

Comparison of the “Oki-gotatsu” in the Traditional Japanese House and the “Kürsü” in the Traditional Harput House

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Abstract: The use of the wooden low table “kotatsu” in the center of the traditional Japanese house in the seventeenth century (Edo (Tokugawa) period), the oki-gotatsu, is similar to the use of the wooden low table in the traditional Harput house, the “kürsü”. The “kotatsu” and the “kürsü” used in winter in both places with similar climate characteristics are the table usage, which is collected around the place and where the warm-up needs are met. The origins of these similar uses in the traditional Japanese house and the traditional Harput house, located in different and distant geographies, can be traced back to Central Asia. In this study, the shape and use characteristics of “oki-gotatsu”, a form of traditional Japanese house in the past, and the shape and use characteristics of the “kürsü” in the traditional Harput house are compared.

1. Introduction

In this study the traditional Japanese house wooden low table “kotatsu” is compared with the traditional Harput house “kürsü” known from Turkey. The similarity of these two draws attention. Their uses not only meet the need for heating in cold-climate environments, but they also integrate the use of tables with other indoor furniture.

As Japan extends for about 3,000 km in the north-south direction, the country's climate varies from region to region; a multitude of natural environments can be observed due to the country's spread over many degrees of geographical latitude and the effect of various landforms, most of which are mountainous. (Keskin, 2012: 59) In the North the summer is warm and short, whereas the winter is long and very cold. In the central area summers are hot and humid, whereas winters are short. In the southwest the summer is hot, humid and long, and the winter is warm. (Hee-Soo: 570) For all of the country the climate is cold and harsh in winter, because of the continental cold air masses coming from Central Asia. (Büyük Larousse Sözlük ve Ansiklopedisi, “japon”, vol: 12: 6054) Japan's position between the ocean and the Asian mainland is one of the main factors that determines its climate. In addition, the characteristics of the local and regional topography produces local climate differences. In the mountainous interior for example, the temperature can drop considerably on short notice. (Ana Britannica, “Japonya”, vol: 17: 211)

Kotatsu is the traditional center of life in Japan during the winter months. In the evenings, family members gather around kotatsu and keep the lower half of their bodies warm with kotatsu while eating, watching TV, playing games and enjoying commune (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kotatsu>). Even until today in many houses in winter, the Japanese people prefer to sit in cushions around kotatsu. (Şenavcu, 2006) (Dündar, 2011)

Harput settlement in the Anatolian part of Turkey is an ancient winter city founded in rocky terrain at high altitude. The

area is exposed to northern and southern air currents and dominated by a cold climate, which makes life conditions difficult. (Kahraman, 2010) Continental, polar-like air masses originating from the inner parts of Asia move southwest before entering the Harput area. This cold winter air mass is dry and is pulled up during spring time with occasional heavy precipitation released in the area. Harput settlement, on average 500 meters higher than the low areas around the Harput plateau was founded for defense and protection and to give Harput advantage against the harsh and cold climate. (Öztürk and Coşkun, 2014) During the winter months and due to the difficult and long winter nights Harput houses were heated with “kürsü”. (Karkın and İmik, 2010) (Kara, Karabulut, Demirdağ, Özmen, 2007) Apart from the stove and grill some houses used methods such as the tandoor for heating the traditional Harput house. (Kahraman, 2010) Homeowners and guests would sit around the mangal and warm up. The aim was to warm up the person, not the room. (Yünkül, 2005)

Still, the table usage “Kotatsu” in Japan and “kürsü” in Harput, also included the need for heating. Both are traditional home interior furniture.

