

An Investigation of the Actual Conditions of a Chinese Shopping District -A Case of Yuelu Campus City, Changsha-

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Abstract:

Reinvigorating traditional shopping districts is a common problem among developed countries. In China, however, even though many new modern shopping malls and supermarkets similar to those found in developed countries have been flourishing, traditional shopping districts remain competitive.

In order to collect characteristics of such Chinese shopping districts and find a clue to reinvigorate a city center, we conducted surveys using two different approaches in Yuelu campus city, in Changsha, Hunan Province. The first is a review of its historical background and geographical conditions documented in earlier research. According to it, we found that there is a strong continuity between the campus of Hunan University and general urban district around the university, and that means users of this district aren't only students but also common man. That is a distinctive characteristic among other campus cities in China. We also found that that spatial structure is a reflection of the process of Yuelu campus city's development.

The second is a field survey. In order to collect some data about the stores in this district, firstly we have made a record of them seven times, once per month. And it demonstrates that this district itself also has typical characteristics of campus city. For example, many bookstores and shops offering takeout snacks and drinks are located in there.

The data also showed that very many replacements of tenants occur in there, over 10% of all the shops have closed businesses. Especially, numbers of replacements of restaurants and take-out stands are relatively big. The reason might be because these kinds of shops have too many competitors, therefore to get enough profit is difficult.

We also confirmed that there is an interaction between the type of business and the location of the shop. More specifically speaking, bookstores, guesthouses and cafés tend to be located in alleys. Besides breakdowns of types of business, kinds of signboards are also different between the street side and alleys. Therefore that makes a difference of landscape between them. We can infer that such a multilayered structure of space and the frequency of replacements of the stores, except locational advantage, could be reason of the prosperity of this district. Meanwhile, a campaign regarding town scape improvement including restrictions on sidewalk activities was launched in early 2014. Although it effectively prevents violations, it also has changed the district's character considerably.

Keywords:

Shopping district, Campus city, Reinvigoration

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Purpose

The exponential economic growth that is currently occurring in China has inspired the construction of large shopping malls in various cities. Such expansion is taking place not only in developed coastal areas, such as Shanghai and Guangzhou, but also in mid-continent cities. Many foreign investors have recognized the advantages presented by the increasing consumption of the Chinese and have accordingly established business divisions in China. Some convenience store chains have begun expanding into the Chinese market, thereby creating a highly competitive retail industry in the country.

Despite the influx of large businesses, traditional shopping districts that consist of small private shops remain competitive. Regardless of city size, early-evening street life continues to thrive. We take a bustling shopping district located in Yuelu Campus City, Changsha as a study area to determine the characteristics of traditional shopping districts. Reinvigorating such establishments is a common problem among developed countries—an issue that drives us to conduct a case study to get a clue to the reinvigoration of such traditional shopping districts.

1.2 Study Area

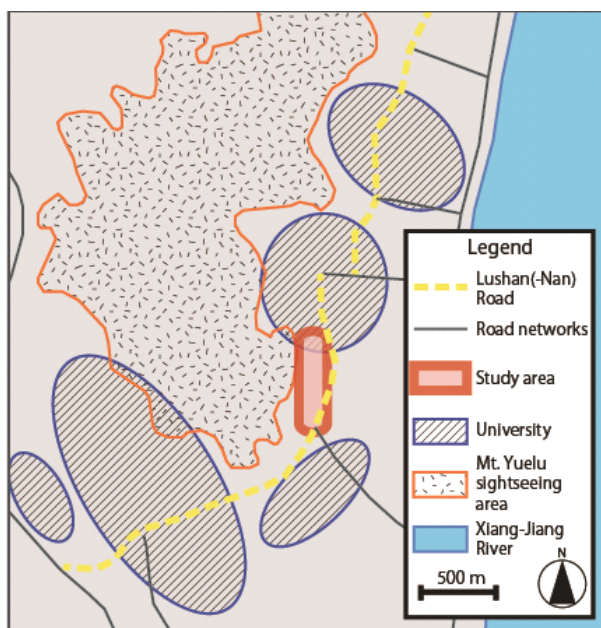


Figure- 1 Diagrammatic illustration around the study area

As previously stated, the study site was a shopping district in Yuelu Campus City, which is located in Changsha, Hunan province. The campus city is approximately 4 km southwest of Wu-Yi Square, the commercial center of Changsha. The Yuelu area is home to three universities (Hunan University, Central South University, and Hunan Normal University) that are connected by Lushan-Nan Road. The road passes the land wedged between Mt. Yuelu and Xiang-Jiang River. We focused on a shopping district along the road near Hunan University, which extends across the west side of the road and across alleys that all lead to the shopping district (Figure- 1). We chose the busiest section of the shopping district—the northern

segment—as the study site in which to conduct the field surveys.

