



Comparative Asian Research Network

Monthly Lecture Series on Issues and Research in the Asian Region

Organized by the Department of Japanese Studies, CUHK

Japanese Craftsmanship in Asia: Neoliberal Discursive Practices and Material Processes of Production



Speaker: Professor Reijiro Aoyama (Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Time: 1:00 pm – 2:15 pm

Date: 3 November 2018 (Saturday)

Venue: Room 408, Yasumoto International Academic Park, CUHK

Language: English

All are welcome!!

Abstract:

The presentation will examine Japanese service professionals' role as participants, producers, and subjects of the consumer culture in Asia, where their productions often symbolize the promise of sophistication and cosmopolitanism among urban middle class city dwellers. To capitalize on this demand and to distinguish themselves from other service providers in the market, Japanese service professionals - chefs, bartenders, hairstylists etc - use specific notions of their Japanese heritage to construct and market their services as 'cultural' productions, where various cultural resources are deployed to produce authenticity, including references to group-specific values and concepts such as 'selfless' hospitality (omotenashi) and craftsman spirit (shokunin kishitsu). Their idea of what constitutes an authentic service is defined less by the physical aspects of the service and more by the spirit and quality of the execution. The conceptualization of the Japanese heritage conceived by the Japanese service professionals inadvertently aligns them with the Japanese government's official agenda of promoting Japanese soft power abroad embodied in the 'Cool Japan' campaign. However, their common effort is not as much an expression of cultural nationalism as a market-driven attempt to convert the so called Japanese values into a commodity and transform Japan into a brand in and of itself.

Speaker:

Reijiro Aoyama is a Research Assistant Professor at the Department of Chinese Bilingual Studies at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research has focused on Japanese studies, transnationalism and Japanese migrant communities in East Asia. His interests include anthropology of production, circulation and consumption, narratives of migration, media discourse and literacy, and language education. He has conducted several long-term ethnographies of the Japanese presence in China and Hong Kong, and has published on Japanese language education and Japanese diaspora in this region. He is currently working on a project centered on digital gift exchange in China and Japan.

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