

Global Architect's Education: Tearoom Database of Interactive Online Workshops

Adriana PICCININI HIGASHINO

National Institute of Technology, Akashi College



This talk is about global architect's education in Japan. Recently the Japanese government has emphasized the training of Japanese students able to work outside of Japan. To work with people from a different culture is a difficult task. We have tried to teach our students English, but it is not only about learning the language. It is more complicated than that, so we've been trying to teach them how to work inside different cultures through workshops.

We have received students from abroad, and also Japanese students have been sent abroad but this is very expensive, so develop online tools is a much cheaper way to continue this process. Thus, I propose to envisage a platform that permits the implementation of online workshops.

At first, we will show the workshops that have been realized in real time and not virtually. We will show how the theme was chosen and then discuss how this interactive platform may work or look like.

The main theme of the workshop is "Tea". Why? Because drinking tea is a relevant social activity in many different countries. Japanese tea came originally from China. Other countries tea habits are also famous, for example, British tea, or the Brazilian tea "Chimarrão", or the Mali tea that takes hours to be prepared. The pictures show the vast differences between each culture is tea drinking habits. Tea drinking, as a social activity, is a universal concept, but Japan is the only culture that has developed a space especially built only for drinking tea. The tea room is unique to the Japanese culture. Tea rooms are interesting because they relate to something which is common to most cultures, every country has drinking tea as a social activity, but at the same

time it is a strong and unique characteristic of Japanese culture.

The Tea Room Design Workshop would be an interactive design studio platform for architecture students to allow them to work in internationally collaborated activities by designing a Tea Room together.

To explain briefly: tea arrived in Japan at the end of VIII century, but it became popular after the XVI century with the spread of Zen and Buddhism (the warrior state period). The tea room is a simple concept: you drink tea in a beautifully designed space, which is made only for drinking tea. It is like when you have water in a pet bottle and water in a wine bottle. It is the same water but which one tastes better? Perhaps, it is the power of design. By designing a space such as the tea room, it was possible to bring the experience of drinking tea to a whole different level.

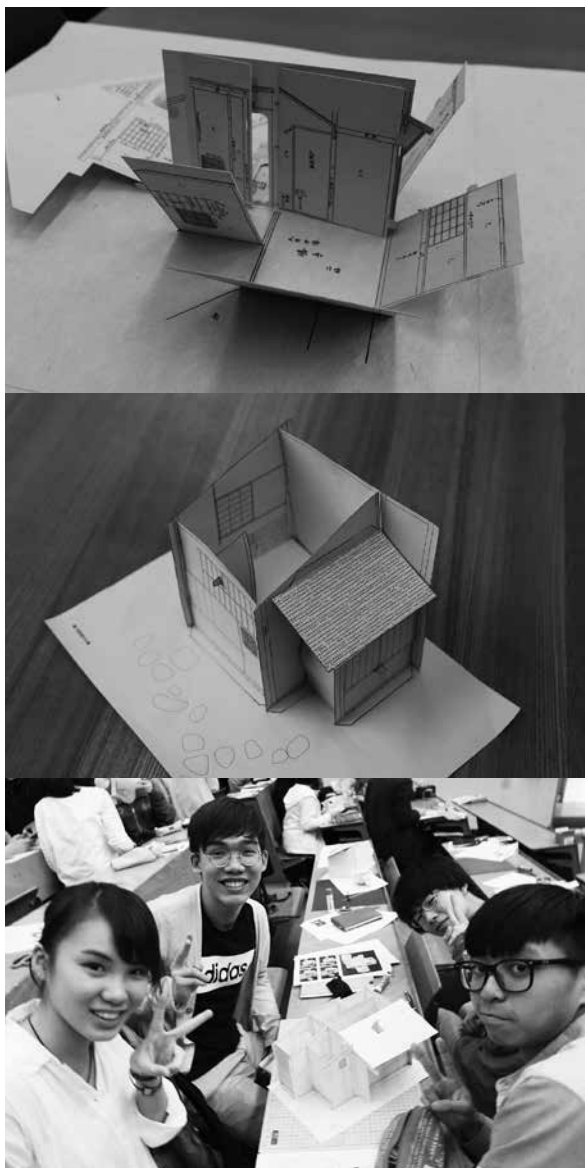
Drinking tea in a tea room is different from getting *matcha* at Starbucks. It will perhaps taste much better because it involves Japanese aesthetic concepts of *wabi sabi*. A book that explains those concepts is "The Book Of Tea" (1906), written by Okakura Kakuzo (Tenshin), the book can be found online for free. Explaining the concept of *wabi sabi* simply — which is not *wasabi*, attention!! — *wabi* means simple or poor (in a "less is more" way of thinking). *Sabi* means something that gets beautiful when it gets old, the beauty you get from time, a sort of paradox that is probably the most interesting feature about tea rooms.

