

# Classification of Iranian Contemporary Architecture, Based on Trends and Challenges

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**ABSTRACT:** The use of demands such as "Iranian-Islamic architecture" or "preservation of Iranian-Islamic identities" appeared in different dimensions and have gradually caused the shape of contemporary Iranian architecture. Many criticisms have been made from various perspectives on the architectural conditions, despite, all of them are worthy of attention, it seems that a required issue has been neglected in all these studies, which is having a proper classification in a morphological and meaningful format. In this article, an attempt has been made to introduce in a suitable classification in the form of the Iranian architectural process and its challenges and sub-branches of each of the researchers' views. In this regard, we have used a research method based on critical discourse in a library and field method, which has been saturated with information by examining the maximum number of available samples, and finally, we have analyzed it. Then, all the studies were evaluated, both in terms of time and in terms of checking the buildings in tables and graphs. The results of this article include a historical proposed course with a morphological and semantic classification in contemporary Iranian architecture and finally, among them, the style according to the current situation is more logical and more Iranian was introduced that can provide the prelude to artistic stylistics for contemporary Iranian architecture.

**Keywords:** *Contemporary Iranian architecture, Islamic Revolution, Architecture time Course, Stylistics.*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, Iranian civilization has undergone many evolutions, revolutions, wars, and other transformations that few areas in the world have had to tackle. It is inevitable that over the past centuries, the different facets of this civilization have also undergone numerous transformations, of which architecture is one of the most prominent. What seems most evident in the transformation of cultures, civilizations and their different manifestations is the progressive nature of these changes. Since culture is not formed suddenly, it cannot change suddenly either. Contemporary architecture is also born out of gradual and historical changes, which have their roots in the past. It should, therefore, be the same for Iran's contemporary architecture, in that it should also be born out of its history, or at least, it should have signs and clues from its past. Even though the formation of new architectural forms and philosophical ideas often occurs faster than the evaluation and criticism that is directed at them. Nevertheless, a quarter of a century

after the Islamic Revolution of Iran and its subsequent cultural transformations, there is still too little serious effort put into investigating the evolution of the architectural language that has appeared during this period in Iranian cultural history. Apart from a few journalistic texts about certain periods or moments in the history of Iranian contemporary architecture, which only reveal the personal tastes and opinions of their authors about particular aspects of architecture. There is still no written history, based on established methods of historiography, which would be able to serve as a reference for a better understanding of Iranian contemporary architecture and the identification of different styles and theories related to it.

With these issues in mind, this paper proposes that the main trends and trials of Iranian contemporary architecture can be studied from the following three perspectives:

- Trends and trials of Iranian contemporary architecture at the level of design and construction.
- Trends and trials of Iranian contemporary architecture at the

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level of theory, criticism, and their publication and distribution.  
- Trends and trials of Iranian contemporary architecture at the level of architectural pedagogy (Figure 1).

At the first level (Fig.1), which can be examined morphologically, the science of construction and the appearance of buildings, and their design features are considered, which are discussed in this research. In the second level, in terms of orientation, the production of architectural theory in contemporary Iranian architecture has been published in a study, and it has been explained that it has passed during several years after the Islamic Revolution and since the beginning of production of writings in the field of architecture (such as articles and books) what have been translated the most so far and what have their orientations been more towards (Western and Iranian architecture). What is the meaning of the third level of post-revolutionary styles and schools and educational approaches and what are the different methods and approaches that have been addressed in practice and what are their strengths and weaknesses and what are the strategies to improve them, can be provided.

This study seeks to answer these questions: what changes have taken place in Iranian contemporary architecture after the Islamic Revolution took place? What events influenced Iranian contemporary architecture? Can we find sparks of ancient Iranian architectural patterns in some of the buildings built during the mentioned period? How has the process of Western architecture influenced the trends of Iranian architecture?

Basis of this research hypothesis is due to various socio-political-economic events, Iranian contemporary architecture has lost some of its Iranian identity (except in some cases).

The problems created by the eight years of the imposed war have caused a lot of damage to various aspects of Iranian contemporary architecture.

The tendencies of Iranian contemporary architecture in the last three decades have taken on the color and smell of modernism.

### Theoretical Foundations

#### Cultural and Historical Classification of Iranian contemporary architecture

There is still no consensus amongst experts about the date that would mark the beginning of Iranian contemporary

architecture. For some, the beginning of Pahlavi I dynasty<sup>1</sup> marks this date, that is to say around 1925, which coincides with the modernist reforms of Reza Shah<sup>2</sup>. However, others believe that Iranian contemporary architecture began as early as the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, which instigated many social and political transformations in Iran. Nevertheless, all these different opinions agree on one point, namely that the beginning of Iranian contemporary architecture was accompanied by extensive and widespread variations, which continue until the present day. These transformations seem to have occurred in the middle of the Qajar era when in 1867s Naser al-Din Shah<sup>3</sup> decided to develop and expand Tehran. The major transformations that occurred in Iranian architecture can be categorized into four different phases. The first phase begins in 1867 when Naser al-Din Shah began to expand Tehran. This phase continues until 1934, i.e. the beginning of the reign of Pahlavi I. This phase is characterized by fundamental changes in the urban and architectural structure of Tehran instigated by Naser al-Din Shah, and it is for this reason that we shall call this phase, the Naseri Era. The second phase begins in 1935 and continues until 1953, in other words, from the beginning of the reign of Pahlavi I until the twelfth year of the reign of Pahlavi II. This phase coincides with the peak of modern architecture and International Modernism in the West. We shall call this period in the history of Iranian contemporary architecture, the Pahlavi I Era, even though a part of this period is not politically related to its name. As we shall discuss later, architecture did not change immediately after the change of reign.

