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Conceptual Paper

Presenting a Conceptual Framework of Spirituality in the Philosophy of Islamic Art with Emphasis on Master-Apprentice System

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Abstract

As man descended on this universe and time lapsed over this history-owning creature, various eras took form, which consequently resulted in the appearance of forms of civilization. In each era, man stood in a relationship with truth, and each time with the change of this relationship, he turned to another manifestation of latent secrets of the universe and humanity, which resulted in the creation of a new civilization. Art, too, as a manifestation of civilization, is the best and most transparent mirror of truth in each period of history and human civilization in which manifestations of secrets between truth and creation are laid bare. Man, for his godlike character, is, at the same time, a work of art and an artist; he is a work of art because he is an image, and an artist. After all, this image is an image of a divine artist. For this, man, who enjoys a spiritual nature, marks a system of human beliefs that are concentrated on the meaning and discovery of the meaning of life and a total of his relations and connections in life, so that he further takes a step in the direction of realizing his substantive nature by moving through the horizons, the souls, and the creation of a work of art. In its inward, Islamic art contains the most excellent moral and spiritual components, which greatly contribute to the process of transferring techniques and methods. On the other hand, the most outstanding components of a master-apprentice system are founded on spiritual themes, which are specifically revealed in Islamic art. This study investigates the concept of spirituality under the philosophy of Islamic art and the master-apprentice system and presents spiritual components by integrating two approaches. This study also falls under qualitative and descriptive research. It also examines such components as respect, decent behavior, search for meaning, aestheticism, and spiritual concepts of the philosophy of Islamic art by referring to the master-apprentice system.

Keywords: *Spirituality, Islamic Art, Master-Apprentice System.*

Introduction

As man descended on this universe and time lapsed

over this history-owning creature, various eras took form, and consequently, forms of civilization appeared. In each era, man stood in a relationship with truth, and

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each time with the change of this relationship, he turned to another manifestation of latent secrets of the universe and humanity, which resulted in the creation of a new civilization. Art, too, as a manifestation of civilization, is the best and most transparent mirror of truth in each period of history and human civilization in which manifestations of secrets between the truth and the creation are laid bare. Man, for his godlike character, is, at the same time, a work of art and an artist; he is a work of art because he is an image, and an artist. After all, this image is an image of a divine artist. For this, man, who enjoys a spiritual nature, marks a system of human beliefs that are concentrated on the meaning and discovery of the meaning of life and a total of his relations and connections in life, so that he further takes a step in the direction of realizing his substantive nature by moving through the horizons, the souls and the creation of a work of art. The creation of a work of art is undoubtedly born of the spiritual dimension of existence, which assumes a special position in both traditional art and Islamic art; in this connection, a master-apprentice system can help reveal this substantive characteristic. The master-apprentice system originates from a fully spiritual approach in a divine path where man becomes familiarized with his god-like character and learns fundamental principles of morality, respect, and apprenticeship rites. The goal of this study was to investigate the conceptual framework of spirituality in the philosophy of Islamic art by emphasizing the master-apprentice system using descriptive-analytical methods. This study also examines the position of spirituality in the philosophy of Islamic art and the master-apprentice system and uses a spiritual approach to the components of the philosophy of Islamic art to analyze the master-apprentice system.

Review of the Literature

• Definition of art

In the Persian language history, art has had different meanings, denoting perfection, virtues, decency, superiority, decent and good traits, ability, capacity, empowerment, power, craftsmanship, profession,

gains, etc., while also denoting risks and threats in the Beihaghi History (Hashemnejad, 2006, 314-315). The term art was originally an Avestan and Pahlavi word, composed of Ho meaning good, decent, beautiful, gentle, and expressive, and Nar meaning male. Components of perfection and decency constitute the inherent components of the meaning of art in Iranian literature and within its civilization (Balkhari-Qahi, 2014). The term art is referred to as *Techne* in European languages, *Artos*, *Artis* in Greek, *Ars* in Latin, *Ar* in French, and *Art* in English (Hashemnejad, 2006, 314). Art is defined as the recreation or representation of a meaning or a kind in a favorable manner; art denotes revelation, demonstration, creation, or invention. An artist is a creator and a maker; in other words, art is a subject of this creation, and it is a reality with favorable perfection. If created is recreated in the direction of a favorable perfection, it is artistic, and this re-creation will be more art-like as it resembles the favorable perfection and the truth of the art (Rashd, 2015, 7).

