COLLECTIVE NETWORK BUILT BY SHOP OWNERS IN A SHOTENGAI
— Case study on Shoin Jinja shotengai in Setagaya Ward, Tokyo —

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Collective network refers to the gathering of different layers of connections that each local shop owner brings to a shotengai. Through their own personal experience, the owners bring to their shops unique products with an added value to it. In this sense, a shotengai behave as a series of entrances to different networks that leads the customer to narratives that they cannot experience in large-scale retailers. This paper presents a methodology to understand the collective network of the shops applied in Shoin Jinja shotengai.

1. Introduction
1.1. Background and Aim
Japanese commercial streets, the shotengai, have been facing the issue of an increasing number of shops shutting down due to several circumstances that come from the aging population and the changing lifestyle of the society. While the rise of roadside shopping malls and supermarkets stimulated the decline of shotengai as an exterior competitor for customers, the spread of convenience and chain stores since late 1970s triggered its internal collapse by substituting the once local shops1. This process was then accelerated in the 1990s, leading to the entry of the term “shuttered street” (shutte dori) into the lexicon. A shop might be forced to close because the owner had no successor in the family to pass down their business or they could not keep competitive prices against the chain stores, supermarkets or the always rising online shopping2. Instead of discarding shotengai as a business model from the past, there are some approaches being discussed in order to support and improve these districts. The concern is to find means to create new added values for the shotengai aside from what they were shaped for: places for daily shopping.

Chain store are well-established business that can offer competitive final prices of their products for customers as well as the convenience of selling standardized products, in every branch mostly the same range of products with an added value to it. In this sense, a shotengai behave as a series of entrances to different networks that leads the customer to narratives that they cannot experience in large-scale retailers.

Therefore, this study aims to clarify the collective network brought to a shotengai by the shop owners through their shops, in the case study of Shoin Jinja shotengai in Setagaya ward, Tokyo.

1.2. Previous studies
Several researches were conduct from different point of views to understand shotengai. Sato et al.3, Amano and Yasukawa4 discussed the spatial experience of shotengai by analyzing shop-front appearance. Konno et al.5 showed the invisible relationships between shop owners and local residents; Shimizu and Nakayama6 also grasped the contribution by owners for the operation of local events. Sand67 discussed the practices of specialty shop streets with a collection of shops handling common products and services. Apart from previous literature, this analysis doesn’t focus on the urban space itself, but it explores a singular way of looking to the object: through the experience provided in a shotengai by the diversity of local shops. For this purpose, Bruno Latour’s actor network theory8 is utilized as a reference to trace all the connections established by the local shop owner in a structure that permits a clear visualization of its qualitative aspects.

2. Methodology
2.1. Shoin Jinja shotengai
Shoin Jinja shotengai is a remarkable example of a re-activation movement in commercial streets initiated by a new generation of retailers. It was boosted by the successor of Shoin Kaikan, a real estate family business in the area,
who is engaged in actions to revitalize the neighborhood, as it is discussed in the book Public Produce12. Parallel to this, two other shop owners started activities to improve the area each with their own particular contribution. Therefore from 2010 the movement was then followed and intensified by other newly-comE shop owners as it was also explored in the article “The Secrets of Shoin-Jinja-Mae” by Tokyo Keizai11. The effort of the owners, mostly also residents of the area, is noticeable when walking along the street with wide variety of offers interweaving the new and the traditional retails and complementing each other.

The shotengai is mostly formed by unique local shops and there are relatively few chain stores in the area. To contrast this aspect of Shoin Jinja shotengai, a quantitative comparison with Ookayama shotengai in Meguro Ward, Tokyo is shown in Table 1. Both of them have similar length and number of shops. Only 11% are chain stores in the first case, few compared to the second one that features 54% of its shops as franchises. Regarding the type of business, in Ookayama it is observed more service and miscellaneous goods shops, that is related to the type of franchises such as cleaning, hair salon, pharmacy and 100-yen shop. In contrast, Shoin Jinja shotengai contains many food and beverage shops, likely most of them being local shop.

Table 1. Comparison between Shoin Jinja and Ookayama shotengai.

|                          | Shoin Jinja shotengai | Ookayama shotengai |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Length                   | 441 m                 | 493 m              |
| Local Shop               | 89%                   | 46%                |
| Chain Store              | 11%                   | 54%                |
| Restaurant (Re)          | 18                    | 13                 |
| Café (Ca)                | 7                     | 4                  |
| Bar (Br)                 | 7                     | 2                  |
| Market (Ma)              | 13                    | 11                 |
| Bakeery (Bk)             | 3                     | 0                  |
| Convenience store (Co)   | 2                     | 4                  |
| Miscellaneous goods (Mi) | 26                    | 32                 |
| Services (Se)            | 15                    | 29                 |
| Total                    | 91 shops              | 95 shops           |

The street is located in a residential neighborhood between two important train lines – Odakyu and Den-en-toshi line. The old tramway of Tokyo Setagaya line starts from Sangenjaya station, intersects the street in Shoin Jinja-mae station and continues towards Gotokuji station. The small platform of Shoin Jinja-mae station inaugurated in 1925 provides easy accessibility to the area, though in a limited capacity of the two-cars tram that doesn’t interfere in the slow-paced characteristic of the district. Meanwhile, the absence of a large train station within a closer distance contributes to keep the companies of chain stores uninterested in the location. Despite the calm neighborhood, the area surrounds important buildings such as the Setagaya Ward Office and the Shoin Shrine that works as an attractor to increase the flux of people11.

