

Performing National Gymnastics: The Appropriation of Japanese Radio Exercise and Militarism in Postcolonial South Korea

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Abstract

From time to time, a familiar marching band fanfare, followed by a commanding male voice shouting, “National Gymnastics, Start! One, two, three, four...” catches the ears of Koreans through media or community events, evoking memories of school days. This music–voice combination is part of National Gymnastics (*kungminch'ejo*), a five-minute free-hand calisthenics program introduced in the 1970s by the South Korean government, especially during the military regime of President Park Chung-hee, as part of citizenship education aimed at building a strong, prosperous, and independent nation. Interestingly, however, National Gymnastics was not an original invention of the regime but an adaptation of a Japanese colonial practice. This paper examines the historical ironies surrounding the development of National Gymnastics, focusing on how the South Korean military regime reimagined and transformed the Japanese Radio Exercise (*rajio taisō*)—a colonial propaganda tool of the Japanese Empire—into a postcolonial practice. I analyze the programs’ audio elements—the music and verbal instructions of both the Japanese and Korean versions to investigate how South Korea’s National Gymnastics was shaped by the legacy of its imperial predecessor. Significantly, this adaptation reflects an effort to build a disciplined, modernized, and militarily strong nation, paradoxically grounded in colonial structures. Through this case, the study reveals how music and sport can simultaneously reinforce colonial legacies while serving as sites for constructing new national identities. In doing so, it contributes to broader discussions on postcolonialism, neo-colonialism, and the modernity of South Korea and East Asia.

I. Introduction

From time to time, a familiar marching band fanfare, followed by a commanding male voice shouting, “*National Gymnastics, Start! One, two, three, four. . .*” catches the ears of Koreans through media or community events, evoking memories of school days. This music–voice combination is part of National Gymnastics, or *kungminch'ejo* (국민체조), a five-minute free-hand calisthenics activity that was established as part of citizenship education in the 1970s during the military regime of President Park Chung-hee.¹ National Gymnastics is emblematic of the 1970s and '80s, the era when South Korea experienced a period of extraordinary economic transformation. This era marked a time when the country achieved remarkable economic growth and high GDP at an unprecedented pace, fueled by a government-led strategy of export-driven industrialization, despite the lack of natural resources and capital, and the

¹ In this article, I use uppercase National Gymnastics to indicate a gymnastics program developed in 1977 under Park Chung-hee’s regime and distinguish it from the lowercase general national gymnastics that includes National Health Gymnastics, Reconstruction Gymnastics, New World Gymnastics, New Village Gymnastics, and New Millennium Health Gymnastics.

destruction of much of the infrastructural base during the three-year-long Korean War (1950–1953).² During that challenging time, the South Korean state utilized National Gymnastics as a tool to improve citizens' health and encouraged them to work hard to make a strong, wealthy country. It was a national symbol of collective strength and vitality. For those who grew up performing the exercise, their bodies would automatically respond to the music and the voice and start the gymnastics routines they learned in school.

National Gymnastics was officially abolished in school education at the end of the twentieth century and was replaced with another program, named New Millennium Health Gymnastics, or *saech'ōnnyōn kōn'ganch'ejo* (새천년 건강체조). However, National Gymnastics is still well remembered in South Korean society today and learned by many schoolchildren, largely due to its effectiveness as a brief exercise routine and teachers' familiarity with the program. The sound of National Gymnastics arouses nostalgia in some older South Koreans for what they perceive as the past glorious days in which they had overcome historical traumas and hardships and achieved remarkable economic growth in a very short period, ideologically celebrated by the government as the “Miracle of the Han River.”³

Given its lasting popularity and significant role in South Korea's history, particularly during the postwar national reconstruction period, one may wonder why National Gymnastics suddenly disappeared from the official school curriculum. It was discontinued due to its associations with remnants of Japanese colonial rule and, after independence, with military politics and dictatorship. Specifically, its prototype can be traced back to a Radio Exercise—known as *rajio taiso* (ラジオ体操) in Japanese and *radio ch'ejo* (라디오 체조) in Korean (also translated as Radio Calisthenics)—which was developed in Japan during the 1920s and introduced to Korea and other Japanese colonies in the 1930s.⁴

This paper examines historical ironies surrounding the development of National Gymnastics, focusing on how the South Korean military regime of the 1970s reimagined and transformed the Japanese Radio Exercise—a colonial propaganda apparatus of the Japanese Empire—into a practice adapted to its unique postcolonial context, ultimately culminating in the creation of National Gymnastics. I argue that by grounding their school and public education policies and activities in colonial legacies, South Korea's post-Korean War political elites framed modernity as a state-driven, militarized project. This highlights how Japanese colonial governance left a lasting imprint on South Korea's nation-building efforts in the twentieth century.

² The 1970s, under Park Chung-hee, focused on building South Korea's industrial base through heavy and chemical industries with strong government support. Key sectors like steel, shipbuilding, and petrochemicals were developed, backed by subsidies and the growth of *chaebōl* (large conglomerates). However, the global oil crises in the late 1970s caused an economic downturn, exposing South Korea's reliance on foreign capital and trade. In the 1980s, Chun Doo-hwan's government shifted focus to economic stabilization and restructuring. Efforts centered on diversification and modernization, prioritizing high-tech industries like semiconductors and electronics. Export strategies moved toward high-value-added goods, reducing dependence on heavy industries.

³ For the history of South Korea's economic development, see Barry Eichengreen, Dwight H. Perkins, and Kwanho Shin, *From Miracle to Maturity. The Growth of the Korean Economy* (Harvard University Asia Center and Harvard University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9781684175260>.

⁴ The origin of the Radio Exercise program can be traced to the early 1920s in the United States, where the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. sponsored a 15-minute exercise program promoting the health and well-being of the populace in the major cities, as an advertisement for the company. Radio Exercise was created with co-operation between the Department of Simplified Insurance of the Ministry of Mail and Communication, the Japan Broadcasting Association, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Association of Life Insurance Companies, after Japanese governors' visit to the United States. For more details, see Satoshi Shimizu, “Cultural Struggles on the Body in Japan and Asia: When Should We Use ‘Modern’ or ‘Traditional’ Body Techniques.” *International Journal of Eastern Sports & Physical Education* 3, no. 1 (2005): 89–104.

I begin by discussing the establishment of Radio Exercise in Japan in the 1920s, tracing its evolution through radio broadcasting to examine its development, dissemination, and eventual transformation. Next, I investigate how the Japanese Radio Exercise inspired the military government of postwar South Korea to develop several different versions of national gymnastics programs represented by National Gymnastics. I take a special look at the audio elements—music and verbal command—to examine the relationship between Radio Exercise and National Gymnastics and to explore how sports and music are integrated into the two exercise programs. By investigating this case, I highlight the enduring influence of colonial structures in postcolonial states, revealing the complexities of disentangling national identity from colonial legacies. Furthermore, this article contributes to broader discussions on postcolonialism, neo-colonialism, and South Korean and East Asian modernity, by demonstrating how music and sport can inadvertently reinforce colonial legacies while simultaneously serving as sites for the construction of new national identities. Transcriptions of the music from Japanese Third Radio Exercise No. 1 and Korean National Gymnastics are included as an appendix.

