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Western Sports were introduced and regarded in China

By *Kohsuke Sasajima**

Western sports were introduced into China after China was defeated in the Opium War that started in 1840 and opened the country by the Nanking Treaty of 1842. In spite of opening of the country, being defeated by the successive wars with several foreign countries after the opening, Qing recognized the necessity of introducing western civilization into China for modernization, and began to found schools of new system from 1862. However, China founded only engineering and army related schools in the light that all they had to do to build the powerful new China is to learn western technology and to strengthen the army. It was during Guangzhou period after 1875 that the liberal art schools were founded. While those schools of new system were being founded, the old education institutes for K'o-chü examination (the classical examination system for the government service in old-time China) still existed. At the same time, with the opening of the country, western mission schools began to be founded in China.

In those-day China, the life of the common people were not such as to permit them to enjoy sports in leisure time, and only those children from the upper class who attended the schools of new system or mission schools were able to enjoy sports.

This paper deals with the sports which were among the events of the 6th National Athletic Meeting held in 1935; namely track and field, tennis, soccer, basketball, volleyball, baseball, softball, except swimming, and table tennis which was supposedly popular among the common people.

Track and field were introduced into China as early as the late 19th century, however, they were introduced for the first time as sports when foreign teachers taught them to Chinese students at St. John's school (mission school, later St. John's University) in Shanghai in 1890. It was after 1899 that athletic meets for track and field events began to be held. However, the for women did not start before 1920' as

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those for men did.

It is said that tennis began to be played in China about 1885, and that Chinese began to play tennis by imitating foreign missionaries, teachers, business men, etc. doing it.

During the initial period of introduction, tennis was played only by the students of mission schools, and the very first tennis match was done among the mission schools. In 1910's, tennis became popular among other schools beside mission schools, and in 1920's, women started to play it.

Chinese began to play soccer imitating the foreign residents or foreign troops playing it in 1870's. It was also mission schools that introduced soccer to China. Then it gradually became popular among the schools in general.

With regard to the time when the basketball was introduced into China, there are 9 views; the earliest is 1892, and the latest is 1909.

None of those 9 views are definitely supported by any materials, and they are said to include even utterly wrong information. There was basketball in the events of the First National Athletic Meeting held in 1910. So, it is considered that basketball was introduced at the beginning of 1900's. Women joined basketball in 1916.

As for volleyball, the history of its introduction into China is not fixed, either. There is an opinion that it was first introduced in 1905, but this is not clearly supported by any materials. What is clear according to materials is that Philippine which had made an entry into the First Far Eastern Athletic Meeting in 1913, asked China to make an entry, also. Thus China was trained volleyball by Philippine and participated in the event. This is said to be the cause of introduction of volleyball into China.

The volleyball which was introduced into China became popular first in Guangzhou, and became popular throughout China. Women started volleyball later than men. The initial volleyball teams consisted of 16 members per team.

Qing aimed at modernization of China by sending many students abroad for study, and in 1873, 30 students were sent to U.S.A. for study. They watched baseball game in U.S.A. and learned to enjoy playing it. Upon returning home in 1887, they introduced baseball into China. After being introduced, baseball was played in mission schools, but it took time to be spread all over China.

Softball was introduced into China in 1915 when the Second Far Eastern Athletic Meeting was held in Shanghai. At that time, the women team of Philippine played

softball for exhibition. Watching the exhibition, the special course for physical education of Aiguo Women's school and the Young Women's Christian Association adopted it.

Those days, the name of softball was not authorized yet. The name was authorized in 1930 by unifying the rules of the several sports of the same kind. It is not known what the softball first introduced into China was like.

There are two views with regard to the introduction of table tennis into China. One is that a Shanghai stationery dealer returned home from Japan with the instruments of table tennis in 1902, and spread it through Y.M.C.A. The other one is that the Chinese learned and began to play it in 1913 watching it played in the factories run by the Japanese, in the Japanese schools, or by the Japanese residents.

The Western sports were introduced into China by foreign teachers, and people returned home from abroad, or by imitation of foreigners playing them. But it was the mission schools that adopted it first and spread it. In this view, the mission schools have made big contributions with regard to the introduction into and settlement in China of the western sports.