Contemporary Space as a Cross-cultural Complex: The Case of Japanese Restaurant Interior Space in Vietnam

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Abstract

The article research about Japanese restaurant interior space in Vietnam as an intercultural symbol. Based on the material of previous works and fieldwork in Ho Chi Minh City, the article identifies Japanese restaurant’s interior space as a cross-cultural complex when considering that this space is created by combining and harmoniously using patterns from external culture to psychology and locally available material. In another word, the interior space of Japanese restaurant in Vietnam is considered as a pluralistic symbol, which is the results of the integration and cultural exchange process. Through that symbol, an atmosphere with unique feelings impacts diners’ psychology and offers an impressive culinary experience.

Key words: interior space, cross-cultural, psychology of space

Introduction

When a diner visits a restaurant, space plays a significant role that directly influences their taste buds, emotions, and visual perception. Therefore, it is extremely vital to design and decorate suitable spaces with unique style in order to attract customers. These spaces base on distinct restaurant design standards for each style, with bold colors conveying meaningful messages. There, restaurant’s interior space not only meets to the demand of customers, but also has traditional and cultural meaning.

The Japanese often use Aesthetic sense and capacity factor when evaluating artistic value. So what is Aesthetic sense? The aesthetic sense refers to the ability to appreciate and recognize beauty in various forms, such as art, nature, design in terms of aesthetics that are conventional – metaphorical, mysterious and focused on functionality. The artistic value of wooden material decoration must both meet the functional and aesthetic requirements while closely following the aesthetic sense of the Japanese but still being in harmony with Vietnamese culture.

The interior space of the restaurant achieves aesthetic value when ensuring the content such as function, purpose and form of expression such as color, light, materials, patterns, decorative arts, the harmony between architecture and interior in the project in general. Besides, from the perspective of Vietnamese culture, the interior space of the restaurant has aesthetic value when knowing how to harmonize cultural characteristics with indigenous and regional elements under the context of global integration.

The object study of this article is the interior space of Japanese restaurant in Vietnam. As a result, Japanese restaurants demonstrate a philosophical and spiritual philosophy of life by using natural materials associated with
the natural setting, particularly wood, which the Japanese regard as "alive". Furthermore, interior space design frequently makes use of minimal furniture, reflecting the Japanese way of life, which is gentle, delicate, harmonious, and profound.

Before designing Japanese restaurant, interior designers in Vietnam not only survey symbolic and conventional images and texture, but also clearly understand Japanese restaurant of interior design standards according to the country's own aesthetic rules.

The Introduction of Japanese Restaurant Interior Space into Vietnam

As Vietnam's socio-economic development progresses, Japanese restaurant interior space can be found in all three regions of the country. However, within the scope of the article, the study chose to investigate the interior spaces of Japanese restaurants in the HCM City. HCM city is one of the country's major economic, political, cultural and educational centers, which is directly under the Central Government, where traffic is the main artery connecting air, sea, and land from domestic to international. During the process of formation and development, Ho Chi Minh City is a place where East – West culture converges, and is the center of cross-cultural activities.

With that background, the tourism industry in Ho Chi Minh City is increasingly develop, leading to a variety of types such as restaurants and hotels to meet the "eating well, dressing well" needs of both locals and international tourists. There are many different types of restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City, such as fast food, buffet, carte, banquet, chain restaurants, and restaurants in hotels and resorts. In 2017, according to the survey conducted by Grant Thornton Vietnam, Vietnam is the country attracting domestic and foreign capital to invest in the food and beverage sector. Ho Chi Minh City is an important place for economic development and international exchange, so there are many foreign restaurants here, including Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, Thai, and American. Each restaurant will introduce diners to the delicious dishes and traditional cultural features of its respective country. For example, Japanese restaurants are famous for sushi – sashimi while the signature dish of Korean restaurants is kimchi.

According to a Decision Lad report, Vietnamese people's culinary tastes began to shift dramatically between 2016 and 2018, with a 66% increase in preference for BBQ dishes, a 49% increase in preference for Japanese dishes, and a 17% decrease in preference for other Western dishes, specifically fast food. According to the data of Decision Lab's Aggregate Food Service Monitor (Lab, n.d.): From the fourth quarter of 2017 to the third quarter of 2018, the average culinary spending per diner in Vietnam was 280,000 VND for Japanese dishes, followed by 271,000 VND for BBQ and 225,000 VND for hot pot. Furthermore, according to statistics from the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), there were approximately 770 Japanese restaurants in Vietnam in 2015, but by 2020, this number had increased to nearly 2,500 points of sale (Binh, 2022).

