

## The Impacts of Revivalist Trends on the Contemporary Architecture of Iran (1977-2011)

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**Abstract:** A new age in Iranian architecture began with the rise of the Islamic Revolution. The political and social events of 1979 created a rupture between architecture before and after the Revolution. The special and unique characteristics of the Islamic revolution of Iran and the historic background of this country culminated in the comprehensive tendency to the revival of Iranian and especially Islamic patterns at so many fields, particularly the art and architecture. So, the architects' efforts were concentrated on the formal and conceptual connections with the past. The comparison between the architects' theory and the practice or the architects' claims and the respondents' perceptions about the amount of fidelity to the traditional architecture in their works through drawing an analogy between the architects' and the respondents' comments by means of a "Correlation Test" is considered as the fundamental scope of this research. The results are based on twenty outstanding case-studies, focused in the specialized textbooks or journals, among from all contemporary Iranian architecture. The research theoretical framework is founded on the distinguished architects' viewpoints about the contemporary Iranian architecture. Relying upon it, the case-studies are analyzed from four aspects, ranging from: 1- concept or Idea, 2- form or shape, 3- material and 4- respect to context. Based on the accomplished studies, attempting to create the architecture with an Islamic-Iranian identity is perceivable in the architects' comments; but they have not been so much successful in connecting their theory to the practice from the respondents' points of view.

**Key words:** Contemporary Iranian architecture • Revivalist architecture • Traditional patterns • Islamic Revolution of Iran

### INTRODUCTION

According to Winston Churchill, we build our cities and our cities build us. This citation signifies that through studying the people's thoughts, we can anticipate the way they build their houses and on the contrary, through analyzing their architecture, we can perceive their thoughts. So, taking the contemporary Iranian architecture in to consideration is an opportunity to comprehend the various systems of thought and the cultural achievements of Iran after the Revolution.

The occurrence of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, as one of the turning points in the history of this country which was followed by a long-scale Islamization of the society, resulted in some unique developments at

various fields. The Revolution mottos including independence, freedom and Islamic republic influenced and even transformed many aspects of life. The interpretation of such mottos was the revival of Islamic-Iranian identity, the issue which was strictly demanded by the government and the political organizations and gradually became a public demand. The Iranian government decision to influence over the Muslim world culminated in promoting the Islamic patterns. On the other hand, considering the effects of the ancient findings, which are the result of archeological discoveries was encouraged by the government. So, the adaptation of cultural and religious patterns was considered as a fundamental factor to gain legitimacy throughout the Muslim world so that the traditional elements became very

much alive in the fabric of ordinary people's lives and worldview. This upheaval naturally engendered a transformation of architecture and eventually, the rise of a novel architecture in Iran which embodied the nationalistic and progressive goals and looked back to the examples of Islamic-Iranian architecture. Such an approach stroke root through the first and the second Development Programs of Iran and was emphasized through the third and the fourth ones, so that through the fifth Program took priority over all other approaches [1-3].

Therefore, the study of the contemporary Iranian revivalist architecture can be considered as an opportunity to evaluate the characteristics of such a trend in the developing countries like Iran. Moreover, finding its shortages and progresses out would be as a guideline to the future plans and programs.

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**Reaserch Background:** Contemporary Iranian architecture is one of the most controversial issues in the recent decades in this country. Most architects or architecture critics in accordance with their definite approaches have categorized the existing trends.

According to Darab Diba, the certain pluralism and the variety of points of view are the special features of architecture during two decades after the Revolution and especially during the 1990s. On the one hand, creating the architecture to correspond with the values and ideals of Islamic society was an essential element in this period. On the other hand, western- influenced trends like Post-Modernism and Deconstructivism also played a role in Iranian architecture. In his view, the several trends can be distinguished during these years, ranging from:

1-Revitalization/Rejuvenation of traditional patterns, 2- Eclecticism related to western post-modern architecture, 3- the permanence of Modern architecture, 4- Scientific-functional trends (abstracted from the environment) and 5- Creation of a dialogue between Iranian architecture and world architecture [4-7].

Seyed Hadi Mirmiran has arranged the existing trends of Iranian architecture after Revolution in two main groups: 1- Formal interpretation of the Iranian traditional patterns: in this type of architecture, one of the traditional forms is used in a new format, e.g. in Rafsanjan cultural-

sport complex, the traditional form of Yakhchal<sup>1</sup> has been applied for a new function. 2- Conceptual interpretation of the Iranian traditional patterns: such patterns include the concepts like myth or cultural themes.

