

Japanese Social Interaction in Sento

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Abstract

This cultural article discusses sento as a place of Japanese social interaction. Sento is a bath house or public bathing place that is commonly found in Japan where visitors must pay money to be able to use this facility. Although today the number of sentos is not as much as before, this place remains one of the places visited because of social reasons. It is also commonly called the hadaka tsukiai or naked meetings. Sento visitors usually get to know each other, it happens often they meet at the place and interactions also occur between users of Sento services.

Keyword: *sento, bath, culture*

Foreword

The Japanese nation can be said to be one of the unique nations in terms of culture. In daily life it is never free from etiquette. Eating etiquette, running etiquette, greeting etiquette, visiting etiquette, and even bathing etiquette.

Bathing culture in Japan is an interesting topic to discuss because one culture is so strange in the eyes of foreigners, especially those who are completely unfamiliar with this one, namely the culture of bathing together in public baths called sento. Why is it strange, because bathing in sento requires us to be naked and so are other visitors. You could say that sento is a place where naked people gather.

Sento is a bath house or public bathing place that is commonly found in Japan where visitors must pay a sum of money to be able to use this facility. Although today the number of sentos is not as much as before, this place remains one of the places for social interaction. It is also commonly called the *hadaka tsukiai* or naked meetings. Sento visitors usually get to know each other, it is because they often meet at the venue and interactions occur between users of Sento services.

The reason why people use the services of sento is because there are no private bathroom facilities in their homes or just want to enjoy a relaxed atmosphere after a long day of work. What makes this sento so unique? Following is an explanation of Sento as well as being associated with aspects of social and cultural values.

About Sento

1. Location and Layout

Sento has different floor plans, but on average all of them have similarities in layout, namely the entrance looks like a temple that is closed by a typical Japanese curtain called noren. This curtain is usually dominated by blue with kanji prints 湯 or hiragana 湯. After the entrance is the footwear storage area followed by two long curtains or a door on each side that leads to the dressing room called datsuijo or datsuiba.

2. Dressing Room

A 10 × 10 meter dressing room with a tatami base and a wardrobe inside, for the customers, a special shelf is provided to store the equipment. The ceiling is very high, around 3-4 meters. The separation wall between the men's and women's locker rooms is about 2 meters high. The dressing room usually has access to a small garden complete with a pond and Japanese-style toilets. There are many tables and chairs including massage chairs which are operated by entering coins. Scales and height gauges are usually available there. In the women's dressing room is usually equipped with a baby

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bed and a greater number of mirrors. Also available are automatic beverage vending machines where customers can self-service.

3. Shower Room

The shower room is separated by a sliding door to keep the temperature warm. Exceptions occur in the area of Okinawa where the weather in the area is always hot so there is no need to maintain the temperature. Plus sento in the Okinawa region usually there is no separation between the dressing room and bathroom, or there is only a small wall that opens.

The bathroom floor is usually covered by tiles and near the entrance to the room are benches and small buckets. On the wall there are many taps lined up. One unit has two taps for hot and cold water, and a shower. At the end of the room there is a bathtub which is usually available with two or three different water temperatures, and there is also a denki furo, an electric bathtub.

In Osaka most bathtubs are located in the middle of the room while in Tokyo there is a wall attached to the end of the room. In certain cases also found a sento bathroom that has a small hole in the dividing wall that serves to pass soap between family members. But this is rarely found now because family members can bring their own soap.

On the walls there are usually pictures or paintings as room decorations. The image most often found on the walls of the sento bathroom is Mount Fuji, but does not rule out the possibility of other images such as natural landscapes of Europe, rivers or oceans. Also found pictures of warriors or naked women on the men's bathroom wall. While in the women's bath room are pictures of children playing or pictures of women's beauty.

4. Heating Room (Kamaba)

Kamaba is a room to warm water located behind the shower room. The fuel can use oil or electricity, or even firewood. After World War II, sentos in Japan tend to use electric fuel.

