

Modern History and Problems of Physical Education in Japan.

Yoshio KATAGIRI

Department of Educational Sciences
Aichi University of Education

SUMMARY

Japanese school is controlled under the strict rules, and student's individuality is often avoided. Going through this kind of schooling, character of most Japanese people devoting themselves to authority or total system has been built up. Physical education at Japanese school also has made one of the core of such education. That is essentially uniform and conservative. The physical education at school and sports in Japan were imported from the Western countries after modernization at the Meiji Restoration, 1868. But in the process of the history, they have been modified into Japanese style. I'll mention the history how they accepted and modified physical education.

1. The characteristic of Japanese school under the hand control.

Not a few people mention that Japanese school is controlled under the strict rules, and student's individuality is often avoided. Especially at secondary schools in Japan, they have generally regular classroom teaching, or teacher-centered education by the textbook in order to raise up intellectual level of all students. Most students only sit on a chair and listen to teacher and have few chance to utter their thoughts and to discuss each other. They are hardly encouraged to do so. Students who absorbed the contents of textbook with passive attitude, can pass the entrance exam for upper school luckily. The effect of the exam is decided only with the scholastic achievement which can be converted into marks. You are demanded to follow the regular program, and it is better you don't have individuality.

Going through this kind of schooling, character of most Japanese office workers has been built up. They devote themselves to authority or total system, and follow the policy of company without complaint.

2. Characteristic of physical education and sports in Japan.

Physical education at Japanese school also has made one of the core of such controlled education. Most Japanese students who came back from foreign countries after long stay for father's job, say that they could have the physical education in more relaxed atmosphere and learned more practical thing than Japanese one, which is more uniform and conservative.

The baseball, which is the most popular professional sports in Japan, was imported from the United States after modernization in the mid-19th century. Robert Whiting, American researcher, said "At first glance, baseball in Japan appears to be same as the U.S. version - but it isn't. The Japanese view of life, stressing group identity, cooperation, hard work, respect for age and seniority, and "face" has permeated nearly every aspect of the sport, giving it a distinct character of its own."

Even professional sports, the Japanese characteristic has permeated.

The physical education at school and sports in Japan were imported from the Western countries after modernization at the Meiji Restoration, 1868. In the process of the history, however, they have been modified into Japanese style and accepted, as I'll mention below.

3. Physical education in Japan before the modernization.

Japan took the policy of seclusion from the 1630s to the 1850s aimed at preventing subversion from outside. Japan, however, was surprised at the threat of Western countries' military strength by the visit to Japan's shores in a squadron of four ships commanded by U.S. Commodore Matthew perry in 1853. Taking this opportunity, Japan had been under the pressure to have to make his own powerful military strength. Physical education was introduced from the Western for it, and started as a part of military training.

Of course there were traditional military arts in Japan on the other side. But their purposes were mainly to train the *samurai*'s (warriors') technique and to cultivate their own mind. The meaning for upbringing body was subsidiary. They were, moreover, not for the training as a group but as a individual. That means, as Japan had made the best use of the geographical condition that he was an isolated island country, he had never thought that he might fight with other countries directly. He had left himself in a defenseless state. Particularly, as he had not the experiences of modern massive battles, traditional militaty arts were considered as a personal matter, or a matter of taste. The aim of training of traditional military arts was self-culture rather than practical use, they thought. Only *samurai* were permitted these trainings, and Japanese chivalry (the way of *samurai*) was developed from here. I think it is similar to the case of Europe, but the basis of the Japanese chivalry is the self-culture.

4 . Introduction of physical education as military training.

The Shogunate Government was overthrown by the anti-government force in 1868. Even though the Shogunate Government was rather advantageous in the number of cannon and warships and so on, why did the anti-government force gain the final victory? The reason is that soldiers of the anti-government were better trained than the Shogunate.

The former organized not only *samurai* but also the lower classes; farmer, artisan, merchant, unlike the latter organized only *samurai* who had self-respect. For *samurai*, the training in a group was a weak point. They could not march in step in a group at all. Compared with them, the sons of the common people who didn't have pride too much were adapted for the training in a group more easily. It was very symbolic that when the anti-government army to have overthrown the Shogunate made a triumphal entry into the capital city, they marched in step to the pipes. This was the first military parade in Japan. It means the latter could utilize physical education as military training better than the former.

5 . The Orient tradition in physical education.

