Sport in China's Universities and Colleges from the Late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China (1890s-1937): Origins, Expression and Problems

清朝後期から中華民国期（1890s - 1937）の中国の高等教育機関におけるスポーツ
：起源、表現、諸問題に着目して

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Abstract

This paper references literature to focus on three aspects: the origins, the expression of sport, and the problems faced by sport in China's universities and colleges from the Late Qing Dynasty to the era of the Republic of China.

In China's traditional cultural system, physical culture did not develop into something similar to sport as it had developed in Western cultures. This Western sport was introduced into China, where it emerged and developed in Christian and government-run higher education institutions in the period from the 1890s to the early 20th century. Competitive sporting events became the expression of university and college sport from the Late Qing Dynasty to the era of the Republic of China, including collegiate, national and international games. These games were advocated and organized by Chinese-based offices of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and higher education institutions, and the athletes who participated were mainly students enrolled in universities and colleges. One of the problems faced by university and college sport in the period was *the contestants system*.

The paper's conclusions are as follows: 1) the origins of university and college sport in China can be identified in the period from the 1890s to the early 20th century; 2) university and college sport in China represented the pinnacle of sport at that time and athletes who were training in higher education institutions made up the majority of athletes participating in competitive sporting events; 3) *the contestants system* had a significant impact on sport popularization in higher education institutions in the 1920s and 1930s.

1. Introduction

In the Western world, physical education and sport (*tiyu* “体育”)²⁾ developed within schools, as the introduction of physical education and sport into school curricula required schools, naturally, to conduct the physical training of pupils (You, 2012). In China, modern higher education was established gradually as part of the process of learning from the West. Going back to the origins of modern higher education reveals that military academies (*junshi xuetang* “军事学堂”) and technology academies (*jishu xuetang* “技术学堂”) were considered to be the first generation of modern higher education institutes in China to be influenced by the Westernization Movement (*yangwu yundong* “洋务运动”: 1860s-1890s) (Xiong, 1988; Jin, 2000; Dong, 2007; Chen et al., 2007). China actively introduced Western technologies and thought into schools, and physical activities were introduced as well, with a particular focus on a type of calisthenics/gymnastics called *yangcao* (洋操) or *bingcao* (兵操); this type of exercise was part of the Chinese cultural domain (Fan and Tan, 2002). In addition, Western missionaries established mission schools and introduced Western sport by means of games, and it was these schools that were the first to spread sport throughout China. Some mission schools became higher education institutions after the 1880s, when sport was increasingly emerging in Christian universities and colleges³⁾. Meanwhile, some universities and colleges were founded by the Qing government such as Peiyang University. Sport was introduced into many of these campuses by foreign instructors, employed by China’s reformers who had studied Western countries and Japan.

University and college sport led to the development and constituted the basic features of sport in China in the Late Qing Dynasty (1890s-1911) and the era of the Republic of China (1912-1949). During these periods, the organizers of sport were university and college administrators, and almost all of the athletes participating in competitions such as the Far East Games were students who were currently studying in

or had graduated from higher education institutions. Indeed, “For privileged university youth of the 1900-1910s adoption of the new western/modern ideology of sport and its knowledge of the body and its movements was one more conspicuous way to display their elite status” (Andrew, 2004, p.19).

In the 1920s and 1930s, university and college sport became the main body of sport in China, but few researchers paid little attention to the role of sport in higher education, with only a handful of researchers discussing it (Ma, 1933; Wang, 1935; Wu Cheng, 1935; Huang, 1936; Ruan, 1935; Su, 1994). For these reasons, this paper focuses on a period spanning the Late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China era, or more specifically the historical period from the 1890s to 1937. Literature, both from the period in question and contemporary, was used in order to discuss three issues from a historical perspective: the origins of, the expressions of and the issues surrounding university and college sport in China.

