A Statistical Analysis of History of Japanese Light Novels

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ABSTRACT

The light novel is a genre of novels which constitutes a part of current Japanese pop culture. Light novels were chiefly read by students of high and junior-high schools in the early days, but the range of the readers has been expanding widely in recent years. In the present study, 533 titles of popular light novels published in 2004–2020 were chosen and the data of published year, publisher, label, platform first appeared on, length of time from the first publication to release of the anime adaptation, and length of time from the first publication to the manga adaptation were collected, and the resulting cross-tabulation table was analyzed using correspondence analysis and cluster analysis. The results showed that the history of the light novels could be divided into four periods; 2004-2005, 2006-2015, 2016–2017 and 2018-2020. It was shown that the circumstances of the light novels were drastically changed in these terms. The results showed that the chronicle change of the light novels is closely related to the internet media in recent years.

Keywords: Japanese light novel, Pop culture, Correspondence analysis, Cluster analysis

INTRODUCTION

The light novel is a genre of novels which oriented to teens. Light novels are playing a part of current Japanese pop culture. According to the "ORICON Entertainment Market Research 2020," the light novels were sold in total 32.5 million copies and 28.37 billion yen (about 220 million dollars) in 2020, although they are gradually declining. The light novels are easy to read and include anime-like illustrations. The name of the genre, "light novel" has been used for more than 25 years, expanding the range of readers to 10–40 years old now. The circumstances of the light novels seem to have been quite changed during the 25 years. In the present study, historical changes of the light novels of 533 titles of popular light novels published in 2004–2020 based on numerical data.

METHODS

A guide book entitled "This Light Novel is Amazing!" is annually published by Takarajima-sya. This guide book shows the sales ranking of the light novels for that year. In total 553 titles of the light novels appeared in the rankings during 2004–2020 were collected. In the present study, five categories

Table 1. List of categories and items.

Category	Item
Label	Dengeki Bunko, MF Bunko J, Fujimi Fantasia Bunko, Kadokawa Sneaker Bunko, famitsu Bunko, ENTERBRAIN, Kadokawa BOOKS, MF Books, Fujimi Mystery Bunko, Dengeki no Shinbungei, KADOKAWA, Kadokawa no Shinbungei, Gagaga Bunko, GA Bunko, Shueisha Superdash Bunko, HJ Bunko, Overlap Bunko, Earth Star Novel, Hayakawa Bunko JA, Seikaisha FICTION, GC Novels, HJ Novels, Cobalt Bunko, C★NOVELS Fantasia, GA Novel, TO Books, Overlap Novels, Kodansha Ranobe Bunko, Hero Bunko, AlphaPolis, Kodansha BOX, Kodansha Novels, Kadokawa Bunko, Dash X bunko, Kodansha Taiga, Sonorama Bunko, White Books, Media Works, JUMP j BOOKS, KCG Bunko, LINE Bunko Edge, L-Entame Shosetu, Monster Bunko, M Novels f, TYPE-MOON BOOKS, Wings Bunko, Kadokawa Shoten, Kodansha X Bunko TEEN'S HEART, Koudansha X Bunko WHITE HEART, Shueisha Orange Bunko, Sougensha Kuria Bunko, Chuo Koron Shinsha, Tokyo Sogensha MYSTERY FRONTIER, Novel ZERO, Hayakawa Shobo, Haruki Bunko Nouvelle SF Series, Famitsu Bunko(Size:B6), Book Blast, Genro Fantasia Novels, Legend Novels
Publisher	KADOKAWA, Shogakukan, SB Creative, Shueisha, Kodansha, Hobby Japan, OVERLAP, EARTH STAR, Hayakawa Publishing, Seikaisha, MICRO MAGAZINE, Chuokoron-Shinsha, Shufunotomo Infos, TO BOOKS, AlphaPolis, Asahi Sonorama, Futabasha, Seiunsha, LINE, TYPE-MOON, Kadokawa Haruki Corporation, Gentosha, Shinshokan, Sogensha, Tokyo Sogensha
Platform first appeared on	Non-internet platforms, Shōsetsuka ni Narō, Kakuyomu, The other internet platforms
Length of time from the first publication to the anime adaptation (years)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, No anime adaptation
Length of time from the first publication to the manga adaptation (years)	0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 16, 22, No manga adaptation

of label, publisher, platform first appeared on, length of time from the first publication to release of the anime adaptation, and length of time from the first publication to the manga adaptation, and in total 117 items listed in Table 1 were prepared.

