

# THE CRANE AS A SYMBOL OF FIDELITY IN TURKISH AND JAPANESE CULTURES

## Türk ve Japon Kültürlerinde Sadakat Sembolü Olarak Turna

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### ABSTRACT

The crane is the symbol of fidelity, sack, profusion, welfare, pureness, patience, honour, love and freedom in Turkish culture. On the other hand, it is the messenger of enthusiasm, sadness and well-being. Therefore, they take an intermediary role in telling one's feelings in folk songs. The cranes have an important role in Japanese culture. The crane is the symbol of fidelity, welfare, beauty, sake, profusion, longevity in Japanese culture. In this context, Turkish culture and Japanese culture have some parallel points.

Japanese believe that a patient will clear up by making one thousand cranes with the paper folding method. Sadako Sasaki who contracted leukaemia when the atom bomb dropped to Hiroshima tried it. According to a Japanese tale, a boy treats a wounded crane. Whereon, the crane turns into a young and beautiful woman. After that, they meet and marry. The woman is very skillful. She enriches her spouse by twilling. The man decides to gaup his wife secretly. Because he wonders how she woves fabric. He astonishes anything that he comes across. It seems that the woman who turns into the crane in the atelier is twilling with the feathers that she plucks one by one. However, when she realizes that her husband sees her as a crane, she flew away. According to a common belief, the cranes are monogamist.

### Key Words

Crane, fidelity, Japanese culture, symbol, Turkish culture.

### ÖZ

Türk kültüründe sadakat, uğur, bereket, refah, temizlik, dürüstlük, sabır, sevgi, onur ve özgürlük sembolü olan turnalar; aynı zamanda coşku, hüznün ve mutluluk habercisidir. Bu sebeple halk türkülerinde duyguların anlatımında aracı rolünü yüklenmişlerdir. Geniş bir coğrafyada ve farklı kültürlerde kendine önemli bir konum edinmiş olan turnanın Japon kültüründe de önemli bir yeri vardır. Japonlarda sadakat, mutluluk, güzellik, uzun ömür, şans ve bereket sembolü olan turnaların taşıdığı değerler; Türk kültüründekilerle benzerlik göstermektedir.

Japon kültüründe ayrıca hasta bir kimsenin kâğıt katlama yöntemiyle bin adet turna kuşu yaptığında sağlığına kavuşacağına inanılır. Hiroşima'ya atom bombası atılması sonucu lösemi hastası olan 12 yaşındaki Sadako Sasaki de bunu denemiştir. Yaygın bir Japon masalına göre bir genç, yaralı turnayı tedavi eder. Bu iyiliğini karşılıksız bırakmak istemeyen turna, bir müddet sonra genç ve güzel bir kadına döner. Daha sonra ikisi tanışıp evlenirler. Çok maharetli olan kadın, inanılmaz kumaşlar dokuyarak eşini zengin eder. Adam kapalı bir odada nasıl kumaş dokuduğunu bilmediği eşini gizlice seyretmeye karar verir. Gördükleri karşısında şaşırıp kalır. Meğerse atölyede turnaya çevrilen kadın, her gece tüylerini bir bir kopararak bunlarla kumaş dokuyormuş. Fakat kocasının kendisini gerçek hâliyle gördüğünü anlayınca, uçarak kaybolup gitmiş. Yaygın bir inanışa göre, çiftler halinde yaşayan turnalar; tek eşli bir hayat sürerler.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Turna, sadakat, Japon kültürü, sembol, Türk kültürü.

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Many researches have been done hitherto concerning cranes that have a significant place in Turkish culture. This elegant bird, on which people internalizing different cultures impute their emotions, bears an important particularity of symbol in also Japanese culture. However, we have witnessed the comparative studies dealing with the importance of cranes in Japanese and Turkish cultures are not at the required level yet.

Therefore we have given point to how crane, that is used as a common motif in Turkish and Japanese cultures, takes place in both cultures in the article we present. First, we searched the position of crane in both cultures within this context. We identified the common points and tried to put forward importance of the crane motif in Turkish and Japanese cultures by concretizing the cultural elements related to the subject with various examples.