2. An exploration and analysis of the origins of sport in China’s universities and colleges

2.1. The origins of universities and colleges in China

In the 1890s, higher education in China developed in two ways, resulting in the existence of two types of university and college: government-run institutions (*guanban* “官办”) and those operated by Christian missions. Peiyang University (established 1895), founded by the government in Tianjin, is usually considered to have been the first university in the sense of modern China⁴⁾. Although the higher education institutions of the 1890s displayed few of the characteristics of modern universities, government-run universities and colleges adopted curricula from the Western model of higher education institutions from the very beginning, and these institutions offered multiple courses designed to nurture talent. This emergence of universities, however, did not mean that higher education had been completely established in China. Aside from the

guanban (官办), the other type of higher education institution in China was the mission university or college; these institutions were regarded for a long time as a part of the imperialist ‘invasion’ (Li, 1987; Li and Gu, 1982). Since the 1980s, however, Chinese scholars have started to look at missionary schools from other perspectives, and some have argued that missionary-led higher education was more than just a tool of the imperialist ‘invasion’ into China, but rather something that also served to impart a deep influence on the development of higher education in China; as such, these missionary schools should be thought of as an integral part of China’s higher education (Ng Tze, 1995; Ren, 2002; Zhang and Ma, 2000; Zhang, 2003). Some missionary schools were upgraded to colleges in 1880s, such as Tengchow College (established 1882) in Shandong, which is an indication of the development of higher education. Chronologically speaking, although mission-run higher education institutions appeared before government-run ones, most of the Christian universities and colleges were the result of merging secondary-level Christian academies or colleges, although some mission schools called themselves universities from the very beginning, such as the Methodist University of Peking, the establishment of which has been described by Lutz:

With the organization of a board of trustees in New York and incorporation under New York state law in 1890, Peking University (the Methodist University of Peking) officially came into existence. In addition to a preparatory school and an industrial school, the three major divisions were the College of Liberal Arts, Wiley College of Theology, and the College of Medicine. The first class of

five graduated in 1892 (Lutz, 1971, p.31).

Other mission higher education institutions emerged in similar situations; St John’s College, for example, formed its first college curriculum in 1890 (Zheng, 1994), but it only had 6 students enrolled by 1894. “Many other mission schools were established during middle of the 19th century; some were called colleges or universities, and some later to develop into colleges. But none offered a full college course before 1900” (Lutz, 1971, p.33).

After 1900, having experienced shocks to its national pride and a faltering monarchy, China began to see increasingly rapid change in mission higher education (Fenn, 1994). For example, institutes such as Soochow University (established 1901) and St. John’s University (established 1905) changed their names and status to university and accordingly established systems into which the characteristics of modern Western higher education institutions had been built. This made them increasingly attractive to students, who enrolled in ever larger numbers. As such, it can be argued that mission-led higher education did not truly establish itself in China before the 20th century.

Eventually, most Christian universities and colleges were transformed from secondary-level mission schools (age 13-18), and many changed their names and addresses as part of this process. As a result, it can be difficult for researchers to determine the exact date of the founding of Christian universities and colleges, and to establish which was the earliest in China (He and Shi, 1996). For this reason, there are difficulties in determining the exact

Table 1 Establishment dates of early China’s universities and colleges

Name	Year	Location	Type	Comments
St. John’s College	1879	Shanghai	Christian	Renamed as St. John’s University in 1905
Peiyang University	1895	Tianjin	Government-run	The first Chinese university in the modern sense
Imperial University of Peking	1898	Beijing	Government-run	The first national university in China
Peking University	1900	Beijing	Christian	It only reached to secondary level university
Soochow University	1901	Suzhou	Christian	
Aurora University	1903	Shanghai	Roman Orthodox Church	The first Roman Orthodox Church university

date of the emergence of universities and colleges in China. On a practical level, it can be said that higher education institutions began to emerge in China in the 1890s.

2.2. The origins of sport in China's universities and colleges

The dawn of physical education and sport in China began in mission schools (Chen, 2007), and the history of the development of mission schools is also that of the dissemination of modern sport in China; some mission schools were even conducting sport as early as the 1860s and 1870s. When missionary-run higher education institutions began to emerge in the 1880s and 1890s, the growing presence of sport was gradually reflected by the holding of competitive school sporting events; St. John's College and Soochow University, for example, held the first inter-collegiate games in 1890, the earliest sports meet ever held in China (Howard et al, 1990). St. John's then held games almost each year from then on, with the events schedule divided into two seasons, spring and autumn. The program of events included baseball, tennis, football, track races, jumping (long jumping or high jumping), and other events. Soochow held the first ever basketball tournament in China, in 1903, and other popular sports at the university included volleyball, tennis, soccer, and track events (China Christian Colleges).

