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TUAN NGUYEN DUC ANH
VIETNAM

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INTRODUCTION

A Japanese can live in a quiet suburban and work in the center of the crowded urban, pass through many space and place in just one day. Leaving home and family in the early morning, walking down to the subway, take a familiar crowded train, and arriving at workplace with a smile. Within the time come to workplace, a person can pass through a lot of social and public space, some with uncomfortable feeling, and some with enjoyable feeling. A modern city gives people a lot of opportunities to interact to each other but the fact is only a few places where contact is voluntary and chosen and which we also known as the public space.

So, what is public space in Japan? It's hard to say because Japan's public space is not follow a rule like we used to think that it's must be a big space like parks, squares, etc... or it's must have it own function in the urban area. Well there is also a lot of public space with everything that I'm mention above but some of the public space defined by its history, scale, culture, evolution or maybe some combination of any specific criteria. And what is these places look like? Most of people will instantly think about the café, or maybe some bars and pubs, but according to my research, it's more than just these place above. And these places also known as the third place.

In my article I will talk about some kind of third place that I visited and do some research on them, these places divided base on the age and the use of the users. Not all these places can divide into groups like this, I mean some place in also have the same age and the use elements inside it, but some place it's only have the limited use and ages of the users. Some of these place may popular in some countries, but in Vietnam, it's a new experience in my opinion.

SCHOOLS' (UNIVERSITIES') TERRACE

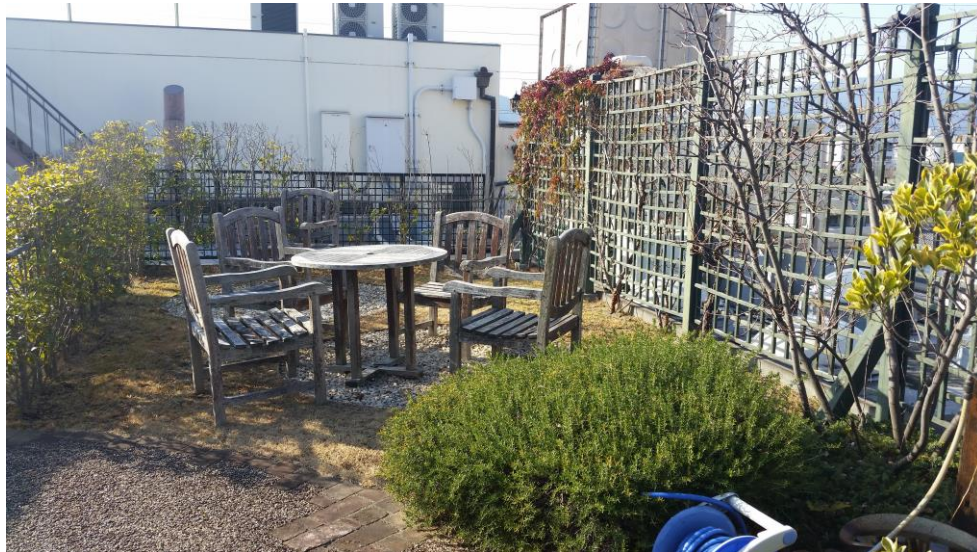


A view on a terrace of one building in Kyoto Koka Woman's University in Kyoto, Japan.

You might wondering why schools' (universities') terrace can be a third place. As I mention in the introduction, this is a place which is limited by a certain age of users, and the users we talk here is students and of course strangers cannot enter this area. And because of that this place usually become a great place for students to come after class or maybe in the break time. Back to the question, in my opinion, this place is meet with the requirements of the third place as Ray Oldenburg mention in his book – The Great Good Place. The first thing is the neutral ground. Everyone is allowed to use this place for many reason. Let's talk a little bit about how the terrace

look like. So every schools or university in Japan and maybe some other countries have the same fence systems, but some don't have it. It's usually about 2.5 meters tall. What makes this place special? Well in Vietnamese we used to think that 'oh I don't think that we can do anything on the terrace because it's kinda boring and dangerous in some reason', but in Japan, they know how to attract students to use this place which means that it is designed very beautiful. So I will talk about one of university I came when I'm at Kyoto, it's Kyoto Koka Woman University. The first time I came to this place I'm very surprised. It's like a mini garden in the top of the building, very relaxing place for

students to come after a work-hard day. Although the place I came quiet small like it just fit about 20 people, but some of the students here said that in the summer, this place have more than just 20 people, no matter they from different class, different major, different ages, they all enjoy this place together. There is one thing that I like about the terrace of this university is that they have a cherry blossom tree here. It's like students don't have to go far away to see cherry blossoms while they can see it at their own university. As the picture here you can see the design of the terrace here.