The crane<sup>1</sup>, a bird of the family Gruidae, lives on all continents except Antarctica and South America. The cranes are long-necked, long-legged and long-winged birds with short tails. They also have crests on the back of their heads and they live in wetlands. Their crowns, wingtips and some part of the necks are black and they have beautiful blue, green and red wing feathers.

Cranes are migratory birds and their diet includes seeds, fruit and a variety of different small animals. They lay two bluish, freckled and motley eggs. The parents incubate the eggs by turns and attack any predatory animal that approaches to the

nest (Elçin 1997: 63-75). One of the most particular qualities of cranes is the resonance of their voices caused by the convolution of the trachea within the sternum. That screamy and trumpet-like call can be heard from several kilometres away.

During migration, cranes choose one of the flock as a leader to follow and fly in V-shape formation and when they touch down, they perform an elaborate dance with wings half-open. Immature cranes also dance as often and strongly as the adult ones do. (And 1958: 116-118).

Another characteristic that is peculiar to them is 'crane prayer'. They perform the prayer either individually or as a group. They turn around each other with wings half-open, sometimes leap up in order and throw the rubbish they picked up from the ground to the air and catch them again which reminds a band-leader's throwing his stick and catching it again (Karabolat 2003: 62).

## 2. The Crane in Turkish Culture

The crane is regarded as a remarkable pattern in Turkish culture. According to W. Eberhard, the crane is the symbol of the dominant spirit in Chons who are considered to belong to Proto-Turkish. (Eberhard 1947: 17, 33, 64). Volkov narrates that the crane pattern is used also in Orkhon inscriptions. (Volkov 1967, photo 29). The crane is stated to be one of the Gods apart from Sky God (Gök Tanrı) in Ibni Fadlan's *Seyahatname*, too (Sesen 1975: 43).

Cranes are seen to be used as a pattern also in artworks of Central

Asia and Anatolia. Crane patterned objects and tablets are met in Pazırık Kurgan, in the carpets that belong to Hiyongnus and on the tombstones in Akşehir, Sivas and Tokat (Ögel 1971: 34; Eyice 1966: 213; Karamağralı 1970: 81-82; Elçin 1997: 63-75).

As the crane is a symbol in Turkish culture and a pattern in Turkish art, it also has an important place in folk songs which are the significant elements of Turkish culture, in the narrations, legends, epics, shortly; in all folklore products. The crane is considered to be the messenger of enthusiasm, happiness and sometimes of sadness; therefore, used as a means of reflection of feelings. Thanks to their specific qualities and appealing attitudes, they have always been loved and protected by people.

Since the cranes always migrate between their homelands and foreign lands, they usually play the role of a messenger in many folk songs. Thanks to it, they take part in the expression of the feelings of those who long for their homes or lovers. They symbolize either the messenger or a shoulder to cry on.

It is possible to see crane pattern which can be come across nearly in all elements of Turkish culture, in any field of life such as clothes, carpets, rugs, embroidery, doorsills, baby's crib, ornaments and the walls of historical buildings.

The crane is regarded as a sacred being not only in Turkish culture but also in a wide geographical region from Central Asia to Japan. It also serves as an important symbol in Alawism and Bektashism. In Alewi-

Bektashi folklore, the crane symbolizes Ali, the fourth Caliphe. Bektashis regard cranes as the symbols of faithful people who live according to the doctrine of divine love and crane flock as the representative of "the ritual of Cem". Saints who take the affection from the nightingale, love from the rose and wisdom from the bee have attained that enthusiasm through the crane. (Elçin 1997: 63-75).

One of the kinds of whirling which are considered to be the significant elements of "cem" is the "crane sema" that reminds the flight of the crane. Spirits reach to Allah through whirling which has some figures that remind the actions of cranes in the sky and "crane sema" represents this reach. The cranes whose voices are believed to have been provided by Ali, carry with them the greetings of Anatolian people while migrating from the north to the south and also from the south to the north.

"Yemen ellerinden beri gelirken  
Turnalar Ali mi görmediniz mi?  
Havanın yüzünde semah dönerken  
Turnalar Ali mi görmediniz mi?"

