



## ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL FACTOR IN THE FORMING OF FURNITURE IN THE CASES OF TRADITIONAL TURKISH AND JAPANESE HOUSES

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### Abstract

*The concept of culture can be defined as all abstract and concrete features and values that shape the life of various communities. Societies have reflected these features and values into their living spaces by being inspired from their social structure and the environment. Therefore culture stands out as an important factor in the forming of living spaces that meet the basic requirement of housing and the furnishings inside. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the cultural factor on the forming of furniture, in the cases of traditional Turkish and Japanese house furniture. In this context, in the first section of the study the definition of culture is made and based on this, the relation between culture and lifestyle and the interaction between culture and furniture is discussed. In the next section, the "culture" factor in the forming of furniture, the main subject of the study is discussed with the relation between Traditional Turkish and Japanese house furniture and the culture and lifestyle of both societies. In the conclusion section, similar and different features are identified and analyzed in the forming of furniture in both cultures, using the information obtained from the study.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Furniture, Form, Turkish House, Japanese House

## MOBİLYANIN BİÇİMLENDİRİLMESİNDE KÜLTÜR FAKTÖRÜNÜN GELENEKSEL TÜRK VE JAPON EVİ ÖZELİNDE İNCELENMESİ

### Özet

*Kültür kavramı, belirli toplulukların yaşam biçimlerini şekillendiren soyut ve somut özellik ve değerlerin tümü olarak tanımlanabilir. Toplular bu özellik ve değerleri, içinde buldukları toplumsal yapıdan ve çevreden de etkilenerek yaşama mekânlarına da yansıtılmışlardır. Bu nedenle, temel gereksinimlerden olan barınma ihtiyacının karşılandığı yaşama mekânlarının ve içinde yer alan donatı elemanlarının biçimlenişinde kültür önemli bir etken olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, kültür faktörünün mobilyanın biçimlendirilmesi üzerindeki etkisini geleneksel Türk ve Japon evi mobilyaları özelinde incelemektir. Bu kapsamda; çalışmanın ilk bölümünde kültür kavramının tanımlanması, buradan yola çıkılarak kültür-yaşam biçimi ilişkisi ve kültür mobilya etkileşimi irdelenmektedir. Bir sonraki bölümde; çalışmanın ana konusu olan mobilyanın biçimlendirilmesinde "kültür" faktörü; Geleneksel Türk ve Japon evi mobilyalarının her iki toplumun kültürü ve yaşam biçimiyle ilişkilendirilmesiyle incelenmektedir. Sonuç bölümünde ise; incelemeden elde edilen bilgilerle iki kültürde mobilyanın biçimlendirilmesindeki benzer ve farklı özellikler saptanarak analiz edilmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültür, Mobilya, Biçim, Türk Evi, Japon Evi

### 1 Culture

There is no clear and exact description that is accepted by authorities in spite of culture concept is used in many fields with various specifications. It is considered as first and most significant description of culture word is the description of Edward Burnett Tylor that was given in his book titled "Archaic Culture" on 1871: "Culture is a complex entire including knowledge, art, ethics, traditions and similar ability, performance and habits that humanity got to know as a member of community [1]. According to Güvenç, many culture theories were described by the inspiration of this specification [2].

Culture concept is tried to explain in various shape with different aspect by many specialists such as anthropologist, philosophers, sociologist from past to present. It is possible to mention that this variety derive from multiple meaning of the word, far-reaching and abstract concept. By taking various descriptions into consideration, culture concept can be described as the entire of concrete and abstract properties and values that give life styles of certain communities into shape. In accordance with this description, it is drawn attention that the relationship is established among culture and life style.

### 1.1 The Relationship of Culture-Life Style

Culture is an abstract concept generated from all properties and values that shape life styles of communities. Life style is one of the fundamental factors in order to understand what people are making their choice according to, how they act and according to what, and expresses the order generated and developed as the result of living in certain community.

Cultural accumulation can undergo change with the ways such as diffusion, borrowing, synthesis at the result of the communication of communities with other culture. It is a fact that shows an ongoing change for this reason. In this context, cultural changes and differences reflect into the life styles of communities directly.

According to Rapoport, life style brings us actions and action systems. These are the most concrete expressions of culture. For instance, in traditional Turk culture, a table arrangement close to the floor and floor cushions are convenient in order to bring into the sitting shape close to working style of the people in that culture. Community work in the field, process the crop on the ground. By the end of the day, when turning back home, they are tired. Sitting of these people in the level close to working style let rest and relax them [4]. Action systems give a

shape into the life style such as this and so it also reflects the culture directly. The relation and interaction between culture and life style maintain the continuation bilateral.

