



Title	Women's Games in the Japanese Market : a Look at Gender and Contemporary Social Trends
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Citation	平成28年度学部学生による自主研究奨励事業研究成果報告書. 2017
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/60355
rights	
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平成 28 年度学部学生による自主研究奨励事業研究成果報告書					
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研究課題名	<u>Women's Games in the Japanese Market: a Look at Gender and Contemporary Social Trends</u> Literary Review and Content Analysis of <i>Moshi, Kono Sekai ni Kami ga Iru to Suru Naraba</i> and <i>Niru Adomirari no Tenbin — Teito Genwaku Kitan</i>				
研究成果の概要	<p>1. Introduction</p> <p>The proportion of female to male participants in the gaming community is noticeable skewed, and this is reflected in the amount of content marketing towards “female gamers” as opposed to the standard “gamer”: there seems to be an assumption that the term gamer is paired with being a male, indicated by how gender is emphasized with the addition of females. Games and forms of entertainment undoubtedly morph to best suit what is believed to be consumer demand (Prescott and McGurren, 2014). The research aim of this project was delve into the existing market of women’s games (女性向けゲーム, <i>jyoseimuke gemu</i>) available in Asia through a literature review and product study focused on the Japanese market. The resulting findings give insight as to how gendered trends are enforced and reproduced through the popular media of Japan, where there are a number of established game developers who consistently create women aimed content. What was especially a focal point in the research was on how traditional images of the ideal woman (Sekiguchi, 2010) have met with her contemporary in modern Japan. Moreover, the project seeks to understand how gender continues to be marketed to an audience that has been historically critiqued as placing traditional domestic and family responsibilities on women (Smith, 1987). The analysis has been conducted by comparing literature and marketed products in order to see whether the image of “good wife, wise mother” (良妻賢母, <i>ryosai kenbo</i>) (Sekiguchi, 2010) remains a female ideal today.</p> <p>The research plan initially included three phases: 1. literature review; 2. product study; 3. interview survey with game designers of two major gaming companies. However, since it was not possible to get into contact with the targeted companies, the research project was developed up to phase two, with no expenses to claim.</p> <p>2. Methodology</p> <p>The research plan for this study involved the examination of literary sources regarding market audience and established women’s games that paved the way for future expansion of the market for such games. In addition, the research would take the gathered ideas from the literature and do a critical comparison of those ideas with the themes and motifs central in two recent women’s games, 『もし、この世界に神様がいるとするならば』 (<i>Moshi, kono sekai ni kami ga iru to suru naraba</i>) and 『ニル・アドミラリの天秤 — 帝都幻惑奇譚』 (<i>Niru Adomirari no tenbin — teito genwaku kitan</i>). These were developed by major game producers Rejet and Ideafactory respectively, and released in 2016. In researching more on preexisting literature with the focus on both the birth and growth of the market and audience desires, a more clear understanding on the present image of women’s game and its reception can become the basis to see how trends in such</p>				

games have evolved and show variation. The two specifically chosen games approached in this project were selected based on two major criteria: firstly, the product had to be a fairly recent release, not having been on the market for more than 3 years. While classic games hold significance in the sense of being corner stones for the development of trends in women's games, newer games can provide a more up to date reflection of audience needs, as new titles are released every season. The second criterion was based upon the game developer, with the company needing to not only be based in Japan, but already have a significant share in the market. Based on the results of this research, I analyzed the relationship that the heroine of each game with male counterparts and elements such as character development, diction and recurring themes.

3. Background

Background on both the literature used and the choice of women's games is first necessary in order to better understand the framework of this study. Only more recently has there been an increase in academic writing on the role of women's games in the gaming industry, and research has gained momentum over the last few decades with the acceptance that there was a lack of games appropriately suiting the needs of the female audience. Karen Dill-Shackleford (2005) mentions a 1998 study by Tracy Dietz (qtd. in Dill-Shackleford, 116), and notes that in that top selling games of Japanese developing companies Sega and Nintendo "21% [depicted] violence towards women... 28% of the games portrayed women and sex objects" and that females were "likely to be depicted as victims or as damsels in distress" (2005:116). She writes that with female images physically being "hypersexualized, with disproportionately large breasts and small waists" (2005:117), these games were created more with the intention to appeal to a male audience, and in doing so also unintentionally created distance between the games and their potential female audience. In response to this, comes the newer Japanese market for women's games (女性向けゲーム, *jyoseimuku gemu*), where the female audience is especially developed for and marketed towards. I argue that these games reveal how companies project the traditional image of women, and how certain elements and values remain constant even as their characters are placed into contrasting situations and met with challenging obstacles.

