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Effects on Physical Education at Schools in Republic of China of Semi-wartime and Wartime (1931–1945)

*By Kohsuke Sasajima**

It is universally the case with any nation in the world that, when a nation has entered into a wartime structure or has rushed into a war, it stands in need of powerful military forces. Accordingly, during a semi-wartime and a full-scale wartime, schools are, in conducting physical education, required to turn out prospective members, healthy and of a strong constitution, of powerful military forces.

In the Republic of China, the subjugation of the northern provinces was completed in 1928, with the result that the whole country was, at least for the time being, brought under the sole sway of the Kuomintang (the Nationalist Party). For all that, there were strong forces opposed to Chiang Kai-Shek. Particularly, the Communist Party pitted itself against him, and in so doing, it set up soviet districts in some parts of China. Chiang, for his part, succeeded in suppressing other opposing parties and thereafter proceeded to attack the Communist Party.

On the other hand, subsequently to the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Japan's advance into China became increasingly active, and the so-called Lukowkiao Incident, which occurred in July, 1937, ushered in an allout war between Japan and China. The year 1941 saw the outbreak of the Pacific War.

I will now inquire into the effect produced by the above-mentioned circumstances upon the physical education conducted at schools in accordance with the educational system promulgated by the Nationalist Government in 1928.

Following the Manchurian Incident that broke out in 1931, Japan dispatched troops to China frequently. Meanwhile the Nationalist Government pursued a policy toward Japan which stressed "resistance on the one hand and negotiations on the other."

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Furthermore, the Government made every effort to consolidate the domestic structure of the nation.

In 1928, an educational policy characterized by an anti-Japanese coloring was adopted. The Government Promulgated what was termed "National Educational Policy". From 1931 onward military training was vigorously conducted. This fact suggests that the military training had some effect on physical education.

As a result of the Japan-China War which started in 1937, most of those areas in China which are more blessed economically and culturally came under Japan's occupation. Consequently the Nationalist Government had to shift its seat to an upcountry area. The war now assumed the aspect of a protracted struggle. The Nationalist Government, promulgating a directive styled "General Instructions for Making Resistance and Founding Our Country" in 1938, consolidated the wartime structure.

Education, too, having entered into the wartime structure, physical education was revised so as to be adapted to the wartime conditions. The physical education at schools during the wartime was aimed at hardening the bodies of the trainees so that some of them might become components of powerful military forces while the others might otherwise serve their country efficiently. Accordingly, the number of hours allotted for conducting physical education as well as its substance were revised while the number of hours for extra-curricular physical education was increased and the standard for the minimum of facilities and implements was prescribed. Nevertheless, owing to the prevalence of the wartime, priority was given to anything connected with military affairs, so that it was for from easy to complete the facilities and provision of implements. As a result, various temporary expedients were resorted to. Also, in order to cope with the shortage of teachers of physical education, schools for training prospective teachers of that type were established, without, however, the desired object being satisfactorily accomplished.

Although measures were taken to complete the conduct of physical education, it is conceivable that shortage of facilities, implements, funds, and teachers of physical education stood in the way of such efforts.