10 The Novelty of Being Mobile: A Case Study of Mobile Novels and the Politics of the Personal

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In the rise of networked, ubiquitous, and social media epitomized by Web 2.0 and user-created content (UCC), mobile media has been central in ushering in new types of participation, creativity, and collaboration. The specters of Mark Weiser’s (1991) prescient words about the importance of context awareness and embeddedness within the constitution of ubiquitous technologies can be seen in multiple localized forms—as a set of media and communication practices, philosophies, aesthetics, and politics. In each location, ubiquitous computing is taken up in divergent ways.

As this book identifies, ubiquity takes many forms across cultural, aesthetic, and social landscapes. In each context, we see various features of ubiquity getting deployed and embedded subject to the locality. This is particularly the case in one of the most pervasive technologies of the twenty-first century, the mobile phone. Far from being placeless and signaling the demise of geography, the mobile phone heralds the importance of place. Ubiquitous technologies and technics take many forms and require us to locate the phenomenon within specific contexts. One location that has seen personal ubiquitous computing become synonymous with mobile media is Tokyo.

Through the lens of mobile media, we can examine the sociological and cultural dimensions of ubiquitous media. To comprehend fully the phenomenon of mobile media, we must frame it as part of a process of “remediation” (Bolter and Grusin 1999) and convergence of older media; that is, mobile media simultaneously rehearse older forms of intimacy and copresence (Hjorth 2005a; Milne 2001) as they expand and enable new media. Throughout their divergent and rapid uptake across the world, ubiquitous media have become a poignant symbol for contemporary postindustrial models of technology and technics, and personal technologies such as the mobile phone have been key repositories for the rise of ubiquitous media. Personal technologies have also helped foster the emergence of immaterial forms of labor—social, creative, affective, and emotional—such as UCC. Marrying the personal to technology has seen the embedding of ubiquitous media through the process of “personalization,” a process that is deployed differently by users than by industry. Moreover, like
ubiquitous media, personalization is subject to the forces of the local: in each location, we can see different personalization techniques occurring. In this chapter, I argue that we can understand ubiquitous media through the changing notion of personalization. I discuss ubiquitous media and UCC in a location that has been lauded for its innovation around personal technologies (Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda 2005) and personalization: Tokyo (figure 10.1).

So what do I mean by “personalization”? With the ushering in of ubiquitous media, two dominant tropes of personalization have been incurred—one driven top down from industry, the other driven through user practices such as UCC and user-generated content (UGC, a less active process). Indeed, in an age of “participatory media” (Jenkins 2006), the role of the personal has taken on a new, paradoxical position. This change has led social-networking systems expert Clay Shirky to argue that the “personal” no longer belongs to people, but to technologies. Although some industry-driven approaches and marketing may corroborate such notions, there is an alternative, more insightful route for understanding the rise of ubiquitous, affective technologies—through the role of UCC. Mobile media epitomize affective technologies (Lasén 2004) by way of their conflation of the personal and the intimate; for many, the mobile phone is the most intimate and personal device (Fortunati 2005).
Despite the pervasiveness of industry-driven modes of personalization, the rise of the mobile phone has also included the rise of UCC-driven personalization; the success of mobile media as ubiquitous technology is thus also a history of the growth of the subversive user. In the Asia-Pacific in particular, with “pioneering” locations such as Tokyo and Seoul, twenty-first-century ubiquitous-technology dreams have been transformed into a lived reality—specifically through convergent innovations around mobile media (Hjorth 2009). Through these models of mobile media whereby the mobile phone becomes a multimedia, networked device, we see practices and techniques of UCC begin to reconnect the personal with the political (that is, the user’s politics of practice).