5. Sauna

Modern Sento mostly has sauna facilities with a bathtub filled with cold water that serves to cool down after entering the sauna room. To use this sauna facility, visitors must pay a higher rate, then later will be given a hand ban as a sign that the visitor has paid extra fees.

6. Toiletries

Equipment needed when bathing at a minimum sento is a small towel and soap or shampoo. Waiters at the sento usually sell the equipment at a price of around 100-200 yen. Most visitors bring two towels, namely to clean or rub the body while bathing and the other to dry it. Scrub brush from nylon material is not uncommon to wash and scrub the body. Other toiletries that are permitted to be brought are toothbrushes, toothpaste, shavers, combs, headgear, hair cream, cosmetics, and so on. Some visitors store their toiletries on the open shelves in the changing rooms.

The Ethics of Bathing at Sento

In Japan, the culture of removing footwear when entering a home is very important. So even when entering sento. Footwear are removed at the entrance and stored in the shoe locker. This facility is free of charge and is free of charge. After removing the shoes visitors will choose one of the two doors to be entered according to their respective gender. The door in a man's room is usually blue and has a kanji, while the door for a woman's room is red and has a kanji. The cost of using sento ranges from 450-600 yen for all sentos in the Tokyo area.

After paying, visitors choose an empty locker to store their clothes and take off the clothes they wear until there is no cloth left on the body except towels. Then, enter the bath. In the shower, visitors take a bucket and small bench and choose a faucet.

Before you start bathing, a small stool needs to be watered first so that it is hygienic because previously it was also used by others. When bathing with water from a tap, visitors are free to use the soap and shampoo they carry, but it is hoped that the water used to clean themselves does not splash on other people, because there is a possibility that the other person is already clean.

After tidying the toiletries and body completely clean without any soap or shampoo foam, then visitors can enter the ofuro and be free to bathe as long as they like. At the time of going into ofuro, visitors must ensure that there is no more soap or shampoo on their bodies. Because maintaining the cleanliness ofuro water is a basic rule when bathing in sento. Littering the water ofuro will greatly disturb other visitors and harm the owner of the sento because he has to dry, rinse and refill it again. It takes a long time so the owner will lose visitors and of course will be financially disadvantaged.

After bathing, visitors return to the dressing room and wear their clothes calmly. There visitors can also enjoy ice cream or enjoy the peace of the park. When leaving a sento, visitors must ensure that their luggage is not left behind.

Tattoos and Foreigners

In sento, members of the yakuza (Japanese mafia) are easily recognizable from ordinary Japanese people because of tattoos that cover their entire bodies. Yakuza is always associated with violence so ordinary visitors become scared and uncomfortable. As a result, many sento banned the yakuza from coming to their place. Another reason for prohibiting tattooed yakuza is health reasons because making tattoos with needles might cause the person to have an infectious disease. Aside from the yakuza, foreigners are also prohibited from coming to sento. The reason is that many foreigners do not obey the rules of bathing at the sento, for example they enter the ofuro with their bodies still dirty or in their bodies there is still leftover soap foam or shampoo. It is not uncommon for foreigners to bring liquor and get drunk, causing a ruckus.

History of Sento

The original sento culture originated from Buddhist rituals in India which then spread to China and reached Japan in the Nara period (710-784).

1. Nara to Kamakura Period

The Nara period to Kamakura can be said to be the era of "religious baths". That is because at that time baths were usually found in temples. The bath is called yuya (hot water shop), and then its size increases so that the term ooyuya appears. These baths generally use steam. Although basically the baths may only be used by temple priests, even sick people are allowed to enter. Until the Kamakura period (1185-1333), people who were sick were routinely given the freedom to use the baths. Then the upper class community did not want to be outdone by building baths in their respective residences. The first commercial public bath was built in the Kamakura period in 1266, which is a mixed bath for men and women.

2. Edo Period (1603-1867)

In the early Edo period public baths were divided into types based on the eastern and western regions of Japan. In Edo (present-day Tokyo) the bathhouse has a rather deep pool called yuya. Whereas in Osaka it is called mushiburo because it generally uses steam, plus the pool is rather shallow.

