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A Coffee-Scented Space:
Historical, Cultural, and Social Impacts of the Japanese *Kissaten*

Supervised by William W. Kelly,
Professor of Anthropology and Sumitomo Professor of Japanese Studies

A Senior Thesis in East Asian Studies
By Claire A. Williamson, JE '17

Table of Contents

List of Figures...	3
Introduction...	4
The <i>Kissaten</i> : Intersections of Personality, Atmosphere, and Coffee...	14
The <i>Kissaten</i> Master and Their Cult of Personality...	17
Atmosphere, or Creating the Perfect Space...	22
Coffee and <i>Kodawari</i> ...	27
Chain Shops: Convenient <i>Machiawase</i> ...	35
Gender Stereotypes in Coffee Shops...	43
An Educational Experience: The Future of Coffee and <i>Kissaten</i> in Japan...	51
References Cited...	64

List of Figures

- Figure 1: The author in a Kanazawa café...4
- Figure 2: Coffee Bar Tram...14
- Figure 3: Mariko Matsuda...18
- Figure 4: The exterior of The Ocean and the Orgel...22
- Figure 5: Green coffee beans...28
- Figure 6: One of six Starbucks in Kanazawa...35
- Figure 7: The “Blank Trunk” dessert...43
- Figure 8: A Kalita set up...51
- Figure 9: Coffee shop associations by age group...55
- Figure 10: Coffee cup collage...63



Figure 1: The author in a Kanazawa café. Photo by Yoshiaki Shimizu.

Introduction

In the summer of 2015 I interned at the Hokkoku Newspaper in Kanazawa, Japan. The newspaper assigned me to the Society Section, and for two months I shadowed senior reporters at their various news events throughout the city. As an intern, I helped ask questions, take notes and photographs, and occasionally translate between English and Japanese. I experienced a side of Kanazawa that tourists often miss—I was able to interview local artisans, visit flower-arrangement exhibitions, ride the newly-constructed bullet train, meet a professor at Kanazawa University who won the Ig Nobel Prize in Chemistry, interview a minor-league baseball pitcher, and help carry the kiriko lanterns in Nanao City's famous Kiriko Festival. I also spent a lot of time in local coffee shops.

The truth is, whenever I explained the topic of this project to friends and family I was often met with incredulous surprise. Some of this surprise was the product of the misconception that Japan didn't—and doesn't—really *have* a coffee culture, but most stemmed from the fact

that I actually don't drink much coffee. Not only have I been exclusively decaf since childhood (thanks, Mom), but I've always preferred tea to coffee. I've never used coffee to pull an all-nighter, never really frequented Starbucks, still in its peak during my middle school years, and while I've always appreciated the warm, nutty smell of coffee I'd never become fond of its bitter taste. Until the summer of 2015.

I have my immediate supervisor at the newspaper, Nana Morita, to thank for my burgeoning interest in Japanese coffee. The first assignment she asked me to cover—on my own!—was to interview the owners of *curio*, a Seattle-style espresso joint popular with tourists and locals alike. The husband and wife duo, Sol Gallago and Yuko Otoku, kindly welcomed my fumbling questions as they introduced me to the history behind their store and how coffee could actually taste, well, good. This was my first experience with Third Wave coffee, but not my last.

After writing that first article, not only did I become a regular at *curio*, but I started to branch out and visit other coffee shops near the Hokkoku Newspaper office, which was conveniently located in the bustling downtown Korinbo neighborhood. Not only was I in search of that special, “local” joint, but most of these shops offered excellently priced (read: inexpensive) lunch sets that I could afford on my student budget. As an intern, rather than a full-time employee, my hours were much more flexible than my seniors—rather than quickly eating a *konbini bentou* (convenience store lunch box) at my desk, I was able to take an hour or so and explore the side streets off Korinbo's main thoroughfare. As I became closer to my fellow reporters, I began to invite them along for lunch. One such lunch, which happened to be just my friend Yoshiaki Shimizu and me, produced a curious conversation.

After pulling out his phone and taking the photo at the top of this section (Figure 1), Shimizu said the following:

“Claire, you suit this kind of place. I, on the other hand, am more suited to a bar.”

Naturally I found this statement more than a little confusing. What did he mean by “suit?” Did I suite a café because I was American? Because I was a woman? Why did he, on the other hand, think that he *didn’t* suit a fairly standard café? Because masculine work socialization in Japan is often centered around boisterous drinking? I ran through questions like these as I thought about how best to respond—“thank you” didn’t seem like the right follow-up to that declaration. But at the same time, Shimizu’s opinion didn’t seem completely unfounded. Looking around the coffee shop, the majority of the customers *were* women. My original conception for this thesis was to explore whether or not men and women did view and use coffee shops differently in Japan—whether that initial observation was merely a coincidence or indeed indicative of broader consumer trends. I wanted to research who came to coffee shops, when, and why.

Even though I envisioned some great feminist critique of coffee shops in Japan, as my supervising professor, William Kelly, warned me, anthropological field work was apt to change mid-project. As I spoke to Masters and Mamas, baristas, and customers I gradually realized that a more compelling trend was the decline of the historic Japanese coffee shop, the *kissaten*, in favor of more trendy and contemporary “Third Wave” coffee shops, particularly amongst the younger customer base. Throughout the six weeks I gradually adjusted my research to reflect the new questions that arose in regards to this demographic shift.

This thesis reflects the results of my background research on Japanese consumerism and coffee history, personal observations gathered from my experiences as a customer in the Japanese coffee shop scene, the more qualitative results of my questionnaire, and the conclusions

drawn from the various interviews I conducted, both formal and informal, throughout my stay in Japan.

This ethnographic thesis is broken into four distinct sections. I will first describe the history of coffee shops in Japan and the significant social role they played in shaping Japanese modernism. I will dive deeply into *kissaten* culture, identifying and exploring the three factors, the Master, the atmosphere, and the coffee, that make *kissaten* a unique cultural institution. I will then look at the role that chain shops play in shaping the coffee drinking experience, and how that experience contrasts to that of a *kissaten*. In the third section, I identify the various gender stereotypes present in Japanese coffee culture and the impact these stereotypes have on the gender disparity at the staff and leadership level in coffee shops. Finally, I look at the necessity of creating a customer base that is educated about coffee and how Third Wave coffee shops in Japan are going about it. This last section also looks at the generational gaps, using data from my questionnaire to look at how *kissaten* better fill the needs of the older generations, rather than millennials and other young professionals in Japan. The section concludes with a brief look at the influence *kissaten* have had internationally and how the changing social structure in Japan, as well as the equally changing coffee culture, might affect the future of *kissaten* in the years to come.

A Brief Categorization of Coffee Waves

The words “First Wave,” “Second Wave,” and “Third Wave” were coined by Trish Skeie (now Rothgeb) in a 2002 article written for The Flamekeeper to describe “three movements influencing...specialty coffee” (Skeie 2002). These semi-overlapping “waves” are both methods and philosophies, influencing everything from how coffee is prepared and enjoyed to business

models and even which countries are sourced (and *how* those beans are grown) for coffee beans (Chataro 2013, 66). These waves are closely intertwined, with the conventions of one wave developing in response to those of the one prior. Japanese coffee and *kissaten* developed within this framework as well, even if at first glance they appeared to exist in a separate realm than coffee and coffee shops in the West.

First Wave coffee, which ran from the latter half of the 1800s to approximately the 1960s (Chataro 2013, 66) was the wave that made coffee a beverage for popular daily drinking through revolutionary packaging and marketing at the corporate level (Skeie 2002). Vacuum packaging, which kept coffee beans fresher for longer, and instant coffee, which was invented in Chicago by Japanese scientist Dr. Satoru Kato (White 2012, 109) paved the way for brands like Folgers, Maxwell House, and Nescafe (Chataro 2013, 67) to become American household staples. In Japan, instant and canned coffee was (and is) marketed with masculine names like “Boss” or “President” (White 2012, 110); even today American actor Tommy Lee Jones’s haggard, unsmiling, and stereotypically taciturn face stares out at consumers from Boss Coffee vending machines and banner ads on trains.

Second Wave coffee, which picked up where First Wave Coffee left off in the 1960s and continuing to 2000 (Chataro 2013, 67), arose in response to criticism of First Wave coffee (Craft Beverage Jobs 2016). The big brands of First Wave coffee were accused of making “bad coffee commonplace...low quality instant solubles, [and who] forced prices to an all time low” (Skeie 2002). Second Wave coffee, of which Starbucks is an iconic, albeit massive, example, is credited with elevating coffee to a more artisanal beverage, as well as introducing the corresponding vocabulary (such as “latte,” and “cappuccino”) into everyday vernacular (Skeie 2002). Coffee drinking became about the experience, and Starbucks in particular mastered the art of packaging

“the things that the broad [middle class] wanted and thought it needed;” (Simon 2009, 3) things that included knowledge about where the coffee beans came from and how they were prepared. That desire for knowledge and the feeling of cultural superiority defined Second Wave coffee as a more “artisanal” experience (Skeie 2002).

Third Wave coffee, which has continued from 2000 through to the present day (Chataro 2013, 68) is a sort of “alternative” Second Wave coffee experience. With the advent and rapid expansion of Starbucks and other such “hyper” Second Wave coffee store brands, a certain degree of homogenization and marketing began to eclipse the initial focus on the coffee itself (Craft Beverage Jobs 2016). Traditions of Second Wave coffee became overly rigid—one could *only* use a certain type of bean in an espresso drink, for instance—so a large aspect of Third Wave coffee is constant experimentation and “an exercise in avoiding absolutes” (Skeie 2002). The emphasis on the terroir of the coffee bean that began in Second Wave coffee reasserted itself so “consumers can trace the heritage of their favorite coffee to the very farm from which it was harvested” (Craft Beverage Jobs 2016). Third Wave coffee shops are typically small, independent affairs that often roast their coffee beans in-house, and Japan has plenty of these types of coffee shops. Third Wave coffee shops also take up the substantial role of coffee educators, training their customers about coffee beans, sustainability, and of course the pleasures of high-quality coffee.

Kissaten, although they developed during the periods of First and Second Wave coffee on the timeline, feel like neither. *Kissaten* and their Masters have always valued the quality of their coffee and the importance of crafting the beverage by hand, even when the mass-marketed instant and canned coffee around them made their marks through sheer quantity and convenience. When Starbucks and other Second Wave coffee shops began to craft and market

coffee drinking as an “experience,” *kissaten* had already proliferated into dozens of niche genres centered around various coffee-drinking experiences (albeit often of the musical variety).

Kissaten have always embodied elements from all three coffee “waves,” and in that regard have always stood apart from them. I would hesitate to categorize *kissaten* as true members of any of the coffee “waves.” Instead, they are more like the element connecting all three schools of thought together.

Terminology and Methodology

I would like to briefly note the various terms used to distinguish among the different types of coffee shops referenced throughout this thesis: coffee shop, Third Wave coffee shop, café, chain shop, coffee stand, and *kissaten*. Coffee shop is the broadest way I will refer to places that sell coffee as their main beverage, typically when I’m referring to coffee shops in general and not referencing one genre (or specific shop) in particular. It is also the umbrella term under which all the others—Third Wave coffee shop, café, chain shop, coffee stand, and *kissaten*—fall. Third Wave coffee shop, then, refers to the genre of coffee shop that is considered to be “Third Wave” in terms of its coffee philosophy, approach to customer service, and general shop aesthetic. Cafés refer to establishments that serve a variety of food options alongside their coffee. While the typical coffee shop might have snacks, such as baked goods, for sale, a café will have more substantial offerings for a light lunch or dinner; they could *also* be Third Wave in terms of their coffee. The term chain shop refers to a brand that has a series of stores that are managed by one corporate body and have identical (or nearly identical) menus and décor, whether across a specific region, nationwide, or internationally. Coffee stands are small spaces that sell coffee to go and do not offer customer seating or food items. Finally, *kissaten*, the main

subject of this work, will naturally be elaborated on from many angles including its socio-historical relevancy, the current role it plays in shaping Japanese coffee culture, and how it compares to the other types of coffee shop mentioned above. At this point I will too-briefly define a *kissaten* as a genre of coffee shop unique to Japan whose owners pioneered coffee as an individualistic art form.