So what do people do in here? As I mention above, students use this place for many reason: some use this place for reading books, some use it to have lunch with friends, some use it to relaxing, some use it for taking photos, etc... but the main activities is chatting with each other. 'Sometimes chatting makes it easier for you to interact with others' one of the student said. 'We have a lot of fun while we talk to each other, although we don't know each other very much. Sometimes we also have small party like birthday party in here, it's very fun. It's like all the tired is disappear immediately.' Although this university have an open space for students between two buildings but the feeling like someone is watching you while you sit there makes you uncomfortable sometimes so they prefer to

go to the terrace to have a break. With a nice view of the city, the nice design with the tranquility, I would prefer this place more than other place in university too.

So what about the mood of this place? Although this place is always cheerful but sometimes people with bad moods also come to this place. They came here to forget what they are concern about, they came here to share with their friends their sadness. It's give me a new way to think about the third place, it's not always be cheerful to be a third place, sometimes place with uncheerful atmosphere can also be a third place but I think it depends on some reasons. For some students, this place inspire them a lot of ideas to write their books, to do their works, to study for their exams, etc... The fact I see in Vietnam here is we don't have many space for students to enjoy like this. Just an example, the library. Okay it's maybe not too big, but it's good to have some place for students to discuss for their works, for their projects, or maybe just to sit there and do some essays. The third place in my opinion for Vietnamese students is the university's traditional festival where we are all be one, from strangers to be friends, no matters who you are. But you know it's a festival, it's doesn't last long. I mean it will be better to have a place for us students interact more than just a festival like that.

SENTO & ONSEN: PUBLIC BATHHOUSES IN JAPAN

“It’s more than a bath.”



Nishiki-kyu Sento in Kyoto, Japan.

This place may be new to us but in Japan it’s still very popular. In the past, many houses in Japan don’t have bathtub. To fill this void, the public bath was place where the locals could go to wash themselves, soak in a tub and chatting with neighbors. Nowadays most of households have their own baths, the numbers of traditional public baths has decreased, but actually we still can find

them in many of the old-fashioned city neighborhoods. Sento are known for their temple-style architecture called “Miyazukuri”, which can often be seen in Tokyo. Public baths are segregated by gender. What is the different between Sento and Onsen? Onsen, typically in hot spring resort, use natural hot spring water for their baths and most onsen are located in the countryside, near the volcanic mountains. Unlike sento, some onsen are outside and open to the natural so you are able to bathe in the refreshing hot water of the springs whilst taking in the beauty of natural around you. And most of onsen are not allowed people with tattoos to go in because onsen is more leisure and luxury place. More commonly, however, Sento simply use heated water instead. Because sento is for citizen’s sanitary, a public space for everyone to come and enjoy, even people who have tattoos. Actually there is a law to protect the right to bath at sento for any kind of people including people with tattoos in Japan which give people opportunity to enjoy this space, especially for foreigners.

So back to our main topic, what makes it become a third place? Bathhouses of this period were spaces in which neighbors, friends, and strangers would come together and socialize and it was in these interactions that this communal cleansing ritual transformed a simple bath into a sento experience. Which means it provided people space to interact with each other. And because people come from the same area, which mean they also know each other very well, or maybe not I guess. People not only come here to take a bath, they also come here to chatting, to discuss about some politics, they share the joy together,... And sometimes, they also held a few small games in here too. My friend lives in Tokyo said that sometimes the game just like a matching words game, sometimes they sing all together, or maybe sometimes just some funny quiz. They create a cheerful atmosphere, leave all the tired behind. And the special thing here is the low profile. For example, if in the office there relationship is manager – staff, but in here they just like other people, they don't care about their level in society, they all have a good talk here and usually go somewhere for dinner after the bath. This mixing created a new cultural flow between the elite and commoners. Although people only chatting in the bath area, but the changing room is also a place that most of Japanese men like to enjoy too. It's sound a little weird, but after the bath, they like to enjoy light refreshment, and of course nothing lighter or more refreshing than a nice cup of Japanese sake. They buy it at the vending machine, standing somewhere near there, drink and continue the chatting. My friend said that that is an experience worth to try when you come to Japan. Here I just talk about what Japanese men do after taking bath, I don't know what about Japanese woman so I won't mention it in here but maybe it's the same I guess.

