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A Study on the Characteristics of the Sports Meeting during the late Chosun Period

Kim Youn Soo, Shin Eui Yun*, Kim Dae Sung

Assistant professor, Dept. of Exercise Rehabilitation, Hanil Univ, Korea
wkucampus@hanmai.net, yilian@hanmail.net, ds04211@naver.com

Abstract

It is true that early Chosun's sports meeting was influenced by Japan and the West. However, the positive nature of Chosun's sports meeting development cannot be underestimated just because it was influenced by the outsiders. It is remarkable achievement for those enlightened people at those time to promote and influenced Korean people to strengthened their nationalistic and patriotic spirit through sports meetings.

Keywords: *the end of Chosun, sports meeting, Nationalistic Characteristics, Private-led, Government led.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The study targets all sports meeting held between April 18, 1895 to August 29, 1910, when Korea was under Japanese rule. Since King Gojong proclaimed the Korean Empire in 1897, I think it is reasonable to regard this period as the late Chosun Dynasty, not just as Korean Empire.

Recently, there was a controversy in sports history about Korea's first sports meeting. However, according to Son Hwan · Park Sang Seok (2009), this controversy has been settled since "A study on the first sports meeting(undonghoe) in Korea" about 10 years ago. And Korea's first sports meeting was recognized on April 18, 1895. However, the first sports meeting can be more precisely measured if there are more recent or earlier documents than expected. So I think it is important to look at the nature of the event rather than the time of the first meeting.

In 1895, King Gojong organized the 'The Order on Building the Country Through Education' to strengthened the physical, moral and intellectual education. This was an epoch event in Korea's tradition of not focusing on physical activities. At that time, however, the restoration of national sovereignty and military reinforcement were very important under the oppression of Japanese rule. So, from school, a class called 'Gymnastics' started to took place. However, the physical education class at this time was primarily a military-style gymnastics, not a modern physical activity. [1] Nevertheless, during this period, school sports communicated with society on the occasion of sports meetings, becoming as important event for the spread of modern sports from the west at the end of the Chosun Dynasty.

In this paper, we tried to present a new view base on the existing sports meeting classification from the existing research findings. Also, we wanted to find out the characteristics of sports meetings for each period. This study was carried out as a documental research, using historical analytical method.

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Corresponding Author : yilian@hanmail.net

Tel:+82-63-230-5400

Author's affiliation

Assistant professor, Dept. of Exercise Rehabilitation, Hanil Univ, Korea, assistant professor

2. HISTORICAL DISCUSSION ON KOREA'S FIRST SPORTS MEETING

To this day, the Korean sports history recognizes the sports meeting held in April 1895 at Ul-mi Uisuk, which was recorded by a Kim Yun Sik's diary. Na Soon Sung's *History of Korean Athletic Events* (1958) claimed that Hwaryu-hoe, a public English school held the first sports meeting on May 2, 1896, cited from the Independent newspaper article published on May 5, 1896. And in more than 50 years, Na Soon Sung's first Korean sports meeting which was held in 1896 was recognized as the orthodoxy of the Korean sports history academic community. Na Soon Sung claimed the same theory in *the History of Korean Sports Studies* (1981). Lee Hak Rae also agreed with Na Soon Sung's claim to the first sports meeting in *Korea Sports History* (1994) and *History of Korea Sports 100 Years* (2001). Lee Hak Rae also reaffirmed that the English school Hwaryu-hoe held the first sports meeting at Sam-Sun Pyong in Seoul on May 2, 1896,

However, Lee Tae Woong opposed the claimed of his academic seniors in his paper "A Different View on the First School Sports Festival (Undonghwe) Held at the End of Chosun Dynasty" (2005) [2]. He said that on May 2, 1896, school sports meeting at the English school could not be the first sports Meeting because it only used the name 'Hwaryu-hoe'. And Lee Tae Woong claimed that the association of public primary schools sporting on May 31, 1896 using the formal name of 'sports meeting' was the first sports meeting in Korea. Lee Tae Woong's opinion is not contrary to logic. However, sports meeting cannot be judged by its name alone, nor by its actual activity.

Then in 2009, Son Hwan · Park Sang Seok (2009) found out in Kim Yun Sik's diary, at the 'Ul-mi Uisuk', that Korea's first sports meeting was held on April 18, 1895. The diary is from Kim Yun Sik written from 1887 to 1921. Now it is transformed into a books intitled *um-cheng history 陰晴史* and *suk um-sheng history 續陰晴史*. The book described several domestic and international events, including from Chosun's Donghak Peasant Movement to March 1 Independence Movement. Here's an excerpt of Kim Yun Sik's diary related to the sports meeting.

