

コロナ禍の大学地域における中国人留学生生活を支える場所に関する研究  
－ 東京大学本郷地域でのケーススタディー

A Study on Places That Support Chinese Students' Life in the University Area  
during the COVID-19 Pandemic :

a Case Study on the Hongo University Area of the University of Tokyo  
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In recent years, the number of international students in Japan has increased in response to society's and higher education institutions' growing development needs. Additionally, international students are becoming a critical component in university neighborhoods' placemaking and community development in light of their social circle and lifestyle. This research examined the PLACE that supports Chinese students, who make up a sizable portion of international students in Japan, in the University of Tokyo's Hongo university area. Furthermore, it determined the ROLE of these locations by examining the significant transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

#### 1) Background 1: Japan's growing demand for international labor and talent

Japan's population is aging and shrinking rapidly, necessitating foreign labor recruitment to boost productivity. Japanese higher educational institutions also face an increasing demand for foreign talent to help them develop sustainable campuses and meet the government's modest funding requirements. Governments and schools have implemented various strategies to increase international student acceptance in response to this situation. Consequently, in 2019, the number of international students reached 312,214.

#### 2) Background 2: The current situation in university areas

Certain university areas in Japan are now confronted with the disappearance of elements integral to students' lives due to changes in these students' lifestyles over the last few years. Moreover, many international restaurants and stores on the university street and newly-constructed infrastructure exist for international communication on campus.

#### 3) Background 3: The pivotal role of

#### international students

International students' lives and social networks are relatively close to the school in comparison to Japanese students. As a result, they rapidly establish themselves as a critical component of developing relationships between universities and their surrounding communities. Additionally, Chinese students, who make up a sizable portion of the international student population in Japan, are a critical component of this research.

### 1. 2 Research Purpose

The primary objective of this research is to demonstrate what kind of places support the international student's daily life in the Hongo university area through the perspective of Chinese students. Additionally, this research explains how these places are connected to Chinese students using the following three aspects of changes during the COVID-19 pandemic:

**Purpose 01:** To ascertain the transition of places that support Chinese students' life in the university area before and during the COVID-19 pandemic;

**Purpose 02:** To determine the 'roles' that on- and off-campus places play through analyzing changes in the post-COVID-19 pandemic; and

**Purpose 03:** To demonstrate why these locations can be considered a ‘place for Chinese students’ by examining how they have been managed and how they interact with Chinese students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 1.3 Review of Existing Research and Significance

Previous research examined the relationship between the students’ places on three levels:

**a.)** Kakishima’s (2016) thesis, for instance, focused on the utilization of spaces in the university area; **b.)** research that attempted to assess students’ place attachment, such as the series of studies conducted by Konishi and Nozawa (2013, 2014) and Matsunaga, Goto, and Yoshie (2019); and **c.)** research on places associated with the lives of international students, such as the study conducted by Ridwan Vita Fajriani and Matsumura (2020). However, only a few previous studies examined more than two dimensions. Meanwhile, this research attempts to defend a position that encompasses all three facets. Additionally, it focuses on the PLACE of Chinese students based on place attachment rather than on the neutral space that discusses the existing SPACE. Specifically, it uses the extreme changes in the ROLE of these places during the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study to illustrate such changes to Chinese students and analyze the underlying causes.

### 1.4 Structure and Methodology

The structure and methodology of this research are depicted in Fig. 1. The research objects, including the investigation site and target respondents, are discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 aims to explain the transition of the places that support the lives of Chinese students on the investigation site by analyzing previous research, open data, information, residential maps, and historical Google Street views, among other sources. Chapter 4 identifies the target respondents using formal questionnaire investigation, and a semi-structured interviews conducted

previously. Meanwhile, in Chapter 5, this research takes the form of a case study of the two specific places that support Chinese students’ life. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the research findings and provides recommendations.

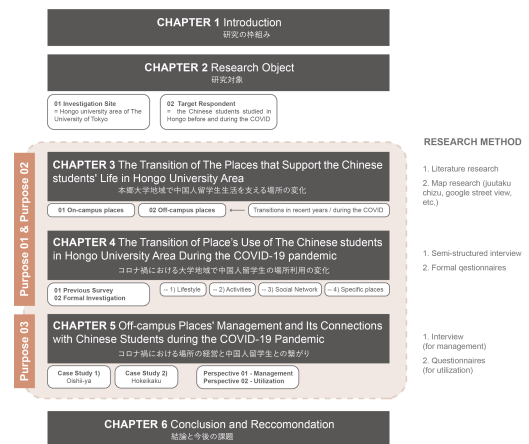


Figure 1 Research structure and methodology

## 2. Research Object

### 2.1 Introduction of the Research Object

The Hongo university area and international students at the University of Tokyo., particularly Chinese students, are the research subjects of this research.