The modern-day onsen and sento are different from their historical counterparts. In here I'm not talking much about the history of these place but it play an important role in culture, economic,

hygienic and religious contexts of Japan. Onsen and Sento have reinvented themselves as affordable and legitimate entertainment in new ways that elevate them beyond a mere bath.

THE CAFÉ

Urban life in Japan is more than what you thought: a crowded urban and intense. You can easily see the traffic of crowd standing with you at the subway, next to the traffic lights, etc... One of the thing that we may realized in Japan's urban is the "ignore" – or can be understood as *pass over*, paying as little attention as they want to things that maybe make them feel uncomfortable. In someway we call it self-protection, but public spaces, distinctions can thrive if they can be ignored. Japanese urbans share characteristics such as density and a fast paced life, but each of them have their own historical and topological factors. For example, Tokyo, most of part of the city built in webs of lanes, later loosely organized by more recent grids. Because of this structure, visitors (even people from elsewhere in Japan) confuse to find a location by its address. On the other hand, Kyoto, is built on a grid, based on a Chinese imperial city – is more ancient in its outlines. You may find it quite similar to New York City or may be Manhattan. It's easy for you to navigate where you are, with the layout of streets and numbered laddering from north to south. You may find a new experience in here, the experience of modern life lies between webs and grids, between formal and informal places. Without an open space – a park, sitting spaces, where people can stop for a several minutes, recover or maybe prepare for the next destination. Mediating between the crowded of the city and the

spaces, the intensely private and the very public, are the cafés (and also bars) that we’re going to talk about.

Talk about the café we all may instantly think about the public space with its society. But in Japan, it have a different characteristic than just a public space and of course, the café in Japan divided into many of kinds with their own characteristic. In this article I will talk little bit about some kind of café in Japan.

3.1 THE MAID CAFÉ: WELCOME HOME MY MASTER!



Maidreamin café, Akihabara – Tokyo, Japan

Maid Cafes are a major cultural icon in Japan, especially for foreign visitors. As cosplay went up in popularity, so did the demand for seeing people wearing it. At maid cafes you can enjoy the feeling of being the master of your own domain; the maids that tend to you will call you “goshujin-sama” (meaning “master”), or “ojo-sama” (meaning “mistress.”) – where the young and the otaku (means the community of people who love anime (Japanese animation) irrespective of age and gender), this one is very famous at Akihabara, Shinjuku and Shibuya ward – Tokyo. It is lighthearted fun in colorful designed rooms with a funky disco feel. The staffs here all dressed like a maid, sometimes

they also dressed like an idol but they also singing and dancing on a small stage in the café too if visitors request her to do it. When girls isn’t singing and dancing, they will chatting with the guest,

invite them into their little dream-like world for a special dining experience. The staff are all warm and welcoming, no matter what you look like, they make it a safe and carefree place for visitors to come, but according to what I saw here, most of the customers are Japanese teenagers, sometimes office workers also come here too, foreigners who want to experience something new. Most of maid cafés in Japan have their own special rules for visitors, such as how to order foods, drinks, how to call for services, never touch the maids, never ask for maid's phone number or email address,... which is quite interesting. But there is a rule that most of maid cafés have that they are not allowed to take any pictures and videos, but luckily the café where I visited they allowed us to use camera. It's Maidreamin Maid Café in Akihabara. So I had zero maid café experience, but I think I will never forget this experience in my life. When I and my friends take a sit inside maid café, a maid will introduce to us a little bit about the menu, and also she takes us through how it works like to call for service, we had to shout "Nyan nyan!" (It's Japanese words for Meow and in Japan culture, it's also mean cute). Honestly to say I my first time to try this so it's kinda shy to shout out loud like that, like people may think "That's guy is abcxzyz blah blah...". But after that I can get along with this because some group of people in here shout it out together very loud to get maid's attention with make me feel a little bit confident. But in the maid's view, I think that scene is very funny because you can imagine a bunch of guys sitting a table, putting their closed fists against their cheeks making really bad cat noises to get your attention. Depending on the café you visit, you might be given a cute headgear to wear during your stay. It's a lot of fun if you've prepped yourself for the experience! It's even more fun when you're with friends who are more than happy to do the actions with you and make it less embarrassing. The laughter from participating also makes everything taste better! As I mention above, the crowd was mostly male, with a few foreigners who were enjoying themselves. Actually

there were a couple of Japanese girls in this café, but they seemed more interested in each other than the entertainment.