(Pir Sultan Abdal)

(Hey Cranes! When you are coming back from Yemen, did not you see my Ali? When he is whirling on air, did not you see my Ali?)

"Turnaya vermiş sesini

İmamlar çeker yasını

Yine kendi devesini

Yeden Murtezâ Ali'dir."

(Hatâyî)

(He gave his voice to crane, the Imams sorrow for him. Still, Murtaza Ali pulls his own camel.)

In Erzurum, there are some folk

dances called 'sıra bar' and the name of the fourth of them is "crane bar". Cranes dance on water twice a day; at sunrise and sunset and the dance is the starting point of "sema" and "crane bar" in Mevlevi rituals. (Elcin 1997: 63-75). In Turna Bar, one actor and one actress represents the crane couple. During the play, the cooing and actions of the cranes are imitated, too.

In Turkish culture, the cranes are the symbols of fidelity, sack, profusion, welfare, pureness, honesty, patience, love, honour, and freedom, they also represent the enthusiasm, sadness and happiness. Therefore, they are seen to be used as a means of expressing feelings in folk songs.

### 3. The Crane in Japanese Culture

The crane is an important symbol not only in Turkish but also in Japanese culture. The crane family is called *turu* in Japanese. There are various species of cranes in Japan such as Japanese Crane (*Grus Japonensis*), Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*), white-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*). The homeland of Japanese cranes is Hokkaido. They migrate from Siberia, the breeding land, around November and fly back North in spring. "The crane dance" is seen in the folklore tradition of ethnic Ainu culture in the northern Japanese island, Hokkaido (Sashima 2003: 57-58).

Japanese began crane aviculture in the 11th century and since the crane is a tall bird, crane meat was also believed to have a life lengthening effect which kept it as the most preferred kind of meat for some period.

After 17th century, the crane was

used as a significant figure in Japanese sword ceremonies which were, therefore, called "turu-houtyou (crane-sword) ceremony". Then, it was offered to the emperor to help him live longer but after a while, it was given up (Sashima 2003: 58).

As they are the symbols of longevity and happiness in Japanese culture, they are also considered to be the symbols of profusion and luck. If cranes fly over rice fields, it means that there will be a profusion of rice that year. Cranes are believed to live for 1000 years by Japanese people.

In Japanese culture, it is also believed that one can recover from his illnesses if he folds 1000 origami<sup>2</sup> cranes. Sadako Sasaki, the twelve-year old girl who suffered from leukemia also tried that method. She began folding paper cranes to be able to recover but she died when she had made only 644. She couldn't reach her goal of 1000 cranes, but Sadako's friends completed and dedicated them to her at her funeral. The story inspired the Children's Peace Memorial and a statue of Sadako in Seattle. Each year, on Peace Day (August 6th), thousands of origami cranes folded by children all over the world are sent to Hiroshima (Tugrul-Kavici 2002: 4-5).

Crane, which has importance in Japanese culture in different aspects, has greatly been given place in Japanese literature. It is seen that crane is frequently used as a concept symbolizing poets in Classical Japanese Literature. Those lines of Shunzei (1114-1204), who is one of the famous poets of Classical Japanese Literature, are a good example for this.

“The crane which cries as it heads toward the reeds by Poetry Bay-why can it not return to that place beyond the clouds” (Huey 2002)

There are also other poems in Japanese literature in which cranes are given place. Like in those lines of famous Japanese poet Taeko Takeori:

“On the dawn-reddened sky they are spreading out, the singing cranes, a thousand of the cranes, and each voice a distinct voice.” (<http://fact-sanddetails.com/japan.php?itemid=885&catid=26&subcatid=164>)

#### **4. The Crane as a symbol of fidelity in Japanese and Turkish Cultures**

The cranes as the symbols of fidelity, happiness, beauty, longevity, luck and profusion in Japanese cultures represent similar values in Turkish culture, too. According to a common belief in Anatolia, cranes are regarded as the symbol of innocence, purity, honesty, fidelity, patience, love, honor and freedom as well as of fortune, profusion, happiness. Therefore, people neither break up their nest nor kill them. In Anatolia, cranes were believed to have curse on people that hunt them and the field which they settled will be benign.

