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The title says it all, really, *Robots Won't Save Japan,* but do read the book if you want to be convinced, because you will be. The author, anthropologist and science and technology studies (STS) scholar James Wright, has adopted this title in reaction to a Japanese book from a generation ago, *Robots Will Save Japan* (Nakayama 2006). Since then Japanese discourse on robots has failed to make clear exactly what Japan needs to be saved from, unless it is simply that there are fewer and older Japanese every year. There is not even clarity on just what a robot is let alone what it might do about this.

In this monograph, Wright confirms for us how difficult it will be for robots and their engineers to ever overcome Sherry Turkle's (2011, 107) seasoned judgement, that robots may someday care for us, but they will never care about us. Can we even define care in a way that will let us distinguish the physical from the emotional, a distinction not easily maintained where so much care is truly touching, where physical care wordlessly expresses emotional commitment? Wright is not certain robots will ever even care *for* us, and he feels particularly hesitant if these robots are designed in Japan to care for the aged. What robots are being designed to do, and what caregivers for the elderly, who are never consulted in the development process, might need them to do, are galaxies apart.

Wright examines three circles of robot interest – budget bureaucracies, academic and proprietary research, and nursing homes – and shows how these fail to overlap sufficiently to form a Venn diagram, with a potential 'consensus robot' at its center. The book is organized around this wide gap between how initiatives are designed and budgeted at a national level devoted to export; how engineers with almost no interest in communication work to develop the many machines called robots; and what pains workers in nursing homes go through and suffer to care for their charges and to keep their jobs. In the Introduction the author connects these three areas of activity by focusing on Japanese demographic crisis discourse, that argues that Japan is aging faster than any other nation and has for many years not reproduced at replacement, leading to the implicit conclusion that there are insufficient caregivers for Japan's elderly. Wright offers multiple perspectives from which to question the reality of this assertion. For example he mentions that while the government is prepared to spend vast sums on both eldercare and robotics, there seems to be no actual process or procedure to connect these two targets. A major difficulty to which I will return below is the constructed opposition of care robots versus foreign care workers, a future of one or the other. Wright recognizes a false dichotomy when he sees one.

Through participant observation and especially extensive interviewing in Japan's National Institute for Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST), the author, in the second chapter, takes us into

the heart of robot development: the how, what, why, who and especially the how much of bringing robots, particular care robots, into the world. AIST is the main research institute leading the government's flagship national Robot Care Project. The late prime minister Abe Shinzō declared 2015 "year one (*gannen*) of moving towards a 'robot society'," and AIST became the launch pad. While the engineers Wright interviews all seem devoted to creating something of value for eldercare, they are by no means sure either what ought to be done or that what has been done so far is of value. One engineer concludes, "We need something for supporting our future, but I don't know whether robots are a practical solution" (49).

Chapter 3 introduces the reader into the daily routines of a nursing home with eldercare robots. Through his analysis of fieldwork experiences in the nursing home, we get a feel for the qualities of this place, the residents, the staff, the management, and the daily flow of activities. Many of the residents have dementia. Also many have limited mobility. The staff, largely middle aged women and some men laid off from manufacturing jobs, try to spend time with residents individually. The most taxing part of the job is lifting. A resident who must be lifted must be lifted eight times each day. Eighty-six percent of the staff complain of back pain, but wages appear the barrier to staffing, not the difficulty of the work.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 respectively display the three robots in this nursing home: HUG, a sort of small fork lift robot competent residents might use to lift themselves; Paro, a cuddly baby seal kind of thing that responds to sounds and touch the way a small cat or dog might; and Pepper, a semi-anthropomorphic robot which can monitor human movement as well as gesture in ways that imitate human movement. One of Wright's central findings is the overall otiose quality of elder care: the fundamental reality of this effort to bring robots into nursing homes is that for the staff they are more trouble than they are worth; for residents they are not worth much at all without simultaneous staff participation; and for management they are too expensive without either assisting or replacing staff while they themselves absorb valuable resources.

Chapter 7 draws conclusions on the current and near-future fit of robots and eldercare. To date, only about 10% of Japan's eldercare institutions have introduced care robots at all, and in these few places less than half the care staff have found them useful. The near term offers vague promises, the distant future remains all hype.

If this book has a shortcoming, it's that it's short: the politics of robot policy should have been treated at greater length. There is no field site for this third leg of Wright's analysis but we need to follow the money. The national government alone spent over $300 million on a global market of just $48 million for nursing and care robotics by 2018, not dedicated but just repurposed machines, of which Japan's share was only $19 million (143). The politics behind this deserves the same close attention as was paid to the two areas in which he carried out fieldwork. More attention to the reality behind Japan's care crisis discourse would be valuable too. As with all automation, machines will replace people or reduce their required skills enough to reduce their wages. And so, robot discourse goes, robots must be inserted into eldercare because 1) there are not enough Japanese to do what must be done and 2) if not robots, foreigners!, a dichotomy purposefully created by policy.

Japan's Long Term Care Insurance (LTCI), which pays for eldercare, "disincentivizes co-living with a close relative, [which] can mean missing out on some financial support" (29). In the discussions leading to the passage of LTCI in 1997, however, in fact feminists and business leaders surprisingly agreed that family members should not be reimbursed for care because the amounts involved would not be enough to actually compensate middle-aged women for their work but only keep them out of the paid labor force. Consequently, a massive training and credentialing program began for eldercare workers:

housewives could be trained and paid to care for each other's parents while employers could make money. And yet, although the majority of eldercare workers are middle-aged married women, household income tax law, erecting the notorious *hyakumanen kabe* ("the million yen wall"), still constrains these women to half-time jobs at pay only slightly above minimum wage. Wright makes the argument that the lack of caregivers is an artificially contrived labor shortage that higher wages would improve, but as matters stand over 60% of housewives say they would like to work more but do not because of the constraints of this tax law (see also Marshall 2023). Marginally higher wages would not change this. Simultaneously, policy has made immigration appear threatening while creating a funnel that allows almost no foreign workers to enter the field: "In 2017, the number of non-Japanese people who passed the qualification exam to become a certified care worker totaled 213, compared with 65,000 Japanese in the same year" (31).

Wright argues that the national policy pivot was made from family care to robot care under the fear of foreigner care, while Japanese married women who want to work more than half time have long been hidden even from consideration. It is worth examining in greater detail why the only evident solution to this created crisis of care worker shortage is a robot that does not exist and shows no promise of realization on the horizon. Another 25 or so pages of the same high quality data and analysis which informs the rest of the book would have been as welcome to readers as more eldercare workers would be to Japan. As it stands, this book will be useful in courses on aging and eldercare, and will appeal to anyone interested at all in tremendous push by Japan's government and IT industry to create robots which can be exported.

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