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Physical Education and Sports in the Former Manchurian Empire

*By Kohsuke Sasajima**

Manchuria, the birthplace of the Ch'ing dynasty, had hardly attracted any attention of nations till the close of the dynasty. About the middle of the 19th century, when the dignity of the Ch'ing dynasty began to decline, European nations started advancing into China and Russia made inroads into Manchuria from the north.

Japan won the Russo-Japanese War, however, and consequently the influence of Russia, which had controlled Manchuria since the middle of the 19th century, declined notably and, in its place, Japan advanced into Manchuria.

Japan kept on expanding its influence with the Kwantung Leased Territory and the South Manchurian Railway as its base of action. As the Japanese influence grew stronger, its relations with military cliques in Manchuria were aggravated, leading to the breaking out of the Manchuria Incident in 1931, and the next year Manchoukuo was founded.

Japan had intended to govern Manchuria by making Manchoukuo independent, so, though there existed the Manchoukuoan Government, the real ruler was the Japanese army in Manchoukuo. On December 1, 1938, Japanese extra-territoriality was abolished, but the privileged status of the Japanese remained unchanged and the important posts of the government and other offices of the Manchoukuo were practically occupied by people of Japanese nationality.

To the dynasty of the Han race Manchuria was an out-of-the-way place beyond the Great Wall of China and, besides, the Ch'ing dynasty held its court at Peking, so that the education in Manchuria had been left out of consideration, with the result that the percentage of school attendance at the time of the founding of Manchoukuo was only 15 percent, and hardly any school facilities were worth mentioning. So physical education at school was little more than a mere name.

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As means for educating Chinese, there were schools conducted by foreigners such as Russians, Japanese and church men (missionary schools), as well as those managed by Chinese. (Russian-conducted schools were located in the Eastern Chinese Railway Zone and Japanese-managed ones in the South Manchurian Railway Zone.)

After the foundation of Manchoukuo, efforts were made for raising the percentage of school attendance and improving and expanding school facilities. As is probably known from the motives of the creation of the country, the contents of physical education at school resembled those of Japan at that time.

Until the foundation of Manchoukuo sports in Manchuria had had nothing worthy of notice. The president of the Manchurian Empire Amateur Sports Association, which was established after the creation of Manchoukuo and corresponded to the amateur sports association of Japan, was a Japanese and all the representatives of its subordinate sporting organizations were also Japanese. Thus sports in Manchoukuo developed under Japanese Guidance.

Since the founding of the country the idea that Japan and Manchoukuo were in one body was advocated, and since December 28, 1938, all Japanese players living in Manchuria were made to be treated as Manchoukuoan players according to athletes control agreements, so that Manchoukuoan sports, which were just beginning to develop, came to be completely controlled by the Japanese and opportunities for Manchoukuoan athletes to win championship series were almost gone.

Sports in Manchoukuo continued to grow through the actuation of that sports exchange between Japan and the country which was then going on constantly, while Manchoukuoan skaters participating in championship series held in Japan had a large influence upon the Japanese skaters.

Countries with which Manchoukuo played games were only Japan and China under Japanese occupation, as it was only recognized by few nations because of the motives of its foundation.

It was perhaps one of the achievements of Manchoukuo that sports grew in prosperity so rapidly after its creation, in Manchuria, where sports worthy of the name had hardly existed.

This Manchoukuo, however, became the territory of China again for the first time in 14 years since its founding because Japan was defeated in the Pacific War.