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Original Research Article

A Study of Dragon Motifs on Golden Tiles Through Symbolism and Historical Background

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Abstract

Problem statement: Tiling as one of the most prominent decorative elements in Islamic-Iranian architecture is seen in many Islamic buildings. Some tile designs, such as the dragon pattern, are seen as one of the recurring patterns in the art of Iran and other nations such as China.

Now the question arises what are the similarities and differences in terms of format and content between the role of the dragon in the tiles of Iranian buildings and the role of the dragon in Chinese art? To answer this question, the tiles of the two buildings of Imamzadeh Ali Ibn Jafar (AS) and Imamzadeh Ismail (AS) in Qom have been examined.

Research objective: For this purpose, the dragon motifs in the ancient cultures of Iran and China were compared; the similarities and differences between the dragon motifs on Ilkhanid tiling in Iran and dragon motifs in Chinese art were studied in terms of form, content, and meaning. Therefore, the authors were able to investigate the hypothesis of research stating that the dragon motif in the Ilkhanid period, unlike previous periods in Iran, has found a positive meaning and has been used for religious purposes in religious buildings and palaces after getting acquainted with Chinese culture and art.

Research method: The research method of this article is descriptive-analytical and library, documentary, and field sources have been used to collect information.

Conclusion: Finally, the hypothesis of this research was approved and it was concluded that despite the negative and evil characteristics of dragon motifs in Iranian literature and art in previous periods, the dragon motifs on the golden tiles of the Ilkhanid period were influenced by Chinese culture and found a positive meaning and a good concept.

Keywords: *Golden Tile, Dragon Motif, Ilkhanid Era, Chinese Art.*

Introduction

The most characteristic decorative element of Iranian Islamic architecture is tiling. Tiling has been used along with murals, plaster, and

brickwork decorations in all Islamic countries. In addition to the decoration of the building, tiling has also strengthened the building surfaces. It has brought various decorative designs and colors for mosques, tombs, schools, palaces, and private mansions. Tiles of the Islamic era are among the

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valuable artistic and cultural works left from the Islamic world. In the absence of written illustrated documents, tiling has recorded a clear picture of how the arts such as painting and calligraphy evolved in terms of applying decorations and colors (Porter, 2002, 5). Decoration is an integral part of Iranian-Islamic architecture and art, and this feature also has been seen in pre-Islamic Iranian architecture for many centuries. Meanwhile, tiling with the long history in Iran plays an important role in this context and can express the taste and the art of the creators. This art has evolved in different Islamic periods. We have seen its use in religious buildings frequently so far. Two samples of Ilkhanid tiles studied in the present research, namely star tile with golden glaze and hexagonal tile with turquoise glaze, that are both related to two shrines in Qom, as well as the golden tile of the Ilkhanid palace in Takht-e Soleiman indicate the importance of the dragon motif in Iranian decorations. The question of this research was “What are the similarities and differences between the dragon motifs in the tiles of Iranian buildings and the dragon motifs in Chinese art in terms of format and content?” It was assumed that influenced by the Chinese culture, the dragon motifs in Iranian art, especially in the two mentioned religious buildings have been formed with a positive concept and meaning.

The approach of this research was to describe, interpret and symbolize the dragon motifs, to find out how and when they have appeared in Iranian visual arts. If we want to interpret motifs and illustrations as manifestations of basic principles, we must consider the artworks not only in their narrated style and content but also with indescribable unprovable forces that formed the special existence of the works like psychological, social, cultural, political, spiritual and philosophical forces. These forces can be unknown to the artists themselves and can even be significantly different from what they intend to express (Keshmirshakan, 2017, 119). In fact, a motif can be repeatedly used in different art eras while its symbolic meaning and concept have been changed

considerably. A lot of motifs and symbols of ancient Iran which have stood the test of time during the Islamic era and survived up to now, are considered as merely decorative motifs (Javadi, 2020).

Referring briefly to iconography, the present study dealt with the roots and role of the dragon motifs in the two cultures of Iran and China. Eventually, it was concluded that the dragon motifs in the religious buildings of Imamzadeh Ali Ibn Ja'far (PBUH) and Imamzadeh Ismail (PBUH) as well as the Ilkhanid palace of Takht-e-Soleiman was contrary to the evil and negative characteristics of the dragon in Iran and being influenced by Chinese culture, it has found a positive good indication.

