsion. The same thing can be said in regard to physical education. The Western rationalistic ideas of sanitation were to some degree assimilated chiefly through the Dutch language by the “Bakumatsu”, and with the coming of the Meiji era this new concept of health developed as the basis of physical education.

The establishment of modern physical education

The newly established Meiji government, organized after years of civil wars, carried out drastic reforms, modelled on the West to promote the modernization of education. In the fifth year of Meiji (1872), the New Education Act (Gakusei) was enacted by which gymnastics was made a required subject in elementary school. Nevertheless, the physical education of those days, reflecting the age of “civilization and enlightenment”, utterly neglected military arts and foreign style drills. The Japanese people of those days were busily engaged in the attempt to put into practice new gymnastics suitable to “the age of enlightenment” supported by enlightenment theories of physical education with emphasis on hygiene. First the tablet of gymnastics was compiled, by selecting suitable gymnastics from the Western manuals of gymnastics, especially those of Mason and Schreber. Textbooks on Western hygiene were also published, which, together with the encouragement of physical activities, served to some extent in breaking down the feudalistic view of labor.

It is remarkable how the special books on physical education and hygiene published in the West were utilized in Japan within several years. It gives us a vivid account of the Japanese people of the period who were alert in absorbing new things.

In the seventh year of Meiji (1874), Manuel de gymnastique by the Frenchman, Vergnes, was translated into Japanese for school use for the first time. This was of course published as a reference book for teachers, but with it the teaching of gymnastics passed beyond the stage of depending on the tablet of gymnastics into that of using the manual for instruction. In quality, however, it was much the same as the French manual of gymnastics, Instruction pour l'enseignement de la gymnastique, used by the army. There was no special reason why a French manual of gymnastics was selected for translation; yet it was a fact that French manuals of gymnastics had been studied by the Japanese people in connection with military drills since the early years of the Meiji. As a result, the French system of gymnastics had a great influence on school gymnastics also in the compilation of manuals. Thus, school physical education of Japan gradually inclined toward the French system, until an American, G.A. Leland, was invited to Japan.

In the eleventh year of Meiji (1878), the Ministry of Education founded the Institute of Gymnastics in Tokyo for the training of teachers (men only) as well as for research on school physical education. In the same year, Dr. Leland (1850~1924) came to Japan as an instructor at the Institute. This marked the beginning of Japanese-American relationship in physical education. Leland in brief developed the theory of physical education based on health and sanitation, born in the age of “civilization and enlightenment”, giving rational
grounds for distinguishing gymnastics as a phase of education not only from military drills but also from sports and military arts. Naturally, he severely criticized the state of things at middle schools where they had been practising the French system of gymnastics similar to that of the army.

The actual method of physical education which he chose was based largely upon The New Gymnastics for Men, Women, and Children by Dio Lewis. This gymnastics was called Normal gymnastics, because any normal child could do it as it required no special ability or physical fitness. Gendo, Tsuboi who later became the leader of school physical education in our country, called it “futsū-taisō” in translation. With this Japan’s school physical education developed so far as to reach the stage in which it attained its general shape, with Normal gymnastics at its core, supported by “Katsuryoku Kensa” (physical examination) for measuring stature, weight and breathing capacity.

Though Western sports had already been introduced into our country at the end of the 1860’s their educational value had not yet been acknowledged. Besides, conditions for playing them were still inadequate as regards playgrounds and tools, teaches’ capacity, and pupils’ clothes. However, in the 1870’s, they came to be played as extracurricular activities in some schools above elementary school. Also in some elementary schools they began to hold school sports day once or twice a year when simple games were played.

The development of modern physical education

As mentioned above, Normal gymnastics established by Leland was of a rational nature, based on medical science, aiming primarily at the preservation of health. But after the eighteenth year of Meiji (1885) when Arinori Mori became Education Minister, school physical education in Japan underwent a sudden change. It changed from the physical education for the preservation of health to that for training the body. This was the “Military gymnastics” based on the idea of enriching and strengthening the country. In spite of its misleading name, Military gymnastics was not pure military drill, but it consisted of the army system of free-and apparatus exercises as well as military drill.