1.3 Methodology

In advance of the main survey, we organized our information about the environment that surrounds the study site and the process that underlies the development of the traditional shopping establishments. After the basic research, we conducted a field survey from May to Nov. 2013 and another in Apr. 2014 to examine the distinctive structure of the shopping district. The survey was divided into three stages. The first involved a continual survey of tenants. To collect data about the stores in the Yuelu shopping district, we surveyed the district eight times (once per month during the aforementioned survey period). The data collected included shops'

name, location, and type of business. The second survey stage involved conducting interviews with shopkeepers regarding rent and inaugural year, among other related information. The interview respondents were divided into groups: newly established businesses and long-established shops, which were identified through conversations with local people. We invited 11 shopkeepers to participate in the interviews and all of them consented. The third survey was an observational investigation, for which we documented the landscape of the study area by taking photographs and creating figures of simple elevation views.

1.4 Previous Study

Cheng (2008) described the studied district in Yuelu Campus City as a “students’ street.” The author also studied the consumer behavior in this area by questionnaire survey. Chen and Wei (2006) presented the geographical characteristics of the campus city and discussed ideas for the appropriate development of the site in the future. As shown here, several researchers have studied shopping districts in China, including the Yuelu area. However, although these studies highlight the circumstances that surround the formation and existence of such commercial centers, they provide only a superficial understanding of the marketplaces as dynamic spaces. Comprehensive research on these locales necessitates elucidating their constantly changing nature. To address this gap, this study aims to provide an in-depth discussion of the spatial structure of the shopping district in Yuelu Campus City primarily by focusing on how it has changed over time.

2 General Outline of Yuelu Campus City

2.1 Historical Background of Development

Yuelu Campus City dates back to the founding of Yuelu Academy in 976. The academy, which is one of the “Four Great Historical Academies,” was later renamed Hunan University. In 1914, Xiangya Medical University (the precursor of Central South University) was established, after which the campus of Hunan University was redesigned by Liu Shiying, a professor of the School of Architecture at the university. Although he intended to minimize the influence of classicism, he also attempted to ensure that the campus reflected the historical context of the area and arranged the facilities on the basis of a functional layout. Furthermore, this design was used as basis in constructing the campus of Hunan Normal University, which was established at a later time. During this period, some restaurants were constructed around the area where student dormitories were located. National Teacher’s College (the precursor of Hunan Normal University) was then established in 1938.

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the government constructed Lushan-Nan Road, which connects Hunan University and Hunan Normal University. In those days, however, the road was narrower than the current thoroughfare and was in poor condition. Given this problem, attempts to link universities and schools with one another and to create a campus city in the 70s fell through. Meanwhile, shops began to be established in the northern region of the study area. A trend of campus expansions was already prevalent in the 70s to the 80s. In the 90s, the number of university students sharply increased and universities rapidly grew, thereby further accelerating the expansion trend. Consequently, growth in the area began to be characterized by blurring boundaries between the campuses and the urban areas around them. In this period, a shopping zone called Decadence Street began to be developed along Taozi Lake and Pailou-Kou Street. Nevertheless, the shops located at the Pailou-Kou roadside were forced to close as soon as road improvement works were underway. Soon after, the shops

along the lakeside were cleared, and Decadence Street eventually disappeared within the decade. In January 2001, the development of the campus city was discussed during a provincial assembly, and a competition on development planning was held. Architectural design studios and laboratories from the US, Germany, and Japan participated, and the design of gmp Architekten, a German architectural studio, was the winning entry. The following year saw general repair work on Lushan and Lushan-Nan roads. The improvement included increasing the number of lanes to four.

