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Dancing with the War: Disciplinary Power via Exercise Music in Early Modern Japan

This paper explores how Japan on her way to modernisation adopted exercise for forming people into modern, war-ready nationals. In the late 19th century, exercise with music was introduced and localized in Japan. Some prominent schools had these songs choreographed, followed by the publication of textbooks with the instructions and lyrics. During the Japan-Russo War, playgames simulating war were added to the program of physical education to teach children military order.

The militaristic character appeared to weaken after the war, only to regain it when Japan entered World War II. In addition, the radio gymnastic exercise was installed for administering the nationals, including schoolchildren. Participating in the exercise movements among peers created an atmosphere of cooperation and order, which were required for national mobilization. Therefore, this paper examines the ways exercise music was used in different wars, in terms of its lyrics, gestures, and music.