The famous tea master Sen no Rikyu (1522-1591), was not the first one but he is the one who developed the rustic tea room called *Soan*. He designed a very famous tea room called *Taian*. This tea room is a small space and has only two tatami mats. The size of the tea room is important because it will define the distance between the guest and the host. So if you invite someone you like very much, and you feel very comfortable, you'll have tea in a small space. But when you invite your boss maybe you would need to use a bigger tea room.

Another interesting thing about the tea room is that in traditional Japanese architecture the designer and the builder used to be the same person,

so buildings were built by carpenters without any drawings. But the tea room is designed by the tea master, who had to transmit to the carpenters all the details of the tea room, how he wanted to have it built. So the tea master began to build paper models called *okoshie* (pull up drawings) where elevations and the floor plan of the tea room are combined, to transmit their design ideas. An example of *okoshie* is the *jiguretei*, a tearoom in Kodaiji temple, designed by Sen no Rikyu's style.

Okoshie is also important because the materials used to construct a tea room are not durable. After some time the tea room may be destroyed, but if there is an *okoshie*, it is possible to rebuild it, and transmit the design over time.



The “Tea Room” has been used as a tool for international exchange between students for four years. We have promoted four “Tea Room Design Workshops”: the first one was with architecture students from Australia, the second, third and fourth

with students from Brazil. In January we will organize another one, and the invitation is open. Of course, the workshop is not only about architectural design. The foreigner's students stay three weeks in our school, in the dormitory located on the school campus. So they develop the Tea Room Project, but they also visit temples and take part in the Ceremony Tea performed by the college tea ceremony club (*sadōbu*).

The workshop has the involvement of the whole school, and great results had been obtained. But unfortunately, since it is quite expensive to come to Japan not so many students are able to participate. In the same way, it is very expensive to send students abroad. Thus, it would be great if this workshop could be organized over an online platform.

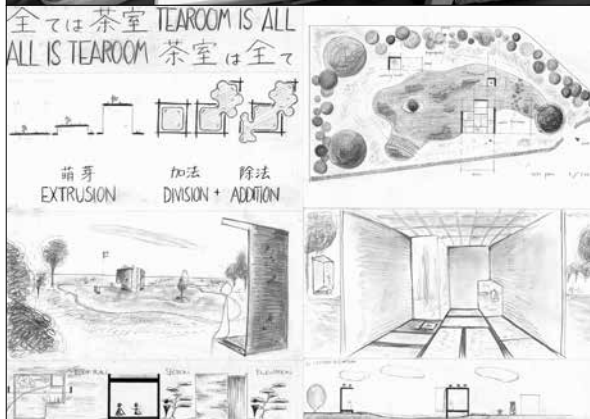
The attempt here is then to propose IT know-how items to feed this platform. I believe a “Tea Room Interactive Workshop” could have three levels of interaction. A webpage level (passive level), a database that can be consulted without evaluations, grades or certifications and open to the general public. An intermediary level (semi-active level) which allows the inclusion of evaluations in the form of quizzes or tests, to verify how students have been studying, and verify how much they have learned. Eventually part of it could also be open to the general public. And an active level that is controlled by students, the access is limited to associated schools, and from where they would be graded and evaluated, receive certifications or maybe credits for the participation in the workshops.

The material on this platform would be uploaded by the students themselves. For example the quizzes allow the online check of right answers. This platform could also include an *okoshie* (download option) drawn based on Horiguchi Sutemi's book. Sutemi's model could be printed out, and folded together or individually, to give a more 3-dimensional idea of the tea room.

The workshop module would mix the features of social media like Facebook, Line, and WhatsApp from where the students can discuss together with a notepad, exchange hand drawings. Videos could also be taken into consideration, but it must be tested because Japanese students have difficulties talking English, and it seems like with texts they would go much faster.

In this interactive platform students would work in groups, maybe two from Japan, two from Brazil, and other countries from wherever as far as the jet lag problem would not interfere, e.g., Hong Kong.

Then several groups could work at the same time, and the students would design tea rooms doing drawings, building models or by using computer graphics of their tea room design. The workshop should not be very long. The first time we organized it, it lasted for three weeks and lately it was shortened for two weeks. In fact, the students stay three weeks in Japan, but the design workshop lasted only for two weeks because they get tired if the workshop is too long and they tend to lose interest after a while. So it is better to organize an intensive workshop program with short sessions.



