



License to Play

Michal Daliot-Bul

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Play is one of the most powerful cultural forces in contemporary Japan and in other late modern societies. In this notable contribution to our understanding of play, Michal Daliot-Bul explores the intricate and dynamic transformations of culture and play (asobi) in Japan. Along the way, she takes readers on a theoretically informed journey to better comprehend what makes play a significant cultural function, asking such questions as How can we explain the dialectics between play as a biological instinct and play as a culturally specific activity? What defines the best player? How is creativity related to play? What is the difference between play and playfulness? Are some cultures more play-oriented than others, and if so, why? Daliot-Bul argues that the cultural meaning of play and its influence on sociocultural life are not inherent properties of a fixed, universal behaviour called play but rather are conditioned by changing cultural contexts and competing social ideologies. Spanning Japan's pre-modern period to the twenty-first century, the extent and expressions of play described in this book become thought-provoking lenses through which to view Japanese social dynamics and cultural complexities. As she approaches the post-industrialized 1970s in Japan, Daliot-Bul's narrative also explores urban consumer culture as a system for organising daily life, the tension between institutional and contemporary popular cultures, the production of new gender identities, and the cultural construction of urban space. License to Play is an insightful and engaging work that will appeal widely to scholars and students specialising in cultural studies, cultural anthropology, and Japanese studies. Given the global fascination with Japanese popular culture and with play-like pleasures in late consumer cultures, the book will also find a readership among those interested in Japan in general and the universal phenomenon of play.

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