"十八日, 己未陰微雨, 午後大風, 今日乙未義塾六處學徒三百餘名, 會于訓練院, 設大運動會, 余往觀之 " On the 18th, it rained to Ul-mi Uisuk and there was a big wind in the afternoon. Today, about 300 students from six department gathered at Ul-mi Uisuk training center and held 'Undonghwe', so I went to see it.

It is clear from this document that the term 'Undonghwe' appears and in Ul-mi uisuk, about 300 students participated in the sports meeting. More than half of the funding for the establishment of the school called Ul-mi Uisuk a Japanese language school was coming from Japanese government the rest were paid by the Chosun government. So the term '運動會 Undonghwe' which was held in Ul-mi Uisuk was coming from a Japanese word, and the Japanese teachers would organized a Japanese-style sports meeting. Therefore, it is likely that activities related to sports events will be similar to those that were popular in Japan. Japan's first sports meeting started with the name 'Competition Party'. However, it was called 'Undonghwe' at the University of Tokyo on June 16, 1883. Then, from 1886 in Japan, 'a primary school order' was distributed and 'Gymnastics' class became a regular subject of the Japanese primary school. In the 1890s in Japan, the scale and frequency of athletic events became more and more important event in Japanese schools. [3] In fact, even in Japan at the time, the term "運動會 Undonghwe" was being used for sports meeting. In fact, a previous study also mentioned the name of a school called 'Gymnastics' in Chosun, which had been adopted from Japan. So the term and content of the late Chosun military-style gymnastics were introduced from Japan, contrary to speculation that patriotic nationalist elements might have been added. And the textbooks and contents of Chosun Army Military Academy were similar to those of Japanese at the time. [4]

However, it cannot be completely ignored that Na Soon Sung and Lee Hak Rae claimed that Hwaryu-hoe of the public English school in 1896 was the first sports meeting of Chosun period. Hutchison, an English teacher, led the sports activities of Hwaryu-hoe. At that time, Hutchison (W. F. Hutchison), an English teacher of the Yook Young Public Education School, arrived in 1886 and devoted himself to modern sports distribution in Chosun. As the Yook Young Public Education School was transformed into a public English school,

Hutchison continued to work at the school, emphasizing physical activities of the students. At the time, Hutchison has a special interest in athletics and gymnastics. In 1896, he invited the British a naval officer to teach his students how to exercise their military exercises for two years[5]. Although Hutchison did not use the name 'Undonghwe', it would have been a long time ago that school had conducted practical school sports meetings for students. There is no denying that there was a direct Western influenced led by foreign English teachers such as Hutchison himself as the starting point of Korea's school sports meeting.

Therefore, Eulmi-suk's term 'Undonghwe' was considered the first sports meeting of the Chosun Dynasty, it appears to have come from the term held in Japan. However, I don't used the term 'Undonghwe' in this paper. Even at Physical education in Christian schools in Korea sports meeting has continued ever since the 1880s .

Therefore, in this study, we emphasized the term of the general concept of sports meeting as marked 'sports meeting', while the term of sports meeting as the term influenced by Japan as termed 'Undonghwe'.

3. DIVISION OF SPORTS MEETING AT THE END OF CHOSUN

The school sports meeting is a representative of school sports event that has continued so far. There is not too much to say that the Korean sports meeting started and ended with the Korean Empire period. No one expected the sports meeting was developed so much at the late Chosun. Chosun had neglected the physical movement of the body rather focus confucianism tradition.

Generally, I think that the Korean sports meetings was strongly develop this way due to the physical activity for the restoration and to claim the national sovereignty, promote national unity among Korean people against the Japanese rule in the country. So many people think that the sports meeting at that time had only a strong nationalist character. But if you look at it specifically, it has much more diverse characteristic such as being nationalistic, patriotic, festive, and being a loyal to the country.

Park Sang Seok tabulates the current status of sports meeting in his doctoral dissertation, *The Scenery of Sports Meeting at Late Chosun Dynasty*. The first sports event, from the 1895 until to Korea-Japan annexation of Korea in 1910, was organized as shown in three Table below. According to the report, the number of sports events held increased gradually from 1895 to 1899 until it was rarely held from 1900 to 1904, but suddenly have been held four in 1905. Instead, it has been held 54 times since 1906, 161 times in 1908, and 76 times in 1910, the year when Korea-Japan Annexation was established. [6]

