



The Perception of International Tourists Toward Iran's Culture and  
Their Intentions to Visit Iran.

Ms. Mehri Yasami

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Business Administration in Tourism Management  
Graduate School of Business  
Assumption University  
Academic Year 2013  
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## ABSTRACT

While a great deal of research has examined the destination image that influences the tourist's destination choice, the impact of perception toward cultural attributes of the destination solely on such choices remains unclear. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of international tourists toward Iran's culture and the possible relationship between tourists' perception of Iran's culture and their intentions to visit that country. Specifically, the relationships among destination perception, visit intention, and tourist characteristics were explored.

A conceptual framework was proposed and entirely 384 international tourists were surveyed. By conducting the particular qualification rules of valid questionnaires, a total of 295 questionnaires was selected to be used in this research. Overall, the respondents perceived Iran's culture positively. The respondents' perception towards Iran's culture doesn't change by their gender and nationalities whereas the respondents' past visit experience of Iran had a significant impact on their perception. Cultural image was significantly ( $p < .05$ ) predictive of intention to visit Iran. The cultural attribute of Iranian traditional festivals ( $\beta = .686$ ), was found to be a significant contributor amongst other cultural components to the relationship between tourist's perception towards Iran's culture and intention to visit that country. This study also expanded understanding of tourists overall impressions about Iran in order to elicit initial and immediate effect of Iran upon respondents' minds.

**Keywords:** destination perception, cultural attributes, intention to visit, tourist destination

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Mehri Yasami

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **GENERALITIES OF THE STUDY**

### **Introduction**

While a great deal of research has examined the destination attributes that influence tourists' destination choice, the impact of perception toward cultural attributes of the destination solely on such choices remains unclear. This study chooses international tourists and examines their perception of Iran's culture also their intentions to visit Iran. The first chapter starts with background of the study that argues Iran tourism development and cultural tourism. Then, it focuses on the statement of the problem, research objectives, scope of the study, limitation of study, and definition of the terms.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The tourism industry is a largest and most dynamic sector among other industries of the today's global economy and should be considered for more than one-third of the total global service trade in 2015 (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2011). According to World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2012), the total contribution of the tourism industry to world GDP is US\$6,3trillion (9.1 percent) in 2011. It also provided 255 million jobs in 2011, 1 in 12 of all jobs in the world. Its significant contribution in the global employment shows the tourism industry's position as a high labour intensity sector among the world's top generators of jobs that needs a variety of skills and facilitates, the presence of youth, women and migrant workers (ILO, 2011).

ILO (2008) also pointed out that tourism has enough potential to be considered a major source of economic growth also as a vehicle for poverty reduction in developing countries (Manyara, Jones & Botterill, 2006). Today, many destinations in developing countries like Thailand, Turkey, and India take advantages of this opportunity and converting

tourism into a key accelerator for social and economic development. However, Iran as less significant destination with unique tourism resources such as ancient civilization, exclusive historical monuments, cultural heritages, climate diversity and natural attractions should employ tourism as a profitable and entrepreneurial industry to improve its economy and social development. This country needs to consider tourism as an appropriate alternative due to her economic dependence on the lucrative but vulnerable oil and gas industry, also a young population structure that created the unemployment phenomenon as a major social challenge.

Unfortunately, political atmosphere of Iran associated with many imposed social, political and economic sanctions during the last 33 years have isolated this country from the rest of the world thus resulting in less commercial, academic and touristic exchange. Today, the image of Iran in the eyes of many potential tourists from western even Asian countries has been altered. The existence of conflict in the neighboring countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan is another factor that faces Iran with many challenges as a tourist destination. Clearly, Iran should seek a way to revive its golden position during the years of 1967-1977 when this country was recognized as the most favorite tourist destination in the Middle East.

Concretely speaking, this study examines the relationship between perceived image of Iran's culture by particular respondents and their intentions to visit that country. This research should pave way for future potential tourists and uncovering how a possible link between potential tourists and Iran's culture might be developed to increase her competitiveness and distinctiveness among other regional tourism destinations as Turkey and Dubai.

### **1.1.1 Tourism development in Iran**

There is insufficient knowledge about tourism developing process in Iran (Aref&Marof, 2008) thus we should be limited to some scattered data. Undoubtedly, Iran with such a rich natural and cultural asset was considered among the best tourist destinations to Old Testament tourists. The study of Herodotus, Eratosthenes works, and others before



Islam (Baker, 1948 as cited in Ebrahimzade, 2007, p. 3), Arabic and European tourists after Islam (Kristiansen, 1969) support this claim. There is no accurate information about foreign tourists who came to Iran before Islam but many came to Iran after Islam and recorded their observations in some particular travelogues. The famous foreign tourists who have come to Iran and shared their experiences in the travelogues include: Ibn Hawgal, Pierre Loti, George Clark, Lawrence Lockhart, Engelbert Kampfer, Shardin, Yaghot Hamavy, Antony Sherly, and Eugene Flandan (Mirjalili, 2011).

Interestingly, the historical evidence indicated that the Iranian hospitality dates to at least 2000 BC (O'Gorman, Baum, and McLellan, 2007). The ancient Greek historian Herodots reported many comfortable guesthouses (called Karevansara) along Iran roads. Herodots admired the Iran's roads during Achaemenian Empire era and stated:" Scale of measurement for their road is persang (each persang is about six kilometers) and Iranians built a station for each four persang that containing a convenient guesthouse or Karevansara to obtain enough welfare and convenience for guests." (<http://hotelmagazine.ir/print/2000>).

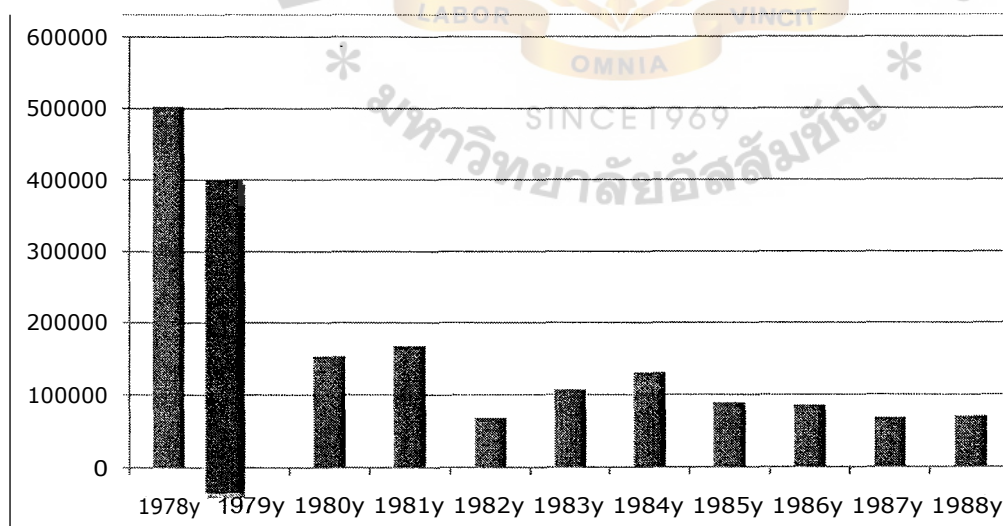
However, the first tourism department has established by Iranian government at Interior Ministry in 1935. Then, this department was replaced by high tourism council in 1941. Regarding to positive economic aspect of attracting foreign tourists and consolidating the foundations of goodwill between Iran and other countries, the high tourism council developed the policies and executive programs in the 1954 (Ebrahimzade,2007).

Due to its impressive history over 2500, this country was identified as a top tourist destination in the Middle East during the years of 1967-1977. While Egypt was ranked 14th in the region at the same period even if this country compass the world's Seven Wonders (Fakharian, Jalilvand, Elyasi & Mohammadi, 2012). The total number of international arrivals was 678157 tourists by 1977 that United States citizens alone accounted for 70000 of

it (Faghri, 2007). During this period, both accommodation and transportation sectors reflected a dramatic growth.

According to Baum & O'Gorman (2010), Iran Air was seen to be the fastest growing and most profitable airline in the world by 1970s. It also was ranked only second to Qantas as the world's safest airline by 1976. Recently, Iran Air along with 13 other private airlines suffers from the lack of availability of bona fide spare parts and maintenance imposed by western boycott. In terms of accommodation, many American chains hotels such as the Hilton, Sheraton, Intercontinental, and Hyatt invested in accommodation sector throughout the country but a few days after the revolution, all western businesses were forced to leave and tourism industry was significantly depressed. In other words, since 1979, Iran is characterized by the absence of global brands among all categories. Many business sectors are dominated by local players including travel and accommodation. However, the eight years of imposed Iran-Iraq war, changed political structure, and the western boycott caused a rupture in tourism production in Iran after revolution.

**Figure 1.1 International tourist arrivals in Iran during 1978-1988**



Source: Adapted from Ebrahimzade, E., 2007. *Journal of Geography Science*. 6(9).

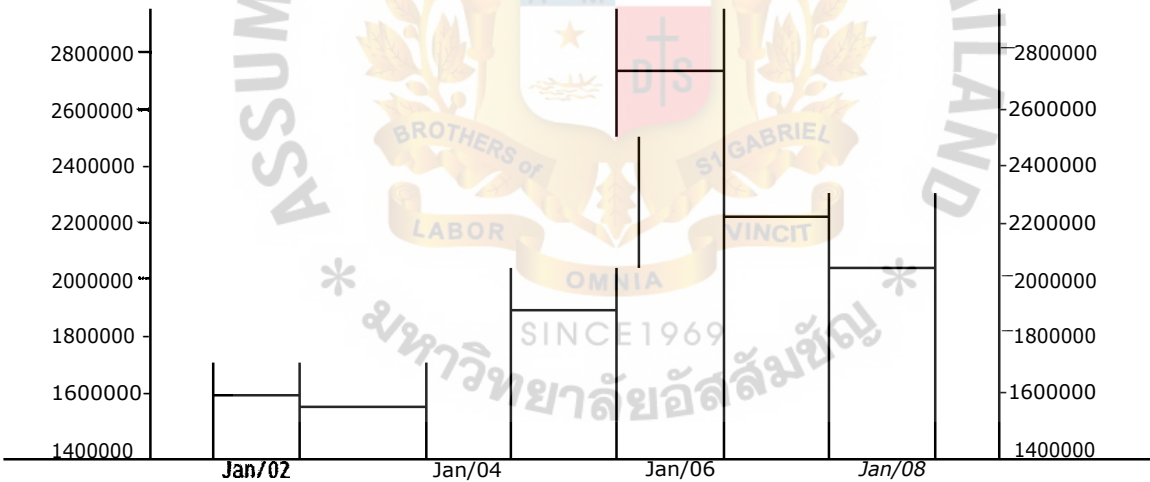
Consequently, tourist arrivals experienced a dramatic decline during the year of 1980(Figure 1.1).During this period, the most visitors to Iran have been changed from people

who travel due to impressive history, culture and breathtaking landscape to religious pilgrims, businessmen, and many immigrant Iranians returning to visit their families in Iran (Seadat Abadi, 2007).

The following chart also represents the historical data of the number of arrivals in Iran since 2002 till 2008 (Figure, 1.2). Those Statistics indicate that Iran experienced a 100-percent growth from 2004 in foreign tourist arrivals until mid-2008 when the number of foreign arrivals surged up to 2.0345 million (Trading Economics Organization, 2012).

One of the main reasons for increasing the number of arrivals refers to the return of peace and security to the country by the end of war. In addition, Iran's government got through many five year plans. The main objectives of the first five-year plan (1989-1994) were the reconstruction of damages induced by Iraq imposed war with a great emphasis on

**Figure1.2 International arrivals in Iran during 2002-2008**



Source: Trading Economic Organization,(2012). Retrieved 24 July, 2012, from <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/iran/international-tourism-number-of-arrivals-wb-data.html>

the balance of economy also developing tourism industry. In other words, from the first five-year development plan, the tourism industry was taken into account to introduce the Iranian culture and civilization, increase foreign exchange and improve the image of the country. By

2004, the Iran Cultural Heritage Organization (ICHO) and the Iran Touring and Tourism Organization (ITTO) merged to get together. This merger has created a suitable ground for such purposes and reinforced the growing link between tourism and conservation of national and cultural heritage.

The widespread efforts have been launched by the tourism and cultural heritage organization to provide further facilities in order to meet tourist requirements. As a result, Iran's travel and tourism industry in 2005 accounted for 10% of GDP and provided 1,710,190 jobs equivalent to 9% of total employment (Faghri, 2007). The statistics clarify the valuable achievements in the rising number of arrivals over 2010. According to Washington Post, Iran experienced nearly 13 percent growth in the number of arrivals over 2004 to 2010 whereas the world's tourism growth met the average of 2 and 3 percent (<http://www.bazarkhabar.ir/News.aspx?ID=35530>).

While the number of arrivals has been constantly increased during the 2009 -2011, the dramatic decline in the number of arrivals in 2012 was unavoidable and estimated to be continued over 2013. In fact, it seems much more difficult that Iran would meet the WTO prediction. WTO anticipated that the number of inbound tourists to Iran will increase with an average annual rate of 8.4% through 1955 to 2020 (Hiedary, 2011).

Obviously, Iran with such a political and social situation won't practice mass tourism as it is practiced in other regional destinations such as Turkey and Dubai. Although, many marketing efforts have been conducted by Iran's government to change the world's attitude toward Iran and promote Iran as a tourism destination. According to Mehrizi (2007), Iran Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) allocated 10 Million US\$ in the 2006 to advertise Iran's tourism in the BBC, Al-Arabia, Al-Jazeera, Euro News, MBC TV channels, and an English speaking Iranian channel "Press TV".



While, the government tries to overcome international tensions and seriously pursues many plans to increase the numbers of inbound tourists also generate more tourism revenue during the forecast period, this country faced with a negative balance of tourism exchange. According to Najafi (2012), by 2010, almost 500 thousands Turkish tourists came to Iran, but more than one million Iranian tourists went to turkey in the first four months of 2010. Emirates in the same time attracted 300 thousand Iranian visitors .By 2011, 143 thousands Iranian tourists went to Thailand but very few of Thais came to Iran (TOT, 2012).

Seadat abadi (2005) also stated, the twelve year average expenditure of Iranian tourists abroad is estimated much more than the foreign tourist flow into the country and the hard currency generated by inbound tourists is only 15.5% of total foreign currency spent by Iranian tourists abroad. Being realistic, tourism industry in Iran is more likely becoming the significant ground in losing foreign exchange instead of being key source of hard currency. In addition, the existence of many travel agencies in that county is another significant challenge which facing Iran's travel market.

There is not accurate information about the numbers of travel agencies in Iran by 2012 but it is estimated that there are more than 2500 active tour and travel agencies in Iran, 700 of that are in Tehran and others were spotted throughout different provinces (Najafi, 2012). Despite of their rapid growth, little effort has been done in the field of attracting foreign tourists. Most of those agencies focus on the outbound tourists to afford their internal costs. Table1.1 shows how the numbers of travel agencies operating in Iran has dramatically increased during the past ten years. In summary, the wreck of the Iran tourism industry might be attributed to many barriers: Absence of international investment in tourism and distance from major tourist generating market (Imani,Mehrjoo&Karami,2012), Negative image of country, lack of skilled manpower , weak institutional frameworks for tourism planning, political instability, government controlled or owned tourism industry inappropriate

**Table 1.1 Numbers of Iran travel agencies**

Year	Ticketing	Tour Operating	Ticketing & Tour Operating	Total
1990		9	82	91
1992		91	80	171
1994		129	144	273
1995	53	189	176	418
1998	121	339	313	773
1999	N/A	N/A	N/A	1188
2009	N/A	N/A	N/A	2500

Source: Payvand news, 2005. Retrieved by 13 July, 2012, from

<http://www.payvand.com/news/05/oct/1224.html>

international relations, and bureaucratic politics (Allahdadi, 2011) are the significant barriers that contribute to underdevelopment of Iran's tourism. Furthermore, the nuclear program of Iran that created an uncommon opportunity for western media to continue their job and develop their negative propaganda against Iran. O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan (2007) also added persistent political and regional security issues (civil war in the neighboring counties), political and ideological opposition and lack of tourism facilities particularly in transportation sector. However, the Iran's tourism industry is on the path of development even if it is facing serious challenges regarding its image as a tourist destination.

### **1.1.2 Cultural tourism in Iran**

In particular, from the late 1970s, the role of cultural assets in attracting tourists and differentiating destinations become obvious and tourists with cultural motivations are known as a separate tourism category (Mckercher & Du Cros, 2002 as cited in Boukas, 2008, p. 31). Today, this category is considered as the most dynamic and fastest growing tourism market. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) revealed that the total number of

international arrivals in 2007 was 898 million whereas the cultural trips accounting for 359 million (40%) of it (as cited in OECD, 2009, P.25).

Although, defining the cultural tourism is as complex as the identifying the cultural tourists but academics and tourism marketers define cultural tourism as a sophisticated category that differentiated by consumption of a destination's tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Richards, 1996). As a result, tourist with the differentiated demand of culture should be considered a cultural tourist. According to Silberberg (1995 as cited in Yun, Hennessey, Mac Donald & Maceachern, 2007 ,p.102), cultural tourists are tourists who motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, and scientific or lifestyle/heritage of the host community. However, Silberberg suggested the different levels of motivation toward destination culture between cultural tourists. Greatly motivated cultural tourists are tourists who travel to satisfy only their cultural needs. The cultural tourists might be partly motivated by destination culture or cultural attraction is adjunct to other main reason. Accidental cultural tourists are kind of cultural tourist who seeking in other attractions rather than culture of destination. Indeed, the cultural tourists are usually well educated and affluent people who possess a dramatic desire to experience the destination culture in order to satisfy their cultural needs and wants.

However, Iran's international tourism is typically regional and it is mainly fed by neighboring countries (Baum & O'Gorman, 2010). Almost, 30% of total travelers are coming to Iran with business purpose. 30% are Pilgrims visitors, 26% VFR with a combination of both regional and long haul travelers, 10 % sightseeing from long haul originating countries and 4% of total visitors are from small MICE. Although, this structure does not clarify the cultural tourism share in this composition, but there is a great demand for cultural attractions in Iran and this market is growing fast. As, Shahbaz Yazdani the Deputy Head of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization said that cultural tourists consisted

the majority of foreign tourists visiting Iran in the 2010 (when the international tourists reached the peak) that mainly coming from European countries, like France and Germany ([http : // English. irib.ir /radioculture / iran/tourism/item/77629](http://English. irib.ir /radioculture / iran/tourism/item/77629)).

Today, the Iran's government is well aware of the importance of cultural heritage for motivating tourists and eager to develop this form of tourism. Regarding many obstacles on the path of Iran tourism development, contemporary government has been forced to place cultural tourism in priority to achieve the reliable source of income, to boast Iranian identity, and develop cultural communication. In fact, Iran's tourism officials accepted that the only chance for tourism promotion is cultural tourism.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Recently, Iran is shrouded in worldwide negative politic, religious, economic, and social propagandas. This country also has been stuck by politic, religious and economical controversy (O'Gorman, Baum & Mc Lellan, 2007). Due to Iran's government religious interpretation of the politic, culture, socio- economical environments, and negative images particularly created by the western media, this country suffers of the particular obstacles on the way of tourism development. Presence of strict standards toward individual's social behavior such as dress code, Disco ban, prohibition of alcohol consumption, and other recreational drugs have created a great gap between Iran deserved tourist capacity and its actual arrivals statistics. Those factors along with the existence of conflict in the neighboring countries like Iraq and Afghanistan distort the Iran's image as a tourism destination.

According to Gartner (1996, p.325), a destination image is important in the set of variables that influence destination choice. Thus the negative image of a destination significantly affects the destination's competitiveness because the destination image significantly determines visitor's destination choice (Lee, O'Leary & Hong, 2002). This fact

raises some serious questions. How can this country avoid projecting negative images? How can Iran reach a sufficient degree of recognition among potential tourist? What can effectively impact the potential tourist intention to visit Iran? These issues are crucial for that country, whose economy relies heavily on the terminable source of oil and seeks the reliable source of foreign currency.

Concretely saying, Iran needs to recreate her image by identifying and promoting its distinctive features to the tourist generating market. Many tourism experts believe that Iran's culture in all its forms is likely to figure strongly in the future tourism products. In the countries with rich cultural resources, like Iran, culture has always contributed as an important element for providing tourism product. Therefore, culture either as a motive or as an attraction, is a dynamic resource that should be planned and promoted harmoniously to attract tourists. In fact, Iranian tourism policy makers and marketers should promote Iran's cultural tourism as a key source of foreign revenue.

In order to be successful in the international tourism market and take advantage of Iran's culture as a reliable tourism drive, Iran's tourism planners and marketers need to clearly understand how the other nations as the potential tourists perceive Iran's culture, which attributes of Iranian culture are really important to them and influence their perception also their intentions to visit Iran respectively.

As a result, this study has posed the following research questions:

"What is the perceived image of Iran by international tourists "?

"How can avoid the projecting negative images by exploitation of Iran's culture"?

"How can reach a sufficient degree of recognition among potential tourists by exploitation of Iran's culture"?

"Whether or not the perceived cultural image of Iran determines tourists' intentions to visit that country?"



"Which cultural attributes of Iranian culture effectively impact the potential tourists' intentions to visit Iran "?

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

This study seeks to understand the relationship between perception of international tourists toward Iran's culture and their intentions to visit that country. If this relationship is confirmed thus Iran's cultural attributes can respectively exert its impacts on tourist perception also intention. In other words, whether an individual intends to visit Iran or not, is determined by how she/he perceives each of the Iran's cultural attributes. However, it is not possible that all cultural attributes impact individuals' intentions to visit Iran equally. Some important attributes may be more effective than others.

Therefore, the main purposes of the current study are to investigate the relationship between international tourists' perception towards Iran's culture and their intentions to visit that country, recognize important cultural attributes respective importance level in the forming individuals' intentions to visit Iran.

The following objectives will be achieved in this study:

- 1.3.1 To examine the perception of international tourists toward Iran's culture.
- 1.3.2. To clarify the different group characteristics' (such as gender, nationality, and past visit) impacts on the international tourists' perception toward Iran's culture.
- 1.3.3. To find out the possible relationship between international tourists' perception toward Iran's culture and their intentions to visit Iran.
- 1.3.4. To identify Iran's cultural attributes that effectively influence the international tourists' intentions to visit that country.

## 1.4 Scope of the Study

This research examines the perception of international tourists 'perception toward Iran's culture and explores the possible relationship between tourists 'perception toward Iran's culture and their intentions to visit Iran. This research also explores those Iran's cultural attributes which effectively influence cultural image of Iran. We will study respondents' perception about Iran's culture by considering cultural attributes; it means we neglect the impacts of other social, economical, political and psychological attributes. Respondents in this research are international tourists at Svarnabummi airport (Bangkok). Different group characteristics (gender, nationality, and past visit) that likely influence tourists' perception of Iran's culture are included in this study.

## 1.5 Limitation of the Study

1.5.1 The result of the questionnaire is limited in teams of period of time (March-April, 2013), so the study's findings cannot generalize for all times because respondents could always change their minds in each period of time or influence by other impressive factors.

1.5.2 Lack of complete and accurate statistics related to tourism indexes in Iran during the period concerning this studies also lack of conformity in the given information were significant limitation of this study.

1.5.3 The current research focuses mainly on the perception of respondents toward Iran's culture on selected cultural attributes after reviewing the relevant literature. Therefore its finding could not be generalized for attributes not included in the framework of the proposed research.

1.5. 4 Unfortunately, There is not any research under similar context which conducted in Iran. Therefore, it is impossible to compare the current research findings to other Iranian related

studies' results or make use of them as the available frameworks in order to develop this research properly.