II. Radio Exercise, Getting Started

Introduction of Radio Exercise in 1920s Japan

Radio Exercise is a set of simple, standardized calisthenic routines that has been broadcast on Japan's national radio (NHK) for nearly a century. The first broadcast took place on November 1, 1928, as part of the commemorative events marking the coronation of Emperor Hirohito (the Shōwa Emperor). Initially, Radio Exercise was named National Health Gymnastics (國民保健體操) and had only one routine. By 1939, it had developed to gain its current name and to include three routines: Radio Exercise No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3.⁵ Among the three routines of the first-generation Radio Exercise, this paper focuses on the most widely known, the original Radio Exercise No. 1. The choreography for this routine consists of eleven distinct sets of body movements, to which a suitable piece of music was later selected and synchronized. The exercise includes a variety of simple yet structured movements such as knee bending, neck and chest exercise, arm circles, and side bending (see Figure 1, Shōwa Radio Calisthenics).

⁵ No. 3 was discontinued in the 1940s.



Figure 1: Shōwa Radio Calisthenics⁶

The gymnastic movements are coordinated by music that includes verbal instructions. Several music pieces were selected for the first Radio Exercise. The most widely used version is a simple piano music piece, titled “Cute Singer” (可愛い歌手), composed by Fukui Naoaki (福井直秋, 1877–1963). The music consists of sixteen measures in G major and four–four time. The right hand plays a simple monophonic melody, and the left hand accompanies the melody by playing an Alberti bass pattern. The music was also subtitled “In the Morning Sun” (朝日を浴びて), after lyrics starting with “The wind blows gently in the morning, the radio plays one, two, three” was added to the music.⁷ This song is simply repeated five times in total for the Radio Exercise program, without having an introduction, bridge, or postlude.

The verbal instructions provide the performer with a comprehensive guide for the exercise from the beginning to the end, including the sequence of the routines and the time of each beat, as well as counting of the beat. The instructions were recited by an NHK male announcer. Egi Riichi (江木理一, 1890–1970) became a celebrity through NHK Radio Exercise broadcasting (1928–1935), with his masculine, military, and authoritative, “boot-camp-style” tone of voice.⁸ Before the exercise starts, Egi first declaims a short introduction speech to announce the start of the Radio Exercise program, with a

⁶ Nao Koba, “SPレコード説明書「ラジオ体操」” 昭和モダン好き, July 11, 2012, accessed July 21, 2015, <http://showamodern.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-146.htm>.

⁷ Note that the name of Japan, 日本 (*Nippon* or *Nihon*), literally means the Sun’s root or origin. Japan is often called the “land of the rising sun.” See Louis Frédéric, *Japan Encyclopaedia*, trans. Kathe Roth (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁸ Japanese and Korean names traditionally place the family name before the given name, so I maintain this order, except when citing an author in references.

powerful voice. In the NHK recording of the Radio Exercise program, Egi announces, “Good morning, everyone in Japan. Now, we are going to start. Please get ready and be energetic. Let’s do Radio Exercise No. 1 once. Put your heels down, your hands on your sides, and your knees together. Alright!”⁹ Egi’s introduction speech is delivered in an energetic but flat monotone without using much accent or intonation, but overall its pitch is rising gradually, increasing tension and fostering a solemn and resolute atmosphere.

During the exercise program, Egi counts the beats in a 16-beat cycle: “*ichi, ni, san, si, go, roku, sichi, hachi; ni, ni, san, si, go, roku, sichi, hachi.*” Because the Radio Exercise’s music is in common time, eight beats constitute two measures, or a phrase. Each beat counts as one-quarter note. One body movement usually is done in two measures and repeated once. Therefore, four measures that count sixteen beats, or two phrases, match with one body movement group. In addition, the forthcoming choreography is announced two beats before the new movement starts. To make room for this announcement, the last beat counting (*hachi*) in the 16-beat cycle is omitted and replaced with the introduction of the new movement. Egi Riichi articulates the beat counting in a peculiar staccato voice. For the beats made of two syllables, such as *ichi, roku, sichi*, and *hachi*, the second vowel is hardly heard and, therefore, pronounced as *ich, rok, sich, hach*. After completing all the program’s routines, Egi also announces that the exercise has come to an end, saying “*owari*” (the end).



Figure 2: NHK Rajio Taisō announcer Riichi Egi posing in the Tokyo studio in 1938 (Shōwa 13). Shukan Asahi (週刊朝日).¹⁰

⁹ The text was translated by the author. An NHK-made video that shows the Radio Exercise performance with “Cute Singer” music and Egi Riichi’s announcement is available on the NHK Archives website:

http://cgi2.nhk.or.jp/archives/tv60bin/detail/index.cgi?das_id=D0009060013_00000. The same song with the lyrics is also available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1nnO7s3kgk>.

¹⁰ Source: Kjeld Duits. “1930s: How Radio Gymnastics Conquered Japan,” *Old Photos of Japan*. October 28, 2024, accessed March 19, 2025, <https://www.oldphotosjapan.com/photos/891/radio-gymnastics-calisthenics-rajio-taiso-vintage-photography>.

Radio Exercise as an Imperialistic Ritual and Apparatus Linking Mainland Japan and Its Colonial Subjects

The name Radio Exercise implies the importance of the radio as the medium for its circulation. From 1928 until the end of World War II, several times almost every day starting from 6:30 a.m., Egi's morning greeting and energetic instructions for the Radio Exercise workout, set to piano keys, was aired on NHK radio channels to find a nationwide audience in Japan.

Radio emerged as a wireless alternative to telegraphy in the late nineteenth century. Initially, wireless technology was limited to transmitting signals and unable to broadcast voices. However, by the 1920s, it had evolved into a medium capable of transmitting human voices and music, becoming primarily associated with entertainment and informational broadcasting.¹¹ The world's first radio broadcaster was KDKA in Pittsburgh, United States, established in 1920. The first radio broadcasts in Japan were aired in Shibaura, Tokyo, on March 22, 1925.¹² Osaka and Nagoya followed the Tokyo broadcast in June and July, respectively.¹³ The following year, the three broadcasting companies were combined to form NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai, or Japan Broadcasting Association).

Radio was celebrated as a powerful tool for fostering national unity in the early twentieth century. Radio made it possible to deliver the same information—through human voice, music, and emotions—simultaneously to anonymous individuals listening to the same channel in different locations across a country, connecting them through the shared experience of hearing. A 1922 American article in *Collier's* declared that radio was “spreading mutual understanding to all sections of the country, unifying our thoughts, ideals, and purposes, making us a strong and well-knit people.”¹⁴ Two years later, an article in *The Century Magazine* similarly observed that radio could “do much to create a sense of national solidarity in all parts of the country, and particularly in remote settlements and on the farm.”¹⁵ As a popular media, radio has contributed to creating, sustaining, and reproducing so-called “imagined” communities called nations around the world. Media scholar Michele Hilmes suggests that Benedict Anderson's description of the newspaper reader—who observes exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by anonymous thousands (or millions) of others, and “is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life”—even more accurately evokes the radio listener.¹⁶ Hilmes writes, “Radio, more than any other agency, possessed the power not only to assert actively the unifying power of simultaneous experience but to communicate meanings about the nature of that unifying experience.”¹⁷

In principle, Radio Exercise is not a collective exercise and can be done privately at home. However,

¹¹ Michael A. Krysko, “American Radio and Technological Transformation from Invention to Broadcasting, 1900–1945,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.414>.