The third phase begins around 1954 and continues until 1970. This period coincides in the West with the ideas of Louis I. Kahn and ends with the theories of Robert Venturi and Team X's denunciation of International Modernism. In Iran, this period is associated with a special architectural phase, which we can call the Pahlavi II Era, even though politically, it only covers a part of the Pahlavi II reign. The fourth phase, to which most of this paper is dedicated, begins around 1971 (eight years before the Islamic Revolution) and continues until the present day. We shall call this phase the Era of Iranian contemporary architecture (Table 1).

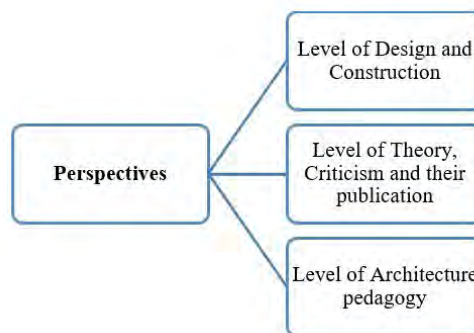


Fig.1: the main proposed perspectives of trends and trials of Iranian contemporary architecture

Table 1: Cultural and historical classification

Date	1867-1934	1935-1953	1954-1970	1970-Present day
Evident	Naser-din-Shah expanding Tehran, Fundamental changes in urban and architectural changes of Tehran.	Coincides with the peak of Modern Architecture & International Modernism in the West.	Coincides in the West with the ideas of Louis I. Kahn and ends with the theories of Robert Venturi and Team X's denunciation of International Modernism. In Iran, this period is associated with a special architectural phase, which we can call the Pahlavi II Era.	Eight years before the Islamic Revolution, the Era of Iranian contemporary architecture.

### Trends and Trials of Iranian contemporary architecture at the Level of Design and Construction

Since 1971, Iranian culture and architecture have withstood a series of complex and challenging events. In the first decade of the 70s, the rise of oil prices made Iran one of the largest oil-producing countries and with unprecedented economic growth. In this decade and for the first time in Iran, long-term economic development plans were put together, and a large portion of the budget was devoted to the construction industry. Inevitably, architecture experienced a boom in the public sector and the government. For Iranian architects, the 70s began with a renewed energy in developing the debates and activities that had begun during the previous decade. In September of 1971, the office of Empress Farah Pahlavi invited the most famous Iranian architects of the time to organize the "First Isfahan International Congress of Architecture." Many renowned Iranian architects<sup>4</sup> attended this first congress to study "The Possibility of Linking Traditional Architecture with New Construction Techniques." (Qobadian, 2004), Also present in this congress were eighteen of the world's most renowned international architects including Louis I. Kahn, Paul Rodulf, and Richard Buckminster Fuller. Others like Mies Van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and Richard Neutra also accepted the invitation, but they passed away before they could participate, and the congress was carried out without them (Ministry of Development and Housing, 1970). Four years later, in 1974, the "Second International Congress of Architecture" in Shiraz saw the participation of architects like Hans Hollein, Kenzo Tange, and Moshe Safdi and in 1976 the "First International Congress of Women Architects" in Ramsar were amongst the most important events of the decade. (Tahai, 2004) The issue of architectural identity, especially in the Ramsar convention, which was entitled to the "Crisis of Identity in Architecture," was discussed with transparency and rigor. The topics that were dealt with in these events, i.e. tradition, technology, modernity, and identity, pointed towards the kind of issues that preoccupied the minds of the avant-garde Iranian architects of the late 1960s, and also went on to determine the framework of Iranian architecture in the 70s and the following decades. In 1979, the special circumstances caused by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, radically altered the values and goals prevalent in the country at the time. Indeed, the Islamic Revolution coincided

precisely with the time when many projects aimed at national and cultural development and supported by higher oil prices were about to bear fruit. At the start of the revolution, most of the major architects of the time left Iran permanently, either because of their connection to the office of Empress Farah Pahlavi or because of their political and religious views, which differed from the prevalent mood of the time (Zibakalam, 1998, 102). During this period, the intellectual, cultural and sometimes physical cleansing process aimed at the signs and symbols of the previous monarchical regimes, and their substitution with the themes of the revolution, became the most important goal of the new government (Zibakalam, 1998, 95-98). Thus, at the beginning of 1980, universities across the country were closed for three years under the title of "Cultural Revolution". During this period, the "Central Committee of the Cultural Revolution" fired many existing university professors and began reviewing all academic subjects in all disciplines. In this review, the observance of Islamic codes and the introduction of Islamic values in university courses were considered an important necessity. At the same time, while the country was in its initial stages of experiencing a new political, social, and economic condition after the revolution, it was invaded by Iraq (in September 1980), forcing the country into an imposed war that lasted eight years. This had a considerable effect on most Iranian projects and activities, both inside and outside the country. Keeping in mind the circumstances caused by the imposed war, one could not expect significant events in the development of Iranian architecture and urbanism. Consequently, not only there were no buildings of high artistic value constructed during this period, but also a large number of valuable buildings, both historical and modern, were heavily damaged or destroyed completely, especially in the war-stricken areas. Thus, the contents of two international conferences on the reconstruction of areas devastated by war were particularly representative of the mood of that era (Ayatollahzade Shirazi, 1996). From an architectural point of view, reconstruction in time pressures and economic difficulties produces an inevitably predictable strategy: building faster, cheaper, and more. But this cannot be regarded in itself as negative if next to it, there is a real desire for research in developing theories and practices that help find new ways to get out of such an architectural plight. However, following the reconstruction