4. Results

In a piece of her literature, Hyeshin Kim (2009) addresses the differences in games based on the gender of audience, referring specifically to the 1994 women's game *Angelique*, which was successful in creating a "loyal and close-knit fan base" by drawing upon female culture such as girls' comics (少女漫画, *shoujo manga*), and the following of popular voice actors. Being one of the pioneer games in the genre, Kim argues that *Angelique* "also set up the specifics and conventions of women's games: a focus on romance, easy controls and utilizing other multimedia" (2009:165). One of the major differences that Kim notes existing between male and female targeted games are the subject of the game itself, with "girls have distinct preferences and tastes different from those of boys" where girls like "collecting, creating and constructing" and place more focus "on character, story and relationships than achieving a given set of goals" (2009:166-167). This prefaces the idea that females as a consumer group have tastes that conflict with what has more traditionally been the structure for popular games in the industry, as hence can explain the additional lag in introducing desirable content.

This is seen as true in both *Moshi Kami* and *Nil Admirari*, as while *Moshi Kami*'s plot is supposedly focused on the unraveling of the secret behind the letters addressed from each character's past self, the multiple endings are all ultimately reliant on Haruka (the player) being able to answer correctly in a series of interactions between herself and

other male characters. If done correctly, a meter reflecting the closeness of her relationship with a specific character goes up, and a positive ending is only achievable by successfully improving relationships. Failure to do so ends with the player receiving one of bad endings, with names such as the “chaos end” and the bluntly put “dead end”, in which the heroine and central characters are usually killed off or possessed by the vengeful gods. Similarly, *Nil Admirari* has its plot established by the mystery of multiple cursed books circulating in Tsugumi’s city, but the advancement of plot and the reveal of the “true ending” are done by having the heroine and one of several male characters admit their love for each other. Before this happens, players must manoeuvre social situations and similar to *Moshi Kami* give the appropriate answer, and afterwards the focus is shift to how the player and chosen male character navigate situations together as a pair, rather than Tsunami being the focus as an independent element.

Furthermore, Kim believes that the game avatar in women’s games are especially vital to the success of a women’s game. As one might fight especially relevant taking into Japan’s importance in role language (役割語 - *yakuwarigo*), Kim argues that not just characters, but narratives are gendered. This is made especially easy to notice in Japanese popular culture by the many contractions and gender specific words used frequently in conversations. In *Moshi Kami*, Haruki’s speech is easily distinguished by her use of feminine pronouns, and the male characters each use distinctive endings to their words including the masculine “ze”, contractions, and the referral to other characters as “*aitsu*” and “*yarou*” which are impolite forms of addressing not usually used by females. In *Nil Admirari*, Tsugumi’s inner thoughts to the player frequently make comments that heavily emphasize her awareness of the difference in genders, stating on one occasions at a restaurant that it would be “so scandalous for [her] as an unmarried female to be seen eating alone with a male”. At another point, Tsugumi suggests that the appropriate show of gratitude to the *Fukuroou* for giving her housing and a job would be to use her skills and “wake up early to clean [the house] and make breakfast for everyone”, giving the player a most blatant declaration that the heroine, with her special ability to detect cursed books and knowledge of self defence, was still most apt when in the kitchen and serving males colleagues.

The games analysed in this paper are 『もし、この世界に神様がいるとするならば』 or “*Moshi, kono sekai ni kami ga iru to suru naraba*” (2016), henceforth referred to in this paper as *Moshi Kami*, and 『ニル・アドミラリの天秤 — 帝都幻惑奇譚』 or “*Niru Adomirari no tenbin — teito genwaku kitan*” (2016), which will be referred to as *Nil Admirari*. *Moshi Kami* and *Nil Admirari* were both commercial successes in 2016. *Nil Admirari* and *Moshi Kami* are examples of how the mold for the ideal women as the “good wife, wise mother” continue to be reproduced in the Japanese gaming market, even as its games strive to create a more gender equal sphere through increased women’s games. This is possible precisely because the protagonists of women’s games are not just a lens through which a player experiences the story (Kim, 1994). It can be suggested that the character is also an object of admiration and a role model since she represents what is socially acceptable, and more importantly- desirable.

Moshi Kami follows the adventures of modern day high school heroine Haruka Kurumi, and four other male characters who begin experiences strange phenomena in their city one day after each character receives a mysterious letter from their past self on which is written their innermost desire. The game is loosely based on Japanese mythology, incorporating characters such as Izanami and Izanagi, beings from the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) and the *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan) who in mythology are the creators

