5-2019

Culture of Mobile Phone Novels in Japan: A Comparison of Cultural Particularities of Mobile Phone Novels and Service Providers

Sarah Trinh
Suffolk University

Culture of mobile phone novels in Japan: A comparison of cultural particularities of mobile

phone novels and service providers

Sarah Trinh

College of Arts and Sciences

Suffolk University

I first became interested in Japanese popular culture by watching anime such as *Full Moon wo Sagashite* (Searching For the Full Moon) and *Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle* as a child. As I grew older, I added manga and live-action dramas to the mix. In 2008, I watched a live-action movie called *Koizora* (Sky of Love), then I looked online for other adaptations. I enjoyed the movie so much that I wanted to see more versions of the story. I remember that the first time I watched it, I was captivated by the relationship between the main characters. I discovered that there was also a manga which I read, but still wanted more *Koizora*. That is when I stumbled across something called *keitai shousetsu*, or cell phone novels. This was the original *Koizora*, a cell phone novel written by "Mika" before the manga and the movie that further popularized it. *Koizora* follows the love story between the sweet Mika and the delinquent Hiro. The two experience a sad but tender relationship that eventually ends in tragedy. Despite my interest in *keitai shousetsu,* I still could not understand it like a native. My lack of complete understanding of this cultural form however sharply contrasts with my ease of purchasing cell phone products in Japan.

My interest in Japanese culture spurred my desire to one day study abroad in Japan, something that I eventually did in the spring of 2018. On my second day in Tokyo, I went to purchase a SIM card at Yodobashi Camera. My student supporter from the school suggested I go here to get one. While I could have chosen to rely solely on the widely-available public WiFi like many of my friends, I decided to get a SIM card because I wanted to be able to use my phone anytime to ensure my safety and to feel connected in places where my Japanese competency does not allow me to converse with the locals. Upon getting the SIM card, I no longer felt like a total stranger to the country. I was able to get get around without constantly asking passersby for

directions simply by pulling up a map on my phone. I successfully navigated back to the dorm on

my own.

The experiences of reading cell phone novels and getting a SIM card implies that

non-Japanese tourists could easily understand where to buy SIM cards and how to use them, but

a different kind of cultural competency is needed to understand cell phone novels that target a

niched audience, generally young girls and women.

Keitai shousetsu (cell phone novels) are the works of literature that are written and read

on mobile phones. Two popular ones are *Koizora* by "Mika" and *Deep Love* by "Yoshi".

Koizora has a readership of about 20 million readers since its publication. *Keitai shousetsu*

Keitai was originally created for flip phones that have less advanced features, but now they can

be downloaded or read from websites and smartphone apps. However, most smartphone apps

are often limited to Japanese region app stores. For readers outside Japan, they must read the

works on websites hosting cell phone novels instead of downloading the app for an optimal

reading experience.

For this book chapter, I want to understand how cell phone retailer websites were

designed to aim for both Japanese-speaking and non-Japanese audience while cell phone novels

were for girls and young Japanese women. Websites provide good entry points to compare

cultural differences between cell phone retailers and cell phone novels because they show that

the content providers are aware that non-Japanese-speaking viewers go to the websites. They

may consciously design the websites to apply to people coming from different cultural

backgrounds by including different languages and selecting particular cultures to highlight. I

argue that while websites hosting *keitai shousetsu* are only understandable to its target audience,

those of mobile network carriers and retailers are understood by populations who use smart

phones. Both types of websites used text and images to convey cultural messages, but only those

of mobile network carriers or retailers would be understood by someone who did not understand

the Japanese language and culture. I used girls' studies as a theoretical framework to explain why

keitai shousetsu is like a private language to its readers, i.e. girls and young women in Japan.

However, girls' studies cannot be completely applied to understand Japanese culture because it

was developed from western girls' experience.

In the following, I will first discuss Japan's unique cell phone culture and media usage

among females. Then, I will explain what girls' studies are and how it relates to *shojo. Shojo* is a

Japanese genre directed at young girls and teens. I will then discuss the methods and present an

analysis of websites and still images. Finally, I will discuss why *keitai shousetsu* are

understandable only to its target audience.

Young Women and Cell Phone Culture

Literature about young women and digital technologies in Japan can be grouped into

three categories: (1) cell phone cultures in Japan; (2) gender constructions in the media; (3) how

young women use technologies; and (4) why writers contributed to cell phone novel sites.

Current literature shows why unique cell phone culture exists in Japan and why cell phone

novels are predominantly written by and for young Japanese women.

