THE UTILITY OF CAFÉS IN TOWN FOCUSING ON THE TWO FUNCTIONS OF 'THE THIRD PLACE'

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Abstract

This study reconsidered the function of town cafés as 'the Third Place' from the two perspectives of "a place for exchange" and "a place for emotional support" for city dwellers and clarified the following three points based on user's consciousness and state of mind. In Japan, it was found that many people use cafés as a place to work alone or recover as "my place" type, and that "my place" type tends to use Chain cafés. Those who use cafés as a place for socializing in the traditional 'Oldenburg type' chose privately owned cafés and were found to be highly dependent on them. People who use cafés tend to have higher well-being-related indicators, especially those who use privately owned cafés, than those who use Chain ones.

Keywords

The Third Place, Café, Well-Being, Emotional support, City Dwellers

1. Introduction

The concept of "the Third Place" proposed by Oldenburg, 1989 has recently come into common use that is not "the First place" (home) or "the Second place" (work or school). According to Oldenburg himself, "the Third place" is "the core environment of informal public life," characterized by

(1) Neutrality	(5) Regulars
(2) Egalitarianism	(6) Modesty
(3) Conversation as the main activity	(7) Playfulness
(4) Accessibility and convenience	(8) Another home.

The "social place" is where the focus is on interaction. He also mentions that "cafés" run by individuals (Independent cafés) in particular function as "the Third place".

In Japan, cafés are used as a place for people to socialize and rest, and according to Industry Trends of Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2021 in 2008 there were about 290,000 such establishments. However, the number has begun to decline, plummeting to approximately 200,000 in 2017 and the number of Independent cafés, not the company, has decreased by 60% in the 20 years since 1996. It is not difficult to imagine that many privately owned cafés were hit and decreased by the COVID-19 disaster, although statistics do not yet show the impact of the disaster at this time. The loss of "the Third Place" in the city could hurt the vitality and ties of the community, as well as on the mental health of urban residents.

According to this background, this study aims to clarify the following:

- Function as a "place for interaction among city dwellers"
- Function as a " a place for emotional support "

To reconsider the two aspects of cafés, especially the Chain cafés and Independent cafés that are frequently used by the Japanese, to clarify the utility of these two functions in terms of user's consciousness and state of mind, and to clarify how the decrease in the number of cafés affects urban life.

2. Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

In recent Japanese studies related to "the Third Place", it has been expanded beyond Oldenburg's original definition. For example, Motoyanagi, (2018) found that the usage patterns of the third places in cafés can be divided into three types in addition to "(1) Interaction with café's

staff and other customers" assumed by Oldenburg: "(2) Spending time with friends" and "(3) Relaxing alone", indicating that the third places are not only for interaction with people but also for "spending time alone ("my place" type)". Niwa & Sato, (2011) and Hatakeyama et al. (2015) also pointed out that Japanese cafés are used for study and work purposes.

Furthermore, Ueda & Akashi, (2022) focused on Independent cafés and found that there are two functions (ways of use) of "the Third Place" as "Oldenburg" type and "my place" type, suggested through quantitative surveys of Independent cafés' owners.

Thus, in Japanese academic research, the function of a place for interaction among city dwellers with others is not essential, and places to spend time alone are increasingly included in the concept of "the Third Place". Considering this trend, this paper also includes the concept of "the Third Place" not only "Oldenburg" type" but also "my place" type.

3. Data

Customers with cafés in Tokyo that they frequented before COVID-19 as a "comfortable place to be" were sampled by Internet research from March 14 to 16, 2023, and responses were received from 553 samples. Online Survey Overview is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Online Survey Overview*

Item	Contents
Method of investigation	Distribution and collection via the Internet
Terms and conditions	Residents of Tokyo and 4 prefectures who used cafés as a "comfortable place to stay" in Tokyo.
Effective Date	March 14-16, 2023
Respondent Number of samples	Men and women from 20s to 80s 553 samples

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

4. Methodology

In conducting this study, it was necessary to understand the state of mind of users, especially in a "comfortable place to be", so it reviewed relevant research in existing studies and found the following two indicators as follows:

1. Measurement indicators (13 items) related to the sense of "Place where one belongs ". (Table 2)

2. Measurement indicators (15 items) to measure the state of "Well-being". (Table 3)

Questions (1) were edited using the results of Kawamura et al.'s "Research on the Influence of Town Places on Quality of Life and Attitudes toward Community", in which psychological measures regarding town places were extracted from an analysis of a large sample.

