

Family and Home Space in Mobile Era

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Abstract

This research clarifies the reality of social impact of the explosive growth and penetration of the cellular phone(s) (hereinafter called Keitai) to everyday living group in Japan. In particular, this research focuses on "Family and Home Space" which undertakes an essential role of daily life. The methodology to research the reality of usage of Keitai in Family/Home Space, is "Ethnography" which emphasis individual concrete. This includes interviews through actual home visiting and participant observation. The data collected has been decrypted and interpreted.

As a result of positive communication between family members by Keitai, there are some cases, which "Family" expands beyond "Home Space" as a physical container. In these cases, responsibilities for maintaining family relationship increases on full time and location basis. This shows that "Home Space" has emerged not as a static physical container, but a dynamic place to coordinate family relationship.

Assuming home space as a place for "negotiation", it has been concluded that the sharing and distributing of domestic resources. Though the process, people balance the relationships between family identities and individual identities and personal media such as Keitai play an important role.

Keywords: 1.Keitai, 2.Family/Home Space, 3. Media Acceptance, 4. Ethnography

Introduction

Keitai Diffusion and the Impact in Japan

In Japan, Cellar phones (hereinafter called Keitai) are becoming one of the most important and basic social infrastructures. The mobile communication industry organization in Japan

reported that the number of subscribers to Keitai had reached ninety million as of the end of January 2006. (TCA, 2006) This number is equal to about three fourths of the Japanese population. In addition, the Keitai adoption rate is higher than that of PCs in all generation except teenagers. (MIC, 2005) As Internet devices, the Keitai adoption rate is generally lower than that of PCs. (MIC, 2005) But each adoption rate trades places as home Internet devices. (DCI, 2004)

Keitai has been embedded in and supporting Japanese ordinary life. Okada (2003) called such Keitai “Vernacular” (Illich, 1981) media. The vernacularism of Keitai has concealed Keitai from social science researchers. For that reason, compared with the number of social studies on the other media, that on keitai is relatively small in Japan.

Japanese Keitai studies are deeply linked to the cultures of female high school student called Jyoshi-ko-sei, which seems strange for researchers. Rheingold (2002) visited the holy place of Jyoshi-ko-sei, Shibuya, and see young people who are manipulating Keitai with thumbs beautifully and getting in touch with each other constantly. This experience made him predict the oncoming of the thumb revolution. Researchers on Japanese Keitai, more or less, have the same impact from them. They also tend to study Keitai from young cultures and urban sociology viewpoints.

Previous Works on the Social Influence of Keitai

One of the most popular themes of these previous works is the relationship between young people connections in urban spaces and their Keitai usage.

On the ground of their quantitative survey on young people communication activities, Nakajima et al. (1999) show that public spheres in urban spaces are converted into private spheres by their Keitai use and young people construct fulltime intimate communities among a few close friends via constant Keitai mails. Ito and Okabe (2005) illustrate the process of the constructions of such connections and communities in depth through their ethnographic research.

Meanwhile, Tomita (1998), who focused social functions of Keitai use, suggests that Keitai plays an important role to relieve the users of urban loneliness and amuse the users with urban freedom. Matsuda (2005), who developed the discussion, dismisses the dominating notion that Keitai use dilutes human relationships among young people and suggests Keitai use, as soon, promotes selective sociality. Tuji (2003) describes the basis of selective sociality

through empirical research on address book categories of Keitai.

As stated above, lots of researches and studies have been conducted from the viewpoint of young people cultures and urban sociology. While, in this way, the relationships between young people cultures and their Keitai use have caught researchers' eye, Keitai has been penetrating our ordinary life steadily.

This study focuses the ordinary spheres, especially family and home spaces, which have been brought to outside the field of Japanese researchers' vision and aims at understanding the practice of Keitai use in such ordinary spheres in detail. The last purpose of this paper is to illustrate the both functional and cultural changes created by Keitai use.

