

Research Article

**The Necessity of Rereading the History of
Concepts in the Contemporary Iran**

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Abstract

One of the major reasons for not accessing a clear answer, in the spheres of thought and practice, to the question of how to enter the modern age while preserving the Islamic identity in the contemporary Iran is not having a right understanding of the concepts that entered the Islamic world and its political-social language in a confrontation between the Islamic traditions, especially the Islamic-Iranian tradition, and the modern tradition of the western Europe as well as its modern lifestyle. Thus, one of the basic tasks in the sphere of the political-social thought and practice is a systematic rereading of the history of those concepts. In the present article, we have attempted to do the reading of the history of thought through reading the history of concepts. Such a reading will provide us with the awareness and understanding of the facilities, limits, logic and the energy hidden in those concepts to open the way towards the modern age while preserving our Iranian-Islamic identity. This will be done through understanding those concepts and their proper location in our language, and will give us the ability to speak in the language of the modern age, making it possible to interact with other lingual traditions and lifestyles.

Keywords

contemporary Iran, modern age, conceptual history, confrontation with the west.

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Introduction

The main question in the Islamic world and in Iran, the question that the thinkers and political-social agents are still trying to find a practical and scientific answer to it, is how to enter the modern age while preserving our Islamic identity. This basic question arose in the confrontation of the Islamic world with the Western Europe, which is now called the 'West'. From the viewpoint of the present article, one of the major reasons for not accessing a clear answer to the above question in the sphere of thought and practice is not having a right understanding of the concepts that entered the Islamic world and its political-social language in a confrontation between the Islamic traditions, especially the Islamic-Iranian tradition, and the new tradition¹ of the Western Europe as well as the modern lifestyle. Thus, one of the basic tasks in the sphere of the political-social thought and practice is a systematic rereading of the history of those concepts. In this way, reading the history of thought will be done through a reading of the conceptual history. Such a reading will provide us with the awareness and understanding of the facilities, limits, logic and the energy hidden in those concepts to open the way towards the modern age with preserving our Iranian-Islamic identity. This modern age will emerge along with the lingual, intellectual and biological methods formed by recruiting all Iranian-Islamic lingual potentials. This is the proper and insider version of modernism (modern age) that will construct a strong bridge linking the past and the modern worlds – from inside our own tradition and with its authority – to prevent our society from falling down to the abyss of bewilderment under the authority of the meta-tradition and the hegemonic dominant discourse of the present modernity.

1. Here, 'tradition' is a systematic synthesis of Gadamer's tradition and the tradition for communitarians, which is a coherent value system that gives meaning to the life and identity to the individual. Any tradition expands its own special rationality and goodness.

It is evident that such a historical reading and investigation will be chronological and philological as well as emphatically contextual. Considering and investigating the political, social and cultural backgrounds and conditions of our tradition in the challenge of transacting the concepts with other traditions will reveal the logic and energy of those concepts in creating new thoughts and interaction with practice in the political and social spheres. Consequently, it will grant us the ability to predict the future in imposing the logic of those concepts and practices on the process of current thought and practice. Awareness of the history of formation and evolution of those concepts will lead us to understanding how to use – consciously – the energy and capacity of those concepts and practices inherited to us in the form of traditions. This is because any modification or reinforcement of the concepts and traditions will be possible by having a clear understanding of them. No concept, tradition or discourse can be evaded or omitted. Any way forwarding passes through those concepts and traditions. From this perspective, the meanings, concepts and social – and even individual – practices are by no means closed; rather, it provides – equally – sources for their adherents and critics in the lingual tradition and the insider lifestyle (Walzer, 1994, p. 65). Accordingly, these concepts are always in the state of alteration in interaction with various lifestyles and different political-social backgrounds. This alteration is in a way that the starting point of those concepts and political-social practices vanish in the pass of time and in interaction with other intellectual and practical traditions as well as social backgrounds. They then get new starting points for themselves and, in this way, their capability in furthering the discussions and disputes pertaining to the new lifestyle and the new time and place increases (Gadamer, 1993, p. 10). Accordingly, the reformist thinkers and agents learn that what is impossible and forbidden is not attempting to put pressure on other cultures and traditions for putting aside their

own perception; rather, it is encouraging and guiding them for rereading their fundamental concepts by referring to the sources of their original tradition (Walzer, 1994, p. 65). This is because if the modern view is to be persuasive, it is necessary to be relevant to the old view argumentatively (Sandel, 1984, p. 194). In other words, they must be capable of being understood and interpreted by referring to the main sources of the lingual tradition and the insider lifestyle.

Concept, thought and practice

The concepts are the most abstract and even the most powerful tool of the language for stating our situation in the universe. The concepts are something more than words. Each concept corresponds to a word; but any word is not a concept. The concepts are dependent on words, but they are not equal to words. The concepts refer to facts, but are not the same as facts, because the concepts prepare the environment for meaning (Heydari et al., 1394 SH, p. 242). Simply put, the concepts are the meeting point of meanings, words and objects. Through meaning, the concepts have the background (time and place), and – more precisely – the history, and consequently the interpretation inside themselves. The meaning gives the concepts the capability of being interpreted, flexibility, fluidity, and – accordingly – influence and power. Thus, concepts are the man's most powerful instrument for constructing his own life and life-world.