### 1.2 The Interaction of Culture- Furniture

Furniture continues its existence in various forms and shapes based on factors such as life styles, cultural differences, human behaviors, the function of place and action type as supplementary element of places from past to present. Furniture which is used need-oriented for different necessities situates in the places as adornment item as well.

Culture fact which comes to the fore as determinant and discriminator element in each fields of life is involved in an interaction with furniture directly. According to Özdemir, relationship between furniture and human is determined by the possessed culture [5]. Shapes, forms, materials, functions of furniture can vary according to cultural elements. For instance, the differences in west and east thought systems cause to become different even though basic measurements are same. "While West describes life place as a building and furniture (table, chair, armchair, bed...) which he/she will be settled inside, Ottoman Turk community, as in the past culture, perceive the furniture (sofa, closet...) as an integrated part of place" [6].

## 2 Shaping Culture Factor and Furniture in Traditional Turkish and Japanese House

### 2.1 Culture and Life Style in Traditional Turkish House

After Turks have passed into permanent settlement from nomadic life style, they generated a new life style by combining the data such as current cultural textures which Anatolian and Islamic World-view have possessed, with the adoption of Islam. "An Anatolian synthesis has generated at the result of interactions current traditions with external cultures. Traditional Turk House has been raised at the result of the synthesis of these different cultural components. This cultural synthesis in which nomadic life style in Middle Asia, religious faiths and Islamic world-view generated has become stereotyped, behaviors which became norms and place arrangements principle have been reflected the forming traditional Turk place"[7]. Family life in Islam is in very important position. By this reason, Turks family who need life place providing an opportunity life style pursuant thereto this religion has been gone the way of arrangement of their place by taking care of certain Islamic limitations or criteria. For instance, in traditional Turk House, based upon clearance understanding needed in Islam, it is seen that there is a bathing cubicle concealed in closet at each room which nucleus families live (Figure 1). Islam which brought arrangements into each fields of life has been prepared and directed Turk community who were nomad in their daily lives.



Figure 1. Bathing Cubicle in Traditional Turkish House.

Forming traditional Turk House with elements as high blank walls, small and limited amount windows on the ground floor, decomposition each rooms of house as haremlique & selamlique has been occurred at the result of generating self-enclosed life style needed in privacy facts in Islam. Like these elements have been divided "house" from external life and come to the fore privacy internal life.

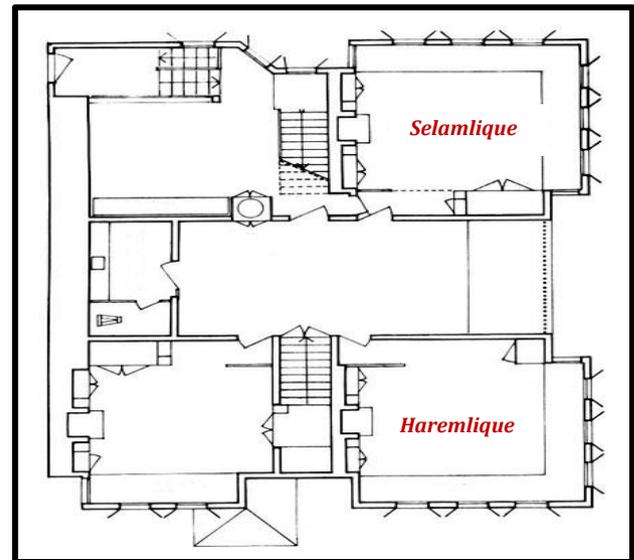


Figure 2. Haremlique/Selamlique Rooms in Traditional Turkish House.

The head room (the most important and privilege room of the house) has been arranged as "selamlique room" in which man entertained his guest close to staircase because of man was in the position of important individual of house in Turks who had patriarchal social structure (Figure 3). At the room which departed various rooms based on acts conducted, it was specified the areas in which servants, guests and man of house would exist and the room was shaped with regard to these features.



Figure 3. Head Room in Traditional Turkish House.