necessitated by the damages of war, a profit-seeking trend grew with considerable speed, which exploited the circumstances by constructing low-quality buildings for the private sector. This trend constitutes the majority of constructions in the country in the past two decades and is responsible for the urban look of major Iranian cities. For example, in the capital city of Tehran, this trend resulted in the construction of many tall residential buildings and high-rises in the northern districts of the city.

Despite these exploitations, one can observe a dynamism in the theory and praxis of architecture since the mid-1990s, which has manifested itself in different ways. The first and the second conferences on the history of Iranian architecture and urbanism, held in the citadel of Bam (Arg-e Bam) and the publication of their proceedings, (Cultural Heritage Organization, 1996) and the considerable wave of books written and translated in the field of architecture and urban planning, as well as the increasing number of specialized periodicals, have all shown the enthusiasm and passion of architects and other experts of the discipline in documenting their experiences, research and studies, while also highlighting the theoretical movement which is determined to expel the mayhem of the past fifteen years.

During this period, a new generation of architects has arisen, mainly composed of the students of the great architects of the 70s<sup>5</sup> and others belonging to a group of architects trained outside of Iran who was now returning home<sup>6</sup>. This new generation has tried to implement new architectural styles developed in the West by focusing on their inherent philosophical concepts. In this process, they often make vague, inconspicuous, and diluted references to Iranian architecture, either because of stylistic considerations or in order to satisfy the client's tastes, especially in the government or the public sector. These references are sometimes so abstract that if the architect does not elaborate on them, they would not be easily recognizable, even by a professional architectural critic (Table 2).

Throughout this fourth phase of architectural evolution (i.e. before and after the revolution), one can recognize two categories of Iranian architects. The first category is composed of architects who can be considered faithful to, and dependent

on the indigenous culture of Iran. The second category is those architects who do not see a need for such a relationship with Iranian culture.

The first category of architects can itself be divided into two groups:

- Those architects who use architectural elements or decorative features belonging to traditional and historic Iranian architecture, attempting to evoke a nostalgic feeling for the past. Their work produces a kind of architecture, which can be called Nostalgic Iranian Architecture.

- Those architects who use the principles of modern creativity together with modern rationality in order to make abstract and allegorical interpretations of traditional and historical symbols present in the traditional and historical architecture of Iran to create a new modern architecture. Their work results in what can be called Rationalist Iranian Architecture.

The second category of architects who are not bound by Iranian tradition can also be divided into two groups:

- Those architects who adopt a strategy, which is still faithful to the principles of modernist architecture and the International Style, in which answering Man's primary needs in a modernist manner is still more important than any other secondary needs (such as cultural, contextual, historical, traditional needs, and so on). This leads to an architecture, which can be called Modernist Iranian Architecture.

- Those architects who seek to echo and reiterate the latest trends in Western contemporary architecture.

In this group, i.e. architects who echo Western Architecture, one can see two different approaches, which though they share the same source of inspiration, are nonetheless different in their strategy: 1). The first group of architects who merely copy Western architecture regardless of the theory, philosophy and/or requirements that have led to such architecture in the first place. These architects often imitate only by looking at the images of buildings (often not even by visiting the actual architecture in situ). 2) The second group who pays attention to the theoretical, philosophical, or even historical roots of the architectural styles and examples found in the West. These architects produce works that are closer to the structural

Table 2: Analysis of events in the time before and after the Islamic Revolution of Iran

Date	Event
1971	The rise of oil prices, Economic growth, Construction industry, National congress of architecture
1974	The second international congress of architecture in Shiraz
1976	First international congress of Women architects in Ramsar, Crisis of Identity in architecture
1979	The most of major architects left Iran, Culture Revolution, Introducing Islamic codes and Values
1980	Iran was invaded by Iraq for 8 years, Construction stopped, Valuable buildings (both historical & modern) were heavily damaged
1989	Building faster, cheaper and more, Profit-seeking trend grows for 2 decades, Tall residential buildings and high-rises
1990	Citadel of Bam, Documenting experiences, researches, and studies, growing a new generation of architects .making vague references because of stylistic considerations in order to satisfy the clients' tastes

principles of their chosen style and can, therefore, produce more successful architectural projects. Amongst such architects who are not bound by Iranian tradition and take inspiration from the architecture of the West, post-modernist architecture, in its stylistic definition, has achieved much popularity in both private and public architectural projects. It can even be argued that this trend has become dominant and common during the past few years. Since post-modernist thought, with its sources in the West, often results in architecture that is different from those produced in Iran and by the hands of Iranian architectural thought, one could argue that some of the works produced by Iranian architects have achieved what can be called an Iranian Post-Modernist Architecture.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method, in this research, is a critical discourse analysis, which we have used descriptively-analytically. The tools for this are library and field studies, which are available in libraries and published or interviewed material. In this way, by examining the maximum number of examples and available resources, it has saturated the information, then finally, this content has been summarized and analyzed in the form of critical discourse analysis in the form of different classifications. Case studies have been selected from a series of studies conducted by the Ministry of Housing, based on each of the above trends, and have tried to be the most effective and also the most exaggerated example for the audience to accurately understand the trend. In this way, other samples can be identified based on these effective and exaggerated samples, each of which has a percentage of the characteristics of the designed samples. To assess the onset of the effects of historical, economic, and social events on contemporary architecture, the period from 1971 to the present has been studied (Table 2) and then their time overlap with Western architecture has been mentioned in the same period (Table 1). Finally, a case study was introduced for 5 styles. Thus, for the first style, two samples were introduced due to the two subsets hidden in them, and for each of the other styles, one sample was mentioned.



