

## **Secret Nico Nico Douga: Meeting Arimura Yuu san and three of his junior fellows**

Arimura-san is new. He is new in many respects. He is new on Nico Nico Bu, the community of Nico Nico Douga bloggers on Hatena. His popular blog, which existed before he entered Nico Noco Bu, provides a new take on anime: Faster, and more political. He is interested in anime for the Nico Nico Douga generation (most other Nico Nico Bu bloggers are more focused on the Idolmaster genre). His views on copyright are outspoken and clear, and he does not shy away from making statements that can make you unpopular: When recently a Korean singer uploaded a video on Nico Nico Douga, some Nico Chuu flamed this video. When later a Taiwanese singer did the same, the video was warmly welcomed. Arimura-san is the kind of person, who would question this publically. Such questions can take guts on the Japanese Internet.

I meet Arimura-san on a Saturday night, one week after we first have met. He brings with him three distinguished members of an anime society of a prominent Japanese university. All of us – Carpenter-san, Takashiro-san, Arimura-san, the three male students and me, take a stroll around Ikebukuro, and visit the ground floor of a shop, that displays items for female Otakus, especially ‘Boys Love’-Mangas, – Music-CDs and –Animes. Most of you will know, that the ‘Boys Love’ genre is about love stories between (mostly androgynous) boys. Famously, ‘Boys Love’ is mostly bought by girls, though it also has a

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<sup>1</sup> 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/>.

following from straight boys, and one of the students outs himself as such a fan.

Many of the 'Boys Love'-Mangas in the shop are fan-produced. You can find all sorts of levels of explicitly. Some of them are pretty hardcore, lots of detailed images of anal sex and so on, though always with a miniscule little black bar, which points more to the genitals than covering them. My fellow visitors stress that even the hardcore versions of 'Boys Love' are not read as pornography, but for the romantic content. The sex scenes are there to heighten the drama, not to stimulate. Sex serves the story, which is, of course, the other way round in comparable genres in the West.

Our next step is a Cosplay Café that specialises in role play: We enter a fictional school, where the waitresses in costumes pretend that they are students in a lower grade, while we are sitting underneath a large screen that plays videos of German and Italian landscapes and monuments (the Rhine valley ...). I mention Cosplay and 'Boys Love' on this blog in more detail, because I guess that Nico Chuu bring me to such places (this was not the only time) to explain to me that Otaku culture is part of the background of the culture of the Nico Chuu. Though Nico Chuu and Otaku are not the same (Nico Chuu are in a way less radical), you will not understand Nico Nico Douga, if you do not have some knowledge about the Otaku culture. This research project cannot get deeper into this. This is also not really necessary, because Otaku, Manga, 'Boys love' and Cosplay cultures have been extensively researched in the recent years.

Instead, I want to talk here about some of the new things that I learned from Arimura-san. Actually I want to concentrate on one topic, because Arimura-san was the first blogger to write about it: The secret practices of illegal uploaders on Nico Nico Douga. To write "write about it" underestimates Arimura-san's contribution: He has

researched this new practice on Nico Nico Douga. To understand it, you have to know that Niwango, the company behind Nico Nico Douga, has recently decided to automatically delete most TV content, including all full anime episodes – only anime openings and fragments in 'Mad movies' are still allowed. This is a change of policy: Before, Niwango only deleted on request. Arimura-san's research is about the Nico Nico Douga underground that emerged after this change in policy.

So this is how it works: Anime fans still upload full anime episodes, often late at night. They label it differently, so that Niwango does not recognise them as anime episodes. Often they also insert an intro with other content, which again allows you to hide the content. However, anime fans would be able to find these episodes (I prefer not to write, how they find them exactly, but they tell me that it is possible). They search for these episodes early in the morning, before they are deleted. The next step is especially smart: As soon as they have found an anime episode, they open a window and keep it open. The video stays in the cache memory, as long as the browser window is open. As the video server and the comment server are separate systems on Nico Nico Douga, comments still get updated, if they replay the video (they only have to keep the browser window open). This way, anime aficionados can still watch anime episodes with comments.

So why do they do that? Arimura-san gives three reasons. The first one is probably the most important one: For the Nico Chuu, TV without comments looks dull, empty and alone. So Nico Chuu, who are at the same time Anime-fans are in trouble. They can watch anime only on TV or DVD. The practice described above solves their problem. The second reason has to do with the Japanese TV landscape: Many popular anime are only broadcasted in local stations. The fans get their newest episode often only some days or even a week, after it is broadcasted at another station: Too late to take part in the lively

Internet debates, most prominently on 2channel. So these people have to get their episodes earlier, and Nico Nico Douga is the privileged platform, though increasingly, Chinese video sharing site, which delete hardly anything, become the solution of choice. The third reason: Nico Chuu have a high emotional affiliation to Nico Nico Douga, and they just want to watch content on this particular platform. Hmm.. so they are illegally uploading content, because they love Nico Nico Douga so much. Another one of these interesting Nico Nico Douga contradictions.

I am asking Arimura-san and the three students, whether there might be a fourth reason for this: Is it protest, an expression of anger against the rights holders? The response I get is ambivalent, and fatalism seems to be the main attitude: There is nothing you can do against this in Japan. Yes, it makes them angry, but anger does not help. And it is not Niwango's fault anyway. Then there is another element: It seems as if the additional fun that you get out of this underground practice almost equals the annoyance. When a video gets deleted, other users, who have not yet found the video before, will start to use the comment function to voice their disappointment about deletion, while the real aficionados have the video still in their browser cache, and can watch it, while they read the frustrated comments of the ones who are not in the know. Another interesting effect: These conversations almost merge into real time chat: You would find comments like "Oh, have to go to work now" on these videos, because the users enjoy them at one particular moment. This is another sign that semi-synchronous watching in smaller groups bears fun. As does the underground on Nico Nico Douga.