### 2.2 The Hongo University Area

The history of the Hongo university area is inextricably linked to the University of Tokyo students, as it contains one of the most famous historical university streets in history, complete with multiple boarding houses, ryokan, and bookstores. However, it currently faces many problems due to the student exodus, including the disappearance of old stores and ryokans.

### 2.3 The International Students at the University of Tokyo

On the other hand, the number of international students studying at the University of Tokyo increased. While international students in Japan tend to have more multicultural backgrounds, the University of Tokyo’s Chinese student population is relatively large, making it an ideal case study for this research.

### 3. The Transition of the Places that Support Chinese Students' Life in the Hongo University Area

#### 3.1 The Transition of On-campus Places Supporting International Students

As the policies and institutions for accepting and managing international students have recently been enhanced, the University of Tokyo's international student population has grown. As a result, numerous on-campus facilities have been established to support international students' life and study on the Hongo campus. These on-campus support spaces include each department's office for international students, Japanese classrooms, and other multi-purpose spaces for various events (Fig. 2).

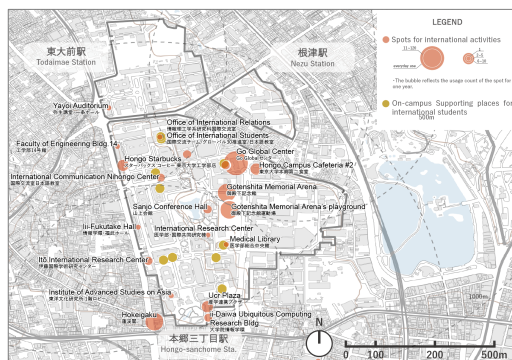


Figure 2 International events on the Hongo campus

#### 3.2 The Transition of Off-campus Places Supporting International Students

The growing number of Chinese students and faculty at the University of Tokyo and Chinese tourists visiting the Hongo campus on a study tour have resulted in the growth of off-campus Chinese eateries in the Hongo university area. Between 2006 and 2021, the number of Chinese eateries on Hongo Street increased from ten to sixteen, according to residential maps. Additionally, these restaurants may share an inherited relationship within an ethnic network.

#### 3.3 The Transition of Places during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The process from the pandemic outbreak in Tokyo to the adaptation to living with the virus can be divided into four stages.

**STAGE 01** - The first stage refers to the period

from March to June 2020, during which there was widespread public awareness of the COVID's protection against this unknown danger. At the University of Tokyo, students' activities were restricted to a greater extent. The majority of on-campus facilities were closed. Additionally, some Chinese restaurants were temporarily closed to reduce their losses.

**STAGE 02** - The second stage is a recovery period lasting from June 2020 to January 2021, between the end of the first State of Emergency and the start of the second. At the time, it was expected that a prolonged convalescence would restore normalcy. As a result, numerous on-campus locations were reopened to students and staff. However, while many Chinese restaurants and other off-campus establishments reopened, the lack of student patronage and the two-month-long losses forced the closure of several Chinese eateries on Hongo Street.

**STAGE 03** - The third stage refers to the period of adaptation to living with COVID-19, during which people attempted to balance daily life and risks in the post-COVID-19 era from January to October 2021. The school attempted to meet research and educational needs while considering the pandemic. During the transition of school policies, various faculties and on-campus public facilities developed their set of long-term adaptive solutions. On the other hand, due to the State of Emergency's requirement for restaurants, most off-campus restaurants that survived the pandemic were forced to reduce their operating hours and adopt new management styles.

**STAGE 04** - The fourth stage spans from October 2021 to the present (December 2021). The Hongo university area attempted to accommodate the needs of students and the public while adhering to COVID-19, and the school gradually reopened to the public. In addition, the Chinese Student Association initiated several offline events as part of its COVID-19 protection strategy. Off-campus locations that survived this disaster appeared to have figured out how to manage themselves

in the post-COVID-19 era.

#### 4. The Transition of the Place's Use of Chinese Students in the Hongo University Area During the COVID-19 Pandemic

##### 4.1 Abstract of the Investigation

This chapter examines the transition of Chinese students' use of places during the COVID via previous hearing surveys and a formal questionnaire investigation to better understand the role of off-campus places.