Kambiz Navaee has introduced five main trends as the dominant trends of contemporary Iranian architecture, too: 1- Imitation of the traditional architecture: in this kind of architecture, the traditional patterns have been adopted directly or indirectly. 2- Use of the brick volumes: such architecture has been influenced by the traditional architecture patterns and the brutal movements of modern era at the same time. 3- Formal interpretation of Iranian architecture: the familiar forms of Iranian architecture have been applied. 4- Inclination to the late modern architecture: in this kind of architecture, the concepts like shell, inner and outer space have been considered. 5- Postmodern architecture: these works have imitated the famous postmodern forms.

Farshad Farahi has recognized three main trends, too: 1- Neoclassicism: a kind of post modern architecture, with the western neoclassical trends. 2- Adaptation of Iranian traditional and modern architecture: a kind of regionalism is perceivable in such works. 3- Neomodern architecture: following the concepts like the axis changing.

As a matter of consideration, the significant point of all mentioned categorizations is the focus on the Iranian traditional architecture archetypes or concepts. Overall, according to Darab Diba, Seyed Hadi Mirmiran, Kambiz Navaee and Farshad Farahi, the emergence of the traditional patterns in the contemporary works is the symbol of the crystallization of Islamic-Iranian doctrines and values.

**Theoretical Framework:** Relying upon the above mentioned literature review, four main analysis parameters have been adapted and each parameter has got some sub-parameters:

**Concept or Idea:** The study of the pivotal idea of the plan involving:

- Traditional concepts derived from Iranian traditional architecture (hierarchy, transparency, privacy, etc)
- Modern concepts (rationalism, functionalism, etc)
- Postmodern concepts (historicity, playfulness, etc)
- Neomodern concepts (purity, variance, etc)
- Deconstruction concepts (disorder, etc)

N.B.: It was assumed that the contemporary

architecture has been founded on the above mentioned concepts or been affected by them.

**Form or Shape:** The study of the formal characteristics of the case-studies:

- Traditional forms (ziggurat, yakhchal, dome, wind tower, etc)
- Modern forms (rectangular, cubic, etc)
- Postmodern forms (varied, non pure, playful, etc)
- Exotic forms (zoo-morphic, extraordinary, etc)

**Material:** The used materials in the contemporary buildings of Iran, ranging from:

- Traditional materials (brick, timber, tile, etc)
- Iranian brutal modern materials (cement, etc)
- Traditional- modern materials (brick, concrete, etc)
- Postmodern materials (types of granite, travertine, etc)
- New materials (3D panel, aluminum composite, etc)

**Respect to Context:** A building in three manners is connected to its context:

- Homogeneously (in harmony with the environment)
- Contrastingly
- Indifferently

**Inference Mechanism:** The research is based on a comparative analysis of the architects' and the respondents' viewpoints; so, it has got a qualitative-quantitative approach. The case-study research method (Growth, 2002) and the combined tactics have been adopted. (Diagrams 1, 2)

**Research Steps:** At first, referring to the articles, written by the architects about their own works and extracting the needed data, the first column of the questionnaire has been filled up by the questioner. In this manner, according to what has been emphasized by the architects in their writings, the pre-determined parameters have been marked in the questionnaire. At the second step, twenty respondents have expressed their points of view about each case-study and the questioner has filled the questionnaires up, marking the pre-determined parameters, according to his perceptions of their

expressions. N.B.1: The questioner marked the parameters which had the most frequencies among the respondents' comments.

According to the architects' and the respondents' comments about each of four parameters, the particular frequency tables have been set separately and the resultants of the respondents' and the architects' comments about each parameter and its sub-parameters have been recorded in front of each one. Then, the correlation between the architects' and the respondent' comments have been evaluated by means of the Correlation Test and have been registered in the correlation table, too. Finally, based on the quantitative data, the qualitative results have been extracted. [8-10]

**Case Study Selection:** To study the contemporary Iranian revivalist architecture comprehensively, the case-studies should have been selected in an efficient and authentic manner. So, fifty buildings, discussed in the specialized journals or textbooks, among from all Iranian contemporary architecture were selected as the research case-studies.

Since the specialized comments have been needed, twenty respondents have been chosen from among MA or PhD students in architecture at University of Tehran. The survey was conducted in January till March of 2010.

