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Author(s): MANZENREITER, Wolfram

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Using Bourdieu and Foucault to Study the Cultural Political Economy of Sport in Japan

Wolfram Manzenreiter, University of Vienna

Introduction

Sport can be viewed as one of the most successful export products of the Old World. Over the past 500 years, western civilization has exported numerous social, cultural, political, and economic institutions to the rest of the world, often assisted by military force or enforced by economic power. The hegemonic position of the West framed the processes by which its own locally grown cultural institutions turned into apparently universal principles. Worldwide, states and people have largely consented to the framework of the nation state and its associated principles of parliamentarianism, egalitarianism, market capitalism and the like. Yet in terms of spread, compliance and acceptance, hardly any institution has proved to be more successful, pervasive, and persistent than sport. While democracy, free entrepreneurship, equal employment opportunities, and even human rights are often highly contested and the subject of severe dispute, there seems to be almost unanimous consent to the veneration of physical prowess on the playing fields and the excitement generated by sportive games and contests. No matter what cultural belief and value systems give order and meaning to a particular society, people everywhere are highly likely to approve of the aesthetics of the sporting body, the narratives of symbolic competition, the moral economy of fair play, and the symbolic and often also material value of victory and sporting records.

The point I want to make here is that a study on sport in Japan is as much a study of cultural globalization. In order to surmount the shortcomings of undertheorized sport histories and compartmentalized approaches focussing on one sport within one nation, I suggest a comprehensive approach towards sport as a distinctive cultural sphere at the intersection of body culture, political economy, and cultural globalization. This contribution, which summarizes the introduction to my study of Sport and Body Politics in Japan (Manzenreiter 2014), argues that dynamics of globalization are influencing body cultures in Japan – as elsewhere around the world – and that the driving force behind this transformation is rooted in political economy.

Cultural globalization

I will start with a short explanation of cultural globalization and its twofold nature: One dimension refers to the worldwide spread of culture, the second to the way in which culture is impacted by globalization. Globalization became the dominant concept within the social sciences to frame the social, political and economic processes of the post-Cold War world system. Since the 1980s, mindful observers noticed the rise of a new world economy that came to be characterized by the growing influence of global capital, the increased importance of global markets for financial services and specialized services for international
investments, and the new international division of labour based on low paid and flexible labour relations. Technological innovations such as world-encompassing computer and telecommunication networks facilitated the creation of transnational markets and their never-ceasing operations. The transformation of the economy paralleled the diminishing power of national governments in the regulation of economic processes.

In line with the economy, culture emerged as the second most important field of analysis for globalisation theory. Notwithstanding the conceptual discord with historical traits – capitalism has always been global – and the nature of the effects of globalisation, most commentators concur on the common notion ‘of one single world or human society, in which all regional, national, and local elements are tied together in one interdependent whole’ (Holton 1998:2). Accordingly, globalisation is conceived as ‘a process or a set of processes which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transaction […] generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power’ (Held et al. 1999:16). If culture is understood in line with symbolic anthropology as the ‘historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life’ (Geertz 1973:89), then the complex and multiform interrelations, penetrations and cultural mutations that characterize globalization are leaving their imprints on styles of cultural experience and identification everywhere (Tomlinson 1999:105). An emphasis on the ideational and mental-cognitive aspect of culture would also see globalization as a ‘pseudo-natural objective’ accepted by people worldwide as ‘the way things are’. This does not imply placing it merely in the sphere of consciousness or ideas, as this would fail to take its real-life dimensions as well as its historicity into account. Yet by emphasizing the relative importance of economic capital and the capitalist modes of production, distribution and exchange within the nodes and hubs of a globalized world, globalization must be acknowledged as an outcome of social and economic struggles, not from a moralizing point of view, but from a theorizing angle.

