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Kinue Hitomi and the Development of the Olympic Movement in Japan

By *Shuko Homma**

I. Kinue Hitomi's Life and her Activities in the Athletic Sports:

The purpose of this study is to clarify the significance of Ms. Kinue Hitomi's contribution to the Olympic Movement in Japan. It is a well-known fact to the most Japanese that she (1907–1931) was the first Olympic Athlete and a silver medalist as a Japanese woman.

Today, the Olympic Games has been acceleratingly becoming a giant event in the world and having greater effects on the societies in each country and the relationships among them, so that these facts are now adding the more importance to the seeking of the Olympic Ideal. Thus, it is needed for us to try to study the development of the Olympic Movement in the history of the Olympic Games and to understand what the problems have been there and how have they been solved or unsolved.

Japan participated, for the first time, in the Olympic Games in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1912. Only two men were sent to the Olympics. But the Olympic Games in Amsterdam that Ms. Hitomi participated in was held in 1928. It took sixteen years for Japanese women to participate in the Olympic Games. This means that in Japan women had been behind men in the involvement in the athletic sports as in Europe and America. When we investigate Ms. Hitomi's contribution to the Olympic Movement, first this should be noted.

Ms. Hitomi entered Okayama Girls' High School in 1920. At that time sport involvement of young women had just begun to spread, especially at the girls' high schools and women's normal schools. Okayama Girls' High School was not an exception. Tennis which just showed a cult among girls at Okayama Girls' High appealed to Ms. Hitomi, and when she was promoted to the second year of high school, she became a representative tennis player of the school.

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However, when she became a fourth-grade student, she happened to be selected as the school representative athlete in the running long jump and won first prize at the Second Okayama Prefectural Interscholastic Athletic Meet. She set a new record for women in those days, 4 m 67, but this record was not publicized.

In 1924, she entered Nikaido Women's School of Gymnastics in Tokyo on the advice of the principal of Okayama Girls' High School in order to become a physical education teacher. As a student she participated in the Fifth Okayama Prefectural Athletic Meet and broke the world record for the triple jump with a new record of 10 m 33.

After graduating from Nikaido Women's School of Gymnastics in 1925, she was granted a position as a physical education teacher at Kyoto Municipal First Girls' High School. She continued her own training in running long jump, triple jump, javeline throw, and other events after coaching the students' volleyball and basketball teams as extracurricular activities. But she soon had to return to her alma mater, Nikaido Women's School of Gymnastics to help in the preparation for raising the school to the status of a college.

Soon after the realization of the college in 1926. She accepted a new position as a newspaper reporter for the Osaka Mainichi. This opportunity provided her with plenty of time for the training and participation in both national and international athletic meets.

As a result of her achievement in at the Third Japan Women's Olympic Games, she was sent to the so-called Second Women's Olympic Games (International Ladies Games) at Gothenburg, Sweden, in 1926 and captured excellent results: 100-yard dash, 12'0, third; running long jump, 5 m 50, first; standing jump, 2 m 49, first; discus throw 33 m 62, second.

These numerous wins enabled her to gain the highest individual total score, 15 points, and she received the 'honorary prize'. With these achievements she quickly came to world-wide fame as a woman athlete. After returning to Japan, she was in demand for writing and giving lectures on the Athletic Meets as well as continuing in her work as a reporter. She continued to set new records one after another. At last, she was selected as a member of the Japanese delegation to the Amsterdam Olympic Games in 1928.

After being defeated in the semi-finals of the 100-meter dash, she recovered from the agonizing feeling of defeat two days later and bravely entered the preliminary heat of 800-meter race that she had never experienced. She could happily win a silver medal in the event which was held the next day. Thus, she became the first woman Olympic athlete and medalist in Japan and had to spend far busier life than before when she returned to Japan.

She continued to train and participated in both national and international athletic meets. She also helped in the training of younger woman athletes who were expected to succeed her. The so-called Third Women's Olympic Games (Women's World Games) in 1930 were the last games in which she participated. She gained 13 points in the individual total score, which included the result of the running long jump of 5 m 90 and earning the first place.

As a result of overwork for the past several years, her health began to fail. When she returned from Prague, her condition deteriorated to such an extent that she had to lie in bed at Osaka University Hospital for treatment. She was called to "heavenly home" on August 2, 1931. Many Japanese people were shocked by the news and felt sorrow for the death.

II. Her Contribution to the Olympic Movement in Japan:

The documents analyzed for this study are the books written by her, her articles appeared in the magazines and the newspapers. The results of this analysis will be summarized as follows:

(1) Her participation in the international athletic meets including the International Olympic Games and the International Women's Olympic Games (Women's World Games) and her achievements in those meets informed the Japanese, and, in particular, had greatly encouraged Japanese women to be involved in sports, and as a result, the number of women athletes rapidly increased in Japan. In this case, her participation in the International Women's Olympic Games (Women's World Games) seemed to have served as a means of making the Japanese familiar with the name of the Olympic as the highest athletic meet.

(2) She gave many lectures on the International Olympic Games and the International Women's Olympic Games, worked for the fund-raising campaign to send the

women athletes to the third World Women's Games, made a plan of training camp, and took care of younger women athletes. These activities as a leader of women athletes in Japan had exceedingly contributed to the development of Japanese women's sports, and thus to that of the Olympic Movement.

(3) She wrote many books on the method of women's track and field and those books helped young girls know the training and the improvement of women's abilities to compete, and as a result, she contributed to the development of the Olympic Movement. But there was a more important contribution as the author of a book that contained the explanation on the history and nature of the Modern Olympic Games. It should have enlightend the Japanese people on the Olympic Idea.

(4) She tried to have her own training while she was working for a newspaper. She was going to realize the Olympic Ideal through amateurism. In this sense she had an aim to develop a woman as a whole, that was a new type of a woman for the coming days.