This past summer, thanks to the generosity of the Robert C. Bates Summer Traveling Fellowship, I was able to visit Japan for six weeks to research coffee shops first-hand. I began my research on June 1 and ended on July 14, 2016. The first four weeks were in Kanazawa while the final two were in Tokyo in order to get a balance between a smaller, regional city and large metropole. I prepared by researching Japan's long and prosperous coffee history and created a preliminary list of shops to visit which I culled from "best of" Japanese coffee lists I found online and from my previous experiences. I also crafted a questionnaire to hand out to customers, designed to pick out common traits associated with coffee shops, why they chose to visit coffee shops and with whom, as well as the good and bad points of coffee shops overall. This questionnaire accounted for gender and age so I could sort responses into cohesive social demographics. I conducted my research in the style of participant-observation, which meant that I both attempted to insert myself fully into the experience of being a customer at a coffee shop in Japan (which I could do by simply going in to purchase coffee), but also actively observing the customers and workers around me, asking questions, listening to conversations, and taking daily notes of my observations. This method has many benefits, including the ability to both experience the phenomenon being studied as well conduct impartial observations. The greatest restriction to this method is, of course, time: I was only able to spend six weeks in the field. My

opportunities to truly establish myself as a regular at coffee shops was limited, but what I was unable to achieve in depth I replaced with the breadth of shops I visited. The number of people I was able to approach with my questionnaire was also limited, and given a longer period of time in Japan I would have been able to increase my sample size. That being said, despite my time limitations I was able to establish strong relationships with many coffee shops, as well as their customers and staff, and did become a regular at several.

Of course this thesis could not have happened without the support of many people. I would like to thank, in no particular order, my parents (who agreed to lose me to a summer in Japan *yet again*), Professor William Kelly who not only agreed to sponsor this thesis, but guided me through my first foray into anthropological field work and the writing and editing process, the Bates Fellowship for funding the entire experience (including a rare and too-expensive copy of *Drift* magazine), the Yale East Asian Library and librarians, Tracey Camp, Koichi Hiroe, my two host families, the Takata family in Kanazawa and the Arai family in Tokyo, and everyone who granted me an interview, online or otherwise, including the fabulous duo Chataro Mameoh, Eric Tessier, Hengtee Lim, Naoya Akagawa, and the owners and workers of the following forty-nine shops (whether they knew it or not): About Life Coffee Brewers, Aoyama Ichibankan, Arise Coffee Entangle, Arise Coffee Entangle, Bear Pond Espresso, Blanket Café, Blue Bottle Coffee-Kiyosumi, Blue Monday, Cafe de Charmy, Cafe de L'Ambre, Cafe Obscura, Cafe Takeya, Cobi Coffee, Coffee Bar Tram, Coffeehouse Nishiya, Coffee Ron, Collabon, curio, Fuglen, Good Day Chai Stand, Green Bar, Haden Books, Hickory, Higashide Coffee, Hoshino Coffee-Sayamashi, Ishikawamon, Kanazawa Coffee Shop Honten, Katsura Coffee, Kotomi, Kotori, Latteest, Mine Drip Coffee, Nazoya Café, Oh Life Delicious Book Café, Safu Vege, Sarutahiko Coffee, Starbucks, Streamer Coffee Company, Tachibana Coffee, The Local, The Roastery by Nozy, The

Theater Coffee, Toranomom Koffee, transitbeans, Tsutaya. Umi to Orugoru, Urara, and Wagashi Kurogi.



Figure 2: Coffee Bar Tram, a *kissaten* in the Ebisu neighborhood of Tokyo. Photo by the author.

The *Kissaten*: Intersections of Personality, Atmosphere, and Coffee

There is an unexpected connection between Yale and Japanese coffee: the first coffee house in Japan was founded by a Yale alumnus named Tei Ei-kei. Also known by his Japanese name of Tsurukichi Nishimura, Tei Ei-kei was born in Nagasaki in 1859 to a Japanese father, but was adopted and primarily raised by a man named Tei Ei-nei, a Taiwanese secretary in Japan's Foreign Ministry (White 2012, 9). At age sixteen, Tei Ei-kei was sent to study at Yale but he was unable to complete his four years of study and left the school in 1879, after only two years. According to White, Tei Ei-kei learned to enjoy coffee while in America and, while passing through London on his way back to Japan, Tei Ei-kei familiarized himself with London's coffeehouses, the "penny universities" where people of all social classes could mingle and exchange ideas for the price of a single cup of coffee (Miller 2003, 118; White 2012, 9).

After returning to Japan and weathering a series of personal tragedies, Tei Ei-kei opened up the *Kahiichakan*, Japan's first coffee house, in 1888 (White 2012, 9). Much like the

communal, club-like atmospheres of London's coffee houses, the *Kahiichakan* was more like a social gentlemen's club than what is considered today to be a coffee shop. Tei Ei-kei provided his exclusively male customers with "newspapers, comfortable leather chairs, billiard tables, writing desks and supplies, baths, and nap rooms," and likely even more than that, for the price of a single cup of coffee (White 2012, 10). Tei Ei-kei created the popular center for exchanging knowledge that he envisioned, but unfortunately he couldn't continue to finance his elaborate plan and went out of business just a few years later, in 1893. Right now there is only a small monument in Tokyo standing where his beloved *Kahiichakan* once was, memorializing the man who first brought the coffee shop to Japan (White 2012, 11).

The rest of Tei Ei-kei's personal story is less than uplifting. In brief, he ended up returning to America and passing away in poverty and obscurity (White 2012, 10). But Tei Ei-kei started a phenomenon in Japan—coffee and coffee shops—that has proved remarkably resilient, weathering wartime and post-war shortages, dramatic changes in gender relationships, family structures, and Japan's ever-changing position in the global economy. But of course, Tei Ei-kei's *Kahiichakan* and the modern *kissaten* are quite different: coffee spaces in Japan have shifted from spaces designed to showcase Western, "modern" fashions to spaces that have instead co-opted these previously Western items and made them uniquely Japanese. Additionally, as social needs in Japan have evolved, so too has the coffee shop, slowly transforming from this first *Kahiichakan* to the *kissaten* and other contemporary coffee shops of today.

The *kissaten*, of course, didn't appear out of nowhere, nor was its development from the boy's club-esque *Kahiichakan* to neighborhood staple a linear one. Adaptations and adoptions in technology, as well as rapidly shifting social roles for men and women, not to mention class

structure, during the Meiji (1868- 1912) and Taisho (1913- 1926) eras greatly impacted coffee shops and cafes. This jumble of change—a “central symbol” of Japan’s jump into a Western-esque modernity—converged on the café and the coffee shop, eventually leading to the *kissaten* as it is understood today (Tipton 2000, 119).

One of the most important roles the café began to play, starting in the 1910s and 1920s, was as a public area to have one’s own private, personal space as well as a place where men and women, who were embracing new freedoms as part of their modern lifestyle, could meet and socialize. Men, now working outside of the home in factories or offices rather than in agriculture, could use cafes to relax in solitude from the burdens of work; another group of migrants, recently moved to the city from the country, could use a café to commiserate with others from their home region in relative privacy (Francks 2009, 110; White 2012 16, 20). To be private, even if in small groups, while in public was somewhat of a revelation and an indicator of modernity (White 2012, 44). Even today, there are few places in Japan where it is completely socially acceptable to be alone for long periods of time—back in the Meiji and Taisho eras it was a novelty. As White describes, “time in the café had a slippery quality: life inside and outside the café might be on a very different clock” and certainly cafes during these eras provided a relatively inexpensive place for its customers to relax and adjust to their ever-increasing work-life demands (57). As options for transportation proliferated as well, cafes and coffee shops began to crop up near stations to fill in the gaps in time between arrival and departure (White 2012, 29).

At the same time, the clientele of these cafes and coffee shops was also changing from the (mostly male) workforce. As women began to frequent cafes they changed public patterns in socialization. “Modern” men and women—modern, here, still has the nuance of Western—gathered together in cafes and coffee shops which were fast becoming “miniature democracies”

where various social classes could convene (White 2012, 28). During the 1930s, these *moga* and *mobo*, slang terms for “modern girl” and “modern boy” respectively, strolled down the streets of Ginza, a popular shopping district, to window shop and eat together in public (Tipton 2000, 123). Shops offered desserts to attract female customers, and these so-called milk halls (ミルクホール) offered spaces for men and women to eat Western food and drink coffee together (White 2012, 43). These establishments allowed men and women to interact “easily, cheaply [and] directly,” providing opportunities for both platonic and romantic social interaction with an ease that geisha could not (Tipton 2000, 128).

Gradually cafes and coffee shops in Japan became—although they didn’t lose Western influences—less “Western” and more “Japanese.” Japanese cafes and coffee shops never had the same atmosphere of burgeoning revolution that their European or American counterparts did (White 2012, 26), and the types of shops available and their natures soon adjusted themselves to Japanese life accordingly. What at first was Western-exotic soon became wholly Japanese—coffee, jazz, and even the notion of the café itself became subsumed into daily life and culture through a concept called *wakon yousai* (和魂洋才) or “Japanese spirit, Western technology” (White 2012, 31). Today there are a variety of types of coffee shop: the café, the chain shop, the coffee stand, and the *kissaten*. Within *kissaten* there are *jazz kissa*, *junkissa*, *kissaten* that are no more than five seats, *kissaten* where only those who are serious about coffee go, and even *kissaten* that have existed, like Café Paulista, for over one hundred years. But all these varieties of *kissaten* have three things in common: the Masters and Mamas that run them, their distinct atmospheres, and, of course, their coffee.

The *Kissaten* Master and Their Cult of Personality



Figure 3: Mariko Matsuda makes a cup of coffee with a siphon at her shop, Urara. Photo by the author.

The first time I walked into Urara, Mariko Matsuda was standing behind the counter and chatting animatedly with the other customers in her *kissaten*. As soon as I sat down, she bustled over with a glass of water and a menu and promptly launched into a conversation about where I was from, what I was doing in Japan, and, my, wasn't my Japanese good! She was a force of nature, albeit a warm, inviting one. Stepping into Urara felt like stepping into a *kissaten* my grandmother would run, where everyone was welcome and everyone was treated like a member of the family. The handwritten sign outside the front door proclaimed that while coffee was 450 yen, warm hospitality was free. Aptly, the word *urara* itself means “warm and comfortable” (Field Note 6/6/16).

The other regulars seated at the counter or nearby tables chatted with Matsuda about the flowers they were growing in their garden, the weather that day, or the newest art exhibition on Urara's walls (in June it was a collection of vintage and antique clocks). Even as a newcomer, I was naturally enveloped into the conversation, as if I'd been coming there a long time. Matsuda seemed to have a sixth sense for knowing when customers wanted to talk or when they wanted to be left alone with their paper, their cigarette, and their cup of coffee. Either way, she constantly checked in with everyone to refill their water glass or ask if they wanted another cup of coffee.