1.5.5 Respondents' lack of information about Iran made nearly 16% of the total questionnaires useless which in turn influences the research results inevitably.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Most of the previous studies on destination image are based on series of socio-culture, economic, political and tourist facilities attributes of the destination but this study focuses only on the destination's cultural attributes. It will generate a clear understanding of the tourists' perception towards Iran's culture and its possible relationship with respondents' intentions to visit Iran. It also aims to examine Iranian cultural attributes in terms of their respective importance level in the forming potential tourists' intentions to visit Iran. The results of current study will help the Iran's Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) to identify and promote Iran's culture distinctive features. In fact, it will create insight into the proper ways to market Iran in the Asian, western, or African countries also explore the suitable ways to promote change in the current image of Iran as a tourism destination.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

### **Cultural attributes**

A culture consists of a great number of cultural components. Cultural attributes in the context of tourism usually refers to destination's culture and its elements that shape the people's way of life. Therefore, cultural attributes in this study refers to the history, people, religion, language, art, food, and Traditional festivals of the destination.

## **Intention to visit**

Intention is defined as something that people want and plan to do. Tourist's intention to visit represents whether a tourist goes to a destination. However, it is important to observe tourists' visit intentions from a time perspective because the intention often changes. However, intention in this research refers to international tourists 'desire to visit Iran within the next 12 months.

## **Destination perception**

Destination perception is the process by which a person receives, selects, organizes, and interprets information to create a picture of the destination which in turn influences the destination choice (Mayo & Jaris, 1981 as Cited in Poolprasert, 2009, p.7). Obviously, tourist develops perception of a destination even prior to his /her visitation. (Reisinger & Turner, 2003, p.148). Therefore, perception in this research refers to respondents' "a priori" and "a posteriori" perception about Iran's culture.

## **Tourist destination**

According to Kotler, Bowen & Makens, "Tourists travel to destinations; places within some form of actual or perceived boundary, such as the physical boundary of an island, political boundaries or even market-created boundary"( 2007). In other words, Destinations are places that attract visitors for a temporary stay, and have a wide range of countries, cities even villages (Pike, 2005). However, tourist destination in this research refers to the Iran.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITRATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The tourism industry is one of the largest and most dynamic sectors among other industries of the today's global economy. According to World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2012), the total contribution of the tourism industry to world GDP is US\$6.3trillion (9.1 percent) in 2011. In terms of employment, travel and tourism provided 255 million jobs in 2011, 1 in 12 of all jobs in the world. Those statistics show that tourism as a profitable and entrepreneurial industry has enough potential to be considered a major tool of economic growth also as a vehicle for poverty reduction in the developing countries.

However, in the tourism researches, culture has long been studied as an important factor that affects tourist's destination choice. According to Ng, Lee, & Soutar (2007), four elements of culture such as the tourist's national culture, the tourist's internalized culture, the destinations' culture, and the "distance" between tourists' home country's culture and the tourist's destination culture can significantly affect tourists' destination choice. Today, culture of destination is increasingly being used to attract tourists and enhance destinations' competitiveness and attractiveness. This paper focuses on the destination's culture and examines its impacts on the tourist's destination choice. This chapter contains four sections. The first section argues the socio-demographic and travel characteristics as the independent variables. The second section focuses on the tourist's perception towards Iran's culture as the intermediate variable. The third one argues the dependent variable of visit intention. Finally, the Furth section tends to discuss the theories used in this study and the existing empirical studies.



## **2.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Past Experience**

In general, socio-demographic variables have been considered the usable variables in research since they are easy to assess (Lawson, 1994). Those variables are also commonly used in tourism research in order to profile and segment tourists by gender, age, income, marital status, occupations, educational level or ethnic background. Developing a greater understanding of each market segments' socio-demographic characteristics will enable many destinations to enhance the local tourism industry through better marketing and promotional activities.

However, the service literature contains contributions that analyze the relationship between perception of tourism destination and socio-demographic variables. Baloglu & McCleary (1999) asserted that the tourists' perception of objects, products, and destinations is highly influenced by Socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, occupation, education, and marital status (as cited in Cui, 2005, p.22). Beerli & Martin (2004) by studying the previous studies results revealed that the tourist's socio-demographics significantly influence the perceived image of the tourism destination. In fact, the socio-economic & demographic characteristics also the satisfaction of the past experience not only represent the important determinants of tourist perception toward a tourism destination also they influence the tourist's destination choice (Eva, Francesc & Edoardo, 2012)

However, this study provides international tourists' socio-demographic characteristics in order to explore particular relationship between those characteristics and perception toward Iran's culture also their intentions to visit Iran. Socio-demographic characteristics in the study include: gender, nationality, and past visit.

### **Gender**

Sex refers to biological characteristics but gender refers to psychological dimensions of masculine and feminine behavior. In fact, gender might influences tourists' thinking,

attitudes, behaviors, wants, and purchase decision (Kotler, 2000, as cited in Hoang,2008, p.9).Wang &Thanh (2003) found that gender and information can influence the destination perception and motivation to visit. Zhou's (2005) examination of Cape Town international tourists' perception toward the most important destination attributes revealed that female respondents are more concerned with destination culture than the male respondents and their overall perception of destination is more influenced by cultural attributes.

Also, Jordan and Gibson (2005) in their study of Solo women travelers found women hold mental maps of the world in terms of safety, cultural differences, and the social norms associated with women's roles in different countries. Apparently, the women are more likely to be motivated to visit by culture than males also more likely engage in the cultural activities (Lord, 1999).

#### Nationality

Tourists come from different countries with different attitude, cultures, and lifestyles thus they have different perception on an identical tourism product as well. Nationality is one of the significant issues in demographic segmentation with similarity to use in distinguishing tourists' groups (Kotler &Amstrong, 2000). However, some studies directed their interests to examine the perception among different nationalities and cultures. For instance; Bonn et al. (2005) pointed out that geographic and cultural differences will result in different destination perception (as cited in Maden, Koker&Topsumer, 2012,p.110) or destination perception, satisfaction levels, and tourist activities varies according to the tourist nationality (Baloglu, 1997; Pizam &Sussman, 1995). Therefore, country of origin should be a key consideration in determining a specific positioning strategy for a destination.

#### Past Visit

Past experience has been identified as an important determinant of the future behavior in social and psychological studies. In the tourism context, it has been discussed by many

researchers as well. Tourists make their travel experiences and accumulate their knowledge during trip which leading them to form their overall perception. Clearly, tourist's perception will change during a course of trip (Vogt & Stewart, 1998).

Um & Crompton (1990) argued that tourists' perception of a destination might be influenced by different internal and external inputs. Internal input refers to travelers' socio-demographics, values, and motives, whereas external inputs include mass media, word-of-mouth, and past visit. Past travel experience has also been found to exert more impact on travel decisions than information acquired from external sources (Mazursky, 1989).

In particular, Chon (1991) found that the perception of destination by post-visitor were more positive compared with the perception of pre-visitors. This might be because, the more familiar a destination becomes the more positive becomes its perception. In fact, familiarity influences tourists' perception of a place (Hu and Ritchie, 1993 as cited in Gao & Zhang, 2009, P.2). Hammitt et al. (2006) stated that with familiarity, one perceives a place differently than before, also feels differently about it (as cited in Mechinda, Serriat, Anuwichanont & Guild, 2010, p.62).

In the simple words, individuals with past travel experience, might become more confident travelers with more positive perception toward destination as a result of their experience and are more likely to revisit (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Although, the findings of Yun, Hennessey, Mac Donald & Maceachern's study (2007) illustrated that demand for cultural attractions as such is greater among first-time visitors. This can be explained by tourist's novelty seeking motivation. However, past experience (PE) in this study refers to the experience of visiting Iran.

## **2.2. Perception towards Iran's culture**

This part contains two sections that argue the concept of perception and destination perception also Iran's cultural attributes.

### **2.2.1 Perception**

There is a significant distinction between sensation and perception. According to Lindsay & Norman (1977:p.51), perception is the process by which the received senses are selected, organized and interpreted. The fundamental elements of the perception are the perceiver, the target, and the situations. Thus, the perception not only depends on the physical stimuli but also on the conditions within individual develop her/his perception (Durmaz & Diyarbakirlioglu, 2011). As a consequence of being individual, the emotional and motivational states, together with expectation and culture, might influence people's perception.

#### **The process of perception**

According to Kotler (2004) the existence of three stages in the perceptual process leads people to have different perception of the same object (as cited in Durmaz & Diyarbakirlioglu, 2011, p.19).. Those stages are known as the selective attention, selective distortion, and selective retention. In the simple words, despite of huge number of stimuli which individuals are exposed to it in the everyday life they select only limited number of them. They also change the received information in the selective distortion stage in order to make it more consistent with their pervious received information. Finally, by selective retention people choose what they want to remember and throw away anything else thus it would be logical that perception is the process by which this stimuli is selected, organized and interpreted.

### 2.2.2 Destination perception

The destination perception is a psychological concept and refers to the process by which a person receives, selects, organizes, and interprets information to create a picture of the destination (Mayo & Jaris, 1981 as Cited in Poolprasert, 2009, p.7). It is formed by a set of attributes that identified a destination in its various cultural, social, natural contexts, and tourist infrastructure as well (Gao and Zhang, 2009). Tourists consider most or all of those attributes when form their perception toward destination also their decision to visit a destination. However, the perceived images that people give to a destination will fundamentally shape their choices (Lee, Lee & Lee, 2005, as cited in Poolprasert, 2009,p.6). Many empirical studies examined perception of tourists toward particular destination (D'Silva & D'Silva, 2008; Wang & Thanh, 2003; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chheang ,2011) and found what tourists perceive as important for a destination, and how they perceive it, can influence them positively or negatively toward a destination. Reisinger & Turner (2003) pointed out: "The more favorable perceptions, the greater the likelihood of choosing a product from similar alternatives." It confirms the existence of positive relationship between the perception of the place and intention to visit (Milman & Pizam, 1995). This positive relationship also applies to the perception of potential tourists and destination choice (Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000). Therefore, successful destination marketing requires focusing on tourists' destination perception because it critically influences their destination choices.

Obviously, in many cases destination perception is formed without the experience or knowledge of the destination. As, Gartner's (1993) study revealed that tourists' images of the place are built more on their perception than reality because tourists are not able to pre-test the tourism product prior to actual experience. It can be concluded tourists' perception of the destination should differ with actual visit experience. According to Reisinger & Turner (2003), the perception of tourist who never had an experience of the product before and



whose perception is made by knowledge originated from promotion differs from the perception of tourist who had already experienced the product.

Di Marino (2007), argued the process of different tourists' perceptions.

- "a priori" perception is the mental picture that an individual makes of a place without having a physical visit which likely origins in the individual general exposure through reading, watching television, or even movies.

- "in situ" perception occurs when the tourists experience the destination. It is clear that they have a previous perception of the place that can be confirmed or not.

- "a posteriori" perception indicates that tourists' experience doesn't end with the trip. For instance, the roles that photograph have in recoding specific elements of destination.

Those categories show people based on their experience of destination possess different kind of perceptions in their minds. However, the previous studies, mainly studied tourist perception towards destination attributes that were classified into five dimensions including environment, infrastructure & accessibility, culture and social elements, tourist leisure entertainment, and local food (Fodness, 1994; Zhou, 2005). Although, the perception of each destination attribute doesn't impact on tourists' destination perception and choice equally and some attributes impose stronger impacts (Zhou, 2005). The fast growth of cultural tourism has led some researchers to argue that cultural attributes have become the most important attributes for special kind of tourists. This study focuses on respondents' perception towards cultural attributes of Iran and involves both "a priori" and "a posteriori" perceptions.

### **2.2.3 Iran's Culture and Cultural Attributes**

The word "culture" is complex and has diverse definitions, ranging from the way of life to historical inheritance, knowledge, values transmission or other descriptions. It could be

defined by its concerns with socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions and all other products of human work and thought (Coons,2000) or as a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor,1871). Despite of its different definitions, culture can be described simply by "the way of life" of a country or society (Gyekye, 1998 as cited in Aikiins-Bekoe, 2009). The ways of living together including value systems, traditions, religious beliefs, social structure, political and educational system, language, moral, forms of art or other products of the creative spirit are passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, the basic ingredients determining a country's culture or the ways of living to gether might be geography, ethnicity, language, religion, and history that a combination of those elements plus the "condiments" of the local scene make cultures different(Cushner & et al., 2003 as cited in Chen, Jo &Donnell,2004). In the simple words, geography, history, language, ethnicity, and religions as the dominant forces are strongly reflected in the country's culture. In other hand, the concept of culture usually refers to things (both physical and mental) that are made by human beings rather than the things that often occur in the nature. That is culture is the human-made part of the environment and a very diverse and rich factor, comprising the societal norms and traditions, language, dressing styles, architecture, handicrafts, art, music, gastronomy, etc. (Triandis,2002 as cited in Iliachenko,2005). As a result, the country's culture could be referred to the combination of manmade part of environment plus the basic ingredients determining country's culture.

However, there are literally thousands of cultures belonging to the different countries on earth which contributing to the global cultural diversity. The importance of culture refers to its critical role in experiencing differences. As, tourism is primarily about experiencing differences (Kubalek, 2008) thus a variety of cultures which practiced at different places of the country as a tourism destination have enough potential to attract tourists. The dramatic

rise in the number of travelers who seek adventure, culture, history, archaeology and interaction with local people (Hollinshead, 1993, as cited in Huh, 2002, p.18), explains how culture of a destination impacts tourist destination choice and encourages tourists and hosts to appreciate cultural difference as well as to make basic cultural ties (OECD,2009). Although it does not limited only to cultural distance between host and community, the tourist cultural similarities with host also influence destination choice. The study conducted by Ng, Lee & Soutar (2007), revealed that the cultural similarities in terms of language, religion, and geography may influence Australian tourists' intentions to visit different destinations.

Obviously, Iran with her impressive history and rich cultural assets has enough potential to appeal tourists who seeking differences (Tavakoli, 2011). This country with a proud civilization in the area of science, art, religion, literature and politics is among the richest in the world. Those unique characteristics of that country are rivaled by only a few countries. Her central location within Middle East associated with historical elements put that country at a crossroad of civilizations. Being at this situation has created Iran's constant interactions with the neighboring cultures which in turn enhance her brilliant history and diverse culture. Although, there is a great ethnically, religiously and linguistically differences between the mainland of Iran and other places, it is still possible to identify certain core of Iranian culture which practicing in common by Iranians. No matter where they live, Iran's culture gives the Iranians their basic identity.

However, Iran's culture like any other country's culture consists of a great number of cultural components (Heatwole, 2008). The cultural components or attributes in the context of tourism include all cultural elements associated with the destination by which visitors can learn about history and people's way of life (as cited in Poria, Butler & Airey, 2003). Thus the cultural attributes are usually created by human beings rather than the nature born. They involve the development process of history, lifestyle, arts and other human creative

achievements. That is history, traditional festivals, historical sites, beautiful scenic heritage, architecture, folk arts, and folk cultural village (Sofield & Li, 1998) can be considered as the cultural attributes as well as museums, multicultural regions, Linguistic diversity, local people, and food (Chheang, 2011). The current study mainly discusses history, art (architecture, carpet, and cinema), food, traditional festival, people, Persian language and literature, and religion as the cultural attributes of Iran.

### **2.2.3.1 History of Persia**

Tourists' interests in discovering past stories of other people has increased recently and is estimated to be continue. According to Hollinshead (1993), the number of travelers who seek adventure, culture, history, archaeology and interaction with local people is dramatically increasing (as cited in Huh, 2002, p.18). Today, many destinations are known throughout their history. Egypt is one of those destinations that maintained her image throughout the middle and modern history. However, the discovery of the historical antiquities makes a destination more attractive and appeals a large number of cultural/heritage tourists. The historical monuments that belong to different periods of human settlement in the plateau of Iran can retell the past history of Persians even human beings and the way of their living. As, Hegel stated at his book: "The principle of evolution begins with the history of Iran"(Nezami, 2013). Therefore, such an ancient history, which reflected in the historical and architectural heritages and events, has enough potential to tempt tourists' curiosity to learn more about Iran's history. This section offers a quick view of the ancient history of Persia.

However, according to Mahdavi (1986, P.6) today's Iran is part of greater geographical area that was the home of great civilization. Persia was what the Greeks referred to Iran when they spoke of that country. In the 1935, the government officially registered the

name of Iran for this country (Moghadam: 1993, p. 38). However, the recent archaeological studies indicate that as early as **10,000 BC**, people lived on the southern shores of the Caspian; they were Aryans (Iranian ancestors). Those who later moved to Europe and probably the first men in the history of mankind to engage in agriculture and animal husbandry (Abdollahi, 2009)

Obviously, the early civilization is considered to be established along the Karun River in the southwest of that vast area. This area was occupied by the Elamites. They established a kingdom in 2700 B.C. and became a major power during the period 1500-1100 B.C. In other words, Elamites formed the first kingdom in Iran. They were not ethnically "Iranian" (Sykes, 1951). When the Elamites were at its peak, two main Indo-European tribes started to threaten this kingdom.

At first, the Medes tribe played the dominant role. They established their kingdom at Ecbatana and were as the powerful neighbors of Assyria. The control of wide area of Iran including Fars the heartland of Persians in the southwest was in the hands of Medes and Persians king was a vassal of the Medes. In 612 B.C. they joined with Babylon to oust the Assyrian. The Medes also had formed a kind of alliance with the Persians (Sykes, 1951).

### **The Persian or Achaemenid empire**

According to Elton&Mahdi (2006, p. 6), the Persians established their kingdom on the old homeland of Elamites. The Median king Astyages in order to strengthen Medes' bond with Persian people made a marriage of convenience of his daughter, Mandana to Persian ruler. She gave birth to a boy Cyrus II. However, in 549 B.C. Cyrus II defeated his grandfather Astyages, and created the Achaemenid Empire. The Achaemenid Empire or Persian Empire became one of the greatest empires in human history up until that point. Afterwards, Cyrus the Great defeated King Croesus of Lydia and the Babylonian empire in 539 B.C. and developed his empire. According to Khairabadi (2003, p.22), Cyrus the Great in



Babylon ordered the release of Jewish prisoners who had lived in captivity for many years and allowed the 40,000 Jews to return Jerusalem. Because of this philanthropy action, he is known as the "liberator of Jews" as revealed in Jewish history and also documented in the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament.

Cyrus was a great leader of men, generous and benevolent. The charter of Cyrus (*Manshour Koroosh*) was discovered in the excavation of the site of Babylon in 1878. In the charter, Cyrus the Great described his human treatment of the inhabitants of Babylonia after war. This charter is known as the first charter of human rights and the United Nations has published translation of it in all the official U.N. languages in 1971 (Marvasti, 1993).

Indeed, Cyrus was a master of diplomacy. He allowed people and defeated rivals to retain their local religion and customs. His life was mostly spent to pacify eastern Iran and defending its borders. Cyrus died in 530 and was buried in the Pasargard. His gold coffin was broken and stripped by Alexander the Great two centuries later. Cambyses II, the Cyrus's son defeated the Egyptians in battle at Pelusium in 525 and Egypt became a Persian province. Cambyses on the way home was attacked by his cousin, Darius and was killed by him. Darius took the throne. During the rule of Darius I, the Achaemenid Empire reached its greatest extent from Macedonia in the west to the northern India in the east (Figure, 2.6.1).

According to Khojani(2001), Achaemenid kings made substantial high way system. There were many posting stations along those royal roads where new men and fresh horses were available at any moment to carry a document. In fact, a message was able to travel the full distance (3200 km) in ten days. They made an advanced irrigation technique which is known as kariz or qanat system. This system is a network of underground channels to carry water by gravity feed from highland to field at lower elevations. They created a universal legal system, and an universal system of weight and measures. Persian art and culture were flourished during this period.

However, the constant struggle between the Greeks and Persians reached its peak in the bloody battle of Granicus. Alexander the Great's empire defeated Darius III in the 334-330 B.C and the empire of Persia came to an end. Although, Alexander burned the Persepolis (Achaemenid capital) in order to humiliate his defeated rivals but the impressive ruins of this magnificent city are left in the north part of the modern Shiraz. After Alexander's death (323 B.C), two Iranian empires were redeplored the Parthians and the Sassanids.

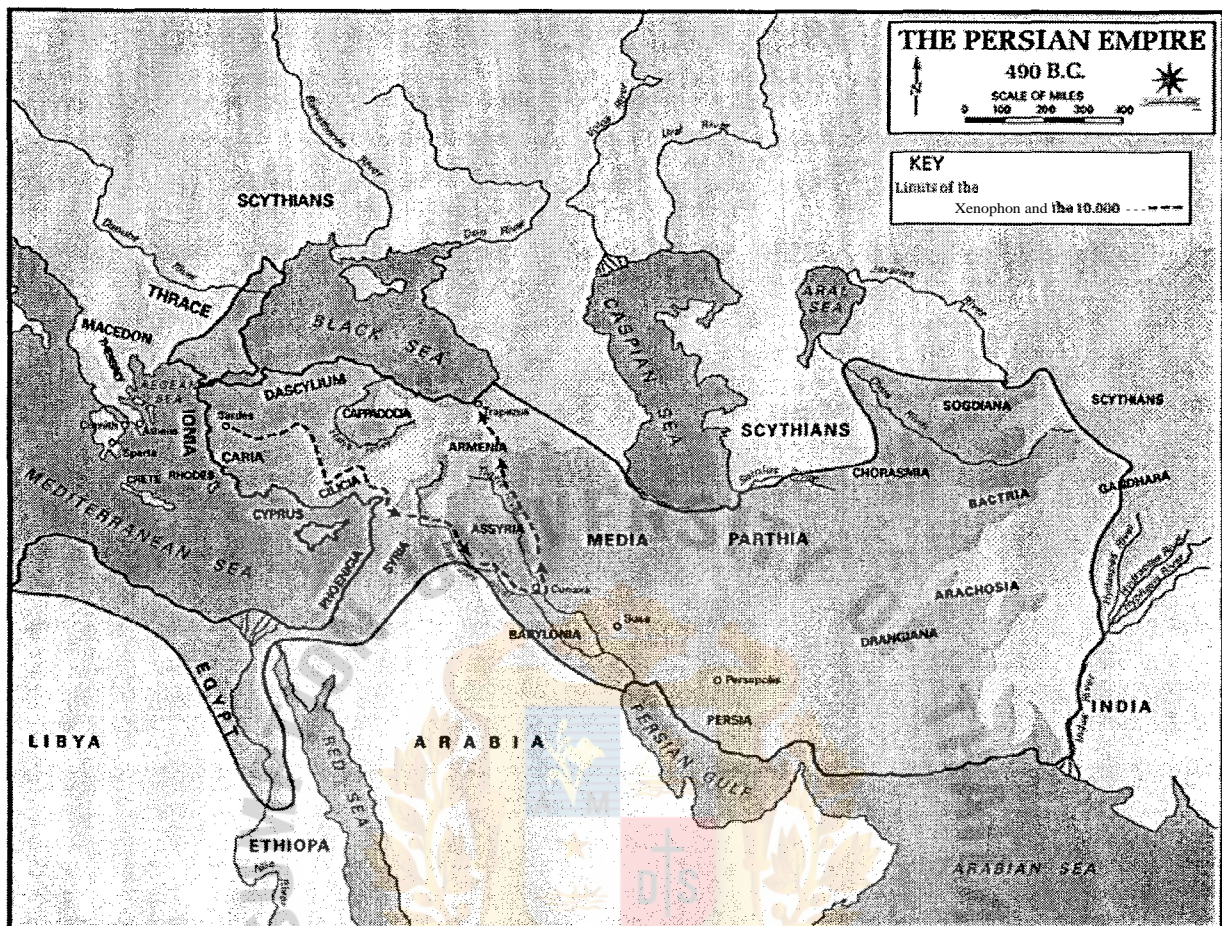
### **The Parthian empire**

Parthians were the nomad people who claimed ancestry from both Persian and Greeks (International History Project, 2007). They settled in the region between the Caspian and Aral seas. They took advantage of the Seleucid's weakening power and set up their capital at Hecatompylos, near Damghan. Parthian ruler, Mithridates I extended his Empire from the Euphrates to Herat in Afghanistan. In fact, he reconstituted the ancient Achaemenid Empire. They adopted an administrative system similar to Achaemenid and used the Persian language and a form of writing called Pahlavi script as their official language (Khairabadi: 2003.p. 31). Parthian dynasty was overthrown by internal rebellion which conducted by Ardashir, the son of Sassan, in 224 AD, and established the Sassanid Empire that lasted for over 400 years.