This descriptive-analytical research was carried out by applying bibliographic methods together with the field research methods. Since each work of art is a collection of signs that goes beyond the artist's thinking and is considered in a range of beliefs and culture of society, the main purpose of this method was to explain and define the distinction between theme and meaning and secondly between the form and content of the artwork. Therefore, during the three stages of pre-iconographic, iconographic and iconographic-descriptive, a step-by-step approach was designed to identify the three primary, secondary and content layers of artwork and then to receive hidden messages beyond the tangible elements of the artwork, researchers analyzed and discovered the unknown hidden elements such as beliefs, convictions, and worldviews in the visual elements of the artworks (Kangrani, 2012, 23). Iconographic and iconographic-descriptive interpretations both provide the researcher with the symbols needed for decoding. The samples studied in this research are golden and turquoise tiles with the motifs of a dragon, belonging to the palace of Takht-e Soleiman and the Imamzadeh Ali Ibn Ja'far (PBUH) and Imamzadeh Ismail (PBUH) shrines in the city of Qom from the Ilkhanid period. These tiles are being kept in the Astane Hazrate Masoumeh (PBUH) Museum together with ten other similar golden tiles.

Literature review

Numerous articles and books have been written

about the dragon, its meaning, and its application in Islamic art and handicrafts. But all these texts have dealt with the dragon based on its negative function. For example, Abbas Daneshvari (2011), in his book "Snake and Dragon", refers to the dual concept of the dragon in Islamic art. He believes that the dragon in Islamic art has two opposite poles or two forces. Rastegar Fasaei (2000) in his book entitled "Dragon in Iranian Mythology" has referred to the appearance of dragon based on some poems and texts. Dr. Fereydoun Joneidi (2020), Shahnameh scholar and linguist, in his book entitled The Story of Iran from Beginning to the Death of Damavand based on Iranian Discourses, based on Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, considers the dragon a symbol of a volcano and as a result a symbol of destruction and evil forces.

Presenting a classification of dragon form, Taheri (2009) in an article entitled "Evolution and Classification of Dragons in Iranian Painting" believes that dragons in Iranian painting are more influenced by their Chinese counterpart, however, there are examples of dragons influenced by western dragons. Fakhri Daneshpourparvar, in an article entitled "The dragon Motif in the Art of Painting, Pottery, and Architecture", has identified this motif in Iranian architecture and has sought traces of this motif in Chinese art. Regarding the golden tiles in Qom, a book called "Qom Guide" was published by the Astane Qom Office Publication in 1938, in which the tiles are briefly mentioned with a picture of them without any study or interpretation. Kalbadinejad (2013) introduced these tiles and inscriptions and also has analyzed and interpretative them.

The present study seeks to find out how the dragon entered the Iranian visual arts with its positive meaning in contrast to the previous era and also to symbolize this element.

Dragon theme as an icon

In the first stage of iconography and in order to analyze the dragon motifs, it is necessary to explain its physical features in the simplest form through the

pre-iconographic description. This motif is engraved on a star tile with golden glaze¹ and belongs to the collection of tiles used in the body of Imamzadeh Ali Ibn Ja'far (PBUH) in Qom². The tile was located on the plinth of the building, which is now kept in the Astane Hazrate Masoumeh (PBUH) Museum along with other obtained tiles related to this collection. The dimensions of the sides of this tile are 23 cm. The main motif of the work which has been golden glazed is surrounded by a glaze in azure and turquoise. Several white spots have covered the body of the dragon as fish scales.

• **Historical Study:** This tile is collected from the plinth tiles of the tomb of Imamzadeh Ali Ibn Ja'far (PBUH) in the 14th century. The tiles of this building were probably made by the Abi Taher family³. The date 1337 is engraved on the other tiles of this collection, indicating the fact that they belong to the 14th century and Ilkhanid period (Fig. 1). On this tile, there is a dragon figure with the body covered with white scales. The dragon's mouth is open and flames come out of his mouth, which shows him in a state of rage. Fereydoun Joneidi believes the dragon was a symbol of the molten magma from terrible deadly volcanos located in Alborz Mountain that fell from the summit of the volcano and destroyed everything in its path.