The above information demonstrates that Vietnamese culinary tastes are changing, and Japanese restaurants are thriving in Vietnam, resulting in fierce competition in terms of restaurant space, food quality, price, and service attitude.

Through the regorious survey in Ho Chi Minh City, the researcher discovered that Japanese restaurants are concentrated in central districts such as District 1 and District 3, with well-known brands like Gyu- Kaku, Maruya, Daichi – Ramen & Curry, Uraetei, Sorae Sushi, Gyu Shige restaurant. Each restaurant in these systems is a separate interior space, but it still represents Japanese cultural values and the close connection between Vietnamese and Japanese culture to diners when they set foot in the restaurant.

Attractive characteristics of Japanese restaurants are cuisine, culture, service attitude and interior space. In the age of technology, diners are increasingly considering restaurants and they frequently use websites to read reviews before making a decision. To attract a large number of customers, restaurants must continually improve the quality of their cuisine and service. The aesthetic value of interior space is also an important consideration. As a result, design plays an extremely important role; after the space design process, it not only ensures the aesthetic value in particular and the artistic value of the interior space, but also ensures the brand and special elements. Understanding Japanese cultural values is particularly important for proposing solutions and incorporating appropriate cultural components.

Gyu – Kaku restaurant is a beef hot pot restaurant chain under the Colowide brand that has over 2,500 restaurants worldwide, as well as a leading BBQ restaurant system with over 600 branches in Japan and ten other countries. Gyu–Kaku restaurant has opened ten branches in Vietnam since 2014. Gyu – Kaku restaurant has four branches in Ho Chi Minh City. Many websites have voted this Japanese restaurant as a favorite among diners in Ho Chi Minh City. To complete this article, the researcher polled 25 diners at Gyu – Kaku restaurant aged 25 to 50. The survey scales assess the artistic value of wood material decoration in restaurant interior spaces.

From 2016 up to now, Gyu – Shige restaurant is a BBQ restaurant chain that has opened six locations in Vietnam while has three branches in HCM city. This is one of the restaurants with a Japanese-inspired design among the restaurants surveyed in District 1.

Sorae Restaurant, also known as Cloud Peak Restaurant, started operating in 2017, located on the 24th and 25th floors of AB Tower, 76A Le Lai, Ben Thanh Ward, District 1. This is a high–end restaurant that is consistently ranked among the top 10 most famous Japanese restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City. The name Sorae means 'Above the sky',
located in a prime location with a 360-degree view of the bustling city. With distinctive Asian-style architecture mixed with the spectacular and magnificent beauty of the West, the application of Zen style in interior decoration is expressed through materials such as bamboo and wood with deep tones as the main theme. Sorae deserves to be one of the top 23 most stylish buildings in the world voted by VISI magazine; it also won the award for Vietnam's favorite Japanese restaurant voted by Guide magazine.

Uraetei Restaurant - Pho Dinh BBQ is the earliest grilled beef restaurant chain in Vietnam. Uraetei – BBQ Pho Dinh restaurant has had nine branches in Vietnam since 2006, with eight in Ho Chi Minh City, three of which are located in District 1.


To clarify cross-cultural dialogue in designing Japanese restaurant interior spaces in Vietnam, the study goes into in-depth analysis of 5 basic aspects of interior design space. These are: woods in outdoor decoration, woods in facade decoration, woods in floor decoration, woods in ceiling decoration, woods in partition decoration and woods in interior items decoration. Through the real case of Japanese restaurant spaces located in central districts of Ho Chi Minh City, the researcher did fieldwork, collected data and concluded cross-cultural factors between Vietnam and Japan in terms of culinary space design.

Woods in Floor Decoration
The language of wood decoration in the floor area of Japanese restaurants is frequently designed on favor of blocks, dividing the space according to the designer’s intention. Most Japanese restaurants today such as Gyu - Kaku, Gyu - Shige, Sorae and Uraetei still maintain the floor-sitting culture. Nonetheless some areas continue to use high tables and chairs so that diners can select the style that suits their needs. This helps to flexibly harmonize Western culture with Vietnamese culture.

To be more precise, the Gyu-Kaku restaurant’s Le Thanh Ton branch's interior wood decoration solution is simple. The second floor is primarily decorated with wooden floors, as this area reflects the floor-sitting culture. Most of the floors of Gyu – Kaku restaurant use tile materials, mainly gray ceramic tiles and wood, stone, and gravel. Dark brown floorboards with a roughly 450 high level are used in the wooden floor, which enables diners to comfortably sit on pillows in the traditional Japanese manner while placing their feet on the tiled floor.