At Urara, Matsuda is what is called the *Mama* (men are called *Masters*), or the owner and proprietor of the *kissaten*. She decides the hours, the décor, the menu, and brews each cup of coffee herself. Her personality shapes the space and the pleasure of her company is the reason regulars return week after week, just as much as they do for the coffee.

The concept of a teacher, or *sensei*, hearkens back to most traditional Japanese crafts and professions. They are considered to be people who have perfected and elevated their chosen craft, as well as founts of knowledge about their specialty (and even life itself). But rather than the traditional *sensei*, “a new word was needed to describe the owner of a [coffee shop] who is responsible for everything the shop is,” (White 2012, 66) and that is the Master. Kakuzo Okakura, writing at the midpoint of the twentieth century in *The Book of Tea*, says that “not only in the usages of polite society, but also in the arrangement of all our domestic details, do we feel the presence of the [master]” (1964, 62). The sense is that they are people whose every move, every minute adjustment to their technique, has a purpose, even if it's not widely understood. Masters aren't limited just to *kissaten*—Third Wave coffee shops and cafes have them too—but it is in the *kissaten* that their presence is felt most strongly. It was the *kissaten* Master that first elevated coffee from a simple beverage to a work of art in Japan, and their desire to create the

best cup of coffee has resulted in countless new brewing equipment and techniques. Their *kissaten* are the Masters' domains, and within them they are dictators of the space, socialization, and, of course, the coffee.

From the first moment a customer walks through the door, the Master sets the tone of their stay. Customers are greeted with an “*irasshaimase*,” a traditional welcome, or perhaps a simple *konnichiwa* if they're a regular. The amount of conversation after that, once the coffee has been ordered and prepared, varies wildly. There are chatty Masters like Mama Matsuda at Urara, those that are more content to let guests set the amount of conversation (Field Note 6/21/16), and those that wrap themselves up so deeply into the process of brewing coffee that even to speak to them while they're pouring feels like an unforgivable interruption of their concentration (Field Note 7/3/16). Ultimately, you have to find a *kissaten* where the temperament of the Master suits what you need as a customer: if you wanted solitary peace and quiet, Urara wouldn't always be the best choice. Someone might initially be drawn to a *kissaten* for its décor, its location, or a word of mouth recommendation from a friend, but what keeps them coming back is the Master.

Since there are so many *kissaten* in Japan (in the 1980s there were over 150,000), starting in the post-war period they began to diversify into various genres, using “gimmicks” in order to “distinguish one establishment from the next” (Hani 2003; Trucco 1983). Music *kissa*, book *kissa*, *kissaten* for conducting business or for students (Hani 2003) all erupted during this period and continued to diversify through the 1980s. But Masters, too, become a part of each shop's distinguishing brand, and the reputation of one can act as a strong allure to customers. For instance, the mere description of Katsuyuki Tanaka, the enigmatic Master of Bear Pond Espresso in Tokyo, as “a mysterious man making mysterious coffee” was enough to entice me to make the

trip out to his shop (Field Note 7/8/26). Even between Masters themselves, certain individuals have reputations, either for good coffee or excellent service (Field Note 7/2/16).

Standing behind their counters, Masters have the non-stop task of both brewing coffee and facilitating communication between their regulars and any new customers, often a delicate balancing act, and it's the Masters themselves that are most critical of how well this harmony is maintained. "The most difficult thing [as a Master] is remembering what customers like," the Master of Higashide Coffee in Kanazawa reported in a magazine article (Kikuchi 2016, 190). It's not just their faces, but what they like to drink and how they like to drink it in terms of temperature or sweetness (Kikuchi 2016). This is not a singular phenomenon—Mr. Akagawa, a latte artist at The Theater Coffee, was heavily complimentary of another *kissaten*'s Master because "he can remember a customer's face and order after only meeting them once" (Field Note 7/2/16). Mr. Akagawa then went on to describe his coffee shop vision, saying that he wants to create a place where it is easy for customers to communicate with each other, as well as the Master; where customer A and customer B and the Master behind the counter have a triangular relationship of mutual conversation and community (Field Note 7/2/16).

Other Masters prioritize their regulars above this sort of open-communication. At Higashide Coffee, the only *kissaten* I visited that was completely unreceptive to my burgeoning research, it is the regulars that hold court at the counter. The five regulars seated in a row at the counter chatted with each other, smoked, read the paper, and exchanged banter with Master Higashide himself. When one left, another seamlessly took their seat; in contrast, other customers were left mostly to their own devices, and my own questions were functionally ignored (Field Note 6/6/16). Though most Masters were not quite as standoffish, some are certainly more selective in whom they speak to than others, preferring the company of their

regulars or the solace of brewing a cup of coffee to small talk. While White cites some of her sources as describing *kissaten* Masters as *kiza*, which means “odd” or “affected” (White 2012, 74), this “oddness” is just part of the allure. While some audiences certainly would view Masters, fundamentally people who are in the *service* industry, who intentionally ignore a portion of their customers as “odd,” it’s just a part of their cult of personality that customers buy into with a cup of coffee when they enter the Master’s space.

Atmosphere, or Creating the Perfect Space



Figure 4: The exterior of The Ocean and the Orgel in Noto, Ishikawa. Photo by the author.

One day during my stay in Kanazawa, my host mother decided to take me to *her* favorite café, a place called Umi to Orogoru (海とオルゴール), The Ocean and the Orgel (“orgel” comes from the Danish word for music box) located in Notojima, Ishikawa. Notojima is a small island in the north of Ishikawa, tucked within the curve of the peninsula. By car it’s a little over

an hour away from Kanazawa, a scenic drive that winds through the mountains and along the coastline.

The Ocean and the Orgel is also situated directly on the coastline—quite literally the ocean is mere feet from the edge of the building. The Ocean and the Orgel gives off a strong impression: the building itself is completely painted pastel pink with white trim. The front is pleasantly cluttered with potted plants; rosebushes climb up a wicker trellis that arches over the front steps. Two blue dolphins frolic over the store's sign. To the left, in the outdoor seating area, a darker pink umbrella that shades a white picnic table flutters gently in the wind. It feels a bit like a Barbie vacation house.

The inside is no less soft-hued: indeed, one of the first reactions I wrote in my notebook was “pastel-colored dreamland” (Field Note 6/15/16). Light, lacy curtains fluttered from windows and doorways. Herbs and wildflowers were drying in bunches from the rafters while the rest of the wall space was covered with pictures of dolphins, artistic ripples of water, and sunsets. A huge dolphin statue greeted visitors as soon as they walked in while the sea breeze wafting from the back of the main room beckoned visitors further in; a small herb garden grew outside on the slope leading down to the water. The wait staff all wore pastel pink chef's jackets, though the owner, Satomi Sakashita, was wearing a more casual teal T-shirt. As I spoke to her over a cup of coffee and homemade herb tisane, it became clear that his space embodied all Ms Sakashita's hopes and dreams for her customers—how she hoped they would feel inside the space she created and the emotions she wanted to inspire. That is *funiki* (雰囲気)—aura and ambience.

Funiki is more than simply saying a place is “bright” or “dim,” “welcoming,” or “unwelcoming.” In large part, *funiki* is about how an owner or customer wants to portray

themselves to others, how they want a space to make them feel—what emotions they want it to inspire or enhance, or to complement the purpose of their visit. For many owners and customers alike, this ambience is more important than the coffee itself, even in Third Wave coffee shops.

“No one goes comes back to a café that does not suit his taste in both senses [coffee and atmosphere],” and I, too, can attest to the fact that a bad experience at a coffee shop, even if the coffee was perfectly fine, would prevent me from returning (White 2012, 170).

There are two mindsets when creating a space with memorable *funiki*: the Master either creates their ideal space or creates a space with their customers in mind. Ms Sakashita, for instance, falls in the latter group. She said that she wants her customers to experience a “time slip” when they visit her shop—and to that end, she picked the name “orgel” because music boxes are where you store precious trinkets that provoke feelings of nostalgia when you look at them. The natural feeling of her shop—the flowers, the open windows, the effort to bring nature inside—was all crafted with the safekeeping and care of the customer in mind (Field Note 6/15/16). This thoughtfulness isn’t surprising: for years Ms Sakashita worked at Kagaya onsen, a resort that is consistently ranked first or second across Japan for the quality of its hospitality. Other Masters design spaces that fit their aesthetic, and their customer base self-selects to people who also share their sensibilities.

While every coffee shop will have its own unique atmosphere, there are some commonalities between the *funiki* in *kissaten* when compared to other more contemporary Third Wave coffee shops. *Kissaten* have an image that is older and smoke-filled, cafes are brighter spaces that cater to a younger crowd or couples, and coffee shops are where people who are serious about coffee go (Field Note 6/9/16). Another barista, a young woman who worked at The Local, a trendy coffee shop in Shibuya, described the difference between atmospheres in terms of

time. To her, *kissaten* were spaces that stayed open until late in the evening, where you could spend a few hours relaxing, while in other coffee shops you spent only a half hour or so (Field Note 7/2/16).

Even though coffee shops in Japan fragment into many niches including artistic cafes, music cafes, cat cafes, and book cafes, just to name a few, I've found that there are some atmospheric consistencies. *Kissaten* tend to be smaller, dark wood paneled, hole-in-the-wall joints, secreted away on second floors, in basements, or side streets. They're usually dominated by a counter; the space behind it will be filled with teacups or old CD's. The speakers will play some sort of mellow jazz or classical music. The closest American comparison might be the neighborhood dive bar. More contemporary cafes, coffee stands, and Third Wave coffee shops tend to be brighter, filled with natural light or bright fluorescents, and more spacious. There might be a counter, but rather than sitting at it, it's often just to allow customers a view of the coffee-making process. The walls are covered in quirky artwork, but the rest of the space is frequently minimalistic. The speakers might play anything from jazz to muted pop music. The color themes are light wood contrasted with grey concrete (Goldberg and Velasco 2016, 100-109). They are cool without trying to be so. In the end, it is this elusive sense of "cool" that matters to customers even more than the quality of the shop's coffee.

"I pick the cafes and coffee shops [I go to] based on their atmosphere rather than their beans," said one young woman having coffee with her friend in Curio. "Curio doesn't feel like Kanazawa" she added later in the conversation (Field Note 6/19/16). A space that is different than the places a customer usually frequents—something that is unusual and alluring—is what customers seek out in their coffee shops. Curio's owners, Sol and Yuko, designed and renovated the interior of the espresso bar themselves, creating their ideal space (Interview 6/11/15). To the

two friends chatting animatedly over cinnamon or mocha lattes, the space that Sol and Yuko designed is like another world, a place that they couldn't find anywhere else in their lives—and also something that doesn't feel Japanese. Going to a coffee shop is about entering someone else's space, but also “creating your own world” (Field Note 6/17/16). White records one informant as saying that “she must have a place that is different from her home, and it must have sophistication...an escape from her cluttered home and office” (2012, 160). A comparable phrase in Japanese is *kibuntenkan* (気分転換) which is the “change of pace” that customers look for. Of course it's possible to make coffee at home, but there's something special about going out for your coffee. Meoh Kawabe, for example, described her father's coffee habits by saying that rather than making coffee himself he goes to a *kissaten* to smoke, read a book, and take his time to drink coffee from his own special cup—all in “the Master's world” (Interview 9/26/16). Atmosphere is about separating yourself from daily life and elevating the coffee drinking experience in some way. Respondents to my survey gave various reasons why they often went to coffee shops: to relax (リラックスできる), to do nothing (のんびりする), and to have a change of pace were common answers. The opportunity for a “borrowed community” or for solitude are other possible reasons people frequent coffee shops, but there are as many reasons as there are people and moods (White 2012, 149, 165).