(1) Cell phone cultures in Japan

Daliot-Bul (2007) looked at keitai as a product or plaything deeply ingrained into the

personal lives of Japanese people, it has evolved from merely being a piece of technology into a

means of cultural change. *Keitai* illustrates that sociocultural changes and technological

progression places communities in new relationships and communication styles such as

self-expression. For example, the usage of emoticons and *kaomoji* allows users to playfully insert

their feelings into messages as text. It has become a social practice between teen girls who want

to portray a certain image of themselves onto others.

Kaomoji was said to compensate the "disrupted bodies" by using a computer (Katsuno &

Yano, 2002). The researchers argued that *kaomoji* re-asserts the missing physical body on the

computer screen, it becomes electronic prostheses of the face and emotion. Using Internet

surveys and participant observation, they found that *kaomoji* usage varied across specific niches

on the Internet. *Kaomoji* are more creative and elaborate on Internet chat boards, but its style,

content, and usage relate to timing of a response to a particular message. Some inappropriate

contexts to use *kaomoji* in e-mails are communication with one's superiors, strangers, close

friends and family. Users also had their own personal rules: some did not use *kaomoji* with close

friends because they understand the contexts of the messages; some used it to increase the

feelings of intimacy. On personal webpages, the usage of kaomoji varied greatly, ranging from

none to extensive.

Some scholars looked at how a population segment uses mobile phones. For example,

Boase and Kobayashi (2008) used a survey to show that mobile phone email is used to bridge

and develop, but not break, social ties. Only bridging ties had a positive association with the

number of emails sent daily; heavy cell phone users bridged more ties than light users.

In another example, Matsuda (2008) examined the reasons behind adopting *keitai* for

children and how it affects the parent-child relationship. Two surveys showed that even though

parents have a concern of public safety, they hesitate to give cell phones to their children. Some

reasons to provide one are: arranging a pick up time after school or to prevent unpleasant past

events from occurring. In yet another example, Okuyama (2014) explored textisms--defined as

unconventional spelling used in text messages--adopted by deaf Japanese adolescents, an

overlooked population of cell phone use. She asked how Japanese deaf adolescents use linguistic

features of texting and which features might resemble Japanese sign language. A case study of a

one-week long text message exchange by a high school romantic couple showed that the students

primarily used short sentences when messaging one another; and those sentences ended in

kaomoji. She found that their messages did not resemble Japanese sign language and all words

were typical of "proper" Japanese (known as kokugo). This finding seemed to disprove the

common perception by Japanese people that most deaf children have literacy problems.

Ishii and Wu (2005) would agree that cell phone use is highly ingrained into a culture.

They asked how Taiwanese and Japanese use mobile phones and the Internet differently for

maintaining personal relationships. They used both quantitative and qualitative methods and

found that while the Taiwanese were more likely to use Internet from their PCs, Japanese used

mobile phones to access the Internet. They also found that the Taiwanese preferred maintained

direct communication through face-to- face of phone communication while the Japanese

preferred maintaining indirect communication through email or text messaging.

(2) Gender constructions in the media

Some scholars looked at the portrayals of females in Japanese media.

Miller (2004) examined the way in which young Japanese women who challenge gendered norms through their own unique linguistic speech style (known as *kogals*). They used assertive and vulgar language patterns that changed typical Japanese language structures. In the media, *kogals* were portrayed as rebels, going against societal norms of how a girl should be. *Kogals* are loud, self-assured, lacking in manners, going after sex, and enjoy fighting. Kogals are similar to the reimagined *yanki* culture that Kim (2017) described as masculine.

Muramatsu (2002) used a feminist perspective to examine media texts since the 1970s from a gender identity perspective. It was found that the media presented conventional gender ideology. For example, girl- oriented novels contained heroines who were in a troubling situation, they met a male character and fell in love. These heroines are described to be sympathetic and caring, implying the female readers should strive to become feminine. However, a later study found that heroines who were strong and independent were refreshing to the girl readers. Her study suggested that women identify a different kind of femininity by reading these novels. In addition, she found that audiences in a homogeneous society such as Japan tend to decode dominant media messages that reinforce conventional values.

(3) How young women use technologies

Young women are not always the targets of media technologies, so they may not interpret the technologies in the same way as the targeted audience. Kim (2012) explored how keitai shousetsu became a mechanism that Japanese females could use to express their experiences on personal media. By focusing focusing on the relationship between keitai and keitai shousetsu, Kim showed how consumers incorporate keitai into their activities such as reading, writing, and

sharing comments by placing a meaning of on keitai shousetsu in their lives. Using in-depth interviews and ethnographic research in Japan's urban areas, they found that consumers chose to use mobile phones as the medium on which they read *keitai shousetsu* because the interface was more suited for it than a PC. They primarily read the novels at a designated time and place, most often in bed before going to sleep due to the privacy and relaxed atmosphere in the bedroom. Kim also found that consumers saw *keitai shousetsu* not as a new form of serious literature, but as a new form of email akin to personal messages.

Adding to Kim (2012), Hansen (2015) examined how cell phone novels contribute to a sense of authenticity between writers and readers through gendered female speech that characterizes the creation and content on *keitai* novel sites. She suggested that these characteristics contribute to authenticity because gendered speech validates women's experience, leading to the emergence of virtual communities where they could express themselves and intimately connect with strangers in anonymity.

Kim (2017) would agree with Hansen (2015) and Kim (2012) that cell phone novels allow young women readers to reimagine what being a girl means in Japanese culture. She argued that girls reimagine yanki culture as their own by writing and reading mobile phone novels. *Yanki* culture is a unique type of male-oriented Japanese rebellious or delinquent culture that emerged during the 1980s. It is characterized by teenage motorcycle gangs led by powerful gang leaders. She examined the *Wild Beast* series that extended *yanki* discourse to girls and highlight their rebellion by using it in mobile phone novels. This is similar to the *kogals* (Miller, 2004) in which the use of feminine equivalents are rejected, implying a type of rebellion.

In another example of how technologies are used with gendered implications is Fisch (2015) who looked at the mobile phone game Days of Love and Labor as a type of appealing serious play for young women while simulating a dismal employment experience for players. He asked what kind of message the game tried to convey and why players returned to a game with a dismal predetermined outcome. In the game, players simulate a salaryman who works hard but is yelled at by his boss and struggles to maintain his marriage. It is similar to the nature of today's youth employment in which young people work hard only for their lives to become a futile struggle against capitalism. The developers marketed the game towards young women as they feared that men would find the game "too real" and relate it to their own lives. Online discussions of the game however that show the players' motivation was different from that assumed by the developers. The users found the game appealing because it condensed all careers into a single representative salaryman by depicting life as a collective struggle for brief glimpses of happiness, an experience shared by many.

(4) Why authors contributed to the cell phone novel sites

The above three groups of studies examined why and how users consume media and technologies. Lukacs (2013) is one of the few who did asked why authors write cell phone novels. She related cell phone novel writing to labor and politics. Novelists said in interviews that writing is a form of affective labor at which unpaid content creators contribute. Affective labor is defined as a form of labor where a person invests their life experiences, commitments, and beliefs as the raw material from which surplus value is extracted. Lukacs found that writing cell phone novels allow the authors to find self- fulfillment and as a means of upward social

mobility, such as gaining celebrity status. In the next section, I discuss how Girls' Studies may provide a framework that would explain the appeal of keitai shousetsu to its target audience.

Girls' Studies

Research in girls' studies was mostly done in western countries, in particular the U.S. Studies focus on girlhood and girls' challenges such as their experience of growing up, finding their own identity, and deciding whether to conform to societal norms or not. However, girls' studies may not be applicable to young women's experiences in Japan because of cultural differences between the U.S. and Japan.

Girls' studies study the "tween" girl, who is neither a child nor an adolescent (Mitchell & Reid- Walsh, 2005). "Tween" has not always existed in societies, they arose when marketers created a niche market in which nine to twelve-year-old girls are allowed to explore being a teenager while still being given the security of childhood. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2005) argued that studies on children began at the Medieval Ages, but only boys were studied. A loose idea of girlhood emerged as girls began as a concept during the 18th century. However, there is no simple and unified concept of a tween.

Lipkin (2009) suggested that girls' studies is about how young women figure out who they are as individuals in the U.S. society. Girls' Studies addressed concerns—some deep, others deemed shallow—such as double standards between genders and societal pressure from adults and the male counterpart. Girls' studies is not just about young women, but also how gender and age intersect with sexuality, identity, body image, and the media.

Kearney (2011) suggested that Girls' Studies fill in a gap of gender studies because girl-centered academic work from the 1970s and 1980s mostly focused on women. Girls have been historically marginalized in academic research which reflects the marginalization of girls in society. Feminist research has exclusively centered on the adult narrative. The emergence of girls' studies may be able to contribute to positive social change because scholars can be allies to marginalized groups that do not have the power to make changes. Therefore, Girls' Studies has an activist stance.