¹² The commencement of Japanese radio broadcasting began three years after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. Through the experience of the Great Kanto Earthquake, the Japanese government realized the importance of offering reliable information via broadcasting to its people. The details of the history of radio broadcasting in Japan is found in Japanese main radio broadcasting company NHK's official website: <http://www.nhk.or.jp/str/aboutstr/evolution-of-tv-en/p04/index.html>. See also John Horne, “Sport and the Mass Media in Japan,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 22, no. 4 (2005): 420, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/ssj.22.4.415>; and Sabiene Strasser, “Home, Militarism and Nostalgia in Japanese Popular Song from 1937 to 1945,” *Vienna Graduate Journal of East Asian Studies* 2 (2011): 115–147, <https://doi.org/10.2478/vjeas-2011-0011>.

¹³ Horne, “Sport and the Mass Media in Japan,” 420.

¹⁴ Quoted in Krysko, “American Radio and Technological Transformation from Invention to Broadcasting, 1900–1945.”

¹⁵ Krysko, “American Radio and Technological Transformation from Invention to Broadcasting, 1900–1945.”

¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983), 39–40.

¹⁷ Michele Hilmes, “Radio and the Imagined Community,” in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Stern (Routledge, 2012), 352.

due to the limited number of radio receivers in the country, people were often required to gather at schools or communal spaces to participate. The development of radio broadcasting technology facilitated the dissemination of Radio Exercise across Japan and its outer territories. Interestingly, the scarcity of radio receivers contributed to transforming Radio Exercise into a communal activity—a mass performance—rather than an individual practice. Kato Hidetoshi, one of the pioneers of Japanese modern media studies, claims that radio exercise enabled Japanese people across all classes to actively embody and enact a shared national culture, facilitated by the advent of radio broadcasting: “One verbal command aired from one radio station makes millions of Japanese people do the same body movement. I would say that it is only possible through the function of radio that millions of people simultaneously respond to the same information in the same way.”¹⁸

In this sense, Radio Exercise functioned as a public ritual—what American sociologist Mabel Berezin describes as “arenas of identity, bounded spaces, where collective national selfhood is enacted.” According to Berezin, the functions of a public ritual are as follows: “The repeated experience of ritual participation produces a feeling of solidarity—“We are all here together, we must share something”; and lastly, it produces collective memory—“We were all there together.”¹⁹ What is experienced and what is remembered is the act of participating in the ritual event in the name of the polity.” Each morning, Radio Exercise brought people together for synchronized performances across the Japanese Empire, fostering unity and a shared identity.

With Japan’s territorial expansion, its radio broadcasts began to cover the entire empire, including colonies such as Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Manchuria, in the 1930s and ’40s.²⁰ In newly occupied regions, it especially served as a tool for assimilation, reinforcing loyalty to the Japanese state and solidifying the identity of overseas Japanese as imperial citizens. The nationalistic sentiments associated with Radio Exercise are evident in a statement by Nakayama Ryuji, vice president of the Japanese Radio Exercise Association. When implementing the program in Japanese colonies in 1932, he declared, “People will do Radio Exercise anywhere the Japanese national flag is raised, not only in mainland Japan, but also in our colonies.”²¹

Japanese authorities started Radio Exercise broadcasting in Korea, then called *Chosŏn*, in 1931, and integrated them into school education. This initiative was supported by the Japanese Government-General of Korea, which had made gymnastics a mandatory subject in the school curriculum in the 1910s and enforced Japanese gymnastics programs. South Korean sports historian Kun-jick Yoo, in his analysis of gymnastics education in Korea during the Japanese colonial period, argues that Japan’s primary objective in promoting Japanese gymnastics in Korea was to cultivate a compliant and loyal populace under colonial rule while simultaneously enhancing the military capacity of the Japanese Empire. In 1938,

¹⁸ Kato Hidetoshi’s words are introduced in Isamu Kuroda, *Radio ch’ejōi t’ansaeng [The Birth of Radio Exercise]*, trans. Jaegil Seo (Gang, 2011). The text was translated from Korean to English by the author.

¹⁹ Mabel Berezin, “Fascism/Identity/Ritual,” in *Fascism, vol. 3: Fascism and Culture*, ed. Roger Griffin and Matthew Feldman (Routledge, 2004), 223.

²⁰ The responsibility for spreading Japanese culture and ideology was entrusted to the Propaganda Corps of the Japanese Army, established in October 1942 and later renamed the Department of Information of the Imperial Japanese Forces. Col. Nakashima, who led the department, declared, “It is our desire to foster the dissemination of correct and truthful news and information to the mass of the people.” This quote is from A.V.H. Hartendorp, *The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines* (Bookmark, 1967), 464. It would be interesting to compare the process and result of implementing Japanese Radio Exercise in those countries. However, I leave that topic for future research and focus on Korea’s case in this paper.

²¹ Nakayama Ryuji’s words were introduced in Hwang and Son, “The Social Influence and Propagate of Radio Free Gymnastics During the Japanese Occupation,” 42. The text was translated from Korean to English by the author.

alongside the implementation of Radio Exercise, the Japanese authorities introduced the “Imperial Subjects’ Gymnastics (皇國臣民體操, 황국신민체조)” in Korea. According to Yoo, this program emphasized physical training for Korean youth, incorporating the use of Japanese wooden swords, and was initially mandated for schoolchildren before being extended to the broader public.²²



Figure 3: A group of people doing Rajio Taisō at Awajicho-dōri (淡路町通り) in Osaka in 1938 (Shōwa 13). Shukan Asahi (週刊朝日).²³

²² Kun-Jick Yoo. “ch’eyuksa: singminji ch’ejogyoyukkwa han’guginūi sinch’ehyōngsōnge kwanhan yōksajōk koch’al [A Historical Review of Colonial Gymnastic Education and Korean People’s Body Formation].” *The Korean Journal of Physical Education* 38, no. 2 (1999): 24–34. See also Eui-Ryoung Hwang and Hwan Son, “Ilje kangjōmgiūi radioch’ejo pogūpkwa sahoejōk yōnghyang [Social Influence and Propagate of Radio Free Gymnastics During the Japanese Occupation],” *The Korean Journal of History for Physical Education, Sport and Dance* 14, no. 3 (2009): 37–48.

²³ Source: Duits. “1930s: How Radio Gymnastics Conquered Japan.”

Radio Exercise was aired in Japan and in Korea at the same time several times a day, until Korea's liberation. As the adoption rate of radios in early colonial Korea was sluggish, efforts were made to encourage the establishment of radio exercise associations in each region, starting in 1934.²⁴ The Japanese government actively promoted Radio Exercise as a communal activity in villages and institutions such as factories and schools, encouraging people to gather in communal spaces to perform the Radio Exercise program together in unison. In areas without radios, members of the Patriotic Unit (*Aegukpanwŏn*) were trained to implement group exercises with village residents. In the 1940s, promotional efforts were strengthened through newspapers and magazines, as well as through the distribution of leaflets, explanatory illustration sheets, and other promotional materials. Posters were displayed in schools, post offices, bus stations, factories, and youth organizations. Audio and video recordings of Radio Exercise were also made available at record stores and movie theaters.²⁵ Furthermore, the broadcast schedule was expanded to include morning, lunchtime, and evening sessions. As a result, the practice quickly spread across schools, factories, corporations, and local organizations.²⁶