Simplicity needed in Islam philosophy has been showed itself interior design of house as well. Interior design of house has been based upon order, compliance and peaceful principles. The emptiness and simplicity of space is considered to symbolize soothing existence of God in Islam philosophy which commented everything as divine indicator. Interior space of traditional Muslim House, as similar to mosque, which was not fulfilled with furniture has been given sanctity feeling in human with the principle of space which addressed into the soul [8]. Nature is also important concept for Islam Philosophy which was effective and determining position in many fields of life such as culture, life style, social affairs. It has been showed a grant respect to the nature in which satisfied life necessities. It has been seen to try to preserve and enrich natural character by taking into consideration nature conditions in forming traditional Turkish House. It is possible to say that this manner is the result of Islam faith as well as derives from nomadic habitats.

## 2.2 Furniture in Traditional Turkish House

Traditional Turkish House has been designed in the form of providing an opportunity that many nucleus families in propinquity could live together as great families. Therefore, the rooms which have been arranged and furnished in the feature of satisfy necessities pursuant thereto sheltering of each nucleus families are independent spaces that used multi-purpose, and intended to satisfy many functions together such as sittings, bedding, eating, bathing. Objects which are related to only the action except stable accessories are being subtract and disposed into the room that can be arranged again according to different functions within today, and off-duty objects are removed.

It is required to ensure multi-functionality that particularly middle area of the space has to be left empty and the objects which are not used at that time must be removed. Furthermore, all the way plain, slight and high-mobility accessories have been used and a trace of stable accessories have been tried to use. Stable accessories have been placed on the boundaries of the room, and middle area of place has been left empty in order to do other acts [9] (Figure 4).

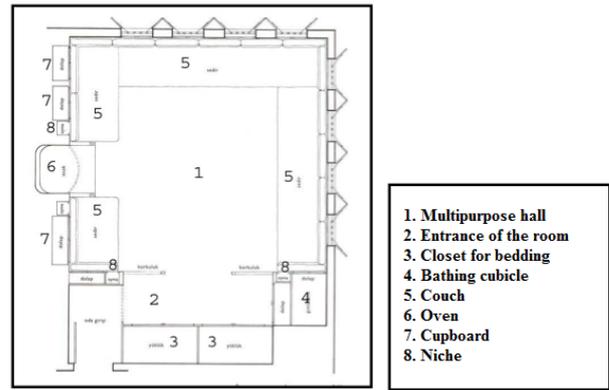


Figure 4. Room Plan of Traditional Turkish House.

It is possible to say that almost all actions are mainly being done on the floor such as sitting, eating, and bedding. "Straw, rug or carpet are covered on the floor, cushions are laid and sat above. The sitting arrangement on the floor has been begun to occur on the couch that gives an opportunity to sit with soft cover and cushions above by having risen up on the sides of floor in time. But they have been continuing to sit on the floor. If there has been a crowd, it has been sat on the floor in the situation of the couch was not adequate. When viewed from this aspect, even small room can be crammed in many people if necessary" [9].

### 2.2.1 Couch

They are stable sitting elements which are placed on the side of wall, usually under the window in the traditional Turkish House (Figure 5). Couches are made up in the form of surrounding two or three sides of room. They are placed in the most illuminated area of room with their location under the window, and situated across the entry usually.

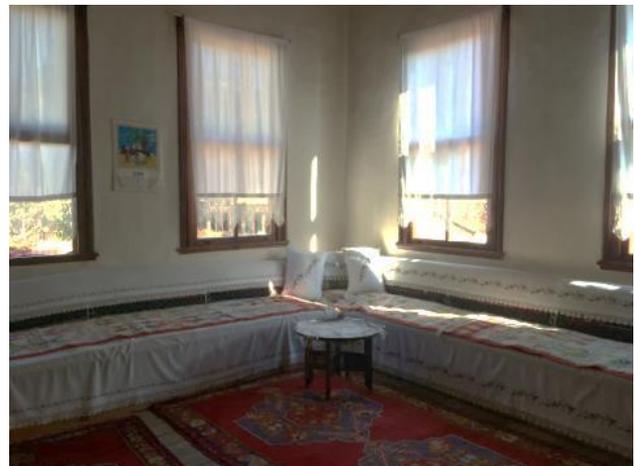


Figure 5. Couch in the Traditional Turkish House.

The heights of couch are usually 30-40 centimeters; depths are 70-80 centimeters. Furthermore, it is seen that their heights were lower in the earlier period. The heights of couches which were made up more recently are about the heights of modern chair. Couches are made up in the form of box above main beam by using wooden plank and covered (Figure 6). Their construction is sufficient for using as crate. But this application is not a quite widespread because of increasing the heights of couch [10].