Girls' studies has not been used in the study of Japanese media, instead the concept *shojo* has been used. To show how shojo is not the same as American teenager girls, Maynard and Taylor (1999) compared the portrayal of teenage girls between Japanese and American advertisements and found that Japanese magazines tended to depict verbal and visual girlish images, such as playful child-like poses that explicitly displays vulnerability. They concluded that American ads were associated with images of independence and determination while Japanese ones were associated with happy and child-like girlish images.

The Japanese young girl prototype is called *shojo*, defined as a genre of comics that are targeted towards young girls. *Shojo* culture emerged during the Meiji Restoration when young girls were sent off to boarding schools in response to a national standard for desirable female behaviors. Young women were expected to become good wives and mothers, and this pressure became expressed in *shojo* (Abbott, 2015). In contemporary Japanese society, *shojo* often connotes a young girl or an infantile maiden. However, *shojo* culture rejects negative stereotypes by building cultural spaces to counter gender roles, challenge mainstream beauty

standards, and create narratives with bodily transformations and sexual autonomy (Wakeling,

2011).

   Shojo has an origin in feminist thoughts (Abbott, 2015). The *uman ribu* (women's

liberation movement) in the 1960s allowed for the legitimization of *shojo* as a uniquely

Japanese means of expression and that *shojo* played a role in establishing Japan as a

major soft power because it became intertwined with *kawaii* consumerism which fueled

the growing economy. In the 1970s, *shojo* culture became commodified, yet it became a

means for girls to escape from reality.

   Shojo is different from tween in that it stems from a genre, while tween refers to a

marketing demographic. American tweens may be able to identify with *shojo* in that works

produced within the genre feature relatable heroines that struggle with identity. Kornfield (2009)

argued that *shojo* develops from feminism and can be identified by American young women

because in contrast to American comics where girls are described to be passive, dependent, and

highly sexualized, *shojo* has empowered heroines who can be identified by American tweens.

For example. One genre is *shojo* ballet manga that examines the interrelationship between ballet,

femininity, beauty, and selfhood that changed from the 1950s to the present day (Monden, 2014).

In the 1950s, ballet was seen as a world of luxury and elegance. This genre presented a princess

fantasy that is characterized by a foreign setting as well as frilly and flowery outfits. Ballet was

seen as a luxury because the cost was prohibitive to young women in 1950s Japan when the

country was still recovering from WWII. In the 1970s, ballet was seen to represent female

independence because the genre shifted to depicting girls in a world of glamor and beauty, yet

the protagonists still experience issues such as finding independence, having low self-esteem, and experiencing injury.

In the global stage, the *shojo* motif was contextualized in contemporary feminist art (Wakeling, 2011) because *shojo* is a girls-only cultural space where the subject problematizes dominant gender stereotypes of Japanese society while showing Japan absorbing foreign influences and making the culture uniquely Japanese.

Shojo also brought critiques in the depiction of *enjo kosai*, defined as the fetishization of the Japanese schoolgirl image that victimize and sexualize schoolgirls (Hausler, 2017). These narratives largely ignore the genuine concerns surrounding abuse and exploitation, falsely representing the schoolgirls that practice it. In contrast, *shojo* novels provide readers with a perspective from both sides.

My work will fill in the gaps between girls' studies, the appeal of *keitai shousetsu* to young women, and their websites' niched understanding when compared to websites of cell phone retailers. A comparison of the webpages is needed because girls' studies did not study how girls' cultures are always in relation with mainstream consumer culture, centered around males.

Methods

In order to demonstrate the knowledge required to understand the websites of *keitai shousetsu* and cell phone retailers, visual communication criticism and semiotic analysis of still images were used to analyze photos, illustrations, and advertisements from a

perspective of someone who has studied abroad in Japan, but is not fluent in the Japanese

language nor is fully familiar with Japanese cell phone culture. Even if I am unable to

understand the text, the images still convey meanings to me. For example, an ad for the

new iPhone informs me about the price of the new device.

Analysis of Websites

When using the search term "ケータイ小説" (*cell phone novel*), Google returned

26,800,000 websites (all in Japanese) where one can read Japanese cell phone novels. The

top four sites are "魔法のiらんどNOVEL" (*Magical Island Novel)*, "noichigo" (*Wild

Strawberry)*, "Berry's Café" (both *Wild Strawberry* and *Berry's Café* are owned by the

same company), and "ちょっと大人のケータイ小説" (*A Little Adult's Cell Phone

Novel*). In the following, I will describe the front pages of these websites and compare them

in order to show their similarities and how they cater towards their target audience.