I noted one such early example of ubiquitous computing while living in Tokyo in late 1999 and early 2000 with the phenomenal rise of one of the first models of third-generation mobile media—the mobile phone with Internet, Global Positioning System technology, camera, and so on—coming from the dominant service and device provider NTT DoCoMo. In the convergence of various media into the one device, the mobile phone in Japan (called “keitai,” abbreviated from deskwa keitai, “mobile phone”) represented one of the first mainstream uptakes of context-aware embedded media. DoCoMo’s ubiquitous multimedia, plethora of applications, and devices with big screens can be viewed as the precursor to Apple’s personalization hyperbolics for the iPhone. Prior to this “walled” version of the Internet proffered by DoCoMo, Internet access via a personal computer or an Internet café in Japan was expensive, but with DoCoMo Japan leapfrogged into twenty-first-century ubiquitous computing via the keitai. The dominant ritual of reading hard-copy manga (comics) on the long daily public-transport commutes was suddenly replaced by activities such as emailing and net surfing using the keitai. This embrace of personal ubiquitous computing via mobile media was due to the significant role keitai culture played into what Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Misa Matsuda (2005) call the “personal, pedestrian, and portable” within Japanese everyday life. In particular, the keitai highlights the highly significant role that the personal plays both in Japanese tradition (Fujimoto 2005) and in the rise of new media practices (Hjorth 2005b, 2006). This cartography of personalization is specifically marked by the crucial role that young women (shōjo) played in the alignment of the personal with the gender politics of UCC.

Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere (Hjorth 2003a, 2003b), one of the dominant symbols of both Japan’s and the region’s mobile media has been the conspicuous female user. She is representative of emerging cartographies of personalization (through UCC) in the Asia-Pacific that have ensured the success of mainstream ubiquitous media.

One of the first types of UCC to be part of this gendered phenomenon is the keitai shōsetsu (mobile novels). The phenomenal rise of keitai shōsetsu has to do with the highly significant role played by the keitai within Japanese everyday life. For many
Japanese, the *keitai* is their main Internet portal, thus rendering the device a tool both for communication and for information and entertainment. In a culture where long train journeys back and from work are the norm, the transformation of the *keitai* into *shōsetsu* is but just one possibility for passing the time. The *keitai shōsetsu* phenomenon began with the founding of one of Japan’s most pivotal UCC sites, Maho i-Land (*maho* means “magic”), in 1999. Although *keitai shōsetsu* were initially written by professionals, by 2005 everyday users had begun to be inspired to write and disseminate their own *keitai shōsetsu*.

Predominantly written by women for women, this mode of new media highlights the significance of remediation (figure 10.2); many of the successful *keitai shōsetsu* (among millions produced yearly) are adapted into older media such as film, *manga*, and anime. This practice can be seen as an extension of earlier gendered tropes of Japanese new media that in the 1980s was dubbed the “anomalous female teenage handwriting” phenomenon (Kinsella 1995). Characterized by *kawaii* (cute) transformations of the Japanese alphabet or by *hiragana*, “women’s language/script,” this

![Image of people waiting at a train station, some using their mobile phones.](image)

**Figure 10.2**
emerging genre of new media writing soon dominated mobile communication from the pager on, thus heralding what has been called the “high school girl pager revolution,” whereby girls’ and women’s UCC hijacked (through personalization techniques) technologies that industry had aimed at businessmen (“salarymen”) (Fujimoto 2005; Matsuda 2005). Moreover, keitai shōsetsu can also been seen as an extension of literary traditions evoked by arguably one of the earliest novels in the world, The Tale of Genji, written in AD 1000. Drawing on haiku, letters, and love sonnets, “Murasaki Shikibu’s” (the pen name of a person thought to be Fujiwara Takako) The Tale of Genji deploys hiragana to tell both the men’s and the women’s versions of the playboy “Genji’s” exploits. This tradition of women’s writing in Japan, amplified within the genre of keitai shōsetsu, was most explicitly highlighted in an updated version of The Tale of Genji entitled Tomorrow’s Rainbow by eighty-six-year-old Buddhist nun Jakuchō Setouchi—the “Marguerite Duras of Japan” writing under the pen name of “Purple” (Yourgrau 2009).

By exploring this emerging form of creative, social, affective, and emotional labor typified by keitai shōsetsu, this chapter considers how the keitai functions in extending the localized and gendered notions of the “personal” (Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda 2005) that, in turn, inform (sociocultural) revisions of “the personal as the political” in an age of ubiquitous media.