For Tolstoy, art is inherently characterized by an artist's expression and transference of his inner feelings to the audience. In other words, a work of art conveys the artist's feelings to the audience. If a work lacks this feature, it cannot be called a work of art (Hashemnejad, 2006). Defining art, Tolstoy says: "Art is a human activity and denotes the conscious transference of one's feelings to others by using apparent signs, in a way the feelings conveyed would make them experience the same feelings and go through the same sensory stages he had gone through" (Tolstoi, 2004).

This suggests that all humans need objects of decent craftsmanship to meet both practical and mystical needs in life. On the other hand, the pleasure from objects of true and decent craftsmanship is not a need independent from our need for those objects; rather, it is part of our nature. Pleasure makes an action perfect, but is not its ultimate end. The ultimate end of art is fully utilitarian as such because it refers to humans entirely (Rahmati, 2015). According to evolution and religion, traditional [arts] demonstrate the fulfillment of divine rules and laws

governing the system of creation and human lives, as all humans are invited to a single path; hence, traditional arts are derived from divine traditions. Traditional art never falls under a specific time sphere, because it is the language of all arts due to its inclusive and comprehensive system of all events; for this, it has a practical aspect, with humans contributing to the creation of a work (Dadashi, 2015).

• Philosophy of Islamic art

In sum, the philosophy of Islamic art defines art to be a “human act of creating beauty”, which involves all definitions and concepts of art (ibid, 318). Hence, for many scholars, art is beauty, and beauty is a general characteristic used for it (Afrough & Aghasi, 2014, 158). In the view of Farabi, beauty denotes the “unveiling of the existence of each creature whose perfection is derived from beauty” (Farabi, 1986). Accordingly, the human’s superior existence is manifested when it resembles most of the Truth Almighty and represents the names and traits of the beauty and glory of the Lord (Hashemnejad, 2006, 320). Focus on infinity is one of the most important characteristics of Islamic art, discussed as horizontality. Horizontality in Islamic art is mainly characterized by a view from above, distant from and parallel with the universe. Horizontally appears to help phenomena become abstract and lose their nominal nature, and thus convert to concepts and structures, which represent the true universe, and are ultimately directed towards the single Truth (the Creator). Looking from above, a single image is derived from plural components, which is also likened to a parallel view. Looking in a parallel way is like painting, indicating that an observer is present in all areas and observes the subject. A parallel view not only provides for the presence of the observer in all areas but also ignores his role as one who orders. Therefore, the observer’s role is removed and his individuality is lost. One would claim that Islamic horizontal works were founded in the far past, and referred to worshipping a single Lord through the discovery and intuition of the truth, and intellectual, instinctual, and sensory perceptions. In Islamic art,

horizontality is imagination within the imagination, and view from above is the observation of and contemplation about the Lord, whose allegorical nature is made possible by abstraction, geometry, and multi-level patterns, with its conceptual objectives involving the manifestation of the unity and the link of the sky and the earth, the movement towards the infinity, and arriving at illumination (Islami & Nikghadam, 2012). Islamic art is founded on two scientific and practical wisdom and involves some ranks, which refer to an artist’s enjoyment of each wisdom. In its noblest form, Islamic art is based on real wisdom, and the artist of such art is a perfect human being (Keramat & Goudarzi, 2014, 23).