Table 1 shows the list of the categories and items. Numbers of each of the 117 items were counted for each year, and a 17×117 cross-tabulation table was constructed. These numerical data were collected from a website, "Hanmoto.com" managed by several publishers, a retrieval service "Webcat Plus" managed by the National Institute of Informatics, an internet shopping site, "Amazon", and official web sites of the light novel titles and the labels. The cross-tabulation table was used for correspondence analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the correspondence analysis showed a three-dimensional solution with the cumulative contribution ratio of 64 %. The results showed clear clusters of the years on the I-III axes plane, although a similar tendency was

observed on the I-II axes plane. The following results are illustrated on the I-III axes plane.

The results of cluster analysis with Ward method showed four clusters; 2004–2005 (period I), 2006–2015 (period II), 2016–2017 (period III) and 2018–2020 (period IV). Figure 1 shows the resulting dendrogram of the cluster analysis and Figure 2 shows the plots of the years on the I-III plane. Figure 3 shows the plots of the labels of the light novels, appearing more than four works in the cross-tabulation table on the I -III plane. Nearer the distance between the plots of a label and a year, stronger the tie between the label and the year. Contrasting Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, many labels belonging to the publisher KADOKAWA are plotted near the periods I and II. This means that most of the popular light novels were published from the labels of KADOKAWA. In fact, almost 70% of the popular light novels were published in the labels of KADOKAWA during 2000-2009. Figure 3 also shows that many labels belonging to the other publishers, plotted in the area of the periods III and IV. This means that many novels became to be published from the labels of the other publishers. Figure 4 shows the plots of the publishers. In Fig. 4, KADOKAWA, Kodansha and Shogakukan are placed in the central position. This means that these three publishers have been constantly publishing many popular light novels throughout 2004-2020. Figure 5 shows the plots of the platforms where the novels first published. In Fig. 5, "The other internet platform" which includes many personal websites, the KADOKAWA's novel submission site "Kakuyomu" and another novel submission site "Shosetsuka ni Naro" are places near the periods of III and IV.
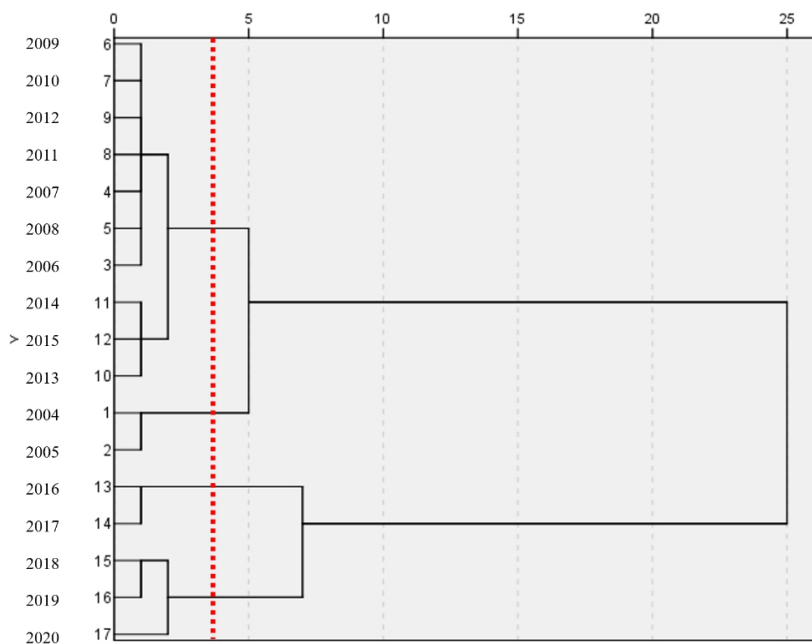