His legs resemble the legs of an eagle, and the artist's drawing of the body spirals shows it is to fly and move forward. The background of the work is inspired by the Chinese style and is decorated with small clouds, and the motifs are surrounded by azure and turquoise colors and small dots.

There is a verse attributed to Ferdowsi in Shahnameh that:

It is better for the woman and the dragon both to be in the grave and the earth be clean from both of these dirty creatures.

Joneidi believes that this verse is not from Ferdowsi and according to the great position of women in Shahnameh and the brave and pure women who exist in this book, this verse has been wrongly attributed to Ferdowsi. But even if it is from Ferdowsi, it is

a reference to Soodabeh and her sedition against Siavash. It should be noted that the dragon motifs in the art of ancient Iran and the works of the Sassanid period are creatures combined with the head of a lion, horse or other animal, claws and wings of an eagle, and feathers of a peacock tail; the creature is referred to as Simorgh or dragon. But what is mentioned in Iranian poetry and literature about the evil of the dragon is in the form of words. The dragon motifs were not in the form of snakes or lizards in the visual arts until the 14th and 15th centuries AD in the Islamic era. Obviously, this element, like some other motifs such as Simorgh, Chinese clouds, and miniature rocks, is inspired by Chinese art that shows the influence of Chinese painting on Iranian painting in some elements (Javadi, 2020).

• **Attribution of the Artwork:** Some golden tiles decorated with flowers and plants have been found which belong to a large set of tiles with brown and blue mixed designs that one of them is the studied star tile (Fig. 1). Based on the signatures, this is believed that they are from Rabi al-Awal 1337 and belong to Kashan city and the Workshop of Seyyed Roknuddin Mohammad Ibn Seyyed Zainuddin Ali Ghazaeri (the potter). Another tile is also found with the signature of Master Jamal Naghash (decorator), which probably indicates that the painter of these tiles is also Jamaluddine Naghash, who is one of the prominent painters of golden glazed tiles in Kashan style (Pope & Ackerman, 2008, 1809).



Fig. 1. A star tile with the dragon motif belonging to Imamzadeh Ali Ibn Ja'far (PBUH). Source: Authors Archive.

Another tile with the same motif from the Ilkhanid period and in another shrine in Qom is now on the Astane of Qom. The tile is in a hexagonal shape and decorated with a turquoise glaze and is to be introduced below due to having a similar motif.

This tile with turquoise monochrome glaze has been used to decorate the wall in the building of Imamzadeh Ismail (PBUH)⁴ in Bidqan village of Qom (Fig. 2). It is also necessary to explain that the tile discussed in the research along with 9 other tiles were transferred to the Museum of Astane Hazrate Masoumeh (PBUH) during the reconstruction, and are currently kept there. This tile is in the form of a hexagon and its sides are 25 by 20 cm. The tile has been glazed by applying the uniform turquoise glaze technique and the motif is embossed on the tile. This tile does not have a signature or date. The number 1262, however, is evident on another star tile obtained from this building, but due to the difference in techniques, it is not possible to determine the exact date of this tile. Since this shrine was built in the 13th and 14th centuries in Qom and the decorations were added to it in the same centuries, it can be said that it belongs to the Ilkhanid period.

Takht-e Soleiman is located in the northeast of Takap section of Miandoab city, which was chosen as a summer palace during the reign of the second Mongol Ilkhan and the nephew of Holakukhan, meaning Aba Qakhan (1264-1281). Samples of the building's decorative tiles are now housed in various



Fig. 2. A turquoise tile with the motif of a dragon belonging to Imamzadeh Ismail (PBUH) in Bidqan village of Qom. Source: Authors Archive.

museums and collections, including the Nasser Khalili Collection, the David Denmark Collection (Fig. 3), the Victoria and Albert London Collection (Fig. 4), and the Berlin Museum of Islamic Arts. In all of these tiles, the motif of a dragon is illustrated with a long body and in the shape of a snake with four legs, each with four claws with a head that is turned back and fire comes out of its mouth and dense hair has grown from the dragon's head. In all of these samples, the dragon is surrounded by floral and plant ornaments and there are cloud-shaped motifs in the background. Other examples of these tiles with the motifs of the dragon have been obtained from the Takht-e Soleiman, which are made in the form of a mold and in which wings are



Fig. 3. The Golden Tile of the David Denmark Collection.
Source: Hosseini, 2011, 62.