• Philosophy of spirituality

Despite single-dimension approaches to spirituality, it cannot be simply called religion, because spirituality is much broader than religion, and religious beliefs and acts of religion are considered some elements of it (Arya, 2011). Spirituality refers to a level of human senses, intelligence, and feelings that distinguishes him from other creatures of the universe and thus helps him link his immaterial dimensions of existence and his self. In essence, spirituality is the same immaterial aspect of the human dimension that becomes meaningful for itself, others, nature, and the Creator of the universe, and allows him to gain excellence and the ultimate end of existence, consequently bringing him physical and mental health (Jackson et al., 2016). In this connection, Motahhari says: “Materiality is not the opposite of spirituality, and thus he associates material with spiritual factors to be along with each other. He also demonstrates spirituality through attractions that are not material and exist in humans, such as the tendency to seek truth, the tendency to beauty, and the tendency to worship (Motahhari, 1996). Spirituality has been defined to be a system of human beliefs founded on meaning and the discovery of the reality of life, and a sum of his relationships in life (Smeltzer & Bare, 2010). Spirituality in humans is defined to be one’s ability to hear, touch, receive, love, like, express affection, trust, feel happiness and unhappiness, and a sum of his inner states, emotions, and spirits. In essence, spirituality

denotes activities that concern one's spirits and feelings, and motivate his inner states, including music, art, literature, food, and tastes (Mooney & Timmins, 2007, 276-277).

• Master-apprentice system

A review of the history of teaching and learning indicates that the transference of knowledge and skills in societies and throughout generations was performed through the face-to-face interaction of "one who did not know" and "one who did"; this path, which is the most natural way of education, is the master-apprentice method. Throughout history, the master-apprentice method was a way for everyone to learn whatever he needed via observation, imitation, and training under a mentor or a more knowledgeable and capable individual than himself, and since the learning process was part of life and work with requirements of training, the education product could be completed this way. This way of learning characterized the educational system before the establishment of the entity of "school" in societies, which involved all levels of learning (Collins et al., 2018 Cited in Nadimi, 2010). In the traditional educational system, the transference of skills and techniques was not made to apprentices at a certain period, nor would they be left off or discharged without having attained their full ability to achieve the mastership stage; rather, they were under the supervision of their masters even outside their workshops and had their lives linked with their masters (Sediq, 1982). This close contact involved positive and negative values. It was positive because there was no discordance or conflict between the apprentice's work and his life, and it was negative because the apprentice sometimes had to fully comply with the master and the artistic technique training hinged on the apprentice's demonstration of capacity, moral, and spiritual competences (Seifi et al., 2017, 42). Masters were one of the key pillars of the traditional training of arts, as they could take the positions of fathers and mentors. This educational system was more of a didactic system than a teaching one. In this sense, didactics involve a broader meaning. The presence of the apprentice before the master included

the development of talents and moral virtues, in addition to the transference of techniques and skills of different professions, causing artists or craftsmen to grow up in a context of principles and beliefs, and to enjoy such traits as humbleness, open-mindedness, avoiding ambitions and reputation (ibid., 2017, 34).

Iranian traditional art embraces the most excellent moral and spiritual components, which have greatly contributed to the flow of transferring techniques and skills. In many Iranian texts, from moral and historical texts to literary and artistic works, emphasis has been on paying respect to masters and also on the commitment to and love of apprentices. A review of past texts refers to the deepest moral values latent within the master-apprentice relationship, suggesting that Iranian traditional art owes a major part of its glory to this very relationship. The most notable components of the master-apprentice relationship include reciprocal commitment, observing reciprocal rights, reverence, submission and obedience, the tendency to morality, respect for the mastership position, honoring traditional masters, soul purity, and giving importance to hierarchies, etc. which have been extracted from historical, literary, and mystical texts and documents. The components are illustrated in Fig. 1.

To achieve higher artistic and human hierarchies, artists have customs and rites that help them purify their souls. Decent morality and virtues help artists to be polite and reveal their upbringing in their works of art. An artist needs three principles: education, practice, and inward purity. In this connection, penmanship, well-writing, and being an artisan in the master-apprentice path are founded on these three principles. The apprentice must make use of the master's education (teaching), practice more, and nurture his inward purity. To achieve this latter principle, he must move in the right direction through necessary beliefs and rites. The apprentice must pay respect and honor the master and focus on perfection. Attention to masters' works and meticulousness in their styles is key. The apprentice must be humble and pious to achieve perfection (Ghelichkhani, 1994; Dadashi, 2015).

