

IJACT18-4-19

A Study on Military-style gymnastics and Its Adoption in Public Schools in Late Chosun dynasty

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Abstract

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, Among those of the Northeast Asia three countries, school physical education and military-style gymnastics of Chosun can be regarded as having been the most nationalistic.

The adoption of modern physical education in public schools was from the proclamation of 'the Order on Building the Country through Education' by King Gojong in February 1895. This paper intends to examine the process of adopting military-style gymnastics education which played the central role in school physical education in the late Chosun period.

But, unlike the common guess that military-style gymnastics in public schools in late Chosun would have been full of patriotism and nationalism, the textbooks and teaching contents of Chosun Military Officers' School were very similar to those of Japan, which is an unexpected fact. Therefore, Chosun decided to accept the Japanese-type military-style gymnastics and military training to improve physical strength of youngsters and military power.

The fact that, with the advent of modern education, physical education was emphasized above all else has a very important meaning to the history of Korean physical education. Physical activity education emerged as a major education course which had been unthinkable in previous ages. The second characteristics is that the process of adopting military-style gymnastics and its contents were influenced by Japan. Third, even if military-style gymnastics was imported from Japan as part of school physical education course in late Chosun period, its aim was to train military man powers for the independence movement against Japan, rather than to develop harmonious body.

Keywords: *physical education in early modern Korea, adoption of Military Gymnastic, independence movement, school discipline*

1. Preface

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the three countries in Northeast Asia, Korea [Chosun], China, and Japan, threatened by the demand of opening their doors by Western powers, began to adopt modern culture and products of the West, and change their political and educational systems. In adopting Western educational systems, what those three countries responded most quickly among all education systems is the very physical education. It was due to the fact that, after experiencing military powers of Western countries, they felt that it as necessary to adopt physical education to protect their countries and strengthening their soldiers, and to improve physical power of young people who would be soldiers in the future.

Among those of the three countries, school physical education and military-style gymnastics of Chosun can be regarded as having been the most nationalistic. Japan was the first in modernizing itself in Western style, and, recognizing the importance of physical education to strengthen defence power, it adopted physical education including military-style gymnastics. However, as the aim of strengthening army of Japan was on invading other countries, rather than defending itself or resisting against invasion, the physical education has militaristic character, rather than nationalistic one.

Ever since the Opium War, China had been in crisis among Western powers, but, was not in the crisis of losing the sovereignty, and the military forces of Yuán Shì Kǎi (袁世凱) were still strong. Rather, the not-very-successful Xinhai Revolution in 1911 caused the domestic situation to be unstable. At any rate, China at that time did not need to depend on school physical education to strengthen its military forces. So, in the process of adopting modern physical education in China, patriotism was emphasized to terminate domestic and external chaos. Therefore, the time when physical education became a regular course in China was 1903, and the time when it became an essential course was 1922, later than the cases of Korea.

On the contrary, in late 19th century, Chosun was in danger of losing its sovereignty following the Eulmi Accident in 1895 and the Escape of King to the Russian Consulate in 1896. Volunteer armies were formed in various regions to protect national sovereignty, and Chosun needed to strengthen its military forces to protect the national independence and royal authority. And, under the supervision of foreign countries, the only way to strengthen its military forces was physical education in school.[1]

Accordingly, school physical education in those days was performed for educational modernization and practices of physical education course caused by the royal order on school. However, it was actually military drill process to strengthen physical power of young people and supply strong soldiers in the future.

The period in Korea is characterised by efforts trying to establish a self-reliant modern state while introducing modern for being strengthened by means of education, and physical education as a part of the education was taking on strong nationalistic characters as needed by the situation of the times. such characters were represented in various aspects. military gymnastics was educated at Korea modern school, and especially students in schools managed by patriots were trained to make their inspired with the independence spirit.[7]

This paper intends to examine the process of adopting military-style gymnastics education which played the central role in school physical education in the late Chosun period. Contents and textbooks on military-style gymnastics adopted in those days were very similar to those of Japan, and Korean traditional martial arts were not reflected on them. This paper reveals that graduates of Army Officers School who were influenced by the Japanese-type military-style gymnastics education in early days worked as gymnastics teachers of national schools, and that, after the Chosun army was disbanded in 1907, they became volunteer soldiers against Japan, or moved to private schools as physical education teachers. And, those physical education teachers led anti-Japan movement.

2. Physical education course becoming a regular course

It cannot be denied that school education in late Chosun period too much emphasized nationalism. In those days, In the crisis of losing national independence, reformers, patriots including King Gojong and common people wanted to implement physical education to strengthen the army and protect national independence.

2.1 Advent of 'Gymnastics' course in national schools

The adoption of modern physical education in state-built national schools was from the proclamation of 'the Order on Building the Country through Education' by King Gojong in February 1895. The king emphasized three principles of education: cultivation of virtue, cultivation of physical strength, and cultivation of knowledge. Among them, he emphasized the importance of cultivation of physical strength. And, in that year, the government founded the national school, Hanseong Normal School, and adopted 'Gymnastics Course' (In those days, it meant physical education.) as a regular course.

