

Iranian Identity in Logotype Design

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ABSTRACT

Abstract — In psychology and sociology, identity is a person's conception of his own or group affiliations. Group identity can be gained from nationality, ethnicity, religion or locality. Culture is an important factor in shaping identity and one of the main characteristics of cultural heritage is its “pictorial reservoir”. Increasing interconnectedness among cultures may suppress “Third World” identities. Some artists, among them graphic designers, try to vivify traditional elements and techniques. They combine the intelligence raised from international knowledge with their native self-awareness and expand the domains of their relations with addressed people. The success of a graphic design, in its modern application, is measured by how well a specific message is conveyed to particular groups of people; that is why it is important for a graphic designer to know about visual elements which possess symbolic meanings. The meaningful forms and images acquire their significance from various domains such as ancient myths, religious notions and folklore tales. Through ages, figurative concepts have never remained fixed and permanent; and their essence changed according to historical and cultural events. For instance, many 19th century newspaper logos not only mirror symbolic contents but also represent historical events of the time. For designing logotypes, graphic designers profit from Persian heritage as an important part of collective identity and consider direct implications as well as oblique ones. This article surveys about 300 logos containing cultural references. Human, animal, vegetal, and geometrical elements, as well as Persian calligraphy and architectural schemas, have been excellent inspiration sources for designers. Semiology is the main approach of this article and semiotic codes, containing cultural hints, have been studied. As a conclusion, it is remarkable that graphic designers tried to pass from overt implications to more cryptic semantic layers and expand the limits of their visual expression.

Keywords — Iranian Identity; Logotype Design; Sign.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural identity, as part of the self-conception and self-perception, is feeling of belonging to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality, and any kind of social group that have its own distinct culture; in this way, cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also to the culturally identical group that has its members sharing the same cultural identity (Moha, 2005). According to Shindler, Since one of the main characteristics of a culture is its "historical reservoir," many if not all groups entertain revisions, either consciously or unconsciously, in their historical record in order to either bolster the strength of their cultural identity or to forge one which gives them precedent for actual reform or change (Shindler, 2004) Cultural globalization involves the formation of shared norms with which people associate their individual and collective cultural identities. This Phenomenon also occasions transmission of ideas and values and common consumption of cultures diffusing by popular media and international travel. As the result of globalization, some artists are more engaged to their own cultural identity; Graphic designers try to vivify historical elements and techniques and stick to their own figurative tradition. Graphic designers profit from Persian heritage as an important part of collective identity. They combine the intelligence raised from international knowledge with their native self-awareness and expand the domains of their relations with particular addressed people. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), American philosopher, proposes three main definitions of the signs. This is the typology of the sign as

distinguished by phenomenological category of its way of denoting the object. This typology emphasizes the different ways in which the sign refers to its object: An *icon* which also called likeness and semblance is a sign that denotes its object by virtue of a quality. The *icon* (for instance, a portrait or a diagram) resembles or imitates its object. An *index* is a sign that denotes its object by virtue of an actual connection involving them, one that he also calls a real relation in virtue of its being irrespective of interpretation. It is in any case a relation which is in fact, in contrast to the icon, which has only a ground for denotation of its object, and in contrast to the symbol, which denotes by an interpretive habit or law. A symbol is a sign that denotes its object solely by virtue of the fact that it will be interpreted to do so. The symbol consists in a natural, conventional, or logical rule, norm, or habit; thus, a symbol denotes by virtue of its interpretant. To know what a given sign denotes, the mind needs some experience of that sign's object. In that context Peirce speaks of collateral experience, collateral observation, collateral acquaintance, all in much the same terms.

Human elements

For designing logos¹, Iranian graphic designers benefit from meaningful elements taken from Persian “pictorial reservoir” which may be divided into some basic categories such as Human, animal, vegetal, or geometric elements. The use of human elements in newspaper logos comes back to 19th century in Iran. Constitutional movements in that era were supported by intellectuals who spread their ideas by printing them in countless newspapers. They encouraged people to riot against dictatorship led by the king himself (Shah). Pioneers of graphic designers illustrated epic and mythical heroes as well as ordinary people in the logos of some van printed matters. As a good example, “Kaveh” was a revolutionary newspaper whose name was taken from a national hero; it is narrated in epic texts and poems that Kaveh, a blacksmith, raised his apron as a flag and led people to overthrow the cruel ruler. The frame of the logo is pierced by the flag, indicating the deconstruction aspect of the movement. The angles were also illustrated as winged human beings; the most popular example of this kind belongs to a newspaper called *Soor Esrafil* (Seraph Horn). It is mentioned in religious texts that in the doomsday, Seraph will blow in his horn and revive all dead mankind. Considering the rebellious atmosphere of the time, the logo indicates the necessity of raising awareness and uprising against autocracy. Ordinary people, and representatives of different classes, such as poor peasants, were also illustrated in newspapers logos (Fig.1). As the result of constitutional movement, demons appeared in newspapers as political symbols, and animal-like horned men with a long tail symbolize despotism, particularly dictators.