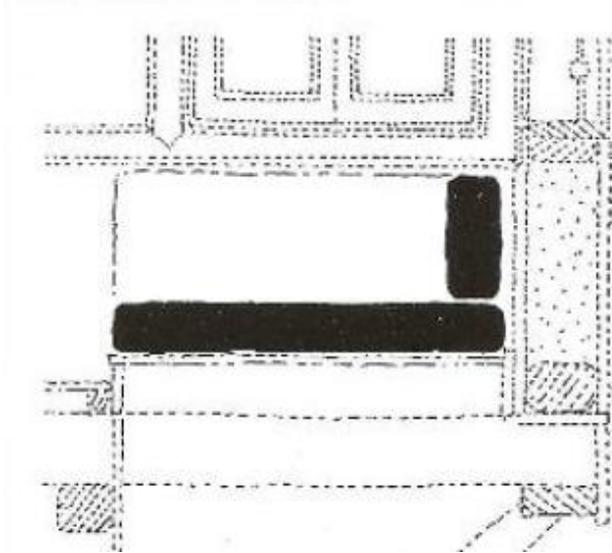


Figure 6. Couch Section in the Traditional Turkish House.

It is sat on the couch with purpose of resting, sparing free times, cheering up, reciprocal chatting, meeting, heating and working. Sitting style of Turks varies. Like sitting cross-legged, sitting put one leg down below, sitting upon knees. These styles of sitting are required a wide place. Couches are made up a far amount wide by this reason [11].

The empty among couches and width of the room according to this don't pass the limit of 3-5 m which can be distance that the individual can see someone's mouth movement, and hear the low voice easily. It prepares an environment for warm and deep conversation [12]. At the same time, couches are built-in furniture that enhancing flexibility of space by satisfying the different needs such as sitting, resting, lounging [5].

### 2.2.2 Closet and Other Wardrobes

Closets placed across the windows and in the side of entry are wardrobes in which people put their beds in the daytime. (Figure 7)



Figure 7. Closet in the Traditional Turkish House.

There have been small cubbies (niches) in which candlesticks, pots and pans and water jugs were put, particularly in the two sides of ovens in addition to these great closets (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Wardrobes in the Traditional Turkish House.

### 2.2.3 Ovens

Ovens positioned as only element which are overhung of the room at the side of wall usually are used for the purpose of giving a service such as heating and if necessary cooking in the traditional Turk House. Above the oven, there is a cone called as extractor fan which is settled in order to draw smoke. "At the head rooms, oven takes on an esthetic task besides its functionality. The wall is given both esthetic and functional task by making lazy holes, cubby-holes, niches and wardrobes into the wall in which oven existed" [13]. Oven which was usually positioned by the side of wall has been begun to place as mobile elements at other rooms of house as well (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Oven in the traditional Turkish House.

It is possible to say that each detail is arranged by taking into consideration human measurements in the traditional Turkish House. It is seen that the top limit of wardrobes are made up in accordance with the height that can reach by human hand. One wooden shelf called as shopwindow which was surrounded the room in order to specify this top limit has been used. "Shopwindow which was specified the top limit of doors, windows and wardrobes has been constituted the top limit of useful environment. This shelf is on the height of 2.20 m uttermost from the floor. This limit has been emerged with the basic principle of not go out of human dimension of usage areas. If wardrobes don't end up at this level, it continues either open racks or a serial of cubbies covered with cap, and this line is reserved for very rare objects. Human measurement has been prioritized at designing of Turkish House place, as you understand from this" [12].

When you look at the furniture in the traditional Turkish House, it is possible to see the reflections of Turkish culture which was shaped by Islam faith as well. These reflections are commented in the form of arrange bathing cubicle in closet at the rooms by the result of clearance understanding in Islam faith; make an arrangement for preserving the privacy as far as both interior place construct and sitting orders; create clean places by building current furniture with elements such as niches, cubbies by the result of simplicity understanding in the culture.

### 2.3 Culture and Life Style in Traditional Japan House

Japan, one of the most crowded countries of the world, is a Far East country which is located in Far Asia, managed by monarchy. The effect of other Far East Cultures, in particular China, play rather important role at shaping Japan culture. According to Güvenc, everything which can be human-formed and learned by human is culture for Japans. It is possible to count as primary elements, such as traditions, philosophy, and faith system, which constitute the culture according to this definition. Particularly, religious and philosophy are so important elements which affect the life style in Japan culture. The most significant and effective ones of the religious in Japan are Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Whereas Shintoism is local, Japan-oriented religious, Buddhism and Confucianism are transferred from China. Shintoism is the most widespread of them.

