

Some Historical Interpretations of Physical Culture in the People's Republic of China

by
DARWIN SEMOTIUK
University of Western Ontario

It is the purpose of this paper to historically examine the development, evolution, and conception of physical culture in the People's Republic of China from 1949 to present. As is the case with most countries having a Marxist-Leninist orientation, physical culture occupies an important place in the hierarchy of values. This is especially true in the People's Republic of China where all manifestations of sport and physical activity in Chinese Communist theory and practice have deep ideological roots in such areas as politics, health, welfare and economics. Naturally, one might expect that, for all activities and institutions to be found in socialist states have their roles precisely defined within the system.

The writings of Mao Tse-tung on physical culture have had considerable impact on how sport, physical education and recreation have been interpreted within Chinese society. It is interesting to note that Mao completed a treatise entitled "A Study of Physical Culture" in April, 1917 — the only article written by Mao prior to 1923 for which entire text is available. Perhaps the significance of this lies in the fact that in a country where Maoism has become the equivalent of a state religion anything written and uttered by the Chairman is tantamount to canon. A later proclamation by Chairman Mao in an address to a meeting of the All China Athletic Federation in 1952 is of equal significance. Emanating from that speech was a capsular summary of the address appearing in the form of a quotation:

"Promote Physical Culture and Build up the People's Health". It is this quotation that suggests the role that physical culture must serve. In this respect, physical culture becomes a proselytized vehicle for a) contributing to labour productivity, and subsequently the economy; b) contributing to military preparedness; c) contributing to promoting a feeling nationalistic identities, and eventually social order; and d) to international prestige.

These objectives are realized through programs of the All-China Athletic Federation (founded in October, 1949), the Physical Culture and Sports Commission (founded in November, 1952), the educational institutions, the Spare-Time Schools for Physical Culture and Sports, the factories, and the rural communes.

The "Cultural Revolution" which took place in the People's Republic of China between 1966-1970 had considerable impact on modifying and changing certain orientations in physical culture. Some of the major changes included are-emphasis on the military aspects of the physical education curriculum and an emphasis on mass participation in sport. The sports system advocated a "friendship first, competition second" philosophy and displayed a distinct trend in moving away from the awarding of prizes and the recognition of individual athletic achievement.

The People's Republic of China has a definite idea what her commitment to physical culture is. A utilitarian, practical motivation underlies this commitment where sport is used to "serve the people" and in this culture "the *people* are the *state*."

The immediate aims are to use sport as it contributes to social order and patriotic nationalism, military preparedness, economic productivity, and eventually, in the not too distant future, international prestige. Thus, within the present ideological framework jointly articulated by Chairman Mao Tse-tung and the Communist Party of China, physical culture is guaranteed an enduring future.