To aim at rousing patriotism through physical training was the characteristic of this gymnastics, in which physical education and moral education were closely united. The trend of those days is clearly revealed in that a measure for cultivating moral nature was sought not in military arts but in military gymnastics. Education Minister Mori organized the moral objectives into the following three virtues: obedience, friendship and dignity, which he declared could best be cultivated through gymnastics. To him military gymnastics meant an educational reform to combat the harmful influence of intellectualistic education. It was a world-wide tendency of the nineteenth century physical education to take on a marked nationalistic character. However, it might be said that military gymnastics was the peculiarly Japanese form of the most typical nationalism.

Nationalism reflected on the Western physical education of the nineteenth century differed greatly between the advanced and the backward nations. The Japanese people were alert in
reacting upon such an international trend. France and Belgium seem to have received special attention. In those days, France, defeated in the Prussian-French War, assigned military drill to public school boys under the instructions of the Educational Minister Jules Ferry. In Belgium, military drill as well as light gymnastics was a compulsory course.

In the nineteenth year of Meiji (1886), under such circumstances, the New Educational Act was issued, under which military gymnastics was added to the course of physical education, at the sacrifice of normal gymnastics. The periods for physical education were also increased drastically, about five hours being required per week both in the elementary and middle schools. Besides, many military officers came to take charge of physical education which had hitherto been left to school teachers. The study and training of physical education in Japan originally started separately at the Institute of Gymnastics (the Ministry of Education) and the Toyama Military Institute (the Ministry of War), each achieving its own particular development. In this respect Japan had differed from France, Denmark and Prussia, where the two had developed out of one institution, but now the original distinction began to break down. This confusion in the educational administration resulted in a great turmoil in the physical education world of the Meiji period, as will be mentioned later.

Particularly in higher schools, many undesirable effects were seen after military gymnastics under the instruction of military officers held sway in school physical education. Students appeared outwardly to acquiesce in the compulsory military gymnastics backed by national power, but as a result, physical education as a course of study was mixed up with military drill and gradually a trend to despise school physical education (not sport) was implanted among the Japanese intellectuals. However, some practical improvements were also made in school physical education through the government's encouragement of military gymnastics, such as the increase in number of large playgrounds, and the popularization of foreign-style clothes for men, even down to elementary school boys.

Incidentally, physical education of those days, including normal gymnastics, was as a whole formal and forcible, while student sports which had developed chiefly as extracurricular activities were fairly free. Western sports were positively adopted in the middle schools of 1880's, perhaps because they offered the students the best opportunity for getting free from the hard school life of those days and also because they fitted the needs of the young people. Thus the extracurricular activities of boys became the center of students' associations, and at inter-school matches both players and cheering parties displayed devoted enthusiasm.

The physical education in Japan entered upon another stage after the Sino-Japanese War (1894~1895). On the victory racial pride was intensified and the national desire to build up a rich and powerful nation increased, which in turn enlarged the field of vision of physical education. Again school physical education began to be viewed from the standpoint of promoting the development of national physical education. Of course, educational policy was still founded on the idea that "happiness of an individual lies in the State and the prosperity of the State lies in a powerful army"; but now it took a concrete shape: it was no longer confined to simply emphasizing military gymnastics and inspiring spiritualism, but it
was now turned toward the improvement of playgrounds and equipments. In the last several years before 1900, laws with regard to the standard of physical facilities and school health were issued in rapid succession, revealing the government intention to improve physical education rationally.

The system of employing school health advisors and directors in the Ministry of Education was enacted in 1896, the school health law and the physical examination regulation in 1897, the law for the provision of school doctors in 1898, and the standard for elementary- and middle school accommodation in the next year. According to this standard, even an elementary school of less than one hundred pupils had to have a playground of more than one hundred shiba (c. 6×6 ft.), and a middle school, more than two thousand shibu. Also they advised the building of gymnasiums wherever local conditions suggested their need.