Toward the end of the war, Radio Exercise was implemented alongside activities like worship of the imperial palace (*kungsŏngyobae*) in mainland Japan and its colonies. The practice took on an explicitly nationalistic and militaristic significance when it was used to support war efforts and to pray for Japan's victory. Japanese historian Satoshi Shimizu underscores this aspect, describing Radio Exercise as a form of "prayer performance" for the nation's success in war, often conducted at Japanese shrines:

As the Japanese war machine accelerated, patriotism rose at a fevered pitch, and Radio Taisō (exercise) was held at shrines throughout Japan, including the famous Meiji Shrine. It was then that Radio Taisō was elevated to the heights of spiritual ceremony to worship the Late Meiji Emperor through bodily movement and became a "prayer performance" to overcome national crises. It was considered the pinnacle of patriotic spirit when the nation concurrently performed Taisō together without the accompaniment of the Taisō music, which commonly led people into mobilization.²⁷

Transformation of Radio Exercise in Japan After World War II

Immediately after the end of World War II, Radio Exercise was banned by the Allied Occupation forces for appearing too militaristic, since it involved large groups gathering to exercise together in unison, responding to the military-style verbal commands. However, Radio Exercise was revived in Japan in 1946, one year after its abolition. Cultural authorities in Japan started to develop new versions of Radio Exercise that excluded military verbal commands but emphasized the use of music to guide participants through the exercise program. The producers of this second Radio Exercise attempted to compose a piece of music that could lead the gymnastics program without providing verbal instructions. Because the role of music in the exercise came to the fore, music was first composed and then gymnastics routines were built around

²⁴ According to Japanese historian Isamu Kuroda, the number of radio receiver sets in Japan was about 500,000 units, while the population numbered over 62 million. The radio receiver distribution rate was even lower in Korea than in Japan. Korea's population in 1931 was around 20 million and the number of radio receiver sets in the country was 20,379 units. This means that one out of 1,000 people had a radio receiver at that time. Moreover, 17,641 units out of that 20,379 were with Japanese people who were in Korea but not counted as part of the Korean population. For further details, see Kuroda, *The Birth of Radio Exercise*, 40–43.

²⁵ Hwang and Son, "Social Influence and Propagate of Radio Free Gymnastics During the Japanese Occupation," 42.

²⁶ For further discussions of Radio Exercise clubs in the 1930s, see Shimizu, "Cultural Struggles on the Body in Japan and Asia."

²⁷ Shimizu, "Cultural Struggles on the Body in Japan and Asia," 94.

it, the opposite of the first Radio Exercise. The composer of the second Radio Exercise's music was Hattori Tadashi (服部正, 1908–2008).²⁸ The music of the second-generation Radio Exercise changes its rhythm frequently between four–four, three–four, and six–eight time, and also its tempo fluctuates. However, many Japanese found the second-generation Radio Exercise too complex and difficult to learn and perform. As a result, efforts to promote the program were unsuccessful, and its broadcasting was discontinued within a year.

The Radio Exercise practiced today is the third generation, established in 1951. In a reflection on the failure of the second Radio Exercise, the producers decided to build the body movements and music collaboratively, attempting to integrate these two separate entities. The producers had realized that the Radio Exercise program is not simply remembered through repetition; so, the music should be able to lead the body movements naturally.²⁹ The role of music suggested in the third Radio Exercise therefore was to offer the order of the program and to remind the performer of the exercise routine easily, not just accompanying verbal instructions. The third Radio Exercise consists of two routines: Radio Exercise No. 1 and Radio Exercise No. 2. Because Radio Exercise No. 1 is more popular and widely used among the Japanese, the name Radio Exercise sometimes is used just to indicate Radio Exercise No. 1. The descriptions and illustrations of the thirteen body movements are provided in Figure 4.³⁰

²⁸ Hattori Tadashi was a prominent Japanese composer, arranger, and conductor known for his contributions to early Japanese popular music, film scores, and radio programs. For more information about Hattori's music in the second-generation Radio Exercise, please see Kuroda, *The Birth of Radio Exercise*, detailing the history of Radio Exercise in Japan.

²⁹ Eske Tsugami. "Undō o Kanri Suru Ongaku: Hattori Tadashi Sakkyoku <Radio Taisō Daiichi> no Bunseki [Body Movements Controlled by Music: Analysis of Hattori Tadashi's Composition Radio Taiso No.1]", *Seijo Journal of Aesthetics and Art History* 16 (2010): 1–15.

³⁰ The third Radio Exercise consists of two routines: Radio Exercise No. 1 suitable for all ages, to increase strength; and Radio Exercise No. 2 for the elderly or disabled, which can be done whilst seated. Each exercise is about three minutes long and has 13 different body movement groups. Radio Exercise No. 2 is often left out in practice because many body movements in No. 1 are repeated in No. 2. Because Radio Exercise No. 1 is more popular and widely used among the Japanese, the name Radio Exercise sometimes is used just to indicate Radio Exercise No. 1.

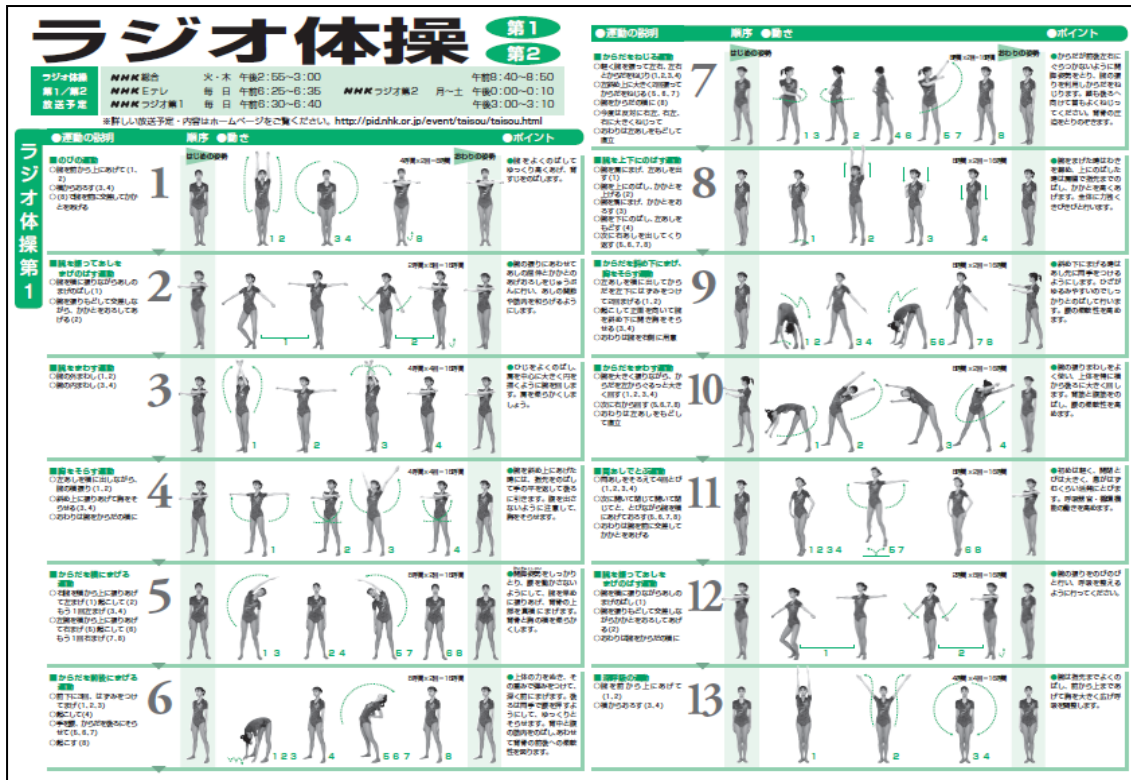


Figure 4. Third Radio Exercise by NHK³¹

Hattori Tadashi, the composer of the music of the second Radio Exercise, participated again in producing the third Radio Exercise. Although the music of the third Radio Exercise was created as a kind of substitute for the role of the verbal introduction and instructions, verbal instructions were added later to the music to help the audience with their exercise workout when the Radio Exercise was broadcast. Like the first Radio Exercise, the instructions are also offered by a male voice, but the voice tone is very soft, friendly, and less masculine.

