The Constructs of Formation of an Independent Bookstore and Typological Analysis

An Empirical Investigation in Taiwan and Kyoto

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Abstract: This empirical investigation reveals the key factors that influence independent bookstore formation and development. We delineate independent bookstores into three types: self-owned, apart from figures and revenues; company-owned, apart from figures and revenues; and community-owned, apart from figures and revenues.

1. Background and Purpose for Research

Commonly referred to a bookstore that is opened and run by a local resident, an independent bookstore builds close ties with communities and holds discussion sessions for enthusiastic readers to talk about books from time to time. Hence, the independent bookstore is not merely a place where a reader may have a hearty talk with the owner about any book they are reading, or share their enthusiasm toward the book, but a place signifying the diversity and autonomy of society as a whole.

In Taiwan, the Ministry of Culture initiated a program named “Supporting independent bookstores”. The content of which is mainly about subsidizing independent bookstores in the following respects: helping with start-ups, promotion of reading literary books, and operations of physical bookstores. All in all, a bookstore is supposed to demonstrate an value of its own, apart from figures and revenues. When it comes to value, a culturally diversified venue where reader groups are able to interact and communicate is the best option, and it is an independent bookstore we are referring to under such circumstances.

It is our hope that the current study may provide a useful reference for the government in formulating policies regarding “supporting independent bookstores” in the future. This might in turn help to clarify the planning of an independent bookstore and help the owners (and prospective owners) of such bookstores better understand the trends and future directions at the same time. On the other hand, the publishing industry in Japan also warrants exploration. Its long history guarantees a wider spectrum into which researchers can probe and make comparisons with the condition in Taiwan. The purposes for this study are as follows:

1) To understand the differences between the independent bookstores in Taiwan and Japan.
2) To make typological analysis on independent bookstores through interviews with owners of such bookstores.
3) To build the constructs regarding the formation of independent bookstores for anyone who wishes to know more about independent bookstores.

2. Methodology

This study employs field research and in-depth interviews to understand what attitude the surveyed owners hold toward independent bookstores by asking questions regarding the value of the bookstore itself, the indoor environment and functions of the bookstore, and its service and sales condition. We then further make a comparison and analysis of the content of the interviews conducted in Taiwan’s and Japan’s independent bookstores and present the types of such bookstores and the constructs of the formation of an independent bookstore.

The present paper selected Keibunsha and Hohohozu in Kyoto as research subjects as we knew from Kyoto Intelligent Trip discussions over the websites that the two bookstores are preeminent ones in Kyoto. The former bookstore answered our questions by returning email, whereas Hohohozu gave us an in-person interview.

In Taiwan, we conducted interviews with four independent newly founded bookstores that were subsidized by the Ministry of Culture (in 2012) and are located in northern Taiwan. They are Green Bookstore, Sipoly, Lifestyle Bookstore, and Nankan 1567.

3. The Analytical Results of Cases in Taiwan and Japan

3.1 The differences of independent bookstores in Taiwan and Japan

1) Passing down values: In Taiwan, bookstore owners are responsible for passing down ideas or values to consumers, whereas in Japan, the owners of such bookstores would try to collect consumers’ ideas, and then internalize these ideas and develop the bookstore (Table 1).

2) Range of services: In this respect, we are referring to the food and drinks provided in Taiwan’s bookstores. In order to make more money, the owners of independent bookstores in Taiwan are inclined to sell beverages for additional income. Yet in Japan, several independent bookstores usually work together and support each other so as to improve the development of the community. They tend not to sell beverages lest they are
confused with a coffee shop (Table 1).

3) Regional segmentation: In respect of geographic consideration, the independent bookstores in urban areas usually have a specific theme, whilst those opened in towns or rural areas are mostly based in community (Table 1).

3.2 The typological analysis of independent bookstores

The current study divided the independent bookstores into three types depending on the type of consumers: the community, the social group, and tourists, for field research (Table 1).

The community-based independent bookstores tend to emphasize local culture and a closer interaction with local residents. They also sell local-flavor books and provide information regarding local activities. The social-group-based independent bookstores choose books according to theme and subject, and cannot completely satisfy the need of local residents. However, the selection of books is worth exploring. The formation of a tourist-based independent bookstore is known for its elegant decoration and atmosphere, which is recognized for natural elements in general, such as wood and yellow lights.

3.3 The constructs of formation of an independent bookstore

Figure 1 shows the constructs of an independent bookstore and three main constructs:

1) Core value: There are three sub-constructs under the category: theme, locality, and concept. As every owner of an independent bookstore embraces dreams and goals, what they want to achieve is to convey the ideas and dreams to readers.

2) The creation of style: This construct consists of differing styles, such as “idyllic,” “romantic,” “literary,” “social,” and “queer”. Some bookstores may coordinate the decoration with the selection of books, so that readers can have a full picture of what the bookstore is all about when entering the store.

3) Target readers: Based on the above two constructs, an independent bookstore attracts differing groups of readers, namely, the community, the social-group, and tourists.

The above three constructs have an interplaying influence upon each other. Once the owner has started to harbor an explicit idea about operations of a bookstore, and the style of the bookstore is manifest, like-minded people would try to take part in activities.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

We present research results and suggestions upon the basis of investigation in independent bookstores in Taiwan and Japan, a series of typological analysis, and the constructs comprising an independent bookstore.

1) In Taiwan and Japan, an independent bookstore acts as the medium which conveys the owner’s ideas and ideals and is expected to energize the cultural atmosphere of society. Specifically, it is worth consideration that a bookstore should join hands with other industries or shops, so as to boost the development in that region.

2) An independent bookstore is categorized into the community type, the social group type, and the type for random tourists. The first type refers to the core values embraced by the locals, the second type means having its core values based on a specific theme. With regard to the bookstore that attracts tourists, it is the bookstore’s atmosphere that plays a crucial part in media exposure or consumer participation, and thus relies on non-core values.

3) This study successfully simplifies the many constructs of an independent bookstore into three constructs: core values (theme, locality, and concept); the creation of style (idyllic, romantic, literary, social, and queer); and the target readers (either belonging to a community or a social group, or are random tourists).

4) The subsequent development of an independent bookstore: Owing to the time constraints and geographical limitations, the sample body is rather small. It is recommended that future research be broadened in scope and increased in methodological efforts so the objectivity and generalizability can both be elevated.

Reference


Table 1. The Analytical Results of independent bookstores

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<th>Independent bookstores</th>
<th>Core values</th>
<th>Geographical location</th>
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Figure 1. The constructs of an independent bookstore