Each of the websites is designed in a way that would appeal to young girls and

women. Their color schemes heavily employ pastels, particularly pink and white. Although

A Little Adult's Cell Phone Novel is the outlier by using a pastel blue color scheme with

pink accents, it still implies femininity. Similarities can also be found from the font types

that are highly stylized for some images and logos. Similar color schemes using pastel

colors can be found on *shojo* media, such as on the covers of manga serials.

The organization of content is similar as well: each website has sections where

users are able to browse by genre, the most popular of which is love/romance and boys'

love (BL). In addition, they all encourage interactivity. After users sign in, they can send

messages, post comments, bookmark their favorite works, and even submit their own cell

phone novel. By being anonymous, users can share intimate connections with one another

while hiding their real identities.

Each of the websites also has unique features that set them apart. For example, *A Little

Adult's Cell Phone Novel* groups *keitai shousetsu* using emosaics, small facial icons

indicating different emotions (such as embarrassment, surprise, and shock) that the reader

may feel while reading a novel linked on its respective page. These emosaics may be unique

to Japanese culture, specifically this website, as this was the first time I have encountered the

term despite having an understanding of what the facial expressions mean.

The websites of mobile network carriers and retailers are not like those of cell phone

novels. First, they are much more gender neutral in color. They predominantly use shades of gray

and white. These colors are not typically associated with either males or females (such as pink,

which is on most of the *keitai shousetsu* websites and is associated with girls). I chose to look at

websites of two major carriers— NTT Docomo and au—as well as two major retailers, Bic

Camera and Yodobashi Camera.

The more gender neutral colors may inform viewers that they are intended for users who

are older than teenagers. Ad images are predominantly displayed throughout the front page to

promote products in a slideshow for cell phones and contract packages. Their navigation menus

include links that take users to pages with more information about products and services. Users

also have the option to change the websites' language settings to English, a feature not found on

cell phone novel sites that are only in Japanese. Japan attracts millions of tourists annually (30

million in 2018). Major mobile carriers such as NTT Docomo or au try to be multilingual to

appeal to these foreign tourists, who may purchase a SIM card like I did. In addition, consumers

can also log into their accounts through the menu to edit their phone plan, make purchases, and

view data usage history. The interactivity is primarily pragmatic.

The front pages of retailers are also dominated by the products being sold. Featured items

or promotions are boldly advertised in images with large fonts and bright colors. Cell phone sites

primarily target adults because they are the ones who are legally allowed to sign plan contracts.

Adults are typically considered people who are twenty-years-old or older.

Semiotic Analysis of Images on Websites

I selected the first five images on each website's homepage that were not miniature icons

because these would be the first few that a user would see upon opening the site. The majority of

the images were found somewhere in the center of the page or near the top, while others on a

sidebar while scrolling partway down.

First, I will describe some of the images found from cell phone novel websites, including

photographs, manga, graphics, and so on. One is a photographed image that depicts a young

woman with a finger to her mouth, making a shushing motion in a secretive and almost sexually

suggestive manner. The bright red of the dress and text stand out against the more muted grays.

Another image contains two cartoon characters drawn in a manga style. They are implied to be in

love given how they share a scarf, are holding hands, and standing close to each other. There is

text next to the two characters including a date and time. Another image is a manga drawing of a

man in a three-piece suit and necktie with an arm in the air, seemingly angry. The last image is

primarily a graphic that has text with the words "BL" showing up twice and a "Poket Novel

Club" crest. A coat of arms appears behind one of the BL appearances.

Some of these images require Japanese cultural knowledge while some others require

less. For example, the woman in red is understood to be sensual to even non- Japanese culture,

but the BL crest is not readily understood if one does not know what "BL" and "poket" stand for,

even among Japanese speakers. The woman in the red dress probably leads users to cell phone

novels with some sort of tantalizing plotline, given the woman's gesture and how red is

considered a scandalous color. The image with a lone man requires much Japanese cultural

knowledge because it depicts *kabedon,* known as the wall slam. It is drawn from a first-person

point of view where the male is probably pinning the female (e.g. the implied reader) to the wall.

This scene could possibly involve some sort of passionate exchange between the two or a love

confession from the male. The graphic BL also requires much cultural knowledge. BL (boys'

love) typically consists of romantic relationships between two young males and sometimes even

includes sexually explicit ones.

