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Effect of Globalization on Identity Components of Contemporary Rugs of Tabriz

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Abstract


Statement of the Problem: The cultural heritage and its aspects including the handicrafts are accounted as the stabilizing factors of ethnic groups' cultural identity. Tabriz rug is viewed as one of the most important cultural products and Iranian handicrafts in a global domain. In recent decades, the cultural waves resulted from the globalization phenomenon have caused changes in the identity components of the rugs. As such a trend continues, the expected functions of Tabriz rug face serious challenges. Losing the local identity and cultural authenticity and commodification are the consequences of continuing such a trend. The strategy in terms of scientific encounter with the global culture lies in recognizing works and concepts of such a phenomenon in Tabriz rug.

Purpose: This research studies the effects and consequences of cultural globalization on Tabriz rug and discusses the strategies for how to cope with it.

Research Method: This research is was conducted on 200 pieces of hand-knotted contemporary rugs of Tabriz through a descriptive-analytical method, using field-study data and library resources.

Conclusion: The contemporary rugs of Tabriz have joined the global trade network of cultural goods due to their cultural and commercial aspects. As this trend continues, the identity and style components of this Islamic-Iranian hand-knotted product experience changes. Thus, the concepts of such phenomenon are observable in three domains of visual, technical and applied components. Awareness of the principles and acquiring the necessary skills are the prerequisites of acting in a system. Therefore, facilitating the access of the designers of Tabriz rugs to the principles and basics of Iranian traditional designs can reinforce the constructive interaction of these agents against the surrounding structures resulted from globalization.

Keywords: *Local Arts, Global Culture, Tabriz Rug, Training.*

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Introduction and Problem Statement

The development of media, transportation systems, multinational trade networks and has led to the rise of terms such as 'globalization', 'information explosion', 'time-space compression' and 'global village'. These components accompany big challenges including the danger of destroying cultural aspects of ethnic groups and indigenous and local micro-cultures, traditional products, and customs. The process of producing handicrafts became an important part of the production activities of the labor force in Iran until recent decades and it was reflecting the cultural values of the producing ethnic groups. With the entrance of products of western industrial and modern factories to Iran and marginalization of indigenous and local handicrafts, the first consequence of globalization emerged in this domain. The dominant traditional and applied handicrafts in Iran such as metal, wooden and pottery handicrafts have lost their functional aspect rapidly and changed to the decorative and visual works bearing the museum function. Since the cultural heritage and its aspects such as handicrafts are the stabilizing factors of identity and cultural status of ethnic groups; hence, weakening the status of cultural aspects following the globalization appears as a threat to the life of indigenous cultures.

The theoreticians consider the globalization as a real and on-going issue and believe that resistance to globalization is doomed to failure. Thus, they recommend that the nations should try to export the cultural links and cognitive and identity-related fundamentals of their society together with the exported goods because the transaction of goods between different communities and cultures becomes unavoidable. They believe, when people produce goods to meet their needs, these objects link the people, even indirectly, to others' needs and activities. The use of the objects among other cultures and ethnic groups is imagined as the representation of original culture in the host community, even if the objects have changed into a form far from their form in the original culture because of the influence of the

modern global system (Helfgott, 1994: 1).

According to a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the rug is the only Iranian creative industry in the global domain (Zakariyae kermani, Shairi & Sojoodi, 2013: 12). In this respect, Tabriz rug, as a presentation of Islamic-Iranian culture, has an outstanding status among the exported traditional products of Iran. Tabriz rugs, due to representation of sociocultural links of their manufacturing community and their exportation to all over the world, are considered as the striking instances of local goods in a global arena. They are also accounted as the pricy cultural objects for barter(s) in the domain of cultural globalization for Iran. Providing that the competition goes towards the space of technology and industry in the domain of globalization, we will be put into the margins. But, we can transfer our specific influence in the domain of handicrafts and local culture. Fakouhi states that art is a major factor in creating the socio-cultural identities and can support or weaken the national identities. He sees the art goods as the identity objects which people consume because of their own attachment to a certain type of identity carried by that object (2013: 98-101).