The Politics of Ubiquity: Getting Personal

The rise, dissemination, and adaptation of ubiquitous media are characterized by unilateral uptakes. These uptakes are the result of various factors—such as technonationalism and sociocultural nuances—that inform both micro (individual) and macro (cultural) contexts and practices. Hence, to conceptualize ubiquity, we must recognize that it is far from homogeneous in its dissemination globally. Although ubiquitous media might be everywhere or “everyware” (Greenfield 2006), it is through the lens of locality that we can gain insight into the practices and politics of ubiquity. For example, what it means to use ubiquitous computing in Japan—where the keitai is pretty much the device for everything from emailing to using positioning and social-networking systems to taking pictures—is a completely different embodied experience than it is in the United States, for instance. I argue that these technocultural localities are best understood through the rubric of cartographies of personalization. These cartographies take a specific geoimaginary within the Asia-Pacific.

As the mobile phone has grown from an extension of the landline into a networked multimedia device, it has accompanied and complemented the region’s economic, technological, and political transformations since the 1997 Asian economic crisis. In this phenomenon heralding new models of consumption and technocultural lifestyle narratives, the young female mobile-media user has played a central role. It is through
the role of personalized micronarratives in the form of UCC, what I have called “imaging communities” (Hjorth 2009), that we can begin to gain insight into new modes of media creativity, literacy, and labor in the twenty-first century. This rise of gendered mobile media can also be read as indicative of the region’s broader post-industrial shifts in which gender has colored various types of labor practices.

Indeed, just as female paid employment (predominantly in precarious new media sectors) has increased over this ten-year period (International Labour Organization 2008), so too have the new forms of mobile media and social labor that have accompanied this phenomenon. These parallel and interrelated trends have resulted in the reworking of gender, labor and technology. From social intimacy to UCC, labor has taken on various immaterial and material guises. Labor can be creative, affective, emotional, and social. As Arlie Hochschild (1983, 2000, 2001, 2003) notes, the rise of globalization can be seen through the role of service-care industries whereby women, especially in developing countries, are exploited for their emotional labor. She notes that with the increasing commercialization of human feelings and the intimate, distinctions between work and home have blurred. This phenomenon of commercializing the intimate (or what Lauren Berlant [1998] calls the “publicness of intimacy”) is amplified within the ambience and labor of UCC. These new forms of labor and intimacies can be witnessed within localized UCC characterized by camera-phone images and vernacular text messages as well as within new commodity forms such as keitai shosetsu.

Through these UCC practices of gendered mobile media, the Asia-Pacific can be understood as a series of local and transnational geoinimaginaries that are marked by personalization. Although the phenomenon of personalization can be seen as a broad global trend across the cultures of lifestyle and mobile media, it is within the Asia-Pacific that we already witnessing particular synergies between gendered intimacy and labor that are almost indivisible from the production and consumption of mobile media. This is a result of the region’s shift from comprising a series of newly industrialized countries—demonstrating increasingly economic and technological power—to comprising a series of localities that amplify ideological prowess with twenty-first-century capital (Arrighi, Hamashita, and Selden 2003; Dirlik 2007; Hjorth 2009). In this transformation of the Asia-Pacific, one can see emerging formations that can only be described as “cartographies of personalization.”

Cartographies of personalization are as much geographic and spatial as they are emotional and sociocultural. These topographies are marked by the interior, intimate, and contingent practices that both challenge and reinforce gendered performativity around labor and intimacy. They are a product of the rise of affective technologies such as mobile media in which industry attempts to shift the “personal” away from people and toward technologies (Shirky 2008). Through UCC, however, the personal is reclaimed from technologies and relocated in people. Indeed, as one of the most
“personal” and “intimate” devices (Fortunati 2005), the mobile phone affords users a space in which acts of copresent intimacy, emotion, affect, and the haptic can come into play, contesting industry or designers’ original intentions. This relationship is highlighted by the fact that the transformation of the mobile phone into a multimedia device has occurred through the burgeoning numbers of subversive users (Hjorth 2003a, 2003b). Many applications are successful simply because users have repurposed their intention.

Like social, networked media, these cartographies are global, but so are they likewise marked by distinctively regional and localized characteristics. Here the notion of the “personal” is significant, with the rise of keitai culture (synonymous with “ubiquity” in Japan) marked by three key features—the “personal,” [the] portable, and [the] pedestrian” (see Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda 2005). These three P’s render new technologies relevant; that is, they transform them into an integral part of the technocultural landscape. Indeed, the role of “personalization” has been crucial in the rise of ubiquitous and affective technologies such as mobile media—playing a significant role in the media localization.