### **The Sassanians.**

According to Boyle (1977, p.25), during the Parthian dynasties, some of the ancient imperial traditions were remained in Fars and the Greek couldn't influence as strongly as it did in the other areas. The local Sassanian dynasty began to expand its territory out of Fars into neighboring areas, and presented itself as the true inheritor of the Achaemenian dynasty and authentically Iranian culture. Sassanians adopted the title of Shahanshah which meaning "the king of kings" in Persian.

**Figure 2. 1 Map of Persian Empire**



Source: [http://theopavlidis.com/MidEast/files\\_of\\_part05/786px-Persian empire 490bc.gif](http://theopavlidis.com/MidEast/files_of_part05/786px-Persian%20empire%20490bc.gif)

However, during the Sassanian dynasty, Zoroastrianism was firmly established for the first time as the official religion. It gave the Zoroastrian priest, powerful situations in the court of Sasanid leaders. Khosroe I was one of the greatest Sassanian rulers that his expansionist policy was continued by Khosroe II (590-628), who regained Damascus, Jerusalem, and Egypt (Elton, 2001). The Sassanian Empire did not last long after Khosroe II death.

### **Arab invasion**

According to Mahdavi(1986,p.24), Muslims invaded Iran under Umar rule (637). They defeated Yazd Egerd III after several great battles in 651 and imposed a painful end to this dynasty. In fact, Iranian soldiers did not protect their homes against the Arabs. They had



already heard about Islam and assumed that a government ruled under the Islamic principles of justice would be better than the immoral government of Sassanid rulers. Many Persians converted to new religion and Islam became a popular religion among Persians.

However, Arab conquerors embraced many elements of Iranian culture and adopted some of the Sassanid administrative and court mannerisms practices. Persian played a major role in developing the Islamic civilization also valuable developments in theology,

philosophy, literature, medicine, science, history, and geography (Ravandi: 1975, p.51).

Although the Arabic language was the official language of the court in 696 A.D, Persians used to speak their own language. However, the Persian script adapted to Arabic script and borrowed many Arab words during the Arab rule. The Arabs gradually lost their control over the vast Iranian territories and several local dynasties with central Asian origin challenged the Arab rule and gained control over different regions. The Samanids (875-1005), Ghaznavids (962-1186) and Seljuks (1037-1220) were the most significant dynasties over that period. According to Love Day (1999), the cultural and scientific achievements during the Seljuke reign were significant. Under the leadership of Nizam al Mulk, the popular Iranian prime minister (vizier), many schools, universities and observatories were built. The Seljuk rule came to an end when the Mongols invaded Iran.

#### Mongol invasion

According to Boyle (1977, p.31), the Mongol invasion imposed painful and bitter impacts on Persian history and cultural heritages. Changiz Khan destroyed whatever city he passed through and killed a large number of Iranian people. They burned libraries, many historical and cultural sites, and replaced mosques with Buddhist temples. Fortunately, the life improved during the later Mongol rulers. Under Ghazan Khan and his Iranian vizier, Rashid ad Din Fazlullah, the economy revived and taxation system improved. Also the irrigation systems were rebuilt and international trade increased. Although Tamerlang

(another Mongol invader) devastated many cities like Shiraz and Esfahan, he eventually became a patron of art and promoted architects and poets. He associated with later Mongol rulers made many mosques and religious schools (Ravandi: 1975, p.59).

### **Safavids**

According to Boyle (1978, p.40), Safavids were the first true Iranian dynasty which ruled the country after the Arab invasion. This dynasty was founded by Shah Ismail I. In fact, Ismail unified Iran under his rule. During this period, Iranian territories were as extensive as the Sassanids period.

However, the Safavids declared Shiite as the official religion of the state. They considered themselves spiritual as well as political leaders (Love Day: 1999, p.36) and made a government that strongly influenced by religion. The greatest of the Safavid monarchs, was Shah Abbas I, (1587-1629). Shah Abbas made the Safavid dynasty as a major power in the world and started the promotion of tourism in Iran. He changed his capital from Tabriz to Isfahan. Shah Abbas and his successors showed a great interest in changing the governmental system from the theocracy based government to one of absolute government. He also made Isfahan as the capital of architecture and art. With the death of Shah Abbas and the accession of his grandson Shah Safi in 1629, the decline of both the dynasty and country set in.

According to Ravandi(1975,p.76), under the Safavid rule eastern Persia became a great cultural centre. During that period, painting, metalwork, textiles, and carpets reached their peak of perfection. The Safavids were often artists themselves. Shah Ismail was a poet and Shah Tahmasp was a great painter. They opened the royal workshops for artists and created the favourable climate for the development of art. However, Nader Khan (1736-1747) put a final end to Savavid Dynasty rule when he took the throne in 1736 and created the Afsharian dynasty which preceded by Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties.



## **Qajar and Pahlavi**

According to Mahdavi (1986, p. 33), in 1794, Agha Muhammed Khan, the Qajar leader, defeated the Zand ruler and established the new Qajar dynasty. He moved the capital from Esfahan to Tehran and made the most of Persia as his domain in 1796. The early 20<sup>th</sup> Century was dominated by Qajar economy decline and a growing conflict between Russia and Great Britain. Russia try to reach the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean through Iran, and Britain wanted to protect its colony (India) also stop the Russian expansion. Russia and Britain obtained concessions from Iranian government during that period .However, In 1921 Reza Khan, an army officer, established a military dictatorship. He was subsequently founder of the new Pahlavi dynasty. In 1963 Iranians' uprising led by Ayatollah Khomeini took place. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Mohamad Reza Shah (Reza Khan's son) was overthrown and Iran, officially named the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **2.2.3.2 People**

Iran's population is about 75.2 millions that have scattered among 31 provinces. The 38% of its citizens are under 18 years and almost 70% under 35 years. Those characteristics make Iran as a very young country. Although Iran is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse country, the oldest written human documents reveal that Iranians' race originated of Aryan tribes who had white race (Abdolahi, 2009).

However, its geopolitical importance has encountered Iran with numerous migrations of people who have passed through Iran and gave this country the diverse ethnic composition of Persian, Azeri, Gilak, Mazandarani, Kurd, Arab, Lur, Baluch, Turkman, and other Ethnic minorities (Figure 2.6.2). Those facts represent Iran as a multicultural society. According to Sillitoe and White (1992), an ethnic group is a socially distinct group of people who share a

common history and culture and often a religion as well. The key aspects that distinguish them are culture and shared origin.

Absolutely, the cultural wonders of the ethnic groups to others are the primary attractions for ethnic and culture tourism (Yang, 2007). The review of tourism literature shows that as ethnicity is commodified, recreated, marketed or through tourism, it has become a marketable, profitable tourist attraction worldwide (Smith, 2001 as cited in Yang, 2007, p.12). However, each ethnic group in Iran has its unique culture and belief. They have their own handicrafts, dances, music and music instruments even their own folk songs which pass from many generations to transmit the custom and history of these people and to express their feeling of love and grief. They share common legends and myths which describes many stories about their ancestors' struggles to defeat evil and malevolent ghosts. According to the geographical situation and climate, each ethnic group tends to have its own food and dress. Approximately, 100 kinds of ethnic dresses and 198 ethnic food recipes are recognized in Iran (Bagheri chokami: 2012, p. 8). Thus, Iran's diverse ethnicities and cultures can act as a strong competitive advantage to support its vulnerable tourism industry.

## **Ethnic groups**

### **Persian**

According to Congressional Research Service (2007), the majority of Iran's population is ethnically Persian (51%). Persians are Aryans' descendants. Aryan is an ancient word that means noble in the Sanskrit language. They gave their name to the new land of Aryans. Then, they established the ancient Persian Empire around 1000 BC and known as Persians. The Persians still are living in central part of Iran where the city of Shiraz and province of Fars are. Almost, all Persians are Shia Muslims.

## **Azeri (Turk)**

According to Bagheri chokami(2012,p.12),the Azeri people live mainly in the north west of Iran in the Eastern Azerbaijan, Western Azerbaijan, and Ardebil provinces. They also are scattered throughout Iran. There are two different assumptions about their origins. Firstly, they are descendants of Turks who migrated to Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The second refers to original Iranian on whom the invaders have imposed their language throughout of their occupation. Although Turkish language is the common language of the Iranian Turks, they share different cultures and customs. However, they account for 24% of Iran population. They are exclusively Shia Muslim.

## **The Gilaki and Mazandarani**

They differ in their names because they are living in two provinces of Gilan and MAzandaran which are located in the western and eastern coast of Caspian Sea. They have originated from Caspian and Kadussi ethnicities and account for 8% of Iranian population. Their religion is Shia Muslims.

## **The Kurds**

According to Minoriski, renowned scholar of East, the Kurds are the most Iranian authentically ethnic group who are the descendants of the Medes (Behtoe: 1989, p.12). The Kurds are scattered in different countries like northwest of Iran, South Russia, southeast Turkey , and Syria. They account for 7% of Iran's population. The Iranian Kurds mainly live in Iranian Kurdistan, Kermanshahan, south of western Azerbaijan and north of Khorasan Provinces. They speak Kordi. The Kurds' religion is Sunnis Muslim but some of them follow Shia' Muslim, Yazidi, Ahle-Haq, Qaderi, and Nagshbandi Sufism.

## **The Arabs**

The Arabs migrated to southwest of Iran where known Khuzestan in the early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. They account for 3% of the Iranian population. They speak Arabic language

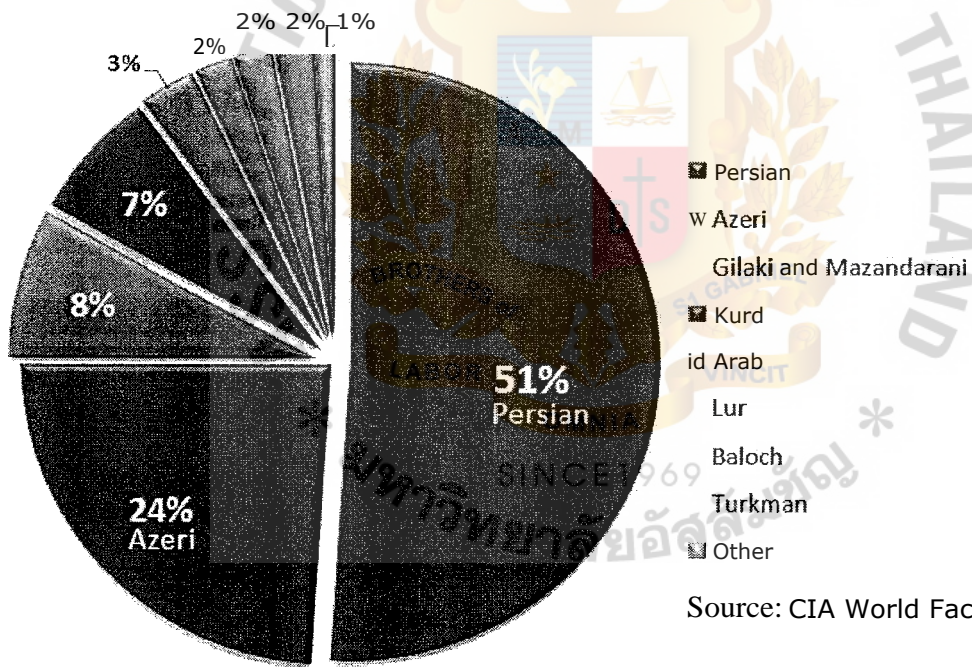
and follow both Shia and Sunni Muslim. The city of Dezful, Minoo Island, Khorramshahr, Ahwas, and Shadegan are populated by Arabs.

**The Baluchis**

They have unknown origin and speak their own language. They moved to the south and southeast regions of Iran or the Iranian border with Pakistan and Afghanistan or modern Baluchistan. About half of them are semi nomadic or nomadic. The rest of Baluchis are living in the villages or towns. They follow the Hanafi brand of Sunni Muslim. They live under a tribal system and account for 2% of Iranian population.

**Figure 2.2 Major Ethnic Group in Iran**

**Major Ethnic Groups in Iran**



Source: CIA World Fact Book

Source: [www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4CE3E15FF40BD/](http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4CE3E15FF40BD/)

**The Lures**

They are living in the mountainous areas of the southwest where is called Lurestan. They are probably of Kurdish origin (Rezvanfar, 2008). Their language is really close to Kurdish. Their religion is Shia's Muslim.

## **The Turkmans**

They are the descendants of Central Asian Turks. They speak the same language spoken in the Republic of Turkmenistan. They live in Gorgan and Turkmen Sahra. Most of the Turkmans are followers of Hanafi brand of Sunni Muslim, but some of them follow the Naghbandieh Mslim Sufism.

## **The Qashgaie and Assyrians**

The Qashqaies are nomads or semi-nomads who used to move their herds in the south and north of Shiraz. Most of them have settled in the villages and towns. Their territory extends from Abadeh in Isfahan into the Persian Gulf coast. In fact, nomads are people who lead a migratory life with no fixed home or residence. Those people can be domesticated live stock. They move from one place to another by passing along the same route every year within the same territory. But the semi nomads have a fixed home where they farm and they leave their family or part of them at home during migration to summer range (Kookeki, 1981). However, the Timour and Holako Khan army who moved to Iran from Turkestan are Qashqaies ancestors (Rezvanfar, 2008). They are following the Shia's Muslim. The Assyrians are East Syrian Christian Communities in Iran. They speak Assyrian. Only 100000 Assyrians live in Iran.

### **2.2.3.3 Persian language and literature**

In fact, language can be defined as a verbal expression of culture. The folklorist Crats Williams defines language as "culture expressing itself in sound" (as cited in Brock-Utne, 2005, p.6). According to Brown (1994), a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; language cannot separate the culture without losing the significance of either language or culture (as cited in Jiang, 2000). In the other words, culture and language are interrelated and cannot be separated. The concepts which in the particular language are used



by people, describe much about their culture. For instance; it is difficult to talk about the *sofreh-ye 'aqd* in Germany but in Iran this refers to an essential part of marital ceremonies which originated in Zoroastrian symbolism and varies according to region, ethnicity, and the family's economic status. It clarifies the role of language as the mirror of culture, and shows how the certain culture of people can be understood through the language that they use.

In summary, language is recognized as the chief vehicle for the transmission of culture (Phipps, 2006, as cited in Ramani, 2012). In fact, language of people in the country they grow up is affected and shaped by their values and customs. In the tourism context, language is a key factor of identifying cultural similarity or distance between host and tourist that can influence tourist destination choice. The study which conducted by Ng, Lee & Soutar (2007), revealed that the cultural similarity in terms of language, religion, and geography may influence Australian tourists' intentions to visit different destinations. However, the language what the Iranian people speak is a mirror of their culture.

According to Khirabadi (2003, p.64), over two-thirds of the Iranians speak the languages that belong to the particular branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Those languages are really close to languages that spoken in India, Romance, Germanic and Slavic. Some of the English words with Persian originates are cummerbund, shawl, pajama, kiosk, divan, lilac, jasmine, julep, caravan, checkmate, and bazaar (Love Day: 1999, p. 10). The most important Indo-European or Indo-Iranian languages are Persian, Kurdish, Luri, Baluchi, Dari, Gilaki, Mazandarani, and Armenian. Turkic languages which belong to the Ural-Altaic family are spoken by some 26 percent of the population in Iran like Azeri Turks, the Qashqâi tribal confederation, and nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes (usually called Turkomans). The Persian language is also spoken outside the Iran boundaries in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and the southern Persian Gulf countries. According to Moghadam (1993, p.41), the "Old Persian" was the language of the Achaemenid Persians.

Many cuneiform inscriptions have supported this claim. The ancient language was later changed into "Middle Persian" after the Achaemenids and was named "Pahlavi" language during the Parthian dynasty. "Modern Persian" is a language that represents the Iranian national identity and Islamic Iranian culture.

However, Two centuries of Arab rule left its impacts on Iranian Persian language. Today, this language borrowed many Arabic words. It is written in Arabic script which induces many difficulties. In the simple words, it is not well suited for writing Persian.

### **Persian literature**

Persian literature is one of the oldest and most famous literatures in the world which refers to the ancient period. Goethe stated that Persian literature is one of the four main bodies of the world literature (Moghadam: 1993, p.42). However, Bukhara the capital city of Samanids (modern Uzbekistan) is considered by many professions the birth place of Iranian literature. The early literature was written in "Modern Persian" and then medicine, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, geography, and natural science texts were written in this language. Rudaki (858 – 941) was the first great literary writer of the modern Persian language who lived in this city and created the great foundation of Persian literature. Today, the rise of novels and short stories represent a significant innovation in the nature of Persian literature that reflects the significant changes in Persian's culture and society. The highest achievement of the classical Persian literature is Persian poetry. Persian poems are the most important samples of Iranian literature and have universal fame. The Persian culture and customs never can ignore the role of Poetry. Persian poetry is highly symbolic. It acts as a bridge that links earthly and heavenly images, and spiritual and profane ideas. In fact, such a complex beauty makes it difficult to translate in to other languages (Boyle:1978, p.59). The *Shahnameh*, or "Book of Kings," which written by the Iranian poet" Abo-l Qasem Ferdowsi" took over 30 years to finish and contains sixty thousand verses. This masterpiece possesses

Iranian pre-Islamic mythical stories of Achaemenids, Parthians and Sassanids which played a critical role in the preservation of the Iranian culture, language and identity. According to Sakhifar (1998), one of the main reasons that the Modern Persian language today is the same language that existed more than 1000 years ago, lies in such works (as cited in Mehrizi, 2007, p.54).

The recitation of verses (*Naghali*) from the *Shâh-nâmeh* or stories based on it became an important part of entertainment in traditional Iranian society. In the public or private places, the recitation often takes place dramatically by an individual or narrative (known as a *naqqâl*) who might use a drum, hand clapping, singing, and pictures on curtains hung on the wall to enhance the story (Elton & Mahdi: 2006, p.73). However, Divan-e- Hafez, Shaykh Sadi's Bustan and Golestan, Molavi's Masnavi and Divan-e-Shames and many other Persian poems act like a bouquet of beautiful flowers from a glorious garden, which offer human beings the "wisdom of the East".

#### 2.2.3.4 Religion

Zoroastrians make up one of the smallest religious minorities in the contemporary Iran, but this religion is the first, oldest and most authentically Iranian religion of all (Yale, Ham & Greenway, 2002). In fact, Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest religions in the world which influenced Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Today, there are less than 200,000 adherents of this faith mainly in Iran, India, and Southeast Asia and in the West (Moghadam: 1993, p.71). This religion developed from the reforms of the old cults of Indo-European tribes that carried out by Zarathustra or Zoroaster. The Aryan's religion was a polytheistic one which worships a principal God, Ahura Mazda who was surrounded by a group of Gods known as the Amesha Spenta. However, from the old Aryans' religion only Ahura Mazda has remained. A single God from whom everything originates. Ahura Mazda

Subordinates were two spirits. Spenta Mainyu was the Holy one and Ahura Mainyu was the Evil or Ahriman one (Purdavood, 2010).

Based on Zoroastrian, human is blessed with free will and the choice of the road he takes in life. The person, who has lived in accordance with God, will be rewarded after death. According to Khairabadi (2003,p.12), Zoroastrian religion with the Prophet Zoroaster, who lived long before Jesus, Moses, and Mohammad (seventh and sixth century B.C) was the first religion that introduced humanity to religious concepts such as angels, heaven, and hell,. Those concepts were later borrowed by Christianity. Zoroastrianism Commands are based on the principle of "Good Deeds", "Good Words", and "Good Thoughts". The Zoroastrianism in Iran has stronger and sustainable cultural impacts that have been represented in many ways despite the decline of this religion such as Iranian festivals and holidays. In the seventh century A.D., Arab invaders defeated the Sassanid's army and brought the religion of Islam to Iran and Zoroastrianism was declined.

According to Shomali(2005) ,Muslims like Christians and Jews are monotheistic. The God of Mohammad is the God of Ibrahim, Moses, and Jesus. The religion of Islam itself means "submission" to God and his will. Mohammad who lived in Mecca and then Medina was the last messenger of God .The revelations received by Mohammad were collected together in a Holy book, the Koran which represents the exact words of God to mankind in its final form. In fact, Koran unlike Holy Bible and Tohra has only one version.

However, Muslims believe that the human being are responsible for their deeds and will be judged on the Judgment day. They also believe that Mohammad is sent by God to lead and direct them to the path of God which is explained in Koran and Hadith(the book which documented the prophet saying). In fact, Mohammad spent his life to teach Muslims the law and rituals that do not extract directly from Koran. All of those traditional practices that made by Mohammad make Sunnat. The combination of Koran and Sunnat organized Shariat. Shariat

is the whole rules and principles that determine how Muslims should worship and live. It also covers most of the aspects of Muslims' daily life such as inheritance, contracts, sexual behavior, dress, food and drink, marriage, etc. However, after Mohammad death, Islam has been divided into two branches of Shiite and Sunni. The differences between Sunni and Shiite branches originate from the Muslims' disagreement about the succession of the prophet Mohammad or concept of Emamat. Most of them believed that Abu Bakr who was Mohammad close friend and his father-in-law should be accepted as the Muslim leader.

But another group of Muslim (Sia's Muslim) believed that the leader should be his cousin, Ali ebne Abitaleb. They believe that twelve of Mohammad descendants are political leaders as well as spiritual leaders of Muslims. According to Shiites the imamate started by Ali and continued through his twelve male descendants. The twelfth Imam (Mahdi) is disappeared but he is still alive and waiting till God allows him to appear.

Approximately 15% of world's Muslim population is Shiites. The largest communities of Shiite Muslims are living in Iran. In the period of Safavid dynasty Shiism became the official religion of Iran (Resagholi: 1991, p.71). Under this umbrella Iran got united and resisted against Turkish Ottoman Empire. Over centuries, Iranian cultural elements entered in Islamic religion to such a high extent that it created an Iranian Islamic culture which has heavily influenced the Islamic world (Sayedabadi, 2006)

Nowadays, Iranian national government's control is in the hands of Shiites. Iranian Muslims like other Muslims are believe in ritualized daily prayers (Namaz in Persian), fasting during the Holy month of Ramazan ( Rooze in Persian), Haj as pilgrimage to the city of Mecca where the house of God is located, consumption of Halal food and non- alcoholic drink, and Hejab code. Although, there are a number of important religious practices which distinguish Iranian Muslims from Sunni Muslims and completely related to Shiite doctrine. The most important one is ceremonies of mourning during the first 10 days of the month of



Moharram that refers to the death of Imam Hosayn (the Ali's son) at Karbala. Obviously, the Iranians both Shiites and Sunnis live together peacefully (Elton&Mahdi: 2006, p.54).

### **Religious minorities**

Almost 99 percent of the Iranians are Muslim. 89 percent of Iranian are Shiites and 10 percent are Sunnis. Baha'is, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians constitute the remaining 1 percent. Most of Sunni Muslims live in the Iran border areas like Kurds, Baluchis, Turkmen and Arabs (Rezaghali: 1991, p.71).

There is not accurate statistics about Baha'is community in Iran. Some statistics indicated that the largest non-Muslim minority in Iran is the Baha'is community. However, Bahaism, claims that Baha'is is a new world religion which will replace Islam. From the Shiite's point of view, Baha'ism is a "misguided cult and it is not acceptable religion. The majority of Iran's Christians are Armenians and Assyrians. Armenians are the large groups that mainly live in Tabriz, Esfahan and Tehran. The northwestern of Iran around Lake Urumia, is populated by Assyrians. The Christians are accepted by Islamic Republic of Iran as an official religious minority and they have their representatives in Iranian parliament.

According to khajarbadi (2003,p.9) ,the presence of Jewish community in Iran dates back to the period of the Achaemenid under the Cyrus the great rule in 539 BC when he defeated the Babylonian Empire. He allowed them to return to Jerusalem and live there. They continue their living and working on Persia soil even during the Islamic period. According to Roger Cohen (the New York journalist), the most Jews who live in Middle East are concentrated in Iran (after Israel) and their population is more than 25 thousands (Gilani, 2009). The Jews mainly live in Hamedan, Nahavand, Shiraz and Kerman. The Jews like Christians are accepted by Islamic Republic of Iran as an official religious minority and they have their representatives in the Iranian parliament.