Conceptual Frameworks

Media Consumption in Families and Home spaces

Keitai is a bottom-up media (Okada, 2002; Rheingold, 2002). The usage and interaction of general public via Keitai has created new social practices beyond the intent of careers, manufacturers and governments. Families and home spaces are filled with the interaction, so they seem to be one of the most important places where new social practices are creating through the social interactions.

There are few researches considering such social interaction. But Siverstone et al. (1992) manage this viewpoint in the discussion, "Information communication technology and moral economy". In order to illustrate Keitai and media consumption and interaction in family and home spaces, this paper used their theoretical output.

"Moral economy" is the term, which means the original trading system of the meaning influenced by the family history and power. It deeply linked to "public economy", which means the trading system of economic value. They relate moral economy to public economy each other, and theorize the cycle of object and meanings in two different economies.

The circle can be divided into 4 parts. First part is "appropriation". In this part, bought and given the original meaning of moral economy, goods in public economy are converted into private objects. In second and third parts, the given meanings are presented in home spaces. "Objectification" is spatial presentation of the meanings. Where and how they use or put it is deeply linked to the concept of objectification. "Incorporation" is temporal presentation of the meanings. When, Which timing, how they use it is deeply linked to the concept of

incorporation. These presentations produce the negotiation of power, role, territory and relationships among family members. Through the process, the meanings of object are altered and reproduced, and unique moral economy is created. The last part is “Conversion”, which is presentation of the created unique moral economy in public economy. The process of conversion enables the cultures in moral economy to run into the cultures in public economy.

Using this conceptual framework, Hirsh (1992) write an ethnography on the media consumption and the negotiation in home spaces. In addition, Ribak(2001) and Bakardjieva et al. (2001) illustrates the negotiation of power and relations in the faced of the home computer and via internet. But these studies assume only telephone, TV, Video and PC (Internet) and don't assume the existence of Keitai. Considering the problem, this paper illustrates the family and home negotiation in mobile era from the standpoint of the conceptual framework.

Methodologies

The context created by Keitai use is more and more complex. The person using Keitai has to join two parallel contexts, one is the context via Keitai and the other is the context of local environment where Keitai is used. Keitai is “mobile” media. So the context of local environment is variable easily. For that reason, the users have to pay attention to both two context of Keitai and the interaction of Keitai users becomes complex much. That prevents researchers from imaging the situation of Keitai use with accuracy.

In addition, the walls called “privacy” close family and home space, which is another theme of this paper. Today when the diversification of lifestyles is proceeding, it is difficult for the stranger of a family to image the family practices and situations.

In view of those features of research themes, this study conducts hypothesis-seeking and qualitative research. It is danger to set up a hypothesis and verify it in the area where we have enough knowledge, such as Keitai use and family/home space.

Concretely speaking, in order to illustrate Keitai use among family members and in home spaces, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with family members and short-term participant observation through actual home visiting based on the previous interview research on parent-child connections via Keitai. (Amagasa, 2005) Table1 summarizes the research outline.

- Consultation period:	July, 2005 ~ November, 2005
- Total number of informants:	11 families
- Main living place of informants:	Tokyo and its surroundings
- Research method:	
1.	semi-structured interview 1.5 hours/person
2.	short-term participant observation (with video recording)
- Interview items:	
1.	family structure and family condition (incomings, history, activities)
2.	lifestyle of the informant and media consumption
3.	communication among the family members and the role of keitai (asking informant to draw a graphic representation of their family relationship and representation of their home spaces)
4.	meaning of media : personal construct interview (Livingstone 1992)

Table1. Details of the Research

Cases

In what follows, two families, which are especially peculiar to their Keitai and other media use, are described and interpreted. First one is the case that various resources to manage family relationship and home spaces are limited very much, and second one is the case that the resources are very rich to the contrary.

Case1: Creating territories with their personal media

The family of this case lives in a suburb area little far from Tokyo. They are running meat shop at their domicile. Six members construct the family, 43years father, 37 years mother, 9 years son, 7years son, 4years son and grandfather. The father manages the shop mainly and the mother helps her husband works. The mother said that she and her husband were always together and have a lot of talk compared to other couples. Their income is about ¥4,000,000/year, which is lower than the average incomes. The layout of the house is not so small, but their children are running about and room number is not enough for all members.