In recent years, with the invasion of western culture components that are riding the modernism waves in terms of modern marketing and customer orientation principles, these components have trespassed the geographical borders. The producers of Tabriz rug as the pioneers of encountering such phenomenon try to adapt their works to the emerging concepts and create major changes in the identity components of rugs. The continuation of such a trend created serious challenges for the expected functions of Tabriz rug as a cultural product that can be offered in the world trade network of cultural goods. Since the lack of cultural ties in the design of the rugs distracts people from their identity-related functions, the major problem of the present research is the emergence of foreign and primarily western artistic and cultural aspects in the domain of hand-woven Tabriz rugs and their gradual substitution with the

original and traditional Iranian patterns. The major research questions include:

What are the effects, consequences and instances of globalization in contemporary rugs of Tabriz?

What is the appropriate strategy for constructive interactions with such a phenomenon?

Considering that the major means of globalization are serving the western culture in many fields, it is expected that the instances and aspects of western culture would be observed in Tabriz rugs as well. Sociocultural interactions with the surrounding world are unavoidable in the current era because of the powerful trend of globalization. In such an atmosphere, increasing the awareness level of the agents involved in the Tabriz rug production and supply system will help improving their agency power.

Theoretical Principles

The term 'global' has been used since 400 years ago by researchers in different fields. Emphasizing the time-space compression and interwoven communities as well as studying their consequences are the mutual core of many definitions presented for the globalization. In other words, "globalization in its major meaning guarantees the compression of the whole world and guarantees the rapid increase in self-understanding of the whole world" (Robertson & Khondker, 1998: 29). Globalization is observable not in its overt aspects such as the development of Internet networks and digital media, but also in the performance of powerful arms of such phenomenon in all living aspects of humanistic societies. "Each of humanistic communities is affected by the changes received by the social, economic, cultural and political conditions and circumstances. Strength, weakness, positive or negative nature of globalization consequences depends on the conditions mentioned" (Pourahmad, Gharakhloo & Mousavi, 2011: 31). Since, "the development and improvement of modern technologies, especially the communication, information, and structural technologies, in the recent decades, known as globalization, is changing

different aspects of the global social, economic, cultural and political structures" (Shams, SafariRad & Ghasemi, 2015: 120), all phenomena that are in action to synchronize the various and local cultural aspects can be studied as globalization.

Anthony Giddens, a great contemporary sociologist, believes that globalization cannot be considered just as an economic phenomenon although the formation of global economy is the most important drives of globalization. In response to the economy-based approach of some theoreticians, he emphasizes the socio-cultural aspects of globalization and considers it beyond the formation of a global system (Giddens, 1998: 30-31). The position of culture in the process of globalization is to the extent that several researchers believe, "Nowadays, the goods, services or capital is not being sent overseas, but culture, tradition, and knowledge are exported beyond the contractual borders. The growth of daily-increasing technologies overshadows the stream. Generally, an important deal of research on globalization is focused on the applied and intuitive aspects" (Razavian, fanni & Aghaei, 2015: 139). "Cultural globalization means the formation and development of a specific culture in the global domains. This process creates a wave of cultural assimilation in the world and challenges all cultural specifics. The process of globalization creates a global economy and a meta-national society" (Golmohammadi, 2007: 98). The forming elements of this global culture are the specific and local cultures of various ethnic minorities and nations and each plays a role in this process by emphasizing the potentials and capacities. This phenomenon is so pervasively happening so that almost no local or indigenous culture can escape its consequences. The major components and cultural aspects of ethnic groups including the political and economic dimensions of globalization are separated from their original land and context and scattered in the global space. This dense global space is the field of presence and encounter of various cultures and helps the formation of global assimilated cultures. Tomlinson, a thinker in the field of globalization

of culture, believes that: “the enormous evolving processes of our time that describe the globalization cannot be understood except the conceptual words of culture” (Tomlinson, 1999: 13).

Literature Review

A number of studies have been conducted on the effects of globalization on arts. Rezaee Nabard (2012) is an example. The author studied the effects of globalization on the various aspects of western contemporary art and concluded that publicizing arts, developing museums, and highlighting the role of audience are the effects of globalization in the western contemporary art. Shams et al. (2015) studied the effects of globalization on the physical structure of Isfahan as an Islamic country. They concluded that the process of globalization put enormous effects on the physical spaces such as public spaces and entertaining and social centers of Isfahan.