Fig. 4. The Golden Tile of the Victoria and Albert Museum.
Source: [www. http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O67412/frieze-tile-unknown/](http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O67412/frieze-tile-unknown/)

in the same color. These tiles have different shapes compared to golden glazed tiles; they are often in the form of octagons or squares. A piece of octagonal tile with a dragon ornament and uniform turquoise glaze is housed in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in which the dragon is designed in a curved shape due to space constraints. An example of a square rectangular tile with a uniform green glaze and the motif of a dragon is also kept in the National Museum. The interesting point is the continued use of the motif of the Persian dragon alongside the Mongols; the artistic characteristics are very similar in both (Hosseini, 2011, 53-54).

• The origin of dragon motifs in Iran

In Persian culture, the dragon has long been considered a demonic force. Heroes who believe in God have considered the dragon as an obstacle to divine thoughts and always seek help from Gods to defeat the dragon (Koyaji, 1999, 131). It is the largest harmful demonic creature in myths and epics around the world. In Persian narrations, it is described as a smokey poisonous creature with a body like a mountain, a mouth full of blood, a huge black tongue, a knotted tail, long hair, and eyes full of blood (Ferdowsi, 2002, 232-233). Dragon in myth, folkloric and heroic narrations is sometimes a water barrier. It causes drought and famine but a hero, Izad Yar Pahlavan, destroys the dragon and releases the waters, and the rivers begin to flow again (Sarkarati, 1992, 238-240). This description is in harmony with Dr. Joneidi's interpretation of the dragon as a symbol of the deadly volcano. In the morphology of the dragon, the form of the dragon face has appeared many times throughout the history of Iranian art in various forms and with cryptic themes. Simorgh or Sassanid dragon is a mixed animal and a good and useful animal whose motifs are placed on so many dishes, objects, and fabrics of this period. Khosro Parviz's summer clothing is decorated with a dragon. There are various images of this mythical creature, including a snake-like image or a combination of complex creatures. The dragon is an amazing animal that is both a reptile and a bird.

This creature has no eyelids, it has two wings and fire flames come out of its mouth. It has claws like a lion's, a horn-like deer's, eyes like a shrimp's, skin like a fish's, a head like a camel's, a jaw like a bat's, and teeth like crocodile's (Rastegar Fasaei, 2000, 34). The word dragon in Avesta is written as "Axhi Dahak" which is a demonic creature with a negative character (Purdavood, 1968, 188) and the dragon in Iran is a symbol of a deadly devil (Koyaji, 1999, 254).

• Dragon motifs in China

In China, the dragon is spiritual power and ancient symbol of Eastern mythology and a critical part of art subjects. Ancient Chinese people worship dragons in different methods; the dragon is a supreme creature and protector of the water god. It is a symbolic element and the most important indicator of creation and life and the secret of all things that exist. Dragon is the origin and the womb of all possibilities of existence, it is also the symbol of the very first Friday. In China, the dragon is a symbol of the blessing of power and happiness, so that only emperors have the right to use the dragon design (Fitzgerald, 2005, 266). The dragon in China is the first benevolent animal among the four sacred animals meaning the dragon, the phoenix, the unicorn, and the tortoise. The Chinese dragon brings wealth, happiness, and rain. It is a symbol of strength, courage, and heroism. It has originality and priority and people pray for rain to the dragon in the temples (Warner, 2005, 301-302). In general, the dragon is a symbol of the sky, life, sunrise, rain, and spring sun (Radfar, 2012, 34).