That presses the adult members of the family.

While the father engages in only the family business, in addition to helping the family business, the mother mainly managed domestic and child care. The burden on her family is heavy enough to complain about that in the interviews. Her usage of Keitai and other media is deeply linked to the hard situation. In the interviews, she said that the most favorite room in her house was the playroom on the 2nd floor. This room is separated from her duty area, shop, kitchen and living room, and has TV, books and audio, which amuse her. At a lunch brake when her children are absent, she always moves into the room, watches TV, listens to audio, reading books and types Keitai mails to her own friends. She said that doing so was the most precious time for her in home spaces.

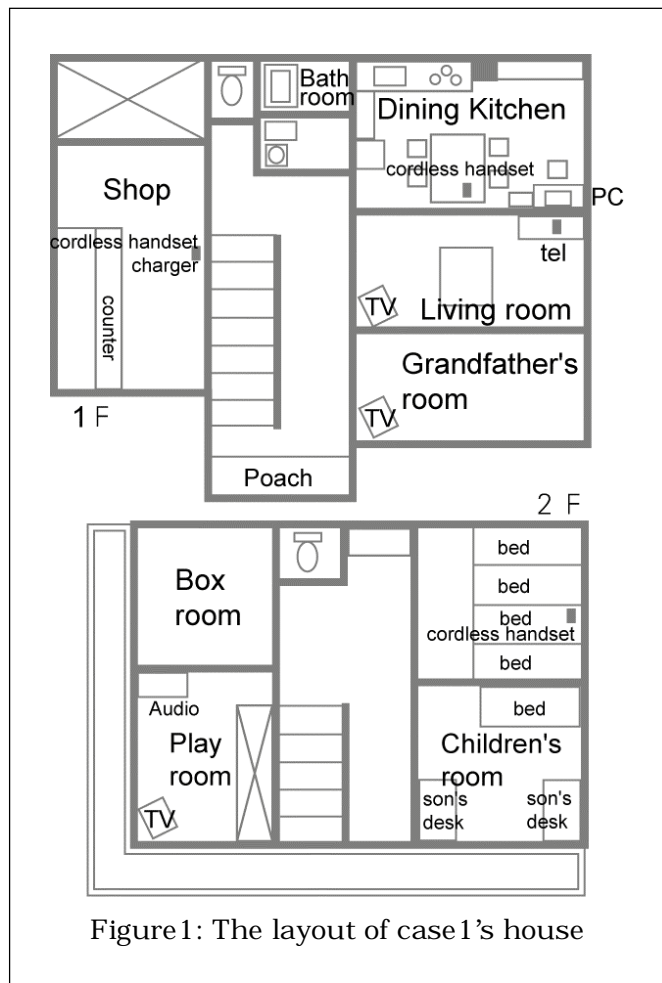


Figure 1: The layout of case 1's house

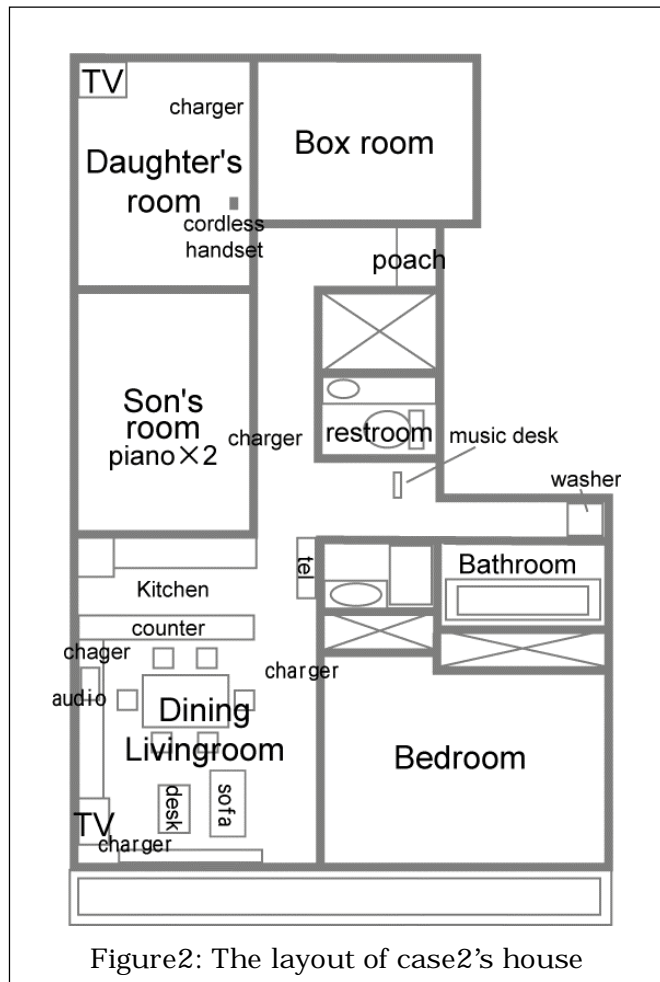
While Keitai is her precious relief, that is also her duty. When the father goes out, whether it is to deliver or to play, the mother gets him to bring his Keitai and gets in touch with him according to needs via Keitai. And a lot of mails about club activities of her son from mothers of her son's friends arrive at her Keitai. She is trying to response them as soon as possible and dealing with them matter-of-factly. In order to do so, she always carries on her Keitai even in the home space. Managing Keitai communication is one her duty. She said that she liked Keitai but Keitai was intrusive at the same time.

Such impressions on keitai prevent her from using keitai in very emotional way. She doesn't send long emotional mails to her own friends via Keitai, but send such mails via PC. All family members except her can't use PC. It's conceivable that such technical barriers and the place down the kitchen, which it is hard for the other members to access, create virtual private sphere to relieve her.

Case2: Efforts to maintain and divide family relationships through Keitai use

The family of 2nd case also lives in a bedroom suburb little far Tokyo. The father is working as representative manager of a pharmaceutical company. The total income is ¥17,000,000/year, which is the twice as high as the average. In exchange for that, his office is very far from his house and he is very busy for his work. That gets him to live alone and return to home only weekend.

