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## **Honouring High Places: The Mountain Life of Junko Tabei**

By Junko Tabei and Helen Y. Rolffe

**Honouring High Places: The Mountain Life of Junko Tabei. Junko Tabei and Helen Y. Rolffe, translated by Yumika Hiraki and Rieto Hotven. Rocky Mountain Books, 2017. Hardcover, 376 pages, \$32 (CDN).**

When Junko Tabei stepped on to the summit of Everest in 1975, there were 38 men who had done so before her. But Tabei was to make climbing history as the first woman on top of the highest mountain in the world.

Today, a woman climbing Everest while using supplemental oxygen and accompanied by a Sherpa guide doesn't qualify as a notable mountaineering feat. But at that time, Tabei and her contemporaries were up against considerable challenges to get to the mountain in the first place, not least a widely held opinion that the mothers on the expedition should be home caring for their children, and that women—in general—wouldn't be physically able to climb at altitude. "It was considered unrealistic, unproductive and most of all, detrimental to our families," she writes. (In this light, I especially appreciated Tabei later describing their female porters not only carrying small children on top of their 30-kilogram loads but also knitting while walking.) There was no roster of experienced high-altitude women climbers in Japan from which to choose expedition members. Recruiting team members took place by travelling around the country and visiting women's climbing and hiking clubs, as well as "chatting up" women climbers/hikers in Tokyo train stations as they headed out on their weekend trips.

Tabei makes it clear that they were well supported on the mountain and climbed with Sherpa men. Still, 1975 was long before one could book a commercially guided expedition on Everest and the sheer logistics of their Women on Everest expedition were impressive. In preparation for the climb, Tabei and her team made their own sleeping bags and sewed overgloves and other gear from recycled car seats. They dehydrated food, assembled equipment, and packed and shipped thousands of pounds of supplies from Japan to Everest base camp.

About a third of book is taken up by Everest. The rest covers Tabei's numerous other climbs, including Annapurna II, Aconcagua, and Carstensz Pyramid, as well as her years in fundraising and activism: cleaning up trash on Everest, helping the survivors of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, volunteering for various causes, all while engaged in a courageous battle with cancer in the later years of her life.

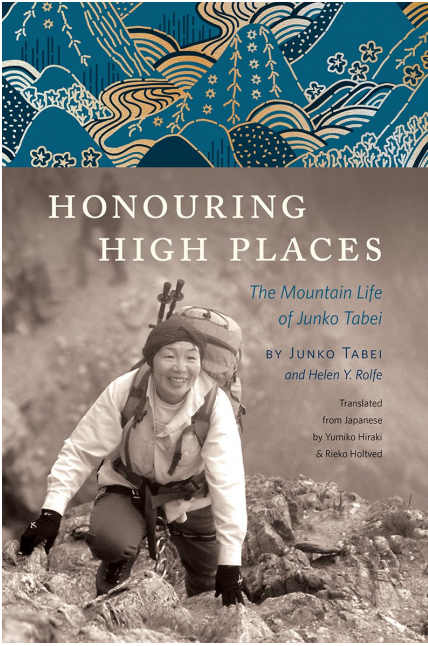
The translation is excellent, with a smooth-flowing narrative, though sometimes overpacked with details. The book provides a comprehensive reference to Tabei's climbing career, as well as numerous reflections and insights, and entertaining stories with enjoyable glimpses of Tabei's world through her unique lens: "Sato was popular among the Sherpas and porters because she was cute, and she was the only smoker among the women. When she ran out of her Japanese-made cigarettes, the Sherpas and porters were quick to offer their local stash. Her posture when she smoked—left hand casually placed in pants' pocket and a gentle lean forward while she inhaled—was the subject of much mimicking by our comedian, Mr. Gopal."

Most endearing, however, is Tabei's recurring acknowledgment and appreciation of those around her, including her husband whose unwavering support was remarkable for that time, as well as other women climbers: her insistence that Pan Duo, the Tibetan woman who climbed Everest 11 days after

Tabai be included in a gathering in France organized by Maurice Herzog; Tabai's admiration of Alison Hargreaves and her grief at Hargreaves' death, not so much as a climber, but as a mother; and the way Tabai seemed so taken with Lydia Bradey, the first female to climb Everest without supplemental oxygen. Tabai writes: "She was tall and blonde and full of humour; her mischievous nature made me feel like we had been friends for a long time." The book is peppered such examples, and it's in these gracious moments where the reader really falls for Tabai and sees her as the wonderful ambassador of adventure she became.

– Shannon O'Donoghue Child

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