



A Triple Typology of Religious Scholars' Responses to Modernization: A Comparative Study of Thought and Practice during the Qajar Period

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Abstract

The encounter of Shi'i scholars with modernization during the Qajar era constitutes one of the most critical intellectual and sociopolitical issues in modern Iranian history, bearing extensive consequences for the country's political, cultural, and identity transformations. This study, based on the analysis of primary historical documents and sources, investigates the typologies adopted by religious scholars in responding to modernity, along with the underlying causes and ramifications of each approach. The findings indicate that the clerical engagement with modernization was not a static or monolithic reaction; rather, it can be classified into three primary models: (1) Rejectionist Model, characterized by a comprehensive negation of modernity, especially its ideological and value-based components, rooted in a profound sense of civilizational alterity; (2) Selective Adaptation Model, which conditionally accepted certain scientific, technological, and institutional elements of modernity under specific religious and identity-based considerations; (3) Transformative Indigenization Model, which sought to reinterpret and integrate modern phenomena within the framework of Islamic principles and epistemology. The diversity of these approaches was shaped by historical contingencies, intellectual frameworks, and sociocultural contexts, grounded in the hermeneutical dynamics of Shi'i jurisprudence (ijtihād). A scholarly elucidation of these models not only clarifies the intellectual-cultural landscape of the clerical response to modernity but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of religion and ijtihād in the modernization of Iranian society, paving the way for further comparative research in related domains.

Keywords: Modernity; Modernization; Constitutionalism; Selective Adaptation; Transformative Indigenization; Total Rejection.

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Introduction

The transformations of the Qajar era, marked by Iran's encounter with the achievements of modern Western civilization, represent a major turning point in the country's modern history. The coincidence of the establishment of the Qajar state (1796–1925 CE) with the height of the European industrial and scientific revolutions laid the groundwork for new cultural and civilizational ties between Iran and the West, initiating a novel phase in bilateral relations. Iran's repeated military defeats against Tsarist Russia, especially in the battles of Qarabagh and the Treaty of Turkmenchay, drew increasing attention among elites, statesmen such as 'Abbās Mīrzā, and religious groups to the country's scientific, military, and technological backwardness, prompting the rise of discourses on "development and modernization" within public and political life (Vahram, 2006: 292). The initial signs of modernization appeared primarily through the importation of Western technological and infrastructural tools—such as factories, weaponry, and military academies. However, these initiatives were often carried out without adequate intellectual and cultural groundwork among the broader society, thus provoking serious resistance and sociocultural friction. Gradually, "modernity" entered Iran not only as a technological phenomenon but as a comprehensive ensemble of Western values, ideologies, social structures, and ways of life. This broad penetration catalyzed tensions between tradition and modernity within the fabric of Qajar society (Rahbari, 2008). Within this context, Shi'i religious scholars and the clerical establishment—due to their central role in Iran's traditional sociopolitical hierarchy—stood at the forefront of engagement with modernization. The experience of national defeats, exposure to Western intellectual currents, and the spread of socio-cultural changes brought religious leaders face-to-face with fundamental questions regarding the compatibility of **Sharī'a**, historical contingency, and religious identity. The emergence of concepts such as factories, codified law, modern schooling, nationhood, liberty, and cultural Westernization challenged the traditional epistemological order and redefined the relationship between religion and society (Mottaghi, 2015: 23–40). The response of Shi'i scholars to modernization was neither singular nor uniform; rather, it was shaped by diverse epistemological premises, individual interpretations, and sociopolitical contexts. Some scholars adopted a rejectionist stance, perceiving all aspects of modernity as existential threats to the foundations of religion, and thus insisted on total opposition (Rezvani, 1983: 27–70). Others, recognizing the inevitability of new developments, cautiously adopted selected tools and institutions under specific religious and identity-based conditions (Madpour, 2001: 43). A third group, relying on religious rationality and dynamic **ijtihād**, sought to reconstruct and adapt certain aspects of modernity within the framework of Islamic law