“Kotatsu” and “kürsü” are used for sitting on the ground with crossed legs. For this reason, the main room of the house, where the family gathered in the traditional Japanese house, goes along with a washitsu (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washitsu>) meaning there is wooden made low table in the middle of the room. In the traditional Turkish house, the seating conventions depend on the ground. As in much of Asia, the Turkish house required the use of a carpet on the floor, where it was possible to establish a bond on the ground, to kneel down, and also to have the bed arranged on the ground. It allowed to walk comfortably on the soft carpet where the rug laid on the pavement. Daily work has been done on this floor. (Erdinç, 2009) The meals also were takings place on the ground. This habit was born of as a nomadic style and strengthened with the habit of eating comfortably. The

habit of nomadic life still continues in Anatolia until today. (Erdinç, 2009) As a necessity and part of the habit of nomadic life, the most important feature of the rooms in the Turkish house is the multi-purpose use. You can sit in every room, work, eat, sleep, wash. The biggest factor that enables this is that mobile equipment (furniture, goods) is used. When necessary, the items are placed in the center of the room, after use, they are put back in place. For this purpose, the central area of the room was left empty. (Sayın, 2014)

In the traditional Japanese house, there is also a multi-purpose use of the room. However, the only furniture in the center of the room and which makes it a special case of the Japanese house, is the wooden table. (Dodd and Richmond, 2001) This table is especially the "kotatsu" in winter times. If necessary, it can be replaced with other uses for some period; meaning it is eliminated or replaced by something else.

The "kürsü", which meets the need for heating and has been established as the "kürsü" tradition in Harput, started from Central Asia and is a tradition that started with the Seljuks and Ottomans in Anatolia and lasts to the present day. With the arrival of the Turks in Anatolia in the thirteenth century and the transition to city life until modern times artisans came together in the organisation of "Ahilik" to bring the people together in unity, fellowship, friendship, solidarity, love, respect, hospitality, music and games, and to organise commune meetings where elements such as the "kürsübaşı" have become an essential component. (Akbiyik, 2004)

During the day, people around the house gather at the kürsü, and during nights, it would be allocated to the guests. The order has been decided in advance, with each night it was held on the kürsü of a particular house. On long winter nights, there were held gatherings by age groups at the beginning of the "kürsü", which was almost the only entertainment of Harput people. In the "kürsübaşı", legends, tales, riddles were sung, jokes were made, ring games were played. At the end of the game, the loser was punished, heavy jokes were made. (http://www.habitat.org.tr/kultursanat/816-kursubasi.html)

During the musical and entertaining meetings, known as the "kürsübaşı" around the "kürsü", the stories of the people and the issues that have an important subjects in cultural life were discussed. (http://www.habitat.org.tr/kultursanat/816-kursubasi.html)

(http://www.elazigkulturturizm.gov.tr/TR,96038/kursubasi-gelenegi.html) The tradition of commune, together with Harput music, constitutes a cultural feature. (Erol, 2012) In Harput, the "kürsü" became a social tradition and meetings were held around the "kürsü"; those meetings were called "kürsübaşı". The assembly was held in the biggest and most beautiful room of the traditional Harput and Elazığ house, where the mangal was brought to the center of the room and the "kürsü" was placed on the mangal with a wooden table, the "kürsü" itself was laid on the top of the quilt or blanket. In the "kürsü", music was performed on religious and contemporary issues. (Yünkül. 2005) (Erol, 2012) (Fig. 1)



Fig 1. In Harput, the tradition of "kürsübaşı" (<http://www.elazigkulturturizm.gov.tr/TR,96038/kursubasi-gelenegi.html>)

The harsh winter climate in Harput has been a factor shaping the traditional house, and Islam's privacy has been effectively supportive, too. (Yünkül, 2005) In this use, the concept of introversion, based on Central Asian beliefs and nomadic life, was also effective. (Erdinç, 2009) The other result of Islam on the traditional house is the separation of places according to gender. (Ekici, 2004) Foreigners and guests from outside were welcomed in the "selamlık" section reserved for the use of men. Therefore the large and spacious room of the selamlık section was reserved for the guests. In the traditional Turkish House this room called "başoda" is also called "Şahnişin" (sohbetcı) room. This room was more flashy than any other room and its ceiling was high. In addition to being the place where the head of the family was sitting and accepting the guests, these rooms were used like any other rooms in daily life. (Yünkül, 2005) Harput houses are open to the outside including the rooms where guests are accommodated and the rooms that establish the connection between the street and the house. Therefore, these rooms are placed at the front side of the house facing the street, in a position that dominates the view, and where guests usually come out passing through the "şahnişin". These exits are made larger as both in the number of windows and the size of the window, making in Harput the relationship between the house and the outside specific. In these windows, blinds or latches were used to protect the sanctity and privacy of the house. (Kahraman, 2010) The origin of the "başoda" (köşkoda), which is located in one corner of the sofa or on the roof, is the old Turkish tent where close friends gather and commune. (Yünkül, 2005)