However, many People travel in order to satisfy their religious needs or faith yearly. According to Jackowski (2000), approximately, 240 millions of the world's people travel every year because of the religion reasons, including Christians, Muslims and Hindus (as cited in Asadi & Daryaei, 2011). Religions not only motivate religious tourists also influence their behaviors as tourist product preferences and destination choice (Weidenfeld & Ron, 2008 as cited in Ansari, Mahdavinejad & Abedi.2012, p.72). Obviously, Iran with such a religious diversity has dramatic attractions for Muslim and other religious tourists who are motivated to visit sites, ceremonies, festivals and events at religious centers. Asadi&Daryaie (2011) in their study found that religious tourism has the second priority among other forms of tourism in Iran.

#### 2.2.3.5 Art

Host art and culture can have positive economic impact because of creating landmarks that attract tourists, assisting the generation of jobs, and contributing to the branding of destination. Today, many international destinations like Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai by protecting and revitalizing historic buildings, and promoting creative and cultural industries, are making substantial investments in arts and culture (www. arts, vic, gov. au). Undoubtedly, art of Iran in all forms of performing (music, Theater), visual (painting, sculpture), film, literature, and architecture can play a critical role in strategically positioning that country as an international centre of cultural excellence, creativity and innovation in the minds of cultural tourists.

However, Art in Iran is one of the ancient human creativities which practiced by early inhibitors of this Plateau. Petri as a prominent orientologist in his famous speech pointed out "when Egypt had only just begun the art of pottery, the people of Susa (in Iran) were painting beautiful pictures on ceramic."(Nezami,2013).This indicates that the Iranian art and creativity

was several thousand years ahead of that of Egypt and it dates back at least 10,000 years ago when the recent archaeological studies show the evidences of early civilization in the plateau of Iran. Architecture, calligraphy, painting, weaving, pottery, cinema and metalworking are different parts of Iranian art. This section aims to have a quick view of Architecture, carpet weaving and cinema as the most renowned Iranian arts that captured more attention of Iran's international tourists (Isfahani, 2008).

## **Architecture**

Iranian Architecture underwent many changes in various eras and achieved a unique degree of variety. This paper will discuss the Architecture of Iran during the different historical periods.

### **Pre – historic architecture**

One of the oldest pre -historic architectural buildings refers to painted building of *Zaghe Tepe* in Qazvin plain. Its history goes back to the late 7th and early 6th millennia B.C. This building has been decorated with images of wild goats. The *Zâgheh Tepe*, consisting of a fire place, two storerooms, and a living room with decorated red painted walls. It was probably used for social and religious gatherings (Elton&Mahdi: 2006, p.124). Another evidence of pre- historic architecture is *Tepe Sialk* in the southwest of modern Kashan and belongs to the first half of the fifth millennium B.C. However, the houses that made of irregularly-shaped mud bricks testify the human initial techniques in construction. At that time, the mud and sun-dried brick were the main material of housing (Lendering, 2010).

The Elamite king, ordered to build the magnificent temple which known as *Choga Zanbil* temple mainly to honor the Great God *Inshushinak* .In fact, the innovative character of this structure is the forming system of a portable water system used for both worshipers and the people of the city (Elton&Mahdi: 2006, p.125).

One of the earliest cities in Iran constructed with pre-historic style is based on urban principles was Ecbatana that had been made by Medes. However, architecture during the time of the Medes was extremely improved. The mud and wood were mainly contributed to construction during that period (Mostafavi, 1967).

### **Pre-Islamic architecture**

As Abulghasemi(1987) stated that during the Achaemenid empire a large number of fantastic architectural works like gray stone palaces, mausoleums, and fire temples were constructed under the influence of Zoroastrian. Palaces and mausoleums of Achaemenian after twenty-five centuries are still strong and stunning. Most of the top ancient world artists were at the service of Achaemenid Empire and created majestic monuments that still are considered among the human architectural masterpieces. Persepolis is made by the Achaemenid king, the Darius the Great for governmental and ceremonial functions. It took 100 years to be completed. One of significant architectural wonders of Persepolis is the "Gate of All Nations". It was the Particular venue where the representatives of different Iranian nations passed through it and gathered in the audience hall. However, similar architectural infrastructures were constructed at Susa and Ecbatana by Darius the Great which have similar governmental and ceremonial functions.

Persepolis architectural details, high Columns, upright stone towers and pedestals, reliefs, terraces, its impressive Column head stone sculptures, and its masterly crafted reliefs which portrayed people from all walks of life represented somewhat new development in Iranian architecture and a high-level of skill (Mostafavi, 1967). Achaemenians took advantage of all available materials and technologies in their vast empire. No wonder that Persepolis as a symbol of Dynasty city was burned by the Greeks king, the Alexander in 330. Today, Persepolis and 14 other Iran's architectural buildings are in the list of historical

monuments that have been registered in the UNESCO World Heritage List (World UNESCO Heritage, 2012).

The significant characteristics of Parthian architecture are the emergence of *iwan*, an audience hall supported by arches and open on one side (Gartwaite, 2005 as cited in Isfahani, 2008,p.6) , widely use of the cut stones and stucco, and fired brick for making walls and ceilings. Bisotun and Susa still represent some of the Parthian reliefs. Later, after the Parthians, The Sassanids followed earlier Achaemenid architecture and revived it. As Elton &Mahdi(2006:p.126-127) stated that the unique features of the architecture of this era include: the size of constructions in the form of large monuments and huge towns, the advancement of stucco art and colorful mosaics used for decoration, the widest high-rising baked-brick vaults, and the use of stone as the construction materials

### **Islamic architecture**

This period began from the late 7th and induced construction of many mosques, mausoleums, dome, *madrese*, *hamam*, and *carvansara*. Mosques are amongst the oldest architectural buildings which belong to Islamic period of architecture in Iran. In fact, mosques were built in order to provide holy places for people to praise God. According to Love day (p.78), during Seljuq dynasty a large number of mosques were built in Iran particularly in Isfahan, Ardestan, Zavareh and Qazvin. The main novelty of this architecture was the integration of a domed pavilion with the central country yard surrounded by arcades. In the center of each side of the court was an *iwan*. The *iwan* in the *qebela* wall gave directly onto the *mehrab* that located at the back of a domed room. This combination of domed chamber and *iwan* had already appeared in Iran in the earlier Sassanian palaces. The Masjed Jome (Friday Mosque) in Isfahan is one of the most significant one with this style. This mosque was built in several stages. First, the plan of a country yard with four- *Iwan* had been built then it changed very little through the centuries. The later developments concerned



decoration of surfaces (Abulghasemi, 1987). The peak of nearly six hundred years development of the four-*iwān* mosque in Iran is glorious Imam Mosque or Shah Mosque in Isfahan that built in the reign of Shah Abbas. Its construction began in 1611. Obviously, the unique feature of this building mainly originated of its seven-color mosaic tiles and calligraphic inscriptions (Isfahani, 2008).

According to Mostafavi,(1968), Mausoleum, or Imamzaddeh is another major type of Islamic constructions in Iran that dates back to tenth century. In fact, Mausoleums are generally built to protect the tomb or grave of the person who is buried there. Based on Islamic tradition, all of these mausoleums are built in such a way that they face Kabaa. In general, they don't have *iwāns* or porches. They present two types of, the canopy tomb and the tower tomb. The canopy tombs are square buildings with opening on all four sides like tombs of Ismail the Samanid at Bukhara. The most important example of tower tombs is *Gonbad-e Kavus* near Gorgan. This tower is star shaped on the outside but circular inside has 51 meters tall and shows a masterly use of brick.

According to O'kane (1984), the dome as a dominant Persian architecture element is another architectural feature which widely built during the Islamic architecture period. The earlier domes appeared in Persia in the Sasanian period. However, the art of tile work which used to decorate *iwāns* and domes made them so magnificent and attractive that each part of them looks like a glorious painting. Domes in Iran underwent many changes through centuries and achieve a high degree of excellence.

### Carpet

The Persian carpet is a part of Persian (Iranian) art and culture. Today, Persian carpets are famous for their richness of artistic patterns and colors. In palaces, famous buildings, mansions and museums of the world a Persian carpet is amongst the most treasured properties. Without carpet, an Iranian's home is bare and soulless. It reflects a strong and

deep connection between the Iranians and their national art. The origin of Carpet weaving as a most widespread handicraft in Iran and most famous one abroad dates back to the Bronze Age.

Old documents tell us that the ancient Sumerians and Egyptians used to weave carpet as the Achaemenians did in Persia (Isfahani, 2008). The oldest known knotted carpet was found at Pasyryk in Altai (Siberia) and there is an assumption that claims this carpet has been made in Persia around the fifth century B.O (Love Day: 1999, p.85). According to Isfahani(2008), carpets were made by nomadic tribes, whose goats and sheep being sheared for wool and hair that was spun to weave carpet. The wool was for a long time one of the major sources of income for the nomad communities. During the Sassanian dynasty (224-641) many magnificent carpets were exported to distant lands.

In the Safavid period (1501-1736) in the 16th century, a new development promoted the production of Persian carpets and they became famous worldwide .The royal manufactures and independent workshops established in the large urban centers. Carpets began to be appearing among Persian exports products to India, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe. Purely abstract Designs adopted into hunting scenes, animals, flowers and figures under the influence of contemporary miniature painting. The new motifs like Shrub design, Harati design, and vase design were created. Besides those carpets that produced in the urban workshops, there was considerable production of tribal carpets often less well known abroad. The tribes of Qashqai, Turkomans,Afshar, Shahsevan and Bakhtiar each had their own motifs and styles. The tribal carpets are traditionally narrower than those made in urban workshops because they make on small, horizontal looms that are easy to dismantle and to transport. They usually use the certain designs. Those kinds of designs are the oldest one transmitted from generation to generation. In fact, they are reproduced from memory without the use of a model or a design cartoon.

According to Love Day (p.86) Carpet weaving was one of the most important tasks for nomadic women and was taught to girls at a very young age. The carpet held such economic importance for group that a woman's ability to weave was a major criterion in the choice of a wife. Persian carpets underwent many changes in various eras and achieved a unique degree of excellence. Persian carpets can be classified by their size and motif; *Farsh* or *Qalii* (great one) *Qalicheh* (rug), and *Kilim*, (nomadic carpets). Today, Iran is the most famous exporter of hand-tied carpet in the world.

## Cinema

According to Talachian(1980), The start of cinema in Iran refers to the first cinematography which introduced by Mozaffaro Din Shah in 1900. Then in 1912, the first cinema halls were built. In 1933, Abdolhossein Sepanta in Bombay made the first no-silent Iranian movie which named *Dokhtare Lor*. After 1953, emergence of huge investment which conducted by film maker companies and increased public interest in the cinema, provide a great environment to flourish cinema related activities. However, prerevolutionary cinema was not globally known but it was very popular in Iran. After revolution, Iran's cinema was in disarray for a while. Based on revolution's values and norms, sex features and violence were forced out and many confusing religious and political limitations on movie products were applied. Despite of this frustrating situation, filmmakers continued their jobs by applying a series of new skills and technologies and gave new life to the cinema. Latterly, Iranian government has invested a large capital to rebuild this industry. Today, Ministry of Culture holds an annual international film festival in Bahman (January) which known as the Fajr International Film Festival in order to promote the quality of movies and enhancing the Iranian youth interest in cinema(Omid,2010).However, the modem Iranian cinema is considered to be among the world's most progressive one. In fact, the post revolutionary

Iranian cinema has captured the world's attention. The new movies that are produced after revolution questioned the old cinematic traditions in the content and technique.

In fact, they offer the "New Wave" of cinema that represents social responsibility, rather than only entertainment. The female Iranian directors, Tahmine Milani and Rakhshan Banni-Etemad, have played the important role in demonstrating the problems of Iranian women and society. Every year several Iranian movies win awards from most respectable film festivals. Taste of cheery, black board, a time for drunken horses received different awards from Cannes film festivals. Many Iranian filmmakers like Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Ebrahim Hatamikia, Ja'afar Panahi, Abbas Kiarostami, Majid Majidi(Oscar nominations), Abolfazl Jalili, Asghar Farhadi, and Bahman-e Qobadi have won awards from the variety of international film festivals. The climax of the Iranian cinema's international successes was in 2011 when the Oscar award went to Asghar Farhadi for his renowned movie of Separation (*Jodaeyi Nader az Simin*). However, cinema can act as a powerful tool to express the Iranian values, beliefs, and stories. It also shares the Iranians' experiences and culture with other nations (Omid, 2010).

#### 2.2.3.6 Food

According to Tikkanen (2007), food is an attraction, is a product component, is an experience, and is a cultural phenomenon (as cited in Lertputtarak, 2012, p.119). This statement reveals the importance of food as a part of culture and its contribution to tourism industry. Hu & Ritichie (1986, as cited in Hall, 2003, p.80) revealed that food, climate, accommodations, and scenery are most important attributes in tourists' perceptions of destination attractiveness.

In fact, food is one of the components which contributing to the destination image and influences the attitudes of potential tourists and their intentions to visit (You, Back, & Boger,

2011). However, Iranian food is an integral part of Iranians' life and culture. Meanwhile, their ingredients reflect the geography of Iran, their taste, colors, and textures reflect the aesthetic taste of Iranians. According to Hakimi (1999, p.55), the importance of Iranian ingredients is reflected in many metaphors which applied for describing beauty. For instance, beautiful faces have almond-shaped eyes, pistachio like mouths, and hazelnut like noses. In addition, they have a significant contribution to the Iranian traditional medicine. Based on traditional Iranian medicine, food plays a critical role in the maintaining the body's balance. Nature of cold and hot food is still believed by many Iranians and influences their planning for using meals.

Obviously, Persian cuisine is ancient cuisine. According to Daryabandi (2000, p. 22), Iranian, Chinese, and western cuisines are known as the main cuisine styles in the world. Although, Iranian cuisine borrowed many cooking techniques and products from the ancient neighboring cultures like ancient Greece, Rome, and many Asian and Mediterranean cultures. Existence of a great balance between sour, sweet and salty flavors along with a variety of dainty and rare spices like Saffron, black Cumin, and Iranian Cardamom are the unique features of Iranian food.

However, Iranian culinary practices have been affected by the country's history and religions. Based on Islamic codes, the consumption of alcohol and other edibles such as pork, blood and some kinds of fish is forbidden. Muslims are allowed to eat *Halal* meat. It means Muslims should use the meat which slaughtered according to the Islamic prescribed codes. In addition, during the Ramazan (Islamic month), eating and drinking is not allowed during days. People use to distribute foods to poor people and patients as a charitable act during some religious events. The Iran's traditional eating habit is completely different of what is today. In the past, Iranians used to eat sitting on the floor. They spread a large cloth which called *sofreh*, and then they put bowls and platters containing the different dishes on it.



Recently, this custom is replaced by western eating habit and you can find it only in rural area. During a day, the main meal is lunch which serving around 12.30 o'clock. They used to eat light breakfast and dinner.

They used to buy fresh bread every day even for each meal. There exists a variety of breads that made by whole or white wheat in this country. Based on religious belief, Iranians used to treat the bread with respect. They never drop bread under the feet or in a disrespectful place (Elton&Mahdi: 2006, p.151) Today, rice is a major ingredient and is cooked in different ways like *chelow*, *polo* and *kate*. A *chelow* which served with grilled meat ( *chelow-kabâb*) known as a national dish. The main beverage in Iran is black tea that its making procedure is completely different from the rest of word. A great number of stews, soups, snacks, appetizers, and beverage show the variety of ingredients and ingenuity in Iranian cooking. Obviously, restaurants both in Iran and outside the country offer a very limited choice of Iranian cuisine and such diversity will be found only in the Iranian homes.

#### **2.2.3.7 Traditional Iranian festivals**

Today, local festivals play a significant role in the tourism development. According to Felsenstein &Leischer (2003),local festivals act as a powerful tourism development tool in three different ways. They generate demands for local tours and recreate the image of the destination also they increase the number of tourists in the low season. Like other Asian countries, Iran has a number of national and religious festivals and events which deeply rooted in her culture. They have enough potential to be used as a strong tool to promote tourism in Iran.

#### **Religious festivals**

The Shiite festivals and events or more properly holy religious festivals have long been an essential component of Iranian culture and are categorized by two types of happy and

mournful festivals like *ayde fetr*, *ayde phorban*, *ayde mabas*, *arbaeen*, and so on. The most important mournful ones refers to *dahey-e-Moharam* that refers to ten days of Moharam month (Arabic calendar) when *Imam Hosayn* (Ali's son) and his family members killed at the Battle of Karbala. This festival like other Iranian festivities, differ considerably from one region to another. The processions are conducted by religious groups of men (*hayat*) over 10 days. They typically practice some type of rhythmic mourning practices. Other members of the *hayat* may make large, symbolic structures to carry. The team works are organized and conducted by women to provide some particular kind of dishes that should be served during those days. This festival attracts many pilgrimage tourists yearly.

### **National festivals**

In fact, the national festivals and events in Iran reflect traces of ancient religion of Zoroastrianism that have been enthusiastically celebrated by all ethnic groups in that country (Elton & Mahdi: 2006, p.186). *Chaharshenbesuri*, *Yalda*, New Year's Day, and *Sizdabedar* are some examples of Iran's national festivals. *Chaharshabesuri* (the last Friday of the solar year) is the most famous one. People make bonfires in their yards, the streets, or the open country and jump over the flame and singing "Your redness to me, my pallor to you". Setting fireworks, Banging spoons (women go door to door and banging a spoon on the plate and receiving little gifts), serving some special dishes, and burning rue seeds to ward off misfortune are common rituals which holding during this particular night.

### **2. 3 Intention to Visit**

Intention is a sign of an individual's willingness to perform a particular behavior. According to Ajzen(1991,p.182), intention is the amount of effort, one is willing to exert to attain a goal. That is, an individual's intention to engage in the behavior is the single best

predictor of that behavior. It could be simply understood that if one intends to do a behavior then it's more likely to be done by one.

In the tourism context, the travel intention process model offered by Beerli & Martin (2004) can be applied to predict potential tourists' behavioral intention towards traveling to a certain destination for tourism purposes. This model shows that the destination image plays a vital role in the tourists' intention to visit a destination (Gibson, Qi & Zhang, 2008; Lee, Lee & Lee, 2005). Therefore, a positive perception or image of a destination essentially influences the tourist's intention to visit even revisit a destination. Also, Woodside and Lysonski (1989) by proposing a general model of traveler destination awareness and choice supported those previous studies. They argued that intention to visit is influenced by tourist characteristics and marketing influences destination awareness which in turn associated by affective component will influence tourists' destination preference (images). In the other words, destination image influences tourists' intention to visit a destination.

Ajzen (1991, p.181) by offering the theory of planned behavior has defined intention as trying to perform a given behavior rather than in relation to actual performance. Meanwhile, Ajzen (1991, p.185) has explained actual behavior is a person's observable response in a given situation along with a given target. He explained that the actual behavior should be identified with four its elements target, action, context, and time. This close relationship between intention and behavior makes it reasonable to define intention by using similar elements.

As, the intention to visit is an antecedent of visiting a destination in the tourism context thus this study can apply those four elements of actual behavior (visiting destination) to define intention to visit. Visiting Iran could be considered an action. Visitation could be considered the target and Iran should be the context. A year is considered as time frame for performing behavior in the consumer behavior research (Sparks, 2007). Therefore, Intention

in this research would be defined as the international tourist's desire to visit Iran within the next 12 months.

## **2.4 Theories Used in This Study**

### **Theory of perception**

Theory of perception argued that physical reality does not coincide necessarily with perceptual reality. According to Pender (1999), the cognitive distance and size impression, effort after meaning, selective perception, expectations and closer are different principles of perception theory. In fact, distance and size are perceived subjectively by people. This fact explains the existing difference between tourist's perception of destination's distance or size and its actual measure. The individual willingness to inflict a meaning to new stimuli represents the principle of effort after meaning. This principle indicates the importance of creating a favorable first impression by the tourism marketers. Selective perception is the personal filtering of what perceiver senses to suit his/her own needs. The perceivers are always bombarded with many stimuli every day but they don't pay equal attention to all of them. They choose to pay attention to stimuli due to their motivations, experiences or even their cultural background. The theory of perception also argues that perception is usually learned by people. In this regards, expectation principle explains that people perceive what they expect to perceive. If their perception is not according to their expectations they will be frustrated. Individuals have a desire to change the inappropriate stimuli to appropriate one. In other words, they aim to bring their experience to a close in a satisfying manner. This fact refers to the principle of closer. However, effort after meaning, selective perception, and expectations are more applicable in this research.

## **Theories of attitude**

Attitude is significant factor which influence person's decisions, and guide her/his behavior. It is defined as an enduring system of beliefs that typically reflected in a person's behavior. In fact, people will behave generally in ways consistent with their attitudes. The more positive the attitude about the particular behavior, the more powerful intention will be created to perform that behavior (Ajzen, 1991, p.187).

However, in the tourism context, attitudes are considered as positive or negative willingness toward a destination. Tourist intention to visit a destination is considerably based on tourist's perception and attitude toward a destination. In fact, the tourist by learning from his/her perception forms his/her attitude, which strongly influences the tourist intention.

Attitudes are composite of three different components (Figure 2.) These components are highly interdependent and to get better influence the consumer's react to the object. That is marketers cannot determine the consumers' attitudes about a particular product only by exploring consumers' beliefs.

-Cognitive represents how they think or belief about specific attribute or overall object.

-Effective represents how they feel regarding specific attributes or overall object or person's like or dislike of the attitude object.

- Behavioral represents how they act or their behavioral intention toward specific attributes or overall object.

## **Theories of attitude formation through cognitive component**

The consumer may hold either positive or negative even neutral beliefs toward an object. Clearly, beliefs which consumers hold about object do not need to be accurate. The positive beliefs associated with particular product create a positive overall cognitive component. According to Fiske (2010), the expectancy value model offered by Fishbein and Ajzen revealed that positive or negative attitude towards an object is a result of the total



attributes of it. In fact, after evaluating all attributes of the object, the individual attitude could be constructed (as cited in Munoz, 2012).

### **Affective component**

Consumers also hold certain feelings toward brands or other objects. Sometimes these feelings are based on the beliefs. For instance, a tourist feels fear when thinking about a very greasy local food because of the unhealthy amount of fat it contains. In other hand, there might be feelings which are independent of beliefs. For example, a green tourist believe that firework cause air pollution, but he/she has positive affect toward firework as he/she associates this firework with the experience that he/ she had at new year as a child. However, the statements of, " I like" and "I don't like" are outputs of emotional evaluation of a products. However, Fiske(2010) stated that mere exposure, operant conditioning, modeling and observational learning are the process that involve affective attitude formation (as cited at Munoz, 2012 ).Fiske explains that the mere exposure refers to constant encountering of individual with a neutral stimulus that leads them to evaluate it. If occurrence of neutral stimulus is rewarded simultaneously it would create a positive attitude toward stimulus. If occurrence of the stimulus is punished simultaneously it would create a negative attitude. This fact refers to the operant conditioning. According to social learning theory, modeling and observational learning are kinds of operant conditioning that happen as a result of observation of others' behavior and modeling.

### **Behavioral component**

The behavioral intention is what the consumer plans to do with respect to the object. In the simple words, buy or not buy the brand. This is usually a logical consequence of beliefs or affect. Bern (1972) by offering self perception theory explains how attitude are formed when individuals do not have any obvious attitude toward an object. In this situation,

individuals will develop their attitudes by focusing on their behaviors (as cited in Munoz, 2012).

## 2.5 Some Related Studies

To my knowledge, no previously published study exists that investigates the influences of cultural attributes of Iran on tourists' perception and their intentions to visit that country. However, this section represents some related studies.