Japanese keitai culture is part of broader “personalization” techniques that can be mapped back to the eighteenth century (Fujimoto 2005; Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda 2005) and thus should be contextualized as part of broader shifts within industrialism and postindustrialism. However, within these broader cartographies, localized and temporalized features occur—exacerbated at particular key sociocultural and economic periods. One of the key factors that ensured the success of technological ubiquity and the media convergence represented by keitai in Japan was the central and defining role that personalization played in the uptake of new technologies. And so what does it mean to think about a politics of personalization in an age whereby the “personal” is claimed by technology via industry but movements such as UCC attempt to claim it back for the people? And how does this concept differ or overlap with the 1960s feminist adage “the personal is political”?

As ubiquitous media spreads, the attendant forms of emerging creativity, collaboration, and community within terrains such as Web 2.0 will undoubtedly transform everyday users and their UCC. One of the key attributes of this personalization phenomenon is what Jean Burgess (2008) calls “vernacular creativity.” Here Burgess spearheads the emerging amateur/professional nexus that has been altered by networked social media. Within these new-media social cartographies of UCC, users and their labor—or “playbour” in the case of gaming (Küchlick 2005)—are increasingly becoming coproducers or “produsers” (Bruns 2006).

A key example of UCC “vernacular creativity” is keitai shōsetsu. As I argue in this chapter, keitai shōsetsu vividly demonstrates the increasing role that personalization plays in the politics of ubiquitous media. Far from renouncing older media, ubiquitous personalized media such as keitai shōsetsu are rehearsed and remediated as they
converge and diverge—extending and expanding upon the tradition of women’s subversive writing through the use of new media in the form of “kitten writing” or kawaii cultures. From Hello Kitty customization to keitai writing, examining the kawaii can give insight into gender practices in Japan (Hjorth 2003a, 2003b). This is most tangible at the intersections between keitai shōsetsu, kogals and the kawaii.

The Art of Being Mobile: The Keitai Shōsetsu Kogal and the Kawaii

Tokyo’s emerging cartographies of personalization in the form of UCC (Fujimoto 2005; Matsuda 2005; Okada 2005) are most palpable in the rise of the kogal (Miller 2005): a new hybrid type of performativity by young women born through the technocultures afforded by the keitai. Kogals have been instrumental in the shift from the pager to the personal handy-phone system (a hybrid of the personal digital assistant and mobile phone) to the keitai in Japan (Fujimoto 2005; Hjorth 2003a, 2003b; Matsuda 2005; Okada 2005). Beginning in 2000, as the keitai phenomenon became increasingly pervasive and synonymous with personal ubicomp, it became apparent that the symbolic and literal meanings associated with the keitai were concurrent with a steady increase in the visibility of young women and the new forms of creative and affective labor in which they were involved. This burgeoning of keitai kogal new media and emergent new creative industries is most tangible in the case of keitai shōsetsu. Behind these images of the successful keitai and the specific role of “personalization” within Japanese technologies lies a parallel story—the growth of the active and subversive female user (Hjorth 2005b, 2006). Indeed, the genealogy of the rise of mobile ubiquitous media is tied directly to the subversive, personalization practices of young women by means of UCC rather than the use of industry-driven applications.

The rise of the keitai from business tool to social accessory parallels the demise of the national symbol, the “salaryman,” and the expanding power of young female users—epitomized by the female high school girl user or the young female consumer, the shōjo (Fujimoto 2005). Consumers, in particular young female consumers, have played an integral role in both the growth and adaptation of keitai cultures, so much so that the emergence of new tropes of empowered female consumers (or what Axel Bruns [2006] calls “produsers”) are indissoluble from the keitai phenomenon, which, in turn, has been integral within emerging forms of Japanese technoculture.