Fig. 2: Shahyad, (Azadi), East Facade, Hossein Amanat , 1967-1972

### Case Studies

The study of examples belonging to these architectural trends could lead to a deeper understanding of their characteristics at the time of their conception. Among the most prominent examples of the first trend, i.e. the one dependent on Iranian culture, or Nostalgic Iranian Architecture, one can mention the monument of Azadi Square by Hossein Amanat. This monument was built in the early 1970s and at the time was called Shahyad (Figures 2 and 3). In 1967, the design of the monument was put up for a competition, among Iranian architects and in 1972 the completion of the winning design was celebrated in a special ceremony on site.

According to Pirnia, in the geometry of ancient Iranian architecture, the deviation of straight lines, their transformation into angled surfaces, and the inclination of curves occurring at heights are always such that they allow for Iranian domes and arches to be constructed upon them (Pirnia, 1990, 53). An important design characteristic of the Azadi monument is that this technique is utilized here too, where diagonal wings rising from the ground, pass through gentle twists and gradual deflections to form an Ivan-like arch. In the upper part, this Ivan-arch is transformed into a Pointed Arch, becoming more formal and reminiscent of traditional Iranian pointed arches, thus evoking a nostalgic reverence for the past and the creation of a traditional Iranian space (Figure 4).

Considering the historical presence of geometric order in Iranian architecture and its dominance over the appearance of buildings, (Pirnia, 1990, 202). The main facade of the Azadi monument is derived from modules obtained from four 21m squares, in such a way that the main arch fits in the central square, and the four columns follow the diagonals of the two side squares. The highest point of the central pointed arch lands at the centre of the fourth square (Figure 5).

The principle Ivan-like arch is inspired by Ivan-e-Khosro, also known as the Taq-e-Kasra (Figure 6), the imperial residence of Sassanid kings. The construction of this arch, together with the intersection of its four diagonal columns, the pointed arches, Iranian style arch bracings (Karbandi), and the pointed arch over the Sassanid arch (Figure 5), all point towards the



Fig. 3: Shahyad, (Azadi), West Facade, 1967-1972



Fig. 4: Iranian Ivan

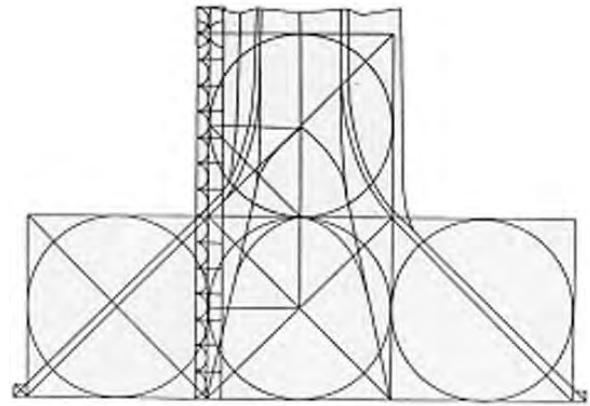


Fig. 5: The modular system of the design

nostalgic approach in Iranian contemporary architecture. In the late 1980s and after the war, economic pressures and shortages of time for reconstruction were becoming dominant factors in architectural projects. During this time, the government's desire for the "Islamisation of post-revolutionary Iranian architecture" highlighted the absence of the architects and theorists of the previous generation, who had acquired valuable experience about architectural methodologies rooted in the Iranian cultural tradition. Therefore, before the advantages and disadvantages of the government's intentions had been tested in the theoretical realm, the theory was put into practice by both public and governmental institutions throughout Iran. Meanwhile, a large number of aggressive and questionable interpretations of Islamic architecture developed at an extraordinary rate. Every architect found the definition of

Islamic architecture in a different thing: from the apparent application of brick and tile-work (once used in mosques) to any building type with any plan and form, to the use of Iranian geometry in the name of Islamic architecture, and even the direct imitation of particular buildings belonging to post-Islamic Iran for modern applications. These attempts were simultaneous to the declining quality of construction due to the acceleration of reconstruction after the war, thus summing up the architectural efforts that occurred during the first few years after the war, and especially in the war-stricken areas of Iran. Since these attempts were generally devoid of solid scientific, theoretical, or philosophical foundations, they remained as one or two isolated events. Some architectural projects in the administrative and public sectors in Tehran show a continuation of this Nostalgic Iranian Architecture of the 1970s - see The Palace of Organization Pilgrimages (Figures 7 & 8)<sup>7</sup>. However,



Fig. 6: Ivan-e Khosro (Taq-e Kasra or Ivan Madyn)



Fig. 7: The Pilgrimage Organization Building, Tehran, 1980 – 1987



Fig.8: The Pilgrimage Organization Building , Tehran, 1980 – 1987

during this time, there was another group of architects that produced Rationalist Iranian Architecture, identified by the use of modern principles of design accompanied by implicit or more abstract use of ancient Iranian architectural forms and theories. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran is one of the symbolical buildings of this style, designed by Kamran Diba with consulting engineers D.A.Z. (Figures 9, 10 & 11)<sup>8</sup>.