and principles, thereby preventing identity disintegration and promoting the indigenization of modernization (Madpour, 2001: 43). Accordingly, the typology of clerical responses to modernization in the Qajar period may be categorized under three major models: (1) **Rejection**, (2) **Selective Adaptation**, and (3) **Transformative Indigenization**. Each of these reflected specific historical horizons, political conditions, and identity concerns among Qajar-era Iranians. Together, they defined both the boundaries and the bridges between tradition and modernity in Iranian society. Furthermore, the specific sociopolitical context of Qajar Iran—characterized by weak governance, dependency on foreign powers, and the legitimizing role of religion—complicated the landscape of modernization. On the one hand, the spread of Western symbols and the fear of Islamic identity erosion, fueled hostile and rejectionist responses. On the other hand, the urgent need to preserve national sovereignty and remedy technological backwardness compelled some scholars to reevaluate the boundaries of **Shari‘a**. Thus, the modernization experience in Qajar Iran was neither a purely imitative adoption nor absolute resistance, but rather a **multifaceted, gradual, and dialectical process** characterized by dialogue and tension between tradition and modernity. The goal of this study is to conceptualize and classify the various modes of clerical engagement with modernization in the Qajar period, based on historical, epistemological, and sociological analyses. In methodological literature, the terms *typology* and *categorization* are largely synonymous, referring to the classification of responses based on criteria and indicators derived from historical, intellectual, and social evidence. Although, in a strict sense, *typology* involves identifying recurring structural patterns, while *categorization* emphasizes naming and grouping based on similarities and differences, the practical distinction is minimal. Both aim to systematically analyze and classify groups or patterns of response. In the present study, both terms are used interchangeably to indicate a structured classification of clerical responses, enabling us to trace their intellectual and practical evolution in relation to modernization. The aim is to present a coherent and comparative typology based on agreed-upon indicators in the text—namely, the type of response, historical context, and epistemological foundation. Ultimately, analyzing these three models is essential not only for understanding intellectual and cultural developments in the Qajar era but also for gaining a deeper grasp of the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in modern Iranian history. The present research focuses on the central question: **In what ways, and through which models, did Shi‘i religious scholars in the Qajar era respond to modernization, and what epistemological, historical, and sociopolitical factors account for their differing approaches?** In doing so, it also addresses several sub-questions:

- ✦ What historical and political factors—such as military defeats, increased contact with the West, and state transformation—shaped these responses?
- ✦ What were the jurisprudential and epistemological foundations of the three models (Rejection, Selective Adaptation, Indigenization)?
- ✦ How did the attitudes of scholars evolve over time, and what were the social and political consequences of their positions?

Utilizing **content analysis of historical documents**, primary texts of Qajar scholars, and **comparative study of empirical evidence and theoretical discourse**, this research aims to reconstruct a nuanced picture of clerical engagement—one that moves beyond simplistic narratives of resistance or submission to instead offer a layered account of **thought, interaction, and identity redefinition** within the historical transformations of the era. The findings show that the responses of Shi'i scholars to modernization were shaped not only by individual orientations or jurisprudential principles but also by the broader historical, social, and political conditions of the Qajar period. The coexistence and overlap of the three models throughout the century reflect the **dynamism and fluidity of Shi'i religious thought**. Indeed, the gradual transition from rejection to selective engagement and ultimately to transformative indigenization testifies to the **adaptive capacity of Shi'i religiosity in Iran**—a phenomenon that reveals its openness to critique, innovation, and renewal within the tradition of **ijtihād**, offering new insights into the modernization process and the enduring tension between tradition and modernity in Iranian intellectual life.

1. Literature Review

In recent years, the encounter of Shi'i scholars with modernization during the Qajar period has attracted increasing attention from researchers in the fields of modern Iranian history and the sociology of religion. However, a close examination of existing sources reveals a significant gap in analytical, systematic, and typological approaches to this topic. Broadly speaking, the existing literature may be classified into three categories:

- 1) Works that examine the introduction of modernity into Iran and the resulting intellectual transformations in general terms;
- 2) Studies that focus on clerical thought or the institution of religion, yet without adopting a typological or structural framework, offering instead fragmentary observations about resistance or instrumental acceptance;
- 3) Research limited to fatwas or responses to specific artifacts, rather than addressing modernization as a comprehensive phenomenon.

In the first group, works such as *A Reflection on Iranian Modernity* by Ali Mirsepassi and *The First Encounter of Iranians with the Idea of Modernity* by

Karim Mojtabedi focus primarily on the general reception of modernity by various actors—including intellectuals and the royal court—without providing a distinct analytical treatment of the diversity of clerical responses. These studies aim more at narrating sociopolitical transformations than at offering a detailed analysis of the behavioral and intellectual patterns among religious scholars. Among the second category, *The Najaf Seminary and the Philosophy of Modernity* by Dr. Mūsā Najafī explores the rationalist critiques of modernity within the Najaf seminary, especially during the Constitutional era. While this work highlights aspects of traditional critiques of modernity, it concentrates on the Najaf context and does not offer a focused investigation of clerical thought in Qajar Iran. Similarly, *Religion and State in the Qajar Period* by Hamid Algar—despite frequent references to the ‘ulamā’—centers on the religion-state relationship and intra-religious debates (such as the Akhbārī-Usūlī controversy), without treating clerical responses to modernization as an independent subject of inquiry. The third group includes works such as a dissertation titled *The Response of Shi‘i Scholars to the Introduction of Modern Artifacts into Iran, with an Emphasis on Religious Fatwas* (Ramazanizadeh), which focuses primarily on scholars’ reactions to specific technologies and fatwas related to them, rather than examining broader intellectual developments or long-term clerical agency in response to modernization as a structured project. Additionally, *The Encounter of Muslim Intellectuals with the Two Aspects of Western Bourgeois Civilization* by ‘Abd al-Hādī Hā’erī, while offering a descriptive account of Western civilization and Muslim responses, does not provide a typological and systematic treatment of clerical responses in Qajar Iran, and its references to the ‘ulamā’ are mostly peripheral. Finally, works such as *The West in the View of Shi‘i Clerics in Contemporary Iran* (Ahmad Rahdar) and *Shi‘ism and Modernity in Contemporary Iran* (compiled by researchers at the Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute) offer broad surveys of clerical engagement with Western thought and modernity from the Safavid period to the Islamic Revolution. However, these studies mostly concentrate on epistemological and historical factors underlying clerical perspectives on the West, with limited attention to the concrete social actions or systematic classification of clerical responses specifically during the Qajar period. In reviewing the extant literature, it becomes evident that no comprehensive study has yet been conducted that analyzes, defines, and typologizes the three major models of clerical engagement with modernization in Qajar-era Iran. The present research thus aims not merely to collect scattered narratives but, through a **comparative and typological approach** grounded in **historical sources and primary documents**, to identify, define, and explain the three major models—**Rejection, Selective Adaptation, and Transformative Indigenization**. In

doing so, this study seeks to partially fill the gap in the existing scholarship.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study

The present study seeks to analyze and typologize the patterns of Shi'i religious scholars' engagement with modernization during the Qajar period. To achieve this goal, the research is grounded in a **multi-theoretical and interdisciplinary framework**, drawing on key concepts from the intersections of tradition and modernity, foundations of religious thought, and theories of social transformation. At the theoretical level, the study adopts the **tradition-versus-modernity paradigm**, which conceptualizes the arrival of modernity in Iran not merely as the transfer of technology, but as the **penetration of a civilizational and cultural package** encompassing new epistemological, ontological, and axiological structures. This approach enables the researcher to interpret clerical responses beyond their superficial or instrumental dimensions, delving instead into their deeper discursive and cognitive underpinnings. Thus, **modernization is examined not only in its "hardware" aspects (technological tools and institutional structures)** but also in its **"software" dimensions**, such as modern worldviews, epistemologies, identities, and value systems. Modernity itself is conceptualized as a comprehensive discourse, comprising key elements such as **rationalism, individualism, scientism, and Western secularism**—elements which constituted points of tension and critical reflection for Qajar-era scholars. Meanwhile, modernization refers to the practical and structural translation of modern elements into the Iranian context, spanning political, cultural, and economic domains. Accordingly, the models of scholarly engagement analyzed in this study are shaped by various factors, including:

- 1) The epistemological and jurisprudential foundations of Shi'i clerics;
- 2) The degree of familiarity with the West and its products (tools);
- 3) The socio-political conditions and urgent needs of Qajar-era Iran;
- 4) Concerns regarding cultural assimilation and identity erosion;
- 5) The perceived necessity of localizing science and technology.

This framework allows the study to classify clerical engagements into three principal models:

(1) **The Rejection Model:** characterized by epistemological and identity-based concerns, and the rejection of both the principles of modernity and many of its manifestations.

(2) **The Selective Adaptation Model:** based on the distinction between tools and content, and an attempt to adopt beneficial elements without embracing modernity's foundational ideologies.

(3) **The Transformative Indigenization Model:** an effort to reinterpret and integrate modern elements within the parameters of religious tradition, aiming to

maintain Islamic identity while accommodating necessary change.

In summary, the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study embodies an **interdisciplinary approach**, bridging the **history of ideas** with the **sociology of religion**. While attending closely to historical context, it emphasizes theoretical analysis of clerical responses to modernization, seeking to open new pathways for understanding the dynamic interplay of tradition, religion, and modernity in the intellectual history of modern Iran.

2-1. Historical Background and Context of the Emergence of the Models

The historical roots of the formation of Shi'i clerics' patterns of engagement with modernization in Qajar Iran trace back to the onset of Iran's serious and extensive interactions with Europe in the late 12th and early 13th centuries AH (18th–19th centuries CE). These contacts, primarily triggered by Iran's military defeats against Tsarist Russia and the realization of Western technological superiority, provided a pretext for initiating a modernization process that introduced Western civilizational manifestations at military, industrial, and subsequently social and intellectual levels (Varahram, 2006: 292). The institution of religious scholars—endowed with significant social authority and normative influence within Iran's traditional societal structure—suddenly confronted a phenomenon encompassing not only new tools and technologies but also a comprehensive set of Western values, anthropological concepts, and epistemological frameworks that challenged many foundational beliefs and social relations (Farahmandzadeh & Sadeghi, 2024: 253–274). Early encounters with modernization were primarily focused on “hardware” domains such as the military (firearms, factories, railroads), followed by more tangible manifestations like new schools and educational systems (Varahram, 2006: 292 ff.). These engagements were largely state-driven initiatives, often without deep intellectual or cultural groundwork among the general public or even the ruling elite, resulting in persistent resistance and skepticism. Observing the spread of novel phenomena and fearing threats to religious and cultural identity, clerics did not perceive these manifestations as mere technologies or tools isolated from culture; rather, they feared that the intrusive entry of Western values and lifestyle might gradually undermine the epistemological and identity foundations of society (Farahmandzadeh & Sadeghi, 2024: 263–269). The social and intellectual context that gave rise to clerical models of engagement was shaped both within the religious community and in reaction to the increasing presence and influence of Western thought and technology: On one hand, some clerics, relying on traditions and jurisprudential principles, condemned any imitation or resemblance to unbelievers, with a primary concern to preserve identity boundaries between Muslims and Westerners. This approach is reflected in jihad

treatises and anti-imitative fatwas (Rezvani, 1983: 27–70). On the other hand, another group, while aware of the dangers posed by modernity, sought to find a synthesis by cautiously embracing useful elements of modernity given the inevitable progress of society and global transformations (Madpour, 2001: 43). Finally, a third faction adopted a more proactive stance, creatively appropriating and localizing modern elements to harmonize them with religious heritage and the socio-cultural realities of Iran (Madpour, 2001: 43).

A scientific understanding of these models requires deeper elaboration along two dimensions:

Temporal (Historical) Dimension: The interaction of Shi'i clerics with modernity during the 135-year Qajar period was continuous yet variable, influenced by tangible developments (such as military defeats, political provocations, and technology transfers) and cognitive transformations (such as the emergence of reformist ideas and efforts to safeguard religious-national identity).

Topical Dimension: Engagement with modernization encompassed both “hardware” aspects (e.g., acceptance or rejection of weapons, factories, and schools) and “software” dimensions, including value systems, intellectual principles, and legal structures.

Accordingly, the socio-historical context of Qajar Iran—characterized by the central role of religion, the clerics' influence in power arenas, and concerns over Western cultural hegemony—provided fertile ground for the emergence of three main models:

Rejection (Absolute Refusal), Selective Acceptance (Conditional Adoption), and Appropriation/Indigenization. Each model emerged from specific epistemological foundations, external conditions, and the clerics' historical experiences with modernity—especially after critical events such as the Russo-Iranian wars, the Constitutional Revolution, and the rise of new intellectual currents. The purpose of this typology is to demonstrate that the evolution of clerical thought and practice was neither unidimensional nor uniform, but rather contingent upon historical circumstances, intra-group intellectual bases, and the socio-political exigencies of the era. These models reflect a continuous and dynamic struggle between tradition and modernity within Qajar Iran.

2. Analysis of the Three Models of Clerical Engagement with Modernization, Emphasizing Contextual Factors

✦ The Shi'i clerics' encounter with modernization in Qajar Iran was not merely a reaction to the sudden arrival of Western technology or innovations but rooted deeply in the historical, political, social, and intellectual context of that era.

✦ Post Russo-Iranian wars, the urgency of addressing military and economic backwardness became widely recognized, especially among elites and officials acquainted with Western military organization and industrial power.

✦ Modernization efforts were top-down, state-led, and implemented without broad cultural or intellectual preparation among society, leading to resistance from traditional segments, especially religious scholars.

✦ Clerics, as spiritual authorities legitimizing governance, faced fundamental questions about the relationship between religion, tradition, and modern experiences.

✦ Their worldview encompassed concerns that modernization was not merely technological but entailed deep cultural and identity challenges—often equated with "otherness" or threats to Islamic and indigenous identity, and regarded imitation of non-Muslims as religiously impermissible (Rezvani, 1983: 27–70).

✦ Political instability, military defeats, economic grievances, reformist efforts, and anxiety over cultural loss combined to create a multi-layered context that gave rise to three distinct clerical responses: rejection, selective acceptance, and appropriation/localization.

✦ These factors shaped a spectrum of jurisprudential and social attitudes, ultimately influencing Qajar Iran's intellectual and behavioral landscape vis-à-vis Western modernization.

3. Triple Typology of Clerical Responses to Modernization

3-1. Rejection and Refusal (Complete Opposition)

✦ A faction of Shi'i clerics in Qajar Iran completely rejected modernity, perceiving its principles as antithetical to religious values and a threat to Islam's survival.

✦ In Qajar political discourse, modernization and reform efforts inspired by the West were seen as cultural colonization risks, endangering Iranian-Islamic identity.

✦ Historical anecdotes, e.g., Mirza Sadeq Agha Mojtahed Tabrizi's distrust of the Constitutional system as a Western import that should not be given an indigenous label, exemplify this skepticism (Kasravi, 1992: 251).

✦ While outright rejection of technological modernization was rarer, resistance focused mainly on the ideological and cultural dimensions embedded in new educational and institutional frameworks.

✦ Opposition to new schools stemmed from concerns about secular or irreligious educators, deviation of graduates from religious beliefs, and the creation of ideologically inappropriate milieus (Torkaman, 1984: vol. 2, p. 320).

✦ Medical modernization raised alarms due to the infiltration of European languages and cultural distance from Islamic traditions (Haeri, 1986: 313–314).

✦ Opponents viewed Western legal codification, majority-based decision-making, and constitutional law as imitations of infidels and incompatible with Islamic governance (Torkaman, 1984: vol. 2, p. 320; Salehi, 2009: 93).

✦ Concepts like liberty and equality provoked vehement opposition, as these were seen contrary to Islamic principles of political authority based on the divine mandate of the Prophet and Imams, rather than popular sovereignty (Zargari Nejad, 1998: 198).

✦ This group, relying heavily on Quran and Sunnah with a traditional jurisprudential outlook, fiercely defended Islamic existence against modernity, considering aspects of modernity as forms of disbelief, heresy, or apostasy, warranting religious duty to combat them.

✦ Their resistance extended to preferring even autocratic rule by an individual over democratic systems rooted in alien values (Naini, 2014: 56).

3-2. Selective Acceptance Pattern (Conditional Adoption):

✦ Some Shia scholars during the Qajar era adopted a selective acceptance or conditional adoption approach in response to modernization. This group held that certain manifestations of modernity—particularly new tools and technologies such as cannons, rifles, trams, and railways—are merely human inventions and Islam, by nature, does not oppose these kinds of manifestations. From their perspective, the utilization of technology and industry becomes objectionable only when it brings with it foreign cultural and intellectual elements incompatible with religious and traditional principles. Historical sources provide documented evidence indicating that some scholars, such as Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi and, at times, figures like Sayyid Muhammad Tabatabai, emphasized the distinction between the outward manifestations of civilization and the epistemological foundations of Western civilization; meaning that adopting innovations like railways or telegraphs, and even some teachings related to order and rule of law, is permissible provided that it does not result in fundamental changes to the beliefs and ethics of society (Kashravi, 1992 [1371 SH], p. 86).

✦ Historical data also indicate that even some scholars of the Qajar period accepted the achievements of civilization such as modern medicine and certain livelihood methods, believing these sciences to be fundamentally compatible with Islamic teachings. For example, the acceptance of herbal medicine, which shares a common lineage between Islamic culture and other nations, was put forward (Al-Hasani, 1999 [1378 SH], p. 65). It is explicitly emphasized that "those civilizational and livelihood methods that have an innate or revealed origin and are common between non-Muslims and Muslims are exempt from the ruling of prohibition of imitation (tashabbuh) with non-Muslims" (Al-Hasani,

1999 [1378 SH], p. 65). This statement clearly shows that opposition arises only when the introduction of innovative elements equates to weakening faith or cultural domination by the West; otherwise, the utilization of new knowledge and industry in public affairs is considered unproblematic.

✦ Other concrete examples in sources point to efforts by some scholars to interpret and justify the introduction of factories and new educational methods. For instance, some scholars considered the teaching of new sciences permissible, provided it did not lead to religious destabilization among the youth. In Qajar-era documents and correspondence, the acceptance of new schools and even the teaching of the French language was criticized only when its content was deemed a threat to religion; if it served the Islamic realm and the progress of the Islamic society, it was not objectionable (Roshdiyeh, 2024 [1403 SH], p. 15).

✦ In summary, the selective and conditional acceptance approach of Shia scholars during the Qajar period clarifies the distinction between technological tools and manifestations and the intellectual and value foundations of Western civilization. While preserving the authentic religious and cultural values, they adopted a more flexible attitude toward new technologies and innovations, accepting them conditionally so long as they did not threaten the foundations of religion and societal ethics.

3-3. The Pattern of Appropriation and Localization:

✦ Some Shia scholars in the Qajar era, rather than outright rejection or mere acceptance of the manifestations of modernization, adopted an active approach of appropriation and localization. They sought to reinterpret and contextualize new tools, technologies, and even concepts according to the religious and cultural principles of Iranian-Islamic society. According to documented evidence presented in the accompanying text, this group opposed the indiscriminate adoption of Western civilizational elements but simultaneously endeavored, through *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning) and religious thought, to absorb and Islamize beneficial and necessary elements of the new civilization.

✦ Some scholars believed Islam inherently does not oppose technology and modern manifestations such as cannons, rifles, or new transportation devices. However, their main emphasis was on the cultural and ideological appropriation of these manifestations; namely, that Western civilizational elements should not enter society without scrutiny, and each new phenomenon must be defined in accordance with Islamic rationality and the real needs of the country. Historical Qajar texts include examples such as the writings of Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri, who, relying on jurisprudential principles, redefined the subject of legislation and constitutionalism—not through outright rejection or unconditional

acceptance—but by innovating the concept of “Constitutional Monarchy under Sharia” (Mashruteh-ye Mashru'eh), wherein religious law and principles form the basis of new laws (Ansari, 2023 [1402 SH], p. 350). Also, concerning new sciences and technologies, it is recorded that some scholars recommended that teaching and learning new sciences should occur under Sharia supervision and through committed and qualified teachers so that progress could be achieved without compromising religious identity (Mahbubi Arkani, 1991 [1370 SH], vol. 1, p. 409).

✦ Certain scholars asserted that parts of Western civilizational and livelihood methods, such as medical techniques and modern medicine, if possessing innate or prophetic origins and being necessary for society, could be inferred from religious sources and organized within a religious framework and appropriated accordingly. They emphasized that what must be confronted are philosophies and intellectual foundations incompatible with religion, not all material achievements or contemporary sciences. It is also stated that “those civilizational and livelihood methods which have innate or prophetic and revealed origins... and are common among non-Muslims and Muslims, are exempt from the ruling of prohibition of imitation (tashabbuh) with non-Muslims” (Al-Hasani, 1999 [1378 SH], p. 65). This proactive approach allowed facets of the new civilization that aligned with reason or societal needs to be filtered and religiously interpreted before being integrated into Iranian society.

✦ In fact, the path taken by some intellectuals and scholars went beyond mere acceptance or total rejection and involved selection, Islamization, and redefinition based on public interests and doctrinal principles, so that the society would neither lag behind the civilization nor suffer damage to its religious and cultural identity.

✦ Addressing why some Shia scholars in the Qajar era adopted the approach of appropriation and localization in response to modernization—which was neither passive acceptance nor absolute rejection but rather re-interpretation, adaptation, and harmonization of new elements with the Iranian religious and cultural context—one can infer from historical documents, especially scholarly fatwas and treatises of influential scholars, that they were aware that the arrival of new civilizational manifestations such as military technologies, railways, factories, new educational structures, and even certain political laws and institutions, could simultaneously pose a threat to identity and an opportunity for progress. Therefore, it was emphasized that every new phenomenon should first undergo jurisprudential and socio-legal examination (ijtihad and investigation) and then be implemented in society with appropriate conditions and restrictions (Zargari Nejad, 1998 [1377 SH], pp. 315–320). Historical examples related to this approach include the discussion on the introduction of modern weapons

such as rifles and cannons, which belonged to the domain of hard technology. Some leading jurists of the Qajar period did not object to these industrial manifestations on the condition that they were not part of Western mechanisms of domination or aimed at undermining religious values. Instead, they even considered them necessary for defending the Islamic land and advancing the Islamic society (Rajabi Davani, 2011 [1390 SH], vol. 2, pp. 106, 109, 110). In related jurisprudential treatises, it was asserted that Islam does not oppose any invention or human innovation that lacks religious harm, and indeed “acquiring anything beneficial from non-Muslims, so long as it does not lead to imitation (*tashabbuh*) or weakening the religion, is permissible” (Zargari Nejad, 1998 [1377 SH], pp. 309–315).

✦ In the field of educational and cultural structures, localization was also seriously considered. The acceptance of new schools, teaching Western sciences, and even foreign languages was permitted by some scholars provided that the teaching of religious fundamentals and Islamic ethics remained a priority. The pinnacle of such an approach is evident in the theoretical innovation of Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri, who, through the concept of “Constitutional Monarchy under Sharia” (*Mashruteh Mashru'eh*), redefined the parliament and legislation not by outright rejection but by embedding them within the framework of Sharia and with clerical supervision over new laws (Kasraei, 2000 [1379 SH], p. 379). This type of intellectual and cultural appropriation allowed society both to keep pace with civilization and to maintain its religious boundaries. It is noted that some scholars considered the teaching and learning of new sciences and technologies under Sharia constraints and by competent, faithful teachers not only permissible but necessary for the power and dignity of the Islamic society (Rajabi Davani, 2011 [1390 SH], vol. 2, pp. 102–112).

✦ The main reason for the emergence of the appropriation and localization approach was the initial concern over the identity threat posed by modernization and the experience of intense Westernization. However, after early encounters, this approach became more prevalent, affirming that modern tools and institutions could be utilized to reinforce Islamism and improve Muslim affairs. The consequence of this approach was the emergence of a new generation of educational and social institutions with hybrid characteristics: *Dar al-Fonun* (Polytechnic School) is a prime example, whose foundation was inspired by the West but quickly integrated into Iran's religious and national framework. Similarly, many new medical techniques, engineering, and modern agriculture were accepted selectively and carefully and redefined within the indigenous culture. Even in the political realm, the efforts of scholars to Islamize parliamentary structures, establish Sharia oversight on laws, and emphasize the permanence of religious authority exemplify this pattern.

✦ In conclusion, the appropriation and localization of modernity by the scholars aimed not only to prevent complete cultural domination by the West but also to enable endogenous adoption of scientific and structural advancements. This process, based on a conscious synthesis of tradition and innovation rather than passivity or surrender, is considered one of the reasons for the persistence of religiosity amid Iran's modernization and the formation of a localized modern identity during the Constitutional era and afterward.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the encounter of Shia scholars with modernization during the Qajar era was multifaceted and multilayered; no static or uniform approach dominated all groups or periods. Three primary identified patterns include: complete rejection of modernity's manifestations, selective and conditional acceptance of new elements, and finally, active appropriation and localization of modern phenomena. Each of these approaches reflects the epistemological foundations, identity concerns, and the political and social exigencies of the Qajar period. Analysis of historical texts and the juristic treatises of that era reveals that initially, many scholars adopted a rejectionist stance towards modernization's manifestations, particularly in the ideological (software) dimension—such as new ideas, laws, and educational systems—which largely stemmed from early passivity in the face of foreign culture and sometimes the fear of weakening religion and the religious identity of society. However, this approach diverged somewhat in the face of new technologies and tools (hardware dimension), where some pioneers even regarded the use of instruments like cannons, rifles, and factories as inherently compatible with Sharia, provided that they did not entail cultural imitation of non-Muslims or pose a direct threat to religion. Subsequently, with the expansion of modern institutions, the lived experience of scholars and society, and the defensive and developmental necessities of Iranian society, a selective acceptance approach emerged. In this model, only certain scientific, technological, or even educational aspects of modernity were accepted, conditioned on conformity with religious interests, Sharia oversight, and preservation of religious identity boundaries. Under this pattern, acceptance of new schools, foreign language instruction, technological tools, and certain bureaucratic mechanisms was permissible as long as they did not overtly conflict with Islamic teachings and Sharia structures. The most advanced and complex pattern that gained prominence towards the late Qajar period was the pattern of appropriation and localization. This pattern not only went beyond mere selective adoption but also sought to reconstruct new elements within the intellectual, social, and religious framework of the community. Historical evidence and documented fatwas—particularly in

domains related to new sciences, medicine, constitutional laws, and modern education—indicate that while scholars initially resisted, they gradually employed the tools of *ijtihad* and interpretation to redefine and localize novel elements within the Islamic society. A salient example of this pattern is the concept of “Constitutional Monarchy under Sharia” (*Mashruteh-ye Mashru’eh*) and the innovations aimed at aligning new political structures with Sharia principles. Factors such as the necessity to defend the integrity of religion and the Islamic community, compensate for developmental lag, and utilize the capacity of *ijtihad* to produce a new social order were primary drivers of this approach. The consequence of this pattern was the formation of Iranian-Islamic scientific and educational institutions and the continued influential role of Shia scholars in the public sphere. By highlighting the diversity and evolution of approaches, this research has shown that religion and its scholars have never been passive actors in the face of modernity. Instead, in numerous instances, they have actively engaged in reconstruction, reform, and even the creation of unique cultural and social models. This analysis deepens the understanding of the history of religious and social thought in Iran and provides an analytical framework for comparative studies in later periods or for assessing the engagement of the Islamic world with subsequent waves of modernity. Based on these results, it is recommended that future research investigate the evolution of these patterns during the Pahlavi era and thereafter, examine the transmission or transformation of their intellectual foundations, and, more importantly, study the practical mechanisms of modernization and localization in more specialized domains such as education, judiciary, medicine, and technology. Moreover, further efforts should be made to clarify the precise connections between the historical *ijtihad* of scholars and the sociopolitical functions of these approaches in contemporary Iranian life. In summary, this study revealed that the encounter of Shia jurists with modernization in the Qajar period was shaped by historical, epistemological, and social conditions, with a spectrum of reactions—including rejection, selective acceptance, and appropriation and localization—traceable within the social and intellectual behavior of the scholars. This underscores the significance and capacity of *ijtihad* and the active role of Shia scholars in the modernization process and national-religious identity formation in contemporary Iranian history.

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