The formal investigation, which took the form of a questionnaire based on previous hearing research, was conducted online between November 28 and December 31, 2021, with 44 responses in total. The questionnaire collected basic information about the respondents, their living situations, social network, and activities in the Hongo university area prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

##### 4.2 Results and Analysis

The information gathered through the questionnaire revealed three significant changes that occurred during the COVID and affected the places visited by Chinese students.

##### Change 01: The relationship between Chinese students and the Hongo university area

In general, the property of students attending school during a pandemic declined. Chinese students who commute to school more than five times a week decreased from 43% to 29%, while those who commute three to four times a week decreased by 18%. Additionally, the duration of stay on the Hongo campus decreased during the pandemic.

On the other hand, the most striking finding from the data is that, while the number of Chinese students who attended school regularly decreased, the frequency with which they visited off-campus locations increased during the epidemic.

The analysis of the collected data groups in Table 1 summarizes the situation prior to and during COVID-19.

No.	Item	Mean (%)	Range (%)	Average (%)
<b>Situation before the COVID-19</b>				
01	Probability of Studying in off-campus places when visiting school	67	25-400	81
02	Probability of Eating in Off-campus Places When Visiting School	100	25-200	93
03	Probability of refreshing in off-campus places when visiting school	67	25-200	70
04	Probability of exercising in off-campus places when visiting school	50	25-100	52
05	Probability of communicating in off-campus places when visiting school	67	25-133	68
<b>Situation during the COVID-19</b>				
01	Probability of Studying in off-campus places when visiting school	100	25-400	103
02	Probability of Eating in Off-campus Places When Visiting School	100	25-300	99
03	Probability of refreshing in off-campus places when visiting school	75	25-200	77
04	Probability of exercising in off-campus places when visiting school	67	25-150	71
05	Probability of communicating in off-campus places when visiting school	100	25-300	88

Table 1 Mean, range and average of the data groups

When considering the COVID-19 as a turning point, it can be concluded that the connection between Chinese students and the university area is more critical than ever.

##### Change 02: The transition of Chinese students' social networks

According to students' friend requirements, the investigation classified the three social networks of Chinese students as Mono-cultural Networks, Bi-cultural Networks, and Multicultural Networks. The analysis of Chinese students' social networks during the pandemic was based on their preferences for social relationships with various activities before and during the pandemic. The transition of social networks with different cultural groups is depicted in Fig. 3 using the two data groups.

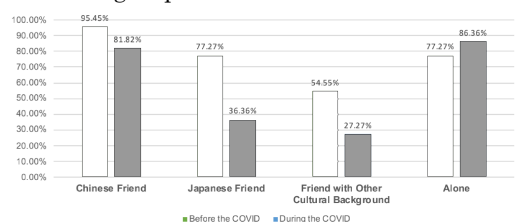


Figure 3 Transition of Chinese students' social networks with different cultural groups

Chinese students' time spent alone in the university area increased during COVID-19, while social activity with each cultural group decreased in the post-COVID-19 environment. Nonetheless, compared to respondents who chose to hang out with Japanese and other foreign friends, those who chose to hang out with Chinese friends in the Hongo university area saw a relatively more minor decline in property.

##### Change 03: The transition of specific activities in different places

The research categorized Chinese students' daily activities in the university area into five categories: study, eat, refresh, exercise, and communicate. Figs. 4 and 5 illustrate the transition between the matching of place and activities prior to and following COVID-19. For example, prior to the pandemic, communication was primarily confined to on-campus locations. However, communication activities shifted away from campuses and

toward students' homes during the pandemic.

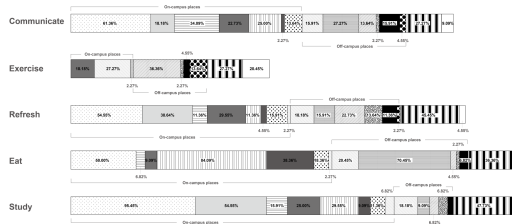


Figure 4 Match of specific place and activity (before)

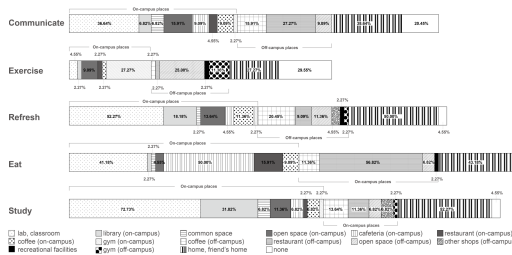


Figure 5 Match of specific place and activity (during)

## 5. Off-campus Places' Management and Connections with Chinese Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This research examined the specific locations frequented by Chinese students in the Hongo university area. Apart from the laboratories throughout the campus, respondents' multi-use facilities such as the central library and cafeteria were the most frequently mentioned on-campus locations. On the other hand, Hokeikaku and Oishii-ya, two of Hongo street's Chinese restaurants, were the most frequently mentioned off-campus locations.