As stated above, the three universities that form the core of the current campus city were already-existing institutions, and commercial accumulation could be observed as early as the 50s. In other words, the germination of the present-day campus city began in this decade, marking one of the earliest developments of suburban campuses, including those in Beijing, Shanghai, and Wuhan. This background differentiates Yuelu Campus City from other similar areas that were developed after the construction boom in 1999. The development of these “administratively planned campus cities” was jointly organized and initiated by the national government, local governments and academic institutions. Because these types of campus cities are planned as separated spaces, they tend to lack history and culture and do not complement surrounding environments. By contrast, Yuelu Campus City is classified as a “self-generating campus city” and Hunan University is known as an “externally opened university,” with no school gate. That is, the campuses and surrounding urban areas are appropriately harmonized, in contrast to the environment that characterizes the typical “closed” campuses in China. Aside from Yuelu Campus City’s historical background, it is notable for its distinctive characteristics.

2.2 Current State and Ambient Surroundings

The core sections of the current campus city are Lushan and Lushan-Nan roads. These thoroughfares connect the three universities that form the campus city: Hunan University, Central South University, and Hunan Normal University, as well as their adjunct facilities, such as dormitories. These roads are therefore not merely the main roadways on the west side of Xiang-Jiang River, but also the living spaces of the students from the three universities and other schools. The roadsides are consequently lined with many shops. Our study site particularly bustles with traffic from Hunan University because the site is located between the main south campus and the dormitory zone of the university. The students ordinarily go to school on foot, and there is currently no parking lot at the site. We can assume that visitors travel to the site primarily on foot or by bus.

The students’ quarter is not the only region that occupies this segment of the district. Mt. Yuelu, a popular tourist destination rated as AAAAA quality (the highest national ranking conferred on a destination spot) by the government, is located behind this segment. Between the shopping district and the mountain is a residential area for general inhabitants. Aside from students, therefore, other people reside in this area. Typically independent zones, such as university campuses, sightseeing spots, and a residential area, seamlessly co-exist—a representative characteristic of Hunan University that makes it an externally opened institution.

Finally, the environment near the commercial area is occupied by some strong competitor shopping malls. Yuwan Dock Shopping Plaza is located near the southern edge of the segment, and Tongcheng Shopping Plaza is about 2 km away from the district.

Table- 1 Changes in the composition of businesses

Month	Eating Establishment			Retailer								Service business					
	Restaur- ant	Café	Bar Pub	Take- out stand	Clothi- ng shop	Book- store	Groc- ery	Househ old goods store	Home appli- ance retailer	Super- market	Others	Guest house	Barber	Mobile phone dealer	Photo studio	Copy shop	Others
2013/5	38 18.0%	13 6.2%	1 0.5%	32 15.2%	22 10.4%	15 7.1%	13 6.2%	9 4.3%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	8 3.8%	24 11.4%	4 1.9%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	10 4.7%
6	37 17.4%	13 6.1%	1 0.5%	38 17.8%	21 9.9%	15 7.0%	12 5.6%	9 4.2%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	8 3.8%	24 11.3%	4 1.9%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	10 4.7%
7	36 16.9%	13 6.1%	1 0.5%	38 17.8%	21 9.9%	15 7.0%	12 5.6%	9 4.2%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	8 3.8%	24 11.3%	4 1.9%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	10 4.7%
8	36 16.9%	14 6.6%	1 0.5%	38 17.8%	21 9.9%	15 7.0%	12 5.6%	9 4.2%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	8 3.8%	24 11.3%	4 1.9%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	9 4.2%
9	37 17.4%	13 6.1%	1 0.5%	39 18.3%	23 10.8%	15 7.0%	12 5.6%	8 3.8%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	8 3.8%	24 11.3%	4 1.9%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	8 3.8%
10	39 18.1%	12 5.6%	1 0.5%	39 18.1%	23 10.7%	15 7.0%	12 5.6%	8 3.7%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	8 3.7%	24 11.2%	4 1.9%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	9 4.2%
11	40 18.6%	11 5.1%	1 0.5%	40 18.6%	23 10.7%	15 7.0%	12 5.6%	8 3.7%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	8 3.7%	24 11.2%	4 1.9%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	9 4.2%
2014/4	47 21.3%	9 4.1%	1 0.5%	42 19.0%	23 10.4%	14 6.3%	11 5.0%	7 3.2%	2 0.9%	3 1.4%	8 3.6%	25 11.3%	4 1.8%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	3 1.4%	8 3.6%