Regarding the enjoyment of Iranian rug of a special position among the cultural goods, the explorations on the databases of scientific periodicals and titles of academic theses indicated that no research has been published on the cultural and identity-related effects of globalization on Tabriz/Iran rugs. However, Daneshghar (1997), Souresrafil (2002), Akbari et al. (2014), Mirzaei (2016) mentioned the deviation from Islamic-Iranian identity criteria and use of the western cultural elements in the design and color as major features in their description of the contemporary rugs of Tabriz.

Research Methodology

The present research was a qualitative study which was conducted both descriptively and analytically using data obtained from library resources and field observations. Since this research examines the effects of globalization on various types of Tabriz rugs (rug tableau and carpets) and presents a strategy for coping with such phenomena, it is considered as an applied research in terms of purpose. In the process of conducting this research, library resources and field

studies were used. The statistical population of this research included 200 samples of rugs knitted in the last two decades in the geographical area of Tabriz. Samples were selected using purposeful sampling method according to the research objectives and the examination of the examples of globalization in contemporary rugs of Tabriz. Based on the observed effects and consequences of globalization on their identity components, the samples were selected and studied through the visual and field documentation of 200 pieces of rugs available in Tabriz market related to the research period.¹ Then, in order to explain findings of the first part of the research and to understand the prevailing domains of the mostly western methods in the visual components of Tabriz rug, semi-structured interviews were performed with 20 contemporary elite rug designers of Tabriz (introduced by the Office of the Rug Designers Association).

Research Findings

• Analysis of Samples

The study of the rugs showed that following the overcoming of the forces generated by the waves of globalization, extensive changes have taken place in the identity-making and style-making principles² of the Tabriz rug. From the viewpoint of researchers, the beginning of the effects of the devastating waves of globalization on Iranian culture and art dates back to the Qajar period. “Since the mid-nineteenth century and following some domestic and international evolutions, there have been many changes in the political and social status of Iran; the deepest and most stable aspect of these transformations was the cultural aspect” (Alaghmand, Salehi & Mozaffar, 2017: 8). The aspects of such changes in Tabriz rugs have also started since then and become more intensive in recent years due to the strengthened globalization tools. Table 1 indicates these changes in three visual (content), technical (form) and functional domains.

• Visual Components (Content)

Visual components include the design and color scheme of rugs that reflect the cultural and geographical identity of the producing communities.

Table 1: Instances of Globalization in Contemporary Tabriz Rug. Source: Author.

Major and Minor Domains of Aspects of Culture Globalization in the Identity Components of Tabriz Rug		
Visual component (content)	Technical component (form)	Function
- The realistic approach to the design and color motifs	- piece patching or collage (combination of a rug with leather or with another rug)	- Elimination of the function as flooring carpet
- The display of depth and perspective in the design and motifs	- Unusual dimensions (polygonal, circle, etc.)	- Induction of decorative and visual function for rugs (tableau rug)
- The use of colored tonalities instead of using design pattern and scheme to cover the background	- Multi- level surface rug knitting	- Induction of the museum function for rugs from the very beginning of production
- The use of eclectic motifs and alien elements	- Volume knitting (in the form of jars, portraits, spheres, etc.)	
- Pictorial knitting (tableau knitting)	- Unusual very high raj-counter and unnecessary decorations	
- Using western concepts in designs that are contrary to Iranian culture		
- Using similar color harmonies and color multiplication		

These components directly reflect the cultural and artistic values governing the society. They are, therefore, important and considered to be a criterion for recognizing the cultural and traditional originality of local and indigenous arts. The study of the rugs included in the statistical population on this research showed that changes have occurred in the visual components of the Tabriz rugs under the influence of various waves of globalization, which can be seen in various forms in the content of the rugs. The display of depth and perspective in the design and motif, the use of colored tonalities instead of using design pattern and scheme to cover the background, the realistic approach to the design and color motifs, the use of eclectic motifs and mostly western and alien pictorial elements, and pictorial knitting are the most important instances and aspects of cultural globalization and influence of foreign cultural principles on the visual content of contemporary rugs of Tabriz (Figs. 1 & 2).