The concepts do this in a variety of ways. Creating conceptual dichotomies, fundamental concepts, making equivalents in other languages, and lifestyles are among these methods. In these ways, the concepts heighten their ability of ambiguity and not falling prey to transparency, increase their capability of openness to other possible universities, change and create new worlds and lifestyles, and – on the other hand – create new meanings under the influence of those new lifestyles to prepare the materials needed for transforming and creating

new interpretations of themselves, turning more words into new concepts, and gathering them in their semantic domain. In this way, in the interaction between the concepts and social backgrounds, layers are added to semantic layers and concepts hide their evolutions from societies by removing initial tracks. Thus, they direct the political-social action and practice towards a special orientation with their hidden energy. Considering the interaction of concepts with objects in inserting them into our world and making them understandable, they have a dual feature and serve like a double-edged blade that, on the one hand, causes the promotion and fixation of various lifestyles and, on the other hand, causes – in facing other similar concepts originated from other lifestyles – alterations by mutual influence of those various lifestyles.

In this way, the concepts have a mutual relationship with practice and lifestyle. Indeed, the concepts are both constructed by the political-social conditions and construct them. Accordingly, by studying the history of the concepts in relation to the social and political context and lifestyles, one may find one's individual and social situation and predict the process of the future of the society by understanding the potential energy hidden in these concepts that are forming the political-social practice. Thus, studying the history of the concepts in regard with their political-social background in a contextualist way provides us with the ability to understand our present situation, which is the history of humanity. Besides, it increases our power to overcome the man's greatest fear pertaining to the unpredictability of the concept of life and making it more controllable – which is a mere illusion.

What we have from rereading our past so far under the title of “human history” is that the new age – whose dawn started from the West – is an age that brought with it new concepts and modern lifestyle that was far from its former ages. Although this image is falling down,¹

1. For instance, see Michael A. G. (2009). *The Theological Origins of Modernity*. University of Chicago Press.

investigating whether such an understanding has been dominant so far is, from the viewpoint of historical investigation – whether right or wrong – a scientific and historical work and can be so.

Encountering the new concepts

The Muslim societies, in the aftermath of an interval of the clash between those two worlds, got their first impression of the modern age through their encounter with the Western Europe by considering the stark difference between the lifestyle in the Islamic and eastern world and that of the new world. This encounter, however, was not in an intimate and friendly atmosphere; rather, it occurred in a violent and hard situation. The new world was a tool for colonialism in the hands of the Western Europe, looking at the Islamic world and the east from a high and superior angle. This humiliating look smashed the image that the Islamic world had of itself and others in its historical mind, the image wherein “Islam was superior and nothing would overcome it”. This violence and contempt made such an encounter for the Islamic world more and more difficult and painful in the external world. The prestigious and identical nature of such an encounter – which the Islamic world has in its mind and is the starting point for *Salafi* and radical movements – has cast its heavy shadow on the most important question in the Islamic world in this era.

The way of entering the modern age with preserving the Islamic identity is the most important and the most strategic question in the Islamic world and, consequently, in the contemporary Iran in its encounter with what is called the West. The major form of this encounter in the Islamic world was in Iran, in Ottoman Empire, in Egypt, and in Indian Subcontinent. The zenith of this encounter in Iran took place under the Qajar Fathali Shah during the wars between Czar Russia and Iran (1805-1813). The defeat in those wars, in spite of the larger number of troops as well as Iranians’ motivation and bravery –

just like other struggles between Muslims and western communities – due to the technological and military superiority of the enemy, created a sense of fear and admiration in the Islamic tradition and among Muslims in addition to identity crisis as well as political and social crises. Accordingly, the basic question arose as follows: “Why and how could the other world – that was in darkness, ignorance and backwardness during the golden era of the Islamic civilization – change its situation in the recess emerged, and achieve such a considerable progress?” Thus, the first concept formed in the mentality of the Islamic world was the concept of ‘decline’. The initial answer for the question posed regarding such a backwardness and decline was the Muslims’ distance from Islam and its genuine tradition.

The initial solution in proportion to the identity question and the abovementioned political and social questions was a return to the genuine moral values of the early Islam, the values and teachings that led the ignorant Arabs of the seventh century AD to the zenith of development and global civilization.¹ Thus, the main task was ‘reforming’ the Muslims’ affairs, which meant ‘revival’ of the past values. Accordingly, with the emergence of the concept of ‘decline’, the concepts of ‘reformation’ and then ‘revival’ were highlighted. The early reformists and intellectuals organized all their political and social activities in the framework of the conceptual network of colonialism, modernity, decline, reformation and revival. In this way, the Islamic tradition needed a rereading of the sources and concepts as well as recalling their facilities in reformulating the meaning and the way of living in the modern age. However, since the starting point for such a rereading and considering the two traditions of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ was a political issue and would be done in the political-

1. For instance, see Asadabadi, *Rasā'il wa Maqālāt Fārsī darbārayi Dīn wa Falsafa* (ed. Khosrosahhi, S. H.), pp. 108-109. PDF copy available at <http://www.khosroshahi.org>

social context, it was accompanied by political challenges in the social arena (Hamed Abu-Zayd, 2015, pp. 32-33). This made such a rereading interpretable on the basis of numerous interpretations of the main Islamic traditions, i.e. the Book and the *Sunnah*,¹ making it complicated.

Contingent acceptance of the new concepts

Muslims' initial attention was paid, in the form of the concepts of progress of others and decline of their own world, to the [modern] lifestyle and especially the new technology and sciences in the spheres of technological and military advancements.² Such a view gradually deepened and, instead of paying attention to long-range artillery and the arms, equipment and order of the new army, attracted their attention to the power and energy of new concepts such as 'order', 'law', 'state', 'citizen' and the like. Of course, the starting point for such a consideration was the insider concepts such as '*Shari'a*', 'Iran's guarded lands', 'subjects', 'king', and 'justice', and especially the concept of 'despotism' as a central concept.