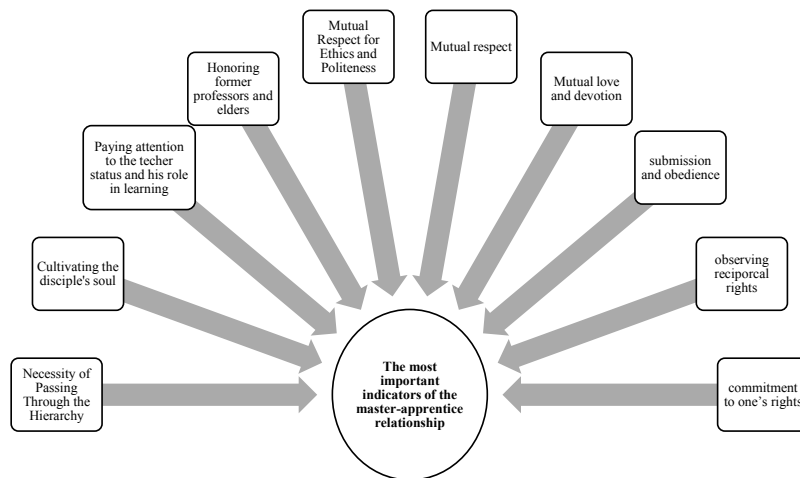


Fig. 1. The most important indicators of the master-apprentice relationship in the traditional system of art education. Source: Seifi et al., 2017, 40.

Research Method

This qualitative study fell under descriptive-analytical methods and used the library method. It also examined concepts and models presented about the philosophy of Islamic art and investigated the concept of spirituality and the master-apprentice system. In the end, it also presented a conceptual framework to analyze the theoretical foundations of the study (Boo, 2008).

Theoretical Foundations of the Study; Presenting a Conceptual Framework

The relationship between art and spirituality is clear to all. Spirituality is the internal origin of art, and art that with no link to spirituality or the immaterial dimensions of existence and human beings does not fall under the category of art. The important point here is the type of an artist's and viewer's approaches. The artist takes into account spirituality in his work both consciously and unconsciously based on the type of thoughts, interests, culture, skills, and experiences that he has gained. Now, the opposite point is the type of a viewer's approach to a work of art and the extent to which he understands spirituality. The main subject is whether or not spirituality exists both intentionally or unintentionally inside art and all works of art. For this, the type of approach of the viewer and receiver of a work of art could highly influence the concept of spirituality (Arya, 2011). For Rabindranath Tagore, man builds truth not in a collection

of real affairs but in his created creatures. To him, the relationship between art and human consciousness is an indispensable one, and for this, art implies human chains; an art that is lively, dynamic, vital, and full of senses. The communicational aspect of art involves the world of living. This denotes that the relationship between humans and the world and the world and humans is a two-way relationship, which is aesthetically important. The reason underlying art is the creative motivation of the human being so that he can move freely and create works of art. These works of art give man the ability to move from quantity to quality and from reality to truth and from unity to beauty. It is this path that helps reveal the spiritual order in the human being (Biswas, 2005). As a manifestation of civilization, it is the best and most transparent mirror of truth in each period of human history and civilization wherein the secrets of the truth and the creation are revealed. The history of art also falls under the history of an artist (Yasini, 2015, 22-23). In Islamic art, designs and patterns not only convey themes and beauty but also involve inner meanings, which the eyes of a viewer aim to find from behind the apparent forms of beauty, and to discover those inner secrets; these are the meanings that pertain to the world of inside. Thus, the language selected by Islamic art is one of the symbols and this is an advantage of Islamic art, which helps its advocates not only enjoy the apparent beauty but also indirectly utilize its divine concepts

(Enayat, 2008, 34). The main approach to the philosophy of Islamic art is founded on “beauty”, which is illustrated as in the following Fig. 2.

