



The Role of European Furniture in the Transformation of the Spatial Organization of the Iranian House: An Analysis of the Transition from Fluidity to Rigidity during the Qajar Period

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Extended Abstract

Objective: The transition from tradition to modernity in Iran, particularly from the Qajar era onward, was not limited to mere technological or physical changes; it profoundly reshaped lifestyles, everyday actions, and the spatial organization of life. The traditional Iranian house, as a fundamental setting for social life, underwent a radical transformation during this process. While most previous studies have examined these changes through the lens of physical, decorative, or formal patterns, the role of "European furniture" as a material phenomenon influencing spatial agency and the lived experience of inhabitants has remained largely overlooked. The primary goal of this research is to analyze how the gradual introduction of European furniture transformed the spatial organization of the traditional Iranian house. It explains the transition from a fluid, flexible, and multi-purpose space to a relatively rigid, compartmentalized, and functionalist structure during the Qajar period. The study argues that this shift was not just a change in household objects, but a rearrangement of relationships between individuals, social phenomena, and spatial structures, ultimately restricting the inhabitants' spatial agency. Consequently, the research focuses on how European furniture impacted spatial patterns, its consequences for daily life, and how this historical experience can be critically applied to contemporary architecture.

Methodology: This study adopts a qualitative approach based on logical reasoning. The methodology is documentary and interpretive, with data gathered from archival and historical sources. These include specialized texts on architecture, urban planning, and historical studies of Qajar-era houses. Alongside these, European travelogues from the Qajar period serve as primary historical sources. Travelogues were selected for their "outsider's perspective," which captures mundane details of daily life and sensitivity toward material changes in space that locals might take for granted. The theoretical framework is built upon the "Production of Space" theory, theories of social phenomena and spatial action, and the



"quadrant methodological model" for spatial analysis. Data were analyzed using directed qualitative content analysis, interpreting information through concepts such as perceived, conceived, and lived space, everyday practice, the arrangement of material elements, and institutional structures. To ensure validity, source triangulation was employed, correlating historical narratives with theoretical analysis. The study focuses on Iranian urban houses during the Qajar era as the turning point of the encounter with modernity, while acknowledging limitations such as potential traveler bias and the scarcity of visual documentation for commoners' homes.

Findings: The findings reveal that prior to the arrival of European furniture, the traditional Iranian house was based on principles of multipurpose spaces, movement fluidity, flexible boundaries, and minimal furnishings. These features allowed for active agency, enabling inhabitants to adapt the space to changing daily, seasonal, and long-term needs. Spaces were defined by climatic conditions, time of use, and social relations rather than fixed functions, and minimal mobile furniture played no role in "locking" a room into a single use. With the gradual introduction of European furniture in the Qajar era, these items first appeared symbolically in aristocratic homes, often without their original intended functions. This created a temporary, hybrid blend of traditional and modern elements. However, as the use of tables, chairs, beds, and other fixed furniture became institutionalized, spatial relations shifted. The findings show that these new objects gradually led to functional segregation, reduced flexibility, restricted movement paths, and the solidification of specific behavioral patterns. Analysis suggests that European furniture did not just increase physical comfort; it created "invisible prohibitions" that diminished the inhabitants' spatial agency. Spaces once defined by diverse activities became rooms with pre-determined, fixed functions. Consequently, individual agency in organizing space weakened, while the role of material objects in dictating behavior grew. This process coincided with a rise in individualism and a decline in collective interactions.

Conclusion: This research demonstrates that the transformation of the Iranian house's spatial organization was a multi-layered process in which European furniture played a role far beyond mere aesthetics. As material social phenomena, these items rearranged spatial relationships and daily actions, moving the home from a fluid environment to a rigid, functionalist structure. While this transition improved welfare and functional order, it resulted in reduced flexibility, restricted spatial agency, and weakened social interaction. The results emphasize that understanding this historical experience can provide a basis for rethinking contemporary architecture. It suggests a



synthesis where modern technology and comfort are integrated with the fluidity and flexibility of traditional architecture. A critical re-reading of the role of furniture in the "production of space" can lead to the design of homes that meet modern needs while reducing the "spatial determinism" and hidden constraints of everyday life.

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