Figure 1 Newspaper Logos in 19th Century

¹ -A logo or logotype (Greek: *λόγος* logos "word" and *τύπος* typos "imprint") is a graphic mark, emblem, or symbol commonly used by commercial enterprises, organizations and even individuals to aid and promote instant public recognition. Logos are either purely graphic (symbols/icons) or are composed of the name of the organization.

Animal elements

Images of animals were demonstrated in various Persian art works and handicrafts during long periods of time; Animals and birds such as lions, antelopes, cows, eagles and pigeons symbolize multifarious concepts. Antelope as an index, as well as a mythical symbol (rain Goddess) appears in the logo of “Iranian Environmental Protection Agency”. Accompanied by patterns of “sun” and “water”, the logo not only generally represents “nature” but also embodies rich cultural background. Homa and phoenix have nearly the same notions; it is quoted in epic poems, like “Shah-nameh”, that both of them bring happiness to people. Homa (birds’ king), with countless ancient implications in mythical texts, has been manifested in the logo of “Iran Air” The main image has been taken from a statue in Persepolis which is very famous in the world; that is why it can be a suitable choice for an international aviation. In Mithraism, image of lion symbolizes Mithra, power and light. The lion-and-Sun image has been an allegory for powerful cohesion of kingdom and religion, so the combination of this icon with sword appeared on many Persian flags (presenting kingship dynasties), as well as logos of state newspapers in 19th century (Fig. 2).



Figure 2 Logos Inspired from Animal Symbols

Vegetal patterns

The word “Eslimi” which is also known as Arabesque, defines some simplified vegetal forms with very fine curves. This word is derived from “Islam” and sometimes called “Islami” too. In Persian art, these decorative forms were frequently used in paintings, book illustrations, inscriptions and architecture; and somehow they represent traditional art; that is why Iranian graphic designers are so fond of Eslimi forms. Eslimi forms arise from the Islamic view of the world. To Muslims, these forms constitute an infinite pattern that extends beyond the visible material world; they concretely symbolize the infinite nature of the creation of Allah and convey spirituality the art of other religions. The Eslimi patterns in Islamic art are often used to symbolize the transcendent, indivisible and infinite nature of God. On the other hand, Eslimi shapes are symbol of “life tree” which attributes various notions. Eslimi forms appear in their iconic meanings generally displaying plants and flowers, but their usage for revealing symbolic significance is more dominant; for instance they exist in the logos of many cultural centers (Fig. 3).