From a mystical angle, beauty may appear to be a mundane affair, because an affair of this kind tends to look upon anything with an eye of will, which helps beauty to blend with tendency. However, from an intuition angle, which is the perspective at which the truth of objects is viewed and one that does not rely on requirements, beauty is a spiritual affair because it unveils blessings and truth in its specific manner (Rahmati, 2015). Once beauty is perceived, pleasure is attained. In other words, pleasure is a result of perceiving beauty, and the more intense beauty is, and the stronger the perception is, the more pleasure is there. Hence, observing a beautiful perspective helps reveal more pleasure (Hashemnejad, 2006). Mimesis, representation, and story narration are the three latent elements, with the latter involving a narrator, the narrated, and the narrative (represented act) (*ibid.*). Imagination is regarded as a kind of natural mimesis (*ibid.*, 327). For Mulla Sadra, the imaginative faculty is the purgatory between the intellect and the senses. The imaginative faculty can be used by man at all times and places; it is a faculty from which all types of human arts originate. This is because art is capable of moving wherever it desires. Art assumes a major role in imagination to get man towards love, which is an artistic function of the imagination because love comes from perceiving beauty (Afrough & Aghasi, 2014). An image is also a set of possibilities to express an art; possibilities that are raised in a poem whose context is underlain by types of simile, metaphors, figurative speech, codes, and various forms of subjective images (Shafei Kadkani, 1991). An image is not just limited to visual implication (Seyedi, 2008, 107). An image is “born of a word from which it is derived; in other words, the word imagination denotes the realm of fancy and images” (Al-Sebagh, 1983). However, a subtle difference can be found between imagination and image, as “imagination denotes a set of expressive and figurative manipulation with the poem, while an image includes any outstanding and definite

expression” (Shafei Kadkani, 1991). In general, an image is the outward realm that tells of the inward state (Seyedi, 2008, 107). Metaphysics is part of philosophy that delves into the main principles of truth. In the Islamic tradition, metaphysics covers all existence and human cognition. Metaphysics has a special meaning load in the Islamic tradition, telling of the beyond of the world of nature; i.e., matters simply intelligible or imperceptible (Bahrami, 2015, 96). Metaphysics is as old as the history of thinking and philosophy. Here, Aristotle refers to the subject of unity and consistency in the concept of wisdom, i.e., inclusive and pervasive knowledge and the philosophy of divinity (Ilkhani, 2014, 33).

The immaterial dimension, truth, beauty, discovery, connection, soul, and reality are the key concepts of the concept of spirituality, given in Table 1. By emphasizing the immaterial nature of man and believing that his existential principles are connected with elements beyond the material world, these subjects define spirituality to be a reality of the human nature from which he is created.

The keywords of spirituality, Islamic art, and the master-apprentice system are given in Tables 1, 2, & 3.

Art is defined as creation, ability, virtues, and beauty; art is derived from the divine and immaterial nature of humans and is connected to divine and immaterial spirits. Art is founded on the manifestation of God, and truth. Thus, definitions suggest that art is an immaterial category and is intuitional knowledge of the truth that helps man approach himself. For this, art and Islamic art can be considered as an immaterial and metaphysical character, which underlies beauty (Table 2).

The keywords extracted from the definitions are given in Fig. 3. Components of the philosophy of Islamic art and the master-apprentice system are founded on spirituality as if they are all spiritual components. Hence, the context of art formation and the master-apprentice system is based on the divine nature, man, and existence, which is the spiritual approach.

The master-apprentice path and the philosophy of Islamic art are founded on a creed, with the artist or apprentice seeking to learn in a path whose one part is material and

Table 1. Keywords for defining spirituality. Sources: Authors.

References	Spirituality
Motahari, 1996	Tendency to beauty and seeking truth
Smeltzer & Bare, 2010	Discovery of truth
Willson et al., 2013	Finding the existential truth; the human soul
Mooney & Timmins, 2007	Individual ability; love and affection, inner states, good tastes
Jackson et al., 2016	Connection with the immaterial dimensions of existence; connection with one's self, others, and the Creator
Moal-Ulvoas, 2017	Individual beliefs

Table 2. Keywords for defining Islamic art. Sources: Authors.