Question (2) was prepared based on the "PERMA -Profiler", which is based on Seligman's theory, one of the measures of "Well-being".

The scale for (1) was a 5-point scale: "very applicable," "somewhat applicable," "neither applicable nor not applicable," "not very applicable," and "not applicable at all," For (2), the scale was 10, ranging from "1 (to a lesser extent or frequency)" to "10 (to a greater extent or frequency)".

In addition to gender, age, place of residence, marital status, presence or absence of children, and occupation, the respondents were asked about their basic information requirements.

Table 2. *Measurement indicators of "Place where one belongs".*

Measuring indicators	
I have someone who listens to me	Diversity
I can have time to myself	Environment for thinking
Calmness	Feel like an indispensable place
Affectionate	I can be who I am
Feeling liberated	I feel like I'm part of a group
Feeling ties to the community	Work, study, etc.
Feeling that I have a role	

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

Table 3. *Measurement indicators of "Well-being".*

Category	Measuring indicators
Positive emotion	How often do you feel happy (enjoyment)
	How often do you feel positive (positivity)
	How satisfied you usually feel (satisfaction)
Engagement	How often do you feel absorbed in what you do (absorbed)
	How excited or interested you feel about different things (excited)
	How often do you lose track of time when you are doing something you enjoy (concentration)

Relationship	How often do you receive help and support from others when you need it (Acceptance of support) To what extent do you feel that you are loved (sense of being loved) How satisfied you are with your relationships (Relationships)
Meaning	The extent to which you live a life of purpose and meaning (meaningful life) The extent to which you feel that what you do is important and worthwhile (value of actions) To what extent do you feel that you have direction in your life (life direction)
Accomplishment	How much time do you feel you are on track to achieve your goals (time to achieve) How often you can achieve the important goals you set for yourself (frequency of achievement) How often can you fulfill your responsibilities (responsibility)

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

5. Result

5.1 Questionnaire's Basic Information

Tokyo was the most common place of residence (52.6%), followed by Saitama (18.8%) and Kanagawa (17.8%). In terms of marital status, 43.9% of the respondents were never married, while 56.1% were married. 53.2% had children, while 46.8% had no children. The most common occupation was company employee, accounting for 52.0% of the total, including office workers (26.9%), technical workers (14.0%), and others (11.1%); the second most common occupation was a part-time worker (12.6%) and the third was a full-time housewife (househusband) (12.1%). (Table 4)

Table 4. *Questionnaire's Basic Information (n=494)*

Category		Number of cases (%)		Category		Number of cases (%)
Gender	Male	238(48.1)			Civil servants	14(2.8)
	Female	256(51.9)			Management/officer	12(2.4)
Age	20s	88(17.8)		Occupation	Company employee (clerical)	133(26.9)
	30s	95(19.2)			Company employee (technical)	69(14.0)
	40s	100(20.2)			Company employee (other)	55(11.1)

	50s	108(21.9)	Self-employed		19(3.8)
	60s and over	103(20.9)	Freelance		14(2.8)
Residence	Saitama Prefecture	93(18.8)	Housewife		60(12.1)
	Chiba Prefecture	53(10.7)	Part-time job		62(12.6)
	Tokyo	260(52.6)	Student		15(3.0)
	Kanagawa	88(17.8)	Other		6(1.2)
Marriage	Unmarried	217(43.9)	Unemployed		35(7.0)
	Married	277(56.1)			
Children	With children	263(53.2)			
	No children	231(46.8)			

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

5.2 Purpose of using cafés

When asked which cafés in Tokyo they visited "most frequently" as "a comfortable place to be", 439 (88.8%) were Chain cafés and 55 (11.2%) were Independent cafés, indicating that Chain cafés were used more frequently. In terms of the purpose of use, 2/3 of the cafés were used for "my place" type activities such as 'relaxing alone', while "Oldenburg-type" activities such as 'spending time with friends in a close relationship' only accounted for about 20% of all cafés used. However, the proportion of "Oldenburg-type" use was slightly higher among users of Independent cafés. (Table 5.2) This indicates that Japanese frequently tend to used cafés for relaxing alone.