Nakamichi Masahito, the owner and Master of transitbeans, built his four-seat shop into a ground floor room of his own house. He ranked the priorities of his shop as *funiki* first, followed by facilitating conversations, and *finally* the coffee because “he wants his customers to relax first and foremost” (Field Note 6/8/16). A worker at Café Obscura, a shop tucked into a side street in the Setagaya area of Tokyo, said that their shop's goal was to be “quiet, a place to relax, and an atmosphere that stays the same every time you come;” nowhere did she mention their coffee,

even though it *is* delicious (Field Note 7/5/16). Ultimately the implication is that even sub-par coffee can be tolerated with the right atmosphere. In other words, it wouldn't be possible to get customers through to doors to even try quality coffee if the atmosphere weren't first inviting.

This is not to say that *kissaten* don't have atmosphere. Instead, one could say they have an atmosphere of *un*-atmosphere, in other words an un-studied, un-crafted charm of their own. A charm of pleasant cluttered knick-knacks, one too many potted plants, and wooden counters shiny with years of use. *Kissaten* have an atmosphere of cozy clutter that appears natural, even though it was likely meticulously planned. "Space is important," affirmed Shuntaro Kawashima, the head barista of Blue Bottle Coffee in Kiyosumi; his store is for people who "want to have fun with their coffee" (Field Note 6/30/16). Ultimately the importance of atmosphere boils down to that point—having fun with your coffee and the fact that different types of spaces inspire different demographics of people. What someone in their mid-twenties needs and wants from a space is different than someone in their mid-forties, fifties, or sixties because each group is in a different stage of their family, their career, and their awareness of themselves. But the value of the coffee in *kissaten* matters more than the inherent photogenic aesthetic of the space. Once you're past a certain age, there's no pressure to be "effortlessly cool" anymore, and you can simply go to enjoy the coffee.

Coffee and *Kodawari*



Figure 5: Green coffee beans in the middle of being sorted by hand. Photo by the author.

The final piece to the three-part formula that comprises a *kissaten* is, of course, the coffee. At Blanket Café in Kanazawa, the process from bean to cup is arduous and all done by hand. The unroasted beans, which have a waxy texture and smell “green” like a cut flower stem, are laid out on a baking tray where Shinichi Sasaki and his wife, Kumiko Sasaki spend hours every day sorting them for imperfections. Sasaki efficiently runs his fingers through the tray, dividing the expanse of beans into four or five “rows,” like panning for gold, which he examines quickly, tossing out the imperfect beans. Beans that are too small, have black spots from insect damage, or those that are disfigured are discarded—maybe 10-20 percent of the total amount. Once Sasaki goes through the tray once, he reshuffles the beans and does it again. Only after that small portion of coffee beans has been picked over several times does he move on to the *next* chunk of beans. Going through their weekly stock takes hours, and the two of them have to make time for sorting when the shop is slow or after hours. Once the beans are roasted (and Blanket Café roasts their beans daily) they’re sorted *again* (Field Note 6/7/16). Naturally this sorting

process must be repeated for each type of bean that Blanket Café sells—and they have about five or six types of beans on hand. The resulting cup of coffee is one that has only perfect beans for the best possible taste, as well as one that is uniquely Blanket Café's.

As with the Masters themselves and the singular spaces they created, their coffee is full of personality and *kodawari*—indeed, it's dependent on it. *Kodawari* (こだわり) is a word without an exact translation in English. Various dictionaries define it as “fastidiousness” or “pickiness” but its nuance is more one of seeking absolute perfection. It's an attention to detail that's grounded in the service relationship—a Master makes a cup of coffee with *kodawari* because he's seeking to serve you the best cup of coffee he can, and at the same time the customer trusts that the product he pays for and receives is indeed so (White 2012, 68). Blanket Café's Sasaki sorting each bean by hand is an example of *kodawari*, as is Jun Matsumoto, the Master of the incredibly hip ARISE Coffee Entangle, tasting each cup of coffee with a spoon before serving it to customers (Field Note 6/30/16), or iced coffee being poured over cubes frozen from coffee themselves so the taste won't get diluted as they melt (Field Note 7/12/16), or even the detailed temperature and timing measurements Nakamichi Masahito of transitbeans takes during roasting to ensure each roast is consistent from day to day (Field Note 6/8/16). Each task is fundamentally a guarantee that the Master cares about the customer, but also a sign of his knowledge base about coffee and his abilities.

Kodawari is also as much about the skill of the Master as it is a mindset. “You should be able to change the blend based on the person. That's a pro's job,” (Clubism 2016, 52). So said Toshio Sakaguchi, the gruff-faced Master of Katsura Coffee in Kanazawa. When I visited his shop, it was clear that he held himself, as well as other Masters, to high standards. Not only could Master Sakaguchi perform all the maintenance on his vintage roasting and grinding

machines (he had several from the 1960s and 70s, each from a different country) himself, but when he takes a sip of a blend of coffee he can identify each type of bean used—that, to him, is what defines a “pro” (Field Note 6/10/16). Other Masters said that they need to be able to make many types of coffees, even when using the same base bean, or sense the emotional state and fatigue-levels of their customers at first glance in order to better customize their individual beverage (Field Note 6/8/16). This strictness extends to the shop’s employees as well. One day, while I was sitting in Blanket Café, another young woman sat down at the counter a few seats over. As it turned out, she was currently apprenticing at a shop called Capek (pronounced cha-pek); in effect she is the latest link in the store’s 30-year coffee pedigree. When I asked her about her role, she said that she was still “in practice” and not allowed to serve any customers yet, and wouldn’t be able to until the Master said she could, no matter how many months or years that took (Field Note 6/23/16).

Ultimately, however, a Master’s blend is the strongest indicator of his skill and “speaks of his—or her—mastery of taste, color, and weight of beans” (White 2012, 115). While most Third Wave coffee shops feature “single origin” beans, where each cup of coffee is made with one specific bean from one specific country, each *kissaten* has its own blend. Sometimes called an “original blend” or a “house blend,” they’re often what I default to ordering to best get a sense of the shop’s flavor profile: blends are essentially taking the best features of various beans and experimenting about how to best combine them into one drink that best comprises the Master’s sense of “delicious” (Field Note 6/7/16). Master Sakaguchi’s blend at Katsura Coffee, for instance, is a four-bean blend that is deep and aromatic, almost too strong to be pleasant but falling just inside that boundary; a blend that is just as strong-willed and assured of itself as Master Sakaguchi himself.

Speaking about coffee in terms of personality is not unusual when speaking about *kissaten*. Though the misconception is that all coffee will taste the same (and perhaps this is a consequence of chain stores, like Starbucks, emphasizing a homogenous flavor no matter which of their shops a customer visits), in reality, even if the same bean is offered in multiple shops its taste will vary wildly. “Coffee is the kind of beverage where even if you use the same beans and the same brewing method, the unique personality of the Master will emerge in great detail,” the Master of Higashide Coffee reported in a magazine (Kikuchi 2016, 190). Master Sakaguchi goes as far to say that even making a blend is impossible without being familiar with one’s own personality (Clubism 2016, 53). Of course, some of this variance will be the result of the bean itself. Like the wine grape, even if a vineyard plants the same variety of grape in the same place, the change in weather year to year will affect the taste and quality of the vintage. Coffee beans are no different, and one of the reasons the Master of transitbeans takes such detailed notes during his roasting process is to track how the beans he has change from year to year and ensure that “his” flavor shines through the roast consistently (Field Note 6/8/16). In fact, Master Nakamichi was so protective of his unique flavor that he didn’t have anyone teach him about roasting or brewing coffee because according to him, “when you learn from a teacher you learn their ways of making coffee and their taste. Learning yourself...lets you develop your own taste” (Field Note 6/8/16). Many Masters are self-taught, having experimented with roasting and brewing themselves through trial and error, while others learned by watching their own Masters and figuring out techniques that way (Field Note 7/2/16), and a third group actually took courses and achieved official certification from the Specialty Coffee Association of Japan (Field Note 6/9/16).

Personality and coffee is so prevalent—and indeed, crucial—because with rare exceptions all coffee in *kissaten* (and most Third Wave coffee shops) is brewed entirely by hand. You won't find espresso machines in *kissaten* (though you might in other cafes and Third Wave shops), instead there will be a dizzying assortment of scales, cups, sacks, and funnels made of plastic or porcelain for pour-over coffee. Of course, coffee-making technology continues to develop new ways for the average person to make a “professional” cup of coffee perfectly suited to their tastes—personal espresso makers like Nespresso and Keurig have certainly become household staples in America. Coffee technology in Japan, on the other hand, is more about elevating taste and the human role rather than replacing coffee's handmade quality with complete automation. While such automated technology would certainly promote efficiency (and is put to good use at chain shops like Starbucks), it does little to promote artistry, which is why “we are in a strange relationship with machines—we want them to do only the work they can do better than we can, not to take the art of coffee-making away from us” (White 2012, 110). Commonly used “technology” includes the nel drip, a flannel cloth fastened around a wire circle to make a sack through which water is poured, the various paper-filter pour-over brands like the Hario V60 or Kalita, donut-drippers, and siphon coffee machines, the latter of which is likely the most “automated.” Siphon coffee is a two-part machine, the bottom part is a glass globe filled with water (enough for however many cups are being brewed) and the top part is an open-faced cylinder with an extended tube onto the bottom that slots into the glass globe below (see Figure 3). Coarsely ground coffee beans are placed into the cylinder, and then a small Bunsen burner is lit underneath the globe. As the water heats, it bubbles up through the glass tube into the coffee grounds above and as it cools it trickles back into the globe as coffee. It's a process that Urara's Mama says “anyone could [do],” (Field Note 6/6/16).

The personality of the Master asserts itself here in technology as well. While there aren't "schools of coffee brewing" where ancient traditions are passed down from teacher to disciple—coffee innovates too quickly for that kind of rigid teaching philosophy—(White 2012, 72-73), there is no shortage of criticism between Masters about certain brewing or roasting styles. Master Sakaguchi is adamant that his method of brewing coffee without paper filters is best because, according to him, "paper filters make the coffee taste bad" (Field Note 6/10/16) while Master Tachibana of Tachibana Coffee dismissively said that another *kissaten*'s coffee in Kanazawa was "just alright" (Field Note 6/20/16). Beyond personal opinions, if there isn't a piece of equipment to make coffee the way a Master wants sometimes they just invent it, as Master Ichiro Sekiguchi (as of this year he is over 100 years old and still roasting coffee in his *kissaten* thrice weekly) of Café de L'Ambre in Tokyo's Ginza neighborhood has done. According to an interview he gave with Tokyo coffee aficionado and blogger Eric Tessier, Master Sekiguchi invented and patented a kettle with a wide base and a narrower top, as well as a custom-built coffee grinder and thin ceramic coffee cup (Tessier 2016). Even amongst *kissaten* Masters, Master Sekiguchi is known for his strict and particular training of his employees and equally rigid standards for his customers (it would not be wise, for instance, to ask for sugar with your coffee), so the fact that his particularities extended to the minutia of his coffee equipment is unsurprising (White 2012, 71).

