Original Research Article

Essentialist Approaches to National Designs Through the Lens of Herder's Theory of National Personality*

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Abstract

Problem statement: The national approach to design history has been popular on the one hand and has faced challenges on the other hand. This dual aspect has also intensified in the context of globalization. On the one hand, the dominant functionalist view considers the identity of objects to be limited to their practical purposes; On the other hand, modern design historians with a postcolonial approach consider the design of objects to be inspired by different climatic, social, and cultural conditions. So how can product design as part of a nation's material culture reflect national or regional identifying meanings? How does product design convey a particular national character to its audience?

Research objective: The purpose of this study is to explain the position of the essentialism approach to national design in the historiography of world design, and identify the approaches, tools, and methods adopted to form a design with national identity based on the identification of national personality in it.

Research method: In response to the above questions, the present study has examined the macro-nativist methods of national design with a qualitative approach and a descriptive-analytical method based on identifying the concept of national personality in the design.

Conclusion: In this study, by examining the valid documents of the history of national design, five general effective methods for establishing national personality in product design were identified: a) extraction of aesthetic characteristics in accordance with national characteristics, b) a specific functional feature of the product derived from national characteristics, c) designing products based on the lifestyle of the citizens of a country as a national brand, d) marking the product using local materials and a special manufacturing method, and e) the national design thinking method that is rooted in different worldviews. In all the above methods, achieving essential identity and creating a national personality in design has been done by relying on two factors: "Exclusive element or phenomenon" of design and "historical continuity or multiplicity" of that element.

Keywords: *Essentialism, National Design, National Identity, National Personality, Postcolonial Studies, Von Herder.*

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Introduction

The approach to the history of national design has been popular on the one hand and has faced challenges on the other hand. The challenge of the identity or anonymity of product design has been raised in European design-related scientific societies since the middle of the twentieth century, and thinkers in this field have been divided into two groups: those who believe in timeless and placeless design and designers who believe in specific, cultural and ethnic characteristics. These issues have manifested themselves in different periods through different forms. Industrial design was formed from the beginning of the twentieth century and with the consolidation of modernist teachings of leading design schools, such as Bauhaus and Ulm, emerged as industrial art, which is "art used to shape the structure of mass production products" (Pakbaz, 2010, 348- 349). It is an attitude that does not limit the products to their function and makes them suitable for all times and all users worldwide (Gosili, 2008, 54 & 70). Such a view has been really challenged since the turn of the century, with the growth of emerging markets and emerging economies, as well as the contribution of developing countries to the core body of the design.

Indeed, the expansion of postcolonial issues into the field of design studies has also been effective in the growth of alternative historiographies of global and modern design. An approach that has helped theorists of nation design to refer to hidden indigenous achievements and neglected design values in their indigenous products. Thus, with the resurgence of nationalism in the second decade of the 21st century, the inference of national identity in the design of functional products has also become an interesting topic in industrial design studies. It must be acknowledged that geographical boundaries are still the most valid mechanism for separating nations, and according to Lees-Maffei and Fallan, this also justifies classifying design based on nations

(Lees-Maffei & Fallan, 2013, 2; Woodham, 2005, 257-267). This study seeks to answer the question of how and in what ways the national character has emerged in the design of nations as the oldest essentialist manifestation of national identity? The theory of national personality is at the heart of the Primordialism paradigm, is the driving force of the national identity approach, and has been cited and referred to by thinkers in this field in different periods of history after the enlightenment.

Literature Review

The dilemma of the universality of design or its nationality goes back to the discussions of design thinkers in the mid-1980s. Professor Prown believed that, in addition to works of art, man-made objects, consciously or unconsciously, reflect the beliefs of the larger community to which they belong (Prown, 1982, 1-2). Since then, research in the design of peripheral countries has been emphasized by leading industrial design theorists (Bonsiepe, 2010; Buchanan, Doordan, & Margolin, 1995; Walker & Attfeild, 1989; Woodham, 1995). The history of the design of nations over the last 20 years has found a special place in European scientific societies and then on other continents. In this regard, Anna Calvera (2005) in her article "Local, Regional, National, Global, and Feedback: Several Issues to Be Faced with Constructing Regional Narratives" emphasizes the need to study the production methods and technology of different nations and considers the manner of dealing with global and neighboring countries' design trends as one of the important factors in forming the identity of design of nations. At the same time, no attention has been paid to the formulation of essentialist identity approaches in design. In his doctoral dissertation on formulating the Norwegian national design Kjetil Fallan (2007), considers it necessary to utilize and produce designed works and propaganda works simultaneously, and also the

