

The world of characters: reading Japanese society through popular culture

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As often noted by scholars, tourists, and others, Japanese social life is saturated with “characters” to a rather extraordinary degree – from corporate branding to bureaucratic announcement. What is the significance of characters in contemporary Japanese popular cultural forms, such as anime, manga, and video gaming (‘otaku culture’)? What does this tell us about our increasingly media-saturated everyday life? This lecture shows how the idiom of characters – playing a character, empathizing with a character, staying ‘in character’ – has emerged out of Japanese popular culture and is understood and appropriated by people who participate in it. In the otaku cultural field, people are experiencing themselves as characters, just as they experience characters in anime, manga, and video games. In particular I look to Japanese-language computer-mediated communication as a salient social site in which to explore the performance of characters.

Shunsuke Nozawa got his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, Department of Anthropology and currently is a lecturer at the IES Abroad Tokyo. His research interests include social media and speech communities, urbanity and popular culture.

No registration necessary/Lecture in English

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