Video presentations of the tea room design would be uploaded to the platform after the students complete the workshop and it would be cumulative, and it could be open to the public.

In conclusion from this experience, I can say that the tea room as a theme is great to work in

short-term design workshops. It deals with a very Japanese topic and at same time links together with a very global idea. Tea rooms are small and do not take much time from the students. I believe that using new IT tools, to create virtual spaces for the students to work together with people from other countries over an online platform would allow a larger number of students to join and get the taste of international experience.

Questions and Comments

(Luis SAN PABLO) The *tatami* unit of surface is defined and used for contemporary architecture or only for traditional Japanese architecture?

(Adriana PICCININI) It is still used today, but the size is different. A *tatami* is a unit of measure of reference that if you go to rent a room in Japan, they will describe the rooms by saying if it is a four or six tatami room size. Real state offices use it quite often, but there are different sizes, the average is 180x 90cm (long enough for a person to sleep on it).

(Hugo SEGAWA) It is very interesting this idea of using IT to support this exchange. However, bringing foreign people to experiment the Japanese culture, the difference of cultures, is something existential, so in the workshops and the school the students live this real experience of being in Japan, of tastes (food and tea), etc.. So in the interactive platform how do you think this could happen?

(Adriana PICCININI) It wouldn't be the same sort of experience, but it would be just a little grasp of the experience, like a trailer for a movie. It will be more connected to communication, about learning how to communicate with other people, than learning about the Japanese culture itself. Japanese architecture is fun, and this could give a chance for more people to experience it.

(Sacko OUSSOUBY) I think it is really true about how we can perceive the difference of culture through tea, this peculiarity of the Japanese culture for drinking tea in a tiny space. We are now also trying to introduce the Japanese tea culture to some African countries, but I wonder how the workshops could be organized. For example, are the workshops supervised on site? Because even for explanations of terms like *tatami* or the size of it, these explanations are so deep in Japanese culture, and

the questions keep coming up, so I wonder how this platform would be supervised?

(Adriana PICCININI) I think that the Japanese students should be able to answer that. And the first part, the open part to the general public will include students' research that would allow to create materials for the general people to study it. From our experience, if you explain too much the Japanese traditional architecture, the design product from the workshop ends up being a very traditional room, and that is not what we want. We want them to understand it and go further than that. In several occasions, the Japanese students are very shy, and they don't know how to express their thinking, they are not very confident about themselves. So by using a theme based on the Japanese culture that they are supposed to know, that gives confidence and stimulate them to communicate with the students from abroad.

(Sacko OUSSOUBY) We did something which slightly resembles with these workshops in our faculty of *manga*, where we leave foreigners to bring up a conclusion to a story, and that was in France in the Japan Expo Sud. And the foreigners will come with many ideas that the Japanese students never thought about. We can see how different the ideas are. So, in your proposition will it be more oriented towards teaching some rules or preconceived models, or more oriented towards leaving the creation of foreigners. Because foreigners also have the culture of tea, so it would be like to imagine which Japanese version or what can it be for them the Japanese tea room or tea ceremony place like?

(Adriana PICCININI) The design workshop tea room should be more open-minded. At first, foreigners are there to grab the concept, the essence of *wabi sabi*, of simplification or the paradox way of treating the space of the tea room, but we do not expect them to have the *nijiiri guchi* and all these traditional elements in their design. Also, if they do not include *tatami* that would also be ok.

(Igor DE ALMEIDA) I come from a different field, from psychology, when I listened about your workshops I thought about experiments that we call "priming experiments", where we suggest some kind of international condition, and we make people start thinking internationally. Do you feel that by taking part in workshops, do you see the stu-

dents behave more internationally? And how long do you think this "international behavior" would last? A few months? Years?

(Adriana PICCININI) Well, you should ask them, they have participated in some of the workshops. どうみんなさん、国際ワークショップに参加して、世界の見方が変わりましたか？日本語でいいよ。真島くん？結構行ってる・・・ He has been to Brazil, he spent one month in Brazil

(Ryo MAJIMA) 変わってないよ

(Adriana PICCININI) He said "no changes". Liar....

(Ryo MAJIMA) 自分でやっぱり行ったほうがわかりやすい、日本の中でやるより・・・

(Adriana PICCININI) Well, he said that going abroad is better, the experience is more intense than doing it in Japan.