Among government-run higher education institutions, Peiyang University, which was modeled on some European and American universities, held a competitive track event in 1897, but it was only a simple imitation of similar events, without any real understanding of racing techniques and rules. In

1898, the President of Peiyang University, Charles Daniel Tenney, proposed to hold a joint school games in Tianjin and sent invitations to the Peiyang Naval Academy, Military Academy and Telegram Academy. These games were to become Tianjin's, and also China's, first inter-school games (He, 2010). The second chapter, outlining regulations on courses, in the constitution of the Imperial University of Peking (established 1898), stated that *ticao* (体操) was to be the tenth course; this was the first time that physical education and sport was officially included into a university curriculum. Still, the persons responsible for the management of higher education institutions tended to put little value on sport. As one example, in a memorandum from Sun Jia-nai's (the first president of Imperial University of Peking, 1898-1900) to Qing Emperor Guangxu, he mentioned that all courses had been put into action as ruled except for *ticao* (体操), it was not as effective as ... (Peking University and China's First Historical Archives, 2001). Although physical education and sport were listed as mandatory courses in universities and colleges, in practice they were often carried out as extracurricular activities. Sport mainly took the form of *ticao* (体操) rather than track and field, ball games, or other sports.

As illustrated above, the exact time of the emergence of universities and colleges in China has been difficult for researchers to establish. However, the period from the 1890s to the early 20th century is known as the founding period for universities and colleges in China. Prior to this, mission schools had already been actively engaged in sport, particularly those which had upgraded to become higher education institutions. These trends

Table 2 University and college games in the Late Qing Dynasty (1890-1911)

Year	University or college	Form	Type
1890	St. John's College	Track and field games	Christian
1897	Peiyang University	University-level track games	Government-run
1899	Nanyang College	University-level games	Government-run
1905	Imperial University of Peking	The first Imperial University of Peking games	Government-run

meant that sport continued to establish itself in China, gradually becoming more popular among students. Government-run universities and colleges were the first to publicly exhibit sport in the form of competitive games. It is possible, therefore, to pinpoint the period from the 1890s to the early 20th century as having seen the origins of university and college sport in China.

3. The expressions of university and college sport from the 1890s to 1937—an examination of games in that period

Early games put an emphasis on the reshaping of the spirit of athletes in China; put simply, it did not matter who won or what rank was achieved (Zhuang, 1909; Hou, 1909; Huan, 1909; Yi, 1913). These games were meant to uplift the spirit of the nation; the intended focus was to train strong bodies for the nation or to save the nation and to strengthen the race. Most games were established by higher education institutions and mostly took place in the cities and open port cities in eastern China, such as Shanghai, Tianjin, and Wuchang in Hubei province, where such schools were concentrated. For example, the nationwide students' games were launched and held, albeit irregularly, by Nankai School in Tianjin, Nanyang College in Shanghai, and Soochow University in Suzhou at that time (Sang, 2007). These early games were more like a demonstration of skill, but as sport techniques and skill improved, they gradually became more competition-like. Some presidents and administrators of higher education institutions were aware of the value of sport and started to organize sporting games. In 1890, Francis Lister Hawks Pott, the president of St. John's College, was the first to organize games at St. John's and indeed proposed to hold games in spring and autumn of every year (Shi, 2011). In 1899, Charles Daniel Tenney general instructor of Peiyang University, organized joint games for schools in Tianjin. In 1907, Tang Wenzhi was appointed president of Nanyang College, established sport teams and advocated that football games be

held with St. John's (1903-1910). The importance that presidents and administrators attached to sport was responsible for the development of these early games in Chinese universities and colleges. Events such as the St. John's track and field games (first held 1890), the Peiyang University games (first held 1898), the first games of the Imperial University of Peking (1905), as well as inter-schools games including the joint games of schools in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province (first held 1906), the Shanghai all-school games (first held 1906), the first joint games of Ningyuan (Nanjing in Jiangsu province) academies (first held 1907) and the joint Nanchang school games (first held 1911).

3.1. The expressions of university and college sport in the Far East Games and the Olympic Games

In the 1910s, university and college sport in China began to increase in scale, with athletes participating in national and even international events under regional games, through the wider dissemination of sport, joint advocacy and initiation by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA); two such representative events were the Far East Games and the Olympic Games. The performance of Chinese athletes in these Games can be considered a reflection of China's level of sport at that time. It is also possible to identify the shared characteristics of those who participated in sport in China by examining the identities and the professional characteristic of the athletes of those times.