**Mosavi(2001):** This study examined " Shiraz destination image and international tourists' intentions to revisit Shiraz ". This study aims to understand the perceived image of Shiraz by international tourists in order to find out the relationship between destination image and intention to visit. A survey questionnaire was conducted by researcher in order to collect required data. 167 international tourists participated in this research. This questionnaire was designed in three parts. The first part contains open-ended questions. The second part adopted Likert scales and the third part contains some multi-choice questions to address the study questions. This study evaluated the image of Shiraz in terms of its cognitive and affective image. The cognitive image was examined in terms of the six dimensions of natural resources, art and culture, social setting, tourist facilities and infrastructure, general infrastructure, and atmosphere. 75% of respondents were male. Only small portion of respondents (6%) had a past experience about Shiraz and this study didn't report any relationship between past experience and intention to revisit Shiraz. Approximately, 48% of the respondents had positive perception and image toward Shiraz that differed by nationality. 85% of that percentage had intention to revisit Shiraz. Also, this study found that there is no difference toward perception of Shiraz in terms of the respondents' age and educational levels. The friendly people, natural attraction, culture and architectural attractions of Shiraz were the most significant factors that strongly influenced image of Shiraz. This study

revealed that female respondents more valued the cultural dimensions of Shiraz compared with other dimensions. Approximately 80% of respondents were concern about the accessibility and availability of tourist facilities. Mosavi concluded that comprehending the tourists' perception and image of Shiraz as a tourism destination and their socio-demographic profile will help tourism marketers and planners to develop appropriate strategies to attract and serve them efficiently and effectively. Further research should be applied in order to explore the additional factors that might influence the relationship between destination image and intention to revisit a destination.

**Cosma, Pop& Negrusa (2008):** The research studied "Tourists' perception regarding Cluj-Napoca as a cultural tourist destination". This study aims to find out the main tourist segment on the market and analyses the perception of tourists regarding Cluj-Napoca as a tourist destination. The researcher used the personal interviews (with 56 respondents) also analyzing available empirical studies and resources. The results revealed that 68% of the Cluj-Napoca's tourists were young (between 20-40 years). Majority of tourist were male with high educational level but low income (under the Romanian average wage). It also disclosed that the main purpose of visiting Cluj-Napoca is personal interest, followed by professional training, business and cultural motivation. By examining tourists' perception regarding destination attributes of Cluj-Napoca as a tourism destination, the researchers found the moderate positive perception of tourists towards that place. Most of the subjects perceive Cluj-Napoca as being an academic centre followed by a business and cultural centre. They didn't find any differences in the respondents' perception towards Cluj-Napoca as a tourism destination in terms of tourists' gender, educational level, monthly income, and travel purpose. However, the researchers by comparing the tourist resources of Cluj-Napoca with the target profile analyzed the place of cultural tourism for the destination. They

recommended cultural tourism as a powerful tool to differentiate Cluj-Napoca from its competitors.

**Lee&Billy(2010):** This research studied "A qualitative Analysis of the impact of Popular Culture on Destination Image: A case study of Korean wave from Japanese fans". It aims to investigate the perceived Korea's image as a tourist destination and how a country's popular culture impacts its destination image through a case study. Focus group interviewing was employed to collect required data. For the focus group interview, eight fans from Japan were selected. The study used semi-structured interviews. The meaning-focused analytic approaches were used in data analysis. All Participants were female. They had been the fan club members with Korea visit frequency from 5 to 40 times. The research found that popular culture is a significant agent of Korea's recent image. The study also revealed that the respondents' high level of interest for the pop-star was a key reason for their visiting in the destination and changing their perception. The researchers recommended further study on special interest tourists to understand their likely behaviors within that destination. they concluded the destination marketing organizations can take advantage of the study results to formulate destination image and promote destination to the proper target market.

**Chheang(2011):** This research studied "Angkor heritage tourism and tourist perception". It attempts to explore and understand the experiences and perceptions of tourists during their visits to Angkor Park and Siem Reap town. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data. This survey was conducted in the way to understand the tourist perceptions in regard to the issues of authenticity, museum and cultural attractions, festivals and events, customs and tradition, linguistic diversity, cultural distinct region, multicultural region, local food and services, local environment, local atmosphere, and local price. Also, face-to-face interviews with 23 Cambodian tourists visiting Angkor were performed. 219 completed questionnaires were returned. 80% of all respondent were first time visitors. 82% of the tourists had

education higher than high school. The main purpose of people's visits was to learn something new, understand culture and history, and experience the atmosphere. Non-Asian tourists were more interested in learning Asian culture than Asians tourists. Age and level of education had positive correlations with tourist motivations to learn new things at the destination. In addition, the results showed that tourists' perception was positive and their experiences were beyond their expectations. Friendliness and warm hospitality offered by the locals towards the tourists rank top in tourist perceptions followed by Authenticity, culture, local customs and traditions. Also, tourists' perceptions were influenced by two main factors of learning new things and learning local culture and history. The specific results drawing by interviews revealed that tourists were satisfied with their visit. Although the researcher couldn't ignore the issues of environmental pollution, sanitation and cleanliness, local poverty, and language barriers, that made some concerns to tourists.

**Tavakoli(2012):** This research studied "tourists' attitudes toward Isfahan's historical -cultural attractions and tourism facilities". Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this study. A survey questionnaire (in site) was conducted and distributed among 135 international tourists at Isfahan historical and cultural sites to address research questions. The non-random convenient sampling method was used. 78% of respondents were female. Also, interview with 40 tourists were done as a part of qualitative method. The cultural and historical sites of *Imam Square*, *Ali Qapu Palace*, *Grand Bazaar*, *Masged-e-Shah*, Isfahan museum, art of chiseled works over copper, rugs, paintings on leather, pottery, and calligraphy were used as the testable attributes. The results revealed the positive attitudes of international tourists toward Isfahan historical -cultural attractions and tourism facilities. The findings also showed that there is no difference in the international tourist attitudes toward Isfahan historical -cultural attractions and tourism facilities in terms of respondents' age, marital status, and educational level. Although, this study found out a significant difference



of respondents 'attitude toward Isfahan's historical -cultural attractions and tourism facilities in terms of their gender, nationality, monthly income, travel purpose, and number of visits. The author concluded that tourism planers should develop different historical and cultural attractions in order to satisfy different cultural needs of international tourists. In addition, Isfahan's historical and cultural attractions as an important recourse of tourism development should be protected in the sustainable manner. The researcher also recommended that the proper improvements in the various aspects of Isfahan tourism products and facilities .Further qualitative research to provide better comprehending the impacts of tourist's characteristics on the tourists' attitudes towards Isfahan historical and cultural attractions and its tourism products are suggested as well.

**Fazli (2012):** This study examined " Evaluation of destination image among foreign visitors in Tehran ". Its aims to identify the destination image of Tehran holding by international tourists also determine strong and weak image components of Tehran perceiving by foreign travelers. In addition, investigates the relation between destination image and its components, overall image, and future behavior. A survey questionnaire was conducted by researcher in order to collect required data, 100 international tourists who stayed in Tehran during a four-week period in July 2012 participated in this research. The cognitive image was examined in terms of tourist attractions, services, climate, facilities, and safety at low prices by 18 items. The findings of this research revealed that foreign travelers have a positive overall image of Tehran. The strong components of Tehran's image were hospitable people, museums, low prices, and cuisine respectively. The weak image components concluded crowdedness of Tehran, lack of tourism information and appropriate tours. They also identified a significant relationship between overall image of Tehran on the visitor's future behaviors based on tourist' intention to revisit Tehran or positive word of mouth. The researcher recommended the proper improvements of the weak image components of Tehran as a tourism destination.

**Table 2.1 Related studies summary**

Author	Year	Titles	Population	Collecting Data	Main Findings
Mosavi,	2001	Shiraz destination image and international tourists intention to revisit Shiraz	International tourists (167)	Survey questionnaire	48% of respondents have positive image of Shiraz that differs by nationality and gender. 85% of this percentage have desire to revisit Shiraz. The friendly people, natural attractions, cultural -architectural dimensions( more valued by female respondents) had strong impact on the Shiraz image
Cosma, Pop& Negrusa	2008	Tourists' perception regarding Cluj-Napoca as a cultural tourist destination	International tourists (56)	Personal interview	There is a moderate positive perception of tourists towards that place which not influencing by tourist socio-demographic. By comparing the tourist resources of place with the target profile, it was identified as cultural tourism destination.
Lee & Billy	2010	A qualitative Analysis of the impact of Popular Culture on Destination Image: A case study of Korean wave from Japanese fans	Japanese	Focus group interview (8)	The popular culture is a significant agent of Korea's recent image. Respondents' high level of interest for the pop-star was a key reason for their visiting in the destination and changing their perception.

Author	Year	Titles	Population	Collecting Data	Main Findings
Chheang	2011	Angkor heritage tourism and tourist perception	International tourist (242)	Survey questionnaire (219) Personal interviews (23)	Tourists had a positive perception toward destination and their experiences were beyond their expectations. Their perception towards destination strongly influenced by local friendliness, authenticity, and culture. Tourists' perceptions were influenced by learning new things and local culture and history factors.
Tavakoli	2012	Tourists' attitudes toward Isfahan's historical-cultural attractions and tourism facilities	International tourist (177)	Survey questionnaire (137) Personal interview (40)	The positive attitudes of international tourists toward Isfahan's historical-cultural attractions and tourism facilities which differing by tourist' gender, monthly income, travel purpose, nationality, and visit times.
Fazli	2012	Evaluation of destination image among foreign visitors in Tehran	International tourists (100)	Survey questionnaire	Respondents had a positive overall image of Tehran which influencing their intentions to revisit. Hospitable people, museums, low prices, and cuisine were as the positive image items and crowdedness, lack of tourism information and proper tours as the negative attributes.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS**

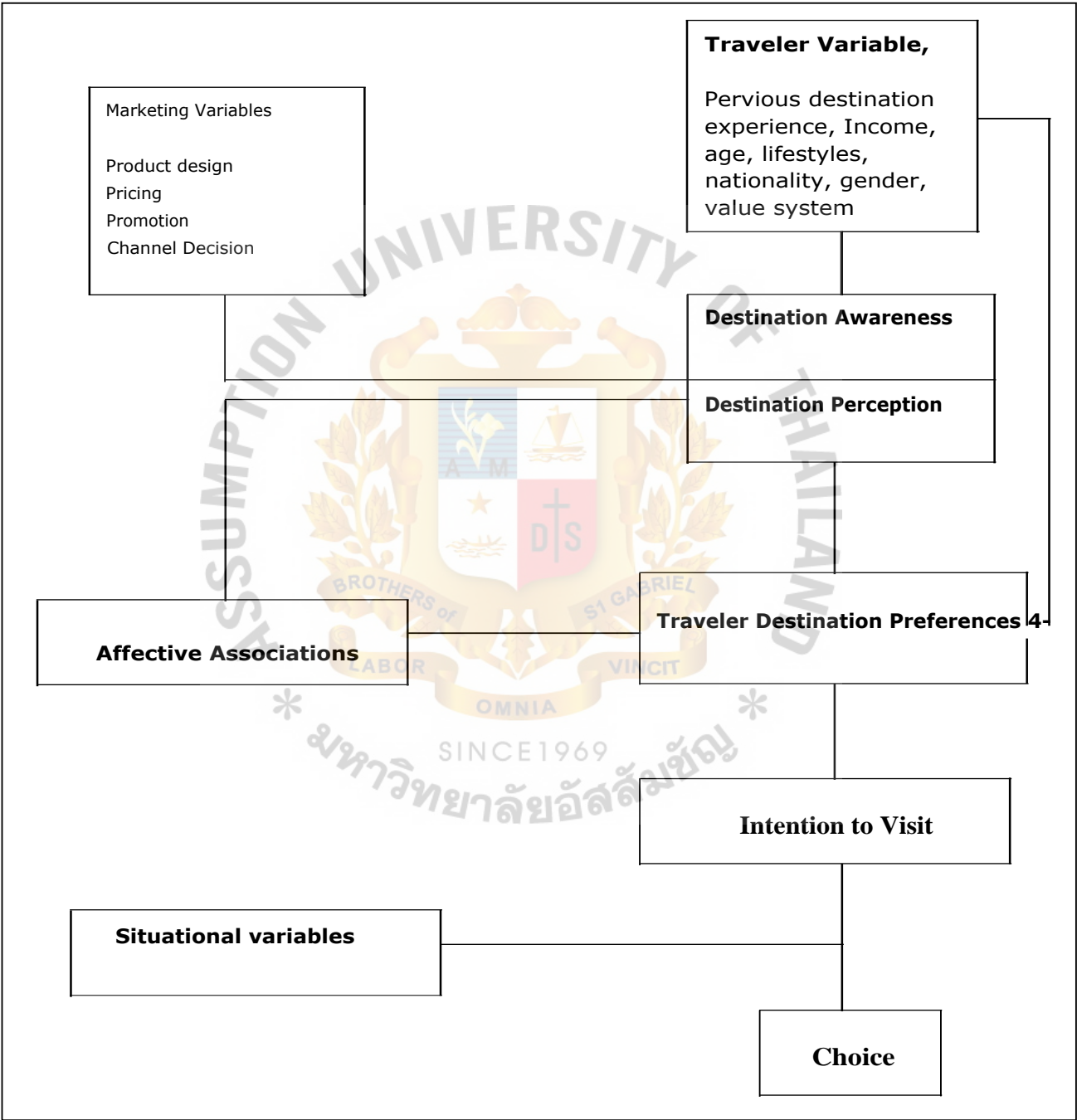
This part aims to describe the framework of the research. It contains five parts that show the theoretical framework, definition of variables, conceptual framework, research hypothesis and operation of the independent and dependent variables. In the first part, the researcher focuses on the theoretical framework of the study. In the second part, the researcher will elaborate all of the variables that are used in that research. The third part focuses on the conceptual framework. That is, the researcher's own framework explaining the independent and dependent variables. The fourth and fifth parts describe the research hypothesis and operation of the independent, intermediate and dependent variables by which the relationships between those variables should be elaborated.

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework is a conceptual model of how one theorizes the relationship among the several factors that have been identified as important to the problems (Sekaren, 1992). Theoretical framework indicates all the concepts, definitions and propositions that relate to the research problem. In the simple words, theoretical framework explains what has been done on the topic or problem being investigated. This study was framed within Woodside and Lyonski's (1989) general model of traveler destination awareness and choice (figure 3.1). Those researchers conceived the destination awareness as four sets of destinations based on tourist negative, positive and neutralized perception towards them. Potential tourists make their destination preferences from these destination perceptions and include affective components in the form of positive and negative evaluations of a destination. Indeed, Woodside and Lyonski proposed that intention to visit is the perceived

desire that a tourist will visit a particular destination within a specific time period and influenced directly by destination awareness (perception) which in turn is affected by travel (tourist socio-demographic and trip characteristics) and marketing variables.

**Figure 3.1 - General model of traveler destination awareness and choice**



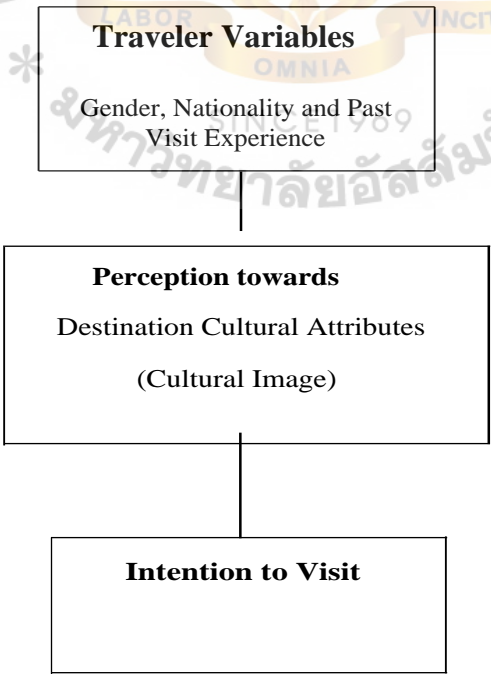
Source: Woodside, A.G., & Lysonski, S. (1989). A general model of traveler destination choice. *Journal of Travel Research*, 17(4), 8-14.



In the simple words, the destination perception as a result of tourists' perception of the destination's attributes (Lumsdon, 2000 as cited in Zhou, 2005) is a predictive variable for tourist intention to visit. Although, the perception of each destination attribute doesn't impact on tourist destination perception equally and some attributes impose stronger impacts on it (Zhou, 2005).

By reviewing the recent tourism literature, cultural attributes are frequently used in determining tourist destination perception amongst many other attributes associated with a specific destination (Um &Crompton, 1990; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Zhou, 2005) also become important attributes, which motivating people to visit a destination (Richards, 1996; Smith, 2003) thereby further supporting the propositions suggested by the current paper conceptual framework. However, a proposed model of destination cultural image and visit intention could be constructed by refining the general model of traveler destination awareness and choice (figure 3.2)

**Figure 3.2 Sequential relationships among travel variables, destination cultural image, and intention to visit**



The literature of following studies was analyzed in order to drive the current research travel variables (Mosavi, 2001; Farhadi & Esmaeli, 2010; Tavakoli, 2012).

### **3.2 Definition of Variables**

#### **3.2.1 Independent variables**

##### **1. Gender**

Studies have found that gender and age significantly affect the perceived image of tourist destinations (Baloglu, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Consequently, the marketers and tourism planers are more interested to use gender as a travel market segment (Stephen & Mountinho, 1995).

##### **2. Nationality**

The pervious researches reveal that variables such as tourist perceptions of a destination, satisfaction levels, and tourist activities may vary according to the country of origin (Baloglu, 1997; Pizam & Sussman, 1995). Therefore, it could be concluded that tourists with different nationalities hold different viewpoint and perceived image toward the same destination.

##### **3. Past Experience**

Past experience has been identified as an important determinant of the future behavior in the social and psychological studies. Tourists make their travel experience and accumulate their knowledge during trip which leads them to form their overall perception. Past experience in this research refers to respondents' experience of visiting Iran.

#### **3.2.2 Intermediate variables**

##### **1. Perception toward Iran's Culture**

Tourist motivations, attitudes, and perceptions are important socio-cognitive variables

That must be taken into account to better understanding destination choice process.

Perception in this study refers to both "a priori" tourists' perception toward Iran's culture as a specific kind of perception which developing by them prior to physically visitation of Iran and the "a posteriori" perception toward Iran's culture that is developed by them after visiting Iran. Perception of Iran's culture in terms of:

### **1.1 History**

The unique characteristics of Iran's history are rivaled by only a few countries in the world. Iran is inheritor of the great civilization of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, Parthian, Sassanian, Samanian, Safavid, Qajar and other dynasties that ruled Iran during 2500 years.

### **1.2 People**

Iran's geopolitical importance has encountered Iran with numerous migrations of the people who have passed through Iran and gave this country the diverse ethnic composition of Persian, Azeri, Gilak, Mazandarani, Kurd, Arab, Lur, Baluch, Turkman, and other Ethnic minorities. Such the diverse ethnicities make a multicultural society.

### **1.3 Persian language and literature**

Over two-thirds of the Iranians speak languages belonging to what is known as the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. The "Modern Persian" represents the Iranian national identity and a very rich literature.

### **1.4 Religion**

Zoroastrianism makes up the first, oldest and most authentically Iranian religion of all. Arab invaders brought the religion of Islam to Iran which feeding approximately 90 percent of Iran's religious population.

### **1.5 Art**

Art in Iran is one of the ancient human creativities which practiced by early inhibitors of this Plateau. This study focuses on the Architecture, carpet and cinema.

## **-Architecture**

Architecture in Iran underwent many changes through pre —history, pre-Islamic, and Islamic periods and achieved a high degree of excellence. Each period represents unique features of Iranian architecture.

## **-Carpet**

Persian carpets are famous for their quality of design and possessing the variety of artistic patterns and colors. From the Safavid period, carpet weaving became the important source of export products to other countries.

## **-Cinema**

The modern Iranian cinema is considered to be among the world's most progressive cinema. It offers the "New Style" of movie production that represents social responsibility, rather than only entertainment.

### **1.6 Food**

Iranian food ingredients reflect the geography of Iran. Their taste, colors, and textures reflect the aesthetic taste of Iranians. Iranian culinary practices have been affected by the country's history and religions.

### **1.7 Traditional Iranian festivals**

Iran has a number of national and religious festivals and events which deeply rooted in the country's culture.

### **3.2.3 Dependent variables**

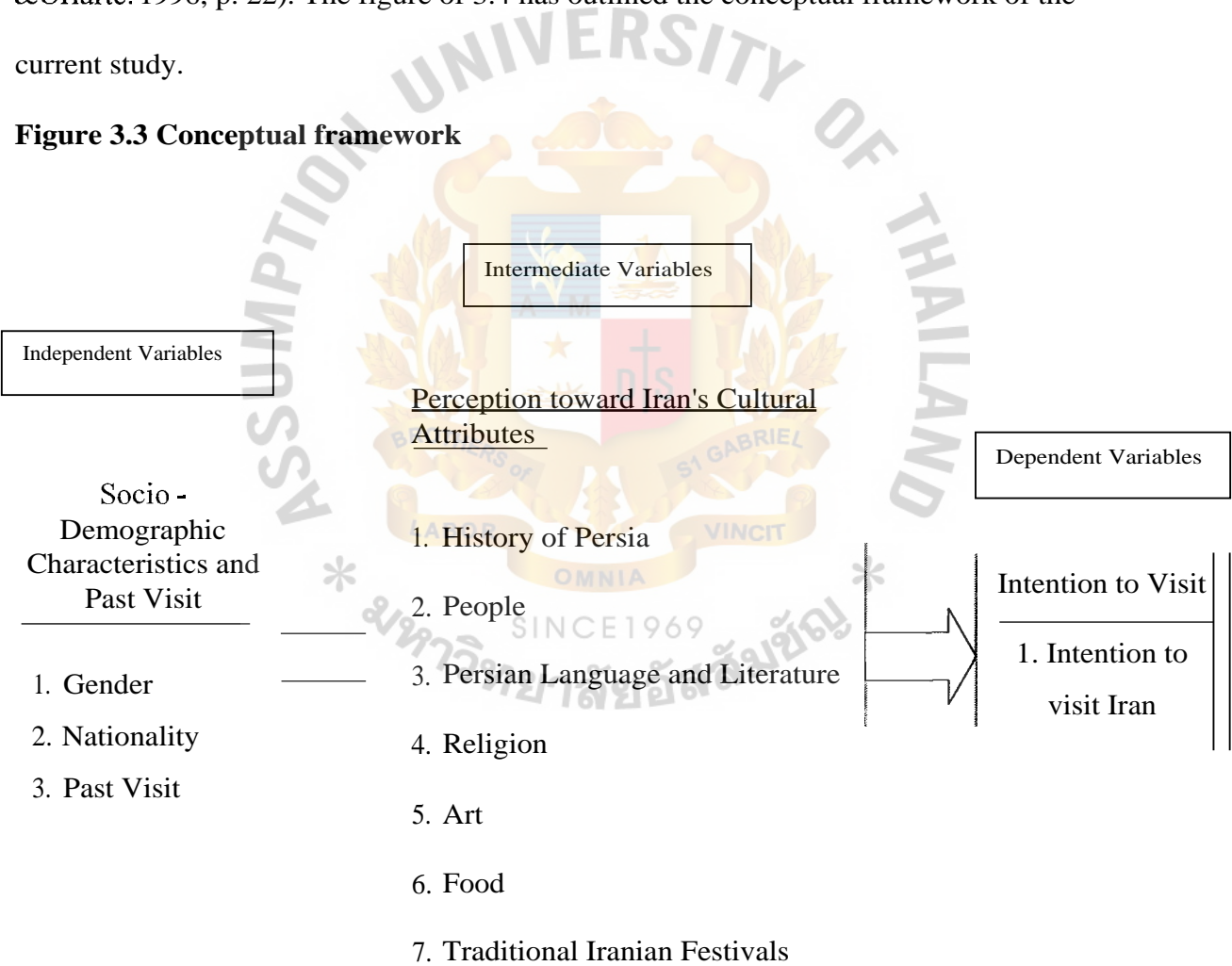
#### **1. Intention to visit Iran**

As the positive and negative perception toward a destination, essentially influences the tourist's intention to visit even revisit a destination. Intention to visit in this research would be defined as the international tourists' desire to visit Iran within the next 12 months.