The concepts such as attention to nature, simplicity, plainness, settled for, spiritual rest have been brought light for shaping Japan world-view and life style. According to Japan culture, "The human must adapt to the nature instead of change and harmonise to himself" [14].

Geographical conditions of Japan, having small survey and faith and culture of Japan community, traditional properties had influenced Japan world view and life style and it was very effective that Japans took over minimal life style. Besides, Japans had the ability to express their selves with the least of everything because of these reasons like that.

It is seen the most explicit affects that Japan has been taking over minimal life style as the result of cultural values they had. When looked at the traditional Japan houses, it is seen that the planning is consisting of three parts about external environment, entrance and indoor (Figure 10).

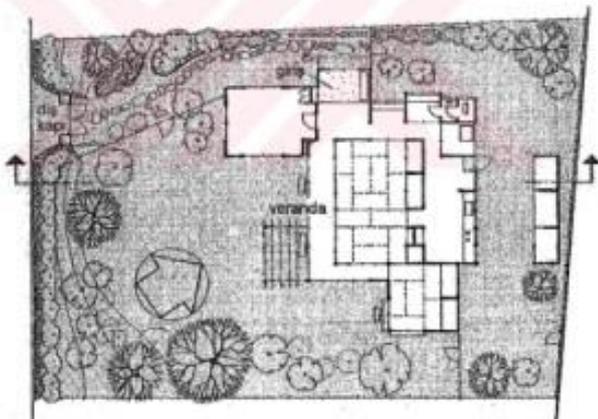


Figure 10. Traditional Japanese House Plan.

The entrance hall has assumed buffer zone along with protection and security function between indoor and external environment when it was symbolized with the garden. In a sense, it was separated the clean environment indoor and the dirty environment outdoor from each other. The shoes are put

into the cupboard by taking off in entrance hall. The floor of it is below one step according to the other parts. "This step is sometimes used for sitting while taking on-off shoes as it is symbolized the distinction of internal and external world" [9] (Figure11).

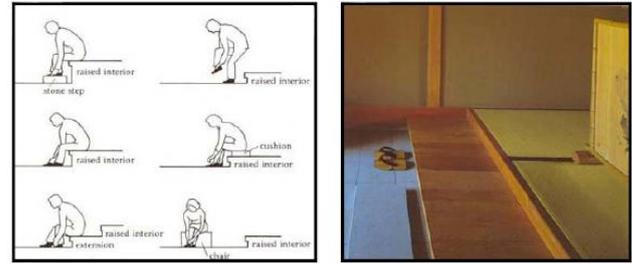


Figure 11. Entrance Hall Step.

In indoor it has been seen that dimensions of room are specified by mat covering called as tatami (Figure 12). Tatami straw over which walked slept and sat "is the floor item to be woven with natural materials such as fibers and stems with thickness of 5-6 cm, and dimensions of 90x180 cm, and to be covered upper survey with thin mat, to be pressed on the sides with fabric rims" [15]. The basis of this sizing system is based on "ken" which was traditional measurement unit of Japans actually. At first, Ken was used to specify the intervals between the columns; afterwards it was standardized for using house architecture in a short time, and became a definite measurement [16].

