
Book Reviews

MANZENREITER, WOLFRAM *Die soziale Konstruktion des japanischen Alpinismus: Kultur, Ideologie und Sport im modernen Bergsteigen* [The Social Structure of the Japanese Alpine: Culture, Ideology, and Sport of Modern Mountain Climbing]. Vienna: Abteilung für Japanologie/Institut für Ostasienwissenschaften, 2000. Pp. xviii + 300. Map, graphs, notes, bibliography, index. ÖS 280 cb.

Some books, like Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), promise more than they deliver. Manzenreiter's study of Japanese mountain-climbing delivers a great deal more than it promises.

The first chapter is an incisive critical commentary on the state of Japanese sport sociology, a discipline that seems stereotypically to have survived, like Japanese sociology generally, on its "Eurocentric heritage" (22). According to Manzenreiter, Japanese sport sociologists have been influenced by Marxism, by modernization theory, and—more recently—by Clifford Geertz, Erving Goffman, and the Parisian postmodernists. Unfortunately, when Japanese sociologists and their counterparts among the historians do empirical research into their own sports, as opposed to those of Europe and North America, they seem to abandon all interest in the theoretical discussions that have enlivened contemporary sport sociology. They tend to present their data in an episodic format that can leave a non-Japanese reader confused rather than informed. Manzenreiter names a number of honorable exceptions from this rather dismal generalization, but his account of Japanese sport studies is—on the whole—quite harsh.

After his critique of the rather scanty serious research done to date, Manzenreiter provides a framework to compensate for this theoretical deficit. Following a critical discussion of some of my work and that of Eric Dunning and Norbert Elias, Manzenreiter opts for the cultural-studies approach exemplified by John Hargreaves. When he turns from a more general discussion of theory to work specific to mountain climbing, Manzenreiter pays generous tribute to the contributions of Peter Donnelly.

Although Manzenreiter's subtitle refers to modern mountain climbing, he begins his analysis with a fascinating account of Japanese ascents that began as early as the seventh century. Hundreds of years before Europeans like Walter Weston (1861-1940) began to explore and to write about the *Nihon arupsu* ("Japanese Alps"), monks and lay pilgrims had climbed Mount Fuji and scores of other peaks favored by the gods. If Europeans had the illusion of priority, it was because "religiously motivated mountain-climbing had diminished in importance in the years following the Meiji Restoration (1868)" (59). Weston offered assistance to the *Nihon Sangakkai*, the mountaineering club found in 1905 by Kojima Usui (1873-1948) and six other men who combined a strong interest in geology and botany with

a romantic sense of mountain grandeur. On the whole, however, Weston and other Europeans contributed little to Japanese alpinism, which developed in “relative independence” (73).

The second of the four periods into which Manzenreiter divides the history of Japanese alpinism extended from 1915 to 1940. These were the years of *Versportlichung* (“sportification”), during which scientific and aesthetic interests gave way to ludic competition. Who was the first to climb this mountain? By which route and with what equipment? These were also the years of moderate popularization of the sport, which in its first decade was distinctly an activity for Japan’s elite. Once middle-class Japanese began to venture into the *Nihon arupusu*, an infrastructure of railway lines and mountain lodges (with professional guides) was formed. In 1930, Waseda University graduate Kawasaki Kichizō began to publish *Yama to Keikoku* (“Mountain and Ravine”), the sport’s first commercial journal.

Mountaineering recovered rapidly from the effects of World War II. Enthusiasts tended, in the years from 1945 to 1970, to fall into two camps. There were those who organized ambitious and expensive expeditions to foreign peaks. Passion for the grand expedition intensified in 1956 when Imanishi Toshio scaled the Himalayan peak of Manaslu, the world’s eighth highest mountain. Fourteen years later, a wave of nationalism accompanied the Japanese conquest of Mount Everest. Meanwhile, less hardy (and less well heeled) Japanese were content to amble among their homelands less challenging hills. Between the elite climbers and the amblers was a large group of rather reckless adventurers who risked—and frequently lost—their lives on peaks of various heights. If I read Manzenreiter’s graph correctly (195), Japanese climbers from 1958 to 1989 were approximately ten times as likely as North American climbers to fall to their deaths or perish from the cold. So much for Japan’s vaunted *seishin* (“intrepid spirit”).

As for the sport in more recent times, there have been profound demographic changes. Women, who were rarely among the ranks of prewar climbers, now comprise some 40 percent of all mountaineers and some 25 percent of the elite. Young men in their twenties and thirties dominated the sport for its first fifty or sixty years, but the majority of those registered with the *Nihon Sangaku Kyōkai* (Japanese Mountaineering Association) are now forty or older. Young people, attracted by an array of less demanding and less expensive avocations, have drifted away from alpinism.

There have also been social changes. In 1965, climbers affiliated with Japan’s Communist Party began their own mountaineering organization, the *Nihon Kinrōsha Sangaku Renmei* (“Japanese Workers Alpine Federation”). This organization has become an important rival to the Japanese Mountaineering Association.

Now that working-class climbers have added their numbers to the throngs headed for the *Nihon arupus*, there have been protests by environmental groups—presumably middle-class—who are fearful of the degradation of fragile mountain habits. The environmentalists may be fighting a lost battle. “Thanks to the mass media and to commercialization,” mountaineering’s days as an elite sport “are definitely past” (238). On the other hand, if this splendid book is a harbinger, the best days of Japanese sport studies have just begun.

—ALLEN GUTTMANN
Amherst College