Special show for the customers. The crowd they all stand up and cheers

About every hour in the night a maid would get on the stage to speak to the customers and start to sing and sometimes dance performance. Whenever that happened, there always have a group of Japanese guys would stand up and do this comically energetic, perfectly awkward dance alongside. This call Japan Idol Culture. If you dig a little bit into Japanese Culture you may find there is Idol Culture, it's different from the K-pop idols. If Korean's idols become famous and start their "pro" career with tour around the world, sign which many events, etc.... but in Japan, the idol culture is the idol everyone can meet, everyone can talk to them, or it can be understand that people can interact more closely to their idols. The most famous idol group in Japan is AKB48. This is a group of 48 girls in one group and sometimes they divide into smaller group to perform along Japan. Actually the member of this idol groups is more than 200 members. And of course to be an idol, which mean you have to follow the rules from the managers. But what I like from Japan idol group is they all start from *zero to one* which mean they all start from nothing – they don't sing very well, their dance are bad,

they don't have any special skill in perform,... but after training they will get better by the time and the fans also can see how she becomes better. That's why they call *the idol of everyone*. So it's kinda related to maid café here. The maid café is also the module of idol in maid suit, but they are not famous in the society, just in the café. Visitors come here can talk to her, they can have polaroid with her, they can see her almost everyday. Because of its special characteristic, most of visitors come here and become friends very quick, especially when the maid dancing or singing, people sometimes join together into a large group, cheers and dancing and sing along with the maid. Sometimes you can also take the chance to play some games with the maids. Usually something basic like rock - scissor – paper or board game, but an interesting experience all the same. What seems to be the aim of this particular themed café is provide a space for everyone to enjoy, to allow Japanese workers to forget the stress of the work, escape into a more pleasurable atmosphere for a short time and have a cheerful dining experience. For the girls it is also an opportunity to escape the stress of work, but also enjoy very cutely designed foods. For a foreigner like me, it is to have an unforgettable trip to a café, something different to write home about.



The maid chatting with us while we're here.

3.2 TSUNDERE CAFÉ: WHEN THE GIRLS ARE MEAN, THE CUSTOMERS ARE HAPPY

Another kind of café in Japan, Tsundere Café. Actually it's similar to maid café, but the maids here are different from the "idol everyone can meet". So what is the meaning of the word "tsundere"? Tsundere is a Japanese term for a character development process that describes a person who is initially cold and even hostile towards another person before gradually showing a warm side over time. In a normal maid café, the maids will treat you sweetly, but in tsundere café, they will treat you like something they don't like to see and they don't welcome you to come. For example in the maid café the maid will say "Welcome home, master!", but in tsundere café, they will say something like "What are you doing here?" when you entered the café. I haven't have a chance to try this experience, but I heard from my friend in Tokyo this kind of café is quite famous here. Most of customers here is male with the age usually around 18 ~ 40 or something like that. All of them usually have a same hobby, pay money to be treated like dirt. People might think that these guys must be crazy to pay money like that or why they have such a café place like that, but in my opinion, it's a good experience for anime's fan. And of course there is no dancing or singing maid in here, because well you know, they just serve you the way they like it – rudely, like sometimes they will ignore your calls, items may be handled roughly by the maid,... But when customers leave, the tsundere character suddenly becomes clingy, asking if the customer is leaving and going to a maid cafe because she's been mean. This is precisely why the tsundere events are popular - the clingy moments at the end, right after being a total pill. It's all somewhat masochistic, but the unpredictable nature of the tsundere events makes them popular with customers.

3.3 THE REGULAR CAFÉ

“Sometimes it is enough just to be alone in a café ...”

The café life in Japan, although it's similar to other countries but in some aspect, it's different from them. It's hard to compare bar and café. In bars there is an anonymous community, in which you can hide yourself, in an uncommitted way. The café as a public space is different from the bath and bar. In addition, the café is a place where one can take one's time without the social demands of the bar and without the justifying task of bathing. For urban residents, this may be the freedom that is needed. The café can still the noise of the city, a noise that is both desired and daunting. However, urban are places of tight-knit clannishness. It is hard to find a place where you can rest in unwatched solitude. “A café can take care all of that pressure, you don't have to leave the neighborhood” a *shitamachi* (downtown Tokyo city) resident said. From a community which intimacy was lacking, a café might provide a space for connection with other people.



Vermillion – espresso café at Fushimi Inari Taisha, Kyoto.

