Food Culture + Built Environment: Exploring China, Thailand, and Japan

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract –

Culture and diversity are increasingly gaining attention as international interaction grows in commerce, academics, sports, travel, and so forth. An understanding or awareness of cultural differences and similarities is becoming more valuable in the design of environments, products and services. Even the most basic aspects of everyday life become an appropriate discourse for issues of diversity and culture. While food and built environment have intimate roles in the daily lives of people, culture permeates and shapes all aspects of both. As an interior design student, I understand that design lies interwoven with and between culture and the built environment. My honors thesis, “Food Culture + Built Environment,” is centered on exploring the relationship between food, culture, and design in China, Thailand, and Japan by investigating the built environments for dining. I also examined the representations of Chinese, Thai, and Japanese food cultures in American society. Literature review on the topic, interviews of individuals with international experiences from the given cultures, and the use of ethnographic observations of dining environments constructed my informational foundation. With the gathered data, I employed my intellect and knowledge of interior design to seek clarity in this topic layered with significant obscurity and complexity. Ultimately, I have only scratched the surface of the relationship between food culture and the built environment, but my new knowledge and perspective have been greatly expanded – an accomplishment worth the endeavor.

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First, I would like to thank Dr. Thelma Lazo-Flores for advising me throughout my semester-long journey. Her experience and insight pushed me to ask more questions learning more about the world. In addition to guiding me this semester, our conversations have fostered a passion to live a life of learning and discovery.

Second, I would like to thank all of the individuals who offered their international viewpoints. Without this added perspective, my thesis would have been very limited. I would also like to thank those who shared with me images to expand my visual documentation of the study. They greatly enhanced my presentation with representations of visual authenticity.

Third, I would like to thank Ms. Debra Goens, her graduate assistant, and Dr. Kris Rugasaken for connecting me with a number of international students. Their assistance made a great difference in finding opportunities to broaden my perspective.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my family, friends, and classmates who encouraged me throughout the semester. At times, simply listening to my trials or showing interest in my topic made a world of difference. I also extend special thanks to all of those who supported me by attending my honors thesis presentation.
Author's Statement –

Throughout the globe, food and shelter are present as part of basic human needs. What seems most basic, however, can often have great cultural significance. By examining the similarities and differences between cultures, one can increase the ability to communicate and interact with others. Culture has become an important topic with the significant global exchange of goods and ideas, extensive international travel for commerce and leisure purposes, and the increasing attention to diversity in the workplace and academic environments. Misunderstandings between cultures can create barriers. In response, it has been established that cultural exposure and understanding of our multiple differences can generate opportunities.

Common in all societies, food and shelter provide starting points for developing cultural awareness. Food is an especially effective medium in cultural exchange. It not only reflects geography, climate, etc., but also manifests intrinsic social interactions and behaviors. Dining is typically done with others: family, friends, significant others, business associates, and so forth. Meals can even reveal world views including connections with religious practices and social hierarchies. On the other hand, designers shape the built environments, or shelters, in which people live their lives, interacting with the confined spatial parameters and with other people. Environments leave impressions on us and shape the way we view the world, just as culture shapes the environments themselves. The relationship between culture and built environments is reciprocal.

For my honors thesis, I chose to explore the relationship between food culture, built environments, and the inclusive design that binds in many facets. My research concentrated on the food cultures in China, Thailand, and Japan, and also investigated their cultural representations in American society. While I have always had a personal interest in cultural similarities and differences, I also understand that culture poses a unique and important relationship with design. My inspiration rose from a single question, “When someone chooses to dine in a China Buffet, are they experiencing Chinese culture in some way?” From there, the concept cultivated new questions and ideas for an honors thesis project. While I would have loved to examine all of the food cultures around the globe, I chose to explore three Asian cultures represented often in American society through restaurants. Then, I determined my goals for the thesis project and appropriate steps to achieve them.

Goals and Progression

For the successful completion of my honors thesis, several goals were set in place and considered throughout the semester-long process. These goals also directly relate to the steps taken in the progression. The first step required gathering information about Chinese, Thai, and Japanese food cultures in order to understand them better. Similarly, I required data about representative built environments in American culture in order to evaluate them. Once sufficient information was collected, the second step involved analysis and synthesis. With such massive amount of information gathered, it
was necessary to filter through it for relevance. I also used my background as a design student and an individual in the context of being a consumer to make significant connections and draw conclusions. The coherent assembly of the appropriate materials and giving a public presentation made up the final steps for the completion of my thesis.

The first step, gathering cultural information, served my goal “to gain understanding of the authentic food cultures of China, Thailand, and Japan.” From the beginning, I had intended to explore the three food cultures by consulting books, published articles, and relevant websites bearing information from the experts. However, I determined that further clarification was needed even after finding several reliable sources. Some of them offered a great deal on the traditional food cultures, but lacked the amount of information I desired concerning modern day dining environments.

After discussing this with my advisor, I decided to broaden my approach. Through the Rinker Center for International Programs, I was able to contact several international students currently attending Ball State University. Thanks to my advisor, classmates, and my job at the Writing Center, a few additional Chinese, Thai, and Japanese students and faculty were brought to my attention. Then, I spent many hours conducting interviews and informal conversations to discover more about these food cultures. The explanations of varying restaurant types and dining experiences offered a much broader view of the contemporary food cultures.

Observing and gathering data about American restaurants helped to fulfill my goal “to evaluate restaurants’ representation of the Chinese, Japanese, and Thai food cultures.” I had initially intended to collect this information locally in Muncie, Indiana, assigning one restaurant per food culture. Again, after a discussion with my advisor, I chose to broaden the scale of my observations. First, I decided to conduct the three local observations in Indianapolis, Indiana, instead. Indianapolis offered more options as a larger city. Therefore, I could compare a sampling of restaurants and select restaurants which seemed to be making an effort toward authenticity. In addition, a visit to Chicago, Illinois, was planned to include three more restaurant observations. In comparison to Indianapolis, Chicago offered an even broader range of restaurants with a cultural representation more typical of a large U.S. city. With a wider sample of restaurants to observe, variances and commonalities could be more easily identified and stronger conclusions could be made.

The choice to interview international students and faculty also strengthened my perspective on Chinese, Thai, and Japanese restaurants in the United States. In the set of discussions I conducted, I included questions for reflection on their dining experiences. The international comparisons that their viewpoints presented gave me a much deeper understanding than mere observation from my personal perspective. Ultimately, the choice to conduct interviews helped in achieving an added goal of “acquiring a broader cultural perspective than my own.” Without the interviews, I would have been looking at all of the information and drawing my conclusions entirely through my own cultural lens.
The second step, analysis and synthesis, moved closer toward my goals "to gain understanding of the authentic food cultures of China, Thailand, and Japan" and "to evaluate American restaurants' representation of the Chinese, Japanese, and Thai food cultures." Without considering the relationships between food, culture, and design, I would only be half-way to my goals after I collected the necessary information. In order to reach more complete and valid conclusions, I referred to my set of literature resources, interview notes, and personal observation notes and photo-documentation. I also applied my educated knowledge of built environments as an undergraduate student of interior design. In this way, I discovered connections and had the ability to correlate and communicate my findings effectively.