In this manner, Japan's physical education acquired modern shape by the beginning of the twentieth century. As far as theories were concerned Normal and military gymnastics were still taught side by side, but the actual physical education was much improved as regards equipments and playgrounds. The building of many gymnasiums in elementary schools in deep snow areas resulted from this law. It could not, of course, be carried out perfectly because of the poor conditions of local finances. However, it is a surprising fact that, unlike the European and American elementary schools with the wide disparity in their equipments and playgrounds even today, almost all the Japanese elementary schools of those days had playgrounds and some of them were even equipped with a gymnasium.

Also since the early years of the twentieth century Japanese teachers became more active in the study of physical education. The publication of books for school play, from the elementary school up, increased in number also about that time. Among them we can find some excellent studies based on the writers' own personal experiences, which shows that school physical education was emerging from and overcoming the stage of mere imitation of the West. Moreover, it may be worth noticing that the physical education for girls, which had been neglected behind the emphasis on enriching and strengthening the country, began to get under way at last. Statesmen and school principals of foresight began to see that it was an important field in the nationalistic physical education. The physical education for girls was encouraged for the following reasons: that girls' potential abilities had hitherto been suppressed by the feudalistic view of womanhood; that healthy mothers were a moral property of the nation; and that physical improvements were an urgent need in order that Japanese women might become as active as Western women.

Reflecting such trends of the times, training courses for female physical education teachers were finally established in the thirty-sixth year of Meiji (1903), about twenty-five years later than those for men. It was about this time that athletic clubs were organized in girls' schools and that girl students began to play sports, wearing separated skirts convenient for games.

At the same time boys' sports which had been played as extracurricular activities became very popular, and new sports were added to track and field events, boat races, and baseball.
Though their motto, sportsmanship, had taken on Japanese coloring mixed with the "samurai" spirit, extracurricular sports had already become an established existence. Competent principals, following the model of Principal Arnold of Rugby, came to value sports highly and make it a means of revitalising the school spirit and of guiding students' thoughts.

Toward the beginning of the twentieth century, normal gymnastics had already lost its first fresh spirit and become mere repetitions of a series of gymnastic exercises using hand apparatus. Physical education by the dual system of normal and military gymnastics was no longer attractive enough. Discussion became lively over school physical education as a result of the teachers' study of games, the encouragement of extracurricular sports, the petition for permission to teach military arts (Jūjutsu and Gekken) as part of the regular curriculum, and the introduction of the new Swedish gymnastic exercises. The old gymnastics could no longer retain their position without renovation.

Above all, the new theory of the Swedish gymnastic exercises shook the old gymnastics to its foundation. The Swedish gymnastic exercises of those days meant Posse's gymnastics, "Special Kinesiology of Educational Gymnastics" which had flourished in Boston. This gymnastics had the best organized theory of teaching gymnastics at the time, giving systematically explanations as to how to guide each sports in accordance with the objective of physical education. In those days, interest in play and sports increased in Japan and criticism on gymnastics became strong, but after all no educational theory beyond gymnastics could mature, and great importance began to be placed on gymnastics again. There were also other reasons why gymnastics was so highly valued in itself in the early years of the twentieth century.

Here, we must take a wide view of the conditions of establishing school gymnastics of the whole world. For, in those days it was still a common idea even in the West to make a distinction between education and play. There existed even in America the thought that play and sports, being interesting, would all the more desecrate the serious and sacred place of education. There still remained the task of convincing people of the importance of a healthy body for study, before physical education could secure a place of its own as part of the school curriculum. Therefore, in order that sports might be recognized as part of physical education, it was necessary that they should be represented by gymnastics which might control students' natural kinetic impulses, and which were artificial in its methods, rational in its guidance, and strict in its attitude.

Leland was aware of this when he directed the school physical education of Japan. But having come to Japan as early as 1878, he only set up a broad distinction between the army system of gymnastics and competitive sports, and his normal gymnastics; and his ideas were not organized into a theory of instruction. However, Posse's gymnastics, introduced into Japan early in the twentieth century, possessed a theory concerning how to give a concrete form to their educational aspects in the actual instruction of gymnastics.