References	Art; Islamic art
Balkhari-Qahi, 2014	Perfection; virtue, ability
Rashd, 2015	Desirable recreation of meaning; desirable truth
Tolstoi, 2004	Conveying feelings
Farabi, 1986	Beauty; achieving perfection
Islami & Nikghadam, 2012	Attention to infinity; discovery and intuition, imagination, contemplation, and the manifestation of unity
Keramat & Goudarzi, 2014	Wisdom; knowledge of the truth
Hashemnejad, 2006	Divine soul

Table 3. Keywords of the master-apprentice system. Sources: Authors.

References	Master-apprentice system components
Ghelichkhani, 1994	Education; practice; inward purity Decent morality and conduct; inward purity, contemplation
Seifi et al., 2017	Commitment; subordination and submission; respect; moral principles

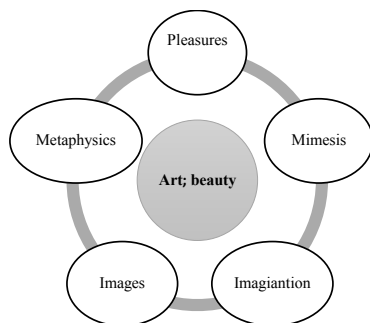


Fig. 2. Elements of Islamic art. Source: Hashemnejad, 2006; Afrough & Aghasi, 2014.

material means are provided to the artist, and the other part is spiritual, which is dependent on the artist's beliefs, doctrines, truth-seeking, and spiritual approaches. Hence, the artist is represented as an apprentice both inwardly and outwardly. This is meant to suggest that apparent principles, tools, hours, and texts to be learned constitute parts of the outward aspects, while morality, humbleness, submission, beliefs, and empowerment underlie his inward aspects. This creed and relevant changes are illustrated in Fig. 4 which reveals the spiritual basics of

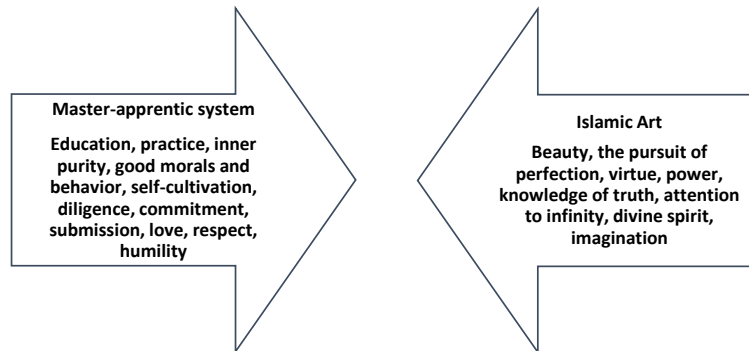


Fig. 3. Spirituality; the common concept of the philosophy of Islamic art and the master-apprentice system. Sources: Authors.

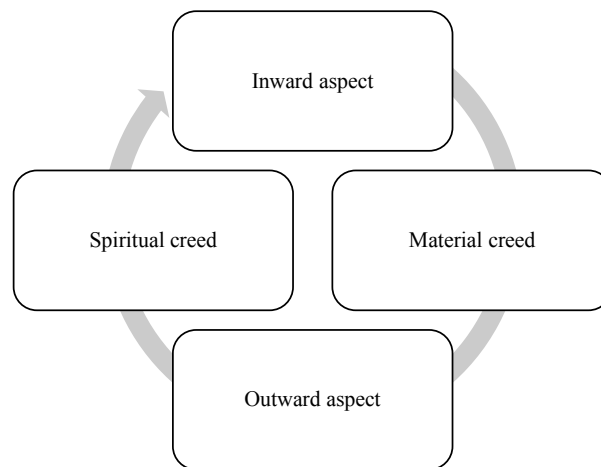


Fig. 4. Key elements of the philosophy of Islamic art and the master-apprentice system. Source: Authors.

the philosophy of Islamic art and the master-apprentice system.

