Mobility, Space, and Community: a study on the importance of Tokyo’s Car-free Local Shopping Streets as Social Spaces for Residents

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Abstract
For Centuries, local shopping streets in Japan have been central to the lives of communities as spaces for trading, various forms of social interactions, and for cultural festivals. However, uncontrolled motorisation and the convenience of shopping malls is reducing the streets’ importance to the everyday life of residents. This study aimed at unearthing the underlying relationships between residents’ attributes and the use of nearby shopping streets. The survey targeted residents in the vicinities of two shopping streets in Tokyo: Honcho-dori street in Adachi Ward and Pearl Centre in Suginami Ward. The results affirm the importance of local shopping streets to the lives of those living in their vicinities; this is evident in the prominence of residents’ daily visits to the local shopping streets. Nonetheless, usage is largely restricted to necessary activities of shopping, while optional activities such as strolling and social interactions are sidelined in daily life. Additionally, years lived in the locality, the value placed on social interactions, and respondent’s age are statistically significant in explaining residents’ frequency of meeting acquaintances along the street in both cases although inconveniences and the reasons for choosing alternative destinations were additional explanations in Pearl Centre. We conclude that by evaluating the uniqueness of individual shopping streets and the population dynamics of the surroundings, urban planners can spur positive change for local residents to ensure functional, safe, and comfortable streets while encouraging rather than undermining business.

Keywords: Shopping Street, Community, Car-free, Mobility, Space.

1. Introduction
Local shopping streets in Japan, shotengai, generally comprise of a line of shops such as noodle shops, butcheries, confectionaries, beauty parlours, and boutiques. Minimalised motorisation is an added advantage—many shopping streets have car-free hours especially in the evenings and weekends. Some of them are covered arcades allowing for an all-weather shopping experience. For centuries, these shopping streets have been central to the lives of local communities, serving purposes beyond shopping and mobility. To many residents of adjacent neighbourhoods, strolling, emergent interactions, children’s play, events, and festivals transform the significance of these streets into valuable community spaces. The wide assortments and the traditional feel of shopping streets are also key attractions to locals and tourists in pursuit of shopping and sightseeing.

Car-free shopping streets enhance a safe and comfortable environment for local communities to shop, interact, play, and carry out events and festivals. As Watson (2009) posits, markets are public spaces that offer a platform for a variety of social interactions. Coincident or deliberate, pleasant or unpleasant, the frequent encounters among residents for various objectives produces

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relationships with the physical space; an understanding of these relationships is critical to planners interested in human-environment relationships in urban streets. Gehl, Gemzoe, and Rogers (2006) posit that as compared to the past where street spaces were a platform for daily-life activities, people are no longer required to visit the shopping streets to fulfil their daily needs due to the availability of alternatives. This, in turn, has affected the ability of local shopping streets to offer a platform for leisure activities and general pleasure.

Tokyo and its surroundings continue to experience an upsurge of malls such as Aeon, Marui, and Itoyokado, as well as smaller supermarkets and convenience stores in the suburbs that are competing with traditional establishments on shopping streets. Furthermore, with more dispersed mobility patterns, the local shopping street becomes a mere shopping venue filled with people only keen on the exchange value entrenched in the buying and selling of goods and services. The ease and convenience brought by the efficient public transport system in Tokyo and the use of private cars redistributes people to distant shopping destinations while the build-up of moving and parked cars along shopping streets invades the safety and comfort of the local space.

Although studies on shopping streets and pedestrianisation from the economic and mobility perspectives exist, the underlying relationships and contradictions regarding the local community have however remained unclear. Whereas mobility is more universal across continents, the intricacies in the use and production of social space in Tokyo’s local shopping streets is unique but has not been thoroughly examined. The study presupposes that with an improvement of the quality of the street and the socio-cultural activities therein, the streets can be sustainable and able to survive the onslaught from available alternatives. As such, an understanding of the underlying issues among residents is necessary regarding the movement of people (mobility), the use of the street as an urban open space, and the affairs of the local community.