Contrary to the widespread practice in Anatolia, in the traditional house in Japan there are no home gatherings or home visits. (Erdemir, 1993) (Keskin, 2012)

The use of the traditional Japanese "oki-gotatsu" in the development phase of "kotatsu" is seen similar with in the "kürsü" in the traditional Harput house. These solutions appear to be similar traditional solutions used under similar climate conditions.

1.1. "OKI-GOTATSU" IN THE TRADITIONAL JAPANESE HOUSE

Kotatsu; it is a general statement that refers to the use of the heat source with the table. This use is the result of a development that takes hundreds of years to reach its today's use. When developed and diversified in this process, Kotatsu had different names that express their particular characteristics in order to qualify the differences between the various uses. However, although there are differences between them, they can all be expressed as "kotatsu" in general.

The main furniture of the traditional Japanese living room "washitsu" is a low table on tatami ground. Around the wooden low table known as "kotatsu" where the family meets for meal and welcomes guests for sitting, cushions called "zabuton" or legless chairs called "zaisu" are located. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washitsu>) Kotatsu is an interior furniture where the use as a heating source is combined with using it as a table. (Gill, 2004) The heat source's container is made of wood and located under the table where a mattress or a heavy blanket covers the bottom which is overlain by a quilt that covers the table. (McMillan, 1996) Kotatsu is covered with a thick cover and prevents the heat from dissipating. During the cold winter days the family members wear thick clothes around kotatsu putting their legs under this cover. (Şenavcu, 2006)

The place of kotatsu is the centre of the traditional Japanese house and with the development and change of Japanese type heaters over time kotatsu's heat source has reached its modern

form after undergoing some change and development. (Gill, 2004) Kotatsu is a result after centuries of development, which has been transformed into a modern interior furniture, starting from the traditional hearth, which provides the cooking and warm-up function at the center of the traditional Japanese House located called “irori”. At kotatsu the use of the heat source gained portable properties during this development and is called “oki-gotatsu”.

In the seventeenth century (during Edo) kotatsu was known as hori-gotatsu (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kotatsu>). It it was used as a wooden set around irori, which was excavated in a square shape. Mattresses were laid out on the wooden set to keep the legs warm. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kotatsu>)

Hori-gotatsu, based on the concept of a mobile kotatsu in the eighth century (Nara 710-745 AD) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nara_period), developed as a heat source and was an open charcoal mangal called “Hibachi”. (Doi, 2014) (Hanley, 1997) Thanks to the movability of the mangal the source of heat was portable. (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1994) (Fig. 2) Hibachi was used for individual use, because it was warm only near it and cool when moving away from it. (Nesbitt, 2007) This is why only hands could warm up when using a hibachi. In this heat source, heat was supplied using charcoal in a large pot. (Kaylor and Kaylor, 2007) Over time, the use of kotatsu has gained a portable feature thanks to the combination of the portable feature of hibachi, which is advantageous in heating, with the new function of seating around it, which has started to be shaped in “irori”. Another portable heating tool was the hot coal reservoir used to heat the feet and which was called “anka”. (Fig. 3) It likewise belongs to the portable kotatsu. (Hanley, 1997) Thus, the coal fire in irori, a source of heat that came in from the past, was placed in a soil pot and became portable. In this way kotatsu became “oki-gotatsu”, which remains unchanged until modern time. Oki means docking, ko means fire, tatsu means hot feet and by today's modern use of kotatsu the use of the heat source in oki-gotatsu has been converted to an electric heater. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kotatsu>)