As the transitional facilitators, café have displayed the urban and modern, at the same time offered relief from its anomie. A worker from countryside, need to catch up with the pace of urban, went to a café where some of their countryman had come, entering a network for passing on information in a dialect they could understand. These café are similar to English public house in London or Irish pub in Boston where newly arrived industrial workers could make contact. In the early 20th century, young people came to cities for education, they would gather at café as social spaces away from classrooms and boardinghouses. The café for them was a place of learning. Café encouraged education among student peers, offering opportunities to learn and contend over philosophy, literature, and politics in a space where changing the world seemed possible. According to what I read on a Japan history book, in the late 1920s, café is a place where political activist could attempt to move history. During the World War II, when political discussion was under official scrutiny, the last public social spaces still open as rations ran out were café.

The postwar brought people back to café. Movies and cafés filled people's need for inexpensive entertainment. Such places are now nostalgic room. For young people who would not have experienced the originals, the past is a style on parade, enjoyable as a mood. Older visitors come for community to remember about the past. As my friend in Kyoto said "This is such an old-fashioned place, but the oldness is what we are adore today and we want the place to stay as it always used to be." The café becomes the producer and container of memory and culture. Japanese café in their shape-shifting tell, reflect, and create urban life in a constantly evolving, diversifying, merging, and sometimes problematic social place. However it is the shape-shifting itself that has allowed it to do more than persist.



Café Garakuta – Kyoto, Japan with its old fashion style.

The attraction of the café is its provision of space. With the modern life nowadays, the rising of technology, people contact to each other through cell phones and social media may have made café less crucial either for beverage or for sociability. Café in some reason can reveal what is not working in society as well. For example, the loneliness. As I mention above, café sometimes is good to be alone, where people can escape from the crowded society out there. That is the problem for the society.

The café in modern life usually crowded in the late afternoon till the late night. People come here for many reason: relaxing, chatting with friends, or sometimes to do homework, write a book or maybe just buy a coffee and go. Although the café is crowded but it's not too noisy, you can still find tranquility in here with the music is big enough to hear. You can also find it quite similar to bar in Japan too. As my observation, there are usually a group of office workers come into a café to drink

and smoke together, relax after a hard-working day (there is a smoking room in here). Just buy a cup of beer, a pack of cigarette shared to each other, and they begin the conversation. For some café they also hold some little games for customers to enjoy with some small prizes. Some café just focus on provide people a private – quite space to enjoy, not being seen by the society.

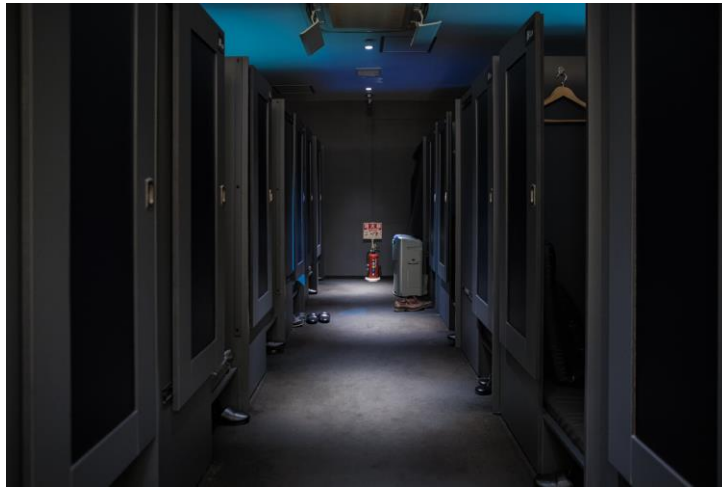
3.4 THE INTERNET/MANGA CAFÉ: THE DARK SIDE OF JAPAN CAFÉ



Welcome to Shinjuku, home to one of Tokyo's many internet café.

This is also the interesting café in Japan. Talk about Internet café, most of people instantly think about an open space with computers for people to use. But that is just what you thought. In