Like the keitai, shōsetsu plays on the significance of the personal within Japanese tradition (Fujimoto 2005), a fact that can be evidenced in Japan’s successful role in developing “electronic individualism” (Kogawa 1984), from the Sony Walkman to GameBoy. The keitai shōsetsu epitomizes the specific role the personal has played in Japan upon both micro (individual) and macro (nationalism) levels (McVeigh 2003). Through the keitai shōsetsu and its emerging modes of creative, social, affective, and emotional labor (UGC), we can see the keitai’s pivotal role in extending the notion of
the “personal” (Ito, Okabe, Matsuda 2005), so much so that I argue that these mobile novels completely revise “the personal as the political” in an age of full-time public intimacy.

The “personal as political,” with its feminist overtones from 1960s and 1970s body politics, plays a particular role in keitai shōsetsu given that these mobile novels are predominantly written by women for women. What began as a youth-oriented activity (most keitai shōsetsu are both written and read on the long commuting journeys that are part of Tokyo daily life) has more recently become a medium for women of different generations and class. This shift marks a time when the keitai shōsetsu becomes more interesting and thus a more compelling study not only for understanding the relationship between new media and older media such as the print novel, but also for gaining insight into Japanese women’s practices of storytelling.

Far from eroding Japanese “high” literature (Sullivan 2008), keitai shōsetsu invoke the art of haiku poetry (Twitter also arguably draws on such a tradition) and recall the significant role played by a female writer, “Murasaki Shikibu,” in the development of the novel through The Tale of Genji. In this context, keitai shōsetsu highlight not only early models of literature, but also the role female writers have played in the field. Given that women were not required to learn the art of kanji, the Japanese system of writing, they had to learn the alternate "women’s language." The Tale of Genji is written in hiragana, once the only Japanese alphabet women were allowed to use (when it was invented around AD 800), further reinforcing the development of a female-centered, emotionally charged vernacular. In contemporary keitai shōsetsu, we can see hiragana and the female, emotionally driven flavor being further intensified, especially through the deployment of emojis and "kitten writing" (a hybridization of emoji and hiragana) (Kinsella 1995).

Indeed, it is the ambiguous role of kawaii culture to evoke multiple forms of performativity able to reinforce and yet transgress gendered stereotypes around technologies that makes it such a poignant subject for analysis. It is impossible to understand the rise of keitai cultures as synonymous with the burgeoning female UGC without comprehending the pivotal role kawaii culture has played at both the level of the technonational imagined community and, more important, the level of the imaging community. Through mapping this relationship, we can gain greater acuity in understanding emerging gendered mobile intimacies, labor, and capital. Kawaii culture has helped to embed mobile media within forms of localized gendered intimacy and thus provided both the backdrop and the vehicle for the rise of female “producers.”

According to Sharon Kinsella’s groundbreaking research, kawaii culture arose as a youth subculture in the 1970s as a means of self-expression and rearticulation and as a reaction to the overarching traditions perceived as oppressive. Young adults preferred to stay childlike rather than join the ranks of the corrupt adults (Kinsella 1995). This phenomenon highlighted the way in which “childhood” as a construct is conceived
and practiced in locations such as Japan, with its premature adulthood, in contrast to locations such as the West (Ariès 1962; White 1993). In practices such as “kitten writing,” youths subverted Japanese cultural concepts by intentionally misspelling words in acts of political neologism (Kinsella 1995).

Kawaii culture draws from the Japanese tradition of gift giving and provides a means to overcome the Japanese proclivity toward shyness in social interactions (Kusahara 2001). The gift-giving genealogy is pertinent in kawaiif’s translation into mobile telephony, highlighting and facilitating the gift-giving cartography of mobile telephonic social rituals and symbolic exchange (Taylor and Harper 2002). Kawaii culture’s role in customization articulates a type of social glue to the copresent online space of the keitai. It reminds users of the role of subjectivity in technological spaces; at its core, kawaii customization domesticates the technology. It transforms the technology into a sociotechnology, bringing the role of the sociocultural to the forefront of the technology. Kawaii culture is instrumental in the gendered cartographies of personalization in Japan and can be seen to extend its vernacular creativity in the form of keitai shōsetsu. The tendency of customization to be cute—or what Brian McVeigh (2000) calls “technocute” (whereby the cute makes new technology “warm”) (figure 10.3)—has taken various guises and turns in the rise of gendered new media in Japan. It has been an important part of women’s gaining access and feeling comfortable with the emerging technocultures. The fact that “kitten writing” is now part of the mobile phone industries’ gender scripting (i.e., the keitai now comes with increasingly varieties of emoji) highlights how the UCC feminized practices not only have a long tradition but also have become institutionalized.