The music for the third Radio Exercise is a piano piece in D major in common time, consisting of fifty-four measures in total. The first four measures constitute the introduction, serving as a prelude. Because the third Radio Exercise was initially designed to be done without the use of verbal instructions, the prelude of the third Radio Exercise serves the role of Egi's verbal introduction in the first Radio Exercise, which announces the start of the Radio Exercise program. All the body movements are done for the duration of four measures, except the first movement, a breathing exercise. The breathing exercise is done for two measures, providing the performer with a warm-up before the actual exercise begins.

A dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythm (♩) and ascending arpeggio are characteristically used in the music (see Music Example 1). The dotted rhythm is suggested in the motif in the introduction and appears numerous times throughout the music. The rhythm drives the music, adding consistency, continuity, and liveliness. The arpeggio is used to mark pauses and endings; it is used for the end of the introduction and for the “warm-up breathing” section.

³¹ Source: Duits. “1930s: How Radio Gymnastics Conquered Japan.”



Music Example 1: The motif of the music of Radio Exercise No. 1

Music Example 2: Chest, upper body circling, and jumping exercises

The music of the third Radio Exercise is organically integrated with the exercise routine. Beyond being just the accompaniment of the exercise, the music conducts the Radio Exercise program by itself. First, the melody is composed to be matched with the body movements, as if it depicts the body movement. For example, in the warm-up breathing exercise, when the performer circles his or her arms while breathing, the melody draws a circular line like a pendulum. In the chest exercise, when the performer first bends his or her body and then stretches to reach up, the melodic contour coincides with the up and down of the body movement. The upper body circling exercise is the most intense and biggest body movement in the entire Radio Exercise program. In the music for this exercise, sixteenth notes, which were previously used only as ornaments, become the primary rhythm of the melody. The tune of the jumping exercise is very lively with the extensive use of the staccato technique.³²

In the first-generation Radio Exercise, the music did not have a meaningful connection with certain body movements of the program, and the performer needed verbal instructions to keep track of the correct order of the program. In contrast, the third-generation Radio Exercise requires performers to recognize the corresponding body movements by listening to the accompanying music. In this version, the music functions as both a conductor—providing rhythmic cues and shifting tempos—and a mnemonic aid, helping performers memorize and execute the exercise routine.

³² See Tsugami, “Body Movements Controlled by Music: Analysis of Hattori Tadashi’s Composition Radio Taiso No.1,” for a detailed analysis of music corresponding to body movements in the Third Radio Exercise No. 1.

III. National Gymnastics in Postwar South Korea: Adopting the Legacy of Colonial Radio Exercise

Development of National Gymnastics in Postwar South Korea

After Korea's liberation from Japanese rule in 1945, armed forces gained significant control over the states through the Korean War in both North and South Korea. The two governments did not admit each other's legitimacy, and each claimed authority over all of the entire Korean Peninsula. They regarded each other as an enemy and sought their respective nation's security, as well as the sovereign authority of the state. The existence of a close-at-hand enemy helped the military powers in both North and South to justify their dictatorship. Gymnastics education, which had been used during the Japanese occupation as a political tool to colonize Koreans' bodies and propagate Japanese nationalism, was similarly promoted by the two postwar antagonistic Korean governments to indoctrinate citizens' bodies and minds with their respective ideologies. Gymnastics exercise programs were promoted by each government initially as a school-based discipline aimed at bringing up healthy, exemplary citizens within their respective communist or capitalist economies. Communist North Korea, inspired by China and the USSR, focused on developing mass gymnastics performances involving as many as 100,000 participants as an annual festival for state celebration and glorification. Nationalistic folk songs, including Arirang—an unofficial folk anthem cherished by Koreans both on the peninsula and abroad—were incorporated into these celebrations to inspire the North Korean people with a sense of national pride and unity.³³

In contrast to North Korea's totalitarian mass games, the South Korean government developed individualistic gymnastics programs that did not require collaboration but could still be performed collectively as a communal activity. Inspired by the Radio Exercise introduced during the Japanese colonial period, these exercises were transformed into a series of practical daily free-hand routines as part of the national gymnastics programs.³⁴ The first national gymnastics program developed in 1953 under the regime of President Rhee Syngman was named "National Health Gymnastics," or *kungminbogŏnch'ejo* (국민보건의체조), a name derived from the name of the Japanese first Radio Exercise, "National Health Gymnastics," or *kokuminhokentaisō* (國民保健體操). The second, third, fourth, and fifth national gymnastics were established during the regime of President Park Chung-hee, South Korea's longest-ruling autocrat.

Park took over the reins through the Military Revolution in May 1961. Park's Revolutionary Government tightened control of power, stressing anti-communism and national defense, as well as rapid advancement of the national economy, promoting heavy and chemical industries. Under his rule, South Korean schools focused on producing physically strong anti-communist workers on the back of the slogan

³³ Keith Howard, *Songs for "Great Leaders": Ideology and Creativity in North Korean Music and Dance*. (Oxford University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190077518.001.0001>; Lisa Burnett, "Let Morning Shine over Pyongyang: The Future-Oriented Nationalism of North Korea's 'Arirang' Mass Games," *Asian Music* 44, no. 1 (2013): 3–32, [10.1353/amu.2013.0010](https://doi.org/10.1353/amu.2013.0010).

³⁴ The developed programs include "National Health Gymnastics" (1953), "Reconstruction Gymnastics" (1961), "New World Gymnastics" (1972), "New Village Gymnastics" (1974), "National Gymnastics" (1977), and "New Millennium Health Gymnastics" (1999). The history of the development of free-hand gymnastics in Korea is available on the website of National Archives of Korea, hosted by the government of Korea: <http://theme.archives.go.kr/next/koreaOfRecord/gymnastics.do>. For more details, see Yoon-Hee Park. "Kwangbogihu han'guk maensonch'ejoŭi pogŭpkwa paljŏn [Supply and Development in Korea's Free Exercise Since the Restoration of Independence]" (Master's Thesis, Dongduk Women's University, 2008).

“Physical Strength is National Strength.” This relationship between the body and the state reflects a broader trend in modern capitalist societies, where the body is regarded as a form of capital. To enhance economic competitiveness, governments have often prioritized the cultivation of healthy citizens who can also serve as efficient, productive workers. Moreover, having experienced wars involving major world powers, some modern states have viewed the physical well-being of their citizens as a crucial military asset. As a result, they have competed to improve their populations' physical fitness, preparing their bodies for future mobilization.³⁵

As soon as Park Chung-hee took the reins in 1961, the Ministry of Education of Park's government declaimed the plan and objective to develop a national gymnastics program: “the government plans to establish and distribute national gymnastics to enhance citizens' health and promote a cheerful mood that will make a great contribution to the national reconstruction movement.”³⁶ The distribution was planned to be done through the participation and support of the Ministry of Education, the National Reconstruction Movement Center, the central broadcasting station, schools, governmental institutes, factories, and workplaces.