This museum is one of the few buildings in Iran, designed for such a purpose. The appropriate use of materials and the appropriation of ancient Iranian architectural forms like the Badgir<sup>9</sup> to introduce daylight into the galleries of the museum have resulted in a design in which form and function seem complimentary of each other. This re-appropriation of the traditional Badgir is indicative of a creative, yet sensible and



Fig. 9: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Kamran Diba, 1977



Fig. 10: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, External forms of the Badgir



Fig. 11: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, External View

logical architectural approach, which unites form with function and strengthens the characteristics of the building by taking inspiration from traditional Iranian architecture (Figures 12 & 13).

The design of a central courtyard is also reminiscent of traditional Iranian courtyards, the only difference being that instead of disciplining the courtyard into precise geometrical proportions, the architects seem to be more interested in the quality of space. The organization of the interior space of the museum is made simple and practical (Figure 14 & 15) connecting, seven galleries, and leading the visitors through all intervals before returning them to their original point of departure. This inner journey is regulated with harmonious intervals of tranquil and dynamic spaces.

In the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran, the visitors are always affected by space, yet they are free to make their own decisions during the journey. The use of exposed concrete in the interior (bearing the marks of the wooden casting), the combination of concrete with glass in the restaurant, and the particular shape of the concrete columns in the main lobby, all express the modernity of the building on a smaller scale (Figure 16 & 17). However, the use of familiar traditional Iranian forms appropriated for a different use (Figure 18) and the traditional use of stone cladding in certain parts of the exterior (Figure 19) provides the visitor with a successful example of Iranian

Rationalist Architecture.

Thus, the MOCA project in Tehran is a good example of the trend that uses the principles of modern creativity together with modern rationality in order to make abstract and allegorical interpretations of traditional and historical symbols present in the traditional and historical architecture of Iran, in order to create a new modern architecture. However, among the architectural trends in Iran, there is another approach, which does not connect new architecture with traditional Iranian culture.

This architectural approach has been subdivided into two groups. In the first group, which remains faithful to the principles of international modernist architecture, (especially in the 1970s), we do not find many public or governmental buildings, except for a limited number of large residential complexes, such as Shahrake Ekbatan and Shahrak-e-Gharb, both in the West of Tehran (Figure 20 & 21).

Therefore, it is possible to argue that in the first decade of the fourth period of Iranian contemporary architecture, Modernist architecture and the International Style lost favor with Iranians and their government.

In the second group, which is more interested in utilizing the accomplishments of Western contemporary architecture, we find two different approaches. The first is an imitative and plagiaristic style, which is mostly found in the private sector

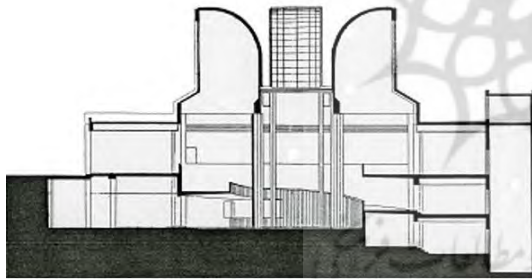


Fig. 12: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, A cross section showing the Badgir



Fig. 13: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, section showing the Badgir

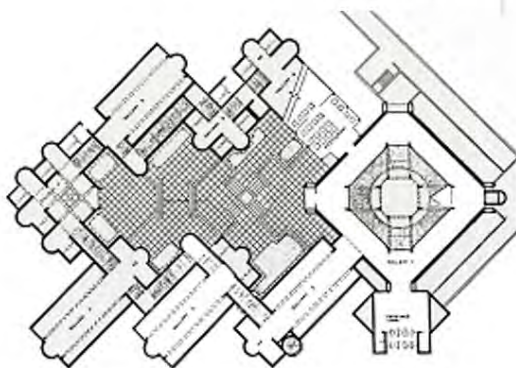


Fig. 14: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Plan

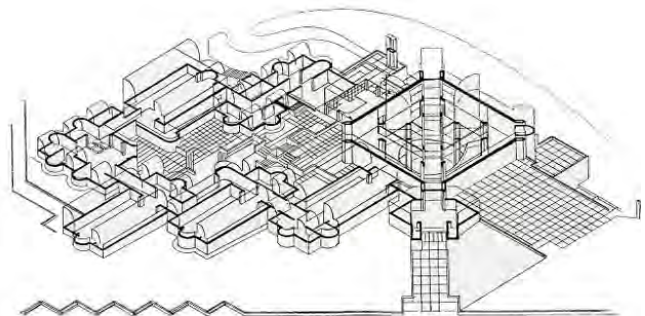


Fig. 15: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Isometric view of the interior





Fig. 16: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, The exposed concrete columns of the interior



Fig. 17: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, The exposed concrete walls of the galleries



Fig. 18: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, stone façade



Fig. 19: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, stone covered skylights.