The Far East Games (1913-1934), also known as the Far Eastern Championships, were launched by the YMCA in the Philippines, Japan and China. The Games were held 11 times in total, although in 1934 they ceased to be held for political reasons. The Far East Games were the first inter-regional games and were the precursor to the modern-day Asian Games. Some of the research and discussion in China on the Far East Games has concentrated on descriptions of what was witnessed at the games (Anonymous, 1914; Cheng, 1917; Zhan, 1919; Weng, 1921; Huang,

1923; Huang, 1925), on the analysis of the causes of the failure of China's athletes to perform well (Wu, 1917; Ren, 1917; Wu, 1930), and on explanations of the impact of the Far East Games on the country and the nation in China (Ren, 1917; Xie, 1925). Few researchers have focused on the identities and the professions of the athletes themselves. However, it has been possible to establish, by analyzing the identities of Chinese athletes in the Far East Games, that they were mostly university and college athletes; specifically, those who won games were almost all athletes from universities and colleges. In the first Far East Games, for example, of the 36 athletes from China, 9 came from Tsinghua College and Peking University in Beijing, 9 from Jinling University in Nanjing, Nanyang College and St John's University in Shanghai, and the Shanghai YMCA, and 18 from Nanwu School in Guangzhou, the Guangzhou YMCA, Hong Kong University, and Nanhua Sports Association in Hong Kong (Anonymous, 1913). The Chinese athletes who took part were mostly affiliated with Christian higher education institutions and YMCAs that maintained a sporting tradition. There was little change to this situation throughout the first five Far East Games held before 1923. The *renxu* (壬戌) education system⁵⁾, introduced in 1922, partially modified regulations on physical education and sport for universities and colleges. As a result, between the fifth and the tenth Far East Games, some national and private universities and colleges started to shine and achieved excellent results. Although the performance of China's athletes in the Games gradually waned, Ruan Weicun (1934b) pointed out that the Far East Games propelled the development of China's sport in both direct and indirect ways, and that the majority of athletes who took part in the Far East Games were students.

As a result of the efforts of the China National Amateur Athletic Federation, China participated in the Olympic Games in 1932, 1936 and 1948. In the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games, Liu Changchun, a graduate from Northeast University in Shenyang, was the only Chinese athlete to take part. By the

1936 Berlin Olympic Games, however, China had put together a huge team for the Games, a veritable fleet of 66 athletes who participated in soccer, basketball, track and field, swimming, weightlifting, race walking and cycling. Taking the track and field team as an example, of the 23 athletes, 17 were university and college students or graduates and the identities of the other 6 are now unknown. Except for Fu Baolu who advanced to the semi-final in the pole vault, none of the athletes managed to pass the qualifying round, showing that there was still a significant gap between the competitive ability of leading Chinese athletes with that of elite international sportspeople.

"Besides its delegation to the Berlin Games, China also sent a forty-two-member (42) study group to Berlin and other European cities to study sports in Europe. Led by Hao Gengsheng, the group included nine (9) government officials, twenty-three (23) representatives of higher education, nine (9) participants from non-governmental sport organizations, and one (1) military delegate" (Xu, 2008, p.45).

3.2. The expressions of university and college sport in national and regional games

For the first ten years after the founding of the Republic of China (1912-1922), the education system in place still required that *ticao* (体操) be the main constituent of physical education and sport in Chinese higher education. However, national and regional games continued to be held under the influence of the YMCA and the active organization and advocacy of sport activists (Wu, 1956). For example, the Shanghai YMCA launched and organized the First National School Division Sports League in Nanjing in 1910 (the first National Games in China), which were promoted and organization by Western delegates running that YMCA (Hao, 1933). In total, 140 athletes took part in those Games, which featured 4 events: athletics, soccer, tennis and basketball. Athletes who participated were students from mission schools or members of the YMCA (Ruan, 1933). Taking the third (1924) and the

Table 3 China's track and field athletes at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games