Finally, developing a presentation to give to my colleagues, peers, and superiors achieved my goal "to impart my knowledge to the Ball State community and to help to broaden others' perspective on cultural differences." My presentation acted as an avenue to explain my goals and to give a sampling of my initial findings. I used my design background to create a professional looking and visually pleasing presentation. In achieving this goal, the ability to cohesively assemble and logically organize the content was very important. I carefully considered the order and manner in which I presented the content to my expected audience, the academic community at Ball State University.

**Research Methods**

While taking steps toward achieving my honors thesis goals, different sources were consulted and various approaches were chosen to find the most desirable information. During my literature review, I sought published resources that offered general information on China, Thailand, and Japan as countries and cultures. This would help me to give a general background for my own understanding and also for my presentation. Naturally, explanation of the different food cultures was the most important information I hunted in literature sources. Food culture might include food dishes, utensils, typical place/table setting, dining furniture, and formalities of a group meal. I focused, however, on the dining experience with special attention to the different environments. During my research, I also came across a very interesting book entitled *Culture, Architecture, and Design*, which discussed the relationship between culture and design. I scanned some of my sources and took notes on others, sifting through all of the collected information at a later time.

When conducting interviews with international student and faculty, I used multiple approaches in order to collect useful materials. I chose to use a digital recording device, which was available for check-out at Bracken Library on the Ball State campus. Along with the recordings, I took some supplemental notes in a standard notebook. I made an effort to collect some background information about the interviewees to provide as an indicator of my sampling. The interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 1 hour and 35 minutes. I did not create a structured set of questions as I would like to randomly share their own dining experiences. Because I only created a guideline of "talking points," the responses varied. However, I believe this made many of the international students more
comfortable as they were sharing in an informal conversation. The English levels varied as well, which made the recordings extremely useful. I had the ability to replay responses for precise quotations.

Visuals also played a large role, both in my research and for my presentation. After interviewing, I would suggest that the individual send me images depicting some of the aspects we discussed or representing the typical restaurants in China, Thailand, or Japan. Most of the students and faculty were eager to find images to share. I also found several images to represent the Chinese, Thai, and Japanese cultures, to explain aspects of their food cultures, not only to add visual interest to my presentation but to fully express the connectivity with food culture and the built environment. Photographs were an integral part in completing my restaurant observations and were significantly included in the presentation as well.

The process of observing restaurants representing Chinese, Thai, and Japanese food culture began with an online search. I referred to the popular review website, Yelp, to find a selection of restaurants and, second, to choose the restaurants most appropriate for my observation. For my study, I purposely avoided carry-out restaurants and buffets. The website indicated that restaurant owners were another factor; for example, a sushi restaurant owned and operated by Japanese would be preferred over Korean. However, I did not make great efforts in this area, especially with my focus being on the experience and environment instead of food. The reviews by a variety of common people, both locals and visitors, offered an interesting span of perspectives.

When visiting restaurants for ethnographic observations, I brought along a notebook, sketchbook, and camera. Someone usually accompanied me to help photograph, while I took notes and made sketches. I made notes based on the general experience and environments, considering continually the information from my literature review and interviews. The photo-documentation not only supplied an extensive view of the entire spaces but also an accurate depiction of specific environment features and cultural artifacts therein. One interesting development was that my “photographer” chose to take pictures of the tea cup at every restaurant, which accidentally generated an interesting comparison of codified cultural variances. Even tea cups can represent cultural differences through forms, materials, and decorative motifs. What is more, these variances were observed at restaurants in America, not in China, Thailand, or Japan.

**Results of the Study**

In Chinese food culture, a focus on the social and communal aspect of meals and dining out is evident. The dishes are not ordered by each individual guest and individually served; instead, several dishes are served at once and shared among all at the table. For this reason, round tables with chairs for 8 to 12 people are highly preferred. Each person does have an individual bowl for rice, an integral part of almost all meals. The Chinese diet consists of *fan*, necessary food, and *cai*, secondary food. *Fan* usually refers to rice but may be another type of grain, while *cai* refers to dishes of meat and vegetables. As dishes are shared within a group, variety is considered
important, and guests are expected to at least try each dish. Chinese restaurants are known for being bright and noisy, which is attributed to enjoying the mealtime with family and friends.

Thai food culture also regards sharing a meal as a social event. All dishes are served at once in the center, including a large container of rice. All dishes are shared with the group. Everyone helps himself or herself placing rice and dishes on an individual plate. Dishes may include meat and vegetables with seafood being quite common in southern, coastal regions. Thais traditionally eat sitting on the floor, but tables and chairs are quite common today. One practice that sets Thai food culture apart from China and Japan is the minimal use of chopsticks, which are really only used for noodles. Spoons are the most common utensils with occasional use of forks as well. In Thailand, dining seems to place a strong focus on the company of people. Spending several hours sharing a meal with friends would not be unusual. The climate often calls for open, even outdoor restaurants in response to the tropical heat and humidity.

In Japan, dining remains a social occasion, but dishes are created for individuals instead of groups. Typically, a meal is small and light featuring the individual ingredients. Seasonal changes and regional differences affect the ingredients available, instilling an appreciation for them. Actually, Japan is known to have the most spice-free cuisine in Asia. Rice is a staple food in the Japanese diet, but vegetables, meat, and soy products are also found. As an island country, the sea influences many aspects of Japanese culture, including a wide use of fish, seafood, and seaweed. The meal is taken at a low table sitting on cushions upon a floor of tatami mats. However, tables and chairs are quite common as well. Certain settings in Japanese food culture demonstrate an emphasis on the social aspect of dining quite well. In an Izakaya, a cross between a bar and a restaurant, many people will gather around a table to eat and drink, sitting close together on the tatami floor.

Whether in China, Thailand, or Japan, the dining experience seems to focus on enjoying delicious food with family and friends. However, the built environment has the potential to decrease or complement that experience. In the interviews, several individuals noted that they don't often consider the built environment while dining, unless it makes a strong impression on them either positively or negatively. I believe this demonstrates something about the relationship between food culture and the built environment. First, the built environment is only one of the many elements that make up food culture. The typical food setting and size of group call for a specific furniture arrangement. The spatial characteristics of a restaurant blend with the whole experience of several factors: taste of the food, capability of the servers', noise levels of fellow patrons, price, etc. Second, an individual may pay less attention to culturally significant features that are familiar or intrinsic to his or her own culture. Average people do not seem to notice furniture or lighting level in a restaurant, unless it either impresses them or annoys them to a certain degree. This observation is evident from the interviews and my visits to several restaurants. Finally, the dining environment does have direct influence in affecting a restaurant patron. It can either make an individual feel at home or feel like they are experiencing a new and different culture. Therefore,
the American representations of Chinese, Thai, and Japanese food cultures may be delivering cultural cues, but Americans may misunderstand them. Most of all, the cultural representations in American society do indeed have the potential to make an impression on their patrons, hopefully, by effectively exposing Americans to several facets of Chinese, Thai and Japanese food cultures in a positive light.

Reflections on the Study

From the beginning, I have been enthusiastic about my chosen topic concerning food culture and the built environment. While I was continually eager to learn more and more about the food cultures of China, Thailand, and Japan, this thirst for knowledge and expanded perspective led me to an overwhelming sea of information. The topic “Food Culture + Built Environment” is unbelievably broad. However, I had no way of knowing this when I developed my proposal; it was only when I began my literature review that I realized this challenge. Even if I had focused solely on Chinese food culture, for instance, I still would have encountered an extensive variety in regional differences, restaurant types, dining levels, traditional vs. contemporary cultures, etc. Then, if I attempted to evaluate the representations of Chinese food culture in the United States, I would once again be faced with another great span of variations. In many ways, I believe my results from this semester’s efforts only scratched the surface of this enormous topic. Nevertheless, I feel as though it was a meaningful journey, on which I learned a great deal and developed a much broader perspective in dining experiences and how the built environments and design define or distinguish them.