The impact of global economic flows on the culture of sport has been assessed in contrasting ways. Key notions of the debate, such as cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 1991) and cultural diffusion (Guttmann 1996), hybridisation (Houlihan 1994) and homogenisation (Harvey, Rail and Thibault 1996), glocalization (Robertson 1994) or grobalization (Andrews and Ritzer 2007), vary widely on directivity, processuality, and agency. Maguire (1999:93) argued that globalization should be understood ‘in terms of attempts by more established groups to control and regulate access to global flows and also in terms of how indigenous peoples both resist these processes and recycle their own cultural products’. The key dichotomy emerging from his argument, ‘diminishing contrasts, increasing varieties’, echoes Appadurai’s earlier observation ‘that both sides of the coin of global cultural process today are products of the infinitely varied mutual contests of sameness and difference’ (Appadurai: 1990:308).
Sport, play and culture

Sport nowadays consist of an ever increasing pool of different forms of physical activity. At the same time, however, regional differences and local particularities of sport practices diminished, as both local traditions (of folk games) and local versions (of world games) adjusted to the dominant model of modern sport (Guttmann 1979). A closer look at the phenomenon of modern sport in any particular locality reveals the dialectics of universalism and particularism at work. While the global political economy under Western hegemony has played a crucial role in the dissemination of sport without doubt, a number of universal conditions have also facilitated the adoption and adaptation of sport all over the globe. I see these universalities rooted in the corporeality of sport, and two interrelated binary pairs that characterize the sport form: certainty / uncertainty and sameness / difference.

Most sports are based on the certainty of fair and equal starting conditions for all contestants, but the goal of the game is to extract difference out of sameness: difference measured in seconds, centimetres, goals, or points that draw the line between victory and defeat. The open nature of sport as a ‘real-life event’ that can change direction anytime creates thrill and suspense, the particular aesthetic dimensions of sport (Bette and Schimank 2000). With rituals or ritual-like behaviour marking start and finish of the competition, or ceremonies heralding the temporary discontinuity of the rules of everyday life, sport is placed within a clearly demarcated spatial-time-frame of a ‘secondary life’ (Bakhtin 1987). Yet as any ritual, sport symbolically refers to the social order of the ‘primary life’, both in form and content (Gebauer and Alkemeyer 2001). The symbolic message of the contest may conflict with official ideology or folklore theories about the ‘natural order’ and underlying rationalities of hierarchical power inequalities. Tensions and contradictions can be formally mitigated because the performance itself is separated from everyday life. Ever since anthropologists started to pay attention to the symbolism involved in the production of meaning, they have argued that any society has developed its own set of rituals and cultural media that function to maintain structure – or to subvert it (van Gennep 1960 [1909]; Geertz 1987; Turner 1982). Like initiation rites, spiritual ceremonies, carnivalesque spectacles and dramatic performances, the cultural form of sport constitutes a powerful cultural device that instils certain orientations to the world in individuals, in the first instance through the symbolic manipulation of the body, in the second through the bodily manipulation of symbols. If structured body movements are assigned symbolic and moral significance, and if they are repeated frequently enough, they generate a moral orientation toward the world (Brownell 1995:11-13).

It was the cultural historian Johan Huizinga who rated the inventive power of play and its impact on cultural change as the central and distinguishing feature of man. His seminal study on the culture of play (Huizinga 1955 [1938]) clearly demonstrated that all societies have known how to transform the basic play drive into a cultural expression by giving order to the movement of the body. Collective practicing and inter-group exchange of knowledge on how to play the game subdued the chaos of natural play to the rules of social play. But twentieth century sport was for Huizinga merely a corrupted aberration of cultural creativity, having lost most of its original play-like qualities to the allures of profit-making. Categorizing societies
according to the games their people prefer, anthropologist Roger Caillois (1958) developed a matrix, based on whether the element of competition (agon), chance (alea), simulation (mimicry), or vertigo (ilynx, or inebriation) was dominating the stock of games held by society; at a second level of analysis, he differentiated between spontaneous, creative play (paidia) and rule-bound games (ludus). Even though most games tend to belong to more than one category, the typology enabled him to classify social entities by marking the structural analogies between a society’s stock of games and its value system and normative orientation. Sports, which are characterized by rules and competition, fit well into the value system of liberal societies – as well as into capitalist economies which is why Adorno disdained the passion for sport as the real basis for the dictatorship of mass culture.