Although UCC may provide the everyday user with a voice and models for intimacy, interactivity, and dialog between authors and readers, one of the big problems is that it exploits the user’s creative and social labor often without remuneration. However, it seems Japan is providing a different picture for the future of UCC in which media content—distribution companies, such as Maho i-Land, take an active role in encouraging and fostering talent and media literacy programs. For example, Maho i-Land has an annual award for UCC: the winner of the best keitai shōsetsu award can win one million yen and a publishing contract, and a runner up can get 500,000 yen and a publishing contract. With its establishment in 1999, Maho i-Land provided avenues for various forms of UCC—poems, images, music, and stories. Its template “Let’s Make Novels”—along with unlimited data packages for the keitai in 2003—impelled the dramatic rise of writers and readers of keitai shōsetsu. By 2007, nearly four million different keitai shōsetsu had been printed in hard copy. With one million keitai shōsetsu being produced in 2007 and 1.9 billion page views per month, Maho i-Land has become an exemplary case of the popularity of UCC. These data paint a picture of an active UCC scene in which keitai cultures are nurturing new talent, but how do they reflect female empowerment through such technologies?
The keitai shōsetsu provides an interesting lens to think through new gendered forms of UCC labor. One of the key features of keitai shōsetsu is that they tend to follow a diarylike, confessional, autobiographical model—very much reflecting Berlant’s (1998) observation of the growing “publicness of intimacy” being forged through the highly personalized and intimate media, the keitai. These novels inspire users to become writers and are part of a broader trend toward the professionalization of UCC, particularly through its adaptation and translation into other media such as film. For example, the most popular and famous mobile novel, Koizara, written by female keitai novelist “Mika,” was famously adapted by female director Natsuko Imai into a movie.

Through keitai UCC, we can see many examples of female users finding inroads into creative activities. Thanks to UCC-oriented organizations such as Maho i-Land, these users can be empowered on various levels—sharing and collaborating on stories as well as potentially making a career and gaining professional recognition in the form of book publishing or film contracts. Far from a situation in which keitai shōsetsu culture is eroding the significance of older, remediated media such as manga and film,
it is providing new material for and interest in adapting stories by everyday users. The intimate, personal nature of mobile media unquestionably provides a platitude for rehearsing the earlier epistolary traditions of women’s fiction, with its literacy devices such as letter writing. To think about ubiquitous networked media is to acknowledge the pivotal role that remediation has played in the practices of UCC new media.

Conclusion

In the rise of participatory, networked, ubiquitous, and social media, we are seeing emerging and yet remediated forms of new media. Through the rubric of UCC practices, we can begin to reconceptualize what these emergent modes of participation, engagement, creativity, and collaboration entail. But within these shifts of media practices, we must ask: What does it mean to be personal and political in an age of ubiquitous media? In other words, what happens to the feminist adage that “the personal is political”?

In Japan, we can see that creative labor around mobile media—drawing from the history of the first Japanese novels and gendered genres of expression such as gyaru-emoji (girl emoticon), kitten writing—has transformed into a multifaceted industry of popular keitai shōsetsu and is now being adapted into other media such as film. Women’s stories are being heard. Through the personal and intimate frame of the keitai, millions of micrnarratives are being told to millions of readers. The keitai shōsetsu demonstrates its particular role in nurturing the personal as a space for women’s literature—a place where personal stories, politics, and communities are founded. These stories take flight across a variety of old and new media—with the keitai shōsetsu reinvigorating other media canons such as manga and film. Through Web 2.0, social-network media such as 2ch and mixi, community storytelling is taking on new value again, featuring the rise of female directors, creators, and producers. Is this a taste of a future in which traditionally “feminine” social labor has gained some form of value in the market? How will this gendered cartography play out?