3.3 Conceptual Framework

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a conceptual framework "lays out the key factors, constructs, or variables, and presumes relationships among them" (as cited in Jabareen, 2009). The conceptual framework both graphically or narrative form identifies the dependent, intermediate and independent variables and the presumed relationships among them. An intermediate variable is the variable that causes changes to dependent variables and is itself caused to vary by the independent variables (Sevilla, Ochave, Punsalan, Regala, &Uriarte: 1996, p. 22). The figure of 3.4 has outlined the conceptual framework of the current study.

Figure 3.3 Conceptual framework





### 3.4 Research Hypothesis

Hypotheses are the testable statements about relationship among two or more variables that should be supported by empirical data. A good hypothesis is one that shows a reasonable explanation of the events that have occurred or will occur. This research offers totally five hypotheses. These hypotheses would be tested to achieve research objectives.

Ho1: There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by gender.

Ha1: There is a difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by gender.

Ho2: There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by nationality.

Ha2: There is a difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by nationality.

Ho3: There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by past visit.

Ha3: There is a difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by past visit.

Ho4: There is no relationship between perception of Iran's culture and respondents' intentions to visit Iran.

Ha4: There is a relationship between perception of Iran's culture and respondents' intentions to visit Iran.

Ho5: There is no correlation between cultural attributes of Iran and respondents' intentions to visit Iran.

Ha5: There is a correlation between cultural attributes of Iran and respondents' intentions to visit Iran.

### 3.5 Operation of the Independent, Intermediate, and Dependent Variables

#### 3.5.1 Operationalization of independent variables

**Table 3.1 Operationalization of independent variables**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Conceptual Definition</b>	<b>Operational Components</b>	<b>Level of Measurement</b>	<b>Question No.</b>
1.Gender	The state of being man or woman	-Male -female	Nominal	Q1
2.Nationality	The governed state to which each person normally live or belong	-Asian -European -American -African -Oceania	Nominal	Q2
3.Past visit	Personally encountering to somewhere in the course of time	-not visited -visited	Nominal	Q3-4

#### 3.5.2 Operationalization of intermediate variables

**Table 3.2 Operationalization of intermediate variables**

<b>Intermediate Variables</b>	<b>Conceptual Definition</b>	<b>Operational Components</b>	<b>Level Measurement</b>	<b>Question No.</b>
1.History of Iran	A series of past events related to country	- Great history - Ancient history -Impressive -world history	Interval	Q5-8
2.People of Iran	A collection of individuals forming a whole	-Friendly -Diverse Ethnicity -Diverse Cultures	Interval	Q9-11

3.Language and Persian Literature	A body of words and systems that used by people to communicate or express their emotions in the particular style or rhythm	-Persian language as the national Identity -Beauty and Harmony of poetry -Rich and outstanding literature	Interval	Q12-14
4.Religion	A strong belief in and worship of a God	-Significant impact of Islam -Freely living of minorities	Interval	Q15-16
5.Art	Conscious efforts to generate or combine the sounds, colors, movements, forms or other elements to impress the sense of beauty	-Unique architecture -Islamic architecture - Authenticity - Progressive cinema -Attractive cinema	Interval	Q17-21
6.Food	any nutrients that should be consumed by human beings to survive and growth	-Unusual taste, exotic taste, nice appearance ,healthy ingredients -Variety of cuisine -Special dietary habits	Interval	Q22-24
7.Traditional Iranian Festivals	An event for feasting or cherishing that usually occurs annually	-Unusual and exotic	Interval	Q25

### 3.5.3 Operationalization of dependent variables

**Table 3.3 Operationalization of dependent variables**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Conceptual Definition</b>	<b>Operational Components</b>	<b>Level Measurement</b>	<b>Question No.</b>
1.Intention to visit	A determination that leads to act	Visit Iran within the next 12 months -Abolished political sanction -Settled Middle East unrest -Existence of fairs and festivals -Existence of national carrier	Interval	Q26-29



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter argues the used research methods, respondents and sampling procedures, research instruments, collection of data and statistical treatments of data. Respondents and sampling procedure consists of target population, sampling method, sampling unit, and sample size. The research instruments section discusses the questionnaire as a research instrument in detail in order to reveal existing consistency between questionnaires and research's statement of the problem and hypothesis. Data collecting section focuses on the methods that were used by researcher to provide primary and secondary data. Finally, statistical treatment of data shows what data analysis techniques were applied in the current research to examine its hypotheses.

#### **4.1 Research Method**

Descriptive study determines and reports the way things are. In fact, descriptive method helps researcher to gather information to test hypotheses or to answer questions concerning the current status of the study's subject. In this study, after collecting secondary data through academic journals, books, academic tourism researches, and internet, the researcher conducted a sample survey to gather the primary data. In fact, the researcher by using sample survey provided a great opportunity for the respondents to disclose their judgments. It also made it possible to collect data from a large group in the minimum cost and time. However, the researcher distributed a number of questionnaires through a survey. To make sure that respondents could understand the questions clearly, the researcher used very simple and unambiguous sentences.



## **4.2 Respondents and Sampling Procedures**

### **Target population**

This research has targeted the international tourists who were in the international airport of Svarnabummi ( Thailand ) within the specific period of time.

### **Sampling method**

Non-probability or non-random sampling was used as a sampling method. Thus, all the participants of the investigation were not derived through equal chances. In fact, by using this method certain parts in the overall group were deliberately not included in the selection of the representative group (Gay: 1998, p.119). Based on the convenience of the researcher, convenience sampling was used as a sampling strategy in that research and international tourists with different destinations (not exactly who coming Iran) were surveyed.

### **Sampling unit**

The sampling unite is that element or set of elements identified for selection in the stage of sampling. For this study, the sampling unit contained international tourists both male and female in the international airport of Svarnabummi (Thailand) within time periods of March-April (2013) regardless of the destinations that wanted to go.

### **Sample size**

The time, money and effort involved in the research do not allow the researcher to study all possible members of a population but the larger the sample the more likely the response will reflect the total universe under study( Schiffman and Kanuk,1994 as cited in Gay:1998,p.123). As, the sample size needs to be reasonable to ensure statistics produced are reliable thus it was important to sample at both weekend and during the week as numbers of tourists varies from day to day. For the calculation of the sample size, Burns & Bush (1995) recommended that researchers have to consider 3 factors: the variability in the population; the

accuracy required; the level of confidence. The formula for calculating sample size in this research refers the specific formula which using usually for unknown population.

The formula:  $N = Z^2 (pq)/e^2$

N = the sample size

Z = standard error associated with chosen level of confidence (95%)

P = estimate variability in the population 50/50

Q = (100 – P)

E = acceptable error  $\pm 5\%$

$$N = Z^2 (p q)/e^2 = (1.96)^2 \times .5(0.5)1(0.05)^2 \\ = (3.8416 \times 0.25) / 0.0025 = 384.16 \sim 384.$$

#### 4.3 Research Instruments /Questionnaire

A self—administrated questionnaire was designed to investigate the perception of international tourists at Svarnabummi airport (Thailand) toward Iran's culture and their intentions to visit Iran. This questionnaire consists of 4 parts as follows:

##### Part I: Representation part

This part contains three questions. The first two questions, was designed to elicit raw knowledge of respondents about Iran in order to screen the study's participants. The third question was deliberately placed to investigate the overall impression of Iran among international tourists.

##### Part II: Socio- demographic and past experience

This section contains four questions that respondents were asked about their gender, nationality and their experience of visiting or not visiting Iran.

### **Part III: International tourists' perception toward Iran's culture**

In this part, the respondents were asked to rate their perception about Iran's culture. This section comprises of 21 items which involving seven cultural attributes of Iran's culture. The levels of agreement range from strongly agree to strongly disagree, measured on the five point Likert scale.

### **Part IV: International tourists' intentions to visit Iran**

This part asked the respondents to rate their intention to visit Iran. This section contains four questions. Those questions were designed to examine the level of intention based on a five point Likert —type scale.

#### **4.4 Collection of Data/Gathering Procedure**

##### **4.4.1 Primary data**

The primary data collected through the survey by using the researcher's self — administered questionnaire. The data collection process was performed during 20 of March-to 30 April (2013) at departure and arrival parts of international airport of Svarnabummi (Bangkok) by distributing 384 questionnaires among international tourists.

##### **4.4.2 Secondary data**

The current study is based on comprehensive reading English and Farsi materials. The source of secondary data in this research consists of textbooks, academic tourism researches, professional journals, and Internet. This study collected some statistical data from Iran Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization and Iran's Embassy in Bangkok.

#### **4.5 Pre-test**

The pretesting refers to the examining of the constructed questionnaire on a small sample of respondents in order to identify and solve possible problems. All elements of the questionnaire should be examined like question content, relevance, instruction, and layout

(Sevilla, Ochave, Punsalan ,Regala, &Uriarte: 1996, p.200). The reliability of the current research instrument was tested by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to find out the internal consistency. In this research, 30 questionnaires were distributed among international tourists at Svarnabummi airport (Thailand) during March 28-30, 2013. The reliability testing results are shown as Table 4.1

**Table 4.1 Pretest results**

Reliability results

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on	
	Standardized Items	N of Items
.910	.911	25

The outcome of reliability analysis —scale or alpha of 25 items was higher than 0.6(Table 4.1). Therefore, this questionnaire was considered a reliable questionnaire that enables the researcher to meet the research objectives.

#### 4.6 Statistical Treatments of Data

##### 4.6.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to describe and calculate the basic elements of the data like average, frequency and percentage distribution. In fact, this research used descriptive statistics to analyze International tourists' socio-demographic and past experience characteristics and their perception toward Iran's culture also their intentions to visit Iran. Because of the nature of data, the content analysis was used for the open-ended question alone. The content analysis is a set of procedures for collecting and organizing information in a standardized format that allows analysts to make inferences about the characteristics and meaning of written and other recorded material (Chelimsky, 1989 ).The simple format is

developed for summarizing information or counting the frequency of statements. Phrases were coded into themes; frequency of each theme were counted and categorized into larger groups of related subjects. The result of this content analysis reflected the general image of Iran among international tourists which complimented the quantitative evaluation of the cultural image of Iran.

#### **4.6.2 Inferential statistics**

The inferential statistics were used to reach conclusions that expand beyond the immediate data alone. One —way analysis of variance or one-way ANOVA and t-test were used in this research to illustrate the differences in perception toward Iran's culture also their intentions when the respondents are classified by gender, nationality, and past experience.

t-test usually is used for comparison of the means of two groups but One-way ANOVA is used when researcher calls for comparison of the means of two or more groups (Sevilla, Ochave, Punsalan ,Regala, &Uriarte: 1996,p.267 ). The primary reason for choosing ANOVA rather than t-test in particular cases is the comparison error rate for t-test is bigger because so many *t*'s should be computed. This method also deals properly with analysis of one interval dependent variable and one or more nominal independent variables.

The Pearson Correlation or the Pearson Product Moment Correlation is used when the purpose is to determine the relationship or co-variation between two variables that are usually of the interval type of data. Correlation, or *r* for short in the case of a Product Moment Correlation, ranges from  $r = -1$  to  $r = +1$  as limiting value. If the  $r = 0$ , there is no correlation between the variables under study (Sevilla, Ochave, Punsalan ,Regala, &Uriarte: 1996,p.281). The Pearson Correlation or the Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used in this study to illustrate the relationship between the perception of international tourists toward Iran's culture and their intentions to visit Iran.



The multiple regression analyses was conducted in this research to identify the contribution of the seven cultural attributes in the tourists' perception toward Iran's culture. Multiple regression as an extension of linear regression is used when the objective is to predict the value of a variable based on the value of two or more other variables. The variable that researcher want to predict is called the dependent variable and the variables which using to predict the value of the dependent variable are called the independent variables(SPSS,2006).



## CHAPTER FIVE

### PRESENTATION OF DATA AND CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter focuses on the data analysis and findings of the study. It contains two main sections: (a) data processing and analysis (b) inferential analysis and hypothesis testing. The first section summarizes the data collected from 295 respondents by assessing the frequency distribution of independent (socio-demographic and past visit experience), intermediate (perception towards cultural attributes of Iran), and dependent variables (intention to visit Iran). It also represents the frequency distribution of the different elements in the tourists' overall impression of Iran. Finally, the second section by focusing on the inferential analysis of data will discuss hypothesis testing results.

#### 5.1 Data Processing and Analysis

A total number of 384 questionnaires were collected, out of which 295 questionnaires were used because of applying the particular qualification rules of valid questionnaires. Those questionnaires, which representing the lack of respondents' knowledge about Iran (61 questionnaires) were discarded as well as those in which the answers were not represented regularly (28 questionnaires).

In order to achieve the objects of the research and test its hypothesis, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 15.0 was employed to summarize the data which is collected from 295 questionnaires. This chapter begins by descriptive analysis of independent variables that provides an initial summary of the collected data represented in terms of frequency and percentage distribution of each variable.

### 5.1.1 Frequency distribution of independent variable

#### 5.1.1.1 Gender of respondents

Table 5.1 shows out of 295 respondents in this study, 132 respondents (44.7%) were male and 163 respondents (55.3%) were female. It can be concluded that the majority of respondents were female.

**Table 5.1 Gender of respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	132	44	44.7	44.7
Female	163	55.3	55.3	100.0
Total	295	100.0	100.0	

#### 5.1.1.2 Nationality of respondents

Table 5.2 shows that out of 295 respondents in this study, 216 respondents (73.2%) were from Asia, 37 respondents(12.5%) from European countries, 16 respondents(5.4%) from Africa, 14 respondents(4.7%) from Oceania, and 12 respondents (4.1%) from American countries. Therefore, the Asians comprise the greater part of respondents that followed by Europeans, Africans, Oceania, and Americans.

**Table 5.2 Nationality of respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid African	16	5.4	5.4	5.4
Asian	216	73.2	73.2	78.6
American	12	4.1	4.1	82.7
European	37	12.5	12.5	95.3
Oceania	14	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total	295	100.0	100.0	

### 5.1.1.3 Past visit of respondents

Table 5.3 demonstrates the experience of visiting Iran by respondents. Out of 295 valid samples, 271 respondents have not visit experience of Iran, representing 91.9% of total respondents. The remaining 24 respondents (8.1%) have visited Iran in the past. It can be concluded that the majority of respondents never visited Iran.

**Table 5.3 Frequency of visit of the respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	24	8.1	8.1	8.1
No	271	91.9	91.9	100.0
Total	295	100.0	100.0	

### 5.1.2 Frequency distribution of intermediate variable

#### 5.1.2.1 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's culture in terms of history

According to the outcome showed in Table 5.4, the statement "Iran has an ancient history" has the highest mean score (4.06) followed by "Iran inherits a great history of Persia", represents 4.04. The lowest mean (3.69) belongs to the statement "history of Iran is impressive".

**Table 5.4 Foreign tourists' perception of Iran's history**

Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's history	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Iran inherits a great history of Persia.	295	4.04	0.830
Iran has an ancient history.	295	<b>4.06</b>	0.812
History of Iran is impressive.	295	<b>3.69</b>	0.832
History of Persia constitutes a significant part of the world's history.	295	3.82	0.905

a: A 5 level scale was used where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree

As to the standard deviation of International tourists' perception towards Iran's history, the statement "History of Persia constitutes a significant part of the world's history"

has the highest standard deviation (0.905). The lowest standard deviation (0.812) comes from the statement "Iran has an ancient history".

#### 5.1.2.1.1 Frequency response of foreign tourists' perception toward Iran's history

Table 5.5 indicates the frequency and percentages of international tourists' perception towards Iran's culture through Iran's history aspect, the respondents were instructed to rate their level of agree. A five point Likert Scale was used.

**Table 5.5 Frequency of foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's history**

History of Iran	Strongly agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree(3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Iran inherits a great history of Persia.	33.2% N=98	<b>41%</b> N=121	23.1% N=68	2.4% N=7	0.3% N=1
Iran has an ancient history.	32.9% N=97	<b>42.7%</b> N=125	23.1% N=68	1.0% N=3	0.7% N=2
History of Iran is impressive.	18% N=53	38% N=112	<b>39.7%</b> N=117	3.7% N=11	0.7% N=2
History of Persia constitutes a significant part of the world's history.	25.1% N=74	<b>39.3%</b> N=116	29.8% N=88	4.4% N=13	1.4% N=4

The Table 5.5 shows that the majority of respondents agree "Iran has an ancient history" representing 42.7% out of total 295 respondents ,followed by "Iran inherits a great history of Persia" which 41% of respondents agree to it. 39.3% of respondents agree that "History of Persia constitutes a significant part of the world's history ". Although, 56% of respondents agree "History of Iran is impressive", 39.7% of respondents have no idea regarding the same item. However, a majority of respondents agree that Iran with an impressive history inherits an ancient history of Persia that constitutes a significant part of world's history. In addition, more than one third of respondents have no idea regarding impression of Iran's history.



### 5.1.2.2 Foreign tourists' perception of Iran's culture in terms of Iran's people

**Table 5.6 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's people**

Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's history	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Iranian people are friendly.	295	<b>3.68</b>	0.904
Iranian people have diverse cultures.	295	3.55	0.875
Iranian people have diverse ethnicities.	295	<b>3.47</b>	0.925

a: A 5 level scale was used where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree

According to the outcome showed in Table 5.6, the statement "Iranian people are friendly" has the highest mean score (3.68) that followed by "Iranian people have diverse cultures" represents 3.55. The lowest mean of 3.47 belongs to the statement "Iranian people have diverse ethnicities".

As to the standard deviation of International tourists' perception towards Iran's people, the statement "Iranian people have diverse ethnicities" has the highest standard deviation (0.925), followed by "Iranian people are friendly" (0.904). The lowest standard deviation (0.875) comes from the statement "Iranian people have diverse cultures".

#### 5.1.2.2.1 Frequency response of foreign tourists' perception toward Iran's people

Table 5.7 indicates the frequency and percentages of international tourists' perception towards Iran's culture through Iran's people aspect, the respondents were instructed to rate their level of agree. A five point Likert Scale was used.

**Table 5.7 Frequency of foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's people**

People of Iran	Strongly agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree(3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree ( <sup>1</sup> )
Iranian people are friendly.	20.7% N=61	33.9% N=100	<b>39.7%</b> <b>N=117</b>	4% N=13	1.7% N=5
Iranian people have diverse cultures.	13.9% N=41	37.6% N=111	<b>39.3%</b> <b>N=116</b>	7.8% N=23	1.4% N=4
Iranian people have diverse ethnicities.	13.9% N=41	32.5% N=96	<b>42.7%</b> <b>N=126</b>	8.1% N=24	2.7% N=8

The Table 5.7 shows that 42.7% out of total 295 respondents, have no idea about "Iranian people have diverse ethnicities", followed by "Iranian people are friendly", of (39.7%). In addition, 39.3% of respondents have no idea regarding "Iranian people have diverse cultures". In fact, more than one third of respondents have no idea regarding Iran's people. It can highlight the lack of respondents' knowledge regarding Iran.

### 5.1.2.3 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's culture in terms of language

**Table 5.8 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's language**

Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's language.	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Persian language represents the Iranian people national identity.	295	3.75	0.852
Persian poetry is a combination of beauty and harmony.	295	3.63	0.801
Persian literature is rich and outstanding.	295	<b>3.62</b>	0.852

a: A 5 level scale was used where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree

According to the outcome showed in Table 5.8, the statement "Persian language represents the Iranian people national identity" has the highest mean score (3.75) followed by "Persian poetry is a combination of beauty and harmony" of 3.63. The lowest mean of 3.62 belongs to the statement "Persian literature is rich and outstanding".

As to the Standard deviation of the tourists' perception towards Iran's language, two statements "Persian language represents the Iranian people national identity" and "Persian literature is rich and outstanding" have the highest standard deviation (0.852). The lowest standard deviation (0.801) comes from the statement "Persian poetry is a combination of beauty and harmony".

### 5.1.2.3.1 Frequency response of foreign tourists' perception toward Iran's language

Table 5.9 indicates the frequency and percentages of international tourists' perception towards Iran's culture through Iran's language aspect, the respondents were instructed to rate their level of agree. A five point Likert Scale was used.

**Table 5.9 Frequency of foreign tourists 'perception towards Iran's language**

Language of Iran	Strongly agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree(3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Persian language represents the Iranian people national identity.	23.4% N=69	31.2% N=92	<b>42.7%</b> N=126	2.4% N=7	0.3% N=1
Persian poetry is a combination of beauty and harmony.	15.3% N=45	36.9% N=109	44.1% N=130	3.1% N=9	0.7% N=2
Persian literature is rich and outstanding.	18.3% N=54	30.5% N=90	<b>47.8%</b> N=141	2.0% N=6	1.4% N=4

The Table 5.9 shows that 47.8% of respondents have no idea about "Persian literature is rich and outstanding". 44.1% out of total respondents also have no idea regarding "Persian poetry is a combination of beauty and harmony" followed by "Persian language represents the Iranian people national identity" (42.7%). Therefore, it can be concluded that the significant number of respondents (slightly less than 50% of respondents) have no idea towards Iran's language. It provides further evidence of respondents' lack of knowledge regarding Iran.

#### 5.1.2.4 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's culture in terms of religion

**Table 5.10 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's religion**

International tourists' perception towards Iran's religion.	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Islam in Iran has significant impacts on its culture(food, religion, and dress)	295	<b>4.05</b>	0.957
People from different religions can live freely in Iran.	295	2.98	<b>1.086</b>

a: A 5 level scale was used where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree

According to the outcome showed in Table 5.10, the statement "Islam in Iran has significant impacts on its culture (food, religion, and dress)" has the highest mean score (4.05) .The lowest mean of 2.98 belongs to the statement" People from different religions can live freely in Iran". As to the standard deviationof the tourists'perception towards Iran's religion, the statement" People from different religions can live freely in Iran" has the highest standard deviation (1.086). The lowest standard deviation (0.957) comes from the statement" Islam in Iran has significant impacts on its culture (food, religion, and dress) ".

##### 5.1.2.4.1 Frequency response of foreign tourists' perception toward Iran's religion

The Table 5.11 indicates the frequency and percentages of international tourists' perception towards Iran's culture through Iran's religion aspect, the respondents were instructed to rate their level of agree. A five point Likert Scale was used.

**Table 5.11 Frequency of foreign tourists 'perception towards Iran's religion**

Religion of Iran	Strongly agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree(3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Islam in Iran has significant impacts on its culture(food, religion, and dress)	<b>39.3%</b> <b>N=116</b>	33.2% N=98	22.0% N=65	3.7% N=11	1.7% N=5
People from different religions can live freely in Iran.	7.8% N=23	22.7% N=67	<b>40.3%</b> <b>N=119</b>	17.6% N=52	11.5% N=34

The Table 5.11 shows that more than one third of respondents (39.3%) strongly agree that "Islam in Iran has significant impacts on its culture (food, religion, and dress)". In other hand, a majority of respondents (40.3%) have no idea regarding "People from different religions can live freely in Iran". Furthermore, 29.1 % of respondent exteremly disagree or disagree that Iranian people with different religions live freely in that country. It might be originated in the television documentaries or news programs which outlining the growing conflict between Iran's government and Iranian Bahia's'.

#### 5.1.2.5 International tourists' perception towards Iran's culture in terms of art

According to the outcome showed in Table 5.12, the statement" Iran's carpet is known for its authenticity" has the highest mean score (3.88) .The lowest mean of 3.12 belongs to the statement" Iran's cinema is a progressive cinema".As, the deviationof the tourists' perception towards Iran's art shows that the statement" Iran's carpet is known for its authenticity" has the highest standard deviation (0.926). The lowest standard deviation (0.881) comes from the statement" Iran's architecture is influenced by Islamic architecture ".

**Table 5.12 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's art**

Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's art.	N	Mean <sup>s</sup>	Std.Deviation
Iran's architecture is unique	295	3.76	0.889
Iran's architecture is influenced by Islamic architecture	295	3.81	0.881
Iran's carpet is known for its authenticity.	295	<b>3.88</b>	0.926
Iran's cinema is a progressive cinema.	295	<b>3.12</b>	0.856
Iran's cinema is an interesting and attractive cinema.	295	3.13	0.883

a: A 5 level scale was used where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree



#### 5.1.2.5.1 Frequency response of foreign tourists' perception toward Iran's art

The Table 5.13 indicates the frequency and percentages of international tourists' perception towards Iran's culture through Iran's art aspect, the respondents were instructed to rate their level of agree. A five point Likert Scale was used.