Event	University/College	Name/Sex
100m	Unknown	Fu Jincheng (Male)
100m	Northeast University (graduate)	Liu Changchun (Male)
100m	Soochow University	Cheng Jinguan (Male)
100m	Southeast Sport Specialist College	Li Sen (Female)
110m Hurdles	Xiamen University	Lin Shaozhou (Male)
110m Hurdles	Sun Yat-Sen University	Huang Yingjie (Male)
400m	Xiamen University	Dai Shuguo (Male)
800m; 1500m	Shanghai Sport Specialist College	Jia Lianren (Male)
50km Race Walk	Unknown	Cai Zhengyi (Male)
50km Race Walk	University of Shanghai (graduate)	Zhou Yuyu (Male)
50km Race Walk	Unknown	Zhang Zaojiu (Male)
50km Race Walk	Unknown	Zheng Chengshan (Male)
Marathon	Unknown	Wang Zhenglin (Male)
Decathlon	Northeast University	Zhou Changxing (Male)
Discus	University of Nanking	Leng Peigen (Male)
Discus	Feng Yong University & Northeast University	Guo Jie (Male)
Jump	Furen University	Wu Bixian (Male)
Pole Vault	Jinan University	Fu Baolu (Male)
Triple Jump	Peking Sport Specialist College	Wang Shilin (Male)
Shot Put; Discus	Unknown	Chen Baoqiu (Male)
High Jump; Triple Jump	Lingnan University	Situ Guang (Male)
High Jump; Triple Jump	Shanghai Sport Specialist College	Zhang Jiaxie (Male)
High Jump; Javelin	Soochow University	Hao Chunde (Male)

fourth (1930) National Sports Games as examples, it is possible to show how the winners of the track and field championships were mostly athletes from higher education institutions. Furthermore, most of the outstanding performances recorded at these Games were from student athletes.

In the period of the Republic of China, the best representation of regional games was the North China Games, which were held 18 times in total between 1913 and 1934, and had an extensive range of participants (including people from the northeast part of China in later periods). The initiations, the organizations and the gathering together of the main participants of the North China Games relied upon teachers and athletes from higher education institutions, especially universities and colleges, in

all areas of North China (Dong, 1934). The games were initially a joint meeting of several schools in Beijing and Tianjin, and later developed into a meet that incorporated dozens of schools in all areas of north China. Eventually, the North China Games became a large-scale sporting event composed of participants from all provinces and cities in north China (Wang, 1934). The first fourteen games (1913-1929) organized participants into university and college groups, whereas from the fifteenth to the eighteenth games, the participating units were organized by province or city. At almost every games, schools or colleges achieved overall champion status, as the following table shows:

Table 4 Results for men's athletics in the 3rd and the 4th National Games in China (1924, 1930)

Event	The 3 rd National Games		The 4 th National Games	
	Name	University	Name	University
100m	Zhu Baozhang	Unknown	Liu Changchun	Northeast University (graduate)
200m	Zhu Baozhang	Unknown	Liu Changchun	Northeast University (graduate)
400m	Zhu Baozhang	Unknown	Liu Changchun	Northeast University (graduate)
800m	Zhang Heng	Southeast University	Deng Zhiming	Shanghai Sport Specialist School
1500m	Zhang Huan-an	Beijing Normal University	Jiang Yunlong	Northeast University
5000m	Zhang Jicheng	Cheeloo University		
10000m			Zhao Dexin	Northeast University
110m	Li Junyao	Soochow University	Lin Shaozhou	Xianmen University
200m	Chen Qidong	St. John's University	Liang Jingping	Lingnan University
Javelin	Yin Shangping	Cheeloo University	Pan Nanshun	Unknown
High Jump	Ma Xiangbo	Yueyun Middle School	Li Zhongsan	Unknown
Discus	Zhang Fengying	Unknown	Zhao Wenzao	Beijing Normal University (graduated in 1926)
Pole Vault	Xia Xiang	Southeast University	Fu Baolu	Jinan University (enrolled in 1937)
Shot	Zhang Yinchu	Nankai School	Pan Nanshun	Unknown
Long Jump	Huang Bingkun	Fudan University	Hao Chunde	Jinan University
Triple Jump	Lu Ming	Nankai School	Situ Guang	Lingnan University
Pentathlon	Wu Demao	Southeast University	Hao Chunde	Jinan University
Decathlon	Wu Demao	Southeast University	Cao Yu	Jinan University

Table 5 Champions of the North China Games (1913-1934)

