

## **An effort to define the concept of bodywork**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to discuss, in terms of body techniques, the relationship between culture and body that influences how people live. It also explores the development of the concept “bodywork” beyond the mere framework of a culturally determined body. In other words, it is an attempt to define the concept of “bodywork.” Sociologist Marcel Mauss considered bodily techniques to be uses of the body accumulating within a given culture and traditional means of using the human body in different societies. Specifically, bodily techniques are performed by an individual and a culturally informed role beyond a mere bodily state. Bodily techniques consist of two elements, “habitual physical activities” and “physical movements.” The former are daily actions that create a culturally determined body, and the latter are systemized techniques for eliciting body awareness. Physical movement is learned and refined through the spontaneous repetition of physical activities such as exercise or training. Physical movement through such experiences powerfully appeals to the perceptions of people. Thus, physical movement allows people to learn body techniques. This “bodywork” can act on the ways in which humans live. There is a hidden aspect of bodywork that influences how an individual’s lives and mere physical activities. Moreover, bodywork may be a process of cultural inheritance infused with body communication.

*Key words; Bodywork, Bodily actions, Bodily techniques*

### **1. Problem of issue**

Mauss considered bodily techniques to be the uses of the body accumulating within a given culture and the traditional means of using the human body in different societies<sup>1)</sup>. Specifically, bodily techniques are performed by an individual and are a culturally informed role beyond a mere bodily state<sup>2)</sup>. Namely, this society is built and changed by bodily techniques.

Saito wonders whether “Is the current situation in which young Japanese people have lost their self-identity caused by the loss of Japanese bodily culture?”<sup>3)</sup>. This is proof that humans have

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forgotten that the cultural body is the base of identity, leading to its loss today. Namely, we must consider the context in which bodily techniques influence how people live.

## 2. Purpose of this study

This study aims to discuss, in terms of body techniques, the relationship between culture and body that influences how people live. It also explores the development of the concept “bodywork” beyond the mere framework of a culturally determined body. In other words, it is an attempt to define the concept of “bodywork.”

## 3. Classification of bodily actions

“Acceptance of diversity” is a common slogan for modern human society, where international cultural exchanges have flourished. Director and screenwriter Miwa Nishikawa says that Olympic competitions are a “crucible of values”<sup>4)</sup>. Different thoughts are expressed in a diverse society. In contrast, Morris contends that “humans are animals” in his book *The Naked Ape*<sup>5)</sup>. Moreover, Hatano says that “a characteristic is ‘typical of the species’ if some conditions are met”<sup>6)</sup>. Namely, humans are diverse from the perspective that “humans are animals.” Therefore, we will consider zoological perspectives in this chapter before cultural movement.

First, Morris classifies human behavior into (1) natural actions (genetic inheritance: innate actions that do not require prior experience) (2) discovering actions (self-discovery: discovered by trial and error with growth) (3) assimilative actions (social assimilation: unconsciously learned by mimicking the behavior of others) (4) training actions (planned training: learned through conscious training)<sup>7)</sup>.

These four patterns can be distinguished from two viewpoints. “Evolutionary psychology” is the general idea that human tendencies are also based on biology. Morris says that “humans may have made progress in abstract thinking and in the act of making, but in impulses and movements they have not changed at all”<sup>8)</sup>. Hasegawa says that “the diversity of human behavior does not mean that there is no consistency to it”<sup>9)</sup>. These two opinions indicate that human behavioral choices have a common biological basis. Namely, humans are already programmed in many ways. This is the first point of view.

Benedict says that “People become a product of culture when they learn to speak. Habits become customs, beliefs become creeds, and it is impossible not to adopt customs”<sup>10)</sup>. As one grows up, one learns behaviors suited to the culture. Namely, “the society in which we live has a profound impact on ourselves”<sup>11)</sup>. In other words, humans are reshaped by culture. This is the second point of view.

Humans act based on embedded programs (internal factors) and they act while incorporating cultural elements (external factors). This is evident in two perspectives: “humans are already programmed in many ways” and “humans are reshaped by culture.” However, many of the behaviors seen in adults are affected by a mixture of these factors, resulting in “mixed actions.” Mixed actions are movements learned in various ways<sup>12)</sup>. Namely, the concept of bodily technique

covers almost all human bodily movements.

#### 4. Learning bodily actions

“Natural actions” and “discovering actions” are instilled based on internal factors while “assimilative actions” and “training actions” are learning based on external factors. “Mixed actions” are when the two types of actions are intricately intertwined. How are these actions learned?

In accordance with the first perspective, bodily techniques are learned unconsciously, as exemplified by “walking.” In the West, walking is where the front leg is extended forward and the back leg follows <sup>13)</sup>. In Japan, in contrast, walking is performed with a narrow stride and leaning forward, moving in small steps while dragging the heels <sup>14)</sup>. These actions are affected by culture. For example, walking in Japan is affected by wearing a kimono, while walking in the West is affected by wearing Western clothing. This is how established bodily techniques are passed between ethnic groups across generations. Namely, those actions are bodily techniques that are learned unconsciously.