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Types of Businesses in the District

Table- 1⁽¹⁾ shows the changes in the composition of businesses in the study area. Each row indicates the composition observed for each month. The figures in black denote the number of businesses and those in gray indicate the percentages of each business type per month. The table shows that the overall composition of businesses remained nearly unchanged during the survey period. The study area had many restaurants and take-out stands, which accounted for nearly 30% of all the tenants in the district. This density is attributed to the huge demand for dining out in this area, which caters mostly to students. Similar to the students of other universities in China, most of the students of Hunan University live in school dormitories where they are prohibited from cooking. Furthermore, our results suggest that the high proportion of bookstores in the area is also attributed to high demand from students.

Another distinct feature of the shopping district near Hunan University is the large number of guest houses. The houses are characterized by simple designs and able to be leased on a monthly basis. These establishments are therefore geared toward student boarders and not tourists. To sum up, the results indicate that business composition in this area is heavily influenced by a geographical factor, that is, the presence of neighboring universities.

Table- 2 Locations of shops based on the survey data collected on 19 Nov. 2013

		Upstairs	Inside of alley	Roadside & street level
Eating establishment	Restaurant	8	9	23
	Café	1	5	6
	Bar/Pub	0	1	0
Retailer	Take-out stand	1	0	39
	Clothing shop	1	3	19
	Bookstore	0	14	1
	Grocery	0	2	10
	General shop	0	2	6
	Home appliance retailer	0	1	3
	Household goods store	0	0	3
	Others	2	1	5
Service business	Guest house	5	20	1
	Barber	1	0	3
	Mobile phone dealer	0	0	3
	Photo studio	2	0	1
	Copy shop	0	1	2
	Others	0	3	2
Others		0	1	3
Total		25	62	130

Table- 1 also shows that vacant stores were a rarity in the district during the study period. Even with the good geographical features of this area, the saturation of businesses is still a remarkable characteristic.

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3.2 Shop Locations

Table- 2 shows the arrangement of business composition according to location. The table shows a considerable difference among locations. For a detailed illustration of composition, we plotted the data on a map (Figure- 2).