• **Technical Components (Form)**

Throughout history, Iranian rugs have been self-sufficient products. They are knitted by weavers,

using the available indigenous and local materials, with the designs and patterns derived from the dominant culture and geography of the region to meet the needs of the weavers and others. Since the main function of these rugs was as a flooring carpet, the technical components of these rugs, including the type and fineness of materials, the raj-counter, knit type, texture fineness, and the design, should be selected in a way to be appropriate for their function. Over the centuries, these rugs have continued to exist with such a purpose, far from the transformations taking place in the western world of visual arts.

The expansion of media networks and the propagation of the principles and aspects of the culture of the western world have induced value to the aspects of such civilization in the non-western communities. In recent decades, many changes have been made in the technical components of the Tabriz rug according to the taste of their producers. These changes are largely an imitation of the art aspects and common practices in western visual art, and are contrary to the main function of these rugs as flooring carpet. Instances of such an attitude considered in the



Fig. 1. Spiderman Mask Design Knotted in - Tabriz Rug. Source: Author, 2018.

statistical population include: collage in the form of a combination of a rug with leather or pieces of other rugs under the influence of collage style in the west, the unusual dimensions and shapes of rugs, widespread multi-level surface rug knitting, volume knitting in the form of jars, portraits, and spheres, and very high and unnecessary raj-counters (Fig. 3).

Function

Although decoration is one of the most important principles of Iranian arts and is considered as one of the main attributes of arts in Iran, the decoration has always been in service of the function in traditional Iranian art and does not hinder the functional goals of the product. Thus, throughout history, the main purpose of the production of rugs was their use in everyday life, although these flooring rugs were also used as decorations in some social events and festivals. Studies have shown that the production of pictorial and tableau rugs, began in the late Qajar

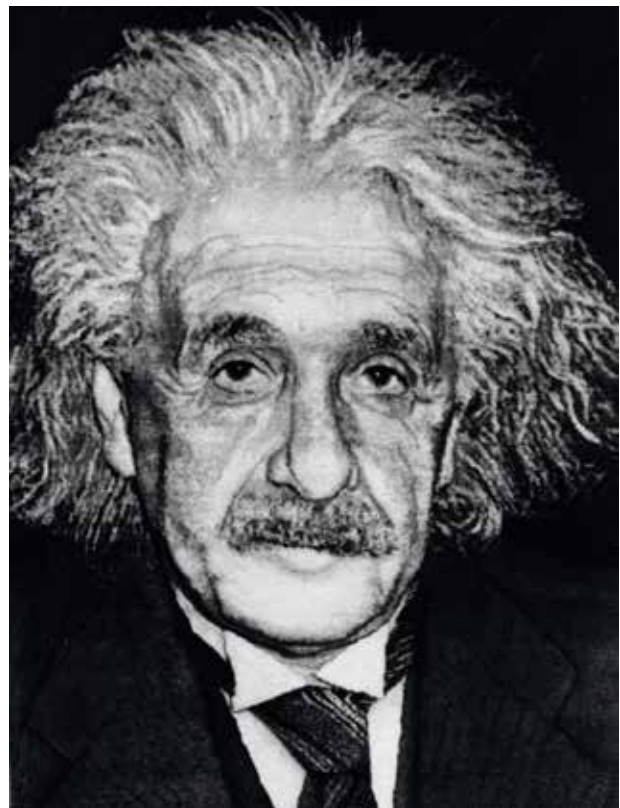


Fig. 2. Albert Einstein's Portrait Knotted in Tabriz Rug. Source: Author, 2018.

period and in a very limited number, consists of a large volume of contemporary Tabriz products. Contrary to the original and flooring function of rugs, they are produced with visual and pleasure function now. Hence, the induction of tableau, decorative and purely visual function for rugs by eliminating their flooring function and induction of the museum function for rugs from the very beginning of the production are examples of changes in the Tabriz rugs under the influence of the western visual culture.