Woods in Ceiling Decoration
In the case of the Gyu-Kaku restaurant, the visual language is demonstrated by the decorative arrangements of ceiling wooden materials, which include the use of thin wooden bars arranged in a parallel fashion. When combined with lighting, these arrangements create an outstanding highlight on the interior space's black painted ceiling system. When decorative wooden bars on the ceiling are arranged parallel at a specific distance and divide the space between the reception area and the service space. This way produces a sense of rhythmic movement. This solution contrasts the light – heavy black ceiling with dynamic – static elements, creating a warm, eco-friendly feeling and gentle expressiveness with a light yellow color scheme. According to the house’s design perspective, the space’s depth and width, light and dark, are increased by the arrangement of wooden slats in a parallel vertical orientation toward black painted metal bars that are arranged horizontally and vertically. Japanese restaurants always use dark lighting and focus only on the dining table. This shows access to technology, modern trends, and cultural exchange between Vietnam and Japan.

Woods in Wall Decoration
Woods in wall decoration for Sorae restaurant draws attention to the surrounding walls' black tones with a combination of light from cup-shaped lamps and light yellow natural-grained wood. The space is rustic but still very warm, close to nature. Additionally, it stimulates diners’ senses visually, enhancing the appeal of the restaurant’s food. Wooden decoration is consistent between spaces from wooden wall panels, partitions, and rustic, simple but gentle objects. Therefore, the sophistication in choosing decorative wood materials is an extremely important factor in creating a harmonious space in the interior of Sorae restaurant.

Sorae restaurant’s wooden wall decoration is composed of a 20 x 40 box iron frame system, the middle part of the iron frame has a hanging tongue system measuring 60 x 12. After completing the frame system, start screwing it into the wooden bar. Depending on the shape of the wall, the wooden cross section will have different shapes. In the Sorae restaurant, wood is mostly used for decoration, giving the space a rustic Japanese appearance and a welcoming atmosphere for guests. The wooden slats are arranged and interwoven very delicately and aesthetically.

Woods in Partition Decoration
In interior design, there are numerous ways to partition space. Designers can create partitions for light, plants or objects. Partitions can also be used as shelves to hold wine and other small items, or they can be decorated with lights to create a cozier and brighter aisle area. One common type of wood used for decoration in Japanese interior design is
partitions. These are useful for creating flexible divisions between public and private areas, as well as sliding doors and other decorative elements.

Because of this, the Uraetei restaurant has a partition decoration solution that consists of a wooden frame system with two different types of decoration divided into a rectangular array above it. The first type is geometric, the second type is a wooden frame with with natural motifs and haphazard curves carved on top. When Ramma (Japanese wood carving technique) is applied, the top retains its Japanese cultural essence. Japanese interior design facilitates air and light circulation. The Uraetei restaurant’s partitions are made of a variety of decorative wood materials with different patterns, combining horizontal and vertical wooden slats with blinds and geometric or naturalistic patterns. Surrounded by a large wooden frame to harmonize Vietnamese and Japanese culture.

The restaurant’s wooden partitions are decorated in three distinct colors: light yellow, cockroach brown, and light brown. Specifically, the Gyu - Kaku restaurant and the Sorae restaurant have light yellow partitions. The cockroach brown partitions in the Gyu-Shige restaurant inspire a deep sense of space. The light brown partitions of Uraetei Restaurant highlight natural wood, a feature common to Japanese culture.

**Woods in Interior Items Decoration**

In keeping with Japanese tradition, dining tables at restaurants like Gyu - Kaku, Gyu - Shige, Sorae, and Uraetei are square, plain, and static in shape. Meanwhile, the restaurant’s dining chairs have a rich and varied design that combines East and West in a harmonious way while maintaining a basic Japanese aesthetic.

As a result, the interior design and wooden materials utilized in Japanese restaurants have decorative colors that are closely associated with Vietnamese culture and are quite well-known in Japan. A unique characteristic of Japanese restaurants is the use of light wood for the dining table as a highlight, in contrast with the dark color of the chairs above.

**Interaction between Interior Space and Design Trends**

To be aware of the interaction between Japanese restaurant space and the psychology of diners and experts in Vietnamese fine arts and interior design. The research conducted a survey on 70 experts and 50 diners using services at Japanese restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City.