media should express the national design features to explain the specifics of that design (Fallan, 2007). Based on postcolonial studies, Lees-Maffei and Fallan present in their book "DESIGNING WORLDS: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization " a wide range of design historiography approaches and methods which cover national and regional levels in different continents. This diversity, however, reveals the lack of a coherent and systematic theoretical framework in the study of national design (Fallan & Lees-Maffei, 2016a). Javier Gimeno-Martínez (2016), in his famous book "Design and National Identity", has established the connection between valid and widely used theories of nationalism and design and has developed the theoretical issues of national identity to industrial design. In his work, Gimeno-Martinez introduces three approaches: essentialism, constructivism, and bottom-up, and mentions their effects on the design of products and works of art. However, the lack of studies on examining, introducing, and explaining specific and exemplary methods for the above approaches is felt. Yet, identifying and developing methods and tricks for creating identity in national design with an essentialist approach, as a widely used and consistent method in the design of nations seems necessary.

Research Methodology

In this qualitative research, to identify the essentialist approaches to the formulation of national design, the descriptive-analytical research method is used. The data were collected from documentary sources, and non-textual documents were selected from library and internet sources in accordance with those sources and inferential concepts to display the meanings of textual documents. For this purpose, this study descriptively examines the concepts of national design and the approach of essentialism in identity, and then inductively explains the different methods of national design in different societies.

Data analysis was performed qualitatively through content analysis. Textual documents were selected through purposive sampling from scientific texts with the topics of "national design of countries" and "relationship between the design of countries and their national identity".

Theoretical Foundations
• Definitions
- Identity
In the Moin Persian dictionary, the word "identity" literally means "existence, being and nature, and what causes the identification of a person" (Moein, 2002, 5228). Allameh Dehkhoda has also used the word "hu1" in expressing the root of the word "identity" (Dehkhoda, 1998, 23596). In English, the word "identity" means "sameness". In scientific terms, it also means "ontology" or "epistemology" and first started with the topics of psychology and has expanded to other scientific disciplines (Mirmohammadi, 2004, 6-7). The definition of identity is "a set of characteristics that in the simplest definitions, shows the physical and mental characteristics of individuals". As a result, they include both their physical characteristics and their way of thinking (Shabani, 2015, 23). According to different definitions, the identity of human and non-human phenomena can be recognized and distinguished. Similarities and distinctions are two basic factors and at the same time construct the identities of each phenomenon (Meskub, 2019, 24-25; Afroogh, 2020, 28-30; Tajik, 2005, 11-12). In conclusion, we can say that identity is the result of the harmonious function of similarity and distinction. In addition to human beings, it also includes objects and, despite the historical continuity of identity, is always subject to redefinition and reproduction.

- National identity
According to the classification of sociologists and social psychologists, the three layers of individual identity, collective identity, and national identity can be distinguished. Every

phenomenon, including human beings and objects, has unique characteristics that are referred to as "individual identity" (Akbari, 2014, 323). In general, the individual characteristics of each phenomenon are divided into two groups: basic (immutable) and secondary types (variable). If the basic characteristics change, the identity of the phenomenon will also change. Of course, identity has different levels and is formed in a social context. Phenomena are grouped together according to common characteristics and are distinguished from other groups, thus transforming the "I" into the "we" (Herriot, 2007, 28; Goudarzi, 2005, 7-8; Haghir & Kamelnia, 2018, 44).

If the "we" transcends the individual units and becomes "common" and brings people together in a geographical area, a "national identity" is formed. Today, national identity is the most pervasive and legitimate level of identity in social systems and international forums. National identity is the product of the inherently cultural phenomena of nationhood and nationalism and has been consolidated with a political function in modern Europe and has spread to the east since the nineteenth century (Hajiani, 2000, 197; Gimeno-Martinez, 2016, 10).

National identity is multidimensional and consists of various elements that infer various categories of nationalism (Belbasi & Bagheri, 2020, 192). Due to the appropriate social conditions, each of these elements appears more strongly than the others and plays a more prominent role in creating the identity of the society they belong to.