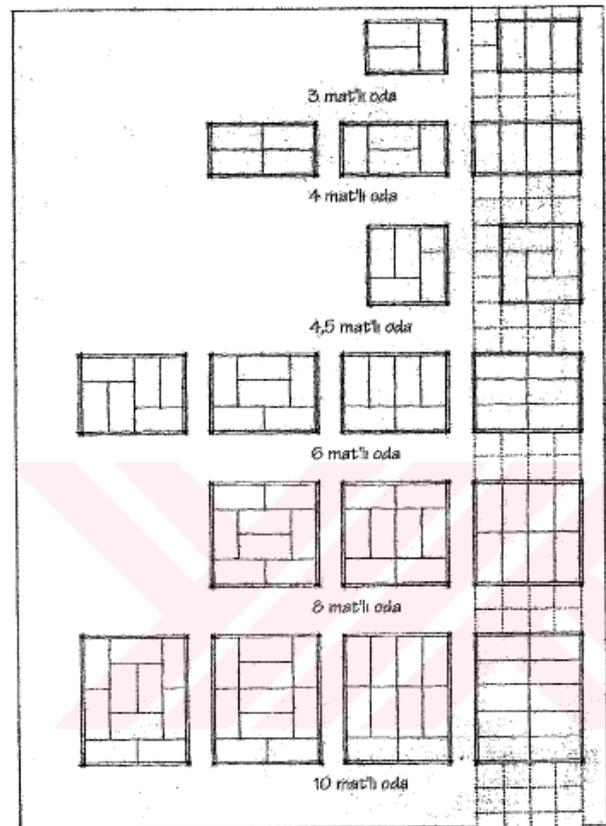


Figure 12. House orders to be specified with the measurement of Tatami mat.

Japans have been doing many activities at the floor such as sitting, eating, studying, and sleeping in daily life. For this reason, Tatami floor used in houses has great importance. Tatami mat which has different usage styles brings aesthetic

and comfort, and multi-purpose usage to the Japan place (Figure 13).

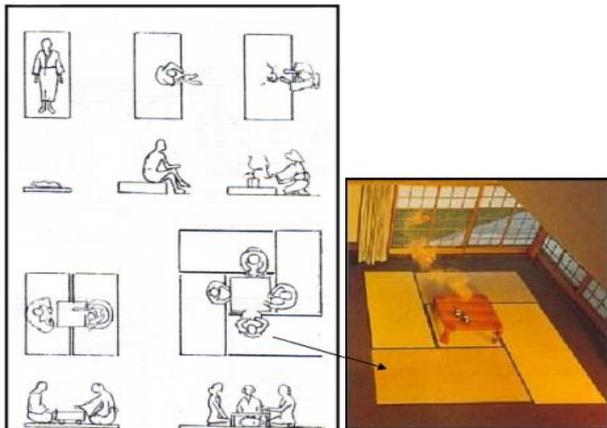


Figure 13 Different usage of Tatami.

The other significant element of Japan interior is sliding divider walls. They ensure to meet different usage needs of places, at the same time they preserve the sustainability of indoor-outdoor by providing that humans remain to be in relationship with the nature.

Dividers used in the traditional Japan house are two types:  
-Semi-translucent sliding dividers (shoji) (Figure 14)  
-Opaque sliding dividers (fusuma) (Figure 15)



Figure 14. Semi-translucent sliding dividers.



Figure 15. Opaque sliding dividers.

Shoji is generally used in external walls of inner court, veranda and places for not breaking off the relationship with the nature. Fusuma is used as indoor dividers of house in terms of providing security if necessary. These elements which bring flexibility to Japan space are used as elements that symbolize the nature at the same time due to the used materials, or nature patterns made over them [9].

There has been a seat of art and honor called as “tokonoma” in living room at traditional Japan houses. It has been seen that decorative items generally such as candle stick, vase, flower in front of it and various artworks were hung on the wall in this part which separated from the place by elevation difference (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Tokonoma place in the traditional Japanese house.

It can't be made a definite distinction between indoor and outdoor in Japan houses. The most significant element which provided the sustainability between indoor and outdoor is verandas. Verandas which make a balance the coldness in winter and hotness in summer in Japans who pay much more attention to the nature are indivisible part of traditional Japan houses (Figure 16).

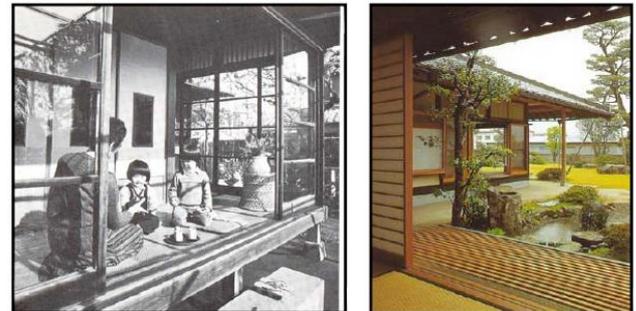


Figure 17. Veranda in traditional Japanese House.

#### 2.4 Furniture in Traditional Japan House

The factors such as thriftiness brought from faith systems, being temporary of everything in Japan houses, limited content because of small survey of country are required the multi-purpose usage of spaces. It has also been brought along solutions such as the usage of movable equipment instead of stable equipment while doing actions in the spaces and storage of these in the cupboards at each place, only picking out when they used. Because it is required to remain places empty generally in order to do actions.