Discussion

To explain the reason for resorting to western content in the design and motifs of Tabriz rugs, field studies and interviews with Tabriz rug producers and designers show that most of these people agree with viewpoint of one of the most prominent rug designers of Tabriz, who believes that “rugs are commercial products and originality and classics are of no use anymore”. They believe that “the demands



Fig. 3. A Part of the Rug Called the Circulation of Creation. Source: Author, 2018.

of the market and the customer are important and we should do in line with the customer's opinion." Such an attitude is a prevailing and growing approach in Tabriz rug design and production system. Hence, according to Spooner (2011), "today, weavers or designers do not pursue the practice of the ancestors regarding the use and repetition of the traditional motifs to be the more similar to the past works and to gain the admiration of others in the same guild; instead, they are trying out practices that please those who make purchases for foreign markets. This change of attitude has made apparent changes in the general qualities of the rug, such as the combination of motifs and the choice of colors" (Spooner, 2011:

218). Hence, the massification of culture in the aftermath of the introduction of media, the dominance of the economic factor in cultural products, and the utilitarian attitude in the form of modern and postmodern marketing concepts (which consider the customer satisfaction as the main prerequisite for the success of a commodity) are some of the tools of globalization which cause changes in the stylistic and identity elements of contemporary Tabriz rug. Nowadays, various other tools also play a role in the determination of the path for the cultural movement of different societies. Among these tools in the realm of rug production industry, one can mention the annual exhibitions around the world and the introduction of works with themes and elements that are alien to the Iranian-Islamic identity, as salient and appreciable works. The authorities holding such events attempt to streamline for popularity and promotion of a particular taste in products through powerful media tools.

In explaining the factors affecting the changes in the style components of Tabriz rugs, the changes in the training of rug designers should not be ignored. The change in the rug designer -training system is an evident consequence of globalization. Giddens, referring to the formulation of structures by human actions, writes: "there is a potential possibility in human actions to change the structures, in addition to the formulations, for example, by disregarding ways of doing things (rules and resources) or reconstructing them differently" (Giddens, 2005: 21). Regarding the unintended consequences of such a change, he writes that:

the consequences of what the agents do – intentionally or unintentionally – are events that would not occur if the agent has had behaved in a different way. The extent and severity of these consequences depend on both the smartness of the agents and the sources of their power (rules and resources); (Ibid: 138-139).

• Tabriz Rug, Training and Globalization

In the social space of the world resulted from the time-space compression, some forces are dominant but not almighty; for that reason, the aspects of local

cultures can have its own place (Hannerz, 1992: 96). In the meantime, Tabriz rug can play a major role in Iran's cultural exchanges due to its Islamic-Iranian identity elements. Increasing cultural exchanges in the current era as compared to the economic exchanges, which is referred to as the culturalization of the economy (Tavasoli, Saghafi, Saei Orsi, Shekarbeygi, Mohaddesi & Madani, 2010: 172), have made it necessary to study scientific strategies for interaction with the culture globalization. The Persian rug is the only globalized Iranian creative industry. The Tabriz rug, as the salient example of the cultural heritage, is naturally "local" due to the presence of moral and material intellectual and emotional aspects of the social groups. In addition, it is "global" due to its high volume of exports and presence in the international arts exhibitions. Moreover, it is essentially an identity-making factor expressing the nature of the community of its producers.

The structures and institutions will not exist without the knowledge-gaining capability of the agents because "knowledge is the fundamental principle of social reproduction" (Pearson, 2005: 146). Hence, the study of the quality of the designer training system and its influence on Tabriz rug designing system is important. From the perspective of sociology, training means to transfer knowledge, skills, and practice of interaction in different situations, in order to familiarize new members with the frameworks of their own society. "Sociologists differ between general training and school education. Training can be defined as a social organization that enables the acquisition of skills and knowledge and development and promotion of personal thought horizons, which can be formed in different domains. Education is always formal, and a certain type of knowledge and skill is delivered through a pre-designed curriculum. Training is the key to understand socialization" (Giddens & Sutton, 2014: 80-81). As a result, with regard to the existence of significant differences in the various training methods of the contemporary training systems, attempts have been made to explore various types of training methods provided