Time	Year	Champion	Time	Year	Champion
1 st	1913	Tsinghua College (predecessor of Tsinghua University)	10 th	1923	Nankai University
2 nd	1914	Tsinghua College	11 th	1924	Beijing Normal University
3 rd	1915	Nankai School (predecessor of Nankai University)	12 th	1925	Cheeloo University
4 th	1916	Nankai School	13 th	1928	Beijing Normal University
5 th	1917	Nankai School	14 th	1929	Northeast University
6 th	1918	Tsinghua College	15 th	1931	Beiping (Beijing)
7 th	1919	Tsinghua College	16 th	1932	Beiping (Beijing)
8 th	1920	Tsinghua College	17 th	1933	Beiping (Beijing)
9 th	1921	Tsinghua College	18 th	1934	Beiping (Beijing)

Source: (Ruan,1934a)

4. University and college sport confronting with a problem—the contestants system

As the above chronology shows, physical education and sport in China gradually spread from schools to wider society and the influences of physical education and sport also expanded progressively in the Late Qing Dynasty and the era of the Republic

of China. Competitively fought sporting events, including the Far East Games and National Games, encouraged the nation to realize the value of sport. In the 1890s, some Chinese thinkers such as Yan Fu and Liang Qichao advocated social Darwinism, which emphasizes the militarization of national spirit and physical training. Indeed, the government of the

Republic of China trumpeted military citizenship education (*jun guomin jiaoyu* “軍國民教育”) as the guiding philosophy of the educational system, which resulted in the official promotion of forms of sport and physical education influenced by militarism and social Darwinism (Lu, 2011). Therefore, in the first two decades of the 20th century, physical education and sport in Chinese higher education institutions were strongly shaped by societal militarism (*jun guomin zhuyi* “軍國主義”), and one consequence of this was *ticao* (体操) becoming widely initiated in schools, with the main focus on military gymnastics (*bingcao* “兵操”). The aim was to train students to have a soldiers’ body, and to cultivate the soldier spirit in students. At the end of World War I, in 1918, societal militarism was debated by national government in China, as described by Lu:

Through the debates, people reached a deeper understanding of the value of modern sport and physical education in cultivating the spirit of cooperation, equality and national unity. ... The government changed its sports policy accordingly and sport ‘became a physically experienced link between citizens’ dual responsibilities – to keep healthy and fit in body and mind and to work and unite with their fellow Chinese (Lu, 2011, p.1031).

After the promulgation of the *renxu* (壬戌) education system in 1922, it was determined that *ticao* (体操) which had become so heavily influenced by the intellectual movement of societal militarism, was to be abandoned. In its place, athletics and ball games became the main constituents of university and college physical education and sport. Some scholars in the 1930s, however, even proposed the concept of “using sport to save the nation” (*tiyu jiuguo* “體育救國”) (Wang, 1933; Liu, 1935a, 1935b; Qian, 1937), linking sport, national identity, and national survival very closely. This slogan, “using sport to save the nation”, was used to convey societal militarism.

Sport in universities and colleges was still facing some problems in the 1920s and 1930s. The extensive development of university and college sport during this period had wide-reaching social effects, and this led to a particular emphasis in

some schools on achievements in sporting events. As a consequence, very few higher education institutions encouraged all students to take part in extracurricular activities; rather, most schools encouraged only a few students—the most talented—to participate in sport. Students who participated in sport were called *contestants* (*xuan shou* “選手”), and many universities and colleges invested most of their funding and faculty for sport in training just a few *student-contestants* for the purpose of competitive games, while neglecting to implement physical education and sport of the benefit of the majority of the students. The phenomenon was called *the contestants system* (*xuanshou zhi* “選手制”), the only purpose of which was to ensure victory at championships (Hao, 1934; Wu Yunrui, 1935; Xiang, 1935; Chen, 1934). The problem of *the contestants system* was a long-term issue. Cai Yuanpei (1922) was one of the critics of *the contestants system* in university and college games, as follows:

There appeared some weaknesses in schools games. First, educators always focused upon contestants rather than intending to popularize sport in school. Second, student athletes only focused on competing in games, and there was no need for them to bring out the best in their own study. Third, sport was only used to compete for championships and contestants paid no attention to the coordinated development of their bodies or to over-intensity in training, therefore causing harm to their health. These weaknesses were not inherent in all games but should be attributed to the vanity of some sport advocates who propagandized sport in universities and colleges at the expense of some contestants. The result was that not only were the specially trained athletes sacrificed, but the interests of those who did not qualify as contestant-athletes were also sacrificed (Cai, 1922, p.1).