By making the concept of 'despotism' as a fundamental concept and a central denotation in their view of the status quo, Muslims attempted to reread and re-understand the concepts presented by other traditions. According to that reading, all disorders and political-social closures were referred and reduced to the concept of 'despotism'. On the contrary, for removing all disorders originated from that concept, the concept of 'constitutionalism' was translated and adopted.

1. Here, *Sunnah* means the Prophet's way of life or, in the Shiite view, that of the Prophet and the Infallible Imams

2. Such an approach has still had its heavy shadow cast on Muslims' view and understanding of the west in appreciating concepts such as development, self-sufficiency, and education as well as in adopting the western civilization with its special consequences.

‘Constitutionalism’ constituted anything that the people and the society did not have and anything that was not present in ‘despotism’ (Zargari-nejad, 1377 SH, pp. 17-18). On the other hand, the concepts of despotism and constitutionalism were considered, in a dichotomy, as the distinctive features of the desirable and undesirable political systems (kingdom). (Zargari-nejad, 1377 SH, p. 96).

In this way, the Islamic-Iranian tradition preserved the presence of sultan and the public commission of sultanate as one of the elements of the political system in the sphere of the political literature and directed all discontents from the status quo in the direction of structural reformation, and prevented radicalism of the demands. Besides, with the centrality of the concepts of ‘despotism’ and ‘constitutionalism’, a kind of mobilization and coalition of all demands of the social groups and forces was conducted. In the following stage, the first concept attracted around the constitutionalism was the concept of ‘law’. The ‘law’ as the total manifestation of constitutionalism was the only way for limitation and eradication of despotism and, shortly stated, it was the solution to all difficulties and issues closing the trend of the social life.

On the onset, the concepts companion to ‘law’ are ‘order’ and ‘system’; and the law as the symbol of order supervises the security, troops, treasury and taxes. Thus, according to the same initial perception, the law is the link between the tradition and modernity and constitutes the personages’ hope for improvement of the country’s conditions. The personages and intellectuals would state, based on their experiences from the foreign countries, that the solution to the country’s problems is in one word, which is the ‘law’. The traditional perception of this concept was “... equality of all members of the nation with the ruler in all laws and regulations” (Na’ini, 1378 SH, p. 51). And “the king and the pauper, the ordinary man and the noble man, the scholar and the ignorant, the rich and the poor must all be under

trial equally, and the judge must not treat them with discrimination” (Na’ini, 1378 SH, p. 582). With such a perception of the law, this concept reinforces and confuses other concepts such as ‘justice’ in the sense of ‘equality’, relating them to other demands such as justice, just court, and constitutionalism, mobilizing these concepts in its system, gradually extending its coverage circle to jurisprudential rules and religious courts, contacting with the concept of *Shari‘a*. Although the orthodox and traditional section of the clerics used the concept of *Shari‘a* to reject the concept of ‘law’ (Na’ini, 1378 SH, p. 47), the dominant line of constitutionalist movement was that the ‘law’ is one word and that word is not opposing the spirit of Islam.

Finally, the constitutional law was a text originated from two conceptual centers of ‘state law’ and ‘religious law’, and other concepts such as equality, freedom, state, nation, and the like were floating in the spectrum of those two concepts. This created lingual dispute and challenges for determining the semantic demarcations of the words such as nation, state, freedom, equality, law and *Shar‘*, manifested in the form of discussion on the code of elections, tariff, courts, and military services in the sessions of the National Legislative Assembly.

It seems that reproduction of such texts is the result of intra-traditional perception of other traditional doctrines and conceptions. Thus, the basic issue is not mixing up the old and new vocabulary, because this is inevitable and, if not present, the continuation and dynamism of cultures and traditions would be impossible. What is important is some kind of self-conscience in inserting the new concepts in one’s traditional texts, awareness of the history of these concepts, the energy and logics hidden in them and the consequences of that logic, and the energy and magnetism of their meanings. The adherents of constitutionalism and especially the cleric tradition paid less attention to the implications of the semantic system originated from the lifestyle of the new age, perhaps because this needed a

different reasoning and familiarity with the foundations of the new age, which was not possible for them at that time. On the other hand, the fast process of happening as well as the increasing need for new vocabulary and concepts for stating new ideals and demands in the modern age on the part of the old tradition, in adjusting itself to the emergent conditions, imposed a haste and carelessness in taking and inserting those concepts in the texts related to the old tradition.

Designing and producing new concepts in order to continue the lifestyle was the art and task of the philosophy and philosophers (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, p. 11). However, as in the historical era of translation, formerly experienced by the Islamic society, redesigning and changing the new language and lifestyle was conducted by translators, not philosophers and thinkers.¹ Since the language of that time was the religious language, the words used as equivalents for those concepts in the insider's tradition had religious lineage and were formed inside the Islamic lifestyle. As Ajoudani rightly mentions, "new concepts entered into our culture from the western culture were originally the concepts grown up in the context of another culture and history and would express – considering the history and culture of the western society – experiences that had more or less clear meanings in the history of those countries and the European languages. However, they had neither a background in our culture nor in our language, and nor in our history" (Ajoudani, 1384 SH, p. 7). Thus, words such as justice, freedom, law, nation, legitimacy, lieutenancy, representation and other new concepts translated from the tradition of the Western Europe by translators who had a superficial perception of those words and the lifestyle from which they were originated gained another meaning and

1. In the present time also, some believe that translation serves as a kind of thinking and philosophical task, and it is one of the way for entering the modern age. See for example, Farhadpour, M. (1378 SH). *'Aql Afsurda (Ta'ammul-āī dar Bāb Tafakkur Mudirn)*. Tehran: Tarh Now.

energy when they were put in the texts of the Islamic tradition.