And Park Sang Seok divides the athletic meeting into three periods. However, there is no explanation as to why the period should be distinguished than the increase or decrease of the numbers of sports events held during those time. Byeon Seong-Ho also categorically divided the sports meeting into two category National led sport meeting from 1895-1899 and the Private school led meeting 1905 and 1910. [7] However, I believed their way of dividing the sport meeting is meaningful. I believe by doing this is the basis for identifying the resources of funds and intentions of these sports meetings. After 1905, there was a mix of government and private-led sports. Moreover, there are more private-led sports events held during that time. After 1905, it was a time when tension of between Korean Empire and Japanese government became intense that made the sports meeting with different goals. So it cannot be said that the private-led sports meeting during this period was all nationalistic and patriotic. Because there were festivities and local characteristics. Kim Seong Hak (2009,2011,2013) has three papers in this field. Kim Seong Hak has divided the sports meeting between before and after the signing of 'Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905.

the number of sports meetings took place with the historical and political situation. In this paper, the year that became the biggest significant point during the division was 1905. 1905 is the year when 'Japan-Korea Treaty' was signed. In fact, 'Japan-Korea Treaty' was not suddenly signed in November 1905. On February 23, 1904, after the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, the Korean Parliament was forced to sign. It was a time when Japan began to take over the independent sovereignty of Chosun.

3.1 acceptance period (1895-1899): government-led sports meeting

For In 1895, the first sports meeting was held in Eul-mi uisuk, where Japanese has been taught, and in 1896 a sports meeting led by Hutchison, an English teacher, was held named "Hwaryu-hoe" by a government English school. In 1897, King Gojong was proclaimed and ascended to the throne. During his term, various systems and modern cultures were presented to show the power of the Korean Empire and as King. Therefore, the sports meeting was a way to show the people how to restore national power under Japanese colonial rule. So the sports meeting at the time was a politically meaningful activity led by the government.

If the ul-mi uisuk '運動會Undonghwe' in 1895 was held under the influence of Japan, it can be seen that many Western elements were reflected in the government-led sports meeting from 1896 to 1899, which was led by the government. Those who attended the event as guests and the organizers of the sports meeting were mostly government ministers or Westerners. These Westerners were either teachers of a government-run foreign language school or diplomatic missions in the West. The sports meeting was draped with insignia and national flags representing the royal dignity, and national flags of each country were also erected. Modern military bands played Western music. Songs symbolizing loyalty and patriotism were also sung, including national anthem, celebratory song, independence song and military song.

However, it was the audience of Chosun that broke down the character of all these sports meeting at once. For them, the sports meeting was a festival, and it became an opportunity to learn the spirit of patriotism and the spirit of modern enlightenment. In addition, the sports meeting played a crucial role in the spread of school sports to social sports. Later, these audiences became the fund contributor and social support for the event to be held in privately led provinces as the government-led movement was pushed to its limits. Since 1905, these audiences have been actively participated and supported these privately led sports meetings.

3.2 The Standstill Period (1900-1904)

It was in 1905 that a large scale government-led sports meeting reappear after a long disappearance after 1899. According to Table 1 of the above Park Sang Seok, there were one sports meeting in 1900, 1901 and 1902, but there was no sports meeting held in 1903 and 1904. Then the sports meeting was held again in 1905. Officially, the Korean government-Japanese Language School in Incheon held two sports meeting which was in 1900 and 1902, according to the 'Hwangseong Newspaper'. [7]

Originally in 1896, King Gojong returned to the palace again after the Agwan Pacheon incident (when king Gojong hide to Russian Embassy), declaring the Korean Empire in 1897 and trying to strengthen his royal authority, and in the process of making an independent country, However, after King Gojong seized absolute power for a while since August 1899, he no longer felt the need to focus on making felt his authority.

However, in my opinion the biggest reason is the lack of financial resources that can handle the expenses to hold big government-led sports meeting, which has happened from 1987; large numbers of people participated in sports meetings when a government distributes a some expensive souvenirs and foreign products to them. In addition, since there were no organizations in-charge to lead the Physical Education policies at that time that will guide the sport meeting; therefore the decision to hold a sports meeting was made according to the needs of the imperial court. One of the reasons why the initial sports meeting did not last long.

Finally, the Korean Empire's modernization of sports policy did not have any real impact to the people, so the government has not been able to sustained to hold a large sports meeting in the mid of danger over the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War and the strong political pressure of Japan.

3.3 The Golden day of Private-led Sports Meeting (1905-1910)

As mentioned in the table above, the number of sports meetings are different. The reason why their number

of sports meetings are different is because of the different data that whether or not they included sports meetings organized by community-led sports meeting or government-led sports meeting. However, the number of annual events shown by these studies is of great help to understand the changing trend at the end Chosun sports meeting.