Examples for Japan's traditional games with fundamental rules and a strong competitive stance include horse riding, archery, fencing, sumo wrestling, boat racing, and gichō, a team game roughly comparable to field hockey. Usually they were part of a ceremony or ritual that directed their meaning away from the apparent triviality and make-believe of the world of play. The seriousness of non-play was most pronounced in martial arts (bugei), which is the realm of traditional body culture that Japan has become most famous for. Yet martial arts have turned into combat sports, and judo even into an Olympic sport, which illustrates the way body cultures change and travel. The deterritorialization of culture, stripping-off the odour of local tradition and meaning, is an important prerequisite for the successful global diffusion of a cultural form, no matter whether it travels east or west. Yet deterritorialization does not imply the end of locality, rather it signifies its transformation into a more complex cultural space (Tomlinson 1999:149).

The body in culture

Within this scenario of cultural transfer, the corporeal interface between self and society is of crucial importance for the performative acts of presentation and representation. The body has been noted as a signifier of cultural difference by travellers and ethnographers of all times. It was Marcel Mauss who first elaborated on the socially mediated nature of body movements. His ground-breaking essay ‘The Techniques of the Body’, originally published in 1934, turned the attention of the social sciences towards the constructed nature and cultural rooting of even the most profane everyday physical practices. The notion of ‘habitus’, that helped Mauss to understand the human being as a totality in which the tangible aspects of human life are related with the body and its material experience, the techniques of work, control of emotion and the enactment of ritual and ceremonial performances, has been used by authors as different as Hegel, Weber, Durkheim, Polanyi, Elias and Levi-Strauss. It was Pierre Bourdieu (1987), however, who sharpened the concept as an explanatory and analytical tool. Habitus became the central pillar for his sociology of practice, referring to a complex set of dispositions, a habitual way of being, that rests upon the objective conditions everyday life is subjugated to as well as the cultural expressions, media, rituals, games etc., that represent society’s stratification.
The conception that the body and its movements are shapeable and in fact have to be shaped in order to achieve progress and mastery has been central to most traditional Japanese crafts, including the martial arts. The precise imitation and repetition of set models of action, as demonstrated by teachers, is their standard method of learning, and by way of extension, a preferred model of appropriation in Japanese culture. Instructors usually rely on non-verbal and kinetic modes of training. Students are expected to learn by carefully observing and imitating the performance of their superiors. Kata, a pattern of movements which in the case of martial arts contains a series of logical and practical attacking and blocking techniques, were developed as mnemonic vehicles through which the skill could be passed down from one generation to the next. In the peaceful Edo period, the original purpose of lethal effectiveness waned in significance, and the Confucian ethic of self-cultivation became a more appropriate frame of meaning. Kata thus came to emphasize exact form, not immediate effectiveness. Even in modern martial arts, kata serve the body to memorise the techniques properly, while randori and kumite, the free sparring practice, serve to revise practical knowledge and to confirm that the disciplined body is able to act instinctively.

If the body in martial arts moves in unison with the demands of the moment, a perfect balance between skills and challenge is achieved, and the practicing subject enters a state of no-mind (mushin). The sensual experience of mushin apparently corresponds with ‘flow’, an intrinsically motivating and optimally rewarding condition once encounters when being fully immersed in an activity that is testing the limits of one’s skills, yet without putting one under stress (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). Linking Japanese martial arts techniques of the body with the phenomenological view of the body, Cohen (2006:77-78) argues that the practice of progress achieved by the endless repetition of movements does not simply lead to perfection but to profound changes in the ‘body-self’. Japanese martial art practitioners explain the transcendence of consciousness as a result of the individual’s efforts to develop a sense of inner self which requires the accomplishment of an outer self which is in harmony with the social order and the environment (Cox 1990:68-70).