With this new semantic load, the texts from which these concepts were extracted and translated were reread and reinterpreted with an insider perception and in the religious language common in that time. With that reading, it seemed as if new texts emerged that had no relation with the related original texts; rather, they were generally in opposition with them. The spirit of translation is a hermeneutic spirit that covers all levels and angles of the cultural life to make the west and east and the past and present familiar with one another. The understanding and interpretation is a necessary condition of any successful translation, just as any successful understanding or interpretation is, in turn, a kind of translation from the language of the text into the interpreter's language. Indeed, understanding, interpretation, and translation are inseparable versions of one process (Farhadpour, 1378 SH, p. 13).

Translation is, in itself, a kind of interpretation; and interpretation is overcoming the concepts of other traditions through inserting them in the insider traditional texts as well as flexibility and openness to the modern age and system from inside the insider tradition. Otherwise, it would be a non-homogenous and erroneous synthesis of reproduction of the old system in the modern age or, basically, a new construct with an old façade for relieving the life in the insider tradition. Thus, the new meanings produced, through translation of these concepts and in integrating with the meanings of the Islamic tradition, new multi-layer meanings, and became more complicated and more political through interaction in scientific disputes conducted in a new political, historical and social text in the confrontation of the Islamic and western traditions. This, in turn, produced new trends and new intellectual and practical streams in the realms of thought and practice. In this way, when there was an opportunity and necessity for thinkers and philosophers to think, they came across a language whose

fundamental concepts the translator had already designed and located. Thus, these thinkers had no way other than speaking and thinking in that language and any modification and alteration would increase its complication and ambiguity, escalating the disputes and disagreements in the sphere of the political-social arena.

For a right understanding of the concepts of the modern age, one had to perceive the hermeneutic distance between oneself and those concepts. To do so, we have to be aware of the fundamental turnover emerged in our perception in the modern age. For this purpose, inserting not much precise translation of some basic European concepts into the traditional texts was not possible. Not only would this fill the hermeneutic gap in the horizon of appreciating the two traditions, but also it would add to the darkness and ambiguity of the texts, originated from this non-homogenous synthesis. To understand those concepts and the requirements of the modern age from whom those concepts had originated, it was necessary to have a new language originated from the insider tradition and in an organic relationship with it. A few number, and of course a little late, rightly concluded that “Today, if we really want to have a modern constitutional sultanate, we inevitably need modern constitutional words” (Sour Israfil, 1325 SH, p. 4).

In a short time, the leftist movement and tradition distinguishes the law ‘in favor of the public’ and the law ‘to the detriment of them’. The main theme of this literature has been and is rioting against the existing order, hoping to establish a better order in favor of the public. Radicalism in thinking inevitably led to fanaticism in practice and that caused closure in the political and social spheres. The old concepts that had been managing the Iranian lifestyle in the form of jurisprudential concepts were not able to represent, open and interpret the new concepts and, finally, could not manage to form a new Iranian-Islamic lifestyle by recalling their own concepts in referring to the main

sources of the ‘insider tradition’, which ended in political closure. The violence hidden in the leftist concepts led, by producing insecurity and terror, the scholars and people towards a ‘savior’ that can conditionally save the society from this closure (Sadra, 1399 SH, pp. 56-76).

Accordingly, the old tradition could not overcome the epistemological crisis that necessitated innovating or discovering new concepts and establishment of new type(s) of theory, and could not offer solutions for issues whose resolution was formerly impossible through an organized and consistent method. Wasting too much energy in the system, and erosion and extreme disappointment of the activists of political system in that condition imposed an ill life on it without finding an assured solution for the issues. With diffusion of anarchy and insecurity, the conditional state finally fell in 12/1299 SH (1921) with a coup d'etat said to be launched by a few Cossacks, and just five persons were killed (Firahi, 1391 SH, p. 406).

Imposing new concepts

The new regime and Pahlavi dynasty were the monstrous children of constitutionalism. This finally made the continuation of that regime impossible. In other words, this regime was from the onset an insolvent regime and its survival was dependent on crises facing it – crises that if this regime could overcome, it could not continue anymore. That regime would feed on crises. The product of constitutionalism was the opposition of the two concepts of ‘*Shar*’ and ‘law’, which led to the crisis in both concepts as the origin of the authority in the traditional and new societies. This led, in the sphere of the political practice, to the mutual weakening of the religious scholars and legislation, the process that inevitably led to the emergence of the new regime (i.e. Pahlavi). With the ruin of both sources of legitimacy of the old and new systems, it was neither possible to continue the ‘true constitutionalism’ nor it was possible to return to the old system of

‘Islamic sultanate’. In this way, Pahlavi had just two ways: it had to prepare, as a transitional system, the necessary grounds – in the spheres of political thought and practice –for the Iranian society’s exit from the conceptual triangle of ‘despotism-rioting-despotism’, or it would keep on its ill living as a crisis-making system until the next crisis.

As we previously noted, the Pahlavi regime that originated from imperfect constitutionalism did not have the intellectual and practical capability of entering the modern age. Thus, the intellectuals adhering the new regime, who maintained that continuation and creation of true constitutionalism in Iran was impossible, believed that the idea of creating a powerful and stable state in the framework of an imperfect constitutionalism was among the immediate obligations of Iranians. The main reason of this for those intellectuals, including Taqi-zada, was that “the Iranians’ national morality is so corrupted that either Genghis Khan must appear to mass murder the Iranian people or Damavand volcano must destroy them” (Kaveh, 1338 SH, p. 6). Accordingly, Kaveh magazine that would reflect the opinions of this group of intellectuals adhering the state wanted the modernists and politicians to establish, first of all, a powerful and stable state and, then, immediately employ foreign experts for doing reformations in Iran and, simultaneously, make great efforts to prepare necessary facilities for educating people and diffusing science and technology in the country so that Iran may be in the path of progress to compensate the past. Otherwise, other efforts would be fruitless (Kaveh, 1296 SH, p. 6).