In Islamic art, designs and patterns not only convey themes and beauty but also involve inner meanings, which the eyes of a viewer aim to find from behind the apparent forms of beauty, and to discover those inner secrets; these are the meanings that pertain to the world of the inside (Enayat, 2008, 34). Beauty, the discovery of truth, meaning, the course of perfection, divine soul, connection, and human soul full of feelings and experiences compose the common spiritual aspects of Islamic art and the master-apprentice system, founded on spirituality. Components of Islamic art, including beauty, pleasure, mimesis, imagination, image, and metaphysics, are also spiritual components, which are similar to the keywords given in Fig. 4. These are the components that manifest meanings and are illustrated

as follows:

Islamic art and the master-apprentice system that are paths towards perfection have both spiritual and divine nature and are established on seeking perfection, the tendency to perfection, and the tendency to the beauty of human nature. Hence, a review of theoretical foundations indicated that Islamic art and the master-apprentice system have a spiritual nature, and the ultimate end of these two will be realized when they are discussed from a spiritual level. Thus, any debates and analyses without taking into account the subject of spirituality could endanger Islamic art and the master-apprentice system. On the other hand, the most excellent levels of human perfection, considered by God for man, include truth, beauty, meaning, the path of perfection, connection with self, existence, and the Creator, and human feelings and experiences, which all have spiritual

dimensions. Hence, the emphasis on spirituality in Islamic art and the master-apprentice system is not a discovery but rather a way to elucidate some key terms that existed in these two categories since the very beginning. If the master-apprentice system and Islamic art do not take steps in the spiritual past of the human existential nature, the ultimate end of none of them will be materialized, and thus become null and void.

Conclusion

The philosophy of Islamic art, which falls under beauty that emphasizes the perception of pleasure, imagination, image, mimesis, and metaphysics, is formed in the context of a spiritual approach to existence, that leads the artist towards the discovery of truth, levels of perfection, virtues, and empowerment. On the other hand, the master-apprentice system that adopts a traditional and unique approach to education, searches for reverence, humbleness, writing customs, decent morality, and a set of decent traits and human perfection, originated from the divine nature, so that the artist is led in a spiritual path towards perfection and excellence. For this, the philosophy of Islamic art and the master-apprentice system are both established on spirituality and have no goal but to pursue human

spiritual perfection. Hence, the identification of the spiritual themes of the master-apprentice system and the philosophy of Islamic art can lead the human soul, which is derived from feelings and experiences, towards the path of perfection and the discovery of truth, and thus make it closer to its divine soul.

Based on his spiritually-oriented human nature, the artist comes into existence and moves in a divine direction consistent with his divine nature; specifically, if art is formed within the master-apprentice system, both could take on a spiritual character and help realize human's divine dimensions. The master-apprentice system is a moral and spiritual subject and is directed at human dignity and perfection; a real artist, as a creator of artwork, cannot get closer to truth unless he recreates the spiritual concepts of existence. Hence, the master-apprentice system, which has a spiritual character, helps the artist to achieve perfection.

Endnotes

1. Art is called Honar in Persian, which is a compound word of Ho and nar

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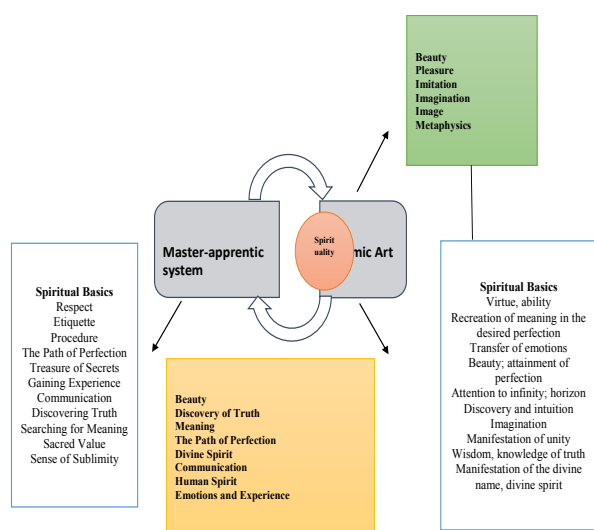
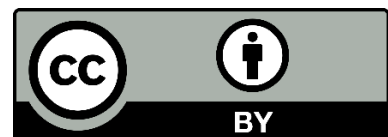


Fig. 5. The conceptual framework of spirituality in the philosophy of Islamic art with an emphasis on the master-apprenticeship system. Source: Authors.

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