2. Literature review
2.1 The assault on the significance of local shopping streets
Leen & Huang (2007) trace the foundations of shopping streets in Japan to as early as the Azuchi Momoyama period (1573-1600) when liberalisation of trade spurred the popularity of traditional markets called rakuichi rakuza. In the succeeding Edo Era (1603-1868), streets became key shopping venues for a variety of commodities and as a community and children’s play space (Suzuki & Almazan, 2015). Whereas the significance of these streets continued to evolve over centuries, special happenings such as the Second World War prompted rapid growth of informal markets along the streets. Shopping streets across Japan are diverse; their appearances vary depending on the physical position, population, history, their function, and the degree of functional differentiation of the city (Fujimoto, 1953). Since Japan has one of the highest proportions of narrow streets across the globe (Kwon, Morichi & Tetsuo, 1997) the physical structure is very unique, and the mix of shopping and social activities is more sophisticated than shopping streets in other countries. Many of the Shopping streets in Tokyo are also closely related to adjacent railway lines and train stations; although some run along or under the railway lines, many shopping streets intersect the railway lines perpendicularly at the stations (Ohno, 2006).

Local shopping streets produce aesthetics, collective memory, traditional forms of interaction, and a feeling of local identity; they are vernacular spaces that are often inconsistent with modern
economic modernisation and consumer culture (Zukin, 2012). Although goods in local streets in Japan largely reflect the people’s needs (Tsuboi & Kitano 2010), with the rapid globalisation of economic activities and business chains increasing, the uniqueness of each shopping street is being eroded. Micro-scale area studies about the contextual implications of car-free streets in neighbourhoods are therefore critical in understanding the relationship of local residents and adjacent shopping streets in Japan. The current understanding relies on fragments of research efforts targeted at particular aspects of streets such as studies on walking speed (Matsumoto, Kiyota & Ito, 2009), and studies related to the use of streets by elderly people (Sone & Kayama, 2009; Tsuboi & Kitano, 2010). Although shopping streets support day-to-day livelihoods of residents and offer a unique shopping experience for visitors in Tokyo, they are suffering serious decline. The decline of shopping streets in favour of shopping malls is a worrying problem in recent years: 32.7% of Shotengai in Japan are experiencing a decline, 37.6% are stagnating but likely to decline, and only 1.6% of Shopping Streets are prospering (Torii et al., 2010). The upsurge of huge shopping malls and the multinationals they host has been key to the reducing significance of shopping streets all over the world (Watson, 2009; Ozuduru, Varol, & Ercoskun, 2012). Additionally, with improved Information Technology and consumer cooperatives in Japan, the need to visit the local shopping street is being reduced by the convenience of home deliveries (Ozawa & Kishimoto, 2014; Gehrt, Onzo, Fujita, & Rajan, 2007; Moen, 2000).

Unfortunately, agglomeration of retailers in shopping areas is laden with challenges especially in marketing them as integrated entities and in the provision of facilities such as toilets, vehicular access, and parking (Teller & Reutterer, 2008). To Erkip (2005), shopping has also evolved from mere buying and merged with leisure. Customers prefer malls instead of shopping streets due to the atmosphere, support factors such as parking facilities and refreshments, wide assortments, as well as communication, sales, and promotional factors (Anselmsson, 2006; Teller & Reutterer, 2008). Nonetheless, where malls are situated far away from the street, Tsuboi and Kitano (2010) observe that they have little correlation with the success or failure of the local street. Consequently, independent small-scale shops in Tokyo’s shopping streets are disadvantaged in promoting their businesses and in providing a pleasurable environment compared to shopping malls that are centrally managed from the start.