Similar observations on routine training methods, pedagogical philosophy and moral orientations have been made for a great number of sports in Japan, particularly within institutions of formal education. Herrigel (1953) noted that practice, repetition and repetition of the repeated are distinctive features for long stretches of the way to mastery in archery. Kelly (1998) carefully plotted the way Japan’s ‘king of homeruns’, Oh Sadaharu, learnt to swing the bat in endless sessions of repetitive drills and supervised practice. Field notes from sport lessons and training hours with school sport clubs in Japan reveal that also today a great proportion of time is consumed by repetitious training exercises performed over long periods of time with little or no variation. The way sports are practiced in training as well as in competitions actually serves to shape the players’ moral (seishin) and social skills utilising the body as a somatic or corporeal tool. The social frame of the sport club conveys a sense of stability and certainty to them which might be a surrogate for the absent pure pleasure of play. Coaching a Japanese university rugby club, Light (1999) noted that his students often referred to concepts that are subjectively understood and learnt through the body such as the
notion of *seishin ryoku* (spiritual power) and *gaman* (restraint). Training regimes of team players typically require commitment of the individual, group ethos, perseverance and endurance, and reflect a general belief in the need to learn specific patterns. These are all characteristics highly valued by Japanese society and are also values that underpin education in contemporary Japan.

To summarize the debate on sport and body culture, sports are like any kind of cultural performance media of the ‘somatisation of the social’ (Bourdieu 1992) in a double sense. On the one hand, they are embodiments of objective conditions. On the other hand, they are performative media of embodied attitudes, world views, or ‘cultural dispositions’. As cultural manifestations, sport and meanings associated with the rule-conducted and playful, yet in many cases also competitive and achievement-oriented body practices, have been changing with time and space, as well as the societies that created them.

**Political economy of the body**

Michel Foucault’s theoretical contributions to the micro-physics of power and the political economy of the body are helpful to understand how practices of the body and social structures are interconnected by way of ‘discourses’, ideas, and meanings. These are genuine elements of the realm of culture, but Foucault’s analysis clearly shows that they are political, too.

Political economy in its broadest sense seeks to explain the relations between economic processes and social or political conditions. More of importance to this study is its conception in a more practical sense that conceives of political economy as a method to safeguard the accumulation of wealth of a nation and as such a particular form of governmental intervention which emerged in the transition ‘from a regime dominated by structures of sovereignty to a regime dominated by techniques of government’ in the 18th century (Foucault 2007:142). The emerging techniques of power were essentially centered on the individual body, to take control over it and increase its productivity through exercise and drill.

Foucault’s idea of history is based on shifts of ‘epistemes’. Each historic epoch is characterized by a specific episteme, or systems of knowledge, ‘that defines the conditions of the possibility of all knowledge’ (Foucault 1970:168). The tectonic shift towards the episteme of modernity, following upon the Renaissance episteme of resemblance and the Baroque episteme of representation, became evident in new ways of thinking about Man as natural being and his body and human life in terms of biology. Knowledge of the body in the Classical Age consisted of a seemingly endless chain of analogies, emulations, sympathies and congruencies that placed the body in relation to the divine order of the world. In the age of representation, by contrast, knowledge of the body became systematically ordered in networks of identity and differences facilitating the taxonomical and utilitarian perception of the body. The episteme shift took shape in the foundations of the human sciences, including modern medicine, psychology, criminology, population studies and political economy (Amariglio 1988).