As my honors thesis research progressed, the situation forced an unfortunate change in my original plan as laid out in the proposal. I had intended to apply my findings from the research to a design project. In this way, I would not only use my design perspective to address the topic of culture and dining environments, but also apply the design skills acquired during my career as an undergraduate in interior design. Unfortunately, I realized that I may not reach the point where I would have sufficient information and conclusive findings to carry out such a project. The last thing I wanted to do was create a design based on minimal research. I believe that it is a dangerous approach to latch onto a small piece of information when designing. While designers cannot know everything, a more comprehensive understanding will undoubtedly result in a more effective design. It also became apparent that sufficient time would not be available within a single semester to complete even a conceptual design and to present both my research and design boards. Therefore, I chose to focus on a presentation of research, including literature review, perspective building interviews, and ethnographic observations of dining environments.

As I mentioned previously, some changes and additions were made to my research approach. The restaurants made a shift toward larger cities and expanded in number of observations per food culture. Interviews of international students and faculty were added, with participants from China, Thailand, and Japan. These alterations to my original plans contributed to completely moving away from a design project. However, I know that they were steps toward a more inclusive research and a broader experience.
The added observations created opportunities for comparisons, minimizing the tendency to make assumptions. With only a single observation of each food culture representations, one could assume that all Chinese restaurants in the United States had similar environments. Actually, a broader sampling would have been ideal, with several restaurants across the country of several types at varying dining levels. However, my time and resources were limited as a student working over a single semester wherein I am also registered for other courses.

Interviewing international students and faculty was an invaluable part of my process. The conversations allowed me to expand my perspective. Without them, the project would have remained entirely from an American perspective – a lifetime Hoosier perspective to be more specific. Once again, I would have liked to expand the interviews. A greater number of interviewees from varied regions and backgrounds would result in more comprehensive findings. Furthermore, I wanted to interview Americans who had visited China, Thailand, and Japan to discover the inverse perspective on the food cultures and their American representations. Once again, sufficient time was not available for this undertaking. I still believe, however, that all my efforts were steps in the right direction and provided me with a fascinating voyage into a new realm of knowledge and view of the world.

I gave my honors thesis presentation in the Ball Honors House on December 9, 2010. The format consisted of a PowerPoint presentation accompanied by a verbal explanation and elaboration of the topic. The presentation lasted about an hour. The attendees were primarily design students, my classmates, and the turnout was relatively small. While I had planned for a somewhat formal presentation, the audience seemed to call for a more casual approach. During the presentation, I answered a number of questions at various points. I also concluded by answering several questions and encouraged an open discussion, in classic Honors College style. Because the audience largely consisted of personal acquaintances and not strangers, I was able to get some honest feedback after the presentation, which was mostly positive. Creating and giving my presentation frustrated me at times; I wanted to share everything that I had learned, but needed to restrain myself to the important information and overreaching ideas. Overall, presenting my honors thesis was a positive experience, and an appropriate way to bring the semester-long project to completion.

Conclusions

In my honors thesis proposal, I stated, "Exposure is the first step to better understanding the differences, similarities, and miscommunications between cultures." I believe that this concept applies to everyone. In any field of study or practice, even in personal life experiences, an understanding of culture will be beneficial. Culture shapes the lives of all people, including their behaviors, interactions with others, and ways of viewing the world around them. With this awareness, individuals, businesses, and even whole countries might be more successful in communication and interaction. While the world continues to move toward a global market, it is certain that cultural understanding applies to many. However, the United States has always been a diverse nation and
continues today on a multi-cultural course. Cultural awareness is important for everyone, but especially for designers, who shape the environments where people work, dine, play, socialize, and experience most aspects of life. If culture and built environment have an interconnected relationship, then design is interwoven with and between them.

The relationships between culture, design, and built environment, while important, also pose a problem. As a designer, cultural significations and codifications can be difficult to grasp, identify, assess and use. The nature of culture is dynamic, not static. It continually changes, continually adapts to new influences, succumbs to others, and displays extensive variety within itself. For instance, many cultures around the world seem to be "modernizing," which is often synonymous with "westernizing." Some aspects of native cultures may blend with the western influences, while others begin to fade away as old-fashioned, backward, or obsolete. I find it interesting that Americans seem expect - or restaurateurs think they expect - the traditional, sometimes stereotypic, cultural artifacts in Chinese, Thai, and Japanese restaurants. From my research, interviews, and observations, it seems that restaurants in China, Thailand, and Japan may not be appear remarkably different than a local American restaurant, either privately owned or franchise. However, culture encompasses much more than appearance. To understand it, one must dig deeper than a few decorations, lighting levels, or even furniture. It is my opinion that people can play a part in determining the identity of a cultural setting.

Finally, my efforts this semester have only just begun to explore the depths of the relationship between food culture and the built environment. I believe what is waiting in the vastness to be discovered will be worth the effort for either myself or others who will pursue similar studies in the future. I do suggest conducting a more inclusive study with a good representative sampling of observations and interviews. While it seems ambitious in retrospect, I would not change my choice to explore three food cultures. The differences between cultures often shape a culture's identity. Therefore, examining the food cultures of China, Thailand, and Japan provided greater opportunity for comparison. In the end, completing my honors thesis project has been a wonderful adventure. My expanded knowledge and broadened perspective will certainly remain with me and prove useful in my professional design career. Furthermore, my eagerness to explore the complexity of culture remains strong, perhaps even invigorated by the discoveries I have made over the past few months.
References


Appendix
Food Culture + Built Environment

An Honors Thesis by Elizabeth Wheeler

Why is culture important?

Design > Culture > Design...
Design & Built Environment

• What is design?
  – To create, fashion, execute, or construct according to plan; To devise for a specific function or end
  – Design is for Users

• What is the built environment?
  – Environment: The circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded
  – Built: man-made
  – A Cultural Landscape

Design & Culture

• Cyclical & Reciprocal
• "Built environments are at the same time a part of culture and a product of culture”

• Two way interaction between
  Behavior <--- Environments
Design & Culture

• People often choose their environments, instead of being “plopped” into them
• Environments are better at inhibiting behaviors than generating them
• Meaning and communication

Introduction to...

China and Chinese culture
China

- “The Central Nation” or “The Middle Kingdom”
- 92% Han Chinese
- Language: Mandarin (several dialects exist)
- Religion: 39% None & 29% Folk religionist
- Literacy: 93.3%
- Arable Land: 15%

Introduction to...

Thailand and Thai culture
Thailand

- “Land of the Free”
- 75% Thai, 14% Chinese, 11% Malay, Khmer, & other
- Language: Thai
- Religion: 95% Buddhist (Theravada)
- Literacy: 94.2%
- Arable Land: 28%

Introduction to...

Japan and Japanese culture
Japan

- "Origin of the Sun" or "Land of the Rising Sun"
- 99% Japanese
- Language: Japanese
- Religion: 84% Shinto & Buddhist (together)
- Literacy: 99%
- Arable Land: 12%
"By studying the foodways of people different from ourselves we also grow to understand and tolerate the rich diversity of practices around the world."