2.2 Street functions and activities

Streets model the form, the comfort, and order of communities far beyond facilitating the essential mobility and support infrastructure (Jacobs, 1993). However, the use of streets as open spaces is pegged on the quality of the open space rather than the mere availability (Jacobs, 1961; Gehl et al. 2006; Inoue et al., 2011). The physical characteristics of the streets have a lot of influence on street functions. Gehl et al., (2006) categorise these functions into necessary activities and optional activities. The necessary activities comprise the daily activities that people need such as exchange of goods, news, and transport, while optional activities comprise the recreational activities such as jogging, skating, and children’s play. Each of these activities has a corresponding set of physical conditions that support it. Users determine which conditions are likely to satisfy them depending on the history and social background (Chen, Nakamura, & Kuma, 2014).
Physical conditions have diverse influences on street activities. Spaces with a variety of information e.g. an open feeling, signs, and merchandise show a slow walking speed and are commonly attractive to pedestrians (Matsumoto et al., 2009). Mansouri, Matsumoto, Aoki & Sugiyama (2011) identify the sky, ground, buildings, vegetation and actors (such as people) as the five main classes within a streetscape visual array. Additionally, Kwon et al., (1997) found that for narrow urban streets, the main influences are the distances from standing obstacles to the moving traffic modes, pedestrian walking position, car speed, and the interactions among traffic modes in mixed traffic conditions. Inoue et al (2011) observe that among Japanese elderly people aged between 65-74 years, the social environment and aesthetics are consistent correlates of both transportation walking and recreational walking but the specific issues of concern differed widely between men and women. Particular to shopping, Erkip (2005) observes that women tend to be more expressive in their shopping preferences than men.

2.3 Motorisation and vehicular infrastructure in shopping
There is a growing awareness on the need to rethink car dependence since unrestricted use of automobiles has been instrumental in jeopardising the general quality of urban areas and the safe and comfortable use of streets by city residents (Buissink, 1977; Kawada, Kishimoto & Fukai, 2013; Parkhurst, 2003; Sheller & Urry, 2000; Iranmanesh, 2008). Pedestrians largely occupied urban streets in the 19th century before the advent of cars that largely replaced pedestrians in the early and mid-20th century in Europe and America, and mid-20th century in Japan (Kwon et al. 1997). Pedestrianized streets in many cities were traditionally used as cultural and entertainment plazas where people met not only on ordinary days but also on holidays and festive seasons (Jacobs, 1961). Meanwhile, Yuen & Chor (1998) identify two competing schools of thought concerning car usage in urban areas: the first is pegged on the importance of cars to economic development and the personal freedom of car users to access roads and parking spaces; the second is concerned with limiting the use of cars in urban areas by direct prohibition, offering alternative modes of travel, or a combination of both. Sheller & Urry (2000) however allude to the automobile as being irresistible because of the flexibility it offers while being coercive, a consequence of the time and space complexities its reliance produces.

2.4 Sense of community
Rogers (1998) established that the level of interaction between neighbours and their sense of community is inversely proportional to the amount of car traffic on their street. Continued motorisation has specifically affected children’s independent experience of urban streets as well as their physical activity (Gehl et al. 2006; Valentine & Mckendrick,1997; Veitch, Bagley, Ball, & Salmon, 2006; Carver, Timperio & Crawford 2007). To varying extents, residents model street spaces for communication in their everyday social life (Tsuboi & Kitano, 2010). Unfortunately, open spaces in commercial areas are often suffering from over-commercialisation, over-occupation, pollution, and lack of general order (Chen, Nakamura & Kuma, 2014). Nevertheless, local shopping streets are not always public spaces: many are pseudo-public spaces in the private realm, public spaces where citizens are welcome if they fulfil the business needs of the shop owners, a privilege and not a right (Banerjee, 2001).

In general, the function of shopping streets as communal spaces is two-sided. On one side is the local community’s communication entrenched in familiarity, cooperation, and collaboration, one
whose intimateness is likely to grow with time; on the other side is the mere coexistence of strangers in public open spaces. Urban life and the consumer culture offer a platform for the coexistence of people with different objectives who may not be interested in advancing relations beyond the mutual respect on the street space (Zukin, 1998; Jacobs, 1961). The sense of community and the effect of street conditions on shopping streets also varies with the user groups (children, elderly, male, female) and all these entities must be part of decision making (Matsumoto et al. 2009; Inoue et al., 2011). Ultimately, discourses on public space should be founded on an understanding of the evolution of the values and symbolism associated with the society in question (Lefebvre, 1991; Banerjee, 2001). In addition to good design, collaboration among government agencies, private sector, social organisations, and space users is necessary for successful streetscapes (Moriyama & Deguchi, 2011; Chen, Nakamura & Kuma, 2014).