Foucault grasped political economy as the governing principle of bureaucratic rationality that restlessly pursues increases in efficiency: its techniques of power ‘were also techniques for rationalizing and
strictly economizing on a power that had to be used in the least costly way possible, thanks to a whole system of surveillance, hierarchies, inspections, bookkeeping, and reports – all the technology that can be described as the disciplinary technology of labor’ (Foucault 2003:240). Political economy is the ‘knowledge of processes that link together variations of wealth and variation of population on three axes: production, circulation, consumption’ (Foucault 2007:450). The body of the populace not only provided laboring bodies to production, but also desiring bodies to the market. As power in Foucauldian terms is the cumulative effect of all social positions, rather than the privilege or possession by a single class of social actors, it achieves its goals without force, brutal oppression or open ideology. The corresponding strategies consist of diffuse, invisible technologies of power, embedded in the pores of everyday life, stretching into the most intimate zones of the body. Under the ubiquitous impact of the ‘micro-power’ the body is constantly placed in the political: ‘power relations have an immediate hold upon it, they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies and to emit signs’ (Foucault 1977:25). Because the political allocation of the body is tied to its economic utility, Foucault explicitly introduced the term of the political economy of the body.

A Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge spanning the past five or more centuries would reveal that in Japan the body has been similarly placed in varying epistemes shifting with the ages. To my knowledge, such a project is still wanting. Such a task would have to carve out the analogies and networks between the living body and the metaphysics of the dominating Buddhist worldview of medieval times, and how the emphasis on unreality of things has been systematically interlinked with the lack of sovereign state power, the major landholding structure of shōen (autonomous estates or manors) with its complex hierarchies of rights to income from the land, the omnipresence of warfare and death, the manifold uncertainties Japanese of all social origins experienced in this world, and the historically unique prevalence of naturalist depictions of the human body in works of art, such as the oversized but hyperrealist wooden body sculptures of the niō (guarding figure) placed at many temple gates, the graphic depictions of corpses in the process of decay and decomposition (kusō-zu), or Ikkyū’s poems on dying and burial rites.

A history of thought for the following period would certainly take for its starting point the many tractates of Neo-Confucianism, which provided a heavenly sanction for the highly formalized social order of the Edo period (1600-1868). A system of thought explaining reality as well as issues of social responsibilities strongly harmonized with the needs of the centralized Tokugawa bureaucracy (bakufu) and its total authority over social mobility, economic activities, religious affairs, education and everyday life. This social philosophy, strongly shaped by the school of Zhu Xi (in Japanese shushigaku) and Taoist traditions, was rooted in the idea that reality is shaped by the dynamic between the principle (ri) giving the universe its structure and its manifestations through energy or vital force (ki). Hence Neo-Confucianism equated the rigid corporate order of the four classes and the reciprocity of social relations with the cosmic harmony of the universe; similarly, health and well-being were also considered as an ephemeral state taking place only when the delicate balance between body and its environment had been achieved (Ohnuki-Tierney 1989:62).
Kaibara Ekiken’s famous tract Yōjōkun (Lessons on leading a healthy life, 1713) described the appropriate techniques of the body and its underlying principles in great detail. With the help of dieting, exercises, mental control, sexual restraint, and art of breathing, man was capable of achieving the balance and circulation of the vital power so that he or she could live for the entire predetermined span of life. As the body was regarded as a gift from heaven and earth, forwarded by father and mother, taking care of one’s health was intimately related to filial piety and the maintenance of the cosmic order.

The Edo period concept of health did not separate body from mind and spiritual well-being. Health and longevity were maintained by an integrated body ‘as a small universe in relationship with nature as a larger universe’ (Takizawa 2011:5). Accordingly, traditional medicine of Chinese origin (kanpō) was concerned with making use of the five phases in nature (gogyō: wood, fire, earth, metal and water) which were equally constitutive factors in creating the universe. The cultivation of the self, based on a regular life style in accordance with moral and ritual rules, linked personal health with social health, and human development with cultural refinement and society at large: Body care was clearly understood by Kaibara and his contemporaries as contribution to society at large. This was even more pronounced in the early 19th century, when the publication of self-cultivation texts (yōjōron) proliferated more than ever. At a time, when the social reality of power and wealth was hardly in line with the ideals of Neo-Confucian doctrine, these manuals revealed a shift from a focus on disciplinary body techniques, such as self-restraint, body exercise, and mental control, to a focus on coordination and quality of life by emphasising the needs and tasks of morality, domestic economy, and education (Takizawa 2011:7-8).