After 1905, the sports meeting can be largely divided into just government-led and private school-led sports meeting. Since then, the number of sports meetings held in Seoul as well as in provincial areas has exploded. The number of sports meetings in local private schools is higher than in central government schools. Since then, Koreans have not believed in public education under Japanese colonial rule that led to the establishment of many small-scale local private schools with strong nationalistic mission. As there are many more schools; naturally, the number of sports meeting has also increased.

At the same time, the government-led association of public and private schools sports meeting in Seoul has been revived. This includes King Gojong and government intention to regroup national power and royal authority, which have weakened since the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905.

From 1905, local schools also began participating in the Seoul Public Schools sports meeting. These sports meeting have been held twice in spring and fall. During this period, the Association of Public and private Schools sports meeting was held annually until 1909. However, the Japanese have been involved in the operation of the sports meeting since 1906. Japanese officials and teachers have been members of the sports meeting. And since 1908, Japan banned local private school from participating in the government-private school movement.

In 1907 and 1908, Itō Hirobumi also participated in the sports meeting and attempted the cultural exchange through the sports meeting. However, this was opposing purpose of the first Korean Empire sports meeting. As a gradualist, Itō Hirobumi wanted to promote modern changes to Koreans through sports meetings and show Japan's prestige. So, Japan also donated money to this period's sports meeting and wanted to promote the fact that the event is being held with Japan's financial resources.

Of course, these government-led sports meeting were not the only ones held in Seoul at the time. An association sports meetings were held for private schools in Seoul. Later, after King Gojong's abdication and military disbandment, local private schools opened in each province with the aim of restoring national sovereignty. But the Chosun government also banned private school student activists on September 1, 1908 under Japanese pressure. Then, the government-organized sports meeting of Chosun gradually disappeared.

Based on Park Sang-Seok's paper on the scale of the athletic meet during this period, there have been seven sports events with more than 5,000 participants. More than 7,000 participants participated more than four times. Also, the number of sports events that 10,001 spectators is 9 times. There were more than 20,000 and as following sports meeting held so as the number of spectators increases to a hundred thousands and more. [6]

Another characteristic of the private school movement during this period is the speech. This speech is the most powerful manifestation of the nationalist character of the movement during the sports meeting. Usually after the games, the leaders of the enlightenment spoke to a large crowd of people. With a main theme of the speech was usually patriotism and restoration of national power. They also talked about the importance of physical activity.

However, not all of the sports meeting were anti-Japanese. In the case of a school in Kang-Gyeong, Japanese students and Korean students participated in the sports meeting together. In addition, the local residents paid for the sports meeting, but some Japanese donated money to the sports meeting for the purpose of forming a business district in the province. That's why it cannot be said that every sports meeting at a local private school has a nationalistic nature that aims to dishonor Japanese rule and aims for a strong anti-Japanese movement.

4. CONCLUSION

A In 1895, Korea's first school sports meeting called 'Undonghwe' was started. It started at a Japanese school called Eul-mi Uisuk, which was mainly run by Japanese funds and Japanese people. This is where we come to acknowledge that the Japanese has significant role in the establishment of the sports meeting in 1896 and it was an sports meeting named 'Hwaryu-hoe' at the Public English School. Another noticeable contribution

was from foreign English teachers from the West also provided a significant contribution through physical education at Christian schools. Although there is no historical data, that can be inferred that the modern meaning of the sports meeting has already been conducted by foreign teachers.

It was the contribution and power of the audience that has made significant impact in the expansion of the sports meeting. In addition, the power of these citizens' spectators allowed the government-led school sports to develop into private-led social sports. However, since 1900 the imperial authority has stabilized and the financial burden has increased, no sports meeting has been held.

During the period of standstill from 1900 to 1904, neither government-led public schools nor social-organization-led sports meetings were held. The reason for the four-year stagnation was that the government at the time had no political reason to hold the sport meeting at the expense of financial burden.

However, by the year 1905 to 1910, its the year of the where sports meeting was drastically growing in numbers. In this period, not only the government-led sports meeting but also the sports meeting handled by local private schools with physical education activities and festive. Private schools, whose personalities are freer than public schools, had stronger nationalistic personalities. They have also conducted military exercises necessary for the independence movement. And patriotic and enlightening tendencies were assured through speeches through sports meetings, and many visitors gathered.

In those case of sports meeting of local private schools, the event was conducted through the helped of voluntary donations. However, provinces who held sport meeting were not strictly anti-Japanese but rather just for pure physical activities and fun. Some were co-hosted by Korea and Japan and had a friendly nature with Japan. However, the basic nature of the sports meeting did not deviate from nationalism and patriotism.

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