Table 5. *Purpose of Using the Most Visited Cafés as "A Comfortable Place to Be"*

Purpose of using café	total		Chain		Independent	
Relaxing alone	329	66.6%	290	66.1%	39	70.9%
Used by one person for work, study or reading	169	34.2%	151	34.4%	18	32.7%
Used by more than one person for work or study	26	5.3%	24	5.5%	2	3.6%
Spend time with (close/intimate) friends	102	20.6%	87	19.8%	15	27.3%
Spend time with (casual/non-relationship) friends	98	19.8%	88	20.0%	10	18.2%
Number of respondents	494	100.0%	439	88.8%	55	11.2%

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

Furthermore, when the differences in use between Chain and Independent cafés were examined using Quantification III for all cafés frequented in Tokyo, "relaxing alone" and "used alone for work, study or reading" were closely related to Chain cafés, while "used with several people for work or study" was closely related to Independent cafés. (Table 6)

This indicates that in Japan, the use of cafés as "the Third place" was found to be different, divided between the "my place" type for Chain cafés and the "Oldenburg type" for Independent cafés.

Table 6. *Differences in the Using Chain and Independent Cafés (Analyses by Quantification III).*
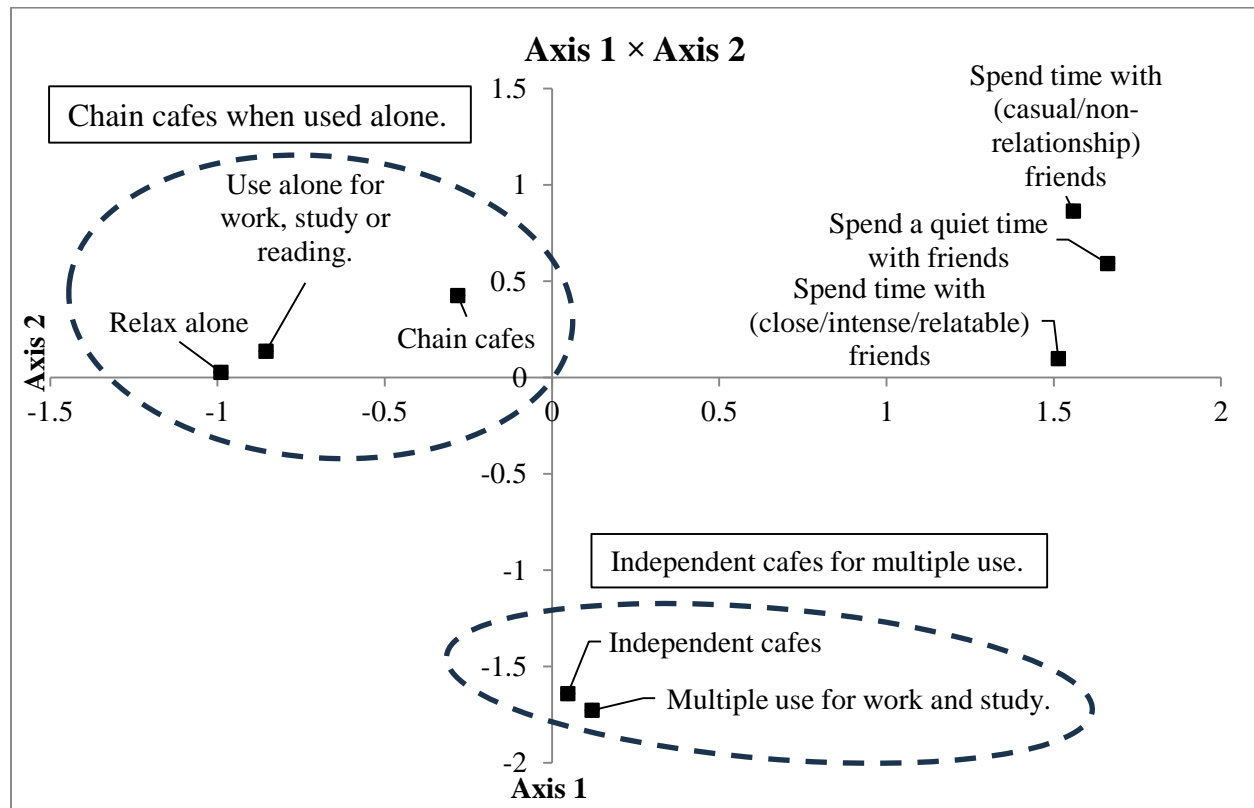
(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