Japanese-style physiocratism during the Edo period did not recognize the value of the individual: while land and agriculture provided the economic base of the state and income for the nobility, the smallest unit of any economic planning was the family whose labor in the fields yielded the rents that contributed to the collective tax load of the village. Only the ‘great transformations’ of the 19th century separating the age of Japan’s modernity from its antecedent period made it possible to speak of a political economy centring on the body. Western state theory radically changed the relationship between the individual and the social order. The strategies utilized by the Meiji government complied with the previously outlined technologies of bureaucratic rule by and large. The modern institutions of compulsory education and conscription army served as powerful tools to transform the peasant body and conduct according to the needs of modern ‘statefare’ (governance). Cultivation of one’s self continued to be seen as standing in the service of the larger collective. But under the impact of western sciences and medical knowledge, a compartmentalizing perception of the body divided in its parts replaced the comprehensive view on health and illness in relation to the cosmic order.

It must be noted that the body politics of modern or pre-modern epistemes never reached all segments of society to the same degree. For example, the confinement of body movements, postures and attitudes was most prominent among the aristocracy and urban upper classes but hardly filtered down to the lower levels of society, which also rebelled against the ban of nudity in public by the Meiji government.
Public health measures against cholera, such as isolation hospital, conflicted with the more familiar diagnosis of causes and cures of similar symptoms by traditional physicians, who practised *kanpō* (Chinese herbal medicine), and often provoked open protest and even popular riots (Suzuki and Suzuki 2009:189). Despite the suppression of *kanpō* medicine and the enforced normalization of public health by Western scientific knowledge, Taoist belief and Shintoist symbolic notions of purity and impurity continued to inform folklore understandings of illness and health care among the Japanese deep into the 20th century (Ohnuki Tierney 1984).

**Conclusion**

My critical investigation into sport attempts to bridge the gap between local memories, archives, and national knowledge systems on the one hand, and transnational discourses and universal theories that consciously transcend the particularistic boundaries of Western epistemology on the other. Rather than strictly separating the structural from the actors-based approach as well as the symbolic from the material analysis, I pursue an integrated research programme that combines questions and insights of both fields of inquiry and theoretical claims. Hence my investigation of sport and the body in Japan looks at its object as a distinctive place in contrast to other localities *and* deals with the structural relations that shape the practice of sport in various social groups, all the while paying attention to Japan’s relative positioning within the global political economy.

**Table 1: A model of body culture (source: Manzenreiter 2014:6)**

![Diagram of body culture model](image)
As an anthropological project, my social scientific study of sport in Japan locates the inquiry in particular times and places to find out the commonalities of body practices, games and contests that this society subsumes under the notion of sport and/or alternative concepts – and by the same token, identifies the categorical differences and boundaries that are giving shape to a field of common interest. As a sociological project concerned with the particular social phenomenon of sport, this study demonstrates how the production and consumption of sport is reflecting the social structure of Japanese society in time and in transition.

As a multidisciplinary research programme on sport and body culture, my analysis is based on a multi-level model that relates the interdependence of meanings, practices and institutions in body culture to the impacts of political economy and cultural globalization (see table 1). By addressing ten different sub-questions, ranging from the role of sport in the educational system to its significance for regional redevelopment in 21st century Japan, my book offers answers for questions on the roles of sport and body practices in the regulation of the social fabric of subject and society in Japan. More specifically, it demonstrates how and to what purposes politics of the body are articulated; the agenda of state actors that develop politics aiming at the body; how political decisions on the allocation of resources are made, and what the consequences are for sporting opportunities and practices of the body in general. Table 2 summarizes the chapter headings, the theoretical background, methodology and the data that were used for each of the singular studies that make up this book.
Table 2: Overview of Sport and Body Politics in Japan (Manzenreiter 2014)

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