- National design

With the beginning of the 21st century, there has been an attitude change in design historiography that has been promoted by reputable design theorists for the development of industrial design (Buchanan et al., 1995; Walker & Attfeild, 1989). The history of design with its new function goes beyond the introduction of designs, designers, and technological events and begins the narrative of the product itself, its design, and the meanings that are inferred from it. As a result, it analyzes the objective political and economic conditions of the producing and consuming society of the product. Furthermore, as the humanities gained a greater influence in industrial design, its macro and dominant western-oriented narratives were shaken (Fallan, 2011; Hauffe, 2007, 19-21). Therefore, the study of innovative achievements and aesthetic values of nations, that are different and often overlooked behind the mainstream of global design, has become an attractive topic for design researchers. Thus, in close connection with material culture, the socio-cultural values and the historical and product design background of countries can be classified into the forms of indigenous, local, and national design, which are inspiring. The economic benefits of national design in regional markets must be added to these arguments, as well as the validity of geographical boundaries in international relations. Nationalist design historians refer to a design as the region or nation that designed, produced, mediated, or consumed it (Balcioğlu & Emgin, 2014, 104; Fallan & Lees-Maffei, 2016b; Lees-Maffei & Fallan, 2013, 5; Woodham, 2005). If one of these factors is preferable to the others, it is possible to assign a design to a specific country. As a result, the product design classification is manifested in the form of different nationalities.

- Theoretical foundations of national identity

In general, the term "identity" finds a conceptual and semantic framework in various schools of thought and theoretical models. Accordingly, three general theoretical approaches to essentialism, constructivism, and discourse can be identified for the concept of national identity. In a recent study, Umut Özkirimli, a prominent theorist of globalization, used another paradigm in three categories: Primordialism, Modernism, and Ethno-symbolism, in the classification of national identity (Özkirimli, 2017, 60-61). The same classification can be found in Anthony D. Smith's studies. Yet, Smith also added the two paradigms

of perennialism and postmodernism to the above (Smith, 2015, 425-427). If identity is rooted in the inner core of nations for essentialists, identity for modernists and postmodernists is the result of a gradual construction in the interaction of the individual and society. Whereas, in the discourse approach, identity is like wax, formable in the hands of the dominant power and knowledge; therefore, it is changeable and suspended. Primordialists, on the other hand, derive identity from fundamental social and cultural characteristics such as religion, language, land, and kinship. Ethno-symbolism pursues the reflection of ancient symbolic heritage and myths in modern identity, and postmodern analysis also considers the multiplicity of identity and fragmentation in contemporary times (Smith, 2015, 422-426; Akbari, 2014, 318–321). Due to the older background of essentialist theories in national identity, and also the citation of designers in the real world, and the reference of design historians to it in the path of identity production in product design in different periods, this study attends to the methods and tools of implementing identity in the product design of nations and their differentiation.

- National identity in design; Essentialism in identity from Herder's view

National personality, or national temperament, was a central idea in the essentialist theory of Johann Gottfried von Herder, the nineteenth-century romantic philosopher, and father of nationalism. Relying on the historical continuity of nations and peoples, Herder established the concept of ethnic spirit, national spirit, or the same national character and made it the axis for the establishment of national identity (Berlin, 2019, 222-223). The national spirit, or national temperament, is "an integrated set of national resources, national traditions, and national aspirations that, because of their special importance in the lives of nations, shape the image of any nation both in the minds of its people and in the minds of other nations." (Akbari, 2014, 319). In the Age of Enlightenment,

the era of European arrogance, Herder believed that every nation had happiness at its center (Herder, 2004, 29).

Herder sought the roots of nationalism in culture, considering it more fundamental than geography or anything else. The extension of this socio-cultural attitude toward nationalism in the contemporary world can be seen in the theories of Ernest Gellner (1983) (theory of cultural homogenization) and the research of Joep Leerssen (2006). If we consider national identity, nationalism, and nation as cultural phenomena in the new world, nationalism can be culturally extended to design. Over the last two centuries, nations have created the past with the help of design, and design and art, in general, have been a recurring theme in national and ethnic symbolism (Gimeno-Martinez, 2016, 10-13). Gimeno-Martinez believes that the ancient traditions of design are not buried in history, but are present in contemporary design discourses (ibid., 75). In general, despite the sharp criticisms of constructivists such as Brubaker, the essentialists believe that by analyzing the cultural productions and development methods of a nation's design, one can understand the national character of that nation, and the idea of national personality has been used repeatedly in des i gn history to distinguish design culture, desi g n methods, and products, and continues to be u sed until now (Fig. 1).