Fig. 20: Ekbatan City, Tehran, 1971



Fig. 21: West City (Shahrak-e-Gharb), Tehran, 1972

and is more geared towards profit-making rather than the creation of good architecture<sup>10</sup>. The most notable examples of this approach can be found in the many residential high rises, office towers, or even in houses along the streets of Tehran. For example, Figures 22 and 23 show an office tower in Argentina Square in Tehran. This building, which is evidently an imitation of the famous "Chrysler Building" in New York, has until recently been known as the "Dar ol Koran"<sup>11</sup> and served as an official public space for Qur'anic studies and research. Later, however, it became the headquarters for a semi-private finance company. This flawed imitation of the "Chrysler Building," almost in one-fifth of the original scale, without taking into consideration the cultural context, spatial conditions, or the dimensions of the original building, make this project one of

the most amusing examples of the Imitative approach adopted in this period.

In such imitation of Western architectural styles, special attention has been given to Deconstruction and its related architectural strategies, which can not only be seen in the translation of articles and books on the subject, but also architectural projects in both the professional and academic circles. Although most of these projects have only been developed on paper, there are nevertheless some built examples in the private sector that have been mainly imitating Western models and therefore do not reveal a deep understanding of the subject matter (Figure 24, 25 & 26).

However, such interest in Western architectural knowledge has created a second approach belonging to those who use

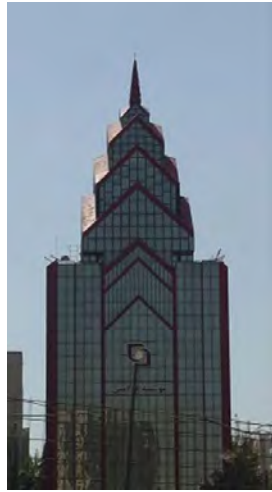


Fig. 22: Dar ol Qoran, Tehran, 1995



Fig. 23: Dar ol Qoran, Tehran, 1995



Fig. 24 : Example of Iranian Deconstruction, Bâtiment Privée, Mashad, 1995



Fig. 25: Example of Iranian Deconstruction, Private Building, Tehran, 2002



Fig. 26: Example of Iranian Deconstruction, Private Building, Tehran, 2002



Fig. 27: Iranian Embassy, Tokyo, Hossein Sheikh Zeyneddin, 2002-2004

contemporary architectural knowledge in a more informed manner. As an example, one can mention the new building of the Iranian Embassy in Tokyo (Figure 27) which was commissioned in September 2004 and designed by Hossein Sheikh Zeyneddin<sup>12</sup>. In addition to the physical and programmatic characteristics of such projects, the design

of embassies offers an opportunity for the expression and elucidation of customs, ideas and ideals of a particular country. This is especially important for a country like Iran with an ideological leadership, which has been searching for appropriate architectural representation for the past thirty years. Thus, this project seemed to offer a great opportunity for such an endeavour. However, in practice, we find a different

approach offered by the architect of the project:

"In the construction of a building such as an embassy, the important thing for me, and I think it is also important in politics, economy and culture, is the expression of the mutual characteristics and interests of both countries, concerning common conventions acceptable by human societies. It seems that in this day and age, most countries want to construct buildings and host exhibitions, not only to highlight their own specific characteristics, but also to inspire peaceful ideas, promote respect for others, and express the goals and dreams of their country for the prosperity and progress of humankind with scientific and cultural values - a bilateral relationship!" (Personal communication, 14 August, 2004).

Observing the history of diplomatic buildings, we notice that they often express the characteristics of the host country in a rather unilateral manner, seeing architecture as an opportunity for a prelude. This is particularly evident in ideological systems. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003) However, regarding this issue, Sheykh Zeyneddin Says:

"In principle, what is the definition of an ideological architecture? Has it had satisfactory results? We cannot expect governments to play the role of the architect. If they start to dictate the architecture, they will eventually destroy it. We have seen that they failed during this period [three decades]. At most, governments should provide the necessary space for architectural design. The government is not a specialist in architecture, it is the architect who cleverly listens to the government's requirements and walks on the tight rope." (Personal communication, 14 August 2004).

It seems that the opinions of this architect are more acceptable for a global political philosophy, one that promotes respect for other countries and utilises international symbols in order to participate in international and global decisions, so much so that:

"Instead of exhibiting their own architecture, some countries use the architectural elements of the host country for their diplomatic buildings." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003,

132) .It is important to note that in such buildings, the client requires at least fifty percent of the architecture to be devoted to expressing Islamic and or Iranian architecture. We note, however, that in this project the architect has a completely modern and different approach." The issue of Iranian identity has in one way or another attracted the attention of Iranians. When civilization and culture are at their peak, there are no worries about identity. However, during periods of stagnation or transition, these concerns become very serious and the characteristics of these periods lie in the lack of culturally significant products. It is inevitable that in such a situation, people quickly and easily find refuge in the past because they find nothing suitable for their mood or expectations. But, this deepens the problem and adds to the stagnation. We should not expect that repeating or imitating the past could turn stagnation into prosperity. Prosperity comes with the creation of new things. Though new works take inspiration from the past, they are not similar to the works done in the past. The future is a reinterpretation of relationships, functions, and aspirations that at first face objection from habits. But later, they will pave a new path for others who will be the creators of prosperity and development" (Personal communication, 14 August 2004).