The Chinese dragon, according to Chinese folklore, hides in inaccessible waters or deep seas, waiting for the day when it will connect the earth and the water and will clear the weather and cause spring and blossom of life. Because the dragon in the Orient is the symbol of good power; the essence of change is the very life. In the spring equinox, it ascends to the sky and in the autumn equinox, it descends to the depths of the sea. Its blood is black and yellow, the main colors of heaven and earth. The dragon is the

symbol of vigilance and security, it is the protector of the treasures of the gods and the executor of their ideas; is nothing but the spirit of order and creation in the universe. In the second century BC, during the Han Dynasty, the dragon was the symbol of the absolute power of the empire and the sign of the emperor who had a dragon pearl in his throat, which means that he has reached perfection in speaking and thinking. The dragon is called "Long" in China and has ancient ancestors, which is why it is found in islands, forests, mountains, caves, and meadows. The dragon has a positive image in China and is the emperor himself and has the role of a protector, guide, and guardian of goodness, blessing, happiness, and success. In the morphology of the dragon, the characteristics and appearance of the dragon in ancient texts are described as follows; a creature composed of snake, fish, crocodile, pig, horse, and cow, with a snake-like neck, deer-like horns, fish-like scales, cow-like mouth, and a dog-like nose. The dragon has no wings in China, but it can fly and appear with smoke, fog, clouds, and lightning, bringing with it rain. The Chinese dragon has several horns and is a peaceful creature. This creature has claws of birds of prey, especially eagles (Taheri, 2009, 15). The dragon in China is a symbol of empire, fertility, and masculine energy. It symbolizes clouds, earth, intelligence, power, supremacy, water, blessing, happiness, courage, heroism, originality, and divinity. The embossed engravements of the dragon in the Mongol period with Chinese and Buddhist meanings have had the greatest impact on Iranian motifs (Chevalier, 2009, 125).

• Dragon motifs during the Mongol empire

During the Islamic era and with the government of the Mongols, the connection with Chinese art expanded in Iran and due to the familiarity of Iranians with Chinese art, artistic methods and styles entered Iranian art during the Song and Yuan periods and its effects remained in Iranian art for a long time. Chinese artists worked along with other artists in the illustration workshops of the Ilkhanid period, and

the Chinese style in the book Demotte Shahnameh confirms this claim. The dragon motifs used in this period have two eagle wings with the claws of a lion and the tail of a huge snake, which is depicted as a flying piece of cloud. Its body is covered with scales and has two horns above its head. The Persian dragon has no wings or mane, has a long claw and a snake-like body with the characteristics of an Asian dragon. Besides, it resembles a European mythical dragon since fire flames come out of its mouth. In other words, the Persian dragon has the appearance of an Asian dragon and the characteristics of a western dragon, and at the same time in some cases, it is different from both. The dragon presented in Chinese and Japanese art is very diverse and is different from Iranian dragons, especially in terms of the number of fingers and the method of drawing. In general, the characteristics of the Persian dragon and its differences from the Chinese and Japanese dragons can be summarized in the following cases: The Persian dragon often has an appendage on its hind leg, while other dragons do not have this organ. It has a branch in the middle of the forehead that is usually divided into two parts, but in case this branch is present in Chinese and Japanese dragons, it is in a pair. A branch on each side of the head has no special meaning, while the Chinese dragon has a hair-like tail resembling a cow's tail and is said to distinguish males from females. Persian dragon is blowing fire, but the Chinese dragon rarely blows fire or steam. Persian version does not like to fly in the sky or swim in the water, so it is often depicted without wings, while swimming and flying is a key feature of Chinese and Japanese dragons (Abdullah & Shayestehfar, 2013, 78). These features also express the interpretation of volcanoes and dragons. When it comes to the visual arts, the dragon appears as a creature that is created by the combination of Iranian and Chinese beliefs.