Mainly sitting style and indoor transformation systems reflects to the used furniture in Japan traditions. Japans are taking off their shoes, and strolling with their socks over flat floor, and sitting on their feet and knees on special cushions at the floor. It is possible to say that the tradition of sitting at the floor instead of chair is closely related to the Japan's habitat of taking off their shoes while they are entering to the house. It is natural to rise this habitat for a geography where spends rainy in large part of year, because not taking off shoes carry dampness and wetness to the indoor. At the same time, sitting at the floor brings low outlook and different perspective view to the objects, nature and people according to Japan.

As it is also stated in previous part, Japans who get used to sit at the floor are doing many actions at the floor. It also specified the shape of almost all furniture used in the space. Besides, the existence reason of everything is functions in traditional Japan house in which simplicity comprehension dominates. For this reason, any useless items don't have a place in the space.

When you look at the furniture in traditional Japan house, it is seen that there are cupboards similar to closet as only stable equipment and all the rest furniture have the characteristic of mobile and easy portable as few as possible. Japan houses give a sense of simplicity and sometimes of space with the influence

of divider system which develops in Japan as well as limited furniture usage.

#### 2.4.1 Cupboards

Cupboards which have a place on the wall as stable equipment are not much distinct apparently because of covering with one kind of sliding door. Generally the width and length of it measure 0.5 ken. (91 cm, 1 mat) It is only measure the length because of the depth is stable while calculating the total area of cupboards. There are cupboards with the length of 20.5 ken (4.55m) averagely (Figure18). Their covers are always sliding, their inside are simple [17].

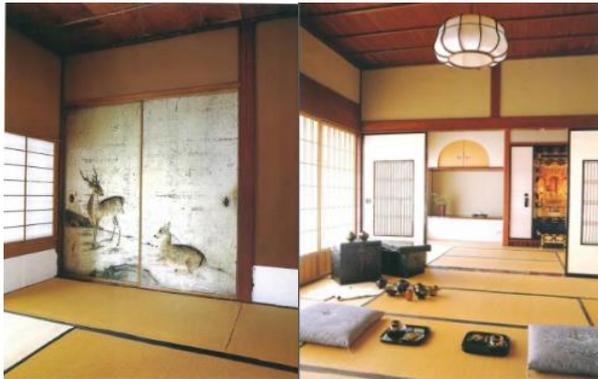


Figure 18. Cupboards with sliding doors in traditional Japanese house.

Limited number of stuffs surrounding are picked up in closet if necessary they are extracted from cupboards. For instance, beds, cushions and blankets are sprawled on the tatami floor at the end of day. When it comes morning they are picked up in closed again and room is ordered for family member usage (Figure 19). When it is suppertime, a low table and squabs are brought.

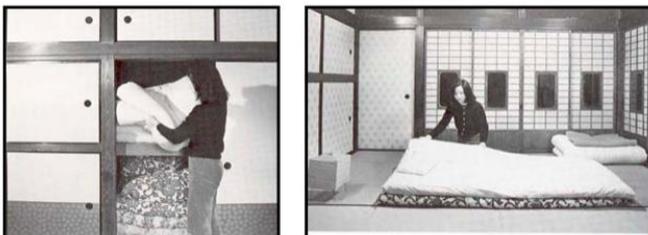


Figure 19 Storage in Cupboards.

#### 2.4.2 Low Coffee Tables

It is used low coffee tables which are carried easily for many actions such as eating, drinking tea, reading-writing, studying depending on sitting style on the floor (Figure 20).

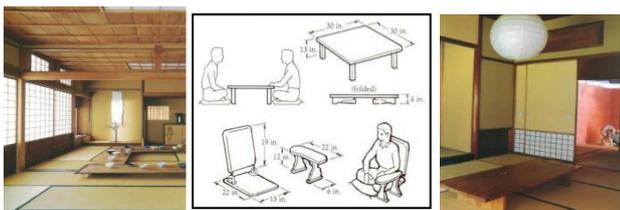


Figure 20. Low Coffee Tables Used in Traditional Japanese House.

#### 2.4.3 Heaters

Another important element used in traditional Japan houses is heaters. The heaters which are used in actions such as heating, eating, steeping tea are taken place in the middle side of rooms with different shapes according to sitting style (Figure 21).