Cranes are monogamist and they mate for life. Therefore, they are thought to be the symbols of fidelity in love and loyalty in friendship. Besides, according to another noteworthy information, cranes look after their parents and support them during their old age.

As we stated before, cranes symbolize similar things in both cultures. A Japanese fairy tale tells of a young man who treats an injured crane:

“The young man treats the crane. In return for his help, the crane turns into a young and beautiful woman and finds the man. Then, they meet and marry. Everyday, the skillful wife weaves various fabric and so by twilling, she enriches her husband.

The man is happy with the situation. However, he also wonders how she weaves all those fabric and decides to watch her secretly when she is weaving in the atelier. He is shocked to see that his wife is, in fact, a crane.

Every night, in the atelier, the woman turns into a crane again and weaves fabric with her own feathers. When the man moves, the woman realizes that her husband has seen her as a bird and disappears by flying away” (Kara 2000: 10-15).

As it is seen in the story, cranes are believed to be loyal in Japanese culture and in Turkish culture, they are the messengers that bear messages from one person to another. Since the cranes are known by people for their reliability and fidelity, they are preferred as the messengers and people living far from each other can communicate thanks to them.

In “Telli Turnam”, a Mut folk song which is compiled by Musa Eroglu, cranes are asked to send regards to the lover. It shows that cranes are regarded as the loyal messengers that enable communication between the lovers:

“Telli turnam selam götür  
Sevgilimin diyarına  
Üzülmesin ağlamasın,  
Belki gelirim yarına” (Aytaş 2003:

17)

(My demoiselle crane gives my lover’s land my best regards, he does

not worry and cry, perhaps, I will come tomorrow.)

In another Mardin anonymous folk song, the best regards are sent in the same way:

“Turnam gidersen Mardine

Turnam yare selâm söyle” (Aytaş 2003: 18)

(Oh my crane! If you go to Mardin, oh my crane! give my lover my best regards.)

In another compiled Yozgat folk song, the situation is the same again:

“Fazla gitmen bizim köye varınca

Selâm söylen eşe dostu sorunca

Sağ selâmet menziline varınca

Benden yare selâm edin turnalar”

(Aytaş 2003: 18)

(When you arrive in our village, you do not go more, when kith and kin ask, give them my best regards; when I arrive your distance safe and sound, give my lover my best regards.)

As the cranes convey news from the lover, the friend, the mother and the father, they are thought to be loyal friends. The lines by Pir Sultan Abdal below also stand as an example to show that the cranes are hoped to bring news.

“Yüce yüce dağlardan mı gelirsin

Hayır mı gök turnam yardan ne haber?”

(Do you come from high mountains? Oh my cerulean crane! Is it good? What about my lover?)

Cranes are also the confidant of the sufferers who live away from home and those who miss his lover and hometown. People pour out their feelings and grief to the cranes to feel better.

In an Adiyaman folk song, the

crane is asked to stay warning that it may get into trouble if it flies far away.

“Gitme turnam bizim elden

Dön gel Allah’ın seversen

Ayrılık ölümden beter

Dön gel Allah’ın seversen

Gitme turnam vuracaklar

Kanadını kıracaklar

Seni yarsız koyacaklar

İkrar verdim dönülür mü?

Kalbi hain görülür mü?

Yarsız devran sürülür mü?

Dön gel Allah’ın seversen” (Aytaş

2003: 25)

(Oh my crane! Do not go from our land, come back for God’s sake. Separation is worse than death, come back for God’s sake / Oh my crane! Do not go from here, they will prick you, break your wing; leave you alone. I gave offer, Has it turn back? / Has the person who has traitor heart appear, has the time last without a lover. Come back for God’s sake.)

As it is seen in these examples, the fidelity of the cranes reflects itself in folk songs which are the important elements of Turkish culture.

In Japanese culture, the crane is considered to be a loyal and magnificent kind of bird that never leave people alone. They don’t leave their mate alone, either. If a hunter kills one of the mates, the other one wants to die, too.