Japan, Internet/Manga café is way different from the others countries. So what is Internet café in Japan? Internet café is a place that offers all sorts of services centered around the internet and general connectivity. These kind of café can be found mainly but not only in big cities. People come here for using computers, charging their phones, or even when just wanting to take a rest. That's right it's true that you can take a rest here, and of course you can stay overnight if you want to. There are some recommend for travelers that I read on the Internet, it said "In Japan, if you are cheap, you stay in capsule hotel. If you're cheaper, you stay in an internet café". What is these place look like? Easily for you to imagine that this is a place divided in to small cubes equipped with a computers, a wheel chair and if you want to stay overnight you can pick a room with a bed. In some way it's more like a motel than a café. Internet café can't be booked, but generally they always have seats available, especially before midnight. After midnight, with the closing of the subway, these place are crowded of salary-men who decide to spend the night in these places near the workplace after having missed the last train to come back home. Internet/manga café aren't just for game and reading manga in Japan. They're part entertainment, part hotel. So do they have any special service? The answer is yes they do. You want to take a shower? Check. Bed? Check. Nails salons? Why not. For some Japanese, it's like their second home to go. With a full equipment place like that, why it's the dark side of Japan? An increasing number of low income Japanese men and woman are permanently living in tiny dark cubicles at internet cafés where they play video games in their spare time while saving on rent. Known as "internet café refugees", they spend every night washing, sleeping and eating at the gaming centers in between what is usually low-paid and menial employment.



The cubicle halls were dark, smoky, and cast in eerie blue light.

The trend started in 1990s with some young men spending a growing amount of their time playing video games, and then graduating into low paid mindless jobs which occupied the space in between going back to the café. Eventually they moved permanently into the 24-hours cafés, which have cubicles where the computer user can fall asleep as well as bathrooms where they can freshen up before heading off to work. They live in a world where they drift from one darkened cubicle to the next in between working in jobs that keep them on the edge of the society.

People live here, like a small community of urban, reflect the social reality of Japan – the pressure of life. One of the refugee said that he is originally wanted an apartment of course but it was expensive here in Tokyo, so he decided to just live at the Internet café. He spent most of his time there anyway hanging out, so it wasn't really much of a step to spend the rest of his time there. He is also said that life is hard in here, you can imagine that it's like a cell but smaller. Sometimes people live here share their difficulties in life together, sometimes they go to have dinner together, but he admitted it is not easy to sleep here, you will never feel rested because there's always noises and disturbances going on around but it's got great facilities. He is also hoped that he would able to save some money, but it doesn't really work out like that, it's just getting him from one day to the next. So

people want to become full-time employees but the fact of Japan is once they get that job, what's waiting for them is long hours and high stress work. This may cause some serious effects in society as you know that Japan have such a high suicide rate, as the 26th place in the world. But refreshingly, the café owners have an enlightened attitude to their guests – looking upon them as valued customers rather than vagrants – and have attacked local press coverage which has scornfully labelled the cyber-sleepers “refugees”.

BARS: JAPAN'S NIGHTLIFE

Beside this, there is also a hostess bar, which is one of the most famous nightlife in Japan. Amid the bright lights and the hustle and bustle of Tokyo, foreign hostess bar major part of Japan's nightlife. Most of Japanese live in cramped houses which are uncomfortable and prefer to spend their time after the office outside the home. It is an integral part of Japanese life.

Bars are vital to Japanese because they are the nerve-releasing centres for them. The concentration of bars on the back streets of the shopping centres of the cities is extremely high in Tokyo and other Japanese cities. When offices close, Japanese stop over at bars to drink with their close friends, sometimes they are their colleagues, etc... They will remain drinking there until well after the last train before they get home. It's not the drink that attract them to stay, it's the chance of relaxation after a hard working day. Bars are a means of soothing their nerves.



Bars are always crowded with people come here to relax and have a chat.

The atmosphere of Japanese bars is quite different from the bars from over the world which is always crowded and open. The Japanese prefer small bars where lights are dimmed, with a background of quite music. It's a very personal atmosphere: no matter how you look, they are always accepted you.

There is a Japanese tradition in bars that I like it a lots, that is whatever you said when you drink is excused and it should be forgotten and forgiven. In Vietnam probably it's gonna be a fight in this situation. Therefore the bars become an important place to pour out the frustration and grievances and as some Japanese said: "I can't live a life without a bar".

Why do Japanese people need bars? The answer is simple. Because they are rather slow to speak out on formal occasion and feel considerable pressure from the rigid vertical system. When a conversation becomes tense or when difficulties arise to releasing one's tension, a chat with a drink in a bar often provides good effect to release their tension. Or for some Japanese, this is the place where they can find complete relaxation and can talk and laugh from the heart. Bar conversations

enable them to voice their different ideas and views, and it is here that they really have an emotional outlet.