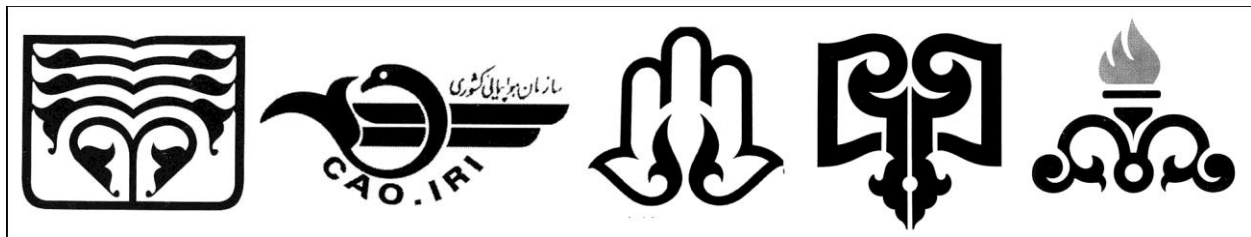


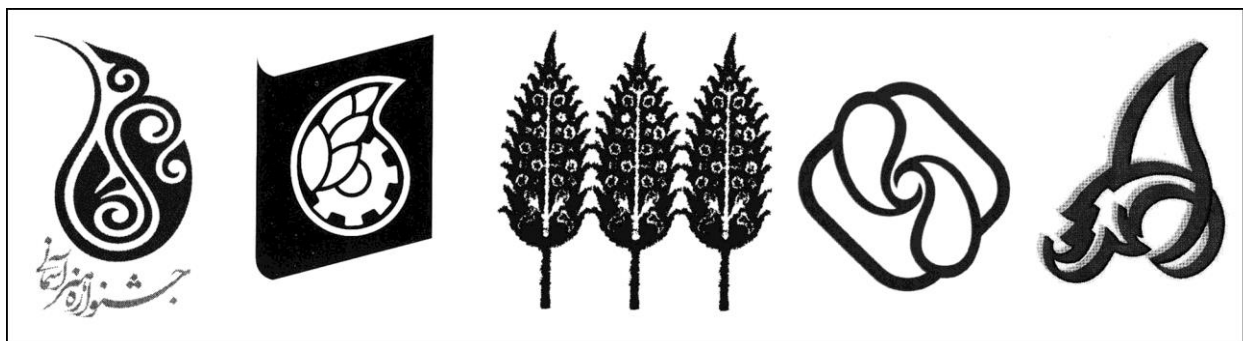
Figure 3 Logos Inspired from Eslimi Forms

The Persian word “Laleh” (Tulip in English) derived from Sanskrit, means “red”. The image has been illustrated many times; for instance, it was illustrated on a stone seal in 20th century BC. In Sassanid era; some icons of tulip were carved on seals as well as silver dishes. In Persian literature and poems, tulip is generally a symbol for

“love” but in revolutionary texts, it is a metaphor for martyrdom and it is believed that red tulips grow whenever the martyrs blood pour down the soil; so the tulips images were main parts of the logos of constitutionalist newspapers in 19th century. After Islamic revolution and especially during Iran-Iraq war, the image of tulip was vastly used in posters, illustrations, murals as well as logos. In Zoroastrian myths, cypress was descended from heaven to be planted in front of a temple. In Persian texts and poems, cypress has been always a symbolic sign for “liberality”. By repeating the image of this tree in the signs, the graphic designers evoke the notion of “Persian Garden”. In the logos of the organizations attached to Iran-Iraq war, the images of cypress symbolize martyrdom (Figs. 4 & 5).



Figures 4 Logos with Symbolic Tulips and Cypress



Figures 5 Logos with Symbolic Tulips and Cypress

Architectural elements

Architectural elements are also used in some cultural logos. The main part of the logo of “Iranian National Museum” is taken from its façade. The building completed in 1936, was conceived as a modern building with a traditional façade. It is inspired by the pre-Islamic architecture of the Sasanian period as favored by the Pahlavi state. Being inspired from the famous arch of Ayyvān (or Tāq)-e Kesrā, André Godard (1881–1965), specialist in Middle Eastern archaeology, designed Iran’s first modern archeological museum. Graphic designers apply some elements of mosque, as the most manifest phenomenon of pious identity. The domes, often placed directly above the main prayer hall, may signify the vaults of heaven, and a common feature in mosques is the minaret, the tall tower that usually is situated at one of the corners of the mosque structure. These key elements not only represent direct religious inheritance but also the cultural centers located in holy cities. The logo of a university in Mashhad composed of a book (symbol of awareness), and a dome as the symbol of the 8th Imam’ shrine, placed in Mashhad (Fig. 6).