"Food traditions play an inextricable role in our daily lives."

"Meals are social events as well as food events. An 'ideal' meal is typically eaten with others."

"Chinese food culture aims at creating and enjoying outstanding dishes at all levels of society."

"The Chinese respect food, talk about it frequently, and share it often."

What the experts know about...

Chinese Food Culture
Chinese food culture

• The Meal:
  - Necessary food “eating to live” - fan & Secondary food “eating for pleasure” – cai
  - Fan: grains, usually rice, but varies by region 60 – 80% of calories in diet
  - Cai: animal or vegetable items, wide possibilities
    Often stir fried, 4 different regional cooking styles:
    Northern, Central, Southeast, South

• Eating together:
  - Meat and vegetable (cai) dishes placed centrally for everyone to help themselves
  - Each person has a bowl or dish for rice (fan)
  - Prefer round table
  - Variety and fresh ingredients important
"In Thailand, the ingredients are fresher, the spices more potent, and the companionship more engrained into the very experience of dining."

What the experts know about...

Thai Food Culture

"All dishes are shared, and dining is regarded as a social occasion to enjoy with family and friends."

Thai food culture

• The Meal:
  – Rice dominated diet
  – Fish / Seafood, Noodles, Curries, Stir-fry, Tropical & Temperate fruits and vegetables
  – 4 regions affect ingredients and influences: Northeast, Central, North, and South
  – Important to have fresh ingredients and freshly ground spices, for the "4 tastes"
  – Known for delicately carved fruits and vegetables
Thai food culture

• Eating together:
  - All dishes served at once in center with large container for rice
  - Each person serves themselves and eats from an individual plate
  - Traditionally ate sitting on the floor, but tables & chairs now common today

"The tables of the people living in Japan are decorated with something new and different throughout the year."

What the experts know about...

Japanese Food Culture
Japanese food culture

• The Meal:
  - Rice (gohan), Fish / Seafood, Noodles, Soy products, Seaweed, Fruits & Vegetables
  - As an archipelago, greatly influenced by and dependent on the sea as a resource
  - Regional climate differences and seasonal variances in available ingredients, instilled appreciation & created sensitivity to seasons
  - Most spice-free cuisine in Asia

Japanese food culture

• Eating together:
  - Individual, usually light, portions
  - Small dish for each food item
  - Rarely share from a communal dish
  - Eat at low table on a tatami floor with small cushions, but table & chairs quite common
Is culture useful to designers?

The Obscurity of Culture

Nature of culture

• Dynamic, not static
• Differences, not similarities
  – Regional, ethnic, economic
  – Family, friends, personality
Chinese Interviews

"Chinese people really focus on the food, so all the background decoration seems really blurred. ...unless, it's really impressive and unique."

- Doctorate Student from Nanchong (Sichuan province), 5 years in U.S.
Chinese Interviews

"Unless they have something very unique, I will more focus on interaction with my friends and on the food."
- Doctorate Student from Nanchong

"In Chinese restaurants, you will never find a place very quiet. It's very loud. We like noise. We're enjoying the mealtime."
- Undergraduate Student from Nanchang (Jiangxi province), 2 months in U.S.

Thoughts on American Dining

"Some [American] restaurants are really dark, really dark. Only two of you can see each other"
- Doctorate Student from Nanchong

"American food I think is too sweet and use many oil and chicken and beef and have few vegetable. I think... not good for health."
- Undergraduate Student from Shanghai, 2 months in U.S.

"They are not Chinese food. They are more suitable for [American] taste. But compared to the other food, they are a little more comfortable for [Chinese people], because even though they are not real Chinese foods, they are still Chinese foods."
- Undergraduate Student from Nanchang
Restaurant Observations

• Chinatown, Chicago, IL

Restaurant Observations

• China Garden, Indianapolis, IN
Thai Interviews

“I think quality of food probably comes first in my opinion, but then furniture would be secondary.”
— Faculty from Chiang Mai (North), 10 years in U.S.

“I think the way you decorate food is part of the architecture of the whole environment. Even fruit that you eat they will carve it. So, decoration goes through the plate, too.”
— Faculty from Chiang Mai

“Some restaurant near my home didn’t even have a wall, just have only a roof. [The climate] is very hot, and if you have a wall then that restaurant is very hot.”
— Undergraduate Student from Satun province (South), 2 months in U.S.

Thai Interviews

“In my country, we use a lot of time for eating. Even just a cup of coffee is more than one hour, because we forgot on conversation. Just keep talking, talking with your friend but food is just optional, and then talking is more important.”
— Undergraduate Student from Songkhla province (South), 7 months in U.S.

“Really, there are many levels, many kinds of restaurants.”
— Faculty from Chiang Mai
Thoughts on Home

“I miss sitting in a restaurant that is open, outside and watching the beautiful mountains and then seeing the stars and the moon coming up. You’ve got the best food in front of you, a little beer or wine, and then good friends to talk for 3 or 4 hours.”

— Faculty from Chiang Mai

“In that generation [parents’ generation], they don’t use the spoon. When I go to Thai restaurant, I miss that: someone sit beside me and eat by hand. Ways to eat are different when you’re eating here. When you go to Thai Smile, the food is quite similar, but the people sit beside you are different.”

— Undergraduate Student from Songkhla province

Thoughts on American Dining

“Things [decorations] that you might see in some grand Thai restaurants in the US are not exaggeration actually. The king’s image, something carved, handicrafts, and all that... These are the reflection that Thais love to show off their handicrafts and their skills.”

— Faculty from Chiang Mai

“What is interesting is this: overseas the grand restaurants will put a lot of stuff that is Thai, but in Thailand maybe you can see the opposite, too. You can see western stuff, because that is the symbol of wealth, symbol of modernity.”

— Faculty from Chiang Mai
Restaurant Observations

• Thai Classic, Chicago, IL

Restaurant Observations

• Thai Taste, Indianapolis, IN
Japanese Interviews

"You can stay and talk, and you can study in the restaurant. The longest hours I stayed there (Family Restaurant) may be 10 hours with my friends. We ate lunch, and we ordered drink bar. And, we ate dinner there."

"In my opinion, people like division area (private rooms). It's more relaxing."

- Undergraduate Student from Nagoya, 2 months in U.S.

Japanese Interviews

"In Japan, people generally like to have bright light. Comfortable by Japanese standards, but probably too bright for Americans"

- Doctorate Student from Nagoya, 10+ years in U.S. (segmented)

"We can sit close, because we don't have chair, just cushion. Tatami is very good to relax and make conversation. Japanese people go to [Izakaya] and eat dinner with alcohol."

- Undergraduate Student from Nagoya
Thoughts on American Dining

“It's a different country, and I am sure Americans' perspective of a Japanese restaurant is a little bit different than what we think.”
- Doctorate Student from Nagoya

“I don't feel like I'm in Japan. I think it's more attractive to American people. If there is only a little bit Japanese style there, American people do not feel it's Japanese.”
- Undergraduate Student from Nagoya

“I think the people try to make the place like Japanese style, so obvious. It's a little bit strange to me. For example, Japanese pictures or Japanese letters on the wall, also the lanterns. So, American people can tell that it is Japanese restaurant.”
- Undergraduate Student from Nagoya

Restaurant Observations

• Ginza Sushi, Chicago, IL
Restaurant Observations

- Oishi Sushi, Indianapolis, IN

Conclusions:

What just happened?
Most of Thai people like to eat at home, “cooking and eating together”
A few people go to restaurant; businessmen (meetings) or for you birthday or graduation, celebrations

Most important: “Have good food and maybe good price. Delicious, something like that.”