Evidently, the architect of this project believes that the building is in total balance between Iranian characteristics and the context upon which it is built. Moreover, he declares that the encouragement of the visitor for exploring the character of Iranian culture has been an important goal of the design, which has been implemented in the final building (Memar, 2005, 30). There are some features of the building, like the courtyard, the Gowdal-Baghcheh<sup>13</sup> (Figure 28), or the wooden wall which mimics the colour of deserts in Iran - the "Iranian Wall" according to the architect (Figures 29 & 30) - which create a vague impression of traditional Iranian architecture. However, these impressions are so pale that if for example, the architect did not entitle the timber wall, the "Iranian Wall," the square patterns, the modern and intricate construction of the wall (which has nothing to do with the indigenous structures



Fig. 28: Iranian Embassy, Tokyo, Gowdal-Baghcheh



Fig. 29: Iranian Embassy, Tokyo, Interior Space, The Iranian Wall



Fig. 30: Iranian Embassy, Tokyo, Interior Space, The Iranian Wall

of the desert regions of Iran), would hardly be recognized as symbols of Iranian architecture, even by those who are experts in such matters.

Furthermore, in the outer part of the building, there is a curved form (Figure 31 & 32) which the architect refers to as an advanced form of the Taq.

"The signs of Iranian architecture on the inside of this building consist of a garden wall and two Iranian Walls on the north and south, as opposed to, the external sign is the presence of a large Taq, which represents the first nation who with the invention of the Taq, actually lay the foundations of architecture. The soft and slow movement of glass and stone in the north curve emphasizes the great curve" (Personal communication, 14 August 2004).

Firstly, the Taq was invented by Iranians to cover the roof and not the walls. Secondly, the use of this curved wall has more to do with achieving a better modernist composition in the plan and the form of the building rather than defining or representing the Iranian Taq (Figures 33 and 34). Yet, despite these contradictions, the architects continue to describe the work as the following:

"Yet, the outer forms of the building were not the only concern, but rather, we also tried to create spaces and geometries that are evocative of the interaction between two cultures" (Personal

communication, 14 August 2004).

This building is exemplary of many projects in Iran, where although contemporary architectural knowledge is used in a more informed manner, a brief investigation into the conceptual aspirations behind the design reveals many issues that remain unclear or difficult to clarify. Unfortunately, there are very few contemporary Iranian architectural projects that are based on modern theoretical concepts, and those that exist do not withstand careful scrutiny. Therefore, there seems to be an urgent need to develop a stronger relationship between theory and praxis in Iranian architecture, whether those devoted to traditional principles or those inspired by modern doctrines.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By studying the case samples and picking them up (Table 3), it is possible to argue that after examining the trend of changes in Iranian contemporary architecture after the Islamic Revolution and examining the case studies introduced in the styles introduced in this research, it can be concluded that; Styles such as international style and imitation style have not been very successful in practice or culturally welcomed. Of course, it is worth mentioning that this opinion has been expressed from an architectural point of view, and in practice, the residents of Tehran, regardless of this issue, have welcomed



Fig. 31: Iranian Embassy, Tokyo, The Arc Wall



Fig. 32: Iranian Embassy, Tokyo, The Arc Wall



Fig. 33: Iranian Embassy, Tokyo, The Arc Wall



Fig. 34: Iranian Embassy, The Arc Wall

Table 3: Analysis of case studies in style classification

Style	Building	Elements
Nostalgic Iranian Architecture	The monument of Azadi-Square	Iranian dome and arch, Bracings (Karbandi), Sassanid arch
	The Palace of Organization Pilgrimages	Brick and Tile work, Using Iranian geometry in the name of Islamic architecture
Rationalist Iranian Architecture	The Museum of contemporary Art, Tehran	Use of materials and the appropriation of ancient Iranian Architecture forms; Bad-Gir & Central courtyard, Geometrical proportions, Traditional use of stone cladding
International Modern Architecture	Shahrak-e-Ekbatan, Shahrak-e-Gharb & Large residential complexes	-
Imitative Architecture	Mostly found in private sector, Dar-ol-Qoran Building	No cultural context & spatial conditions or dimentions
Theoretical Western Architecture	The Iranian Embassy in Tokyo	The expressions of mutual characteristics, Cultural values, Ideological Architecture

them to meet the needs of housing and its economic benefits. But there is no denying the fact that these two styles are not rooted in the past, nor can a strong philosophy and theory can be found behind them. Finally, between the two nostalgic and modern theoretical styles, it is better to adopt a method that puts the elements of native Iranian architecture in a modern format and today's adaptation of technology and concerning today's Iranian culture and identity so that the original Iranian

architecture can be preserved and Modern facilities can also be used.