Accordingly, the group of experts is divided into 4 categories, including: Interior designers, Architects, Fine arts researchers, and Wooden furniture production managers. Of these, the group of interior designers accounted for 67.1%, architects accounted for 14.3%. And 10% came from production managers of wooden furniture; and 8.6% came from fine arts researchers.

According to the data, 13.10% of diners report frequently visiting Japanese restaurants, 63.33% report coming here occasionally, 20% report coming here infrequently, and 3.30% report eating there the first time. Of these, 9.8% highly value the quality of this kind of restaurant’s cuisine, 6.6% appreciate the design space, and 1.6% appreciate the service attitude while 8.2% think that the appeal of Japanese restaurants comes from all three of the factors mentioned above.

In evaluating the general opinions of experts regarding the architectural and interior design elements of Japanese restaurants, 14.8% expressed admiration for the floor-sitting and partition culture; 4.0% expressed admiration for the materials made of wood and paper; 4.9% expressed admiration for the patterns; and 75.4% expressed admiration for all of the previously mentioned features. In terms of customers, 2.9% of diners are impressed with the floor-sitting and partition culture; 4.3% were impressed with wood and paper materials; 1.4% are impressed with patterns and textures and 91.4% feel satisfied with all of the above features.

According to a survey regarding the aesthetic value of wood material decoration in Japanese restaurant interiors, experts rate the following qualities highly: 5.7% highly value usability; 8.6% highly value visual design (including layout and shape of motif); 5.7% highly value structure (texture, wood material); and 80% highly value all of the above.

Besides, in the modern context, it can be seen to ensure the function of a place of residence, spaces are increasingly seen as places that connect with the souls and feelings of the people inside them. Numerous international studies have demonstrated that the capacity to induce relaxation, cultural issues, and interpersonal psychology are not distinct but rather interact. With research on the interior space of Japanese restaurants in Vietnam, we can observe part of the psychological aspect that exists in these spaces. This includes the psychological interactions that occur between individuals and their surroundings, between space and surface phenomena, and the depth of cultural interference through particular surveys.

In particular, with regard to the psychology of diners, spaces are divided into public and private areas, such as the interior spaces of Japanese restaurants, are highly appropriate for the psychology and cultural norms of the general public. The celebration also bears a lot of characteristics with Asian customs like Vietnam. Because of this, Japanese restaurants are frequently chosen as locations for meetings, talks, and private events in Vietnam. The clear boundaries created in the Japanese restaurant space make diners feel somewhat polite in the hierarchical relationship, but also create a feeling of security and intimacy due to the level of privacy. certain.
Apart from private spaces for formal meals, communal open spaces inside Japanese restaurants become a meeting place for diners interested in the food and culture. Diners who use this kind of restaurant have experienced happiness and comfort thanks to its open designs and closeness to trees, which create a lively and distinctive atmosphere. These days, it’s evident that open, well-lit, healing, and contemplative spaces have become part of people’s cultural consciousness and encouraged a sense of ease, comfort, and relaxation.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be claimed that Japanese restaurants’ interior spaces in Vietnam are modern, pluralistic, and cross-cultural multiplexes. -The origin of these spaces stems from the needs and tastes of diners who want to learn about culinary culture, enjoy delicious dishes and enjoy beautiful spaces. Therefore, understanding the artistic value of wood material decoration in Japanese restaurant interior design in Ho Chi Minh City is an essential issue. This will help to create a perfect culinary space in the future as well as express the style, personality and brand mark of Vietnamese – Japanese

In Japanese restaurant interior design, the traditional joinery technique combined with construction techniques is the artistic structural element of wood material decoration. Japanese interior design and furniture often feature colors that are similar to Vietnamese people’s favorite colors. Using the yin and yang principle, there is light within the dark and darkness within light, creating a balanced, harmonious ratio of colors between the highlight and the overall Japanese restaurant space.

Furthermore, the color of the wood-based decorative art in Japanese restaurants’ interior spaces demonstrates the distinction between modernity and tradition.- For Japanese or Vietnamese people, wood itself has aesthetic value, natural materials and shaping features are close and in harmony with nature, environmentally friendly, humble but sophisticated.

The artistic structure of decorative wood materials in a Japanese restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City combines traditional and modern structures, as well as Vietnamese and Japanese construction techniques, to create valuable decorative wooden furniture.

Furthermore, the art of decorating wooden materials not only emphasizes the "Land of the Rising Sun"’s national cultural identity, but also creates a space for luxurious, classy, and culinary enjoyment. Designers have taken the artistic values of decorative wooden furniture to new heights, harmonizing the two cultures of Vietnam and Japan in the interior spaces of Japanese restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City.

**References**