3. The Study
3.1 Aims and objectives
This study aims at explaining the significance of Tokyo’s car-free local shopping streets as community platforms for local residents. The key hypothesis is that the liveability of local shopping streets is pegged on the ability of local residents to utilise the street as a communal social space in daily life. Consequently, the study is structured to achieve the following objectives:
I. To evaluate the day to day importance of local car-free shopping streets to residents
II. To expound on the nature of social interactions on the car-free street space
To evaluate the importance of the local street, we examined residents’ frequency of visiting the street. To expound on the nature of social interactions, we examined (1) residents’ view on the importance of social interactions on the street, and (2) the frequency of meeting acquaintances.

3.2 Analysis framework: Case Studies
Since there is a wide variation in the physical and social characteristics of shopping streets in Tokyo, to achieve the objectives above, we considered streets with differing physical characteristics and varying levels of car-free environments. Ultimately, two case studies were selected: Honcho-dori street in Adachi Ward, and Pearl Centre street in Suginami Ward. Honcho Dori is a typical shopping street near Kita Senju train station with car-free hours while Pear Centre is a fully pedestrianised roofed arcade. Flyvbjerg (2006) notes that the closeness of a case study to real-life situations helps to create a nuanced view of reality. According to Yin (2014) the need for a case study emanates from the desire to understand a complex social phenomenon and allows for a holistic and real-world view.

Case 1: Pearl Centre Shopping Street
Pearl centre is one of the most famous covered shopping streets in Tokyo; it is popular for household goods, as well as annual events such as the Tanabata Festival and the Asagaya Jazz festival (figure 3.1). With a width of 5 metres, it starts from the Asagaya JR station in Suginami Ward and stretches southwards for 500 metres (figure 3.2). The street has been car-free since 1952 when the neighbouring Nakasugi-doro street was constructed (Ibuse, 1987). It initially consisted of mainly traditional Japanese stores and restaurants that are being replaced by modern establishments such as convenience stores and shops for electronics. On most days, it is crowded with shoppers on foot and those pushing their bicycles, as well as traders and merchandise displayed outside the shops. The shop owners’ association has a centralised website with links to
all the businesses on the street. Residents of surrounding areas live in both detached houses and multi-household houses such as apartments. The area of one-kilometre radius around Asagaya Station has a population of 51,017 people in 25,833 households; residents living alone constitute 64.28%; those aged above 70 years consist of 17.31% of the population (https://storestrategy.jp).

Figure 3.1 Pearl Centre street in Suginami ward, Tokyo. Source: Authors

Figure 3.2: Contextual location of Pearl Centre shopping street in relation to the Asagaya Station
Source: Authors, adopted from Google Maps
Case 2: Honcho-dori shopping Street

Honcho-dori is a 10-metre-wide street that begins 180 metres off the West exit of the Kita Senju Station in Tokyo’s Adachi Ward, and stretches southwards for 400 meters. It consists of a line of restaurants, grocery shops, and flower shops among others (Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4). Honcho-dori is car-free on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays from 1300HRS to 1800HRS as well as 1600HRS to 1800HRS on weekdays. Historically, Adachi ward was host to the Senju-shuku a post station during Edo era; Honcho dori street was a section of the Nikko Kaido part of the five routes that connected Edo (present-day Tokyo) to outer provinces.