### Comparative Analysis

**Concept or Idea:** Based on the frequency table about the parameter of concept or idea, the architects have been more inclined to the traditional, modern and postmodern architectural concepts in their works respectively, with the frequencies of (36%), (14%) and (30%), from their own point of view. On the other hand, according to the respondents, most Iranian architects have been strongly influenced by the postmodern concepts. They appraised the contemporary architectural works, as the works affected by the postmodern, neomodern and traditional architectural concepts respectively, with the frequencies of (51.2%), (27.4%) and (13.1%). Neomodern and deconstruction concepts are less considerable ones, from the architects' points of view, both with the frequencies of (0.1%); whereas, the respondents evaluated the buildings, as less affected by the modern and deconstruction concepts respectively, with the frequencies of (5.7%) and (2.6%). (Table1), (Diagram 1).

Table 1: Frequency Table of Parameter of Concept or Idea

Concept or Idea		Traditional	Modern	Postmodern	Neomodern	Deconstruction	Sum
Architects' V.P.	N	18	15	7	5	5	50
	P	%36	%30	%14	%10	%10	%100
Respondents' V.P.	N	131	57	512	274	26	1000
	P	%13.1	%5.7	%51.2	%27.4	%2.6	%100

N.B.1: N stands for number, P for percent and V.P. for viewpoint.

Table 2: Frequency Table of Parameter of Form or Shape

Form or shape		Traditional	Modern	Postmodern	Exotic forms	Sum
Architects' V.P.	N	24	14	12	0	50
	P	%48	%28	%24	0	%100
Respondents' V.P.	N	136	113	584	127	1000
	P	%13.6	%11.3	%58.4	%12.7	%100

Table 3: Frequency Table of Parameter of Material

Material		Traditional	Iranian brutal modern	Traditional modern	Postmodern	New	Sum
Architects' V.P.	N	23	10	2	8	7	50
	P	%46	%20	%4	%16	%14	%100
Respondents' V.P.	N	193	109	102	461	137	1000
	P	%19.3	%10.9	%10.2	%46.1	%13.7	%100

Table 4: Frequency Table of Parameter of Respect to Context

Respect to context		Homogenous	Indifferent	Contrasting	Sum
Architects' V.P.	N	32	7	11	50
	P	%64	%14	%22	%100
Respondents' V.P.	N	104	739	156	1000
	P	%10.4	%73.9	%15.6	%100