THE SMALL RESTAURANT / PUB

The final space I want to talk about is the small restaurant. This kind of restaurant we can see everywhere in Japan, from the small alleys to the big streets, from the underground to above the ground. Easy to understand is the sushi restaurant or ramen restaurant. They all have the same characteristic: the customers' seats is face-to-face with the chef (but it's not available for some restaurant) which is quite interesting because you can see the chef prepare a meal for you, or for some Japanese, they chatting with the chef. People come here is diversity: elder, workers, tourists, etc... So more than just a restaurant which people just come to eat, have a drink and leave, some restaurants and pubs also know how to create a cheerful atmosphere inside such a small place. For some restaurants, sometimes when they bring the whole tuna to their restaurant and start to slice it into parts, they hold a small game like rock-paper-scissor for customers to enjoy, compete with each other. And of course the price is the best part of the tuna with just half price. I haven't luckily to see this but my friend told me that it was very fun at that time. All the customers take part in the game, kid vs the adults, foreigner vs local people, and the laugh and happy faces everywhere in here, just like all of the tired of the day disappeared.



Japanese men are take part in a small game held by the restaurant.

For the pubs, it's a little different from the restaurant. Well the different that we may see that this place usually don't have kids, more like a place for adults. This place is usually crowded in the night till the midnight and some pubs they open overnight. Pub in Japan mostly similar to the regular café and the bars, but the space inside pub have a little bit modern and ancient, which made people feel safe and warm when they entered. And because to serve people in the midnight, some pubs are also restaurant, they serve a lot of kind of food here. I went to a small pub with my friends in Kyoto once at 1.00 am. The pub is quite near my hotel, which just take about 4-5 minutes from the hotel. Although it late but this place is always full of people, seems like they all live near hear and hang out with their friends after work, but some people they just stay in here for 10 – 15 minutes and then they go to work. The design of this pub is simple, but it's still attract a lot of people to come and enjoy it. Although it's always crowded but it's not very noisy, you can still enjoy the jazz music inside here while people are chatting. Sometimes they also hold some small games for customers too, the prizes are some beverages, usually the special one which is expensive. I have a good experience here, it's

like in the midnight the streets is likely entered their sleep, it's very quietly but sometimes you can hear some cars' horn, but when you stepped inside the pub, it's like the different world – crowded but not very noisy, narrow but very comfortable, strange but cozy. For some local people, this place is like their second home where they can come when they sad, and even when they happy, sometimes when they drunk they sleep at the pub till the morning.



View inside a pub in the evening when people came back from their work.

PACHINKO: MORE THAN JUST A MECHANICAL GAME

I think this is new for people in Vietnam. Talk about mechanical game, some people might think about a pinball game and will said “It’s just a game for kids”. But in Japan, this is more than just a normal mechanical game. So what is *pachinko*?



A sample of pachinko game machine.

Pachinko is a very popular entertainment game in Japan. The name “pachinko” is said to derive from the sound of the balls ricocheting about the machine. A player buys a box of ball bearings and feeds them into the machine. The aim is to direct the stream of balls through a maze into the successful player’s stray, which can be exchanged for a variety of prizes. The open secret is that players can change the prizes into cash as well, even though the law bans pachinko gambling for money. Pachinko attracts more than 17 million Japanese people every year from the young to the elderly. People choose Pachinko as the most beneficial way of entertainment. You can say that pachinko is the industry which bring a huge profits for Japan. Pachinko machines can be seen everywhere, but most of Pachinko is located near the subway stations. Most of people just play it for fun but in the other hand there are also a lot of professional players play Pachinko to make money. They are very skilled and know everything about Pachinko. The money they earn is not enough to make them rich but they also help them to survive day by day. Such an easy way to make money!

As I mention above, although pachinko is a game for kids, but nowadays pachinko is banned from children under the age of 18. Why? Easily, because pachinko is not just a game like it used to be, it's a game of gambling. Because of the thinking you can easily make money with the pachinko, they suddenly become addicted to pachinko. Although the balls use to play the machine here is cheap, just about 4 yen/ball (about 800 VND), but on average, one person will spend about 2.000 yen in this game (about 4 million VND). A lot of pachinko's addicts have to borrow money to play, which leading them to insolvency when they can't afford to pay. On the other hand, the rules of pachinko is depend a lot in lucky not the count because the machine here is already setup for the prizes, so the player's destiny is completely depend on the path of the ball and the rotation of the machine. Because of its characteristic like that, pachinko has been argued that this is actually a form of gambling.



Inside of a pachinko centre. It's always crowded with people.