**Table 5.13 Frequency of international tourists 'perception towards Iran's art**

Art of Iran	Strongly agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree(3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Iran's architecture is unique.	23.7% N=70	33.6% N=99	<b>38.3%</b> <b>N=113</b>	3.4% <b>N=10</b>	1.0% N=3
Iran's architecture is influenced by Islamic architecture	23.4% N=69	<b>40.3%</b> <b>N=119</b>	30.8% N=91	4.4% N=13	1.0% N=3
Iran's carpet is known for its authenticity.	29.8 N=88	<b>34.9</b> <b>N=103</b>	30.8 N=91	2.7 N=8	1.7 N=5
Iran's cinema is a progressive cinema.	6.8 N=20	18.3 N=54	<b>60.0</b> <b>N=177</b>	10.2 N=30	4.7 N=14
Iran's cinema is an interesting and attractive cinema.	8.8 N=26	15.3 N=45	<b>60.3</b> <b>N=178</b>	11.2 N=33	4.4 N=13

From the results of table 5.13, it can be seen that more than half of respondents (57.3%) agreed the statement "Iran's architecture is unique" whereas 38.3% of respondents have no idea regarding the same item. 40.3% of respondents agreed that "Iran's architecture is influenced by Islamic architecture" followed by "Iran's carpet is known for its authenticity" (34.9%). In other hand, the majority over half of international tourists (60%) have no idea regarding "Iran's cinema is a progressive cinema", followed by "Iran's cinema is an interesting and attractive cinema" (60.3%). Most of the tourists' responses were a reflection of their organic images of Iran that have been generated from books, television, and general stereotypes of Iranian culture.

### 5.1.2.6 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's culture in terms of food

**Table 5.14 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's food**

Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's food.	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Iran's food is unique (unusual taste, nice appearance, healthy ingredients).	295	<b>3.65</b>	0.957
Iran has a variety of cuisine.	295	3.59	0.876
The Iranian dietary habits are unique and special.	295	<b>3.54</b>	0.802

a: A 5 level scale was used where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree

With regard to the outcome showed in Table 5.14, the statement "Iran's food is unique (unusual taste, nice appearance, healthy ingredients)" has the highest mean score (3.65). The lowest mean of 3.54 belongs to the statement "The Iranian dietary habits are unique and special". As to the standard deviation of the tourists' perception towards Iran's food the statement "Iran's food is unique (unusual taste, nice appearance, healthy ingredients)" has the highest standard deviation (0.957). The lowest standard deviation (0.802) comes from the statement "The Iranian dietary habits are unique and special."

#### 5.1.2.6.1 Frequency response of foreign tourists' perception toward Iran's food

The Table 5.15 indicates the frequency and percentages of international tourists' perception towards Iran's culture through Iran's food aspect, the respondents were instructed to rate their level of agree. A five point Likert Scale was used.

**Table 5.15 Frequency of foreign tourists 'perception towards Iran's food**

Food of Iran	Strongly agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree(3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Iran's food is unique (unusual taste, nice appearance, healthy ingredients).	20.7 N=61	34.2 N=101	<b>36.9</b> <b>N=109</b>	5.4 <b>N=16</b>	2.7 N=8
Iran has a variety of cuisine.	17.3 N=51	31.9 N=94	<b>44.7</b> <b>N=132</b>	4.7 <b>N=14</b>	1.4 N=4
The Iranian dietary habits are unique and special.	14.2 N=42	30.2 N=89	<b>51.5</b> <b>N=152</b>	3.4 <b>N=10</b>	0.7 N=2

According to the Table 5.15, it can be seen that largest number of respondents (54.9%) agreed "Iran's food is unique (unusual taste, nice appearance, healthy ingredients)", whereas 36.9% of respondent have no idea regarding the same item. Also, slightly less than half of respondents (49.2%) have no idea regarding "Iran has a variety of cuisine". The majority over half of international tourists (51.5%) have no idea regarding "The Iranian dietary habits are unique and special."

#### 5.1.2.7 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's culture in terms of festivals

**Table 5.16 Foreign tourists' perception towards Iran's festivals**

Foreign tourists' perception towards Iranian festivals.	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual.	295	3.49	0.845

a: A 5 level scale was used where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree

The table 5.16 shows that the mean score of the statement "Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual" is about 3.49. As to the standard deviation of the tourists' perception towards Iran's festivals, the statement "Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual", has the standard deviation of (0.845).

#### 5.1.2.7.1 Frequency response of foreign tourists' perception toward Iran's festivals

The table 5.17 indicates the frequency and percentages of international tourists' perception towards Iran's culture through Iran's festivals aspect, the respondents were instructed to rate their level of agree. A five point Likert Scale was used.

**Table 5.17 Frequency of foreign tourists 'perception towards Iran's festivals**

Iranian Festivals	Strongly agree(5)	Agree (4)	Neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree(3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree ( <sup>1</sup> )
Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual.	14.2 N=42	28.1 N=83	<b>51.5</b> N=152	4.7 N=14	1.4 N=4

According to the Table 5.17, it can be concluded the majority of respondents (51.5%) have no idea regarding "Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual" and it refers to the nature of organic images holding by respondents about Iran.

### 5.1.3 Frequency distribution of dependent variable

#### 5.1.3.1 Foreign tourists' intentions to visit Iran

With regards to the outcome showed in Table 5.18, the statement "If tourism related fairs and festivals being organized at reasonable budget, I will be happy to visit Iran within the next 12 months. " has the highest mean score (3.65) followed by " If I am aware that national carrier of Iran offers discountable price tickets and suitable connection to where I live, I will visit Iran within the next12 months ", represents 3.60. The lowest mean (3.46) belongs to the statement "As political unrest in the Middle East settles, I will visit Iran within the next12 months ". As to the standard deviation of International tourists' intentions to visit Iran, the statement "If I am aware that national carrier of Iran offers discountable price tickets and suitable connection to where I live, I will visit Iran within the next12 months" has the highest standard deviation (1.099). The lowest standard deviation (0.971) comes from the statement" As political unrest in the Middle East settles, I will visit Iran within the next year".

**Table 5.18 Foreign tourists' intentions to visit Iran**

Foreign tourists 'intention to visit Iran.	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
If politically motivated sanctions against Iran are abolished, I will visit Iran within the next12 months.	295	3.52	1.013
As political unrest in the Middle East settles, I will visit Iran within the next12 months.	295	<b>3.46</b>	<b>0.971</b>
If tourism related fairs and festivals being organized at reasonable budget, I will be happy to visit Iran within the next12 months.	295	<b>3.65</b>	0.960
If I am aware that national carrier of Iran offers discountable price tickets and suitable connection to where I live, I will visit Iran within the next12 months.	295	3.60	<b>1.099</b>

a: A 5 level scale was used where 1 means extremely unlikely and 5 means extremely likely

### 5.1.3.2 Frequency response of foreign tourists' intentions to visit Iran

The table 5.19 indicates the frequency and percentages of international tourists' intentions towards visiting Iran, the respondents were instructed to rate their level of agree. A five point Likert Scale was used.

**Table 5.19 Frequency of foreign tourists' intentions to visit Iran**

Intention to visit Iran within the next12 months.	Extremely likely (5)	Likely (4)	Unsure (3)	Unlikely (2)	Extremely unlikely (1)
If politically motivated sanctions against Iran are abolished, I will visit.	15.6 N=46	<b>39.0</b> N=115	31.9 N=94	8.8 N=26	4.7 N=14
As political unrest in the Middle East settles, I will visit.	11.9 N=35	<b>41.0</b> N=121	32.5 N=96	10.5 N=31	4.1 N=12
If tourism related fairs and festivals being organized at reasonable budget, I will be happy to visit Iran.	20.0 N=59	<b>37.6</b> N=111	32.5 N=96	7.5 N=22	2.4 N=7
If I am aware that national carrier of Iran offers discountable price tickets and suitable connection to where I live, I will visit.	16.3 N=48	<b>37.3</b> N=110	35.9 N=106	7.5 N=22	3.1 N=9



Table 5.19 demonstrates that totally 41% of respondents likely will visit Iran within the next 12 months if political unrest in the Middle East settles. 39% of respondents likely will visit Iran within the next 12 months if politically motivated sanctions against Iran are abolished. Also, the results show, 37.6% of foreigners likely will visit that country within the next 12 months if tourism related fairs and festivals being organized at reasonable budget. In addition, 37.3% of respondents likely visit Iran within the next 12 months If they are aware that national carrier of Iran offers discountable price tickets and suitable connection to where they live. Perhaps, participants view Iran as a long-haul destination that associated with high cost, particularly in terms of the airfare thus they intend to visit that country since their cost of travel is significantly reduced. It can confirm the nature of organic images holding by respondents. That is most of participants have not engaged in the active information search to find out the possibility of actual visiting Iran.

#### **5.1.4 Content Analysis of Open Elicitation Question**

The study's only open-ended question was designed to address the tourists' overall impression of Iran. The content analysis was applied for this open-ended question. The question was designed as follows:

1. What comes first to your mind when you are thinking of Iran?

##### **5.1.4.1 Frequency distribution regarding different elements in the overall impression of Iran**

The purpose of that question was drawing the raw impression of Iran without any impact of gleaned information from subsequent questions. The information elicited from the overall impression of Iran among study's respondents from the concept of "Iran" is analyzed as follows:

The information derived from impression of Iran among different respondents (Table 5.20) shows that Iran's symbols has the highest share (23.7%) in the tourists' impression of

that country which following by religion(16.6%), safety and security concern(14.9%), and Iran's history(13.6%). Interestingly, the lowest share belongs to the nuclear issues (4.7%). The following section discusses the most significant results of the present survey.

**Table 5.20 Frequency distribution regarding different elements in the tourists' impressions regarding Iran**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Iran's symbols	70	<b>23.7</b>	23.7	23.7
Safety and security concern	44	<b>14.9</b>	14.9	36.6
The nuclear issues	14	<b>4.7</b>	4.7	43.4
Political issues	28	9.5	9.5	52.9
Religion	49	<b>16.6</b>	16.6	69.5
Climate and Environment	24	8.1	8.1	77.6
History of Iran	40	13.6	13.6	91.2
Cultural attributes	26	8.8	8.8	100.0
Total	295	100.0	100.0	

**Symbols**

**Table 5.21 Symbols in the tourists' impressions of Iran**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Oil	48	16.3	16.3
Persian Carpet	15	5.1	5.1
Persian Cat	7	2.3	2.3

It is no surprise that one of the most commonly elicited responses to the open question was "oil"(16.3%). Oil has been Iran's primary industry and plays a vital role in generating national revenue since the1920s. According to the latest statistics released by National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), Iran holds the highest oil reserves after Saudi Arabia and Venezuela (<http://www.shana.ir/fa/newsagency/168620>). Findings of the present study show that the strong awareness towards Iran as a major supplier of oil among respondents.

The old documents tell us the oldest carpet has been weaved in Persia around the fifth century B.O (Love Day: 1999, p.85). Today, carpet weaving is the widespread art practiced by Iranian people. The Persian carpets are renowned for richness of artistic patterns and colors. However, a total of only 15 respondents mentioned Persian carpets as a response to Iran, constituting 5.1% of the entire group. As a result, less frequency observed regarding Persian carpet in the tourists' responses shows the poor link between the impression of Iran and Persian carpet in the mind of different respondents. It creates an opportunity for Iranian tourism marketers. Certainly, strong awareness of Persian carpet as a valuable national product will be able to promote Iran as a tourism destination in the mind of tourists who do highly souvenir-based behaviors.

Although a few respondents mentioned Persian cat as a response to impression of Iran (2.3%), it doesn't detract the importance of that element in the tourists' impressions of Iran. obviously, some particular marketing activities like setting up a Persian cat exhibition can increase more attraction for niche tourists who love to see the pure-race creatures that couldn't be found easily anywhere in the world.

## Religion

**Table 5.22 Religion in the tourists' impressions of Iran**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Islam	42	14.2	14.2
Hijab code	7	2.4	2.4

As the official name of the country is "Islamic Republic of Iran", so it could be expected that the religion has the high portion in the answers of the study's respondents. In addition, being in the global head news that continuously releases many news and pictures of Iranian Muslims particularly Iranian women who covered whole body by black cloth (Chador), helps religion to create such a big portion in the Iran's image. Today, 89 percent of the Iranians are Shiites. The remaining 21 percent belongs to Sunni, Jews, Christians, and

Zoroastrians who are living freely in that country. Certainly, Iran with such a religious diversity has dramatic attractions for Muslim and other religious tourists who are motivated to visit sites, ceremonies, festivals, and events at religious centers.

**Safety and security concern**

**Table 5.23 Safety and security concern in the tourists' impressions of Iran**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
War	33	11.2	11.2
Dangerous country	6	2.0	2.0
Iran-Iraq war	4	1.4	1.4
Terrorism	1	0.3	0.3

The Table 5.23 shows that "war" is one of the most commonly elicited responses to the open-ended question among other safety and security concern elements (11.2%). As, Iran is located in the Middle East where the entire region is suffering from serious crises (civil wars) similar to those happened in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon, and Pakistan so Iran as a Middle Eastern country naturally creates this impression in the people's mind.

However, the number of people who mentioned "danger" in their impressions of Iran was 6 persons which representing 2 %. The existence of conflicts in the neighboring countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan also the possible war between Iran and America over Iran's nuclear program might foster this image in the mind of international respondents. In other hand, 1.4% of respondents mentioned Iran-Iraq war in their impressions of Iran. It means that Iran's 8-year war with Iraq has made a significant impact in the minds of those who have knowledge of these countries. However, few people mentioned "Terrorism" in their impressions of Iran (0.3%). Apparently, the huge negative propaganda generated by western media fails to form terrorism in the people's mind as an image of Iran.

## History of Iran

**Table 5.24 Iran's history in the tourists' impressions of Iran**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
History of Persia	28	9.5%	9.5%
Ancient civilization of Persia	7	2.4%	2.4%
History of Iran	5	1.7%	1.7%

The Table 5.24 demonstrates that the history of Persia represents 9.5% of respondents' impressions of Iran which following by Ancient civilization of Persia (2.4%). In the simple words, the history of Persia as one of the most primary civilizations in the ancient world that reflected in the Iran's historical, architectural heritage and events has enough potential to tempt other people curiosity to visit that country. However, the historical attractions of a particular country are not necessarily enough to attract travelers from other countries unless they know about them (Mehrizi, 2007). It can create an opportunity for Iran's tourism marketers to advertise Persian history by holding some particular seminars in order to increase people's awareness about Iran which in turn will promote Iran as a tourism destination for history and cultural tourists.

## Political issues

**Table 5.25 Iran's political issues in the tourists' impressions of Iran**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Ayatollah Khomeini	9	3.1%	3.1%
Conflict between Iran and America	8	2.7%	2.7%
Sanction	6	2.0%	2.0%
Ahmadinezhad	5	1.7%	1.7%

The Table 5. 25 show that almost 3.1% of respondents mentioned Khomeini in their overall impressions of Iran. 1.7% of respondents also mentioned Ahmadinezhad, the Iran's current controversial and news producer president in their images of that country. Ayatollah Khomeini was the founder of the Islamic Revolution (1979). Under Khomeini's leadership, the Pahlavi monarchy was overthrown and Islamic Republic of Iran was formed.



Although, 23 years have passed since his death but in contemporary Iran, Khomeini as a founder of Islamic Republic of Iran has become a national symbol and his photographs can be seen in all governmental offices and public places. No wonder if respondents mentioned the character of those people in their impressions of Iran.

According to the Table 5.25, it can be seen that 2.7% of respondents mentioned anti - USA image of Iran which following by sanction (2%). Although, these issues did not appear as big in the survey as was expected but after the revolution, the relationship between Iran and America deteriorated to the extent that all relations between two countries were severed. Today, Iran's nuclear issue is the main topic for the existing conflict between these two countries. United States of America has won the support of all European countries, China, and Russia which leading to impose many economic and political sanctions against Iran. Certainly, the piles of negative news against Iran's nuclear program generated by global media forms Iran's image in the mind of people as an anti – USA country that buckles with many crippling embargos.

**Cultural attributes**

**Table 5.26 Iran's cultural attributes in the tourists' impressions of Iran**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Persian culture	2	0.7%	0.7%
Iran's food	6	2.0%	2.0%
Iran's art	4	1.4%	1.4%
Friendly people	14	4.7%	4.7%

The Table 5.26 demonstrates that the friendly people of Iran represents 4.7% of respondents' overall impressions of Iran which following by Iran's food (2.0 %). They also mentioned that Iran's art and Persian culture in their impressions of Iran which representing 1.4% and 0.7% respectively. No surprise if cultural attributes are part of elicited responses to the open question. Due to Iran's political structure and negative image created by western media in the last 33 years, that country has been isolated from the rest of world. But for the

first time in Iran's history, 5 millions of Iran's population has migrated around the world. Iranian immigrants have created widespread interactions with the world that did not exist in the country prior to the revolution. In addition, more than 6000000 Iranians travel abroad yearly with leisure or business purposes (Asadi & Daryaei, 2011). As a result, Iranian culture is getting more tangible to other nations and likely influences their core perception toward Iran.

**Climate and environment**

**Table 5.27 Iran's climates and environment in the tourists' impressions of Iran**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Desert	12	4.1%	4.1%
Diverse climate	12	4.1%	4.1%

As the findings of the survey show that the desert image doesn't exist for Iran in a big portion and only 12 cases had the impressions of desert about Iran (4.1%). It can be explained by weather conditions of the region where Iran is located. Middle East is one of the world's most water-scarce and dry regions. Therefore, Iran in the people's mind forms as an empty land without any vegetation. Although, this matter doesn't apply truly to Iran with such a climate diversity but it creates an opportunity for Iranian tourism marketers. Certainly, strong awareness of Iran's diversity of climate and natural resources can promote Iran as a tourism destination in the mind of many eco-tourists who travel to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature.

**Nuclear issue**

**Table 5.28 Iran's nuclear issue in the tourists' impressions of Iran**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Iran's nuclear program	14	4.7%	4.7%

The Table 5.28 demonstrates that the nuclear issue represents only 4.7% of respondents' impressions of Iran. It can be concluded that the nuclear issue of Iran is

considered as a temporary issue and cannot influence people impression regarding that particular country.

## 5.2 Inferential Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Inferential analysis was applied to test different hypotheses. A hypothesis is the testable statement about relationship among two or more variables that should be supported by empirical data. This research offers five hypotheses to be tested in order to demonstrate the relationship between different variables. One way ANOVA, t-test, Pearson Correlation, and multiple regression analysis were used to test all research hypotheses. In this study, one way ANOVA and t-test were applied to test the differences in the perception of foreign tourists toward Iran's culture when they are classified by nationality, gender, or past visit. In order to determine whether to accept or reject a hypothesis, a significance value with probability level of 0.05 or 0.01 was used. If the probability of occurrence is smaller than the level of significant thus the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) should be rejected (Sevilla, Ochave, Punsalan, Regala, & Uriarte: 1996, p.268 ). The Pearson's Correlation was applied to test the relationship between foreign tourists' perception toward Iran's culture and their intentions to visit that country. If the significance value is less than the chosen level of significance, the null hypothesis should be rejected. Otherwise, the null hypothesis will be accepted.

However, this paper doesn't ignore the particular objective of the current study that claims the contribution of the seven cultural attributes in the tourists' intentions to visit Iran might be different and some of these attributes might be more important than others. In order to examine this hypothesis, the correlation between "tourists' intentions to visit Iran" as a dependent variable and "contribution of each of the seven cultural attributes" as the seven independent variables was examined by means of the Multiple Regression analysis in SPSS.

**Table 5.29 r-value table which Measures the strength of association**

<b>Correlation(r)</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>1.0</b>	Perfect positive linear association
0	No linear association
-1.0	Perfect negative linear association
0.90 to 0.99	Very high positive correlation
0.70 to 0.89	High positive correlation
0.40 to 0.69	Moderated positive correlation
0 to 0.39	Low positive correlation
0 to -0.39	Low negative correlation
-0.40 to 0.69	Moderate negative correlation
-0.70 to -0.89	High negative correlation
-0.9 to -0.99	Very high negative correlation

Source: Hussey,J.,&Husey,R.(1997).*Business research: A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate*. London, Macmillan.

### 5.2.1 Hypothesis 1

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by gender.

H<sub>a1</sub>: There is a difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by gender.

t-test was used to test this hypothesis. As, the results of Table 5.30 shows that the estimated significance value for Levene' test is more than 0.05(F=2.773, Sig=0.097) thus it approves the assumption of the equal variances. Proceed with the test; it was found that the significance level for equality of means is more than 0.05 or Sig>0.05 (t=0.042, d.f=293, Sig = 0.967). Therefore, the null hypothesis failed to reject. This means that there is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by gender. It probably refers to the tourists' lack of knowledge and experiences regarding Iran that doesn't reveal any gender diversity in their perception towards Iran's culture.

**Table5.30 t-test results for hypothesis 2**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig
Perception toward Iran's culture Equal variance assumed	2.773	0.097	-0.042	293	0.967
Equal variances not assumed			-0.043	291.412	0.966

**5.2.2 Hypothesis 2**

Ho2: There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by nationality.

Ha2: There is a difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by nationality.

**Table5.31 One-way ANOVA for hypothesis 2**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig
Perception toward culture					
Between group	327.16	4.290	61.79	0.716	0.580
Within group	33044.96	290	113.94		
Total	33372.14	294			

The One-way ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis. The Table 5.31 reveals that the significance value is more than 0.05 or Sig>0.05(f=0.716, df=4.290, Sig=0.580) thus the null hypothesis failed to reject. This means that there is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by nationality. Perhaps, the largely organic images that those international tourists hold about Iran are homogenous, and few of them had enough knowledge or experience of that country. Also, assessing international tourists' perception towards Iran' culture were conducted in terms of the geographical regions where tourists live and not with tourists' countries of origin.



5.2.3 Hypothesis 3

Ho3: There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by past visit.

Ha3: There is a difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by past visit.

t-test was used to test this hypothesis. As, the results of Table 5.32 shows that the estimated significance value for Levene' test is more than 0.05(F=0.190, Sig=0.663) thus it approves the assumption of the equal variances.

Table5.32 t-test for hypothesis 3

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig
Perception toward Iran's culture Equal variance assumed	0.190	0.663	4.383	293	0.000
Equal variances not assumed			4.315	27.077	0.000

Proceed with the test; it was found that the significance level for equality of means is less than0.05 or Sig<0.05 (t=4.383, d.f=293, Sig=0.000).Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by past visit. This supports previous literature that past visit experience might significantly affect people's perception of a destination (Chon,1991; Um & Crompton,1990, Vogt & Stewart,1998) and lead to the development of "a posterior" tourists' perception(Di Marino,2007).

5.2.4 Hypothesis 4

Ho4: There is no relationship between perception of Iran's culture and respondents 'intention to visit Iran.

Ha4: There is a relationship between perception of Iran's culture and respondents' intention to visit Iran.

The analysis of Pearson Correlation in the Table 5.33 indicates that the significance equals 0.000(Sig=0.000). As, the significance is less than 0.05(0.000<0.05) thus the null hypothesis is rejected. It means there is a relationship between perception of Iran's culture and respondents' intentions to visit Iran at 0.05 significance levels. Furthermore, it approves that at  $r=0.446$ , there is a moderate positive correlation between international tourists' perception towards Iran's culture and their intentions to visit Iran. However, the link between tourists' destination perception (awareness) and visit intention is supported (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989) that is consistent with other tourism literature (Risinger & Turner, 2008; Milman & Pizam, 1995).