From the viewpoint of those intellectuals, a benevolent and progressive absolute sovereign, such as Peter the Great in Russia or Mikado in Japan or Bismarck in Germany, was necessary for realization of such immediate changes. Thus, they rose to defend the concept of ‘enlightening despotism’ (Kaveh, 1296 SH, p. 3). With the emergence of the beloved dictator, who was the very concept of

‘enlightening brain’ or ‘enlightening dictator’, new concepts would made greater efforts to replace and mix with the old concepts and, this time, took a seemingly pioneering role. The concept of ‘Iranian Guarded Lands’ changed and reappeared in the form of the modern concept of ‘Iranian country’ to declare the start of a new era and, apparently, enter the Iranian man into the modern age. For this modern era, a new and proper cloth, and of course a new language, were needed. The old language was not able to offer a series of concepts to the new insight to deal with an explanation of the modern world by some changes and more equipped semantic transferences. The traditional literary language was the language of poetry, storytelling and posing questions, and the manifestation of its ultimate ability in stating histories was *Nāsikh al-Tawārīkh*. The new philosophical thinking began with a stammering language.

The despotic brain, with an emphasis on cultural management and engineering, attempted through creating structures such as ‘Organization of Nurturing Thoughts’¹ attempted, with precipitation and imposition, to put on a new dress on Iranian society for entering the modern age and teach the people new manners and, consequently, new language. However, this new ‘purely Farsi national’ language had neither an organic link with the old language nor could it speak, think or act in the new world. The Iranian people would still regard themselves the subjects of the ‘Iranian Guarded Lands’. The Iranian individual was a member of his/ her clan and ethnic lineage, not the citizen of the modern Iranian society. This quasi-citizen had to be the

1. In 1317 SH, the First Pahlavi took broad measures in various arenas of culture, politics, society and economics. Inauguration of the Academy of Acting, Organization of Nurturing Thoughts, Organization of Scouts, Iran’s Red Lion and Son, and Iranian Women’s Center were among the cultural measures of that era. However, the most important among these centers was the Organization of Nurturing Thoughts. For example, see Babak Darbeyki (1382 SH). *Sāzīmān Parwarish Afkār*. Center of the Documents of Islamic Revolution.

soldier of Reza Khan's newly constructed army and serve in the 'obligatory' military service for defending the 'national interests', which were a composite of his vague ethnic and tribal interests.

Such a mess in concepts caused the formation of dichotomies in the sphere of the fundamental concepts and, consequently, the modern regime was practically involved in a crisis in the form of the realization of these non-homogeneous demands and expectations. Thus, people had many expectation of the new government: establishing the national state inside the Islamic nation, empathy with modernity and evading the west, returning to oneself and criticizing the tradition, negation of despotism and concern for security, enacting laws and commitment to *Shari'á*, patriotism and being worried of nationalism, establishing state societies and central state, freedom and equality, and finally democratic governance and a powerful state, which is neither secular nor radical from the religious viewpoint. Reconciling these dichotomies was of course difficult, and it would cause the Iranian thought and practice to face challenges and add to the vagueness of the national state (Firahi, 1400 SH, p. 147).

Among the existing conceptual dichotomies, there were some fundamental concepts that furthered political and social discourse, linking it with trends, structures, and phenomena, and forming – in interaction with them – the new lifestyle of the Iranian society. The dichotomies of Islamic sultanate and modern state, nationality and religiosity, modernity and nationalism, and law and *Shari'á* were among these fundamental dichotomies that formed the intellectual trends and proclivities in the sphere of the political thought and practice under Pahlavi dynasty, and the echoes of the disputes and challenges surrounding them is still heard in the Iranian society.

Pahlavi that sought to reject religion, religiosity and the Islamic sultanate in the name of the modern state needed a cultural asset for struggling with the religious interpretation presented by the traditional

clerics so that it can use it as a uniting factor in the absence of the Shiite culture. Considering the conditions governing the region and the world in formation of the new independent nation-states, choosing the nationalist discourse, while having a modernist appearance, seemed to be the only solution. However, as Boroujerdi states, “Nationalism as a super account mostly requires a kind of archaism, for it creates a symbolic heritage and a cultural asset for nationalism” (Boroujerdi, 1389 SH, p. 97). On the other hand, the crisis shows itself when this archaism creates some form of modernity. For instance, Abul-Hassan Foroughi, Muhammad Ali Foroughi’s brother, who was a member of the Kaveh circle and an adherent of the new state, refers to this contradiction. He says, “... thus, if our modernity must mean the mere imitation of the European nations, it will inevitably include an explicit contradiction. This is because, on the one hand, this modernity – due to being a mere imitation of others – necessitates the change and elimination of our own works and, on the other hand, since the others regard protecting the national works as an obligation, we must do the same. In other words, for modernity, we must attempt to give up our [traditional] works and prestige and, at the same time, we must guard the same works and prestige of ours for the purpose of patriotism and sense of nationality. Clearly, these two tasks are contradictory and reconciling them is impossible” (Foroughi, 1396 SH, p. 166).