To demonstrate how a place has been managed with a connection developed with the students, and to investigate why these places can be considered 'places' by Chinese students, this chapter analyzes the place attachment and the community that a user shares when visiting the two specific cases, Hokeikaku and Oishii-ya, through an interview with the place owner and a questionnaire distributed to the place users.

### 5.1 Case studies

By examining how the two places were managed, particularly their management and strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible to conclude that connecting with Chinese students was a critical issue for those places. In all cases, establishing an online

community with Chinese student customers is critical to establishing a connection. Hokeikaku has quickly become the most mentioned off-campus establishment, despite its brief existence (since 2018). Establishing an online WeChat chat group as soon as possible is critical to its success. In the case of Oishii-ya, the online community was established during the COVID-19 pandemic, aiding management in some ways moving forward.

Fig. 6 illustrates the factors that influence place attachment to help explain the question, based on questionnaire responses and critical points mentioned by interviewees in the previous survey.

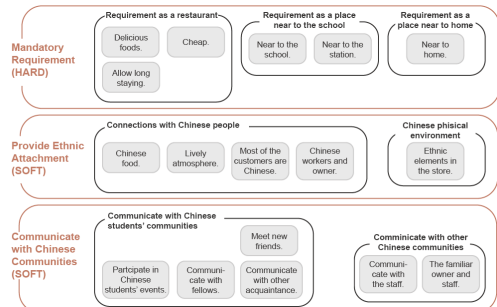


Figure 6 Influence factors of place attachment

Three categories of influence factors exist. The first step is to meet the mandatory requirements for a restaurant on university street, including providing high-quality food at a reasonable price, accommodating extended stays, and being near a school or residential area. Second, the location must foster an ethnic bond with the Chinese students. Along with a physical environment infused with Chinese elements, it must have a vibrant Chinese atmosphere complete with Chinese owners, employees, and customers. Thirdly, the location must facilitate communication with various Chinese communities. For instance, it should provide a long-term stay environment for communication with Chinese student groups, enabling people to participate in student association events, communicate with their peers, other store patrons, and even new friends made in this location. Additionally, communication between the staff and the

owner should be permitted.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

### 6.1 Conclusion

**Chapter 3** examined the transitions between the places that support the lives of Chinese students in the Hongo university area.

**Chapter 4** demonstrated that during the pandemic, the likelihood of Chinese students using off-campus facilities while attending school increased. Before and during the COVID-19 era, Chinese students were more likely to stay in the university area with their Chinese friends. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, portions of Chinese students' activities, such as communication and eating, were relocated from on-campus to off-campus locations.

Thus, the distinct ROLES of on-campus and off-campus places can be summarized as follows:

- On-campus places are primarily used for educational activities and international communication with multicultural student groups, particularly in the run-up to COVID-19.
- Off-campus places are tasked with feeding and communicating with multiple Chinese student communities.

**Chapter 5** discussed why a site should be designated as a PLACE for Chinese students.

### 6.2 Recommendation for the Development of the University and Its Surroundings

Historically, efforts to establish a space for international students in the university area have concentrated on on-campus spaces organized by the school. However, the research findings shed new light on the potential of off-campus locations. It is anticipated that balancing the roles of on- and off-campus locations within the university area will foster positive relationships between the school and its surrounding communities. Several recommendations should be followed to realize this vision:

- 1) Establish places of worship for various student ethnic groups outside of campus in the university area. Communion places

should meet the needs of a cultural group by fostering ethnic attachment and facilitating long-term communication with other members of the same cultural group.

- 2) Make use of the diversity and adaptability of the management of off-campus locations. In comparison to on-campus locations, off-campus locations have a more adaptable and unique management strategy based on their experience, as embodied in various situations throughout the post-COVID-19 era.
- 3) The university area may consider establishing a Multicultural Network to house and connect various student cultural communities in collaboration with the school.

### 6.3 Prospects

Since this research discusses only the case of Chinese students, much more work needs to be done to ascertain the various relationships between the university area and various student ethnic groups to assess international students' situation fully. Moreover, categorizing the research object based solely on nationality is limited. Different cultural groups of international students may have varying influences on place attachment and choice. Additionally, conducting research in various university areas may yield mixed results.

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