### CONCLUSION

It is quite clear that during the first decade of the modern period in Iran<sup>14</sup>. architectural events possessed a serious theoretical and practical will, which pointed towards architecture with Iranian identity. In this context, the prominent architects of

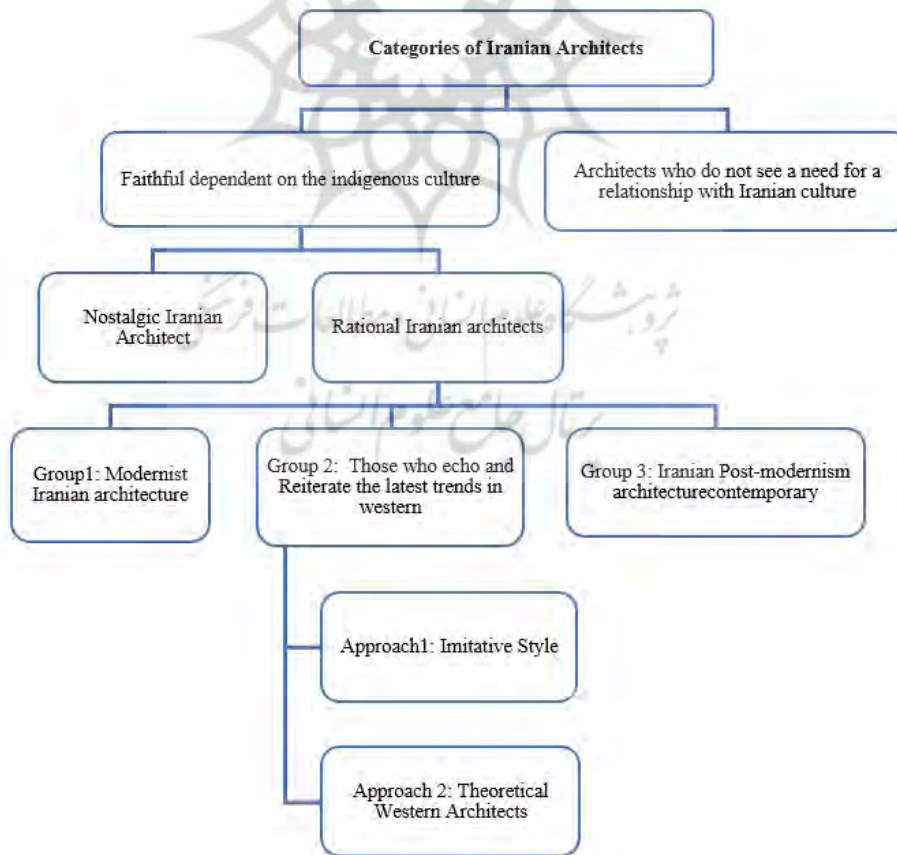


Fig. 35: Classification of architectural styles

this period, especially in the beginning of the first decade, devoted their time and effort to create an architectural space or an architectural theory that not only met the needs of modern man but also possessed a cultural soul and an indigenous and Iranian identity. This was to be an architecture made for the contemporary Iranian people. However, during the second and third decade of this period, and despite the will of the political establishment to make contemporary architecture Iranian and Islamic, the results are of a lower quality of construction, they are more superficial in their treatment of cultural and ideological issues, and therefore are less successful in comparison with the projects of the first decade, whether in theory or practice. Moreover, the last fifteen years of this period have been marked by the rapid development of imitative projects that merely copy Western architecture, with or without an appropriate understanding of its original cultural context. To please the political establishment, the architects of such works have attempted to include diluted signs and inconspicuous metaphors to show that their architecture has some roots in Iranian culture. However, a lot of these signs and metaphors are so vague that even experts have difficulty deciphering them (Figure 35).

## ENDNOTES

1. Pahlavi Dynasty ruled Persia from 1925 to 1979.
2. Reza Shah Pahlavi I, King of Iran from 1925 to 1941.
3. Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, King of Iran from 1848 to 1896.
4. Architects such as Houshang Seyhoun, Nader Ardalan, Mohsen Foroughi, Kamran Diba and Ali Sardar Afkhami.
5. In the past two decades these students did not find an active role in construction or were merely adding to their theoretical or practical experience.
6. Among the architects and theorists of this generation, one can mention Hossein Sheykh Zeyneddin, Djahanshah Pakzad, Ali Akbar Saremi, Behrouz Pakdaman, Darab Diba, Yousof Shariatzadeh, Seyyed Hadi Mirmiran, Behrouz Ahmadi, Seyyed Mohammad Reza Djowdat and Amir Mansouri.
7. These examples will be studied and analyzed in due course with other buildings on the same period, constructed from different methods.
8. The project was completed in 1977, but its design lasted more than ten years and its construction took more than four. See: Architectural Archives of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran.
9. Badgir (or wind catcher) is a traditional architectural device widely used in ancient architecture of the desert regions of Iran. It is used to create natural ventilation in buildings. The Badgir not only allows the breeze to enter the building, but it also can act as a heat chimney that extracts exhaust air. This is done through the Coanda Effect. The Badgir can also direct the hot breeze across a qanat (underground

waterways) thus cooling it before it enters interior spaces.

10. It must be noted that the administrative and public sectors have also used this approach.

11. Arabic word meaning "The City of the Koran."

12. Architect and Professor at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Science and Industry in Tehran. Also Chief Director of Bavand Consulting Engineers. The design of the building lasted 15 months (January 2002-April 2003) and it took 18 months to complete the construction (May 2003-September 2004). The consulting engineers were Bavand (in Tehran), in collaboration with consulting engineers Nihon Sekkei Japan. Presentation of the project, Memar, No. 32, 2005, p.27.

13. Traditional Iranian architectural device in which a sunken courtyard with vegetation provides shade and a cool place for gathering.

14. Earlier in this paper, we have defined the modern period to be from around 1971 (eight years before the Islamic Revolution) until the present day.

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This article is mostly critical. All photos, tables and interviews are done by the authors and most of the written content is the result of the authors' analysis. Therefore, the final sources of this research are not many.

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