Although it's an entertainment game which causing a lot of argument but you can't deny the role of pachinko in the entertainment industry. Pachinko has helped players to relax after stressful

work hours with the thrilling moments of watching the results and feeling happy to claim their rewards.

IKEBANA: GIVE LIFE TO FLOWERS

For some Japanese people, ikebana is the activity which they enjoy in their leisure hours. So what is ikebana? Ikebana comes from the word “ikeru (to keep alive)” and “hana (flowers)” which we can understand as “living flowers” – or easy to understand it is flower arrangement. Ikebana is one of the most famous cultural traditions of Japan, and nowadays it is becoming more and more popular all over the world. For some people they may wonder “What is the different between other flower arrangement and Ikebana?” when first time know about Ikebana. Well, flowers are generally known as the symbol of beauty all around the world and flower arrangement are popular in the world too. Many people arranging flowers to decorate their rooms, houses and other places. Although that the flower arrangement is for the beauty, but Ikebana is different, it has a special meaning.



An example of ikebana, exhibited at Shinkansen Kyoto Station concourse made by Takako Shiono.

Originally ikebana was only done by monks or men and it was thought of as a spiritual practice. They arranged flowers for the gods and in order to clear their minds. They gave more meanings to flowers and created ikebana as a high cultural practice. In Japan, people not just arrange flowers but also giving life to the flowers which mean they not just make them more beautiful but also try to feel nature. They recreate nature in miniature to see individual flowers which have been left behind. Ikebana is like one of the ways to communicate with nature. They also try to express peace through flowers too.



An example of Rikka, one of Ikebana style.

I have a chance to visit Ikenobo once when I came to Kyoto (Ikenobo is oldest and largest school of ikebana). This place called Rokkakudo temple – a Buddhist temple in Kyoto, Japan. The name of the temple come from its main hall’s hexagonal shape. So is there any meaning behind the hexagonal shape? The answer is yes. Hexagon implies “Rokkon seiyo” (purification of the six roots of perception). The word “Rokkon” means 6 desires caused by eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and consciousness. It is said that when you purify desires, corners of desires are removed and you can get a harmony. With the busy life style, people are always seem to be hurry in Karasuma area, which is the center of business in Kyoto, this is the place that people can forget about the busyness at the area where are a lot of office buildings lined up. This place is also located in the center of Kyoto with the famous hexagon shaped stone called Heso-ishi (Naval Stone). It’s really hard to find such a place like this in a crowded city, especially a temple surrounded by many tall buildings. In Vietnam we also have a lot of temple inside the cities but the fact is this place is very crowded with people come to visit and people try to do their business around the temple. It’s doesn’t have a “Zen” space for people to calm

themselves, to take a sit and relax. Japanese people come to Rokkakudo temple to learn ikebana, and for foreigner, they come here to experience the Japan's culture. Ikebana helps people to connect together, they share their feelings and express it into flowers, and also have a good time to forget all about the stress and the busy life.



Inside Ikebana class at Ikebono Headquarters near Rokkakudo Temple. And my first time try to arrange flowers.

There is one thing that I learnt from the Japanese is their deep sense of appreciation for things aesthetic. They have good sense of artistic appreciation. Sometimes I noticed Japanese spending hours staring at a bunch of flowers, at ikebana or sometimes just at a simple painting. They love nature and would like to be with nature. They believe that everything must come from the heart.

LIFE IN A POEM

Getting a chance to visit Japan, having a truly global experience and my own personal development are some of the many things that I have while I'm in Japan. I have found Japan to be a wonderful blend of both eastern and western cultures, a wonderful place to live. With the time I stayed in Kyoto, I have been able to experience different aspects of Japanese culture and society. There are also a lot of memorable experiences that I have in here and I would love to talk about all of them. In here, I found myself like in a different world, with many different feelings. Although it is a crowded place but not too crowded, it is a place where the traditional blend with the modern, the old and new, the harmony flows between the busy life style and where people can find for themselves a place to go, a place to relax and leave all the stress behind to blend with the atmosphere. In here you can also find yourself mingling with people from all corners of the world, sometimes smile with you although they don't know about you. Great service is not something you ask for, it's a way of life, where you never need to beg for more. There is one quote that I like a lot while I stay in Japan, "Ichigo Ichie", which means every moment in life is unique and every person we meet is special. To conclude, I would like to express my heartiest gratitude to the Kyoto City Government, the Consortium of Universities in Kyoto for providing me and many others students with this priceless opportunity. Thanks to Kazue-san, Takako-san, Takuya-san and local students for helping us during the program.