Furniture - for most people basic chair and table (metal w/ tablecloth), sit on the floor comfortably (very common for young people) “go to drink coffee and sit with your friends and enjoy”, businessmen or high level of people more like American comfortable table and chairs, nicer places: wood and cushioned chairs

Lighting - more dim, “Sometimes you cannot see which color is your food.”

Servers - friendly, make conversation (similar to here), no tip, some people will pay it but is optional, most often will not tip

Privacy - open area preferred, even with other groups around talking too, sometimes might share with other groups, only private rooms when need to have private conversation, few restaurants are open dining areas

“In Thailand, most of the restaurants you can see them cook.”

“In my country, we use a lot of time for eating. Even just a cup of coffee is more than one hour, because we forgot on conversation. Just keep talking, talking with your friend but food is just optional, and then talking is more important.”

“In my country, you can order what you like, but then you can share your food with your friend.” Order all together and share the food money (bill)

You have to pay tip, not okay to only pay when you like

“Furniture is okay; I think about the same. Some restaurant is more comfortable than my country.”

Food a little bit expensive, plus the tip

Order individual dishes and pay separately
Uncommon to serve yourself drinks (fast-food or buffet)

Images

- Mentioned sending links to restaurant pages
- Also mentioned parents visiting and going to Chicago and sister's rehearsal dinner photo of restaurant

Fresh, spring restaurant "Bird Singing and Flower Fragrant"?

Traditional Chinese restaurant, Hot Pot restaurant, Good Chinese style restaurants in America (mentioned Chicago),
"If you just had 100Rmb (maybe equals to 50 dollars), but your family is in poor condition, what are you gonna do with that money? Most people would say, 'I would buy some necessities for my family'; Nanchang person would say 'I would go to restaurant'."

To try other regional Chinese foods, visit restaurants; much like people from Indiana eating Cajun or Tex-Mex at a restaurant

Western foods have also become popular: French style, Italian, KFC and McDonalds. If couples want to date, they usually go to western style food because it is very romantic ad very quiet.

"In Chinese restaurants, you will never find a place very quiet. It’s very loud. We like noise. We’re enjoying the mealtime."

Occasions for dining: birthday, meeting with classmates, trying new foods

Very bright lighting in restaurants, joke that if it’s too dark might miss mouth and hit nose; May have similar style, but "if the light is turned down, it will be Western style food; if the light is turned up, it will be Chinese style food."

Seating varies with type and price range of restaurant

Usually very focused on the food and flavors

Small restaurant might be open as part of someone’s home, hardly any decoration... but the food is quite good. (Jiang Xu) rice noodle for breakfast in shop near his house.

Name of restaurants can also be very important (0791 like area code), the story of the kitchen - food empire) Chopstick material can indicate the level of the restaurant (wood, ivory, gold)

"90% of food you can never see how they make it. Food is our culture, and a lot of food is a secret. You should never know how they make it." Other foods they may make it into a performance. There is no secret how to make noodles. Also, there is sushi in China.
Servers - tables not assigned to specific servers, just a number of people working throughout the room of many tables; private rooms are assigned; may help to serve food, such as ribs which are difficult with chopsticks; there is no tipping in China, some policies servers not allowed to accept

(King Buffet) "They are not Chinese food. They are more suitable for your taste. But compared to the other food, they are a little more comfortable for us [Chinese], because even though they are not real Chinese foods, they are still Chinese foods."

Lighting very bright; Tables and decorations very Chinese; “I’m satisfied with the decoration. It feels familiar, and they play Chinese pop music.” “fake mountain” = water feature with rock

Very Chinese elements (in Mural): golden fish, lotus flower, wood boat
Simple ink paintings, meant to think about the elements of painting

Buffets exist in China. Most of them are barbeque. Chinese are focused more on the flavor and different types of food than on size [quantity].

(Lao Sichuan) Hot Pot restaurant in Chicago’s Chinatown (& Beijing)

Bars an unusual seating; in Chinese restaurant “We must sit at one table and crowd together to share with one another.”

Chinese pronunciation tips: min. 47 - 51 {Lao = Old}

Feng yung (northern China) - “Chinese people like to eat with each other at a round table...” which is good for sharing together. There is only one platter or plate for a dish and bring some of the food to your own plate and bowl, instead of having own individual dish and plate.

A lot of smoke from cooking in Chinese restaurant (from cooking method); kitchens have vents and chimneys for handling this problem

Images

Fancy Western Restaurant in China vs. Fancy Chinese Restaurant there, Noodle Shops or small restaurants as part of someone’s home, Large fancy restaurants with several floors, Private rooms with minimum spending requirements, Typical kitchen in a Chinese restaurant
Undergraduate Student - China

Shanghai, 2 months in U.S.

“In China, we have many different spaces: small, medium, and large. The large is a five star restaurant. We have many small restaurants, and people in daily life, they don’t cook and go to small restaurant. ...Holiday and festival must go to the large restaurant.”

Usually, eat in the restaurant (take-out uncommon); Dinner is “family time together” and talk about daily life; eat together with extended family at Spring Festival

Birthday party> go out to eat and to “KTV” place (karaoke) or play games

Low food prices “You can spend little money and eat more food.”

Private rooms in large restaurant come in various sizes based on size of the group; has refrigerator, TV, and assigned waiters

Most often people will choose the medium and small restaurants, because the large restaurants will be very expensive

Seating: small restaurants just chairs, most restaurants have chairs, but some may be more comfortable than others

Servers: no tips, “this [serving] is their responsibility”; in large, good restaurants, very friendly; small restaurants, they don’t care about you; serving has low pay and work many hours, they’re often tired

Serve many different kinds of food in big meal for guests

Pace of the meal more slow: drink beer, talking about life, and eating

Servers are friendly, not much different than China

Furniture might be the same to China

Feels like America has clean air and is safer, less fear of theft

Other things seem the same, only food different (misses food from home)
"American food I think too sweet and use many oil and chicken and beef and have little vegetable. I think not good for health."

Images

Large "five star" restaurant, Medium "three star" restaurant (Sheraton), Small restaurants
Doctorate Student - China

Nanchong, Sichuan Province (SW)
(Chengdu - capital city of Sichuan), 5 years in U.S.
“spiiicyyy foood”

Regular restaurant:
Very loud; tables and chairs; people seating and serving, but no assigned waiter, come and go, flag them down to get service, also means no interruption; no tipping; “Chinese people really focus on the food, so all the background decoration seems really blurred. ...unless, it’s really impressive and unique.”

Classic Chinese decoration: wood, grass, reds and chocolates (often coming from woods), many warm colors, table decorations not present, wood very common material (furniture, accents, & finishes)

Personal favorite in China: Unique contemporary restaurant “Liao? (bird speaking and flower fragrant, smell good?)”- spring, fresh, all white with green & bamboo accent, glass table with green in glass, “of course the food is also good.”

“Unless they have something very unique, I will more focus on interaction with my friends and more focus on the food.”

