

A Study of Physical Culture

Mao Zedong

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Mao Zedong

Photo courtesy Xinhua News Agency.



Table tennis was a favourite sport with the late Chairman.

Photo courtesy Xinhua News Agency.



Mao Zedong swimming across the great Yangtze
on September 23, 1967.

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Publisher's Preface

A Study of Physical Culture was written by Comrade Mao Zedong in his youth and published in the *New Youth* magazine on April 1, 1917 under the pseudonym Ershibahua Sheng. The article was off-printed by our publishing house first in March 1958 and then in December 1979, using Mao Zedong's real name for the second edition.

As a youth Mao Zedong was a strong advocate of physical culture and actively propagated the idea of attaching equal importance to moral, intellectual and physical education. *A Study of Physical Culture*, in which he put forth his views on such questions as the significance and effects of physical culture and sports and their relations with general education, is a repre-

sentative document in the development of modern sports in China.

The article, written in classical Chinese, has been translated into English by Prof. Cen Yuefang. For the convenience of readers, the translated article is supplemented by the original Chinese text with footnotes and a translation in the vernacular done by Messrs. Xin Lan and Lu Pei and revised by linguists Ye Shengtao and Ye Zhishan. We wish to acknowledge these contributions.

The People's Sports Publishing House

February 1996

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A Study of Physical Culture

A Study of Physical Culture

Mao Zedong

The country is being drained of strength. Public interest in martial arts is flagging. The people's health is declining with each passing day. These phenomena are deserving of serious concern. Exponents of physical culture have over the years failed to accomplish anything because they have never got to the root of the problems. Our country will become even weaker if things are allowed to go on unchanged for long. It should be noted that athletic feats such as accurate shooting and long-distance throws are something external that results from training, whereas sinewy physical strength is something internal that causes good performance. How can a person shoot accurately or make a long-distance throw if he has a poor physique and shies away from weapons? Sinewy physical strength comes from training, which must be

done conscientiously. Physical culturists of today have devised not a few methods, yet they have failed to achieve the desired results. This is because external forces can hardly appeal to the public who are not aware of the real significance of physical culture. What after all is the value of physical culture? What are its effects and how should one go about it? Since people are all at sea with these questions, it is only natural that little result has been attained. To make physical culture effective, it is imperative to activate the minds of the people and make them sports-conscious. With such consciousness, they will be able to understand the essentials of physical culture without having to be taught by others, and the ability to shoot accurately and make long-distance throws can readily be acquired without much effort. I am strongly convinced of the importance of physical culture, and I bitterly regret the inappropriate methods used by its advocates. I believe that there must be many people in our country who share my feelings, so I make bold to bring up my humble views for discussion. I must admit that not all my propositions have been put into practice, and that many of them only

deal with high principles or perfect standards. If these propositions of mine are heeded, I should be prepared to listen to any comments with an open mind.

First, what is physical culture?

Since the emergence of humanity, man has lived through some dark ages but there has never been anyone who is ignorant about the need to preserve one's own life. Thus the wild roses on the West Mountains had to be eaten when one was dying of starvation, [1] the rotten plums scattered about the mouth of a well had to be swallowed; [2] nests were built on treetops

[1] "Wild roses on the West Mountains" refers to the story of Bo Yi and Shu Qi of the late Shang Dynasty (c 16th-11th century BC), who refused to serve the king of the Zhou State and fled to the mountains where they subsisted on wild fruit. Eventually they died of starvation.

[2] "Rotten plums scattered about the mouth of a well" refers to the story of Chen Zhongzi of the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), who detested his brother's official post as unjust and, disdaining to sponge on him, tried to eke out a living by making shoes with his wife. One day, having had nothing to eat for three days, he had to allay his hunger with rotten plums scattered about the mouth of a well.

as homes, and animal skins were used for clothing. All these were instinctive actions – done without reasoning. Life then was rather primitive. Later, with the appearance of sages, rites were instituted and people began to lead a regular life and practise temperance in eating and drinking. Thus “Confucius took comfortable rest in his idle hours;” “he refrained from eating putrid fish or meat;” and “when he practised archery at Juexiang park ^[1] he was mobbed by large numbers of admiring onlookers.” The structure of the human body is very much the same as that of other animals, yet most other animals do not live as long as man. This is because animals do not practise temperance while man knows how to regulate his life with self-control. As he did this more and more conscientiously, physical culture began to take shape. Physical culture is concerned with ways of preserving life. It is seen in a different light in the East and the West. Zhuang Zi drew inspiration from a cook ^[2] in his quest for ways of preserving life. Confucius practised

[1] Juexiang Park was located in today's Qufu County, Shandong province.

physical training through archery and charioteering. Among the civilized nations of today, Germany is most developed in physical culture, with the art of fencing enjoying nationwide popularity. Things are also quite impressive in Japan with her bushido, in addition to the new sport of judo created on the basis of traditional Chinese methods. As to the contents of these sports, they are all based on exhaustive physiological studies about the structure of human organs and the distribution of arteries and veins, the purpose being to find out the level of development of different parts of the body so that physical culture can accordingly be applied to check overgrowth and mend deficiencies – in a word, to achieve a balanced development of the body. We can see then that physical culture is a means by which man preserves his own life through a balanced development of his body, and which is governed by certain rules and procedures.

[2] Zhuang Zi (c 369-286 BC) was a philosopher of the Warring States Period. Drawing from a cook's experience in slaughtering cattle, he realized the truths of human anatomy and ways to preserve life.