At the end of the Edo period, Tokugawa Shogunate ordered to separate the bathing room for male and female sections in order to preserve the morality of society. But the bath owners followed the order only by giving a small boundary board to the two rooms. Other baths choose to specify men's and women's bathing schedules on different days or specialize only for customers of a certain gender, for example only for men or for women only.

At that time the term yuna was also known, namely the female servant in charge of helping customers clean their bodies by rubbing their backs. After the working hours of the yuna, they often peddle sex with male customers.

In order to prevent the rampant practice of prostitution in public baths, Tokugawa Shogunate stipulated that there should not be more than three yuna in each bath. However, the regulation was ignored so as to make Shogunate go further, namely by stopping all yuna from public bathing. Ex-yuna who do not have jobs eventually move to the red light district where they can continue their activities as sex workers.

Until 1870 there was also a male servant called Sansuke who helped customers to clean themselves both men and women. Unlike Yuna, these male servants are not involved in the practice of prostitution. Mixed baths were finally banned after Commodore Perry came to Japan in 1853 and 1854.

3. Meiji Period (1867-1912)

In this period the design of the baths began to change according to needs. The entrance to the bath room is made wider, then the bathtub is made lower so that customers can easily enter it, and the height of the ceiling is doubled.

Because the baths are more focused on hot water and not steam baths, then windows can be added so the bathroom becomes brighter. The difference between sento at that time and modern sento was that the room was covered with wood and the lack of taps.

4. Taisho Period (1912-1926) and Post World War II

In the early Taisho era, wooden floors and walls in public baths began to be replaced with tiles. This change was more intense after the Kanto earthquake in 1923 which devastated Tokyo. As a result of the earthquake, most of the public baths were destroyed without a trace. Then at the end of the Taisho period the use of taps began to be familiar in the community until now.

World War II for Japan (1941-1945) was a difficult time due to frequent air attacks that destroyed the city and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Along with the destruction of the city, the number of sentos was drastically reduced. This has triggered the emergence of many temporary bathing places when they were built with makeshift materials, sometimes even without a roof.

Most of the houses were destroyed and caused a high number of people visiting public baths. Plus new buildings that were built after the world war don't have an average bathroom or shower. This is the cause of sento's peak at that time. In 1965 the public baths began adding showers connected to the faucet in the bathroom. Sento business also reached the peak of its heyday around 1970.

5. After 1970

In the 70s, private bathrooms began to be known in general, and in almost every new apartment building always provided a bathroom complete with a shower. Convenience like this makes the number of sento customers begin to decrease. Some Japanese young people now feel ashamed if they look naked, and for this reason they avoid public baths. There are also people who still think that without skinship (physical interaction with naked body) children will have difficulty in socializing (between families). The age of children who are allowed into the bathroom with parents of different genders is under 8 years.

Conclusions (Aspects of Socio Cultural Values)

Public baths are unique places to communicate and interact. Because in everyday life people generally present themselves after wearing makeup or dressing. Make up and clothes give a statement of who the person is and also gives the person status. However, in public baths all people are naked so that nothing can be used as a tool to distinguish or determine a person's social status. Sometimes there are also people who are embarrassed naked before other people even with people of the same sex. In this sento we can see people as they are without anyone being covered. Here, too, we can see that no one is perfect so they can be more confident despite their own shortcomings.

Even though it is said that the younger generation of Japanese are now ashamed to use sento, the image of sento which is identical or symbolized by closeness or familiarity does not fade. This is shown in the drama on television where there are often scenes of young people spending their time in sento after a day of activities. They discuss or rub each other's backs, and other scenes. In the process of shooting too, the actors are really nude but still does not display vital areas.

Scenes that show social interaction in sento are very popular and are mostly found in films and television dramas. This eventually formed an opinion, that is, cleanliness + openness + togetherness = sento, without feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed.

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