

Research Report: Graduate School of Global Studies Research Grant

I applied for the Graduate School of Global Studies Research Grant to finance the first phase of my doctoral research, originally designed as a nationwide quantitative survey of approximately 790 Mexican restaurants across Japan. The objective was to collect data on the nationality of owners, managers, staff, and clientele in order to map variation in ownership, staffing, and clientele structures within what I have conceptualized as Mexican food in Japan as a case of “Mexican food without Mexicans.”

The survey has not yet been distributed. This decision was made in order to use the granted resources more effectively. During discussions with my advisor, Professor James Farrer, and as part of the ongoing development of my dissertation framework, we concluded that it would be methodologically stronger to delay the survey until additional fieldwork clarified the hypotheses guiding the questionnaire design. While my initial intention was to use the survey in an exploratory way, we determined that a more hypothesis-driven instrument, grounded in deeper qualitative research, would ensure a more responsible and analytically meaningful use of funds. The survey remains a central component of the dissertation and will be implemented.

Although the survey has not yet been mailed, the following progress has been made:

A. Expansion of the Research Scope

The dissertation framework has expanded from an exclusive focus on Mexican restaurants to a comparative design that includes both Mexican and Peruvian restaurants in Japan. The addition of the Peruvian case emerges from the contrast between the widespread presence of Mexican food in Japan despite a small Mexican migrant population, and the opposite case of Peruvians in Japan, who represent a large migrant population but a limited restaurant presence.¹

¹As of December 2024, there were 3,702 Mexican residents and 48,247 Peruvian residents in Japan. Yet, according to Tabelog, Japan’s most widely used restaurant review and listing platform, there were 791 Mexican restaurants but only 79 Peruvian restaurants nationwide (consulted August 26, 2025).

B. Construction of a Nationwide Restaurant Database

I completed a comprehensive database of all Mexican and Peruvian restaurants listed on Tabelog. This database establishes a national sampling frame, including restaurant addresses necessary for survey distribution. This empirical groundwork is essential for the survey's implementation, but also, is a substantial research output in itself.

C. Survey Instrument Refinement

The survey instrument is being redesigned to reflect clearer research hypotheses. To date, two drafts of the survey have been completed. This refinement ensures that when the survey is mailed, recognizing that response rates in surveys are usually low, the opportunity to collect data will be used effectively.

D. Use of Grant Funds and Logistical Preparation

The mailing of the requires considerable logistical preparation, including translation, printing, and envelope preparation. Grant funds were used to purchase official postage (stamps) in advance for both outgoing mail and return envelopes.

As additional logistical support, I secured assistance from the Institute of Comparative Culture (ICC) at Sophia University, which provided 800 official envelopes and agreed to assist with mailing preparation and the reception of returned surveys through its address at Sophia University's mailroom.

The finalized survey instrument will also be submitted to the Ethics Committee for Research on Human Subjects prior to distribution.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Although the survey has not yet been distributed, the decision to postpone mailing is a commitment to using resources carefully and effectively. Given that survey response rates are typically limited, it is essential that the instrument be theoretically precise and empirically grounded before distribution.

The survey remains a central component of the dissertation and is currently being strengthened through expanded comparative design, clearer hypothesis formulation, and institutional preparation.

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I am grateful to GSGS for the support, which has enabled the careful preparation necessary for this phase of my research.