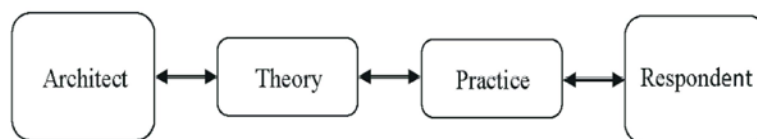


Diagram 1: Comparison between theory and practice

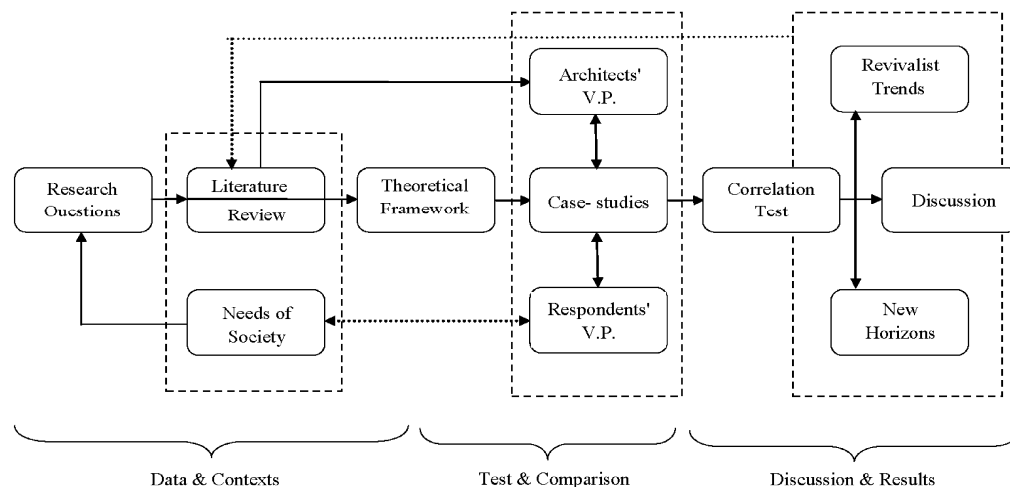



Diagram 2: Inference Mechanism

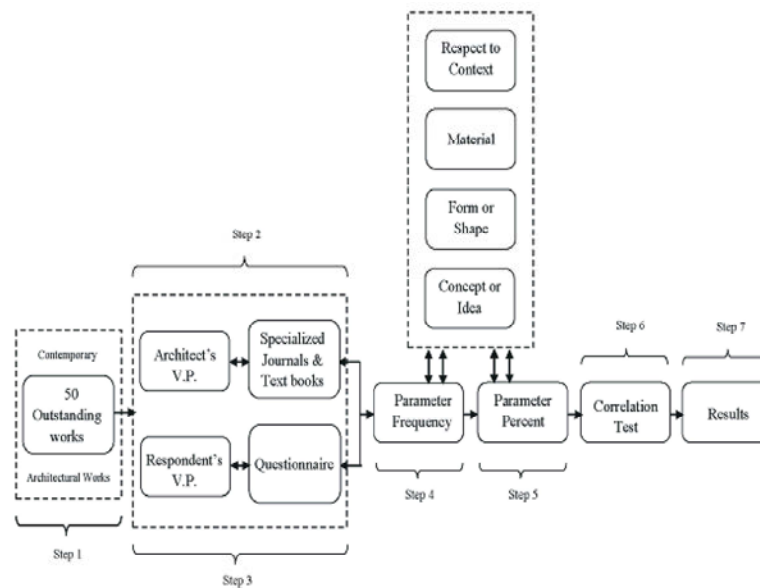
 <div> Name of building: Hall of the Islamic summit  Date of construction: 1997  Architect: Pizar consultants  Site: Tehran, Iran </div>				
Parameters	Sub-Parameters	A. V.P.	R. V.P.	Description
<b>Concept or Idea</b>	Traditional	✓		Inspired of the concept of introversion in Iranian architecture
	Modern			
	Postmodern		✓	The combination of traditional and modern patterns
	Neomodern			
	Deconstruction			
<b>Form or shape</b>	Traditional			
	Modern	✓		The use of pure and abstract forms
	Postmodern		✓	The use of the traditional forms, e.g. dome, triangular light apertures combined with modern volumes
	Exotic			
<b>Material</b>	Traditional			
	Iranian brutal modern			
	Traditional & modern	✓		The use of brick, rock, compressed plates and other modern materials
	Postmodern		✓	The use of colorful materials and the companion of brick and rock
	New			
<b>Respect to Context</b>	Harmonious	✓		The convergence of the building and the surrounding green spaces
	Indifferent		✓	The use of a form indifferent to the rest
	Contrasting			

N.B.: A.V.P. stands for Architect's viewpoint and R.V.P. for Respondents' viewpoints.

Diagram 3: Sample Questionnaire

**Form or Shape:** According to the frequency table of form or shape, the architects have been more inclined to the traditional and modern forms respectively, with the frequencies of (48%) and (28%); while the postmodern and exotic forms respectively, with the frequencies of (24%) and (0%) are the less considerable ones. On the other hand, from the respondents' points of view, the postmodern and traditional forms have been used more than others by the architects respectively, with the frequencies of (58.4%) and (13.6%); whereas, the exotic and modern forms have taken the next places in the table respectively, with the frequencies of (12.7%) and (11.3%). (Table2), (Diagram 2).

**Material:** Relying upon the achieved results about the parameter of material, the architects have claimed more attention to the traditional, Iranian brutal modern and postmodern materials in their works respectively, with the frequencies of (46%), (20%) and (16%); whereas, the respondents have detected the architects' more attention toward the postmodern, traditional and new materials respectively, with the frequencies of (46.1%), (19.3%) and (13.7%). The architects have allocated the less attention to the new and traditional modern materials in their works respectively, with the frequencies of (14%) and (4%), from their own points of view; however, from the respondents' points of view, the less used materials by the architects,



- Step 1: Selecting the case-studies from among all contemporary Iranian architecture.
- Step 2: Extracting the architects' viewpoints and filling the questionnaires out by the questioner.
- Step 3: Extracting the respondents' viewpoints and filling the questionnaires out by the questioner.
- Step 4: Calculating the parameters frequencies according to the architects and respondents.
- Step 5: Calculating the parameters percents according to the architects and respondents.
- Step 6: Testing the correlations between the architects' and the respondents' viewpoints.
- Step 7: Extracting the results.

Diagram 4: Research Steps

respectively are the Iranian brutal modern and the traditional modern materials, with the frequencies of (10.9%) and (10.2%). (Table3), (Diagram 3).

**Respect to Context:** Considering the parameter of respect to context, the architects have evaluated their own works, respectively homogeneous, contrasting and indifferent to their contexts with the frequencies of (64%), (22%) and (14%). On the contrary, according to the respondents, the contemporary buildings are respectively indifferent, contrasting and homogeneous to their contexts, with the frequencies of (73.9%), (15.6%) and (10.4%). (Table 4), (Diagram 4).