However, archaism as the core of the Iranian nationalism has an epistemological problem with the modern state as well. The problem is that the geometry of the Iranian archaic governance and the political order emerging of it are founded on the accompaniment of the king and the religion, or the kingdom and religiosity. As Firahi says, “it is clear that in this governing tradition, the political affairs is not constructed among the people; rather, it is constructed by the kings whose existential philosophy – by definition – is establishing justice and welfare among the subjects, and any ruler’s action and justice is

the very religion (Shari‘a)’’ (Firahi, *Dowlat Modern*, 1400 SH, p. 28).

In this way, neither the efforts of persons such as Abul-Hassan Foroughi in reinforcing the concept of reasoning as opposed to imitation, nor the genius of his brother, Zoka’ al-Molk, in reinforcing despotic Reza Khan’s brain could assist the new regime in opening a way to the modern age in Iran by reliance on national identity. And finally, in spite of what the intellectuals – such as Foroughi, Dawar, Taqi-zada and others – adhering the state would think, Reza Khan’s despotism removed, one by one, from the power scene those intellectuals that had a unique role in his origination, just like Cronus who devoured his own children. On the other hand, the policies of these intellectuals – cultural homogenization and obligation with a mostly religious leaning, whose executive instances included removing the veils, controlling religious institutes and schools, manipulating the system of endowment, and changes in the judicial and educational system of the country – showed their inefficiency very soon and reached the dead end of violence and domination.

It seems that this pioneering group of intellectuals who were adherents of the state, considering the paradigm dominating their mind, ignored the fact that traditions are formed gradually and with a special logic and rationality in a long historical process and in accordance with the conditions and events of life. Besides, any effort for and emphasis on changing them in the structural and static level in an imperative form in a short term will not be fruitful; rather, it can have opposite results. This compulsion, violence and dictation in the sudden change of the culture and tradition of the Islamic Iranian society caused society and layers of people not to welcome those changes in an organic form; rather, a negative reaction – ranging from accepting with reluctance to stressing on the traditional and Islamic traditions – was formed in the society.

With the fall of Reza Khan as demanded by the conditions ensuing

the world war in the temporal and intellectual interval emerged, and with the failure of each of the leftist, communist, and nationalist traditions as well as the Islamic and cleric traditions, after an era of rioting with coup de'tate of 05/28/1332 SH (08/19/1953), another period of despotism in the continuation of the policy of imperative modernization led to repetition of the first Pahlavi's mistake. Relying on the chauvinistic nationalism and continuing the policy of cultural management in the form of 2500-years feasts, changing the calendar, and art feasts would herald entering the gates of the modern age civilization by relying on the old civilization of kingdom. However, the kingdom civilization that was to be the basis of democratic Iran in the world and the troubled region of Middle East was non-democratic and authoritative in essence and, at best, the concept of favorite dictator that Muhammad Reza Shah would honor emerged from it. However, the experience showed that the imperative look at culture and tradition and attempting to manipulate or omit it as well as imposing a quasi-modern and eclectic tradition finally led to a new despotism and political closure in the Iranian society. Cultural view of economics and politics caused the money originated from selling the oil to be used for transferring the empty signs in the spheres of economics and culture, creating a seemingly modern society. This was a quasi-modern society with concentration on the center and neglecting the geographical, economic and cultural peripheries in the margins of the country. This would growingly increase the discontent originated from political-social closure of the Iranian society.

The Iranian man and Iranian society would still consider the old meanings of traditions and new concepts. This man, just like any other man, had his own affiliations and cultural-social affinities, which were part of his existence. More importantly, inside the language whose basic concepts and central denotations belonged to the Islamic and religious tradition, he would understand and interpret his surrounding

world. Thus, all traditions with which he had contact or which were imposed on him were, for him, part of a world that he had become familiar with through his own tradition and thus he would view them through the window of his familiar language and world. The authoritative modernism policy and its despotic administrator neglected and did not have a right perception of the fact that the language, the concepts, the lifestyle and the traditions – and in other words, the individual and social practice and thought – are things related and mixed with one another. Indeed, like a living organ, they have their own mechanism of birth, growth and dynamism, and any effort to change and manipulate them outside the rules governing this living organ would have detrimental effects on the individual and society. This would add to the illusion and blindness resulted from the dictator's policies that went in a direction exactly opposite to what he wished.¹

The social order and various lifestyles are formed in the pass of time with human action and experience and are in strong relation to language, deposited in the intellectual and practical traditions. In facing and contacting with other traditions and lifestyles and life-worlds, from one period to another, they adjust themselves with the man's conditions of individual and social action in new situations in order not to create political or social closure.²

Neglecting the power and energy hidden in the concepts and the traditions originated from them in a strong relationship with lifestyle and political-social practice can turn the illusion of dictatorship to a closed despotism from inside which the 'national will' for changing

1. See for instance, Husseini, H. (1399 SH). *Rāhnamāy Fīlm Sīnamāyi Irān* (1st vol.). Tehran: Rowzana.

2. For instance, we may refer to the concept of Hayek's 'spontaneous order' as well as the concept of tradition in texts related to communitarians, especially McIntyre.

and revolting – in the negligence and disbelief of the rulers¹ – would erupt like a volcano.