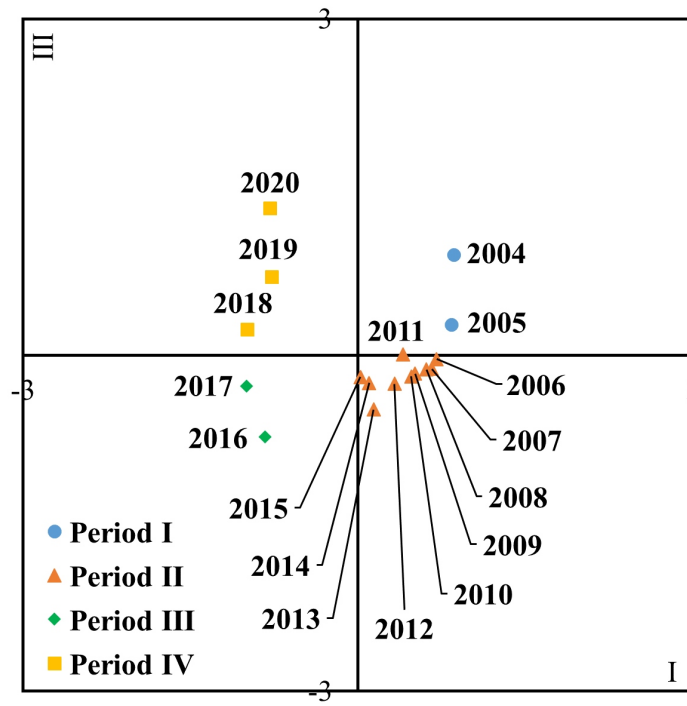**Figure 1:** Results of cluster analysis for years.