## DISCUSSION

Considering the frequency table about the parameter of concept or idea, there is no meaningful correlation between the architects' and the respondents' perceptions of the buildings and the correlation condition is reverse. The correlation degree and square are respectively about (-0.35) and (0.12).

The results about the parameter of form or shape differ a little from the previous ones. There is no meaningful correlation between the architects' and the respondents' comments again. The correlation degree about (-0.59) shows the reverse correlation condition too and the correlation square about (0.35) indicates the non-meaningful correlation.

About the parameter of material, the unanimity between the respondents and the architects emerges; so, there is an acceptable correlation between the architects' and the respondents' comments. The correlation degree about (0.9) has got the positive sign, denoting the direct correlation condition and the correlation square about (0.82) indicates the meaningful correlation.

The achieved results about the parameter of respect to context show the lack of unanimity between the architects and the respondents. The correlation degree about (-0.67) denotes the reverse correlation condition and the correlation square about (0.46) indicates the meaningful correlation. (Table 5), (Diagram 5)

Table 5: Correlation Test

Correlation Test	Concept or Idea	Form or shape	Material	Respect to context
(CT)	-0.35183	-0.59435	0.909457	-0.67937
(CT) <sup>2</sup>	0.123784	0.353252	0.827112	0.46154
Correlation Condition	Reverse	Reverse	Direct	Reverse
Correlation	Non-meaningful	Non-meaningful	Meaningful	Non-meaningful

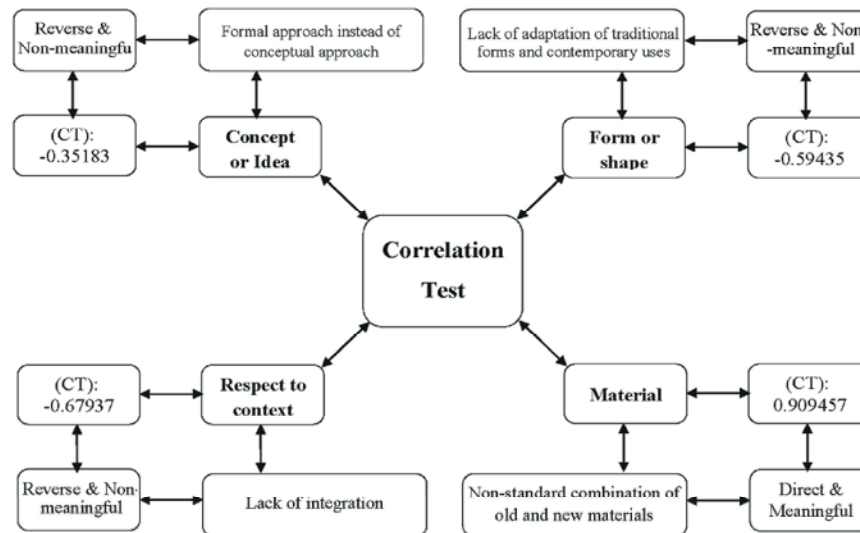


Diagram 5: Contemporary Iranian Revivalist Architecture Mapping

## CONCLUSION

Relying upon the accomplished studies, an overwhelming majority of the architects have specified in a manner, a tendency to the application of the traditional architecture in their works; so that, in none of the case studies, no indifference to the matter does exist, from their own points of view; but an overall analysis of the prepared questionnaires demonstrates that the architects have not been so much successful at conveying their intentions to the respondents or connecting their theory to the action.

Generally speaking, at the material field, the respondents could understand the architects' intentions well. In other words, when the architects have used the traditional materials, their works have been appraised as the revivalist architecture by the respondents, but about other parameters like concept or idea, form or shape and respect to context, the architects have not got much success in conveying their intentions to the respondents. About these three parameters, the correlation conditions are reverse, which can be interpreted as the unanimity between the architects and the respondents. Their non-meaningful correlations denote the lack of common understanding of the buildings between the architects and the respondents.

Therefore, the lack of convergence between the architects' and the respondents' comments at analyzing the contemporary Iranian revivalist architecture, in spite of the architects' theoretical tendency to the revivalism in architecture, demonstrates a kind of bewilderment in the contemporary architecture, in spite of the continual emphasis of the different states and the governmental organizations on the necessity of revivalism, at the first to fifth Development Programs of Iran.

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