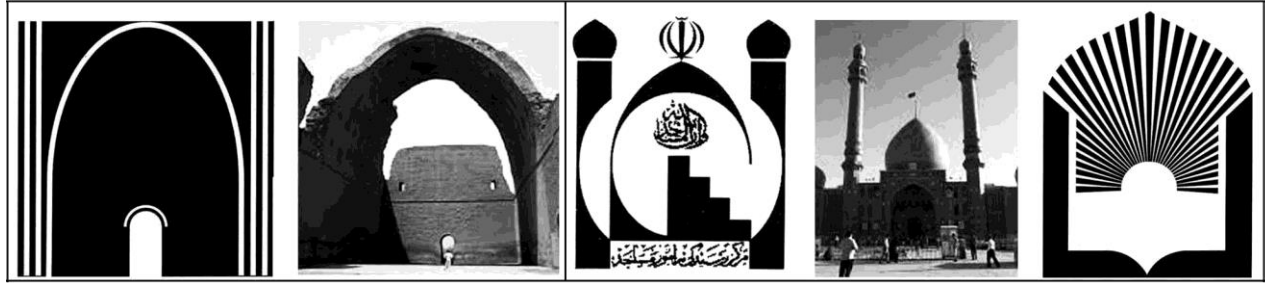


Figure 6 Logos with Architectural Elements

GEOMETRIC PATTERNS

In Islamic art, geometric patterns make up one of the most important non-figural types of decoration. They also include calligraphy and vegetal patterns and have been appeared in combination with non-figural or figural representation. Geometric patterns are popularly associated with Islamic art, largely due to their aniconic quality. They not only adorn the surfaces of monumental architecture but also function as the major decorative elements on all types of handicrafts. The most well-known geometric form called “Sun Carrousel” is in direct connection with “Swastika”. According to Reza Assasi, Swastika is a geometric pattern in the sky representing the north ecliptic pole centered to Zeta Draconis. He argues that this primitive astrological symbol was later called the four-horse chariot of Mithra in ancient Iran and represented the center of Ecliptic in the star map and also demonstrates that in Iranian mythology, the cosmos was believed to be pulled by four heavenly horses revolving around a fixed center on clockwise direction possibly because of a geocentric understanding of an astronomical phenomenon called axial precession. He suggests that this notion was transmitted to the west and flourished in Roman Mithraism in which this symbol appears in Mithraic iconography and astrological representations (Assasi, Reza, 2013).

In Islamic art, the symbolic notions of “Sun” are presented with a geometric shape called “Shamseh”. This word comes from the Arabic word “Shams” means Sun. Representations of “Shamseh” appear with numerous shapes in decorative arts, such as religious architecture, book illustrations, and painted tiles. This motif has been also the principal part of the logos of various organizations.

“Shamseh” usually symbolizes “light of God”, “multiplicity in unity”, and “oneness in plurality”. “Shamseh” is generally the major part of the logos of some publishers, cultural institutions, and Islamic foundations. In some cases, symbols of national identity have been added to this shape; the logo of “Persian booth” in an international fair is a combination of this motif with a simplified lineal map of Iran (Fig. 7).

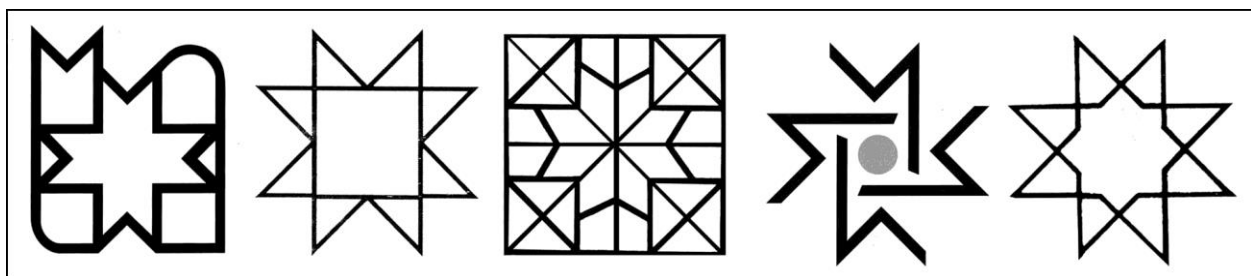


Figure 7 Logos with Geometric Patterns

CALLIGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

Calligraphic design is omnipresent in Islamic art. Apart from Qur'anic verses written in Arabic, various calligraphic elements in Persian, may be served as decorations included in secular objects like coins, tiles and

miniatures. Graphic designers used calligraphic elements as a base for creating the logotypes. Kufic is the oldest form of the Arabic script whose style emphasizes rigid and angular strokes and later developed into several varieties, including floral, foliated, plaited or interlaced, and bordered Kufic. The common feature in using the Kufic script is the angular, linear shapes of the characters which range from very square forms to flowery and decorative ones; so it is a favorite base for designing logotypes.

Nasta'liq is a cursive style originally devised to write the Persian language for literary and non-Qur'anic works. Nasta'liq is thought to be a latter development of the naskh and the earlier ta'liq script used in Iran. The nameta'liq means 'hanging', and refers to the slightly steeped lines of which words run in, giving the script a hanging appearance. Letters have short vertical strokes with broad and sweeping horizontal strokes (Mohsen, 2009). The shapes are deep, hook-like, and have high contrast (Kvernen, 2009). Being called "Calligraphic Bride", Nasta'liq is believed to be in perfect harmony with Iranian literature and poetry; so its usage for creating logotypes is numerous (Fig. 8). Apart from Kufic and Nasta'liq, different forms driven from other calligraphic elements, have been prevalently used by Iranian graphic designers.

