

# Physical Activities in Ancient China

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In ancient China when writing had been introduced and formal education had become a necessity; certain physical skills were carried along. Prior to 1122 B.C., education was chiefly moral and religious and in this context archery was taught. Under the succeeding Chou Dynasty 1122-249 B.C., the curriculum had developed into the six virtues, the six praiseworthy actions and the six arts. Among the arts were music, archery and charioteering. The harmonious development of mind and body was to be accomplished by combining these with other arts like writing and math, all of which were covered by government examination.

Later under the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-211 A.D.), the range of subjects required for civil service increased, but physical activity tests were also retained. Under the T'ang, Sui, Mongol and Ming dynasties (620- 1642 A.D.), the six arts were still considered necessary for a complete education. However, the amount of literary learning had become enormous, and with subsequent increases in emphasis on mental attainment, physical education succeeded into the background. The shunning of physical activities that developed in China is credited to the influence of religion . Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, all of which stressed a quiet, studious and contemplative life.

Even before the age of Chou, dancing formed a regular part of instruction of the children of the upper classes. The dancing involved steps, posturing, swaying, whirling and movement of the arms. In early times the performer danced bareheaded and with empty hands. So great was the prestige of dancing, so important was it as a criterion in the judging of men that in ancient feudal society it appears to be thought of as strange, even suspicious, if a person of noble station refused to dance or danced badly. The teaching of dance continued long to be a part of the instruction of a scholar or nobility. The decline of the ideal liberal education which combined mental and physical excellence meant inevitably that dance would cease to be part of the scholar's training.

Hunting skills in early China were necessary to secure food, for war, for recreation, as a safeguard for their crops and as an act of religious reverence. Equipment used in hunting included chariots, horses, bows and arrows and nets. Dogs and fires were also used to scare up prey of rabbits, boars, geese, deer, wolves and wild ox. Archery was one of the original six arts of the Chou era. Such respect was held for the highly skilled archer that feudal lords and princes in ancient times were chosen by their skill in the sport. It was felt that good performance served to establish virtue and revealed the true character of the archer. A man who could hit the target was recognized as an able and virtuous man. Learning to ride a horse well was also an important part of a boy's education. Horses were used for hunting, fighting, pageantry, transportation and recreational activities. Noblewomen were also taught to ride.

Wrestling dates back to the age of Chou. Later under the Chin and Han Dynasties, wrestling was commonly employed by the army and became a popular exercise for both men and boys. Its popularity increased from 265-216 A.D. at which time exhibition matches were arranged semi-annually. As its role in entertainment increased, wrestling as a participant sport declined. A form of football was enjoyed in the age of Chou. Chinese military forces played football as a part of military training and recreation. Football was divided into

four classes according to the age in which it occurred: first, there was football going around a field; secondly, there was football not going around a field, thirdly, there was football using two goals and lastly there was football using only one goal. Polo is believed to have been introduced in China early in the seventh century by tribes of Central Asia, possibly the Tartars. The game was soon adopted by all, although the religious community frowned on its practice. Under the T'ang dynasty, ladies learned to play polo on donkeys.

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