“Greetings” are linked to the second perspective, and that action involves similar elements to those when bodily techniques are learned unconsciously. Greetings take different forms with relative ease and vary depending on the situation. For example, a “handshake” is popular in the West but a “bow” is popular in Japan. However, greetings are bodily techniques that change depending on the situation, and they change with relative ease.

Greetings are bodily techniques that are performed consciously, but bodily techniques that are learned unconsciously can be used consciously. Walking is one such technique. “A model walking on the runway,” “a Japanese portraying a Westerner,” “marching soldiers,” and “racewalkers” … At what moment is one conscious of one’s body?

One becomes conscious of one’s body when feeling inferior or superior. Editor, literary critic, and Miura says that “Although the homogenization and individualization of the body seem to be incompatible, differences due to individual characteristics become apparent when examined collectively” <sup>15)</sup>. Namely, humans become conscious of their bodies when they feel that they are different. In contrast, one becomes less conscious of one’s body when one’s presence has less impact. Kobayashi says that “where various cultures are simply mixed, various values are simply held in parallel and contrasted, and people’s mindsets are fractured both culturally and internally” <sup>16)</sup>. In this way, humans are conscious of their bodies when they feel that they are same. One only becomes conscious of one’s body when compared to others.

The body can always be the subject of consciousness. Miura says that “When people are conscious of their bodies, they first feel “embarrassment” <sup>17)</sup>. However, humans learn “sophisticated behaviors” and “special techniques” to eliminate “embarrassment.” Namely, there is a conscious “education of the body” in modern society.

## 5. Learning bodily techniques

First, we need to look at “training” to learn bodily techniques and teach the body. Inoue says that “the concept of exercise refers to movements that are concerned with the resulting effects rather than the movements themselves”<sup>18)</sup>. However, that idea is not necessarily respected in Japan. Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo, says that “I have come to realize that the intellectual practice that accompanies the practice of competition is a type of valuable intellectual practice that can be applied to anything”<sup>19)</sup>. Namely, “the experience of practicing in Japan has a special meaning beyond its rationality”<sup>20)</sup>. Thus, “training” has various meanings in Japan.

There is something called *keiko* [training] in Oriental practice. According to Yuasa, “*keiko*” is “training to adopt a fixed ‘*kata*’ with one’s body; one acquires skill by adding more *kata*, i.e. remembering *kata* with one’s body”<sup>21)</sup>. In this way, bodily techniques are learned by *keiko* through the martial artist’s constant repetition of movements and physical sensations. There is also a valuable concept known as *kata* [forms]. According to Imafuku, *kata* “are equally reproduced by the bodies of all those who mastered the techniques”<sup>22)</sup>. For example, the *kata* of *Kodokan* Judo, which was invented by Jigoro Kano, has various educational purposes. The *nage-no-kata* [throwing techniques] and *katame-no-kata* [grappling techniques] aim to improve freestyle practice while the *jyu-no-kata* [difending techniques] aims to instill fundamental principles and train the body. These forms of training have great educational significance.

The learning of “sophisticated bodily techniques” has been emphasized in liberal arts education in Japan. One educational approach is the idea of “the liberal arts discipline”<sup>23)</sup>. One is expected to learn the liberal arts through bodily techniques based on politeness and manners. Simultaneous growth of the mind (inside) and body (outside) is required. The goal of the liberal arts discipline is the practical overcoming of dualism (mind-body). Yuasa says that “Oriental martial arts are a form of meditation and movement and have the same purpose as training the mind in meditation”<sup>24)</sup>. He also says that “Prolonged training is a process of approaching a unified state of physical and mental movement. It is an attempt to reach the ideal state where both internal meditation and external action are directed, that is, “*shinshin-ichinyo* (mind/body oneness)”<sup>25)</sup>. So what is the state of unification of the mind and body?

According to Yuasa, a unified mind and body mean seeing “human existence as the world’s existence.” This is the existence of one who can see others (the subject) and the existence of what other people can see (objects). The body acts on the world (subject) and the body is affected by the world (objects)<sup>26)</sup>.

Human existence involves ambiguity between subject and object, but the body is a physical object that resists instructions from the mind. However, this state can be avoided through constant training. When, for example, an athlete tries to learn a new technique, he practices until he reaches a level where it can be used reflexively. This is the state at which a training action becomes a technique used unconsciously. In such a state, says Yuasa, “the body that was the object becomes the subject, and, conversely, the mind ceases to be the subject (self-consciousness)”<sup>27)</sup>. In other

words, the body is no longer a physical object acting on the world. Techniques that are learned consciously are used unconsciously. These techniques greatly affect how one lives, becoming “bodywork.”

## 6. Conclusion

The concept of bodily techniques covers almost all human bodily actions, but actions are classified as either conscious or unconscious. The conscious repetition of bodily actions is referred to as “training” or “practice,” but its original purpose is to learn bodily actions. The concept of “*syugyo* (personal cultivation)” refers to Japanese training actions to simultaneously cultivate the mind and body, i.e. the purpose of a “liberal arts discipline.”

The goal of the liberal arts discipline is the unification of mind and body; the body is not a physical object acting on the world in this state. Bodywork that affects how one lives is learned, and training actions become techniques that are used unconsciously.

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