

Tetsugaku (= philosophy) on Nico Nico Douga: More about tags

Each time I did a focus group, my list of questions gets longer: By now, the questionnaire contains 15 pages, and in the end of each focus group I have to admit to myself that I not even managed to ask one quarter of these. Instead, I often talk about new stuff that I never even thought I could ask about: It ranges from the properties of the interface to background knowledge about Japan. Of course this is very humbling. However, I also take it as a good sign. Each new question is always already an answer in another respect. This focus group, which was again recruited through "Mixi", was no exception.

In this post I want to focus once again on tags. Perhaps the most important shift in the last two weeks has been this new focus on tags. To put it very simply: I came here to research the comments on the videos, but tags have now become just as important. Tags consolidate genres and subgenres. I can therefore only understand tags properly, if I can understand the huge amounts of videos that describe the tag, just as the tag describes them. As you can imagine, there is no way I can do that myself. In such a situation I really need help from the focus groups.

A first tag that I became obsessed about in this particular focus group was the tag "Kaigai no hannou" (= "response of overseas"). This tag is mostly used for videos where Non-Japanese people talk about Japanese culture – everything from anime to robots. Some of this is

¹ In this series of short and preliminary (!!) texts we publish first results of the Metadata Project's ethnographic research on Nico Nico Douga. You can find more under "output" on <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/media-research-centre/project2.php> and on our research blog: <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/metagold/>.

just found footage, often from Youtube. Other comments are generated on purpose by the uploaders: They put Japanese Nico videos on Youtube, and then re-collect these videos after a while. While they do so, they take screen grabs of the comments on Youtube (which are, of course, below the video), and these screen grabs are then inserted into the original Nico video. You can guess already, what is most amusing: Comments that describe Japanese as crazy. What these commenters on Youtube do not know: They are watched, laughed about and commented on here. Kind of cool, isn't it?

A second tag I want to introduce here is "Sakusha wa shukusei" (= "the creator should be cleaned up"). Such videos are "dangerous videos", and often contain footage of political figures such as Vladimir Putin or Pope Benedict. Both are viewed as powerful and scary: "If you get Putin angry, he might come and destroy you". Communist iconography in general can be found under the tag "Doushi" (= "comrade"). Here you can find lots of Putin, but also Lenin and Stalin, and, rather confusingly, quite a bit of Mussolini as well. Another tag that relates to the "Doushi" as subgenre is "Joshi" (= "female"). Such videos belong in turns to a larger genre of videos that use a known anime-theme-song and provide it with new words. While these user-generated music videos are done a lot, "Joshi"-videos relate to history. In the beginning, their words were mostly about themes from the Edo period, but more recently, communist and especially Russian history has become a big topic. Anime characters singing about Stalin: Hmm... there is definitely need for more analysis here!

One tag that I became particularly obsessed about is the "Tetsugaku"-tag (= "philosophy") - this is a tag, which also some of the members in our focus group liked particularly. If you enter this tag, you get some of the share of Deleuze, Foucault and Agamben that you might expect. However, such videos are the minority. Next to them you find all sorts of other videos. The members of our focus group explained to me that

many of these videos make you ask questions like “Why am I watching this video?” or “Why does this video even exist?” – basically videos that make you think. So many of these videos provide an interesting meta-level (which is, of course, by far not the only one on Nico Nico Douga). “Tetsugaku”-videos are often tagged because they make you reflect about Nico Nico Douga and your own practice of uploading, commenting and watching (though at the same time this is of course also a joke). One video under the “Tetsugaku”-tag shows a wet cat: In the comments you will find often a lot of speculation on what this cat might think, while it gets wetter and wetter. A philosophising wet cat: Deleuze would have been probably very proud of this new media-neighbour.

So tags can obviously re-contextualise videos. Sometimes this is done to make a joke. At other times, such a re-contextualisation can stimulate new forms of “kuuki” and thus generate new forms of comments. At the same time it also seems to be fun to try to “take over” a tag. In such a case the meaning of a whole tag is changed. “Tetsugaku” has definitely become more fun since it relates to more than only French philosophy.

Two members of our group were particularly keen to establish the “Tetsugaku”/philosophy-tag as a tag for “pants-wrestling”-videos. The latter videos re-edit footage of one particularly cheesy American gay porn movie, where several bodybuilder-types engage in semi-naked wrestling activities before they move on to more serious business. If you are interested: You can find such videos not only under “Tetsugaku”, but also under “Mori no yousei” (=“woodland fairies”). The reason for the latter name is, of course, that these pants-wrestling guys are anything but woodland fairies.

As I have already started to talk about “pants-wrestling”, I might just as well mention that there are many different forms on Nico Nico

Douga, how straight people enjoy gay content. Apart from “pants-wrestling” there are of course the videos that belong to the famous genre of “boys love”. This genre is decades old. It originally referred to Mangas, which depict romantic love between young boys.

Traditionally, it is mostly consumed by girls, or, if it gets more explicit, by grown up women. “Boys love” and “pants-wrestling” seem to form two opposite sides of a spectrum. Nico Nico Douga would not be Nico Nico Douga if you would not find by now quite a few videos where pants-wrestlers and “boys love”-characters are depicted against each other. Such videos are made to stimulate tag- and comment-wars. In a way, “boys love” is more a female, and “pants-wrestling” is more a straight-male form of obsession with male gayness. However, one has to be careful to make such fast conclusions. At least some of the girls in our group stressed that they also enjoy the pants-wrestlers a lot.

Placed in the middle of this spectrum you can find the gay figure, which is the by far most popular on Nico Nico Douga: “Abe”. He originated as a hero in a Manga, which was directed to a gay audience. On Nico Nico Douga, Abe became everybody's darling. Nowadays you can see him most often in the form of a 3D animated character that likes to dance. His movements are slightly camp, but not too much. He also has multiplied himself into the Abe dancers, which all look and dance like Abe. His dance moves became so popular, that some members of our focus group have attended offline events devoted to him, and it will be hard to find a party of Nico Chuus, where the Abe dance moves are absent.

All this was – you might guess my point by now – developed under the roof of a tag. Tags first consolidate, and as they consolidate, they stimulate the production of a whole range of content that fills them. However, when they have become strong, they get undermined again. This way they remain interesting, even when their meaning has become pretty established. Tags are alive on Nico Nico Douga.

OK. So far the tags. Once more I am already going on for far too long, and there is more stuff to write about that is queuing up. This was a rather arbitrary selection of some of the tags we discussed in this particular focus group. There are of course thousands and thousands of tags on Nico Nico Douga. Just as important: Whatever I said here, might already become different in some weeks, because tags are always on the move on Nico Nico Douga. So this is just a glimpse into the world of tags. But maybe you can understand why I become so obsessed about them.