

**Speech by Mr. Nobutaka Shionomiya,**  
**On the occasion of the “Japan: Kingdom of Characters” event**  
**August 19th, 2011**

Distinguished \_\_\_\_\_ guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Boa Tarde!

I am very pleased to be here today at the opening ceremony of the cultural event: “Japan : Kingdom of Characters” or “Paraiso das Mascotes”, organized by the Japan Foundation, together with the Orient Museum and the Embassy of Japan in Portugal.

Today, when people think of Japan, aside from sushi, ikebana, Noh play, Ukiyoe (Japanese wood-plint) for example, “Anime” and “Manga” have become one of the things that naturally come to mind. They are so popular around the world, among the people of all ages, especially the young, that we decided it is finally time to organize an event in Portugal, which examines characters as one crucial aspect of subculture.

In this exhibition, by presenting Japanese popular characters, we hope to introduce the dear visitors the intimate relationship between characters and the Japanese people, and to answer the visitors' questions. Starting with:

What exactly is a character? And why are they so popular?  
What kind of society do these characters reflect and what kind of influence do they exert on that society?  
And finally, where is the Japanese character culture headed to?

Tonight, we will also have a lecture by Ms. Megumi SUYAMA, associate professor of Tokyo Polytechnic University, about the Japanese anime culture. She has been engaged in cultural and academic exchange with Portugal. Last year, she has organized in several Portuguese cities, together with her colleagues and students, a series of exhibitions and workshops titled “Beyond kawaii”. Japanese word “Kawaii” originally just means pretty or cute, but it is actually one of the key words to characterize the modern Japanese culture. I know from their past events that they tried to introduce what does this seemingly tiny concept of

"Kawaii" means for the modern Japanese culture, creating new values by tremendous intellectual devices and flood of sentiment of the artists.

This reminds me of Master Sen-no-Rikyu, who created the Japanese Tea ceremony. He gave a new meaning of a sensibility for beauty to the concept of "Wabi-Sabi", a simple daily used word. I believe that the culture of "Characters" in modern Japan, may be creating a new and modern idea of "beauty", just like "Wabi-Sabi" of the 16th century or the today's concept of "Kawaii" did.

For today's event at the Orient Museum, I would be very satisfied, if you, dear visitors will gain better understanding on the Japanese sensibility for culture, shown in their love of characters, as well as the future of subculture in the contemporary Japan.

Please enjoy,  
Thank you very much.