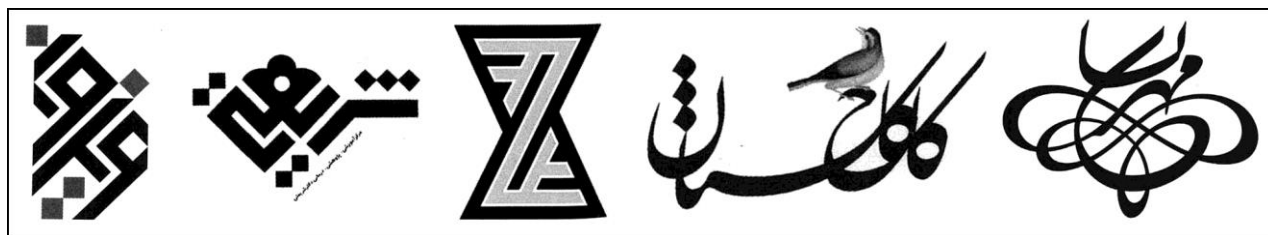


Figure 8 Logos Inspired from Traditional Calligraphic Elements

CONCLUSION

It is usually mentioned that globalization helps developing nations to industrialize much faster through increased technological advances, which may seem quite evident in new methods of visual communications like graphic design. On the other hand, cultural globalization involves the formation of shared norms and knowledge with which people associate their individual and collective cultural identities. This process may weaken national sovereignty and identity; that is why artists, among them graphic designers, feel the jeopardy of losing self-identities and try to use some elements of "pictorial reservoir" in their works. Charles Peirce proposes three main definitions of the "sign" according to the ways it refers to its object: An icon that resembles or imitates its object, an index that denotes its object by virtue of an actual connection and a symbol that denotes by virtue of its interpretant, and therefore acts as a cultural norm. Logos (or Logotypes) are graphic marks or symbols commonly used by organizations or even individuals to aid instant public recognition. Logos are either purely pictographic or a composition of the name of the organization and an image. In 19th century, new tendencies of designing logos (in its modern concept) commenced by photography and printing industry, and were simultaneous with constitutional movements in Iran. The logos of revolutionary newspapers were usually compositions of complex pictographic signs with the terms expressing particular purports.

Human, animal, vegetal, geometric, calligraphic and architectural elements were vastly used as thematic sources for designing logos. Human elements in the form of mythical characters and also ordinary people were frequently applied in 19th century newspaper logos. Epic personalities like "Kaveh" who generally symbolized heroism, turned up as the national revolutionary characters of the time. On the other hand, human-animal creatures such as angels and demons were illustrated in the logos, possessing up-to-date notions. As the result of the rebellious atmosphere of the time, some religious implications of human elements were also substituted by novel concepts.

The images of animals and birds in logotypes represent distinct senses and act as indexes, as well as mythical symbols. As an index, the effigy of animals appears in the logos of institutions related to real animals, like zoological gardens, protected areas or wildlife parks. In some logos, mythic creatures like "Homa" and phoenix which were often

quoted in epic poems, present with their symbolic implications; this is the same about “lion” which is an allegory for cohesion of kingdom and religion.

Vegetal elements are also major parts of logos. “Eslimi” (a simplified vegetal form) is a symbol for infinite nature of the creation of Allah and its usage for revealing symbolic significance is very dominant. “Eslimi” forms also appear in their iconic meanings, generally displaying plants and flowers. Image of tulip has been also a symbol for “love” and the notion of “Persian Garden”. Its significances were altered in the logos of constitutionalist newspapers as well as Iran-Iraq war illustrations; this image became a metaphor for martyrdom in some revolutionary texts. This is the same about the image of cypress which has been evermore a symbol for “liberality”, but in the logos of the organizations attached to Iran-Iraq war, this tree symbolized “martyrdom”.

Even though the architectural elements are frequently applied as icons in the logos of some concrete locations like museums and religious sites, but in many cases they are very much inspired from ancient monuments and cultural heritages conveying symbolic notions. Geometric patterns like “Sun Carrousel”, “Swastika”, and “Shamseh” with their countless significations are very much associated with Islamic art. These motifs repeatedly exist in the logos of publishing companies, cultural institutions, and Islamic foundations; they symbolize some notions like “light of God”, “multiplicity in unity”, and “oneness in plurality”. It may be deduced that the symbolic implications of geometric patterns in logos are more dominant.

Calligraphic elements of Kufic, naskh, Nasta'liq, and... are also regularly used by artists. Kufic script with its angular shapes and decorative details is a favorite base for designing logotypes. On the other hand, it is believed that cursive style and short vertical strokes of Nasta'liq is in perfect harmony with Iranian literature and poetry; that is why it is prevalently used by Iranian graphic designers. As a conclusion, it is remarkable that graphic designers tried to pass from overt implications to more cryptic layers and expand the semantic limits of their visual expressions; they also improved the process of their communications with particular groups of people.

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