5.3. Sense of "Place where one belongs."
5.3.1 General Tendency

We asked respondents how they felt about cafés (n=494) they visited most frequently in Tokyo as a comfortable place to be. The highest percentage was 82.6% for "calmness (sense of relaxation)," followed by 77.1% for "having time to myself (sense of freedom). (Table 7)

Table 7. *Comparison of "Sense of "Place Where One Belongs."(N=494)*

Sense of "Place where one belongs	All		Chain		Independent	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Calm down (feeling of relaxation)	**408**	**82.6%**	**363**	**82.7%**	**45**	**81.8%**
Have time to yourself (freedom)	**381**	**77.1%**	**341**	**77.7%**	**40**	**72.7%**
I can organize my mind (thinking environment)	262	53.0%	236	53.8%	26	47.3%
There are people from all walks of life (diversity)	248	50.2%	228	51.9%	20	36.4%
I feel liberated (liveliness)	222	44.9%	195	44.4%	27	49.1%
I can get more done at work or study (Workplace)	217	43.9%	198	45.1%	19	34.5%
I feel attached to it (sense of attachment)	206	41.7%	176	40.1%	30	54.5%
I feel like it is an indispensable place (dependence)	189	38.3%	163	37.1%	26	47.3%
I can be myself as I am (sense of self)	133	26.9%	118	26.9%	15	27.3%
~~There are people who~~ Some people listen to me (a sense of acceptance)	128	25.9%	109	24.8%	19	34.5%
There are my friends (sense of community)	110	22.3%	96	21.9%	14	25.5%
I feel I have a role to play (sense of self-usefulness)	94	19.0%	82	18.7%	12	21.8%
Feeling connected to the community (community ties)	91	18.4%	74	16.9%	17	30.9%

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

5.3.2 Difference between Chain and Independent Café

The items that showed particular differences between the averages of Chain and Independent cafés were "I can get more done at work or study (place to work)" for Chain cafés, and "There are people who listen to me," "Feeling connected to the community (ties to the community)," " I feel attached to it," and "I feel like it is an indispensable place (sense of dependence)" for Independent cafés. (Table 8)

These indicate that while Chain cafés are used as ~~a~~ place to work, Independent cafés are valued as place with strong emotional ties, with high levels of dependence as a place to accept oneself and feel connected to the community.

Table 8. *Comparison of Mean Difference of "Sense of "Place Where One Belongs."*

Sense of "Place where one belongs	All	Chain	Mean difference		Judgment
	Mean	Mean	Difference	p-value	

Calm down (feeling of relaxation)	4.16	4.22	0.05	0.321	
Have time to yourself (freedom)	4.07	4.00	-0.07	0.199	
I can organize my mind (thinking environment)	3.51	3.44	-0.08	0.012	*
There are people from all walks of life (diversity)	2.79	2.74	-0.04	0.009	**
I feel liberated (liveliness)	3.31	3.31	0.00	0.010	*
I can get more done at work or study (workplace)	3.25	2.96	-0.28	0.012	**
I feel attached to it (sense of attachment)	3.21	3.47	0.26	0.062	
I feel like it is an indispensable place (dependence)	3.19	3.44	0.24	0.004	**
I can be myself as I am (sense of self)	2.94	3.04	0.10	0.006	**
Some people listen to me (a sense of acceptance)	2.50	2.82	0.32	0.000	**
There are my friends (sense of community)	2.59	2.84	0.25	0.001	**
I feel I have a role to play (sense of self-usefulness)	2.51	2.69	0.18	0.006	**
Feeling connected to the community (community ties)	2.48	2.76	0.29	0.000	**

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

5.4. Well-being
5.4.1 General Tendency

Users of cafés that they "frequented" in Tokyo as "a comfortable place to be" (371 Chain cafés and 182 Independent cafés, for a total of 553) were asked about their "Well-being", and those users who selected a high rating of 4 or 5 were summarized. More than one-half of the total respondents selected 4 or 5 for all items, indicating that café users tend to have high "Well-being". (Table 9)