2.2. Field survey

Assuming that each local shop has the potential to contain a rich network, the aggregation of them composes a diverse collective network clarified through interviews with the keynote actor of each shop: the owner. The survey was conducted preferably with the shop owner and when not possible, the staff was consulted. After a brief explanation of the research intents and their following agreement, the interview was conducted followed by a photographic record of both the interior and the façade of the shop. A questionnaire to guide the interview was used containing questions about the owner, the shop, the products and the necessary skills as shown in figure 1. Firstly, for an overall understanding, all the 91 retails were mapped and classified in Local/Chain, Type of shop and Opening period. From the 81 local shops, 67 shops12 were investigated by their Year Established, Ownership of the property, Number of Staff, place of residence of the Owner (if they Live Nearby or Live within the Shop Building) and the relation within the shotengai, analyzed by Association membership and participation in Events. Next, the network of each shop was analyzed by its quality and further discussed in item 3.

Figure 1. Sample of a questionnaire filled out by the shop owner.

2.3. Profile of Shops

The data collected is shown in table 2. The numbering of the shops starts from the north with the station located midway between shops no. 40 and no. 45. By investigating Type of shop and Open period, it is noted that daily good shops are located in the north, open during daytime. In the south there are more restaurants and bars that remain open at night. Among the selected shops, through Year Established it is observed that several stores remained open for generations, passing through a single family. However, 37 shops started from 2010 attracted by the revitalization movement in the area. Most of the food and beverage related shops are rather recent, indicating that the new comers usually open a café, restaurant or bar for being more profitable. In Ownership, 66% of the shops are rented property and the few that own the building are mainly long-established shops. The majority of the Owners are also residents of the area and show a stronger will to engage in local activities. Within the Shotengai, 61% are members of the Association, yet only 37% of them are new shops, the majority being long-established shops. In contrast, the new generation is more involved in events such as Nominoichi and held collaborations between shops.
3. Network of each shop

After analyzing the general aspects of the shops, the next step was to further examine each of them. The network of each shop was studied through: 1) Products Network indicates the network that comes with products or services that are brought by the owner to the shop and their relation to the origin of fabrication; 2) Background Network explores the background or skills of the owner, such as a previous job, technical formation or birthplace that is reflected in their business; and 3) Front Network concerns the relationship established in front of the shop through the owner, within the shōtengai or the neighborhood such as events, local activities or collaboration between shops.

3.1 Analysis example

Figure 2 shows the analysis example of Marusoh Arikuma (no.57), an oyster bar run by Yoshikazu Hirooka since 2014. Previously, he worked at the Tsukiji Market, which enabled him to apply his knowledge in sea food and his contacts in the selection of the main product according to its origin (Hokkaido, Kobe, Saga, Fukuoka and Nagasaki prefectures) bought at Toyosu market. As a collaboration with producers, he keeps a vegetable stall in front of his store and also sells oyster cream cheese. As a retailer and resident of the area, his network extends in front of the shop by engaging in local activities such as the Association festivals and the common urban farming. Recently he initiated the street market Nominoichi, where craftsman set a stand to sell their products while street shops benefit from the greater flow of clients during the monthly open event.

4. Collective network

Once established how to treat the information collected from the shop owners, the same structure is applied to every interviewed shop and the diagrams are assembled in the map of Shioin Jinja shōtengai in figure 3. Having the network of all shops combined in the map reinforces the shōtengai as a series of entrances to different networks maintained by the shop owners. Also, it is important to note that these connections are more likely to happen in local shops rather than chain stores and the information is reachable due to the scale of the shop and the presence of the owner inside their retail.

Every shop has at least their Product Network represented in the map since this is the basic network shared by all of the shops. Among them, 28 shops are highlighted based on the presence of the owner in the shop and the connection established to different location through products or their skills. The selected study cases have their complete network displayed, which means also the components of Background Network and Front Network. These shops are further discussed when analyzing the patterns of networks observed.
4.1. Products Network
Regarding the products origin, most are made in Japan related to the prefecture where it was produced, but there are also items imported from several countries. The highlighted networks are classified in three groups. The first pattern observed is the shop that has all products sharing the same origin, like cases no.14 and no.15 that have a fixed collaboration with a small producer proportional to the shop’s scale. The second pattern is a shop offering one main product from different origins, where the customer can experience the nuances of its variety according to its origin such as the honey shop (no.57e) and the rice shop from several prefectures in Japan (no.31). The third pattern brings a variety of selected products of the same theme, each strongly linked to its origin, like selling different traditional fermented goods from specific Japanese producers (no.22) or crafts from various local artisans (no.65), in both cases carefully selected by their owner.