In the thirty-seventh year of Meiji (1904), the Educational Ministry set up a committee to inquire into gymnastics and plays in order to solve wide issues of physical education raised by the development of physical education itself of the Meiji era, and to establish the funda-
mental policies of school physical education. Various issues were arranged into nineteen items, and an expert committee deliberated on each of them. Their conclusions were given in a report in the thirty-eighth year of Meiji (1905). The Educational Ministry then established their attitude to depend on the Swedish gymnastics for the guiding principles and methods of school physical education. In consequence, normal gymnastics which had held sway over school physical education up to the 30's of Meiji began to decline. Meanwhile, many arguments for the amendment of military gymnastics were voiced, but they involved many complicated problems beyond mere conclusions of single committees.

Needless to say, military gymnastics had come into use, backed by the needs of the time to make the nation powerful. Moreover, in those days when people were celebrating the victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), those in official positions could not very easily criticize it openly. However, the idea that it should be regulated from the standpoint of school physical education was boldly expressed. Discussion was focused on free and apparatus exercises which had been carried out as a part of military gymnastics. Feeling the inconsistency in the fact that, in schools which were under the jurisdiction of the Education Ministry, these exercises should be directed in accordance with the Manual of Gymnastics of the Ministry of War and by military officers also, the committees reached the following two conclusions: (1) As gymnastics was different from military drill, the military system of free- and apparatus exercise should be re-organized as teaching material for school gymnastics. (2) Consequently, the contents of military gymnastics should be limited to military drill, and the misleading name “military gymnastics” should be changed into school military exercises.

In order to realize these conclusions of the committees, a revision of the laws was naturally required. But the Education Ministry had to negotiate with the Ministry of War. The position of normal gymnastics which had dominated for nearly thirty years still remained secure. Among the members of lecturers at the training courses which were offered by the Education Ministry, there were some who hesitated to switch over to Swedish gymnastic exercises. Besides, Swedish gymnastics involved problems in itself. Domei, Nagai who was abroad then for the study of physical education, held the opinion that Posse's gymnastics should not be considered the whole of Swedish gymnastic exercises. For such various reasons, the Education Ministry, judging that the hasty revision of the laws might throw things into worse confusion, postponed the administrative decision.

Their chief opponent with whom they had to come to an understanding was, however, the Ministry of War itself. Noticing the difficulty of the problem, the Education Ministry held a preliminary conference between the ministers as early as in the thirty-ninth year of Meiji (1906). But the Ministry of War expressed an uncompromising opinion directly opposing the Education Ministry. The War Minister Terauchi insisted that school physical education should be wholly controlled by military gymnastics and should be practised in accordance with the drill book and the manual of physical training issued by the Ministry of War, and, moreover, that future physical education teachers should be supplied by the reserve non-commissioned officers. Needless to say, the Education Minister Makino emphasized the
difference between military- and school physical education, and that between building up a powerful army and school education. This brought about the fatal antagonism between the two.

The remote cause of this problem originated in the adoption of military gymnastics into schools by Arinori Mori in the eighteenth year of Meiji (1885). Even if we can understand Mori's patriotic motives, the fact that the Education Minister Makino took great pains to restore his educational measures to a normal form shows more clearly than anything else how Mori's views of education had been too extreme.

In the fortieth year of Meiji (1907), a joint investigation committee was formed to strive for a rapprochement between the Ministries of War and Education. However, after the first meeting, it adjourned without having broken down a single basic opposition, until the return of Nagai, who had been sent abroad for study by the Education Ministry. The Ministry of Education intended to pass final judgement after learning about the real state of school physical education of foreign countries. Nagai, going over to Sweden after his stay in America, was then studying at the Royal Institute of Gymnastics in Stockholm. The head of the Institute at the time was L.M. Törngren, a naval captain. The first thing that Nagai was surprised at in comparison with the Japanese situation was that Swedish military and naval officers, with a good understanding of educational gymnastics, made the best use of the rational instruction of Swedish gymnastic exercises in the armed forces also: Another thing was that the Swedish gymnastic exercises at Stockholm was different from Posse's Swedish gymnastic exercises which had just been introduced into Japan, and sports and basic military drills were given their positions according to the principles of this gymnastics.