**Table 5.33 Pearson Correlation for hypothesis 4**

		Meantpc	Meantiv
Meantpc	Pearson Correlation	1	0.446
	Sig(2-tailed)		0.000
	N	295	295
Meantiv	Pearson Correlation	0.446**	1
	Sig(2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	295	295

\*\* Correlation is significance at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### 5.2.5 Hypothesis 5

Ho5: There is no correlation between cultural attributes of Iran and respondents' intention to visit Iran.

Ha5: There is a correlation between cultural attributes of Iran and respondents' intention to visit Iran.

Multiple Regression analyses was conducted to examine the correlation between "tourists' intentions to visit Iran" as a dependent variable and "contribution of each of the seven cultural attributes" as the seven independent variables. The Multiple R for the

relationship between the set of independent variables and the dependent variable is 0.495, which would be characterized as moderated relationship (as a correlation less than or equal to 0.20 is characterized as very weak; greater than 0.20 and less than or equal to 0.40 is weak; greater than 0.40 and less than or equal to 0.60 is moderate; greater than 0.60 and less than or equal to 0.80 is strong; and greater than 0.80 is very strong).  $R^2$  shows that 25.5 % of variation is explained by model.

**Table 5. 34 Model summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.495 <sup>a</sup>	.245	.226	2.903

a. Predictors: (Constant), traditional festival, people, Religion, Language and Literature, food, history, art

$R^2$  shows that 25.5 % of variation is explained by model. From the results of Table 5.36, it can be concluded that our model is significant (sig< 0.05).

**Table 5.35 ANOVA results**

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	784.267	7	112.038	13.296	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	2418.329	287	8.426		
	Total	3202.597	294			

a. Predictors: (Constant), traditional festival, people, Religion, Language and Literature, food, history, art

b. Dependent Variable: intention to visit

Multiple regression analyses revealed that cultural attributes of Iran were significantly ( $p < .05$ ) predictive of the tourist's intention to visit that country within the next 12 months, with a total of 24.5% variance explained thus the null hypothesis is rejected (Table. 3 ). Of the destination cultural attributes 3 attributes, Traditional Festivals (( $\beta = .686$ ), Religion ( $\beta = .294$ ), and Language and Literature ( $\beta = .218$ ) were the significant contributors to the relationship between perception towards Iran's culture and intention to visit that country. However, for promoting tourism destination particularly for cultural destinations, the general perception of a destination related to festivals and events is a significant part of the process

predicting intentions to visit a destination. This finding is consistent with Richards & Wilson's (2004) study results over the impact of cultural events in improving city image

**Table 5.36 Coefficients**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	P
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.205	1.244		2.576	.010
	History	-.042	.082	-.035	-.514	.607
	People	.166	.091	.116	1.824	.069
	Language and Literature	.218	.107	.132	2.036	.043
	Religion	.294	.145	.127	2.026	.044
	Art	.120	.077	.114	1.568	.118
	Food	.081	.095	.057	.859	.391
	Traditional Festivals	.686	.250	.176	2.750	.006

a. Dependent Variable: intention to visit

The researcher summarized the research results through hypothesis testing as follows:

**Table 5.37 Summary of hypothesis testing**

Number	Null hypotheses	Statistical test	Results
H <sub>0</sub> 1	There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by gender.	t-test	Fail to Reject
H <sub>0</sub> 2	There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by nationality.	One-way ANOVA	Fail to Reject
H <sub>0</sub> 3	There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by past visit.	t-test	Rejected
H <sub>0</sub> 4	There is no relationship between perception of Iran's culture and respondents 'intention to visit Iran.	Pearson correlation	Rejected
H <sub>0</sub> 5	There is no correlation between cultural attributes of Iran and respondents' intention to visit Iran.	Multiple regression	Rejected

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations based on the research results. The summarized findings on the research questions and hypothesis testing are discussed first. Then, the researcher will draw the conclusions as per the results along with recommendations to tourism marketers. It also offers some suggestions for further research in the end of that chapter.

#### 6.1 Summary of Findings and Discussions

##### 6.1.1 Sample profile

In this section, summarized findings of the respondents' socio-demographic and travel characteristics, hypothesis testing results, tourists' perception towards cultural attributes of Iran, and cultural attributes' contribution are discussed.

According to the table 6.1, 44.7% of respondents were male and 55.3% of them were female; nearly three quarters of respondents (73.2%) were from Asia and only 12.5% from Europe; 91.9% of total respondents have not visited Iran

**Table 6.1 Summary of respondents' socio-demographic and travel characteristics**

<b>Respondents' socio-demographic and travel characteristics</b>	<b>Findings (%)</b>
Gender	<b>Female</b> (55.3%), Male (44.7%)
Nationality	<b>Asian (73.2%)</b> , European (12.5%), African (5.4%), Oceania (4.7%), and American (4.1%).
Past Visit	<b>Not past visit (91.9%)</b> , having past visit (8.1%)



### 6.1.2 Summary of mean and standard deviation descriptions

Descriptive statistics for the cultural attributes and visit intention variables are presented in Table 6.2. From the 21 items related to tourists' perception of Iran's culture, a total of 20 items had a mean score that was significantly greater than 3.0, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that international tourists have a positive perception towards Iran's culture.

Participants perceived Iran's culture as a combination of rich ancient history, friendly people, having particular language and religion that influence Iranian cultural identity, unique artistic attractions, exotic cuisine, and unusual festivals. In contrast, they expressed concerns over difficulties of religious minorities in living freely in that county. Apparently, the majority of respondents reflected their organic images of Iran's culture and those images have been garnered by television, printed media, interne, text books, and general stereotypes of Iran's culture. Among 4 items related to tourists' intentions to visit Iran, all items had a mean score that was significantly greater than 3.0, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that the participants have the significant intentions to visit Iran. Interestingly, tourists' intentions to visit Iran are highly linked to affordable tourism related fairs and festivals also suitable connection of Iran's international carrier to where those tourists live.

**Table 6.2 The highest and lowest mean of intermediate and dependent variable**

Variable Group	Mean			Standard Deviation		
	Standard	Range Value	Variable	Standard	Range Value	Variable
Perception Toward Iran's history	highest	4.06	Iran has an ancient history.	highest	0.905	History of Persia constitutes a significant part of the world's history.
	lowest	3.69	History of Iran is impressive.	lowest	0.812	Iran has an ancient history.
Iran's people	highest	3.68	Iranian people are friendly"	highest	0.925	Iranian people have diverse ethnicities.
	lowest	3.47	Iranian people have diverse ethnicities.	lowest	0.875	Iranian people have diverse cultures.

Iran's language	highest	3.75	Persian language represents the Iranian people national identity.	highest	0.852	Persian literature is rich and outstanding.
	lowest	3.63	Persian literature is rich and outstanding.	lowest	0.801	Persian poetry is a combination of beauty and harmony.
Iran's religion	highest	4.05	Islam in Iran has significant impacts on its culture	highest	1.086	People from different religions can live freely in Iran.
	lowest	2.98	People from different religions can live freely in Iran.	lowest	0.957	Islam in Iran has significant impacts on its culture.
Iran's art	highest	3.88	Iran's carpet is known for its authenticity.	highest	0.926	Iran's carpet is known for its authenticity.
	lowest	3.12	Iran's cinema is a progressive cinema.	lowest	0.881	Iran's architecture is influenced by Islamic architecture
Iran's food	highest	1.65	Iran's food is unique.	highest	0.957	Iran's food is unique
	lowest	3.54	The Iranian dietary habits are unique and special	lowest	0.802	The Iranian dietary habits are unique and special.
Iran's festivals	highest	3.49	Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual.	Highest	0.845	Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual.
	lowest	3.49	Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual.	lowest	0.845	Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual.
Intention to visit Iran	highest	3.65	If tourism related fairs and festivals being organized at reasonable budget, I will be happy to visit Iran within the next 12 months.	highest	1.099	If I am aware that national carrier of Iran offers discountable price tickets and suitable connection to where I live, I will visit Iran within the next 12 months.
	lowest	3.46	As political unrest in the Middle East settles, I will visit Iran within the next 12 months.	lowest	0.971	As political unrest in the Middle East settles, I will visit Iran within the next 12 months.

### 6.1.3 Summary of hypothesis testing

All research hypotheses in this research tested by applying T-test, One-way ANOVA, Pearson Correlation, and Multiple regression analyses.

**Table 6.3 Summary of hypothesis testing**

Number	Null hypotheses	Statistical test	Results
H <sub>01</sub>	There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by gender.	T-test	Failed to Reject
H <sub>02</sub>	There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by nationality.	One-way ANOVA	Failed to Reject
H <sub>03</sub>	There is no difference among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by past visit.	T-test	Rejected
H <sub>04</sub>	There is no relationship between perception of Iran's culture and respondents' intention to visit Iran.	Pearson Correlation	Rejected
H <sub>05</sub>	There is no correlation between cultural attributes of Iran and respondents' intention to visit Iran.	Multiple regression	Rejected

These results revealed that gender differences in the tourists' perception of Iran's culture are not evident. It can be explained by the nature of organic images that widely hold by respondents also their little knowledge about Iran's culture.

This study also reveals that nationality doesn't affect tourists' perception toward Iran's culture. It can be explained by the participants' little knowledge about Iran's culture and categorizing structure of respondents. Perhaps, those reasons didn't allow the researcher to detect the possible nationality differences in the tourists' perception towards Iran's culture. However, the results of first two hypotheses are not in line with the studies' results of Tavakoli, (2012) and Mosavi (2001) which showed the significant gender and nationality differences in tourist destination perception.

Not surprisingly, if these results show the significant differences among respondents in their perception of Iran's culture when they have a previous visit experience of Iran. It supports the pervious literature that past visit experience significantly affect people's

perception of a destination. However, familiarity with a destination plays important role in the tourist destination perception. Dann (1996) found that past visit changes the tourist perception about a destination or the perception of a destination by post-visitor are more positive compared with the perception of pre-visitors (Chon, 1991).

However, one of the unique findings of this study was a significant relationship between cultural image of Iran and tourist's intention to visit that country therefore further support to existence of a significant relationship between destination awareness (perception) and intention to visit (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). This study also revealed that the cultural attributes of Iran are significantly ( $p < .05$ ) predictive of the tourist's intention to visit that country. 3 attributes, Traditional Festivals ( $\beta = .686$ ), Religion ( $\beta = .294$ ), and Language and Literature ( $\beta = .218$ ) were the significant contributors to the relationship between perception towards Iran's culture and intention to visit that country.

6.1.4 Summary of perceived overall impressions of Iran by international tourists

Table 6.4 Summary of different elements in the tourists' overall impressions of Iran

Impression of Iran	Iran's symbols(23.7), Religion(16.6%), safety and security concern(14.9%), History of Iran(13.6%), Political issues(9.5%), cultural attributes(.8%), Climate and Environment(8.1%), and nuclear issue(4.7%).
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Information derived from image of Iran among different respondents (Table 6.3) shows while Iran's symbols had the highest share (23.7%) in the tourist's impression of that country, the lowest share belongs to the nuclear issues (4.7%). Obviously, the parts of world's people still imagine Iran as a religious country with many strict restrictions on people social behaviors and freedom even worse a country whose name is associated with war. Perhaps,

the lack of awareness and direct sources of information about Iran should be considered as the important reason for existing current negative impressions of that country.

However, widespread interactions of Iranian people with the rest of world during 33 years and some marketing efforts conducted by country's government to counter the piles of negative propaganda generated by western media have been successful to change somewhat the world's attitude toward Iran.

## **6.2 Conclusion of the Study**

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the international tourists' perception toward Iran's culture also to discover possible relationship between tourists' perception of Iran's culture and their intentions to visit that country. Key findings of the study can be summarized in five ways: the international tourists have positive perception towards Iran's culture; there are not significant differences among tourists in their perception of Iran's culture when they are classified by gender and nationality; the past visitation of Iran caused the significant differences among tourists in their perception toward Iran's culture; a significant relationship between tourists' perception of destination's culture and their visit intentions is disclosed; the cultural attributes of Iran are significantly predictive of the tourist's intention to visit that country.

However, this study reveals some valuable results, particularly related to the nature of the organic images of Iran's culture holding by international tourists and the impacts of destination cultural image on tourists' visit intentions. Although, some of the study results were contrary to the expectations, especially those related to impact of socio-demographic characteristics on the tourists' perception toward Iran's culture (gender, nationality). Since this is the first study that examines the influence of socio- demographic characteristics' involvement with tourist perception toward Iran's culture, it is really difficult to find any



evidence to contradict these results. Perhaps, it should be concluded that gender and nationality involvement, at least as measured in this study, are not the main factor for respondents to change their perceptions toward Iran's culture.

Existence of the specific correlation between cultural attributes and tourist intention is clearly documented by the current study. Although, testing the predictive relationship of cultural attributes in the tourist's intention to visit is unique and has not been examined previously in this way. But in terms of marketing applications, those valuable findings persuade tourism marketers to be aware which cultural attributes might be important to the potential tourists because these can significantly influence their destination awareness and choice.

This study also expanded understanding of tourists' overall impression of Iran. Surprisingly, the viewpoints of the research respondents show that people don't imagine Iran as an Islamic Arab country with a social situation back in the medieval age with respect to the religious restrictions and civil war that decrease possible intention to visit that particular country.

Although, causal link between tourists' overall impressions of Iran and their intentions to visit that country was not investigated in this study, it is generally assumed that current impressions of Iran among international tourists in the years following thoroughgoing media war against Iran is an indicator of the increased people's awareness about current political environment of the Middle East .

### **6.3 Recommendation to Iran's Tourism Marketers**

Eventually, after confronting Iranian tourism industry with many political and social challenges regarding tourism promotion in Iran, the role of cultural assets in attracting tourists and differentiating that country as a cultural tourism destination was seriously taken

into account. Today, both public and private sectors are well aware of the importance of cultural heritage for tourist motivation and eager to develop this form of tourism. They believe that Iran with impressive history and unique cultural heritage has high potential to appeal cultural tourists which in turn create job opportunities for  $2/5$  million persons and 3% of GDP, at the same time, protect the environment and culture of that country (Tavakoli, 2012). No doubt, this trend will not only flourish by developing cultural tourism products but also the appropriate marketing policies and comprehensive strategic planning should be adopted because improper and inefficient policies and strategies can result in deterioration of the culture and even declining of tourism.

From the marketing viewpoint which referring the main interest of the current study, a destination should be appropriately differentiated from other competitors, or positively positioned, in the minds of the tourist. A key success in distinctive positioning is the creation of positive destination perception or image. In the simple words, it can be concluded "the more favorable perceptions, the greater the likelihood of choosing a destination from similar alternatives ". So in adopting marketing strategies, it could be beneficial to examine the destination perception or images hold by visitors.

In this regards, destination perception of the pre- visitors should be tested. Because the mental images that individuals develop of a destination without having a physical visitation are different and probably more negative from those who have visited the same destination. The practical way to screen pre-visitors' perception regarding Iran is surveying them on the airplane or in the arrival part of the Iranian international airports. By implementing this policy a variety of strengths and weaknesses in the existing destination image can be identified which in turn addresses the desirable promotional strategies. However, there are some additional recommendations that the current study offers based on the research results.

### 6.3.1 Recommendations for hypotheses 1 and 2

The study results show that the international tourists' perception regarding Iran's culture doesn't differ by their gender and nationality which offering the significant insight to the tourist less awareness about that country. Indeed, the study's respondents reflected their organic images of Iran among a relatively large set of potential destinations which originated in their general exposure to those places through reading textbook, watching television, and word of mouth.

Obviously, the organic images of Iran's culture even positive ones that hold by potential tourists cannot effectively influence the tourists' decision to visit that country. Because when the desire to take a trip emerges, potential tourists should engage in an active search of travel information in order to develop more induced images of the alternative destinations. They assess the induced information resources and choose destination that offers the best images for them.

Therefore, an effective destination cultural image that persuades tourist to make a decision to visit a particular destination is a combination of positive organic and strong induced image that raises tourists' awareness toward destination culture. This kind of image should be developed by tourists under the influence of variety of organic and induced information sources. Organic information sources refer to mass-media broadcast news, television programs and school textbooks whereas the induced ones refer to travel Website, promotional videos, promotional printed materials like travel guides or brochures, and travel advertisements. Simply, the induced and organic image formation attempts, should consider a huge number of such resources.

However, direct access to the potential tourists and get them pure information about Iran and its unique culture is not possible except by promoting e-commerce. Today, the web is the world's biggest marketplace for travel products. Each travel business obligated to find

its market share via that widest marketplace to obtain an opportunity to reach all its potential customers. In deed, the Internet as a basic infrastructure of e-commerce is the lowest cost marketing channel and valuable source of information. During the day, **hundered** millions of home users engae in the active search of travel information by connecting to the Internet. Only one click can make a destination visible to millions of them. All of those facts compel Iran's marketers to give themselves a global presence 24 hours a day with a professionally designed website which getting specific attention to visual appeal, easy navigation and great content in order to introduce Iran's cultural and natural attractions.

By opening a fan page on the Facebook , Twitter and TripAdvisor ,many customers make tourism marketers aware of their preferences and quality of received services. Social connection to those networks is powerful marketing tool that promote widespread positive word of mouth and effective advertising. Iranian tourism specialists in collaboration with IT professionals should set up a quite numbers of online travel agencies to penetrate in the world potential market. Also, advertising cultural and historical attractions of Iran in the world popular travel agencies or websites like Expedia, Agoda, and booking.com will make that country more visible to the rest of the world. In other words, the Internet and Web technology due to their global penetration and accessibility can be used as the stong tools in destination branding process.

In addition, tourism marketers should provide considerable exposure in the literary media. The literary media used to be the primary ways to make people aware of cultural and historical attraction of world places. The literature, newspaper, articles, travel magazines, travelogues, travel guide books and other printed media play the critical role in the destination image formation and should be employed by tourism marketers as well. As, the popular culture such as TV programs, drama and pop-star is a very effective vehicle in attracting tourists to a destination while boosting the economic impacts (Busby & Klug,

2001) and reinforcing positive images of a destination (Connell, 2005) thus both public and private sectors should allocate enough budgets to produce Iranian movies, promotional videos, and constant TV advertising programs which represent Persian culture with suitable portrayed Iranian symbols (e.g. Persian cat, carpet, Iranian tulip). By displaying those products on the popular satellite channels, the image of Iran will improve gradually.

### **6.3.2 Recommendations for hypothesis 3**

The study results reveal the influence of tourists' familiarity of the destination (past visit experience) on their perception regarding Iran's culture. In the simple words, tourists who have already visited Iran had more positive perception regarding that country' culture even more intended to visit that country. It can provide enough rooms for applying customer loyalty programs. Certainly, customer loyalty program is a strong way to gain the repeat customers and provide the best word of mouth advertising. Numerous tourism loyalty programs can be developed by tourism marketers in join with airlines (frequent flier programs), hotels (hotel loyalty clubs), restaurants (membership card), and historical and cultural sites (half- priced tickets).

### **6.3.3 Recommendations for hypotheses 4 and 5**

The current study provided strong empirical evidences documenting that cultural image of Iran influences tourist's intention to visit that country. It also showed the significant predictability of Iranian festivals and events on the tourists' intentions to visit Iran. It can be concluded that positive cultural image of Iran can be employed by tourism specialists to promote country's tourism industry. Today, the local culture and history are often seen as popular also well-sold products. Examples from tourism industry suggest the complex constructs of culture and history can be effectively incorporated in the tourist destination branding process and help to create the unique image of a destination on the marketplace. Probably, implementations of the low cost packages simultaneously with Iranian traditional



festivals increase the international arrivals. Also, holding cultural programs like food festivals or exhibitions, religious events, and particular seminars on the Iran's history and literature will effectively appeal the international tourists.

In addition, penetrating in the potential markets of Islamic countries that have the historical, religious and cultural relations with Iran is highly recommended. A quite number of the tourism offices should be set up in those countries to conduct the promotional activities. Although, the tourism promotional activities should be done with direct help of local travel agencies and cultural association while they are equipped with Iran's cultural tourism advertising materials, low cost packages, and tempting commission. However, a big change in the current situation of cultural tourism in Iran needs full support from Iran's government over many long term plans because we cannot expect miracles from the short term plans in promoting Iran's cultural image in the current political environment.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for Future Studies**

There are not many researches that conducted by specialists in the field of tourism in Iran. Investigating relationship between tourist perception toward Iran's cultural attributes and visit intention also exploring predictive relationship of those attributes in tourists's intention to visit that country is unique and has not been done previously in this way. Therefore, further research is needed to better understanding relationship between tourist perception toward destination cultural attributes and visit intention. Also, the current study did not take into account the impacts of other respondents' socio-demographic characteristics like age, educational level, and social class on the tourists' perception towards Iran's culture. Thus, future study should explore the impacts of those characteristics on tourist destination perception. Furthermore, this study only examined the relationship between destination cultural attributes and tourist intention to visit Iran and neglected the other destination

attributes which contributing to that relationship. So, further study is required to investigate the same relationship between those attributes and tourist destination perception.



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## Appendixes

### Appendix A: Questionnaire

#### Questionnaire

##### Dear Respondent:

I am a student of MBA-TRM program at Assumption University in the Bangkok, doing a Master thesis on **International Tourists' Perception towards Iran's Culture and their Intentions to Visit Iran**. I request you kindly spare few minutes to answer the questions enclosed herewith.

I pledge you that the information collected from you will be utilized only for the academic purpose. Your response would be most helpful in making this project work success.

Your time and efforts are very much appreciated. Thanks again.

##### **This part will examine your knowledge about Iran** (*Please tick one*)

-Do you know where Iran is located?

Middle East

Africa

America

Europe

Asia

Oceania

-Which is the capital city of Iran? —

Cairo

Dubai

Kabul

Tehran

Baghdad

Islam Abad

- What comes first to your mind when you think of Iran?

#### **Part 1 Demographic Characteristics and Past Experience**

1. What is your gender? \*

Male

Female

2. What is your nationality?

African

American

Oceania

Asian

European

3. Have you ever visited Iran? (If no, please skip the question number 4)

Yes

No

4. What was your purpose of visiting Iran?

— Business

Education

Visiting relative and friends

Leisure

Research

Religious purpose

#### **Part 2**

Please rate your perception towards Iran's culture by using the following five-point scale:

5= Strongly Agree

4= Agree

3= Neither strongly agree nor disagree

2=Disagree

1=Strongly Disagree

Research items	Rating scales				
	5	4	3	2	1
<b>History</b>					
1. Iran inherits a great history of Persia.					
2. Iran has an ancient history.					
3. History of Iran is impressive.					
4. History of Persia constitutes a significant part of the world's history.					
<b>People(Based on your interaction)</b>					
5. Iranian people are friendly.					
6. Iranian people have diverse cultures.					
7. Iranian people have diverse ethnicities.					
<b>Language and Literature</b>					
8. Persian language represents the Iranian people national identity.					
9. Persian poetry is a combination of beauty and harmony.					
10. Persian literature is rich and outstanding.					
<b>Religion</b>					
11. Islam in Iran has significant impacts on its culture(food, religion, and dress)					
12. People from different religions can live freely in Iran.					
<b>Art</b>					
13. Iran's architecture is unique.					
14. Iran's architecture is influenced by Islamic architecture					
15. Iran's carpet is known for its authenticity.					
16. Iran's cinema is a progressive cinema.					
17. Iran's cinema is an interesting and attractive cinema.					
<b>Food</b>					
18. Iran's food is unique (unusual taste, nice appearance, healthy ingredients).					
19. Iran has a variety of cuisine.					
20. The Iranian dietary habits are unique and special.					
<b>Festivals</b>					
21. Iranian festivals are exotic and unusual.					

### Part 3

Please rate your intention towards visiting Iran by using the following five-point scale:

5= Extremely likely      4= Likely      3= Unsure      2=Unlikely      1=Extremely unlikely



Research Items	5	4	3	2	1
22. If politically motivated sanctions against Iran are abolished, I will visit Iran within the next 12 months.					
23. As political unrest in the Middle East settles, I will visit Iran within the next 12 months.					
24. If tourism related fairs and festivals being organized at reasonable budget, I will be happy to visit Iran within the next 12 months.					
25. If I am aware that national carrier of Iran offers discountable price tickets and suitable connection to where I live, I will visit Iran within the next 12 months.					



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