He has three family members, 48 years wife, 16 years son and 14 years daughter. He seems to mind living apart from his other family members and frequently get in touch with family members, especially his son and daughter, via Keitai mails. He often asked son to answer his question about current affairs through Keitai mail. Then, his son obediently studies the topic and reply to his father. He also invites his



daughter to go watching sports games together. Since her childhood, he has watched sports games of his favorite teams with his daughter. That may be why. She also loves the same teams and is willing to watching the games with her father. He spares no effort to maintain and reproduce his family.

His thought for family gets his wife, who usually manages the family, to feel strong duty on her children. She works in school meal center as a part-timer. Although the hygiene of her workplace is strictly checked, she carries on her Keitai even there. She explain the reason that she can response emergency call and mail from her children as soon as possible. The existence of Keitai forces her to think of her family even out of the home space. In these situations, she began to feel intrusive for Keitai.

Such intentions to maintain family relationships are common with the other family

members. For instance, the son send e-mail to his mother via keitai and taught her what time he is coming home, whenever he reaches near station of his school. In addition to that, the daughter sends e-mail to her mother via keitai and tells her ordinal trivial matters such as seeing a neighbor. She exchanges such mails among her junior high school friends at home, among her elementary school friends in her junior high school and among family members out of home.

These efforts of each family member are seen even in the home space. For instance, although their home is large enough to sleep in each room, they sleep the same room, together. And they always have dinner and coffee break after that all together. Their home space is filled with the means of “objectification” and “incorporation” to show strong family relationships.

The family members, however, have each means to dilute too strong family relationships and create private spheres in the home spaces. In the case of the daughter, she lock herself into the restroom, doing her homework, reading (comic) books, using her Keitai, and even sleeping, whenever she wants to be alone. She said that everything of the restroom would be fine, if Keitai were not any service. The mother and her son also create virtual private spheres by playing their favorite instrument. The wall of sound prevents others from entering the private sphere.