Mentioned round tables with turning center portion (lazy susan) for the food in the middle of everyone

Hot Pot - “big part of the culture”... hole in the table for pot, can control the temperature, servers give you what you order and won’t bother you unless called on

Private rooms for big groups (family reunion, class reunion, etc.) many fancy restaurants have this option available with reservation, common areas are very loud, much like a living room?

Views toward dining out vary by generation > younger generation more similar to American perspective: don’t want to cook or going out with a few friends to a cheap or mid-range restaurant more often
Older generations > cooking yourself can show respect and hospitality

Occasions for dining: birthdays, seeing old friends, awarded raise

Pace is slow > talking, eating, talking, eating, toasting, eating

Common to have pictures of dishes on menu to help you order
First time, excited to get authentic Western food, but nervous about table manners “Although I know how to use fork and knife, I was a little nervous.”

Longer wait in the states for food to be served

Much quieter here, have to yell at each other in China to hear one another

Tipping a challenge for those not used to it (when appropriate? How much to give?) End of meal should be relaxing not stressful about tipping

Feel as though being taken care of by waiter, but sometimes would rather not be interrupted in conversation by servers checking in

Menu more daunting, with several courses and options, Fruit at end of meal (dessert) and hot tea (like ice water) in China is included, Drinks are not usually cold in China

“Some (American) restaurants are really dark, really dark. Only two of you can see each other” Restaurants in states sometimes try to have their own personality, more individualism “You kind of get their own little culture.”

Already expected Chinese restaurants to be Americanized, but surprised by how old (outdated) the restaurants are here; buffets exist in China, but had never been to one; “It’s not just for food. For me, going to restaurant is more social and enjoying the experience.” “Also, my mom is a good cook, so I’d rather stay home than go to a buffet for unhealthy food.” Doesn’t like Chinese buffets here, for many reasons; does enjoy Chinese style restaurants found in bigger cities (mentioned Chicago)

Booth seating = American; at least, it’s uncommon in restaurants in China; learned the word “booth” as a type of seating after coming to America, formerly thought of it only as a stall to sell things

Prefers more modern looking restaurants that are here

Likes the quieter setting here, “In China, there’s so many people, and obviously you cannot require everyone has that kind of manner (low volume for voices)”

Unusual to eat with your hands, example: hamburger and buffalo wings Also, strange that only one, individual dish would be a complete meal
“A lot of friends. When you go to restaurant, it mean you have some meeting with your friend.”
"In Thailand, all restaurant is simplified, basic. When we think about restaurant, we think about the food. Just the food, that's all. Sometimes we have kitchen and someone will cook and the table and chairs. That's all. [Restaurant] is very simple in my hometown."

Come from “super, super countryside” of Thailand, no luxury restaurants near his home

“In some areas, it’s similar with Muncie. A little bit dark in the restaurant make you feel you want to eat something. It’s a kinda western restaurant when they serve something to you it’s not a big one like my hometown do.”

Rarely go to restaurants; most of the time eat at home; Also, when out of town and cannot cook, will eat at a restaurant; Cook for celebrations, too

Thai noodle most popular type; also seafood (geographic location)

Furniture - cheap, plastic, basic

Lighting - very bright, often daylight

Privacy - “If I walk in some restaurant nearby my home, I know every customer in there. It’s a pretty small island. We have a private area, but most of us know each other.” Very loud because of this; not comfortable sitting right next to strangers

“In my hometown, you can sit wherever you want. You walk in and then you sit at table and waiter gonna come to your table and can help you.”

“Some restaurant near my home didn’t even have a wall. Just have only a roof. Restaurant have a corner to cook something and then have table and chair. [The climate] is very hot, and if you have a wall then that restaurant is very hot.”

The oldest person always pays or boyfriend always pays, no splitting bill

Eating on the floor on cushions > Japanese or Korean, “Not Thai at all!”

“In my parent’s generation they do that, but not mine. We don’t do that anymore. During that time, they sit on the floor, and then they sit in a
circle and have the rice place. In that generation, we don’t have any
table.”
Curry or something you eat with rice, each person has rice

Pace depends who you go with, common to just eat and leave

Very quiet

“A little bit dark for me.”

Unusual to have breakfast, lunch, and dinner menus separate, “in Thailand
you can order everything. It’s up to you if you want to eat pancake for
dinner. It’s up to you! If you wanna eat cereal for dinner, it’s fine.”

Waiters often refill water for you instead of having a pitcher of water to
help yourself

“In America, the waiter have to direct you to sit somewhere, that table
or this table.”

“In that generation [parents’ generation], they don’t use the spoon. When
I go to Thai restaurant, I miss that: someone sit beside me and eat by
hand. Ways to eat are different when you’re eating here. When you go to
Thai Smile, the food is quite similar, but the people sit beside you are
different.”
Faculty Member - Thailand

Chiang mai - Northern (2nd largest city), 10 years in U.S.

“Really, there are many levels, many kinds of restaurants. You can go to very expensive restaurants, and you can go to normal restaurants.”

“Restaurant in Thailand could be a house. You own a house and you have the first floor you open that as a restaurant. People can sit and eat, but usually that is something very simple like noodles or almost like ‘Thai fast-food.’ It could be something where they cook very quickly for you, you just order and you get hot, tasty, in 5 like minutes.”

Restaurant - “hardcore” more expensive, not just a room in a house: fancy restaurant in a big hotel “that concept would come with luxury. The furniture and everything would have to be grand. I think you pay more when the furniture is more expensive. Also cleanliness, I think that is a part of it; even the building itself and location also.”

“Restaurant business is really huge in Thailand. They [restaurants] are in many different places, hotels, in good buildings, or they can have their own building in the rice field. I mean it’s expanding outside of the city area.”

Climate - Rainy and Sunny > open space, outdoor seating, many windows for good circulation; fancy, expensive > indoor with A/C; variety in spaces

Lighting - “relative to what they want” > target consumers, Sukiyaki (Japanese style food catering to Thai style) very bright,

Furniture - “I think restaurants have different target consumers, customers”; sometimes indoor have booths, others focus more on serving good food to hungry people at just any tables and chairs, less privacy;
“In Thailand, they really care a lot about making the place look cozy”; “We have a lot of wood [mentioned teak], and Thais are pretty good at carving”
Many decorated/carved pieces of furniture

“I think quality of food probably comes first in my opinion, but then furniture would be secondary”; if people pay a lot, they expect to see grand furniture and environment OR if you make a name for your restaurant, you must live up to it
"I think the way you decorate food is part of the architecture of the whole environment. Even fruit that you eat they will carve it. So, decoration goes through the plate, too."

Servers - make it a business to really please the customer, especially in the expensive, "hardcore" restaurant; tipping becoming more common in the big restaurants; hierarchical service > subordinate to the owner and to the paying customers; have "Thai hospitality" little extra things

Volume - some restaurants have live shows (live music, alcohol); most places serve alcohol; high-end, romantic setting more quiet; Many Chinese businesses in Thailand including restaurants (mix Thai and Chinese) "Chinese are pretty open, pretty expressive in ways they eat, in ways they talk. So, it might be a little noisy"; places people go to socialize can be loud; Less noisy = More expensive; "I think people pay for the atmosphere and also privacy sometimes"

Pace - "Thais love eating, and they love chatting over the meal. So, people spend a lot of time in most restaurants, and most restaurants are pretty generous about that. So, people don't rush through their meals." Chatting and ordering all night... "it is very common for Thais, when they go to restaurant, to spend over two hours" (Lunch: sometimes quicker)

"So many great restaurants out there... You can have restaurants by the river; you can sit in the garden and eat great food with some music. I do miss variety, too."