Revolution in new concepts

“Revolution is a state wherein people are fed up with the unlawful behaviors of the despotic and oppressor king and agree to riot, remove him for the sake of their own welfare and felicity, enact laws and – when they have understood the nullity of religious beliefs – rise against scholars to choose a new ordinance for themselves, based on the philosophers’ prescription and in line with reason” (Akhound-zada, 1395 SH, p. 15). Akhound-zada and his like-minded companions did not live enough to see – according to him – the revolution that was finally formed by the people who were fed up with the second Pahlavi’s despotism – more severely adopted since 1332 SH (1953). This national will for removing the Pahlavi regime, unlike what Akhound-zada thought, was not based on a belief in nullity of the religious beliefs, but on the fundamental religious concepts and with the religious scholars’ guidance and leadership. Religious concepts, in contact and challenge with concepts and traditions like leftist and Marxist traditions and nationalism as the representative of secularism, now had found radical and revolutionary capacity and energy, and directed the revolution of the oppressed against tyrants. Not only was this revolution in the national level, but also did it occur in the secular world with its assumption was that the religion is not able to be present in the modern society and has moved to the private sphere, the event that raised a wave of religious concepts in the Islamic world and other religious worlds. This new wave that the modern world changed to the concept of political Islam and religious radicalism shook the

1. The CIA reports and SAWAK, and even the opponents maintained that Shah would be in power for at least 10 years more.

pillars of secularism in the modern age. In other words, this revolution in concepts was the product of the contact and challenge between the religious language with the centrality of its concepts and the traditions of nationalism, secularism, *Salafism*, and radicalism. This revolution still needs various investigations in the sphere of historical concepts in the national and international levels to understand the delicacies and complexities of its formation and the related consequences. This is while the rapid process of evolutions in the global level and especially in the national level with establishment of a new system in the political sphere growingly increased the need of this revolution for new concepts in furthering the new lifestyle created from those concepts. Providing new Islamic concepts for fulfilling such a need initially seemed easy. It was enough for the cleric tradition, as the representative of the Islamic tradition, to offer the new concepts to its original and fundamental sources and to extract the equivalents of these concepts from the insider tradition.

A system of concepts in the form of theories and discourses and various modern paradigms were presented to original Islamic sources through scientific disciplines such as psychology, politics, economics, and law. In this way, efforts were made to produce Islamic science through reverse engineering, or more precisely, efforts were made to reproduce Islamic sciences in accordance with the conditions of the new life in the modern world. The quantitative, industrial and managerial view of producing science, civilization and culture caused the 'Ministry of Science and Culture' to turn into 'Ministry of Science and Technology'. It produced a large number of superficial articles and resumes as well as quasi-modern scholars and professors. The scholars of humanities became inefficient and unable and the startups of reproducing technological sciences flourished.

This approach showed that the Islamic world's view of the so-called modern and western sciences and civilization is still focused on

its technological aspect. Reproduction of the western technology for struggling with the west has still the smell of the conjoint fear and admiration of the Islamic world in its initial encounter with the Western Europe in the modern age, reviving it in the historical memory. The arena of science and culture was full of concepts related to jihad and fighting for destruction of the *Dār al-Kufr* (literally, ‘the house of infidelity’) of the global arrogance. The concepts of global justice, independence, self-sufficiency, the decadent culture of the West, economic and cultural imperialism were all instances of concepts that – in contact and challenge with the leftist tradition and in its semantic net and magnetic field – would further the sphere of political and social action and practice.¹ The humanities, as the immediate custodian responsible in this arena, could not have a leading role; rather, it was involved in the vortex of these concepts in bewilderment at the point of overlap, fluidity and multi-layer state of these meanings and concepts.

In its path to cover, humanities had the fear of falling in the gulch of *Salafism* and radicalism in linking with modern and traditional thoughts, especially the leftist thought. What made and still makes covering this path risky is the rapid process of social events and evolutions, especially in the modern age and need for a model for acting in the sphere of political and social practice. Bewilderment, fluidity and disorder in the level of concepts, and the rapid process of events and quick changes in the global level turned into a model for practice in the national and international spheres in reacting to the emergent events and issues for preventing the political and social closure and continuing the political and social affairs. All these

1. For a detailed familiarity with the relationship between the leftist and Islamic thought from this perspective, see for example, Sadra, M. (1399 SH). *Rowḥāniyyat wa Andīshahāy Chap dar Īrān Mu’āshir* (2nd ed.). Tehran: Amirkabir;

increasingly highlight the contradiction of the ‘hesitation/ haste’ dichotomy in the spheres of thought and practice. Thus, from the viewpoint of the present article, to slow down and stop this cycle, one of the important tasks is the historical rereading of the fundamental concepts that play a basic role in producing political and social practice in the public arena. The ultimate goal of such a rereading is increasing the lingual capacity and openness for confronting the issues presented to it through the contact of one’s language and tradition with other traditions and lifestyles in the form of concepts. In other words, in this way, we attempt to enable Farsi to speak in the new language in relationship with other traditions and lifestyles in the modern age. Accordingly, the Iranian society will be able to enter a dialogue with the language and lifestyle of the modern age with the centrality of the insider language, and in this way, it can enter the modern age.

The presupposition of rereading of the concepts for conversing in the language of the modern age and entering it is that, in the modern age, there is no pure language, culture and lifestyle, and – in other words – a raw and initial text. Understanding and living in the modern age has, basically, a conversational and collective nature. No lingual and cultural tradition is an absolute donor or an absolute receiver. In this dialogue, any lingual tradition enters with its own centrality and understanding. However, the product of this dialogue is a proper interpretation and perception from inside the insider tradition for living in the contemporary world. In other words, any lingual tradition has to enter the modern age with a kind of dialogue through translating and understanding other lingual traditions. And since translation is, in itself, a kind of interpretation and re-understanding of other languages in one’s language, it needs proper method, bases and sources appropriate for one’s own lingual tradition. In other words, when the insider lingual tradition access any concept or word, a new window opens to the world for the lingual tradition that can expand its experience from

the world. This change through one word or one concept, when enters the world of the insider lingual tradition in the form of many words, can completely alter the view of the insider language and society.