The surrounding area is a traditional Japanese downtown with many narrow alleys, roji, that connect small businesses such as restaurants, bars as well as homes to Honcho-dori. The establishment of educational institutions including universities has increased the number of young people from other parts of the country, a situation that has disrupted the conventional street fabric that mainly consisted of residents who have lived in the area for many years. The street is also experiencing problems related to unregulated use and parking of bicycles, limited smoking zones, and littering. The area of one-kilometre radius around Kita-senju railway station has a population of 64,679 people and 39,619 households; residents living alone constitute 47.8%; those aged above 70 years consist of 16.64% of the population (https://storestrategy.jp.)

Figure 3.3: Honcho-dori street in Adachi Ward. Source: Authors
3.3 Data collection methods

Firstly, a pilot study was conducted: it included basic observation on the streets and a test survey on fifteen respondents. The survey questionnaire was then revised; for example, the number of choices on activities carried out on shopping streets as well as items shopped was revised. To understand the perception of traders on the street, questionnaires were administered on traders operating businesses in stores along Honcho Dori; a total of 21 responses were analysed.

In the main survey, 2000 questionnaires (1000 in each case) were distributed by inserting them in mailboxes of residences in the vicinity of the two streets. Residents replied through post using designated return envelopes. In total, questionnaires from 256 respondents were received (170 in Pearl Centre, 86 in Honcho-dori). During data analysis, descriptive statistics to describe the fundamental attributes of the data was done using SPSS. One-way Anova test of variance was used to establish the significance (p<0.05) of the variance of means between the two case studies. Additionally, cross-tabulation of the relationship between variables was done. To test the significance of various variables on ‘the frequency of visiting the street,’ ‘importance of interactions,’ and ‘frequency of meeting acquaintances,’ the cross-tabulation data from SPSS was used for association tests on XLSTAT to obtain the significance of the influences between variables.
4. Results

4.1 Characteristics of residents.

There were more female than male respondents for both Pearl Centre and Honcho-dori streets as shown in figure 4.1. There was no significant variance in means for gender between the two cases (male, p= 0.181 and female, p= 0.462).

Among the age groups, respondents aged 70 years and above form the biggest category (figure 4.2). Except for the 20s age-group, there was no significant variance in means for age of respondents between the two cases: less than 20 years, p=0.629; 20s age group, p=0.050; 30s, p=0.502; 40s, p=0.149; 50s, p=0.178; 60s, p=0.926; 70 years-old and above, p=0.165.

The biggest proportion of respondents in this study live within a ten-minute walk distance to the street (figure 4.3). There were significant variances in means for proximity to the street (minutes taken to the street) between the two cases for close distances compared to respondents living further from the street: utmost 5 minutes, p=0.007; 5 to 10 minutes, p=0.027; 10 to 15 minutes, p=0.444; more than 15 minutes, p=0.495.

Most respondents have lived in the street’s vicinity for ten years or more (figure 4.4). All categories did not have a significant variance of means across the two groups: less than one year, p=0.875; 1 to 2 years, p=0.849; 2 to 5 years, p=0.147; 5 to 10 years, p=0.312; more than 10 years, p=0.773.
4.2 Importance of local shopping street to residents

In both case studies, the biggest proportion of respondents utilise the street daily, followed by weekly, and monthly. However, the percentage of daily visits in Honcho-dori (67.1%) is higher than Pearl Centre (41.8%) as shown in Figure 4.5. The differences across the two streets were statistically significant for Daily, p<0.001 and Weekly, p=0.002 but not significant for Monthly visits, p=0.330.

The main objective of visiting the street is shopping; the percentage of respondents who go to the street for social activities is slightly higher in Honcho-dori (6.8%) compared to Pearl centre (4.6%) as shown in Figure 4.6. However, all the differences in objectives across the two streets were not statistically significant: Strolling, p=0.509; Shopping, p=0.139; Socialising, p=0.656; Work, p=0.086.