Occurrences for dining - birthday, anniversary, dating, festivals, end of the month / paycheck time, social outings, to try something different

"Things [decorations] that you might see in some grand Thai restaurants in the US are not exaggeration actually. The king's image, something carved, handicrafts, and all that... These are the reflection that Thais love to show off their handicrafts and their skills."

"I think they do try to simulate 'Thai-ness.' In terms of decoration, I think they try to put in the stuff that represents Thailand and Thai culture." Symbols > more present in this country

"What is interesting is this: overseas the grand restaurants will put a lot of stuff that is Thai, but in Thailand maybe you can see the opposite, too. You can see western stuff, because that is the symbol of wealth, symbol of modernity."
"In terms of atmosphere, I'm happy with every place I go. They represent Thai culture and hospitality." Some American servers in Thai restaurants even seem very Thai, learning to wai.

"Right now, culture in general and architectural stuff is becoming more global. You start to see a lot of houses that are built just like here, despite the fact that Thailand is so hot. Some people will put in no windows. Of course, that comes with the price of having to use air conditioning."

"In Thailand, I think we have fewer middle class people than in the US. When you have that gap, people who are rich tend to distinguish themselves. So, business owners also catch that."

"Especially if the quality of food is good and the price is friendly enough, there may be a lot of people coming in. That's when they care less about furniture and all that. I will still go to a place that is not well decorated if the food was clean and good."

"I miss sitting in a restaurant that is open, outside and watching the beautiful mountains and then seeing the stars and the moon coming up. You've got the best food in front of you, a little beer or wine, and then good friend to talk for 3 or 4 hours."

"One thing about architectural principles is probably that one thing can compensate for the lack of something else. When the atmosphere is good, you don't care about furniture; it might work in the background. When things are good, it will complement the atmosphere, and you probably will not notice it. But, if it's bad, it stands out. So it's better architecturally speaking to design everything in ways that will enhance the environment."

"Food is really actually one of the best media for the transportation of cultures across borders."

"You have already deciphered the complexity of the term restaurant."
Undergraduate Student - Japan

Hokkada, 2 months in U.S.

Servers more formal; say “gaise mashe” = welcome and bow to customers; “not allowed to make personal conversation with customer”; very polite; No tips at all

Wasting not uncommon, but Japanese people would feel guilty to throw away food or leave on plate

“Before eating, most of the Japanese people say, ‘toda kimasu.’ It’s a tradition showing respect on the food.” A traditional custom, but at least ½ of people say it. “goto sama” afterward

May go out for no special occasion, but usually dine out for birthday, Christmas, and New Year (special foods: mochi = rice cake, udon, soba)

“In Japan, the environment is like a variety of environment. The really traditional Japanese restaurant is tatami.”

Booths common in Japan as well; many restaurants where you sit on the floor, on tatami or with cushion at a table; private rooms very common, but can adjust to accommodate larger groups by opening screens; might also have the option for table and chairs or to sit at a counter

“It depends on what you eat. Usually, at the side of the table there’s a box which has bunch of chopsticks and another box that has spoon and forks. Actually, I haven’t used knives almost entire life for me.”

Rengi = spoon? Spoons not used very often, seen more at western restaurants; do not use spoons to eat miso soup for instance

Preparation visible, even displayed at some restaurants (sushi); “people are making sushi in front of us and we are eating. You might say ‘I want that one’ and they make it in front of you.” Color of plates often indicate price of dish > servers count number of each color plate to add up the bill

Pace of meal often very fast, hurried; especially noodle restaurant, very crowded supposed to leave after eating because there is often a line

Izakaya “mix of bar and restaurant”; “people will have dinner and also have drinks” not found anything similar in the U.S.; can get very loud
Noise in restaurants normal, but not really considered a good thing; “sometimes people are irritated or frustrated (by noisy people)”

Servers more friendly; common to say “How are you today?” informally; might carry on conversation with co-workers in front of customers (strange experience)

Americans often throw away leftover food; cups are very large, twice the size of cups in Japan; “everything (dishes and potion size) is big in America”; things in America are bigger and cheaper

Japanese Fusion: “Most of the Japanese here is not real Japanese food. ...Japanese in the village is almost like real Japanese food.” (not including sushi, only other Japanese dishes) “It’s not like traditional Japanese restaurant (environment).”

Main differences: taste, tipping, paying bill at table instead of at register

“In America, eating with making sound is kind of impolite. When only eating noodles in Japan, if I make this sound [slurping sound], the cook will think it’s very good, very delicious. When eating ramen making sound is very good, and eating fast with chopsticks is very common. Most of the people making sound.”

Images

Traditional Japanese restaurant, Private Rooms with tatami, Sushi bar, Noodle restaurant, Izakaya
Undergraduate Student - Japan

Nagoya, 2 months in U.S.

Different kinds of restaurants: western ("not so different from restaurants here" in US), more Japanese, sushi (with conveyor), noodles

Worked at "fast-food" Japanese restaurant serving Japanese food, mostly business people, many single men, who want something quick and cheap

Serving - fewer servers, no tips (only paid by hour), only say the "scripted" words to customers, do not make conversation, varies by type, fancier restaurants might have strict rules (piercings, hair color, uniform)

Enjoys Chinese food - often go to local Chinese restaurant with family, perhaps once a week, can order a lot of things and share with each other (Chinese style) instead of individual meals

"At home, we share the dishes and we have each own rice, white rice, for each person. If we go to western restaurant, we order one meal for one person." "Some Japanese restaurant serves big hot pot and we share."

Quick eat restaurant: come to eat food and then leave

Family restaurant: "You can stay and talk, and you can study in the restaurant. In Family restaurant, we have drink bar. If you order drink bar, you can choose any kind of drink, and you can drink many times. The longest hours I stayed there may be 10 hours with my friends. We ate lunch, and we ordered drink bar. And, we ate dinner there."

Izakaya: "Japanese people go to there and eat dinner with alcohol." All of them serve alcohol. You can stay there for hours drinking with friends.
Party in izakaya is quite common in Japan. "In Izakaya, there is a table but there is also tatami floor. People sit zabuton, cushion, on the tatami. We can sit other people because we don't have chair, just cushion. So we can sit close. Tatami is very good to relax and make conversation."

Furniture - might have all tables and chairs or all booths, some have counters, sofas uncommon other than cafes

People don't care about noise as long as it's just a normal restaurant, not a fancy restaurant, "In my opinion, people like division area (private rooms). It's more relaxing."
"I think Japanese restaurant is more brighter than here." "Izakaya is also bright." Bars and Izakaya are different, the bars in Japan are much like here (US). Izakaya is more friendly, more loud, more noisy, and much brighter than bars here (US). Japanese house brighter too. [mentioned European people having lighter colored eyes (blue) than Japanese (black, brown) less sensitive to light] "If the light is bright, you can see your food, and the food color more look delicious. I think Japanese people like appearance of the colors (in food). I think bright light makes the color more vivid."

"You can choose a lot of things to order when you order." gave example of ordering breakfast food: biscuit or toast, what kind of eggs, etc., can customize orders, more flexible: no pickles, with cheese, etc. In Japan, you just order one thing and could pick out what you don’t like when you get it

On US Japanese restaurants:

"I think the people try to make the place like Japanese style, so obvious. It’s a little bit strange to me. For example, Japanese pictures or Japanese letters on the wall, also the lanterns. So, American people can tell that it is Japanese restaurant."