• The colorology of the tiles

The colors used in these tiles are brown, white, blue, and azure. Technically, blue and azure are cold colors and brown is warm, but white is a neutral

color that makes everything on it shine. Using a cold color and its complementary warm color together creates a balanced atmosphere for the viewer. In defining the meanings of colors, white evokes the concept of holiness and purity and also expresses hidden meanings and themes. White is used in the scales of the dragon's body in the golden tiles. The designs are painted in brown; brown has a material nature, mass, and reality, and is in fact the color of earth. Blue is the most complex and mysterious color and is the sacred color of the sky; blue and its derivatives such as azure and turquoise, carry supernatural power. Blue is generally the color of belief and the color of religion and has been used in surrounding lines of the motifs and also in the background color (Kalbadinejad, 2015, 49). In general, both gold-colored glaze with gold glitter and turquoise-colored glaze with blue glitter refer to the transcendent meaning and derived from the ancient Iranian culture. The golden glaze is obtained from metal oxides that have golden-yellow and reddish-copper colors. Golden and silver dishes with dazzling beauty and splendor replaced the pre-Islamic cups and dishes in the Islamic era, however, there is a narration saying that drinking from golden dishes was prohibited during the second to the 14th century.

• Iconic interpretation

Iconology is not only a method of creating artworks but also is considered as a method of studying and analyzing the artworks. As a result, researchers and art critics have been able to use this method to provide a better understanding of the artworks. For iconic interpretation, to find the meaning of an artwork, it is necessary to separate the data we have talked about so far, put them together, and provide a correct interpretation of them (Panofsky, 1995, 38). Furthermore, it is necessary to pay attention to the political and social conditions of that time, which were strongly influenced by the Mongol invasion. The increasing influence of Chinese art in Iranian artworks is also another remarkable fact. The important question we face at this stage is why the

artists in that period chose this Chinese theme? In Table 1, a comparative study of the issues related to dragons in the two civilizations of Iran and China can be evaluated. Separated in two columns, the iconological study of this symbol is presented briefly for better comparison (Tables 1&2).

By studying the characteristics, roots, and concepts of the dragon motifs in the two civilizations of Iran and China, it can be easily understood that before the Mongol conquest, the dragon motif in Iranian artworks including literature, architectural decorations, etc was always under the influence of Islamic traditions and Iranian myths and legends and as a result had a negative meaning. In fact, the dragon motifs were never considered with their positive features before the Ilkhanid era. But it seems that before the Islamic period and in Sassanid art, the dragon was a good and positive creature, which should be examined in other articles. In China, the presence of dragons in temples, and architectural decorations such as around columns and capitals have various meanings that all have a positive role for the dragon, such as a symbol of goodness and blessing, a sign of rain and fertility, a guardian of the temple as a sacred place, an element for preventing possible fires, an element to ward off evil spirits from the temple, and a symbol of the Chinese Yang and Buddha’s steed (Daneshpourparvar, 1997, 674). In examining the colors used in the tiles, it should be said that blue, as a sacred and heavenly color, contains supernatural forces and is attributed to the god of the sky, and is considered the color of religion. Decorating the tile with turquoise glaze confirms the positive functions of this color. The

golden glow in the star tile can be attributed to the celestial and divine light of the sun.

According to the authors of this article, the dragon motifs in the mentioned buildings, especially two Imamzadehs, holy places, and other tiles in the Astane Hazrate Masoumeh (PBUH) museum, refers to the positive meaning of the dragon and the shape and form of this creature is influenced by Chinese art and culture. The important point is portraying this animal considering its positive features.







Conclusion

Iconography is defined as a branch of cultural history that includes the historical, social, and cultural backgrounds of the motifs used in visual arts. Iconographic researches discuss how social and historical developments are reflected in the visual arts; these studies deal with the artworks as documents or certificates, so scientific, social, religious, literary, and philosophical developments are also considered important for iconic interpretations. Due to this issue, the history of culture and the history of art are related to each other in iconographic studies. Based on the concepts in the field of iconology, the roots of the dragon in the two civilizations of Iran and China were examined and compared in order to evaluate and study the remained tiles of the Ilkhanid palace in the Takht-e Soleiman and the tombs of Imamzadeh Ali Ibn Ja’far (PBUH) and Imamzadeh Ismail (PBUH) located in Takap and village of Bidqan in Qom respectively. Based on the tables and what previously was said in the present text, it could be pointed out that the most important difference between Iranian and Chinese

Table 1. A Comparative Study of Iranian and Chinese dragon. Source: Authors.