According to Figure 1, the national personality is a belief already accepted by the citizens of the society; As a result, it manifests in various aspects of life, including material culture and, consequently, in the design and structure of the objects they use.

- National personality approaches in product design

The extraction of national features in the design of objects is not limited to the pre-modern era; Rather, the categorization of product design into different countries, through the recognition of national personality in their design works,
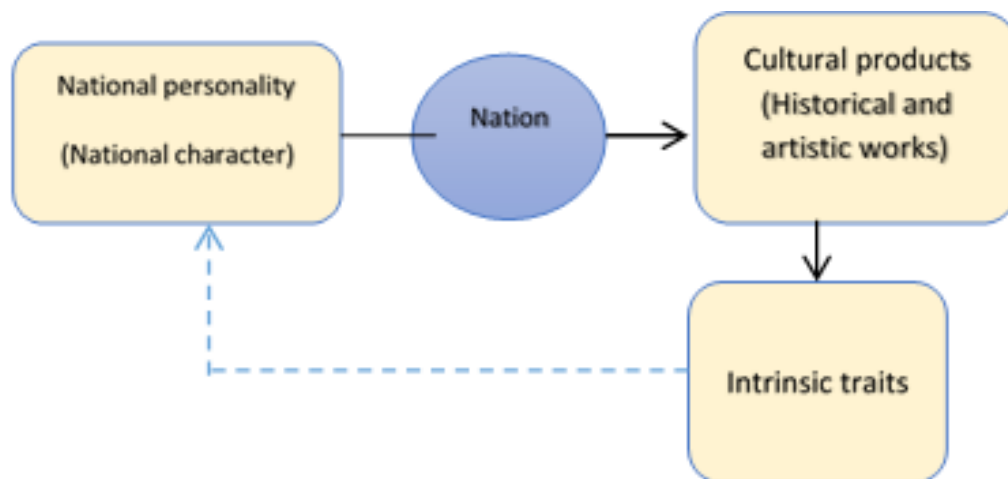
Fig. 1. The relation between national identity and cultural, historical, and design products of a nation from the perspective of essentialists. Source: Authors.

has been raised in different decades of the twentieth century until today. This classification and separation have been done in different periods by different methods. The national character has been expressed to the audience sometimes in modern times from the aesthetics of products, sometimes from the continuity of its functional characteristics, sometimes from the objects derived from the nation's lifestyle, in some cases through differentiation using special indigenous materials, and sometimes in different design cultures. In all these cases, two determining factors can be seen: "a unique special phenomenon" and "historical continuity or multiplicity of that phenomenon" in the production and consumption of the citizens of the country. In the following, the various methods mentioned above will be explained relying on objective examples.

- National personality derived from aesthetics
The aesthetic attribution of a product to the national character of a particular country dates back to the mid-twentieth century. They were the first research efforts of design theorists at the height of the dominance of modern discourse in industrial design and in the form of identity-making for the design of the countries that were the pioneers of design in the West. The forerunner of this method was the British "Paul Reilly" and his famous article entitled "The

Influence of National Character on Design" (1956). He considered the finding of lasting elements of design in the works of nations, the study of handicrafts, and folklore productions to be in accordance with national characteristics and suitable alternatives to historical and literary clichés (Reilly, 1956, 920). According to Reilly, technological capabilities and the expansion of global communications are two factors threatening the national personality and the national identity in design in general. At the same time, he emphasizes that under no circumstances will national personality be destroyed in light of global design and trends (Gimeno-Martinez, 2016, 78-79). With Reilly's theoretical framework, certain traits can be extracted from the product design of a country that reflects the attitude of its citizens towards material life (Table 1). In this model of identity-making, the continuation of the aesthetic element will play a vital role in historical works and products.

- Continuous functional characteristics resulting from the national characteristic
Behind the functional layer of modern products, a special identity, and consequently, a type of national classification can be obtained. The function of the designed product is in accordance with the spirit and attitude of the designer and its producers. At the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the National Characteristics in Design

Table 1. Adaptation of teapots produced in four countries with their characteristics and national personality by Reilly's method. Source: Authors.