This issue seems to be deeper, broader and more critical when we face the fundamental concepts in abstract affairs such as justice, freedom, felicity and the like in contact with other traditions, lifestyles and the concepts originated from them. In this way, it can lead to a lingual revolution and, consequently, a revolution in the lifestyle and a social evolution. Any lingual tradition requires new vocabulary and concepts for having dialogue with other lingual traditions. The language that is reluctant to take and fabricate new vocabulary and concepts becomes mute. Thus, no culture and tradition enters the modern age without conceptual and lingual revolution.

In this way, it is necessary for any social and political revolution in the modern age, for entering the modern age, to have an insider lingual tradition that includes the insider society and insider world. Such a revolution aims at designing and explaining a new account of history and world for constructing another world and another man in the modern age. There are various methods for explaining this lingual revolution in entering into the modern age. One can investigate the whole language created in encountering other languages and various lifestyles to see how the vocabulary, grammar and explaining styles as well as their concepts are altered. This method, however, seems to be time-consuming and inefficient in view of the existing conditions. One way for investigating is focusing on fundamental concepts using the method of conceptual history and with its centrality. Indeed, the main idea of the method of conceptual history is that the concepts are collections of historical experiences. Even if a concept remains the same from the phonetic and phonemic perspectives, it can show the various experiences of its users in different eras, and this is what makes the history of concepts attractive (Jordheim & Neumann, 2011, p. 156).

In methods that are based on the history of concepts, efforts are made to investigate and study the changes and evolutions of the political and social concepts in the pass of time and in relation to institutional and structural evolutions (Jordheim & Neumann, 2011, p. 156). In other words, no effort is made to reduce the political and social affairs into merely abstract concepts. Rather, the effort is made to stress on historical, social and political data that make these concepts meaningful, in addition to the merely linguistic data and findings (Koselleck, 1982, p. 414). Thus, in this type of investigations, concepts are considered more as tools and warfare for ideological disputes than as scientific and impartial propositions about the universe (Skinner, 2002, p. 299). From this perspective, to obtain a right perception of the conditions and the political, social and cultural relations in the past and present, we must investigate the history and the fundamental concepts in relation to them. Since the concepts constitute the political positions, using these special concepts are inevitably considered as taking political positions (Jordhem & Neumann, 2011, p. 153). In this way, concepts make disruption in the past experiences, and can help increase the contemporary awareness. This causes the historical clarification, leading to political disambiguation (Koselleck, 1995, p. 3). What is of great importance in applying these investigations is paying attention to the conditions and the contexts wherein the concepts have been formed. Thus, in this method, just separating a concept from its background is not considered and emphasized; rather, its location in the new context is also considered. Accordingly, the status of the intellectuals and those who are responsible for carrying, transferring, and – of course – familiarizing the concepts is very important, because these individuals are agents and carriers of transferring one concept from one context into another.

In this way, what is the responsibility of these intellectuals and translators is the right perception and understanding of political and social backgrounds and conditions as well as the lifestyle wherein the

outsider concepts have been formed and grown. Understanding the meaning of a word or a sentence isolated from the society and the related language is impossible. The cultural background is always necessary for giving meaning to the lingual context. Thus, we can understand anything just when we are the member of a society that makes the meaning possible.

Conclusion and suggestion

From the viewpoint of the present article, one of the main problems for the Iranian society in entering the modern age, while preserving its Iranian and Islamic identity, is not having a right understanding of the new concepts and creating a logical and coherent lifestyle in relation to the insider language and tradition. In this article, thus, we have tried to have a short review – using a contextualist view and with the centrality of the method of history of concepts – the first encounter of the Islamic world and Iranian society with the West in the modern age from the window of history of concepts. In this investigation, in several stages, while catching a glimpse of the conditions of encountering the West through the new concepts originated from the new lifestyle in the modern age, we investigated the interaction of the Iranian-Islamic lingual tradition with the new concepts. Besides, we tried to show how – in different political and social eras in contemporary Iran – lacking enough understanding of new concepts (due to paying no attention to the fact that these concepts were formed inside a special lifestyle and any concepts has its own special history) produced understandings, interpretations and translations that finally made those concepts more obscure and more fluid; hence weakening their relationship with the insider lifestyle and lingual tradition.

What was more effective in making those concepts invisible and in entering, inserting and integrating them into the insider tradition was the fact that it seemed that the insider tradition – in relation to other

new lingual traditions – enjoyed, in some cases, the same beliefs, assumptions and texts. However, it was the case that each of those traditions, for offering argumentations and reasons for any of those concepts, had their own special criteria. Besides, each of them would prepare their own special beliefs for filling out their background. Ambiguity and multi-layer nature of the meaning of those concepts in entering into the insider lingual tradition and lack of their right relationship with the Iranian-Islamic tradition caused lack of right understanding and right usage of the energy hidden in those concepts. This, finally, caused the political-social closure and eclecticism in various spheres of thought and practice in the contemporary Iran.

Thus, in view of the synoptic investigation conducted here, one of the most important solutions for getting out of this vagueness, eclecticism, and existing political-social closures, from the viewpoint of this article, is making effort for rereading the new fundamental concepts in contemporary Iran in a systematic manner.

Such an effort can be made in the form of compiling encyclopedias or conducting studies in the form of monographs for more explanation of those concepts through a systematic investigation of their history and recognizing the energy and potential hidden inside them in interaction with the practice in political and social spheres for a better and more usage of them in order to further the political and social current of life in contemporary Iran. In other words, by a right understanding of those concepts through rereading their history and the way they interact with the practice and political-social background in the insider lingual tradition, we create the ability to understand them in the insider language and their proper location of those concepts in new concepts. In this way, the insider lingual tradition will be able to speak in the language of the modern age and, thus, can enter a formative dialogue and interaction with other lingual traditions and lifestyles.

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