

# Book Review of *Waza no Jinruigaku*

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*Waza no Jinruigaku (An Anthropology of Techniques)* is based on case studies from different parts of the world. It reexamines techniques/technologies that intervene in or involve relationships between humans and objects/things. Taking approaches not only from anthropology, but also philosophy and other related fields, including non-human subjects such as chimpanzees, the book offers new perspectives on the study of body and embodiments.

The book is a sequel to two previously published books: *Mono no Jinruigaku (An Anthropology of Things)* and *Mono no Jinruigaku 2 (An Anthropology of Things 2)*, which investigate interactions between humans and objects/things by examining what objects/things do or cause. However, as the editor states, there are always various techniques involved when humans and objects/things interact, thus this book shifts its focus from the agency of objects/things to techniques that have shaped, changed, developed and enforced the relationship between humans and objects/things. By applying a broad understanding of techniques, including the arts and modern technology, each article in the book challenges a modern/Western view of technology, issues related to embodiment and locality and the dichotomy between modern and traditional technologies.

The book consists of thirteen articles divided into four parts, with one separate section entitled “parenthesis”; each section explores different aspects of techniques. Part I, “Reconstruction of the Relationship between Techniques and Embodiment”, points out the blurred boundaries connecting art and technology. It comprises four articles, including three cultural-anthropological pieces based on ethnographic fieldwork in Japan, Indonesia, The Philippines and Malaysia. It also features one philosophical piece critically reviewing previous works on techniques of the body in daily life that sets out a theoretical framework for the following discussions.

Part II, “Bricolage of Techniques”, contains three articles that address the dichotomy between traditional and modern techniques. Each article takes a unique example of Japanese home cooking, river reconstruction/restoration and the Islamic calendar in Indonesia and deconstructs and offers a new perspective on the long-perceived dichotomy of techniques.

Part III, “Possibility of De-anthropocentric Debate on Techniques”, aims to reacknowledge the understanding of techniques by shedding light on various techniques acquired and applied between humans and animals, such as chimpanzees and the Japanese cormorant. By shifting analysis from human-centric to non-human, two articles and one essay in the section broaden our understanding of techniques often believed to be only obtained and applied by cultural beings – humans.

Part IV, “Heading to a New Debate on Techniques”, which contains two articles by scholars from

the fields of Philosophy and Primatology, further expands the debate on techniques to a post-human one. Both the historical-philosophical discussions of the relationship between humans, animals and techniques, and in-depth data from long-term ecological participant observation on bonobo, make a great contribution towards illustrating how techniques have emerged, developed and revised not solely by humans, but during the interactions between humans, objects/things, animals, nature and many other surroundings. It is a constant learning process for all sides. In addition to these four sections, the parenthesis section, “Criticality of Technoscience”, deals with issues of locality and the embodiment of techniques/technologies. It includes two articles: the first one investigates the global network of nuclear power, and the second analyses the disaster prevention (Bosai) technology training offered by the Japan International Cooperating Agency. Through discussions on the relevance of local techniques/technologies in changing environments, and in the process of contents-isation, the uncertainty and incompleteness of these techniques/technologies are exposed.<sup>1</sup>

The book, *Waza no Jinruigaku*, provides not only a comprehensive and critical overview of the historical discussions on techniques/technologies, but also a conceptual ground for an anthropological study of the topic. The inclusion of analysis from various fields of study and non-human subjects also has the complementary effect of deepening the understanding of various techniques that have not yet been considered and reviewed, making this book unique. This book should be translated, at the very least, into English to be more accessible to a non-Japanese audience and discussed across diverse fields of study. In doing so, it would increase the impact of each scholarly piece that is based on extensive fieldwork and dedication towards the scholar’s particular field of study.

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<sup>1</sup> Contents-isation is the method of summarising and presenting important information in the most effective way.