Article 4 of the School Rules of Hanseong Normal School, announced in July 1895 emphasized the importance of physical education: "Physical health is the basis of study, so, students need to be careful of their hygiene, and promote their health through gymnastics." [2] By that, physical education as part of modern education began. On August, elementary school did too, After that military style gymnastics was taught in Foreign Language School too.

It was the momentum by which military-style gymnastics performed in the special army and private schools entered into school physical education. However, even if gymnastics became a regular course in national school, textbooks, facilities, and teachers were not prepared properly.

2.2 Beginning of military-style gymnastics activities within gymnastics course

According to School Rules of Hanseong Normal School, 'Gymnastics' is regular course, and in the standard program (2-year program), 'Gymnastics' course consisted of common gymnastics and military-style gymnastics, and, in the short program (6-month program), it consisted only of common gymnastics. What is important is that in that school, 'Gymnastics' is the essential course, and the rules clearly designated common gymnastics and military-style gymnastics as activities of 'Gymnastics' course. [3]

In summary, 'Gymnastics' course became a regular course in 1895, and, In July and August of that year, it appeared in the gymnastics curriculum in national and public schools. Military-style gymnastics was officially adopted in school curriculum

Military-style gymnastics played the central role in school gymnastics in the period from the proclamation of the first Korean school system in 1895 to the revision of School Order in 1909. In particular, military-style gymnastics was mainly taught in middle and high schools. [4]

3. Advent Military-style gymnastics imported from Japan

3.1 Foundation of the military training in Chosun and drill master Horimoto

As mentioned before, in the background of why 'Gymnastics' was adopted as a regular course and why military-style gymnastics was included in the 'Gymnastics' course in national school in the same year when the Education Order was proclaimed, there was urgent need of Chosun which wanted to make its nation and army strong. However, there was also the influence of Japanese advisers who intervened in the making of the Education Order.

In those days, as early as 1886, Japan already had 'Gymnastics' course in school curriculum, and military-style gymnastics and common gymnastics were distributed. Subsequently, Japanese advisers participated in designing the School Order of Chosun, trying to transplant Japanese-style modernization to Chosun. Actually, the goals and teaching contents of 'Gymnastics' course prescribed in those days were very similar to those of Japan.

We can find out that Chosun adopted Japan's military-style gymnastics without changes, In as early as 1881, Japan already started modern military training, and the program taught soldiers and military cadets close-order drill, military theories, and method of using gun. And, to improve physical power, it also taught gymnastics.

The time when modern military training was performed for the first time in Chosun was also 1881. At that time, the Military Training Group was established in Chosun, and it performed modern military training

to soldiers and military cadets until June 1882. Drill master was Horimoto from Japan.

3.2 Introduction of military-style gymnastics by Chosun students dispatched to Japan

In the similar period, military-style gymnastics was introduced by Chosun students dispatched to Japan. Among those dispatched to Japan as diplomats to Japan in 1881, Jang Dae-yong and Shin Bok-mo entered Japan Army School. Later, they returned to Chosun, and served as military drill master, training about 1,000 Chosun soldiers. Subsequently, 14 youngsters including Seo Jae-pil entered Japan Army School, being trained as military cadets.[5]

As described above, military-style gymnastics was adopted as the method of training soldiers in Chosun owing to the foundation of modern army in Chosun and students dispatched to Japan in the 1880s. And, in the early 1890s, some Christian schools opened the gymnastics course, and taught military-style gymnastics as part of that course

3.3 Textbooks of Chosun Military Officers' School

Most of drill masters in Chosun Military Officers' School founded in 1898 and Yeonseong School founded in 1904 had been educated on military-style gymnastics in Japan. and, the textbooks used in Chosun Military Officers' School were not very different from *Guidebook on Foot Soldiers* and *Instructions on Gymnastics*, textbooks of Japan Army School. Training contents identifiable on records and textbooks of Chosun Military Officers' School are almost the same.[6] For example, the title of the textbook used in Chosun Military Officers' School was *Instructions on Gymnastics*. The contents of the book are roughly divided into two parts: flexible gymnastics and heavy gymnastics. The former consists of stand-still exercise, movement exercise, and total exercise. The latter consists of common exercise, applied exercise, and special exercise.

And, contents of *Guidebook on Foot Soldiers* published in Chosun in 1989 consists of individual training, platoon training, company training, battalion training, regiment training, and brigade training, similar to those in the Japanese textbook. We can conclude that the textbooks of Japan Army School were used in Chosun, and teaching contents were also very similar.

3.4 Education of military-style gymnastics in public schools by graduates of Chosun Military Officers' School

After 1900, graduates of Chosun Military Officers' School were dispatched to public schools as gymnastics teachers. Then, we can guess that the education given by those graduates may have been similar to that given in Japanese schools.