Going to a *kissaten* is a multi-layered sensory experience. The Master, the atmosphere, and the coffee all coalesce into encounter that is both of this time, but also a remnant of a slower-paced era gone by. It's also a bit of a contradiction: the nonchalant clutter of the space is contrasted with the almost too-precise *kodawari*-filled method of brewing coffee. One gets the

sense that the Master *could* “clean up” and organize his *kissaten* if he so chose, but prefers it to be just as it is. The charming clutter of the *kissaten*, the blended and heady smells of roasted coffee and cigarettes, the mellow jazz playing on old speaker systems providing a background to the flipping of newspapers and idle chatter between counter and customer, the polished wood of the bar counter and the warm porcelain or ceramic mug, and of course the taste of the coffee are all inseparable from the *kissaten* experience. Time is the sixth element blending the five senses together: in the *kissaten* itself it possesses a slipperiness in that a whole afternoon can be whiled away over a cup or two and a book, but also that *kissaten* have a staying power that other coffee shops—particularly chain shops—do not. While chain shops are always “new” (new flavors! new designs!) or “more” (more flavorful!) or even, oxymoronicallly, “less” (fewer calories! less sugar! nonfat!), and constantly reinventing and reinvigorating themselves, *kissaten* are content to stay just as they are. Despite the fact that “we’re a disposable culture” (Henderstein 2016) and the fact that neighborhoods are constantly evolving, *kissaten* will remain as long as there’s a Master and a customer who needs a cup of coffee.



Figure 6: One of the nine Starbucks in Kanazawa. Photo by the author.

Chain Shops: Convenient *Machiawase*

Towards the end of my research trip, I made plans to meet one of my friends at the train station nearest to the Hongo campus branch of Tokyo University, Hongosanchoume station. We had agreed to meet at the West gate at ten that morning, but because of the way my series of connecting train schedules were arranged I actually arrived fifteen minutes early. It was a hot, muggy July day—the kind where your shirt sticks to your back within minutes—and I certainly didn't want to wait outside. Fortunately, a few buildings over from the station gate the bright sign of a Doutor greeted me. The letters are shaped to mimic coffee beans, the second yellow “o” in particular, a promise of the beverages you can purchase inside. Without hesitation I walked in and ordered one of their summer specials, a peach ice tea (many of their prominently marketed items are beverages other than coffee, even though the company emphasizes its coffee's quality), and waited out the remaining fifteen minutes in comfort. For the slight price of 320 yen (just over three dollars) I was able to wait in an air-conditioned space with a cold drink, a comfortable

chair, and the option to quickly use the restroom before the quarter hour was up. Without consciously realizing it, I had used the Doutor—a chain coffee shop—as a *machiawasebasho* (待ち合わせ場所), a “meeting spot;” one of the common answers I received when I asked what role chain stores played in customers’ lives.

Japan, like most countries in the world, does not lack for different brands of chain coffee shops. While manufacturers of coffee products—as well as roasting beans at large scales—have been around since the early 20th century (the Ueshima Coffee Company, which pioneered canned coffee in Japan, for instance, was founded in 1933), the typical “chain shop” as we have come to conceive it began in the 1980s. Japan has its own domestic coffee chains, such as Komeda Coffee, Hoshino Coffee, or the Doutor I described above, but it is also home to many international brands such as Tully’s Coffee, Peet’s Coffee, and, of course, Starbucks. While all chain shops serve as a *machiawasebasho*, in this section I will focus on Starbucks and how its global brand has shaped coffee culture and consumption in Japan in particular. Rather than the intimate, coffee-centered space that the *kissaten* or Third Wave coffee shop provides, the chain shop fulfills a different niche. Not only does Starbucks provide a convenient environment for work and sociability for a wide range of people, the various Starbucks drinks help introduce Japanese consumers to higher quality coffee and a larger coffee vocabulary.

As soon as a customer enters a Starbucks—or any chain shop, really—the coffee experience is instantly different from that of a *kissaten*, or even the average Third Wave coffee shop. While conducting my research in Japan, I held off on visiting a Starbucks for a week or so. Entering a Starbucks after being inundated with Kanazawa’s heady *kissaten* culture was almost more shocking. The first thing that struck me was the lack of a “coffee smell.” While independent cafes and *kissaten* constantly smelled like freshly ground coffee beans, a warm,

nutty smell, the Starbucks was almost sterile—a product of the frequent and mandatory store cleanings (Simon 2009, 91).

Secondly, when compared to an independent café, I was almost completely anonymous and alone. After ordering at the counter, the brief “conversation” I had with the barista at the counter and the requisite “thank you” when I picked up my paper cup was the extent of my interpersonal communication (Field Note 6/13/16). That rote conversation, what Simon calls a “weak tie,” is the opposite of the Master-customer interaction you get at a *kissaten* (2009, 95). Not only do you not talk to or form a relationship with the staff behind the counter, customers don’t talk to each other. As one of Simon’s sources put it, “I don’t go Starbucks to talk—I go to be alone” (2009, 115). This was certainly the case for me as well. When I frequented a *kissaten* and sat at the counter, it was a guarantee that I would have a conversation with the Master about where I was from, why I was in Japan, and about my research whether I really wanted to or not. Sometimes this would draw in other customers sitting a few seats down from me, or the Master would call out to a regular at another table. Even when silently drinking coffee, the Master would constantly be attentive to my needs by refilling my water glass or exchanging occasional pithy comments. Even though the typical chain shop is a more public space, in reality I have more privacy than if I were at a *kissaten*.

Part of the allure—one might even say inevitability—of chain shops are their frequent locations. Wherever you go, it’s impossible not to find a chain coffee shop of some variety, even outside of the major cities. Chain shops occupy the best real estate on main streets, busy corners, and in department stores and train stations because they can afford the steep fees that relegate *kissaten* to back streets and basement floors. Starbucks alone has over 1,000 shops spread across Japan—Kanazawa has six; a single neighborhood in Tokyo has forty (Starbucks Japan 2016).

The three main Starbucks in Kanazawa each occupy popular and frequently traveled areas: the first floor of the Forrus department store next to the train station, the first floor of the M'za department store across from Omicho fish market, a popular tourist destination, and the first floor of the Tokyu Square department store in the classy Kohrinbo neighborhood (and just a few doors down from the Hokkoku Newspaper office where I interned a few summers ago).

Everyone in Kanazawa knows where those three department stores are, so if you're meeting a friend or waiting to catch your train, the nearest Starbucks makes a perfect *machiawasebasho*.

Indeed, when I was making plans with a friend, she automatically suggested that we meet up at the Forrus Starbucks (Field Note 6/24/16). In Tokyo, as well, Starbucks claim the busiest and most well-known locations for their outlets.

The coffee at chain shops is also “convenient” because unlike *kissaten* or Third Wave coffee shops, where a single cup of coffee can take up to ten minutes to prepare, your coffee at Starbucks is ready in under three. For some customers, this speed means that “you can’t feel their *kodawari*” like you can in a *kissaten*, as one mid-twenties woman told me when I asked her about chain shops (Field Note 6/19/16). But for busy workers, like the Section Chief of the sports section at the Hokkoku Newspaper, the ability to walk in before work and get a cup of coffee to go—which you can’t do at a *kissaten*!—is a convenience that’s better than the weak, over-sweet vending machine coffee down the hall from his desk. Occasionally when I was taking advantage of Starbucks’ free wifi in the morning (another convenience) I would see him get a cup of coffee to take back to work. I should note that “taking coffee to go” does not equal “drinking while on the go,” which is still considered culturally unacceptable in Japan. Instead of drinking their coffee while walking or on public transportation, customers who take their paper cups to go return to their office or home before drinking, so chain shops targeting businessmen and women

set themselves up near major office buildings or intersections where people can purchase their coffee and still be at their office within a few minute's walk.

Convenience store coffee also fulfills this need for quick, portable coffee when even Starbucks is too slow or too far away from the office. One Japanese professor told me over lunch that when she doesn't even have time to go to a Starbucks she can go to the Family Mart that's on the first floor of her office building, press a button, and have hot coffee (that she knows is freshly brewed) ready in under a minute. In situations like this, even though she values taste, convenience is more important (Field Note 6/26/16).

Like chain shops in the United States, the interior design and atmosphere of chain shops in Japan are strictly controlled and homogenized. Starbucks is no exception to this trend: its stores are all designed with the same brown wood and olive green color scheme, the same piped-in music, and the same generic artwork (often coffee beans in various stages of production) hanging on the walls. Together, these features pointed to Europe, particularly Italy, as the "very center of true coffee culture," and Starbucks played up this connection by requiring its own pseudo-Italian coffee language; for instances coffee sizes are referred to as "tall," "grande," or "venti," (Simon 2009, 39). Combined, these qualities are supposed to hearken to the "upper-middle-class desires for the natural and how the natural made them look and feel better" (Simon 2009, 41).

Starbucks in Japan largely follow this trend, which Grinshpun refers to as a "Disneyscape" that strips away all senses of a unique space in favor of "uniform spatial logic and excessive, albeit standardized, array of cultural images" (2012, 174). In this case, rather than attempting to harken back to a European tradition, Starbucks in Japan appeals to a Western and largely American heritage, which still has a certain cachet of quality. Around holidays like

Halloween the stores advertise pumpkin-flavored foods and drinks; at Christmas it's peppermint. At the time of writing this section, the coffee seminar section of Starbucks Japan's website is advertising a class called "How to make delicious coffee—Christmas version" (Grinshpun 2012, 180; Starbucks Japan 2016). Drink and food offerings also vary more generally by season: in spring Starbucks Japan has a sakura (cherry blossom) flavored Frappuccino and a peach one in summer (much like Doutor had a peach iced-tea in July). More generally, Japanese Starbucks use the same made-up Italian that their American counterparts do, and even though smoking in some restaurants in Japan is still allowed, smoking is banned at Starbucks (and while it *is* allowed in some other chain shops, like Komeda Coffee, smokers are usually restricted to a smaller side-room).

While talking to a woman, perhaps in her low-mid 50s, at a small Kanazawa café about chain shops she told me that "in chain stores you don't really get that 'coffee feel' but even so I go sometimes" (Field Note 6/20/16). She seemed resigned but not regretful about it. Chain stores in general are a place that many find, as Grinshpun reports, "*hairiyasui*," or "easy to enter," when compared to the environment of a *kissaten* or Third Wave coffee shop (2012, 185). Unlike *kissaten*, which are small, dim, and hidden away, chain stores have large windows and are located in public spaces. The inside of a chain shop has a variety of tables and booths in the same space: while some tables are communal, some are small two-person affairs, and others are single chairs tucked into a corner so that no matter what type of experience a customer wants (social or private) there's a range of options that simply aren't available at a *kissaten* (Field Note 6/14/16). At a chain shop, you can be alone but still surrounded by other people, and compared to Starbucks in America, customers in Japan are more likely to take their drinks "for here" and sip them slowly at a table with a book to relax (Grinshpun 2012, 186).

The communal tables are often occupied by high school students sipping sweet Frappuccinos in the afternoon, once school is out, because chain shops like Starbucks are one of the few cafes they're allowed to gather at. Japanese schools are strict about what spaces their students are allowed to frequent, and *kissaten* and other independent coffee shops are forbidden because a student might start smoking, or meet weird “*ojisan*,” middle-aged men who might somehow be a bad influence on a student—and therefore hurt the school's reputation (Field Note 6/15/16). Women, too, occasionally find chain shops easier to enter than *kissaten*, according to Grinshpun, because *kissaten* are “men's spaces, uncomfortable to enter and unpredictable” (2012, 185). Starbucks, to some degree, caters to these two groups with its sweet, coffee-based drinks that are perceived both in America and in Japan as “girly” or “childish” (Simon 2009, 51, 128; Field Note 6/9/16).

Even though Starbucks Japan constantly advertises (and provides in-store samples!) of its sweet, seasonal offerings, the company encourages customer coffee education by offering various seminars, such as “how to pour coffee by hand” or “how to pair coffee with food” (Starbucks Japan 2016). Print materials like the “Starbucks Japan free newspaper” and the “*Starbucks Coffee Japan Magazine*” attempt to continue the education process while putting an emphasis on the process of individuality—“my Starbucks” (Grinshpun 2012, 179, 180). That sort of personalization isn't present at other independent coffee shops where it's often the Master's way or the highway, figuratively speaking.