The main advantage of the street, the reason why residents prefer the street is its proximity to their homes, followed by the availability of centralised assortment of goods and services. The percentage of respondents citing car-free as a reason is higher in Pearl Centre which is permanently car-free as shown in figure 4.7. The variance between the two cases is statistically significant for Because the street is car-free, p=0.001 and Centralised Assortment, p=0.001. The others are not statistically significant: Proximity to home, p=0.218, and May meet acquaintances, 0.731.
4.3 Social activities on the street

Many respondents take a neutral view on the importance of social interactions on the street space; those that think social interactions on the street are very important comprise the smallest category. However, there is a higher tendency for residents around Honcho-dori to perceive social interactions as important compared to residents around Pearl Centre (figure 4.8). Differences in the two streets are statistically significant for the variables I think interactions are important, p=0.038, Neutral, p=0.013, and Interactions are not important, p=0.006. Interactions are very important p=0.391 and I do not care about interactions, p=0.126 were not statistically significant.

Regarding the frequency of meeting acquaintances, a majority of the respondents meet acquaintances sometimes, while only a small percentage meets acquaintance always as shown in figure 4.9.
Differences in the two streets are statistically significant for *I always meet acquaintances*, \( p=0.002 \). The variances for *Sometimes* (\( p=0.675 \)) and *Never* (\( p=0.204 \)) were not statistically significant.

### 4.4 Inconveniences

Although excessive bicycles, crowding, and lack of sitting space are the key concerns in both cases, lack of bicycle parking is a greater concern in Pearl Centre (21.6%) compared to Honcho-dori (1.4%) as shown in Figure 4.10. Only the differences for *excessive bicycles* \( p<0.001 \) and *lack of bicycle parking*, \( p=0.001 \) are statistically significant across the two cases. *Crowding* (\( p=0.975 \)) and *Insufficient sitting space* (\( p=0.870 \)) were not statistically significant.

![Inconveniences on the street](image)

### 4.5 Alternatives

Among the destinations favoured by residents as alternatives to shopping streets, the key ones are large shopping malls such as Lumine and Marui near Honcho-dori, and Seiyu and Itoyokado near Pearl Centre. Alternatives also include other shopping streets such as the Gakuen-dori near Honcho-dori and the Kita-guchi Shotengai in Asagaya. Top on the reasons for choosing alternative places is the availability of a centralized assortment in the same building, followed by the presence of elevators and escalators in the buildings (Figure 4.11). Only the differences in the influence of elevators and escalators are statistically significant (\( p=0.003 \)). The variance between the two cases is not statistically significant for the others: the presence of open spaces, \( p=0.728 \); car parking, \( p=0.346 \); bicycle parking, \( p=0.166 \); not crowded, \( p=0.842 \); and central assortment, \( p=0.956 \).

![Reasons for choosing alternative shopping places](image)
4.6 Full-time pedestrianisation of Honcho-dori

Regarding changing Honcho-Dori into a fulltime car-free street, most respondents would prefer the conversion of the shopping street into a permanent car-free street (63%, n=47) while respondents who prefer that the street remains temporally car-free constitute 37% (n=28) as shown in figure 4.12. Safety and comfort were the major reasons for preferring fulltime pedestrianisation: comments such as “it will be comfortable,” and “to be able to walk with children” are good examples. Concerns by those opposed to full-time pedestrianisation generally fall into two categories: inconveniences brought by car restrictions and bad manners associated with car-free spaces. Comments included “annoying for people with luggage,” “to allow for deliveries,” and “manners of cyclists and pedestrians will worse.”

![Figure 4.12: Permanent pedestrianisation of Honcho-dori](Image)

4.7 Variables explaining the frequency of visiting local shopping streets.

For Pearl Centre, the ‘importance of interactions,’ ‘frequency of meeting acquaintances,’ ‘reasons for choosing alternatives,’ ‘years lived,’ and ‘minutes to the street’ are significant in determining the frequency of visiting the street. In the case of Honcho-dori, only the ‘frequency of meeting acquaintances’ and ‘minutes to the street’ have a significant relationship with the frequency of visiting the local shopping street as shown in table 4.1.

| Variable                                | Significance |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------|
| Importance of interactions              | 0.035*       | 0.100       |
| Objective of visit                      | 0.368        | 0.725       |
| Advantage of street                     | 0.423        | 0.749       |
| Frequency of meeting acquaintances      | 0.008**      | 0.002**     |
| Inconveniences                          | 0.838        | 0.215       |
| Reason for choosing alternatives        | 0.036*       | 0.993       |
| Years lived                             | 0.026*       | 0.120       |
| Minutes to the street                   | 0.040*       | 0.034*      |
| Gender                                  | 0.410        | 0.102       |
| Age                                     | 0.717        | 0.109       |

*Note: ** and * show statistical significance at 0.01 and 0.05 levels respectively.*
4.8 **Variables explaining the importance of social interactions on local shopping streets.**

For Pearl Centre, only the ‘Frequency of visit,’ and ‘frequency of meeting acquaintances,’ were significant in explaining the importance of interactions. For Honcho-dori, the ‘frequency of meeting acquaintances,’ and the ‘age of respondents’ were in explaining the same as shown in table 4.2

| Table 4.2 Significance of various variables on the importance of interactions |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **Variable**     | **Pearl centre** | **Honcho-dori**  |
| Frequency of visit | 0.029*           | 0.100            |
| Objective of visit   | 0.080           | 0.961            |
| Advantage of street | 0.219           | 0.736            |
| Frequency of meeting acquaintances | <0.0001*** | <0.0001*** |
| Inconveniences | 0.080          | 0.520            |
| Reason for choosing alternative | 0.278          | 0.397            |
| Years lived | 0.950          | 0.093            |
| Minutes to street | 0.103           | 0.162            |
| Gender | 0.996          | 0.766            |
| Age | 0.576          | 0.003**          |

*Note:***,**,** and * show statistical significance at 0.001, 0.01 and 0.05 levels respectively.

4.9 **Variables explaining the frequency of meeting acquaintances on local shopping streets.**

For Pearl centre, ‘frequency of visiting the street,’ ‘importance of interactions,’ ‘inconveniences’ ‘reason for choosing alternatives,’ ‘years lived,’ and ‘age’ are significant in explaining the frequency of meeting acquaintances on the street. For Honcho-dori, only the frequency of visiting the street,” ‘importance of interactions,’ ‘years lived,’ and ‘age’ are significant in explaining the same (table 4.3).

| Table 4.3 Significance of various variables on frequency of meeting acquaintances |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **Variable**     | **Pearl centre** | **Honcho-dori**  |
| Frequency of visit | 0.033*           | 0.028*           |
| Importance of interactions | < 0.0001*** | < 0.0001***    |
| Objective of visit | 0.121           | 0.246            |
| Advantage of street | 0.362           | 0.396            |
| Inconveniences | 0.033*          | 0.270            |
| Reason for choosing alternative | 0.048*        | 0.504            |
| Years lived | 0.001***         | 0.002**          |
| Minutes to street | 0.528           | 0.893            |
| Gender | 1.000           | 0.797            |
| Age | <0.0001***      | 0.028*           |

*Note:***,**,** and * show statistical significance at 0.001, 0.01 and 0.05 levels respectively.*
5. Discussion
From the findings in the previous section, it is clear that car-free street conditions are key in encouraging the use of streets as communal open spaces. The results affirm the relevance of car-free shopping streets in the day-to-day lives of those living in the vicinity; this is evident in the prominence of residents’ daily visits to the local shopping streets, a key source of basic home supplies such as foodstuff. Nonetheless, the objectives of visiting the street are largely constricted to necessary activities of shopping, while optional activities such as strolling and socialising are side-lined in the everyday life of residents. The results suggest that the attachment of residents to local shopping streets is generally viewed as a mere trading relationship although aspects such as high frequency of visiting the street increase the perceived importance of the street as a local space for social interactions.