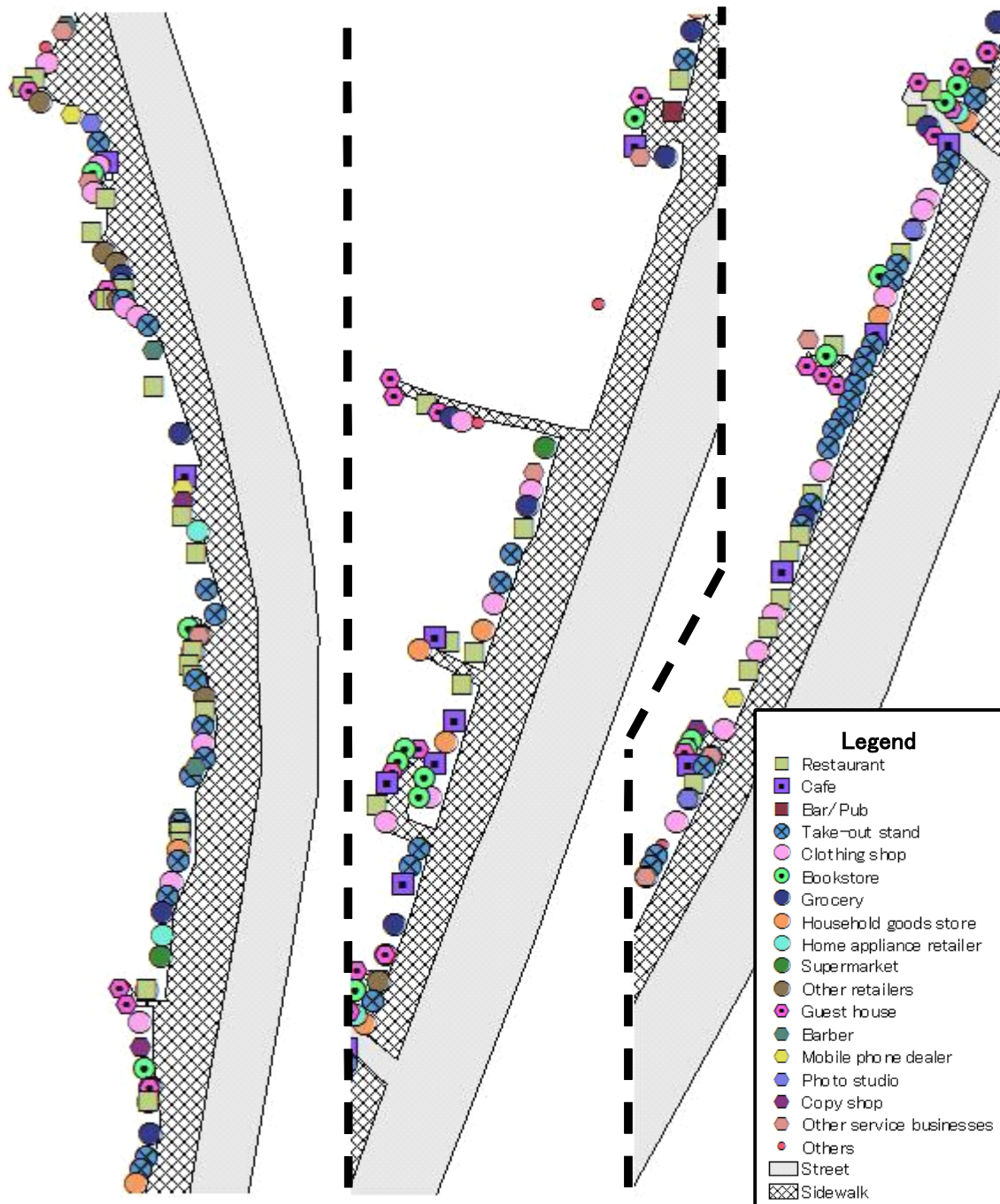


Figure- 2 Distribution of each each business (on 19 Nov. 2013)

This indicates that almost all the take-out stands were located on roadsides. As stated in the preceding section, many such establishments were found in the district. We infer that this density is due to the need of take-out stand owners to position their businesses in areas that are visited by numerous customers. As shown in Figure- 2, the stands tended to be located next to each other. In this area, we also found many small lots, which were formed from huge lots (i.e., huge lots were divided into two or more smaller-sized lots). We assume that take-out stands are easily positioned in small lots because they do not take up much space. Consequently, the take-out establishments were typically arranged in clusters.

In contrast to the take-out stands, the guest houses and bookstores tended to be located

Table- 3 The number of closed / newly established shops from May to Nov. 2013

	Take-out stand	Rest-aurant	Café	Clothing shop	Other service businesses	Household goods store	Guest house	Mobile phone dealer	Book-store	Total
Closed	8	5	3	2	2	1	1	1	0	23
Newly established	17	6	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	29

in alleys. Half of the cafes were also located in these road sections at a relatively high density. The common ground among these types of businesses is the requirement for a silent environment. Guest houses and bookstores also need large spaces. These requirements explain why the aforementioned businesses are usually located in quiet and low-rent places. These factors can also explain why some guest houses are located in elevated areas.

3.3 Tenant Replacements

Table- 3 shows how many shops had been closed and newly established from May to Nov. 2013. According to the latest survey in Apr. 2014, closed shops eventually accounted for about 20% of the 210 shops surveyed in May 2013. A close examination of each type of business indicates that tenants serving food (e.g. take-out stands, restaurants, and cafes) were more likely to establish their businesses and then close shop. Next, we took particular note of the location where closed shops were replaced by new ones. Most of such “replacements” took place on the roadsides. We also found that in a single year, tenant replacements occurred at least twice on four lots and three times on two lots. All of these lots, which are small to medium-sized, are located on the roadsides.

The frequency of replacements may be attributed to the high density of shops. More than 200 shops are located throughout a 650-m long section of the district. During the interviews, several shopkeepers argued that this area is saturated because of the excessive duplication of shop character. The interviews also reveal that all the respondents rent lots from owners of land-use rights and few of the respondents live in these lots. Given that other shopkeepers also just rent lots and don’t live in their lots, they may not be obligated to hold on to the lands and easily decide on closing their shops once their shops are no longer profitable.