The government's plan of building a national gymnastics program was carried out. They distributed Reconstruction Gymnastics, or *chaegöñch'ejo* (재건체조) in 1961³⁷, New World Gymnastics, *sinsegŷech'ejo* (신세계체조) in 1972, New Village Gymnastics, or *saemaülch'ejo* (새마을체조) in 1974, and National Gymnastics, or *kungminch'ejo* (국민체조) in 1977. Among all of the gymnastics programs developed in Korea, National Gymnastics has been the one most effectively implemented as a form of citizenship education by the South Korean government. National Gymnastics was officially used in schools and government organs for twenty-two years, until it was replaced with New Millennium Health Gymnastics, or *saech'öñnyöñ'göñ'gangch'ejo* (새천년 건강체조) in 1999 by the democratic government in an attempt to dispense with the legacy of the military dictatorship, as well as Japanese colonialism.

The Relationship Between Radio Exercise and National Gymnastics: Reflections on Audio

Like Japanese Radio Exercise, National Gymnastics is a sequence of free-hand calisthenics activities composed of gymnastics, music, and verbal instructions. The music was composed by Kim Hee-jo (1920–2001), a former bandmaster of the South Korean Army, who served until his retirement as a lieutenant colonel in 1957. He composed numerous military marches and songs and later remained active in musical theater, broadcast music, and university teaching. The gymnastics routine and verbal instructions were created by Yoo Geun Lim (1932–), who was the vice president of the Korea Gymnastics Association and

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (Picador, 2003). In this publication, Michel Foucault discusses the concepts of biopolitics and how states exert control over populations, including health and bodily regulation, for purposes such as military readiness. For a more specific context related to physical fitness and nation-states, see also Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (Columbia University Press, 1978). This book explores the role of sports and physical fitness in modern societies, including their use as tools for nationalism and state control.

³⁶ The text was translated by the author. The original Korean text is found on National Archives of Korea Online: <http://theme.archives.go.kr/>.

³⁷ Reconstruction Gymnastics was originally named “National Gymnastics” and promoted targeting all Korean citizens in all age groups. However, because of the budget problem, the program was changed to be for the older population only and renamed “Reconstruction Gymnastics” at the request of the National Reconstruction Movement Center. See Moon-Gi Cho and Suk-Won Yim. “5.16 kunjönggi chaegöñch'ejöüi chejönggwa pogüp [Establishment and promotion of ‘Jaegeon-Chejo’ in 5.16 military dictatorship era].” *The Korean Journal of Physical Education* 48, no. 3 (2009): 35–43, <http://210.101.116.12/kiss2/viewer.asp>.

professor at Kyung-hee University. The gymnastics program consists of twelve different movement groups, each focusing on different body parts: warm-up breathing exercise, legs exercise, arms exercise, neck exercise, chest exercise, sides exercise, abdomen and back exercise, trunk exercise, entire body exercise, jumping exercise, arms and legs exercise, and warming down breathing exercise (see Figure 5). Starting with a warm-up, the exercise gains in intensity to involve the entire body in exercise and jumping before relaxing.

Compared with the music of the wartime and postwar Japanese Radio Exercise, the National Gymnastics' music is even more militaristic in its style. The distributed music recording is played by a military band composed of brass, woodwinds, and percussion, particularly flute, oboe, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, and drums. Korean National Gymnastics' music offers an introduction and warm-up section before the main exercise begins, as does the Japanese third Radio Exercise. As I discussed previously, the music for the introduction and warm-up in the third Radio Exercise is soothing and calm, with the piano playing arpeggio patterns. However, the introduction of National Gymnastics is a fanfare by a brass band and the warm-up is marching in place instead of breathing (see Music Example 3).



Figure 5: National Gymnastics program and descriptions by Korean Sport Committee³⁸

³⁸ Source: Jung-mi Kim. "National Gymnastics, Start!," *National Archives of Korea*, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://www.archives.go.kr/theme/next/koreaOfRecord/gymnastics.do>.

Preparation (준비)
Fanfare

March in place (제자리걸음)
March

Music Example 3: National Gymnastics Introduction and Warm-Up: Fanfare and Marching in Place

1 Warming up breathing (숨쉬기)
Moderato

Korean national gymnastics

2 Arms and legs (腕を振ってあしをまげのばす運動)

Japanese Radio Exercise

Music Example 4: Motifs of Radio Exercise and National Gymnastics

While National Gymnastics looks and sounds more militaristic, its melody and structure are notably similar to those of the music of the third Japanese Radio Exercise. The music of National Gymnastics is composed in G major in four-four time, consisting of sixty measures. As in the third Radio Exercise, a dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythm also dominates and drives the music. The use of an ascending diatonic melodic contour is also similar to Radio Exercise, as we can observe in the motifs of the two programs in Music Example 4.

National Gymnastics borrowed the concept of using music as both a conductor and a mnemonic aid from Radio Exercise. The primary function of the music is to provide rhythmic cues and tempos that synchronize with the body movements. Additionally, the music subtly adjusts its tempo and mood to correspond to the flow and nature of the movements. For example, the music is soothing and peaceful in accordance with warm-up and light body movements during the beginning of the gymnastics programs. As the movements become intense, the music also becomes intense and reaches a climax. For the jumping exercise, the music changes to a cheerful tune. It finally returns to a relaxing and peaceful mood for the breathing exercise and warming down. The contrast between fast and slow tempos is especially striking in the seventh body movement, abdomen, and back exercise. In Music Example 5, the first and third

measures are for abdomen exercise and the second and fourth are for back exercise. The abdomen exercise is a quick movement which is to stoop down and then straighten, while the back movement is a slow movement, which is to stretch oneself. The tempo of the music changes to give the performer enough time for the movements.



Music Example 5: Tempo Contrast Between Fast and Slow in the Abdomen and Back Movement

Verbal instructions, or commands, are synchronized with the military tune. The verbal instructions provide the performer with detailed instructions for the gymnastics programs from the beginning to the end. The gymnastics program starts with Yoo's commanding voice shouting, "National Gymnastics, Start!, or *kungminch'ejo sijak* (국민체조 시작)!, in a boot-camp-style military tone, evoking similarities to Egi's instruction in the first Radio Exercise. Throughout the program, Yoo's shouted instructions offer a description of the order of the programs, as well as counting the beat, as with the Japanese Radio Exercise. Yoo repeats "*hana, tul senn, nenn, tasöt, yösöt, ilgop, yödöl / tul tul, senn, nenn, tasöt, yösöt, ilgop, yödöl*" in a staccato voice.³⁹ Especially in *tasöt* and *yösöt*, the second vowel is hardly heard, therefore pronounced as *tas* and *yös*. After completing all of the routines of the program, Yoo announces the end of the exercise, crying out in military terms, "Stand in place, or *chejari* (제자리)," similar to Egi's announcement of "the end (おわり)."

