How did I see Japan and the Japanese society? Its charms and disagreeable points

Jikan ga tatsuno ga hayakatta (the time went by so fast). I just realized that it's been more than two years since I left Japan in 2011. I am missing Japan so much that I searched for every files and memories about Japan. Then, I found this article that I wrote for my "Topics on Japan" course, and I decided to rewrite it here, just for making it easier to read. The course homework was about the “modern” and “traditional” Japan, both their charms and disagreeable points. This is what I wrote back then:

When I take a look at one side of Japan nowadays (the youngsters' fashion, shopping centers, new appartments, tall buildings, etc.), I can easily say that they all exist as a result of modernization. However, at the same time, I can still see the “traditional Japan”, such as temples, shrines, traditional houses, aristocratic mansions, etc. Amazingly, they are all in a very good condition. What I learned from this phenomena is that the Japanese can adapt their tradition to the modern point of view. They rebuilt the traditional buildings in a modern way, utilizing the traditional skills that they learned and preserved so that they can keep the traditional values of those buildings.

The importance of maintaining the uniqueness and originality of Japanese culture can be observed in the way Japanese utilize others' ideas. In the traditional period, the Japanese periodically borrowed useful aspects of foreign cultures, especially from China and Korea. However, they didn't want to simply replace a Japanese idea with the foreign one. Typically, they retained their original concept and then superimposed elements of the foreign one, creating a new Japanese version.

One traditional feeling for Japanese which has been inherited from generation to generation is the feeling of group solidarity and pride. Japanese people has a very strong bond and identification for their group. They care for the group more than they care for individuals. In my opinion, the line between 'we' and 'they' in Japan is sharper than in other country. Even in this modern era, group is still very important for a Japanese. One obvious example is the self introduction:

· in Japanese: watashi wa Tokyo Kougyou Daigaku no Lisa desu
From these three examples, we can easily note that a Japanese will mention his group (Tokyo Institute of Technology) first before himself (Lisa). This is the exact opposite from both English and Indonesian. In a nation/group point of view, this is very good since a Japanese will be very devoted to their nation/group, creating good cooperations and strong bonds within the group's member, as well as significant improvements for the group itself. However, from smaller scope, groups in schools for example, this kind of feeling can be a huge disadvantage. In the schools, students unintentionally form several groups. The shy person with low self-confidence and does not belong to any of these groups will probably be the victim of bullying which could lead to a major problem in Japan: suicide.

Another traditional attitude that survives in the modern Japanese national character is a strong feeling of separateness from others. In the traditional period, Japan was geographically and politically isolated from other countries. Although now Japan is no longer isolated, many Japanese still feel that they are separated from "the foreigners" in some sense. Even among the Japanese themselves, I found that the feeling of separateness still exist. It is very difficult for some Japanese to share their private problems with others. Most Japanese prefer to keep their private problems as their secret. Supported by the Japanese culture that respect privacy, Japanese usually do not really care of others' business, especially if it comes to private issue. Then, again, this phenomena leads to a more complex problem: suicide.

So, which one do you think is better? The Japanese culture or the Indonesian culture? :)

Reference: