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Critique and Innovation: Homa Katouzian's Contributions to Iranian Studies

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Abstract: *Since the Islamic Revolution, Western Iranian studies have undergone significant transformations, with many scholars of Iranian descent actively contributing to the field. Among them, Homa Katouzian stands out as a prominent figure. Katouzian critiques the path dependency inherent in Western Iranian studies and proposes a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing Iranian society and history. Katouzian argues that unconstrained autocratic power has been the fundamental issue shaping Iran's historical development, leading to a persistent despotic social structure that has hindered long-term societal progress. This, in turn, has perpetuated the antagonistic relationship between the state and society, ultimately resulting in Iran's lagging development relative to the West. However, influenced by Western intellectual traditions, Katouzian's theoretical approach exhibits certain limitations, leading to a somewhat unbalanced analysis of certain historical issues. Scholars of Iranian descent, represented by Katouzian, have become a dominant force in Western Iranian studies. While they are driven by a "search for a path"—seeking insights from history to envision Iran's future—they are also subtly shaped by their prolonged exposure to Western academic and social environments. As such, their perspectives on Iran must be approached with a dialectical and critical lens.*

Keywords: *Homa Katouzian, Western Iranian Studies, Iranian Immigrant Scholar, Short-term Society Theory*

Since the 1980s, the widespread participation of Iranian diaspora scholars in Western Iranian studies has emerged as a notable phenomenon in the academic

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world, warranting in-depth exploration from both political and intellectual historical perspectives. Homa Katouzian,[1] a leading figure among Iranian diaspora scholars in the West, has played a pivotal role in shaping the field. Serving as the editor-in-chief of *Iranian Studies* (2014–2017)[2], Katouzian dedicated himself to the development of academic journals and the cultivation of scholars, significantly contributing to the advancement of Western Iranian studies.[3]A prolific writer with substantial international influence, Katouzian has published extensively in English-language journals such as *Iranian Studies* and *Iranian Nameh*[4], as well as Persian-language journals like *Iranshenasi*[5]. His academic contributions include the authorship and translation of 17 English monographs and 29 Persian-language books, covering a wide range of subjects in Iranian literature, politics, and history. Most importantly, Katouzian has conducted comparative research on Europe and Iran, formulating a comprehensive theoretical framework for Iranian historical and social analysis. His framework includes the "theoretical model of feudalism", which systematically differentiates Iranian and European historical and social structures; the "arbitrary rule" theory, which explains the structural problems in Iranian history; the "short-term society" concept, which characterizes Iran's historical development patterns; and the "state-society conflict" theory, which examines the dynamics between the Iranian state and its society. Since the 1990s, Chinese scholars have begun citing Katouzian's works,[6] and in recent years, his academic thought has gained increasing attention among scholars in China. In 2020, the Institute for International and Area Studies at Tsinghua University invited Katouzian to lecture on his "short-term society" theory.[7] That same year, his edited volume *Iran in the 21st Century: Politics, Economics, and Conflict* was published in China.[8] Additionally, his two seminal works, *The Persians: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Iran* and *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism*

[1] Homa Katouzian's name has undergone three different translations: in the 1990s, it was transliterated as 何·卡图西安; in 2020, it appeared as 霍马·卡图简 and 霍马·卡图赞. This article adopts the third transliteration.

[2] *Iranian Studies*, founded in 1967 in the United States, is one of the most authoritative academic journals specializing in Iranian studies.

[3] The information is based on an email interview conducted by the author with Homa Katouzian on March 27, 2023.

[4] *Iran Nameh*, established in 1982 in the United States, is a renowned Iranian studies journal founded by Iranian diaspora scholars.

[5] *Iranshenasi*, launched in 1989 in the United States, is one of the most authoritative international journals in Iranian cultural and Persian literary studies.

[6] Zhang Zhenguo, *The Unsuccessful Modernization: A Study on the Pahlavi "White Revolution"*,（张振国：《未成功的现代化：关于巴列维的"白色革命"研究》） Beijing: Peking University Press, 1993.

[7] Institute for International and Area Studies, Tsinghua University, *http://iias.tsinghua.edu.cn/blog/20201123-lecture-homa-katouzian/*. Accessed December 21, 2022.

[8] Homa Katouzian and Hossein Shahidi, *Iran in the 21st Century: Politics, Economics & Conflict*, Translated by Li Feng, Yuan Jingna, and He Keyong, Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2020. Original edition: Homa Katouzian, Hossein Shahidi (eds.), *Iran in the 21st Century: Politics, Economics & Conflict*, London: Routledge, 2007.

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and Pseudo-Modernism (1926–1979), were translated into Chinese and published in 2022 and 2023 under the titles *New Moon and Rose: Five Thousand Years of Persia* [9]and *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: 1926–1979*[10], respectively. Despite these developments, there remains a lack of systematic studies on Katouzian's academic thought in Chinese scholarship. Based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature and email correspondence with Katouzian, [11]this paper aims to elucidate his academic theories and intellectual framework while highlighting the role of Iranian diaspora scholars, represented by Katouzian, in Western Iranian studies. By doing so, this study seeks to provide insights for Iranian studies and area studies in China.

I. Homa Katouzian's Academic Career and Theoretical Innovations

Homa Katouzian's transition from economics to Iranian studies was not an isolated event among modern Iranian intellectuals but rather a significant phenomenon that emerged following the Islamic Revolution. Many Iranian diaspora scholars in exile closely observed Iran's political developments while utilizing Western academic resources to reassess Iran's historical trajectory and contemplate its future. Born in Tehran in 1942, Katouzian received an elite education in Iran and developed a deep passion for the country's history and culture. In 1960, during the climax of the anti-Shah movement opposing Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (r. 1941–1979) [12], Katouzian, then a student at the University of Tehran, briefly engaged in political activities and maintained close connections with prominent Iranian political figures and intellectuals, particularly those represented by Khalil Maleki[13] and Jalal Al-e Ahmad[14].[15] In 1961, Katouzian went to Britain to study economics, and disengaged from Iran's political movements.[16] Over the next decade, he made substantial academic contributions in economics while remaining deeply engaged with Iran's historical and contemporary developments. Prolonged exposure to Western society prompted him to adopt Western parliamentary democracy, forming an ideology that was completely different from Marxism-Leninism

[9] Homa Katouzian, *New Moon and Rose: Five Thousand Years of Persia*, Translated by Wang Donghui, Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2022. Original edition: Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009.

[10] Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: 1926–1979*, Translated by Liu Lanyu and Hu Qi, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2023. Original edition: Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926–1979*, London and New York: Macmillan and New York University Press, 1981.

[11] The author conducted multiple email interviews with Homa Katouzian between January 29 and April 3, 2023.

[12] Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919–1980), the last king of Iran.

[13] One of the most significant leftist intellectuals in 20th-century Iran and a founding member of the Tudeh Party of Iran.

[14] Iranian writer and author of West Struckness, a comprehensive critique of Western ideology.

[15] Mohammad-Ali Homayoun Katouzian, Barg-ha-yi az Khaterat-e Man, Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 2019, p. 1.

[16] While in Iran, Katouzian participated in anti-Shah activities and joined Maleki's Socialist League, writing for the magazine he edited. While in Britain, Katouzian joined the anti-Shah Confederation of Iranian Students.

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and Islamism that were active in Iranian politics at the time. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, he neither returned to Iran nor participated actively in political activities, instead reflecting as an observer on the root causes of his motherland's historical problems. After retiring from the University of Kent in 1986, he fully transitioned to Iranian studies.[17] He is currently affiliated with St. Antony's College at the University of Oxford, specializing in area studies, and is also associated with the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.[18] Katouzian's Iranian studies bear a distinct mark of his life. As a witness to the Pahlavi dynasty's autocratic rule, Katouzian systematically reflected on its governance model, economic policies, and social strategies, and proposed an academic concept represented by "petrolic despotism" theory.[19] His experience of interacting with Iranian intellectuals gave Katouzian a rational attitude towards Iranian politics and a dialectical perspective to examine Western theories. Maleki became an important research object for Katouzian. The economics background is the academic tool for Katouzian to analyze the Iranian economy and society. His works have become an important reference for Iranian scholars to analyze the land tax rate, currency exchange rate, and population growth rate of the Qajar dynasty.[20]

Katouzian's shift to Iranian studies was influenced by both personal interests and broader historical contexts. His passion for Iranian culture and history was a key driving force.[21] As early as the late 1970s, he had already published articles on Iranian literature and history in leading academic journals and had begun writing a biography of the renowned Iranian novelist Sadeq Hedayat.[22] In literary studies, Katouzian focused on Hedayat and classical Persian poets such as Saadi,[23] while in political studies, he explored historical details through biographical narratives. His works include the autobiography of Khalil Maleki, a key figure in Iran's socialist movement, and his translation of the memoirs of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad

[17] For a detailed account of Katouzian's academic career, see: Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Homa Katouzian: A Bio-Bibliography", *Iran Nameh*, vol. 30, iss. 4, 2016.

[18] Formerly known as the Faculty of Oriental Studies, the institution was renamed in 2022. Established in the 19th century, its Middle Eastern studies program traces its origins back to the 16th century.

[19] Eskandar Sadeghi, "The Persians: An Interview with Homa Katouzian (Part One)", October 4, 2010, *Tehran Bureau*, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/10/arbitrary-rule-and-chaos-are.html. Accessed December 21, 2024.

[20] Hooshang Amirahmadi, *The Political Economy of Iran under the Qajars: Society, Politics, Economics and Foreign Relations*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2012, p. 20.

[21] Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926–1979*, London: Macmillan Press, 1992, p. ix.

[22] Based on the author's email interview with Katouzian on March 27, 2023.

[23] Relevant works on literature: *Hedayat's The Blind Owl*, Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 1995; *Sadeq Hedayat: His Work and His Wonderous World*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002; *Sadi: The Poet of Life, Love and Compassion*, Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2006; *Sadi in Love: The Lyrical Verses of Persia's Master Poet*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016; *Poetry and Revolution, Poets and Poetry of the Constitutional Era of Iran*, London: Routledge, 2022.

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Mosaddegh.[24] However, personal interest alone does not fully explain Katouzian's complete transition to Iranian studies. The 1979 Islamic Revolution significantly altered Western policies toward Iran, reshaping the field of Iranian studies and ultimately influencing Katouzian's academic trajectory.

Before the revolution, Iran was a key strategic pillar of the United States in the Middle East. Prominent American Middle East scholars such as George Lenczowski and Cold War expert William E. Griffith highly valued Iran's strategic role and the Pahlavi monarchy (1925–1979).[25] However, the state of Western Iranian studies during that period was insufficiently developed to substantiate this strategic vision. Iranian studies were largely subsumed under Middle Eastern studies and Orientalism, focusing mainly on "Persian studies", which emphasized Persian language and literature. Western scholars dominated the field, and in 1971, only 3.2% of Middle Eastern studies scholars were of Middle Eastern origin.[26] These scholars either criticized the Pahlavi monarchy or echoed official support for it, yet few truly grasped Iran's political dynamics. Under this knowledge-production model, the West failed to recognize the Pahlavi regime's vulnerabilities and was unable to predict the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution. Consequently, after the fall of the monarchy, Western Iranian studies underwent a transformation, shifting toward "Iranian studies" as an independent, reality-based field with characteristics of area studies.[27] Following the revolution, many Iranian diaspora scholars—both newly exiled and those already residing in the West—began researching Iran,[28] leading to the rise of the "historiography of the Iranian revolutionary movement", which adopted a secular intellectual stance and a social-historical perspective.[29]

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[24] Relevant works on literature: *Khalil Maleki's The Contest of Ideas*, Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 1995; *Khalil Maleki, the Human face of Iranian Socialism*, London: Oneworld, 2018; *Musaddiq's Memoirs*, London: Jebhe, 1988、*Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1990.

[25] William E. Griffith "An Overview", in Abbas Amirie, ed., *The Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean in Intermational Politics, Tehran: Institute for International Political and Economic Studies, 1975*, p. 23. George Lenczowski, "Political Process and Institutions in Iran: The Second Pahlavi King-ship", in George Lenczowski (ed.), *Iran Under the Pahlavis*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978, p. 475.

[26] Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America*, Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001, p. 39.

[27] The study of the history, art, and culture of the Greater Iran region, as well as Iran's political and social structures, is conducted through an interdisciplinary approach. *Persian Studies* is a subfield within this broader discipline. Following the Islamic Revolution, *Iranian Studies* became more independent, acquiring a stronger political dimension and greater contemporary relevance.

[28] Hooshang Amirahmadi, "The Civil Society Approach to Iranian Studies", *Iranian.com*, September 1995, http://iranian.com/Sep95/Amirah.html. Accessed March 17, 2023.

[29] The primary sources for this historiographical approach include revolutionary-era publications, personal testimonies, and memoirs, which provide a firsthand account of the Islamic Revolution but also reveal significant limitations. First, these sources were predominantly produced by Iran's elite and leftist organizations, making it difficult to fully capture the motivations of the general populace in joining the revolution. Second, they exhibit strong ideological biases, as most memoirists belong to the secular intellectual class. Lastly, the *state perspective* is notably absent, leading to a lack of comprehensive analysis of the Pahlavi monarchy. See Charles Kurzman, "Historiography of the Iranian Revolutionary Movement, 1977–79", *Iranian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1/2 (1995).

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Katouzian's transition to Iranian studies must be understood within this broader historical context. As an eyewitness, Katouzian has profound thoughts on the history of the Pahlavi dynasty: "the Shah's White Revolution, [which] had a deep and lasting impact on me… I was struck by…the fact that, since 1963, [the economy] was going through a boom…The power of the state (i.e., the shah) had dramatically increased… [leading to] total domination of both politics and the economy."[30] Therefore, he did not follow the trend of "historiography of the Iranian revolutionary movement" in Western academia, but instead focused on exploring the rule of the Pahlavi dynasty from a national perspective. In 1981, he synthesized his thoughts into a theoretical framework, publishing *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism (1926–1979)*, his first major contribution to the field. This work marked the beginning of his theoretical innovations. Using the concepts of "petrolic despotism"[31] and "pseudo-modernism"[32], Katouzian provided a groundbreaking analysis of the Pahlavi state, summarizing the changes in Iranian society and economy during the Pahlavi dynasty. He focused on the relationship between various classes (human resources) and social reality (material resources) in Iran, and identified its fundamental issue: the persistent antagonism between the state and society. More importantly, Katouzian critiqued Western Iranian studies for their long-standing reliance on European theoretical paradigms. He argued that Western scholars often applied Eurocentric models mechanically, defining Iranian "feudalism" as a rigid landowner-peasant system and assuming that European-style class structures and class conflicts were essential prerequisites for technological and social transformations. In reality, the European paradigm failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for the Islamic Revolution,[33] underscoring the need for an Iranian studies framework rooted in Iran's own historical experiences.

In subsequent works such as *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Rise of the Pahlavis* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), *Iranian History and Politics: The Dialectic of State and Society* (London: Routledge, 2003), and *The Persians: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Iran*, Katouzian continued to refine and expand his theoretical model. Ultimately, he developed a comprehensive

[30] Cyrus Schayegh, "'Seeing Like a State': An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 42, 2010, p. 46.

[31] The introduction of modernization, technology, and cultural elements without the corresponding institutional frameworks. See Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926–1979*, London: Macmillan Press, 1992, pp. 103–106.

[32] A phenomenon commonly observed in oil-dependent economies, where the state consolidates authoritarian rule through oil revenue monopolization rather than fostering social development or democratization. See Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926–1979*, London: Macmillan Press, 1992, pp. 244–248.

[33] Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, p. 1.

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framework for Iranian social history, characterized by the "theoretical model of feudalism", the theory of "arbitrary rule", the concept of the "short-term society", and the "state-society conflict" framework.

II. The Theoretical Model of Feudalism and Arbitrary Rule in Iran's Political and Economic Structure

Homa Katouzian conducted an in-depth comparative analysis of European and Iranian history, formulating the "theoretical model of feudalism". Drawing upon European medieval history and starting from the mode of production, he systematically compared power structures, social classes, and patterns of societal development in Europe and Iran. According to Katouzian, in Europe, laws and traditions (Primogeniture) constrained the monarch's "Divine Right of Kings", granting legitimacy to his rule. These legal and traditional frameworks also ensured the stability of property inheritance, allowing landlords, nobles, and clergy to form stable social classes. These groups controlled feudal territories composed of rural communities, the countryside became the concentration point of grassroots power, and the state either relied upon or represented them in governance. The presence of stable social hierarchies in Europe resulted in a pyramidal social order in which higher-ranking classes could check state power. The combination of the manorial system, serfdom, and legal protections for private property established the foundations of feudalism, with the protection of property rights facilitating the free transfer of financial capital—an essential precondition for capitalism. European feudalism was a prolonged historical phase in which capitalist development fostered a political alliance between the bourgeoisie and the monarchy, weakening the power of the aristocracy and the church and paving the way for the rise of absolutist states.[34]

Katouzian, however, contends that "arbitrary power" is the defining feature of Iranian history. The concept of "Divine Grace", derived from *Shahnameh*,[35] deified the monarch and his authority, rendering laws and traditions incapable of restraining his power. In Iran, the legitimacy of rule was highly concentrated in the person of the monarch, leading to a fragile sense of state legitimacy and an unstable system of power and property inheritance.[36] Katouzian contends that from Darius's[37] resistance

[34] Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, London: Macmillan Press, 1992, pp. 10-13.

[35] The "Four Pillars of Persian Poetry", including Ferdowsi, contributed significantly to Persian literary heritage. Ferdowsi's Persian national epic, *Shahnameh*, is a monumental narrative that chronicles the myths and history of Persia from ancient times to the fall of the Sassanian Empire.

[36] Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, London: Macmillan Press, 1992, p. 14.

[37] Darius the Great, the third sovereign of the Achaemenid Dynasty, became the king by defeating Gaumata after the death of Cambyses II and then ordered the engraving of the Behistun Inscription.

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against Gaumata[38], who purported to be the son of Cyrus the Great in 522 BC, to the rebellion of the royal family members against Mohammad Mirza[39], the successor of Fath'ali Shah[40] in 1834, succession struggles have abounded throughout Iranian history.[41] The recurrent succession struggles throughout Iranian history prevented the emergence of a stable and independent social class structure. Instead, all social members remained dependent on the state, forming a state-society binary structure, making European-style class divisions inapplicable to Iran.[42] Additionally, Iran's arid climate and scarce water resources prevented the development of feudal estates and feudal lords. Instead, cities exerted control over rural villages, becoming the primary centers of local power. The Iranian state monopolized land ownership, with landlords and farmers merely holding cultivation rights, while merchants' wealth was also vulnerable to state expropriation. Katouzian argues that this state monopoly on wealth impeded the formation of a feudal society and hindered capitalist development. Although Iran functioned as a trading nation and its society experienced material progress, it never developed a feudal system and remained under despotic rule for much of its history.[43]

The "theoretical model of feudalism" identifies despotic power as the fundamental reason behind the divergent historical and social developments of Europe and Iran. Katouzian's "arbitrary rule" theory further elaborates on this distinction via the analysis of the structural impact of despotic power in Iran from three key perspectives. First, Katouzian argues that Iran's centralization far exceeded that of Europe. In Europe, centralization was a gradual process, progressing from the feudal period to the Renaissance State (15th century) and the Absolutist State (17th–19th centuries), where central power progressively strengthened. By contrast, Iran's centralization was historically more intense. While different dynasties exhibited varying degrees of centralization, overall, power remained concentrated in the state. Even under the Qajar dynasty (1789–1925), which had a relatively decentralized structure, the monarch retained the authority to directly appoint and dismiss provincial governors and exercised arbitrary control over his territories.[44]

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[38] Some scholars assert that Gaumata was indeed Bardiya, the son of Cyrus II. Both the Behistun Inscription and Herodotus' Histories record the war between Darius and him.
[39] The third monarch of the Qajar Dynasty.
[40] The second monarch of the Qajar Dynasty.
[41] Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 6.
[42] Homa Katouzian, "Arbitrary Rule: A Comparative Theory of State, Politics and Society in Iran", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1997, p. 51.
[43] Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, London: Macmillan Press, 1992, p. 21.
[44] Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 396.

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Second, Iran formed a binary structure of state and society in political and economic sphere. The abundance of land and water in Europe facilitated the development of prosperous rural communities, forming the foundation of feudal estates—the basic political units of European feudal society. However, Iran's arid climate and mountainous terrain resulted in small, isolated, and self-sufficient villages. The state, leveraging its despotic authority, controlled these villages through urban centers, establishing the economic foundation of Iran's autocratic state.[45]To explain this structure, Katouzian defines Iran as an "arid-isolatic society" and critiques Karl Wittfogel's[46] "hydraulic society" theory, which suggests that Eastern states, including Iran, consolidated control over rural communities through large-scale water management systems. Katouzian refutes this notion, arguing that Iran, lacking major rivers, relied primarily on small-scale water infrastructure (e.g., qanats). Farmers accessed production resources through landlords rather than state-directed irrigation projects, meaning agricultural production did not fundamentally depend on state-controlled water management. Instead, Iran's political structure was based on urban centers and military outposts, which controlled scattered villages through an extensive transportation network. Taxation, the primary source of state revenue, was extracted from these villages, and when rival factions gained control over significant numbers of villages, the state's fiscal stability and legitimacy were threatened. Additionally, Wittfogel's "hydraulic society" theory emphasizes class conflict, whereas Katouzian argues that Iran's "state-society binary" allowed despotic power to directly influence every individual, circumventing class-based social structures.[47]

Third, the Iranian Revolutions lacked Legal Foundations. Katouzian identifies three defining characteristics of European revolutions. First, they aimed to establish new legal and social orders. Second, European societies were internally divided along class and interest lines, with old and new systems supported by different social foundations. Third, European revolutions ultimately resulted in new constitutional structures rather than merely replacing rulers.[48] Katouzian maintains that in the English Revolution, different social classes respectively supported the king and the parliament. In the French Revolution, the constitutional monarchists, the Girondins, the Jacobins,

[45] Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, p. 17.

[46] Karl August Wittfogel (1896–1988), also known by his Chinese name **Wei Fugu**, was a German-American sinologist and historian. He is best known for his work *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, which examines the nature of totalitarian rule in hydraulic societies. The Chinese edition was published as 东方专制主义——对于极权力量的比较研究, Translated by Xu Shigu, Xi Ruisen, and Zou Rushan, and released by China Social Sciences Press in 1989.

[47] Homa Katouzian, "The Aridisolatic Society: A Model of Long-Term Social and Economic Development in Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1983, pp. 265-270.

[48] Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, p. 13.

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and the Thermidorians came to the fore in turn with the backing of different social classes. In the Russian October Revolution, the political alliance that had previously joined forces to overthrow the rule of the Tsar fell apart, and the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks embarked on a years-long struggle. Katouzian contends that although the forms of revolution were largely similar, "law" remained an important yardstick for European revolutions throughout. Different social classes were in opposition to each other based on their own interests, and the revolution ultimately established a new constitutional system and government structure. In contrast, Katouzian argues that both pre-modern uprisings and modern revolutions in Iran—including the Constitutional Revolution and the Islamic Revolution—exhibited a common pattern: they lacked legal foundations, were primarily motivated by opposition to "despotism", and mobilized a unified society against an "unjust" ruler and state.[49] This revolutionary model reflects Iran's historical cycle: after an autocratic regime is overthrown, a strongman emerges to restore order, ultimately reconstructing a new autocracy. As a result, Iranian history follows a repetitive pattern of "despotism-chaos-despotism".[50]

The "theoretical model of feudalism" and "arbitrary rule" theory construct a comparative framework for understanding the historical and structural differences between European and Iranian societies. Through a macro-analysis of political and economic structures, these theories reveal that "unconstrained despotic power" is the structural factor behind Iran's divergent historical trajectory from Europe. Furthermore, despotic power has led to the formation of a "short-term society", perpetuating Iran's historical cycles and limiting its long-term social development.

III. The Short-term Society Model in Iran's Historical Development

Building upon the "theoretical model of feudalism", Homa Katouzian formulated the "short-term society" theory to explain Iran's historical trajectory, using Europe's "long-term society" as a comparative framework. According to Katouzian, Iran's short-term societal structure is primarily driven by three factors: instability in legitimacy and power succession, the vulnerability of life and property, and the discontinuity of capital accumulation and social development.[51]

The fundamental cause of the "short-term society" is the persistent instability in legitimacy and power succession. Katouzian argues that in Europe, "law" has always been the foundation of governance. On the one hand, law legitimized political

[49] Homa Katouzian, "Arbitrary Rule: A Comparative Theory of State, Politics and Society in Iran", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1997, p. 66.
[50] Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, p. 15.
[51] Homa Katouzian, "The Short-Term Society: A Study in the Problems of Long-Term Political and Economic Development in Iran", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 40, iss. 1, 2004, p. 2.

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authority while constraining royal power;[52] on the other hand, it established a stable system of succession, ensuring continuity in power transitions. In Iran, however, monarchical legitimacy was based on "Divine Grace" rather than legal institutions. Katouzian points out that as early as the pre-Islamic period, Iran had developed an idealized standard for the "wise ruler"—a sovereign who was virtuous, noble by birth, open to learning, and capable of discerning right from wrong.[53] These qualities were necessary for a ruler to maintain "Divine Grace" and justify his personal legitimacy. If a ruler failed to govern "justly", he was deemed "unworthy of the throne".[54] During the Islamic era, rulers continued to be viewed as divine agents who wielded absolute authority above the law. Katouzian argues that "Divine Grace" not only legitimized monarchical rule but also provided a basis for rebellion. When a ruler was deemed incapable, it was considered justifiable for a "wise ruler" to replace him. In Persian mythology, a legitimate sovereign could prove his divine right through supernatural feats; however, since divine power did not manifest in real history, the control of despotic authority became the *de facto* proof of legitimacy. Even if a rebel's claim to power was illegitimate, successfully seizing absolute authority was sufficient to demonstrate his possession of "Divine Grace".

To clarify the instability of power succession, Katouzian differentiates between "Divine Right of Kings" and "Divine Grace". He notes that while William the Conqueror[55] and Harold II[56] fought fiercely over the English throne, William's ultimate legal claim to the crown was crucial in establishing his legitimacy.[57] In contrast, "Divine Grace" in Iran lacked institutional safeguards, allowing anyone who seized power to declare his divine mandate, while his opponents could, in turn, justify their legitimacy through rebellion. This dynamic is vividly illustrated in a letter from Naser al-Din Shah (r. 1848–1896)[58] to the British envoy, in which he acknowledged Iran's tradition of instability:

> *"Your excellency must pay attention to some peculiar Iranian customs and*

[52] Homa Katouzian, "Legitimacy and Succession in Iranian History", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 23, iss. 1-2, 2003, p. 234.
[53] Ferdowsi, *The Complete Shahnameh (vol. 3)*, Translated by Song Pifang, Beijing: Commercial Press, 2017, p. 124.
[54] Ferdowsi, *The Complete Shahnameh (vol. 1)*, Translated by Song Pifang, Beijing: Commercial Press, 2017, p. 512.
[55] William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, who had a distant royal lineage to the English throne. After defeating Harold II, he established the Norman dynasty in England.
[56] Harold II, the last monarch of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty.
[57] Homa Katouzian, "Legitimacy and Succession in Iranian History", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 23, iss. 1-2, 2003, p. 238.
[58] Naser al-Din Shah, the fourth Shah of the Qajar dynasty (1831–1896), supported Iran's modernization. However, his reign was marked by frequent concessions of economic resources and privileges to foreign powers, which sparked the Tobacco Protest.

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> *traditions and realize that, in Iran, the things that your excellency has in mind will not work, and one cannot be immune from the evil intent of seditious and rebellious people. If the leaders of the Iranian state wish to act on the basis of fairness and justice to maintain order and security for all their subjects, they would have no choice but at the slightest thought, imagination or supposition of rebellion, irrespective of who it might be, to try to put it down forthwith and not to hesitate even for a moment."*[59]

Such violent and chaotic power transitions reinforced the cyclical pattern of "despotism-chaos-despotism" in Iranian history.

The instability of legitimacy and succession directly contributed to the precariousness of life and property in Iran. Katouzian notes that prior to the Constitutional Revolution, the Persian term for "subject" referred to all individuals except the king, signifying that the monarch and state existed independently of and above society.[60] In this context, the despotic state wielded absolute power over all individuals, capable of arbitrarily confiscating their wealth and ending their lives. Katouzian's analysis aligns with 19th-century Iranian modernist thinkers, who viewed the vulnerability of life and property as a key distinction between Iran and Europe and a major obstacle to Iran's modernization.[61] Malkam Khan proposed that taxes should be based on law, and without legal permission, no one should be arrested at will, no private property should be confiscated, or residences entered at will. However, Katouzian is careful to distance himself from Orientalist narratives that dismiss Islamic law as inherently irrational or claim that "reason" is an exclusive privilege of Western civilization.[62] Instead, he emphasizes the necessity of legal constraints on despotic power and the role of law in protecting individuals' lives and property.

The vulnerability of life and property, in turn, disrupted capital accumulation and impeded long-term social development. Katouzian argues that throughout European history, the accumulation of capital was systematically encouraged and protected. The stability of social classes and long-term capital accumulation left Europe with abundant financial resources, which facilitated investment in technological industries, ultimately driving technological progress, industrialization, and the onset of the Industrial Revolution. In contrast, in Iran, political power was the primary determinant

[59] Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 155.
[60] Homa Katouzian, "The Aridisolatic Society: A Model of Long-Term Social and Economic Development in Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1983, p. 260.
[61] Homa Katouzian, "The Revolution for Law: A Chronographic Analysis of the Constitutional Revolution of Iran", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2011, p. 759.
[62] Ziauddin Sardar, *Orientalism*, Translated by Ma Xuefeng, Changchun: Jilin People's Publishing House, 2005, p. 3.

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of wealth. The closer an individual's relationship with the state, the greater their economic advantage. Although Iran had a long history of financial institutions, the connection between political power and wealth meant that private property lacked the sacred, legally protected status it held in Europe.[63] Katouzian's discrimination of the relationship between long-term savings and the security of life and property originates from the viewpoint of classical economics: "In those unfortunate countries, indeed, where men are continually afraid of the violence of their superiors, they frequently bury and conceal a great part of their stock, in order to have it always at hand to carry with them to some place of safety in case of their being threatened with any of those disasters to which they consider themselves as at all times exposed."[64] Therefore, long-term savings can only be realized under the precondition that property maintains a minimum level of security within a certain period of time, that property owners are not threatened with arbitrary infringement during their lifetime and beyond, and that there must be a certain expectation for future peace and stability.

The long-standing insecurity surrounding life and property led Iranian investors to focus on short-term profits rather than long-term returns, further hindering sustained capital accumulation. Katouzian highlights that while Iran achieved remarkable commercial, cultural, and technological advancements in certain historical periods, the enduring influence of the "short-term society" model prevented the country from catching up with post-Renaissance Europe. This, he argues, is one of the fundamental reasons why Iran never underwent an Industrial Revolution.[65]

According to Katouzian, the combination of legal institutions, traditions, and stable social hierarchies enabled the emergence of Europe's "long-term society", ensuring capital accumulation and facilitating social transformation. In contrast, Iran's unconstrained despotic power allowed the state to arbitrarily control life and property, undermining capital accumulation, technological advancement, and long-term social development. This, he asserts, is the fundamental reason behind Iran's "short-term society". Despite Iran's extensive efforts to learn from the West in the 19th and 20th centuries, which objectively contributed to social reform, the fundamental relationship between state and society remained unchanged. Katouzian encapsulates this historical pattern with the concept of "state-society conflict", using it as a lens to examine Iran's political modernization process.

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[63] Homa Katouzian, "The Aridisolatic Society: A Model of Long-Term Social and Economic Development in Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1983, p. 262.
[64] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into The Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*, London: Printed for W. Strahan; and T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1776, p.339.
[65] Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, London: Macmillan Press, 1992, pp. 18-20.

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IV. State-Society Conflict in Iran's Political Modernization

Building upon the "theoretical model of feudalism" and "short-term society" framework, Homa Katouzian further refined his analysis of Iran's historical trajectory by introducing the "state-society conflict" theory. Katouzian critically engaged with Western social contract theories, arguing that, due to the absence of stable social classes and legal constraints on autocratic power, Iran never developed a constitutional social contract defining the rights and obligations between the state and the people. Consequently, the state's primary function was not to serve society but to maintain its own power.[66] Historically, the Iranian state established its ruling order through the "exploitation" of society rather than by deriving legitimacy from social support, leading to a persistent antagonistic relationship between the state and society. Katouzian pointed out:

> *"The most persistent Iranian equivalent to European class conflict or antagonism has been manifested between the people as a whole and the state: a wealthy merchant without links with the state is regarded as melli, 'of the people', while a much less wealthy state official is categorised as dawlati, 'of the state'. Until a few decades ago, members of the 'civil service' were universally described as nawkaran-i dawlat, or 'lackeys of the state'."*[67]

Katouzian contends that in the process of Iran's political modernization, monarchy and autocratic power prevented long-term reforms from being institutionalized, reinforcing the "short-term society" model and obstructing fundamental changes in state-society relations. During the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, the limited presence of a decentralized government allowed for a degree of social resistance, providing the Tobacco Protest with some political space. Katouzian argues that the Tobacco Protest was the first instance in Iranian history where the people united for a clear and specific goal, and for the first time, the state yielded to social pressure through non-violent resistance. From a European historical perspective, this movement can be considered Iran's first political struggle. Following the Tobacco Protest, the Constitutional Revolution represented a break from Iran's historical patterns, as it was the first movement aimed at legally constraining the government. Unlike earlier uprisings that sought to overthrow a "corrupt" ruler, the Constitutional Revolution opposed "despotism itself" and sought to achieve its goals through modern European

[66] Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, London: Macmillan Press, 1992, p. 15

[67] Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, London: Macmillan Press, 1992, p. 16.

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legal and institutional frameworks.[68] However, the revolution also retained traditional Iranian characteristics. From a comparative perspective, European revolutions were not primarily about "establishing" rules of law but about "modifying" existing laws to expand social rights. In contrast, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution sought to create a legal framework to restrain state power. While European revolutions were driven by economic development, capital accumulation, and technological progress—leading to political transformation through class conflict—the Constitutional Revolution occurred during a period of economic decline in Iran. For the first time, "state-society conflict" directly targeted autocracy, seeking political reform.[69] The revolution temporarily clarified the state-society relationship through legal mechanisms, mitigating their antagonism. However, both the state and society continued engaging in "the politics of elimination", seeking to incorporate rivals and monopolize power.[70] Katouzian argues that this adversarial yet interdependent relationship is a defining feature of Iranian history. When society triumphed over the state, political instability followed, as seen in the post-revolutionary turmoil after the Constitutional Revolution. Conversely, Reza Shah's rise to power demonstrated another characteristic of Iranian history: "It is typical of Iran's history that whoever has the centre also has the periphery."[71]

Despite the Pahlavi monarchy's modernization reforms, Katouzian argues that its autocratic core remained unchanged. The Pahlavis exercised control over Iran through "modern arbitrary rule". First, enhanced state control through modernization. The development of modern communication and transportation networks, the expansion of administrative, police, and party institutions, and the establishment of modern governance mechanisms reinforced the state's penetration into society. The monarch directly controlled the administrative apparatus and security forces, increasing state dominance over society. Second, a formal but powerless constitutional system. While the Constitutional Revolution led to the establishment of a legal framework and parliamentary institutions, these remained subordinate to monarchical authority. The king could still impose his personal will through legal modifications or direct intervention. Third, elimination of traditional social safeguards. Modernization dismantled traditional patronage systems, and the introduction of a modern prison system allowed the state to deal with dissidents and political opponents more directly

[68] Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 180.
[69] Homa Katouzian, "The Revolution for Law: A Chronographic Analysis of the Constitutional Revolution of Iran", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2011, pp. 763-764.
[70] Homa Katouzian, "The Revolution for Law: A Chronographic Analysis of the Constitutional Revolution of Iran", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2011, p. 767.
[71] Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 190.

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and severely.[72] State-society conflict persisted throughout the Pahlavi era, culminating in the Islamic Revolution of 1979, when "society" ultimately overthrew the "state" and its autocratic rule.

Katouzian contends that the downfall of both Pahlavi rulers was directly linked to their increasingly despotic governance. Reza Shah (r. 1925–1941) initially gained support as a "modern dictator" who restored political order (1921–1929), but in his later years (1929–1941), he transitioned into a fully autocratic ruler. Katouzian argues that, in essence, Reza Shah was no different from other rulers of Iran's "short-term society". However, had his authority been exercised within a constitutional framework, he might have been remembered in Iranian history as a great leader like Kemal Ataturk.[73] Following Reza Shah's abdication, Iran entered a "constitutional regime period" (1941–1953), marking a transition toward Mohammad Reza Shah's eventual authoritarian rule. During this phase, Mohammad Reza relied on a "landlord-Ulama alliance" for governance. However, the political groups participating in government did not challenge the monarchy itself; some even used the monarchy to consolidate their own power. During the "dictatorial period" (1953–1963), the king's efforts to centralize authority provoked significant social unrest. The revolt of June 1963 signaled the beginning of direct confrontation between the state and society, with religious leaders emerging as the core of resistance against the monarchy. Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as the indisputable leader of this opposition.

In the "totalitarian period" (1963–1979), opposition forces were systematically suppressed, while skyrocketing oil revenues bolstered state finances and reinforced autocratic rule. The king established the National Resurgence Party and forced all Iranians to join it in order to identify those with dissenting political views and further consolidate his autocratic power. He divided Iranians into three groups based on their stance: the majority (supporters of the regime); the passive and neutral; and the dissidents and critics (who had no place in Iran and could freely apply for passports and leave the country).[74] Mohammad Reza Shah increasingly alienated different social groups by excluding them from political participation, eliminating potential allies. His economic reforms further alienated large segments of the population. Thus, when "state-society conflict" escalated into a full-scale crisis, the king faced the wrath of an entire society alone. Katouzian emphasizes that the Islamic Revolution was fundamentally a "societal revolt against the state". Throughout the revolution,

[72] Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, pp. 315-317.
[73] Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, p. 338.
[74] Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 274.

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the monarchy lacked any social class as a supportive base, illustrating the structural dynamics of Iran's "state-society conflict".[75]

Objectively, the Islamic Revolution ended monarchy and autocratic rule. Khomeini argued that "Islamic government is neither tyrannical nor absolute, but constitutional," and "Islamic law has absolute dominion over people and government alike: Islamic government is a government of law."[76] By structurally limiting state power through Islamic legal frameworks, the institutional triggers for "state-society conflict" were significantly altered, marking a new phase in the evolution of Iran's state-society relations.

Conclusion

Overall, Homa Katouzian's theoretical framework on Iranian social history is both innovative and highly applicable. First, he critically integrates Iranian historical realities with European theoretical paradigms, constructing a model grounded in Iran's unique historical experiences, effectively demonstrating that European frameworks are not a universal solution in the humanities and social sciences. Second, he successfully applies comparative world history methodologies to Western Iranian studies, incorporating economic thought to vividly illustrate Iran's distinct social structures and historical trajectory. Finally, Katouzian moves beyond the conventional "religion-secularism" dichotomy, offering a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the Iranian history and society.

However, while Katouzian's work provides a significant contribution to Iranian studies, his theories retain a distinctly Western imprint and exhibit certain limitations. First, he has a dualistic analytical perspective. In his "state-society conflict" framework, Katouzian adopts a highly critical stance toward the state, portraying it primarily as a source of oppression and exploitation. Similarly, in his "theoretical model of feudalism", he evaluates Iran through a rigid "rule of law vs. despotism" dichotomy, attributing Iran's historical stagnation to its lack of legal constraints on autocratic power. Second, Western archives contain more accessible and detailed records on the Pahlavi dynasty and the Islamic Revolution than those available in Iran. However, the "historiography of the Iranian revolutionary movement" has demonstrated that these sources are often highly selective and ideologically driven. Consequently, Katouzian's reliance on such materials results in a somewhat one-sided perspective, focusing primarily on societal grievances while paying less attention to

[75] Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, p. 20.
[76] Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 301.

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the state's role in governance. Third, he has a simplified and idealized interpretation of Iran's political development. Katouzian's interpretation of Iran's political institutions tends toward oversimplification. He presents governance as a binary choice between "rule of law" and "despotism", implicitly suggesting that European constitutionalism is the only viable model. In reality, state governance is far more complex. Iranian monarchs were not universally incompetent despots; many actively sought effective governances, as reflected in seminal political treatises such as the *Siyāsatnāmeh*.[77] Since the Qajar era, Iran has continuously explored paths to modern governance, and today, many of its historical political challenges have been addressed. The abolition of monarchical rule, for instance, marks a fundamental transformation. However, Katouzian's analysis, often rigidly framed within a "state vs. society" lens, tends to overlook these significant historical achievements. Forth, Overgeneralization of Historical Patterns. Katouzian's "short-term society" and "state-society conflict" theories may provide valuable insights into the Pahlavi period, but they are not universally applicable to all Iranian dynasties. Many Iranian diaspora scholars, such as Sadegh Zibakalam, have explored Iran's historical development by focusing on specific periods rather than overarching structures of despotism. Zibakalam argues that Iran missed key opportunities for transformation after its golden age, leading to its divergence from the West.[78] In contrast, Katouzian attributes Iran's developmental struggles primarily to "unconstrained despotic power", which arguably oversimplifies a complex historical process. Katouzian personally witnessed the autocratic rule of the Pahlavi monarchy and Iran's modern geopolitical isolation, which likely influenced his intellectual pursuit of a historical roadmap for Iran's revival. His theoretical framework reflects the enduring "search for a path" among Iranian intellectuals.[79] Despite the controversies surrounding his work, his contributions to Western Iranian studies remain groundbreaking and influential.

As a leading figure among Western-based Iranian diaspora scholars, Katouzian has pointed out that this intellectual community rarely provides direct policy advice to Western governments; rather, their significance lies primarily in academic research.[80] The development of Western Iranian studies is inseparable from the contributions

[77] Written by Nizam al-Mulk, the vizier of the Seljuk dynasty (1037–1194), *Siyasatnama* aims to guide rulers in understanding the practical realities of governance and how the government should operate. Nizam al-Mulk, *Siyasatnama*, Translated by Lan Qi and Xu Xuya, Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2002.

[78] Zibakalam, Sadeq, *Ma Chegune Ma Shodim: Rishe-yabi-ye Elal-e Aghabmandegi dar Iran*, Tehran: Entesharat-e Rozaneh, 2007, pp. 291–293.

[79] Iranian intellectuals, apart from religious figures, constitute another crucial group that can influence the political landscape of Iran and shape public opinion. They have long sought the path to national revival and played an essential role in both the Constitutional Revolution and the socialist movement. The comprehensive Westernization policy of the Pahlavi dynasty undermined Iran's cultural foundations and prompted Iranian intellectuals to reexamine the path to national rejuvenation.

[80] Source: Email interview with Katouzian, March 27, 2023.

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of Iranian diaspora scholars, who can be broadly categorized into three generations. The first generation consists of scholars who received higher education in Iran and experienced its political upheavals firsthand. This group, including individuals like Jahangir Amuzegar, Abbas Amanat[81], and Ali Mirsepassi[82], migrated to the West following the Islamic Revolution, playing a key role in establishing Iranian studies as an independent academic discipline.[83] The second generation consists of scholars who had some lived experience in Iran but received their higher education in the West. Figures such as Ali Massoud Ansari[84], Arang Keshavarzian[85], and Afshin Marashi[86] have continued to advance Iranian studies, forming the backbone of the field today. They remain deeply engaged in discussions about both the Pahlavi period and contemporary Iran, while also exploring broader questions of Iranian national identity.[87] The third generation consists of scholars who were born and raised in the West, with little or no direct experience of life in Iran. This group includes researchers such as Assef Ashraf[88], Beeta Baghoolizadeh[89], and Eskandar Sadeghi (a student of Katouzian)[90]. While they continue to analyze Iran's modern history—particularly the Pahlavi era and the Islamic Revolution—they have also pioneered new research areas in Iranian studies.[91]

Through the efforts of these three generations, Iranian diaspora scholars have

[81] Iranian-American scholar, Professor of History at Yale University, graduated from the University of Tehran in 1971.

[82] Iranian-American scholar, Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University, graduated from the University of Tehran in 1974.

[83] Related works include: Jahangir Amuzegar, *The Dynamics of the Iranian Revolution: The Pahlavi's Triumph and Tragedy*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991; Abbas Amanat, *Iran, a Modern History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017; Ali Mirsepassi, *Iran's Quiet Revolution: The Downfall of the Pahlavi State*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

[84] Iranian-British scholar, Professor at the University of St Andrews and founding director of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the same institution.

[85] Iranian-American scholar, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at New York University.

[86] Iranian-American scholar, Professor at the University of Oklahoma and founding director of the university's Centre for Iranian Studies.

[87] Related works include: Ali Massoud Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000; Arang Keshavarzian, *Bazaar and State in Iran: Politics of the Tehran Marketplace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Afshin Marashi, *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.

[88] Iranian-American scholar, Associate Professor at the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge.

[89] Iranian-American scholar, Associate Researcher at the Iran and Persian Gulf Studies Center, Princeton University.

[90] Iranian-British scholar, Senior Lecturer in Middle Eastern History, University of York.

[91] Related works include: Abbas Amanat and Afshin Marashi eds, *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, Leiden: Brill, 2018; Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, *Revolution and its Discontents: Political Thought and Reform in Iran*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020; Beeta Baghoolizadeh, *The Color Black: Enslavement and Erasure in Iran*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2024.

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become the dominant force in Western Iranian studies.[92] However, an important issue that warrants attention is the declining presence of native Iranian scholars in Western academic discourse. Iranian diaspora scholars, by virtue of their "exile status", are often perceived in the West as authentic voices on post-revolutionary Iran. Between 1980 and August 2012, 86% of the editorial board members of *Iranian Studies* resided in the Western world, with 57% of them being of Iranian descent. Furthermore, 69% of published authors in the journal were of Iranian origin, whereas less than 2% of editorial board members and 4% of authors were based in Iran.[93] This imbalance raises critical questions about the objectivity and authenticity of Iranian studies. Many Iranian diaspora scholars have become "outsiders to their homeland", interpreting modern Iran through an "orientalist lens" or through preconceived notions that depict religious influences as inherently regressive. Additionally, some scholars rely on "low-credibility sources", further complicating the accuracy of their analyses. These issues significantly impact the reliability of Western Iranian studies. Therefore, it is crucial to critically evaluate Western academic narratives and adopt a more dialectical perspective when assessing the writings of Iranian diaspora scholars on Iran.

Edited by Liu Fan

[92] Evangelos Venetis, "Iranian Studies: Exploring the Iranian 'Otherness'", *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2010, p. 245.
[93] Seyed Mohammd Marandi, Zeinab Ghasemi Tari, "Iranian Studies in the United States and the Politics of Knowledge Production on Post-Revolutionary Iran", in Tugrul Keskin (ed.), *Middle East Studies after September 11*, Boston: Brill, 2018, pp. 281-282.

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