Then Prime Minister Katsura was military man, and he himself was ardent advocate of the principle of drill. So the Education Ministry had to take great pains to overpower the idea of "Spartan training" of the army. But being encouraged by Nagai's new information, the Education Ministry explained the international trend in physical education and emphasized the merits of the new Swedish gymnastic exercises, and the Ministry of War at last yielded to the view of the Education Ministry. It was in October in the forty-second year of Meiji (1909). We might say that this was a memorable year as Japan's school physical education protected the essential mission of education. Thus a new era set in with stress laid on Swedish gymnastic exercises, and laws and regulations of school physical education were successively revised. Sports, military arts and military gymnastics were all readjusted according to the theory of Swedish gymnastics. Sports were put to practical use according to the teaching plans of gymnastics. Military drill, which had been called "Military gymnastics", was changed into "school military exercises", and military arts began to be practiced in class as an optional subject above elementary school.

From this time on, school gymnastics in Japan became greatly influenced by Sweden. Japan which had been influenced by Lewis' and Posse's gymnastics by way of Boston since the eleventh year of Meiji (1878) turned away from America and cultivated closer relations with Sweden after 1909. Törngren's famous work "Manual of Gymnastics" (Larobok i Gym-
nastik, 1905), published two years before Nagai went to Stockholm, gave still greater influence on physical education in Japan.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, student sports also have made rapid progress. The greatest factor to expedite it was, of course, the athletic meetings. The time was past when student were satisfied with the sports on their school field days. Now sports came to be played at regular athletic meetings following established rules. Records improved, but extracurricular sports came to lay greater stress on records merely for athletic meetings. Then, naturally, champions and rooters became separate and sports chiefly for athletic meetings became differentiated from physical exercises for the general public. The so-called "champion system" might be said to be the natural effect attendant upon the advancement of sports, but principals and statesmen who had placed great importance on sports for the purpose of renovating school spirit and guiding student thoughts, began to feel grave doubts about it.

Viewed from the standpoint of the fundamental state policy to advance national physical education, this "champion system" developed into an educational problem. The Ministry of Education came to show great interest in the effective management of student sports for educational purposes. In the fortieth year of Meiji (1907), advantages and disadvantages of interschool matches provoked much discussion at a conference of middle school principals. Sportsmanship came to be emphasized particularly, and the famous expressions, "A sound mind in a sound body" (orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano) and "The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton" were all the more earnestly preached.

After all, by the end of the Meiji era, Japan's sports had attained adequate growth both in the theory and in the technique. Sports which had started as extracurricular activities of students at the beginning of the Meiji era, coming through various ups and downs, finally reached the stage where it could organize itself within the nation. Japan Amateur Athletic Association established in the forty-fourth year of Meiji (1911) symbolized this fact. Internationally, Japan officially opened its doors of sports to the world after this. In the next year, the forty-fifth year of Meiji, Japan took part in the Fifth Olympic Games, and thus entered the international stage.

Conclusion

To sum up, the Meiji era was an important age which established the foundation of Japan's modern physical education and a foothold for the further advancement of physical education. During this half century, the path was rough and never easy. The leading systems of physical education, for example, shifted from normal gymnastics to the dual system of normal- and military gymnastics and then finally to Swedish gymnastics, and internal strife among the systems was bitter in its course. However, as a whole, the physical education of the Meiji era, from the latter half of the nineteenth century, when it started to grope after modern physical education, to the beginning of the twentieth century, when it positively chose Western physical education, was ever alert to perceive the trend of Western physical education and to digest it by changing it into a form fit for Japan, and it had nearly reached the Western level by the end of the Meiji era. Thus, the contribution of the Meiji era to the establishment of the modern physical education of Japan was very great indeed.