Images from service provider and retailer sites are all photos of products and implied

consumers, there are no illustrations. . Some pictures consist solely of the products while others

are human models using the products. There are ads for the iPhone XR, displaying several

models in different colors with some text to the side, including one in which three young people

are looking excitedly at an iPhone screen with the word "Netflix" at the bottom of the ad. Unlike

the images found on *keitai shousetsu* websites, less Japanese knowledge is required to

understand the ones on service provider and retailer websites. This is because many of the brands

they feature are internationally known and the products are used by people outside the country.

One image is meant to bring users to check out the iPhone XR, a model that NTT Docomo carries. The brand "Netflix" would resonate with the US viewers. However, they may not know that the three people in the image are supposed to be high school students as school uniforms are not commonly worn in the US. In addition, a US viewer may find their facial expressions to be overly exaggerated.

Here I will explain which images would be easier for non-Japanese speakers to understand and which ones would require more cultural knowledge. The images that are easier for non-Japanese speakers to understand would primarily be those from the cell phone carriers or retailers. It does not take a niched understanding to know that images of various iPhone X models are trying to get consumers to buy it. Images depicting social media links would also be easier for non-Japanese to understand. The Twitter blue bird logo can be readily recognized by consumers of online culture.

For images that require a cultural understanding, various types of Japanese pop culture knowledge are needed. For example, take the *kabedon* (wall slam) image. It is very commonly depicted in many manga, anime, and *otome* games (dating simulations for females), particularly those with a romance element. When a *kabedon* occurs, there is almost always some sort of passionate exchange, anger, or jealousy on the male's part, or a love confession. However, those who do not have this knowledge will not fully understand what is happening in the image such as why the male's arm is raised up and why he has an intense facial expression. An understanding of the way Japanese advertising works is needed to understand ads on cell phone sites. These images are what many Westerners would consider "Japan's weird ads". Western advertisements tend to focus primarily on the product, its functionality, and how it can benefit the user if they

purchase it. However, in Japan, advertisements are meant to create a memorable impact on the audience more than highlighting all features. This impact is created by bringing in skits and seemingly outlandish outfits or scenarios. Without an understanding of why there are such advertisements being produced, people would simply dismiss them as "weird" without ever considering that the ad is to gain the attention of viewers and promote a product.

Shojo Culture and *Keitai Shousetsu*

Websites of *keitai shousetsu* use specific aesthetics to create an exclusive feeling for readers whose cultural taste is dismissed by the mainstream society. Cell phone novels emerged as a response to the development of gendered speech patterns used by females known as *jogakusei kotoba* (schoolgirl speech), particularly by schoolgirls in a closed social group (Hansen, 2015). These patterns include the use of certain sentence endings after a verb such as *ne* or *wa*. For example, *ne* is akin to adding "right?" at the end of a statement in the English language (e.g. "it's sunny, right?"). These speech patterns that are also used in *keitai shousetsu* are generally frowned upon by male intellectuals who believed that it was a "corrupt form of speaking" that should be discouraged. Male intellectuals would most likely prefer the speech patterns on retailers' websites. Schoolgirl speech in printed form validated the female experience in a patriarchal society in online communities that allow girls to express themselves in their own voices anonymously, yet intimately. On the cell phone sites, the speech is more like "approved" language. *Keitai shousetsu* are mostly uncensored and self-published, so authors do not need approval by anyone. In addition, cell phone novel sites sometimes host contests where publishers judge and physically publish the best ranked novels.

Similar to how male intellectuals dismiss schoolgirl speech patterns, they will most likely also dismiss the visual formatting of cell phone novels. The visual formatting of the text of *keitai shousetsu* is unique when compared to the formatting of a traditional novel. Traditional novels are typically written in paragraph form with proper punctuation and grammar. On the contrary, the formatting of *keitai shousetsu* includes line breaks, broken-up sentences, unique spacing, short phrases, and informal speech. It might even be comparable to the unique formatting that may be found on tweets and personal messages in Japan. For example, the text may have words or phrases broken into multiple lines instead of being written together. In some cell phone novels such as *Koizora*, the style of language allows readers to connect with the speaker on an emotional level. Following the story of a high school girl's first love and written in the first person, many readers can place themselves inside the story by reading it as "me". They can then connect with the speaker emotionally.

Kim (2012) found that some readers saw these *keitai shousetsu* not as serious literature, but more like personal messages that are similar to email. Unlike a traditional novel where readers and the author cannot interact with one another, cell phone novel websites provide a platform for readers to become intimate with each other as the novel gets updated. They can react to the story's events as if they were sending emails to a friend. The formatting of *keitai shousetsu* is more akin to a personal message sent between friends than that of serious literature where the readers are always on the receiving end. The informal written style of a cell phone novel combined with the intimate interactions found in emails would lead some readers to not see keitai shousetsu as serious literature.