As I have demonstrated throughout the example of keitai shōsetsu, the rise of ubiquitous computing through affective technologies has been accompanied by UCC practices—often with subversive results. Keitai shōsetsu can be seen as part of the kitten-writing phenomenon that began in Japan in the 1970s—accompanying the birth and rise of personal technologies. Kitten writing has always fused the cute with the emotional and social, playfully merging Japanese alphabets such as hiragana with the logographic in order to personalize a media communication space. In this way, keitai shōsetsu extends three traditions—the gendering of keitai culture, the gendering of the Japanese language, and the significant role female writers such as Murasaki played in the birth and rise of the novel. For these three reasons and more, it is hard to ignore the role keitai shōsetsu has played not only in evoking the personal
but also in linking the personal to a political currency in which gender is mobilized as a form of performativity and potential subversion. Thus, through the example of the *keitai shōsetsu* we can revise notions of “the personal as the political” in an age of ubiquitous media.

**Notes**

1. As sociologist Amparo Lasén has noted, the increasing significance of mobile media is predicated around its role as an “affective” technology in which emotional and affective labor become the dominant currencies. Mobile media is a by-product of the always-on phenomenon whereby work and leisure boundaries are blurred. We are always ready to respond to our mobile phone, always ready to perform particular “feeling rules.” Lasén also argues that mobility has always been at the heart of intimacy. This relationship is demonstrated through the various forms of propinquity that have accompanied changing notions of “romance” and “intimacy” (Giddens 1992; Hjorth 2005a; Milne 2001).

2. Invented by a Buddhist priest known as Kōkai (AD 774–835), *hiragana*, as a phonetic version of *kanji*, was taught to women because it was seen as simple in comparison to *kanji*. At this time, women spoke Japanese and wrote *hiragana*, which is why *hiragana* was defined as “women’s language.”

3. Within models of innovative ubiquitous media, the Asia-Pacific has featured prominently. Beyond techno-orientalist (Morley and Robins 1995; Yoshimi 1999), soft power (Nye 2005, 2007, 2008), and “gross national cool” (McGray 2002) interpretations, the significant role played by ubiquitous media within specific technocultural landscapes in the region can be clearly framed through localized notions of personalization. Since the 1997 financial crisis, locations in the Asia-Pacific region have sought to rebuild and reconceptualize their economies from information and communication technology manufacturing sites into models of twenty-first-century informational societies. The mobile phone, as vehicle for ubiquitous-communication media, has been symbolically and materially integral to this shift.

4. According to the International Labour Organization’s 2008 report *Global Employment Trends for Women*, these increases in female employment can be noted in East Asia and the Pacific, whereas South Asia remains relatively unchanged, with an “untapped female potential and sizeable decent work deficit” (21).

5. As Judith Butler (1991) notes, gender is constructed and naturalized through a set of localized regulations and rituals that she defines as performative. Through this revised notion of gender as a set of performances, we can begin to uncover some of the modes of gendered identities—and attendant modes of femininity and masculinity—arising in the transnational interstitials constituting the Asia-Pacific. An important aspect to add to Butler’s notion is the pivotal way in which gender is localized within a cultural context. With the rise of postcolonial feminists such as bell hooks, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Rey Chow, and Sarah Ahmed, the Western inflection underscoring much of the earlier work in gender studies is now challenged by new regional gender studies and returns of essentialism.

*Ekman—Throughout*
6. As John Whittier Treat (1996) perspicuously notes, the term *shôjo* signifies a sexually neutral, consumption-focused female.

7. Kitten writing can be seen as earlier examples of *emoji* (emoticons) before it was institutionalized by industry as part of built-in *keitai* customization (Hjorth 2003a, 2003b). Under this light, the emergence of kitten writing with personal technologies in the 1970s was no accident; indeed, this emergence highlights that the rise of industry-driven customization has been accompanied by the emergence of UCC personalization. In this way, kitten writing can be read as part of a tradition of female, UCC personalization practices that have sought to align the personal with the interpersonal. *Kawaii* can take various forms: writing, character culture, and animation, to name a few. The *kawaii*, although stereotyped as a young female’s preoccupation and thus characterized as “female,” is traditionally seen as asexual (Whittier Treat 1996)—that is, as having a gender without sex. Characters like Hello Kitty are emblematic of this asexuality. Like the typical consumer, the *shôjo*, the *kawaii* was a female without agency in a society where the *oyaji* (older man/father) was the national symbol after World War II.

References