| Dragon in Iran | Dragon in China |
|--|--|
| It is considered a demonic force and is the most famous demonic creature in the classification of mythical animals. | The dragon is a symbol of spiritual power and is the first benevolent animal among the four sacred animals of China. |
| It is a water abductor. It causes drought, and the heroes overcome the drought by destroying the dragon. | It is the patron and the god of water. He brings with him wealth and rain, and people in the temples pray to the dragon for rain. |
| It is a demonic creature and the symbol of the devil and death. | It is a heavenly symbol of life and revelation. |
| The Persian dragon has a horn in the middle of its forehead. It blows fire. It is a creature that likes to be on earth and has no desire to fly or swim. | The Chinese dragon has two horns on both sides of its head. It rarely blows steam or fire. Swimming or flying is a key feature of the Chinese dragon. |

Table 2. A Comparative Study of a Chinese dragon with the dragons on the studied tiles. Source: Authors.

| | Chinese Dragon Samples | Dragon on the Studied Tiles |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Type and shape of heads |  |  |
| Type and shape of claws |  |  |
| Type and material of skin |  |  |

dragons was the good aspects in the Chinese example and the evil aspects in the Iranian examples. Apart from the dragon in Sassanid art which seems to be a good creature, the dragon motifs in the pre-Mongol Iranian culture were always negative and demonic and were not considered as blessed auspicious elements. While in Chinese culture, the dragon is a symbol of happiness, positivity, and heaven, and is always accompanied by good and fertile rain and blessings. Based on the studied samples of tiles and studies on Ilkhanid art, it is clear that the dragon motifs used in the buildings had a function indicating good concepts derived from Chinese culture, and the influence of Ilkhanid art that came from the Far East to Iran can be seen clearly. Although there is a far distance between Iran and China and the two lands are not adjacent to each other, the goods came from China to Iran through the Silk Road and a branch of it (Spice Road) had packages decorated with dragon motifs and other Chinese elements (Javadi, 2008). The cultural sphere of the Iranian world has always been in contact with other cultures and has been influenced by them and influenced them as well. These influences have been maximized with the Mongol invasion and the conquest of the Ilkhans. In conclusion, we can mention the key

point that the use of the dragon motifs in these buildings was based on the Chinese dragon with the same physical characteristics and same positive meaning; since the Mongol Turkic race has been ruling in Iran for centuries and the artworks were commissioned by Turkish sultans during this period, their racial and sometimes cultural elements were left in Iranian art, including Fig.s of the Mongol-Turkish race in paintings and elements such as Phonix, dragons, Chinese clouds and rocks. It was influenced by the taste and desire of the supporters of art in that period, namely the Mongol sultans.

Endnotes

1. Zarrin Pham (golden-glazed) is a method of decorating and making pottery. First, the dish is heated and glazed in a conventional method, then the design is painted on the cooled glaze with a combination of sulfur, silver oxide and copper oxide plus yellow or red ochre flowers. The dish is then dipped in vinegar. After that, the dish is heated for the second time at a lower temperature with a carbon monoxide atmosphere, wet fuel, and limited tanks. Finally, the ochre flower is slowly removed from the surface of the cooled dish and the design on the glaze remains fixed with a metallic sheen (Wilson, 2004, 12).
2. Imamzadeh Ali Ibn Ja'far (PBUH) is a descendant of Imam Ja'far Sadegh (PBUH) and one of the Imamzadehs buried in Qom. Other tombs are also attributed to him. Ali Ibn Ja'far was a scholar and pious man. He lived during the time of the four Imams. He also has written a book and is buried in Qom (Yasemi, 1938, 19).
3. The Abi Taher family was engaged in the production of these tiles in Kashan, which were sent to other places after the construction (Pope & Ackerman, 2008, 1802). In Takht-e Soleiman Takap, there is a kiln for baking these tiles. Samples of these golden-glazed tiles are kept in Takht-e Soleiman Museum and the Islamic Museum of Iran today, which are with the motifs of Phonix

and golden dragon on an azure background. These tiles are different from other golden tiles in terms of dimensions and design.

4. Imamzadeh Ismail Ibn Musa (PBUH), is a noble and high-ranking Shiite scholar and jurist. He is one of the companions of Imam Reza (PBUH) and Imam Javad (PBUH) and has been in charge of the endowments of his father Imam Musa Kazem (PBUH) (Wiki Fiqh).

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