Figure 2: Plots of the years.
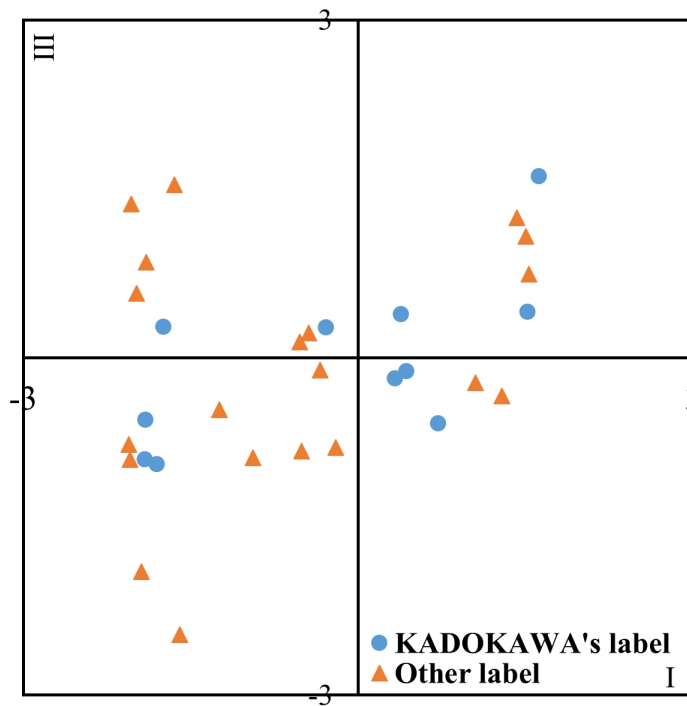

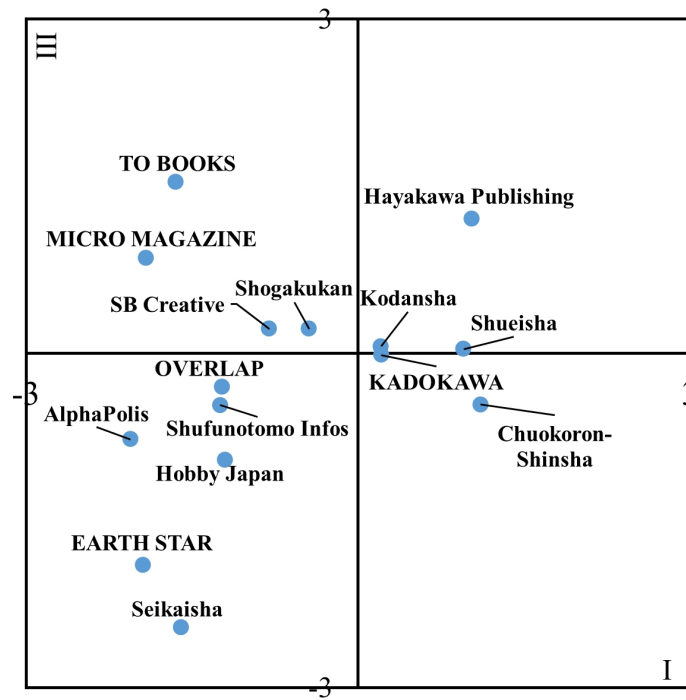**Figure 3**: Plots of the labels of light novels.
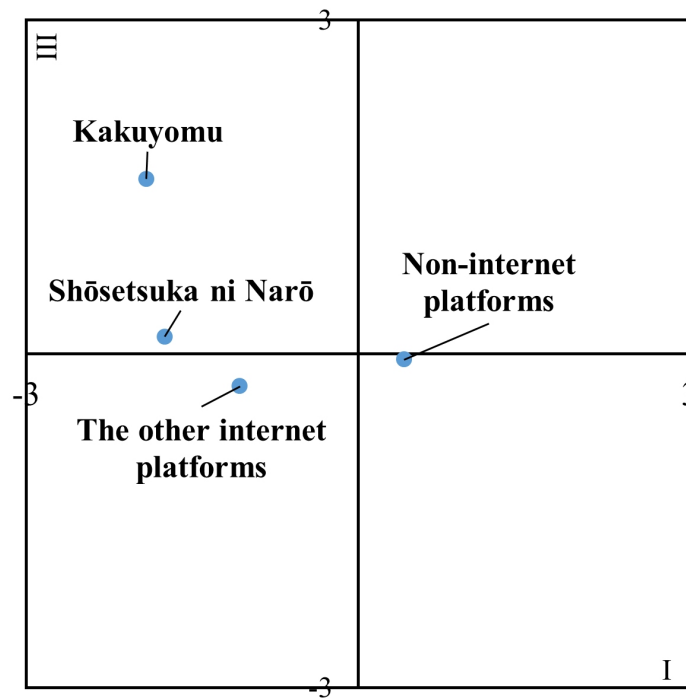
Figure 4: Plots of the publishers.

Figure 5: Plots of the platforms where first appeared on.

The most important point to succeed in the light novel business is mass-production, which implies that the publishers need to maintain many talented writers and have them write many novels. A head-quarter officer of KADOKAWA, Enomoto (2008) described that one of the most difficult point for a new label to enter into the light novel business is maintaineing writers. In recent years, UGC (User Generated Contents), content created by common users became to be popular, thanks to the development of the internet circumstances.

The plots in Fig. 5 show that the writers of the light novels were recruited from these UGC sites, recently. The UGC sites allowed the new labels into the light novel market. In fact, Sato who was the president of KADOKAWA described that "the publishers have to manage a source for rerouting new talents," and he started to manage the UGC site "Kakuyomu," aiming for surviving in the new era.