Fig 2. Portable hand mangal “hibachi”. A primitive “hibachi” used before the Edo or Tokugawa era, Fukagawa Edo Museum (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hibachi>)



Fig 3. Portable foot-stove “anka” (<https://www.jappleng.com/culture/articles/jp-culture/406/what-is-the-kotatsu-and-horigotatsu>)

In oki-gotatsu, two types of heat sources were used over time. The first is the type, in which a mattress is laid on the table and the heat source in the pot is made of clay, is placed under the table and can be carried away. In this type, a finer mattress (futon) is laid on the table. The second one is a table that is placed on a thicker mattress laid on the floor, with the heat source under the table. A second heavy blanket called “kotatsu-gake” is laid on the

blanket called “shitagake”, which is usually laid on the table. Kotatsu-gake; is usually decorative and designed to fit the decoration of the house. In summer, the blanket on the table is removed and without the heat source the kotatsu is used only as a table. It is also possible to sleep under kotatsu. However, it is appropriate to use the heating elements for a short-term rest, which we call -nap-, rather than for long-term sleep, because of the risk of burn associated with accidental damage. Children and pets like cats can sleep under kotatsu. In Japan of today kotatsu still is the center of life in the some homes in winter. In the evenings family members gather around kotatsu and heat until up the lower half of their bodies and their legs, if they want to up to the chest, while gathering around it for eating, watching TV, playing games and commune. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kotatsu>)

1.2. “KÜRSÜ” IN THE TRADITIONAL HARPUT HOUSE

The “kürsü” in the “selamlık” section of the traditional Harput House is a low table made of wood, which is used for sitting on the floor. Ground height is 50-60 cm. The “kürsü” is a square table resting on four wooden legs, which can reach up from 60 cm to 1.5 m on one side. Cushions are located on the floor level around the table. The heat source of 30-60 cm in diameter is placed in the middle of the mangal under the table. According to the size of the kürsü a pot, which is made of straw and sticky mud, is placed underneath. Apart from those who were sitting around the kürsü, there were copper vessels to warm water. In some villages, there were empty kürsües surrounded by mudbrick on four sides and laid out with egg shells. It was placed in the middle of this kürsü and covered with charcoal. The charcoal fire, which burnt in the open air and usually in the cookers, was put into these grills using a “carit” (fire shovel) and it was covered with ash to keep the warmth for a longer time. Depending on the cold temperatures from outside, this fire kept the kürsü warmth for 10 to 12 hours allowing to warm those persons around it. On the “kürsü”, the inner face is red-coloured and flat, the outer part of it is covered by large quilts made of cloths with flower decoration. Feet, legs and arms are placed under these quilts and the quilt of the kürsü is pulled up to the chest. Those who were sitting around the kürsü heat up like this. (<http://www.habitat.org.tr/kultursanat/816-kursubasi.html>) (<http://www.elazigkulturturizm.gov.tr/TR,96038/kursubasi-gelenegi.html>) (Fig. 4)



Fig 4. “kürsü” and “mangal” in a traditional Harput house, from Harput Şefik Kültür Evi (photo: İlknur Yüksel Schwamborn)

The mangal in the middle of the room is placed under the kürsü, with a comforter or blanket laid on the kürsü. The house party and the guests became warm by sitting around the kürsü. The goal was not to warm the room, but to warm the person. (Yünkül, 2005)

The house party gathered around the “kürsü” during the day and it was allocated to the guests at night. Each night, after prior decision the guests gathered at and around a kürsü of a particular house. This usage has become a “kürsübaşı” tradition thereby gaining social content. Next to the warming function of the heater the “kürsü” served as community meeting place, where to learn and to entertain with social content. (<http://www.habitat.org.tr/kultursanat/816-kursubasi.html>)

1.3. COMPARISON BETWEEN “KOTATSU” AND “KÜRSÜ”

Kotatsu and kürsü are located in the common living area of traditional Japanese and traditional Harput houses. However, under the effect of the privacy brought in by Islam to Anatolia, the place of the “kürsü” is reserved in the “selamlık” section for the use of men only.