4.2 Background Network
Concerning shops related to the owner’s background, even though it tends to be more specific to each shop, another three tendencies are found. It can be related to their previous experience, such as the owner that opens a lunch menu restaurant to sell her homemade overproduction of bread and ham from her cooking school (no.77), or the owner that has studied pastry cooking in France before opening his French bakery (no.48). It can also be related to the owner’s birthplace like the Bangladeshi butcher (no.75) that sells South-Asian take-away such as tandoori chicken. Or it can be an inherited business where an expansion of connections is identified as it is passed down through generations: the current owner of the inherited rice shop (no.31) searched for specific products in order to offer a variety of brown rice from small producers that are not available in regular supermarket. Similar process occurred in the family run Shoin Kaikan (no.90) and Matsuzaki Senbei (no.50).

4.3. Front Network
The Front Network was examined according to the owner’s activities with other shops or with the local community. For example, the owner of the real estate company Shoin Kaikan (no.90) is actively engaging in constructing bonds within the neighborhood by providing common urban farm area, promoting participative projects for local parks and collecting information for a Setagaya guide. In comparison, the owner of Marusho Ariku (no.57) leads the street market Nominoichi, which occupies the street with vendors next to buildings without shop in their ground floor, unifying scattered empty spaces by a single activity. From both cases, it is seen that the Front Network of each shop articulates a spatial management of the shotengai and its interference is not only limited to their shop but extended to the urban quality of the neighborhood. In figure 6, all the connections between shops are traced illustrating the cohesion of the shop owners in the shotengai.

Figure 4. Common urban farm.
Figure 5. Street market Nominoichi.
Figure 6. Front Network between shops in Shoin Jinja shotengai map.
5. Narrative by network

By investigating the network through the shop owners, it is possible to identify a narrative that adds value on the product or the service of the local shop. Product Network describes the narrative of the product itself and emphasize its special characteristics, it relates the history of the object, either its origin or it means of production. Background Network recalls the history of the shop and the profile of the owner, it contributes to the experience provided to the customer inside the shop. Last, through the relations between shops and within the neighborhood, the Front Network affects the spatial management and is an added value to the experience in the shotengai. Both networks behind and in front of the shop require the owner as keystone actor of their shop and the accumulation of them materializes the collective network of Shoin Jinja shotengai. After understanding how different networks foster narratives either related to the shop or to the shotengai, we can also analyze the overlapping of this networks and how the narrative is woven by the relation of them. When the Background Network overlays the Product Network, the narrative inside the shop is enhanced, like the owner of the restaurant (no.61), originally from Kagawa prefecture that sells udon from his hometown. However, in the case of any overlapping with the Front Network, it is the narrative of the shotengai that is intensified. For example, the owner of Study café (no.38) is an interior designer and did the renovation of his own shop as well as four other shops in the street, changing the physical assets of the shotengai. He invited acquaintances who wish to open a store to join them in the area. Therefore, at the same time he got to work on the design projects, the new shops helped increasing the flux of clients which contribute for his own cafe to succeed.

6. Conclusion

Shoin Jinja shotengai stands out thanks to the increasing number of unique local shops that creates an interesting environment with self-identity and changes the dynamics of the street. From the assumption that each local shop discloses a rich network, this study case is chosen to explore how the content of the shops brought by the owner can connect customers to other place and time through their networks. The collective network of the shotengai is clarified by investigating the network of each shop through the origin of the products, the background of the owner and the relation established in front of the shop. By interviewing each shop owner accordingly guided by the same parameters written in the questionnaire, it is possible to trace the current collective network of Shoin Jinja shotengai as it is summarized in Figure 7. The network in front of shop (FN) occurs between the shop owners and shapes Shoin Jinja shotengai today. On the other hand, the network behind each shop leads the shotengai to be expanded in time and place. Through the origin of products (Product Network – PN), Shoin Jinja shotengai is connected to different places in Japan and abroad; and through the owner’s background (Background Network – BN), we can access the history of the shop and the profile of the owner, connecting also to different moment in the past. In the figure, we can observe the patterns of network behind the shop discussed throughout this study. Product Network can link the shop directly to the origin of their products, either single origin or multiples ones. Background Network may connect past time by recalling previous generations of shop owners, or it can also connect both different time and place, as the owner that has past experience or birthplace somewhere else and that characteristic is reflected in their business. Also, PN and BN can happen independently in one shop or it can be overlapped as explained before. Lastly, as the network of a shop depends on the profile of the owner, each experience produced in a local shop is unique according to their own connections to different people, time and space. The possibility to trace the network through the owner leads us to understand the added value to the product in local shops since the clients have a finer experience inside the shop and also expanded to the shotengai. Shotengai in general seems fascinating from the urban design perspective, but it is difficult to acknowledge how to grasp its value. This study explores another dimension of shotengai, focusing on the content and the network of local shops that affects their experience. It could be used to analyze and evaluate other streets by the quality and extension of their networks, which, as seen in Shoin Jinja shotengai, may present it as a factor for the resilience of the commercial street and the dynamic of its neighborhood.