of Japan and from which all other Japanese gods are born. The title of the game, which can be translated as “If Gods Existed in This World”, is both ironic and satirical given that it is revealed all prominent characters are possessed by mythological deities, which is a major source of conflict. The title is perhaps also satirical as the world the characters initially inhabit turns out to be an alternative universe born out of the desires of the heroine and other prominent characters to escape their traumatic pasts in the real world. The traumas are rooted in parental abuse and neglect, sexual assault, and murder. As five desperate 11 year olds, Haruka and her friends cast letters with their wishes into the ocean, which are then granted when the god Izanami hears the pleas. The solution offered is to create an alternate world where such traumas never occur. Yet as time goes on, Izanami’s control of the world begins to dissipate and causes distortions in the reality of the world, causing the letters from the real world to arrive in the alternative world and break the mirror that divides the two. As the plot continues, the player is dragged deeper into Haruki’s dark past where it is shown that she was violated by her abusive step father as a child, and unable to escape until her mother finally discovers letter written by her older brother. However, the most disturbing revelation is when it is revealed that her brother himself was also guilty of raping his own sister, being the reason Haruka frequently getting frightening dreams of being stuck inside a whale, and wishes to the gods to “not be herself”. Such strong themes act as vital keys understanding the convoluted relationships that Haruka has with the other characters, which are frequently sexual. However, at the same time, Haruka is portrayed as a motherly figure to several male characters who experiences problematic family relationships with their own parents, such as the neglect of the character Neji Yumikura by his mother.

Nil Admirari has a title loosely translatable to “Balance of Indifference - Legend of the Dazzling Capital”, and is a historical game with fantasy elements. It is set in the Taisho Era, a period in Japanese history characterized by blossoming modernity, political liberalism (Minichiello, 1998), a boom in Western influence and growth of the arts. One could describe it as Japan’s roaring 20s, and this unique time of both traditions and modernity meeting face to face through social and political change, allows the heroine Tsugumi Kuze to experience the conflict of being a woman in a man’s world. A major hurdle she encounters as the main character is the personal struggle between her upbringing that emphasized women as inferior to men. Plot wise, the central conflict revolves around cursed books that are created when the author’s writing imbues the book with strong negative emotions, and as a result cause the book’s readers to go crazy and often commit violent crimes or attempt suicide. After Tsugumi’s own brother falls victim to one such book, she joins a police special investigations unit *Fukurou* to use her new found ability of sensing cursed books to help the predominantly male task force discover the culprits who are making cursed books. While Tsugumi’s own past is largely glossed over in the story, the audience is at least able to rest assured knowing that it was not as abusive as the one Haruka in *Moshi Kami* battle. However, other male characters in *Nil Admirari* include characters who discover the dead body of their own mother. Another character was the son of a prostitute, and thus raised witnessing women forced to sell themselves, until he himself was almost forced into the profession before his mother sacrificed herself in order to spare her son. With these characters as a backdrop for Tsugumi’s adventures, an unfortunately frequent occurrence is the threatening of sexual

assault by male characters when Tsugumi is seen as a hinderance to the hatched plans of the antagonist.

Yet perhaps more surprising and somewhat alarming is the same use of such techniques by Tsugumi's own allies, such as when her friend Rui Sagisawa tells her that most men would take advantage of her when they find her under the influence of alcohol and an unknown inhibitor. The plot continues to place the heroine in situations where she is at the mercy of males who are all too willing to flaunt their gender as a tool to influence and pressure Tsugumi on her behaviour at the *Fukurou*. This once again raises the question of how male characters who, on the onset seem ideal but actually carry an undertone of misogynistic tendencies, work to built up a reality of women where they feel compelled to appeal to males in order to achieve success in endeavours of work and social relations. One may wonder what this message enforces in the minds of female players who see this reality in the form of workplace structure in Japan and steadfast gendered messages in popular media. Having a gendered narrative, the female avatars in *Moshi Kami* and *Nil Admirari* are a way through which the player inserts themselves into the game, and who are encouraged to understand the story through the perspective of the female character. When the protagonist's avatar is of a different sex, it becomes more difficult for players to identify with the characters as they are forced to interact in the game a certain way in accordance with the assumptions associated with the sex of that character.

However, Kim points out that "despite their 'sliding signifiers that move fluidly across various forms of image production and cultural boundaries', games fail to challenge the gender stereotypes repeated in 'old' media such as television and story- books" (2009:168), essentially saying that even games developed more recently continue to propagate the traditional ideas of women through visual aesthetic, plot and character dialog. For example, the "icon of the sunny heroine...[is] in essence, [a] cultural and generic archetype easily recognizable by readers of shoujo manga" (2009:174). Accordingly, *Moshi Kami*'s Haruka is a cheerful if not relatively friendless high school girl, her age in itself a representation of what Japanese associate with being a positive time in their lives, free of adult responsibilities and yet old enough to experience more complex development of character beyond those of a child's mindset. Factoring in her long hair and bright school uniform, Haruka is a great example of the iconic school girl who wins the heart of those around her. In *Nil Admirari*, Tsugumi also starts off a long haired delicate female who has just finished going to a female only trade school where she learnt the necessary women's skills of cooking, cleaning and social etiquette that trained her to believe that, in line with the thinking of that time period, women were more appropriately suited to being wives and happy mother. Yet she shows signs of challenging this tradition mold when she symbolically cuts her hair short and leaves the comfort of her home to go work with the *Fukurou*, a police unit full of men, yet notably run by a woman.