Since the niche filled by chain stores is so different from that of *kissaten* or other coffee shops, many Third Wave baristas I spoke to didn't seem to resent the fact that Starbucks' coffee is of lower quality or that their overall popularity is high and said instead that “they're good and have their place” (Field Note 7/12/16). Through chain shops like Starbucks, it's possible for new

people to find an interest in coffee. Indeed, the barista from Toranomom Koffee who gave me that quote originally started as a barista at Starbucks ten years prior, slowly working his way towards involving himself with specialty coffee. (Starbucks is not considered specialty coffee—as Meoh Kawabe, author of *The Third Wave Coffee* told me in an interview over Skype, Starbucks buys from the lowest rank of beans since they must purchase in bulk; to be considered “specialty” the bean must be from the top 10 percent of the crop.)

It’s more typical for the owners of *kissaten* that have been around a long while to disparage chain shops. The Master at Café Hickory, a *kissaten* that has been in business since 1978, lamented the fact that the number of *kissaten* has declined because “everyone goes to chain shops” (Field Note 6/27/16). The husband and wife owner of Safu-Vege, another *kissaten* in Kanazawa that caters to businessmen, said that “everyone is too engrossed on their phones to look around and find new places,” choosing instead to defer to tech-friendly chain shops (Field Note 6/25/16). Perhaps this is why coffee shops are known as “*mizushoubai*,” or “risky businesses.”

Even though my mother accused me of becoming a “coffee snob” after returning from my coffee education in Japan, I can’t give up on chain shops, Starbucks included, altogether. While the quality of the coffee found at smaller coffee shops and *kissaten* is far superior, sometimes a chain shop is what you need to relax in a place where you know all the informal rules—and know that others know the rules, too. As a foreigner in Japan, Starbucks in particular was a small piece of America I could turn to in times of homesickness or stress or as a place where I wouldn’t stand out in the crowd as much. And, yes, when meeting up with a friend Starbucks is a fantastic landmark and *machiawasebasho*.



Figure 7: The “Blank Trunk” dessert at Nazoya Café in Kanazawa. Photo by the author.

Gender Stereotypes in Coffee Shops

At Nazoya Café in Kanazawa, the theme is mysteries and its customers are the detectives. The café’s Master, Mineyoshi Gouji, is a self-proclaimed lover of detective novels, so he themed his entire café around mysteries, or *nazo* (謎), in Japanese. Master Gouji’s coffee blends and desserts all have names involving mysteries, like the Black Trunk chocolate cake (pictured above) that perhaps references the grisly Brighton trunk murders or the New York Chinatown trunk mystery. When you order one of these specialty desserts you’re handed a small yellow card with a riddle or puzzle on it; customers that solve all twenty of his “mysteries” are given a gold certificate for being a *meitantei* (名探偵), a great detective (Field Note 6/9/16). When I first visited Nazoya Café I naturally ordered one of Master Gouji’s desserts. As I watched him use a stencil to dust cocoa powder in a question mark design onto the plate, I couldn’t help but say that it looked *oshare* (おしゃれ), which loosely translates to “stylish” or “fashionable” in English.

As he finished the design, Gouji said that because many of his female customers order the sweets he makes them cute (Field Note 6/9/16).

Although Master Gouji's association of cute sweets with women is a small thing, overall it is indicative of some of the stereotypes connected to women in the world of Japanese coffee shops. Typically these stereotype come not from the customers themselves but from above: in other words, the various staff and Masters. Despite the fact that most Masters say they have more female than male customers, and even though the marketing of chain shops like Starbucks is specifically targeted toward women, the top-down perceptions are that women are less knowledgeable than men about coffee and that they value the food and opportunity to socialize more than the quality of their drink. These stereotypes, as well as the historically masculine nature of social spaces in Japan, both contribute to the perception that coffee shops in Japan, and *kissaten* in particular, are a male space.

"Coffee is a different world," one young woman told me in an interview. She then admitted, like many other women, that she usually just asked the Master or barista for a recommendation for what to drink (Field Note 6/19/16). In all fairness, this was a similar response to most people, male or female, when I inquired about their knowledge of coffee beans. Only once in six weeks did I witness anyone walk to a shop and confidently order a certain type of bean without consulting the shop's Master first, and this person was clearly an established regular so he would already have had some idea of what beans he did or didn't like (Field Note 6/20/16). Indeed, when I asked baristas or Masters to estimate what percentage of their customers were *kuwashii* (詳しい), a word often used to describe people who are well-informed about a subject, the estimates were fairly abysmal. "On weekdays only about 5 percent of the customers are *kuwashii* about coffee, and on weekends it's only about 20 percent," one barista

working at a busy coffee stand in central Tokyo told me. Even though the general perception is that all customers in general are fairly ignorant about coffee beans—which explains the proliferations of signboards and menu guides at various coffee shops that elaborate on different types of beans and their flavor profiles—women are still assumed to be *less* knowledgeable than their male counterparts. “Woman just want to drink something tasty,” said Hiroshi Tachibana, the Master of Tachibana Coffee in Kanazawa, “what the bean is isn’t as important” (Field Note 6/20/16). His response to my question—are men or women more knowledgeable about coffee?—was swift and in favor of men.

Much like Nazoya Café’s Master, the baristas and Masters of coffee shops generally assume that women favor sweet drinks, “cute” things, and frequent their spaces in groups to talk with their friends over food, rather than for the coffee offerings. Major chain shops, Starbucks in particular, also buy into and feed this stereotype by marketing to its “target upmarket clientele...younger women who like dessert-style drinks” with sweet flavors such as matcha, sakura, peach, and caramel Frappuccino’s (Miller 2003, 141). Critics often accuse these sweet coffee-based drinks of being inauthentic (Simon 2009, 53) while also asserting that “functional, utilitarian coffee... [was] male, and Frappuccino’s...were female, a “girl thing” (Simon 2009, 128). Women in the United States and Japan are constantly associated with this feminine, “lesser” form of coffee, perhaps because, as Master Sakaguchi of Katsura Coffee in Kanazawa stated, “men and women have different tastes” (Field Note 6/10/16).

In order to lure women “of good family” into the space as customers—to make it both attractive and safe—in the early 1900s coffee shops and cafes began selling ice cream, cake, and other sweets (White 2012, 43). It was there that women were socialized into their sweet tooth, (White 2012, 43) a trend that has continued to this day—it’s expected, in fact, for women to

prefer sweet offerings. For Starbucks, which heavily markets its sweet options, “sixty percent of Starbucks Japan’s customers are women in their 20s and 30s” (Miller 2003, 143).

This supposed difference in “taste” also extends to social habits. While men are “more likely to...drink and leave” (Field Note 6/7/16) women come “to chat for a long time with friends and eat sweets” (Field Note 6/9/16). The Master of Hickory, a longstanding *kissaten* in Kanazawa, offered me a cup of tea after I finished my first cup of coffee there, saying that “all the *baa-chan* (grandmothers) drink tea after their coffee...they talk and drink for a long time” (Field Note 6/27/16). Another *kissaten* in a Tokyo suburb, after a group of women paid for their lunch and drinks, said that they “get a lot of groups like that: women whose husbands are away all day at work so they have free time during the day to come and chat (Field Note 7/1/16). The majority of Masters said that men generally came for the coffee while women came for the food and to chit-chat with their friends, staying longer in-store on average than their male counterparts. Most shops, when they gave estimates of their customer breakdown by gender, then said that the *majority* of their customers were women—both Blanket Café and transitbeans, for instance, said that their customers were about 70 percent women (Field Notes 6/7/16 and 6/8/16). Casual counts I, too, made (by tallying each customer that walked in the shop while I was there) corroborated those statements (various Field Notes). Shops that tended to have a male majority like Toranomom Koffee were frequently located near or in office buildings, where the majority of people working nearby are men (Field Note 7/12/16). *Not* having office buildings nearby implies that the potential customer base would be the stay-at-home moms, or those women who have already retired—their husbands would all be off at work and wouldn’t have time to frequent a nearby *kissaten* during the middle of the workday (Field Note 6/27/16). While more women in Japan work—accounting for 43 percent of the workforce overall—over half of those women are

employed in irregular positions and have more job uncertainties than their male counterparts, which leads to an increase in “free time” available to frequent coffee shops (Japan Times 2016).

All of these small stereotypes and dismissals add up to the overall perception that coffee in Japan is, as Katsura’s Sakaguchi stated, “a men’s world” (Field Note 6/10/16). Of the forty-nine shops I visited over six weeks, only sixteen had female baristas—32 percent. Several of those shops, however, were chain stores like Starbucks, so within independent Third Wave coffee shops and *kissaten*, the percent of coffee shops that had female leadership is actually *under* 30 percent. Even though the majority of customers are women for most shops, the baristas and Masters serving them are most often men; space décor and menu offerings are therefore also designed by men, and whether they keep women in mind besides offering *oshare* desserts is difficult to say.

When considering *kissaten* and coffee shops in Japan historically, however, the view that coffee in Japan is “a men’s world” doesn’t come as a surprise and could certainly account for the gender disparity behind the counter. Harkening back to *chaya* (茶屋), the teahouses which were “almost exclusively male in clientele,” (White 2012, 14) public social spaces in Japan gradually evolved into spaces where men could show off their modern sensibilities; it was only by the end of the nineteenth century that women began to join them (White 2012, 15). Having women present as part of the clientele, rather than simply the wait staff, was an indicator of modernity for a café or coffee shop in Japan.

Previously, women mostly worked as the wait staff, feminine objects designed to cater to the male customers (Tipton 2000, 129). As the shopping and entertainment services in the bustling areas of Ginza, Shinjuku, and Asakusa continued to develop, it was in these alcohol-friendly spaces that women filled a second role—that of the sexualized waitress. The café

waitress became an inseparable aspect of the Japanese café and bar where their attentive services, frequently of the erotic nature, eclipsed the importance of food and drink (Tipton 2000, 127). Nevertheless, these jobs offered a good income and a measure of freedom to young women that wasn't available to them previously (Tipton 2000, 128). Milk halls or *junkissa*, "pure cafes," began to staunchly distinguish themselves from these "dissolute places" by focusing on their coffee and cultivating a serious intellectual nature within their clientele (White 2012, 54).

For the *kissaten* and coffee shops in Japan today, having female customers is no longer a sign of "modernity" as it was in the late nineteenth and pre-war twentieth centuries. Nor are the female baristas or Mamas expected to provide an eroticized feminine presence for male customers. Naturally women can frequent any *kissaten*, café, or coffee shop they wish to and eat or drink whatever they prefer, sweets or otherwise: the lingering effects of these gender stereotypes are more subtle. One such effect is that *kissaten*, much like bars in Japan, can feel intimidating for women to enter alone (Grinshpun 2012, 185). Even though women were first recognized as a major purchasing bloc after World War Two, prompting some cafes to adjust their atmosphere accordingly (White 2012, 55) that hasn't been the case with *kissaten*. Many counters at such *kissaten* are full of men smoking, reading their papers, and talking with each other—not leaving much space, both literally and figuratively, for female customers to join them. An unofficial "boy's club," a counter dominated by a group of men who clearly know each other and the Master strongly influences the atmosphere of the space and shuts out anyone unaffiliated with their group (Field Note 6/6/16). The unspoken signal is "this is our space." There are, of course, spaces that feel decidedly feminine, but they have to explicitly make that demarcation with frilly decorations, pastel colors, and the proliferation of sweet offerings on the menu, while *kissaten* by themselves feel neither masculine nor feminine in terms of ambience alone.