The combination of music and verbal commands provides comprehensive and efficient instruction during the National Gymnastics program for the purposes of training and performance. The militaristic nature of the music and verbal commands in the National Gymnastics program not only disciplines and synchronizes participants but also carries a deeper sociopolitical resonance. Military-style music, traditionally used to command and control armies, evokes an atmosphere of order and authority. Similarly, the verbal commands provide precise, authoritative instructions, ensuring uniformity and cohesion among participants. In the context of South Korea, these elements collectively serve as a poignant reminder of the armistice with North Korea, reflecting the ongoing tensions and the need for vigilance and collective strength. This combination of music and commands reinforces a national consciousness tied to discipline, unity, and preparedness, aligning with broader societal efforts to maintain security and solidarity amidst the uncertainties of the divided Korean Peninsula. By integrating these auditory elements, the National Gymnastics program not only trains physical bodies but also shapes collective memory and identity, linking synchronized movement to a shared national purpose.

South Korea underwent democratization in the 1980s after decades of civil protests against an authoritarian regime. The 1987 June Democracy Movement was pivotal in the country's history, directly challenging military rule and paving the way for direct presidential elections. Despite the transition to democracy, National Gymnastics continued to be practiced for over a decade after democratization.

³⁹ In English: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight; two, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

During my childhood, I regularly learned and practiced these exercises on the school field at my elementary school. In 1999, the government introduced the New Millennium Health Gymnastics, replacing National Gymnastics to celebrate the arrival of the twenty-first century. This initiative not only marked the new millennium but also symbolized an effort to break away from the lingering legacies of military dictatorship and Japanese colonialism. By reimagining national physical culture, the government aimed to align health and fitness programs with democratic ideals while incorporating elements symbolizing Korea's identity.

The producers of New Millennium Health Gymnastics excluded military elements, such as verbal commands and military fanfare and marching, and used many traditional musical elements. Its gymnastics routines were inspired by the body movements of traditional mask dance and martial arts, such as *t'aegwŏndo* and *t'aekkyŏn*. The music of the new gymnastics program notably incorporates many traditional elements. It features melodies and rhythms inspired by traditional folk songs and is performed using indigenous instruments, such as the *p'iri*, *haegŭm*, *ajaeng*, and *puk*. For my generation, who spent their school years together, this new gymnastics program was part of our middle and high school experience, where we learned it during physical education classes and even took tests on it.

Despite the South Korean government's efforts in promoting New Millennium Health Gymnastics as a new national calisthenics, it has faced challenges in gaining recognition as a new national gymnastics by the Korean public. Today, with a wider range of options for sports and physical activities, people are less inclined to adopt government-distributed gymnastics programs for maintaining health, especially in a freer and more open atmosphere rather than under authoritarian rule. Additionally, many individuals are less familiar with traditional Korean music and dance movements, which can make the program more challenging to learn. The absence of verbal instructions in the program further makes it harder for one to remember and follow the routines, as the music alone does not provide clear guidance for the routines. The music and gymnastics routines have undergone updates over time, and the program's official name was changed from New Millennium Health Gymnastics to National Health Gymnastics in 2010. Although the revised music incorporates Korea's beloved folk song, "Arirang," the repeated melody with minimal variation in tempo and instrumentation over the six-minute exercise makes it difficult to follow and memorize the sequence of movements. This lack of instructional clarity presents a significant barrier to the program's adoption and effectiveness.

The Imbrications of Colonialism and Modernity in Postwar South Korea

Now, several critical questions arise: Why did Korea, a nation that endured thirty-five years under Japanese colonial rule, continue to perpetuate practices and legacies rooted in Japanese colonialism and militarism? Furthermore, what accounts for the 1970s South Korean government's adoption of Japanese radio exercise—a practice it had previously criticized as a tool of Japanese colonial propaganda? These questions point to the complex relationship between colonial legacies and postcolonial nation-building.

The imbrications of colonialism and modernity, alongside Japan's emergence as a regional model of

Asian modernity, have been extensively explored across disciplines.⁴⁰ In the field of music scholarship, Hyun Kyong Hannah Chang examines Japan's rise as a regional empire and model of Asian modernity in the late nineteenth century by studying the diffusion of classroom songbooks published by the Japanese colonial government for use in Korea's elementary schools.⁴¹

South Korean sociologist Ou-Byung Chae offers further insight into the persistence of colonial legacies, asking why the postcolonial state reproduces a colonial state. He argues that after Japan's defeat in 1945 and the dislocation of colonial structures, the postcolonial state—under the intervention of U.S. and Soviet military administrations—adopted familiar colonial frameworks to navigate the ideological conflicts between leftist and rightist forces. According to Chae, Rhee Syngman, South Korea's first president, legitimized his power by utilizing colonial structures, using them to consolidate authority and stabilize the fledgling nation during a politically volatile period.⁴²

The postcolonial South Korean government not only inherited cultural practices from the colonial era but also continued the governance system established by Japanese colonial rule, particularly through reliance on military power to assert control and consolidate sovereignty. From its foundation, the South Korean government fostered and exploited anti-Japanese sentiment to gain political favor and maintain control. The political and cultural elites of 1960s and 1970s South Korea, particularly under Park Chung-hee's regime, reimagined modernity and nation-building within a framework that mirrored colonial precedents. Seungsook Moon, a political and cultural sociologist, offers a compelling framework for understanding this era through the concept of "militarized modernity." Moon defines this as "the construction of the (South) Korean nation as the anti-communist self at war with the communist other, the constitution of members of the anti-communist body politic through discipline and physical force, and the intertwining of the industrializing economy with military service."⁴³ Moon emphasizes that during the 1970s, the South Korean state monopolized the imagination of modernity, deeply entangling it with legacies of colonial governance.

South Korea's geopolitical realities, particularly its military confrontation with North Korea, granted extraordinary authority to the military regimes of the era. These governments justified coercion and disciplinary measures by appealing to the dual imperatives of economic development and national security. This state-led modernization strategy echoed Japanese colonial tactics, which emphasized loyalty, unity, and productivity through militarized discipline. By grounding their policies in colonial legacies, South Korea's postcolonial political elites framed modernity as a state-driven, militarized project,

⁴⁰ Hyun Kyong Hannah Chang, "Colonial Circulations: Japan's Classroom Songbooks in Korea, 1910–1945," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 27, no. 2 (2018): 157–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2018.1506941>; Nayoung Aimee Kwon, *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan* (Duke University Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822375401>; Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876–1945* (University of Washington Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780295805139>; Jin-Yeon Kang, "T'alsingmin kukkahyöngsöng yön'guüi pip'anjök kömt'owa t'onghapchök sigagüi mosaek [Rethinking Postcolonial State Building: Toward an Integrative Approach]," *Korean Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012): 223–63; Ou-Byung Chae, "Singmin'gujoüi t'algü, tasagön, kürigo chaejöphap [The Dislocation, Event, and Rearticulation of Colonial Structure: Postcolonial State Formation in South Korea, 1945–1950]," *Discourse* 201 13, no. 1 (2010): 65–97.

⁴¹ Chang, "Colonial Circulations," 157–83. In this article, the author discusses how the Japanese songbooks introduced genres such as *tongyo* (artistic children's songs) and *kagok* (an art song genre that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s under the influence of Japan-educated Korean composers), which became significant in shaping Korea's musical landscape. This cultural transmission underscores the complex ways colonial practices and modernity intertwined to shape postcolonial identities and practices in South Korea.

⁴² Chae, "The Dislocation, Event, and Rearticulation of Colonial Structure," 65–97.

