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Christopher P. HOOD / *Cardiff University*

An Anthropology of the Machine: Tokyo's Commuter Train Network, by Michael Fisch, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018, 320 pp., \$27.50 (ISBN 9780226558554).

Travelling by train is ubiquitous feature of most visits to Japan. Indeed, as the number of visitors to the country has skyrocketed, so have stories about people traveling to Japan primarily to experience the country's train service, whether it be on the iconic *shinkansen*, one of the special liveried trains, or a slower ride through a rural setting. Yet, while academics will often speak of how impressive the railways are in discussions with students, colleagues or friends, academic studies about Japanese railways are conspicuous by their scarcity. There are some historical studies, such as Ericson's (1996) in-depth look at the development of the railways during the Meiji period, my own study on the *shinkansen* (Hood 2006), Freedman's (2011) study *Tokyo in Transit: Japanese Culture on the Rails and Road*, and the special edition of *Japan Forum* (2018, Vol 28, No. 2) which contains articles looking at aspects of Tokyo's Yamanote Line. In that respect Fisch's study is a very welcome addition to this under-studied aspect of Japan.

One of the challenges for those of us who study transportation can be to attract people to read our work. For, despite the fact that travelling tends to be such a ubiquitous part of our visits to Japan and many will marvel at aspects of the experience, there is seemingly little desire to know how the system works or to understand how Japanese society can be studied through its transportation networks. Perhaps due to this challenge, some of us attempt to cover as much as possible in a single study to show just how relevant and helpful such studies can be. Whether this is ultimately a weakness of such studies or not is debatable. Perhaps this tendency even puts off others from pursuing studies of their own. Although individual chapters or articles from the publications mentioned above and Fisch's own study could be developed into whole books on their own, seemingly few have thought to do this, at least in English.

For those of us with an interest in transportation, particularly in relation to Japan, Fisch's study is welcome due to the different approach it brings to the subject. However, I fear

that it may not get the wider recognition that it deserves. Part of this is owing to the subject matter. However, another aspect relates to the challenge discussed in the previous paragraph. There were times when I could not help but feel that less would have been more; that the author would have done better to go into more depth on particular chapters rather than trying to cover as much as he did. The apparent desire for comprehensiveness, which many of us have got sucked into, creates an uneasy tension. The most striking example of this comes in the final chapter of the book. Whilst the subtitle of the book is 'Tokyo's Commuter Train Network', the last chapter provides an in-depth, and excellent, analysis of the Fukuchiyama Line derailment of 2005. Given the comprehensive nature of the book and its focus on the relationship between humans and machines, the logic of including such a chapter is unquestionable, but the crash did not occur in Tokyo and so devoting one of the six chapters to this topic is problematic. It would have been preferable for Fisch to do a whole book on this crash alone (or combined with other transportation accidents or disasters; as it is, the chapter concludes by linking the accident's relevance to the events at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant), building upon the conclusions of *An Anthropology of the Machine*.

Perhaps, then, as much as the attempt at comprehensiveness, the issue here is the packaging – again a common problem for many of us writing about transportation. As the chapters cover such a wide range of issues, there are things in here for people from many different academic disciplines. In that respect, the title of the book itself perhaps does not sufficiently speak to these various interests. Yet, at another level, this suggestion may do a disservice to the book, as without doubt one of the key contributions that Fisch makes is to get us to think about the relationships between humans and machines, in particular in relation to the machines' 'trustworthiness' (xi). As Fisch notes, 'the book advances the normative claim that we need to transform our understanding of technology if we hope for collective life to not only survive but thrive on this planet. Just as there can be no collective future without technology, there will certainly be no future collective without a significant transformation in how we think of technology and what we demand of ourselves in relationship with it' (x).

With the possible exception of the aforementioned final chapter, the book progresses in a logical fashion. The introduction provides the theoretical framework for

the study as a whole, allowing readers – many of whom may only have superficial understanding of the way in which trains actually operate and have never stopped to think about their own relationship with machinery – to appreciate the approach that Fisch is taking and to understand its significance. Following this, the first two content chapters look more specifically at the development of the railways, primarily around Tokyo, focusing in particular on the way in which the all-important timetable is developed and what can be learnt by looking at behaviours on the railways, e.g. the issue of ‘intervals’. Chapter 2 will be of particular value to those interested in aspects of behaviour and attitudes about (personal) space in Japan – something that is not immediately obvious from the title of the chapter (‘Inhabiting the Interval’).

Chapter 3 takes a deeper look at how a new train-traffic control system was developed and introduced. In many respects this is the key chapter, for it not only helps to provide an understanding about the significance of time, it expertly illustrates the significance of the railways and their operations to the way in which the Japanese economy itself operates and is central to Fisch’s point about the need to rethink humans’ relationship with technology or technicity (a term which Fisch promotes throughout the book in relation to techno-ethics). Chapter 4 (‘Gaming the Interval’) provides a study of the relationship between the railways and their portrayal in movies. Again, from the title of the chapter this contribution could easily be missed by those with an interest in Japanese movies. This would be a shame, as there is much to commend about this chapter for those with such interests, in isolation from the rest of the book.

Just as chapter 4 starts with one of the well-known images of Japanese railways (commuters being crammed onto a packed train), so chapter 5 deals with another notorious aspect of Japanese railways – suicides. Again the title (‘Forty-Four Minutes’) does nothing to attract those with an interest in this subject matter, and again this is a great shame as it is, without doubt, the most thoughtful writing on the subject that I have come across. The chapter should certainly be read by journalists before they embark on their next cliché-ridden and under-researched article on the topic in the English-language media on Japan.

On balance, Fisch’s book is a very detailed and comprehensive study on aspects of Japanese railways. But, as its title suggests, it is more than that. It provides a mechanism for us to rethink our relationship with machinery. Yet its title also hides the

wide-reaching breadth of its coverage. I can only hope that through reviews such as this and through keyword searches, more people will pick up the book and, even if they do not read it in its entirety, that they at least read the chapter(s) that are of particular relevance to their own studies.

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