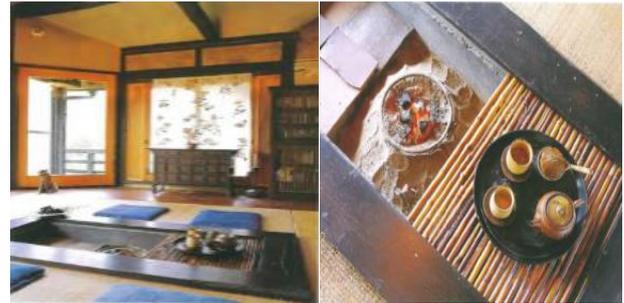
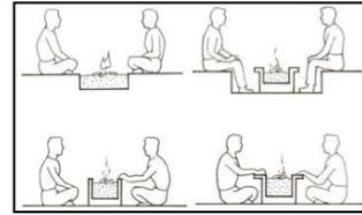


Figure 21. Heaters in Traditional Japanese House.

When it is looked at furniture in Traditional Japan House, it is seen explicitly the effect of culture which is developed subject to factors such as religious, faith system and physical environment. House phenomenon is temporary space for Japans because of not having an important place in their lives. Paying attention to material life as a part of culture is almost sin. For this reason, as far as simple numbers of furniture are used in houses in where simplicity and plainness, integration with nature dominate. The furniture used in flexible places and created with the characteristic of serving to many functions is also shaped such as to give a response to this flexibility by extension.

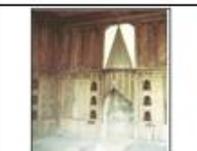
### 3 Conclusion

Culture concept which was tried to clarify with various descriptions by many specialist from past to present has been one of the most significant factors which shaped life styles over certain communities. Both living places and placing and using furniture in these places are the most concrete examples of this shaping. Information which are obtained by the result of analyzing of culture factor at forming of furniture discussed in this study in the cases of Traditional Turkish and Japanese House furniture also support this conclusion. When analyzing both cultures it is possible to say that culture factor has a determinant role at forming furniture.

It is seen that there are many similarities when both cultures which are different from each other in terms of many factors such as language, religious, race and geography are talked over generally in terms of cultural. Simplicity, plainness, respect to the nature have a quite large influence over shaping living spaces, so furniture. For this reason, when it is analyzed traditional Turkish houses types is concluded there are certain common shares both in Turkish and Japan houses. Actions which reflect this understanding in both cultures and do in only one room are shown in Table 1 with common and different properties. Apart from this, in reaction to the will of creating simple and clean places, while it is common point that hiding of storage places (closet, cupboard etc.) as built-in in the place, it

is differed from opening system of these cupboard covers. While covers are opening with hinged system in Turkish house, these covers are opening with sliding system in Japan house.

Table 1. Actions which are done in the same room in Traditional Turkish and Japanese house

Actions	Traditional Turkish House	Traditional Japanese House
Storage		
Eating		
Sleeping		
Heating/Cooking		
Bathing		In a separate section of the house

The thriftiness comprehension which is brought from Japan faith systems and factors such as volume constraint originating from small survey of country are required the multi-purpose usage of places. The reasons such as giving a one room to each nucleus families in the houses where crowd families lived had caused the necessity of performing many functions only in one place with the extension of nomad life styles in Turks.

The other common property that is seen in the houses is to situated heaters which are built with structure in either places, and generated the focal point for the place. The heater which is generally situated at the side of wall in head room as only element of room that stands out in traditional Turkish house, but it is placed in more central position in Japan house. However, it has been begun to place as more movable items in time at other rooms of Turkish house.

When looking over traditional house types of both cultures, it is drawn attention some different properties beside there are many common properties as this. Although both cultures have a habitat of sitting on the floor, it is seen to sit on couches which have a certain high and built with structure, except the actions such as eating, doing in traditional Turk houses. Japans have sitting order on the floor in all times. Besides sliding doors and partition of place which were seen in Japan houses has not been placed in traditional Turk house understanding. Apart from this, it can be interpreted as the reflections of differences between both cultures in the places that there is a seat of honor called as tokonoma over floor raised and set apart from other

places with elevation difference for faith in Japans and there are bathing cubicle which is hidden in closet as a result of cleanness understanding in Islam faith.

At the end of study, it is determined that common concepts such as portability, pliability, storability, flexibility, comfort understanding, simplicity, integration with the structure, practical performance direct at forming of furniture in either cultures.

#### 4 Acknowledgment

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