Papers of Sagong Hill[7] and Kim Seong Hak[8] list the names of graduates of Chosun Military Officers' School who worked as teachers in public schools. Sagong listed 14, and Kim listed 21 who were dispatched to foreign language schools and middle schools to teach gymnastics. Their researches show that, from 1901 when the first graduates of Chosun Military Officers' School were released to 1906 which was the last year when education of military-style gymnastics was possible, military-style gymnastics in public schools in late Chosun was took charge of mostly by graduates of Chosun Military Officers' School.

Military gymnastics was eliminated from national and public schools and spread throughout private schools after 1907. It was in order to meet the demands of Chosun's that military gymnastics was carried out in almost all private schools. And military gymnastics played a role in unifying Korean society and under the king and raising brave fighters to restore national rights. [8]

In summary, unlike the common guess that military-style gymnastics in public schools in late Chosun would have been full of patriotism and nationalism, the textbooks and teaching contents of Chosun Military Officers' School were very similar to those of Japan, which is an unexpected fact.

In those days, Chosun had to adopt modern military training methods as soon as possible to protect its

independence. Japan had already imported such methods from Germany and France, and applied to school teaching. Therefore, Chosun decided to accept the Japanese-type military-style gymnastics and military training to improve physical strength of youngsters and military power.

In summary, military-style gymnastics adopted and imported from Japan in 1881 caused students of Chosun Military Officers' School founded in 1898 to receive Japanese-type military-style gymnastics education. And the graduates of Chosun Military Officers' School taught military-style gymnastics to public school students until 1907 when the Japanese Authorities prohibited military-style gymnastics education in Chosun public schools and revised the rules to select gymnastics teachers. And, after the Japanese Authorities disbanded the Chosun Army in 1907, those graduates either became volunteer soldiers fighting against Japan or gymnastics teachers in private schools.

Military-style gymnastics education in early days which we can assume from remaining documents is similar to that of Japan. However, the contents of education in real teaching-learning process must have been patriotic. gymnastic education in early modern Korea. so deal with the process of military style-gymnastics between 1895, when modern public school in Korea was first established, and 1910, when Korea was deprived of its sovereignty by Japan.

The main idea of military style-gymnastics came from the consciousness of crisis caused by the threat of the Japanese aggression. At that time, Koreans realized the importance of physical education by this crisis consciousness. And Korean people was interested in physical education that they could not think of in traditional education. This Gymnastic class was much more like military training and has a patriotic character. [9]

So, we need to understand the influence of Military-style gymnastics on Korean physical education. the previous approach can be an obstacle in recognizing the history of Korea modern sports by the nationalistic point of view.[10]

4. Conclusion

The Order on Building the Country through Education' by King Gojong in February 1895 was the proclamation of modernization of Chosun's education. And, unlike the case of old days when physical education had been ignored, people paid attention to physical education, and 'Gymnastics' was adopted as a regular course in school education. It was because of the recognition among leaders that it was urgent to improve physical force of people and cultivate military man power in future army.

For example, in 1896, students in public foreign language school demonstrated military-style gymnastics before King Gojong who escaped to the Russian Consulate. In 1897, they did gun-carrying training and military-style gymnastics before King Gojong and the crown prince who had returned to their palace. Those demonstrations were to show that the royal power was still strong amid pressures of strong powers, and to integrate members of the society. Military-style gymnastics was used to show that Chosun is strong, and spread the conception that physical exercise is linked with protection of national sovereignty and improvement of military forces.

The fact that, with the advent of modern education, physical education was emphasized above all else has a very important meaning to the history of Korean physical education. Physical activity education emerged as a major education course which had been unthinkable in previous ages.

The second characteristics is that the process of adopting military-style gymnastics and its contents were influenced by Japan. In 1881, Chosun invited a Japanese drill master to teach Chosun soldiers. And, the government sent some students to Japan, and some of them went to Japan Army School who later became officers in Chosun Military Officers' School. And, textbooks and teaching contents used in the school were similar to those of Japan. And graduates from Chosun Military Officers' School who received Japanese-type military-style gymnastics education became teachers in public schools and private schools. As described up to now, military-style gymnastics imported from Japan became important contents of education in Chosun.

Third, even if military-style gymnastics was imported from Japan as part of school physical education

course in late Chosun period, its aim was to train military man powers for the independence movement against Japan, rather than to develop harmonious body. If we call the Japan's military-style gymnastics as militaristic one, the Chosun version was the one to defend the country from Japan.

However, there were some problems in military-style gymnastics in late Chosun. First, the military collective training called military-style gymnastics influenced school education to be characterized by military disciplines. In later years, such military characteristics in school education continued by the courses like 'School Training' adopted in excuse of military confrontation with North Korea and the governments led by former military officers.

Next, it is sad that when modern physical education was adopted in school for the first time in Korean history, the basis of independent and Korea-unique physical education was not established. It is sad that Korean traditional martial art was not included in the textbook, nor used in student training. If such martial art had been included, military-style gymnastics would have been proud tradition of modern physical education and remained for a long time in the history of school physical education history.

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