The physical education was practiced at first in the army after the Meiji Restoration. Of course, the purpose was not only the training in a group but also the development of physical strength of soldiers. Physical education at school, however, was not necessarily attached importance. That is why, at the beginning of Meiji-era, the education for knowledge was regarded as important first of all. Japanese people thought it's most important to learn Western knowledge to overtake the industrial developed Western countries. In Japanese tradition, moreover, they had not have Grecian idea, as it were, at which the physical beauty was glorified. I would say such idea were not in the Orient tradition, whether in Confucianism or in Buddhism. In Confucianism, they set literary arts against military, and emphasized the former. In Buddhism also, the body is a place of passage that must disappear some day.

Even in today's Japan, comparing the students who are good at sports but poor at study with the students who are good at study but poor at sports, the latter would be admired without arguing, even though such idea have been changing little by little in these days.

In this meaning, we can say there were no idea of "physical education" clearly in Japanese tradition, and the Orient also: to strive for promoting health and improvement of physical strength through a rational practice of exercises. Physical education in Japan started with Westernization since Meiji-era.

6 . Introduction of physical education to school.

In 1878, 10 years after the Meiji Restoration, Ministry of Education established the institute of

physical exercises to train teachers of physical education, and invited the American surgeon Dr. George A. Lealand, who is credited with formally introducing tennis in Japan. Method of physical education which he taught in Japan was called "light gymnastics", in which they used light implements as dumbbells and clubs, etc. More than twenty students learned every year at the institute. After graduation they became teachers in normal schools established in every prefecture, and undertook to spread physical education. However, this institute was abolished in April, 1886, "light gymnastics" had not been spread so much.

7. Advocacy of military-style physical fitness drills by Arinori Mori, the first minister of education.

In contrast to this, the real spread of physical education was advocated by the first minister of education, Arinori Mori, as "the quasi-military drills". Mori intended to introduce it into schooling not only for the development of physical strength, but also for "cultivation of behavior to keep order and to endure every hardship". Mori attempted to train the students' mind of order and discipline with this, and to cultivate patriotic spirit. The quasi-military drills were assigned only male students of elementary and secondary education. The contents consisted of march formation, march in parade, bayonet drill, gymnastics with apparatus, field exercises, etc. Actually in the case of elementary education, march formation and march in parade were mainly assigned.

Arinori Mori, breaking the prohibition law, went to study in England and U.S. before the Restoration, and after it, returned to join the new Meiji government, serving as envoy to America 1870-1872, to China 1875-1878, and to England 1879-1884. He was called back to be appointed minister of education in 1885, at age 38.

He was well informed of conditions in the West by the rich experiences as same as many of political leaders in Japan at that time. He laid the foundation of Japan's prewar education system at all levels, of course, including teacher training system. He thought the wealth and the military strength of a nation were the purpose of education. He thought that it was most necessary to prosper his own country to avoid the colonization by the Western countries, showing a strong consciousness of crisis during his long stay in the West. Therefore, he often made a public speech that the purpose of education had to be not for students themselves but for a nation.

8. Bad condition of physical education in elementary school and development of nationalism education.

I cannot say, however, physical education in elementary school was enough done at that time. Because the teachers graduate from normal schools weren't so many, and first of all,

pupil's clothes were almost Japanese ones which were not suitable to physical exercises. Meanwhile, parents expected for their children to be educated for more practical knowledge and skill than nation consciousness that Mori insisted. And when they had money to spare and their children had good ability, they wanted to take good marks and to pass the entrance exam for upper schools. Needless to say, there was no relation between the entrance exam and physical ability or strength.

This table is a school schedule of a elementary school in my town in 1893. You can see class of physical education had not weight so much.

| | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Moral education | Reading | Moral education | Reading | Moral education | Reading |
| 2 | Reading | Arithmetic | Reading | Arithmetic | Reading | Arithmetic |
| 3 | Calligraphy | Calligraphy | Arts and craft | Calligraphy | Calligraphy | Calligraphy |
| 4 | Arithmetic | Composition | Arithmetic | Composition | Arithmetic | |
| 5 | Composition or physical education | Singing or physical education | Composition or physical education | Singing or physical education | Composition or physical education | |

As you see, the quasi-military drills which Mori advocated to introduce could not take position in elementary school. But the nationalism education which Mori intended had ruled over Japanese education at all level. Moral education and others rather than physical education were effective for it. And the idea that the purpose of education was to make the people loyal to the Emperor and the state, became a general idea which the people could not doubt, and most teachers also had never questions of it.