The living room, covered with tatami wicker floor in Japanese house, is the meeting place of the family members. The family spends most of its time here. In the middle of this room there is a large blanket under the “kotatsu” and a heater under its and cushions around its. (Şenavcu, 2006) In the Anatolian Turkish house's ground the walking ground in the room is mostly covered by carpets, rugs and wicker textiles. From time to time felt is used. One of the important factors in the formation of this kind of floor cover is that the Turks sat on their knees and prayed on the ground. (Yünkül, 2005) In Japanese society for comparison, people sit with their legs crossed. (Locher, 2013) (Güvenç, 2010)

Kotatsu and kürsü can also be examined in terms of their shape and technical features; the plan dimensions of oki-gotatsu are as follows; approximately 75 x 75 cm, one edge of the kürsü table is raised above ground from 60 cm up to 1.5 m, it is four-legged. Both, kotatsu and kürsü, are made of wood and have a square-shaped table. (<http://www.habitat.org.tr/kultursanat/816-kursubasi.html>) Considering that this table has become a part of musically social activities in Harput it is understood to grow according to the number of people. Elevation above ground is 30-35 cm of the kotatsu, 50-60 cm of the kürsü. (Fig. 5)

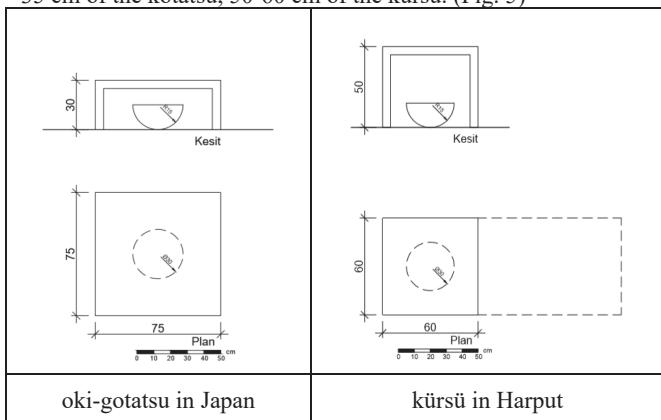


Fig 5. Comparison of oki-gotatsu and kürsü (drawing: İlknur Yüksel Schwamborn)

In oki-gotatsu coal was used for fire and wood was used in kürsü.

2. Conclusion

The use of a heated table in the traditional Japanese house known as kotatsu in the Edo period (1603-1867) (Ana Britannica Ansiklopedisi, “Doğu Asya sanatı” cilt: 10, s: 254) is similar to the use of “oki-gotatsu”. It has a similar use like a “kürsü” in the traditional Harput house.

In the traditional Harput house a “kürsü” and in the traditional Japanese house a “kotatsu” are common living spaces, which are the centre of the traditional house. Both have been the center of life in winter in the traditional house.

While the use of “kotatsu” in Japan was more private for the use of family members, the use of the “kürsü” in Anatolia was used among family members, but also was a part of social meetings with guests. For this reason, the place of the “kürsü” has been the “selamlık” section that is reserved especially for men in the traditional house. (Öztürk. 2008)

The reason that the dimensions of kotatsu and kürsü are different from each other is because they are shaped according to the ergonomic characteristics of Japanese and Turkish people.

Coal was used in kotatsu and wood was used in kürsü.

Oki-gotatsu is a usage that corresponds to the Edo period in this development. It depended on the changing heat sources during the period of kotatsu usage. Innovation continues until today and thanks to improvements kotatsu is still being developed and continuously be used in Japanese society. Kotatsu turned into an electric heater installed under the table today. The use of the kürsü in the traditional Harput House is abandoned today.

The origin of the similarity “kürsü” of the traditional Harput house and the “kotatsu” in the traditional Japanese house is traced back to Central Asia.

As a result, similar uses seen in two different societies in the past according to similar climate and cultural characteristics have been affected differently in the face of Westernization.

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