These communities allowed girls to convey thoughts and feelings they may not want associated with their friends and acquaintances. In real life, girls are expected to conform to broader societal norms and established in-group norms. Not doing so would lead to becoming ostracized and thus they may feel the need to hide certain thoughts such as harboring romantic feelings for their friend's boyfriend or being lesbian. Similar to the closed schoolgirl groups that used these gendered speech patterns, *keitai shousetsu* websites are visited and understood by members of a novel's community. Novel groupings by theme or genre allow viewers to easily find new novels that appeal to them. Some genres and themes include "bad girl", "I love my teacher", "mystery", "tragedy", "romance", "BL", and more. Girls with shared interests are able to gather and interact with one another through the cell phone novel. Readers can comment with their thoughts on an update, and the author can respond to their fans. The websites allow them to communicate with those who are not in their existing social groups and form new ones. The girls probably do not know one another in real life because they become familiar with each other through usernames that hide their real identities.

Lipkin (2009) discussed that young women in general face double standards and societal pressure alongside the intersectionality with gender, sexuality, identity, and more. The novels are written in a wide range of genres, the most popular ones being romance, BL (boys' love), and slice of life. Slice of life is a genre that focuses on daily life, heavily featuring students in school because most young girls are in school and thus can relate. They also cover a variety of themes such as forbidden love, cruel past, teen pregnancy, and more. These are things that would generally be frowned upon by society if girls were to discuss or participate in them. The genres and themes of cell phone novels explore sexuality, identity, or societal norms that girls face in

the real world but in a space where girls are able to delve into such topics without the same kind

of backlash they would receive otherwise. For example, BL allows girls to fantasize about

homosexuality and sometimes even sexually explicit, relationships between males. Japanese are

expected to conform to established norms, including heterosexual relationships and explicit

male/female gender roles. If they were to publicly show their interest in BL, they would be

labeled as perverse and possibly ostracized by their social groups or communities. It is in the

keitai shousetsu space that girls can engage in topics that defy the norms they are told they

should follow. In another example, Kim (2017) describes the way in which girls reimagined the

male- oriented *yanki* culture of the 1980s as their own through cell phone novels, using *Wild*

Beast as a source of her analysis. By depicting females as motorcycle gang leaders and having

them use masculine terms to refer to themselves, they are demonstrating their non-conformity to

the societal norm in which girls and gentle and feminine. Cell phone novels continue providing a

space for young girls. They could possibly play a role in changing Japanese society as girls they

allow girls to discuss taboo topics in these spaces. By being able to discuss them, girls could

become increasingly empowered to talk about them outside the private online sphere and

eventually challenge societal norms in person.

Because of this, *keitai shousetsu* constitutes a space where girls are able to explore or

even challenge societal norms that surround them in their daily lives. Even though the space is

solely online, a new world is created when reading cell phone novels. It is similar to how readers

immerse themselves inside the world of a book. In many Asian cultures, there is a lack of private

and personal space. This is especially true in Japan where there is less space available for use. As

a result, the usage of space is different between an American and a Japanese context. For

example, children in the U.S. are typically each given their own bedroom and sleep separately

from their parents. However, in Japan, family members often sleep together in the same room.

The use of public transportation is also more common in Japan, thus giving people time and

space to indulge in reading cell phone novels during their commute to school or work. People in

Japan typically spend 60 to 90 minutes commuting on public transportation in each direction. By

contrast, people in the U.S. typically spend 20 to 25 minutes commuting by car. Although the

physical space is very public, the online space of keitai shousetsu is one that readers can call

their own private one.

Conclusion

Were I to continue exploring this topic in the future, other methods that could be used are

interviews and surveys that look at viewers' understanding of an image or website from looking

at a featured image or the homepage. These viewers would both be people who understand

Japanese culture and those who do not. By seeing first-hand responses, I would have a better

grasp on what a person thinks upon encountering the images, rather than making assumptions

based on previous literature and my own understanding of Japanese culture.

In addition to cell phone novels, the *josei* genre can be used to illustrate girls' studies in

Japan. It is typically aimed at older teenage girls and young adult women with works that contain

more mature or realistic themes. Such themes include divorce, an unhappy sex life, prostitution,

large age gaps between romantic partners, stagnation in life, and more. On the other hand, the

shojo genre features more idealized themes.

References

Abbott, L. (2015). Shojo: The Power of Girlhood in 20th Century Japan. *Honors Theses (WSU Pullman, Passed with Distinction)*.

Boase, J., & Kobayashi, T. (2008). Kei-Tying teens: Using mobile phone e-mail to bond, bridge, and break with social ties -- a study of Japanese adolescents. *International Journal of Human - Computer Studies*, (12), 930. Retrieved from http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.187846246&site=eds-live

Daliot-Bul, M. (2007). Japan's mobile technoculture: the production of a cellular playscape and its cultural implications. *MEDIA CULTURE & SOCIETY*, *29*(6), 954. https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437081710

Hansen, K. (2016). Authenticity in Japanese Cell Phone Novel Discourse, (1), 60. https://doi.org/10.1353/jwj.2015.0004

Hausler, R. (2017). Schoolgirl Sex and Excess: Exploring Narratives of Japanese Girlhood and Compensated Dating in Ruth Ozeki's Novel A Tale for the Time Being. *Hecate*, (1–2), 158. Retrieved from http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.553402758&site=eds-live

Katsuno, H., & Yano, C. R. (2002). Face to Face: On-Line Subjectivity in Contemporary Japan. *Asian Studies Review*, *26*(2), 205–31. Retrieved from http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2002420745&site=eds-live

Kearney, M. C. (2009). Coalescing: the development of girls' studies. *NWSA Journal*, (1), 1.

    Retrieved from

    http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&d

    b=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.215305277&site=eds-live

Kim, K. Y. (2012). The landscape of keitai shosetsu: Mobile phones as a literary medium

    among Japanese youth. *CONTINUUM-JOURNAL OF MEDIA & CULTURAL*

    STUDIES, *26*(3), 475–485. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2012.665841

Kim, M. (2017). Girls Just Want To Have Fun: The Portrayal of Girls' Rebellion in Mobile

    Phone Novels. *New Voices in Japanese Studies*, 28.

    https://doi.org/10.21159/nvjs.09.02

Kornfield, S. (2009). Comics for Girls? A Study of Shojo and American Girlhood Culture.

    Texas A&M University.

Lipkin, E. (2009). *Girls' studies. [electronic resource]*. Berkeley, Calif. : Seal Press, c2009.

    Retrieved from

    http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&d

    b=cat03139a&AN=suff.b1735603&site=eds-live

Lukacs, G. (2013). Dreamwork: cell phone novelists, labor, and politics in contemporary Japan.

    Cultural Anthropology, (1), 44. Retrieved from

    http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true

    &db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.325929821&site=eds-live

Matsuda, M. (2012). Children with Keitai : When Mobile Phones Change from "Unnecessary

    to "Necessary,". *Duke University Press*, (2), 167. Retrieved from

http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&d

b=edspmu&AN=edspmu.S1875215208200019&site=eds-live

Maynard, M. L., & Taylor, C. R. (1999). Girlish Images Across Cultures: Analyzing

Japanese Versus U.S. Seventeen Magazine Ads. *Journal of Advertising*, *28*(1), 39–48.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1999.10673575

Mitchell, C., & Reid-Walsh, J. (2005). *Seven going on seventeen. [electronic resource]:*

tween

studies in the culture of girlhood. New York : Peter Lang, c2005. Retrieved from

http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true

&db=cat03139a&AN=suff.b1589744&site=eds-live

Miller, L. (2004). Those Naughty Teenage Girls: Japanese Kogals, Slang, and Media

Assessments. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *14*(2), 225. Retrieved from

http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true

&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.43102647&site=eds-live

Monden, M. (2014). Layers of the ethereal: a cultural investigation of beauty, girlhood, and

ballet in Japanese shojo manga. *Fashion Theory*, (3), 251. Retrieved from

http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=tru

e&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.371400213&site=eds-live

Muramatsu, Y. (2002). Gender Construction Through Interactions Between the Media and

Audience in Japan. *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, *11*(1), 72–87.

Retrieved from

http://ezproxysuf.flo.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=

true&db=sih&AN=7484096&site=eds-live

Okuyama, Y. (2014). Japanese deaf adolescents' textisms. *International Journal of*

Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning, *4*(2), 20–32.

https://doi.org/10.4018/ijcbpl.2014040102

Ishii, K., & Wu, C.-I. (2006). A comparative study of media cultures among Taiwanese and

Japanese youth. *Telematics and Informatics*, *23*, 95–116.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2005.05.002

Wakeling, E.J. (2011). "Girls are dancin'": shōjo culture and feminism in contemporary

Japanese art. *New Voices*, 130. https://doi.org/10.21159/nv.05.06