for Tabriz rug designers. To do so, referring to the Tabriz Rug Designers Association, 20 active rug designers of the city were selected; their training methods were explored by conducting an interview. The results showed that their training methods for rug designing, in terms of the frequency, included the master-student (50%), self-study (40%) and academic (10%). Due to the reduction in applicability of the training method of the master-student, which was prevalent in the traditional Iranian art training system, the methods of training, the designers and the agents in production of these rugs underwent many disorders and transformations. As a result, they weakened the forces of consistency linking the past and present authentic practices; and. Accordingly, it led to this resulted the lack of knowledge and access of Tabriz rug designers to the proper agency rules and resources. Tabriz rug designers explained their reasons for using Western and imported patterns in the design and motifs of rugs to be lack of knowledge of and access to traditional and authentic patterns of rug designing; in other words, poor resources. In interviews, they claimed to believe that "the training system should be systematized and organized. Training is needed for all of us, and the master-student method of learning must be revived." Tabriz rug designers acknowledged their need to acquire further skills; this indicates that there are failures and shortcomings in this system and it needs cultural transformation, reconstruction, and renewal through the training and fertilization of the agents involved in this process. The training based on the identity-making components of the local culture and the traditional practices of cultural art creation can benefit from the capabilities of the contemporary world. Proper training along with a futuristic view regarding the global status of culture, which is a historical process inseparable from today's life, is an investment. "If individuals of the society ask for a world in which sustainable development can be achieved in all its aspects, they have to train committed and informed individuals with global insight and understanding" (Keshavarz, 2014: 325).

Conclusion

Studies show that Tabriz rugs owe their major cultural advantages to their design and motifs, and designers of these rugs, as the agents interacting with the phenomenon of cultural globalization in the Tabriz rug production system, are the creators of these design and motifs. Accordingly, the more the designers of Tabriz rugs have access to the treasure of traditional Iranian-Islamic designs and motifs, and the more capable they are of understanding and analyzing surrounding structures, the more they will succeed in interacting with global cultures while protecting the cultural foundations and local traditions. The study of the current system of production and export of Tabriz rugs also shows that, although constraining structures, riding on the waves of modernity and globalization, are putting pressure on Tabriz rug designers and limit their choice domain, rug designers as agents with the ability to think, in the case of having sufficient power, can play a role in choosing from the existing options and in conscious reviewing of the reflection of their actions. Hence, globalization can be considered an opportunity for nations rich in culture.

Finally, in line with the research questions, it can be claimed that the aspects and instances of Tabriz rugs joining the global network of cultural goods trade in the form of globalization phenomena are observable in three domains of a) design and color, b) technical components, and c) functional components and the continuation of such a trend without knowing the nature and consequences of globalization can bring about serious challenges for the Tabriz rug production system as a part of the cultural and identity heritage of Iran. The prevailing domains of such phenomena in the Tabriz rug over the last century have been shaped by some of the specific geographical and political characteristics of this city as well as the evolution of the traditional training system into the school system, and accelerated by the development of extensive communication and trade networks. Preparation for better interaction with the structures of culture globalization in order to protect

the spiritual heritage of Iranian-Islamic culture and art in global interactions can be achieved by training the agents involved in the production of Tabriz rugs, especially designers, and equipping them with the principles and basics of the significant treasures of the traditional motifs of Iranian rugs designing. Reinforcement of identity, cultural and social beliefs and promotion of social prestige of the agents involved in the design and production of Tabriz rugs make them achieve a definite definition of identity based on ethnic and regional ties. Accordingly, they will be able to repeat the cultural links of their art and empower them in interactions with structures such as globalization.

Endnote

1. Due to the limitation of using more visual samples in the body of the article, the researcher can provide the full archive of the samples if required.
2. The identity principles of Iranian rugs include those visual and structural features that make the rug individually distinguishable from other similar examples. Visual features are mainly in line with the principles of traditional Iranian design, such as observance of symmetry, balance, rhythm, balance, etc., and structural features in the use of texture techniques appropriate to the geography of Iran's rug.

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