No.	Country	Product sample	National Personality	Visible features in the design	Producer companies
1	England		Based on historical examples (The form is determined before)	- Confidence in historical forms - Use of historical decorations - Visual patterns of the 18th and 19th centuries - Loyalty to historical achievements	Wedgwood & Sons Company
2	Germany		Rational and logical experience	- Without imitating previous models - Paying attention to the temporal and spatial context - Based on technical functions	Rosenthal Porcelain Company
3	Italy		Fun and entertainment	-Emotional and visual attraction - Sculptural forms - Integration with art forms	Milan's Richard-Ginori Company
4	United States of America		Diverse and market dependent	- Successive diversity - Dependent on market demands - Testing innovations	The Hall China Company

Exhibition (1985) introduced a new aspect of product design identity; an exhibition with the aim of presenting world-renowned designs.

In fact, a kind of national division could be seen in the heart of an exhibition to show global designs with a modern approach. Jonathan Glancey, Executive Director of the Exhibition, by collecting the famous products of 8 industrialized countries, succeeded in extracting the national design personality of the countries based on the products of each country; of course, it was not dependent on a sense of nostalgia and historical attitude, but based on obvious traits in the performance of each country's products

(Andreae, 1985, 2-5). Glancey thus suggested that one should go beyond the appearance and visual effects of products and look for design personalization in how they function, how they respond to design problems, their methodological differences, and the economic, social, and political contexts of each producing country.

- Derived from the national lifestyle

The forms of adaptation are often created between the culture of object design and the collective identity of nations (Gimeno-Martinez, 2016, 33). This can be seen in the fields of fashion and clothing, household utensils, and furniture (Fig. 2). For example, the Moka pot coffee maker

Table 2. Adaptation between product design and national characteristics derived from different functional perspectives. Source: Authors.

Country	Japan	United States of America	United Kingdom of Britain	Soviet Union
Product samples in the exhibition				
Examples	Pink Public Phone (1980)	New York Taxis (1982)	London buses (1979)	Russian tractor seats (1985)
Adapted national personality	- Extent of products - Efficient - Small - Inexpensive	- Big - Courageous - Juvenile - Mass production	- Original - Collectedness - Quiet	- Big - Merely functional - Tough

shows the manner of making coffee in the Italian style.

Similarly, contemporary Turkish designers, focusing on equipment related to indigenous food culture, present a type of national design in a modern format (Fig. 3). Such designs are identified by introducing the specific lifestyle and method of meeting a need of other communities and carrying the national emblem and brand as a label.

- Application of special indigenous materials

One of the recommendations of leading design historians is to focus on everyday life and interpret the concepts and meanings embedded in everyday objects. In fact, design is a part of the visual culture and material culture of nations (Kikuchi, Lee & Wong, 2012, 100). In addition, the postcolonial theory has also encouraged indigenous historians and designers to avoid centralizing industrial materials and modern production methods, and has made developing indigenous materials, and updating indigenous manufacturing methods a priority.

From the late nineteenth century, the classification of objects based on the materials used in them and the technical processes of their production became common, but in recent years has become doubly important in light of the theory of product mediation; product design is the mediator in the transfer of diverse information from the community that produces and consumes it. Part of this material information is about the ability to

Fig. 2. Moka Express machine, designed by Alfonso and Renato Bialetti - 1933: Reminiscent of Italian identity in the form of Italian design. Source: Hauffe, 2007, 115.
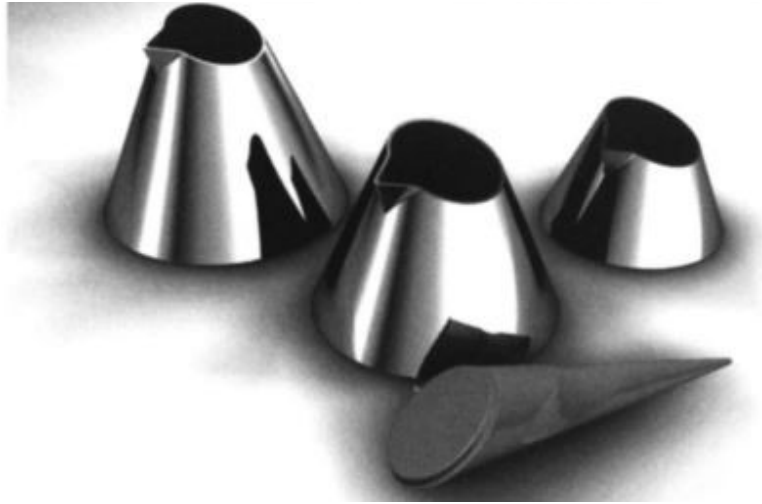
Fig. 3. Modern Design of a Turkish Coffee Cezve, Designer: Aykut Erol, 2010. Source: Balcioğlu & Emgin, 2014, 104.