The cranes who mate for life are also known to be proud and have a simple life-style. In Japanese culture, they are seen in *Senbaorizuru Orikata* (1000 paper crane folding), the art of origami and in some other Japanese cultural products and in Turkish culture, they are seen as the symbols of

various concepts in carpets, rugs and clothes as well as being told in Turkish folk songs, tales, legends and epics.

Japanese people make 1000 origami cranes to show their respect for cranes. (*Senbaorizuru Orikata -1000 paper crane folding-*). They also use crane pattern as an ornament. In wedding ceremonies, you can see the red crane maquettes tied to the flowers with silver strings.

Moreover, the Japanese have frequently used crane motifs at the marks of kimonos, decorations, ornamentations, curtains, porcelains, bronze mirrors, and playing cards on account of affection and devotion they have for cranes.

### **Conclusion**

Devotion is a concept that keeps inside togetherness and fidelity of sad and happy days. There is a good deal of parallelism in patterns of the lives of who live in the fate of union. In this regard, it is quite natural that Turkish and Japanese societies that are both Altay people use crane as a common motif.

Cranes, which symbolize some other things besides devotion and friendship in both cultures, are significant beings for both Japanese and Turkish cultures as understood from the examples given so far. Therefore crane motifs have been used in various sections of Turkish and Japanese cultures since ancient times.

It is possible to see the crane as a common motif in Turkish and Japanese beliefs, cultures, arts, folk tales and legends, gravestones and epigraphs.

Crane, which comes out as deity

in K k Tengri belief, is seen as the symbol of abundance and auspiciousness in Japanese belief system. Crane, which takes place as a significant motif in works of art executed in Central Asia and Anatolia, has a position in various Japanese arts as a very important symbol.

Crane, which comes out in folk tales and legends that are among the important Turkish narrations, works of monument such as gravestones and epigraphs, is also seen in Japanese dancing, sword ceremonies and funerals besides Japanese folk tales and poems.

It is possible to attribute why cranes are seen so frequently in both cultures to a few reasons. That these birds have a particularity peculiar to themselves, they have been liked by people very much by their lovable manners and elegant frames and are protected can be admitted to be one of these reasons.

Furthermore, that cranes shuttle between home and abroad by migrating and they are believed to bring some news must be one of the important reasons, too.

That cranes dance in water twice, as one early in the mornings and the other in the evenings at sunset, must also be another reason why they have gained importance in both cultures. As a matter of fact, this dance of cranes has been effective in emerging of "semâ" and "crane bar" in Turkish culture, and "crane dance" and "turu-houtyou (crane-sword) ceremony" in Japanese culture.

In short, cranes come out as a symbol at almost every area of life

in both cultures. Cranes, which penetrate in life so excessively, have become a symbol of fidelity at love, pertinacity and devotion at friendship in both cultures.

#### NOTES

1 The word crane is seen in old Turkic dialects as of Old Turkic. The word appears as *turunya* in old Turkic, as *turna* in middle Turkic, Kıpçak Turkic and Ottoman Turkish. The word is seen in modern Turkish dialects, too: as *turna* in Turkey Turkish, Kyrgyz Turkish, Uighur Turkish; as *durna* in Azerbaijani Turkish and Turkmen Turkish; as *torna* in Bashkir Turkish and Tatar Turkish, as *turnä* in Uzbek Turkish; as *turna* in Kazakh Turkish; as *turuya* in Yakut Turkish. This word is quoted as *turuya* in Tungusic, *turumi* in Korean, *туру* in Japanese (Ercilasun vd. 1991: 902-903; Choi 2004: 86-87; Robbeets 2005: 340, 369, 410, 592, 659, 900, 965).

2 Origami (折り紙), from *ori* meaning "folding", and *kami* meaning "paper". *kami* changes to *gami* due to *rendaku* is the traditional Japanese art of paper folding, which started in the 17th century AD at the latest and was popularized in the mid-1900s. The first examples appeared in the period of Henian dynasty (M.S. 794-1185). During this period, the art of paper folding are performed in festivals and ceremonies frequently. The white paper is used in order to keep the secret and sacred items and continuing to use in some temples. It is thought that the tradition of *one thousand paper cranes* which calls as "Senbaorizuru" in Japan probably began in the period of Henian dynasty (Tuğrul-Kavici 2002: 3)

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