9. Excursion and athletic meet.

However it might sound curious, we can say that the quasi-military drills which Mori advocated to introduce had resulted in excursion and athletic meet in elementary school. In

those days most elementary schools didn't have a schoolyard that many pupils could play all at once. So, the quasi-military drills had inevitably to be the march on the road to the field they could make exercises all together, such as the precincts of a shrine or the top of a small hill. This was happy excursion as recreation for both pupils and teachers. More physical activities had resulted in an athletic meet which held one or two times in a year as a local event. It was a happy event for country people who didn't have enough amusements. At the same time, especially in the countryside, elementary school began to play the role of a center of culture in its district.

These athletic meets have been done in all schools, since around the time when Japan was left out the crisis of colonization, and contrarily became a member of imperialism countries to colonize the neighbor, Korea. It was parallel with spread of the thought of recreation into the people during their life becoming comfortable. On the other hand, it means that most schools had a schoolyard to do athletic meets, and that Western clothes began to be popularized among the people.

10. The way to the revival of traditional military arts.

To the contray, Japanese rulers began to feel another crisis of individualism growing among the people with the new conditions. They exclaimed again to bring up national morality to keep the people from "bad influence" of Western individualism. In this process, traditional military arts, *judo* and *kendo* (Japanese fencing), which had been ignored until then, came to be reconsidered.

When we think of physical education at beginning of modern Japan, we have to think about four parts; general gymnastics for health, military-style physical fitness drills (quasi-military drills), traditional military arts, and modern sports imported from the West. But, as I mentioned above, sports and traditional military arts were hardly introduced into elementary school. This situation was a little different above secondary school. At elementary school, they thought that *judo* and *kendo* were too hard and sports as game were not educational. In addition, there was another more actual reason why it was difficult economically to prepare the instruments of these sports and military arts for pupils.

At secondary school, also, it was rather late that traditional military arts were placed on the regular curriculum. Even Arinori Mori, an earnest nationalist, criticized their educational meaning, as he said "By a sword, a man can keep only his own body from one enemy." He would have a smell of essential individualism from them. Not only this, some doctors made a question for *judo* if it was suitable for well-balanced physical development.

In this reason, sports and military arts had been progressed in club activities of

extracurriculum even above secondary school. However, especially when the trend of individualism spread in the students above secondary school, teachers felt it as crisis, and noticed that such club activities had useful value to prevent those trend. The ethics of uncritical loyalty to the authority and strict discipline which had been formed in such sports clubs, agreed with the demand of rulers in those days.

In 1911, at last, traditional military arts were placed on the regular curriculum of secondary school as an elective subject. At elementary school, however, they weren't yet, and even at secondary school, they became compulsory still later, for the criticism depend on medical rationalism was still deeply rooted.

11. Militarism and promotion of physical education.

On the contrary, Swedish gymnastics exercises introduced through the United States were widely practiced in most schools. It was very rational and systematic exercises on the basis of physiology. Spread of it in Japan at that time, however, backed the tendency of nationalism which rose in the world before and after World War I. Physical education to bring up strong soldiers, which Mori had desired but not developed enough, spread out on a full scale from those days. Quasi-military drills were advocated loudly again. In 1931, the year or beginnig real invasion to China, traditional military arts (*judo* and *kendo*) were made compulsory above secondary schools to "cultivate a national spirit". Physical education was painted out with one colour of militarism. At elementary school also, traditional military arts were made compulsory in fifth and sixth grade, in 1941, the year of declaring the War upon the United States.

12. The defeat of World War II and democratic reforms of education.

Defeat in 1945 and reforms by the Occupation of the Allied Forces had great influences on Japan thereafter. The new Constitution asserted fundamental human rights, and to receive education became one of the rights in contrast to the duty to the Emperor in prewar era. The United States Education Mission, which came to Japan after half a year of the defeat, criticized the education had been blindly devoted to the aim of a nation only, and recommended the education after this had to be more democratic one to respect children's individuality. The reform after the War were conducted in line with it. That means, the idea of education was turned in a 180-degree arc. Most people welcomed it, and the educational foundation of economic development today was built on this concept.