"Some of them are very Japanese things, but I think the owner mix Japanese things and messed up."

"I don’t feel like I’m in Japan. I think it’s more attractive to American people because they can feel ‘Japanese’ style there. If there is only a little bit Japanese style there, American people do not feel it’s Japanese."

"Sake Bomb" in Japanese Fusion - never saw it in Japan, the first time here (US) in Japanese restaurant, a unique style to drink sake

"The amount of food is very huge every time. In Japan, we don’t eat too much, and we don’t usually bring it home. The amount of food [in the US] is very big, but you can bring it home. In Japan, we serve only one person size, so people usually can eat all of them. So, people don’t have to bring it home."
Restaurant = "A cozy place that you don’t have to worry about washing dishes and cleaning up the table. A place for people to gather and have a meal together. Peaceful and yet fun." Not too harsh light, but not too dim. Not too noisy. Some comfortable chairs; Booth is sometimes comfortable, but can be annoying, hard to get out. Plants, “flowers would be nice”; “I don’t know about fish. It’s kind of disturbing to me sometimes.” “I don’t know if they’re going to be eaten, but they look like appropriate size. Should be tropical fish instead.”

Occasion: don’t want to cook, too many guests to cook for at home

Ramen shops - only make noodles and maybe Japanized Chinese food, very family oriented, informal, quick pace, less sitting and chatting (comparison to Jimmy John’s)

Nicer restaurant - less noisy, dimmer light, but “in Japan, people generally like to have bright light. Comfortable by Japanese standards, but probably too bright for Americans”

Traditional Japanese restaurant - individual rooms, remove shoes, and close door/screen, might only hear people in rooms next to you, stay a much longer time because there is more privacy and can talk about anything you want, only visit occasionally/rarely, option for open area (table and chairs) in many of these as well

Furniture - usually wooden (table and chairs), contemporary restaurants may have other materials like plastic

Finishes - neutral colors: cream or beige, brown, subtle decorations, not to loud or gaudy, not too disturbing

Servers - depends on the restaurant “They are not going to be really overfriendly, smiling all the time like here” less personable, sociable, not trying to make a conversation, you have to get their attention, even sometimes have buttons to call a server, no tipping

Sitting on the floor is common even at restaurants that are not fancy; there is often a hole for stretching out legs underneath table
Booth is not really common in Japan, more often individual chairs
Izakaya - like a bar, but has more food; focus more on the food at izakaya, more on the alcohol at bar; “Enjoying alcohol, you eat certain food”

Didn’t expect it to be exactly like Japan, but many seem too old-fashioned or outdated, have simplified versions of geisha
“It’s a different country, and I am sure Americans’ perspective of a Japanese restaurant is a little bit different than what we think.”

Japanese Fusion - too harsh wall color (red), quite dim, “usually we [Japanese] prefer to have a little brighter light than that.” Small light for each table also unusual, Decorations seem bulky

Seems like red is a really common color used for Asian restaurants here, but in Japan only maybe in a very modern/contemporary restaurant

Has visited Sakura in Indy… “My focus was on food.” Dim lighting

Japanese restaurants in America usually have quite dim light

“Japanese restaurants” in the states are “usually / Korean / Chinese, which is an issue. We’re all different”

Servers - “Waitress and waiters here are more sociable. Even though some people don’t want to, they will try to make conversation.”

“I think food and culture really affect each other.”

Asian restaurants in America - coy pond with water rushing through “very cool” water sound soothing, good idea

“At a restaurant, my interest is only food.”

Main differences: Color usage, Light (levels), & Décor they (Americans) use

Images

Ramen shop, Traditional Japanese restaurant w/ private rooms,
Izakaya, Family restaurant
Servers - Chinese

- Soft rock music
- Instrumental Asian music
- no automatic ice water
- all tablesets w/ knife, fork, spoon
- servers attentive
- fortune cookie at end of meal

Decor - Fans, Plants, Red Lanterns, Chinese paintings
- Large chandelier w/ tassels
- chubby smiling Buddha

Walls - old wall paper + painted wood panel mauve?
- windows have vertical blinds

Floor - carpet throughout
- plain mauve, broadloom

Lighting - (medium + dim)
- ceiling fans
- central fixture

Ceiling - 21'
Decor:
- Thai paintings
- Gold & Glass/Crystal Frames
- TV showing images/videos of Thailand
- Light wood paneling + coral? paint + Elephant Sky
- Wooden tables & chairs w/ tablecloths + Thai cloths
- server daily attentive
- brought check to table
- soft, instrumental music 70s songs

Lighting:
- Medium + Dim
- Crystal Ceiling Tendrils (Gen)
- Lanterns (Task?)

Flooring:
- (and broadloom carpet throughout)
servers - asian/japanese

- Asian instrumental music playing
  (TV on minimally)

- chop sticks
- server attentive

- no automatic ice water

Lighting -
closer to dim than medium

Decor -
minimal
plants, architecture,
features
simple accents
lanterns, etc.

Furn -
wood tables + chairs
booth seating
+ traditional japanese
private rooms

Walls - painted warm
neutral
DARK wood trim

Flooring -
mostly nice
patterned
broadloom
hardwood/lam.

Lighting -
pendent over
tables
spot lighting
- Colorful & Bright
  - Accent Lighting
  - Recessed Can Lighting
- Asian
- Pop Music & TVs
- Wood
- Translucent
- Storage Drawer
- Wood
- Solid Surface
- Ceramic/Tile Floor
- Gypsum/Painted Walls
- Korean
- Japanese
- Chinese
- ???
- Foods
- Busy, Bright, Colorful, Noisy
- OUTSIDE ORDERS
- Ice Water when seated
- Servers - not very attentive
- Dishes Wait Area
- To Kitchen
- Dish Storage
- Bar

* Ice Water
  - Medium
  - Seated

* Asian
  - Food
  - Ethnicity
  - Bar

* Korean
  - Food
  - Ethnicity
  - Bar

* Japanese
  - Food
  - Ethnicity
  - Bar

* Chinese
  - Food
  - Ethnicity
  - Bar

* European
  - Food
  - Ethnicity
  - Bar
- Carpet Throughout
- Wood Furn. Upholstered Seats or Chairs
- Grays/Neutral Blues w/ warm accents (gold, pink, yellow, orange)
- Ceiling - 2x4 Accent tile

Local Caucasians
Servers - All Asian

- Soft Instrumental Music (Mellow Asian)
- Buffet
- Ice Water when seated
- Servers check-in regularly
- Removed shoes on platform area

BUFFET AREA
RAISED PLATFORM
RAILING
STREET

SKYLIGHTS (diffused)

SUNKEN AREA

LOW LIGHT LEVELS (DIMMED?)
- Walls - almost entirely wood
  - Solid Cupscum in back
  - All wood X in front

- Lighting - General ceiling pond.
  - Pretty "Lantern" wall sconce
  - Bright

- Basic Standard
  - Booths + Metal Chairs
  - Laminate "Wood" Tables

- Asian (peabyrinth.
  - Japanese
  - (I think)

- Ice water when seated
- Server checking-in between soup & main
- Sometimes refilling water
- Miso included w/ Sushi a la carte