The frequency of meeting acquaintances and the proximity to the street (minutes to the street) were statistically significant in explaining the frequency of visiting the street in both cases. For Pearl Centre, years lived in the neighbourhood, the importance of interactions, and reason for choosing alternatives were also statistically significant. The importance of social interactions on the shopping street has a statistically significant relationship with the frequency of meeting acquaintances in both cases; additionally, the frequency of meeting acquaintances is significant in Pearl Centre while age is significant in honcho-dori. In both cases, the likelihood of meeting acquaintances can be significantly explained by the frequency of visiting the street, residents’ view on the importance of interactions, residents’ age, and the number of years lived in the current location. In Pearl Centre, it is also significantly related to shopping streets’ inconveniences and the reasons for choosing alternatives. This suggests Pearl Centre’s greater sophistication in what residents consider in their day-to-day life.

It is clear that local shopping streets are being reduced to mere mobility channels and shopping venues, paths connecting residents’ homes to various destinations. Only the occasional events such as the Tanabata festival and the Asagaya Jazz festival in Pearl Centre bring out the role of the shopping street as a key urban open space for communal activities. However, the diversity in visitors during such events is not consistent with the character of the local population. Even though some of the residents often meet acquaintances, this has not sufficiently contributed to their social interactions. The continued diminishing of local shopping streets’ uniqueness, the move towards the uniformity (common with malls) in Pearl Centre, and the invasion of cars and car parking in Honcho-dori are largely responsible for the decreased sense of community. Residents’ ease of finding alternative venues for social interactions such as coffee shops, as well as the convenience of finding a centralised assortment and modern facilities also lures them into shopping malls.

Between the Pearl Centre and Honcho-dori street, there are clear differences in the perception of residents living in the surroundings. Even though Honcho Dori is equally urbanised, the social interactions are more pronounced compared to Pearl centre as evidenced in resident’s regard for interactions, frequency of meeting acquaintances, and their objectives when visiting the street. This may be partially attributed to the population dynamics: people living alone (whose proportion is higher around Pearl Centre) are likely to have less concern for community relations as compared to those in bigger households.
As one of the most popular shopping streets in Tokyo, Pearl Centre continues to thrive as a destination for shopping and events for tourists whereas the social interactions among residents are marginal. Nevertheless, compared to Honcho-dori that is made up of largely independent shops, the management of Pearl Centre as evident in its website (promoting all the businesses) makes it more competitive against the assault of malls while unfortunately falling into the globalisation trends that reduce the uniqueness of places. The evolution from traditional shops to modern establishments is a great indicator of this globalisation. Although Honcho-dori is faring better, the increasing proportion of ‘strangers’ population in the local area that has been brought about by increased educational institutions and the proliferation of izakaya (taverns) is a turn off for elderly citizens as revealed in their comments. As one elderly respondent notes “it is becoming like Harajuku (a district famous for pop culture).”

The dangers of cars in Honcho-dori remain even though there are car-free hours every week. Residents’ opinion on the future of cars in Honcho-dori reveals the great contestations on space as people pursue differing interests. Most respondents propose full-time pedestrianisation of the street majorly because of safety concerns; older residents are attracted to a full-time car-free environment compared to younger ones. A big proportion of residents still opposes the permanent removal of cars for the convenience of traders and car users such as those carrying heavy luggage.

6. Conclusions
Although limited in scope, this study has demonstrated the significance of local shopping streets as social spaces in two Tokyo neighbourhoods. It is clear that although the two streets remain significant to the daily lives of residents, this significance is largely restricted to necessary activities such as shopping. Additionally, the study has demonstrated the influence of attributes such as age and proximity on the social importance of a street to the daily lives of residents.

Mere restriction of cars has not been sufficient in encouraging the consideration of these streets as communal open spaces for local residents. For urban planners attempting to make shopping streets thrive, it will be important to consider the enticements presented by alternatives such as shopping malls. At the same time, it will be critical to utilise the unique advantages of target shopping streets as well as the population dynamics and environmental settings instead of competing with shopping malls. In furtherance of these findings, the study recommends undertaking of more investigations in neighbourhoods with different physical conditions and demographics.

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