Table 9. *Comparison of "Well-being"*

Well-being		ALL		Chain		Independent	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Positive emotion	Satisfaction	356	64.4%	221	59.6%	135	74.2%
	Enjoyment	339	61.3%	213	57.4%	126	69.2%
	Positivity	322	58.2%	201	54.2%	121	66.5%
Engagement	Concentration	357	64.6%	220	59.3%	137	75.3%
	Engrossment	338	61.1%	217	58.5%	121	66.5%

	Excitement	330	59.7 %	213	57.4 %	117	64.3 %
Relationship	Relationships	333	60.2 %	208	56.1 %	125	68.7 %
	Sense of being loved	323	58.4 %	199	53.6 %	124	68.1 %
	Acceptance of support	296	53.5 %	185	49.9 %	111	61.0 %
Meaning	Meaningful life	329	59.5 %	208	56.1 %	121	66.5 %
	Value of action	300	54.2 %	188	50.7 %	112	61.5 %
	Direction in life	295	53.3 %	178	48.0 %	117	64.3 %
Accomplishment	Sense of responsibility	338	61.1 %	212	57.1 %	126	69.2 %
	Time to Achievement	300	54.2 %	191	51.5 %	109	59.9 %
	Frequency of Achievement	294	53.2 %	182	49.1 %	112	61.5 %

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

5.4.2 Difference between Chain and Independent café

In addition, the fact that the mean values for all items tended to be higher for Independent cafés than for Chain cafés indicates that Independent cafés users tend to have better "Well-being". (Table 10)

Table 10. *Comparison of mean difference of "Well-being"*

Well-being		Chain	Independent	Mean difference		Judgment
		Mean	Mean	Difference	p-value	
Positive emotion	Satisfaction	6.05	6.62	0.57	0.002	**
	Enjoyment	5.97	6.44	0.47	0.008	**
	Positivity	5.82	6.38	0.56	0.004	**
Engagement	Concentration	6.13	6.77	0.64	0.000	**
	Engrossment	5.97	6.33	0.36	0.039	*
	Excitement	5.93	6.31	0.38	0.036	*
Relationship	Relationships	5.83	6.47	0.64	0.001	**
	Sense of being loved	5.86	6.53	0.67	0.000	**

	Acceptance of support	5.60	5.97	0.37	0.037	
Meaning	Meaningful life	5.89	6.31	0.42	0.021	*
	Value of action	5.61	6.07	0.46	0.012	*
	Direction in life	5.65	6.31	0.67	0.000	**
Accomplishment	Sense of responsibility	6.05	6.48	0.44	0.015	*
	Time to Achievement	5.53	5.97	0.44	0.017	*
	Frequency of Achievement	5.67	6.10	0.43	0.011	*

Bilateral verification ＊：P<0.05 ＊＊：P<0.01

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

6. Conclusion

6.1. Role of Town Cafés

The purpose of this study is to reconsider the function of town cafés as "the Third place" from two perspectives: (1) Function as a "place for interaction among city dwellers" and (2) Function as a "a place for emotional support." The survey clarifies the utility of these two functions in terms of the user's consciousness and states. The method was based on the analysis of an Internet questionnaire survey.

It was found that for many Japanese users, cafés are used for their Third place as a "my place" type, to work or recover alone, and they tend to use Chain cafés. Those who use cafés as a traditional "Oldenburg" type that is a "place for socializing", were found to be particularly likely to choose Independent cafés put highly feeling on them. This indicates that the existence of Independent cafés in the city plays a certain role for many people, both as a "place to socialize" and as a "place to feel at home".

6.2. Benefits of Cafés for Sense of Community Attachment and Quality of Life Promotion

The survey showed that Independent café users tend to be more highly attached to the community and satisfied with their daily lives than Chain cafés users, with particularly positive trends regarding their outlook on life among users of Independent cafés. This suggests that the presence of Independent cafés in the city contributes to promoting local relationships and fosters a sense of attachment to the community.

6.3. Benefits of Cafés for People's Mental Health

The results of the analysis showed that the indicators of well-being, which represent people's mental health, tended to be higher for both types of café users, and higher for Independent café users than Chain on all the indicators.

This suggests that the presence of cafés in the city, which people like to visit frequently as "the Third place" other than home and work, contributes to the well-being of city dwellers, especially for Individual café users.

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