Conclusive Remarks

Expansion of Family Relationships beyond the Boundaries of Home Space

In above cases, family members are getting in touch with each other constantly via Keitai. Setting aside whether the contact is indirect one or direct one, most of them look like businesslike exchange on the surface. The meaning is, however, not only businesslike but also very emotional. As the father of case2, through exchanging the needful messages, people are confirming that he/she needs and are needed by the other family members. Matsuda (2005) explains that family relationships, which didn't require especial efforts in the past, are now maintained by perpetual conversations and efforts by family members. Families frequently getting in touch with each other via Keitai, can be thought of as an extension to this.

From this point of view, Family relationships seemed to be expanded by Keitai beyond the

boundaries of home space without relation to the place and time. People always bring their family in their pockets or bags with their Keitai. That is bringing about several changes in their families.

First, the person who is playing a role of managing family relationships and home spaces are possibly choking up because of fulltime commitment for their family via Keitai, as the mothers of case1, 2.

Second, the family relationships become more relative. The daughter of case 2 constructed the same fulltime intimate community with her mother as with her friends. That means family relationship is any more not special but selective case by case, as friend relationships. In deed the daughter selected connections via Keitai by places and adjusted her relationships to be comfortable. Viewed from another side, families are braking in other social groups. What follows is the interview script of another mother having 17years daughter.

(Homemaker female, 54years, Fujisawa):

Interviewee: Mayumi (her daughter, age 17, High school students) took on an after-school job. She was the youngest of the employees, all the others being university students. Whenever she disagreed with them, she was blamed for her rudeness. She would send me mail (SMS) saying, "I feel down". I would reply, "Are you O.K.? Take it easy." or "You're being too hard on yourself."

Amagasa: Would she send you SMS while on duty?

Interviewee: (Yes) In really hard times she would say, "I need to use the restroom" and send me SMS. This worried me.

* "Mayumi" is the allonym of the interviewee's daughter.

In the modern era, places has been deeply linked to roles of people. Moving the place means changing roles. Beyond the boundaries based on the modern division (Giddens, 1990), Keitai, however, enable us to maintain particular connections wherever we go. As above, these connections works as safety-net in a time of emergency.

Negotiations faced by Mobile phones

Another important change of families is that the negotiations in home spaces have become more essential for maintaining family relationships. Heretofore, Japanese families have been

said to tend to be personalized. (Meguro 1987) The structure of houses (Ueno, 2002) and Cordless telephones (Yoshimi, 1992) had prompted the trend and home spaces were the representation of the personalized families. The diffusion of Keitai, however, enables us to maintain family relationships and that breaks the power balance between the individuals and families. Each family members have to expend effort in order to balance the relationship between individuals and families.

Usually, family members are conducting the adjustment with the physical resources in home spaces. It is essential to distribute the spatial and temporal resources. That is how to do “objectification” and “incorporation” to borrow Silverstone's phrase.

For instance, The mother of case1, who is pressed by domestic duties, child management and family business, move into the room with nobody in it on break times and enjoys her own time. In case2 that their large house and different lifestyle make it difficult to share common space and times, the family members, especially the parents, think a great deal of common practices, such as dinners and coffee breaks to share common spaces and times.

However, only distributing of spatial and temporal resources is sometimes not enough to adjust the family relationships. In order to manage such situation, Personal media, as Keitai, are used. In the case of the busy mother and the daughter, who locks oneself in restroom, the uses of Keitai strengthen the identities as an individual in the space and time. In addition, through the use of PC, which none of her family can use, the mother of Case1 creates the virtual private spheres and through playing instrument, the mother and son of Case2 also creates the virtual private spheres. These cases are good instances in which family members solve the adjustment problems with the personal media.

While mobile personal media as Keitai enable us to connect to family members constantly and create new form of family beyond the places and times, they are used as very effective tools to adjust the family relationships.

The diffusion of Keitai gives major change to families and home spaces, soundly. It is necessary to continue researching the relationships between mobile media and families, considering the progress of mobile media.

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