At physical education also, of course, demilitarization or democratization was done: exclusion of military contents, stop of teaching traditional military arts, decline of position of gymnastics exercises, and introduction of team sports, etc. They thought sportsmanship and spirit of

cooperation was important for democracy. Respect for students' interest based on their individuality was demanded.

13. Economic reconstruction and centralization or standardization of education.

Economic reconstruction, taking a chance of the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and independence in 1952, made the Japanese rulers recover their self-confidence, and the centralized educational system controlled by ministry of education was revived. Democratic education which the United States Education Mission had recommended was changed subtly, too. The revival of traditional military arts in physical education was one of the expressions.

Standardization of education in Japan became dominant in this way. But, we should pay the attention to that the source of such standardization did not only depended on the policies of centralization by the government.

Democratization of postwar necessarily pushed forward the people's consciousness of equality. Anybody liberated his own desire and began to run after more comfortable life. The war brings the consciousness of equality to the people in a sense. On the battlefield, anyone who received only primary education, secondary education, and even higher education, were equally laid themselves to the attack of enemies. Within Japan also, people were bombed out equally by the U.S. forces. No, just in cities where rather rich people of higher education career generally lived, they had to receive more miserable damage. On these conditions, postwar democratization was proceeded. For example, liberation of farmland, which was one of the various democratic reforms directed by the United States, relieved poor farmers and contributed to equalization at farm villages. Parallel with economic reconstruction, the ratio of students going on to upper schools rose gradually, and this made a contribution to the high economic growth reversely, which accelerated to go up the ratio more rapidly on the other hand.

Going up the ratio necessarily makes hard competition of entrance exam. The study only for it becomes the most concerned matter for parents, children, and teachers. First of all, it's necessary to make efforts steadily for a long time to triumph over long-term competition for entrance exam. In this process, the control is more important than the liberty indispensable to develop students, individuality. Japanese punctiliousness by nature makes it possible, and accelerates it more.

Japanese education has not produced any geniuses as Picasso and Dali, but it has been useful to secure comparatively high intellectual level of the people. And not only school ability but also mentality formed in such education have brought up people who devote themselves to a company, and the economic development in Japan.

14. Economic prosperity and the problems of education and physical education today.

Japanese people's desire to escape from poverty and to make a economic wealthy country as soon as possible - to escape from the misery of the War in a short term, and to admire the Western developed countries since the Meiji Restoration in 1868 in a long term, - was satisfied by high economic growth since 1960s. But, after around 1975 when Japan made economic prosperity and became a number of developed countries, various educational problems have ironically broken out. In a word, it is decline of eagerness to learn; loss of diligence.

It has been taken up that the problems of the children well-nourished but poor in physical strength, and the children lacking in spiritual strength. Physical education is expected again as a countermeasure of these problems and shows its function. In the hard controlled education in Japan, we can say physical education play the role to strengthen the uniform and conservative character.

(1992年12月22日受理)

REFERENCES

- Katagiri, Yoshio. (1988) The Positions and Roles of Teachers in Japan: The Present and the Past (Conference papers for the 10th Session of the ISCHE, Joensuu 25-28 July 1988, Finland).
- Katagiri, Yoshio. (1991) Japanese Education in the Development of Economics (The Bulletin of Aichi University of Education, Vol. 40. Japan).
- Kinoshita, Hideaki. (1970) Sports no Kindai Nihonshi (Modern Japanese History of Sports) (Tokyo, Kyorin shoin)
- Mizuno, Tadafumi. et al. (1966) Taiikushi gaisetsu (An Outline of History of Physical Education) (Tokyo, Taiiku no kagakusha).
- Nakamori, Shiro. (1977) Kodomo no hattatsu to karada no kyoiku (Children's Development and Education for the Body) (Tokyo, Aoki shoten)
- Takenoshita, Kyuzo. & Kishino, Yuzo. (1983) Kindai Nippon Gakko Taiikushi (History of Physical Education at School in Modern Japan) (Tokyo, Nippon tosho center).
- Wada, Masashi. (1991) Kodomo ga mita sekai no taiiku jugyo (Physical Education in the World as seen by Japanese Children) (Tokyo, Taishukan).
- Whiting, Robert. (1977) The Chrysanthemum and the Bat (Tokyo, The Permanent Press).

(This paper is based on my presentation at 14th Session of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education, ISCHE XIV, 3rd-6th September, 1992, Barcelona.)