Secondly, when Masters assume that women are uninformed about coffee beans and don't care about the quality of their drink, those assumptions perpetuate a cycle of ignorance. Many women I asked, even if they had interest in learning more about coffee, said that it seemed too difficult (Field Note 6/19/16). Not only that, but women are almost coerced into buying sweeter drinks that put more emphasis on how cute or popular they are rather than the quality of the coffee—often, shops have signs prominently informing customers that such-and-such drink is “the most popular,” which strongly influences sales. I fell prey to this once myself: when I was looking up information about Sarutahiko Coffee in Tokyo, I saw that their honey latte was popular with women so I decided to try it, and its sickeningly sweet aftertaste almost made me gag (Field Note 7/6/16). Was that what I was expected to enjoy? Perhaps if there were more female baristas and Mamas behind the counter, the drinks would be more to “our” preferences, which is certainly what Master Sakaguchi suggested when he said that men and women have different tastes (Field Note 6/10/16). If this is (biologically) true, Third Wave coffee shops are adapting to this difference better than *kissaten* are since Third Wave coffee shops emphasize the importance of selecting beans and making coffee suited to the individual's own tastes while in many *kissaten* the coffee is prepared only as the Master wants it to be.

Of course these stereotypes are just that—stereotypes—and there are certainly many exceptions to the rule for Masters and their customers. There's nothing wrong with women who like sweets and men who don't, or vice-versa. Ideally, of course, there would be as many female customers deemed “educated” about their coffee as male customers, as well as more equal representation of female leadership behind the coffee counter. Both Third Wave shops and *kissaten* are taking steps to mitigate this divide by continuously educating their customers about coffee beans and the resulting brew, and even though Third Wave shops are having more success

with this mentality ultimately this education is what will push Japanese coffee into the future and determine what form *kissaten* assume in this ever-evolving space.



Figure 8: A Kalita set up ready for a customer to brew a cup at Mine Drip Coffee. Photo by the author.

An Educational Experience: The Future of Coffee and *Kissaten* in Japan

If you get off the train at Shinjuku Station, arguably Tokyo's busiest and most confusing train station, and head to the nearby NEWoMan department store, tucked away on the sixth floor outdoor balcony can be found a coffee stand called Mine Drip Coffee. It truly is nothing more than a stand: plywood boards hammered together to make a waist-high counter and shelves to display coffee brewing equipment and beans under a white canvas tent. The premise of Mine Drip Coffee is unique as well. The customer chooses their preferred coffee bean (from the nine or so varieties offered) and is shown to a station like that in Figure 8 above. They are also handed an instruction card with brewing instructions specifically tailored to the bean they selected, which explains how many grams of beans to grind, how hot the water should be, and how the water should be poured over the coffee grounds. Actually pouring the cup of coffee is thus left up to the customers themselves, a "Do It Yourself" concept that aims to "make the pouring side

of coffee much closer than it appears from the other side of the counter” (Field Note 7/8/16). The price for this coffee is also “do it yourself” in that you only pay what you think the cup of coffee was worth by stuffing your bills and change into a glass jar left out on the counter. “Mine Drip Coffee” is, quite literally, *your* experience to dictate.

At the counter, the staff helped me pick a bean—one from Guatemala—and then led me over to an empty station, where I attempted to follow instructions (both written on the card and orally from the employees) and actually brew my own cup of coffee. To anyone who has previously disregarded the difficulty of being a barista—one that actually pours the coffee from scratch, rather than from a pot sitting on the back burner—I urge you to reconsider. The hallmarks of a well-poured cup of coffee, according to Third Wave coffee standards, were challenging physically, but also mentally, to achieve. A steady hand, an even, thin stream of water, and the ability to concentrate and manage the fine motor skills of your hand and wrist to ensure that the water was strictly controlled proved to be a challenge for me. The two men managing the stand were hugely encouraging, often telling me to “yes, yes, pour a little more now” or “ok, stop right there” until I had my own unmarked paper cup of steaming coffee.

Mine Drip Coffee had only been open for a month or so by the time I visited, and the managers said that the “do it yourself” concept hadn’t quite caught on with the general populace yet (Field Note 7/8/16). Many still expected to walk up to the stand, order, and have their coffee prepared *for* them. But the role that Mine Drip Coffee is playing—bringing coffee preparation closer to the customer and taking Third Wave coffee from a trend to a household staple, as well as educating customers about beans and brewing methods in general—is an essential one. Although Third Wave coffee shops and specialty coffee in general have established themselves across Japan, including Tokyo, the ongoing struggle for coffee shops both new and old is to help

customers feel comfortable and capable ordering and interacting with coffee, particularly since the vernacular, flavor profiles, and preparation methods constantly evolve. As coffee is elevated from a mere “cup of joe” to a product that must be spoken about in terms of “notes of chocolate/orange/tomato,” or “mouthfeel,” whether or not the Japanese coffee scene can succeed in establishing a base of “educated customers” will influence the future role of Third Wave coffee, as well as the staying power of *kissaten* as a cultural institution.

Much as Mine Drip Coffee brings the art and experience of pouring coffee across the proverbial counter and makes it something anyone can do for themselves, educating customers about their coffee is about making the product more enjoyable and accessible to a wider range of people. Largely this entails helping customers decide what to order when they come to a coffee shop; ordering from a menu where the various coffee offerings are referred to by their country of origin is not helpful, and frankly is rather intimidating, if you don’t know anything about the qualities of the beans. Becoming an “educated customer” is part knowledge, part confidence, and part knowing what you, as an individual, find delicious. This focus on individual preference is a somewhat new phenomenon for Japanese coffee. Early in my research, I was given a lecture on moka coffee by a customer who said that “fifty years ago everyone just ordered moka coffee but now people are more particular about their individual preferences and tastes...people are of the mindset that they should drink what they like” (Field Note 6/7/16). Although at some *kissaten* the way the Master makes the coffee is law, such as Café de L’Ambre, in many places coffee education has become more about helping customers identify what flavors and brews they personally enjoy.

Coffee shops go about crafting this knowledge base and confidence (personal preference is developed after the former are established) with a variety of menu-based “guidelines.” Some

coffee shops provide menus with helpful graphics that indicate where on the scale of sour and fruity to dark and bitter a particular roast falls (Field Note 6/26/16). Other shops prefer to highlight the flavor profiles of their offerings and have their customers order based on the appeal of the underlying notes of “almond, chocolate, vanilla syrup” rather than how light or dark the brew is (Field Note 7/4/16). Often it’s simply the Master behind the counter who answers questions about their beans, providing recommendations upon request or talking through the different aspects of their coffee—something that’s simply part of the job (Field Note 6/20/16). Public cuppings, where patrons can gather to “slurp” coffee and assess its quality, and coffee brewing seminars (offered even at chain shops such as Starbucks) are other ways coffee shops engage with and elevate their customers into a bloc that can not only identify quality coffee, but also understand *why* it’s of quality. In essence, “to be a good customer you to know enough to have preferences” (White 2012, 114).

Establishing this cadre of customers who both understand and appreciate quality coffee serves two purposes: it allows the customers themselves to better enjoy the coffee they are purchasing, but it also solidifies Third Wave coffee’s place as more than a mere trend. At present Third Wave coffee still *is* a trend in Japan—a very popular trend, but still not something that has become part of everyone’s daily habits (Field Note 7/8/16). Blogger Eric Tessier illustrated Third Wave coffee’s “trend” status when he described the “coffee tourist” phenomenon—people who ‘hop’ from shop to shop in order to take photos for social media and to cultivate a certain image around themselves, rather than going to appreciate the coffee or support a neighborhood business (Field Note 7/8/16). I noticed this phenomenon myself on my last day in Japan when I went to visit Bear Pond Espresso, which is in the quiet neighborhood of Shimokitazawa in Tokyo. Bear Pond’s “mysterious” Master has several things he’s known for—his brusque, almost rude

temperament (a significant portion of his negative reviews online cite this characteristic) and his sheer dedication to coffee, particularly the espresso drink he developed, Angel Stain. Master Katsuyuki Tanaka only brews Angel Stain for two hours every day, 11-1pm, and will only pull a maximum of ten shots a day (Goldberg 2015, 88). When I arrived at Bear Pond Espresso, promptly at 11am, there was already a small gathering of people outside the front door, and all of them were clearly tourists. I couldn't help but wonder how Master Tanaka felt about people using his shop—and the coffee he clearly dedicates his entire life to—as a tourist attraction or something to check off a list (Field Note 7/13/16).

Juxtaposed against this forward-looking Third Wave trend is the *kissaten*. Throughout my research, the theme that arose time and time again was the decline of the *kissaten* in terms of sheer number of shops and their popularity among younger generations. The 52 questionnaires I handed out to customers revealed several social trends.

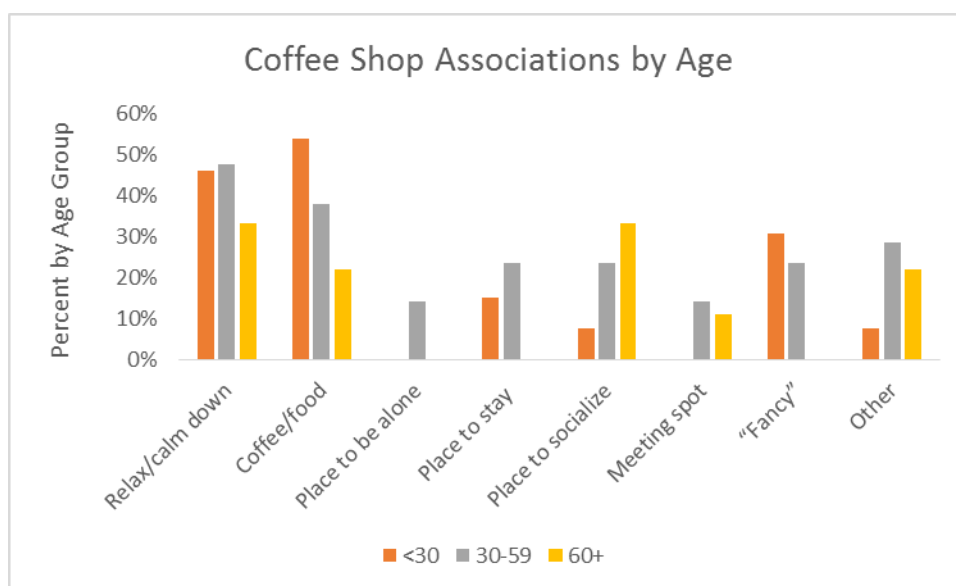


Figure 9: Coffee shop associations graphed by age group.

There are two crucial differences present within this data that indicate the divide between generations. In particular, there are disparities in the emphasis customers place on a coffee shop's atmosphere, indicated within the categories of "relax/calm down" and "fancy." Furthermore, there are noticeable contrasts between the generations that view coffee shops and *kissaten* as a "place to socialize" rather than a "place to be alone." Reviewed holistically, the data expose the reasons that *kissaten* are struggling to attract the hearts and minds of the younger generations despite the institution's historical and cultural significance.