The closing down of businesses may also be explained in relation to the types of core customers (i.e., students) in the district. First, students are temporary residents and therefore cannot be counted on as long-term or regular customers. In addition, students’ needs vary depending on trend or novelty. Aside from the closing down and replacement of businesses, frequent shop renovations and business name changes occur possibly because of the desire of business owners to keep pace with the “neophilic” tendencies of customers in the district.

Enshu (2002) analyzed tenant replacements in shopping districts. She refers to this phenomenon as “metabolism” and regards it as a positive occurrence that animates life and business in shopping districts. On the basis of her concept, we can view the tenant replacements in Yuelu as a factor that brings vitality to the district.

3.4 Landscape

Figure- 3 is a simple elevation view of the study area. The figure shows that most shops on the roadsides are located in low-slung or mid-rise buildings. The structures and heights of their façades are rarely unified.

With regard to signboards, every shop on the roadsides had huge and eye-catching signs, which were typically located on the upper side of an entrance (see Figure- 3). Some of these shops used to have standing signboards on the sidewalks, but these were cleared in Apr. 2014. As



Figure– 3 Simple elevation view of the study area (an excerpt)

determined in the latest survey, only five of the shops had projecting signboards that were also small enough to fit into eaves. More than half of the shops in the alleys had projecting or standing signboards. Another interesting observation was that almost all the signboards in the alleys were red. These results indicate that restrictions have been imposed on allowable locations for

signboards; that is, standing signboards are allowed only on alleyways and not on roadsides. Local people stated that the urban control division of the local government strengthened their monitoring efforts in 2014. These efforts are related to the “Clean City” campaign advanced by Changsha City beginning in Jan. 2014.

This area also had many shops with open façades⁽²⁾, and they represented about 30% of the total number of such shops in Apr. 2014. These shops used to display their merchandise at the front of the establishments, but this feature was not observed during the latest survey. We speculate that the absence of displays also resulted from the campaign.

Although this restriction is beneficial in terms of the creation of a safe and clean space, it also created an ordinary cityscape. An important consideration is the comfort that people experience in public spaces, but this factor can be incorporated into urban planning without sacrificing spatial character. This study was motivated in part by the hope that urban improvements will eventually harmoniously integrate the two aforementioned values.

4 Conclusion

This study collected and organized data on the geographical conditions and historical background of the development in the study site. The results indicate that the spatial structure of the area visibly differs from that of “administratively planned campus cities,” which have been rapidly constructed in recent years. This difference stems primarily from the spatial continuity between the site and its surrounding urban areas. The campus city was a pioneer development project for suburban campuses in China, and its spatial frame was gradually formed as campus development (e.g. expansion) was advanced. Historical background also exerts a huge influence on the current spatial structure of the campus city.

On the basis of the results, we conducted field surveys to determine the actual conditions at the study site. The results are summarized as follows. In terms of business type, the district consists of a particularly large number of restaurants and takeout stands, as well as many bookstores and guest houses. This composition is attributed to the good geographical location of the district; that is, it is surrounded by neighboring universities. We also found that takeout stands tended to be located along the roadsides and guest houses, whereas bookstores and cafes tended to be located within alleyways. Such contrast produces a multilayered space—one of the factors that differentiate the site from modern shopping malls.

Furthermore, numerous businesses closed down and were replaced during the survey. The interviews reveal that this phenomenon is primarily caused by the high shop density in the district. Given such density, shop character is duplicated. As Enshu suggests, the replacement of shops can be regarded as a positive factor because it maintains the novelty and appeal of the

street.

In terms of landscape, the structures and heights of the shop façades are mostly diverse. Restrictions on sidewalk activities have also been implemented; these measures include prohibiting the erection of standing signboards on roadsides and display of merchandise at the front area of shops. This campaign was launched in early 2014. Although the townscape improvement effectively prevents violations, it also diminishes the energy and uniqueness of the street. This situation highlights appropriate townscape improvement as a challenge to the further development of Yuelu Campus City.

As demonstrated in this paper, a continual survey of a specific area sheds light on many factors related to unique shopping districts. In the future, the causal relationships between these factors and the ability of shopping districts to thrive should be investigated in more detail.

Notes

- ⁽¹⁾ We classify take-outs under retailers because they don't provide space to eat and should be separated from eating establishment.
- ⁽²⁾ Here, "open façade" means that no separating element, such as glass or a wall, delineates the interior of a shop from the sidewalk.

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