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## A Discussion on Physical Education of Chinese Girls in the Era Between Last Days of Ching Dynasty and Early Days of Republic of China

*By Kohsuke Sasajima\**

The Ching Dynasty, which came into being in the wake of the defeat in the Opium War that burst out in 1840, was prompted to push forward the westernization move after unfavorable experiences in the subsequent wars with many countries. The establishment of schools designed after the western educational system was part of this renovation, but these schools included no institutions for girls.

Reasoning that the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War was due to the very fact that Japan was so far ahead of the national education, the Ching Dynasty set out preparations to promulgate the educational system, which came into force in 1902 and 1903. At that time, however, the public thought of man being predominant over woman was still so overwhelming that the promulgated educational system did not concern the school education of girls.

With the progress in the modernization, some informed people began to advocate the necessity for girls' education, which, coupled with the fact that all the advanced countries had schools for girls, led the Ching government to the promulgation of regulations concerning schools for girls in 1907. Such schools, however, differed from those for boys in term, and only included primary and normal schools.

At any rate, the educational system intended for girls was established, which, however, never could change the stubborn "No Education for Girls" philosophy that was then deeply rooted among the public. This tendency kept the number of girls' schools from increasing beyond a 171st of boys' despite the lapse of three years after the educational system was enforced; girls going to schools were then one 150th of boys, and as many as 13 provinces had no schools for girls.

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At that time, only children of good and wealthy families could afford to go to school. Among these favored children survived the inveterate custom of foot binding tenaciously. They did go to school, but must have found themselves inadequate to physical education.

The law provided for physical education at girls' schools. In fact, however, the situation might be that it could not be performed due to the shortage of qualified teachers, as well as the fact that girls who could afford to go to school had their feet bound.

The Ching Dynasty collapsed in the 1911 Hsin-Hai Revolution, which was followed by the establishment of the Republic of China. In its early days, however, one civil war after another broke out in the wake of the struggles for power among military clans, keeping the political situation instable without sufficient educational spendings. What was worse, most battles took place in culturally developed and economically favored areas, which exerted tremendous impact on the educational field.

The Republic of China established in 1912 promulgated a new educational system in the same year, and carried coeducation into effect at elementary school level, although it was entirely for mere expedient purposes.

By and by, public understanding of the necessity for educating girls was becoming higher. But the percentage of school attendance by girls was still low, or less than 7% of that by boys. As the schools increased in number, proportionate increase in the number of unqualified teachers came to be seen. The average number of students per school stood at 37 in the elementary school and 167 in the middle school. It follows from these figures that schools existing in those days must have been small in size, with single classes per grade and poor physical facilities. The shortage of qualified teachers also might have prevented such small-scaled schools from giving physical lessons the way they wanted.

Meanwhile, mission schools were being established here and there since the Nan-Ching Treaty (1842). These schools, with their independent system and organization, had been devoted to the education of girls that was then thought little of, working energetically on the Chinese government for its expansion. Most of them, however, was at the elementary school level, many of which were very small with less than 50 pupils. However, the ratio of girls with boys in such schools were more than eight times higher than in other schools.

Unified groups of mission schools were then set up at places, but the curriculums

established by them little involved physical education. This fact might be due to the poor facilities for physical education and too small-scaled institutions that must have prevented them from holding physical education classes against their will.

So, the physical education for girls at the early days of the Republic of China might have hardly been executed at most schools, despite the law so prescribing, due to the shortage of qualified teachers and poor facilities with only a few exceptions.