In considering the atmosphere of a coffee shop and *kissaten*, a significant consideration for younger customers is the shop's overall image. "Locations are acting as a representation of who [customers] are and who they want to be," Hengtee Lim, the Tokyo-based coffee blogger for Sprudge told me as we sat at the tiny tables in Sarutahiko Coffee sipping our drinks. According to Hengtee, coffee shops in Tokyo, especially, have become more "cool," making efforts to collaborate with artists, fashion, and music (Field Note 7/6/16). Social pressures from school, work, family, and even hobbies—which require absolute dedication in Japan—mean that people are constantly defining themselves through their relatively rigid relationships with others. Homogeneity is enforced in schools and offices, and coffee shops are one area where it's possible to pick an atmosphere and location that's specifically suited to a single person and allow that person to define themselves by what they like. The atmospheres that coffee shops create are actually crafting what their customers want from their own lives, whether that be a sense of "cool," of calm, of quiet, or of riotous urban chic. Smaller details like who makes the mugs—are they handmade or not?—where the shop gets its furniture, or if they use local vendors all affect how customers views themselves.

It's in this regard that *kissaten* don't always meet the needs of younger coffee drinkers. As Eric Tessier, founder of tokyocoffee.org said, *kissaten* "are just not cool anymore, not casual." In fact, they're viewed as something old fashioned (Field Note 7/8/16). If a customer wants to show off their cosmopolitan sensibilities, their desire to be trendy, young, and chic, *kissaten* are not the place to go, even if their coffee has a history of quality and good taste. The *kissaten*'s emphasis on coffee over curated atmosphere is not an insignificant weakness.

Although all three age groups identified relaxing and calming down as strong associations to coffee shops (30 percent of customers aged 60 and up, 50 percent of customers aged 30-60, and 45 percent of customers under 30), the intimacy and the semi-requisite socialization that happens at *kissaten* actually disadvantages *kissaten* in the eyes of demographics who rank relaxation most highly. Kawabe echoed these sentiments: "A *kissaten*'s Master, according to young people, has too much fastidiousness [*kodawari*], and it's difficult to enter [them]. Third Wave shops are more casual" (Interview 9/26/16). The coffee matters, of course, but how the coffee makes you feel is more important. Magazines and blogs pick up on this trend, Hengtee observed, when they have photoshoots that highlight particular coffee shops. "It's easier to sell a space than it is to sell a flavor," he continued. "You can photograph a space for magazines to highlight the feeling it would bring; it's less simple to photograph a cup of coffee and claim that 'it's delicious'" (Field Note 7/8/16). I wasn't immune to this effect, either. When picking shops to visit before arriving in Tokyo, I perused "best of" coffee lists and coffee blogs, looking for spaces that would pique my interest and make me feel like "I want to go there." The "fancy" category of the data, which is how I translated the word *oshare*, is a reflection of the strong allure that elegance possesses. Photography and social media is a crucial way to spread awareness of a space, to play up its aesthetic, and add to its desirability. Perhaps that speaks poorly of the sensibilities of the younger

generations in Japan, to a superficiality that sacrifices taste for form, but it would be foolish to disregard the significance of the space. Respondents who associated the word *oshare* to coffee shops were exclusively in the under 30 (30%) and the 30-60 (25%) demographic, which indicates that the image of the coffee shop matters significantly to these groups while not at all to the demographic over age 60.

More than atmosphere and image, what matters most to older demographics is the social role the *kissaten* are able to play in daily life. Customers in the middle and upper thirds of the demographic breakdown were two and three times as likely to associate *kissaten* and coffee shops with places for socialization compared to customers younger than 30 years old. Whenever I visited a coffee shop and looked around at the customer breakdown, people around my age and slightly older typically sat alone and were usually ensconced in their phones, or using their time in the coffee shop to recover from work: one young office worker told me that since she works nonstop from Monday through Friday, she uses coffee shops on the weekends to “forget about the stresses of the week” (Field Note 6/27/16), not to devote more of her personal energy toward other people. When socialization amongst younger customers did happen, it was almost always a pre-planned event with a friend or a significant other, rather than spontaneous interaction with a stranger. Spontaneous socialization was more likely to occur between regulars (though those groups, too, generally restricted themselves to familiar faces) and customers who belonged to the demographic aged 60 and above.

The customer base of Urara (which I spoke about in the section on *Kissaten Masters*) is one such “older” demographic. Each time I went, all the other customers (the majority of whom were regulars) were middle-aged, if not in their seventies or eighties. Many of them had been coming since Urara’s current Mama took over the *kissaten* twelve years ago (Field Note

6/14/16). When leaving, they all say “*o saki ni*” which is a polite phrase that means “I’m leaving first.” Also used at offices (when one employee leaves before another), the implication is that the person will soon return and see everyone again. Urara, out of all the *kissaten* I visited, also welcomed me the most warmly: everyone was friendly and willing to talk, to the point that it felt like I was the entertainment for the time I was there (but in the same way that a grandchild is to their grandparents). One elderly woman gave me an extensive list of the reasons she visits Urara multiple times a week, but the reason she emphasized most was the opportunity to talk with the Mama and with other customers. For her, conversations are a way to interact with various people—they help her realize that her way of thinking is not the only one and that “ah, that sort of thought also exists” (Field Note 6/14/16). Using *kissaten* as a social space is not unique to the clientele of Urara. As White writes, “the population called elderly [in Japan] is increasingly diverse...increasingly independent, and increasingly in need of such social spaces as homes become more private, neighborhoods less communal, and families more centrifugal (76). For this population, the *kissaten* is the “place of encounter” that’s increasingly difficult to find in urban areas (White 2012, 132), particularly as “soloization” in Japan—people living alone and not with family members—becomes more and more common. Urban apartments simply do not have the space for extended family, in this case grandparents, to move in with their children—in truth, apartments in Japan can feel scarcely large enough for one person. *Kissaten*, many of which have been around for years, and the coffee shop in general provide a place to be around other people, even if you just want to be “alone together.”

Another aspect that endears the older generations to *kissaten* but not the younger is the sense of nostalgia that *kissaten* invoke. Before the advent of Third Wave coffee shops and chain shops, the *kissaten* and cafes that sprang up in Japan’s postwar economic prosperity of the 1960s

through the 1980s were what the current generation of people in their fifties and above quite literally grew up with (Hani 2003). One afternoon I went to visit a friend who studies at Tokyo University. She had offered to take me around the campus, and as we were walking down the street in front of the university's famed *Akamon*, she pointed out several cafes and *kissaten* that had been around when her parents were students—one *kissaten*, in fact, was one her mother spent significant amounts of time in. When I remarked that "it must be nostalgic for you," my friend looked at me in a skeptical manner and said that "no, it's not nostalgic for me, but I guess it would be for my mother" (Field Note 7/11/16). The nostalgia that *kissaten* have built up in the hearts and minds of their older customers, the ones that began drinking coffee during the heyday of *kissaten*, doesn't exist—yet!—in younger generations.

The unfortunate result of the lack of interest in *kissaten*, whether that apathy is because the space is too fussy, too intimidating, or doesn't offer the desired place for socialization or relaxation, is that their overall numbers are steadily declining. In 1981 there were 155,000 cafes across Japan; in 2001 there were only 89,000 (Hani 2003) even though it seemed as if new chain stores were constantly opening. The various Masters and Mamas I spoke to all agreed that the numbers of *kissaten* and other independent cafes were declining. Although no one could give exact numbers, the general consensus is that they are "fading away" (Field Note 7/8/16). Competition from Third Wave coffee shops and chain shops—whose prices are typically less than half that of the coffee at *kissaten*, not to mention the 100 yen coffee available at convenience stores—eat into the already modest profits a typical Master can make. When I spoke to university students, the demographic that perhaps visits coffee shops the most in the United States, about their coffee habits, the majority said that they didn't usually visit them because the coffee (which usually costs anywhere between 400 and 600 yen, or \$4-6) was too

expensive (Field Note 6/27/16). Though some *kissaten*, like Café Paulista and Café de L’Ambre, have survived for decades, the past few years have seen several famous *kissaten* close (Hani 2003). I can only see this trend increasing as Masters—the proverbial centers of their coffee-based universes—retire. When a Master retires, even if someone else takes up ownership of the *kissaten*, the resulting impact on the atmosphere, not to mention the unique profile of the coffee, means that the space will never be quite the same as before. What would Katsura Coffee be without Master Sakaguchi, or Café de L’Ambre without its fastidious Master, Sekiguchi? That is simply one of the risks run when a shop’s brand is centered on a single person.

I won’t make any predictions about the future of *kissaten*—that “if they just did *this*,” then they would be able to revitalize their image. Certainly there’s still plenty of interest in *kissaten* to be found abroad. Making pour-over coffee with Hario or Kalita equipment is functionally the standard in the United States, and both of those companies are Japanese in origin (the nel drip, however, has yet to catch on). Many coffee shops also use *kissaten*—their aesthetic as well as their ideology about coffee—as their inspiration. James Freeman, the founder of coffee company and roastery Blue Bottle Coffee, is heavily influenced by *kissaten*, which he calls a “cultural treasure” (Goldberg and Velasco 2015, 122). In fact, the publicity Freeman has been giving *kissaten* as an institution, which happens naturally when he promotes Blue Bottle, has been catching the attention of people in Japan (122). I visited the first Blue Bottle outlet he opened in Japan, a massive complex that looks like a warehouse but is nestled in the quiet Tokyo neighborhood of Kiyosumi, and was surprised at how *kissaten*-like the coffee was in its flavor profile. Pioneers like Freeman are expanding awareness of *kissaten* abroad, which at some level does feed people’s interest about *kissaten* within Japan. There are also coffee shops in Japan that have a decidedly Third Wave design aesthetic but use traditional *kissaten* brewing techniques,

becoming in effect a “modern *kissaten*.” Cobi Coffee, a small coffee shop located within a clothing shop called Bloom & Branch is one such “modern *kissaten*,” in that its Master blends the minimalist wood, exposed metal, and concrete aesthetic of Third Wave coffee shops with coffee that is meticulously poured with a nel drip (Field Note 7/8/16). For the image-conscious millennial and young professional, this type of coffee shop is the best of both *kissaten* and Third Wave coffee worlds.

Fundamentally, as long as there are people who need a *kissaten*-esque space, there will be *kissaten*. *Kissaten* have managed to endure through the three “waves” of coffee in such a way that preserved their most important priorities—the people, the atmosphere, and the quality of the coffee. Whatever the next trend in coffee is—whether that’s some sort of “Fourth Wave” or a wave of “Smart Coffee” driven mainly by technology—*kissaten* will stick it out in the small neighborhood backstreets, the basements of department stores, the various small spaces you wouldn’t believe could even squeeze in a counter and stools (Interview 9/26/16). *Kissaten* have captured the hearts, minds, and palates of people for generations, from the elite, Western *Kahiichakan* to the humble neighborhood coffee shop. There’s a phrase bandied about when talking about coffee in Japan, which is “*koohii o tanoshimu*” or “to enjoy coffee.” *Tanoshii* is an adjective that was first taught to me as the word for ‘fun,’ so in my mind that phrase has always meant to have *fun* with your coffee. Throughout my six weeks studying *kissaten* in Japan I asked various people what that phrase meant to them. Answers varied. Some people said that communication with others was what made coffee fun, others said that having time they could spend how *they* wanted was what made “coffee time” enjoyable. I would like to add this fourth dimension to what makes a *kissaten*, well, *kissaten*: in addition to the Master, the atmosphere, and the coffee, that fourth element is the element of fun. No matter your preferences, whether

you like your coffee dark and bitter, or light and sour; whether you prefer to sip in silence or amidst a chattering crowd; whether you want a space that is homey or one that feels like a spaceship, there is a *kissaten* in Japan that fulfills your requirements, your wants, and your needs for “fun.” There will be a seat at the counter. There will be a Master to welcome you. And there will be a hot cup of coffee, prepared just the way you like it.



Figure 10: Collage of all the coffee I had in Tokyo. Photo by the author.

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