5. Discussion

Even in a game marketed towards women in the 2010s, developers of such games are unable to break away from the mold that was birthed through traditional representations of gender in an industry that was and continues to hold the male populace as the superior audience. Hence while new women's games are attempting to challenge the old, they simultaneously enforce the traditional female image through their writing and art of their products. Roseanne Tompowsky (2013) emphasized in writing the importance of

language to the creation of women's games, reaffirming that "traditional gender stereotypes in Japan [are not] limited to behaviour, but also include language" and that not only are women expected to "speak more appropriately or calmly than men" but are also categorized differently "down to specific personal pronouns or sentence endings" (2013:3). As mentioned previously, this was frequently seen in both *Moshi Kami* and *Nil Admirari*, and deeply reflects the way that Japan's view on gender difference takes shape. As such, the creation of gendered characters in women's games "focus on having characters that as many people as possible will find appealing", and is always striving to "create a game with characters that are the ideal partners to the Japanese population" (2013:4), hence meaning that the way in which characters speak are also a large factor to their development. In relation to this Tompowsky touches upon the ideas of gender relations, gender ideology and gender identities. She supports that "power structures" in society are at work with "historically constituted gender related categories" and ongoing fluid "gender identities within a *langue*" (2013:8) to power the continuation and shaping of gender stereotypes in communication.

So while the niche market of women's games in itself has allowed for the expansion into a relatively new development of games that challenge the preexisting structure of games, and "women's games can be understood as expansions of female culture into the realm of electronic gaming capable of enhancing both areas with their philosophy, perspective, gender-awareness and diversity" (Kim, 2009:184), they continue to be reliant on certain commonly accepted images of femininity within Japan that I argue are directly linked with the Japanese concept of a "good wife, wise mother" (良妻賢母 - *ryosai kenbo*). Not coincidentally, the "good wife, wise mother" theme is a theme in both *Moshi Kami* and *Nil Admirari* that surfaces frequently enough that while the heroines display the occasional moment of empowerment and status equality, they ultimately retract back into roles that are reliant on male counterparts, while they play the role of damsel in distress and are frequently reduced to sexualized objects for the sake of the male characters.

This observation appears to have very similar results with Emily Taylor's (2007) writing on the characters that appear in dating simulation games, category within Japan's gaming industry and makes up around "25 percent of software that is bought and sold at video game stores across Japan" (2007:205). Taylor writes that "many female characters appear strong initially" but this first impression is only a veil, as it almost "always turns out to be a mere façade". When the "true" self of the character is revealed, Taylor described her as "one of weakness and the desire to be subordinate to men" (2007:201). While this can be critiqued as a strong generalization of the female characters, there is truth in that "dating-sim games appear to be presenting an *akogare* - 憧れ (longing, fantasy)" (2007:202) for the consumer, and thus the male targeted images of females spill over into women's games and result in the not unfamiliar image of even female protagonist, that supposedly hold higher status than the male characters, eventually requiring the attention and assistance of said characters in order to be considered a successful interacting in the game. In the case of *Moshi Kami*, Haruka is revealed in the alternative world to be able to access the divine powers of Izanami, one of two central divine beings, and yet despite having arguably the strongest power out of all the main cast, Haruka escapes most situations of peril either by having characters such as a junior at her high school appear and fight off her attacker, or allowing someone to serve as a decoy and in the process have them harmed. One might argue that her insistence to refrain from fending off others is in favour consistency with her character that insists on seeing the

“wounded heart” behind the attacker” rather than the danger. However, I believe it is more a testament to the long standing pattern of games to have a female character equated with a source of vulnerability and need for care specifically by a male character who exercises powers of skills as display and confirmation of masculinity impossible without having the weak feminine opposite for comparison.

6. Conclusion

The study of both *Moshi Kami* and *Nil Admirari* have proven insightful on the extent to which female characters in women’s games are both symbolically a wife and motherly idea, they are also marketed with a heavily sexualized role that takes away from their value and strengths as individuals, instead pinning their worth on the ability to have males give them approval. Haruka and Tsunami are heroines from a modern day high school drama and a historically set mystery that appear to have strong in game message about the ongoing hierarchy between women and men that place men in a position where they are given the benefit of the doubt, while women often find themselves shortchanges. This is true not just for the main protagonists, but also for other supporting female characters in the games such as those with motherly or spouse roles. A look at some literature from Dill-Shackleford (2005), Kim (2009), Taylor (2007) and Tompowsky(2013) all shed light on the development of characters within Japan’s industry for women’s games, and suggest that gendered cultural values continue to openly form the foundation upon which female characters in games are developed, even while the change of time strives to challenge these traditional ideals.

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