This *contestants system* was one of the most important characteristics of university and college sport in this period, and polarization appeared in university and college sport as a result of the widespread application of the system. *The contestants system* was a blight on sport development in China (Shang, 1927). It brought about a hierarchical-type structure with the *contestants*, who got many privileges, on top, and it deeply influenced the

popularization of sport in universities and colleges. To take Fudan University as an example, the sports department was essentially a “club” for a few students, dominated by the *contestants*, and gave them aristocratic-like power over other students (Anonymous, 1929). Cheng Dengke, professor at the National Central University thought the main obstacle facing the development of sport in China was the existence of this sporting aristocratic:

The reason for the halt in the development of China’s physical education and sport lay in the aristocracy which was not suitable for China’s national conditions. This was not the nature of physical education and sport. Today, admittedly, China is poor and weak. Therefore, physical education and sport must be popularized to have their beneficial effects. If we do not make this a national feat, China’s own national physical education and sport will never be created (Cheng, 1935, p.671).

Some universities and colleges proposed collaborating to develop strategies for dealing with the problem of *the contestants system*. Nanking and National Zhejiang Universities, for example, formulated the ‘revised common regulations for universities in Nanking’ in 1925, which stipulated that only students with an average grade or 3.5 or above would be eligible to organize, work in associations, or take part in any kind of competition as a university representative, thereby ensuring that sport and other activities would not impede regular study (Wang, 1992). Elsewhere, the National Zhejiang University stipulated that athletes of all university sport teams were to take part in their respective sports, solely for the purpose of interest in that sport, and that no additional privileges whatsoever would be granted to *contestants* (Anonymous, 1933). In addition, administrators of the Ministry of Education and of universities proposed measures to solve the problems caused by *the contestants system*. Hao Gengsheng, for example, who was a physical education and sport inspector at the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China, suggested setting physical education and sport as a compulsory course at universities to give students opportunities as well the requirement to participate

(Hao, 1934). Elsewhere, Zhang Boling, who was president of Nankai University, put forward the idea that the presidents of universities should be tested on their views on physical education to determine if they understood educational principles (Zhang, 1935). His aim in this proposal was specifically to encourage educators to place emphasis on the issue of physical education and sport in universities and colleges.

By 1935, most of China’s universities and colleges had decided to adopt the wider popularization of sport as a principle driving educational policy, given the negative consequences that had arisen from advocating *the contestants system*. These changes were brought about by the joint efforts of the Ministry of Education and people who were actively engaging in sport at higher education institutions (Hao, 1935).

5. Conclusions

The origins of sport in China’s universities and colleges can be traced to the period between the 1890s and the early 20th century. There were two types of higher education institutions: the first of these were Christian-advocated universities and colleges in China, which were the first to hold competitive school games and introduce modern Western sporting rules and practice into China. Physical education, sport and sporting events were transmitted into and developed throughout schools in the Late Qing Dynasty and the era of the Republic of China. Higher education institutions in particular represented the pinnacle of sporting development and ability in China during this time.

Sport in the period of the Late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China manifested itself in competitive sport events, or games, which were advocated and organized by the YMCA and higher education institutions. The participants of these games were also mostly affiliated with such organizations. These games provided the main expressions of university and college sport from the 1890s until 1937; representative examples

include the Far East Games, the National Games and the North China Games. It should be noted that although the level of China's sporting prowess at the time was exemplified by university and college sport, the performance of Chinese sportsmen and women in international events, such as the Far East Games and the Olympic Games, was evidence of the comparatively low level of sporting ability in China during that period.

In the early 20th century, societal militarism had a deep impact on sport in China's universities and colleges, leading to a situation in which the events contested at games consisted mainly of physical activities like military gymnastics (*bingcao* “兵操”) and gymnastics (*ticao* “体操”). In addition, the popularization of university and college sport was profoundly influenced by *the contestants system* in the 1920s and the 1930s. In response, a number of researchers, officials and administrators of higher education institutions proposed suggestions to solve the problems faced by sport in higher education institutions.

6. Future studies

The lack of research on university and college-level physical education and sport in the Late Qing Dynasty and the era of the Republic of China requires that the issue be reviewed from other angles. This research will approach the topic from the following two perspectives:

1. Analyzing university and college-level physical education and sport under different education systems in the Late Qing Dynasty and the era of the Republic of China. Four education systems were designed in all during this period, and there were significant changes in the guiding theories and educational purposes that influenced these systems. Therefore, the analysis of the transition of university and college-level physical education and sport under different education systems is beneficial to a better understanding of the value orientation of sport in higher education institutions.