⁴³ Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*. (Duke University Press, 2005), 24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv120qt90>.

demonstrating how Japanese colonial governance left a lasting imprint on South Korea's nation-building efforts in the twentieth century.

While promoting anti-Japanese nationalism through school curricula and mass media, the postcolonial South Korean government simultaneously preserved many colonial legacies. Charged with the task of national reconstruction following the Korean War, it retained much of the Japanese colonial social and political systems, such as health insurance and education frameworks. The development of gymnastics in South Korea reflected these dynamics, with programs like National Gymnastics directly copying the form of wartime and postwar Japanese Radio Exercise, including its music-driven, verbally guided exercises.

IV. Conclusion

Sports and music both possess the capacity to shape cultural and national identities while conveying political ideologies. The intersection of music and sports often creates synergies that shape and reinforce national ideologies. Canadian popular music scholar Ken McLeod claims that sports and (popular) music are “often interconnected through common cross-marketing tactics, metaphoric similarities of aesthetic and stylistic approaches, and issues of spectatorship, but also through their often active influence on each other’s performative strategies and content and their action as synergistic agents in the construction of identity and community.”⁴⁴ This connection highlights the integration of physical and aesthetic dimensions, challenging traditional mind–body dualities. Examples include music in sporting events—such as national anthems, chants, and cheers—and its prominent role in sports-themed films, where music enhances the narrative and emotional impact.

A compelling example of this nexus is the Radio Exercise program of the Japanese Empire during its territorial expansion in the twentieth century, which later evolved into a national gymnastics program under the autocratic military regime in postwar South Korea. These programs demonstrate how the integration of physical movement and music can serve as an effective mechanism for simultaneously disciplining both body and mind, becoming a powerful tool for disseminating political ideology.

Radio Exercise was initiated in the 1920s, celebrating the new media technology that could deliver information in an audio form simultaneously to audience members nationwide. It was an exercise program that aimed at enhancing Japanese people’s health based on the idea that a physically strong body is an important asset in a competitive global society. With the sluggish distribution of radio receiver sets in the country, Radio Exercise evolved into a communal activity that involved groups of people and mass participation in public spaces. During wartime, Radio Exercise further developed into a political ritual in the Japanese mainland and its colonies, in which citizens prayed for the victory and prosperity of the Empire of Japan, which claimed that it would unify its colonies into a pan-Asian world.

In colonial Korea, where Radio Exercise broadcasting started in 1931 as a part of Japanese assimilation policies, Koreans reaffirmed their Japanese national identity in surrender to the colonial hegemony by participating in the mass national morning exercise ritual. It functioned as a tool for enforcing conformity to imperial ideals, offering a controlled form of social and national inclusion. However, this inclusion was inherently unequal, reflecting the hierarchical nature of the colonial order and the complex interplay between national identity and colonial subjectivity within the imperial

⁴⁴ Ken McLeod, *We Are the Champions: The Politics of Sports and Popular Music* (Ashgate, 2011), 1.

framework. Through broadcasting, Egi's morning greetings, followed by a piano tune featuring verbal instructions for the Radio Exercise program, awakened the bodies of loyal subjects throughout the entire Japanese Empire. Millions of Japanese—old and new citizens in different locations—performed the same bodily movements in response to his commands.

After the end of World War II, Japan developed new versions of Radio Exercise that excluded the military verbal commands and emphasized the role of music as the conductor of the program. However, the use of gymnastics for military purposes was revived in postcolonial South Korea under the name of "National Gymnastics." Koreans not only adopted Japan's form of Radio Exercise, consisting of sports, music, and verbal instructions, but also drew on Japan's idea of using communal gymnastics exercises to improve the country's military strength and nurturing healthy anti-Communist citizens and workers for the prosperity of the country, under Park Chung-hee's political philosophy "physical strength is national strength." National Gymnastics adopted audio elements eclectically from first- and third-generation Radio Exercise programs, including military-style verbal commands from the former and the use of music as a conductor from the latter. With its original elements, the exercise program was even more militaristic than the Japanese wartime Radio Exercise program. It started with a brass band playing a military fanfare, which was followed by Yoo's powerful verbal commands leading the mass of participants to march in place and then in a sequence of calisthenics exercise activities. The music and verbal commands of National Gymnastics inspired wartime sentiments and reminded South Koreans of the existence of the national enemy, North Korea.

Ironically, National Gymnastics, which was not only a legacy of the Japanese Imperial Radio Exercise that served for its colonial propaganda but also a tool for dictatorship, is now an icon of the so-called glorious 1970s, an era of rapid economic development. Even now, almost two decades after the abolishment of National Gymnastics from official school education and its replacement with another program, National Gymnastics is still remembered by many South Koreans as their "national exercise."

V. Appendix

APPENDIX A:

Japanese Third Radio Exercise No. 1, composed by Hattori Tadashi, transcribed by the author.

Radio Exercise No. 1

ラジオ体操

Hattori Tadashi

Transcribed by Chaeyoung Lee

Introduction

Allegretto

mf

① Warming up – breathing (のびの運動)

Moderato

p

② Arms and legs (腕を振ってあしをまげのばす運動)

③ Arms circling (腕をまわす運動)

④ Chest (胸をそらす運動)

⑤ Sides bending (からだを?にまげる運動)

⑥ Upperbody front and back bending (からだを前後にまげる運動)

The musical score is written for piano and guitar. It begins with an introduction in 4/4 time, marked *Allegretto* and *mf*. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The first exercise, 'Warming up – breathing', is marked *Moderato* and *p*. Exercises 2 through 6 follow in the same key and time signature, each with specific musical notations for the movements described in the Japanese text.

APPENDIX A: (cont.)

⑦ Body twisting (からだをねじる運動)

Radio Taiso No. 1



⑧ Arms up and down (腕を上下にのばす運動)



⑨ Diagonal body bending (からだを斜め下にまげ、胸をそらす運動)



⑩ Upper body circling (からだをまわす運動)



⑪ Jumping (?あしでとぶ運動)



⑫ Arms and legs (腕を振ってあしをまげのばす運動)



⑬ Warming down - breathing (深呼吸の運動)



APPENDIX B:

South Korean National Gymnastics, composed by Kim Hee-Jo, transcribed by the author.

National Gymnastics

국민체조

Kim Heejo
Korean Olympic Committee
Transcribed by Chaeyoung Lee

Preparation (준비)
Fanfare



March in place (제자리걸음)
March



① Warming up breathing (숨쉬기)
Moderato



② Legs (다리)



③ Arms (팔)



④ Neck (목)



⑤ Chest (가슴)
meno mosso



APPENDIX B: (cont.)

National Gymnastics

국민체조

Kim Heejo
Korean Olympic Committee
Transcribed by Chaeyoung Lee

Preparation (준비)

Fanfare



March in place (제자리걸음)

March



① Warming up breathing (숨쉬기)

Moderato



② Legs (다리)



③ Arms (팔)



④ Neck (목)



⑤ Chest (가슴)



APPENDIX B: (cont.)

National Gymnastics

⑥ Sides (옆구리)
a tempo

⑦ Abdomen and back (등배)



⑧ Trunk (몸통)



⑨ Entry body (온몸)



⑩ Jumping (뿔뛰기)

⑪ Arms and legs (팔다리)
Tempo I

⑫ Warming down breathing (숨고루기)



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