Figure 6 shows the plots of the length of time from the first publication to the release of the anime adaptation. Figure 6 shows that it took one or two years to be published in the period II, but many titles took three years for anime adaptation in the period III, and four years for the period IV. The plots show that the light novels ranked in the sales list rapidly adapted to anime works in the late '00s and early' 10s, whereas it takes a longer time for anime adaptation recently.
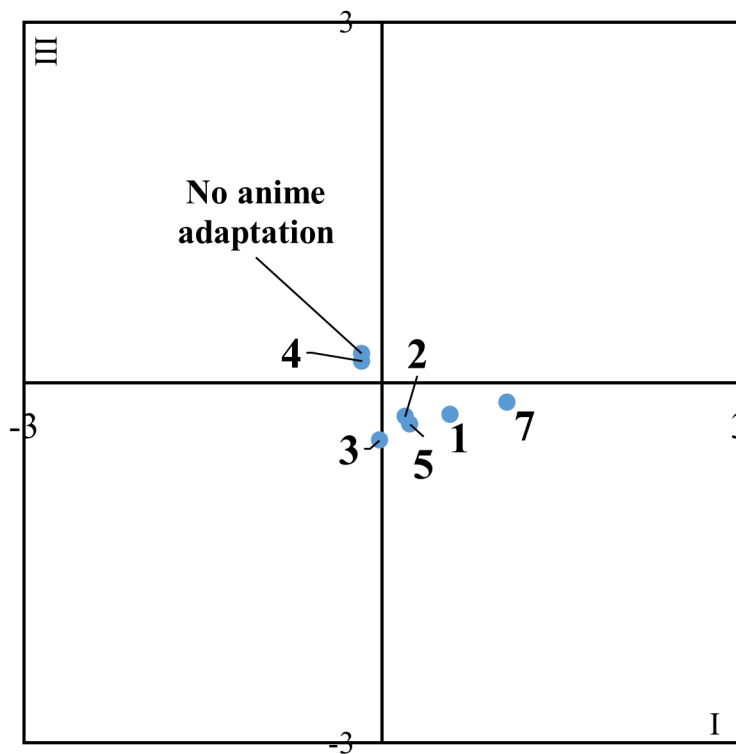

Figure 6: Plots of the length of time from the first publication to the anime adaptation (years).
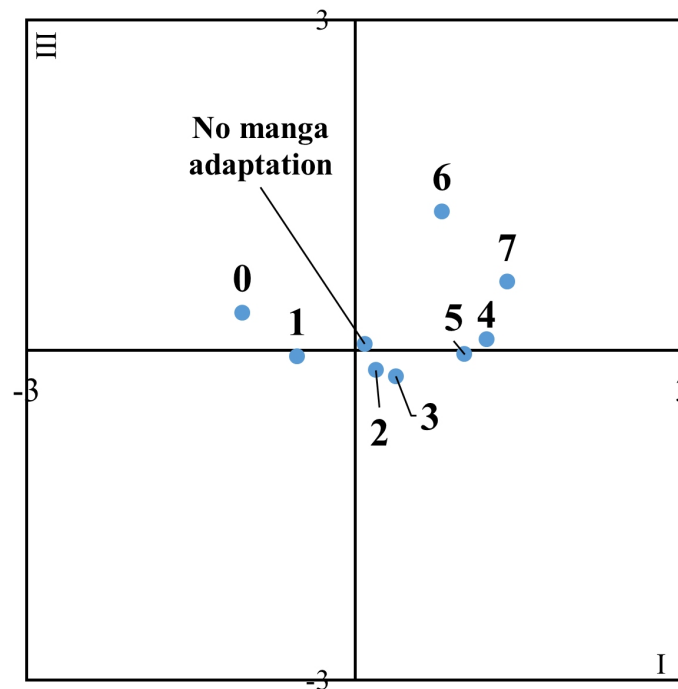
Figure 7: Plots of the length of time from the firstpublication to the manga adaptation (years).

Figure 7 shows the plots of the length of time to the manga adaptation. Figure 7 shows that it took more than four years in the period I to be adapted in manga, but it took two to three years in the period II. The length of the time for the manga adaptation is shortened to 0 or one year for the periods of III and IV. Figures 6 and 7 suggests that the center of the media-mix strategy of the light novels shifted from the anime adaptation to the manga adaptation. This may be correlated with the spread of e-comics since mid-'10s. Only small number of popular manga works which could be sold many copies were appeared in paper magazines. In' 10s, American and Japanese companies started to release electronic reading devices, and comic apps were released by publishers and IT companies. This situation enabled publishers to release manga works without printing on paper. Then, the publishers released many manga works based on light novels through these e-comic devices. Moreover, readers became to access unpublished light novels easily. In the '00s the multimedia strategy of light novels aimed to be adapted for anime works directly. However, the quality of anime works improved and it takes a longer time for producing anime, also the budget of anime works increased recently. Therefore, anime studios tend to select a light novel for anime adaptation carefully, observing the sales of e-comics based on the light novels.

CONCLUSION

In the present study, 533 titles of popular light novels published in 2004–2020 were investigated using the correspondence analysis and the cluster analysis.

The results showed that the chronicle changes of the light novels were closely related to the internet media in recent years.

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