2. Analyzing sport in different types of university

through individual cases studies. There emerged three different types of higher education institutions during this period, namely Christian, national and private. The comparative performance of sport in different types of universities and colleges deserves special attention. This research will select representative universities on which case analyses will be carried out.

Note

- 1) The time scale for the scope of this study is between the 1890s and 1937. The 1890s was when sport in China's universities and colleges came into existence, and 1937 was when the Sino-Japanese war broke out, meaning that sport in China's higher education institutions was interrupted. Subsequently, China experienced long-term war and the issue of sport was outside the scope of research from 1937 to 1949.
- 2) The concept of *tiyu* (体育) did not exist in ancient China. With the advent of modern times, the term *tiyu* (体育) was introduced into China from the West and Japan, such as *yangcao* (calisthenics and gymnastics “洋操”), *bingcao* (military gymnastics “兵操”), *ticao* (calisthenics and gymnastics “体操”), *tiyu* (physical education and sport “体育”), *yundong* (sport “运动”), *julie yundong* (sport “剧烈运动”), *jing ji* (sport “竞技”). Research on this period rarely defines these concepts, but Guo's definition, generally taken as representative, defines *tiyu* (体育) on three levels: in its broadest definition, *tiyu* (体育) means “everything related to the body”; a narrower definition is of “all activities, no matter whether they are intentional or unintentional”; and the narrowest meaning is “activities that follow certain methods and orders” (Guo, 1919). Following his definition, sport is part of the narrowest meaning of *tiyu* (体育). This study does not discuss the other concepts of *tiyu* (体育) and takes *tiyu* (体育) to mean physical education and sport used to express it.
- 3) During the periods of the Late Qing Dynasty and

the Republic of China, there were 16 mission universities in total, including 13 Christian universities, and 3 Roman Catholic universities in all. The Roman Catholic universities had only a small impact in China and achieved little in terms of sport. The Christian universities mentioned in this paper are those higher education institutions co-founded by protestant sects, such as the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Congregational Church, and Anglicanism. Although China's Protestant universities existed only for a relatively short period of time, they were the first to introduce a higher education system to China and guided the modernization process of university and college-level sport in China.

- 4) Although the development of modern higher education in China dates back more than a hundred years, the origins of China's modern higher education have yet to be conclusively determined. Now, looking back from a historical perspective, it seems to be quite obvious which university was the first to be established in China. However, due to different purposes and angles in research, it has been difficult to agree upon one common conclusion. The Imperial University of Peking could well rank as the first in terms of the power of its impact, while Christian universities were earlier in terms of the introduction of higher education to China and the use of the term university. This research took a temporal perspective and regarded Peiyang University to be China's first modern university. Peiyang University was founded by Chinese educators according to the modern university model.
- 5) From the 1900s to 1949, there were four education systems in place in China: the *renyin* (壬寅) education system (1902), the *guimao* (癸卯) education system (1904), the *renzi-guichou* (壬子-癸丑) education system (1912, 1913), and the *renxu* (壬戌) education system (1922). The *renyin* (壬寅) education system was the

first national education system designed by the central government (the Late Qing government) in modern China. It specified the nature, educational purpose, enrollment qualifications, duration of study and curricula of schools at all levels and of all kinds. This education system was an imitation of Japan's education system in the Meiji period (1868-1912) but it was not actually implemented. The *guimao* (癸卯) education system was promulgated by the central government (the Late Qing government) and was the first to be implemented as a national, legally binding education system in modern China. This education system solved the problem of newly founded schools having no regulations to follow and laid the foundation for the development of new schools. It was in many ways the realization of the ideals of the *renyin* (壬寅) education system. The *renzi-guichou* (壬子-癸丑) education system was the first education system put in place in the Republic of China. This system comprehensively reflected the demands of the bourgeois on education and functioned as the core education system in the early period of the Republic of China. It was also highly influenced by Japan's education system. Finally, the *renxu* (壬戌) education system followed the American education system (6-3-3 system: 6 years of elementary school, 3 years of junior high school, and 3 years of high school), and its implementation was a monumental event in the history of education in modern China. It was the first education system to followed America instead of Japan and it remained in place until 1949.

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