use indigenous materials and specific production methods. This can be easily seen in the designs and design studies of African countries in the last decade. This identification based on the use of indigenous materials and manufacturing methods can be found in design-oriented businesses in South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Ghana, which focus on everyday usable products that are made of natural and indigenous fibers, such as bamboo, ceramics, and African plant fibers. (Gimeno-Martínez, 2013, 5-11; Lange & Eeden, 2016, 64-73). Distinctive African identities are easily observed in the face of such products.

- Different design cultures as a national personality

In this approach, national design historians try to formulate and explain a culture different from the design method in the form of modern discourse. This innovation is based on cultural values and historical experiences, and it is also in accordance with a specific cognition of the universe and its phenomena. It should be noted that industrial design has been developed based on meeting the needs of customers and relying on technical, aesthetic, and scientific principles. Modern design is based on mass production, ease of use, simple form, and cheap prices. In the 1990s, based on experimental design, this discourse faced a serious challenge (Hauffe,

2007, 21). Different perceptions of existence and human beings have had different results in culture, thought, and design methods.

Some of the horizons have emerged in the form of national culture and ethnic identity. This intellectual endeavor has increased in the design of the second decade of the new century and has been pursued in different continents according to their worldview, discourse, and socio-cultural conditions. Here are two examples of such differentiation. The first example can be seen in a Japanese modernist design that is based on naturalism and is different from its European counterpart; it is based on a culture in which man is a part of nature and believes in maintaining its natural order. It is from this culture that the meaning of Wabi-Sabi design (Fig. 4) is created in the selection of raw materials for its production, and it is reproduced as part of the Japanese design identity worldwide.

Another example is the effort made by the Dutch design community that has formulated the concept of "open design" and equated it with Dutch design, through which expanding a pluralistic and polyphonic identity from the level of social interaction to product and graphic design. In doing so, they managed to practically set civil nationalism in motion. In this atmosphere, subcultures, small design groups, and experimental studios operate

Fig. 4. The Wabi-Sabi phenomenon versus the "Perfectness" concept of Western design, a bowl with a Japanese design.
Source: www.studiojeandre.com

outside the complete domination of modern design and present their capabilities.

Conclusion

Throughout the twentieth century, there has always been an intellectual debate between proponents of global design and proponents of identity-centered design; On the one hand, designing under universal guidelines, and on the other hand, designing with various cultural and social references. With the beginning of the new century, influenced by the early postmodern background and especially in light of the growing expansion of postcolonial studies in design, contemplation of the historical achievements of nations in design and the application of socio-cultural values to it has become an attractive field in industrial design historiography. Building a national design based on indigenous information has found a place equal to the history of global design, and seeks to bridge the gap between major and peripheral countries in the history of design. National design studies have both socio-cultural capabilities and the potential for international competition. This differentiation has appeared in design by emphasizing a variety

of methods. The study of objective examples concludes that the creation of a national design based on aspects of primordiality and by appealing to the concept of national personality has been manifested in different periods and different areas of design. Essentialist national identity flows in the lives of citizens through various design tools. National personality in design has been achieved by referring to five general design approaches in product design, which are as follows:

1- Extracting lasting aesthetic characteristics of a nation's products and establishing the relationship between the nation and national characteristics.

2- Functional characteristic for addressing the need in product design, which is derived from the national characteristic.

3- Designing lifestyle-related products and supplying them at regional and international levels, which acts as a national brand.

4- A special way of thinking and a different design culture that depends on the attitude of nations toward the universe.

5- Using local and indigenous materials and a special production method in products with general uses that express the material culture of the society. Overall, despite the high technological power of functionalist design, national design is based on the two factors of extracting the "exclusive indigenous element" and "its continuity and successive representation" in product design. Contrary to the criticisms of modern identity theorists, the essentialist approach, relying on the concept of national personality, has been effective in creating the identity of the design of main and peripheral countries.

Endnotes
1. Hu in Persian refers to the one who is unseen and is usually used for reference to God.

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