

## History of swimming education at school in Japan which influenced Japanese swimming ability

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### Background

Most elementary and junior high schools in Japan have their own swimming pool, and swimming education is carried out there. Rates of public school pool establishment are 86.7% at elementary school, 73.0% at junior high school, 64.5% at high school. (Stats from Statistic Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2010.) From an international point of view, they are very high, and they are the characteristic of the country. 'Can You Swim?' Project would be helpful to make the problem in each country on water safety clear and would lead to solution. When we examine a Japanese problem, we must mention process of the past swimming education.

### Historic Process

In the Middle Ages or later Japan, swimming training has been performed as military arts of the samurais, as well as traditional fishing. When the times of the samurai were over, and, by a process to build modern education system, Jigoro Kano who was the founder of Judo insisted on importance of the swimming education and made it with a compulsory subject in a teacher training school.

The submergence accident of the passenger boat Shiunmaru occurred in 1955 and 100 children were drowned beside a lifeboat because they could not swim. With this accident, the Diet and the government made action to spend a budget on the construction of the school swimming pool with the promotion for all the people should able to swim (1961). The Tokyo Olympics were held at the same period (1964), and the swimming race as competitive sports became popular, too. The contents of the swimming class at school were prescribed by the Ministry of Education, which aimed to develop the skills of the crawl and the breast stroke mainly, and it has been revised every ten years (1961, 1971, 1980, 1992, 2002, 2011). However, the vertical movement as like diving into the water, surface dive, and underwater swimming were not dealt with. The reason is that a regular swimming pool in school has very shallow depth (80cm–120cm in elementary schools).

### Problem and Prospects

Japan has succeeded in decreasing the number of deaths by drowning by making a swimming pool in school (Matsui, 2009), although still have the highest rates of drowning in OECD countries. According to the interim report of 'Can You Swim?' Project, Japanese can swim with crawl and breast stroke to some extent, but not good at staying afloat, backstroke, dive into, and underwater swim. This result is related to contents of skill in swimming class at school.

It is necessary to reexamine a swimming skill standard and assessment for human education, and to rebuild the appropriate swimming curriculum to fit the purpose of the water safety.

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